

THE COLONEL-BIRD

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The n'th war in East Europe. An UN care package falls in a distant psychiatric hospital. The package contains some canned food and K-FOR uniforms. The patients put on the uniforms and embark on a peace-keeping mission. It turns out that they are the only normal people in the mindlessness of the war. As a response to the gender equality issue a female version of that play could be find at the author's website: www.hristoboytchev.com

CHARACTERS:

DOCTOR
COLONEL/SOLDIER
HACHO
MATEI
KIRO
DAVUD
PEPPA

ACT ONE

ROLOGUE

Doctor: They say that there isn't a normal doctor in the field of psychiatry. Perhaps that's why I chose to work there after leaving the Institute: I often suffered from long-lasting depressions as a result of the absurdities of every-day life, which the philosophers call existentialism. Yes, I've never had much confidence or belief in myself. I've always believed there to be many truths in a conflict but I've never known which one to support myself. This is known as "the Hamlet Complex" by psychiatrists. In the regional Clinic for Psychiatry, where the usual misery and over-crowding reign, I was told that there was a very real need for a young and energetic specialist like myself. Not there in the clinic but at "The Forty Holy Martyrs", a branch of the clinic named after an old monastery in the mountains, where there were about ten interesting but harmless cases. "There's no professional risk there for the doctor," they told me, "and there's no doctor." It was only 43 kilometres away. It was a long journey along rough mountain roads. The mountains became wilder and more splendid whilst the road became rougher and more broken. We didn't meet a soul along the way. At last, at the very end of a huge savage gorge with overhanging rocks, the ruins of the monastery appeared..

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

Driver: This is the monastery. I'm going back. There's a mist rising and there are wolves around

here.

Doctor: What wolves?

Driver: Real ones! They hide here until the snow falls.

Doctor: And when the snow falls?

Driver: There's even more of them.

Doctor: And how do you get food up here?

Driver: We don't.

Doctor: I don't understand.

Driver: You will.

Doctor: Doesn't anyone else live up here apart from the patients?

Driver: I told you, didn't I? The wolves.

Doctor: Bloody hell!

Driver: That's it. Come on...

Scene 1

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

Doctor: Good evening /They don't even look up./

Doctor: /louder/. Good evening! /No reaction./

Doctor: /shouting/. Good evening! /The same result./

Doctor: /yelling/. Excuse me, but are you deaf? Three times I've said 'Good evening'.

/Peppa peers in through the other door./

- Peppa: /staring hard at the doctor/. didn't we meet at Customs on the Danube bridge?
- Hacho: /sees the doctor/. Are you a new patient?
- Doctor: I'm the new doctor.
- Hacho: /politely/. How do you do? I was a student at the Academy of Drama. Would you like to hear one of my monologues?
- Doctor: I said 'Good evening' a moment ago.
- Hacho: I'm sorry, I didn't see you.
- Doctor: But I shouted...
- Hacho: I'm completely deaf, doctor...
- Doctor: /points to Soldier who is still in the same pose, not moving in the slightest/. And is he deaf too?
- Hacho: I don't know, doctor. I've never seen him speak. All I know is that he's called the Soldier.
- Doctor: Where's the Sister?
- Hacho: Run away.
- Doctor: How do you heat that place?
- Hacho: With nothing. We live in one room to keep warm.
- Doctor: So you're deaf?
- Hacho: Completely. A shell exploded in my hands when I was doing national service - I lost my hearing then...
- Doctor: Well, how can you hear me now?
- Hacho: I can't. I lip read. Excuse me, what time is it?
- Doctor: Half past seven.
- Hacho: In half an hour the News will start.
All this time Peppa has been calculating something from a pile of papers, whispering numbers to herself. Then she falls on her knees.
- Peppa: 195000, 375000!! Lord, forgive me!
/continues whispering a prayer./
- Matei: /knocking loudly on the door and calling from offstage/. I'm here!
- Hacho: It must be Matei. Come in, come in.
- Matei: /opens the door timidly and stands close to it/. I'm coming in.
- Hacho: Go on then, come in.
- Matei: Don't move anyone.
- Hacho: OK, O.K
- Matei: OK, but you're moving.
- Hacho: Look, I've stopped /*He stands still/*.
Matei enters very cautiously, standing with his back close to the wall. The doctor takes a step and Matei freezes to the spot, terrified, pointing a red pocket torch at them.
- Matei: Don't move! It's getting dangerous! One false move and you'll be in prison for life.
- Hacho: This is the doctor.
- Matei: So what if it is? We're all equal in the eyes of the law. /*Matei gets under the furthest away of the beds.*/ You can move now, but no one's to step on me!
- Doctor: What's going on here?
- Hacho: He suffers from this mania that he's very, very small and he's afraid that someone will step on him.
- Matei: Only the evening. During the day I'm normal, but when it starts to get dark I become ever so small. I carry a red torch because if someone steps on me he'll end up rotting in gaol.
- Peppa: /lifting her head from her calculations/. Three hundred and eighty thousand, seven hundred and forty! Lord, forgive me!
Davud enters, clutching his crotch.
- Davud: I'll cut it off! /*Takes out a knife.*/
- Matei: Get to the right! /*lights the way with his torch.*/ Move to the right and keep your eyes down!
- Davud: I've made up my mind - I'm going to cut it off!
- Matei: Make up your mind but look where you're stepping!
- Davud: /*sees the Doctor.*/ Is there a new patient?
- Hacho: This is the doctor.
- Davud: /*flinches.*/ A doctor, are you?
- Doctor: Yes, I'm a doctor.
- Davud: /*clutching even harder.*/ Doctor, I'm ever so poorly.
- Doctor: Does it hurt?
- Davud: Worse than that! I'm going to cut it off!
- Hacho: You can cut it off later. The News is starting now.
The door opens slowly and Kiro appears on the threshold. He stands at the door reluctant to enter. Eventually he sits beside Hacho.
- Hacho: Don't sit by me. I've nothing left. Look! /*He turns out his pockets.*/
- Kiro moves to sit next to Davud.
- Davud: And I've got nothing. Look. /*and he turns out his pockets.*/
- Kiro moves to the empty bed in the corner and sits.
- Matei: /*shouts from below.*/ Owww! Not on me! You'll go to gaol!
- Kiro: I've been there already. It's no worse than here.
- Doctor: /*to Kiro.*/ I'm the new doctor. What's your trouble?
- Matei: Nothing. We're the ones who're troubled.
- Hacho: He's an alcoholic. He steals everything and then drinks it.

Kiro: That's not true. I steal but I don't drink.
Davud: So, where's the monastery wine?
Kiro: I didn't steal it. I found it.
Matei: And the petrol for the jeep?
Doctor: What jeep?
Davud: Scrapped. It was a present from the detachment. And the soldiers gave us half a ton of petrol - and he drank it.

Hacho: Quiet! The News!

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

Doctor: /looking at them in amazement/. There's no sound?

All: Sshhhh...

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

Davud: The sound doesn't work.

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

Hacho: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Today the fierce fighting continued. The UN once again attempted to get a convoy with aid for the occupied zones through but the convoy was held up by the opposing forces...

Scene 2

Doctor: /on the telephone/. Hallo, hallo! Is that the regional hospital? Chief Consultant, please! Hallo, hallo? Is that the Chief Consultant? I'm calling from "The Forty Holy Martyrs". There's nothing here... no medicines, no bed linen, no warm clothes, food...what? Yes, yes! There are some tinned tomatoes but they are well past their sell-by date. What? Aha...eat them as soon as possible so that they don't go off. Fine, OK...and when they've been eaten? There are no medicines whatsoever... I need new medicines...what? Medicines! Can't you hear me? I'll get a list over to you... Hallo? Hallo?

Davud enters, clutching his crotch.

Davud: It's terrible, doctor...

Doctor: What is?

Davud: Total impotence!

Doctor: How long have you been here?

Davud: Half a year.

Doctor: Do you have a wife?

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

Doctor: Have you any children?

Davud: Six. And it looks as though that's all I'm going to have...
Doctor: Isn't it enough?
Davud: Well, if there can't be any more... /bursts into tears./ The shame of it, doctor! The whole neighbourhood is laughing at me. When a gypsy can't do that what is left for him?
Doctor: You'll recover, have no fear.
Davud: /sighing/. I know who can cure me but she won't have anything to do with me.
Doctor: Who's that?
Davud: The customs officer. She's the only one who could cure me.
Doctor: And how could she do that?
Davud: They know everything.
Doctor: Customs officers?
Davud: They... Shall I call her in?
Doctor: Now?
Davud: She's waiting in the corridor. /He opens the door./ Come in! /To the doctor./ Tell her she's got to help me. Peppa enters with a white sheet draped around her so that she looks like a nun. The doctor continues to search.

Peppa: You remember me, don't you?

Doctor: Where from?

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

Doctor: So you were a Customs Officer?

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

Doctor: All of them?

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

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

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

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

Peppa: I'm deep in sin...

Doctor: Are you having any treatment for it?

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

Doctor: Well, where are you?

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

Davud: /after her/. Wait, come back. The doctor will tell you something...

Doctor: Not now. I've finished for today.
Davud follows Peppa. The Doctor tries to close the door after them but someone is trying to get in/

Kiro: /offstage/. Help! Help!
At last Kiro manages to open the door and rushes in.

Kiro: Doctor, they're beating me!

Doctor: Only because you're a thief.

Kiro: I don't do it on purpose.

Doctor: Is it true about the monastery wine?

Kiro: I found it in the cellar...

Doctor: And what did you do with it?

Kiro: I drank it.

Doctor: And the petrol.

Kiro: I drank it too.

Doctor: You drank the petrol!?

Kiro: I sold it first...

Doctor: Where did you sell it?

Kiro: Abroad.

Doctor: You crossed the border in your pyjamas?

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

Doctor: Whose is that?

Kiro: The other patients'.

Doctor: Give it back immediately.

Kiro: There's no point. I'll only steal it again.

Doctor: Then keep it yourself and give it to them whenever they need it.

Kiro: That's what I do. Look. */Takes out a piece of paper/* From Hacho - 70 taken, 58 returned. From Matei 12 taken - 9 returned. I keep strict records. I've even given more to Peppa than I've taken.....

Doctor: Well, then, look after mine */He searches his pockets/*

Kiro: Don't bother to look. I've got it already.

Doctor: /amazed/. When on earth...

Kiro: Last night. I need a really powerful medici8ne.

Doctor: What sort of medicine?

Kiro: One to stop me thiefing.

Doctor: There is nothing for that, but might be able to thing of something for the alcoholism.

Kiro: The alcohol isn't a problem, it's the thiefing that worries me. If you only knew how many times I have been beaten... */He rises and goes*

towards the door./ Shall I tell the next one to come in?

Doctor: No, that's enough for today. */Kiril goes out, the voice of Hacho can be heard outside./*

Hacho: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Today the fierce fighting continued. The UN once again attempted to get a convoy with aid for the occupied zones through but the convoy was held up by the opposing forces...

/Fade./

Doctor: I had a feeling that the Regional Hospital cut us off completely. They haven't sent us any medicine or food or winter clothing and winter's approaching nearer with each passing day. This morning the mountains awoke silvered with frost or wrapped in icymists which haven't lifted for weeks. Telephone conversations with the Regional Hospital have all been the same. */Lift the receiver./ Hallo, hallo! Is that the regional hospital? Chief Consultant, please! Hallo, hallo? Is that the Chief Consultant? I'm calling from "The Forty Holy Martyrs". There's nothing here... no medicines, no bed linen, no warm clothes, food...what? Yes, yes! There are some tinned tomatoes but they are well past their sell-by date. What? Aha...eat them as soon as possible so that they don't go off. Fine, OK...and when they've been eaten? There are no medicines whatsoever... I need new medicines...what? Medicines! Can't you hear me? I'll get a list over to you... Hallo? Hallo?*

Doctor: **Scene 3**

The colonel is looking through the window while the Doctor, is reading his patient's notes.

Doctor: *(looking in the folder)*. First and middle name - there is no written down , they have written you down as "colonel" .. Are you really a colonel or is it a nickname - it isn't unclear? But anyway, that's what we'll call you. How You got to the clinic is also unclear ... Deep schizophrenic depression ...Yes... "After a brain contusion..." is also visible. Judging by the facial injuries, probably shell fragments, so you can be a soldier. And that's all... *He lifts his head and looks at the Soldier.* Well, Colonel, shall we talk? *(The soldier does not move.)* What's the date today?

The same reaction.

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

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

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

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

The Soldier automatically follows these commands and exits, marching clumsily.

Hacho: The Lord's work is truly wonderful!
Doctor: That's an unconscious reaction. The military instinct is really strong... And what happened after the explosion?

Hacho: What about I was telling?
Doctor: About "quick march"?
Hacho: And "quick march", "quick march" I reached the Academy of Dramatic Art.

Doctor: After the explosion?

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

Doctor: And what happened at the Academy?

Hacho: I studied there for a month and then got a letter from the army. "We are most grateful to you for your noble gesture regarding the our Private Ivanov. Although he is stone-deaf the boy has talent etc. etc.

Davud: The News is starting.

Doctor: Haven't we already heard it? (*Comes out.*)

Hacho: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Today the fierce fighting continued. The UN once again attempted to get a convoy with aid for the occupied zones through but the convoy was held up by the opposing forces.... A spokesman for the UN declared that there would be an attempt to fly in aid with the help of planes...

Kiro: /screams/. You - you say one and the same thing every single evening.

Hacho: /nervously/. I don't think up the News? I tell you what the news is - just as it is.

Kiro: Change the commas at least. You've been using one and the same text for six months...

Hacho: That's not true! For instance now I said that tonight they'll send in humanitarian aid by air whilst last night I didn't say that.

Kiro: Yes, you did.

Hacho: I didn't mention aeroplanes.

Kiro: You did.

Hacho: No!

Kiro: You did.

Hacho: /yelling/. No! /They are beating each other./

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

Hacho: /screaming/. I can't change the News. The news isn't a monologue. I know lots of monologues and can recite you a different one every evening. Listen, I'll start. The first monologue - a tragic one... „To be, or not to be...”

Kiro and Matei rush for the door.

Hacho: /yelling/. Just one! Come on - only one... *He rushes outside after them. Only Peppa and Davud remain on stage.*

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

Peppa: Get off, I told you.

Davud: Just to lie next to you?

Peppa: No!

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

Peppa: Even the thought of it is a sin.

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

Peppa: No!

Davud: Please help me, I'm ill, it would be an act of charity.

Peppa: No!

Davud: One act of charity and God will forgive you. God will forgive you for everything.

Peppa is quiet.

Davud: He'll forgive you for everything!

Peppa: Do you really think so?

Davud: Of course. God loves those who do good, even if they are sinners. The sinner is dearer to him than the righteous. And the Doctor says so.

Davud: Did you hear that?

Peppa: Blindfold me so that I don't see the sin.

Davud: Right /He blindfolds her./

Peppa: And you.

Davud: Fine! ./blindfolds himself./

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

Peppa: /crossing herself/. Lord, forgive me!

Davud: Lord, help me!

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

Davud: Oh, Lord, why do you punish me so, why?

Peppa: Thank you Lord, for saving me from sin!

- Davud: Why do you punish me, Lord? Isn't enough that I was born a gypsy, and now this....I'm a gypsy but I'm a man too, aren't I? You'll see, Lord, you'll see who we are, us gypsies! */He turns in rage on the other patients./*
- Davud: What are you all staring at? Don't you know who we are - the gypsies? Don't you know? You're the gypsies - I'm Romany. Romany! We, the Romanies founded Rome. You've heard of the brothers Romulus and Remus who were fed by the she-wolf? That Romulus was a pure Romany. That's why the city is called Rome - in Italian, Roma. It comes from Romany. And what about Romeo and Juliet? Romeo is a Romany too. And Roman Polanski? Him too. Us Romanies have a state too - Romania. And in the spring, at the gypsy meeting at Brashow, they're going to make me a gypsy baron. Then you'll see who I am! You'll see! *His anger turns to tears and he leaves, shaking with uncontrollable sobs. Fade. The fade turns into a stormy night. The howling wind fills the stage. Thru the storm Pepa's screamers are heard.*
- Pepa: */shrieking/. One million truckers! Two millions truckers! Three millions truckers... The sound of the storm mingles with the roar of low-flying aircraft. Fade.*
- Doctor: Winter arrived and the snow blocked the mountain roads. No one took any interest in us and so we, six madmen and an addict, were buried in the snow high up in the mountains. That night the storm was unusual, a storm with thunder in November. All night long we could hear the sound of aeroplanes that had lost their way overhead but the most unusual thing of all was what we found in the courtyard of the monastery the next morning...
- Scene 4**
Early morning in the courtyard of the monastery. In the centre of the courtyard - a large plywood box with the UN emblem on it, attached to a parachute, no doubt this is how it has been delivered. Kiro appears. He looks at the box for a long time from each side, takes a furtive look around and then tries to lift it - but in vain. He rushes to the outhouse and returns with a sack into which he quickly starts to push the parachute. At this instant the high-pitched voice of Hacho is heard.
- Hacho: Stop!
Kiro freezes with raised hands.
- Hacho: Where did you steal that from?
Kiro: Nowhere. It was here.
- Hacho: It wasn't here last night, was it?
Kiro: It must have fallen during the night.
Hacho: From the sky?
Kiro: As it has parachute it must have. */He pulls the parachute out of the bag./* Look, it has the UN emblem.
- The Doctor appears.*
- Doctor: What is going on?
Hacho: This one's stolen a box from the UN.
Kiro: I haven't. I was going to steal it but I didn't.
Doctor: This is humanitarian aid for the occupied zone.
Hacho: Didn't I tell you last night - they said they'd be dropping supplies.
Kiro: The occupied zone is five hundred kilometres away.
Hacho: The storm must have driven them off course.
Doctor: That's possible.
Hacho: They don't know the difference. It's all the front to them. They were told to drop the stuff over the front and that's what they've done.
Doctor: What are we going to do with it now?
Kiro: Shall we send it back to the UN?
Hacho: We didn't have anything to eat last night...
The doctor thinks.
- Doctor: Go on!
They open the box and first of all pull out a silk UN flag then from under that packages of winter camouflage uniforms.
- Hacho: Army uniforms?
At this moment Davud runs in panting.
- Davud: Doctor, I've found a box of tinned stuff and chocolate.
Doctor: Where?
Davud: Behind the monastery.
Matei arrives.
- Matei: Doctor, the whole forest around here is littered with boxes.
Kiro: Take them all to the store!
Doctor: But if they are looking for them?
Kiro: Who's going to look for them? The UN?
Fade. The voice of the doctor is heard in the dark.
- Doctor: From that moment on I stopped phoning the Regional Hospital. I don't know who's right or who's wrong in this war, but I am sure that if anyone needed help it was us.
- Scene 5**
We're going to witness a tragic-comical scene in the general ward. The patients have pulled the army uniforms on over their hospital pyjamas but they are unbuttoned and slovenly. Their hair is, as always, long and tangled, their boots not laced up

properly etc. At the moment, in the middle of the room, there is an open box with food in it and the patients, covered in white milk powder, are eating it straight from the packets with spoons.

Kiro: Davud, stop stuffing yourself with that milk. You haven't stopped eating since morning.

Davud: I'm stuffing myself on purpose. Let's hope that this milk will cure me.

Hacho: Milk suppresses the reproductive system.

Davud: */throwing the packet away/*. Why didn't you tell me before? I've eaten three packets.

Hacho: You didn't ask.....

Matei: */from under the bed/*. Give me a packet too.

Kiro: Impossible! You're so small you'd fall into it.

Hacho: Here's a biscuit.

He throws one under the bed.

Matei: Only one?

Hacho: You're small. It's enough.

Matei: Just one bar of chocolate?

Hacho: A whole bar of chocolate! How can a person weighing 100 grams eat a

50 gram bar of chocolate?

Davud: Go on, give him a bar. Let him have one as well.

He gives Matei a bar of chocolate.

Kiro: */to Davud/*. If he dies of over-eating, it'll be your fault.

Davud: Oh, to hell with it!

He thinks and takes the chocolate back.

Matei: Give it to me!

Davud: I'll ask the doctor first.

Hacho: */searching the box/*. There's ham here as well...

They all stick their heads into the box and start to fight. At this moment the door opens with a loud crash and a loud, commanding voice is heard.

Colonel: Attention!

The imposing figure of the Colonel is standing by the door, washed, cleanshaven, hair cut short and in full uniform. The patients freeze to the spot and drop packets and spoons. The Colonel enters with a straight-backed military step and calmly sits by the table. The patients continue to stand motionless, staring at him in disbelief.

Colonel: */in a military tone/*. At ease, gentlemen. */To the Hacho/* Ivanov?

Hacho: Sir! */He instinctively stands to attention/*.

Colonel: Hot water for tea, if you please.

Hacho: Yes, sir....

Colonel: */modestly/*. I'm a colonel. Hot water, said! */Hacho rushes out/*.

Colonel: */to all of them/*. It's a lovely evening, isn't it?

Davud: I was a corporal, sir...

Colonel: Well done, corporal! It might be a good thing if you had a shave, don't you think?

Davud: Yes, sir.

The patients gradually recover from the shock and their military instincts return as they unconsciously start to button up their uniforms. Hacho enters carrying a kettle. He salutes.

Hacho: Tea, sir! */He pours tea for the Colonel/*.

Colonel: */seeing Matei under the bed/*. And you, soldier, what are you doing under the bed?

Matei: It's so no one will step on me, sir, I'm very small.

Colonel: Why do you think that?

Matei: Because I'm ill, sir.

Colonel: If you are wearing a uniform you can't be so very small. What do you do?

Matei: Driver, sir.

Colonel: You'll be behind the wheel again, Private...?

Matei: Private Popov, sir.

Colonel: So why don't we light the bathroom boiler tomorrow? Corporal?

Davud: Sir!

Colonel: Find a supply of wood and get the boiler going at ten.

Davud: Sir!

The Doctor enters and stands amazed at the door. The Colonel rises and introduces himself.

Colonel: Doctor. At your service, Doctor.

The doctor gulps as he takes in the situation.

Colonel: Ivanov!

Hacho: Sir!

Colonel: Tea for the doctor!

Hacho: At once, sir!

Peppa also appears at the door. The Colonel clicks his heels and bows slightly, taking a chair for her.

Colonel: Miss! */He indicates the chair/*.

Peppa staggers and holds on to the doorpost. Fade.

Scene 6

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

Davud: Careful and listen to your corporal. When you look along the string all the edges have to merge into one line. Straighten the blanket on

the third bed. That's how the Colonel wants it.

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

Davud: Mad, yes, and he's dangerous. And strong. We really shouldn't provoke him.

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

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

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

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

Hacho: He was at the Staff College. And he fought in all the international conflicts.

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

Kiro: The doctor! What on earth can doctor say when there's a colonel from The Foreign Legion present?

Hacho: The Foreign Legion?! How do you know?

Kiro: The Colonel told me.

Matei: Liar. The Colonel never speaks about himself.

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

At this moment the Colonel's voice echoes down the corridor.

Colonel: Fall in for evening roll-call!

Davud: Fall in! At the double!

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

Davud: Sir! Section present and correct!

Colonel: /commanding/. Attention! Roll-call! Davud?

Davud: Sir!

Colonel: Ivanov?

Hacho: Sir!

Colonel: Penev?

Kiro: Sir!

Colonel: Popov?

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

Colonel: /severely/. Why are you not in line, Popov?

Matei: Someone might step on me, sir.

Colonel: Private Popov, in line!

Matei: I can't! I'm afraid, don't you understand? Look, I'm shaking from head to toe.

Colonel: Popov, in line! The responsibility is mine.

Matei: I want to, but I can't...please! I'm so small, very small. /in tears./

Colonel: /sharply and loudly/. Private Popov, on your feet!

Matei slowly stands up shaking.

Colonel: Attention!

Matei freezes instinctively.

Colonel: Into line, quick march!

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

Colonel: Attention! The army, gentlemen, has been in existence as long as mankind and the line has been in existence ever since there has been an army. Every army in the world depends on its fighting ranks and when you are in line no one can take your place because then the line would collapse and then so would the army. The great armies have lost because their line has collapsed and small armies have won thanks to the strength of their line. But the line, gentlemen, is not a simple line of people and soldiers, it is inside us. And when the line within us collapses then a man is no longer a man. The line inside us supports us all, all societies, all armies. Because the spirit of an army is just that line inside each one of the soldiers. Clear?

All: Yes, sir!

Colonel: Attention! Left turn! Right turn!

Fade

Doctor: /thumbing through a textbook/. The patient's condition was clear to me in theory: severe schizophrenia in the paranoid form. Psychiatrists call it "dephasing". But a few days later the other patients began to change too as though they were infected by the Colonel. Instead of the former scarecrows shuffling about the courtyard there were these clean-shaven, washed and smart commandos. They move more energetically, their speech clear and to the point. The Colonel, as a result of his illness, had acquired the confidence and desire to command which resulted in all the other subconsciously and unquestioningly to accept his spiritual strength.

Scene 7

The doctor's monologue is interrupted by the sound of a bugle. The loud voice of the Colonel is heard in the distance: "One...two...three" and then they all appear in the courtyard running at the double, stripped to the waist.

Davud: At the double!

Hacho /to Kiro/. Now we're really like lunatics...

Colonel: No talking, take deep breaths. One...two, one...two...halt! Shirts on! Attention! At ease! /The Colonel paces along the line./ Today's orders are as follows: until lunchtime, cleaning the courtyard. After lunch from 14.00 hours to 16.00 hours - rest. From 16.00 to 20.00 hours time for individual pursuits and evening meal, after 2000 hours television and rest. Clear?

All: Yes, sir!

Colonel: Any other suggestions? No. Second: from today we start to take turns at cleaning the rooms and kitchen. Ivanov!

Hacho: Sir!

Colonel: Your turn today.

Hacho: Yes, sir!

Colonel: And now...gentlemen, we have a delicate matter to deal with. Force of circumstance has resulted in us having a lady living among us. You will, of course, all understand that she will have to be moved into a separate room.

Davud: But there is no stove there...

Colonel: That is true. Corporal, will you see to it that there is a stove and wood in Miss Antonova's room.

Davud: Yes, sir! /To Mate./ Popov! Stove and wood! At the double!

Colonel: I haven't finished yet...

Davud: Halt! Attention!

Colonel: I have heard that certain items have been disappearing from bedside cupboards. Please would the person responsible for this infringement of the regulations return the items.

Kiro: Sir!

Colonel: Any repetition of this infringement will result in the person responsible losing his right to wear military uniform. Is that understood?

Kiro: But if there is no thieving in the barracks what sort of a barrack will it be?

Colonel: And finally - an honest and highly-qualified person takes care of our welfare. You will realise that I am referring to the doctor. I insist that you follow his instructions and take whatever he prescribes - also, whenever you meet him you will salute.

Hacho: Colonel! The doctor!

Colonel: Attention! Eyes right!

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

Colonel: Sir! All present and awaiting their morning check-up.

Doctor: Morning, men!

All: Morning, sir!

Doctor: Any complaints?

Hacho: None at all, sir.

Doctor: Petrov?

Kiro: None at all, sir.

Doctor: Popov?

Matei: Nothing at all, sir.

Doctor: I understand that you no longer sleep under the bed?

Matei: I feel fine in the line, sir.

Doctor: Excellent! So I am not needed. Courage, men!

Colonel: We shall endeavour, sir! Attention! Three cheers for the doctor. Hurrah!

Fade

Doctor: Destiny has given me a chance rarely experienced by a specialist - to witness a socio-psychological experiment occurring in front of my very eyes. But after all, every society is a game of set rules which only the mad ignore. And my patients here now live in a game with rules which they can keep. So they're not mad any longer. Quite the opposite, they could even be said to be flourishing. I decided not to interfere, just to let the process develop naturally. I started to write down all my observations. I had the idea that I could develop a similar form of therapy and then patent it.

Scene 8

Peppa: Good morning.

Doctor: Good morning, do sit down.

Peppa: I'm thinking of leaving the monastery.

Doctor: Leaving the monastery?

Peppa: Yes.

Doctor: And where will you go?

Peppa: I'll join the army. They always need women in the army. Haven't you heard of Mother Courage?

Doctor: Of course I've heard of her.

Peppa: I want to be like her. So, there on the field of battle risking my life, I'll atone for my sins. I'll care for the wounded, I'll give them spiritual comfort.

Doctor: There aren't any wounded at the moment.

Peppa: There will be.

Doctor: Yes, that'd be a truly noble gesture but they don't take many women into the army these days.

Peppa: I've talked to the Colonel about it and he said it is possible.

Doctor: Well, if he said.....

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

Scene 9

Evening. The sleeping quarters.

Colonel: And so, let's take stock of all our resources. Ivanov?
 Hacho: /*consulting his list.*/ We have food, including tinned stuff and fruit juices for one year.
 Colonel: Davud?
 Davud: There's enough clothing for about ten years.
 Colonel: That's enough for now. Petrov? What's the financial situation?
 Kiro: 24 dollars and 45 euro.
 Colonel: It's not much...
 Kiro: Well, I've stopped stealing, Sir. But if I am ordered...
 Colonel: Popov? How are we off for transport?
 Matei: There's a jeep in good condition but there are no tyres for it.
 Kiro: It did have tyres but....
 Colonel: It must have tyres by the end of the week.
 Kiro: Yes, sir!

Matei: There's no petrol.
 Colonel: In one week it must be found.
 Kiro: Yes, sir!
 Hacho: Sir, permission to speak!
 Colonel: Yes?
 Hacho: The News is beginning.
 Colonel: Take your places for the news! Line up!
They line up in front of the television.
 Davud: Attention!
Hacho switches on and starts doing the voice over.
 Hacho: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Fierce fighting continued today. The U.N once again attempted to get a convoy with aid through but the convoy was held up. A spokesman for the UN declared that there would be an attempt to fly in aid with the help of planes...
 Colonel: That's good...
 Kiro: Very good. They might fly off course again...
 Hacho: /*continues.*/ The member countries of the UN have declared that if the conflict continues they will have to adopt decisive actions to ensure the security of Europe.
 Colonel: There's only one possible conclusion - we shall have to join the UN Forces..
He bangs his fist on the television set and the sound starts to work. The voice of the announcer is heard: "Fierce fighting continued today". The sound of shooting and shells exploding. The sound gets louder and louder.

ACT TWO

Scene 1

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

Davud: Please! I only want to try, nothing else.
 Peppa: No!
 Davud: Please - as a comrade-in-arms.
 Peppa: No!
 Davud: I feel so much better. I only want to test if I'm OK or not.
 Peppa: Listen, if you don't leave off I'll tell the Colonel.
 Davud: Why the Colonel?
 Peppa: Why not? You're the one who's married whilst I'm not. You can see for yourself that not right for you to make a pass at me.
 Davud: Are you serious?
 Peppa: Yes.
 Davud: You serve God, don't you? He will forgive you.
 Peppa: I serve in the UN Forces now.

Davud: What about all those sins from Danube Bridge?
Peppa: Danube Bridge and all the other bridges leading to the past have been burnt, corporal.
Peppa moves aside with a provocative step.
The doctor appears.
Doctor: How are you, Davud?
Davud: Much better, doctor. What does a simple soldier need? To eat, to sleep and, if there's an opportunity, to....but there are no opportunities.
Hacho rushes in out of breath.
Hacho: Doctor, the Colonel invites you to a General Staff meeting.
Doctor: So there's a General Staff already, is there?
Hacho: Yes, sir.
The shrill sound of a siren is heard, Hacho and Davud throw themselves onto the ground.
Davud: Get down, doctor! We're testing the anti-nuclear attack system.

Scene 2

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

Davud: The doctor is coming!
Colonel: Attention! Eyes right! /The doctor enters./
Colonel: Come in, doctor, we can start now.
/Turning to them all./ Brothers! A month has gone by since the heavens sent us their gifts, just as God sent manna to the children of Israel in the wilderness. Then we were starving and freezing to death and we accepted that gift from civilised Europe in the practical form of food and clothing without further thought. But today, with the wisdom of hindsight we can calmly say that it was not a simple humanitarian act but something more. It was a sign from God, an invitation to join forces with them. And because of this, after long deliberation, I propose the following:

First: to declare our military unit a part of the UN as from today.

Second: to declare that the territory which our unit covers is to be a separate European territory where European standards of living and international relations are to be upheld.

Third: to establish links with the European administrative institutions and join them as a European enclave. Are there any other proposals?
/They all keep quiet./ None. I suggest that we now have a secret ballot and if there is a positive result we shall sign the constitutive document. The white

ballot papers are "for" and the black ones "against".

He seals an empty ballot box - marked chocolate - and carries it into the booth.

Colonel: Attention! Quick march to the voting booth!
*They all vote one after another.*r

Doctor! Although a civilian you have shared our joys and sorrows throughout this time and because of this it is right that you, too, should vote. In the name of all of us in this unit I kindly request you - please, proceed!

After a moment of tense hesitation the doctor rises and goes slowly to the ballot box. Everyone holds their breath as they wait for the result of the ballot. The doctor comes out of the booth. The Colonel unseals the box ceremoniously and announces the results.

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

Davud: Attention!

Colonel: As a result of our secret ballot we declare our fighting unit to be a detachment of the UN and the territory that we cover as a separate European territory. This is our constitutional document. /He raises high a sheet of paper./

Davud: Hurrah!

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

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

Hacho: So we'll never leave?

Colonel: Private Antonova will be appointed as Customs Officer.

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

Peppa: Never!

Colonel: Calm down! UN drivers have different moral standards...Quiet! Quiet! Gentlemen, at this moment we have put into force the first two proposals of our programme. The final proposal remains, the most important and the most difficult one - to establish contact with the European administrative institutions and to integrate with them. I await your suggestions as to how this contact can be established.

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

Doctor: Colonel, sir, may I speak?

Colonel: Please.

Doctor I know that at the moment everyone is thinking of the telephone in my surgery but I do

think that using it for such a purpose is unwise. There is every probability that the line is tapped and we will become the victims of insinuation and blackmail even before we have gained the support of the West.

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

Hacho: During the war have been used homing pigeons.

Colonel: So we did.

Matei: So let's use migrating birds. Huge flocks are flying south at the moment.

Colonel: This is one way of resolving the problem. Yes, by using the thousands of years old experience of the military mind we can send hundreds of messages using the birds. One of them is sure to get through.

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

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

Colonel: We start to send messages tomorrow.

Fade.

Doctor: /Making notes/. The birds flew in great flocks over the mountains and at night we caught them in nets while they rested. They were very careful and gentle with the birds so as not to hurt them and they tied hundreds of messages to their legs - messages to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, UNESCO headquarters and anywhere else they could think of. The birds flew south towards Africa, but the Colonel explained that the UN have observers absolutely everywhere and the messages would get through to their destination eventually.

Scene 3

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

Davud: It's biting! My hands are covered in bites.

Hacho: They're pecking us because they don't understand that our intentions are good. When we let them go they'll know that they are and then they won't peck us any more. Birds are wiser than humans.

Kiro: Than humans.

Matei: Yes, because humans have evolved from the birds and no one is superior to their creator..

Kiro: Why?

Kiro: Man came from apes.

Matei: Right, but the apes came from the mammals and the mammals came from the birds. So man has come from the birds and one day might return to being a bird.

Kiro: Why precisely to being a bird?

Matei: Because only the birds and man can fly. The birds with their wings, man with his soul. And besides, the bird is a noble creation, it is so small and it is capable of such great endeavour - to carry our message for thousands of kilometres and so to save us.

Hacho: Every creature is capable of endeavour whether it is large or small.

Matei: To some extent, yes, to some, no. Because a truly great endeavour compared with the size of a tiny creature becomes proportionately greater.

Davud: Everyone ready?

All: Ready.

Davud: Let's release them, then.

They go to the open window.

Davud: Attention! Ready for action! Three... four. Off they go!

All: Off they go!

The sound of wings is heard and they all stare after the departing birds for a long time.

Kiro: They've gone....

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

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

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

Matei: You're crazy.

Kiro: I know. But I saw him. He was flapping his arms at a flock of birds and then he slowly moved away from the ground, about a metre up for half a minute and then he came down again.

Hacho: You were drunk.

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

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

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

Matei: Sometimes, in the evening when I'm very small I long to cling to a large bird and fly away. To fly for ages and ages, far,far away and to land THERE and to hand over the whole message. And

THEY, when they see how tiny I am, will say, "How could such a tiny creature fly such a great distance?" And I will say to THEM, "I succeeded because my friends are there and even though they are large they are just as unhappy as I am". Then THEY will ask, "Why are they unhappy?" and I will reply, "Because they are mad and there is no one who understands them."

Scene 4

In the courtyard. Peppa is stroking a bird which has its head tucked under its wing and she rocks it to sleep singing a lullaby which children sing to the chickens.

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

The Colonel passes by and salutes.

Colonel: Good evening, miss! At your service.

Peppa: /finger to her lips/. Shhhh! Quiet! /She puts the sleeping bird down./ It's asleep...

Colonel: Yes, really....

Peppa: Birds fall asleep very quickly.

Colonel: Really?.... I hadn't noticed.

Peppa: And they shouldn't be woken before they wake up naturally or they stop singing.

Colonel: Interesting.

Peppa: What is it dreaming of now? That it's already in a hot country probably...and someone will be waiting there for her and she won't be lone... birds can't live alone...

Colonel: Maybe...probably...Yes, yes, come to think of it we learnt at school...

Peppa: You don't learn those things...

Colonel: Lovely day, today...

Peppa: Yes, yes...

Colonel: Sunny too...

Peppa: Yes.

Colonel: And it wasn't too bad yesterday...

Peppa: No, it wasn't.

Colonel: Yes....but we don't know what it'll be like tomorrow.

Peppa: That's right, we don't know about tomorrow.

Colonel: And then it might continue like this all week.

Peppa: Perhaps, perhaps.

Colonel: Once it turns fine it can go on. Until it turns bad it's always good...

Peppa: That's true.

Colonel: And after that it gets better again...eh, well, goodbye.

Peppa: Goodbye, and I'm sorry...

Colonel: What for?

Peppa: Well, you know how to have a proper conversation while I...

Colonel: What conversation?

Peppa: About the weather...and other things...

Colonel: Oh, that's nothing...it's so easy that I could teach you.

Peppa: Thank you so much.

Colonel: Oh, it's nothing. Permission to leave, miss!

He salutes and strides away. Peppa picks up the sleeping bird, strokes it and starts to weep.

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

Fade.

Doctor: We started to wait for answer to our messages sent by the birds. All day long there was someone on duty in the courtyard whose job it was to observe the sky whilst the other looked out for birds with messages landing on the rocks and trees. Sometimes huge flocks came from the north and one by one they flew for hours over the ravine. Then we all came out into the courtyard and stared at the sky hard and long hoping to see a bird leave the flock and land near to us. Our eyes were stinging from staring so long...

Scene 5

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

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

Davud: Down!

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

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

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

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

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

Davud: Down!

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

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

Matei: Even better! Ravens are the most intelligent of all the birds.

Colonel: Ravens are strong and can carry all sorts of messages. Watch carefully to see if any of them break away from the group.
 Hacho: Look! The two flights have flown into each other!
 Matei: That's not true. It only looks like this from here, but really they are flying at different heights and can never get mixed up. Every flight has its own air corridor.
 Davud: If one of the birds from the higher company wants to land here now with a message the lower company will get in the way...
 Matei: No! It won't. They'll open up a corridor for it. Watch carefully for signs of a corridor opening!
 Kiro: Why are we looking northwards when our messages went south? We should be looking south.
 Davud: True! Very true! We should be looking south. Attention! About turn!
They all turn to the south and again lift their eyes to the sky.
 Hacho: There are no birds coming from south.
 Davud: Really?
 Kiro: It is very clear. In winter the birds fly south, not north.
 Colonel: OOH could have got our message in the south but sent a reply to us from the north. Their lines of communication are unlimited.
 Davud: So a message could come from the north?
 Kiro: Of course it'll come from the north. What bird is as crazy as us to fly north in the winter?
 Davud: Attention! About turn!
They all turn once more to the north.
 Peppa: Two more flights are approaching.
 Hacho: /mournfully/. Oh, Lord, so many birds and not one of them has landed here!
 Peppa: Calm down! Don't give up! There are billions of birds. If they've sent a thousand messages it means that from one million birds only one will have a message. And so far hardly half a million have gone over....
 Matei: Can you see that one?.... it's looping. Can you see it?
 All: Where?
 Matei: Over there. In the middle of the second flock.
 Davud: Yes, yes! One of them's turning over in the air. Ah-ah-ah!
 Peppa: It's trying to attract attention, can't you see?
 Hacho: True - at least that's what it looks like.
 Matei: It is. Look, none of the others are doing it.
 Hacho: Look, look! It is leaving the flock.
 Matei: There, it's coming down.
 Davud: To the forest! It's flying towards the forest.
 Hacho: I can't see it now. It must have landed. Let's go and find it.
 Kiro: Where?
 Hacho: In the forest, where else?
 Kiro: How will we find it in the forest? The forest covers hundreds of acres.
 Matei: It'll call us itself.
 Kiro: We're all mad but you're completely...how will the bird call us?
 Colonel: They'll have trained it.
 Kiro: That would be possible....
 Davud: To the forest - quick march!
 All: To the forest! To the forest!
 Davud: Forward...march!
They set off. Fade.
 Doctor: Perhaps the bird was carrying a message but they didn't find it because of the fog that came down. They searched for it until the evening in the fog but obviously the bird was confused and it didn't call them. In the days that followed the flocks became less and no news arrived. The Colonel was worried as well, although he gave no signs of it in any way. Marching drill and military exercises continued day in and day out but he himself knew that it wasn't possible to train an army for any length of time without taking it off somewhere. They went on waiting for the news and in the meantime there was an unpleasant incident.

Scene 6

Kiro and Davud creep on stage in the dark.

Davud: /whispering/. Petrov?
 Kiro: Yes.
 Davud: Where are you?
 Kiro: Here.
 Davud: Forward, crawl!
 Kiro: On my way.
 Davud: Down! It's here. I've never ever seen such a huge bird.
 Kiro: Are you sure?
 Davud: I'm sure. I saw it as it came through the window.
 Kiro: What sort of bird?
 Davud: I don't know, a female I think.... it was big and it had everything...
The flapping of the wings of a large bird can be heard.
 Davud: There, did you hear that?
 Kiro: I heard it.

Davud: I told you, didn't I? Great! She came of her own accord, without us calling her - so she must be bringing something.

Kiro: She's looking for contact. Did you close the window so she can't get out?

Davud: Everything's shut. You guard the door and I'll go and feel if she's got any messages.

Kiro: Get her from behind.

Davud: I know.

Kiro: Hold tight and search through.

Davud: No need to teach a corporal!

Kiro: And if there's any money there, take that too!

Davud: Enemy ahead. Advance!

Kiro: Forward crawl!

Davud: Attack!

The sound of a struggle.

Davud: /yelling/. Ah, you bitch! Oh, you've made a hole in my skull! Help! I'm wounded!

Kiro: Hold on! I'm coming!

Davud: Into close battle!

Kiro: I'm closing in!

Blows are heard.

Davud: That's me!

Kiro: Hand-to-hand engagement, sorry!

Davud: She's got away! She went for my eyes but I'll find her!

Kiro: Is there a message?

Davud: I don't know! I don't know but it looks as though I'm cured!

Kiro: Liar!

Davud: I'm not lying! When I held her and I felt something come over me... I'll find her and I'll finish her! It was caught up in the net and freezing cold.

Light. The Colonel, the doctor and the others appear. Pepa crawls out from under the bed holding injured bird.

Colonel: /severely/. Who attacked this bird?

Davud: It attacked first - all I did was to feel her for messages.

Colonel: Stand! Attention! Birds are incapable of reasoning, therefore they are defenceless. We're waiting for news and help from them and how do we welcome them? With violence? Just imagine how the rest of Europe would view this. And how can we look into their eyes when we go to meet them? How can we look into the eyes of those people who have sent us food when we were starving, clothes when we were perished to death and hope when we were down in the depths of despair? Those people who are going to send us messages with a bird and when we get them they'll

accept us as brothers. Because those people aren't ordinary folk, they are angels!

Peppa: News! News! News has arrived! Here it is!
The Colonel takes the bird and looks at the news carefully.

Doctor: It looks like an ornithological ring...is there anything on it?

Colonel: It's in a code.

Hacho: It says: C.01/01.

Kiro: /reading slowly/. C. 01/01.

Colonel: /decoding/. Come. The first, the first. /To them all./ We leave on the first of January.

Hacho: What do you mean? We leave?

Colonel: Never question orders! Is that clear?
Fade.

What at first had seemed impossible became more and more likely with every day that passed even though there was less than a week to go to January 1st. They got out the old jeep and painted it white and the blue UN emblem appeared on the bonnet and doors. Discipline was tightened from day to day. They were getting up at four thirty every morning so as to have time to get everything done.

Scene 7

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

Colonel: To repeat our encrypted route. From here towards...

All: Point one.

Colonel: After...

All: Point two.

Colonel: After...

All: Point three

Colonel: After...

All: France.

Colonel: France...

All: Strasbourg.

Colonel: But I want to tell you that when we cross the frontier we might make contact with other UN troops. Now - possible obstacles. First, we could be stopped by the traffic police.

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

Colonel: Right. Then.

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

Colonel: Gentlemen! Gentlemen, we have a constitutive document with which we have become members of the UN and no one can stop a fighting unit of the United Nations. Today is 30th

December and we are finally ready. Tomorrow is 31st December. I declare it a day of rest and reflection...Departure - 31st December at 24:00 hours. Dismiss!

Doctor: They really were going to set off. Of course, every great plan has its weak point. I could have phoned the Regional Hospital and thwarted the whole plan. But that would have ruined the game with all its rules that my patients had invented, a game that ensured that they all lived the lives of normal people. If I had done that they would all have turned back into the human tragedies that they were when I arrived. And when all is said and done who can say which game is the real one? Is it their little game or the great one that we all play, all of us that they call the normal ones. On 31st December the Colonel came to see me...

Scene 8

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

Doctor: Yes. Come in.

The Colonel enters and salutes.

Colonel: Good morning, doctor.

Doctor: Sit down, please.

Colonel: Thank you. */He sits./* Doctor, before anything else I would like to express my gratitude to you for the position of non-interference which you have taken. I am a military man and am well able to calculate the problems that you could have and still could create.

Doctor: As you see, I have not done this.

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

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

Colonel: What do you mean?

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

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

Doctor: That document is purely and simply paranoia.

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

Doctor: Great initiatives rarely succeed...

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

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

Colonel: Doctor, God helps only those that are mad in this world. Because when he created the world he was mad too. And now he is in love with his mistake.

Doctor: Perhaps... there is some logic...

Colonel: We leave at midnight. */He salutes and exits./*

Doctor: */alone/*. To go or not to go? Who shall I follow? Yorick or Fortinbras? In any case up to now I've always followed the normal people and God only knows that hasn't got me anywhere in particular. Neither geographically speaking or in any other way...

Scene 9

Fade - the sound of a bugle and heavy marching steps. The Colonel's loud commands are heard in the dark.

Colonel: Fall in! Attention! Roll-call! Corporal?

Davud: Sir!

Colonel: Antonova?

Peppa: Sir!

Colonel: Ivanov?

Hacho: Sir!

Colonel: Popov?

Matei: Sir!

Colonel: Penev?

Kiro: Sir!

Colonel: Attention! To the right, quick march to the gates. Halt! To the left! Attention!

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

Colonel: Gentlemen, in our role as a fighting unit of the UN it is necessary for us to use foreign languages.

Davud: I can speak Romany.

Hacho: I know a monologue in English: 'To be or not to be...'

Peppa: You'd be best off keeping your mouth shut.

Hacho: I'll keep quiet but if you start on about the Danube Bridge they'll all know that we're mad.

Peppa: Mad? Me? Is this a genuine medical certificate or isn't it? Doesn't it say here that I'm well? Doesn't it?

Colonel: Gentlemen... Lades and gentlemen! You are not mad, gentlemen. You are only different from the others. It is quite simple - you were not created for this world, gentlemen, because this world was created for everyone to be the same. But our world exists somewhere and we must believe in this because it says in the Bible:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,

Blessed are they that mourn,

Blessed are they that are persecuted,

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness"

We are all of those brought together, brothers, and so let's add one more thing that God has spoken "Blessed are the mad"! And let's believe in it although nowhere in the Charter of Human Rights is there a single line about the rights of those that are mad. Here you have one and only one right - to be treated so that you become the same as everyone else, that's why the mad are the most defenceless and unfortunate people in the world. We must escape all this. In fact we are already escaping but not as though we have been defeated. We shall escape as those who have won. And we will succeed because we are different. Is that clear?

All: Yes, sir!

The doctor, who up to this moment has been listening from the side, approaches the Colonel.

Doctor: Colonel, permission to fall in!

Colonel: Permission granted.

They all clap and the doctor stands at the end of the line. The Colonel stands at the other end.

Colonel: Attention! Forward march!

Scene 10

Doctor: The easiest time to cross the border is on the morning of January 1st...We didn't see Customs Officers at all - no doubt they were still seeing the New Year in. The border-guards saluted in a manner fitting for a U.N. Colonel and wished us a pleasant journey. The further west we went, the more units of blue berets we met and we were welcomed by them. In the end we joined a column of vehicles belonging to the French blue berets and went on north with them. Five days later we arrived in Strasbourg. They wouldn't let us into the building of the European Parliament so we had to submit their application by post. The people there are very precise and one month later we received a reply. They wrote that there wasn't a law to deal with the question of foreign fighting units who voluntarily joined their forces. For that reason they could not expel them either. So that's how we found ourselves outlaws but in the heart of Europe. We raised camp in the centre of Strasbourg, in front of the cathedral where any outlaw can find sanctuary. Praise be to God!

Scene 11

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

Colonel: On your feet! Attention!

They obey without thinking.

Colonel: In line! Attention!

They obey

Colonel: Brothers, we have achieved a great victory.

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

All: Sir!

Colonel: Three cheers for victory!

All: Hurrah!

Colonel: In line! Attention! Quick march! One-two, one-two...

They march in single file around the Colonel.

Colonel: Section!

This command means that they have to mark time and they continue their march under the heavy beat of soldiers' boots.

Colonel: Louder! Louder!! Tighten up! By the left! Left! One-two-three! Left, left, one-two-three!

The Colonel's commands get shriller and shriller over the sound of the song until, in the end, he clutches his heart and collapses on the ground. The others rush towards him and lift him up. Delirious, The Colonel continues to shout:

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

Suddenly the Colonel throws his cap to the ground, his head flops and he falls silent and motionless. Fade.

Doctor The Colonel never spoke again. His illness once again turned back into depression. All this happened a long time ago, one, two or three years ago, I no longer remember exactly when. I didn't know what day it was or which month but it was spring because they caught a migrating bird and Davud used it to send a message to his wife. And so, as he couldn't write, Davud dictated me letter. Here it is.

Davud: My Dear! I'm writing to you from France, from the Cathedral Square in Strasbourg. It's sunny here and it must be sunny with you too because in

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

EPILOGUE

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

Doctor: Fall in! Attention! Quick march!

In twos the soldiers march in ceremonial step. Around them are heard the voices and clapping of sightseers while the squad continues its formal march. One of them comes down from the stage and moves through the audience shaking a blue cap with coins in it.