

Lauris Gundars

TOUCH THE POLAR BEAR!



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The first attempt to depict the events of mass deportation of Latvian people after WWII on the stage. It is not a retrospective view of the past, but an ideological impact on people's thoughts, fates and personal collisions. The items selected for the performance bear a multidimensional significance and address the public aesthetically. The play follows the editing principle, the images move around in time and space directed by relativity in the rules of the play.

The action takes place in Latvia and in Siberia between 1937 – 1957. It is a love story of two 19-year-old people that started during a party in the summer – Gunars invites Elza for a dance and immediately steps on her toes... Love and death, happiness and hatred, fire and ice, soul and common sense, ideals and survival.

Cast of characters:

Elza

Gunars

Teiksmā,

who also portrays the following nine characters:

Yelizaveta Prokofievna Pudure (née Streltsova),

Little Zigrīda,

Brigadiers 1, 2, and 3 of the forced settlement fishing kolkhoz,

Ziedonis,

Investigator Ermine,

Prison Camp Registrar,

Brigadier-in-chief of the prison camp.

(Normal font used for Teiksmā's dialogue, text is italicised when Teiksmā portrays the other mentioned characters)

June 1941

ELZA...I didn't know what actually happened – I'd lost touch with reality. Had a minute, a day or a week passed? The sun had stopped dead at one point. It only moved when I came to my senses, when I understood that the thick pine above me was real. Two more sunsets. No one looked for me. Silence. A doe approached me. But she, startled, fled suddenly as if she had seen something more horrifying than a wolf. Frightening me more than herself. I tore off all my clothes. Absolutely all. But because I looked so very white in the forest I put my dress back on. In a shed I found some old rags and smeared my face with mud. There was only one hen there. Cackling shrilly, she scampered off to the house. It too was deserted...All alone in the world... Just a dull rumble could be heard in the distance. The Russians, it turned out, had already left. Germans. They kept their distance from me. No one said anything to me. Me – a crazy, dirty old hag. It's a good thing they didn't say a word to me because I would have stabbed them – under my rags I had hidden a knife. I don't know why but I would have stabbed anyone to death. Maybe I was going to stab you. Maybe. But there was no one in your flat. All abandoned. Just two men carrying out a wardrobe. And then, when I opened my mouth for the first time ... I talked in Russian. I no longer knew Latvian. Not a word. (*in Russian*) “*Kuda vi!*¹” ... The men dropped the wardrobe and ran off. Blood flowed from my mouth – I had bitten my tongue a hundred times into a hundred shreds. But it was still in my mouth.

¹ Where are you going?

Only it was a Russian tongue. I talked through blood. For two years! I thought in Latvian, but...I'd come to stab you to death, I'm certain. (*In Russian*) *Ubila bi, glazom ne morgnuv!!!*² You disgust me!!! You're an absolute idiot!!! A freak!!!

A knife suddenly appears in Elza's hand and she makes a stabbing motion toward Gunars, but Teiksma manages to wrestle the knife away from Elza.

GUNARS ... I was so overjoyed...so very overjoyed...so happy that day. We're moving to the Soviet Union. At last! We will break free from our small, warm cage to be part of a large tempestuous world. We're going to help the people who are creating a radiant new social order...there are wagons for men separate from wagons for women and children. These have been specially adapted to transport people – everything has been thought out: wooden two-story bunks and a hole in the floor. Of course: we're not animals. I find out from the soldiers who help us get settled in that there's a shortage of real passenger wagons. I manage to calm my mother – I'm ready to work night and day because I can see the logic of it. Maybe they'll let me do designs on my own: but I still have to show them what I can do. My mother is crying. She's going to a different wagon: one for women, of course. Father arrives at a run at the very last moment: I see him through a crack. Terribly agitated. But he's still allowed to board the train about seven wagons further down. It's summer. The 14th of June and warm at night. We are many – 42 men – too many to sleep lying down. But no one feels like sleeping. Everyone is debating what and how. I have to talk for a long time, to convince them. Totally out of character for me. But they believe me – it's clear that specialists, good workers are as necessary for a

² I'd have killed with no hesitation!!!

new nation as air and water. I agree that they needed to inform us earlier so that we could pack. I agree that one needs to talk things over with people. But they don't understand how large this new country is, how hard it is to foresee everything. They agree. However, during the night, when we've already crossed Latvia's border, my tooth is knocked out. By someone called Juris, from Nauksheni. I don't get angry. I understand: if a person is not ready for life, he becomes aggressive. You yourself said that. He, however, says it's because of the singing. I do sense it, what life is in reality – you're right, it's change every day. So much change my head spins. I'm aware, I feverishly think, I'm fully aware: therefore I'm alive! ...I'm only sad that you went to see your father and that we aren't together this night. You, of course, would now be in a women's wagon, but we still would be together in one train. I can't wait to get to Moscow, where I can post this letter to you. History is helping us begin our real life sooner than we had dreamt was possible. Don't envy me – I shall send for you as soon as tomorrow! ... ELZA. For once look at what's happening around you! What really is happening!

TEIKSMA. "Stay the same as you are! Promise me?" ...Who said that?

ELZA. Me?! Never! ...And that was totally in a different context!!! (*leaves*).

TEIKSMA. They met on the 12th of August 1938. It was hot. In some cottage at the seaside, with friends and...

Gunars sings a romantic Russian ballad.

TEIKSMA. That was his special song. Usually he had to be begged for a long time to sing it. But not that day. And she noticed.

GUNARS. I didn't dare even to think. She was so ... transparent. Floating above the earth, it seemed to me...

TEIKSMA. Floating above the earth!... And you yourself? They laughed at you.

GUNARS. Who?

TEIKSMA. Only flying, gliding, spinning and diving. When he was present all conversations turned to planes. That was in style then.

GUNARS. Not because of that!

TEIKSMA. Yes, to be in style wasn't important for him. He was simply mad.

GUNARS. That was just my job! I was working at VEF. For Irbitis. I began with the I-11. That was an outstanding monoplane with a superb free-carrying wing, a 90 horsepower Cirrus Minor engine, our first glass cockpit, a tight gliding angle, high dynamic quality – small frontal area...

TEIKSMA. He was a draughtsman, a young lad apprenticing.

GUNARS. A designer's assistant!

TEIKSMA. Who for almost half a year could not manage to tell his girl what he wanted.

GUNARS. We danced! Two times!

TEIKSMA. Without a word.

GUNARS. Yes, we spoke!

TEIKSMA. (*laughs*) "It's so cool today! Yesterday was warmer!"... The second time: "It's so hot today! Yesterday was cooler!"...

GUNARS. I told you about the new I-14!

TEIKSMA. "A monoplane with a negative wing span and retractable wheels"...

GUNARS. One day Irbitis casually asked: “Are you in love?” I had made an error of as much as 63 millimetres in my drawings of wheel supports. He didn’t know that I had already a month earlier made an error and that I had secretly reworked the rear support reinforcement for the I-12.

TEIKSMA. “Are you in love?”

GUNARS: No...yes...

TEIKSMA. What was your answer then?

GUNARS. I asked for a Saturday off work.

TEIKSMA. Well – yes, or – no?

GUNARS. You’re not allowed to make mistakes on a plane!

TEIKSMA. Therefore – “No, Mr. Irbitis, of course, I’m not in love. What rubbish!”

ELZA. Stop it!

GUNARS. That Saturday, honest to God, I wanted to confess to you ...I swear! But there was a dreadful snow storm...

ELZA. It wouldn’t have mattered because I had gone home, to see my father.

TEIKSMA. He didn’t know that but he didn’t go.

ELZA. My father had found out that I hadn’t enrolled in the agricultural faculty but in philosophy instead at the University. I even screamed at my father for the first time in my life. That he understands nothing of the modern world or of spirituality. He hissed – “Liar!!!” In fact I was his “son” who was to inherit his farm – 53 hectares and 22 cows. My sister was my sister – a woman...

GUNARS. Philosophy! ...Aristocrat.

ELZA. And that’s how it was left – forever after. I wasn’t able to understand. He couldn’t forgive.

TEIKSMA. He understood and forgave. He was able to do that.

ELZA. I came back to Riga, needing so much... needing someone...

(she kisses Gunars passionately).

GUNARS. How that frightened me!!! No, for her sake I would have been ready to do anything... but I didn't understand...

ELZA. Then only loose women did that. What shame!

GUNARS. I fell ill. I didn't sleep for four days and four nights. Pitch dark all around, with my heart racing like mad.

ELZA. We both were nineteen . Such loneliness! ... I howled...

TEIKSMA. Yelizaveta Prokofievna, maiden name Streltsova, smiled for four days and four nights and slept soundly.

TEIKSMA/YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA *Take a rozhocka³ and go and visit, why don't you!*

GUNARS. I can't...(all of a sudden) What rose, mam'? What are you talking about?!

TEIKSMA. Is she a pretty girl?

GUNARS. *(in Russian) Ja prosto bolen!*⁴

TEIKSMA/YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *Speak Latvian!*

ELZA. He had a red rose in his hand.

TEIKSMA. For 19 years already Yelizaveta Prokofievna Streltsova was called Liza, the wartime wife brought back from Russia by rifleman Jekabs Puduris. He, himself, a Latvian.

ELZA. He passed by my front door six times: I saw from the upstairs window. Once he even managed to walk into the entrance hall. I was all dressed up...

³ In Russian "rose"

⁴ *I'm simply sick!*

TEIKSMA/ YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *And why do we need someone like that, eh? Gaze fixed a half-metre or so above the far horizon, smiling like an overgrown angel. And ideals, ideals and more ideals... What you need is a proper farmer! At the very least, a veterinarian.*

Gunars' song sounds.

GUNARS. I learned where she would be and went, after all, and found her.

ELZA. He couldn't conceal it that he was singing just for me. But I couldn't show him that I knew: as it was, I was already supposed to be a slut.

GUNARS. And then on March 3rd, 1939...

TEIKSMA/YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *Secretly I was listening to Moscow radio. The boy listened openly, but I pretended that none of it concerned us. Well, it was a mistake – that I kept silent.*

GUNARS. *(to Elza)* Ordeals, daily changes, concentration, perseverance! They're creating a new world! Happy people live there!

TEIKSMA/ YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *Jekabs continued to be the brave rifleman – he built two large houses right in the centre of Riga and was digging the foundations for a third. In debt right up to his neck, but happy. I was unhappy: he was coming home late at night and leaving at daybreak. I said, let me dig too or carry the bricks – I can do it! He laughs. Or even take accounting courses? I plead...*

GUNARS. *(to Elza)* Just imagine, everyone there is learning how to fly aeroplanes and jump with a parachute! Everyone! Really, it's training for the psyche! You fly higher and higher and then you have to make a choice...

ELZA. Have you jumped?

GUNARS. This summer. They promised me.

ELZA. Have you flown?

GUNARS. This fall. Piloting courses for sure.

TEIKSMA/YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *Don't dig the foundations now, don't! There's going to be a war.*

GUNARS. You have to feel you're alive! Feel it with every fibre in your body, every second of the day!

ELZA. I didn't even hear what exactly he was saying y. For the first time in my life.

GUNARS. Are you listening?

ELZA. Yes...but...what about the world, about what we can't influence.

GUNARS. That's nothing, nothing at all. There's only the two of us. And everything that happens around us depends on us. On our training, willpower, endurance and concentration. The world belongs to us, not we to the world. Let it run after us, if it wishes. We won't pay any attention to it. Because we're the only thing of value – we, ourselves...Stupid, ha?... I don't know how to be smart...

ELZA. I regurgitated things I had picked up from books, but he found proof in everything for what he himself thought. He was obsessed. I was obsessed. Or maybe only our young bodies were inflamed...

GUNARS. Will you come with me tonight?

ELZA. Yes...

GUNARS. We'll sneak into the factory through a window tonight. They're already building the I-14. You'll see for yourself – it's truly courageous, a challenge...

ELZA. No, those weren't just passionate bodies... He is... You can't say banal things about him, but... He...

TEIKSMA/ YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *I never told Jekabs. About the war and what I thought. What you don't think about also doesn't happen. Foolishness, of course, but I wanted it to be true. Jekabs would have answered like that. I wrecked the radio. But the boy fixed it again.*

ELZA. He absolutely was not able to be like everyone else. He tried but...

GUNARS. I knew they were laughing at me. But I can't ...I don't know how to tell jokes, I don't know how not to step on toes while shuffling on a dance floor, my head hurts when I have a drink...And they laugh at me when I start to speak...Life is different, it seems to me...

ELZA. Remain just as you are. Promise?

GUNARS. What am I?...

ELZA. No, I haven't said anything to you.

GUNARS. But that, it seems to me, happened later.

ELZA. Why would I even have said it?

GUNARS. You said it. I didn't understand.

TEIKSMA/ YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *Have you ever kissed a girl?*

GUNARS. Mam'!

TEIKSMA/ YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. (in Russian) *Tak trepetno, tak zhadno...*⁵...So tenderly, so... I was looking through a door left slightly ajar and crying... Oh, to be only nineteen!...

ELZA. (*suddenly*) That's it! Tears and sniffles! It wasn't so ...banal! It was... And then the Russian tanks moved in!

TEIKSMA/ YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *And you asked to learn Russian...*

GUNARS. Of course, everyone was perturbed about what would happen next. That was clear to everyone – in contrast to our small factory, the new

Soviet State was manufacturing thousands upon thousands of aeroplanes!... On a grandiose scale! But they praised our I-16 and gave it high marks. It's a destroyer plane. We were so happy! We had to send one each of the VEF models to Moscow. Comrade Fyodorov wanted to talk to me personally – we were *zemliaki*⁶, he said. We talked about my mother. He didn't want anything else, but I wasn't able to control myself – I blurted out my readiness to work, work and work some more. “You're already working!” – said Comrade Fyodorov, laughing. Isn't that the truth.

TEIKSMA/YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *The young lady was learning Russian. I couldn't listen to it. She used to be more clever. But, when girls take it into their heads... Jekabs had to sign over one of the houses to the new regime, and the boy was glad. “Working people increase our welfare with their work, we should be grateful to them!” – he said. ...I wanted to slap his face, but Jekabs didn't let me. He just sat there in silence. Jekabs would remain in his place! And the rest in theirs!...*

ELZA. *(spelling out letter by letter) (speaking Russian) Freilina vishla v sad, no Bonton uzhe bezhal za nej vshlipivaja...⁷*

GUNARS. *(throws his book away) I'll run get a paper! Different times. Everything is different!!!*

TEIKSMA/YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *Barishna⁸, I've been meaning to tell you ...guard my boy, he's so... so ...oh, nothing!*

ELZA. *(In Russian). Jelizaveta Prokofjevna, spasibo....⁹ You have brought up a real ... chelovek¹⁰ ...! I really think so. He ... dumaet¹¹ so profoundly.*

⁵ So tenderly, so hungrily!

⁶ Russian meaning “man from the same district”.

⁷ Mademoiselle went out into the garden, but Bonton was running after her gasping for breath.

⁸ In Russian “young lady”

⁹ Elizaveta Prokofievna, thank you.

¹⁰ In Russian “man”.

¹¹ In Russian “thinks”.

TEIKSMA/ YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *Oh, be quiet!*

ELZA. I'm sorry. He is...the most honorable *chelovek* I know.

TEIKSMA/YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA.(In Russian) *Urod! Urod on!!!¹²*

ELZA. What does that mean Yelizaveta Prokofievna?

TEIKSMA/ YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *What could I have said to her? That bad times were coming? Then it only seemed like that. Well, I sensed that it was going to be really bad. (in Russian) It was nagging at me here.¹³ ...People were whispering. All at once they remembered that I was Russian. That's why Jekabs too... People were disappearing. One day they were here, the next gone. Rumours were spreading. But the boy...Rubbish!...Like his papa.*

ELZA. *What is "urod"¹³, Yelizaveta Prokofievna? How would you translate it?*

TEIKSMA/ YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *Freak!*

ELZA. *(laughs)* Stop that!

TEIKSMA/YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *A saint!...When you fall in love, you become...stupid, isn't that so. It happens even to philosophers.*

ELZA. No, Yelizaveta Prokofievna! I see everything very clearly. Truly, really as it is!

TEIKSMA/ YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *Is your life difficult?*

ELZA. No. Why do you ask?

TEIKSMA/ YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. *Do you need to change something?*

¹² He is a freak! A freak!

¹³ In Russian "freak"

ELZA. No, but it can always be better. Qualitatively better, you understand. Gunis speaks the truth when he says with every fibre of your body...

TEIKSMA/YELIZAVETA PROKOFIEVNA. (*interrupts*) *I'm the one who says it, I – a russky! Do you not understand?! (leaves)*

ELZA. Yelizaveta Prokofievna!...

Gunars returns with a newspaper.

GUNARS. Take a look at this! Read it! Sudrabkalns thinks the same! Read it: *Red roses in Vermanis Park* – read it aloud!

ELZA. Guni, your mother...

GUNARS. It's terribly difficult to find words that rhyme with Stalin ... What's happened?

ELZA. No, nothing. (*hugs him*) (in Russian) *Urod ti moj!...¹⁴...*

GUNARS. (*laughs*) What? What do you mean?

ELZA. My saint. (in Russian) *Urod ti moj!...*

GUNARS. No, it's ...*svjatoj! Svjatoj!!!...¹⁵*

Elza gives Gunars a long, drawn out kiss.

TEIKSMA. After a week Elza went home to apologise to her father. She arrived late in the evening. Her father was sitting at the table while three armed men were turning the house upside down. The strangers were happy to see the oldest daughter come home. She'd know better what to pack to take along. Save time. Cut 20 minutes to three... Gunis and Yelizaveta Prokofievna were led to the Tornakalna railway station first – also by three armed men. Jekabs only found them around early morning, just prior to the train pulling out of the station. That day on a beautiful morning 15 424 persons arrived in the Soviet Union from Latvia. “For life, without right to

¹⁴ My freak.

change their place of residence”, as they were informed after a week, when they deboarded the train in Krasnoyarsk, in the heart of Siberia. That is – those that got off the train. (*in Russian*) *Na vechno, bez prava*¹⁶ ... Signature: I agree ...(*Counts*)...1, 2, 3, 4, 5 ... I counted once, not calling everyone by name ... 15 422, 15 423, 15 424... It took 13 hours 42 minutes to count all... Yelizaveta Prokofievna had returned to her land of birth. As soon as the train crossed the border of Russia, she started to scream shrilly. Incessantly. In some station she was taken off the train. (*in Russian*) *Na vechno*¹⁷ ... Jekabs was shot dead while attempting senselessly to escape across the infinitely endless steppe.

ELZA. They pulled me from the train while we were still in Latvia, during a short stop. Three soldiers, or officers, or ... With rifles. From the bushes I could see the train. They breathed hard on top of me. Like the locomotive... where water was being poured in. When the train whistle blew, only one of the men, the last one was still there. I don't know how I thought to kick him – I ran and remained.

GUNARS. I was so overjoyed...so happy that morning when we crossed the Soviet Union border. Get ready Elza. I'm sure you'll like it. I can't wait to get there!

ELZA. My tongue didn't heal for two years, it continued to bleed...and I talked only in Russian ... all through the German occupation! You're an idiot! *Urod! Sviatoy urod*¹⁸ !!!

¹⁵ In Russian “Saint. Saint”

¹⁶ For life, without the right...Signed: I agree.

¹⁷ *For life.*

1943. Winter. By Lake Plague.

GUNARS. ... The seventh great ordeal The seventh in three years. Lucky $7 \times 3 = 21$. (*laughs*). 21! Blackjack! The exhaustion is truly horrendous, but I'm happy! Could there ever be anyone so lucky? 21! – lucky 7 times 3. ... We've walked two days and one more night. When we'll have crossed three lakes and circled a fourth one, there is supposed to be an old hunting shack. We don't dare stop – our boots would freeze immediately to our feet. The boots we made ourselves from wadding and rags. Now they're totally soaked. Mrs. Melkis is still wearing her Riga-made overcoat – not a hole in it after three years. What a fine tailor! And also because she's wearing two housedresses over it. The rest of us hadn't thought when we left in the summer to take along something warm to wear. And there's not enough to go around here. You should see what all we're not wearing! I have ... I don't know what it is any longer. It's wartime after all. The new state barely can manufacture enough clothing and boots for the army, certainly not enough for us, the *dormoedi*¹⁹. But that's fine! $7 \times 3 = 21$ is blackjack! The snow on occasion is right up to your armpits, across three lakes, circling a fourth one – 80 kilometres $21 \times 80 = 1680$! ... We'll fish again there. *May the fascist bastards be beaten!* – so said Koshevoy, our Brigadier-in-Chief. We too can help. We are two men. $1680 \times 2 = 3360$. The rest are seven women or *babas* as he calls them. $3360 \times 7 = 23\,520$... never let your mind go slack – it must keep you warm!!! $3360 \times 7 = 23\,520$... (in Russian) *Plan perevipolnim za tot zhe pajok!*²⁰ The bread is frozen, hard. Good! You can't bite off too much, so more is left! 650 grams for each of us for the journey – two days, across three lakes, circle a fourth: 650 grams. $23\,520 \times 650 = 15$

¹⁸ In Russian “Freak. Sainly freak”.

¹⁹ In Russian “parasite”.

²⁰ We shall fulfil the plan for the same food ration.

288 000! ... I haven't been able to get to a postal box ... but this month for sure ... I'll get to one ... I'm frozen to a pine, and your letter can't even find me. It's already dark. We found the shack but it has been in ruins for a long time already. We're all frozen, each to our own tree. We just wanted to rest, lean for the briefest of moments ... But we know, that tonight we'll still build a hut! We'll overcome! Everything really depends on me. The seventh ordeal in three years, $7 : 3 = 2.333333333333$...

TEIKSMA. *Vzīali, suki!!!*²¹ Snow falls away from Koshevoy! ...

1943. Autumn. Latvia.

ELZA. ... In two years I had only thawed out on the surface, just a little. And only thanks to Ziedonis. For weeks, months I slept in all sorts of barns and sheds. I didn't want to eat, drink – a person can do without for two weeks, four if need be. Better that my tongue be mute – so it wouldn't bleed... But what had I to say and to whom? (*In Russian*) *Izvinite, chto jesche hozhu po belu svetu!*²² I'm still not dead ... Ziedonis is a veterinarian. He's the best in the neighbourhood at insemination and very good at deliveries. Doesn't complain! Does what he has to do. No one else would have been able to calm me down. Even Ziedonis himself said to me afterward: "An untamed wild horse is better off?!" ... But even he couldn't heal my tongue. I was mute – even with him. What and how could I explain? Only today I ...screamed – "I'll stay!!! I'll stay here, with you!" In clear, unbroken Latvian. Suddenly, I could talk. But Ziedonis wasn't even surprised. "I'll stay!" He wanted to send me across the sea, to Sweden. "The

²¹ In Russian. "Together, bitches!"

²² I apologise that I'm still alive.

Russians have returned!!!” I’m not deaf! “We’ll stay! We have to hold out until the English or the Yankees come, only a few more months!” Ziedonis said and he knew, of what he spoke. “We’ll go into the woods!” We burned down the house ourselves, calmly, by ourselves. Into the woods! Yes, yes, just like that, into the woods! (*referring to Gunars*) I would never go into the woods with you, never!!! Do you hear me, Saint?! What would you do in the woods? You’d collapse and breathe your last in the very first minute! You who live life in theory! Fortunate theoretician! Who has ran off and is missing!

1942. Agapitavo, Siberia. Teiksma as little Zigrida is drawing on birch bark.

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. (*about the drawing*) *These here are us, but those there are the ones who were chosen.*

GUNARS. Why are they bigger?

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *We weren’t chosen. They were better and stronger.*

GUNARS. But it wasn’t a slave market there.

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *What is a slave market?*

GUNARS. It wasn’t a slave market.

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *They didn’t choose me, because I couldn’t carry anything, mamma said.*

GUNARS. (*laughs*) Do I look like someone who can’t carry anything?

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *You’re an idiot.*

GUNARS. Why?

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *Mamma said. A saint and an idiot, isn’t that so?*

GUNARS. Do you not want to go home, to your mamma?

TEIKSMA. Little Zigrida was six years old. She'll never get older but, for now, she's still alive. Also little Zigrida's mother and her six-month old brother were not selected in the large railway square in Krasnoyarsk. The people who were not selected boarded a boat – they spent five days in the belly of a rusted whale navigating a gigantic river. The best thing to do was for all to fall asleep facing in one direction, huddled on their knees for lack of space. At dusk on the sixth day the whale with a heavy thud hit against land. Agapitova. Beyond the Polar circle, where winter starts in summer. It wasn't clear, if any of the newcomers even knew the name of the place, perhaps they just called it that. A barren, rocky bluff and the other side of the river is 10 kilometres away – a real sea. A thousand people get off and stay. (*in Russian*) *Na vechno*.²³ During the night it starts to snow. There are six tents for the whole lot of them. The task assigned by their new “home” is to prepare firewood for the steamer boat for next year's navigation. Life – in the free time after work.

GUNARS (*about the drawing*) It's some sort of celebration here, isn't it?

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *We're sleeping on the ground and God is above – like a minister. We're already dead. Here some of the guests are already being eaten by wolves.*

GUNARS. We haven't died!

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *By March there won't be anyone left, Uncle Sepp said.*

GUNARS. You don't understand Finnish!

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *Wolfgang also said so.*

²³ In Russian “forever”.

GUNARS. You don't know German! And Wolfgang is already dead! ...

Better ask your mamma. Look! Who wakes us each morning with a song!

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *Wolves.*

GUNARS. Your mamma! Your mother is an example for all of us. Always smiling. How she sings! We have to think about what we would like, not ... that which we don't want.

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *I do want to.*

GUNARS. You can't want that.

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *I'd like it better if a little ermine would eat me. What about you?*

GUNARS. Better make a drawing ...of work! How we cut down trees, how we dig caves for ourselves. When I was small, in my garden I had such a cave – a bunker. But it couldn't be heated, like this one. (*referring to the drawing*) And here, what's this?

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *You and I are eating grass and chewing on birch bark.*

GUNARS. It wasn't tasty, was it? You know sometime in the future people will eat only grass. It's very healthy because it contains all sorts of good things for you. (*about the drawing*) Is that my aeroplane?

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. (*laughs*) *No, silly, that's a cross. Over all of us. Pretty, isn't it? I like it the best.*

GUNARS. Go home.

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *It smells too much.*

GUNARS. Don't make up things! It also smells here – stale stagnant water, mould, damp. It smells a little for everyone, in all the dugouts. But we're soldiers aren't we? We've been assigned our duties, haven't we?! Let's smile! Together!

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *My little brother smells.*

GUNARS. Aren't you ashamed of yourself ?!

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *People don't smell if you put them outside – I say to mamma. But she says my little brother doesn't smell.*

GUNARS. Your mamma loves him so.

Gunars tries to tear up the birch bark but does not succeed.

GUNARS. We're alive! We won't die!

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *My little brother died. Long ago. But mamma doesn't believe me.*

GUNARS. ... Your mamma wouldn't sing then ... (*leaves*)

TEIKSMA/LITTLE ZIGRIDA. *Uncle Gunis only took away my little brother from my mamma after three days. We had porridge tied in a cloth. I still lived for a week. Afterward the little ermine nibbled me clean. Except for my right leg. The wolf got that. I hadn't drawn it right: when we're dead, everything is upside down of course, feet in the air – we're flying and the cross is not above us. We're flying as if in a plane. Wherever we want and however long we want ... In the spring on the Agapitova bluff for each person there were at least four caves. There was much firewood for the steamer and just a few not quite dead yet – about 50 or 70 left. That was the first large "ordeal" for Uncle Gunis, as he called it. Mamma it seems had got attached to him, because all three of us, including my little brother, still floated above him for almost three years. Nowhere far because he was fishing in the large Plague lakes. Together with some women. We don't hear voices here, of course, but, from their clothes, we could tell they were Latvians. There was a second and a third "ordeal". During the fourth one, a bear attacked him. During the fifth one all the women fell through the ice together with their net. They didn't come up again. Precisely on the day that the motherland won the war with the Brown*

ones. Some people were smiling and dancing. Then came the “big build-up”, when Uncle Gunis was close by and almost with us. And the seventh – across three lakes, round another. To freeze to the trees is not horrible. During the sixth “ordeal” Uncle Gunis was much closer to us. Drenched, he was lying on clear, sparkling ice. He was staring straight at us, becoming whiter and whiter. It seemed that he smiled at me. I waved back at him, but he didn’t recognise me. But I don’t know what that little ermine had left and what she had nibbled off. They were prying Uncle Gunis off the ice with long poles, and then they held him above a large bonfire, its flames almost reaching the sky. We got scorched. They held him so for a whole day, like a killed wild boar. He thawed and started to drip.

GUNARS. That morning something opened up. I tried to tell them that you were waiting for me to come home. In the beginning no one understood – all of us there were neither men nor women. I told them that we had a little son. I don’t know why. Little Karlis, I said ... what all did I not blurt out! They needed it: they started to unfreeze, or ... And I too, probably, needed it. No, of course, I do understand – six years have passed: you wouldn’t recognise me probably. And I would understand. I’d understand you very well. But that morning I told everyone who’d listen, and ...I could no longer handle it. I was lying on clear, sparkling ice – I don’t know how, but I could also see under me. And, it seemed to me, a small angel waved at me from heaven. Phooey! A mess! A total mess!!! But it was the only time! The only time, I swear!!!

1948. *Siberia.*

GUNARS. They had watched me very carefully. Measured for seven years, cut once. It was spring 1948. No one specifically and openly talked about aeroplanes. (*in Russian*) *Ja sozdal novij prototip istrebitelja: G-1. Ot slova – Gunar...*²⁴ Everyone I told it to, pretended they knew nothing about it. I was simply naïve – no one talks about such things aloud and just any place. However, they examined the draft drawings with great care. To be more precise they were sketches – who would call them draft drawings? The general meeting of the fisherman’s kolchoz freed me from participating in the execution of the planned catch quotas. I set to designing the super plane with lowered wings called E-1 for Elza. Seven years. Seven happy years. Their most vital feature is the durability of the wings. ...

TEIKSMA. All the three kolkhoz brigadiers: Nevinny, Bezsmertmniy and Neizvestniy²⁵ had been crippled during the war. Each had one lame leg. After the war all of them were merry. After the war – all three loved to listen to stories about flying.

TEIKSMA/BRIGADEER 1. (*in Russian*) *Postroj-ka nam, Zhorik, takoj jeroplan, chtobi uletet otsjuda k jedrene materi, a, mozhesh?! Mozhesh, a?!²⁶*

GUNARS. Even without an engine! When we fire up the bathhouse in the woods, we tie an old canvas between four trees and the hot air mass generated by the fire raises the canvas up high! Have you noticed? Just draw it closed at the bottom and it can fly away! (*in Russian*) *Shar, vozdushnij shar!!!²⁷* Even to America!!! ...

²⁴ I created a new prototype of a destroyer plane. G-1 from the name Gunars

²⁵ In Russian their names mean Innocent, Immortal and Incognito

²⁶ Build us a plane to fly the fuck away from here. Can you do it? Can you?!

²⁷ A hot-air balloon!

TEIKSMA/BRIGADIER 2. (In Russian) *A ti, Zhorik brat, znajesh, chto takoje rodina?!*²⁸

GUNARS. Of course I don't know what is my homeland, I don't know! ...

TEIKSMA/BRIGADIER 2. Homeland, (in Russian) ... *tvoja... rodina, brat Zhorik, eto kogda, eto... kogda holodno i golodno, no... ti ljubish... Povtori!*²⁹

GUNARS. Your homeland is where it's cold and you're starving but you still love it!

TEIKSMA/BRIGADEER 3. (in Russian) *A vozdushnij shar daleko letit?*³⁰

GUNARS. You can fly the whole kolkhoz to Moscow in one hot-air balloon, no problem!

TEIKSMA/BRIGADEER 1. (in Russian) *Pochemu Moskva?! A Amerika?*³¹

GUNARS. If you want you can fly as far as the North Pole!

TEIKSMA/BRIGADEER 3. (in Russian) *Ti chto?!*³²

GUNARS. I very much like you, our homeland! Very much!

TEIKSMA/BRIGADIERS 1 & 3. (in Russian) *Oi, durak, durak, durak ti nash svjatoj!!!...*³³

TEIKSMA/BRIGADIER 2. (in Russian) *Mataj ti domoj, Zhora!!! Bistro, chtobi ja ne zaplakal!!!...*³⁴

GUNARS. I'd been watched very closely. And I'd passed the test and proved ... proved to you! The world submitted to me ... I wont post the letter. I'll tell it to you over a hot cup of tea. It's only 6000 kilometres. I'll be there!

²⁸ Do you know Zhorik where your homeland is?!

²⁹ a homeland, brother Zhorik, is the place where you feel cold and hungry but you love it ... I repeat!

³⁰ Can the hot-air balloon fly far?

³¹ Why Russia? Why not America?

³² You're kidding!

³³ Oh, idiot, idiot, idiot you're a saint!

³⁴ Go home Zhorik!!! Before I start crying!!!

1948. Latvia Birzgale Parish. A hay barn.

ELZA. ... Spring 1948. Ziedonis fires back with two pistols. We already knew that they were at least twenty – we had counted them when they surrounded the yard. “I wasn’t born to rot in hay! That’s senseless !!!” – he screams. I’ve never doubted him, never. He’s not a freak. He’s a saint! ... “Can we prove anything to anyone, if we’re shot while dug down deep under hay, am I not right?” It was the favourite preoccupation of destroyer planes – to shoot a volley into a haystack. Of course, they can shoot us, but they won’t find us. We’ll head out further. But, if not? “I wasn’t born to rot in hay!” – he swears. And we must not have doubts. Destroy the destroyer! We’re here! Unfortunately! We’re still here! We’re playing your game, in order not to give up! Never!!! ... No matter what anyone says! I trusted and trust Ziedonis! Until the end and absolutely. He fired back with two pistols. He jumped out from the shed when it already looked as if they would drive away, having accomplished nothing. Five of the destroyers fell into a pile in no time at all. We retreated into the swamp. They wounded me in the arm – the pistol flew off somewhere. I shot with my other hand. With my hand. With my finger. I shot and shot and shot ... Long ago it had fallen silent ... Ziedonis went down and died as a saint. I’m very proud of him! You always have to bare your teeth against injustice! Teeth !!! ...

1947. Jekabpils district. A small shed. Teiksma as Ziedonis has pressed

Elzas’s mouth shut with his palm.

TEIKSMA. Ziedonis’ hand had always been very strong. So is his voice. During the second year in the woods his eyes changed from light blue to black. Black and very shiny: they seemed to also shine in the dark, even

during sleep under his eyelids. When he opened his eyes it looked as if Ziedonis had not slept. The smile lines around his eyes did not disappear ever. The English didn't come. The Americans didn't come.

ELZA. Too strong!!! ...

TEIKSMA/ZIEDONIS (*pressing his hand over Elza's mouth*) *No, it isn't hopeless, no! We'll give birth again and again, until the woods will be full of our children. Yes! Maybe! Maybe they'll also fall! They'll shoot at us, but there will be more and more of us. If we become more and more, they'll become less and less! The more of them will be here, the more we'll procreate! Don't bite! Don't bite, I say!!!* (*pulls his hand away*)

ELZA. I can't. I can't anymore! ...

TEIKSMA/ZIEDONIS. (*again pressing his hand over Elza's mouth*) *how fortunate we've been – the woods, freedom; under the moss, silence in a dugout, and no one knows about it. It surely was the happiest time in your life. It still is! You must have understood long ago what freedom means! Here you are, free. And your child will be born free! And he'll choose death not slavery! If it's necessary!*

A child is born to Elza. Ziedonis, with consummate professionalism and practicality, assists in the birth.

ELZA. I couldn't scream or moan – they were looking for us. To destroy us. But Ziedonis allowed himself to be persuaded to give Little Karlis in secrecy in the keeping of his cousin. Nothing suspicious – a woman living alone in the country. No one even noticed. Of course, the child was given her last name. I simply did not exist. Ziedonis didn't exist. And my little Karlis, my little boy didn't exist.

TEIKSMA/ZIEDONIS. *You were weak from pain. Is everything fine now?*

ELZA. Yes, of course...

TEIKSMA/ZIEDONIS. *We have to move on.*

ELZA. It's safe here. Just for tonight still.

TEIKSMA/ZIEDONIS. *Let's start out at five a.m. I have found an unbelievably good place, right on the main street. Between the Brivini house and the militia building there is a very narrow cranny – yes, yes, it's there. Barely discernible. On the other side there's a small shed – yes, yes. Let's mount the automatic rifle on a base, let's position it so that the bullets are aimed in the direction of the street and then get them – one by one! One after the other. As they walk by – hit them. And we ourselves in the shed, no one to see from where, who and how! The people just die, fall one after the other! God's punishment – yes, yes, yes! Let's set out tomorrow. At five.*

ELZA. I wasn't afraid to talk to him. I could have said if I had any doubts. I did doubt. Myself. Am I even allowed to doubt?

TEIKSMA/ZIEDONIS. Something in this life has to be of the utmost importance among men! Yes, yes, yes! One has to decide what that is and then hang onto it tooth and nail! While one is alive!

ELZA. *(stands up)* I again was one of the guys, a man. I already took the place of a “son” for my father. For Ziedonis... his pal. Who could also procreate. But I loved him very much.

TEIKSMA/ZIEDONIS. *We need neither the English nor the Yankees! We have the Russians !!! ...*

ELZA. The following night I saw a dream. Ziedonis is firing back with two pistols. We're surrounded, sitting dug down deep into a haystack and some twenty men in uniform are breathing hard right near us, like dogs exhausted after a chase. Very near, then further and further. And we already know that they'll soon be gone. We'll have escaped. But then suddenly Ziedonis leaps out. I try to haul him back with all my might. But he's screaming that he

doesn't want to rot in hay. The dogs hear him, he's screaming so loud. The dogs swing round to race back. Ziedonis escapes my grasp. For the briefest of moments I see his eyes, his true eyes – the blue ones. He doesn't want that I see them. Ziedonis is already out of the shed. "It's suicide!" – I scream, – "Why?!" ... Maybe I didn't scream. I really don't know. I'm already firing with my automatic. He – with two pistols. He does it magnificently... I know that dreams don't mean anything, but his eyes ... We would have escaped ... for, God knows, which time again.

1950. Train wagon. Night.

GUNARS. ... A boy needs to have a strong backbone. It would be a great error to give him a pacifier. A *pacifier* – the very word expresses its meaning: something that eases, subdues and limits your aspirations and spirit. It is crucially wrong to protect the would-be human being from fire, sharp objects and falls. All these experiences should possibly be even encouraged. Within reason, of course. I have no doubts – we shan't argue about it. Fine, I'm ready to prove it myself...

The same train. A different wagon.

ELZA. (*she rocks back and forth, holding in her lap a small bundle*) Be afraid, tremble, bow down, be silent. Smile, don't judge, don't think, admire. Don't believe, believe, forget, hide ... Be afraid, tremble, bow down, be silent. Smile, don't judge, don't think, admire. Don't believe, believe, forget, hide ...

GUNARS. ... Girls should not be raised under different conditions or be sheltered. Because there are no conditions. We're just ourselves. Everything

depends on us. Whether it's a girl or a boy, it's irrelevant. If we accept the opposite: we become playthings in the hands of others. Droppings. At this moment a human being ceases to exist. The boy as well as the girl. Subject to conditions that one oneself invents, judges and characterises.

ELZA. Be afraid, tremble, bow down, be silent. Smile, don't judge, don't think, admire. Don't believe, believe, forget, hide ...

GUNARS. I wouldn't have thought of writing to you, if it hadn't been for the child crying in the wagon besides us. Incessantly and pointlessly. And his mamma probably doesn't know what to do with him. I don't want our boys and girls to cry. I want us to know what to do. Be in agreement on what's to be done. We simply have to be prepared. And that's all.

TEIKSMA. The child is truly crying. Incessantly and pointlessly. Adjacent to them is also a wagon for prisoners. It's 1950 and the destination again is Krasnoyarsk. The child's mother has no milk but she has some water. That can be warmed up. The child is six months old though he looks smaller. His name is Ziedonis Gunars. Or Gunars Ziedonis. The Soviet regime doesn't accept two names – because they maintain there is only one concrete person. The mother has to choose. Ziedonis, of course. The following day correcting the error was no longer possible. Only the mother remembered the two names. And also the child. Because now she exists. Absolutely, certainly she exists.

ELZA. Be afraid, tremble, bow down, be silent. Smile, don't judge, don't think, admire. Don't believe, believe, forget, hide ...

TEIKSMA. The mother is the one who has been convicted under Article 58, Section 4 for counter-revolutionary crimes. (*reads*) “Any kind of support given to the international bourgeois segment, which does not recognise the egalitarian Communist system, which attempts to overthrow it and substitute the capitalistic system, or for being under the influence of this bourgeois

social group or organisation, or for being involved in its activities oriented toward hostile actions against the USSR, shall be sentenced to ...” The gun-wound in her arm has healed. Elza’s second child was born seven months after the gun battle at the shed. Her tongue bleeds. Also since that day. Without apparent reason.

GUNARS. The total does not alter. Five hundred and forty two stations. Till Krasnoyarsk. Coming here there were 542. Janavarti was the last one. Now it is the first.

TEIKSMA. (*about Gunars*) The prisoner wagons – *vagonzaki* – are large, equipped with compartments. In the compartment intended for four, they are altogether 22. At least it’s warm. This is a regularly scheduled train. A year earlier, in the Spring of 1949, waves of “correctional” trains rolled to the North. (*in Russian*) *Na vechno*³⁵, of course. In one night the trains transported 42 231 people from Latvia. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 ... it took 31 hours and 9 minutes to count them. They were deported much more quickly, in one night. According to planned numbers. Selected without special criteria. Did someone just like the number 42 231? ... But this one is a regularly scheduled train.

1949. Interrogation Room # 1. Teiksma as Investigator Ermine and Gunars.

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *There’s no such answer – I don’t know! No. After all, I’m not asking you about anyone else, I’m not ... (from a scrap of paper) asking about Brigadier Bezsmertmniy, or about Brigadier Neizvestny either. Also the Head of the kolkhoz Petrov will answer for himself. This is of no concern to us at the moment. I asked you in plain Latvian – why do you yourself think you were released from there? If we do know, that in*

³⁵ In Russian “forever”.

extraordinary cases something like that could happen to a person, who at the time of deportation from the previously bourgeois Latvian territory was not of age. It's possible. But you were an adult. And you're still an adult. In addition an adult who claims his head is crammed full of knowledge of significance to the country. And they let you go. What's the reason for this? Are you a saint?

GUNARS. No, of course not.

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *Are you a cripple? But even that would not be sufficient reason to be allowed to be deported from there.*

GUNARS. I don't know. I really don't know. I didn't make a request to anyone.

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *An unwarranted action.*

GUNARS. Perhaps people understood that my knowledge ... Excuse me ... Are you feeling ill? ...

TEIKSMA. Investigator Ermine really did feel ill. It's possible that it would have been good if he had been a sadist. But here, in this room, he felt tormented. "Why do I have to be punished so?" – he often asked his mother. But she no longer could answer, because she had died. Already on the third day, before she even reached Kirov. From pneumonia. Father and mother, both died together. In the middle of summer, although they had been totally healthy at the time of the deportation from Grobina. Investigator Ermine had not, however, tried to investigate this odd occurrence. Because his mother and father were no longer his mother and father. He had simply been lucky. They no longer were registered as his mother and father. They were registered with some other Ermine. Someone who was a gold miner in Kolima. Number B-2431. Investigator Ermine prayed to God at night to help him handle his duties. He couldn't not perform. He particularly couldn't fail to perform his

duties. It seems that God really did help him. But because of this, the Investigator always had slept poorly.

Investigation Room #2. Teiksma as Investigator Ermine and Elza.

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *Yes, I can see that you're not being obstinate. I do see that. But a bleeding tongue does not mean that a person is mute, don't you agree? Moreover, mute only when you're awake. You talk in your sleep. Did you know that? We know. We'll talk now, won't we? ... Let's forget these last four months, and you start to talk freely, all right? The number one question still is: how can you explain that you're alive, but you can't name even one civilian who has fed you even once during these three years. You must understand that this isn't logical...*

Interrogation Room #1. Teiksma as Investigator Ermine and Gunars.

GUNARS. My only explanation is that my knowledge may be more useful to the country than my physical contribution. I already pointed out to you that the aspects of this case could be confirmed by comrade Fiodorov. I truly am not informed if comrade Fiodorov's first name is Stephan, Vladimir, Sidor or Anatoly or something else, but the comrade is a pilot. In addition, I can explain that due to some stupid coincidence, I could die in circumstances similar to the ones I found myself in during the seven years of my absence there. In truth, I admit to the possibility of such circumstances, but one must take into account, that if this were the case I would have no opportunity to keep abreast of the fast development of aviation technology. Without such information my investment in the country's development...

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *Go on, continue! ...Of course, I also would find it awkward to lie. Even if we assume that you're not lying, how can you explain the fact that at least for the last four years you have pretended to*

be a simpleton? That's substantiated by the testimony of the currently imprisoned Neviny, Bezsmertny, Neizvestny and Petrov. An idiot. Have you an explanation for this?

Interrogation Room #2. Teiksma as Investigator Ermine and Elza.

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. ... *Yes, you've explained to me that you shot wild game and stole from farmers' fields. And in three years in this small patch of earth no one noticed you with all your guns? Only you saw and heard everything. Can you explain this?*

Interrogation Room #1. Teiksma as Investigator Ermine and Gunars.

GUNARS. I haven't lose my optimism. I'm still able and ready for new assignments...

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *(laughs) The mark of a true simpleton, for sure.*

GUNARS. I've already lived in the city of Riga in the territory of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Latvia for seven months and done the socially significant work of a garbage collector, thus proving that my transfer is not associated with personal gain...

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *Go on, go on! ... Also about your secret trips to Eleya searching for someone named Elza Kalnina. Were you searching for her for public benefit? Do you after all have some personal connection with this person? People do see everything and are ready to cooperate...*

Interrogation Room #2. Teiksma as Investigator Ermine and Elza.

ELZA. What do I have to do so that I ... I ...

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. ... *you won't be given the harshest penalty provided to protect society – be shot to death?*

ELZA. The only thing I refuse to do is name any civilian names.

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *We do know that already! We know! You're in your fifth month of your second pregnancy! And you don't have a choice. Everything is so simple in this life.*

Interrogation Room #1. Teiksma as Investigator Ermine and Gunars.

GUNARS. Not everything is so simple...

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *Life goes on. It's 1949. Eight years have passed, four of which have been years of peace and stability. One of Elza Kalnina's boys is already of marriage age, while, one can say the other is still in the belly. It's unclear if he will be a soldier or a woman. Whatever the party will need, as the saying goes ... Forget her – that woman you remember no longer exists.*

Interrogation Room #2. Teiksma as Investigator Ermine and Elza.

ELZA. I need a guarantee that...

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *Go on! Continue!...*

ELZA. What is it you want from me?

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *You want from me! And from our country, citizen Kalnina. (She hands Elza a thick wad of papers, covered with handwriting)*

Interrogation Room #1. Teiksma as Investigator Ermine and Gunars.

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *Well, read what we've come up with?*

GUNARS. (*reads in Russian*) ... *Daju nastojashchuju podpisu organam Ministerstva vnutrennih del Latvijskoj SSR v tom, chto dobrovolno izjavljaju zhelanije jehat v mesto moevo budushchego poselenija v Krasnojarskom kraje vagonzakom cherez ispravitelnuju tjurmu Otdela ispravitelno trudovih lagerej...*³⁶

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. (*in Russian*) *V chem raspisivajus...*³⁷

Gunars signs.

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *There's a diacritical mark above c. Who's the Russian here – you or me? A prisoner should find it easier – you won't have to figure out how not to die from starvation. You haven't had this privilege. And won't have it when they throw you out at the other end... Now who is always able and ready for new assignments? Does it also seem to you that life is unfair?*

GUNARS. No.

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *Yes, it is. If I could, I would reconstruct this world. Old women have to abide by some sort of laws. I agree.*

GUNARS. (*about the paper*) I want to cross out one word: *dobrovolno*³⁸.

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *What would be the sense of that?*

GUNARS. It makes sense to me.

The document is returned to Gunars. But he doesn't cross out anything after all.

Interrogation Room #2. Teiksma as Investigator Ermine and Elza.

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. (*about the document*) *Sign it and that's all.*

ELZA. What's the sense in that?

TEIKSMA/INVESTIGATOR ERMINE. *None.*

Elza signs nonetheless.

TEIKSMA. Everyone wanted to have Ermine be their investigator.

1949. A train.

³⁶ ... hereby with my signature I certify to the institutions of the Ministry of the Interior of Latvia SSR that I am ready to voluntarily leave for my future place of residence in the Krasnoyarsk region via the high security prison of the Correctional Department of Labor Camps.

³⁷ Thereby I sign...

³⁸ In Russian "voluntarily"

GUNARS. ... If you are no longer, I don't have to forget anything: you can't kill something that doesn't exist! You're rehabilitated and the death sentence is revoked.

ELZA. ... I really wasn't sure why I ran the next day, why I asked. Is Ziedonis son Ziedonis? He can't be Gunars. A nightmare. Something got twisted in my head. I haven't thought of you for five years. Well, at least three. Not even once. Because there isn't anything to think about. Your timeless naivete? More precisely, your idiocy? No, idealism, as you yourself would like to call it. Your dog-like eyes? A teenage girl's grow bigger, become smarter, more world-wise. Your infantile, dilettantish interest in aviation? Horrible! But I, the fool stand shaking and hear my mouth speak the words – "I would like to call my boy Ziedonis Gunars..."

TEIKSMA/PRISON CAMP REGISTRAR. *Perhaps you should once and for all make up your mind. The child is alive and breathing! Which of the two names?*

ELZA. Gunars...

TEIKSMA/PRISON CAMP REGISTRAR. *Yes, in Russian Ziedonis is written as "Zedon".*

ELZA. Gunar ... Ziedonovich... Let it be Gunars!

TEIKSMA/PRISON CAMP REGISTRAR. *I told you that Zedon is already in the register!*

ELZA. And thank God!!! *(to the child)* If you weren't Ziedonis, you wouldn't be able to survive. Thank God!...

1952. Prison Camp.

TEIKSMA/BRIGADEER-IN-CHIEF. *The procedures in our camp are the same as anywhere else on this earth! Welcome to Kolima! Line up! Undress! All, absolutely all! Examine your beards and hair! Nothing?! Mouth open! Tongue out! Arms raised: armpits? Fingers spread – hop to it! Lift up your penis, open it! Kneel, Bend – open! Legs, toes! (to the women) Shave every time in the bathhouse! Legs! Please! Attention! I don't see enthusiasm! Yes, men, always men! (to the men) Let's not be afraid – one-two! The bath house once every two weeks. Maybe. Attention! ...work makes a person healthy. We're going to work for health without days off. 12 hours each day. Line up! Listen here! Don't lag behind, no talking, don't pick up anything from the ground! A step to the left, a step to the right is seen as an attempt to escape! The guards will shoot without warning! Is that clear?! ...Answer all together!... Shoot without warning! Is that clear?! ...That's your prayer,*

amen! Each refusal – means two years, $3 \times 2 = 6$ and so on. First Brigade – mines: 1.5 tons per day, if you don't fulfil the quota you're not pulled up from the mine. There's no distinction between men and women. Second Brigade – the forest: the quotas are impossible plus you must carry the lumber to the transport trucks. Third Brigade – digging into the permafrost: 50 cm per day. Forward, march! Smile! 12 hours at minimum. No sickness here. No one freezes. It's warm today. Minus 47 degrees Celsius of course. Fulfil the quota – you eat; don't fulfil – we drink and cry. No talking! For giving bread away to someone else – 1.5 years. $1.5 \times 3 = 5$. Happy 1951, comrades! Hurrah!!! ...A step to the left, a step to the right! Is that clear?! Without days off, I said! The bath house, prisoners, the bathhouse! Come on, come on get used to it! Here it's 12 months of winter, the rest is summer! Who said – starvation?! Happy 1952, comrades! Hurrah!!! Yes, we don't notice it. Because we're smiling! ...Attention! Open your mouth, open your penis, balls, the guards shoot without warning! ...your child has been sent to an orphanage. Of his own free will. Here is his signature. There's nothing to do here for a three-year-old, agreed! Where are you crawling off to E-550?! ...

ELZA. Strangle me, please...

Elza laughs hysterically.

TEIKSMA/BRIGADEER-IN-CHIEF. Adjourn! Adjourn!!! E-550! I'll have two years added to my sentence! I don't want it! Adjourn E-550!!! ... I'll also lose my mind!

Elza continues to laugh.

1953.

ELZA. The third year in the prison camp they put me into the *psihpalatka*–the psycho tent. This is the where they bring people to die, a sort of morgue for people who are still alive. But this is the only place in the prison camp where you're allowed to laugh. The same as anywhere else on this earth. You could laugh only here.

GUNARS. I've never been a prisoner. We're working voluntarily. But *na vechno*.³⁹ Sometimes as much as 16 hours per day. Without the right to leave your assigned place. The same as anywhere else on earth.

TEIKSMA. I died and was dead 12 times. And left this earth 12 times, and finally ended up as a creature that at least one other creature recognizes as being a similar creature. I died and was dead. The same as anyone anywhere

³⁹ In Russian “forever”.

else on this earth. Like Comrade Stalin on March 5, 1953. As a colossus, giant, friend of all children and the promoter of Lenin's ideology. Stalin has died comrades.

Psycho tent. Elza is laughing. Teiksma as Brigadeer-in-Chief is crying.

TEIKSMA/BRIGADEER-IN-CHIEF. ... *and then he gives me his strong, firm hand and we walk toward a bright light, the brightest beam in the Universe – it's the Future. I don't know if it's Communism, but it's the Future. I trust him and I hold onto his hand with all my might ... (to Elza) Do you see? And then...*

Elza leans close to Teiksma/Brigadeer-in-Chief's ear and for a moment intensely whispers something.

TEIKSMA/BRIGADEER-IN-CHIEF. *(continuing what Elza has said) ...And then he puts his pants back on again, lights up his pipe so magnificently that the earth trembles under our feet. I dry myself and crawl into his breast pocket. I can't bear to look at the superhuman light. Where do his steps lead to...*

Again Elza whispers briefly into Teiksma/Brigadeer-in-Chief's ear.

TEIKSMA/BRIGADEER-IN-CHIEF. *No! ...*

Elza persists.

TEIKSMA/BRIGADEER-IN-CHIEF. *(continues) ...And then ...he doesn't condemn me. He says – "Of course, I no longer am a leader of our great country and sometime in the future I'll be able to do something similar, but for the moment my advice is still very much needed by the motherland!" I applaud! ...*

Elza whispers again.

TEIKSMA/BRIGADEER-IN-CHIEF. *No, that's not right: he wasn't like that! He was ...great, he was a friend and ruler of all the outcasts and Mongolian horned beasts on earth ...*

Elza whispers.

TEIKSMA/BRIGADEER-IN-CHIEF. *... and healer of monkeys' asses...*

Elza whispers.

TEIKSMA/BRIGADEER-IN-CHIEF. *...and protector of the life of all Caspian roaches on earth ...*

It's Teiksma/Brigadeer-in-Chief who now is laughing, while Elza is crying her eyes out.

1956. The North. A barrack.

GUNARS 1. ... getting ready to land, Captain Gailitis steadies his aeroplane too high, it stalls and falls through – Bahhh!!! But if instead of expanding the surface area of the wings, there would be flaps, then ...

GUNARS 2. Sometimes it's worthwhile to look at yourself from the side, don't you think?

GUNARS 1. What's the sense of it, Lieutenant Pudurs?

GUNARS 2. I still am a creature, something that can be touched, and at least one other creature who is like me under this sun who recognises me for what I am.

GUNARS 1. Brigadier Sriukov walked by me as if I was invisible. You, too, Lieutenant Pudurs have died finally!

GUNARS 2. It was night and dark. He didn't notice. Everyone was drinking yesterday.

GUNARS 1. Personally it has always seemed to me that a single engine biplane is the most beautiful – a real aeroplane.

GUNARS 2. Gunars Pudurs perhaps is a fool, a naïve fool, but Gunars Pudurs will never lose his mind, never. That simply isn't possible. No big deal – it's Polar night. Only for a month and four more days.

GUNARS 1. And then it will be day! Super day – the sun will shine on me for half a year. On me! Who will I be? A young man maybe?

GUNARS 2. You know damn well, you have to hang in, pull yourself together!

GUNARS 1. Why?

GUNARS 2. Let's not start again!!!

GUNARS 1. The De Haviland Gypsy Six has constant speed – let's add a propeller with changeable speed!

GUNARS 2. There are no more women, not any more.

GUNARS 1. I'm not a man. Increase the speed! ...

GUNARS 2. To maintain illusions about a non-existent person is foolish, don't you agree?

GUNARS 1. Decree. Plea. Flee. – Bahhh! Fall in, fall out, rush out!

GUNARS 2. But the meaning of life is not to be found in women!

GUNARS 1. In men?!

GUNARS 2. In you! In you yourself!

GUNARS 1. And I, I myself cut my veins! Yesterday already! And now I spin my propeller, and ...

GUNARS 2. I'll start to cry soon! I'm already crying...

GUNARS 1. Cry!

GUNARS 2. I won't hang in till the sun comes, I won't! ...

GUNARS 1. You'll hang in.

GUNARS 2. Why should I?

GUNARS 1. Let's not start again!

GUNARS 2. And then once more half a year of night, half a year of day, and again ...

GUNARS 1. Stalin was wrong. Now everyone admits it and...

GUNARS 2. And you too?

GUNARS 1. They could let us go home.

GUNARS 2. And then again they might not. For three years already they've been allowing people to go. It's happened so fast you barely can notice.

GUNARS 1. I'm convinced!

GUNARS 2. And home? What is home? Who needs you? We'll only transport shit again. Everyone will run at the sight of us. And from our wives and children, and the children of our children to the seventh generation! Why don't you argue that it won't be like that? Just mentioning our names, people – Bahhh!!! – will fall into hell.

GUNARS 1. It won't be like that...

GUNARS 2. What will it be like?

GUNARS 1. Soon I'll start to cry! I'm already crying ...

GUNARS 2. Cry!

GUNARS 1. Like this I won't hang in till the sun comes, I won't! ...

GUNARS 2. You'll hang in, you will!

GUNARS 1. Maybe we should fire up a Cirrus Minor engine?

GUNARS 2. But then the gas emission apertures should be on the side: it's the right solution for minus 37 degree cold.

GUNARS 1. Let's fly!!! ...

The same place.

TEIKSMA. (*about Gunars*) It looked as if he couldn't hear, simply couldn't hear. Couldn't hear and kept smiling. But he didn't even try to understand when one of us talked. He was flying in his own world. We gave him something – fine, we didn't need to give him anything – it didn't matter, he would not have died. There was nothing to die for: 30 kilograms maybe. During this interminable polar night of 1956, unusually many of the deportees had gone mad, but not him. That's what I thought. No, I was convinced of it.

He'd only lost his teeth because of scurvy, which is common here. What does it really mean to go mad? He simply didn't make any sense/fit in that place – he didn't kill anyone for 200 grams of bread. He lived for himself, in himself. To do this you need incredible strength and endurance. To be oneself, to be master over oneself ... **B**ut he was a poor master – he had no plans. What about tomorrow? What was “tomorrow”? I too couldn't answer, what “tomorrow” was. And why it was necessary. Some time later – two months after it was day again, a woman with a bleeding tongue arrived at our station. It was already 1957.

Same place.

ELZA. In the Polar regions, a human being becomes immortal, almost. If you consider that a person lives ... on the average ... if he lives under average circumstances, let's say about 54 years, but if both a day and a night are half a year in length! Plus the freezing cold, in which, as you know, nothing spoils! (*laughs*) It's a joke!

TEIKSMA. She herself had applied to come here. This is the edge of the world, the only place further is the North Pole. In our station, three years were counted as one – for this reason alone some people begged to come here so that the forced settlement period they had been sentenced to would end sooner. Ten years lived in three. That's why at the beginning they just noticed her bleeding tongue. Otherwise she was just like any other person – after six years in a prison camp. Six instead of fifteen years – what luck. A totally ordinary creature. At birth she had also been a woman.

ELZA. I'm sure we couldn't return to warm regions – there are bacteria and microbes there that would get a hold of us and kill us. Everything is pristine here. Only a human being survives. (*laughs*) It's a joke!

TEIKSMA. Truthfully, these were the only two sentences she ever uttered. She worked like a madwoman. More than two well-fed men. And we had none of those. She worked like a robot, mechanically, not like a living human being ... That day, that night that was two months and 12 days long, was freezing cold. They don't herd people out of prison camps on such days, but in forced settlement only Sundays are off work. It was minus 59 degrees Celsius. Even eyes froze.

1957. Elza⁴⁰ and Gunars are wearing facemasks – in order not to get frostbite. Side by side they are prying up the permafrost with crowbars, digging a hole.

ELZA. (after working some time in silence) *Sovsem durak ili prikidivajeshsja? ...Deutsch shprechen? ... Polak, litva, suomi, eesti pois? ... Rumania, ukraina? ... Amerika?! ...*⁴⁰

Gunars hears but doesn't respond.

ELZA. (in Russian) *Ti ne nemoj... So mnoj mozžno govorit, so mnoj mozžno... Ti mozhesh ved... Ja ne sobirajusj družhitj, ne bojsja, mne ne nado... Tebe nuzhno pogovorit...*⁴¹

GUNARS. (after a while) I don't need to ...

ELZA. (sharply) Then don't just stand there! Work!

Both work for a while in silence.

GUNARS. What else?

ELZA. Work.

GUNARS. If you stand at the edge of the world, then the rest ... I don't know.

ELZA. You know.

GUNARS. Then, all that which has been left there ... well, is ...

ELZA. Perhaps simply nothing is left there? That's all.

GUNARS. No, everything is fine there!

ELZA. Wife, children...

GUNARS. Wife, children. One. A boy – little Karlis. Already of marrying age, you could say. The second still in the belly of his mamma. Don't know if he'll be a soldier or a woman. Whatever the party will need, as they say...

ELZA. Whose? The one in mamma's belly.

GUNARS. I was there. Yes, I was. They allowed me to go there, yes they did ... Yes, yes, it does sound incredible! It turned out to be a mistake, but I was ... It's all right! ...

ELZA. If you stand at the edge of the world, then what?

GUNARS. They'll soon let us go back, that's for sure! ...

For a while again the two of them work in silence.

GUNARS. There's nothing there?

ELZA. Why not? There is...

⁴⁰ Are you totally off your rocker or pretending? ... Are you Polish, Lithuanian, Finnish, Estonian? ... Roumania, Ukraine? ...

⁴¹ You're not dumb... You can talk to me ... You do want to. I'm not looking for friends. I don't need it, don't be afraid ... You must talk.

GUNARS. Husband? There? Why not here?

ELZA. Because he's an idiot. Those aren't taken. A little idiot.

GUNARS. They don't survive.

ELZA. He'd die immediately if he was taken.

GUNARS. It shouldn't be allowed to take them.

ELZA. One must look at things as they are. Realistically. With force against force, hate against hate. Isn't that so?

GUNARS. I don't know...

ELZA. And the two of us? We're still here. And only thanks to the fact that we have not adapted! Only because of that! And what does it mean to adapt! To accept everything with open arms. To see only the good in everything. To nod in agreement. To say – "Excuse me, forgive me I'm really not here, but if you wish, I can serve! To find the ultimate objective of slavery! And generally...

GUNARS. Talk ... you need to.

ELZA. I need nothing, absolutely nothing! (*laughs*) It's a joke!

Silence for a brief while again, while the two work.

GUNARS. But it's essential for you.

ELZA. It's a joke! A joke I said! A total loss of one's identity! (*about the work*) We'll never be able to do it! GUNARS. I did say: eternally frozen...

ELZA. We have to bury that person like a person deserves to be buried!

GUNARS. Why? Why does he deserve it?

ELZA. Deserves it, because.

GUNARS. He has ... he has already buried himself ... what I mean – a human being in reality lives (points to his head) here ... and it can't be helped.

ELZA. Idiot. You're an idiot. (*she sets to working with renewed force*)

GUNARS. (*exclaims*) No more.

ELZA. What's no more.

GUNARS. The corpse. That human being. The dogs ...

Elza collapses.

GUNARS. Why did you come here?

ELZA. God's face is closer at the edge of the world ... (*laughs*) It's a joke!

GUNARS. But God doesn't explain anything.

ELZA. It's a joke, I said. But what if He answered all of a sudden? It's a joke.

GUNARS. There's nothing further. Only a path made by Polar bears – as they say here.

ELZA. Soon we'll be going home, soon! Be happy!

GUNARS. I am happy.

GUNARS. Apparently you have nightmares only about aeroplanes?

GUNARS. It's a joke!

ELZA. Have you ever flown? Parachuted?

GUNARS. It's a joke!!!

ELZA. When you dance, do you step on the lady's toes?

GUNARS. You're confusing something!

ELZA. What's your name? What was your name there?

GUNARS. I don't understand how I've survived, I don't understand. And why?

ELZA. What's your name?

TEIKSMA. My name is ... what does it matter today what it is? I'm dead. This time forever. And no one cares anymore what my name was. I probably wouldn't care either. Because I'm the one, the only one who lives my life, and I'm the one who dies. I lie to myself and I believe myself. No, I thought that I wasn't lying to myself, of course. That I believe, that *that's how it should be!* And then, the day after again – no, it really must be with “with feet in the air” ... I had died 12 times before the thirteenth, the final death. Do I now know how? Maybe ... The first time I died ... was when I was raped in the bushes beside the railway station. Perhaps for a young, inexperienced girl it's the worst thing that can happen. The second time I was shot dead as I was trying to run away. In the middle of that swamp I said good-bye to all for life. I was fighting for justice! Against injustice! ... The third time it was because of an epidemic – in the Taisheta barracks everyone had only half a metre of a wood bunk, all piled together in a heap. It's a miracle that I was even pulled out of that line-up. The fourth time they crashed a tree on top of me in the forest. The fifth time gas exploded in the shaft of our nickel mine. The sixth time was when the *blatnije* – the criminals killed me: fat Dunia only loved the political criminals. But the seventh time they took my child away. The eighth time we over-ate – a half a loaf of bread at once after five days of starvation. Happiness killed me. The ninth time was when the guards raped all our barrack – that's called a tram . Three days without a break. On the first day I suddenly remembered prayers I'd never-known and by the third day I was talking to God personally. The tenth finally was suicide. Irrationally I was saved. The eleventh time I allowed myself to be sexually used in order to get the prison camp's hairdresser's post. The twelfth time I betrayed others, many others.

And again I remained alive. Was the devil's hand in this ...I really don't know. It's my life and no one else's. But it could have been someone else, anyone else. I finally died forever on my way back to Latvia, which I hadn't seen for 14 years. Perhaps I didn't any more ... didn't know how it should be. Humans usually do know. And believe in how it should be. I envy this ... (*about Gunars and Elza*) And the two of them? One nice long day they had both disappeared from the station. No one escapes from there – it's the edge of the world, all around only a sparkling white expanse, unbearably white. The axis of the earth somewhere. Someone claimed that he had seen their footsteps on the polar bear path. That does exist.. The bears themselves we ourselves had never seen. Maybe it's the face of God ... I don't know. It's a joke. But they were gone.
