

[Disquiet]

A play about "the author"

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"Thus, myth is not a historical event as such, but nevertheless it is words. And, as words, historical events are elevated to the level of self-knowledge."

(A. Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*)

"You have to be extremely short-sighted in science, or even simply blind, not to notice that myth (for the mythical consciousness, of course) is in its tangibility, the most powerful and extremely intense level of reality. It is not invention but the most bright and authentic reality."

(A. Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*)

"Love is the disquiet of the Creator who worries about all of us, inside each one of us."

(Rabbi bar-Shalom Elikea Rozer, 17th century.)

Characters:

Ula Richter – a famous American author.

Krzysztof Zieliński – a Polish journalist.

Steve Raccoon – Ula Richter's literary agent.

Natalie Blumenstein – Ula Richter's daughter and lawyer.

Michael – a photographer.

The Presenter – a warm and compassionate male voice.

New York. The living room in the apartment of the famous writer Ula Richter. The room is furnished expensively and in a very contemporary style. In the middle of the room is a large sofa, next to this is a

low coffee-table made of glass. There's an armchair next to the coffee-table. On the right, in the corner, there are a couple more armchairs as well as another coffee-table. On the left side of the room, there's a door leading into a hallway, and into another part of the apartment. There are two large windows with a city view, at the far side of the room behind the sofa, and judging by the view, it looks like this is one of Manhattan's many high-rise apartment blocks. On a special shelf on the left side of the living room, there are some expensive drinks on display: wine, whiskey, cognac and a good selection of other drinks. On the other walls, there are book-shelves, full of books. There are magazines and books lying in piles on the floor, near the windows.

The journalist Krzysztof Zieliński, the photographer Michael, the literary agent Steve Raccoon and Ula Richter's daughter, Natalie Blumenstein, all enter.

NATALIE. Please - make yourselves at home. Mom will be here in a moment. She asked you to give her ten more minutes.

KRZYSZTOF. Thank you very much. It's such a lovely apartment! I imagine this is where Mrs. Richter writes her masterpieces, in this very room?

A measured and caring male voice, The Presenter, speaks.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. The Polish journalist Krzysztof Zieliński has come to New York, to conduct an interview with the world-famous author, Ula Richter.

NATALIE. Actually, mom writes all of her books either in a café somewhere, or at the airport.

KRZYSZTOF. Oh! Thank you. That's a great detail. I'll definitely have to ask Mrs. Richter about that as well.

Pause.

STEVE. There's one thing I'd ask you to understand, Krzysztof – Ula is very reserved. She's a total introvert. And she usually feels nauseas when she's doing interviews.

KRZYSZTOF. I'll keep that in mind, too, Mr. Raccoon.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Krzysztof is fairly nervous. It took him a year to get Ula Richter to agree to an interview.

STEVE. As you know, Ula Richter gives interviews very rarely – only when she has a new book out, and even then only to the most prestigious publications... world famous titles, you know, like *The New Yorker* or *Rolling Stone*. But since *this* novel has a connection with Poland... Well, we *all* understood that it would be important to give an interview to a Polish magazine. So, thank you very much, Mr. Zieliński, for your determination in seeking out an interview with our dear Ula.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Steve Raccoon is Ula Richter's literary agent. That's why he behaves in a manner of pointed self-importance. For him, it's crucial that this Polish journalist feels trepidation and respect towards this famous author – and simultaneously that he has a profound feeling of gratitude towards *him* – Steve Raccoon, for offering this Polish journalist such a wonderful opportunity.

KRZYSZTOF. Not at all! It is *I* who is eternally grateful to you, Mr. Raccoon, for offering me such a wonderful opportunity. It goes without saying that I feel trepidation and respect for Mrs. Richter.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Looks like Krzysztof forgot to thank Mrs. Richter's daughter, Natalie Blumenstein, because it was she who managed to persuade her mother to give an interview to a Polish publication.

STEVE. Well, naturally, above all, one ought to thank our inimitable Natalie. It was after all she who managed to persuade her mother to agree to this interview.

KRZYSZTOF. Of course! I'm so grateful, Natalie, that –

NATALIE. Well, of course! But we need this as much as you do. The Polish publication paid a very healthy sum for the rights to this interview, to be frank, it's even surprising that they could pay so much, for such a poor country.

KRZYSZTOF. It's probably because the novel is about Poland. And we Poles take pride in our famous compatriots!

NATALIE. On that note... Do be careful when it comes to questions about Poland. My mother has never – and will never – speak about her Polish roots. So, please do not speak to her as if to a Polish woman. The world knows her as Ula Richter, an American author of German descent, living in New York.

Michael the photographer takes a photo of Natalie.

NATALIE. Is he going to be doing that the whole time? Sticking his camera into our faces?

STEVE. There's no other way, I'm sorry to say. Ula would never agree to a separate photo session – even more so for a *Polish* publication.

NATALIE (*to the photographer*). Hold on – are you also Polish?

MICHAEL. Does it make any difference?

STEVE. Don't be silly! Michael's from New York! He works for the top magazines – *Esquire* and the like. A few years ago he even did a cover for *Time*! Didn't you, Michael?

MICHAEL. Seriously – what difference does it make? Couldn't you at least try to be a bit more polite?

NATALIE. Wasn't I polite?

MICHAEL. I'm just here to do my job, okay?

NATALIE. Okay. Of course, that's fine.

Natalie brings a few bottles of water and two glasses, places them on the glass table in front of the sofa.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Natalie is worrying about how everything will go. She knows her famous mother's complicated personality all too well. And this interview is really very, very important for her whole family.

KRZYSZTOF. Maybe this is a good time for you to remind me which topics are off-limits?

STEVE. Well, come on, Krzysztof! New York is the most democratic city in the world! You have the right to ask anything you like! As long as you are respectful, obviously. Anything at all! I would only flag up three subjects which are best left alone. Firstly, as Natalie already mentioned, do not talk to Ula about her Polish roots or about being born in Nazi-occupied Kraków. Second, please refrain from asking about the

scandal which erupted two years ago when her novel, *Blood*, came out and Ula was accused of anti-Semitism, leading to the revoking of her nomination for a Nobel prize, and third, do not – under any circumstances – ask Ula about her German father. But as far as everything else goes – be my guest!

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Like Natalie, Steve is very anxious about this interview. He understands that this interview with a Polish publication is very, very important for Ula Richter.

KRZYSZTOF. Please don't take this the wrong way.... I hope you'll understand why I'm asking this – certainly not out of disrespect... But in any case... Steve, Natalie, are you certain that you need to be here, while I'm interviewing Mrs. Richter?... What I mean is... maybe she will feel *constrained*... she may feel *timid* around you... after all –

STEVE. Woah, hold on now, Krzysztof! Let's pretend that you never said that, shall we?... and that we never heard it. Ula never speaks to outsiders without Natalie and me present. And this interview was only made possible after we assured Ula, repeatedly, that we'll be listening in to each and every word, and we will not allow her and you to stray from the right path.

NATALIE. We *must* tread the right path, Krzysztof, I hope you can understand that?

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Krzysztof does not entirely understand what the expression “treading the right path” means, since he belongs to the left-leaning liberal segment of the Polish media, and that's why he's not familiar with the word “path”.

STEVE. Our common goal is to end up with a superb interview which speaks volumes to Polish readers, to Polish society, and which gives the right signal to certain people in New York.

NATALIE. But above all the interview must please Ula Richter.

STEVE. Well, of course!

NATALIE. Then again, it must also please the journalist.

STEVE. That too!

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. What Krzysztof does not realise is that the real goal of this interview is to reconcile the author Ula Richter with the influential Jewish diaspora in New York, which – after the Ula's penultimate novel *Blood* – accused the novelist of anti-Semitism and pressured the Nobel Committee into deselecting her from their list of nominations for a Nobel Prize in Literature.

KRZYSZTOF. You see, I'm actually very pleased that you are here, I just thought that –

NATALIE. Perhaps the photographer really isn't necessary here?

STEVE. No, Nat, we need photographs.

NATALIE. Well, he can come back at the end of the interview. He can come back in an hour and take a few shots when they've finished.

STEVE. Good shots take time. She there's no way she'll agree to pose for the camera afterwards, even more so for a Polish publication.

NATALIE. Then, let's use these photos for other publications, not only the Polish one, and we can even put them on our own website.

STEVE. The photographer was hired and paid for by the Polish publication. The content belongs to them. He's a very expensive photographer, by the way. I even wondered how a *Polish* publication has the money – to pay for such an expensive photographer.

MICHAEL. Is it normal to talk about me in the third person, when I'm standing right here?

NATALIE. Yes, quite normal.

STEVE. Don't pay any attention to us, Michael. Go about your business – you're a professional after all.

MICHAEL. If you are rude to me again, I'm out of here, is that clear?

KRZYSZTOF. Friends, please! Michael, please! It took me a year to get this interview! Well, if I'm honest, I've been trying to get this interview my whole life! Please... let's not spoil it.

STEVE. That's precisely why we're here, Krzysztof. To make sure nobody ruins anything.

NATALIE. Fine, the photographer can stay – since he's so necessary.

MICHAEL. Thank you, my beautiful, cold-hearted thing.

NATALIE. What! What did you just say?

MICHAEL. Okay, okay – I was just joking.

KRZYSZTOF. Michael – I'm begging you, please!

NATALIE. Well, really!

STEVE. Natalie, calm down, please! We're all on edge. Michael – don't pay any attention to Natalie, she's just anxious.

MICHAEL. It's hard not to pay any attention to such a beauty.

NATALIE. What's he saying?! Did you hear that?! Should I call the police?! Or do you want me to write on Facebook that I've been sexually abused during my mother's photo shoot? Do you want to your career to be over, mm?

MICHAEL. Oh my God, what is this place?!

STEVE. Calm down, right now! Stop it, Nat! Don't react to him! And you, too, Michael – cut it out! Everyone – just shut up... and wait here in silence! As for you, Krzysztof, just trust Nat and me. Try to understand - we're your biggest supporters. Everything is going to go very well – don't even doubt that.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Krzysztof experiences a strong sense of disquiet. This interview is very, very important for his future career because, as it happens, Krzysztof dreams of working as a journalist in New York.

KRZYSZTOF. Natalie, Steve, I trust you entirely and again I want to thank you for the opportunity of conducting this interview.

STEVE. Quite right, Krzysztof. New York is dangerous terrain, when you're here you need skilful guides.

NATALIE. So if the conversation isn't going as it ought it, we'll give you a signal. I'll walk behind my mother's back and I'll wave my hand. Like this (*she demonstrates*), and that means you need to change the subject immediately.

STEVE. We're your guides, Krzysztof. We're going to guide you.

KRZYSZTOF. Well, alright. But nevertheless! Nevertheless, Auschwitz is mentioned a few times in Mrs. Richter's new novel, so I can't really *not* talk about it, since it's already in the book. And actually it's a novel about Poland, how can I not talk to Mrs. Richter about Poland?

STEVE. Let me run you through this again! You can discuss whatever you like with her. There are no forbidden topics. Talk to her about concentration camps, about Poland, about Jews –

NATALIE. Steve!

STEVE. Well, why not?! Talk to her about Jews, about Nazis, whatever and whomever takes your fancy. Just don't bring up her Polish origins, don't talk to her about being born in occupied territory in Kraków, don't mention the accusations of anti-Semitism against her and don't ask Ula about her father. That's all, Krzysztof. No topics are off-limit in the USA, there are only a few "undesirable" ones, so relax my friend.

The door opens and in comes Ula Richter.

ULA. Hello. It's me!

Natalie and Steve walk over to Ula.

NATALIE. Mom!

STEVE. Ula! Come on in! Come in!

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. The author Ula Richter is very shy. She's a confirmed introvert and that's why every time she makes new acquaintances, she gets very stressed.

STEVE. Allow me to introduce to you this charming young man to you. This is Krzysztof. He came here specially, from Poland, to talk to you.

KRZYSZTOF. Hello, Mrs. Richter. It's a great honour for me to shake your hand.

Krzysztof reaches out his hand to Ula. Ula shakes Krzysztof's hand and examines him with interest.

STEVE. I think, Krzysztof, that Ula would like you to call her by her first name. Is that right, Ula?

ULA. That's right.

Ula continues to examine Krzysztof.

KRZYSZTOF. Yes, of course, as you wish. Although I must admit that as a Polish man raised in a family of Polish intellectuals, that won't be easy.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Once, when Krzysztof's older sister, Marta, broke her leg... but actually, that's not important. Sorry.

ULA. If I'm not mistaken, this young man with a camera is a photographer?

STEVE. Yes, Ula, this is Michael. One of the best photographers in the world. He made a cover for *TIME*.

ULA (*throwing Michael a coquettish glance*). Very pleased to meet you! Very pleased to meet you, Krzysztof. Shall we?

Ula walks over to the sofa. Krzysztof places a Dictaphone, and also a just-in-case iPhone with its recording device switched on, onto the table in front of Ula, and sits down to Ula's right on the armchair. Steve and Natalie move to the back of the room and settle into the armchairs next to the other coffee-table. Michael moves to the window and perches on the windowsill.

KRZYSZTOF. Well then! Let's begin. You know, to start with, I'd like to ask you –

ULA. Natalie, there's some whiskey somewhere, pour me some whiskey.

NATALIE. Are you sure?

ULA. Yes, I'm sure.

Pause. As before, Ula is looking very strangely at Krzysztof, as if she's spotted a rare type of insect in front of her.

STEVE. I'll bring it.

ULA. Thank you, Steve. You know, I only drink whiskey. My husband appreciated a good whiskey and because of him, I acquired a taste for it.

Steve goes to the drinks shelf, pours half a glass of whiskey and puts it on the coffee-table in front of Ula, but she doesn't touch it.

STEVE. I'm not offering any to you, Krzysztof, but if you did want a little drink...?

KRZYSZTOF. No, thank you. No. Just some water.

STEVE. That's what I thought.

Steve goes back to his seat next to Natalie.

Pause.

The click of the camera. Ula turns abruptly and looks at Michael. Michael smiles at Ula and shrugs, a little childishly.

ULA. That's amusing.

NATALIE. If the photographer's bothering you, we can get rid of him.

MICHAEL. What did you just say, "Barbie"? *Get rid of him?*

NATALIE. What! What did you call me? "Barbie"?!

ULA. It's funny that this young man, the photographer, looks exactly the way I imagined my man. Well, if not *my* man, then at least yours, Natalie. Look at him carefully, with the utmost attention, he's an ideal candidate to be your husband.

MICHAEL. Wow!

NATALIE. My God, Mom!

MICHAEL. So wait, you're not married then?

NATALIE. What the hell is going on here?!

STEVE. We've got distracted. Let's begin the interview. Krzysztof, you take charge now.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. When a flower blossoms, it emits a scent into the world, - a scent which informs this universe "I am ready".

ULA (*to Michael*). Forgive me, I've forgotten your name?

MICHAEL. Michael.

ULA. Perfect!

STEVE. Krzysztof!

KRZYSZTOF. So you know, Ula. First of all I want to ask you about your roots. What do you *feel*? Polish? Or German? Or already American?

Pause.

Natalie and Steve freeze.

The click of the camera.

Pause. Ula takes a sizeable gulp of whiskey.

There are several clicks in a row from the camera.

ULA. I was born in 1943 in Kraków, several months before the Red Army arrived. My mother was a Polish Jew from an ancient Jewish lineage. And my father was an officer of the SS. He raped my mother but left her alive. My mother was a very religious person and felt unable to rid herself of her child, so that's how I came to be on earth. Many years later, when I turned twenty-five, I began searching for my father. As it happened, he had just been released from a camp in the USSR and had returned to the GDR. My father spent about fifteen years in a Russian camp, and then he lived for another eight years in a penal colony in Siberia, but in 1968 they let him return to Germany. So he and I met. Of course, he didn't even know about my existence. I told him everything and gave him the choice – either he accepts me as his daughter and helps me to resettle in Germany... Or I'd go to the police and tell them about my mother's rape. And then, presumably, he would receive yet another prison sentence. So that's the dilemma I put to him. And he made his choice – and accepted me as his daughter. And so, we never stopped corresponding right up until his death. Then at the end of the 1970s, he helped me to attain German citizenship and to resettle in East Berlin. So that's how I discovered my father and how I became German. And in 1982, on my first trip to New York, I happened to meet my future husband, the very successful businessman David Blumenstein. A year later, we had a daughter – here she is. And a few years after that, I moved once and for all to New York. Now I'm an American citizen. So that's my biography - in brief. Next question?

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. When the famous German scientist who worked for the Nazis, Karl Friedrichhelm, was asked which one is better – patriotism or the urge to be true to oneself? He replied

that when a flower blossoms and emits some sort of secret signal, the bee understands exactly what to do, because he – the bee – *is* the intended recipient of that secret signal.

Pause.

Ula looks strangely at Krzysztof. Natalie walks behind Ula's back without drawing attention to herself and from there she waves her hand at Krzysztof, indicating that the conversation has gone in the wrong direction.

Michael turns his camera to Natalie and takes a photo. The click of the camera. Natalie drops her hand sharply and returns to her seat.

Pause.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Because a real bee always means honey.

KRZYSZTOF. But, as far as I'm aware, at least judging by what's written on Wikipedia, you were born in Kraków in 1943, to a German officer and Polish woman, Barbara Brzezinski, who got together with your father and then started working for the Nazis?

Pause.

ULA. Perhaps.

KRZYSZTOF. Then why did you tell me that horrific story about your mother being raped?

ULA. That was spontaneous! Perhaps I was feeding your journalistic greed, or perhaps as a writer I always need to create a mythical reality so you, my readers, won't get bored... bored of living.

KRZYSZTOF. Essentially, you prefer fiction to reality?

ULA. *Let's just say - I love myths. And myths are always reality. Do you understand that?*

KRZYSZTOF. What does that mean, myths are reality?

ULA. I don't have time right now to teach you what "myth" is, my immature Polish friend. Let's move on.

STEVE. Forgive me but I can see that Ula isn't feeling very well, I suggest postponing this interview until tomorrow.

NATALIE. Good idea!

ULA. Bad idea. I feel just the way I need to feel – let's carry on, Krzysztof.

Krzysztof drinks half a glass of water.

KRZYSZTOF. After your penultimate novel *Blood* was published, why do you think you were accused of anti-Semitism?

Pause.

ULA. Because the main character, the American writer, comes to the conclusion that she doesn't love her own blood. The actual blood running in her veins. And since she's Polish by nationality... Krzysztof, do you love your own blood?

KRZYSZTOF. That's a strange question. I've never thought about it.

ULA. What do you think is the most unusual thing about you, in your opinion?

KRZYSZTOF. I'm gay.

ULA. Don't you like being gay?

KRZYSZTOF. Well, of course, I like being gay.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Krzysztof has already been living for several years with the man he loves, a Belgian called Oliver. Oliver works in Warsaw as the director of a famous Belgian company, "New Colours of Space".

ULA. You see, you are not in conflict with yourself, and that's why you'll find it difficult to understand me. What about you, do you love your blood, Michael?

MICHAEL. It's hard to say – I haven't tasted it.

ULA. A funny reply.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Right now, Steve and Natalie are thinking that everything isn't "going as it ought to" much faster than they could ever have imagined.

ULA. Well, my main character didn't love her blood. She didn't choose it. It's the blood she was born with. The blood of her ancestors. But her conscience didn't want to accept that blood, her conscience resisted that blood. The blood flowing in her veins. I wonder if you can understand that, with "pure" Polish blood flowing in your veins?

KRZYSZTOF. Well, to be honest, not yet...

ULA. Blood is what distinguishes one individual from another. Blood divides nations and delineates cultures. Blood locks people into a cage of their own narrow thinking, and people become slaves to their blood and a hostage to their nation. But the main thing is each person's inner freedom is in conflict with their own body.

KRZYSZTOF. So blood is a conflict?

ULA. Certainly a conflict! Their conscience against their genes. Mind against blood! Like in *Hamlet*, do you understand? I think that *Blood* is my best novel! And coincidentally my main character was Polish. She could have been Spanish or African but I made her a Pole. Because I'm half Polish – and I don't like *my* blood. This novel is really about me.

KRZYSZTOF. But what was the problem? Why did they accuse you of anti-Semitism?

ULA. Because somebody here in New York decided to use their private time to dig around in somebody else's dirty linen. And he, or rather they, because we're talking about a particular group of people, managed to uncover that my mother had Jewish blood, distant relatives on my mother's side of the family were Jewish. But because my mother's parents died young, she was raised in a family of Polish Catholics, and they adopted her. That's why my mother always considered herself Polish. And of course when the Germans came, it didn't make sense for her to recall her Jewish roots, even more so since she didn't feel any real connection to those roots. Right?

Ula is lost in thought for a few seconds.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Looks like Krzysztof – like many other people on the planet – does not fully comprehend what this conversation is all about. Well, the right to “not comprehend” is bestowed on each person at birth, but then again they also have the right to “comprehend everything” at some point in their life.

ULA. Let’s carry on, Krzysztof. Where were we?

KRZYSZTOF. Your mother...

ULA. Well, obviously, she was afraid. That’s normal. Everyone’s afraid. Including you, no?

KRZYSZTOF. I mean, of course I’m afraid, but that’s not the point.

ULA. That’s exactly the point!

STEVE. Forgive me – but as Ula’s agent, I think that you should change the subject. You have broken several of our preliminary agreements, so –

ULA. Take, Steve, for example. Right now he’s shitting his pants - and that’s why he’s abandoned all decorum and he’s started meddling in our conversation. Get a grip of yourself, Steve, and don’t interrupt us. So, what’s your biggest fear, Krzysztof?

KRZYSZTOF. Are we really talking about me now?

Am I the issue now?

ULA. Who else?

KRZYSZTOF. Well... I think... this is about you.

ULA. A dialogue is always about two people, my dear. I hope we are having a dialogue, are we not?

KRZYSZTOF. Of course. Obviously! But still – I’d ask you to say a bit more about that scandal.

Ula takes another gulp of the whiskey.

ULA. So you see, unfortunately, in each nation, and even more so among Jews, there are certain representatives with such radical mindsets that they simply will not allow criticism of their own country, nor jokes about their blood. Nothing except praise and tears. I’m not anti-Semitic, Krzysztof. I’m a woman who does not love her own blood. And my novel is only a mythical reality. A work of art! My main character is not my mother, she’s a fictional character. My protagonist didn’t have Jewish blood and she didn’t marry a German officer, I created a Polish woman with an entirely different fate. The action in my novel, if you’ve read it, occurs in 2008 in New York. What analogy can there be between my mother and my own personal life? When I say that my novel is about me, I don’t mean the facts of it, I’m only talking about the agonising disquiet, which the creator experiences about her chosen subject. Do you understand me?

KRZYSZTOF. I’m trying to.

ULA. The comparison is only that I have Polish, German and Jewish blood in my veins. And I truly do not love it. It's not nationality, it's the blood itself which makes a person a slave of their race. Is that any clearer to you?

KRZYSZTOF. To be honest, I'm still in the dark...

ULA. Well then, the time has come to walk into the light, my dear!

STEVE. Ula! Friends! Natalie! Krzysztof! I think we should take a short break. Krzysztof, could you give us a few minutes alone?

ULA. Be quiet, Steve. This is my interview. I decide when we take breaks. And Natalie, you shut up too.

NATALIE. But I'm not saying anything anyway!

ULA. True but I can feel that you want to. That's why I'm warning you in advance – silence! That goes for the both of you – you'd better be quiet. It will be better for all of us. So just, everyone - silence! Everyone except Krzysztof obviously. And yeah, except Michael also.

MICHAEL. Thanks for your trust, Ula.

NATALIE. Unbelievable!

ULA. Silence! When I say silence – I mean silence!

Pause.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. And when Karl Friedrichhelm, who worked for the Nazis, was asked how one can live with a conscience which torments unrelentingly, he replied that your life is either sweet or bitter, and that's that.

KRZYSZTOF. But why do you not love your own blood.

ULA. Did you read my novel, Krzysztof?

KRZYSZTOF. Of course.

ULA. Well, that's precisely what it's about.

KRZYSZTOF. I read it twice-in-a-row. I think it's a work of genius. But I didn't find an answer to that very question. I didn't understand why your main character doesn't love her blood. I saw how she suffers, I felt her inner conflict, I was torn to shreds emotionally by the state of her mind. By the intolerable pain she feels but... I never understood – why?

ULA. Do you know the play *Hamlet* well?

KRZYSZTOF. It depends what you mean by "knowing it well" but I think so – reasonably well.

ULA. What's the conflict in that play? "Duty to one's father" or "honouring God", correct? The choice between duty and God, do you agree?

KRZYSZTOF. Well, probably, yes.

ULA. If he avenges his father, he sins against God but if he obeys God, he isn't fulfilling the will of his father. "The duty to one's kin" versus "honouring the universe", something like that. Do you understand what I'm saying, Krzysztof?

KRZYSZTOF. Much more now, yes. But you still haven't answered my question "why"?

Pause.

ULA. Because I always knew that I'm somewhere inside.

Pause.

ULA. Because I always knew that I'm not what everyone is taking me for here, from my childhood, I'm something completely different, I'm somewhere there – far away, far inside.

Ula has a gulp of whiskey.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Right now Michael is thinking that Natalie looks like the woman he has been dreaming about his whole life.

KRZYSZTOF. Fine, then let's turn to your latest book – where you write about Poland for the first time in your career, why is that?

ULA. Because my literary agent Steve and my daughter Natalie forced me to do it.

KRZYSZTOF. Excuse me?

ULA. I should have been awarded the Nobel prize a long time ago and Steve did a lot to try to make that happen. And my last novel which critics considered to be absolutely genius suddenly, certain people in certain circles called it anti-Semitic. And I was struck off the shortlist of nominations for a Nobel prize. And because it's very important for Steve and Natalie that I receive a Nobel prize, since it has a direct bearing on their career, since they both work for me, that's why they forced me to write this monstrous novel, shot-through with artifice, about Poland, with the almost unbelievably detestable title *The Victim*.

KRZYSZTOF. Sorry, what do you mean they forced you?

STEVE. Stop it, Ula! I have to intervene now.

ULA. You have to be quiet, Steve.

STEVE. No, I won't be quiet, Ula. Because I'm your agent. Because my job is *you*. Every careless word which you thoughtlessly toss out will be used against you! I can see that you're making a horrific mistake and I won't sit here in silence.

NATALIE. Me too – I won't sit here in silence, mom. Your career and your social standing are on the line.

STEVE. We're sorry, Krzysztof, but you broke all of our preliminary agreements.

NATALIE. So unfortunately we're forced to end this interview.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Right now Michael is thinking that, for the first time in his life, he has just met a woman who looks good when she's irritated and angry. "Her whole body is wonderful and so are all of those wonderful angry noises which that body is emitting," thinks Michael.

NATALIE. As Ula Richter's manager and lawyer, I say that we must stop.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. "She's so wonderful!" thinks Michael but out loud he says something else altogether.

MICHAEL. I'm sorry to interrupt but I think Ula has the right to say whatever she wants. It's *her* interview, isn't it? Every person on earth has the right to be heard.

STEVE. Enough, Michael. Please don't go sticking your nose into things you can't even begin to comprehend!

ULA. I demand silence.

NATALIE. Mom, I'm begging you – listen to us!

ULA. I demand silence. Okay?

Silence.

ULA. Steve, Natalie. Listen to what I have got to say. You're at work now, aren't you? Because you work for me. Steve, you work as my literary agent, and Natalie, you work as my manager and lawyer. Am I right? Yes, I'm right. That's why I'm warning you for the last time, if anyone dares to interrupt our conversation again, they will be fired immediately. That's right, fired! And they will have to leave the room. My dears, I'm saying that absolutely seriously. That's exactly what I'll do – I'll fire you on the spot and continue to give this interview. I hope that's completely clear? Yes?

Pause.

Ula finishes the whiskey in her glass.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Once, Krzysztof's older sister Marta, when she came home from school, asked Krzysztof a very unusual question. She was tired and in a fairly bad mood. She said "are you ever ashamed of being Polish?" And Krzysztof, who was thirteen then, gave a reply which was unexpected even for himself, he said "every second of my life".

ULA. Please pour me some more whiskey.

NATALIE. Sorry, but I refuse to do that – you can fire me.

STEVE. I'll pour you some more, Ula.

Steve stands up, goes over to the coffee-table by the sofa, take the empty glass and goes to the drinks shelf.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. The last time Steve felt this low was three years ago, when the operation to cut out his haemorrhoids was not entirely successful.

Steve pours whiskey into a glass.

ULA. Let's continue, Krzysztof. I think we were talking about how a small girl falls up?

KRZYSZTOF. I'm sorry?

ULA. So, you see – a small girl takes a deliberate step and falls up, in order to learn how to love.

KRZYSZTOF. I'm afraid I don't entirely understand you, Ula. What are you talking about?

ULA. About what you need to do, in order to truly love – you need to walk away from everything.

Steve brings a glass of whiskey, puts it down in front of Ula and returns to his chair by the other coffee-table.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Actually, when Steve had a relatively unsuccessful operation to cut out his haemorrhoids three years ago, he felt a lot better than he does right now.

ULA. Even as a child, I always felt that I must leave.

KRZYSZTOF. Leave?

ULA. Leave everything which was mistakenly considered to be mine. To stop being the person who had had the image of me imposed upon her. Leave my nationality, leave my language, leave my culture, my kin, my blood, my skin, my body, everything which wasn't in fact mine. Because I'm nobody.

KRZYSZTOF. Ula, are you saying this seriously?

ULA. Absolutely. I've never said this to anyone. All of my interviews are total fabrications. Only my books are the truth. Except for the last one obviously. But now I want to tell you about that. And I'm telling you. I'm nobody.

Pause.

Ula takes a gulp of whiskey.

KRZYSZTOF. A few minutes ago, you said that your daughter and your literary agent forced you to write a novel about Poland. Could you elaborate on that?

STEVE (*in a pleading voice*). Ula!

ULA. You're fired.

STEVE. Well, then... I think I'll also have something to drink.

Steve goes to the drinks shelf and pours himself a whiskey.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. During the Nuremberg trials, one of the Nazi officers who served in Auschwitz, was asked what he felt when he sent Jewish children to the gas chamber. Looking strangely to one side, he replied that he felt an unbearable disquiet.

ULA. They said that if I didn't write this novel, no publisher would ever work with me again. Because rumours of my anti-Semitism were spiralling out of control. So they chose a theme: Poland, the Second World War, a Jewish ghetto in Kraków, and of course Auschwitz. These are all themes which I hate because usually the people who write about them never lived through them. So, when I wrote this awful novel, I was crying and retching the whole time. I was snorting cocaine and drinking whiskey. I drank litres of whiskey and snorted kilos of cocaine. But I did it. I wrote the novel. And now my novel is on sale in countries around the world, and most importantly – in Poland. And now certain people in New York have to shut up and eat their own shit. Ha, ha, ha!

Ula is laughing earnestly and maliciously.

KRZYSZTOF. You know, I think your last novel wasn't as bad as all that. It wasn't as multi-faceted as, let's say, your penultimate novel, *Blood*, but still – in the subtext, how can I put it... your feelings seep through, like in your other books... *you* are distinctly visible.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. More than anything, Krzysztof and his beloved Oliver love to lie together, in each other's arms, watching American TV-series, while drinking Prosecco from champagne flutes. Their favourite series, right now, is *Breaking Bad*.

ULA. To some extent, I do have the right to choose that subject. After all I was born during the war, even if I was the child of an "occupying father" and a mother-turned-traitor. But you know, after that, when the war was over, I had to endure some very difficult years. My father and mother were sent to a camp. I was brought up among distant relatives, whom I hated – but that's by the by. The point is... when I asked my father many, many years later, after he was back from the camp, - what did you feel in 1942 when you met my mother and persuaded her to become your wife and a traitor to her people? Do you know what he said?

KRZYSZTOF. Of course not.

ULA. He said – he felt an inexplicable disquiet, - so you see, Krzysztof. That's how it is.

Ula finishes her whiskey.

NATALIE. Steve, pour me some whiskey, would you?

STEVE. Certainly.

Steve pours whiskey into one glass for himself and also into another glass, which he brings to Natalie.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Once, the famous British comedian Tony Goldman was asked – it is permissible to joke about the Holocaust? You're allowed to joke, replied Tony Goldman, but not to laugh.

Steve and Natalie drink whiskey.

STEVE. Krzysztof, as Ula's literary agent, I think we must end this interview.

ULA. Steve – you're fired.

NATALIE. Krzysztof, we're in a position to offer you sizeable compensation to cover time wasted and emotional distress.

ULA. You're also fired, Natalie. Let's carry on our conversation, Krzysztof.

STEVE. By the way, the chief editor of the New Yorker, Hardy Wilson, is a good friend of mine, I'd be happy to call him and tell him about you.

NATALIE. He's a family friend and a recommendation from us could play a pivotal role in your career in New York, if that's of interest.

ULA. What are these "bystanders" doing here? Steve, Natalie, you don't work for me anymore, please leave.

STEVE. Sorry, Ula, but I'm too dedicated to you to leave. I'm staying here because I love you.

NATALIE. I'm also staying, mom, because I can't leave you when you're in such a terrible state. And right now, mom, - you're in trouble.

STEVE. Yes, Ula – you're in trouble.

ULA. Fine, I'm obviously not going to pick you up and throw you out. You can sit here and get drunk on my whiskey. But you don't have the right to interfere in my conversation with the journalist. I'm going to give this interview, whether you like it or not. And if you won't let me do it here, and now, then I'll meet Krzysztof in some other place tomorrow. Let me decide for myself when to open my mouth and when to shut it. Am I right, Michael?

MICHAEL. Absolutely. Each person has the right to open and shut their mouth whenever they want. The only thing you have to remember, Ula, is that journalists usually twist everyone's words, to create something provocative, - they like to make it more exciting for the readers, they don't give a damn about the person they're interviewing. The only thing they care about is creating a scandal. Don't take that personally, Krzysztof, it was just an observation.

STEVE. Thank you, Michael.

ULA. Krzysztof isn't like that, are you Krzysztof? He's a sweet boy. Also, he's Polish – and all Poles are naïve and provincial simpletons. And also – he's gay and he understands what it's like to be "an outsider". You don't cheat on your partner, do you, Krzysztof?

KRZYSZTOF. Of course not. I love him.

ULA. I believe in this Polish boy. He won't lie. Obviously, he's thinking about his career, like the rest of us, but, like all provincials, Krzysztof puts his professional responsibilities above all else. Let's continue, Krzysztof.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. When a flower blossoms, it sends a signal to the world that now it is ready. Ready for anything.

KRZYSZTOF. Could you tell me a bit about your father? What he was like as a person?

ULA. For the most part, he was a good person, obviously he had his shortcomings, like we all do. But the thing which I liked most about him, - was his capacity for loving women. When they released him from the camp and sent him to live in a colony in a small Siberian village, even there, over the course of eight years, my father managed to get through three women, even though he was still technically married to my mother. Three women! One after the other. What else is there to say – he loved women. He really did! He wasn't reliable – but what can you do about that. That's because of his genes and his upbringing. Right up till his last few years, he was in great physical shape, he was handsome, witty, hungry for life. But the main thing is – he was decisive. You don't meet men like that very often. People like, for example, our friend, here - Michael.

Michael points his camera at Ula and takes several shots.

ULA. Michael is handsome, he's witty I think, he's probably hungry for life but he's absolutely not decisive. Are you married, Michael?

MICHAEL. No, I've never been married.

ULA. Why not?

MICHAEL. Well, Ula, probably because I'm indecisive.

ULA. But then again, he's able to laugh at himself. Do you know, I've always thought a man should have three main qualities: he must be kind, decisive and able to laugh at himself. And the last quality is more important than the first two... because if a man can't joke and laugh at himself, then he's nothing more than an insecure petty tyrant. A minor tyrant, like a little tyrannical cockroach, capable of terrorising everyone around him. And if that little spider manages to come to power, then that's just a disaster – he'll force everyone to honour and praise him because inside he feels such terrible insecurity and fear. But thank God that our friend here, Michael, - he's not like that.

MICHAEL. Thank you, Ula.

ULA. I just like you, dear.

STEVE. Listen, I have a suggestion.

ULA. Bystanders who just happen to be in this room have no right to interrupt our conversation.

STEVE. Nevertheless... Couldn't we move to a wonderful little restaurant just around the corner from here?

NATALIE. Do you mean "The Filipino Fisherman"?

STEVE. Or "The Laurence". They have a phenomenal wine list.

NATALIE. I'll try to get through to the New Yorker's editor Hardy Wilson and maybe he can join us. It wouldn't be a bad idea to introduce him to Krzysztof.

ULA. They're trying to find a way of interrupting our interview, Krzysztof. Don't give in to them. And by the way Hardy Wilson is my friend, not theirs. I can call him myself and put in a good word for you. Of course, that's if you do everything right, Krzysztof. Agreed?

KRZYSZTOF. And what does "doing everything right" mean?

ULA. Right always means accurate. Do you follow?

KRZYSZTOF. I think so.

ULA. Then let's continue. Next question.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. The possibility of meeting the chief editor of the New Yorker has made Krzysztof's heart start beating fast because, as you already know, Krzysztof dreams about a journalistic career in New York.

KRZYSZTOF. As far as I could tell, you spoke with a good deal of warmth about your father. So, you don't consider him to be some sort of "villain" who forced your mother to betray her nation and who basically ruined her whole life?

ULA. What a strange question! If he hadn't done what he did, I wouldn't be here on this earth. My readers wouldn't be reading my books, my daughter Natalie wouldn't be such a dazzling beauty with a sizeable inheritance from her rich father, Steve wouldn't be getting rich from his percentage of the

million-plus sales of my book, and you, my sweet Pole, wouldn't have had the chance to escape your *pięknego kraju* and step into the adult world of New York, which you've been dreaming about since you entered the journalism faculty of Jagiellonian University in Kraków. So it wouldn't make sense for anybody in this room, including Michael, to level any criticisms against my father.

STEVE. My God, Ula, stop already!

NATALIE. I hope you understand that she's not saying any of this seriously, she's just playing on your nerves, that's her style.

ULA. So, Michael, will you come to me for a lesson in self-confidence?

MICHAEL. I'm not confident I'll make it.

ULA. A wise guy.

Michael photographs Ula.

KRZYSZTOF. How do you know that I studied in Kraków?

ULA. I prepared for our meeting, my dear boy. I even made enquiries about your parents. Your father was called Zbigniew Zieliński, and he killed himself two years ago, possibly because he couldn't accept your sexual orientation, he was after all an officer of the Polish Army, a patriot and a homophobe, but then again perhaps because he knew he had lung cancer. And your mother Katarzyna, maiden name Dimkovska, has been deteriorating for many years – with Alzheimer's. By the way, how is she now? ----
нет текста — Ей хуже? - Is she worth?

KRZYSZTOF. I don't know what you're talking about, Ula?! My father is still alive and he was never in the army. He's a professor at Jagiellonian University, where I studied as well. And my mother was killed in a car crash ten years ago, it was very unfortunate, but she was perfectly healthy.

ULA. I know all that, of course. I just permitted myself to be creative again. Believe me, I'm very sorry for your mum, Krzysztof. I know what it's like to lose one's parents. I know what it feels like when your mother dies in a car crash. When my mother was released from the camp, she came back to Poland, and the first thing she did was to drink herself to oblivion, get in her car and drive at top speed for a few minutes until she rammed into a tree right next to the road. Evidently, she couldn't live with her treason. So, I understand you my sweet – maimed by life – dear Polish citizen. You deserve to live in New York, and I'll take care of you if you do everything right, as we agreed. And "right" always means "accurate", you remember that, don't you, Krzysztof?

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. When a Christian mystic, a saint, was asked which were the most important words which the Lord transmits, through his saints? Without hesitating, the saint replied that the Lord always remains silent through his saints.

NATALIE. Listen, Krzysztof. I'm begging you to stop this interview. You don't know her. You're talking to a brilliant but unfortunately very complicated person. You don't have any idea what's actually going on here. She's using you. This interview will cost you your career in journalism, I promise you.

ULA. That's nonsense, Krzysztof! She's frightening you to stop all this dirt from seeing the light of day because it's a risk to our family business. Don't give in to her provocation, do your job and the result will be superb.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. During the Nuremberg Trials, one of the German generals was asked whether he felt any sort of disquiet at giving orders which were leading to the deaths of millions of people? He replied... actually, that's no longer important right now. Apologies.

ULA. Ask your question, Krzysztof.

KRZYSZTOF. I didn't know that your mother committed suicide, I read that she lived to over eighty years old and died in a home for old people near Warsaw.

Pause.

ULA. That's right. I said that she committed suicide because I wanted to comfort you in your grief, young man. That's one my creations again. My mother would never have had the courage to do that. She deteriorated from old age and anti-depressants. But I see you came here well-informed.

KRZYSZTOF. I prepared for our interview.

ULA. Me too, my dear. Next question.

NATALIE. Be more careful, Krzysztof. I know my mother, she's up to something, that's for sure!

ULA. Listen, if you're going to keep interrupting our conversation, I'll carry on this interview somewhere else. And you definitely won't be there! Forgive them, Krzysztof, they're only afraid for themselves. Let's continue.

STEVE. And what's more, a year ago Ula cussed fatally at Hardy Wilson, when he refused to publish her article in the New Yorker. So she's not going to call him and she can't help you get a job at the New Yorker. She's bluffing. But Natalie and I will actually call him, I'm giving you my word.

ULA. Ha! Yes, I had a fight with Hardy but so what?! If I call him right now, he'll piss himself with joy that I've forgiven him and he'll come crawling to the first restaurant I point at. Let's carry on, Krzysztof.

NATALIE. It's a bluff, Krzysztof! Wilson won't even pick up the phone – not when he sees it's Ula calling. After he refused to publish her article, she publicly called him a monstrous racist oppressing the rights of people of colour, preventing them from expressing an opinion about the most pressing problems facing humankind.

KRZYSZTOF. But if I'm not mistaken, Hardy Wilson is a black man.

STEVE. Exactly! She was accusing him of racism against white people. Namely, against her. Because in her article she wrote, in particular, about how "the next step which humankind must make to achieve freedom is to allow ourselves to mock race, skin colour, nationality and patriotism".

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Once, an Indian holy man was asked – where do all the spiritual paths of all the religions on earth lead? Without hesitating, he replied – all spiritual paths lead to the solitary tree, growing by the roadside, into which the drunk mother of the writer Ula Richter didn't in fact crash.

ULA. Let's continue, Krzysztof. Don't you want to ask me about my lovers?

KRZYSZTOF. To be honest, I wasn't planning to go there.

ULA. Well, I'm giving you permission. So?

KRZYSZTOF. So?

ULA. You probably heard that I love young men?

KRZYSZTOF. Well, I don't normally trust the tabloids or rumour.

ULA. Well, it's true. Half a year after my husband David Blumenstein died, I let myself do what I had always dreamt about. I dreamt about beauty, self-confidence, power, as well as naivety, courage, stupidity and joy, so basically – about youth! From then on, my lovers were always young men under the age of thirty. Of course, I have to admit that the so-called love that all these boys felt for me vanished as soon as they had got what they wanted or on the contrary when they'd given up, but anyway when they didn't need me anymore. Ha, ha! How old are you, Michael?

MICHAEL. Thirty seven.

ULA. Well, you're a bit too old for me. But I can see that you're looking at my beautiful daughter?

MICHAEL. I admit, I would like to photograph her in the right light in my studio. I'm certain it could turn into something of significance. I might be able to hang those photos in my personal exhibition next year. The incensed beauty! Irresistible, horrifying, inaccessible and magnetic.

ULA. Natalie is a sumptuous woman, even if she is a bitch. But in your hands, perhaps in the spring she would blossom into a bitch-flower. Don't you think, Michael?

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. At the start of May, in the foothills of the Alps, there is always a rare and intoxicating smell. That's the time of year when the valley is blossoming with bitch-flowers.

MICHAEL. You have a beautiful daughter, Ula. That's why I'm ready to take a risk.

ULA. Just be more decisive, Natalie is one of those women who like it when you grab her by the hair with big dirty hands and drag her into the bushes.

NATALIE. My God, mom! Don't you feel any sense of shame?!

ULA. No. Where did we stop, Krzysztof? I think it was my love of young men, no?

KRZYSZTOF. Tell me why you've decided to talk about that? Do you feel that there's something not right about your life?

ULA. ??? A manipulative journalist! You learnt how to conduct an interview in order to sensationalise everything! No, my dear, my life is just as it should be, except perhaps one thing – there was never any love all that time. Not one of those boys loved me and... well, if I'm honest, I never felt anything serious for any of them.

NATALIE. Except Milan.

Pause.

KRZYSZTOF. And who's that? Who's Milan?

NATALIE. He killed himself after he and Ula consumed a large amount of LSD. He jumped out of the window while Ula was waiting for him in the bubble bath. You loved him for real, didn't you? We all thought it was true love, didn't we? At least, for a whole year after his funeral, you couldn't come to your senses! Even when your father died, you didn't collapse like that, and half a year after *his* funeral, you started a romance with some cute baby-

faced lad. But after Milan's death, you didn't have any other flings and even now you're still single. You still keep photos of him in your bedroom.

Pause.

ULA. Well... I need to piss now, Krzysztof. I'll be back in a few minutes and then we'll continue with this engaging conversation.

Ula stands up and walks to the door. She lingers by the door.

ULA. Do you know what love is, Krzysztof?

KRZYSZTOF. Well, a lot's been said on that subject - it's hard to add anything new.

ULA. You can always add something new, if you live a new life with each second. Love is disquiet – think about that while I'm gone. Okay?

Ula leaves the room.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. When a wise rabbi was asked – what is love? He shut his eyes and slowly responded, Love is disquiet. After a brief silence, he added – The disquiet of the Creator, who cares about all of us, inside each one of

STEVE. Listen, Krzysztof, I hope you understand that you can't publish this interview. For Ula's sake, for the sake of her art, you mustn't publish this nonsense!

NATALIE. That would be the same as killing her!

STEVE. Even more so now – when she's in astonishingly good form. When, I believe, she's started writing a new novel. When she has another chance to try to win a Nobel prize!

NATALIE. And also because what she's telling you is 80% just nonsense! I mean, she's exaggerating the facts on purpose and presenting everything in a vulgar way so you lose your balance.

KRZYSZTOF. Why would she do that?

NATALIE. So when you're drained and losing your bearings, she can gradually prepare you for the main message.

KRZYSZTOF. The main message?

STEVE. Listen, Krzysztof, I've been working with Ula for fifteen years. And I know that she can't bear giving interviews. You can't even force her to do them. And when she does agree to them, the journalist has to drag each and every word out of her – it's like getting blood from a stone. She never talks to anyone the way she's talking to you. So, she must need to do this. She has some sort of plan.

KRZYSZTOF. What plan?

NATALIE. Something which she wants to tell the world through you. Some sort of unbelievable idea.

MICHAEL. And what's wrong with that, that a person wants to tell the world his unbelievable idea?

NATALIE. A writer does that in each of their works, so why bring the press into it to boot? Speak through your fiction.

MICHAEL. Well, maybe she needs to say something personal, coming from herself not through her art.

STEVE. Listen, Michael, this is none of your business. You're a photographer! Krzysztof, my good man, we don't have much time, she'll be back soon! Krzysztof – you must listen to us and trust us. If you really want everything to be fine for Ula and for yourself, you have to resolve to take a radical step.

NATALIE. Believe me, Krzysztof, this interview won't just ruin her career... it won't be good for you either.

STEVE. As a minimum, you'll have to forget about New York, my dear man! One thing they detest here is nosey little hacks from minor-league countries sticking their noses into the lives of the great and the good. This world can only be built or destroyed by those who hold it in the palms of their hands.

NATALIE. Americans own the planet, not some Polish guy.

STEVE. On the other hand – “American” isn't a real nationality, is it, Nat? An “American”, it's just a work permit, a green card, a career in the USA, don't you think?

NATALIE. That's exactly right!

STEVE. And then you can say whatever you want. Get your work permit in the USA and then open your mouth. Wipe someone from the face of the earth, ruin them, uncover pseudo-truths, expose the dirty linen, destroy another person's life, but first get yourself a job at a publication which has earned itself the right to live knee-deep in all that filth.

NATALIE. And that's why – starting tomorrow – we're organising several meetings with a few “big fish” – to introduce them to you.

STEVE. Not only with the New Yorker and the New York Times but also a few high-profile online publications, which have a global readership. We know everybody here but even more importantly – everybody here knows us!

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Krzysztof dreamt of working in New York not only because it's the capital of the world, and people here are paid properly and you get the opportunity for personal development, but more importantly he wanted to escape from his own country because recently he'd found Poland to be more and more suffocating for people like him. And it wasn't just because of his sexual orientation, but more because of the whole system of liberal values which he believed in. The rise of patriotic nationalism and political Catholicism didn't allow him to express himself the way a crazy flower expresses itself fully when its crazy blossoming season has come.

KRZYSZTOF. Well, okay, what are you suggesting that I should do?

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. During the trial of a paedophile-Catholic priest, he was asked, did he fear God at the very instant when he was forcing small boys to have sex with him? He replied that he felt something worse than ordinary fear. And when he was asked to describe that feeling, he replied: that feeling could be described with a single word, and that word is:...

Pause.

STEVE. First, as quickly as possible, right now in fact, delete everything which you recorded on your Dictaphone and iPhone. That's first. Go on.

KRZYSZTOF. And second?

STEVE. Second, don't turn your Dictaphone or iPhone back on when she comes back in and then you can continue. Just put them in front of her and continue to talk to her, as if you're still recording. Pretend that you're still interviewing her. Listen to her attentively. Let her have her say. Give her some more of your time. Then all of this lives on only in your memory and ours, but it doesn't go any further. Hurry, Krzysztof, she could come in any second.

KRZYSZTOF. I can't do it!

STEVE. You can, Krzysztof! You can – if you want to!

NATALIE. We're going to do everything possible to make sure this interview doesn't come out anyway. We'll find a way of stopping it, take my word for it.

STEVE. Not a single Polish publication will want to start a fight with us!

NATALIE. Bear in mind – everyone will end up turning on you!

STEVE. Your career depends on this decision. Well, Krzysztof?

KRZYSZTOF. Lord Jesus forgive me! Fine – I agree!

Krzysztof begins to destroy the files on his Dictaphone and iPhone.

MICHAEL. Hey, hey! Hang on! What about me? I'm not going to let you throw my work into the trash heap – and I won't let you wipe your feet on a famous woman like this.

STEVE. We'll pay you for your work, Michael. Plus a premium to compensate you for the inconvenience. And we'll buy your photos from the Polish publication and return the rights to you. You'll hold the exclusive rights to photos of Ula Richter at home – you'll be able to sell them for a good price.

MICHAEL. In exchange for lying?

NATALIE. In exchange for saving a great person from a fall.

STEVE. Hurry up, Krzysztof, she'll be back any second.

KRZYSZTOF. Done! I've deleted it all.

STEVE. Thank you, Krzysztof. We owe you. But look, it's not that I don't trust you, I just want to be completely sure that those files have actually been deleted. Show me.

KRZYSZTOF. I deleted them all, honestly.

STEVE. I believe you, but still....

Krzysztof shows Steve all of the files on his iPhone and on his Dictaphone.

MICHAEL. Don't you think this is cruel? Maybe she does actually have something very important to tell you about herself?

NATALIE. Cut it out, Michael. You don't know her – but we know her very well. She doesn't have anything to say, except what she says in her novels. Outside of her art, she has nothing to say – believe me.

Steve gives back the Dictaphone and iPhone to Krzysztof.

STEVE. The deed is done! Thank you, Krzysztof.

Pause.

MICHAEL. Well, alright. Have you got something to say?

NATALIE. Sorry, what?

MICHAEL. Do you have something to tell the world – in whichever way you choose to do it? Through your body, your character, your love affairs?

NATALIE. Are you trying to hit on me, Michael?

MICHAEL. That too. But I genuinely want to understand – the meaning of you? I mean, I look at you – you're a beautiful, strong woman. But what's your purpose?

NATALIE. Well... What's yours?

MICHAEL. To document the unusual, the out-of-the-ordinary, the extraordinary, to retain those moments and show them to other people.

NATALIE. Well, fine, sure, you already know what you're living for – but I don't. Even though I'm already thirty-three.

MICHAEL. You're thirty-three? You only look thirty-two!

NATALIE. You actually *are* trying to hit on me, aren't you?

MICHAEL. True.

NATALIE. Why?!

MICHAEL. Because for the first time in my life I've met a woman whose anger, irritation, intrigues and all the repulsive qualities suit her so well. You're an enchanting, charming bitch-flower!

NATALIE. And you're a typical self-obsessed photographer from New York. You think that any woman you wave your camera at will rush over and give you a blow-job?

MICHAEL. Woah! Hold on... I need something completely different from you.

NATALIE. What is it then?

MICHAEL. I want to do a photoshoot with you. Come to my studio and I'll take photos of you for a few hours, agreed?

NATALIE. I have no interest in being a model.

MICHAEL. That's my condition – in exchange for being complicit in your scheme against Ula, it's my price for not telling her what you're up to.

NATALIE. You're blackmailing me?!

MICHAEL. Exactly. And by the way you don't have much time to think about it – it'll be too late when Ula comes back in.

NATALIE. Steve, did you hear that?

STEVE. Sure. You have to agree to it, Natalie, he's got us in the palm of his hands.

Ula comes in.

ULA. Well, here I am again! I'm afraid you'll have to stop talking about me behind my back.

Ula walks over and sits back on the same spot on the sofa.

MICHAEL (to Natalie). So is that a yes? Or should I do what I said?

NATALIE. Yes! Yes!

MICHAEL. You won't regret.

NATALIE. We'll see.

ULA. Well, Krzysztof, I'm sure they've been working on you with all of their might. They promised you a career in New York and threatened to destroy your career in every country on this planet if you don't accept their conditions. But you're an ambitious young man, and I hope you didn't give into their simple American trickery. Can you guess what I was doing all this time? I doubt you can, because you don't believe in a simple thing like "forgiveness". That's why you'll never ask for forgiveness and you don't know how to forgive, but I believe in forgiveness. I ask for forgiveness and I myself forgive. So you see, I just called Hardy Wilson. I asked him to forgive me and not only did he agree, but as I assumed, he almost burst into tears and said he regretted everything that had happened between us. We're due to have lunch together tomorrow. Me, Hardy, Krzysztof and you Michael, if you'd like to join us.

NATALIE. And I presume we're not invited?

ULA. Certainly not.

STEVE. Ula... Did you really make up with Hardy?

ULA. I swear it on the health of your mother.

NATALIE. Mom! Think about what you're saying! Steve's mother has cancer!

ULA. That's why I swore it on her health – I wouldn't joke about something that serious.

NATALIE. I'm sorry, Steve.

STEVE. It doesn't matter. I'm used to Ula's dirty pranks. Anyway I'm sure that she was telling the truth, so we're back in Hardy's good books, and that's what counts!

ULA. I'll introduce you to him tomorrow, Krzysztof. He's the first black man to run a progressive journal like the New Yorker. Only white men could have held that post before but now you're better off being black and gay in the USA, and it's even better if you're disabled, then every door is open to you, plus you can express your opinion any place you like, because you're the perfect combination: black, disabled, homosexual. And that's exactly what Hardy is by the way. He's gay but he also has a prosthetic limb instead of a right arm. It's the ideal combination for a career in the West these days! But to be fair, you have to admit – he is devilishly clever, he has excellent taste and he has unbelievable intuition. By the way, fifteen years ago, those qualities wouldn't have been enough. But now, as I was saying, different qualities are in vogue. So it's actually a pity that you're not disabled, Krzysztof. Maybe we should ask Steve to break your leg or at least one of your fingers? And also perhaps we could dye you black?! Ha, ha, ha!

Ula laughs heartily for almost a minute. Finally she regains her composure.

ULA. Anyway... I was joking. I was just joking! But tomorrow you'll get an opportunity to make a new life for yourself, Krzysztof. If, as we agreed, you do everything right. Let's continue. So, your next question, young man.

Pause.

KRZYSZTOF. Let's talk about your future plans. When you were out of the room, Steve was saying that you are working on a new novel, can I ask you what it's about?

ULA. Do you know which question you must never ask an artist? What their work is about. When stupid journalists ask me – "Tell us what your book is about?", I just start trembling with indignation. Because any real book could never be "about something", a book isn't just a theme, or a subject, a book is an entire construction – a work of art. It's about what you *feel* when you're reading it. Do you understand that, my Polish simpleton?

KRZYSZTOF. Not completely, I'm afraid.

ULA. The meaning is always discovered in the reading of the book, not in its contents.

KRZYSZTOF. Could you please repeat that? That feels like a very interesting thought.

ULA. You've recorded it on your Dictaphone, so you can listen back to it as many times as you like.

MICHAEL. And I'm certain that's exactly what he'll do!

KRZYSZTOF. Still... what did you say? The meaning of a book appears when you're reading it... What do you mean?

ULA. Well, young man, the meaning is discovered in the reading. Books are written to be read, - for the act of reading itself. Okay? The book's meaning is revealed when you hold it in your hands. A book is always about the person who is reading it, at any given moment in time. It is about the feelings which the reader experiences when reading – about giving the reader contact with something mystical and terrifying. About the disquiet which we feel when we come into contact with anything which confirms our own infinity. Even if the theme of the work is a repulsive hell. Do you understand me, Krzysztof?

KRZYSZTOF. Well, I'm trying hard in any case. I think that we've stumbled once again across the question, as old as our world – what is the meaning of art? Actually, what's your position on that?

ULA. I think that art has only one meaning – the pleasure of art. Sometimes a gut-wrenching one.

KRZYSZTOF. Well, okay, but one more very stupid question from me if you don't mind. The thing is – in my country, there's a very topical debate at the moment – "censorship in the arts". What do you think, is everything permitted in the arts or are there limits and taboos?

ULA. I think that everything is permissible in art... everything except "non-art". Do you follow me?

KRZYSZTOF. But what are the criteria of art, who gets to decide what is art and what isn't?

ULA. A work of art must exist within a frame. Just like the frames around paintings by the old masters, when you see them exhibited at art galleries. Not the same in any literal sense, obviously, but just as tangible. Art always lives within those frames. Inside clearly determined boundaries. To repeat, those boundaries may not be material ones. Still, the boundaries are important because they create the distinction between art and the surrounding living environment. To wash away those boundaries never brings the audience closer to reality, on the contrary, it only creates a greater distance. That's why it's very important that we can look at a work of art, as if from an outside perspective. To look and to see – these are the first steps towards true love.

MICHAEL. Love?

ULA. Yes, Michael, love. Because, in order to love, you must be free from the object of your love. Dependent love doesn't exist. Love is freedom and independence. It means you need to look! It means boundaries are still so important. Boundaries are very important for love! Who is it – there inside her own boundaries so quickly falling up? I'm looking! Who is it – wanting so desperately to leave from many places?! I'm looking! To depart from oneself, from one fixed perspective on life, from one's blood, from one's nationality and from one's sex, from one's artistry, to leave it all, this girl is rapidly falling up in order to learn how to love! Pour me another whiskey, please, Steve.

STEVE. Are you sure?

ULA. What are you nuts, Steve? Have you ever known me to be unsure when I've decided I want something?

STEVE. You're right – never.

ULA. Then be a good man, - whiskey, my dear.

STEVE. Yes, Ula.

Steve goes over to the shelf with spirits, pours a whiskey, brings it to Ula and goes back to his chair.

KRZYSZTOF. Excuse me, what's the title of your new novel, the one you're working on now, or is it still a secret?

Ula takes a gulp of whiskey.

ULA. It's called Disquiet.

STEVE. Oh! So now you've got a new title!

NATALIE. Disquiet! That's a beautiful title!

KRZYSZTOF. Very poetic!

ULA. Well... yes. Which is right because it's a novel in verse.

STEVE. In verse?!

NATALIE. I didn't know you write poetry, mom?

ULA. I just started. I started - one month ago. But I can see that your Dictaphone has a large memory, Krzysztof, it's been on for a long time, are you sure that it is recording all of this?

KRZYSZTOF. Um....

STEVE. If anything happens to one device, he's always got the other one.

NATALIE. It's fine – we're taking care of that side of things.

MICHAEL. Yeah! They've got that covered!

NATALIE. Don't let yourself get distracted, mom. Tell us what you wanted to announce to everybody.

KRZYSZTOF. Yes, really, Ula, I've started to have the feeling that **you want to share something very important with your readers?** Something important *for you*. Do you want to announce something?

Pause.

ULA. Yes.

Pause.

KRZYSZTOF. What is it?

Pause.

ULA. Well, you see... hm... There's no easy way to say it... I'm feeling a certain disquiet... Okay, fine, I suppose the time has come... This young man, Milan, whom Natalie mentioned half an hour ago. He was Serbian by the way. A handsome, breath-taking Serbian man! Serbs are all crazy, highly sexed, throwing themselves out of windows.

(Attention. Translators and directors: from this point, the structure of the phrases contains a poetic rhythm.)

Milan... That Serb, who took LSD and jumped down, as Serbs should, from the window. And as you know, I was waiting for him in the bubble bath... Ha, ha! Right... So, the thing is, he didn't exactly jump out of the window by himself, but it was... It was I who helped him a bit. I helped. By slightly pushing him in the back, when he was sitting on the windowsill, looking down. I stood behind his back, he said "down there is such height". And I loved that phrase: "Down there is such height". If you fall down, but down there is a vast height, then you're actually flying up? That's right, isn't it? Falling down, you fall up. LSD is a powerful psychotropic substance, it changes you completely. It alters your perception of what is "down" and what is "up", what is "space" and what is "love". With LSD, love is always a bold step forwards! So, it was me who pushed him from the window. I stood behind him and gently pushed him... In his back. And he didn't have anything to hold on to and wasn't expecting it, so he left. He fell down. And since down was a "vast height", he actually "fell up". So it turns out that I killed him. I helped him to "fall up", by pushing him down.

Pause.

ULA. And now, Steve, I'm definitely going to get that Nobel prize. Ha ha ha!

Ula laughs or cries with a "strange laugh". After a minute she calms down.

Pause.

STEVE. It's a joke.

MICHAEL. Ula, you're a genius! I'm happy that I got to meet a person like you! This is the best day of my life!

KRZYSZTOF. That was a joke, wasn't it?

NATALIE *(anxiously)*. Mom?!

ULA. It's a work of art, darling. But for me, it's first and foremost, "falling up". After all, I'm falling up. From very early childhood, I'm falling up.

NATALIE. Mom! Couldn't you get a grip on yourself and stop joking like that, especially since someone died. A man that you loved. You said it yourself – there have to be boundaries.

ULA. And indeed there are. We are all inside those boundaries now – we have all fallen out of the window now and we're flying.

NATALIE. And what do want to say by that, explain yourself!

ULA. I've already explained. I'm falling up!

KRZYSZTOF. It's another metaphor, yes?

NATALIE. Dammit, Steve... I'm a bit scared...

STEVE (*fairly worried*). Ula?!

ULA. Everything is my fault. Nothing is my fault. I'm falling up. It's a myth!

KRZYSZTOF. It's a myth?!

NATALIE. Mom?! Look me in the eyes. It's all because of the whiskey?

ULA. I'm saying – I'm falling up.

STEVE. Ula, I'm begging you, tell us it's just another one of your games!

ULA. It's certainly a game.

MICHAEL (*worried*). What's going on?

KRZYSZTOF. Tell me, Ula, are you really capable of pushing a person out of a window?

ULA. I don't think that's important. It's meaningless – because I'm trying to tell you about something completely different.

KRZYSZTOF. What is it?!

ULA. What happens is meaningless, what's meaningful is only our reaction, what we feel at any given moment.

STEVE. Right... I think we don't have any cause to worry. It's just another of her games.

NATALIE. Mom, is this just a game, so you can show us what an author feels when they're writing a new novel?

ULA. You know... I'm already not sure I can explain all that to you, because you are all...! All of you! All of you are looking absolutely in the wrong direction. Not what you should be looking at.

KRZYSZTOF. Fine. I'm ready to try to understand. So – what do I need to understand?

ULA. First of all, you should just feel.

KRZYSZTOF. Feel what?!

ULA. What's happening to you, right now.

KRZYSZTOF. Damn! Another vicious circle.

NATALIE. Steve, do you realise that it could all have happened the way she described it?

STEVE. Personally I prefer to think that it's not like that.

MICHAEL. Ula, I don't understand, did you actually shove that guy out of the window or not?!

ULA. I told you – you're looking in the wrong direction.

KRZYSZTOF. Where should we look?! Perhaps down from the window?

ULA. Out of the window there's no down, there's only up. Height.

STEVE. But you also said that's it's just art, a game.

ULA. *Because* it's art and it's a game.

KRZYSZTOF (*losing it*). Damn! But I don't understand what that means – a game?!

ULA. I'm falling up.

STEVE. My God, Ula! This has gone too far. Let's stop this now, right now.

NATALIE. Mom, you're very drunk, aren't you?!

ULA. I'm completely sober.

NATALIE. Christ! She actually did it, Steve.

STEVE. I don't think so.

MICHAEL. Okay – and what should I think?!

KRZYSZTOF. And me?!

NATALIE. Mom?!

ULA. I just wanted to say that for me, life is words. Life, in general, and my personal life, *is* words. The words spoken by me and the words spoken about me. From early childhood, I live with a feeling that somebody is creating all of these words about me, that my life *is* somebody's words. Somebody is speaking words about me – and so I live. Somebody is speaking words about me – and so I love. Or there are words say that I lost love. Or words about what pain I'm feeling. Or there are words that somebody is falling down from a window, but at the same time falling up. All of that is words. I am words. A piece of art. And a piece of art is what you feel in that very moment. Right now. That's how the Author appears. The Creator! The creation *is* the Creator's disquiet, at every second of creation, in every single part of this strange universe and in every single one of us. I'm flying.

Pause.

NATALIE (*hoarsely*). Mom, I'm scared. Steve?!

STEVE. I'm very tired.

MICHAEL. Well – boy! What a day!

NATALIE. I'm also exhausted.

KRZYSZTOF. I've just been torn to shreds!

Pause.

ULA. Well then, that's all I wanted to say. You can switch your Dictaphone off now.

Ula stands up and walks over to the window. She sits on the windowsill and looks out of the window. Krzysztof picks up his Dictaphone and iPhone from the table and packs them away in his bag. Michael goes to the drinks table, pours himself a drink and drinks it. Steve and Natalie sit quietly.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Ula Richter. An extract from her new, as of yet unpublished, novel in verse.

DISQUIET

When I see you, you are not at all the one I love.
 You are for me what ought to have happened but did not happen.
 You are for me a dream which has only flowers, the smell of salt and dead tissue.
 A tissue woven from feelings, doubts and a chasm in which there is no end.
 Disquiet is water.
 Disquiet is water and water flows down.
 Disquiet is a river and a river rushes to where there are no longer borders – to the ocean.
 There are no longer borders there.
 There I feel only the necessity to love.
 Disquiet is the necessity to love the one who is not there.
 The one who is not alive.
 Disquiet means loving the one who flows as a stream and always, always, is the one who must not be caught.
 Who must not be conquered.
 About whom it is impossible to be silent and about whom one *must not* speak.
 Because words are only what I say to you about love, but not love.
 They are only what we are silent about, but that is scarcely love.
 They are not love at all.
 Because love is you.
 The disquiet rising somewhere in one's breast.

Pause.

VOICE OF THE PRESENTER. Thank you for watching. Good bye.

THE END.

Warsaw, 17 July 2018.