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CHAPTER IV

EVERYTHING HAS ITS TIME

von Katja von der Ropp

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CHARACTERS

AGATA *mid 60's*

ANDRZEJ *late 70's*

In the foyer of the theatre, Agata is clearing her workspace and closing the ticket office. She sings a song while she works.

Andrzej enters the foyer and goes over to her.

ANDRZEJ Agata....

AGATA Do I know you? (*Remaining silent, looks closely at Andrzej.*) Is it you?

Pause

ANDRZEJ You're still as beautiful as in those days.

Agata stays silent.

ANDRZEJ Who would have thought...

AGATA You, suddenly standing in front of me, as if nothing had happened!

ANDRZEJ Here I am and I'm pleased to see you again.

AGATA After all these years.

ANDRZEJ Almost thirty years and now I find you here!

AGATA I have to do a round and check whether everything is locked up and the lights are off. Would you please leave the building.

ANDRZEJ Can I come with you? Please!

AGATA I'm not allowed to do that.

ANDRZEJ Everyone's gone already.

AGATA What do you want?

ANDRZEJ To talk.

Pause

AGATA Well all right. There's no performance today, I'm the last one here.

She closes the entrance door and they go further into the building together.

ANDRZEJ What's happened to props?

AGATA That was long ago.



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ANDRZEJ And now you sit...

AGATA It's lucky for me. I'm in the midst of life and supplementing my pension.

ANDRZEJ How has it come to that?

AGATA I was ill.

ANDRZEJ So bad, what has happened Agata?

AGATA I had to have both of my hips operated on and afterwards I was given early retirement. I was just unlucky, nothing more. We're living in different times today Andrzej. So much has changed since we last saw each other. (*Pause.*) Where have you been hiding?

ANDRZEJ In London traffic jams most of the time.

AGATA Is that supposed to be a joke?

ANDRZEJ Yes. No. I was in London.

AGATA What are you doing here?

ANDRZEJ Searching for the time we lost.

AGATA Andrzej, it was all such a long time ago. We've got older. Our story is over.

ANDRZEJ It was the day... Do you remember? We talked about the demonstrations and about whether things could be changed. Whether the system could be changed, or whether it would destroy us. You didn't want to come. They arrested me when we were on our way home. (*Long pause.*) After I was released I just wanted to get away. I went to England then. Rather than bring danger to you ...

AGATA You just didn't turn up at work anymore, nobody heard anything from you. I even traced your mother. She didn't know anything either. Then we heard about the arrest, but when you didn't appear after the amnesty... Why didn't you get in touch? It would have been possible later. I thought you were dead!

ANDRZEJ I couldn't do anything else, I had to go. I muddled through as a taxi driver. I was safe in England. I lived a simple, tranquil life. I could think clearly, eat what I wanted, I didn't need anything else. A few weeks ago a friend came to visit and told me about his trip to Poland. He had seen you here in the theatre.

AGATA And now you want to pick up where we left off in those days?

ANDRZEJ I don't know.

AGATA We can't turn back time.

ANDRZEJ We can't deny it either. Like every evening I sat in front of the television, there was this film about a man who... I suddenly understood how egoistic it was of me to flee.

He sings a song

AGATA You still remember it?

ANDRZEJ We first met in the choir with that song! Rehearsals were on Monday evenings. We sang that song together at our last concert...

AGATA We still have to check the stage.

Agata opens the door and they go on to the stage.

AGATA Sometimes, when all the others are gone, I sit in the stalls and let my thoughts wander. Performances were always well attended in the past. The house was full of life, people met up. Only the elite still come today, hardly anyone younger than us. Listen to how quiet it is!

They listen and go to the auditorium.

ANDRZEJ It was a good place to exchange secret information.

AGATA I admired you in those days. You went into things with such strength and energy, you never allowed yourself to be intimidated. I didn't have the courage. There was always something more important, family, work. There was always some duty that had to be fulfilled. There was always something that had to be taken into consideration. There was always the fear that they could destroy your life. You seemed to be independent of that,



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you fought for a better life. I just wanted Maciek to survive it.

ANDRZEJ How is he?

AGATA He lives in Krakow with his family. We hardly ever see each other. Pawel died three years ago. Do you have family?

ANDRZEJ What a time it was when we started here in the theatre! You got me the job, just after you and Pawel had started in props. What a sight, do you remember? You had succeeded in getting the entire storeroom emptied, so that it could be sorted out. Everything was lying around in the yard, seven thousand items!

AGATA It took two months.

ANDRZEJ The whole theatre was in a flap. What if it rained?

AGATA Who is going to put it all back?

ANDRZEJ *und* AGATA *in chorus* Have they taken leave of their senses?

ANDRZEJ A great heap in the yard and you, like the eye of the storm, in the middle of it. Quietly sorting things, making lists and giving instructions. A sight for sore eyes! In the end they all admired you for it.

AGATA They were good times. We thought we had it made. The pay was good, very good in actual fact. Do you remember? It was so much that we didn't know what to do with it. Apart from the small shop here in the theatre, the shops were empty and there was hardly anything to buy.

ANDRZEJ I still remember the enormous balls of wool that you bought. I carried them for you because your husband wasn't available. With the greatest of pleasure.

AGATA Do you mean...

ANDRZEJ I mean...

AGATA It was supposed to be an investment, in case of bad times. I simply didn't know what to do with the money. In the end the moths ate everything.

ANDRZEJ A banquet for moths!

AGATA How we would have loved to have invested our money in a decent meal! But then the atmosphere in the theatre went downhill and in a way, in props, we became the theatre's unofficial complaints office.

ANDRZEJ Everyone was dissatisfied.

AGATA Yes, when you suddenly disappeared...Maciek was still so small, change was in the air already... Pawel and I reconciled. (*Pause*) We still worked in the same office in those days. People were always coming to us to complain. About unjust payment and the preferential treatment which was given to some, allowing them to travel. You must still remember the story of the artists and the technicians.

ANDRZEJ Yes, I remember it. It was a question of whether everyone is equal, or if some types of service are more important than other.

AGATA At some point I'd had enough of the whingeing and of being with Pawel for twenty four hours a day. So I set to work establishing Solidarity. It was 1987. I didn't have a clue about anything to do with setting it up and had to learn everything first. I let Słowik give me guidelines; later on I chaired sessions and did the bookkeeping.

ANDRZEJ You brought Solidarity to the theatre?

AGATA I should have done something much earlier. I was ashamed of myself for always shying away and keeping quiet. I could never put anything at risk – family, work, there had always been some excuse. And then all of a sudden you were gone and nobody knew what had happened. That... (*Pause.*) I thought that setting up the union was something that I could do.

ANDRZEJ In 1987 that was still forbidden.

AGATA But nobody did anything against it anymore. There were so many of us, the Pope came and gave us hope, there was no going back. About three hundred people came to



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our assembly at the theatre. After we had finally got it established, I spent most of my time in the director's office signing any papers. Pawel had to carry on working in props without me.

ANDRZEJ Agata, I retreated into my shell in England while you...

AGATA We achieved several things. We exposed corruption for example. The technical director had actually embezzled three thousand dollars! But nothing really changed. Faces were replaced, but everything stayed the same. Birds of a feather stick together. I was invited to various events, for instance if visiting dignitaries were in the house. Then there would be a banquet. New directors came, one after another and then again; banquet, banquet, banquet. Those who were involved with Solidarity didn't have a plan. At some point I'd had enough of it. By 1989 it was all behind me. I didn't take part in anymore demonstrations. Now I sit at the till and watch the show from the outside.

ANDRZEJ But hasn't Poland changed for the better? People can breathe easier!

AGATA The idea of us all being equal hasn't taken hold. Not even in the theatre. In the end the artists broke away and founded their own union. They thought they were above the technicians. As if their affairs had nothing to do with the technical department. I wanted nothing to do with that!

ANDRZEJ There isn't any democracy in the theatre; it doesn't matter under what political system. All the same Agata, I feel comfortable here. After all these years. I could imagine...

AGATA Come on, let's go.

They go towards the stage.

AGATA Theatre people are the absolute worst. Ungrateful and lacking in solidarity! It makes me sick!

ANDRZEJ You're really upset! What's happened?

AGATA After so many years! Because of the bad economic situation. What is that for a reason?

ANDRZEJ What's going on?

AGATA I was given notice recently. This is my last month at the theatre.

ANDRZEJ Is that why you're so angry?

AGATA They all knew about it long before me. Nobody told me anything. I was the last to hear about my own dismissal!

Pause. They go onto the stage

ANDRZEJ What will you do now?

Agata is silent.

ANDRZEJ Will you fight?

AGATA I gave that up long ago.

ANDRZEJ The theatre is your life!

AGATA Is that how I want to live?

ANDRZEJ How do you want to live?

Agata is silent.

ANDRZEJ Come to England with me!

AGATA You turn up here as if the last thirty years had never happened!

ANDRZEJ What are you afraid of?

AGATA My son...what about my son?

ANDRZEJ What about you?

AGATA What do you want?

ANDRZEJ Hope.

AGATA Andrzej I've hoped for so long that you would come back. Life goes on. You didn't manage to wipe out your past in England, no more than we can wipe out the last thirty



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years. They're throwing me out of the theatre. I don't know what I'm supposed to do.

ANDRZEJ From this theatre we both dreamt of a life of freedom and happiness and we fought for it.

AGATA We both failed in that.

ANDRZEJ But we didn't try it together. Give us a chance!

AGATA And what will we do then?

ANDRZEJ We'll go wherever we like. To England. Or we'll stay here. The world is our oyster! We used to dream about growing old together. It's still not too late!

AGATA Yes, we're still alive and kicking.

ANDRZEJ How many years have I spent taking other people to their destinations in the taxi, but didn't ever know where my own journey should go. Now that I've found you, I know what I want again. I've found a reason to fight for my own happiness! Together, with you!

AGATA Us together, a nice thought.

ANDRZEJ Now I believe that together, we can still make a difference!

AGATA We can find our old comrades. Form a group again, do something together. I have a few ideas of what we could do. And in the evenings you and I will go home together.

He begins to sing their special song. She joins in.

ANDRZEJ Where would you like to go?

AGATA I've never been to England. It would be nice to travel.

ANDRZEJ At the end of the month we can travel to my place. I'll show you everything!

AGATA We've got lots of time. We can do whatever we like. Come on, let's go!

They go towards the exit

ANDRZEJ You and I, just like the old days!

AGATA Like the old days! *(Pauses.)* But how do I know that you won't abandon me again?

ANDRZEJ How could I? Now that I've found happiness once more!

AGATA I wouldn't survive it again.

ANDRZEJ I've learnt my lesson, trust me please! I'll never leave you alone again!

AGATA On my pension I can't even afford to keep my apartment. Maciek and his family are prepared to take me in. They're keeping a room free for me in his apartment. I don't know for how long. I can't risk losing it.

ANDRZEJ Please Agata!

AGATA I'm sorry.

ANDRZEJ Is that your final word?

Agata remains silent. Long pause.

ANDRZEJ I love you!

Black.