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# **BERTHA AND BERTMAN**

- the story of a murder -

2019/2020  
Wolfsberg

## Characters

**Bertha** – a chief nurse anaesthetist at a Styrian clinic

**Bertman** - an investment advisor, who owns several companies in Europe

*In 2018, Bertha Ruth was brought before a Styrian court and charged with murder. Her hearing took place on 6 May 2018. She was charged with killing investment advisor Bertman Schultz. Bertha Ruth pleaded guilty. Prior to the verdict, Bertha wanted to lie down for a few minutes, because she was very tired. Under the supervision of the female prison warden, she slept on a bench, but never woke up. No organic disorder in her medical history accounted for her death. After the death of the accused, the proceeding was deemed terminated by the court and no sentence was passed.*

### **The first encounter.**

*Bertha is trying to open a can. It is difficult, but she succeeds. The living room of the flat is very modest and poorly furnished. Bertha is wearing a worn-out jumpsuit. The small table is laid for one person. There are only a napkin and a fork on it. Otherwise, the room is tidy and clean. The furniture is shabby, the carpets are old. Bertha pours the content of the can into a bowl and sits down. Someone is ringing the bell. Bertha jumps up with surprise. She is waiting. There is a ring again. Now, a more impatient one. Bertha opens the door. Leaning against the doorpost, Bertman is desperately holding a bunch of flowers in his hands.*

BERTMAN

Here you are! These flowers are for you.

BERTHA

Oh my god! Bertman! What has happened...?

BERTMAN

It looks as if something has happened, doesn't it?

BERTHA

Flowers for me? Has anyone died?

BERTMAN

I don't understand.

BERTHA

I tend to get flowers only when tragedies happen. You're pale. You're trembling.

BERTMAN

You wanted to say that I didn't look like this at our high-school reunion. Will you let me in?

BERTHA

Of course. I just don't understand and didn't expect any guest.

BERTMAN

I received your address at the clinic. I was turning around in the street, turning around despairingly. You came to my mind. I was just spinning like an idiot. I asked myself who I could go to. I needed a person who understands me, with whom I am not in any relationship ... you are the one who came to my mind. Nobody else but you. I had to come here. What kind of can is this?

BERTHA

Raw herring. With onion. Pickled fish.

BERTMAN

What a smell it has...

BERTHA

But it tastes good. Otherwise, you have to swallow it whole. You just swallow it. Then you won't feel it.

BERTMAN

Would you take it away from here, please? Anyway, I'm not well.

BERTHA

Of course. Not everyone can stand it. I'll swallow it later. Would you like something?

BERTMAN

No. Maybe something to drink. I feel like drinking now. I do feel like drinking.

BERTHA

I don't drink alcohol, so I don't have here...

BERTMAN

Baking rum?

BERTHA

I don't usually bake here at home. It's not worth baking only for me...

BERTMAN

Stronger after-shave lotion?

BERTHA

I don't shave.

BERTMAN

I mean... for your boyfriend.

BERTHA

I don't have a boyfriend. No man comes here.

BERTMAN

I see.

BERTHA

What has happened, Bertman?!

BERTMAN

You have never come to high-school reunion parties.

BERTHA

I haven't. It's not so simple, because I'm often on duty.

BERTMAN

But you turned up last week.

BERTHA

Because I was free.

BERTMAN

Not because of that.

BERTHA

Not?

BERTMAN

You were the ugliest girl in the class. At least you believed you were.

BERTHA

And wasn't I?

BERTMAN

Yes, you were. At the time, we thought you to be. You were reserved and quiet.

BERTHA

Did you believe?

BERTMAN

We didn't really spot you for four years. I mean, we, the boys.

BERTHA

No, you didn't. It's true. What's the problem?

BERTMAN

Shall I go into my office and tell them who she is in my life? Shall I explain it to an empty-headed secretary who is held together by her make-up? Shall I talk about it in front of a business partner who can't wait to see me go bankrupt? Or shall I disclose

it to a prostitute in a massage parlour? Who can you discuss it with? Have you ever experienced stress inside and felt that unless you got rid of it, you might explode?

BERTHA

After eating such pickled herring, many feel like this, but I haven't...

BERTMAN

While I was standing in the main square, I realised that I had nobody. I've never had. I've become a guest here on Earth. Bertha, I'm 44 years old. I've achieved everything you can. I've got a house in Villach on the lakeside. I've got any incredibly large apartment here in the town and a lot of investments everywhere. Is it worth anything? Nothing. And then... You came to my mind.

BERTHA

Why me?

BERTMAN

You were in love with me at the secondary school.

BERTHA

Who? Me? No!

BERTMAN

No?

BERTHA

Not at all!

BERTMAN

Sure?

BERTHA

No.

BERTMAN

Why do you say no?

BERTHA

I mean, yes, of course.

BERTMAN

You were after all.

BERTHA

Right. But, yes. Teenage love isn't too serious. Did I come to your mind because of this?

BERTMAN

Do you think that I didn't feel it, your look didn't reveal it? You were sitting in the school bench, even in the breaks, looking forward to my arrival to the class. And once, I was made to sit next to you, as I had done mischief with my benchmate, or, in other words, I was punished. And you, Bertha, were over the moon in those weeks.

BERTHA

Really? Was it true?

*Silence. Bertman is looking at Bertha.*

BERTHA

You were very delighted, weren't you? While you were sitting next to me. You didn't even look at me, but at least you were next to me. It was more than nothing. You were near my aura. You were warming my aura. My aura needed it.

BERTMAN

And you came to that high-school reunion party to see me.

BERTHA

No, I didn't. I just wasn't on duty at the clinic.

BERTMAN

You hadn't attend previous reunion parties, because you believed that nobody would care about you and they might even mention old taunting. And this is exactly what happened last week. Nobody was interested in you. You were looking at me like back then.

BERTHA

I don't believe. I look at everybody in the same way everywhere.

BERTMAN

Did you come to see me?

BERTHA

No.

BERTMAN

Bertha, I did not arrive alone.

BERTHA

Who else is outside?

BERTMAN

Nobody. Two of us arrived. Me and sincerity. So?

BERTHA

Yes. I wanted to see you. Of course, I see you in the newspapers many times...

BERTMAN

Now, I'm here.

BERTHA

Here I am.

BERTMAN

Because, there are no friends, no disinterested relationships anymore, Bertha. When something happens, you want to share it with someone, otherwise, you would go crazy. In this case, you just have to listen to inner pictures. You just close your eyes and wait. Suddenly a picture flashes through your brain. A face. A look.

BERTHA

And that face...

BERTMAN

... was yours, Bertha. Do you live here?

BERTHA

Yes, I do, as far as I know. But now I am surprised and a bit confused.

BERTMAN

May I be honest? Because I can be very rarely honest with someone. So rarely!

BERTHA

I would like you to be honest with me.

BERTMAN

This flat is fucking ugly.

BERTHA



Is it? It is suitable for me.

BERTMAN

You deserve a better one.

BERTHA

But I'm happy about it.... I paid back the last instalment to the bank last week.

BERTMAN

Give me your hand. You need something different. More. More valuable. Something more.

*/silence, Bertman lowers his head. /*

BERTHA

What has happened?

BERTMAN

My mother is terminally ill. She's only a few weeks left.

BERTHA

I feel very sorry.

BERTMAN

Mother. What a simple word. But she means more to me. She's been my mother, sister, lover, everything. Especially since the death of my father. She's living with me. I've taken care of her since she became ill. There's no new, expensive medicine or treatment I haven't tried. However, there are some problems you can't solve with money, Bertha.

BERTHA

What's her problem?

*/Bertman takes out a piece of paper and hands it over to Bertha. /*

BERTHA

Yes. These lab test results are very bad.

BERTMAN

Do you think so?

BERTHA

Unfortunately. Yes.

BERTMAN

I've heard that you were appointed to the position of chief nurse in the department.

BERTHA

Yes, I was. Where did you hear it?

BERTMAN

When I asked for your address. A nurse mentioned it. She was very proud. They like you, Bertha.

BERTHA

Nobody complains about my work.

BERTMAN

"Nobody complains about my work!" They like you. Do you understand? Whoever I spoke with seemed to like you. I have trusted you. I think you have saved the lives of dozens of people.

BERTHA

I'm an anaesthetist. It does not really depend on me. Perhaps I'm responsible for their dreams. Actually, there are dreams which may save lives. They are dreaming. I see their eyeballs rolling under their eyelids. I anesthetize them. Yes, some dreams might save lives.

BERTMAN

And what about me? Does anyone love me? Perhaps my money. My money is what they love.

BERTHA

You just feel it now. In this state. Wait...!!! I've got a bottle of champagne. I got it for my appointment from the department. I forgot about it. Would you like some?

BERTMAN

Yes, I feel like drinking some champagne now.

*/Bertha jumps up, runs out and returns with the champagne./*

BERTHA

Unfortunately, I don't even have a champagne glass...

BERTMAN

Any glass will do.

*/Bertman grabs and opens it. Bertha brings two mugs and pours the drink into them.  
Bertman take a long pull.*

BERTMAN

Drink with me.

BERTHA

I can be called to the hospital anytime. I'm on standby duty.

BERTMAN

Please.

BERTHA

If you want.

*/She drinks, as well./*

BERTHA

I don't even know when the last time I drank champagne was.

BERTMAN

Based on the test results, do you also say that there isn't any hope?

BERTHA

Unfortunately, considering this tumour marker, I cannot have a different opinion, Bertman. I'm sorry. If you arrived with sincerity, I cannot lie either. I don't know how to lie. I haven't learnt it over the years. I haven't needed it.

BERTMAN

That's why I am here. Exactly here. I've been telling lies all my life. I'm an investment advisor, as I explained at the reunion party..... a well-known wealthy man. And perhaps I'm still in good shape.

BERTHA

Yes, very....oh, this little champagne has already gone to my head.

BERTMAN

From scratch. At the moment, I have six companies in Europe. The headquarters are here, in this city. And do you know how I have achieved all this? By telling lies. Continuously. To everyone. I hardly attended any classes at university. I used to go

to parties with friends and women. I didn't become a good expert. I only bluffed at my first company. I was just lucky. I have been rather lucky than unlucky so far. I used to lie everyone. The bigger lies I told, the more money I earned. And now, here I am, Bertha. My mother is about to die. Now I feel what a disgusting, pitiable fellow I've been so far. What a damn life I have! You are here. Do you enjoy your work?

BERTHA

I love it very much.

BERTMAN

You help. People. Without lying. Although you haven't opened any private clinics...

BERTHA */laughs/*

No, I haven't. That's true. You can't really open from two thousand..... though, my salary has just been raised to three thousand since my appointment.

BERTMAN

Three thousand....Do you live by from this amount?

BERTHA

I can on my own. I economize.

BERTMAN

You mentioned that dreams can turn into life. What's your dream, Bertha?

BERTHA

A private hospital...I mean, for the poor. The miserable and the needy. The homeless. Here, in this country or elsewhere. In Africa. Or Syria. I don't know. There is so much poverty everywhere. I could establish one anywhere. Aww! The champagne is already working...I never talk about this. My dreams aren't interesting.

BERTMAN

You're a great woman, Bertha. A hospital for the needy.

BERTHA

I believe....I could run such a hospital. Anywhere. Although now, that there is no hope of giving birth to my own child...but I don't have time for such projects. There have been attempts, but in the end, I remained single, as you see. And it's good.

BERTMAN

Look into my eyes.

BERTHA

It isn't easy. Whenever I drink alcohol, I become squint-eyed.

BERTMAN

Look into my eyes. It's good, as you said.

BERTHA

Because it's true.

BERTMAN

IS IT GOOD, BERTHA?!!!! Really?

*/silence/*

BERTHA

No. But there is no other choice. Or there is. The clinic.

BERTMAN

Poor ugly duckling. You've become swan without realising it.

BERTHA

I think I would have realised it.

BERTMAN

I meant it in a figurative sense.

BERTHA

Ah, so!

*/Laughs/*

BERTHA

Me? A swan?

BERTMAN

Swans never leave each other. They choose a partner. They stay together for a lifetime.

BERTHA

Yes.

BERTMAN

If one of them dies, the other follows it. I'm in a similar relationship with my mother....now that she is about to die, I'm afraid of following her. I'm frightened, terrified, Bertha!!!

*/Sinks his head into Bertha's lap./*

BERTHA

I've seen several similar cases at the clinic. They believed that their loved one's death was the end of the world. But the world will never end. There is always tomorrow. There has always been.

BERTMAN */stands up/*

Thank you. You have helped me a lot.

BERTHA

All right then.

BERTMAN

I have drunk your champagne.

BERTHA

I don't drink champagne anyway.

*Silence.*

BERTMAN

Bertha, I never thought that I would really need you once. After so many years.

BERTHA

Nor did I. I'm happy that it was my face that came to your mind....as you mentioned.

BERTMAN

Don't you put the flowers into water?

BERTHA

Oh, yes... thank you. Unfortunately, I've no vase. I haven't needed one yet. I have never received any flowers..... Maybe a beautiful bunch of flowers on the occasion of my appointment, but I gave it to a little girl in the street. She was so delighted.

BERTMAN

What a beautiful soul you have, Bertha. I'd like to meet you again after digesting.....this encounter. I can't stand sitting next to my shrinking mother and looking at her all day. I just can't stand it. Do you understand? I'm on holiday for a

couple of weeks, as I haven't even been able to work properly since I learnt that she's going to...

BERTHA

You're always welcome here, Bertman. If it helps.

BERTMAN

What about tomorrow?

BERTHA

I'm working in the morning.

BERTMAN

Then in the evening.

BERTHA

The evening is OK.

BERTMAN

At 7 o'clock.

BERTHA

Possible.

BERTMAN

For dinner.

BERTHA

Of course. I'll order something.

BERTMAN

Don't you cook?

BERTHA

I haven't cooked for 15 years.

BERTMAN

Don't you like cooking?

BERTHA

I haven't had anybody to cook for.

BERTMAN

But now you have.

BERTHA  
Right.

BERTMAN  
Cook for me. My mother can't anymore.

BERTHA  
Instead of her.

BERTMAN  
Yes.

BERTHA  
All right.

*/silence, both of them are standing and looking at each other/*

BERTMAN  
Tomorrow evening.

BERTHA  
Yes. Yes!



**The second encounter.**

*Bertha is sitting desperately, wearing jeans and a T-shirt. Someone is ringing the bell. Bertman is standing in front of the door, holding a bunch of flowers in a vase and a bottle of champagne. He can hardly hold all the presents in his hands.*

BERTMAN

My mother is in a relatively good mood, under the current the circumstances. At least she isn't suffering. She's conscious.

BERTHA

That's fine. What's this?

BERTMAN

A vase. I've also bought a vase.

BERTHA

You keep everything in mind.

*/Bertman enters the room. The table is laid, but Bertha is remarkably silent./*

BERTMAN

I've brought champagne, as well. It's cool, as they keep it in a refrigerator in the shop. Or are you on standby duty again?

BERTHA

No. After a full-day shift, I am not. Sit down.

BERTMAN

You don't seem to be cheerful.

BERTHA

I'm not. But I'm happy about your mother's condition. Many people suffer from pain in the end.

BERTMAN

I can talk to her. Today, we talked a lot. We evoked old memories.

BERTHA

Can I bring the dinner?

BERTMAN

Of course. I'll open the champagne.

BERTHA

I might not be a good drinking partner.

BERTMAN

It doesn't matter. Glasses?

BERTHA

Two mugs...

*/Bertman takes two champagne glasses out of his pocket./*

BERTMAN

As I expected.

BERTHA

You never forget anything. I'll bring it.

*/She leaves the room, brings in two bowls and places them on the table./*

BERTMAN

Great...it smells excellent....what's this?

BERTHA

Potato dish with vegan meatballs.

BERTMAN

That's...fantastic!

BERTHA

This was all I found there in the late afternoon. I could have gone back to the hospital for food. I could have brought something from their dinner, but they have salami with bread and a cheese triangle. At least, this is boiled.

BERTMAN

Is it from the hospital?

BERTHA

Yes. For the patients.

BERTMAN

You must have had no time to cook.

BERTHA

Will you taste it?

BERTMAN

No.

BERTHA

Why not?

BERTMAN

We talked about sincerity last time, didn't we? I told you that I had been telling lies all my life. Since then, I have changed. Because of you. Today, I have told the truth to everyone's face. In the morning, I drove many of my business partners up the wall by doing this. But I have calmed down. I feel much better. Pour it out. I didn't come here to eat the portion of the patients. I came here for dinner. I'm sure that you've cooked something. Have you? And this was only version "B", wasn't it?

BERTHA

Yes. I tried to bake, but ... I burnt it....that's all.

BERTMAN

Are you sure that it can't be saved?

*/Silence/*

BERTHA

The food or the life?

BERTMAN

The food.

BERTHA

Why did you do this?

BERTMAN

Me? What?

BERTHA

You brought a dress to the department.

BERTMAN

I wanted to give it to you, but you were in the operating theatre. By the way, why didn't you put it on?

BERTHA

Who am I? A doll to dress? What do you think? You come here to tell me that you were in love with me as a foolish teenager. You order dinner from me and want to dress me up. What kind of people have you been living among? Among those who did what you ordered them to do?

BERTMAN

You're being unfair.

BERTHA

We'll use this stupid girl, dress her up and get her to cook for us... I'm alone. Do you understand? It hasn't always been like this. Last week, my cat was still alive, but it died at the weekend. It was 16 years old. That age is considered to be old when it comes to cats. I'll get another one and I won't be alone! I like this situation! Do you know how many sleazeballs have tried to sleep with me, then they even denied their existence the next day? You come in a tuxedo to this flat, where the colour, shape and condition of the walls are part of me. Everything you see reflects my character! My late parents' furniture which I wouldn't like to sell! Because I like living here! I would like to live my life here. Do you see? Earlier, I used to have desires. I believed that some married doctors at the clinic wanted to leave their families because of me. I let them in here. They left me, though they have regretted it since then. They've learnt not to approach me anymore. As in our old class, men avoid me at the clinic, as well. However, I'm a first-class colleague. My work is recognised by everyone. I'm going to take that fucking advanced-level exam in English required for getting a job in a Cameroonian hospital for the poor. I'm going to work there until cholera kills me! I'll be happy when I die, because I'll have lived for those for whom I've always wanted to live! You know how many haughty patients, who were similar to you, we have had? Businessmen? They weren't satisfied with anything. They lived in a private room equipped with a TV, a computer, a printer. They used to pester everyone while they stayed at the clinic. I've never liked men like you. As patients, they are twice as intolerable! There isn't any food, any dinner. I have neither champagne glasses, nor a vase. And I'll never have. I had lived a happy life until yesterday, when you arrived and destroyed everything. I was very stupid to go to that reunion party. 'I'm not in my right mind! I remember the tremendous amount of humiliation I received at high school. You used to make fun of me because of my ugliness. And do you come here? Do you dare to come here?

BERTMAN

I have realised that you don't have a TV. Have you never had one?

BERTHA

What? Why are you asking this?

BERTMAN

Never?

BERTHA

Never.

BERTMAN

I took a peep at your bedroom. It's full of books.

BERTHA

Because books don't lie.

BERTMAN

You read a lot.

BERTHA

Every evening. In peace. I'm going to read tonight, as well. But there won't be any peace. Eat or do not eat the potato dish made by the hospital's dietitian for acute care patients and leave me alone.

*/Silence/*

BERTMAN

Didn't you succeed?

*/Silence/*

BERTHA

I did. I'll achieve my dream.

BERTMAN

I'm not talking about your life. I'm talking about the food you made for me. Or you wanted to make.

BERTHA

There's no such food.

BERTMAN

You prepared for this evening. Yesterday, you realised that there was a kind of life different from the one you had with the memory of your dead cat and your books. You were looking forward to my visit, so you weren't able to sleep last night. You cleaned the flat and did the washing-up. You had a look at the photos from high

school and you were happy about my coming tonight. You're happy despite of the fact that I simply want to take you to bed. I'm just talking bullshit about worrying about my dying mother with the only aim of making you pity me. Women tend to let someone into their bed out of pity. Regarding me, you were wrong. I also hate the businessmen you are talking about. I just take advantage of them. Nowadays, this is the only thing you can live well off. You give advice to people who don't need your advice at all. Dirty money has to be laundered somehow. I've just written a study for 100000 at the request of a businessman who has earned billions from trafficking migrants. This is a lucrative job now, not being a kindergarten teacher. Your monthly salary of 3000 wouldn't be enough for them for a single necktie. However, work hard for this money every day. While you're doing this, you suppose false things about yourself. You were ugly at high school. Yes, you were. Very ugly. But some women become beautiful as they age. However, they don't realise it. They go on pretending to be the ugly duckling. They're already swans, but they're still desperately walking around in one place in a miserably way. You're like this. Did it get burnt or did you burn it?

*/short silence/*

BERTHA  
I burnt it.

BERTMAN  
In the oven?

BERTHA  
Yes.

BERTMAN  
Did you throw it out?

BERTHA  
No. It is still crouching in the oven.

BERTMAN  
You should accept the dress. I saw you in that shabby home outfit yesterday. I thought that I would buy a dress for you for the dinner. A solid cocktail dress that ordinary women wear when their ex-classmate knocks on the door to share their sorrow with them at the dinner table. People live like this, Bertha.

BERTHA  
I didn't want to try it on. But the nurses persuaded me.

BERTMAN

And?

BERTHA

What a handsome man brought it! You've hit the jackpot! They told some vulgar jokes.

BERTMAN

Did it suit you?

BERTHA

Yes. At least they thought so. The head physician was so surprised that he bumped his head against the French door.

BERTMAN

I would like to see the dress. But first, please bring in the food that you think is burnt.

BERTHA

Look, Bertman! I wasn't kidding a minute ago. I asked you seriously to...

BERTMAN

I won't go anywhere until I don't see the food and you in the dress.

BERTHA

Why do you want this?

BERTMAN

If you decide that you don't want to see me from tomorrow, you won't see me.

BERTHA

Will you promise?

BERTMAN

Yes.

BERTHA

Which one first?

BERTMAN

Put on the dress first. I understand that jeans and a T-shirt constitute the uniform of your life. You enjoy wearing them, strengthening the club of those women who have already committed suicide while being alive, but please, collect yourself only this

once. At least to in memory of those weeks I had to spend next to you in the school bench. And when...you must remember....once....

BERTHA

Once you defended me from other boys who wanted to crack a bad joke. You even slapped one of them.

BERTMAN

I did. Because I respected you. I got to know you while you were sitting next to me. I like the fragrance of the perfume you poured on yourself for whatever reason every morning.

BERTHA */smiling/*

I stole it from my mother. If I wasn't beautiful, at least I didn't want to smell.

BERTMAN

Yes. Go and put on the dress. In the meantime, I'm going to call my mother.....my phone's battery is down....will you lend me your phone?

BERTHA

The phone is there. Just use it.

*/She is pointing at an old phone on the cupboard./*

BERTMAN

What's this?

BERTHA

A landline phone. It works.

BERTMAN

Don't you have a mobile phone?

BERTHA

I need one because of the hospital. But I leave it there if I'm not on standby duty. If I'm at home, I can be contacted by landline, as well, if I'm needed.

BERTMAN

I haven't used such a phone for 20 years...

BERTHA



You have to pull the numbers with the dial.

BERTMAN

I see.

BERTHA

I don't know how you made me...

BERTMAN

Me? Nothing special. You want it.

*/Bertha goes out, Bertman picks up the phone and dials the number./*

BERTMAN

Bugger me.... it revolves...Hello Mom! How are you? I'm happy that it doesn't hurt anymore...listen, I'll be a bit late. I'm in her flat. You know, the woman's I mentioned you. No, not for a long time. You're kind, but I'd like to help you bathe....non, no, you have to bathe every evening, and you need the antiseptic solution....Yes. I enjoy being with her very much. I haven't been together with such a soulmate for a very long time. And she is my former classmate. It feels like bathing in fragrant medicinal water when I'm with her. Of course. It's raining. Yes, it is. Yes, I have. I've brought an umbrella. Listen. At 9 o'clock at the latest...

*/He notices Bertha in the cocktail dress. She is very pretty. The dress suits her very well. Bertha hears the last sentences./*

When I am with her, I am in a different world. As if I had deleted everything from my previous life. She has such optimism and love for life. Moreover, she is so wonderfully simple...I have always wanted to have such a woman. I'll arrive home. Or only at 10 o'clock...anyway, I'll hurry. Mom, watch television until I get home. Your favourite series is on.

*/He hangs up. He is watching the woman. Bertha is looking into his eyes intently./*

BERTMAN

And the food?

BERTHA

I'll bring it. At least what have been left.

*/She brings in the fry pan with some strange meat on it./*

BERTMAN

Yes. Do you have mustard? And mayonnaise?

BERTHA

Of course. Yes, I do.

BERTMAN

What kind of meat is this?

BERTHA

I don't know.

BERTMAN

Why don't you know?

BERTHA

There's no service counter in the shop anymore....the meat they display is packed...it seemed to be the nicest. I also bought some mushrooms and carrots, then pushed everything into the oven.

BERTMAN

I see. Do you have a blender? Is it powerful?

BERTHA

Yes, I do. It's on the buffet table...

BERTMAN

I need one and a half minutes.

BERTHA

What?

BERTMAN

Don't care about it. Sliced bread? Eggs?

BERTHA

The bread is in the basket, while the eggs are in the fridge...

BERTMAN

All right. 90 seconds. Meanwhile, put on a pair of tights, because they match this cocktail dress much better than your naked legs. By the way, you should have epilated your legs.

BERTHA

Fuck! You're right.

BERTMAN

I've brought some cold wax. Here you are.

*/Bertman jumps up, pulls out the wax from the pocket of his jacket and hand it over to Bertha. He goes to the kitchen. We can hear the noise of the blender. Meanwhile, Bertha goes to the mirror and looks at herself. She applies the wax to her legs quickly and pulls it down. She fetches some tights and pulls them up slowly. She seems not to have worn tights for ages. She is barely ready when Bertman returns./*

BERTMAN

To the table!

*/Bertha sits down, Bertman puts the two plates on the table./*

BERTHA

What's this?

BERTMAN

What should it be? Steak tartare. Or something similar. By chance, you bought beef. I poured the quick marinade into the machine, cut off the burnt parts and ground the rest. Spices, mayonnaise, mustard. A raw egg in the middle. And here is some toast. Do you like it?

BERTHA

But how on earth....

BERTMAN

There are no lost situations, only lost people. Especially when two people are together. It's hard to get lost together. People tend to get lost when they're alone. On the toast and taste! And the champagne...champagne matches this dinner.

*/He opens the champagne and pours it into the glasses./*

BERTMAN

Clink. Eyes into my eyes!

BERTHA

You haven't commented on my dress yet...

BERTMAN

Because it naturally suits you. It's naturally beautiful. Why should I praise you? You may get conceited. We don't talk about natural things.

*/Bertha is so embarrassed that she can't utter a word. She takes some meat, puts it on the toast and tastes it./*

BERTHA

This is fucking good!

*/She starts devouring the food, Bertman is look at her, smiling./*

### The third encounter

*There is an incredibly big duvet on Bertha's bed. The movements of amorous sexual intercourse under the duvet to some music and Rilke's "Love Song".*

#### **BERTHA'S VOICE**

*How shall I hold my soul so it does not touch on yours.  
How shall I lift it over you to other things?*

*Ah, willingly I'd store it away with some lost thing in the dark, in some strange still place,  
that does not tremble when your depths tremble.*

*But all that touches us, you and me, takes us, together, like the stroke of a bow, that draws one  
chord out of the two strings.*

*On what instrument are we strung?  
And what artist has us in their hand?  
O sweet song.*

#### **/Rilke: Liebes-Lied**

*Wie soll ich meine Seele halten, daß  
sie nicht an deine rührt? Wie soll ich sie  
hinheben über dich zu andern Dingen?  
Ach gerne möchte ich sie bei irgendwas  
Verlorenem im Dunkel unterbringen  
an einer fremden stillen Stelle, die  
nicht weiterschwingt, wenn deine Tiefen schwingen.  
Doch alles, was uns anrührt, dich und mich,  
nimmt uns zusammen wie ein Bogenstrich,  
der aus zwei Saiten eine Stimme zieht.  
Auf welches Instrument sind wir gespannt?  
Und welcher Geiger hat uns in der Hand?*

*O süßes Lied./*

*/The movement stops, Bertha's head comes out/.*

#### **BERTHA**

No...I can't do it any longer....fuck! My whole body is trembling....I must go into alpha state, otherwise, I won't survive...stay calm, breathe steadily, Bertha! In and out.

#### **BERTMAN**

It was awesome.

BERTHA

Of course, this is what you tell everyone...and I believe that I was reciting Rilke aloud, but I'm not sure. Or I don't know. Incredible.

BERTMAN

Where did you get this huge duvet from?

BERTHA

It used to be my grandmother's, who lived in the country. I wheedled it out of my mother. Nowadays, there aren't any duvets like this anywhere...oh my gosh, what was it...

BERTMAN

As if we had been in another place, in another house, in a different climate zone, in a different continent...

BERTHA

I feel the same.

BERTMAN

I tried to allude to the duvet. It's crazy that we were able to slip under it, get lost, then look for each other. When your body was suddenly disclosed...You drove me crazy again.

BERTHA

Listen, Bertman. It's not because I haven't had.... because I succumbed to a young doctor 2 months ago, but I didn't feel anything. After this, I believe that, actually, I hadn't experienced real pleasure before.

BERTMAN

Some women die without experiencing it.

BERTHA

Perhaps It wasn't real pleasure either. How would I know? I'm sure I had never been filled with so much joy before.

BERTMAN

I realised.

BERTHA

If you didn't feel anything, it wouldn't be possible...

BERTMAN

No. It's not possible in that way.

BERTHA

Does it bother you if I ask you about this?

BERTMAN

It depends.

BERTHA

I must know. Do you always get this from women, other women?

BERTMAN

No.

BERTHA

Then?

BERTMAN

There are enjoyable intercourses. Delightful sexual adventures. The most memorable encounters happen when a woman is impressed by my wealth and neat appearance, and she makes every effort to make me fall in love with her. She does her best. These cases result in something memorable.

BERTHA

You told it very bitterly.

BERTMAN

Because I enjoy it at the very moment, but later, thinking back, I am either ashamed of it, or I just forget it.

BERTHA

It's not true that you have never been in love with...

BERTMAN

I haven't. I have been looking for love, as anybody else. I've experienced good feelings, perhaps affection, perhaps compassion. But love? I don't know what it is. Or I haven't experienced it till now.

BERTHA

And for money?

BERTMAN

For money? No, I have never needed to pay for sex.

BERTHA

Sorry, I didn't want to...

BERTMAN

I'm happy that you asked me. At least this question shows how far we are still from each other. From getting to know each other. I have really had the opportunity to try all forms of sex, except prostitutes. I have had a lot of pleasure. However, I have never felt that I had to tell the woman after sex to stay a few more days. Months. Years. I'm 44 years old, and I have never felt this. Now I could mention commonplaces such as I have been busy with my work, had not time, which is true. Or I just haven't realised who enjoyed our intercourses sincerely. Up to now.

BERTHA

Don't lie, Bertman...

BERTMAN

Do you think that you could have enjoyed having sex so much if I hadn't felt the same? When I came up here for the first time, we discussed that lie didn't exist, only sincerity. When we were coming up today, you kissed me unexpectedly in the lift. I already went crazy about you there.

BERTHA

I didn't understand what happened to me... in the lift...

BERTMAN

I already had to press you to my breast there. My desire was so strong that the place and time ceased to exist. I didn't care about where we were. I felt the same in the staircase, when we were taking the lift for the second time.

BERTHA

I can't even remember how we entered the flat and when I took out my key...

BERTMAN

I can't even remember when you made the bed, or did it look like this?.....we did it on the carpet, under the shower in the bathroom, then here, in the bed...I can't remember anything.

BERTHA

Nor can I.

BERTMAN

You have no idea what it means to me...I forgot my mother and her illness for a while, and I even forgot to behave like a reserved gentleman with my former classmate.

BERTHA

Some barriers the existence of which I hadn't even known about were destroyed in me, Bertman. Thank you. Even if your wife enters the room, you jump up and this whole story proves to be a lie. Even then. I would tell her not to be sorry for you, as you came here to perform good offices, to bring out all the joy from a woman, so that



she could realise how much physical, spiritual joy and suppressed life she had in her. I would tell her: "Please, don't be angry with him for that. And now, either get divorced, or take him home, or let's continue in a love triangle..."

*/They laugh at it intensely*

BERTMAN

In a triangle? Your development has accelerated. Slow down a bit...

BERTHA

I was just kidding. I would never...share this kind of joy with you.

*/Silence/*

BERTMAN

You were very kind with my mother.

BERTHA

What do you mean by that?

BERTMAN

She became fond of you. Immediately. She liked your answers to all of her questions. I am happy that I was able to introduce you.

BERTHA

This is my profession.

BERTMAN

She imagined someone like you for me. I've introduced very few women to her so far. There have been successful encounters - but they have never really enjoyed being together. She was smiling.

BERTHA

Your mother is very kind. And she is very educated. She reads a lot.

BERTMAN

I listened to you as you were talking about writers and books. Yes, my mother became cloyed with television, as well. She has read a lot, mainly classics recently. There was a poem...you recited together.

BERTHA

Yes. And I felt terribly sorry for because of her illness. I understand your pain. By the way, I talked to the professor at the clinic. I showed him your mother's laboratory test results.

BERTMAN

And what did he say?

BERTHA

You already know that answer. He couldn't add anything.

BERTMAN

I see. Bertha...wait...

*/Bertman goes to his trousers and takes out a small box./*

BERTMAN

You can't say that I give it to you only after this fantastic sexual intercourse...it had already been in my pocket before we went up to my mother. You can't say that it's just a sudden flame. Just because of your body. You can't say that it's just because of your money either... here you are.

*/He opens the box and shows it to Bertha./*

BERTHA

Is this what I think it is?

BERTMAN

It's called an engagement ring.

BERTHA

Wow!!! How much was it?

BERTMAN

When it comes to buying engagement rings, I don't have too much experience, but I think it isn't usually the first question.

BERTHA

Beautiful...

BERTMAN

60,000

BERTHA

What?!

BERTMAN

Is it important?

BERTHA

No. It isn't.

BERTMAN

Try it on. I think it fits well. I measured your finger in secret.

BERTHA  
When?

*/She tries it on./*

BERTHA  
I don't know what to say, Bertman.

BERTMAN  
You don't have to say anything. It is not a proposal yet. You have time to think it over. It is my intention. And come with me on a kind of engagement trip. Now I have three days. My mother is having dialysis for three days...I would like to take you to Venice. On an engagement trip.

BERTHA  
The only place where I have always wanted to....Venice! I might get three days off. My boss mentioned that I had never taken any days off. I still have all of them...

BERTMAN  
We should hurry to see Venice until it's visible. Until the whole city sinks. The world is about to sink.  
*/Bertha is looking at the man, but cannot utter a word. Bertman sinks his head into the woman's lap./*

BERTMAN  
Oh my god. Dear me! How wonderful those couple of hours were with you. How beautiful!

*/He starts crying and shaking silently, Bertha is looking in front of her, smiling./*

### The fourth encounter

*Bertha and Bertman enter the apartment with huge packages.*

BERTMAN

We need a built-in cabinet in the hall, otherwise they won't buy this flat. Nowadays, no large cupboards are located in the living room. Anyway, this living room is too small.

BERTHA

I haven't agreed to move to you.

BERTMAN

But we have bought up half of the products from the furniture store. It would also make a difference if you replaced this old chandelier by a more modern one.

BERTHA

It's also part of my family inheritance.

BERTMAN

A lamp? Not. A DNA chain, the genes, maybe the inheritance of character. The lamp isn't.

BERTHA

And you aren't even forcing me to move...

BERTMAN

Why would I be forcing you? When you think that it's time to move, you will be welcome at my home.

BERTHA

Thank you. I love you for this.

BERTMAN

If you move to my flat, you must bring the duvet. Moreover, if you decide to move, bringing the duvet will be compulsory.

BERTHA

Yes, the duvet.....thank you for Venice.

BERTMAN

Last time, I visited it 10 years ago. I had completely different memories.

BERTHA

Neither did I think that I would have to see St. Mark's Square in waist-high rubber boots.

BERTMAN

We should be happy that we saw it under these circumstances. It won't last long. The sea dam should have been built several years ago, but the investors put off the construction works. The longer the design process last, the more designs you have to order and, the higher profit they can make.

BERTHA

I didn't even think that admission to the square wasn't free of charge.

BERTMAN

Yes. 10 years ago, I just parked the car, took a deep breath and walked into the city. Nobody raised tollbooths to collect money from visitors who want to see this wonder.

BERTHA

You very freaked out by the restaurant, as well.

BERTMAN

I was stupid. I should have taken you to a restaurant on the outskirts of Venice to have dinner. The chef there might still be Italian.

BERTHA

It was strange to see the Chinese cook folding the pizza dough...

BERTMAN

The Russian waitress wanted to cheat with the bill. I had a different idea of Venice...

BERTHA

But...it was still beautiful. Even the dying Venice was nice.

BERTMAN

There were some places where I would have liked to take you, but it was impossible due to the high water level. Far from the centre, off the tourist routes, there are some smaller churches with the works of Tintoretto and other great maestros.

BERTHA

If the sea level might recede, we could again...

BERTMAN

You told my mother only about nice things. You didn't even mention that they wanted to steal your bag.

BERTHA

At that moment, I fell in love with you again. As you ran after the thief and caught him...

BERTMAN

He was an unfortunate, skinny immigrant. It wasn't hard to catch him.

BERTHA

You weren't raging and didn't hit him. You had a chat with him.

BERTMAN

I tried to chat with the few English words he knew.

BERTHA

But you did.

BERTMAN

My mother's eyes were shining. She hadn't looked like this for ages. And you just talked and talked about Venice. She likes this city. When I was a child, we used to travel there every year. Everything came to life in your account. You're a great girl, Bertha. You made her happy. Despite her serious pain.

BERTHA

The medicine I took her might ease her pain a bit.

BERTMAN

I suppose it's not available in pharmacies.

BERTHA

No. But the chief physician allowed me to take some. We have just received it. Actually, it's a newly developed painkiller. In fact, it's still being tested.

BERTMAN

Thank you. Hey! What's this in my pocket?

*/He takes out the box with the engagement ring in surprise. /*

BERTMAN

How did it get into my pocket?

BERTHA

I've thought everything over, Bertman. Our story is very beautiful, but quite unbelievable. The ugly duckling and the prince. I'm not sure that I'm the one for you.

BERTMAN

I believed that since our trip to Venice, everything has become clear.

BERTHA

It has nothing to do with Venice. In Venice you treated me like, you hugged my in the hotel like... and I had never laughed so much before. You were amusing and kind. But I realised something important in the office today.

BERTMAN

You spent hardly an hour there. I just wanted to show it....

BERTHA

Full of glass. Full of expensive paintings. Everything was glistening. I was so proud of you for achieving all this. After high school, you became a dental technician. I followed your career from the distance. You didn't spend too much time in that profession. You employees praised you exuberantly, as well.

BERTMAN

I pay well for everyone's work.

BERTHA

I observed your clients and the people with whom we had lunch. All of them were very kind. At least I had the opportunity to practise my English.

BERTMAN

You hardly uttered a word.

BERTHA

What could I have talked about? What do I have in common with this world? I don't fit in this world, in your world.

BERTMAN

I don't understand you.

BERTHA

You do understand me. You're much smarter than me. No matter how expensive dress you buy for me, no matter how hard I try to fit in your company...I cannot live

with you among those people. Nor do I want to leave the hospital, as I like my work. You cannot appear in front of them with a nurse. Moreover, I won't have any free time due to being on duty all the time. You would arrive from parties, while I would come from the operating theatre. We will realise that the two lifestyles are incompatible.

BERTMAN

You're underestimating me.

BERTHA

Me? No! I have never appreciated anyone as much as you in my life. You're doing your job very well. May I ask a question?

BERTMAN

Yes?

BERTHA

You're an investment advisor...as I saw, one of the best. Your secretary mentioned that if someone wanted to negotiate with you, could fix an appointment only for next year. Currently, what is the best investment you would recommend first?

BERTMAN

Human trafficking in Europe. As I have already mentioned. Organised trafficking of migrants with a profit margin of over 3%, in the short-term.

BERTHA

In Europe. And globally?

BERTMAN

Globally? Definitely. Trade in organs. With the development of medicine and implantation, it has become the most profitable business. Nowadays, you don't even have to kidnap children or adults to do this. In developing countries, people are so poor that they sell either their own, or their children's organs. Legally. The profit amounts to 256%, in very short term, as well. No government bond can outperform this.

BERTHA

And the third?

BERTMAN

Trafficking in girls. Now that men have left the third world, girls are traded illegally. The younger a girl is, the more she is worth. 11-12-year-old girls are the most valuable.



BERTHA

Giving advice is not the only activity you do... In order to make it work, I suppose that you also have to be in contact with the right people, groups or whatever they are called.

BERTMAN

Of course. Although indirectly. Otherwise, it wouldn't be possible.

BERTHA

This flat is too small to discuss such serious issues here. And I'm...I'm also very little to bear all this. I know that it's real. I'm aware of what's going on in the outside world. However, my flat is 3 bus stops away from the clinic. And I don't wish to go further. If you understand what I mean. I can't digest that while I'm having the time of my life with you, Bertman Schultz, as a private person, you are the most disgusting...

BERTMAN */interrupts her/*

I see. I'll show you something. I planned to show them later, but now it's all the same.

*/He takes out some documents from his briefcase./*

BERTMAN

Will you have a look at them, please?

*/Bertha is turning the documents wonderingly./*

BERTHA

I'm not sure whether I interpret them well or not.

BERTMAN

You do, I'm sure. As you see this is an agency contract, commissioning a firm to sell my company with its affiliates. The whole system. As soon as possible.

BERTHA

It hasn't been signed yet...

BERTMAN

That's why I told you that it was too early. It is to be signed in a few days. I have commissioned one of the largest firms trading in companies. It'll be able to sell it.

BERTHA  
The whole?

BERTMAN  
We won't come off badly.

BERTHA  
We? What do I have to do with it?

BERTMAN  
As my future wife? Everything. And yes, the whole. All of my six companies. And I'll show you something else.

*/He hands over another document. /*

BERTHA  
Incredible.

BERTMAN  
It is what you see. A renewed master certificate. As you know, I didn't go to university after high-school graduation. My father, his father, everyone was a dental technician in our family. I grew up in his workshop, his surgery. I adored the smell of the workshop and the way my father worked with my grandfather. I loved the small country house my father bought and where I spent my childhood. We were happy even without owning a corporate empire. I knew that being a dental technician was going to be my profession.

BERTHA  
But this is yesterday's date....

BERTMAN  
Yes. In principle, after not practising for several years, I should have taken equivalency exam. However, I managed to solve the problem with some cash. Based on this certificate, I can practise. I can build my own surgery and workshop. I can have employees or just work on my own. I haven't decided it yet. I'm not in need of establishing a big enterprise, especially after selling my companies. Did you like my house in Villach? Where I took you on the way back home from Venice.

BERTHA  
Yes, I did. I liked it very much. I expected it to be much bigger, but it looks like a fairy tale house for a girl who has become a swan from a stupid duckling.

BERTMAN

I asked the designer to use the simplest materials possible.

BERTHA

A fabulous human-scale house .... perfect in every sense. I also dreamed about such a house after the herring.

BERTMAN

You didn't believe it, did you?

BERTHA

I imagined a luxurious, snobbish mansion, where you can't even give a normal party.

BERTMAN

It has everything a family needs. I mean for two people....and for little people who may come from this relationship.

*/Silence, they are looking at each other seriously. /*

BERTHA

And would you like to live there? With me? Be aware of the fact that you're still sitting here with your sincerity!

BERTMAN

I wouldn't have thought that a pair of rubber boots could make me realise so many things. Yes, it was in Venice, where I was enjoying life among dirty doves in the sunshine ten years ago. When on our recent trip, some water flowed into my boots, I thought everything over. I realised that my work is part of everything that's happening or will happen in the world. I don't have a finger in the pie, yet I am involved in everything. I could have puked at myself. But it wouldn't help. I can't change anything. If I can't, at least I'll do my job like you. I look for something by which I could serve and benefit others. I'm not late. We are still both young, Bertha. A dirty cloud is approaching to stifle our world. Perhaps, it will arrive in Villach a bit later. Undoubtedly, all of us are going to die. In filthy crowds of people, in melted islands, next to the raped bodies of teenage girls. But we might we some more years. We may climb under your grandmother's duvet and hug each other as long as possible. As long as possible.

BERTHA

I love you.

*/They kiss each other. /*

BERTMAN

Do you know how many vacant practices are there in Villach for dental technicians? Look at the local job search website on the Internet. 250. And there is a hospital three bus stops away from the house. There is always demand for anaesthesiologist nurses. I've inquired. Do you think that we will be able to get by there ... together?

**The fifth encounter.**

*A week later. Bertha is coming in a black dress, followed by Bertman in a black suit and a black shirt. He sits down. Bertha goes to the cabinet.*

BERTHA

Would you like something to drink? Drink something. We already have everything. Whisky, cognac, wine. A few weeks ago, there was only expired vanilla milk....

BERTMAN

I feel like drinking a cognac.

BERTHA

Here you are. Greek? Your favourite.

BERTMAN

Thank you for being there when I covered her eyes.

BERTHA

Five days have passed since then and you have thanked for it many times. Of course, I was with you.

BERTMAN

You mother was staring at you, then at me. "I'll continue living in you," she said and smiled. She died in this way.

BERTHA

Yes. She passed away without pain.

BERTMAN

Thanks to you, Bertha, as well.

BERTHA

The funeral was very solemn. I told you that we should call a young priest.

BERTMAN

You were right...and thank you for arranging everything.

BERTHA

Because you were lying in bed all day long, looking at the ceiling. I was worried about you.

BERTMAN

She was more than a mother to me. She also substituted my father, she was everything.

BERTHA

I've made a cake for you. For your birthday.

BERTMAN

You remembered this, as well...

BERTHA

It was a bit unfortunate to hold the funeral on your birthday, but there was no other solution. A lot of people die, a funeral is held every thirty minutes.

BERTMAN

Right.

BERTHA

Your mother's funeral and your birthday.... don't you think that it's symbolic, Bertman?

BERTMAN

Yes, I do. It is probably.

BERTHA

I'll bring it.

*/She leaves the room; Bertman is sitting and staring in front of him. Bertha enters the room with a smaller chocolate cake and a cutting knife. /*

BERTHA

Truffle. I noticed that you like it. This is my first try. I have never baked anything similar.

*/Bertman is just looking, silently. /*

BERTHA

If you allow, I'll cut it.

*/She cuts a slice and pushes the plate closer. /*

BERTHA

She was old. 89 years old. A lot of people don't live until this age. Your mother was beautiful even in the funeral parlour. It was her special request...she was lying in bed

as a majestic, real woman, as well. She was lying as if she was dancing. Ballet dancers tend to lie like this, following the music with all their movements. When she said: "I would like to continue living in you", she was sincere. She expressed the most beautiful request. She passed away, being aware of the continuance of her life. I frequently see death at the clinic, believe me, Bertman. A lot of stupid books have been published about the road waiting for those who are about to die. People who have returned talk about radiant roads and light. Nonsense. Nobody has ever returned from death. Our body is wonderfully built, Bertman. It knows the solution and response to everything. Do you think that it doesn't have the answer to death? I observe people's face, the moving eyeballs behind closed eyelids. I feel the wonderful experiences they have, because nature has its own response to death. The brain has its own response. Without your consent, it takes you to a holy world from where taking farewell is not anguish and pain. We have a brain surgeon at the clinic. He can talk so beautifully about this. Of course, we don't know what comes after death, but most patients believe that their lives will continue in someone else.

*/Silence/*

BERTHA

Listen, Bertman. At the clinic, I meet life and death every day, but I hadn't met my own life before your arrival. I had no idea why you needed exactly me, but I have understood it slowly. I started looking at shoes in shop windows; I just popped in Cafe Schwallbennest, a downtown café on the riverbank and smiled. I realised that in the morning, I didn't get up automatically anymore. I got up like someone who has to deal with...herself. You had to arrive to make me feel this. At our first night together you mentioned something....as inquired about its scientific explanation at the clinic. You were right. Most young women don't know what real sexual pleasure is. And most of them never experience it. You also gave me this opportunity. I could take care of a wonderful woman with you. We travelled to Venice and had so many other adventures. Once I told you that I wanted to work somewhere in a Syrian hospital. Yes, I strongly believed in this calling at the time. I still believe in it, but I don't want to go away anymore. I feel at home. I arrived home without even having left. You opened a gate and invited me to enter. Come in, my love, toddle in, ugly duckling. I entered the room where I was born. In this city, which I knew inside out, but which was still unknown. I don't want to set up a hospital for the poor. I'll do what you want, Bertman. After the funeral, you introduced me to your friends and business partners at the reception. Although you were filled grief, you took me aside to tell how happy everyone was about our relationship. They thought that I was a decorative, smart and kind woman. So, I've passed the exam. I didn't believe that it would be so easy. You not only made me rediscover my city, but also my own personality. I will stay with you and serve you, Bertman. I didn't use any birth control during our intercourses, neither did you, so the continuance of your mother might already be in my body. If you want me to leave the clinic, I'll do it. I'll run the

household, bring up our children and be a spouse your mother dreamed for you. I swear.

BERTMAN

It's not so simple, Bertha.

BERTHA

Simple? Of course, it isn't simple. I must change completely. Like in a fairy tale.

BERTMAN

Nobody can substitute my mother. Nor can you.

BERTHA

I don't even want to.

BERTMAN

Since the death of my father, we almost always lived together. We shopped for clothes, went on holiday together. We celebrated Christmas and New Year's Eve together. Imagine, what nonsense! Even as a man over 40, I slept in her bed at night, like a little child. I felt her smell and snuffle as I used to do when I was a baby and she was breastfeeding me.

BERTHA

That's very nice, but it has ended. A new chapter is about to begin.

BERTMAN

She used to tell me that it could not be continued anymore. For 20 years, she was looking for the perfect woman who might replace her. It wasn't simple living like this. Once I was sleeping next to her, and when I woke up in the middle of the night, I saw her sitting next to the bed, smoking and watching me. She shouted at me. Ordered me to go home and grow up at last. Next day, she begged me to return and stay with her. And we were cuddling again at night. We used to live in a kind of fatal symbiosis.

BERTHA

But today, we took farewell of her, Bertman.

BERTMAN

We? You talk as if you knew her for decades.

BERTHA

Right. Only for a couple of weeks. But I noticed that she became fond of me during this short period.



BERTMAN

Sometimes her behaviour made me very angry. When I visited her, she was waiting for me with a stranger, a woman who she had invited, thinking that she would be the ideal partner for me. These were ridiculous and pitiable attempts.

BERTHA

Look, how lucky you are that you found me. She didn't force you into this relationship.

BERTMAN

She did.

*/silence/*

BERTHA

Really?

BERTMAN

Indirectly, yes.

BERTHA

She hadn't known me before.

BERTMAN

Despite of this.

*/silence/*

BERTHA

I wouldn't like to understand it now.

BERTMAN

You're an incredibly intelligent woman, Bertha. When we first met, we promised each other to be honest, so I will be honest now.

BERTHA

All right.

BERTMAN

In spite of all her efforts and silly attempts, I infinitely loved her. Now, After her death, I feel the same. Have you see that big package in the boot of my car?

BERTHA

Yes, I have.

BERTMAN

I wouldn't disclose it to anyone but you. Because I infinitely love you, Bertha. You won't misunderstand it and won't call a doctor immediately. I...I had her made, Bertha. I know, it's crazy and insane, or it isn't. I had a puppet made. I dressed it in her favourite nightgown. Sometimes, I'll sleep in her bed, next to this mother substitute. This time, she won't drive me away at least.

BERTHA */screams/*

Bertman! I'm here for you. What are you talking about? Or if it's so serious, there's a solution. There is solution for everything. Do you think that I have never heard about similar cases? Of course, I have. This is an unhealthy stage of a mother-son relationship.

BERTMAN

No, I don't need any treatment. I see myself from the outside, as well. I know exactly what I'm doing. Look, Bertha! When I learnt that she was going to die, I decided to make the process, the end of her life a bit easier for her. I decided to introduce her someone who would like to have a baby from me, wants to live with me and is visibly attracted to me.

BERTHA

.....

BERTMAN

You came to my mind. I knew that you lived alone. I also remembered that you were really in love with me at high school for four years. Even though it was teenage love. Or wasn't it? At the reunion party, I noticed the same old glance in your eyes. You became a chit of a girl again and were striving to get close to me. I thought I would try.

BERTHA

This must be a lie. Quibble. Each of our intercourses was real and honest. I know. You can't lie to women like me. With your body no way. I know the human body too well. You're keeping something secret....

BERTMAN

We're sitting here together, sincerity and me. Nothing has changed.

BERTHA

I see. You should have let me know that ...you just needed me to...

BERTMAN

Oh, no! My mother was much smarter! She would have realised at the first moment that was only a play. I needed someone who loved me sincerely. Who seemed to be honest and ready to do everything for me. It was very important. To let her give the opportunity to tell her last sentence. She had to believe that her son wouldn't have a doll made, but, as an adult man, would establish a family, bring up children and continue living this kind of normal life instead. I couldn't disclose it to you.

BERTHA

But our encounters...here, in my flat, in Venice and who knows where else....my life was continuous orgasm...and as I saw, your life was, as well...

BERTMAN

Yes, I didn't expect this. I believed that I couldn't do this anymore. I was surprised, as well. Thank you for this. You know, ten years ago, I had a relationship with one of my colleagues, a married man. He had a wife and two children....it didn't last long. He chose his family, while I haven't started any relationship with a man since then. I believed that I had lost every bond with women, but I hadn't. You could give me something that made me believe in change for a couple of weeks. I thought that it was the right path. I chose you for a task with forethought - and suddenly everything changed. Unknown pleasures came to life in me, I desired every part of you. When I was standing next to you, I was trembling.

BERTHA

And it has gone.

BERTMAN

Yesterday I realised that it has gone indeed.

BERTHA

Yes. Last night you told me to hug you and just lie next to each other silently. I believed it was just because of the funeral today. I even respected you for this. I respected your deep feeling...I even felt ashamed that I tried to ...the night before the funeral of your mother... yes, I think I understand everything.

BERTMAN

I didn't feel any desire, sensual attraction, rather.... abhorrence.

BERTHA

Abhorrence...

BERTMAN

If we continue this, it will turn out tomorrow that everything has ended. For both of us. I don't want this.

BERTHA

I see.

BERTMAN

And let me return the favour. A favour that cannot be returned. You are the one who enabled my mother to pass away happily. Only you. Nobody else would have been able to do this. You told me that you wanted to help me. You did it. No greater help exists. This envelope contains a cheque. This amount will enable you to open a hospital anywhere in the world for the miserable. To turn your dream into reality. You don't have to do it now. Do it later, when you feel it's time to do it. Moreover, I can also deduct it from my income tax.

BERTHA

And you? In Klagenfurt... as a dental technician...

BERTMAN

A nice dream.

BERTHA

You showed me the documents.

BERTMAN

They haven't been signed yet. I cannot get out. My fortune comes from transaction with dangerous groups behind them. I know too much. I know all the networks. I cannot get out of such a world.

BERTHA

It's clear.

BERTMAN

And please, keep the ring. Sell it, if you want. Your life will be easier.

BERTHA

Yes, I realised that you didn't give it back when.

BERTMAN

But now, here it is.

BERTHA

This expensive ring and a cheque. You're generous, Bertman.

BERTMAN

Only thankful. You deserve a hundred times more.

BERTHA

Listen! As I see, the world I can provide you pleases you indeed. Perhaps it could solve your problems related to your mother and sexual identity. I think we should try to continue for a week. Maybe it was only the funeral that made you break down. If we continue, everything might change. Bertman, I'm not young anymore. I don't have any other chance...if it doesn't work or succeed, we'll break up in peace, OK?

BERTMAN

You have to know something. At the reception after the funeral, my colleague I mentioned came up to me. We're meeting. His wife has left him, so he is very upset. We're seeing each other in the evening.

*Silence.*

BERTHA

Clear. Then accept a little cake at least. Shall I cut some?

BERTMAN

Is this the farewell?

BERTHA

Let's say.

BERTMAN

You're a beautiful woman, Bertha. Sympathetic and clever. I haven't met anybody like you yet.

BERTHA

Is this slice enough?

BERTMAN

Yes, thank you.

*Bertha hands over the plate, Bertman starts eating, Bertha is holding the knife in her hand and looking at Bertman.*

BERTMAN

Very delicious.

*Bertha jumps up, stabs the knife into the chest of the man, Bertman falls over. Bertha stabs the man 3-4 times again.*

BERTHA

YOU DAMN, MOTHERFUCKING BEAST!!!!!!!!!! DAMN BEAST!!!!!! UP YOURS!!!!!!!!!!  
DAMN BASTARD!!!!!!!!!! DAMN BASTARD!!!!!!!!!!

## CODA

*Berta is standing in the middle of the stage, in the spotlight, looking upwards.*

BERTHA

Honourable Court! Thank you for the last word before the verdict. I would also like to thank the appointed attorney for all his endeavours to find attenuating circumstances in my case. Yes, I agree with him regarding the changed role of women and men in the modern world and other issues. He delivered a really clever and beautiful speech, as he is not a young man anymore either. He has seen and understood a lot of things. I do not need any attenuating circumstances. There's no such circumstance. I killed Bertman Schultz. It was an aggravated murder. I have never denied it. Nor am I denying it now. I am very thankful to him. Some happy years at high school, when I was a teenage girl, he attracted me and gilded my days with his presence. And I killed him. I provided me the opportunity to be next to him and mingle my tears with him in his grief for his mother. We spent wonderful weeks together. He overwhelmed me with presents. He took me to Venice, where I had always wanted to go. And a lot more. I was always sincere with me. Gentle and sympathetic. And I killed him. He wanted to help me achieve my earlier dream by providing the necessary funds. And I killed him. He shared his deepest secrets related to his mother and other people with me. He disclosed everything sincerely, as a real friend. And I killed him. If I had not killed him, he would live as a happy man on the side of another person, while I could do the job I have always wanted to do. By the way, in the envelope which contained the cheque, there is also a certificate proving the it was Mr. Bertman Schultz who had given me the amount. I would like to ask the Honourable Court or, rather Mr. Attorney, to send this amount to an organisation that could support a public hospital in Syria. As far as I know, murder does not entail the confiscation of property. Actually, it is not even my property. Let it belong to those who really deserve it. I will be happy. Now, I would like to ask something from the Honourable Court. I have not been able to sleep in the cell of the detained for days. I am extremely exhausted. Please let me lie down a bit until the verdict in a smaller room or on a bench or something. I am exhausted, extremely exhausted....terribly exhausted... I am afraid of not being able to listen to.....

*She slowly lies down on the floor, huddling herself up in embryo shape.*

VOICE

*In 2018, Bertha Ruth was brought before a Styrian court and charged with murder. Her hearing took place on 6 May 2018. She was charged with killing investment advisor Bertman Schultz. Bertha Ruth pleaded guilty. Prior to the verdict, Bertha wanted to lie down for a few minutes, because she was very tired. Under the supervision of the female prison warden, she slept on a bench, but never woke up. No organic disorder in her medical history accounted for her death. After the death of the accused, the proceeding was deemed terminated by the court and no sentence was passed. The court did not deem it to be necessary to order a forensic autopsy. The case has been closed.*

- The end?

Performance right must be obtained before production. For contact information, please see [the Bertha and Bertman information page](#).