



In the 70s, in Poland, three somewhat - only somewhat - sozzled artists were rather brutally belaboured with truncheons by three militiamen, no doubt also under the influence. The matter went to court. The victimised artists agreed between themselves on the simplest strategy possible. They would tell the truth. The prosecutor interrogated all six, first separately, then two by two: a real virtuoso. He rapidly came to the conclusion that the militiamen were to blame. But the case was dismissed. It had to be, because of the artists' statements. They did not tally.

Before the victim appeals against such a decision, he has the right – even in the People's Republic of Poland – to examine the prosecutor's records. That is exactly what the beaten artists did. And that is when it transpired that each had remembered the events in a completely different way. Memory is not a tape recorder. A better strategy would have been - before we set out to tell the truth and nothing but the truth – to establish in a preliminary fashion, what the truth was.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER is a 'documentary' book. The speech marks mean that a prosecutor would question its value as a reliable record of events. Events are being recalled by someone whose ambition it is to tell the truth, but the tape he plays back is his memory; not that of a tape recorder.

Literature, even of the documentary variety, remains literature; and life is life. Prosecutors know that. Ordinary, decent people, who occasionally become involved in a scandal, rarely remember that that is so. The author uses the original names and in the spirit of sympathy to their bearers. Before they complain to the prosecutor, before they decide to sue for libel, let them carefully read the next sentence. Apart from the facts, all flesh which became the word is fiction.

Wojciech
BRUSZEWSKI THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Wojciech BRUSZEWSKI



THE
PHOTOGRAPHER

Wojciech BRUSZEWSKI

THE PHOTOGRAPHER

THE PROLOGUE

When at the opera, once we have sunk into a comfortable chair, waiting for the spectacle to begin; while the acoustic chaos of the orchestra tuning attempts to cut us off from reality; the monotonous violin glissandi sends us to sleep and the sudden excursions of the bassoons arouse us from slumber; sometimes because we are bored, and sometimes because we are curious, we leaf through the so-called programme. We glance at the list of performers. Some names mean something to us, others – nothing whatsoever. We check whether it is our favourite that is performing today, or a stand-in. If we should be so lucky, this knowledge enables us to survive the boring passages of the operatic opus. The list of the singers and their roles in the spectacle inform us, often better than the actual overture can, what will happen once the curtain goes up. Or, one might not bother to read the programme, and during the overture, while the lights are out just take a nap.

It is possible to omit the ‘prologue’, to bang the baton personally on the wooden pulpit, silencing the orchestra, to put out the lights completely and to reveal the stage.

Copyright Wojciech Bruszewski, 2005, All rights reserved.

While carrying out the final edit of the book, the author made a list of the characters for his own use. He was amazed at how long it was. He crossed out those names or nicknames which appeared in the pages on fewer than three occasions.

The list remains long.

Those interested are presented with the *dramatis personae*. They will be soon able to assess whether to read on, or whether to devote their attention to something completely different.

Here are the protagonists of the more important events, in the order of appearance:

- The Photographer, the main protagonist; a man whose gift is photographic memory; at times he resembles the author;
- Róża, first a pretty little girl, later a concrete poetess, and later still – a thorough-bred radio and TV journalist;
- Władek, a film director; he did all he could to avoid making a film about Wanda Wasilewska;
- Evgen Bavcar, a blind photographer, a Slovene, lives in Paris;
- Eadweard Muybridge, or rather Edward James Muggeridge, a photographer and an inventor, an American of British origin;
- Eugeniusz Haneman, a retired photographer, an ex-owner of the photographic studio in Białystok;
- Uncle Mundek, who kissed the Russkies' hands;
- Wolf Kahlen, a multimedia artist, the owner of the Art Ruin Berlin; he also did art exhibitions for dogs;
- Uncle Tadek, the director of the collective farm Rapture;
- an anonymous administrator of the village Bordziłówka, an emissary of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Poland, a Russian;
- Joseph Beuys, the most important artist of modern Germany, in his youth – a Luftwaffe ace;
- Jerzy Teliński, a graphic artist, the author of a completely

- unrequited manifestation of support for communism;
- the Restorer, an avant-garde artist, who – in real life, not so much in this book – overuses the phrase ‘as if’;
- the Brickie/Plasterer, an avant-garde artist, a film maker and poet;
- Javier, a young conspirator, a member of the anti-Franco underground, a Spaniard;
- the Vice Secretary, a somewhat embittered, auto-ironic member of the Polish United Workers' Party;
- Arnulf Rainer, a scandalous painter, frequently arrested by the Austrian police;
- Squirrel, a country teacher;
- the Conceptual Painter; reminiscent of a couple of Polish conceptual painters;
- Herman, lives in West Berlin; an avant-garde film-maker, alternative to the core;
- Victor, a construction engineer, Polish émigré of the 50s, lives in Madrid;
- Paul Sharits, a star of the American structural cinema, member of the Fluxus art group, likes a drink;
- Georgiy Zhukov, a marshal, Carl Spaatz, a general, Arthur Tedder, an air marshal – representatives of three great imperia; also Wilhelm Keitel, a field marshal and Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, a general, emissary of Charles de Gaulle;
- Pablo Picasso, a painter, participated in the Congress of Intellectuals for Peace in Wrocław in 1948;
- Jacek Petrycki and Lindsay Anderson, film makers; what they have in common is a history of attempted coup with machine guns;
- Terry Fox, American video maker; he did not know that objects could have gender;
- David Hall, an avant-garde film maker and video maker; a

- mysterious Englishman with obscure connections within Scottish TV;
- Ladislav Galeta, a mystic, visual artist and a film maker; he placed the centre of the universe in an immobile ball and made all things orbit around it; a Croatian;
 - Josip Broz Tito, a marshal, charismatic leader of Yugoslavia;
 - Harry Larkins, a major, the lover of Eadweard Myubridge's wife;
 - Wiesia, a student of history of art; stupid or callous? Hard to tell;
 - Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov, media artists from Vancouver;
 - Wiktor Woroszylski; a poet, a passionate bard of the communism, later much disappointed by it;
 - Muriel Olesen, a beautiful woman from Geneva, a perspicacious reader, especially of a particular sonnet by Arthur Rimbaud;
 - Helmut Schmidt; the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany;
 - Jan Leon Hipolit Kozietulski, the leader of the Third Squadron of the First Regiment of the Light Cavalry Guards; a hero of the battle of Somosierra;
 - Jacek Pająk, a secret police agent;
 - Heniek and Wiesiek, painters and decorators;
 - Edward Gierek and Olof Palme, leaders of workers' parties;
 - Maria Wiernikowska, a TV reporter from Warsaw;
 - Gabriel Buchwald, an atomic physician;
 - The elder Buchwald, a German communist, Gabriel's father;
 - Bolesław and Rozalia Mazur, live in the Street of the 9th of May in Wrocław; they don't like or don't understand cubism;

- John Paul II, a pope;
- Ali Agca, an armed assassin;
- Ronald Reagan, an actor, later the President of the USA;
- Russky, the last President of the USSR; a failure – or the whole thing just had to cave in;
- Nina Andrycz, the brightest star of the Polish theatre;
- Richard Demarco, an art enthusiast and photographer, a friend of the agent 007, a Scot;
- Leon Thermen, a physicist and inventor and Lydia Kavina, a virtuoso of Therminvox; Russians;
- Velimir Abramovic, a professor, lives in Belgrade, he knows everything about the Serbian genius, Nicola Tesla;
- Elżbieta Mazur, a post-communist, the director of the press office of the President of Poland;
- Father Andrzej Kordecki, the director of the all-Poland network of Catholic radio stations;
- Edward Kienholz, an American sculptor, the author of the dangerous Death Machine;
- El Vitti, an outstanding bullfighter, in the classical tradition;
- Rainer Werner Fassbinder, a controversial West German film director, appears in a cameo role;
- Wacek Kisielewski, a pianist, the son of Stefan;
- Charles Marvin, a jockey;

as well as other artists, artists on a grant, poets, footballers, spies, secretaries, mathematicians, vice-ministers, railwaymen, secret agents and the riff-raff in front of their TV boxes.

The action takes place in today's Europe and in 19th century America.

The first episode, the awakening of the Photographer, took place in 1970 in a country somewhat unfortunately situated – Poland.

Wojciech Bruszewski

THE PHOTOGRAPHER



*To Tadeusz Domański, my uncle,
the director of the collective farm Rapture*

The Photographer wakes up, opens his eyes and can see nothing. He closes his eyes, opens them again. No difference. Total darkness. He chokes with terror.

The day before he had drunk the home-brewed Lithuanian Trojanka. The press had been full of reports about cases of irreversible blindness caused by drinking concoctions based on methylated spirits. He has learnt recently that Trojanka is a medication. He always used to consider it a kind of booze. Ethylated spirit plus 3 x 9, twenty seven herbs, thus the name Trojanka.

He closes his eyes.

•

Róża is on duty at the post office today. She works as a telephonist, in a blue uniform, connecting local calls. In a professional manner, she inserts and takes out the plugs of the hand-operated local exchange. Her friends have gone to town, with big postbags. The Photographer is a militia man. In his steel-coloured uniform, he stands at a crossroads, directing the traffic. There isn't much traffic today – a handful of pedestrians and a few cyclists.

After work, in civilian clothes, they will go to the railway station.

They will buy tickets at the ticket office. They will stand on the platform, holding hands, waiting for the train to arrive. She is eight, he is nine. The PKP ticket offices are manned by those of similar age. They ‘sell’ tickets for free. On the platform, stands the little platform guard; on the train, there are little conductors. From the windows of the train, you can see a lake and a jetty. Little sailors are bustling around. Podgrodzie is a wonderful, ideal little town, built along the lines of the Soviet Artek. It is governed by children.

•

In the Photographer’s motherland, there are only two kinds of vodka. They are both called Pure Vodka. The difference lies in the colour of the paint used for printing the label and, of course, in the flavour. The Red Label Pure Vodka is drinkable. The (cheaper) Blue Label Pure Vodka is not – when sober. The Methylated Spirit is even worse. It is pure spirit, contaminated. Drinking it risks death. It is purple, stinks foul, and there is a skull and cross bones on the label. It is popularly known as the Berryade on the Bones. There are other names: Goner, Cardboard, Ink.

There are no known cases of death from drinking the Berryade. There are many notorious places (known as *melina*) where the regular drinkers (called *menele*) congregate.

The myth about the deadly risk is propaganda. The fact is, the Meths is not contaminated.

The Meths, an industrial product, is popular because of its price.

•

It is 1956. July. A special coach is waiting in front of Szczecin Central railway station to pick up the new batch of inhabitants of Podgrodzie. Róża has come from Warsaw. She is a pretty little blond with blue eyes. The Photographer has come here from Wrocław.

The white-and-blue coach with the big letters PODGRODZIE is taking them north, along the left bank of the Odra. She is sitting by the window, offering sugared jellies to him. He is holding a camera. On the coach, he takes his first shot of her. He has an East German Taxona with him, the only one in Podgrodzie. He got it from his parents as his present at First Communion. The camera is easy-peasy to use. It takes 50 square miniature pictures on one film. The Taxona will be the reason for his Podgrodzie nickname: the Photographer.

•

The artistic circles prefer to drink wine called Wine. The Wine wine, for a while, was the only wine on sale. The starting ingredient is apples. The official label on the front of the bottle says that this is Wine. On the label on the back, the producers state honestly that they add various chemical preservatives to the Wine, including sulphur compounds. The Wine is commonly known as the Sulph. It is also referred to as Appol.

For a hangover, a beer called Beer or Full Beer is good.

It tastes all the same all over the country. Either you can buy it or you can’t.

There is also a well-known combination to intensify the efficacy of the components, if consumed separately. Its name is derived from photographic technology. In popular slang, it is understood to be, literally, the developer and the fixer. A 100g of vodka and a tankard of beer - drunk in that order, and not the other way round.

•

Before Nowe Warpno, the coach turns right into a sandy road through the forest and, two kilometres further on, it stops at a square, where the road comes to an end. There is a road block and a soldier with an automatic Russian pistol. Adults are not allowed in.

Adults can only admire the green enclosure from afar. It is reminiscent of an ordinary park with beautiful old trees. Each group of children has its own house. Red tiles on the roofs peek through. The houses are dispersed in a regular pattern along very short streets. Above them, tower massive oak trees. Under their huge crowns, real small-town life carries on. The occasional adults discreetly monitor the town management, the uniformed services and the citizens themselves. Along the edge of the town, there is a narrow-gauge railway which links three stations. Podgrodzie Town is a real, white-washed brick building, with ticket offices and platforms. Podgrodzie Jetty and Podgrodzie Forest are only platforms. The line is manned by child managers and technicians. With one exception: the train driver. He is not a child.

•

After a wedding, when there is only some leftover booze, Władek, a friend of the Photographer's, has arrived with a small supply of something superior.

Two seasoned alcoholics settle down at the table. They pop the cork. It is eight in the evening. They sit facing each other. Between them, a bottle of Lithuanian Trojanka. They take sips from small glasses and talk in between. It is now nine o'clock. Their tongues get twisted at the very same moment and they both fall asleep.

Lithuanian Trojanka turns off the areas in their brains responsible for reasoning, verbal communication, sight and hearing. The dream-controlling projectors switch on automatically.

The see-saw is relentless. Waking, sleeping, waking, sleeping. Waking without sleeping is inconceivable. The sleep sometimes stretches to a few years, or even longer than a decade. It is Władek who, 28 years later, will go to sleep for a long while and will sleep until the biological projectors, which keep him entertained when asleep, break down and finally pack up.

After the train ride, they briefly separate. Their groups take meals in different pavilions. After lunch, Róża and the Photographer will go to the attic of one of the little houses. There, undisturbed, they will play the game reserved for adults: doctors and nurses.

After a month, when they are packing, the Photographer will realise that someone has stolen his Taxona with the only film that his parents had given him. He has lost the priceless photographs of Róża with the crucial settings of the children's paradise in the background. With the Taxona gone, the story of the childish romance is no more; as is Podgrodzie, both no longer real. The material proof for the existence of this extraordinary place has vanished. There was everybody in the ideal town: not only postmen, railwaymen, sailors, militiamen and ordinary, honest citizens; but also criminals, that is to say – thieves. They had no uniform and their faces are not on record.

•

That night, they are still alive. One of the twenty seven herbs reaches the region of the cortex that ordinary vodka cannot reach. The instinct to seek basic comfort has been paralysed. Instead of falling inertly upon the table, an arm under the head for a pillow; instead of waking up briefly in the middle of the night in search of something better than the wooden floor to lie down on in a more comfortable reclining position – they sit upright in their chairs, only their heads bent, as if they are looking intently for something in the darkness under the table. Two hyper-realistic sculptures. They will sit like this, without moving, till the morning. Above the table, there is a yellow lampshade. A centrally placed bulb throws a triangle of light on the white table cloth, on the bottle of home-brewed Trojanka, on two small glasses and on the two rigid intellectuals. The rest is in shade. The paralysed ego is waiting for a biochemical transformation by the treacherous herbs, for a return

to reality due to vapour release, and for a resumption of the temporarily adjourned, exciting discourses. For now, they sleep.

The Photographer: the End

The Photographer: the end of opening sequel

/ . . . /

Two seasoned alcoholics settle down at the table. They pop the cork. It is eight in the evening. They sit facing each other. Between them – a bottle of Lithuanian Trojanka. They take small sips and talk. It is now nine o'clock. Their tongues get twisted at the same time and they both fall asleep. Lithuanian Trojanka turns off the areas in their brains responsible for reasoning, verbal communication, sight and hearing. The dream-controlling projectors switch on automatically.

The treacherous vodka is reminiscent of absinthe – not by its flavour, but by its pungent, herbal smell. The absinthe in question is the original (now banned) alcohol with the correct, that is to say – dangerous – content of the hallucinogenic thujone – and not the Czech fake, charmingly named *Havel*.

Picasso adored the real absinthe. Rimbaud was an aficionado. Van Gogh's cut-off ear and a few suicides were some of the effects of the legendary thujone. Another was an attempt by two Poles, under the cover of darkness, to break and bring down a massive mast with a Spanish flag. The flag streamed in the air in the small seaside resort of Peniscola. Not to be confused with today's Tourist Machine of the same name. No, in the traditional, romantic Peniscola, built on the peninsula of the same name – as it used to be at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. It was the night that General Franco celebrated the 35th anniversary of his

victory over the Republic. The mast was wrestled down by the two artists, ‘for our freedom and yours’. One of them was a member of the PZPR (the Polish Communist Party). The other had never been in any party. In the morning, they viewed reality realistically, although with a strong yellow undertone. In the ranking of hangovers, this was the Hangover of the Century.

On the evening preceding the gesture of solidarity with the Spanish Republic, they had each only drunk a quarter of a litre of the green liquid. Three times the sensible recommended French norm and tenfold the cautious Spanish norm.

Today, their brains are in the clutches of another herbal concoction – Lithuanian Trojanka. They are in no danger of cutting off their ears or topping themselves. But they are in danger of a heavy hangover, but maybe, not too heavy. For now, they sleep.

•

From Radio KFM, Róza moves across to National TV. At KFM, her career had advanced like lightning. In no time at all, she stopped running with the mike from a flood to a fire. As a slick moderator, each week she led political debates, inviting both those in power and the power wannabes. The point of such programmes is to have a row on air. The bigger, the better. In the radio circus, Róza is a charming but ruthless trainer. She can control the rabid political pack, cracking her whip. Faced with someone like that, the media outbid each other with higher and higher salary offers. The state TV or public television pays the best. Róza is the star hit of the programme *An Eye for An Eye*.

His mobile rings.

‘Hi there.’

He cannot believe it. Only moments earlier he saw her on TV.

‘Listen. I am having a beer with some colleagues from the Cultural News, who gave me your number. I don’t know how they know that we have known each other for yonks, so that, on the one

hand, they seem to think that there is something between us... yes, that’s right... they stare with funny smiles... but, on the other...’ When he used to hear her on the radio, he felt that time stood still. Now, seeing her on TV, he notices unappealing bags under her eyes and wrinkles on her neck. Her face is unnaturally smooth. She is of an age when a surgeon is called in to help with conquering nature, and the menopause makes women counterattack hormonally. When Róza smiles, he can see her crooked teeth, stained with nicotine. But she doesn’t care. She does not even try to distract the viewers with an aggressive shade of lipstick. She is following in the footsteps of a Slavonic Marina Vlady, untouched by make-up. Has she changed so much, or has he never taken a good look at her? Wrinkles do have to appear sooner or later. But the dreadful teeth? On the radio, they did not matter. On TV, they don’t bother anyone, either, because Róza has a phenomenal number of viewers. The graphs soar, and the dosh from advertising floods the TV bank accounts.

Some of the dosh hits Róza’s own account. She has made it. This gives her the laid-back stance, which the viewers like so much.

The TV channel is organising Open Studio Day, and the guys from the Cultural News, through Róza, ask him for an avant-garde idea. Róza’s task is to lay on the charm and, as a side effect, to ensure that the artist’s fee is reduced to the bare minimum. Culture generally, and the Cultural News in particular, have no funds. Róza explains to him, that they want to make a departure from the schematic scenario of boring talking heads, where well-known actors sit at tables and smile at the Varsovians who in droves invade the temporarily accessible TV studios. They have shown tripods, large satellite dishes and kilometres of cables many times before during such occasions. Now they are counting on a dazzling, electronic bit of wizardry.

‘Lasers, computers, whiz kid bullshit. Get it?’

So, he has her number. It has shown up OK. He wants to enter it in the memory under her proper name ‘Róża’, but the damn mobile does not have Polish characters. He does not like to butcher the Polish, so instead, he writes ‘Luxemburg’.

But maybe she didn’t call from her own phone?

He decides to take the risk and sends her a mangled text.

I PROBABLY LOVE YOU WICH YOU PROBABLY KNOW.
THERE ARE PEOPLE WHOS HEARTS WAKE UP WITH A
BATTERY. ROZA, BE MY BATTERY.

As a sex fiend, the Photographer is these days a bit of a damp squib. He can only manage the odd electronic kick. But as a joker, he is still doing OK.

The answer comes back almost immediately. ‘Luxemburg’, in correct Polish, writes succinctly

GO FUCK YOURSELF.

Yes, so this is her phone. The explicit grossness proves that she has also written his number in the memory of her phone. Before she kicks someone in the balls, Róża tends to check that she has got the right man. Because it could be the President or the Prime Minister who has sent her the romantic message.

•

The year is 2004 and, tonight, Róża’s guest is the ex-Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Helmut Schmidt.

Helmut Schmidt is in Poland on a private visit, but Róża has her ways and means.

Inviting the Chancellor to the studio, she inaccurately translates the name of the programme for him. *An Eye for An Eye* smells of revenge for miles. But she tells him it is *Auge in Auge*, which can be understood more neutrally as *Eye to Eye*, or even *An Eye in An*

Eye, which sounds like a quotation from Wittgenstein. Helmut Schmidt succumbs to the personal charm of the Polish journalist and agrees to be interviewed.

‘Mr Chancellor,’ asks Róża, ‘why didn’t you support the aspirations for freedom of Poles, when you were leading the government of the Federal Republic of Germany?’

The programme only takes a few minutes, so there is no time for any preambles. We fire off the Katyushas and look to see how the visitor from the West takes it. Helmut Schmidt, elegant as usual, though perhaps a little less tall than he used to be, reaches out for his notes, pencil and cigarettes.

‘Mr Chancellor, are you intending to smoke?’

Róża delivers this as an irritated schoolteacher might. Helmut Schmidt is taken aback.

‘We do not smoke in the TV studios here!’ and she gives the distinguished visitor a crushing look. Helmut Schmidt sheepishly puts his fags away.

‘I am so sorry,’ he mumbles so quietly that probably only he can hear himself.

He does not like it that, right from the start, someone gives him a smack right in front of millions of viewers.

‘Well? Why didn’t you?’ insists Róża, in the offensive, and showing the first signs of impatience.

Róża often asks a question not merely in order to get an answer. She wants to see, and let the viewers see, the expression on the face of the interviewed person, which can speak volumes.

‘Dear lady...’

‘Mr Chancellor, instead of conducting rational international politics, which over the long run would have been oriented towards a unified Europe, including the countries of the Eastern bloc, you and your government spoilt East Germany rotten.’

‘What do you mean, rotten?’ asks the Chancellor.

Good question. But Róża has no time to delve into Polish idioms. If someone does not understand, that is just too bad.

‘Credits, credits... Were you not aware that your credits were

spent on financing the military programmes of Erich Honecker and the Stasi? Had you learnt nothing from the unpleasant experiences of your predecessor, Willy Brandt?’

‘The Günter Guillaume affair had undermined the confidence in...’

‘But it was you who had agreed the absurd monetary exchange of the East German mark in the one to one ratio...’

‘You know, our politics in respect of the other German state...’

‘The Stasi budget was larger than the CIA budget. Didn’t you know that? Were your security services financed by the DDR?’

It is only once in the *plaza de toros* that the bull slowly begins to comprehend the rules of the deadly game of the *corrida*. It is beginning slowly to dawn on Helmut Schmidt what the rules of the programme *An Eye for An Eye* are.

‘Our aim was to...’

‘maintain the *status quo!*’ Róża mockingly interrupts. ‘Two magical words which you incessantly repeated in the German press and on the TV. *Status quo!* Poles used to clench their teeth when they heard those words and responded with Latin of their own. Do you know what it means that a Pole “speaks Latin”?’

‘The German *raison d'être* ...’

‘What German *raison d'être*, Mr Chancellor? The German *raison d'être* should have been to support Solidarity, and not to put your head in the sand. After all, it was thanks to Solidarity that the Berlin Wall fell.’

The bull first chases the cape, then slowly attacks with his horns the cover protecting the *picador*'s horse, then rushes after the *banderilleros*, and only when, finally, well and truly enraged, he stands in front of the red *muleta*, he knows, that he has to drive his horns not into it, but into the belly of the chap waving it about. The problem is that by then, he has run out of steam.

‘I don't agree with you...’

‘Really? So, in your opinion, who brought down the Berlin Wall? the Red Army, on its way out of Germany? General Gratchev's tanks? Or leprechauns?’

Helmut Schmidt knows, that the eyes of millions of Poles are on him. and that a chorus of *Ole!* rises after each blow delivered by Róża.

He should get up and leave. What stops him are the impeccable manners of a European public persona.

‘It was your party, the SPD, which financed the election party broadcasts, where the equivalent of the German Mrs Kowalski lights the gas in the kitchen, and her husband, with a silly grin to the camera, asks, ‘Do you know, dear wife, that the gas comes to us from the Soviet Union?’

The aggressive Polish journalist, of the highest national rank, for once shows a modicum of respect for her esteemed visitor. She says ‘the German Mrs Kowalski’ instead of simply ‘Mrs Schmidt’ which both linguistically and idiomatically means the same. It is hard to imagine that the perverse bitch does not know that.

‘We were of the opinion that co-operation...’

‘Co-operation with whom, the Empire of Evil?’ screams Róża.

Helmut Schmidt for a second appears to consider whether to throw in her face the glass of water in front of him. But this is United Europe and not the Union of Independent Nations, and he is no Zhirinovsky.

‘When the war in Afghanistan broke out...’

Polish politicians are familiar with the style. They meekly put up with Róża’s impertinence, because otherwise they will stop being invited in front of the camera and the voters will forget them, which would be the end of the world. People can be divided into those who have been on the telly, and the others.

The German visitor is unaware that Poland post-2000 is not run by the President or the Prime Minister or the Constitutional Tribunal, but by Róża.

Helmut Schmidt catches his breath with difficulty. During his entire political career, in no television studio anywhere in the world has he been pulled apart like this. He is no longer trying to have a discussion. He is simply trying to get a word in edgeways.

‘When the war in Afghanistan broke out...’

‘Yes, yes. We know that, to save your face, you finally got interested in increasing the military might of NATO. Better late than never.’

Róża does not take her eyes of the diminutive silhouette of the Chancellor, sunk into his armchair. A second of silence before the final salvo is fired.

The bull is now so weakened, that he can no longer reach his torturer with his horns. He awaits the mortal blow, which the beautiful *torero* will deliver into his very heart with her fine blade. Breathing heavily, the bull eyes the crowds spilling out of the stands at the *plaza de toros*. The Spanish call that moment ‘the moment of truth’. The *torero* with his *muleta* provokes the bull to attack, so that, by lowering his horned head, it is possible to deliver the final blow. The bull puts his entire effort into one thing only: to fall only after the blow has been dealt, and no sooner.

Róża fires her last missile.

‘And who was it that wrote into the constitution the duty to unite the two German states? The DDR?’

‘I assure you...’

‘Pumping millions of marks into a Russian satellite, were you not betraying your own constitution and the *de facto* interest of the united Germany? The future of the whole, damn it, united Europe, as it now is!?’

Helmut Schmidt opens his mouth, but no sound comes out. The clapper strikes.

Róża generously gives him another two seconds.

Two seconds earlier, the Photographer takes a swig of the excellent, although illegal, *hrushkovitza*. In the Black Danube region where he has just been on holiday, on the Slovak side of the border, the forbidden moonshine can be bought in the official shops but only to those familiar with the unofficial password. A dumb computer can ask for a password any time; so - at times - can the salesman in an off-liscence.

Common vodka gets you into its clutches, holds you for a while and suddenly lets go. It soars swiftly in a steep curve, then breaks and drops like a stone. It has caused many a heart attack, or even death. An experienced alcoholic knows how to moderate the gradient. When the come down starts, or the phase technically known as the hang-over, he supplements the alcohol, vanishing from the bloodstream, with half pints of beer. Cucumber brine and fermented milk offer the dangerous illusion of protection for the organism from a catastrophe.

But *hrushkovitza* – that’s something else.

It gets you into its clutches as swiftly as common vodka, but it won’t let go for at least 24 hours. You fall asleep, wake up again and you are still zonked. You could drink beer, but why bother? You descend gently to normality in an extended time lapse.

The Photographer is sitting in front of a TV set in the mountains. In one hand, he is holding the prohibited liquid, with the other, he is pressing on the green button of his mobile. On the display, the pre-set number lights up: ‘Luxemburg’.

An ultimate man-eater, a Leopard tank and a B-52 bomber rolled into one would not make such a basic mistake, would she? For a laugh, the Photographer feels like testing this. He wants to know whether *An Eye for An Eye* is shot in real time. Is it broadcast live?

The sound of a mobile phone ringing brings back to life the frozen clipboard.

Helmut Schmidt grabs his pocket, but it is not his mobile that is making an impact on the impeccable, shiny professional armour of Róża.

‘Unfortunately, Mr Chancellor, our time is up,’ rounds up the star of the talk show.

Two modern mobile phones demand a response. One, with the view of the Tatra mountains, held to the Photographer’s ear, emits a monotonous bleep every 3 seconds. The other, 300 km away in Warsaw, in a ladies’ bag under the table at which Róża is sitting, is brutally interfering with the mike over-modulation. The sound technicians are a bit surprised, but not fazed by it. They indifferently watch the sound levels, where the indicator keeps breaching the forbidden red field. They don’t like the bitch.

Helmut Schmidt raises his eyebrows and, for the first time that evening, he smiles at the Polish journalist.

The trademark jingle sent off by the sound man signals the end of the program. A mixed choir syncopates the name of the programme:

An Eyyeeee for An Eyyeeee!

Then, with the background music, invasively assisted by the insistent communication device in the background, Róża says her good-bye to the viewers.

‘Our guest today was the ex...’ she turns towards the camera, looks into the lens and satellite glare sweeps with frank disgust not only over the mischievous bastard, the cunt, who dared to ring her up just then; not only over the whole of Poland, dying of laughter in front of their TV sets, but also over the united Europe, which,

like her – the aging top toty – can’t be arsed to chat about Freedom.

Before the final credits roll, in the last close up, Róża reveals (this is meant to be a smile) her white-brown, wolf fangs.

translated by Anda MacBride