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HELVER'S NIGHT

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(excerpt)

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- HE** *(feverish, excited look, fast, nervous moves)* You know ...?!
- SHE** *(very calm, in control of Herself, though suspecting something wrong)* Good evening, darling. Good that you're already...
- HE** You know ...?! *(pointing a flag to the window)* Know what's going on?! Everyone! I'm telling you, everyone ...
- SHE** Put it away ... *(pointing at the flag)* ... And take off the beret. It's lunch time. Would you rinse your hands. *(approaches the stove, grabs the pot of soup with a linen mitten, returns to the table and serves the soup into the plates)* Here we go. Do sit down.
- HE** *(doesn't move from the spot, tense, trembling, attentively within Her moves)* Look out the window! The entire neighbourhood! I'm telling you, the entire neighbourhood! They say in the centre, too ...
- SHE** *(approaches the window and shuts it)* Let's sit at the table... *(waits briefly and sits at the table alone)* Will you be eating?
- HE** *(aggressively)* No.
- SHE** *(starts eating Her soup)* Just the way you like it – potato. Try some...
- HE** *(a step towards Her)* Look what they gave me... *(unfolds the flag towards Her)*
- SHE** Made it with pork belly and marjoram...
- HE** *(one more step)* Look! They gave me a flag. See?! Not everyone got one...
- SHE** *(tastes the soup)* Hmm, delicious... Might have some more...

HE *(swiftly approaches the window, opens it wide, loud echo of a crowd)*
E aaaaa! E aaaaa! *(shouts towards the crowd and waves the flag)* E
eeee! E eee!

Very slowly she gets up from the table, She approaches Him and tenderly places Her hands on His shoulder.

HE *(He senses the touch, suddenly jumps away from the window and, confused, gazes at Her)* What?!

SHE *(soothingly)* Don't lean out too much, it's a second floor... Come...
(trying to take Him under Her arm) Let's have lunch... You must be hungry by now.

HE *(spelling out)* Don't you get any of this? Don't you get it? *(turning towards the window all the time)* Everyone's out there! Look! *(leans from the window)* A aaa!!! A aaa!!! Go on, shout! A aaa! *(waves the flag)*

SHE Let's leave it... *(tenderly moves Him away from the window)* You're all sweaty... let's have lunch, you'll change...

HE *(frees himself resolutely)* I don't want to change, I won't eat ...
Actually, I ate already...

SHE *(She sits at the table and very slowly finishes Her soup)* What did you have?

HE *(enticingly)* Split-pea soup.

SHE Was it nice?

HE Yeah. And then the field kitchens arrived, you know, those with tiny chimneys. It was especially sent to us by our garrison, so we aren't

hungry, and everyone was given a metal bowl and spoon, and the chef who was serving me the soup, served me two ladles.

SHE Was it nice, the split-pea soup?

HE *(more slowly)* Then they served palinka... *(She is silent)*

HE *(even more slowly)* I got some, too... *(faster)* They poured it from those large green hot water bottles... *(more slowly)* Though only one... *(faster)* Because there was this dancer... And Gilbert approached me: "Here you go, have some, go for it."

SHE *(gets up, heads towards the stove)* Do you like Gilbert? *(brings plates with the main dish to the table)*

HE Uhm, Gilbert always says: "You will make a soldier one day, you will." As we stood there, Gilbert gave me the beret ... (He abruptly removes the beret from His head and pushes it under Her nose.) See?! And he attached the badge by himself.

SHE What a neat beret, it does suit you...

HE Yeah. *(places the beret on His head)* Gilbert gave me the flag as well. See?! He said to hold it like this... *(demonstrates)* On the shoulder...

SHE Didn't he also give you a torch?

HE *(concerned)* No... Why would he?

SHE Don't know. Did you ask Gilbert?

HE No, because he was talking to the officers. *(hastily, demonstrating)* They stood like that and did this with their gloves. They were

slapping their hands, and smoked cigars, and Gilbert smoked with them. Why didn't he give me the torch?

SHE I don't know. Perhaps only the tall ones were given them, to be seen better.

HE Indeed... And then Gilbert gave me a smile ... He praised me for having polished my boots properly, and he said that officer's boots must shine like dog's balls. *(more slowly)* It was Gilbert to put it like this, he said that one can even use such boots to shave; I will give myself a shave, perhaps today I shall shave, because it's time I start shaving, you see?

SHE Alright. Tomorrow we'll pop in a shop and get some shaving soap, a bowl, large bottle of cologne and a shaver.

HE I will use a razor.

SHE We'll get you a razor. I saw here, in the shop by the tram stop, some quite smart ones, with handle of black ebony...

HE *(thrilled)* Just like the one that Gilbert's got, he showed it, sharpened it on his belt, a razor with a black handle, like Gilbert's!

SHE We'll get one tomorrow.

HE *(confused)* Not tomorrow...

SHE Tomorrow. I'll go shopping and will get the razor. When you get up and finish your breakfast, you can shave right away.

HE Better not go to that shop for the razor.

SHE Why?

- HE** Because they haven't got any razors in that shop...
- SHE** I saw some today, in the shopwindow...
- HE** There are no razors in that shop. Better get it elsewhere. In that large shop by the rail station, where you always buy me soldiers...
- SHE** Alright, though I still must pop into Mr Hanssen's shop to get a milk can...
- HE** I'll get you a new one ... Because ... That shop is no longer there. *(hastily)* It means that they haven't got any razors there, nor your milk can, because the shop burned down, and everything smells there, so don't go there anymore, don't, because it's stinky there...
- SHE** It burned down...
- HE** Entirely... *(She hides Her face into Her palms)*
- HE** But don't you worry, don't, you can get me the razor in the shop by the rail station... And would you get me some more soldiers? Though now only those on the horses, and get a cannon and orchestra... Don't you worry...
- SHE** Have you been to Mr Hanssen's shop today?
- HE** I haven't. I just stood across the street, though with the flag that Gilbert gave me, and I yelled..
- SHE** What did you yell?
- HE** Well, the same as everyone else...

SHE And what did everyone yell?

HE *(shrugs His shoulders)* Well, "Yuck!" *(covers His nose)* "Yuck!" Like this... *(hastily)* For, as we walked down the street, everyone went: "Aaaaaa!!!" They rushed towards the shop and Gilbert used this stick *(demonstrates)* on the window, and then ... then, when the old man rushed out of the shop with this knife – suuuuuuch a knife, then everyone with the torches ... Though I stood on the other side of the street, all the way by the wall, with the flag that Gilbert gave me...

SHE What happened to the old Mr Hanssen?

HE Nothing. *(hastily)* Though when everyone rushed out of the shop, Mr Hanssen walked like this in front of Gilbert, and it was all in flames, then his daughter charged out of the shop and threw herself at Gilbert... *(in disbelief)* At Gilbert... She started shaking him... *(violently)* And Gilbert grabbed her by her hair *(demonstrates)* and shouted: "You biiiiitch!!!" *(ever more violently)* And then, as he finished kicking that stupid messed-up head...

SHE *(very quietly)* What is it you're saying...

HE *(increasingly upset, He spreads out the flag, standing in front of Her, legs wide apart, he chants loudly)* Scu-um!!! Scu-um!!!

SHE *(stares at Him absently)* What is it you're saying?

HE *(He sits at the table and pushes away the plate)* You can always tell a scum... *(hastily)* Gilbert says he can tell a scum by mile, he can sniff him because of the stench... *(violently)* Swine! *(spits in disgust)* Yuck!

SHE Don't spit on the floor.

HE *(slowly, cautiously)* Why?

SHE Because I spent the morning washing it... You messed it up already...

HE *(He suddenly gets off the table and, with loud stomping, sets off marching round the table)* Tram-ta-ta-ta-dam, tram-ta-ta-dam!!! This is how we marched, see? Tram-ta-ta-dam! And I was almost the first one to be on the spot! They arrived on foot, motorbikes, large cars. Tram-ta-ta-dam! Because I know everything already! *(stops)* You know? Gilbert told me to learn, you know. He gave me this book with pictures, where everything is drawn, everything. And I learned it all. Don't you believe me? Look. This is – "Attention!" *(stands in attention)*, one's got to stand straight, belly tucked in, legs wide apart, palms lined up with the trouser line, head slightly upward. And "At ease!" "At ease" goes like this *(standing at ease)* left leg is bent. See, how easy. I learned it all! *(stands)* At ease! *(stands)* Attention! *(stands)* At ease! *(stands)* Attention! *(stands)* See, how easy? Try... It's easy... Attention! At ease!

SHE *(smiling)* No... Not me...

HE I'm telling you, it's easy, easy-peasy. Well, try.

SHE *(smiling)* Drop it...

HE *(all heated-up, excited, emphatic)* Because it's not easy at all. At all. Gilbert said that one's got to keep learning it the whole life. That's what he said. Whole life. *(more slowly, warily)* Only an idiot will never learn it. *(more hastily)* Thus said Gilbert... I learned it all quickly, see? Quite quickly. Gilbert said: "Clever, clever"... And you know how this is to be done: "In double raw, facing me"... Sure you don't. Because it's hard... Look. Come-on, keep looking at me! They just walk like that, walk around, well, everyone who got to the roll-call spot, and you stand up, stand in alert and call: "Attention!" And everyone stands in silence and stares, and you call: "On my command, in double-raw!!!!"

And they spread, quickly spread out. See? Can you do it? Nope. Because it's hard. But then, once they are standing, they have to get in groups of four and march. And then one's got to call... *(thinks hard)* "Groups of four, march!!!" And they march, holding torches and flags, just like the one Gilbert gave me, because Gilbert gave me this flag... Can you do it? Never ever. Never ever... You can never do it... Because it's hard...

SHE *(She is collecting plates from the table, carrying them to the sink. He watches Her very move.)* How about a cake? Strawberries and cream.

HE You can never do that.

SHE *(cautiously, kindly)* Because only men can do that, not women...

HE The scum can't do that either... *(hastily)* Though you might do it. You would learn it...

SHE *(shakes Her head, smiling)* Not me...

HE *(slowly)* If you want, you can learn... *(even more slowly)* You've got to learn.

SHE *(very cautiously)* Got to learn? Why?

HE Because Gilbert tells everyone that you...

SHE What does Gilbert say about me...?

HE *(thinks hard)* That you... *(bursts out)* That you, too, would learn, if you wanted to.

SHE Gilbert says...

HE You've got to learn. I'll teach you, because I've learned it...

SHE And what am I to do?

HE Well, everything... *(very hastily)* Because when they are off to the training camp, then they sleep in tents, even got guards, and exercises, and they shoot, and Gilbert even shot from the machine gun, they've also got rota, and when they go to a real training ground, to the airport, they even got on an airplane, and Gilbert, too, flew on an airplane, and when one of the scum escaped the master, they called a hunt and when they caught him in a pile of hey, they set it aflame, the scum, and he rushed across the field, Gilbert ordered to shoot him in his legs and when he fell to the ground, Gilbert lit his cigar on him, the scum, and the others lit their cigarettes, because it is only Gilbert to smoke cigars, and this officer gave it to Gilbert... *(very slowly)* Gilbert said that, one day, I, too, will go to the camp...

She is silent.

HE Gilbert said that order is supreme, everything must be in order, order must be everywhere, because that's what matters most...

SHE Yes, it matters most... I guess I'm off to bed, I'm quite tired. Tomorrow I'll have to get up again...

HE You can't go to bed. You've got to learn... It's easy... I'll teach you everything...

He approaches Her, takes Her by hand.

SHE That hurts...

HE I'll teach you everything...

SHE It really hurts... Let go, please...

HE *(loudly, straight in Her face)* Attention!!! How do you stand!?

SHE Please...

HE Attention!!! *(He tidies Her body)* Legs together, hands, feet apart. Head up. Well, now you look human. Once again. Attention!!! And now at ease ... well, at ease!!! Why are you dancing? At ease! Left leg relaxed... *(thundering)* Think, man, what you're doing!!! *(hastily)* Attention! At ease! Come-on! Attention! At ease! *(Awkwardly, She carries out all commands)* And now... To the ground!!!

SHE *(terrified by now)* What you...?

HE Ah, you don't get it ... I'll show you how it's done. Just watch carefully. *(gives Himself commands)* To the ground! *(drops to the ground)* See? *(gets up)* Your turn. To the ground!

She awkwardly kneels to the ground.

HE Not like that! Didn't you watch?! To the ground! *(grabs Her by Her neck and turns towards himself)* Again! *(She gets up and awkwardly drops)* Once again! Up – To the ground! – Up! – To the ground! – Up! *(She is standing, panting)* What? Tired? That's good, one's got to get tired...

She's worn out.

HE See... Have some rest, rest... And now it will be even more difficult. Well, rested? To the ground! *(She properly drops to the ground; He walks round Her)* Good, good... And now you've got to crawl. Well, crawl, crawl... *(He squats by Her and pulls Her arms, legs)* Arm – leg –

arm – leg – arm – leg... *(She grows still, Her body trembles in a sob)*
Tired? That's good. One's got to get tired...

SHE *(raises slowly, smiling beggingly)* Phew, enough, I guess I learned it already...

HE *(Disoriented, threateningly)* No "Up" command was given...

SHE Let's have a break...

HE *(louder)* No "Up" command was given!

SHE I'll just catch my breath...

HE You've got to lay down!!! Gotta lay down!!! No "Up" command was given! To the ground!!! *(forces Her to the ground)* To the ground and crawl!!!! Got to learn it! Well, One-two-one-two... *(pushing her)*

SHE *(frees Herself, begging)* Let me be...

HE *(forces her moves)* One-two-one-two...

SHE *(louder)* Let me be...

HE Gotta do it evenly. One-two-one-two...

SHE *(hysterically, tears Herself away)* Let go of me... you idiot!!!

He grows still and gets up very slowly.

SHE *(She kneels, quietly, rather to Herself)* Gosh, I didn't mean to...

HE I wanted to teach you, teach you... And you don't want to learn! At all, not at all! *(She wants to get up, He keeps jerking her and pushes her to the ground)* And don't get up! Just in no case get up! *(He grows terrifying, She senses it and becomes stiff while laying on the ground)* Herr Jesus!!! Herr Jesus!!! *(He keeps jerking Her)* You don't get anything!!!!... And now, get up, you! Well... ! *(He is clumsily lifting Her)* Get up! Stand to "Attention", attention! *(adjusts Her position)* Well then? Well?... *(He looks around the kitchen, as if losing the track)* Why are you standing like that? Let's got to work! You've got to work a lot! Gotta work plenty!

SHE *(quietly)* What am I to do?

HE *(long thought, bursts out)* Gotta tidy up! Gotta tidy up here!

SHE I will...

HE *(loudly)* I am finding it's messy here! A mess. *(paces around Her)* Doesn't – smell nice here. Do-esn't. *(frowning)* I can't go on like this, no way...

She fears the worst.

HE You've got to attend the exercise. Got to learn it all. Well, no worries, gotta enrol in the exercise...

SHE *(doing Her best not to panic)* What shall we do?

HE Alright, get packing... Haven't even got a rucksack and stuff... Got a rucksack?

SHE Nope...

HE

Never mind, though it's reaaaly bad. Here... (*hands Her a shopping bag from the door hook*) This will be your rucksack... Well, put something in, go on... Gotta have a belt, too... (*ties a rope around Her waist*) And a hat... (*places a hat on Her head, happy*) See? And now we will do some marching, well... (*drags her along the wall*)
One-two-one-two-one-two-one-two... Now your turn:
One-two-one-two-one-two-one-two... Gotta lift your legs higher, come-one! (*She is marching, He is watching and commanding Her with His hands*) Yes! One-two-one-two-one-two-one-two...
Attention! (*She stands in attention*) Well done, you see, you are at an exercise. Do you enjoy attending an exercise? (*hastily*) And you will sleep in a tent... Well, under the table, pretend, like...