

Indicates HALINA to sit on one of the very few chairs, she sits in her grey dress surrounded by her bags.

HALINA. I must say before you begin, the absolutely, the completely last thing I want to do is cause anymore trouble.

ANDREW (*businesslike*). Of course. I usually ask at this stage (*Glancing at NEVILLE*,) when people aren't certain what to do (*Slight pause*,) is there any alternative?

HALINA *blows smoke, sitting in the centre of the stage*.

NEVILLE. Any other possible way of getting Halina in — other than marriage.

Pause.

(*Lightly looking across at HALINA*), Yes, it's essential to ask that I think.

ANDREW. LANDING Halina — to use the language of immigration officers . . . we have to be brutally honest about the position.

HALINA (*staring about through smoke*). Please be brutal, yes.

ANDREW. It has to be a bald selection of pros and cons.

NEVILLE (*sitting at typewriter, deciding to take notes, beating out her name*). R-O-D-Z-I-E-W-I-Z-O-W-N-A.

He pronounces it perfectly.

HALINA (*startled*). That's right, yes.

ANDREW. Neville is infuriatingly good — at a surprising number of things. (*Moving across room, up and down, flicking out red and blue notebook*,) To start with the cons — with the negative factors.

Firstly, Halina has waited, which is usually fatal. There is a deterioration of casual applications — unless you arrive screaming at the airport, I can't stand it back home and I'm not safe there, demanding immediate asylum, they are intensely suspicious, they are paranoid about all sorts of odds and sods being dumped on them from Eastern Europe.

HALINA (*blowing smoke*). I have waited far too long, yes.

NEVILLE (*typing*). Too late.

ANDREW. Secondly, every attempt to land is made in context — the context of world events, and that isn't too good at the moment is it. The recent sudden squall of East West tension, the expulsion of five Polish students in the US for industrial and military espionage, and three Russians from here.

HALINA. It is quite a bad time, yes.

NEVILLE (*types*). Wrong timing.

ANDREW. Moreover Halina does not wish to get involved in ritual 'hate' propaganda about her homeland, understandably. (*Sharply*,) Lastly — Halina is not unfortunately a famous dissident, or even a member of Solidarity, no fashionable reason here, nor obviously is she something nationally desirable, like a ballerina, olympic athlete, boxer, squash player, or even a film director!

HALINA (*sitting with her bags, staring ahead*). No, I think that probably is right. (*Slight pause*,) I'm not.

NEVILLE (*typing*). Professional status — absent.

ANDREW. And that brings us to the personal history of the case, and the chances of media or parliamentary exploitation, of Halina.

NEVILLE. Which can be vital of course.

ANDREW. Is there any possible angle her story suggests?

NEVILLE (*lightly, looking across at HALINA, clasping her bags*). There must be something isn't there?

ANDREW (*briskly*). See if you can spot anything. As a child she is separated from her family for a few months during the war, and had to fend for herself on the streets of Warsaw, amongst the German troops. But that had a happy outcome, they are reunited, — nothing there. Next —

NEVILLE. Maybe Halina would like to tell us.

HALINA. Me? (*Pouring smoke*,) The big event, the one that is interesting, every angle leads back to my father. . . . and the large event is — he was found guilty of corruption, deceit, and

incompetence. He was a member of the government, this is many years ago of course. He lived for ages afterwards, on and on, and on, I think you should tell it, it sounds much better when you do it.

ANDREW (*confident*). Her family plunged into semi-disgrace.
HALINA. Yes.

ANDREW. Her father, a minister, involved in the internecine party warfare of the Stalinist fifties, he loses, made to retire early from a government department to do with *Fish*. He isn't even thrown in prison!

NEVILLE. Really. He doesn't go to prison, at all?

ANDREW. No . . . His teenage daughter writes vigorous letters in his defence, he dies 29 years later having been cared for by said daughter, and drunk himself into oblivion.

NEVILLE. That is a long time.

ANDREW. Halina finds normal avenues to her all closed, she couldn't join the film school she very much wanted to, couldn't get into design college,

HALINA *staring ahead, blowing smoke*,
works occasionally as a part-time assistant for an elderly

optician, and goes to design evening classes. *Finally* resulting in her being allowed to come over here on this course — reaching England.

Pause, HALINA moves on chair holding one of her bags.
But unfortunately this story is very mild, they've heard it a thousand times before.

HALINA. Yes, I know.

ANDREW. Even worse it's 32 years ago, there's no room now for subtle grey areas, mournful little tales from way back, only for something very strong, black and white.

ANDREW *moves*

Halina is a victim of a tiny spec of history, no more than a pimple, so small the story wouldn't even show up on their screens, so to speak.

Pause.

She is too small to register.

Silence, HALINA staring ahead.

HALINA (*blowing smoke*). Absolutely.

NEVILLE (*watching HALINA*). And there is nothing else that is usable at all?

ANDREW. There is no real story, no.

NEVILLE (*laconic smile*). Maybe we ought to move on to the plus side now.

ANDREW. Of the plus side, the pluses — Halina is a woman. It is generally considered easier for women to land than men, because of the employment situation.

He stops, silence.

NEVILLE. That's it? That's all?

ANDREW. Yes — on a scale from A to G, I would put the chances of a straight application succeeding hovering between F and G.

Slight pause.

ANDREW. This analysis is devastating I know — and it is intended to be.

HALINA. Of course.

HALINA *moves with her heavy cluster of bags towards the window*.

NEVILLE. I think he maybe suggesting there is no alternative.

ANDREW. I am. (*He smiles.*) That is why she was put in touch with me.

NEVILLE (*watching her, sharp*). Halina — you can leave your bags, you don't have to take them everywhere with you.

HALINA. Yes.

HALINA *with her back to them by the window, sunlight and artificial light now mixing in the room*.

have a chance in hell of reaching this stage, but that reason seems to have disappeared into thin air. It's evaporated. It's unrecorded! In fact, now you are here, I really want you to do well, Halina. I do. . . .

HALINA (*dryly, slight smile*). That's good to know.
Blackout.

Scene Two

The wall of the office rolls across with a very large door in the middle of the wall.

PEIRCE's office now fills the stage. The door is oddly large for the scale of the walls. Around and above the door is misted glass looking out on the passages beyond, we can glimpse the mural on the back wall, now looking smudged and diffused through the glass.

There is a small picture on the wall of people on a golden beach mirroring the mural outside, it is the only ornament on the wall.

The stage is very bare, just the desk with papers on it, and three chairs, one of them a very ordinary wooden chair, empty in the middle of the stage.

PEIRCE and BOOTH standing waiting. NEVILLE also in the office, they are looking towards the large open door.

HALINA enters, looking confident almost flamboyant. She stops in the doorway.

HALINA (*surveying PEIRCE*). So you're the one that's going to be seeing me.

PEIRCE. Miss Halina Rodziewizowna.

HALINA. Yes.

PEIRCE. I've pronounced it correctly?

NEVILLE. Yes.

PEIRCE (*looking across the stage at her*). If I may say so, you don't look at all like your photographs.

HALINA. Really. (*She smiles, still in doorway*) I hope that will not be held against me, (*Glancing around*.) nor my choice of clothes.

PEIRCE (*welcoming smile*). I wouldn't have thought so. In this job I have to consume acres of newspaper, make sure I know what's happening out there. (*Indicates the outside*.) And I kept on coming across your picture.

HALINA. So did I. (*She smiles, moving forward*) I quite enjoyed that in fact. Things travel very fast through your media.

She moves to wooden chair.

NEVILLE. This office has changed — it didn't look like this before.

The chair HALINA is sitting on squeaks every time she moves, rasping and rickety.

PEIRCE (*invitingly*). Can we offer you anything Miss Rodziewizowna? There's some tea here, yes, and there's a single biscuit left.

HALINA. No. (*lightly*.) I think I'll wait until I've got into the country, before I start becoming a serious tea drinker.

NEVILLE (*taking the biscuit*). Halina's a very cautious person.

PEIRCE. There is no mystery in what is going to happen — we're simply here to establish the truth. (*Pleasantly*.) Or to be more accurate what I think the truth is — that's all that matters.

HALINA. Good, that could not be clearer. (*Looking at him*.) Your impression of the truth.

PEIRCE (*lightly*). They're as many approaches in this building as there are interviewing officers. (*Moving to the desk*.) My colleague will not be saying anything, he is here merely to take notes.

PEIRCE produces another full packet of biscuits from his desk, he bites into one.

PEIRCE. People have often been up all night before interviews, rehearsing.

HALINA. I promise not to fall asleep.

PEIRCE (*pleasantly*). And because they are nervous, lies can happen, sometimes almost by accident, and then people often seem to get into a spiral of untruths, which is unfortunately

disastrous, if I unpick one false link usually —

HALINA. The whole lot comes tumbling down — of course. (*She moves, rasping, squeak from the chair.*) And is this chair chosen on purpose? When people tense themselves up it squeaks. (*She does it, the chair squeaks.*) An English Lie Detector maybe? (*Slight smile.*) A very good idea.

PEIRCE (*watching her*). Like everything else in this building it's feeling its age. Miss Rodziewiczowna, there is a fact about your case which you are probably unaware of.

NEVILLE. Which is what?

PEIRCE (*calmly*). We have received certain information about you — alternative information, via a phone call to this building.

NEVILLE. You mean somebody informed on her!

PEIRCE. Yes.

HALINA (*blowing smoke from small cigar*). How strange — somebody bothering to give false information about me.

NEVILLE. I hope having mentioned it — you are going to tell us exactly what it consists of, and where it came from?

PEIRCE. The information was anonymous — which we take much less seriously, what this person didn't realise is, we get a torrent of malicious false information, as well as the truth.

NEVILLE. Obviously this must all be withdrawn — I demand on Miss Rodziewiczowna's behalf, these anonymous allegations be erased from the case.

PEIRCE (*ignoring him, to HALINA*). It merely makes this difference — before I was under pressure from those I'm answerable to, to make this interview a formality because I'm all the publicity, and the nature of that publicity. That can no longer be the case.

NEVILLE. No, I must insist you disregard these flagrantly malicious allegations.

HALINA *moving, chair rasping*.

HALINA. The chair's getting excited. Please, I can't make you

forget whatever you've been told — so I'll just have to demonstrate it's not true.

PEIRCE (*looking at papers*). Your preliminary questionnaire — your answers seem very satisfactory, very clear, your education, the sudden halt, not married, no children, your father's loss of power and your time looking after him.

HALINA (*lightly*). 29 years.

PEIRCE. 29 years, yes, a long time. Your interests . . . by the way have you bought any records since you arrived here?

HALINA (*meeting his eyes, smiles*). You mean gramophone records to play on a gramophone?

PEIRCE. Obviously.

HALINA (*stretching her legs out*). I have been listening to the radio like a small child, all channels, it's started to grow on my car . . . No I haven't.

PEIRCE. You've never been into a record shop!

HALINA. I didn't say that, I've wandered into a few.

PEIRCE (*effortlessly, casually*). What have you done since you arrived here, what jobs?

NEVILLE. She hasn't.

HALINA (*cutting him off*). I haven't a job, it's illegal isn't it. I see now you ask an innocent question and then slide one underneath, the one with the kick. (*She smiles.*) That's good.

PEIRCE. You haven't worked in a store selling hi-fi video equipment?

HALINA (*calm smile*). If I'd been offered such a job I might have been tempted (*NEVILLE twitches*) but I wasn't.

I know nothing about hi-fi. (*Casually.*) You've checked of counsel!

PEIRCE (*briskly*). Yes. The stores we contacted, none of them had ever heard of you.

He looks at her.

Miss Rodziewiczowna — I think I want to move straight to

your story, your dramatic story.

HALINA (*smoking small cigar*). Good, I have been waiting for this.

PEIRCE. Because the merit of your application so clearly depends on that. (*Looking down at notes*.) I see you were picked up by the police while speeding . . .

HALINA. No. (*Calm smile*.) You are quite wrong right from the beginning. We were 'picked up' while driving normally late one evening. We were taken to the police station in Karmelicka Street . . . (*The chair squeaks*.) One of the legs of this chair is vibrating . . .

HALINA *continues talking effortlessly as she gets up and changes the chair for the one BOOTH is sitting on.*

There were five of us, we were told there was something wrong with the license of the car. At first we were put in this normal room in the police station. Excuse me (BOOTH *forced to vacate his chair, she takes his*.) Thank you . . . which even had magazines on the table, (*She sits on new chair*.) That's better, we sat there for . . .

PEIRCE. What are the colours of the walls in this room?

HALINA. The walls? A pale green.

PEIRCE. You remember it just like that, you didn't have to think.

HALINA (*leaning back on new chair*). You know for a fact, or you ought to, I was in that police station — so obviously know the colour of the walls, what you want to prove or disprove is what happened there. (*Innocently*.) Isn't it?

NEVILLE (*coolly*). Do you want Miss Rodziewizowna to continue or not?

PEIRCE. Very much.

HALINA (*very casual smoking cigar*). In fact there was a picture of the American movie ET on the walls with its feet sticking out. I hope we can leave the walls now. The youngest of the guards then came in, he said we all had to come down

the passage with him, I thought they must want to take photographs of us, I even looked at myself in the mirror.

PEIRCE. What were the exact words he used, this young guard?

HALINA (*brushing this aside*). I don't remember — some things I remember, some I don't. We found ourselves at the end of the passage, in a large old washroom full of baths, that were unused, dead.

PEIRCE (*incredulous*). Baths?

HALINA. Yes, Baths, you know that you wash in; the taps were rusted up, I remember seeing some spiders at the bottom. Suddenly one of the guards shouted, 'Take off your shoes. Take them off now.' We all did.

PEIRCE. You were barefoot now, by these baths.

HALINA. No, it was *winter*, as you know. I was wearing blue tights. (*She smokes calmly*.) An old more senior police guard came in, he started shrieking at us, we had been found guilty, crimes against the state, they had checked our files, we were the ones they had been searching for, they had proof, at last they'd found us. (*She turns to BOOTH*.) Please be quiet on that chair of yours, if possible.

She looks back at PEIRCE.

I thought they were drunk, this being New Year's Eve.

PEIRCE (*casually*). And you were all standing in this old decaying kitchen?

HALINA. No, the *washroom*. Please *try* to listen. (*She pauses, flicking the ash off her stubby cigar*.) We were taken outside, which was brightly lit, with very high walls, a small pond in the middle, with two large goldfish swimming in it, I remember thinking there's hardly any room for them in the pond. We were told to go over to the far end of the courtyard.

PEIRCE (*sensing an opening*). These fat goldfish in *winter*, Miss Rodziewizowna, this pond in fact was frozen solid of course, wasn't it!

HALINA. NO, there was a pipe running into it. Please remember

Warsaw is often no colder than London. (*Tone changing to firm.*) I will go on, we were lined up against the wall, arranged carefully, we were forbidden to turn round. They stopped shouting, there was a curious silence (*Perfectly matter-of-fact.*) I heard this click behind us, and there was a moment, a very clear moment of realisation, then of panic, almost like a blow punching you in the stomach — they were going to shoot us. We . . .

PEIRCE. One moment Miss Rodziewiczówna. Did you turn round, at this moment?

HALINA (*momentary pause*). I'm trying to remember the exact order, yes, the lights were shining in my eyes.

People started screaming, then somebody dropped their spectacles, there were three men behind us with machine guns, they were yelling at us this abuse, both maniacally and then very deliberately and all this time, there was this song playing on a radio from somewhere, a Polish pop song of that Christmas, a really banal song.

Then suddenly they started whispering to each other, the police, and said they had decided to select only half of us, we —

BOOTH. Could you say that again, I didn't get that.

HALINA (*sweeping this aside*). IF this is a device — it's not a very clever one, get someone who can take shorthand properly next time.

We were led back, into a different room, a long low room, and there.

She gets up, having seemed very casual she shifts gear, now with full authority.

This is the very clever thing they did, their one stroke of genuine imagination, one of the most alarming things I've ever seen, there was this pile of clothes in the corner, other people's clothes, shoes, stockings, spectacles, even false teeth, in these heaps, and all over the floor these buttons staring up at you.

We all thought of course, this must be the group before us,

they had been shot, we really believed it was real then. (*She moves.*) No, don't interrupt.

Four times, *four* times they took us out there, and put us through that, (*Loud.*) until there was *nothing* left inside us, *nothing*, and the final selection had been made. And I was in it, I was one of the chosen, come through this door they said, come through, and we did, we went through — only to find ourselves out in the street, and fire.

Pause.

PEIRCE (*shrilly*). I see.

HALINA (*lightly*). We never got our shoes back either.

The door flies open, the TURKISH WOMAN holding her bags, asking excitedly looking for her interview.

PEIRCE (*immediately*). Not in here, your interview's not in here . . . along the corridor . . . you'll find your officer somewhere else.

She nods and leaves with her bags.

(*To HALINA:*) It must have been an ordeal Miss Rodziewiczówna.

HALINA. It was yes.

PEIRCE (*sharp*). Having to tell me all that.

NEVILLE. Of course it was.

HALINA (*having been wrong-footed, recovering immediately*).

No, not really, it was all right. There's even a certain pleasure in retelling something you've survived. I've told it so much in the last few weeks it just comes out now. (*Looks at him.*) And you listened, in the end.

NEVILLE. I feel now we should —

PEIRCE (*sharp at NEVILLE*). Please, be quiet. (*To HALINA, watching her closely.*) You complained of course about this appalling event.

HALINA. Two days later, the official response was — it never happened. And when I got in touch with the others who went

through it with me, they'd all been let go that morning, they didn't want to talk about any of it, or even hear it mentioned. After my official complaint, I never felt entirely safe again, from the police.

PEIRCE. Not entirely safe.

HALINA. No. That is why I'm here. Before you ask I think the reason it happened was a kind of manic spire from the guards, revenge for bad publicity, or simple terrible boredom. *Pause, PEIRCE watching her.*

PEIRCE. That seems conceivable, yes.

HALINA (to BOOTH). Can I see your notes please, you can have your seat back in a minute. *(As she flicks through BOOTH'S notes.)*

(To PEIRCE :) Something I don't understand if you want to prove I'm lying, you don't have to prove anything, you just tell them that I am.

(Pleasantly, turning to BOOTH, with his notes :) These aren't too good, no, a little imprecise you've missed some detail — I'll correct them later for you.

(Innocently looks up at PEIRCE.) What's next please?

PEIRCE suddenly exits sharply, frustrated movement, BOOTH scurrying behind him.

Round one. Reasonable.

Blackout.

Scene Three

HALINA and WAVENEY alone on stage in PEIRCE'S office, with the large door wide open and the vista of the mural seen through it. Warm mid-afternoon sun, distant music, dance music drifting from the bowels of the building, mingled with the announcements for interviews booming out. WAVENEY stands in the open doorway, back to the audience, staring towards the music.

WAVENEY. Listen to that! Can you imagine anything worse than a Christmas party full of immigration officers? All trying to work out who in the room hasn't been invited. *(She turns smiling.)* I wouldn't like to try to gatcrash that party!

HALINA. Maybe that's why they haven't come back — they are dancing with each other down there.

WAVENEY. They'll be back for more, don't worry! I've lost count of the times I've been stopped out there *(Indicates through door.)* given a number, and told to wait for my interview. If I'm here any longer I'll start wanting to tell an officer my life story.*

HALINA. He doesn't believe me yet Waveney, I can feel it.

WAVENEY. He believes you, you are doing well.

HALINA. How do you know?

WAVENEY. It's being relayed out there, live coverage, another giant screen, people are crowding round to see, betting on the outcome! No, you're doing fine — you're still here aren't you.

HALINA. He's fifty-fifty. Sometimes I think I've got him, and then he gets away from me. There's too little room for error.

WAVENEY. I don't know why I want you so much to get in, but I do you know. Badly.

HALINA. I had noticed.

WAVENEY. There's nothing at all logical about it. *(Sharp smile.)* Maybe I wouldn't mind somebody I know winning something for once. *(She moves.)* So don't let me down.

HALINA. Thank you! *(Looking down at her hands as she smokes.)* I don't want to smoke too much. *(Lightly.)* I want to unnerve him with a dizzy calm. *(She fiddles with plastic bits in her bag.)*

WAVENEY. You will! *(Moving loudly to wall where plaster has come away.)* Look at this — the 'gate-way' to the country is falling to pieces! I don't know why I feel things so extremely today, of all days, vividly.