

# COST OF GENERATIONS

## ACT I

*Late '50s, Northern Montenegro.*

I

*On a clearing near the village, Petar and Nikola (10) are playing ball. Božica (8) sits and watches them.*

BOŽICA: (disturbed) Why can't I play with you?

PETAR: This is not a game for girls, Božica.

BOŽICA: Why not?

NIKOLA: Because it's for boys.

*Božica gets up and heads towards the mountain.*

NIKOLA: Where are you going, Božica?

BOŽICA: To pick strawberries.

PETAR: Bring us some, I'm hungry.

BOŽICA: You didn't let me play with your ball, so I won't bring you any strawberries.

NIKOLA: What if we come with you?

BOŽICA: Pick your own.

*The boys throw the ball and chase after Božica towards the mountain.*

## II

*As they walk through the lush forest, they stop at every corner to pick strawberries and blueberries.*

PETAR: What's that over there?

Petar points with his finger at the cave above them.

BOŽICA: That's the cave of the forest fairy.

PETAR: Why are you so silly, Božica? Fairies don't exist.

BOŽICA: Yes, they do.

NIKOLA: They don't.

BOŽICA: If fairies don't exist, then where do we get the strawberries and blueberries from? Everyone knows that the fairy makes them.

PETAR: Yeah, right.

NIKOLA: Then where do we get them from?

PETAR: From the market.

*The group starts going towards the cave. Petar enters the cave.*

NIKOLA: Petar, come back.

BOŽICA: You'll wake her up.

PETAR: Nikola, come on.

BOŽICA: I think this is a bad idea. We should go back home.

*Nikola enters the cave, leaving Božica alone. The boys stay in the cave for a while, and Božica gets scared that something might have happened to them. She approaches the cave and calls for them.*

BOŽICA: Nikola! Petar!

*The boys don't respond, so Božica decides to go back to the village to seek help.*

### III

*As she walks down the forest, she hears the boys calling her. She runs back to the cave.*

PETAR: (excitedly) Look what we found.

*The boys unwrap a heavily soiled cloth, revealing rusty guns. They pick up the guns and pretend to be soldiers.*

NIKOLA: We can play war. We are soldiers, but we fight on opposite sides. You came to steal my land.

PETAR: No, you came to steal my land and I'm going to beat you.

BOŽICA: I don't like this game.

PETAR: That's because you're a girl.

BOŽICA: No, we should return them to the cave. Someone probably hid them there on purpose.

NIKOLA: You're just scared.

*Nikola aims at a tree, but when he pulls the trigger, it doesn't move. He imitates the sound of gunfire.*

BOŽICA: I don't care, this game is stupid.

*Božica turns around and walks down the forest path. Petar aims at the tree next to Božica, unaware that his gun is working and*

*unprepared for the recoil, he hits Božica who falls. The boys drop their guns and run towards Božica.*

## **ACT II**

*40 years later, same place.*

### **I**

*Deep forest, morning. Jakov(14) and Bogdan(12) are sitting on the grass and drinking water from plastic bottles, while Đorđe (16) and Luka (16) squat, as if they are looking for something in the grass.*

BOGDAN: Do you remember when we first came here?

JAKOV: I honestly don't.

BOGDAN: How can you not remember!? I know that was the first time I saw it. Wild rabbit.

JAKOV: Maybe you.

LUKA: Do you two have something smart to do?

BOGDAN: We're resting for a while, let us go.

ĐORĐE: You are really tired.

BOGDAN: Well, I didn't want to come here.

LUKA: So why did you go for a walk with us?

BOGDAN: I'm not talking about that. I am talking about the village at all.

JAKOV: So what... would you bleat in that smog down in the city?

BOGDAN: Well, that's good, except that I'm a little bored these few days.

ĐORĐE: Come on, join us, pick strawberries or find somewhere else blueberries.

BOGDAN: We didn't find a single one, now there are already three hours. There used to be tons of them here. And strawberry and blueberry.

*Luka gets up from a crouching position, stretches and sits on the grass.*

LUKA: You are right about that. Now we really can't find even the most ordinary small, green strawberry. About blueberries, I don't even want to talk.

BOGDAN: That's what I'm telling you.

*Small drops of rain are starting to fall on them.*

DORĐE: Is this rain?

JAKOV: Yes, I hop it won't rain now.

LUKA: My God, I don't really know.

*A loud crash of thunder is heard, causing Bogdan to jump on the spot.*

BOGDAN: I don't like this.

LUKA: Just thunder, it's not that scary.

BOGDAN: It's getting cold.

DORĐE: Have any of you watched the forecast these days?

BOGDAN: No. How are we going to watch when there is no signal for days and my phone is of no use to me.

*At that moment, the rain is getting stronger, and after that you can hear chill-inducing thunder.*

LUKA: Guys, what are we going to do now? Shall we run?

BOGDAN: Come on.

JAKOV: Don't joke, people. Let's run over there to the old one hut that we walked last year.

ĐORĐE: That old hunting society?

JAKOV: Yes. That one.

ĐORĐE: Is it locked?

JAKOV: I don't know. Come on, until Poseidon bathes us.

BOGDAN: Poseidon is the God of the sea.

LUKA: Don't make fun! Let's get out of here!

They all run together.

## II

*The hut, a few minutes after the rain started. The rain is getting heavier and heavier. In the hut there are old things and shelves that are mostly empty. The only thing left are old papers that no one knows what they are for. In the corner of the hut is a stove, and next to it a couple of logs. They enter the hut Luka, Jakov, Đorđe and Bogdan.*

ĐORĐE: It's good, it's not locked.

BOGDAN: I see, we'll have to spend the night here.

JAKOV: How I got wet. Are there any hunting clothes that I could change with mine?

LUKA: Don't be silly, Jacob.

JAKOV: Well, I wouldn't mind.

ĐORĐE: People! Here are some stoves, and there are also wood! Let's warm it up at least that way.

BOGDAN: My God, that's smart.

*Everyone approaches the stove into which they put the wood, they found next to it.*

LUKA: How are we going to light them?

DORDE: But they are wet anyway.

LUKA: At least let's try. Let's see if there are any matches or a lighter in these drawers.

JAKOV: Didn't you start smoking a few months ago, Luka?

LUKA: No, brother! Where did you get it!?

JAKOV: I'm just asking.

LUKA: Come and see if there is anything here.

*Everyone starts searching the wooden drawers and shelves around the hut which are mostly empty. Bogdan finds one large rough paper in one of the drawers.*

BOGDAN: Watch this!

DORDE: What is that?

BOGDAN: I don't know, it looks interesting.

JAKOV: Throw it away, Bogdan, who knows what it is.

LUKA: Throw it in the furnace, it will be used to light the fire.

*At that moment, Bogdan opens an old, dusty paper that opens sticky. After he opens it, he sees some markings on it as if it were a map.*

BOGDAN: Alas! This is a map.

LUKA: Let me see!

*Everyone runs up and surrounds Bogdan, looking at what he has found.*

JAKOV: What is this?

BOGDAN: It looks like a map.

LUKA: Are you serious, I thought it was movie.

DORĐE: Guys, I know what is this.

JAKOV: How?

*Dorđe points to a part of the map.*

DORĐE: I think this is the river that dad told us about.

JAKOV: Is that the part of the land that Petar sold!?

LUKA: Don't call him Peter! He is your father.

JAKOV: I'll call him as I want. You call him as you want.

BOGDAN: People! Is that the river that dad told us about not to go there. In the cave next to it, lives a witch.

JAKOV: That's why he sold that land.

DORĐE: Who did he sell it to?

JAKOV: I don't know, he only mentioned that he got a lot of money for what he did.

BOGDAN: Let's go there to find a witch.

LUKA: What a witch, there is no such thing as a witch. And besides that, it's storming outside.

JAKOV: But the downpour always passes quickly.

LUKA: And maybe it will start again.

BOGDAN: No! Let's find a witch!

LUKA: Oh, come on. But we have to be quick. I don't want parents to worry about us. Besides, I didn't come here to hunt witches.

JAKOV: As you say.



III

*Wet forest, the storm stopped, and the clouds cleared. Luka, George, Bogdan and Jakov are going in the line, while Luka is the first in line looking at the map. Loud, eerie, inarticulate, high-pitched sounds are heard in the depths of the forest, as if someone or something is screaming. The four of them stop.*

LUKA: What was this sound?

JAKOV: I don't like this.

BOGDAN: Me neither.

ĐORĐE: People, don't be afraid. It's just a bird.

LUKA: It probably is.

JAKOV: When was the last time you saw a bird here?

BOGDAN: I would like us to go back.

LUKA: Don't joke Bogdan! It was you who that we go to look for the witch. You're not going to give up now, are you!?

BOGDAN: I won't!

LUKA: Well, fine. I like that about you.

ĐORĐE: Luka.

LUKA: Huh?

ĐORĐE: And now? Are we going straight or to left?

LUKA: Both ways are ending at the bridge on the river.

ĐORĐE: So where are we going?

LUKA: Maybe it's better to the left because this sound was heard straight down. What do you think?

BOGDAN: Yes.

JAKOV: Yes, as far as I'm concerned.

LUKA: So let's go there.

*They all go along the path to the left.*

IV

*It's dusk. Luka, Đorđe, Bogdan and Jakov are surrounded by naked, rotten trees, which is why they decide to stop and take a break.*

JAKOV: Didn't Petar say that nature flourishes in this part, and it's unlike anything we have never ever seen before.

LUKA: Didn't dad say that?

JAKOV: Okay, okay... dad.

ĐORĐE: Yes, maybe 20 years ago.

JAKOV: Maybe.

BOGDAN: Do you hear anything over there?

*Everyone falls silent to concentrate and try to listen to it. Only male voices are heard, calling out each other.*

BOGDAN: Well, those are people.

LUKA: Well, what did I tell you? There is no witch.

BOGDAN: Shall we go back then?

ĐORĐE: Not now, when we have come this far.

JAKOV: Let's see what's happening there.

LUKA: Come on.

*All four go straight, in the direction of the sounds they hear. There is less and less trees around them.*

JAKOV: Do you hear any river?

ĐORĐE: I don't.

LUKA: Me neither.

BOGDAN: No, me neither.

JAKOV: I don't know about you, but I'm really thirsty from this long trip. I can't wait to drink some water.

DORĐE: Me too.

LUKA: Me too.

BOGDAN: Me too.

*They continue their journey through the bare trees. They come out in bulk field, where they see huge felled trees lying on the ground. In front of them are blue pipes through which water flows. Big dump trucks are passing by across the field with trees they are dragging to the machines that process them. Among all those machines there have people who communicate loudly.*

JAKOV: What is this?

DORĐE: I don't know, I didn't expect this.

LUKA: I am not going to drink water here.

BOGDAN: Do they know where the witch is.

LUKA: Don't you see that they are processing wood? They might even give us a ride home. It's not as scary as it seemed.

### **ACT III**

#### **MUMA PADURII**

*An old woman, with long graying hair, sits outside of a katun, in front of a flickering, dying campfire, covered by threadbare blanket. Behind her, on a screen, shadow puppets play out story that she is narrating. Sometimes she immitates voices.*

STORYTELLER:

The mountain is bare now.

I watch, as each year, rains descend upon it, easily flushing soil away, without roots to keep it safe. The stone of which it is formed is uncovered, like skeleton stripped of the flesh. As days roll on it is shot through with more and more gray, and what isn't gray, is a boring and dead, unfertile brown dust. Like exhausted housewife's hair, that is how it looks now.

There used to be forest there, once. Pines and firs, mostly, but hazels and wild cherries too. The grass grew riotous and wild, and shrubs as far as you could see, and you could pick fat wild strawberries and blueberries to your heart's content. It was not all green, for each year it proudly decked itself out in poppies and cornflowers and anemones, as decorated as dancer at carnival.

People lived off its fruits and produce, and it was generous with lumber too, never unwilling to let an old tree fall villager's axe. There were many wild beehives, packed tight with honey, and you could find many a rabbit and deer and wild duck, for those who prefer something meatier. Yet curiously predators were kept away from the hunters, nary a hair or breath to be seen of the wolf.

There was a woman there, too, or something that often wore woman's shape. In spring garlands of wildflowers would grow upon her flesh, and in winter she would be covered by crystal lattice. In summer she would be deep emerald green, and in autumn she would turn brown and red. The ancient maiden lived in a grotto by the river, and her long, long hair stretched all way down to the roots of the mountain. Fox and rabbit sat upon her lap, and she would show a way through to the lost traveler, and send wind to caress children's faces.

Now the mountain is bare, its fruits gone, its beasts hunted down. There is an awful smell coming off it, sickly sweet and dry, like ancient aftertaste of over-ripe fruit and ashes. People are often hungry.

But there is something hungrier yet that walks the mountain.

The mountain gathers stormclouds to warm itself, like I do with this old rag. Coal poisoned darkness rests heavy round it, ever ready to unleash its rage upon unwary travellers, trap them with no tree crown to provide shelter. There are holes and abandoned barrows to fall into, and landslides and rock avalanches are common.

But it likes nothing more than taking village's children.

A boy found crushed beneath a boulder, pounded into a puddle already half dry.

A girl found fallen and with her neck twisted at 180 degrees, like much abused and thrown away doll.

Twins, that tripped and rolled down, found sliced open by sharp rocks, having bled out over hours.

The news always spread fast through, and neighbors fight over them as magpies fight over shiny bottlecaps, tearing each other apart for privilege of being one to darken household's doorstep for- "That trash cut line before me at the market, I want to watch their faces when they hear."

Gravekeepers hold their own small, private celebrations, thanking all the saints for benevolence, for industry is not only holding out, but really booming these days, celebrating with shouts of "More beer, and put it all on my tab!"

Fathers rage and worry and weep, not for the sake of the children, but because they have to cut down on the monthly budget for cigars and rakia in order to afford coffin, and of course "How dare that rascal let itself get killed, did he not think about anything? Ai ai, now my land will go to that Mrdak and his sons!"

Brothers and sisters roll eyes and struggle to stay calm during funeral, for "Mum, dad, now that we have gotten rid of them, can I have their room, pretty please with cherry on the top, please please please?"

Mothers perform hysterics all day long, snivelling and sobbing, and when they enter sacred privacy of their homes they tear off the mourning gear, breathe fully and freely for the first time in many years, and proclaim "God is real, and He has granted me freedom!"

Children go up the mountain, because it is forbidden, and thus could not possibly be more enticing. They dare each other to go up, name-calling those who refuse, making the mockery out of lives lost. Children used to go up the mountain before too,, when it was bountiful and colorful. It gave them fruits and kept bears away.

And they ripped it's flowers and burned it's bushes. They smashed it's branches with their hands and carved trees with

knives until they bled pitch. They caught butterflies and laughed ripping their wings, held young bunnies in their hands and bludgeoned them with rocks.

They did not do this out of greed, as their parents later did—cutting down more and more of so called useless trees, to sell excess lumber, shooting bears and wolves to have big fur carpet to brag about, burning down woods so theyd have more mushrooms to take to market.

No, they did it because they were too small, and their hands short and soft, to be able to hurt anything else, and they were each too similar, in language and religion and wealth and race, to bully each other. It made them feel so good about hemselves , so joyous, so filled with wild need for destruction, which swept through them all like a plague.

(If you want ever to find true, pure evil of humanity, look into a child's face. And if you ever meet tyrant, or butcher soldier, or any other sort of evil thing, know, that even if they are grey and bent, their eyes will be innocent eyes of a child. )

And these children never grew up. So when toads in human shape, the self-proclaimed princes of provinces, came offering to tame the river and make village rich, if they agreed to work from dawn to midnight, they agreed.

And when they were gone, and second ones came, promising that they will make village rich by opening up mountain and plundering it's treasures, and then export them all through known world, as far as to Foča, if only villagers would go down into the dark to bring out black lumps and fill their lungs with dust.

And when they were gone, third came, and told them, look around thee, at all this endless potential that remains completely neglected, when it could propell you to prosperity unparalleled, if only they would go into the woods with old dull saws and carry lumber on their own aching backs.

And so they did fourth time, and seventh, and again and again...

And again and again, they turned their gaze away, as they held down the ancient forest maiden, so that toads could drive long iron nails in her hands and feet.

As she was drained of her life sustaining blood, drop by drop, and drove trucks of it to the toads' palaces. As her hair was

ripped out, and they covered it in bleach and chemicals so toads could sell it as wigs to noblewomen of province.

As her stomach and womb were ripped open, as when you are gutting fish, and with gloves they handled intestines to the toads to feast upon. And when mountain turned bare and dry, they cursed her for not doing her duty, and keeping it flourishing.

There is something walking the mountain, they say.

An old, old hag, older than the first language spoken in the country, older than foundations of eldest city, older than churches they worship into now, older than two legged things infesting her.

She walks the mountain with her broken legs, finding way with her plucked out eyes, her back so bent it is almost horizontal. Her skin all flayed, her head cracked and bald, eternally bleeding black blood. The massacred dryad of our home, the wrecked and cannibalized zagorkinja, the betrayed muma padurii.

She weeps and she screams and she waits. For she knows that, while time and the rain will grind her too into the dust, it is not for a long time, by human reckoning. She will endure, as she endured wars and droughts and age when ice covered the land. And she knows too, that she doesn't need humans, they need her. And she knows that in the time, green things will grow upon her again, and rabbits and foxes will come back.

But it will take time, even for her. Not until, from summit to foundation, she has been washed clean in that innocent, evil blood. And perhaps someday, she will let children come back too, if they prove they know how to grow up.