

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Nikolina

by Van Badham

EXTRACT

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This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia
email admin@ozscript.org
www.ozscript.org
ph +61 3 6223 4675
fax +61 3 6223 4678

Nikolina

Characters:

(1999)

Nikolina Miljevic: a Croatian-born Serbian refugee, now a café waitress in the UK, 22

Aleks Miljevic: Nikolina's brother, once a research engineer in Belgrade, now a meatpacker at Castle Markets, Sheffield, 28

Francis Keane: an English Literature student at the University of Sheffield, 21

Dale Healy: a Business student at the University of Sheffield, 22

Ruth James: a Law student at the University of Sheffield, 23

(1995)

Gordana Maslic (played by Ruth): From Belgrade, Aleks' fiancée, 23

The Soldier (played by Dale): In a Croatian militia, 17

Soldier 2 (played by Francis): In a Croatian militia, 22

Nikolina Miljevic: 18

Aleks Miljevic: 24

NOTE: *Part of this play takes place around the borderland of the former Serbian republic of Krajina, prior to and during the commencement of Operation Storm in 1995. To denote regionality, the Serbian characters (Aleks, Gordana and Nikolina) should be played with Northern English accents, and the Soldiers with Southern accents. Aleks and Nikolina only speak with Serbian accents when they are speaking to the characters that have English as a first language. Ruth, Dale and Francis are all Southerners.*

In loving memory of my cousin, Enn Gaudzinski, 1981-2004.

Prologue

Nikolina, shaking with cold, fucked up, filthy, clearly traumatised and recently beaten, sits on the ground in an abandoned building. She's only wearing her underwear. There are scratches on her thighs, blood on her underpants. Something horrible has happened - so horrible it has reduced her to an animalistic state.

A Soldier enters. Nikolina is clearly terrified of him. He wears a greatcoat and a cap - it has clearly been snowing outside. A rifle is slung over his shoulder.

SOLDIER: Hey -

He moves closer to her. His voice is gentle.

SOLDIER: Hey, it's okay. I'm not going to hurt you. I'm not. I'm your friend.

Nikolina is terrified.

SOLDIER: We have blankets in there - it's warmer -

Nikolina is terrified.

SOLDIER: You'll freeze to death - it's snowing like the fear of God outside.

Pause

SOLDIER: - We've got food.

Pause.

SOLDIER: Come / on...

A second soldier enters the room.

SOLDIER2: / What's wrong?

SOLDIER: She's frightened.

SOLDIER2: Frightened? Of us? *(Moving closer to her, voice gentle)* Heyyy...!

SOLDIER: Come into the next room.

SOLDIER2: We've got food.

SOLDIER: I told her that.

SOLDIER2: You shouldn't be frightened of us.

SOLDIER: I'm probably younger than you are.

SOLDIER2: He should be more frightened of you.

SOLDIER: We'll all freeze in here...!

SOLDIER2: Come next door.

SOLDIER: Your brother's in there.

NIKOLINA: M-my - !

SOLDIER2: *(to Soldier)* I told you.

NIKOLINA: Aleks! ALEKS!

Soldier2 slaps Nikolina's head with the butt of his rifle. She falls, stone-heavy and unconscious to the ground.

The Soldier freezes. Soldier2 looks at Nikolina's unconscious body. He reaches for her. The Soldier is still frozen.

SOLDIER2: *(tugging at her body)* Come on, help me with this.

The Soldier doesn't move.

SOLDIER2: Marko - !

The Soldier looks up at him. Soldier2 slings Nikolina over his shoulders.

SOLDIER2: You're a lazy shit.

Soldier2 walks off, whistling a folk tune.

The Soldier stands, unsure of his place in the world. He removes his cap, shoves it in his pocket. He's just a boy.

Five years pass. An abandoned room becomes a Sheffield café. Dale inhabits the body of Marko, the boy soldier, in a different space and time.

Scene 1

1999.

The Peasants (a café).

Dale removes a velvet ring-box from the pocket of his greatcoat, and contemplates it. A bell sounds when Francis bounds through the café door. Francis peels himself out of his (soldier's) coat, while Dale stares at the box. Francis grows amused.

FRANCIS: Aren't you hot?

DALE: What?

FRANCIS: It'd have to be a hundred degrees in here. Hello?

DALE: Sorry.

Dale places the box on the table Francis has claimed, and removes his coat at the rack.

FRANCIS: This for me? Dale!

DALE: You realise everyone you know thinks you're gay.

FRANCIS: You realise everyone you know can't spell "gay".

DALE: - It's outrageous you get so much sex, man.

FRANCIS: Stop sneaking into my room at night then.

DALE: Tart.

FRANCIS: *(of the ring)* This is nice.

DALE: You think?

FRANCIS: Too nice. Who's it for?

DALE: Who do you think?

FRANCIS: That's a diamond -

DALE: And platinum mounting. It's top quality.

FRANCIS: Did your mother give you this?

DALE: It's antique. I bought it.

FRANCIS: You what?!

DALE: What does love mean to you?

FRANCIS: What happened to my old friend Dale – what happened to Arnie films and ladies' wrestling? *(a beat)* I've spent all day in the library and I can hardly spell my own name - !

DALE: This is really important to me.

Nikolina, four years older and a café waitress, appears.

FRANCIS: What provoked this?

DALE: Francis - *(indicating the waitress)*

FRANCIS: The Mute Muse! Will I be blessed to hear an utterance from your sweet lips today?

Nikolina, clearly having a bad day, pulls out a pad and a pen.

FRANCIS: No tender words of greeting for me, Muse?

DALE: You're acting like an idiot, man.

Nikolina snorts.

FRANCIS: Did you know, Dale - that Aesop's master, Xanthus -

DALE: - come on...! -

FRANCIS: - once asked Aesop to prepare a banquet for some guests / with the best ingredients he could find. Aesop served the guests a meal in which everything - soup to dessert - was made of tongue /

DALE: / You can be such a pretentious / shit at times.

/ Nikolina taps impatiently on her notepad.

FRANCIS: / since the tongue is the organ of truth, reason, society and all things precious!

Nikolina looks at Dale.

DALE: Just a white coffee, thanks.

FRANCIS: Do you have a tongue, madam?

Nikolina leans in close to Francis in a deeply seductive manner and sticks out her tongue like a pissed-off child. She is NOT interested.

FRANCIS: Then would you mind telling me which varieties of tea I may order?

Nikolina smiles, plucks the menu from the table and slaps it in front of Francis.

DALE: Get him an Earl Grey.

Nikolina flounces off.

FRANCIS: You're spoiling my only pleasure in life.

DALE: It's like you only come here to give that girl a hard time.

FRANCIS: *(jovial)* I haven't heard her *speak a single word*.

DALE: - Because she thinks you're a prick - !

FRANCIS: I can't tell you what love means to me - but love's colour is the strawberry pink of that gorgeous woman's tongue.

DALE: I'm gonna ask her tonight.

FRANCIS: Dale...

DALE: I love her, man.

FRANCIS: You're twenty-two years old...!

DALE: I've done everything I've wanted to do -

FRANCIS: You haven't graduated, or traveled, or / held a job -

DALE: / With girls! Everything with girls.

FRANCIS: That's you.

DALE: And?

Pause.

DALE: And?!

FRANCIS: You want to get *married*.

DALE: You think she'll say no.

FRANCIS: Maybe she's -

DALE: - WHAT?

FRANCIS: You're serious?

DALE: I've got to TALK to somebody. Don't know why I picked you.

FRANCIS: So you like her – love – whatever –