

STORIES IN THE DARK
DEBRA OSWALD



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Characters

Anna

Tomas

All the other roles can be performed by an ensemble of six or more actors:

Miller

Miller's Wife

Boy

Nasty King

Princess

Ferryman

Ogre's Grandmother

Ogre

Man in Jacket

Sardine Man

Cheerful Man

Gus's Wife

Lazy Gus

Mrs Brown

Fisherman

Farmer Jones

Horse

Woman Neighbour

Station Guard

Doctor

King

Serge

Peter

Musician 1

Musician 2

Blackmarket Woman

Woman in Coat

Villagers

Dragon

Ivan

Katerina/She-wolf

Anoushka

Hunter

Hunter's Wife

Neighbour 1

Neighbour 2

Nick

Potato-Head Boy

Various men and women in queues, city streets, townspeople, party guests

Setting

City streets and a derelict house in a war-torn city, such as Sarajevo.

ACT ONE

Scene One

Night. A once-grand city house, battered by mortar shells. There are a few bits of furniture half buried under rubble.

A sixteen-year-old girl, ANNA, enters and switches on the unbroken bulbs on the ornate light fitting. She drags in a car battery and fetches plastic bags which she dumps onto the floor.

A boy lurches up from behind a pile of junk—TOMAS. He's disoriented, terrified, but full of bravado. His sudden appearance makes ANNA yell out with fright, ready to defend herself.

Anna What are you doing? Get out!

When she sees it's just a kid, she relaxes a little.

You shouldn't skulk around like that!

TOMAS grabs a hunk of wood as a weapon.

Tomas Don't come near me!

Anna Whoa... I'm not going anywhere near you.

TOMAS lowers the weapon.

Tomas Who are you? Was I asleep? Must've fallen asleep.

Anna Yeah, well, whatever. Get out.

Tomas Is this your house?

Anna No.

Tomas You can't tell me to get out if it's not your house.

Anna Yeah? Is that what you reckon, you little insect?

She grabs a broken chair.

Get out now or I'll wrap this round your stupid head.

TOMAS gets ready to defend himself with the hunk of wood.

Tomas I'll fight you.

ANNA snorts a laugh and drops the chair.

Anna Oh, I'm too tired. Go back to where you came from.

TOMAS doesn't answer. ANNA scrutinises him.

Ah, you're a country bumpkin, I bet. A farm boy.

TOMAS shrugs.

You and your family dig potatoes and push goats around?

Tomas Well, on our farm, we've got— [pigs and fruit trees]

Anna Yeah, whatever. You're in the city now, potato-brain. And the point is, this is my spot, so you can't stay here.

Tomas I don't want to stay here anyway.

Anna Excellent. You'd better get going.

Tomas [*peering out the window*] Is it night already?

Anna Hey, bring any food with you from the farm? A cabbage? A few carrots?

TOMAS shakes his head. ANNA casts a disdainful eye over him—that'd be right.

She rummages through the plastic bags to find various items.

She untangles a string of party lights and hooks them up to the car battery.

Tomas What's that for?

Anna Word is the power's getting cut off tonight. I'm going to be ready.

Tomas That's dumb. They're not even proper lights.

Anna These little guys suck up less power. So the battery'll last longer.

Tomas But they'll fix the electricity.

Anna You understand nothing, cabbage-head. In this city, we've been putting up with crap for months now. A thousand different kinds of crap. And I bet we don't even rate thirty seconds on the world news anymore. I bet—

ANNA realises she's gone into a rave and confused TOMAS.

Look, the militia—the arseholes over there shooting at us—they cut off the power and water when it suits them.

Tomas You stole that car battery and the party lights.

Anna [*laughing*] Do you think anyone's planning a party tonight?

A mortar exploding in a neighbouring street makes TOMAS jump with fright.

Oh, must be the party fireworks.

Tomas That was a shell. A mortar.

Anna The kid's a genius.

TOMAS peers anxiously out the window.

How old are you?

Tomas Almost thirteen.

Anna Twelve.

Tomas How old are you?

Anna A hundred and five.

Tomas I'm not stupid. You can't talk to me like I'm stupid.

TOMAS goes to leave.

Anna Really? Where are you off to now?

Tomas Wherever you're supposed to go until they find your parents.

Anna Listen, carrot-boy, don't go out unless you know exactly where you're going.

Tomas I'm not a carrot-boy. I have a name—Tomas. And I'm going.

Anna There's a curfew for a reason. In the day, there are snipers, stray mortars, but at night, it's way uglier. At night, either side could shoot you.

Tomas I can look after myself.

TOMAS has been selecting the best weapon for himself from the piles of rubble.

ANNA watches him, then laughs.

Anna Boys. Stupid boys. You won't keep that head on your shoulders for very long.

Another explosion outside makes TOMAS tremble.

Tomas Soldiers bashed in our door in the middle of the night, shouting, said we had ten minutes to pack our stuff.

Anna I bet, in the end, they only gave you two minutes.

Tomas They made everyone get on trucks but we all ended up on different ones. When the truck stopped in another town, I snuck out, tried to find someone from my family but it was too dark.