

AFTER THE DISSOLTUION

By Martha Patterson

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:

I wrote this play while considering the effect the dissolution of the Soviet Union had on couples from different backgrounds and with different political points of view: it was not a completely happy dissolution for some.

I also wanted to write about a marriage that dissolves before our own eyes; however, the lead-up to that has been happening for a while. The wife in this couple is influenced by American television; the husband is selfish and doesn't understand her frustration.

I like to think I'm influenced by Chekhov and other modern classical writers I had to read in college, but have found in recent years that brevity works better than long speeches in my plays.

The play was first produced by The Belrusian Dream Theatre at Out of Balanz, Copenhagen, Denmark, March 2014. The second production was by the Image Theater's "FemNoire" series at the Whistler House Museum, Lowell, Mass., dir. Jerry Bisantz, March 2014. (Spacing is playwright's own.)

AFTER THE DISSOLUTION

A Short Play About Belarusians

CAST OF CHARACTERS

NATASHA 38, Belarusian, a tired housewife wearing a long shift and an apron.

SERGEI 39, her bored husband who works selling air conditioners. He has a beard.

SCENE: Their modest kitchen in Belarus

TIME: The present

AT RISE: NATASHA is cutting meat on a cutting board. On the table at which SERGEI sits there is an apple, a knife, and a bottle of vodka with a glass beside it.

NATASHA

President Lukoshenko spoke on television today.

SERGEI

And why should I care?

NATASHA

You used to care. Life is better today. We can afford meat.

SERGEI

You used to care about how you looked. Now mascara runs down your face when you bring me my lunch at work.

NATASHA

Borshcht, white cheese. Just what you love.

SERGEI

But not the running mascara.

NATASHA

A very handsome man at the market sold me this beef today.

SERGEI

(Laughs.)

A mere grocer?

NATASHA

(Chopping the meat.)

Anyway, he was good-looking.

SERGEI

Are you saying that to get me to straighten up?

NATASHA

I have a game to play with you tonight.

SERGEI

A game?

NATASHA

It's called, "Truth or Consequences." An American game I heard about.

SERGEI

And what "truth" is it you want to know?

NATASHA

Just this. Have you ever, since we married, been attracted to another woman?

SERGEI

Another girl?

NATASHA

Woman.

SERGEI

No.

NATASHA

I don't believe you.

SERGEI

And why not?

NATASHA

Because I found a book in your underwear drawer. A paperback. On physics. It's inscribed, "With love from Anastasia, 2012."

SERGEI

What were you doing searching my underwear drawer?

NATASHA

Putting your things away after doing laundry, as I always do. Tell me about her.

SERGEI

About who?

NATASHA

Anastasia.

SERGEI

A shopgirl. I used to buy my ties where she worked. She had a thing for me and I let her butter me up. But there was nothing in it.

NATASHA

Then why did you save the book?

SERGEI

(Laughs.)

Because I need to know more about physics.

NATASHA

You're a simpleton, then. I'll bet you never read the book.

SERGEI

If I didn't read it, why are you upset?

NATASHA

Because you kept it.

SERGEI

All right. Truth or Consequences. Did you ever let another man fondle you before I did?

NATASHA

None of your business.

SERGEI

“Truth or Consequences.”

NATASHA

I was a virgin when we married; that’s all you need to know.

SERGEI

Hmph.

NATASHA

And – Truth or Consequences – do you still love me?

SERGEI

Hmph.

NATASHA

So my mascara runs. I don’t care much what I look like now. When you took the job selling air conditioners I thought one day we’d be rich.

SERGEI

Two people living on one income. You could have worked.

NATASHA

We wanted children.

SERGEI

Where are they then? I see no children.

NATASHA

We could get tested at the hospital. To see why not.

SERGEI

There’s nothing wrong with me.

NATASHA

You’re saying there is with me?

SERGEI

What would we do with children, anyway? I'm 39, you're 38. Some people are grandparents at our ages.

NATASHA

Who, I'd like to know?

SERGEI

You should take better care of your appearance. At work when you arrive they all say, "Ah, it's Sergei's old lady."

NATASHA

That's just a fond expression. At least it is in America.

SERGEI

You're too enamored of America. Because of those television shows you watch. And you're jealous because some young girl gave me a book.

NATASHA

Truth or Consequences. Are you glad our country is independent? Didn't you love being a part of the Soviet Union? Your parents were Russian.

SERGEI

Hmph.

NATASHA

But mine are Polish.

SERGEI

I'm glad things changed. I make more money now.

NATASHA

(Lighting a cigarette.)

Tell me, Sergei, would you like me better if I smoked all the time and teased my hair and wore short dresses?

SERGEI

What would you want to be that sort of woman for?

NATASHA

I have a feeling –

SERGEI

You have a feeling that what?

NATASHA

(Putting out the cigarette.)

That you'd prefer someone like that. Is that what Anastasia is like?

SERGEI

Truth or Consequences. Would you like it if I shaved my beard and wore sunglasses and were a movie star?

NATASHA

Don't say such silly things.

SERGEI

It's you who are being silly.

NATASHA

Are you having an affair with Anastasia? Because you don't come home until ten o'clock, most nights.

SERGEI

I kissed her once.

NATASHA

(Tears run from her eyes.)

I knew it. You no longer love me.

SERGEI

And what if I don't? We shall grow old, you and I, in our misery, and then we shall die, and that will be the end of that.

NATASHA

Is that all you have to say?

SERGEI

Is that all you have to complain about?

NATASHA

(Crying.)
You're cruel.

SERGEI

Face facts. We have everything we want now here, in Belarus. And yet we're not happy.
We
want more.

NATASHA

I want you to love me.

SERGEI

Then – I'll tell you I can't. When our land became Belarus I wanted my complete
freedom. I
didn't want to be married anymore.

NATASHA

(Sobs.)
Sergei!

SERGEI

I wanted to be with young women, not like you, not tired and cooking for me
all the time, but instead dressing up to please me and going to the theatre with me.

NATASHA

I don't please you with my cooking?

SERGEI

You're no maiden any longer. You've let yourself get old.

NATASHA

Is that all you feel for me?

SERGEI

I'm sorry. I'll tell you the truth. I've leased an apartment a half a mile from here. I'll
move into it
tomorrow. We'll be separated, then divorced.

NATASHA

Ohhhh!

SERGEI

You see? You wanted Belarus in all its glory, and we're no longer happy partners. I want more.

You should want more, too.

NATASHA

(Handing him an apple and a knife.)

Take this apple and peel it. And know that you're peeling away my heart. Eat it. It will be good

for you. You can remember how your wife once loved you and took care of you. But how she no

longer will. Apples are sweet, like me. Know that it's the last sweet apple you'll ever taste.

SERGEI

Couldn't you have worked? Or had a child?

NATASHA

(Crying.)

You're an ungrateful jackass! And tomorrow I'll be free of you. I miss my Soviet Union!

SERGEI

Thank you so much.

NATASHA

My last gift to you. The apple. Now I'm going to bed.

(Exits, slamming door behind her.)

SERGEI

(Pours himself a glass of vodka from the table and laughs.)

Tonight – I sleep alone.

THE END

AUTHOR'S BIO: *Martha Patterson is a playwright, essayist, poet, and fiction author. Her plays have been produced in twenty states and eight countries. Her writing has been published by Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, Smith & Kraus, Pioneer Drama Service, the Sheepshead Review, the Afro-Hispanic Review, Silver Birch Press, In Case of Emergency Press, Denfenestration.net, Syndrome Magazine, and the Pointed Circle Journal. She has two degrees in Theatre, from Mount Holyoke College and Emerson College. She lives in Boston, Mass., the USA.*