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# Refugees. An investigation – or polish zombie

## EXCERPTS

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### MAIN CHARACTERS:

- MARSHAL
- PROSPECT
- SOLDIER
- JEW
- PROKOP
- ANIELA
- SKROBKOVA

**AND:** BRIDE, SAINT WITH A DOG'S HEAD, POPE, ICON, DUCHESS TATIANA, COMRADE, ETHNOLOGIST, PERSON WITHOUT E, BARBARA NIECHCIC, CLERK, VOICES.

### PROLOGUE

Dark times have come.

World War I has ended, but the peace treaty did not bring peace.

The czarist empire fell. The Republic of Poland was reborn.

The exiled, called bezhency, are returning to the eastern frontiers of Poland from the hinterlands of Russia and Asia only to find burnt houses, trenches full of dead soldiers, fields covered with animal carcasses, hunger, homelessness and lawlessness.

From the ruins of the past a new civilization is slowly coming to life...

### SCENE ONE

*Somewhere in Poland. Ghostly emptiness. Here and there the fragments of destroyed cannons and chimney stumps of burnt houses are sticking from the ground. A hangman is swaying in the wind. Crows are cawing, wolves are howling, and from time to time the squeaking of wooden farm carts can be heard.*

MARSHAL: Do I look like if I...? These days everyone is on the move. It's easy to blend in. Crowds of people are coming from the east. The exiled, prisoners of war, soldiers. This is a doctor's uniform. He had a soft spot for orders. It's a bit spotted with blood..., but with the naked eye you can't see that it used to be his uniform. My blood is red too. It fits like a glove. Many people wear uniforms. Uniforms of four different armies, if you count in the Polish one, which is currently being formed. Or even five, including the red Bolshevik vermin. And then there are railroad men uniforms, police uniforms... However, the German military police are not here anymore, the czarist Okhrana has perished, and the Polish police force is in its infancy. You'd have to be stupid not to take this opportunity! I was in a hospital since the beginning of the war, that is from 1914. Now it's 1919, so that's... four years, because I escaped in early November last year... Soon after that the independence of Poland was declared... You could say we both regained our independence...

At first I thought I should become a doctor, as I wear a doctor's uniform, but after what I've been through, I feel such a disgust with medicine, that I'd rather be a pig... Join the police, I mean...

Well, duty is a cruel master, and taking part in the making of the national police of the Second Polish Republic would count for something. It's not a great career for someone who escaped from a looney bin, because remember that in 1905 our Marshal Piłsudski also escaped from a looney bin in Saint Petersburg, where he had been transferred from the Citadel, where he apparently was faking a mental illness. Faking... yes... Every nutcase thinks that he is sane, every prisoner that he is not guilty. And the reason the Marshal wears a mustache is allegedly due to the fact that the Muscovites knocked out his front teeth with a rifle butt, but I know exactly how much teeth and insanity have in common. That's how it is in this world... One becomes the marshal of the Polish Republic, another – the marshal of a police station at the eastern frontiers... But never mind. A uniform is a uniform. Authorities can't be touched.

Just look. They're hanging a Jew. I told you it was going to be interesting! I landed well! The territory of the new Polish Republic is a safe place, because it is extremely unsafe. For people like me it's a paradise! And the people you meet here! The situations you encounter! It's a wild country, that for a long time was separated from the motherland by the partitions. The true-born Polish people are scarce here, and the minorities are the majority, seems like only the bison in the forest speak Polish, and if you ask the local people where they are from, they will say:

VOICES: We're the locals!

### SCENE THREE

PROKOP: One, two, three, four... Not enough. A room, a hallway, a pigsty... Five, six...

SKROBKOVA: Get out of here! Can't you see it's mine?

PROKOP: It's an empty field! No man's land!

SKROBKOVA: Mine! My house was here. This is where I used to pluck the hens, and this is where the pig used to bite me.

PROKOP: Pig...

SKROBKOVA: Well, well, well! Don't go too far! Get lost!

PROKOP: Bolshevik vermin... Should have died somewhere on the way here...

MARSHAL: Do you know how to write?

PROSPECT: I do, but I write slowly...

MARSHAL: So listen. Your job is to take notes. From interrogations, inspections of the crime scenes, and when I ask you to spy on somebody. Let me give you an example. March 8<sup>th</sup>: suspect A. was released from jail and spent the night in town C. March 10<sup>th</sup>: witness B. met him. March 12<sup>th</sup>: A. was in O. and talked to witness D. March 14<sup>th</sup>: witnesses H. and J. saw that he had a golden watch, which had been stolen in G. Do you understand?

PROSPECT: Yes, I do! And... the watch? Did he steal it?

MARSHAL: I will punch you in the head, I swear. Pay attention, because I will not repeat myself. In the investigation the simplest explanation is usually the correct one.

PROSPECT: How to be a good policeman?

MARSHAL: It's impossible. If you don't make a fool out of yourself, it's already a success. First of all: don't be surprised by anything. Secondly: remember that every witness may give you a different account of the events, and in many cases they will even be contradictory.

PROSPECT: Why is that?

MARSHAL: Because everyone remembers the same event differently. Everyone has their own truth.

PROSPECT: And why do people give false testimony?

MARSHAL: They either have something to gain, or are afraid of revenge, or they themselves act out of revenge. In some cases they lie because of hysteria, mythomania, or because they are under somebody's suggestion or under hypnosis. You have to be especially careful with the uranians.

PROSPECT: What kind of demons are they?

MARSHAL: Pederasts. They lie just for the pleasure of it. Did you know the victim?

PROSPECT: Aniela? Not as well as I would have liked. But she had everything in the right place, and pretty smooth, too.

MARSHAL: Did you want to marry her?

PROSPECT: If it was necessary...

MARSHAL: Desire is a strong motive. Maybe she didn't want to fool around with you, so you killed her? A crime of passion perhaps?

PROSPECT: If everyone whose courtship had been rejected would start killing people, no girl would survive even for a day... I don't act under emotions, and my house was burned by the czar.

MARSHAL: We need to investigate how she died.

ANIELA: Why not just ask me then?

PROSPECT: Oh Jesus!

MARSHAL: Who are you?

ANIELA: Aniela. Bezhenka ubita.

MARSHAL: And you want to testify? Dead?

PROSPECT: First of all: don't be surprised by anything.

ANIELA: Death is not a reason to not testify.

PROSPECT: Who killed you, Aniela?

ANIELA: That I didn't see, because he came from behind, Judas!

MARSHAL: So it was a man?

ANIELA: I'm not ruling out a woman...

MARSHAL: So who do you suspect?

ANIELA: Is there not enough vermin in this world?

MARSHAL: What were you doing when...

ANIELA: I was standing in the bushes, taking out my coin purse filled with rubles, which I had hidden, well, pardon me, here... It was a beautiful purse, embroidered with roses... So I was counting the money and counting...

PROSPECT: So you earned quite a bit there...

ANIELA: And wham! Somebody hit me on the head and I fell to ground!

MARSHAL: What are you waiting for? Take notes! And when did you come back here? And where from? And what were you doing there?

ANIELA: It was August when the army evacuated us to Russia, just after the harvest, but before the potato-lifting. There were twelve people in my family. I am the only one who came back.

PROSPECT: To die...

ANIELA: Apparently this is what was destined for me... The Cossacks said that we were just leaving for a while, to wait it out, to wait for the Russian army to pull itself together and drive the enemy away. We were away for three years... Death one by one took away my father, mother, grandmother and grandfather, older siblings... Me and my younger brothers got to Kiszki, near Minsk. The people were good there, they gave us food and work. But we were too much of a burden for them, so after a while we were on the road again.

MARSHAL: You couldn't come back?

ANIELA: Here? Right into the warzone? Everyone was urged to go further away.

MARSHAL: And there, in Kiszki, you made some enemies?

ANIELA: Not everyone liked refugees. People were afraid there won't be enough bread and work left for them... There were a few fights between our men and the locals... But to have enemies wishing me death? Maybe Skrobkova...

MARSHAL: And why did she want you dead?

ANIELA: Probably because of a pail...

MARSHAL: A pail of... milk?

ANIELA: She gave birth to many children and her husband used to complain that when he lied with her, it felt like stirring milk in a pail with a tree branch...

SKROBKOVA: If I see you with him ever again, I will kill you, so help me God!

MARSHAL: Was she a local person?

ANIELA: Yes, a local. Our whole village run away and for a long time we were all wandering together... In Kiszki they put us on a train and sent us far, far away, to the Caucasus... It was my first time on a train and I will never forget it...

MARSHAL: What's wrong? Are you nauseous?

PROSPECT: But she's dead. Can it get any worse?

ANIELA:

Four little horses made out of bread  
yes yes yes yes yes yes  
their manes like braided from the rye  
their hooves like sculpted in bronze  
yes yes yes yes yes yes  
together they carry a boy on their backs  
and run countless miles along the tracks  
yes yes yes yes yes yes  
his hair tangled with the manes  
and tears streaming down his face  
yes yes yes yes yes yes  
Hospodi pomilui, my little brother is gone

PROSPECT: What do you mean? Your brother is gone? Which one?

ANIELA: We were on a train... for a month, or two. The boys, my brothers, were bored. And tired of being in a train car all the time... And we never knew when and where the train was going to stop. One time I saw the youngest, Antoś, play with little horses. Where did he get them? I was afraid he stole them from someone, from Skrobkova's children for example, that would be the worst! So I grabbed them from his hands and wanted to give them back, but then I realized they were made out of bread! Like sculptures! I wanted to tear him apart! Bread was scarce, we were facing famine, and he made toys out of it! And when the train stopped in the middle of nowhere, as soon as the car doors were opened Antoś started running straight ahead...

PROSPECT: Aniela, what's wrong?

ANIELA: And the train suddenly started moving again... And Antoś... I saw him running across the field...

PROSPECT: He didn't make it?!

ANIELA: I wanted to jump after him, but my other brother was on the train... Was I supposed to leave him?

PROSPECT: Jesus... What happened to him?

ANIELA: He was six... My death for his suffering...

MARSHAL: He probably died... So he didn't come back to seek revenge...

ANIELA: Death is not reason enough to not seek revenge...

#### SCENE FOUR

MARSHAL: What do you want here?

PROKOP: Officer! We found another dead body!

PROSPECT: First of all: don't be surprised by anything... Jesus... another one?!

MARSHAL: Where?

PROKOP: By the river, in the lumber mill...

MARSHAL: We'll be there soon. Don't touch anything! Don't step on the footprints, like in Aniela's case! Anything else?

PROKOP: The worst part, officer, is that it's not a Jew.

#### SCENE SIX

JEW */hanging/*:

I am hanging from a tree

My fellow hangman keeps muttering

Being dead made him lose his marbles

He lost his speech and now he gurgles

He wonders in Yidish why he

is hanging from a tree

His family came here in the olden days

Is he lying or not? Head or tails?

Even if I die, I'm going to tell you though

Before my tongue gets ripped out by a crow

From the life of slavery in the Egyptian land

We came here to find freedom in Poland

They called us hospitable and generous

very familial, righteous and virtuous

On a tree branch ends his life the Polish Jew

Shame on you, Christians, shame on you...