SCENE I

The scene is a large living room with a panel on the right side separating the kitchen. On the left is a kitchen table. The kitchen has a stove with a saucepan on it; food is cooking. Food and vegetables are spread on the counter. Fatmira walks in. She looks around and sees that nobody is there. She checks what is cooking in the saucepan and sits in the corner. She takes out her embroidery and starts knitting evenly. Zoja walks in with a cake in her hands; she does not see Fatmire. Zoja puts the cake down and looks around and at what is cooking. She turns on the oven and then faces the table and sees Fatmire. Fatmire stands up.

ZOJA: [Looks scared] Oops!

FATMIRA: Sorry!

ZOJA: No, it’s okay. I just didn’t see you. I thought nobody was in. Good, you came. You are Fatmire, right?

FATMIRA: Yes

ZOJA: I am Zoja. That’s my name. How are you? You are doing well?

FATMIRA: I am fine, thanks. What about you?

ZOJA: Fine. Congratulations! My best wishes for your birthday. Hope you reach 100 years. No worries, everything will go away. I wish you to stay healthy and everything else will turn out better.

FATMIRA: It’s not my birthday.

ZOJA: No?!

FATMIRA: A girl that works here invited me for someone’s birthday.

ZOJA: Which girl?

FATMIRA: A young girl, with that shirt on...

ZOJA: A beautiful one, tall, blond?
FATMIRA: Yes.

ZOJA: Of course not... she is Adelina. That’s the queen. She doesn’t work here. She is sheltered here, same as us.

FATMIRA: Aha! I thought she was...

ZOJA: She’s too... she hangs around making all this noise... and it’s not even your birthday! Maybe she was speaking about the other girl.

FATMIRA: Which one?

ZOJA: Another one, a young girl. She came in a few days ago. I haven’t seen her much, didn’t have any chance though.

FATMIRA: Maybe it’s her birthday.

ZOJA: But, how would Adelina know that quickly about her birthday? That girl was locked until yesterday.

FATMIRA: [Worried] What do you mean locked?! Who locked her? Why, women are locked here?!

ZOJA: No, no. They are not locked here. This is a shelter for women, like all other shelters. Nobody forces you to stay here. God forbid.

FATMIRA: Why then did you say ‘locked’?

ZOJA: She is not locked like in prison, but she was told to stay in her room until some procedures with the female prosecutors are finished. Something like this, I don’t know much about it! She didn’t come to hang out with us. We were not allowed to go and see her – this is what I thought.

FATMIRA: Ah ha!

ZOJA: Director told us we shouldn’t go and visit her for the time being, and we shouldn’t ask her anything.

[Zoja continues cooking. Fatmire picks up her handicraft and starts knitting.]

FATMIRA: Why? What’s her situation?

ZOJA: I don’t know. We weren’t told. The director didn’t tell us, neither did the other people who work here. Usually they tell us, but...don’t know. Yesterday they closed up that procedure; this is what I last heard. But I didn’t see her yesterday either, I was at work.


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[Zoja continues cooking. Fatmira drops her handicraft and looks around with no interest.]

FATMIRA: Nevermind. Adelina told me that she was arranging something and that I was invited for a birthday party. I thought she works here, otherwise why would I come here? I am not into her funny stuff; she is a sort of...

ZOJA: Adelina? No, no, she is a great girl. She is a bit pampered.

FATMIRA: And where is she now?

ZOJA: She was here. She will pop up again. She moves around; she can’t stay in a place. She is young, poor her. She used to hang out a lot, and she hasn’t familiarised herself yet with this place.

FATMIRA: You know what, it’s better if I go now. [Stands up]

ZOJA: No, you don’t have to go. Why? Stay here. When we have birthdays here in the shelter, or any other occasion, everybody, all the women are invited. We have a lot of fun, we chat, we do things, we cook what we like – everything just for fun. If you feel tired, just have a seat. I will prepare everything.

FATMIRA: No, no, I am fine. Yes…I don’t even know what I’m doing here. We don’t know even whose birthday it is!

ZOJA: Come on. Sit. Sit here. Probably it’s the birthday of that young girl. Join us, now that you are here. We will wait for others; all the women will gather here. It is better you keep with us, otherwise we can go crazy from loneliness.

FATMIRA: What about the other women? Where are they?

ZOJA: Mmm, actually there are no other women! Only that other girl. Until lately, we had Sabrije and Vjolica, but they both left from here. Sabrija, just 10 days ago, the day you arrived. And Vjolica left a week ago. Vjolla is doing well now. I don’t know if you met her? She got a job and a place to live. Vjolica is a clever woman.

FATMIRA: No, I didn’t meet her.

[Zoja finishes cooking and takes a seat.]

ZOJA: What would you like to do? Is there anything you would like to eat?

FATMIRA: I don’t know. Whatever, it’s the same for me.


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ZOJA: We have sarma, we have chicken, and I am preparing soup. If you like cookies, I can do that for you.

FATMIRA: No, no...you don’t have too, no need for that.

ZOJA: Ok, don’t worry. Have a seat there and accommodate yourself. Ok, as soon as the soup boils we will have a cup of coffee.

FATMIRA: No, let me help you. What do you want me to do?

ZOJA: Ok... [Thinks for a moment] You can make the salad; just take some vegetables and put them in the bowl.

[They both keep busy cooking for a while.]

ZOJA: Ha- ha! I am laughing

FATMIRA: [Laughs] Why?!

ZOJA: You know, all of us here give each other funny names. The most funny, which I laughed at, is yours.

FATMIRA: Why?! Is there something funny with my name?

ZOJA: [Laughing] 'Fatmire chopper!'

FATMIRA: What?!

ZOJA: [Trying to stop laughing] Didn’t you want to kill your husband with a chopper?! [Laughs]

[Fatmire stops moving.]

FATMIRA: That’s not your business. You better look after yourself...

[Fatmire stops cooking and doesn’t move. Zoja is not laughing anymore. She continues working and remains silent.]

ZOJA: Fatmire! I am sorry; I apologise, for goodness’ sake! Don’t take me the wrong way. I swear, I didn’t mean to offend you...but simply, we are used to making jokes about each other. It is all about our problems, what we have gone through. Sorry, I just rushed in saying that. I didn’t
think that you only just arrived, and you don’t know about the way we ... for goodness’ sake, don’t take me wrong!

FATMIRA: No problem.

[Fatmire takes her handicraft but doesn’t work. She puts down the handicraft and again takes the knife in her hands.]

ZOJA: Fatmire! I didn’t think you would get angry with me. I fully forgot you didn’t have a chance to meet with the other women here.

FATMIRA: Okay, okay.

[Silence. Fatmire starts chopping vegetables nervously. Zoja continues to work.]

ZOJA: Me... [Laughs], Adelina calls me 'Miss Garlic'. You know why, because I was beaten up even just because of garlic.

[They continue working. Fatmire finishes what she was doing and takes a seat. She folds her handicraft.]

ZOJA: You shouldn’t feel bad, Fatmire, none of us came here because we wanted to or because we were doing well. But, we have no other choice but to laugh. We laugh about things we have gone through; this helps us to overcome and forget our past. It’s not good to be anxious all the time. Look at me, I have suffered for 12 years. I endured being beaten up by my husband. Only I know what I have gone through. But, what can be done? We should move onward.

[Silence. Zoja stirs the food in the saucepan. Fatmire finishes with the salad and takes a seat. Zoja wipes her hands and joins Fatmire.]

Silence. Fatmire takes her handicraft in her hands.

ZOJA: I noticed you don’t like to hang out much with women here, with those sheltered here. You came just twice and left and didn’t say much. You left after 10 minutes. It will be good if you join us. You would mingle with the other women, chit chat with them, talk about each other’s troubles. You’ll forget a bit about...

FATMIRA: Even if I will get along with them, nothing will happen.

ZOJA: But, here we have only each other.

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FATMIRA: I have paid for the trouble some women gave me.

[Fatmire continues working.]  

FATMIRA: There are a few who do not deserve even to live. I don’t know; thanks to God I didn’t kill any. God helped me not to do so.

[Zoja remains silent. She looks sadly at Fatmire. She stands up.]  

ZOJA: I feel tense, can’t wait to know about that young girl. It’s even her birthday...

[Fatmira keeps silent. She looks annoyed. Zoja is speechless and looks at her.]  

ZOJA: Should we make a pie or mantija with this pasta?

FATMIRA: Do whatever you want to.

ZOJA: I will prepare some mantijas. I was thinking to make them some time ago but simply didn’t yet. I will make them just for pleasure, why not.

[She starts folding the pasta.]  

Oh, you don’t know how many times I was beaten up by my husband because of mantijas. I like to make them with a bit more garlic. ‘Miss Garlic’ as Adelina calls me. [Laughs] I like them with lots of garlic. He hates garlic. He didn’t like garlic at all. It happened about three times. I was making garlicky mantijas, and I would always have a piece with lots of garlic, just for myself. I don’t know how, but he always picked the wrong piece with lots of garlic. First what he would do – he would throw them on me, then on the floor. Then he was beating me up. I never dared to make mantijas anymore. But he couldn’t ever take away the joy I feel when I taste mantijas.

[Fatmire stands up and moves closer.]  

FATMIRA: Would you like me to help you with that? I can squash garlic.

ZOJA: I crushed a few, but if you would like, you can crush some more and then prepare the yoghurt stuff.

[Fatmire takes the garlic and starts preparing it.]  

ZOJA: Did you live on your own or with your in-laws, Fatmire?

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FATMIRA: Not with my in-laws, but my sister-in-laws were around...

ZOJA: I lived with my parents-in-law.

FATMIRA: Only with your mother-in-law?

ZOJA: Yes, she wasn’t a mother-in-law – she was a devil. She knew only about doing horrible things. My husband was fully with her. I have gone through many things. I was so stupid.

When I got married, my husband didn’t make any gathering for our wedding; they were poor. He was very jealous, though I never stepped out of home. After some time, he didn’t let me go and visit my father. I didn’t visit them for two years. He was also very greedy and never liked to work. I couldn’t get pregnant for four years... and I know why; I was always cold. I had to clean up our yard. I had to wash cemented paths during the winter and summer, as my mother-in-law asked me to do so. My husband liked to drink a lot and didn’t want to do anything else except drink. He lost a lot of money gambling. He was than furious about that and would come back home and beat me up. In the beginning, I endured the situation and thought as time goes on things would change slowly. He would get better and behave. Then children came... I was always speaking with myself, saying, ‘I better endure this. Now that we have kids maybe he would get better. Perhaps he would feel grief for our kids’. But nothing turned for the better; things got even worse. I was beaten when the kids were crying. I was beaten for everything, even for the smallest things. When I would say something – ‘Why do you speak?’ When I didn’t speak – ‘Why are you not saying anything. What’s up?’ He would say, ‘Who are you to provoke me, even in my own house?’ Then he would beat me again. Or when he got back home very late in the evenings or even early mornings, he would ask me ‘Why didn’t you wait for me. Why did you sleep?’ I was waiting for him, I never slept, but sometimes I fell asleep quickly. He would then make trouble. He beat me up in front of my kids’ eyes. One evening, the same as many others, he came very late; it was around four o’clock in the morning. I was asleep. He started making trouble, hitting me. The kids burst into tears, crying. My older son came to me and was trying to protect me, as he felt sorry for me. He took our son and threw him over the shelf and then grabbed the other son and beat both of them badly. They went crazy crying and I couldn’t stand anymore. He walked out and didn’t come back that evening. I took the kids and went to my father’s place.

But, my father told me to send the kids back home, as he could not take care of somebody else’s kids. I felt terrible, much worse than when I walked out of my husband’s house. My father prepared everything to send the kids back home. I couldn’t sleep all night. Then I thought, what about women who lost their husbands during the war, how they live. They raise up their kids on their own; they have done so for so many years now. I took my kids and walked out.

[Fatmire brings a tissue to Zoja to wipe her tears, but Zoja wipes them with her hands.]

ZOJA: Don’t worry, I am fine...I just feel embarrassed when I think of those things...

FATMIRA: Everything is gone now and hopefully will be forgotten soon...


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ZOJA: Yes, for sure. It’s about the past; it will never happen anymore as long as life goes on. God saved us. No...now I have a job. I am working for five months now. I saved some money, and maybe I will be lucky to find an apartment for a good price. I will find another job too...and will continue on like this...

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