

WOMAN WITHOUT A BODY

Author: MATE MATIŠIĆ

Original title: Žena bez tijela

World premiere: season 2006/07

Number of characters: 3 m + 2 f

Length: two acts + epilogue

Translation: English

Martin (retired, 34) brings an older prostitute back to his apartment who introduces herself as Emma. While drinking her doses of alcohol and demanding to be paid in advance, Emma wonders why Martin didn't choose a younger prostitute. She sees women's shoes in the hall and suggests they get down to "business" before his wife comes back home; but Martin explains that he is not married and that the shoes belong to his mother who has just left for a pilgrimage to Medjugorje. "She went because of me...", he says, confessing he has cancer. Emma is confused but still takes the initiative – she tells him dark-humoured anecdotes from her "practice" and recounts her alleged life tragedy: her husband is in jail; her son is ashamed of her and avoids any contact; one of her daughters is adopted and the other one sick and in a nursing home... Emma was also under treatment as she had attempted suicide by slashing her wrists in a moment of mental turmoil; this is when Martin admits that it was actually in the Psychiatric ward that he first saw her. He tells her he was hospitalised because of a phobia of grass surfaces and soil... A doorbell interrupts their conversation. Emma hides in the bathroom, while Pista (retired, 34, Martin's friend) appears for a short visit. He questions Martin about his plans with Emma, peppering his curiosity with an array of vulgarities ("And will you fuck her, or just...? ... As far as I remember, she's got a nice cunt..."). Before leaving, Pista tells Martin in a half-threatening tone that he will "have to tell the others". Emma comes back to the room and asks him to begin with the sex. But Martin tells her he is not interested in that and asks her if she would marry him. Emma is shocked but Martin explains his plan: he only has two or three months to live and he wants to do a good deed: he would like to marry her so that she would be left with his war invalid pension. Then she could stop with the prostitution and take care of her sick daughter. In the middle of their conversation, his mother rushes in. She had tried phoning Martin and as he didn't answer, fearing the worst, she rushed back from the bus station. At first she is pleased, thinking that Emma is Martin's girlfriend, but thanks to tragicomic chain of circumstances, she realises Emma is a prostitute. She offends her and Emma leaves in anger. Martin then reveals to his mother the true identity of that woman. Her husband was a notorious Chetnik leader, a war butcher who massacred Martin's war mates. Martin and his group found him, broke into his house, hanged him by his feet and left him hanging until he was dead, meanwhile raping his wife – Emma, whose real name was Ruža, he thinks. Her tragic life story began, says Martin, "the night we paid her a visit..." His only chance for redemption lies in the attempt to help this woman. Her friend told him that Emma decided not to get married again until she had found her husband's body. But Martin decided to solve that problem: he will send her an anonymous letter with a map of the location where they buried him.

In the second act, Martin clashes with his former war commander, Mladen (45, retired), who asks him to give up on his plans because, he says, it will appear as if we have been killing "innocent civilians" and "I don't want to rot in The Hague". Martin calms him down, promising he will assume the responsibility for that murder but it is only then that he discovers the real truth: Pista, Mladen and his other mates had buried several more executed

Serbs in that same spot. Now they are all very distressed and they want to kill Emma in order to protect themselves; but before that, they decide to give their old war companion one more chance. No one, says Mladen, would be surprised if a terminally ill war veteran committed suicide... The boys are with Emma right now; they hired her as clients and are waiting for his answer.

In the play's epilogue, Martin's mother Maria first meets Mladen who expresses his condolences and then Emma, who put together all the pieces at Martin's funeral. The one who held the pathetic speech, and that was Mladen, was the one who had spoken the only words uttered the night she was raped. He said, "Hold the whore", and the words were addressed to the only person who didn't rape her: Martin. Emma recognises that voice and she now begs Maria to bear witness in court about what she knows, but Maria cannot do it: "...They are his friends... And Mladen is about to have a baby...". "Lady, pray for your son... This is what he needs most now", says Emma in the last line of the play.

Woman Without a Body is the central part of the *Post Mortem Trilogy*, Mate Matišić's dramatic triptych. Matišić is interested in some of the crucial ethical misgivings that are the consequence of war conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia. All three plays, including *Woman Without a Body*, are characterised with an unusual mixture of thriller, dark-humour elements and serious dramatic discourse. Despite being grounded in a Croatian milieu, *Woman Without a Body* is a play with a universal theme that is problem-wise equally transparent and familiar in any part of the world.

EXTRACT from WOMAN WITHOUT A BODY

Ema looks at him mystified.
Silence.

MARTIN: I'd like to talk to you about something important...

Silence.

MARTIN: Please, sit down...

Silence.
Ema sits down on the sofa uneasily.

MARTIN: I don't know where to start...

EMA (anxiously, decisively): I told you that you couldn't fuck me in the ass. Don't even try to persuade me...

MARTIN: No, no... It's not that...

Silence.

MARTIN: This, what I am going to tell you, maybe it will seem to you... I don't know, frivolous... But...

EMA: For your money you can say whatever you want... I have heard all sorts of things in my time... Such stories that there are few things that could shock me...

MARTIN (unexpectedly): Would you like to marry me?

Short pause.

EMA: I beg your pardon? (smiling) Are you joking, or...

MARTIN: No, I'm asking you sincerely...

EMA: This is not that film... what's it called... The one with that actor and that pretty actress with a big mouth...

MARTIN: I know it's not... But... I've thought about it for a long time and I want you to know that I haven't said what I said just like that...

EMA: Well, now I really must have a drink... (She drinks) And why do you want me to be your wife? I'm almost twenty years older than you. I'm not sure that your devout mother would want a woman her age for a daughter-in-law...

MARTIN: That's just it ... you don't have to be my wife, just marry me...

EMA: Excuse me, but now I really don't understand anything...

MARTIN: I mean that we don't need to live together. Just get married... After that we needn't even see one another... There, if you want I can vouch in writing that I will never contact you after that...

EMA: So you won't mind if I continue working after I marry you? ...

MARTIN: Perhaps you wouldn't need to, especially not after I die ... Here... Look. Here are all my papers...

Martin takes his medical diagnoses and documents from a drawer.

MARTIN: Here, you can see the X-rays, so you don't think that I have made all this up... Cancer and disease... Although my mother goes on pilgrimages I know that I do not have much time left... The thing is that you'd get my pension after my death... You'd be better off with that... you and your sick daughter... You'd not need to rent a room because you'd be entitled to a flat as the widow of a disabled veteran... If you still don't believe me you can ask doctor Nikolić... I wrote down his phone number for you...

EMA: Strange that you ask me that when I've told you that I have a husband...

MARTIN: I know that you don't... I talked to your friend Ljerka... She told me that you always tell the clients that you have a husband – a murderer in prison to frighten them... But that you are a self-supporting mother who hasn't known the whereabouts of her husband for over ten years...

EMA (slightly hurt): So you have chosen me out of pity?

MARTIN: No, that's not the reason.

EMA: Why then?

Short pause.

MARTIN: It would be a pity that my pension didn't help somebody after my death... It's better that someone who needs it gets it... You don't have to decide now... but please don't wait long... Sometimes the illness can progress faster than the doctors expect...

EMA: I know women who are in far worse situation than me... If you want I can introduce you to them, so you can ask them... One of them is bound to want to get married for the pension... I've decided not to look for a new husband till I found out where my first is ... Martin is silent.

Pause.

Ema is watching him and trying to discover the "background" of the marriage proposal. Suddenly, she looks towards the door.