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LAZARUS

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LAZARUS

MARY and MARTHA - his sisters

It is dark.

There is not a living soul in the room.

From far off, the murmur of a crowd is heard. The crowd approaches: cries, shouts, shrieks —

— A miracle! . . .

— He has risen from the dead! . . .

— Death is dead! . . .

MARTHA'S VOICE. Enough! . . . enough! . . .

MARY'S VOICE. Oh God, my God . . .

A VOICE FROM THE CROWD. Say something, Lazarus!

(The crowd falls silent.)

MARY'S VOICE. Please . . . have mercy . . . ANOTHER VOICE FROM THE CROWD. Speak, Lazarus! Speak!

(The crowd again falls silent.)

MARTHA'S VOICE. Leave us alone . . . MARY'S VOICE. We beg you ...

(The crowd calms down and disperses. A rustling is heard at the door.)

MARY'S VOICE. Hurry up! ... Open the door! . . . MARTHA'S VOICE. Just a moment... — I can't do everything at once . . .

MARY'S VOICE. Hurry! . . .

(The door opens. In the dark, MARTHA and MARY carry LAZARUS in.)

MARY. Let's lean him up against the wall. *(She braces herself against LAZARUS.)* I'll hold him, while you get the light.

(MARTHA goes towards the lamp.)

MARY. Help! He's going to fall! . . .

(MARTHA runs over. The sisters carry LAZARUS into the middle of the room and sit him down on a bench. MARTHA goes over and lights the lamp. Propped up against the table, LAZARUS sits wrapped from head to toe in a shroud tied up with bandages, like a mummy. MARY falls to her knees and cradling LAZARUS'S legs, begins to cry. MARTHA stands nearby.)

MARTHA. Why are you crying?

MARY. I'm so happy.

MARTHA. Don't be so hasty.

MARY. God! Are you blind? Can't you see?

MARTHA. Oh yes, I do see what's happening.

MARY. And it's not enough!

MARTHA. It's too much. It's hard to believe.

MARY. You have to believe.

MARTHA. I do. *(After a pause.)* And I'm afraid.

(LAZARUS stirs. MARY embraces him affectionately.)

MARY. Again . . . you're with me once again . . .

MARTHA *(smiling faintly)*. That's right, you can't get away that easily. *(Facing LAZARUS.)* Lazarus died . . .

MARY. And is risen!

MARTHA. But does he live?

(LAZARUS stirs restlessly.)

MARY. Merciful heavens! . . .

MARTHA. I don't know . . . now I don't know if it really was the right thing to do ...

MARY. Be quiet! . . . Hush! . . . *(Gripping LAZARUS.)* Oh, if you would only speak!

MARTHA. He's gagged.

MARY. Well, untie him.

MARTHA. Who, me?

MARY. Quickly! Off with the shroud!

MARTHA. Why me? Can't you get along without me just once?

MARY. Don't you want to know what he has to say?

MARTHA. What's happened is quite enough.

MARY *(determined, staring intently at LAZARUS)*. Well, it's not enough for me.

(MARY begins to unwrap the bandages from LAZARUS'S head. The odor of decay fills the air.)

MARY. What a strange smell . . .

MARTHA. The smell of death.

MARY. No, no! Lazarus is alive! There is no death!

MARTHA. Then there is no life either.

MARY. Stop playing games, Martha. (*Unbinding LAZARUS'S forehead.*) Look. (*She takes MARTHA'S hand and places it on LAZARUS'S forehead.*) His temples are throbbing.

MARTHA. But his forehead is cold.

MARY. It's damp and chilly here. Light a fire.

MARTHA. Are you cold?

MARY. Like death. I'm shivering.

MARTHA. Maybe you're ill?

MARY. Light the fire.

(MARTHA goes to the hearth and lights the fire. MARY uncovers LAZARUS'S eyes: they are fixed in a frozen stare.)

MARY. Soon . . . soon you'll be able to speak . . .

(MARTHA is still standing by the hearth.)

MARY. . . . soon you'll say your first word . . . your very first word . . .

MARTHA. And his last?

MARY. . . . which no one has ever heard . . . never could have heard . . .

MARTHA. But did we really want to?

(MARY unwraps the bandages, exposing LAZARUS'S neck. LAZARUS sits with his mouth dosed, teeth clenched. His eyes are still staring blankly. MARTHA looks at him from a distance. Finally she approaches.)

MARTHA (to LAZARUS, but looking past him). Would you like me to fix you something to eat?

MARY (annoyed). What for? Why are you talking to him about food?

MARTHA. He hasn't had anything to eat for four days.

MARY. So what?

MARTHA. Well, do you want to see him die again?

MARY. Everything is in the hands of the Lord.

MARTHA. You have hands, too. But all you do is sit around at the Master's feet and anoint him with oils. M

MARY. Are you jealous?

MARTHA. Jealous? Maybe I am. I stay home and do all the dirty work.

MARY. That's not important. MARTHA. Of course, it's not important when your stomach's full at my expense. You just sit on your ass.

MARY. Martha! Fear the Lord! I'm praising Him, while you're shooting your mouth off!

MARTHA. You're just praising yourself, Mary.

MARY. What? Are you accusing me of false pride?

MARTHA. And you're always putting everybody down. All that incense has gone to your head.

MARY. Are you calling me a fraud?

MARTHA. You heard what I said.

MARY. As God is my witness! . . .

(MARY moves threateningly towards MARTHA. LAZARUS turns his head and pierces MARY with an icy stare. She restrains herself, returns to LAZARUS, and furiously continues unwrapping the bandages. LAZARUS tries to protest, but to no avail: he is already naked to the waist.)

MARTHA (*watching MARY*). Are you still at it?

(*MARY glances in her direction.*)

MARTHA (*with a smile*). Is it because he's naked?

(*MARY cries out in pain and jumps away from LAZARUS.*)

MARTHA. Forgive me, Mary.

MARY. Never!

(*MARY pounces on MARTHA. They grab each other by the hair. LAZARUS stares at one sister, then the next, attempts to rise, but falls back onto the bench. Seeing this, the women pull apart and look at LAZARUS. He again tries to get up, but again fails. MARY runs over to LAZARUS.*)

MARY. Finally? . . . finally, you're going to speak? . . . you're going to tell us? . . .

(*LAZARUS wants to open his mouth, but cannot. MARY grabs LAZARUS by his jaws . . .*)

MARY. I'll help you . . . I'll help you, brother dear. . .

MARTHA (*terrified*). Mary! . . . What are you doing! . . .

(*LAZARUS resists, but with great effort MARY manages to open his mouth. A deep roar emerges.*)

MARY. Yes! . . . Now! . . . now you can do it! ... (*Holding LAZARUS around the waist.*) Say something! . . . speak to me! . .

LAZARUS (*his eyes closed, painfully*). . . . aaaaaaa . . . *_

MARY. Yes! . . . Speak! . . . speak! . . .

LAZARUS. . . . aaaaaaaggggggg . . .

MARY. . . . I'm listening . . . I'm listening! . . .

LAZARUS. . . . aaaaaaaggggggghhhhhh . . .

MARY. . . . listen to him, Martha! . . . listen! . . .

(*MARTHA turns away.*)

MARY. . . . everyone, listen! . . .

LAZARUS. . . . aaaaaaaggggggghhhhhhrrrk! . . .

(*LAZARUS takes a deep breath and again clenches his teeth.*)

MARY (confused). Why did he stop? (To *MARTHA*.) Why doesn't he say anything?

MARTHA. Maybe he has nothing to say?

MARY. Nothing to say? (To *LAZARUS*, *taking his head in her hands and smiling lovingly.*) Our sister has gone crazy, plain crazy. (*Kisses him on the forehead.*) Just listen to her: risen from the dead . . .

MARTHA. Raised from the dead.

MARY. . . . and you have nothing to say!

MARTHA. Or maybe he just doesn't want to?

MARY. Doesn't want to? (*Suddenly, in a rage.*) What did you see? . . . Tell me, what did you see? . . . Heaven? . . . Hell? . . .

MARTHA. Maybe nothing at all?

MARY (*insistently*). Did you see Hell? . . . (*Digging her nails into LAZARUS'S chest.*) Speak! ... say something! . . .

(*Teeth clenched, head tilted back, LAZARUS looks directly into MARY'S eyes. She grabs him by the throat.*)

MARY. Damn it! ... Just one word! . . .

MARTHA (*rushing towards her sister*). Mary! . . . (She tries to pull her off LAZARUS.)

(MARY pushes MARTHA away and, grabbing LAZARUS, starts to shake him violently.)

MARY. Speak! ... say something! . . . just one word! . . . (Suddenly LAZARUS begins to stand up.)

MARY (*still clutching LAZARUS*). Finally! . . . Glory to God Almighty!

(LAZARUS, with superhuman strength, hurls MARY away. She falls backwards to the floor. Speechless, MARTHA retreats.)

LAZARUS stands like a stone statue. Finally he opens his mouth.)

MARY (as she gets up from the floor, hysterically). At last! . . . Listen! . . . everyone, listen! . . .

(She stands up moaning, staggers again, and faints to the floor. MARTHA falls to her knees. LAZARUS speaks in a low, screeching, but simultaneously majestic and overpowering voice.)

LAZARUS. No!

(It is as final as the drop of an axe.)

MARTHA (*striking her head on the ground*). Lord, have mercy on us ... Lord, have mercy . . . have mercy . .

(A long silence. LAZARUS collects his bandages, and with heavy, stiff steps, staggers out. MARTHA, shaking with fright, watches his departure. Suddenly, she jumps up, bolts the door, and leans against it with her whole strength.)

MARTHA. Amen. Amen. Amen.

(MARY comes to and looks around.)

MARY (*in a daze*). Where's Lazarus?

MARTHA. He's left.

MARY. Left? Why?

MARTHA. What do you think?

(Silence.)

MARY. Where did he go? MARTHA. I don't know. (Silence.)

MARY. Will he return?

(MARTHA goes over to MARY and helps her get up.)

MARY. Will he come back?

MARTHA (*looking at the door*). Maybe he's back already.

MARY. Back?

MARTHA. In his grave.

(MARY looks at MARTHA.)

MARTHA. Perhaps. I don't know.

(Silence.)

MARY. Well, what did he say?

(MARTHA looks away.)

MARY. What did he say?

(Pause.)

MARTHA. Nothing. (She moves aside.)

MARY (*rushing over to MARTHA*). You're lying!

MARTHA (*looking again at the door*). Nothing. Nothing at all.

(*Silence.*)

MARY. Nothing?

For a long time the sisters stare at each other. Suddenly, MARY breaks out in hysterical laughter. MARTHA puts out the light. MARY'S laughter becomes a mournful wail. . .

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* Kostas Ostrauskas, b. in Lithuania. After World War II, studied in Germany, later at the University of Pennsylvania, where he received his Ph.D. in 1958. His published plays include *Pipké* ('The Pipe', 1954 and 1963); *Kanarėlė* ('The Canary', 1958); *Žaliojo lankelė* ('The Green Meadow', 1963); *Kvartetas* ('Quartet', 1971); *Čičinskas* 1977, *Gundymai* ('Temptations' 1983), etc. *Lozorius* ('Lazarus') first appeared in the magazine *Metmenys*, No. 22, 1971.

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** His utterances are like early man's first attempts at speech. Therefore, LAZARUS'S text, except for his last remark, is merely a phonetic suggestion.