

Basa Janikashvili

Before We Get to Know Each Other

One Act Play

Characters:

Nino Tsuleiskiri (F)

Gia Tsuleiskiri (M)

Author

A hotel room.

Noise can be heard in the dark: the rhythmic, somewhat awkward creaking of a bed. Then a pause.

Nino: Sorry...

Gia: My fault...

[The creaking rhythm intensifies.]

Nino: Do we know each other?

Gia: We do. How are you?

Nino: Not bad... Are you sure you know me?

Gia: Sure... *[Laughing.]* Of course.

Nino: Then tell me what my name is.

Gia: *[Laughs louder]* Ha, ha, ha! Do you need to ask? Of course I know your name...

Nino: Then tell me.

Gia: You think I don't know, right? No way, ha, ha, ha...

[Nino turns on the light. Nino and Gia are looking at each other.]

Nino: If you know it, say my name.

Gia: [*More strained laughter*] I know your name.

Nino: Then say it!

Gia: Why should I?

Nino: Say it!

Gia: I won't!

Nino: Why?

Gia: Because it's embarrassing to ask a man who knows you to say your name at such a moment. Are you an egocentric by chance?

Nino: You lost me. [*Crashes out a cigarette.*]

Gia: I said I know your name, but won't say it.

[*He lights a cigarette and inhales the smoke.*]

I won't say it because now it's a matter of principle.

[*Nino studies him closely.*]

What are you staring at? Don't you believe it?

Nino: Fine, then tell me where we met each other.

Gia: [*With forced laughter*] In our previous life.

Nino: What was I wearing?

Gia: A dress... And you had your hair up...

Nino: I'll never forgive that!

Gia: Tied at the back!

Nino: And what colour was the dress?

Gia: The colour... That I won't tell you!

Nino: What kind of stubbornness is that?

Gia: I don't suppose questions are suitable. We should leave the past behind. Even if we haven't met, now we can say we know each other, can't we?

Nino: So you admit not knowing me before?

Gia: I haven't said that. Yet, total strangers would've got to know each other by now.

[Silence. They sit with their backs to each other.]

I wonder how long this lamp has been on.

[NINO doesn't react.]

Must have been long because the light is dim, right?

[NINO doesn't answer.]

What's the problem with getting to know each other?

Nino: True, why am I stuck on 'What's my name'?

[GIA goes to the window.]

Gia: Has it stopped raining?

Nino: We could've got to know each other by now.

[GIA goes over to NINO, puts his arm around her shoulder.]

Gia: Is it really necessary when we already know each other?

Nino: Sometimes it's necessary to know someone once again.

Gia: Oh, you mean sometimes you believe you know someone but suddenly it turns out you don't know them at all, right?

Nino: More importantly, I'm not sure you know me.

Gia: That's... I don't even know what it is...

Nino: I don't.

Gia: Neither do I.

Nino: It doesn't really matter.

Gia: Okay, let's assume you're right, but I insist that's not the case. I know you and very well at that.

Nino: It's ridiculous.

Gia: Fine, let's say you're right, that as if I don't know you. Then you insisted that I say your name and that's when we got stuck, because I couldn't say I didn't know. So, here we are...

Nino: When I was little, I used to wear a floral dress and believed a bee would sting me. I've been afraid of flowers since then. I don't like flowers. What were you saying?

Gia: I don't remember.

Nino: I do!

Gia: Please remind me.

Nino: Enough is enough! I asked you what my name is, but you had no courage to admit you didn't know it. That's a man, no courage... As if not knowing each other or getting to know each other is a crime.

Gia: Um, I... Crime has nothing to do with it.

Nino: Now please remember why you said so, because until you say what my name is...

[A knock on the door, rather loud, as if someone is ready to smash it. GIA jumps to his feet, running in circles in confusion while knocking continues.]

Gia: *[to the audience]* Must be her husband! Will break down the door and when he gets in, I don't know what he's going to do. *[Knocking.]* My clothes are all around the room. What can I say when he discovers me? *[Knocking.]* Hiding can save me, the bathroom! *[Knocking.]* He'll break in, drag me out of the bathroom and that's when

I'm going to fall down for the first time. Then he'll help me up and hit me in the face. I'll fall backwards, knowing it's all my fault. I might even be surprised he hits me because I deserve death. That's how it is. A cuckolded husband never hits his wife's lover. He shoots. [*Knocking.*] But he's going to hit me, probably kick me too while I'm down. In the meanwhile, I'll think I deserve worse and even feel relieved when he finishes with me and turns to his wife. [*Knocking.*] Anyway, come what may. [*Knocking.*]

[He rushes into the bathroom. The knocking gets louder. NINO, similarly scared, remains in the room.]

Nino: [*to the audience*] I'm scared of my husband. I'm scared when I'm at home, in a shop, or at work... When he falls asleep, I wonder why I'm so terrified, but I'm helpless. I look at him and tremble. No courage to get up because he might wake up and ask me something. I know I won't be able to answer, will just mumble some nonsense, then he'll turn on the light and ask if I'm all right. That question petrifies me because it baffles me. That's why I stay in bed and tremble. [*Knocking.*] But I'm also scared of trembling, because it might wake him up, and if he asks why I tremble, what can I say? So I stop trembling. [*Knocking.*] But I'm afraid of lying still because he might wake up and ask why I'm so still. That's the most terrifying question, because I have no answer to it either! [*Knocking.*] That's why from time to time I turn in bed. Then I think he might wake up and ask why I'm awake, why I turn in bed. Tell me, what can I answer? [*Knocking.*] Now, that knocking – it's my husband! Is he going to kill him? [*Knocking.*]

[The door crashed down and GIA, NINO's husband rushes in. He is fully dressed, but it is the same GIA who was in bed with NINO, acting like her lover. The husband and wife face each other.]

Nino: [*with fear*] Say it! Say, 'Shall I kill him?'

Gia: [*happily, as if seeing her for the first time*] Nino! What are you doing here?

Nino: He's in the bathroom, hiding!

Gia: [*confused*] And what must I do?

Nino: [*shouting*] Why are you doing this to me?

Gia: [*drawing a pistol from his pocket, trying to control himself*] You know how much I love guns. You do, don't you? [*Scrutinizing her, he checks the clip, counting the bullets and then clicks it back.*] What's his name? Tell me! Say something! What's his name?

Nino: He didn't tell me.

Gia: [*his words are blurred, but the meaning is clear through his yelling*] Screw you, you motherf... [*He heads for the bathroom.*] He's in there, I feel it.

Nino: He is, but you're being subjective, Gia.

Gia: I'm more subjective than anyone else has ever been! I'm going to explode from subjectivity! I'm going in there to blow his head off with this gun and will know I was subjective. Then I'll show you what subjectivity can be if pushed to the limits. I might not kill you because I want someone to see what Gia Tsuleiskiri's subjectivity can be!

[*Flushing of toilet can be heard.*]

Screw you, you motherf...!

[*He rushes into the bathroom, closing the door behind him. The sound of fighting can be heard. NINO hides behind the bed. Finally, three gunshots are heard. NINO jumps on the bed and hides under the blanket. The bathroom door opens. Covered in blood, GIA slowly emerges from the bathroom.*]

Gia: I'd be very tall, as tall as a basketball player, and very upright. Because most players are hunched.

Nino: Did you kill him?

Gia: Yeah, I'd be very tall, with brown, short hair, and slightly pale complexion. I heard on the radio women prefer pale-faced males... And green eyes for sure, amazing green eyes, long lashes and my gaze would be thoughtful and sad. Because sad people have some kind of mysterious advantage over the others. Women like sad men... If I were a basketball player, I'd be a film director, or an actor... I'd make many films and become famous. If I were a basketball player, I'd play Hamlet. I'd see his father's ghost and drop poison into his uncle's ear. Of course, I'd hate his mother... [*NINO helps him out of his jacket and unbuttons his shirt.*] Do we know each other?

Nino: Suppose we do...

Gia: Are you sure you know me?

Nino: Sure, sure I do.

Gia: Then tell me...

Nino: [*unclasping his belt*] Can I?

Gia: [*holding on to his belt with both hands*] I just want you to say my name.

Nino: Now it looks as if I've deprived you of your name, but it's not what I meant.

Gia: Then tell me what you were about to say when you said 'Suppose we don't know each other'?

Nino: Did I say that?

Gia: Exactly. You said we didn't know each other.

Nino: No way!

Gia: I heard it with my own ears!

Nino: I'd never say such nonsense.

Gia: You're a woman who never says nonsense?

Nino: Not that kind!

Gia: But you did!

Nino: Did I say, 'Suppose we do'? Are those my exact words?

Gia: Word for word.

Nino: Oh, I remember!

Gia: Such progress!

Nino: But before that you said something...

Gia: What crap is that? Did I say 'something'?

Nino: Then I answered that suppose we didn't know each other, and then you interrupted me.

Gia: Finish now if I interrupted you!

Nino: I don't remember.

Gia: It means I remember correctly, right?

Nino: Remember what?

Gia: That you don't remember.

Nino: Let's face the truth.

Gia: Gladly.

Nino: And admit it all began because...

Gia: Because you were embarrassed to admit you didn't know me.

Nino: I didn't mean that! [*After a pause.*] What has embarrassment to do with it?

Gia: It was rather rude of me to ask what I had no right to ask.

Nino: What was rude about it?

Gia: Men don't behave like that.

Nino: I don't know what others do but... I again forgot what I wanted to say.

Gia: And as usual, I remember.

Nino: I've always relied on you!

Gia: Give me a minute... It began like this...

Nino: Which words do you mean?

Gia: Are you going to listen? I said you felt embarrassed to admit you didn't know me and you said it was rather rude of you.

Nino: I said that?

Gia: You also added that men don't treat women like that.

Nino: It was you who said it!

Gia: I'm sure you don't behave like that with all men. I forgive you. Shall we get to know each other?

Nino: Now listen, please listen without interrupting me, because the matter is really serious. I said I knew you but wouldn't say your name, didn't I? Then I said I wouldn't tell you my name out of principle, right? And now you're saying I'm stupid. Shouldn't I be upset?

Gia: I haven't said you're stupid!

Nino: Neither have I said you're rude.

[*There is a knock on the door. NINO springs up in fear.*]

Nino: [*to the audience*] The same happened to one of my friends. She met a man, jumped into bed with him and his wife caught them! That's when I thought again I'd never do it with a married man. Never! [*Knocking.*] I remember arguing with her, saying those women who do so deserve what they get. And now? Here I am, half-clad, with a stranger in the bedroom, just like a whore, hiding from his furious wife. Didn't I know he was married? I knew when I saw the ring on his finger but thought it didn't matter. [*Knocking.*] She's going to beat the living daylights out of me. My neighbour's dog fell down from the fourth floor and broke its legs, poor thing. Now, why did I say that? Don't remember. [*Knocking.*] Anyway, I'm sure nothing good awaits me. But who knows, if he keeps her out of here it'd be great. God, look at the mess! Know what drives me mad? Must everything I've cherished for all those years end here and now? I mean my life. And what for? Because of that beast? And his wife must stab me in the belly? I shudder at the thought of a cold blade stabbing my liver. I can see red stains on my new dress. The blade is going to hit my spleen too because the rogue's wife will surely stab me again. That's when I'm going to feel how my healthy organs shred to pieces in my belly. I'll wish to say something, but only a croak will escape my throat and I'll decide to die quietly rather than become a laughing stock. I'll collapse on the tiles and will remember every single one who died with their eyes open. Who wouldn't wish to die with their eyes closed, to meet their end normally? But how can they say so later? [*Knocking.*]

[*NINO rushes into the bathroom.*]

Gia: [*to the audience*] It's my wife, I'm sure. She's always threatened to catch me with someone, promising to kill me and her. No, she said she'd slowly roast me. I used to find it funny, wondering how she was going to do it. I thought she's not strong

enough and I can always run away. [*Knocking.*] But now I know I'm so scared I can run nowhere. [*Knocking.*] Now it's vital that she doesn't ask certain questions or look into my eyes. The pain? I'll bear it. I'll gladly let her slap both cheeks! Know what drives me mad? What happened to everything that I liked in her when we got married? I remember our first night. She wore a red night gown... I believed I was the hero of an erotic film... Everything was fine for a couple of years, but then the wardrobe began to fill up with strange underwear. Those corsets, tights dropped on a chair with small feet and a bulging butt... [*Knocking.*] Surely, I don't enjoy wondering around in search of new adventures, do I? [*Knocking.*] Just a minute!

[*GIA opens the door and NINO comes in. It is the same NINO who was in bed with GIA only a short while ago, acting like his lover.*]

Nino: Where is she?

Gia: I always hoped women don't exist!

Nino: Tell me where she is and what her name is!

Gia: Please believe me, Nino, I have no idea. I asked but she didn't tell me.

Nino: I'm not sure what to do now.

Gia: Hit me, kick me, torture me! I deserve it! I'm not going to run away.

Nino: Where is she? [*She looks around.*]

Gia: Who are you looking for? I swear, I don't know if she was at all! Now I only wish to gain your trust again! But first hit me, beat me up, so that I never do the same. Hit me ten, a hundred times, as the poem has it: 'So that the old dagger shows its battle spirit'!

Nino: [*drawing a knife from her bag*] At the moment I'm a calculator! A cheap, Chinese one, with an acid and sun batteries in it. I am charging from both, but still, I can't do more than the destiny had in store for me: to multiply dry dreariness...

Gia: What?

Nino: Yeah, I multiply eighty-seven by ten thousand, divide it by eight, then find a square root and still get a zero! But I go on calculating falsehood, envy, hatred and filthiness.

Gia: What's wrong with you, Nino?

Nino: I'll remember all my life how I go into the bathroom to calculate hypocrisy plus cowardice divided by fear, then find a square root of falsehood from betrayal and all the while I feel it all amounts to treachery.

[NINO rushes into the bathroom. The sound of struggle can be heard. A woman screams. GIA hides under the bedcover. Holding a blood-stained knife, NINO emerges from the bathroom.]

Gia: Have you killed her?

Nino: I always thought you feel only the misfortune, while you know what happiness is when they deprive you of it...

Gia: I don't like you today.

Nino: Because you never remember the most important things. As a rule, one remembers trivial things and unimportant details, believing one knows more than one knows but doesn't remember it... One remembers what he wants to... One must be grateful to remember at least something... *[She begins to undress.]* The most significant things escape one's attention, knowing they will happen again, so one's thoughts just scatter! Is that good or bad?

Gia: Why do you speak in the third person?

Nino: I feel totally alienated. I'm running away from myself. As if there are two creatures in me, one saying all's well and the other telling be fibs about my future. *[She gets in bed with GIA.]* Lately, I've noticed I often speak in the third person. It kind of makes my life easier, as if I'm detached from everything around me, even if it concerns me and my future. *[She accidentally pulls the blanket.]* Sorry.

Gia: My fault.

Nino: I've just killed my husband's lover.

Gia: What a coincidence. I killed my wife's lover.

Nino: No way!

Gia: Such things happen.

[*Pause.*]

Nino: Do we know each other?

Gia: We do. How are you?

Nino: Not bad. Are you sure you know me?

Gia: Absolutely sure. [*He laughs.*]

Nino: Then tell me what my name is.

Gia: What kind of question is that? You think I don't know. Please don't start...

Nino: Say my name!

Gia: I won't!

Nino: Why?

Gia: Because it's embarrassing to demand it from a man who knows you. But do you know me?

Nino: Suppose I do.

Gia: Are you sure?

Nino: Of course I am.

Gia: Then tell me what my name is.

Nino: Now it looks as if I've deprived you of your name. I swear I didn't mean to.

Gia: I believe you didn't.

Nino: You must have noticed I didn't say I knew your name. I just said I knew you.

Gia: It doesn't change anything.

Nino: That's rude. It's not becoming.

Gia: Now admit you knew I didn't know your name, but that you like me, that's why you don't let me leave.

Nino: Keep dreaming!

Gia: What's this then? You're keeping me here and still complain.

Nino: [*getting out of the bed*] You don't know me.

Gia: You've dragged me into this conversation, demanding I say your name...

Nino: Enough! It doesn't matter anymore!

[*GIA also rises. His mobile phone rings. He answers.*]

Gia: Yes, Dad, hold on. [*He gives the mobile to NINO.*] Here.

Nino: [*into the phone*] Yes... In my wardrobe, on the left.

[*She returns the phone to GIA and begins packing the suitcase, preparing to leave.*]

Gia: Please don't go.

Nino: Why shouldn't I?

Gia: I don't know, but if you leave now... Please don't go, stay for a while. I can't take my eyes off you.

Nino: Neither can I. Time to go. It's hot.

Gia: Yeah, it is.

Nino: Let me go.

Gia: I love you.

Nino: Love you too.

Gia: I don't believe it.

Nino: Neither do I.

Gia: Why not?

Nino: If you love me, say my name.

Gia: I will.

Nino: Go on, say it.

Gia: I will, later.

Nino: Come on! Just say what my name is and that's all.

Gia: I won't because I know your name.

Nino: Then describe me.

Gia: You're beautiful.

Nino: And?

Gia: Isn't that enough?

[*NINO doesn't answer, but she indicates it's not enough.*]

Gia: [*looking at NINO but describing another woman*] You've got black eyes, long black hair, you're very slim and tall...

Nino: How awful! Do I really look like that?

Gia: What about me?

Nino: [*looking at GIA but describing another man*] You've got brown hair, quite thick, and green eyes. You're a bit pale, very tall and slightly hunched.

Gia: Seriously?

Nino: [*regretfully*] Yeah.

[*An awkward silence follows. NINO takes the suitcase, ready to leave.*]

Gia: If you leave now, I don't know what I'm going to do.

Nino: Does it matter?

Gia: Of course it does.

Nino: We don't know each other.

Gia: We do. We know each other much better than we suspect.

Nino: Then... [*She means, 'Why don't you say what my name is?'*]

Gia: And you? [*He means, 'Why don't you say what my name is?'*]

[*NINO heads for the door.*]

Gia: Nino! [*NINO stops.*] So, apparently I know your name!

[*The TV set switches on and the author of the play addresses the audience.*]

- Hello, I'm Basa Janikashvili, a playwright and writer. I have written plays and novels, also I'm the presenter of the programme *The Best Books* on the Public Broadcaster Channel...

[*GIA takes a remote control and switches off the TV.*]

Nino: I know your name too, Gia!

[*TV comes to life again, showing the playwright.*]

- I'm in front of the Courtyard Marriot on Liberty Square. I'm going to tell you what brought me here: the thing is that...

[*NINO switches off the TV. GIA and NINO get closer to each other, but before they kiss, TV comes to life again, showing the playwright.*]

- Right now, in one of the hotel rooms they are performing my play *Before We get to Know Each Other*. Because the security doesn't allow me inside, I've chosen to address you in this way.

[*NINO and GIA look at the screen.*]

- The main problem, dear viewers, is that the finale is changed. It's not what I wrote. They've played something different. In my version, the conflict deepens at the end of the play. I wrote a true drama, not a melodrama. The situation is hopeless in my play because the characters don't recognize each other. They seem

to have lost each other, just like it happens in real life. When two people lose each other, they become strangers. That's what my play is about! About alienation, loveless life, about losing each other. I wrote a play about two individuals who lose each other. In my play love is hopelessly lost.

[GIA looks out of the window, grabs his handgun and rushes out of the room, followed by NINO.]

- The finale in my version isn't as sweet as you've just seen. It's completely wrong to offer such an unconvincing ending when completely different events unfold in the performance.
- Also, a play is written for a theatre, so the hotel has nothing to do with it. The hotel is excellent, but one can't have a performance in one of its rooms. I wanted viewers to come to Theatre as usual...

(On the television, behind the author, we see Gia Tsuleiskiri running out of a hotel and rushing toward the author. Nino follows Gia, shouting: "Don't do it, Gia..." But Gia Tsuleiskiri doesn't listen. The author notices Gia Tsuleiskiri running toward him, armed and victorious, and flees. On the television, we see footage of the chase filmed with a phone, and we hear Nino Tsuleiskiri's scream, followed by the sound of a gunshot. We must imagine that Gia Tsuleiskiri is chasing the author. The author, wounded, collapses. The phone falls, but the recording continues. On the television, a sky appears first, then the blurred faces of Gia and Nino Tsuleiskiri. They stare at us from the TV. Gia and Nino Tsuleiskiri together stomp on the mobile phone's camera. The broadcast arranged by the author on the television cuts off. The screen goes dark.)

THE END

2010-2018