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Characters:

KATINKA MEDVE

early to mid-twenties; recent Hungarian émigré; wants to be an actress

ANTAL “BROWN” MEDVE

her younger brother; also a recent émigré, HE wants to direct films

Setting:

Carl Schurz Park, on the East River in the 80s, New York City. The stage is John Finley Walk- the promenade overlooking the river. On the other side of the river is the northern end of Roosevelt Island, and Queens, beyond Roosevelt Island to the northeast. At the tip of Roosevelt Island is a stone promontory with a lighthouse, warning boats away from “Hell Gate,” the dangerous currents around it. Upstage are stone steps leading down to the rest of the park, and a box-shaped compressor that pumps air into the roadway (the East River/FDR Drive) below. Stage right is downtown, stage left is uptown. The edge of the promenade is the apron of the stage. Looking across the river is looking at the booth; looking at the water is looking at the house.

Time:

The play takes place over the course of Easter Monday, April 22, 1957.

Technical Note: The Rex-5 camera that Brown uses has a small motor attached to it in order to advance the film. Each time he shoots, the actor should turn on the motor to activate the camera. Each time the actor loads a roll of film, he should run the camera for 2 to 3 seconds before he starts shooting to avoid using film that may have been exposed in the loading process.

This play was given a public reading as part of the William Inge Theatre Festival (Peter Ellenstein, Festival Director) on Nov. 3, 2003. The cast included Carmen Thomas and Benjamin Smith. Peter Ellenstein directed. A later draft was given a staged reading the Tristate Actors Theatre (Paul Meacham, Artistic Director) in Sussex, New Jersey on November 14, 2006. The cast included Clark Gookin and Katie Tame, directed by Paul Meacham.

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For Tony

(Morning in Carl Schurz Park. The day after Easter, 1957. The sun is bright, burning off the haze of the early day, but the temperature is still cool spring. The Park is quiet, except for the occasional traffic noise drifting up from the East River Drive, and the boat traffic on the East River. Specifically this is John Finley Walk, a promenade overlooking the river)

KATINKA:

(Enters, coming up the upstage steps, hauling a boom mic and a recorder onto the promenade)

Whew!

(Puts the equipment down)

BROWN:

(Entering up the same steps, HE carries a camera bag)

Care, Katinka! Care!

KATINKA:

I have care. Why you carry camera?

BROWN:

I, director. You, assistant.

KATINKA:

Next time, you will carry sound. Brown-

BROWN:

Barna.

[Brown]

KATINKA:

American English. Brown. You must learn.

BROWN:

You must learn. I know.

KATINKA:

I will never be famous actress if I do not practice.

BROWN:

I not actress.

Actor. For men.

KATINKA:

I care not.

BROWN:

Must practice the English. We are not there anymore.
(BROWN looks at HER, annoyed)

We are here. Be here. You would stay there?

BROWN:

No.

KATINKA:

Well?

BROWN:

Why must choose?

KATINKA:

I don't know.

BROWN:

Is not fair. I want-

KATINKA:

What?

BROWN:
(Shakes HIS head)

Not possible.

KATINKA:

Sometime, you go. You are in Budapest. Expression in your face-

BROWN:

You do it.

KATINKA:

Not so much, I think.

BROWN:

Brother knows.

KATINKA:

Is weak to think no place in this world. Maybe okay for American girl. Not me.

BROWN:

What I see yesterday? Boys playing-

KATINKA:

Boys always play.

BROWN:

Cowboys and Indians! As in Budapest. You think some Hungarian teach them so?

KATINKA:

(Crosses to the edge of the promenade and looks at Queens. Inhales)

Can smell the sea. I forget Manhattan is island. I always dream the sea. Until I see how is....

(Spreads HER arms apart)

to push apart. Far from home.

(Looks down at the river)

East River. Some name.

BROWN:

They should have ask you? "Miss Medve, what you think we name river?"

KATINKA:

(Looks at Hell Gate)

The Danube not go so fast. Look.

BROWN:

(Crosses to HER and looks down at the water)

Something diff'rent? Make it go so? That's why little ... *világítótorony?*
[vih-lah-jee-to-toh-roh-nyee]

KATINKA:

(Pulls a dictionary out of her purse and looks it up)

Light-house.

BROWN:

Light-house there.

KATINKA:

What this park name?

BROWN:

Carl Schurz.

KATINKA:

Schurz? *Deutsch*.

BROWN:

English is “German”! Think park in Yorkville name for Italian?

KATINKA:

Who this Schurz?

BROWN:

I not know him. You remember when we come to New York?

KATINKA:

How forget! New-wark Int’national Airport.

BROWN:

The monkey?

KATINKA:

King Kong?

BROWN:

Day we come here, first gorilla born in zoo. In Bronx, New York Zoo. His name Colo. Photograph in *Daily News*.

KATINKA:

Colo?

BROWN:

That day, I think I am like him.

KATINKA:

You like bananas?

BROWN:

Monkey in cage. Not belong anywhere.

KATINKA:

Why not think you like monkey because ev’rything is new to you, too?

BROWN:

I do not.

(Goes to the sound equipment and start checking it)

KATINKA:

(As SHE stretches)

Spring at home now. Is warmer. The flowers.... I think trees here will be different. The birds ... exotic. But they look the same. The trees- not so old, but they are many same kind.

BROWN:

Is different enough.

KATINKA:

Is ... Feels different, each place. Greenwich Village not like theatre district. Not like here. Is so bright here- No shadows-

BROWN:

No skyscraper.

KATINKA:

World in a block. You not need World Fair in New York ever. Whole New York is World Fair. All the time.

BROWN:

All noise. Subway, presses at my work, automobiles. Even the people. So noise!

KATINKA:

Friendly. I like it.

BROWN:

(Covers HIS ears)

Hurts. I never live on Manhattan. I never sleep here.

KATINKA:

I sleep. Is ... okay. Get used to. I never get used to so much hot water! I wash my hair twice times yesterday. I forget to wish you Happy Easter.

BROWN:

We do in church yesterday. Do you go?

KATINKA:

(Irritated)

No. Christmas only.

BROWN:

I can go. No one is writing my name down to report to AVO. So, I go.

Boring.

KATINKA:

Boring?!

BROWN:

Not of interest. You never go at home. You go now. Fine. I not go.

KATINKA:

You feel happy if you go.

BROWN:

I not. I hear Fred Astaire sing Easter song on radio. About hats.

KATINKA:

He cannot sing.

BROWN:

He is great!

KATINKA:

What you do on Easter Day?

BROWN:

I stand on Broadway, watch the ladies in their fancy hats coming out of great church. *Anya* ... Mother has hats so beautiful before the war. I try not to envy ladies.

KATINKA:

Are you sad for *Anya*, or you want such a hat?

BROWN:

Not sad, only I can't make ... can't see why.

KATINKA:

Camera help you. We start now. If clouds over, or automobiles loud-

BROWN:

You means boats?

KATINKA:

Under the park. East River Drive down there. The highway.

BROWN:

No!

KATINKA:

BROWN:
 That's why we not walk to river. See.
 (Points to the compressor sticking up out of the lawn)
 That puts air in the road.

KATINKA:
 You teasing.

BROWN:
 No.
 (Gets film and Rex 5 camera out of the bag. Takes out a little motor, which HE attaches to the camera. Takes a can of film out of the bag, and huddles over it to keep the light out)

Scheiss!

KATINKA:
 Don't count as cursing if do in German?

BROWN:
 Is ver' important. United Nations never take testimony from film before. We're first.

KATINKA:
 I want the Committee, to have an audience.

BROWN:
 They have no room. This way, they listen.

KATINKA:
 My job not like me take day off.

BROWN:
 My job also.

KATINKA:
 This is not Budapest- there is no Easter Monday here.

BROWN:
 I know.

KATINKA:
 Then why must we today?

BROWN:

I think is good for Easter Monday this film. Good time.

KATINKA:

Can I go to work later?

BROWN:

No. We finish today.

KATINKA:

Not pay me if I not work.

BROWN:

United Nations has deadline. No testimony more after two weeks.

KATINKA:

Just so. We can do later.

BROWN:

You not listen. I need to finish shoot so can edit. I must to synchronize sound. All late at night- only time I can get equipment. I will not sleep.

KATINKA:

But-

BROWN:

I have no time.

KATINKA:
(Suspicious)

This all about to testify? Really?

BROWN:

Yes.

KATINKA:

Not trying to get job there?

BROWN:

What you mean?

KATINKA:

People at United Nations they pay to makes movies, and for the television. They go all over the world. You would wish to do this?

BROWN:

Yes.

KATINKA:
So you will make film to get job?

BROWN:
No. Will be too plain to get job.

KATINKA:
But if some United Nations movie guy see this film. He like it. He say, "I must have Antal Medve!"

BROWN:
Almost no chance.

KATINKA:
But little chance.

BROWN:
We have no time for film, Katinka. I not eat lunch for two months. Olden's Camera not give Rex 5's away.

(KATINKA leans as far over the railing as SHE can looking downtown. HE sees HER and pulls her away)

You crazy?

KATINKA:
I want see United Nations. Can almost.

BROWN:
(Shaking HIS head at HER)
You live through war and revolution to die in East River?
(Finishes with the camera)

Okay.

KATINKA:
(Indicates the mic)
What about this?

BROWN:
Hold it to the rail.

(SHE holds it. HE takes a length of rope out of the camera bag and lashes the mic stand to the railing)
You need must to stay in the frame. Else mic in the shot.

KATINKA:
(Taps the recorder with HER foot)

What about this?

BROWN:
It must to stay out of the shot, far away as possible.

KATINKA:
Why?

BROWN:
Camera make noise.
(Imitates)
Errrr... Sound check.
(Switches on the recorder)
Okay.

KATINKA:
Is not only learn English here. That is hard- English is logical as Magyar.
(HE puts on headphones)
My boss at drugstore calls Magyar-
(With exaggerated New York City accent)
“Mag-yar.” Sounds so funny to me. Americans not so exact with words.

BROWN:
American not have to be so careful what they say.
(HE switches off recorder)

KATINKA:
Magyar must pack meaning into how is said. I think like Chinese. The language is tone.
One word one tone mean “horse,” another tone same word mean “mother.”
(Sighs happily. HE takes the headphones off)

BROWN:
All life is sound to you.

KATINKA:
Is why I sing.

BROWN:
Or being in basement for too long during the war.

KATINKA:
No! If you had practice-

BROWN:

Film school harder than acting school. I got no time as you.

KATINKA:

During the war. I am teaching myself English, reading Noel Coward and J.M. Barrie and Maxwell Anderson in basement. You learn airplanes.

BROWN:

Was important. Government want us to know planes.

KATINKA:

Not matter now.

BROWN:

I like planes. To think of them in the dark. You hide in the basement, but I know about what is bombing. Is better to make it so. Less scared. Being in basement make me want to see ev'rything.

KATINKA:

Make me want to be an actress. When I was little girl-

BROWN:

(Parroting)

“When I was little girl-”

(Picks up the camera)

Get in the frame.