

Excerpt from the play

THE LAST NIGHT OF THE DEER

by Jānis Balodis

DRIVER. My daughter was three or four years old. I was in the car with her, and she asked: "Dad, are you a driver?" And I said: "Yes, I am a driver". And she said: "No, you are not a driver, you are a dad."

CO-PILOT. Who are you then? A father or a driver? Or maybe you are both of them? Or neither - neither a father or a driver. Or you're something else.

Co-pilot goes to play a melody on a synth.

DRIVER. Well, she's seven now. And there is another baby who just arrived. And I will drive that baby too. And she might ask: "Driver, are you a driver?" And I will say: "Yes, I am a driver. I am the driver for you, and I am the driver for your sister. I took her on her first drive. And took you for your first drive. And for the second. I drove you to see your grandparents. I drove you to see your godparents. I drove you outside of Riga. And I drove you to the countryside. I drove you to the lake. I drove you to see the sea. I drove with you across the border. And many times I drove away from you, but then I was driving back to you. I was never driving in the backseat together with you, because I wanted to drive. I drive. Driving you to the kindergarten, to your first birthday party, to the school. And at one night I will stay awake, and maybe you will write a message: "Dad, I think I drank a bit too much, maybe you can drive and pick me up." And I will drive to the same summer cottage district I drove 30 years ago to get drunk. I will drive, and I will be driven by everything that I have driven. And you will get in the backseat, and I won't be there again. You will tell me the address of our home, give me 15 euros and say that's all you have and fall asleep. And I won't wake you up. I will drive. I drive. It's like in that song - are we fathers or are we drivers?

CO-PILOT. I said I will soon need to pee. And I also said that I am exactly 248 days past the age of my father when I was born. And I was the last kid.

DRIVER. Wait, so you don't have kids?

CO-PILOT. No, and I don't have a car. I don't own a flat. I don't have a stable income. I haven't seen my father for two years, and I hope your omen is not true. I really hope.

DRIVER. I'm sorry.

CO-PILOT. I want to drive with him to the mountains. Or to the sea. Or to the rivers. I will and he will drive.

DRIVER. Being a driver is not fun and games. What if you are late? What if the kindergarten is already closed. What if there is a snowstorm outside /

CO-PILOT. Like the one now?

A snowstorm tunes in.

DRIVER. Exactly. A snowstorm, and the nursery school teachers are going home, leaving my daughter alone outside saying: "Where is your driver? Your driver is never on time. Good-bye."

CO-PILOT. That would never happen.

DRIVER. What if it does?

The driver sits down on the seat.

What if the gas runs out when I stand in a traffic jam to the kindergarten?

What if a tree falls on the street?

What if she can't recognise me?

What if we are strangers to each other?

What if we are not strangers but we live parallel lives?

What if I have done everything wrong?

What if it's wrong?

What if it's wrong?

What if she thinks all the time why did my parents split up?

What if it's wrong?

What if she asks me: "Why did you bring me into this world?"

What if it's wrong?

What if I have to say just one non-egoistic reason "why", and I can't find one?

What if it's wrong?

What if I say I know that life is more of suffering and pain than joy, and in the end you will see your loved ones dying and you will yourself get weaker and older but I still thought it is a worthwhile experience to have?

What if it's wrong?

What if it's true for the world I came from and that world is gone?

What if it's wrong?

What if it's true for the body I have?

What if it's wrong?

What if I can try to imagine the world in her twenties, thirties, fifties, in her sixties but I am afraid to do that?

What if it's wrong?

What if it's wrong?

What if I'm taking the wrong exit now?

What if my phone dies, both of our phones die, and I have to drive by memory?

What if I can't trust my memory?

What if it's fucked up because I tried to be a good son, good student, good person?

What if I haven't done anything really meaningful?

What if silence is the answer?

What if it's not?

What if I'm just obsessed with purity, and I can't accept that things are not one but many? That someone and something can be good and also bad, a source of joy and a cause of sorrow?

What if it's wrong?

What if my daughter who was recently born at 18 years receives money (if I will have any) for her education or anything else she would like to have and afterwards finds out that I killed myself?

What if it's a good plan?

What if she, knowing me for 18 years then, thinks that it was the best thing he did?

What if it's wrong?

What if it's just a question of finding a goal that is larger than myself?

What if it's not even that?

What if it's a need to know that I am?

I am, I am, I am, I am, am I...

What if that feeling can't be given?

What if we drive home from that kindergarten and she asks: "Who's your hero?"

What if she maybe wants to say that I'm her hero but I start to say that as a kid I liked Spider-man, and he's still my favourite, and after hearing this it would feel stupid for her to say: "But for me - you are my hero."?

What if I need to show her how she can keep her beliefs, how she can say them out loud, but at the same time can challenge and change them?

What if I don't know how to do it myself?

What if many years ago when I was driving with my dad I would have spoken my mind and said: "Dad, great that your hero was a movie character of Native American played by a Serbian guy in an East German movie, but for me, dad - you are my hero."

What if it all could have been different?

The driver stands up.

What if it all could have been different?

What if I stop?

Here - let's stop at the petrol station.