

Andrew

Hello everyone. This is Andrew Pond, Artistic director of Eclectic FULL Contact Theatre. Welcome to Season 5 of The Half Hour Audio Hour. Every month, we'll be featuring a different playwright, allowing you to not only hear their work, but to find out a little more about them and their process. If you enjoy what you hear, please remember to like, follow, and subscribe to our podcast. And feel free to leave a review! You can help us out in continuing this work by heading over to tinyurl.com/EFCTHHAH, where you can sponsor us through a one-time or recurring donation and become our partner in highlighting the voices and stories of women, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ artists.

This month's production is "Unrequited Love", written by Elena Naskova, directed by Devon Carson, and starring Dakota Pariset and EFCT Company member Alexis Vaselopulos. Before we start, we'd like to briefly introduce you to Elena Naskova. After the production, stay tuned for an interview with Elena for more insight into the play and this process.

Elena Naskova is an immigrant. She was born and raised in Macedonia and immigrated

to the USA in her late twenties. After living for thirteen years in Los Angeles, she moved to Seattle, Washington.

Elena's plays have been produced, read and published in the USA, Canada, England,

Spain, and the UAE. Some of her plays have received awards at theater festivals.

Elena is a member of the Dramatist Guild of America.

And now, Unrequited Love

AT RISE: WILDERNESS.

DAN2

I'm an experienced hiker, but I was caught off guard. I didn't expect such weather. It was going to be a 60-degree day! Clouds were moving in, and there was more snow on the ground than I expected, which slowed us down, significantly. I took a shortcut and I somehow got off course. At some point, I realized things were unfamiliar and we were actually "lost."

(pause)

The first thing you do when lost in the mountain is, you stop hiking. Searchers cannot hit a moving target, and continuing on will only get you more lost.

DAN1

Get up, Liz! We need to move to warm up.

(pause)

Liz! Get up!

LIZ1

I'm warm ... and cozy ... and exhausted ...

DAN1

No, Liz, you're not! You're freezing!

LIZ2

There was only white ... white under me, white above me, white around me. Nothing else but frozen white. My eyes were sore and tired, my mind was blank, and I was exhausted.

(pause)

I'd stopped freezing and shivering, and I was sleepy. Extremely sleepy.

DAN1

Get up, Liz! If you fall asleep now, you'll never going to wake up again!

(pause)

Liz! Open your eyes!

LIZ1

Let me be, Dan. Just for a few minutes. Just so I can gather back my strength.

DAN1

Open your eyes, Liz! Now!

(he grabs her shoulders and shakes her)

Liz! Open your eyes, now!

LIZ1

Stop it, Dan. Stop it, please.

DAN1

Stand up! Now!

LIZ1

There's no up, Dan. There's only white.

DAN1

You can't give up on me, Liz! Please.

Liz, please, I need you!

DAN2

I couldn't just let her give up and watch her die on me. Witnessing

her death would've devastated me. I didn't need that while fighting to survive.

LIZ2

Hearing him say that he needed me brought me back from where I was headed. Dan had never told me anything like that before. During the six months that we'd been together, he'd always kept his distance. I had accepted that and had given him space and time, while I was... falling deeper and deeper in love with him. Telling him anything even close to that would've scared him off, so I kept my love to myself, waiting for a sign from him that he was ready for the next step. His 'I need you' filled my frozen body and mind with so much warmth, as if the sun had made it through the thick dark clouds and was shining on me.

Liz1 tries to get up but she doesn't have the Strength.

DAN1

Come on, Liz. You can do it.

Dan1 helps Liz1 get up.

LIZ1

Bonfire! Let's walk to the bonfire!

DAN1

Where?

Okay Liz. Lead me to the bonfire.

Liz makes a few steps and then she stops.

DAN1

What is it?

(Liz1 attempts to sit down.

Dan1 prevents her from falling down)

Hey, careful! What are you doing!

LIZ1

This is it.

DAN1

This is what?

LIZ1

The bonfire. If we walk any further, we will walk into the flames and burn alive.

Liz1 tries to sit down again.

DAN1

Hey! No, please!

LIZ1

I need to sit down.

DAN1

Let's walk around it, instead.

LIZ1

I can't walk anymore, Dan. I'm exhausted. I walked all the way to the bonfire.

Liz1 attempts to sit down, again. Dan1 helps her. He sits next to her.

DAN1

We shouldn't sit too long, Liz. We should keep on moving.

LIZ1

This is it, Dan. This is when and how we die. We die here today by the bonfire.

DAN1

We're not going to die, Liz! We're going to get through this. We're going to be okay. They're already looking for us. I know they are! Dave knows where we'd gone hiking. I was supposed to meet him for a beer this afternoon, right after I dropped you off. Dave has already realized that something isn't right since I haven't shown up and I hadn't called. He knows that I'm not a flake, and I know that Dave will raise a bloody hell and get everyone out here searching for us.

LIZ1

Everyone dies ... sooner or later.

Pause.

DAN2

I was certain that I couldn't possibly die then and there. But I wasn't sure about Liz. Liz was ... giving up.

LIZ2

I felt completely calm and resigned about dying. There was no fear and no self pity about me dying. But I was sad about Dan. I wanted him to live.

LIZ1

I'm not the woman you would want to die with, am I?

LIZ2

It was just a private thought. I don't know why I was saying it aloud. It was as if it wasn't me who was talking. Those were my thoughts, and that was my voice, but it wasn't me who had control of what was said, and what was left out.

DAN1

I don't want to die, Liz! I don't want to die on this damned trail by this imaginary firework. I'm only thirty-six! I'm too young to die. There's so much left that I want to do and ... and ... my mother would be heartbroken.

LIZ1

You must be very scared. I'm sorry.

DAN1

You should be scared, too.

LIZ1

I'm not scared. I just want to go to sleep.

DAN1

Open your eyes, Liz!

Dan1 shakes her shoulders again.

LIZ1

Stop it. That hurts. Why do you hate me so much?

DAN1

I don't hate you!

LIZ1

Yes you do. You hate me.

DAN1

I don't hate you, Liz! I ... I love you.

Pause.

LIZ2

It was the first time he'd said anything even close to that.

(pause)

Love was not a word in our relationship vocabulary, and hearing him say that he loved me ... made me think that maybe he did love me, after all. Maybe he just had a hard time admitting it. And now that he... now that he had realized that this was probably his last chance to tell me how he really felt, he'd gathered the courage to say it.

(pause)

Oh, how much I loved him at that moment, I wanted to jump up and embrace him with all my strength.

DAN2

Telling her that I loved her woke her up a little. So, I decided to keep on going.

Liz1 makes a move as if trying to get up, but she has no strength to do much.

LIZ1

Please say it again, Dan.

DAN1

Say what, again?

LIZ1

What you just said.

LIZ1

Please?

DAN1

(pause)

I love you, Liz.

DAN2

Well, I did love her as a friend, as a fellow human being in danger of losing her life. I knew what kind of love she had in mind. I knew that she wanted more from me. She wanted a more serious relationship. She'd never said that, but it was obvious by how she acted and how she was always trying to inch up closer to me... and my life. It wasn't bothering me that much then, but I knew that it would become tiresome, eventually.

DAN1

I wish that ... I wish that I was telling you this under different circumstances. I wish, we were somewhere romantic ... on a boat at sunset, or in a mountain lodge ...

LIZ1

No mountains, please!

DAN1

How about a beach resort?

Liz1 stares somewhere far
in front of her.

DAN1

Liz?

(pause)

Liz!

LIZ1

I'm just lying by the sea in a soft beach chair, and you're lying next to me. It's a warm and sunny day and it smells of the sea. The sound of crashing waves is so soothing ...

Liz closes her eyes. Pause.

DAN1

Don't close your eyes, please! Liz! Open your eyes, now!

Dan1 shakes her again.

DAN1

Liz! Open your eyes, now!

LIZ1

Why?

DAN1

Open your eyes because ... I need to tell you something very important.

LIZ1

What?

DAN1

It's one of the most important things that I'll ever tell you!
You don't want to miss it!

LIZ2

I barely managed to open my eyes. I held my breath waiting to hear. He was quiet for a while, but his eyes were burning. He was looking at me as if... That movie came to my mind, "Ever After", and that scene where the prince was just about to propose to Danielle...

DAN2

She was even smiling a little as she was staring at me with her frozen eyes. I had no idea what to say. All I knew was that it had to be something good, and I'd said "I love you" already.

(pause)

There was this long, frozen silence. It felt like we'll never get to say anything to each other, ever again. The sun has set and it was already twilight. It was going to get dark in less than an hour and the ways that I could create light were limited. I did have a flash light, fortunately, and we had our phones, if the batteries were still charged.

LIZ2

And then he finally said it. 'Liz,' he said, 'will you marry me?'

LIZ1

I will, Dan. I will marry you.

DAN2

What!? I hadn't said a word, much less proposed to her. Can hypothermia cause insanity? She wasn't taking off her clothes, or anything, but she was definitely acting like a mad woman.

LIZ1

You can kiss the bride.

Dan1 hesitates and then he kisses her.

DAN2

I hesitated, but I kissed her, which really frightened me because... I could taste death on her lips.

LIZ2

So, that was that. He proposed to me, and of course I said "yes."
Even if I didn't love him, even if I hadn't wanted to marry him,
how could I have said anything but "yes"? How could I've refused
his proposal on that cold day while lost in the mountains, frozen
and facing death? For me that proposal was unlike any proposal
ever made. I was about to die, he was about to die, and at the
moment when his whole life was flashing in front of his eyes,
when there were so many things and so many people to think of, he
chose to propose to me.

(pause)

And so there I was ... engaged and about to fall into an eternal
sleep. It was bitter-sweet, to say the least.

DAN2

I can't explain the relief when the rescuers found us. It was
like ... like I could finally breathe, and smile, and think about
what will be, instead of what could've been.

SCENE 2

HOSPITAL ROOM.

Liz1 is in the bed, reading
a 'Modern Bride' magazine.

Liz2 enters.

LIZ2

The next thing I knew, I was in the emergency room. We've been
rescued... . They'd let Dan go home just after a few hours, the
Superman that he was. I, on the other hand, was admitted for
hypothermia and frostbite.

(pause)

It took me a while to get in contact with Dan. He claimed to be
busy seeing family and having some emotional issues to deal with.

DAN2 enters.

DAN2

Liz kept on texting and calling, wanting to see me. I was going to wait a while. I needed some space. And ... whatever was going on between us, I wanted to end it.

(pause)

I figured she wouldn't stop bugging me until I go and see her, and tell her in person how I felt, and where I was emotionally.

Dan1 enters with a bouquet of yellow yarrow.
He stops by the door.
Pause. Liz puts down the magazine as soon as she hears him.

LIZ1

Dan! Hello my love! Why are you standing there? Come come give me a hug.

LIZ2

He was looking at me as if... as if he wasn't glad to see me. Has he stopped loving me? I wondered. "Don't read too much into his body language. Just look at his choice of flowers," I told myself. Yarrow is a symbol of love. Dan wouldn't have known that, but he must've asked someone in the flower shop.

(pause)

Why am I insecure about his love when his love saved my life? Because of his love I have a second chance to live and to... to love him!

LIZ1

I'm so happy to see you, Dan! Sorry, I'm not looking my best.

DAN1

You're alright.
Pause.

LIZ1

Are the flowers for me?

DAN1

Who else is in here?

LIZ1

You're so sweet.

DAN1

We made it, Liz. We're alive.

LIZ1

We did, Dan. Thank you for saving my life. You are my Superman.

DAN1

You're welcome, Liz. I did what I had to do.

LIZ2

It was Dan's idea to go on that hike. He had done the hike in early spring a hundred times before and insisted that I had no reason to be concerned about the weather. But I was concerned. It was too early for a hike. It was only March. Late March, but still March. I was going to tell him that I didn't want to go, but I didn't want him to see me as a weak person. He had once told me that he liked strong women. And I wanted to be one of those... a

strong woman. And to be that I had to ignore my fears and self-preservation instinct.

LIZ1

Are you going to give me a hug, finally?

Dan1 approaches her. He gives her a hug and quickly moves away from her.

LIZ1

How about a kiss?

DAN2

She wanted me to kiss her, but I avoided her lips. I couldn't even kiss her on the cheek, or the forehead. I was still horrified from that kiss of death, up in the mountains.

LIZ2

It slammed into me like a crashing wave. I had been such a fool. It had all been fake. And stupid me, I'd fallen for it. He hadn't meant any of it. A little voice in me had been trying to tell me that the whole time, but I preferred to be a fool.

LIZ1

Are the flowers for me?

DAN1

Yes, and they're yellow.

LIZ1

Yarrow is a symbol of love.

DAN1

Red flowers mean love. Yellow flowers mean friendship.

LIZ1

Yet Yarrow is a symbol of love.

DAN1

Yarrow?!

LIZ1

That's the name of the flowers that you're holding.

(pause)

Can I have them, if they're for me?

Dan1 gives her the flowers.

LIZ1

Thank you. I'll ask the nurse for a vase when she shows up. For now, I'll put them on my 'Modern Bride' magazine.

Liz1 puts the flowers on the top of the magazine.

LIZ2

The way he looked at that magazine as I put his flowers next to it. He looked at it like a... like a scared little mouse that had been caught in a trap. Not supermanly at all. I was scaring Superman, and that was starting to make me feel powerful. I felt like a... strong woman for the first time in my life. I knew the feeling was going to be short-lived, but I was going to hold onto it as long as I could and play with him for a while. Like a cat plays with a little mouse.

LIZ1

There's so much we have to talk about, Dan. We have plans to make!

DAN1

What kind of plans?

LIZ1

The kind of plans that engaged people make.

DAN1

I don't follow you.

LIZ1

You don't?

DAN1

No ... I don't.

LIZ1

Dan? Has something changed?

DAN1

Who are 'the engaged people'?

LIZ1

You and I. Aren't we?

DAN1

We're not engaged.

LIZ1

I thought we were.

DAN1

An engagement would mean that there has been a marriage proposal and an acceptance of that proposal. And nothing like that has happened.

LIZ1

When we were up there, on the trail, you proposed to me, Dan. And I said 'yes'.

DAN1

No, Liz. Nothing like that happened.

LIZ1

So you don't remember proposing to me?

DAN1

You were starting to hallucinate, Liz. Maybe you'd ... dreamed it, or imagined it, or ... whatever. I bet that ... after some time, you'll realize that.

LIZ1

Just say you'd changed your mind, Dan. Why pretend that it never happened?

DAN

Why would I say it happened when it didn't?

LIZ1

And you're absolutely sure about it?

DAN1

Yes, I am.

LIZ1

What if you'd forgotten?

DAN1

No Liz, I've never had any intention, nor desire to even consider it.

LIZ1

You know how you liked to say that you've never been lost in the woods. Well, you can't say that ever again.

DAN2

We took a shortcut and we got lost. I shouldn't have taken that shortcut, but I did it because of her. She was moving slowly and I got concerned that she may get too tired.

DAN1

Okay, Liz. I'll never say I haven't been lost in the woods, again. Unless, I forget about it.

LIZ1

Please leave. And take your flowers with you.

Liz1 gives the flowers
back to Dan1. Dan1 takes
the flowers.

DAN1

Dave is throwing a party for us next Sunday, to celebrate that we'd made it out alive. He asked us both to be there. You should be out of here by then.

LIZ1

Are you really asking me to go to Dave's party with you, or am I hallucinating again?

DAN1

I didn't ask you to go with me. I asked you to come to Dave's party. I'll give you his address, if you don't have it.

LIZ1

Tell Dave that Liz fell asleep and didn't make it off the mountain.

DAN1

That's pathetic, Liz. Dave saved your life! If it wasn't for Dave, you would be dead and frozen, still sitting by your imaginary fire!

(pause)

I'm sorry. It's your choice.

(pause)

Are you sure you don't want to keep the flowers? They're bright and colorful, and it's a gray and gloomy day outside.

LIZ1

Just go, Dan! Go, and let me sleep!

Dan1 exits.

Pause.

LIZ2

Liz got lost as she fell into unrequited love, long before the incident on the mountain. She ignored her instincts and agreed to go on the hike because Dan wanted her to go. As for Dan, he knew what was going on with Liz, and he used it to save her life so that he could save his life.

(pause)

Love can save you, or kill you. And love killed Liz, so I could be saved. Yes, the lost Liz, the humiliated Liz is dead now. She died so that I'll never be lost again.

Andrew

Thank you for listening to Unrequited Love, here on The Half Hour Audio Hour. Next up is a brief interview we conducted with Elena Naskova after the recording of this show.

[Andrew]

So first off, Elena, I want to say thank you so much for being on this episode of Half Hour Audio Hour and for letting EfCT be part of your show, Unrequited Love. So the first question that I have is, how long have you been writing?

[Elena]

I've been writing plays for 20 years, probably, a little more than 20 years. Before that I was writing short stories and poetry. I got into haiku writing too.

I was writing a screenplay at some point with a friend of mine, and I had a conversation with a stage actress who told me, she said, don't bother writing screenplays. Start with plays. I mean, with plays at least you have some chance of seeing some of them produced.

And I listened and it was great advice because I fell in love with theater. After that I read everything about playwriting and theater, everything I could find. And then I saw all the plays I could see, and it's been a 20-year love affair with theater and playwriting.

And I've been really enjoying it until now, and I hope to enjoy it a little longer.

[Andrew]

That's absolutely wonderful. And so what inspired *Unrequited Love*?

[Elena]

I don't remember exactly what inspired me to write *Unrequited Love*. I've written that play a long time ago, not long time, a couple of years ago. And I've been writing it since it turned out that writing a play about what someone's thinking is not a very easy task.

I've probably read about people being stranded in the mountains. I live in the northwest, lots of hikers, and there are lots of stories about people being stranded. And I stress about, when I read them, I stress about what's going to happen.

So probably I read something about that, and it started there. The basic idea of the play is to kind of convey how we're all in our own world, no matter where we are, what's happening with us, and how one event, especially if it's like a stressful event, can affect us completely differently. And we can experience it differently.

I would like to think that this play is a positive play, even though Liz ends up really hurt and kind of a little humiliated at the end. But she survives. She learns a lot.

And she learns a lot about herself, I think. And she will move on from there and get where she needs to be and with whom she needs to be. I also think that Dan learns a lot about himself, too.

So it's a very positive play, and it happens to all of us. We're in a relationship that might end up very badly. But at the end, we learn from it, because we learn the best from drama, right?

And no matter how bad your relationship ended, it can mean a serious growth for you, and it can really enrich you and get you closer to who you really are, I think.

[Andrew]

I think that's a really interesting idea that this is an overall positive play. I think that's a really important thing, because it is, in a lot of ways, a lot of people may look at the end of this and think that, oh, both of their lives really are ruined. But I love the idea that it's a positive play, allowing them the chance to grow and develop.

I think that's wonderful. My next question is, what do you like about writing for audio?

[Elena]

Writing for audio gives you freedom. You don't have the visual constraints. You don't have financial constraints.

You don't have to worry about staging. So it allows you to push your boundaries and allows you to use your imagination and go as far as you can. So it's about freedom, I think.

It's about just going for it without worrying about, can that be done, really?

[Andrew]

That is one of the really wonderful things about being able to produce audio drama, is that you don't have to worry about all the attendant stuff that requires either money, time, or special effects. So I agree with you. I think it's wonderful.

So do you have any upcoming projects that you like to promote?

[Elena]

I have two local events coming. One is a stage reading of a short play of mine. It's a weird play.

It's a play about being dead and having to be reborn again. The character doesn't want to be born again, but doesn't have a choice. And the reading is happening in one of the oldest bar scenes in an area close to Seattle called Georgetown.

There is a theater behind in the back. The theater is called Drunken Owl Theater. And there will be a reading with music and poetry.

And the theme of the evening will be sacrilegious or something like that. So it's going to be fun. And I'm looking forward to seeing what they do with my play and with everything else.

Another event is a stage reading of a full length of mine. It's called Tom's Girls. It's a play with only two female characters.

And that's going to be happening in the Edmunds Driftwood Players Theater in Edmunds, which is also area close to Seattle. And I'm also looking forward to that one, too.

[Andrew]

Those both sound amazing, and I hope that they go very, very well. And anybody listening to this who's in that area, you should go check that out. And now this, of course, brings us to the most important question of the entire interview, which is, what's your worst date story?

[Elena]

This wasn't my worst date experience, per se, but it was one of the most disappointing ones. And to go along with the play that we are doing today, I will single that one out. It was just, you know, like we met over the Internet and we end up exchanging messages for two months over the Internet. And oh, my God, I fell in love with that guy so bad. I thought he was my soulmate because our conversations were so deep and inspiring and intellectual and he liked things I liked. And it was just a total connection, and I just couldn't wait to meet the guy.

And when we met, there was nothing there. I distinctly remember the moment when we were sitting next, standing next to each other. I think we were kind of walking and stopped.

I don't know. We were standing next to each other and as if we were looking at that big void between us, big nothing between us. And realizing that, you know, there's really nothing there, which was really ironic. What was really ironic was he gave me a love stories book by Avid, and then we parted, you know, and we never heard from each other again. I learned from that never to date over the Internet again. If I am to meet someone, I'll meet them in person so I can feel the vibes and the chemistry and hear the voice and be there, be present. And since then, that's how I dated.

[Andrew]

Well, it's definitely a story that I hear a lot from people who date over the Internet. It seems like a real crapshoot when it comes to that. Whereas meeting in person seems to, I don't know, do better for some people, some not.

I don't know. I don't understand the whole swiping thing, but I'm old. So that doesn't really matter.

But Elena, once again, I want to say thank you so much for being part of this episode of the half hour audio hour and for sharing your show, Unrequited Love with us. It was really wonderful to work on. And on behalf of myself and everyone at EFCT, I just want to say thank you so very much.

Andrew

We hope you enjoyed Unrequited Love. Next month, we will be presenting The Elevator by Alice Burke, And don't forget to head over to eclectic-theatre.com to find out about all our other shows and projects, like our fourth annual Patchwork Festival, running Feb 21-March 2nd at the Edge Theatre in Chicago. 9 amazing new plays featuring the theme of Redemption! More info at eclectic-theatre.com! On behalf of myself and everyone here at EFCT, thanks for listening