

Dušan Kovačević

THE GATHERING-PLACE

Belgrade May 2005

Dušan Kovačević was born in Mrdjanovac, near Šabac (Serbia). He graduated from Academy for Theatre, Film, Radio and Television, Department of Dramaturgy. Dušan Kovačević is a professional writer. He has written film scripts for the following films: *Special Treatment*, *Who is that Singing*, *The Marathon Runners*, *Once Upon a Time There Was a County (Underground* – in collaboration with Emir Kusturica). His plays include: *The Marathon Runner's Victory Lap* (Sterija Award of the Town of Vršac, 1974), *Radovan III*, *Springtime in January*, *What Is it in Man Which Drives Him to Drink*, *Campaigning*, *The Gathering-Place*, *The Balkan Spy* (Sterija Award for the best play, 1984), *St. George Killing the Dragon* (Sterija Award for the best play, 1987), *A Claustrophobic Comedy* (Round Table of Critics Diploma for the best stage performance, The Sterija Festival 1989), *The Professional*, *A Roaring Tragedy*, *Larry Thompson- the Tragedy of a Young Man*, *Five Stars Container*, *The Shoemaker*. The plays of Dušan Kovačević have often been performed by theatres all over former Yugoslavia, and also by many theatres all over the world (Hungary, Slovakia, Russia, Bulgaria, Greece, Germany, England, USA, Iran) where they have been exceptionally successful.

- In the Professor's home:

MIHAJLO PAVLOVIĆ

A retired professor. A sweet-natured, quiet man. In his declining years, he attempts to transform his home into a Regional Museum.

AUNT ANGELINA

Has spent most of her life in the Professor's house. She has brought up his children, Ivan and Sonja.

IVAN PAVLOVIĆ

The Professor's son. He has always been a problem to the family. And still is.

LEPOSAVA-LEPA PEKARKA

Their closest neighbour, wife of the late Marko, a baker.

SIMEUN SAVSKI

Has been a barber for as long as anyone can recall – a master at shaving, and grumbling. His friendship with Mihajlo dates back to the Professor's first pre-war shave. He is the brother of the late Stevan Savski-Keser.

JELENA KATIĆ-POPOVIĆ

A doctor: an energetic and extremely conscientious woman. Daughter of the late Dr Katić the well-known Head of the Municipal Hospital.

PETAR

A former school-teacher, who abandoned education to devote himself to 'freelance archaeology'.

BATA KONJ (BATA THE HORSE')

An accordion-player. In the old days, he used to play at wedding parties with the late Srećko Ruzmarin.

CHARACTERS

- in The Gathering-Place

The late MILICA PAVLOVIĆ

Wife of Professor Mihajlo Pavlović, cut off in the prime of her life. She remains as lovely as she was.

the late STEVAN SAVSKI-KESER

Former fighter (in the Second World War): a man of strong physique and strong opinions. Father of the late Janko Savski, who during his lifetime did everything of which his father disapproved.

the late JANKO SAVSKI

Spent his life at cafe tables. He left the cafe on three occasions: twice, to see what the weather was like, the third time to meet, his death. A quick-witted lay about.

The late MARKO PEKAR*

Died of distress at having his privately-owned bakery taken away from him, during the years when the revival of the 'small business economy' was still many years to come. He bears a violent grudge against his still living wife, Lepa*.

the late DOCTOR KATIĆ

During his lifetime, a well-known and respected doctor. His reputation has survived his death.

the late SREĆKO RUZMARIN*

A (gipsy) accordion-player, both before and after his death. He acquired the nickname 'Ruzmarin' (rosemary) for having played at so many wedding celebrations (at which rosemary is worn by the guests). A sad, simple-hearted man.

I

THE LAST MOMENTS OF PROFESSOR MIHAJLO PAVLOVIĆ

(Throughout the past twenty years of hard and painstaking research into the findings from excavations of a 'distant province' of the former Roman Empire, Professor Mihajlo Paolović has built up a rich and varied collection of archaeological relics, with which the entire house is now filled. Day by day, this ordinary home has gradually become transformed into a true archaeological museum: the shelves of the living-room, once lined with books, are now packed with funerary urns from more than a hundred graves on the Dobrava slopes. Beneath these urns, ranged in order of value, state of preservation, and importance, are to be seen various tools and implements, weapons, and objects from the daily life of the former conquerors. A separate, glass-enclosed case, serves to 'preserve' the silver jewellery and fragile ornaments of the second or third century. As these ancient objects have gradually settled into the house, they have brought with them the silence and the chill characteristic of most museums.

From outside, through the wide-open window – partly obscured by a white, net curtain – come the plangent sounds of an accordion, And the full-throated cries of people celebrating... A bell rings in the corridor, at the entrance. The sound reaches through to the next room,

rousing 'Aunt' Angelina, a shrivelled, godfearing old woman, dressed in black, and well into her seventies. She crosses to the telephone and picks up the receiver. Just as she is about to speak, the door-bell sounds again, alerting her to her error. Embarrassed by her false reaction, Angelina gestures irritably, as if to show that she has had quite enough of these importunate interruptions, replaces the receiver and goes out to the corridor. Here, in the half-light, she welcomes Petar, an angular, middle-aged man, dressed in a loose-fitting grey suit, two sizes too large for him. He carries a bundle wrapped in canvas. Angelina invites him to sit down, but he refuses.)

PETAR

I won't, thank you. No. How's the professor?

ANGELINA

Poorly. Very poorly.

PETAR

Well... have you called the doctor?

.....

* PEKAR: The literal translation of this name would be Marko Baker. This strikes me as somewhat forced. I have therefore retained the original names, both for the husband and for the wife. For similar reasons, I have also preferred *Ruzmarin* to the surely misleading equivalent, Rosemary.

ANGELINA

She came this morning.

PETAR

And what did she say?

ANGELINA

The Professor must go to hospital – but he won't.

PETAR

Why not, for hell's sake! He must go to hospital, it's quite clear. I'll tell him...

(Petar places his bundle on the table, and moves towards the next-door room, determined to make the professor see reason. But Angelina bars his way.)

ANGELINA

Don't go in. Please. The doctor said he wasn't to be disturbed. She promised to come back around one o'clock. When you rang, just now, I thought it was her...

(She has crossed to the window, drawn the curtain, and is looking outside. The sound of the accordion enters, mixed with indistinct snatches of song... Petar glances at the wall-clock).

PETAR

It's nearly two, already. So much for doctors' promises. Do you have her number?

*(Angelina takes a scrap of paper from her pocket and hands it to him.
Angrily, he dials.)*

PETAR

Hello? Is that the Municipal Hospital?... I'd like to speak to Doctor... Just a minute. (To Angelina) What's that doctor's name?

ANGELINA

Jelena Katić-Popović, daughter of the late Doctor Katić.

PETAR:

Hello?... Jelena Katić-Popović? Tell her it's urgent... Hm? What d'you mean, she's not there?... Well where's she gone, then?

ANGELINA:

She must be on her way here.

PETAR:

Look, isn't there a local doctor on emergency call? Hm?... Well, who am I supposed to ask if not you?... I would suggest – comrade – that you be a little more polite with your callers. Nobody rings you up for the fun of it... Damned nerve.

(Angry and helpless, Petar replaces the receiver and goes back to the table... The door-bell sounds. Angelina hastens to open the door.)

ANGELINA

It must be her...

(Petar carefully unties the many strands of string around the canvas-wrapped object... The visitor on 'urgent call' is not, however, the long-awaited Doctor, but the barber. Lame in the right leg, and a thorough professional from pre-war days, he enters, carrying the professional 'black bag', and speaking as if in self-justification.)

BARBER:

I heard, just a moment ago, from Mr Žunjić... How is the professor?

ANGELINA:

He's not well.

BARBER:

His heart, is it? He was telling me only on Sunday, while I was shaving him, that he has serious trouble with his heart. Says he feels suffocated at night, can't sleep on his left side... But why isn't he in hospital?

ANGELINA:

He won't hear a word about hospital.

BARBER:

Wise man. I've told my apprentices: If I have a stroke, finish me off right away... I don't want to be dragged off to gasp my last in hospital. There used to be a doctor in this town – the late Vlada Katić, father of Jelena, who's our doctor now. You don't find men like him any more. All these others, they just belong to the doctors' dilettante association. Imagine, they even have their own choir in the hospital. In the evenings, they all get together for a sing-song. I've seen them with my own eyes. Crossed myself till my hand was numb! Doctors singing, nurses singing, porters singing, cleaners singing. A huge room, filled with their din – and the people upstairs complaining...

PETAR:

What's wrong with doctors singing? They're also human. They don't have to break into dirges, do they? The professor must be taken to hospital...

BARBER

I don't know who you are, young man, nor what you do – I've never seen you in my place.

PETAR:

And you won't.

BARBER:

But I can tell you this much: with this leech-flask of mine, I've saved many people's lives in this town, and in the villages around. I drop what I'm doing, leave my customers all ready-soaped, and out I go – lame as I am – to give what help I can. I draw blood, apply the compresses, then along comes the doctor to give me stick. Except the tale doctor Katić; he always used to say I deserved a doctor's pension as well. Medicine is surgery, all the rest is fate.

ANGELINA:

Won't you sit down?

BARBER

Thank you... You know, young man...

ANGELINA

Petar is the professor's assistant.

PETAR

Student, Aunt Angelina. I'm a long way from being an assistant.

BARBER

What I was going to say is: I've been shaving the professor for more than fifty years, and I know him as a man who...

(The garrulous Barber is interrupted by another ring at the doorbell. Angelina goes out to the corridor. The Barber turns quietly, confidentially, to Petar.)

BARBER

There you are. Once again, I arrive before the doctor.

(A woman, festively dressed, bustles gaily into the room; her blue 'matching outfit' is decorated with a spring of rosemary; she is wearing a lacy white blouse, and her freshly washed hair is frizzed around her neck – all in keeping with the taste of a fifty-year-old lady attending a celebration... Petar greets her reproachfully.)

PETAR

What's taken you so long?

LEPA PEKARKA

I beg your pardon?

ANGELINA

Petar, this is our neighbour. Mrs Leposava.

PETAR

I'm sorry. I thought you were the doctor.

LEPA PEKARKA

No such luck, I'm afraid! You quite threw me, you know. We've already been introduced at least three times before.

(The Barber has risen; he offers a warm hand.)

BARBER

Congratulations, Mrs Lepa, congratulations. Please convey my warmest good wishes to your son and daughter-in-law.

LEPA PEKARKA

Thank you...But where is the professor? He's not going to back out on us, is he? He promised to come.

ANGELINA

He's ill. Seriously ill.

(The neighbour goes to the door of the adjoining room. For a few moments, she looks inside.)

LEPA PEKARKA

When I told them I was going to fetch the professor, they all clapped and shouted. Half the wedding guests are his former pupils. What's wrong with the professor?

BARBER

His heart.

PETER

How do you know it's his heart?

BARBER

I know.

PETAR

Found out with your leeches, did you? I'll thank you not to practise your sorcery and divination in this house. The professor's exhausted, weak, tired out; he was working all spring with the excavators, out on the site, in the rain and the cold, and he refused to rest.

ANGELINA

I told him he should...

PETAR

We all told him, he didn't want to listen.

(The neighbour crosses to the window and shouts down towards her own yard)

LEPA PEKARKA

Quieter, down there! Quiet! The professor's ill! Keep quiet!... *(Returning to the table.)* This morning, after nineteen years, I took off the black weeds I've been wearing for my Marko, and I found myself remembering the professor's wife, our Milica... she and Marko, just two months apart, somehow... died... I put

on this suit, and Marko was looking down at me from our wedding picture... frowning... Only his moustache seemed to quiver.

*(She takes a white handkerchief from her pocket and wipes her eyes...
Swiftly, unpredictably, her mood changes.)*

LEPA PEKARKA

But then – what else could I do? That's life, isn't it? I'm not going to kill myself, that's sure; I've got three bright healthy children. He must have been fated to go that way. He died out of sheer spite when they took away his bakery. I told him: 'Forget the bakery, Marko, to hell with it, you're like crusty bread yourself now, all scorched by the furnace; leave it, we'll eat what everyone else eats'. Huh, all to no good. He was tearing himself apart, burning away inside, then one evening he said: 'Tonight, I'm going to die' – and he did... The doctors at the hospital couldn't get over it; they opened him up, examined him – couldn't find a thing. He died, hale and hearty.

BARBER

The bread you get nowadays, you buy it in the morning, by the evening you could build a house with it. The old two-kilo loaves, golden as an ancient ducat – you can't get them any more.

LEPA PEKARKA

And to make it even more ridiculous, today my son's getting married to the daughter of the very same man who came into the bakery and said: 'Marko, as from today this belongs to the

people; you can stay on as a baker, but you're no longer boss'. But what could I do? The children love each other, time's moved on, and her father was saying: Ah, if only he'd lived it through, now they're encouraging private bakeries again... Introducing the 'small business economy', reviving the crafts'.

And I thought to myself, if my Marko was to hear that we were now kith and kin with them, he'd be after their blood right away... You probably didn't recognise me because it's the first time I've been out of black. When I looked at myself in the mirror this morning – the big one in the hall – I couldn't help laughing, I looked like a parrot.

(The neighbouring courtyard is filled with the sound of accordions and of wedding songs, over which pistol shots are suddenly heard. Lepa crosses angrily to the window and shouts.)

LEPA PEKARKA

Who's that shooting? Hey! Sava! Who's shooting?! *(A voice shouts back, indistinctly)*. Tell them to stop! Or I'll be down right away to break it all off! What do they think this is – 43?! If I hear one more shot, the party's off! *(She turns and moves towards the door.)* The doctor's on her way. I'm going down to get the guns away from the guests.

PETAR

Go, then, go.

LEPA PEKARKA

If the professor feels any better, bring him down for a few minutes. I've made a layer-cake, specially for him.

(Petar impels the neighbour through the door, for she is so overexcited that she will never get to her last sentence... Angelina has gone out to meet the doctor, and now leads her in Jelena Katić-Popović is a woman of middle age, serious and constantly preoccupied. She is wearing a severely cut grey suit, and carrying a black bag very similar to the one on the table, which the Barber brought... Petar has at last managed to 'see off' the neighbour... Without a word, the doctor goes into the patient's room. Petar returns, gesticulating, crosses to the window and shuts it.)

PETAR

She must have had a bit to drink.

BARBER

When should she, if not today? She's brought up three children, seen them all through university, and knitted and sewed for them while they were studying in Belgrade... Say what you like, she's a remarkable woman.

(Jelena comes out of the professor's room, followed, like a shadow, by the old woman. The doctor moves to the telephone, and begins to dial...)

JELENA

Hello... Give me Dr Papić, please... Yes, yes... Hello... Doctor, would you have an ambulance sent right away to No. 20, Karađorđeva... That's right... Yes... Thank you.

(Jelena goes over to the table, puts down her bag, and returns to the patient's room. The Barber stands up clumsily, knocking over the canvas-wrapped package, which falls to the floor with a dull thud. Petar hurries across, alarmed, thrusts aside the clumsy Barber, picks up the package and begins to unwrap it...)

BARBER

I'm sorry... I didn't mean to... Excuse me...

(From the grey, tent-canvas covering, Petar draws out the bronze figure of a Roman warrior, headless and armless, and some 50 cm. tall. The Barber is distraught.)

BARBER

Did that get broken now?

PETAR

No. It was found like that.

BARBER

Excuse my asking, but who removes the heads and hands of these statues?

(The lean archaeologist lifts up the statuette like a child, clearly resolved not to let it out of his hands again... From the professor's room, Angelina emerges, crushed.)

ANGELINA

He doesn't recognize me any longer... He speaks only of Milica.

PETAR

Can I show him this figure? He'll get better when he sees it. We dug it out this morning...

(Jelena joins them. She moves to the table and sits down wearily.)

JELENA

Have you contacted the professor's children?

ANGELINA

I have, yes. I called Ivan, in Belgrade. But Sonja's on holiday in Spain with her family. I don't know how we could get hold of her. She sent a postcard, but no address...

BARBER

Maybe, through their embassy? *(Angelina takes a postcard from the shelf and holds it out to Jelena.)*

PETAR

Is it really so serious, then? I mean, that the relatives have to be called...

JELENA

Yes, it is... *(The doctor picks up the black bag, opens it and, astonished, takes out the jar of leeches. The Barber smiles in self-justification, and hands her the other bag.)*

BARBER

That's my bag... and this is yours.

JELENA

Do you really still, cure' people with these creatures? You came to help the professor?

(Disgustedly, Jelena replaces the jar in the Barber's bag. From her own bag, she takes out a packet of cigarettes and a Ughter...)

BARBER

I came to shave the professor.

JELENA

Weren't you in a bit of a hurry to get the shaving done?

BARBER

Well, the way you doctors arrive on time, I'm rarely late. *(Jelena lights a cigarette.)*

JELENA

Tell me, why do you think I was not 'on time'?

BARBER

I don't know...

JELENA

Then you'd be better advised to say nothing. I've had fourteen calls already this morning, half of them urgent cases. None of your shaving and 'rimming... I work under exceptionally difficult conditions!

BARBER

Why are you so annoyed?

JELENA

Because you're ill-mannered. I won't stand for snide, malicious insinuations like that. I do my utmost to be honest and conscientious in my profession, I'm always on the move, day and night. You can keep your witty jibes for those who sit in the barber's chair.

BARBER

The doctor is angry, for no reason. (Jelena has gone over to the window: she opens it and looks out. The noise of the accordions and the singing has been 'toned down'... The Barber attempts to justify himself to Angelina and Petar.)

BARBER

I just wanted to tell how, long ago, before the war, I shaved the professor for the first time. You see, one day Gazda* Ljubiša came into my barber's shop, you remember him?

ANGELINA

Oh yes, yes.

BARBER

God rest his soul – a fine, strong, clever man, and his son Mihajlo, a graduate, in history and geography. The father had brought his son for his first shave: he came with a bottle of French cognac – drinks all round. He was joking and laughing; and afterwards, he took us out to lunch. Gazda Ljubiša was... well, he had the common touch. The only thing he didn't like was left-handed barbers. Always worried they might cut him to bits... And from that day on, I shaved the professor every day – except for the two-and-a-half years he spent in concentration camp.

(Jelena turns round, like a prosecutor, waiting to pounce on a false declaration from the defence.)

JELENA

Even then, you were very busy. *(The Barber turns pale, shakes, and stands up angrily.)*

BARBER

Are you trying to say what your mother used to say?

JELENA

I don't know what she's said to you.

BARBER

That I went on shaving during the war.

JELENA

Didn't you?

BARBER

I did.

JELENA

And who did you shave? Who?

BARBER

Whoever came in.

JELENA

You could be sharper, wittier. You shaved Germans?

BARBER

Yes, Germans too.

JELENA

And later, when your friend came back from concentration camp, you shaved him with the same razor?

BARBER

How do you mean 'the same'?

JELENA

The one you used to scrape the German officers' cheeks.

BARBER

And if I hadn't shaved them, do you think they'd have gone unshaven? The Germans – as you surely know – are an orderly people.

JELENA

Orderly? And what does that mean to people like you?

ANGELINA

Please, please...

PETAR

How can you quarrel at a time like this? He may be rude and ill mannered, but you should at least respect this house.

JELENA

I'm sorry.

BARBER

We two can talk later about my vulgarity... And you, doctor, can vent your Yew-lover's venom on someone else. There are better' cases' than mine to be found in this town, if you have the guts to look around. And you can pass that on to your mother. If I had done anything I shouldn't have, the authorities would've closed down my barber's shop right after the war...

JELENA

And what was your brother doing after the war, if I may ask?

BARBER

My brother?

JELENA

Yes, your brother, the celebrated Stevan Savski Keser.

(A further outburst of disagreement is unexpectedly halted by the sudden entrance of a tall, middle-aged man, carrying a suitcase. Angelina bursts into tears, goes up to Ivan and gives him a close hug. He kisses the old woman, looks round at the others, then crosses towards his father's room.)

IVAN

How is father?

JELENA

Very poorly. I'm sorry to say, but I don't think anything can be done for him. I've called the ambulance; he'll be taken to hospital... As long as he was conscious, he refused to leave the house.

(Ivan and Jelena go into the patient's room... The Barber walks up and down by the window, breathing deeply, unable to calm himself.)

BARBER

She turns on me like a war criminal. A man with a weaker heart could have died from her insults. And you too, you too, you've made some very cutting remarks. We still have some talking to do – you and me – about who I am and what I am! Should be ashamed of yourself! You work with the professor and you haven't learnt anything from him. I had my legs broken by them, and my spine...

(Jelena returns from the room, stops by the table, and announces calmly.)

JELENA

The professor is dead.

(Angelina hurries back into the room, as if the death might somehow be prevented or postponed. The Barber makes the sign of the cross; Petar goes over to the doctor as if to ask her something, catches the back of the chair, then slowly sinks to the floor. The bronze figure rolls under the table: Petar remains on his back, in a strangely cramped

posture. Jelena picks up her bag, kneels down beside the unconscious man and begins to give him first aid...

Ivan comes out, deep in thought, from his father's room. When he sees Petar on the floor, he gives a start.)

*gazda, literally a landowner or landlord, a word with strong pre-war associations. Here, the suggestion is that Ljubiša was a man of some (financial) weight.

IVAN

What's happened?

JELENA

He fainted. Help me carry him to the armchair.

(Jelena allows the Barber to take her place: together, he and Ivan carry the man over to the wide leather armchair... Angelina her face covered by a handkerchief, her shoulders hunched, crosses the room and sits down at the head of the table... Petar stirs, but still does not open his eyes.)

IVAN

Who is this man?

ANGELINA

Petar. You father's assistant from Javora, the village near Dobrava. He's been helping Mihajlo for the past raw years... Oh God, what's to become of me... Oh, God...

(The mention of the dead man's name brings on a fit of weeping... Ivan is more surprised by the frailty of this unknown man than by his father's death. He simply can't understand why he should have fainted.)

IVAN

He's not ill, is he?

JELENA

No, no, he's not... I'm sorry, Ivan.

BARBER

Please accept my condolences... He was like a brother to me...

(Ivan accepts the proffered hands and the expressions of sympathy with a calm dignity... Jelena goes over to the telephone. While she is dialling, the Barber goes to the door of the dead man's room.)

BARBER

The noblest man in the whole town has left us. The noblest, the wisest, the most honest man. We are left alone.

JELENA

Hello... Yes... Did you send the ambulance?... Yes... The professor has died.

(From the cupboard, Ivan takes a decanter and several ''rakija'' glasses. He pours the first glass and offers it to Petar, Who rubs his face with his hands, as if washing himself.)

IVAN

Drink this. It'll help you... What made you faint? Did you feel ill?

(Petar takes the glass, looking with dazed eyes at Ivan, as though he has neither heard nor understood his question... Ivan goes over to the table, puts down the glasses and pours ''rakija'' into them. The Barber walks round behind the doctor, waiting for her conversation to end. As soon as she replaces the receiver, he asks impatiently.)

BARBER

Do you think that I – with my lame leg – could have fought, and run, and attacked, and carried arms...? You're bitter against all those who survived the war, because your family ended up in the camps.

JELENA

They didn't take them all away to the camps. And you here were also confined to a camp. So let's say no more about it, please. Not another word.

BARBER

At times, you know, I think of myself as a bad man, which, it seems to me, is the mark of honest people; and the fact that I've

not lived a more beautiful, more intelligent life causes me greater regret than anything for which you can condemn me...

(The Barber crosses angrily to the table, picks up his bag, and takes out the razor and strop. As he passes the blade across the taut leather, he observes the doctor with a sideways glance... Ivan raises his glass.)

IVAN

To the soul of my father Mihajlo... as was once the custom.

(Jelena, the Barber and Petar empty their glasses... Angelina lights candles. Petar, now fully recovered, moves across to the table, and crawls under it on hands and knees to reach the statue which had fallen from his hands when he fainted. Ivan, with renewed astonishment, observes this weird behaviour. He crosses discreetly to the Barber, and asks softly.)

IVAN

Is he quite normal, that man?

BARBER

I wouldn't say so. They tell all sorts of stories about him.

IVAN

That's a golden statue?

PETAR

It's worth even more than if it were gold.

JELENA

What a pity these wonderful objects can't be seen by the public. I've heard there are some exceptionally interesting display-pieces here.

PETAR

They're in boxes, up in the attic. But soon the people will be able to see all these treasures. The professor has bequeathed his house to the town, to be turned into a museum. A regional museum such as they have in most other towns.

ANGELINA

Ivan, my boy, how are we going to notify your sister? She's...

(Ivan is not listening to her. Instead, he is staring with amazement at Petar.)

IVAN

What sort of museum?!

PETAR

Big, beautiful, with glass cases along all the walls. Look, here's the plan.. Your father drew it. The inside walls which divide up the house and are not structural supports will be removed; this will give us a large display room... That's it, down there, you see. And the estimated cost... fifty-eight million old dinars... to start with. It'll be an endowment truly worthy of the professor

and your late mother, who fell ill from working up on the site at Dobrava... This will be the history not merely of our own town but of all the people who have lived for centuries in this region. Nearly two thousand years of history, spread out before your very eyes. The Romans, the Huns, the Slavs...

IVAN

Hold it a moment, there's something I'd like to ask.

PETAR

Please do.

IVAN

What do you mean by "bequeathing" this house to the town and having a museum opened here? Could you explain this to me more precisely?

PETAR

Don't worry, everything's been arranged. You won't have to waste a moment of your time over it. The professor went to see the town council and talked to the people there.

IVAN

Did he, indeed? And what did the people say?

PETAR

Well, that they were unbelievably grateful and the they would ensure that everything was done according to his wishes. The mayor has recommended that a commemoration tablet be placed on the outside wall, with the inscription: "Regional Museum – bequest of Milica and Mihajlo Pavlović".

IVAN

How nice.

JELENA

Really, very nice.

IVAN

For one's posterity

PETAR

I'm sorry?

IVAN

And you would be working as custodian?

PETAR

Later, once responsibility for the site and the museum has been taken over by the Republican Institute for the Preservation of Historical Monuments.

IVAN

Excellent. And how does this Republican Institute stand for ready cash?

PETAR

Badly. For ten years they've been promising aid, but at the moment – so they say – there are more important excavations to be financed: Kolovrat – Prijepolje, Tomolava – Šabac, medieval Stalac, Castellian, Mediana and Viminacium, Naissus – Niš...

JELENA

Surely our town also deserves its museum, particularly if it can be started with small funds?

IVAN

But, of course. And do you intend donating your house soon to the town so that they can open up a health centre of an outpatient's clinic?

(The doctor stares at him, baffled by the question.)

JELENA

How do you mean?

IVAN

With small funds... Knock down the partition walls, turn the living room into a waiting-room, and the bedroom into the

doctor's office. Line the walls with wood-paneling and cover the floor with wall-to-wall carpeting...

JELENA

As you may be aware, I live in that house with my husband, my two children, and my mother.

IVAN

Of course. But are you aware that in Belgrade I live cooped up with my wife, and also with "two children", in a small, three-roomed flat?

JELENA

No, I wasn't aware.

IVAN

And you, did you know that?

PETAR

No... But I don't see where the problem lies.

IVAN

Aunt Angelina, I've often spoken to you about it.

ANGELINA

Yes, my boy, you've often told me about your "small three-roomed fiat". But we'll talk about that later, Ivan. It's a shame to...

IVAN

Why then did you let my father get caught up in this museum business? Why did you not tell him to consult me, at least to ask me what I thought about it?

ANGELINA

When did I ever interfere in his affairs? All I know is that two months ago he spoke with your sister.

IVAN

Sonja was here?

ANGELINA

No, they spoke on the phone.

IVAN

And he couldn't call me... So, what did Sonja have to say?

ANGELINA

As far as I could gather, she agreed. She wrote to him...

IVAN

I'm going to ask you to collect all those objects from the room, those boxes from the attic and the cellar, those stone slabs from the yard – and take the lot away from here.

PETAR

Take them away? but where to? Where?

IVAN

Nowhere to take them? Then take them back to that roman necropolis and rebury them. You've turned my house into a mortuary! You've peopled it with dust and bones, with spears and axes: one feels frightened oven to move in here. And tomorrow I shall go to the mayor, and tell him he can put the museum plaque on the wall of his own house. He's got two floors, he can choose whichever suits him. And he can move all this stuff in as well. It's easy to be a humanist and a benefactor at the expense of others.

PETAR

Scientists from the Netherlands Biological Institute have announced a visit, with the promise of aid, at the end of September. Your father had planned to open the museum by the time they arrived.

IVAN

Then welcome the visitors, let them see the graves at the site – but nobody is coming round here any more. And if the town wants a museum, let it build one – or else buy this house. The town is certainly richer than I am. The Pavlović dynasty has

slightly miscalculated. Did my father not perhaps leave instructions in his will for a bronze memorial to be erected to him in the courtyard?... Is it clear to you at last that these things can't be done? For years, I've been coming down here, fixing the foot, repairing the house, setting aside every dinar of my pay, spending my holidays at work while Sonja swans around Europe... And now, at the end of it all, the real kick in the teeth. A regional Museum! Why of all houses did you have to pick on this one?

(Outside, the ambulance can be heard arriving. Jelena picks up the black bag and makes for the door. On the way, she glances at Ivan, and goes out saying...)

JELENA

Your father has died.

(Angelina follows the doctor to see her off. The Barber and Petar sit down at the table... Then the Barber stands up, asking timidly.)

BARBER

If it's all right, I'd like to shave him..

IVAN

Yes, quite all right...

(The Barber takes the other black bag and, shoulders hunched, limps into the dead man's room... A soft song drifts in from the neighbour's yard... Angelina ushers in the weeping neighbour, who is carrying

half a cake on a large platter. She goes over to Ivan, to express her condolences...)

LEPA PEKARKA

I'm terribly sorry, Ivan... I can't believe it. Just two days ago we were talking at my gate...

IVAN

Sit down... please... What can one do...

(The barber comes out, agitated, from the professor's room. He goes to the window...)

BARBER

Has the doctor gone?

(All stare at the distraught old man.)

ANGELINA

She's gone.

BARBER

How could she!...

IVAN

What's happened?

BARBER

She's taken my bag, with all the equipment, and left her own... How d'you like that! I may be absent-minded, yes, I'm getting on but... I'll have to go back to the shop to replace it all, because when she sees the leeches, she'll throw the lot onto the rubbish heap... I'll be back in a moment...

ANGELINA

Please...

(She and the Barber talk in subdued voices, while Lepa continues to bewail her "dear neighbour".)

ANGELINA

Call in at the church, will you? Tell Mića, the priest, about the professor. Ivan won't like that, but you must do it... Tell him to announce Mihajlo's...

BARBER

There, there, calm yourself... I'd already thought of it. But there's something I'd like to say to you. If this young lad sells the house, and if he should happen to forget you, I'm at your service as a friend. My door will always be open to you.. You know how much respect and esteem I have for you.

ANGELINA

Thank you, but it won't be necessary.

BARBER

Please, will you see me out.

(The old woman glances at Ivan, who has been observing her and the Barber all this time, as though he feared some complicity between them.. The neighbour waits until the old pair have left the house, then she dries her eyes and says to Ivan, quite collectedly.)

LEPA PEKARKA

I don't know if you still remember the talk we had last summer. This isn't the time to bring it up but one day, if you come to a decision, my children would be interested. Our two houses have always been like one...

IVAN

We'll talk about it.

LEPA PEKARKA

We were just remembering this morning how, when you were still children, you all decided we should knock down the fence and make a big common yard. The professor got right up from the table, took the spade, and dug out the post by the gate. That was in the days when Marko was still alive, and used to come back from the bakery singing the same song: "All my hopes have been in vain..", poor man, as if he had a premonition of what was coming to him... I just can't get the wedding guests to keep quiet. As soon as I leave the yard, they start their noise again.

(She goes to the window and shouts down, unnecessarily and loudly, to the singing guests.)

LEPA PEKARKA

Quiet down there! The professor has died! Quiet!

PETAR

Please, don't touch any of these things until I get back. I'm going to find somewhere to take them.

(Clutching the long-since broken statue, he leaves the house... The neighbour gesticulates, hopelessly.)

LEPA PEKARKA

The pride's family are impossible! The things they get up to, Lord only knows, it's enough to make you fall on your knees. This morning one of them, thin as a beanpole, put on a devil's mask, and all the rest chased round the yard trying to find him; and when they did, they beat him and squeezed him and kicked him, all chanting: "No devil in the house!". I was hardly able to stop them from rooting out the roses and planting some bushes, with thorns this size on them... Will Sonja be wanting to sell her half?

IVAN

Yes, no doubt she will... *(Ivan pours 'rakija' into two glasses).* There... for his departed soul.

(The neighbour sits at the table and continues her bargaining. Their conversation is gradually covered by the singing from the wedding festival and, somewhat later, by the sound of church bells...).

LEPA PEKARKA

We've already agreed that we'll pay you half the price in foreign currency, as soon as the contract is signed, and the rest – if you're prepared to wait – by New Year, in dinars, with an interest rate of 10% of course for every month as from...

(Ivan remains silent, nodding distractedly and filling his glass... The church-bells, mingling with the sounds of 'Tamo daleko'* - a song which somehow does not suit such a celebration – gradually overpower the garrulous woman. And while she 'dumbly' persists with her recital, and Ivan goes on drinking and gathering invisible crumbs from the table with his fingertip, the soul of Professor Mihajlo Pavlović depart from the terrestrial home which has no doubt embittered his death and settles, 'tamo daleko*', in the Gathering-Place, the extraterrestrial home for the dead of this small town.)

II

THEGATHERING-PLACE

(In an undulating sandy expanse, illuminated by a pallid blue light, five men and a young woman are working in silence. The men are dressed in the clothes of their former 'trades'. Each is building something for himself. The young, extremely attractive woman surveys the men with anger, for they are carrying off the stone slabs and all the other archaeological findings she has so diligently excavated. With undisguised indignation she observes the efforts of a swarthy man, who is struggling to lift an oval-shaped stone, but is hampered by a large white accordion round his neck. Whenever he bends over, he is constricted by the straps. In sheer frustration, he thumps the stops with a dusty fist.)

RUZMARIN

I told 'me, I did, not to bury me with the accordion! Goddamn squash-box – you squeezed out my life on earth an' now you torment me up here!... But then, if I think of Đura, my old mate Đura, I don't feel so bad. He's hardly five foot tall, an' his double bass is nearly six. So if the family's broke when he dies, they'll have to bury him inside the case.

(The accordion-player gives a wheezy laugh. The young woman removes the stone from his hands and returns it to its place.)

MILICA

Will you stop taking these stones I've set aside! You're using valuable relic to build your own nonsense!

(Doctor Katić, a tall man in a dark suit, with a dried-out carnation in the lapel, straightens up and looks towards the nearby hill).

DOCTOR

Look, someone's coming!

(All turn round with a troubled look to gaze at the figure on the sandy slope... Stevan Savski-Keser, a powerful, sombre-looking man, wearing a leather coat, with a large pair of binoculars hanging from his neck, climbs up onto the pile of rocks. He raises the binoculars...)

**Tamo daleko...* Opening words, and part of the refrain, of one of the most celebrated Yugoslav national songs. It's strong associations with war (particularly the Balkan Wars) make in 'unsuitable' here.

(tamo daleko, far, far away).

DOCTOR

Is he a young man?

KESER

No... He's pretty old.

DOCTOR

I'm always worried it may be someone young.

(Marko the baker, dressed as if he had just come out of the bakery, is the first to recognise the newcomer.)

MARKO

Milica, it's your husband coming! Hey, everyone, it's the professor! My dear old neighbour!

KESER

So it is! It's the professor!

JANKO

About time somebody intelligent died!

(Commotion among the men. Milica drops the stone slab and runs to meet the professor, who is slowly coming towards them. He is an angular, greying man, with smiling features. His wife gives him a firm hug and, with her eyes fixed upon him, kisses him several times, as though they were being forcibly parted, not meeting again after many years. The professor is confused. He gazes at his young wife and speaks as though seeing her for the first time.)

PROFESOR

How lovely you look, Milica... Dear God, how lovely... And look at me: a real old dodderer...

MILICA

Here, the words sin of all is to wish for someone to join you. I have sinned, Misha. I've been expecting you every day.

(She bows her head, trembles, and clings to her husband... Janko Savski, the son of Stefan Savski-Keser, and twenty years older than his father – for the father had died relatively young, and Janko had lasted out to sixty-five, which, for such a hard drinker, was more like a century and a half – is the first to come over and greet the professor.)

JANKO

Welcome, Professor!

PROFESSOR

It's good to see you.. I don't know what to say to you, I'm rather confused. I must admit, I didn't believe in all this.

JANKO

Do you know the others? Marko, the baker...

MARKO

We grew up next door to each other, and now you introduce us. Greetings, Misha.

PROFESSOR

Greetings, my old neighbour.

JANKO

This is my father, the famous Stevan Savski-Keser... You mustn't be surprised that I'm twenty years older than him –

that's all possible here. He died at forty-five, I managed to get past sixty and a bit. Now I'm like his father...

KESER

I'm sorry to see you here. You were still good for a few more years...

PROFESSOR

Enough's enough.

JANKO

Doctor Katić, head of the hospital in which most of us gave up the noble ghost.

PROFESSOR

Your daughter, Jelena, was with me to the very last hour. She was truly worthy to step into your shoes.

DOCTOR

She's a doctor?

PROFESSOR

Yes, and highly regarded.

DOCTOR

You could have told me nothing that would give me greater delight. You give me great pleasure, professor.

JANKO

And now, renowned far and wide, our accordion-player – Srećko Ruzmarin. He got the name 'Ruzmarin' for his wonderful playing at so many weddings.

RUZMARIN

Tell me, teacher,* what month is it down there?

JANKO

You never got further than 'teacher'! You're talking to a professor.

RUZMARIN

For me, there's no greater professor than a teacher. Do they still have good weddings? Are people getting married?

PROFESSOR

As always... In fact, there's a wedding on today in your yard, Marko. Your son's getting married. Your wife, Lepa, asked me to go, but as you see I had a justifiable reason for not being there. She brought me half a cake. A grand celebration: music, singing, shouting, shooting...

MARKO

But why did they go on when you were dying?

PROFESSOR

Never mind, Marko. Let us be where we belong. I told Angelina not to tell them what was happening to me. Why spoil the celebrations when there's nothing anyone can do to help? Don't you agree?

MARKO

It's still not right. It's not proper.

JANKO

Professor, they didn't by any chance bury a little 'rakija' with you, did they? No? I knew it! Only the sober die; the drinkers manage to hang on to life.

KESER

It was 'rakija' that killed you, man, and you still need it here?

JANKO

What more can happen to me now? I drank all my life, and suddenly I was stopped short. If I could have just half a glass. You know what's terrible, professor: to die with a hangover, and here not to be able to have a hair of the dog that bit you.

PROFESSOR

I can't understand you; I never was a drinker. All I wanted at the end was sour milk. That's what my soul was yearning after.

(Milica leaves her husband's side and turns in jesting anger on the excited crowd.)

MILICA

Would you very much mind if I just had five minutes to talk to my husband? Just five minutes? And then you can go on as long as you like about your 'rakija' and sour milk.

JANKO

We have all eternity before us.

(The smiling wife clasps her husband's hand and leads him over to a large stone with relief carvings. The professor sits down wearily on the stone, as though he had come the whole way on foot.)

MILICA

How are Ivan and Sonja? Tell me, Misha, you know what interests me most.

PROFESSOR

They're well, really very well. They've got two children each.

MILICA

Two each? For grandchildren?

PROFESSOR

Little rascals, all of them. When they come round together, on your anniversary, they turn the house upside down. Ivan arrived today, and Sonja's on holiday in Spain with her family. It's going to be hard for her, I'm sure, when she hears... She and I got on very well together. But Ivan...

MILICA

More problems again?

PROFESSOR

You know him. Strange fellow. If there aren't any problems, he'll go right ahead and make them. In the end, I must admit, he disappointed me rather.

MILICA

What happened?

PROFESSOR

I'll tell you later. We have time... As he said; We've got all eternity before us. Your sister's well, too. You didn't ask me about her...

**teacher*: Ruzmarin addresses the professor as '*učitelj*', a school-teacher.

(While talking to his wife, the professor has been looking round with growing interest at the excavated stones and archaeological remains lying around them.)

PROFESSOR

Milica, what are these stones? What's this?

MILICA

That's what you'll have to explain to us. Out of habit, I started searching around among the sand-dunes. Then one day I dug out this stone slab. I've been imitating your 'crises-cross' method of digging. I give instructions, like you, but nobody listens to me. They just carry off the slabs, and columns and stones, and build all the things they never got round to building in their lifetime. Surely you'll be able to persuade them that one doesn't mess around with relics as valuable as these. Keser's been building bunkers, the neighbour a bakery, Janko a café, the doctor a clinic, and Ruzmarin a two-roomed flat with a bathroom... I can't go on battling with them any longer. I've been waiting for you to come and help me... You don't know how glad I am to see you, Misha.

(Curious and excited, the professor picks up a stone tablet with a carved inscription.)

PROFESSOR

Incredible... All my life I've been searching for this. Every day I was expecting to come across a large, well-preserved Roman town, but all I ever stumbled upon were the fragments and

shattered remains left after the vandalism of the Huns and Slavs.

MILICA

What do you make of this?... It looks to me like a burial-vault of some kind... We tried to raise the stone slab, but it's too heavy. We've got no tools – the digging's done by hand.

PROFESSOR

I only I'd known where I was going, I'd have brought spades and shovels and pickaxes with me... Still, let's all try lifting together, perhaps we'll manage to shift the slab. Come on, you lot, what 're you waiting for? To work! We're wasting precious time! I've always felt sure there must exist a town of greater size and importance than Viminacium in the province of Upper Moesia.

(The men laugh... Janko pats the Professor's shoulders.)

JANKO

He's new; still hasn't cooled out properly.

PROFESSOR

Come on, let's give it a go; there'll be time for joking later.

(The Professor goes down first into the sandy hollow, the others after him. All together, they take the strain, to the Professor's 'u-u-up!' But the stone slab will not budge.)

PROFESSOR

All we need is two more strong men..

DOCTOR

That's a wish one doesn't make here, professor.

JANKO

As I say, he's new... You wouldn't have a cigarette in your pocket, would you?

KESER

All my life, you shamed and disgraced me, and now even here I have to blush for you!

(The professor takes from his pocket a packet of cigarettes and a lighter. he offers the packet round; most of the men accept... Janko points to a small transistor.)

JANKO

No hope of your having any 4.5 volt batteries, is there?

PROFESSOR

Batteries?

JANKO

They buried me with a transistor, but no batteries. It's only when you die you find out who were living with... If we didn't have Ruzmarin to play for us, we'd never hear music at all. If we had a pretty singer as well – that would be something.

(The baker taps the cigarette ash into the palm of his hand.)

MARKO

It's been long since I last felt hot ash... Who's my son marrying, professor?

PROFESSOR

Well. You won't be glad when I tell you. The daughter of Ilija Rajković.

MARKO

It can't be! He took my bakery away from me...

KESER

It wasn't him, it was the people.

MARKO

What 'people', huh?! He wanted me out, he issued the order, he brought it, and he told me: 'You've fed us long enough, now go home and bake for yourself and your family! The next day, the 'people' came to buy bread – they had no idea the bakery was closed.

KESER

If you really want to know, I was also interested in seeing it shut.

PROFESSOR

You've had a street named after you, the one that used to be 'Balkanska' – running beside the railway line, towards the bridge.

KESER

The cobbled street? With the warehouses and storage-sheds?

PROFESSOR

That's it... They say, Janko – you won't be angry – that they were waiting for you to die first, before naming a street after your father. It's said you caused a scandal, insulting your father...

JANKO

Just as I knew: as soon as I died, they'd do something stupid. While I was still alive, it would never have entered their heads.

MARKO

So, Stevan, you were also working behind my back?

KESER

Yes, I'm glad to say.

MARKO

Then why wasn't that barber's shop of your brother's closed down? He shaved Germans, even during the war. I never fed Germans with bread!

KESER

My brother, Simeun, is a case apart. I forgave him everything because he was crippled. And I didn't pay any attention to him because of this no-good here.

JANKO

Because of me?

KESER

Yes, because of you! You spent the whole war in the café listening to gipsy music! While the rest were shedding their blood, you were singing!

JANKO

That's something you never gave me credit for – keeping the people's spirits up. You might like to know, all of you, that he wanted to kill me. One day when I was in the café, The Golden Eagle, some men came rushing in, shouting: 'Run for your life, Junco, your father's coming with a gun in his hand!'... Already as a child he used to chase me with a willow-cane, then it was

the stick and belt, and finally the pistol. What a teacher, that man!

RUZMARIN

That's nothing, man; he sentenced me to be shot, on the river Drina. He gave the order for attack, at Loznica – but I could see the Germans across the river, waiting for us with guns ready. They were all prepared, out to kill – that was one thing; the other was – I didn't know how to swim. If I didn't get shot, I was sure to be drowned. So what else could I do but give orders to myself – for retreat; I simply retreated, and he sentenced me to death. After that, he was searching for me everywhere; I didn't like to push my luck. The whole war, I just sang through my nose.

KESER

I remember you, and a few others... We should've made short shrift of the lot of you!

RUZMARIN

Hold it, now, hold it! Doesn't a man have the right by law to be afraid? He does! If I'd have had the courage. I'd have been commanding you, not you me.

MARKO

Tell me, Stevan, do you know why that Ilija Rajković of yours was the one who handed me the order to close?

KESER

I know why, and he was right. While he was an apprentice in your bakery, you beat him like a donkey.

MARKO

And he was a mule! That's where I made my mistake!

PROFESSOR

You see how relative it all is. Here you are, quarreling about privately owned business, and right now they're beginning to encourage the so called 'small business economy'.

JANKO

Is that so? As if up till now they'd had a 'big economy'.

(The professor is the first to smile; Janko, to be on the safe side, shifts out of his father's reach.)

KESER

If you'd spent a bit of time behind bars, you might be a little wiser.

PROFESSOR

It's because of words like these that the street wasn't named after you while he was still alive.

KESER

Seeing what they've given me now, they might as well not have bothered.

JANKO

Were you hoping for some street in the centre?

PROFESSOR

No quarreling, please! I had quarreling when I left – now quarreling when I arrive. As far as I can see – if we can't get on together – there's room enough here for us all to... Does anyone know where we are?

KESER

As far as I can tell from my reconnaissance trips, we're surrounded by nothing but dust and sand. A few kilometers the other side of that hill, I came across the prints of soldiers' boots. Apart from that, no signs anywhere, no objects, no voices, no sounds. Nothing anywhere.

MILICA

What was the quarreling about, Misha, when you left?

PROFESSOR

I'll tell you in time...

MILICA

Please.

PROFESSOR

Silly things, really, nothing else. Our son was furious when he heard that I bequeathed our house to the town, to be turned into a museum. He started shouting at people, and threatened to contest the right of transfer... One of the councilors had proposed that the house be regarded as our bequest and that a memorial plaque be put up outside. In the end, it looked as if I had been doing it all to have a memorial erected to the two of us.

MILICA

Misha, why did you give away the house?

(The professor, whose tone has so far been calm, looks angrily at his wife.)

PROFESSOR

Surely you don't also think I was mistaken?

MILICA

I do. You *were* mistaken. It was quite enough that we had been digging away for years, that you were paying the workers out of your own pension, that you saved so many valuable relics. And that I fell ill...

PROFESSOR

But what would have happened to all those relics if we hadn't taken them into our house?

MILICA

And what would have happened to us and to our children if your father had bequeathed the house to someone else? Did you never think of that?

PROFESSOR

You talk just like your son! Sonja told me I was right. She was always urging me to turn the house into a museum. And she is in just the same situation as Ivan. So, the issue is quite different.

MILICA

No, Misha, it isn't. You should have been thinking, above all, of them.

JANKO

Milica's right, one thousand per cent right!

KESER

Don't be so rude! Interrupting when people are talking! The professor did what a man should, because a man should always be above selfish, petty desires!

JANKO

He's right because he cared for his son as you cared for me! I was left homeless in my old age!

(The men, quarreling loudly, divide themselves into two antagonistic groups. Janko is the most vociferous.)

JANKO

You cluttered up the rooms with rusting guns, all sorts of globes and tattered maps, big boots and great coats and flags, and you crammed the yard with cannon-barrels and grenade throwers and half wrecked aeroplanes. I wouldn't have put it past you to have dragged three German corpses into my study!

(Keser goes angrily up to his son.)

KESER

Your study?! When did you ever study anything in your life?! Tell me, so that I can die once again! You frittered away your whole life at my expense! You were a sponger, a loafer, a lay about! In short – a good-for-nothing!

RUZMARIN

Calmly, brother-shades, calmly!

KESER

I came back from the war – no bed for me to rest on! This no-good had sold the lot, even the beds! He'd even sold the old

frames on the family pictures to pay for his café-life. Then he stuck the pictures back on the wall with nails! Grandfather – right through the forehead!

JANKO

If a family has nothing stronger than picture-frames to hold it together, then that family's going to fall apart.

KESER

Oh, indeed?! I'll show you now who's going to fall apart!

(Keser seizes his son by the lapels.)

KESER

I should have had you put behind bars, with all the other lay bouts... Deserters, black-marketeers, fifth columnists!

MARKO

If only I could drop in suddenly on the wedding-feast, just for two minutes, to ask my wife and children why I had to die before my time. To hell with children and whoever invented them. Nobody can let you down the way a child can.

KESER

Nobody!

JANKO

Parents can. And don't you hold my hand any more! I'm old enough to be your father! When I was your age, I took my hat off to people as old as I am now, and greeted them politely. Remember what I say to you now: in that other world, I was your son – here I am your father, not because of my age, but because of my mind, for children are made with what's in your head, and not with what every fool is born with!

KESER

Goddamn your nerve! I'll kill you!

(Keser hurls himself at Janko, who flees behind the stones... While the men struggle to calm Keser and save his terrified son, the professor gazes thoughtfully ahead of him, wondering.)

PROFESSOR

Why did I die? – if only I could know.

(Keser shakes a warning fist at his son, hurls away the stone he had been preparing to throw at him, straightens the binoculars over his chest, and goes back to join the dejected professor. He speaks to him gently, confidently.)

KESER

May I ask you something, professor?

PROFESSOR

Go ahead.

KESER

What's happened to the Germans? The news goes from bad to worse: I hear they're having more and more success. What are they up to now?

PROFESSOR

Nothing... Others are working for them.

KESER

Goddamn them. Just before the end of the war Ilija Rajković told me: 'the Germans have lost the war – the whole world's going to suffer for it'.

(The men slowly drift back to the heap of stones. Janko keeps a wary eye on his father.

Keser, nodding ponderously, repeats.)

KESER

Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes...

JANKO

As soon as he took the reins in his hands, I got a taste of the lash!

PROFESSOR

I had hoped, when I went to my resting-place, I might actually get some repose. I was wrong.

JANKO

When a man fails to become his own teacher, his own law and master, then he becomes all these things to others.

KESER

For the last time – and I'm telling you nicely – don't you dare talk back to me! I swear to you, Janko, before all these people, if you...

(Their quarrel is cut short by a shout from the accordionist.)

RUZMARIN

Hey – what's this coming?!

(The shades gaze up at the 'sky'. Floating gently down from on high, a newcomer arrives at the Gathering-Place. Like a figure from an old-master painting, Petar, clutching the bronze statue, descends amongst the motionless shades. Around his thin neck dangles a rope. The Professor gazes astonished at the newcomer. He approaches him with disbelief.)

PROFESSOR

Petar?

(Petar smiles, and embraces the professor.)

PETAR

I thought we'd never see each other again... Good-day to you all.

(The doctor stares at him.)

DOCTOR

You hanged yourself?

PETAR

I suppose so, yes.

PROFESSOR

But why, dear friend?

PETAR

A lost cause, professor. The house is sold, the whole collection packed into cases, sealed, and taken down to the cellars of the National Library. There was no longer anything I could do; it was clear when I went up to the site and saw the workers carting it all off by the lorry-load – mosaic tiles, stone blocks, columns... They had heard of your death and said they didn't want the material to go to waste, since they were already building houses... Within two hours they had cleaned out the whole excavation site.

(The professor gazes in silence at his former assistant. Milica hurries across anxiously. She turns to Petar with the question to which she already knows the answer.)

MILICA

Who sold the house?

PETAR

Ahh... Ivan, the professor's son.

MILICA

He's my son as well.

PETAR

I'm sorry. I didn't realise. I came after your time.

MILICA

But who bought the house so quickly?

PETAR

The next-door neighbour... She's called 'Lepa Pekarka'.

(Marko, the baker, leaps over and seizes Petar's hand.)

MARKO

Lepa Pekarka?

PETAR

Yes. While we were packing away the collection, she signed a contract with Ivan. All I heard was something about half in foreign currency, half in dinars...

MARKO

Lepa, Lepa, I could throw you in the oven for this! But you'll be up here with me – sooner or later! You've no idea how hard your death is going to be.

(The professor, who has all the while been standing bowed and withdrawn, now moves.)

PROFESOR

Do you happen to know what he did with his aunt – Angelina? He didn't sell her as well, did he?

PETAR

No, I don't. When I last saw her, she was in the house packing her things, with the barber. Lepa told Ivan that the two of them would surely hitch up together. He had invited her already to his home, but she was still saying 'no-go'...

KESER

That barber, professor, he's not my brother Simeun, is he?

PROFESSOR

That's him: Simeun.

KESER

With a lame leg, hunched shoulders?

PROFESSOR

It's him, I tell you. Simeun. He shaved me for half a century: the first time and the last.

JANKO

Ah, that's good to hear! Now your brother Sima's going to chuck all those rusty guns into the street, tidy up the house and bring in a bride. And the wingless plane will fly away! That's the end of your museum, too!

(Keser sits down beside the professor on the stone block, hiding his face in his hands. Petar goes over to the professor, hands held wide, in self-justification.)

PETAR

I did everything I could. You know better than anyone that when I gave up my post as a teacher and began working with you they all said I was mad. As long as you were alive, they listened to me because of you; but as soon as you died, they began pushing me around and insulting me: 'Out of the way, idiot, madman, fool...' I hanged myself on the St. Peter's pear-tree, the one below the site.

(Ruzmarin takes the end of the rope which is hanging round Petar's neck.)

RUZMARIN

If I'd had the sense to hang myself like you, at least I wouldn't be humping this accordion round like a gravestone round my neck... But could I ask you a question now, professor? I can't get a word in edgeways for all this quarreling. I used to live at the beginning of the 'gipsy town'...

JANKO

That beautifully whitewashed house – with walls in four colours. When it rains, everyone thinks it's the rainbow.

RUZMARIN

You keep out of this, you drunken bum! You still owe me two thousand for the music on your last night. My songs!

JANKO

Songs! I'll sing to you for two thousand, then we'll be quits. Imagine – he wants me to pay him for bawling in my ear!

PROFESSOR

As far as I could tell from the other side of the fence, they're all happy and yell.

RUZMARIN

While I was alive, they were all sad. Some men, when they die, bring their family sorrow, others bring them joy. If I'd known it

would turn out like this, I'd have gone to the doctor twice a day... Are there any kids round the back?

PROFESSOR

A whole yard-full, Ruzmarin.

RUZMARIN

I had two of 'me.

(Janko takes out a silver watch – on a chain – from the fob pocket of his waistcoat.)

JANKO

What time is it, professor? I'd like to set my watch before yours stops as well.

PROFESSOR

Half past seven.

KESER

Got an urgent meeting somewhere?

JANKO

No, I just want to hear something ticking, beating.

(While Janko winds his watch, Petar looks round, observing his surroundings with curiosity.)

PETAR

I've often wondered: is there life after death?

JANKO

And I've often wondered: is there life before death?

(Petar laughs, childishly, and embraces the talkative old man.)

PETAR

What have you been doing here all these years? How do you pass the time?

JANKO

We squabble a bit, stroll around, go for little 'excursions', and with these stones give shape to our unfulfilled desires; who's to blame if during our lives we did not have the strength of courage to realise all our plans? I build myself a café, but my father takes all the material away – bunkers and defence-walls are more important! Then I steal at back by dismantling Ruzmarin's two-roomed flat with a bathroom; Ruzmarin, of course, gets his own back by 'lifting' from the bakery, the Baker from the clinic, and the doctor – when my father goes off on reconnaissance – by 'borrowing' part of the bunker – and so round and round it goes. Milica can never dig up as much as we can carry away.

MILICA

As in life.

JANKO

And in the evening, when a sort of darkness falls – not unlike our night – we sit around on the stones and gaze up at the stars. I claim that the Earth is out there somewhere in the midst of all those mists; my father, of course, takes the opposite line; then we sigh, and remember our nearest and dearest; they must be this age or that by now they have children or grandchildren, now they must be sitting over dinner at that same table where we once ate, now they'll be talking of us as we are of them, looking at our yellowing pictures and trying to hide a tear, touching things that were ours – they keep our warm winter coats, as though one day we were going to return – and on Sundays they come to our graves, bringing carnations, tulips, purple irises and pale roses, boxes of turkish delight and packets of cigarettes, sweets, slender candles and watering-cans... And while they tidy our graves and cut back the grass they talk softly with the other widows and widowers about how quickly time passes and how they can't believe that we have been gone for ten, fifteen, twenty years...

(While Janko revives this picture of earthly activities, the fellowdeparted listen with sighs and nods of recognition.)

JANKO

"How long is it – forgive my asking – since your Marko left us?"

MARKO

I don't want to hear of Lepa!

JANKO

"Twenty come spring? Lord, Lord, as if it was only yesterday we were eating his bread and his jam rolls... It'll be a full six years, come November, that my Ruzmarin went away".

RUZMARIN

Who could she have had all those kids with in six years?!

JANKO

At the graveyard, each of us starts his second life, from the beginning: first day, first week, sixth week, sixth month, first year, second year... then, ten years, twenty years... and then, gradually, we begin to die again for the second time – in our memories. Then our endless and eternal death begins. We vanish slowly from life in conversations, stories, memories.

PETAR

Surely that isn't all you talk about?

JANKO

No. We often look back regretfully at the foolishness of our lives. How we used to get upset, and irritated, how we worried and feared, how we gave ourselves away, how we were frightened to say what we thought, and how we lived to suit others; in short – how we worried and hurried and scurried, and only when we arrived here understood it all – and everything become clear to us, but too late!

PETAR

Sad, very sad.

JANKO

It isn't as sad as all that. We have our choir here. The doctor's our choirmaster. He was already practising for it down below, in the hospital, so he carried on up here. Doctor, shall we treat our new friends to our rendering of 'Eine Kleine Cantata'?

DOKTOR

With the greatest of pleasure! I'm always ready for a song, like the professor for a dig. Ruzmarin, get ready to strike up!

JANKO

C'mon, Ruzmarin, I'll give you back the two thousand as soon as I get a job! The promised to get my application through 'any day now'. It may be a bit late, but what matters is being accepted.

KESER

Ah, my damn luck. Why, of all sons, must you be mine?

DOCTOR

Silence, please!

(The choir of the departed takes up position in front of the pile of 'archaeological stones'. The Doctor signs with his baton for Ruzmarin to give the pitch, then all begin to sing together. The professor and his devoted assistant Petar listen with a smile as their new-found friends give voice. It is clear, from what can be seen and heard, that the 'choral society' has had plenty of time to perfect its performance.)

CHORUS OF THE DEPARTED

Cherries on the hill in blossom
 Spring is on its way
 All at home is much the same
 Only I'm no longer there
 Only I'm no longer there.

The slender vine is greening now
 On the trellis of our old house
 All is as it was before
 Only I'm no longer there
 Only I'm no longer there.

(Ruzmarin, delighted, draws out the accordion full stretch, his left hand trembling over the stops. Janko embraces him with a friendly cafe-hug, while the others attentively watch the doctor's baton. Petar links arms with the professor. The two men are clearly surprised by the closeness of these old acquaintances, by the singing, and by the place to which they find they have been spirited after death...)

And of Act One

ACT TWO

III

THE GATHERING-PLACE

(Lepa Pekarka is drying her tears and attempting in self-pitying tones to convince her husband of the justness of her decisions. Marko Pekar listens, with undisguised ill-will, his teeth firmly clenched to hold back his mounting anger.)

LEPA PEKARKA

...And the first time I took off my widow's weeds was for their marriage. I'd never have dreamed of putting on colours like these before the wedding. I never stopped mourning for you – you were always before my eyes. Please, Marko, don't...

MARKO

I wasn't asking about your mourning clothes! Don't try to play the innocent with me, Leposava – you know what I was asking! Now I want an answer, dammit, short and clear...

LEPA PEKARKA

But what were you asking me? I've no idea, I really don't!

(At this moment, Lepa's self-confidence and resolution return; this inflames Marko even more.)

MARKO

Why did you allow my enemies to come into the house and celebrate there?! .. Listen, Leposava... Wait! Leposava! Leposava!

(Leposava has vanished; speechless, Marko looks around... The others, searching through the archaeological remains, smilingly observe their dumbfounded companion. The professor approaches.)

PROFESSOR

Who was that you were talking to? I thought it was your wife. I could swear I saw Leposava!

(Marko waves his hand resignedly: He's had enough of it all.)

MARKO

Yes, that was her. She was dreaming about me. Whenever I'm about to give her a piece of my mind, she wakes up. Runs away. Disappears.

PROFESSOR

Does she often dream of you?

MARKO

Not as often as she might, but she's afraid we could meet up again. In the early years, she dreamt of me almost every night. Now, it's only when I call her in her sleep, and I'm finding it harder and harder to get through. She knows she's done wrong.

(Janko carries a carved stone over to Petar, who is noting all the pieces and setting them in order against a stone column.)

JANKO

Who's going to dream of you when you're spitting fire?... Do you know, Doctor, why our people, all have such poor teeth? Because they're always clenching them in anger. One quarrel – two teeth gone. This is how they speak: they clamp their jaws so tight that their molars go numb, and all they can do is

mumble threats through their lips: 'Just you wait – you'll get what's coming to you!'...

(While the men laugh at Janko's explanation, Milica comes fawningly up to her husband's side and takes his hand.)

MILICA

Don't be angry would sell the whole place the very next day. As if he could hardly wait...

PROFESSOR

The house is no longer any concern of mine.

MILICA

You're worried about Sonja?

PROFESSOR

Yes, I am. This will all take ten years off her life. She was too closely attached to me, to the house, to our things. It's as if those two hadn't grown up together. That's something that has always surprised me: two children grow up together, you train them together, give them the same food, love them alike, and yet in the end it's as if one of them wasn't yours: he goes his own way, sets himself apart, and does precisely what you don't want... But let's rather get on with the digging. C'mon, you lot – get to it! We've heard enough of your private affairs. It's a shame to be using valuable material like this for your own childish amusement.

(The professor returns with renewed energy to his digging. He goes over to the stone slab of the vault...)

PROFESSOR

Let's try once again to raise this lid. Maybe all we were needing was Petar's strength... But where's your father?

JANKO

Pursuing the enemy over the hills. He's found the prints of soldiers' boots.

DOCTORA

Ruzmarin's also missing.

(Janko climbs up onto the heap of stones, cups his hands to his mouth, and shouts at the top of his voice.)

JANKO

Stee-vaan! Hooo, Steee-vaan!... I've never been able to call him – he's got the wrong name.

DOCTOR

What do you mean, 'the wrong name'?

JANKO

Simple: when you give a child a name, you must only give it a name it can be easily called by. If you can't call the child back with two shouts, you've give it the wrong name.

DOCTOR

Brilliant theory.

JANKO

Accurate, too. Take, for example, the mountain regions, where you have to call children over great distances: their names consist of four letters, two of which are vowels. Now listen: Ooo Jovooo, O Borooo*, Oooo Božo... The second letter in the name, and the fourth, is O, because O travels farthest. These, then, are the so-called 'prime names for long-distance shouting', with a range of five kilometers... These are followed by the names suitable for heights below 2000 meters above sea-level: Ooo Jelooo, Oooo Savooo, Oooo Vukooo, Ooo Pavooo, Ooooo Milooo... Names with a range of three kilometers, in fine weather, or between two thunderclaps. As we gradually descend, however, towards the lowlands of our country, rich in geographical diversity (alone), the names become increasingly longer, flatter, more lethargic, for there is no need for the voice to be projected over forest and mountainridge; the children are playing in the pasture-land, the orchard, or the neighbour's back-yard. Oooo Miloradeeee, Oooo Dragoslaveeee, Oooo Milaneeee, Oooo Aleksaaa, Oooo Leposavaaaa, Oooo Miliceeee, Oooo Mihajlooo... You feel the strain, as if the top button of your shirt was done up. These are the children from the green woodlands of Šumadija, from the rolling hill-country of the Mačva, and from the other undulating regions of hill and dale. Names with a shoutingrange of 100 to 800 meters, depending

on the throat-power of the parents. Then, when we sink down further still to the true plains, to the unrelieved flatlands, the names too become broad and unending: Oooo Maksimiliannn, Oooo Haralampijeee, Oooo Nikiforeee... Now, just imagine what happens if a child from the mountam parts is given a name such as Haralmpije. Out you go to the front of the house, you gaze up at the snow-capped mountain-peaks, and you bellow: Oooo Haralampijee! And the name falls flat at your feet. The name Haralampije weighs a good two kilos: it's better suited for shot-putt with name-weights. And you know when Haralampije is likely to come home – never! So the child gets a beating: 'I've been calling you half the day, and you still don't come!' The child swears it didn't hear... Exactly the opposite happens in the great flat plains when you roar for Jovo. Oooo Jovooo - and your voice carries so hard and loud that the child thinks he's in for a beating, and runs away and won't come home. That's why in the lowlands they think up pet-names to soften the threat from the throat. Instead of Jovo, they call Oooo Jovice... Oooo Jovanče...

(The men are laughing at this strange but not entirely baseless invention.)

DOCTOR

And what conclusion did you come to?

JANKO

Quite simply, that children should be given names ending in A or in O.

MILICA

And when all those ending in A or O answer your call, you choose your own A and send the rest packing?

(Petar sniggers.)

PETAR

When I see and hear all this, I'm not at all sorry I hanged myself.

PROFESSOR

You were wrong to do it, Petar.

MILICA

What you needed was a good psychiatrist. Am I right, Doctor?

PETAR

I went to the psychiatrist, several years ago, when a man was following me.

DOCTOR

Who was following you? Sit down. Just sit down and relax.

PETAR

A man. I went out into the street, and he was standing and waiting for me across the way. I went into the cinema; he was

watching the film. I thought it must be a coincidence, so just to check, I bought tickets for the same film; again, he was watching it. This went on for several months. You remember, professor, that was the year when we first made contact with the Dutch scientists.

DOCTOR

And what did the psychiatrist tell you?

PETAR

Just what any normal person would, once he realised that the man following me really existed. He said: 'Go and report it to the police. I can't help you, you aren't ill'. I went to the police, spoke to comrade Žunjić. Told him this told him that, then I said 'there's a man following me'...

DOCTOR

And what did he say to that?

PETAR

Told me I was antisocial! Told me to go back to the psychiatrist and get him to cure me of my solitude complex. "You don't people," he said, "you aren't sociable, you take refuge in being alone..."

(The Doctor smiles and pats Petar comfortingly on the back.)

DOCTOR

You didn't tell that to the psychiatrist?

PETAR

Yes, I did. He laughed, as you're laughing now.

DOCTOR

Joking aside – let me tell you something serious, something which I've learnt from practice and which recurs from case to case. There exists a certain type of criminal, who, alas, is never sentenced: the killer of suicides.

MARKO

The killer of suicides?

DOCTOR

Yes, you heard me correctly. Suicide is always an extension of the killer's arm. The killer may remain unknown, or be very well known, but nobody dares do anything to touch him.

PETAR

I was killed by my surroundings.

MARKO

The Doctor's right. Take my case, for instance: would I be here if they hadn't taken away my bakery? And today my killer is celebrating in my house.

JANKO

Nonsense! Killers are born, like drinkers! I committed suicide the day I agreed to be taken to hospital. I IO hadn't made that one stupid mistake, I'd still be sitting in the garden of "The Golden Eagle".

(The Doctor, normally so calm collected and good-natured, suddenly flares up.)

DOCTOR

So you blame the hospital?! The hospital's to blame?!

JANKO

It is. The diagnosis at my death was "unsuccessful operation".

(The Doctor is silenced. Milica goes up and attempts to soothe him.)

MILICA

Leave him alone, please. Don't let's get excited.

DOCTOR

What nonsense you're talking! You don't know what you're saying! What put it into your head that you died from an "unsuccessful operation"? I told you myself that if you didn't stop drinking you'd ruin your self through and through! You died as most drunkards do – of cirrhosis of the liver!

- In Serbo-Croatian, the chief vocative endings are 'o', 'a' and 'e'. Part of the humour of Janko's speech depends on this distinction.

JANKO

How very interesting! Then where did I get this scar from?

(He pulls his shirt out from his trousers and opens it to reveal a long cicatrice on his left hip.)

JANKO

You just opened and closed, me, like a brief-case.

DOCTOR

You were brought in literally dead drunk.

JANKO

Come off it, doctor, you can't tell me I don't know where my liver is. I've had pain here all my life – and look where you made your cut. You sliced me apart like a sucking-pig.

DOCTOR

After death.

JANKO

Just a minute, I still want to ask you about the time before my death; once a man's dead, even I know how to cure him... You were head of the hospital, a well-known, popular doctor, liked and respected by the patients; yet when you fell ill, you packed your bags and shot off to Switzerland, didn't you?

DOCTOR

I knew you'd ask me that.

JANKO

I know knew, but what I don't know is how you're going to answer. When they first recommended an operation for me, I agreed, on condition that the operating should be done by you. 'It's not possible', they told me, 'Dr Katić is undergoing treatment in Switzerland'. 'Then I'm going to Switzerland too'.

'You can't: we have to deal with you here' and they dealt with me.

DOCTOR

With me too – I didn't get back alive from Switzerland.

JANKO

That's just what I wanted to ask you: why didn't you die in our hospital, so people could believe in you?

DOCTOR

My daughter organised the whole trip. I refused to go, time and again, because I knew there was no hope for me.

JANKO

Your daughter's also a doctor. How can we ordinary people have any faith in you, if you doctors have no faith in yourselves. My father also come here straight from Geneva. Great patriots you are, aren't you, dying for your homeland abroad. At the first twitch of pain, you all scatter across the border: help, help, foreign brothers, something's hurting me here...

(Down the slope of the sand-dune comes Ruzmarin, wailing and lamenting. They all gather round their distressed companion, who no longer has his accordion.)

RUZMARIN

Oh, no, oh no... Oh what can I do?... way should it happen to me?... The devil shrivel his hands...

(Clutching his head, Ruzmarin sits down on a stone column. Milica puts her arms round him, trying to calm him down.)

MILICA

What's happened? Why are you crying?

RUZMARIN

They've stolen my accordion.

PETAR

Who's stolen it?

RUZMARIN

I know who... He came round to buy it, while I was still on my death-bed... He brought money, but I didn't want to sell... I too have a son...

(Ruzmarin stands up, looks out towards 'earth', and shouts.)

RUZMARIN

I hope to hell you play that damn accordion at your own funeral:

(Having delivered his curse, Ruzmarin calms down somewhat. The professor offers him a cigarette.)

PROFESSOR

They wouldn't have stolen it from your grave, surely?

RUZMARIN

As you see, they did... I've looked round the whole area – it's nowhere to be found. And last night! I could feel someone pulling the accordion off me...

JANKO

Did you see who it was, goddamn their living guts! Now who's going to play for us? You've no idea, professor, what kind of town you used to live in, what kind of people you spent your life among. Some day we'll tell you about it all. You won't believe it.

MILICA

You were always complaining that it was heavy for you, that the straps were constructing you.

RUZMARIN

If I complained, lady, it was all out of affection... We gipsies, you know, we learn to play before we learn to walk, 'cos here could we go without an instrument... Here, look...

(Sighing, and wiping his with his sleeve, Ruzmarin takes a large photograph from the inside pocket of his coat. He shows it to Milica...)

RUZMARIN

The one with the accordion, that's my son, Rade... I taught him to go round playing in front of houses... This is my wife... and that one grinning over the fence, that's the great thief, the famous quickfingers, Bata Konj... Oh, why *me*? Why did it happen to me?...

JANKO

Today, professor, there'll be pictures of you and Petar in the papers.

PETAR

There's nobody to put in an obituary for me.

JANKO

All the better for you. My friends had a little photo printed with the words underneath: 'Dear Janko, your place at the table will be forever empty, your glass forever full...'

(The Doctor takes some pictures on of his wallet. And the others, as is usual when people get on to the subject of their loved ones, begin searching through their pockets.)

DOCTOR

My daughter's learning the piano...

MILICA

D'you remember this one, Misha?

PROFESSOR

Yes... I was looking for it everywhere, you know. I wanted to have it enlarged and put above the bed... Just look how young Ivan and Sonja are... Sokobanja, 1955....

MARKO

And here we are together at the fair: you two, and me with that slut of mine.

MILICA

Misha, look at this!

PROFESSOR

Dashing young man, I was!

(They exchange pictures, with cries of surprise and delight. As if for the moment they have forgotten where they are. Janko takes a picture from Marko.)

JANKO

You're already looking a bit washed out in this picture. It's clear your soul was beginning to yearn for a priest.

MARKO

Yes, that was my last picture... But look at this, my fiend. This is the very first picture of me, taken on my eighth birthday. A lovely child, wasn't I?

JANKO

Pity you had to grow up... And now, everyone, I'm going to show you a natural wonder...

(Janko takes a large photograph from his pocket. He hands it to the Doctor.)

JANKO

Doctor, where am I in this picture?

DOCTOR

You aren't there...

JANKO

I'm not there, but my picture was taken. You see, by then I already realised I wouldn't last long, because I no longer came out in photographs. We all posed for it – the whole crowd from the 'Golden Eagle' – and they all came out, except me. I'm that blank space there. The camera wouldn't 'take' me any more.

(While the others are gazing at the strange photograph, the Doctor, with boastful pride, holds up his own picture.)

DOCTOR

Look at that – the finest-looking young man after the war... That's me in '51 , on holiday in Rovinj. He's young, he's handsome, he's attractive, *and* he's a doctor...

JANKO

And he doesn't know how to swim.

DOCTOR

Who doesn't know how to swim?

JANKO

Come, off it, Doctor, you can't fool me. There's nothing funnier that an inlander by the sea. I remember watching one year in Budva. This is how it looked...

(Janko plays the scene of the 'inlander by the sea' with the somewhat overemphatic touch which, not doubt, owes something to the influence of the 'café-school' of acting.)

JANKO

Like this, you see: our 'hero' strolls down nonchalantly to the water's edge and gazes out at the open sea as if all of a sudden he was going to swim straight across. In his firm-set features one senses the superiority of a powerful swimmer. Then he takes his watch out of the little pocket in his body-hugging swimming-trunks, hands it to some trusty watcher on the beach, then turns back and strides smoothly into the sea. He treads on tiptoe over the seaweed, masking his fear with a squeamish smile, for he's tempted to shriek out loud. The water gradually reaches above his knees; he looks round, and, shuddering with disgust, heads towards a slippery rock, clambers to the top and balances there... Then, carefully, he wets his body: first, over the heart, then all the arteries, so that the shock should not cut right through him when he hurls himself into the chilly depths. This is something he has read about before setting out for the sea, in an article: 'Never plunge in when your body's hot'. Having wetted himself thoroughly, he no longer needs a swim; he gets off the rock and continues his trek towards the open sea. There must come a moment, of course, when the water touches his balls; for an instant, he shivers and recoils, but because he's had good traditional upbringing and knows that one's personal emotions should be kept to oneself, he carries on smiling, though the grin is

somewhat distorted... At long last, he concert his forces, takes a deep breath and flings himself into the water. He swims, arms thrashing, head submerged, until his breath is all expended. This, to him, is style. And just when he's beginning to think that all those watching from the beach must be overwhelmed by his powerful, elegant swimming, he rams into the back of a swimmer in the shallows. Our 'hero' has forgotten that his right arm is the stronger, thanks to much thumping with his first upon the table; he rubs the salt from his eyes, and apologises, wondering 'how on earth' he could have swum in a circle. He runs out, stomach drawn in, breathing just deeply enough to recover from the encounter, and dashes towards the nearest shower. And only when he feels the soft water on his skin does he breathe out, relax, and turn proudly to gaze out at the defeated sea. Then he stretches out on the sand beside some lady companion, and fans himself while darting charming looks around; that evening, the doctor calls on him, because he is suffering from sunstroke, second degree burns and a high temperature... Admit it, Doctor, that's how your holiday-by-the-sea ended, isn't it?

(The Doctor laughs.)

DOCTOR

Well, not quite like that but there's a grain of truth in it.

JANKO

The one difference being that you're a doctor, so you cured yourself.

MARKIO

I didn't get far with my summer holidays: I started quarreling with Leposava in the train, got off at Vinkovci station, and went home...

(The others slowly raise their heads... Petar is the first to notice a strange, shimmering object flying in the distance, leaving behind it a reddish trail.)

PETAR

What's that, Professor?

PROFESSOR

Some kind of flying-ship...

(Keser comes running over the sand-dunes, highly excited; he follows the path of the shining object through his binoculars.)

KESER

A space-ship! It's a space-ship!

JANKO

We can see. No need to shout.

KESER

D-you know what that means?! This could save us. Could change our life!

PROFESSOR

How do you mean?

KESER

Well, professor, if someone living can reach us, then we aren't dead, just distanced from the Earth. The dead and the living can never meet, if the dead are not living or the living are not dead.

(Keser raises his arms and begins to wave... All stare at him with astonishment, then one by one, they too begin to wave ... The spacecraft draws closer, flies over the heads of the excited watchers, and then – like a passenger liner steaming on past invisible castaways – vanishes into the distance... Helplessly, they drop their hands. The professor gazes at them compassionately.)

PROFESSOR

Only now I see how greatly you long to be living again... Even you, Petar, even you waved, didn't you?

PETAR

I am sorry... I hanged myself.

JANKO

As the Lord so rightly says in the Fifth Commandment: 'Honour thy father and thy mother, that you may prosper and live long upon the earth'.

KESER

Maybe this Gathering-Place of ours lies close to some unknown, inhabited planet. What do you think, Professor?

PROFESSOR

I'll try to explain to you where we are: the extent of the known regions of space is measured as 25 light aeons. One aeon, in astronomy, represents the distance travelled by light in a billion years, which means that the space known to science is equivalent to 25 billion light-years. But beyond that, as Einstein says, 'There begins something else'. The question is: Where are in that 'something else'?

RUZMARIN

Dear professor, all you say is no doubt correct, but I can tell you for sure there-s much greater distance than all those aeons – eight hours of tramping through rain and mud. When I used to play at the weddings...

JANKO

Now you be the scientist among the gipsy musicians.

PROFESSOR

Enough, please. The secret lies in these stones. Look what the traces of a great civilization may mean. Perhaps the answer lies beneath this very slab... Come, let-s try just once more... Now or never...

(The men strain and heave; the slab moves a foot to one side.)

PROFESSOR

It's moved! We can do it!

KESER

If I had the strength I had when I was alive, I'd shift this stone with one hand.

PROFESSOR

Let's try again... Ready? One, two, three – lift!

(The slab moves a further six inches. Encouraged by their success, the men prepare to try once again. At a sign from the Professor, they all grasp the side of the stone, and the slab slowly moves. It topples from its square base. From the interior, which has been covered by the slab, a fierce light shines out, illuminating their astonished faces. The Doctor and Janko step back a few paces. Petar is the first to step forward and peer into the bright-lit opening. The Professor comes to his side.)

PETAR

Good Lord, what's this?

PROFESSOR

I thought it was a grave.

JANKO

Cover that maw – who knows what's inside.

(Keser is peering into the hole.)

KESER

Listen, maybe we're in the middle of the Earth. This could be the great hollow in the centre of our planet.

PETAR

Perhaps these steps lead to the living? All is clear to me, only – where does the light come from?

PROFESSOR

It is indeed a wonder.

MARKO

Oooh, They'd be delighted if we suddenly appeared to them from inside the earth. Leposava would have a stroke.

KESER

I can tell you for sure, these steps are going to lead me to the light of day.

(He advances, determined, towards the opening. Janko runs up and catches him by the sleeve, holding him back.)

JANKO

Hold, it, father, where the devil are you going? That light may come from the fires of hell. It may be burning beneath the cauldron. Don't provoke the Devil, or he'll come to get us all and plunge us into boiling oil. We must stop him, men, things are fine as they are... Wait, father, wait...

(Keser shakes of the restraining hand and announces firmly to his frightened companion.)

KESER

I'm going through to the light. If I don-t come back, either follow me or close the hole.

(Keser waves and proceeds down the steps. The others stare after him; for a long time, his footsteps echo on the concrete.)

JANKO

That's how he went off to the war one night. Saying the same thing: 'If I don't come back, follow me or lock the door and don't let anyone into the house'. What is this destiny that men pursue?

(Petar is kneeling beside the opening)

PETAR

Eeeeeee! What's that down there... what is it?!

(The Professor clings to his wife, unsteady and trembling, as if he were about to faint. he tries to undo his shirt-buttons.)

PROFESOR

Milica, I don't feel well... I'm choking... I don't feel well... Help me sit down...

(The Doctor hurries over to help. he and Milica lead the Professor over to the stone column. The old man sits down, enervated.)

MILICA

What is it, Misha... You can't feel ill here...

PROFESSOR

I'm choking... I feel as if my chest's being torn apart... I can't get air... I want to breathe... Just a little air...

DOCTOR

Could it be a reflex that's still active?

JANKO

He's still fresh, still under the powerful influence of life. Yes, Doctor, he is; why do you look at me like that? His beard, his hair, his nails – they're still growing, aren't they?...

I had just cut my nails before I died, and look how long they are now – like a witch's. Life leaves deep marks on the dead.

(The Professor is huddled up on the stone column. With jerky movements, he unbuttons his shirt, waistcoat, jacket...)

MILICA

Misha, what is it, Misha?... Help him, Doctor...

PROFESSOR

As if I was dying again...

DOCTOR

Lie down, Professor...

JANKO

Just as I thought – I knew some curse would come out of that hole.

(While Milica and the Doctor help the Professor to lie down, the sound of returning footsteps is heard on the stairs. Petar runs over to the opening. In a moment, the dejected Keser reappears. Shaking off the dust, he holds out a bronze head and an arm cast in the same material.)

KESER

That's all I found. *(Petar takes the two objects from him.)*

JANKO

And the light? Where does the light come from?

KESER

From the white-hot rock. After only fifteen steps of so the ruins begin, and the burning rocks. The only way out is up. No space-ships can fly in the centre of the Earth... What's wrong with the Professor?

(Keser approaches the Doctor, who is carefully examining the incapacitated old man. Petar stares amazed at the head and arm, which he has joined to the torso of the figure he brought with him from 'the other world'. The fit is so perfect that both parts might have been broken off from his statue.)

PETAR

Look at this, Professor! It's a marvel; when you add the head and arm to the statue I brought, you get the complete figure of the Roman Emperor, Septimus Severus. You've been searching for it for years....

DOCTOR

Not so loud, please...

(The Doctor bends over the Professor, listening long and carefully to his chest. Then he straightens up and announces without a trace of hesitation.)

DOCTOR

Gentlemen, the Professor is alive.

(From those gathered round come cries in which fear, amazement and doubt are mingled.)

PETAR

For God's sake, Doctor, what are you saying?

RUZMARIN

It's impossible.

MARKO

You doctors, you'll think up anything!

MILICA

Can it be true, Doctor?

DOCTOR

The Professor most likely had a brain-stroke, as a result of which he fell into a deep coma. He was clinically dead. His organism, however, has fought back and he is now returning to the living. How much time has passed since he arrived here?

(Janko hurriedly consults his watch.)

JANKO

Very soon, it'll be twenty-four hours.

DOCTOR

Then he'll probably survive.

MARKO

I'm sorry, but now I don't understand anything at all. How can he survive among the dead? What's a living man to do here amongst us cold creatures?

RUZMARIN

But it's impossible.

DOCTOR

While I was working in the hospital, I had several similar cases. A patient would fall into a coma, all his vital organs would cease functioning, and I would think he was dead; yet after a few hours he would suddenly start to give signs of life.

JANKO

That is, of course, if he hasn't already been buried.

RUZMARIN

As happened in my case.

JANKO

Everything happens to you!

MILICA

What comes now, Doctor?

DOCTOR

The Professor's going to leave us. Now for the first time it's clear to me – but absolutely clear – why people who had recovered from a coma would tell me of meetings with their dead relatives. And I did hear such stories from patients. Only now, a last, I see that it's possible.

MARKO

I've heard at least ten such stories.

(The Doctor takes the Professor's arm, feels his pulse, and smiles.)

DOCTOR

His pulse is growing stronger... His body's warmer.

JANKO

Let me feel his pulse-beat... His heart really is beating, 'ticking' away, like a watch!

(The departed souls crowd round the professor, holding his wrist, feeling his pulse, listening to his heart, touching his forehead. All are amazed.)

MARKO

It's been so long since I last saw a living man... It's a beautiful sight, a living man.

DOCTOR

Professor... Can you hear me, Professor?

(The Professor moves his head slightly and, with an effort, whispers.)

PROFESSOR

Yes, Doctor... I can hear you...

DOCTOR

I'd like to ask you a small favour: if you return among the living, could you call on my daughter, Jelena, and tell her all about us. Tell her she must devote herself to studying the coma and clinical death, for this is the only possible link with the millions upon millions of people who are gone. Tell her also to have nothing to do with machines and computers and all the other kinds of 'allpowerful' technical apparatus; the fate of the ill lies in the hands of a wise, experienced doctor. Even the most serious cases can be cured merely by touch and words, for it is touch and words that are the basic causes of most illnesses. Let computers cure computers, and humans-humans. Death must not be established on the basis of flickering electronic impulses. Tell her that a few years ago a mistake was made in my hospital, and a living man was sent up here. But he, poor man, had already been buried. He couldn't return, as you can now. My daughter was fortunate with you; let your case be a final warning against hasty diagnosis of death.

(The doctor delivers his speech rapidly, nervously, as if afraid that the Professor might 'depart' too soon. Then he bends down and picks up several flat pieces of stone and puts them in the Professor's packet.)

DOCTOR

Take these with you as well, so that people can believe you're telling the truth.

(The Professor turns his head as the others cluster round him, each anxious to impart some message of importance. Keser is the most determined, the most forceful...)

KESER

Come on, Doctor, you're not the only one. The rest of us have also got messages to pass on. Let's do this democratically...

DOCTOR

What I have told you is of vital importance to medicine and science.

MARKO

No quarreling, please. The Professor's going to leave us, and I have important things to tell Leposava.

(Keser bends over the Professor.)

KESER

Professor, will you go to my friend Ilija Rajković and tell him to have my name removed from that dead-end road. If they couldn't find anything more fitting for me, closer to the centre, then I don't need Turkish cobblestones. And if he won't have the nameplate taken down, then I'd be grateful if you'd do it yourself.

PROFESSOR

Yes... yes...

JANKO

C'mon, Dad, keep it short. You were telling the Doctor...

KESER

Tell them about that flying-ship we saw. Describe it to them in detail, and tell them to find out from which country it could have been sent and where it was heading. And when you've found out all the answers, write to the Russians and tell them that we saw it, that it flew over us – maybe they'll set out to find us and save us.

DOCTOR

Write to the Americans as well.

KESER

And you can tell my brother Simeun that I still haven't forgiven him for not offering me shelter at home, in November '42, when the Nazis were hunting us down on all sides. Tell him that all

the time I've been here I've been haunted by the sound of the dogs and the jackboots and the cries of the pursuers – and him, shouting from behind the bolted door: 'go away, Stevan! They'll hang me if they find out you've been here!' That's what I can never forgive him, that 'Go away, Stevan!'

PROFESSOR

Simeun could never have done something like that. I've known him for half a century...

KESER

But he did, Professor; he drove me from the door like a mangy dog. I begged him, I implored him, to take me in only till dawn, but he went on shouting: 'Go away, Stevan, go away... 'That night, I was caught in cross-fire in front of the Cavalry on the outskirts of town, and later I died of the wounds I received. Tell him, when he dies, not to show his face here; let the devil take him to the other side, so I never have to set eyes on him again! Or hear his name. And let him never call me brother again in his life! It hurts me to have to say all this, but I couldn't hold it back any longer...

PROFESSOR

I had thought... he was an honorable man...

(The Professor falls silent, gazing fixedly at the figures around him, from whom he hears more and more terrible revelations about their friends and acquaintances... Marko has somehow managed to force his way past the burly Keser into front position.)

MARKO

I'd like you to go round to my house and tell Leposava to stop her nonseanse. Tell her I'm mad at her: she's disappointed me both as a woman ad as a friend. Tell her she'd better try to live as long as she can, because she won't have a good time when she gets here. And, with so many houses in town, she's to stop bargaining over yours. Then tell my son to get himself a divorce as soon as possible, and find a decent girl from a good home. D'you hear me, Professor?... And tell Leposava, when I dream of her she's not to wake up straight away she's to hear me out!

(Marko kisses the Professor's hand, and yields his place to the tearful Ruzmarin.)

RUZMARIN

Professor, I beg you, like my own brother, to go to Bata – the one they call Bata the Horse, everyone in 'gipsy town' knows him – and tell him to put my accordion back where he stole it from, to give it to me, personally, or to my family. And if he refuses, if he pretends he doesn't know what you're talking about – and he's better at that than anyone in the world – report him to the police, for the sake of honour and justice. Tell them to have his house searched – they're sure to find the accordion there. Nobody but him would do such a dreadful thing. And if anyting goes wrong, if there are ony problems, tell my wife to get a lawyer. With you as my witness. That's what I'm asking you.

PROFESSOR

I will, Ruzmarin. I promise...

(Janko pushes aside the plaintive musician to make room for Milica, who is wholly overcome.)

JANKO

Give the Professor's wife a chance to say farewell to her husband.

PETAR

Please do... I just wanted to give the Professor the statue of Septimus Severus to take back with him, now that it's whole... If I'd known this was going to happen, I'd have waited for you. Now I'm sorry; I regret what I did... Professor take me with you...

(The Professor accept the bronze figure, and clutches it firmly.)

JANKO

You hanged yourself for the hell of it.

(Janko pushes Petar aside, making way for Milica. She takes her husband's hand.)

MILICA

Misha...

PROFESSOR

I hear you...

MILICA

I can see, you're shaken and upset by all these stories. But all men must do some evil during their lives, and it's a wise and happy man who doesn't do more than he need. For years, I was angry against you. I heard rumours up here that right after my death you began living with Angelina.

PROFESSOR

Milica... what are you talking about?... That I was living with...

MILICA

We'll talk about that some other time. Tell my sister Angelina not to go on with her holier-than-thou pretence, because the whole town knows why she stayed on in the house to bring up Ivan and Sonja, why she never got married, and why she courted you for years... Tell her I'm bitterly disappointed in her.

PROFESSOR

Heavens, Milica... do you really think..?

MILICA

And one thing more, please: if for the sake of peace, you need to sell the house, sell it, and persuade the people on the town council to build the new museum. Don't let the children start bickering and quarreling. I'll be waiting for you, longing for

you to return again as soon as possible – though I'll pray for you to live as long as you may... Misha, it's very hard for me....

(She bursts into tears, huddling against her husband and resting her head upon his shoulder. Gently, he draws her to him... The Professor's breathing becomes more and more laboured. Janko, standing at his feet, begins his farewell speech.)

JANKO

Dear Professor, you have spent only a moment amongst us, but long enough for you to see how we spend our death. And you must admit, it isn't as bad as they say. If we didn't still resemble the living, it would be far better for us.

Believe me, Professor, during my lifetime I would never have dared to deliver a funeral speech, for what can you say to a man when you don't know where he's going? To sing eulogies to the late departed is not advisable ' eulogies are for the living. That's why only the good die – yet we must live amongst the corrupt. However, because I know the place you are returning to, I now have the boldness to deliver for you a farewell-to-death speech!

KESER

Keep it short!

JANKO

Since the times of our distant ancestors, Granpa Adam and Granma Eve, some eighty billion people have walked and crawled, hurried and scurried over this earth; at present, there

are some five billion people living, which means that seventy-five billion have left their Mother Earth. The history of mankind is the history of the dead, a history that is being written and perpetuated by the tiny number of those still living. And the fallacy has been perpetuated ever since the naming of our planet, a celestial body which consists of 29% mud and 71% water, and which was named Earth, not Water. This erroneous naming is the most innocent of lies, which has been followed by ever greater falsehoods, until at last we come to the concepts of – the Future and the Enemy. All Enemies are opponents of the Future, which is why they have been persecuted, burnt and slaughtered by the Friends of the Future. And the Future has been victorious: in the world today, someone dies of hunger every second. Medicine will not recognise that the most incurable, the most dangerous and most fatal disease of the modern world is – hunger. Medicine cannot admit this, because the cure lies in the hands of those by whom medicine is paid to say nothing of this illness.

(The agitated Keser is joined by the Doctor in his attempt to silence his son.)

DOCTOR

You're talking nonsense! You're out of your mind!

JANKO

The history of mankind is the history of a war broken off from time to time only for new weapons to be invented and the old ones to be refashioned. The twentieth century is the culmination of crime...

KESER

What you've said now, you'll never say again –or I'll strangle you!

JANKO

If anyone were to come on a campaign one day against our planet, the first thing he'd hear would be the gnashing and grinding of teeth – and then he'd see us as we are. You'd be lucky to find even three people who would testify to the joys of our civilization – and they'd all be in jail together! Dear Professor, all that you died for is now waiting for you. An uncertain future now awaits you; behind us – the departed – lies a definite past. You are leaving us after a brief death – may your life be easy!

KESER

Stupid old fool!

DOCTOR

Don't forget what I told you about medicine, or I'll...

MILICA

Misha... Misha... Can you hear me?... Micha...

(The Professor lies motionless, his hands draped limply along the edge of the stone column. He is breathing calmly, peacefully, and staring with fixed eyes up at the distant stars. The others gather round the man who has just left them. Milica weeps silently. Janko supports the

helpless woman, while the others gaze with deep respect at their friend who has been brought to life again.)

IV

CRAZED

/The sitting-room of Professor Pavlović's house has been restored overnight to the cosy order of bygone times: the archaeological relics have been replaced by rows of 'collected works', crystal glassware, decorative wall-plates, porcelain figures... The furniture is 'protected' with little crochet covers, and the family portraits and needlepoint designs, all in their gilt frames, have been replaced on the walls. Not a

trace remains of the museum which was never to be. On a cupboard in the corner a candle is guttering; there is a smell of incense in the air.

Angelina is standing at the large table, carefully ironing the Professor's black suit; she sighs.)

ANGELINA

Misha... Misha...

(Through the wide-open window comes the gentle but somewhat irritating sound of a song. The Barber comes bustling out of the late professor's bedroom; he is carrying a washbasin and towel.)

BARBER

Is there any more hot water?

(Angelina takes the washbasin and goes out to the kitchen. The Barber crosses to the window, look outside, shakes his head and exclaims angrily.)

BARBER

If that neurotic doctor hadn't run off with my best equipment, I'd have shaved the Professor to perfection. Iron's best worked while it's still warm – the same goes for a man... And those guests of Lepa's down in the yard, they go on as if they were never going to stop. They've been yowling for two days now. There's a primitive streak in the people that can't wait to come out.

(Angelina returns with the washbasin, and sighs resignedly.)

ANGELINA

The common herd. Lepa did try to quiet them down, but what can you do with drunken people?... This crease on the trousers just won't go in.

BARBER

And I've been battling for all my worth. Though I've always liked shaving the Professor, for an honest face is the easiest to shave. *(The Barber limps back to the bedroom. Angelina tests the heat of the iron: Sprinkles it with water... The Barber comes hurrying back from the bedroom; he is pale, distraught, scarcely able to speak.)*

BARBER

The Professor... The Professor moved his lips...

(Angelina looks at the Barber as though he were touched, and carries on with her ironing. Fearfully, the Barber returns to the bedroom door, looks in, and, after a few moments, shouts out as though he had seen the devil himself.)

BARBER

He moved his hand! He's alive! The Professor's alive! He moved, his whole body moved! He's alive!

(Angelina leaves the iron and rushes into the bedroom. The Barber, encouraged by her going in, moves back towards his resurrected

*friend, but the old woman, overwhelmed with wonder and delight,
drives him back into the sitting-room.)*

ANGELINA

Hurry. Go and fetch Ivan! He's gone to Lepa's to congratulate her. I'll call the doctor... Quick! Quick!...

(The Barber, in his hurry, can hardly find the door. Angelina, her hands trembling, takes out a note on which is written the number of the hospital... While she is clumsily trying to dial, the iron burns into the trousers, filling the room with smoke.)

ANGELINA

Hello!... Doctor Jelena, please, it's urgent... Yes!... Heloo! Doctor, the Professor's alive!... How do you mean which Professor? Professor Pavlović, of course! He's moving all over... Yes.. As soon as you can, please!...

(Through the window comes the sound of shouting and running footsteps. Ivan, like one demented, comes running in first, followed by the panting, limping Barber. Angelina is leaning against the bedroom door weeping... In the bedroom, Ivan can be heard attempting to speak to his father.)

IVAN

Father, can you hear me?.. Father...

ANGELINA

The doctor's coming, right away...

(She gives a start as the smell of burning reaches her; she hurries over to the table, removes the iron, and soaks the clothes with water. The Barber returns from the bedroom, beaming with delight, as though he had seen the greatest wonder in the world.)

BARBER

He opened his eyes. He looked, and seemed to recognise us.

ANGELINA

And there I was ironing the clothes, and I could see that something strange was happening: the crease on his trousers wouldn't take, it was fated not to be.

BARBER

And I was trying to shave him, but it wouldn't work; it was as if I was holding the razor for the first time in my life.

(Ivan returns from the bedroom. He turns to his aunt, confused.)

IVAN

Father has managed to speak.

ANGELINA

What did he say?

IVAN

He wants some sour milk.

ANGELINA

He wants some sour milk? We've got some, of course, we've got some... I'll get it, right away...

IVAN

I don't know if he should...

BARBER

It might be too much for him?

ANGELINA

Let's wait for the doctor, she knows best.

BARBER

She doesn't know anything! She pronounced him dead; just think, we might – God help us – have buried him this afternoon.

ANGELINA

Everyone will be waiting at the cemetery at half-past five; someone should go and cancel the...

BARBER

Let the people know, you mean. I'll do that.

(Without announcing herself, Lepa comes into the house. She holds her arms wide with a show of delight, and shouts.)

LEPA PEKARKA

Can it be true? I've just heard from the guests!

IVAN

He is alive.

LEPA PEKARKA

And I was thinking they'd all drunk themselves silly. Lord forgive me, when I first heard it I was afraid.

(Lepa goes to the bedroom door, looks inside, then turns round, crosses to the window and shouts down into her yard.)

LEPA PEKARKA

He's alive! The Professor's alive!

(The announcement is greeted with shots from guns and pistols. The music and singing grow louder. Lepa goes over to Ivan, gives him a motherly embrace, and sobs loudly... The Professor's feeble, trembling voice is heard from the bedroom.)

PROFESSOR

I want sour milk... Sour milk... Ivan!

(A hush descends on the room. Tentatively, they move towards the bedroom door Lepa Pekarka shrieks and steps back two paces. The Barber withdraws to the window. Only Ivan goes in.)

IVAN

Lie down, father. Lie down, don't try to get up... Father...

(Shortly, Ivan and the Professor emerge, the son supporting his exhausted, trembling father, who is carrying under his right arm the 'rejoined' statue of Septimus Severus. The old man pauses and looks round in silence at the assembled company. Lepa Pekarka attempts a smile, but her expression belies her lips. The Barber stands motionless, like a soldier on parade. The Professor looks round and, almost angrily, repeats his request to Angelina.)

PROFESSOR

I want some sour milk, Angelina... I've asked you already...

ANGELINA

Right away, Misha, right away... I didn't dare...

PROFESSOR

I've got a raging thirst... Help me sit down...

(Ivan helps to settle his father in the leather armchair. The old man sits, gazing blankly around the house. He clasps the statue in his shaking arms.)

PROFESSOR

Ivan, Ivan... Never mind, as soon as I can get back on my feet... I'll go round to the council and withdraw the bequest... Your mother has asked me to do it... and out of love for her I will.. She sends you her greetings, and asks me to tell you... to live in peace like brother and sister... She cried when I told her... about your children. *(They listen to the Professor, striving to grasp what he is talking about.)*

IVAN

Father, who is this mother?

PROFESSOR

Do you have two mothers?... Your mother, Milica...

IVAN

My mother Milica? She's telling me to do what?

(Ivan stares in amazement at his father, while Angelina, the Barber and Lepa look on in silence.)

PROFESSOR

Yes, your mother... I thought she would understand me, take my side... but not a hope... You are all and everything to her... But, oh Lord, how lovely your mother is... When I saw her, I thought... that I had never deserved... such a lovely woman...

(Angelina, disquieted, comes over to the armchair.)

ANGELINA

Misha, have you seen Milica?

PROFESSOR

I've seen her and talked to her... Give me that milk...

(Angelina hands him a large cup and a teaspoon. The Professor attempts to eat, but the white curds cling around his mouth and to his chin. Ivan watches his father from one side, while Lepa Pekarka and the Barber whisper together. Clearly, only Angelina believes in the Professor's tale.)

ANGELINA

And how is my sister? What did she tell you?

PROFESSOR

What did she tell me? All she can think about is him... Whatever you say, she talks about him.

ANGELINA

I don't want to offend the dead, but even while she was alive she loved him more than Sonja.

(Angelina goes to the chest-of-drawers, takes out a cloth and wipes her sister's picture, which is hanging on the wall by the window. The Professor points his spoon at Lepa Pekarka.)

PROFESSOR

Llepa...

LEPA PEKARKA

Yes, what is it?

PROFESSOR

Come over here, will you.

(Lepa crosses to the armchair and stands like a frightened schoolgirl.)

LEPA PEKARKA

What is it?

PROFESSOR

Your husband sends his greetings... Your Marko.

LEPA PEKARKA

My Marko?

PROFESSOR

Your Marko.. Whose do you think?... Unless you've got two Markos...

LEPA PEKARKA

Excuse me, do you mind if I sit down?

(Stunned by what she has heard, she takes a chair and, with relief, sits down. She endeavours to collect herself and proceed calmly with the conversation.)

LEPA PEKARKA

So you've seen Marko as well?

PROFESSOR

Yes, I have.. He was delighted, my old neighbour... If he hadn't died when he did – he's such a fine, sturdy man – he'd have lived to a hundred...

LEPA PEKARKA

Strange, I was dreaming of him last night. I stretched out on the couch to get a bit of rest from all these goings-on, and dreamt about him.

PROFESSOR

I know.

LEPA PEKARKA

How do you know?

PROFESSOR

I saw you.

LEPA PEKARKA

Forgive me, but where did you see me?

PROFESSOR

In your sleep... You were quarreling about something, but very soon you woke up... Marko didn't have time to tell you.. All that was on his mind... he asked me to say ... when you next dream about him, don't wake up too soon.

(Ivan is sitting rigid at the table. Lepa crumples her handkerchief and gazes at the Professor, who calmly continues eating.)

PROFESSOR

Just as I came along, you woke up... And Janko says... Simeun, that's Janko, your nephew...

BARBER

Oooh, Janko. Of course. Janko. Lord, how could I not remember Janko?

(The Barber is scarcely able to stand on his already shaky legs; he leans for support on the table. The Professor smiles reflectively.)

PROFESSOR

An extremely witty fellow, sharp-minded and clear... Nobody in my life ever made me laugh as he did.

BARBER

Yes, ah yes.. He was very witty.

PROFESSOR

Well, Janko said to Marko: 'How can she dream of you when you're spitting fire?' He's very angry with you, my neighbour... Says you've disappointed him, both as a woman and as a friend. That's what I'm to tell you.

(Lepa says nothing. She looks at the Professor, not knowing whether to laugh or cry.)

LEPA PEKARKA

Professor, do you realise what you're saying?

PROFESSOR

Yes, I do. Because I'm telling you only what I was asked to say. And he's also angry... about this wedding... It was Ilija Rajković who closed down his bakery wasn't it?

LEPA PEKARKA

Yes, it was him. But my son's not marrying Ilija – he's marrying his daughter, Biljana. I've explained that to Marko at least ten times, but he always comes back with the same answer: 'You shouldn't have allowed my enemy to mingle with my blood!' Who's she to marry, man?! Don't you realise you've been dead for half a century! What have the children got to do with your '+economic war'? As far as I can see, what he'd have liked best

is to have his son give the enemy's daughter a child and then leave her. That would be a truly masculine, Balkan form of revenge! I told him, only a few days ago, when he come to me in my sleep after lunch: 'don't you come to me and start poisoning my life, or I'll stop dreaming of you, thank God! I've had all I can take – enough! Go back where you belong and leave me to live out these last few years with my dear children!'

PROFESSOR

I'm only too well aware that what I have to say is unpleasant... but I must speak... I promised I would. I gave my word.

IVAN

To whom, father? Who did you give your word to?

PROFESSOR

All of them... all of those I met in the Gathering-Place... When we parted, when they came to see me off, I promised to pass on their messages... And your brother was among them, Simeun.

BARBER

My brother? Stevan, you mean?

PROFESSOR

Stevan Savski –Keser...

(Lepa Pekarka rises in agitation, takes the chair and returns it to the table.)

LEPA PEKARKA

I scarcely dare shut my eyes for fear he'll appear all covered in flour, mad as a wild dog, barking and baying, bristling and biting, all tooth and claw, ready to rip me apart! I swear I'll drive a stake through his heart if ever again he appears to me!

ANGELINA

There now, Lepa, it's not so bad as all that.

LEPA PEKARKA

Not so bad, you say?! He wants to drive me to the madhouse! For five years I've been taking tranquillisers, going from one doctor to another. Physically, there's nothing wrong with me – it's just that my nerves have been shattered by this monster, this demon! For a good ten years now he's been nagging at me to join him: 'Come to me, Lepa. It's hard for me without you'. How can I 'come' to you, Marko? 'Get sick, and die'. When he told me that, I very nearly did die. I wanted to press him, to see how far he'd go. So I asked him: 'You want me to kill myself, then?' He jumped at that: 'Yes, kill yourself, kill yourself!' That was the last bloody straw – excuse the language – I picked up the crystal ashtray and threw it at him. But you can't hit a ghost, though you can smash a glass-plated double door. After that, he calmed down; didn't visit me in my dreams for a good two years...

(The Barber has been waiting impatiently for the agitated woman to calm herself. As soon as a break comes in her flood of wrath, he turns to the Professor.)

BARBER

Professor, what did my brother Stevan have to say?

PROFESSOR

The first thing he asked me to do was to go to that friend of yours, Ilija Rajković, and tell him.. To have his name removed from the plates on that street by the bridge... He's far from satisfied with the position of the street and the way it looks... In fact, he's very angry about it.

BARBER

That's just what I've been telling everyone, Professor. Only recently, I was suggesting to Mr. Žunjić that he undertake to do something about it, but...

PROFESSOR

That's something we'll settle, but there's something else we can't ... Simeun, my dear friend, as from today, you'll no longer be shaving me... for a man who betrays his own brother, in deadly danger, cannot be my barber, let alone anything more than that... Stevan asks you never again to mention his name. He says he is still hurt by those wounds and by the memory of that night when he was fleeing and begged you to take him into the house and shelter him only till dawn...

BARBER

Professor...

PROFESSOR

Siemun, be silent while I'm speaking!... Your brother later died of those wounds. If an enemy had come, a man would have had cause for thinking, for questioning...

BARBER

Because of him, I was taken to the police, my leg was broken, my spine twisted! He pursued his war, I my peace. What did they ever do to him on account of me? If I had taken him in that night, they'd have stretched me out like a goatskin in the middle of town. Is it so little to have suffered what I did for him, to have been a cripple for forty years?

PROFESSOR

You committed an error, Simeun, a serious error...

(Their argument is broken off by a ringing sound. Angelina looks round, unsure which way to go.)

ANGELINA

What's that ringing, Ivan?

IVAN

The phone.

ANGELINA

A few days ago, I went to the door and shouted to the postman – 'Hello!' He was so startled, he looked at me as if I was off my head.

IVAN

Madhouse.

(Angelina picks up the receiver. After the very first words, she becomes confused.)

ANGELINA

Yes, yes... Well, listen... how can I tell you?... Don't cry, there's no need! ... Listen, I'll let your brother explain to you...

(Distraught, she holds the receiver out to Ivan.)

IVAN

Sonja?

ANGELINA

Yes. She got our telegram through the embassy. She's crying so hard I can't get her to listen...

(Ivan takes the receiver. Speaking in careful, measured tones he attempts to explain the newly-arisen situation.)

IVAN

Hello, Sonja... Calm yourself... Father's alive... No, no, there's been no mistake... We sent the telegram last night, when he was dead... that is, while we thought he was dead... No, now he isn't... You think I'm crazy?... Well he's right here, sitting and talking to us... He's all right, except for some strange after-effects... I'll tell you when I see you... You want to speak to him? Well, I don't know if that's the wisest thing right now... Very well...

(Ivan pulls at the extension cord and carries the telephone over to his father. Meanwhile, the Professor is staring at the small squares of stone he has found in his coat pocket.)

IVAN

Father, it's Sonja to speak to you.

(At the mention of his daughter's name, he gives a gentle, satisfied smile, reaches quickly for the receiver and shouts as loudly as his enfeebled voice will permit.)

PROFESSOR

Sonja, my dear!... How are you, child?... Well, it was touch and go, but, as you've heard, I managed to pull through... Now, don't cry!... The effects? What effects?... Who told you that?... Ivan's talking nonsense... Tell me, how are my grandchildren? Are thy getting tanned in the Spanish sun?... I can hardly wait to see you... Don't unpack – get into the car and come back right away... Just between you and me: I've got something very important to tell you... I've been with your mother. She sends you all her love. She's your age now, you know... How do you mean 'what mother'? What's got into you, child? Your mother,

Milica. You speak as if you'd forgotten her, or as if I'd remarried so often you can't remember your real mother! ... *Your* mother, Milica!... When you come, we'll have a good leisurely chat... Good, and don't be long...

(From outside comes the sound of the ambulance siren. Ivan rushes out to meet the doctor. The Barber and Lepa gaze at the Professor with unconcealed anger. Only Angelina shows some understanding of the professor's story and of his unusual behaviour.)

The doctor arrives, wearing her white uniform and carrying her black bag. As she walks in, Ivan whispers a few hurried words to her. The Professor smiles and holds out his hand.)

PROFESSOR

Well, here I am, back again.

JELENA

For the first time I'm glad to have made the wrong diagnosis. It's beyond me, I simply can't believe it... You refused to go to hospital...

PROFESSOR

I won't go now, either.

ANGELINA

Is it all right for Misha to eat sour milk straight out of the fridge?

BARBER

As if they know anything... Where's my bag?

(Ivan turns confidentially to Jelena, who has been observing the rapidly recovering Professor with a fixed, silent gaze.)

IVAN

What exactly has happened to my father?

JELENA

I don't know. The coma could have been caused by encephalitis, cerebral bleeding, thrombosis, brain tumour, skull fracture, uremia, diabetic complications... and numerous other factors. If I'd been able to examine him in hospital, I'd have known where the problem lay... Professor, I want you to get ready now and come with me for a small examination. I've made one mistake, I don't want to make another. Please, without any fuss...

BARBER

Off to the Inquisitor!

JELENA

What was that?

BARBER

He has to go away... for a thorough examination.

IVAN

Will you get my father's things ready, aunt Angelina?

LEPA PEKARKA

Let me help you.

JELENA

Now I'm ordering you, Professor, just as you used to order me at school: 'come and point to the map, Jelena, or go and fetch the register'. You'll have to do as I say, just as I used to do as you said.

IVAN

Come on, father. The car's waiting.

PROFESSOR

Not on your life! I'm not leaving this house as long as I can breathe... Thank you, Jelena, for your concern about me, but I feel quite well now. Your father examined me, and concluded that I must have been in a coma. He said...

JELENA

My father examined you?

PROFESSOR

Thoroughly. You established death, he established life.

BARBER

He was a real doctor. Even during his life, he achieved miracles.

JELENA

My father?

PROFESSOR

You answer just like my children. Didn't you have a father?

JELENA

Yes, I did.

PROFESSOR

And wasn't he a good doctor?

JELENA

He was.

PROFESSOR

And did he understand anything about clinical death?

JELENA

Of course he did.

PROFESSOR

Why, then, are you so surprised? I didn't tell you I'd been examined by Marko the baker, but by your father, the celebrated Dr Katić... If only you could know how delighted he was when I told him that you had not just stepped into his shoes, but had continued his work most honourably. He was quite overcome with pride and happiness, and you have forgotten him... Yes, he asked me to tell you to devote yourself to the study of the coma and clinical death, because this is the only possible link with the millions upon millions of departed souls. That is his message to you.

IVAN

D'you hear? That's what I was telling you about.

(Jelena is becoming increasingly interested in the Professor's case. She listens attentively to him, behaving as though she were back in her own clinic.)

JELENA

Did he have anything else to say to me?

PROFESSOR

Yes. He said you were to have nothing to do – his very words – nothing to do with technical apparatus and electronics and that

you were to cure people by your knowledge, experience and patience. A few years ago it happened that his hospital, which is now yours, sent a living man up to the other world. Probably this was due to some mechanical fault of failure, but it might also have resulted from a doctor's error.

BARBER

It was the doctor, for sure.

ANGELINA

You've brought messages for everyone, Misha, but nothing for me a...sif I didn't have anyone up there.

IVAN

Please, Aunt Angelina...

PROFESSOR

Are you really keen to know?

ANGELINA

Of course.

PROFESSOR

It's rather unpleasant, but since that's what you want, I'd better tell you. Everyone down here turned out to be open in some way to blame or reproach, only you and I might seem unsinning. But that's not so... Your sister, Milica, has disowned

you. As we were parting, she told me how people had been talking about you and me... so many years ago...

IVAN

Hmm, what else is new.

(Angelina is dumbfounded. The professor shrugs his shoulders helplessly, and speaks in repentant tones.)

PROFESSOR

I thought she would never find out, but there you are, I was deceiving myself. The sin lies upon my soul. We were alone, the children had gone their separate ways...

ANGELINA

Dear Lord, to think at first I believed all he was saying, and now I see he's no longer in his right mind. I really thought he'd been with our loved ones...

IVAN

Until suddenly he came out with this.

PROFESSOR

And all because of you, my son, a fine, noble-spirited young man went and hanged himself. My friend and assistant, the teacher Petar. He couldn't bear to see the collection being thrown out of the house.

JELENA

It's quite true – that young man was brought into hospital this morning. Professor, who told you about this?

PROFESSOR

I have been with them, Jelena. I have been with them, just as I am with you now. I have been with them, with Marko, with your father, with his brother...

(The Professor is growing increasingly upset and angry. His vexation I saggravated by their doubting words and their even more dubious looks.)

PROFESSOR

I spoke with those people! They told me all the things that have been galling and tormenting them for years! They have no peace, no rest, because of you – the living... This statue was given me by Petar, may good Petar. It was once headless and armless, but now at last it is whole, now it is Septimus Severus, the Roman emperor. Up there lie the remains, up there was a great civilization. When I die again, you are to bury with me a dozen spades, shovels, and pickaxes. You are to bury all my documents, my archaeological instruments. The people are digging with their hands, working all day long. We discovered some incredible things... Look, these stone fragments come from that site. We also saw a space-ship . It flew overhead; we waved to it. That's an indication that in the future contact with the dead will be possible. You must also bury with me a demijohn of 'rakija', for Janko...

(Ivan and Jelena are standing apart, deep in discussion. Lepa, Angelina and the Barber, meanwhile, continue gazing at the 'crazed' Professor.)

PROFESSOR

Jelena! Send that ambulance away from the house! I've had enough of that siren – it's bursting my skull!

IVAN

Get his things ready, Aunt Angelina.

JELENA

Professor, you'll have to come with me.

LEPA PEKARKA

He must go, he must... Where's his case, Angelina?

PROFESSOR

I will not go to hospital! I will not!

(A swarthy-looking accordion player comes into the house. He looks round, startled. He had not expected to find himself caught up in vehement quarreling. Catching sight of him, Lepa Pekarka places on the table the Professor's jacket and slippers, which she has already found and is preparing to pack.)

LEPA PEKARKA

What do you want here?

ACCORDIONIST

Mrs. Lepa, please, could you come-n help us. Mr. Rajković is tryin' to make us play hangin' upside down: like bats on a branch, swingin' by our feet – that's how he wants us to play! 'My little top-drawer Miss!' Radiša, the fiddler, he played a kolo like that – landed on his skull. They're trying to bring him round, but he won't open his eyes!...

JELENA PEKARKA

Excuse all this, I'll have to go down and see what they're up to there.

PROFESSOR

Wit! You there with the accordion – I want to ask you something!

(The accordionist stops, confused. He looks round to see who called him. The Professor half' rises, pointing a bony finger at the white stops of the instrument.)

PROFESSOR

Whose accordion is that?

ACCORDIONIST

Mine, sir.

PROFESSOR

Are you sure it's yours?

ACCORDIONIST

'Course it's mine. Whose d'you think?

(The Professor, steadying himself against the side of the table, crosses to the musician.)

PROFESSOR

Are you any chance the one who's called – Bata Konj?

ACCORDIONIST

Only behind my back. There are always people mean enough to...

PROFESSOR

I knew it... And did you ever know a musician called Ruzmarin?

ACCORDIONIST

Srećko Ruzmarin – but of course – God rest his soul. We used to play together, till he was knocked off by a heart attack.

PROFESSOR

Now you're going to hang that accordion over to me and get the hell out of this house – you mean, sneaking thief! Stealing from a dead man's grave!...

(The Professor makes a jerking lunge for the accordion, attempting to wrench it away from the frightened musician. Ivan and Jelena come over to support the old man, who is swaying on his feet.)

IVAN

Calm down, father... Calm down!

JELENA

Professor, please...

LEPA PEKARKA

Take him away, he's out of his mind.

ACCORDIONIST

Let me go, sir! This is my accordion!

PROFESSOR

Thieves!... You're all thieves!... I never knew before who I was living among... among thieves.. and scoundrels...

(With a sudden tug, the old man succeeds in freeing the instrument from the musician's grasp, but in so doing he loses his balance and

falls back into the armchair. The Doctor has already run over to him. Ivan, too, wishes to help, but it is too late: the Professor, in a spasm of pain, raises his head, draws a deep, desperate breath, as though surfacing from a long dive underwater, then stretches his arms along the arm-rests, and grows calm. In his lap lies the accordion, its concertina-folds relaxed, as though it too had breathed its last... Angelina bursts into tears, Lepa Pekarka and the Barber make the sign of the cross, and Jelena, after a brief examination, quietly announces.)

JELENA

Patients who are seriously ill sometimes, before death, go through a brief improvement... My condolences.

(All now, for the second time, offer Ivan their condolences...)

JELENA

Do you want me to take the Professor to hospital while the ambulance is still there?

IVAN

Yes... Just a moment...

(Ivan readjusts his tie, crosses to the telephone and dials...)

IVAN

Hello... Sonja... Yes... Not good... He's died again... Calm yourself... We did all we could, but.. Come round... I'm waiting for you...

(Reflectively, Ivan replaces the receiver, turns round and goes back to his father's chair. For a few moments he gazes round in silence at the others, then addresses them in a soft, measured, and slightly menacing voice.)

IVAN

Dear Friends, duty obliges me, in this tragic moment, to address you in words which, I feel sure, you will take in their true sense, and which you will respect, above all as tried and trusted friends, both of my father and of this house. Circumstances are such that I am compelled to speak of everything at just this moment.

To my deepest regret, you have witnessed certain very peculiar occurrences, which have arisen as a result of my father's serious illness. Comrade Jelena may be able, from the medical point of view, to explain to you the causes of this comatose behaviour; I should like, however, to say something to you of the possible, and readily foreseeable consequences.

ACCORDIONIST

'Scuse me, they're waiting for me...

LEPA PEKARKA

Don't you dare move till comrade Ivan has finished!

IVAN

As you are very well aware, there are in this town certain individuals, even small groups, who would enjoy with

particular relish, and would 'interpret' in their own way, the accounts of my father's last words and actions. Nor would the care and concern we have shown towards a man who was terminally ill pass without comment in the conversation of those intriguing behind the scenes. All that has taken place here would be 'translated' into the speech of the market-place and of the enemies of this house. The town would be rife with rumour – malevolent, offensive, and biased in the extreme. And I am far from sure that the press would not also make sport of the story.

LEPA PEKARKA

They can't wait to get onto it.

BARBER

You can wash yourself clean of anything but words.

IVAN

My father, as you know, devoted his entire life to the wellbeing and prosperity of this town; firstly, as a teacher, then, over the years, through his social and cultural work, as a campaigner for the preservation of our antiquities and historical monuments. And all this he did, as one may say, out of the purity of his heart and his own goodwill. As circumstances would have it he received for these services no official recognition, though twice he was shortlisted for the October Award. Yet, insofar as we knew him, he derived his greatest satisfaction from popular recognition, both at home and abroad. And men of science, at every stage in his career, demonstrated their respect and gratitude towards him.

I am saying all this to you, because we must not allow the figure of such a man to be exposed to scorn and to scurrilous rumour. I appeal now to your consciences, and I beg you in the name of friendship to ensure that the occurrences I have mentioned remain known only to ourselves and to this domestic circle...

Let us today, this afternoon, we shall bid farewell to my father in the manner he deserved. Finally, I should like to thank all those present, on behalf of myself and of my sister Sonja, for the care and attention you have shown these past two days. Thank you...

(Lepa Pekarka, unable to restrain herself to the end of Ivan's speech, bursts into tears and flings her arms in a tight embrace around the distressed son.)

LEPA PEKARKA

Ivan, my dear boy... Now they've started up their racket again...

(She goes to the window and shouts out angrily):

Quiet down there! Quiet! The Professor's died!... What is it, Sava, what are you shouting for?... He wasn't alive, we just thought he was... Keep the guests quiet.

(Once again, Ivan takes the decanter from the cupboard and fills the glasses. Without a word, Jelena takes her bag and hurries out. The others stare after her in astonishment.)

LEPA PEKARKA

What got into her?

BARBER

Crazy as her mother.

(Ivan, reaching over his aunt's bowed shoulders, holds out his hand to the musician.)

IVAN

I don't know who this man is, but I hope he understood me.

ACCORDIONIST

I did, sir.

LEPA PEKARKA

If ever I hear him say a word...

ANGELINA

If he talks, he'll go to prison for the accordion. So he'd better make up his mind what's wisest.

(The others stare angrily at Angelina for this rude outburst.)

IVAN

Don't you understand me, for heaven's sake? What's all this about prison? Who said anything about prison? What I said was...

LEPA PEKARKA

She was just babbling.

BARBER

Comes with age.

ANGELINA

I know what you were saying, my child, but what I'm saying is that for stealing from the grave he should serve his time...

ACCORDIONIST

What d'you mean ' stealing?

IVAN

She goes on and on ' always the same! Aunt Angelina, please...

(And while the agitated group attempts to explain to the stiff and startled old woman what the problem really is and how she has misunderstood it all, and while Angelina takes in what they say, and yet persists in having her own word, the soul of Professor Mihajlo Pavlović wings its way for the second time towards the Gathering-Place. There to be greeted by his now familiar friends, acquaintances and fellow-townsmen, and by his wife, Milica. The first to sport him is Marko the Baker. The flour-dusted neighbour greets him with exultation.)

MARKO

The Professor's back! Here he comes!

KESER

Milica, your husband's arrived!

JANKO

He's brought the accordion! Hey, Ruzmarin, your accordion's back!

RUZMARIN

Thank you, Professor. You're a real brother! I kiss your hand...

MILICA

Misha, why did you come back so soon?

PETAR

Professor, look what I've found!

DOCTOR

Ah, we've all been longing for a song! Strike up, Ruzmarin!
Silence! Gentlemen, are we ready?

*(The shades of the departed, delighted with their dear friend's return,
burst into a powerful, harmonious rendering of their song):*

CHORUS OF THE DEPARTED:

Cherries on the hill in blossom
Spring is on its way
All at home is much the same
Only I'm no longer there
Only I'm no longer there.
The slender vine is greening now
On the trellis of our old house
All is as it was before
Only I'm no longer there
Only I'm no longer there.

(The song drifts quietly in through the window of the old house. To the group gathered round the body of the recently deceased Professor it no doubt seems that the singing comes from the wedding celebrations in the neighbouring yard. Only the Professor knows who is singing the song and from where it comes. Which is why, on his wrinkled face, there now appears something close to a hidden, secretive smile.)

THE END

Translated into English by
Alan McConnell-Duff