

**KRCHEŇ THE IMMORTAL\***

A drama in four acts including the Matej's dream

**By Eva Maliti-Fraňová**

Translation: Ľuben Urbánek

## **CHARACTERS:**

Krcheň The Immortal/the late old Krcheň (both played by a single actor)

Hana, his wife (alive, and then dead) /Marka, his daughter (alive, and then dead - both played by a single actress)

Matej, the postman

Peter (with moustache) and Paul (without moustache), Krcheň's sons, a Gemini (both played by a single actor)

Eva, Peter's wife, a tall, slim black-haired young woman

Peter's son, Krcheň junior (played by a dwarf)

Three Woman Mourners: Zuza Mišeje, Žofa Big-Teeth, Anča Sojková/Three Dead Men: Ďuro Marcin, Kubo Big-Teeth, Jano Štrba (all characters played by three actresses or two actresses and one actor or some other combination on the principle of travesty)

The chorus of the dead

## Act One

*(The action takes place in Central Europe, in a small village in Slovakia, sometime towards the end of the Communist era.)*

*In the middle of the stage - a rural kitchen - there is a large bed where Krcheň is lying on two big cushions, underneath a heavy duvet, wearing gray-striped flannel pajamas. Magazines and old paperback books are scattered all over the bed. He is a man, about 65 years of age, almost bald, heavily built, with an animal-like expression in his face - untamed, violent and smart all at once. The room is furnished with standard rural furniture, and, in the rear, a ladder leaning against the wall leads up to the attic. Hens are sitting on the steps of the ladder. The walls are dark and cracked, musty and wet. There are windows on each side with the front door in the middle. The room is a mess. Instead of a lamp, a single bulb is hanging from the ceiling. Krcheň's wife Hana is wandering, clearly without purpose, to and from all around the room. She must have been a beauty once, but now has long grey unkempt hair - clumped together as she hasn't combed it for a long time. Her age is unclear, about 55-58. The face of a retired Madonna. She is wearing a black overcoat, fastened at the waistline with an old stocking. She keeps arranging and rearranging things, as if day-dreaming, and seems out of this world. She looks as if she were looking for something. Matej, the lame Postman - his left leg is shorter - is sitting on a chair near the bed, wearing a postman's uniform. He is the youngest of them and looks fifty years old. Out of his postman's bag, he produces some pieces of the day's newspapers, puts them on the bed and lays his bag against the bed. Matej's eyes switch from the wandering Hana to Krcheň in bed. The morning sunshine is creeping into the room through the open, rural style windows.)*

Krcheň: *(Shouting in a deep voice.)* What is it?

*(The postman gives a start.)*

Matej: *(Hurriedly.)* There's your Pravda, your Práca, your Smena...

Krcheň: *(Shoves the newspapers off the bed with a single move; the postman starts collecting them with care and murmuring to himself: "Well, I still have to dispatch these to the addresses.")* Were I not dying, we could have... we could have checked the mail from the National Committee, for instance... *(Squints at him.)* What do you think, Matej?

Matej: *(Hesitantly.)* Well, there is one envelope... Jano Štrba is writing to a woman from Bratislava... *(Gets embarrassed.)* You better leave me alone, Krcheň! You've been dying on

a daily basis anyway. You can die ten times before you come home from the pub. When you were dying a week ago, I even believed you... And then Jano Štrba said the other day the only thing you wanted was to avoid municipal work, when he called for grass-reaping volunteers from the National Committee...

Krcheň: ...grass-reaping volunteers... First, it's not voluntary when that scoundrel keeps talking about it that much, and second, the reds have made a mess with the cows, like everything else. They should be out grazing decently, not laying about in a stall like that, and you've got to feed the green right into their throats... like a production line, that's what it is.

Matej: Why, you're a red yourself, Krcheň!

Krcheň: I am who I am!

Matej: You're yourself all right, but why should I do your share of reaping!

Krcheň: *(As if he hasn't heard.)* You have no idea. You haven't grown up yet. What do you think, you fool, that the mystery of life is? It's the fact than one day you are going to die. One has to try it out, once in a while in a lifetime, to get to know the nature of the business.

*(The postman shakes his head, unconvinced.)*

Krcheň: *(Matter-of-factly.)* So what does that scoundrel have to say in writing?

*(The postman turns his head, dispirited, and notices Hana moving a huge dirty cushion. His appearance gradually turns gentler and childish, and he gives her shy looks. Suddenly, Krcheň gives her an overbearing nod and Hana drops her cushion. She turns around, absentmindedly and goes to the kitchen-dresser and produces out of it a half-empty bottle of borovichka, strong Slovak juniper brandy. She pours it absentmindedly into two small glasses and gives them, with the same absentmindedness, to the postman, who accepts with gratitude: "Thank you, thank you, darling, how very nice of you... thank you." Without responding, Hana walks away.)*

Krcheň: Don't bother with her. She is stupid anyway.

*(The postman gives one glass to Krcheň.)*

Matej: Cheers!

*(Krcheň drinks down his glass while Matej sips his.)*

Krcheň: *(Philosophically, listening to himself.)* Well, you know, I have already made up my mind. I am not going to spend my days after death rotting in soil, getting stripped to the bones by worms. I read in a newspaper the other day that over in Bratislava they don't have a fair Christian burial any more. Instead, you go to some sort of a new cemetery where you get buried with your legs right down. Coffin to coffin, like soldiers, to save space.

Matej: *(Nods his head, unconvinced.)* Is that right...?

Krcheň: So I've said to myself, once I'm no more, I'll have myself burnt like the ancient Greeks. Like that, in a nice and neat crematorium with a coin under my tongue...

Matej: But...

Krcheň: Everyone's doing it these days.

Matej: But...

Krcheň: Why, you've never heard of the crematorium before?

Matej: But people here in the village just get buried under ground...

Krcheň: *(With disrespect, impatiently.)* Yes, and the whole cemetery is stuffed with them! How many times have I told you that getting laid down among these knuckleheads means to join the line. Which one of our dead has had an inch of good sense in his lifetime? Just think about them in their graves, one by one...Jožo Hadraba, Mišo The Miser, Pa'lo Sojka, Jano Mikuň... Just think about it. The whole cemetery is a grave full of idiots... *(Waves his hand, tired of it.)* Now, my plans for after-life are different... Getting burnt is healthy and even beneficial for society. I'll have you burnt, too.

Matej: *(Startled, starts coughing.)* Why, have you lost all your good sense? I'm not going to die yet. I'm even younger than you. I haven't sinned in my life. I haven't done anything wrong to anyone... *(Embarrassed.)* Indeed, I have not. I feel alright like this.

Krcheň: But it would be great, wouldn't it? Getting burnt nicely, our dust put into urns, urns then stuck here on the dresser, and that one... where the hell is she? *(Turns to Hana who is mounting the ladder.)* Where's she going, damn it, Matej, go and fetch her, would you, or she's going to drop...

*(The postman dashes to the ladder and gently takes Hana's hand. Giving him a look, she climbs down, wordlessly. She comes over to the stove, begins prodding in the oven noisily. Trying to stir up the fire, she burns some scraps but fails. Having said nothing so far, she is nevertheless drawing all attention to herself, becoming dominant.)*

*Meanwhile, Krcheň speaks on, while keeping an eye on his wife. The postman is looking at her, mesmerized.)*

Krcheň: : Anyway, if you don't want to get burnt, all right, I'm going to have myself burnt alone... *(Postman does not pay attention.)* Do you hear me? Stop ogling her like that! *(Postman gives a start, turning his face to him.)* I'll have myself burnt alone and you will scatter my ashes from a plane all over the world.

Matej: *(Disapprovingly.)* Why, you're no Indira Gandhi... Besides, why do you need a plane to get your ashes scattered? A church tower should do. I've never flown in my life...

Krcheň: Don't be down-to-earth, Matej. You know, I've read recently about the Vikings - there were once such people somewhere up in the North - well, these Vikings would have themselves buried in their ships. They'd put their dead aboard a ship and send them and the load sailing across the sea.

Matej: *(Objecting, half-drunk.)* But how could I send you up the stream here in the village, there's too little water?

Krcheň: *(Frowning.)* And the old Scythian nomads?.. It's believed they used to bury their men with their horses, even with the whole family...

*(Meanwhile, Hana has finally managed to start the fire. In a sudden burst of activity, she searches in every corner, shakes the cloths scattered on the long bench, opens the doors of the kitchen-dresser and the cabinet, pulls out all the drawers and scatters their contents. Stomping around the baffled men, she glances under Krcheň's duvet. In a short while she has turned everything upside down. The room is an incredible mess.)*

Matej: *(Watching her, then turns to Krcheň.)* You know, Krcheň, she hasn't said a word since your Marka disappeared.

Krcheň: *(Diligently, with his head turned aside.)* Why, what is she to say anyway?

Matej: Just walking, lost in thoughts, always looking for something...eh, what is it that she's looking for?

Krcheň: *(Tense.)* How am I supposed to know that?..

*(The room is silent, save for an occasional hen clucking outside. Hana is climbing up the ladder, entering the attic. Clucking, the hens follow her. She fusses about a while, the sound of her steps upstairs is heard. She then climbs down, hens are hopping out along with her. The Postman and Krcheň both turn their heads, evading the flurried birds. Horror-struck, the Postman glances at Krcheň with a questioning look on his face. Krcheň just nods him away.)*

Krcheň: Right, that's enough. Why don't you open that envelope, Matej. See what that scoundrel is up to...

Matej: *(Defiantly, yet his will weakens.)* Oh, let that be, Krcheň...

Krcheň: Don't you worry. I bet he's been for a spa treatment or something. He must have fallen for another chick, yeah. We've got to do it, you nut. Theresa should know the kind of son of a bitch she lives with. Bring that candle over so we can break the seal... *(Violently.)* Come on, give it to me...

Matej: *(Frightened, grabbing his postman's bag.)* I'm afraid I must be off now... I'm late as it is... I might be wanted some place...

Krcheň: Ouch, ouch, ooooh, waaaah, it's starting all over again... Come on, do something, quick! I'm dying! Here, here... my heart... and head! What... what's this... This is the Grim Reaper, make no mistake! *(Whining and sobbing.)*

Matej: *(Perplexed.)* Hanka, quick, we must do something! The doctor... we must call the doctor!

*(Meanwhile, Hana, dressed in the black overcoat, is busy doing something with the sheets and the duvet. She is now standing in the middle of the room, opposite the bed, looking indifferently at Krcheň, who is tossing about in his bed. Suddenly, he grows stiff with his head turned upwards, eyes glazed, rattling as if breathing his last.)*

*(Unconcerned, Hana digs a string bag out of the disarranged mess scattered on the kitchen-dresser, producing money from a knotted handkerchief. She comes to the door and goes out into the street.)*

Matej: *(Worriedly.)* Where did she go?

Krcheň: *(Whining.)* To get brandy. We've run out.

*(Postman Matej is looking out after her and, suddenly, catches sight of her through the window. Hana is stark naked. Matej's eyes pop out, in apparent disbelief as to whether it is true or just an illusion. For another moment, her figure glimmers behind the window. His jaw drops, Matej can't get enough of that otherworldly apparition. Then he gives a sudden start as something blocks his view. It's the jealous Krcheň, who has covered Matej's eyes with his hand, to stop him ogling his wife.)*

Krcheň: What's the matter? She's a witch...Doesn't even cook any more...

*(At that moment Matej makes his long-awaited jump, stoops, covers his head with his bag as if awaiting a blow from above, and, horror-stricken, shuffles away. At the doorstep, he manages to turn round and address - someone or other, even he is not sure who.)*

MATEJ *(Shouting hurriedly.)*: I'll send a telegram to Peter and Paul: Come before your father breathes his last! *(Rushes out into the street.)*

*The stage lights fade.*

*After a while, the stage is relit by a strange, white light. Krcheň is lying on his bed, reading a newspaper. It is his dummy, turned with its back to the audience, its face covered with the newspaper. Then the door opens: a white male figure is standing in the doorway, dressed in a dead man's winding sheet. It is Krcheň's deceased father, the Old Krcheň, who died in World War Two. He is staring at his son.)*

Old Krcheň: So you're reading, eh? Well, you're not going to read for long, my son. They are waiting for you there where I come from.

Krcheň: *(From behind the newspaper.)* Father, is it really you?

Old Krcheň: At our place you can read as much as you want, and yet, you're not going to read anything!

Krcheň: But, father, I loved you once!

*Old Krcheň remains silent, then takes a quick step towards Krcheň grabs his newspaper and leaves.*

Krcheň: *(Shouts.)* Father! Where are you going? Wait, wait, I love you! Father, wait, please! Father! *(Grows silent.)*

*(Silence. Hana enters the room, dressed in the black coat with a bottle of borovitchka – whortleberry brandy tucked under her shoulder, along with the Postman Matej and his postman's bag.)*

Matej: *(Jumps towards the bed and feels Krcheň's forehead.)* For Christ's sake, what happened?.. I can't even tell if he's burning or freezing!

*(Hana is looking on, unconcerned. The lights go off.)*

## Act Two

*(The lights come up. The bed is neatly made. Two big snow-white cushions are plumped-up high, the duvet gently smoothed over. Around, there is still the same mess. Krcheň is absent. His best black suit is laid out on the bed, ready to be used in the coffin. Both jacket and trousers are arranged to suggest a man in them: a shirt is folded on the chest and a black hat makes the head. A candlestick is standing at the bedside with an unlit candle. In front of the bed there are three chairs. In the left chair, The First Woman Mourner Zuza Mišeje is sitting, facing the audience. She is dressed in black, has no headscarf and is crumpling a white handkerchief. Hana is standing at the stove, eagerly cooking something in an enormous pot. Her unkempt grey hair is reaching down to the pot. The kitchen is all steamed up, looking rather nightmarish. Hana is using a huge wooden stirrer like a brewing witch. Front stage, in the right kitchen corner, the postman Matej, curled up on a small chair, is trying to get some sleep. The door swings open. Enter the Second Woman Mourner Žofa Big-Teeth. She, too, is dressed in black, has a white handkerchief, and a black scarf on her head.)*



Second Mourner: *(Loudly, so the whole kitchen can hear her.)* God bless this house!

First Mourner: *(Sadly.)* Bless you too, Žofka. *(Hana is lifeless.)* Why don't you sit down and join us.

Second Mourner: *(Taking a seat in the middle, speaking softly to Zuza.)* How is he? Is he still alive? Or are we going to mourn today?

First Mourner: *(Loudly.)* I hope the doctors will save him... What a man he was, what a loss he would be... *(Sighs.)*

Second Mourner: *(Loudly.)* Yes, what a loss! *(Voices her pity.)* There was no one who could stand up to him. *(Softly, gleefully.)* Anča Sojková should be here any minute, she could say things about him...

First Mourner: *(Whispering, startled.)* Anča?!

Second Mourner: Who do you think that little bastard of Sojka's is...

First Mourner: What?!

*(Suddenly, Hana grows wary, and raises her head from above the pot.)*

Second Mourner: Well, what! *(Turns to Hana, loudly.)* Hana, oh Hana... How are you going to cope without him? All alone, like that... Your sons are gone, your daughter's gone missing... The house needs to be taken care of, the estate, too... A woman alone can't handle that without a man... *(Steps towards Hana, hugs her with sympathy.)* Oh, Hana how will you cope when your old one kicks the bucket?

*(Meanwhile, the Third Woman Mourner Anča Sojková enters the kitchen. She, too, is dressed in black, with a white handkerchief and a black scarf on her head. Hana pulls out of Žofka's hug, and goes, without a word, from the kitchen into the yard.)*

First Mourner: So what! She must be so happy, she will dance... Remember how she must have suffered under Krcheň... *(Touches her head.)* Oh, I forgot to put my scarf on! *(Rushes out, following Hana.)*

Third Mourner: *(Joins them on the right seat.)* Yes, yes, it was a real torture to live with him...

Second Mourner: *(Ironically.)* Real torture, eh... Our sweet Zuzka forgot she used to court him herself once. During the reaping she was always next to him, clinging to him like a leech! She didn't care about Hana then like she does now.

Third Mourner: *(Upset.)* Zuza?!

Second Mourner: Oh yes, Zuza. And it wasn't fruitless either... *(Anča is staring at her with an open mouth.)* Just take a good look at the young Janko, he is the spitting image of Krcheň. Really, my dear.

*(Enters Zuza with a scarf on her head.)*

First Mourner: He should be back from hospital any minute, dead or alive, no one knows.

*(Zuza takes a seat. Žofka is sitting in the middle, with Anča and Zuza on each side. The latter two are giving each other dirty looks.)*

Second Mourner: *(With dignity, sadly.)* That booze has gotten the better of him. The old Krcheň was the very opposite of this devil; never dipped his tongue into brandy. Remember, at war when he got that awful diarrhea, it just kept pouring out of him till he died. And one glass would have been enough! But he? Never! *(Sighs.)* The old Krcheň was a born angel...

First Mourner: That's the way it goes. A good father breeds a robber.

*(Enters Hana with an empty look on her face, walks to and from a little, then exits back to the yard.)*

Third Mourner: *(Looks around carefully.)* Did you notice how Hana turned an utter fool since her daughter Marka had vanished, her mouth is sealed. The folks in the village say some awful things have been going on here but not a soul knows what... Remember, Marka was for a time quite out of her mind, she even stopped going to school. Folks kept asking her what had happened, what her trouble was, and she just kept muttering something was the matter with some golden teeth... And then she just vanished! How strange!

Second Mourner: *(Whispering.)* The postman, he knows all sorts of things, he's hand in glove with Krcheň.

*(The postman moves slightly, then sleeps on.)*

Third Mourner: And how he drove his boys out of home... Peter hasn't showed up here for three years! They say they would easily tear each other apart... Remember, the boy was so eager to marry. He was going to repair the house to have a place to bring his bride to. He got it settled the usual way, had the wood stolen from the forest, had his pals steal cement for him from the collective, but the old man wouldn't hear about it though the house was already breaking down...

First Mourner: Just look at the house. How rotten through and through it is and the roof is nearly hollow. When it rains, Hana has to bring her basins and bundles up to the attic. *(Looking up.)* The water just keeps pouring down...

Second Mourner: There isn't a single day here without rain...

Third Mourner: They say there was once an awful row here. Krcheň flew at Peter with an iron bar. The boy told him the plain truth that their house was hardly a house to live in, and that he, Krcheň, was a rogue, doing nothing, just laying about. They say he was all purple with

rage, screaming: "I helped my father build it with these hands, you lousy bastard!". But old folks remember that when the old Krcheň built this hut, he wasn't even born!

Second Mourner: Anyhow, Krcheň had an awful lot of respect for the old man, wouldn't say one bad word about him.

First Mourner: Indeed, he even liked these kids, and Marka was his most beloved one.

Third Mourner: Yes, yes. It's too bad Peter couldn't stand his father's guts... He left the house then and Paul would follow him soon. I mean, they come from the same egg, makes them inseparable, doesn't it? So Hana and Marka were left in the cold to handle this old monster. What could they do, ha? *(Thinking.)* I understand they live in Bratislava now. And, by the way, Peter has married.

First Mourner: Do you know Peter is coming over for a visit today with his young wife and Paul. They're supposed to bring Peter's first son...

All mourners across each other: Oh, is that right? Well, then. I wonder if the boys have changed since!

Third Mourner: But this disappearance of Marka, what a mystery...

Second Mourner: *(Mysteriously.)* The postman knows everything!

*(The postman gives a start and wakes up, fear and horror in his face. He can't fall asleep any more and is watching what is going on.)*

*(At this moment, Hana comes back with a basket full of green weeds. She throws a handful into the pot. At once, the mourners grow silent and watch her cautiously.)*

Third Mourner: *(Whispering ironically.)* I reckon Hanka is going to feed us her tasty brew - weed soup, delicious, isn't it? *(The mourners suppress their laughter.)*

*(From some place behind there is an echo of a train braking. The train stops for a while, whistles, then goes on. After a while the door swings open and enters, hesitantly, the other twin of Krcheň's - Paul. He is carrying two traveling bags. Hana keeps looking into her brew. Looking askance at the boys, the mourners begin, with a very quick motion, wiping their dry eyes with their handkerchiefs.)*

Paul: *(Softly.)* Hello.

*(Paul puts the bags on the floor. The Mourners stop wiping their eyes, looking around.)*

Third Mourner: Oh, hello. Nice of you to have come down here from that Bratislava...

First Mourner: Which of the two are you?

*(Embarrassed, Paul rushes out of the kitchen, just murmuring: "I'll fetch the other things.")*

Third Mourner: That was Paul. He's always been shy.

*(After a while Peter enters, with enthusiasm. He is his brother's look-alike, except for his moustache. Peter is carrying a funeral wreath made of red carnations.)*

Peter: I wish a good day to everyone!

Second Mourner: Good day to you, too, eh, Peter, is that right?

Peter: Is it really all over? Father is dead?

*(The Mourner start sighing, running, with a very quick motion, their handkerchiefs across their eyes.)*

Peter: So he's dead?

Third Mourner: We are waiting to see if he'll come on his own or be brought in...

Peter: And mother? *(Seeing Hana.)* Mother! Oh, my god, it's been so long since I've seen my beloved momma! *(Taking a closer look at her.)* Why, I hardly recognize you... *(Puts the wreath on the table and wants to hug her but is startled by her unconcern.)* Momma...

*(The mourners grow silent, curious to watch what is going to happen. Then a young, tall, slim, black-haired woman appears at the doorstep. Curious, she is watching the chaotic interior of the house, including the wordless Hana at the stove. The mourners grow quite vivid, whispering and pointing to the young woman.)*

Peter: Mother, this is my wife Eva.

*(Hana keeps still, paying no attention. Eva would like to come to her but, suddenly, there rushes out from under her wide skirt a small lively boy – it is Krcheň junior. He is mischievous, has a bald head like his grandfather whom he seems to have thoroughly taken after. He starts running across the kitchen like a little tornado, torpedoing some chairs, breaking some dishes, upsetting a pile of dirty cloths, kicking away the shoes at the wall. Within a couple of seconds he has messed everything up. Eva is trying to catch the young monster, saving what she can in haste. Meanwhile, the boy has run to the mourners, tearing one's scarf off her head, grabbing the other's handkerchief and showing the length of his tongue to the third one. Agitated, the mourners jump off their chairs and try to help Eva catch him, unsuccessfully.)*

Mourners: *(Interrupting one another.)* You small little rowdy! You hooligan! Catch him!

Peter: Where's Paul? *(Rushes out of kitchen.)*

Eva: *(Lovingly.)* Come here, you monster! *(Fixing the chairs, collecting the pieces of broken dishes, tidying up the shoes.)* Come here, you vicious monster, stop it! I'll catch and beat the soul out of you! *(The boy stops, putting his fingers into the electric outlet.)* I'm going to grind

these little fingers in a meat grinder!!! *(The boy starts to run but Eva manages to catch him.)*

There you are, you little demon! *(Raising him in her arms, starts spinning.)*

Eva: *(Motherly.)* Oh my, I could swallow you for love! *(Spinning with him and kissing him furiously, she whispers gently in his ear.)* You Satan!

*(Enter Paul, carrying a wooden rocking horse in his hands. He stops to glare lovingly at Eva and the small boy. Eva smiles at Paul. He puts the horse on the ground.)*

Paul: *(Grabbing the boy in his hands.)* Come, let us do the horse thing!

*(He seats the boy on the horse. The boy is rocking. Eva approaches Paul, hugs her body around his and smiles.)*

Eva: Ughh, it's so cold here... Is there central heating? My boy can catch cold.

*(Paul gives a start.)*

Paul: That suitcase with clothes. *(Exit.)*

*(Enter Peter and calls on the young one.)*

Peter: *(Talking sweetly to him.)* Come, my little one, come. See there, that's your granny. Go and kiss her like a good boy! *(Shoves him towards Hana.)*

*(The boy makes a hesitant step forward, then rushes out and hugs Hana. His hands run against the stocking tied at her waist. As a result, the stocking unfastens and the overcoat falls down. In a second, Hana is standing there stark naked as she was created, in front of everybody. Young Krcheň bursts out laughing, pointing at the naked old woman. The mourners are shrieking with horror. Peter jumps to his mother and covers her - so that the audience can not see her - with his own body. Young Krcheň suddenly stops laughing. He has new mischief on his mind. He grabs the overcoat from the floor and rushes out.)*

Peter: My god, Eva. Go and catch him! Do something, for Christ's sake!

*(Eva rushes out to get him but it's too late, the young one has gone.)*

Eva: *(Waves her hand, stopping, thinking quickly.)* Wait, wait, where do you keep your clothes?

Peter: *(Holding his mother with both hands.)* They've always been in that dresser! *(Points with his head, though panics as Hana has slipped out and, naked, strolls across the kitchen - Peter rushes out to stop her.)* Get her some clothes quickly!

*(The mourners are looking on in curiosity.)*

Eva: *(Rummaging in the dresser.)* There's nothing in here!

Peter: Wait! *(Rushes out into the yard.)*

*(Paul enters the kitchen, a suitcase in his hand. Eva seems to have an idea.)*

Eva: Paul, dear, give me that suitcase, will you?

*(Paul puts the suitcase in front of her and she tries to open it. She wrestles for some time, then opens it - a flood of red carnations comes out. Dazzled, all people on the stage are staring at it.)*

Eva: *(Wondering.)* But the clothes for the funeral? Where are they?

*(Only now Paul notices that his mother is naked. Horrified, he half-closes his eyes.)*

Paul: *(Eyes half-closed, pointing at the flowers.)* Oh, that is for the funeral wreaths... Eva's parents have a hothouse full of them...

*(Still naked and oddly concerned, Hana approaches the red flowers. Eva takes her hand and pulls her away.)*

Eva: Come on, mother, and let me flower you up a bit. Let's do the curlers first...

*(Outside there is a sound of a car stopping. Žofa has a quick look out of the window.)*

Second Mourner: Ambulance.

*(All stiffen. Paul rushes out into the yard.)*

*After a while the car is heard to start up. The people on stage are intently staring at the door. Krcheň enters the room in his grey striped pajamas. The mourners whisper to each other "They let him out, I reckon..." "Has he recovered?!" Krcheň looks at the bed and the mourners, then at the flowers and the funeral wreath on the table. Apparently, he has figured the situation out. Frowning, he lays down right on the suit stretched on the bed. He lays against the plumped-up cushions, puts the hat on and his hands behind his head. In such a position, he throws an askance look at his naked wife and Eva.)*

Krcheň: Put that black overcoat on her, will you? A small boy has wrapped it around himself. He is laying outside under the nut-tree, asleep.

*(The door opens. Peter is standing in the doorway with his screaming son in one hand and a battered overcoat in another.)*

*The lights fade out.)*

### **Act Three**

*(The lights come on. In the kitchen, Krcheň is lying on the bed - in the same pajamas - and his grandson is playing at the stove. A pot full of soup is sitting on the stove. Krcheň is wearing glasses and reading a newspaper while the Krcheň Junior is carefully cutting out some old prints, a lot of them, with huge scissors. Occasionally, Krcheň gives his grandson a careful look from under his spectacles, then reads on. A number of hens are sitting on the*

*ladder, giving an occasional lazy cluck. An echo of the village radio news is heard from outside, broadcasting about the upcoming session of the local council and elections of its new secretary. Finally, there is a swift brass music melody from Western Slovakia. The postman Matej appears at the doorstep.)*

Matej: *(Calling from the doorstep.)* Hey, Krcheň, where are you? I hope you won't die now, for you would miss the whole lot! There's so much going on I don't know where to begin...

Krcheň: *(Still reading.)* Jano Štrba?

Matej: *(Wondering.)* How in the world do you know? *(In admiration.)* You know everything, Krcheň!

Krcheň: Got kicked out?

Matej: *(Sits down on a chair at the bedside.)* He did indeed. Not a soul would ever think that, one day, Jano Štrba is not secretary any more. There was a late night meeting at the council yesterday.

*(Krcheň mutters knowingly.)*

Matej: Had big things on his conscience but was pulling that innocent face. The guys told him what was on their minds, how they knew about all his fiddles, and he just kept snapping "You got together in a case against me and you have all set me up. The county officials know better about my work in the office!" People say he even got beat up in the end!

Krcheň: Really!...

Matej: Now they put him in for a night porter at the collective to cool his head off. *(Rubbing his hands with malicious joy.)* From a cozy office right down into a cold porter's lodge. Ha-ha-ha... I understand some nice guy *(Smiles at Krcheň.)* has sent a poison-pen to the county council. So they looked into the matter...

Krcheň: Those telephone bills...

Matej: Every one in the village knew he was always on the phone calling his girlfriends- I can't see what they find so attractive about him.

Krcheň: *(Rancorously.)* It's the telephone, what else!

Matej: All those girlfriends and his boozing partners from the county, he'd want them to iron out his frauds at the council. But now they can't help him out any more, there are higher instances!

Krcheň: The mills of God grind slowly but they grind small!

Matej: Why, you don't believe in God, do you!

Krcheň: Why not. If I will, I do believe! *(Produces a bottle and two glasses from under the bed, winking at the postman and nodding him to pour.)*

Matej: Why, you said you quit the booze!

Krčeň: Death is near so I must drink!

*(Both men clink glasses.)*

Matej: To Štrba's career!

*(Laughing about the comment, they drink down their glasses. Krčeň nods he wants one more. They drink down their seconds.)*

Matej: Oh, by the way, here's your post... *(Producing letters from his bag.)*

Krčeň: *(Interested.)* Let me have a look...

Matej: *(Glancing at the envelopes.)* There's something from the Anti-fascist Union, some invitation... *(reading the invitation)* to a talk by the young builders of socialism from the elementary school... And here, a meeting of war veterans... they want you... to give an opening speech... You see, Krčeň, you're wanted all over the place. Everyone wants to hear what you have to say. You can just speak on whatever topic you choose. Remember that speech you gave, picking on that lector fellow from town. God, you were yelling your head off about materialism...

Krčeň: *(Serenely, hands crossed behind his head.)* Really? What crap did I talk back then?

Matej: *(In admiration.)* You did teach him a lesson, Mr. Big Brain. Really, Krčeň, there's never been a chap like you in the village and there won't be one soon. This doctor was staring at you like you were our Virgin Mary. And Jano the Secretary was quite desperate, he just wanted to disappear!

Krčeň: *(Shaking with laughter.)* His heart was in his boots...

Matej: Then on Sunday, the women waited for him outside the church and followed him all the way to the third village next. You know, he'd go there, in secret, to the mass. And they beat the soul out of him. So what? The thorough materialist at the party meeting and a devout catholic in church! *(Eventually sees Krčeň junior; he stands up, comes to the child and kneels down.)* How's it going, little fellow? Enjoying your game?

*(Krčeň junior chuckles and shows him, all excited, his newspaper cuttings, waving his scissors right in front of the Postman's nose.)*

Matej: *(Stands up to escape the scissors.)* What a skillful little boy you are! *(Caresses his bald head, turning back to Krčeň.)* Where's everybody, anyway? *(Drops his bag.)*

Krčeň: Oh, they've gone to town to buy something for Hana to wear... Won't be back soon.

*(The men are sipping their drinks.)*

Matej: *(Musing.)* Anyway, I think Jano Štrba should be getting his face punched once a day.



Krčeň: Look, I did what I could. When we came down home after the Uprising...wait, no, that was later when they were setting up the cooperative, in '47 or '48... At that time I put in a word for Štrba that he should be made the head of the cooperative. You know I'd been decorated *Pour le Merit*, so they listened to me. And I was going to be his vice-chairman, you know, sort of maneuvering in the background. I thought it was going to work... But no! This idiot was only interested in impressing the authorities. And so we were plowing the balks away, taking the peoples' land and livestock and even forcing them to hand in their allotments... People couldn't find a single good word about us, cursing us all day long. I can't believe I didn't get killed those days. I knew things could have been done differently, it just needed a little brain work, to reconcile irreconcilables. But that idiot wasn't up to the task. He didn't want it done differently either, he had it all in his pants. I didn't think it worthwhile to haggle with him... Besides, he wasn't alone. Kubo Big-Teeth, our accountant, got murdered, he was his busboy, brown-nosing him all the time until he got stabbed by someone... Anyway, I worked it all out with my good sense and reckoned this isn't worth the trouble. So I said to hell with him and got the disabled pension, with that shot through my right hand.

Matej: (*Murmurs, drinking.*) You did the right thing...

Krčeň: Yes, plus I was receiving compensation as a war hero. I was doing just fine. Except for that right hand which was no good and I couldn't do any work. So I was just laying about in bed, ending up all bored. So then I learned to use my left hand and started to write. I just kept writing and writing like a scribbler. I'd write a poison-pen and wait to see what happened. And Jano would be moved from one place to another. So this is how I've been steering his fortune ever since...

Matej: (*In admiration.*) You are the best, Krčeň!

Krčeň: (*Nodding his head.*) That's right.

Matej: You can do anything!

Krčeň: I certainly can.

Matej: That poison-pen at the county... that was a smart eh... I mean you...

Krčeň: I what?

*(They both burst into laughter. Meanwhile, Krčeň junior gets fed up with the scissors and begins crawling on all fours around the table.)*

Matej: (*Quietly, suddenly.*) I think you know everything that's in people's heads...

Krčeň: I certainly do.

Matej: (*Pausing for a while.*) But aren't you...

Krcheň: *(Interrupting.)* You know, Matej, the principle is this. You'd better have God with you when you need him. *(Raises his glass to the sky; both men have a drink.)* I tell you what: I'm getting help from the dead... Like that time at the pass. When they had us out of that truck, I knew at once something horrible was going to happen. There was nothing but woods and wolves and the Grim Reaper behind every tree! For two days I'd been in the front ranks, running here and there with Jano Štrba and the late Ďuro Marcin like crazy fools. Well, you don't see guns in a village like ours. The only time I saw a gun was at a fair. So I even forgot how to load it. My hair went almost grey. And, on the second night, I had this dream about my dead father. He told me, 'Don't you worry, and just listen to me' - and he whispered something. The next morning I remembered my dream - and told myself it's going to be alright. And indeed it was. As we rushed to fight I - for some reason don't know why - let Jano and Ďuro go ahead. Ďuro was gunned down right away, Lord have mercy on his soul. The second bullet went to Jano but he kneeled down and it struck me. Right into this arm but I was still lucky. They put me into a military hospital and when I got out, the Russians were there and we had already been freed.

*(Half-drunk, both men have a hearty laugh. The young Krcheň is crawling on all fours in the kitchen. He has cut up all the flowers, making the floor red with them.)*

Krcheň: I am God's lucky son, Matej. Just think about all the women I've had! I had to make a notch in the wood in the attic at least once a day! Remember how you were the cover the other day?

Matej: When?

Krcheň: Well, that time with Anča Sojková! Don't you remember? Of course, you'd fallen asleep at the bushes and there comes Sojka back home. Oh, that was something! She didn't give a damn and wouldn't come off me, was all fired up, well... I hardly got out. *(Facetiously.)* But I had a hell of a time! Aaah! Well, I really knew how to get those women, it's true as a gospel. When I look, sort of from above, at our village, I can sort of hover up there somehow or so, in thought, so when I look, I can see cuckolds from everywhere - in the pub, in the church, on the street, they're all the same. I pity those poor jacks but I laugh, too. Krcheň has got them all! Only Jano Štrba thinks he'll have his Theresa for himself forever. Well, I'll have her too before long! You know, Matej, gypsy women are the best...

*(The postman is hushing Krcheň up, pointing to the young one that he might hear something, but Krcheň just waves his hand.)*

Krcheň: Once I had it with two gypsy women at once. For you that would've been too much but I was told by an old gypsy, maybe he was a headman, how to do it. (*Leaning towards his ear, he whispers aloud.*) First, you must tie their waists up with a belt.

Matej: (*Dazed.*) What belt?

Krcheň: A belt... your trouser belt... So you tie her up and there she goes spreading her legs high like a good girl...

Matej: Why, you said it was a couple and you've got only one belt.

Krcheň: Well, they were lucky to be a couple. One had the belt while the other one was driving me on from behind... (*Laughs softly.*) So they ended up dead tired, begging me to take my belt off them, calling me the biggest headman. (*Raising his finger.*) That gypsy fellow was right telling me it ain't the real thing without the belt. Don't worry you missed that, you aren't big enough for that anyway. Doing it with gypsy women is something. Men respect that...

*(While Krcheň speaks Krcheň junior is crawling all the way to the postman's bag. He takes it to the stove, pulling sealed letters out of it one at a time and looking closely at them. He then opens some of them, trying to find out what is inside.)*

Krcheň: I'm telling you, Matej, my boxers are miraculous, aren't they? Just a touch and the woman gets pregnant right away. Tell me, is there a house in the village without an offspring of mine in it? At Mikuň's? I got one. At Sojka's? Got one there too. At Kováč's? The same... at the other end...at Mišeje's? Again, the very young one is mine... And from the widow Žofa I have as much as three!

Matej: (*Quietly.*) And at home?

Krcheň: What do you mean at home?

Matej: I mean, at home... you know... your Marka... your girl...

Krcheň: (*Sharply.*) You fool, there isn't no white cow in the dark...

Matej: (*Eagerly.*) Early in the morning I saw Hana at the stream, picking weeds at the bend in the deepest water, you know, where we, you know... And then she was staring into the water for a long... I wonder what she was looking for...

Krcheň: (*Sharply.*) Nonsense! Where's that letter?

Matej: (*Whispers, hurriedly.*) In the attic under that main beam... where you told me to...

*(Krcheň junior raises his head, listening to them.)*

Krcheň: You burn that letter!

*(The postman, in a gesture of horror, grabs his head by his hands and climbs quickly up the ladder. There is the sound of his steps, then, after a while, he climbs down. Hens, flurried and clucking, are hopping about.)*

Matej: *(Horried.)* The letter is gone!

*(At the same time, Krcheň junior throws an armful of letters into the oven. It sizzles and catches fire. Krcheň bursts into roars of laughter while the young one starts to chuckle. Their voices have a strange echo, adding some horror to the scene.)*

Matej: *(To the junior.)* What have you done?

*(At that moment the door swings open. Enter Eva holding Hana's hand who is dressed in a new white overcoat. Young Krcheň rushes to his mother, grabbing her skirt eagerly. Paul is standing behind Eva and Hana.)*

Eva: *(Turning back.)* Paul, go and fetch the shopping back, please.

*(Paul rushes out.)*

Eva: So here we are. Peter has stopped by at the cooperative to see his friends... Father, just look at mom, isn't she lovely in that coat?

*(Krcheň and the postman look a bit stupefied, still recovering from what has happened a while ago. Eva sits Hana down on a chair, comes to the oven and looks into the pot.)*

Eva: I will at least warm up the soup... What kind is it?

Matej: Hana has made it from burdocks.

Eva: Burdocks?

*(Enter Paul with a shopping bag, he puts it on the table. Eva is emptying the bag.)*

Eva: Go, dear and get those cookies, or else we're going to die of hunger.

*(Exit Paul. After a while, he is back with a box full of desserts. Krcheň Junior rushes out to grab the box, sitting down on the floor and starting to eat hungrily. In an instant, Eva is with him.)*

Eva: Stop it, you devil!

*(Eva bends over the boy, struggling and tugging the box. Paul is standing behind, looking lovingly at Eva as she is bent over. Eva turns her head and smiles coquettishly at him. Shyly, Paul smiles back. Eva stretches herself, turns around him and gives him a caress. Embarrassed, Paul rushes out of the kitchen.)*

*(In a while, enter Peter.)*

Peter: Jano Štrba has died.

*(Everyone looks at him with surprise.)*

*(The lights go off.)*

## The postman's dream

*(The stage is empty and half-dark. Hana is in the middle, sitting on a chair, naked and white, with beautifully strung up red hair and a bundle of red carnations in her lap. She is lit with a strange cone light - dream effect. In the right corner of the proscenium, Matej is sitting on a small chair, half-dark, with his back turned to the audience, and is following his own dream. He is played by a double or a dummy in the same postman's uniform. Suddenly, on the right side, an enlarged and raised window into the space, as if from the kitchen window. Lights up. In the window, the postman Matej also appears enlarged and is peculiarly lit. He is smiling humbly at Hana. She nods wisely, smiling back, encouraging the postman, with a bent finger, to come closer. Matej raises his shorter leg onto the windowsill, wanting to enter. The voices in the dialogue have a strange, dreamy echo.)*

*Hana is smiling, aiming a beckoning finger at the Postman.)*

Matej: *(Stops in the window.)* How beautiful you are today, my little Hana, just like before. Do you remember that? I was going to follow you but Krcheň...

Hana: *(Looking aside.)* So you've come, my dear Matej.

Matej: *(Wondering.)* I can't believe you can talk again, my sweet Hana.

Hana: I certainly can. My third set of teeth has grown...

Matej: *(Perplexed.)* Third set of teeth?

Hana: Don't you remember? When Krcheň broke my teeth to shut me up... In the attic the other day, when we found Marka...

Matej: *(Interrupting hurriedly.)* Alright, he broke your teeth. Is that all?

Hana: My third set has grown, so I'm saying...

Matej: *(Nervous.)* There is no need to say that much...

Hana: *(Casually.)* Every one knows everything in the world anyway...

Matej: *(Frightened.)* You mean everything?

Hana: *(Sighs.)* I shouldn't have read that letter...

Matej: *(Even more frightened.)* That letter?!

Hana: *(Reproachfully.)* Every one knows the story behind that letter, Matej. Everyone knows about that letter...

Matej: ...about that letter?..

Hana: : The letter Marka had written to her friend before she disappeared... They remember it from beginning to end!

Matej: From beginning to end?

Hana: Yes, they do. Just recall it... recall it, Matej...

Matej: *(Recalling.)* That letter...

Hana: Recall it, Matej...

Matej: ...'poor father has slept with me and promised me a set of golden teeth and he is going to burn in hell for that. But I don't need anything gold'.

Hana: Go on, yes, just go on...

Matej: How did it go on...er...oh, Marka wrote that... she wrote... - 'That's the way it is, I have it in me and don't know if it's going to be a man or some monster... I'll kill myself for when my mother finds out about it, she'll kill me herself'...

Hana: *(Reproachfully.)* Now you see, Matej...

Matej: *(Tragically.)* ...but I didn't want that, Krcheň said...

*(The images of Hana and the postman fade away into half-darkness. Lights off.)*

*The light goes off.*

*In an instant, the familiar kitchen space is lit by a slightly more realistic light. Evoking recollections. From the side, a small girl rushes out from a room, making a lot of noise. It is Marka. She has fair hair, quite unkempt, a white nightgown all creased and half-undressed. Crying heavily, she is running out to the yard. Following her, the drunk Krcheň enters the kitchen, buttoning up his pants.*

Krcheň: *(Mumbles as a drunk.)* Stop yelling like that... You'll have teeth like no one else, all gold!

*(Gradually, Marka stops yelling and the lights go off.)*

*The kitchen is relit in the same light – the postman is recollecting again. The drunk Krcheň and the postman are both climbing up the ladder into the attic. Flurried hens are hopping out of the opening. The postman is looking into the opening.)*

Matej: *(Horried.)* For Christ's sake!

*(Flurried hens are flying up and down.)*

Krcheň: What's the matter?

Matej: Marka!!! There, look! *(To Krcheň.)* What have you done, you..?!

*(Krcheň shoves him and looks into the opening.)*

Krcheň: That stupid woman... She could have got the teeth of gold! *(He climbs into the opening.)*

Matej: Teeth of gold?! *(Follows Krcheň into the opening.)* Where is Hana?!

*(The light goes off.)*

*After a moment, a new strange dreamy light shows Hana, naked and red-haired, sitting on a chair. To the left, a window lights up into the space. In it there is Krcheň, enlarged, with his head proudly erect, puffing at his pipe among thick smoke rings. Meanwhile, the postman-dummy figure sitting on the small chair has been replaced by a flesh-and-blood character.)*

Hana: Everyone here knows about the postman and that letter...

Krcheň: *(Angered.)* Oh, of course, that Matej!

Hana: He was all eager to help you when you found Marka in the attic...

Krcheň: Yes, he even pulled out his knife and cut her off...

Hana: And he even leashed that stone around her neck when you were throwing her into the stream, into the deepest water...

Krcheň: And didn't move a muscle when I broke all your teeth!

Hana: And he unsealed Marka's letter and brought it to you brand-new, although he was supposed to deliver it!

Krcheň: And then he hid it under that beam up in the attic!

Hana: He wasn't obliged to do as you told him to.

Krcheň: Of course he wasn't.

Hana: It's all his fault!

Krcheň: Why, of course, Matej is to blame!!

Together: The postman is to blame!!!

*(Both figures vanish in half-darkness and the chair and the window. Focus light fades away, while the light now aims at the postman who has been sitting in the dark. Meanwhile the dummy has been replaced by the flesh-and-blood character. Matej jumps out, clutching his head, terrified, his hair unkempt and soaked with sweat; he is awakening from a nightmare.)*

Matej: *(Faltering.)* But I...but Krcheň... *(Thinking it over.)* Where is that letter?!

*(Lights go off.)*

## **Interval**

## **Act Four**

*(The light is highlighting a coffin on a pedestal with a lit candle beside it. Flooded with red carnations, the coffin features Krcheň, lying, hands crossed on chest, in a dark suit and a hat, his face wax-yellow and eyes shut and a funeral wreath at his feet. There is an ever-growing sound of rainfall. Though it's getting brighter, the kitchen is still in half-darkness, the ceiling bulb just shimmering. The window is dark and the sky beyond it overcast. Outside, it is raining heavily. There is a loud sound of water drumming its way on the attic through the hollow roof into the buckets. Postman Matej is standing by the coffin, searching the dead man's pockets, murmuring "Just where can it be?!". Then three mourners enter the room. They are dressed in black with black scarves covering their heads. The postman gives a start and starts climbing quickly up the ladder into the attic. The hens sitting on the ladder just move a bit to make space, clapping their wings and clucking sleepily. The postman is watching the scene from his refuge in the attic. The mourners stand at the coffin and talk softly.)*

Third Mourner: Jano Štrba's funeral was just yesterday and today even Krcheň is already gone too. His friend's death was too much for him.

Second Mourner: Poor Jano, he hardly warmed up in that lodge. Left the stove on, fell asleep and the fire went out. Was dead before the next morning.

First Mourner: Teresa is going to give them a hard time. They could hardly stop her from jumping into the grave.

Second Mourner: Yes, that crying is what made Krcheň so upset. Couldn't forgive his buddy got her first... *(Whispering.)* I'm sure Jano's called on him from up there to make sure he doesn't chase her around...

Third Mourner: How quickly it all happened.

*(From the other room enter Peter and Eva, Krcheň junior wandering around her. Eva is in black. Instantly, the mourners begin wailing. Eva stands in front of the coffin, holding the young one's hand. Peter is standing next to her. The three mourners are wailing loudly, one on top of the other, wiping their eyes with handkerchiefs.)*

Eva: *(To Peter, softly.)* He was looking again.

Peter: Who?..

Eva: Who do you think!?

*(The mourners start a sadly tuneful lament for Krcheň.)*

First Mourner: Why are you leaving us in this world alone? How are we, abandoned orphans, going to cope without you, who shall protect us, who warm us, who shall set the light on for us... *(The other two join in, lamenting loudly.)*



Third Mourner: Why are you leaving us? You have enjoyed life, given yourself to everyone, worn out your hands in the daily grind... Done no harm to anyone, and yet you're leaving us...  
*(The other two join in, lamenting loudly.)*

Second Mourner: Oh, my poor, sad soul, what shall I do without you, whose shirts shall I now launder? The shirts you had were of five kinds. One you had for Friday, one for Sunday, the other one for the table, one for church and the fifth one will suit you in the coffin!

*(The three mourners lament loudly, one on top of the other. The rain is growing heavier. There is a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder. It is pouring down now. The mourners are lamenting. Then the rain grows even stronger, it seems to have spilt over the buckets and is pouring into the kitchen, into the buckets. The mourners look up and, as if told by someone, produce and open black umbrellas. Peter and Eva rush into the other room. Krcheň junior starts running around the coffin. In the attic's opening, the clucking and flurried hens start flying. Junior raises his head in curiosity.)*

*In a while, Eva is back with an umbrella in her hand. She rushes forward, following her son. She starts screaming and threatening with the umbrella, but Krcheň junior is not listening to her.*

*Paul enters the kitchen. He is dressed in a raincoat. He takes junior by his hand and stands by Eva. It is still raining heavily.*

*Paul covers Krcheň with his raincoat. All are silent.)*

Eva: *(Softly.)* Peter said you were looking at me!

Paul: When?

Eva: Oh, when! Ask him. He'll tell you! *(To junior, loudly.)* Where's your horse?

*(Junior steps down and rushes into the next room. Paul is embarrassed and follows the boy. Outside it is pouring. There is another clap of thunder and a flash of lightning. Enter Peter.)*

Peter: Did you see mother?.. Her overcoat is lying on the bed. I thought she was in the room.

*(Through the window, naked Hana is strolling in the yard.)*

Eva: Mother, mother... I didn't see her!

*(Peter returns to the room, mumbling: "Did the old mad woman hide somewhere or what?" Junior runs in circles at his feet. Peter closes the door. The boy is pointing his finger at the window. Then, suddenly, there is a huge thunder clap, as if a fire has been set somewhere. Only the three mourners are seen as they cover their mouths with their hands in horror. Then power is cut off, the bulb goes dark. Only a candle remains to light the place with its feeble light. Otherwise, the room is almost pitch-dark.)*

Third Mourner: *(Reluctantly.)* That must have struck nearby...

Second Mourner: It was somewhere right here!

First Mourner: *(Whispering.)* Here at the yard!.. A token...

*(Terrified, the three go silent.)*

Krcheň junior: Mom-ma!

Eva: *(Frightened, looking for her son.)* Come to me, my son, come... Where are you!?

*(Rummaging ahead with her hands, they hug each other.)*

Junior: *(To Eva.)* I know where that letter is!

Eva: *(Delighted.)* Did you hear? And I was thinking he would never speak a word!

Junior: That letter Marka had written to her girl friend before she vanished.

Eva: Isn't he just charming?

Junior: That letter says everything!

Eva.: You speech-maker, you prattler!

*(Excited, the mourners begin gossiping with each other.)*

Second Mourner: So where is that letter, my dear?

*(There is a sudden knocking on the door. Everyone on stage goes silent. It stops raining. The door swings open. In a nightmarish white light, Hana is standing in the doorway, dressed in a long white shroud. She has big curlers on her red hair, her face is ashen white. She leaves the door open. The whole stage is gradually lit, showing the group of mourners and Eva with Krcheň junior. Everyone stares wildly at Hana. She leaves the door open.)*

Hana: What are you staring at? I've curled my hair. That's all.

*(The light highlights the spot where the coffin with the dead Krcheň inside once stood. Now a bed is standing in its place, with dirty linen and Krcheň, alive and well in his black suit and a red carnation in his buttonhole. He is smoking a pipe. From the next room enters Peter carrying an overcoat. He stops, talking to Hana in a reproachful voice.)*

Peter: Mother, where have you...

Eva: Were you in the yard when the thunder struck?

Hana: *(Interrupts her.)* Just make sure you pack the overcoat into the coffin. They say it would come in useful there.

Peter: *(Startled.)* Where there?

*(Hana is smiling at everyone, caressing junior's head and walking, relaxed, through the kitchen.)*

Krcheň: Why are you asking stupid questions like that? Pack that overcoat, will you!

Peter: *(Glances at Krcheň.)* What? Father, I didn't know you were...

Eva: Can't you see. Our daddy is alive!

Peter: But...

Krcheň: God, I see your wife has more sense than you!

*(Thankful, Eva smiles at Krcheň. Peter is looking hesitantly around, folding the overcoat and putting it on the table. He takes a seat at the table.)*

*The mourners take their seats and look at each other with questions in their eyes. Something is bothering them. Krcheň junior is wandering around Hana. Eva is thinking. It is dawning on her.)*

Eva: *(Slowly, searchingly.)* Indeed... have you seen our Joe there? He died when he was this small... He never wanted to eat anything. He ate nothing for half a year. So stubborn he was. But then, one day he just passed away.

Hana: Sure I saw Joe there. He is eating like crazy these days.

*(The women jump up, encircling Hana.)*

First Mourner: And our mother?

Hana: Sure, sure... I saw her too.

First Mourner: How is her health?

Hana: She is alright. She can't complain.

Third Mourner: And the late uncle Bakan?

Hana: I saw him too...

Third Mourner: How is he doing?

Hana: In heaven just as on earth.

Second Mourner: And my Kubo the accountant?

Hana: That one too. He is always busy doing his accounting. I saw every one. They are all there. I saw our Marka too. Such a nice talk we had.

Peter: Marka too? She is there?

Hana: Yes. We have talked a lot. About everything.

Peter: And how did she manage to get there?

Hana: You are asking the wrong person. Ask your father about that. He might have something to say. By the way, she mentioned where the letter was.

Peter: What letter is that?

*(Eva reproaches him with her hand, to be silent.)*

*Terrified, the postman looks out of the attic's opening. The hens go flurried and clucking.)*

Peter: *(To Eva.)* Okay, but how did she manage to get there?

Eva: Why don't you shut your mouth and stop bothering me like that!?

*(Hana takes a seat on the chair. Krcheň makes himself comfortable in his bed. He is thinking feverishly, producing thick clouds of smoke from his pipe. After a while, he starts to talk to Hana, cajoling her. Others pay close attention.)*

Krcheň: Hanka, my good sweet wife, I haven't heard your voice for so long...

*(Hana is smiling waggishly, taking the curlers out of her hair, gracefully bent forward, moving in a very feminine fashion.)*

Hana: What is it you'd like to hear?

Krcheň: You see my position here. It's terrible. Everyone is against me. And you, you've left me out in the cold. I am lost here without you, don't know what to do, what am I here for... I'd go with you, I just don't know if I'll find my way up there...

Hana: You would be the first one who wouldn't find it.

Krcheň: Oh, sure, sure, my sweet Hanka, every one will find his way up there. But, still. Can't you tell me how to get here, help me out a little, please. We did love each other after all... There were bad times but we loved each other, didn't we? Here they say there's heaven and hell over there... devils and angels... Which way should I go? How am I to find it?

Hana: *(Dreamily.)* Depends on what are you going to look for!

Krcheň: You! I'll be looking for you! I'll follow you to the end of the world.

Hana: *(Looking up somewhere, feeling her earlobe.)* I'm not sure if you are going to believe me... It was the wildest thing I've ever experienced in my life...

Krcheň: *(In discomfort.)* Wildest thing?

Hana: Well, it was the first time I got to travel. You know, with you I couldn't get around, you wouldn't let me...to see women or men. *(Enjoying herself.)* This only journey of mine was amazing... I woke up as soon as the thunder struck me... but some place else. Everything was so wonderful, colorful, clean... I had no idea where I was. I was carried by a most delicious breeze... And this feeling was just oh-so sweet... I was being caressed on my breasts and belly...

Krcheň: *(Impatiently.)* Alright, alright...And then?

Hana: Then? *(Recalling.)* ...Then I found myself in a huge desert, it was the biggest thing in the world... Wherever I looked, all I saw was sand. Nothing but sand... No sky, no sun, just sand.

Krcheň: Okay, just sand. But the heaven and the hell?

Hana: Well, that was then, first it was all sand. And on the sand white houses, little white houses, scattered all over like matches. I entered the first house - no one inside. There was a big round table in the middle. The table was full of fine things - Slovak dumplings, Vienna schnitzels... and a brandy, too. Well, after I had a good share of that I raised the bottle to drink it down. But there was a piece of paper underneath saying 'Go and do it again'. So I left the brandy and entered one house after another until I got to the last one. I open the door, enter and guess who was sitting there?

Krcheň: Who?

Hana: Jano, our secretary. He was so glad to see me. He hugged me a couple of times, kissed me and said, so, Hanka, you're here, ehm? And I go, yes, then, I'm here. And he says, well, you know, I'll let you straight into heaven, who else if not you, you've had a good share of striving with Krcheň. There's just one thing. What is it, I ask him. Well, says he, I've been serving my term for a lighter sin here, nothing serious really. I must have every woman who's going to heaven.

Krcheň: *(Terrified.)* And you gave yourself to him?

Hana: Of course I did. When we were finished, dead men in white shrouds surrounded me and sang a beautiful welcome song for me...

Krcheň: *(Pressing his palm against his brow, ashamed.)* That arse, he has done it in the end!!!

Hana: *(Smiling innocently, stretching herself cat-like.)* Oh, and more thing... That letter of Marka!

Krcheň: *(Puffing nervously at his pipe.)* What about Marka's letter?..

Hana: That letter! Marka told me to bring it up there... Everyone there wants to read it to calm things down...

Peter: What sort of letter is that, mother?

Hana: I'm supposed to bring it up there because of Marka.

Third Mourner: The letter she wrote to her girlfriend?..

*(Hana nods approvingly.)*

Hana: Everything is written in that letter.

*(Nervous, Krcheň is smoking like crazy.)*

Hana: The letter says that our father and Marka...

Eva: *(Interrupts Hana.)* Oh, well. That letter. Maybe it doesn't even exist!

Hana: Marka said...

Krcheň: *(Readily.)* A new one can be written.

Peter: *(Looks at Krcheň.)* Father, can you tell me what has happened?! *(Takes a better look at him.)* Father, I'm going to! Where's that axe!!

Eva: You'd better take care of what your brother has been up to!

*(Furious, Peter rushes out into the yard. There are sounds of a fight coming from out there. Peter: "Where's that axe?" Paul: I won't!" Peter: "You won't? I swear I'll..." Paul: "Don't be so furious!".. Peter: "Come on, give it to me at once!" Paul: "What do you need it for?" Peter: "And who keeps looking at my Eva?" The fight goes on.)*

Paul: Eva, Eva, please, do something about this crazy fool! He is going to kill me!

Eva: I'll go and see what those two are up to! *(Rushes out.)*

*(Krcheň junior rushes to follow her. Eva is yelling at the brothers. Young Krcheň is wailing. The fight gradually dies away.)*

Hana: *(Combing her hair.)* We're not going to find the letter like this...

Second Mourner: *(After a while.)* Oh, well. I can hear my kids crying. *(Exits.)*

First Mourner: *(Ties her scarf.)* I've had my fun. *(Exits.)*

*(Finally, the third mourner leaves too. The door remains open. There is no one in the room except Krcheň and Hana.)*

Krcheň: Woman... *(Smoking furiously.)*

Hana: *(Finishes combing her hair and folds her hands on her lap.)* So the word is out. Now you are alone to handle it.

Krcheň: Woman!!!

*(It gets dark. After a while, a milky light starts spreading out through the opened door. The chair is empty. Hana is no longer there. Krcheň is lying in bed, again in his striped pajamas, with his back to the audience. It's a dummy. Suddenly, figures with ashen white faces dressed in white shrouds begin to appear from the milky light through the doorway. A light breeze is waving their shrouds. From among them there steps forward Krcheň's late father.)*

Krcheň: *(Frightened.)* Father, you have come? You have come after all, haven't you?

Old Krcheň: I have come, my son.

Krcheň: What is it? What would you like?

Old Krcheň: You know very well what it is I would like.

Krcheň: Well, I'm not as smart as you think. I can't know everything.

Old Krcheň: Now, you listen to me. First, I will never ever forget how you've messed up things about my death. Diarrhea wasn't good enough for you, was it? For your career you needed something better so you had that article published in the county newspaper saying I

died in the resistance movement. The postman had an eraser and you forged my death certificate and all the official papers. Well, death pays all debts, after all. But I wonder what the village folks were saying about me then. Everybody knew I had this damn diarrhea and I just – pardon my language – kept on shitting until I kicked the bucket. You call that a resistance movement?!

Krcheň: But people preferred it that way!

*(A shrouded grey man with a hole in his forehead appears near Krcheň's father. He is dead. It is Ďuro Marcin, his war comrade who was shot.)*

Old Krcheň: What, my good Ďurko, do you want to say?

Ďuro Marcin: What am I to say? That day at the pass they shot me, so I hit the ground. And as I was lying there, I saw two fellows running around. I had a closer look and saw it was Štrba and Krcheň, my buddies! They'd stop and look and Štrba would say, "Look, it's Ďuro. We have to get him out, he might still be alive!" And Krcheň said, "Alive or dead, we have to get him out of here..." And Štrba took a good look around and saw that a dead Russian in an officer's uniform was behind the next tree and he had dropped a huge grandfather clock when he got shot. Jano as much as screamed and said: "Well, well, we should take that Russian too and that clock! I'll get some help. You watch!"

Old Krcheň: And what exactly was he to watch?

Ďuro Marcin: Well, I guess...I don't know because I was so shattered from my death I didn't know what was going on... Anyway, it turned out that Russian was alive and Krcheň didn't know that. He just stayed there for a while sitting next to us. But then he had an idea. There he goes reaching into my inside pocket, pulling out my decoration decree *pour le mérit*. You know, I saved those miserable folks from flames when the Nazis had their village set on fire... And he even searched my mouth to see if there was any gold there. But, then, all of a sudden, that Russian jumped to his feet and yelled: "You thief! You're not going to steal my clock!" And Krchen just shot him down, like that. He took the papers and made off with them. He and Matej erased everything on that paper and forged his name on it... I was so mad about it then, but now the hard feelings are gone. After all, I was dead and he was alive...

Krcheň: So you see!

Old Krcheň: *(Looking hard at his son.)* And Štrba?

Ďuro Marcin: He couldn't find the place any more when he got back with reinforcements. He was swearing his head off but that was that. He couldn't help it. He would never forget about the clock for the rest of his life.

*(Another shrouded man steps forward from the line. It is Kubo Big-Teeth the Accountant, Žofa's late husband. He has a knife stuck in his back.)*

Old Krcheň: Kubo the Teeth, you are here too?

Kubo Big-Teeth: You bet I'm here. I couldn't stand watching from up there how Krcheň would always head straight to my wife's, right out of the pub. There was nothing I could do. I just suffered like a dog. Such a womanizer he was. Were it not for his womanizing I could have still been alive. He sent this jealous fellow on a wild-goose chase to find me so he could get his woman laid in the meantime. And that madcap stabbed me with a knife in the cowshed! The village folks thought it was because of Štrba's collectivization. You bet it wasn't!

Krcheň: But the folks couldn't wait to see you stop embarrassing yourself with this zealous accounting of yours?!

Kubo Big-Teeth: Listen...

Old Krcheň: Wait, fellows!.. Who is this?

*(Yet another shrouded figure steps forward. It is Jano Štrba, the secretary with a green, choked face.)*

Jano Štrba: Oh, yes he was sending these poison-pens against me. I don't know why but every time we were about to accomplish something it got screwed up. I mean, with a profile like that *(Showing his profile to the audience.)* I should have been at least a minister! Every time there was a phone call from the county I could have bet, no promotion this time. And this bastard was such a good writer they would read these poison stories of his aloud at political brainstorming sessions... But I could never lay my hands on him because the letters would be delivered by the postman.

Old Krcheň: : And the sin that you have been repenting?

Jano Štrba: Oh, I've repented that already. But it was hard work, you know, so many women... From all continents, black women, white women, yellow and red ones. And each wanted it her own way... and they just kept coming in quantities and all of them were on their way to Paradise. In one moment, I was having second thoughts and decided to make off but then I said to myself: "Okay. Let that be. Let Krcheň be jealous. Even if I were to die a second time here, I'll hold on. He could be writing his poison-pens to the Afterworld for all I care."

Krcheň: : Don't be naïve. He's talking nonsense again.

Old Krcheň: : Just let him finish.

Jano Štrba: Finally, at least, I was pardoned.



*(Eva and Krcheň junior with a hobby-horse rush in from the yard. The boy puts his horse on the floor and starts rocking.)*

Krcheň junior: *(Boasting.)* I have a horse!

*(Everybody - both dead and alive – wonders, smiles, claps their hands, and is happy about the boy. Screams: Unbelievable! What a man you are! and the like. Then Peter enters noisily with the axe in his hand.)*

Peter: *(To Krcheň.)* Father, I...!

Eva: *(Grabbing his hand.)* Come, dear. At least you can help me with the wood here... The stove is gone out...

Peter: *(Allows Eva to lead him, turning his head.)* Father... I... I... *(Kneels down at the stove and starts chopping wood with the axe.)*

*(Suddenly, a girl in a white shroud appears, all white like driven snow. She has a laurel of lilies on her head, a rope around her neck tied to a boulder. It is Marka, Krcheň's daughter, who has committed suicide. Krcheň junior dismounts his horse, looking at her. He starts running around her.)*

Marka: *(Reproaching.)* Did you forget about me? About my letter?

Peter: It's Marka! And where's Paul?

Eva: Shut your mouth, will you?

Old Krcheň: Is it really you, Marka!

Marka: *(Reproaching.)* You've forgotten about my letter... *(Starts singing a strange melody.)*  
I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round... I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round...

Old Krcheň: Wait, wait, Marka. Make yourself clear. You have slept around but with who?

Marka: Everything, everything is in that letter... *(She walks across stage, singing.)* I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round...

Old Krcheň: Who was it you've slept around with, Marka?

Marka: I have it inside me and I don't know if it is a man or a monster... *(Walks across the stage.)* I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round, I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round...*(Sings on, then says.)* Poor father, he is going to burn in hell.... *(Sings.)* I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round...

Old Krcheň: So who is going to burn in hell?

Marka: I have it inside... Mother is going to kill me! *(Sings.)* I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round... Poor father! *(Starts crying.)* What have you done with my letter?

Krcheň junior: I know where the letter is.

Eva: What do *you* know?

*(Marka keeps singing "I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round..."*

*The boy rushes toward the ladder.*

*Marka keeps singing. Eva at last managed to get hold of the messy boy and is now struggling with him.)*

Eva: *(To Peter.)* Come here. Help me with that little devil!

*(Peter takes the boy in his hands. Marka keeps singing.)*

Old Krcheň: We are seeking justice, not revenge. The letters were allegedly delivered by the postman!

Krcheň: *(Animated.)* Yes, yes. The postman knows all the letters in the world!

*(There are noises coming from the attic. Flurried hens are flying out of the opening.)*

Krcheň junior: *(To Peter.)* The postman knows everything about it!

*(Peter puts him down. The boy jumps on his horse.)*

Marka: I've slept around, I've slept around...got golden teeth for the round... I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round... *(Sings.)*

Krcheň: We must find the postman!

Marka: I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round... I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round... *(Keeps singing.)*

Krcheň junior: *(Rocks in an ever increasing pace along the singing.)* I know where the postman is!

Old Krcheň: What is he saying?

Marka: I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round... I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round...

Krcheň junior: *(Pointing his finger to the attic.)* I know it!

Krcheň: We must find the postman!

Marka: I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round... *(Sings.)*

Old Krcheň: Find the postman!

*(A heavy noise together with hens clucking is coming from the attic. The postman's desperate face appears in the opening. Eva raises her head and catches sight of him.)*

Eva: There he is!

Everybody: *(Except Krcheň and his grandson.)* Where? Where? Where?

Marka: I've slept around, I've slept around, got golden teeth for the round... *(Sings.)*

Eva: *(To Peter.)* Up in the attic! Come, let's climb up and get him!

Peter: But I have no axe...

Eva: Doesn't matter!

Peter: But Paul isn't here...

Eva: Even better. At least he won't be looking under my skirt when I climb! Let's go *(Grabs his hand.)*

*(They are running towards the ladder. Heavy sounds of steps from the attic; apparently, the postman is seeking a place to hide. Screams: "Can you hear his steps!?" "That's him!" "Let's follow him!" "Follow the postman!" "He has Marka's letter!" Everybody, dead and alive, is climbing up the ladder into the attic. Then the three mourners rush into the kitchen, screaming: "The letter has been found!" "The postman has it!" "He is at the attic!" In a moment's notice, the mourners set out climbing up the ladder. Then Peter rushes in, takes a look around and follows them up the ladder. Amid the general chaos, the dummy in the bed is replaced by a flesh-and-blood character. After the last person on stage climbs up, Marka eventually stops singing and her head sinks. Krcheň junior stops rocking on his horse. In bed, Krcheň is seated. He wants to have a puff at his pipe which is extinguished.)*

Krcheň: Come here, my boy!

Krcheň junior: Yes?

Krcheň: You don't happen to have any matches, do you?

*(The boy rushes towards the stove, grabs matches and gives them to his grandfather.)*

Krcheň: Alright, I'm going to have a pipe.

*(Lights his pipe. He then produces an envelope from underneath his pillow and gives it to the boy.)*

Krcheň: In the mean time, you can burn this letter.

*(The boy sets the letter ablaze. While burning in his hand, he throws it on the ground. The letter turns to ashes. Krcheň is getting up.)*

Krcheň: Well, I guess just about time to remove that ladder, don't you think...

Krcheň junior: *(Nods his bald head.)* Ehm.

*(In the instant they take the ladder off the wall a horrible yell ensues. The yelling intensifies and becomes ever more heartbreaking. Those stuck at the attic are going through*

*the most horrible torture imaginable – like burning hell. Wordless, Krcheň with the boy take the ladder out into the yard. Marka is standing alone in the mid-stage, her head sunk. It gets darker. After a while, the stage is re-lit with a bright light. Both the dead and the living close a circle around Marka. They are dancing around her, making unnatural bittersweet gestures and grimaces, jumping about. Finally, facing the audience, they start leaving the stage, slowly. Marka disappears with them. The stage is now empty. The light goes off.)*

**The End**