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M E R I D I A N E X P R E S S

Drama

L I T A

B r a t i s l a v a - 1 9 8 5

The Characters

Thomas Benedik

Eve, his wife

Ilia their sons
Miki

Magde, their school mate

Peter Hajnoš, M.D.

The play takes place now.

ACT I

Friday evening.

Sitting room in a standard two room flat on the fourth floor in a prefabricated tower block of flats in a new dwelling quarter in an old townlet in the South of Slovakia in the middle of a hot summer.

/If possible the artist can present the audience with a complex view of the whole flat with a network of electric traction visible from the window. Noise of the passing main line trains can be heard. If not, the inevitable space of the sitting room, where all six characters meet only at the end of the play will do/.

SCENE 1

Thomas

In a few minutes in which he manages to unlock the door, to enter, to take off his railwayman's uniform cap and jacket, to open the window wide, and to check the time while listening to the echo of the passing Meridian Express we can see that he is a prematurely aged man in his early fifties. Though the fast train roared past on time, according to the watch in his hand, we cannot see an expression of satisfaction on his face of an old engine driver. Just the opposite. His face shows the signs of something like pain or fatigue. He stumbles from the open window to the sofa clad with scattered cushions. He sits down, tries to unbutton his sweaty shirt and when he does not succeed in doing so, he remains lying on the sofa. Silence, only children's voices coming up from the dwelling quarter yard. The humming of the lift stops followed by a bang of metallic door.

Scene 2

Eve and Thomas

EVE /entering with hands full of mesh bags. She has no sooner had time to breathe out than she is busy working/. Already at home? So early? My goodness, it was a hot day today. I felt like dropping off at that blasted cash box. But our manager doesn't care a pin. You can shout it at him through a fog horn but he won't listen. He pretends not to hear anything. And I've been beseeching him since May to make him have the air-conditioning installed. Such a shop without air-conditioning, what a nuisance. But he is as snug as a bug under the rug. When he's hot, he simply sneaks into the store-room and young shop assistants must bring him cool opened tins of beer. He does not care about a cashier. She can sit and work for eight hours right in the scorching sun. He does not care... Well, Thomas Have a look! /She pulls out a bottle from her mesh bag/. We got that bottled tea. /She is still rather looking at the bottle than at her husband/. Just fancy it was sold out in half an hour. They say, there is no what's it. That thing in coffee ... I mean coffee but it has another name. It is said to be recommended against cancer. In half an hour we sold out three hundred bottles. My goodness, people would buy even dynamite, if somebody told them that it is good against aging. The other day Ilia said that they had lots of it in Bratislava, full supermarkets and no one cared. Thomas, don't you know what's the matter with the boy? He hasn't been home since long and hasn't written either. Good gracious! I have such a premonition. Shouldn't we call on him? Say, tomorrow afternoon? Or on Sun-

day? /Only now does she notice her husband and realizes that he does not answer. She comes nearer to him and gets petrified./ Thomas! /She shakes him/. My God! What's the matter with you?

THOMAS. Open the window!

EVE. Which one? The one here is open.

THOMAS. It's stuffy in here.

EVE. Stuffy, you say?

THOMAS. Yes, terribly.

EVE. What's the matter with you? What hurts you? You're turned pale ... and your hands, so cold in such heat!

THOMAS. Haven't you brought some pills?

EVE. What pills? My God! What are you talking about?

THOMAS. Give me ...

EVE. What? Should I call the ambulance?

THOMAS. Not necessary.

EVE. What do you mean by not necessary ... /She quickly makes for the telephone, wants to dial the number, but the telephone is dead. /My God! Just now! And I can't get the dialling tone

THOMAS. Haven't you got anything?

EVE. What should I have, for God's sake!

THOMAS. Any pills ...

EVE. Wait a minute ... We have a doctor in the house. I'll pop in and fetch him here. We went together in the lift.

THOMAS. No, not that one.

EVE. And which one do you want me to fetch!

THOMAS. No one. I don't need a doctor.

EVE. You do! You are shivering. Gee! Just lie, don't move. I'm back in a second! /She runs out into the corridor/.

THOMAS. /as if in spite of his wife's advice tries to stand up, he struggles for a while, but at last he sits, he can breathe better in this position and puts a thick embroidered cushion under his back. He feels a moment of relief - silence interrupted by the drawn out humming of an engine with a roaring goods train. Thomas pulls out the watch again from his pocket and checks the time until he can hear footsteps in the corridor. He manages to take a newspaper thrown aside in his hand and turn on the radio above the sofa. The atmosphere in the room suddenly changes at the sounds of Cikker's march from the Slovak National Uprising/.

Scene 3

Hajnoš and the former

HAJNOŠ. Well, well ... What's the matter? I think Mrs. Benedik ...

THOMAS. Gave you a vain run.

EVE. A vain run? Have a closer look at him, doctor.

HAJNOŠ. Well, well ... We are both in our fifties but it does not mean that ...

THOMAS. That they can sign us off just like that from the inventory.

EVE. You are going to be signed off by yourself, if you want to strain your heart in such a way. Good gracious. Carrying out the regular service and a bagful of other posts, too. He is the president of three organisations, and God knows what else he does.

HAJNOŠ. /sits at Thomas, examines him, feels his pulse and takes his blood pressure/. That is the situation. This is the hectic way of our lives. We all

work, but some of us get worn out somehow sooner.

EVE. I have been telling it to him for ages, but the won't listen to me. He turns a deaf ear to my words. /She turns the radio off as she notices that Hajnoš is putting the stethoscope into his ears/. Oh, the blooming radio! It drives me mad! It needn't yell all day long!

HAJNOŠ. Good God, when we heard this march for the first time, we were thirty years younger, young lads, weren't we?

EVE. Yes, lads ... you used to be sometime. But he thinks that he can jump over fences as well as 25 years ago!

HAJNOŠ. Well, such things must not be done. Fences are the task of the younger now.

EVE. And luckily enough, they seem to have more sense. They can't be easily burdened by all the stupid problems. And they are right. Why not to enjoy themselves?

HAJNOŠ. How's your son?

EVE. Which one?

HAJNOŠ. The elder ...

EVE. He will graduate as an architect.

HAJNOŠ. Good gracious! So he is an artist!

THOMAS. A great one, indeed.

HAJNOŠ. And what about the younger one? Didn't he pass the leaving exams with my daughter?

THOMAS. Yes, he mentioned it.

EVE. He passed the exams with honours.

HAJNOŠ. A very clever boy. He will be a great success not only with girls.

EVE. I hope so. He applied for admission to the Medical Faculty, took the exams but we haven't had any answer yet.

HAJNOŠ. That's all right.

HAJNOŠ. That's all right.

EVE. Are you sure?

HAJNOŠ. Positive. If he passed the leaving exams with honours and his family record is clear there can't arise any complications. And taking into consideration all his father's merits and posts... well, there can't arise any ... not the best blood pressure.

EVE. What?

HAJNOŠ. I'm saying that the blood pressure isn't very brilliant. But it can be moderated, improved. It just needs some peace and a good rest. We know it. Our nerves! Come on Monday, you need a break.

THOMAS. A break?

EVE. A break, so what?

HAJNOŠ. Or I'll send you to the Internal Medicine Department so that we could be 100 % sure.

THOMAS. Don't be ridiculous. I have no time for such wanderings throughout hospitals.

EVE. Well. Here we are. Can you hear him? Time! He has no time. How interesting. Everybody has time but him!

HAJNOŠ. I understand you, but it can happen to everybody that ...

EVE. But he pulls the strings too hard and then can kick the bucket.

THOMAS. That's her. Always writing on the wall ...

EVE. Me? I haven't taken your blood pressure.

THOMAS. It's all from these damned heats.

EVE. Of course. And in winter it is because of the wind. I know this old chant of yours!

THOMAS. But I can't come on Monday. I definitely can't.

HAJNOŠ. So on Tuesday.

THOMAS. I convened a very important committee session.

HAJNOŠ. At your construction?

EVE. They'll have to make do without you.

HAJNOŠ. Such a construction must be a nervewrecking business.

EVE. But if he built a garage, or at least his own house I should not say a single word. But they have been building a certain Depot. They could build it for years but somebody had a bat in the belfry and it dawned on them, that they must finish it right now. They must have it finished until the Uprising anniversary celebrations.

THOMAS. And we shall have it finished, you know!

EVE. Don't count on me, that I shall go and work there too. Isn't it enough that my son has been drudging there for three weeks?

THOMAS. He's well paid. In the olden days we used to work like this, voluntarily, gratis. For a slice of bread with marmelade at Hronská Dúbrava, at the Youth Railway.

HAJNOŠ. That's true, we used to.

THOMAS. In which camp were you?

HAJNOŠ. I beg your pardon?

THOMAS. I can't remember ever meeting you there.

HAJNOŠ. We must have met. It was like an anthill swarming with young people. But it was romantic, and that bit of romanticism is the very thing this young generation is missing. They concrete a Depot, and calculate how much they will earn. And that's all. But that's too little for young people, that's no ideal! By the way, if you manage to finish the Depot, I mean till the D-day, is it true that a delegation of the top level CP people will be coming? I mean the VIPs.

THOMAS. The main thing is to have the work finished.

And the delegation will either come or wait.

HAJNOŠ. It would be very good. One rarely has such an opportunity.

THOMAS. What an opportunity?

HAJNOŠ. Well, to meet the old friends, comrades.

THOMAS. The top level people?

HAJNOŠ. Don't you know that some of them really are?

Almost of the highest rank.

EVE. My goodness, doctor, really?

HAJNOŠ. But in those days, well ... In those days no one thought of it We warmed one another with our breath in the hogan.

THOMAS. Yes, we did.

HAJNOŠ. And just fancy. My daughter claims it to be a legend only. The legend we managed to believe in after the thirty years which elapsed since then.

THOMAS. And what about you? How come that you are not...

HAJNOŠ. What?

THOMAS. A top level VIP too.

HAJNOŠ. It's not my cup of tea ...

EVE. You're right, doctor.

HAJNOŠ. People live everywhere and a doctor can assert himself anywhere. I don't say that I couldn't be one of them. The members of the resistance movement have been trying to talk me in to take some posts for ages.

EVE. But you, as a wise man, unlike my dear husband, told them NO, thank you.

HAJNOŠ. Anyway, I am loaded by such a lot of duties, even more than my younger colleagues. That's our generation. Nothing can be done. We simply can't stand or live without doing anything.

THOMAS. If you could form a team of about ten drivers, that would be a help, indeed.

HAJNOŠ. God forbid, drivers! You can't get them anywhere today.

THOMAS. Not only the drivers. People. Ordinary, diligent people are becoming rather scarce these days.

EVE. I still don't know why you are worried about it. It's none of your business. There are the station masters, vice directors and God knows what, managers, who should care about it. But why on Earth you! A rank and file engine driver!

HAJNOŠ. Well, he is not just a rank and file one. He is the president of the Depot CP organisation and that is something, though the construction has not been finished yet. That's responsibility without quibbling and polite excuses we can hear from so many officials. I understand it, it's only logical.

EVE. But I don't. I'll never understand such logic. One works like a horse and the other watch him from their neat gardens.

HAJNOŠ. Well, ... Those gardens are nothing harmful, if we take into consideration our way of life. Some extra manual work has never done any harm to anybody. By the way, and what about you? No garden? Not growing anything?

EVE. In flower pots on the balcony only.

HAJNOŠ. What a pity.

EVE. When the plots were being allotted - the present chairman of the Citizens' Committee allotted them in such a way, that when it was his turn, there were no gardens any more ...

THOMAS. As if the flower pots weren't enough bother.

HAJNOŠ. I noticed your lovely geraniums. I saw such ones only at home, in the highlands, at Ľupča.

EVE. Good gracious at Ľupča! So you are a fellow countryman, doctor!

HAJNOŠ. Haven't you known it?

EVE. No, at least you can see what it looks like in this household. We simply have no time for speaking about important things.

HAJNOŠ. Oh, gosh! Our native counties! We highlanders have never thought of ever getting here, in these lowlands. What can we do? People live everywhere, but I must tell you, that I haven't grown accustomed to living here yet. The endless horizon with no mountains in sight. It's not my cup of tea.

EVE. Yes, you are just saying his own words. He sighed, too, when we arrived here. But after some time one gets accustomed to everything.

HAJNOŠ. It was a bit different in your case. Thomas has a "movable" job. In the morning he's here and at noon, perhaps already just in the mountains.

EVE. Good gracious! I'd never thought of it. Fellow countrymen and they don't know each other.

THOMAS. As a matter of fact there has never been time.

EVE. Don't talk rubbish! If I met my school mate here, I'd kiss her, hug her, scream of joy in the middle of the main square, and I should never address her as Mrs. So and so ...

HAJNOŠ. Well, such things need an opportunity and we haven't had a chance somehow to get closer to each other.

EVE. Don't say that, doctor.

HAJNOŠ. Yes, you're right. You are absolutely right Mrs. Benedik. I think I am a year or two Thomas' senior /reaches out his hand to Thomas/. I am Peter. We should not be such formalists what a shame.

THOMAS. /accepts his hand/

HAJNOŠ. And you are Thomas, if I remember well, aren't you?

EVE. But we must have a drink to mark the occasion.

HAJNOŠ. /protests with a gesture/ No, no, no! I am not that enthusiastic about these old Slavonic customs.

THOMAS. I understand, because of my blood pressure.

HAJNOŠ. I'm no sportsman, but things like that mustn't be neglected. You'll come to our hospital and we'll put you together again.

EVE. That's it. You can't fancy how happy I am.

THOMAS. Happy to get your husband locked in hospital. You'll wait for it!

HAJNOŠ. Listen Tommy, I've got a feeling that we were in one squad together.

THOMAS. I don't remember.

EVE. That's him! Sclerosis like an elephant already at the age of fifty! And he isn't willing to be treated!

HAJNOŠ. We must have been together in one squad. I think I even have some photographs somewhere.

EVE. You must show them to me. I'd love to see him as a partisan. Apart from the wedding photograph, he has no snaps from his youth.

HAJNOŠ. Well, I am a good boy. I've got my documentation almost complete. One can never know when one will need something. Even now ... You see. I was just about to see Vindent. He's as far as Prague.

But what a good luck that at least we met. You'll save me all that trouble of travelling to Prague, up and down, which takes at least three days. I can bring it to you, right into the kitchen now.

THOMAS. I don't understand.

HAJNOŠ. You'll be surprised. Just fancy, I haven't got the certificate to get a higher pension as those who had been members of the resistance movement.

THOMAS. And do you want it, don't you?

HAJNOŠ. Yes, I do, and I need your autograph to get it.

THOMAS. My autograph?

EVE. Good God, Thomas! I hope you don't ...

THOMAS. Be so kind please, and let me be.

EVE. If you please ... /She turns towards the kitchen/.

HAJNOŠ. /When they are alone/ Have you any doubts about me?

THOMAS. You'd better try in Prague.

HAJNOŠ. /stands up/ Well ... Naturally. I can't force you. It's quite obvious. I've just thought ...

THOMAS. You know, my memory ...

HAJNOŠ. I can prove everything. I'll give you the whole documentation.

THOMAS. Not necessary. I was just going to say, that my memory has not been so bad yet.

HAJNOŠ. /takes his things off the table/.

EVE. /stops in the doorway/ And what till Monday?

Aren't you going to prescribe him anything?

HAJNOŠ. /already leaving/ No, it isn't necessary. It needs calm. No nervewrecking situations. He must have an absolute rest /disappears behind the door/.

EVE. /goes to shut the door and then returns/ What does it mean?

THOMAS. Didn't you hear?

EVE. But he says he has all his documents all right.

THOMAS. How interesting that he hasn't succeeded in getting it so far, in spite of his perfect documentation.

EVE. I think that a grateful doctor in house is worth a signature.

THOMAS. You are telling me that! Don't you know me?

EVE. Just the opposite. I know you too well. But I must tell you, several people arrived at the age of discretion, but you ...

THOMAS. So, I am going to tell you one thing. That dear Peter of yours, with whom you are almost per tu ...

EVE. Me?

THOMAS. Yes, you. So your dear Peter had only one problem as a partisan in the chalet below Mount Dumbier. To find his lost toothbrush. And after he had found it, he did not have good enough toothpaste for his found toothbrush.

EVE. So what? Already then he was as tidy as a doctor.

SOUND. /ringing of the telephone/.

THOMAS. /wants to pick up the receiver but Eve is faster/.

EVE. Who's speaking? Who? The Citizens' Committee?

THOMAS. /takes the receiver from her hand/. Yes, speaking /looks at his watch/ Yes, I'm coming. Start without me.

EVE. /whips the phone out of his hand/. He isn't going anywhere. He's ill. Once in a blue moon you can have your meeting without him. By the way, Friday evening, couldn't you find better time for your meeting?

THOMAS. And when? Which day would be better in your opinion?

EVE. So you must have your say!

THOMAS. But I am not going to the far end of the town, just here, to the basement.

EVE. They can themselves decide whether the dustmen should come twice a week or once a week.

THOMAS. You know that it's not the rubbish.

EVE. So what is it?

THOMAS. /strokes her tenderly/. You know very well, what's the problem.

EVE. When will you come back?

THOMAS. In an hour.

EVE. It means before midnight again, doesn't it?

THOMAS. Mum! What the hell has come over you?

EVE. What the hell has come over me? You, you, have a look at yourself!

THOMAS. /glances at the mirror/. That's all right. A good razor blade will work miracles. Tomorrow I'll be prim. O.K.?

EVE. I'm sorry, but you've been promising it to me for ages.

Scene 4

Miki and the former

MIKI. / a boy right after his leaving exams, well sunburnt, with athletic figure in white shorts with a bag over his shoulder stops in the doorway. Returning from the swimming pool he is in a good mood and paraphrases a well known folk song/.
Good evening to you, my dear parents.

THOMAS. /always willing to look at his favourite son /- So what?

MIKI. Everything's all right.

EVE. Don't you think that you spend too much time swimming? Every day all afternoons in that scorching sun.

MIKI. But mummy!

EVE. Don't mummy me, you haven't had a proper sleep for three weeks. All nights working voluntarily and sleeping in the mornings. What kind of sleep is it? You just have a nap and then you spend the afternoon in water. Do you want to get TB? That's the only thing you're missing.

THOMAS /whispering/. Mum's today like a doctor!

MIKI Why?

THOMAS. You know her, don't you? It'll pass.

MIKI. Dad, if you could press them to send us those soldiers.

THOMAS. Haven't they been there yet?

MIKI. Not a single man. There are only a few of us working on night shifts. Very few for such a concreting job.

THOMAS. I'll call the station master.

MIKI. You needn't be bothered. He has never arranged anything. Go right to the headquarters, or wait, I'll go with you.

EVE. And what about your dinner?

MIKI. I had one at Magde's.

EVE. At Magde's? What new habits.

MIKI. She invited us, the whole team, we had fried sausages.

EVE. Fried sausages! That's Magde. And you want to run all night with your wheelbarrow on fried sausages?

MIKI. And what's the menu in this household?
 EVE. That's a question. Everything.
 MIKI. O.K. So prepare it for me. I'll eat in the morning. Don't you know that I always have an enormous appetite in the morning?
 EVE. /to Thomas/. Can you hear him? But I am as much his mother as you are his father. That's not going to take a good end.
 MIKI. /embraces his mother round her neck and then lifts her up as if dancing/. But mummy, darling!
 EVE. Don't be crazy. Do you want to get hernia?
 MIKI. No mail today?
 EVE. Nothing.
 MIKI. They do take their time.
 EVE. /confidentially to her son/. No worries. It is 100 per cent sure.
 MIKI. How do you know?
 EVE. I talked to somebody.
 MIKI. Who to?
 THOMAS. To a certain comrade with good connections.
 EVE. That's you. You always must make fun of everything. And what shall we do if he doesn't get there? What then? You heard quite well, that he has connections even in Prague.
 THOMAS. If only in Prague. He must have some connections even in the UNO.
 EVE. Where?
 MIKI /in school English/ United Nations' Organization.
 SOUND. /telephone/.
 THOMAS. /picks up the receiver/. Speaking, yes. No, I can't. I have a meeting of the Citizens' Committee. ... Tomorrow? When? Only early in the morning. All right, I'll be coming.

EVE. But tomorrow we are going to see Ilia!
 THOMAS. You'll have to go by yourself.
 MIKI. Can't we go to the barracks now?
 THOMAS. How should I manage to do all at once, don't you know?
 MIKI. /leaves with his father/ I know their new lecturer in politics. He lives in the next block of flats. We could find him on the way ... /their voices die in the humming of the lift in the corridor./
 EVE. /remains alone/. My God! What is it good for to have three men in the house and all of them are always gone, away somewhere. What a life! /Turns on the radio, a pleasant woman's voice speaking./
 SOUND. "... in those days, evening in and evening out, wives and mothers of partisans saw their husbands and sons with fresh loaves of bread hoping to see them again. What did the mothers feel in that bitterly cold autumn and bad winter which covered with snowdrifts the mountain paths leading to hot stoves and loaves of bread ...
 EVE. /turns it off/. They don't know to speak about anything else. One can't hear a piece of good music all year long. /She picks up the bag, pulls out of it Miki's swim suit, towel, has a close look at a shabby book/. Biology. /She skims over the pages, wants to put the book back into the bag but a photograph falls out of it. She picks it up with interest and looks at it carefully/. Jarmilka. Ehm. I don't know anything about this girl. She does not look bad, much better than the spiv Magde. /On hearing the banging of the lift, she quickly puts the photographs into the book and as soon as the door bell rings she goes to open the door/.

Scene 2

Ilia and Eve

EVE. /happy standing in the doorway already before she can see her son/. Ilia, Ilia darling. My dear son.

ILIA. /Also a very handsome young man, Miki's six year older brother, university student. With his typical leisurely gesture he gently takes his mother off his chest/. Hullo, mum!

EVE. /still happy, looks at her son and at the moment she does not mind that his hair is much longer than usual, neither his bright striped trousers shock her. She glances at her son's slightly tired face. She strokes tenderly his nose, cheek and the scar which caused her so much worry last year/. Did you meet dad? He went downstairs with Miki.

ILIA. Perhaps we missed each other in the lift.

EVE. My goodness, Ilia darling. I am so happy that you are here. We just wanted to go and see you tomorrow.

ILIA. /surprised/. Why, for God's sake?

EVE. I had such strange premonitions recently, particularly at night.

ILIA. Had you, really?

EVE. Good God. I'm so glad that the scar's got healed so well. One can hardly see it.

ILIA. You see! Perhaps I'll be missing it one day. /Looks into the mirror/. It made me much more interesting. Everybody said it.

EVE. I had exactly the same premonitions as I had last year, before that car crash. Last night, the night before last. Ilia darling, you don't even know how glad I was to see you at the door.

ILIA. You are saying the same premonitions as last year before the car crash.

EVE. Yes, exactly the same.

ILIA. How interesting.

EVE. My God. Sit down at least and tell me something. How was the last exam? When will be your graduation ceremony?

MIKI. I'll tell you everything. But first I must wash my hands. I am dirty from the train.

EVE. Come on, quick. Have a shower. Shouldn't I call father? He went to the Citizens' Committee. If he comes you can have a nice chat.

ILIA. Dad? Our dad and call him out from a meeting and have a nice chat with him?

EVE. My goodness. He'll never change and he has been looking so ill recently. Today he almost collapsed.

ILIA. He strains himself too much and he shouldn't.

EVE. Will you tell him not to?

ILIA. No use of doing so. He won't listen to me. How's Miki?

EVE. He has been working on that construction for three weeks during his holiday.

ILIA. I read in a paper that they want to sward them the title "The Depot of the Slovak National Uprising."

EVE. I hope so, but I am afraid that they won't finish it in time and everything will be gone, like a bubble in rain water. /Handing a towel to Ilia/.

ILIA. /holds it in his hand but does not stand up/.

EVE. Should I prepare a bath for you?

ILIA. No, don't worry.

EVE. How come? You must have been sweating on the train.

ILIA. /watches his mother but does not answer/.

EVE. Is it so terribly hot in Bratislava, too?

ILIA. Mum. /After a pause/. You said that you had the same premonitions as last year, before my car crash.

EVE. /gets petrified/. My God!

ILIA. How should I tell it to you.

EVE. You failed the last exam and there won't be the graduation ceremony now.

ILIA. Yes, but I'll pass it. I'll ...

EVE. When, what happened?

ILIA. All the way on the train I was thinking how to tell it to you. And you actually helped me with your dreams. Listen, mummy, sit down please, and listen to me ...

EVE. /without a word sits down beside her son/.

ILIA. Fortunately, I got out of this crash without a scar.

EVE. My God!

ILIA. At least without a visible one.

EVE. You promised me, didn't you, that you would never drive again.

ILIA. Yes, I did and I haven't driven a car since. This time it is not a car crash.

EVE. So what is it?

ILIA. Mum?

EVE. Well?

ILIA. I must get married.

EVE. Instead of the graduation ceremony?

ILIA. No, not instead. The graduation ceremony ...

EVE. When will it be?

ILIA. It will be in the autumn.

EVE. Ilia, dear, getting married. Who to?

ILIA. To one ...

EVE. I'm sure that you are not going to marry two ...

ILIA. /embraces his mother happily/. Mummy, do you know that you are a terrific woman!

EVE. What?

ILIA. You've got instinct. No, not instinct, you are a long distance mindreader. Just fancy, there are already two of them.

EVE. /after a long pause/. What?

ILIA. Yes, you hear well. There are two of them.

EVE. No, that's impossible.

ILIA. No, it's quite logical, though it may well seem impossible at the first hearing. I have a daughter with the woman I am going to marry. I have a daughter I must marry her for.

EVE. My God!

ILIA. Mum. Have I told you everything?

EVE. I hope. What else?

ILIA. Haven't I forgotten anything?

EVE. Ilia, dear. What else for God's sake?

ILIA. I'll explain you everything in detail I was only afraid that I wouldn't be able to tell it to you quickly, briefly, and clearly.

EVE. No, it can't be true. You're joking. You're pulling my leg.

ILIA. Mummy, one does not joke about such things.

EVE. I know. I just want to for a while. My God! Don't you know what all this means!

ILIA. I do. I know everything. It's my responsibility and I am not going to fail.

EVE. When did it happen?

ILIA. What do you mean?

EVE. My God. Nothing, I have nothing in my mind.

ILIA. So that's it. It happened earlier, naturally and the little one was born just a month ago.

EVE. Who's that woman?
 ILIA. She's a lovely girl. Cathy. You'll be very fond of her.
 EVE. As much as you are?
 ILIA. Surely.
 EVE. You are saying Cathy. But you have never mentioned any Catherine as far as I remember.
 ILIA. She is in the second course.
 EVE. Second course? My God!
 ILIA. But she is a sweet girl, indeed.
 EVE. I can vividly imagine her. Sweet as candy floss and as sticky as well. A girl able to spoil a young man's life before graduation.
 ILIA. Mummy, don't worry. I shall graduate.
 EVE. Embracing Cathy with the little one in your arms?
 ILIA. Don't speak like that. The little one takes after you. We have registered her as Eve.
 EVE. Eve?
 ILIA. And if you saw her. Her eyes, her little fingers!
 EVE. My God. No. It is not true. Why didn't you tell us earlier?
 ILIA. I hoped till the last moment that it would be somehow different.
 EVE. That's very clever at your age. What else could have developed out of that situation?
 ILIA. You know our dad.
 EVE. My God. Dad, he must not learn anything.
 ILIA. Why?
 EVE. At least not now.
 ILIA. And when?
 EVE. No, that will do him in. Surely. You must not. You must not tell him anything.
 ILIA. But mummy!
 EVE. I'll help you as much as I can, yes, I will. But we must spare dad this blow.

ILIA. Once he will have to learn it.
 EVE. When's the wedding?
 ILIA. It depends on us how we agree upon it.
 EVE. Good God! You haven't agreed upon the date of your wedding and the child has already been born! I don't understand anything.
 ILIA. I haven't come here because of the wedding.
 EVE. What for then?
 ILIA. The wedding can eventually be postponed.
 EVE. The wedding postponed?
 ILIA. I must start a job.
 EVE. Before graduation? Without any qualifications? Who's going to give you a job?
 ILIA. I have a very good job in sight. Not good but excellent.
 EVE. What does it mean excellent in such a situation?
 ILIA. That I can study and complete my course there. It's my specialization, it's in Bratislava and what's the most decisive factor, it is in a preferential corporation with a flatlet within reach.
 EVE. You want to live with your wife and a child in a flatlet?
 ILIA. And where else should I live? Do you think that somebody will wait for me with a three room flat?
 EVE. You are going to spoil your life completely for a roof above your head.
 ILIA. Mummy, do understand me. I can't do anything else. It is a unique chance, others will be happy to have it. Do you know how many applicants they have? It is a preferential corporation. Do you know what it is!
 EVE. And are you sure that they'll give the job just to you?

ILIA. Yes, I am sure, I'm positive, only dad

EVE. What dad has to do with it?

ILIA. I shall have to ask him for help. I've never asked him for anything, but now

EVE. What do you mean "for help"?

ILIA. To use his connections.

EVE. Where?

ILIA. In that corporation. Via the CP district committee. It's a common practice today.

EVE. Don't you know our dad?

ILIA. Oh yes, I do, but in such a situation ... One phone call won't bend his backbone.

EVE. Dad mustn't know anything. I'll help you, but dad

ILIA. Mummy, listen, how can you help me? Dad has a lot of posts and a great lot of connections. That's a whole chain. Joe will help Tom and Tom will help Joe, and ...

/Somebody bangs the lift door, and the rattling of a key can be heard in the lock/.

EVE. /surprised seeing Thomas in the doorway/.

SCENE 6

Thomas and the former

THOMAS. /from the hall, before he notices Ilia/.
Surprised, aren't you? Rarely have I managed to get out of a meeting so early.

EVE. Have you left?

THOMAS. We finished. They are beginning to believe me that each meeting taking longer than an hour is bad. And I swear I haven't thought it out!
/Notices Ilia/. Oh, rare visitors!

ILIA. /reaches his hand to his father/.

THOMAS. Listen mummy, you must have a command of some magic powers. You've driven our dear sonny home so that you would not have to travel to see him. There are very few who can manage something like that. /Scrutinizes Ilia from head to toes/.

ILIA. /nervously shifts from one foot to another, wants to say something, but mother begs him not to from behind his father's back/.

THOMAS. Listen architect, you look a bit strange, I must say.

ILIA. Me?

THOMAS. Your hair!

EVE. It's in vogue now, daddy.

ILIA. But if you don't like it, I can have a hair cut.

THOMAS. Oh, what an obedient sonny, willing to please his dad!

ILIA. It's just a question of formalism.

THOMAS. How long must you brush such a hairdo? Or do you regularly go to the hairdresser's?

ILIA. Oh daddy, stop it. As if we all did not have a lot of other problems.

THOMAS. So you have problems. Don't say that. I bet that you failed an exam again.

EVE. Thomas, please ...

THOMAS. What?

EVE. Don't torture that child.

THOMAS. Has he brought the invitation to the graduation ceremony?

EVE. He will.

THOMAS. When?

ILIA. In the autumn.

THOMAS. Another car crash business?

EVE. Thomas, please stop it.

THOMAS. And what kind of trousers have you got on?

ILIA. /after a short pause/. All right. Fortunately enough, I can take them off immediately on your request. /Takes off his trousers and stands in his gym pants/.

THOMAS. Don't play a performance.

EVE. /takes away his trousers/. Give them to me. I'll wash them, they'll be dry till morning.

ILIA. /to his father/. But this is already a piece of absurd formalism. I hope you admit it.

THOMAS. Do you walk in those trousers also in Bratislava?

EVE. Of course he does, why not? You'd love to see everybody in a railwayman's uniform.

THOMAS. /after a pause/. So what? What kind of crash did you have this time?

EVE. Good God! Stop questioning him. Let him get dressed, poor boy!

ILIA. Dad, we must have a very serious talk, indeed.

THOMAS. Have we ever spoken to each other in another way?

EVE. First, you are going to have dinner.

ILIA. I can't swallow anything until dad does not promise it to me.

EVE. Ilia, what have I told you?

THOMAS. /to Eve/. He's broke, isn't he?

ILIA. No, just the opposite. I hope I shan't need any money from you. Dad, for Christ's sake try to understand me. I'm starting a life on my own.

THOMAS. I'm glad to hear it.

ILIA. Only you must go to the CP District Committee tomorrow.

THOMAS. To arrange a good start for your life on your own.

ILIA. I'm going to get a job.

THOMAS. Don't say that. Why so quickly?

ILIA. In a preferential corporation.

THOMAS. I've never heard of any.

ILIA. They are going to give me the job even without a diploma, only I must not miss my chance now. It'll be too late after the graduation ceremony.

THOMAS. What kind of mouse trap is this?

ILIA. A super job. Just one phone call via political channels.

THOMAS. How interesting.

ILIA. Dad, I beseech you ...

EVE. Me too.

THOMAS. But both of you know very well that I have never arranged any connections for anybody in my life and I am not going to. It's a sheer nonsense. Trying to get into such a corporation without a diploma! What do you want to do there? A draftsman after five years of university? If you need money ... Here you are. We can support you for some time. No problems. But first you must graduate and then ...

ILIA. Then I can go to the damned hell. Do you think they'll be waiting for me!

THOMAS. If they are not, so we shall be waiting for you here.

ILIA. I must stay in Bratislava.

THOMAS. Of course. You all must stay in Bratislava. People don't live anywhere but in Bratislava. The rest is inhabited by savages.

ILIA. You want to offer me a job in this damn' hot stuffy place? What should I do here? Work for your Building Corporation rebuilding and restoring your famous Depot for ages?

THOMAS. Brute!

EVE. Stop it! You must always quarrel for one thing or another.

ILIA. All right. If you don't want to help me via political channels, there are some other possibilities.

THOMAS. No wonder you have no time for taking exams if you are so busy scheming possibilities and chances.

EVE. Ilia, what's the second chance?

ILIA. No one will know about it. It'll suffice to have a talk to one person.

EVE. Who to?

ILIA. The corporation's director. Everything depends on him. He's got his brother here.

EVE. Brother?

ILIA. Doctor Hajnoš. Our neighbour. He can do it and surely will. He'll call his brother up, if the President of the CP organisation in the Depot asks him for a private favour, particularly if he is just a corporation's general practitioner only.

THOMAS. /makes a few steps towards his son. Ilia stands before him almost naked, then he withdraws/.
Now I'd love to box you so that you could learn something and remember it well - the day you started advising your own father ... But I am not going to do it, as doctor Hajnoš recommended me not to get excited or angry.

SOUND. /roaring of a train/.

THOMAS. /pulls out his watch and checks up the time until dusk/.

Darkness with roaring trains.

ACT II

Scene 1

/Stage unchanged. Bright morning sun stripes the room through Venetian blinds. Ilia sleeps on the sofa. The bedroom door is opened, airing eiderdowns hint that parents have already gone somewhere. From above sad whining of a dog, most probably waiting impatiently for his morning outing, can be heard, interrupted by regular humming of the lift. The door bangs, rattling of a key in the lock can be heard and Miki appears in dusty overalls/.

Scene 1.

Ilia and Miki

ILIA. /waking up but still enjoying the pleasure of a good morning's sleep. He mumbles something and turns to the wall/.

MIKI. Hullo, brother! Don't turn your back to me and try to get off the sofa. It's my turn to go to bed now.

ILIA. /sits up and looks drowsily at his brother in overalls/. Do you really mean it?

MIKI. /takes his overalls off/. Don't make speeches. If you still want to sleep, go to the bedroom.

ILIA. Good gracious! You're full of cement, from top to toe! Don't toss it off at me!

MIKI. Dust allergy?

ILIA. Oh, a would be student of medicine? Do you really enjoy that stupid cementing? I thought you were just making big money there.

MIKI. Don't you know what for?

ILIA. What for? Do you think that your scholarship and the alms you beg from your parents will do?

MIKI. I don't care. I haven't troubled my mind with such great problems yet.

ILIA. Of course, lack of experience is your only excuse.

MIKI. If it comes to the worst I'll apply to my rich brother in a preferential corporation.

ILIA. /gets up/. Where do you know it from?

MIKI. Here we know everything.

ILIA. Really, don't pull my leg.

MIKI. Why are you shivering already so early in the morning?

ILIA. Who told it to you?

MIKI. I called on mummy before they had opened the supermarket.

ILIA. I see. So mum has already managed to report all to you.

MIKI. I don't know what do you mean by all, but according to what she told me I gather you are in a pretty pickle.

ILIA. Pretty or not pretty. Don't giggle, look before you leap. And by the way, I am not the only one to be in such a situation.

MIKI. What a nice word "situation".

ILIA. I can cope with it quite easily with a little bit of understanding.

MIKI. Yes, but dad doesn't want to understand it, does he?

ILIA. Just fancy, I've told him only the better, the smaller part of it.

MIKI. Of the situation?

ILIA. Mum begged me not to tell him all.

MIKI. She told me too. It was rather an order, to be frank.

ILIA. I don't know how long she wants to hush it up.

MIKI. He hasn't been quite his old self recently.

ILIA. No wonder. Seven posts will do in even a Samson. And now that fuss about their Depot

MIKI. If we had twice as many people as we have now, we would easily manage to finish it before the celebration.

ILIA. Where do you want to get the people from? You are in a pretty mess, I think, too.

MIKI. Well, in a way we are, because it would be a terrible shame for the whole town if we did not finish the Depot in time.

ILIA. You speak like a functionary, too.

MIKI. Why?

ILIA. Your vocabulary's rather strange.

MIKI. Strange?

ILIA. Don't tell me, that you go there and work all nights to get the flag of a team of socialist activity. Or do you, blimey!

MIKI. You are a masker cross bred with a hooligan!

ILIA. Are you already in the Socialist Union of Youth?

MIKI. And what about you?

ILIA. I am not a fool.

MIKI. No, you aren't the member and in spite of that you are always in trouble with your exams.

ILIA. Easy, darling, easy. You haven't experienced anything yet. Bratislava is not a local grammar school here. By the way, mum told me in the evening: "Put Miki to bed and tell him to eat something before he goes to sleep". She's afraid that you'll get TB ... from your voluntary activities. How much do you get for a shift?

MIKI. You are an expert, you are an architect a builder. Calculate!

ILIA. Are you afraid that I'll ask you for some money for a loan?

MIKI. And do you know that I'll lend you some money.
By God, I will. If you ask, daddy, I'll lend you
money. But not for the pram, that is said to be
bought by the state!

ILIA. You brat!

MIKI. /goodwillingly hugs his brother/. Is she pretty?

ILIA. Who?

MIKI. Your little one. Who does she take after?

ILIA. I can't tell you exactly ...

MIKI. I hope to be her model godfather...

ILIA. Listen, Miki darling, you must help me.

MIKI. How?

ILIA. Dad has a soft spot for you.

MIKI. A soft spot for me?

ILIA. Mum says that you are very kindred characters,
and that you ...

MIKI. What am I?

ILIA. A proper brother.

MIKI. What does it mean?

ILIA. That you will talk him in to go and see Hajnoš.

MIKI. The doctor who lives on the sixth floor? What
has he to do with you?

ILIA. Hasn't mum told you?

MIKI. No, she hasn't.

ILIA. His brother is the biggest boss in that corporat-
tion, where I would get a job if ...

MIKI. Do you know that he was here yesterday?

ILIA. Where?

MIKI. Here, in our place. Mum begged him to come and
see dad and then he begged dad.

ILIA. He begged our dad?

MIKI. He wanted him to sign the - what's it, what the
partisans have. The certificate about participat-
ion in the resistance movement.

ILIA. And dad? Didn't he sign it for him?

MIKI. Of course, he didn't.

ILIA. Is he afraid that this republic will go bank-
rupt if one doctor of medicine will be getting
a few crowns extra to his pension for a few
years?

MIKI. I don't think so.

ILIA. So what's the problem then?

MIKI. Dad cares about the principle.

ILIA. Miki, for God's sake where do you live in
which part of the world!

SOUND /doorbell/.

SCENE 2

Magde and the former

ILIA. /goes to open the door and when he sees Magde,
his brother's school-mate and something like
student's love, with mesh bags full of Coca
Cola in spite of his being in the pyjamas, he
gets all of a sudden animated/. Magde, darling.
Welcome, beauty!

MAGDE. Hullo!

MIKI. /not quite enthusiastic about the early visit/.
Hullo! /He tries to let her know by the into-
nation of his greeting that she shouldn't have
come so early and that she'd rather left/.

ILIA. Magde! You not only passed your leaving exams,
but have grown tremendously beautiful since I
saw you last.

MAGDE. /pretends to be embarrassed and watches Miki/.
I shouldn't say so.

ILIA. If I'm telling you that you have, you can
believe me.

MIKI. That's an expert's statement
 MAGDE. Really, is it?
 MIKI. You know, our Ilia ...
 ILIA. /looks at the full mesh bags/. Magde, beauty, where are you going with that load of sweet drinks?
 MAGDE. Here, if you don't buy Coca Cola in the morning, you won't get any later and you can be thirsty till Monday morning.
 ILIA. I see, you've not only passed your leaving exams, you are a born housewife, too. Miki, stick to her and you'll make a career. You can't be a failure with such a beautiful girl!
 MAGDE. Mother sent me here.
 MIKI. Whose mother?
 MAGDE. Yours.
 ILIA. Our mother?
 MAGDE. She told me to tell you, that you should stand at ease tonight.
 MIKI. Why?
 MAGDE. She said it's Saturday and the other wouldn't go to work voluntarily either.
 ILIA. What a superb mother!
 MAGDE. And she told me that I could invite you.
 MIKI. Where to?
 MAGDE. I hoped that you'd find it out by yourself. It's my ... /after a pause/ namesday today.
 ILIA. Magde dear. Don't say that. That's a sensational news. We must mark the occasion. Miki, flowers and glasses.
 MIKI. Don't be crazy!
 ILIA. I had my namesday the day before yesterday and Magde has hers today.
 MIKI. I hope you did celebrate yours.

ILIA. Fortunately, Ilia is such a name that pubs are not packed on Ilia's day.
 MAGDE. I like it.
 ILIA. But there is no more beautiful name than Magdalen. Miki, I'm telling you, flowers!
 MIKI. Do you want me to cut off mum's geraniums on the balcony?
 ILIA. So at least bring some glasses. We are not going to toast with Coca Cola on such an occasion.
 MIKI. /disappears in the kitchen/.
 MAGDE. I shouldn't say so.
 ILIA. What? Isn't Magdalen a lovely name?
 MAGDE. Miki?
 MIKI. /from the kitchen/. What's the matter?
 MAGDE. Yesterday, the boys were in our place. They said that something should be done so that they could work voluntarily here, for instance at the Depot, instead of that university or what building site in Bratislava.
 ILIA. I'd love to have your problems /pours cognac into the glasses/. Magde, cheers! To your health, to your fantastic figure. May all your wishes come true!
 MAGDE. So cheers!
 MIKI. /drinks the glass up and shudders/.
 MAGDE. /opens a Coca Cola bottle quickly/. Here you are, first aid after an accident!
 ILIA. And such a greenhorn wants to study at the university!
 MAGDE. Don't worry. He'll have got trained by October.
 ILIA. /pours again cognac into the glasses/. I am not so sure. It needs practising.
 MIKI. I hope that with your help ...

- ILIA. I'll keep my fingers crossed. By the way, dear children, if you think to make your own way in Bratislava as teetotallers you are very, very wrong and you make a nuisance of yourself already in the first term.
- MAGDE. Don't you think that you exaggerate a bit?
- ILIA. If you don't believe now, you'll believe later.
- MAGDE. In the end, such a glass of cognac isn't bad at all.
- ILIA. And two of them are even better. Magde, darling, what you learn when young is a godsend when old.
- MIKI. Don't you think that you've started a rather tough course in drinking?
- MAGDE. /drinks her glass up/. And do you know that juice blended with cognac isn't bad?
- ILIA. What an observation. You are simply superb! /pours everybody the third glass of cognac/.
- MIKI. Do you enjoy it so early in the morning?
- ILIA. I am awfully sorry, but I am not willing to toast with milk when we have such a visitor.
- MIKI. /drinks up the second glass, rather as a duty, not enjoying it/. If you please.
- ILIA. You see, you've been quite successful at your second try. You haven't coughed either! /He wants to pour him one more glass, but Miki pulls his glass away/.
- MAGDE. Gosh, it's nice and warming up!
- MIKI. Do you mean to say that you feel it in your head?
- MAGDE. Rather in my legs. I'd better sit down.
- ILIA. Of course, Magde. Sit down please. /Pulls the eiderdown away/. It's a bit untidy here.
- MAGDE. Never mind.

- MIKI. /to Magde/ Your eyes are glittering dangerously.
- ILIA. /to Miki/ Hush, hush. Finger raising is forbidden. /Hands the glass to Magde/. Magde, cheers!
- MIKI. Magde, don't drink!
- ILIA. Miki, dear ...
- MAGDE. Do you mean to say that you don't enjoy it?
- MIKI. I'm telling you don't drink.
- MAGDE. So what? I do enjoy it.
- ILIA. Magde, bravissimo! You'll make a superb doctor of medicine. The whole hospital will be spell-bound when you appear.
- MAGDE. I haven't known that you are such a sensational guy!
- MIKI. Oh, she's tipsy.
- ILIA. Shut up and don't talk rubbish!
- MAGDE. Should I make a hand-stand now?
- MIKI. God forbid!
- MAGDE. Are you afraid that I shan't be able to?
- ILIA. Magde darling. Let's present him a short gymnastic performance.
- MAGDE. /reaches her hand out to Ilia/. Together? Viribus unitis?
- ILIA. No - Unified Sports Clubs of Czechoslovakia. Would you like a summersault or a salto?
- MIKI. Haven't you gone crazy, both of you?
- MAGDE. Miki, you've got no sense of fun. Spoilsport!
- MIKI. It depends. Perhaps I am not so witty after the night shift.
- MAGDE. Good gracious! He wants to go to bed and we are keeping him here.

- ILIA. Sorry. No one keeps him here. In the next room there are two beds, free. If you please. And Magde and I, we'll reorganize it here so as to make it as comfortable as possible.
- MIKI. It's your business.
- ILIA. I hope you don't feel offended.
- MAGDE. No, I'm leaving.
- ILIA. Magde, darling, we've started the double celebration of our namesdays so successfully. It's such a pity, don't leave.
- MAGDE. Miki, do you really want to sleep so desperately?
- ILIA. I'll wake him up, Magde. We all will have one more round and then I'll inaugurate you in the latest hit practised in all private flats of the world.
- MAGDE. Fine. Miki, have one more glass. Let's be equal.
- MIKI. I'd rather not have it. If my stomach starts rebelling during the hit, what then?
- ILIA. These are the principal requisites. If one does not have a whole battery of bottles, one bottle must do. The contents is divided exactly in three parts. A match box is put on the end of the table. The blinds should be down, but not necessarily, in our case. Each player's pieces of clothes must be carefully counted. Ladies, naturally first. To match Magde, we shall complete our "garderobe".
- MIKI. Do you want to suffocate? Now in the middle of the summer?
- ILIA. Just you wait. It is not going to take ages. The system of this game consists in gradual taking off the things.

- MIKI. Which things?
- ILIA. Clothes, you twit!
- MAGDE. My goodness!
- ILIA. The game starts with casting the match box at the table's edge. If the match box falls on the table with its top up, it's 0, if it falls on the table with its longer edge, it means one piece of clothing off, if on the shorter one, two pieces off. All must be splashed by a gulp. The gradual transition into the paradise-like state of prehistoric man is guaranteed in a relatively short time.
- MAGDE. Who's starting?
- ILIA. Of course, ladies first!
- MAGDE. /takes the match box and puts it on the end of the table/.
- MIKI. Just a moment. Ilia's in his pyjamas. It means that he will be in that paradise-like state already after the second round!
- ILIA. No wonder. I am going to put on a decent suit in a moment. Magde, darling, how many pieces of clothing have you got on?
- SOUND. /doorbell/
- ILIA. Right now. We must disconnect the doorbell.
- MIKI. /goes to open the door/.
- ILIA. /hands Magde a glass/.
- MAGDE. Already? Is it part of the game?
- ILIA. A short introduction. We'll be much more at ease then.
- MIKI. /returns with an envelope in his hand/.
- MAGDE. What's it?
- ILIA. Let me see it. Aren't your hands shaking?
- MAGDE. Good God! The Dean's Office of the Medical Faculty of J.A. Comenius University.

- ILIA. Great, it's finally here. The anxiously expected registered letter. I hope it'll add Miki an appetite and will to play.
- MIKI. /hasn't opened the envelope yet/.
- ILIA. Don't stand just. Open it ... God ... Don't shake. Everything is 100 per cent. /Pulls out the envelope from Miki's hand/.
- MIKI. /takes it back and reads the text of the mimeographed letter until he remains speechless and hands it horrified to Ilia. Ilia reads it up, whistles through his teeth and begins to read it aloud/. "... you passed the examination. Due to lack of vacancies we cannot admit you. You can apply against this decision within 15 days from the date of reception. Greeting ... Dean ... illegible signature".
- MAGDE. /stands up and thrusts herself to the door/. That's impossible.
- MIKI. /after a pause/. What's impossible?
- MAGDE. If you got this letter, do you think that something better or different waits for me at home?
- ILIA. No, I don't.
- MAGDE. /from the doorway/ Bye, bye boys. Have a nice time ...
- MIKI. Wait. I'm going with you!
- ILIA. /halts him/. Stay here.
- MIKI. Why?
- ILIA. Why should you?
- MIKI. /calling into the corridor/. Magde, give me a ring!
- ILIA. /when they are alone/. If you were not admitted she knows well what will happen to her.
- MIKI. Due to lack of vacancies.

- ILIA. What a nasty piece of roguery.
- MIKI. Are they really short of vacancies?
- ILIA. Don't be naive.
- MIKI. And I was looking forward to it so much.
- ILIA. You see. Out of the blue, you are in a pretty pickle, too. But I hope this time ...
- MIKI. What?
- ILIA. I hope dad will ...
- MIKI. What will he?
- ILIA. Act as father.
- MIKI. Do you think that ...
- ILIA. If he wants his son to be a student of medicine so he will have to.
- MIKI. How disgusting.
- ILIA. Common practice.
- MIKI. I am not going to tell him a single word.
- ILIA. He will do it for you even without your words.
- MIKI. Our dad?
- ILIA. And if he intervenes for you, he needn't be inhibited to intervene for me.
- MIKI. Ilia!
- ILIA. Yes, that's it. Tough job, but that's the truth. Sometimes even misfortune brings good luck.
- MIKI. And if I don't want? If I tell him that he must not intervene in my case?
- ILIA. You fool. Do you think that I don't see how you are trying not to burst into tears?
- MIKI. That's my business.
- ILIA. Put those knightly gestures aside, or deep, onto the bottom of your mental luggages. You can do without them in your life.
- MIKI. But I don't understand.
- ILIA. What? Why?

- MIKI. Why there is lack of vacancies just for me?
- ILIA. My dear silly boy. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of boys and girls like you, all over the republic.
- MIKI. But why it's me!
- ILIA. Son of such a father.
- MIKI. Don't mix father with it.
- SOUND. /telephone/
- MIKI. /jumps to the phone/. What? You were admitted? Congratulations. /whispers/ Magde was admitted.
- ILIA. You see. Her father must have been much cleverer. He unlike our dad doesn't build the Depot of the Slovak National Uprising but his house with two garages. And he is surely much more interested in his daughter's fate. Though he doesn't commit himself to politics, just sponges on the others.
- MIKI. But Magde was admitted.
- ILIA. You'll be admitted, too. Just don't give in!
- MIKI. I don't.
- ILIA. So what? Don't worry. Now we both have a chance.

Curtain

Act 3

Saturday evening

The scene is unchanged only the sofa is made and the table laid, with left overs from the dinner on. The whole family ate dinner up some time ago, but the moment after it has got dark no one feels like speaking. Then Miki reaches out his hand over the table and takes the match box. Everybody watches him. Miki puts the match box at the edge of the table but mother takes it away from him energetically at his second try. From far away roaring of a train can be heard. Thomas stands up and makes for the window. The express trains roars past with its echoes. Thomas checks the time and then upset says more to himself than to his family:

Scene 1.

Thomas, Ilia, Miki, Eve

- THOMAS. Terrible! It's almost a hundred minutes overdue. It's really terrible. Those people do not care about anything /goes into the bedroom/.
- ILIA. /to his mother and brother sitting at the table/. Well, have you heard it?
- EVE. Ilia, for God's sake!
- ILIA. Meridian Express is a hundred minutes overdue. How terrible. What a tragedy. You'll hear he'll call the station in a moment. I am sure he will. Because of a blooming express train. But he does not mind that a catastrophe is looming here, at home.
- MIKI. Shut up with your catastrophes!
- EVE. Miki will write an appeal.
- THOMAS. /stopping in the door/. In fifteen days.

ILIA. And do you think that if there is nobody to back his appeal, that he won't be refused again? That he won't get another mimeographed notice as the one he had today?

THOMAS. Why should he get another one? The same.

ILIA. /after a pause/ Oh, I see.

THOMAS. What do you see?

ILIA. That in his case you're willing to be bothered.

MIKI. He won't.

ILIA. How come?

MIKI. I forbid it. I simply do not want it.

EVE. You shut up.

MIKI. If there won't be a vacancy for me after my appeal, I'll go and start working somewhere.

ILIA. With your leaving exam certificate? Grammar school experts of your kind are welcome everywhere.

MIKI. I can work at the Depot till October.

EVE. And what then?

MIKI. I'll join the army.

ILIA. What a lovely perspective. There you'll get a driving licence and in two years ...

MIKI. I can be a taxi driver.

ILIA. Dad! Do you approve of all that?

MIKI. What of?

ILIA. Do you approve of such a future for your son who had been an excellent student for eight years?

THOMAS. I believe that the committee will consider the matter justly and seriously.

ILIA. Dad, don't be ridiculous. They had already learned all that and considered it over in such a way that they did not admit him. If he wants to be admitted he must have somebody to back him.

THOMAS. Do you really want to talk me in that there are thousands of "patrons" backing those thousands of young people going to study at universities?

ILIA. Well, not thousands but ...

THOMAS. I know, there are even such cases ...

ILIA. And there are not few ...

THOMAS. My dear, but I am not the one to join them, do you understand? It's simply disgusting.

ILIA. Equally honest communists and comrades are involved in such things. Comrades in top positions.

THOMAS. That's none of my business. It's up to their conscience.

ILIA. And if they defend the rights of those who deserve it? Why do you think it mean and disgusting if somebody says a word in favour of Nicolas Benedik at the committee?

THOMAS. I've never known that you are so tremendously fond of your younger brother.

ILIA. He is naive and inexperienced. He does not know life and its teeth.

THOMAS. But you've already acquired a too good command of all its pirouettes, darling. Your figure skating tricks do not mean anything to me.

ILIA. I am not playing any tricks on you. I am just giving you an advice.

THOMAS. And that's something I don't advise you to.

ILIA. Naturally. You still think we are children you took to the nursery school by the hand. Please, take kindly into consideration that many things have changed since then around and inside us as well. And for a change instead of you, to the nursery school ...

EVE. For God's sake Ilia, shut up. How can you speak to your own father in such a way.

THOMAS. Let him finish it.

SOUND. /telephone/

MIKI. /picks up the receiver/. Yes. Who to? /He turns to his father/. They want you.

THOMAS. Speaking.

EVE. /whispering/. Ilia, darling, please ...

ILIA. Why? How o long should I wait?

THOMAS. /into the telephone/ On Monday. It means ... Yes I see Yes ... I'll come ... naturally I am coming /puts the receiver down/.

EVE. Where are you going?

THOMAS. /to Miki/. A committee from the Ministry will be coming to the Depot on Monday. If they don't find the situation satisfactory, they'll call off the proposal.

MIKI. It means that we have been working like slaves in vain.

ILIA. Even such things do happen. And they happen quite often.

THOMAS. /takes his cap/.

EVE. Thomas! Where are you going?

THOMAS. The station master called me. We must do something.

MIKI. Soldiers! Only soldiers can help. About two hundred of them ... And some machinery. All they can lend us.

ILIA. Dad, when will you be back, please?

THOMAS. Why?

ILIA. I must speak to you unconditionally.

THOMAS. Haven't you told me everything yet?

ILIA. No, not yet.

THOMAS. /puts his cap off/. All right, do start, please.

EVE. Thomas... if the station master called you, you aren't going to stay here ... because of some Ilia's stupid trifles ...

ILIA. It is not trifles I want to speak to my father about. You do know well ...

THOMAS. I am waiting.

SOUND. /telephone/

ILIA. /irritated/. Please, let somebody pick it up and if they call him to a meeting tell them that he has gone away just now ...

THOMAS. Why are you nervous?

ILIA. Me?

THOMAS. You speak in high pitched voice and your hands shake.

ILIA. /looks at his hands/.

EVE. /into the telephone/. Yes ... Yes ... /puts the receiver down/.

THOMAS. Who called?

EVE. Who? My God. I can't tell you.

THOMAS. Are you sure?

EVE. I must be nuts but you'd drive even an elephant crazy.

THOMAS. Who drives you mad?

EVE. Let me be and go if they need you so badly.

ILIA. Mummy please ...

EVE. I said what I said.

THOMAS. Why are you all so irritated?

EVE. Me? I am not. If there is in this family somebody who's normal and not nervous, it's me, only me.

MIKI. Those experts from the Ministry will not care. They'll walk up and down the building site and say: We aren't going to check the completion of this construction. They have no idea what a lot of work and anxiety is behind all that.

ILIA. And they'll add that no one believes in Potemkin's facades these days.

THOMAS. Why do you think that the facades will be Potemkinian?

ILIA. I walked past.

MIKI. On a fast train.

ILIA. You can't simply manage to finish it. It's impossible.

THOMAS. Are you speaking as an expert or are you telling us your views from the fast train window?

ILIA. And what will happen if your Depot is not festively opened at the Uprising celebration? You have lived without it for the last twenty years. What will happen if the ribbon is cut a short while later? Are you really so concerned about that name and decorations? You were promised to be driven here on the festively decorated Meridian Express by the comrades from Bratislava?

THOMAS. You know well, that Meridian Express doesn't stop here.

ILIA. Oh, don't worry. You'd be able to stop it to mark the occasion.

THOMAS. You speak as if you were glad that we shall not be able to finish it.

ILIA. I put it in such a way as I can't stand formalism.

EVE. Ilia, please ...

THOMAS. Let him be, let him air his views and relieve his aching young soul and let him tell us who's the formalist here ...

ILIA. Do you want to talk me in that this feverish activity on a God forgotten, insignificant construction just now before the anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising is not sheer formalism?

THOMAS. A very original view, indeed, after five years at the university.

MIKI. People have finally taken initiative.

THOMAS. Yes, they have finally taken initiative on the construction which has been frozen for ages, and he simply classifies it as formalism.

ILIA. Do you mean to say that the Depot, this townlet and the Uprising had something in common years ago? It did not even belong to this country. It has nothing to do with the Uprising at all. So why do you want to label it with the Uprising quite forcibly?

THOMAS. We aren't labelling anything and I am not going to lecture to you what has or hasn't any connection with the Uprising now. I supposed it was clear to you ages ago.

ILIA. In the same way as I got the name Ilia after the partisan who died in your arms.

THOMAS. /stands up menacingly/.

EVE. /the moment she stands on her husband's side to interfere if necessary/.

THOMAS. /after a while he takes his cap and makes for the door/. Perhaps one can understand it this way. He was exactly your age and wanted to live, terribly. I'd like to ask you for a favour if I may ...

ILIA. You, to ask me for a favour?

THOMAS. Try to be worth your name. /Leaves/.
/A long pause during which Eve sees Thomas to the corridor and it seems as if the two brothers had nothing to say to each other after these words of their father/.

EVE. /after she has returned/. My God! I've never thought I'll ever have such nerve-reckoning situations with my own children.

MIKI. You needn't worry about me.

ILIA. Of course, there is always only one black sheep in a family.

MIKI. Are you offended?

ILIA. You'll only learn what life is like.

MIKI. If you only didn't scare me with life so much.

ILIA. But you are growing to be a perfect egoist.

MIKI. Me?

ILIA. And who else? You could help me.

MIKI. Haven't you heard our dad?

ILIA. Yes I have. But you encourage him in his heavenly honesty by your megalomaniac rubbish that you don't want him to protect you.

MIKI. I won't have it.

ILIA. Fool.

MIKI. May be.

ILIA. But for how long?

MIKI. Forever.

ILIA. To prove your firm character.

MIKI. You have nothing to prove in this respect.

ILIA. What?

MIKI. You're talking about character, aren't you?

ILIA. Fool!

MIKI. If you think so?

ILIA. I think so and I mean it.

EVE. My God! Stop it! I can't listen to it any longer.

MIKI. I'm not calling him names.

ILIA. What harm would it do to you if you simply told our dad not to be so damn' obstinate.

MIKI. Why don't you tell it to him?

ILIA. I not only told it to him, but already asked for help.

MIKI. Are you sure if I ask him on behalf of you that ...

ILIA. No, you needn't ask him for me, ask him to help you

MIKI. But that's illogical. He should do something for me, and then what about you? Is it to be just a ...

ILIA. All right. Have it your own way. Let him do it for me.

MIKI. /after a pause shakes hands with Ilia/. All right then.

ILIA. What?

MIKI. I am going to tell him.

EVE. Where to?

MIKI. I can catch up with him. Down the road.

ILIA. /sees Miki to the door/. I'll never forget it!

MIKI. I hope, however, that you'll disclaim that egoist.

EVE. /when she remains alone with Ilia/. Do you think that Miki could manage it? I'm afraid not.

SOUND. /telephone/

- ILIA. /picks the receiver up/. Yes ... No ... He's just gone away. When? Tomorrow at nine? But it's Sunday tomorrow. Oh ... yes. I see. I'll tell him.
- EVE. Who called?
- ILIA. A woman, a comrade, I don't know who.
- EVE. My God!
- ILIA. We mustn't forget to remind dad that he has his resistance movement members' plenary session.
- EVE. What session?
- ILIA. The partisans are inviting him.
- EVE. They don't let him to be on Sundays either. Terrible.
- ILIA. They always have their sessions on Sundays. She explained it to me on the phone.
- EVE. Was it Rosie?
- ILIA. I don't know and don't care.
- EVE. It must have been Rosie. She brings him their paper. She is a very conscientious and nice woman. Rosie has one hand only and brought up four children. She could have retired ages ago, but she still works and is very efficient. If you knew her you'd love her, and mind you, both her brothers are colonels.
- ILIA. The two chaps with our dad on the photograph?
- EVE. Yes.
- ILIA. You see. They already are colonels and the others who stayed with him in the hogan below Dumbier are either ministers, or vice ministers, or directors or simply managers somewhere. Only our dad is just and only a rank and file engine driver.
- EVE. Yes, he is. I've never blamed him for it, and neither should you. He won't change.

- ILIA. But all those have some profit from their participation in the Uprising but what about us?
- EVE. What would you like?
- ILIA. Would not you deserve a better fate?
- EVE. Me?
- ILIA. A better, less hectic job than sitting at the cash box in a supermarket. And he? What does he think? How long will he be able to work like a horse? On the engine and in the posts he holds.
- EVE. That's it. Those posts of his.
- ILIA. He could hold those posts but he should have a better job, naturally. All are ahead of him. The station master is just a greenhorn, not much older than me. And he? What profit does he have from his having been a partisan? Nothing. Do we live in our own house and do we have a car? No. We live in an ordinary city council small two room flat. Do we have a bank account?
- EVE. Ilia, for God's sake, what from?
- ILIA. To cut the long story short, we have nothing from the famous Uprising, just a lot of nerve-wrecking situations and problems with its celebration.
- EVE. But you must not tell it to him in such a way.
- ILIA. And how should I? How should I tell him the truth?
- EVE. I ... I'll try to have a talk with him tonight.
- ILIA. You told me the same yesterday.
- EVE. I was afraid, so suddenly ...
- ILIA. And today? Won't you be afraid today?
- EVE. I don't know. I'm just considering and reconsidering my life with your father, with you.
- ILIA. Nothing to envy you.

EVE. I've never cared about such things.
 ILIA. But if you imagine what kind of life you could have!
 EVE. I'll be happy if your life is better.
 ILIA. Well, so shall I.
 EVE. I hope it will. /She turns the radio on, during the pause we can hear the partisan's march. When Eve leaves the kitchen, Ilia tunes another station/.

Scene 2

Miki and the former

MIKI. /enters from the anteroom. Eve and Ilia follow him, both anxious and curious/.
 ILIA. Did you catch up with him?
 MIKI. /resigned/. Yes, I did.
 ILIA. And what happened?
 MIKI. Nothing.
 EVE. I knew it.
 ILIA. Did you tell him?
 MIKI. Yes, I told him everything.
 EVE. Really everything?
 MIKI. Yes, everything. I wanted him to know the truth.
 EVE. My God, Miki!
 ILIA. How did you tell it to him?
 MIKI. Very simply. If he does not want to use his connections because of you, he should use them because of the little one.
 EVE. Did you tell him even that?
 MIKI. I thought that as a grand-dad he would be more attainable ...
 EVE. My God!
 ILIA. And what did he say?

MIKI. He did not believe.
 ILIA. What didn't he believe?
 MIKI. He does not believe that he is grand dad. He laughed that it's a practical joke you played on us to pull our legs. That you simply want to lead an easy life.
 ILIA. So he doesn't believe.
 MIKI. He said he'd like to see that grand daughter.
 EVE. Did he tell you that?
 MIKI. I haven't seen him laughing so much for ages.
 EVE. My God!
 MIKI. People turned and stared at us in the street.
 ILIA. /stands up and makes a decision/. All right.
 EVE. Ilia?
 ILIA. He'll stop laughing very quickly.
 MIKI. Ilia, do you know that even I began to have some doubts.
 ILIA. No wonder, you ... /Picks up the receiver and dials a number/.
 EVE. What do you want to do? Whom do you want to call?
 ILIA. To convince those who do not believe.
 EVE. How?
 ILIA. /already into the telephone/. Operator? This is 210 33. Could you kindly give me Bratislava 330 810?
 EVE. My God!
 MIKI. Have you ordered a trunk call?
 EVE. What do you want to do?
 ILIA. Haven't you heard? Dad doesn't believe.
 MIKI. But it ... it ... sounds so unbelievable.
 ILIA. That's a question of taste and goodwill.
 SOUND. /telephone/

ILIA. /picks up the receiver/. Yes, 210 33. I'm holding on ... Hullo? This is Ilia speaking. Good evening. Could I speak to Cathy? Yes. I'm waiting.

EVE. What do you want to tell her, Ilia.

ILIA. /into the phone/. Cathy? Hullo. It's me. Everything's all right ... Well ... are you surprised, aren't you? I have just one wish. Take the little one and come here tomorrow morning. What? How? By the first train. Oh prami! We haven't got the prami! I can carry her. It's hot. She can't get a cold. It's only an hour's journey. What? ... Simply grand dad wants to see her. You see ... And you were so afraid. So I'll be waiting for you at the station in the morning. Bye, bye love! /puts down the receiver/.

EVE. /whispering/. My God!

/In the darkness we can hear the roaring of a train which fills the whole pause/.

Act IV

Sunday morning

Stage unchanged. Ilia sleeps on the sofa. Bright morning sun penetrates the Venetian blinds and stripes the room.

Scene 1

Ilia and Eve

EVE. /coming out of the bedroom, passes by her sleeping son and pulls up the blinds. The room is suddenly full of sun/.

ILIA. /wakes up and watches his mother in the window/. Good morning.

EVE. Good morning - but not for me. I haven't slept a wink.

ILIA. /looks at the bedroom door/. Did you speak to him?

EVE. To whom?

ILIA. To dad!

EVE. No, he hasn't come.

ILIA. Where can he be?

EVE. How can I know?

ILIA. Have you called the Depot?

EVE. Nobody answered the phone.

ILIA. And what about the station master?

EVE. Silence.

ILIA. /begins to get dressed quickly/. Did you tell him whom I invited?

EVE. When could I?

ILIA. And he, he hasn't got enough courage to look in the eyes of his first grand child. He rather disappears. He wants to spite us.

EVE. Perhaps he stayed for the night shift.

ILIA. Where is Miki?
 EVE. He left a while ago.
 ILIA. Where to? So early on Sunday morning. He doesn't want to see the complete family either.
 EVE. My God! Just the opposite!
 ILIA. Opposite to who or to what?
 EVE. He asked me not to tell you. He went to borrow a pram from Magde's sister who has a baby, so that you wouldn't have to carry her ... from the railway station. They could do without a pram on Sunday, he suggested and wanted to give you a surprise.
 ILIA. Where?
 EVE. He's going to wait for you. At the railway station.
 ILIA. Miki? With a pram?
 EVE. Don't be a spoilsport.
 ILIA. He's still such a baby.
 EVE. Don't say, that it doesn't please you.
 ILIA. I don't know. I can't make him out. I have seen him only during the holidays for five years. /Leaves/.
 EVE. And what about breakfast?
 ILIA. Later.
 EVE. You could have at least a cup of tea. The train is arriving in half an hour.
 ILIA. First I try to have a look.
 EVE. At your dad? Ilia please ...
 ILIA. I know, I know ...
 EVE. And by the way what do you want for lunch?
 ILIA. Nothing special.
 EVE. As when we have visitors?
 ILIA. No, as usual, as if only for us.
 EVE. My God!
 ILIA. I hope they'll bring powder milk with them-

EVE. Doesn't she breast feed her any longer? What a mother! Poor little thing.
 ILIA. Today ...
 EVE. It's in vogue, isn't it?
 ILIA. It's on prescription.
 EVE. What should I put on?
 ILIA. Mummy, I hope you haven't got a stage fright?
 EVE. No wonder if I have, from all that.
 ILIA. So I am off.
 EVE. /shuts the door, then she goes to the window and looks at the dwelling quarter. In Sunday silence we can hear the banging of heavy metal lift door. She turns the radio on and the silence full of morning sun is interrupted by the tunes of Schubert's Symphony No.8. Its melody seems to relieve her taugth feeling of tension after the sleepless night. She walks up and down the flat without an aim, as if she did not know what to do, what to start with. The symphony can be heard inobtrusively till the very end of the play. Eve hears the humming of the lift, listens to it attentively and then opens the door. Thomas stands in the doorway/.
SCENE 2
 Thomas and Eve
 EVE. My goodness, Thomas! Where have you been so long?
 THOMAS. /tired after the night shift strokes her cheeks tenderly and takes off his cap and an empty case/. Don't you know where I stroll at nights?
 EVE. Couldn't you give me a ring?

THOMAS. In the evening I was about to set for home when a goods train arrived with a lot of cargo trucks for the construction ... The cargo trucks had to be shifted and so on, and there was nobody. As if they were all on sick leave! And the cargo trucks could not wait till morning.

EVE. Of course, cargo trucks cannot wait till morning.

THOMAS. So what, I can have a nap, it's Sunday.

EVE. My God! He wants to have a nap!

THOMAS. Why not? The young will surely go swimming /looks around/. Or have they already gone?

EVE. I don't know.

THOMAS. /towards the radio/. What kind of music are you listening to?

EVE. Me?

THOMAS. Is this a Czechoslovak radio station playing such sad music on Sunday morning?

EVE. I don't know. The boys have returned it yesterday.

THOMAS. From one wave to another. Wasn't there anything worth watching on TV?

EVE. We didn't watch it.

THOMAS. They were shooting something yesterday.

EVE. Where?

THOMAS. At the building site, at the construction.

EVE. So finally ...

THOMAS. I wonder. We haven't found out whether they wanted to help us or to send us to the damned hell. By the way, where are the boys?

EVE. Didn't you meet Ilia?

THOMAS. No, I didn't.

EVE. They've gone.

THOMAS. Where to?

EVE. Well, how to tell it to you ...

THOMAS. They usually sleep on Sundays

EVE. Today, they aren't ...

THOMAS. Have they changed their programme?

EVE. I am afraid they have, and ...

THOMAS. And what?

EVE. Thomas, please ...

THOMAS. I see.

EVE. What do you see?

THOMAS. That you've wept. Your eyes ...

EVE. It just looks like that. Nothing. Everything is all right.

THOMAS. I can see it quite well, even without my specs.

EVE. Thomas, please ...

THOMAS. Sit down, please.

EVE. Not necessary.

THOMAS. /sits down/. I know. Big children, great problems.

EVE. That's fine that you admit it.

THOMAS. Do you think that it does not worry me?

EVE. What shall we do?

THOMAS. Miki will appeal.

EVE. Yes, he will. But what about Ilia?

THOMAS. Don't you think it's a bit stuffy in here?

EVE. Stuffy?

THOMAS. /undoes his shirt/. Yes, it is.

EVE. All the windows are open.

THOMAS. You are asking what about Ilia.

EVE. Thomas dear, I must tell you something very serious. Something from heart to heart.

THOMAS. I know, you love him and you're worried. Each mother loves her first born son.

EVE. If you knew the truth, the whole truth ...

THOMAS. The business with ...

EVE. What Miki told you yesterday isn't a joke.

THOMAS. /after a pause/. Please, do open the windows properly.

EVE. He ... Ilia really ...

THOMAS. Must get married.

EVE. If only that.

THOMAS. He's already ...

EVE. Yes, father.

THOMAS. /after a pause/. It means that ...

EVE. That you and I ...

THOMAS. Yes, I understand.

EVE. But that's not the end of it.

THOMAS. What else?

EVE. He ...

THOMAS. What did he do?

EVE. He invited them ... He went to wait for them.

THOMAS. Whom did he invite?

EVE. My God! Whom he invited! His bride and your grand daughter. They are coming by the morning train.

THOMAS. /after a pause/. So, we are going to have visitors.

EVE. Thomas, please ...

THOMAS. Why are you shaking all over?

EVE. I'm afraid. I'm so afraid of this meeting. I'm so terribly afraid.

THOMAS. Why are you? I'm not going to bite off their noses.

EVE. What has been done can't be undone. We must help them. Ilia needs that job in Bratislava badly. Now you'll have to do something not only for him and because of him.

THOMAS. I haven't caused all these complications.

EVE. I know, you haven't and neither have I. But if the things are as they are ...

THOMAS. He's old enough, it's his business.

EVE. He wants to. He wants to take care of his family and of himself. Other boys make girls unhappy and leave them, but he ...

THOMAS. Now he'll see what's life.

EVE. But at the beginning, at the very first step you will have to help him, to cope with real difficult life.

SOUND. /door bell/.

EVE. My God! That's them. They are here ... /She goes to open the door/. Thomas, remember that you are a father ... Not only Ilia's but the father of all three of them.

SCENE 3

Doctor Hajnoš and the former

HAJNOŠ. /to Eve in the anteroom/. Don't say that. It's impossible. I don't believe it.

THOMAS. What don't you believe?

HAJNOŠ. That he was not admitted to the Medical Faculty.

EVE. Who told you?

HAJNOŠ. My daughter did, but I thought it was a hoax. They usually play jokes on me, I mean my girls, but when Ilia confirmed it this morning ...

THOMAS. Ilia?

EVE. Did you speak to Ilia?

HAJNOŠ. In the lift only.

EVE. Due to lack of vacancies.

HAJNOŠ. Don't kid me.

THOMAS. He's going to appeal.

HAJNOŠ. Of course, but apart from that ...

THOMAS. What does it mean - apart from that?

EVE. For God's sake Thomas!

THOMAS. He said it here, aloud, that he did not want any interferences through connections.

HAIJNOŠ. Naturally, he's still a child ...

EVE. My words. What would you advise us to do, doctor?

HAIJNOŠ. I think that you will not worry the boy and make his life complicated from the very beginning.

EVE. My words!

HAIJNOŠ. If necessary, I have friends right at the faculty.

THOMAS. Are you sure, are you sure that it can't be arranged without those friends?

HAIJNOŠ. It can be but it need not. Not every risk brings about profit. In your position it is different to intervene for somebody else or for your own son. It may seem rather disgusting. I understand. But in this case you need not do anything. Just stay aside. I'll do it. And he won't even know about anything.

EVE. My God, doctor, you're so kind and ...

THOMAS. Just a moment.

HAIJNOŠ. What's the matter?

THOMAS. What's the price of your kindness?

HAIJNOŠ. What price?

THOMAS. Will you do this favour for me just like that, for nothing?

HAIJNOŠ. I don't understand you.

THOMAS. Without a counter-service?

HAIJNOŠ. Please, don't be ...

THOMAS. I am not going to sign you the certificate that you were in resistance movement and in the Slovak National Uprising.

HAIJNOŠ. Forget it. As if I had never mentioned it. It is quite enough if your wife has a few words with Rosie. Her brother left me a message that I could go and see him.

EVE. Of course, I'll gladly go and speak to her.

HAIJNOŠ. When you have some time off, we could go there together.

EVE. Of course, perhaps tomorrow afternoon. I have a day off.

HAIJNOŠ. That's excellent. Then you needn't worry about Ilia.

THOMAS. Who about?

HAIJNOŠ. Ilia's the name of your elder son, isn't it?

EVE. Yes, it is.

HAIJNOŠ. I've actually come because of him. He told me what the problem had been.

EVE. When did he?

THOMAS. In the lift?

HAIJNOŠ. Yes. You don't need many words to tell somebody a news. Naturally, I phoned my brother immediately ... Well, and I must tell you, that his job is a hundred per cent waiting for him. Without any further problems.

EVE. Doctor!

HAIJNOŠ. Why not! Why should not we help each other! Aren't we human beings? If we want or not one fine day our children can ask what we did for them and what we should have done ...

THOMAS. He's a sod.

HAIJNOŠ. Who?

THOMAS. Without any feeling of shame.

HAIJNOŠ. Don't be naive and don't speak of shame. The old Slovak saying says that who's ashamed is usually hungry and thirsty.

THOMAS. But to bother strange people, that's the limit.

HAJNOŠ. Who's strange here?
 THOMAS. Why didn't you send him to hell?
 HAJNOŠ. Do you mean to say that you would send to hell my daughter if she came here, to ask you for something, or would just come? Don't make yourself worse than you are.
 THOMAS. You can never know.
 HAJNOŠ. I'm sure. I'm positive.
 THOMAS. What are you positive about?
 HAJNOŠ. I'm positive that you didn't sign that certificate for me, only because you yourself don't have it.
 THOMAS. /after a pause/. No. I don't have it, but not because I don't deserve it: ...
 HAJNOŠ. I know, I know ...
 THOMAS. /shouts/. What do you know? What can you know? You only know that I don't have it, but I don't have it because I haven't had time to ask for it. I simply haven't had time ... to collect signatures and to fill in the forms!
 HAJNOŠ. Why are you shouting?
 THOMAS. So that you could hear well that I haven't needed it yet. I haven't missed it to be happy. I have been worrying about lots of other things.
 HAJNOŠ. Don't be angry with me.
 THOMAS. Yes, I understand.
 HAJNOŠ. Well, such exasperated and irritated reactions don't give one the best picture.
 EVE. He's been again ... He's been on an extra night shift.
 HAJNOŠ. What?
 EVE. He's just returned. He came back a few moments ago.
 HAJNOŠ. Wasn't there anybody else to stay there?
 EVE. No, there wasn't.

HAJNOŠ. And what will you do, if I send you on sick leave for quite a long time tomorrow?
 THOMAS. That's the only thing I've ever been missing.
 HAJNOŠ. /to Eve/. So tomorrow afternoon. You are evidently waiting some visitors. I'm not going to keep you. So I'll pop in tomorrow afternoon.
 EVE. With pleasure. I'll be expecting you. We are really, really most obliged to you doctor.
 /Sees Hajnoš to the door/.
 SOUND. /humming of a train/.
 THOMAS. /looks at his watch/.
 EVE. /after she has returned/. He is a nice man, whatever you say.
 THOMAS. /somehow helplessly/. I don't say anything.
 EVE. Of course, that's you. At least you should have thanked him.
 THOMAS. /looks absentmindedly in front of himself/.
 EVE. Why don't you say something?
 THOMAS. I am thinking.
 EVE. What about?
 THOMAS. When we two began our lives together ...
 EVE. The time was different and it was a long time ago,
 THOMAS. What's the name of the little one?
 EVE. They called her after me.
 THOMAS. Eve?
 EVE. My God, Thomas ... Mind you, they are our own children ...
 THOMAS. Yes, our children.
 EVE. Thomas, please. I beseech you. They will be here in a moment. They'll stand in this door, so
 THOMAS. What am I to do?
 EVE. At least don't frown and try to look kind ...

THOMAS. Well, ... I think I should have a shave to mark such an occasion, don't you think?

EVE. Oh yes, I do, but hurry up!

THOMAS. Listen, grumpy ...

EVE. /embraces her husband warmly/. My dear grand dad!

THOMAS. And the other, what's her name?

EVE. She's Cathy.

THOMAS. Cathy? We haven't had a Catherine in our family yet.

EVE. It doesn't matter. I only wish they were happy.

THOMAS. Don't you think that you've forgiven them everything very quickly?

EVE. What should I do? That's life. Everything must be done quickly.

THOMAS. It depends on where and how.

EVE. And why not? Perhaps it is good as it is.

THOMAS. No, it isn't.

EVE. Never mind, go have a shave and put on a clean shirt. And take off your railwayman uniform trousers. /Runs into the other room for the clothes/.

THOMAS. /stretches on the sofa, tired. He does not notice Miki coming in/.

Scene 3

Miki and the former

MIKI. /stops and looks curiously at his lying father/.

EVE. /comes out of the bedroom/.

MIKI. /quietly to his mother/. Is he sleeping?

EVE. No, why should he?

THOMAS. /notices Miki/. So have you already written your appeal?

MIKI. When did you come?

THOMAS. Must I confess to you, too?

MIKI. Didn't you know what was going on?

EVE. Where?

MIKI. The whole squad came and started working.

THOMAS. /enlivened/. So finally they came /goes to the window/.

MIKI. They came with a lot of machinery. They've got scrapers and tomorrow morning they'll pull down the old railway line It should be tough luck if we don't succeed.

EVE. And what about the pram?

MIKI. /surprised by the question uttered aloud/.

EVE. Don't worry. Dad knows about everything. He knows the whole story.

MIKI. I didn't get the pram. Magde's sister wasn't in.

EVE. Poor little thing. They will have to carry her all the way here.

THOMAS. Shouldn't we go to meet them?

EVE. Not you! Certainly not you. But Miki could. I told Ilia that he would be waiting at the station with the pram.

MIKI. You must tell everybody everything.

EVE. Come and have breakfast. /Goes into the kitchen/.

THOMAS. /to Miki/. So what?

MIKI. I don't know.

THOMAS. /whispers to Miki/. Mummy thinks she has already taken me in with that pram, that I'll pave Ilia's road to the paradise.

MIKI. Mummy is like any other mummy.

THOMAS. Listen Miki. Repeat it once more.

MIKI. What should I repeat?

THOMAS. I want to hear it once more. I want to hear once more what you told me last night. Will you repeat it in front of them, too?

MIKI. It's not my problem now.

THOMAS. I know, I know very well. It isn't your problem, but I want to be sure about you at least, if they manage to break me down with the baby.

EVE. /throws Thomas a towel from the kitchen/. Go and shave! /To Miki/. And you'll help me to peel the potatoes.

THOMAS. /takes the towel/. Yes sir! Sorry - yes madam! Miki, I looked at the payroll yesterday. You will be very well paid for that voluntary work.

MIKI. You mean that I'll get a few crowns?

THOMAS. A few hundred crown notes.

MIKI. Each crown comes in handy, but I don't consider money to be the most important or principal thing.

EVE. Principles here and principles there. For the first time in your life you can buy yourself clothes for your own money.

THOMAS. I hope you'll buy something decent and won't stroll about in such zebra-like rags like Ilia does in Bratislava. /He goes into the bedroom instead of the bathroom/.

MIKI. /with a pot of potatoes on his knees/. I don't care.

EVE. Don't tell me that you don't care. And what about Jarmilka? She would certainly quit such a ragamuffin ...

MIKI. /surprised by his mother's remark about Jarmilka/. What?

EVE. Just as I have said.

MIKI. How do you know about Jarmilka?

EVE. My God! There are lots of things I know and you don't know about. You'd be surprised.

MIKI. /mimicks mother to speak more quietly because of father, who left the bedroom door opened/. Hush.

EVE. I haven't said anything. She's a pretty girl as far as I can judge according to that photograph.

MIKI. I see. So you studied my biology, didn't you?

EVE. I hope you are not going to be offended.

MIKI. /calls into the room/. Dad, shouldn't we see the soldiers?

EVE. Now?

MIKI. Not now but perhaps at noon.

EVE. No. You aren't going to go anywhere. Do you want me to be alone with them?

MIKI. So many women together all of a sudden. Something like that hasn't happened in our family, yet.

EVE. I should change into something better too, don't you think?

MIKI. I must tell you that such a young granny must look prim and lovely, much more than any other.

EVE. /looks at herself in the mirror, then goes to the bedroom - pause and then a cry/. Thomas!

MIKI. /drops the pot with potatoes and runs into the bedroom/. What's the matter?

EVE. Jesus Christ!

MIKI. Dad, what's the matter with you?

EVE. He's got a fit like the day before yesterday in the evening.

MIKI. He's choking!

EVE. My God! He said that there was not enough air!

MIKI. Dad!

EVE. Call the ambulance.

MIKI. /runs to the phone/. What's the number?
 EVE. I don't know.
 MIKI. What should I call then?
 EVE. The ambulance.
 MIKI. But the number!
 EVE. It'll be in the phone book.
 MIKI. Where's the phone book?
 EVE. I don't know.
 MIKI. /dials a number/.
 EVE. Call quickly for help!
 MIKI. /realizes that he has been calling a wrong number, throws the receiver down/.
 EVE. Miki, where are you going?
 MIKI. /runs out into the corridor/.
 EVE. For God's sake don't go away! Call for help!
 /Runs into the bedroom, then back with a towel to the wash basin, then back into the bedroom. Schubert's symphony closes up with its last bars. Silence/.
 Thomas! How can I help you? What aches you? Tell me. You mustn't ... /Runs out of the bedroom/. Help! Help!

Scene 4

Doctor Hajnoš and the former

HAJNOŠ. /runs in with Miki/.
 EVE. /points to the open bedroom door/. There ... there ...
 HAJNOŠ. /enters the bedroom/.
 MIKI. /stands on the threshold/.
 EVE. /stands next to him/.
 /Lifts hums from below, then the door bangs. Eve and Miki look at Hajnoš bent over Thomas and do not notice that Ilia has stopped in the anteroom with the baby in his arms/.

Scene 5

/The tension is broken by the baby's wailing cry. Eve and Miki turn. A motionless scene in which they look frightened at one another/.

ILIA.š /looks at his mother and brother uncomprehendingly as they do not move. He puts the baby on the table beside him and makes a timid step forward/.
 EVE. He's there.
 ILIA. Who?
 MIKI. Doctor Hajnoš.
 ILIA. /cheerfully/. Did dad call him?
 MIKI. /puts his head into his hands/. No, not dad. We had to.
 /Another pause/.
 HAJNOŠ. /stops in the doorway, then he makes a deep bow and condoles with Eve on the loss of her husband/.
 EVE. No, no, no! /Runs into the bedroom/.
 HAJNOŠ. I'm awfully sorry. /He makes another step and condoles with Miki and Ilia who stand motionless as if they did not perceive the shattering fact/.
 EVE. /from the bedroom/. Thomas! /Her cry is interrupted by the baby's cry/.
 HAJNOŠ. /only now notices the baby, then he throws a significant glance at Ilia and leaves/. He was such an honest comrade ... We shall... /more quietly/ you will surely miss him, but that's life.
 /Disappears in the door to the corridor. Ilia and Miki do not move. When the baby cries Ilia picks her up from the table, embraces her, makes for the bedroom door but doesn't

enter. He collapses with the baby in arms on his knees in the doorway/.

ILIA. Dad!

SOUND. /telephone - no one reacts to the first ringing/.

MIKI. /Miki turns at the second and after the third he picks up the receiver/. Yes ... Yes, no ... please. He won't come. /lets the receiver drop by the telephone apparatus and whispers quietly/. Our dad will never go to any meeting. /It is getting dark and in the same way as at the beginning of the play we can hear an echo of an engine which fades gradually away in the roaring of the train under the window until it gets totally dark/.

Ján Solovič /1934/

Merited Artist, Laureate of the State Prize is the most prominent present day Slovak playwright. He studied dramaturgy at the College of Music and Drama in Bratislava and upon graduation worked as a dramaturge in Czechoslovak Radio. Later he became Secretary to the Slovak Writers' Union and in 1984 was appointed its chairman. At present he reads theory of drama at the College of Music and Drama in Bratislava.

Ján Solovič writes plays for theatre, radio, and television. He was awarded National Prize of the Slovak Socialist Republic and Klement Gottwald State Prize, and in 1975 the title Merited Artist for his dramatic works.

Already one of Solovič's first radio plays *Midnight in Five Minutes /1958/* marked by non-fiction character evoked positive response.

Great personalities of the past, their efforts for social progress and influence on the course of events of both national and European significance represent the main scope of Solovič's themes he dealt with in the plays *Where Are the Roots of Our Misery /1965/* about Ľudovít Štúr, the most prominent representative of Slovak national movement, *The Dead Sun /1967/* about Dušan Makovický, L.N.Tolstoy's personal doctor of Slovak origin, *The Bell Without a Tower /1984/* about Matej Bel,

an outstanding Slovak and European scientist in the period of Enlightenment, and Peter and Paul, about the youth of the Russian czar Peter the Great.

However, social problems represent the dominant scope of the author's interests. The comedy A Very Tricky Situation /1968/, the tragicomedy A Begger's Adventure /1970/ which followed the television trilogy Three From the Ninth Floor /1969/, the comedy The Tower of Hope /1975/, but particularly the dramatic trilogy Meridian Express /1974/, The Silver Jaguar /1976/, and The Golden Rain /1976/ are his most significant works. The last three plays are connected with one another, dealing with the same characters and unveiling the flow of events triggered in the first one. The author labelled the three works as The Citizen's Trilogy. The plays were published in a book in 1978. /We are presenting the basic data and brief contents of all three plays of the Citizen's Trilogy as an appendix to this general, introductory information/.

Apart from the before mentioned plays in the seventies the author wrote the screen script to the film Quite Nice Guys /1970/, a five part TV serial Lost Property /1975/ and a TV trilogy There Are Still Some Good People in the World /1979/.

The most recent author's plays deal with the themes from present day life, from the environment of new

factories and dwelling estates. The author seems to ask an urgent question - whether the people, working and living there are "new" and responsible, too. His plays The Right to Err /1980/ and The Queen of Night in a Stony Sea /1983/ deal with these problems in their full complexity.

In all his plays and TV serials Ján Solovič has been trying to create a positive ideal in people's lives. The road to it is far from easy. One must clash with selfishness, narrow-mindedness, negligence, with the influence of bad education and immoral environment.

Ján Solovič's plays were presented in many theatres abroad with great success /the Soviet Union, Poland, the German Democratic Republic, Yugoslavia, and in other countries/.

Ján S o l o v i ě

MERIDIAN EXPRESS

Play in four acts

Characters: 4 men, 2 women

Scene: 1

The play is the first part of the dramatic Citizen's Trilogy in which the author manifested his vital interest in and understanding of the problems of the people of today remaining faithful to the main theme.

Engine driver Benedik is the main character of the play. By his way of life he implements the ideals he fought for in the Slovak National Uprising and later at work. The author confronts the hero with essential ethic problems of our days. Engine driver Benedik has never thought of benefiting from his position and merits in the antifascist resistance movement and is disappointed and worried to learn that other people - his family and particularly his elder son want to sponge on his merits. He revolts against it vigorously and does not want to abandon his principles risking a conflict in his own family. At the end of the play he dies as the years passed and his weak heart, struck by new stresses, is no longer able to cope with the situation.

Ján S o l o v i ě

THE SILVER JAGUAR

play in two parts

Characters: 4 men, 2 women

Scene: 1

The Silver Jaguar is a free sequel to the play Meridian Express. Mrs. Benedik, the widow and her younger son Miki follow the principles of their late husband and father Thomas Benedik. The elder son Ilia, an architect has no strict moral principles and goes the easier, more comfortable way. The only things he is concerned about are his personal position and profit. His younger brother Miki criticizes and judges him strictly as Ilia is no longer faithful to their father's moral principles. The elements pointing at the different character of the two brothers were hinted already in the first play of the trilogy and graduate in the next two parts. At the close of the play Ilia finds in an open conflict with his brother and mother, and begins to realize his selfishness and the necessity to correct his approach to the people around him.

The play reacts critically to the negative social phenomena - to connections, hypocrisy, and bribery.

Ján S o l o v i ě

THE GOLDEN RAIN

Play in four acts

Characters: 5 men, 3 women

Scenes: 2

In the final part of the trilogy the author pursues particularly Miki Benedik, the younger son. He is the president of the Municipal National Committee. Both at work and in his private life he acts as an honest, nice young man.

The everyday life of the townlet where Miki Benedik lives is troubled by an accident in drinking water supply which causes a critical situation. Quick action without red tape procedures is the only way out. Miki, as the president of the Municipal National Committee, is fully responsible for the solution of the problem. He tries all possible ways how to do away with the defect as quickly as possible. However, it is far from being easy. In the end, persuaded by his mother and brother, as well as influenced by the pressure exerted by the citizens he uses his own money as a bribe when arranging the pipeline for the new source of water. His adversaries announce his deed to the police. Miki is ready to defend his deed, which though incompatible with law was done in favour of the public interest.

The play is a very sensitive testimony to the character of present day young people and their courage to act in critical situations.

Ján Solovič

MERIDIÁN

Dráma

LITA, Bratislava, 1973

Ján Solovič

MERIDIAN EXPRES

Do angličtiny preložila Oľga Hadrabová-Horská

Zodpovedná redaktorka Ľubica Križanová

Odpísala Eva Butkovičová

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