

Pavol Janík
Dangerous Comedies
Translated by Heather Trebatická
A Private Striptease
(A play in three acts)

CHARACTERS:

RAYMOND QUIET, the main character

further

IRENE, his wife

ROBIN, their son

VICKY, their daughter

furthermore

JAMES BOMB, his colleague

furthermost

CARMELA SWEET, their neighbour

GEORGIE GIBLET, her guest

OTTO LANG, also her guest

The action takes place in the mind of Raymond Quiet.

ACT ONE

Evening - in the QUIETS' home.

(Music, the doorbell.)

SCENE 1

MR and MRS QUIET.

MRS QUIET: What's that, Raymond?

MR QUIET: *(Dryly.)* The doorbell, Irene

MRS QUIET: *(Slowly.)* The door-bell...?

MR QUIET: Yes. I've just installed it and tried it out. It's a little surprise.

MRS QUIET: And what's the big one?

MR QUIET: Quite right. I can see I've taught you to think logically. There's a reason for everything.

MRS QUIET: The doorbell, too?

MR QUIET: Of course. We've got a visitor coming.

MRS QUIET: *(Hysterically.)* A visitor? *(Calmly.)* Why?

MR QUIET: So there'll be someone to use our new bell, without which we have managed for ten years or so, if I'm not mistaken. And I am not in the habit of being mistaken. On principle.

MRS QUIET: I know.

MR QUIET: The world around us is moving on. We won't be left standing on the sidelines.

MRS QUIET: No good will come of it. A doorbell. That's a bad sign. What does a respectable person need a doorbell for?

MR QUIET: To hear when a guest arrives.

MRS QUIET: The only person around here who needs a bell is that woman... Mrs Sweet, on the first floor. She has male visitors coming and going like on a conveyor belt. But what use will it be to us?

MR QUIET: Don't worry, our social contacts won't get out of hand. With us it will be different. Only so far and no further. Everything will be prepared, directed and arranged. Here you have a list of instructions. Get to work.

MRS QUIET: Will do. *(She goes out.)*

MR QUIET: *(Whistles to himself, turns on the radio.)*

(Loud rock song.)

MR QUIET: Ugh, no. *(He changes stations.)*

(Slow, sentimental evening music.)

MR QUIET: That's the thing.

MRS QUIET: *(Enters.)* I'm glad you could come, Mr. Bomb...

MR QUIET: Oh, Irene! Have you forgotten? The doorbell. The doorbell rings first.

MRS QUIET: Sorry Raymond, I don't know what I'm doing. I thought he was already here.

MR QUIET: Calm down. There's nothing to worry about. It's an ordinary event - a visit. Relax and behave naturally. Feel at home.

MRS QUIET: I am at home.

MR QUIET: Then try feeling like the lady of the house.

MRS QUIET: What about you?

MR QUIET: I am the head of the household, it's true, but even so today you will be standing at my side. Keep that in mind. All kinds of things will be changing from now on. Just wait and see.

MRS QUIET: You mean I... at your side... you've been drinking.

MR QUIET: Have I ever drunk?

MRS QUIET: No. You have never drunk.

MR QUIET: Never? Just think back!

MRS QUIET: I know! At our wedding. You drank at our wedding. But that's a good many years ago.

MR QUIET: You see. From now on it will be rather more often. And I shan't be drinking alone.

MRS QUIET: With that man? That man Bomb?! He's got such a dangerous name.

MR QUIET: Don't exaggerate. What does his name matter? He's reliable. I've been meeting him on occasion for some time now. On business. Man of the world. Single. You're sure to like him.

MRS QUIET: Single?

MR QUIET: He'll be the best kind of acquaintance for us for a start. When we get used to the idea we'll invite a married couple. I have it all carefully thought out.

MRS QUIET: So you're going to drink with him?

MR QUIET: I shall be drinking above all with you.

MRS QUIET: At our wedding you ordered me to drink tea instead of cognac... I don't know what might come of it. This has happened so suddenly.

MR QUIET: That was a completely different situation. Times change, without contacts with the world around us you simply can't get anywhere.

MRS QUIET: Whatever you think.

MR QUIET: Yesterday I told you to buy some cigarettes.

MRS QUIET: I bought a packet of Caramels. There's a picture of a camel on it.

MR QUIET: Are you sure?

MRS QUIET: An animal with a hump - that's a camel, isn't it?

MR QUIET: Yes. But is it cigarettes that you bought?!

MRS QUIET: Shh. You mustn't let the children hear such harmful crap exists or we'll be in trouble.

MR QUIET: Mind your language, Irene! Be careful what you say! You're a lady.

MRS QUIET: You're right. What I meant was that it would ruin all our efforts to bring them up properly.

MR QUIET: Just so. Have you hidden them in a safe place?

MRS QUIET: They're in the cupboard.

MR QUIET: Excellent.

MRS QUIET: Raymond?

MR QUIET: Yes, dear?

MRS QUIET: Are we going to smoke, too?

MR QUIET: Good lord, no. We'll only have them, just in case. For guests. And the other things I entrusted you with?

MRS QUIET: Everything's ready. We can start.

MR QUIET: There's no guest.

MRS QUIET: It was your job to invite the guest.

MR QUIET: Of course, that's not your fault. - Unfortunately. He should've been here by now. Can't be helped.

MRS QUIET: Try the doorbell. To see whether it works.

MR QUIET: You're right. Better be on the safe side. *(He goes out.)*

(Noise of movement in the hall, the door creaks, the bell rings.)

MR QUIET: *(Coming back.)* The bell's OK. Something else has let us down.

MRS QUIET: The organisation.

MR QUIET: How dare you, Irene?!

MRS QUIET: Sorry. The guest has let us down.

MR QUIET: Don't insult him before he's even here. We'll move the clock back a bit. So he won't feel embarrassed about being late.

MRS QUIET: If that's meant to be the time now, the children should be up.

MR QUIET: Good observation. Wake them up, please.

MRS QUIET: *(Goes out.)* Will do.

SCENE 2

MR QUIET, MRS QUIET, ROBIN and VICKY

MR QUIET: *(Opens his paper, whistles quietly to himself.)*

MRS QUIET: *(Comes in with the children.)* Here we are.

MR QUIET: *(Folds up his paper.)*

VICKY: Is it morning already?

MRS QUIET: Is it, or isn't it?

MR QUIET: For heaven's sake! You're like a five-year-old.

MRS QUIET: I'm just asking for your opinion.

MR QUIET: No. No, it's not morning.

ROMAN: Night. It's night, isn't it.

MR QUIET: Robin, dear! What's the time?

ROBIN: It's evening.

MR QUIET: Correct. Clever boy! For a nine-year-old even a bit too grown up.

VICKY: Are you going to tell us a story?

MRS QUIET: We could, couldn't we?

MR QUIET: How shall I put it? It is evening. But not the kind we're used to. It's a special evening. I suggest you just behave as I advise you. That way we'll avoid unnecessary misunderstanding.

THE OTHERS: (*In chorus.*) Alright.

MRS QUIET: Can I embroider?

MR QUIET: That's not a bad idea. That's an activity worthy of a woman of your standing. Embroider, dear.

MRS QUIET: Thank you.

MR QUIET: Don't mention it. Sit down in this other armchair.

MRS QUIET: Like this?

MR QUIET: Yes. Good. Sit up a bit. Robin, you sit... at the piano. That'll make a good impression.

ROBIN: And the music?

MR QUIET: Yes, the music's important.

ROBIN: What would you like?

MR QUIET: That latest etude.

MRS QUIET: Not those horrible noises.

MR QUIET: Not everyone understands music and can appreciate the importance of technically difficult exercises.

ROBIN: So, the flight of the mosquito?

MR QUIET: Yes.

ROBIN: But the mechanism? It's still at the repairers.

MR QUIET: That really worries me, too.

ROBIN: Should I touch the keys?

MR QUIET: No. You know very well that ruins the parts inside the instrument. I'm also of the opinion that it's a question of respect for music. When you lose respect, you lose everything.

ROBIN: I understand, Daddy.

MR QUIET: You are unusually quick. Play!

VICKY: And can I go to bed?

MR QUIET: Vicky! You'll sit on the stool and read a newspaper...

VICKY: But I haven't learned to read yet!

MR QUIET: You're always making a fuss about something. You can look at a picture book

(He hands her a colourful book from the bookshelves.)

VICKY: Ooh! Thank you.

MR QUIET: Right. That's that.

MRS QUIET: Quiet. How beautifully quiet it is.

VICKY: I want to go to the loo!

MR QUIET: Quiet! Hold on a minute. I know what to do with the QUIET. We'll remember our near and dear who are no longer with us. Sit, stay sitting. We'll remember them quite informally. While at work. *(Pause.)* That'll do. I've already begun thinking about the living. Vicky! You can go.

VICKY: *(Goes out.)*

MRS QUIET: I feel happy, really happy.

MR QUIET: Don't be sentimental. We are a respectable family. I've arranged it that way.

(Sound of the toilet flushing.)

VICKY: *(Comes in.)* I'm back.

MR QUIET: You could amuse us while we're waiting by reciting a poem.

MRS QUIET: Me?

MR QUIET: Vicky.

VICKY: A tree awoke in the warm March sun. It waved its branches and welcomed old friends. Spring has come, spring has come.

MR QUIET: Well done. Word perfect.

(The doorbell rings.)

MRS QUIET: Help!

ROBIN: Hurrah!

VICKY: What's that?

MR QUIET: Quiet! Keep calm! Don't get excited. The great moment has come. Concentrate on your roles. *(He goes out.)*

(Incomprehensible conversation in the hall.)

MR QUIET: Just keep calm.

MRS QUIET: Has anything happened?

MR QUIET: No, nothing's happened. *(With exaggerated movements he furtively takes the cigarettes out of the cupboard and leaves the room.)*

MRS QUIET: What sweet shall I make tomorrow?

VICKY: Not rice pudding.

MRS QUIET: What about rhubarb tart?

VICKY: What's a rude tart?

MRS QUIET: Rhubarb tart, not rude tart.

MR QUIET: *(Coming in.)* How can you speak like that about Mrs Sweet in front of the children?

MRS QUIET: I wasn't talking about her. I was talking about... Goodness, you've got me all muddled up.

MR QUIET: Carmela Sweet is a very nice neighbour. I'd be glad if you'd take that as the general opinion of our family.

THE OTHERS: *(In chorus.)* We will.

MRS QUIET: What did she want?

MR QUIET: What we were talking about...

ROBIN: A tart?

VICKY: No, not a tart, a sweet.

MR QUIET: It's getting late...

MRS QUIET: Let's put our watches back and we'll have nothing to worry about.

MR QUIET: No. We'll put the children to bed. We can't keep ignoring the facts. Let's be honest and admit it's as late as our watches show. In view of the exceptional circumstances, especially taking into consideration that you are going to bed for the second time today, I'll just briefly remind you of the contents of the tale you heard a short time ago in its entirety. The little girl informs the wolf about where she is going. The wolf swallows her grandmother and shortly after the grandchild. The forester kills the beast of prey and saves the people we have mentioned before they have been completely digested. Good night!

CHILDREN: *(Leaving.)* Good night!

MRS QUIET: Good night!

MR QUIET: Irene, where are you going?

MRS QUIET: I thought your "Good night" was meant to be a tactful suggestion.

MR QUIET: When I come to think about it, why not. I can manage the welcoming and visit by myself. In that way I can do away with the dreaded duty of introductions, directing a conversation between several people at once and the like.

MRS QUIET: By the way, what did she want...

MR QUIET: Her?

MRS QUIET: Her. What did she want?

MR QUIET: Cigarettes.

MRS QUIET: And, of course, you gave her them. Our reserves.

MR QUIET: What else could I do? Spoil neighbourly relations?

MRS QUIET: Neighbourly relations... With a woman who leads a disreputable life.

MR QUIET: Really, Irene...

MRS QUIET: *(Leaving.)* Good night.

SCENE 3

MR QUIET and Mr. Bomb.

(The doorbell rings.)

MR QUIET: *(Puts aside his newspaper, gets up from the armchair and goes into the hall.)*

(Muffled conversation from the hall, loud crash - something has fallen and broken.)

BOMB: *(Entering.)* I'm awfully sorry.

MR QUIET: *(Entering.)* No, no. I'm sorry. I'm very glad you accepted our invitation. Don't let it worry you. It was a worthless vase.

BOMB: But it was Chinese porcelain.

MR QUIET: No! Or could it be?! I doubt it. I inherited it from Auntie Amy. Typical of her. False teeth, imitation Chinese vase. That happens even in the best families.

BOMB: What a nice flat! I like it.

MR QUIET: We live simply. When Uncle Joseph died no one wanted the flat. Its upkeep is very expensive, you understand, and that doesn't suit anyone nowadays.

BOMB: Oh, I'd know how to use it. No doubt about that!

MR QUIET: Unfortunately it's not free. I must disappoint you.

BOMB: Sure. That was just the heart-felt sigh of a man with a hectic social life.

MR QUIET: Don't imagine it's not lively here. We're breeding - I mean bringing up - two children here. And that's no small matter. They need space for their healthy development.

BOMB: Of course.

MR QUIET: Please take a seat.

BOMB: And the lady of the house?

MR QUIET: Irene?

SCENE 4

MRS QUIET and those already present.

MRS QUIET: *(Entering.)* Yes? Did you call me, dear?

MR QUIET: Let me introduce you, this is my friend...

MRS QUIET: I guessed it would be.

MR QUIET: My wife.

BOMB: Your own? I thought so immediately. There's a resemblance...

MRS QUIET, BOMB: Glad to meet you.

BOMB: I'm glad, dear colleague.

MR QUIET: Dear?!

BOMB: Don't misunderstand me.

MRS QUIET: Will you have coffee?

BOMB: If I could trouble you. I admire you, madam. I sensed your presence in all the beauty and tidiness of your dwelling...

MR QUIET: You shouldn't be so eager to overlook my decisive contribution to the order and achievements in general in our household. Irene, be so kind and prepare that coffee.

MRS QUIET: *(Leaving.)* Just a minute, please.

SCENE 5

MR QUIET and MR BOMB.

MR QUIET: What would you say to some music?

BOMB: Adorable!

MR QUIET: As a well-balanced and self-assured man I shall deliberately overlook the ambiguity of your reply

BOMB: I don't understand.

MR QUIET: Let's leave it at that. A little music? *(Turns on the radio.)*

(A loud rock song.)

BOMB: Marvellous. You do keep up with the times.

MR QUIET: Oh, no. *(Tunes to another station.)*

(Sentimental evening melody.)

BOMB: That's it. Wonderful, really. Super. When I was...

MR QUIET: *(Interrupting him.)* Goya! *(He points to a picture.)*

BOMB: *(Taking a closer look.)* Incredible! He took your wedding photos?

MR QUIET: I mean... Here. *(He points elsewhere.)*

BOMB: Ah, I see. Splendid!

MR QUIET: This man confused his century and made nonsense of the history of art. Do you like it?

BOMB: A masterpiece. Just as you say: confusion and nonsense.

MR QUIET: It's not creative disorder I was thinking of, but the greatness of his soul.

BOMB: Yes, in the realm of the soul some things are still not clear, but the number of problems is decreasing even in that area.

MR QUIET: I wanted to raise...

BOMB: I'll help you.

MR QUIET: ...the question of his artistic achievement.

BOMB: Artistic achievement, of course, not...

MR QUIET: Artistic achievement, of course.

BOMB: Of course, of course.

MR QUIET: That can't be held in question.

BOMB: Of course it can't. A masterpiece.

MR QUIET: Reproduction. Unfortunately, just a reproduction.

BOMB: But just like the real thing ...

SCENE 6

MRS QUIET and those already present.

MRS QUIET: (*Entering.*) Here's your coffee.

BOMB: Mm, enticing!

MR QUIET: That's a rather inappropriate remark, don't you think?

BOMB: What do you mean?

MR QUIET: Enticing!

BOMB: On the contrary, I'd say divine. Really divine.

MR QUIET: I'm sorry, but don't you think your sighs are a little too intimate?

BOMB: I'm not in the habit of hiding my feelings. The smell really is enticing. Of the coffee, of course.

MR QUIET: I should hope so.

BOMB: Lovely tray. May I? I'll try it with my teeth.

MR QUIET: Help yourself. Feel at home. - Silver. Sure to be genuine. Of historical value, collectors would be interested.

BOMB: Splendid piece.

MRS QUIET: Inherited from Uncle Joseph. We've a lot to thank him for.

BOMB: Not so much him as his passing away, mm?

MR QUIET: Will you have cognac or whisky?

MRS QUIET, BOMB: *(In chorus.)* Cognac.

MR QUIET: Quite right. I'm always glad when people know what they want.

BOMB: Knowing how to choose makes a good start.

MRS QUIET: It's best to agree.

BOMB: I must agree unconditionally with that.

MR QUIET: Yes, there's nothing better than unconditional agreement.

BOMB: I quite agree with you. That's as far as you can go. It's simply impossible to go any further. Cigarette? *(Suddenly takes out a box of cigarettes.)*

MRS QUIET: Goodness. Just as I thought.

MR QUIET: Irene, keep calm. Light up as you like, sir. We won't, thank you.

BOMB: *(Lights his cigarette and noisily exhales the smoke.)* Is anything the matter, madam?

MRS QUIET: *(A fit of coughing.)*

MR QUIET: *(To her.)* Pull yourself together, you silly cow! *(To him.)* Nothing's the matter, sir. Nothing worth mentioning.

BOMB: *(Exhaling smoke.)* Has she got tuberculosis?

MR QUIET: When did you last have an X-ray?

MRS QUIET: *(Suppressing her cough.)* I don't know. I can't remember. It was a long time ago. I'll go and see the doctor on Monday.

BOMB: Let's hope it's not too late.

MR QUIET: Pull yourself together!

MRS QUIET: *(Clearing her throat.)* I envy you. That smoking. It's so manly.

MR QUIET: Get a grip on yourself.

BOMB: Let her be. At least we'll find out what she's got in her.

MR QUIET: *(Cuts in.)* I don't want to know anything about it. I've had quite enough of everything.

MRS QUIET: No, we can't complain about a shortage of anything. We have enough of everything.

MR QUIET: Complain - we really can't do that. How would it be if anyone kept complaining about something? Such attempts should be nipped in the bud.

BOMB: (*With cigarette in mouth.*) So far as I'm concerned, I believe you. There's no need to convince me. But there are others.

MR QUIET: Don't tell anyone. You know what people are like nowadays.

BOMB: (*Noisily exhaling smoke.*) I certainly do.

MRS QUIET: They'll envy us.

BOMB: Don't worry. Not a word. Not even to the boss. I'll deny everything if necessary. Even our meeting here today. I was careful. No one followed me.

MRS QUIET: That's good news. And it's very noble of you.

BOMB: That no one followed me?

MR QUIET: No, you probably meant the other thing, didn't you, dear?

MRS QUIET: Of course, the other thing. You haven't got any family commitments. You can afford those other things.

MR QUIET: That's your business. Nobody else's.

BOMB: Including yours.

MRS QUIET: We - I think I can speak for us both - don't blame you for anything. On the contrary, we're glad you accepted our invitation.

BOMB: And I'm glad someone has invited me at last. It's usually awkward without an invitation, you know. Sometimes the people living there are already asleep.

MR QUIET: We, too, have a confession to make.

BOMB: (*Another cigarette.*) It'll be just between you and me. I won't say a word to anyone.

MRS QUIET: You're our first...

BOMB: First?

MRS QUIET: First...

MR QUIET: You really are our first visitor.

BOMB: You don't mean to say...

MRS QUIET: There's nothing we can do to change that. You are our first...

MR QUIET: I swear she's telling the truth.

BOMB: Well, I'm amazed how well you two get on together. Who knows, knows, who doesn't goes.

MR QUIET: That's yours? Did you think that up?

BOMB: Well, on long winter evenings, when I was...

MRS QUIET: Alone. Abandoned. In a strange world.

BOMB: How did you know that, madam?

MR QUIET: Enough of that now you two. We've got too much ahead of us.

BOMB: Too much and for too long.

MRS QUIET: And for too long...

BOMB: You're right, cheers! *(He lifts his glass.)*

MR QUIET: To happiness and pleasure and...

MRS QUIET: To your health!

ALL: *(They raise their glasses.)*

(A resounding clinking.)

MRS QUIET: *(Drinks her glass in one gulp and suddenly begins to sing a folk song in a hoarse voice as if she were drunk.)*

BOMB: Marvellous stuff. Fabulous. Sensational. Really super. When I was...

MR QUIET: Quite good.

MRS QUIET: *(Blabbering.)* Not bad. Pour me another! *(She sings)* Pour, damn you!

MR QUIET: *(Pouring.)* Here you are.

BOMB: *(Exhales smoke and crumples the empty box.)* Aha. That was the last cigarette. I think I've overdone it a bit today. Smoking, I mean.

MRS QUIET: Let's drink.

ALL: *(They raise their glasses.)*

(A resounding clinking.)

MRS QUIET: *(Pours the contents of her glass down her throat and begins to sing the same folk song.)*

MR QUIET: No trouble, Mr Bomb. I'll pop out for some cigarettes.

BOMB: It's already too late. The shops are shut.

MRS QUIET: Pour me another! *(She sings.)* Pour, damn you!

MR QUIET: *(Pouring.)* As you wish.

BOMB: I'll have to manage without tobacco.

ALL: *(They raise their glasses.)*

(A resounding clinking.)

MRS QUIET: *(Pours the contents of her glass down her throat, babbles incomprehensibly, dozes off in a sitting position, breathing heavily and snoring quietly, occasionally muttering something in her sleep.)*

MR QUIET: It really is no trouble. I'll go and get some cigarettes from my neighbour.

MRS QUIET: *(Mutters something.)*

BOMB: I couldn't let you do that. It's very late. All respectable people are in bed by now. We're not in Las Vegas. Unfortunately.

MR QUIET: Don't worry. My neighbour's a bit unusual. Life is only beginning for her at this time of night.

BOMB: I can tell you, people nowadays really are....

MR QUIET: We'd be wasting our breath talking about it. You know how it is...

BOMB: I heard something when I was...

MR QUIET: What can I tell you... You wouldn't believe your own eyes.

BOMB: You don't say, I mean do say. Have you ever been in her flat?

MR QUIET: Well, at this late hour we're usually asleep. Or in bed with this woman here... we read.

BOMB: Interesting, go on.

MR QUIET: But it's sometimes even difficult to believe one's own ears.

BOMB: Don't let me interrupt you.

MR QUIET: In short, company gathers there - like in Monte Carlo.

BOMB: And what about her husband?

MR QUIET: Rich man. Now he's dead.

BOMB: Rich man now he's dead?

MR QUIET: He was rich before his death, now he's dead

BOMB: Splendid. So a poor man. What happened to him?

MR QUIET: He drank away his liver, then his brain as well. Or was it the other way round? Finally run over by a car. Unfortunate accident.

BOMB: Sad business. That sometimes happens to rich men. But his property... He can't have drunk it all away. I mean... He didn't have time. He must have left something.

MR QUIET: He sure did. A flat full of...

BOMB: Shh.

MR QUIET: Well, you must know.

BOMB: From hearsay, when I was... But I'd like to try it myself.

MR QUIET: Well, who wouldn't?

BOMB: Alone, otherwise?

MR QUIET: A widow.

BOMB: But alone, otherwise...?

MR QUIET: Very much so.

BOMB: Good. Excellent. Marvellous. Really super. In that case I have nothing against you going there. To look in. For those cigarettes.

MRS QUIET: *(Mutters something.)*

MR QUIET: Excuse me for a moment, please. My wife will entertain you in the meantime. *(He goes out.)*

MRS QUIET: *(Briefly mumbles something in her sleep.)*

ACT II

(Night - in MRS SWEET's flat.)

(Languorous music, the doorbell rings.)

SCENE 1

MRS SWEET and MR QUIET.

MRS SWEET: *(Appears naked.)* I'm coming. Just a minute. *(She staggers, attempts to dance and hums to the languorous music. She is carrying a bit of clothing with her and she gathers up other bits that are scattered around and gradually gets dressed - a striptease in reverse. When she is fully dressed she opens the front door.)* Ah it's you, Raymond! That's splendid! You've come just at the right time. Come in. I've got a couple of guests here.

MR QUIET: I hope you don't mind, Mrs Sweet. I don't like to disturb you, but...

MRS SWEET: Don't bother with the apologies, just come in.

SCENE 2

LANG, GIBLET and those already present.

MRS SWEET: Gentlemen, the devil has brought us this charming man. He's my wonderful neighbour, Mr Raymond Quiet.

MR QUIET: Good evening, sirs!

MRS SWEET: Come on, come in, don't just stand there... Otti, let me introduce you.

LANG: *(To her.)* Don't call me Otti, you cow! *(To him.)* Otto Lang. *(To her.)* It seems it's turned chilly. You're dressed up warm all of a sudden. Are you cold?

MR QUIET: *(To him.)* Quiet. It's a great honour for me.

GIBLET: Haha...

MR QUIET: Mr Lang, I was reading in the periodicals today that...

LANG: Not worth mentioning.

GIBLET: I'm an ordinary man. Georgie Gible. Will that do?

MR QUIET: Then I'm twice as glad.

LANG: You're very clever, sir. I can tell you that.

MR QUIET: You, certainly.

GIBLET: You needn't worry. Here we're among friends.

LANG: Don't let's be so official. Let's call each other by our first names. *(He passes him a glass.)*

GIBLET: Shall we sing?

ALL: *(They raise their glasses.)*

(Clinking sound.)

MR QUIET: As for me, I'm an ordinary tax...

GIBLET: evader... No - payer.

MR QUIET: Yes, my taxes pay for the whole of the state administration.

LANG: The whole? From your taxes?

GIBLET: Who'd've thought it.

MRS SWEET: Don't be put out. Sit down.

MR QUIET: Dear lady...

MRS SWEET: Well, Raymond. It's very kind of you to pop in to see me. I've been waiting for this for eight years. I was losing hope.

MR QUIET: You know, I came for... *(He reaches out for the cigarettes on the coffee table.)*

MRS SWEET: Would you like a light?

MR QUIET: No, thank you, I don't smoke.

MRS SWEET: Did you want something...?

MR QUIET: Well...

MRS SWEET: I know. You need an excuse for everything. You're like my late husband.

(The chandelier shakes and clinks.)

MR QUIET: Your crystal chandelier is shaking.

LANG: It's flickering.

GIBLET: That'll be a storm!

MRS SWEET: No, that's my husband.

(Chandelier.)

MRS SWEET: Are you there?

(Chandelier.)

MR QUIET: That's not possible.

GIBLET: I suspected as much.

LANG: Fantastic, I've never seen anything like that before. And I've seen all kinds of things.

GIBLET: What's the time?

MR QUIET: Keep calm. We'll deal with the matter in an informal discussion. I'll be chairman.

MRS SWEET: Raymond, You're wonderful, but it's only my late husband.

(Chandelier.)

MR QUIET: What's he doing here?

MRS SWEET: Don't take it like that.

LANG: *(Drinking.)* He's somewhere between heaven and earth, Mr Quiet.

MR QUIET: What's he doing here? Does he pay his water bills? Is he registered with the authorities?

GIBLET: He's a ghost and that's that. He doesn't use the bathroom or the loo.

MRS SWEET: My husband wants to tell us something.

(Chandelier.)

GIBLET: Good grief. Otto, look at that...

MRS SWEET: Georgie, don't disturb him.

GIBLET: Shut up.

MRS SWEET: Is that how you speak to a lady?

GIBLET: To you, not to a lady.

MRS SWEET: Did you hear that, gentlemen? He says I'm not a lady, the brute!

(Chandelier.)

MR QUIET: It would be good to give everyone a bit of paper. They could write down questions to put to the deceased and I'll direct the discussion.

MRS SWEET: I'm in favour.

LANG: What I'd like to know, ladies and gentlemen...

MR QUIET: Nothing eccentric. We still don't know where we stand.

GIBLET: He's crazy.

MRS SWEET: Georgie, don't spoil things.

GIBLET: Shall we sing?

LANG: Can I, too?

MR QUIET: I'm waiting for questions for the deceased!

MRS SWEET: They've already asked, haven't they?

(Chandelier.)

MRS SWEET: It seems he agrees.

MR QUIET: But with what?

GIBLET: That doesn't matter. The main thing is, he doesn't object.

LANG: I won't say one way or the other, but I'm right, you'll see.

MR QUIET: What about her?

MRS SWEET: I've already asked.

MR QUIET: What?

MRS SWEET: Do you want my late husband to reply?

(The chandelier flickers urgently and goes out.)

MRS SWEET: Hurrah!

LANG: He's heard enough.

GIBLET: Where do you keep the light bulbs, Carmela?

MRS SWEET: Here.

GIBLET: Aha.

MRS SWEET: Ow.

(Deafening crash as something heavy falls.)

MRS SWEET: Georgie! Are you still alive?

GIBLET: I don't know.

MRS SWEET: That was mine.

MR QUIET: Really?

LANG: Certain to be.

GIBLET: What can you know about it?

LANG: I know what I know.

(More commotion - the light suddenly goes on.)

GIBLET: That's it.

MR QUIET: I can see that.

MRS SWEET: *(Claps.)* Georgie Giblet is a man of action.

MR QUIET: I should think that's enough for one day. I only came for... *(He reaches out for the cigarettes on the coffee table.)*

MRS SWEET: Do you want a fag, Raymond? Otti, pass him those cigarettes.

LANG: Don't call me Otti, you cow.

MR QUIET: Don't call him Otti, you cow!

GIBLET: He's crazy.

MRS SWEET: Okay, okay, Georgie, we heard you the first time. Raymond, you're the only man here.

GIBLET, LANG: *(In chorus.)* Do you mind! That really is too much.

MR QUIET: Depends for whom.

MRS SWEET: Exactly.

MR QUIET: I suggest, gentlemen...

LANG: So far as I'm concerned, I don't object. Ever.

GIBLET: In that case I'm unanimously in favour.

MR QUIET: I wanted to suggest we should take our leave.

GIBLET, LANG: *(In chorus.)* Take our leave?

MR QUIET: It's high time.

LANG: You can't expect us to go along with that.

MRS SWEET: But you can go along without him.

GIBLET, LANG: Well, if that's how it is... *(They leave.)*

(The door bangs.)

MR QUIET: What's the matter with that door?

MRS SWEET: Probably the draught.

MR QUIET: What now?

MRS SWEET: That depends on you.

MR QUIET: And you?

MRS SWEET: Don't worry about me. I'm always in favour. You know how it is - what can a lonely woman do. Always by herself.

MR QUIET: I happen to know something about that.

MRS SWEET: Well, then, don't keep it to yourself. *(She unfastens her clothes and in the course of the following dialogue gradually strips naked.)*

MR QUIET: What's this meant to be? I only wanted... Where are the cigarettes?

MRS SWEET: Can I offer you one? *(She hands them to him.)*

MR QUIET: Thanks, I don't smoke, but I'll take the whole box... *(He hurriedly stuffs it into his pocket.)*

MRS SWEET: The box?

MR QUIET: With the camel.

MRS SWEET: With the picture of a camel. I didn't know you were into art.

MR QUIET: Nor did I. I can't afford good pictures and I don't need bad ones.

MRS SWEET: Nor good ones either.

MR QUIET: There's nothing like a good reproduction.

MRS SWEET: A picture should say something above all.

MR QUIET: To whom?

MRS SWEET: Not to whom, but what.

MR QUIET: You don't say!

MRS SWEET: In time you'll discover that only sensuous pictures make sense.

MR QUIET: Depends how you look at it.

MRS SWEET: Like this. (She places his hand on her bare breasts.)

MR QUIET: Carmela! What are you doing? Your heart is beating like mad. I really must be going. I've already got what I wanted.

MRS SWEET: I know. Let's not talk about it. It's more beautiful that way.

MR QUIET: Yes, but if...

MRS SWEET: What are you afraid of, Raymond?

MR QUIET: I'm afraid to tell you.

MRS SWEET: Go on...

MR QUIET: I've already got what I wanted!

MRS SWEET: So quickly?

MR QUIET: It seems quick to you?

MRS SWEET: Doesn't it to you?

MR QUIET: That's a matter of opinion.

MRS SWEET: True. In my opinion, it wasn't worth the effort.

MR QUIET: You're probably right. (*He takes the box of cigarettes out of his pocket and examines it.*) There's not many left in the box.

MRS SWEET: You brute! You idiot! Get out!

MR QUIET: Yes, dear lady. I'm going. It was a pleasure. Good night! (He leaves.)

(*The door bangs.*)

MRS SWEET: (*To the audience.*) What are you staring at? Why don't you go and light up, too?

ACT THREE

(*Evening - in MR QUIET's flat.*)

(The doorbell rings.)

SCENE 1

MR BOMB and MR QUIET.

BOMB: *(Enters, whistling to himself, and opens the front door.)* Good evening! Welcome. Come on in, please do!

MR QUIET: *(Can't believe his own ears, feels dizzy and stumbles, in an attempt to regain his balance he knocks over the Chinese vase in the hall.)*

(A loud crash.)

MR QUIET: I'm awfully sorry.

BOMB: No, I'm the one who's sorry. I'm very glad you accepted our invitation. Don't let it worry you. It was a worthless vase.

MR QUIET: But it was Chinese porcelain.

BOMB: No! Or could it be?! I doubt it. I inherited it from Auntie Amy. Typical of her. False teeth, imitation Chinese vase. That happens even in the best families.

MR QUIET: What a nice flat. I like it.

BOMB: We live simply. When Uncle Joseph died no one wanted the flat. Its upkeep is too expensive, you understand, and that doesn't suit anyone nowadays.

MR QUIET: Oh, I'd know how to use it. No doubt about that!

BOMB: Unfortunately it's not free. I must disappoint you.

MR QUIET: Sure. That was just the heart-felt sigh of a man with a hectic social life.

BOMB: Don't imagine it's not lively here. We're breeding - I mean bringing up - two children here. And that's no small matter. They need space for their healthy development.

MR QUIET: Of course.

BOMB: Please take a seat.

MR QUIET: And the lady of the house?

BOMB: Irene?

SCENE 2

MRS QUIET and those already present.

MRS QUIET: *(Entering.)* Yes? Did you call me, dear?

BOMB: Let me introduce you, this is my friend...

MRS QUIET: I guessed it would be.

BOMB: My wife.

MR QUIET: Your own? I thought so immediately. There's a resemblance...

MRS QUIET, MR QUIET: Glad to meet you.

MR QUIET: I'm glad, dear colleague.

BOMB: Dear?!

MR QUIET: Don't misunderstand me.

MRS QUIET: Will you have coffee?

MR QUIET: If I could trouble you. I admire you, madam. I sensed your presence in all the beauty and tidiness of your dwelling...

BOMB: You shouldn't be so eager to overlook my decisive contribution to the order and hievements in general in our household. Irene, be so kind and prepare that coffee.

MRS QUIET: *(Leaving.)* Just a minute, please.

SCENE 3

MR BOMB and MR QUIET.

BOMB: What would you say to some music?

MR QUIET: Adorable!

BOMB: As a well-balanced and self-assured man I shall deliberately overlook the ambiguity of your reply.

MR QUIET: I don't understand.

BOMB: Let's leave it at that. A little music? *(Turns on the radio.)*

(A loud rock song.)

MR QUIET: Marvellous. You keep up with the times.

BOMB: Oh, no. *(Tunes to another station.)*

(A sentimental evening melody.)

MR QUIET: That's it. Wonderful, really. Super. When I was...

BOMB: *(Interrupting him.)* Goya! *(He points to a picture.)*

MR QUIET: *(Taking a closer look.)* Incredible! He took your wedding photos?

BOMB: I mean... Here. *(He points elsewhere.)*

MR QUIET: Ah, I see. Splendid!

BOMB: This man confused his century and made nonsense of the history of art. Do you like?

MR QUIET: A masterpiece. Just as you say: confusion and nonsense.

BOMB: It's not creative disorder I was thinking of, but the greatness of his soul.

MR QUIET: Yes, in the realm of the soul some things are still not clear, but the number of problems is decreasing even in that area.

BOMB: I wanted to raise...

MR QUIET: I'll help you.

BOMB: ...the question of his artistic achievement.

MR QUIET: Artistic achievement, of course, not...

BOMB: Artistic achievement, of course.

MR QUIET: Of course, of course.

BOMB: That can't be held in question.

MR QUIET: Of course it can't. A masterpiece.

BOMB: Reproduction. Unfortunately, only a reproduction.

MR QUIET: But just like the real thing...

SCENE 4

MRS QUIET and those already present.

MRS QUIET: *(Entering.)* Here's your coffee.

MR QUIET: Mm, enticing!

BOMB: That's a rather inappropriate remark, don't you think?

MR QUIET: What do you mean?

BOMB: Enticing!

MR QUIET: On the contrary, I'd say divine. Really divine.

BOMB: I'm sorry, but don't you think your sighs are a little too intimate?

MR QUIET: I'm not in the habit of hiding my feelings. The smell really is enticing. Of the coffee, of course.

BOMB: I should hope so.

MR QUIET: Lovely tray. May I? I'll try it with my teeth.

BOMB: Help yourself. Feel at home. - Silver. Sure to be genuine. Of historical value, collectors Could be interested.

MR QUIET: Splendid piece.

MRS QUIET: Inherited from Uncle Joseph. We have a lot to thank him for.

MR QUIET: Not so much him as his passing away, mm?

BOMB: Will you have cognac or whisky?

MRS QUIET, MR QUIET: *(In chorus.)* Cognac.

BOMB: Quite right. I always like it when people know what they want.

MR QUIET: Knowing how to choose makes a good start.

MRS QUIET: It's best to agree.

MR QUIET: I must agree unconditionally with that.

BOMB: Yes, there's nothing better than unconditional agreement.

MR QUIET: I quite agree with you. That's as far as you can go. It's simply impossible to go any further. Cigarette? *(He suddenly takes out a box of cigarettes.)*

MRS QUIET: Goodness. Just as I thought.

BOMB: Irene, keep calm. Light up as you like, sir. We won't, thank you.

MR QUIET: *(Lights his cigarette and noisily exhales the smoke.)* Is anything the matter, madam?

MRS QUIET: *(Has a fit of coughing.)*

BOMB: *s* Pull yourself together, you silly cow! *(To him.)* Nothing's the matter, sir. Nothing worth mentioning.

MR QUIET: (*Exhaling smoke.*) Has she got tuberculosis?

BOMB: When did you last have an X-ray?

MRS QUIET: (*Suppressing her cough.*) I don't know. I can't remember. It was a long time ago. I'll go and see the doctor on Monday.

MR QUIET: Let's hope it isn't too late.

BOMB: Pull yourself together!

MRS QUIET: (*Clearing her throat.*) I envy you. That smoking. It's so manly.

BOMB: Get a grip on yourself.

MR QUIET: Let her be. At least we shall find out what she's got in her.

BOMB: (*Cuts in.*) I don't want to know anything about it. I've had quite enough of everything.

MRS QUIET: No, we can't complain about a shortage of anything. We have enough of everything.

BOMB: Complain - we really can't do that. How would it be if anyone kept complaining about something? Such attempts should be nipped in the bud.

MR QUIET: (*With cigarette in mouth.*) So far as I'm concerned, I believe you. There's no need to convince me. But there are others.

BOMB: Don't tell anyone. You know what people are like nowadays.

MR QUIET: (*Noisily exhaling smoke.*) I certainly do.

MRS QUIET: They'll envy us.

MR QUIET: Don't worry. Not a word. Not even to the boss. I'll deny everything if necessary. Even our meeting here today. I was careful. No one followed me.

MRS QUIET: That's good news. And it's very noble of you.

MR QUIET: That no one followed me?

BOMB: No, you probably meant the other thing, didn't you, dear?

MRS QUIET: Of course, the other thing. You haven't got any family commitments. You can afford those other things.

BOMB: That's your business. Nobody else's.

MR QUIET: Including yours.

MRS QUIET: We - I think I can speak for us both - don't blame you for anything. On the contrary, we're glad you accepted our invitation.

MR QUIET: And I'm glad someone has invited me at last. It's usually awkward without an invitation, you know. Sometimes the people living there are already asleep.

BOMB: We, too, have a confession to make.

MR QUIET: *(Taking another cigarette.)* It'll be just between you and me. I won't say a word to anyone.

MRS QUIET: You're our first...

MR QUIET: First?

MRS QUIET: First...

BOMB: You really are our first visitor.

MR QUIET: You don't mean to say...

MRS QUIET: There's nothing we can do to change that. You are our first...

BOMB: I swear she's telling the truth.

MR QUIET: Well, I'm amazed how well you two get on together. Who knows, knows, who doesn't goes.

BOMB: That's yours? Did you think that up?

MR QUIET: Well, on long winter evenings, when I was...

MRS QUIET: Alone. Abandoned. In a strange world.

MR QUIET: How did you know that, madam?

BOMB: Enough of that now you two. We've got too much ahead of us.

MR QUIET: Too much and for too long.

MRS QUIET: And for too long...

MR QUIET: You're right, cheers! *(He lifts his glass.)*

BOMB: To happiness and pleasure and ...

MRS QUIET: To your health!

ALL: *(They raise their glasses.)*

(A resounding clinking.)

MRS QUIET: *(Drinks her glass in one gulp and suddenly begins to sing a folk song in a hoarse voice as if she were drunk.)*

MR QUIET: Marvellous stuff. Fabulous. Sensational. Really super. When I was...

BOMB: Quite good.

MRS QUIET: *(Blabbering.)* Not bad. Pour me another! *(She sings)* Pour, damn you!

BOMB: *(Pouring.)* Here you are.

MR QUIET: *(Exhales smoke and crumples the empty box.)* Aha. That was the last cigarette. I think I've overdone it a bit today. Smoking, I mean.

MRS QUIET: Let's drink.

ALL: *(They raise their glasses.)*

(A resounding clinking.)

MRS QUIET: *(Pours the contents of her glass down her throat and begins to sing the same folk song.)*

BOMB: No trouble, Mr Bomb. I'll pop out for some cigarettes.

MR QUIET: It's already too late. The shops are shut.

MRS QUIET: Pour me another! *(He sings.)* Pour, damn you!

BOMB: *(Pouring.)* As you wish.

MR QUIET: I'll have to manage without tobacco.

ALL: *(They raise their glasses.)*

(A resounding clinking.)

MRS QUIET: *(Pours the contents of her glass down her throat, babbles incomprehensibly, dozes off in a sitting position, breathing heavily and snoring quietly, occasionally muttering something in her sleep.)*

BOMB: It really is no trouble. I'll go and get some cigarettes from my neighbour.

MRS QUIET: *(Mutters something.)*

MR QUIET: I couldn't let you do that. It's very late. All respectable people are in bed by now. We're not in Las Vegas. Unfortunately.

BOMB: Don't worry. My neighbour's a bit unusual. Life is only beginning for her at this time of night.

MR QUIET: I can tell you, people nowadays really are....

BOMB: We'd be wasting our breath talking about it. You know how it is...

MR QUIET: I heard something when I was...

BOMB: What can I tell you... You wouldn't believe your own eyes.

MR QUIET: You don't say, I mean do say. Have you ever been in her flat?

BOMB: Well, at this late hour we're usually asleep. Or in bed with this woman here... we read.

MR QUIET: Interesting, go on.

BOMB: But it's sometimes even difficult to believe one's own ears.

MR QUIET: Don't let me interrupt you.

BOMB: In short, company gathers there - like in Monte Carlo.

MR QUIET: And what about her husband?.

BOMB: Rich man. Now he's dead.

MR QUIET: Rich man now he's dead?

BOMB: He was rich before his death, now he's dead

MR QUIET: Splendid. So a poor man. What happened to him?

BOMB: He drank away his liver, then his brain as well. Or was it the other way round? Finally run over by a car. Unfortunate accident.

MR QUIET: Sad business. That sometimes happens to rich men. But his property... He can't have drunk it all away. I mean... He didn't have time. He must have left something.

BOMB: He sure did. A flat full of...

MR QUIET: Shh.

BOMB: Well, you must know.

MR QUIET: From hearsay, when I was... But I'd like to try it myself.

BOMB: Well, who wouldn't?

MR QUIET: Alone, otherwise?

BOMB: A widow.

MR QUIET: But alone, otherwise...?

BOMB: Very much so.

MR QUIET: Good. Excellent. Marvellous. Really super. In that case I have nothing against you going there. To look in. For those cigarettes.

MRS QUIET: *(Mutters something.)*

BOMB: Excuse me for a moment, please. My wife will entertain you in the meantime. *(He goes out.)*

MRS QUIET: *(Briefly mumbles something in her sleep.)*

MR QUIET: Sure! Sure! You go.

(The door bangs.)

MR QUIET: *(Runs into the hall.)*

(The sound of the door being hurriedly locked.)

MR QUIET: *(Comes back into the room and laughs out loud.)*

(Urgent ringing.)

MRS QUIET: *(Jumps to her feet, quite sober.)* What's happened?

MR QUIET: Nothing.

(Urgent ringing.)

MRS QUIET: What's that, Raymond?

MR QUIET: *(Dryly.)* The doorbell, Irene.

MRS QUIET: *(Slowly.)* The door...bell...?

MR QUIET: Yes. I'll dismantle it tomorrow.

(Urgent ringing, closing music.)

THE END

(A comic tragedy)

CHARACTERS

EMANUEL GROSS, a retired governor of a bank

EMILIA, his wife

The action takes place before breakfast.

FIRST AND LAST ACT

Morning - in a large house above the town.

(Introductory music, the wall clock strikes the quarter, birdsong and the ticking of the clock in the background.)

FIRST AND LAST SCENE

GROSS and EMILIA.

GROSS: *(Quietly gets out of bed, slips on a dressing gown with a coat of arms on it, yawns, wanders around the room touching things, making a little noise, humming a cheerful melody, finally he picks on the wardrobe as the object of his interest and opens it. The door creaks horribly.)*

EMILIA: *(Torn out of her sleep.)* For heavens sake, Emanuel! What was that?!

GROSS: *(Goes on looking through the wardrobe.)* Sorry, Emilia, dear. Go back to sleep.

EMILIA: What's going on?! Is anything the matter?

GROSS: No. Don't worry.

EMILIA: *(Lying on her back and talking to the ceiling.)* Strange. As if something had changed but I don't know what it is.

GROSS: It's probably that from today I am retired. Aren't you going to sleep any more? Should I wish you good morning?

EMILIA: Good morning to you, too, darling. *(She begins to stir and looks around her.)* Are you looking for something? In that cupboard.

GROSS: I think I should tidy things up here.

EMILIA: As you like. *(Sighs.)*

GROSS: You just rest.

EMILIA: I'll try.

GROSS: I won't disturb you. *(Sticks his head into the wardrobe.)*

EMILIA: *(Sleepily.)* Mm.

GROSS: *(Something rattles and he suddenly exclaims in delight.)* My gold watch!

EMILIA: What about it?

GROSS: I'd almost forgotten I had it.

EMILIA: *(Mildly irritated.)* Aha.

GROSS: *(Quietly.)* It's not going. Not saying anything. It doesn't care about time.

EMILIA: *(Half asleep.)* Perhaps it scorns it.

GROSS: *(Pulling out a black suit.)* My school graduation suit, too.

EMILIA: *(A bit cross.)* What about your school graduation suit?

GROSS: *(Looking over it with pleasure.)* My school graduation suit scorns time. It looks like new. I'll try it on.

EMILIA: *(Purrs in her sleep like a cat.)*

GROSS: *(Changes into it and poses in front of the mirror.)* There, ooh, what a figure. I can still get into it. A perfect fit. What do you say?

EMILIA: *(Automatically.)* Mm.

GROSS: Huh! What's this... Even mementoes can disappoint you. *(Looking disgruntled, he takes it off and drops it on the floor.)*

EMILIA: *(Sleepily.)* Do you need something, dear?

GROSS: On the contrary, dear. I don't need anything.

EMILIA: Not even my help?

GROSS: Not even this useless school graduation suit.

EMILIA: *(Suddenly alert, she lifts her head.)* And what are you going to do with it?

GROSS: Well... I don't know... We'll throw it away.

EMILIA: That's where you're mistaken. You'll hang that suit up again. In the cupboard. In its place.

GROSS: But, dear, you agreed I should tidy up here a bit.

EMILIA: Of course, but that doesn't mean you're going to throw away our property.

GROSS: That can't be classed as property. It's an ordinary school graduation suit.

EMILIA: It's not an ordinary school graduation suit, it's your school graduation suit.

GROSS: Of course, my forty-year-old extra-ordinary school graduation suit.

EMILIA: I'm glad you've got the point at last. And now you can happily hang it up where it belongs.

GROSS: It belongs in the dustbin. It's no use for anything.

EMILIA: It will still come in handy.

GROSS: For heaven's sake, don't be sentimental. We're not going to store things we don't need just because they remind us of something.

EMILIA: Why because they remind us of something?

GROSS: What other purpose could this useless suit serve?

EMILIA: It could be worn, of course.

GROSS: Where on earth could I show myself in such an ancient suit?

EMILIA: At a funeral.

GROSS: (*Surprised.*) Whose funeral?

EMILIA: You can guess.

GROSS: Has someone died?

EMILIA: Someone - that's for certain.

GROSS: And we're going to their funeral?

EMILIA: D'you want to go to just anyone's funeral?

GROSS: Me? I don't want to go to any funeral at all. It was you who thought that would be a splendid opportunity to use my school graduation suit.

EMILIA: And what don't you like about it?

GROSS: Everything.

EMILIA: Everyone will die one day, won't they?

GROSS: Yes, that's very true.

EMILIA: I'm glad you agree I'm right. And now you can put that suit away in the cupboard with a clear conscience.

GROSS: Tell me whose funeral I could show up at in this school graduation suit?

EMILIA: At your own.

(The clock on the wall is just striking the half hour.)

GROSS: So you seriously think I'm going to go to my own funeral in that school graduation suit, do you?

EMILIA: I don't know if you'll go there. I even doubt it, but you'll get there somehow. Leave that to the bereaved. That's my worry.

GROSS: Why do you think you'll outlive me? That's not clear to me.

EMILIA: You see how many things are still not clear in our perfect family life.

GROSS: I do see.

EMILIA: There was never anything wrong with your sight.

GROSS: That's a fact, but even so, it's not clear enough to me why you assume you'll outlive me.

EMILIA: You see, and yet it's so simple.

GROSS: Simple?

EMILIA: Simple.

GROSS: But in spite of that, I don't understand.

EMILIA: That's a good reason for thinking that you'll understand this suit belongs in the cupboard.

GROSS: Oh, no. That's out of the question.

EMILIA: Then tell me what, in your opinion, am I to bury you in? Be so kind and tell me, what I am meant to bury you in?

GROSS: You can't possibly think that you're going to bury me in my school graduation suit, which the moths have been living on for years and years.

EMILIA: You can't possibly think that I'm going to have a new one made for you. Made to measure, so you'll feel comfortable, is that it?

GROSS: To measure? I don't say that...

EMILIA: Look here...

GROSS: I'm looking.

EMILIA: Look here, dear!

EMILIA: Look, dear. Have you any idea how much trouble one ordinary funeral involves? You just can't imagine. To say nothing of the funeral of a retired governor of a bank! There simply won't be time for anything that's not absolutely essential, such as getting a new suit for the deceased.

GROSS: But why a new suit? Who said anything about a new suit? I've got a whole pile of decent black suits which haven't yet had time to live to such a venerable age.

EMILIA: Surely you don't want to be buried in an undignified manner in a suit which has not yet had time to live, or at least wait, until it's a venerable age? I shall bury you in that commemorative and truly historical garment, reminiscent of your eternal youth and lasting education.

GROSS: Out of the question.

EMILIA: You're mistaken, dear. I shall bury you in that school graduation suit. That will be right and proper - and economical. No one understands questions of economy better than you do.

GROSS: It's not possible to save on everything and under every circumstance. There are times in life when magnanimity is called for, when economic interests do not have priority.

EMILIA: If I hadn't known you so well for so many years, I'd probably believe you. But I know those are only empty words.

GROSS: That's not fair. That really hurts.

EMILIA: Can you explain to me why we have looked after your ceremonial school graduation suit all these years? Why you have denied yourself all kinds of pleasures all your life, just so as to keep your slim figure?

GROSS: But that's completely different. Those are things that matter to a person, they're to do with your aim in life.

EMILIA: You're right. My aim just now is to make you understand the value of this school graduation suit of yours. My conscience won't allow me to throw it away, just because I happen to have taken a momentary dislike to it. I have spent my whole life in the company of your suit. While you were away, it was everything to me.. It took your place. It stood in for you.

GROSS: And that's why you're going to bury me in it? Wouldn't the right thing be to keep it to remind you of me?

EMILIA: You haven't understood anything. You took turns in my private life. You and your school graduation suit. When one day you depart for ever, both of you will depart. In my eyes and in my heart you are joined by a bond that you can't begin to grasp. While you spent your time in bank offices, I lived my life with your suit.

GROSS: So that's why you're going to bury me in it. How strange fate is. And you'll put grandfather's glass eye in my pocket, to make my departure truly complete. So I'll disappear without trace, you could say. So nothing will be left to remind you of me. As if I had never been. But why not get rid of this suit here and now. I'm retired - there's no need for us to take turns any more.

EMILIA: Because I shall bury you in it.

GROSS: When will you bury me in it? Now? As you please! I'm dying at your command
(Lies on the carpet.)

EMILIA: There's no need to hurry. There's a time and a place for everything. Nature will take care of that.

GROSS: What do I care about your Nature?! I don't meddle with it, so be so kind and don't meddle with my school graduation suit. I'm going to throw it away now, without batting an eyelid. Do you hear that? And then one day in the future - in the very distant future - you will bury me in one of my decent black suits. Is that clear?!

EMILIA: Yes. It's clear. Quite clear. I shall bury you in whatever I consider suitable.

GROSS: At last you're talking sense.

EMILIA: And it's your school graduation suit that I consider suitable.

GROSS: You really are marvellous!

EMILIA: You've no idea how your affectionate words warm my heart.

GROSS: I'm glad you are beginning to be sensible about the misunderstanding you caused.

EMILIA: That's marvellous! The misunderstanding I caused?

GROSS: Of course. What's so surprising about that?

EMILIA: I can't believe my own ears. You couldn't possibly say that - ever. You just couldn't say such words. I mean, the idea wouldn't even occur to you.

GROSS: You're right. Until now I could never have said anything like that, or even secretly thought it, because it's a fact that until this moment you have never caused a misunderstanding. Never mind, it's never too late to start.

EMILIA: That's the kind of objective view you should take of your school graduation suit.

GROSS: Don't worry your head about my view. It would be more to the point to have your eyes tested, if you can't see this old suit has long been no use for anything, to say nothing of an occasion such as a funeral and my funeral in retirement in particular.

EMILIA: At your funeral what will be important is not so much that you were retired as what you were before your retirement.

GROSS: You needn't try so hard. I understand you very well. I know what you want to hint at, or rather, say. Yes, I'm no longer what I've been up to now. Either in society or in the family. And if you want me to spell it out: either in the bank or in the bedroom. But that still doesn't mean you have to punish me by disgracing me entirely - shamelessly getting your revenge at my very funeral. In public, in the eyes of my friends and colleagues.

EMILIA: Strange, how suspicious you suddenly are. You never used to be like that. You were overflowing with confidence and now you don't trust me. You assume I have dishonest intentions. You give your friends and colleagues as an excuse, while they'll probably never even live to see your funeral. Just think of them, with all their complaints and ailments.

GROSS: Strange, you were always overflowing with joie de vivre and now you talk of nothing but death.

EMILIA: I'm not talking about death. I'm talking about life, which will go on even after the death of your friends and colleagues.

GROSS: I'm sorry, but I don't intend to argue with you, and certainly not about such obvious things. It's the principle that matters to me. That suit will go in the dustbin. It won't hurt anyone. Believe me. No one will mourn. Not even you. I'll take care of that. After all, from today I shan't be going anywhere. I am retired, which is the same thing as resting, and I shall spend my retirement living with you in harmony. You must admit that suit no longer has a place in our household. I'm here - in person. It doesn't need to take anyone's place. To stand in for anyone.

EMILIA: We two have lived completely different lives. Even so, I would still claim that we've never stopped, and we never will stop, loving each other.

GROSS: I can't contradict you there. I should be contradicting myself.

EMILIA: I'm extremely glad you have at last, though in a roundabout fashion, reached a decision to hang your suit up in the cupboard.

GROSS: Forgive me, but my reputation as a man who under all circumstances put forward the right opinion and had it accepted, does not allow me to agree with you in this case. That suit belongs in the dustbin and nowhere else.

EMILIA: That's impossible.

GROSS: It's unavoidable. Because it's impossible to do up the trousers of this suit, since the moths have destroyed them - just at that delicate point.

EMILIA: That's no obstacle. So far as I know, the deceased's hands are held clasped in the coffin, so whether your trousers will or will not be buttoned up is neither here nor there.

(The wall clock strikes three quarters of the hour.)

GROSS: That's a fact. Actually, you're right there.

EMILIA: I admire you.

GROSS: And I adore you.

EMILIA: Give me a hug.

GROSS: I think that would be the right thing to do - hug before we part.

EMILIA: What?

GROSS: You heard right.

EMILIA: How can you know what I heard?

GROSS: If you heard what I said, then it isn't that hard for me to discover what you heard.

EMILIA: I heard - hug before we part.

GROSS: You see, you heard right.

EMILIA: You really said that?

GROSS: Things being as serious as they are, we can't go on like this.

EMILIA: But a moment ago you said I was right.

GROSS: That's just it. This is the end. I'm leaving. This time once and for all.

EMILIA: Just like that? All of a sudden? Without your breakfast?

GROSS: Calm down, don't make a scene.

EMILIA: That sounds better. I'll get your breakfast.

GROSS: No, I'll get yours and gladly and for the last time.

EMILIA: That's out of the question. I don't want breakfast for the last time.

GROSS: You're not afraid I'll poison you, are you?

EMILIA: You've already poisoned my life with boredom.

GROSS: What do you mean?

EMILIA: Do as you like. I'll be back with your breakfast in a moment.

GROSS: Be careful - with that breakfast. That's my job. In the meantime, you do what you like here.

EMILIA: You've never made breakfast in your life. You've never even been in the kitchen all your life. You won't even find your way there!

GROSS: Maybe it will take me a while, but you can put up with that, if you have put up with me for so many years.

EMILIA: I've put up without you for so many years, but I probably won't be able to put up with you for a minute.

GROSS: That's why I'm leaving for the kitchen - to make your breakfast.

EMILIA: What's up with you? I've never seen you like that.

GROSS: I shall put a nice, final end to your boring life. At last you will experience something you never ever dreamed of.

EMILIA: You know I didn't mean it like that. Our life together was always ideal.

GROSS: I'm glad to hear that.

EMILIA: Good. And now just hang your school graduation suit back in the cupboard.

GROSS: What did you say?

EMILIA: Nothing, just put your suit back in the cupboard and, if you want to, get my breakfast.

GROSS: Breakfast for you is a wasted investment. I'll do it here and now. I'll get it over with at once. *(Strangling her.)*

EMILIA: *(Screaming.)* Help!

GROSS: I'll help you! *(Continues to strangle her.)*

EMILIA: *(Stops screaming and slowly drops to the floor.)*

(Birdsong and the ticking of the clock.)

GROSS: You see, Emilia, and it was such a happy marriage. Was it worth dying - for a school graduation suit? Now I don't really have to throw it away. Now you won't bury me in it anyway. Because it won't be you who buries me.

EMILIA: *(Jumping to her feet and hitting him on the head with his own bust.)* Yes I will! *(Looking alternately at the bust and at her husband.)* That's obvious suicide. *(She lifts the suit up from the floor and shows it to Gross, stretched out there.)* You see - now it will come in

handy, and you would have thrown it away, just like that, for nothing. *(Turns to go into the kitchen.)* At last I can get the breakfast undisturbed. *(Ridiculing.)* Will you have some, darling?

GROSS: *(Slowly rising like a ghost.)* Yes, dear. *(Grasps the suit in her hands.)*

BOTH: *(They pull on it until they tear it in half - each falls in the opposite direction, holding on to their part of the suit - they remain lying motionless on the carpet and after a while seem to be talking to the ceiling.)*

GROSS: I'm glad we have at last decided that we have together managed this seemingly insoluble problem. Now no one doubts what must be done with the remains of my school graduation suit.

EMILIA: Yes, intelligent people always find a way out. Just this once you can make the breakfast while I sew up your school graduation suit.

BOTH: *(Suddenly they get up on all fours like wild beasts, poised tensely, waiting their opportunity.)*

(Birdsong and the ticking of the clock, the clock on the wall strikes the hour, closing music.)

THE END

The Trap
(A play in five acts)

CHARACTERS:

ADAM ALBERT, a damned intellectual

ANN, his wife

ADAM ALBERT JR., their son

MARY, his wife

RUDOLF FRIEMANN SR. and JR., a cadre with potential

JULIUS MUL, a born loser

TWO MEN, uninvolved customers

SECRET POLICEMAN

NEWSBOY

(In the beginning there was a cafe and in it there were newspapers.)

PROLOGUE

(A confusion of flashing lights and shadows, the din of engines, gunfire, incomprehensible shouts - the sound fades out.)

ACT ONE

(In the cafe.)

(Music - the cafe piano.)

SCENE 1

ALBERT

ALBERT: (Enters through the swing doors at the back of the stage. The first ray of light shines through the half-open door, silhouetting the figure entering the room. With the arrival of ALBERT the empty cafe gradually emerges from the darkness, but for the time being the lighting is still very dim. ALBERT sits down at one of the tables and takes a newspaper from the wall in the traditional frame provided by cafes. At the moment when he opens the newspaper, the doors fly open and the room is flooded with light.)

SCENE 2

ALBERT, ANN, FRIEMANN, MUL, TWO MEN, SECRET POLICEMAN I and II, NEWSBOY.

(As the light comes on, the other protagonists enter the cafe.)

NEWSBOY: (While selling newspapers to those present, he calls out their headlines.) The storm's over! It's all over! The end of the war! The whole world is rejoicing! (He falls silent and sits down at an empty table.)

TWO MEN: (Two inconspicuous, taciturn men, who at the beginning communicate only by glancing at each other. They sit down together at a table in the background, from which they have a good view. From time to time they "comment" on what is happening with more expressive gestures and facial expressions.)

ANN: (Sits down next to her husband, ADAM ALBERT, in a way that suggests she has always been at his side.)

ALBERT: (Does not even lift his eyes - goes on reading his newspaper.)

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: (Enter together - moving clumsily like soldiers in heavy armour in their thick leather coats. They pause next to the table where ALBERT and his wife are sitting and stare at them for a while with rude curiosity.)

MR & MRS ALBERT: (Take no notice whatsoever of them.)

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: (After staring for a while, they each sit down at a different table near the ALBERTs. They both shift their chairs a little in their direction, openly listening in, even though MR and MRS ALBERT are still silent for the moment.)

FRIEMANN: *(Enters with MUL. Suddenly he hugs him and in an emotional voice cries out.)*
So it's all over for all of us!

MUL: *(Responds rather hesitantly to his embrace, patting him disdainfully.)* Yes, yes. And we've all still got it coming.

FRIEMANN: Some have, some haven't, chum. Depends who.

MUL : What do you mean by that? What are you getting at?

FRIEMANN: Don't worry - you'll see.

MUL : I'm rather afraid I will.

FRIEMANN: *(Stops patting him emotionally; he is still embracing him, but with his arms in the air as he stares at ALBERT)* Look! That's not...!

MUL : Not who?

FRIEMANN: Well, it is, actually.

MUL : *(Held in this strange embrace, he attempts to look in ALBERT's direction - this takes him a while and involves some grotesque movements. In the end he manages to wriggle out of the embrace.)* You're right, it is! Well, good to see you... Adam... Albert... our Slovak. What are you doing here? We haven't seen you in Prague for a good six years.

FRIEMANN: A bad six years, actually.

MUL : Yes, bad, very bad.

FRIEMANN: Depends for who.

MUL : What do you mean by that? What are you getting at?

FRIEMANN: Me? Nothing - I'm just a perspektívny káder.

ALBERT: A perspektívny káder? What's that?

FRIEMANN: Don't ask what, but who. I'm a perspektívny káder - a cadre with potential - who's more than that?!

ANN: *(Pronouncing the words with difficulty in her English accent.)* Per-spektívnyká-der...
(She looks inquiringly at ALBERT.)

FRIEMANN: Doesn't she understand Czech?

ALBERT: No, she doesn't.

FRIEMANN: She's not German, is she? *(He looks around cautiously.)* Maybe it wouldn't hurt to lynch her as a precaution.

MUL : You really are a cadre with potential.

FRIEMANN: Yes, I am. And that's always better than being that - you know - backward, reactionary - or whatever they call it.

MUL : Excuse my friend, madam. You know - he wasn't thinking...

FRIEMANN: What do you mean I wasn't thinking? I was thinking. I was thinking and I am thinking and I will think. And how? You've yet to see how, all of you! *(He bangs his fist on the table and shouts at ALBERT.)* To hell with you, you bourgeois nationalist!

ANN: *(Almost jumps up, then with typical English calm, she says.)* Excuse me, sir. I don't understand Czech.

FRIEMANN: What did she say? There must be something wrong with my hearing. I can't understand a word she says.

ALBERT: I'm sorry, gentlemen. My wife is English.

FRIEMANN: Born and bred?

ALBERT: Yes.

MUL : And a Slovak by marriage?

ALBERT: You know - I lived in London during the war.

FRIEMANN: Yes, life was easy there. But what about here? We were dying meanwhile.

MUL : Depends who?

FRIEMANN: That's more for me to ask - depends who?

MUL : Okay, let's leave it at that.

ALBERT: Gentlemen! Allow me to introduce my wife. Ann, meet my friends: Julius Mul.

MUL : *(Bowing.)* At your service.

ALBERT: ...Rudolf Friemann.

FRIEMANN: In person. *(Points to himself.)* That's me. So now you know who I am. But you've yet to know what I'm like - all of you - you'll see. *(Snatches the newspaper from ALBERT and points a finger at it.)* They'll write about me here... no, not about me... I'll do the writing myself. Me, personally. *(Pointing to himself again.)* Let me look - is there nothing here about me? *(He quickly leafs through the newspaper.)* You can translate it all for her word for word. *(He points first at ANN and then at ALBERT.)*

ANN: *(Looks inquiringly at her husband.)*

ALBERT: It's OK.

FRIEMANN: That's all of it? You've translated it all for her - word for word? Well, that's what I call a concise language. And it tells you a lot. Its okay - and that's that. But otherwise it's a bourgeois language, even though allied - therefore against Hitler. We'll show him!

MUL : Don't start that again.

FRIEMANN: Why shouldn't I? I can afford to. Unlike some people.

MUL : What do you mean by that...

FRIEMANN: (*Cuts in.*) The same as always.

MUL : Then you'd better not say it.

FRIEMANN: I will say it. Deliberately. I have freedom of speech. I've as much freedom as I like. Up to here. (*With a gesture up to his eyes, he shows how much freedom he has.*)

MUL : Alright, alright, I didn't say anything.

FRIEMANN: Yes, you did. I heard you. With my own ears. (*He points to himself.*) But you'll soon stop blabbing - you and your reactional social class.

MUL: (*Corrects him, with emphatic articulation.*) Reactionary.

FRIEMANN: That's what you said! You, personally. (*He points a finger at him.*)

MUL: (*Turns politely to ALBERT.*) Otherwise, what's new in the world?

ALBERT: Oh, the same everywhere - the end of the war.

MUL: Yes, it's boring, nothing's happening anywhere. And what about you two?

ALBERT: (*Turning to ANN.*) Can I tell him?

ANN: Of course.

FRIEMANN: (*Poking a finger in his ear.*) I've been cut off again!

ALBERT: We're expecting a baby.

FRIEMANN: And where is it now?

ALBERT: On the way.

FRIEMANN: Here? Outside? (*Pointing to the door.*)

ALBERT: Here. (*Pointing to his wife's abdomen.*)

MUL : Ach - so!

FRIEMANN: *(To MUL.)* Stop that! Who wants to hear that fascist language?

MUL : *(To MR and MRS ALBERT.)* Congratulations. God bless you both!

FRIEMANN: Be so kind as to leave God out of this.

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: *(Suddenly getting up and speaking in chorus.)* What did you say?

FRIEMANN: That...

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: *(Interrupting him.)* Not you... you! *(Turning to MUL)*

MUL : Me? Nothing.

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: *(Raising their voices.)* What did you say?

MUL : That I...

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: That will be used against you, too. We arrest you for propagating fascism and collaboration with the language of occupying forces. We have witnesses.

ALBERT: Gentlemen - this is a misunderstanding. No one here heard anything like that.

FRIEMANN: I did. I heard it. Me, personally. *(Pointing at himself.)*

ALBERT: *(Gets up and grasps FRIEMANN by the neck.)* You swine!

FRIEMANN: Yes, I am a swine, but one with potential. Unlike some others.

MUL : Which others?

FRIEMANN: You two.

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: *(Suddenly placing their hands on ALBERT's shoulders.)*
You'll come with us, too.

(Darkness.)

ACT TWO

(In the cafe.)

(Music - the cafe piano.)

SCENE 1

ALBERT

ALBERT: (Enters through the swing doors at the back of the stage. The first ray of light shines through the half-open door, silhouetting the figure entering the room. With the arrival of ALBERT the empty cafe gradually emerges from the darkness, but for the time being the lighting is still very dim. ALBERT sits down at one of the tables and takes a newspaper from the wall in the traditional frame provided by cafes. At the moment when he opens the newspaper, the doors fly open and the room is flooded with light)

SCENE 2

ALBERT, ANN, FRIEMANN, TWO MEN, SECRET POLICEMAN I and II, NEWSBOY.

(As the light comes on, the other protagonists enter the cafe.)

NEWSBOY: (While selling newspapers to those present, he calls out their headlines.) The dice are cast! It's break or bust! The cup is overflowing! The time has come! (He falls silent and sits down at an empty table.)

TWO MEN: (Two inconspicuous, taciturn men, who at the beginning communicate only by glancing at each other. They sit down together at a table in the background, from which they have a good view. From time to time they "comment" on what is happening with more expressive gestures and facial expressions.)

ANN: (Clearly in an advanced stage of pregnancy - sits down next to her husband ALBERT in a way that suggests she has always been at his side.)

ALBERT: (Doesn't even look up - goes on reading his newspaper.)

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: (Enter together - moving clumsily like soldiers in heavy armour in their thick leather coats. They pause next to the table where ALBERT and his wife are sitting and stare at them for a while with rude curiosity.)

MR & MRS ALBERT: (Take no notice whatsoever of them.)

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: (After staring for a while, they each sit down at a different table near the ALBERTS. They both shift their chairs a little in their direction, openly listening in, even though Mr and Mrs ALBERT are still silent for the moment.)

FRIEMANN: (Approaches the table where Mr and Mrs ALBERT are sitting. He stands in silence for a while, watching them and making various faces and gestures. Suddenly grasps ALBERT by the shoulder, pulling him up and embracing him and calling out in an emotional voice.) What are you doing here? I haven't seen you in Prague for a good six months.

ALBERT: (Standing in the embrace as stiff as a post.) A bad, very bad six months.

FRIEMANN: (Doesn't stop embracing him, just tightens his grip on him.) Mind what you say! What do you mean by that?

ALBERT: I was in jail. First in Pankrác, and then in Leopoldova. Hell on earth.

FRIEMANN: And what had you done?

ALBERT: Nothing.

FRIEMANN: Don't believe it. They couldn't imprison an innocent man in our new country. Don't try that one on me. All you have to do is confess and I'll forgive you in advance. We're old friends - even if we are still young.

ALBERT: A confession. That's what they've been trying to get from me the whole of the last six months.

FRIEMANN: And so? Did you confess?

ALBERT: No.

FRIEMANN: Quite right. A confession is an incriminating circumstance. Actually you needn't confess anything, even to me. But don't tell anyone you were in prison. Is that clear? Don't spread any hostile propaganda here and everything will be alright. *(Hugs him tighter and pats him harder)* I'm glad we've come to a friendly agreement. Kharasho?

ALBERT: OK.

FRIEMANN: *(Releasing him from his embrace, but still holding his arms wide around ALBERT.)* No provocation now. You know what you've just promised me... Keep to that, please.

ALBERT: *(Fed up.)* Alright, alright.

FRIEMANN: Good. Good. So we've got that over.

ALBERT: *(Responds rather hesitantly to his embrace, patting him disdainfully.)* Yes, yes. And we've still got it coming.

FRIEMANN: It was just a little misunderstanding. You see, in the end it was all explained. We're all human, after all.

ALBERT: And where is our mutual friend, Julius Mul?

FRIEMANN: *(Stops embracing him, for a moment he stands with his arms in the air, then shrugs helplessly.)* Well, that was a rather more serious misunderstanding. He was hanged. But I - personally *(Points to himself.)* - had nothing to do with that misfortune.

ALBERT: What do you mean, you didn't? I was there when he was arrested...

FRIEMANN: You've been imagining things again. It must be another of your mistakes. Humans are fallible creatures.

ALBERT: I was an eye witness at his arrest.

FRIEMANN: Don't be a witness. Why should you be a witness? Do you think being a witness is fun? Quite the opposite - it involves all kinds of unpleasantness. Haven't you had enough of that?

ALBERT: I have.

FRIEMANN: You see. Concentrate on the more attractive sides of life.

ALBERT: But what about justice?

FRIEMANN: I've already told you - don't provoke. Do you want to subvert this young regime? Do you want to give western agencies an excuse for sabotage? Do you want to support world imperialism?

ALBERT: No, I don't. I want justice.

FRIEMANN: Then don't want it. And you'll be left in peace. Once and for all. Haven't you got anything else to think about? Think about your wife. Think hard. (*Indicating ANN.*) When it comes to that, you could have made a better choice. Are all English women such hags?

ALBERT: Do you mind...

FRIEMANN: Alright, alright, you can keep her. No one's going to take her from you. Who'd want her, anyway. (*Looking quizzically at ANN.*) Looks as if you're still expecting an offspring. Blahozelám, madam. (*Holds out his hand.*)

ANN: (*To ALBERT.*) What did he say?

ALBERT: (*To her.*) Congratulations.

ANN: Oh, thank you!

FRIEMANN: (*To ALBERT.*) What did she say?

ALBERT: (*To him.*) She thanks you.

FRIEMANN: Don't mention it. It was nothing. One word of congratulation - one handshake - nothing to make a fuss about. Just normal. The usual approach. Nothing exceptional. No flowers, no music, no Pioneers. (*He pats them both on the shoulders at the same time.*) I share your happiness, friends. Quite unofficially, quite informally, I would say - truly sincerely. That's how I like you! Heads up and march boldly on - to a brighter future. (*Suddenly stops patting them.*) Now that was something extra. A little addition to my congratulations. I hope you were satisfied with this little civil ceremony. I've already had some practice. Ever since I've been... of course, you know... a public servant. Me, personally. (*Points to himself.*) When I go somewhere in person, it's no ordinary event. That's why this now is also a special occasion. It will all go down in history. Ha, not only in history, but in literature, too.

(*Snaps his fingers at the NEWSBOY.*)

NEWSBOY: *(Quickly gets up from the table and hurries over to FRIEMANN, hands out the newspapers, taking small change in return and calling out the headlines.)* Saboteurs unmasked! Conspiracy against peace! Preparations for a Third World War!

FRIEMANN: *(Takes one of the newspapers and points to it.)* They're writing about me here. Me, personally. *(Points a finger at himself - turns towards the NEWSBOY.)* Read out the other headlines, where they're talking about me.

NEWSBOY: *(Quickly leafs through a newspaper and calls out.)* Ode to new times! A song of peace! Young people delighted!

FRIEMANN: *(Reprimanding him.)* Enough, enough. We can't have you encouraging a cult of my personality.

NEWSBOY: *(Falls silent, shrugs his shoulders and goes on selling his newspapers, then sits down at his empty table.)*

FRIEMANN: As I have indicated - I am a great man. But we won't say any more about that. It would be in bad taste. You have to have a sense of proportion. In everything. That's why we'll bring this embarrassing episode to an end. But every ending should be surprising and at the same time should contain the seeds of something new. And that is what your ending will be like, dear Adam Albert. You degenerate intellectual, you agent of world imperialism and bourgeois nationalist. We - and all the working class with us, of which we are the vanguard and iron fist - will not let ourselves be deceived by your false humanism and sweet talk of freedom.

ALBERT: But I haven't said anything.

FRIEMANN: So much the worse. Don't make things more difficult for yourself. You're in a bad enough situation as it is without making it even worse.

ALBERT: I really didn't say anything... not a word...

FRIEMANN: Did you hear that, comrades! This time he's refusing to testify. A hardened enemy!

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: *(Suddenly get up and speak in chorus.)* We've got the message. We know what our duty is. *(They pull out their revolvers, releasing their catches simultaneously and put them to each side of ALBERT's head.)*

ALBERT: *(Just silently gesticulates, his eyes vainly begging the audience for help.)*

FRIEMANN: *(Both looking at ALBERT, but addressing the audience.)* Yes, we decide everything. That is, the cadres decide everything. But I can't help it - I'm only a party functionary. I'm not to blame for anything. I don't make any decisions. All the decisions are collective ones. Although, it's true, I only have to snap my fingers. Look, like this... *(Snaps his fingers loudly.)*

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: *(Suddenly fire.)*

ALBERT: *(Falls to the ground, dead.)*

ANN: *(Slowly gets to her feet, wants to say something and desperately tries to get a sound out, but sways and falls to the ground in a faint.)*

FRIEMANN: *(Not even looking at ANN and ALBERT) I told you - don't be a witness, so now you're not one. Nothing less, nothing more. Nothing's the matter. Nothing's happened. I didn't see anything, anyway. I heard something, it's true. But, you know how it is - hearsay - that doesn't count. People really do say all kinds of things. You know how it is. Words are said and bread is eaten. Anyone who believes gossip is - in my own personal opinion *(Points to himself.)* - not to be trusted. *(He smiles kindly and politely bows to the audience.)**

(Darkness. The urgent cries of a newborn baby are heard in the dark.)

ACT THREE

(In the cafe.)

(Music - the cafe piano.)

SCENE 1

ALBERT JR.

ALBERT JR.: *(Enters through the swing doors at the back of the stage. The first ray of light shines through the half-open door, silhouetting the figure entering the room. With the arrival of ALBERT the empty cafe gradually emerges from the darkness, but for the time being the lighting is still very dim. ALBERT sits down at one of the tables and takes a newspaper from the wall in the traditional frame provided by cafes. At the moment when he opens the newspaper, the doors fly open and the room is flooded with light.)*

SCENE 2

ALBERT JR., FRIEMANN, TWO MEN, SECRET POLICEMAN I and II, NEWSBOY.

(As the light comes on, the other protagonists enter the cafe.)

NEWSBOY: *(While selling newspapers to those present, he calls out their headlines.) International warming! Political thaw! Fresh prospects! *(He falls silent and sits down at an empty table.)**

TWO MEN: *(Two inconspicuous, taciturn men, who at the beginning communicate only by glancing at each other. They sit down together at a table in the background, from which they have a good view. From time to time they "comment" on what is happening with more expressive gestures and facial expressions.)*

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: *(Enter together in unbuttoned leather coats. They pause beside ALBERT JR. and look him up and down. They can't believe their own eyes. They both pull a photograph out of their pockets and compare ALBERT JR. with the person in the photograph - they communicate with exaggerated gestures.)*

ALBERT JR.: *(Takes no notice whatsoever of them.)*

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: *(After staring for a while, they simultaneously take off their leather coats and put them on chairs at two tables near ALBERT JR. Underneath their coats they have smart overalls with ironed-in creases, ties and patent-leather shoes. They straighten the collars of their overalls and suddenly sit down next to their coats. They both shift their chairs a little to listen in, although for the moment ALBERT JR. says nothing.)*

FRIEMANN: *(Approaches the table where ALBERT JR. is sitting. He stands there in silence for a while, observing him while making a variety of gestures and facial expressions. All of a sudden he grasps ALBERT JR. by the shoulders, pulls him up and cries in an emotional voice.)* What are you doing here? You're the spitting image of your father. Allow me to embrace you. Your father was my best friend. I haven't seen you since you were born and that must be a good twenty years.

ALBERT JR.: *(Standing in his embrace as stiff as a post.)* Bad, very bad years.

FRIEMANN: *(Does not stop embracing him, but just grips him tighter.)* Yes, you're quite right.

ALBERT JR.: First I grew up in a children's home and then in an Approved School. Absolute hell!

FRIEMANN: Sad. And what did you do?

ALBERT JR.: Nothing.

FRIEMANN: I don't believe it. I meant, its unbelievable. It really is hard to believe. Only those who've experienced it for themselves can believe it, others can never understand. What was life like for us here? Ugh! Its awful just to think about it, to say nothing of remembering it - especially some of the ugly details. Unbearable, disgusting, intolerable, horrible.

ALBERT JR.: You speak as if from my heart.

FRIEMANN: With all my heart. I'm a soft person, good-hearted through and through, I love my near and dear - and my enemies, too - although I don't have any enemies, you understand. I get on with everyone. I wear my heart on my sleeve. On this one - look! *(He holds out his arm)*

ALBERT JR.: *(Looking at his extended arm.)* What have you got there?

FRIEMANN: Cramp.

ALBERT JR.: My sympathies.

FRIEMANN: I need them. Thank you, young man. *(He moves his extended arm and uses it to embrace ALBERT.)* Well, it's all over now.

ALBERT JR.: *(Responding rather hesitantly to his embrace and patting him reservedly.)* Yes, yes. And we've all still got it coming.

FRIEMANN: True - and now I've got a son like you. He's about to leave for London - as an assistant to the editor of our biggest newspaper. Yes, this is a new age, there are new opportunities. To be frank - we should make the best of them. Take the bull by the horns. You know what I'm getting at. Well, I'm not getting at anything, I'm just saying - I'm a gentle kind of guy. The future belongs to the young, we need new faces, we are all in urgent need of new faces. You know what I mean.

ALBERT JR.: I don't even know my own fate. What happened to my parents? To this very day no one has openly spoken about it - at most someone's just hinted something.

FRIEMANN: *(Stops embracing him, draws his arms away, but leaves them in the air for a moment before giving a helpless shrug.)* Well, it was like this... Those were hard times, they left deep scars on everyone, they were cruel to everyone, everyone was affected in some way. It's hard to say now who more. But you can be assured, your parents were honest and courageous people and they remained so to the very end. Believe me - it's their best friend who's telling you this. We won't poke around in old wounds, they're still too fresh and painful. Your parents' lives were short, but full of energy and determination to change the world. You know how it is - when you fell a forest, splinters must fly. They met an undeserved, tragic fate.

(He begins to gesticulate theatrically.)

Let's look, however - though the tears in our eyes are not yet dry - to a more beautiful future and brighter tomorrows.

(He realises what he is saying and continues in an unofficial tone.) Look - I'm a man of a certain standing, I can do something for you and I'd be glad to. I'll arrange for you to study in London. You'll get to know my son. I'm sure you'll get on fine together and you'll be the best of friends. That'll be nice - just in the way of our family traditions.

ALBERT JR.: *(His eyes light up.)* You'd do that for me...

FRIEMANN: What wouldn't I do for you - would do, I mean, of course. Everything! And when I say everything, I mean everything. And when I once say something I, personally. *(Points to himself.)* then that means something.

(Once more he stops himself and for a while he looks in turn at ALBERT and at the finger he is pointing at himself. Then he recovers and continues a little more naturally.) I can see you are a bright boy, talented - after your father. You should see the world, so that you can see further than the end of your nose.

ALBERT JR.: I can't believe, although I do want to believe, I want very much to believe my own ears. But it seems to me it's only a dream and I'll suddenly wake up to relentless reality.

FRIEMANN: By the way - when you're abroad, if you count your grant, plus some casual earnings while you're studying - it comes to more than the pay of the prime minister here.

ALBERT JR.: That's not what I'm thinking about, but...

FRIEMANN: (*Interrupts him.*) You needn't thank me. There's one more little thing - it's just a formality. When someone goes to study abroad, it's - only naturally - subject to certain administrative rules, bureaucratic approval.

ALBERT JR.: What do I have to do?

FRIEMANN: Nothing important. You fill out some forms, questionnaires, sign them and that's that. Ordinary official routine. Nowadays no one is very concerned about anything. And if by any chance anyone wanted to be petty, then I'm here, I personally...

(*He points at himself for a moment, then realises again.*) ...I'll arrange it. I still have some connections in quite high places. And you know what that means?

ALBERT JR.: What?

FRIEMANN: It's always better to have good connections than to be an informer.

ALBERT JR.: (*Pronounces it as if he had heard the word for the first time in his life.*) An informer?

FRIEMANN: An informer. It's a kind of... service. You deliver things.

ALBERT JR.: To the home?

FRIEMANN: More to an office, to a certain institution.

ALBERT JR.: To a children's home?

FRIEMANN: No, no - not to a retirement home either.

ALBERT JR.: Then to whose home?

FRIEMANN: It's really a delivery into someone's ears, you know. Certain people deliver certain things to someone's ears...

ALBERT JR.: Cotton wool?

FRIEMANN: No - that's for something else, not for the ears.

ALBERT JR.: (*Shrugs helplessly*) Who, what, to whom, ...

FRIEMANN: Exactly. I can see you are quick on the uptake. Who, what, to whom - that's what informing is.

ALBERT JR.: I'm not with you.

FRIEMANN: Don't let that worry you. Communication between people - that's what's hardest. Let's leave it at that. We'll move on to concrete tasks.

ALBERT JR.: Tasks?

FRIEMANN: (*Breathes in deeply.*) Concrete tasks. In London you and my son will found an informal club of politically active young people. And you will nominate my son to be its president.

ALBERT JR.: Is that all? Then it really is nothing much.

FRIEMANN: You will hold meetings in... (*He pulls a slip of paper out of his pocket.*) ... George's Inn.

ALBERT JR.: In a club for law students?

FRIEMANN: Another kind of club - a pub.

ALBERT JR.: Ah, I see. Now it's quite clear. You needn't explain any more. And we two are going to meet there. I mean, not we two... (*He points to himself and to FRIEMANN.*)... but we two - me and your son.

FRIEMANN: Well - not only you two. The whole of your informal club of politically active young people. You'll spend your time discussing.

ALBERT JR.: What about?

FRIEMANN: All kinds of things. Whatever happens to come to mind. Girls, for example.

ALBERT JR.: If girls happen to come to mind, of course.

FRIEMANN: Exactly. If it happens to be a new joke, a new bit of gossip - or even a rumour about something - then... you understand...

ALBERT JR.: (*Intones in a clear, sing-song voice.*) And of what use would a rumour be to us?

FRIEMANN: Well, now - that's a philosophical question. What use is such a rumour to anyone - that is, one rumour or any other?

ALBERT JR.: I suspect it's better to have a tumour than a rumour.

FRIEMANN: I've got it. A rumour - that's what the informer has to deliver.

ALBERT JR.: (*Gives him a long, puzzled look.*)

FRIEMANN: (*Stares into his eyes and articulates slowly, emphatically and clearly.*) People will come to you...

ALBERT JR.: (*Interrupts him.*) I'm not deaf, you can speak faster. I just don't understand.

FRIEMANN: (*Reels off.*) Girls will come to see you.

ALBERT JR.: Girls?

FRIEMANN: Not only girls - boys as well.

ALBERT JR.: Boys? To see me?

FRIEMANN: Not only boys and not only to see you. These hard times must have been harder for you than for others.

ALBERT JR.: That's certainly true.

FRIEMANN: At last we have agreed about something at least. That's something to build on. Listen carefully. Various people will come to see you, students, journalists.

ALBERT JR.: (*Proudly, flattered.*) Students, journalists - all the better class - and they'll come to see me. I'm raring to go. How do you get to London?

FRIEMANN: I'll see to the formalities at once. (*He snaps his fingers.*)

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: (*They are at ALBERT JR.'s side at once. They pull various forms, notebooks, pens, rubber stamps, even a table lamp and a small, portable writing desk out of their overalls and immediately get down to official business. After a minute or two they hand ALBERT JR. some documents.*)

ALBERT JR.: (*Sits at the table like a man of the world, magnanimously handing out autographs on the papers put before him, while muttering to himself.*) One here, that's it, and here, one there. This is the life - at last I know why I was born, why I came into this world, maybe even why I was in fact created.

FRIEMANN: (*Not even looking at them, smiling into the audience, whom he addresses.*) Easy as pie. Better than I'd expected. And once more I'm absolutely innocent. I haven't seen anything, although I did hear something, but... of course, you know how it is with hearsay - I explained that to you once before.

(*Darkness.*)

ACT FOUR

(*In a cafe.*)

(*Music - the cafe piano.*)

SCENE 1

ALBERT JR.

ALBERT JR.: (*Enters through the swing doors at the back of the stage. The first ray of light shines through the half-open door, silhouetting the figure entering the room. With the arrival of ALBERT the empty cafe gradually emerges from the darkness, but for the time being the lighting is still very dim. ALBERT sits down at one of the tables and takes a newspaper from the wall in the traditional frame provided by cafes. At the moment when he opens the newspaper, the doors fly open and the room is flooded with light*)

SCENE 2

ALBERT Jr., FRIEMANN, TWO MEN, SECRET POLICEMAN I and II, NEWSBOY.

(As the light comes on, the other protagonists enter the cafe.)

NEWSBOY: *(While selling newspapers to those present, he calls out their headlines.)*
Tragedy of little Czechoslovakia! Army in the heart of Europe! The world at a crossroads!
(He falls silent and sits down at an empty table.) TWO MEN: *(Two inconspicuous, taciturn men, who at the beginning communicate only by glancing at each other. They sit down together at a table in the background, from which they have a good view. From time to time they "comment" on what is happening with more expressive gestures and facial expressions.)*

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: *(Enter together in elegant suits, with leather coats slung casually over their arms. They pause beside ALBERT JR. and for a while look him up and down with rude curiosity.)*

ALBERT JR.: *(Takes no notice whatsoever of them.)*

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: *(After staring for a while, they simultaneously take off their leather coats and put them on chairs at two tables near ALBERT JR. They straighten the collars of their suits and suddenly sit down next to their coats. They both shift their chairs a little to listen in, although for the moment ALBERT JR. says nothing.)*

FRIEMANN ML.: *(Approaches the table where ALBERT JR. is sitting. He stands there in silence for a while, pulls out a photograph, compares ALBERT JR. with the person in the photograph. He reacts with a variety of gestures and facial expressions. All of a sudden he grasps ALBERT JR. by the shoulders, pulls him up, embraces him and cries in an emotional voice.)* What are you doing here? *(He adds under his breath.)* His face distinctly - of course, I know what you're doing here. Shh - in this place even the walls have ears - ah - and I...

(He pulls both his ears and after a while sticks out his tongue as well. Then he continues normally.)

Allow me to embrace you. It was my father's wish and yours... would no doubt have wished it, too. We are destined to be best friends, although I have never seen you in my life - and that will indeed be a good twenty years.

ALBERT JR.: *(Standing in his embrace as stiff as a post)* Bad, a very bad twenty years.

FRIEMANN ML.: *(Does not stop embracing him, just grips him tightly.)* Bad, bad... I don't want to hear that word. Do you hear? I don't want to hear it. And don't forget that I've got you in my grip - that is - I mean in my arms! And that's even worse - I mean, better.

ALBERT JR.: Depends for whom.

FRIEMANN ML.: Exactly. You should know who you're up against. I hope you know who I am. Because I *(Points with his finger at himself around ALBERT JR.'s head.)* I am someone... *(He then points up at the ceiling.)* ...and the son of someone.

ALBERT JR.: In contrast to me.

FRIEMANN ML.: Exactly. I see you're quick on the uptake. You're only a person to be used. For our higher interests. How did you recognise me, actually?

ALBERT JR.: Like father, like son.

FRIEMANN ML.: Is that a new motto? No one informed me about that.

ALBERT JR.: No, it's a popular wise saying.

FRIEMANN ML.: If it's popular, it's the people's. Nowadays everything's the people's - including democracy. But I go along with that, although not all peoples are the same. You know what I mean...

ALBERT JR.: I don't.

FRIEMANN ML.: All the better and don't even try to understand, because you could pay for it. Although, from the look of you, you'll pay for it anyway. Well, we've got the introductions over, I suppose.

ALBERT JR.: *(Rather hesitantly returning his embrace and patting him without enthusiasm.)* Yes, yes. And we've all the rest to come.

FRIEMANN ML.: *(Stops embracing him, holds his arms wide in the air for a while and then shrugs hopelessly.)* Well, we've got that over. Let's get down to analysing the situation. Things have moved on somewhat, therefore there's a little change in plan. I am going back home and you will stay here. Now that we've met and, I'm not afraid to say, have got to know each other - or, what's more - have become the best of friends - then I can return home with an easy mind to carry out...

ALBERT JR.: Carry out?

FRIEMANN ML.: Carry out. Don't start that again. Father warned me of those tricks of yours. I'm going home to carry out the tasks assigned me.

ALBERT JR.: And what about me?

FRIEMANN ML.: You'll carry yours out here. You'll study and at the same time you'll carry out your own special tasks. Or do it the other way round - it's all the same.

ALBERT JR.: I can do it the other way round? I'm glad about that. Then I'll work for the other side, but you'd better not tell anyone else that. Who knows what they'd think of me.

FRIEMANN ML.: The very worst.

ALBERT JR.: And I really shouldn't like that.

FRIEMANN ML.: That's one thing we can agree on. (*He hands him a piece of paper.*) Here you have the addresses of your relatives in this country. I hope you know your mother was English.

ALBERT JR.: I don't.

FRIEMANN ML.: Well, you've just found out, so get used to the idea. There are worse things in the world.

ALBERT JR.: Mm - so I'm an Englishman as well - at least half of me is. I wonder what else I'm going to find out about myself.

FRIEMANN ML.: Now you'll find this out about yourself: from your new, old English relatives - on your mother's side, of course - you will learn all about your parents' fate. You'll write a book about it.

ALBERT JR.: But I can't write, I can hardly sign my name. I graduated from a children's home and approved school.

FRIEMANN ML.: In this pleasant English setting, you'll easily catch up. We haven't left anything to chance. (*He hands him another bit of paper.*) This book will be a bestseller and you'll become a world-famous writer. In a hotel room at this address you'll find your book already written - all typed out neat and legible. Two copies. Just in case you should lose one.

ALBERT JR.: It's divided into two parts?

FRIEMANN ML.: You will drive me - me, personally - (*Pointing a finger at himself.*) round the bend. The only thing divided into two parts in that hotel room will be the cupboard. (*Slowly, emphatically, articulating clearly.*) The book will be in one volume - but two copies.

ALBERT JR.: You can speak faster - I'm not deaf, I just don't understand.

FRIEMANN ML.: Then everything is as it should be. You can get down...

ALBERT JR.: Get down? I'm not standing on anything.

FRIEMANN ML.: Shut up, follow your instructions and get down to work.

ALBERT JR.: (*With a decidedly English accent.*) OK.

FRIEMANN ML.: Fine. I can see you're going to be a trueborn Englishman - even if you were born elsewhere.

ALBERT JR.: So, with my command of the language I can now found that informal debating club.

FRIEMANN ML.: The plan has changed - with regard to the way the situation has developed. Now we need you to found a press agency, Albert Press, dedicated to the tragic memory of your father.

ALBERT JR.: (*Whoops in delight like a child.*) I'm going to have an agency, I'm going to have an agency. (*Suddenly becomes serious.*) And what will I do there?

FRIEMANN ML.: Inform the world about the troubled situation in your homeland.

ALBERT JR.: About the situation in England?

FRIEMANN ML.: No, in Czechoslovakia.

ALBERT JR.: Aha. Of course - in Czechoslovakia. I've got so many homelands all of a sudden, I can't sort them out. By the way, how many homelands do you have to have to consider yourself on... an international level?

FRIEMANN ML.: That doesn't depend only on the number, but on the quality of your homelands. If it's the United States, for example - one's enough.

ALBERT JR.: And there are over fifty of them.

FRIEMANN ML.: It sure is hard talking to you.

ALBERT JR.: I never said it was easy.

FRIEMANN ML.: (*Alternately pointing a finger at ALBERT JR. and himself.*) Your agency will receive reports - from me.

ALBERT JR.: Reports?

FRIEMANN ML.: Photographs, articles, films.

ALBERT JR.: (*Looks at him, puzzled.*)

FRIEMANN ML.: (*Explains emphatically.*) I am going home...

ALBERT JR.: Yes.

FRIEMANN ML.: ...where they will sack me from my newspaper.

ALBERT JR.: Yes.

FRIEMANN ML.: I shall no longer be an editor of a party daily, I shall be a dissident.

ALBERT JR.: Oh, no.

FRIEMANN ML.: Oh, yes.

ALBERT JR.: And what's that - a dissident? Is it more than a dentist?

FRIEMANN ML.: Much more.

ALBERT JR.: And is it better paid?

FRIEMANN ML.: Much better.

ALBERT JR.: Couldn't I be a dissident, too - at least part time?

FRIEMANN ML.: No, you couldn't. On the contrary - *(He points a finger alternately at ALBERT JR. and himself.)* you will pay me fees from your agency for my materials.

ALBERT JR.: And what about me? Where will I get the money from?

FRIEMANN ML.: For heaven's sake - don't concern yourself about that. Don't let yourself even think about it.

ALBERT JR.: Well, I'm not really concerned. The main thing is we'll have money - we'll spend it - and that's that.

FRIEMANN ML.: Quite right. That's the attitude I wanted to hear.

ALBERT JR.: You wanted to hear an attitude?

FRIEMANN ML.: Yes, but now I don't want to hear anything. *(He snaps his fingers and calls.)* A farewell photograph!

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: *(Suddenly jump up and, drawing cameras out from inside their suits, they take photographs from all possible angles with the help of flashlights.)*

(Strobe lights)

FRIEMANN ML. and ALBERT JR.: *(Pose in the light of the strobes. The spectator sees their uncoordinated movements. They shake hands and hug each other. They bow.)*

(Darkness.)

ACT FIVE

(In the cafe.)

(Music - the cafe piano.)

SCENE 1

ALBERT JR.

ALBERT JR.: *(Enters through the swing doors at the back of the stage. The first ray of light shines through the half-open door, silhouetting the figure entering the room. With the arrival of ALBERT the empty cafe gradually emerges from the darkness, but for the time being the lighting is still very dim. ALBERT sits down at one of the tables and takes a newspaper from the wall in the traditional frame provided by cafes. At the moment when he opens the newspaper, the doors fly open and the room is flooded with light.)*

SCENE 2

ALBERT JR., MARY, FRIEMANN (Sr. and Jr. in one person), TWO MEN, SECRET POLICEMAN I and II, NEWSBOY.

(As the light comes on, the other protagonists enter the cafe.)

NEWSBOY: *(While selling newspapers to those present, he calls out their headlines.)*
Tolerance! Understanding! Decency! It's here! That's what we want! We're not like them! The president to the castle!

ALBERT JR.: Which one?

NEWSBOY: Ours.

ALBERT JR.: And that's which one?

NEWSBOY: What does it matter? *(He falls silent and sits down at an empty table.)*

TWO MEN: *(Two inconspicuous, taciturn men, who at the beginning communicate only by glancing at each other. They sit down together at a table in the background, from which they have a good view. From time to time they "comment" on what is happening with more expressive gestures and facial expressions.)*

MARY: *(Obviously in an advanced stage of pregnancy, sits down next to her husband, ALBERT JR., in a way that suggests she has always been at his side.)*

ALBERT JR.: *(Doesn't even lift his eyes - goes on reading his newspaper.)*

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: *(Enter together in fashionable leather jackets. They pause beside the table where the ALBERTS are sitting. For a while they look them up and down with impolite curiosity.)*

MR & MRS ALBERT: *(Take no notice whatsoever of them.)*

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: *(After staring for a while they take off their leather jackets and hang them over chairs at two tables near the ALBERTS. They are now wearing pullovers with badges depicting smiling faces pinned to them. They straighten the collars on their shirts and sit down at the same time next to their leather jackets. Both of them shift their chairs a little towards the object of their interest and listen in, although the ALBERTS are silent for the moment.)*

FRIEMANN: *(Enters in a pullover with a badge depicting a smiling face pinned on it. He approaches the table where the ALBERTS are sitting. He stands observing them for a while, making all kinds of faces and gestures. Suddenly he grabs ALBERT JR. by the shoulders, pulls him up, hugs him and in an emotional voice cries.)* What are you doing here? I haven't seen you in Prague for a good twenty years.

ALBERT JR.: *(Standing in the embrace as stiff as a post.)* Good, really good...

FRIEMANN: *(Still embracing him, but suddenly gripping him tightly.)* Mind what you say! What do you mean by that?

ALBERT JR.: I've been - as you know - in England for all of twenty years (*He takes a deep breath.*) Life in London. A paradise on earth.

FRIEMANN: Don't provoke! Here we've had to suffer for you, too. (*He points at himself and at the secret policemen.*)

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: (*Nod in agreement, then after a while they both pull out thick wads of banknotes and ask simultaneously.*) Anyone want to buy some foreign currency? (*As no one responds, they put the banknotes away again.*)

FRIEMANN: I was in jail - I, personally. (*He points for a long time at himself.*)

ALBERT JR.: Three days - I informed the whole world about it through my press agency.

FRIEMANN: Yes, yes. So it's all over at last.

ALBERT JR.: (*Responds rather hesitantly to his embrace, patting him somewhat reluctantly.*) Yes, yes. And we've still got it all coming.

FRIEMANN: You're right there - you emigrants have had prosperity and have got more to come. And all we've had and will have is a load of shit.

ALBERT JR.: Where's your father?

FRIEMANN: (*Stops embracing him, for a moment stands with his arms in the air and then shrugs his shoulders helplessly.*) Do you mean - where is my son?

ALBERT JR.: You've got a son? Congratulations.

FRIEMANN: No, I haven't. How can I explain it? You know - when it comes to business, I wouldn't know my own brother - to say nothing of father or son or... holy ghost. (*Stops himself and looks round cautiously.*) I said nothing and you heard nothing. Everyone's got so many ears here, it's a disgrace.

ALBERT JR.: Wait a moment, wait a moment. I don't understand at all.

FRIEMANN: Excellent. The important thing is for no one to understand anything. You asked me whether I am my father or my son. And I don't really know myself who I am. That's how it is - it's hard to say who I really am. And even harder to say what we're all like in fact. But if you ask me directly - is it you? I can answer with a clear conscience - yes, it's me. Me - personally. (*Points to himself for a while*) Do you recognise me?

ALBERT JR.: No, I don't.

FRIEMANN: Don't let that worry you. After all we've been through I can't recognise myself either. You have to play too many roles in life. Some of them suit us better than others. I don't know about you - but the role I'm playing at a given moment is always the one that suits me best. But basically... (*He begins to be theatrical.*) ...in the depths of my sensitive soul, the centre of my vulnerable heart... (*He continues in a somewhat more natural tone.*) ...I am what I always was - a cadre with potential.

ALBERT JR.: A cadre with potential? Is that your particular role?

FRIEMANN: That's me all over - nothing more, nothing less.

MARY: *(With a very English accent.)* Oh, yes. Less is sometimes more. I understood.

FRIEMANN: Where did you dig up this strange creature? Over there, in England? *(He looks her up and down.)* Well - what a sight. And I've an idea she's pregnant. By you?

MARY: *(Slaps his face as quick as lightening)* I said I understood.

FRIEMANN: She's a Russian spy! Where could an Englishwoman learn Czech?!

ALBERT JR.: That's not Czech, it's Slovak.

FRIEMANN: Stop that communist nationalism. What are you blathering about? Slovak doesn't exist. It's just an artificial language which no one speaks - to say nothing of pregnant English women.

ALBERT JR.: A moment ago you were claiming she's a Russian spy.

FRIEMANN: Do you mind - how can you talk like that about your wife? Or isn't she your wife? What we have to put up with nowadays! *(Stops himself)* Goodness, what did I say. Life's better now than ever before.

ALBERT JR.: I can see that. *(He flicks a finger at the face on the badge pinned to FRIEMANN's pullover.)*

FRIEMANN: Don't start that! I'm warning you - don't start that with me. And don't provoke me! Do you know who you're talking to? Do you know who I am and what power I have? Do you know who I - personally *(Points to himself.)* represent, in fact, embody? The revolution.

ALBERT JR.: Which one?

FRIEMANN: All of them, and therefore this one, too. *(He snaps his fingers at the NEWSBOY.)*

NEWSBOY: *(Jumps up, hurries over to FRIEMANN, begins selling papers to those present and calling out the headlines.)* Saboteurs unmasked! Conspiracy against democracy! Subversion of the young regime! Secret agents in parliament!

FRIEMANN: *(Takes a paper and points to it.)* This is about me. Me, personally. *(He points to himself - turns towards the NEWSBOY.)* Call out different headlines now we're talking about me.

NEWSBOY: *(Quickly turns the pages of a newspaper and calls out.)* First league hockey results! Shortage of snow! The weather forecast for tomorrow - cloudy with sunny intervals! The president went to a pub! The president went into the garden to grill sausages! The president went...

FRIEMANN: (*Reprimands him.*) Enough, that's enough! We're not going to encourage the cult of anyone's personality here! I, personally. (*He points to himself.*) shall take care of that. And you'll find yourself working with a spade if you don't know what to read out from the papers.

NEWSBOY: (*Falls silent, quietly retires to his empty table.*)

FRIEMANN: Ugh! huh! That was a sample of the bad taste of these times. Let's put an end to this embarrassing episode. But every ending should be surprising and at the same time it should contain the seeds of something new. And such will be your end, dear Adam Albert Junior. After all, there must be a scapegoat and you can't expect it to be us. It'll be you - personally (*He points a finger at him.*) Do you know the laws of revolution?

ALBERT JR.: No.

FRIEMANN: (*Counts them off on his fingers.*) Revolutionary zeal. Realistic coming down to earth. The search for culprits. Punishment of the innocent. Decoration of non-participants. (*He turns to the secret policemen.*) He's yours!

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: (*Jump to their feet, pull out bunches of keys -jangle them and shout at ALBERT JR.*) Huh! Too late! You've had it! (*They continue as a background to the following dialogues of the other characters.*)

ALBERT JR.: (*Stands, silently gesticulating, his eyes pleading in vain for help from the audience.*)

(*The light in the room is gradually dimmed until there is half-darkness, only ALBERT JR. is standing in the spotlight, as if displayed in a cage for all to condemn.*)

FRIEMANN: (*Laughing.*) Yes, you have to know how to choose the role you want to play in life. Society is not divided from right to left, but from top to bottom. And from that point of view I always knew where my place was. That is, where all you have to do is snap your fingers. (*He snaps his fingers.*)

(*A noose falls on ALBERT JR. from above.*)

ALBERT JR.: (*Driven by his tragic fate, he gets up on a chair and puts the noose round his neck.*)

SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: (*Shouting and jangling their keys louder.*)

ALBERT JR.: (*Jumps from the chair - which leaves him hanging from the noose.*)

MARY: (*Gets up slowly, wants say something and for a moment desperately tries to utter a sound, loses consciousness, sways and falls to the ground.*)

FRIEMANN: (*Not even looking at ALBERT JR. and MARY.*) I can't even look - I'm a very sensitive person. What should I add? It'd be a waste of breath. But when you fell a forest - as I said before - I, personally (*He points a finger at himself.*) - splinters must fly. That's all I have to say.

TWO MEN: *(Calmly get up from their table, shake hands and speak in chorus.)* We've done our work perfectly. Nothing more, nothing less. *(They turn to the audience.)* Don't take it personally, its entirely a professional matter. *(They drink to each other.)* All in a good cause. The world will work together at last. With us. When the Turks conquered this territory long ago, they were far more cruel. We can happily leave for our great homeland to collect our medals and well-earned pensions. *(They leave.)*

FRIEMANN, SECRET POLICEMAN I and II: *(Pull out their cameras and, using flashlights, take photos of the TWO MEN as they depart.)*

TWO MEN: *(Pulling out their guns, they immediately shoot down all three, blow the smoke away - then speak simultaneously.)* No photographs. *(They look round the room full of dead bodies and add.)* A clear case of collective suicide.

(Dozens of newspapers come floating down onto the stage from above.)

(Darkness. Out of the darkness come the insistent cries of a newborn baby.)

THE END

1998

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