

Miro Gavran

ALL ABOUT MEN

- A Play -

www.mirogavran.com

Email: miro.gavran@zg-t.com.hr

First night: October 21, 2006 at the *Jan Palarik* Theatre in Trnava, Slovakia

Translation into Slovakian: Jan Jankovič

Directed by: Michal Babiak

Dramaturge: Mirka Čibenkova

Scenography: Jan Zavorsky

Costumes: Eva Farkašova

Stage Movement: Zuzana Šebova

Music Selection: Michal Babiak

Cast: PETER KOČIŠ
JOZEF BUJDAK
GREGOR KOLOŠKA

Characters:

FIRST STORY – *MATES*

IVO 40 years old

PAVLE 40 years old

ZOKI 40 years old

SECOND STORY - *FATHER*

JAN 32 years old

TOMO 30 years old

FATHER 60 years old

THIRD STORY – *STRIPPERS*

MALI (KID) 35 years old

RUDI 40 years old

MAX 45 years old

FOURTH STORY - *LOVE*

LEO 35 years old

DENNIS 42 years old

ROBERT 41 years old

FIFTH STORY – *SENIOR CITIZENS*

IVO 80 years old

PAVLE 80 years old

ZOKI 80 years old

Note for the director:

- All the roles are played by only three actors.
- Actor I plays Ivo, Jan, Mali and Leo.
- Actor II plays Pavle, Tomo, Rudi and Dennis.
- Actor III plays Zoki, Father, Max and Robert.
- The transitions from scene to scene should be carried out quickly. No major external «costume changes» of the particular characters is required, merely changes in a detail or two (eye-glasses, a scarf, wig, walking-stick...). What makes the character convincing should be given through the means of acting transformation, and not intervention in make-up and costume.
- It would be advisable that each story begins with a characteristic music motif.
- Each story should have its acting and directing rhythm, while the rhythm of the entire piece should suggest the fast nature of contemporary life.

MATES

Scene 1.

(Ivo and Pavle are working out at the health club, while Zoki looks on and tries to repeat from time to time what they are doing, even though it can be seen that he is not very good at it. The three of them are forty-year-olds who want to keep fit, despite their age.)

PAVLE: There's something wrong with my car.

ZOKI: What?

PAVLE: I don't know. I can tell there's something wrong by the sound it makes.

ZOKI: It's new. It should be alright.

PAVLE: That's what I find strange. The sound just changes all of a sudden while I'm driving.

IVO: You can't decide there's something wrong with a car just by the sound it makes. . . If everything else is alright, I can't see that the sound. . .

PAVLE: I'll have to take it in to be serviced. And I've got so much to do, I'm going crazy.

IVO: Let's go to the next piece of equipment.

(They move on to another gym apparatus.)

ZOKI: This is more interesting. But it's harder.

IVO: Continuity is what's important. You can't even miss one week without working out.

PAVLE: You hang around with us anyhow, so it's logical we go together to the gym.

ZOKI: I'm not sure I'm meant for this. . .

IVO: Even when we are travelling, in other cities, the two of us always ask about a health club.

ZOKI: I don't go anywhere anyway. . . I'm here because of my weight. Now that it's going up.

PAVLE: This isn't to take off weight. This is important to feel good – despite the kilos. It's important to be fit for your job and your mental state and for everything. I've got so used to this that I can't do without the gym any more. In any case, it's a matter of culture. I'm pleased you came with us today to try it out. I'm sure you'll like it. You have to take out a year's membership and see how it will change the quality of your life. You start to live differently.

ZOKI: Well, I'll see.

PAVLE: What's most important is that you don't give up in the first two weeks. Everyone goes through a minor crisis at the beginning with sore muscles. You take an Aspirin and that's that. Later, exercise becomes a routine, a necessity, and a real pleasure.

ZOKI: I know, I know. My Ena goes to the gym regularly. And she thinks I should do something with myself and these kilos.

PAVLE: If your wife works out, you have to join in. You have to keep up with her, you have to be an equal partner in everything – both physically and intellectually. And in every other way, too.

IVO: You married men are always competing with your wives.

PAVLE: It's not competing. You just don't get it. It's establishing a balance. A sense of togetherness.

IVO: Always competing. It's all competition. That's why I never got married. Why would I need a competitor in my bed

(Silence.)

ZOKI: Jura told me he was at your office on Monday.

PAVLE: He sold the flat, and came in to certify the papers.

ZOKI: He saw you had someone new in the office. He said she looked great. I didn't know you had taken on new staff.

PAVLE: She's been with me for a month now. If you could just see her – living sex. One for the books. When the clients see her – the men – they get all confused. They don't know why they've come to the notary's office, they drop their papers, start stuttering, and become as embarrassed as adolescents who find themselves alone with a woman for the first time.

IVO: You're exaggerating.

PAVLE: Not at all. She looks like a model.

ZOKI: What would you give her?

PAVLE: A straight A.

ZOKI: No, not that! How old is she?

PAVLE: Twenty-five. She's just got her degree. She's an intern with me.

IVO: You really are the lucky one.

PAVLE: I thought so, too, at the beginning, but now I see that it can be looked at from another aspect.

ZOKI: What are you talking about?

PAVLE: Listen guys, when I come to the office I can't concentrate on work any more. She wears deep décolletage, short skirts, net stockings – at first glance, the real thing. Anyone else dressed like that would look vulgar, but she's just erotic, unbearably sexually attractive.

IVO: What's the problem?

PAVLE: I can't settle down to work. She keeps drawing my attention away from my cases. There's something wild in the air when she's around. I have started to believe that she dresses like that for my benefit. She's casting a net to catch me, to drive me nuts with those long legs which reach up to her armpits.

IVO: Go for it, screw her and the problem's solved! I wouldn't hesitate for a moment.

PAVLE: Ah, no. I swore than I would never ever again take a tumble with anyone who worked for me. Never again! I can't even bear to think of the shit I went through eight years ago with that little Brigitte. I could hardly get rid of her. She was so possessive, she stuck to me like a thistle. My wife started getting suspicious – the little tart rang me at home all the time - some urgent business I had to handle - and then in the middle of the conversation she'd start panting as if we were on a hotline, whispering sweet nothings and charming obscenities. It was terrible! The worst thing was that she showed her inclinations towards me in front of my clients. As if by chance, she would touch me with her hand in front of them, or would look into my eyes without blinking – for a long, long time. She would lower her voice when speaking to me, switching over to some sort of intimate frequency. All in all, it was obvious from a mile away that we were having it off and it was only a matter of time before my wife found out. But luckily, I came to my senses and put on the brakes. I barely managed to shake her off.

IVO: Your problem is that you become too involved with your squeezes. That's why it all gets so complicated. You have to separate your emotional life from your sex life. Scientists established long ago that falling in love and love are only unpleasant chemical processes that never last more than two years and what is essential, in the light of those comprehensions, is that we master the mechanism of distance from the broads we screw. From the very beginning of a relationship, you have to let women know that. It's a matter of morals. You can't just give them a load of shit in the first month of seduction with lyrical fairytales, promising tenderness and emotions, and then suddenly put forward the distance theory when you manage to score the first time. That's out. You have to set up the emotional distance from the very beginning so there's no chance of her dreaming of moving in with you, of marriage, of the right to be possessive. I don't allow any of them to meddle in my life. It's even harder for me than for you married men because women hold out more hope for marriage with us bachelors.

PAVLE: That's all true in theory. But, if my new girl worked in your law office and swayed past you ten times a day, and started playing with that throaty voice, and you smelt the aroma of unfamiliar perfume, and were brought to a stage of a permanent month-long hard-on, all those theories of yours about distance would go by the board.

IVO: No, they wouldn't.

PAVLE: I don't agree.

Scene 2.

FATHER

.

(A living room. Father is sitting in the living room reading a newspaper. Father is sixty years old. His thirty-nine year old son, Jan, comes in holding a computer printout.)

JAN: Dad, Tom's e-mail has arrived.

FATHER: And. . . what does it say? Have you managed to talk him into coming to the fifth anniversary's of Mama's death?

JAN: Yes, I have. But. . . he says he doesn't want to sleep here. He's asked me to reserve a hotel for him.

FATHER: To reserve a hotel?

JAN: That's it.

FATHER: So he's still angry at me?

JAN: Looks like it. But he shouldn't be. That's just the way it is.

(Silence.)

JAN: I'm going to have a jog at Maximir.

FATHER: Alright.

JAN: I won't take my cell. If my girl rings, tell her it's still on for tomorrow.

FATHER: OK.

JAN: Can I see the horoscope.

(Father hands him the newspaper.)

FATHER: Here.

(Jan reads his stars.)

FATHER: Just one important thing. . . please. . . don't tell him about me.

JAN: But Dad, he has a right to know.

FATHER: No, please, don't. He's been away for five years – I want his stay in his homeland to be pleasant.

JAN: How can I keep quiet when. . .

FATHER: Please, you must do this for me, please don't tell him anything. That's all I ask. I don't think that's asking too much.

JAN: Alright then. . .although. . .

FATHER: You think he'll notice himself. . . I hope he won't.

(Silence.)

FATHER: Book him a hotel in our area, somewhere close by.

JAN: He asked to be at a hotel because he doesn't want to come here. . .he doesn't want to dig through «unpleasant memories» - that's what he wrote.

FATHER: And I'm his most unpleasant and most painful memory? I thought that time would change things, I thought he would stop acting like an offended adolescent.

(Silence.)

FATHER: I've thought up a way of getting him here, after we have been to the grave. I have to see him. Talk to him. He is still my son, just like you are, so that. . .

JAN. I don't think he'll want to. He definitely won't want to. You know what he's like. In any case, I can see from his e-mails that he won't agree.

FATHER: Think of something, make something up. Find a way to get him here.

JAN. I'll try!

Scene 3.

STRIPPERS

(Dressed in a chequered jacket, Max is sitting at a table in a nightclub, counting money. Rudi comes in.)

RUDI: Hey!

MAX: Hey!

RUDI: Sorry, Boss, I had to pick up those photos from Mali.

MAX: And where is the kid?

RUDI: He'll be here in five minutes. But I've got the photos.

(Rudi takes a large photograph out of a folder and puts it on the table in front of Max.)

RUDI: There, that's him. A cute, nice-looking kid. What d'ya say?

MAX: I'm counting, mate. Can't you see I'm counting?

(But Max casts a glance at the photo, notwithstanding.)

MAX: Where in the hell do you find them?

RUDI: In pubs. I used to walk around the corridors at the Employment Bureau thinking it would be simpler to register the new blokes there, but then I realised that the ones who go to the Bureau are still hopeful, they still think they can fix up their lives, that the State cares about them and all that shit. But now I know it's only in the pubs that you can find the ones who have nothing more to hope for.

MAX: Did you talk it over with him?

RUDI : Yes, I did. He signed with me. I'm his agent.

MAX: It better not be a cock-up.

RUDI: Ah no, don't you worry.

MAX: I can't afford a cock-up, or a bad production. The competition is growing in this town, and I have to be the best and the most reliable.

RUDI: Don't worry, Boss. I spoke with him twice.

MAX: Only twice?

RUDI: And I'll do it a third time. We can do it together.

MAX: The beginners are the worst. It's hard to talk them into it, and they change their minds easily. And Saturday's the day after tomorrow. The old crew has gone to Dubrovnik, there's some big festival on there, which means, in other words, that I have to rely on this rookie or cancel everything.

RUDI: Everything will be as we agreed. You'll be pleased.

MAX: I hope so. That will be the best thing for me – and for you.

(Mali comes in, with a cough.)

MALI: Good day.

RUDI: Ah, so you've arrived. . . Come over here! This is Max, the boss.

(Mali goes to Max and hold out his hand. Max does not take it, but continues counting the money.)

MAX: So, you're the one.

(Mali withdraws his hand that has been «suspended» in the air in front of Max.)

MALI: Yes.

MAX: Rudi has been telling me about you. You look OK.

(Silence.)

MAX: He's said good things about you. He's said you will be able to pull this off.

RUDI: I explained it all to him. He knows everything. And he agreed to everything. You'll be pleased, Boss.

MAX: I usually work with professionals. The best pros. I pay well, and expect the maximum for my money. I just like to know who I'm doing business with.

MALI: I need the money urgently, I have no other choice. I worked at the sawmill for six months, and got paid for two. Then I worked for a builder, but he still owes me money. I worked for six weeks. . . and my wife is sick, she has to have an operation, we have two small children and I'm ready. . .

MAX: Look, kid – I'm not a psychiatrist or a social worker. I am not interested in all your crap. Your problems are your problems. And if you're in the shit, I'm sure it's your own fault. All I'm interested in is my business, and nothing else. And I'm interested in whether you can do this job in a tip-top manner.

RUDI: He can do it.

MAX: I wasn't asking you. I want the kid to tell me loud and clear whether he can do it, or should I look for someone else. Well, baby-face, can you or can't you?

(Silence.)

MALI: I can do it, don't you worry.

MAX: OK. Be here on Saturday evening at nine, Rudi will give you instructions, and you'll have a chance at eleven to prove to yourself and to us that we haven't made a mistake.

MALI: Alright. But. . . er. . . what about the money?

MAX: As agreed. The same evening I'll give the money to Rudi, and he'll give you your share, as you have agreed.

RUDI: I get thirty percent.

MAX: I don't care about that. I'm not interested. That's your business. Go on then, you're free now. Get going!

(Mali walks towards the exit.)

RUDI: Wait for me in the cafe across the street. I'll come over when I'm finished with the boss.

MALI: I'll wait outside.

(Silence.)

RUDI: What, haven't you even got money for a coffee?

(Mali nods.)

RUDI: Here, order something for yourself while you are waiting for me.

(Rudi hands him a banknote. Mali takes it and goes out of the nightclub.)

MAX: You're putting your money on the paupers, the no-hopers – instead of the ones who love their work.

RUDI: Don't worry.

MAX: He looks shy and retiring to me.

RUDI: Women love the shy ones. We could announce him as «the shy stallion», that could demand a special price. Double prices for tickets – deflowering «the shy stallion». Get it? – Turning the minuses into pluses – that's the key to success.

MAX: Look Rudi, you're playing the American manager here, palming off an inexperienced kid and trying to talk me into something as risky as putting up prices because of the so-called «special programme». OK – I can agree to all that, I can take the risk, but all of it will be on your head. If anything goes wrong, it's your skin I'll be peeling off. Is that clear?

RUDI: Don't worry, Boss, it will be a night to remember.

Scene 4.

MATES

(Pavle is doing some serious exercise at the health club. He is one of those men who takes working on his body very seriously. Some time passes and then Ivo comes in.)

PAVLE: Hey!

IVO: Hey!

PAVLE: How are you?

IVO: Well. . . I'm fine.

(Ivo starts lifting weights.)

IVO: And you?

PAVLE: Me too.

(They are silent for a time, concentrating on their weights.)

IVO: No sign of Zoki – again.

PAVLE: No. Unfortunately. I should have a talk with him.

IVO: No, don't.

PAVLE: Why not?

IVO: Because it's obvious that he has given up on the gym.

PAVLE: What do you mean, given up?

IVO: Just that. Given up. He hasn't been here the last four times, and that means he's given up.

PAVLE: But he needs this. He was pleased enough at the beginning.

IVO: Pleased, like hell. The first time he came out of curiosity, to lose some weight. The second time it was because he would have felt uncomfortable with us if he hadn't come at least once more. And he came the third time because you rang him and asked why he hadn't been the whole week. That third time was the last. Most people give up after the third session. That the statistic.

PAVLE: That's not good for him. I have to ring him.

IVO: Don't!

PAVLE: It would be logical if he, like the two of us. . .

IVO: I knew from the very beginning that he would give up. From the very beginning.

PAVLE: Yes, but if we can. . .

IVO: He's not like us. He's been our friend for twenty years now, but he's not like us. And never will be. If he was like us, he wouldn't be working as a registrar at a high school. He wouldn't be working for peanuts and have a scruffy little two-room flat. He would be a notary public like you, or have a successful law office like me. In both cases, he'd be making big money, living in a better part of town, driving the best car, and it wouldn't be a problem for him to work on himself and his fitness and his appearance.

PAVLE: You're being cruel.

IVO: No, I'm not. I just being frank. We have made it while he always was - and still is - a loser. As a rule, cowards become losers and they remain losers. He never had the guts to do anything.

(They work out in silence. The silence lasts. Suddenly, Ivo pauses.)

IVO: Nothing to say?

(Pavle doesn't reply.)

IVO: Usually when you go quiet, I know you have something very important to say to me.

PAVLE: I have nothing to say.

IVO: Oh yes you do.

PAVLE: No I haven't, leave me alone.

IVO: I can see by your expression that you are angry at me and that you want to tell me something. Something I won't like. Are you angry at me because of all I said about Zoki?

PAVLE: Yes, I'm angry. After all, the three of us are friends.

IVO: But I only said what was true, no more than that.

PAVLE: I think that you are the last person in the world who has the right to speak about him in that way. Absolutely the last.

IVO: Why?

PAVLE: You know why.

(Silence.)

IVO: I don't know why. Tell me.

PAVLE: Come off it. . . leave me be.

IVO: I'm sorry but you've started something, now go ahead – let's have it.

PAVLE: I came here to work out, and I don't want to spoil this session. I want to do it to the end, without interruption. And there'll be time to tell you what I have to say, when the time is right. And that's what I planned.

IVO: Planned? Since when do you «plan» conversations with your friends. Surely you don't complete speeches at home, draft them out on paper to throw them in your friend's face. And that only when the time comes, so that you don't by any chance spoil your workout or your pleasant stroll.

PAVLE: You really are malicious. And just so you know: when you said the word «friend» now, I thought you had no right to use it. It sounds so shallow and empty coming out of your mouth.

IVO: But the three of us have been real friends for twenty years now. In any case, that's what you've always said. I don't know why you are so worked up just because I made a few sincere and truthful remarks about our loser friend.

PAVLE: I'm telling you. You haven't got the right to say anything negative about him at all. Because I know everything. I found out about everything.

(Silence.)

IVO: I have no idea what you are talking about.

PAVLE: Ah yes you do! How could you?

(Silence.)

IVO: Who told you?

PAVLE: Zoki told me that his Ena was at the Plitvice Lakes last weekend at a seminar for mathematics teachers. And you had mentioned that you would be spending last weekend at Plitvice. Then I remembered that Ena had gone to a weekend-seminar in Dubrovnik two months ago, and that you told me about a new fish restaurant that had recently be opened in Dubrovnik. . . And so – I put two and two together and realised that there was a host of coincidences associated with your trips to the same places visited at the same time by the wife of our friend, and that none of it could be just by chance. And today I met an acquaintance who works in the Ministry of Science and Education and asked him where they were getting the money for such frequent seminars for mathematics teachers, and he told me that there was only one this year, and that it wasn't in Dubrovnik but at Plitvice.

(Silence.)

IVO: Playing the private eye, huh?

PAVLE: You could have thought of something more convincing. But there you are – now you know why I am so angry at you and why it upsets me to hear you saying anything bad about Zoki. That's why I said that you have no moral right to talk about him in that way.

IVO: Come on, please. . . cut it out with the moralising. You're like me, you screw women just like I do, you don't care if they are married, engaged, divorced, widows, old or young.

PAVLE: But not if they are the wives of my friends! There has to be some sort of limit. They have two small kids, and my wife and I have two kids. Those of us who are married and have built up a family see things somewhat differently than you arrogant and self-centred bachelors. How could you seduce Ena? How could you do it?

IVO. I didn't seduce her. It was the other way around.

PAVLE: You don't say. And you – you poor innocent, you succumbed to the advances of an experienced seductress.

IVO: Believe me, I held out for quite some time. I noticed ages ago that she was looking at me with eyes brimming with desire. Every move she made, every word she said to me beneath her breath, concealed the call of a female in heat. We ran into each other by chance in town one day and she invited me for a drink. She starts going on about how tough her life with Zoki is, how she is a dynamic woman and he is so inert and uninterested in the life that was passing them by, that she has to make all the decisions herself, and that he can't make up his mind about anything. I'm telling you, she slobbered and moaned and groaned so much that I felt like a psychiatrist facing his worst patient. From what she said it was clear that she was thinking about leaving him, she was so unhappy, so. . . it's hard for me to put it into words. To cut it short: at one moment when she paused for breath, I smiled and looked into her eyes and jokingly asked: «Could all those problems be helped with a good fuck?» And in a second the self-pity left her eyes and they started to shine with a whorish sparkle, and she answered without any further thinking: «I think they could. . . » I had no way out – ten minutes later we were in the toilet of that cafe fucking our brains out. She set to as if she had never done it before, as if she was making up for all that she had missed out on. Later, we both decided we liked it and so we kept on with it. . .

PAVLE: Terrible!

IVO: Why? I did a good deed.

PAVLE: You screwed your friend's wife!

IVO: It could be said that she screwed me. Why don't you ever hear that the woman screwed the man. Even though it often is the case nowadays. And look, don't try to give me a guilty conscience because I don't have one, because I am convinced that, in the long run, what I did was a good thing.

PAVLE: A good deed?

IVO: Yes, a good deed. I saved their marriage. Everybody's happy now – their kids have got two parents, Ena is happy and pleased with her life and Zoki is free of her pressure. The two of them would never have solved the crisis in their marriage without my unselfish help. Otherwise, I don't like divorces, it's the kids that suffer the most, it's always the kids. My distant relative Tomo was already twenty years old when his parents divorced and he took it so hard that he left university and moved to Argentina. If nothing else, at least I saved Ena's and Zoki's children. I'm an authentic benefactor.

PAVLE: You're a wierdo.

Scene 5.

LOVE

(Robert is in the dining-room setting the table with plates, glasses, knives and forks, table napkins. . . Leo comes into the room.)

LEO: Hey!

ROBERT: Hey!

LEO: What smells so good?

ROBERT: Tortellini with cheese.

LEO: Great. It's a long time since we had tortellini.

ROBERT: They'll be ready in ten minutes.

LEO: But bake them well. I love it when the béchamel sauce gets a crust and goes brown.

ROBERT: How was it at work?

LEO: The usual. What about you?

ROBERT: The usual, too. Boring and uninteresting.

(Silence.)

ROBERT: I was worried you'd be late for lunch.

LEO: I zoomed around the shops a bit.

ROBERT: You didn't tell me you would. . .

LEO: I didn't plan to. Just got the urge.

ROBERT: Which shops?

LEO: I wanted to buy a new shirt. Something fine, for special occasions.

ROBERT: And did you find anything?

LEO: No, nothing. Everything was so ordinary, and cheap and nasty. They are either boring, for up-and-coming managers, or they're so way out that only immature kids would wear them. You simply can't find a fine, elegant man's shirt.

ROBERT: We could go together if you like, after work. I wanted to buy a new shirt, too.

LEO: Alright. We could do that.

(Silence)

LEO: Dennis phoned me.

ROBERT: Dennis called?

LEO: Yes.

ROBERT: On your cell phone?
LEO: No. On the office phone.
ROBERT: When?
LEO: Today.
(Silence)
ROBERT: So he called you?
LEO: Yes, he did.
ROBERT: I didn't think he would call you again.
LEO: Neither did I.
ROBERT: Wasn't he uncomfortable?
LEO: No. He talked as if. . . as if we hear each other every day. . . He was. . . how can I put it. . . he sounded normal, pleasant.
ROBERT: Pleasant?
LEO: Yes. What I mean is he made an effort to be pleasant.
ROBERT: And you?
LEO: What do you mean, me?
ROBERT: How did you sound?
LEO: Polite.
ROBERT: Polite?
LEO: Yes, polite. Civilised and polite.
ROBERT: After all that happened.
LEO: What else should I have done?
ROBERT: I would have sent him to the devil.
LEO: You know that I could never descend to that level.
ROBERT: And why not? If he had treated me the way he did you, I wouldn't have been able to resist it. I would have told him everything that he had coming to him.
LEO: Come on, Robby, it's not important any more. It's well in the past.
ROBERT: Are you sure it's in the past?
LEO: In the distant past.
ROBERT: And then why did that PAST call without warning after a year?
LEO: His photography exhibition is being opened next week, here in Zagreb.
ROBERT: In our town?
LEO: Yes, in our town.

ROBERT: When he went to Paris he said in a newspaper interview that this was a hick-town that didn't understand him, that couldn't follow him or comprehend his work, and now he's opening an exhibition in that hick-town. It can't be any bed of roses for him in Paris.

LEO: Quite the opposite, apparently – he's doing well, making money, and working for the top weeklies.

ROBERT: So he managed to do a bit of boasting.

LEO: I asked how he was getting on, so he told me.

ROBERT: And what did he want?

LEO: He'll only be here three days. . . he asked me if he could sleep over here.

ROBERT: Here where?

LEO: Here at my house. He says he's had enough of hotels and official. . . he knows I have two guest rooms. . . he said he would be pleased if we managed to talk.

ROBERT: And what did you say? What did you tell him?

LEO: Well. . . I told him he could. I assumed that you would have no objections.

ROBERT: Does he know about me?

LEO: He knows. I told him. But he knew before. He heard about us from someone. But that doesn't bother him. He'll be pleased to meet you finally.

ROBERT: But you didn't ask yourself if it would bother me. After all, the two of you used to be. . .

LEO: I'm sorry, Robby, but that was once long ago, and I didn't know what to say except: «Ok, come, sleep here, we'll talk», and so on. I thought we were civilised, above petty emotions, above jealousy.

ROBERT: I didn't say that I was jealous, because I'm not. But I do think you should have asked me first, and then told him if he could be a guest in this house which, true enough, belongs to you, but which is also our home and has been for nine months now.

LEO: Alright, I'm asking you now: do you have any objections to him sleeping here? If you are jealous, I will ring him and tell him that, unfortunately, it won't be possible at that time.

ROBERT: Come on, it's not a matter of me being jealous, but that it would have been the correct thing to do for you to ask me first, because of the relationship you two had before.

LEO: I'm sorry, but you didn't ask me anything when you went to the hospital to visit Boki.

ROBERT: That was quite different. Illness is something quite different. Sick people are above all categories.

LEO: But you still could have asked me. And you didn't.

(Silence.)

LEO: I agreed to him coming here before I was confused by his call, and his request. I didn't want to put off my answer, because he would have known that I wanted to consult with you first. And I didn't want him to think that I lacked freedom, I didn't want him to think that you cramped my style, that you were possessive. I wanted him to think that you were sophisticated, broad-minded and above everything. Don't let me down in front of him.

ROBERT: You know I would never do that, but. . . Dammit – what's that smell! That's the tortellini burning!

(Robert rushes towards the kitchen.)

Scene 6

FATHER

(Jan, Tom and Father come into the living room. They take off their mags.)

FATHER: It's become cold outside but it is still pleasant in the house.

JAN: I'm really glad that you've come to have a drink with us. With Father and me. It would have been silly for us to go to that cafe near the cemetery. It's much more comfortable here.

TOMO: I said one drink and that I could stay ten minutes. I have a meeting with friends from high school.

(Tomo looks around him in the way that people do when they see familiar places after a long absence.)

JAN: What is it? Nothing has changed in these five years. . . or in these ten years?

TOMO: Yes, everything is the same.

JAN: Dad, would you like to lie down for a while, or will you have a drink with us?

FATHER: I'll have a drink with you.

JAN: When you felt ill at the cemetery, I thought you should probably lie down.

FATHER: No, not now. I'll have a drink with you, and only after Tomo leaves. . .

TOMO: I won't stay long.

(Jan offers a glass to Father, and then to Tomo.)

JAN: Take your time, we have to have a drink together after such a long time.

(Jan pours a drink for Father, then Tomo, and then for himself.)

JAN: Welcome home, and good health!

FATHER: Good health!

TOMO: Good health!

(They stand there in silence, not knowing how to continue the conversation.)

JAN: I hope you liked the new family crypt. Dad engaged the best stonemasons. And that relief of Mother was done by a well-known sculptor. He has become famous here over the last few years. . . We gave him all the photos we had of Mother. I think he has caught her expression well. That's just what she was like.

(Silence.)

JAN: You were probably surprised when you saw such a large crypt and Mother's relief. It was all Dad's idea, he planned it all.

FATHER: But I consulted you.

JAN: I hope you like the way it has turned out.

(Silence.)

TOMO: No, I don't. I didn't like it.

JAN: Why?

TOMO: I don't like very luxuriant crypts that are too ornate. It's of no importance to me if a crypt is large, small, beautiful or ugly. In any case, they are never built because of the dead but because of the living. It's more important how we treated someone while they were alive than what sort of a crypt we built for them.

(An uncomfortable silence.)

TOMO: Well, I've had my drink, I'm off now!

FATHER. But you just got here. We haven't even talked.

TOMO: Forgive me, but I don't have the strength to talk with you. Jan talked me into coming, but I see now that I can't force myself to conduct a levelheaded, polite conversation with you. I shouldn't have come. It's better that I go before I say something I really don't want to.

FATHER: You haven't been here for five years. Since Mama's funeral. And you didn't come here before that for five long years – after your surprise move to Argentina. Why do I have to wait for another five years for you to tell me how you are getting on in Buenos Aires, what you are doing, do you have a girlfriend, are you happy in that country, in that city?

TOMO: I never noticed that you were interested in the happiness of the people living right beside you. You used to believe that everything had to be as you wanted. You were the one who decided how Mama and Jan and I were to live, and what to think. You never listened to how we felt and what we wanted. You knew better than the two of us how we should live and what we should study.

FATHER: I wanted to help you. I wanted all of you to be happy. If I tried to persuade you about anything, it was with good intentions, in the belief that it would be good for you.

TOMO: «Persuade us»? There was no persuasion. All I can remember are your demands and orders.

JAN: None of that is important now.

TOMO: It is important, it is important – and how. That’s what smothered the two of us, and smothered our mother even more. That's why they divorced. Mama went to live in Split only so that she wouldn't have to look at him. I was twenty, and that divorce of yours was like a flash of lightning out of a bright sky. Everything collapsed. In one day, our family fell apart. I was so shattered by it all that I dropped out of university and went to Argentina, just to get away from our broken family and our dictator father. In one day, everything came together for me in one logical whole. (Turning towards FATHER): All our quarrels and all the tension we lived with during the last months of our being together. And even though you both hid the reasons for all that incessant fighting, when Mama said that you had separated because of your unbearable character, and when you answered my direct question on who was to blame, you admitted that it was your fault – that was when I really came to hate you and understood that I didn't want to live in this house, or this city, or in this country. And you now are asking me to chat as though none of it had happened. And now you are asking me to respect you as a father and a man, but I can't act and pretend that it's pleasant to be in your company. It makes me sick just like you felt sick at the cemetery. That was your conscience waking up and even your stomach couldn't hold out at the grave of the woman who killed herself because of you.

JAN: That's enough!

TOMO: Why?

JAN: Because you have no right to talk like that about our father, about your father.

TOMO: Please don't you start teaching me what I should think and speak about our creator. Just don't start – you have always taken his side, you have always had lots of understanding for our dear father, the dictator who drove Mama to suicide. You are two years older than me, but you have acted like my guardian all your life, as if you know better than me, better than everybody. If you had been so protective and understanding of our mother as you have been of this unfeeling man, our mother would still be alive.

JAN: Stop it! You have no idea about anything, you insensitive man! You don't have the right to say one ugly word about our father!

TOMO: You don't say – as far as I'm concerned he is an ordinary murderer and nothing more! A wife-killer!

(Jan approaches Tomo with clenched fists.)

JAN: One more word and I'll hit you!

TOMO: You're just the same as he is.

JAN: If I only were - because he is a much better person than either of us and than our dead mother. And it's time that you learnt the whole truth.

FATHER: No, Jan, no! Please don't say any more!

JAN: But I must tell him! I have to tell him, I can't keep quiet about it any longer.

FATHER: I beg you, don't! I won't allow it!

JAN: I don't want him to talk about you in this way. He doesn't have the right, and I asked him not to transform this day into a settling of accounts with you. He promised me. He didn't keep his promise because he doesn't care about the feelings of other people – and he must find out the truth about Mama.

FATHER: Please, don't!

JAN: I have to!

FATHER: I can't and I won't listen to this! I don't have you speaking against your mother.

JAN: Tomo has to know that the reason for your quarrels ten years ago was not you but her fifteen years younger lover with whom she moved to Split and then lived with him for five years, until he left her. And then she followed him here, and crawled in front of him and begged him to renew their relationship.

FATHER: Please, stop!

JAN: And when she saw that he would never go back to her, she wrote her farewell letter in which she blamed her lover for her suicide!

TOMO: That's impossible! You're making it up! Dad admitted to me that she had killed herself because of him!

JAN: He didn't want to think badly of our mother whom you idealised so blindly. I knew she had a lover right from the beginning, but Dad didn't want you to find out. He took the blame himself. When the police gave him Mama's letter, where she blamed her lover for her suicide, he hid it from you. I learnt about that letter only a year ago when I was doing the spring-cleaning of the flat. I found it by chance in a box where Dad kept her photographs.

TOMO: I don't believe a word of this.

JAN: You don't have to believe me – you can check it out. I hope you still remember Mama's handwriting.

(Jan walks over to the chest of drawers and takes out a letter that he hands to Tomo.)

JAN: Here! Read it if you have the stomach for it!

FATHER: You shouldn't have done that, you shouldn't have.

(Father places his head in his hands and starts quietly weeping. Tomo reads his mother's letter in disbelief.)

TOMO: But this is. . . it's all different from what I. . . oh God, it's all quite the reverse of what I believed. . . I, I. . .

FATHER: You shouldn't have done it, Jan. . . you have spoiled everything!

(Father rushes out of the flat in tears.)

TOMO: But, I wanted. . . Hell, it's all different! You should have told me earlier!

JAN: If you had wanted to think about it you could have worked it all out for yourself long ago! You're just a spoilt brat!

Scene 7.

STRIPPERS

(The lighting and music of a nightclub. Rudi, dressed in old-fashioned white tie and tails, comes out in front of the audience. He gives a theatrical bow and speaks out, holding the microphone in his hand.)

RUDI: Respected spectators, my dear ladies, my dear sex-starved damsels - welcome to the *Eros* Club, welcome to an evening to remember, an evening for losing virginity! I hope you all know what's its like when a woman loses her virginity, but I assure you that it is nothing as exciting as when a man loses his virginity in front of a hundred horny women. And not just any man. My dear ladies, lasses, married ladies, widows and divorcees, tonight, for you alone, we give you the performance of the «shy stallion» - a dream man, a man who is shy, but one who, despite that shyness, will show all of you lucky women this evening everything that he has to show – just for you. Please let me hear a hearty round of applause for our «shy stallion», a man from the most secret places of your imagination.

(There is a burst of applause and whistles of approval over the P.A. Rudi leaves the stage. Followed by the narrow beam from the spotlight, Mali comes out onto the stage. He starts his striptease.

Following the rhythm of the slow music, Mali peels off his jacket, then his shirt, and then his trousers. When he gets down to his underpants, he pauses for a moment, starts to remove them, but gives up the idea. He looks down at the floor and the music stops.)

MALI: I'm sorry!

(Mali quickly picks up his clothes and runs off the stage. The whistles of disapproval and the booing of the disappointed women burst from the PA, in a growing racket. Max runs out onto the stage. He is disconcerted.)

MAX: My dear ladies, may I have your attention please. As the owner of the *Eros* nightclub, allow me a word or two. As you know, until now our club has been a model of professionalism and has always given its guests what it promised them. This evening, we promised a «shy stallion» and a «shy stallion» is what you are going to get. You all saw how the young man who was supposed to be the «shy stallion» ran away. . . in a word, he was just too shy – but, we will be presenting a second «shy stallion» - his manager and this evening's MC, Rudi.

After a short musical interval, you will be getting your «shy stallion» and he will be losing his virginity, even though he could not have imagined at the beginning of this evening's entertainment that he would be appearing in person as a stripper for the first time in his life. After a little music, you will be getting your «shy stallion» - or you will all be refunded your entrance money.

Scene 8.

MATES

(Ivo, Pavle and Zoki are sitting at a table in a run-down cafe. There is a bottle of wine on the table. The friends are fairly much under the weather.)

ZOKI: Empty. . . our glasses are empty. Why are the poor things empty? Let's have another.

(Zoki fills his mates' glasses with wine, and then his own.)

PAVLE: No more, we've had too much.

ZOKI: There's no such thing as too much good wine. (Zoki lifts his glass.) All for one!

IVO & PAVLE: And one for all!

IVO: It's the end of the working week. Thank God we don't work on Saturdays, but if only we were in a better place. Why did you bring us here? Could you finally let us know us why you brought us here?

ZOKI: Why? Don't you remember?

IVO: No! What am I supposed to remember?

ZOKI: What about you? Do you remember? Do you know why I brought you here on this very evening?

(Silence. Pavle tries to remember.)

PAVLE: I have no idea.

ZOKI: Don't you remember this place.

PAVLE: No! Should I?

ZOKI: What about you, Ivo? Do you remember it?

IVO: No. I can't even remember how many glasses I have drunk this evening. Can't even remember that. Everything is a blur for me from that wine that you think, claim and insist is of such high quality.

(Zoki stands up with his glass in his hand and strikes a formal pose, like people who are about to give a toast.)

ZOKI: Well then, my dear senile, middle-aged friends, the time has come for me to reveal to you why I have brought you here this evening. The time has come to circulate the blood in your hardened arteries, the time has come for a small toast that is just beginning. Here's the thing: my sole and dearest friends, as you know today is St Nicholas Day, the day that children enjoy, a joyful day

for them when the youngest ones gets presents and so on. . . Exactly twenty years ago the three of us became friends on that day and for the first time. After lectures, we went for a drink together. And where did we go for that drink?

IVO: Where did we go for that drink?

PAVLE: No really, where did we go?

ZOKI: We came here for that drink, it was here that for the first time in our lives that the three of us tumbled together. This is where our friendship began. And that's why I wanted us to come here today and. . . this was a well-known law student drinking hole.

IVO: This dump?

ZOKI: It wasn't a dump then.

PAVLE: Is this that place?

ZOKI: Yes, it is. I was sure you would remember. There was a time when you couldn't find a place here.

PAVLE: And now we are the only guests. Terrible! Our cafe has gone downhill like our memories and our youth.

IVO: The only thing that's worth anything in this obscure place is that attractive curvy waitress. Only her. If it hadn't been for her, I would have left even before the first drink.

ZOKI: What is it, you fancy her, hey?

IVO: Yes, I do.

ZOKI: She gives you the hots.

IVO: Yes, she does. I always went for the vulgar ones. The only women who ever turned me on really were the vulgar ones – but I wouldn't admit that to you now if I wasn't drunk and if I hadn't returned to the days of my early youth. But yes, I admit it, when I recapitulate all my emotional and sexual life, I see that I only went for the vulgar broads that I didn't respect. I even despised them.

PAVLE: You're full of shit!

IVO: The ones I have had a high opinion of, the ones I respected – they have never meant anything to me either emotionally or erotically, nothing at all. The only ones that turned me on were the real, authentically common ones with big tits and big arses.

PAVLE: Cut it out!

ZOKI: Don't interrupt him. Let him talk.

IVO: Thank you, Zoki, thank you. You're a real friend because you understand me best, you are the one who understands my sadness, my taste. . . and my lack of it. You have understanding for the feeling that overtook me when I saw this waitress.

ZOKI: I understand you, I do. The ones with the big boobs and arses are the best.

IVO: I have a sudden urge to run off to the women's toilet with her and to let her have it. Do you understand that?

ZOKI: I understand it and I approve.

IVO: And now I shall seduce her in front of you, take her to the toilet and give her the business.

PAVLE: That's enough, stop this shit now when I tell you!

(Pavle gets up from the table angrily.)

IVO: What is it, what are you playing at? You think you can stop me? You? Can't you see that we're celebrating our friendship, do you have to make a balls-up of everything?

PAVLE: Stop showing off with toilets and giving the business to other men's wives! You are drunk and you have no taste!

IVO: And you are drunk and jealous, stop lecturing me, because I don't need any lectures from you. I'll screw whoever I want to wherever I want to. I am going right now to fuck the waitress in the toilet, a stand-up job. I know you would do it if you had the guts, if you weren't such a shitty coward, a trussed up henpecked husband. I know you're jealous that you're not in my place and that you can't do everything that I do.

PAVLE: Stop it already!

IVO: You can't give me orders!

(They rush at each other. Pavle throws a punch at Ivo, Ivo avoids it and punches Pavle hard in the stomach. Pavle falls to the floor with a shriek of pain.)

ZOKI: Stop it!

(Pavle gets up from the floor and rushes at Ivo, hitting him in the stomach with his head, and then punching him twice in the head. Ivo collapses to the floor. Pavle lunges at Ivo intending to strike him again, but Zoki forces his way between them and pushes Pavle away, so that he stumbles and almost falls.)

PAVLE: You idiot! Helping him and he's screwing your wife!

(It's as if a bomb has exploded. All three of them freeze. Their drunkenness evaporates in a second.)

ZOKI: What did you say?

PAVLE: I said that Ivo is screwing your wife, and you're helping him instead of helping me.

(Silence. Zoki turns towards Ivo.)

ZOKI: Is this true?

IVO: No, of course it isn't. That's an absolute lie... a slanderous lie.

(Zoki leaps like a tiger at Pavle and knocks him to the floor with a powerful punch.)

Scene 9.

LOVE

(Robert, Leo and Dennis are sitting at the table. They are just finishing their meal.)

DENNIS: That was a great supper Leo, you cooked a wonderful meal. Everything was wonderful. You always were a good cook. In Paris, I often used to think about your cooking. The French are brilliant chefs, of course, but the two of us always preferred Italian food. I really enjoyed that.

LEO: Thank you.

ROBERT: Leo is a great cook, but I hope you will also enjoy the tiramisu that I have made.

DENNIS: Tiramisu! I adore tiramisu. Thanks so much, Robby. But we just need a bit of a breather.

ROBERT: Of course. We're not in any hurry. Some more wine?

DENNIS: Yes, please.

(Robert pours some wine for Dennis, and then for Leo and himself.)

ROBERT: Here's to Dennis's exhibition, that everything tomorrow goes off well.

DENNIS: To the chef and the pastry cook! Cheers!

LEO: Cheers!

(They clink glasses and drink their wine.)

DENNIS: This is very good wine.

ROBERT: It's domestic, from Korčula Island.

LEO: From the Smokvice vineyards.

DENNIS: Luckily, the wines in Paris are excellent. I can't even imagine lunch or dinner any more without a good wine.

(Silence.)

LEO: My director will be coming to the opening of the exhibition.

DENNIS: That short fellow with grey hair?

LEO: Yes, him. When I gave him the invitation, he was genuinely pleased. He loves social events, exhibitions, theatre productions, fashion shows. He's a great guy.

DENNIS: I only hope that he won't be disappointed.

LEO: Why should he be?

DENNIS: They were supposed to put on a piece of performance art at the opening. Something not ever seen here before. I undertook to prepare the exhibition on condition that the performance would take place at the opening – I sent them a video of it that they made for me in Paris. All they had to do was to copy it and engage local performers. They promised me everything, confirmed it, everything was agreed, only for me to find out today that it has all come to nothing.

ROBERT: Why? What happened?

DENNIS: The performers are supposed to have asked for too high a fee, the director of the gallery wouldn't agree, they wouldn't give way. . . In any case, instead of an off-beat, unforgettable opening, I can now expect provincial, soc-realism bla-bla, and petit bourgeois, stiff-necked airs and graces.

LEO: That's a shame! But that's the way things go here.

ROBERT: Still, your photographs are more important than both the opening and performance. People are coming to see your photographs, and not the accompanying programme.

DENNIS: But I'm irritated by those stereotypes, that lack of imagination and that run-of-the-mill blandness that I have been running away from all my life. I could never come to terms with it. And now I have to play a role in a film that is not of my choosing. Or I have to provoke a scandal, and even that needs a public full of understanding and talent, and this place isn't even sophisticated enough for a juicy scandal, it's just not mature enough.

ROBERT: Well, we are where we are.

(Silence.)

DENNIS: But I am pleased to see that you are happy. . . you and Robert, you can see that the two of you are happy.

LEO: And I'm pleased that things are going so well for you in Paris.

DENNIS: Well, yes they are. I can't complain. I'm doing very well.

Scene 10.

STRIPPERS

(Rudi is in the dressing-room and hears Max's closing words from the previous *Stripper* scene over the PA system. «After a little music interval, you will be getting your «shy stallion» - or you will all be refunded your entrance money.» The music starts, and shortly after the infuriated Max charges into the dressing-room.)

MAX: You idiot, what sort of rookie did you try to palm off on me! A bloody disgrace, outrageous! He ran off, the half-wit ran away!

RUDI: Boss, I thought he would. . .

MAX: Who asked you to think? You have to know who you are dealing with. Playing the manager, taking your percentage, and palming damaged goods off on me, engaging an untried rookie!

RUDI: I was sure that he could do it, and that. . .

MAX: Eh, now you can pick the chestnuts out of the fire. Now you're the one who will be doing his act.

RUDI: But I couldn't, I have never done that, I would be uncomfortable.

MAX: Bravo – you fit the profile of an innocent, shy stallion – you've never done it and you are embarrassed. Super! That's just what we want. Come on now, out on the stage and take 'em off, or cough up One Thousand Euro, so that I can refund the women their money.

RUDI: But I haven't got that much money, you know I landed in debt last month!

MAX: Then, get out there and start working.

RUDI: Max. . . sorry. . . but I couldn't possibly.

(Max takes out a revolver and points it at Rudi.)

MAX: I didn't ask you if you could. You have to! Get it? Now get going!

RUDI: Lower that barrel, man, the gun could go off!

MAX: Of course it could - and it will if you don't do your striptease right. All the way, full frontal, right now!

RUDI: I'll do anything, just lower that barrel, please!

MAX: Ah, that's the way I like you. Come on, my lovely, out onto the stage and take 'em off, the fillies are waiting for you.

Scene 11.

MATES

(Ivo is at the health club working out. He has a bandage on his forehead. After a while, Pavle comes in; he also has a bandage on his head. He stands parallel with Ivo, and then starts to work out. For a time – a long time – they both do their training but not a word passes between them. Pavle looks at Ivo from time to time, but Ivo doesn't look back, not even once. Ivo looks straight ahead like a soldier standing on ceremonial guard, completely ignoring Pavle.)

PAVLE: I would like it if we could talk it all over.

(Silence.)

PAVLE: We have to clear this up. It's not that I wanted to. . . I didn't do it on purpose. You have to understand.

(Silence.)

PAVLE: It's not easy for me either.

(Silence.)

PAVLE: Zoki doesn't even want to see me any more. He's embarrassed that I know about his wife. . . I told him that it just burst out of me because I was drunk, but that I wasn't sure, I just suspected it. He didn't even want to talk about it with me. I know it's awful that I blurted it out like that, but I was drunk. We were all drunk and one word lead to another. You provoked me. . . and the whole situation. . . Now I don't know what's worse – whether it's that Zoki thinks I was telling the truth, or that I made it up about you and Ena. In any case, since that evening my friendship with Zoki has no prospects. His wife even rang me and screamed at me, saying that I had destroyed her life and that Zoki had become unbearably jealous and suspicious, that they fight every day, and now I really don't know what to. . .

IVO: Knock it off!

(Silence.)

PAVLE: I've got the worst of it.

IVO: If you would only shut up! I don't want to listen to you any more.

(A prolonged silence.)

PAVLE: Just let me say this. You have to hear this, and then I won't say another word. . . I want you to know that I care about the friendship between you and me. I'm

sorry that I muddled up your life, I am sorry about everything. But now that I have lost Zoki, you must know that I don't want to lose you. It hurts that you ignore me, and that you won't answer my phone calls. I think that the two of us have to preserve our friendship, that it has to be above all this, and that for the next twenty years, like the last twenty years, we have to. . .

IVO: Stop! Listen to what I'm going to say: you, you rational fixer-upper of the world, you shitty, unbearable little moralist, It's tough for me that I've lost Zoki and that he knows I screwed his wife, and it's tough for me that I have lost Ena forever. You spoiled everything, you made a balls-up of everything for us, and there's nothing more for me to say. But hardest of all is that you always go on about our friendship and smother me with your presence. Try to understand: just as it has it is over between me and Zoki, it's also over between us, and we will never be friends again, not ever. And just as all of your weepy messages on my answering machine give me indigestion, I am equally irritated by your presence here at the health club. I'd like to remind you that I was the first one to come here, and I expect you to join some other club, so that it will be easier for both of us.

(A long silence. Ivo and Pavle keep on exercising for some time. Suddenly, Pavle stops, picks up his gear and leaves. Ivo keeps on exercising, then pauses and kicks out angrily at the mat.)

Scene 12.

FATHER

(Jan is in the living-room. He is reading a book. The doorbell rings.)

JAN: Come in!

(Tomo comes into the room.)

TOMO: Hello there!

JAN: Hello!

TOMO: Is Dad home?

JAN: No, he isn't.

TOMO: That's a shame. I came to say goodbye. My plane takes off in three hours.

(Silence.)

TOMO: Where is he?

JAN: Does it matter?

TOMO: It does to me. I wanted to say goodbye to him. . . Although. . . I am still angry at him and at you for all those years when you didn't tell me the truth.

JAN: You always have to be angry at somebody. Couldn't you go through life without all those negative emotions?

TOMO: He should have told me. And so should you.

JAN: Come on, that's enough about it.

TOMO: Why did you hide the truth about our mother from me all these years?

JAN: You know how super-sensitive you have always been and how you have always found someone to blame for your problems. I thought it was better for you to hate your father rather than your mother. He took the blame for everything because he did not want you to hate all the women of this world. And the way you were, if you had known the truth about her, that would certainly have happened.

(Silence.)

TOMO: Where is he now?

JAN: I don't know. In town somewhere.

TOMO: You're lying. You're hiding something from me again.

JAN: No, I'm not.

TOMO: You're hiding something. I'm sure of it. So, where is Dad?

(Silence.)

JAN: If I told you, you would go to visit him, and he doesn't want that. You hurt him too much last time.

TOMO: Come on, leave out the lies and the secrets. He is my father just as much as yours. I have a right to know where he is.

JAN: But I'm not going to tell you.

TOMO: You have to.

JAN: I don't have to do anything.

TOMO: Alright – I'm not asking for the address, but I am interested in where he is.

(Silence.)

JAN: He's in hospital.

TOMO: Why? What's wrong with him?

JAN: He's had leukaemia for six months now. Acute leukaemia. The chemotherapy is not helping.

TOMO: So that was why he was vomiting at the grave.

JAN: Yes, that was what it was.

TOMO: Is there any hope?

JAN: I don't think so. Everything is going downhill, his body is giving up on him... the only good thing is that he has not lost his hair. The doctor says it's only a matter of days, a week maybe. . .

(Silence.)

TOMO: How terrible. . . I must see him. I must see him right away.

JAN: No, no way. It would only upset him.

TOMO: He's my father, I have a right to know where he is. Which hospital?

JAN: Forgive me, but he made me promise that I wouldn't even tell you he was ill, let alone tell you the hospital where he is. He simply doesn't want to see you.

TOMO: But I have to tell him. . . I have the right.

JAN: No, you haven't!

TOMO: I won't let tell him I know about his illness. I will pretend not to know how seriously ill he is. I only want to take his hand before I go, nothing more.

JAN: I'm worried that you would blurt something out about how sick he is.

TOMO: I swear I wouldn't.

(The front doorbell rings.)

JAN: Come in, it's open. Who could that be?

(Father comes in.)

JAN: Dad, what are you doing here? Aren't you in. . .

FATHER: No, I'm not.

JAN: You should be.

FATHER: I know, but. . . I remembered that Tomo was leaving today. . . and I assumed he would come here to say goodbye to you.

(Silence.)

FATHER: When does your flight leave?

TOMO: In less than three hours.

FATHER: Then you have to leave soon.

TOMO: Yes, I know. . . I'm sorry I didn't have a chance to talk with you. . . There is so much I haven't told you, and I should have.

FATHER: And I wanted to talk to you about so many things, I had so many things to ask you. So much to tell you. I wanted you to tell me about your life, about Argentina and Buenos Aires. I have read about that lovely city, about that beautiful country. It's as if I have been there. Is it really as lovely as it is described in books, as it looks in photographs?

TOMO: It's beautiful, Dad, simply beautiful.

FATHER: I am so sorry that I shall never see it, that I shall never go there. . .that we won't ever stroll together through the city where you have found your happiness. . . Come on now, son, so you don't miss your flight. I saw a taxi downstairs, in front of the house. I suppose it is waiting for you.

TOMO: Yes, it's waiting for me.

FATHER: Go now, son, you know we always have to be on time, wherever it is we are going.

TOMO: I wish that everything could have been different.

FATHER: I am glad that you came for Mama's anniversary and lit a candle at her grave.

TOMO: But she does not deserve our respect or our. . .

FATHER: No, my son, don't speak badly of your mother. Don't be her judge. Don't ever be anybody's judge. Only one has the right to judge – while the rest of us, we should all try to understand, nothing more than that. That's is our only obligation in this world.

TOMO: Oh Dad, my dear father, you have always been such a good man. . . while I. . . I have been so unjust towards you, so selfish. Forgive me, Father, forgive me.

(TOM starts weeping and throws himself into his father's embrace.)

FATHER: Take it easy, son, take it easy. Everything will be alright. Don't cry, my dear boy, don't cry. You are my small dear son, Dad has always loved you. . . always.

(Tom sobs even harder. Their embrace lasts. Finally, Tom steps out of his father's embrace. He goes to his brother and offers him his hand.)

TOMO: Write when you find the time.

JAN: You, too.

(The brothers kiss each other. Tomo moves to stand in front of his father.)

TOMO: It really pains me. . . that I have hurt you so many times.

FATHER: Everything is alright now, son.

(A long silence.)

FATHER: It's time for us to say goodbye.

(They stand there, no-one moving in the silence.)

TOMO: I don't know whether I have the right to ask the two of you. . . to ask you to do something for me, something that would really mean a lot to me.

FATHER: What is it, son?

TOMO: I would like it. . . I would really like it if you would get into the taxi with me, and see me off at the airport. So that we can be together a little longer.

FATHER: With pleasure, son.

TOMO: And you, Jan?

JAN: I would love to, my brother, I would love to.

(Tomo puts one arm about his father, and the other around his brother.)

Scene 13.

LOVE

(Robert is placing a tea tray holding a teapot and three cups and saucers on the dining-room table. Dennis comes in dressed in a dressing-gown.)

DENNIS: Good morning, Robert.

ROBERT: Good morning, Dennis. Would you like some tea?

DENNIS: I'd love some. Where's Leo?

ROBERT: He went to buy the papers and to get some fresh bread rolls for breakfast from the bakery.

DENNIS: He is so attentive. I have always enjoyed fresh bread rolls for breakfast.

ROBERT: Me, too. I also like them fresh.

DENNIS: Really?

ROBERT: Really. Leo brings me them every morning.

DENNIS: Aah, does he indeed?

(Silence.)

DENNIS: I thought you would be going to work.

ROBERT: I took a day off.

DENNIS: Why?

ROBERT: So that I could be with you and Leo. Today is your last day in what you called this «provincial town», so I thought that as a good host I should be at your disposal.

DENNIS: Thank you, but you didn't have to go to so much trouble. You didn't need to neglect your job because of me.

ROBERT: So that you could be alone with Leo? Does it bother you that I'm here now, were you counting on me being at work?

(Silence.)

DENNIS: Yesterday, you yourself mentioned that you would be going to work.

ROBERT: And now after waking up you're disappointed to see me here?

DENNIS: Where is this coming from?

ROBERT: You wanted to talk to Leo alone. That's what you hoped for, isn't it?

DENNIS: You're implying something that's not there.

ROBERT: Not at all.

DENNIS: You are being unreasonably jealous.

ROBERT: I'm not jealous. To be jealous you have to doubt the love of your partner, and I don't doubt Leo's love for me. I know he loves me more than he ever loved you.

(Dennis gives a forced laugh.)

DENNIS: Impressive words. Impressive, arrogant words. If that's true, why didn't you go to work. You're frightened to leave Leo alone with me. Don't worry, I don't have any intentions as far as Leo is concerned, I don't want to renew what was once between us. It's over, over forever. Anyway, you know that I was the one who broke it off and went on my way.

ROBERT: Yes, I know. And I know how you did it. That's not the way you leave someone you ever really loved, someone who really loved you. You wounded him, you hurt him deeply and you were tough and did it intentionally.

DENNIS: That's his interpretation. To get at the real truth you always have to hear the other side. Although I am not prepared now to talk about the two of us to you. What was between us concerns only us and no-one else in this world.

ROBERT: You can see from the way you talk that you try to leave the impression of a superior dude who looks down on what was once between you. But, you see, I simply don't believe in your superiority.

DENNIS: And why's that?

ROBERT: Because you came here to his house, the house where he lives with another partner. Why didn't you go to a hotel, why did you want to sleep in his house, on his sheets?

DENNIS: I really do care about his happiness. I wanted to meet you. To see if he was as happy with you as he was with me. I didn't come here to destroy anything, or to renew anything. There was a time when he and I meant a lot to each other. Surely you don't think that we shouldn't even speak to each other from the day we broke up to the day of our death out of respect for our new partners?

ROBERT: Of course you can talk. But to sleep in your ex's house. . .that's a little too much for my taste. . .

DENNIS: Yours is a provincial point of view, a narrow-minded one.

ROBERT: My point of view is natural and normal. I want Leo to be happy.

DENNIS: And I want Leo to be happy.

ROBERT: If you really wanted that you wouldn't be here. If you had wanted him to put you into a pigeon-hole labelled THE PAST, you wouldn't have been so pushy

about getting under his roof. What were you hoping for coming here? What was it you wanted? – To evoke memories of the past with him, to ravel through memories and remind him of how much he loved you and suffered when you left him?

DENNIS: Those are just your crass insinuations. The way you think I haven't got any right to be his friend, or even his acquaintance. You are scared that I still love him. But, believe me, you have nothing to fear.

ROBERT: That's not what I'm afraid of, because I know for sure that you don't love him. And the question is whether you ever did. You didn't come here to express your emotions, you came to check whether he still loves you, whether he is still suffering because of you, whether he still feels something for you, the man you abandoned. If you really cared about his feelings, you wouldn't have come back into his life in such a pushy way.

DENNIS: When the love between two people is over, don't they at least have the right to friendship? Why do you interpret the need for friendship as the intention to revitalise love and digging through old wounds?

ROBERT: Because that's just the way it turns out. And I also know that your Paris partner broke off with you exactly a month ago. The man who took you to Paris, set you up with a job, and helped you to make a name for yourself – he had had enough of your personage and your exploits and threw you out of his flat.

(Silence.)

DENNIS: Who told you that?

ROBERT: That's not important now. Paris is not so very far from Zagreb. And news travels fast.

DENNIS: Have you been digging into my life?

ROBERT: Your life didn't interest me at all until you decided to come here to this house. I thought you might be looking for consolation after the defeat and pain you caused your partner. What I hold against you is that when your sweetie broke off with you, you came to the house of the man whom you had previously given the boot to so coldly and without feeling. That is more than immoral. And if you are interested, the reason for my not going to work was not that I was afraid that you two could renew your relationship, but that I didn't want you to upset him in any way at all.

DENNIS: What nonsense! He is happy to see me.

ROBERT: But I'm not.

(Leo comes in.)

LEO: Good morning, fellas!

DENNIS: Good morning!

ROBERT: Good morning!

(Leo puts two newspapers, and some bread rolls and bread on the table.)

LEO: Here are the papers and some fresh bread rolls. How did you sleep?

DENNIS: Very well. In any case, I always slept well here. And Robert has been kind enough to make me tea. We had a nice talk about everything.

ROBERT: I just told Dennis how wonderful it is that he could spend these days with us, and that whenever he comes to Zagreb, he can stay with us. We have had a lovely time together.

(Silence.)

LEO: Are you for warm bread rolls with butter and jam?

ROBERT: I certainly am. I'm really hungry.

(Dennis looks at his watch.)

DENNIS: In five minutes. I have to call my editor. . . I'll only be a moment,.

LEO: OK then.

(Dennis goes into the next room. Leo sits down at the table.)

LEO: You know what? I'm proud of you.

ROBERT: Why?

LEO: Because you have been so hospitable and kind to Dennis all these days. You have shown yourself to be superior, above the situation and above vanity.

ROBERT: Did you doubt it? We are civilised people, we are not cavemen. And apart from that, I care so much about your happiness that I decided to treat your ex in such a way that you would be proud of me.

LEO: Thank you, Robby.

ROBERT: There's no need for thanks. He is a likeable bloke and it was a pleasure for me to spend time with him.

Scene 14.

STRIPPERS

(Rudi comes out onto the stage to seductive background music. He stands in front of the audience and reluctantly starts to remove his clothes. Quite awkwardly, Rudi peels off his clothing, piece by piece. When he starts removing his trousers, he suddenly stops. The music dies away. Rudi pulls on his trousers and rushes off the stage. Two gun shots echo after him. Max rushes out onto the stage from the opposite side, holding a pistol.)

MAX: You swine, come back here! Come back here, you son of a bitch!

(Suddenly Max stops his tirade and becomes aware that he has run out in front of the audience. He lowers his pistol and bravely addresses the audience.)

MAX: Sorry, my loves, don't hold it against me. . . It's nerves, you know, nerves. . . this is also part of our performance. . . you are going to see the show, no matter what. . . you'll get your «shy stallion» at the third go. . . I'll be your stallion. . . easy now. . . Don't you worry.

(Max puts the pistol down on the stage.)

MAX: Music!

(The music commences and Max starts taking off his clothes. When he get down to his briefs, he pauses in embarrassment, lowering his gaze. The music stops.)

MAX: My dear ladies, my dear guests. . . I'm sorry, I ask you to accept my deepest apologies. . . you can pick up your refunds at the box office. . . and there will be a drink on the house, and please don't hold anything against us.

(Max runs off the stage. The sounds of angry whistles and indignant cries of «boo», «shame on you» and «con-artists» from the women.)

Scene 15.

SENIOR CITIZENS

(We see Ivo and Pavle sitting in the garden of a retirement home, propped up by their walking sticks. They are now eighty-year-olds. Their hair is grey. They move with difficulty.)

PAVLE: You asked me to exercise with you every day, to exercise your brain.

IVO: Is that what I asked you?

PAVLE: Yes, you did, you did. When this illness started you told me that only exercise could save the brain and memory, and that I had to repeat everything with you every day.

IVO: Is that what I said?

PAVLE: You did, you did.

IVO: I can't remember that any more.

PAVLE: So now, let's exercise. Because you can't remember. Come on now, what is the name of our retirement home.

IVO: It's called. . . it's called *The Past*.

PAVLE: No it isn't

IVO: Then it's *The Present*.

PAVLE: No it isn't, it's *The Future*. It's called *The Future Retirement Home*. And what's your name?

IVO: My name is Ivo.

PAVLE: Bravo! And what was the name of your ex-wife?

IVO: Whore, her name was Whore. She left me! She was twenty years younger than me, so she found herself a lover.

PAVLE: And her name, what was her name?

IVO: I don't know and I don't want to know.

PAVLE: Her name was Violeta. And how many years old are you?

IVO: A lot.

PAVLE: How much is a lot?

IVO: The same lot as you. We have been the same age since we studied law together.

PAVLE: Eighty, you are eighty years old.

IVO: Eighty years old. . . that's a nice round number of years.

PAVLE: And what's my name?

IVO: I know your name very well.

PAVLE: Well, what is it then?

IVO: No, I won't. . . I know, why should I say it when I know?

PAVLE: If you know, tell me, what is my name?

IVO: Your name is. . . your name is. . .

PAVLE: My name starts with 'P'.

IVO: Peter!

PAVLE: No, it's not.

IVO: Payo?

PAVLE: No.

IVO: Predjo?

PAVLE: Nothing like it.

IVO: There's nothing else that starts with 'P'.

PAVLE: Are you sure?

IVO: Yes, I am.

PAVLE: Pavle, my name is Pavle.

IVO: Oh yes, Pavle! It was on the top of my tongue.

PAVLE: And what year is it now?

IVO: Now it's . . . why are you torturing me with difficult questions?

PAVLE: Now it's 2046.

IVO: Is it. . .

PAVLE: Repeat after me: now it is Two Thousand and Forty-Six.

IVO: Now it is Two Thousand and Forty-. . .

PAVLE: Six.

IVO: Six, yes, I know.

PAVLE: You have made me sweat with all this teaching.

IVO: And you me.

(Silence.)

PAVLE: Listen, a new resident has arrived at the Home, our director told me and she said that he would be coming here to the park as soon as he fills in the forms, and that we should be good to him. That we should help him to settle in here as soon as possible.

IVO: Help him, we'll help him. . . even though we need help ourselves.

PAVLE: She said that his children want to pay for a single room for that new one, and you and I have single rooms here. And the single rooms cost a lot and that's why you and I are short of money for a drink, and we can't even pay for the hotline.

IVO: We just haven't got enough.

PAVLE: So I thought that we could agree with the new one and the director that the three of us take a 3-bedded room which is much cheaper, and that she doesn't say anything to our children, and that means we will have money left for booze and for the hotline. And if we save up for two or three months we can buy a new inflatable doll.

IVO: OK, I'm for it.

PAVLE: That's why we have to be nice to this new bloke. . . He's coming now.
(Zoki appears with a stick in each hand.)

ZOKI: Good day.

PAVLE: Good day.

IVO: Good day.

ZOKI: How goes it?

PAVLE: Good, good. Are you the new one?

ZOKI: Ah, yes I am. I just arrived.

PAVLE: And what's your name?

ZOKI: Zoki. And yours?

PAVLE: I'm Pavle, and this colleague here is Ivo.

ZOKI: Ivo and Pavle. . . I knew two fellows who were. . . It's the two of you! You two in my life again, after forty years! I'm going to jump into the Sava River!

PAVLE: Hang on, Zoki, surely not looking like that, without a tie on?

ZOKI: You're right, a gentleman must think of his appearance, no matter what the circumstances – I'm going to get a tie.

PAVLE: Is it a nice tie?

ZOKI: A beautiful one, first class. A Croata Kravata from the *Potomac* store.

PAVLE: It would be stupid to jump into the river with such a lovely tie. It would be a pity for the tie and for the man.

ZOKI: Perhaps you are right. But what are the two of you doing here?

PAVLE: I'm exercising with Ivo – his brain is giving out, so we do memory exercises every day. Ivo, do you remember Zoki, our friend from university?

IVO: Zoki, Zoki. . . I can't remember any Zoki.

PAVLE: We were friends for twenty years, best friends.

IVO: Ah, now I remember – that's the Zoki who screwed my wife, the one that left me.

PAVLE: It wasn't like that Ivo, but. . .

ZOKI: You screwed my wife.

IVO: But you didn't have a wife.

PAVLE: It's all got mixed up.

IVO: You screwed my wife. All my wives left me.

PAVLE: You only had one wife.

IVO: Exactly! I'm telling you they all left me. I can't forgive you for doing that with my wife.

ZOKI: You made out with my wife, it was all different.

PAVLE: Fellas, whether it was like that or like that, it doesn't matter any more now. The only thing that matters is that Zoki is here with us and that we can be mates together again like we used to be.

ZOKI: Never again with you two.

PAVLE: That's a pity, you will be left without drinks and a daily chance to ring the hotline.

ZOKI: Hang on, hang on – what are you talking about?

PAVLE: Do you like to take a drink?

ZOKI: Like to? I love it. It's the only pleasure left in my life, but I don't have the money for it. Everything my children will be giving me for the Home will be only be enough to pay for a single room and regular meals.

PAVLE: Eh, but if the three of us moved into a 3-bedded room, without our kids knowing anything about it, then we would also have money for candy and for the hotline.

ZOKI: Whoopee! But that's wonderful!

PAVLE: But only true friends can live together in a 3-bedded room, people who get on well together.

IVO: And what will we do now?

ZOKI: That's not us.

PAVLE: But we could be friends the way we used to be. What's important is to forgive, to hold out your hands to each other and then we can move into the same room and go to have a drink.

IVO: How can I forgive him, he bonked my wife.

PAVLE: Come on now, stop nagging, forget it!

(Silence. They look at each other. Finally Zoki holds out his hand to Pavle, and then to Ivo.)

ZOKI: It's time to forget, to forgive, for a new beginning, for renewal of the friendship that I have missed all these years. Thank God that we outlived our wives. . . and, by the way, they weren't anything so special. . .

(Pavle and Zoki shake hands, and then embrace one another. And Ivo and Zoki shake hands and hug each other. Finally, Pavle holds out his hand to Ivo and hugs him, too.)

IVO: Pavle, you are the finest person in all this world. Zoki screwed your wife and you have forgiven him everything. It is so moving, that tears are coming from my eyes at the thought of your nobility.

ZOKI: That's not quite the way it was, but it was all so long ago that it doesn't matter how it was.

IVO: Well, time heals all wounds, my friend.

ZOKI: Yes, it heals them. But nothing can heal our rheumatism.

(Zoki raises his walking-stick as if he is holding a sword.)

ZOKI: All for one!

(Pavle and Ivo raise their walking-sticks like swords and place them on Zoki's.)

PAVLE + IVO: And one for all!

THE END

Written during the Summer of 2005
in Stomorska on the Island of Šolta.

