

Miro Gavran

B E E R

(A Comedy - Almost)

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Characters:

The FATHER23 – 83 years old
The SON 8 – 60 years old

SCENE 1. (*THE BABY, 1954*)

(We see a tennis court and one small bench. A father is pushing a baby in a pram beside the tennis court. He pauses beside the bench. He takes a bottle of beer from a small bag hanging on the pram. He sits on the bench, opens the bottle of beer and, just as he is planning to take a sip, the baby starts crying. The father places the bottle of beer on the bench, stands up and approaches the pram, and starts gently rocking it. The baby stops crying. The father goes back to the bench and sits down. He takes a deep, satisfied breath, picks up the beer bottle and, just as he plans to drink some beer, the baby starts crying again. The father sighs deeply – puts down the bottle of beer, stands up again and gently pushes the pram to and fro.)

FATHER: *Rock- a- bye, baby. . .*

(After a short time, the baby stops crying and its father walks slowly back to the bench. He looks at the bottle of beer. He stays like that for a time. He moves his hand towards the bottle, picks it up, and the baby starts crying again at that moment. The father sighs deeply again – puts down the bottle and goes to the pram and starts rocking it more quickly.)

FATHER: *Good boy. . . Daddy's good boy. . . rock-a-bye, baby. . . Daddy's good little boy. . . rock- a- bye, baby – on the tree top...*

(The baby stops crying. Even more carefully than the last time, the father returns to the bench. He sits down slowly, making sure of doing so with no sound that could waken the baby. He stretches his hand out towards the bottle of beer, but then retracts his hand for fear that the baby could start crying again. Some time passes before, once again in slow motion, he moves his hand towards the bottle. Just as he takes hold of the bottle, the baby starts crying. A fleeting expression of anger crosses the father's face. The baby cries more and more demandingly, and the father sits with the beer bottle in his hand, not knowing what to do. Suddenly, a different expression crosses his face - *Eureka!* – he dips his index finger into the bottle and moistens it with beer. With his hand and index finger stretched out before him, he goes to the pram and offers the baby

his finger soaked in beer. We hear the baby's satisfied sucking of his father's *beer* finger. A moment later we hear the baby's even breathing as it sinks into sleep. The father returns to the bench and sits down, picks up the beer bottle, takes a long swallow, and gives a happy smile.)

SCENE 2. (HOW TO PUSH A WHEEL-BARROW, 1962)

(The Son is now eight years old, and the Father is thirty-one. The Son is sitting at the table in the kitchen, which is a part of the living-room in their modest flat. He is sitting there with his notebook in front of him.)

SON: Daddy!

FATHER: What is it, Son.

SON: I have to write an essay called *My Mother*. It's International Women's Day in three days' time.

FATHER: I didn't know that you already had to write essays in the 2nd Grade of elementary school. We wrote literary essays later.

SON: The teacher told us that the one who writes the best essay would receive an 'A'. It will be read at the assembly in front of the entire school. And then it will be put up on the bulletin-board newspaper.

FATHER: And does your teacher know that you do not have a mother?

SON: Yes, I think she does.

FATHER: Silly goat!

SON: Who?

FATHER: Your teacher.

SON: Why?

FATHER: How are you supposed to write about your mother when your mother is not alive?

SON: That's what I asked her.

FATHER: And - what did she say?

SON: She said that you should tell me all about my mother. And that I could then write that down.

FATHER: That I should tell you about her?

SON: Aha.

FATHER: What a silly cow!

SON: Why a cow?

FATHER: Because. . . Your mother was a very beautiful, very sweet and good person. . . We fell in love in our second year at Uni – you were born in the third year, and Mama. . . a day after the birth, Mama went to join the angels. . . in Heaven. . . I have talked to you about it. Then I had to stop my studies and I started working to take care of you.

SON: What were her eyes like?

FATHER: They were black.

SON: And her hair?

FATHER: It was also black.

SON: And did she laugh a lot?

FATHER: A lot. . . and often. . . we both laughed a lot then.

SON: Was she tall or short?

FATHER: Medium height, just the way it should be. Wherever we went, all my friends envied me for having such a beautiful girl-friend .

SON: And did she cook well? Or like you?

FATHER: Well. . . you know. . . we lived in the student hostel, we had a cafeteria, so we didn't have to cook. My parents were still alive then and they sent us packages of food.

SON: Auntie Ena cooks very well – much better than you. Could I perhaps write about Auntie Ena?

FATHER: What do you mean – write about her?

SON: Can I write as if Auntie Ena is my mother?

FATHER: I think that would be silly – she is not your mother, and your assignment was to write about your mother.

SON: But I know everything about Auntie Ena, it would be much easier for me to write about her.

FATHER: But that would not be true – Auntie Ena is not your mother. . . she is my. . . friend.

SON: Yes, but if you were to marry her, could I then call her ‘my mother’?

FATHER: You could call her that then, but I am not thinking of getting married, and that means she cannot become your mother.

SON: Dad, did you know that Dado has been given a bicycle?

FATHER: Which Dado?

SON: The Dado who shares my desk at school.

FATHER: That’s really nice.

SON: I would like you to buy me a bicycle, and then Dado and I could ride together in the park and in the courtyard.

FATHER: I can’t buy you a bicycle.

SON: Why can’t you?

FATHER: Ivo, we don’t have any money. I don’t have a steady job. . . but one day when I get a job – then I shall buy you a bicycle.

SON: And when will that be?

FATHER: I don’t know.

SON: Say, in ten days?

FATHER: Perhaps in a year, or two, or who knows when. . .

SON: Ah, who can wait that long. - Maybe I’ll be grown-up by the time that that happens.

FATHER: Look – neither my father nor your late grandfather had very much money, but we were still happy and satisfied. So when I told my father that I wanted a bicycle, he told me that he knew a game that was more fun than riding a bicycle and that it was called *Wheel-Barrow*. But you need two people who get on well together to push and drive that *wheel-barrow*. And to me, it was more fun than a real bicycle.

SON: And how did you drive that *wheel-barrow*?

FATHER: Would you like me to show you?

SON: Aha.

FATHER: Lie down on your tummy.

(The Son lies on the ground.)

SON: Like this?

FATHER: That's it.

(The Father takes the Son by the legs.)

FATHER: Raise yourself on your hands.

(The Son lifts himself on his hands.)

SON: Like this?

FATHER: Yes. And now walk on your hands!

(The Son starts walking on his hands while the Father holds him by the legs and *steers* his movements.)

FATHER: Left, left!

(The Son turns left.)

FATHER: Now right, right!

(The Son turns right.)

FATHER: Straight, straight ahead!

(The Son goes straight ahead.)

FATHER: Do you like this game?

(The Son stops.)

SON: This is a great game, Dad. Let's play it some more.

(The Son again raises himself on his hands and simulates the movement of a wheel-barrow.)

FATHER: I like it, too. We are the best *wheel-barrow* in town.

SON: Can we go faster?

FATHER: Easy does it.

SON: Dad!

FATHER: Yes, Son.

(Both of them slow down.)

SON: Why don't you marry Auntie Ena?

FATHER: Is that what you would like?

SON: Yes.

FATHER: She is still young and she would want to have a child, and I already have you. I don't need a second child.

SON: Why shouldn't you have two children?

FATHER: Because I barely earn enough for the two of us. Work at the fitness club doesn't pay much. . . But when you become a famous soccer player one day, we won't be poor any more.

SON: And will you buy me that bicycle then so that I can ride it around?

FATHER: Aren't you enjoying our game of *wheel-barrow*?

SON: Of course I am – but my arms are starting to ache.

FATHER: Then we'll take a break!

(The Father lowers his son's legs to the ground.)

SCENE 3. (*THE HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT – MY MOTHER, 1962*)

(The Son comes forward carrying his notebook. He pauses and bows and, as if he is reciting a poem, starts to read from the notebook.)

SON: *My Mother.* In fact, I don't have a mother. She has been living with the angels since I was born. But I can write about three aunties who could have become my mother, except that my father did not want to get married. The first one was Auntie Dragica, who used to bring me lovely big presents, but she never ever smiled. Her face looked as though she had swallowed a pickled cucumber. And then Auntie Rose came along; she had big boobies and a big behind. My father liked that very much, but she also had her dead husband of whom she often spoke, so that it got on my father's nerves. Once he said to her: 'You don't have to dig him up every day – let him lie there in peace at Mirogoy'. That's the name of our large cemetery. And now, Auntie Ena is all the rage. She's Dad's lady-friend. She is a very good cook so that when she is at our place Dad and I really eat well. The only thing is that she constantly fights with my father so that my ears start aching. If my father could put those women together and make one woman who cooked well,

brought lovely presents and had big boobs and a big behind, then that auntie would become my mother. But I'm afraid that my father wouldn't marry even her, although I would like it if he got married and that I got my own mother, so that it would be easier for me to write an essay for International Women's Day, and that he could stop saying that my teacher is a goat and a cow because she gave me this essay to write, even though I know that Dad thinks very well of my teacher, because he told his friend Dragec: "I'd really enjoy bonking her, if she weren't my son's teacher".

(The lights change. The Father appears.)

FATHER: Are you a complete idiot – how could you write such a cretinous essay?!

SON: It was my homework assignment. If it was good, I thought that they would hang it up on the bulletin-board newspaper.

FATHER: It's more likely that they will hang you up at school, and not your stupid essay. I barely managed to talk the principal out of suspending you - your teacher refused to even speak with me, she wouldn't accept my apology because you wrote that I would like to bonk her.

SON: But, Dad, that's what you did say – it was true.

FATHER: Idiot! Stop writing the truth in your essays! And why did you have to write about all those women - do you want them to send the Social Service to me – it looked as though there were all sorts of women in and out of this house.

SON: But Dad, I only wrote about those aunties who wanted to marry you, and I didn't write a word about the others.

FATHER: What others, for goodness sake?

SON: Those that you told Uncle Dragec are only good for a one-night stand.

FATHER: You're not normal, boy – are you listening in to all my conversations? In the future, you must not take any essay to school before I have read it. Is that clear?

SON: Yes, Dad.

SCENE 4. (A FITNESS TRAINING SESSION, 1970)

(The Father is thirty-nine years old, and the Son is now sixteen. They are at the tennis court. A fitness training session is under way. The Son is naked to the waist and is doing push-ups, and the Father is coaching him.)

FATHER: Thirty-six. . . thirty-seven. . . thirty-eight. . . thirty-nine. . . forty! That's enough! That's good! Now we'll do running in a circle.

(The Son starts to run around the playing-field or, more precisely, around his father.)

FATHER: Faster – smaller steps, smaller steps.

SON: I can't make them any smaller than that.

FATHER: You can, of course you can. . . You yourself know how important it is in tennis to be really fit. If you're fit, you're a winner. Those mates of yours from the club practise only three times a week, and you do an extra three sessions with me – in a year's time you will beat them all. . . You can slow down now.

SIN: It won't be easy to beat them – most of them have been playing since they were seven, and I started only recently. I am already sixteen – that's late to start in any sport.

FATHER: The ones who believe in success – are the ones who succeed. It's a pity that I didn't switch you to tennis earlier. But, luckily – there is not much competition in tennis here. If you're single-minded enough and stick to it, you'll even make it to the Olympic Games. And when you win a medal at the Olympics – you'll stand out from the nameless crowd. And the two of us are a team that wins. Repeat that: what sort of a team are the two of us?

SON: We're a winning team.

FATHER: Once again – what sort of a team?

SIN: A winning team. . . But Dad – this is an individual sport?

FATHER: A sportsman and his coach have to be a team, otherwise there's no hope of success. That's enough running! Let's move on to squats.

(The Son stops running and starts doing squats, while the Father goes to take two rackets and checks the strings.)

FATHER: That's enough squats! . . . Listen – when you serve, hit the ball from above, as far as you can from above. Like this! You always make a mistake when you serve. And your backhand is not the best. . . . use both hands. . . I should have realised earlier that soccer was not for you and moved you on to tennis. You would have been in the national team by now. You would have some medals. . . you would have won several of the junior tournaments. . . But, it's still not too late. You have to believe in yourself the way I believe in you, and you'll be a champion. Come on, that's enough for today.

(Both of them move towards the bench and their equipment bags.)

SON: I can hardly wait to go to school tomorrow.

FATHER: Why's that?

SoN: The new issue of the school newspaper comes out tomorrow, and they are publishing my poem.

FATHER: Your poem?

SON: Yes – my poem. My poem about the sea.

FATHER: About the sea, no more, no less?

(The Father puts his racket into the bag and the Son puts his away.)

SON: Yes, about the sea. You'll see tomorrow – I can hardly wait to show you. My teacher thinks that it's the best poem I have written so far.

FATHER: It looks as though your teacher is not quite right in the head. . .

SON: Why?

FATHER: She dresses in a quirky way, and speaks of literature as though it's the most important thing in the world.

SON: But it is. . .

FATHER: Come on. . . surely she hasn't managed to convince you about that? . . . It's alright that you like to read a lot – that's how one achieves knowledge, and it's alright that you write a poem here and there – girls like

that. But – real life begins when a man gives up poetry. Do you take my meaning?

SON: No.

FATHER: You will.

SCENE 5. (*THE BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION, 1972.*)

(The Father is now forty-one and the Son is eighteen. The Father is blowing up balloons and tying them as he does so.)

SON: What are you doing?

FATHER: As you can see. – I am blowing up balloons.

SON: Why?

FATHER: Since you are celebrating your birthday at home, you have to create an atmosphere that will make your friends feel good.

SON: If my friends could see this, they would die laughing, and I would die of shame. No-one blows up balloons for their eighteenth birthday.

FATHER: We'll forget it then.

(The Father lets the air out of the balloons.)

SON: Listen, Dad – this tonight will last a bit. Could you stay at the cinema until two?

FATHER: Until two in the morning? None of Zagreb's cinemas are open that late. I could stay until midnight.

SON: That's not enough for me.

FATHER: I can't stay at Maria's – her parents go to bed around midnight, and they aren't quite delighted to see me there – I think they are angry at me for not having proposed to their daughter.

SON: Can't you find another lady-friend with a flat – but no parents?

FATHER: Come on, stop fooling around. . . The cafés close at eleven – I can watch two films, but three . . . How many of you will there be at the party?

SON: Around ten.

FATHER: And what's the ratio?

SON: What ratio?

FATHER: How many men, and how many women?

SON: Ah – that!

FATHER: Yes – that.

SON: Five - five.

FATHER: You mean five girls and five boys?

SON: Exactly.

FATHER: Does that mean that all of you have an opposite number?

SON: That's the way it turned out somehow.

(Silence.)

FATHER: So that means that you, too, have your own partner this evening?

SON: Yes, I have.

(Silence.)

FATHER: ... the two of us have never had a serious talk. . . about some of those things. . . and we really should, you know. As the saying goes: 'Prevention is better than cure'. D'you understand? . . . Women often get carried away – they start thinking about marriage and children before any preconditions are met. . . and they can also be quite shrewd about it all.

SON: What are you trying to tell me, Dad?

FATHER: You see – if you get into a situation – if a situation develops in that way, then it is essential that you always have with you what you must always have with you.

(The Father takes a packet of Durex condoms out of the inner pocket of his jacket and hands it to his son. The Son takes the packet and examines it.)

SON: What am I supposed to do with these that smell like strawberries – I use Classic.

FATHER: You USE Classic?

SON: Yes – Classic – they're better.

FATHER: For how long already? . . . How long have you been using them?

SON: Well. . . around a month.

FATHER: And I'm only hearing about it now? And here I am - delivering a delayed educative speech. You could have boasted about it to your father.

SON: Well - I could have, I suppose.

FATHER: Is she attractive?

SON: Very.

(Silence.)

FATHER: I hope she's not in your class? You know it can be very awkward if you go with a girl from your class and then break it off – it all gets very complicated.

SON: She's not in my class.

FATHER: Is she from your school?

SON: She doesn't go to school any more.

FATHER: Oho – so you have a student. A freshman?

SON: No, she's not a freshman.

FATHER: But?

SON: She's in her fourth year of university. She studies German and English.

FATHER: Hang on a minute. . . how much older than you is she?

SON: Five years.

FATHER: Five years?

SON: Yes.

(Silence.)

FATHER: Where did you meet?

SON: In the editorial office of the magazine that printed my story.

FATHER: So she writes, too?

SON: No – she translates.

(Silence.)

FATHER: Listen – you must be careful. Girls of that age are already thinking of marriage. . .

SON: Please Dad, I am not thinking of getting married.

FATHER: But that’s a big difference. . .

SON: Dad, we love each other and the difference in age doesn’t bother us.

FATHER: I can believe that it doesn’t bother you – but be careful – this is an experienced young woman. God only knows who she has been with before you. You have to take care that it doesn’t end badly.

SON: Don’t worry Dad – I shall use two condoms tonight.

FATHER: Can’t you be serious?

SON: She had only one boy-friend before me.

FATHER: So you’re her second bloke?

SON: Yes – I’m her second.

FATHER: How naïve can you be! That’s an old female dodge – convincing a fellow that he is the second.

SON: Come on, Dad, she wouldn’t. . .

FATHER: You’re as green as a cucumber.

SON: Listen, Dad, you’re getting on my nerves! I don’t want to discuss it with you anymore!

SCENE 6. (AN AWKWARD PHONE CONVERSATION, 1972)

(The father is home alone. He is walking nervously up and down the room. He then pauses by the phone, sits down, takes a small piece of paper with a telephone number written on it out of his pocket, sighs deeply and starts dialling the number.)

FATHER: Hello. . . have I reached Dubravka?. . . great – I am Ivo’s father. . . We haven’t met yet – he hasn’t given me such an opportunity, you see, I am. . . no, nothing has happened, I just wanted for the two of us to talk a bit about him – I am a little worried – he is still so young, neglecting his practice sessions - and the national competition takes places soon. . . No, this does

not mean that we are talking behind his back – this is the only way we can be utterly open and sincere. . . Where did he get the idea that sport was not for him and that I am pressuring him? . . . I simply know that his results would be incomparably better if he practised with me and spent less time on. . .

Listen, we both love him and that gives me the right to. . .

(The Son comes into the room. The Father does not notice.)

FATHER: He is so young and inexperienced, and it would be hard for you to plan a future with him, because of that difference - I mean. . .

What difference?

I mean the difference in age, of course. . . Why should this be a tasteless conversation – he will finish secondary school in a year’s time, and you will be graduating university so how could you plan a life together. . . Why should I seem to be a possessive father who is stifling his son – surely he didn’t say that. . . I simply wanted to talk with you for his good and for yours. . . why should you tell him about this conversation, I wanted it to stay between us. . . Wait a moment, wait!

. . . Hello! Hello! . . .

(The Father puts down the receiver.)

FATHER: Impudent young hussy!

(At that moment the Father turns around and notices his son.)

FATHER: What are you doing here?

SON: They closed the store early because of inventory-taking.

FATHER: When did you come in. . . how long have you been here?

SON: Long enough. I didn’t know you had her number.

FATHER: I had to tell her what I think. . . for your good.

(Silence.)

FATHER: Are you angry at me?

SON: That phone call of yours. . . there was no need for it. We broke it off yesterday.

FATHER: Thank goodness that you dropped her.

SON: I didn’t drop her, she dropped me.

FATHER: She didn't tell me – she let me go on trying to convince her.

SON: I'll never forgive you for this.

FATHER: But can't you see that she realised, too, that you were too young for her.

SON: Yeah – right! – I just found out that she has started going out with a boy who is a year younger than I am.

FATHER: A year younger than you?

SON: Yes.

FATHER: So it's the young'uns who turn her on.

SON: Looks like it.

FATHER: Then I was right that she was not for you. . .

SON: That doesn't matter now, but don't try to interfere in my intimate life again, never ever!

FATHER: I won't. Forgive me.

SCENE 7. (*THE WRONG UNIVERSITY FACULTY AND FEMALE BLACKMAIL, 1973*)

(The Father is forty-two years old, and the Son is nineteen. The Son is at home alone reading a novel and then his father arrives.)

FATHER: Ah. . . How was it at university today?

SON: Fine.

FATHER: What courses did you have today – History of Sport or Pedagogy?

(The Son does not answer immediately, as if he is surprised at his father's question.)

SON: History of Sport.

FATHER: Mmm. History of Sport?

SON: Yes, History of Sport.

FATHER: And – what did you learn?

SON: We learnt. . . we learnt about the Greek Olympics.

FATHER: Super.

SON: Yes – it was very interesting.

FATHER: Cut the crap, kid!

SON: What? Why?

FATHER: How could you do that?

SON: Do what?

FATHER: I went to the Faculty of Physical Culture today – I called in at Professor Heimer’s office and asked how my son was getting along, how were his studies going, and what was his behaviour like. . . I almost fainted when Heimer told me that you did not even sit for the entrance examination, and that you had not submitted you application documents. You’re not a student there at all – I turned out to be a complete fool!

(Silence.)

SON: Look. . . you know. . . it was . . . I wanted to tell you, but I did not know how to without hurting your feelings. I am not studying what you wanted me to, but what I love.

FATHER: And what is that, if I may ask?

SON: Literature.

FATHER: You’re not normal – what can you do with that? Those are courses for young ladies with time on their hands.

SON: I’m sorry, but it’s my life.

FATHER: You have really disappointed me. For a month now I have been boasting to my friends that my son is studying at the Faculty of Physical Culture. Ivan promised me that he would give you a job at the club as soon as you graduated. . . I thought that would be the best option for you. What can you do with Literature, except teach children in school about dead writers?

SON: Even that wouldn’t be too bad.

FATHER: But it’s not for you – your character is far too dynamic, and being a graduate teacher is a job for women – just fiddling around. . . And apart from that – perhaps you could have achieved something in tennis, even

internationally, that short Italian won the tournament in Prague in his 30th year, and he started fairly late.

SON: Dad, he's an exception. . . tennis is great as a hobby and for fun, but you can't regard it as a lifetime calling. As a serious job.

FATHER: And why can't you. – Quite a few have solved their existence here thanks to sport, but not many can say the same for Literature.

(The Father takes two bottles of beer out of the fridge. He opens one and hands it to his son.)

FATHER: Did Maria ring?

SON: No.

FATHER: Just as well that she didn't.

SON: Have you made up your mind?

FATHER: No, I haven't. It's not easy to decide. . . When she said that she wanted to talk seriously with me, I knew there was some big issue on the horizon. And – she didn't want to come here to our flat – she insisted that we met in some café – on neutral territory.

SON: But listen. . . it still not easy for a woman to say: 'I want to marry you' – it's hard to put that so directly.

FATHER: She wasn't so direct about it at the beginning. . . first of all she spoke something quite far-removed about the weather and the beer I was drinking – things like: is bottled beer better than draught, that she doesn't understand why I always drink bottled beer, but then she suddenly started speaking about the fact that she was already a full thirty-seven years old, that if she wanted to be a mother this was the last moment, that her biological clock was loudly ticking and that, one day, she could regret having missed her opportunity if she did not give birth now. . . Overall – she said that she wanted a real relationship with me and a family – or nothing – and then she added that she did not want to put any pressure on me, and that she would give me ten days in which we would not see each other, so that I could have time to think over everything in peace, and then after that I could either

propose or we could go our separate ways as friends, without anybody being angry at anybody.

SON: I told you it was a proposal – if you reject it – you will lose her.

FATHER: I know – and I have really become used to her. . . but I don't like it when somebody tries to force me and I have to decide on the basis of 'take it or leave it'. I have never liked that.

(The telephone rings. The Father stands up, goes to the table where the phone is standing, and lifts the receiver after the third ring.)

FATHER: Hello - . . . Oh, Maria, it's you. . . tell me. . . yes. . . yes. . . but I was just thinking, I was just going to ring you. . . You can't say that! . . . just let me finish what I was saying. . . But today is the ninth day. . . not the tenth – what humiliation are you talking about. . . that's was never my intention . . . I am sorry if you thought that. . . then good-bye to you, too.

(The Father puts down the receiver.)

FATHER: Oh shit!

SON: What happened?

FATHER: It's over! – She was angry that I had not rung her in these ten days – But she was the one who suggested that we did not see each other until I made a decision and says that my hesitancy is a true image of my character. She was calling from the railway station – she's going to the seaside with some girl-friends. And you know what that means?

SON: No, I don't. What does that mean?

FATHER: That means that she will have it off with the first sailor-boy she finds.

SON: So it's over?

FATHER: Finished.

SON: I'm sorry.

FATHER: So am I. . . She could have at least waited until tomorrow. . . I was already so close to deciding. . . I probably would have even proposed to her tomorrow

. . . but then again, maybe not. . .

SON: Would you have or not?

FATHER: Actually – I have no idea.

SCENE 8. (*HIS FRIEND'S DAUGHTER, 1974*)

(The Father is forty-three and the son twenty years old. The Father is at the tennis court and the Son arrives.)

SON: Hey!

FATHER: Listen!

SON: What is it?

FATHER: Dragec is my friend. . . Dragec has been my friend since we were at university together. And that daughter of his – she is only fifteen years old. Still just a kid. . . He rang me today.

SON: And?

FATHER: He is upset. She hid it from him, just as you have hidden it from me.

SON: I was afraid you would be against it.

FATHER: With good reason – she is just a child.

SON: A child, my foot – she wears a ‘C’ cup. – She looks as though she’s twenty.

FATHER: Couldn’t you choose somebody else?

SON: But we love each other.

FATHER: You’ll ruin my friendship – If anything happens to her. . .

SON: What could possibly happen to her. I don’t take her on a motor-bike without a helmet.

FATHER: Dragec will send me to hell.

SON: Come on, Dad – I can’t be thinking about things like that.

FATHER: But you should.

SON: If you were in my place, you would act just the same.

FATHER: I don’t think so – I would switch on my brain. It would be best if you broke it off with her right now – before it becomes serious.

SON: No way!

FATHER: You really are stubborn.

SON: I could say the same thing about you.

FATHER: It would be best for both of you if you broke it off as soon as possible.

SON: That's never going to happen. Never.

(Music chords. The lights change suggesting the passing of some time.)

SCENE 9. (*THE CLAP*, 1974)

(The Son is playing squash without a ball on the tennis court, as if the 'wall' is where the audience would be. His strokes become stronger as if he is angry. He is out of breath. His father arrives.)

FATHER: Hey!

SON: Hey!

FATHER: Dragec phoned me.

SON: Did he?

FATHER: The little one hasn't stopped crying.

SON: What can I do about that?

FATHER: How could you leave her like that?

(The Son stops playing.)

SON: Dad, she's not for me. She's five years younger than I am – there's nothing for me to discuss with her. - She's young, boring and empty. It's better for her and it's better for me that we have ended it.

FATHER: You've dropped her after three months – just when Dragec and I got used to the idea. She's on the verge of suicide. Dragec is expecting you to call her and for you two to make up. And that's what I'm expecting, too.

SON: What's the matter with you two – are you both normal? What right do you have to interfere in our relationship?

FATHER: She's my best friend's daughter. That's why I told you it was not a good idea to go out with the daughters of my friends, and especially with an under-age virgin.

SON: Come on, Dad – why don't you leave me in peace!

FATHER: I work at Dragec's fitness club – he's the only one who regularly pays me.

SON: Surely you're not going to talk me into making up with her because of money?

FATHER: Of course it's not because of the money – but you can see how complicated this all is for me now – it concerns my job and my friend. I told you that there was no sense in ever getting involved with immature and innocent young girls. And now that you've made such a mess of things you have to phone her and calm her down somehow so that – God forbid – she doesn't do herself any harm.

SON: She's not as immature and innocent as she looks – and I have no intention of ever phoning her again! If you only knew what she has done to me – you would tell me to give her a swift kick in the arse.

FATHER: Come on – what are you talking about? – She is so gentle, so fine and sweet. What could she have done to you?

SON: I can't talk about it.

FATHER: You had best tell me what this is all about.

SON: I really can't – it's too embarrassing.

FATHER: Now that you've started – tell me to the end.

SON: Only if you promise not to tell anyone.

FATHER: You know that I can keep a secret. Well, what is it?

SON: Well, you see. . . a week ago. . . I started to get a stinging sensation.

FATHER: What sort of stinging sensation?

SON: You know – that. . .

FATHER: What that?

SON: That – when I went to the WC.

FATHER: What's the WC got to do with it?

SON: When I was peeing. . . and then my balls swelled up. . . and it started to be painful. . . I woke up one night and went to the toilet – and suddenly I saw a yellowish purulent discharge.

FATHER: Bloody hell? Really?

SON: I went to the student clinic – as soon as I told the doctor about it he laughed and asked: ‘Who was the lady who made a gift to you of gonorrhoea?’ They took a swab for analysis and it showed that I really had the clap.

FATHER: The clap! - What shit! - And who did you pick it up from?

SON: What do you mean, from whom? - From your ‘sweet and fine’ Lana, of course.

FATHER: That’s impossible!

SON: She’s the only one I have been with the last three months. . . The incubation period is a few days – which means – she infected me last week or, in other words, in the meantime, while she was still with me, she was screwing someone else who had the clap, and passed it on to me so I would have something to remember her by.

FATHER: The little slut! How could she do that to you!

SON: Quite easily – it seems.

FATHER: I’ll ring her father right away and tell him what sort of daughter he has.

SON: Are you out of your mind?

FATHER: I am very sane – if you only knew how Dragec was nagging me today about what a swine you are, and his little Lana as sensitive and gentle as a princess!

SON: Dad, you’re working at his fitness centre!

FATHER: He and his fitness centre and his infested daughter can go to hell! He didn’t even know how to bring her up properly. I’ll tell him everything!

SON: Dad, please, don’t make scenes. Everything is alright now.

FATHER: Nothing’s alright.

SON: I have been having injections – in a week or so this will all be in the distant past for me. And, anyway, the story about me and Lana is over.

(Silence.)

FATHER: You know what – the most dangerous girls are the ones who look so innocent.

SON: Yes, I know Dad. . . I know that now.

SCENE 10. (*I'M GETTING MARRIED, 1984*)

(The father is now fifty-three years old and the Son is thirty. The father and son are sitting at a table in a café – there are two beer bottles on the table in front of them.)

FATHER: I'll be quite frank – I am really pleased that you invited me for a beer. Since you moved to your girl-friend's flat, we haven't had a chance to have a good talk. It's as though I don't have a son any more.

SON: Come on, Dad.

FATHER: It's as though she has something against me!

SON: What are you talking about, Dad – she respects you. We are simply in a mess at the moment. Neda was finishing her degree thesis, and has to defend it next week. There's nothing easy about studying medicine.

FATHER: And how are you getting on at the Culture Centre?

SON: Just fine – I have time for my own writing and for editing the journal. No pressure. It's much easier for me than when I was teaching school.

FATHER: I'm only sorry that you gave up on tennis – but I can see that you culture vultures live much better than any of us working in sport. We have to achieve some results, but you lot. . .

SON: We have to show some results, too.

FATHER: You don't say – you can live on your laurels, but if you are not first today in sport, it's as though you don't exist.

(Silence.)

SON: Listen.

FATHER: What is it?

SON: The wedding is in a month's time.

FATHER: Whose wedding?

SON: Mine. . . ours.

FATHER: You're kidding me?

SON: No. – I'm getting married.

FATHER: Who are you marrying?

SON: Dad, what sort of question is that? – Neda, of course.

FATHER: Neda?

SON: Yes, Neda.

FATHER: Isn't that a little bit too early?

SON: We don't have very much more time.

FATHER: Of course you do – you have your whole lives in front of you.

SON: She's pregnant.

FATHER: Who's pregnant?

SON: Neda, of course.

FATHER: Are you sure?

SON: One hundred percent.

FATHER: Which month?

SON: The fourth.

FATHER: Holy shit! - And you are telling me only now – you invite me for a beer only now?

SON: I only found out myself a week ago.

FATHER: Just a minute – she's studying medicine – surely she could have realised earlier?

SON: She says she thought it was only a hormonal disturbance.

FATHER: What sort of hormonal disturbance?

SON: She stopped taking her contraceptive pills.

FATHER: And why did she stop?

SON: Because they are not good for your health – she suggested we be careful in the natural way.

FATHER: Aha – I can see how successful you have been at that. . . Hats off to you.

. . . Women are cunning creatures – when they want to tie a man to them – they don't care about the means. – Natural protection against pregnancy is the surest way to get pregnant and catch their man forever.

SON: Give over, Dad – we would have married sooner or later anyway.

FATHER: Yes, but not like this – she practically proposed to you – isn't that so?

SON: Well. . . I suppose she did – but I accepted immediately.

FATHER: You said 'yes' immediately?

SON: Yes – right off.

FATHER: You know something? – I know people who became henpecked husbands after their marriage, after ten or fifteen years of married life - and I can understand that somehow, but that someone can become henpecked even before marriage is worthy of national mourning – it's a natural disaster - both for the person in question and for the entire male gender.

SON: Dad, I love her. I am happy at the thought that she is going to be my wife and that we will have a child.

FATHER: Really?

SON: Really.

FATHER: In that case, my congratulations. Both regarding your wife and your child.

SON: Thank you.

(Silence.)

FATHER: Do you already know the gender?

SON: Male, probably – but nothing's quite certain.

FATHER: It never is – it's only later that you see if it's a real male or not.

SON: That's not what I had in mind.

FATHER: Ah, yes. . . And what's his name going to be?

SON: He's going to be called Luke.

FATHER: There are no Lukes in our family.

SON: Her father's name is Luke.

FATHER: Ah, so that's it?

SON: They have no male children – just the three girls. . . and Neda is the oldest.

(Silence.)

SON: There has been another very crucial event in my life.

FATHER: What's so crucial? What could be as crucial as this?

(The Son removes a book from his bag.)

SON: My first novel was published yesterday. – This is your copy.

(He hands the book to his father – his father takes it and studies the title page.)

FATHER: *Winning Is What's Important* – it's as though it is a book about sport?

SON: Well, the novel really is somewhat connected with sport.

FATHER: Really?

SON: Yes – it's about a boy, and later he is a young man who trains to be a boxer.

FATHER: I can hardly wait to read it. Ohh – two hundred and fifty pages!

SON: I wrote it over two years.

FATHER: Congratulations. I always knew that you would succeed as a writer, always.

SON: Really?

FATHER: Yes, really.

SON: But you never told me that.

FATHER: But I thought it. . . I assumed you would.

(Silence.)

FATHER: And this wedding – what are you planning?

SON: Well, we thought we would invite only friends – you and her parents – and that's that. . . and her gynaecologist.

FATHER: Why do you need a gynaecologist at your wedding?

SON: Look – they have become friends – he has been monitoring her pregnancy.

FATHER: Alright, but. . . what’s her gynaecologist doing at the wedding?

SON: Just in case – if something were to go wrong.

FATHER: But what could go wrong?

SON: What do I know – he said that she should avoid strain and so. . .

FATHER: You really are henpecked – a prime example of the breed.

SCENE 11. (*THE NOVEL’S HERO*, 1984)

(The Father is sitting at a table in a café. There is a bottle of beer on the table in front of him. The Son comes into the café.)

SON: Hey, Dad. What’s so urgent? We talked about everything the day before yesterday. It’s hectic at work today, but you insisted: ‘Get your arse over here’ and then you hung up on me. What’s so urgent that it couldn’t wait until tomorrow?

FATHER: I read that trash!

SON: What trash?

FATHER: Your novel – your disgusting novel!

SON: Why do you say disgusting – where’s the problem? I only. . .

FATHER: That monster of a coach who mistreats his son from morning to night – that’s me. While that fine, sweet little son who is not interested in sport – that’s you. You described the two of us.

SON: Come on, Dad. . . it has nothing to do with us. It’s about boxing.

FATHER: Of course it has to do with us, and that: ‘I woke up every morning under the pressure of my father’s insatiable ambition and desire to win - that ambition ruined my youth, and took the air from my lungs so that I could hardly breathe’ – My friends will laugh at me when they read it. That man in the novel even has hair my colour, eyes my colour, my height, and even likes beer the way I do! You have shamed me with your book. And I have devoted my entire life to you, and this is how you pay me back – it’s horrendous! I want you to know

that you have deeply offended and disappointed me. And I shall never speak another word to you again.

SON: But Dad, you have misunderstood everything – it’s literature, fiction, the man has another name, I wanted him to be convincing – The wedding is in a month’s time – Neda’s parents rang today, they are looking forward to meeting you.

FATHER: I am not interested in you or your wedding or the parents of your wife. This is our last conversation – your novel is spitting on your very own father – public shaming that I shall never forgive. If anyone asks if I have a son, I shall reply – I have no son! And now, good-bye! And don’t phone me anymore.

SON: But, Dad. . .

(The Father storms angrily out of the café.)

SCENE 12. (A *CRYING BABY*, 1985)

(The Son is now thirty-one. It is night-time – a baby’s crying is heard. The crying continues. The Son, dressed in a sweat-suit, comes into the room, goes over to the phone, lifts the receiver and dials.)

SON: Hello. . . Dado, hello, it’s Ivo. . . no, nothing’s happened, sorry to be calling so late. It’s almost midnight, and I have a big problem – my wife has gone away to a conference, and I’m alone with the little one. . . listen, he has filled his nappy three times in half an hour – it’s a greenish diarrhoea – is that dangerous for a baby who is one year old?. . . No, I gave him his normal food – mashed vegetables and half a banana. . . but it smells awful – it’s like diarrhoea, is it the same with your son?. . . You think that’s normal. . . Should I boil him some rice?. . . I’m worried it’s some sort of infection. . . What do you mean that infections are normal?. . . Every time I look after him he starts to shit like mad, or develops a temperature, or his tummy hurts – screw it, instead of peacefully watching TV and having a beer, I am changing nappies. . .

(The baby’s crying in the next-door room suddenly starts again.)

SON: Sorry, I have to go, he's probably done it again for the fourth time. But thank you, anyway – bye!

SCENE 13. (*THE GIFT OF A BICYCLE, 1990*)

(The Father is now fifty-nine years old, and the Son is thirty-six. The Father is alone at home – he is holding the telephone receiver and speaking with someone on the phone.)

FATHER: Hello. . . Could you please tell me if the bicycle I ordered has been delivered to the address I gave you. . . So everything went smoothly?. . . What do you mean your man told them who was sending the bicycle? We agreed that the sender's name would not be revealed, my grandson is five years old today and I wanted him to receive a bike from his grandfather. . . A chance mistake? – Then you are a chance idiot!. . . What business is it of yours if I don't want my grandson to know that his grandfather is sending him a bicycle!. . . I shall never do business with you again! Idiots!

(The Father angrily slams down the receiver. He starts walking nervously to and fro.)

FATHER: Bloody idiots!

(The Father picks up the newspaper and sits on the couch. . . At that moment the front-door bell rings.)

FATHER: It's open. Come in!

(The Son comes into the room.)

SON: Hey, Dad.

(The Father does not respond to the greeting.)

SON: Forgive me for busting in like this – I just wanted to tell you that they delivered your bicycle two hours ago and that Luke was very happy, and when he heard that it was from his grandfather. . . All the kids at kindergarten boast about this grandmothers and grandfathers. . . and he has not even met you. . . I have come to invite you to his birthday party. . . My wife's parents will also be there

. . . A fifth birthday is an important occasion. . . children remember it. . .

(Still no answer from the Father.)

SON: I know that you are still angry at me. . . It's alright if you want to punish me, but don't take it out on him. . . everyone says he looks like you and his other grandpa is not in the best of health after that stroke.

(Silence.)

FATHER: Have you said everything you wanted to?

SON: Well. . . more or less. . .

FATHER: If that's everything – then you can toddle off home. Because, sending Luke a bicycle did not mean that I have forgiven you.

SON: Dad, I found out that you secretly got hold of Luke's photos.

FATHER: I asked if you had said everything you had to say?

SON: Not everything. . . there is something else, if you permit me.

FATHER: I'm listening – if I have to.

SON: That bike of yours – it will remain in the cellar. Luke won't be riding it until you teach him the way you taught me.

FATHER: What are you talking about?

SON: You can't start riding a bike before you know how to drive a *wheel-barrow* – the way you taught me. I promised him that his grandfather would teach him how to drive a *wheel-barrow*, and a real bike only after that.

(A long silence follows. They look each other in the eye, unflinchingly. At one moment, the Father smiles and widens his arms for a hug.)

FATHER: Come on – I forgive you. I shall teach him the *wheel-barrow*.

(The Son moves into his father's hug.)

SON: Thanks, Dad.

FATHER: I read your novel again a while ago and I understood, not only do you know how to write, but you described me exactly in that book. That's just the way I was.

SON: No Dad, really, that wasn't you.

FATHER: It's me alright. – I wanted to fulfil my ambitions through you, and no father has the right to anything like that, no father at all. When does the party begin?

SON: In an hour's time.

FATHER: Let's go then – so that I can teach him the *wheel-barrow* before the guests arrive – otherwise they'll think that Luke has a screw-ball grandfather.

SON: Let's go.

SCENE 14. (*THE SECRETARY, 1994*)

(The Son is now forty years old and the Father sixty-three. We are at the tennis court. The Father and the Son are playing squash, with the 'wall' on the side on which the audience is sitting. The Father stops playing at one moment.)

FATHER: Anything new at your place?

SON: No, nothing particular.

FATHER: Really nothing?

SON: Really.

(Silence.)

SON: ...have you heard something. . . do you know something?

FATHER: Luke mentioned something at practice yesterday.

SON: What did he say?

(The game is over.)

FATHER: He said that you haven't been sleeping at home for a week now. What's going on?

SON: Look – everything's become complicated.

FATHER: What's become complicated?

SON: With Neda. . . and at work, too.

FATHER: What's happening at work?

SON: You see. . . when I was appointed general manager of the Culture Centre six months ago, we hired a new secretary – secretary to the general manager.

FATHER: Ah yes, that little blonde with the big boobies!

SON: Yes – her.

FATHER: What’s her name again?

SON: Penelope.

FATHER: Penelope – what sort of name is that?

SON: That was the name of Ulysses’ wife.

FATHER: So she’s married?

SON: Of course not – it’s from the Greek myths – Homer.

FATHER: Ahaa.

SON: She’s very sweet. . . I could rely on her for everything and so. . . it just happened. . .

FATHER: What happened?

SON: We became close.

FATHER: You mean you screwed her?

SON: Well. . . yes, I did – once. . . a few times.

FATHER: Are you normal? - You have a ten year old son, you have a wife!

SON: It simply happened. – I couldn’t control myself.

FATHER: It never simply happens.

SON: Neda is always away on her night shifts.

FATHER: While that Penelope is always close at hand.

SON: I thought – it will be over of its own accord – but some idiot sent Neda an anonymous letter telling her that I was having it off with my secretary – after that letter she threw me out of the flat, and said she didn’t want to have anything to do with me – anyway, I had to move out.

FATHER: Where did you go?

SON: Well – to Penelope’s place.

FATHER: Oh, what an idiot!

SON: Why?

FATHER: You only admitted your guilt by doing that.

SON: She had the proof anyway.

FATHER: Until they catch you red-handed – wives never have absolute proof!

SON: I couldn't lie any more.

FATHER: A man must never admit anything. Until he admits it, he is not guilty. – Get it? Women don't want you to admit it. Even when they insist on it at the cost of their suicide.

SON: So I really have made a mess of everything. You're saying that I had to keep on denying it?

FATHER: To the bitter end – everything.

(Silence.)

FATHER: So now you are living with your secretary.

SON: That's it – that's the way it's turned out.

FATHER: That's really messy – you have to break that off immediately and go back to your wife.

SON: How am I supposed to do that – she wants nothing to do with me. She is mad as hell.

FATHER: She has a right to be.

SON: Even I know that now.

FATHER: And the secretary is pleased that the general manager has moved in with her.

SON: Yes – she really fusses over me.

FATHER: Perhaps she was the one who wrote the anonymous letter to your wife.

SON: Dad! Surely she would never do that.

FATHER: And why not – you know how cunning women can be when they are fighting for their man.

SON: But that would be really twisted.

FATHER: Who else would want you to break off with your wife?

SON: Well. . . I don't know. . . Come on now, don't plant that doubt in my mind, I'm crazy enough already.

(Silence.)

FATHER: Man – your son needs you more than ever now – he is ten years old, and his father is leaving home – do you know what that can mean for his mental stability?

SON: I didn't leave because I wanted to. – Neda threw me out.

FATHER: It didn't take much to talk you into leaving. Have you told the boy?

SON: No, we haven't – we agreed that we would tell him after the divorce.

FATHER: What's this now about a divorce?

SON: Neda submitted papers for a divorce yesterday.

FATHER: That, too – makes it even worse. Your wife certainly does not lose time.

(Silence.)

SON: Look – since all this has happened, the boy has avoided talking with me. . . so I thought I would ask you.

FATHER: I'm listening.

SON: Since you are his coach at tennis and he is so very fond of you – try to put in a good word for me with him. . . I am afraid that he will hear only the worst about me from Neda.

FATHER: You know what? I'd rather bawl you out in front of him. – How could you make such a mess of your lives - for yourself and for them?

SON: What can I do now – it happened.

FATHER: It didn't happen without you wanting it to. It's because you think with that thing down there and not with your head.

SON: Please, Dad, it got out of control. . . I didn't want this. . . I have obviously lost my wife, help me not to lose my son.

SCENE 15. (*SHE'S BEEN PROPOSED TO, 1999*)

(The Father is sixty-eight and the Son is forty-five. The Father is in a café sitting on a bar-stool with two bottles of beer and two glasses in front of him on the bar. The Son comes in.)

SON: Sorry I'm late. . . What's the problem, Dad – is it anything to do with Luke?

FATHER: Everything's fine with him – he is training regularly – he is the most talented kid I have had so far in the club. He was been invited to the European Junior Championships.

SON: That's great – so he's in the team for Europe. . . Did you give him my regards?

FATHER: Yes, I did.

SON: And?

FATHER: And what?

SON: Did he say: 'Give him my regards, too.'?

FATHER: No, he didn't. As soon as I mention you – he just falls silent.

SON: It's been the same for five years now – he's never going to forgive me.

FATHER: I have tried to explain to him that parents have a right to their mistakes, too – but he simply won't listen.

SON: Did you tell him that I'm not the general manager anymore?

FATHER: Yes – I told him you were no longer the general manager and that your secretary is going out with the new one and that you have left the Culture Centre, and that you are teaching at a secondary school. I told him how difficult things are for you – but none of that seems to reach him. . . But that is not why I asked you to come here.

SON: Why then?

FATHER: Do you know that your ex-wife. . . do you know that Neda has been in a relationship with that doctor from Split for a year?

SON: Yes, I know - you told me.

FATHER: I saw him a few days ago when he was in Zagreb.

SON: And – what does he look like?

FATHER: Good looking, strong, tall. . . you know what men from Dalmatia are like. He's twenty centimetres taller than you.

SON: Twenty centimetres taller than me?

FATHER: He looks like a male model. I had brought your son a new racket – and he was there so Neda introduced us. He was just leaving. And when he had gone Neda told me he had just proposed to her. . . and that is why he had come to Zagreb.

SON: What do you mean 'proposed'?

FATHER: He had proposed marriage to her. . . and had even brought a ring. . .

SON: And of course she had to tell you. She should have been embarrassed – after all, you are my father.

FATHER: Luke was there, too.

SON: How did he react?

FATHER: He said nothing.

SON: When he is quiet – that's a sign that something is not to his liking. . .

FATHER: Of course, this fellow expects Neda to move to Split to be with him after they marry.

SON: To Split!

FATHER: That's where he lives – he's a big cheese there, heads up the Surgery Clinic. . . And d'you know what that all means?

SON: What?

FATHER: That means that you won't even see your son from time to time any more, and I won't see my grandson. That means that the smallest possibility of you and Neda ever getting together again will be lost forever.

SON: Oh, shit! Where has this all come from so suddenly.

FATHER: That's why I wanted to talk with you. I have a brilliant plan that could fix everything.

SON: What's the plan?

FATHER: A plan for you to win over Neda once more. . . Look, it's like this – to celebrate Luke getting a place in the team for the European Junior Championships – I shall throw a party for all the boys from the club, and I'll

invite you and Neda. I told the boy that this was the last chance for his parents to kiss and make up.

SON: When Neda hears that I'm invited to the party, she definitely won't come.

FATHER: She doesn't have to know that you are invited – I won't tell her and neither will Luke.

SON: That means that you have won his support for this crazy plan. Alright, Dad, but can't you see how funny and naïve it all is – this party and our reconciliation. . . you've started to dabble in science fiction. . .

SCENE 16. *A PAIR OF OLD NANNIES*, 2000)

(The Father is now sixty-nine years old, and the Son forty-six. It is dark in the room. The sound of a baby crying can be heard. The crying grows increasing loud. Gradually the lights come up and we see a baby's pram that is the location of the crying. The Son, wearing a dressing-gown, suddenly enters the room, rubs his sleepy eyes, goes over to the pram and pushes it back and forth.)

SON: Calm down, little one. . . my little love. . . calm down, Daddy's little girl . . . your daddy is here, there's nothing for you to worry about, don't you be afraid of anything. . . be a good little girl.

(The baby calms down. The Son pushes the pram around the room for a while. He then goes over to the refrigerator and takes out a bottle of beer, sits on a chair, opens the bottle. However, just as he goes to put the bottle to his mouth, the baby starts crying again. The Son puts down the bottle, goes to the pram and starts rocking it. After a while, the baby stops crying. The Son goes to the chair again, but just as he picks up the bottle, the baby starts crying once more. At that moment, the Father, also wearing a dressing-gown, comes into the room.)

FATHER: Why is the little one crying?

SON: If you know the answer to that, you can win the Nobel Prize. . .

FATHER: Do you want me to push her around a bit, or should I pick her up?

SON: It's alright – I'll do it.

(The Father goes to the refrigerator and takes out a bottle of beer for himself.)

FATHER: At least we can have a beer.

SON: I had the same idea – but the little one just won't settle down.

(The Father opens his bottle. The baby girl is quiet. The Son goes back to his chair. The Father moves his chair towards his son's.)

SON: Finally we can relax and just be 'here for the beer'.

FATHER: Bottoms up!

(But at that moment, before they can down their first sip, the baby starts crying loudly. The Son wants to get to his feet, but his father stops him.)

FATHER: Wait. . . I'll take care of it.

(The Father dampens his index finger in his beer bottle.)

SON: Dad, what are you doing. . .?

FATHER: You'll see.

(The Father walks over to the pram and offers the baby his index finger soaked in beer. We hear the baby contentedly sucking on his finger.)

SON: Dad, what on earth are you doing?

FATHER: Putting your little daughter to sleep.

SON: Dad, have you lost it, if anyone could see you. . .

FATHER: And who could see me? There are no hidden cameras in this room.

SON: You can't give a baby alcohol.

FATHER: That's not alcohol, it's beer.

SON: So you're saying that beer isn't alcohol?

FATHER: Of course it isn't.

(The baby is quiet. The Father returns to his son.)

FATHER: Ah, now we can enjoy ourselves like men.

(The Father and the Son clink bottles.)

FATHER: Cheers!

SON: Cheers!

(They both take a sip of beer from their bottles.)

FATHER: Ah man, how your life has changed over the last year – you have a new, old wife, a son, and at the age of forty-six you have a daughter! Are you happy?

SON: Happy, yes, but sleep-deprived.

FATHER: If I had not organised that celebration for the entire club, if I had not invited you and Neda – she would have married that other fellow and moved to Split – none of this would have happened and your life would have gone to hell.

SON: If we both had not gotten drunk and ended up in the toilet of that restaurant, our little Lucy would not have happened either.

FATHER: But you're happy now, aren't you?

SON: Well – I would be even happier if she had not decided to take that residency and that you had not suggested that it would be better for me to come here to you with the baby before all her exams, so that she could get some sleep and be refreshed.

FATHER: It's important for Luke, too, to be able to study in peace in the evening and get a good night's sleep.

SON: So here we are, like a pair of old nannies.

FATHER: Ah, what can you do – at least some benefit from the two of us.
(Silence.)

SON: Listen. . . when I was a baby. . . how did you manage with me?

FATHER: Well – I always had a bottle of beer in the refrigerator for me. . . and for you.

SON: You're kidding?

FATHER: What's so bad about that? Even today, you enjoy your beer.

SON: Surely you didn't give me beer when I was a baby. . .?
(Silence.)

FATHER: Of course I didn't. Heaven forbid.

SON: You really didn't?

FATHER: That was a long time ago – I can't remember.

SON: Oh Dad, a man never knows where he is with you.

SCENE 17. (*THE GRANDSON, TOO, BECOMES A MAN*, 2010)

(The Father is seventy-nine and the Son is fifty-six. The Son is sitting at a table in a café. There are two bottles of beer in front of him. The Father appears, supported by a cane as he walks.)

SON: Hey, Dad. I've ordered your beer.

FATHER: Hey, Son. . . Glad you did. Thank you.

SON: How are you?

FATHER: I'd be fine if my hip didn't bother me. And what about you?

SON: Just so-so.

FATHER: If you are just so-so – I know that something must be wrong.

SON: Everything's alright really.

FATHER: No, it isn't.

SON: No, really.

FATHER: What's the problem?

SON: Well. . . I found out something. . . I don't think you will be pleased to hear it.

FATHER: Nobody's ill?

SON: No, it's not illness – just plain stupidity.

FATHER: Come on, tell me finally.

SON: Luke will be graduating in a month's time – he has been offered an assistant professorship at the Faculty of Physical Education.

FATHER: Great. What's wrong with that?

SON: Nothing's wrong there – but that girl-friend of his, that little redhead. . .

FATHER: What's wrong with her?

SON: She's expecting. And he's going to marry her.

FATHER: But that's wonderful.

SON: What's wonderful? She is still a student! The baby's due in six months time – where are they going to live? It's already crowded at our place. Neda and I are completely freaked out – and so is Luke.

FATHER: Ah, that's why he was so distracted at the last practice session.

SON: He's worried about how you will react – with the Davis Cup six months away – there's a chance that he could qualify, but he has to think of his wife, the baby on the way, he has to rent a flat. . . shit – everything at once.

(A long silence.)

FATHER: Listen – what's most important is that, as an athlete, he has peace of mind, that he is focused on his training, and that his concentration is not frittered away on solving prosaic problems. Do you agree?

SON: I agree.

FATHER: And I can offer a solution to all that.

SON: What do you have in mind?

FATHER: I will give my flat to him and his wife, and I shall move to a retirement home.

SON: Surely not, Dad, surely you don't plan to go into a home?

FATHER: Of course I do – I have won a china cabinet full of medals with Luke. Thanks to him, my sporting dreams have come true – and now when the Davis Cup is within his reach – I shall do everything for him to enjoy the best conditions, the very best. . . Another man is his official coach, but I am still his main mentor.

SON: You're not going to do this because of the Davis Cup. . .

FATHER: Yes I am – I went to the retirement home last week to visit a friend. And he introduced me to the manager of the home, who is a sports fan. He told me that, if I decide to go there, he will arrange a place for me out of turn, under the condition that I get some sports activities going at the home. . .

SON: So you'll be working with dilettantes again?

(Silence.)

FATHER: How's your new novel going?

SON: It was going very well. . . until I heard I was going to be a grandfather. Imagine – me a grandfather. And my daughter is only ten years old.

FATHER: Well, you got her quite late. . . And what does Neda say?

SON: She's completely confused. . . doesn't say anything for hours. . . and you know what it means when my wife stops talking.

FATHER: What?

SON: That means that she could blow up like a steam engine at any moment . . . she is angry at that little redhead for not being more careful.

FATHER: Luke could also have been careful – they can share the credit.

SON: You mean – they can share the guilt. . . Would you really go into a home?

FATHER: Yes, I would – I am tired of this solitude. There at least I shall always have company and regular meals.

SCENE 18. (*GIVING UP*, 2014)

(The father is eighty-three, and the Son is sixty. The Father is lying on his bed, under a coverlet. The Son comes into the room.)

SON: Hey, Dad!. . . How are you getting on?. . . They rang me to tell me that for a week now you haven't been going to breakfast, or lunch. . . and you have been skipping dinner!

FATHER: I don't feel like eating.

SON: You can't lie fully dressed in bed all day. . . you can't starve yourself for days. . . You know what that leads to, don't you?

FATHER: Yes, I do.

SON: So why are you doing it?

(Silence.)

SON: You know how much we all love you and how much you mean to us. To your grandson, and to your grand-daughter and to Neda and me and to your great grandson and to both your great-grand-daughters. . . we all care about you – and you are giving up on life. You just can't do that.

FATHER: I can, Son. - Nothing gives me joy any more. It's over. D'you understand – over.

SON: But Dad, life is God's gift. . . People are not supposed to start playing God. . . Let's go to the canteen, that you at least have some soup.

(Silence.)

FATHER: I'm not the least interested in the canteen, or in soup.

SON: I hear that you threw the psychologist out of your room yesterday, and all the woman wanted was to help you.

FATHER: Only those who leave me in peace can help me.

SON: There's no shame in depression. – It's an illness like any other, but a man has to fight against it. . . or at least try to. If you don't want to tell other people – at least tell me what is bothering you.

(Silence.)

SON: Why are you giving up on everything? Is it anything I have done. . . Or is it that you don't like being here at the home?. . . Come on, Dad, stop torturing me with your silence. You and I have always been close – you were both my father and my mother. Tell me so that I know the cause, so that I don't have to blame myself some day.

FATHER: Ahh. . . I'm just fed up with everything – since I have had to give up sport.

SON: How do you expect to have anything to do with sport – you are eighty-three years old – You can hardly move because of those hip operations.

FATHER: As a coach – I could still give a lot to others as a coach. . . if only they would let me.

SON: But you told me that there is no interest in sport here in the home, and that their idea of sport is chess and strolling in the park.

FATHER: Unfortunately – because they are all so lazy, inactive and passive.
(Silence.)

FATHER: Since my grandson gave up tennis, nothing makes me happy any more. He really disappointed me. . . He could have tried to qualify for the next Olympic Games.

SON: Since their third child was born he can't practise any more – and apart from that, he is working on his PhD in the history of sport.

FATHER: What's the point of all that theory?

SON: He has to do it – he is lecturing at the university, and must have academic status.

FATHER: A theoretician – that's just blah, blah, blah. . . I just sit here and don't move around at all. I miss the sport halls, the training sessions, the competition, and the excitement. . . Now, please, off you go and leave me alone. We have talked enough.

(Silence. The Son sighs deeply. He stands up and walks towards the door. . . Then he pauses.)

SON: Listen, Dad – I have a suggestion. - I'll be sixty in two weeks time and I am entering the older group of veteran players, as far as tennis is concerned. . . but I shall still be the youngest in that older group.

FATHER: And?

SON: I'd like to pick up a racket again. There is a national tournament for tennis veterans in the autumn. If you were to coach me three times a week – I am certain that I could be fit in six months. I could even win a cup. Anyway, it's worth a try, don't you think?

FATHER: You're not joking?

SON: No, I'm dead serious.

FATHER: You would agree to me coaching you?

SON: Of course I would – there's no-one better.

FATHER: You know what I have to say?

SON: No, tell me.

(The Father gets up out of bed. He is fully clothed.)

FATHER: This is the happiest day of my life. - We will start practice tomorrow!

SON: But I do have a small problem.

FATHER: What's that?

SON: My nerves are pretty much on edge – what with my wife, the children, the grand-children. - You must not shout at me.

FATHER: I won't, don't worry, I won't. . . if you listen to me, of course. We will start with fitness training tomorrow. You have to change your eating habits – you have been eating so unhealthily the last few years. No more watching television late at night. We will draw up a table of all your daily activities. And being out late at night is a thing of the past. No more partying with failed writers.

SON: Dad, don't make me sorry now that we have agreed.

FATHER: You won't be sorry – the two of us will be on the first page of *Sports News*.

SON: That means – that I shall lose that small literary reputation that I still have left.

FATHER: Sport is more important than culture – let's go on our way to winning.

SON: Let's go. . . but first to lunch!

FATHER: If we have to. . . If you knew what the food is like here, you wouldn't be forcing me.

SON: Coaches have to eat regularly, too – that is also part of self-discipline.

FATHER: I know. You can count on my self-discipline – just you make sure not to give in and become demoralised after the first few days.

SON: I won't, Dad, thanks to you – because we two are a team. What sort of team?

FATHER: A winning team.

SON: Exactly – we are a winning team – except when we lose. (The Father and the Son start laughing and hug each other.)

- THE END -