SUNSPOTS

Mankind must become better and more evil.
Nietzsche

Characters

Matthias
Vera
Joseph
Gregor
Tadey
Judy
Santa Claus

Sunspots was first produced by the Ljubljana City Theatre, opening on September 23, 1999. It was directed by Dušan Mlakar with the following cast:

Matthias	Marko Simčič
Vera	Ljerka Belak
Joseph	Evgen Car
Gregor	Milan Štefe
Tadey	Jožef Ropoša
Judy	Judita Zidar
Santa Claus	Ivan Jezernik

Milan Štefe, Judita Zidar
Sunspots, Ljubljana City Theatre, Slovenia, 1999

Evgen Car, Ljerka Belak, Ivan Jezernik
Sunspots, Ljubljana City Theatre, Slovenia, 1999

Jožef Roposha, Judita Zidar, Milan Štefe, Marko Simčič
Sunspots, Ljubljana City Theatre, Slovenia, 1999

Marko Simčič
Sunspots, Ljubljana City Theatre, Slovenia, 1999

Evgen Car, Marko Simčič, Ivan Jezernik
Sunspots, Ljubljana City Theatre, Slovenia, 1999

Evgen Car, Ivan Jezernik, Marko Simčič
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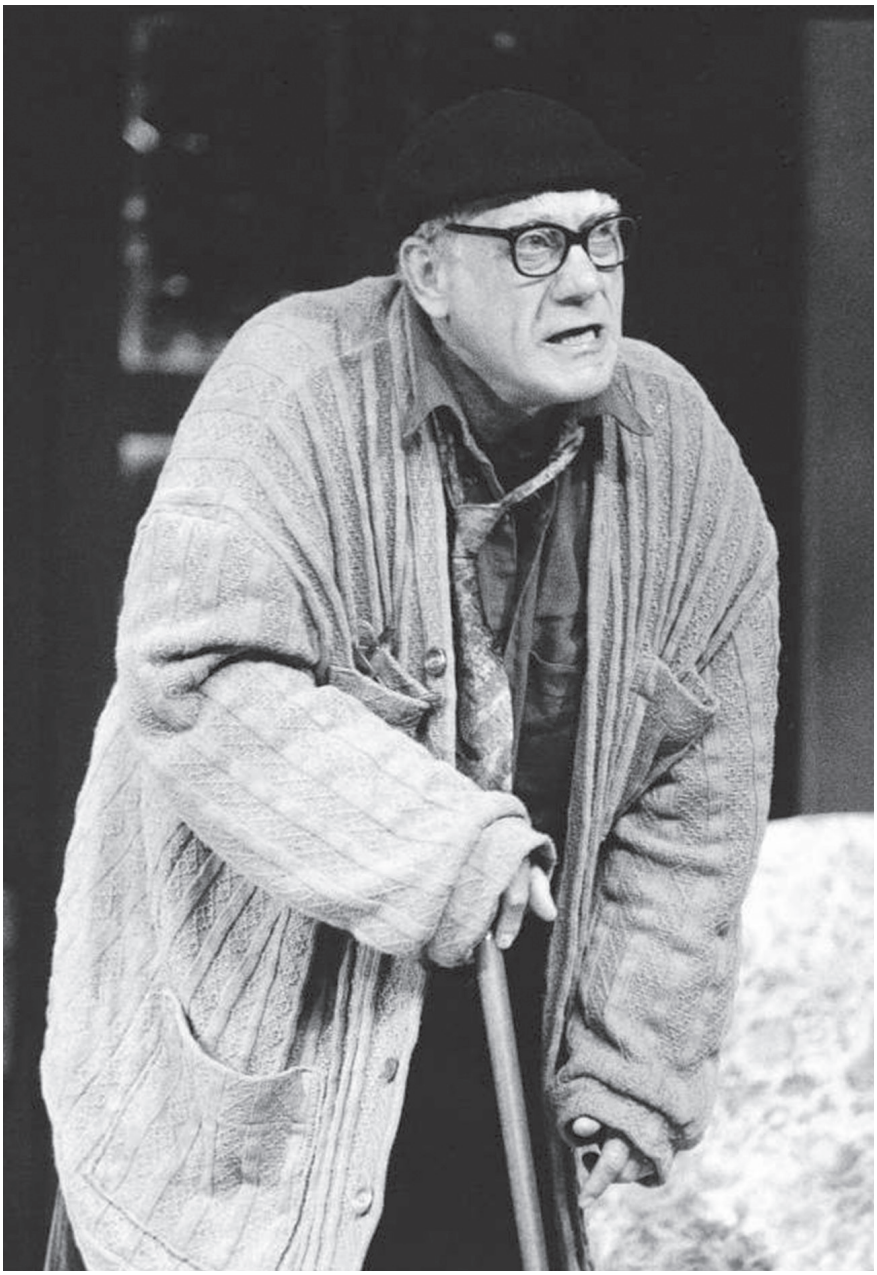

Marko Simčič
Sunspots, Ljubljana City Theatre, Slovenia, 1999

Act One

The living room of a country house. Back-center, a two-winged French window, leading onto the garden. In the left corner, a large decorated Christmas tree, an oval dining table and six chairs. The table is laid for dinner, with a wicker demijohn of wine at the center. Stage right, the door to the kitchen. In the corner behind it, an armchair; beside it, a standing lamp. On the floor beside the armchair, a pile of newspapers. From stage right, a television set with the screen facing the tree. The television remains constantly switched on. We hear Christmas carols, adverts, news snippets, etc., although (except at the beginning, and later when specifically mentioned) not loudly enough for us to be able to make out the words. By the wall, between the kitchen door and the television, a sideboard with a telephone and Christmas cards. On the wall above it several framed certificates. Above the armchair hangs a wall clock which tells the actual time and functions normally till the end.

1.

(In the darkness we hear the singing of "Silent Night." When the curtain rises, we realize that the singing is part of a TV show. Matthias is sitting in the armchair, glancing through an old newspaper. He is wearing slippers, and is covered to the waist with a blanket. For reading he uses one pair of glasses, and for watching TV a different pair; when he puts on one, he slips the other into his breast pocket. For a while he goes on reading, then he straightens up agitatedly, searches on the floor on both sides of the armchair, peers under the blanket.)

MATTHIAS: Vera!

(Vera hurries in from the kitchen, carrying a fiber-cloth duster.)

VERA: Is it the phone?
MATTHIAS: What phone?
VERA: I told you to call me if the phone rang. I'm expecting an important message.
MATTHIAS: Remote control.
VERA: Remote control?
MATTHIAS: To tone down that yodeling!

(Vera goes toward the television, singing along with "Silent Night". She picks up the remote control, which is lying on the set, and lowers the volume. Then she starts dusting the TV set.)

VERA: Aren't they clever, those Chinese, to have invented this device?
MATTHIAS: Brilliant.
VERA: Static electricity. The dust just sticks to the fibers. *(Goes behind him with the fiber cloth.)* It might even be able to suck out the coins from your pockets.
MATTHIAS: The ones you still haven't swiped, you mean?
VERA *(placing the cloth on his head)*: Or silly thoughts from your head. *(She swiftly removes the cloth.)* No. It might stop working.

(She puts the cloth on the dining table and sets about rearranging the decorations on the Christmas tree.)

MATTHIAS: Did you know that Martians first landed in these parts way back in 1925? *(Vera is silent.)* And then again thirteen years later? *(Vera is silent.)* It says so in the papers.
VERA: Then it must be true.
MATTHIAS: But isn't that strange? The Martians land, and you give birth to a son. They land a second time, and again you give birth to a son.
VERA: And when did they land the third time?
MATTHIAS: It doesn't say.
VERA: Ten years ago, when the father of my two sons was reduced overnight from an overbearing monster to a squashed rotten pear!
MATTHIAS: Even if I had been reduced to a tiny thorn, I'd like nothing more than to be stuck in your flesh!

VERA: I know you've always loved me in your own way.
MATTHIAS: If you mention love again – I will fart.
VERA: Listen, if you're planning to spoil my Christmas Eve, I'll tell Joseph to douse you with three buckets of icy water.

(Vera puts down the dust cloth and goes off to the kitchen.)

MATTHIAS *(after her)*: Thank you. Now at least I know how to get a bath in this house!

(He sinks back into his newspaper.)

(From behind the French window there appears Santa Claus: gray-bearded, dressed in red, with a roundish cap on his head. Over his shoulder is slung a half-filled sack. He presses his face against the windowpane and peers inside. He rests his hand against the window – and it opens. Santa Claus steps cautiously into the room, looking round from left to right. He spots Matthias, and observes him for a while. Hunched over, with catlike steps, he approaches the table. He lays the sack on the table and pulls out a bottle. He unscrews the cap, then removes the cork from the demijohn of wine, and pours the contents of his bottle into the wine. He replaces the cork in the demijohn and tucks the empty bottle into his pocket. All of a sudden, Matthias catches sight of him. In disbelief, he stares at the figure. He takes off his glasses and rubs his eyes. Santa Claus tiptoes back through the French windows, closing them as he leaves. Matthias quickly puts on his other glasses and turns to gaze at the French windows. Too late. He shakes his head. He takes off his glasses and wipes the lenses with the edge of the blanket; once again, he turns his head towards the windows, and again shakes his head.)

MATTHIAS: Vera!

(Vera comes hurrying back, stops in the doorway.)

VERA: Telephone?
MATTHIAS: You missed him.
VERA: Missed the call?
MATTHIAS: Santa Claus. He was here, just a while ago.

VERA *(giving him a long look)*: I've already told you: if you ruin our family Christmas –
MATTHIAS: Give me a glass of wine.
VERA: You'll get it when you deserve it – as always – by behaving properly.
MATTHIAS: Where is Joseph?
VERA: Why?
MATTHIAS: Because he, certainly, would not have denied me a small consolation.
VERA: He's gone to pick up Gregor.
MATTHIAS *(tensing up)*: Gregor? Why?
VERA: To bring him here.
MATTHIAS: He has nothing to do here.
VERA: Your own son has nothing to do at home, to which he so seldom comes?
MATTHIAS: Once a month! Last time he recited all his verses to me. For two long hours he intoned them to me, standing just far enough away to be out of reach of my stick.
VERA: Instead of being proud of your son, the poet –
MATTHIAS: You were the one who egged him on.
VERA: Of course, who else.

(She goes to pick up the duster which she had earlier left on the table.)

MATTHIAS: You wanted him to kill me.
VERA: Quite so.

(She crouches down to clear away the dust and pine needles from beneath the tree.)

MATTHIAS: Why would he have made me listen to his verses twice over, if you hadn't urged him on? Why would he direct them straight at me, with hellish delight in his eyes?
VERA: Perhaps he loves you.

(She stands up, duster in hand, and goes off toward the door.)

MATTHIAS: And if Joseph hadn't taken him away there'd have been more of those poems. He'd have carried on until he realized that

sheer anger drove me to have a stroke. *Your* plot – twisted as only you can be.

VERA: Thank you.

(She goes back to the kitchen. Santa Claus reappears from the darkness and presses his face against the windowpane.)

MATTHIAS: Nobody would be able to prove anything. "Madman murdered father with poetry." What court would punish him?

(He changes his glasses, picks up the newspaper, goes on reading. Vera returns. Santa Claus vanishes into the darkness.)

VERA: Don't you ever by any chance say again that Gregor is mad.
MATTHIAS: What's he doing in the madhouse then?
VERA: He's in the ward for chronic melancholics. That's not a mental illness.
MATTHIAS: What is it then?
VERA: Gregor bears within him a great sorrow. A sorrow before which we can only bow our heads.
MATTHIAS *(staring into the newspaper)*: My head is bowed.
VERA: In his soul Gregor has gathered together the moral debts of three generations.
MATTHIAS: Poor little fellow.
VERA: But he himself is pure, without a stain. And so he must remain.
MATTHIAS: Let him. But remain there where he belongs.
VERA: Gregor can come home whenever he wishes! Do you understand? Especially on Christmas!

(She goes off to the kitchen. Santa Claus appears from the darkness and peers into the room.)

MATTHIAS: Vera! You forgot to slam the door!
VERA *(coming back)*: What did you say?

(Santa Claus disappears into the darkness.)

MATTHIAS: You forgot to... brush the dust off your diplomas.
VERA *(glancing at the framed diplomas on the wall)*: I did not.

MATTHIAS *(squinting up at the diplomas)*: From here I can see a sticky fingerprint just there, where it says "Mother of the Year."

(Vera crosses to take a closer look at the glass. She breathes onto it and tries to wipe away the stain with her elbow, but she can't reach it. She takes down the frame and goes with it across to the door. She looks at Matthias and stops.)

VERA: I don't like the expression on your face.
MATTHIAS: My face is expressionless.
VERA: Except for the smirk which you haven't managed to hide.
MATTHIAS: Oh...
VERA: You still can't come to terms with the fact that I received an award for my success in a field in which you miserably failed.
MATTHIAS: Why? Because nobody voted me Mother of the Year? And even that you got thirty years ago.
VERA *(thrusting the certificate under his nose)*: Show me the expiration date.
MATTHIAS: Awards like that should be renewed at least once a year.
VERA: What about your medal from the World War? When did *its* validity expire? To my mind, at the time they pinned it by mistake to your chest.
MATTHIAS *(flaring up)*: At least I didn't get it the way you got your certificate of motherhood.
VERA: And how did I get it?
MATTHIAS: By forcing your soft-headed son to send off a piece to a women's magazine under the title, "My Mother is a Golden Mother"! At your instigation and in words which you yourself dictated to him!

(Vera lifts up the certificate as if to smash it on Matthias's head. Matthias draws his head between his shoulders and waits. Vera changes her mind. She grabs the edge of the blanket with which Matthias is half-covered, and uses it to give the glass a thorough wiping. Then she hangs the frame back on the wall and goes off to the kitchen.)

MATTHIAS: Well, there goes my glass of wine.
VERA *(looking back through the door)*: When the phone rings, call me. *(Closes the door.)*
MATTHIAS: We'll see about that.

2.

(Matthias carries on reading. Santa Claus approaches from the dark and peers inside. We hear the sound of a car arriving, door slamming, steps, voices in the kitchen. Santa Claus disappears into the dark. Joseph comes in from the kitchen and heads toward the table.)

MATTHIAS: Did you know that Napoleon's heart was eaten by a cat?
JOSEPH *(uncorking the demijohn)*: Really?
MATTHIAS: It says here that the two doctors on St Helena ordered an autopsy so that the corpse could be embalmed.
JOSEPH: And? *(He pours some wine into a glass.)*
MATTHIAS: Meanwhile, they hurried off for dinner, leaving the heart beside the corpse. When they came back, they spotted a cat in the corner polishing off the last bits.
JOSEPH: Interesting. *(He tries the wine.)*
MATTHIAS: They were so frightened that they decided to replace the missing organ with a sheep's heart.
JOSEPH: A fine irony.
MATTHIAS: It says so in the paper. The reason I mention it is because it's the same way your mother embalmed our family.
JOSEPH: Father...
MATTHIAS: She tore out our wolf hearts and replaced them with sheep hearts. That's particularly true of you.
JOSEPH *(turns around, holding the glass of wine)*: Father, not today.
MATTHIAS: Give me a glass of wine and I'll stop.
JOSEPH: Not before dinner, Mother said.
MATTHIAS: There, you see. The shepherdess shows her fangs and the sheep bleat like baby lambs.
JOSEPH: Father...
MATTHIAS: Haven't I told you a hundred times not to call me that?
JOSEPH: I am your son, after all.
MATTHIAS: I have no sons. I have two idiots, born to my wife, fertilized by Martians.

(Joseph puts down his glass, picks up a chair and places it beside Matthias's chair; he sits down.)

MATTHIAS: I'm not deaf, you don't have to creep up beside me.

JOSEPH: There's something I'd like to tell you. Will you hear me through to the end?
MATTHIAS: Your end or mine?
JOSEPH: When I finish my book, I'll move away.
MATTHIAS: I suggest Kamchatka. I recently read that they've got thousands of open posts for retired teachers of history. The chief condition is to have the ability to patch history together in one's own fashion. There you could write hundreds of books.
JOSEPH: The thing is... I want to live on my own.
MATTHIAS: You *have* nothing of your own! Your wife has plucked you bare like your mother cleaning a chicken before she shoves it into the oven.
JOSEPH: I'd like to start a new life.
MATTHIAS: Oh? *(Looking at him.)* Well, if it's not too late for you, it can't be too late for me either.
JOSEPH *(rises)*: Least of all for you. By the laws of nature you ought to be dead. Yet every day you're more alive.
MATTHIAS *(genuinely surprised)*: Really?
JOSEPH: Are you deaf?
MATTHIAS: Clearly not.
JOSEPH: Is something troubling you?
MATTHIAS: Not that I'm aware of.
JOSEPH: Are you losing your memory?
MATTHIAS: If only I could.
JOSEPH: You're in a better state than I am.
MATTHIAS: Then how will you manage when you set up on your own?
JOSEPH: As always.
MATTHIAS: You mean like that time when your bitchy wife, on top of everything else, also took over the house? And you came to me to beg for shelter under my roof?
JOSEPH: Father...
MATTHIAS: If I'd known how grateful you'd be, I would have left you outside the door.
JOSEPH: I am grateful.
MATTHIAS: If I'd known you'd leave me alone with this sheepdog, I'd have sent you off with a kick in the butt.
JOSEPH: You'll be all right with Mother.
MATTHIAS: If you leave me alone with her I'll stick my head in a plastic bag and gulp down twenty sleeping pills. I will commit euthasania. Is that the word?

JOSEPH: Euthanasia. It's prohibited. And it wouldn't be euthanasia, it would be suicide. That, too, is against the law.

MATTHIAS: What law? The one which gives you the right to deprive an old man, whom you insist on calling Father, of a glass of wine on Christmas Eve?

(Joseph goes over to the table, pours a glass and takes it to Matthias. Matthias grabs the glass, drains it at a gulp, and hands it back to Joseph. Then he sinks back into his newspaper. Joseph takes the glass over to the table, returns to Matthias and sits down.)

JOSEPH: I would stay at home if –

MATTHIAS: Strange wine. Where did you get it?

JOSEPH: I would stay if we could agree about the monument.

MATTHIAS: Since I don't know what monument you're talking about, no agreement is possible.

JOSEPH: The monument, Father, which I'm building, and which I intend to finish, will remain just a heap of stones if it isn't honored by both of us.

MATTHIAS *(leaning back his head)*: I'm tired.

(Joseph stands up, goes toward the table, pours himself some wine, takes a sip, then a gulp. Glass in hand, he turns back toward Matthias.)

JOSEPH: Do you know when the idea for the monument first came to me?

MATTHIAS: No. *(Closes his eyes.)*

JOSEPH: Ten years ago.

MATTHIAS: Really?

JOSEPH: We were scything the grass in the orchard. It was already knee-high. So high that I couldn't see the blade of the scythe. Then we both headed home for lunch. Are you listening?

MATTHIAS *(eyes closed)*: Uh-huh.

JOSEPH: And when we came back, barefoot – the grass was so soft that we wanted to feel it – when we came back, you spotted the cutting edge of the scythe just a fraction of a second before I could tread on it with my bare foot. And perhaps lose my toes. At the very last moment you held me back.

MATTHIAS: Reflex. Anyone would have done the same.

JOSEPH: What matters is something else. *(Sits down on the chair by Matthias.)* When you grabbed me by the arm – here, by the elbow – and pulled me back, there was no roughness in your grasp. There was force, but there was no roughness. It was then, Father, at that very moment that I decided to build the monument.
MATTHIAS: And ten years later you started.
JOSEPH: Well...

(Matthias squints at the glass in Joseph's hand. He reaches out and takes it from him; drinks down the wine and hands back the glass. Then he leans back and closes his eyes.)

MATTHIAS: I'm tired.
JOSEPH: Just take a nap. Cover yourself so you don't get cold.

(He draws the blanket up to Matthias's chin.)

MATTHIAS: Five minutes. That's all I need.
JOSEPH: You just settle down comfortably and sleep.

(He takes the glass over to the table.)

MATTIAS: Just make sure you don't start eating before I wake up.
JOSEPH: Don't worry. Tadey and Judy are late.

(He turns toward Matthias. Santa Claus appears from the darkness and peers inside.)

Shall I take your slippers off?
MATTHIAS: No!... Always have something on your feet. You never know –
JOSEPH: When you're going to come across a scythe blade lying in the grass.
MATTHIAS: – when you're going on that final journey. *(Opens his eyes.)* Reach into my pocket.
JOSEPH: What?
MATTHIAS: Here, in my breast pocket.
JOSEPH: Why?
MATTHIAS: Earplugs. Stick them into my ears. My fingers are too cold.

(Joseph reaches into Matthias's breast pocket and pulls out two plastic earplugs.)

MATTHIAS: Put them in. It's my only protection against Gregor. Last time he tried to kill me.
JOSEPH *(fitting a plug into each of Matthias's ears)*: All right? *(Silence. Louder.)* Will it be all right?
MATTHIAS: What're you shouting for? I can hear you.
JOSEPH: If you can hear me…

(He tries to press the plugs deeper in.)

MATTHIAS: Take them out! Take them out! *(Joseph takes the plugs out of Matthias's ears and shoves them back into his breast pocket.)* Rather, hold him up for a while in the kitchen. A few minutes, that's all I need. *(Joseph goes towards the door.)* Tell me, did you see Santa Claus?
JOSEPH *(turning round)*: What?

(Santa Claus withdraws into the dark.)

MATTHIAS: Santa Claus. He came from the garden bringing gifts. I pretended to be asleep, so he thought I didn't see him.
JOSEPH: And where are the gifts?
MATTHIAS: That's the funny thing, there aren't any.
JOSEPH: You just get some rest. You don't have to go anywhere.
MATTHIAS: But I'll have to. Soon.

(Joseph goes off into the kitchen.)

3.

(A moment of silence. On the television – Christmas carols. Gregor enters from the kitchen, relishing the last mouthful of cake. He licks his fingers. Bends over. Looks at his two legs from close by. With his fingertips he touches his slippers – and counts.)

GREGOR: One two three, one two three, two legs through my trousers standing free. One two three, one two – three I cannot see, the third is not with me. *(He straightens up, closes his eyes and thinks intensely.)* Where has the third leg gone, the one that refuses to walk with me? The third leg took too long a pace, lost itself in outer space, one limb I miss and can't replace.

(He stops beside Matthias and looks at him. Matthias suddenly gives a loud snore. Gregor stops in front of the television. He listens to the singing, waves his arms, conducting. He turns to the tree. He runs three times in a circle around it, shouting.)

Stop, stop, stop, stop… stop! *(He stops, breathless.)* I've stopped. Bravo. *(He pats his head.)* Good boy. *(He begins pacing up and down, stopping at times.)* Why does the shadow follow me on the pavement? Why does the shadow follow *me* on the pavement? Why does the *shadow* follow me on the pavement?

(He realizes that he has stopped in front of Matthias, who is still sleeping. He sits down on the chair which Joseph had forgotten to return to the table, and leans toward Matthias.)

In my dreams I'm the wind, the wind, the wind, which weaves winds winnows winds weaves winds winnows, yes, through the waves of wheat, across the fields of oil of oil drowsing oil, over lonely hillsides and words and birds, stirring the forests, the wooded crests, soothing, consoling –

(Matthias wakes with a start and stares aghast at Gregor. Gregor moves back slightly. They look at each other.)

MATTHIAS: If you bring me a glass of wine, I'll let you recite me another one.

(He gestures toward the table. Gregor goes over and pours two glasses, spilling some wine on the table. He goes back with the glasses to Matthias, who takes one of them. They clink glasses, and drink the wine straight down. Gregor takes the glasses back to the table.

He returns to Matthias, sits down and bows his head. Santa Claus appears from the dark and peers in through the window.)

GREGOR: But I'm not the wind, I'm not, *I'm not* the wind, the heart cries out as the waving field dies. I cannot drive away the clouds of space. But I would be glad, so very, very glad, if to all the unhappy I could bring the gift of spring…

MATTHIAS: Poor boy. You're not only mad, you're also unhappy.

(Matthias and Gregor gaze intently at each other. Then Matthias draws the blanket back up to his neck and closes his eyes. Gregor looks at him. Then he lies down on the floor beside him, and begins sucking his thumb. He rests his head on Matthias's slippers. Then he falls asleep. From the television we hear Christmas singing.)

4.

(Through the French windows we see the glare of two headlights. Santa Claus retreats swiftly into the dark. A car draws up. We hear the opening and closing of doors. Footsteps. In front of the window, Judy and Tadey appear. They press their noses against the pane. Under the pressure, the window opens. They step inside. Tadey closes the window and steps forward.)

JUDY: Wait a moment. *(Adjusting her hair.)* How do I look?

TADEY: They'll fall to the floor. *(Looking at Matthias and Gregor.)* Two already have. *(He moves on further.)*

JUDY *(drawing him back)*: Wait. Here, hold this for me. *(She takes a hand mirror out of her bag and thrusts it into Tadey's hand.)* Hold it up. Higher. Bit lower. *(She takes some lipstick out of her bag and begins to apply it to her lips.)*

TADEY: Why can't you just be natural?

JUDY: This is my nature. If you don't like it…

TADEY: Did I say I don't like it?

JUDY: I said it. Don't you remember? Right at the start. Tadey, I said, you need a different woman. You need a frowzy mouse who goes around in a nightgown and washes herself as often as the rain catches her outside. A bit lower. *(Catching Tadey's hand and pulling it down.)*

Didn't I tell you? What have you got to be doing with a lady who is ten years older than you and has strange habits of hygiene, so alien to young girls of your age.

TADEY: Don't go over the top.

JUDY: What do you need an old-fashioned woman for – a lady for whom a properly tended appearance is still important – when she might carry nothing more in her bag than a pack of condoms.

TADEY: Have you finished?

JUDY: No.

(Taking his hand and lifting it up.)

TADEY: I meant, with this senseless chitchat.

JUDY: This shade of rouge is really too garish. Look. *(She takes the mirror from Tadey and turns it round to get better light.)* Ghastly. As if someone had punched me in the mouth and left me with a gaping wound. There, take it.

(She thrusts the mirror back in his hand, rummages in her bag, draws out a tissue and thoroughly wipes her lips clean. She looks round, not knowing where to dispose of the tissue. She smoothes it out and fixes it onto the Christmas tree.)

TADEY: We're just wasting time.

JUDY *(takes another lipstick out of her bag)*: Hold the mirror for me, so we don't lose even more of it. Your every minute is worth at least a million. Now that you're such a businessman. *(She begins again with her makeup.)*

TADEY: Why are you so tense?

JUDY *(grasping his hand and drawing it down)*: Because your family can't stand me, and because I'm here only to do you a favor.

TADEY: You don't have to, if you don't want to.

JUDY: Oh… *(She snatches the mirror from his hand and thrusts it back in her bag.)* You could have told me earlier. *(Turning away, as if to leave.)*

TADEY *(pulling her back)*: Judy! It's Christmas Eve.

JUDY: I'm not religious.

TADEY: That's not the point. My family hasn't celebrated Christmas for almost fifty years. My grandma wants it to be a sort of… family reconciliation. And besides… *(Gesturing.)*

JUDY: And besides, this is an ideal opportunity for you to ask your father for that piece of land – isn't it? How could he refuse it to you on Christmas?
TADEY: Are you no longer interested in that land?
JUDY: What I mean is – you don't need to go on with the pretense. The family reconciliation means even less to you than to me.
TADEY: Do we really have to start quarreling the moment we arrive? They already…
JUDY: They already think that you fell on your head when you married me. That's what you wanted to say, right?
TADEY: You win. Let's go. *(He turns around.)*
JUDY *(tugging him back)*: If I have won, you must obey me. First of all, hug me and give me a kiss – one on each cheek – then whisper in my ear that you still love me, at least a little, even though you'd rather kick my backside – and then, let's go together to show your family that we're the happiest couple in the world.
TADEY: Even though we're not?
JUDY: Of course we are. *(Tadey hesitates. Judy presses him to her.)* I'm sorry. I'm a real drag. But you still need me, don't you?

(Judy takes a tissue from her bag and pretends to wipe her eyes.)

TADEY: Why are you sniveling?
JUDY: Because you're so good to me.
TADEY: Judy…
JUDY: Your endless patience moves me. I can't help it.

(She smoothes out the tissue and attaches it to the tree, next to the first one. When she turns round, she suddenly becomes aware of Matthias and Gregor.)

JUDY *(frightened)*: Who's that?
TADEY: Granddad – but you know him.
JUDY: The one on the floor.
TADEY: Uncle Gregor. He won't devour you.
JUDY: Why is he lying on the floor? Is he sick?
TADEY: Cataleptic. Every five minutes he has to take a nap.
JUDY: What does he do when he's awake?

TADEY: I'm going to get Granny and Father.
JUDY: Don't leave me alone!
TADEY: Sit down and finish redoing your makeup.
JUDY *(moving over to the French windows)*: I'd rather wait in the car.
TADEY: Can't you put up with it for at least an hour? We don't have to stay long.
JUDY *(sitting down at the table, pouting)*: If you don't come back in two minutes, I'll start shrieking. *(She looks at the wall clock.)*

5.

(Tadey goes off into the kitchen. Judy opens her bag, takes out the mirror, and tidies up her makeup here and there. She takes out a cigarette, looks over toward Matthias and Gregor, changes her mind, puts the cigarette back into the box, and the box into the bag. She fiddles with the flame of the cigarette lighter. Puts away the lighter. Leans forward to watch the TV. She sighs impatiently and glances at the wall clock.)

JUDY *(impatient, distraught)*: Tadey – where are you? You're really cruel to me, you know.

(Gregor wakes up and sits upright. He stares at Judy. Judy stiffens. Gregor stands up and walks toward her.)

GREGOR: Frieda!
JUDY *(leaping up from the chair)*: I'm not Frieda! *(Starting to move back.)* Tadey!

(Moving backward around the table, then around the tree. Gregor follows her.)

GREGOR: Frieda! Frieda! Frieda!
JUDY: Tadey, come here!
GREGOR: The meaning! *(He leaps up twice.)* The meaning! The meaning!
JUDY: Of what?

GREGOR *(waving his hands wildly and following her about the room)*: The meaning is the black color of the trees which drips, which drips onto the green toads, the *green* toads –

JUDY: Could be.

GREGOR: Meaning is the spiky end of the sea, of the sea to which the outcasts flock and flee before the world of internity, the freezing world of internity –

JUDY: I agree.

GREGOR: Meaning is always present, adhering to the air, to the water, and to the smiles of rotting animals in senseless jungles which we exterminate –

JUDY: We're depraved. *(Sighing.)* Tadey!

GREGOR: Meaning is poured out over the city streets – yes – over the streets, and imprinted on placards, advertisements, slogans and street-signs –

JUDY: And on banknotes, and tax-return forms…

GREGOR: Yet all the same we never stop seeking it, we, the blind fools, the blind, the blind…

(She is trapped in a corner; Gregor is standing in front of her. They look at each other. Gregor turns round, bows his head, goes to the table, sits down on a chair. Suddenly he feels depressed. Judy follows him slowly and sits down on a chair at the other end of the table.)

JUDY: We shouldn't *look* for meaning. We should live it. I read that in a magazine. I do read, you know. Although you couldn't tell it from looking at me, could you? *(Pause.)* Don't you feel like talking?

GREGOR *(slowly raises his head and looks at her)*: And he stands before the rising red ball, he has whetted his knife on the rocks of mad passion –

JUDY *(clapping)*: You're a poet! And I thought *(making a gesture)* that you were… *(Gesturing.)*… you know…

GREGOR *(stands up and walks toward her)*: Frieda!

JUDY *(stands up and moves firmly away)*: I'm not Frieda!

GREGOR: With shuddering blows they shatter the rocks that lie between them. The sun churns their blood.

JUDY: Wrong!

GREGOR: With snakelike body she winds, winds, winds round him and glows, glows into him with bitter, bitter eyes –

JUDY *(moving away from him)*: No, she doesn't! *(Shouting.)* Tadey! *(More quietly, to herself.)* You're going to pay for this.

(Matthias wakes up, sits upright and stares at her.)

MATTHIAS: You've grown younger.
JUDY: Good joke. If my hair hasn't turned gray already, it'll do so in a minute. Tadey!
MATTHIAS *(putting on his glasses)*: Oh… It's not you at all.
JUDY: Then who am I?
MATTHIAS: Come closer. Let me see.
JUDY: I'm not on sale.
MATTHIAS: Then what are you doing here?
JUDY: I came with Tadey…
MATTHIAS: Who's that?
JUDY: You ought to open a chamber of horrors and rake in the entrance fees.
GREGOR: In my mouth there is a wall, overgrown with thick tangleweed. The air from my lungs slams into it and returns into me. *(Waving his hand.)* Ha-hoo, ha-hoo, ha-hoo. The wall is stony and strong. *(Beating the air with his fist.)* Ding, ding, ding! To spit it out I would need the force of dozens of lungs, hundreds, thousands of lungs!
JUDY: My lungs are also not up to much.

(Tadey comes in from the kitchen.)

JUDY: You really are shameless. I was about to go mad.
TADEY: Greetings, Granddad.
MATTHIAS: Come closer.

6.

(Tadey comes up and stands by Matthias, who leans forward and scrutinizes him.)

MATTHIAS: I *thought* it was you. I *thought* she was your slut.
TADEY: My wife, Granddad.
MATTHIAS: A slut remains a slut even after becoming a wife.

GREGOR *(taking Judy by the hand)*: Frieda!
JUDY *(shaking him off and leaping away)*: Why does he call me that?
TADEY: You remind him of his love.
JUDY: You're joking.
TADEY: I'm not. They were both sixteen. Like Romeo and Juliet. Then, one fine day… *(He stops and looks at Gregor.)*
JUDY: What?
TADEY: She vanished.
JUDY *(looking at Gregor with genuine sympathy)*: No.
TADEY: He had been strange already, but that time his hard disk crashed beyond any possibility of repair. Granny thinks that this is poetry. He wrote a whole sonnet wreath to that Frieda of his. *(Turning round.)* Isn't that so, Uncle Gregor? Have you come up with any new verses?
MATTHIAS: If you're planning to encourage him, I'd ask you both to go up to the orchard, so he can write a poem about the monument your father is building there.
TADEY *(unpleasantly surprised)*: Monument? To whom?
MATTHIAS: Ask him.
TADEY: But not in the orchard!
MATTHIAS: Right there.
TADEY: Don't you realize what kind of location that is?
MATTHIAS: Windblown. No one who grazed his cows up there ever escaped a cold.
TADEY: On the main road, Granddad! Breathtaking views. The hills are nearby, and the forests. Did it ever occur to you that a motel could be built there? With a restaurant?
MATTHIAS: Never. I can sleep here, and the food isn't so bad that I'd need to eat at a restaurant.
TADEY: I'm talking of constructing a tourist attraction!
MATTHIAS: Oh…
TADEY: I'm talking about investment – the future!
MATTHIAS: Whose?
TADEY *(after a pause)*: Granddad, listen –
JUDY *(quietly intervenes)*: Wouldn't you rather wait a bit?
MATTHIAS: Nowadays everybody wants to build something. Monuments to the past, monuments to the future. In the old days we were glad if we could get fodder for the cows.

TADEY: There are no cows anymore. They are chopped up, wrapped in cellophane and displayed within easy reach in the supermarkets.
MATTHIAS: Do the cows agree with this?
TADEY: The world is changing, Granddad, and we have to change with it.
MATTHIAS: Not me. I've been the same for more than a hundred years.
TADEY: Are you proud of that?
MATTHIAS: What are *you* proud of?
TADEY: The future which lies before me.
MATTHIAS: You'd be successful in China, you could invent a new cleaning gadget for Granny. She'd be terribly grateful.
TADEY: I don't need gratitude. I need the orchard.
MATTHIAS: Ask your father to pull down his monument.
TADEY: Why is he building it anyway?
MATTHIAS: And on my land, too.
TADEY: That land is yours?
MATTHIAS: Not since the monument's been there. Since then it belongs to Satan.
TADEY: Satan is always ready for business. What interests me is whether *you* are prepared to transfer the land to my name.
MATTHIAS: Not as long as it's defaced by the monument.
TADEY: Leave that to me. What I want to know is whether you, as grandfather to grandson –
MATTHIAS: Bring me a glass of wine.

(Tadey pours him a hefty glass of wine. Gregor, who is sitting at the table, suddenly clenches his hands around the wrist of the hand in which Tadey is holding the glass.)

GREGOR: Why am I no longer the child of the spring wind?
TADEY: I have no idea, Uncle. Let go my hand – okay? *(Shouting.)* Uncle!

(Gregor, alarmed, drops his grip. Tadey takes the glass over to Matthias, who gulps it down and hands the empty glass back to Tadey.)

MATTHIAS: I've never drunk such strange wine before.
TADEY *(puts the glass back on the table and turns back)*: Well?
MATTHIAS: Ah yes, the orchard. The fact of the matter is that, unfortunately, I can't give it to you.
TADEY *(taking a breath)*: Why not?

MATTHIAS: You don't know how to respect the land.
TADEY: Granddad, the land is here to feed us, to give us the ground to build on, to make money –
MATTHIAS: How many rooms will your motel have?
TADEY: Twenty.
MATTHIAS: Got plans already?
TADEY: Of course.
MATTHIAS: Each room with a bathroom?
TADEY: Naturally.
MATTHIAS: And toilet?
TADEY: Surely you don't expect the guests to do their business in the bushes!
MATTHIAS: Do you expect the rooms to be fully occupied all the time?
TADEY: The international route passes right by.
MATTHIAS: Twenty rooms, forty guests – and each will have to shit at least once a day. Where's all that muck to go?
TADEY *(taken aback)*: Granddad, into the cesspit.
MATTHIAS: You're going to have a cesspit?
TADEY: Yes, why not?
MATTHIAS: And you call that respect for the land?
TADEY: Granddad…
MATTHIAS: That God knows how many foreigners are going to relieve their bowels into this sacred earth, where the bones of thirty generations of your forefathers had been buried?
TADEY: Granddad, no one is buried in the orchard.
MATTHIAS: Ask your father.
TADEY: Does he know *who* is buried there?
MATTHIAS: Did I not tell you he is building a monument?
TADEY: A monument to whom, for God's sake?
MATTHIAS: Victims of the war.
TADEY: Which war? And why in the orchard?
MATTHIAS: Because he understands history. He knows all those who have died in these parts. He is writing a book about it. Did he never tell you?
TADEY: No.
MATTHIAS: He told me.
TADEY *(crouching down beside Mathias)*: Granddad… I need the orchard. *(Taking Matthias's hand.)* I need it.

MATTHIAS *(drawing his hand away)*: Ask your granny. It's hers.
TADEY *(standing up abruptly)*: Why didn't you tell me straightaway?
MATTHIAS: I wanted to see how far you'd go to kiss my ass.
TADEY: You know, it's not very nice that you're not honest with me.
MATTHIAS: Thanks for the present, Grandson. And a Merry Christmas to you, too.

(Tadey's mobile rings. He pulls it out of his trouser pocket and holds it to his ear.)

TADEY: Listen, it's… Of course I'm trying, what d'you think… But things are complicated… Don't worry, I will… Ciao. *(He thrusts the mobile back into his pocket. Looks at Judy.)* Vinko… Tactless jerk… Wanted to know if I'd already got the plot.
GREGOR *(suddenly rousing himself and taking Tadey by the hand)*: A stone is a stone, two stones are still stones, more stones make the road which leads into the stony distance. Along it, recklessly, there rumble and mindlessly rush the vehicles – with melancholy shrieks the birds rise up over the gray stony desert.
TADEY: Uncle, let go of me. Let go of me, I said! *(Forcibly tugging his hand free.)*
GREGOR *(pointing to Judy)*: Frieda.
TADEY: Keep her entertained till I come back. *(He heads for the kitchen door.)*
JUDY *(following him)*: I'd rather entertain you.
TADEY *(turning round)*: Judy, please. I'd like to talk to them alone.
JUDY: You don't want me to watch you licking their asses.

(On reflex Tadey shoots out his hand and slaps her face. He immediately feels sorry.)

TADEY: Forgive me.
JUDY: Why? I'm used to it.
TADEY: Judy, I just don't know what… Come with me.
JUDY: No, I'll stay here.
TADEY: Are you sure?
JUDY: Positive.

7.

(Vera comes out of the kitchen carrying a small basket of biscuits.)

VERA: A little something for you to nibble on. The turkey's still roasting. *(She places the basket on the table, looks at the spilt wine, and the dregs of wine in the glasses.)* Who's been drinking wine from these glasses? *(She looks at Tadey.)*

TADEY: Granny, where's Father?

VERA: You know very well that you uncle and granddad turn into monsters when they have a drop. Today, exceptionally, they are justified in having a glass each. Because it's Christmas. Over dinner. But not on an empty stomach!

TADEY: I was having a glass or two with Judy. I'm sorry if we made four glasses dirty. I'll go and wash them.

VERA *(collecting the glasses)*: I'll do it. What you can do instead is tell your wife to take off her boots. I've devoted my life to keeping cleanliness in this house – don't I, at least today, deserve some consideration? Let that be her Christmas present to me.

(She goes toward the door but cannot open it because her hands are full. Tadey hastens to help her.)

MATTHIAS: Look! *(Pointing at the television.)* Look at what they have invented now – the Chinese. *(Vera turns round.)* A broom that cleans using a water jet. Look how it carries away everything before it. Stains, boots, even the owners of the boots. With that you could clean away all the filth from the house in five minutes.

(Vera goes off to the kitchen. Tadey follows her, closing the door behind him. Judy begins to take off her boots. Matthias and Gregor watch her. She holds up the first boot and drops it on the floor beside her. She begins to take off the other boot, then changes her mind and stops. She picks up the boot already taken off, and puts it back on. From her bag she draws a packet of cigarettes, takes one out and lights it. She blows smoke into the air – once, twice.)

JUDY: *I* will be your Christmas present. Just the way I am. *(She stands up, pours some wine into a glass, and takes it over to Matthias.)* Here you are.

(Matthias drinks it down at a gulp and hands the glass back.)

MATTHIAS: Strange wine. Try it.

JUDY: Today is Christmas Eve, so I'm exceptionally – I stress, exceptionally – entitled to abstinence. However, only over dinner. And not on an empty stomach. *(She pours two glasses, offers one to Gregor and raises the other herself.)* To your health, Gregor. I really don't know why I was afraid of you.

(She sits down and drinks. Gregor swiftly empties his glass, sets it aside, moves his chair near hers and leans forward confidentially toward her.)

GREGOR: Two days before the end I knock at the castle gate…

JUDY: You're goodness itself. Really, goodness itself. *(Ruffling his hair.)* Why do you look at me like that?

GREGOR: Frieda.

JUDY: Do you miss her very much? *(Gregor nods. Judy leans forward and looks him in the eyes.)* Oh God! How unhappy you are.

GREGOR: Two days before the end I knock at the castle gate…

JUDY: Don't you know how to have a conversation?

GREGOR *(nodding impatiently)*: Two days before the end I knock on the castle gate, on the worm-eaten oak doors, and I wait two centuries for them to open.

JUDY *(tenderly)*: Gregor… *(She stretches out her hand and strokes his head.)*

GREGOR *(seizing her hand and standing up)*: I'm going up to the top, to the tower! Below me lies the whole wide world: the rivers are flowing in the blue light –

JUDY: Gregor, calm down.

GREGOR: I return to the stone-flagged courtyard, lie on the ground, among the skulls, while the wind rolls me over the slippery stones –

JUDY: Gregor!

(Gregor kneels down and buries his head in her lap. He embraces her around the waist.)

JUDY *(stroking his head)*: Go on, just cry. I'd also like to, but I have no one to caress me. Too many people imagine that nothing can run them over. We know it isn't like that, don't we?

GREGOR *(looking at her)*: Frieda!
JUDY: All right, I'll be Frieda. Although I can't understand why you can't forget her. They all forget me the next moment. Unless they have something to gain from me. *(Stroking Gregor's head.)* Don't you realize how unusual you are? To have such love, many a woman would let herself be whipped! But perhaps Frieda was an angel. An angel who, with her touch, confused your thoughts, and now you speak godly words –
GREGOR *(taking her hand)*: Frieda!
JUDY: No, Gregor. I am not an angel. I drive men crazy.
GREGOR: I leap down from the high wall onto the frozen paving, to snuff out the light of this strange awareness, this strange, strange awareness –
JUDY *(caressing him)*: I don't understand your words. But I do feel them.
GREGOR: Why does the shadow follow me on the pavement?
JUDY: I also wonder. Last year Tadey and I went to the Canaries. You won't believe it – right on the first day I was transfixed in front of a shop window. In it I could recognize my own reflection. It didn't seem possible. I had believed that you can travel around the world and leave yourself at home.
GREGOR *(gazing into her eyes)*: My whole face is empty as this worn-out time –
JUDY *(squeezing him against her)*: Gregor, no… I feel guilty for what you are bearing within you. How can I make up for it? *(She takes him by the shoulders and moves him away from her.)* Look me in the eyes.
GREGOR *(bows his head as if embarrassed)*: Frieda.
JUDY: What would you like Frieda to do?

(Gregor places his right hand cautiously on her left breast and gazes trustingly into her eyes. Judy stubs out her cigarette in the wine glass, takes Gregor's left hand and places it on her right breast.)

Is that what you'd like her to do?

(Gregor nods gravely.) Do you think that would be wise? *(Gregor nods gravely.)* I'm not so sure. Although it's true that I'd do it as Frieda, not as Judy. Wouldn't I?

(Gregor nods gravely.)

I've always wanted to be someone else. And I've done things which Judy would not. Although I've also done many things that Judy *would* do. I've always wanted to make people happy, you see. Above all those who are most unhappy. *(Looks at him.)* Shall we go? *(Gregor nods.)* For a short stroll. To the car, outside?

(Gregor nods and stands up. They set off toward the French windows. The kitchen door opens: Tadey enters, holding the door open for Vera, who is carrying a large tureen of soup.)

VERA: Gregor? Where are you off to?
JUDY: I'm taking him for a walk.
VERA: He is not a dog. Nor is he a child. Come here, Greggy – time for din-dins.

(She sets the tureen at the center of the table. Tadey brings in the four freshly washed glasses. Gregor lets go of Judy's hand, hurries over to the table and sits down.)

GREGOR *(pointing through the French windows)*: Someone's been waiting for two days outside, standing and waiting, only waiting…
VERA: Tadey, you may tell your wife that she does not have to take off her boots – for Christmas I grant her the right to remain faithful to her own habits.

(She goes back to the kitchen. Judy turns around and opens the French windows.)

TADEY: Judy… no!
GREGOR *(rushing after her and grasping her hand)*: Frieda!
JUDY: Very well. *(Closing the windows.)* If you want me to stay, I'll stay. But only because of you. And I'll even take off my boots – you might like my legs.

(She goes back to the table, Gregor still holding her hand.)

TADEY: What's gotten into you? Are you tipsy already?
JUDY *(sitting down and slipping her bag under the table)*: No, dear husband, source of my delight and object of my desires, knight armed

with a mobile phone and hero of business ventures, no, your dearest is not tipsy. She's been possessed by Martians. She no longer has any control over her words. Let alone her deeds! *(She begins to take off her boots.)*

MATTHIAS *(suddenly rousing)*: Martians? Have they landed again?

JUDY: Of course. Tadey and I saw them from the car. Something was skimming through the air; it went puk-puk-puk, and then poo-uuph! – as if exploding into sparks.

MATTHIAS: I knew they would come back.

TADEY: We were seeing fireworks, not Martians. And hearing the sound of crackers.

(Judy kicks her boots under the table, leans back in the chair and stretches out her left leg.)

JUDY: Look at that, Gregor. Doesn't Frieda have sexy legs?

TADEY: Judy, I have apologized.

JUDY: Aren't you tempted to grasp them in both hands?

TADEY: Must you really punish me in such a crude manner?

JUDY: Did you hear that, Gregor? Your Frieda is dissolute, drunk and crude.

(Gregor drops to his knees and squeezes his arms around her outstretched leg.)

Ow! And how crude you can be!

TADEY: Uncle! Leave Judy alone!

JUDY: And now, caress me a little – let me see if you can be gentle.

TADEY: Uncle, leave her alone, right now!

(Gregor seizes Judy around the waist, as if seeking shelter beside her. From the kitchen enter Joseph and Vera.)

TADEY: Uncle, this is the last warning!

JOSEPH: Tadey – no!

(Tadey grabs Gregor's hand, and his hair, and roughly drags him away from Judy. He dumps him on the floor. Before Tadey can vent his anger on Gregor, Joseph pins his arms behind his back. Vera lets out a long, piercing shriek. A moment of silence.)

GREGOR *(on the floor)*: Whose tongue to tear out, whose own blood to spit back in his face? Shadow, shadow, shadow, falling to the closed windows. He is coming along the pathway, coming from the sky, from the depths. Now faster, now he will be here:

(He stretches out his hand toward the French windows and falls silent. Outside, in front of the windows, stands Santa Claus with his sack, looking into the room with a friendly expression.)

VERA: For the love of God, who's this?
MATTHIAS: Can't you see? Santa Claus!
VERA: Whose joke is that?
TADEY: Probably the neighbor's – he's dressed up as Santa Claus and is going around entertaining kids.
JOSEPH: Shall I let him in?
VERA: No. We don't know who he is.
JUDY: You don't know who Santa Claus is? Then what are you celebrating?

8.

(Gregor goes over to the French windows, presses his palms and his face against the windowpane, and stares at Santa Claus. Santa smiles back at him. Gregor smiles in return. Santa Claus draws out a chocolate bar from his pocket, and shows it to Gregor. Gregor opens the windows for him. Santa Claus steps in and hands Gregor the chocolate. Gregor unwraps it and begins eating. Santa Claus takes out more chocolate bars and offers them, in the following order, to Tadey, Judy, Matthias, Joseph, and lastly Vera. They all accept the offer almost mechanically – as if hypnotized.)

VERA *(composing herself)*: Thank you. And enjoy the rest of your journey.
SANTA CLAUS: Journey?
VERA: They must surely be expecting you elsewhere.
SANTA CLAUS: They'll just have to wait.
VERA: Who hired you?
SANTA CLAUS: You.
VERA: Me?
SANTA CLAUS: All of you.

(Vera looks around, examining each person individually for give-away signs.)

JOSEPH: Not me.
MATTHIAS: Not me either.
TADEY: Nor me.
JUDY: No point in looking at me.

(All look at Gregor.)

VERA: So, in brief, you came on your own initiative. Why?
SANTA CLAUS: It's Christmas.
VERA: Precisely so. And as you see, we are about to begin dinner.
SANTA CLAUS *(leaning toward the table, sniffing)*: It smells divine.
VERA: We have sufficient food for six people Therefore, I see no reason why we should detain you any longer.
JOSEPH: Come on, Mother, we can't be like that.
TADEY: That's right, Granny. The least we could do would be to offer the gentleman a glass of wine. *(Reaching for the demijohn.)*
MATTHIAS : I'll have some too.
VERA: Tadey, a moment. *(Tadey replaces the flask.)* I do not wish to be discourteous, but for our family celebration we need an appropriate atmosphere. *(Glares at Santa Claus.)*
MATTHIAS: Just relax, and it will be appropriate.
VERA: How am I to relax if I don't know who is among us?
MATTHIAS: Don't tell me you've never seen Santa Claus.

(Gregor takes Santa by the hand and leads him over to Judy. He points to her as if she were his most precious toy.)

GREGOR: Frieda.
SANTA CLAUS: Pleased to meet you. And you are Gregor, right?
VERA: That is not Frieda, but Judith. And how did you know my son's name is Gregor?
SANTA CLAUS: I'm the one who knows.
VERA: About the others as well, no doubt.
SANTA CLAUS: I can try. *(Looking at each in turn.)* Tadey, Joseph, Matthias, Vera.
VERA: Who hired you?

MATTHIAS: He already told you. We did.
VERA: You mean you did?
MATTHIAS: Not I, we.
VERA: Be quiet, because you've no idea what is going on.
MATTHIAS: What's going on is that you are unable to celebrate Christmas with the proper spirit. Santa Claus appears, and you interrogate him.
JOSEPH: It's true, Mother.
MATTHIAS: Perhaps he's a tramp who hasn't got anyone and would like to spend the holiday in a family circle.
TADEY: It's true, Granny. Some families even invite the poor in for Christmas dinner. That's not to say that I'm suggesting this gentleman is poor – perhaps he just came to make our celebration as genuine as possible. *(Looking at Santa)* Isn't that so?
SANTA: I'll do my best.
TADEY: Can we now give the toast? *(Reaching for the flask.)*
VERA: No. First, let this gentleman explain who he is. Then you can enjoy yourselves with him till the early morning.

(All look at Santa Claus.)

MATTHIAS: Tell her, so we can have peace.
JUDY: I think I know who you are, but if I were to tell, nobody would believe me –
VERA *(cuttingly)*: Let him do the telling.
SANTA CLAUS: Ooof, I'm quite new to this, and pretty poorly prepared.

(He reaches into his sack and draws out a bundle of papers and newspaper cuttings.)

I was, however, expecting the question, so I jotted down a few things… Aha!

(He pulls out a piece of paper and stuffs all the other papers and cuttings into his coat pockets, half into one, half into the other.)

May I?
VERA: Please do.
SANTA CLAUS *(reading)*: "I am the one who converses with the mountains. Who composes things, who seeks. Who seeks where there is

terror and fear. Where things are buried. I am the one who converses with dark recesses, who heals, who cures, who solves all, who reveals the truth. I am the one who in the midst of night converses with the light of day. I am the doctor and the medicine."

VERA *(after a pause)*: Is that all?

SANTA CLAUS: I'm afraid so. The only thing I could still add is that I would gladly arrange for you the greatest festival of delight you have ever had.

(He attaches the piece of paper to one of the branches of the Christmas tree.)

VERA *(turning and heading toward the kitchen door)*: A tasteless joke which one of you is indulging in at my expense. *(To Tadey.)* Most likely your wife.

TADEY: Granny…

(Vera goes into the kitchen, slamming the door.)

9.

(Brief silence.)

JOSEPH: Mother can at times be a bit snappy.

MATTHIAS: Huh! A bit…

JOSEPH: Give her a minute and she'll be back as if nothing had happened.

TADEY: And now, at last, a glass of wine.

(He reaches for the demijohn, but Santa Claus gets there before him.)

SANTA CLAUS: Allow me. After all, did I not bring this nectar of the gods? And, as a general rule: he who brings it, pours it. Isn't that so, Gregor?

(He begins pouring wine into the glasses.)

GREGOR: From the gray morn of dead night the river flows across the gray plains of the long, forgotten days, like time which never passes.

SANTA CLAUS: From the gray morn of dead night a flight of birds descends over the water. And into gray morn of dead night away they fly, with a farewell cry.

(Gregor gazes amazed at Santa Claus. Santa gives him a kindly smile. Gregor's face opens out into a trusting grin.)

JUDY: You two really understand each other.
SANTA CLAUS: Well, Christmas is the day of understanding, is it not? The day of conspiracy against all that's grim and hostile, right? *(Offers Judy a glass of wine.)*
JUDY: Thank you.
JOSEPH: What Judy meant was that you understand each other as if you were reciting together one of Gregor's poems.
SANTA CLAUS: Oh dear! This is the first time in my life that I have managed to produce anything vaguely poetical. Does it seem to you that I have some talent?

(He offers a glass to Joseph, then to Tadey.)

MATTHIAS: Do I have to say something to get some wine?
SANTA CLAUS: Here you are. *(He hands him a glass of wine. Matthias wants to drink it straight down, but Santa Claus restrains his hand.)* May I propose that we all toast together?
MATTHIAS: Right, let's.
SANTA CLAUS: Together with Mrs. Vera, who is the leading light of this family. *(He pauses at this acknowledgment, and looks closely at the framed diploma on the wall.)* Mother of the Year! *(Whistling in admiration.)* What do you say, Gregor – shall we go and fetch Mother?

(Gregor leaps up, takes Santa by the hand and leads him into the kitchen. Santa takes his sack with him. The others, glass in hand, exchange glasses.)

JOSEPH *(to Tadey)*: Did you hire him?
TADEY: No!
JOSEPH: Somebody did.
MATTHIAS: Gregor. *(All turn their eyes on him.)*
JOSEPH: Father…

MATTHIAS *(stubbornly)*: This Santa Claus is Gregor's colleague from the madhouse. Since Gregor didn't succeed in killing me by himself, the two of them will try it together. They will recite to me some of their stupidest verses – each into one of my ears, until they blow my brains away.

TADEY: Granddad…

MATTHIAS: But behind it all is the old shepherdess. Since the Chinese still haven't invented a gadget which could dispose of me in one clean sweep, she decided to make use of the most efficacious disinfectant on the market: a double dose of poetry.

TADEY: At times I get the impression that you should take Gregor's place in the madhouse.

JOSEPH: Actually, I think Dad may be right –

TADEY: Come off it –

JOSEPH: – and that Mother may indeed be behind this. Ten years ago, when I was getting divorced, some sort of family counselor suddenly turned up to salvage my marriage. Mother gave him rough treatment, but in the end it turned out that it was she who had hired him.

MATTHIAS: Well, if she had hired this one, he should at least have brought us some presents.

10.

(Santa, Vera and Gregor enter from the kitchen. Santa has overheard Matthias's words.)

SANTA CLAUS: Oh, the presents are here, Mr. Matthias, stuffed in my pockets. And I must say that you'll be surprised by them. However, first let's have the toast.

(He notices that Matthias has already drunk his wine, so he pours him another glass.)

VERA: Did the phone ring during this time?

SANTA CLAUS: On Christmas Eve the phone never rings.

VERA: Today it will. I'm expecting an important call.

SANTA CLAUS: Oh? *(He hands her a glass, then gives one to Matthias.)*

VERA: They'll let me know if I've been elected president of the Committee for Educational Reform with the pensioner's party.
SANTA: Really! And how do you envisage this reform as future president of the committee?
VERA: Do you have school-going children?
SANTA CLAUS: I have thousands of children, Mrs. Vera. And they all expect Christmas presents. Quite a burden.
VERA: Upbringing and education must be anchored again in traditional moral values. In respect for authority, in love of truth, in law and order, in concern for the weak and the suffering.
SANTA CLAUS: It sounds like a political manifesto.
VERA: That's precisely what it is.
SANTA CLAUS *(raising his glass)*: Ladies and gentlemen –
MATTHIAS: Just a moment. *(All look at him.)* Has he told you who he is?
VERA: Matthias, don't… please.
MATTHIAS: Has he told you who he is!
VERA: This Santa Claus is no tramp. He is a courteous gentleman with excellent manners.
MATTHIAS: So you are friends now?
JOSEPH: Father, may I suggest that we recall the purpose and significance of –
MATTHIAS: I don't want to listen to teacher's talk. I've been listening to it all my life. And –

(Santa Claus has taken out of his pocket a Christmas cracker, which explodes in his hands. All are alarmed.)

SANTA CLAUS: I really am clumsy. I'm terribly sorry it exploded right at the beginning – when I had planned it for the end. *(Raising his glass.)* Cheers. *(All raise their glasses and sip.)* Bottoms up, bottoms up! *(All drain their glasses. Santa Claus collects them and replaces them on the table.)* And now – to work.
MATTHIAS: Aren't we going to eat?
SANTA CLAUS: Mrs. Vera has kindly accepted my proposal that we should postpone the dinner for an hour or so. *(Sticking his finger into the soup tureen on the table.)* In any case, the soup is already cold and will have to be heated up. *(Licking his finger.)* It will also need a pinch of salt and a touch of pepper. While the soup is getting

warmed up, and the turkey cools down, we may as well get on with our entertainment project.

TADEY: And what will that be?

SANTA CLAUS: That depends on us.

(From his pocket he draws out three sealed white envelopes. Gregor immediately snatches one from his hands and takes it to Judy.)

GREGOR: Frieda.

VERA: Greggy, give the envelope back to Santa Claus. At once!

SANTA CLAUS: No need. Each of these envelopes contains one of the historical ways of celebrating Christmas. I am confident that Gregor has chosen the most suitable.

(He pretends that he is about to tear up the other two envelopes.)

VERA: No! *(Santa looks at her.)* I would like to know all the possibilities…

JOSEPH: Yes, I too would like to have the opportunity to choose.

(Santa Claus tears up the other two envelopes and scatters the fragments around the room.)

SANTA CLAUS: There are moments in life when choice is not possible.

JOSEPH: That's not true.

SANTA CLAUS: That's what you've written. *(Searches in his pocket and pulls out a press cutting.)* An extract from the first chapter of your book, which you are writing under the title of *A Short History of My Family*.

JOSEPH: Where did you get that?

SANTA CLAUS: It appeared in the local paper. Have you forgotten?

JOSEPH: No.

SANTA CLAUS *(reading)*: "There are moments in life when choice is not possible. Many times, life is directed for us by others, most often those who simply assume for themselves the right to do so. There are also moments when choice is senseless, because the best response lies in coincidence."

(He attaches the cutting to a branch of the Christmas tree.)

JOSEPH: I didn't… I mean…
SANTA CLAUS: Miss Judy, please open your envelope. *(Judy opens the envelope, draws out a sheet of paper and unfolds it.)* What does it say?
JUDY: The Festival of Fools.
SANTA CLAUS: Well, did I not say that Gregor would, by the sheer power of artistic intuition, choose the most suitable variant?
JUDY: What is the Festival of Fools?
TADEY: Clearly something that we should celebrate.
SANTA CLAUS: Mr. Joseph, as an historian, an expounder of the sense and significance of events, would you tell us something about the origins of Christmas?
JOSEPH: That is not actually my field.
SANTA CLAUS: I understand. You are an authority on more recent events, an expert in the dates of proclamations, attacks on land, by sea and from the air, the auditor of death, one might say, the counter of corpses, the interpreter of conflicts. You are concerned with facts, the provable facts. Christmas, however, is a most tender, almost silken occasion, woven out of almost tangible sensations of yearning, joy and goodwill. And of course – honesty.
JOSEPH: What exactly are you trying to tell me?
SANTA CLAUS: The Festival of Fools is a medieval form of Christmastide entertainment, which developed from the saturnalia. No doubt you have heard of that.
JOSEPH: Of course.
SANTA CLAUS: They are renowned for the fact that, in ancient Rome, on the festival day the slaves and the masters exchanged roles, and gave themselves over to feasting, drinking, rowdiness and folly of all kinds – from the most innocent to the savage.
VERA: And we should be celebrating that?
JUDY: Let's do so!
VERA: And what was in the envelopes which you so quickly tore up?
SANTA CLAUS: In the first, a proposal that we should present scenes from the Bible, while at the same time praying and singing hymns. In the second, a proposal that we should sit down at the table, eat, yawn and talk politics.
JUDY: No-go.
SANTA CLAUS: I vote for the Festival of Fools *(raising his hand)* – what about you?

(Judy, Gregor, Tadey and Matthias raise their hands. Joseph looks at Vera.)

VERA: Very well. But I can't permit the madness, whatever you mean by it, to get out of hand.

(Gregor rouses himself, sits up, and gazes at Judy.)

GREGOR: Frieda.
JUDY *(embracing him and drawing him toward her)*: Yes, darling?
VERA: Greggy, come to Mummy.

(Gregor stands up and goes over to Vera. He stops. He turns back, looks at Judy. He doesn't know what to do. He grimaces with pain and sinks to his knees.)

VERA *(dropping down and embracing him)*: My child…
GREGOR *(turning around, extending his hand toward Judy)*: Frieda!
VERA *(breaking down, thumping her fists on the floor)*: Stop, stop, stop! Stop mentioning that name!

(Gregor leaps to his feet and circles around the Christmas tree.)

GREGOR: Stop, stop, stop, stop… *(Returning to Judy, he kneels down.)* I've stopped.
JUDY *(caressing him)*: Good boy.

(Blackout.)

Act Two

(The play continues with everybody where we left them before the interval.)

1.

SANTA CLAUS: Mrs. Vera, what does the name Frieda mean to you?
VERA *(standing up)*: Nothing.
JOSEPH: This is something that Gregor has got stuck into his head –
SANTA CLAUS: But you, too, Mr. Joseph, have heard of Frieda, have you not?
JOSEPH: That's of no importance.
VERA: Once all this comes to an end, you will be tried in court. Not just for having forced your way into our house, but for deliberately shaming us.
SANTA CLAUS: What about that monument, Mr. Joseph, which you're erecting on the edge of the orchard?
JOSEPH: What about it?
SANTA CLAUS: Well, is there perhaps something wrong with it?

(Joseph hangs his head in silence.)

MATTHIAS: Answer the man.
JOSEPH: There is nothing wrong with the monument. I've got the location *and* the building permit. I'm building on my own land –
MATTHIAS: Mine.
TADEY: But isn't the orchard yours, Granny?
VERA: The orchard belongs to the dead.

TADEY: Granddad said –
VERA: So too does the monument. Your father is not obliged to justify himself for the act by which the wound will finally be healed.
SANTA CLAUS: So, the wound does exist.
JOSEPH: The past is full of wounds. We live in the real world.
VERA: Joseph, that man has no right to interfere in your affairs. You have nothing to explain. *(To Santa.)* What do you want from us? You must leave at once.
SANTA CLAUS: But we agreed, Mrs. Vera. We agreed that I may conduct a little test.
VERA: What kind of test?
SANTA CLAUS: A little interrogation, to use the word you best understand.
VERA: Who gives you the right –
TADEY: Granny, you've already said that three times. If he wants us to answer a few questions, we'll do so. After all, we have nothing to hide. Or do we? *(Pause.)* Granny? *(Vera is silent.)* Father?
JOSEPH: No, we've got nothing to hide.
SANTA CLAUS: Mr. Joseph… *(Drawing a folded newspaper cutting from his pocket.)* Quite by chance, an interview you gave to the local newspaper came into my hands. *(Unfolding the cutting.)* Your decision to erect a monument has, in fact, stirred up a great deal of dust. You have come up against serious opposition.
JOSEPH: No one can keep me from completing the work.
SANTA CLAUS: One of the opponents claims that: *(reading)* "To erect a monument to those who collaborated with the Nazis during the war and to those who fought against Nazism, is the height of cynicism."
JOSEPH: Quite the opposite –
SANTA CLAUS: And here you explain your purpose. *(Reading.)* "The monument is like a lightning conductor, which must de-electrify the pain. It must be joined to the earth, so that it reaches down to the roots and renews the soil for the new generations." *(Folds up the cutting and replaces it in his pocket.)* Mr. Joseph?
JOSEPH: I have nothing to add.
SANTA CLAUS: But at the end of the interview you did add something. And it seemed to me so important that I couldn't help remembering it. You said that you were constructing the monument because you wanted to open the door to the future for your family.
JOSEPH: Did I say that?

SANTA CLAUS: And more. *(Drawing out the cutting again.)* You said – and I quote – "that the road to the future leads only over the threshold of the past, and of this we are too little aware."
JOSEPH: Do you not agree?
SANTA CLAUS: That's neither here not there. But your father does not, as the journalist claims. Your father considers that the monument *lacks* the threshold over which one might step into the future.
VERA: Nonsense.
SANTA CLAUS: According to your father's opinion, it is fear that prevents you from completing the project.
MATTHIAS: No one is guilty. No one's to blame. It's the sunspots. It says so here, in the paper. Sunspots are to be blamed for wars. That's the conclusion of the French astronomer Moreaux *(pronounces it as More-oaks)*.
JOSEPH: Moró, Father –
MATTHIAS *(stubbornly)*: …and as early as 1910 this More-oaks had been warning all the governments of Europe that between the years of 1914 and 1918 the world would be menaced by a great misfortune. Since the year 1890, when More-oaks began his observations, the periods of solar and world peace constantly coincided.
JOSEPH: Father –
MATTHIAS: It says so in the paper. *(Reading.)* "As from the year 1935, the curvature of the sun will again increase, to reach its zenith in 1938." *(Folding the newspaper and replacing it on the pile.)* It's the curvature of the sun that forces those on earth to sin, to raise the axe against brother, son, father. Yet we, in our naivety, were constantly blaming each other! No! The blame lies up there, from where the light comes.

2.

(Matthias reaches for his walking stick and leans forward to stand up. Tadey hurries over and takes him by the arm.)

VERA: Matthias, don't get overexcited, think of your blood pressure.
MATTHIAS *(weaving over to Joseph)*: Where will you put the sacrificial lamb?
JOSEPH: What?

MATTHIAS: Where will you place the one who is to blame for the plague which has been poisoning our blood for a hundred years? Where will you place him, since your monument is without an altar?

JOSEPH: Father…

MATTHIAS: How convenient! "Disturbances on the sun have an effect not only on the weather but also on the human nervous system." So we are erecting a monument to the victims of the sun! So it's irrelevant who does what. And to whom. So it's irrelevant if I pick up my stick and strike my own son. *(Raising his stick.)* Sunspots! *(Heading for Joseph.)* Sunspots…

(He crumples to the floor and groans.)

JOSEPH: Mother, where are the drops?

VERA: In the bathroom.

(Joseph and Tadey pick up Matthias by the feet and half-pull, half-push him back to the armchair.)

VERA: Gregor, get Father's drops!

GREGOR *(marching about the room)*: Four of us going, there on the pavement *(turning around)*, all drunk as lords *(turning around)*, sorrow rings in our footsteps *(turning around)*, here or there one of us utters a curse. *(He sits down and takes Judy's hand.)* Frieda. *(Matthias is gasping for breath, his eyes are closed. Joseph takes his pulse.)*

JOSEPH: Mother… what can we do?

VERA: Ask Santa Claus.

JOSEPH: Mother – Dad is dying!

VERA: Well, he can't live forever! He is ninety-four!

MATTHIAS *(opening his eyes and thrusting aside Joseph's hand)*: "The announcement of my death is somewhat exaggerated." That was said by Mark Twain *(pronouncing it as Tvine)*, as I read a short while ago. *(Looking at Joseph.)* Well? Aren't you going to correct me? Aren't you going to tell me I pronounced it wrongly?

JOSEPH: You did. The name is Twain.

MATTHIAS: I'm eternally grateful to you. Would it not be awful to die with an improperly pronounced word in one's mouth? That is no way to Heaven.

(Joseph stands up and moves away.)

TADEY *(consulting his watch)*: Let's get on with it. Whatever it is we're getting on with.

SANTA CLAUS: Indeed. Mr. Tadey, what is your opinion of your father's monument?

TADEY: Until today, I had not even known about it.

SANTA CLAUS: But now you do.

TADEY: All right, I'll tell you what I think. I've heard a load of sentimental blather – threshold of the past, door to the future, and suchlike pat phrases that your generation is so good at, and which turn my guts when I hear them. And how the monument lacks an altar. I think it doesn't lack an altar. I think that on that altar the father will sacrifice his own son.

JOSEPH *(shocked)*: Tadey…

TADEY: That's how it is, Father – on this heap of stones you will sacrifice me and my future. Isn't that your intention?

JOSEPH: Of course not.

TADEY: Maybe not, but that's the only thing you'll achieve. Shall I tell you how you can show respect for the dead? By showing love for the living.

JOSEPH: You're just like your mother.

TADEY: Thank God I'm not like you.

VERA *(standing up)*: Will you both stop! Right this moment!

SANTA CLAUS: Mr. Tadey… *(From his left pocket he draws a bundle of press cuttings.)* Here I have… Now where is it?... Aha… *(He extracts one and thrusts the others back into the pocket.)* I must say that – at least by local standards – you are a most notable family.

VERA: And what's wrong with that?

SANTA CLAUS: Nothing, Mrs. Vera… You're simply a family to whom the press devotes a great deal of attention. Here, for instance, a journalist is writing about Mr. Tadey.

JUDY: Let's hear it.

SANTA CLAUS *(reading)*: "The young entrepreneur – who also happens to be the owner of two nightclubs – is now starting up with the sale of computer games, which he allegedly dreams up at the rate of dozen a day between shaving and showering. One of these, known as "Our Past," became an overnight success, and the young

entrepreneur is already considering whether, as the next step in his rising career, to build a motel."

JOSEPH: "Our Past"?

TADEY: Our past, Father, is joint property – not just yours.

JOSEPH: You never told me about this.

TADEY: Did you tell me what you did during the war? This is my war.

JOSEPH: Cashing in the profits from fooling around with history?

TADEY: But isn't fooling around with history just what you've been doing for thirty years as a teacher? *(Short silence.)*

VERA: Once again, I would most kindly ask both of you to stop.

(All look at Gregor, who has fallen asleep on Judy's lap.)

SANTA CLAUS *(reading)*: "Why is this game so popular?" the journalist asks. "It delights the children because, on the screen, they can eliminate either one or the other, and place themselves now on one side, now on the other. There is no moral judgment – all is just virtual entertainment. And perhaps – a catharsis on behalf of their grandparents."

JOSEPH: How could you have so utterly shamed us?

TADEY: And where did you get stuck? In what century did your feet get so fixed together that you can only flap your wings and buzz like a demented fly?

MATTHIAS: We were gods! *(All look at him. He leans on his stick and gets up without aid.)* That's what we were – in comparison with you. You strut about on the earth soaked with our blood. You are lice.

TADEY *(acridly)*: Gods…

MATTHIAS: Quite so! Gods! *(He begins to totter toward Tadey.)* We had ideas. And ideals. We had faith.

TADEY: Faith.

MATTHIAS: Well, what do you have? Mobile phones. Current accounts. Balance sheets. Profit margins.

TADEY: And what did your ideas achieve?

MATTHIAS: Are you blind? Look at the world around you.

TADEY: I do, every day. That's why I'm asking you.

MATTHIAS: When I think that I went to the front at the age of sixteen, and on the very first day became a war invalid!

TADEY: You really were rather inept.

MATTHIAS: A hero! Not like the generations I sired. *(To Vera.)* Zounds, I'd almost rather that you fixed on my head cuckold's horns than that my seed should have given birth to this!
VERA: You're drunk.
MATTHIAS: Too sober, if anything.
VERA: When you're sober, you never say "zounds."
MATTHIAS: I first uttered that word in nineteen-fourteen, when a bullet shattered the middle finger of my right hand.
SANTA CLAUS: May I see?
MATTHIAS *(wiggling the fingers of his right hand)*: They sewed it back on, but I still can't clench my fingers – which is a good thing for that greenhorn, otherwise I'd clench them around his neck!
SANTA CLAUS *(showing interest)*: And how did this event occur?
MATTHIAS: I was serving in the first division of the Austro-Hungarian army, which was besieging Belgrade. We were just greenhorns, and they sent us ahead simply to see how good the Serbs were at aiming. An officer behind us roared out: "You gutless lot – are we going to attack or crouch down here till Christmas?" So I immediately waved *(waving his hand)* and shouted: "C'mon, let's get 'em!"
SANTA CLAUS: Very brave.
MATTHIAS: And while my hand was in the air, a bullet came from the Serbian side – the first bullet shot in the First World War – and it shattered my middle finger. I became the first victim of the Great War – and that still remains a great honor to me.
VERA: Only that's not quite how it was.
MATTHIAS: Were you there?
VERA: The officer did indeed damn you as gutless cowards. But what he said was that he'd had enough of you, and that those who would rather go home to Mummy should raise their hands. You were the first to raise yours.
MATTHIAS *(turning away)*: Fuck you.

3.

SANTA CLAUS: Now, where were we? *(He rummages in his pockets and pulls out a bundle of cuttings.)* Mr. Joseph, despite the misunderstandings between you and your father, you have one thing in common.

JOSEPH: And what would that be?
SANTA CLAUS: At the tender age of sixteen, your father was conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian Army. You, at the same age, voluntarily joined the partisans.
JOSEPH: Do you expect me to apologize?
SANTA CLAUS: I mention the fact because, during World War II, your father joined the opposite side, the White Guard.
JOSEPH: If all were to choose the same side, there would be no history.
SANTA CLAUS: But how did father and son manage to grow so far apart?
VERA: That's something I can explain.
JOSEPH: Mother…
VERA: Matthias joined the Whites because Joseph had gone over to the Reds. Matthias was like that all his life: he always did the opposite of what others in the family did. As for Joseph, he was a child. He had absolutely no idea what decision he was making.
SANTA CLAUS: Is that true, Mr. Joseph?
JOSEPH: No.
VERA: He gave in to the pressures of his companions. He really became enamored with those strange ideas, and was proud of those "comrades" of his as only a little boy could be.
JOSEPH: Mother…
VERA: They were always filthy and scruffy. They never shaved. And they stank. Can you imagine what that meant for a mother who had all her life taken care to keep her family clean?
MATTHIAS: And that was even before the Chinese had begun inventing their cleaning gadgets!
VERA: Once Joseph came home with a small band of them to force his father to join the ranks of the just. But Matthias was already with the Whites. Half a year later, he too came home with his band, looking for Joseph. And he told me I could not be on both sides. I had to choose.
SANTA CLAUS: And did you?
VERA: How can a mother choose between her son and his father?
MATTHIAS: I have never been a father to your bastard.
VERA: I chose them both. I waited for the storm to die down. For them to come home. For us to forget. And make a fresh start.
SANTA CLAUS: And they came back…

VERA: For five years after the war they didn't exchange a word. Then for two years they hurled curses and horrible accusations at each other. All without proof. All imagined.
SANTA CLAUS: Not everything, surely.
VERA: Everything.
SANTA CLAUS *(unfolding the bundle of cuttings)*: "Triumphant son confiscates from defeated father the shop where the family had lived before the war."
VERA: That is not true!
SANTA CLAUS: It says so here.
VERA: The confiscation of property was a state affair. Joseph was just… the tool… forced to carry it out… just the tool… *(She sits and stares at the floor.)*
SANTA CLAUS: But you quickly found yourself on your feet again, didn't you, Mr. Joseph? You became a primary school teacher. Later to be promoted to the post of headmaster.
JOSEPH: Was that a crime?
SANTA CLAUS: And your mother, at the same school, became a teacher of moral upbringing. The whole family adjusted itself to the new circumstances without any disturbance. Almost overnight.
VERA: Do we deserve reproach for this?
SANTA CLAUS: Mr. Joseph, that list of names which you intent to carve onto the monument… will it include the fallen on both sides?
JOSEPH: That is its purpose.
SANTA CLAUS: Including Frieda's father?

(Silence. Vera and Joseph exchange glances.)

VERA: I have already said that the name is unknown to us.
SANTA CLAUS: Frieda was the neighbor's little girl, not so, Mr. Joseph?
JOSEPH *(after a pause)*: She was.
SANTA CLAUS: The neighbor's land bordered on yours, and the border ran somewhere through the middle of the orchard. Where you're building the monument.
VERA: I will tell you how it was –
JOSEPH: Mother, please.
VERA: Shortly after the unfortunate girl was born, her mother died. We took care of the child, looked after her, and brought her up. Her father was a drunken lout.

MATTHIAS: Her father was nothing of the sort. Shoulder to shoulder we fought together against the Reds.
SANTA CLAUS: And while you two were fighting, Frieda was growing up with Gregor as brother, here in this house.
VERA: I was too good to her. Now I'm paying for it.
SANTA: After the death of her father, who was killed in the war, the poor girl remained with you.
VERA: She had no one else.
JOSEPH: We adopted her.
SANTA CLAUS: Officially?
VERA: No one in my family ever did anything without an official document.
SANTA CLAUS: And together with Frieda you adopted the land which was her inheritance after her father's death.
VERA: She was a child, for heaven's sake! The land was hers, but somebody had to cultivate it. Besides which – *(She breaks off.)*
JOSEPH: If we hadn't adopted the girl, the state would have appropriated the land.
SANTA CLAUS: Just as you, under state orders, appropriated your father's shop.
VERA: You really do come from Mars! Otherwise you wouldn't speak as if you had no idea of the kind of world we live in.
SANTA CLAUS: True, I did not have the good fortune of being able to come to you for lessons in moral upbringing –
VERA: It's only the living who can behave morally!
SANTA CLAUS: Or the simple souls. Like Gregor.
VERA: Gregor is a brilliantly gifted child who is too sensitive for this world. And too fragile to be able to live without supervision.
SANTA CLAUS: Too fragile even for love?
VERA: He cannot know what that is!
SANTA CLAUS: Yet at one time he did know. Frieda, with whom he played and dreamt together, ultimately became everything in this world to him.
VERA: Frieda and Gregor were brother and sister.
SANTA CLAUS: Not really, since Frieda was adopted –
VERA: Officially. Why do you force me to go on repeating this? She was adopted officially and so they were brother and sister.
SANTA CLAUS: In other words, any love between them –

VERA: If by love you mean her base seduction of a poor boy who did not even know how to urinate alone, then it was my *duty* to prevent such love.

SANTA CLAUS: But you didn't, at least not in time. It turned out that Gregor knew the purpose of the appendage between his legs. He even managed to make Frieda pregnant – at the age of fifteen.

VERA *(venomously)*: She was to blame! That slut, whom we should have drowned instead of taking her into our care.

SANTA CLAUS: And so you drowned her.

VERA *(brief pause)*: What?

SANTA CLAUS: First you took her to the quack, who relieved her of the fetus. Then you drove her out of the house and placed her in a home for juvenile delinquents. The reformatory, as it was known at the time.

VERA: To the reformatory – where she belonged. It wasn't I who sent her there The social workers did!

SANTA CLAUS: Who were acting at your instigation.

VERA: No.

SANTA CLAUS: And you knew what was awaiting the mother of your ill-fated grandchild –

VERA: Improvement! That was what awaited her. The purpose of such institutions is to reform children who have strayed from the proper path.

SANTA CLAUS: Yet with Frieda that did not happen. Rather the opposite.

VERA: Go and talk to the social workers.

SANTA CLAUS: And what about Gregor? Who was responsible for him?

(Vera remains silent. Santa draws from his pocket a newspaper cutting and folds it out.)

SANTA CLAUS: I can't help being amazed how exhaustively the history of your family has been documented. More thoroughly than the fall of the Roman Empire! *(Reading.)* "A sixteen-year-old girl ran away from the home for juvenile delinquents to meet up with a mentally impaired boy of the same age. It was only after several days of searching that the police found them in an underground pit five kilometers from the boy's home – frozen and famished, but happy. When the police tried to separate them, the girl bit and kicked one of the

officers while the boy drew a pistol on another and shot him in the leg. That same day the boy's mother, who must remain anonymous on account of her eminent position in society, had the boy admitted to a hospital for the mentally disturbed."

(He attaches the cutting to the Christmas tree. Silence.)

VERA: I only wanted to…

(She begins to shudder. Joseph takes her by the hand and helps her to the chair.)

JOSEPH: Mother…
VERA: I wanted…
SANTA CLAUS: You wanted to prevent incest. For Frieda was Gregor's half-sister. Isn't that so, Mr. Matthias?

(Matthias pretends to be buried in his newspaper.)

VERA: I acted in the way I thought was correct. Never, never in my life have I acted differently. This family is my work, my achievement…
JOSEPH: Mother, please…
SANTA CLAUS: Mr. Matthias?
MATTHIAS *(looking innocently at him)*: Yes?
SANTA CLAUS: Frieda's mother was employed for several years as a sales assistant in your shop.
MATTHIAS: I don't hear well. Quite normal for a man of my age.

(He buries himself again in the newspaper.)

4.

JOSEPH *(to Santa Claus)*: I think this has gone far enough.
SANTA CLAUS: And how far have *you* gone, Mr. Joseph, with the book you're writing? The history of your family. Is it finished? Or are some chapters still missing?

(Joseph is silent.)

SANTA CLAUS: What, for instance, do you know about the event fifteen years ago?
JOSEPH: Which event?
SANTA CLAUS: Do you remember, Mr. Tadey?
TADEY: Remember what?
SANTA CLAUS: The unpleasant – for you unimportant – affair which occurred before you became the owner of nightclubs and computer firms, inventor of games, an investor, builder of motels…
TADEY: I have no idea what you're talking about.
SANTA CLAUS *(pulls out a cutting, unfolds it and reads)*: "Pimp savagely beats up a prostitute who wanted to break free from his influence and start a normal life."
VERA: Fifteen years ago my son was an economics student.
SANTA CLAUS: One of the best. The lecturers predicted a glowing future for him.
VERA: I will not let his future become part of our past.
SANTA CLAUS: Future is a strange word, Mrs. Vera. It changes into the past even before we have ceased dreaming about it.
VERA: I repeat: I will not –
SANTA CLAUS: Mrs. Judy. When you got to know this talented economics student, you were a hostess for businessmen, mainly foreign.
JUDY: Is it forbidden to go out to dinner with someone?
SANTA CLAUS: No. Nor is it forbidden to spend half an hour with someone in a hotel room.
JUDY: Thanks for the information.
SANTA CLAUS: Where did you get to know this young lady? *(Showing her a press cutting with a photograph.)*
JUDY: I don't remember.
SANTA CLAUS: At the opera? Theater? Art gallery?
JUDY: Ha ha.
SANTA CLAUS: In brief – in a night bar.
JUDY: And what was she doing there if she wasn't dissolute – as you're implying that I am?
SANTA CLAUS: Looking for work? Which you offered her.
JUDY: Wasn't that kind of me?
SANTA CLAUS: But she was looking for a job as a waitress.
JUDY: Waitresses have to be on their feet ten hours a day. In middle age they suffer from varicose veins.
SANTA CLAUS: It's more comfortable to get by with legs in the air.

JUDY: Better for the spine, at any rate.
SANTA CLAUS: And better paid.
JUDY: It depends on how far up you go.
SANTA CLAUS: And you – how far did you…?
JUDY: To the top.
SANTA CLAUS: But the young lady to whom you offered work did not get anywhere. She fell.
JUDY: One must be cautious in climbing.
SANTA CLAUS: Her climbing aims were modest. To survive.
JUDY: How lucky, then, that she bumped into me. I was able to help her!
SANTA CLAUS: Part of her earnings, of course, ended up in your pocket.
JUDY: I don't know what it's like on the North Pole, where you come from, but here we call it agent's commission.
SANTA CLAUS: Although the job of waitress would probably have suited her better.
JUDY: We're talking of a mature woman pushing thirty-five. Not only did she know what she was letting herself in for, but it also wasn't the first time she earned her survival cash by opening her legs.
SANTA CLAUS: In short, you simply transformed a talented amateur into a successful professional.
JUDY: Am I not worth my weight in gold?
SANTA CLAUS: And you remained exemplary co-workers, you exchanged clients…
JUDY: That's the custom.
SANTA CLAUS: Until the young lady fell in *love* with one of your joint clients. A young, talented economics student.
VERA: Stop, stop, stop!
GREGOR *(starts running around the tree)*: Stop, stop, stop, stop… *(He rushes back and stops in front of Judy.)* I've stopped.
SANTA CLAUS: Mrs. Judy?
JUDY *(fumbles in her bag, draws out a tissue and begins to wipe away the tears)*: It wasn't like that. *(Santa waits patiently.)* I had already been friendly with Tadey for some time. I needed a manager. He had that ability. We opened a night bar –
SANTA CLAUS: Mr. Tadey… *(Shows him the cutting with the photograph.)* Is that the woman you kicked and beat up because she refused to be the on-duty prostitute at the night bar you had opened together with Mrs. Judy ten years ago?

TADEY *(glancing fleetingly at the photograph)*: I beat up both of them. But I mainly kicked this one here. *(Looks at Judy.)*
JUDY: Apparently I'm the type of woman who likes violent men.
TADEY *(at Judy)*: You persuaded her to go and leave me in a mess during that most critical moment! You even gave her money! From my cash register!
JUDY: Dear business wunderkind, the money in the cash register belonged no less to her than to me! And to both of us far more than to you, who never had anything better to do with it than count it five times a day.
TADEY: Isn't that why you took me on? To count your money? And invest it? And make it grow?
JUDY: I made a mistake. We all make mistakes. *(To Santa Claus.)* Don't we? But now that's all behind me. Now I'm Frieda.
GREGOR *(beaming)*: Frieda…
VERA *(leaping up violently)*: Are you also going to let yourself be taken in by this woman who has bored her way in like a worm into the juiciest apple of this family? Have you any idea how she got my grandson?
TADEY: Granny, please…
VERA: She bought him. With the money she collected over the years of debauchery from… I simply can't find the word for the men who go to such women for their pleasure.
JUDY: One of those men was your grandson, who lost his virginity with me.
VERA: Silence – you slut!
JUDY: After that, he came back, because he wanted more, and then more and more. And finally we got married, so that he could evacuate his pouch three times a day!
VERA: You – sorceress!
JUDY: He must have liked my legs. *(Stretches out one of her legs.)*
VERA: You knew those fornicators would soon find you too old. That's why you did what you did. You bought yourself an innocent boy whose future seemed assured.
JUDY: You mean a young man who had flunked all his exams, and who had decided to become someone and something with the money of a woman who had fallen in love with him on account of his innocence.
VERA: Have you no shame?
JUDY: I have. You don't have any.

VERA *(to Santa Claus)*: Would you kindly tell this woman she is the last person in the world who has the right to instruct me on how one should conduct one's life.
SANTA CLAUS: I don't think she has that intention.
VERA: You know too little about her. I could tell you more.
SANTA CLAUS: There's no need. Mrs. Judy's past has been thoroughly documented. *(He thrusts the cutting with the photograph back in his pocket, draws out a new bundle of cuttings, and flourishes them.)* The media have recorded the entire history of your family. In addition to which, to bring it all together, a few years ago I too was a client of this long-legged lady. She, of course, will not recall me – at the time, it was not Christmas, and I was differently attired.
VERA: Oh my God.
JOSEPH: There's something I don't understand. What has all this got to do with Frieda?

(Santa Claus shows him a cutting with a photograph.)

SANTA CLAUS: Do you know this young lady?
JOSEPH: Slightly.
VERA: Joseph?
JOSEPH: She was a waitress in the bar where I used to go with friends. Not too frequently at the beginning, but later, when my marriage began to crumble, more and more often.
SANTA CLAUS: I suggest a different order of events. Your marriage began to crumble *because* you were going more and more often to the bar.
JOSEPH: No –
SANTA CLAUS: Your relations with the waitress, as you call her, began one year *before* the breakup of your marriage.
JOSEPH: I was fond of her.
VERA: Joseph!
JOSEPH: I loved her. I'm not going to justify myself for having been with a woman in whose company I felt happy.
SANTA CLAUS: Why, then, after your divorce you did not go and live with her – instead of going back to your parents?
JOSEPH *(after a pause)*: Mother needed me.
SANTA CLAUS: And just as soon as you could have gone to live with her, the waitress disappeared. Didn't you ever want to find out where to?

JOSEPH: No.
SANTA CLAUS: Because you knew where she had gone?
JOSEPH: How could I've known she was Frieda? They all called her Barbara. And she was a woman. Fragile, very unhappy. I was drawn by her sorrow. I still feel that I should have…
SANTA CLAUS: Looked for her?
JOSEPH: I wasn't able…
SANTA CLAUS: To help her?
JOSEPH: You just don't understand, do you?
SANTA CLAUS: Don't I?
JOSEPH: No. You don't understand that we're all, from first to last, subjugated to the unbreakable will which sucks us up like dust from the edge of the carpet and absorbs us.
SANTA CLAUS: Including Frieda.
JOSEPH: I know nothing about that.
JUDY: But I do. *(All look at her.)*
VERA: Whatever she told you is a lie.
JUDY: When I got to know her better, she confided to me that she planned to marry an older man, who had divorced his wife because of her. She loved him, he was good and kind. But then…

(She lights a cigarette.)

VERA: It's not true!
JUDY: Then some unknown man appeared and offered her a choice. Either she disappeared and forgot about the man she planned to marry, or else she would end up in the ditch with a battered skull.
SANTA CLAUS: Poor Frieda. She really had no luck. She falls in love and gets sent to the reformatory. She falls in love a second time and has to go away to save her life –
VERA: Joseph was a headmaster, for heaven's sake! He couldn't live with a waitress. All our lives, had we not made an effort to get somewhere?
SANTA CLAUS: Passion is fleeting, a mother's love is eternal.
VERA: For the first time tonight you have said something sensible.

(Gregor wakes up and leaps up twice.)

GREGOR: Legless leap! Legless leap! *(Marching up and down.)* Let's go the four of us along the paving, drunk and raving, sorrow ringing in our steps, curses showing us the way… *(He stops by the French window. He presses his face against the pane and peers out into the darkness.)* The lightning has rent the sky in the west. The orchard is flaring like an eye on a flame's crest. A flock of crows has flown into the heart of nothing. *(He pushes open the door and goes out into the garden, disappearing into the darkness.)*
VERA: Gregor!

(Judy goes to the window and through it into the garden. She closes the door behind her and follows Gregor into the dark. Tadey makes a move toward the window, changes his mind, stands still, staring at the floor.)

VERA: Where have they gone?
SANTA CLAUS: Away from all this.

5.

MATTHIAS: I need help. *(All look at him.)* Mr. Santa, please. *(Santa Claus comes over to him.)* Under my armchair there is something I hid there. So that it wouldn't come into the hands of the Cleaning Woman of the Year. If it did, she'd blow me away like a cobweb.
VERA: What are you blathering about?
MATTHIAS: Please, Mr. Santa.

(He points under the armchair. Santa kneels down, reaches under the chair, and pulls out an old army pistol.)

VERA: No!
MATTHIAS: Give it to me.
VERA: Don't. He'll shoot us all!
SANTA CLAUS *(standing up and handing the pistol to Matthias)*: I don't think he will.
MATTHIAS *(aiming the pistol at Vera)*: Boom boom boom! *(Aiming at Joseph.)* Boom boom. *(He presses the pistol to his temple. Waits. Silence.)* Boom!

(He places the pistol on the pile of newspapers.)

VERA: Most entertaining.
MATTHIAS *(aiming the pistol at her)*: Admit it – you wanted to shoot me at least twenty times over.
VERA: A hundred times.
JOSEPH *(taking a step toward Matthias)*: Father, give me the pistol.
MATTHIAS *(pointing the pistol at Joseph)*: Not a step further. *(Joseph freezes.)* You've disarmed me once, you won't succeed a second time.
JOSEPH: Father…
MATTHIAS: Shut up! Place yourself over there, by the tree. *(Joseph hesitates. Matthias brandishes the pistol.)* One two! One two three!

(Joseph places himself by the tree. Matthias aims at Vera.)

MATTHIAS: Come on! All Martians together! One two! *(Vera places herself beside Joseph. Matthias points the pistol at Tadey.)* What are you waiting for? Do you think you can avoid becoming part of our past? One two!

(Tadey places himself beside Joseph and Vera. Matthias begins trying to stand up. Santa hurries over and helps him to his feet. Matthias, leaning for support on his stick, takes two paces forward and points his pistol at the three by the Christmas tree.)

MATTHIAS: What shall we do with them, Mr. Santa? What shall we do with these Martians?
VERA: He's losing his mind.
MATTHIAS: Oh! It is me now, is it? *I* am losing my mind?
VERA: Yes. You're to blame for everything.
MATTHIAS: For everything?
VERA: Your whole life is just one long string of mistakes. And I clear them up after you. To have fought on the defeated side in a war, that could still be understood. To have chosen the defeated side in two wars – that's stupidity.
MATTHIAS: We're not all as clever as your son who is writing a book on his victories. Of course, some things have to be invented to make the book historical. History must be decorated. Just like the Christmas tree.

JOSEPH: Father, please…

MATTHIAS: De Gaulle! *(Pronounces it De Gowle.)* Do you remember, my son? Do you remember when I first hit you?

JOSEPH: No.

MATTHIAS: You had finished teacher training college. Your mother begged me on her knees to go to the diploma presentation ceremony. A proper thing to do, she said. All the fathers will be there. So I went, just to please her. And we sat at a long table in some kind of sports hall, draughty like hell. And we ate biscuits and drank tasteless wine. And chatted. And I was really thawing out in the conversation with the fathers of your fellow students. The words were flowing, and I said that I had read how the French General De Gowle said something – I don't remember what, it's not important. Then what do I hear from the other end of the table – loud enough for all the others to hear? "De Goal, Father. De Goal, not De Gowle." That's what you said, almost shouted. And I felt ashamed. Ashamed that my son, a teacher, should have such an uneducated father. And on the faces of the people sitting at that same long table, I could see that they felt sorry for you. Poor boy! And then I stood up, you remember, and walked down past all those faces to you, to apologize to you. To say: "I'm sorry, my son, if I've embarrassed you." But that path down to you was so long, probably the longest path in my life, that something inside me turned. When I got to you, I didn't say anything. I just slapped you. When you were small, I never did.

JOSEPH: Why didn't you?

MATTHIAS: Ask the great shepherdess. *(He slowly weaves his way back to the armchair.)* Ask her why she drained off our blood and filled our veins with chamomile tea. *(Slumping into the armchair.)* Now it's too late for me to start educating you. Now all I can do is kill you. But I don't mean to do you the service. *(He places the pistol on the handrest of the armchair, picks up the newspaper and plunges into it.)*

SANTA CLAUS: Mr. Joseph. This would be an ideal moment for you and your father to shake hands, would it not?

JOSEPH: I have been ready for a long time.

MATTHIAS: I won't shake hands with Martians.

SANTA CLAUS: Why not?

MATTHIAS: Because they're convinced they can dirty the world without the world dirtying them.

SANTA CLAUS: I seem to have read that somewhere. *(Fishing a press cutting from the bundle.)* Oh yes. Another interview with your son. *(Reading.)* "Only if father and son can extend their hands to each other, can this also be done by the next father and son. Otherwise the sins of the generation will become hereditary. Then hell is already here, on Earth."

6.

(Gregor and Judy return from the garden.)

GREGOR: One two three, one two three, two legs through my trousers standing free, the third I cannot see. Where has my third leg gone, that it is not here with me? The third leg was small, so it was left in the past. The third leg was small, but it grew up, it grew, and now here it is, pressing against my trousers. *(Rubbing his crotch.)* Oh my God! I have found my third leg. My heart beats and bounds with delight. *(Leaping up.)* The leap of the third leg! *(Leaping up.)* The leap of the third leg!

VERA *(clutching at her heart)*: I shall die.

(She staggers toward the nearest chair. Joseph helps her.)

TADEY: Where have you two been?

JUDY *(lighting a cigarette)*: In the orchard.

TADEY: Where in the orchard?

JUDY: By the monument your father is building. We found the altar which was said not to be there.

TADEY: And?

JUDY: We found it and sacrificed ourselves on it.

TAYED: What do you mean by that?

JUDY: I mean, dear husband of mine, that we consecrated it with love. *(Blows smoke toward him.)*

MATTHIAS *(to Vera)*: See, your Gregor has also been struck by the solar curve. And a real curvaceous one at that! *(He laughs aloud.)*

JUDY: We could almost hear the earth breathe with relief.

VERA: No.

JUDY: And I saw the light shining into Gregor's mind.

(Tadey strides over to Judy and grabs her by the hand. Gregor snatches up the pistol and points it at Tadey.)

VERA: Gregor!
TADEY *(raises his hands and draws back)*: Uncle… One doesn't play with guns… Judy, tell him to give the pistol to you.
JUDY: That shouldn't necessarily make you feel safer.
TADEY: Judy…
JUDY: I'm not Judy, I'm Frieda.
MATTHIAS: Boom booom boom!
GREGOR *(brandishing the pistol)*: Boom boom boom! *(Pointing it at Joseph.)* So many flowers! So many red, red roses!

(Vera stands up and goes over to Gregor. She holds out her hand.)

VERA: Give it to me. *(Sharply.)* Gregor, give me the pistol! *(For a moment, Gregor hesitates, then he meekly hands her the pistol.)* Now. I don't know how to shoot, but it seems to me that one simply needs to press this thing here. *(Touches the trigger with her index finger.)*
JOSEPH: Mother…
VERA: Don't worry, I won't make any mistakes. If I shoot anyone, it will be on purpose. *(Aiming at Santa Claus.)* You. You've brought this misfortune upon us. *(Short silence.)*
SANTA CLAUS: Press it.
VERA: Give me one reason why I should not.
SANTA CLAUS: There is none. You have a license, I presume, you're firing in self-defense, so all is legal, you have witnesses who will testify that I assaulted you with a dagger, you're covered. I'm waiting.

(Vera lowers the pistol, bows her head, hands the pistol to Santa, who tucks it into his pocket.)

SANTA CLAUS: Now, where were we? *(He fixes the cutting he is holding onto the tree.)*
TADEY: In hell, which we will never leave.
SANTA CLAUS: I haven't yet given up hope. *(He pulls out several new cuttings.)* Mrs. Vera. As the war was nearing its end, it became clear that the victorious side would be the one that was joined by your son.

VERA: So?
SANTA CLAUS: Meanwhile, the side which had been chosen – so mindlessly, as you put it – by your husband, was threatened not only by defeat but also by vengeance.
VERA: Alas.
SANTA CLAUS: But you, with your sixth sense, took appropriate measures before the others could see that new times were coming.
VERA: My duty was to protect the family.
SANTA CLAUS: So you persuaded Mr. Matthias to cross over – at five minutes to midnight – to the winning side.
VERA: To admit one's sin, and to repent for it, is Christian.
SANTA CLAUS: Yet the penance which was imposed on him as expiation for his sins went well beyond the bounds of Christianity.
VERA: What penance?
SANTA CLAUS: He was forced to lead a group of his former fellow fighters into a trap.
VERA *(after a pause)*: They gave him no choice.
SANTA CLAUS: Among them a friend and neighbor. Frieda's father.
VERA: The agreement was that they would be locked up and legally tried – how was Joseph to know they would not keep their word?
SANTA CLAUS: Your son conducted the negotiations.
VERA: He was in the army, for God's sake! He had to obey orders. Above all, he saved his own father from almost certain death.
SANTA CLAUS: But not Frieda's father. And many others.
VERA: War is cruel. Am I to blame for that?
SANTA CLAUS: I don't know.
VERA: Is it my duty to care for the fate of mankind?
SANTA CLAUS: Perhaps.
VERA: Is it not enough that all my life I fought for my family?
SANTA CLAUS *(turns to Joseph)*: Mr. Joseph, what happened up there, where you're now building the monument? *(Joseph bows his head.)*
VERA: Joseph was miles away.
SANTA CLAUS *(flourishing the cuttings)*: Here I have descriptions by the surviving witnesses. *(Selects one and reads it.)* "Along the forest slope a long column of people was moving upward…"

(Gregor, who had stopped by the French windows and is staring out into the dark, turns fiercely round.)

GREGOR: Columns, columns, columns of people! *(All look at him.)* And he stood in front of the rising red ball, sharpening his knife on the rocks of wild fury and passion, mad passion. *(He dashes into the middle of the room; all move back.)* Mothers carry children in their arms, after them stagger men, betrayed, rejected and beaten, with the sun shining into their frightened eyes. *(He looks at Joseph eye-to-eye. Joseph begins to move back, Gregor follows him.)* And my brother on a horse, brandishing a whip and a knife. And he lashes and beats until the blood flows. Flowers! Everywhere flowers! *(Flapping his arms.)* So many flowers! So much warm spring! Gregor and Frieda in the bushes, Gregor and Frieda hidden behind the grass. The metal-red clouds above them spin off into a cobweb of colors. *(Again he follows Joseph.)* The brother looks straight ahead, he does not look aside. Then come the fusillades and the shots, a flock of raven flees the woods surrounding the orchard. And the fresh earth, all submissive, fragrant, inviting, sucking in the blood, which flows, and flows, and cannot be stopped. *(He sinks down on his knees.)* My brother on horseback, a hero, with a floral wreath on his head, bristling in the sunshine, king of the moment and king of the spring, strewing lead across the orchard. So many flowers! Such a warm spring! So many red, red roses! Oozing. Slowly. Oozing roses. *(Stops and stands still for a while.)* Then long years of peace. All forgotten. Flesh only steaks on the dining table, the knife only a kitchen knife. And fine manners. And picnics in the orchard.

(Silence. Gregor goes to Santa and stops before him. He looks at Santa. Santa strokes him on the head.)

(The telephone rings on the sideboard. Tadey leaps over and picks up the receiver.)

TADEY: Hullo… Well, I don't know if it's the right moment… *(Handing the receiver to Santa.)*

SANTA CLAUS: Yes?... Of course I'm delivering presents… Yes, yes, according to the list… Got a bit delayed at some places, you know how it is… I'm leaving at once. *(Replaces the receiver.)* I hope you won't hold it against me. Duty calls, so I won't be able to stay for dinner.

(He picks up his sack and sets off toward the French windows. Suddenly, he remembers something: he draws the pistol out of his pocket.)

Do you think it's safe out there? *(Nobody says anything.)* Or has the time come for a new settling of accounts?

(Nobody says anything. Santa thrusts the pistol back under Matthias's armchair. He sets off again and opens them the French windows. Turns round.)

Or will it now be, as you have written in your book, Mr. Joseph, the end of history?

(He goes out, closing the door, and vanishes into the dark.)

(Gregor rushes to the window, presses his face against the pane, and peers out. Silence.)

7.

MATTHIAS: Well? Will anybody say something? No? Then I'm going to watch TV.
VERA *(standing up)*: We'll have dinner.
MATTIAS: Not that cold soup.
VERA *(picks up the tureen)*: Tadey, open the door for me.

(Tadey obeys her. They exit together. Joseph begins to pluck off the newspaper cuttings which Santa had stuck on the tree.)

MATTHIAS *(to Judy)*: Come on, switch on the TV. I badly need to see an advertisement! To see if the world is still normal. Gregor, switch on the TV, won't you? Come now.

(Gregor does not respond. Vera comes back with a spray and freshens the air.)

JUDY: What about Frieda?
GREGOR *(dashing up to her and taking her hand)*: Frieda!

VERA: I will not hear another word about this horrible hoax. If I knew who had ruined our Christmas like this, I'd have him castrated. Already the better part of the evening is gone for nothing.

(She goes into the kitchen.)

JUDY: And now life will go on as before.
JOSEPH: I don't see why it shouldn't.
JUDY: You will build your memorial. You will finish your book and have it published. Today's evening will be forgotten.
JOSEPH: It's in the nature of things to be forgotten.

(Vera and Tadey return from the kitchen. Vera is carrying a duster.)

VERA: The turkey has gone cold, so it will have to be warmed up. In the meanwhile, we'll do a little tidying up. Tadey, tell your wife I'm not going to touch her cigarette butts, she can clean the ashtray herself – or rather, you do it, otherwise she'll be tramping her boots all over the kitchen as well. *(She begins wiping the furniture.)* Oh, and wash the glasses, too.

(Tadey sets the ashtray and glasses on the tray and carries them off to the kitchen.)

MATTHIAS: A fine attitude toward older people, when even at Christmas they aren't allowed to watch TV.
VERA *(switching on the set)*: Now will you stop your grumbling? Find out where they have better shows, in hell or in heaven – so later you won't regret it.
MATTHIAS: They certainly have better ones in hell. Though, of course, with fewer advertisements for cleaning gadgets. Look… I knew the Chinese had not been resting all this time.

(All look at the screen.)

JOSEPH: A whitening aid.
MATTHIAS: And what an aid! It doesn't drip, your muscles don't ache, you don't get lumbago. Order it right away, Vera. With this you can

whiten the whole house in an instant, you can cover all the stains, not even our shadows will be seen any longer on the walls.

(Tadey brings in the clean glasses and sets them on the table. Picks up the flask.)

VERA: No, Tadey. That wine has turned sour. Joseph, bring another one. Bring those bottles you were given for your birthday. We should have thought of that earlier.

(Joseph picks up the bundle of collected press cuttings from the table and goes toward the kitchen door.)

Throw them in the rubbish bin.

TADEY: Let me help you, Father.

(He takes the wicker flask and goes with Joseph into the kitchen. Vera carries on with her dusting.)

MATTHIAS: Look at that… Earlier he was here, and now he is on TV! *(Vera, Judy and Gregor stare toward the screen.)* Isn't it the same one?

VERA: The same what?

MATTHIAS: Santa Claus. The one who left just a few minutes ago. There he is, can't you see him?

VERA *(placing a hand on his forehead)*: You're feverish.

MATTHIAS: Vera, you may be the best cleaning woman in space, but there are certain things you can't clean away as thoroughly as if they never existed.

(Joseph and Tadey return with three bottles of wine.)

MATTHIAS: Joseph, look. Santa Claus.

JOSEPH *(glancing swiftly)*: I see.

MATTHIAS: That's the one who was here just a while ago.

JOSEPH *(begins to open a bottle)*: Glass of wine, Dad?

MATTHIAS: I won't have any. I want us to talk.

JOSEPH: First we'll have a toast.

MATTHIAS: We have nothing to toast to.

VERA: How can you be so mean-hearted? When did we last celebrate Christmas together?

(The telephone rings. Vera picks up the receiver.)

Yes?

(She listens, her face breaks into a smile.)

Well, I… I don't know what to say… A great honor, and an even greater responsibility… Same to you.

(She replaces the receiver, raises her head, strokes her hair.)

JOSEPH: Madam President of the Committee for Educational Reform?
VERA: I don't know if I'll be up to it – with a family which is not able to stand by me.
JOSEPH: Mother, we are all behind you.
TADEY: Let's have the toast now. Also, among other things, to the agreement which Father and I concluded a short while ago. *(Raising his glass.)* Father promised he would move the memorial to the edge of the forest bordering the orchard. We will be partners in building the motel.
VERA *(stiffening with displeasure)*: Now, when you have almost finished it?
JOSEPH: Mother…
VERA: You might at least have consulted me.
JOSEPH: Of course, everything is still open, it's all a matter of… you know… We must decide on things together, as a family.
MATTHIAS: I demand that, as a family, we speak of the matter of who among us is mad. Either it is me, who saw Santa Claus in this room, or you, who pretend he was not here.
JOSEPH: Father, why don't we first give a toast to Mother?
MATTHIAS: I can't give a toast as long as there is the suspicion that I may be mad.
VERA *(with a heavy sigh)*: Matthias… *(She looks at Joseph.)*
JOSEPH: You're getting upset for no reason, Father. Yes, Santa Claus was here. But not the real one. We all know there are no real Santas –

MATTHIAS: In short, he was here.
JOSEPH: Probably a tramp dressed up as Santa in order to spend the evening in a family circle.
MATTHIAS: But wouldn't he, unless he is a complete idiot, have chosen another family?
VERA: Matthias, I have just been appointed –
MATTHIAS: Alright, alright. The main thing is that I wasn't dreaming. I haven't lost touch with reality. That makes me happy. So, let's toast.

(Tadey promptly hands him a glass. Joseph and Vera each take their own. Tadey shoves one over to Judy and another toward Gregor. Gregor is asleep, leaning on the table.)

TADEY: Shall we wake him?
JOSEPH: Just let him be.
VERA: No, this is a great moment for the whole family, we must toast together. Greggy…

(She gently shakes his shoulder. Gregor wakes up and looks at her.)

Come now, we're going to toast Mummy on the great confidence entrusted in her by her colleagues.
TADEY *(offering him a glass)*: Here you are, Uncle.

(Gregor looks at Judy, takes the glass and stands up.)

VERA *(raising her glass)*: Well, will somebody say something?
GREGOR *(staring into the distance)*: For a long time there haven't been any mothers, nor any children…

(All look at him.)

VERA: Come now, Greggy. Tell Mummy a little poem.
GREGOR: For a long time there haven't been any mothers, nor any children, we have grown old and the young women have remained solitary in their shriveling skins. The plains of old men lie between us, the plains of coagulated blood which has ceased to ooze into the earth. We have poured our sperm into the sky, which is black to the edge.

MATTHIAS: Even my mad son hasn't lost touch with reality. Cheers!

(All raise their glasses. They are disturbed by a knocking at the French windows. They look round. In front of the window stands Santa Claus with his sack on his shoulder. He gestures to show that he would like to come in, for he is bringing gifts. Vera, Joseph and Tadey turn away and ignore him.)

JOSEPH: If it's now my turn, I'd like to say the following…

(Behind them, Gregor slowly crosses to the French widows and presses his face against the pane. He and Santa pull faces at each other and exchange funny, childish gestures. Judy puts down her glass, picks up her bag, and joins Gregor. Gregor takes her hand. Santa waves at them, Judy waves back. Matthias observes them. Vera, Joseph and Tadey have their backs turned on them. Joseph is speaking. Judy opens the door and goes with Gregor out into the garden. Then the door closes on its own. Judy and Gregor each take Santa by the hand. Together they go off into the dark. Matthias gazes after them. Meanwhile:

JOSEPH: I would like to quote Father and stress how important it is that we do not lose touch with reality. To remain in touch with reality after all means – and I speak as a historian – preserving and tending the ability to make suitable choices. For reality is not everything that is forced upon us in the form of impressions; it is not all that we give a label to. Ever since beginning of history, reality has been a matter of choice – and that choice is conditioned, today no less than three thousand years ago – by the basic law of existence, which, as we all know, is the law of survival. Reality is therefore – and I cite from the introduction to my book – a Darwinist construction which acts as a protective layer –

VERA: Thank you, Joseph.

JOSEPH: I got a bit carried away.

VERA: Never mind – you're clever, it can't be helped.

MATTHIAS: A fine Christmas.

(All look at him.)

VERA: Is that all you're going to say?
MATTHIAS: The only pity is that a man of my age can no longer go on a long journey. All he can do is sit and reflect why he didn't do that when he still could have…

(Curtain.)

Why Does My Shadow Go with Me?

At the first rehearsal of *Sunspots* the director Dušan Mlakar recalled Bojan Štih's comment that for any text an actor needs to remember and understand only thirty key sentences: those that support the structure, theme, color, style, purpose and meaning of the drama. Is it possible to find thirty such sentences in *Sunspots*? And if not thirty, then twenty? Ten? Above all, would twenty, ten or even five sentences help us to unlock at least part of the secret that is the essence of the play? For this essence is hidden even from its author – often from him most of all. And so this author at least does not hesitate for long if asked to join with those who are trying to find the pulse behind, beneath and between the words of his text. For a drama to be able to breathe and take on an autonomous existence it needs to be tamed in some way, domesticated. This means appropriating that which the words conceal or simply show. We need to tease an answer from the drama as to why it was written, and why in that way rather than another – at least one of the many possible answers.

Are Štih's "thirty key sentences" a short cut to this inevitable goal? I would like to give it a try. The first key sentence is certainly the one that led Dušan Mlakar to recall Štih's words. "Why does my shadow go with me across the ground?" says the family fool and 'poet' Gregor at one point. The shadow that does not want to separate from man on his path through life can be understood in many ways: from an extension of personal imperfection and decayed hopes to a Jungian accumulation of rejected and unacceptable personal characteristics that with time come alive in the subconscious. If the ego is that part of the psyche which we are completely aware of and which represents reason and culture, it is the shadow of something that remains hidden from us until its energy exceeds the 'civilized' strength of the ego and erupts in the form

of destructive rage or self-destructive acts. We weaken it by regularly paying the tax it extracts from us and thus we acknowledge that it is 'ours' or an integral part of our psyche.

How do we pay this tax? With rituals both small and large, which can be as trivial as tidying up and washing the dishes when we feel that life is most favorably inclined toward us. Through actions with which we restore balance to the psyche and admit that there lurks within us a dark, destructive human dimension with which the 'civilized' ego does not want to come to terms. Through actions with which we seem to sacrifice part of our dignity and thus neutralize the dark forces, so that they do not break free from their cage and appear outside the control that we constantly maintain over our conduct. Thus Jung's pupil Marie-Louise von Franz and her companion Barbara Hannah had the custom that the one who had achieved some kind of success or upon whom fortune had smiled would have to take out the garbage for a week. This was their simple but effective way of paying the tax to their shadows. A somewhat grander idea was that of the French Queen Marie Antoinette, who wearied of her magnificent court and had a shed built where she could milk cows for fun. But when she sat on the stool and smelled the animal from close up she reconsidered. If she had persisted, with this small ritual she could have paid off the tax to her shadow and balanced the formality of her court with a touch of the earthy, 'unclean' side of life. In this way she would have balanced her conduct and her path may not have led her to the guillotine. The essence of this ritual was sacrifice, in this case of regal dignity, the milking stool functioning as an altar.

In *Sunspots*, Joseph decides to build a monument to the victims of war, irrespective of their political appurtenance. He has felt the destructive power of the shadow that has accumulated in his own life and that of his family, and wishes in this way to drain it of its devastating power. But just like Marie Antoinette, he stops where he should take the decisive step. "Where will you put the one responsible for the plague that has poisoned our blood for a hundred years?" demands his father, Matthias. "Where, when your monument has no altar?" In other words, Joseph wants to pay the tax to the shadow with counterfeit money. He wants to achieve redemption with a gesture, but at the same time retain his dignity. In his case – and that of other members of his family – the real sacrifice that would neutralize the shadow would be an acknowledgement of guilt. Not only for the bad things that they have done to others, but also collective guilt at their relations with people close to them, their neighbor and his daughter Frieda.

The family shadow in *Sunspots* is the result of decades of concealment, pretense and rationalization. The most adept and determined in this regard is the grandmother, Vera. "I did what I thought was right. I have never, ever acted any differently." And: "No one in my family has ever done anything without an official document." Maintaining an appearance of normality, regardless of the consequences of the family members' actions, is her mission in life and something that she is matchlessly good at. She does not think of the family's Christmas reconciliation as facing up to conscience and the truth, but as ritual confirmation of a conspiracy of silence with regard to anything that could create the impression that her family is not "clean."

But at the precise moment when the big lie is about to be confirmed by the sacred festivities, the family shadow achieves a critical mass and appears in the form of a shared hallucination: Santa Claus as the most appropriate symbol of mutual openness, generosity and love. At the first rehearsals we were all convinced that Santa Claus was the embodiment of a suddenly awakened conscience. In response to the question as to what the play was about, I too, would automatically have replied "a confrontation with conscience, which does not survive Christmas Eve." Now I am increasingly inclined toward the conviction that something else is taking place, or something more: that the false family celebration is invaded by the cumulative shadow of their concealed actions (concealed from themselves and others, and collectively through silent agreement).

Gregor, who senses the coming trauma, labels the shadow literally: "A shadow, a shadow, a shadow falls on the closed window. It is coming along paths, from the sky, from the depths. It is coming quickly, it will soon be here…" And he points toward the French windows in front of which stands Santa Claus. But why does the ugly, dark side of the family's past appear in a form whose role and general expectations represent its opposite? I think there is a reason for this. Santa Claus is not some witty idea intended to spice up events and create a festive atmosphere, but a collective vision of a genuine festivity such as the members of the family dare not celebrate, although they would long to. But in an authentic and genuine fashion he exposes all that has been suppressed and denied and now demands to be spoken: so the polite, although slightly sarcastic Santa Claus is in reality a metaphysical messenger, come to demand a sacrificial ritual. Put another way, Santa Claus comes to collect the tax that the family over the decades has failed to pay to their collective shadow. Gregor intuitively senses his real role: "The landscape

into which we go is terribly old, a rotten sun shines on it from a blackened sky…" The shadow has come to demand an admission of guilt and, with it, the dignity of the false guardians of morality and justice: of the "embalmed" family members, as Matthias calls them.

Of course, this hallucinatory healer of the familial (national?) soul does not demand payment as a petty officer of justice, but rather creates the opportunity for the family members to save themselves from their individual and collective hell by taking responsibility for past actions. Stepping into a new life is possible only when we acknowledge the shadow from the old, reoccurring life, which by entering the sphere of the human and the candid loses its crippling force. Blaming oneself and not sunspots is a personal action that borders on heroism. It is thus (as we see and experience every moment) almost impossible. "In the muddle of our century," Dürrenmatt has said, "there are no longer guilty or responsible human beings. Everybody claims that *he* is not to blame, that *he* did not want it to happen. And indeed, things would have happened without anyone in particular doing anything about making them happen. We are far too collectively guilty, far too collectively embedded in the sins of our fathers and of their fathers. We are merely the children of their children. That's our bad luck, not our guilt. Guilt presupposes personal action, a religious act." Does not Gregor say something similar at the end of the play? "For a long time there have been no more mothers, nor children, we are getting old and young women are alone in their brittle, wrinkled skin. The plains of old men lie between us, the plains of coagulated blood that has stopped draining into the ground. Our semen has poured into the sky, which has blackened to the edge. Dead children are falling from it."

There are of course more "key sentences" and even more questions. Some have been answered or will be answered by others. I shall agree with some, with others less, although as an author I cannot do anything other than respect each honest and well-intentioned opinion, including those that I find hardest to concur with. My wish is that at least someone will see in this drama a story of lost innocence and the small hope that it is possible to return to it through the door that in a moment of God's grace is opened by some subconscious Santa Claus. That, above all, is how the drama is experienced by its author, the one who felt the need to give birth to it.

Evald Flisar

Unbound Tongue, Unlocked Memory

The room became a privileged private space in the period of naturalism. But in a world mediated by the media, in which the intimate is available online and man's identity is divided among thousands of masks, the room as a legitimate dramatic space of domesticity – albeit false – still needs to be established. The invisible fourth wall, which in naturalistic drama ensures that something is revealed, no longer suffices for an open conversation on the stage. For people to open up to each other it is necessary to capture them in space – literally; enclosed in space they are capable of facing their own and the collective truth only in the presence of a mediator.

The familial and national reconciliation dealt with in Flisar's drama *Sunspots* calls for the laying bare of past events which do not fall easily from the tongue and which the participants would rather keep locked away in memory. The text also speaks to us all through the central characteristic of contemporary forms of communication: in an indirect, mediated way. For conflict resolution, people are needed to play the role of diplomats – those who are paid are called lawyers. Friendly conversations are replaced by confessional monologue. The feeling of domesticity is created by radio announcers and TV hosts. Visiting and physical contact is replaced by chatting on the phone or online, during which we cannot be sure of the sender's identity, while we can also change our own. It seems that these days, simple communication between people requires an intermediary and the path to others is made possible only by a mediator.

In *Sunspots*, this role is played by a mysterious guest whom the playwright calls Santa Claus: who else would be wandering around on Christmas Eve in a characteristic red outfit with a sack of presents? In spite of this, the dramatic characters cannot reach agreement about who

he is: is he Grandfather Frost, St Nicholas, a lonely vagrant, an escaped madman, perhaps even a Martian? More important than the name of this stranger is his mediatory function. To successfully carry out his task, which is to get the family talking to each other, dramatic space and time has to be condensed first. A properly closed space – in Wölfflin's sense of the term – and time trigger action and ensure its development. The dramatist gathers together three generations of an unnamed family on Christmas Eve – a family holiday they have not celebrated for almost fifty years. Time is measured for them by a wall clock – an obligatory part of the set in naturalistic drama – which here also shows real time. Thus fictional stage time is equated with our real time, the action extended into the auditorium and the audience placed at the center of events.

This clock is also significant as even in the stage directions it points to Flisar's writing technique. Most of his plays follow an Ibsenesque dramaturgy resting on naturalism (which entered Slovene drama via Cankar), characterized by an analytic development of a conflict situation. We are reminded of the Norwegian dramatist also by the setting (and not least the way of writing stage directions): a living room from which a number of doors lead to the rest of the house and with the outside world visible through a large window. The fireplace, which gives Ibsen's residents a deceptive feeling of security, is replaced in Flisar by the television. When Santa Claus is allowed in from outside to join the family the room becomes closed. The space becomes a kind of press which works on the same principle as an hour glass: the grains of the past run from the upper vessel and in the lower vessel are transformed into the grains of the future. We are in the narrow, compressed neck of this device, here and now, where past and future interact.

In no other drama does Flisar, by closing off space and time and thus strongly intervening in events, locate them in the now and sharpen the sense of the present as much as in *Sunspots.* Just as in *Tristan and Iseult*, *Tomorrow* and *What About Leonardo?* the solution from the time space continuum is role-play. This involves an exchange of identities that relies on calling up another's feelings, and among all games is closest to the stage play. It is accompanied by a specific awareness of an 'other' reality in relation to everyday life, and this itself is a prelude to the analytical uncovering of family tragedy rooted in conflict between father and son and their appurtenance to the White Guards or Partisans in the National Liberation War. Of course, the basic rule of the game, taking on a role, is only a cover beneath which the participants can remove their

social masks and reveal themselves in all their nakedness. They draw strength for confrontation from this apparently fictitious reality and only within this framework is communication between them possible. Their game does not offer pleasure as does the role-play in *Tristan and Iseult*, nor does it bring oblivion as in *Tomorrow*, but rather a therapeutic effect similar to the fabricated stage play in *What About Leonardo?*

The game in *Sunspots* is called the Feast of Fools. This was a medieval Christmas entertainment in which masters and slaves in ancient Rome exchanged roles and engaged in all kinds of jesting, explains Santa Claus, who forces the family to take part. They must all accept it: the closed space, which actually represents the prison of the self, can only be unlocked by confession. The tension visible on the outside, compressed inside the margin of the space, is internalized, becoming dramaturgic tension of action, visually increasing that tension. The game is led by the master of disorder, confusion and misunderstanding that is Santa Claus, a cross between a voice of reason and a *deus ex machina* (a constant in Flisar, for example the Troubadour in *Tristan and Iseult*, and Goosefeather in *The Poet's Heart*), who is both a distant observer of events and an active driving force. It is paradoxical that in the hour of truth Santa Claus draws his knowledge from such an unreliable source as newspaper cuttings: he reads details from them in "raw" journalistic style, which the family members take as a starting point for confession and which eventually brings about a need to talk that has been suppressed and rejected a priori for almost fifty years. Only in the impenetrable circle of fictitious role-play, in the shelter of magical Christmas Eve and with the help of a communicative mediator can the path to the future, which leads across the threshold of the past, be once more passable. The grains of sand from the upper vessel can once more flow into the lower one, and in the present moment stalled time can run once more.

To begin to speak – to relax the paralyzed throat of the present – is the dramatist's goal, so the end of the drama remains open, with familial and, more broadly, national reconciliation unachieved. Santa Claus vanishes as quickly as he appeared and it seems that his visit has changed nothing. The characters even doubt he was really there. The conviction grows that they are the victims of some bizarre hallucination. Only the father, Matthias, on the surface the most withdrawn character in the play, is aware of the transformation: words have unlocked his memory. Man's treasury of memories is not a computer file that we open and, when we have finished, close and erase. There is no device for cleaning

the memory. His words are conciliatory: "I don't want wine, I want us to talk." This is an optimistic end to this hollow game: rejecting forgetfulness, accepting responsibility for past actions that are no longer subject to sunspots or the constellation of stars in the sky and a fatalistic view of the world in which man has no influence on his own life. Here there is a readiness and even a need to talk.

The play *Sunspots* tells of the crisis of miscommunication already dealt with by Chekhov and even more by the theater of the absurd. If the conversations of the characters in Chekhov's *Three Sisters* take the form of monologic confessions wrapped in dialogue (as they seemed to Peter Szondi), Stanley in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* can no longer sustain even monologue. His statements, as Norbert Greiner shows, are all separate and refer only to themselves. This brings about constant ambiguity of meaning, bearing witness to man's alienation from others and even from himself. Flisar does not accept that the loss of identity is a consequence of the loss of a shared world and self-understanding. He replaces the hermetically sealed dramatic person with a closed space. Into it he brings a mediator Santa Claus who draws from the characters, one response at a time, monologic confessions that they can connect into dialogue. Here, the question asked by the Prague Structuralist Jiři Veltruský becomes relevant: does dramatic dialogue arise from dramatic monologue or from ordinary dialogue? Veltruský theoretically confirms the source of dramatic dialogue in ordinary conversation and Flisar would give the same answer. For him, there are no doubts about language as the primary means of communication, his faith in language is unshakeable: from the theatrical point of view, he believes in dialogue as the anchor of dramatic language and, in a deeper human sense, in talk as the first step to the resolution of problems.

Dr. Barbara Orel