

Stanislav Stratiev

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Translated from the Bulgarian by Iglia Vassileva.

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CHARACTERS

REASONABLE

UNREASONABLE

VIRTUOSO

BOY IN LOVE

GIRL IN LOVE

IRRESPONSIBLE

MAN

WOMAN

ALDOMIROVTSI

ACT ONE

A dilapidated, scratched, rickety, empty bus stands at the terminal. It is autumn. Dusk is falling. The wind blows some yellow leaves around and under the bus. For some time the bus stands alone with the autumn wind chasing the leaves around. Here comes the first passenger – the Reasonable Man. In his fifties and well-dressed. He carries a bulging leather bag with shiny clasps. He examines the seats in the empty bus, looking for the best. Finally he chooses the second seat, puts the bag down, takes out a handkerchief and starts dusting the seat. He dusts it for quite a while, then sits down, takes out a newspaper from his pocket, opens it and starts reading. Suddenly and resolutely he folds up the newspaper, rises and takes the third seat in the opposite row. He remains there for a while, looks up at the upper row of sliding windows, then resumes his previous place, opens the newspaper again and goes on reading.

ALDOMIROVTSI: Good evening!

The second passenger to appear in a while is ALDOMIROVTSI. A man, a little older than REASONABLE, about sixty, evidently from the nearby villages. He carries a heavy sack. ALDOMIROVTSI takes a look around, lays down the sack and starts dragging it along. He takes an end place in the bus' back row of seats. Props up the sack, wipes the sweat off his forehead, rummages into his pockets for a while and fishes out a ticket. He punches it, then sits down, the sack next to him.

REASONABLE: Why didn't you punch a ticket for the sack?

ALDOMIROVTSI (*Fails to hear the words*): Whassat?

REASONABLE: Why didn't you punch a ticket for the sack, I said.

ALDOMIROVTSI: Why should I?

REASONABLE: Because it is luggage.

ALDOMIROVTSI (*Astonished*): Luggage? The sack?

REASONABLE: Yes, the sack.

ALDOMIROVTSI: What do you mean luggage, this is just an ordinary, old, patched-up sack. If it was a suitcase, or something... made of bright plastic – why then... but this here sack ain't nothin'... (*Waves the idea away contemptuously.*)

REASONABLE (*His eyes still fixed on the newspaper*): When the ticket inspector fines you eight levs, you'll learn what is luggage and what is not.

ALDOMIROVTSI: First time in my life I ever heard an ol' sack being called luggage.

REASONABLE: You all know very well what is called luggage and what isn't, but that's the kind of nation we are. Always trying to get a free ride, always trying to be one up on somebody...

ALDOMIROVTSI (*Rises and punches another ticket, muttering away to himself*): OK! What are you bringing in nations for. Everyone blaming the nation all the time. Like as if I'm the nation and you aren't! (*Resumes his seat*)

next to the sack.)

Silence. REASONABLE is reading his newspaper, ALDOMIROVTSI sits sullen next to his sack. Laughter breaks the silence. The lovers, their arms around each other's shoulders, are trying to get through the door together. The door is not wide enough, but they keep on trying until they finally manage it. Inside the bus they make right for the back seat and once seated they immediately start turning each other's collars down. She is dressed in a raincoat, he – in a jacket. She turns his jacket's collar down, then up again.

GIRL IN LOVE: You look better with your collar turned up.

BOY IN LOVE: You, too, look better with your collar turned up. (*He turns her collar up again.*)

GIRL IN LOVE: No, I don't. (*She turns down her collar.*)

The BOY IN LOVE puts his arm around her shoulders and starts whispering something into her ear. At that moment UNREASONABLE appears. A man in his thirties. He carries a loaf of bread in one hand and in the other a shabby old leather bag of the kind that technicians carry around. He punches his ticket and takes a seat in the middle of the bus, next to a window.

Then the bus's doorframe is filled by a black violoncello case, carefully supported by a man's hand. Then the owner of the hand climbs in – the VIRTUOSO. A middle-aged man wearing glasses. His hair is constantly falling down over his forehead. The VIRTUOSO casts a haughty glance around, hesitates whether to choose the front part of the bus or the rear, then lifts the cello carefully and makes for the front part of the bus. The seat on his left is empty. He places the violoncello first carefully and cautiously as if it were a baby and only then takes a seat. Impatiently he glances at his watch and starts bending and unbending his fingers unconsciously – his usual warm-up exercise for finger fitness.

ALDOMIROVTSI: That guy over there, why didn't he punch a ticket for 'is fiddle? That's luggage, ain't it?

The VIRTUOSO turns round and casts a silent, scornful glance at him. He doesn't even bother to answer. REASONABLE keeps on reading.

ALDOMIROVTSI: So my ol' sack's gotta have a ticket and 'is fiddle don't, eh?

Nobody answers. At that moment a WOMAN of about thirty-five climbs in. She wears a raincoat, has a hairdo and an intelligent face. She takes a seat next to a window. A while later a MAN in his fifties climbs in. He, too, has an intelligent face and wears a fashionable raincoat. He casts a seemingly casual glance up and down the bus, takes in the situation immediately and walks down towards the WOMAN.

MAN: Excuse me, is the seat vacant?

WOMAN (*Without looking at him, indifferently*): Yes.

The MAN sits down and places a bulging shopping-bag down at his feet. He leans back and steals a glance at the WOMAN. Her indifferent gaze is fixed straight ahead. The MAN fixes his eyes in the same direction.

MAN: Am I inconveniencing you? (*He moves the shopping bag aside.*)

WOMAN (*In the same indifferent voice*): No, I'm all right.

MAN: What an evening! You can't say if it is the end of autumn or beginning of winter.

WOMAN (*Coolly*): I never noticed it. Are you a weatherman?

MAN: I don't bother much about the weather either, but I had quite a long wait, for the bus. Otherwise I don't even notice whether it is autumn or spring!

WOMAN: That is your own business. (*Stares out of the window.*)

Almost out of breath, a man in his fifties gets on. His clothes are somewhat crumpled, his shoes – dusty, he is unshaven. He carries a shopping-bag with two loaves of bread, a plastic box of yoghurt, lettuce, a bunch of parsley and a bottle of grape brandy. This is the IRRESPONSIBLE.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Whew, I made it. These terminals are always so chock-full of buses... You don't know which number is where. I got on the Aldomirovtsi bus, by mistake... Oof! (*Punches his ticket.*)

ALDOMIROVTSI: Hey, isn't this the one for Aldomirovtsi?

IRRESPONSIBLE: No, it isn't. Can't you see this is a city bus. It goes down to the city centre.

ALDOMIROVTSI (*Angrily*): What was I supposed to see? It don't say where it's for inside or out! Damn it, this is the third time I change buses... (*Gets up and starts dragging the sack down the aisle.*) Can't they put up a notice or something! (*Passing by REASONABLE, he thrusts his two tickets into his pocket.*) Here, you can have them as a souvenir from the nation! (*Gets off the bus.*)

IRRESPONSIBLE: That country fellow has had a bad day at the market. He's lugging a full sack home, that's why he's angry, not because of a notice. There's the private sector for you!... Daily breeding capitalism! Eh? (*Unceremoniously taps the VIRTUOSO on the shoulder.*)

The VIRTUOSO throws a glance of utter contempt at him, then silently resumes his position. IRRESPONSIBLE does not seem embarrassed in the least and addresses REASONABLE.

IRRESPONSIBLE: What do you say, do they or don't they breed capitalism?

REASONABLE (*His eyes still fixed on the newspaper*): These are elementary principles.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Elementary they may be, but... they do breed capitalism.

Don't I see them at the market-place. (*Sits down and remains silent for a while.*)
Whenever are we going to start?

REASONABLE (*His eyes still fixed on the newspaper*): There is a time-table.

IRRESPONSIBLE (*Sceptically*): My whole life I haven't seen a single bus stick to the time-table. This is going to be my first. (*Makes himself comfortable.*)

Everybody is silent. REASONABLE is reading his newspaper. The LOVERS, embracing and caressing each other, keep on whispering. The UNREASONABLE is looking out of the window. Somewhat unnaturally the MAN and the WOMAN are looking in different directions. The VIRTUOSO keeps glancing at his watch. The IRRESPONSIBLE looks at him and smiles.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Your fiddle is pretty big.

VIRTUOSO (*Contemptuously*): I beg your pardon?

IRRESPONSIBLE: I said your fiddle is very big.

VIRTUOSO (*Contemptuously again*): This is not a fiddle.

IRRESPONSIBLE (*Astonished*): No? What is it then?

VIRTUOSO: Can't you keep silent for a while?

IRRESPONSIBLE: Why? Am I disturbing you?

VIRTUOSO: No, you irritate me. (*Goes to another seat.*)

IRRESPONSIBLE: Nerves, buddy, it's only nerves! The scourge of our times. Now you get irritated, next thing you fly into a rage and before you know it you land right into the loony bin. They call them psychiatric clinics now, but I can tell you they are loony bins all right. You shouldn't worry though, there's nothing so bad in that. It is a place for human beings after all.

The VIRTUOSO sees that the dispute with the man is much below his level. He gets up and takes another seat, far from IRRESPONSIBLE. Pause.

IRRESPONSIBLE: They carry children about in such instrument cases.

REASONABLE (*Lifts up his eyes*): Who does?

IRRESPONSIBLE: Oh, there are guys for every job. They sell them to foreigners. 'Cause the birth rate has dropped there.

WOMAN: Please!... (*Shudders*)

IRRESPONSIBLE: They wouldn't carry a child in their arms for everybody to see it was drugged!

WOMAN: Stop it!... (*Waves her hand as if to drive away a nightmare.*)

The VIRTUOSO pretends the talk does not concern him, but he is uneasy, restless, keeps on looking at his watch, drumming on the seat with his fingers... IRRESPONSIBLE stares at him.

IRRESPONSIBLE: I wouldn't say theirs is an easy job. It is dangerous, the strain is often too much to bear and everything gets on their nerves... That's why

these guys they have a short fuse, like.

Unwittingly everybody turns their eyes to the VIRTUOSO. He stands there haughty and imperturbable, his eyes fixed ahead.

IRRESPONSIBLE (*Listens intently*): A baby cried out. Did you hear it? (*Listens again.*)

REASONABLE (*Quits reading the newspaper*): Nonsense! (*Listens.*)

IRRESPONSIBLE: Didn't you hear from over there. (*Points a finger at the violoncello.*)

REASONABLE, the MAN, the WOMAN and IRRESPONSIBLE listen intently. Nothing is heard. Only the wind howls outside.

REASONABLE: That is the wind.

IRRESPONSIBLE: It may be the wind, or it may not be the wind.

WOMAN: Why is the bus so late!...

IRRESPONSIBLE: C'mon buddy, what is in this case, a child or a fiddle? Put your hand on your heart and swear to tell the truth! You're giving that lady the jitters.

The VIRTUOSO looks at him, his rage barely suppressed. He remains silent, though, and continues to stare ahead.

IRRESPONSIBLE: We shall have to open the case (*Reaches for the case.*)

VIRTUOSO (*Rises*): I won't let you! I won't let you desecrate this instrument. You are not worth a whit of it.

IRRESPONSIBLE: If there is nothing but a fiddle in there, why are you so scared? (*Reaches again.*)

VIRTUOSO: Get your dirty fingers off it!

IRRESPONSIBLE: Sounds suspicious, doesn't he?

VIRTUOSO: I am fed up with your stupid banter. You can't keep your mouth shut for one minute! How right I was never to use the city transport, but this area seems to be off limits to taxis. I waited for more than 30 minutes, though now I see I should have waited for another thirty. And I would have gone on waiting if it hadn't been for my recording session. A man like this one can upset you for a whole month. (*Takes a seat next to REASONABLE.*)

REASONABLE: Look, why don't you open the case? I suppose it is not such a difficult operation to perform.

VIRTUOSO: You, too, think I have got a child in there? Took you for an intelligent man!...

REASONABLE: I only want you to break the suspense, I don't suspect you in

the least, but a check will hurt no one.

VIRTUOSO: No!

REASONABLE: Why are you so obstinate? Inspection, they say, is the supreme form of trust.

VIRTUOSO: Then pull down your trousers!

REASONABLE: I beg your pardon!

VIRTUOSO: Take your trousers off, I said.

REASONABLE: What are you blathering about?

VIRTUOSO: I would like to check whether you are a man or a woman. I have a feeling you are a woman in disguise.

REASONABLE: You are talking through your hat.

VIRTUOSO: But why are you so obstinate? Just a check. As you just said: "Inspection is the supreme form of trust". You don't want to! Then why should I comply? Who will let himself be insulted just for the heck of it? Just because some sort of an irresponsible dolt is having a bit of fun talking nonsense. I'm not going to be ordered about by anybody here. Anyway you are just passengers like myself.

REASONABLE says nothing to that. IRRESPONSIBLE, now left without support, resumes his seat. Silence. It is heard how at last the driver climbs into his seat and slams the door with a bang. The pneumatic doors of the bus close with a hissing sound. The engine roars into life with a rattling sound. The driver steps on the accelerator and the bus pulls off. The driver is not visible. A printed calico curtain separates him from the passengers. The curtain shakes with the vibrations of the moving bus.

WOMAN (*Whispering*): Why did you take this seat?

MAN: Because it was clean.

WOMAN (*Whispering*): You shouldn't have taken it. The man in the second seat looks rather suspicious.

MAN (*Whispering*): He looks familiar.

WOMAN (*Whispering*): If he is from our Institute, we are finished.

MAN (*Whispering*): Shall I sit somewhere else?

WOMAN (*Whispering*): Not now, it may make things worse. You'll only draw his attention. Let's hope no one from the Institute gets on at the next stop.

MAN (*Whispering*): There won't be any. Didn't we wait for half an hour in the corn field so they could catch the earlier buses?

WOMAN (*Cries out in exasperation*): Oh, I am fed up with this life! (*Everybody turns round.*)

MAN: There were no free seats, so I sat down here, so what?

WOMAN (*Whispering*): What do you mean no free seats? The bus is practically empty.

MAN (*Whispering*): Okay, you want to let them take the apartment! Is that what

you want?

WOMAN (*Whispering*): Don't shout!...

MAN (*Whispering*): To give it to them as a present? Just like that! Because we own mansions!

WOMAN (*Whispering*): Can't you lower your voice?! (*Looks around.*)

MAN (*Whispering*): I can't lower it more than that. My vocal cords can break with whispering just as they can with shouting.

WOMAN (*Whispering*): This is a nightmare, you are shouting all the time.

MAN (*Whispering*): And you have no right to keep on nagging, for we are no longer husband and wife.

Suddenly the WOMAN gives out a sob and covers her face with her hands. The man casts a glance about and touches her cheek tenderly.

WOMAN (*Whispering, through tears*): I can't stand it any more. I just can't.

MAN (*Whispering*): I know. But there is no other way out. Where are our children to live? We must do it!

WOMAN (*Whispering*): I can't... At the Institute, too, they are constantly asking me, looking at me... I cannot...

MAN (*Whispering*): Okay! Let's marry again and give one of the apartments away for free, for nothing!

WOMAN: If only we worked at different places... (*She startles and lowers her voice.*) So that the people wouldn't know us... but now...

MAN (*Whispering*): Don't be silly, you couldn't find a job! There is no other Institute in our line. You will have to bear it. We have no choice. Only stop going around telling everyone what a monster I had been – beating up the child with the hose of the washing machine... so as to leave no marks! How could you come up with something like that?

WOMAN (*Whispering*): But I had to... You know how Peneva is. She'd buttonhole me and start asking me all sorts of questions: "Why did you divorce him! What made you do it? You looked such a lovely couple, and seemed to get along perfectly"...

MAN: And how about that other story – that I have slept with a couple of girls from the ballet school? Why did you have to think that one up? People started avoiding me in the corridors.

WOMAN (*Whispering*): You said I had to invent something really shocking that would make them stop pestering us with their "whys" and "hows"...

MAN (*Whispering*): Well it was too shocking! I wouldn't wonder if they gave me the sack. Today the boss sent for me.

WOMAN (*Whispering*): What for?

MAN (*Whispering*): In connection with the evidence you have given – my

drinking, my sadism, the ballet school girls...

WOMAN: Oh, Lord!... And what happened?

MAN (*Whispering*): Well, they intend to re-educate me. A man, the chief said, can occasionally indulge in a sin or two, but my little fling had gone beyond the limits of the imagination. He said I was fit for nothing but Madame Tussaud's wax works.

WOMAN: You, too, are to blame. Why don't you stop boozing? Think of your liver!

MAN: The story you've spread about is that I am an incipient alcoholic, therefore I can't smell of lilac, I must have brandy on my breath!

WOMAN: You go to excesses! What was that fight with Ivanov about, why did you start it?

MAN: Don't you know that an incipient alcoholic is supposed to start up fights, to break things, etc. Otherwise there is a strong possibility he won't be taken in earnest.

WOMAN: And the stories you have spread about me being a... a whore! Well, I admit we have to spread rumours around but that one about me having poisoned my father?... I warn you Daddy would never forgive you for this little prank.

MAN: Well, I tried hard to invent something more exciting, for the story of the fallen woman did not impress them in the least!

WOMAN: I don't give a damn whether they were impressed or unimpressed. I forbid you to insult the memory of my father.

MAN (*Whispering*): Stop shouting!

WOMAN: I won't have any of these! I won't let you turn me into a parricide!

MAN: What do you want? To let people learn we have divorced solely in order to keep the apartment from confiscation? Do you know what follows then?!...

(*The WOMAN is silent*) Do you know, I ask! When the indignation of the public gets aroused?... They can fire us both and confiscate the apartment!...

WOMAN: Everything has its limits!

MAN: Don't worry, though! Why trust the words of an alcoholic? But you, too, must stop flirting around before my very eyes, because...

WOMAN: I, too, have to keep up my reputation of a woman of loose morals.

MAN: But you seem to be enjoying your little act.

WOMAN: What do you expect me to do – act the part... but with disgust? Everybody will see through this, won't they?

MAN: Maybe you are...

WOMAN: I am what?

MAN: Maybe this is your true self... before you had a mask on.

The WOMAN lifts up her eyes to him, bites her lips and starts weeping. The MAN looks sullenly ahead. The bus runs smoothly. It is very quiet inside. Pause.

UNREASONABLE (*to the VIRTUOSO*): Excuse me, but don't you think the bus has taken another route? (*Looks again through the window.*)

VIRTUOSO: What do you mean another route?

UNREASONABLE: I mean this is not the right street.

VIRTUOSO (*Unconcerned*): I don't know the neighbourhood. I couldn't say.

UNREASONABLE (*Looking out of the window*): We have just passed a factory and a couple of silos. There are no factories and silos along this bus route, I am pretty sure! I have been travelling along it for ten years.

VIRTUOSO: Maybe you are right, but I couldn't say. (*Shrugs his shoulders.*)

For some time UNREASONABLE keeps on peering through the window, then addresses the passengers.

UNREASONABLE: Citizens, I'd like to ask a question – just where are we going?

REASONABLE (*Folds up the newspaper he had been reading so far*): What do you mean?

UNREASONABLE: I want to ask where we are going?

IRRESPONSIBLE: One more for Aldomirovtsi, eh?

REASONABLE: Don't you know the bus's destination?

UNREASONABLE: I know it and that's why I ask.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Look buddy, if you, too, want to reach Aldomirovtsi, you'd better jump off at once.

UNREASONABLE: I am going to the city centre.

REASONABLE: Why are you asking then?

UNREASONABLE: Because the bus is not following the right route. It took a turn in the wrong direction as soon as it started and it has been circling the district since. All the time it is taking the wrong turns and the wrong streets.

REASONABLE (*Peers through the window*): So it seems to you. It is dark outside, how do you know?

UNREASONABLE: Not so dark that I couldn't recognize familiar streets.

Everybody starts peering through the windows except the VIRTUOSO and the LOVERS, who seem preoccupied with silent caresses.

UNREASONABLE: And there's one more thing, if you don't mind.

IRRESPONSIBLE: You've been asking too many questions.

UNREASONABLE: So far we have missed two bus stops.

Just then the bus slows down and stops.

IRRESPONSIBLE: See, it did stop.

The doors open with the same hissing sound and ALDOMIROVTSI climbs into the bus, the sack still in his hands. The doors close again. The bus moves off.

ALDOMIROVTSI: Evenin'! Is this bus for Aldomirovtsi?

IRRESPONSIBLE: Hi, buddy! Long time no see. Anyway the bus is going into the opposite direction.

ALDOMIROVTSI (*Looks around*): I have a feeling I have been in this bus before.

IRRESPONSIBLE: That you have, buddy. Hop on board and take a seat!

REASONABLE: You see it did stop. They probably changed the route.

IRRESPONSIBLE: They change them every other day.

Pause.

ALDOMIROVTSI: This isn't my lucky day. I've been getting on and off buses all evening and it is always the wrong one. This one is my tenth. Been wandering round and I got lost in the end.

REASONABLE: You got on at a bus stop. Didn't you see...

ALDOMIROVTSI: I wasn't at no stop. When I saw the bus I started waving my cap and the guy stopped.

UNREASONABLE: Didn't I tell you – we are taking the wrong route.

REASONABLE: Don't jump to conclusions. We can't be too sure about that.

ALDOMIROVTSI: Hell, what am I gonna do now? I gotta get off again.

Pause. No one pays any attention to him.

UNREASONABLE: See? He is takin' another turn. I've never noticed so many turns along this route.

ALDOMIROVTSI: I'm getting off. Otherwise I won't reach home till after midnight. It is a long way to Aldomirovtsi... (*Heads for the printed calico curtain*) Hey, driver, lemme get off, I got the wrong one again...

The bus slows down, pulls up, the doors open and ALDOMIROVTSI gets off with his sack. The doors close again and the bus trundles off.

UNREASONABLE: Why don't we do something? Let's ask the driver!

REASONABLE: Why do you keep saying "let's ask the driver" Go and ask him!

IRRESPONSIBLE: He may be taking a shortcut.

UNREASONABLE: What shortcut? Can't you see he is doing a zig-zag!

REASONABLE: You should have more faith in the driver!

UNREASONABLE: Faith I've got plenty, but I'd also like to get home on time. I've borrowed a soldering-iron and I have to give it back this evening.

REASONABLE: What makes you think you won't get home on time?

UNREASONABLE (*Points to his watch*): It's seven thirty! We should be at "Sredna Gora" and I set my watch according to the electric clock at the crossroads. And as you can see for yourselves we are still bumping along into the unknown.

REASONABLE: I believe I shall get home on time. The rest is your own concern. But please, keep the other passengers out of it. In your place I wouldn't be so distrustful. You are a comparatively young man.

UNREASONABLE: So what if I am a comparatively young man? I am not demanding a pension, but only that the bus should follow its route. Do I have to have years of service for that, too?

IRRESPONSIBLE: You are asking too much!

UNREASONABLE: It wasn't me who laid out the route. Look, I am tired. I've been working all day and now I want to get home quickly. And I have got to give that soldering-iron back. (*Shows the soldering-iron to the passengers in the bus.*) The man I borrowed it from leaves for Haskovo tonight. I have to give it back before eight.

REASONABLE: No one wants to spend the night in the bus, but why should we insult the driver with our unfounded doubts?

UNREASONABLE: Quite the contrary I'd say. And then why not ask him? What is so insulting about it?

REASONABLE: It is forbidden to speak to the driver.

UNREASONABLE: It is also forbidden to change the route. And that's what he has done.

REASONABLE: How do you know he has changed it? This may be a new route.

UNREASONABLE: A new route! Only this morning we followed the old one.

IRRESPONSIBLE: It may have been the old one in the morning and then they may have changed it that afternoon. Don't try to teach them how and when to change the route. You'd better mind your own business!

UNREASONABLE (*Fiercely indignant*): I am minding my own business, that's why I want the others to mind theirs, too.

REASONABLE: So young and already full of doubts. At your age we were full of faith!

UNREASONABLE: I am not full of doubts, I only look out of the window and see that this is not the boulevard that we should be taking.

REASONABLE: Don't insist so much on the boulevard. The shortest way to the destination is always the right one. We may be cutting across along the hypotenuse.

MAN: Why shouldn't he ask him? What is so terrible in that?

WOMAN (*Elbows him*): Keep quiet! It is even better if we are not taking the usual route where someone may spot us.

UNREASONABLE: I am dead tired and I don't enjoy bumping along for God knows how long. I'll go and ask him! (*He rises.*)

REASONABLE: I wouldn't annoy him if I were you. It's unwise.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Don't you know he can stop the bus and throw us all out? What are we to do then? Don't you know them drivers, they are all so touchy. And he might even get the crank and crack your head. Better keep quiet.

The UNREASONABLE goes to the driver's cabin and disappears behind the printed curtain. It's all quiet. Only the sound of the engine is heard. In a minute the curtain shakes and the body of the UNREASONABLE slumps down to the floor. The passengers jump to their feet.

WOMAN: He killed him!

REASONABLE: Didn't I tell you not to annoy him!

IRRESPONSIBLE: He hit him with the crank!... He must have been rude to him.

MAN: But what right has he to hit him with the crank?

IRRESPONSIBLE: He doesn't have much else handy, that's why.

VIRTUOSO: What an area!

IRRESPONSIBLE, the WOMAN and the MAN pick up UNREASONABLE, lay him down on his seat and start fussing about.

WOMAN: Is there a doctor here?

MAN: Bring some water! Does anybody happen to have some water?

IRRESPONSIBLE: I have some brandy. But let us first see whether he is still alive. I don't want to waste the brandy on corpses.

REASONABLE (*Still seated*): Check his pulse.

IRRESPONSIBLE: It is easier with a looking-glass.

All eyes turn to the woman. Feverishly she starts rummaging into her bag but can't find a looking-glass. At last she finds one and hands it to IRRESPONSIBLE. He holds it close to UNREASONABLE's mouth.

WOMAN: He is breathing.

REASONABLE: The driver only wanted to teach him a lesson.

VIRTUOSO: Is he still unconscious?

IRRESPONSIBLE: Oh, he will come to all right, but it will be too late. We told him so but he turned a deaf ear to our warnings.

MAN: Bring some brandy!

IRRESPONSIBLE: Here you are! (*Gives the bottle to the MAN who pours some into the mouth of UNREASONABLE.*) You're wasting good brandy on a chap

who's knocked out. Besides what am I to drink tonight?

MAN: He has been struck dumb!

IRRESPONSIBLE: Serves him right too! When we warned him, he chose to play dumb so he deserves what he got! But if you keep on filling him up with brandy go risk scolding the driver myself just to get hit. (*Takes the bottle and drinks a long draught.*)

VIRTUOSO: May I have the looking-glass for a moment? (*He polishes it and takes a look at himself, out of habit. He is horrified by his white face.*)

IRRESPONSIBLE (*Calms him down*): He will be all right, only let him lie down for a while.

They leave UNREASONABLE lying on a seat. The rest return to their respective seats. For a while they travel in silence. Once in a while suppressed laughter resounds from the back seat where the LOVERS seem preoccupied with themselves. The passengers are straining their eyes to see through the windows, but they are doing it secretly, each for him- or herself.

REASONABLE: An interesting route!

IRRESPONSIBLE: Winding like a rat's tail!

MAN: Too many turns, though.

WOMAN: It's not so bad.

REASONABLE: This is nothing, the Monza speedway has got seventy-eight turns.

MAN: Only if you take them all you land up with fifty thousand bucks.

REASONABLE: You are forgetting that there they got exploitation of man by man.

MAN: I'm not. I only mentioned it as a fact.

REASONABLE: Because many seem to forget.

WOMAN: He is not one of those who forget. He took part in the booing of Tsar Ferdinand outside the National Theatre.

MAN: Please!

WOMAN: Why, you did!

MAN: No, I did not, I was three years old.

WOMAN: Yes, but you happened to be in the City Garden at that time, didn't you?

MAN: Yes, in a pram my mother was pushing.

WOMAN: But you were blowing a penny-whistle, didn't you?

MAN: Well, I'd been blowing it before the arrival of Ferdinand as well. The whistle had just been given to me.

WOMAN: It's the facts that count. You might have not been blowing that whistle, but sleeping, like some other little boys. But you were blowing the whistle! You did not sleep, you whistled! (*In an indignant voice.*)

REASONABLE: How do you happen to know all this?

WOMAN: We... we are... were at school together. The whole school knew the story.

Everybody falls silent again.

MAN (*Whispering*): You gonna put the cat among the pigeons.

WOMAN (*Whispering*): And you, why do you deny it?

MAN (*Whispering*): Because it is simply ridiculous.

WOMAN (*Whispering*): But why? Others have no political acts to their credit at all and they still... while you... you are a progressive man.

MAN (*Sighing*): I am progressive, but divorced.

WOMAN (*Comforts him*): So what? There are progressively minded people among divorcees too.

Pause. The engine and the clinking windows of the running bus alone break the quiet.

IRRESPONSIBLE: I wish we did something...

REASONABLE: Like what?

IRRESPONSIBLE: I wouldn't know... It is getting late... my lettuces will wilt... they won't be good for a fresh salad any more...

REASONABLE: We have seen how the land lies... (*Indicates UNREASONABLE still lying unconscious.*)

VIRUTOSO (*Nervously pacing the bus*): This thing is becoming rather alarming.

REASONABLE: What has become rather alarming?

VIRTUOSO: This here. (*He waves his hands about indefinitely*): A man lying out there. We are following a zig-zag route. It is dark outside...

REASONABLE: It is evening. At this moment there is daylight in the other hemisphere. There is nothing we can do about it.

VIRTUOSO: I mean the streets outside are dark.

REASONABLE: That is more than obvious! Do you have any definite proposal?

VIRTUOSO: Me? No. (*He shakes his head.*) Never in my life have I proposed a single idea! (*He says it with pride.*)

Silence. UNREASONABLE stirs a little and the eyes of the others turn in his direction. But he only turns over to the other side and remains so.

IRRESPONSIBLE: I'm going whatever happens... (*Takes a sip of brandy.*)

REASONABLE: Talk to him from a safe distance... Don't get too close.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Sure. At a crank's distance. Though you cannot hear from that distance.

MAN: Yes, because of the engine noise.

IRRESPONSIBLE: We shall see. You keep the brandy ready! (*Hands the bottle to the MAN.*)

He goes to the driver's cabin and disappears behind the curtain. Everybody rises in tense expectation of what will happen. The MAN opens the brandy bottle ready. A minute passes, two minutes. IRRESPONSIBLE does not come out.

VIRTUOSO: He may take him... by the throat. (*Shows how.*)

REASONABLE: I doubt it. He's a pretty big fellow... and strong. And we have already learned the lesson. (*Nods in the direction of UNREASONABLE still lying unconscious on the seat.*)

WOMAN: Why is he taking so long?...

The next moment IRRESPONSIBLE comes out from behind the curtain. Safe and sound and grinning.

IRRESPONSIBLE: We are looking for an open bakery to buy bread.

The passengers are flabbergasted. Automatically the MAN sips some brandy.

MAN: What do you mean bread?

IRRESPONSIBLE: He is looking for an open bakery. He wants to buy three loaves of bread. The guy was right. (*Points to UNREASONABLE.*) We are not on the right route, because there is no bakery along the route.

WOMAN: But we have children waiting for us at home. He can't go shopping with his bus.

IRRESPONSIBLE: That's just what I told him.

MAN: What did he say to that?

IRRESPONSIBLE: "Aren't I a human being?", he shouted, "Don't I have children? Yours will have bread, mine – won't!"

MAN: He should have bought some before we started. Why didn't he buy it earlier? What if an engine-driver decides to go shopping with the train? Can you imagine what would happen then?

IRRESPONSIBLE: Sure he should've got it earlier, but when? He's behind that wheel all day long! Without bread, he said, his wife wouldn't let him in. They are waiting for him to bring some bread home. She, too, is working in the public transport, both go out early in the morning and get back late in the evening. If he doesn't buy bread in the evening, there is no bread in the house for the whole of the next day, that's what he said.

REASONABLE: A logical explanation!

VIRTUOSO: What an area.

MAN: And when will this shopping business end?

IRRESPONSIBLE: He says there is a baker's shop very near here. Three minutes' drive away.

A silence falls. The bus goes on for a while and then pulls up. The driver's door slams shut. The passengers whose row of seats faces the bakery press their foreheads against the windows.

IRRESPONSIBLE: He is going to the bakery.

MAN: The shop girl is counting the takings.

WOMAN: Why doesn't he go in?

REASONABLE: He can't. It is closed!

MAN: Hard luck! And they do close so early.

REASONABLE: Just when people are out buying bread.

WOMAN: He is knocking on the shop window. Will she open the door for him?

REASONABLE (*Indignant*): She keeps on counting! What a nation!...

IRRESPONSIBLE: She won't let him in.

WOMAN: He is coming back.

MAN: No wonder, they refused to sell Botev and his men any bread and he was on his way to die fighting for them... What a damned nuisance!

REASONABLE: Don't generalize.

MAN: I just mentioned it as a fact.

REASONABLE: Because some people like to make sweeping generalizations.

WOMAN: He is not the kind who makes sweeping generalizations. He is...

REASONABLE: I know. He's the kind who likes to boo.

WOMAN: Outside the National Theatre.

The driver climbs in. The door is slammed hard again. The bus sets off. Silence falls for a while. Then all of a sudden the bus pulls up. The pneumatic doors open with the usual hissing sound and ALDOMIROVTSI, still carrying his sack, jumps in. The doors close, the bus goes on.

ALDOMIROVTSI: Evenin'! This bus for Aldomirovtsi?

IRRESPONSIBLE: Here he comes again! I was sure our buddy wouldn't get to Aldomirovtsi before midnight.

ALDOMIROVTSI: How can I get there if I can't catch the right bus. I can't walk all that way.

MAN (*Nervously*): How did you manage to turn up again?

ALDOMIROVTSI: I'll tell you how! Whenever I spot a bus, I hail it. If it stops I get on and ask. But not one was going Aldomirovtsi way. I have been in and out of buses all evening! Ain't I already been on this one?

IRRESPONSIBLE: Sure you have, but only twice... Keep on trying!

ALDOMIROVTSI: Yes, I recognized it by the fiddle. (*He nods towards the VIRTUOSO.*) I have been on this bus before. Damn, whatever happened to

bloody Aldomirovtsi, went up in smoke or whatever? (*He hesitates.*) Oh, shucks I might as well stay on this one. For all I know it may pass through Aldomirovtsi in the end...

ALDOMIROVTSI starts dragging his sack towards the back seat, but stops short because he sees the lovers there engaged in a never-ending kiss. Embarrassed by the sight he turns his head aside and sits down on the first seat he sees. He pushes the sack in first and sits next to it. At this moment the bus stops. The driver's door is slammed again. Everybody presses their faces against the windows, with the exception of the LOVERS, ALDOMIROVTSI and the UNREASONABLE, who is still lying unconscious.

MAN: Thank God this one is open.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Let's see him enter first.

REASONABLE: He did it already.

WOMAN: A nice-looking bakery, bravo! The whole place spick and span.

MAN: The shop girl, too... Look at her apron, so clean and neat.

REASONABLE: What did you expect?

MAN: Exactly what I see. I never expected anything else.

IRRESPONSIBLE: A beautiful woman!

ALDOMIROVTSI: Where? (*Rises*)

IRRESPONSIBLE: The one selling bread. Bravo! Good for her!

ALDOMIROVTSI (*Quickly*): Where, where? (*He peers through the window.*)

IRRESPONSIBLE: Look what a smile she wears... I envy the driver. I'd better get off... (*He is about to get off.*)

MAN: Why is the driver so furious?

WOMAN: He is kicking at the counter...

IRRESPONSIBLE: Look! He is coming back.

REASONABLE: There is no bread. It is sold out.

They are still standing with their faces pressed against the windows of the bus, when the driver's door bangs again and the engine starts up. The bus sets off. They continue to press their faces against the windows. Then slowly, very slowly they go back to their seats.

ALDOMIROVTSI (*Who has only now noticed UNREASONABLE*): What's a matter with the fella here?

REASONABLE: He felt sick.

ALDOMIROVTSI: I can smell brandy. It takes more than five pints to feel that sick.

IRRESPONSIBLE: We only gave him a sip to bring him to his senses.

ALDOMIROVTSI: He has come to all right.

All are quiet for a while. Oncoming headlights are flashing in the darkness outside,

illuminating the inside of the bus for an instant, passing across the faces of the passengers...

MAN: This business has been going on for too long.

REASONABLE: What business?

WOMAN (*Elbows the MAN*): Shut up! You keep out of this... (*He does not answer.*)

VIRTUOSO: This is really an outrage!

REASONABLE: What is an outrage?

VIRTUOSO: I don't quite follow your type of conversation here, but I think it is high time we arrived. What are these bakeries we keep stopping at? What a strange idea!

REASONABLE: The driver has to buy bread for his children. Or maybe you don't think that there must be bread for all.

VIRTUOSO: I couldn't agree with you. I could even raise another slogan "Freedom, fraternity, equality". But what of that? What I want to know is why we aren't getting there.

REASONABLE: Because we are trying to find bread.

VIRTUOSO: But this is ridiculous. I have a fixed hour for the recording. (*He gets up and starts pacing up and down the bus nervously*) One hundred and seventeen people are waiting for me. The whole philharmonic orchestra. Do you understand? Plus the conductor! Do you understand? A conductor from Staatsgrandoper! Plus a whole choir. What do you suggest that choir do while we are looking for bread?

REASONABLE: I am not in charge of any choirs.

VIRTUOSO: That was only a rhetorical question! Of course you have nothing to do with choirs! That is obvious. Don't think you can deceive anybody. I ask you what all these people are to do, nearly two hundred of them, all famous musicians to the last man, marvelous, professional, virtuoso performers! What are the sound engineers to do, the entire staff of the recording studio, while they are waiting for me? You know who the conductor is? You know how many thousands of dollars were paid to induce him to come for a few concerts here? Are you aware that contracts have already been signed for the record we are to make tonight? I ask you, are you aware of that?

Pause. Silence.

IRRESPONSIBLE: No. He is not aware of that.

VIRTUOSO: Of course, he is not! It's quite obvious he is not. And the soloist, Leopold von Brauchenzoller!

ALDOMIROVTSI: What d'you say his name was.

VIRTUOSO: Who has come especially for the recording and flies back

tomorrow morning.

ALDOMIROVTSI: Tut-tut!... (*He can't believe his ears.*)

VIRTUOSO: And what about the ruined art festival? Are you aware of the international complications that may arise from this? This is a UNESCO initiative! Man, do you realize U-N-E-S-C-O! This is a cultural undertaking. This means the nations are standing shoulder to shoulder in a cultural dialogue! After all this is the struggle for peace! This means the planet is being saved. Yes, saved! Meanwhile we are shopping for bread! (*He sits down and wipes the sweat off his forehead*) I just don't understand this! Please, explain it to me, I don't understand a thing!

IRRESPONSIBLE: What is there to understand? Everything is quite clear.

WOMAN: I have two children at home waiting for me. And I don't even know whether they are still two. The elder should have taken the younger one home from the kindergarten. But has she? She often forgets. Last time we had to call the police to find them. And do you know where they found them – asleep at the railway station! They wanted to go for Pavlikeni to visit their grandmother. Can you imagine that, Pavlikeni!... Do you know where Pavlikeni is?... (*The MAN covers his face with his hands.*)

IRRESPONSIBLE: Pavlikeni is the station after Gorna.

WOMAN: What does it matter whether it is a station before or after Gorna, when the children are seven and three?

ALDOMIROVTSI: Tut-tut-tut...

WOMAN (*Bursts into tears*): And who knows where they are now! Are they alive? I want to go home. I want to see my children!

MAN: Calm down, calm down! (*But his eyes, too, are filled with tears.*)

IRRESPONSIBLE: Do not think I am in a better position. Half the brandy bottle is empty (*Points an accusing finger at UNREASONABLE still lying on the seat*) the lettuces have wilted and my brother is at home waiting for me to mark the anniversary of our father's death. May he rest in peace! The curses he must be swearing right now! He probably thinks I am having a drinking binge and will let me have it the moment I get in. "Nothing is sacred for you", he will say. "Not even your dead father. Booze is everything to you". Look at me, I am not boozing, you are my witnesses. (*At the word "witnesses" all turn away.*) This is what actually tortures me – no one trusts me! I speak to them, I lay your heart open and bare before them, and they look right into my eyes and never believe a word of what I say. Go on living if you can!

ALDOMIROVTSI: They are waiting for me, too, but my case is different. We may pass through Aldomirovtsi but then again, we may not, that's why I keep quiet.

REASONABLE (*Feeling somewhat isolated*): You got me wrong, I am with you. I am only a passenger like yourselves! I, too, have children and a brother... Mine

is a special case, too! But, we must be reasonable. We shouldn't give in to emotions. Well now, what do you suggest?

IRRESPONSIBLE: It doesn't matter what we suggest one bit. But I am fed up! I am going straight to the driver to tell him off. (*Takes a sip of brandy and hands the bottle over to the MAN.*)

IRRESPONSIBLE disappears behind the curtain. The rest are expecting his return in tense silence. The MAN uncorks the bottle and keeps it ready, the VIRTUOSO takes out the looking-glass, wipes it and keeps it ready.

WOMAN: Oh Lord, help him!

REASONABLE: His chances are fifty-fifty.

ALDOMIROVTSI (*does not understand the meaning of fifty-fifty*): Whuddaya say?

REASONABLE: Half-and-half. He has got an even chance of succeeding.

ALDOMIROVTSI: Succeeding in what?

MAN: Why is he being so long?

The next moment IRRESPONSIBLE emerges through the curtains. He looks stunned and speechless, as if unable to fully comprehend the words of the driver, as if he had expected anything but that. The rest are staring at him. IRRESPONSIBLE does not utter a word.

REASONABLE: Well?

MAN: What is the matter?

IRRESPONSIBLE: We are going to Koprivshitsa.

The passengers exchange glances. This is incredible.

WOMAN: No! This cannot be true!

VIRTUOSO: This is absurd.

REASONABLE: What do you mean Koprivshitsa? It's 60 kilometers from here.

ALDOMIROVTSI: Are we passing through Aldomirovtsi?

MAN: No. We're going the other way.

IRRESPONSIBLE (*Shakes his head*): Well, I am not.

At these words all jump to their feet and press their faces against the windows of the bus, except the LOVERS who seem busy with each other, and, for obvious reasons, UNREASONABLE. The passengers are looking through the windows.

WOMAN: All I see are fields all around.

VIRTUOSO: He has left the city limits!

MAN: This is impossible.

REASONABLE: But the field is beautifully cultivated. Look at those furrows!
ALDOMIROVTSI: Then we're nowhere near Aldomirovtsi.

Gradually, one by one, they go back to their seats. Silence, except for the screeching noise of tyres.

MAN: But why Koprivshitsa?

IRRESPONSIBLE (*Still stunned, dumbfounded and confused*): Because he is a native of Koprivshitsa. "I won't find an open bakery", he says, "and even if I do the bread will be stale. Mother lives in Koprivshitsa, I haven't seen her for a long time... she will knead a bread for me... and she will broil a chicken in the oven for me... she will fill a glass of red wine for me, vintage wine... Boy, the bread my mother makes! You couldn't find such bread anywhere nowadays – decorated with a rooster and crosses, its crust – sweet-smelling, brown and crisp... I'll sit down on the plank-bed where I used to suck as a babe, where I grew up, where my childhood passed, where dad used to sing songs about heroes and rebel leaders, about Turks and brigands... and outside the stars will be shining, the forest hushed... the stream alone will be murmuring in the back yard, bright with the moonshine... How beautiful the native place, he said, but how rarely we think of it!

The monologue is followed by silence. A ballad-like mood of memories seizes the passengers and their eyes are dimmed with the memories of native places and homes. It is a pleasant, dreamy atmosphere of memories, of quinces on an old chest of drawers. Everybody drifts back to the years of childhood, to things cherished deep in the heart.

MAN (*Sighing*): Koprivshitsa, you said?

REASONABLE (*Lost in reveries*): Koprivshitsa! Where the first shot of the rebellion was fired! The letter written in blood! The words of Benkovski: "I have inflicted an incurable wound upon the body of the tyrant and nothing will ever save him!"

WOMAN: "Oh, to come home when dusk is softly fading into quiet night..."
(*She recites in a melancholy voice.*)

VIRTUOSO (*Jumps up ragingly*): Fading baloney! Koprivshitsa is a hundred kilometres away from here. Please! Come to your senses! I have a recording session!

REASONABLE: How rarely we think of our parents. We never have time for them. Yet it is a good thing to go and see them like the driver is doing, to talk to them... The old ones, their "days are in the yellow leaf", a kind word is all they want and look forward to... Why, let him go and see his mother!

VIRTUOSO: Let him go and see his mother tomorrow! Today I have a recording session this evening. Tomorrow he can go wherever he wishes.

REASONABLE (*In a low, fatherly voice*): You don't have the right attitude. You are a musician, you should feel the music of "when dusk is softly fading into quiet night".... Just try to imagine how we shall arrive in Koprivshitsa when dusk is softly fading into quiet night!

ALDOMIROVTSI: This is my chance to visit Koprivshitsa. I have never been there before.

IRRESRONSIBLE: The problem is we may never get there.

MAN: How do you mean? Where are we going then?

IRRESPONSIBLE (*In a sad voice*): Nowhere!

REASONABLE: That is impossible. We must be going somewhere!

IRRESPONSIBLE: Yes, up there! (*He points to the sky.*)

REASONABLE (*Uncomprehendingly*): Where?

IRRESPONSIBLE: To Heaven!

VIRTUOSO: What heaven are you blathering about? I am warning you again. I have a recording session! I have already warned you once! So, you have been warned!!!

WOMAN: Now, now, what do you mean by Heaven?

IRRESPONSIBLE: He is drinking.

REASONABLE: The driver? What is he drinking?

IRRESPONSIBLE: Grape-brandy! Straight from the bottle. (*Heaves a deeply pessimistic sigh.*)

REASONABLE (*Rises*): But this is awful! Why didn't you say so before?

IRRESPONSIBLE: I could't. You all started reciting poetry.

REASONABLE: I don't believe it.

VIRTUOSO: Neither do I.

MAN: This is impossible. He cannot drink at work. He is responsible for the lives of the passengers.

WOMAN: Lies! Slanders! Bus drivers never drink!

ALDOMIROVTSI: I wouldn't say never.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Go and see for yourselves!

REASONABLE casts a glance at him and then cautiously tiptoes to the curtain. He has a look. Then sad and silent he returns to his seat. The VIRTUOSO stares at him, then jumps up nervously, goes to the curtain, has a look and returns even more pallid, nervously clenching and unclenching his fists. He says nothing. After him the WOMAN is about to go but the MAN puts a firm hand on her shoulder, urging her to sit down again. Then he rises himself and goes to the curtain in the slouching gait of a doomed man. He peeps through and returns pale and panicked. Silently he resumes his seat next to the woman, takes her hand and squeezes it.

ALDOMIROVTSI: There is no need to go and look. The whole thing is quite clear.

Pause.

IRRESPONSIBLE: He will send us hurtling into the first precipice!

At this very instant, the harsh screeching noise of brakes and a heavy crash are heard. Headlights illuminate the bus and dazzle the passengers. Jumping and jerking the bus tilts to the right and everybody slides to the ground... The commotion stops as suddenly as it has begun – two freight vehicles speeding by have made the bus lurch sharply to the right. One by one, the passengers come out from under the seats, rising to their feet.

REASONABLE: The next one will be a head-on collision. What are we to do? Every second is precious. It is a matter of life-or-death.

ALDOMIROVTSI: Let's tell him to drive to Aldomirovtsi.

REASONABLE: This is no joking matter! It is a question of life-or-death! I beg everyone to consider the situation with the utmost seriousness.

ALDOMIROVTSI: No kidding, buddy, but if I'm to die I prefer to die nearer to Aldomirovtsi for that's where I have paid for my grave. (*Takes off his hat.*)

Everybody is horrified by his words. They exchange silent glances.

MAN (*Hopefully*): Well, whatever it is he is drinking may not be brandy.

REASONABLE: What is it? Schweppes?

MAN: Water! Many people drink water from brandy bottles.

IRRESPONSIBLE: He started at the terminal, at the refreshments pavilion where I had a brandy.

REASONABLE: How's that? Why didn't you tell us before?

IRRESPONSIBLE: I wasn't sure he was the same man. I am still unsure but those at the pavilion were all bus drivers, they were complaining of the maintenance service. They tossed down a hundred grams each.

REASONABLE: It is not water. It can't be if he chose to start for Koprivshitsa.

VIRTUOSO: Please, stop joking! This has gone for on too long! At first it was bread, a minute ago it was Koprivshitsa and now you're talking brandy. This is really going too far! I have already warned you. I have a recording to make and I cannot be a party to your practical jokes. Otherwise I find it hilarious. You could laugh your head off!

REASONABLE: I fail to see the joke altogether. Aren't you aware of the gravity of the situation? What are we to do? (*He stands up and starts pacing the aisle between the two rows of seats*) What are we to do? You, too, must think! Think everybody!

IRRESPONSIBLE (*Takes out the bottle of brandy*): I suggest we all have a sip of brandy.

REASONABLE: Oh no. Not at such a moment as this!

IRRESPONSIBLE: What's wrong with the moment, it couldn't be more proper. It will help us shake off our anxiety and relax. During the war they used to give a hundred grams of alcohol to every soldier before battle. (*He looks at the bottle.*) There won't be that much for all of us, but there will be enough for each of us to have a sip. What's more, I think in battle the chances of survival are greater, for they may not hit you, if you are lucky, while here we are sure to be plunged into some precipice. We've got one chance in a thousand. So let's have a sip each while we are still alive.

He takes his sip first and then ceremoniously passes the bottle over. The MAN takes it silently, drinks a sip and passes it further to the WOMAN. She drinks and passes it over to the VIRTUOSO. He drinks and passes it over to REASONABLE. REASONABLE hesitates for a moment, but still drinks and hands it over to ALDOMIROVTSI. This should look like a solemn conspiracy.

ALDOMIROVTSI: The young ones over there in the back seat, won't they get a drop?

REASONABLE (*Glances backwards*): Of course! They, too, have a right to it. For all we know they may come up with an idea. Nowadays the younger generation is very inventive. Come on boys and girls... Hey! Come here, will you.

BOY IN LOVE (*Quite unwillingly*): What is it?

REASONABLE: Come here, for a minute.

LOVERS: We are with you, body and soul!

REASONABLE: Just for a second!

GIRL IN LOVE: OK, if it is only for a second.

BOY IN LOVE: But I told them we were with them body and soul. (*He puts his arm around her waist.*)

GIRL IN LOVE: We've been invited. We must go.

BOY IN LOVE: Since you insist. (*They join the other passengers*) Oh, you are drinking!?!

GIRL IN LOVE: Happy birthday! Whose birthday is it?

REASONABLE: Look, you have been left out of a certain development that took place in this bus, but you must know everything.

BOY IN LOVE: Know what?

REASONABLE: Some uncanny things happened here... The important thing is that just now we are going to Koprivshitsa!!!

LOVERS (*Joyfully*): Hurrah! That's great.

BOY IN LOVE: We shall be together all night long!

GIRL IN LOVE: Wonderful!

BOY IN LOVE: Cool! Very nice of you! How did you manage it? Gosh, this

will be the end of me!

At that very moment the bus passes by an oncoming lorry. The headlights of the lorry fill the bus with bright light which dazzles the passengers. Some fall out of their seats.

BOY IN LOVE (*Filled with admiration*): Wow, we were on two wheels! That was great! That's a real hot-shot driver!

IRRESPONSIBLE: Now, young man, don't you understand what's happening here?

BOY IN LOVE: We are heading for Koprivshitsa. That's all. I only hope the tavern there is open.

GIRL IN LOVE (*As if ordering a meal*): Mixed grill for me, please!

BOY IN LOVE: A double vodka!

IRRESPONSIBLE: Didn't you see the lorry only just missed us? Didn't you see what a narrow shave that was?

BOY IN LOVE (*Filled with admiration*): He nearly skinned us. It was great!

REASONABLE (*Shouting*): Listen, next time it will be a head-on collision! The driver is drinking brandy!!!

BOY IN LOVE: Oh, is he?

REASONABLE: Straight from the bottle!

BOY IN LOVE: What's so wrong with that? Probably he has got no glass.

REASONABLE: Don't you understand that our lives are in danger? When the brandy goes to his head we go to hell!

BOY IN LOVE: So that's what's got you worried. The whole of Europe is drinking and driving nowadays. It is normal. We don't mind... (*He takes the girl by the hand and starts for the back seat.*)

REASONABLE: That's it! Youth! They always laugh at danger.

MAN: Still, maybe the bottle is full of water, eh? What makes you think it is brandy?

REASONABLE: Vain hopes!

MAN: But why? The chances are equal, water or brandy.

ALDOMIROVTSI: Fifty-fifty.

WOMAN: Of course it could be water. Why always expect the worse?

REASONABLE: Let's then expect the best – we are all on a trip to Italy. (*Pause*)

Instead of believing in ghosts, let's form a delegation. It will be more impressive.

We go to the driver and discuss the matter rationally; we tell him that we are perfectly aware of his need, admire it even, we tell him he is right, but... he, too, should try to understand us, for we, too, are human beings. We are living in the age of humanism, after all. After that we'll play it by ear. So let's act.

IRRESPONSIBLE (*Sceptically*): Act! I know the way we act!

REASONABLE: We must first find out the mood he is in happy or morose, so

that we know how to approach him. This is very important. Investigation is a precondition of success!

MAN: All right then. Who goes first?

REASONABLE (*Pointing a finger at IRRESPONSIBLE*): He, being the most experienced. He will go and tell him about our delegation, and at the same time put out feelers.

IRRESPONSIBLE: It won't pass, but I shall try since you insist.

He disappears behind the curtain. The rest wait anxiously.

VIRTUOSO: I think this is superfluous. Why play at delegations?

REASONABLE: What do you suggest we play at? Hide and seek maybe, or we keep pretending that we are on a sightseeing trip to the glorious Balkan Mountains? We can't stay idle and just pray for something to happen... We must act!

IRRESPONSIBLE emerges and goes to the passengers who have assembled in the middle of the bus.

REASONABLE: Eh? What sort of mood is he in?

IRRESPONSIBLE: As I told you, he won't hear of it.

REASONABLE (*Astonished*): Won't hear of what?

IRRESPONSIBLE: Won't hear of any delegation. No delegations he says, I am a driver, not the United Nations. I receive no delegations. We are going to Koprivshitsa and that's that! If anyone doesn't like it, he can get off.

WOMAN: Get off?! In the middle of nowhere. He must be crazy!

MAN: The chances of hitch-hiking a ride back to the city are pretty slim.

VIRTUOSO: No getting off. If we do we won't reach the city till dawn. Where is this driver?

WOMAN: He has no right to do this.

IRRESPONSIBLE: And if anyone else dares to come in here again he said, and start harping on the same string again, I shall crack his skull with the crank. I'm getting fed up. Every five minutes they come up with a story. It is forbidden to talk to the driver. Where were you all this time? Why didn't you come earlier? And he locked the cabin from the inside. (*Pause*)

ALDOMIROVTSI: I have no luck with buses. Let's hope we shall reach Aldomirovtsi – tonight or tomorrow.

Silence. Everybody is deep in thought. Only the clattering of a travelling bus is heard.

REASONABLE: I am getting off. (*The others stare him in surprise.*) I would

rather spend the night in the open than fly into a precipice. Good bye! (*He takes his bag and starts for the door of the bus.*) Hey, let me get off!

(*Nothing happens.*) Please!... Let me get off!

MAN: He cannot hear you.

IRRESPONSIBLE: You have to go to the cabin,

REASONABLE: To get a crack on my head!

VIRTUOSO (*Suddenly*): I am getting off too. (*Takes his violoncello and stands next to REASONABLE.*)

REASONABLE: Then go and tell him to open the doors.

VIRTUOSO: It was your idea. You go.

REASONABLE: Better you go otherwise we'll never get off. (*The two stand next to each other on the steps of the bus each waiting for the other to go to the driver.*)

VIRTUOSO: Well?

REASONABLE: You should go, if only because you are younger.

VIRTUOSO: So he bashes my head in, you chicken? Let's go together!

REASONABLE: A needless sacrifice. It's best for just one of us to go.

VIRTUOSO: And that one is to be me, eh? You go on your own... (*He returns to his seat.*)

REASONABLE stands for a while on the step, then takes a white handkerchief out of his pocket, ties it to his rolled newspaper and cautiously approaches the curtain. There he thrusts the white flag first and waits.

REASONABLE: I've raised the white flag!... I don't want to haggle. I only want to get off... (*No answer.*) You yourself said that whoever wants to may get off... (*REASONABLE glances back at the passengers.*) Please!

IRRESPONSIBLE: I told you, he can't hear you because of the engine. You have to go in.

REASONABLE: Would you do me this favour?

IRRESPONSIBLE: Which favour?

REASONABLE: To go in for me.

IRRESPONSIBLE: I am not a carrier-pigeon. I've had enough of going back and forth.

REASONABLE: This is the last time. (*Confidentially*) For a small fee.

IRRESPONSIBLE: No, thanks.

REASONABLE remains there for a while then withdraws the white flag and returns to his seat. Pause. Suddenly the inside of the bus is drowned in the bright light of headlights. There are skidding, crashing and screeching sounds. All the passengers are flung to the right-hand side of the bus... Everything becomes silent again. They have passed by another truck.

IRRESPONSIBLE: A narrow escape. Next time it will be a head-on collision.

REASONABLE: What are we to do? What are we to do?

IRRESPONSIBLE: That is the question!

WOMAN: Shakespeare's question.

ALDOMIROVTSI: Whassat?

WOMAN: To be or not to be!

ALDOMIROVTSI: Well, if you ask me...

REASONABLE (*Cuts him short nervously*): I know, he should drive you to Aldomirovtsi. We heard that! Only the way things are we won't get to your beloved Aldomirovtsi, but to the Devil... Oh, why did I ever board this bus! Why????!!

MAN: It is a rhetorical question.

REASONABLE: And instead of making fun of me, tell what to do. Do you think you are immortal or that you will rise from the ashes like the Phoenix! Your limbs will be strewn all over the place and no one will put you together again.

MAN: I suppose you intend to get off unhurt.

WOMAN: What are you quarrelling for? Let's get down to work. We must think something up! Time is flying!

MAN: He is pretending to be a fortune-teller! Me all in pieces and him unscathed! Just his raincoat a bit soiled.

WOMAN: Let's speak with him again, like fellow humans, he must understand. All men are brothers. Let's agree in a brotherly manner.

ALDOMIROVTSI: If it is to be a brotherly manner there isn't much chance. I have never got on with my brothers. It is a good ten years we've been trying to split a willow tree which father left us. We just couldn't agree on how to do it. The other stuff we split up, but not that willow tree. No one would yield. This spring one brother said "I won't listen to nobody any more. I take my share and you two do whatever you wish with the rest." The other one said, "Why I too shall take mine, it is from father". And before we knew it, we had felled the willow tree and cut it into pieces. When it was standing we could sit under its shade, or tie a swing for the children. What we got is nothin'. Logs that are good for nothing – you can't burn'em or carve them or nothing. We just threw them away! So if it's going to be a brotherly agreement, we'd better not start it at all.

ALDOMIROVTSI's speech is followed by silence.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Why don't we give him one on the head, just to make him dizzy and then...

REASONABLE: And then we shall wake up in the next world. The bus will overturn. We can't use force. Only persuasion. This is the thread on which our

lives hang. We either persuade him, or perish. We must invent something. Think up something. Think quick! (*All get together and think.*) It boils down to...
ALDOMIROVTSI: To be or not to be!

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

The passengers are in almost the same positions as they were at the end of Act One – feverishly thinking of a possible way out of the situation, with the sole exception of UNREASONABLE, of course, who is still lying on the seat, and the LOVERS, who continue to be preoccupied with each other in the back seat of the bus.

IRRESPONSIBLE: I have always been a good consultant, but now I can't come up with a single idea. For twenty minutes I have been thinking hard, but it was no good. It is because you drank up my brandy.

WOMAN: But you made us drink it.

IRRESPONSIBLE: I made you drink it. Me? Never in my life have I made anybody drink a drop of alcohol.

REASONABLE: Don't get distracted! Keep on thinking hard!

Silence falls again, everybody is deep in thought.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Aldomirovtsi is not thinking!

REASONABLE: What do you mean?

IRRESPONSIBLE: Just that he is not thinking. He is sleeping.

REASONABLE: How can he? When everybody around is thinking hard! That's it!

ALDOMIROVTSI (*Startled*): Eh? Whassat? Did we arrive?

REASONABLE: This is unheard of! You're not pulling your weight, metaphorically speaking. You should have been thinking.

ALDOMIROVTSI: I was, too.

REASONABLE: How do you manage to think and sleep at the same time?

ALDOMIROVTSI: I think best in my sleep.

REASONABLE: You are totally deprived of any sense of responsibility. We're all in the frying pan and you calmly doze off.

ALDOMIROVTSI: I don't see nothing wrong.

REASONABLE: So it's alright to have a nap while everybody else is racking their brains to...

ALDOMIROVTSI: But I always think myself to sleep. It is a habit I've had since childhood. It is the same with my brothers. We are active people, we are good at doing things, not at thinking things. Whenever we start thinking we are finished. This is the end of us. We either fall asleep or take to the bottle.

REASONABLE: Think, buddy, try to think! Think now, because when you go to your last eternal sleep, there will be no waking up, and no thinking. Now is the time to think!

ALDOMIROVTSI: Okay, come what may, I shall give it a try. (*He makes himself comfortable by sliding deeper into his seat.*)

Silence again. Everybody is thinking hard. From time to time the passengers either change their position or pace up and down, or make themselves more comfortable in the seats. Suddenly the roar of engines fills the bus, headlights dazzle both passengers and audience, and in a second it is all over. Another lorry has passed by the bus.

REASONABLE: Faster! Faster! We have no time. Any bright ideas?

MAN (*Hesitatingly*): The man with the violin... (*Stops.*)

REASONABLE (*Encouraging him*): Yes, yes, what?

MAN: Might start playing. I have read somewhere music has a tranquillizing effect on the nervous system. Even on wild beasts. Only certain melodies, naturally.

REASONABLE: There is so denying it. Music ennobles people.

MAN: When Orpheus played the lyre the beasts gathered around him to listen, enchanted by the music.

WOMAN: I, too, have read that it doubles the working potential of the insects of the hymenoptera family.

MAN: If the fellow with the violin would be so kind as to...

VIRTUOSO (*Shaking with rage*): This is not a violin!

MAN: Of course, but I don't exactly know... still if you...

IRRESPONSIBLE: Buddy, you could tell us what the thing is called. Why don't you tell us? All the evening you have been repeating "this is no fiddle, this is no violin". What is it then! We've become closer than relatives. If we are to die, don't let us die ignorant.

VIRTUOSO: Violoncello. If the word rings a bell.

MAN: Yes, of course, if the fellow with the violoncello will be so kind as to go to the driver and play something for him?

VIRTUOSO: Never!

REASONABLE: Now, now why are you so categorical... we are rational grown-up people. Why "never"? Would you explain?

VIRTUOSO: I don't owe you any explanations.

REASONABLE: Of course you don't owe us any explanations. But still, we have been sharing the same bus, and we may share the same fate, a fate, which, let's be frank, could be pretty dreadful. I think you could explain, after all...

UNREASONABLE: He is absolutely right, you have to explain.

Surprised, the passengers turn their faces in his direction. No one has noticed he has regained consciousness and is now sitting in his seat like everybody else.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Oh, our man is all right again.

VIRTUOSO: You at least should keep out of this. You have hardly recovered consciousness and immediately you butt in...

UNREASONABLE: I came to a good half hour ago, so I know the whole story.

WOMAN: Then why did you keep on lying there? We had given you up for lost.

UNREASONABLE: I have been thinking.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Is there so much to think about?

UNREASONABLE: Once burnt, twice shy. While I was lying my whole life passed before my eyes as if on a screen. And what did I see there – rashness and foolishness. How far I have been from the truth and how right that man was, (*glances at REASONABLE*) when he warned me... I realised this as I was lying; I saw the truth with my eyes closed. With my eyes closed I saw the wisdom of that man, how accurately he assessed the situation...

IRRESPONSIBLE: Sure! If you get hit again you could take up philosophy as a career.

REASONABLE: Stick to the point! Why don't you want to play your violoncello?

VIRTUOSO: That is none of your business. I don't want to and that's all there is to it.

UNREASONABLE: But this is very unreasonable of you. Don't you see the plight we are in?

IRRESPONSIBLE (*Tries to persuade him*): A little music may settle everything – he will feel better, get friendlier, he may even start singing... That's the way things are settled, with a little music.

VIRTUOSO: A little music! (*Excited*) What do you know about music? What do you know about the titanic might, the cosmic comprehensiveness, the thrilling power of this art? What do you know about the apotheosis of joy, the light and greatness of man, about those towering cathedrals built of harmony and beauty, on which the Universe rests! What do you know about that flight, that elevation up into a sphere shining with light and love, an elevation which brings us in touch with the divine... Oh, God!... music!

REASONABLE: If it is a matter of elevation towards the divine, (*he points upwards*) we can reach it without the aid of music. I even think we are very close to doing it – as soon as the bus rolls over.

AIDOMIROVTSI: Wait, we've been told God doesn't exist. Are we really heading up there? Have things changed or what?

REASONABLE: Not for God! For us they could do.

WOMAN: If music is so powerful, then play some for him! It will certainly have a soothing effect on him. Please do it!

UNREASONABLE: Why are you so obstinate?

VIRTUOSO: You're asking me to play? Here, in this old dilapidated vehicle as it bumps along? Me, a virtuoso, who has played for the King and Queen of Belgium, who was awarded the second prize at the Langevin Festival, whom the British Royal Opera House has applauded? Me, who has brought tears to the

eyes of Horatio Frugoni! You ask me to play for a driver?!

IRRESPONSIBLE: No one else can do it.

UNREASONABLE: If you won't make him weep, we shall all be weeping very soon.

MAN: Who else but you? No one else has any idea of what apotheosis is.

GIRL IN LOVE: May I have your autograph? (*This initiative of hers comes as a shock to the BOY.*)

REASONABLE: You may be a virtuoso, I don't doubt it, but you are totally blind to the plight of your fellow-passengers, as well as your own. Virtuoso musicians can die, too.

VIRTUOSO: I prefer to die.

REASONABLE: But this is stupid! Why? This will be a double loss – you will lose your art, you will lose your music for ever, and the music will lose one of its priests, a servant, a virtuoso. Why? What good is this? What for? In the name of what? Please, only for five minutes.

VIRTUOSO: No!

WOMAN: But why? Just five minutes. This is your profession, isn't it?

VIRTUOSO (*As if stabbed with a knife*): Profession!... Music! Music is not profession, it is life, it is home, it is family, love, everything. I cannot prostitute with it.

REASONABLE: Nonsense! We only ask you to play for a while. It isn't all that much we're asking for.

VIRTUOSO: To play for him! This is a compromise with art. I don't play in buses.

REASONABLE: So, you don't play in buses!

VIRTUOSO: No, I don't.

REASONABLE: But you do play for kings and queens!

VIRTUOSO: Yes, I do.

REASONABLE: You do play at the Royal Opera House in London!

VIRTUOSO: Yes, I do!

REASONABLE: But you don't play in buses!

VIRTUOSO: No, I don't!

REASONABLE: You don't play for the ordinary working people. You will bring tears to the eyes of some Italian, but you won't bring tears to the eyes of your compatriots. This you consider a compromise with art – to play for those who drive you, who feed and clothe you – this is a compromise with art, is that so?

VIRTUOSO: I play in Bulgaria, too. But I just mentioned my guest performances.

REASONABLE: Keep to the point! So you mean to say that cathedrals and apotheoses are for kings alone. But what about the working people? They

deserve nothing? Is that so?

UNREASONABLE: That's as plain as the nose on your face.

VIRTUOSO: You're giving my words an unpleasant twist! I never said such a thing!

UNREASONABLE: You are giving art an unpleasant twist.

REASONABLE: Look how things stand with you – yes to the kings, no to the people! It is an outlandish philosophy of art, most outlandish.

UNREASONABLE: Quite foreign to our society! That's quite clear.

VIRTUOSO: You distort the meaning of my words! What I was saying was, that you cannot make fine music just like that, "presto", at a minute's notice because it was someone's whim. It is not like giving somebody's shoes a shine.

REASONABLE: You mean it is not a king's shoe, for you are only in the habit of polishing the shoes of kings, isn't that so?

VIRTUOSO: I have never said "no" to the people! This is a ridiculous accusation. But I doubt that he (*points to the driver's cabin*) is a true representative of the people. The people are something bigger than him.

REASONABLE: You shouldn't have any doubts.

UNREASONABLE: Your doubting is very doubtful.

REASONABLE: Remember that no one has ever benefited from his doubts.

VIRTUOSO: Still I have my doubts!

IRRESPONSIBLE: Man, why don't you play some music before you get stripped of your professional licence? You are in a pretty tight corner as it is.

VIRTUOSO: I am not a pumpkin seller. My licence is here (*he lays a hand on his heart*) and no one can strip me of it.

ALDOMIROVTSI: My! I know more about licences 'cause I hang out all day long about the market place. You shall be stripped before you know it, I knew a man from Pancherevo who had his selling licence suspended ten times in a week.

WOMAN: Maestro, please, play some music for him!

Pause.

REASONABLE: Come on now, will you play for the ordinary people or is it royal blood alone that can inspire you? Mind you, this is the last time I ask you!

VIRTUOSO: Still my answer is no.

REASONABLE: Very good!

REASONABLE sits down and calmly folds his arms. The VIRTUOSO starts pacing the bus nervously up and down. All eyes follow his movements, only REASONABLE seems quite unconcerned. He looks straight ahead calmly.

VIRTUOSO (*After a minute's pacing*): But I haven't warmed up... I cannot start

like that... without some exercises... or rehearsal...

UNREASONABLE (*Jumps up*): Maestro, while you are warming up, the bus may leap into the jaws of hell. You don't need any more practice, you are a virtuoso performer, a second prize winner, at Langevin, you have played before the King of Belgium. You don't need any more rehearsals.

REASONABLE: You have brought tears to the eyes of Horatio Frugoni! Why feel uneasy before a driver?

UNREASONABLE: Only hurry! Please, hurry up!

VIRTUOSO (*Still pacing the bus in stage fever*): But still... still... this is a special performance. I cannot start just like that. I feel strangely excited.

REASONABLE: There is nothing strange in it, it is quite an ordinary performance. Just build a cathedral of harmonies. You know how to do it.

(*Waves his arms in the air to "draw" magnificent cathedrals.*)

WOMAN: Our lives are in your hands, maestro!

IRRESPONSIBLE: Courage, man, you're standing on the bucket with the noose round your neck.

MAN: Still calm down. Don't get excited. Get a grip on yourself! It is very important not to show your stage fever.

GIRL IN LOVE: May I have an autograph?

UNREASONABLE: Leave the maestro alone, don't you see he has to concentrate... the virtuoso.

Everybody is up and around him, fussing about like around a boxer before stepping into the boxing ring in the third decisive round. The VIRTUOSO has taken out his violoncello and walks towards the driver, opens the door of his cabin and suddenly turns round.

VIRTUOSO: Oh God! I've forgotten the most important thing! I didn't decide what to play.

REASONABLE: Why, anything will do. Something light... you know best.

UNREASONABLE: You know, you know maestro! You know!

VIRTUOSO: No, I don't know. The point is I don't know in the least. What are his preferences. Maybe rococo variations... or Tchaikovsky.

REASONABLE: Yes, Tchaikovsky... precisely Tchaikovsky! Come on! (*Urges him.*)

VIRTUOSO: Maybe Haydn.

REASONABLE: Naturally, Haydn!

UNREASONABLE: Come on, Haydn! Get on with it!

VIRTUOSO: No, Haydn is not very suitable... I feel the occasion is not proper for Haydn. What else? What else? Dvorak's minuet? No!... Cassado?... No, he is... But maybe Manuel de Falla's "Fantasia Bética"?

ALDOMIROVTSI: I'm all for Cassado!

VIRTUOSO: You think so?... Maybe you are right... yes, yes, exactly, Cassado's "Requiebrus".

UNREASONABLE: At last! Quick.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Naturally this "Requiebrus" must be some kind of requiem. Quite proper for the occasion.

VIRTUOSO: No, no. "Requiebrus" means "caress", do you understand – "caress".

REASONABLE (*Calmly*): It is also suitable, but we must lose no time now. Are you ready?

Everybody is fussing about the VIRTUOSO, smoothing out and brushing his clothes, patting his hair and trying to make him look smart. UNREASONABLE is using his handkerchief to polish the violoncello. The MAN is putting another neatly folded handkerchief in his breast pocket, the WOMAN is brushing the back of his jacket with her coat sleeve trying to remove a small stain...

REASONABLE (*Casts a final look at the musician*): Go and don't forget that our lives are in your hands. If necessary change the tune. Trust your intuition on the spot. And the most important thing is to look him straight in the eye, all the time, look him straight in the eye to see whether he likes the music or not.

VIRTUOSO (*Goes to the driver's cabin and comes back again, feeling very tense and excited*): I am not in tails but... you understand... in a bus... impromptu...

REASONABLE (*Pushes him towards the cabin*): Of course, in a bus... it's impromptu... Sure, go on... The music is what counts!

UNREASONABLE: Buddy! (*The Virtuoso turns round again.*) Don't give a damn! We've reached rock bottom. It couldn't get any worse.

VIRTUOSO: Thank you very much!

With a bow in hand and the violoncello, the VIRTUOSO starts for the cabin in extreme excitement. He disappears behind the curtain. Everybody sits down, still and motionless with eyes gazing at the curtain.

REASONABLE: Hush!

UNREASONABLE (*Repeats*): Hush! Quiet!

The sounds of a violoncello come from behind the curtain. The music is quiet at first, then as if with suppressed pain and yearning it starts growing, it expands into questions and wails, pierces the hearts and souls, fills the one to overflowing. Everything seems to vanish – world, people, buses – everything is gone but the music. The passengers are quiet, their faces are sad and dreamy, the music has taken them away.

The BOY IN LOVE alone wears a sceptical smile. The music ends as suddenly as it has started. A storm of applause, the passengers jump to their feet applauding, seized by joy and

hope, with the exception of the BOY IN LOVE, who is in an ironic mood.

WOMAN (*Clapping her hands*): Bravo! Bravo!

IRRESPONSIBLE: Encore! (*Claps in slow rhythm.*)

WOMAN: Saved! We are saved, sa-ved!

Everybody starts clapping their hands and chanting with her "Sa-ved!", "Sa-ved!" At this moment of supreme animation, the VIRTUOSO comes out from the behind the cabin's curtains. The bravos and applauses gradually die down. Silence. Everybody is staring at the VIRTUOSO. His face is lifeless and gray, he is in a state of extreme shock. In perfect silence he packs the violoncello and the bow in the case, puts it next to him and sits down, not looking anybody in the eyes. Silence. Pause.

IRRESPONSIBLE: What did he say? (*The VIRTUOSO, still in a state of extreme shock, does not answer.*)

MAN: Didn't he like it?

WOMAN: Why didn't he like it? It was so beautiful!

UNREASONABLE: Didn't he say anything?

VIRTUOSO (*In a hollow voice*): He did.

UNREASONABLE: What?

VIRTUOSO: He asked why my fiddle was so big.

UNREASONABLE: Anything else?

VIRTUOSO: He ordered me to get out. Said my playing was making him drowsy.

REASONABLE: Understood! Now we have to start all over again.

Everybody is silent, staring ahead, looking thoughtful. In the back of the bus the LOVERS are busy arguing about something.

GIRL IN LOVE: But this is ridiculous! All you need is a curly head and you'd be the spitting image of Othello!... (*The BOY does not say anything.*) If you are going to smother me, let me take off my raincoat. Just to make it easier for you. (*The BOY says nothing.*) Shall I take it off? (*She takes her raincoat off. The BOY does not budge.*) All I did was ask him for an autograph, nothing else! Why should you call this a sexual relationship...

BOY IN LOVE: It is not a sexual relationship!

GIRL IN LOVE: What is it then?

BOY IN LOVE: A spiritual relationship... If you had touched him with your little finger you both would have been dead by now. I would have... I never thought you could go crazy about someone so easily?

GIRL IN LOVE: I am not crazy about anyone but you, I just asked him for an autograph.

BOY IN LOVE: Of course, you just asked him for an autograph! Of course you will ask him for an autograph, that's how things get started, next thing you start undressing.

GIRL IN LOVE: I don't see why you are so angry. He didn't even give me an autograph!

BOY IN LOVE: Only because there were too many people around.

GIRL IN LOVE: You silly! (*Ruffles his hair.*)

BOY IN LOVE (*Draws back*): Of course I am silly, 'cause I am not a virtuoso.

GIRL IN LOVE: The smothering scene in "Othello" is about to begin, Desdemona will be smothered. The scene is not recommended for highly sensitive people.

BOY IN LOVE: I can't see what it is in those artists that attracts you! The moment you see an artist you instantly start chasing him! As if he were a two-headed creature!

GIRL IN LOVE: Don't start all over again! (*She is about to embrace him.*)

BOY IN LOVE (*Draws back*): It's as if they could work miracles! With the head and torso of a woman and the tail of a fish! Can't you see how empty and vain they are, with no inner life, no moral creed... in love with themselves alone. Yes, in love with themselves alone, and thoroughly incapable of any other feeling or affection. Art!... But he agreed to play, didn't he? The great Virtuoso! He will soon start playing at weddings and christenings. If he hasn't started already! Cathedrals of harmony, my eye.

GIRL IN LOVE: Don't... (*Tries to smooth out his hair.*)

BOY IN LOVE (*Draws back nervously*): But they are so popular! Everybody knows them! Fame! ... He has played before the King of Belgium !

GIRL IN LOVE (*Presses his nose with her finger*): Don't be silly! Leave some of the steam for after we marry... You'll have heaps of time.

BOY IN LOVE: Virtuoso!... Maybe he never did bring tears to the eyes of Horatio Frugoni!... How do you know? Maybe this Frugoni got a mite into his eye. Maybe he'd been cutting onions at that time!

GIRL IN LOVE (*Bursts out laughing*): At a concert?... In the Royal Opera House!... You think he was cutting onions in his box?! Or during the interval? (*In a low tender voice.*) Please, don't be silly! Don't you see nothing has changed. We are still together, we are still the same, don't...

BOY IN LOVE: I am not being silly, just... (*Looks her straight in the eye.*)

GIRL IN LOVE: I know. That's why you shouldn't. Don't say any more and put your arm here, right here... (*She guides his arm around her waist.*) Only don't move it. Now, that's fine...

A brief silence follows, soon broken by a strange crash. The bus virtually rears up, the lights are dimmed for an instant, headlights illuminate the faces, then the lights come up again and

the sound of trucks moving away is heard. The passengers some of whom have fallen to the floor rise and get back to their seats.

IRRESPONSIBLE: It grazed us this time!

WOMAN: When we reared up like that I thought this was the end.

UNREASONABLE: The important thing is not to career down the mountainside.
(*He gesticulates to show a car plunging into a precipice.*)

REASONABLE: This, too, is bound to happen.

MAN: You seem strangely convinced.

REASONABLE: We can't keep having such terrific luck much longer. Luck always deserts you sooner or later.

MAN: For the time being it is with us.

REASONABLE: I am not in the habit of relying on luck. It may desert you when you need it most.

UNREASONABLE: You are absolutely right! We have to govern Nature, not pray for mercy!

IRRESPONSIBLE: See, a crank on the head and the man is reformed!

UNREASONABLE: This didn't come from the crank, but from his outlook.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Did the driver hit you with an outlook?

REASONABLE: This is no time for jokes.

MAN: Laughter is the best way to bid farewell to one's past.

REASONABLE: That goes for the future, too.

WOMAN: No insinuations, please! He participated...

REASONABLE: Madam, we all know about his participation. Still the present situation demands no jokes but hard work. Otherwise we shall certainly bid farewell to our future. Another jolt like that and we are finished. We have not mounted a kangaroo, have we?

UNREASONABLE: I quite agree.

REASONABLE: This is a bus and therefore unfit for the long jump. Even if we do avoid a crash, the bus will surely fall to pieces. That's why I propose we find a new solution to the problem.

WOMAN: What solution?

UNREASONABLE: I agree.

REASONABLE: A woman can succeed where music has failed.

MAN: In what sense?

WOMAN: By no means!

UNREASONABLE: I agree.

REASONABLE: What I mean is that a woman, in a purely spiritual contact with him, in an emotional communion with the exchange of spiritual fluids alone, can make him turn back to the city, or at least let us get off.

MAN: You mean we have to send him a woman.

REASONABLE: This is our last chance.

MAN: It's out of the question! Just forget it.

REASONABLE: I don't mean your... schoolmate. I meant someone with more... how should I put it... She should be a bit... (*He can't find the right word.*)

WOMAN (*Looks offended*): So I need "more", of what.

REASONABLE: No, I wouldn't say you are not..., quite the contrary! If you ask me, you have quite a lot of it, but in this case, you understand... Something more specific is needed!

WOMAN (*To the MAN*): You stay out of this.

REASONABLE: I want you to get me right. A more sociable woman is needed for the establishment of the all important initial contact. The intensity of inner life, the rich personality and erudition do not count in the establishment of initial contact... And as to the above qualities, no one can deny your possession of them.

WOMAN: Are you insinuating I am plain?

REASONABLE: My Goodness! What are you talking about? I never said such a thing!

WOMAN: You didn't? But you said I have an intense inner life! You know when men say such things? When a woman looks like a burnt bun, they talk about how good the cream inside is.

REASONABLE: I personally like you very much, I can assure you, you have my honest word for it! And...

MAN: What is going on here! Is she your schoolmate or mine? You are about to confess love before my very eyes! (*To the woman*) The lies I have been spreading about you may turn out to be true!

WOMAN: But why is he insulting me? I may not be a Claudia Cardinale, but I won't let him talk about intense inner life! Intense inner life is for women of sixty and above!

REASONABLE: Look, I am ready to send you on this mission, but since I anticipated the vociferous protests of your schoolmate...

MAN: It's no use continuing this crazy conversation. She won't go!... Watch out or you may get a bloody nose for this. (*He stares resolutely at REASONABLE.*)

REASONABLE: We all get more than bloody noses if we don't do something pretty soon. (*He points to the driver's cabin.*)

MAN: Who is it to be?

REASONABLE (*Nods back to the LOVERS*): The girl.

UNREASONABLE: I agree. This is a very clever proposal.

IRRESPONSIBLE: She is a nice piece of fruitcake.

MAN: The girl is all right.

AIDOMIROVTSI: Wait a minute. I don't...

REASONABLE: You don't what? We are acting in self-defence. Moreover I don't see what may possibly be bothering you – some nice friendly talking, an

exchange of starry-eyed glances. That's all. Drivers are not woman eaters.

UNREASONABLE: How about her guy?

REASONABLE: We shall have to explain the situation to him. He has to understand the responsibility he and his girl have been entrusted with. Of all people present here they are the ones chosen. This means a lot.

UNREASONABLE: Let's call them over here then.

REASONABLE: Call them. (*He straightens his tie and adjusts his spectacles.*)

UNREASONABLE goes to the back seat, says something to the LOVERS and the three come to the middle of the bus. Black-out. When the lights are up again the BOY and the GIRL are standing on two different seats on both sides of the aisle, divided by the passengers, who are standing between them. The BOY and GIRL are besides themselves with anger and seem prepared for anything. The BOY is waving an empty brandy bottle. The next moment he breaks it against the seat's back and grips the broken bottle by the neck.

BOY IN LOVE (*Shouting*): Don't you dare touch her! You skunks!... I shall rip the stomach of the first one who touches her!

REASONABLE: Why the noise? It will be a most ordinary conversation.

BOY IN LOVE: Then start it yourself!

REASONABLE: The conversation should be... interesting you know. A purely human, purely sentimental, a purely feminine conversation.

BOY IN LOVE: I don't give a damn! The first to touch her is a dead man!

REASONABLE: You cannot say you don't give a damn. You are a part of this society. We have common problems.

BOY IN LOVE: But you want to resolve them at our expense, don't you?

REASONABLE (*Pointing a finger at the VIRTUOSO*): When a while ago the man went to play there he spoke of no expenses.

BOY IN LOVE: This is his own business. Don't touch her, otherwise I shall gore you all.

IRRESPONSIBLE: It is clear he is not civic-minded. Miss, you at least should be more rational. You see the situation we are in. Come on, go over there for a while, there is nothing to be afraid of...

IRRESPONSIBLE reaches to take her hand. The GIRL draws back. The BOY, shouting "Don't touch her!", lurches towards IRRESPONSIBLE. The others try to stop him, to comfort him. There follows a scene of commotion, fighting, rolling... The BOY is the first to emerge from the heap of bodies rolling on the floor and jumps up to his previous place, because REASONABLE stands in front of the GIRL and all the rest, too, who are rising to their feet. He stands on his seat with the jagged bottle still in his hand.

BOY IN LOVE: I am going to slash my wrist! If you touch her, I'll slash my veins!... (*He starts rolling up his shirt sleeve.*)

REASONABLE (*In a suddenly tired and embittered voice*): We got too excited.

This is no good. You can throw away the broken bottle, you won't need it. We are civilized people, we are not savages. We don't eat girls. As to the veins, don't be in a hurry, they may get slashed without the aid of the bottle – as you can see yourself the bus has heaps of glass for the purpose. (*Instinctively the BOY casts a look around.*) We thought that though you were young, you would realize how crucial the problem is and we expected you'd help us. You didn't! You have chosen to remain within your small, comfortable relationship, with your little, safe love. We were sure you would rip out your heart like Danko and lift it up like a torch to light the way ahead and save the people. Instead you threw yourself at us to rip out our hearts. We were ready to swear that you loved the people and would run any risk for them, though I fail to see what risk there is in letting your girl-friend chat up an ordinary, hard-working man, who has been at the wheel for hours on end. It has turned out you don't love them... We thought you were capable of other noble and elevating emotions, but you are not. Well, it takes all sorts to make a world. Sorry, young man, we are very sorry to have disturbed you. Maybe something in your face encouraged us. (*Still disappointed though reconciled, REASONABLE falls silent.*)

GIRL IN LOVE: And you, you thought he would take your dirty advice, that he would take your dirty bait? You thought his love was like yours! What do you know about love, you pitiful philistines... time-servers, climbers and misers! What do you know, you, who are always busy slinging mud at each other, always straining to win the rat race! You, who are playing at nobility, at VIPs, feigning concern! Why don't you tell him what he has to do in the name of the country, in the name of the nation and all progressive mankind?!...

VIRTUOSO: (*Tries to stop her*): Miss, miss, pull yourself together!

GIRL: You word machines! You prudent preachers! Your sermons hardly over, you tiptoe up the creaky wooden stairs to your lovers' garrets to lay your heads and fat bellies next to young bodies!

MAN: (*Jumps up shouting*): Stop it! Stop! You talk like that now, because you've got no family, but I would like to see you tomorrow, when you get married!

GIRL IN LOVE: You are always sermonizing on family and society, on duty and responsibility, but you actually destroy them. What do you know of that feeling which makes humans free as birds? You, chameleon-coloured, pudding-faces! You thought he was going to do as you told him! You thought he would trust your words! You thought he was like you! Don't make me laugh!... You don't know us, you only think you know us. You know our faces – yes, our names – yes, but nothing more. What do you know about love?... You have only read or heard about love! But you have never, never loved – truly, fervently and honestly!

IRRESPONSIBLE: Why are you talking about love when we are virtually

teetering on the edge of the abyss? Do you hear me?! On the edge of the abyss!
GIRL IN LOVE: Let's take the plunge! It'll be all for the better! What's the use of staying alive if love is dead, if love has gone away, if one is all alone? What is the use? If even the leafless tree waits for the spring and the birds to come, how can humans live without love?

IRRESPONSIBLE (*To the BOY IN LOVE, in a very serious voice*): There are plenty of women, my boy. Take my word for it. The bus will crash, she will survive, women always survive, she will find another, women always find another, and you.... You will get a modest wreath with the inscription "He was a good boy". She will never miss you for a moment, your friends will forget you, you will only have the grass above you. Life's like that, my boy! I know better, It is not like in the films. Whatever you do – agree or disagree, love or hate, they jilt you in the end. You get a kick in the ass, do you understand, boy? They are all the same!... There is no "forever". The grass alone is for ever! Believe me! The bottle you are holding is mine. Why am I drinking it and not brandishing it like you? Or maybe you think you are the first and only one who ever loved? Remember boy, there is no such thing as "forever"!

The BOY IN LOVE becomes thoughtful and he no longer holds the bottle threateningly. He is evidently impressed by the words of IRRESPONSIBLE.

GIRL IN LOVE: Don't believe what they say! This is not true!

REASONABLE (*Quietly and painfully*): It is true! It certainly is true!

Unfortunately the woman of today is no more what she used to be – mother and wife and rebel leader like Sirma – embroidering flags and baking bread for the fighters! Emancipated as she is, the woman of today thinks it is quite natural to be unfaithful to her husband at least twice a week and she calls this cultural relaxation! Then she gets a divorce, takes the house, takes the children and kicks you out in the street to meditate on the vicissitudes of fortune.

GIRL IN LOVE: You're wasting your breath.

REASONABLE: Louis Pasteur, too, infected himself with the plague, but he did it to test the virus, to save mankind, and you? You are still young, what have you done? What do you study?

BOY IN LOVE: Architecture.

REASONABLE: Where are the buildings you've designed? Where are the palaces? Where are your new ideas, forms and spaces? If Le Corbusier had cut his veins as a student, there wouldn't have been that pilgrimage to the chapel of Ronchamp or the magnificent housing estate outside Marseilles and people wouldn't have been living in a new and better way, and praying in a new way. The world would have been poorer without Notre Dame du Haut...

GIRL IN LOVE (*Shouting*): This has nothing to do with it! Quite the contrary!

REASONABLE: What does love mean? Only looking at the eyes of your partner? Or squeezing your hands until they get sweaty? Doesn't it also mean doing something for the people, for others, working indefatigably for them? Isn't this called love, isn't this worthy of Man?

GIRL IN LOVE (*Shouts to the Boy*): Words, only words!

REASONABLE: And why should only one woman be the recipient of one's love? And then is she the right one? What makes us sure? Can one be sure at all?

UNREASONABLE: Look, how widely spaced her teeth are. Just look for yourself! (*Unwittingly the BOY looks at her.*) Her hair isn't very beautiful, either.

IRRESPONSIBLE: I cannot say anything about her hair, but her voice.... This is not a girl's voice.

UNREASONABLE: This is a little bit embarrassing, but will you please look – she has got no boobs.

The BOY IN LOVE lifts up his eyes every time they mention her faults.

GIRL IN LOVE (*To the BOY*): Don't mind them! Close your ears!

UNREASONABLE: And her legs? They're only good for walking, but.... otherwise... (*He shakes his head disapprovingly.*) See for yourself!

REASONABLE: You cynic! Scram! Beat it! (*He addresses the LOVERS in a fatherly tone.*) A beautiful futures lies ahead of you both. You don't need the bottle any more, throw it away!

GIRL IN LOVE: Don't! Don't throw it away!... (*Suddenly she throws herself towards the window, breaks the glass with her shoe and takes hold of the frame.*) You've only to say the word and I'll jump. They can do nothing to us! Just say the word!... Don't throw away the bottle!... Don't!

Their eyes are fixed on the BOY.

BOY IN LOVE (*In anguish*): Actually why should we dramatize things any further?

The GIRL is staring at him with eyes wide open. Slowly he puts the bottle down and looks up at her.

BOY IN LOVE: Why?... Let's sit down!...

Slowly he sits down. Only the GIRL remains standing, towering above the others – pale, biting her lips, with unseeing eyes.

Pause.

REASONABLE (*In the same fatherly voice*): Miss, step down!... (*She remains*

motionless.) This is a pretty bumpy ride, you may fall down and get hurt.
BOY IN LOVE: Yeah, you better. You may get hurt. Come on!

The GIRL stands still, looking somewhere far above their heads, as if blind and deaf to everything around her.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Sit down or hold on to something! Standing is forbidden in a coach. (*He approaches her stealthily.*)

BOY IN LOVE: Come here, please!

REASONABLE: Come on, come down! Be sensible! (*Together with IRRESPONSIBLE they seize her and carry her to her seat.*) I can't understand what all the fuss is about? Are you all right now?

GIRL IN LOVE: Yes, I am.

REASONABLE: That's good, that's very good! Though this is a most inopportune moment to relax. Anyway, are you going? You will save nine lives if you do. You are doing this out of humane considerations... (*The GIRL is silent.*) Well?

BOY IN LOVE: You can't make her. Let her make up her mind alone... (*To the GIRL*) If you ask me, I am against it, but... Still you are the one to decide. Think, weigh all the pros and cons... As to myself, I am dead against it.

REASONABLE: Well?

GIRL IN LOVE (*Obediently*): OK.

REASONABLE: Wonderful!

UNREASONABLE: This is a wise decision.

MAN: Bravo!

REASONABLE: You only have to make him feel at ease, to help him relax... You have to charge your voice with emotion, put more glitter into your eyes and utter a few words, just a few words... How great the power of women is. Remember, we are lost without women... Now go! Go!

The GIRL casts a silent glance at the BOY.

BOY IN LOVE: You didn't have to agree. But still it is entirely up to you to decide... Actually, maybe you are right, I am not saying anything... A faint smile, a husky voice, moist eyes... You can certainly do it!

Silently and imbued with the sense of high responsibility, she smooths out her clothes, takes a look at herself in her looking glass and resolutely goes to the cabin.

REASONABLE: Put a smile on your face. This is the main thing. Smile as much as you can!

The GIRL turns about, nods obediently and disappears behind the curtain. Silence falls again. Then the laughter of the girl is heard, going through various pitches.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Too much laughter, eh?

REASONABLE: Hope everything goes smoothly.

UNREASONABLE: Of course it will, she is a hot-shot.

MAN: She is very clever. You saw the way she talked us down a while ago. She will never yield to a driver!

WOMAN: Don't worry, women are cleverer than men.

REASONABLE: A very sensible girl!

UNREASONABLE: In all fairness she is.

The laughter assumes somewhat strange modulations and then fades away, falls into silence. The passengers prick up their ears to catch a sound.

BOY IN LOVE (*Nervously*): They stopped laughing.

IRRESPONSIBLE (*Stands in his way*): A person cannot grin all the time.

REASONABLE: Maybe the driver is concentrating on a difficult stretch of road.

UNREASONABLE: She will manage him, she is a great girl.

BOY IN LOVE: I feel there's something wrong!

MAN: You're crazy! He is busy driving the bus!

Meanwhile all the rest stay with their ears pricked up. Silence. Laughter has ceased. After a while the girl comes out through the curtains. She is buttoning her skirt, then she starts buttoning up her blouse, which until then is unbuttoned, exposing the girl's breasts. She says nothing. The passengers are stunned into silence. They say nothing. Silently she buttons up her blouse, combs her hair with her fingers. She is motionless. They are looking at her eagerly.

GIRL (*Not exactly tearful*): I said nothing!... Nothing of the stuff you advised me to say! I told him only to drive, faster! As fast as he could. I told him I adored a fast drive, the risk, a run along the edge of the precipice. That this was how a man should drive... I love you, I told him, I've been crazy about you for a long time now. I spent the summer waiting for you at bus stops. And then I unzipped my skirt!

BOY IN LOVE (*Screaming*): You are lying! You are lying! This is a pure invention!

GIRL: I told him he was a strong man, just as manly as I had pictured him. I told him he was the type I liked best – men as strong as bulls. (*Pause*) He couldn't unbutton my blouse, he tore the buttons off... (*This last sentence she utters quietly as if recalling the scene.*)

BOY IN LOVE (*Quietly*): This is not true. This is not true. Fantasies of yours... sheer fantasies.

GERL IN LOVE (*In a hollow voice*): It is true.

BOY IN LOVE (*Screaming*): No! You are lying!... You say it deliberately to humiliate me! To hurt me, to get even with me! This is not true! Say it is not true!... Say you are lying...

GIRL IN LOVE: It is true. I did exactly as I said. He promised to drive as fast as the engine would go. I wish you all a pleasant journey!

She goes into the rear part of the bus and sits down on the spare tyre lying there on the floor. A violoncello tune fills the bus – a bitter autumn melody. The boy goes from seat to seat trying to persuade the passengers.

BOY IN LOVE: It is not true.... She has invented the whole story... This is only her fancy. A fancy, I say! Do you hear me? Imagination! Hallucination!

The passengers are still and silent, each of them staring ahead. After going up and down the aisle a couple of times the BOY sits down in a seat somewhere in the middle of the bus. The violoncello melody is like a human voice, thoughtful and sad, questioning and pleading.

REASONABLE (*Raises his hand as if to strike the girl. In a malicious voice*): He stepped on the accelerator. That's it! We can never get anything done because a traitor is sure to turn up at the last moment... (*To the GIRL*) How could you! (*He knocks her down on the floor.*) Didn't you think of the others! You care for nothing! Nothing!

ALDOMIROVTSI (*Rises*): And you, you care for anything? You care for anyone but yourself? You think of anything but yourself? I been listening to you all evening. You never said "Lemme do this" or "Lemme do that". It's always the others. The others get it in the neck; you manage to wiggle out of everything. But mind my word, we all get it in the end.

REASONABLE: Instead of speaking fancy words, you'd better go to the driver yourself! Anyone can philosophise.

ALDOMIROVTSI: You yourself didn't go, did you?

REASONABLE: It amounts to the same thing. We've been doing this together.

ALDOMIROVTSI: I wouldn't know about that. It is one thing to go to the cabin and quite another – not to.

UNREASONABLE: What are you driving at?

REASONABLE: Here you go again... When we have to act, we quarrel.... I simply don't see how we can cope with it.

BOY IN LOVE (*Who has tried to sit next to his girl, but has been repulsed firmly and irrevocably*): You should let him have your bread. That's the only way! He wanted three loaves of bread, didn't he? Give him the bread and that's all there is to it.

REASONABLE: What? Give away our bread?

MAN: You crazy or what?

IRRESPONSIBLE: Watch out or I'll slug you a good one.

WOMAN: Impossible.

REASONABLE: Do you know what this means?

BOY IN LOVE: I do. But you shall have to give it. There is no other way out. Don't you see?

WOMAN: Why not?

UNREASONABLE: My bread is mine!

REASONABLE: If it were just a matter of collecting it, we would have done it at the very start, no need to come all the way here to start collecting it. The point is no one will ever give away his bread!

BOY IN LOVE: Then clutching the bread we shall all turn into grass. A nice green lawn. I already see the butterflies perching on you, then on you, then on you, then on you, then on him... *(An awful crash, the stage is dimmed, headlights flashing across the faces of the passengers. Another vehicle has passed by.)*

REASONABLE: Well, it is clear now. We shall have to give our bread away. I give half a loaf.

UNREASONABLE: You have half a loaf from me, too.

MAN: Wait! These halves won't get us anywhere. We also give half a loaf each, and the comrade over there – half a loaf, that makes two loaves. Where shall we take the third one from?

REASONABLE: I cannot give more than that. I give half a loaf. If everyone gives half of what he has, I think we shall have about five loaves. He, for instance *(points at IRRESPONSIBLE)* has two loaves.

IRRESPONSIBLE: So what? It is not fair. Just because I have bought two loaves I must now give away one. And you – only half a loaf.

MAN: But nobody knows how many each of us has.

REASONABLE: What do you mean? Nobody knows! I have one.

UNREASONABLE: Me, too.

MAN: Let's be fair and everyone takes out his bread and puts it on his seat. Here is ours. *(He takes out two loaves of bread and puts them on the seat.)*

IRRESPONSIBLE: Here is mine. *(Shows the string-net through which two loaves of bread are seen.)*

UNREASONABLE: Here is mine. *(Shows it.)*

REASONABLE: Here is mine. *(Shows his bulging leather bag.)*

IRRESPONSIBLE: Wait! Wait!... *(He goes to him, opens the bag and takes out two loaves of bread.)* Is that what you call one loaf?

ALDOMIROVTSI: Yet otherwise he knows how to humiliate the people! Everyone was trying to get away with it, to outwit the other! *(He imitates the manner of the REASONABLE repeating his exact words.)*

MAN: Okay. If we forget about this shameless cheat, we have a total of seven loaves of bread. If everyone gives half of what he has, this makes... (*he is adding it up*) three loaves and a half!

WOMAN: Now, it is half a loaf more!

MAN: Yes, a new problem. Half a loaf more! What are we to do with it?

UNREASONABLE: Sorry, since my half has proved to be unwanted, I will gladly withdraw it. I do it in the name of the common cause. (*Takes his loaf and tries to sneak it out.*)

REASONABLE (*Grabs his hand*): What do you mean in the name of the common cause? What do you mean? Some are to give bread, others not? I don't agree. I won't give anything in such a case. (*Takes his bread basket.*)

Silently, quickly and precisely a pantomime with the bread is performed. The IRRESPONSIBLE takes it from REASONABLE, the MAN – from IRRESPONSIBLE, REASONABLE – again from the MAN, the WOMAN – from REASONABLE.

ALDOMIROVTSI: Don't play games with bread, it is a bloody shame!

No one pays any attention to him. The bread continues to be passed over from hand to hand. At one moment UNREASONABLE takes it from REASONABLE and rushes to the driver's cabin, shouting.

UNREASONABLE: Why don't you leave me this half? He only needs three loaves. You all have two loaves each, only I have one.

REASONABLE: In the name of principle. We are all equal. And we have to give away equal parts. Thus no one will feel cheated. (*Takes his bread back again.*)

UNREASONABLE: What do you mean no one? I shall be cheated since I'm left with only half a loaf.

IRRESPONSIBLE takes it from him, the VIRTUOSO quickly snatches a piece and starts chewing it. REASONABLE takes the bread from IRRESPONSIBLE, the WOMAN snatches it from him, the MAN snatches it from her and breaks it in two. Everybody is breaking pieces from the two halves until only a tiny piece remains in the hands of the MAN. He looks around and gives it to UNREASONABLE. Up to that moment he has stood stunned, watching silently how his bread disappears in the mouths of the others. In the meantime the passengers have taken their bread from the seat with the words:

REASONABLE: Then I shall give nothing!

WOMAN: Neither shall we!

IRRESPONSIBLE: Neither shall I! (*Each takes his bread and is chewing the pieces from the bread of UNREASONABLE.*)

UNREASONABLE stands in the middle of the bus clutching the remains of his bread. The rest, their backs turned to him, are chewing his bread with gusto.

UNREASONABLE: Principles! These are their principles – to snatch the morsel out of your mouth! Okay, eat! May you choke to death! Stuff yourselves with carbohydrates and die in compliance with your principles! In Europe they eat a thin slice of bread a day, so thin that you can see through it, like through a strainer, while Bulgarians stuff themselves on bread!... *(He says his monologue while passing from seat to seat, until finally he takes his own.)*

Silence.

BOY IN LOVE breaks it in an ironical voice.

BOY IN LOVE: Can you imagine, me being totally unaware of what a health hazard bread is. But now that I already know, I won't put a crumb of it into my mouth for love or money.

ALDOMIROVTSI: Hell. Now I'm not sure whether to feed my pigs on bread or not.

BOY IN LOVE: On what?

ALDOMIROVTSI: Bread! The sack here is full of bread. There is no fodder on the market, you know, so I feed them on bread...

Everybody jumps up as if stung by a wasp and gather around ALDOMIROVTSI.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Hey buddy, is that sack really full of bread? *(He runs his fingers over the sack.)*

ALDOMIROVTSI: Well, fodder is difficult to get...

WOMAN: Let me kiss you! *(She kisses him.)*

REASONABLE: This is what country folks are – as the saying goes, you can never see them without bread in the winter and without an extra piece of clothing, just in case, in the summer! *(Shakes his hand.)*

UNREASONABLE: The country folks, they are bearers of every virtue on earth! *(Taps him on the shoulder.)*

MAN: The end of our ordeal is in sight! We shall get off safe and sound! Bravo! Good for you! *(He taps him on the shoulder.)*

ALDOMIROVTSI *(Incomprehendingly)*: What's makin' you so happy?

UNREASONABLE: Why, because you shall give him the bread and that'll be the end of that. *(He points to the driver's cabin.)*

ALDOMIROVTSI: But I meant to feed this bread to my pigs! It's stale.

REASONABLE: It doesn't matter. Bread is bread, isn't it?

UNREASONABLE: We won't tell him it was for your pigs.

IRRESPONSIBLE: Why load him with unnecessary information?

ALDOMIROVTSI: It ain't no good trying to fool him! It ain't no good!

REASONABLE: Don't worry! Don't worry! Leave this to me! This is quite a normal bread, with the same amount of flour, salt and water as any other loaf of bread.

ALDOMIROVTSI: The same! Only it is in the sack!

REASONABLE: The sack is just the packing. It's the content that is important, not the form. *(To the UNREASONABLE)*: Take out three loaves!

ALDOMIROVTSI: Well, I am a simple man, but I say I wouldn't want to tell a lie. It's sinful.

REASONABLE: Oh; come on now! Forget that old crap... Who goes this time?

UNREASONABLE: Me, with your permission! I have long been longing to be given a task to carry out, to make myself useful.

REASONABLE: Okay. You know what to tell him while handing him the bread, don't you?

UNREASONABLE: Of course, I do! *(He takes the three loaves and disappears behind the curtain.)*

The passengers heave a sigh of relief and sit back and relax.

REASONABLE *(Wipes his forehead with a handkerchief)*: Ooff! It's all over! I was on the verge of despair!

MAN: What we have been through. Like in the movies! *(He, too, heaves a sigh of relief.)*

WOMAN: Simply awful! *(Combs her hair.)*

ALDOMIROVTSI: We won't get anywhere by lying to him...

At this moment UNREASONABLE emerges from behind the curtain with the three loaves of bread still in his hands. He looks extremely confused.

REASONABLE: What's the matter? Why did you bring the bread back?

UNREASONABLE: He does not want any bread.

REASONABLE: That's what it was all about. He wanted bread, didn't he?

UNREASONABLE: Not any more! I want to see my mother, he says, to talk to her, I wanna hear the pine trees whispering and breathe their fresh air. I want to see Koprivshitsa with her fountains, and her bridges, and grandpa's sword.

IRRESPONSIBLE: So now it is a sword he wants!... Where shall we find a sword for him? It was easier with bread. We found a whole sack of it! *(Pause)*

A tense silence. The situation is tense again. No one sees a way out. Gradually anger, fear and despair accumulate up to the extent where a scapegoat must be found. And he is found.

IRRESPONSIBLE (*To REASONABLE*): Look, you are to blame! Aldomirovtsi told you not to lie, it is a sin, and you said it was old-fashioned.

Surrounded on all sides, REASONABLE throws his bag out of the window broken by the GIRL IN LOVE. This drives his pursuers crazy. IRRESPONSIBLE punches him cruelly in the stomach.

GIRL IN LOVE (*Shouts*): No, don't!...

Still dizzy with pain, REASONABLE lurches towards the MAN who hits him hard and presses him against the side of the bus. He grabs hold of his jacket and tears off his lapels. REASONABLE escapes only to fall onto the fists of UNREASONABLE, who sends him into the opposite end of the bus.

GIRL IN LOVE: Stop it! Stop fighting! (*She rushes after REASONABLE in an effort to put an end to it all and help him.*) Don't.

The VIRTUOSO stops the slumping body of the REASONABLE with a punch up and sends him into the rear end of the bus, where the BOY IN LOVE gives him another, and sends him back to the middle of the bus.

GIRL IN LOVE: Don't, please, don't! (*She is shouting.*)

In the middle of the bus stands IRRESPONSIBLE, who grabs REASONABLE, tears a sleeve off his shirt – he has already lost his jacket in the fighting – and with a powerful punch sends him towards the driver's cabin.

GIRL IN LOVE: Don't! (*She tries to twist his hands behind his back, but he breaks loose and she lurches backwards and falls on the floor.*)

IRRESPONSIBLE gives another punch to REASONABLE and sends him back to where he was coming from – the driver's cabin. They all rush him. IRRESPONSIBLE brandishes the broken bottle and just when he is about to stab REASONABLE... the bus pulls up. The brakes screech, everybody lurches to and fro. Immobility. It is a cold shower to the enraged passengers. They, too, are motionless.

WOMAN (*Astounded*): He stopped! (*Pause*)

Everybody peeps through the window.

VIRTUOSO: He is looking at us! (*They all look up at the cabin.*)

BOY IN LOVE: Why is he looking at us? (*Pause*)

ALDOMIROVTSI: 'Cause you were going to kill the man, that's why!

Everybody is motionless and looking about. Silence save for the sound of the chugging engine and the shifting of gears...

UNREASONABLE: He's turned back!...

Pause. Everybody is motionless.

Afterwards quietly they all resume their seats. Only REASONABLE is still lying on the floor. The engine hums evenly. After a while REASONABLE rises, scratched, his face swollen, his clothes in shreds. He, too, resumes his seat.

REASONABLE (*Quietly*): We are going back!... (*He sits down.*)

The passengers are all seated, facing the audience, motionless. ALDOMIROVTSI rises, goes to the GIRL IN LOVE, still lying on the floor as she was sent by IRRESPONSIBLE, and sits next to her on the floor. The sound of the engine grows louder and louder and louder...

THE END