

Stanislav Stratiev
The Suede Jacket

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Translated from the Bulgarian by E. J. Czerwinski.

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CHARACTERS

IVAN ANTONOV
BUREAUCRAT
EUGENE
ZHORO
DERMENDZHIEVA
HANGING MAN
WIFE
SON
BOSS
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT
PSYCHIATRIST
HOUSEWIFE
A 56-YEAR-OLD-MAN
FIRST FARMER
SECOND FARMER
DIKO
BARBER

In addition there are psychiatric attendants and customers in the barber shop.

ACT ONE

Barber shop. Dressed in his new suede jacket, IVAN ANTONOV is waiting his turn. While waiting, he reads a magazine. The barber enters.

BARBER: Who's next, please? Sit down, sir. (*IVAN sits in the barber's chair.*) What's it going to be?

IVAN ANTONOV: A haircut.

BARBER: A haircut... Uh-huh, I see. (*He fidgets a bit; shakes out a towel.*)

IVAN ANTONOV: Close-cropped. So there won't be any hairs left...

BARBER: Don't worry about that... There won't be a hair left. (*Looks at the back of his head and neck.*) But you've already had a haircut!

IVAN ANTONOV (*A bit uneasy*): It isn't for me exactly. I came to get my suede jacket a haircut.

BARBER: What's that?

IVAN ANTONOV (*Still uneasy*): I'd like you to give my new suede jacket a haircut.

BARBER: You want your jacket cut?! Close-cropped?!

IVAN ANTONOV: Close-cropped. So there won't be any hair.

BARBER: Sure. And how about giving it a shampoo? Or maybe a perm? A little massage; maybe a whirlpool bath? How about that?

IVAN ANTONOV: No, no; just a haircut.

BARBER: Just a haircut. May I suggest some excellent hair conditioner? To strengthen the hair?

IVAN ANTONOV: I don't think it needs that. That won't be necessary.

BARBER (*Almost shouting*): You're quite modest, you intellectuals! Just a haircut! Just because you carry attache cases around, you think you can do whatever you want! We're the dumb guys, shaving people all day long and you're the wise guys who get us to give the jacket a haircut, and you'll have all of Sofia laughing at us afterwards...

IVAN ANTONOV (*Feeling awkward*): Please... Let me explain.

BARBER: So we're gonna make fools of the dumb guys, are we? Because we're so intelligent; we read all the latest magazines and these dopes here just keep clipping away!

IVAN ANTONOV: I can't see why you're getting so upset. All I want is to have my suede jacket clipped, nothing more. I don't see that I've offended you. If I thought I could do it myself, I wouldn't be here. But I can't; it's a first for me, too.

BARBER (*Suddenly catches on*): Oh yeah, yeah, sure... I get it now. I see what you mean exactly. I'm right with you. Just a minute; I'll be right back.

He goes to his BOSS, who is working at the far end of the salon, and takes him aside.

BARBER: A nut...

BOSS: A What?

BARBER: A nut. (*Glances at him.*) In my chair.

BOSS: You sure? (*Looks at IVAN ANTONOV.*)

BARBER: Hopped out of a loony bin. Wanted me to give his jacket a haircut.

BOSS: He did?!

BARBER: He's bonkers. He was reading the magazine upside down.

BOSS: He was?!

BARBER: They always pick on me.

BOSS: He'll smash up the joint. And they'll make us pay for it all... Why don't you give his jacket a trim?

BARBER: Are you nuts? You want me to give his jacket a going over. And he just might give me one any minute now!

BOSS: Did you hide the razors?

BARBER (*Going pale*): No!

BOSS: If he gets at them... You've got to get him outside.

BARBER: Why me? You're the boss around here.

BOSS: Yeah, but he's in your chair. Go now... Careful now; there's nothing to be scared of. One little nut isn't going to make us wet our pants, is he?

BARBER: I'm not scared. Only I got little kids and they're depending on me.

BOSS: Cut out the shit now; come on. Careful now. He may be just a little nut.

BARBER: I'm not going nowhere.

BOSS: O.K. We're going together, but if he makes a move – we move! (*They go over to IVAN.*) Hello!

BARBER (*With the voice of a Judas*): This is the manager of our branch.

BOSS: We're all equal... Like the Constitution says, we're all equal.

BARBER: Now you tell me!

BOSS: Come on now, not in front of the customer... How can you... (*To IVAN ANTONOV*) I don't suppose you know there's a place specializing in suede jackets... branch number 9... and it's just two blocks down the street. They're specialists down there; real pros; real nice work. I strongly recommend them; you won't regret it...

IVAN ANTONOV: But why Branch 9 when I've waited my turn here... (*Stands up.*)

BOSS: Listen here, pal; we've got your number!

IVAN ANTONOV: I beg your pardon?

BOSS: We know; we sure do. It's your thing and we're broad-minded. So beat it,

while there's time. We won't call an ambulance, if you get the point?

BARBER: We won't call nobody. We're on your side, man. Don't worry.

IVAN ANTONOV: But, but why?... I don't know what's going on.

BOSS: Well, there are all kinds of people around. There are some who, as soon as they sniff you out, want to put you right back where you came from. The whole world's a loony bin now, but it must be even worse to be locked up inside...

IVAN ANTONOV: Wait a minute! What's all this? All I wanted was a haircut.

BOSS (*Puts his arms around his shoulders and walks him out*): You'd better take the back alley. I wouldn't go downtown if I were you – they're bound to spot ya. Just act nuts, and that'll keep you out of trouble. (*They go out.*)

BARBER: Telling a nut to play a nut!... He shouldn't have told him to act normal... Bosses are like that – they can't think straight or talk straight. But then that's why he's the boss...

CURTAIN

SCENE TWO

IVAN ANTONOV, EUGENE and ZHORO. IVAN is telling them about his experience at the barber's.

EUGENE: So he tells you to play the nut, huh?

ZHORO: Well Ivan was asking for it, and the guy was on the button. I mean going to the barber's to get a haircut for a suede jacket.

EUGENE: You're lucky they didn't put you in a straightjacket!

IVAN ANTONOV: Look here, I'm sick and tired of your jabs about my jacket. Why is it so hairy? Do you use a special formula, or are the bald patches just spreading? Everybody's taking a crack at it like: "Is it made of hedgehogs? How many did you skin?" Well, I've had it up to here. I'll admit there are hairs here and there, but it was the last coat in the store. Either this or none. The idea wasn't mine; it was Zhoro's. And don't pretend now it wasn't. I tried cutting it myself, but it just didn't work out. The hairs were too tough for the scissors or it just wouldn't cut unevenly. So Zhoro told me to go to a barber to get it cut. He said he'd cut it more evenly. There wouldn't be any more hair. And now he's pulling a fast one on me and says I'm off my rocker.

EUGENE: Why do you always listen to Zhoro. There's nothing to it. This is the time of year they shear sheep on the farms. You go to some village, give the farmer who's shearing two leva, and that's all she wrote.

IVAN ANTONOV: Oh, no! I'm not going out to the country!... No way!

In the yard of the cooperative farm they are shearing sheep. IVAN ANTONOV goes to a farmer, who is doing the shearing.

IVAN ANTONOV: Good morning. How's it going? All right?

FIRST FARMER: Sure, why not.

IVAN ANTONOV: Good-looking sheep you've got here.

FIRST FARMER (*Unenthusiastically*): Not mine – the co-op's.

IVAN ANTONOV: Cigarette? (*He offers him one, they smoke.*)

IVAN looks from side to side, as if he meant to murder the farmer. He then takes a two-leva bill and tries to stuff it into the peasant's pocket. In the end he succeeds; the farmer is puzzled; but does not object.

IVAN ANTONOV: What d'you say we give this jacket a cut? It's a bit shaggy; not too pretty... One, two, three – huh?

FIRST FARMER: Well, I suppose I could cut... But we'll have to put it down as a privately owned sheep, because ours have been counted to the exact number. And that guy in the office, he ticks them off. And he likes to stick his big nose into everybody's business and he'll start asking questions: what's this jacket doing here along with the sheep? Are we shearing jackets now?...

IVAN ANTONOV: All right. Put it down as a private sheep. (*The next sheep breaks away from the hands of the shearer.*)

DIKO (*Off stage voice*): Fifteen! Get going with the next one.

FIRST FARMER: On all fours!... (*IVAN kneels down, and the shearing begins.*) Hey, that jacket really needs clipping! Hold it there! Let me do that sleeve again. There now. (*Shouts.*) Diko! Don't count this one, this one's private.

DIKO (*Off stage voice*): Did you say private? Whose is it? I want to see his face.

FIRST FARMER: Well, wear it in good health.

IVAN ANTONOV: Thanks a lot! That's just what I wanted. (*Goes out.*)

A large table, on which there is an inkwell, a bottle of water and a thick notebook. DIKO is sitting at the table and is scribbling something with his pen. IVAN enters.

DIKO: Are you the guy with the private sheep? Your ID.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Astonished*): Here you are.

DIKO carefully peruses the ID card and then starts writing out a receipt.

DIKO: Ivan Kirilov Antonov... street... number 09... 8... That's 78 stotinki. (*Tears off the receipt and hands IVAN the carbon copy.*)

Sign. Here. (*IVAN signs.*) All right. And what's your profession?

IVAN ANTONOV: I'm a linguist.

DIKO: That's... (*Befuddled*)

IVAN ANTONOV: I work with the Bulgarian language. With letters and sentences.

DIKO: Of course. And you raise sheep?

IVAN ANTONOV: I do.

DIKO: A hobby?

IVAN ANTONOV: A hobby.

DIKO: And where do you keep it? In your apartment? On the balcony?

IVAN ANTONOV: In the bathtub. I haven't got a balcony.

DIKO: In the bathtub? How can you keep a sheep in there?

IVAN ANTONOV: She's got no other option.

DIKO: Who would mind being in one's bathtub anyway. I guess if you was a sheep, you might get to like it, too. So, you're a linguist?

IVAN ANTONOV: Yes.

DIKO: Hell, I've always wanted to ask you people something... What's wrong with spelling "lamb" simple like you say it – lam"?

IVAN ANTONOV: Well, because it's the peculiarity of spelling...

DIKO: It sure is. Why not cut out the "b."

IVAN ANTONOV: I wouldn't dream of cutting that final "b."

DIKO: So you wouldn't even cut out a final "b"? You young people don't know your ass from a "b." Better get back to your sheep.

IVAN ANTONOV: Good-bye!

SCENE THREE

The foyer of an office. Corridors and staircases radiate from it. There are a number of cabinets... Above all this there is an elevator. It has stopped between two floors; the dangling cables are visible. IVAN ANTONOV, EUGENE and ZHORO enter.

IVAN ANTONOV: I'll be through in a minute or two. What theatre are we going to?

EUGENE: The Vitosha. We'll make it.

ZHORO: I bet you it's all a joke. Somebody's pulling your leg.

IVAN ANTONOV: It can't be a joke; it's the third time I've received a summons. (*Reads it.*) "Within three days of receipt of the present summons you will pay a livestock tax for your sheep. If you fail to comply, you will be fined from 100 to 4000 leva and legal proceedings will be effected.

ZHORO: And at the bottom: "Aquatic Fowl Department." Since when, may I ask,

do sheep engage in aquatics. The duck – yes. But sheep? What kind of a bird is a sheep?

EUGENE: It looks suspiciously like Zhoro's kind of fun. All right, did you write it – we'll be missing the preview.

ZHORO: How in hell could I think up that Aquatic Bird stuff!

IVAN ANTONOV: I'll only be a minute or two. And after that we'll rush off to the theatre. (*He exits.*)

IVAN enters the appropriate office. Enormous green cabinets, fireproof safes with lions' heads over the locks. Filing cabinets with rosen windows. Behind a counter sits a BUREAUCRAT.

IVAN ANTONOV: Excuse me; is this the Aquatic Fowl Department?

BUREAUCRAT: This is it.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Takes out the summons*): It's in connection with this summons, which I received from you. But it must have been some mistake...

BUREAUCRAT (*Without taking the summons*): The dead fox?

IVAN ANTONOV: Excuse me?!

BUREAUCRAT (*On the point of losing his temper*): Before we go any further, you've got to produce a dead fox. Or an affidavit to the same effect.

IVAN ANTONOV: What's all this about foxes? I'm here on account of a sheep.

BUREAUCRAT: It doesn't in the least matter what you're here for.

IVAN ANTONOV: But, why?

BUREAUCRAT: Can you read?

IVAN ANTONOV: About all I can do.

BUREAUCRAT: In that case read the latest decree, which is right under your nose.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Reads it*): But... where am I to get hold of a fox?

BUREAUCRAT: Go and kill one.

IVAN ANTONOV: But why do I have to kill one? I've come here to straighten out an error. And it's your fault, not mine. You're calling me, I don't want anything. So why should I kill?

BUREAUCRAT: There's no way out; you'd better go out and kill. That's the order of the day.

IVAN ANTONOV: What do you mean order of the day?

BUREAUCRAT: Just that. On a national scale. We've had it up to here with foxes. They've multiplied too fast lately and they're wreaking havoc in the countryside. The mountains are virtually teeming with foxes. The hunters are doing their best to keep their numbers down, but evidently there aren't too many, and they just can't cope by themselves. Now this order is going to act as an incentive to root them out.

IVAN ANTONOV: But I've never killed an animal in my life. I don't even know the first thing about hunting. What am I going to shoot it with? My bare hands? Or am I supposed to buy myself a gun and start tramping through the hills to thin out your damn foxes? I'm a linguist.

BUREAUCRAT (*With pathos*): Tomorrow the foxes will infest the cities, create traffic jams, get into your home. They'll attack your children...

IVAN ANTONOV: I haven't got any children.

BUREAUCRAT: Where will you be then? But it will be too late. If all of you had had a proper sense of civic duty, this never would have happened. But there are people like you, who show their asses and run. They've never killed; they can't bear the sight of blood; they're architects... If every citizen killed his or her fox the problem would be over and done with within twenty days. But not them. They wait for the State to do it. But how is the State going to do it? The State – that's us, all of us. At this very moment the public-spirited citizens are killing off foxes, shot-guns are going off, bells are ringing, and it reeks of gunpowder for miles round... And you tell me you're a linguist. You ought to be ashamed of yourself... We won't deal with your problem without a dead fox. It's evident that we can in no way rely on the public's civic responsibility. Go out and shoot your fox and come back. We'll be waiting for you.

IVAN ANTONOV: But look...

BUREAUCRAT: Good luck. And be absolutely ruthless!

IVAN ANTONOV comes back to his friends in the foyer.

ZHORO: Come on, man, we'll miss the previews.

IVAN ANTONOV: They want a fox.

EUGENE: I thought it was a sheep. Why a fox now?

IVAN ANTONOV: Well, no matter what business you have with them, you have to produce a dead fox. Or an affidavit for a dead fox. He didn't even glance at this paper.

ZHORO: You must be kidding.

IVAN ANTONOV: I'll have to quit the university and start hunting foxes. Do you know some place where they sell shot guns?

EUGENE: Have you gone crazy?

IVAN ANTONOV: The forests are teeming with foxes; there's a campaign going on to get the public to annihilate them.

ZHORO: God! God!... Dost thou hear, God? Dost thou see? Thou who art above us and sees and hears everything!

Unexpectedly for all of them, a voice comes from above. It is coming from the elevator, where

a man has been trapped inside. We have not seen him so far. He has a book in his hand and it is evident that we have interrupted whatever he was doing.

HANGING MAN: Sure, I can hear you. So what?

The three friends, astounded, look up at the elevator suspended above them.

HANGING MAN: So what, I ask you? I just happened to overhear some of your remarks, while I was reading here. You're bitching about the foxes? Well, don't. Go to room 209, to Chillingiroff's, and just say "The Hanging Man sends his regards," then give him a sawbuck, in an envelope, and he'll give you a document certifying you've killed a fox. Watch out that he doesn't try to hand you a certificate proving you've never been convicted – that one's really expensive. Is there anything else I can do for you?

EUGENE: Excuse me... but... do you work here?

HANGING MAN: Hell, no! I was trapped in this elevator about two months ago. And I've been hanging here ever since. The maintenance man responsible for the elevator left suddenly and they couldn't find a replacement. They couldn't assign another one. Technicians are hard to come by, and to top it off, the breakdown was a bad one. Two or three guys came by, fiddled around and left – too complicated and couldn't be bothered. It wasn't worth the effort. They put off getting me out from one day to another and, to this hour the whole question is still hanging. I took unpaid leave, and I'm hanging up here. I'm learning English, subscribed to several papers, and to Time magazine. The Medical Academy is conducting experiments with me, so I'm actually getting something out of this. It is a kind of life.

IVAN ANTONOV: And you tell me all this so calmly?

HANGING MAN: Were you ever left dangling in an elevator?

IVAN ANTONOV: No. I've only gone up and down in them.

HANGING MAN: Well, after you've been left dangling for a while you'll get the point. The first two or three days I hollered myself hoarse, after that I begged in a whisper, and finally, I just sobbed silently. I lost my voice... Then I accepted things such as they were. What could I do? I tried everything – all my relatives, all my friends. At first the Department was greatly concerned about me, but then the staff got tied up in their own affairs. After all this office has nothing to do with repairing elevators; so they forgot about me.

ZHORO: And there's no hope?

HANGING MAN: There's always hope. My oldest son left high school; he's now taking a course in elevator maintenance. He's only got a few months to go now and he'll get me out.

EUGENE: Excuse me, but will Chillingiroff really give us a dead fox affidavit? We're in a bit of a hurry...

HANGING MAN (*With dignity*): I've been hanging here for two months. The whole Department is before my eyes; I know how things are run around here. Do you think there's someone stupid enough here to go hunting foxes? So far I haven't seen a single fox – just affidavits. If the document says you've killed your fox – everything's fine.

IVAN ANTONOV: But that way the foxes won't be getting any fewer.

HANGING MAN: Who the hell cares about foxes? What matters is that on paper we can prove we've exterminated them. Then we'll award those who have distinguished themselves in the campaign and we'll get started on a new one... Who's going to go around counting foxes in the hills? You look like you're an intelligent man...

EUGENE: He just looks intelligent. Sometimes he gets to fool us too, and we're old friends. Anyway, let's get that affidavit and beat it or we'll miss the film.

IVAN ANTONOV: Thanks for your help.

HANGING MAN: Don't mention it. If it hadn't been me, someone else would have opened up your eyes.

The three friends exit. The HANGING MAN is left alone to read his English textbook.

WIFE: Cyril!... Cyril!

HANGING MAN: My... name... is... Peter... (*Looks down.*) Oh, is that you? What's new? (*Lowers a rope with a basket tied to the end of it.*) Did you bring me some tomatoes?

WIFE: I couldn't find any anywhere. I've been out all morning... (*She starts taking the things out of her bag and puts them into the basket.*) They didn't have any even in the upmarket stores.

HANGING MAN: It can't go on like this! I need vitamins. I'm sick and tired of this whole mess! They don't have tomatoes; they don't have peppers. What the hell do they have?

WIFE (*Guiltily*): I've brought you a can of sardines... They have phosphorus... (*Arranging the things in the basket.*)

HANGING MAN: Phosphorus! I've been on phosphorus for a whole week! I'll start phosphorizing pretty soon.

WIFE: It's good for the brain... especially now that you're learning English...

HANGING MAN: For the brain! What'll we do when we run out of sardines?

WIFE: I've bought you a book.

HANGING MAN (*Suspiciously*): Which one?

WIFE (*Timidly*): The Story of a Real Man. A Soviet novel about a pilot who

cope with the loss of his legs during the war...

HANGING MAN (*Exploding*): I don't want to read *The Story of a Real Man*. There's nothing wrong with my nerves, see? My nervous system is in perfect shape. I'm holding up well. This is the fifth time you've brought it to me. What do you have in mind? It's either that or Jack London or the journal of that brave Bulgarian husband and wife team who sailed across the ocean on a raft and managed to survive on a diet of plankton and yet never lost their cool. But I'm not on a raft and not in the middle of the ocean. I'm in a socialist office building. No sharks; no typhoons; I get three meals a day ... (*Stifles his indignation.*) Rafts! Legless pilots!

WIFE (*Timidly*): Georgiev sends you his regards, and says you shouldn't despair. His brother-in-law knew some technician who knew elevators inside-out. (*The HANGING MAN leans forward expectantly.*) The trouble is they're now putting up improved television aerials and it's better paid. (*The HANGING MAN resumes his former stance.*) He asked about the make and said they were very complicated and they stopped making them over thirty years ago...

HANGING MAN: They don't build them anymore. I know they don't build them anymore... I just want him to come and get me out of here. (*Pause*) How is he?

WIFE (*Obviously confused*): Well, he's studying!

HANGING MAN (*Suspiciously*): Is he?

WIFE: Uh-huh. (*One can see there is something wrong.*)

HANGING MAN: Tell me, is he studying? Why are you so quiet?

WIFE: He wants to get married.

HANGING MAN (*Thunderstruck*): What d'you mean he's getting married?

WIFE: Just that. They want to get married... Perfectly normal.

HANGING MAN: I don't see anything normal about it when his father is hanging inside an elevator! How can he? He calmly gets married; and I'm to spend the rest of my life hanging here, eating phosphorus.

WIFE: He promised to finish his studies; he's not giving them up.

HANGING MAN: I know how he'll finish. I won't allow the marriage, until he gets me out of this elevator. Where am I going to take my grandchildren for walks – here, inside this box?... (*Pause*) You tell him I want to talk to him.

Without a word the WIFE leaves.

HANGING MAN (*Calls out*): Do you have *The Story of a Real Man* with you? (*WIFE silently returns and stands under the elevator.*)

HANGING MAN (*Softly*): Give it to me. (*Lowers the basket.*)

The WIFE quietly puts the book in, looks up, as he draws it up, suddenly bursts into tears and hurriedly leaves, covering her eyes. The HANGING MAN sighs, and opens the book. He reads. IVAN ANTONOV, EUGENE and ZHORO enter.

ZHORO: Excuse me! Excuse me! Hanging Man.

HANGING MAN (*Looks down*): Oh, it's you again. Is everything under control?

EUGENE: We got the certificate, but the office seems to have disappeared.

HANGING MAN: What office?

IVAN ANTONOV: The Aquatic Fowl Department. It was there only fifteen minutes ago, but now a completely different set of people are working in the very office. And they don't know anything about the other office.

HANGING MAN: There's nothing supernatural in this – just another common reorganization. It's probably been transformed into another office. Let me think: "Aquatic Fowl"... "Aquatic Birds." Oh, yes; that was formerly "Fowl-Dog Department." Then it became "Aquatic Fowls" and the "Dogs" went over to the "Song Birds Department." Next they merged it into "Rabbits and Others." That's it. I'm sure that's the Department that went to the "Dogs." But it beats me where the "Aquatic Fowl" went to. Where the hell did they go to? They probably split it up into two departments – "Aquatics" and "Fowl."

IVAN ANTONOV: And you think that in one of those two offices we'll find our man.

HANGING MAN: The work style here is so dynamic that one can't actually think. They may have created two new departments, or they may have merged three old ones. One can't be sure about anything – you have to get off your butt and look for yourself.

CURTAIN

SCENE FOUR

The three appear together and separately at different places – on the bridges, high above the stage, by the wings, upstage and down. We hear their voices offstage, faraway and nearby.

IVAN ANTONOV: It isn't here.

EUGENE (*Shouting from the opposite side*): They've put the "Dogs" and the "Cats" together.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Shouting from another place*): We just came from "Cats"; there weren't any dogs there!

EUGENE: Maybe, but there are now...

ZHORO (*Shouting from a different quarter*): What do you want with dogs; I thought we were after "Aquatic Fowl."

IVAN ANTONOV: For God's sake, why Aquatic Fowl? I'm here about that friggin sheep. I'm going nuts!

The three run around a little longer.

ZHORO (*Shouts*): I've found it. It's over here! Here!

EUGENE (*Shouts from somewhere*): What did you find? Hold on to it!...

ZHORO (*Still shouting*): Here it is! "Aquatic dogs with low milk yields."

IVAN ANTONOV: Stop playing the giddy goat!

EUGENE: They've merged them!

The three stand breathless in front of the door.

IVAN ANTONOV: Come on; they've merged! (*The three rush in.*)

Enormous green fireproof cabinets, safes with lions' heads, a desk. Silence. A bureaucrat is scribbling something in his books. A few yards away a farmer is quietly waiting. He carries an object under his arm. The three friends cast a quick glance at one another and then quietly line up behind the farmer. They look at the bureaucrat. He is still scribbling. The bureaucrat who appears at various times in this play should be played by one actor, because this is the same face of bureaucracy, no matter where you meet him, or how he happens to be dressed, or what his education is. He has the same temperament. People are different, but the face of bureaucracy is always the same – indifference to the plight of men and women. Wherever IVAN ANTONOV goes from now on he will meet this same face: the ubiquitous, unfeeling BUREAUCRAT, played by the same actor.

SECOND FARMER: Well, what am... What do I do now? Here's its skin. (*He unrolls something he has under his arm.*)

BUREAUCRAT (*Without raising his head*): I saw it.

SECOND FARMER: Like I said, I was standing by this barrier when this (*points to the sheep skin*) was grazin'... And the barrier comes down.

BUREAUCRAT: I know your story about the barrier.

SECOND FARMER: Well, they were lined up there: a motorcycle with a side-car, a horse and cart and a little Russian car waiting for the train to pass. Just then the motorcycle rolls back a little and hits the horse. Then the horse driver gets down from the cart and goes and hits the motorcycle rider. Then the motorcycle rider gets mad and goes up and hits the horse. Because the horse driver was bigger than him. Then the horse gets mad...

ZHORO: And hits the motorcycle rider?

SECOND FARMER: No, he just shoves the cart backwards and hits the little Russian car. So then the driver, who'd been laughing his head off, gets mad and comes and hits the horse driver... I was just watching and laughing at those crazy

guys, who were ready to kill each other for nothing. It was just like in the movies.
BUREAUCRAT: Cut it short.

SECOND FARMER: Well, then the train goes by and the gates go up and those guys that were fighting, started laughing. I don't see what could be so funny, I yell out, and they point up at the gate, near dying from laughing. I look up and what do I see – my sheep has hanged itself. My sheep. I had tied it to the gate so it wouldn't run off and so I could watch the fight. Well those guys leave happy as larks, but I had to wait till they lowered the gate again to get my sheep back. Then I carried it home and I skinned it, and here's the skin. I figure I'd better show it to the tax people, so they don't make me pay taxes on it no more.

BUREAUCRAT: A death certificate is all I want from you. How many times must I tell you that? A simple death certificate. Nothing on that skin tells me who that sheep belonged to.

SECOND FARMER: Just what kind of certificate did you have in mind? Here's the skin, cured and all. If it was alive, how could it go around without any skin?

BUREAUCRAT: I've been dealing with you all day, and I've had enough. Without a death certificate, I can't do a thing!

SECOND FARMER: Now wait a minute, you can't...

BUREAUCRAT: I've got other people waiting for me; you're not the only one here. Now run along and get that certificate like I told you. Go on!

SECOND FARMER: Now where am I gonna get a hold of a certificate; no one writes them out no more.

BUREAUCRAT (*to IVAN ANTONOV*): Yes? What can I do for you?

SECOND FARMER walks aside, hoping for better luck next time.

IVAN ANTONOV: I've come in connection with a clerical error you seem to have made.

BUREAUCRAT: I made? What error?

IVAN ANTONOV: Right here, here's the summons. (*Hands it to him.*)

BUREAUCRAT (*Without reaching for it*): Your fox?

IVAN ANTONOV: Please. (*Hands him the certificate.*)

BUREAUCRAT (*Reads them*): I don't see any error.

IVAN ANTONOV: I don't own a sheep. That's where the error is.

BUREAUCRAT: What do you own, then?

IVAN ANTONOV: Nothing. I've never owned a sheep. This is clearly some misunderstanding.

The BUREAUCRAT gets up, without hurrying, gets the keys from the strong box and goes slowly over to a large green filing cabinet and takes out several large hard-cover registers and

goes back to his desk. He gives IVAN ANTONOV a condescending look – there can be no error; we just don't commit errors here. He turns the pages....

BUREAUCRAT: Ivan Kirilov Antonov of 73 Tsar Boris Street? Linguist.

IVAN ANTONOV: That's me.

BUREAUCRAT: A month ago you had your privately owned sheep fleeced. Don't attempt to deceive a government office.

IVAN ANTONOV: Look, I have no sheep. I had my jacket cut... my suede jacket. It had pieces of hair all over it; people were making fun of me, so I decided to have it cut. So I went out to a farm. That's all there is to it.

BUREAUCRAT (*Smiling*): Don't try to hide your sheep. You can't hide it from the law.

IVAN ANTONOV: I have nothing to hide from the law, believe me. It was only a jacket. Here it is on me, I happen to be wearing it.

BUREAUCRAT: You see how it is. We don't work on trust here. There are documents corroborating your ownership of a sheep and you are obliged to pay a tax on it. What would happen if every private owner denied the existence of his flock? Where would it end? So don't waste any more of my time. If you don't pay the tax, we'll have the law on you in all its severity.

He returns the registers to the green cabinets, locks them and puts the keys into the drawer of a rolltop desk. He sits down again.

IVAN ANTONOV: Now let's talk like intelligent people.

BUREAUCRAT: Intelligent people also pay their taxes.

IVAN ANTONOV: But listen, documents are not the same things as facts. Show me proof that I've got a sheep.

BUREAUCRAT: You have to prove that you haven't got one.

IVAN ANTONOV: Me? Prove that I haven't got one?!

BUREAUCRAT: If we start proving things like that to everyone, you know where we'll end up? We've got 250,000 cases in our registers.

IVAN ANTONOV: But only one wants proof, not all the rest.

BUREAUCRAT: Now, today. But tomorrow?

IVAN ANTONOV: What about tomorrow?

BUREAUCRAT: And the day after tomorrow? In the future? Do you know how many more might ask? Once there's a precedent – that's the end!

IVAN ANTONOV: Don't you understand it wasn't a sheep but a jacket. Do you hear – a jacket.

BUREAUCRAT: Every jacket starts by being a sheep. If you have meanwhile metamorphosed your sheep into a jacket, that's your own problem. We don't

interfere with people's personal affairs. But even so you'll have to pay your tax plus the fine for the period prior to your sheep's becoming a suede jacket.

IVAN ANTONOV: In that case I'll have to pay a tax on my overcoat. It, too, was a sheep once.

BUREAUCRAT: But not a privately owned one. It was not yours. You do grasp the difference?

IVAN ANTONOV: My God. I'm a linguist. I don't rear sheep.

BUREAUCRAT: In a place called Virginia, in the State of New York there was a photographer who used to grow marijuana in the city park... His little plantation was watered by the town government. He made quite a pile. Needless to say, that photographer didn't pay taxes on his marijuana.

ZHORO: Look, he really doesn't own any sheep. And he never has. I've known him since he was that high (*demonstrates with his hand*) and we've never seen anything in his house or his parents' house even faintly resembling a sheep. Really, this is ridiculous.

EUGENE: What good is a sheep to him – he's a university professor.

ZHORO: He doesn't even have a balcony where he could keep it. Could he have put it in a vase?

EUGENE: You've got something wrong.

At these words the BUREAUCRAT gets up, goes to the roll-top desk, takes out the keys, then goes over to the filing cabinet and takes out the registers...

BUREAUCRAT: Ivan Kirilov Antonov, linguist, shearing of private sheep on the twenty-ninth of March. It's a sheep, not a jacket. It's here in black and white. In the special notes column it says "Keeps it in his bathtub." And further down: "Purpose – hobby."

EUGENE: Do you hear what you're saying – "Keeps it in the bath?" Or maybe it was in an aquarium? Maybe that's written down?

BUREAUCRAT: Is this your signature? And the number of your passport? Issued November second, 1966.

ZHORO: You'll be telling us one of Grimm's fairytales next. "The professor's hobby: he keeps sheep in the bathtub!" Perhaps it wasn't a sheep but a goldfish he kept in his bath? Or a jellyfish?

BUREAUCRAT: I've been working here for ten years and nobody's ever managed to hide his animal from the law. You won't succeed either. So you'd better pay the tax.

IVAN ANTONOV: More important than the tax is the principle. Will you rather believe a document or a man?

BUREAUCRAT: A document. We work with documents. But there's all kinds

of people.

IVAN ANTONOV: The same with documents. But you won't believe people – just paper. And not the best quality paper either.

BUREAUCRAT: I am not a philosopher; I just collect taxes. I want you to pay the tax, and as for your philosophizing, you might try it somewhere else. It doesn't grab me.

ZHORO: But why pay a tax, if there's no sheep?

BUREAUCRAT: What good's your word?

IVAN ANTONOV: All right then, let's have an inspection; come on to my house. Take a look... There's nothing there.

BUREAUCRAT: You're damned right there won't be anything. If you're inviting us to make an inspection, you will have hidden it for sure. Probably grazing peacefully around some country house, while we go on a wild goose chase...

ZHORO: But we've been at his place at every time of the day and night, and would have seen it or heard it... How can you hide a sheep?

BUREAUCRAT: It can be done, and you're proving it.

ZHORO: And you?... what do you think you're doing? Do you understand what you're doing?

BUREAUCRAT: I collect taxes. And when I come across someone just like you, who won't pay his taxes, I fine him. Seems to me, you're the ones who don't understand.

IVAN ANTONOV: But this only goes for the sheep-owners. I do not own a sheep, don't you understand? My field is linguistics, not stockbreeding. Grammar is my business and I'm doing research on the structure of the compound-complex sentence and subject-verb relations, do you understand? "The ploughman ploughs." Who ploughs? The ploughman does. So the ploughman is the subject. It shows the doer of action in a sentence. "The ploughman ploughs" and there are no sheep – only a ploughman. Understand? No sheep.

BUREAUCRAT: "The ploughman ploughs", and you pay the tax.

ZHORO: I can't stand this any longer. He does not understand human speech. I'll let him have one (*He goes for the BUREAUCRAT.*)

EUGENE: Wait a minute! Hold it! (*Holds him back.*) Hold it, man, hold it.

ZHORO (*Struggling*): I'll give him a tax! Up his ass!

BUREAUCRAT: For assault and battery of an official in discharge of his duties, you're get at least three years in the can.

ZHORO (*Still grappling with EUGENE*): Who said assault and battery? I want to murder you!

EUGENE (*Unable to hold him back*): Stop it, I tell you! Do you hear me?

BUREAUCRAT: Plus another three for bearing false witness – six altogether.

ZHORO: What do you mean "False witness?" Now just where do you see a false witness?

BUREAUCRAT: There they are before me – two false witnesses!

EUGENE: I'll let him loose on you!

BUREAUCRAT: So you want everybody to pay their taxes except you, is that it?

There is a pause, which is made use of by the FARMER with the skin.

SECOND FARMER: So, there was this horse cart, and a motorcycle with a sidecar.

The FARMER is pushed aside by IVAN ANTONOV. He stands in front of the BUREAUCRAT.

IVAN ANTONOV: I want you to feel it. (*He takes his jacket off.*)

BUREAUCRAT: I don't wish to.

IVAN ANTONOV: You just feel it.

BUREAUCRAT: I haven't been appointed here to feel things.

IVAN ANTONOV: Never mind, go and feel it. Does it feel like a sheep? Does it say "Sheep" anywhere? Look it over!... Please! Look at the tag! Look in the inside pocket, that's a sheep's favorite place. Check it out, please!

ZHORO (*Still being restrained by EUGENE*): What are you? I'll show you some politeness! Trying to make fools of us. A perjurer, am I?

BUREAUCRAT: I repeat – Get out of this office!

IVAN ANTONOV: Why should I get out! Haven't you read what they say in the papers? Haven't you read all those speeches, essays, documents that say that I – the individual human being – am in the center of everything. You can't treat a human being like that. Haven't you read all this?

BUREAUCRAT: The papers have never mentioned you personally.

IVAN ANTONOV: So what if they haven't written about me personally. Maybe they will? Or maybe they have me in mind? What the hell does it matter what the papers say?

BUREAUCRAT: Absolutely not! They're minding their business and I'm minding mine.

EUGENE: The trouble is you're not, that's the point. You're driving people crazy.

IVAN ANTONOV: You haven't even descended from the apes, like everyone else, but from a document! From a report. From a note in a column. And your children are little documents, too! And they crumple; crumple!

ZHORO (*Surging forward*): He'll crumple you, too! And you will! You'll see he will!

EUGENE: Zhoro, take it easy. He hasn't ascended; he hasn't descended at all; and never will...

BUREAUCRAT: I'll call the police!...

IVAN ANTONOV: We'll call the police!

BUREAUCRAT: Police!

The three exit.

CURTAIN

SCENE FIVE

The friends are excitedly, angrily, walking down the corridor.

ZHORO: Let's go to his boss. He'll tell him how to treat people!...

Suddenly a man appears in a dark suit and a tie. He looks at IVAN ANTONOV; the others have gone on.

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: Why can't I remember you?

IVAN ANTONOV: Because we don't know each other, do we?

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: Have you got a hot plate; have you got one?

IVAN ANTONOV: No. Why?

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: You all say so. But we'll see about that. (*Goes away.*)

EUGENE (*Who has come back*): A friend of yours?

IVAN ANTONOV: Are you kidding? I think he needs some time off – he asked me if I had an electric hot plate.

ZHORO: Don't confess. We've got enough on our hands with that sheep.

CURTAIN

SCENE SIX

After a lot of running around the three appear in front of a door.

IVAN ANTONOV: We'll go in and ask; it can't go on like this.

EUGENE: I've gone up and down those stairs so many times, I feel I've climbed the Matterhorn.

ZHORO: Let's go. What are we waiting for? Let's ask someone.

Inside a melancholy violin is playing. A calendar from 1955. A dying potted flower, covered in dust, stands in the corner. The music emanating from the loudspeaker is heart-rending. Behind the desk is a greying man peeling an apple.

IVAN ANTONOV: Excuse us for disturbing you. But we need some advice.

ZHORO: We want to get to the seventh floor.

EUGENE: To the Executive Director's office.

IVAN ANTONOV: But the stairs only go up to the third floor, and they end there. From behind the wall you can hear the noise of typewriters, laughter; there must be people working there...

EUGENE: We can't find any other staircase. This is the only one.

ZHORO: The only one and it's walled up.

IVAN ANTONOV: Would you tell us how to get to the seventh floor?

The BUREAUCRAT shakes his head. He is amazed that there are people who want to go all the way up to the seventh floor. Like going to the moon.

ZHORO: Did he say anything?

EUGENE: He didn't say anything. Just shook his head.

IVAN ANTONOV: Maybe he didn't hear us. On account of the Muzak. (*Shouts.*) Why don't you turn it off.

BUREAUCRAT (*Slowly shaking his head*): It can't be done.

IVAN ANTONOV: Why can't it be done?

BUREAUCRAT: It is centrally controlled.

IVAN ANTONOV: What do you mean "centrally?"

BUREAUCRAT: Like central heating.

IVAN ANTONOV: And it's on all day?

BUREAUCRAT: It's been on since 1955.

EUGENE: Without interruption?

BUREAUCRAT: Without interruption.

IVAN ANTONOV: And it doesn't bother you?

BUREAUCRAT: One gets used to everything.

IVAN ANTONOV: Well, we're trying to get to the seventh floor.

BUREAUCRAT: I heard.

IVAN ANTONOV: You can't go by the stairs because they've been walled up. There must be some other way. Could you please tell us how?

BUREAUCRAT: I don't know.

IVAN ANTONOV: How could that be? You work here, don't you?

BUREAUCRAT: Ever since 1960.

ZHORO: How do you go up?

BUREAUCRAT: I've never been to the seventh floor.

IVAN ANTONOV: How is that possible? Haven't you ever wanted to go up... and see... Haven't you ever been called up by your superiors?

BUREAUCRAT (*Shaking his head*): No.

IVAN ANTONOV: But men have reached the Moon. They'll be soon going to Mars.

BUREAUCRAT: So I heard. Crazy people.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Glances at his friends*): Excuse us for troubling you.

The three exit, but IVAN returns. There is something on his mind. He jumps on a chair and turns off the Muzak. The music stops. IVAN looks at the BUREAUCRAT.

BUREAUCRAT: My colleague, who retired in 1960, always said it couldn't be turned off. He told me it was centrally controlled.

IVAN ANTONOV: Like central heating?

BUREAUCRAT: Like central heating.

IVAN ANTONOV: And for fifteen years you never bothered to see for yourself if that was true or not. You never climbed on a chair and reached out your hand... For fifteen years you've slept here! Like in a cobweb; scraping violins! Music! You'll start rotting here. Some reorganization ought to be done to flush all of you out, such garbage!... (*Turns to leave.*)

BUREAUCRAT: And what if it comes.

IVAN goes out. The BUREAUCRAT who is peeling his apple, stands and approaches the audience, still peeling his apple.

BUREAUCRAT: I've been working here for fifteen years. During that time endless reorganizations have been carried out; endless changes of heads of department; new styles and methods of work and new furniture was bought... but I survived. And I will be around for a long time to come! Do you know why? It's really very simple; even children know the answer: when you play a war game, there is only one commanding officer, the rest are just common soldiers. All the troubles in the world come from the fact that no one is willing to play the part of the common soldier. Well, good, I agreed to play the common soldier; let the others fight over who should give the orders. While you're fighting, life goes on. This is an endless game and I am always the winner. I'm telling you all this because that man, too, (*he points toward the door through which IVAN left*) is a comet. Through the years my colleagues flashed across the sky like comets, thinking they'd burn for as long as they lived. They were forever trying to

change things, but after a year or two they burned themselves out and all that remained was the smell of smoke in the corridors... They all wanted to change the world, they all wished to be Columbuses, Einsteins, Galileos... And what happened? They aren't around any more. But I'm here. And do you know why I will still be here? It's because I don't want to change anything. And that man (*points again to the door*) is burning bright. Let him keep on burning. I can already detect the smell of smoke in the air.

CURTAIN

SCENE SEVEN

IVAN is with the HANGING MAN, who is weighed down by clocks and meters, needles are producing all sorts of graphs, systems are on – they are all recording the work of the heart, the brain, and all the rest of the organs.

IVAN ANTONOV: How's it going? How are you feeling? What's all this?

HANGING MAN: They're recording. Every movement. Every shudder, every heartbeat, every sigh... That's medicine. It registers everything.

IVAN ANTONOV: They'll register it; they register everything. We rank first in the world in registering things; every outrage is registered and everyone gets to know about it. It's only that no one comes to help you out when you're in an elevator. What do they get out of all this research?

HANGING MAN: I don't need it; everything's done for the people. I'm the first one to be left hanging like this since Yuri Gagarin. These tests are going to help all those who in the future will be left hanging, like me.

IVAN ANTONOV: If they had kept the elevator in good working order, there wouldn't have been any need for tests. Now thanks to you at least five researchers will be getting their doctorates while you'll be left hanging in the elevator.

HANGING MAN: You're wrong. I'm hanging here for the sake of mankind.

IVAN ANTONOV: Mankind should have taken better care of the elevators. I'm really surprised at your fortitude. And you speak so calmly about it all, even with a note of pride!

HANGING MAN: Man is capable of everything. The papers write about that all the time.

IVAN ANTONOV: Yes. I'd forgotten you received newspapers.

ZHORO and EUGENE enter.

EUGENE: Where in hell did you go to? We've been looking for you all over the place.

ZHORO: Well, anyway, there's no getting to the seventh floor. No matter where we went, there was no way.

HANGING MAN: They used to take the elevator, before it broke down.

IVAN ANTONOV: And now?

HANGING MAN: To get to the seventh floor, you have to go down to the ground floor, go out of this building and enter the office building next door.

ZHORO: Whatever do we need to go there for?

HANGING MAN: From their sixth floor you can get back into our building. Through the Planning Department. They opened a door in the wall, temporarily, until they get the elevator fixed. I'm not sure they'll let you through, but there's no harm in trying. Be nice to the porter; everything actually depends on him – don't get him mad – be sure to take your hat off to him, and should the question arise: you barely got through third grade.

EUGENE: Does he want something in an envelope, too?

HANGING MAN: The crucial point is one's education. Under no circumstances admit that you have more than third grade. Otherwise he won't let you through.

The three exit. The HANGING MAN sits in his elevator. There is silence. The machines are working. The HANGING MAN is studying his English lessons. Immediately after the three exit, the HEAD OF DEPARTMENT enters. He has got something on his mind. He carries two hot plates in his hands.

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: Why can't I remember what department he was in? Where did he work? In "Aquatic Fowls?" No. I know everyone there. Where did he work? Why can't I remember?...

By this time IVAN ANTONOV, ZHORO and EUGENE return. The HEAD OF DEPARTMENT buttonholes IVAN ANTONOV, who enters first.

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: Were you instructed?

IVAN ANTONOV: What? Are you talking to me?

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: Were you instructed?

IVAN ANTONOV: No. What kind of instruction?

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT (*Satisfied*): You'll get yours for this. (*To ZHORO, who comes in.*) And you haven't either? (*To EUGENE who is now coming in.*) I've got my eye on you, too... (*Exits.*)

ZHORO: A friend of yours? Repairs hot plates, I take it.

EUGENE: Beats me. I can't figure him out.

IVAN ANTONOV: I've never seen him in my life. Something loose up there.

ZHORO: Unlike us, who are perfectly sane. Thriving. Magnificent prospects opening up before us. Running up and down these corridors is driving me crazy.

HANGING MAN (*Cutting in from the elevator*): So he didn't let you in, huh?

ZHORO: Well, what did you expect, when Ivan tells the peckerhead that he's from Sofia University... "I teach at the University," he blared out.

IVAN ANTONOV: Why not, is it a crime? He asked me if I could understand Bulgarian, and you want me to keep quiet... just because he never made it past third grade.

ZHORO: So what? Because I can't teach at the university, I'm garbage. Because we don't teach, we're a bunch of dogs. No matter where we go: I'm at the university; I teach at the university – so now we'll be shagging our asses here all day. If you had told him you were just learning the alphabet we'd have been through by now.

HANGING MAN: Wait a minute. I understand; you want to get to the seventh floor. But you're not approaching it right. I know how things are done around here.

EUGENE: Well, how?

HANGING MAN: The seventh is too high up. You've got to get there by stages – first, second, third... That's how it is here.

ZHORO: Well, let's move our butts. I'm on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

CURTAIN

SCENE EIGHT

Two desks. Flowers in empty tin cans. Two bureaucrats – male and female. The male keeps stealing furtive glances at himself in a little mirror. She is working at something. Suddenly her colleague jumps to his feet, knocking his chair over and dashes to a filing cabinet. He feverishly fumbles in his pocket for a key with which he unlocks it. The door slides open with a crash. He bends over hurriedly and ... He pours coffee into two coffee-cups.

BUREAUCRAT: Just a little more and... it would have boiled over... Help yourself... (*He serves his colleague's cup.*) That's what I call a hot plate, not like the old one – turn it on – and your coffee's perking... (*Drinks with relish.*) Wonderful... Marvelous coffee... you're just not adventurous enough... If a person doesn't experiment a bit his life's an empty bucket... Let yourself go, Dermendzhieva... Don't give in... Anyhow I've got a fire-extinguisher in the strong box... I've taken all precautions... Dermendzhieva, I've got a funny suspicion that you stick close to the Ten Commandments. (*Laughs at his own joke.*)

ZHORO rushes into the room. The BUREAUCRAT immediately covers his coffee with a folder. DERMENDZHIEVA's cup of coffee remains untouched before her.

ZHORO: Good afternoon.

BUREAUCRAT: Good afternoon. Good afternoon. What can we do for you?

ZHORO: It's about Ivan Antonov.

BUREAUCRAT: The linguist?

ZHORO: Yes.

BUREAUCRAT: You're doing research in the field of the compound-complex sentence.

ZHORO: Yes.

BUREAUCRAT: But you bought a suede jacket? With hairs? You had to have it shorn a bit?

ZHORO: Exactly so.

BUREAUCRAT: Now they want you to pay a sheep tax. Only a few days ago you were a normal citizen, but today they're convinced you're hiding a sheep.

ZHORO: That's right.

BUREAUCRAT: But you aren't hiding anything?

ZHORO: He's not hiding anything. I've known him since he was a kid. He's never had any dealings with sheep. All day long he reads books.

BUREAUCRAT (*Mechanically*): Yes. Yes. A book is a window to the world. I understand... Who's that?

At that moment EUGENE and IVAN ANTONOV enter like the wind.

EUGENE: He can't stand sheep. His system rejects them – an allergy.

IVAN ANTONOV: It's a mistake, it's some kind of a misunderstanding, do you understand? The trouble is no one will believe me.

BUREAUCRAT (*To ZHORO*): And who are these comrades?

EUGENE: His friends.

BUREAUCRAT: Whose? Whose friends?

EUGENE: His. Ivan Antonov's. He grew up before our very eyes. If he'd had a sheep, we would have noticed.

BUREAUCRAT (*After a pause he understands the situation*): Now look here, Antonov. You are the Antonov, aren't you?

IVAN ANTONOV: Yes.

BUREAUCRAT: Yes. Well, you see, Antonov, do you have any idea, however scanty, about the size and state of this country's stock breeding?

IVAN ANTONOV: I don't, my life has avoided this area of our country's activities.

BUREAUCRAT (*Taking himself and the issue very seriously*): We have a serious problem, Antonov. We must try earnestly to further increase the number of our livestock... Make better use of grazing lands, the forage problems, the dwindling labor force – the massive migration to the urban areas has left us without any people ... There's nobody to work the land .. .

IVAN ANTONOV: I understand.

BUREAUCRAT: We import very expensive breeds from abroad... We're experimenting with the triple-milking method... Naturally, our successes are far greater than our failures. It wasn't so long ago that the average yield of one sheep on the average was 28 liters per annum... We have now reached 67 liters. Our sheep-breeders today are, on the average, people with a high school education. Some go to night school... But... still our problems have not been dispelled. There is yet a great deal to be done, a great deal. We are now at a most critical stage – will we have stock farming in this country or will we not... Do you understand the magnitude of the situation?

IVAN ANTONOV: You see we don't seem to understand one another. I'm here in regard to a suede jacket. Do you follow me? For which I'm supposed to pay a tax on...

BUREAUCRAT (*Disenchanted*): You are an intelligent person... don't go on like that... There is no need for us to repeat the errors of the past, when we underrated the mass basis of stock breeding and slaughtered all our cattle in order to narrow the difference between town and country.

IVAN ANTONOV: Maybe I'm intelligent, but somehow I still don't understand. I fail to see the link between myself and the so-called broad-based stock breeding. I'm here in regard to a different matter.

BUREAUCRAT: The matter is that at this particular moment every single sheep matters. Even if one happens to have just one. We don't have the right to wipe away a single sheep with a stroke of the pen. We do not hesitate to state that we depend on your sheep and she is included in the national statistics.

IVAN ANTONOV: My sheep...?

ZHORO: His?

EUGENE: Ivan Antonov's sheep?

BUREAUCRAT: Yours. It has already been computed how much milk she will yield, the quantity of wool she will give, and the amount of meat she will eventually supply the market with. We're counting on that sheep.

IVAN ANTONOV: You've worked all that out!

BUREAUCRAT: The children are waiting for their milk, Antonov. Your child, my child, their children... (*Pointing to ZHORO and EUGENE.*) Will you deprive them of it?

IVAN ANTONOV: Deprive them of what?

ZHORO: Wait, wait, what children are you talking about?

BUREAUCRAT: At this critical moment each one of us must give all he has.

IVAN ANTONOV: And my all is a sheep?

BUREAUCRAT: I know. I know it's difficult. The conditions for rearing a sheep in a city are a real hell. In our time of need, we've received a book. (*Shows it.*) A chemical method for shearing sheep, really interesting news. All you do is add a bit of cyclophosphamide to the animal's diet. Within six days the entire fleece is shed!!

IVAN ANTONOV: This is unbelievable!

BUREAUCRAT: It's been proved to be absolutely harmless for the animals and does not damage the wool. It has already been tried out on rabbits with wonderful results. Do you have any rabbits?

IVAN thinks about this suggestion of the BUREAUCRAT.

ZHORO: No! No! No!

BUREAUCRAT: Just one sheep. A pity! The only problem is that after shedding their fleeces the sheep are absolutely bare and they have to be kept warm for three weeks. But that is no longer much of a problem because they've already settled the legal aspect for remuneration to people who will tend their private stock.

ZHORO: So that problem's been solved finally?

BUREAUCRAT: It has.

ZHORO: That means that a man can now legally hire somebody to graze his lone sheep in the public garden opposite the university, while he's lecturing?

BUREAUCRAT: Naturally.

IVAN ANTONOV: So I can go out and see it during my break?

EUGENE: This is really a great breakthrough. But will they issue a raincoat, too?

ZHORO: A portable radio?

IVAN ANTONOV: Well, I can hire an old shepherd and they'll give him a raincoat and a portable radio. And now with the wonderful new handbook on chemical shearing, all I need now is to get myself a sheep. I'll do my damndest to get one and help my country out.

BUREAUCRAT: This sort of behavior does not become you, Antonov. You're an intelligent man. You should be proud of your sheep, instead of constantly trying to hide it.

IVAN ANTONOV: I am proud of it. I am proud. But I don't have one.

BUREAUCRAT: Well, let's suppose you don't have a sheep. It's your duty to buy one and keep it. I explained about the migration to the cities, about the fields, the highland pasture complexes, the mistakes of the past... Here every citizen can

show his public spirit and public maturity. And you, a person who already has a sheep – I'm simply amazed! You teach children! University students! A legitimate question arises – What exactly is it you teach them? Not too pleasant. Not pleasant at all. It's getting to look very bad. And these two otherwise nice young people have come along with you... You have taken a dangerous road. You claim he has no sheep? Maybe you're guilty of raising illegal sheep? Maybe you're engaged in the illegal sale of dairy products?

ZHORO: This man wants to have three people hanged. Innocent people.

BUREAUCRAT: And I will see you hang, too.

The three exit.

DERMENDZHIEVA (*Quietly*): Didn't you understand that he hasn't got a sheep!

BUREAUCRAT (*Dumbfounded*): What!?

DERMENDZHIEVA: He hasn't got a sheep.

BUREAUCRAT: Dermendzhieva, you talked... But did you hear what you said?

DERMENDZHIEVA: Yes, I said he hasn't got a sheep; one can see that at once.

BUREAUCRAT: No sheep? Dermendzhieva, are you all right?

DERMENDZHIEVA: I'm quite all right.

BUREAUCRAT: But why are you talking like that.

DERMENDZHIEVA: In my opinion there is nothing to talk about; that error just has to be corrected.

BUREAUCRAT: Why do you keep repeating "that error?" "Error?" Who made an error? Why on earth should it be an error? And what makes you so sure he's got no sheep?

DERMENDZHIEVA: I simply believe him.

BUREAUCRAT: She simply believes him! We don't work in a church. Of what use can your belief be to me? We've double-checked the files. And they say he has a sheep. His signature in black and white and his passport number. The same. And you talk to me about believing.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Why do we keep talking about having to believe in people, when nobody believes anybody?

BUREAUCRAT: Are you for real? She's been working here for so many years, quiet, timid, you never hear her voice and suddenly... Dermendzhieva, why don't you go out and get some fresh air? What do you say, Dermendzhieva?

DERMENDZHIEVA: Don't worry about me? Nothing's wrong with me. (*With a bitter smile.*) A person keeps silent for so many years and then, when one day you speak your mind, they say you've gone mad.

BUREAUCRAT: Dermendzhieva! Dermendzhieva! Please!

DERMENDZHIEVA: The day the fish speak out must surely be regarded as a

remarkable event, don't you think? If only because they're expected to keep silent.

BUREAUCRAT: So that's how it is, Dermendzhieva? Would you believe it, I could have sworn there was something wrong with you.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Of course, there's something wrong with me. If you had more brains, you would have noticed it long ago – I haven't been well all these years. I was right there in front of your eyes.

BUREAUCRAT: I have a hunch you're going to get even worse.

DERMENDZHIEVA: You know the joke: "If you're sixty and you wake up one morning and nothing hurts – you're dead." In a slightly different sense this goes for all of us, not just the sixty-year-olds.

BUREAUCRAT: I much prefer not feeling any pain neither before nor after sixty. And what's more, if I were you, I wouldn't start telling funny stories during office hours in front of strangers.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Well, speaking of jokes, your little speech on stockbreeding was the funniest I've ever heard.

BUREAUCRAT: Dermendzhieva, I think you're overstepping all boundaries.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Everyone has to overstep some boundary sooner or later. Today it had to be me.

BUREAUCRAT: You cannot pass the bounds with impunity, Dermendzhieva!...

DERMENDZHIEVA (*Jokingly*): You talk like a man who has gone beyond hundreds of boundaries.

BUREAUCRAT: Rather like a man who has witnessed what happens afterwards.

DERMENDZHIEVA: I'm sick of being a witness! We've gotten to be too many witnesses. Sometimes I get the feeling I'm at a stadium. I want to participate.

BUREAUCRAT: What in, Dermendzhieva?

DERMENDZHIEVA: Well, maybe I'll buy a sheep. I want to go look for one.

BUREAUCRAT: You're joking!

DERMENDZHIEVA: No, I'm going off with them. Because I'm sure you won't do a thing to solve the problem. I know you.

BUREAUCRAT: Going off with them? You're going to be a Trojan horse? Will you turn against your own colleagues?

DERMENDZHIEVA: Right on!

BUREAUCRAT: "The monastery is too narrow for my soul..." go on, go, Dermendzhieva, "the road is dangerous but glorious", as the poet says. Anyway, should it prove difficult to find a job, just call in, we might find something for you... after all, we are human.

DERMENDZHIEVA: I thank you in advance.

She exits. A crowded little room, like a coffee-house. The three friends are standing at the bar

and drinking coffee. DERMENDZHIEVA enters.

DERMENDZHIEVA: I'm going with you. It's because he'll never do a thing to solve your problem, I know him too well.

ZHORO: All we need is a lady for company. You must be out of your mind! Better go back before it's too late!

DERMENDZHIEVA: I must have been out of my mind to have stayed there that long.

EUGENE: No, seriously; think it over. You've worked here. This isn't a bad job.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Think this over?... You know how many years I've been thinking it over?... One half of my life is gone, the years are going by, I don't even remember how many... In the morning you're awakened by the howling of your neighbor's child; they're beating it for something, but the real reason is too many people are cramped in a small apartment and they are always getting in each other's way; then in the streetcar, it's like everybody getting a death-hold on each other; the porter tells you off for being a couple of minutes late; the greasy cheesecake you're munching on, as you run upstairs, is cold like a stone, but you still eat it; you furtively thumb through *Cosmopolitan*, water the flowers, take a deep breath and you begin – letters, routine... you write, you type, you keep quiet, and when you look up to stare out of the window, you think you see doves flying around, and then, without wanting to, you start moving your arms, you give a few flaps and you let them down and you're buried in papers again... And outside it's beginning to snow, it's covering the leaves, you have a feeling that only yesterday it was spring, and you couldn't fall asleep for hours during the warm nights, you'd been waiting for something to happen, for someone to come... And before you know it, it's spring again, and then summer slips away through your fingers, and the years go by... They lie to you in the street, they lie to you over a cup of coffee, they take you out to the movies, but nobody speaks to you, nobody listens to you... and the only hand that reaches out is trying to make a pass at you... Your colleague wants to go to bed with you, but he hasn't got a thing that attracts you; he's neither handsome, nor smart, nor a complete idiot, either – nothing special – he's just undistinguished and horrible; he wears black socks, and the most he can do is to suggest listening to some records. But he hasn't got a single record... Is that life, I ask you? Is that the way everybody lives? Lunch in the cafeteria, meat and potatoes, "Did you hear – Ivanov's wife is getting it on with her dentist!" Then rice pudding and "They're selling designer shoes there, but too expensive!" "Expensive, very expensive, but I'll tell you that Georgiev is a real loser; I just wonder how he could hold onto his job for so long..." And then it's letters again, routine, then the battle of the streetcar again. Year in, year out, life goes by, and I never became a Marie Curie, or a

Sophia Loren, or even a captain of a ship. As a child I wished I could be a bird... And I always dreamed I was flying. Flying, flying... (*Pause*) And here you're telling me to go back. Thanks. No more of that for me. If someone wants my job, good luck! The pay is decent, the people are kind, the work – peaceful. Any applicants? If there are any, let them apply; the position is vacant.

The three remain silent. DERMENDZHIEVA looks at them and smiles guiltily.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Don't be frightened; I usually keep silent. But now, I'm ready to erupt. Still once every ten years, that's not too often. Once in ten years – that's just about right.

CURTAIN

SCENE NINE

The four continue their wanderings through the building. They stop before a door.

DERMENDZHIEVA: This is it. It's here. The man is intelligent and he's bound to understand.

EUGENE: That's the type that gives me the creeps.

IVAN ANTONOV: In we go then. (*They enter.*)

A little child is happily playing on the floor, which is covered with rugs. There is a kitchen range with several boiling pots on it. An old-fashioned bedstead, chairs, a wardrobe, a television set, a refrigerator, family pictures on the walls, a calendar, a table with a colored table cloth, a salt and pepper set, and an oil and vinegar set. A woman in an apron is peeling potatoes – an endearing family ritual.

HOUSEWIFE: Good morning. Come in... come in... (*Invites them to sit down.*) You'll have to sit on the bed... sit down, sit down... Please excuse the way things are; a bit cramped, since we've only got one room. I was just in the middle of peeling potatoes, for the lamb stew... (*Takes her apron off.*) Mircho, treat our guests to...

The guests are completely befuddled. The child goes to the wardrobe, takes out a box of chocolates, hands it round, and puts it back in the wardrobe; then goes back to his little truck on the floor. An uneasy silence follows. The guests don't quite know what to do.

HOUSEWIFE: Looks like the weather's taken a turn.

EUGENE: Getting colder.

IVAN ANTONOV: Winter's on its way...

ZHORO: Yes. The leaves have fallen... (*Then elucidates.*) from the trees.

HOUSEWIFE: About this time last year it was very wet...

IVAN ANTONOV: We certainly had a good deal of rain last year. (*Silence; Pause*)

DERMENDZHIEVA (*Trying to make conversation*): He's awfully sweet. Hi, Sonny, what's your name? ("*Sonny*" takes no notice.)

HOUSEWIFE (*Close to tears*): Unofficially, Tsvetomir.

DERMENDZHIEVA: What do you mean, "unofficially?" And officially?

HOUSEWIFE: Officially he hasn't got a name.

IVAN ANTONOV: What do you mean? Doesn't he have one?

HOUSEWIFE: They refused to register him under that name. It's not in the books.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Refused? What kind of books?

HOUSEWIFE: The place where they register the newborn children they've got this list of the nicest Bulgarian names. You've got to choose a name out of that list. Otherwise they won't put his name down in the book. But we had already christened him while he was in the maternity ward, and how could we change it? How I begged them – but no way. He's not in the books. So the child never got a name. Officially. He isn't anywhere in their books – as if he didn't exist.

DERMENDZHIEVA: I'm awfully sorry... What can we do...

HOUSEWIFE: Oh, it's all right. I'm already used to it.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Didn't a certain Yanakiev use to work in this room? Wasn't this his department?

HOUSEWIFE: We've been livin' here for five years, and I don't know anyone by the name of Yanakiev. Must have worked here before we came.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Five years? You've lived here?!

HOUSEWIFE (*Explains everything calmly*): Yes. They tore down our house, because they had to widen the street. And they were going to give us somewhere else to live, you know the housing shortage and there are so many waiting on the list. They could never find us a decent place, because no matter what houses they offered, they were going to be pulled down after two or three weeks, and they kept looking for another one. They're doing a lot of this widening of streets nowadays. And so we've been living on the road from one room to another. But when our little boy was born, we couldn't keep moving from one place to another so we came here and waited in front of this door. They couldn't put us off. So they finally let us have this room.

IVAN ANTONOV: But this is an office building. How can you live in it?

HOUSEWIFE: We got used to it. There's even some good points about it. If you need a paper to prove something or other, it's right under your nose. Then when I

go shopping, the clerks in the offices next door come and stir the food that's cooking so it won't burn, and they keep an eye on the little kid; I've got very good neighbors; I can't complain... My husband took a longer while to get used to things; he's just that kind, but he's happy enough now... I guess you could say we're all happy. That Yanakiev, is he sort of dark-haired, not too tall... and he keeps blinking like that... Well, he's upstairs, in the room right above ours. He came down here once because he said he'd smelled mint, said he loved it, ever since he was a kid... I was cooking beans, and I gave him a helping. Won't you all stay for lunch? That lamb stew's almost done.

IVAN ANTONOV: No thank you. We really have to see Yanakiev.

HOUSEWIFE: Well, if you decide, it'll be ready in no time...

EUGENE, DERMENDZHIEVA and IVAN ANTONOV exit. ZHORO, who in the meanwhile has been playing on the floor with MIRCHO and his truck, stays behind to play, somehow unnoticed by the others. Seconds later IVAN returns.

IVAN ANTONOV: Come on, man!

ZHORO: I'm staying.

IVAN ANTONOV: What do you mean – staying?

ZHORO: I love lamb stew. I've loved it ever since I was a kid. It's my favorite dish.

IVAN ANTONOV: I thought we were all going to see Yanakiev?

ZHORO: I'm not going.

IVAN ANTONOV: You're not going. If you're that hungry, we'll wait for you.

ZHORO: No.

IVAN ANTONOV: Zhoro, quit clowning. Aren't we going to tell them the truth, that there isn't any sheep at all? Aren't you going to come with us?

ZHORO: I'm tired. Tired of walking around and proving, kicking up a fuss, climbing up and down stairs. I'm simply tired of walking these corridors, chasing after the truth, I don't feel like walking anymore, I'm too dead tired. I'm forty-two, I'm not a young man any longer, and I want to have a family, children, and a wife wearing an apron in our home. Time is going by, while we trudge along these corridors because of a sheep, and nobody knows when we'll manage to get out – if we get out at all. I know, we've been friends since childhood, but I'm only human and I want to live like other people. A man only lives once.

IVAN ANTONOV: Just a little longer... Only one more floor!

ZHORO: And after that one? How many did we do so far? No, I haven't got the strength left to get to the next landing. I don't even care if I do. I'll have some stew, and I'm leaving.

IVAN ANTONOV: You heard, the fellow is supposed to be intelligent; he's sure

to understand. You can't leave us half way.

ZHORO: This road has no ending. I don't feel like going on until I drop from exhaustion. Life is going by and I want to live like a human.

IVAN ANTONOV: Yes, but what kind of a human? That's what it's all about.

ZHORO: An ordinary human. The most ordinary one. Is it my fault that you bought yourself a suede jacket? You chase after your truth and I'll chase after mine. I'm no hero and I don't want to be any Giordano Bruno. I want to be just an ordinary man. I've got a right to that.

IVAN ANTONOV: One day you may get a summons. What will you do then?

ZHORO: Leave me alone. (*Sits on bed.*)

IVAN ANTONOV: I'm no hero, either. I'm no Giordano Bruno. But the thing is they can't treat people like this. There's no way out: we run round and round, we try to convince people, we explain, we swear we're telling the truth – but nothing. Nothing, thin air, vacuum! This means that all these years you've slaved away at your work, a dissertation, piles of books, sensitivity, principles, your whole life is absolutely meaningless; it can be cancelled out with the stroke of a pen. All because a few words have been written down somewhere! And it turns out that these few words can undo a person's whole life. And what about the truth? And we're helpless to do anything whatsoever. No, I refuse to believe that. I'll never believe that. And you won't either. Don't you see? You can't accept it.

Otherwise tomorrow, as we look at ourselves in the mirror, we might suddenly hear ourselves bleating. Come on, get up... Let's go, come on! You hear me, Zhoró?

ZHORO: I'm tired.

IVAN ANTONOV looks at him, then turns and looks at the audience. The HOUSEWIFE also looks at the audience and the little child also looks. ZHORO does the same. The lights in the hall go up. When it is quite bright in the auditorium, IVAN ANTONOV exits.

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

The HANGING MAN is sulking in the elevator. Below his wife is seated on her bag. She is silent. It's obvious that something is wrong.

HANGING MAN: You're driving me crazy! Why don't you say something?

WIFE: Sometimes it's better to say nothing than to speak.

HANGING MAN: Enough of that oriental wisdom. You see how things are, don't you?... Well, say something!... Did he marry the girl?

WIFE: No.

HANGING MAN: What is it then?

WIFE: They want to let you go.

HANGING MAN: Me? What for?

WIFE: For absenteeism from work.

HANGING MAN: That's cynical. How am I supposed to get there? Are these people having fun at my expense? They know damn well, that I'm in this elevator.

WIFE: They said: "Well, he can stay in that elevator forever. What guarantee do we have?"

HANGING MAN: Do they think that I'm enjoying it in this elevator? This is an ordeal. I'm suffering... I'm helping them experiment. How dare they?

WIFE: They said: "That may well be so, but one way or another, he's not at work. He seems to be hanging there. It's not our fault that the elevator jammed. Work is work. It waits for no man."

HANGING MAN: But I'm going to get out; I can't hang here forever. Didn't you tell them?

WIFE: I told them.

HANGING MAN: Well?

WIFE: They said: "We'll wait another two or three months. If he doesn't get back to work by then..."

HANGING MAN: What?

WIFE: By mutual consent.

HANGING MAN: But I do not consent. So it's not mutual! How can it be mutual if I don't agree?

WIFE: They said: "By that time he'll agree. He has no other choice."

HANGING MAN: Bring me that book – How the Steel Was Tempered.

HANGING MAN begins to think. WIFE is also silent.

CURTAIN

SCENE TWO

Yanakiev's office. The BUREAUCRAT is repairing an old cuckoo-clock; his desk is cluttered with cogs, springs, parts of a clock; tools. IVAN ANTONOV, EUGENE, and DERMENDZHIEVA enter.

IVAN ANTONOV: Good afternoon! Comrade Yanakiev?

BUREAUCRAT: That's right. Come in. Oh-ho, a whole delegation. Come in; come in; sit down. I've been trying to repair this old clock; it's tough work, because it's really old... It can't keep time anymore, but still cuckoos... (*A delicate melody rings out, an old minuet – Mozart. They all listen.*) What do you think? Eighteenth century, Louis XVI... And it can still play... Well, what can I do for you?

IVAN ANTONOV: Well, it's rather complicated...

BUREAUCRAT: And you call this simple? (*Points to the clock.*) Three hundred and seven parts!... Don't be bashful. Out with it, out with it.

EUGENE: We've been all over.

BUREAUCRAT: I'm listening.

IVAN ANTONOV: Can I begin at the beginning?

BUREAUCRAT: Wherever you like.

IVAN ANTONOV: The beginning, when I bought myself a suede jacket...

BUREAUCRAT: Oh! So you're the man with the jacket? I know all about it. The whole thing is ridiculous.

EUGENE: Idiotic.

DERMENDZHIEVA: But still it's quite clear.

BUREAUCRAT: Yes, it's quite clear – you have no sheep. It's simply one stupid mistake.

IVAN ANTONOV: Yes, that's just what it is, just as you say.

BUREAUCRAT: Actually, you didn't have a sheep shorn, just your jacket?

EUGENE: Yes, it was my idea.

DERMENDZHIEVA (*To IVAN*): Remember what I told you!

BUREAUCRAT: But then you were put into the register as a sheep owner.

DERMENDZHIEVA: That's where the error is.

BUREAUCRAT: That's exactly where the error is. You were put into the register by mistake.

IVAN ANTONOV: Precisely.

BUREAUCRAT: All this is as clear as day.

EUGENE: I must be dreaming!

BUREAUCRAT: You do not own a sheep.

IVAN ANTONOV: No, I don't.

BUREAUCRAT: And that's where the luck stops, I'm afraid.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Jumps to his feet, surprised*): I don't follow you!

BUREAUCRAT: The main difficulty stems from the unpleasant fact that you neither own a sheep, nor wish to admit that you own one. Otherwise, we would have solved the problem in five minutes.

IVAN ANTONOV: I don't understand a thing.

BUREAUCRAT: If you owned a sheep, there would be no problem at all – we would have transferred it from one register into another, say a case of foot and mouth disease; we could do whatever you wished.

IVAN ANTONOV: I don't follow you.

EUGENE: Neither do I.

BUREAUCRAT: It's perfectly simple. An error has been committed. Right?

IVAN ANTONOV: That I understand.

BUREAUCRAT: The problem is that nowadays nobody owns up to an error. That's the style. They're prepared to commit five new errors just to make sure the first error is covered up. Do you understand? That's the reason why so many of our plainest errors are still referred to as successes. Absolutely no one will admit to having made an error regarding your jacket. He will swear to its being a sheep; even on the rack he'll swear, even if you make him put it on and you button it up for him... So it's just a waste of time trying to prove that it's a jacket. (*Points to it.*) There are two ways out of this predicament.

IVAN ANTONOV: What are they?

BUREAUCRAT: The first option is to pay the tax. That's the fastest way.

IVAN ANTONOV: That's all I need.

BUREAUCRAT: You don't agree?

IVAN ANTONOV: If I did, I would have paid up long ago.

BUREAUCRAT: You could confess to owning a sheep. Just pretend. We'd at least have something to work on.

IVAN ANTONOV: You mentioned another option?

BUREAUCRAT: The other option is to buy a sheep.

IVAN ANTONOV (*After a pause*): What? Did you say buy a sheep? You dare tell me that that's a way out?

BUREAUCRAT: Listen to me. If you had a sheep, fictitious or otherwise, I could do whatever you wanted. Why don't you buy a sheep? Are you married?

IVAN ANTONOV: What? Ah, no.

BUREAUCRAT: What you need is a sheep. A quiet, humble, trusting little creature. It becomes attached to one very fast. And it deserves one's confidence; not like a dog or a cat, who I can tell you, may have a treacherous trait in their character and claws, and other unpleasant features. A sheep is quite another thing.

It can't hate; isn't vindictive; will forgive anything... If I didn't collect musical clocks I'd buy myself a sheep. With it one doesn't feel lonely; it helps create a special atmosphere in the home; and best of all it can't cause alienation and anxiety. Besides, this animal brings us back to the soil, folklore, our nation's heritage... You'll only appreciate how much we need these things when they're gone. What's more, you'll have a milk factory in your own home, a supply of wholesome milk, cheese, and other dairy products... The genuine natural product, straight from the producer, who is also a close friend in whom you have complete trust... Take my advice and buy yourself a sheep.

IVAN ANTONOV is dazed and unable to utter a sound.

BUREAUCRAT: Buy one, I assure you, if only to save yourself a lot of unpleasantness and spare your nerves. You will also be making it much easier for me to help you. Without a sheep, my hands are tied.

IVAN ANTONOV: So the only way to prove I do not have a sheep is to buy a sheep. Is that it?

BUREAUCRAT: In your case only a sheep can save you. I assure you.

IVAN ANTONOV: Thank you very much, but still I'll try to save myself without a sheep.

BUREAUCRAT (*Sighs*): How young you are!... But do what you want; I was sincerely trying to help you... I was like you at your age – always running, running... How long ago it was... How one changes... (*The clock suddenly goes off and starts playing the minuet, recalling Yanakiev's youth.*)

The three leave the room. EUGENE is the first out. Suddenly turns on IVAN ANTONOV.

EUGENE: Look, why didn't you agree?

IVAN ANTONOV: I can't – tomorrow they'll be telling me to pay duty on a dead elephant.

EUGENE: Just admit that you own a sheep. The man is ready to help you – you'll get out clean out of this mess.

IVAN ANTONOV: No, no, no!...

EUGENE: Look, it's in your best interest. One has to make some compromises, after all. This mess may have repercussions on your career at the University.

IVAN ANTONOV: How am I to accept something which isn't true?

EUGENE: Don't be so naive; this is no time to think of the truth. Think of yourself.

IVAN moves off, EUGENE remains alone. At this very moment the HEAD OF

DEPARTMENT appears; he carries five or six hot plates and several Turkish coffee-makers.

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT (*To IVAN*): Where have you hidden your hot plate?

IVAN ANTONOV: I've got no hot plate.

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: And what do you call these? (*He indicates the hot plates.*) I'll catch you yet; wait till I get my hands on you. (*He exits.*)

IVAN ANTONOV: Who was that? This is the third time we've come across him.

DERMENDZHIEVA: He's the head of the Fire Prevention Brigade, a volunteer from one of the social organizations; an honorary position.

IVAN ANTONOV: And I thought he wasn't all there.

EUGENE: And I think we might as well give up. No sense in hiding it any longer. I see that now. We can't hide it any longer.

IVAN ANTONOV: What are you talking about?

EUGENE: About the sheep.

DERMENDZHIEVA: What sheep?

EUGENE: His

DERMENDZHIEVA: What do you mean his? He's got no sheep.

EUGENE: Yes, he's got a sheep.

IVAN ANTONOV: Hey, have you gone nuts?

EUGENE: No use hiding it any longer.

IVAN ANTONOV: You must be off your rocker! Something's happened to him. Eugene, what's got into you?

DERMENDZHIEVA: Do you have a sheep?

EUGENE: He's had it for years – white as snow. His sheep was quite attached to him. You should hear their conversations... Or see how he ties colored ribbons on her. She goes around in colored ribbons.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Do you have a sheep?

EUGENE: What pet names he calls her... She lies at his feet, gazing up at him with those tender eyes. You wouldn't believe she was a sheep.

DERMENDZHIEVA (*Looking IVAN in the eye*): This means...

EUGENE: He's in love with her. He doesn't consider her an animal, that's why he doesn't want to pay a tax on her. Yet I never expected him to deny her existence completely. But he did. After so many years, after so many things that they went through together. He's given her up.

IVAN ANTONOV: Yes. He's right. I've got a sheep.

EUGENE: You do.

DERMENDZHIEVA: So everything you have been saying is...

IVAN ANTONOV: I thought I could keep her hidden away, but I was wrong. So I gave her up.

DERMENDZHIEVA (*Bitterly*): So I've been made a fool of again... As always.

Once it happens it never quits.

IVAN ANTONOV: I'm sorry.

EUGENE: So you're sorry... But why did you drag us through these halls? Why do you mislead people? Why did you have to get this poor girl involved in your affairs?

IVAN ANTONOV: Something's happened to him because of all this; don't contradict him... Agree with him in everything.

EUGENE: Has something happened to me? Nothing's happened to me. I'm just fed up with your principles. I've had your lofty principles up to here. This has gone on for too many years... You've been flaunting this honesty of yours to my face, as if to say – look at me; I'm high-principled, I'm honest, and I stick to my guns. But you're all spineless little creatures, slimy snails that will reach the top of your fir-tree by crawling and creeping, I can get along without a house, I can rent a room, I can get along any old way, but I will not kowtow to anyone. I will not compromise... And all this as life goes on, he lives his unobtrusive life, this linguist, engrossed in his syntactical structures, pays his rent, eats cheap sandwiches for lunch and never suspects how principled he is. What are you now trying to tell people – that a man can after all live honestly, that one should stick to one's principles, and never sell them down the river. Ha! You sucker! All you need is a sign on your chest: "The New Man – ring twice."

IVAN ANTONOV: There's nothing wrong with him. He's completely normal.

EUGENE: But I don't want to live just anyhow; I want to live well, do you hear? When I was at school I used to study like mad to get my diploma and go on to a university; the teachers gave their A's to others... That guy's mother is the principal of the school; the other guy's father is the director... And the teachers ran out of A's and pluses. And the A quota was centrally distributed. And so I had to turn informer and let them know what was going on in our class. I had to play their games in order to get those damned A's. You got C's, but you weren't obligated to anyone. Even to the teacher... It didn't faze you; just came natural to you. But it impressed me; it impressed all of us. And in spite of everything you managed to get into the university, and through the front door, too. To this day I still wonder how it happened.

IVAN ANTONOV: Pure chance.

EUGENE: You bet it was pure chance. But because you got in your way, you're still an assistant professor, while your colleagues are already department heads. They have neither your talent, nor your brains, but soon they'll be full professors, while you will always remain an assistant professor. And I bet you irritate them too, with your opinions and highminded principles...

IVAN ANTONOV: You're talking like a mind-reader.

EUGENE: I'd say like a realist, as a friend. You'll never have a house like mine,

a woman like mine, a position like mine. And I've got them all.

IVAN ANTONOV: That's perfectly normal – one man has opinions, another has a house.

EUGENE: You're just stupid, plain stupid; you don't understand a thing. You've been chasing truth. Well, have you managed to catch up with it? Did you prove to anyone that your jacket is a jacket? Did anyone believe you, except this naive woman here? Did anyone move a finger to help you? Like Jesus on his way to Golgotha! Only not with a cross, but a leather jacket on his back!...

IVAN ANTONOV: Look here, you leave Dermendzhieva out of this.

EUGENE: That sensitive soul dreamed she was a bird. Flying at night in her dreams, wings outstretched. Dream-birds!

IVAN ANTONOV: Leave her alone!

EUGENE: Oh! Are you ready to fight me?

DERMENDZHIEVA: What made you follow us around?

EUGENE: I thought he'd give up in the end. I wanted to see him give it up. But finally he confirmed what I'd always suspected – he's crazy or pretending to be, one or the other. And that's something I'm not. I know enough not to go against the grain. The intelligent man knows he shouldn't go against the grain, he learns to live with it. You'd do best to pay the tax, go and feed the poor animal – and we all go home.

IVAN ANTONOV: Everyone to his own home?

EUGENE: Everyone to his own home. That's the best thing to do, believe me. After all we've been friends since childhood. Put a ribbon on that sheep and we'll follow behind. We can't walk up and down these corridors all our lives. There's no sense in that... No sense at all!

IVAN ANTONOV: I've always wondered why they were so well informed in the teachers' staff-room.

EUGENE: Our life is half over, Ivan, and you're still eating cheap sandwiches for lunch, walking up the stairs. Wake up, man! Come on, let's go!

IVAN ANTONOV: Yes, let's go!

EUGENE: With the sheep?

IVAN ANTONOV: With the jacket.

IVAN ANTONOV and DERMENDZHIEVA exit. EUGENE stands still for a moment and then goes off in the opposite direction. IVAN ANTONOV and DERMENDZHIEVA continue their quest of the proper department. They get to a door. They knock; no answer. He tries the doorhandle.

IVAN ANTONOV: It's locked.

DERMENDZHIEVA: But he's in there; he's in there. Can't you hear his old

calculator clicking! He's the only one who can really solve the problem; it's his section.

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT appears out of nowhere. He is carrying several hot plates, their cords trailing on the floor.

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: You can knock and knock but he won't open the door. He's saving Venice...

DERMENDZHIEVA: What do you mean – saving Venice?

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: What do I mean! Venice in Italy, Venice with its palazzos, its canals, the pearl of the Adriatic... Do you think there are twenty Venices?

IVAN ANTONOV: And what is he saving it from?

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: From sinking. Venice sinks an inch every year. Within fifty years she will be half-submerged, if they don't do something about it.

DERMENDZHIEVA: So he's saving Venice?

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: He is. Doing his best to prevent it... He's been at it for three years. No use knocking; he won't see anyone.

IVAN ANTONOV: Is he in charge of tax collection?

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: Well, what if he is. If he's in charge of collecting taxes, does that mean he must let Venice sink? Does it? Really, what kind of people are you? You're ready to set the whole office building on fire for your sacred cup of coffee and let Venice drown. How egocentric we've become. So long as we feel comfortable and we can brew our secret coffee on a hot plate and then hide it in the filing cabinets, everything is just fine, and the world can just go and sink. I'll get hold of your hot plate, too; you can't hide it from me.

IVAN ANTONOV: I don't doubt that you will get hold of it. I'm sure you will.

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: This place is full of irresponsible people. (*To DERMENDZHIEVA*) And I'll get yours, too.

DERMENDZHIEVA: You've already taken mine away.

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: Fire doesn't play favorites. Once it starts, everything goes on burning, friends, acquaintances, you can't play with fire.

IVAN ANTONOV: That's very true.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Fire will burn those irresponsible people.

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: It certainly will burn them – one way or another.

He goes past them and enters his room. He shudders and plugs in all of his hot plates.

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: This room is one big ice-box. The radiators haven't

been repaired for five years now. I'm fed up with collecting hot plates. I've had enough of playing the social-minded activist... All because nobody will lift a finger to get the central heating running. (*These last few words he pronounces over the hot plates which have heated up, and he has softened a bit since getting warmed up by the hot plates.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE THREE

The elevator. The HANGING MAN is eating straight from a can. Enter his Wife and Son.

WIFE: "Good morning, Dad." Go on!

SON: Good morning, Dad.

They both look up.

HANGING MAN: Oh, is that you? Just a minute. (*Puts the can down, takes off his napkin.*) So, well now, how are things going? Your studies going well?

SON: Not bad.

HANGING MAN: What do you think of this elevator? Think you could fix it?

SON: Dunno. We haven't covered this one yet.

HANGING MAN: You should read foreign scientific journals too. This antique may not figure in your textbooks at all. They don't make them anymore.

WIFE: He does read; I can say that for him.

HANGING MAN: What year was your textbook published?

SON: Well, don't remember, could be '73.

HANGING MAN: You should remember everything. In your field the smallest detail could have fatal consequences.

WIFE: He's got a good memory; I can say that for him.

HANGING MAN: He must remember everything, know everything, and be able to do everything. You're not like the others – your father is stuck in an elevator.

WIFE: He'll do all right.

SON: You're right, Dad.

HANGING MAN: Let me see your report card. (*Lowers the basket.*)

Mother and son look at each other. The son takes his report card out of his pocket and puts it in the basket. The father hauls it up.

HANGING MAN: Well, bravo; bravo. Your father is hung up in this cage for

months, and you come home with D's.

WIFE: He's got A's too.

HANGING MAN: In Literature. What good is an A in Literature? Is he aiming to become a poet, or figuring out a way to get his father out of an elevator?

WIFE: But if the child has a literary bent...

HANGING MAN: I have a literary bent, too. But I'm hanging in an elevator. Tomorrow if you get stuck in an elevator, I'll ask you what your literary bent will buy you.

SON: You only think of yourself.

HANGING MAN: What? You dare to speak to your father like that?

SON: Other kids have fathers, too, and what kind of fathers... All you do is hang there...

HANGING MAN (*Icily*): Just what do you mean by that?

SON: What I mean is that there's no special paragraph for hanging fathers in elevators to get you into a university. Or when they allot new apartments either.

WIFE (*Scared*): He's doing a lot of reading, quite a lot.

HANGING MAN: So. Perhaps you have something else to say?

SON: I do. Knowledge alone won't get you anywhere today. Knowledge is knowledge; pull is pull.

WIFE (*Even more scared*): He's doing a lot of reading, this one is.

SON: You can go on sitting for those examinations until you're blue in the face... if you haven't got a back...

HANGING MAN: A back?

SON: A back. You've got to have a back, Dad, not a face. If you haven't got one to back you up, you'll fall on your face. The other fathers are running around looking for "backs," digging up childhood friends, or schoolmates from the past... But we're doing nothing. "What does your father do?" "Well, he's hung up in an elevator." "What kind of an occupation is that?"

WIFE: He's doing a lot of reading, he really is.

HANGING MAN: This is not an occupation! This is a disaster. And you, instead of helping me out, you lecture me on life. When I was your age, I didn't dare look my father in the eye. Backs! You've got a good back of your own, you don't need another one. You're not a camel.

SON: Well, there are plenty out there who are ready to hump this back.

HANGING MAN (*His voice shaking with emotion*): Do you realize that your own father may turn into a bird? Do you realize that? And if I am transformed into some bird, we'll see what you do then! Then you can write your poems, and give your lectures of life – it'll be all the same to me!

SON: What bird?

HANGING MAN: A very big one... The scientists said that after so long a

period of being suspended in midair biological changes can take place in my organism.

WIFE: My God!...

HANGING MAN: My bones will get lighter and fill with air... Some of my organs will become obsolete, while others will evolve... Will that satisfy you? Then you'll be able to say: "My Dad's an important bird!"

WIFE: Good God!

SON: Don't talk like that, Dad.

HANGING MAN: And when one day I come hovering over your backyard and fly about with the other pigeons and birds, and then soar over the rooftops and trees and veer toward the clouds until I become a tiny speck in the sky, then you'll say: "What a father we had! But we didn't appreciate him. And he took off!"

WIFE (*Stretching out her arms*): Darling!

SON: Father! (*He stretches out his arms as if they were trying to prevent him from flying off.*)

HANGING MAN (*After a pause*): Now go away! Go away! I want to be left alone...

The two go out with bowed heads. IVAN ANTONOV and DERMENDZHIEVA continue their safari through the office building; they stop in front of the next door. They open it and enter. To their amazement the man working behind the desk is none other than EUGENE.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Does he look like Eugene to you, too? This walking up and down is giving me hallucinations... He looks exactly like Eugene.

EUGENE: What's your problem?

DERMENDZHIEVA: It's the same voice, too... Excuse me, but are you called Eugene? Eugene?

EUGENE: Yes, my name's Eugene.

DERMENDZHIEVA: His friend Eugene? What are you doing here, Eugene?

EUGENE: I work here.

DERMENDZHIEVA: What do you mean you work here?

EUGENE: Like everyone else – for the pay. Well, what can I do for you?

DERMENDZHIEVA: Well, this is Ivan Antonov.

EUGENE: Who?

DERMENDZHIEVA: Ivan Antonov. He's called Ivan Antonov.

EUGENE: Nothing unusual about that. He may very well be called Ivan Antonov.

DERMENDZHIEVA: But doesn't that name ring a bell? Ivan Antonov?

EUGENE: Look, you're wasting my time. I've got work to do. What's your

problem?

DERMENDZHIEVA: We're here about the sheep.

EUGENE: What sheep?

DERMENDZHIEVA: Are you making fun of us?

EUGENE: What's your relation to him?

DERMENDZHIEVA: None at all. I give a run-down of the facts when he gets too tired to tell the story.

EUGENE: All right, would you give me a brief run-down of the facts then...

Well? They both seem to have lost their tongues. (*Dials the phone.*) Popov, there's a certain Antonov here; a problem about a sheep... Know anything about it? Yes? A sheep? Undoubtedly? Absolutely no doubt about it?... A case of concealment... (*Looks at IVAN.*) I see... And he hasn't had it vaccinated against foot and mouth disease... Yes... No vaccinations, you say! A fine! I see... He could be prosecuted for the concealment, yes...

IVAN ANTONOV (*Shouting*): What people! Didn't you understand that it isn't a sheep at all! It's a suede jacket, a jacket, a jacket!

EUGENE (*Putting the telephone down*): This is no way to behave. The world has been shaken by events of great significance... see what's happening in the Middle East, people are perishing, a new government crisis in Italy, a satellite launching has been postponed, a high level Bulgarian economic delegation is going to London, the Leipzig International Trade Fair is closing, a new tribe has been discovered in the jungles of Brazil... And all you can do is keep fussing about your sheep or jacket... or whatever it was... That's not the proper attitude... In fact it speaks very badly of you... It does smell a bit of political apathy, a lack of social commitment... And you're an intelligent person; you educate our youth. This is not the proper way to behave, really... Besides, you should really have more confidence in us; if we say it's a sheep, you'd better believe us. After all, we are working for you. You may be taking a very subjective view of the question from your own narrow, individualistic point of view; whereas we take into consideration the entire community. Isn't that so?

IVAN ANTONOV: I've been awarded a citation. Second degree. For saving the life of a drowning man.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Ivan!

IVAN ANTONOV: Here's the ribbon. Can't you see it? (*Showing it.*) Don't you see it?

EUGENE and DERMENDZHIEVA exchange glances – there is no ribbon of citation.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Looking worried*): Don't you really see it? Here it is. Second degree. For saving a life. Can't you see it? (*To the audience*) Here it is...

The ribbon and citation... second degree... you see it, don't you... Don't you see the ribbon?...

CURTAIN

SCENE FOUR

A garden in the city. IVAN ANTONOV is grazing his suede jacket. DERMENDZHIEVA sits on a low stool beside him. She is knitting.

IVAN ANTONOV (*To the jacket*): Now don't eat the camomile; your stomach will hurt you. Go try that clover over there. (*To DERMENDZHIEVA*) It'll eat anything it sees... it might get a case of gastritis, and then what?...

DERMENDZHIEVA (*Without taking her eyes from her knitting*): It's got quite an appetite today.

IVAN ANTONOV: When it's with me, it always eats well. There it goes again!... Can't you see this isn't grass. It's a weed; why do you have to eat right here. (*Pulls the imaginary rope which is supposed to be tied to the jacket.*) Come here... It's better here. Wait; wait a minute till I root out this grass. (*Bends over to root it out.*) Chew a little slower; there's no hurry; otherwise you'll get an acid stomach... (*To DERMENDZHIEVA*) It didn't fall asleep until three in the morning.

DERMENDZHIEVA: You should have given it something against heartburn.

IVAN ANTONOV: I did.

DERMENDZHIEVA (*Without raising her eyes from the knitting*): Didn't that help?

IVAN ANTONOV: It's got a queasy stomach. Ever since I can remember, it was always getting heartburn. When it feeds too much on rye grass, it gets colicky. I don't know if all sheep are like this, but ours is... There it goes, eating daisies again. They're really pure cellulose, they don't do you any good. Why are you so stubborn... (*Moves the jacket.*) And that cyclophosphamide went down the wrong way. It's affected its center of balance. I don't know how we're going to shear it.

DERMENDZHIEVA: With clippers.

IVAN ANTONOV: It's best not to be behind the times. The chemical method is so much better. It'll shed its fleece within six days.

DERMENDZHIEVA: What if it should have some bad effects...

IVAN ANTONOV: Yes. Its center of balance has been affected; it's beginning to zig-zag... Let me see if there's anything about this problem in the Handbook. We're not alone. (*He opens the Handbook the BUREAUCRAT has given him and reads. Looks at his watch.*) Ah, there's more time. (*Closes the book.*)

DERMENDZHIEVA (*Knitting*): Ready?

IVAN ANTONOV: Yes.

DERMENDZHIEVA leaves her knitting, goes out and comes back with two buckets. IVAN ANTONOV puts the jacket on the stool where he has been sitting, goes and brings in a sawhorse, on which he places the jacket. Then he sits on the little stool, takes hold of one of the sleeves, and begins to milk it. Into one of the pails, of course. DERMENDZHIEVA sits down to resume her knitting.

IVAN ANTONOV: The milk's a little overheated today. (*He keeps milking.*)

DERMENDZHIEVA: Must be the rye-grass. There's plenty of soot on the grass. (*Knits.*)

IVAN ANTONOV: Otherwise it's not so warm. Easy now; easy. (*The whine of a jet flying overhead.*) The yield's much bigger when it's not agitated. But when one of those supersonic jets flies over it shuts up. You won't get a drop. (*Makes a gesture.*) See?

DERMENDZHIEVA: It's very sensitive.

IVAN ANTONOV: Anyway, triple milking schedule really gives great results.

Now from the other side... (*He takes the stool and the pail to the other sleeve.*)

Now, now. Don't get excited; it's only your friend, he's a real nice guy. He won't harm you... (*Milks.*)

DERMENDZHIEVA: Did you wash your hands?

IVAN ANTONOV: Yes, at the fountain.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Because yesterday you forgot to.

IVAN ANTONOV: That's why I milked it through my handkerchief... (*Milks.*) I think it'll set by evening... I'll make some desert.

DERMENDZHIEVA: Sheep's milk is rich and creamy.

ZHORO appears on the walk. He pushes a baby carriage. When he sees the two of them he stops, hesitates, but since there is no other path, he goes toward them.

ZHORO: How ya doin'? How's the milk yield? Going up? (*To DERMENDZHIEVA*) Hello.

IVAN ANTONOV: Pretty good today. About 800 grams... From one sleeve.

ZHORO: Yes, so I've heard; so I've heard.

IVAN ANTONOV: It's a bit too warm, though. Because of the rye-grass.

ZHORO: Never mind. It's a hell of a lot better than what you get in the supermarket. Did it have any colic last night?

IVAN ANTONOV: Didn't fall asleep until three in the morning.

ZHORO: Must have gotten into the daisies. But then it could have been a gladiola without your knowing.

IVAN ANTONOV: You know how it is with these animals, the minute you turn away, it gets into the daisies. The thorns keep it from the roses, but it's back to the daisies in a matter of seconds.

ZHORO: That's the way it is. My kid is just as bad, if I didn't keep an eye on him, because he's so small. Yesterday I left him at the table for a minute and when I came back, he was pushing plates over the edge of the table, one by one...

IVAN ANTONOV: Aren't you going to buy some milk for him? It's fresh – straight from the udder.

ZHORO (*Looks into the empty pail*): Thanks, but we rely on Gerber's; he's never even tasted milk. You know women don't breastfeed anymore... It's bad for the boobs.

IVAN ANTONOV: You must take it then. Boil it and make some milk soup for yourself. The animal's under veterinary care, so there's no danger whatsoever...

ZHORO: I know that. But you see I haven't got a container. I'll go home and get a bottle or something.

IVAN ANTONOV: Sure. You do that. We'll be right here for a while longer.

ZHORO moves away with the carriage

ZHORO (*Moving off*): All right then. (*Goes off.*)

IVAN ANTONOV: He says he'll get something everyday, but he never comes back.

DERMENDZHIEVA: An absent-minded man.

IVAN ANTONOV: Terribly absent-minded.

The PSYCHIATRIST enters, with two massive ATTENDANTS, with gentle appearance. They take up positions at the two ends of the stage.

PSYCHIATRIST: Oh, so there are two of them... Have we got two straightjackets?

ATTENDANT: Only one.

PSYCHIATRIST: Well, it's pretty big, we could squeeze both of them into one. (*To IVAN ANTONOV and DERMENDZHIEVA*) Good afternoon.

IVAN ANTONOV: Good afternoon.

PSYCHIATRIST: Nice weather we're having, aren't we?

IVAN ANTONOV: Not bad, mainly low cumulus clouds.

DERMENDZHIEVA: With scattered showers. Mainly in the earlier part of the day.

PSYCHIATRIST (*Sees the needles and knitting*): Well, that rain will do the grass a lot of good.

IVAN ANTONOV: We need it.

DERMENDZHIEVA: When you need it, you need it.

PSYCHIATRIST: Can I see the stich you're using. Oh, this one is really beautiful. (*Takes the knitting from DERMENDZHIEVA and hands it to an attendant.*) Yes, and grass for its part is good for the animals, isn't it? They grow, and are satisfied...

IVAN ANTONOV: No doubt about it.

DERMENDZHIEVA: When it helps, it helps.

PSYCHIATRIST: How's your animal doing?

IVAN ANTONOV: Fit as a fiddle.

PSYCHIATRIST: Yeah, one can see that... May I ask what it is?

IVAN ANTONOV: A sheep.

DERMENDZHIEVA: That's what it is, a sheep.

PSYCHIATRIST: That's what it is, a sheep. We can tell a sheep when we see one, no doubt about it. You're grazing it here, aren't you?

IVAN ANTONOV: We're grazing it.

PSYCHIATRIST: Both of you?

DERMENDZHIEVA: In shifts. He's until 12; I'm from 2 to 8. We close for lunch, a lunch break. Wednesdays are clean-up days.

PSYCHIATRIST: Of course, one needs a lunch break. Everyone breaks for lunch; I quite understand. What are the results, if I may ask?

DERMENDZHIEVA: Very encouraging.

PSYCHIATRIST: Of course, I understand. Give you a lot of milk?

IVAN ANTONOV: More wool than milk – it's that kind of breed.

PSYCHIATRIST: I see, so it's that kind of breed. How often do you milk it?

IVAN ANTONOV: We're experimenting with the triple method.

PSYCHIATRIST: The triple method?

IVAN ANTONOV: From the point of view of the economy; it's very good.

PSYCHIATRIST: I see, I see, so that's it.

IVAN ANTONOV: And would you please stop saying "I see" so much. Because when people start seeing too much, it goes dry. It's anxiety-ridden. Would you pass me that pail, because this one's full.

PSYCHIATRIST (*Handing him the pail*): And how many pails do you fill per day?

IVAN ANTONOV: Two on average, except on Saturdays and Sunday. It has the weekend off. It's on a five-day week.

PSYCHIATRIST: On a five-day week?

IVAN ANTONOV: Sure, like everybody else.

PSYCHIATRIST: I see... I mean of course. And how about the wool?

IVAN ANTONOV: What exactly are you interested in?

PSYCHIATRIST: I mean, does the fleece grow thick? Is it white? Do you shear it?...

IVAN ANTONOV: We shear it chemically.

PSYCHIATRIST: How chemically?

IVAN ANTONOV: We give it a dose of cyclophosphamide in its forage. It sheds its fleece within six days. It's absolutely harmless, both to the animal and the wool.

PSYCHIATRIST: Very interesting. And it doesn't affect the milk?

IVAN ANTONOV: The only thing that affects the milk is too much talking and noise. When there's noise, there's no milk.

PSYCHIATRIST: But are you grazing it here? Isn't it too noisy for a sheep?

IVAN ANTONOV: You mean is the noise too much for a jacket? No, it isn't.

PSYCHIATRIST (*Confused*): But... isn't this a sheep?

IVAN ANTONOV: What do you think?

PSYCHIATRIST: I think it's a sheep.

IVAN ANTONOV: There's something wrong with you, doctor. You ought to get a check up. How can you see a sheep, when it's a jacket?

PSYCHIATRIST: Still, I'm not sure whether it's a jacket or a sheep. I'm of two minds. But isn't it a sheep?

IVAN ANTONOV: A pure case of schizophrenia. Doctor, you ought to see a psychiatrist. He'll set you straight.

PSYCHIATRIST: Hm! Are you quite sure it's a jacket!

IVAN ANTONOV: Just look at it.

PSYCHIATRIST: But then why are you grazing it in the park?

IVAN ANTONOV: Where should I graze it?

PSYCHIATRIST: Why graze it at all?

IVAN ANTONOV: Because according to some papers this jacket is a sheep.

PSYCHIATRIST: According to what papers?

IVAN ANTONOV: According to these. (*Produces them and lets him see them.*)

PSYCHIATRIST: Receipt issued by the Revenue Office. "Sheep. Eastern Blackhead, thin fleeced, vaccinated for foot and mouth disease." This is the first time I've ever heard anything like this.

IVAN ANTONOV: I can assure you, we have no other sheep in our possession. This is a herd of one. So we feel obligated to graze it, so it won't die of starvation.

PSYCHIATRIST: I've never heard anything like this. (*Looks at the papers again.*) "Linguist... Eastern Blackhead... " You could lose your mind!

IVAN ANTONOV: Don't complicate things, doctor. Just accept the fact it's a sheep, and you'll see how smoothly everything will go...

PSYCHIATRIST: But this is a jacket. Any normal person can see that.

IVAN ANTONOV: According to you. According to this piece of paper it's a sheep.

DERMENDZHIEVA: You cast doubts on an official document? I'd be more careful, doctor.

IVAN ANTONOV: You ought to have more confidence in official documents that say it's a sheep. You'll have to take their word for it; it's for the common good.

PSYCHIATRIST (*Nods assent*): I believe them.

IVAN ANTONOV: So do I. (*Pause*) Nice weather we're having, aren't we?

PSYCHIATRIST (*Pensive*): Not bad, mainly low cumulous clouds. What the hell's the matter with the weather these days?

The PSYCHIATRIST walks off lost in thought. Then he comes back to say goodbye to the two.

PSYCHIATRIST: Goodbye. Goodbye. (*Exits.*)

IVAN ANTONOV (*To his jacket*): We've been chatting away, forgetting it's past your bedtime. It's late. Come on. (*They both go off.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE FIVE

The office building. The bureaucrat's office. The BUREAUCRAT is seated behind a massive desk. The telephone rings. He lazily picks up the receiver.

BUREAUCRAT: Hello!... (*He suddenly jumps to his feet and stands at attention.*) Yes, yes. Good morning, good morning, by all means... What do you mean "one of our men?" In the park? How do you mean in the park? I understand, just like that, in the park... No, he's not one of ours. We haven't got any men in the park. He's not one of ours... No... Oh, yes, yes, yes. Of course... yes, of course; yes, quite idiotic, making an exhibition of ourselves, yes, there's never been anything like it... Yes. I'd like to... I'd like to explain this... (*He can't get a word into the discussion.*) Could I just explain: I have always worked body and soul to... even risking my health... This is indeed an unfortunate incident... believe me, an accident, one in a thousand, it's not our common practice, not at all, believe me. My department is working like clockwork, I personally inspect each room in the department daily, I even got varicose veins for my pains, and complications have developed, thrombophlebitis. God forbid it, but I already walk with a limp... No, my work isn't limping, no... Yes, we do have to make

sacrifices; every man makes his own sacrifice; if we have to sacrifice veins, then veins it is: and that's that, although my heart hasn't been in very good shape either... (*He suddenly realizes that no one is listening to him at the other end of the line, that it has been dead for some time.*) Hello; hello!...

The BUREAUCRAT keeps the receiver to his ear a few seconds, then hangs up and begins nervously pacing the room. Then he dashes to the telephone.

BUREAUCRAT: Popov... Yes, it's me. Now listen: It's about that jacket that was a sheep, or vice-versa; well it's got to disappear... Immediately, I said! Legally, of course. Now you're not going to set the files on fire. Immediately, but legally. What do you mean you don't understand? You'll send him a letter in which we acknowledge it's a jacket, and that we apologize, but that it was his fault, know what I mean. Just so he stops these demonstrations in our parks. For us it's still a sheep. It's precisely that sheep that's got to vanish, because it exists only on paper; otherwise, who'll pay the tax on it? I know, I know, it's all in the registers, otherwise I wouldn't be talking to you at all... You'll just have to find some way; you'll find one because that's what you're there for... I'm not interested in explanations, please... Don't talk – act... And make it snappy, you hear? (*He hangs up.*)

He walks back and forth nervously, lights a cigarette, then throws himself on the phone.

BUREAUCRAT: Popov, has that sheep disappeared? What do you mean it can't? Who can't? Are you a virgin around here? So what if it's registered in all the books. You're talking like a preppie, Popov! Don't "can't" or "how" me! You can't write one sheep off the books? Shame on you! Do it the way you do with paper and glue... These things disappear in inventory as if they never existed. Don't worry about that. How about sticking it in "Social Services?" No way, huh? Couldn't we put it down under "Furnishings"... It's just one suede chair. Yes, yes, you're right, it's of a different nature. Well, how about taking three geese out of the "Fowls" department... Oh, you already have... And what? So put them under "Canines"... right, I'm with you... And you take one dog and a half, right... and in "Restricted Milk Yields"... Right!... What's the trouble?... Ahh... Well, you can throw in a couple from "Singing Birds"... You can't touch them, huh?... How is it in "Water Fowls"... Not any better... That's too bad. So there's nowhere we can put away one sheep... I know how difficult it is... Well, Popov, leave this to me then. I'll think about it... (*Hangs up the phone.*)

The BUREAUCRAT downs a glass of cognac and starts pacing the room.

BUREAUCRAT: Where can we put it? Where the hell can I put away that fucking sheep? What can I do? And time's flying... And he gave me a deadline! *(He stops suddenly; an idea has dawned on him.)* Ivanov! *(Rushes to the telephone.)* Ivanov?... Is that you, Ivanov? Ivanov, I'd like to see you. Yes, here... Yes, I am... I'll be waiting for you.

The BUREAUCRAT continues marching up and down the room nervously. Enter Ivanov, the 56-Year-Old Man. He greets the BUREAUCRAT and remains standing.

BUREAUCRAT: Sit down. *(Sits the man down into an armchair.)* Coffee? Or cognac?... A drop of cognac won't do us any harm, will it? *(Pours out the drinks.)* Here's to you. *(They drink.)* Well, how are you? How's the family?

56-YEAR-OLD MAN: Fine, thank you.

BUREAUCRAT: And the little boy? Did you enroll him into the elite class?

56-YEAR-OLD MAN: I have two daughters. They both got married recently.

BUREAUCRAT: Well, thank God; thank God. And how about you? How's your health? I see you look a bit pale. Take care of yourself, Ivanov. You're an important man.

56-YEAR-OLD MAN: I haven't got enough hemoglobin; that's why...

BUREAUCRAT: Ivanov, everybody is short of hemoglobin these days. You know how it is with hemoglobin! There's just not enough to go round. You'll be turning sixty soon, won't you?

56-YEAR-OLD MAN: Fifty-six, and not all that soon, either, but in three months.

BUREAUCRAT: So. The Trade Union Committee is reassigning you to celebrate your 60th birthday tomorrow.

56-YEAR-OLD MAN *(Rising)*: But I'm... but why tomorrow?

BUREAUCRAT: You're a Trade Union member, aren't you, Ivanov?

56-YEAR-OLD MAN: Sure... but I'm only 56. Why suddenly 60?

BUREAUCRAT: It's a matter of necessity, Ivanov. The interests of the Trade Union Committee require it. This is the assignment.

56-YEAR-OLD MAN: But how can I grow four years older in 24 hours?

BUREAUCRAT: You can do it, Ivanov, you can do it. If it's asked of you, you can do it. So tomorrow is your 60th birthday. Does anybody know how old you are?

56-YEAR-OLD MAN: My wife.

BUREAUCRAT: I mean somebody in the office.

56-YEAR-OLD MAN: No, nobody has ever shown any interest.

BUREAUCRAT: Wonderful. It means you're 60 tomorrow and you've worked

for 20 years in our department. Do we understand each other, Ivanov?

56-YEAR-OLD MAN: I don't know if it'll work out.

BUREAUCRAT: You'll make it work out, you will. You're a very conscientious worker. And in your honor we'll eat one sheep.

A banquet table. At it are seated the BUREAUCRAT, EUGENE, the HEAD OF DEPARTMENT and, naturally, the 56-YEAR-OLD MAN, the honoree, in the place of honor. A white tablecloth, shining cutlery, Ivanov in a new suit, knives, forks, plates, salt shakers, toothpicks, platters, table napkins, pepper... flowers. The centerpiece is an enormous silver platter – which should have held the slaughtered sheep. But that is not the case; the platter is empty.

BUREAUCRAT (*Standing*): Colleagues! We have gathered together to eat this sheep (*Points to the empty platter.*) in honor of our colleague, Ivanov, who is sixty years old today. (*Applause*) A sixtieth birthday and twenty years of service in this department – a fact that deserves far greater notice than this humble sheep, which the Trade Union Committee bought, to be shortly eaten by all of us here. (*He notices that IVANOV is looking at the empty platter.*) What's wrong, Ivanov?

56-YEAR-OLD MAN: There isn't any...

BUREAUCRAT: There isn't any what?

56-YEAR-OLD MAN: Well, sh... sh... shit! (*Heaves a deep sigh.*)

BUREAUCRAT: What makes you say "shit", Ivanov? Just look at that beautiful sheep. Don't you like it?

56-YEAR-OLD MAN: Oh, it's... beautiful. It really looks beautiful.

BUREAUCRAT: Excuse me, colleagues, but through this sheep we are expressing our attitude towards the common man. What we do for a man, what interest we take in people, that is how we show the kind of people we are, the way we work, and the way we think. Because it is he (*Points to IVANOV.*) who is the individual human on whom everything depends, this department depends, the whole of our society depends. It is from him that we get our bread, our wine, and our meat. (*Applause*) And today we are happy to say to our colleagues, to the man Ivanov: "We thank you, Ivanov, for your selfless work. For twenty years you were at your post!"

Applause. IVANOV stands up, bows awkwardly. The BUREAUCRAT kisses him.

BUREAUCRAT: Well, colleagues, let's begin. Eugene, carve up the sheep. (*He tucks a napkin under his collar. The rest do the same.*)

EUGENE takes the carving knife and fork and begins cutting up the imaginary sheep. The knife catches on a bone, sometimes he goes back to a shape perfect piece, or he exclaims "A

cartilage." The roast is carved up.

BUREAUCRAT: Thank you, Eugene. Now help yourselves to some meat; let everyone help himself. You'll find it delicious. (*Helps himself first.*)

The bureaucrats dive into their meat, they swallow and gulp down the meat; there is a clatter of knives and forks. EUGENE says to the BUREAUCRAT: "You spilled some gravy on your suit. Shall I sprinkle some salt on it?" Puts a pinch or two of salt on it. The rest continue eating, gulping... Behind them stands IVAN ANTONOV, with a jacket in his hand; he looks at them smilingly. The banquet table with the banqueters sinks down and out of sight. IVAN ANTONOV speaks to his jacket.

IVAN ANTONOV: According to their directive, number 6305, you are once again a jacket. An ordinary suede jacket! (*Puts on the jacket and bows.*)

THE END