

Stanislav Stratiev

The Roman Bath

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Translated from the Bulgarian by Svetlin Stratiev.

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CHARACTERS:

IVAN ANTONOV

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR – AN ARCHAEOLOGIST

MARTHA – HIS FIANCEE

LIFEGUARD

TSEKOV – SMUGGLER OF ANTIQUES, ICONS AND COINS

DIAMANDIEV – REAL ESTATE BROKER

GUECHEV – NEIGHBOURHOOD ORGANIZATION ACTIVIST

IVANOV – PERSON WITH HEARING DIFFICULTIES

TV DIRECTOR

ANCHOR

BUILDER WHO SPEAKS

BUILDER WHO DOES NOT SPEAK

TAXI CALL COLUMN

COMMISSION MEMBER 1

COMMISSION MEMBER 2

COMMISSION MEMBER 3

ALSO, TV CREW MEMBERS

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE

A street corner. A bright orange metal column with a speaker and a button. It is one of many such columns throughout the city. It belongs to the only (state-owned) taxi company and is used for calling taxis from the street. Ivan Antonov presses the button angrily. Obviously, he's been doing this for some time with no result. There is a suitcase next to him, and a duffle bag. A pair of flippers is jutting out of the duffle bag. Ivan Antonov is going on holiday to the seaside but he's catastrophically late for the airport.

IVAN ANTONOV: Hallo! Hallo! Could somebody send me a taxi, please! At least say something! Hallo! (*He taps on the speaker to check if it's working.*)

The pillar remains silent, displaying no sign of life.

Hallo! I've been screaming "hallo" for the past half hour! But nothing happened. I'll lose it all. Because of one stupid taxi call column (*He kicks the column, only to hurt his foot. He goes on kicking it and swearing regardless.*) Stupid, nasty piece of painted tin!

TAXI CALL COLUMN (*starts speaking suddenly*): Now listen mate! How dare you talk to us like that! Who do you think you are?

IVAN ANTONOV: Hello! Finally! Please, send me a taxi, please! Quick! I'm late.

TAXI CALL COLUMN: Fat chance. You abuse us and then expect us to send you a taxi?

IVAN ANTONOV: Please! I kept calling you for the past half hour, but nobody answered.

TAXI CALL COLUMN: We heard you all right. We're not deaf, you know.

IVAN ANTONOV: I got a bit carried away...

TAXI CALL COLUMN: You got carried away? If somebody were to give you a kick, how would you enjoy that, eh?

IVAN ANTONOV: Comrades! Comrades! Comrades! Send me a taxi! I'm late, I'll miss my flight.

TAXI CALL COLUMN: We are not your comrades. Learn to behave and then you can get a taxi.

IVAN ANTONOV (*begins fondling the column involuntarily*): I'm so sorry, I didn't want to hurt the column, I'm stressed.

TAXI CALL COLUMN: Everybody is stressed. But not everybody gets to ride in a taxi.

Ivan Antonov hugs the column, pressing his cheek against its polished surface.

IVAN ANTONOV: Mercy! My bad! Just send me a taxi, please, I'm way too late. There are no later flights today. I promise to behave from now on.

TAXI CALL COLUMN: Promises will only get so far.

IVAN ANTONOV (*glances at his watch and throws himself at the column, hugs it, caresses it with one hand, wiping its glossy surface with the other*): Brothers! Please! Send a taxi! Brothers!

TAXI CALL COLUMN: We're not your brothers. Boors have no brothers!

IVAN ANTONOV (*presses palms together as if for a prayer*): Mercy! I'll lose my holiday voucher! For the seaside!

TAXI CALL COLUMN: So be it.

IVAN ANTONOV: I've been fighting for years to get one. They usually give me vouchers for January. But there is never any central heating, of course. Comrades! As it happens, my boss fell ill and they gave me his summer voucher last minute. Please, he might soon get better!

The column remains silent.

Comrades, you see, those who arrive late at the hotel get sent away. The voucher will expire. Can you hear me, comrades? Here, let me kiss it! (*Kisses the column.*) We can still be friends. Forget the past. (*He hugs the pillar, caresses it, removing gently a few specks of dust from the surface.*)

Enter Guechev, a neighbourhood activist.

GUECHEV: Sex maniac! Obsessed with it, all of them! There, harassing taxi columns now, not just women. I wish he wouldn't do it here, in our neighbourhood. It can cost us our first place in the competition! (*Steps forward with a determined air.*)

IVAN ANTONOV: I promise to send you a seaside postcard. Come on, let bygones be bygones. Let's be reasonable. (*Hugs the column again.*)

GUECHEV (*unctuously*): Comrade! Hey, comrade!...

IVAN ANTONOV (*repeating automatically, thinking this was the column speaking*): Comrade, hey, comrade. Yes? (*Sees the activist.*) What?

GUECHEV: Comrade, why don't you try the next column two blocks down? You'll find many available taxis over there.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Moves away*): Of course! That's what I should do.

GUECHEV: How about your pretty suitcase? Don't forget it.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Comes back*): Yes, indeed. Thank you. Thank you very much, comrade. (*Snatches the suitcase and trots away*.) Thanks a million!

GUECHEV: You're most welcome. Bon voyage. All the best! (*Waits for Ivan Antonov to leave*.) Good riddance. Let him slobber over the taxi columns in the other neighbourhood. (*Exit*.)

SCENE ONE

The living room of Ivan Antonov's house. We can see that there must have been a large bookcase there, with many books, pictures must have been hanging on the walls. There is an old chest of drawers backstage, facing sideways. On it, there are many empty whisky bottles of different brands – Antonov's collection. On the chest of drawers there is the wooden case of a grandfather clock, the clock itself is on the floor. There must have been a table in the middle of the living room. A low, massive comfortable table. And a large desk as well, dark brown, massive wood, a period piece. It must have been overflowing with books, sketches, designs, markers of different colours, a phone and a reading lamp. A guitar must have been hanging on the wall above the desk, above two comfortable leather armchairs covered with tartan plaids. And a sofa with a cozy red furry throw. Everything in this house must have exuded warmth, peace and comfort once.

But not anymore.

Now, as we are looking at it, everything in this living room is upside down, a godawful mess. Things lie scattered or crumpled on the floor, among heaps of books. The carpet has been rolled to one side, the sofa is up against the wall on its side, the telephone is somewhere among the furniture. Rugs and chairs are scattered all over.

And the most important change in this living room: there are a number of holes in the floorboards and in one large hole, smack in the middle of the room, there is a Roman bath.

It is a pool of delicate pink marble, surrounded by a mosaic depicting bathing nudes. There are several more holes in the floorboards. Inside the pool is a man in a smart suit on all fours, crawling around, observing something. Planks have been thrown across the holes in the floor so people can pass. Backstage, there is some scaffolding. We can see various piled-up construction materials splattered with white plaster. In a few moments, this living room will be shown live on television. Cables are trailing all over it, cameras are pointed at the Roman bath, floodlights are shining, audiovisual equipment is humming. The TV show's Director, in a leather jacket, is giving his final instructions.

TV DIRECTOR: Silence! Shut up, all of you. We're going live in a minute. Get the builders.

An assistant ushers the Builders in. They trip over the cables, completely stressed out. One is wearing a suit and a brand-new white shirt, the other just trousers and a white shirt. They follow the assistant like sheep to the slaughter.

TV DIRECTOR: Wait, white shirts! Hey, anchor, is this colour TV or what?

ANCHOR: It is.

TV DIRECTOR: Then why are you bringing me a guy in a white shirt? Get him out. Quick, we've no more time!

The Builder in the white shirt tries to go back offstage, but the Anchor snatches him by the neck and drags him back.

ANCHOR: No way. This is the one who can speak.

TV DIRECTOR: What? Is the other one non-verbal?

ANCHOR: Not really, but we practised with this one. Who knows what the other may say. Even this one's stressed out by the cameras and can hardly speak.

TV DIRECTOR: We'll go live in seconds! Give him a jacket. Quick!

The crew members look desperately round for a jacket. As it turns out, they are all wearing shirts in varying shades of white and no jackets.

The door opens at precisely this moment. Ivan Antonov enters his living room. He is tanned after his seaside holiday, carrying a suitcase and a duffle bag with rubber flippers jutting out. He is wearing a blue shirt. Ivan Antonov freezes at the doorstep, stunned by the sight.

TV DIRECTOR: We're almost live! (*Looks round in panic, sees Antonov.*) Get his shirt, it's a good colour, it'll do. Quick!

Points at Ivan Antonov. Two crew members snatch Ivan Antonov, strip his shirt off and help the Builder to put it on. Ivan Antonov remains there half naked.

TV DIRECTOR: OK! Three, two, one! We're live!

The red lights on the cameras light up. The lenses are focused on the Roman bath. In it, there are four chairs. Sitting on them are the two Builders, grinning self-consciously, the man in the suit and the Anchor.

ANCHOR: Good morning and welcome to our breaking story! I have the privilege of being the first to announce yet another amazing discovery by our proud nation's archaeological science. It provides yet more convincing evidence of the material and cultural sophistication of our country at the time. What you see here is the world's first completely preserved Roman bath from the illustrious reign of Pompillian! And these here are the people who have found it. Please tell us how it all happened. (*Nods to the Builder wearing Ivan Antonov's shirt.*) Go ahead.

The Builder stares dumbfounded. The Anchor smiles and pushes the mike closer to his face.

BUILDER: My name is Traycho Gueorguiev Dyulguerov. I live at 73 Tsar Boris Street in Sofia. (*Stops speaking.*)

ANCHOR: Yes?...

BUILDER: I have two children. Both girls.

ANCHOR: But tell us about the bath, ok?

BUILDER (*Looks at the other Builder for inspiration and starts*): Look, we were supposed to change the floorboards in this bloke's house. We never meant to stir up so much trouble. Poor man went on holiday to the seaside and left us the keys.

ANCHOR: Now, please, tell us about the bath.

BUILDER: Oh yeah, the bath. We took some of the old floorboards out, they were all rotten. Then we cleared some of the soil below. You need to lay proper drainage to keep the moisture out, you know, to preserve the floorboards. And then...

ANCHOR: Yes?

BUILDER: ... we saw some kind of mosaic ... you know ... pink. And then Kiro (*nods in the direction of the other builder*) he goes like: "Let's dig a bit deeper, who knows what we may find. Maybe there is gold, you never know..." And then...

ANCHOR: And then?

BUILDER: We dug up the foundation a bit deeper. We didn't find any gold but... Then Kiro, well, his son-in-law (*nods towards the man in the suit, the Associate Professor.*) He's not his son-in-law, not yet I mean, he may get to be his son-in-law one day. So his son-in-law learned about what we'd dug up. Kiro spilled the beans in front of his daughter and...

ANCHOR: And?

BUILDER: Before we could cover it up and put the soil back in its place, word got round.

ANCHOR: Thank you. Please, Comrade Ananiev, could you please now explain the significance of this find.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: To begin with, I'll ask the viewers to excuse my obvious excitement that's easily explained. This is my first discovery of such importance, and I still get goosepimplies when I talk about it. I would humbly argue that this find is unique. Nowhere else in the world is there such a completely preserved pool from the age of Pompillian and Caius Lucius. It is a rectangular pool 3 by 4 metres, made of fine marble, with a mosaic displaying some elements typical of the age: nudes, suns and Pompillian's motto "Always and to the end!". The craftsmanship is superb. We cannot but admire the exquisite taste of the anonymous master. It was undoubtedly someone from the school of Marcus Antonius Octavian, that famous school that gave us so many other works of pure genius. I think this find is as valuable as the Thracian tomb in Kazanlak. Until now, scientists thought that the baths from this period had all been irretrievably destroyed by the barbarians and forever lost to humanity. In Rome, in California and in the British Museum in London they have separate pieces of similar baths and parts of mosaic that could be attributed to the age of Caius Lucius. However, there was never any convincing scientific evidence for that. And yet, here we are, with a Roman bath so complete, pristine, undamaged that you could fill it up with water and take a bath. There is no doubt that the excavation works, which will continue in the kitchen,

and possibly in the toilet as well, will bring us new surprises, new delights, and so we shall...

On hearing about excavation work in the kitchen and the toilet, Ivan Antonov cannot take it anymore. Naked from the waist up, he jumps into the pool and assaults the Associate Professor.

IVAN ANTONOV: No! Do not touch the kitchen! Let me at least keep the kitchen!

Total confusion. The cameras swing away from the scene. Crew members try to remove Ivan Antonov, he resists.

TV DIRECTOR: Studio! Put on some music! Play the interlude with the swan lake!

SCENE TWO

Ivan Antonov is standing among the chaos of his dug-up living room, clutching his head in his hands. The pink bath is right in front of him. Dusk. Ivan Antonov is alone. Everybody else is gone.

IVAN ANTONOV (*picking up random things, kicking about some of his scattered belongings*): Did it have to be me? Me of all people? Rotten luck. There are no other baths like this on Earth, but they go and find one in my living room. Now I can pretend to be a Roman emperor. (*He drags the bedspring to one side, sits down on it and looks at the pool.*) Good-looking nudes. This Pompillian fellow must've been a big shot. Obviously. (*walks round*) All these years I've been going to the neighbourhood pool and look what I had right in front of my nose...

The light comes on suddenly. The harsh light pierces the dusk. Ivan Antonov turns round. The Associate Professor has entered the living room.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*sternly*): Who are you? What are you doing here?

IVAN ANTONOV: I live here. This is my home. And what are you doing here?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*Frowns, annoyed*): Oh, I'd completely forgotten about you. You are Ivan Antonov?

IVAN ANTONOV: That's right. And you?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Name's Ananiev. Associate Professor Ananiev.

IVAN ANTONOV: Is Associate Professor your first name?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: No. It's my academic title. My first name is different.

IVAN ANTONOV: A friend of mine called his dog Associate Professor. He did this to spite some associate professor who'd failed him in Materials Science at the time. A very intelligent creature.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*unironically*): The associate professor?

IVAN ANTONOV: The dog. So my friend never got his revenge. Instead of insulting the associate professor he was insulting his own dog.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: He should have sent the dog to take the exam instead. The dog would have aced it. Don't you have a dog?

IVAN ANTONOV: If you need to pass any exams, I can find you a dog. But never mind the dog. Tell me about the bath. When are you going to move it?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*uncomprehending at first*): What bath?

IVAN ANTONOV: This one here. The Roman bath. The unique find.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Move it where?

IVAN ANTONOV: What do you mean where? Move it to a museum or some public place. Where everybody can see it. Surely you're not planning to turn my house into a museum?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: You see, moving such artefacts is difficult. In general, it's very risky. At this early stage of the excavations, it's practically out of the question. We couldn't possibly take the risk.

IVAN ANTONOV: What risk can't you take?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: The risk of removing the bath. We've yet to study the composition and durability of the cement, the structure of the mosaic, the chemical parameters of the marble. We don't know how it will react to changes in temperature, to various external influences et cetera....

IVAN ANTONOV: So you don't know?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: No. We haven't studied the impact of the microclimatic conditions and the temperature in your living room. These conditions may be very specific and impossible to reproduce. Perhaps there are special bacteria in the air here, like *lactobacillus bulgaricus*, you know, the one in the yoghurt...

IVAN ANTONOV: Go ahead.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Perhaps if we take the bath out in the open, it will disintegrate, turn to dust. It's centuries old.

IVAN ANTONOV: So move it to your own living room. There may be bacteria there as well.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*smiles condescendingly*): Sorry, this just isn't serious. Not a scientific argument.

Ivan Antonov surveys his dug-up living room.

IVAN ANTONOV: So you won't move it any time soon?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Perhaps we won't move it at all.

IVAN ANTONOV: Can I fill it with water?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*terrified*): Water?! Why would you do that?

IVAN ANTONOV: I want to take a bath. I've a bath in the middle of my living room, what else could I do.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: But this would be a crime! We still don't know...

IVAN ANTONOV: OK. Taking a bath is a crime. May I put a bed in it?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: What bed?

IVAN ANTONOV: Small double.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: No way.

IVAN ANTONOV: Why? You think it won't go in?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Can you at all imagine how valuable this pool is?

IVAN ANTONOV: And a desk?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Why not a cooking stove? Then you could flip burgers in the bath or cook sauerkraut. What more could one wish for!?

IVAN ANTONOV: All right, let's assume you're right about all this. Where am I supposed to live?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Live? I don't get you?

IVAN ANTONOV: Where could I go to sleep? Work. Play the gui... Sorry, but where's my guitar?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Oh, right there, behind the bookcase.

A wide-eyed Ivan Antonov goes to the bookcase and pulls the grip of the guitar from behind it. The grip is all that's left.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Now, this is nothing to do with me.

IVAN ANTONOV: Nothing to do with you. And where am I supposed to raise my kids?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: What kids now? I can't help you at all in this quarter, I'm afraid. People's kids are people's business. You plan for your kids. But frankly, planning isn't enough. Action is also needed. At least initially, before they are born. As for the rest, Antonov, science advances through sacrifice. Progress is impossible without sacrifice.

IVAN ANTONOV: Make the sacrifice yourself. You are the scientist, I'm not. Science is the point of your life. (*Turns to the audience.*) Why do they always ask other people to make the sacrifices?

The Associate Professor remains silent, smiling condescendingly.

IVAN ANTONOV: On top of it all, you plan to dig up the kitchen and the toilet. What about me, should I just, like, evaporate?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Look, Antonov, what you are doing is you are putting your private interest above the public interest. You are an egoist. Society stands to lose immeasurably more if we take the risk of moving the bath. You can find other accommodation. There's a housing boom, the country's practically one huge building site. Science, on the other hand, cannot risk disturbing this unique find.

IVAN ANTONOV: It cannot?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: No.

IVAN ANTONOV: Then I'll risk it myself.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: You? How?

IVAN ANTONOV: I'll dump it in the street, that's how. (*Jumps into the bath.*) Take it out with a pickaxe, sledge hammer, hoe or hammer

drill. That's how. And it won't be the first time something like this happens in Bulgaria.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Barbarian!

IVAN ANTONOV: Barbarian indeed. A barbarian in his own house. And I hate it when guests outstay their welcome. I go to bed early. Like a baby. The door is to your left.

Ivan Antonov goes to the kitchen. The Associate Professor lights a cigarette. Antonov comes back.

IVAN ANTONOV: Are you still around?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: This seems to be a hint.

IVAN ANTONOV: Yes! It is a hint. I'm hinting that it's high time you get out of my home. You had no right to come in here, dig it up, break the furniture and turn everything upside down. Barbarian indeed – what cheek! Get out.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: This is not your home any more.

IVAN ANTONOV: Who else's is it then? Yours perhaps?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: It belongs to society. There are hundreds of thousands of houses like this, but only one Roman bath from the age of Pompillian.

IVAN ANTONOV: Get lost! And take your bath with you.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Yeah, so nothing stops you from destroying the bath. During the night. And then a done deal in the morning. No way!

IVAN ANTONOV: Wrong. I won't wait until the morning. I'll cut it up in half an hour. Then I'll start sending you pieces of it in the post. One per day. Would you like them larger or smaller? Clients have a choice of several standard sizes.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: And then I'll be sending you cigarettes.

IVAN ANTONOV: Where?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: In jail. Clients have a choice among several popular brands. Look, humankind will never forgive me if I let this happen. The loss of what's probably the last fully preserved Roman bath from the age of Pompillian. Get it into your head, Antonov, this bath would be forever lost to humanity. Think of humanity!

IVAN ANTONOV: So you are thinking of humanity? How about the individual human being? One of those that make up humanity. It's easier like that, isn't it? Humanity is an abstraction. It's always the other, never the one who's right in front of you with a will of their own. What am I then? On one side you have humanity, all of nine billion people, on the other – Ivan Antonov. He is not the people, because a Roman bath was discovered in his living room.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Casuist.

IVAN ANTONOV: There's the door. (*Points at the door.*)

The door opens. Enter Martha, the Associate Professor's fiancée.

MARTHA: Good evening!...

IVAN ANTONOV: Evening, evening!

MARTHA (*at the Associate Professor*): You told me we'd be alone.

IVAN ANTONOV: Ooooh now!...

MARTHA: What is this guy doing here? He a friend of yours?

IVAN ANTONOV: Childhood friend. His best friend from early childhood. Name's Ivan Antonov.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: His name is Ivan Antonov, but he's no friend of mine.

MARTHA: What's he doing here this late? Is it for the work?

IVAN ANTONOV: Imagine – this is where I actually live.

MARTHA: How do you mean live?

IVAN ANTONOV: In the ordinary sense. I sleep, eat pizza, work from home. Sometimes I climb up on the cupboard and jump onto the bed. But I try not to do it too often, because it ruins the bedsprings.

MARTHA: I thought this house had been expropriated. Didn't you tell me that?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*nervously*): Well, erm, I sent all the necessary forms, but the red tape is taking forever.

MARTHA: And you told me that the person who lived here had...

IVAN ANTONOV: Had what?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Martha, now's not a good time for this. I'll explain later.

IVAN ANTONOV: Wait, wait, wait! I had a what? What's going on here? Can't I just go to the seaside for a fortnight without... (*waves his hand in a "forget it" gesture*) Expropriation? I should've been informed in advance.

MARTHA: This Roman bath is getting on my nerves. When you found it, life went upside down.

IVAN ANTONOV (*interjects, pointing round*): Exactly. Upside down.

MARTHA: You're away for weeks on end, you spend the night here in this pool, you've changed, and I can't even recognise you anymore. You seem to enjoy the company of these nudes more than anything else.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Martha!

IVAN ANTONOV (*ironically*): Sorry, am I disturbing?

MARTHA: You're suspicious of everybody, afraid of your shadow. This is crazy.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Martha, this is neither the time nor the place to discuss my mental health.

IVAN ANTONOV: Certainly not the time. Time flies, it advances, and I have already had the privilege of telling you that I go to bed early, almost at sundown. Good old-fashioned me. And I like sleeping on my own. Funny, isn't it? It's just that I feel self-conscious undressing in front of strangers.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: That's enough of this tone of voice. Where d'you think you are?

IVAN ANTONOV (*bewildered*): Me?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Go take a walk – it's a beautiful evening.

IVAN ANTONOV: I don't feel like taking a walk. I want to sleep. You go, if you wish.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: You could sleep in the kitchen.

IVAN ANTONOV: On the stove?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Take an armchair.

IVAN ANTONOV: Why should I sleep on an armchair in the kitchen? I've a living room. I sleep here habitually.

MARTHA (*testily*): You promised me we'd be alone with each other. It's a very long time since we were alone last. That's what you said. So do something.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Comrade Antonov, why don't you go for a walk? It is a wonderful evening... spread out against the sky.

MARTHA (*Realizes that the situation is humiliating*): Let's go somewhere else.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: If I leave here, he'll smash the bath.

IVAN ANTONOV: I'll smash it.

MARTHA: You won't dare! It's a unique artefact.

IVAN ANTONOV: So why did you smash my living room? It was just as unique. I had only one living room.

MARTHA: But the Roman bath...

IVAN ANTONOV: I'm not against the Roman bath. I'm happy it was discovered right here, in my living room. I'm proud it's in our city and the only one of its kind in the world. Just remove it, please. Put it in a museum or put it in your own living room. I have nowhere to live. Give me another house. This was my family home. It used to be quiet, cozy and comfortable, I'll have to sacrifice it to science. But not go for a walk when I have a house of my own, even though it may be in a mess. Now I'll leave you – but just to go to the loo, so don't celebrate yet. (*Leaves.*)

MARTHA: He somehow has a point. Why don't they give him another place to live?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Who would do that? These days you get a heart attack before you get a house.

MARTHA: Your institute, couldn't it find him something?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: My institute works with things more than a millennium old. It doesn't distribute residential property.

MARTHA: Then take it somewhere else. The museum or the institute?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: You don't realize what you're saying. Move the bath to the institute, really? The big shots would pounce on it. Nothing would be left for me. One professor would publish a book, another – an article, a third would go the conference in Rome. If I move it, it will no longer be mine, it'll be in the museum, available for all to take advantage of it. No way.

MARTHA: But he cannot just live in the street.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Do you have any idea what this Roman bath means to me? It's a one-in-a-lifetime chance.

MARTHA: Remember the bath is just...

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: The bath is a dissertation, a professorship, books, conferences in Rome, Geneva, London, Madrid, corresponding member of a couple of academies, honours, fame and money! I'll squeeze it dry, this bath. Only I need to act quick, and this Ivan

Antonov character is getting in my way. I'm at a loss how to deal with this guy. He came suddenly out of bloody nowhere.

MARTHA: You're exaggerating. It's his house after all, it's us who came out of bloody nowhere.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*ignores her*): I must be quick, quick, before someone beats me to it...

Martha stops his mouth gently, puts her arm around his shoulder, looks him in the eyes.

MARTHA (*softly*): What's wrong with you? Are you blind? Can't you see me? Can't you see anything but the bath?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*not really listening*): I see you all right.

MARTHA (*gently*): Look this way. Look at me. Can you see me?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*Fails to grasp her meaning*): Don't be stupid, yes, I can.

MARTHA: This is not stupid. Do you see me?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*annoyed*): I already told you – I do see you. My eyesight's fine.

Martha takes her arms off his shoulders and steps back. She's grown serious.

MARTHA: How about now?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*wearily*): Martha...

MARTHA (*Jumps into the Roman bath*): And now?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: I can see you perfectly well. My eyesight's fantastic. (*His tone shows he doesn't realize the gravity of the situation.*)

MARTHA (*to herself*): He doesn't see a thing. (*Comes closer to him.*) You don't see a thing. Since when? Why?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*wearily*): That your idea of a joke?

MARTHA: Yes. My idea of a joke.

Ivan Antonov enters, wearing pyjamas, and heads for the bed.

IVAN ANTONOV: Well, I'm going to bed. Good night!

MARTHA: Is he going to sleep here then?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*annoyed*): Yeah, that seems to be it.

MARTHA (*bitterly*): It's been like this for a while. You never have time for me, you never call, you never think of me. Since the Roman bath materialized it's as if I don't exist...

IVAN ANTONOV: Excuse me, your voices keep me awake. As does the light.

MARTHA: So self-centred.

IVAN ANTONOV: I have this funny habit – I sleep with the lights off.

MARTHA: You're fixated on your bath. Your shortcut to greatness...

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Martha, this conversation's gone too far. You're upset.

IVAN ANTONOV: I am upset too. The light is shining straight in in my eyes.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: OK, let's turn off the light on this caveman. (*Turns off the light.*) Martha, let's talk it over calmly. Better in the dark.

MARTHA: I don't want to talk. He's going to hear everything.

IVAN ANTONOV: Indeed.

MARTHA: Let's go out. let's go somewhere else.

IVAN ANTONOV: I have a highly developed sense of hearing, like an animal – I can hear you a mile away.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Look, Martha, you're underestimating the importance of this.

MARTHA: You are only doing this for yourself.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: I'm doing it for both of us.

MARTHA: Only for yourself. Next thing you'll dump me again for some old tombstone or broken pot.

IVAN ANTONOV: I think that's guaranteed.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: You shut up. Nobody's asking you what you think.

IVAN ANTONOV: Nobody ever asks me what I think. Not when they dug up my living room either.

MARTHA: It can't go on like that, it's too much, this isn't the first time. Always in a rush, in the shadow of something more important. I'm not a mummy, I don't want to live among antiquities all the time.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Think like a modern person.

MARTHA: You mean think like you?

IVAN ANTONOV: No need to think – act, he says.

MARTHA (*looks at Ivan Antonov*): Let's go out, just for tonight. He won't smash the bath. You won't, will you?

IVAN ANTONOV (*points at the Associate Professor*): Listen to what he has to say.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: He'll smash it.

MARTHA: He won't. He'll give us his word. Will you?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Don't be ridiculous – who trusts a man's word these days?

MARTHA: It's your choice – me or the bath.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: It's not fair to put it like that, you know.

MARTHA: I know. I know what this bath means to you. I'm not asking you to let it go for good. I want you to come with me just for tonight. I mean something to you too, or do I?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: It's not possible tonight.

MARTHA: Then I wish you well. (*Leaves.*)

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Martha!

IVAN ANTONOV: Good-looking lass. I'd have gone with her. I'd have taken my chances about the bath, even if it meant it would end up in pieces.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Oh, shut up, will you. (*Lights a cigarette nervously.*)

IVAN ANTONOV: An active sex life is essential to a healthy metabolism.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Shut up!

IVAN ANTONOV: It said so in the paper.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Idiot!

IVAN ANTONOV: Too early to say who the idiot is. I'm going to catch up with her and walk her home. (*He rushes out before the stunned Associate Professor can say anything.*)

The Associate Professor smokes nervously, sitting on a folding bed inside the Roman bath. The clock ticks loudly, obtrusively, each sound feeling a hammer blow. Time drags slowly – tick tock, tick tock. He turns off the light and smokes in the dark. Ivan Antonov comes back, tiptoeing through the dug-up living room. heading for the kitchen.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*Turns on a reading light that is inside the bath*): Where are you going?

IVAN ANTONOV: Oh! Still here, sitting in your precious bath?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*suspiciously*): Where are you going?

IVAN ANTONOV: I'm hungry. These things always make you hungry. I'll go get a bite. (*Opens the fridge, takes a sausage.*)

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: What things?

IVAN ANTONOV: You're such a child – always asking questions. Some things are not for children.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: You must tell me.

IVAN ANTONOV: Oh really? Why? Are you my confessor? Or a local vigilante?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*hopefully*): I don't think you managed to catch up with her at all.

IVAN ANTONOV: And what do you care? You chose the bath.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: I'll smash your face.

IVAN ANTONOV: Oh, get out.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Antonov, so far I've managed to crush all those who've blocked my way.

IVAN ANTONOV: So maybe your first name isn't Professor, after all? Maybe it's Steamroller. Steamroller Ananiev.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: I'll crush you, Antonov!

IVAN ANTONOV: I shudder. Do you crush at night? Because I'm going to sleep now. (*Slips under the covers.*)

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: What did you get up to with Martha?

IVAN ANTONOV (*ironically*): We discussed art.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Tell me...

IVAN ANTONOV (*interrupting*): I'll explain it to you tomorrow morning with a colour-coded chart. Now I'm trying to sleep, so, please, stop your adolescent questioning.

The Associate Professor turns off the light, plunging the stage in total darkness.

SCENE THREE

Ivan Antonov's living room, looking very much the same: dug up, with piled-up furniture. The pool is still in its place. A bed is placed inside the pool. The Associate Professor is asleep in it. There are planks thrown over the hole in the floor for people to pass. Ivan Antonov is asleep as well.

Enter Tsekov, a middle-aged, elegant, experienced-looking man. He looks round, examines the Roman bath and the two sleepers, hesitates a little...

TSEKOV: Good morning! (*nobody moves*)

TSEKOV (*louder*): Good morning!

Ivan Antonov and the Associate Professor remain immobile.

TSEKOV (*almost shouting*): Good morning!

IVAN ANTONOV (*Startles, jumps up*): Huh? What?

TSEKOV (*smiling politely*): I said “Good morning”.

IVAN ANTONOV: Why did you wake me? Only to wish me “Good morning”?

TSEKOV: No, not only.

IVAN ANTONOV: I thought for a moment it might be your job – going round wishing working people good morning. Yet another social improvement introduced by the government for the people.

TSEKOV: No, not my job. (*Eyes the bath with an expert air.*) Excuse me, that's the unique Roman bath, right?

IVAN ANTONOV: Indeed. You aren't an associate professor by any chance? There's one here already – asleep.

TSEKOV: Unfortunately, it was never my lot to climb such academic heights. I have O-levels.

IVAN ANTONOV: That's to your credit. May I ask what brings you here? O-levels are hardly sufficient justification.

TSEKOV: I need to talk to Ivan Antonov, the owner of this house. May I speak to him?

IVAN ANTONOV: If you need to speak to Ivan Antonov, that's still me. The way things are going, this might change as well.

TSEKOV: Excuse, me, I see two persons here. Can you show me your credentials?

IVAN ANTONOV: A birth certificate?

TSEKOV: Oh, do not worry, any photo ID will do. I assure you it is of mutual interest.

IVAN ANTONOV: Bizarre. But I'll show you my ID. Because you have O-levels. (*Shows ID.*)

TSEKOV: Very much obliged. (*Shows his own ID*) My name's Tsekov, I'm an art... erm... historian. Excuse me, I must ask you something, it's a professional requirement. Is the sleeping person your friend?

IVAN ANTONOV: No. He is an associate professor. At least that's what he says. You'd better ask to see his ID too.

TSEKOV: Not a relative?

IVAN ANTONOV: No, heaven forbid. He's sleeping here because of the Roman bath. He's protecting it. From me. He's afraid I may smash it up. He discovered it, or rather he came here first after they discovered it.

Tsekov tiptoes to the sleeping Associate Professor, lifts the edge of the blanket, looks at his face then goes back to Ivan Antonov.

TSEKOV: Ananiev.

IVAN ANTONOV: Associate Professor Ananiev.

TSEKOV: Let's keep this between the two of us. Do you think he's really asleep

IVAN ANTONOV: Who knows. He may just be keeping his eyes shut.

TSEKOV: Either way we'll talk quietly. And go somewhere further away. When he wakes, tell him I'm your cousin from Lukovit.

IVAN ANTONOV: Does it matter if I get it wrong and mention another town, and not Lukovit?

TSEKOV: I couldn't care less.

IVAN ANTONOV: Good.

TSEKOV: I believe you are an intelligent man.

IVAN ANTONOV: Appearances can be misleading.

TSEKOV: No, you are intelligent and an intellectual, and that's precisely why you've no chance at all. Look at your situation. Your house is a mess, your furniture is in pieces and you have a Roman pool in the middle of your room.

IVAN ANTONOV: With nudes.

TSEKOV: The nudes do not change the situation materially. Rather, they aggravate it further. This Roman bath from the times of Pompillian and Caius Lucius is the only surviving one of its kind in the world. It is quite unique, don't nurse any hopes on this count.

IVAN ANTONOV: I do not.

TSEKOV: Good. This pool is only going to get more famous from now on. Like the Boyana Church frescoes and the Thracian tomb at Kazanlak. International scientists will drool over it. The school of Marcus Antonius Octavian, after all.

IVAN ANTONOV: Pretty impressive O-levels.

TSEKOV My grades were disastrous. I actually had to resit three exams. Bribed my way through the system. You know, it was still the old corrupt bourgeois system. But no matter. What matters is that the Roman bath will be declared a World Heritage site. Then UNESCO will come into play and you'll be dead.

IVAN ANTONOV: Think so?

TSEKOV: Positive. I know UNESCO. They don't mince about. I told you at the outset – you haven't a chance. They will start excavations in the kitchen, they will dig up the storage room, they won't spare the toilet either.

IVAN ANTONOV: No, not the toilet. Do you think so? The toilet as well?

TSEKOV: I've been working with UNESCO for years. Know their back teeth. And I know our own guys as well. They don't mince about either. They will dig up the toilet and you'll be forced to use public toilets. And they're quite disgusting nowadays.

IVAN ANTONOV: Terrible.

TSEKOV: No toilet paper. Dirty. Almost always occupied. A shitshow.

IVAN ANTONOV (*nods*): A shitshow. I think he's moving.

TSEKOV: In Lukovit, all is well... (*Looks at the Associate Professor.*) He's turning. Maybe he's still asleep?

IVAN ANTONOV: Can't be sure with him.

TSEKOV (*Observes carefully*): Probably asleep. The worst thing is, they aren't always open.

IVAN ANTONOV: Who isn't?

TSEKOV: The public toilets. They get inspected every now and again. What is there to inspect? Or they are just closed. Imagine, you're running, driven, and it's closed. The horror.

IVAN ANTONOV: Your account is blood-curdling. I shudder.

TSEKOV: Shudder you may. The thing is, you'll be kicked out of here.

IVAN ANTONOV: How do you mean?

TSEKOV (*Mimics a kick*): Like this. On your back.

IVAN ANTONOV: You think it'll get to that?

TSEKOV: I can visualize it in detail.

IVAN ANTONOV: But they'll still give me another place. As compensation.

TSEKOV (*laughs*): Antonov, you're an intellectual and you've no idea of the housing situation. You can't even bring yourself to pronounce the word "bribe". You don't enjoy grovelling, you would never go down on your knees and kiss an official's hand. Tell me, would you fall to your knees and kiss the hand of the official who has to approve your new accommodation?

IVAN ANTONOV: Well, why should I?

TSEKOV: If you were in a more lucrative trade, I wouldn't be worried. You'd probably move to your second home, up in the mountains, for some fresh air. But you're an intellectual, you don't even have a second home. Admit it.

IVAN ANTONOV: I don't.

TSEKOV: See? You're finished. That's why I'm here. By the way, does it look like one of his ears is cocked? Like he's listening.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Looks in his turn*): Which ear?

TSEKOV: The one on your side.

IVAN ANTONOV: I can't see the other one to compare.

TSEKOV: Whatever. So, to cut a long story short, they'll take your house and kick you out in the street.

IVAN ANTONOV: I don't think so. Worst case scenario they'll give me another house.

TSEKOV: Best case scenario they'll promise to give you one. They've promised that to thousands of people, and do you know how many have actually got one? Waiting for public housing is a dead end.

IVAN ANTONOV: But I...

TSEKOV: Yes, I know. You'll fight. You'll complain. You'll write letters, wait in line in the institutions. And you'll be paying private market rent all the while. And that is serfdom. 120 bucks for a one-room flat. 140 if there is a lift in the building, and it'll be mostly out of order.

IVAN ANTONOV: What?

TSEKOV: This is what the law says. They can charge you a certain percentage for the thrill of possibly getting stuck in a faulty lift. They can charge you for everything – view, insulation, lift... Everything's fine in Lukovit, auntie says hi, asks when you'll come to visit.

Behind them, the associate professor is stirring and Tsekov's watchful eye has spotted that. He winks and nudges Ivan Antonov, but the latter fails to grasp his meaning.

IVAN ANTONOV: Auntie? Whose auntie?

TSEKOV: Well, cousin, I'll be on my way.

Ivan Antonov is briefly confused, then turns around, sees the Associate Professor and gets it.

TSEKOV: Come and walk me some of the way, I keep losing my way here in the big city...

They leave, go out on the street and stop in front of the taxi call column. Tsekov leans on it.

TSEKOV: I don't want to take anything from you. I want to give you something.

IVAN ANTONOV: Give me what?

TSEKOV: Antonov, face it, you are an intellectual. You don't stand a chance. This Roman bath will be the end of you. They'll take your house, so much is already clear. You've just one ray of hope – you can turn the situation to your advantage.

IVAN ANTONOV: How?

TSEKOV: Trust me. Nowadays, clever people in the West, that is to say, rich people, they invest their money in art. Paintings, icons, antiques, pottery. The prices go only one way – up. A work of art doesn't need maintenance. You don't have to pay it a salary. It doesn't get unionized. It just sits there in a corner, adding value. All day, very quietly. Prices have gone up, Antonov, sky-high. And what does one need nowadays? Why, money. Money won't make you happy, but neither will its absence.

IVAN ANTONOV: Are you lecturing me on the meaning of life?

TSEKOV: Precisely. What is the point of living in a dug-up house looking increasingly like a battlefield? Why not live on the shores of a lake, say Lago di Como? You're an intelligent man.

IVAN ANTONOV: Do you imply that this is enough to live on the shores of lake Como?

TSEKOV: Not for others. For you it is enough. Look, Antonov, I can picture you living quietly in a villa of your own, on Lago di Como. Or maybe in Switzerland, with a solid bank account. Plenty of lakes in Switzerland. No worse than Lago di Como.

IVAN ANTONOV: What is this hot air about Lago di Como? You're talking as if it's the local reservoir. How am I supposed to go live on Lago di Como?

TSEKOV (*looks round furtively*): By moving the bath.

IVAN ANTONOV: What? Move the bath? Wonderful. Where to?

TSEKOV: Abroad. To Italy. There will be other people to take over from there, most likely from the States. Americans have money. You don't have to worry about that. There will always be a buyer for the only remaining Roman bath from the times of Caius Lucius and Pompillian. With nudes! We'll charge them for the nudes as well. Squeeze them dry. They have cash.

IVAN ANTONOV: But how can we take it to Italy? It is in my living room, right?

TSEKOV: Precisely. It is in your living room. Once they take it to a museum, that's it. They'll have tight security, it's a huge asset for the nation. That's why we have to act fast before they click into action. Bureaucrats are slow. Letters, decisions, application number, procedure number... Meanwhile we'll do our own number. Don't worry, Antonov, I've been in this business a long time. You might safely say that I have exported half the neolithic tombs from Bulgaria. If you put together all Thracian burial sites and archaeological finds I've exported, you could fill half the British Museum. I was also about to sell the Roman villa they found in the Rhodope mountains, but they blew it up before I got there, so there was nothing left.

IVAN ANTONOV: So you are...

TSEKOV Yes. An art dealer. I sell old icons, rare books, altar pieces, Thracian and Roman jewellery, anything. But that's all small fry compared to this Roman bath. Antonov, the bath is a bonanza. We'll get a hundred million, no less. And then we'll be off to Lago di Como.

TAXI CALL COLUMN (*Suddenly starts speaking*): I got this thing about Lago di Como. Go on.

TSEKOV (*Startles and looks round*): Did you say something? I thought somebody spoke here.

IVAN ANTONOV: But wait, Tsekov, in this case the Roman bath would have to be destroyed. And exported in pieces.

TSEKOV: We'll cut it in pieces, Antonov, we'll cut it up like a cake.

IVAN ANTONOV: What if it turns to dust?

TSEKOV: Won't happen, Antonov, I use cutting-edge techniques, the latest scientific stuff. I read scholarly journals. They can cut up whole temples. I don't foresee any difficulty with this bath.

TAXI CALL COLUMN: What if you get caught?

TSEKOV (*Freezes, looking round suspiciously*): This voice again. Antonov, you a ventriloquist?

IVAN ANTONOV: Not that I know.

TSEKOV: Someone asked: "What if you get caught?"

IVAN ANTONOV: My thoughts were elsewhere.

TSEKOV: It wasn't a thought. It was a voice.

IVAN ANTONOV: Tsekov, the Roman bath belongs to the nation, after all.

TSEKOV: Why should it belong to the nation? Did the nation build it?

IVAN ANTONOV: There are laws.

TSEKOV: I know. According to what law did they dig up your living room?

IVAN ANTONOV: This happened by chance.

TSEKOV: There is no such thing as chance. You can get married by chance, but that's about it.

Ivan Antonov is silent. Tsekov looks at him anxiously.

TSEKOV: Oh, come on. Scruples. I thought you were an intelligent man. Why should you care? Does anyone care about you? It's just a Roman bath. You should've seen all the ancient burial chambers and Roman amphitheatres that they bulldozed, all the necropolises that they blew up, all the ruins they dismantled. At least I mean well. At least we'll preserve this bath for humanity. It won't be destroyed, it will be put in some museum, well, private collection, so we'll save a work of art. Think of art, Antonov! This is a noble endeavour, after

all. And well-paid, too, and that makes it even nobler. We can get fifty million dollars apiece!

TAXI CALL COLUMN: Excuse me, I didn't get the exact amount. Did you say fifty million? US?

TSEKOV: What? Since when do columns speak on their own?

IVAN ANTONOV: Oh, this one has always been very talkative.

TSEKOV: Let's move on.

TAXI CALL COLUMN: Twenty percent! Twenty percent for me! If possible, in Swiss francs. The dollar's too volatile.

TSEKOV: Jumping the gun, isn't it? Talking about a percentage at this stage. Antonov, let this be an example for you. It's only a column, but it is sharper than you.

IVAN ANTONOV: Machines are about to replace people completely.

TSEKOV (*Looks anxiously round*): Think, Antonov, think, don't let this opportunity pass. It's your only chance.

TAXI CALL COLUMN: We could get away by taxi.

TSEKOV: Well, I'll be off. I'll come back soon. Do not accept others' offers, you'll get cheated. And think quick – there's no time to lose. (*Tsekov scuttles left.*)

TAXI CALL COLUMN: Hey, wait, where are you going?

TSEKOV: As if I'm going to tell you that. (*Leaves*)

SCENE FOUR

Ivan Antonov comes back to his own dug-up living room. The Associate Professor is shaving with an electric shaver. The radio is on.

IVAN ANTONOV: Before you go away for good, don't forget to leave twenty-two bucks. For one night's accommodation. I've included ten percent for the Roman bath, like for live music.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Nothing could be further from my mind. I'm not going away – my work is at the initial stage.

IVAN ANTONOV: If I throw you out?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: You won't be able to. I'm a judoka.

IVAN ANTONOV (*shouting*): On what legal grounds are you still in my house? It is protected under the Constitution.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Please. Here is the order to start the excavations. Then here is the order to extend them to the storeroom and the toilet.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Reads*): Stamped and all. But this is a private house. How come?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: This is an archaeological site. And I'm in charge of the excavations, in case you hadn't noticed.

IVAN ANTONOV: I'll complain.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Of course. The normal procedure takes two months. The Scientific Council will then appoint a commission to examine your case. The commission will work for a month and will ask for two more months to present its findings.

IVAN ANTONOV: Why two?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Academics are busy people. They can't do it all in a day. They may be here today, but be in Berlin tomorrow for a conference, in Italy the day after, for a symposium. Then I'll appeal against the decision, if it happens to be in your favour. I'll submit detailed justification, a couple of hundred pages. My appeal will be heard by a commission first, then by the Scientific Council...

IVAN ANTONOV (*interrupts him angrily*): Do you happen to know how many years they give for premeditated murder? In case the murderer surrenders voluntarily.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Don't even think about it. I'm sturdy and my blood group type is the most common one. Attempted murder will only slow things down.

IVAN ANTONOV: Don't you have a conscience?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: I have a degree.

IVAN ANTONOV (*shouting*): Then give me another house!

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: We only deal with things at least a millennium old.

IVAN ANTONOV: So who deals with guys in their thirties who just want to lead a normal life? Who deals with human beings?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*shrugs*): I don't know. That is outside my special field. Ask an agony aunt.

Enter the Lifeguard, a youngish man.

LIFEGUARD: Excuse me, is this where the pool is?

IVAN ANTONOV: It's right there.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*sternly*): What pool do you need?

LIFEGUARD: The one they showed on TV. I've been appointed a lifeguard at the newly opened pool.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: A what?

LIFEGUARD: A lifeguard. There must be a lifeguard at all swimming pools, beaches and other bodies of water. We save bathers' lives.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Bathers' lives?

LIFEGUARD: Bathers are precious assets. It says so in the Lifeguard's Rule Book. (*Goes out for a moment.*)

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Nobody will ever bathe in this pool. Or swim.

LIFEGUARD (*Enters carrying a sunshade, a case and a foldable camping chair*): How come?

IVAN ANTONOV: Can't you see that nobody can possibly drown in here?

LIFEGUARD: There are people who have drowned in sinks. (*Tosses the case on the floor and sits down on the foldable chair.*)

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: This is some mistake. It's not a swimming pool but a Roman bath, a cultural monument thousands of years old...

LIFEGUARD: I have my appointment letter in my pocket. (*Slaps his pocket.*)

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: But it won't be filled with water, ever. It's about to be studied scientifically.

LIFEGUARD: Not my business. My business is to save people.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: There is no need for a lifeguard.

LIFEGUARD: Well, maybe there is.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: We'll see!

LIFEGUARD: At this time, when the summer holidays are in full swing, when the directives say we should teach thousands of people how to swim, you want to close a pool? When our Olympic swimmers are so crap?

IVAN ANTONOV (*horrified*): Do you mean to train people how to swim in here?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: In this specific case we have a...

LIFEGUARD (*interrupting*): The issue isn't the specific case. This is a matter of principle. They won't even listen to you if they hear about the closure of a swimming pool. No matter if it is Roman or Greek. The situation with pools is catastrophic.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: We'll see about that.

LIFEGUARD: Take it from a friend – you’re wasting your time. Our country has plans to win ten gold medals in swimming at the Montreal Olympics. They have even made a solemn pledge.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: We’re not friends. I don’t care about Montreal. And if you spill so much as a drop of water in this pool, I’ll sue you. Nobody could save you then. Name’s Ananiev, Associate Professor Ananiev, remember this. (*Collects his bag and leaves.*)

LIFEGUARD (*to Ivan Antonov*): You an associate professor too?

IVAN ANTONOV: No, I’m Ivan Antonov.

LIFEGUARD: You’ve something to do with the pool?

IVAN ANTONOV: No. I was careless enough to be born in this house. I live here.

LIFEGUARD (*Walks round looking for a place for something*): Oh, surely not. It isn’t a bad house. I like it.

IVAN ANTONOV: We have similar tastes then. I like it too. But it got dug up a little.

LIFEGUARD (*humouring him*): Look, they dig up everything everywhere these days. Streets, houses. Don’t worry.

IVAN ANTONOV: No more reason to worry.

LIFEGUARD: Yes, that’s the right place. Comrade Antonov, could you step out with me for a moment, please?

They leave. Next moment we hear Ivan Antonov’s objecting voice: “No, no don’t, not this, please!” etc. In a while, they come back, carrying a disassembled beach watchtower, with elements made of steel tubes, with a flagpole. They stop in front of the bath.

IVAN ANTONOV: Why do you need a watchtower?

LIFEGUARD: The issue is where to put it. (*looks round assessing the locations*) The tower is part of the standard kit. No way you can work without a tower. It gives better visibility. Perhaps right here...

IVAN ANTONOV: You can't be serious...

LIFEGUARD: No, there is no window here, let's place it opposite the window. (*They take the tower elsewhere, opposite a window.*)

LIFEGUARD: Here.

IVAN ANTONOV: No, no, this is where I put my bed. Get it?

LIFEGUARD (*Places it down in spite of Ivan Antonov's resistance*): Perfect.

IVAN ANTONOV: Listen, I've nothing against swimming as a sport but I wouldn't like you to train thousands of new young swimmers in my living room.

LIFEGUARD: But why, Comrade Antonov?

IVAN ANTONOV: Well, you know, sometimes I sleep, sometimes I feel like being on my own. I work. I would get in the way of the swimmers.

LIFEGUARD: No worries, Comrade Antonov. A competition-level athlete must be mentally stable. Let them get used to it.

IVAN ANTONOV: I'm worried more about my own mental stability.

The Lifeguard has mounted the scaffolding above the Roman bath. He swings his arms as if preparing to dive in.

LIFEGUARD: You need exercise, Comrade Antonov!

IVAN ANTONOV: Oh, no! He wants to dive. (*Scrambles into the bath*) I must act. Clearly. Or else, next in this Roman bath, I'll get the US Sixth Fleet!

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

Ivan Antonov's living room. It looks the same as before. There is scaffolding around the Roman bath, the floor is dug up, there are gaping holes in the floorboard. There is the same scaffolding of steel tubes and planks smeared with plaster. A plank is also thrown across the bath. The Associate Professor is digging in one of the holes. In the middle of the living room behind the bath is the Lifeguard's watchtower. A white flag is hanging from the mast. In the lower part of this tower is a blackboard with six vertical lines marked in chalk. A brightly coloured beach sunshade crowns the structure. At the foot of the tower there is a spool of nylon rope, a heap of floating balls strung with rope, bright red lifebelts and buoys scattered all around. The Lifeguard is perched on top of the tower, wearing a bright yellow towelling gown, looking through a pair of binoculars. Music is playing on a small radio next to him.

LIFEGUARD: The Ivanovs are cooking beef stew. D'you like beef stew, Comrade Ananiev?

The Associate Professor keeps digging in silence.

LIFEGUARD: The pretty student from the 5th floor has a visitor again. She's drawing the curtains. How do youngsters ever find the time to study, eh, Comrade Ananiev?

The Associate Professor goes on digging and does not answer.

LIFEGUARD (*Looking through his binoculars*): Mrs Deleva just dropped one more plate. (*He draws one more vertical chalk mark on the blackboard.*) Her seventh this week. Abysmal hand-eye coordination. Nothing new on the fourth floor either. The crone's munching an apple. Do you like apples, Comrade Ananiev?

The Associate Professor keeps digging, ignoring the Lifeguard.

LIFEGUARD (*Lowers his binoculars and looks at the Associate Professor*): You shouldn't look down on lifeguards, Comrade Ananiev. We're human beings too, you know.

The Associate Professor remains silent.

LIFEGUARD: Shall I save you, Comrade Ananiev? What d'you say?

The Associate Professor keeps digging, teeth clenched.

LIFEGUARD: You're bizarre, Comrade Ananiev. You don't speak to me. Why not?

The Associate Professor keeps digging with his back to the Lifeguard.

LIFEGUARD (*Observes him for a while*): Digging – like Hamlet!

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*Stops and wipes the sweat off his face*): Nonsense!

LIFEGUARD: Why nonsense? I've seen the film – that's how it was. Only there was a skull there.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Yeah, while here we have a lifeguard. For an empty pool of a dozen square metres.

LIFEGUARD: That's according to regulations.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: You're a burden on the taxpayer.

LIFEGUARD: We lifeguards, we may be a burden, but at least we save lives. Look at yourself – you only dig places up.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: If you were an honest lifeguard, you'd ask to be transferred to a normal pool, with water in it. You could say this was a mistake, a misunderstanding.

LIFEGUARD: I was hired to work here. Why should I resign of my own accord?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: It's what an honest lifeguard would do.

LIFEGUARD: Tending your resignation is a bourgeois cliche. In this country, no one ever resigns. Have you heard about anybody quitting their post voluntarily? No, you haven't. And you won't. Why should I be the first one?

His question remains unanswered, Diamandiev enters precisely at this moment. A middle-aged man, he moves slowly, self-assuredly, ignoring both the Associate Professor and the Lifeguard, who observe him in silence. He reaches the bath and looks over the rim.

LIFEGUARD (*blowing his whistle*): Don't come too close to the pool!

Diamandiev steps back and then tries to go down the stairs into the bath.

LIFEGUARD (*blows his whistle again*): It's prohibited to enter the pool with your clothes on.

Diamandiev looks at him sourly and clammers out of the bath.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*aggressively*): Excuse me, can I help you?

DIAMANDIEV: Who are you?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: I think you should answer first.

DIAMANDIEV: Ivan Antonov?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Name's Ananiev, Associate Professor Ananiev, I'm in charge of the excavations here. Unauthorised persons aren't allowed on site.

DIAMANDIEV: Is this pool really from the times of the Roman Empire?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Are you here just to ask me that?

DIAMANDIEV: I'm looking for the owner of this house – Ivan Antonov.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: What d'you want with him?

DIAMANDIEV: That's my business.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Why are you asking questions about the Roman bath?

DIAMANDIEV: Why not?

LIFEGUARD: Here is Comrade Antonov. (*Enter Ivan Antonov, looking tired.*) Comrade Antonov, this guy's looking for you.

IVAN ANTONOV (*to Diamandiev*): Good morning. Where are the dolphins then?

DIAMANDIEV: What dolphins? (*Looks at the pool and the holes in the floor.*)

IVAN ANTONOV (*to the Lifeguard*): Isn't he the guy from the circus? (*to Diamandiev*) You're not from the circus?

DIAMANDIEV: No.

IVAN ANTONOV: Good. There was some dolphin trainer that wanted to talk to me. Wanted to rent the pool. Dolphins indeed!

DIAMANDIEV: My name's Diamandiev. I want to talk to you.

IVAN ANTONOV: All right.

DIAMANDIEV: This needs to stay between the two of us.

IVAN ANTONOV: Between anybody you like. (*They go to the left of the stage.*)

TSEKOV (*Pokes his head out of a hole in the floor*): Do not accept this, Antonov! (*Disappears again.*)

They look round and Ivan Antonov, puzzled, goes further left. Diamandiev is about to start talking, when the Associate Professor comes closer. He feigns cleaning an object with a brush but is really listening. Ivan Antonov is at loss as to where they can have some privacy. He gestures to Diamandiev they could go across via the scaffolding.

IVAN ANTONOV: Come with me. (*He goes first. Diamandiev follows him. They stop in the middle, where they finally seem to be on their own.*)

DIAMANDIEV: I'm a real estate broker, you may know my name. Diamandiev – I've bought and sold half the properties in Sofia.

IVAN ANTONOV: That leaves you the other half.

DIAMANDIEV: I have plans about the other half. You see, I deal in high-end properties. Four-bedroom luxury flats and higher. With fireplaces, floor heating. Water features, marble floors, fitness rooms.

IVAN ANTONOV: Sport is good for one.

DIAMANDIEV: In my case... (*Stops, because Ivan Antonov gestures at him, drawing his attention to one of the holes in the floor. The Associate Professor has appeared in it.*)

Ivan Antonov sighs, looks round and beckons Diamandiev to climb up onto the bed, which is currently placed on the scaffolding, a couple of metres above the floor.

IVAN ANTONOV: Over here, please!

DIAMANDIEV: Up there? (*climbs up and sits on the bed*) Thank you. I don't work with random clients, Comrade Antonov. I charge a 15% commission, but my clients know what they're getting. I offer quality that you can't find anywhere else.

We see the Associate Professor appear from a rectangular hole in the floor underneath the bed and listen. Antonov notices him and grips his forehead in desperation. Following the direction of his eyes, Diamandiev sees the Associate Professor. He frowns and then gestures for them to go out, pointing the way over the bed, down the ladder and then out, where they can talk undisturbed.

DIAMANDIEV (*going down the scaffolding*): It's getting harder and harder to do business.

They move for the door, but then in comes the Lifeguard and tosses a floating ball and some rope inside the bath. The two of them go back and sit on two chairs by the desk.

DIAMANDIEV: Comrade Antonov.

IVAN ANTONOV: I'm listening.

DIAMANDIEV: I have a client who wants something really special. He's ready to pay for it. A lot.

IVAN ANTONOV: What does he want?

DIAMANDIEV: Your house. He's heard about the bath.

IVAN ANTONOV: My house? You mean this here battlefield?

DIAMANDIEV: Yes.

IVAN ANTONOV: He has a fetish for dug-up places?

DIAMANDIEV: No. He could buy and sell both of us. He deals in construction materials and has obscene amounts of money, can't tell you how much.

IVAN ANTONOV: Don't tell me – if it's obscene.

DIAMANDIEV: His wife wants a house with a Roman bath. She's heard it's the only one of its kind in the world.

IVAN ANTONOV: Sure. I must disappoint you, though. You cannot buy this house. Not with the bath anyway.

DIAMANDIEV: There's nothing that can't be bought. The only question is – how much.

IVAN ANTONOV: You see, this bath is unique, a monument of global significance. The archaeological institute is conducting excavations. Now they are digging up my toilet as well.

DIAMANDIEV: Doesn't matter. We'll sue the institute. This is private property, nothing's definite yet. We'll get the best lawyers. Leave that to me.

IVAN ANTONOV: Besides, there's a lifeguard. From the sports ministry.

DIAMANDIEV: We'll sue the sports ministry. With the best lawyers.

IVAN ANTONOV: It seems this Roman bath should belong to the nation. And to all of humankind, as the associate professor keeps saying.

DIAMANDIEV: We'll sue the nation. And all of humankind, if need be.

IVAN ANTONOV: With the best lawyers.

DIAMANDIEV: The very best. I haven't lost a single court case. Just give me written consent for the sale and leave the rest to me.

The Lifeguard blows his whistle off-stage, and shouts "Watch out! Can't you see the buoy!", then enters carrying three buoys and a letter.

LIFEGUARD: Comrade Antonov, we have got a letter.

Ivan Antonov reads the letter. The Lifeguard places the buoys around the bath and on the scaffolding. Diamandiev steps back discreetly.

IVAN ANTONOV: I don't believe this.

LIFEGUARD: It's from the local council.

IVAN ANTONOV: Can't be true. I spent hours describing the situation to them. In detail. Articulating slowly and very distinctly. I explained that a Roman bath had been found in my house, that I had nowhere to live, that it was high time for them to intervene and remove this bath from my house. And I get this answer: "Dear Comrade Antonov, we are writing in response to your application for a permission to open a Roman bath in your house. We hereby inform you that your application has been rejected in accordance with paragraph 57, point 3 of the Regulation for limiting citizens' private initiative. With a comradely salute, yours sincerely..."

DIAMANDIEV: Signed and stamped.

IVAN ANTONOV: Signed and stamped.

LIFEGUARD: You should've done it in writing.

IVAN ANTONOV: I submitted a written application as well.

DIAMANDIEV: Work with public institutions at your peril.

IVAN ANTONOV: Incredible! I talked to them for hours!

DIAMANDIEV: Make some money instead. Get lots of cash, rather than a comradely salute.

TSEKOV (*Pops out of a hole in the floor*): Antonov, the Swiss franc is super stable, think about that. (*hides again*)

LIFEGUARD (*Jumps up*): This looked like a dolphin!

IVAN ANTONOV (*absent-mindedly, still thinking of the letter*): What dolphin? Where?

LIFEGUARD: Right there. The dolphin spoke!

IVAN ANTONOV: Dolphins can't talk. What a mess.

DIAMANDIEV: Will you give me a power of attorney now, or... should I come tomorrow?

IVAN ANTONOV: Oh, come tomorrow. What power of attorney?

DIAMANDIEV: Empowering me to sell the house on your behalf.

TSEKOV (*Pops out from somewhere else*): Remember Lago di Como! (*Hides.*)

DIAMANDIEV: That voice seems familiar.

IVAN ANTONOV: Really?

LIFEGUARD: It was a dolphin! (*excitedly*) A dolphin, no doubt.

DIAMANDIEV: No, no. I know this voice. When, Antonov?

IVAN ANTONOV: When what? Oh sure! Not now, I can't think now, you can see the mess it all is.

DIAMANDIEV: Do not take too long. The prices may go down, the state may slap price controls. It's a volatile situation.

IVAN ANTONOV: Volatile indeed.

The Associate Professor comes in through the door with a pickaxe in his hands, looking suspiciously at Diamandiev. The latter looks shaken and moves to exit hastily.

DIAMANDIEV (*whispering*): I'll drop in tomorrow once again. See you.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Hey, Antonov, it strikes me that there are some pretty dodgy characters coming to visit.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Pointing at him*): With pickaxes!

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Let me warn you again, do not even think you can lay your philistine hands on my Roman bath. More than once, the State has ultimately shown who's boss. More than once, it has put philistines like you, thinking only of their own narrow interests, in their rightful places. It will put you in your rightful place too.

IVAN ANTONOV: And whose interests are you defending? Sacrificing your life to serve science, are you? A life in the service of humankind. Not seeking to extract any profit, no hidden agenda, you're a selfless hard-working bee.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Successful modern people act, Antonov!

IVAN ANTONOV: Regardless of what the action is?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: The end justifies the means. There will always be somebody to justify your actions. As long as you achieve your purpose. I know people like you – you wait all your life for somebody to notice your spiritual depth, the unique value of your character. Your rare and precious qualities. Your loving heart. You wait, you do nothing. And then you wonder why everybody ignores you, why women prefer others' company.

IVAN ANTONOV: I don't feel ignored.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: You need to make a move, Antonov!

IVAN ANTONOV: To you, the perfect man needs just fuel, is that it? In order to crush the others?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Get off your high horse, Antonov.

IVAN ANTONOV: It's not about me. Any human being deserves to be valued higher than a bath.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: OK, you can stay human. And I'll go dig up the toilet. (*Walks away.*) What does the toilet deserve? Should it be valued higher or lower than a bath?

IVAN ANTONOV: Depends on who digs it up. In the event, it deserves to be valued higher. And mind you don't break the toilet bowl while you're digging. Or I'll sue you. With the best lawyers. That's what successful modern people do when their toilet bowls get damaged, don't they?

He drops down on the bed, looking tired, on the bed that is still placed on the scaffolding above the floor. The Lifeguard is sitting on his tower, unmoved, staring ahead.

IVAN ANTONOV: Serves me right for going to the seaside in the summer! I was better off when they gave me the vouchers for January. Cooler and not at all crowded. Most importantly, nothing ever happened. Nothing worse than getting a banal pneumonia. But when I got to go in August, look what happened.

The lifeguard raises a red flag on the tower, writes “12°” and sits down again calmly.

IVAN ANTONOV: Now my house is full of associate professors and life belts, and no one can save me.

LIFEGUARD (*Jumps*): Let me save you, comrade Antonov!

IVAN ANTONOV: Aren't you fed up with saving me? Go save the associate professor.

LIFEGUARD (*excitedly*): But he doesn't want to be saved. Egghead.

IVAN ANTONOV: I'm an egghead.

LIFEGUARD: No! You're different! You don't despise ordinary people. Comrade, I must save people, after all, that's my job. It doesn't look

good otherwise, does it? The pool has a lifeguard but he never gets to save anybody. I must build a track record, otherwise they'll fire me.

IVAN ANTONOV: I don't feel like being saved right now.

LIFEGUARD: Why not, it's a good moment, there's a red flag.

IVAN ANTONOV (*irritably*): No, not today.

LIFEGUARD: And the water is icy, you can easily get a cramp.

IVAN ANTONOV: I hate drowning in cold water. You can catch a cold.

LIFEGUARD: Comrade, you're a good man, you have always treated me with respect. Please, let me save you. What do you think? It'll take just five minutes, comrade. Please!...

IVAN ANTONOV (*angrily*): All right, all right, save me. Where do I get to drown this time?

LIFEGUARD: Over there, behind those rocks. (*Takes off his towelling gown in a hurry.*)

IVAN ANTONOV: But no resuscitation! Last time you almost broke my arm.

LIFEGUARD: I'll take extra care, Comrade Antonov.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Stops next to the Roman bath*): Over here?

LIFEGUARD: Yes.

IVAN ANTONOV: Shall I jump in?

LIFEGUARD: Yes, jump!

IVAN ANTONOV: I'm jumping in. (*Enters the pool gingerly and sits down on the bottom*)

LIFEGUARD: Better with a broken arm but alive, is what I say.

IVAN ANTONOV: Couldn't you skip all this?

LIFEGUARD: It's my job. I must practice my skills, or I'll lose them. Besides, my back gets stiff from sitting all day.

IVAN ANTONOV: Shall I shout?

LIFEGUARD: Yes.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Shouts*): Heeeeelp! Heeeeelp!

The Lifeguard, on top of the tower, snatches his binoculars and points them in the wrong direction.

IVAN ANTONOV: Heeeeelp!

The Associate Professor comes running from the kitchen, pickaxe in hand.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: What is it?

IVAN ANTONOV (*Explains matter-of-factly*): I'm drowning. Heeeeelp!

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Idiots! (*leaves*)

LIFEGUARD: I can see you! I'm coming! Hold on! I'm swimming in your direction. I'm coming.

The Lifeguard jumps off the tower, snatches the life belt and throws it at Ivan Antonov. Then he jumps into the pool and mimics swimming – lies down on the plank thrown across the pool and starts moving his arms and legs in a breaststroke manner. Then he grips Ivan Antonov and drags him out by the stairs.

IVAN ANTONOV: Take it easy, you'll break my back.

LIFEGUARD: Every second counts. I'm fighting for your life. (*Applies rescue breaths and CPR. Ivan Antonov screams underneath him.*)

IVAN ANTONOV: Enough! That's enough! Ouch! Stop it! Do you hear me?

LIFEGUARD: I'm done. (*Pulls him to his feet. Ivan Antonov is dizzy and stumbles.*) One more minute and you'd have gone under.

IVAN ANTONOV: The water was freezing. I got a cramp.

The Lifeguard runs to get towelling gowns, puts one on himself and wraps Ivan Antonov in the other. Antonov takes it off.

LIFEGUARD (*Opens a drawer and takes out a big register*): Now please sign. Here. Great. Thank you!

IVAN ANTONOV (*signing his name*): What's the point of doing this each time?

LIFEGUARD: Procedure, Comrade Antonov. Lifeguards need procedure. And it's good for the stats. (*Spots a man by the door.*) Look, there's somebody by the door.

During the resuscitation a man has entered the room quietly. He is standing silently by the door.

IVAN ANTONOV: Not the dolphin guy, is he?

LIFEGUARD: He doesn't say anything, so he must be a big shot.

IVAN ANTONOV: Wait! This guy might be from the city council. I filed a complaint there as well. They said they'd send someone round to have a look. And we've been wasting time saving me. Please, Comrade, do come in. At last! Pleased to meet you. I am Ivan Antonov. You can see how it is – holes, cracks, a pool in the middle, in a word – the battlefield at Verdun. I go on holiday and when I come back, I see a Roman bath they discovered in my living room. From the times of Emperor Pompillian. With nudes. There, the nudes in question. (*Points.*) I had left a couple of builders here to change the floorboards and they started digging and pop goes a Roman bath. The only one of its kind in the world. A unique monument. They are

writing scientific studies about it. UNESCO will put it on their World Heritage list. And we have a lifeguard. (*Points at the Lifeguard, who bows.*) That's all very well, but I have nowhere to live. That's the upshot. My home is full of associate professors, lifeguards, life belts, and it will be used for training thousands of young swimmers. My toilet has been dug up. They won't spare the kitchen. Science calls for sacrifices – and Ivan Antonov makes them. We need to win ten gold medals at the Montreal Olympics – at Ivan Antonov's expense.

The man listens carefully, absorbing each word, then takes a notepad from his pocket and writes.

IVAN ANTONOV: I admit, I am not a Roman... or a bath, but don't I have the right to exist nonetheless? To have a home? Get a bit of attention?

The man nods silently in agreement.

IVAN ANTONOV: Can you imagine what will happen? They are digging in the toilet now. If they find something there, my house becomes a museum. They'll cordon it off, put signs in several languages. But where am I supposed to go? Foreign tourists don't care to look at humans.

LIFEGUARD: They don't.

IVAN ANTONOV: I'm in trouble on all sides. I have one guy digging up my home, another saving my life, yet another talking of Lago di Como. Those who dig do not provide housing. They only dig. The ones who provide housing have nothing to do with those who dig. And all of them say they have nothing to do with my case. This is the situation in a nutshell, dear comrade. If you cannot do anything about me, I might as well go and live on the shores of bloody Lago di Como. That's how desperate I am. After all, I cannot just go and

pitch a tent under the ash trees in the square. I have written a zillion applications and have explained the situation as many times – nothing. Please, take action.

Ivan Antonov shuts up and looks at the man. The man, in his turn, looks back at him to see if has finished speaking. Then the man writes something down and hands the notebook to Ivan Antonov, who reads it. Ivan Antonov looks at the man in amazement, and then at the Lifeguard.

LIFEGUARD: What is it, Comrade Antonov, are they offering you a new house?

IVAN ANTONOV (*Looks at the man again and reads out loud*): “I have severe hearing and speaking difficulties since childhood. Please, help me by donating 2 leva. Thank you very much in advance!”

LIFEGUARD: Huh!?!...

IVAN ANTONOV (*to the hard of hearing man*): Why didn’t you say so right away, man?

LIFEGUARD: How could he – if he can’t hear or speak?

IVAN ANTONOV: He could have given me the note. To stop me rattling away in vain.

LIFEGUARD: Well, he saw you speaking and decided to wait for you to finish, so as not to offend you. Seeing as he’s asking for money...

IVAN ANTONOV: Maybe. But I do not have the exact amount. (*To the man.*) Excuse me, will you take the money in small change?

The man hands him another note.

LIFEGUARD: What’s he saying?

IVAN ANTONOV (*reading*): He will.

SCENE TWO

Ivan Antonov's drawing room, looking the same, only the Lifeguard's tower is up on the scaffolding in place of the bed, next to the bath. The bed has been taken down and is under the tower. On top of the tower, under the sunshade, the lifeguard is sitting, blowing his whistle.

LIFEGUARD: Go back! Go back! Not this way, you're outside the limit of the bathing zone. It is unsupervised. (*Addresses somebody standing just outside the door.*)

Guechev, the neighbourhood organization's activist, enters, confused by the Lifeguard's chaotic instructions.

LIFEGUARD: Where are you going? This is the most dangerous stretch, it's outside the bathing limit, unsupervised. There are sharp rocks just below the surface. Go left! Look at me. Look at me! Otherwise what's the point of me being here, you must look at me! Go straight ahead. Now stop! (*Guechev is right in front of a hole*) Can you see that? Go on, go on, you can jump from there now. You're clear of the rocks, now jump!

Following these instructions, Guechev falls into one of the rectangular holes in the floor and vanishes from sight. That's what the Lifeguard's been waiting for. He takes off his towelling gown, puts on a snorkel and mask and makes for the hole.

LIFEGUARD: There! Told you so! Hang on now! I'm coming! I'm swimming towards you! (*Jumps into the hole.*)

At the same time, Guechev emerges from another hole in the floor, clammers out and listens, amazed, to the Lifeguard's shouting.

LIFEGUARD: I'm coming! I've seen you! Keep calm!...

GUECHEV: What do you mean you've seen me, Comrade?

The Lifeguard emerges from the hole, takes a deep breath and dives again, Guechev bends over another hole, the one where he fell down. The Lifeguard comes out of it and they bang their heads.

GUCHEV: Ouch, I must have got concussion! (clutches his head)

LIFEGUARD: You deserve no less – for ignoring my instructions. Hold on now. (*Trips Guechev up with his foot and Guechev falls to the floor. The Lifeguard jumps on top and starts resuscitation.*)

GUECHEV: Ouch!... But you... my arm... ouch, help!

LIFEGUARD: You shouldn't speak.

GUECHEV: Ouch... my waist... Why?

LIFEGUARD: You need to calm down first. You're in a state of shock. (*Continues resuscitation as he has been trained to do.*)

GUECHEV: Mercy!

LIFEGUARD (*Leaves him on the floor mangled and gagging*): You've been saved. (*Runs up to the tower, jumps on one leg to shake the water out of his ear, wraps himself up in his towelling gown.*)

GUECHEV (*slowly coming to, aching all over*): Is this the Roman bath?

LIFEGUARD: This is it.

GUECHEV: Allegedly the only one of its kind in the world?

LIFEGUARD: That's what they say.

GUECHEV: But are you part of our neighbourhood organization?

LIFEGUARD: What organization?

GUECHEV: Our neighbourhood organization. I am an activist, I attend all events but I haven't seen you around.

LIFEGUARD: I'm a lifeguard. At this pool.

GUECHEV: Really? What do you do?

LIFEGUARD: I save drowning people. Also, we are going to train thousands of young swimmers in here. As per the directive. Mass sport is a prerequisite for top sporting achievements.

GUECHEV: So are mass organizations, do not forget that.

LIFEGUARD (*Produces the register*): Now sign here, please.

GUECHEV: What's that?

LIFEGUARD: A document saying I saved you.

GUECHEV: Do I need to pay for that?

LIFEGUARD: No. In this country you get saved for free.

GUECHEV: OK, I'll sign. (*Signs.*) So this is our neighbourhood organization's pool then. (*Looks at the Roman bath.*)

LIFEGUARD: This is Emperor Pompillian's pool.

GUECHEV: The times when emperors had baths are over. They don't any longer. Now this is our neighbourhood organization's pool. (*Enters the pool and looks round covetously.*) Beautiful. And, as you say, the only one of its kind?

LIFEGUARD: There is no other like it.

GUECHEV: So there's no way another neighbourhood organization can have such a bath?

LIFEGUARD: No.

GUECHEV: Are you sure?

LIFEGUARD: That's what the professor says.

GUECHEV: Yes! Now we get to win the competition! For sure. Let our competitors do as much recycling as they will. We here, we've

got the only Roman bath in the world. Is there any other neighbourhood organization that could boast such an achievement?

LIFEGUARD: None.

GUECHEV: None. Not the 43-nd organization, nor the 107-th, nor... (*Points at the nudes.*) Only these here naked ladies... they're not quite in order.

LIFEGUARD: That was typical of the age. They bathed naked.

GUECHEV: Yes, that's it, I'll say: the age is to blame, comrades, the age is to blame. And then about the swimmers. Our neighbourhood organization will train thousands of young swimmers here. As per the directive, innit?

LIFEGUARD: But how is your neighbourhood organization going to train them?

GUECHEV: You said there would be thousands of new swimmers trained here. By whom – well, that's immaterial. What matters is we win the competition. The commission should be able to see that we're keeping up with the directives, that we are being proactive. Yes indeed, thousands of new swimmers in the former pool of Pump... Pump... What was it exactly?

LIFEGUARD: Pompillian. It comes from the word “pump”, only it sounds kind of diminutive – “Pompillian”.

GUECHEV: Yes. Pump it up. That's a good sign. I'll tell it to the commission. We are sure to win. And, you know, Comrade Lifeguard, then we get the prize. Do you know what the prize is?

LIFEGUARD: Not really.

GUECHEV: A trip to East Germany.

LIFEGUARD: Not bad.

GUECHEV: You can buy good stuff there, electrical appliances are really cheap.

LIFEGUARD: And how about customs duties?

GUECHEV: Oh, activists are exempt, aren't they? We serve the public. Or so I think.

LIFEGUARD: I wouldn't be so sure.

GUECHEV: We should be exempt as...

Enter Ivan Antonov and Martha, the Associate Professor's fiancée, interrupting Guechev. The latter stares pointedly at Martha.

MARTHA: Good morning!

GUECHEV (*ogling her*): Good morning indeed.

IVAN ANTONOV (*ironically*): Excuse me for the mess in here.

MARTHA: More like a battlefield really.

IVAN ANTONOV: The wonders of archaeology.

MARTHA (*reproachfully*): Drop it, ok?

IVAN ANTONOV: Sorry. (*Asks the Lifeguard*) Who is that comrade here?

LIFEGUARD: Another saved soul. From the neighbourhood organization.

IVAN ANTONOV: Nice to meet you.

GUECHEV: And how about the comrade with you? Does she also live within the catchment area of our neighbourhood organization?

IVAN ANTONOV: No. She is from another neighbourhood.

GUECHEV: That's a pity. She could make an outstanding activist. (*Ogles Martha.*) Well, I should go. You're busy. (*Looks at Martha, pauses, then looks at the bath, then at Martha again, then at Ivan Antonov*) Goodbye.

IVAN ANTONOV: Bye. (*to the Lifeguard*) That a friend of yours?

LIFEGUARD: I just managed to save him from the whirlpool. He talked about some competition.

IVAN ANTONOV: I see. And he didn't ask for anything?

LIFEGUARD: No.

IVAN ANTONOV: Bizarre. This makes me paranoid – someone who comes and doesn't ask for anything.

MARTHA (*half-whispering*): Who's the dude on the tower?

IVAN ANTONOV: A lifeguard. Appointed to survey the pool here. By the sports ministry.

MARTHA: So who does he save?

IVAN ANTONOV: Me. He's saved me from drowning about fifty times.

MARTHA: Are you serious?

IVAN ANTONOV: Well, he has a contract of employment, he must do something. And he cannot find any other victims here.

MARTHA: No way – a lifeguard!

IVAN ANTONOV: He is a kind-hearted sort.

MARTHA: Let me go look for the book. (*Goes to the pile of scattered books.*)

LIFEGUARD: Comrade Antonov!

IVAN ANTONOV: I'm coming, just let me find the key to the bookcase. (*Walks to the bookcase.*)

LIFEGUARD: Comrade Antonov, may I have your attention for a moment?

IVAN ANTONOV: Yes?

LIFEGUARD: You are expected to give me a gold watch. It may be a pocket watch.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Thinks this is some kind of joke*): Why? You have a birthday?

LIFEGUARD (*seriously and firmly*): You must give me a present out of gratitude for saving your life.

IVAN ANTONOV: Nonsense. Saving my life?

LIFEGUARD: Many times. This is what I told my bosses. That you gave me a gold watch as a sign of gratitude.

IVAN ANTONOV: Look, stop kidding, I'm busy.

MARTHA (*Shouts from among the furniture*): This is a total mess, I can't find anything.

IVAN ANTONOV: It's there for sure, I'll be with you in sec. (*He tries to move away.*)

LIFEGUARD (*Pulls him back*): You have signed these documents. (*Waves the register in his face.*)

IVAN ANTONOV (*surprised*): But I did it to please you?

LIFEGUARD: Yeah, sure, it's huge fun saving drowning people.

IVAN ANTONOV: I'll talk to your bosses.

LIFEGUARD: Is this your signature? (*Shows him the register.*) It is your signature. Is this an official document? It is an official document. Do you know what the sanction is for forging official documents? Prison. With your signature, you have defrauded the State more than once, and you have skewed the statistics.

IVAN ANTONOV: But it was a game.

LIFEGUARD: Some game. A game that could send you behind bars.

IVAN ANTONOV: But I don't have a gold watch.

LIFEGUARD: Yes you do – it's there in your pocket.

IVAN ANTONOV: This is a memento. My dad gave it to me!

LIFEGUARD: You can go to jail if you prefer.

IVAN ANTONOV: Might do as well. I have nowhere to live as it is.

LIFEGUARD: What is she going to say, though?

IVAN ANTONOV: Who's she?

LIFEGUARD (*Points at Martha*): The Associate Professor's fiancée. While you're behind bars the Associate Professor will win her back. He is terribly efficient.

IVAN ANTONOV: He is.

LIFEGUARD: Women care about reputation. And you care about her a lot.

The Lifeguard puts his hand out. Ivan Antonov remains motionless, thinking or just stunned. Martha is the only person he cares about. So he takes the gold watch out of his pocket and hands it to the Lifeguard in silence. The Lifeguard holds it next to his ear.

LIFEGUARD: Works all right. (*He moves away, pulling the hood over his head.*)

Ivan Antonov, crushed by this betrayal, hangs his head down. Then he looks up at the Lifeguard and hangs his head again. The Lifeguard leaves. Ivan Antonov walks to the back of the stage where Martha is waiting and just manages to catch a book that she throws at him. Martha throws a second book, then a third and a fourth.

MARTHA (*playfully*): Hey, is it this one? Or this? Or this?

IVAN ANTONOV: No. Not this one either. Nor this. Wait, you'll stone me to death. (*He laughs too.*)

Now Ivan Antonov holds several books that Martha threw at him. Martha takes some more from the heap, comes closer to him and dumps them on top of the others in his hands, then hugs him. They kiss. His hands are full, weighed down by the books. At this moment, the Associate Professor appears in the kitchen door. He chortles at the scene.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Martha!

They take a step back, embarrassed, but then Ivan Antonov throws the books down on the floor and hugs her again.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Martha! Doing this – in my face!

IVAN ANTONOV: Look away.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Don't you tell me what to do. I'll deal with you separately. I did warn you at the time not to stand in my way.

IVAN ANTONOV: I remember. You said you would crush me. Since then, I can't stop thinking that your steamrolling capabilities could be put to better use in public works.

MARTHA: What do you want?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: How could you? In front of me. With this...

MARTHA: Do you want an oral or a written answer?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Oh, Martha!

IVAN ANTONOV: I'll go look for the book. (*Goes to one side.*)

With the Associate Professor's entry, or a second earlier, the Lifeguard has also entered the living room, wrapped in his towelling gown, hood on his head. He has climbed up the tower and started observing the scene through his binoculars. Ivan Antonov is prone among the furniture, looking for the book he and Martha need.

MARTHA: Other questions? Anything else bothering you?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*in a low voice*): I thought you loved me – at least a little bit.

MARTHA: Really?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: You're in my heart.

MARTHA: The bath is in your heart.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: It's you.

MARTHA: Not enough space for both of us.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (*having thought for some time*): You want me to drop everything.

MARTHA: Yes.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Drop the bath, the dissertation, everything!

MARTHA: Yes. I'll believe you then.

Ivan Antonov has turned around and is watching tensely. It is a decisive moment. The Associate Professor thinks feverishly, calculating for a few seconds.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Would that be rational? Or sensible?

MARTHA: Of course not. Throwing it all to the winds for a woman. It happens only in movies.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Oh Martha, be sensible. The bath will not only secure my future, but yours as well. My dissertation on the Roman bath will bring you much more than this common man could ever possibly give you. This nonentity crawling among the furniture. Why should I drop the bath? Let's not be so old-fashioned. There is no inherent contradiction between you and the bath, quite the contrary.

MARTHA: Then don't drop it. Go on and dig. I don't want to ruin your career. I actually came with Ivan Antonov.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Oh, Antonov! The sound of his name, so common. (*Disdainfully.*) A man hiding in his philistine shell. There's just one thing he knows, one thing he cares about – “give me my house back, give me my house back”. He doesn't care about art,

science, or any higher, spiritual values – he just wants to live. To eke out his miserable existence, to be more precise.

IVAN ANTONOV: I think she told you to go and dig.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: And you will eke out your existence with him.

MARTHA: Don't you worry about me. Too little, too late.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: You think he can give you anything? He will dither, he will try to think of something and he will never achieve anything, never ever. You will have nowhere to live, the two of you. He won't get this house back. No way. I'll dig it up. All of it. I'm sure he doesn't have any cash either.

MARTHA: He doesn't.

IVAN ANTONOV: I don't.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: That will be your downfall, Martha. You'll lose your social standing. On the other hand, as the wife of an associate professor, you would ...

Meanwhile Ivan Antonov has found the book they were looking for.

IVAN ANTONOV: There it is. I found it.

MARTHA (*Rushes towards him*): Fantastic. (*Kisses him.*)

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: So you kept meeting all the time...

They ignore him, leafing through the book, discussing something. The Lifeguard, in his towelling gown, hood and binoculars, starts speaking.

TSEKOV (*It is him wearing the same towelling gown as the Lifeguard*): Antonov!

MARTHA: And who's this?

TSEKOV (*Reveals his face and takes off the hood*): May I? For just a moment? (*Jumps off the tower and comes quite close to Ivan Antonov and Martha.*)

IVAN ANTONOV: You may not. I'm busy.

TSEKOV: Antonov, that's the chance of your life and you're letting it slip away.

IVAN ANTONOV: Good. Nothing to worry about from now on.

TSEKOV: That's a hundred million, man, think! You'll have as many women as you want, sports cars, everything. Don't miss it for one woman.

IVAN ANTONOV: Discussion's over, ok? (*Walks away along the rim of the bath.*)

TSEKOV (*Jumps into the bath and clutches at Antonov's trouser leg*): Antonov!

IVAN ANTONOV: You can see I'm busy. You're a nuisance!

TSEKOV (*Looks round*): No time to lose. Now's the time. If you don't make a decision now, it'll fall through. My guy at customs is getting seconded next week. Then we wouldn't be able to export the bath.

IVAN ANTONOV (*Moves further away from Tsekov*): Won't leave me to kiss my fiancée in peace. (*Tsekov crawls under the floorboards and pops up from a hole next to Ivan Antonov and Martha.*)

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: You'll regret it.

TSEKOV (*Appears in the hole from the waist up*): We can take her as well. Just don't lose time.

MARTHA: Who is this man?

TSEKOV: Antonov, time is hard currency!

LIFEGUARD (*Enters and spots Tsekov in the hole*): Is he drowning then? (*Tsekov hides*) He went under! (*Scurries to the hole. To the Associate Professor as an aside.*) This guy is after our jobs.

The Lifeguard gives chase. Tsekov flees. They keep popping up from one hole or another.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Thief. Stealing others' fiancées, are you?

IVAN ANTONOV: He who can, does.

MARTHA: Don't bother with him, we discussed that. (*to the Associate Professor*) Don't you forget, the toilet's waiting. Go and dig it up!

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: You're a low, despicable woman!

IVAN ANTONOV (*Moves to take off his jacket*): Can't let him get away with this.

The Associate Professor unbuttons his jacket too, but then realizes the futility of it and moves away. Ivan Antonov and Martha take a few steps to leave, but then Diamandiev, the real estate broker, springs up from a hole nearby.

DIAMANDIEV: Good morning! I'm here for the power of attorney.

IVAN ANTONOV: What power of attorney? Oh yes, for the house.

DIAMANDIEV: The client's getting impatient. He raised the price. I don't want to speak about it in public, but it's a huge amount. Who is that other comrade?

IVAN ANTONOV: My fiancée.

DIAMANDIEV (*theatrically*): Beautiful lady. So I can speak in her presence?

IVAN ANTONOV: As you would in mine.

At this point Tsekov appears in another nearby hole and listens. The Lifeguard blows his whistle and gives chase. Tsekov escapes into yet another hole and the Lifeguard jumps in after him and disappears.

DIAMANDIEV: What are they playing at?

IVAN ANTONOV: Hide-and-seek, quite childish.

DIAMANDIEV: I called the lawyers. Very sharp, all three of them. Now for a mere formality – you must adopt my client.

IVAN ANTONOV: Adopt who?

DIAMANDIEV: My client.

IVAN ANTONOV: How old is he?

DIAMANDIEV: Fifty-nine, but that doesn't matter.

MARTHA: A grown-up son.

IVAN ANTONOV: But you can only adopt people under the age of...

DIAMANDIEV: Leave that to me. I've arranged for the adoption of eighty-year-olds.

IVAN ANTONOV: No, I don't think so...

DIAMANDIEV: Don't worry, it's a legal trick. Quite innocent. Otherwise we wouldn't be able to sell the house to my client of all people. Here are the forms, please fill them in and let's get down to business.

IVAN ANTONOV: Um, no. Out of the question.

Ivan Antonov and Martha walk away. Diamandiev follows, fumbling in his briefcase, taking papers out and dropping some in the hurry. Around them Tsekov and the Lifeguard are still chasing each other. The living room is in total chaos. Ivan Antonov and Martha don't know which way to go, they weave in and out of the chaos. The Lifeguard catches up with Tsekov, who escapes up the ladder of the watchtower. Then we hear the voice of Guechev.

GUECHEV: Please, comrades, this way.

Enter Guechev, the neighbourhood organization's activist, accompanied by three people in black suits, with black leather briefcases in their hands. This is the commission – the competition jury.

GUECHEV: Here, comrades, but please be careful, there are many holes in here.

The commission members look round and line up in front of the bath.

GUECHEV: Here is our neighbourhood organization's greatest achievement. (*The Associate Professor enters from the kitchen and freezes in amazement at the sight.*) As a result of our hard and systematic effort and thanks to the wholehearted effort of all our members, we managed to discover the only Roman bath of its kind from the times of Emperor Pompillian. He was a Roman emperor. This unique monument was even shown on television. And it is exclusively on the territory of our neighbourhood organisation. No other organisation elsewhere has anything remotely like it. Here, in this unique location, we shall hold our meetings and conferences, we shall place recycling bins. We shall organize meetings with high achievers whose output is higher than planned. We might hold meetings of the neighbourhood mediation body and even place a snooker table. Here, in this pool, we will also be able to train thousands of young swimmers – as per the latest directives. Our country has planned to win 10 gold medals in swimming from the Montreal Olympics and, as we decided at our latest sitting, eight of these shall be won by swimmers from our neighbourhood organisation!

Ivan Antonov and Martha are standing next to the bath. The Associate Professor is behind them. On the other side, facing them, is Diamandiev, briefcase in hand. The Lifeguard is on the ladder. Up on the tower is Tsekov, looking gloomily ahead of him.

GUECHEV: And this here is Comrade Antonov. He lives here, right next to the Roman bath. His conduct is exemplary, he pays his annual fee quite regularly. He helps the leadership to organize various events. (*The commission scrutinizes Ivan Antonov in the same way that it scrutinized the Roman bath a while ago, as an exhibit.*) And he is also a role model when it comes to recycling, helping our industry cope with the scarcity of raw materials.

GUECHEV (*Points at Martha*): His loyal life companion, who recently joined our neighbourhood organization.

GUECHEV (*Points at the Associate Professor*): The plumber for the Roman bath. Works as a volunteer. (*The Associate Professor sits down, speechless with indignation.*)

GUECHEV (*Points at Diamandiev*): His assistant. On a part-time contract.

GUECHEV (*Points at the Lifeguard*): An active member of public in charge of sports in the neighbourhood, he's helping train thousands of young swimmers. Bringing up the new generation, the future of our country.

GUECHEV (*Points at Tsekov*): He is the living soul of the neighbourhood organization. He is active politically, takes part in events, writes slogans and updates the achievers' noticeboards. And the rest of the decoration. (*Tsekov laughs self-consciously.*)

The commission members leave, led by Guechev. Then anger explodes – and they all hound Ivan Antonov.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Snooker in the Roman bath! Antonov, you'll hang for this!

TSEKOV: What mediation body? Why do we need mediation? The state has no business here. You promised me, Antonov!

Ivan Antonov retreats to the Roman bath.

IVAN ANTONOV: I never promised anything.

DIAMANDIEV: What conferences? What recycling? On what legal grounds, may I ask?!!

IVAN ANTONOV: I don't know.

LIFEGUARD: What young swimmers? What future of the nation? This is idiocy! There's not a drop of water in here!

TSEKOV: I've incurred costs, suffered moral damage. Shall we do the deal?

DIAMANDIEV (*Enters the bath, following Ivan Antonov*): He's not doing any deals with you. My client's waiting. The three lawyers are waiting. He is a father – he must adopt the guy.

TSEKOV: I've suffered moral damage. He called me the soul of the neighbourhood organization. I won't leave it at that!

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: This is barbarity! This fan of recycling must be put back in his place!

They surround Ivan Antonov, who is in the pool, shouting at him from above.

DIAMANDIEV: Give me the power of attorney! Your son is waiting!

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: I found the Roman bath!

LIFEGUARD: My appointment decision is in my pocket. Right here!
(Slaps his pocket.)

TSEKOV: My guy in customs will be transferred. It's now or never!

DIAMANDIEV: He's a father. Let him adopt his son!

LIFEGUARD: Why are you trashing lifeguards' work?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Give me my fiancée back!

TSEKOV: Let's export it!

Ivan Antonov stares at them and shouts: "Stop it"! Then he snatches the pickaxe from the bottom of the bath and raises it above his head. All freeze. Silence, then shouting.

ALL TOGETHER: Nooooooo!

TSEKOV: Think of culture!

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Think of humankind!

LIFEGUARD: Think of mass sport!

DIAMANDIEV: Think of your son!

GUECHEV (*Enters*): Think of the neighbourhood organization!

HARD OF HEARING PERSON (*Enters together with Guechev*): Think of the hard-of-hearing!

Ivan Antonov surveys them, looks at Martha and raises the pickaxe. All of them jump into the pool and shield it with their bodies. Ivan Antonov remains standing with the pickaxe above his head. For a moment they all freeze. Then Ivan Antonov puts down the pickaxe and hands it to the Associate Professor with an ironically exaggerated gesture. He goes up the steps and takes the clock off the wall. He tucks it under his arm and walks back over the Roman bath by the plank thrown across it. Everybody is in the bath except Martha. She is

up on the floorboards. Ivan Antonov smiles at Diamandiev, making a tiny gesture with his hand meaning “Do you want me to sign?” Then he walks a little further and imitates sketchily a few swimming strokes. He mimics fleetingly Guechev’s gestures, then gives Martha his hand and they walk away, leaving everybody else in the bath. They cross the stage. Suddenly, the Taxi Call Column starts speaking. Martha stares at it wide-eyed.

TAXI CALL COLUMN: Antonov!

IVAN ANTONOV: Don’t worry, Martha. (*to the Column*) Yes, what is it?

TAXI CALL COLUMN: Why walk? Look, there are plenty of taxis waiting.

IVAN ANTONOV: Really? But we are very close now.

TAXI CALL COLUMN: Close? Where are you going then?

IVAN ANTONOV (*Looks at the audience in the theatre*): To be with the people.

TAXI CALL COLUMN: With whom?

IVAN ANTONOV: With the people.

He and Martha step into the hall among the audience and take a bow.

The end.