

Vida Ognjenović

MAI NEIM IZ MITAR

Vida Ognjenovic, born in Montenegro, Yugoslavia, graduated Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Philology of the Belgrade University (1963) and Stage Direction at the Academy for Theatre, Film and TV (1965). She began post-graduate studies in Paris, at Dorbone, and presented a master's thesis on stage directing at the University of Minnesota (USA) in 1971. She has written the following plays: *Chekov's Marriage Proposal as Performed by In-Mates at Cheranton*, *How far the Distance from Man to Man* (documentary play), *My Name is Mitar*, *How to Make the Ruler Laugh*, *Kanjoš Macedonovic*, *Was There a Royal Supper* (Sterija Award for the best contemporary play in 1991), *The Girl with Blue-Black Hair*. She has dramatized memoirs of Gojko Nikoliš *The Roots, the Tree Trunk and Epilogue* (Sterija Award for dramatization in 1984), Klaus Mann's *Mephisto* and Miloš Crnjanski's *Migrations*.

Fiction: *The Poisoned Milk of Dandelions*, 1994, *The House of the Dead Scents*, 1996, *The Old Clock*, 1997; essays: *Fear of Stage Discussion*, 1980, *Shakespearomania*, 1980. She translates from English and German.

Plays and fiction of Vida Ognjenovic have been translated to English, German, Check, Polish and Hungarian.

Vida Ognjenović has directed plays by Shakespeare, Chekhov, Pinter, Krleža, Njegoš, Lorca, Crnjanski, Mammet, Olbi and others.

She is *president* of Serbian PEN Club.

Beograd May 2005

A Stage Ballad on Wayfaring

Characters

MARKO POPOVIĆ

VASO POPOVIĆ

OBREN

VELJKO RADOVIĆ

DAMJAN POPOVIĆ

STJEPAN IVO DOJČIĆ

MILKA POPOVIĆ

The events take place on the transatlantic liner "Dante" on its voyage from Kotor to New York, 1910.

(At the theater entrance, as the audience arrives, stands a group of young people. They are dressed in various costumes. Some of them are in Montenegrin heavy cloth pants and European style jackets, some in long capes, but all of them are dressed in such a way that their very clothes reveal that they are prepared for a long journey. In a corner, their bundles are piled up. They are guarded by a young girl, almost a child. She hugs a bundle of her own things to her breast. She is crying. The young men are excited, open collared, a bit tipsy. They are passengers on the "Dante", sailing from Kotor to New York. The year is 1910. A bit apart, a well dressed gentleman stands holding a suitcase. He too waits to embark. The young men sing in a full voice.)

YOUNG MEN

Young men's strength is wasting, oh, from New York to
Chicagooo...

MILKA

Markooo!

YOUNG MEN

We'll sail two months, to a day,
over the dark ocean's way...

MILKA

Markooo!

YOUNG MEN

Here I am, and my uncle's son,
America, return at least one...

MILKA

Mašan!

YOUNG MEN

Sing, brother, sing out loud
So it's heard in Morača proud...
Let our bones not be laid to rest
In Alaska, Montana and the West...

MILKA

Vasooo! They're calling us to board!

YOUNG MEN

Mother, I'll send you pictures
From the far American shores...
Mother, don't let your lad
End his life in foreign sod...

(Piercingli and somehow sadly, the ship's horn wails. It sounds like an accompaniment to their drawled mountaineer song. Taking their things from the pile, and interrupting their song, they enter the theater, that is, come onto the stage. "They embark on the ship". Their eyes are tearful, their song grows louder, in order to cover up their sobs. Milka grips Vasa by his coat tails.)

MARKO

Then it goes, look here: di vik, di mant, spring, samer, fol and vinter...

VELJKO, VASO, DAMJAN, MARKO

Di vik, di mant, spring, samer, fol and winter...

MARKO

Now we're in trouble! We can't go on without Ivo's book. The next three pages are missing from this one...

VELJKO

Let's do this first...

VASO

Let's, my good man, take a breather...

DAMJAN

This Ivo is like a brother to us.

MARKO

He is our brother. Every countryman, in foreign parts, is our brother, if he is an honest man.

VASO

Maybe he's conning us.

MARKO

Vaso!

VASO

A man can't even joke freely! I don't know what's come to pass!

VELJKO

I feel, my good men, somehow sorry for that Ivo. All alone on this steamboat, like a solitary bird. if it wasn't for us, it seems to me, he wouldn't utter a word, now would he have anyone...

VASO

What are you saying, he can talk to anyone he wants, he speaks English....

VELJKO

I know, but what is he going to talk to them about...

MARKO

I'll ask him nicely to sell that book of his to us. What does he need in for, if he knows it all by heart?

VELJKO

We won't be able to pay for it... With what...

DAMJAN

What day is it today?

VASO

(Takes a long thin string out of his pocket, there are many knots on it. He counts and calculates the knots): Thursday, according to my reckoning, but I don' know what day it is according to their's. Ivo says that their day comes a bit earlier than ours...

DAMJAN

They're advanced in everything, by God...

MARKO

They are one day ahead of us. Ivo says. When its night there, it daytime in our parts. So today, Vale, it is, quite nicely, their Fraidei!

VASO

Oomph, what an ugly word Fraidei!

MARKO

Ugly or not, you have to learn it...

VASO

True, but when it's ugly, it's difficult to learn...

VELJKO

Fraidei is not so ugly, but Trzdei is uglier...

VASO

My good men, do you know what day it is? By my reckoning, it's twenty days since we set sail. Look, here...

DAMJAN

It seems like a year to me. By my eyes, shall we ever see that America...

VELJKO

We're beginning to sprout, surrounded by all this water!

MARKO

Easy, men, don't whine like orphaned bastards. What's keeping Ivo, that's what I'm worried about.

DAMJAN

You should hear Ivo go on in English, God love you brothers. You should hear him babble those words one after another, on and on, as if he were twice an American...

MARKO

That's the way you'll be babbling, Dašo, by the time we get to America. You'll understand everything they ask you.

DAMJAN

Vattamizit?

VELJKO

Itizkvoterpasttaim... I mean pastfaiv... Kvoterpastfaiv....

MARKO

Aimmatchoblaijd.

VASO

I know how to say a boot in english.

VELJKO

Say it?

VASO

Buut.

DAMJAN

Is that so, by your life?

VASO

Yes.

DAMJAN

How do you know?

VASO

My uncle told me, Milika Ikov, he doesn't lie, not without dire need. He told me that, when, I went to say goodbye to him this summer.

VELJKO

Ask Ivo if that's right?

VASO

It is, I tell you. There's no need to ask.

DAMJAN

What else did he tell you?

VASO

Who?

DAMJAN

Your uncle.

VASO

That everything we need is written down in this book. That we should guard it well. I gave him a kilo of tobacco for it, and I promised to bring him two more when I get back.

MARKO

Let's do the months.

VELJKO, MARKO, DAMJAN, VASO

Yanuari, Februari, Martch, Eipril, Mei, Yun, Yulai, Ogust, September, Oktober, November, Disember...

MARKO

This is not right out nonsense...

VELJKO

But it's not easy, either.

VASO

Still, you have to twist your tongue, it's like passing nettles over it...

DAMJAN

Yulai, Yulai.

VASO

Why do they use their tongue so much, if I only knew?
Why do they say Yulai, when it's so much easier and
nicer sounding to say July...

MARKO

Enough of your stories, Vajo, but tell me, what month is
it?

VASO

Whichever one you want, except this Yulai, spit in its
eye...

MARKO

Now, come on, tell me in English, what month is it?

VASO

Ogust.

DAMJAN

Oh, Vale, may you always be so forthright! Ivo would say
now: quite correct pronunciation...

VELJKO

Does that mean August?

VASO

Ogust.

VELJKO

Lay Day will be coming soon, my man!

MARKO

Ingliish, Veljo, come on, say that in Ingliish...

VELJKO

I'd swear that not even Ivo knows how to say Lady Day in Ingliish!

MARKO

Who? Who doesn't know? Let's bet on it that he knows how to say Lady Day in Ingliish. You heard him yesterday, telling us how washing soap, whiskers and finger nails are called....

DAMJAN

I remember how whiskers are called. Mastash.

VASO

Awful.

MARKO

Don't call everything awful, Vaso! Why do you call everything awful?

VASO

My heart sinks from this language...

DAMJAN

Hvataimizit?

VELJKO

Itizkovoterpastifaiv... There, is that how it goes, Mašo?

(At that moment Ivo comes in. he is a young man in a European style suit. he has a coat over his shoulders. under his arm he bears a new book: "advice to a Serb in America", St. Louis, 1910. His glasses give him a serious and learned look, while in fact, his an amiable and witty man.)

MARKO

Welcome, welcome, Ikan!

VASO

Marko has been tormenting us all morning with those months you taught us yesterday. He won't even let us sleep. He wakes us up at night to recite the months...

IVO

How is Mitar?

MARKO

Well, so, so...

IVO

Guud morning!

MARKO, VELJKO, VASO, DAMJAN

Guud dei!

IVO

Guud dei!

MARKO, VELJKO, DAMJAN, VASO

Guud dei!

IVO

Guud ivning!

MARKO, VELJKO, VASA, DAMJAN

Guud ivning!

IVO

Guud nait!

MARKO, VELJKO, DAMJAN, VASO

Guud nait!

IVO

Guud bai!

MARKO, VELJKO, DAMJAN, VASO

Guud bai!

IVO

Very correct pronunciation!

MARKO

Well done, by my life!

IVO

Let's do the numbers! Count after me! Un, tuu, trii, foor, faiv, siks, seven, eit, nain, ten, ileven, tvelv, tertiin, fortiin, fiftiin, sikstiin, seventiin, eitiin, naintiin, tventi...

VASO

Oh, my!

IVO

Now, once again!

IVO

Uan, tuu, trii, foor...

VASO

Slowly, for God's sake, why are you rushing, we're not birds in flight.

IVO

Alright, let's take it slowly: uan, tuu, trii, foor, faiv, siks...

VELJKO

That's easy, nothing easier, here I go: uan, tu, tri, for, faiv, siks, seven, eit... *(as fast as he can, he counts to twenty, without paying attention to pronunciation...)*

IVO

Now, we have to learn the ordinal numbers... This is how they go: di ferst, di sekond, di terd, di fort, di fift, di sikst, di sevent, di eit, di naint, di tent... you say the number and then you add "t"...

MARKO

When do I add "t"?

IVO

Right off, as soon as you say the number, you end it with "t"...

MARKO

By God, that's not easy to do...

IVO

Now, let's all say them together, aloud, that's the best way to learn: di ferst, di sekond, di terd, di fort, di fift...

(They all shout after him, struggling with the sounds, asking how the words go again, twisting their tongues, shouting. Vaso gets up and walks around in an angry mood. Obren jumps, suddenly awake. He looks around him, still sleepy, he thinks he's dreaming...)

OBREN

What's all of this, men, where are we?

VASO

In the devil's armpit, that's where...

MARKO

Vaso!

OBREN

Well, men, if anyone heard you cackling here on this wide water like the dung bird at horse manure, they would laugh at us to leave a stain on our names forever...

VASO

Get up, Obro, and start counting in Ingliish... Start learning, you'll need it when the American starts pouring dollars into your purse, so you can count how many there are...

DAMJAN

do you know, Obero, that the number three sounds the same as in our language?

OBREN

could it be, does it really?

DAMJAN

Here, ask Ivo.

OBREN

does it really?

DAMJAN

Yes, it does. Why would I lie to you?

VASO

So, Obren guess how they say two in Ingliish?

OBREN

Does it sound like in our language?

MARKO

Well, it's sort of close to ours...

OBREN

What's the first letter?

VELJKO

T.

VASO

Don't say any more!

OBREN

Well, well; is it a long word?

VELJKO

No, not very.

OBREN

Begins with a "t" you say...

VASO

Obro, the two of us will get it... Just us two!

OBREN

How does it start, what is the second letter?

DAMJAN

There are only two of them, if I tell you both of them,
there is nothing to guess.

OBREN

Well and fine. The number two, two letters. "T" you say?
How can I guess, tell me...

VASO

And I told you nicely, us two.

MARKO

Come on, don't horse around, let's go on learning. Obren, two is: tuu.

OBREN

What is tuu?

MARKO

Tuu is two.

OBREN

Uh!

MARKO

Tuu.

OBREN

What?

MARKO

Obren, my poor man, you're not daft! In Ingliish two is "tuu". That's what I'm telling you, do you understand?

OBREN

No, I don't, so help me God. How can I understand? Why is two pronounced tuu, and not...

DAMJAN

Obro! He's saying it in Ingliish. This is the way it goes: when he says "tuu" in Ingliish that means he has said two... Uan, tuu, trii, foor, faiv, siks, seven...

OBREN

Auhhh!

VASO

Has that sunk in, Obro?

MARKO

Ivo would you please read us the couple of pages that are missing from our book. But, I'm afraid, we're imposing on you a lot...

IVO

Of course, of course I'll read them. You're not imposing on me. That's what I came for. Here. Rule number four: entrance into the United States is denied to all mentally feeble and mentally ill persons...

VASO

Go back home, Obren, swimming backwards. Don't you see you've no reason to go. They won't let you in, with that head of yours...

OBREN

As they like. But perhaps I'll get in, when I tell them that I know that two and two are tuu-tuu.

MARKO

Stop, take a breath! Don't make such a noise! Ivo, go on, please...

... Top all mentally feeble and mentally ill persons, to all the indigent and poor. To all those persons who have communicable diseases, and also to the crippled, blind, deaf, plagued, or with any illness which makes them incapable of work...

IVO

To all criminals and assassins; to all persons over the age of sixty, and to polygamists, to pregnant maidens...

VASO

How can a maiden be pregnant... The one who is pregnant, is no longer a maiden...

OBREN

Maybe she is, in America...

IVO

...to pregnant maidens, underage children unaccompanied by their parents, or members of their close family, to persons who do not have at least twenty five dollars in cash, and to workers coming to America to work under contract...

VASO

By my honest face, why men, according to this, they'd find fault even with the King of Montenegro, and would prevent him from entering America!

DAMJAN

He's over sixty...

OBREN

It's quite unclear to me why it's not allowed to have a job contracted in advance, so that you're have something sure, while it's allowed to go there like a lost bird with no flock, so that the dark can gobble you up?

VASO

Well, Obro, they won't let you in because of this where it says they don't let in polygamists. As if they don't know that you have a village full of young girls crying after you, and several widows, too.

MARKO

I'm scared to death they won't let Mitar in.

DAMJAN

If they won't let Mitar in, then they won't have a chance to let any of us in. We'll all go back, and let those Italian cock-a-doo-dle-doos work for them.

MARKO

Ivo, tell me truly, is this sea-sickness a deadly disease?

IVO

No, no it isn't, if there's nothing else wrong with him, he'll recover from that. I'm worried about that fever that's shaking him...

VELJKO

We'll take care of him, see here, even if we have to give him food out of our own mouths!

MARKO

No one has to know that he is ill...

IVO

There is one thing you should know: immigrants from our parts are most often turned away because of these advance contracts. Always bear this in mind. So, here is what the book says: Always, and ever, either on the ship, or when you disembark, or anywhere else, when anyone asks whether you are going anywhere for a contracted job, agreed in advance, immediately say no.

MARKO

No.

IVO

Otherwise, you can be sure, they'll send you back home from New York...

VELJKO

Oh, my God!

MARKO

What's the matter, Veljo?

VELJKO

Up on the top deck, I told an Italian everything, where we are going and how my uncle Aleksa Bratić invited us and promised to help us, and how I have work waiting for me and...

MARKO

Veljo, you must beware of everyone and everything! These are foreign parts, you poor thing!

VASO

Maybe he's a spy, a thousand devils take him!

DAMJAN

What language did you talk to him in, Veljo!

VELJKO

I in mine, he in his.

DAMJAN

And what did he say, where is he going and does he have work waiting for him there?

VELJKO

I couldn't understand him full well. He kept shouting at me: tobacco, tobacco. He was saying something funny something like herzegovina, herzegovina, and so I thought he was asking me whether I was from Hercegovina, and I told him nicely: no, Mon-te-negro.

OBREN

Let's go, men!

IVO

Where to?

OBREN

We have to find him and warn him not to spy on us, if his head is dear to him!

MARKO

Stop, Obren...

(Milka rushes in.)

MILKA

Where are you going, Marko?

MARKO

Nowhere.

IVO

How is he?

MILKA

The cough is choking him. And the boat is rocking like a cradle, right-left, right-left. Poor Mitar is awfully sick of this great water...

(All of them head to where Mitar is.)

THE LIGHTS GO DOWN

MUSICAL TRANSITION

(When the light goes on again in their cabin, everyone is sleeping, except Marko and Veljko.: Peering into the book, they spell out a dialogue in English.)

MARKO

How old are you?

VELJKO

Hauoldarjuu?

MARKO

I'm twenty eight years old.

VELJKO

No, I'm not, Mašo, but I'll be twenty tree on St. Nicholas Day.

MARKO

But why is your name not Nikola?

VELJKO

They named me after my grandfather.

MARKO

How are you going to say: I'm twenty three years old.

VELJKO

Tventitrii.

MARKO

What job do you do?

VELJKO

Hvatsjurtreid?

MARKO

Hvatsjortreid?

VELJKO

Yes.

MARKO

Come on.

VELJIKO

Where to?

MARKO

Say it.

VELJKO

How does it go now?

MARKO

That farmer thing.

VELJKO

Should I say that, or that other thing: leiberor, an ordinary hand.

MARKOP

Farmer, farmer, you don't have to have any language training for that...

VELJKO

Mišo?

MARKO

Yes?

VELJKO

Can I tell you something?

MARKO

Yes, you can, Veljo, whom else?

VELJKO

Don't make fun of me, Mašo, but I'm somehow afraid when I'm away from you all, when I go up on deck and I'm all alone with those other people. When they start gabbing in their own tongue, it seems they're making fun of me. I come out in a cold sweat. I just can't wait to get down to you all. If I knew only a third of the English that Ivo does, I think I'd be less afraid...

MARKO

You'll learn, Veljo, you've already taken in a lot...

VELJKO

Oh, I know I will, but I just can't wait...

MARKO

There's still plenty of time before we get there...

VELJO

There is, I know.

MARKO

Now, let's do those numbers, in order... di ferst...

VELJKO

Mašo?

MARKO

What is it?

VELJKO

Does it grab you by the throat?

MARKO

Come on, how does it go, di second, di terd, di fort...

VELJKO

Mašan, it grabs me, as if to choke me. it clutches me here. If I could now poor me, find myself again in Jelovica, and walk in those fir tree voods behind the house.... How everyone would gape to see me...

MARKO

Learn Ingliish, Veljo, you're welcome whenever you get back to Jelovica. It won't go away....

VELJIO

In won't, but here I am and I've run away... Don't tell Damjan that I've been crying. I'm ashamed when it gets me like this, and I can't fight it off...

MARKO

Come on, Veljo, it will go away, it's going to be fine there... Your uncle will find you a fine wife... Who knows what beauty awaits you there...

VELJKO

I know, but, what can I do, Marko I'd go back now, this minute...

MARKO

Be quiet, Veljo, don't say foolish things! Go on, count a bit, how does it go: uan, tuu, trii, foor...

VELJKO

Faiy, siks, seven, eit, nain, ten... And what's the matter with you, Majo, you face has gone so grey these past few days You keep looking through this bit of a window, day and night. Sleep never comes to your eyes. You too would go back, Majo...

MARKO

I'm afraid, and I go stiff all over, that they won't let Mitar in, and what are we going to do then...

VELJKO

We won't give in that easily!

MARKO

And what can we do then, poor as we are?

VELJKO

We won't leave him alive. Either all of us, or none of us!

MARKO

Who's going to ask us. The law is the law. My Veljo, that is a cruel foreign land. No one is going to take any notice of us.

VELJKO

Perhaps Ivo will help us somehow.

MARKO

That seems to be a weak support too, Veljo!

VELJKO

No, it isn't Ivo is a good man.

MARKO

A good man, a good man, but he disappeared when the doctor came. I saw plainly, he was not happy to have the doctor see him with us.

VELJKO

You're right. I think he ran away. He hid somewhere. But, still, the doctor understood us.

MARKO

Yes, he did.

VELJKO

Mitar is taking that medicine, he'll get better, Majo, you'll see.

MARKO

Yes, he will.

VELJKO

Mišo!

(Marko does not reply. He looks into the distance, his head turned a bit to the other side. Veljko rustles with his covers in order to hide his tears. Down Marko's cheek a tear rolls quietly. Everything goes quietly. Everything goes quiet.)

THE LIGHTS GO DOWN.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

(When the lights go on again in the cabin, we see the whole group together. Ivo is explaining something and pointing to drawings in the book. Vaso makes a knot in his rope.)

OBREN

Ivo, how do they measure things in America?

IVO

Now, listen carefully. The American measure for length is a yard. It is divided into three parts which are called feet. A single part is called a foot, and it is divided into twelve

parts and they are called inches. A longer measure for length is a mile, and it has 1,760 yards which is 1,690 meters and three decimeters. You have to know this.

OBREN

So, they don't have spans and arm's lengths.

IVO

And what are spans and arm's lengths?

OBREN

Here, this is a span (*measures it out on his arm*) and this is an arm's length (*spreads both of his arms out*).

IVO

No, no. These are the only official measures, and with them they measure everything there is to measure...

VASO

I can't say those words, even if they put a knife to my throat now!

MARKO

There's no hurry for you to say it now, you have time to learn. There's twice as much of this water until then.

VASO

It can't be that much, we've set out on the devil's road, yes we have.

MARKO

By my soul, there is. There's Ivo, let him judge who's right.

VASO

Is that right, Ivo?

IVO

Well, thereabouts...

VASO

Oh, mother of mine! *(He shouts)* Where does all this water come from? God couldn't have made this? This is neither God's work nor man's! This is the devil's work! a thousand billion giants have peed this, and not twice that number could drink it up! Why did you let me go, mother of mine, into this pissed, treacherous wilderness! Mother of mine!

MARKO

Stop it, Vaso!

(Everyone has jumped up, terrified. Vaso continues to go on screaming. Ivo tries to calm him down. Damjan holds Vaso by the waist.)

DAMJAN

Come on, Ivo read some more to us. We have to hear everything of what it's like over there... Sit down, Vaso...

IVO

Let's see these personal pronouns, the word for me is "ai"...

VASO

Oh woe is me, from now until forever, mother of mine! Oh woe is my brothers... Oh woe is my family, my home, my brothers, my country, woe and double woe, you cried for me this morning, mother of mine! You should cry, for woe is me...

MARKO

Vaso, be quiet! Don't utter another word... Do you hear me!

(They make Vaso lie down on the bench. He falls silent soon, so Marko tries to go on with the lesson. He tries to seem calm and collected.)

MARKO

How does it go, Ivo, what is the word for me?

IVO

The word for the first person is "ai", the word for a second person is "juu", for the third persons is "hii", "shii", "it".

VELJKO

How funny!

DAMJAN

When I want to say: I am Damjan, do I just say: ai Damjan?

OBREN

You'd better say: come, Ivo help!

IVO

I am Damjan goes: al em Damjan. The "em" means "am".

DAMJAN

All of this "aiming" seems funny to me. They'd laugh at us to burst their sides, if they heard us "aiming" like those folk from Lika.

VELJKO

They would for sure, aime, vaime, daime, naime... People from America and Lika "aim" in a similar way...

MARKO

How would you say: You are Ivo?

IVO

Juu ar Ivo.

DAMJAN

Why, that's not difficult... Juuarivo, juuarivo...

OBREN

It's not difficult, but somehow ungainly: juuarivo, juuarivo, somehow devilish, unseemly: juuarivo...

IVO

Let's repeat it together. Don't think how it sounds, just repeat after me: Ai em Marko (*they repeat*) juuu ar Ivo (*all of them repeat*), hii iz Vaso (*all of them say the same*).

IVO

Shii iz Milka. It iz oshen, that means the ocean, the sea..

MARKO, OBREN, VELJKO, DAMJAN, IVO

Ai em Marko, juu ar Ivo, hii iz Vaso, shii iz Milka, it iz oshen, that means the ocean, the sea...

MARKO

Ivo, how do you say, for instance, the word for us: say I want to say: we are brothers, or: we are Montenegrins?

IVO

We.

MARKO

No. Us. How do you say the word for us in English?

IVO

We. We. I'm telling you.

MARKO

But no, Ivo, You didn't understand me. Not we, but when I want to talk about "us"! Us Popović brothers! How do I start?

IVO

That's what you say: "we". We are brothers hoes: Vii ar braderz! We is the word for us.

VASO

Oh, men! Is there, by my eyes, anything in that language that is said in the right and proper way? How are we going to say "vii" and think of us. Who's going to remember that?

IVO

"Maii" in Ingliish means I, or for me. For instance: Who, me? Then you say: hauu, mii?

VASO

Oh my, huuhuu mii! Huuhuu mii, woe is me!

OBREN

There's one thing I see clearly, my good men! I'll have to find a job where there's no talking. Well, brothers, in a mine you don't need words for anything, nor can you be heard over the thunder of blasts, even if you spoke like a bishop. And down there, under the ground, there are no other men except our countrymen and Bulgarians. With your contrymen you can't speak a word for the noise, and to the Bulgarians you have nothing to say, so Ingliish is no use to me, even if I spoke it like Ivo!

IVO

Easy, Obren, don't give up so soon. I'll give you the book, and you follow the words as I pronounce them, then you'll repeat after me. You'll see it's quite simple...

OBREN

Oh, Ikan! Give the book to Marko, or to Vaso, for I can't see a single letter in it. I'm not a Pope's son, but a shepherd's. I can only write my name, and even that with great difficulty. These Popović boys read like bishops, their house is a wealthy one...

VELJKO

Bit by bit, Obro, and we'll understand these letters...

OBREN

What kind of language is this, I'd rather eat shit, than speak the way they do...

MARKO

Let it be, Obren!

VELJKO

We have to study, my Obro, we have to. I'm afraid we can't stay together all the time. And what are we going to do, if we don't know how to say anything, when we're left alone with them...

MARKO

We'll be together! We'll never separate! We'll find a job with the same boss, we'll work in the same mine, if it's a mine, in the same workshop, if it's a workshop, we'll live in the same place, we'll eat our meals together! Everything like we agreed when we set out. All of us from the same village will be together. Everything like we agreed when we set out. All of us from the same village

will be together. We're brothers, whether Popovićs or not!
One mother could not have borne us all! That's why
Milka has come with us, to kepp our house. Isn't that so?

OBREN

(Takes off his hat, his voice is tearful): Thank you, Mašan!
Thank you ever for this! *(Obren leaves the cabin, so that the
others can't see that he is moved to tears.)*

IVO

So, now you know. We are brothers is: vii ar braderz.

ALL

Vii ar braderz

IVO

Correct pronunciation. Now, Damjan, when I ask you
who you are, tell me: the three of us are brothers from
Montenegro.

DAMJAN

How do you say: us three brothers?

VELJO

Trii.

DAMJAN

Ivo?

IVO

Yes, it's trii, trii, they make no difference, three men of
three women...

DAMJAN

The three of us... You say it, Mašo.

MARKO

Why, it's not difficult. here goes: A ar... No, no, it's: vii ar... No, it's: as trii... Oh, devil take it... Vii trii, vii ar braderz Montenegro. Is that right, Ivo?

IVO

Yes, sir!

VASO

By your word, Ivo, is a boot: a "but"?

IVO

Not "but", but a long sound: buut!

VASO

Such a little word, and they drawl it so? And why do they drawi it so, for the love of God. Buut, buut...

IVO

That's an important warning for you. See here, Rule Number 2. Be careful which word is pronounced long, and which short. Without that, all your trouble with the language goes to waste. If you pronounce the word "pliiz" with a short "iz", no one will understand you. An Englishman will only understand you when you pronounce it long. So "buut", is not "but", it's "buut".

VELJKO

That's not nice at all, this drawling. What am I going to do when I want some chicken: chiiiken, buuut, voooter... Vaaasooo...

IVO

Chiik means a cheek.

DAMJAN

Is that so, by your life?

IVO

Aha.

VASO

Now, if you tell me that the word for shit is shiit, I'll turn back this very minute, I swear. My foot won't walk among those devils...

IVO

No, that's not how it goes, that's not how it goes....

OBREN

Mitar is no better from that medicine. Who knows what they gave him.

MARKO

Is he a good doctor, Ivo?

IVO

I don't know him, but I believe that he is good. he is the ship's doctor. He is experienced.

MARKO

By the looks of him, he's a wonderful man. He checked him over thoroughly.

VELJKO

Why didn't you stay, Ivo, so that you could tell him everything in English...

IVO

You don't have to explain anything to a doctor. He can see for himself what's the matter. Come on, those measures for length... Do you remember how to pronounce; chiik, pliiz, buut...

DAMJAN

And how do you say, lady, Veljo, wants to know, he might need it, hee, hee, hee...

VELJKO

It's not me who asked, but Dašo... Hee, hee, hee...

MARKO

The little crawlers, look at what they want to know...

IVO

Lady .

VELJKO

Lidi.

IVO

Aha.

OBREN

May the Lord freeze their tongue, haven't they got some hot word for a woman...

VELJKO

What is pliiz?

IVO

Please.

VELJKO

I asked you what pliiz means?

IVO

Please, please, that's what pliiz means. Please is: pliiz!

VELJKO

Pliiz!

IVO

Please.

VASO

A thousand times phooey.

IVO

What do you mean, Vaso?

VASO

What kind of language is that, for the love of God! How can they turn such a polite and soft word into: pliiz? What kind of people are they who pronounce things so awfully and ridiculously when they speak. I'm ashamed to say: pliiz... It turns your mouth sour when you roll that on your tongue... it's a language of badgers, not men...

VELJKO

It seems so at first, Vaso, afterwards you get used to it...

VASO

By my word, it'll take a club to make me get used to it...

MARKO

Read to us, Ivo some of those rules of entry, they're important for us now...

IVO

Here is the most important legal warning on the dangers of expulsion from America...

OBREN

Why is that important, let them expel me, let me die of hunger, a curse on their soul!

MARKO

Obren, you must'nt talk like that! We're nog going for them to expel us, we are entering to stay until we need to!

IVO

The authorities have the right to expel from the contry all those who have give false answers to questions at enty, and also in the case you fall ill during the first two years of your stay and become a burden upon the state or the community...

VELJKO

Woe is us, if Mitar does not get well.

(A silence falls)

IVO

That's why it is recommended that our people, a soon as they arrive, should become mebers of mutual welfare societies, which can help them in case of illness or death!

OBREN

Come, let's learn something nicer! Men have gone to America up to now, but they have not died suddenly, for the love of God... My lovely woods in flower, I'm roaming the wide world over...

VELJKO

Let it be, Obren, let the song be, let's learn some more Ingliish!

OBREN

So, let's go on with the Ingliish, better that than this talk about death!

DAMJAN

Go on, Veljo, count, since you know it so well...

VELJKO

Uan, tuu, trii, foror, faiv, siks, seven, eit, nain, ten ileven, tvelv, tertiin, fortiin, fiftiin, sikstiin, sikstiin, sikstiin, and seventiin, eitiin, naitiin, tventi... Uph!

DAMJAN

For the love of me, do it once again, I like to listen to you...

VELJKO

Uan, tuu, trii, foor, taiv, siks, seven...

VASO

Veljo, you poor thing, don't you see that Damjan is making fun of you...

VELJKO

Look here, look here... You'll pay for this, Dasho! Why should I go on counting, I'm not going there to mind sheep... Ivo, show us something nice... some real Ingliish so that we can chatter away like you do with hose Italians on the top deck...

IVO

That is in Italian...

VELJKO

By your life, Ivo, do you know how to speak Italian?

IVO

Yes, quite well.

VELJKO

Well, congratulations, you've a head on your shoulders...

MILKA

(Runs in from outside): Marko! Come quick. Mitar is talking to himself, he is burning up...

(Marko jumps up and runs after her. The others also get up, and follow, at a slower pace.)

THE LIGHTS GO DOWN
MUSICAL TRANSITION

(Once again the lights go on suddenly in the cabin. Veljko, Damjan and Ivo are studying. Their backs are to the audience and they cannot hear what is being said in front stage.)

DAMJAN

How do you say sick?

IVO

Il.

DAMJAN

Such a short word?

IVO

Yes.

DAMJAN

A great pity.

IVO

Come on, Damjan, say: Mitar is sick!

DAMJAN

Mitar bii il.

IVO

And you, Veljko?

VELJKO

Mitarizil!

IVO

Good. Mitar is ill! Is means to be!

DAMJAN

How do you say: is he going to die?

IVO

Let's not talk about that! Come on, Veljko, those questions on how to find your uncle. First you ask for the street...

(Veljko takes a piece of paper from his pocket on which the address is written. He holds the paper as if it were a holy relic.)

VELJKO

Pliiz, telmii hverdizstriit iz!

IVO

To the left, two blocks from here?

VELJKO

What comes now?

IVO

Ask if it is near by?

VELJKO

Ah, yes! Iz it nier bai hier?

IVO

No, not nier, hier but: niir, hiir...

VELJKO

Niir, hiir! Now I'll ask about my uncle. Duu juu nou Aleksa Bratić, hii livindz hauz?

IVO

excellent.

DAMJAN

It's not excellent! He didn't ask whether he can get there on foot!

VELJKO

Go on, Dasho, you ask about that!

DAMJAN

Wait, wait... How does it go... Ken aigoder on fit, no, no, it's onfut, fut, fut. Should I say it long here Ivo, or can I say it short.

IVO

You've said it well: on foot. That's short... It's long when you say feet.

VELJKO

Lucky you, Ivo! When did you become so knowledgeable of the world, Ikan? Where did you, by my word, learn to speak English so well?

IVO

Over there.

VELJKO

Is there anything, when they rattle away, that you can't understand?

IVO

I don't know, maybe there is, but I try to figure it out from what I know...

VELJKO

Six languages in one head! Oh, brother, that is some learning! And what is your surname, Iko, I seem to have forgot...

IVO

Dojčić, Stjepan-Ivo Dojčić. But everyone calls me Ivo.

DAMJAN

Why isn't it Šćepan, that's a fine name. Šćepan. A real Montenegrin name.

IVO

Ivo is easier.

VELJKO

Ivo Crnojević.

DAMJAN

That's a fine name too.

VELJKO

Ivo, what is stiiindustrii?

IVO

It's the steel industry. The large steel works n Chicago. Many of our fellow countrymen work there.

DAMJAN

Is it very hard work in that stiiindustrii?

IVO

It is. Especially until you get used to working on the machines. People lose their hands, often even their arms,

they get carried away and the machine goes whiz, and cuts their arm off to the elbow...

DAMJAN

Oh, my, you don't say....

VELJKO

Is the house of my uncle Aleksa Bratić anywhere near yours, over there?

IVO

No, it's not. I live in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and he lives in Chicago. Those places are far away from one another...

VELJKO

I'm very sorry to hear that. We won't be seeing you there. And we've become so close and friendly, Ikan, my good man...

DAMJAN

Ivo, are you an office worker!

IVO

Well, something like that!

DAMJAN

Lucky you. I would like to be an office worker, for at least two days, more than I would like a sheep to baah in my ear now...

VELJKO

Who knows, maybe you'll learn to be an office worker over there...

DAMJAN

How do you say mother, Ivo?

IVO

Mader.

DAMJAN

Phooey, what an ugly word!

IVO

You can say mommy. That's something like our mom.

DAMJAN

Come on, I can' say mami, like a child... And how do you say sister?

IVO

Sister.

DAMJAN

As if she were a man, sister. And mader is ugly. it's not very nice to call your mother and sister that way.

VELJKO

No, it isn't.

DAMJAN

Would you know, Ivo, by your life, how you to say "the Mountain Wreath" in English?

VELJKO

So, Ivo? Do you know?

IVO

Something like "mauntin vriit"... You could say it like that...

DAMJAN

Well, many thanks to you and congratulations, our scholar! By your life, say it again!

IVO

Mauntin vriit.

DAMJAN

I would have never guessed that was the "Mountain Wreath", if I heard them hollering it out all around me.

VELJKO

Neither would've I.

IVO

You have to learn.

VELJO

But it's true, this language it puzzling. Who would guess that the word for madam is leid.

IVO

Leidi!

VELJKO

There's no guessing a word, my Dašo. This is a nasty language!

DAMJAN

Well, I could guess that Yanjuari, Februari, Martch, Eiprill...

VELJKO

It's not, Yanjauri, my poor man, but Yanjuuari. Isn't that so, Ivo?

IVO

January.

VELJKO

You see, Dašo, you can't guess. Now, Ivo, and what is the name of their Mater, their ruler, like our prince Nikola?

DAMJAN

I know: Roosevelt!

IVO

Not, it isn't. Now, it's William Howard Taft. Roosevelt was up to 1908. But remember, they do not have kings, or princes or rulers! He is the president. The people elect him, freely, by voting, every four years!

DAMJAN

Not me, by God!

IVO

But, you see, I could!

VELJKO

What could you, Ivo, my poor man?

IVO

I belong to a movement for the liberation of nations from tyrants and their rule of terror. If you want freedom, you must win it by force!

DAMJAN

But how is the Master terrorizing you, when, by my soul, he doesn't even know you?

IVO

He is terrorizing you! He is terrorizing your people! He is unjust!

DAMJAN

No, he isn't by God, he is just and honest. A hero and a poet...

IVO

That's a lie. He is a tyrant and murderer!

DAMJAN

What is a tyrant?

AIVO

A despot, a torturer, a leech!

DAMJANA

You can't say that about our Master, Ivo!

IVO

Why can't I! You're defending a dictator and autocrat!

VELJKO

We don't know anything about that.

IVO

Are you going to inform on me to the steamboat authorities?

VELJKO

Not us, for sure.

IVO

Can I rely on you?

DAMJAN

Yes, you can.

IVO

Swear on it.

VELJKO

By my father's grave.

IVO

I'm an anarchist.

DAMJAN

You don't say?

DAMJAN

No, not us!

IVO

Do you know what an anarchist is?

DAMJAN

No, not us!

VELJKO

Yes, we do.

DAMJAN

So, we do.

VELJKO

Tell us.

IVO

Žerajić is also an anarchist. There are many of us. An assassination is being prepared in America on Duke Cuvaj. He is terrorizing the Croatian people. Not a word to anyone about this. Do I have your word on it?

DAMJAN

May I bury all my three brothers, if I breathe a word of this to anyone!

VELJKO

Neither will, by my uncle's life.

IVO

That's not much of a oath.

VELJKO

I have no brothers.

(Ivo pulls out a gun, with a quick movement. He throws it one the ground, grabs hold of their hands and places them on the gun. The two hesitate, but do everything that he shows them to.)

THE LIGHTS GO DOWN.

MUSICAL TRANSITION

(When the lights go on again throughout the cabin, all of them are together, except Ivo who is evidently being expected.)

OBREN

Vale!

VASO

What is it?

OBREN

What day is it since we set sail?

VASO

Exactly thirty five days since the ship set sail, if we count by our reckoning. Thirty four times has night come to us on this boat, and thirty five mornings dawned...

MARKO

Well, my good men, this water is washing our lives away... There is too much of it, even if gold coins jumped out of it. Have you washed your faces, Ivo will be coming soon?

VELJIO

We've washed our faces, for sure, at least there is enough water here...

DAMJAN

Come on, Mašo, read us something from those instructions of yours, in order to make the time pass, this rocking is driving me crazy...

MARKO

I can't take it much longer, either, but it's these words that will be the death of me...

DAMJAN

You're right, Mašo...

MARKO

Come a little closer... Warning number twelve: In America it is forbidden by law to spit in the street cars, and smoking is also forbidden in them. In some towns in America it is also forbidden to spit in the streets, where the pedestrians walk...

VASO

And where am I going to spit by St. Peter of Cetinje!

OBREN

Into your pocket, my Vale, that's where!

VELJKO

Would they really fine you if they caught you spitting?

MARKO

They would, by God!

OBREN

And they would send you back to your country, to have a good spit, and then come back to the mine...

VASO

If we had known, we would have had a pit, like men, before we left...

OBREN

You've spat your spit, my Vasilije! No more spitting for you!

MARKO

Listen to this about working conditions! Working conditions for our people are very poor in New York. A German or Italian is more likely to find work in that city than a man from our parts... since that is more of a trading than a factory place...

OBREN

Why do they always give them work before us, fuck their fathers...

VASO

What do you mean, why? They're the same religion!

OBREN

That's what it must be, by God!

VASO

What else would it be?

MARKO

Listen to his: On the West Side of New York, there is man from our parts who has been conning our people for years. He has been taking ten dollars from our people to find them jobs, but there is no sign of work. Even though he's been to prison twice for this, when he gets out, he goes on with it...

DAMJAN

Well, I'll spit in his face, and let them fine me a hundred times. They can't forbid me from doing that!

MARKO

Here is something even worse: In New York there was an agency which conned people, since it sold them tickets for half the way for the full price. So, brother, be careful from whom you buy your ticket.

VASO

Oh, my brothers, what great villainy!

MARKO

Wait a minute. Misfortune has taught our people a great trickery. It is called "jumping". When they have no money for a ticket, our fellow countrymen jump onto a train. Many of the have broken their leg or arm in this way, and though injured they have been taken to jail...

OBREN

I believe that Ivo will help us to buy good tickets and everything else we need, isn't that so, Marko?

MARKO

He will, why shouldn't he? Ivo is a fine man, there's no doubt about it.

OBREN

We won't jumping like that, even if we had to return home over the water on foot...

MARKO

No, we won't, woe is us! We are not rogues, why would we do a thing like that!

VELJKO

Are there any more terrible things, Majo!

MARKO

Yes, there are. This is about work: our people should best seek work in the open, say on the railroads...

VASO

Why should, my man, the railroad give us work? There is nothing else for us to do but head straight for the mines...

MARKO

Look at this slander about us: most of our people are turned back for reasons of health!

VELJKO

Is that because they are sick?

MARKO

Yes.

OBREN

Oh, terrible thing!

MARKO

Our people are turned back particularly because of contagious diseases such as tuberculosis, from which many of our fellow countrymen suffer. During the great crisis of 1908 an article came out in St. Louis calling upon

the authorities to forbid us entry into the United States and to expel us from cities, because we had become a danger to the health of the nation...

(A deadly silence prevails. Everyone looks in a different direction.)

DAMJAN

Woe, perhaps Mitar...

MARKO

Shut up!

OBREN

Let them fuck themselves. I'm not afraid of them! So let them turn me back a hundred times! They'll turn me back to my fatherland, let them fuck themselves!

VELJKO

Mašo, let's skip that portion about illness. Mitar will jump to his feet in a couple of days... Go on and read something more about work....

MARKO

Here is something: lately our people have become victims of a terrible habit: they have begun to bribe the heads of shops, who are called foremen. The routine began in this way, they began firing older workers, also our countrymen, in order to hire younger men who paid them in advance and after their first pay. Then they too would soon be fired, and new men would be hired... and so on...

VASO

My God, what terrible people! Where are we going! They would save us if they turned us back...

VELJKO

God forbid!

MARKO

Listen to what it says here: for this reason one should join a union...

VELJKO

A what?

MARKO

Union... Those are organizations which protect workers from many things and which punish evildoers...

DAMJAN

Where are we going to find those unions by ourselves?

VELJKO

We'll ask Aleksa when we get there. We're not going into complete darkness. There are plenty of our people there. They won't let us tumble along like wild stock...

MARKO

Now, here it says something that should be remembered as the most important: entry into the United States is most strictly forbidden to anar... anarchi... anarchists since the late president McKinley fell victim to their mania... They are forbidden permission onto disembarkation sites, and they should not even be allowed to board ships...

OBREN

By a thousand devils! Who are those anar... anarchists? Are they rightists or nationalists?

VELJKO

They are the ones like Žerajić...

DAMJAN

We don't know anything about that!

VELJKO

Right, how would we know...

VASO

Is there, Majo, anything about that?

MARKO

There is, but I'll let Ivo read it and explain it to us nicely...

VASO

Why Ivo, I like it better when you read and I understand it better and you read slowly, you don't rush through like he does...

MARKO

Many of our people don't even know what anarchism is...

OBREN

By my word, they don't...

MARKO

Wait a minute... Anarchism... Let's explain that: since men began to form some kind of community, man has been most interested in what form of community is the best one. Some think that what we have today is the best. Others, by the name of socialists ask themselves: how is it possible that this is the best, when there is so much poverty and injustice?

OBREN

That's right, by my word...

VASO

It's good that you agree... you're a flash in politics...

MARKO

And they want to order things differently...

VASO

Who would?

MARKO

Listen carefully! The socialists would like to change that order. The same opinion about the present order is held by theanarchi... anarchists. We can't go into the differences between them now, but one difference is important, the socialists fight like other parties by legal means, while the anarchists take a different way. First they kill the crowned heads, and then the presidents of governments, one by one...

OBREN

Bloodthirsty, by God!

VASO

We have nothing to do with that!

OBREN

That is world politics. Let that be, Mašo, read something that we need to know...

MARKO

Here is something: Bear in mind this important advice: the one to find work first will be the one who keeps himself clean and proper. For this reason, cut your hair

regularly, scrub your face and don't let your beard grow long...

OBREN

You see, that's something nicely written. We must bear that in mind...

MARKO

Look here, what it says about dress: be reasonable along the way. Be especially careful that your clothes fit properly, or you'll have a bad time in New York. Many of our travellers, especially Montenegrins, have paid dearly for the clothes they bought in Kotor at the "Counsel" shop. They began to tear, even while on board ship. The children in New York would finish the job, so at their first step, the police would lock our people up as beggars and vagrants...

OBREN

Why didn't we know about this before... poor wretches... We spent so much money... Did you buy anything at the "Counsel", Veljo?

VELJKO

Not me! Everything I have was sent to me last year by my uncle.

MARKO

Dašo, has your coat begun to tear anywhere?

DAMJAN

No, it hasn't

MARKO

Take it off, and put something else on.

DAMJAN

What?

MARKO

You don't need anything else, it's not cold in here.

DAMJAN

I can't sit here naked.

MARKO

But you're not naked....

OBREN

Does it say anything about shoes?

MARKO

No, it doesn't.

VASO

And about umbrellas?

MARKO

No, not a word.

(Ivo comes in. He seems somewhat tired and absent, as if he had not slept. He sits down immediately, as if his legs do not hold him.)

VASO

Where have you been, you sharp sword of a man? We are eager to see you! Don't leave us for such a long time, our brother and protector...

(They all draw near to shake hands with Ivo, or to tap him on the arm or shoulder. Milka brings him a piece of cheese and bread.)

IVO

How is Mitar?

MARKO

He didn't sleep a wink last night. He moaned the night through. We'd ask you to go find the doctor. There is no more of that yellow powder he gave Mitar.

IVO

Alright.

VELJKO

Ivo, do you know that I've learned to say: Please, where is the waiting room: Hver iz veitingrum...

IVO

Please!

VELJKO

Yes, pliiz!

VASO

Don't make us use that pliiz, I beg you!

IVO

You have to say please! And it's not rum, but a long sound: ruum. Rum is something to drink while ruum is a chamber...

VASO

When you've mentioned rum as something to drink, Ikan, how do you say: give me a glass of spirits?

IVO

Giv mii a glas ov viski! Pliiz!

VASO

Fuck that pliiz! What's spirits there?

IVO

Whiskey. Whiskey.

OBRREN

Well men, to tell you truly, I like the word. It's somehow fine, noble sounding. It sparkles when you say it... Viski...

VASO

But it's little bit hissing too.... Viski...

OBREN

Don't, don't... It's a nice word, it is, to tell the truth.. it's nicer to say viski than spirits...

VASO

But spirits is also a fin word, Obro, among the finest...

OBREN

That's true, but this viski somehow fires you up...pours itself out suddenly, right nicely... viski...

MARKO

Good thing you mentioned spirits, let's wet our throats a bit! Milka...

VASO

Come on, by your life, ask her in English, let's see what she'll do...

DAMJAN

Yes, let's .

VELJKO

Don't she'll be embarrassed...

(Milka comes in.)

MILKA

What is it, Majo?

VASO

Come on, Veljo, how does it go...

DAMJAN

Giv miii...

VELJAKO

Giv mii a glas ov viskii!

IVO

Please!

VELJKO

Yes, pliiz!

MILKA

What's the matter with you?

DAMJAN

Come on, Milka, bring us some, what are you waiting for?

MILKA

What should I bring you?

DAMJAN, VELJKO, VASO, OBREN

A glas ov viski!

VILKA

Marko, do you hear what they're saying?

MARKO

What is it!

MILKA

They're saying nasty things!

DAMJAN

It's not nasty, Milka, it's something fine, it's in English...
come on, you can learn it too...

IVO

That's the way, Milka, you say in English: Bring me a
glass of spirits. Here: Give me a glass of whiskey, please.

MILKA

Is that true, Mašan?

MARKO

Yes, by God!

MILKA

Can Dašo also say it?

DAMJAN

Here goes: giv mii a glasofviski!

VELJKO

Here, I can say it too: giv mii aglasofviski!

IVO

Please!

VASO

Come on, Milka say pliiiz!

MILKA

Go t, why should I say such an ugly word!

VASO

It's not an ugly thing!

MILKA

Marko, just listen to him!

VASO

That's the way to say please, here, ask Ivo.

MILKA

It's so funny...

MIRKO

Now my dove when you've learned English, bring us some spirits...

MILKA

Ha, ha, ha... Is that what viski is?

DAMJAN

Look how quickly she learns...

MILKA

It's right funny... viski, ha, ha...

(Milka runs out laughing. The others laugh as well. Milka returns with a bottle of spirits. She hands it to Marko.)

MARKO

Give me that bottle! Let's toast to the thirtysixth day we've been crawling across these troubled waters of God's creation... *(He takes a drink.)* Mitar is also a little better today! So we can say: In good time!

OBREN

Amen *(He takes a long drink and hands the bottle over to Ivo.)*

IVO

To your health!

OBREN

(Sings out suddenly in full voice.):

Oh, if I could, in great my woe,
Before the grand Billiard Hall go!

(The others join in the song. Even Ivo joins in, trying to scream in harmony, yet with some dignity.)

MARKO, OBREN, VASO, DAMJAN, VELJKO, IVO

Take communion from the holy cup,
At Cetinje Monastery, high up!
Native mountains, black cliffs,
My heart turned to stone, weeps.

MARKO

Come on, come on... It's easy to sing, but now it's time to
end the song...

OBREN

let us be, Mašo, this is instead of crying...

MARKO

Come on, come on, we have more urgent work to do than
singing and crying... Come on, Ivo, read to us some of the
short cuts in getting work...

IVO

Where did you stop? Did you read this passage on
strikes?

MARKO

Yes, yes!

IVO

Good, now see here: our people should be very careful of one thing: the strikes of the local workers!

OBREN

Even if we are very careful, how will we know what or what for it's all about?

IVO

You will know, things go like this: either because of low wages, or because their employers fleece them in some other way, the workers leave their work and go home...

VASO

Good, that's where we'll quickly find work, get their jobs...

IVO

Wait, wait... When the workers go home, it is called a strike... The employers then hire foreign workers in their stead, and take their jobs away from them...

MARKO

How should we know who worked that job before us . All we want to do is work and earn some money! What can we do if the workers have left their jobs... It's their fault, they shouldn't have gone home.

IVO

You see, that is where unions help!

DAMJAN

And where are we going to find these unions?

IVO

Our honest countrymen will make you members as soon as you arrive!

MARKO

Aha! We're not going to get our selves into any politics over there, but to find honest work, and when we have earned a pile of money, to go back home...

IVO

It makes no difference, Marko! Think it over for yourselves, when workers leave their jobs somewhere, they are men like yourselves, they want to work and earn money, but the employers won't let them, the conditions are not good... In their own way they are also fighting for you...

MARKO

There's no need for anyone to fight for us... We'll fight and work as we should, why should we meddle into who is satisfied and who isn't...

IVO

Marko! No one runs away from something good! When things are bad for other workers, they will be bad for you as well! You have to learn that the fate of each worker is also your own! You are going to a free country where there is equality and where there are no royal leeches...

MARKO

What leeches, by God, Ivo what are you talking about... Which king is a leech...

Don't you go slandering...

DAMJAN

Ivo, do you want to hear how we've learned those questions you taught us yesterday....

VELJKO

Yes, yes we have...

IVO

Have you learned the one about names?

DAMJAN

Noo!

IVO

Pay attention, this is important! When you begin work, they will ask for your name. Tell them your real name, and not some English one like Michael, Joh, Steve... Many of our people, probably to please Americans, register themselves under English names, and when they have some kind of accident, there is one name in the passport, and another on the work sheet, and they et nothing of what they are entitled to under the law...

VASO

Who, in his right mind, would call himself other than his christened name? How do you say, Ivo, my name is such and such?

IVO

Mai neim iz Marko, Ivo, Vaso...

MARKO

Main neim iz Marko, Mai neim iz Marko... Should I say Marko Popović or only when they ask me for my surname...

IVO

You should say it right away: My name is Marko Popović.

VELJKO

How do you ask what is your name?

IVO

Hvatz jour neim?

VELJKO

Go on, ask me, Ivo?

IVO

Hvat iz jour neim?

VELJKO

Mai neim iz Veljko Savov Popović.

MARKO

There, Veljo, you've learned that easily. Mai neim iz Marko Popović... Mai neim iz Marko Popa Luke Popović... Is that so, Ivo?

IVO

Yes, sir!

DAMJAN

Now ask me, Ivo, please.

IVO

Hvat iz jour neim, ser?

DAMJAN

Mai neim iz Damjan Popović.

IVO

Correct pronunciation!

MARKO

Now, go on and ask me those things about asking for work... in the right order, Ikan, our fr5iend and benefactor...

IVO

Come on, Vaso, ask for a job... First you must say the greeting... Here, I will be the employer... Good morinig!

VASO

What now, brother?

IVO

Come on, come on... Hello!

VASO

Helou?

IVO

Now you should say: I would like to ask you something!

VASO

Let's do it together, I can't do it alone.

ALL

Ai vud laik tu ask juu somting!

VASO

Now goes that: dej ar teling...

MARKO

Yes, yes: dej ar teling mii dat juu nou ver vork...

VELJKO

Vervorkkudbiigoten!

IVO

That's right.

VASO

What have I said?

IVO

You have said that you heard that he knows where there is work.

VASO

Ah, yes.

IVO

Let's suppose he says he knows...

MARKO

Well, we might find some nice man...

IVO

What do you say then?

DAMJAN

Does that thank you come now: that ajmmatchoblaijd?

IVO

Yes. And then you ask where that work is... Now go on: Where, where... about?

VASO

Hver about?

IVO

And he says, for instance: In the railroad shop... In the car shops...

OBREN

pray to God that's what he answers, that's what we're looking for, work on the railroads...

DAMJAN

And what about the unions, how are we going to ask about the unions?

VELJKO

Not now... Ivo, Ivo, ask the one whether I want that job?

IVO

Do you want this job?

VELJKO

Jes, ai duu?

MARKO

What has Veljo said just now?

VELJKO

Translate it to him, Ivo.

IVO

He said he does.

VASO

Look at Veljo mumbling-jumblin in American, god smiled on your house!

MARKO

Now, let's all thank Ivo in English!

DAMJAN

Aim matchoblaijd, Ivo!

ALL

Aim matchoblaijd, Ivo..

DAMJAN

And those unions, how are we...

(Milka runs in, all in tears).

MILKA

Marko, run and call the doctor. Mitar is spitting blood and gasping. I think he's dying...

(All of them jump up and run in the direction where Mitar is lying.)

THE LIGHTS GO DOWN

MUSICAL TRANSITION

(When the lights go on again in the cabin, Veljko and Damjan are alone. Obren comes in a little later. The two of them are studying "Ingliish".)

VELJKO

If only this steamboat would stand still for a while, I think I'd feel easier that very minute.

DAMJAN

All I want is to get there alive...

VELJKO

It's been three days now, that Ivo hasn't come round...

DAMJAN

Marko says he doesn't he is contagious too...

VELJKO

What are you saying, Mitar doesn't have tuberculosis.

DAMJAN

Marko says that maybe Ivo thinks he does...

VELJKO

That't not nice of him...

DAMJAN

Don't say that, in front of Marko!

VELJKO

How could I!

DAMJAN

Let's learn those questions...

VELJKO

Yes, let's.

*(Obren comes in and sits down down without saying a word.
He holds his head in his hands.)*

DAMJAN

How is he Obro!

OBREN

Always the same.

DAMJAN

Is he any better?

OBREN

By my word, it's a stone heavy load...

DAMJAN

Why doesn't, Marko let us in to see him a while?

OBREN

So that they don't see us there. He says the ship's authorities will see us. There are spies everywhere, who will lie that we are all contagious and other things...

VELJKO

Just to have a look at him...

OBREN

When Marko goes up to sign something for the doctor, I'll let you in, so you can see him...

DAMJAN

Obro, tell us truly, is Mitar going to die?

OBREN

I don't know, Damjan, I don't know myself. He's struggling, and I hope he won't he won't.

VELJKO

No, he won't, he won't for sure. Let's learn Ingliish...

OBREN

Yes, you'd better, learn...

VELJKO

Come on, Dašo, you read better, take the book, and make believe you're Marko and you're looking for work, and I'll be Ivo...

DAMJAN

Good morning, boss... Gud morning, bos!

VELJKO

Gud morning, huuz der?

DAMJAN

Ai em... Mai neim iz Marko Popović... And now your turn...

VELJKO

Yes, now it's may turn.. Hvat ar juu?

DAMJAN

A Serbian body and soul... A Serbiyan badii and soul...

VELJKO

And now I'm going to ask what you want here...

DAMJAN

That's right.

VELJKO

Hvat ar juu lukiing for hiir?

DAMJAN

Wait, I've lost my place.. Wait, wait... Here it is... I am loking for work... Ai em lukiing for verk, seer!

VELJKO

Good thing you made that seer long... Huu ar douz trijangmen vid juu!

DAMAJAN

What?

VELJKO

Huar douztrii jangmen vid juu? (*He shows his meaning by hand.*)

DAMJAN

Yes, I know, I know.. Dej ar mai trii braderz...

VELJKO

And douz men derhuu ar dej?

DAMJAN

Douz ar Obren and Veljko... Douz ar mai.. now I don't know what to say, how does it go, Veljo?

VELJKO

Kantrimen!

DAMJAN

Yes!

VELJKO

Hvatkaind ov vork duujuu vant?

DAMJAN

Vii vud teik 'enikaind ov vork!

VELJKO

Seer!

OBREN

What did you say just now, Dašo?

DAMJAN

That we would take any ... of work...

OBREN

Ah... Now comes the part, Veljo, when you ask whether we would be willing to work at night?

VELJKO

Ah, yes. Duu juu keer hveder juu vork bai di dei or di nait?

DAMJAN

Ol di seim!

VELJKO

You should say: iz ol di seim... no, no... no: it ol di seim!

DAMJAN

So, what do we say now?

VELJKO

You ask how night work is paid?

DAMJAN

That's right. Hau duu juu pei fornait?

VELJKO

Tventi!

DAMJAN

Itizlitl!

OBREN

What did you say?

DAMJAN

It iz litl, I said that it is little!

VELJKO

Ask when do we get a raise?

DAMJAN

I seemed to have forgot that... I don't know how to ask that!

VELJKO

Hven duu juu reiz it?

DAMJAN

Oh, yes! Hven duu ju reizit?

VELJKO

After foor viiks, hven juu lern divork!

DAMJAN

Come now, about the working hours?

VELJKO

Aha.

DAMJAN

Haumeni aurz duu juu vork?

VELJKO

Vii vork ten aurz.

DAMJAN

What comes next?

VELJKO

Peek into that book, and look up that part about starting work...

DAMJAN

Wait, wait... here it is... start! And now I say. Ken vii start et vans?

VELJKO

Jes, et vans ol ov juu!

DAMJAN

What do I ask now?

OBREN

Ask now who is our head man?

DAMJAN

Yes, forman...

VELJKO

Go ahead, ask!

DAMJAN

Hvat iz forman?

VELJKO

Ho, huu iz forman?

DAMJAN

Yes, huiz forman?

VELJKO

Jour kontrimen Majkl.

DAMJAN

Hver iz vork?

VELJKO

Not that, ask about getting paid... I don't understand that one bit...

VELJKO

Duu juu pei.. No, no, you first ask when you get paid... Hven duuu juu pei, and he answers: Trzdei at foor oklok.

DAMJAN

Now I know... I have to ask: vit keshmoni or vitчек?

VELJKO

Vit чек!

DAMJAN

Does that thing about cashing come now?

VELJKO

Yes.

DAMJAN

Hver ken ai kesh det chek?

VELJKO

In eni saluuun!

OBREN

When did you manage to learn Ingleish so well, so help you God. I don't understand a thing you're saying.

DAMJAN

And now, you say that thing about going to the workshop.

VELJKO

Gou der in det vorkshop!

DAMJAN

And now that you're there... My turn first? Haur juu, Haur juu?

VELJKO

Verii vel, verii vel!

DAMJAN

Now you turn.

VELJKO

Jes, jast from di ould vorld?

DAMJAN

What is that?

VELJKO

Are you just now from the old country?

DAMJAN

Ah, yes. Jes jast nau.

VELJKO

Hauz der in di old kontrii?

DAMJAN

Now this is too long for me to say: Don't ask, it's not good, if it were good, why would so many people be rushing to come ove her...

VELJKO

Dont ask, bed, if it ver gud der vud... I can't go on without Ivo...

OBREN

Ar those our people who are asking how it is at home?

DAMJAN

Yes.

OBREN

Why would you talk to our people in Ingliish, don't be silly. Don't go learning that! Learn only the things that you have to chatter with those folks of theirs.

VELJKO

That's right. Now let's repeat everything, only now, I am Marko who is looking for work, and your are the boss...

DAMJAN

Gud morning! Gud morning!

(Marko comes in. He is beside himself, His cap is in his hand. His eyes are clouded with tears. He stands by the bench.Evryone is silent.)

MARKO

Has Ivo been round?

DAMJAN

We haven't set eyes on him these three days.

MARKO

Perhaps you've seen him somewhere, Obren?

OBREN

Mašo, are you kidding me, where do you think I wander about?

MARKO

Have you ever heard the name Šćepan Dolčić?

OBREN

What name?

MARKO

Šćepan Dolčić!

OBREN

Not me, by God, never in my life!

VELJKO

Is Stje...

DAMJAN

We haven't, Marko, where would we have heard it!

MARKO

My God, there is great unhappiness in wayfaring parts...
Go in to see Mitar, for a short while, just enough to say
goodbye...

DAMJAN

What is it, Mašo, is Mitar on his death bed?

MARKO

go in!

THE LIGHTS GO DOWN

MUSICAL TRANSITION

(When the lights come on again in the cabin, we see all of them together except Marko. Milka has a black kerchief over her head and she is crying quietly without stopping. Damjan goes over to her, embraces her, and begins to sob with her. The others try to keep back their tears, but they find it difficult. In the middle of the cabin there is a wooden traveling trunk. A Montenegrin cap is on it, and above it a lighted candle. Marko comes in. He stops at the door, turns his head away, covers his face with his hands and begins to sob. Everyone is crying.)

MARKO

He hasn't been round?

VASO

Noo!

OBREN

What do they say upstairs?

MARKO

They keep saying the same: Dojčić, and Dojčić. They showed me the passport, the picture is Mitar's, but the name below it is Stjepan Dojčić I swore and pointed out in vain: no and no, that is my brother, Mitar popa Luke

Popović... But, nothing in the world can dissuade them!
Stjepan Dojčić and that's that!

VASO

Are they going to throw him into the water?

MARKO

Yes, they are.

VASO

When?

MARKO

They say they'll let us know.

VASO

What are we going to do?

MARKO

We'll go on, woe is us, what else is there to do? That's what our brother Mitar, our poor brother, who died of this great water and the hardships of the journey... And let them have that Dojčić Stjepan, do what they like with him, let him haunt them in their dreams...

OBREN

Whay didn't you say, Mašo, that someone stole his passport, and substituted his name...

MARKO

I kept telling them, until my mouth went dry, but how do I know, may good Obren, how to say all that in Ingliish... There is no sign of that wretched Ivo. Without him I can't make them understand. Dead mouths do not speak. He can't rise from the mercy on his soul... Vaso

What a terrible thing they've done to us, may they rot...

OBREN

So, what can we do...

VASO

If he could only have died as Mitar Popović, a simple death... That would be as if he were dancing with us here now... But now someone will get into America nicely as Mitar Popović, while we are going to plunge our fine brother into the dark waters under the ugly name of Stjepan Dojčić... It's like they stole him from us, God's damnation...

MARKO

If I only knew who stole his passport, sick and on his deathbed as he was, I would cut his throat with my own teeth...

OBREN

Oh my fine, good, sad Mitar! Now you're going to a double grave. How are we going to mourn over you, when they have killed you a second time over, now that you're dead. Look at what a funeral you're going to have and what marble gravestone... No name, no grave, no last rights... Woe is to pop Luka and to his house for four generations down... We're burying Stjepan Dojčić today, instead of our fine and meek Mitar....

MARKO

Don't Obren, don't...

OBREN

Why was it your destiny to die as a strange, to be buried like an outcast, Mitar, my brother...

(Milka cries out loud.)

MARKO

Who killed you for a second time, may the good Lord strike him dead. Let the earth, by God, cave in a hundred times over his grave, let each family consider him a bastard, let him rot into pieces smaller than that passport with which he shamed himself for eternity...

VASO

Woe is us...

(The candle dies down. The ship's horn wails. Slowly the lights fade on the weeping faces.)

THE END

Translated by Dr Vladislav Felbabov

