

Veljko Radović

JACOB EMBRACES THE THORNS

Veljko Radović was born in the village of Gruda in Montenegro in 1940. Since 1955 he has lived in Belgrade. He graduated in drama in 1968 at the Academy of Theatre, Film, Radio and Television in Belgrade. Veljko Radović has been involved in literary work since 1960 when he published his first text in the Belgrade magazine *Student*. The first of his plays to be performed was in 1969 when Montenegrin National Theatre staged his two-part play *Under the Heavens, Jakob Embraces the Thorns and The Bones*. The other plays: *The Citizens*, *The Medal*, 1975, *The Dead Season*, *A House with an Echo*, 1973, *War and Peace in Gruda*, 1981, *Each and Everyones*, 1978. Veljko Radović writes novels and essays and his works have been translated into English, Polish and Macedonian.

CHARACTERS:

JAKOV, 50 *years-old*

LANJO, 50

MOJSIJE, 60

DRAGOLJUB, 50

DENA, 30

A GIRL OF MARRIAGEABLE AGE, 20

(Daytime.
Summertime.)

The entire length of the stage is covered by the wall of a typical house in the village. The wall has two windows.

Lanjo and Dena are leaning up against it.

Lanjo has no right arm – his empty sleeve hangs loose next to his body. There is a bottle of brandy standing next to his foot.

Dena is fanning herself with an oak branch. Her breasts are openly bared. Lanjo looks at her and she buttons up her shirt.

The lazy bark of a dog is heard.

Jakov enters, wearing the uniform of a captain. His cap hides his eyes. He stands "at ease" in front of Lanjo, and salutes, clicking his heels sharply together.)

LANJO

Who are you, standing there without a head?

JAKOV

Guess, you who have a head!

LANJO

Say something else, captain!

JAKOV

You don't recognize my voice?! You've listened to it often enough.

(Smiling, Jakov takes his cap off. He spreads out his arms and approaches Lanjo. Lanjo stands up. They embrace.)

LANJO

Jakov!

JAKOV

Hey, dear Lanjo, this is all that is left of your Jakov.

LANJO

From a few people, even less remained.

(Jakov shakes hands with Dena.)

JAKOV

Is this your wife?

LANJO

That's what my parents left me. A sister!

JAKOV

My, my. A beautiful girl!

LANJO

Sit down, you must be tired! No, no, not on the stone! Dena!

(Dena runs into the house. She brings out a round table and a chair. Jakov cleans the chair carefully and then sits down. Dena takes his cap, and puts it on her head. She laughs. Lanjo sits on a stone and leans on the wall. Dena brings a bottle and pours Jakov a glass of brandy.)

LANJO

I'm really glad to see you!

JAKOV

Cheers! *(Lanjo drinks from the bottle.)*

LANJO

I must say, you're a good marksman!

JAKOV

I used to be.

LANJO

But you know you're still not bad, you found the house!

JAKOV

Many years have passed, that's a fact.

(Jakov takes a comb out of his shirt pocket and combs his grey hair and moustache slowly for a long time. Dena takes his suitcase into the house, still wearing his cap.)

JAKOV

(looking at the house): Was I born here, my Lord?!

LANJO

You were, you were, for the first and last time! As far as the house goes, a bigger man than you could have been born there.

JAKOV

I believe so.

LANJO

If you'd told me you were coming I would've sent the donkey to the train station for you.

JAKOV

We are used to marching.

LANJO

It's inappropriate for a captain to walk.

JAKOV

It won't harm me. I'm not a captain any more.

LANJO

How is that possible?

JAKOV

I was retired.

LANJO

What did you screw up?

JAKOV

Nothing, man.

LANJO

They wouldn't have thrown you out if you hadn't!

(Lanjo sees that Dena is watching Jakov through the window and eavesdropping.)

Dena, you'd better find something to do, or I'll show you!

JAKOV

Do you know why I got thrown out, as you say?

LANJO

Because you screwed something up!

JAKOV

Because I got old, Lanjo.

LANJO

What? You're only fifty, like me!

JAKOV

School, Lanjo!

LANJO

When someone around here retires, not even his family respects him any more. They don't iron his shirts any more, just the collars. They measure him for a coffin. Tell me honestly – Dena isn't listening any more – was it something... political?

JAKOV

I told you, school! All officers from the war were retired at the same time!

LANJO

Do peace-time officers exist?!

JAKOV

Well, we didn't have time to get schooling, which is what it takes, just now.

LANJO

Why weren't they looking for educated people for the front? Don't need school for that, huh? Why didn't you ask them that? You didn't dare, huh? Jakov: Orders, and it was over! You have to obey, it's the army – and with as little grumbling as possible.

LANJO

And everyone just the same – get out, retire?

JAKOV

God forbid! I didn't say that. it probably has to be like that.

LANJO

That means, you're no good any more? If you're no good, on the junk pile? Get out of the way, get out of that chair!

JAKOV

Don't provoke me, Lanjo! You may not like what you hear.

LANJO

You still can't say what you want to, eh? As long as you've got a uniform?

JAKOV

As a brother, I beg you not to dig too deep! My heart is weak now, too. Dr. Dekleva told me to take strict care of myself. My health is teetering on the edge.

LANJO

I know it's not easy. You are as used to the uniform as you are to your fingernails. It suits you well. I believe you, it's not easy to take off and pack it up.

JAKOV

I'm not even supposed to wear it any more, but to tell the truth I can't even move without a uniform. *(He smiles with melancholy)* Uniforms are made for men!

LANJO

And by God, you wore it a long time! Somehow a man in uniform looks bigger.

JAKOV

I wanted you to see me in it and to remember me that way. Believe me, when I used to put on street clothes, I looked like another Jakov. Someone I really didn't know! I look in the mirror, completely amazed, and I ask: "Is that you, Yasha?"... Sorry, I'd like to look around the house!

(Jakov enters the house, bows his head on the door step. Lanjo stands up and watches through the window, but to the side so that he is not

seen. Dena's giggle is heard. Lanjo coughs loudly, intentionally and sits on the stone.)

DFENA

(off stage): You devil! Don't pinch me!

Jakov comes out calmly, as if nothing happened.

LANJO

Got a thousand demons under her skin.

JAKOV

She should be married off, ASAP!

LANJO

It's easy to say, Yasha! Find me such a man?

JAKOV

Must be someone somewhere!

LANJO

Then you find him!

JAKOV

Why me?

LANJO

Then shut your mouth!

JAKOV

It's a pity she's still unmarried!

LANJO

How do you know she's not married?

JAKOV

I'm a man of the world, Lanjo.

LANJO

Can I tell you something?

JAKOV

Of course.

LANJO

I'd like you to be my son-in-law.

JAKOV

And what if I'm married?

LANJO

I'm experienced. Jakov. It's obvious you're not.

(Pause.)

JAKOV

The house hasn't been whitewashed for twenty years.

LANJO

Exactly twenty!

JAKOV

I'll whitewash it. That's my first job. You took good care of the land, I passed by before I came here. But it still needs cultivating. Part of it's gone wild again.

LANJO

I've gone wild too, why not the land which is never ploughed! You see this rock I'm sittin' on? It's worn down from my skinny butt. Everything gets worn down, Yasha.

JAKOV

You didn't build anything?

LANJO

What do you mean?

JAKOV

I mean a house for yourself.

LANJO

How, Yasha?

JAKOV

Other people manage to do it.

LANJO

Can't you see that I am missing something? How could I?

JAKOV

If you couldn't, why didn't someone else?

LANJO

Who else, Captain? (*Stands*) The “others” are dead. They’ve all left it and each other behind. But you didn’t used to talk like that from the balcony, with carpet under your feet and the people under the carpet. You become a big shot and start promising.

JAKOV

I’m not talking about that, it was a long time ago!

LANJO

Then about what?!

JAKOV

Please don’t provoke me!

LANJO

I’ll provoke you to see if you’ve got it in you. Talk like a man why don’t you!

JAKOV

(*indicates his uniform*): Do you see this?

LANJO

What the man under the uniform can’t talk?

JAKOV

Not like you! The talk has to be more serious and responsible. Brandy shouldn’t talk so much.

LANJO

I'm naked under these rags. There's nothing to be taken away from me. Unplug your ears, I want tell you what you've forgotten!

JAKOV

I didn't forget anything, Lanjo, believe me!

LANJO

You did. If you have to lie to others, don't lie to yourself... you say, why didn't the "others" build a house for me?! It's good that they can stand me in this house! We songs are being sung today, with new melodies. As soon as someone comes to power they start promising! "You did so much, our hearty congratulations! We won't forget you! "Poor people, even God can't stand you, how can the people around you! How many houses do you have in Belgrade?

JAKOV

Are you mocking me?

LANJO

Just say the number!

JAKOV

Where do you live?

LANJO

Lanjo doesn't live anywhere!... Listen! I got cheated bad a lot of times in my life, and I'm no longer a child. Who are you talking to? We still didn't go crazy. We know how to read clearly, from the papers and from a man's eyes!

JAKOV

I don't have anything, believe me! All the material comforts passed me by.

LANJO

(laughs): That's how all of them live! You know how to live like no one before you. You can find entertainment for your butts. You learned that quickly enough, and that without any school! You don't know what you've got, Yasha!

JAKOV

You know who talks like that? Don't you start that way!

LANJO

Enough of everything! Everything is under your command. Hup-two, Hup two!

JAKOV

I commanded but I was also being commanded. It became tiring, one and the other. I got old. That's life in the army...

LANJO

When you get tired of commanding the soldiers then you give orders at home to your wife.

JAKOV

Well, I never went too far. *(He smiles.)* She left me. "What shall I do with you, with such a small retirement!?" That's what she said. That was her ultimatum, before I retired.

LANJO

What do you mean "left"?

JAKOV

Just like that! Took her suitcase and left!

LANJO

Why do you care about her?! With such a retirement you can find some young broad. It's easy to live alone with a retirement. You'll get yourself a new one easily.

JAKOV

I also have three kids.

LANJO

You made them. While you were doing it you bellowed like they were sticking needles in your ass.

(Dena's giggle is heard off stage. Jakov drinks from the bottle. Dena comes out with the cap of her head and watches Jakov. He is embarrassed by the "special" way she looks at him.)

LANJO

Get inside, Dena wash something! Knead some bread!

(Dena reluctantly goes inside, watching Jakov.)

JAKOV

I left one daughter my apartment. The other flat to my other daughter, and my wife stayed in the third with the third daughter. What could I do but to pack up my bags?... You listening, or are we all too preoccupied?

LANJO

Keep talking! The day is long enough for both of us... at least you had something to leave your children, by God! It's good!

JAKOV

What kind of man doesn't take care of his kids?! He must take care of the family "unit", as they say. When he already did it...

LANJO

So now you're lording it up in your fourth apartment?

JAKOV

Are you kidding?

LANJO

How many square meters does it have?

JAKOV

I don't have a square meter of my own believe me. I swear by all that I am!

LANJO

Well, they'll find some place for you. They won't leave you on the street. I'm not worried about you, you know how to get by.

JAKOV

You see, it's all gone!

LANJO

What'll you do now, in God's name?!

JAKOV

What do you mean "what"?

LANJO

You learned all the deatils. "At ease", "right face"... Who'll you command now?

JAKOV

Myself.

LANJO

That's nothing special.

JAKOV

Commanding is nothing special, believe you me. I'll live for a while without that now, just for myself.

LANJO

But commanding is nice, by golly! I like to give orders to my donkey. he has to obey me, the motherfucker! Where I go, he goes! It's my way and not his! That's why you got grey like a sheep. Yasho, like you met a hungry wolf on the mountain! We all reap what we sow. You surely thought that you would be swimming in wealth all the way to your grave? Where will you go now, without your wife, without the troops behind you, without any special respect?

JAKOV

I'm going back to where I started.

LANJO

Where would that be?

JAKOV

I started here in Gruda, Lanjo.

LANJO

I know that.

JAKOV

I'm not needed there any more!

LANJO

I know that too.

JAKOV

I'm going back to what is mine, to my people!

(Pause. Unexpected tension. Questioning glances, drinking brandy.)

JAKOV

I spent nights and nights thinking about you all.

LANJO

Uh-huh.

JAKOV

Really I did. With my whole heart.

LANJO

Then why didn't you even write a postcard for all these years?!
Because I don't know what goes on in people's heads at night.

JAKOV

I thought, really I did. And how! Where will the two of you go?

LANJO

What do you mean "where"?

JAKOV

Well, I mean, you know, life, moving... believe me, its not easy for me, I do care. I am a human being. Above all! I swear!

LANJO

Don't you worry about us, more than you would about a worm in wood!

JAKOV

I have to worry! We're people, aren't we?

LANJO

Those two rooms on the east side will be enough for me and her. Let the sun warm me up first, then you! *(He forces a smile.)*

JAKOV

I see, you've never thought about it?

LANJO

Why should I, dear brother?! It's easy to make an agreement with us. Aren't the two rooms on the west side enough for you?!

JAKOV

How did you figure all that out so quickly?!

LANJO

I figure pretty well myself.

JAKOV

It seems to me you don't.

LANJO

I'll surely outlive you.

JAKOV

How do you know?

LANJO

I deserve it. *(He smiles a little drunkenly.)*

JAKOV

How much retirement do you get?

LANJO

Bless their children! They didn't forget me. I'll say! A remote village, remote Lanjo in the village, and my check arrives the first of every month. They remember me every time!

JAKOV

How much?

LANJO

Enough! I can light ten candles for my parent's souls.

DENA

(through the window): Just two thousand!

JAKOV

Impossible?!

LANJO

So, there you have it. Futile war, useless suffering! They set themselves up well. Tell me, aren't they ashamed of themselves?

JAKOV

Don't provoke me to talk, Lanjo!

LANJO

It seems there is no point in talking with you?!

JAKOV

My heart skips a beat, understand me! Brother, you're making it hard on me. You're torturing me. I don't dare even dream about such things.

LANJO

I'll get you some wax so you can stop up your cars!

(Mojsije and Dragoljub arrive. Dragoljub takes off a tattered straw hat.)

MOJSIJE

I told you, it's Jakov!

DRAGOLJUB

So it seems, Mojsije. You hit the nail on the head!

(They approach Jakov. Jakov greets Mojsije with a kiss, and politely shakes hands with Dragoljub. Mojsije and Dragoljub sit on a stone.)

MOJSIJE

Welcome from the wide world. Jakov!

JAKOV

It's good to see you, Mojsije!

MOJSIJE

We've been waiting for you for a long time.

JAKOV

Well, now I'm here!

MOJSIJE

You see how the uniform suits him? Like he was born in it...

JAKOV

Thanks!

DRAGOLJUB

Now that you're getting grey even Gruda is okay?

JAKOV

It's okay, Iceman.

MOJSIJE

You mean you still remember his nickname?

JAKOV

Well, I remember he was always freezing, even in summer!...

MOJSIJE

How long are you staying?

JAKOV

Up to the very end!

MOJSIJE

What do you mean "up to the very end"?!

JAKOV

Well, from now until they lay me in my grave.

MOJSIJE

(watches Lanjo drinking): When a man gets to his fifties, his back is up against the wall.

DRAGOLJUB

It depends.

MOJSIJE

We end up picking up the leftovers, picking that which others didn't want.

(Dena comes out, and "salutes" them. She laughs.)

DRAGOLJUB

Do you see this soldier, my brother?!

(Lanjo looks at her reproachfully. Dena, laughing, goes back inside.)

JAKOV

This laughter is familiar to me.

DRAGOLJUB

Would you listen to him, he said "familiar to me"!?

JAKOV

What can I do, Dragoljub! That's how they talk.

DRAGOLJUB

And all that which they have is prettier, eh?

JAKOV

Well, Iceman, I had to adapt to my place on the map, and become "noble". Can I tell you the truth?

DRAGOLJUB

Whae're you want. Let's pass the time...!

JAKOV

My wife forced me to change my way of talking. "Pretty" not "purty", "white" not "what", and so on. Just so folks wouldn't laugh at our children. She was born in Belgrade, she told me a million times – even in bed.

DRAGOLJUB

I'm glad to hear that. Women order soldiers around?!

JAKOV

They ordered Napoleon around, Iceman! That whore of his who the people called "Madame Deficit". Spent the whole state budget. *(Quietly)* Soon as a girl gets nigh to twenty, marry her off! Where there's a house with an unmarried girl, there's no peaceful lunch nor supper.

MOJSIJE

Pity! Such a pretty girl, and still at home!

DRAGOLJUB

And how would Lanjo manage alone?

JAKOV

Then he would also get married easier. Eh, Lanjo?

(But, he sees that Lanjo is not listening.)

MOJSIJE

It's tough to marry nowadays. Thank the Lord, I don't have to.

(He laughs)

DRAGOLJUB

That girl-cousin of yours still ain't married.

MOJSIJE

I'm worried about her.

DRAGOLJUB

Who'd believe that Jakov would get four stars?!

JAKOV

And why not, Iceman?

DRAGOLJUB

Don't know. Just talk! Magine that, Lanjo ain't got even one star!?

MOJSIJE

He's got them in the sky at night.

DRAGOLJUB

And he deserved to get them, too!

JAKOV

Why "deserved", he's still alive?!

DRAGOLJUB

Barely alive... he earned them before and more than many of those who show' em off.

JAKOV

For example?

DRAGOLJUB

There are examples enough!

JAKOV

As our grandmas said, it just happened that way. Some kind of destiny.

DRAGOLJUB

Do you believe in destiny?!

MOJSIJE

Shut up, I know even your thoughts! Let Yasha tell us a little about what I don't know!

JAKOV

Destiny is – just a saying.

MOJSIJE

Don't pay attention to Iceman, as if he weren't here! It's not Dragoljub Čipranić who arrived from Belgrade as far as I know.

DRAGOLJUB

As soon as he comes here, like he's running away from something – something nasty is going down.

JAKOV

And what's "going down"?

DRAGOLJUB

You know!

MOJSIJE

Shut up, you aren't a captain! If a war is boiling in the still, you'll be the last one to know about it. Let him talk, shut your face!

JAKOV

Nothing “going down”, Mosha.

DRAGOLJUB

And why not?!

MOJSIJE

There he goes again!?

JAKOV

I came here to live here with you all. They retired me. The time finally came, even though I didn't think I would ever get old.

DRAGOLJUB

Hm!

JAKOV

What does it mean when you grunt like that. Iceman?

DRAGOLJUB

It means a lot!

JAKOV

I have nothing to hide. I'm not even hiding the fact that I'm retired. It's no shame. They retired even the most important people. Everyone grows old, as our grandmas used to say. Young, educated officers came, and took the helm from us. It's time to make room for the young; maybe they are more capable.

MOJSIJE

I don't believe they will be more capable.

DRAGOLJUB

Don't be a fool!

MOJSIJE

It will be an honor to live in the village with a captain.

JAKOV

Reinforcements to the front, huh? *(He laughs.)*

MOJSIJE

We have more weapons now, too.

JAKOV

Soldiers never retire. We're always around!

MOJSIJE

The old folks built a big and spacious house. As if they knew.
There's room for everybody. Companies used to sleep in it!

DRAGOLJUB

Various kinds...

JAKOV

Some by force, some were invited.

DRAGOLJUB

And why are you looking at me?

JAKOV

That's what I'm aiming at. There is my azimuth... And why do you keep moving around? Don't sit behind my back, I don't like it!

DRAGOLJUB

As soon as the shade comes I get cold. I'm moving to be in the sun.

JAKOV

Move some other time! Sit down there!

(Dragoljub sits "there" where he was told, on the stone.)

MOJSIJE

Now you'll live in the same house! A man has to get used to that to!

JAKOV

Why?!

MOJSIJE

You'll get along fine. Like a real family.

DRAGOLJUB

All Lanjo needs is a bottle of brandy a day. Then he's as quiet as a lizard.

JAKOV

In the first place –don't tell me how to run my house! Do you understand me? I will live here in this house that you see with both your eyes. Me!

MOJSIJE

And them?

LANJO

Let him go on, Mosha!

JAKOV

This is my house! And since it's like that, I'll live in it alone.
And don't let that worry your pretty little heads!

DRAGOLJUB

And what did you say *then*?

JAKOV

When?

DRAGOLJUB

You did say, and you said it loud and clear!

JAKOV

What did I say, Iceman?

DRAGOLJUB

It's not good how all of you seem to forget what you say. I'll
you just now! The city seems to effect the memory. I'll repeat
what you said.

JAKOV

You won't repeat anything for me! Who are you?! Who gave
you the right to talk?!

DRAGOLJUB

And why shouldn't I? Am I the worst?

JAKOV

Everybody knows who's who.

MOJSIJE

And I was here also!

JAKOV

You were here nor there, Mojsije.

MOJSIJE

I killed no one, I robbed no one, and I didn't spy on anyone...

JAKOV

Maybe you should have, you think?

MOJSIJE

I tell you I didn't do any of that. My honor didn't allow it.

DRAGOLJUB

Come on, Masha, remind him! Goad Jakov's memory a bit.
Then he'll remember.

MOJSIJE

May I, Yasha?

JAKOV

Why are you all picking on me?!

LANJO

Let them talk, Jakov! Let them say it. They was witnesses!

JAKOV

This is not a court room, and they are no jury!

LANJO

They are for me!

DRAGOLJUB

Don't leave anything out, Mojsije! Don't be afraid! Tell it like it was!

MOJSIJE

(he stands up): Please, Yasha, don't be angry with me! I love the truth more than life itself. *(He points to one place in the yard.)* I was just o'er there. Wasn't I, Iceman?

DRAGOLJUB

On that exact spot!

MOJSIJE

(he points to the audience): And there were a lot of people. Then you came, Jakov... what was he then?

DRAGOLJUB

Second lieutenant.

MOJSIJE

You came as a second lieutenant. Marchin' in time. All decorated up, like a Christmas tree. Folks! A parade!

DRAGOLJUB

And where was Lanjo?

MOJSIJE

Lanjo wuz 'ere! (*He turns to Lanjo*) Ain't that so, Lanjo? (*Lanjo nods his head.*) Here's where they bandaged him up. And then you – Yasha, don't get mad, I'm beggin' you – then you said: Lanjo here you are. Take my house. In front of these witnesses! And everything that goes with it!" Am I lying?

DRAGOLJUB

Every word in the right place!

MOJSIJE

Don't get angry, Yasha, you said so! "As long as you live, stay in this house, because you don't have your own!"

DRAGOLJUB

He also said "I'm leaving you everything, may it bring you luck!"

JAKOV

Look at Iceman!?! When we came here then, he was smaller than sheep droppings. And now he's so brave. Then he was sweet as sugar – just so we wouldn't kill him. And now, that sugar is full of poison – and it hurts! Why I didn't kill you then – may my soul rest in hell!

DRAGOLJUB

If you'd been able to, you wouldn't have thought about it much.

JAKOV

What gives you the right to examine me!!? Who are you to defend someone from me?

DRAGOLJUB

I only know that no house or property can repay a man for his arm. Right one at that! (*Mojsije nods his head*) After the war they sang songs about his empty sleeve. "Empty sleeve..."

JAKOV

Shut up! Not another word!

DRAGOLJUB

That's justice?! Lanjo didn't have anything, but you had everything. Your folks left it all to you.

MOJSIJE

Please Yasha, don't get mad – but you did give him everything!

DRAGOLJUB

Lock, stock and barrel.

JAKOV

And the stock, eh? And what's the sense of all that?

MOJSIJE

There are still folks living who still remember every word.

DRAGOLJUB

They, weren't all killed. Not all of them have died. They're still witnesses.

JAKOV

Why do you all hang on to words so much?!

MOJSIJE

What else have we got, Yasha?! Don't get angry!

JAKOV

It was... some kind of... young naivete! It could be a mistake. An error! As the old folks say, thoughtless words?

DRAGOLJUB

Such words can't be thoughtless! Big words.

JAKOV

If anyone should be questioned, Iceman, it's you and not me!

DRAGOLJUB

You gave him everything orally, didn't you?

LANJO

Let him say everything!

JAKOV

I was young and green.

DRAGOLJUB

We heard every word like a rifle shot. A man's word is as important as his life.

MOJSIJE

What are we if don't keep our word?!

LANJO

(he stands up, walks about) You're hones'ly thinking of throwin' me out?

JAKOV

I ain't throwin' nobody, Lanjo.

LANJO

How you ain't throwin'!?

JAKOV

Don't stand behind me, come around here so I can see your face!

(Lanjo stands in front of Jakov.)

To tell the honest truth, you've lived in my house for a long, long time.

LANJO

I intend to go on.

JAKOV

We'll see.

LANJO

We'll see!

JAKOV

You're threatening me, eh. You and whose army?

LANJO

It would suit you fine if I died right away somewhere behind the bushes, and that Dena gets married as soon as possible? to get rid of us! Admit it, come on, be a man for once!

JAKOV

Do I owe you anything? I don't intend to give you any kind of account. I just came home! I 'm not stealing anything from anyone. An that's that! We drank enough, let's go home. We don't need an audience.

DRAGOLJUB

He's a good neighbor to us all. It'd be a sin to throw him out of this house.

JAKOV

And you, I somehow skipped over you then? You got away between my legs. You got lost, Iceman. I didn't pay attention to you, because we were after the big shots. We couldn't do everything! Thanks to that you're still avoiding the shade! Ho, all of you go home! Let's not argue, neighbors!

DRAGOLJUB

But, we just started...

JAKOV

We'll wind this up without you, Iceman. It's boring with your wives, eh, and you saw that something was happening over here! Go do something, there's always something to be done in the village!

DRAGOLJUB

This story will be heard far and wide. All the way to Belgrade! It can't be that way – now you say this, now you say that! "Mistake", "error", "then it was likethat" ... hah!

LANJO

When he needed me he'd've given me everything. Now no one don't need me, so let's take it all back!?

JAKOV

Lets go home, come on!

LANJO

Then you kissed my hand like I'm the bishop. You see this, captain? I have both arms only in my dreams. Ehh, Lanjo, half of Lanjo! Why didn't I build a house!? With what?! With what money and who's body?! Where's Lanjo?! What did he do with himself?!

DRAGOLJUB

That's it, Lanjo, we know who you were!

JAKOV

And we knew who you were, Iceman. Chetnik!

DRAGOLJUB

It's not me on the agenda, it's you!

JAKOV

You'll pay for all of this, believe me. At once! We'll meet once in the middle of the road. We won't be huggin', be sure. Jakov doesn't embrace thorns or weeds! Go home now, we talked ourselves out!

(Dragoljub puts his hat on and starts to go. He encourages Lanjo, and comforts him with a squeeze of the arm. Mojsije follows him.)

DENA

(at the window, laughing): Oh, Lord, don't let me get old like those two!

LANJO

Y'know to tease, but not how to make bread!? You're lucky you don't live in Turkey – they'd nail your ears to the door for such bread there!

JAKOV

(He is also a little drunk, he talks to himself): Eh, Jakov my dear, why didn't you shoot him when you had the chance. Now he's ordering you around your own house!

LANJO

Why did you mention the house, Yasha?

JAKOV

You only hear that.

LANJO

A heard right that you said "house"! I still ain't that drunk. Watcha gonna do with the house, tell me.

JAKOV

This is my house. It was and still is!

LANJO

Yes, but only on paper!

JAKOV

If you don't have papers, you don't have anything! Word of mouth ain't nothin' at all.

LANJO

Now we're going to talk about documents, huh?

JAKOV

This is a serious country now! Things no longer work "on your word" or "approximately". It doesn't mean anything in court, no more than a fart in your shorts. I think that it is fair that I grow old and die in my own home?

LANJO

And it's fair that Dena leads me around the village like a bear on a chain and that we beg?

JAKOV

My morals won't allow that, Lanjo! Take the meadow by the stream and build yourself and her a house there. I'll help you. But we won't live together! I finally came here to live.

LANJO

To feed the worms six feet under, eh? You lived down there like a Tsar. If it weren't for me, you wouldn't live even like a worm. You wouldn't be alive at all.

JAKOV

There would have been someone else to save me, even if you hadn't been.

LANJO

You're screwing around with Lanjo, eh? And that "other" would've done the same as Lanjo, eh?

JAKOV

You saved your own hide and not mine.

LANJO

(struggles to his feet): What'd you say? Whose hide did I save?! Say that again!

JAKOV

You saved your own hide and also mine along the way.

LANJO

I'm glad to hear you say that. My own, huh!? That's the thanks I get?! I should've been in your place, and you in mine or nothing at all. Six feet under Bugojno. That I lord it up, riding

horseback with my company marching behind me. Ain't you sorry for me, sorry for Dena?!

JAKOV

People know who I am. Why are you always nagging me?!

LANJO

They know, all right. They know that you went to war just because your dad made you get up 'fore dawn to plow.

JAKOV

You're lying! I chose to do that!

LANJO

I ain't lying, and you're shooting blanks!

JAKOV

You're slandering my name?! You think you can use me forever, like a state-given donkey?! You're mistaken, Lanjo. You're sucking my lifeblood, like a parasite. I've faced up to folks with bigger balls than you.

LANJO

(takes a long drunken look at him): I know where the court is too. It's hard by the Committee Building. I'm Lanjo! I won tallow it! Do I deserve to be thrown out on the street like a dog?! What'll I do with my unmarried sister?! There's a place for us in this country... Why don't you marry Dena?

JAKOV

And why should I!? Am I guilty for that too?!

LANJO

What's wrong with her?!

JAKOV

Why are we talking about that?! I won't marry again. Never!
Once was enough!

LANJO

I'd bet my eyeteeth that she'd give you a son nine months later!
She's that kind of woman. Hell, she might even get pregnant
from wearing your cap.

(Dena is singing something un discernible in the house.)

JAKOV

I'm too old for that, Lanjo.

LANO

If you're so old why do you keep combing your hair and
smoothing down your moustache?!

(Lights down.)

*(Jakov is sleeping at the table, arms folded on his chest. From time to
time he shoos a fly from his face. Dena watches the sleeping man
mockingly.)*

DENA

He's out like a light!

LANJO

He'll wake up without his arm.

DENA

The right one, please, Lanjo! *(She laughs)* Can he hear us?

LANJO

(He nods): Why does he need his right arm?! He can count money with his left one. I don't need a grenade to wound him.

DENA

Jakov! Jakov! If you could only see how Lanjo slaughters chickens! With just one hand, and they don't hop around at all! He just grinds in his heel.

JAKOV

Assholes!

LANJO

His dreams will catch up with him sooner or later. We'll wait! And then he'll see how a fellow can't even button up his pants like a man. Your sleeve'll hang loose, just go to sleep! It's dangerous even to nod off here, and even more so to sleep. Just sleep! And then we'll see who you throw out of the house... – Bring me the chopping block and the ax!

(Dena leaves. She brings back the block and ax.)

Dena laughs joyfully at this demonic game.

Lanjo places the chopping block near the table where Jakov is sleeping, and then heaves the ax mightily into the chopping block.)

DENA

How are we going to put him on the block?

LANJO

Easy. He'll help us. And we can do it by ourselves. I know he's still not sleeping. He's faking it! He'll find out who Lanjo is.

DENA

Then the doctors will sew him up like an old sack.

LANJO

Lanjo is just as good with his left arm as he was with his right. He taught it all it needs to know. Lanjo can hit a target on a tree with that left hand, either with a pistol or with a knife... Give me that!

Dena gives him the cap and Lanjo puts it on.

DENA

Dear brother, don't ever take it off! Walk around a bit, Lanjo, so that I can see how it looks!

(Lanjo "walks around" with the cap on. Mojsije and Dragoljub show up. Between them is the Young Girl, walking modestly. She is dressed emphatically "formally". All three sit down on stones.)

MOJSIJE

What are you doing, Lanjo?

LANJO

I'm walking around.

MOJSIJE

I noticed. But what are you doing?

LANJO

I'm walking around.

MOJSIJE

Then walk!

LANJO

(looks at Jakov): wipe the weakling's forehead!

(Dena wipes his brow with the hem of her skirt.)

DRAGOLJUB

(quietly): Don't give up, Lanjo! We're all behind you.

(Jakov wakes up. He squints at the light for a while, because the light is too strong and he is sleepy. When he raises his head from the table, it can be seen that he slept with a pistol under his hands.)

JAKOV

These are the witnesses, eh?

LANJO

They came on their own.

MOJSIJE

We came for other reasons, peacefully this time.

JAKOV

(indicates the young girl with his head): Who's the girl?

MOJSIJE

My cousin.

JAKOV

What is she doing here?

GIRL

(looking down): I don't know.

JAKOV

Louder!

GIRL

I don't know!

JAKOV

So who does know?

GIRL

Him. *(points to Mojsije).*

DENA

Hey, Sweetie, nowdadays no one marries shy girls.

(The girl stares at her blankly, and then looks down again.)

MOJSIJE

It's not time to work, so I thought we might come by! Just like that. Look at this beauty, Jakov, please! *(He indicates the girl)* You've seen enough of those world beauties, I know, but this is what you really want! There's no reason why she shouldn't

marry a Japanese Mikado, so she can surely marry someone here.

JAKOV

Whose girl are you?

MOJSIJE

Janko's You don't know, but let me tell you: Janko has asthma for years now, he's not long for this world. She's his only child. You should know that!

JAKOV

And why are you hiding your eyes, girl?!

MOJSIJE

Take it easy with her, she ain't one o' them city girls! It's her virtue. I was thinkin' while I was waitin' for you to wake up: "It's a pity" I said to myself, "Captain, big shot, with position" – and living alone!? Look at her carefully! She's plows and digs by herself, believe me? Because Janko is sick with asthma. I'm telling you just so you can get a feeling! I'm telling you in front of her, Janko won't see many more Easters. Asthma is deadly! Look at her good! Healthy as a horse.

JAKOV

By God, if Janko wasn't in the same crowd as Iceman in the war.

MOJSIJE

He's an honest man.

JAKOV

I know, but the crowd is the crowd.

MOJSIJE

Even if that's true, what's that got to do with her?! Look at her, like a brick house! She has lips but they don't flap.

GIRL

I'd lie to go home.

MOJSIJE

Stay here. Sit where you are until I tell you differently.

JAKOV

It would be the best if she took you all by the hand and showed you the way out.

LANJO

(drunkenly): I'm not going anywhere, and neither is Dena!

DRAGOLJUB

And where would you go! Old age is waiting for you behind the first bush.

JAKOV

Have you ever met old age, Iceman?

DRAGOLJUB

No, I haven't but I know that it's waiting for Lanjo. And for Dena.

LANJO

(Thinking out loud): It was exactly the 'leventh o' June, ninetee' an' forty three!

DRAGOLJUB

Why June, Lanjo?

LANJO

My arm was torn off, by a German grenade! And this one here who combed his hair three times with a comb since he came wouldn't be here if I hadn't been there. *(He beats his chest with his fist. He stands up, goes to Jakov. He takes Jakov's summer shirt from the chair, where Jakov had so carefully placed it, and puts it on. Dena helps him button the buttons.)* A German threw a grenade at this guy. And at me! And who hit the dirt, and I didn't? This guy got scared, froze up, laid down like a frightened child. I grabbed the grenade! Not him, but me! With this arm!

(He indicates his sleeve.)

(The girl looks at Mojsije, and he motions her to go. She goes out quickly as if she were running away.)

LANJO

And now they're throwing me out?! They can't bury me alive. Nor Dena... This guy kneeled over me then and thanked me. And now we're of no use to him, not me or my arm.

JAKOV

If I die before you, you'll nag me in my grave... But it doesn't matter. You'll have to move out. If you won't go on your own, there are always the courts!

LANJO

I won't go, Jakov!

JAKOV

I can't and won't live together with anyone, any more.

DRAGOLJUB

Oh?! And why has there been so much talk about "all things in common"?

LANJO

You can choose where you wanna live, but th' village's chose me. Don't have nowhere to go, man!

JAKOV

And I don't want to go anywhere. Why would I!? I want to rest my soul here. I even love the way the dogs bark. The river is dear to me. I was delighted this morning when I heard someone's donkey braying...

LANJO

And I also love it. You'll have to make me go.

(Jakov stands up and Lanjo approaches the table with unambiguously threatening gestures. Lanjo takes the pistol with the cartridge belt from the table.)

JAKOV

Don't risk your life.

LANJO

You're the one who's risking, Jakov, playing like an evil child.

DRAGOLJUB

Go away, Jakov, you don't know Lanjo!

JAKOV

You'll all see who I am. It seems you still don't know... – give me that, I'm going to the city now!

LANJO

I won't give you anything!

JAKOV

You'll be sorry for the rest of your life!

LANJO

I won't give you anything, not your cap, nor your shirt, nor your pistol... I deserve all of that and not you!

JAKOV

We're going to stop playing now. I'll throw you out of the house as soon as I come back.. Give it to me now, I can't go like this!

LANJO

You can, now you're retired! I know that you're going to bring back a couple of "cousins", but I know where the Committee building is too. And the courts! I am Lanjo! People know me. It can't be like that: get out of my house! Eh, Lanjo, may you never see the light of day again! Can't you see whose house you lived in all these years?! Fuck this damn right arm of mine!

JAKOV

I'll come back soon. (He leaves.)

LANJO

Good-bye, Jakov! At first, I thought about killing the fatted calf for you. He doesn't even know why he's still alive! the calf doesn't even know how lucky he is today.

(Dragoljub, Mojsije and Dena watch Jakov as he recedes in the distance. There is a long pause.

Lanjo goes to the table and sits down. He watches them, stiff and straight in his chair.

The lights fade out.)

THE END

Translated by Randall A. Major