

#7

On Native Ground

A Dramatized Study

Janko Polić Kamov

Mother
Ivo
Joso
Youth
Number Six
A maidservant
Rade
The People

An ordinary room. Left, facing the window, a door; in the middle, another. This is a room, it seems, meant for dining, for studying and for receiving visitors. On the wall there are mainly photographs, but a coloured portrait of an old man, a great man of the people, is particularly prominent. In the corner there is a not-yet unpacked suitcase.

From the next room, through the middle door, comes the sound of angry voices, one of which is on the verge of tears. The howls of the storm can be heard above the house, becoming in moments almost frenzied, as if the voice had leaped out of the throat and the monster could not catch its breath. And then at once silence — as if you could see it knocked down by persistence, exaggeration and exertion.

Ivo, Mother and Joso come out. Mother is suffused with blood, red with crying, her cloudy eyes are still starting, the hand with which she holds tight on to Ivo is stiff. Ivo is thin, he is overgrown with whiskers, with unevenly cut hair. Joso, pleasant, neat, fairly good-tempered, at once stands a bit further off, and looks sometimes at

them, sometimes down at his shoes.

Ivo: There, there mother. Here I am, I've come, let's be cheerful.

Mother: Cheerful? And what about all this?

Ivo: All this...

Joso: Not now, not now.

Mother: You don't know, Ivo. You were a long way off. You didn't have to see it. Your father suffered a lot, had a lot to cope with, loved a lot... He was constantly repeating your name.... We were expecting you.

Ivo: I didn't know anything about it. I got just the one card from Joso. "Father is ill." And I answered it: Let me

know at once in detail, exactly, what is the matter with father... And I was waiting for two months.

Joso: I wrote to you.

Ivo: I never got a word. Then, one morning, a telegram came. And I said: why go back now? Better be on our own, in ourselves, because we would just make each other even more unhappy.

Mother: But the way the papers wrote about him!

Ivo: I read them.

Joso: The local weekly had a whole study about him. Sekulić wrote it.

Ivo: You didn't let me know anything about that.



Marijan Trepše: Vji, 1919

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Joso: Came out last week. You'll read about it. (A pause.)

Ivo: But, mother. Look at our mother. Always in good health, always the same, always beautiful. I come back after a good five years away, and I find you just as healthy and beautiful as ever. But I've got uglier, haven't I?

Mother: You've changed. You're different now. Not the same person. You're covered in whiskers.

Ivo: Oh, right. I didn't have my mother there to keep me in order. You get ugly there. You have nobody, you look after nobody. And look at that. People don't pay as much attention to their shoes as they do here.

Mother: What do they pay attention to then?

Ivo: Nothing. You've got a mass of shop windows... and one of ties doesn't stand out so much... So then... (He doesn't know what to say. He feels something dry in his mouth, something empty in his words. And looks round the room): So, this great old man of ours is always in the same place.

Joso: (laughing): Always.

Ivo (quickly looking past him, looks at his mother and meets her eyes. He gets up and walks across the room.)

Mother: Tell us something. Five years, heavens above, five years.

Ivo: What of it?

Mother: How you've changed, got more serious, older, different.

Joso: You've said that to him a dozen times. (Pause.)

Ivo: (Sitting on the other side of the room. He seems tired, lost in thought. His mother looks at him carefully. Joso too can sense the way she is looking and stamps impatiently on the floor.)

Mother: Well...

Ivo (notices both of them; sits up straight and repeats): Well...

Mother (distracted, quietly): Well...

Ivo (insistently): Well, say something!

Mother: ... not a year has passed.

Ivo (heavily, bitterly takes off his hat, throws it to one side and shakes his head almost as if in pain): It is hardly half a year.

Mother: But you, Ivo, you are not in mourning.

Ivo: No, I am not.

Joso (rapidly, warning Ivo with his eyes): They don't do that there, you know... so he... You know how he is... disorganized, forgetful....

Mother: That's not something you can forget.

Joso: Naturally, naturally. But then, I'll lay a bet, he's got another hat in his case, a better one, with a black veil.

Ivo: No, I haven't

Joso (the same, but a little more impatiently): As if we didn't know you!

Ivo (catching his glance implacably): No, you do not know me. That is the only hat I have. And it's the custom for people to go into mourning there, I suppose you know that. I suppose you know. Mourning is just not my custom.

Joso: How touchy you are. Wait. He'll have something to eat, go to bed, right, mother, then we shall see how he is tomorrow. As if we can't see what is hidden in that gloomy, bearded man. Mother! Well? Come closer. Look here, into the heart. What can you see? Tears, tears.

Ivo (gets up and turns his back on him).

Joso: That's it, as I said. If you're tired, you need to go to bed. If you're hungry, you need your supper. Go on, mother, go on... He can have my bed, I'll go to Dikić's.

Mother: Ivo! Are you angry?

Ivo: No, mother.

Mother: What can one do. I don't understand (exits).

Ivo: Go on, then. Tomorrow. tomorrow... I'll tell you about things. I'll tell you. About everything. (As if he wanted to bite off his tongue, he bites into his convulsed finger. A pause.)

Joso: You're really strange. Really strange. Or was it that you actually didn't understand me?

Ivo: Oh, but I did. But too well.

Joso: You're making fun of me.

Ivo: If you like.

Joso: I know what it means, coming here, this land of bigotry, from a free country... coming here, to this moral corpse...

Ivo: Drop it. That's the way editorials are written. But you're horribly mistaken, brother, if you think that there is no bigotry there. I told you. They

go into mourning there too. And they pay for masses, and write studies about the late great departed. But they don't upset you quite so much. You haven't earned the right to be upset yet, follow me?

Joso: Of course. But do understand mother. Have to have a bit of feeling.

Ivo: You're right. Of course. But don't tell me you understand me. (After a pause.) What was the point of that study Sekulić wrote about father?

Joso: He gave a broad outline of the old, decent, idealistic generation. His idea was this: let us give it respect, because it worked, let us give it recognition, because it's working, but not successors, because that of course is impossible... It's written with warmth, with feeling... It's perhaps the best thing that's ever been written about our father. And when you think, it's from the other side... And then it concludes: "if this late great man had known us, he would have joined us without hesitation."

Ivo: Why that? On what basis?

Joso: Our father was a very decent man.

Ivo: I won't deny it.

Joso: We are decent too.

Ivo: Fine. I agree.

Joso: Isn't it natural for decent people to get together?

Ivo (turns round, pulls at his beard, involuntarily bites at his bent, dry, yellowed finger): Yes. Yes. (Still more curtly, still more sharply): Yes.

Joso: You don't think so?

Ivo: Forget it. I just wanted to find out. (Turns round, and catches his glance in a stern and inflexible way.) You took my part with mother. Why?

Joso: I told you. I suppose you know what that, custom, let's call it, means to her.

Ivo: I know, I know only too well. Or do you think I am an ignoramus?

Joso: Not at all. But please. You're working yourself up again. ..This is supposed to be our first meeting.

Ivo: Seems like it. But tell me one more thing. Why do you now take my mother's part?

Joso: What do you mean why? (Shrugs.)

Ivo: That's no answer. Don't you know how to answer?

Joso: I do. But there is no point in answering.

Ivo: Oh yes there is, brother. There is. *(His voice trembles, as if his thoughts, that would out, are stuck somewhere in his throat, or somewhere lower, somewhere deeper.)*

Joso: Come on, explain yourself. You look offended. I don't know that I have given you cause. We were just talking. Everyone has his own way of thinking, but it doesn't mean we have to go at it like hammer and tongs. And if I have offended you, I didn't mean to, so forgive me. *(He lights a cigarette, recalls himself, puts out the match and offers one to his brother):* Have one.

Ivo *(taking one)*: Thanks.

Joso: Still the same big smoker.

Ivo *(showing the bitten finger)*: Look. I've got used to smoking down to the last drag. Smoking violently, one after the other, for it to knock me out, intoxicate me, satiate me. And that was a matter of necessity. I couldn't smoke whole cigarettes, a third had to make up for a whole one.

Joso: But recently mother has been sending you money.

Ivo: Father has left practically nothing, and she was asking for it herself.

Joso: I hope you don't think I spend too much.

Ivo: Not at all.

Joso: If I am dressed like this...

Ivo: Forget it. But there is no want of anything.

Joso: It's a modest way of life. And one could live better. That is, mother could live better.

Ivo: She could, but doesn't. Say what you mean.

Joso: It's a bit awkward. But you can take it. Promise you will. Our mother is a bigot, she's religious, the way women are, especially older women. She spends too much on masses for father...

Ivo: That too! And I really needed that money, and threw it away like you throw it to a beggar, no, a dog, a dog.

Joso: You're not thinking of her, surely.

Ivo: No, not her.

Joso: But this is not the point. I don't like it myself, but you would have found out in the end anyway. You have to believe that I am myself absolutely against it. More, I think it's theft, it's meanness. And I know how much it hurts me. So I know how much it will hurt you.

Ivo: What is all this prelude about? Get to the point. Here I am. Once, the north wind hurled me down flat on the stone. What are your words compared to that howling?

Joso: Listen, you know what the reactionaries think about you. You are the devil as far as they are concerned. And so, some very good people managed to persuade mother to have a mass said for you too...

Ivo *(shouts)*: For me! Me!

Joso:.. for God to bring you to a better way of thinking. As they put it. Show you the way.

Ivo: For me. Say a mass for me. And I am starving. *(Grits his teeth. Anger has knotted his tongue, thoughts, veins, feelings. And then again, he walks around, banging his bony hands on the table, the window, the walls, as if letting out his sarcastic, disdainful, scornful anger and spleen with this action):* Hail, the homeland. Hail, our great and common mother. You are turning our money into confectionery, confetti and private rooms at the carnival. So what if by unmasking we create the masks. When antimilitarists support the army with their right arms. It makes you want to burst. Like a bladder.

Joso: Calm down. I didn't know that *that* was going to upset you so much, that you would take it *that way*.

Ivo: That, that way, something else then, some other way. Come on, explain yourself.

Joso: I thought that you would find it painful and embarrassing that they consider you a lost soul, a blackguard, a devil.

Ivo: Really? What a fine young chap you are. Perfect. But that really does not upset me. What does anger me is that I have to go hungry while the reactionaries can debauch. But it suits me well enough, you see, my fine young

chap, my free thinking and infidel fellow, it suits me, that the faithful have at last touched a living devil. On the contrary. It flatters me, my melancholy friend. It sets my vanity alight, arouses it, tickles it. And my pride.

Joso: And you wouldn't react to all that then?

Ivo: No. For, what does it mean to be decent, for example? It means to be what our father was, who was of the opinion that Dante confuted Darwin, and that St Theresa was meant for anywhere at all but the brothel or madhouse.

Joso: Just a moment. You don't think he was uninformed, surely?

Ivo: Yes, I do.

Joso: You say that?

Ivo: Yes indeed.

Joso: And you're not ashamed?

Ivo: Forget about shame. Sekulić wrote: if he had known us, he would have joined us. And you interpreted that as decency. It divides the generations, then, people. Now I would just like to know if the whole of the new generation thinks this way?

Joso: It does.

Ivo: And you were moved by this article...

Joso: To tears.

Ivo: It moved me, you see *(hoarsely)*, to spleen.

Joso: You should be ashamed.

Ivo: Yes, it was written about father... But I do know that in one of your letters you wrote to me: "Fegić has died. Tons of articles, wreaths, songs of praise... For the old saw, *de mortuis nihil...*"

Joso: Fegić was a know-nothing.

Ivo: In that, he was exactly the same as our father.,

Joso: And how calmly you can say that.

Ivo: Completely calmly. But there's something else as well. Why did you all set out to appropriate an adversary the like of our father? No answer? Fine. Because you could do with his name. And his name had a value as soon as they opened his will, which left almost the whole of his estate to charity. You knew what kinds of charity they were meant to be, and that they negated you. And you said to the dead

man: if he could talk, he would be on our side, even if, while he could talk, he was unrelenting in his condemnation of you. You say: he didn't know us, and yet he was a man in the public eye.... But he wasn't satisfied with decency, the same way a teacher isn't satisfied with just industry, for neither one will give results... (*More gently, making fun, jokingly*). You were advocates and now you're becoming prosecutors, you're defending and condemning, but without being completely consistent. You would be good judges, judging, when you have to, according to tradition, law and paragraph of the law, but that is not what you want to be. And a modern judge... (*He puffs, smiling and melancholic*)

Joso: But you are talking about us as if you were somehow distinct from us... as if you were on some other side...or above us.

Ivo: I'm surprised, that's all. This clutching at names of yours, this invocation of the dead, ... the fact that you feel lost, nostalgic, depressed without them, without the past...

Joso: There is no clutching at names here.

Ivo: Yes there is. It is not just the matter of our father. I, as you can see, do not forget. If we don't need the great, the heroes, the demi-gods, then at least the mass does... And you don't even realize that you thereby recognize the necessity of authority for yourselves as well.... But you feel something else. You broke with the past, and found yourselves like schoolchild without a home. You longed for the past, because it's always better to have a bed always waiting for you, warmed milk and polished shoes. ... Much the same, as those who come to spiritualism via atheism, not because it has something, but because they need something. And when you've thrown up in one bar, you look for another. You know what that kind of schoolboy does?

Joso: You're a schoolboy, you are.

Ivo: You are. This schoolboy first of all goes soft, perhaps is sorry he has done it, starts being terribly nice to people, and all he wants to say is: look at me, I am not all that black. Not me.

I reply, and I reply to you and your friends, I'm even blacker than you paint me. Blacker.

Joso: It doesn't seem there is anyone here for you. But you still came back. Isn't that nostalgia too?

Ivo (*smiles at him with a kind of smile from on high, as if he were looking at a gnome who fancies himself a Hercules*): How naive you are. (*Then he strokes his chin prettily.*) I read what you wrote. Look, I thought, tactics. Politics is an excellent sergeant. I dropped it all, and thought. Ah, those chaps there, what chaps they are. Joso, Majer, Rade... yes, our Rade the ruffian, where is he?

Joso: Here, he's working in the editorial office. But wait. You have not even seen these men. You have seen only me.

Ivo (*involuntarily gruff*): You. Yes. You. First and only, you.

Joso: Look, perhaps I am just making a bad impression on you. First meeting, perhaps. From a country of men to a country of slaves.

Ivo: Oh, stop it. There are slaves there too, great, conscious, proud slaves; slaves of a great, glorious tradition... But you still don't understand me. (*In a wondering query*): And why should they understand me. (*And then he*

sways, comes alight, flares up from a reminiscence that comes so unexpectedly, so involuntarily. At a leap, like passion, enthusiasm, luxury.) Once, remember, when the north wind had overturned my train. I wrote to you about it.

Joso (*surprised*): So?

Ivo: Oh, nothing. The stormwind was dreadful.... Look, this one is dying down. (*He listens.*) Seems that it has dropped....Knocked flat, huddled, curled up like a drunken singer. And then, when it gathers its strength! When it is carried away. When it froths up the great sadist, when it sets its beaten nerves a-playing. And it — the great whoremaster, the sterile stud, the winner of these crags, this hard, stony, beaten skin... When it is carried away. That mane, rearing, shaken, scattered, torn up... It tosses. Impotent, it kissed and kissed a virgin. And more than that — that other, empty, drawn out, symbolic...Heaven. Grinds its teeth. It will tear her apart, you think. And then it tears its lips, its very self. Like Leopardi. Is it chortling? There is no laughter in it — roaring, wailing, moaning, cursing. Like the living on the grave of the corpse. ... It is great, human-like, ideal!



Marijan Trepše: Wretches, 1919

Joso (looks at him blankly, in embarrassment, raises his shoulders, lips and eyebrows).

Ivo (at once bites the same finger, and keeps it there among his crooked teeth).

Joso: But you had begun...

Ivo: Yes, there was a storm, it toppled over the train, and I got out alive. (Turns his back on him.)

Joso: You do surprise me. You don't understand what you mean in our circles. Your articles were real eye-openers for us. And your letters too. We started reading according to your prescription then. Until then we had read for technique, characterization, psychological analysis, and but too often just for entertainment. Only after that did we make some progress, understand the writer as a personality, studied his personality more than the works. And then onwards. We diverted our public life, eaten up with clichés, romanticism and sentimentality, to economics, the battle for survival, realism. We raised our history and written tales to the level of laws, sociology. Until then, we had known laws only in chemistry, physics and jurisprudence. And so on. From being poets, we became critics. You were our physician, plunging your hand into the filth, giving pain, but curing. And that's in what light I presented you. A fighter for a healthy, truthful, decent, free life... And then... you came... you came and, do forgive me, ... the mere sight of you... sickly as you are, neglected, decadent... The way you have about you, your behaviour... Perhaps I felt embarrassed by the way you express yourself about father without any respect... And then the mourning... It all makes you very alien, cold, inaccessible... It seems that you despise me, that you despise us all, and that your articles have that kind of effect on us because we didn't see the author in them, the man, the personality.

Ivo: That's exactly it. You didn't see the man. (Extremely serious): That's just it. You didn't see the man. (Still more serious): And nor did I. (Pause. The brothers do not look at each other. They go past each other in silence. Ivo blows out puffs of smoke. They slowly

rise above him creating an aureole of pensiveness, madness and silence.)

Joso: You could drop round to see mother. We've spent too long here. Say a few words to her, though not like to me. You have to speak differently there.

Ivo (turns round angrily, abruptly): Differently. (Then he looks at his brother's gloomy, distressed, deceived face, and despairingly, swallowing): Different — (Pause.) Oh, yes, yes. (Unintelligibly, half in a question): But how? (Laughs): But you know how to talk differently... (Then with a solemn voice and a sneer on his lips): I was a believer once. I kneeled, prayed, fasted. I kneeled for myself, prayed for you, fasted for the sake of the people. Look at me. A toothed thinker, an idea of a claw, an ideal of nothing, not of nirvana, not of nihilism... Understand! I no longer have a past. That was the first thing I destroyed... it had rotted inside me... And there was nothing in me to destroy any longer, so I started to destroy in you whatever was not yet rotten... I plucked out your healthy limbs, and you, for the sake of propriety, compunction and — embarrassment — hide your arm. Not me. I hold it out like this. (He holds out his hand, on which the thumb is half missing.)

Joso: Oh.

Ivo: I lost it then, during that storm... And I find out that not even a thumb is a vital part for someone who doesn't want to be a soldier. (A murmuring and knocking at the door.)

(Youth comes in from left. Youth has five representatives. One with a bundle of newspapers, one with a pince nez, a third wearing galoshes. This is about all that can be said of them. All the faces are similar, as in old fashioned pictures. All have whiskers, whether thin or thick, like or dark, and the all of them have cheeks that are paper white, dandyish; their hair is fresh from the barber's; their foreheads are top-hattish, sunken. Only Number Six, who comes in last, dignifiedly and without a hurry, who is let through at once, is different because of his cowlick, years and golden pince nez... There is hand-shaking, a disorganized murmuring and

confusion, with forced smiles, greetings, names, acknowledgments. With the help of Mother who, torn by curiosity, has already gone away, Joso has brought in chairs, and gestures to them with one arm stretched out wide. But no one sits down.)

Ivo (the first to sit down, throwing himself back, sticking out his legs wide: this is an act that seems at once to have brought silence into the whole of the house.)

Number Six (sits, unexpectedly dried up; while talking he frequently swallows his saliva as if wanting to give savour to his words): Do you expect to be here very long, Mr Maurović?

Ivo: No.

Number Six: Just passing through, then, a month in the country.

Ivo: Passing through, yes, but hardly a month in the country. Like in jug, when they drive you by cuffs.

Number Six (ironically): Oh, I see. (Silence.)

Number Three (who has in the meantime pulled himself together): We, you see, Mr Maurović, are intending to put on a little reception in your honour.

Ivo: But — (stops dryly, stretching his legs out still further): I, you see, am intending to depart in a day or two.

Number Three: Not to worry. Then — (At this, one more person comes into the room, abruptly, breathless, an exclamation in every lively movement. It seems as if the older young man has got younger, all cut and shaved, but still seeming hairy and dishevelled because of his awkward, too broad, asymmetrical frame.)

Ivo (he too jumps up): Rade!

Rade: Put it here! That's the way. You're hairier, my lad, hairier still.

Ivo: You shave.

Rade: They shave me.

Ivo (recognizes the resigned pain of his old friend, shudders within himself, but immediately copes): Not so clever. Living people shave themselves. (Seeing in the ever greater disharmony of the bones of his face that he has understood, he turns at once to the rest and says): Well?

Number three: Then, do you see, tomorrow we shall put on our weekly

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meeting. We shall be very pleased if we can see you here. For we, you see, we young and free-thinking people, all of us, who learned to learn from you, who found our methods in you, and from that our system, as we recognize, as we know, in our humble circle you occupy the first and an outstanding position, and so we would like to see you there, in the chair, at the meeting, so that one day we shall be an organized and disciplined part of everything that is healthy, decent and free-thinking, that this party should become, on the principles of there being one honesty, in private and in public, one kind of healthiness, of spirit and matter, one idea, of progress and patriotism, and one man, on the platform and at home, should become, I say, what parties are not here in this country, but what they should be.

Ivo (He has already half way through this speech fixed his eyes on his friend, fixed them fiercely, secretively, warmly. And when this last speech has finished and there is silence, Ivo continues looking at his friend. Rade briefly raises his eyes to him, and his look swallows at a moment the whole of his battered face.)

Number Three: Well, then?

Ivo (Shakes himself; his mouth turns down, he swallows as if it were saliva; he walks across the room as if lost; then stops; swallows a bigger gob of spit; breathes out; his head rocks backwards and forwards; he smoothes back his hair, and keeps his hand on his forehead; then he drops it and pushes it at once into his pocket): Do you have time, gentlemen? I ask that because I would like to reply to this gentleman right now, Mr Tadić, if I am not mistaken, and all of you. Well then?

The house in which I lived recently was by itself, but not alone. It was connected with the other houses, but during the day there was no one in it. The tenants went out in the morning, came back in the evening. My room was on the first floor, at the back, looking out onto the yard. As you know, the doors are closed during the day as well. If someone wants to knock on your door, he will first of all have to ring the bell of the outer door, the door of the

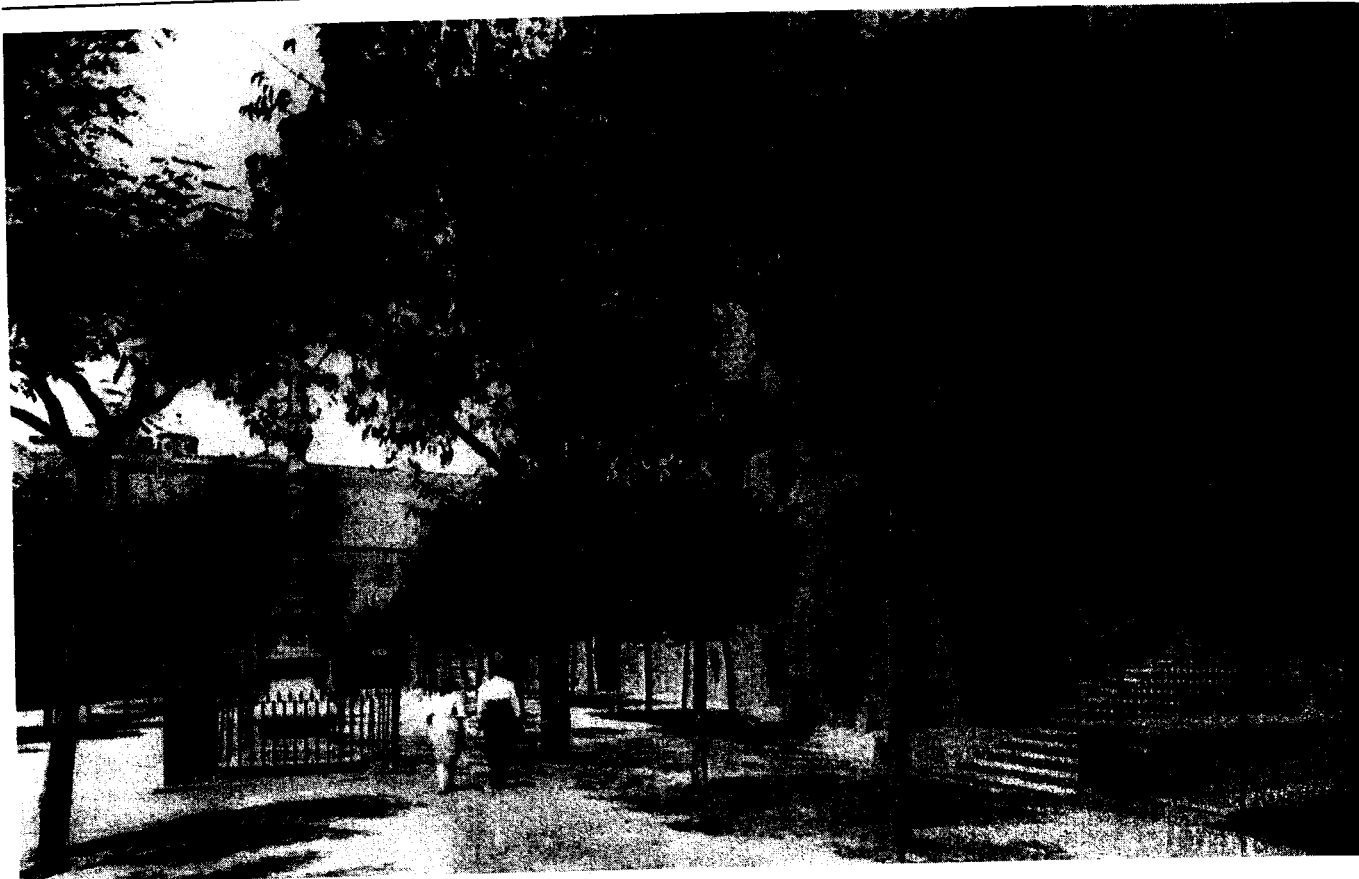
house. And so, just be patient please, one day I came back home earlier. I was supposed to finish off a certain work of mine, which is still unfinished, and I was also expecting my regular fee. I hadn't got a bean. "It has to come," I told myself, "It is seven days since I sent my final letter and set the final date." And I kept on telling myself this until I was finally convinced, and then I started to write. I was good tempered, in the mood, felt like writing, felt the words coming. And then, suddenly, the bell rang. I went out onto the road. There was no one. I waited. No one. "Some passer-by rang the bell for a joke," I said to myself. "But that is not the reason, it's silly." I could no longer work upon my writing. I started thinking about this joke, exploring it, explaining it. There went the bell again. I went down, and came back. Then the bell again, and once more, nothing. Several times. Always the bell went, never anyone there. That short sound of the bell always stayed too long in the air like steps that you are making as soft as possible and then you suddenly hit a board, the kind of steps that you are afraid will wake someone up. More or less the same way an inexperienced thief must feel, when he is stealing from someone else's house, feeling his breath the louder the more he holds it, his steps the louder the softer he goes, his movements the more violent the more restrained he is... I knew who it was that was ringing. Children, they were revelling in my impatience, relaxing in my disturbance, developing their mind in my interrupted work. I don't know how many times I was there at the door, swearing the more juicily in an ever deeper voice. And then, upstairs, I began thinking. If I had the money, I would buy a pistol, I said, for that was the most sensible, most effective thing to do. Aim, pull, kill. The fun, the liveliness, the healthiness and good looks of these children were just the same to me as being licked by the vilest smelling flies. And then there was some logic in it. You kill a fly, crush it and throw it out. It was perched on your nose too long. You beat the child, kill it, man-

gle it: it rang too often at your door. The fly's action was quite the same as the child's for me. On the contrary, that of the fly was more justifiable, forgivable, understandable. The deed of the child was worse, more to be condemned, more unintelligible. You kill a fly with a quiet conscience. And so you should kill a child with just as quiet a conscience, quieter in fact. So then? Stand by the door, and when it went, leap out, get hold of the weakest, the slowest, the youngest child, and strangle it; and then smash it against the stone, smash, smash, smash... For it is not enough just to kill the fly, you have to make it suffer, trample on it, destroy it, when you get drunk, then you drink till you drop, out cold... But then. Here is the question. A fly is tiny, fragile, minute. Just one movement of the hand... And a child is bony, it's big and strong.... What my strong conscience would let me do, my debilitated musculature would not. Oh, for a pistol. Here, the faces around him have become totally disgusted, contracted, changed. He has gone over the whole of that moment and with his vivid memory has made the whole scene come to life, the entire logic of it, has repeated every word, every wish and idea with the same dark relish. It seems to him that he is attractive, and fine and marvellous in his speech, his pose and his grimaces. He does not know that his hard, coarse hairs have got into their mouths, that his protuberant cheekbones have rattled on their temples, his doleful eyes dripped disgust into their finicky throats. But there was just one "Well?" heard, and after a short period of expectation the chairs clattered, some got up, some coughs of protest could be heard, some consumptive complaints, until Number Six got up, ready to talk in his own dry way.

I haven't finished yet. You promised to listen to me. You promised. I would just like to ask this. Do you want me, the way I am, in your party?

Number Six: No.

Ivo: And that's not all. I get drunk. (Falsely, roguishly, while the sacred weight of feelings bends him in mar-



The courtyard of Santa Cruz Hospital, 1914

tyrdom): I drink. Like a pig. Roll in the mud. Like a pig. Roll around. Puke. Vomit. Then they have to carry me, good people, though my guts are leaking the scent of a corpse, of Lazarus, of carrion.

Number Six: Ugh.

Ivo: To everything?

Number Six: Everything.

Ivo: (*like lightning, feverishly*): And you all of you say ugh?

(*The same "ugh" can be heard, not contemptuously, but in repulsion, from the heart.*)

Ivo: All of it, ugh? All this? (*He thrusts himself triumphally into their faces, wetted, alcoholically*): Spit! Spit! Fools. Fools. They throw orange peel on the pavement there, people fall down, break their necks, snap their spinal column...Not one looks for the guilty person, because stupidity can't be guilty. And the hungry man steals, the murdered kills, the thinker does a rape and they carry him off to jail, to the court, to the gallows. Because, you

say, an honest fool is better than a dishonest thinker. Thank you for that. Thank you. (*In protest, they are buttoning up their coats, raising their collars, backing towards the door. He seems to be licking that dripping, alien saliva on his face*): You spat at me. That is your morality. Their morality. The act of copulation is vile, though it brought all you fine ones into the world. You respect your father, and despise how it was that he became a father. Because the family is the apex of morality, although its foundation is protoplasm. Vileness yes. And I created you in drunkenness, in delinquency, in perversion. That is what wrote all my articles, that — (*and as if his brain is laughing with a dreadful, shattered, painful laugh he starts to collapse, going out at the central door.*) Your morality. Their morality. And all at once voices begin to be raised. Mad, Mad. Joso starts to apologize, it is not clear to whom, because all you can see is the waving of hands, spines

and tongues. Rade is lost, confused, distraught. But when Number Six gives a signal with his hand, twists his lip as if he is imitating a diplomat about to be photographed and says "Charlatan", Rade comes to himself. And when all the rest have gone, he remains bleary, sad, ugly.

Rade (*going first of all to the central door; stays there uncertain; then goes back: scratches his head; listens; then goes to the same door; knocks twice; opens it*): Ivo!

Ivo: Who is it?

Rade: Can't you tell?

Ivo: Oh, yes. (*He comes out.*)

Rade: Have you calmed down?

Ivo: Wasn't I calm?

Rade: As usual, my old friend, as usual. You get worked up, jolly well worked up.

Ivo: You think so? Hm, yes. ... (*Deep in his thoughts*). And you really think...

Rade: (*Looks at him, dreamily stirred*): My friend!

Ivo: (*rapidly, quietly*): But still, you

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stayed. Didn't I disgust you? But the rest, the rest... (*Obstinately, as if asleep*): But that is it. I want it. Understand?

Rade: (*reminiscing, comical for the sake of being appealing*): Right back then... You were a kid... Once, you got a pass. I got a fail. We waited for the teacher and thrashed him. Like that, remember? Then the inquiry. The form master was so amazed when he said, Vučinić failed, that put his back up. Naturally. But you, Maurović, you. And you said, I, because I passed, because the master was doubly unfair.

Ivo: Yes, we were always rebels.... Then.... But now? You, Rade, you...

Rade (*despondently*): I give accounts of other people's speeches, correct other people's articles, translate other people's jokes... I can't find myself, you see... Rade has gone missing... Not here (*Dully*): Where's Rade? (*Derisively*): Rade! Not a sound... Rade! Sonny!

Ivo (*At the same time*): Rade! Sonny! (*Falls silent.*)

Rade (*weakly*): I've got this satire. Just needs to be written. Listen. The wolf calls a parliament of the domestic animals. All of them come. The wolf speaks, as convener. People, says he, you have to put up with man's tyranny. Flee. Leave all this. There is killing among us, it is true, but liberty, we are all allowed to kill. Come into the forests, our great, deep, free forests. But then comes man. In the name of the law (he has a whip in his hand) I dissolve this parliament. The domestic animals, with their servile nature, their bourgeois blood, the peasants, obey, only the obstinate donkey kicking up his heels, throwing himself on his back and while he is being thrashed shouting out "I protest"... You're a man of the coast, where there are plenty of donkeys coming into the world, and you've got something of this donkeyish nature... I am a peasant, a bull, with a Herculean strength, that a girl can lead on a rope... The donkey always rages, is always against. Against things with his intellect... But when a bull goes wild, he does it with the muscles of an animal... There, then, that's the kind of breed we are... (*Silence*). You know

what they said about you? Donkey, like a donkey.

Ivo (*bangs his hand on the table*): Yes. Yes.

Rade: Let it be. If you stayed longer, I would take you into our society. All the domestic animals are there. You've got oxen, to pull; sheep, to bleat; horses, that strut; hens, that peck; geese, in love with their own vocation; cockerels, big with their words; dogs, the work shy, aristocrats, pigs, canonical, fat, lazy. You've got all this in our national economy.

Ivo (*having listened to this slow, low toned talk, which is so calm, resigned, simple, and looks at him, and says tensely, in a monotone*): I was watching you.

Rade: And what did you see?

Ivo: Oh! (*Sitting down on a chair. Pause. Then he gets up, angry to the point of desperation*). Who snapped your pen?

Rade: Plucked out my tongue too. (*His head droops on his chest. His collar is yellowed. His tie is never straight. It seems that one trouser leg is shorter than the other, and one might wonder whether it is his legs or trousers that are uneven*): I wrote too. They said to me, that's not the way to write. So I spoke. They said to me: that's not the way to speak. I was an agitator. They said to me, that's not the way you do it.... They didn't reject you. And I thought. Look. Do I try that somewhere else, in Paris? Or write a novel set in London? Or caricature a Spaniard?... I thought all this, but I didn't write any more... I don't know why, but I liked a particular phrase. Life's a whorehouse.... I prostituted myself like a Slavonian woman.... Hugo wrote "merde" and they said, what power, what size, what fullness. I translated the word, and they used it for the whole of my work... You have to be of age.... But here, it's still just a matter of years.

Ivo (*cutting him off*): Why don't you go somewhere else? Come with me.

Rade (*starting, going dumb, but at once becoming gloomy again*): Now? (*Sighing*): I'm lazy... Tired... (*In a completely different voice*). How tired this place

makes you. It's terrible. Out of pure idleness...

Ivo (*astonished, his eyebrows raised*): Here? (*Then firmly*): When you were a lad, why did you cry?

Rade: When I was in pain.

Ivo: Why were you in pain?

Rade: Because they beat me. (*They are becoming closer in their looks, phrases, thoughts. A pause.*)

Rade (*fearfully*): And there, abroad, they don't beat you?

Ivo: They avoid you.

Rade: And you don't stop them?

Ivo: Why should I? (*They come close again. And then, as if fatigued by this short moment of thinking, they suddenly collapse. Then, as if having rested, Rade goes on questioning with the curiosity of an impassioned reader.*)

Rade: But you didn't come here for a rest.

Ivo: When the storm from the north used to blow, rocking the thoughts, putting the nerves to sleep, I would lie down. And listen.... It seemed that I was in my own home, in my mother's songs... My thoughts could be taken off, put down, wrapped up, to rest, to fall asleep. I thought about my dreamy, slumbering childhood, the first sun, the first fairy tale... Then I would fall asleep.

Rade: And you have come, come to your own home, your own north wind, your own bed. Then sleep.

Ivo: But they keep me awake. The bells, the cars, the crowing and the pests.

Rade: And you shout —

Ivo: — I shout —

Rade: — awake —

Ivo: — and alive.

Pause

Ivo (*quietly, slowly, amply*): My mother prays. That whole generation had its prayer. Morality in faith. A feverish, dreadful, but still, passionate morality... She lost her daughter, her husband,, left with two children... lost children, they say... And she prays, ardently. Ardently... This is everything. Pain with prayer, or pain with tears, will kill either you or itself. You have

no feelings, or you're dead.... There is no life without pain, there is no pain without life. It's hard to squeeze tears out, but they do get forced out, and then it's easier. I don't know if you have ever considered tears. They come in a cloud, insidious like the rumbling when the skies crumple like the face of terror, anger, suffering... It is awful. Suffocating. The horizon presses on you, the surroundings, the village, the house, the room, your own skull... Like this... Until it presses you and squeezes you like a stockfish. What would it be like then, if there were no downpour, blessed, abundant, overbrimming. It flows, it drops, it beats, the spectre, the monster, the grotesquerie of tears... And the relief. And the skies come to life in your breath, the agony——
— *(he continues the same phrase in the same tone of voice)*: My mother prays and lives. Like old age. *(Giving emphasis more with his face than his gestures and words.)* In prayers there is no morality, for every prayer is an injustice. In prayer you say, save me, for I am a sinner. There is no point in a prayer for innocence, no pain, no life. *(He stops for a moment.)* Then comes the time when you can't and won't pray. Like this generation *(waves his hand around the room, pointing at the door on the left)*, which is passing. There comes a time, when you have to raise morality, and depress religion, and replace the conscience of the soul by the conscience of the law. The tyranny of the father by the rule of the boss, filial love with the duty of the citizen. And everything is dry, and nothing is hot any more, because the reprimand takes the place of the whip. They beat you more mildly, and it hurts less, and you cry in a civilized way. And it is all insipid... This generation, that is passing, would feel the stick, if it had not been done away with, because this generation that is passing, cannot feel the reprimand of the boss while it stands up for it. Because, because, this generation that is passing, is ashamed of its mother's prayer, the love of Turgenev, the sobs of Dostoyevsky... There is no passion in duty, nor morality in life... and then, you see...

(comes up very close to Rade) — I wanted to give it fire, passion, nature... That brat of a rebel, fellow countryman of asinine protestations and fishermen's oaths... They... our fishermen... with their swarthy, cracked skins, their burned out eyes... Have you ever seen them when they go fishing, calling on god. They pray. And then when they come back empty-handed, cheated, hungry, how they grind the deity in their full-toothed curses. What does prayer become in the passion of those canine, rusty, clenched teeth. They snarl. They bite. And the prayer becomes a swearword. Because there is the sea, there, the dreamy romantic, the painted fantasy, smooth as the ideal, and then, a naturalist, a monster, a lump, a psychological decadent, an intellectual rebel and a sexual sadist. *(More and more caught up, ecstatic, face becoming word, word organism, organism soul.)* But I am a Croat, that I am. Because being Croat gave birth to the swearword, and I am the swearword. Take that from me, and you take my language from me. Make me satisfied, and you've made me a turncoat. Give me respect, fame and a salary, and you have made me impossible. Make me a monument, and I shall be dead, dead, dead. *(He does not shout, but it is a shout all the same, more than with the voice, the throat, the hearing. Then he falls silent as if drugged, and turns his back to the audience.)*
Rade *(still more despondent, gloomy, straightens his tie, takes out a cigarette, softens it and puts it back in his pocket.)*; Yes. *(Again takes out a cigarette and looks thoughtfully at it, as thin as his own leg which makes dents in his trousers).* Have a smoke. *(But just then running can be heard on the stairs, quick, agitated, awkward running, and then at once a bell.)*
Rade: Is that your bell ringing?
Ivo: Seems so. *(He goes to the middle door. There too, the same kind of voices, equally rapid, urgent, awkward, until they are settled by the shout from one single rebarbative organ. And he at once seems more ugly, more nervous, still hairier.)* They are coming, you know. They are coming, the citizens,

the patriots, the believers, to give me the answer to it all. All of it.

Rade: Coming? Who? What?

Ivo: The people are coming. They want to respond. My people! My people! *(He opens the window. A far off murmuring in the twilight, coming closer like the night, the mass descending ever lower in the dark, which is its herald, which goes before it, exacerbates it. Herald from the skies, without a fire in the cloudy atmosphere. The storm has died down long before. But then the people are heard.)* They are coming. Look at them. My people. My people.

Rade *(he too is leaning out at the window, and mother has come too, and she leans out, as does a bare-footed maidservant — all of them leaning out, looking, waiting, trembling)*: Come back in. Back. It will pass. They are just going past. *(The murmuring becomes a shout)*: Don't be afraid.

Ivo: *(Catches hold of the window, hysterically, desperately)*: Leave me. I want to see. I came to see people. Here they are... *(And the shouting becomes a chant)*: Down with him. Turncoat. Down with him. *And the mother calls her son with terrified glances, and God with great wet words; and there is the maidservant with her heaving tits and lightning breath, and Rade, calming them, himself, him, and Ivo, transfixed at the window, staring, stiff, hypnotized by the dark, gloomy, muttering scene. And they shout again*: Down with him. Turncoat. Renegade. Ugh. *And the dark, which comes closer, and the night, which is falling, and the darkness, which is gathering. All of this has started to become an ever faster body on a slope, like charms in love.... And Ivo, at once, hastily, trying to break free with his arms, prayers, pleas — showing a face at first solemn without end, pale to the extent of majesty, with his eyes staring in a fever, lips trembling in delirium, tears the Great Man from the wall and hurls it down, out the window, onto the heads, hats, sticks. — And just as lightly, slipperily, he jumps dancingly into the other room, pulling after him all that shock, all those attempts at persuasion, and in a moment,*

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among all those growing throats, muscles and sticks, tumbles out of that room with the crucifix — leaving behind him a cry, one isolated, fatal cry. And then, when he has dropped the synthesis, the past, the life, the holiness of his house, his hearth and soil on the seething, boiling, foaming lips, arms and minds, something bashes, dull, hollow, deadly, like a corpse, like a dead branch, like a log, on the half opened door. But he stays there, shouting at the top of his voice, until a stone sends him back. And all the shouting seems to burn out at once. He closes the window. And it is as if it were all over. The silence begins to shout. And so he closes his eyes. And then, from that room, at last, after a long, painful, ominous pause, groaning is heard, almost impatiently. Like a bell. Like a lost sheep... Like dear, naive, pleasant bleating. But the silence still yells. It seems that it is tearing its tangled hair, beating its airy heart. And Ivo, as if he is being pulled by an invisible, terrible, transparent, empty hand, no, a finger that is long, drawn out, symbolic, goes into that other room. And at once, the silence is calmed: It is unquiet that roars, the damned, Ivo! Oh. And it is as if you can see the tooth, that has bitten into that thumb; a short, concise, human tooth. Into that long, empty, symbolic...)

Rade: (comes out famished, tired, thirsty: he presses his head, presses his shoulders, presses his eyes.)

Ivo: (he too comes out, with one lip wide, flattened like a bap, his eyes narrowed into two clenched fists... And there are steps in the hall, but not like before, constantly slower, quieter, constrained... It all lasts a long time... Then more in fear than in pain.

Joso: (quiet, swallowing, restraining himself, creeping): What have you done?... What have you done? The neighbours are coming. They are asking: What's...

There were demonstrations, yes, well... They want to know it all. Oh. Now. Now. Now. Brother! Now. Now at least... learn to talk differently... Learn... Be strong... Be strong. At least now. Because... because... listen...

you've got to say... that it wasn't that... that killed her... that... that you... you've got to say... at least now.. it was... fear ... that killed her... got to say, got to...

Ivo: (turns round, takes his brother by the chest, but lets him go at once. The fists of eyes clench even more. ... They don't see them. His eyes are not to be seen. They are fists.)

Joso (exits).

Rade (mysteriously): Now there will be peace, rest, dreams... (And then he takes hold of his old friend.): Friend. Friend. (Then quietly, in tears, briefly): It's all gone. Ruins. You've killed everything. (Shakes him.): Your mother is dead. You wanted to kill the faith in her, and you've killed it in your own... (Mean in his pain and grief.): Why did your brother crawl? Why did he pray (Trampled, beaten, crushed.): It was your disciple begging you. Asking you, like god. (Meaner and meaner, more trampled on, lower down, where pain turns into laughter, depression into derision.) And you've killed it in yourself.... You have killed it... The swearword... Rest for yourself too.... For yourself too... (Derisively, unconsciously, hollowly.) Why don't you say something? Who ripped out your tongue?

Ivo (does not tear himself away from his old friend, for he has simply slid off him all by himself; only those fists, those eyes, still as hard as a spasm, even more condensed like a pain, still heavier like ice, begin to shake, shake more and more drunkenly, more crazily, more deliriously, and he starts to push him, push, push.): I! I! I killed. With a finger. A million hands. One finger. Point it?. You too. When a skull can't be changed. No. Because it is lack of faith that has killed man. You, you sleep. (Pushing him further off still, not himself knowing where, in which direction, or why): But I am only just awakening. Because it is religion that killed my mother, terrified the mob, drove away my disciples. Because I am only just beginning to swear. I, Christ. I, rampant. I, resurrected. I, alone. I am. (And he comes to the wall, and seems to push the wall and the whole house,

the whole country, the whole of mankind. Ever more tearingly, ever more vulnerable, ever thornier.) Because the crime of the beast incites the crime of man. Because the crime of the brat incites the crime of the man. Because the crime of the fool incites the crime of the thinker. (And then, it is as if he has become enraptured, as if he were pulling his sainted fists out of the mud, cramped, with great difficulty, mutilatedly.): I am the prosecutor. I am the witness. I am the judge! (With still greater difficulty, still more ravaged, still more cramped.): Pettifoggers. And at that, it is as if it is all over. And as if it is hiding the view with its arms.... As if he has shaken the curtain.... or as if the wind has shaken it, the wind which has begun to make itself heard, at first lightly, in snatches, tuning up. And then louder and louder, with greater fullness, confidence. ... Or it is shaken by the unsteady steps of the old friend, the boards squeaking beneath him.... But the quiet does not yell, the quiet can not yell. For it is palliated by the wind... That stormwind... It palliates the dark, the night, the mourning... everything that is dense, deep, blind, everything that is gulped down, defunct, dead.... And it soothes the man that shakes like rubbish in the wind, the living in the frost, blood on the crag... Soothes him, because he whimpers... Because the awakened storm puts him to sleep.... Because the sleeping nation has put him to sleep... And he has arisen.. Arisen like a string with a thousand voices in a single tremor... For the wind has sent him to sleep... He takes his hat, his luggage, his raincoat... And goes out... But because he has left the door of the room open, when he opens the door downstairs, there is a sudden, unlooked for, impatient, angry gust of wind that bangs it violently to. ... As if crying, in anger.

The End

Venice, March 11, 1907