

**Friedrich Dürrenmatt**

# **The Visit of the Old Dame**

## **(Der Besuch der alten Dame)**

A tragi-comedy, new version 1980

English translation by Joerg Esleben of the adapted German performance script for the play's production by the Augenblick!-Theater group, Ottawa, Canada, 10-11 May 2019, used for surtitle projection

Claire Zachanassian, nee Wäscher  
multimillionaire (Armenian-Oil)

Her Husbands VII-IX

The Butler

Toby, Roby, chewing gum

Koby, Loby, blind

Ill

His Wife

His Daughter

His Son

The Mayor

The Priest

The Teacher

The Doctor

The Policeman

Citizen 1

Citizen 2

Woman 1

Woman 2

Station Master

Train Driver / Conductor

Reporter

Place: Güllen, a small town

Time: the present, ca 2015

## Act I

*Citizen 1:* The “Gudrun” express train from Hamburg to Naples.

*Citizen 2:* At eleven twentyseven the “Rapid Roland” from Venice to Stockholm is coming through.

*Citizen 1:* The only pleasure we still have: watching trains go by.

*Citizen 2:* Five years ago, the “Gudrun” and the “Rapid Roland” still stopped in Gullen, plus the “Diplomat” and the “Lorelei”, all express trains of importance.

*Citizen 1:* Of global importance.

*Sound of a bell.*

*Citizen 2:* Now, not even the slow passenger trains are stopping, aside from those two from Kaffigen and the 1:13 pm from Kalberstadt.

*Citizen 1:* We’ve been ruined.

*Citizen 2:* The Wagner factory has collapsed.

*Citizen 1:* Bockmann has gone bankrupt.

*Citizen 2:* The Sunshine Steel Mill has closed.

*Citizen 1:* Living off welfare.

*Citizen 2:* Off soup kitchens.

*Citizen 1:* Living?

*Citizen 2:* Vegetating.

*Citizen 1:* Croaking.

*Citizen 2:* The whole town.

*Sound of a train, the Station Master salutes. The men follow the train with a movement of their heads from right to left.*

*Citizen 2:* The “Diplomat”.

*Citizen 1:* And to think we were a city of culture.

*Citizen 2:* One of the most important in the country.

*Citizen 1:* In Europe.

*Citizen 2:* Goethe spent the night here. In the Golden Apostle Inn.

*Citizen 1:* Brahms composed a quartet here.

*Sound of a bell.*

*Citizen 2:* Berthold Schwarz invented gun powder here. It’s high time the billionairess came here. They say she endowed a hospital in Kalberstadt.

*Citizen 1:* And a daycare in Kaffigen and the Memorial Church in the capital. She and her money. She owns Armenian Oil, and the entire amusement district of Bangkok.

*Citizen 2:* We're ruined politically, too.

*Arriving from the town are the Mayor, the Teacher, the Priest, and Ill, a man of almost fiftyfive, all dressed shabbily.*

*Mayor:* The honoured guest is coming on the 1:13 pm train from Kalberstadt.

*Teacher:* The mixed choir will sing, together with the youth group.

*Priest:* The fire station bell will ring. That one has not been pawned yet.

*Mayor:* In the market square, the city brass band will play, and the gymnastics club will form a pyramid in honour of the billionaireess. Then there'll be a dinner in the Golden Apostle. Too bad we can't afford to illuminate the cathedral and the town hall in the evening.

*Citizen 1 has finished the inscription on the banner.*

*Ill:* This is definitely not on, Mr. Mayor, the inscription is too intimate. "Welcome, Claire Zachanassian", that's what it should say.

*Citizen 1:* But she's Kläri. Kläri Wäscher. She grew up here. Her father was a master builder. So I'll just write "Welcome, Claire Zachanassian" on the back. Then, once the billionaireess is deeply moved, we can still show the front to her.

*Citizen 2:* The "Stock Marketer" from Zurich to Hamburg. *An express train goes from right to left.* Always exactly on time, one could set one's watch by it.

*Citizen 1:* Please – who here still has a watch.

*Mayor:* Gentlemen, the billionaireess is our only hope.

*Priest:* Except for God.

*Mayor:* Except for God.

*Teacher:* But he doesn't pay.

*Mayor:* You were close to her, Ill, so everything depends on you.

*Priest:* You two went your separate ways back then. I heard a vague story – do you have anything to confess to your priest?

*Ill:* We were the best of friends – young and fiery – after all, I was a stud, gentlemen, thirtyfive years ago – and she, Klara, I still see her, with flowing red hair, lithe, slender, tender, a devilishly beautiful witch. Life split us apart, only life, as it happens.

*Mayor:* For my little speech at dinner in the Golden Apostle, I should have some details about Mrs. Zachanassian.

*He pulls a little notebook from his pocket.*

*Teacher:* I searched through the old school files. Klara Wäscher's grades were, unfortunately, very bad. Including for behaviour. She only got a satisfactory in plant and animal biology.

*Mayor, writing:* Good. Satisfactory in plant and animal biology. That's good.

*Ill:* I can be of service there, Mr. Mayor. Klara loved justice. Very much so. Once, when a vagabond was arrested, she threw rocks at the policeman.

*Mayor:* Love of justice. Not bad. That's always a winner. But we better leave out the story with the policeman.

*Ill:* She was charitable, too. Whatever she owned, she gave away, stole potatoes for a poor widow.

*Mayor:* Sense of charity. That, gentlemen, I have to bring up without fail. It's the main point. Does anyone remember any building her father constructed? Would be good window dressing for the speech.

*Citizen 1:* Nobody. They say he was a drunkard.

*Citizen 2:* His old lady ran off on him. He died in the insane asylum.

*Mayor, closing his notebook:* I for one am prepared – the rest is up to Ill.

*Ill:* I know. Need to get the Lady Zachanassian to fork over her millions.

*Mayor:* Millions – that's exactly the right attitude.

*Teacher:* Just a daycare won't be enough for us.

*Mayor:* My dear Ill, for a long time now you have been the most well-liked personage in Gullen. I will be resigning in the spring and have been talking to the opposition. We agreed to nominate you as my successor.

*Ill:* But – Mr. Mayor!

*Teacher:* I can only endorse this.

*Ill:* Gentlemen, let's focus on the issue at hand. First, I want to talk to Klara about our miserable situation.

*Priest:* But carefully – with sensitivity.

*Ill:* We must proceed intelligently, in a psychologically correct manner. Even an unsuccessful reception at the station can ruin everything. It's not enough to just let the town brass band play and the mixed choir sing.

*Mayor:* Ill is right there. It's an important moment, after all. Mrs. Zachanassian steps onto the soil of her home town, finds her way home, tears in her eyes, sees old familiar places. Of course, I won't be in shirt sleeves like right now, but in festive black, my wife next to me. My God, if only everything comes together in time.

*Sound of a bell.*

*Citizen 1:* The "Rapid Roland" is coming.

*Citizen 2:* Venice to Stockholm, eleven twentyseven.

*Priest:* Eleven twentyseven! We still have almost two hours to put on our Sunday best.

*Mayor:* Hofbauer and Helmesberger will lift up the inscription "Welcome, Claire Zachanassian". The others should best wave their hats. But please: No screaming like last year when the government commission came. The impression was nil and we still do not have a

subsidy. What is called for is not exuberant joy, but the inner kind, almost a sobbing, empathy with the returned child of the home town. Be at ease, affectionate, but the organisation has to work, the fire bell has to start right after the mixed choir. Above all, we have to make sure ...

*The thundering of the approaching train drowns out his speech. Screeching brakes. All faces express utter incredulity.*

*Priest:* The express train!

*Citizen 1:* Is stopping!

*Citizen 2:* In Gullen!

*Citizen 1:* In the most impoverished –

*Citizen 2:* lousiest –

*Citizen 1:* most pathetic backwater on the Venice-Stockholm line!

*Station Master:* The natural laws have been suspended.

*Claire Zachanassian approaches from the right, aged fiftytwo, red hair, pearl necklace, huge gold bangles, heavily made up, gaudy, but precisely for that reason a grand lady, with a strange grace, despite all grotesque features. Behind her comes her retinue, the butler, Bobby, about sixty, with black shades, her husband VII (tall, slender, black moustache) with complete fishing equipment. An agitated train conductor accompanies the group, red cap, red bag.*

*Claire:* Am I in Gullen?

*Conductor:* You pulled the emergency brake, Madam.

*Claire:* I always pull the emergency brake.

*Conductor:* I must protest. Emphatically. One never pulls the emergency brake in this country, even in emergencies. Punctuality in accordance with the timetable is the highest principle. May I ask for an explanation?

*Claire:* I am in Gullen after all, Moby. I recognize the sad little backwater. Over there is the Konradswailer Forest with the creek where you can fish for trout and pike, and on the right the roof of Peters' barn.

*Ill, as if waking:* Klara.

*Teacher:* The Lady Zachanassian.

*All:* The Lady Zachanassian.

*Teacher:* And the mixed choir not ready, nor the youth group!

*Mayor:* The gymnasts, the fire brigade!

*Priest:* The sexton!

*Mayor:* My suit jacket is missing, for God's sake!

*Citizen 1:* Kläri Wäscher! Kläri Wäscher! *He jumps up and rushes towards town.*

*Mayor:* Don't forget to bring my wife!

*Conductor:* I am waiting for an explanation. Officially. In the name of the railway company.

*Claire:* You are a fool. I just want to visit this little town. Am I supposed to jump from your express train?

*Conductor:* Madam, if you wish to visit Gullen, the twelve forty local train from Kalberstadt is at your disposal. As it is for everyone. It arrives in Gullen at one thirteen.

*Claire:* The local train? I suppose you want to inflict half an hour of chugging through this region on me?

*Conductor:* Madam, this will have expensive consequences for you.

*Claire:* Give him a thousand, Bobby.

*The butler gives the conductor one thousand.*

*Conductor, baffled:* Madam.

*Claire:* And three thousand for the foundation for the benefit of railroad worker widows.

*The conductor receives three thousand from the butler.*

*Conductor, confused:* There is no such foundation, Madam.

*Claire:* Then establish one. *The mayor whispers something in the conductor's ear.*

*Conductor, aghast:* The lady is Claire Zachanassian? Oh, my apologies. That's another matter, of course. Evidently we would have stopped in Gullen, if we had had even the smallest inkling – you will receive your money back, Madam – four thousand – my God.

*Claire:* Keep that trifle.

*Conductor:* Madam, do you wish the “Rapid Roland” to wait until you have visited Gullen? The rail company management would gladly consent.

*Claire:* Buzz off with your train.

*Husband VII, whining:* But the press, sweetie, the press has not gotten off the train yet. The reporters sit in the dining car and have no idea.

*Claire:* Let them dine on, Moby. For now, I don't need the press in Gullen. And later they'll come anyhow.

*In the meantime, Citizen 2 has brought the mayor his suit jacket. The mayor officiously approaches Claire Zachanassian. Citizen 1 and 2 lift up the inscription “Welcome, Claire Zachanassi...”. Citizen 1 has not quite finished it.*

*Station Master, lifts the signalling disk:* All aboard!!

*Conductor:* As long as your Ladyship does not complain to the rail company management. It was a pure misunderstanding.

*The train starts moving. The conductor jumps on.*

*Mayor:* Esteemed Lady. As mayor of Gullen I have the honour to welcome you, dear lady, as a child of our home town ...

*The rest of the mayor's continuing speech is drowned out by the sound of the departing train.*

*Claire:* I thank you, Mr. Mayor, for the nice speech.

*She walks towards Ill, who has approached her somewhat bashfully.*

*Ill: Klara.*

*Claire: Alfred.*

*Ill: It's nice that you have come.*

*Claire: I have always been determined to; my entire life since I left Gullen.*

*Ill, uncertain: That's nice of you.*

*Claire: You have thought of me, too?*

*Ill: Of course. Always. You know that, Klara.*

*Claire: It was wonderful, all those days we were together.*

*Ill, proudly: Indeed. To the teacher: You see, teacher, I've got her wrapped around my finger.*

*Claire: Call me what you always called me.*

*Ill: My little wild cat.*

*Claire, purring like an old cat: What else?*

*Ill: My little magic witch.*

*Claire: I called you "my black panther".*

*Ill: I am, still.*

*Claire: Nonsense. You have grown fat. And grey and boozy.*

*Ill: But you have remained the same. Little magic witch.*

*Claire: Tut! I, too, have grown old and fat. And my left leg is gone. A car accident. I only take express trains now. But the prosthesis is excellent, don't you think? She lifts her skirt and shows her left leg. Easy to move.*

*Ill, wiping sweat from his brow: I would never have guessed, my little wild cat.*

*Claire: May I present my seventh husband to you, Alfred? He owns tobacco plantations. We have a happy marriage.*

*Ill: By all means.*

*Claire: Come, Moby, take a bow. His name is actually Pedro, but Moby sounds nicer. It also goes better with Bobby, the name of my butler. That's a lifelong relationship, after all, so the husbands have to adjust name-wise.*

*Husband VII bows.*

*Claire: Isn't he nice with his black moustache? Think.*

*Husband VII thinks.*

*Claire: Harder.*

*Husband VII thinks harder.*

*Claire: Even harder.*

*Husband VII:* But I can't think any harder, sweetie, I really can't.

*Claire:* Of course you can. Just try.

*Husband VII thinks even harder. Sound of a bell.*

*Claire:* You see, it worked. Don't you think, Alfred, that he almost appears demonic that way? Now I want to have a look around Gullen. *She looks at the toilet shack with a gem-studded lorgnette.* This public convenience was erected by my father, Moby. Good work, carried out with precision. As a child I sat on its roof for hours and spat down. But only on the men.

*In the background, the mixed choir and the youth group have gathered. The teacher steps forward.*

*Teacher:* Gracious lady, as principal of the Gullen high school and as a Lover of noble Lady Music I ask your permission to present you with a simple folk song, performed by the mixed choir and the youth group.

*Claire:* Fire away, teacher, with your simple folk song.

*The teacher takes out a tuning fork, strikes the tone, the mixed choir and the youth group start to sing solemnly, but in that moment another train comes through from the left. The station master salutes. The choir has to contend with the rattling of the train, the teacher is desperate, finally the train passes.*

*Mayor, disconsolate:* The fire bell, it was supposed to sound now!

*Claire:* Well sung, Gulleners. Especially the blond bass on the far left with the big Adam's apple was a standout.

*A policeman pushes his way through the mixed choir, stands to attention in front of Claire Zachanassian.*

*Policeman:* Police constable Hahncke, Madam. At your service.

*Claire, inspecting him:* Thanks. I do not want to arrest anyone. But maybe Gullen will need you. Do you sometimes look the other way?

*Policeman:* Well, yes, Madam. How can I not, in a place like Gullen?

*Claire:* Better look away completely.

*The policeman stands there, somewhat baffled.*

*Ill, laughing:* That's Klara for you! That's my little magic witch. *He slaps his thighs in amusement.*

*Mayor:* Our parish priest, Madam. *The priest bows.*

*Claire:* Ah, the pastor. Are you in the habit of consoling the dying?

*Priest, puzzled:* I do my best.

*Claire:* Including those who have been condemned to death?

*Priest, bewildered:* The death penalty has been abolished in our country, Madam.

*Claire:* Perhaps it will be re-introduced.



*The doctor pushes through the crowd.*

*Mayor:* Doctor Nüßlin, our physician.

*Claire:* Interesting. Do you issue death certificates?

*Doctor:* Death certificates?

*Claire:* When someone passes away.

*Doctor:* Yes, certainly.

*Claire:* In future, list the cause as “heart attack”.

*Ill, laughing:* Little wild cat! You sure are making such hilarious jokes!

*Claire:* Now I want to go to into the town.

*The mayor offers her his arm.*

*Claire:* What are you thinking, mayor? I will not march for miles with my prosthesis.

*Mayor, alarmed:* Right away! Right away! Doctor Nüßlin owns a car.

*Doctor:* A 1980 Mercedes, Madam.

*Claire:* Not necessary. Since my accident I only get around by sedan chair. Roby and Toby, bring it here.

*Two Herculean monsters, chewing gum, come from the left with a sedan chair. One of them is carrying a guitar on his back.*

*Claire:* Two gangsters from Manhattan, sentenced to the electric chair in Sing-Sing. On my request, they were pardoned to carry the sedan chair. Cost me a million dollars per pardon. Carry me to the town, Roby and Toby.

*Roby and Toby:* Yes, Mam.

*Claire:* But first to Peters’ barn and then to the Konradswweiler Forest. I want to visit our old love spots with Alfred. In the meantime, get the luggage and the coffin to the Golden Apostle.

*Mayor:* The coffin?

*Claire:* I brought one along. Might need one. Off we go, Roby and Toby.

*The two gum-chewing monsters carry Claire Zachanassian into town. The mayor gives a sign, and everyone erupts in cheers, which however are dampened by surprise as two servants carry a lavish black coffin past them, towards Güllen. At that moment, the fire bell begins to ring.*

*Mayor:* At last! The fire bell!

*The people follow the coffin. Claire Zachanassian’s maid servants follow with luggage and an unending number of suitcases carried by Gülleners. The Policeman regulates traffic and is about to follow the procession, but from the right two short, fat old men approach, holding each other’s hand, both carefully dressed.*

*Koby and Loby:* We are in Güllen. We can smell it, we can smell it, we can smell it in the air, the Güllen air.

*Policeman:* Who are you, then?

*Koby and Loby:* We belong to the old Lady, we belong to the old Lady. She calls us Koby and Loby.

*Policeman:* Mrs. Zachanassian is staying in the Golden Apostle.

*Koby and Loby, jollily:* We are blind, we are blind.

*Policeman:* Blind? Then let me lead you two there.

*Koby and Loby:* Thank you, Mr. Policeman, thank you very much.

*Policeman, surprised:* How do you know that I am a policeman, if you are blind?

*Koby and Loby:* By your tone, by your tone, all policemen have the same tone.

*Policeman, suspicious:* You seem to have experience with the police, you two small, fat men.

*Koby and Loby, marvelling:* Men, he takes us for men!

*Policeman:* What the hell else would you be?

*Koby and Loby:* You'll find out, you'll find out!

*Policeman, most puzzled:* At least you're always cheerful.

*Koby and Loby:* We get steaks and ham. Every day, every day.

*Policeman:* Then I would be dancing around, too. Come on, hold my hand. These foreigners have a strange sense of humour. *He walks into town with the two.*

*Koby and Loby:* Off to Boby and Moby, to Roby and Toby!

*Change of scene to the Golden Apostle. Decayed luxury. Everything is torn, dusty, broken, stinky, mouldy, the plaster is crumbling. The mayor, the priest and the teacher are sitting in the right foreground with glasses of Schnaps and observe the endless caravan of suitcases, to be imagined going by in the auditorium.*

*Mayor:* Suitcases, nothing but suitcases.

*Priest:* In piles. And earlier they carried up a panther in cage.

*Mayor:* A wild black animal.

*Priest:* The coffin.

*Mayor:* Is being brought into a separate room.

*Teacher:* Strange.

*Priest:* World famous ladies have their foibles.

*Mayor:* Pretty maid servants.

*Teacher:* It seems she intends to stay here for quite a while.

*Mayor:* All the better. Ill has got her wrapped around his finger. Little wild cat, little magic witch he called her. He'll get millions out of her. To your health, teacher. Let's drink to Claire Zachanassian putting Bockmann back into business.

*Teacher:* The Wagner factory.

*Mayor:* The Sunshine Steel Mill. Once that gets going, everything gets going, the community, the high school, public wealth.

*They toast.*

*Teacher:* For more than two decades I have been correcting the Latin and Greek exercises of the students of Gullen, but only since an hour ago, mayor, have I known what terror is. It was fearful, how she descended from the train, the old Lady in her black robes.

*The policeman arrives, hangs his helmet on a hook.*

*Mayor:* Sit with us, constable. *The policeman sits down.*

*Policeman:* It's no cake walk to work in this two-horse town. But now the ruin will blossom again. Just now I was in Peters' barn with the billionaire and the shopkeeper Ill, before they went into the Konradswailer Forest. A veritable procession. Up front two fat, blind men with the butler, then the sedan chair, and behind it Ill and her seventh husband with his fishing gear.

*Mayor:* Using up men.

*Teacher:* A second Lais.

*Priest:* We are all sinners.

*Mayor:* I wonder what they were looking for in the Konradswailer Forest.

*Policeman:* The same as in Peters' barn, mayor. They seek out the places where once their passion – how to put it –

*Priest:* burned!

*Teacher:* Ablaze! Makes one think of Shakespeare. Romeo and Juliet. Gentlemen, I am deeply moved. For the first time in Gullen I feel the greatness of antiquity.

*Mayor:* Above all we should toast our good man Ill, who is making every conceivable effort to improve our lot. Gentlemen, to the most popular citizen of our town, to my successor!

*They toast.*

*Mayor:* Suitcases again.

*Policeman:* The luggage that woman has.

*In the Konradswailer Forest. The two gum-chewing monsters emerge from the background, carrying the sedan chair with Claire Zachanassian, Ill walking next to her. Behind them husband VII.*

*Claire:* Here's the Konradswailer Forest, Roby and Toby, stop here.

*Claire Zachanassian steps out of the sedan chair, looks at the forest.*

*Claire:* The heart with your and my name, Alfred. It has long faded and been pulled apart. The tree has grown, its trunk and branches have grown thick like we have. Go take a walk behind the bushes with your sedan chair now, gum chewers, I don't want to always see your mugs. And you, Moby, take a hike to the creek on the right to your fish.

*The two monsters with the sedan chair go off to the left, husband VII to the right, Claire Zachanassian sits down on the bench.*

*Claire:* Look there, a deer.

*Ill:* Hunting season's closed. *He sits down beside her.*

*Claire:* We kissed on that boulder. More than thirtyfive years ago. Then you married Mathilde Blumhard with her small shop, and I the old Zahanassian with his billions from Armenia. He found me in a brothel in Hamburg.

*Ill:* Klara! I married Mathilde Blumhard for your sake.

*Claire:* She had money.

*Ill:* You were young and beautiful. The future was yours. I wanted your happiness. So I had to renounce mine.

*Claire:* Now the future has come.

*Ill:* If you had stayed here, you would have been as ruined as I.

*Claire:* You are ruined?

*Ill:* A failed shopkeeper in a failed town.

*Claire:* Now it is I who have money.

*Ill:* I have been living in a hell since you left me.

*Claire:* And I have become hell.

*Ill:* I have to duke it out with my family, who blame me for our poverty every day.

*Claire:* Little Mathilde did not make you happy?

*Ill:* As long as you are happy.

*Claire:* Your children?

*Ill:* Without sense for ideals.

*Claire:* It'll dawn on them.

*He is silent. Both stare into the forest of their youth.*

*Ill:* I lead a ridiculous life. I have not even really gotten out of this town. One trip to Berlin and one to the Ticino canton, that's all.

*Claire:* What good would it do? I know the world.

*Ill:* Because you were always able to travel.

*Claire:* Because I own it.

*Ill:* Now everything will change.

*Claire:* Certainly.

*Ill, expectantly:* You will help us?

*Claire:* I won't abandon the town of my youth.

*Ill:* We are in need of millions.

*Claire:* A pittance.

*Ill, exuberant:* Little wild cat! *He playfully slaps her left thigh and draws back his hand in pain.*

*Claire:* That smarts. You have hit a hinge of my prosthesis.

*Ill:* If only time were suspended, my little magic witch. If only life had not separated us.

*Claire:* That would be your wish?

*Ill:* That, and that alone. Because I love you! *He kisses her right hand.* The same cool white hand.

*Claire:* Wrong. Also a prosthesis. Made from ivy.

*Ill, shocked, drops her hand:* Klara, is just about everything about you a prosthesis?!

*Claire:* Almost. This is from a plane crash in Afghanistan. I crawled from the wreckage as the only survivor. Can't be killed.

*Festive brass music sounds. The Inn's Apostle backdrop is lowered. The Gülleners are carrying in tables, with woefully worn table cloths. Table settings, food, a table in the centre, one on the left, one on the right, parallel to the audience. The priest comes from the background. More Gülleners stream in, one of them in gymnast's outfit. The mayor, the doctor, the teacher, the policeman reappear. The Gülleners applaud. The mayor comes to the bench where Claire and Ill are sitting.*

*Mayor:* That applause was for you, my dear lady.

*Claire:* It was for the town orchestra, mayor. They blow admirably, and earlier, the pyramid by the gymnastics club was beautiful.

*At a signal by the mayor, the gymnast presents himself.*

*Claire:* I love men in tight sports outfits. They look so natural. Do some more gymnastics. Swing back your arms, Mr. Gymnast, and then go into a push-up.

*The gymnast follows her instructions.*

*Claire:* Wonderful, these muscles! Have you ever strangled anyone with your power?

*The gymnast in push-up position sinks to his knees in surprise.*

*Gymnast:* Strangled?

*Ill, laughing:* A golden sense of humour, that Klara! I could laugh myself to death about these bonmots!

*Doctor:* I don't know, such jokes chill me to the bone.

*The gymnast leaves.*

*Mayor:* May I accompany you to the table? *He leads Claire Zachanassian to the centre table.*

*Ill, conspiratorily:* She has promised millions!

*Mayor, gasping:* Millions?

*Ill:* Millions.

*Doctor:* Oh my gosh!

*Claire:* Now I am hungry, mayor.

*Mayor:* We are just waiting for your husband, madam.

*Claire:* No need to wait. He is fishing, and I am getting a divorce.

*Mayor:* Divorce?

*Claire:* Moby will be surprised, too. I'm marrying a German film actor.

*Mayor:* But you said you had a happy marriage!

*Claire:* Each of my marriages is happy. But it was the dream of my youth to be married in the Gullen cathedral. One has to carry out the dreams of youth. It will be festive.

*All sit down. Claire Zahanassian takes her place between the mayor and Ill. To the right behind another table are the teacher, the priest, and the policeman, on the left the two citizens in the background, where the banner says "Welcome Kläri". The mayor rises, beaming with joy, napkin already tied around his neck; he taps his glass.*

*Mayor:* Dear lady, my dear Gulleners. It has now been thirtyfive years since you left our little town, more than three decades, a lot of time. Much has happened in the meantime, much that is bitter. The world has suffered a sad fate, as have we. But we never forgot you, dear lady – our Kläri – *applause*, neither you nor your family. Your splendid, utterly healthy mother, who found her calling in her marriage – *Ill whispers something to him* – unfortunately too soon departed, your father, a man of the people, who at the train station erected a building much frequented – *Ill whispers something to him* – much noticed building – they still live in our thoughts, as our best and bravest. And then you, dear lady – as a wild filly with blond – *Ill whispers something to him* – with red curls you frolicked through our alleys, now unfortunately run down. Who did not know you? *He pulls out his notebook.* You have remained unforgotten. Indeed. Your achievements in school are still held up as a model by the teachers, especially since you were astonishing in the most important subject, plant and animal biology, as an expression of your empathy for every creature, every seeker of protection. Your love of justice and your sense of charity elicited the admiration of wide circles even back then. *Thundering applause.* To wit, our Kläri obtained nourishment for an old widow by buying potatoes with her hard-earned pocket money and thus saving her from death by starvation, to just mention one of her acts of mercy. *Thundering applause.* Dear lady, dear Gulleners, the tender shoots of such promising predispositions have now developed strongly, the redhaired wild filly became a lady, who showers the world with her charity, and so I would now like to call on her who has found her way home: Hip hip, hurray, hurray, hurray!

*Applause. Claire Zahanassian stands up.*

*Claire:* Mayor, Gulleners. Your unselfish joy about my visit touches me. Though I was a somewhat different child than I appear in the mayor's speech: in school I was beaten, and I stole the potatoes for widow Boll together with Ill, not to save the old bawd from starvation, but to lie with Ill in a bed for once, where it was more comfortable than in the Konradswailer Forest or in Peters' barn. However, in order to make my contribution to your joy, I want to declare right away that I am prepared to gift a billion to Gullen, fivehundred million to the city and fivehundred million distributed among all families.

*Deathly silence.*

*Mayor, stuttering:* One billion.

*All are still stunned.*

*Claire:* Under one condition. *All break out in indescribable cheers, dance around, stand on chairs, the gymnast makes moves, etc. Ill thumps his chest in glee.*

*Ill:* That Klara! Golden! Wonderful! To die for! Totally my little magic witch! *He kisses her.*

*Mayor:* Under one condition, you said, madam. May I know that condition?

*Claire:* I will tell you the condition. I will give you one billion, and for that I will buy justice.

*Deathly silence.*

*Mayor:* How should we understand this, madam?

*Claire:* As I said it.

*Mayor:* But one cannot buy justice!

*Claire:* One can buy anything.

*Mayor:* I still do not understand.

*Claire:* Step forward, Bobby.

*The butler steps into the centre among the three tables, takes off his dark glasses.*

*Butler:* I am not sure whether anyone of you still recognizes me.

*Teacher:* Judge Hofer.

*Butler:* Correct. Judge Hofer. I was District Court judge in Gullen thirtyfive years ago and then went to the appellate court in Kaffigen, until fifteen years ago. Mrs. Zachanassian then made me the offer to enter her service as butler. I accepted. This may seem a somewhat strange career for an academic, but the offered salary was so fantastic –

*Claire:* Get to the case, Bobby.

*Butler:* As you have heard, Mrs. Zachanassian is offering a billion and wants justice for it. In other words: Mrs. Claire Zachanassian offers you a billion if you redress he injustice that was done to Mrs. Zachanassian in Gullen. Mr. Ill, may I ask you to come forward?

*Ill stands up, pale, simultaneously frightened and bewildered.*

*Ill:* What do you want from me?

*Butler:* Step forward, Mr. Ill.

*Ill:* If you insist. *He steps in front of the table on the right. Embarrassed chuckle. Shrugs.*

*Butler:* It was in the year 1980. I was District Court judge in Gullen and was trying a paternity case. Claire Zachanassian, back then called Klara Wäscher, was accusing you, Mr. Ill, of being the father of her child.

*Ill is silent.*

*Butler:* You denied your paternity back then, Mr. Ill. You had brought along two witnesses.

*Ill:* Ancient stories. I was young and foolish.

*Claire:* Toby and Roby, bring forth Koby and Lobby.

*The two gum-chewing monsters lead the two blind eunuchs, who merrily hold each other's hands, to centre stage.*

*Koby and Loby: We are present, we are present!*

*Butler: Do you recognize these two, Mr. Ill?*

*Ill is silent.*

*Koby and Loby: We are Koby and Loby, we are Koby and Loby.*

*Ill: I do not know them.*

*Koby and Loby: We have changed, we have changed.*

*Butler: Say your names.*

*Koby: Jakob Hühnlein, Jakob Hühnlein.*

*Loby: Ludwig Sparr, Ludwig Sparr.*

*Butler: Well, Mr. Ill?*

*Ill: I know nothing about them.*

*Butler: Jakob Hühnlein and Ludwig Sparr, do you know Mr. Ill?*

*Koby and Loby: We are blind, we are blind.*

*Butler: Do you know him by his voice?*

*Koby and Loby: By his voice, by his voice.*

*Butler: In 1980 I was judge and you were witnesses. What did you swear to, Ludwig Sparr and Jakob Hühnlein, in front of the court in Gullen?*

*Koby and Loby: That we had slept with Klara, that we had slept with Klara.*

*Butler: That's what you swore before me. Before the court, before God. Was it the truth?*

*Koby and Loby: We swore falsely, we swore falsely.*

*Butler: Why, Ludwig Sparr and Jakob Hühnlein?*

*Koby and Loby: Ill bribed us, Ill bribed us.*

*Butler: With what?*

*Koby and Loby: With a liter of Schnaps, with a liter of Schnaps.*

*Claire: Now tell what I did with you, Koby and Loby.*

*Butler: Tell it.*

*Koby and Loby: The lady ordered a search for us, the lady ordered a search for us.*

*Butler: That's right. Claire Zahanassian ordered a search for you. Around the world. Jakob Hühnlein had emigrated to Canada and Ludwig Sparr to Australia. But she found you. What did she do with you then?*

*Koby and Loby: She gave us to Toby and Roby. She gave us to Toby and Roby.*

*Butler: And what did Toby and Roby do with you?*



*Koby and Loby:* They castrated and blinded us, they castrated and blinded us.

*Butler:* This is the story: a judge, an accused, two false witnesses, a misjudgment in the year 1980. Isn't that right, plaintiff?

*Claire Zahanassian stands up.*

*Ill stomps his feet:* This all falls under the statute of limitations. An old, crazy story.

*Butler:* What happened to the child, plaintiff?

*Claire, quietly:* It lived for one year.

*Butler:* What happened to you?

*Claire:* I became a whore.

*Butler:* For what reason?

*Claire:* The court's judgment made me one.

*Butler:* And now you want justice, Claire Zahanassian?

*Claire:* I can afford it. A billion for Gullen, if someone kills Alfred III.

*Deathly silence.*

*Ill:* Little magic witch! You cannot mean to demand that! Life has long moved on!

*Claire:* Life moved on, but I have forgotten nothing, Ill. Now we have grown old, both of us, you degenerate and me hacked to pieces by the surgeons' knives, and now I want the two of us to settle accounts. You have chosen your life and forced me into mine. You wanted time to be suspended, just then, in the forest of our youth, full of transitoriness. Now I have suspended it, and now I want justice, justice for a billion.

*The mayor rises, pale, dignified.*

*Mayor:* Mrs. Zahanassian: we are still in Europe, we are not yet heathens. In the name of the town of Gullen I refuse the offer. In the name of humanity. We would rather remain poor than stained with blood.

*Thundering applause.*

*Claire:* I will wait.

## Act II

*The town, only hinted at. In the background the Inn to the Golden Apostle, from the outside. Decade Art Deco façade. On the right an inscription: Alfred Ill, General Store. Underneath it, a dirty counter, behind it a shelf with old goods. When someone comes through the fake shop door, a thin bell sounds. On the left an inscription: Police. Underneath it a wooden table with a telephone. Two chairs. It is morning. Roby and Toby, chewing gum, are carrying wreaths and flowers as if for a funeral from the left across the stage and to the back into the hotel. Ill watches them through the window. His daughter sweeps the floor on her knees. His son watches her.*

*Ill:* Is mother coming for breakfast?

*Daughter:* She says she'll stay upstairs. Says she's tired.

*Ill:* You have a good mother, my children. It's high time that I said it. A good mother. Let her stay upstairs, let her rest. So then we'll have breakfast together. We haven't done that in a long time.

*Son:* You'll have to excuse me.

*Ill:* You are not eating with us, Karl?

*Son:* I'm going to the station. One of their workers is sick. Maybe they need a substitute.

*Ill:* Rail work in the hot sun is no work form my boy.

*Son:* Better some work than none. *He leaves.*

*Daughter, getting up:* I'm going as well, father.

*Ill:* You too? Really? Where to, if I may ask young lady?

*Daughter:* To the unemployment office. Maybe they have a position for me. *She leaves.*

*Ill, moved, sneezes into his handkerchief:* Good children, well-behaved children.

*Some guitar chords sound from the balcony.*

*Claire's voice:* Pass me my left leg, Bobby.

*Butler's voice:* I cannot find it.

*Claire's voice:* Behind the engagement flowers on the dresser.

*The first customer arrives in Ill's shop (Citizen 1).*

*Ill:* Good morning, Hofbauer.

*Citizen 1:* Cigarettes.

*Ill:* Like every morning.

*Citizen 1:* Not those, I want the green ones.

*Ill:* More expensive.

*Citizen 1:* Put them on my tab.

*Ill:* Just because it's you, Hofbauer, and because we have to stick together.

*Citizen 1:* Someone's playing guitar there.

*Ill*: One of the gangsters from Sing-Sing.

*The two blind men come from the hotel, carrying fishing poles and other fishing gear.*

*Ill*: Wreaths.

*Citizen 1*: Every morning they bring them from the station.

*Ill*: For the empty coffin in the Golden Apostle.

*Citizen 1*: That doesn't intimidate anyone.

*Ill*: The town stands by me.

*Koby and Loby*: Have a good morning, Alfred, have a good morning.

*Ill*: Go to hell.

*Koby and Loby*: We are going fishing, we are going fishing. *They walk off to the left.*

*Citizen 1*: They're going to the Gullen Creek.

*Ill*: With the fishing poles of her seventh husband.

*Citizen 1*: They say he lost his tobacco plantations.

*Ill*: Those belong to the billionaire, too.

*Citizen 1*: Oh well, at least there'll be a gigantic wedding with her eighth. Yesterday they celebrated the engagement.

*Claire Zachanassian appears on the balcony in the background, in her morning gown. She moves her right hand, her left leg. Perhaps accompanied by notes plucked on the guitar, which follow along with the rest of the balcony scene, a bit like in an opera recitative, depending on the meaning of the lines, sometimes a waltz, sometimes snippets of various national anthems, etc.*

*Claire*: I'm re-assembled. Play the Armenian folk song, Roby.

*A melody on the guitar.*

*Claire*: Zachanassian's favourite piece. He always wanted to hear that one, every morning. He was a classical man, still owned billions, that was still worth a marriage.

*Two women arrive. They give their milk cans to Ill.*

*Woman 1*: Milk, Mr. Ill.

*Woman 2*: My can, Mr. Ill.

*Ill*: A very good morning to you. One liter of milk for each of the ladies.

*He opens a milk kettle and is about to ladle milk.*

*Woman 1*: Whole milk, Mr. Ill.

*Woman 2*: Two liters of whole milk, Mr. Ill.

*Ill*: Whole milk. *He opens a different kettle and ladles milk.*

*Claire Zachanassian observes the morning through her lorgnette.*

*Claire:* A beautiful autumn morning, like Count Holk painted it, my third husband, the foreign minister. Dabbled in painting during his holidays. It was awful. *She sits down with much ado.* The whole Count episode was awful.

*Woman 1:* And butter. Half a pound.

*Woman 2:* And white bread. Two kilos.

*Ill:* I guess the ladies must have come into an inheritance.

*Both women:* Put it on our tab.

*Ill:* All for one and one for all.

*Woman 1:* And some chocolate for two twenty.

*Woman 2:* Four fourty.

*Ill:* Also on your tabs?

*Woman 1:* Also.

*Woman 2:* We'll eat it here, Mr. Ill.

*Woman 1:* It's nicest at your place, Mr. Ill.

*They sit down in the background of the shop and eat chocolate.*

*Citizen 1:* There she sits on her balcony and has herself waited on hand and foot.

*Ill:* She has miscalculated. I am an old sinner, Hofbauer, but who isn't? Sure, it was a mean trick of youth I played on her, but when everyone rejected her offer, all the Gulleners in the Golden Apostle, in one voice, despite the misery, that was the most beautiful hour of my life.

*Claire:* Whiskey, Bobby. Straight.

*A second customer (Citizen 2) arrives, impoverished, dishevelled like everyone else.*

*Citizen 2:* Good morning. It'll be a hot day today.

*Citizen 1:* The good weather continues.

*Ill:* Do I ever have customers this morning. Before, nobody came the entire time, and now it's been a steady stream for some days.

*Citizen 1:* Well, that's because we stand by you. By our Ill. Rock solid.

*The Women, eating chocolate:* Rock solid, Mr. Ill, rock solid.

*Citizen 2:* After all, you are the most popular personality.

*Citizen 1:* The most important.

*Citizen 2:* You'll be elected mayor in the spring.

*Citizen 1:* As sure as death.

*The Women, eating chocolate:* Sure as death, Mr. Ill, sure as death.

*Citizen 2:* Schnaps.

*Ill reaches into the shelf. The butler serves whiskey.*

*Claire*: Wake up the new husband. I don't like it when my men sleep so long.

*Ill*: Three ten.

*Citizen 2*: Not that one.

*Ill*: But you always drank that one.

*Citizen 2*: Cognac.

*Ill*: That costs twenty thirty-five. Nobody can afford that.

*Citizen 2*: You have to splurge once in a while.

*A half-naked girl races across the stage, Toby after her.*

*Woman 1, eating chocolate*: Scandalous, the way Luise carries on.

*Woman 2, eating chocolate*: And she's engaged to the blond musician from Berthold Schwarz Street.

*Ill takes down the cognac.*

*Ill*: Here you are.

*Citizen 2*: And tobacco. For my pipe.

*Ill*: Alright.

*Citizen 2*: The imported kind.

*Ill calculates the total.*

*On the balcony, husband VIII arrives, film actor, tall, slender, red beard, in a morning gown. He can be played by the same actor as husband VII.*

*Husband VIII*: Honeybunch, isn't it wonderful: our first breakfast as a newly engaged couple. Like a dream. A small balcony, a rustling linden tree, a murmuring town hall fountain, some chickens running across the pavement, housewives gossiping somewhere with their small worries, and behind the roofs the cathedral tower!

*Claire*: Sit down, Hoby, don't talk. I can see the landscape for myself, and thoughts are not your strong suit.

*Citizen 2*: Now the husbands sits up there, too.

*Woman 1, eating chocolate*: Number eight.

*Woman 2, eating chocolate*: A handsome man, film actor. My daughter saw him as a bank robber in a Tom Tykwer film.

*Woman 1*: And I saw him as a priest in a film by Caroline Link.

*Claire Zachanassian is kissed by husband VIII. Guitar chord.*

*Citizen 2*: I suppose you can get anything for money. *He spits.*

*Citizen 1*: Not among us. *He bangs his fist on the table.*

*Ill*: Twenty-three eighty.

*Citizen 2*: Put it on my tab.

*Ill*: This week I'll make an exception, but you have to pay me on the first, when you get your unemployment cheque.

*Citizen 2 walks toward the door.*

*Ill*: Helmesberger!

*He stops. Ill comes over to him.*

*Ill*: You have a new belt. A pink new belt.

*Citizen 2*: So?

*Ill looks at Citizen 1*: You, too, Hofbauer. You have a new belt as well. *He looks at the women, walks over to them slowly, full of dread.* You both, too. New pink belts. New pink belts.

*Citizen 1*: I don't know why that bothers you so.

*Citizen 2*: One can't wear the same old belts forever, after all.

*Ill*: New belts. How could you buy new belts?

*The two women*: We had it put on our tabs, Mr. Ill, we had it put on our tabs.

*Ill*: You had it put on your tabs. And with me, you also had everything put on your tabs. Better tobacco, better milk, cognac. So why do you suddenly have credit in the shops.

*Citizen 2*: Well, with you we also have credit.

*Ill*: What do you want to pay with?

*Silence. He starts throwing goods at the customers. They all flee.*

*Ill*: What do you want to pay with? What do you want to pay with? What? What? *He runs to the back.*

*Husband VIII*: There's a commotion in the town.

*Claire*: Small town life.

*Husband VIII*: Something seems to be happening in the shop down there.

*Claire*: They're probably fighting over the price of meat. *Strong guitar chord. Husband VIII jumps up frightened.*

*Husband VIII*: Oh my God, Honeybunch! Did you hear?

*Claire*: The black panther. It growled.

*Husband VIII, puzzled*: A black panther?

*Claire*: From the Pasha of Marrakesh. A present. He's prowling around next door in the salon. A big, mean kitty-cat with glowing eyes.

*The policeman sits down at the table on the left. He drinks beer. He speaks slowly and measuredly. Ill arrives from the back.*

*Claire*: You can serve breakfast now, Bobby.

*Policeman*: What do you wish, Ill? Have a seat.

*Ill remains standing.*

*Policeman:* You're shaking.

*Ill:* I demand the arrest of Claire Zahanassian.

*Policeman:* Strange. Exceedingly strange.

*The butler serves breakfast, brings the mail.*

*Ill:* I demand it as the future mayor.

*Policeman:* The election has not taken place yet.

*Ill:* Arrest the lady right away.

*Policeman:* You mean to say, you want to lodge a complaint against the lady. Whether she is then arrested is for the police to decide. Has she committed a crime?

*Ill:* She calls upon the inhabitants of our town to kill me.

*Policeman:* And so now I'm supposed to just arrest the lady? *He pours himself more beer.*

*Claire:* The mail. Trump has written. Putin. They send their congratulations.

*Ill:* Your duty.

*Policeman:* Strange. Exceedingly strange. *He drinks beer.*

*Ill:* The most natural thing in the world.

*Policeman:* My dear Ill, the thing is not as natural as all that. Let's take a sober look at the case. After all, we are bound by the laws.

*Ill:* Incitement to murder.

*Policeman:* Now look here, Ill. Incitement to murder is present only if the proposition to murder you is meant seriously. Obvious, right?

*Ill:* I think so, too.

*Policeman:* Exactly. Now, the proposition cannot be meant seriously, because the price of a billion is exaggerated; you have to admit that yourself, one might offer a thousand or maybe two thousand for something like that, certainly not more, you can bet your life on it; now, this in turn proves that the proposition was not meant seriously, and should it be meant seriously, the police cannot take the lady seriously, because in that case she is crazy. Got it?

*Ill:* The proposition is a threat to me, constable, whether the lady is crazy or not. That's logical.

*Policeman:* Not logical. You cannot be threatened by a proposition, but only by the carrying out of the proposition. Show me a real attempt to carry out this proposition, for example a man aiming a gun at you, and I will arrive in a hurry. But it is exactly this proposition that nobody wants to carry out, on the contrary. The manifestation in the Golden Apostle was extremely impressive. I have to congratulate you belatedly. *He drinks beer.*

*Ill:* I am not quite so sure, constable.

*Policeman:* Not quite so sure?

*Ill:* My customers buy better milk, better bread, better cigarettes.

*Policeman:* So be happy about it! Your business will look up, then. *He drinks beer.*

*Claire:* Have them buy up the Microsoft stocks, Bobby.

*Ill:* Helmesberger bought cognac from me. And that even though he hasn't earned anything for years and lives on the soup kitchen.

*Policeman:* I'll sample that cognac tonight. I've been invited to Helmesberger's. *He drinks beer.*

*Ill:* Everyone's wearing new belts. New pink belts.

*Policeman:* So what do you have against new belts? After all, I'm wearing a new belt, too. *He points to it.*

*Ill:* You too.

*Policeman:* You see.

*Ill:* Also pink. And you drink Pilsener.

*Policeman:* It tastes good.

*Ill:* Before, you always drank the local beer.

*Policeman:* It was awful.

*Music plays.*

*Ill:* Do you hear that?

*Policeman:* Well?

*Ill:* Music.

*Policeman:* The Merry Widow.

*Ill:* A sound system.

*Policeman:* At Hagholzer's next door. He should close the window. *He writes in his notebook.*

*Ill:* How does Hagholzer have a sound system?

*Policeman:* That's his business.

*Ill:* And you, constable, what do you want to pay for your Pilsener beer and your new shoes with?

*Policeman:* That's my business.

*The telephone on the table rings. The policeman picks up.*

*Policeman:* Gullen police station.

*Claire:* Call the Russians, Bobby, and tell them I agree with their proposition.

*Policeman:* Alright. *He hangs up the phone.*

*Ill:* My customers, what are they supposed to pay with?

*Policeman:* That doesn't concern the police. *He gets up and takes the rifle from the chair back.*

*Ill:* But it concerns me. Because it is me whom they will pay with.

*Policeman:* Nobody is threatening you. *He begins to load the gun.*



*Ill:* The town is going into debt. The debt increases wealth. That wealth increases the necessity of killing me. And so the lady just has to sit on her balcony, drink coffee and wait. Just to wait.

*Policeman:* You are fantasizing.

*Ill:* You are all waiting. *He knocks on the table.*

*Policeman:* You have had too much Schnaps. *He busies himself with the gun.* Right, now it is loaded. You can rest easy. If from anywhere and any side the slightest hint of a threat should show itself, the police will intervene, Mr. Ill, you can rely on that.

*Ill, quietly:* Why do you have a gold tooth in your mouth, constable?

*Policeman:* Huh?

*Ill:* A new glittering gold tooth.

*Policeman:* Have you gone crazy?

*Now Ill notices that the barrel of the gun is pointed at him, and he slowly lifts his hands.*

*Policeman:* I don't have time to quarrel over your fantasies, man. I have to go. The eccentric billionaire has had her little pet go missing. The black panther. I have to hunt it. The whole town must hunt it. *He goes out the back.*

*Ill:* It's me that you're hunting, me.

*Claire, reading a letter:* He's coming, the fashion designer. My fifth husband, the most handsome one. He's designed every single one of my wedding dresses. Play a minuet, Roby.

*A guitar minuet starts.*

*Husband VIII:* But your fifth was a surgeon, I thought.

*Claire:* My sixth. *She opens another letter.* From the Western Railways owner.

*Husband VIII, astonished:* I didn't even know about that one.

*Claire:* My fourth. Impoverished. His stock belongs to me. I seduced him in Buckingham Palace. By the light of the full moon.

*Husband VIII:* But I thought that was Lord Ismael.

*Claire:* Indeed. You are right, Hoby. I completely forgot about him, with his castle in Yorkshire. Then it is my second who writes. I met him in Cairo. We kissed under the Sphinx. An impressive evening. Also full moon. Strange: it was always a full moon shining.

*Transformation on the right. The inscription "Rathaus" is lowered. Citizen 2 arrives, takes away the cash register, moves the shop counter a bit so it can be used as a desk. The mayor arrives. He puts down a revolver on the desk, sits down. Ill comes from the left. There is a building blueprint hanging on the wall.*

*Ill:* I have to talk to you, mayor.

*Mayor:* Have a seat.

*Ill:* Man to man. As your successor.

*Mayor:* Please.

*Ill remains standing, looks at the revolver.*

*Mayor:* Mrs. Zachanassian's panther is on the loose. It is prowling around in the cathedral. So one has to arm oneself.

*Ill:* Certainly.

*Mayor:* I have called up those men who own rifles. The children will kept in school.

*Ill, suspicious:* A bit much ado.

*Mayor:* Hunting a predator.

*The butler arrives.*

*Butler:* The president of the World Bank, madam. Just flown in from New York.

*Claire:* I am not available. Let him fly back again.

*Mayor:* What's on your mind? Just speak freely.

*Ill, suspicious:* A new tie?

*Mayor:* Silk.

*Ill:* And I suppose you also bought a belt?

*Mayor:* I had it shipped from Kalberstadt. Strange, how do you know?

*Ill:* That's why I have come.

*Mayor:* What's the matter with you, anyway? You look pale. Sick?

*Ill:* I'm afraid.

*Mayor:* Afraid?

*Ill:* Prosperity is rising.

*Mayor:* That's news to me. Would be nice.

*Ill:* I demand protection by the authorities.

*Mayor:* Well, whatever from?

*Ill:* You know very well, Mr. Mayor.

*Mayor:* Suspicious, are we?

*Ill:* A billion has been offered as the price on my head.

*Mayor:* Go to the police.

*Ill:* I did go to the police.

*Mayor:* That will have reassured you.

*Ill:* A gold tooth is glittering in the mouth of the constable.

*Mayor:* You forget that you are in Gullen. In a town with a humanist tradition. Goethe spent the night here. Brahms composed a quartet. Those values are binding.

*Citizen 1 enters from the left carrying a laptop.*

*Citizen 1:* The new laptop, Mr. Mayor. It's a Mac.

*Mayor:* Put it in the office.

*Citizen 1 walks off to the right.*

*Mayor:* We do not deserve your ungratefulness. If you cannot place trust in our community, I feel sorry for you. I did not expect this nihilist attitude. After all, we live in a state governed by the rule of law.

*The two blind men come from the left with their fishing poles, holding hands.*

*Koby and Loby:* The panther is free, the panther is free! *They skip.* We heard him growl, we heard him growl. *They skip into the Golden Apostle.* We're going to Hoby and Bobby, to Toby and Roby. *They go off at the centre back.*

*Ill:* Then arrest the lady.

*Mayor:* Strange. Exceedingly strange.

*Ill:* That's what the constable said, too.

*Mayor:* The lady's way of proceeding is not entirely incomprehensible, God knows. After all, you incited two fellows to perjure themselves and you pushed a girl into abject misery.

*Ill:* Well, this abject misery means several billions, mayor.

*Silence.*

*Mayor:* Let's talk honestly with each other.

*Ill:* Yes please, let's.

*Mayor:* Man to man, as you requested. You do not have the moral right to demand the arrest of the lady, and there is also no question of you becoming mayor. I am sorry to have to say this.

*Ill:* Officially?

*Mayor:* On the authority of all the parties.

*Ill:* I understand.

*He slowly walks over to the window on the left, turns his back to the mayor, stares outside.*

*Mayor:* The fact that we condemn the lady's proposition does not mean that we condone the crimes that led to this proposition. The post of mayor makes certain demands of a moral nature that you just do not fulfill anymore, you have to realize that yourself. Other than that, it goes without saying that we offer you the same esteem and friendship as before.

*From the left, Roby and Toby once again carry wreaths and flowers across the state and disappear in the Golden Apostle.*

*Mayor:* It is better we stay silent about the whole thing. I also asked the "Volksbote" newspaper not to publicize the affair.

*Ill turns around:* They are already decorating my coffin, mayor! Silence is too dangerous for me.

*Mayor:* But why, dear Ill? You should be thankful that we spread the veil of forgetting over the whole affair.

*Ill*: If I talk, I still have a chance to survive.

*Mayor*: Well now, that's preposterous! Just who is supposed to be threatening you?

*Ill*: One of you.

*Mayor, getting up*: Whom do you suspect? Tell me a name, and I will investigate the case. Without lenience.

*Ill*: Each one of you.

*Mayor*: In the name of the town, I protest solemnly against this slander.

*Ill*: No-one wants to kill me, each one hopes that somebody else will do it, and so at one point someone will do it.

*Mayor*: You are seeing ghosts.

*Ill*: I am seeing a blueprint on the wall. The new town hall? *He taps on the blueprint.*

*Mayor*: Good God, is it forbidden to plan a bit?

*Ill*: You are already speculating for my death!

*Mayor*: My dear man, if I as a politician were to no longer have the right to believe in a better future without immediately having to think of a crime, I would have to resign, you can rest assured.

*Ill*: You have already condemned me to death.

*Mayor*: Mr. Ill!

*Ill, quietly*: The blueprint proves it! That proves it!

*Claire*: Zuckerberg is coming. The duke and duchess. Kim.

*Husband VIII*: Heidi Klum?

*Claire*: The whole Riviera riff-raff.

*Husband VIII*: Journalists?

*Claire*: From around the world. Wherever I get married, there is always the press. They need me and I need them. *She opens another letter.* From Count Holk.

*Husband VIII*: Honeybunch, do you really have to read letters from your ex-husbands at our first breakfast together?

*Claire*: I don't want to lose the overview.

*Husband VIII, pained*: But I, too, have my problems.

*He gets up and stares down into the town.*

*Claire*: Is your Porsche not working?

*Husband VIII*: A small town like this depresses me. Alright, the linden tree rustles, birds sing, the fountain murmurs, but they already did that half an hour ago. There is nothing whatsoever happening, neither with nature nor with the inhabitants, all is deep, carefree peace, satiety, coziness. No greatness, no tragedy. What is missing is the moral determination of a great age.

*The priest comes from the left, with a rifle slung over his shoulder. Over the table that the policeman sat at earlier, he spreads a white cloth with a black cross, leans the rifle against the wall of the hotel. Darkness.*

*Priest:* Come in, Ill, come into the sacristy.

*Ill enters from the left.*

*Priest:* It is dark here, but cool.

*Ill:* I do not want to disturb you, Reverend.

*Priest:* The house of God is open to all. *He notices Ill's gaze falling onto the rifle.* Don't be surprised about the weapon. The black panther of Mrs. Zachanassian is prowling about. Earlier it was here in the roof trusses, then in the Konradswweiler Forest, and now in Peters' barn.

*Ill:* I am looking for help.

*Priest:* Against what?

*Ill:* I am afraid.

*Priest:* Afraid? Of whom?

*Ill:* Of people.

*Priest:* That people will kill you, Ill?

*Ill:* They are hunting me like a wild animal.

*Priest:* One should not fear humans, but God, not the death of the body, but death of the soul.

*Ill:* My life is at stake.

*Priest:* Your eternal life.

*Ill:* Prosperity is on the rise.

*Priest:* The ghost of your conscience.

*Ill:* People are merry. The girls adorn themselves. The lads wear colourful shirts. The town is preparing for the festivities of my murder, and I am croaking of dread.

*Priest:* Positive, only positive, the things you are going through.

*Ill:* It is hell.

*Priest:* Hell lies within you. You are older than me and think you know human beings, but one only knows oneself. Because you betrayed a girl for money, many years ago, you believe people would now betray you for money as well. You draw conclusions from your own character about that of others. That's all too natural. The reason for our fear lies in our heart, in our sin. Once you realize that, you conquer what torments you, you receive weapons in order to do so.

*Ill:* Siemetshofers have bought a new dishwasher.

*Priest:* Don't worry about that.

*Ill:* On credit.

*Priest:* Worry about the immortality of your soul.

*Ill:* Stockers have bought an HD television.

*Priest:* Pray. Thoroughly examine your conscience. *The fire bell begins to sound.* Now I must see to my office and perform a baptism. The Bible, the liturgy, the book of psalms. The little child is starting to yell, it must be taken to safety, to the only glow that illuminates our world.

*A second bell begins to sound.*

*Ill:* A second bell?

*Priest:* The sound is magnificent, don't you think? Full and strong. Positive, only positive.

*Ill yells:* You too, Reverend! You too!

*Priest throws himself at Ill and clutches him:* Flee! We are weak, Christians and Heathens. Flee, the bell sounds in Gullen, the bell of betrayal. Flee, do not lead us to temptation by staying.

*Two shots ring out. Ill sinks to the ground, the priest crouches by him.*

*Priest:* Flee! Flee! *Ill gets up, takes the priest's rifle, exits to the left.*

*Claire:* Bobby, there's shooting.

*Butler:* Indeed, madam.

*Claire:* For what reason?

*Butler:* The panther has escaped.

*Claire:* Have they hit it?

*Butler:* It is lying dead in front of Ill's shop.

*Claire:* A pity about the animal. Play a dirge, Roby.

*A dirge is played on the guitar.*

*Butler:* The Gulleners are assembling to express their condolences to you, madam.

*Claire:* Let them.

*The butler exits. The teacher with the mixed choir enters from the right.*

*Teacher:* My dear, venerable lady.

*Claire:* So what do you want, teacher of Gullen?

*Teacher:* We have been saved from a great danger. The black panther was prowling forebodingly through our alleys. However, even if we breathe a sigh of relief, we nevertheless mourn the death of such a precious zoological rarity. The animal world is constantly impoverished where humans dwell, we certainly do not ignore this tragic dilemma. For this reason, we would like to sing a chorale. An ode of mourning, dear lady. Composed by Heinrich Schütz.

*Claire:* Fine, sing your ode of mourning. *The teacher begins to conduct. Ill enters from the right with a rifle.*

*Ill:* Be silent! *The Gulleners are startled into silence.*

*Ill:* This mourning song! Why are you singing this mourning song?

*Teacher:* But Mr. Ill, considering the black panther's death –

*Ill:* It is my death you are practising this song for, my death!

*Mayor:* Mr. Ill, I must ask you to control yourself.

*Ill:* Get out of here! Pack off home!

*The Gülleners retreat.*

*Claire:* Go for a bit of a pleasure drive in your Porsche, Hoby.

*Husband VIII:* But Honeybunch –

*Claire:* Get out of here!

*The husband leaves.*

*Ill:* Klara!

*Claire:* Alfred! Why are you disturbing these folks?

*Ill:* I am afraid, Klara.

*Claire:* Well, but it is kind of you. I do not like this constant singing. I already hated it in school.

*Ill:* Klara, please say that you are joking, that all this is not true, your demands. Please say it!

*Claire:* How strange, Alfred. These memories. I was on a balcony, too, back then, when we saw each other for the first time. And you stood there and looked up to me, the whole time. I was embarrassed and did not know what to do. I wanted to go inside into the dark room, and could not go.

*Ill:* I am desperate. I am capable of anything, I'm warning you, Klara. I am hell-bent, if you do not say now that everything is just a joke, a cruel joke. *He points the gun at her.*

*Claire:* And you did not move on, down below on the street. You stared up to me, almost darkly, almost angrily, as if you wanted to harm me, and yet your eyes were full of love.

*Ill lowers the gun.*

*Claire:* And then I left the balcony and came down to you. You did not greet me, you did not say a word, but you took my hand, and that's how we walked out of the town, into the fields.

*The Butler arrives front right.*

*Claire:* Lead me to my room, Bobby. I need to dictate something to you. Have to transfer a billion, after all.

*She is led to her room by the butler. From the rear, Koby and Loby come skipping in.*

*Koby and Loby:* The black panther is dead, the black panther is dead.

*The balcony disappears. Sound of a bell. The stage as at the beginning of the first act. The station. Only the timetable on the wall is new, not torn, and somewhere there hangs a big poster with a brilliant yellow sun: Travel to the South. And: Visit Paris. Also, some cranes can be noticed in the background between the houses, as well as some new roofs. The thundering, pounding noise of an express train rushing past. The station master salutes in front of the station. Ill arrives from the background with an old small suitcase in his hand, he looks around. Slowly, as if by chance, Gülleners come onto the scene from all sides. Ill hesitates, stops.*

*Mayor:* Greetings, Ill.

*All:* Greetings!

*Ill, hesitant:* Greetings.

*Teacher:* So where are you off to with that suitcase?

*All:* Where are you off to?

*Ill:* To the station.

*Mayor:* We'll accompany you.

*Citizen 1:* We'll accompany you.

*Citizen 2:* We'll accompany you.

*More and more Gülleners appear.*

*Ill:* You don't have to, you really don't. It's not a big deal.

*Mayor:* You are travelling, Ill?

*Ill:* I'm travelling.

*Policeman:* Where to, then?

*Ill:* I don't know. To Kalberstadt and then onward –

*Teacher:* Ah – and then onward.

*Ill:* To Australia if possible. I'll get the money together somehow. *He continues on towards the station.*

*Citizen 1:* To Australia!

*Citizen 2:* To Australia!

*Priest:* But why?

*Ill, embarrassed:* Well, one can't always live in the same place – year after year. *He begins to run, reaches the station. The others follow leisurely, surround him.*

*Mayor:* Emigrating to Australia. But that's ridiculous.

*Doctor:* And most dangerous for you.

*Teacher:* After all, one of the two little eunuchs emigrated to Australia, too.

*Policeman:* You are safest here.

*All:* Safest, safest.

*Ill looks around fearfully, like a hunted animal.*

*Ill, quietly:* I wrote to the governor in Kaffigen.

*Mayor:* Well, and?

*Ill:* No response.

*Teacher:* Your distrust is incomprehensible.



*Doctor:* Nobody wants to kill you.

*All:* Nobody, nobody.

*Ill:* The post office did not dispatch the letter.

*Priest:* Impossible.

*Mayor:* The postmaster is member of the town council.

*Teacher:* A man of honour.

*Citizen 1:* A man of honour!

*Citizen 2:* A man of honour!

*Ill:* Look at this. A poster: "Travel to the South".

*Doctor:* So what?

*Ill:* "Visit Paris".

*Teacher:* So what?

*Ill:* There is construction!

*Mayor:* So what?

*Ill:* You are becoming ever richer, ever more wealthy!

*All:* So what?

*Sound of a bell.*

*Teacher:* You can see right here how well-liked you are.

*Mayor:* The whole town is accompanying you.

*Citizen 1:* The whole town!

*Citizen 2:* The whole town!

*Ill:* I did not ask you to come.

*Citizen 2:* Well, we're allowed to say farewell to you, are we not?

*Mayor:* As old friends.

*All:* As old friends! As old friends!

*Sound of a train. The station master takes his signalling disk. On the left, the conductor appears as if he had just jumped off the train.*

*Conductor, with a drawn-out shout:* Gullen!

*Mayor:* That's your train.

*All:* Your train! Your train!

*Mayor:* Well, Ill, I wish you bon voyage.

*All:* Bon voyage, bon voyage!

*Doctor:* Have a nice life!

*All:* Have a nice life!

*The Gülleners crowd around Ill.*

*Mayor:* It is time. In God's name, get on the train to Kalberstadt now.

*Policeman:* And best of luck in Australia!

*All:* Best of luck, best of luck!

*Ill stands motionless, stares at his compatriots.*

*Ill, quietly:* Why are you all here?

*Policeman:* What do you still want?

*Station Master:* All aboard!

*Ill:* Why are you crowding around me?

*Mayor:* But we're not all crowding around you.

*Ill:* Give me space!

*Teacher:* But we have given you space.

*All:* We have given you space, we have given you space!

*Ill:* One of you will hold me back.

*Policeman:* Nonsense. You just have to get onto the train to see that that is nonsense.

*Ill:* Go away, all of you!

*Nobody moves. Some stand there with hands in pockets.*

*Mayor:* I don't know what you want. It is you who is going away. Get onto the train now.

*Ill:* Go away!

*Teacher:* Your fear is simply ludicrous.

*Ill falls to his knees.*

*Ill:* Why are you so close around me!

*Doctor:* The man has gone insane.

*Ill:* You want to hold me back.

*Mayor:* Get on the train already!

*All:* Get on the train already! Get on the train already!

*Silence.*

*Ill, quietly:* Someone will hold me back as I am getting onto the train.

*All, protesting:* Nobody! Nobody!

*Ill:* I know it.

*Policeman:* It is high time.

*Teacher:* Come on, do get on the train now, my good man.

*Ill: I know it! Someone will hold me back! Someone will hold me back!*

*Station Master: All aboard!*

*He lifts the signalling disk, the conductor acts jumping onto the train, and Ill covers his face with his hands, broken down, surrounded by the Gülleners.*

*Policeman: You see! Now it has chugged off without you!*

*They all leave Ill, broken down. They slowly walk to the back and disappear.*

*Ill: I am doomed!*

### Act III

*Peters' barn. Claire Zachanassian sits on the left in her sedan chair, immobile, in a bridal dress, white, with veil, etc. On the far left a ladder, also a hay waggon, an old hackney coach, straw, in the middle a small barrel. Above hang rags, rotten sacks, huge spider webs are spreading. The butler emerges from the back.*

*Butler:* The doctor and the teacher.

*Claire:* Let them come in.

*The doctor and the teacher appear, feel their way through the darkness, finally find the billionaire, bow. Both are now dressed in good, solid, bourgeois clothes, almost elegant.*

*Doctor and Teacher:* Madam.

*Claire, looking at them through her lorgnette:* Looking dusty, gentlemen.

*The two brush the dust off their clothes.*

*Teacher:* Pardon. We had to climb over an old hackney coach.

*Claire:* I retreated into Peters' barn. I need rest. The wedding just now in the Gullen cathedral tired me out. I'm not a spring chicken anymore, after all. Have a seat on a cask.

*Teacher:* Thank you kindly.

*He sits down. The doctor remains standing.*

*Claire:* It's humid here. Enough to suffocate. But I love this barn, the smell of hay, straw, and waggon grease. Memories. All the tools, the pitch fork, the hackney, the broken hay waggon were already here in my youth.

*Teacher:* A place for contemplation. *He wipes the sweat off his brow.*

*Claire:* The priest's sermon was uplifting.

*Teacher:* First Corinthians Thirteen.

*Claire:* And you did a good job, too, teacher, with the mixed choir. It sounded festive.

*Teacher:* Bach. From St. Mathew's Passion. I am still completely stunned. The world of glamour was present, the financial world, the film world ...

*Claire:* The worlds have buzzed off to the capital in their Rolls Royces. For the wedding feast.

*Doctor:* Madam, we do not want to intrude on your precious time more than necessary. Your husband will be waiting impatiently.

*Claire:* Hoby? I have sent him back to Geisalgasteig with his Porsche.

*Doctor, confused:* To Geisalgasteig?

*Claire:* My lawyers have already filed for divorce.

*Doctor:* But the wedding guests, madam?

*Claire:* Are used to it. My second shortest marriage. Only the one with Lord Ismael was even swifter. What brings you to me?

*Teacher:* We have come about the matter of Mr. III.

*Claire:* Oh, has he died?

*Teacher:* Madam! We do have our civilized principles.

*Claire:* So what do you want?

*Teacher:* Unfortunately, the Gülleners have acquired various things.

*Doctor:* Quite a lot of things.

*The two men wipe their brows.*

*Claire:* In debt?

*Teacher:* Hopelessly.

*Claire:* Despite the principles?

*Teacher:* We are only human.

*Doctor:* And must now pay our debts.

*Claire:* You know what to do.

*Teacher, courageously:* Mrs. Zachanassian. We are not poor, Madam, just forgotten. We need credit, trust, orders, and our economy, our culture will blossom. Güllen has things to offer: the Sunshine Steel Mill.

*Doctor:* Bockmann.

*Teacher:* The Wagner factories. Buy those, rehabilitate them financially, and Güllen will flourish. You should invest a hundred million tactically, at a good interest rate, not squander a billion!

*Claire:* I still own two more.

*Doctor:* Do not let us have waited all our lives in vain. We do not ask for alms, we offer a business deal.

*Claire:* Really. The deal would not be bad.

*Teacher:* Dear lady! I knew you would not abandon us!

*Claire:* It's just not doable. I cannot buy the Sunshine Steel Mill, because I already own it.

*Teacher:* You own it?

*Doctor:* And Bockmann?

*Teacher:* The Wagner factories?

*Claire:* Are mine as well. The factories, the Pückerried lowlands, Peters' barn, the town, street by street, house by house. I had my agents buy the whole mess and had them shut down the businesses. Your hope was a delusion, your perseverance senseless, your sacrifice was stupidity, your whole life was wasted.

*Silence.*

*Doctor:* But that is monstrous.

*Claire:* It was winter at that time, when I left this little town. I resolved to return, once upon a time. Now I am here. Now I make the conditions, dictate the deal. *Loudly.* Roby and Toby, take me to the Golden Apostle. Husband number nine has reported for duty with his books and his manuscripts.

*The two monsters emerge from the background and lift up the sedan chair.*

*Teacher:* Mrs. Zachanassian! Relinquish the ominous thoughts of revenge, do not drive us to the extreme, help these poor, weak, but honest people lead a life with a bit more dignity, find it in yourself to act from pure humanity!

*Claire:* Humanity, gentlemen, is made for the stockmarket of millionaires; with my financial power, one can afford a world order. The world made me into a whore, now I will make it into a bordello. Those who can't cough up the dough must endure things if they want to join the dance. You want to join the dance. Only those who pay are decent, and I do pay. Güllen for a murder, economic upswing for a dead body. Let's go, you two. *She is carried to the back.*

*Doctor:* My God, what shall we do?

*Teacher:* What our conscience dictates, Doctor Nüßlin.

*Change of scene to Ill's shop. New shop sign. New blinking counter, new cash register, more expensive goods. When anyone enters through the fake door, there is pompous ringing of bells. Mrs. Ill is behind the counter. Citizen 1 comes from the left, now a prosperous butcher, some blood stains on the new apron.*

*Citizen 1:* What a celebration. All of Güllen was watching it on the cathedral square.

*Mrs. Ill:* Little Klara deserves happiness after all that misery.

*Citizen 1:* Film actresses as bridesmaids. With breasts like this.

*Mrs. Ill:* That's fashionable today.

*Citizen 1:* Cigarettes.

*Mrs. Ill:* The green ones?

*Citizen 1:* Marlboros. And a cleaver.

*Mrs. Ill:* A butcher's cleaver?

*Citizen 1:* Exactly.

*Mrs. Ill:* Here you are, Mr. Hofbauer.

*Citizen 1:* Nice quality.

*Mrs. Ill:* How is business?

*Citizen 1:* I have personnel now.

*Mrs. Ill:* I'm hiring, too, on the first.

*Citizen 1 takes the cleaver. Citizen 2 comes in, now a well groomed business man.*

*Mrs. Ill:* Hello, Mr. Helmesberger. *Ms. Luise walks past, elegantly dressed.*

*Citizen 1:* She's got some nerve, to dress like that.

*Mrs. Ill:* Shameless.

*Citizen 1:* Aspirin, please. I partied at the Stockers last night.

*Mrs. Ill hands him a glass of water and the aspirin.*

*Citizen 1:* Journalists are everywhere.

*Citizen 2:* Snooping around the town.

*Citizen 1:* They'll come around here, too.

*Mrs. Ill:* We are simple people, Mr. Hofbauer. They don't want anything from us.

*Citizen 2:* They're grilling everybody.

*Citizen 1:* Just now they are interviewing the priest.

*Citizen 2:* He'll keep quiet, has always had a heart for us poor people. Chesterfields, please.

*Mrs. Ill:* Put it on your tab?

*Citizen 1:* On my tab. Your husband, Mrs. Ill? Haven't seen him in a good while.

*Mrs. Ill:* Upstairs. Walking around in his room, for days already.

*Citizen 1:* His bad conscience. He's done terribly by poor Mrs. Zachanassian.

*Mrs. Ill:* I'm suffering under it, too.

*Citizen 2:* To plunge a girl into misery. Disgusting. *Determined:* Mrs. Ill, I hope that your husband does not tattle when the journalists come.

*Mrs. Ill:* Of course not.

*Citizen 1:* Well, given his character.

*Mrs. Ill:* I have it tough, Mr. Hofbauer.

*Citizen 1:* If he wants to embarrass Klara, tell lies about how she is supposed to have made an offer on his death and such, which was only an expression of her indescribable suffering, we will have to intervene.

*Citizen 2:* Not because of the billion.

*Citizen 1:* Because of popular anger. God knows that brave Mrs. Zachanassian has gone through enough on account of him. *He looks around.* Is this the way up into the apartment?

*Mrs. Ill:* The only way up. Impractical. But we'll remodel in the spring.

*Citizen 1:* This is where I'll park myself, then.

*He stands by the stairs, arms crossed, holding the cleaver, calmly, like a guard. The teacher arrives.*

*Mrs. Ill:* Hello there. So nice to finally get a visit from the teacher.

*Teacher:* I am in need of a strong alcoholic beverage.

*Mrs. Ill:* Steinhäger?

*Teacher:* Just a little glass.

*Mrs. Ill:* For you too, Mr. Hofbauer?

*Citizen 1:* No, thanks. I still have to drive to Kaffigen with my Volkswagen. To buy piglets.

*Mrs. Ill:* And you, Mr. Helmesberger?

*Citizen 2:* Until these damned journalists have left town, I'm not drinking a drop.

*Mrs. Ill pours for the teacher.*

*Teacher:* Thank you. *Gulps down the drink.*

*Mrs. Ill:* You are shivering.

*Teacher:* I've been drinking too much lately.

*Mrs. Ill:* One more will do no harm. *She pour for him again.*

*Teacher:* Your husband?

*Mrs. Ill:* Upstairs. Always pacing back and forth.

*Teacher:* One more little glass. The last one. *Pours for himself.*

*The policeman arrives from the left.*

*Policeman:* The press is coming.

*Citizen 2:* Let's keep our traps shut. And watch out he doesn't come down.

*Citizen 1:* That's taken care of.

*The Gülleners take up positions on the right. The teacher has drunk half the bottle and remains standing at the shop counter. A reporter arrives.*

*Reporter:* Good evening, folks.

*Gülleners:* Hello there.

*Reporter:* First question: how do you feel, generally speaking?

*Citizen 1, embarrassed:* Of course we are happy about Mrs. Zachanassian's visit.

*Policeman:* Touched.

*Citizen 2:* Proud.

*Reporter:* Proud.

*Citizen 2:* Kläri is ours, after all.

*Reporter:* Second question to the woman behind the counter: they claim your husband preferred you over Claire Zachanassian.

*Silence.*

*Citizen 1:* Who made that claim?

*Reporter:* The two little fat blind guys with Mrs. Zachanassian.

*Silence.*

*Citizen 2, hesitantly:* What did the little guys tell you?



*Reporter:* Everything.

*Policeman:* Damn it.

*Silence.*

*Reporter:* They said Claire Zahanassian and the owner of this shop almost got married forty years ago. Is that right?

*Silence.*

*Mrs. Ill:* That's right.

*Reporter:* Where's Mr. Ill?

*Mrs. Ill:* In Kalberstadt.

*All:* In Kalberstadt.

*Reporter:* We can imagine the romance: Mr. Ill and Claire Zahanassian grow up together, maybe as neighbours, perhaps they go to school together, walks in the forest, the first kisses and so on, until Mr. Ill gets to know you, my dear, as what is new, unusual, passionate.

*Mrs. Ill:* It happened exactly how you tell it.

*Reporter:* Claire Zahanassian understands and, in her quiet, noble way renounces her rights, and you two marry –

*Mrs. Ill:* For love.

*The Gülleners, relieved:* For love.

*Reporter:* For love.

*The reporter writes indifferently in his notebook. The two eunuchs come from the right, led by the ear by Roby.*

*Koby and Loby, pleading:* We won't tell anything more, we won't tell anything more. *They are led to the background, where Toby is waiting for them with a whip.*

*Koby and Loby:* Not to Toby, not to Toby!

*Reporter:* Your husband, Mrs. Ill, does he not now and then ... I mean, it would be only human, if now and then he would have regrets.

*Mrs. Ill:* Money alone does not make one happy.

*Reporter:* Not happy.

*The son arrives from the left, wearing a suede leather jacket.*

*Mrs. Ill:* Our son Karl.

*Reporter:* A strapping young man. Does he know about the relationships ...

*Mrs. Ill:* We have no secrets in our family. My husband always says: what God knows, our children should also know.

*Reporter:* God knows. Children know.

*The daughter enters the shop wearing a tennis outfit, a tennis racket in her hand.*

*Mrs. Ill:* Our daughter Otilie.

*Reporter:* Charming.

*The Teacher pulls himself together:*

*Teacher:* Gülleners. I am your old teacher. I have quietly drunk my Steinhäger and remained silent about all this. But now I want to give a speech, about the visit of the old dame in Gullen. *He climbs onto the little cask left over from Peters' barn.*

*Citizen 1:* Have you gone mad?

*Citizen 2:* Stop it.

*Policeman:* Come down from that barrel!

*Teacher:* Gülleners! I want to proclaim the truth, even if our poverty should last eternally!

*Mrs. Ill:* You are drunk, teacher. You should be ashamed!

*Teacher:* Ashamed? You should be ashamed, woman, because you are about to betray your husband!

*Ill's Son:* Shut your trap!

*Citizen 2:* Get out!

*Teacher:* Fate has prospered ominously! As with Oedipus: swollen like a toad!

*Ill's Daughter, pleading:* Sir, please!

*Teacher:* You disappoint me, my daughter. It would be incumbent on you to speak out, and now your old teacher must do it with a thunderous voice!

*Citizen 1 pulls him down off the barrel.*

*Teacher:* I protest! In the face of the global public! Iniquitous things are afoot in Gullen!

*The Gülleners jump him, but at that moment Ill arrives from the right in old, torn clothes.*

*Ill:* What is afoot in my shop?

*The Gülleners pull away from the teacher and stare at Ill, frightened. Deathly silence.*

*Teacher:* The truth, Ill. I am telling the gentlemen of the press the truth. *He sways.* For I am a humanist.

*Ill:* Be silent.

*Teacher:* But humanity –

*Ill:* Sit down.

*Silent.*

*Teacher, sobered:* Sit. Humanity is supposed to sit down. Fine then, if you, too, betray the truth.

*He sits down on the cask, swaying.*

*Mr. Ill:* You must excuse him. The man is drunk.

*Reporter:* Mr. Ill?

*Mr. Ill:* What do you want from me?

*Reporter:* I am happy to finally meet you. I need some pictures. Could I trouble you? *He looks around.* Groceries, household goods, hardware - the best shot will be: you selling the cleaver.

*Ill, hesitantly:* The cleaver?

*Reporter:* Sell it to the butcher. He's holding it already. Give me that murderous implement for a minute, my good man. *He takes the cleaver from the hand of Citizen 1 and demonstrates.* You take the cleaver, weigh it in your hand, make a thoughtful face, you see, like this; and you, Mr. Ill, lean across the counter, cajole the butcher. Here we go. *He arranges positions.* More naturally, gentlemen, less stiffly. *He takes pictures.*

*Reporter:* May I ask you to put your arm around your wife's shoulders. The son on the left, the daughter on the right. And now, please beam with happiness, beam, beam, contentedly, from inside, beam in quiet joy. Yes, well beamed ... and died.

*A voice calls from off stage:* Zachanassian has a new guy. They're promenading in the Konradsweiler Forest.

*Reporter:* A new guy! That'll make a great cover for "Bunte" magazine!

*The reporter runs from the shop. Silence. Citizen 1 is still holding the cleaver.*

*Citizen 1, relieved:* We got lucky.

*Policeman:* You must excuse us, school master. If we still want to settle the affair amicably, the press cannot find out anything. Got it? *He leaves. Citizen 2 follows him, but stops in front of Ill before exiting.*

*Citizen 2:* Smart, very smart, not to talk nonsense. They wouldn't believe a word from a scoundrel like you, anyhow. *He leaves.*

*Citizen 1:* Now we'll even make it into the illustrated magazines, Ill.

*Ill:* Exactly.

*Citizen 1:* We'll be celebrities.

*Ill:* So to speak.

*Citizen 1:* A Jägermeister.

*Ill:* Here you are.

*Citizen 1:* Put it on my tab.

*Ill:* Of course.

*Citizen 1:* Let me speak openly: What you did to little Klara, only a villain would do. *He wants to go.*

*Ill:* The cleaver, Hofbauer.

*Citizen 1 hesitates, then gives him back the cleaver, leaves. Silence in the shop. The teacher is still sitting on his barrel.*

*Teacher:* You must excuse me. I have sampled a few Steinhäger, about two or three.

*Ill: Alright.*

*The family exits to the right.*

*Teacher: I meant to help you. But they beat me down, and you, too, did not want me to. Ill, pull yourself together, fight for your life, contact the press. You have no more time to lose.*

*Ill: I am not fighting anymore.*

*Teacher, taken aback: Say, have you lost your mind completely from the fear?*

*Ill: I realized that I do not have any right to, anymore.*

*Teacher: No right? Against this damned old dame, this arch-whore, who changes her men before our eyes, shamelessly, who gathers up our souls?*

*Ill: I am guilty for it all, in the end.*

*Teacher: Guilty?*

*Ill: I made Klara into what she is, and myself into what I am, a slimy, shifty huckster. What should I do, teacher of Gullen? Act the innocent? It all is my doing, the eunuchs, the butler, the coffin, the billion. I cannot help myself anymore, nor can I help any of you either.*

*The teacher gets up with difficulty, swaying.*

*Teacher: I'm sober, suddenly. He sways towards Ill. You are right. Completely. You are guilty of it all. And now I will tell you something, Alfred Ill, something fundamental. He stands very straight before Ill, swaying only slightly anymore. You will be killed. I know it, from the beginning, and you, too, have known it for a long time, even if nobody else in Gullen wants to acknowledge it. The temptation is too great and our poverty too abject. But I know even more than that. I, too, will participate. I feel how I am gradually becoming a murderer. My belief in humanity is powerless. And because I know it, I have become a drunkard. I am afraid, Ill, like you were afraid before. For now, I still know that to us, as well, one day an old dame will come, and that then the same thing will happen to us that is now happening to you; but soon, perhaps in only a few hours, I will no longer know it. Silence. Another bottle of Steinhäger. Ill puts a bottle in front of him, the teacher hesitates, then he resolutely takes the bottle.*

*Teacher: Put it on my tab. He walks out slowly. The family returns. Ill looks around his shop as if dreaming.*

*Ill: Everything's new. Looks modern around here now. Clean, tasteful. A shop like this was always my dream. He takes the tennis racket from his daughter's hand. You play tennis?*

*Ill's Daughter: I've taken a few lessons.*

*Ill: Early in the mornings, right? Instead of going to the unemployment office?*

*Ill's Daughter: All my friends play tennis.*

*Silence.*

*Ill: I saw you in a car, Karl, from my room.*

*Ill's Son: Just a used Mercedes, those are not all that expensive.*

*Ill: When did you learn to drive?*

*Silence.*

*Ill:* Instead of looking for work at the station in the hot sun?

*Ill's Son:* Sometimes. *Embarrassed, the son carries the small barrel on which the teacher had sat out to the left.*

*Ill:* I was looking for my Sunday clothes, and found a fur coat.

*Mrs. Ill:* Just to try it out.

*Silence.*

*Mrs. Ill:* Everyone goes into some debt, Fredi. You're the only one who's hysterical. Your fear is simply ridiculous. It is so clear that the affair will be resolved without the slightest harm coming to you. Little Klara won't go all the way, I know her, she has too good a heart for that.

*Ill's Daughter:* That's for certain, father.

*Ill's Son:* You have to realize that.

*Silence.*

*Ill, slowly:* It is Saturday evening. I would like to ride in your car, Karl, just one time. In our car.

*Ill's Son, uncertain:* You want to?

*Ill:* Put on your good clothes. We'll take a drive together.

*Mrs. Ill, uncertain:* I'm supposed to come, too? But that's not proper.

*Ill:* Why shouldn't it be proper? Put on your fur coat, then it'll be inaugurated on this occasion. I'll balance the cash meanwhile.

*Ill's wife and daughter exit to the right, the son to the left, Ill busies himself with the cash register. From the left, the mayor arrives with a rifle.*

*Mayor:* Good evening, Ill. Don't let me disturb you. I'm just paying you a quick visit.

*Ill:* By all means. *Silence.*

*Mayor:* I've brought you a rifle.

*Ill:* Thank you.

*Mayor:* It is loaded.

*Ill:* I don't need it.

*The mayor leans the rifle against the shop counter.*

*Mayor:* This evening we have the community assembly. In the Golden Apostle. The theater auditorium.

*Ill:* I'll be there.

*Mayor:* Everyone will be there. We are dealing with your case. We are in a certain bind.

*Ill:* I think so, too.

*Mayor:* The proposition will be rejected.

*Ill:* Possibly.

*Mayor:* Of course, one could be wrong.

*Ill:* Of course.

*Silence.*

*Mayor, cautiously:* In that case, would you accept the judgment, Ill? The press will be there.

*Ill:* The press?

*Mayor:* TV, too. A delicate situation, not just for you, but for us as well, believe me. As the birthplace of the lady and through her wedding in the cathedral we have become so well known that they are making a documentary about our ancient democratic institutions.

*Ill busies himself with the cash register:* You will not announce the lady's proposition publicly?

*Mayor:* Not explicitly – only those in the know will understand the meaning of the proceedings.

*Ill:* That it is about my life.

*Silence.*

*Mayor:* I advised the press that, possibly, Mrs. Zachanassian would create a foundation, and that you, Ill, had brokered this foundation as her boyfriend in youth. It has now become known that that's what you were. This way, your name is cleared for purely external purposes, whatever else happens.

*Ill:* That is sweet of you.

*Mayor:* I did not do it for your sake, but for that of your long-suffering, honest family, to be quite frank.

*Ill:* Understood.

*Mayor:* We play a fair game, you have to admit that. Up to now you have been silent. Good. But will you continue to be silent? If you want to talk, well, we'll have to do the whole thing without community assembly.

*Ill:* I understand.

*Mayor:* Well?

*Ill:* I am glad to hear an open threat.

*Mayor:* I am not threatening you, Ill, you are threatening us. If you are going to talk, well, we'll have to act. Beforehand.

*Ill:* I'll be silent.

*Mayor:* Whatever the decision of the assembly might be?

*Ill:* I will accept it.

*Mayor:* Alright.

*Silence.*

*Mayor:* I am glad to hear you agree to undergo the community trial, Ill. There is a certain glimmer of honour in you yet. But wouldn't it be better if we didn't even have to convene this community trial?

*Ill:* What do you mean to say?

*Mayor:* Earlier you said that you did not need the rifle. Perhaps now you do have a need for it after all.

*Silence.*

*Mayor:* In that case we could tell the lady that we convicted you, and would still receive the money. It has cost me several nights to make this suggestion, you can believe that. In a way, it would really be your duty now to end your life, to face the consequences of your actions as a man of honour, don't you think? Even just from a sense of community, from love for your home town. You can see our abject poverty, the misery, the hungry children ...

*Ill:* You are all doing quite well now.

*Mayor:* Ill!

*Ill:* Mr. Mayor! I have gone through hell. I saw all of you going into debt, felt death creep closer with every sign of growing prosperity. If you had spared me this fear, this terrible state of being afraid, everything would have turned out differently; we could talk differently, I would take the rifle. For the sake of all of you. But as it turned out, I locked myself in, I conquered my fear. Alone. It was hard, now it is done. There is no turning back. Now you must be my judges. I submit to your judgment, whatever it may be. For me that is justice, what it is for you, I don't know. May God grant that you do not fail in the face of your own judgment. You can kill me, I will not lament or protest, I will not defend myself, but I cannot take on your actions for you.

*Mayor, taking the rifle back:* Too bad. You are missing the chance of washing yourself clean, of becoming a halfway decent human being. But I suppose one cannot expect that of you.

*Ill:* Fire, Mr. Mayor. *He offers him the flame of the lighter, but the mayor waves it off and leaves.*

*Ill's wife arrives in her fur coat, his daughter in a red dress. The shop disappears. Ill's son puts four chairs onto the empty stage.*

*Ill:* Nice car. My whole life I've been toiling to achieve a bit of wealth, some comfort, a car like this for example, and now that it's been achieved I do want to know how it feels. Mathilde, you come into the back seat with me, and Otilie will sit next to Karl.

*They sit on the chairs and act out a car ride.*

*Ill's Son:* I can go a hundred and twenty.

*Ill:* Don't go so fast. I want to see the surroundings, the town where I lived, for almost sixty years. The old alleyways are clean, a lot has been renovated already. There's smoke from the chimneys, geraniums in front of the windows, sunflowers, roses in the gardens by the Goethe Gate, children's laughter, pairs of lovers everywhere. This new building on Brahms Square is very modern.

*Mrs. Ill:* Hodel Coffee is expanding.

*Ill's Daughter:* There's the doctor with his Mercedes 300.

*Ill:* The plains with the hills behind it, they look gilded today. We're diving into enormous shadows, and then there's light again. The cranes of the Wagner Works and the chimneys of Bockmann, like giants on the horizon.

*Ill's Son:* The town wants to buy them.

*Ill:* What?

*Ill's Son, louder:* The town wants to buy them. *He honks.*

*Mrs. Ill:* Strange vehicles.

*Ill's Son:* Drag bikes. Every apprentice has to have one these days.

*Ill's Daughter:* C'est terrible.

*Mrs. Ill:* Otilie is taking courses in French and English.

*Ill:* That's practical. There's Kübler's gin joint. I haven't been out in a long while.

*Ill's Son:* It'll become a fast food joint.

*Ill:* You have to speak louder at this speed.

*Ill's Son, louder:* It'll become a fast food joint. Of course, there goes Stocker, overtaking everyone with his Porsche.

*Ill:* You look elegant, Mathilde.

*Mrs. Ill:* Persian.

*Ill:* Like a lady.

*Mrs. Ill:* A bit expensive.

*Ill:* Your dress is beautiful, Otilie. But a bit risqué, don't you think?

*Ill's Daughter:* Oh come on, father. You should see my evening dress, then.

*Ill:* Drive through the Pückenried lowlands now. Beautiful land, flooded with evening light. I'm seeing it like for the first time today.

*Ill's Daughter:* A mood like in Adalbert Stifter's works.

*Ill:* In whose works?

*Mrs. Ill:* Otilie is also studying literature.

*Ill:* How genteel.

*Ill's Son:* Hofbauer with his Volkswagen. Returning from Kaffigen.

*Ill's Daughter:* With the piglets.

*Mrs. Ill:* Karl is driving safely. How elegantly he is now taking the curve. No need to be afraid.

*Ill's Son:* First gear. The street is uphill here..

*Ill:* I was always out of breath marching up it.

*Mrs. Ill:* I'm glad I have my fur coat. It is turning cool.



*Ill:* You drove the wrong way. This is the way to Beisenbach. You'll have to turn around and then turn left into the Konradswweiler Forest.

*The son honks.*

*Ill's Son:* Another deer. The creature doesn't even bolt from the street.

*Ill's Daughter:* Tame. There's no poaching anymore.

*Ill:* Stop under these trees.

*Ill's Son:* Here you go.

*Mrs. Ill:* Why, what do you want to do?

*Ill:* Walk through the forest. *Gets up.* The ringing of the bells from Gullen is nice. Quitting time.

*Ill's Son:* Four bells. Now it finally sounds homey.

*Ill:* Everything's yellow, now autumn is really here. Leaves on the ground like mounds of gold. *He shuffles into the forest.*

*Ill's Son:* We'll wait down by the Gullen bridge.

*Ill:* Not necessary. I'll walk to town through the forest. To the community assembly.

*Mrs. Ill:* Then we'll drive to Kalberstadt, Fredi, and go to the cinema.

*Ill's Daughter:* So long, Daddy.

*Mrs. Ill:* See you soon! See you soon!

*The family disappears with the chairs. Ill looks after them. He sits down on the wooden bench placed to the left. The wind is rustling. From the right, Roby and Toby come with the sedan chair, in it Claire Zachanassian in her usual dress. Roby carries a guitar on his back. Next to her, husband IX is walking, Nobel laureate, tall, slender, greyish hair and moustache. (Can always be played by the same actor.)*

*Claire:* Here's the Konradswweiler Forest, Roby and Toby, stop here. *She steps out of the sedan chair, looks at the forest through her lorgnette.* Bark beetles. The tree is dying. *She notices Ill.* Alfred! How nice to meet you here. I'm visiting my forest.

*Ill:* So then the Konradswweiler Forest also belongs to you?

*Claire:* Also. May I sit with you?

*Ill:* But of course. I just said farewell to my family. They are going to the movies. Karl has bought a car.

*Claire:* Progress. *She sits down to Ill's right.*

*Ill:* Ottilie is taking a course in literature, as well as English and French.

*Claire:* You see, they did develop a sense for ideals. Come here, Zoby, take a bow. My ninth husband. A Nobel laureate.

*Ill:* Very pleased to meet you.

*Claire:* He is especially peculiar when he does not think. Stop thinking for a bit, Zoby.

*Husband IX:* But Cutie ...

*Claire:* Don't act coyly.

*Husband IX:* Oh, alright then. *He stops thinking.*

*Claire:* You see, now he looks like a diplomat. Reminds me of Count Holk, only he did not write books. This one wants to retire, write his memoirs and manage my wealth.

*Ill:* Congratulations.

*Claire:* I don't feel right about it. One keeps a man for exhibition purposes, not for practical use. Go do research, Zoby, you'll find the historical ruin on the left.

*Husband IX goes to do research. Ill looks around.*

*Ill:* The two eunuchs?

*Claire:* They began to chatter. I had them sent away to Bangkok, into one of my crack houses. There they can smoke and dream. Soon the butler will follow them. I won't need him anymore, either. Should Roby play something for you on his guitar?

*Ill:* Yes, please.

*Claire:* He plays well, the pardoned murderer; I need him for my contemplative minutes. I hate CDs and Spotify.

*Ill:* "When the red sun sets into the sea off Capri"

*Claire:* You favourite song. I taught it to him.

*Ill:* You had – I mean, we had a child?

*Claire:* Certainly.

*Ill:* Was it a boy or a girl?

*Claire:* A girl.

*Ill:* And what name did you give her?

*Claire:* Genevieve.

*Ill:* Pretty name.

*Claire:* I saw the thing only once. At birth. Then it was taken away, by the Christian social services.

*Ill:* The eyes?

*Claire:* Weren't open yet.

*Ill:* The hair?

*Claire:* Black, I think, but it often is with newborns.

*Ill:* I guess that's so.

*Silence. Guitar playing.*

*Ill:* In whose care did she die?

*Claire:* Some people. I have forgotten their names.

*Ill:* Of what?

*Claire:* Meningitis. Or maybe something else. I received a card from the authorities.

*Ill:* In cases of death you can count on them.

*Silence.*

*Claire:* I have told you about our girl. Now tell me about me.

*Ill:* About you?

*Claire:* What I was like, when I was seventeen, when you loved me.

*Ill:* One time I had to search for you for a long time in Peters' barn, found you in the hackney coach in your undershirt, with a long straw between your lips.

*Claire:* You were strong and brave. You fought against the railroad worker who was stalking me. I wiped the blood from your face with my underskirt.

*The guitar stops playing.*

*Claire:* The ballad is over.

*Ill:* And now "Home on the Range".

*Claire:* Roby knows how to play that, too.

*Guitar playing resumes.*

*Ill:* Now the time has come. For the last time, we sit in our mean forest full of cuckoos and rustling wind. This evening the community is assembling. They will condemn me to death, and one of them will kill me. I do not know who will do it and where, I only know that I am coming to the end of a meaningless life.

*Claire:* I loved you. You betrayed me. But the dream of life, of love, of trust, this once real dream I have not forgotten. I want to resurrect it with my billions, change the past by destroying you.

*Ill:* I thank you for the wreaths, the chrysanthemums and roses. They look beautiful on the coffin in the Golden Apostle. Elegant.

*Claire:* I will have you brought to Capri in your coffin. I had a mausoleum built in the park of my palazzo. Surrounded by cypresses. With a view of the Mediterranean.

*Ill:* I only know it from pictures.

*Claire:* Deep blue. A grandiose panorama. There you will remain. With me.

*Ill:* Now "Home on the Range" is over, too.

*Husband IX returns.*

*Claire:* The Nobel laureate. Returning from his ruin. Well, Zoby?

*Husband IX:* Early Christian. Destroyed by the huns.

*Claire:* Too bad. Your arm. Roby and Toby, the sedan chair.

*She enters the sedan chair.*

*Claire:* Adieu, Alfred.

*Ill:* Adieu, Klara.

*The sedan chair is carried to the back. Ill remains seated on the bench.*

*Change of scene into the theatre auditorium. Theatre portal with the usual curtains and drapes, an inscription "Life is serious, art serene". The policeman comes from the back in a new, resplendent uniform, sits down next to Ill. A TV reporter arrives and begins to speak into his microphone, while the Gülleners are gathering. Everyone is in new festive clothes.*

*Reporter:* Ladies and gentlemen, after the shots in the birth house and the conversation with the priest we now witness a community event. We are arriving at the high point of the visit that Mrs. Claire Zachanassian is paying to her friendly and cozy little home town. While the famous lady is not herself present, the mayor will make an important declaration in her name. We are in the theatre auditorium of the Golden Apostle, the hotel where Goethe spent the night. The men are gathered on the stage, which normally serves the purpose of club events and the guest performances of the Kalberstadt theatre, according to old custom, as the mayor has just informed us. The women are in the audience seats – that, too, is tradition. There is a festive atmosphere, extraordinary anticipation, my colleagues from TV, reporters from all over the world, and now the mayor begins to speak.

*The reporter goes with his microphone towards the mayor, who is standing at centre stage, the men of Güllen around him in a semi-circle.*

*Mayor:* I bid the community of Güllen welcome. I open the assembly. Agenda item: a single one. I have the honour of announcing that Mrs. Claire Zachanassian, the daughter of our illustrious fellow citizen, the architect Gottfried Wäscher, intends to gift a billion to us. Five hundred million for the town, five hundred million distributed among all citizens. *Silence.*

*Reporter, voice lowered:* A huge sensation. A donation that with one stroke makes the inhabitants of the town into wealthy people, and that thus represents one of the greatest social experiments of our era. The community is stunned. There is complete silence. Emotion on all faces.

*Mayor:* I give the floor to the teacher. *The reporter approaches the teacher with his microphone.*

*Teacher:* Gülleners. We have to be clear that Mrs. Zachanassian intends something specific with this gift. What is this specific thing? She wants justice for her billion, justice itself. She wants our community to turn into a just one. This demand gives us pause. Were we not a just community already?

*Citizen 1:* Never!

*Citizen 2:* We tolerated a crime!

*Citizen 1:* A misjudgment!

*Citizen 2:* Perjury!

*A woman's voice:* A villain!

*Other voices:* Very true!

*Teacher:* Community of Güllen! This is the bitter truth: we tolerated injustice. Of course, I recognize the material possibilities that the billion offers to us, and yet: this is not about money, -

*huge applause* – this is not about wealth and good living, not about luxury, this is about the question whether we want to realize justice, and not only justice, but also all the ideals that make up the value of our Western civilization! *Huge applause*. Freedom is at stake when charity is violated, when the commandment to protect the weak is ignored, when marriage is slighted, when a court is deceived, when a young mother is plunged into misery. *Catcalls*. Well now, in God’s name, we must consider our ideals to be serious, deathly serious. *Huge applause*. Wealth only has meaning when from it grows wealth of mercy: but only those will receive mercy who hunger for it. Do you have this hunger, Güllener, this hunger of the spirit, and not just the other, profane one, the hunger of the body? Only if you refuse to endure evil, only if you can under no circumstances live in a world of injustice anymore, may you accept the billion from Mrs. Zachanassian and fulfill the condition that is attached to this donation. This, Güllener, I ask you to consider.

*Thunderous applause.*

*Reporter:* Ladies and gentlemen, you hear the applause. I am deeply moved. The speech by the teacher evidenced a moral greatness that we – unfortunately – do not find very often anymore today. Courageously, problems of a general kind were pointed out, injustices that occur in every community, everywhere, where humans are.

*Mayor:* Alfred III –

*Reporter:* The mayor’s turn to speak again.

*Mayor:* Alfred III, I have a question to pose to you.

*The policeman gives Ill a shove. Ill gets up. The reporter approaches him with the microphone.*

*Reporter:* And now the voice of the man whose suggestion led to the establishment of the Zachanassian Foundation, the voice of Alfred III, the benefactor’s boyfriend in her youth. Alfred III is a sturdy man of about sixty years, an upright Güllener of the old school, naturally very moved, grateful, full of quiet satisfaction.

*Mayor:* For your sake the foundation was offered to us, Alfred III. Are you aware of that?

*Ill quietly says something.*

*Reporter:* You have to speak up, good old man, so that our viewers can also understand.

*Ill:* Yes.

*Mayor:* Will you respect our decision regarding acceptance or rejection of the Claire Zachanassian Foundation?

*Ill:* I will respect it.

*Mayor:* Does anyone have a question to pose to Alfred III?

*Silence.*

*Mayor:* Does anyone have a remark to make about Mrs. Zachanassian’s foundation? *Silence.*

*Mayor:* Reverend?

*Silence.*

*Mayor:* Doctor?

*Silence.*

*Mayor:* The police? *Silence.*

*Mayor:* The political opposition?

*Silence.*

*Mayor:* I will proceed to the vote. Those who, with pure heart, want to realize justice, raise their hand. *Everyone except Ill raises their hand.*

*Reporter:* There is a rapt silence in the theatre auditorium. Nothing but a sea of raised hands, like an enormous conspiracy for a better, more just world. Only the old man sits motionless, overcome with joy. His goal is achieved, the foundation has been established thanks to the beneficence of the girlfriend of his youth.

*Mayor:* The foundation by Claire Zachanassian is accepted. Unanimously. Not for the sake of money –

*Community:* Not for the sake of money –

*Mayor:* but for the sake of justice –

*Community:* but for the sake of justice –

*Mayor:* and due to the urging of our conscience.

*Community:* and due to the urging of our conscience.

*Mayor:* For we cannot live if we tolerate a crime among us -

*Community:* For we cannot live if we tolerate a crime among us –

*Mayor:* which we must eradicate –

*Community:* which we must eradicate –

*Mayor:* so that our souls will not suffer damage –

*Community:* so that our souls will not suffer damage –

*Mayor:* nor our most sacred values.

*Community:* nor our most sacred values.

*Ill yells:* My God!

*All stand there with hands raised solemnly, but now there is breakdown in the TV camera.*

*Reporter:* Too bad, Mr. Mayor. The lighting malfunctioned. Please repeat the final vote.

*Mayor:* Once again?

*Reporter:* For TV.

*Mayor:* But of course.

*Reporter:* Lights working?

*A voice:* Working.

*Reporter:* Let's go then.

*The mayor strikes his pose.*

*Mayor:* Those who, with pure heart, want to realize justice, raise their hand. *All raise their hand.*

*Mayor:* The foundation by Claire Zachanassian is accepted. Unanimously. Not for the sake of money –

*Community:* Not for the sake of money –

*Mayor:* but for the sake of justice –

*Community:* but for the sake of justice –

*Mayor:* and due to the urging of our conscience.

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*Mayor:* For we cannot live if we tolerate a crime among us -

*Community:* For we cannot live if we tolerate a crime among us –

*Mayor:* which we must eradicate –

*Community:* which we must eradicate –

*Mayor:* so that our souls will not suffer damage –

*Community:* so that our souls will not suffer damage –

*Mayor:* nor our most sacred values.

*Community:* nor our most sacred values.

*Silence.*

*Reporter, quietly:* Ill! Well? *Silence, the reporter is disappointed:* Ok, your call. A shame that the cry of joy “my God” did not come, it was particularly impressive.

*Mayor:* The ladies and gentlemen of the press and TV are invited to a reception in the restaurant. You best leave the theatre auditorium through the stage exit. For the women, a tea will be served in the garden of the Golden Apostle.

*The reporter exits back right. The men remain immobile on the stage. Ill gets up, wants to leave.*

*Policeman:* Stay! *He pushes Ill back down onto the bench.*

*Ill:* You want to do it today?

*Policeman:* Of course.

*Ill:* I thought it would best happen at my place.

*Policeman:* It will happen here.

*Mayor:* Is no-one left in the auditorium? *Citizen 1 and Citizen 2 look into the rows of seats.*

*Citizen 1:* Nobody.

*Mayor:* In the gallery?

*Citizen 2:* Empty.

*Mayor:* Close the doors. Nobody is allowed to enter the auditorium anymore.

*The two go to close the doors.*

*Citizen 1: Closed.*

*Citizen 2: Closed.*

*Mayor: Extinguish the lights. The full moon is shining through the gallery windows. That's enough.*

*The stage turns dark. In the weak moonlight, the people can only be made out vaguely.*

*Mayor: Build a gauntlet. The Gülleners build a gauntlet, at the end of which the gymnast stands, now wearing elegant white trousers and a red sash over the athletic outfit.*

*Mayor: Reverend, would you please. The priest slowly walks towards Ill, sits down next to him.*

*Priest: Well, Ill, your difficult hour has come.*

*Ill: Let me have a Schnaps.*

*Priest: A Schnaps, Mr. Mayor.*

*Mayor, warmly: Of course. A particularly good one.*

*He hands the bottle to the priest, the policeman hands him a glass, the priest pours and gives the bottle back to the mayor.*

*Priest: As the prophet Amos once said –*

*Ill: Please don't. He drinks.*

*Priest: You are not afraid?*

*Ill: Not very much anymore. He drinks.*

*Priest, helpless: I will pray for you.*

*Ill: Pray for Güllen.*

*Ill drinks. The priest slowly gets up.*

*Priest: God have mercy on us. He slowly joins the ranks of the others.*

*Mayor: Rise, Alfred Ill. Ill hesitates.*

*Policeman: Get up, you bastard. He yanks him up.*

*Mayor: Constable, control yourself!*

*Policeman: Excuse me. I got carried away.*

*Mayor: Come this way, Alfred Ill.*

*Ill puts down the glass. Then he slowly walks to centre stage, turns his back to the audience.*

*Mayor: Enter the gauntlet. Ill hesitates.*

*Policeman: Come on, let's go.*

*Ill slowly walks into the gauntlet of silent men. At the end, the gymnast bars his way. Ill stops, turns around, sees the gauntlet closing mercilessly, sinks to his knees. The gauntlet turns into a*



*silent bulk of people who slowly crouch down. Silence. The reporter comes from front left. Lights go on.*

*Reporter: What's going on here, then?*

*The bulk loosens; the men gather in the background, mute. Only the doctor remains, kneeling before a body covered with a checkered table cloth typical for inns. The doctor gets up and takes off his stethoscope.*

*Doctor: Heart attack. Silence.*

*Mayor: Death from joy.*

*Reporter: Death from joy. Life writes the best stories. Back to work.*

*The reporter hurries to the back right. From the left, Claire Zachanassian arrives, followed by the butler. She sees the body, stops, then slowly walks to centre stage, turns towards the audience.*

*Claire: Bring him here.*

*Roby and Toby come with a stretcher, put Ill onto it and carry him to Claire's feet.*

*Claire, immobile: Uncover him, Bobby. The butler uncovers Ill's face. She regards it for a long time, immobile.*

*Claire: He is again as he was, a long time ago, the black panther. Cover him. The butler covers up the face again.*

*Claire: Carry him to the coffin. Roby and Toby carry the body out to the left.*

*Claire: Take me to my room, Bobby. Have the suitcases packed. We are travelling to Capri. The butler offers her his arm, she slowly walks out to the left, stops.*

*Claire: Mayor. From the back, emerging from the row of silent men, the mayor slowly comes forward.*

*Claire: The cheque. She hands him a paper and walks out with the butler.*