

THAT THING

By
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*Translated from the original Bulgarian
by Judith Sprostranova*

CHARACTER

DINKO - uniformed level-crossing keeper

VERA - his heavily pregnant wife, also a level-crossing keeper

PHILIP - the keeper of the neighbouring level-crossing

PIPPA - his wife, also a level-crossing keeper

SHEINO - their colleague

THE DRIVER - a locomotive driver

SCENE ONE

All the action takes place in the level-Dinko's house which is somewhere in the middle of the fields. The crossing-keepers usually work and live in such houses. At least this is true in the Balkans. The main character from time to time lowers and raises the barrier although no train passes. Why this is so we will understand all in good time. High up in the left hand corner of the back wall of the room there is a small door leading to the attic. There is a wooden ladder below the door. That is all there is to be seen. And that which we will not see we will not comment upon as life has proved that commentary on invisible things is practically pointless. We could even say that, if one thinks about it, invisible things themselves have no point. But, if one does not think, then maybe they do...

At the moment the stage is empty but from the attic there is an incredible cacophony of falling objects, breaking tiles etc., as well of the cries of the searchers, «Hold on!»,

«There's nothing here!», «Nothing here either!», «Behind the chimney! Behind the chimney!», «Oh, bugger it...There is it hiding?» etc. Sheino appears cautiously at the attic door and quickly descends the ladder.

DRIVER (peering through the doorway). Stop! Stop, don't go!
SHEINO I'm not going.
DRIVER Come back here!
SHEINO No.
DRIVER Where are you off to?
SHEINO Here. In the ambush. I'm going to surprise it with a blow from behind. (*Shouts from the ambush*). Get him! Go on!
PHILIP (*his head appears*). Stop shouting! There's nothing here.
DINKO There is! There is!
PHILIP If there is where is it?
DINKO I don't know but it's there!
PHILIP No, it isn't. Where's the driver?
DRIVER Here I am - I didn't see anything either. Maybe it's hiding?
PHILIP There's nothing here, I tell you.
DINKO There is! There isn't now but there is!
DRIVER Look here! Let's go over it all once more (*To Dinko*). Cousin, tell us all about it once more but calmly. From the beginning to the end. I'm a driver and I want to know the way clearly.
DINKO I told you, didn't I? I went to bed this evening and a little while later something started moving up in the attic: creak, creak, creak, creak and so on. All night long. At first I thought it was a cat. But it isn't. Cats are light on their feet and this was something heavy. At least sixty kilos.
SHEINO (*from the ambush*). How did you know it was sixty kilos?
DINKO I didn't know anything. I guessed from the creaking. (*Looks at his watch, lowers the barrier and stands to attention to meet the on-coming train as laid down in the rules.*)
DRIVER If it's sixty kilos it must be somebody.
DINKO I don't know what it is but it isn't somebody. What would somebody be doing in the attic at night. There's nothing up there. The interests of that thing aren't human. That thing is something which a strange thing. And frightening too, perhaps. Because everything strange becomes frightening when you don't know what it is. (*He raises the barrier.*)
SHEINO Of course it's frightening. Sixty kilos of something mysterious.
DINKO At least sixty.
SHEINO Well, if one step is sixty then if it has two legs it'll be one hundred and twenty.
DRIVER And if it has four that makes two hundred and forty.
SHEINO Let's hope it's only got one!
DINKO I can't say - I only hear it.

SHEINO That thing's not an animal. It's something ...well, let's not say what.

DINKO What is it?

SHEINO Go on.

DINKO At first I found it interesting. I waited for morning and then went up into the attic. I looked and looked - nothing. But during the night there it was again: creak-creak, creak-creak, creak-creak, creak-creak. I got up straight away and went up to the attic again. I switched the light on - nothing. I switched it off - and there it was again.

DRIVER Bloody hell!

DINKO I switched on the light again - nothing there!

SHEINO I told you. That thing is - better not to say what.

DINKO What?

SHEINO You'll understand. Go on!

DINKO The third night nothing happened. And on the fourth nothing happened. I felt a bit better about it and started to sleep properly again. Then, on the fifth night, there was a full moon. Such a bright night that sends shivers down your spine. I couldn't sleep at all. I went outside - the moon was round and clear like a ball of rock salt licked by heavenly cows. You could see everything in it: the mountains and ravines, the dried up river courses and seas, the ruins of ancient castles - I even saw a dried -up tree.

PHILIP You saw a tree?

DINKO A dried up one.

DRIVER Dried up because there's no life on the moon.

SHEINO It was a night like that when I met Christ.

DINKO The whole moon is like a Saharan desert, swept bare to the rocks by wind. And I started out along a dry river-bed. I went on and on and eventually reached the end of a dried up ocean. I continued over the floor of the ocean stepping on empty sea shells and again I heard it. Creak-creak, creak-creak. I stopped and again I heard, creak-creak, creak-creak. That thing was following me. It came nearer and stopped about three metres behind me.

SHEINO You saw it?

DINKO I saw nothing - I heard it.

SHEINO Well, then how did you know it was three metres away?

DINKO I could hear.

PHILIP Where did this happen?

DINKO Up there.

PHILIP Are you having us on?

DINKO It only started there. And when I opened my eyes, I heard it from the attic; creak-creak, creak-creak, creak-creak and so on. And since then its as though there's something wrong with me, I can't sleep or anything. Nine months already.

SHEINO It's the full moon. I still dream of Christ - with his coat collar turned up and asking me for the money for a cinema ticket .

PHILIP So it comes every evening?

DINKO Not every one. But when it doesn't come I still can't sleep.

DRIVER Why?
DINKO Because I wait for it.
DRIVER That's bad .
DINKO It really is bad ... and when I can't sleep I get up and start to torture myself.
PHILIP What do you torture yourself with?
DINKO With thoughts. And I've started to do things I'd rather not speakabout.
SHEINO What things?
DINKO No, I'm not going to tell you.
DRIVER Why?
DINKO I'm ashamed.
DRIVER Go on, tell us, we're all men together.
DINKO Well, here it is, this is what I started to do. (*He indicates an installation made up of metal pipes.*)
PHILIP Isn't that the central heating?
DINKO It was. It's a steam-driven clock now. This is the boiler and here are the driving mechanisms. It's very accurate but gets very hot.
PHILIP Never mind, you'll be fine in winter.
DINKO Of course. It takes four buckets of coal every twenty-four hours. And I keep on shovelling it in. What am I going to do all through the night?
PHILIP Well, you'll have to give up.
DINKO It's easy to say that but if you were in my place?
PHILIP Me, why me? Come on, why me?
DINKO Only for an example.
PHILIP No, you've got something in mind.
DINKO Nothing.
PHILIP Come on, it's not just a coincidence. There's something you know.
DINKO I don't know anything. I only said. I've already forgotten what it was I said. We were saying that I hear that thing.
SHEINO And your wife?
DINKO What?
SHEINO Does she hear it too?
DINKO She says not.
SHEINO Are you sure?
DINKO What do you mean by that?
SHEINO Nothing. I'm only making a guess.
DINKO What?
SHEINO Something, for instance...could it possibly be...
DINKO What?!
SHEINO It's only a guess.
PHILIP Sheino, if you're going to say it, say it. If not ...
SHEINO Calm down, Philip! Calm down, for when I look at your wife, someone could be up in your attic.

Suddenly Philip flies into a rage and goes for Sheino.

PHILIP So you've been looking at my wife, have you? I won't have it! Not from anyone! If I have to I'll throw myself in front of the fast train but I won't have it! I won't...

SHEINO (*frightened*). There aren't any trains ...

PHILIP No trains, is that so? Liar! Don't I see one every day? I'll kill you!

DINKO Wait! What's up with you, Philip? (*He pulls them apart.*)

DRIVER Sheino, are you going to say anything or shall we be off?

SHEINO I'll tell you - I wanted to say that someone, without Vera knowing anything about it, could, for example, be lurking around the place because of her. There's all sorts about these days.

DINKO Well, that never crossed my mind.

SHEINO Not to worry. You'd have heard about it only you'd have been the last to hear.

DINKO (*through the window*). Vera! Vera! Come in for a minute!

Vera enters.

VERA Have you caught it yet?

SHEINO What?

VERA How should I know? You're the ones doing the chasing.

SHEINO Go on, tell us what we are chasing?

DINKO Sheino, please! (*To Vera.*) Vera, that ... You went out somewhere this morning, didn't you?

VERA Yes, I went out.

DINKO Where did you go?

VERA For the milk.

DINKO From now on I'll be the one to fetch the milk.

SHEINO (*to Driver*). She's expecting yet she has to go for the milk....hmm?

DINKO And where did you go at lunchtime?

VERA For the bread.

DINKO Well, from now on I'll take care of that.

SHEINO She's expecting but goes to queue for bread.

DINKO And what about this afternoon? Where did you go then?

VERA To the ante-natal clinic.

DINKO No more ante-natal clinics for you! I'll go there instead.

SHEINO She's expecting yet goes to the ante-natal clinic.....

DINKO Well, on all your little trips here and there, haven't you noticed anything strange?

VERA No, like what?

DINKO Like someone looking at you, sort of... strangely.

VERA What are you getting at? What do you mean?

SHEINO Well, a man....

VERA I beg your pardon! (*She explodes.*) Oh! So that's why you're listening all night long! And you pretend to be making a clock. Just take a look

at the thermometer! 45 degrees in the shade! I'm dripping with sweat all day and all night because of that clock and all the time he suspects me and now he asks me why I go out! Of course I go out when it's like a furnace at home. I'll be going out at night too because it's not fit to live here. It's as hot as hell. All my plants have died, the cat's disappeared - and so will I if this goes on.

Pippa enters with a book under her arm.

PIPPA What's going on?
VERA He's suspicious of me! Crazy!
PIPPA Calm down! It's only ignorance. Calm down!
VERA I'll calm down all right... (*Weeps.*) Suspecting me of an affair with that thing of his... He should be ashamed.
PIPPA Now then, come along, stop it! It's all right. I know what it is.
SHEINO How do you know?
PIPPA From the operating instructions for the level-crossing.
DRIVER So, what is it?
PIPPA The barrier. The barrier creaks.
SHEINO Not any more. I've oiled it.
PIPPA Well, then something else is creaking.
SHEINO And the question is, what is it?
PIPPA I've looked it up in the encyclopedia Volume 6, page 243, letter M. «Mystery». It says there that in such circumstances 99 % of mysteries are realities.
DINKO So that leaves 1 % which are not.
PIPPA No, the 1 % are also reality but a reality as yet unknown to science.
DRIVER So if we catch it we can sell it to the scientists? We've got to find out how much they will pay for that thing.
SHEINO By weight, no doubt. We'll make enquiries once we've got it.
PIPPA What are you going to catch?
SHEINO That thing - that thing there.
PIPPA That thing doesn't exist. That thing is just creaking and we've got to find out what that creaking is.
DINKO Well, I think that thing creaks.
PIPPA That thing is nothing.
DINKO If it's nothing, why can I hear it?
VERA Well, I can't hear it. Even when Dinko hears it, I don't. As soon as I start to listen I fall asleep...
DRIVER Same with me. My work's like that. When I'm sitting in the driver's seat all I can hear is the locomotive. What else is there to hear - at those speeds nothing can get on to the train. Well, stowaways are different. Once a stowaway from Roman had locked himself in the toilet and he was in there for two weeks. He'd waited and waited. Well, without a ticket what else could he do? That toilet was engaged for two weeks until in the end a cleaner unlocked it. When the stowaway came out he was as thin as a rake - he'd lost twenty

kilograms and learnt the names of all the stations on the route by heart. I'm sure he'll never try to travel without a ticket again.

SHEINO If you ask me, he'll never go into the bog again either...

DRIVER That's hard...whatever anyone says the bog is the bog even though they call it the toilet on the trains.

DINKO Fine, it's clear what happened to him but what about me? Shall I catch a train and lock myself in the bog and ignore what's going on here?

VERA If that's what you want I can lock you in our bog. Two weeks in there and perhaps you'll calm down a bit.

PIPPA Whilst I'll bring him books about the problem and so by the end of two weeks he'll find the scientific explanation. Or still better - he can write «I can't hear anything» two thousand times. And whilst he's writing that he'll come to believe it' Write it often enough and it becomes true

PHILIP God almighty, it's getting hot!

PIPPA You write «I'm not hot» a thousand times and you'll feel cooler.

PHILIP I'm cooler already.

PIPPA You see! Come on Dinko! Here's an exercise book and pencil!

DINKO What? Write it one thousand times!?

PIPPA The sooner you start, the sooner you finish. I'll check the exercise book tomorrow.

DINKO What do you mean?

PIPPA Two thousand would be even better...

DINKO No, no. One thousand's enough. I'm starting...*(He starts to write, whispering the words to himself.)*

PIPPA That'll calm him down. Once Philip and I went through the same thing. Do you remember, Philip?

PHILIP No.

PIPPA I'll tell you all about it now, then you can repeat it so you can remember it as well.

PHILIP I've just remembered it.

PIPPA What do you remember?

PHILIP That it happened to us too.

PIPPA That's right. When I was taking exams in town Philip arranged for us to have a white cockerel for Christmas dinner.

PHILIP Yes.

PIPPA Now, was it for Christmas, or not?

PHILIP That's right.

PIPPA When was it for?

PHILIP It doesn't matter. It's the rest that's important.

PIPPA Yes. Philip kept the bird in a box while he was fattening it up and in the meantime our landlady went to the psychiatric clinic three times because she kept on hearing a cock crowing in the flat.

PHILIP Really?

PIPPA Don't you remember?

PHILIP I said I did - it was just like that

PIPPA But you had forgotten it, hadn't you?.

PHILIP Yes, but that's something that happened to the landlady not to us. Nothing could happen to us because you spent the whole night studying.

PIPPA I'm used to it - and I enjoy it . *(She clutches her books.)*

SHEINO One night I met Christ in town.

PIPPA Jesus?

SHEINO Yes.

DRIVER How did he look?

SHEINO Fine - a little older...

PHILIP Time is no respected of persons....

DINKO *(raising his head)*. Who did you meet?

PIPPA Get on with your writing, don't let us bother you.

SHEINO It must have been October, because he'd turned his coat collar up. And it was a magnificent full moon - all lit up like the Central Station. I was on a business trip and had nowhere to stay. I met him in the underpass near the station.

«What's in your bag?» he asked.

«A clean shirt.»

«In the Holy Scriptures it says that if you have two shirts you should give one to your neighbour.»

«So it does.»

«Well, give it then.» I gave him the shirt and he asked again. «What else does it say in the Holy Scriptures?»

«I can't remember exactly.»

«Doesn't it say that if someone strikes you on the cheek you should turn the other one?»

«It does.» So then he slapped me on the left cheek and said, «Now the right cheek.» I turned and he asked me again:

«So when they strike you on the right cheek what must you do?»

«Turn,» I shouted, «the left one!»

«So, do it!»

And once he'd started....he slapped the left, I turned the right, he slapped the right, I turned the left and so on until the morning....a full moon and all to be had was slaps.

DRIVER That's not true

SHEINO Why?

DRIVER Because Christ doesn't slap people.

SHEINO Have you ever met him?

DRIVER No.

SHEINO Once you have we'll talk again.

PHILIP What else is written in the Holy Scriptures?

SHEINO Why?

PHILIP Does it say «Do not covet your neighbour's wife?»

SHEINO It does.

PHILIP So why do you look at mine? *(Slaps him.)*

PIPPA Philip!

SHEINO *(insulted)*. Philip, don't you remember who I am? It's me, Sheino. Last year I took over your crossing for a whole week when you were called up by the Reserves.

PIPPA That's right. And Philip will be called up again...

PHILIP You took over?

SHEINO Yes, of course it was me. That's my job - I take over level-crossings for keepers on leave.

PHILIP Then why are you here now?

SHEINO Working. I'm taking over from Vera while she's on maternity leave. I'm going to be lowering and raising the barrier in her place.

DINKO Well, Vera and I live here...One week I do the night shift and Vera the day, the following week we swop...

PHILIP I know, you don't have to tell me. You know my wife and I work at the next crossing.

DINKO The bosses have arranged for Vera to take maternity leave and have sent Sheino in her place. So now the three of us live here. Of course, our line has been closed down but...

PHILIP I know it's been closed down.

DINKO There hasn't been a train for a year now yet we're constantly on duty. That's what the military want: the line to be maintained and manned in case of war. There, now it's time for the fast train. *(He gets up to lower the barrier.)*

PIPPA The fast train?

PHILIP *(nervously)*. You won't see it. Trains don't pass this way any more.

SHEINO *(to Dinko)*. I'll lower the barrier, you get on with your writing! *(He lowers the barrier)..*

PIPPA At least there's no noise here. It's train after train at our place. We're on leave at the moment and another couple of crossing-keepers have taken over whilst we're on holiday. It's a bit of a squash as we've only one bedroom but we sleep in shifts. When the woman is on night duty Philip and the man sleep and when he's on duty I sleep with his wife.

DRIVER *(impressed)*. Where do you sleep when she's on duty?

PIPPA I don't - I study. You have to go on studying your whole life long.

PHILIP Yes, true, but you have to know why you study.

PIPPA Because I have the time. Duty lasts twelve hours and six hours sleep is enough for me. The rest of the time I study. I've already taken my secondary school leaving certificate twice through part-time study and now I'm going to repeat them. Because repetition is the way to learn. In fact I've already repeated one course and got two diplomas for it.

VERA You'll have to get a new job with all those diplomas.

PIPPA I don't really want to. I'm used to this - I don't think I could manage without the barrier. And I'd certainly miss the trains - especially the fast one at five past ten. I love. I wait for it every day. I study and wait, study and wait. It's the sole purpose of my life.

PHILIP *(nervously)*. Don't say that...

VERA I understand her. Dinko was just like that with the night train and now it no longer passes he still listens all night long - until in the end he started to hear that thing.

PHILIP It's time we went to bed.

DRIVER Who with?

PHILIP Me with my colleague. His wife is on night duty.

DRIVER Aha - see what goes on at the crossings! And I must be off 'cos I'm on nights. So it's quite clear, isn't it? If that thing turns up Dinko will call us. We'll come over and we'll catch it.

DINKO Hang on, I'll see you out.

PIPPA You go on writing and don't let us disturb you. Vera will see us out.

VERA I'm coming now... *(Gets up and goes towards the door.)*

DINKO Right then, if anything happens I'll call you.

PIPPA No calling - writing! Write because I'll pop round tomorrow to see how much you've done. *(They go out.)*

DINKO I'm writing, writing! *(He writes and repeats the words aloud.)* I can't hear anything. I can't hear anything. I can't hear anything. I can't hear anything... What?

The attic door opens with a fearful creaking and closes again.

SCENE TWO

SHEINO Dinko? Vera? Are you up? *(He knocks on the door and enters).* My shift is over. I nearly missed lowering the barrier for the early morning train. Awful! When I think what might have happened...

DINKO Nothing.

SHEINO At the moment - yes, but if there's a war..... I can't bear to think about it.....how's it going with you?

DINKO Worse than war. When there's a war on at least you know who the enemy is, but here all you can hear is the creaking.

SHEINO That's it. The enemy never sleeps.

DINKO And neither do I. I've made another clock. A diesel one. Water-cooled. Both the clocks are working now and I can compare them.

SHEINO So, and...? How are they?

DINKO Fine.

DRIVER *(enters panting).* I've come straight from the station. I've got an idea! I've got this sack from the luggage office and we'll make a trap. And this whistle is off a steam engine. We'll fit it on to the boiler of the clock and connect it to the sack. When the cord tightens the whistle will go off.

VERA That's all we needed - a whistle.

DINKO The whistle will be connected to the clocks and sound on every hour

DRIVER Why?

DINKO For the idea.
DRIVER Why on the hour?
DINKO For the idea, don't you get it?
DRIVER What idea?
DINKO Of whistling on the hour. You still don't get it, do you?
DRIVER No, but I'll think about it.....

Philip enters.

PHILIP Have you caught it?
DRIVER Not yet but we will.
PHILIP When you do, come and tell me...
DRIVER Why should we tell you?
PHILIP That's what you say. I want to say that it's all right.
DRIVER All right? Don't you understand that during the night...
PHILIP I understood.
SHEINO When?
PHILIP Yesterday.
SHEINO How could you have understood yesterday when we're talking about last night?
PHILIP It doesn't matter. What does matter is what is actually happening.
DRIVER What is actually happening?
PHILIP The fact is that Dinko can't sleep.
SHEINO Because there is something.
PHILIP There are thousands of things in this life but people go to sleep every night. If they're not on shift work, of course.
DINKO I've gone over to oil. But that gets very hot too. These radiators are for water cooling. I must fill up with oil because the clock is losing. (*He pours oil from a container.*)
SHEINO Driver and I have a plan for catching it.
PHILIP Well done.
DRIVER We'll set up a trap. I got this sack from the luggage office and we'll set it up in the attic and with this cord we'll fix it to this engine whistle. And when the cord tightens, the whistle will blow on the hour.
SHEINO Why on the hour?
DRIVER For the idea.
SHEINO What idea?
DRIVER If you think about it you'll get it. I didn't get it straight away either. Come on, are you with us?
SHEINO Go up there?
DRIVER Where else?
SHEINO I'll help from the ambush.
DRIVER How? You're scared, aren't you?
SHEINO It's not that I'm scared. It's the principle of the thing. On principle I operate from an ambush. The ambush is the most convenient principle for action: you sit there hidden away and wait for the right moment. And when the

right moment comes - out you pop. And apart from that it has some advantages: if the right moment doesn't come, you needn't appear at all. Because it's much more convenient to appear at the right moment than at the wrong one. There are people who spend their whole life in an ambush without ever making an appearance. They are like a reserve of humankind who are awaiting the right moment, and sometimes they don't even wait but go off without making an appearance.

DRIVER So I've heard. And afterwards they rise from the grave to make up for it. Like that one here who creaks. It didn't appear when it should have done and is making up for it now...

SHEINO (*frightened*). Who told you that that was what it is?

DRIVER No one. It just crossed my mind, but let's hope it isn't that. If you catch one of those who can you pass it on to? The graveyard?

PHILIP I think there's nothing there. At least we haven't seen anything yet.

SHEINO We haven't because it's waiting in ambush. The world is full of ambushes and nobody knows what might appear and from where or even what might not appear.

Dinko drags in the sack, half-filled with straw.

SHEINO What's that straw?

DINKO Straw like straw. I've put it there so if that thing falls into the sack it won't get hurt.

DRIVER That's not a trap anymore, it's a straw bed. Are we trying to catch it put it to bed?

DINKO It might be something useful. When we don't know anything...

DRIVER Maybe we could sell it to the zoo. If they take it for a kind of monkey they might pay something. Sheino, are you coming?

SHEINO Yes. The only thing I've never hunted is a monkey but now I'm going to hunt monkeys...

They go up into the attic.

PHILIP Not again.

DINKO Again.

PHILIP It's not good. It's getting very hot.

DINKO It's the diesel clock. I'm forcing it because it's losing time.

PHILIP All night long?

DINKO Yes.

PHILIP Quiet steps you say?

DINKO That's right.

PHILIP Really quiet?

DINKO Really quiet.

PHILIP Almost too quiet to hear?

DINKO Yes, almost too quiet to hear.

PHILIP I could even say that they couldn't be heard at all.
DINKO And so could I if I didn't hear them.

The screech of a train whistle is heard. Sheino hangs from the attic and tentatively searches for the ladder with his foot.

DRIVER Sheino! Stop! Why are you running away? (*Grabs him.*)
SHEINO Let me go, I tell you. You've no right to hold me by force!
DRIVER What do you mean, hold you by force?
SHEINO You've got hold of me. (*He strikes Driver on the arms.*)
DRIVER Well, aren't you using force when you do that to me?
SHEINO It's not force, it's self-defence.
DRIVER Are you frightened of the pigeons?
SHEINO What pigeons?
DRIVER The ones that have frightened you.
SHEINO So you're not sure?
DRIVER I am sure, I saw them.
SHEINO Isn't it a monkey?
DRIVER You're the monkey. There's no monkey here.
SHEINO So it's pigeons! Well, are you going to let go of me at last?
DRIVER I'm letting you go.
SHEINO Let go then.
DRIVER I'm letting go. (*Sheino falls.*)
SHEINO Is that the way to let someone go?
DRIVER How else?
SHEINO More smoothly, how... (*To Philip, regaining his dignity.*) Did you find anything suspicious?
PHILIP No.
SHEINO Good. But be extra careful anyway. (*He goes up.*)
DINKO What do you thin? Shall we catch it?
PHILIP I don't think so.
DINKO Neither do I but I don't want to give up. Because giving up is the same as surrendering.
PHILIP And why not?
DINKO Why not surrender?
PHILIP Of course.
DINKO How can we surrender? Who to?
PHILIP You'll simply hear it without doing anything about it.
DINKO For how long?
PHILIP Until you get used to it.
DINKO By the time I get used to it I'll be in the mad-house.
PHILIP You'll like that. You'll be able to take your clocks with you.
DINKO And the coal?
PHILIP They've got their own there.
DINKO I don't know... mightn't they start to think things when they see them?

PHILIP They're used to it. Take them and off you go. I can get you in away.

DINKO Thanks. For now I'll wait a bit.

PHILIP You wait. I can still fix you up there later on.

Vera enters, busy with everyday housework. Driver and Sheino come down from the attic. They all sit and observe the whistle.

SHEINO This time we'll catch it.

DINKO I think so too.

DRIVER I never think at all because that's my job. The rails stretch out in front of me and neither I nor the passengers think about anything awful. Everyone knows where they are going and everyone concentrates on their final destination.

DINKO What final destination?

DRIVER How do you mean? The North Station.

DINKO And when you get there what do you do?

DRIVER What do you think...set off back the way we've come.

PHILIP What else?

DRIVER It's not important where you are going, it's that you are going. And yes, it's true, when there's a stop it's different. During a stop at Roman Station a woman got on the train with her lover and her husband threw himself under the train. And what do you think happened?

VERA What?

DINKO Oh, stop it, for god's sake! My wife is pregnant when all's said and done.

They all stop still and wait for that thing.

DRIVER What is important is that every stop comes to an end. So far there's never been a case in history of the Railways when a stop did not end. It's even considered to be one of our greatest achievements. That's why I always wait calmly in the train and wait to hear the green signal.

SHEINO How do you hear it? The green signal is for seeing, not hearing.

DRIVER It's for seeing but however hard I look at it there's no use.

Because, between you and me, I'm colour-blind. Green and red look just the same to me. I can't tell the difference and that's the truth.

SHEINO Not really! So how do you know when to go?

DRIVER Easy, I wait at the window until I hear one of the passengers saying: «Come on, you idiot, can't you see it's green?» and off I go. The voice of the people is the voice of God. No mistake.

At this moment Dinko gives a sharp tug on a cord hanging from the diesel clock and the deafening roar of a motor echoes out. They all put their hands over their ears and dash off.

SHEINO What's happened?
DINKO The starter motor of the diesel. We were chatting here and nobody noticed that one of the clocks had stopped.
PHILIP I feel cold.
DINKO You would feel cold, of course. Look the thermometer is down to 35.....*(He pours in some oil.)* This thing drinks oil, eh!
DRIVER Well, if that was a diesel locomotive that amount of oil would have got us to our destination by now.
PHILIP And all the way back...By now they're all in vests. Pippa enters with a business file and a large metal ladle.
PIPPA Have you got it?
DRIVER Not yet. Are you going to cook it with that ladle?
PIPPA It's a weapon.
SHEINO I think, however, that that thing is connected with foreign intelligence.
DINKO Foreign intelligence?
SHEINO Yes.
DINKO How so?
SHEINO Well, this is a military site, isn't it? After all we work for the army...
DINKO So?
SHEINO There are spies here. The enemy is very interested in the movement of trains.
PHILIP But there aren't any trains.
SHEINO There aren't any trains but there is a timetable. We raise the barrier according to a timetable, don't we? And the enemy notes it down. So if we catch it, we'll hand it straight to the army.
DRIVER Will they pay?
SHEINO The army doesn't pay. They only give awards.
DRIVER With what?
SHEINO With ranks. With one award you become a colonel and there's no need to hunt monkeys.
DRIVER There could be a whole network of spies with all the level crossings involved. Foreign intelligence usually has networks and they get people caught up in them as collaborators.
SHEINO The spies are amongst us, that's for sure.

They all look around at each other suspiciously.

SHEINO I met a spy at the station one night.
DRIVER How did you know he was a spy?
SHEINO Easy, it shows straight away...
DINKO And what was the spy doing?
SHEINO Asking questions and collecting information .
PHILIP What did he ask?
SHEINO He asked me when the night train arrived. That made me

suspicious immediately. And when he also asked when it left - then it all became clear. From that he at once knew how long the stop was. And all that information went over to the enemy straight away. But I tricked him by half an hour.

PHILIP So you misinformed him?

SHEINO And how. I went past an hour later - he'd missed the train and was waiting again at the station. And when he started to slap me - a fight.

VERA Why?

SHEINO Because I'd ruined his plans. He'd missed the train and the spy network was broken.

DINKO In that case, hadn't we better inform the army?

DRIVER By no means. Never get mixed up with the army! They'll close the crossing down and we'll be out of work.

DINKO Why would they close it?

DRIVER Because everything has been revealed, that's why. Why would the army need a crossing once the enemy knows when the barrier is raised and lowered?

SHEINO They'll close it. We let a whole UFO through because of them, so what else is left...

DINKO What UFO?

SHEINO I woke up one night and saw a whole UFO. And I phoned the mayor at once. It's like this, I said, a UFO....

«Where?»

«Over Roman Station.»

«Go back to bed at once,» he said, «if it's over Roman you can answer.»

«How can I go to bed,» I ask, «when I can see it?»

«Go to bed, because tomorrow the army'll turn up and make us redundant.»

DRIVER And what happened?

SHEINO Well, I went to bed, what else... and the following evening they landed.

DINKO The army?

SHEINO The UFO.

PIPPA Where?

SHEINO Behind the bog in the yard. And I was in it. They surrounded me and started to ask, «What's your name?» - I kept quiet. «Where does the mayor live?» - I still kept quiet. Once they realised that I wasn't going to say anything they swore at me and left. «Bye then, lads,» I called, «you've not seen me and I've not seen you!» ...and that was it. Strongly affected by Sheino's story they are all quiet and gaze up at the starry sky. Only the crickets can be heard. Driver tiptoes out.

DRIVER I'm off...

PHILIP We're all going. Whatever he catches he'll catch it without us and Dinko can call us.

DINKO You want to leave me on my own all night long?

PHILIP You want us to sleep here?

PIPPA I'm staying with my sister.

PHILIP And I'll stay if there's a bed for me.

DINKO There's a bed in the duty room.
DRIVER Well then, I'll stay too.
SHEINO We'll all fit in somehow. I'm going to make an ambush and sleep
in that.
PHILIP Give us some blankets and we'll go to bed.
VERA Right. We'll have to give them a good shake to get the mothballs
out.

*They all go outside to shake the blankets. Driver and Dinko
remain.*

DRIVER Now look here, cousin Dinko! Why don't you come to us at the
Railways? At the beginning you'll be a brakeman until you get used to it and
then we'll fix you up with something more responsible. The important thing is to
be on the move. If you're on the move nothing can get on the train and turn your
world upside down. Well?
DINKO I've thought about that, cousin Driver. And I don't think that's the
answer. If I'd started with the Railways before I'd heard that thing then it might
have worked. But now I've heard it, even if I never hear it again, I'll go on
thinking about it. *(The others enter.)*
SHEINO I'll sleep here.... just as though there's no one here.
PHILIP *(To Pippa)*. Where are we going to sleep?
PIPPA I'm sleeping with Vera.
PHILIP And what about me?
PIPPA You... *(She makes secret gestures indicating that he should sleep
with Dinko.)*

*Philip lies next to Dinko. Driver is amazed once again and shakes his
head sceptically. The stage darkens and everyone seems to be asleep.*

PHILIP *(whispers)*. Dinko, why don't you try my suggestion, eh?
DINKO What suggestion?
PHILIP Mine.
DINKO What are you talking about?
PHILIP You know - that thing- try not to hear it. Have you tried that?
DINKO I tried. I've tried everything. Earplugs, wrapping a blanket round
my head - still I hear it and that's that. Totally helpless, Phil, could anyone be
more helpless?
PHILIP They could.
DINKO What?
PHILIP You'll find out all in good time. Goodnight! *(He turns
away. Dinko gets in with Driver.)*
DINKO Driver! Shhhhhh....! Driver, are you asleep?
DRIVER *(startled)*. Where are we? Roman Station?
DINKO No, we're here. I only wanted to ask you something.
DRIVER *(a little more awake)*. What? Have you decided about working for

the Railways?

DINKO No, not that. Tell me what happened to the one that threw himself under the train.

DRIVER Ahhh, the one that threw himself under the train, is it? Well, what happened... nothing. The station staff pulled him out afterwards.

DINKO What, piece by piece?

DRIVER No, in one piece. And with a cold beer from the buffet car he was as right as rain.

DINKO What do you mean, beer? Hadn't he been run over?

DRIVER How? The train wasn't moving. Come on, goodnight now! *(He turns over and sleeps.)*

DINKO There's strange things go on in this world. You seem to have got to the end and then it all starts again. You have a cold beer and there's no dying, none...

SCENE THREE

Dark before dawn. Suddenly the piercing sound of the engine whistle cuts through the silence. Shouting is heard, banging of kitchen utensils etc. Silhouettes are seen rushing about in the dark. In other words - chaos reigns!

DRIVER *(yells)*. I've got it! Quick!

PHILIP I'm coming, coming!

DRIVER Come on!

SHEINO Hold on to it! I'll get it from behind

DRIVER The sticks! Get the sticks!

SHEINO Go on, go on ... I'll wait for it in the ambush . *(He hides.)*

VERA What is it - what's going on, Pippa?

PIPPA Vera, you go outside. This here isn't for pregnant women. *(Escorts her out and returns.)*

DRIVER Faster! Faster!

PHILIP Go on, go on.

They go up the ladder.

DRIVER Faster! Sheino?

SHEINO *(From the ambush)*. Thrash it, thrash it!! That's right! Hit it! Hold it fast! That's it! Well done! Tie it up tight! Kick it! Thrash it, thrash it, thrash it!

At last the tied up sack is lowered from the attic. Something is struggling in the sack. Driver and Philip jump from the attic on to the sack and start struggling with it.

SHEINO *(from the ambush)*. Hit it! Hit it!

DRIVER It's not moving any more.
SHEINO Is it dead?
DRIVER Dead.
SHEINO (*leaves the ambush*). Now give me that ladle and you'll see what I
can do! (*He takes the ladle and starts to beat the sack furiously.*) There and there
and there! At long last Dinko will sleep easy.
PIPPA Where is he?
SHEINO He was here.
PIPPA But he's not here now.
PHILIP Really?
DRIVER Ah?
SHEINO Perhaps he's in the ambush?
PIPPA Dinko?!
DINKO (*from the sack*). Ow...ow...!
SHEINO Oh!

Philip unties the sack. Inside, motionless and silent, lies Dinko.

PHILIP Are you OK?
DRIVER It's a good thing you shouted out. I was just about to start again.
PIPPA Look at the dents in his head.
SHEINO It's always been like that. I even think it's straightened out a bit.
DRIVER Dinko, were you inside all the time?
DINKO (*starting to speak again*). I don't know. I haven't been out
anywhere.
PIPPA Why didn't you shout?
DINKO When? I opened my mouth and bam - the ladle. I opened it again
and again - bam with the ladle...
SHEINO It's Philips' ladle. Pippa brought it.
PIPPA Yes, but who was using it?
SHEINO You told me he was dead, didn't you?
DRIVER That's right. And what were you doing in the sack anyway?
DINKO Well, I don't know... I couldn't sleep at all so in the morning I
decided to have a look around and see what was happening. I went up and
peeped inside - own again something pushed me from behind and...
PIPPA The laws of Physics pushed you. When you don't know them,
that's what can happen...

Vera enters.

VERA What's going on here?
SHEINO Nothing.
VERA Dinko, have you been fighting with that thing?
DINKO No, I haven't.
VERA And where is it?
DRIVER It's not here.

VERA Well, who beat you up?
DINKO I don't exactly know. It was anonymous...
VERA Didn't you see?
DINKO How could I see through the sack?
VERA You've been in the sack? Who put you in there?
DINKO No one. I got in myself.
VERA Why?
DINKO To see what was in it.
VERA And what was?
DINKO Can't you see... all right, it was straw. It's as though I've known it all beforehand. Take a look at the ladle now.
PIPPA Doesn't matter. We'll buy a new one.
SHEINO I only hit lightly, it's those ladles, they're very poorly made these days. In the old days ladles were really strong... you could hit anything with a ladle and they didn't bend in the slightest.
VERA (*shivers*). So it was you that beat him up?
SHEINO Only with the ladle.
VERA So now I'll only use the ladle. (*Which she grabs.*)
SHEINO They all beat him.
VERA And I'll beat them all. (*Chases them.*)
DINKO Vera, I'll explain.
VERA What will you explain? It's all quite clear! (*Lashes out with the ladle.*)
PHILIP We only beat him for his own good.
DINKO You beat me for my own good!
PIPPA Vera - I'll explain. They beat Dinko because he hasn't got his school certificate. If he had he'd have known that when he bent down over the sack his centre of gravity would shift.
PHILIP I'll shift his centre of gravity! I know all about those who put things back in place. I've even given them a call. They'll come and get him now and put everything in place for him.
VERA What will they put in place for him? Has he dislocated something?
DINKO No, no. There's nothing wrong with him.
PHILIP I know there's nothing wrong with you and that's why I called them
DINKO Will they give me an injection?
PHILIP No, you'll not feel a thing except the final result. They're really very gentle. All you need to do is say «Philip sent me». They know... they've even got a car for you.
VERA Why a car? Can't he walk?
SHEINO Yes, he can but why walk when there's a car?
DINKO That's right. If there's a car, why... What car?
PHILIP A white one. A comfortable one. There's even space to lie down...
SHEINO What are you wondering about, Dinko, man? If I was in your place I'd be there already.

DINKO What's stopping you then?
SHEINO Nothing - I'll come with you. For support.
PHILIP They usually ask the question «To be or not to be?» You know
the right answer, don't you?
PIPPA Of course he knows. To be.
PHILIP It's not that.
DINKO Then - Not to be?
PHILIP And that's not it. The right answer is, «I've never thought about
that question.»
SHEINO Have you got that?
DINKO I've got it.
SHEINO Right, if you've got it, let's go.
VERA When will you be back?
DINKO Straight away - once they let me go. You take my place at the
crossing and keep the boiler stoked up with coal. The clocks mustn't stop
because life goes on and if the clocks aren't there you won't know how it's going.
And keep the oil topped up too.
VERA I will. The forecast on TV said it was going to be cooler - and
don't you be long!

They take Dinko out and the sound of an ambulance is heard.

PHILIP *(relieved)*. They've gone.
VERA Dinko isn't well. They beat him about the head so much that he
doesn't make sense when he's talking: to be, not to be...
PIPPA That's about something else.
VERA What else? Everything starts with that thing. From then on
everything's gone wrong.
DRIVER Why didn't I understand where my cousin's gone?
VERA What didn't you understand? He's gone to...there and he'll come
back.
DRIVER To my mind there's no point in it. He should have come straight
to work for the Railways with me. It's just like a madhouse there too but only on
public holidays.
PHILIP When he comes back we'll send him to you.
DRIVER Of course. The only place for someone like him is the Railways.
There's nowhere else as suitable. And the rails are rails and the speed is speed
and the destination is your destination... how sensibly it's all been thought out!
You go thinking about it there's no point in it all but on the other hand if you
don't think about it there is. The Railway's the only place for Dinko.
PHILIP It's not bad where I sent him.
VERA Where did you send him?
PHILIP To some of my people.
VERA If they're your people why don't you go?
PHILIP It's his turn this time.

VERA Do you think that I don't realise what's going on? Why did you beat Dinko when he was in the sack? Because he hears things which you pretend not to hear, that's it, isn't it?

PHILIP I haven't heard anything and I don't want to hear anything.

VERA So, if you don't want to hear something then he hasn't the right to hear it, is that so? For that matter I don't hear anything either but I believe him. Look at the clocks he's made! In the old days we never noticed life was passing by and now we do notice... and what have you achieved so far? Go on, tell me!

PHILIP I raise and lower the barrier...

VERA And Driver? All he does is travel like a parcel on the train.....

DRIVER I drive them.

VERA Drive them, yes... but along the rails. You just try to go off the rails and then we'll see what happens.

DRIVER I'll go to jail, what...

VERA I want Dinko back here. Immediately!

PIPPA He'll be back. When the seminar is over and they let him go. All they do is listen to lectures there.

VERA Dinko doesn't need lectures. You've listened to so many lectures but could you make a boiler like that? Look at it. One hundred and fifty atmospheres it goes up to.

*She looks at the pressure gauge and suddenly clutches her belly.
They all rush towards her.*

PIPPA Vera, what is it?

VERA The pressure's right down to almost nothing. Quickly - coal!

DRIVER Now, now... Phil - get those buckets!

They form a chain and pass the buckets along.

DRIVER More coal! Come on! How much of this stuff have I carried on the railway millions of tons. Millions of miles I've travelled. Backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards - Stop! The pressure's going up. Take a break.

They sit.

DRIVER We've done a lot of work on the railway, lots... and we're still doing it. Just take a look at the last shift but one. There I set off carrying sand and returned with wood. Then the last shift I set off with wood and brought wood back. There's no end to the work of the Railways.

PHILIP Right. But if the train's a long one you get even more done. You'd be able to take the sand and wood in one go and...

DRIVER ...in one go bring them back.

PHILIP Yes.

DRIVER There's no point in that, Philip. They pay me for each trip.

VERA Here you are, here you are!

DRIVER Coal alone is not enough. Once, on the National Day of the Railways, our minister said this, «Our locomotives are like the locomotive of history and their whistles will signal each historical event until we reach the victorious end. You mustn't spare yourselves, history needs sacrifices.» So what did I do? I had a steam locomotive then and when I sounded the whistle from one end of history to the other... I shovelled in coal and I shovelled ... the whistle sounded throughout history... the whole of history was all because of me. And there I was, shovelling coal, shovelling coal... and all at once...

At this moment the safety valve of the boiler explodes and the room with steam.

PHILIP What's going on?
DRIVER The safety valve's gone, what else?
PIPPA Wait! I heard something.
PHILIP I can hear something, the devil take it!
VERA And I can hear it!
PHILIP You?
VERA Quiet!
PHILIP Behind the door!
PHILIP It's over. PIPPA, the lamp.

On the floor lies the motionless body of Dinko.

VERA Aaaahhhh...! Dinko!
PIPPA Dinko!
PHILIP Oh, god!
VERA He's not breathing.
DRIVER Has he got a pulse?
PHILIP Very weak.
DRIVER It's enough. We could have lost him....
VERA Oh, god, they've killed him! Killed him!
DRIVER He's alive. He's alive although I hardly dare to say it.
VERA Dinko!
DINKO *(regaining consciousness)*. What?
DRIVER Are you alive, mate?
DINKO Why do you ask?
VERA I know why. So they can thrash you again, if you're alive. Because they've decided to thrash you until you're dead.
DRIVER What do you mean - dead?
VERA Dead from beating, of course. Twice so far today and the sun hasn't gone down yet. Who knows what'll have happened by sunset.
DRIVER Well, it's for his own good, isn't it?

They start to bandage up Dinko.

PHILIP And why did you come back?
DINKO No room in the car.
PHILIP How's that? I told them.
DINKO You told them but only about one place... There was a place but Sheino took that.
PHILIP Why Sheino?
DINKO Ask him.
PHILIP Didn't you ask him?
DINKO I asked him but he didn't say. Only when that man asked «which one of you?» Sheino said, «I'm in an ambush» and they took into the car.
VERA But I thought that there was nothing wrong with Sheino.
PHILIP That's how he appears - the better a man appears, the worse it is.
DINKO And the opposite...
DRIVER You, for example, look fine, don't you?
PHILIP We're talking about Sheino, not me. But why did he push in? If he'd let me know before I could have had him in mind. Didn't you tell them that I'd sent you?
DINKO I told them.
PHILIP And they?
DINKO They sent you their regards and asked how you were.
PHILIP And so... how am I?
DRIVER Just fine. I told you.
DINKO Then if he's fine, they said, they'll take him again but there's no place at the moment.
PHILIP Is that what they said?
DINKO Just that.
PHILIP They're crazy.
DRIVER Never mind, as long as we're OK.
DINKO And I'm fine. Now I'm all bandaged up I won't hear anything even if there's an earthquake. I won't hear it, I won't hear it, I won't hear it, I won't hear it, I won't hear it, I won't hear it, I won't hear it, I won't

SCENE FOUR

The next day. A cock crows. There's knocking at the door.

DINKO Who is it?
PHILIP *(outside)*. It's us, Driver and me.
DINKO *(opening the door)*. Come in.

Philip and Driver enter carrying a large chest wrapped up like a parcel.

PHILIP There's a parcel - for you.

DINKO For me?
PHILIP Yes, it came by train.
DINKO Who's it from?
PHILIP Doesn't say.
DINKO What do you mean, it doesn't say?
PHILIP Just that. It doesn't say.
DRIVER We wondered about it too. It only has two labels saying «fragile
«and «this way up».
DINKO (*studying the parcel*). How heavy is it?
PHILIP Well, around sixty kilograms....
DINKO No! I'm not expecting a parcel like that from anywhere.
PHILIP Well, here it is. Sixty kilograms.
DINKO It says ten here.
DRIVER True. It really says ten.
DINKO Ten but it weighs sixty.
PHILIP There's nothing we can do about it. If it had sixty written on it but
weighed only ten we could make a claim.
DINKO And now we can't?
PHILIP We can, but we'd have to pay for another fifty kilograms.
DINKO Didn't they weigh it there?
DRIVER Of course they did.
DINKO And....
DRIVER Perhaps it was ten then.
DINKO And now it is sixty?
DRIVER Well. Just one of those things...
DINKO No, there's something going on here. First - I'm not expecting a
parcel from anyone. Second - it says ten but weighs sixty and third - no sender.
DRIVER That's right, but there is a name. If it has your name, there's
nothing you can do about it. (*He thumps the parcel with his fist. From inside two
thumps are heard. The three of them draw back, frightened.*)
DINKO I told you there was something....
DRIVER Oh, mother of god!
DINKO Let me try. (*He knocks twice and the parcel replies with two
knocks.*) There's something in here.
PHILIP That's it. There's nothing you can do about it.
DRIVER And now?
PHILIP I don't know. I want nothing to do with it.
DINKO If you don't want anything to do with it why did you bring it
here?
PHILIP Because it's got your name on it. But I'm having no more to do
with it.

Sits in the corner and demonstratively folds his arms.

DRIVER I know what's in it.
DINKO And so do I. But I don't believe it.

PHILIP That doesn't interest me.
DRIVER But you know what it is, don't you?
PHILIP No, what is it?
DRIVER Are you going to be a part of it?
PHILIP (*hesitates*). Ok, I'm in. What is it?
DRIVER What you thought it was.
PHILIP Then I'm having nothing to do with it. But I'll tell you what to do.
DINKO What?
PHILIP Write another address on the parcel and send it off again. That
way we'll get rid of it.
DRIVER Where shall we send it to?
PHILIP There. To them....
DINKO Whose name shall we put?
PHILIP Put Sheino's name and they'll know what . And we're not
responsible for anything, that is, you're not responsible because I'm having
nothing to do with this.
DRIVER That's sensible even though I still haven't really understood
exactly where Sheino is.
PHILIP Exactly where he should be.
DRIVER And there's something else not clear. I don't understand why it's
arrived in a parcel when it was in the attic.
DINKO And do you understand why it arrived in the attic?
DRIVER No.
DINKO Then why don't you ask about that - not why it's arrived in a
parcel?
DRIVER Well, I sort of accepted it in the attic.
PHILIP And you'll accept it now.
DINKO Well, I want to open it first.
PHILIP I thought you didn't want to.
DINKO I do now.
DRIVER So do I - and at the same time I don't.
PHILIP If we open it it'll escape. And we won't catch it again, all we'll do
is chase it.
DINKO At least we'll have seen it.
DRIVER Why don't we just make a hole in it?
DINKO That's right, we'll make a hole in it and we'll see it . (*He makes a
hole*). Ready!
PHILIP Come on, take a look then we can send it on.
DINKO Driver, do you want to take a look?
DRIVER I'm colour-blind. And if it's coloured I won't see anything. I paid
so much for a colour TV and what happened? It's still black and white....
PHILIP At least your wife watches in colour.
DRIVER No, she doesn't. She sees it in black and white too.
PHILIP Does the shop know that you're colour-blind?
DRIVER They do.
PHILIP They've fobbed you off with a black and white set.

DINKO Philip, why don't you take a look?
PHILIP I told you, I'm taking no part in all of this.
DINKO Fine. I'll have a look. (*He takes a look, timidly at first, then with more confidence.*)
DRIVER What is it?
DINKO It's dark.
DRIVER Let me try. (*He peers in*). I can't see anything.
PHILIP Come on, let's send it off.
DINKO Shall we try with a stick?
PHILIP Why?
DRIVER To find out if... to find out something.
DINKO To find out if there is anything?
PHILIP Right. But if there isn't anything?
DRIVER If there isn't anything - well, that's another question.
PHILIP Fine, have a go.
DINKO (*hands over a stick*). Driver?
DRIVER Harder!
DINKO There.
DRIVER Give it to me.

Driver pushes the stick in forcefully and that thing starts to knock from inside the parcel.

PHILIP It's in there.
DINKO Give it to me. (*Pushes the stick in and that thing knocks again.*)

Suddenly something pulls the stick inside the parcel.

DRIVER Bloody hell!
PHILIP That's enough! Let's send it off!
DRIVER Did you see what happened?
PHILIP I did.
DINKO We could put some steam through that hole.
PHILIP Why?
DINKO To see what it'll do.
DRIVER It'll suffocate.
DINKO No, not if it's only a little steam.
DRIVER (*sticking the end of the pipe into the hole*). Shall I?
PHILIP It's nothing to do with me.
DINKO Just a very little bit.

Driver turns the tap and steam starts to hiss around the. Knocking is heard from inside the parcel.

DINKO Stop!

DRIVER All it can do is knock. A little more steam? Maybe it'll start to do something else then.

PHILIP What else?

DRIVER I don't know, but we'll see.

DINKO Right - a bit more.

Driver increases the steam. That thing starts to knock loudly from inside.

DINKO Stop.

DRIVER I can't stop, the tap's stuck.

DINKO Pull it towards you, then in.

That thing knocks loudly and in the end stops. The parcel is veiled in steam.

DRIVER The steam's stopped.

DINKO And it's stopped knocking.

PHILIP That steam's ever so hot...

DINKO Let's open it up. It won't escape now.

PHILIP Aren't we going to send it off again?

DRIVER Better to open it first and then.

DINKO We'll open it. *(He starts to lever off the lid)*. Ready. Who's going to have the first look?

PHILIP I'm nothing to do with this.

DRIVER Fine. I'll take a look.

He approaches carefully, looks cautiously into the parcel and draws back, looking puzzled at Dinko. Philip also takes a look and he and Driver look at each other with very puzzled expressions.

PHILIP What is it?

DRIVER Take a look and you'll see.

Philip looks and also becomes puzzled.

PHILIP I never expected that.

DINKO What are we going to do now?

PHILIP He's in a coma. From the steam. Shall we pour some cold water over him?

DRIVER *(taking a bucket of water)*. Shall I pour?

DINKO Go on!

Philip splashes the water into the parcel and out jumps Sheino with a loud shriek. Vera enters.

VERA Dinko, have you received a parcel?
DINKO Why?
VERA Some people outside are asking.

They all look out of the window.

PHILIP It's them.
VERA They're asking if you've had a parcel.
DINKO No.
VERA And that? Isn't that a parcel?
DINKO No, it's not. Why are they asking?
VERA I don't know. Perhaps they sent it.
SHEINO No, they didn't. I did.
DRIVER But you were inside it.
SHEINO I was. I paid to send the parcel and when I took it over to where all the other parcels were I got inside it.
PHILIP Why?
SHEINO Because I had escaped And they would have caught me in the train.
PHILIP What's it like there?
SHEINO Where?
PHILIP There, with them.
SHEINO It's fine. If you like go and see for yourself.
PHILIP Did... did they ask you about that thing?
SHEINO They did.
PHILIP A and you?
SHEINO Told them.
PHILIP What? That there is or there isn't?
SHEINO That there is.
PHILIP You should have said that there isn't.
SHEINO But Dinko said that there is, didn't he?
PHILIP You should have said that there isn't. Now we will have to grass on you.
SHEINO To them?
PHILIP As they've turned up here.
DINKO And me?
PHILIP You too. They missed you last time, but now...
VERA And you?
PHILIP I don't hear anything.
SHEINO Yes, but they think you do.
PHILIP How do you know?
SHEINO From them. They said that you hear it but that you pretend not to because you're a malingerer.
PHILIP I don't understand.

SHEINO That's what they said. There are two sorts of fake malingerers. Some of them pretend to be ill whilst others pretend that there's nothing wrong with them. You're one of the second group.

PHILIP So, now I've got to tell them that there is something so that they'll think that I'm not a malingerer?

SHEINO Tell them and see.

PHILIP Let me think that through again. If I tell them that there's nothing there, they'll think that there is something because I'm a malingerer. Whilst if I tell them that there is something it means.

SHEINO You must say that there is something for them to think that there's nothing wrong with you.

PHILIP Right. I'll tell them now. *(He yells through the window.)* There is something!

SHEINO Now they know you're not a malingerer.

PHILIP Yes, but now they might think that there's really something wrong with me. No, better to tell them that there's nothing.....

DRIVER Whatever you tell them it's all the same now.

PHILIP Then it's better to tell them there's nothing, isn't it?

SHEINO Whatever you like.

PHILIP I'll tell them that there's nothing. *(Yells through the window.)* There's nothing!

Pippa enters.

PIPPA Philip, why are you shouting?

PHILIP Because there's nothing.

PIPPA There is.

PHILIP What is there?

PIPPA I don't know but there is.

PHILIP How do you know?

PIPPA I read about it. Here! *(Reads)*. «Something cannot be nothing because if it is nothing then it cannot be something.»

PHILIP That's clear. When you hear something that means it's something even if it's nothing.

PIPPA There's something about nothing here too. *(Reads.)* «A nothing cannot be something because if it is something that means it is not nothing.»

DRIVER I understand. Something is something., nothing is nothing...

VERA So there is something?

PHILIP Well, when you all say that there is, even if there isn't, we're all responsible.

DRIVER Responsible to whom?

PHILIP To them - that's why they've turned up here.

PIPPA If we give them a scientific reply then they'll go away.

DRIVER I can't even remember it.

PIPPA Just repeat it with us. We'll explain all together.

DINKO Won't they think it's odd?

PIPPA But they'll hear us saying something that's logical. Come on, all of you - one, two, three!

ALL Something
cannot be nothing
because if it is nothing
then it cannot be something.

PIPPA Let's repeat it. Repetition is persuasive. One, two three!

They all repeat.

ALL Something cannot be nothing
because if it is nothing
then it cannot be something.

PIPPA Again!

ALL Something cannot be nothing
because if it is nothing
then it cannot be something.

DINKO We're not convincing them.

PHILIP There's only one way to convince them.

DRIVER What's that?

PHILIP By catching that thing.

DINKO How? Haven't we been trying for three days?

PHILIP We'll get rid of the attic.

DINKO And where will we live then?

PHILIP You call this living? You can't sleep or eat.

VERA And the baby? How will the baby be in a house without an attic?

PHILIP We'll build a new one. The most important point is that we catch something. Once there's no attic, that thing will come into the room and we'll get it.

SHEINO What if it's invisible?

PHILIP We'll still hear it. We'll cover the floor with straw and when we hear it we'll catch it.

DINKO So that still means we've got to demolish the attic.

PIPPA An attic can't be demolished because once it's demolished it's no longer an attic.

DINKO Fine, I agree.

DRIVER Let's make a start.

They start to pull down the attic.

SCENE FIVE

Through the demolished roof the stars are shining and the chirping of crickets is heard. The floor of the room is covered with straw. They're all sitting around in a circle keeping quiet and listening for that thing.

PHILIP (To Dinko.). Can you hear it?
DINKO No.

Someone coughs quietly.

ALL (Fingers to lips.). Shhhhhhhhhhhh!

The whining of a mosquito is heard. They all follow its flight with eyes. It lands on Driver's neck and he slaps at it.

ALL Shhhhhhhhhhhh!

PHILIP Is that a noise?

DINKO When there's no roof there's a draught and the straw is blown about. That's what we can hear.

DRIVER Look how the straw is lifting right up through the roof - right up to the stars.

PIPPA It would take a million years to reach the stars.

SHEINO The straw has reached them already. Because the first straws set off a million years ago. Billions of tons of straw are travelling right now out in deepest space and it is scattered over the planets where there is nothing but that straw and cosmic dust. Because that's no ordinary draught - it's a cosmic wind. Somewhere a cosmic corridor has opened up and it's sucking the straw up from the earth.

VERA It really is strong.

SHEINO The worst colds are caught from cosmic winds. We're from the earth and have no immunity against cosmic winds.

They all wrap up well.

DINKO I've heard that a villager stole a bucket of straw from his best man and then passed through a cosmic wind. But the wind sucked the straw up into space...

SHEINO I know. That's how the Milky Way was formed. But that's not the true story. The Milky Way is so vast that all the straw in the Universe wouldn't be sufficient to cover it, never mind the best man's straw.

DRIVER Not just the Milky Way but you couldn't even cover the whole of the rail network with straw. But you could with snow. Snow covers everything.

SHEINO Cosmic winds do not suck up snow. Snow contains lots of water and is heavy.

PIPPA There are no winds in space.

SHEINO Why not?

PIPPA Because to have wind you must have an atmosphere and space is a total vacuum.

SHEINO But isn't that exactly what sucks up things - a vacuum. Just imagine how a total vacuum sucks up things compared to an ordinary one.

PHILIP If we go on talking we're not going to catch anything because we won't hear it.

SHEINO How can we hear it whilst the straw is rustling in the wind?

PHILIP The wind makes one sort of noise whilst maybe that thing makes a different kind of noise.

DINKO I don't know. I've only heard it creaking but I don't know what other noise it makes.

DRIVER If it's here there's no point in waiting. Better to begin.

DINKO I don't know if it's here.

PHILIP But you're not sure it isn't?

DINKO No, I'm not.

PHILIP Then let's start! Listen carefully! Attention!

They each take a carter's whip and line up against the wall.

PHILIP On your knees!

They all kneel down.

PHILIP All together - beat the floor and we'll all move ahead together. That way we'll drive it into the corner opposite and then into the chest.... Ready? Go! One-two, one-two, one-two, one-two, one-two....

They all beat the floor in rhythm and crawl across the floor. Pippa starts to talk in the same rhythm: Something cannot be nothing because if it is nothing then it cannot be something. The others repeat it with her. They cover the whole floor like this and 'drive' that thing into the chest..

PHILIP Quick, shut it now! (*They close the chest*). Right, now it's in there!

SHEINO It's not.

DRIVER We drove it in there, didn't we?

SHEINO No, we didn't.

PHILIP Why?

SHEINO I tell you, it's not in there.

DINKO Then where is it?

SHEINO Behind us.

DRIVER Why behind us?

SHEINO Because it jumped over us.

They all think.

PHILIP Are you sure?
SHEINO Yes.
PHILIP Why are you so sure that it jumped over us?
SHEINO And why are you so sure it didn't?
DINKO You're both right.
PIPPA They can't both be right. A body can't exist in two places in space.
DINKO It might not be a body.
DRIVER But I don't understand what's happened. Is it in there or did it jump over us?
DINKO If it's in it's in. If it jumped over it jumped over. That's the truth of it. That's why we'll drive it once more. If it's in there, that's where it'll stay - if it's out then it'll have to go in.
DRIVER That's what I wanted to know.
SHEINO And if it jumps over us again?
PHILIP It won't. We'll be one on top of the other. Come on, let's try again!

They go back to the wall. Philip, Dinko and Driver kneel down, the women sit astride their husbands whilst Sheino, the lightest of the men, sits on Driver.

SHEINO Ready! Go!

The wail of the cosmic wind heightens. The riders wave their whips. Occasionally the whips catch the neighbouring rider and their yelps mingle with the wailing of the wind. Total chaos reigns once more but eventually they drive that thing into the corner and close the chest.

VERA It's in there now!

The riders shout out in triumph, wave their whips and circle the room as in a lap of victory around that thing.

PIPPA *(ceremoniously)*. Man is invincible and there's no secret in this world shall remain hidden from him. Because, born on the wings of knowledge we are flying further and further until we reach the edge the Universe and then...

DRIVER We'll stop.

PIPPA No, we won't. We'll still go forward.

The four men lift the chest and carry it in with funereal ceremony the two women climb up the ladder and peer down to see will happen. Above them is the starlit sky.

SCENE SIX

They are all sitting in a circle under the stars. In the silence only the howl of the cosmic winds and the insistent ticking of the clocks is heard.

VERA It's all over.
DRIVER Over.
SHEINO Over.
PHILIP Over!
DRIVER What shall we do now?
PIPPA Nothing.
PHILIP Nothing.
SHEINO Nothing.
DINKO Nothing.
DRIVER I'm travelling tomorrow.
SHEINO You travel every day.
DRIVER Yes, I do, every day.
VERA Well, I'll be cooking tomorrow.
PIPPA You cook every day.
VERA Yes, I do, every day.
SHEINO The day after...
DINKO The day after just like yesterday...
VERA Summer's nearly over - autumn is on its way.
DINKO Just like every year.
DRIVER Yes.
VERA After that the rains will come, then winter and the cold...
DINKO As usual.
VERA If only we had a house...
PIPPA You've got a house although it's not got a roof.
DINKO A house can't not have a roof.
PIPPA That's right. Be we caught that thing.
DINKO We caught it, so what? Nothing, if anything it's worse now
because we have no house. Look, the clocks have stopped as well. So much
work *.(He bangs on the clock mechanisms.)*
PHILIP At least you have created something. While all I've done over the
past ten years is raise and lower the barrier.
DRIVER. Not so. You've kept to the timetable. And thanks to that timetable
trains all over the planet make their journeys. And the Earth with all the trains on
it moves around the Sun. Whilst the Sun, together with the earth and the trains
moves around 'I don't know what' and all of that 'I don't know what' together
with the Sun, the Earth and the trains moves around other 'I don't know what's'
Why do they move, ask, when there's no destination for them? If the planets ever
met I would understand. The planet could be loaded with coal and wood and

then unloaded onto another planet. That planet would take it on to the next and then it would go on to the third and so coal and wood would go from one end of the Universe to the other.

SHEINO That's another matter... taking building materials to the other end of the Universe would really be something purposeful.

DRIVER And who would buy it from you there when there's no life there? The planets are useless vehicles and nothing more.

PIPPA But there are some things in existence that do have a point to them. Plants, for instance exist to be eaten by animals. Animals exist to be eaten by humans. Humans exist to eat the animals. Animals exist to eat plants.

DINKO So everything exists to eat?

DRIVER And why do they eat?

PIPPA To exist.

VERA And there's no point in eating. Yesterday I cooked, we all ate and it was just as though I hadn't done any cooking. Just think about it, nine tenths of our lives is spent in obtaining food and cooking it while one tenth is left for eating. So if you live for one hundred years ninety will be busy cooking and that leaves ten for eating.

DRIVER And if you die at ninety all that work goes for nothing.

DINKO Just think of the future that awaits our child. Ninety years spent in working and ten in eating... At least you don't have a child to worry...

PHILIP No, we haven't. And all because of the barrier. When she's asleep I'm on duty, when I'm asleep - she's on duty. Ever since we've been together we've been apart. And the fact that we don't have children is that we've never deserted our post. We received a medal on tenth wedding anniversary.

DINKO Because you deserved it. No-one should desert their post.

PHILIP Quite, but there are those who do, as I can see. And they work for the army...

DINKO There are occasions when there is nobody there to declare war.

PHILIP How do you know that there's nobody there?

DINKO From the television. When the Minister is abroad who will declare war? And he's quite often away...

VERA We follow politics regularly.

PHILIP We don't but we did take a holiday... and they sent us this Sheino couple...

VERA Well, go away somewhere.

PIPPA I relax when I'm studying. I'm used to it and that's all I need. How not to get used to it when I always sleep alone. And now we're on holiday I'm sleeping with this colleague.

SHEINO And I've no family all because of this job as a Sheino crossing-keeper. All my life I've gone from crossing to crossing. And I've not even got a home. Oh, I don't need one, I'm here today, there tomorrow. But to have a family...

PHILIP So you don't have any children?

SHEINO Yes, I do, I do have children.

VERA Well, where are they?

SHEINO In lots of different places. My work is like that, I move from one line to another...

PHILIP So when I was away with the reserves...

PIPPA Are you off on that again? Up to now you've been jealous of the fast train, now it's your Sheino. I've never deserted my post and there's proof of it as you well know...

SHEINO And I've never deserted mine but I've no proof...

PIPPA *(to Philip)*. If only you'd deserted your post once, but, you were on duty on our wedding night. Come on, you said after the wedding, I'll take you to our home and you took me to the crossing. Now, you said, you go to bed because I'm on nights. And you put on your uniform cap. Never mind the first night - I've never had a wedding night in the whole of our married life. And I've never slept with anyone - except this colleague now. And all I've got out of life is two diplomas.

SHEINO There's no point in children. I've got so many but what's the use? There's still no one to call me 'daddy'. It's a good thing I travel free of charge so I can visit them when I'm on holiday. My holidays are a non-stop journey along the rail networks. Why? So I can visit all my kids - and they don't even know that I am their father. I travel like 'I don't know what' and wherever I go they look at me like I was an unknown planet. And nobody in the whole of the Universe knows why they move except for me.

The sound of the wind gets louder.

DRIVER Perhaps the planets know why they move around the Universe.... when things go on at the crossings that I've never even imagined could go on, what could be going on in the Universe? It's all based on lies in this eternal and lawless Universe.

PIPPA When I look at the Milky Way I think that we're a planet in the Milky Way too. So those of us here think that the Milky Way is somewhere out there in the furthest reaches of the Universe and actually we're both out there in the furthest reaches of the Universe. But we think that we're here, not there and all that there exists simply for us to gaze at. Who knows who gazes at us? And does that mean that we exist for them to gaze at us?

PHILIP If there is anyone there. If there is no one to gaze at you then it's just as though we do not exist.

SHEINO If you ask me perhaps we really don't exist but imagine that we do.

PIPPA And if we don't, how do we see all that out there?

SHEINO We see nothing, it's all imagination. And if we do see it, what use is it?

PHILIP I don't know - and maybe there's no point in knowing.

DINKO And why do we have to know what that thing is when we still haven't worked out what it is? All we had to do was chase it and believe that when we caught it things would be better. And it would have been nice...

SHEINO That's right. Things have to be chased but not caught.

DINKO Right - but you're saying that after it's already gone. Well, speaking frankly, I always thought that we'd caught nothing.

DRIVER To be honest that's what I thought.

PHILIP Why do you think that?

DRIVER Because there was nothing in the chest.

PIPPA There was something but it couldn't be seen.

DRIVER Well, how did you understand that there was something there?

DINKO That one said that there was.

SHEINO They lied to make us think that we'd caught it so we'd stop chasing it. Because they think there's nothing there.

PHILIP That's it. There was nothing in the chest.

VERA That's what I think.

DINKO Well, why didn't you say so?

VERA Because you all said that there was so I thought that there really must be.

DRIVER And that's what I thought.

PHILIP And me.

DINKO Then let's trick it into coming again. Perhaps when we catch it things will become clearer. But we must trick it and lie so that it thinks we aren't going to catch it.

SHEINO How can we do that?

DRIVER Easily - how do they trick us in the Railways? With a Celebration Concert. Because during the year we make lots of stops. And for each stop they take something off our salary. A stop here, a stop there and at the end - nothing left for us. And just as we're about to quit our jobs the Day of the Railways comes around. We all meet up, acknowledge our weaknesses and at the end - a Celebration Concert. A Celebration concert which congratulates us all because in spite of everything there've been no stops that didn't come to an end. And thanks to that our railways continue to move ever further forward...

SHEINO And backwards.

DRIVER Yes. And during the concert we are filled with pride that thanks to us our railways continue to move forwards - and backwards. And we all start again: a stop here, a stop there... the important thing is that every stop comes to an end and finally... there's a concert. That's the truth of it. All the rest is the struggle and the hope up to the time of the concert.

PHILIP So, shall we have a concert now?

SHEINO All we've got is a train whistle.

DINKO Let's try with that. Maybe that thing'll like it? Some people do.

DRIVER That's right, sometimes I've had the whistle blowing for ten kilometres non-stop. In the end they court-martialled me.

DINKO You were court-martialled?

DRIVER Yes. For giving false air-raid warnings. They even mobilised. It doesn't take much to get the army going....

DINKO Let's try it. Build up the pressure.

They grab shovels and start on the coal. The steam engine slowly moves faster and faster, puffing like a locomotive.

DINKO More! More!

Driver pulls the lever and the wail fills the starry sky. They all stand and wait, their heads lifted to the stars.

VERA Nothing?

DRIVER Nothing.

DINKO Come on, again!

Driver pulls the lever again and the sound drifts up to the stars. Again they wait.

DRIVER Come on, again!

The sound is heard for the third time and again they wait.

SHEINO Nothing?

PHILIP Nothing.

DRIVER That's enough, we don't want the army turning up again.

PIPPA *(To the sky)*. Something cannot be nothing because if it is nothing it cannot be something.

The others start to chant up towards the sky together with her.

ALL Something cannot be nothing
because if it is nothing
then it cannot something.
Something cannot be nothing
because if it is nothing
then it cannot be something.
Something cannot be nothing
because if it is nothing
then it cannot be something.

During this Driver pulls the lever again and the long disappointed wail mingles with the chanting of the characters. Silence once more. All that is heard is the heavy rhythmical breathing of the panting heroes. At this moment Vera clutches her belly and gives a cry typical of a woman in labour. They all rush to her except Dinko who is rooted to the spot by the enormity of it all.

PIPPA It's all right!

SHEINO It's all right!

PHILIP It's all right!

DRIVER It's all right!

PIPPA It'll soon be over...

SHEINO It'll soon be over...
PHILIP It'll soon be over...
DRIVER It'll soon be over...

Vera is gently led out as they continue to repeat «It's all right» etc. Pippa closes the door and the men remain on stage waiting. At last the cry of a new-born baby is heard and the men rush over to Dinko with jubilant cries. Pippa appears in the doorway with the baby.

PIPPA That thing!

They all freeze in amazement.

PIPPA I heard it in the cellar!

Suddenly all the men grab hold of their sticks and shouting «Come on! Get it! Thrash it! etc. They rush off to the cellar. In the glow of dawn the voice of the newborn baby is heard and the clocks begin to work.

