

Ivan Vidić

**The Thousand Year Dream**

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## Men's Writing

I'll have to choose my words very carefully, because what I'm about to say may easily blow up in my face. If only I could write the way I can speak - under the breath, almost whispering – to be heard only by those who are meant to hear me, and remain inaudible to everyone else, like a frequency that is not perceptible to all living beings, the whistle that makes dogs bark, but leaves cats indifferent. I will try, I'll take the risk, because I can't keep quiet any longer.

It is little known (and that in itself is not a bad thing) that a few of us men have started a men's club. Dissatisfied with what has been happening to our sex in the last few decades, we decided to do something about it. Following the example of women's studies, we have established a men's studies program to look into the historical situation and the problems we have found ourselves in at the time when our place and role in society are being challenged, our reputation threatened, our position snatched away from us, and we are being mercilessly pushed to the sidelines. Unfortunately, we are poorly funded. We don't have a Mr Soros behind us, or an attractive Ms Soros to back our cause; our work is supported only by a handful of sympathetic pub owners and bartenders, honest innkeepers of the old stamp, but it's better than nothing. Our efforts are slowly yielding first results – we organize meetings on a regular basis, discreetly exchange scientific papers, and things are looking up.

On Friday evening our meeting was presided over by one of our most respected members, Mr Pisarović, and we discussed the position of men in today's society.

The range of themes we discuss is surprisingly wide, and I decided to start with an interdisciplinary research involving literature and social sciences, anthropology, psychology and sociology. Or rather, I analyzed the archetypes in the famous fairy tale „Hansel and Gretel” written by brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. To be more precise, I analyzed only some introductory theses and the most

important points because, in my humble opinion, that tale deserves a serious interdisciplinary study. My efforts resulted in a scientific paper that I will present here in abridged form and layman's terms.

The pub keeper Polančec brought us a fresh round of beers, and I asked to speak and started my talk about the unfortunate Hansel.

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– It is about us men, my friends. Everything in that tale is against Hansel. You all probably know the plot, so I'm not going to retell it. In a nutshell, the parents decide to get rid of Hansel and Gretel and leave them in the woods to fend for themselves. Horrible, isn't it? And the little boy is expected to find a way out of that nightmarish situation. But who does he have to look up to? First, their father is obviously a doormat. The wife tells him to get rid of the kids, and he obeys without a second thought. The woman is their stepmother so I guess one shouldn't be surprised that she's such a beast, but to grow up with a father like that?! Good Lord, our dear Hansel really didn't have a chance. But he is a quick-witted lad – he comes up with a solution and gathers white pebbles so they could find their way back home. The following day he does the same thing with bread crumbs, but this time it doesn't work, because the birds eat the crumbs. Okay, the kids are lost in the woods, but Hansel is still the main man. Then what happens? The hideous old hag imprisons them. She locks Hansel in a cage and enslaves Gretel. She force-feeds the poor boy like a pig, so she could eat him. But the smart lad tricks the myopic witch every time she wants to check how fat he is, and instead of his finger, he sticks out a bone. And that's more or less everything he does. Gretel is the one who later pushes the witch into the oven and frees her brother. What does that mean? It means that there has been a historical, fateful change – Gretel has taken things in her hands. True, the kids manage to return from the bloody woods with the help of a goose. And they are seemingly saved. But can Hansel be

saved? I don't think so. He is irreparably damaged. His wits are gone. If his younger sister Gretel hadn't asked the goose to ferry them across the river one by one, they would have drowned. Hansel is destroyed. He is no longer the man of ideas and initiative, he has lost every sense of leadership given to him by nature. He was force-fed and abused, and now he is marked forever. The horror he's been through has left unspeakable consequences. He will suffer not only from obesity for the rest of his life, but of PTSD and neuroses that can lead to psychotic disorders. Destroyed and marginalized, he doesn't have a bright future, if any. It is quite possible that he will end up as permanently incapable of caring for himself, and that he will find himself at the mercy of others (we can easily imagine him living with Gretel and her family, like a crazy uncle harassed by his nephews, abused by his brother in law and snapped at by his sister). He, who was smart and resourceful in the beginning, is but a shadow of his former self. On the other hand, the Gretel at the end of the story is an emancipated young lady. She is decisive, aggressive. Hansel is destroyed, he is now a fatso with probably permanent mental problems, but Gretel has proved and asserted herself. She has saved her brother and now she thinks and decides for him. Poor Hansel will never amount to anything. He was powerless in front of the stepmother and the evil witch, he failed to protect his little sister. The trauma is incurable, and he will remain a fucked up tub of lard for as long as he lives. But the hardest blow he receives is that delivered by his little sister. She is now the boss. She has become aggressive, learnt to resort to slyness and violence. Look how she fixed the evil witch! That's it. Her time is coming, and Hansel is destroyed forever.

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When I finished my presentation, everyone was silent as the grave and deeply shaken. But when they snapped out of it, they were ready for a serious discussion.

– Boys shouldn't be read that fairy tale – the skinny, high school teacher Bijelić said in a shaky voice.

– My parents read it to me when I was little, and I turned out just fine – remarked Popivoda, an engineer by profession.

– Fine, you say? Is that why your wife beats you with a rolling pin every time you play the football pools? – Hlapec, our electrician, mocked him.

– They read it to me too. And that tale is our ruin. Once you hear it, everything starts to go downhill. Hansel escaped one pot only to find himself in another – concluded Doctor Njegovan sadly.

He was in low spirits. His gloom slowly rubbed off on all the others. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the pub keeper Polančec. Even his moustache looked sad.

– It is no longer just a children's fairy tale.

– You are right. It is a tale for us, grown up men. We have become recessive. Women dominate. We are finished. We don't stand up for ourselves. I wonder what's next.

– Maybe we should just accept it – Bijelić shrugged. He looked defeated.

– See where it got us – Hlapec said.

– You're right – Bijelić agreed.

– That's why we have to put up a fight for our rights. For our lives, our well-being, for the normal order of things which is jeopardized in today's world. We have to do it for all of us and our just cause – I concluded and was rewarded with an applause.

We drained our drinks and before we knew it, the new round was on the table. The mood brightened up, and the conversation became more animated. We talked about feminists, their butch haircuts and crazy hair colours, their hairy legs and knowledge of truck tires. One of our colleagues asked about the suffragettes. We explained to him that the suffragettes were predecessors of feminists, something like the grandmothers of today's feminists and the mothers of the Women's Antifascist Front members. Then the plumber we all

call Jug Ears asked one of his stupid questions. He's not a bad guy, but has some serious mommy issues.

– Has any of you ever banged a feminist?

Hands flew up in the air. But then we all looked at each other and started to lower them. Soon not a single one was up.

– We are afraid of them – somebody concluded dejectedly.

– How difficult is it to bang a feminist? – asked Jug Ears, the hopeless sucker.

– Contrary to expectations, of all the groups we've mentioned, feminists are the easiest lays because they like to have many lovers. If they are married, their husbands are their maids. They clean and cook, do the laundry and iron, buy groceries, sanitary pads and tampons, and massage their feet when they watch TV.

– They dress provocatively, but it is strictly forbidden to touch them or pinch them, grope their breasts or, God forbid, pat their bums

– Popivoda complained.

– True.

– Is it true that feminists pee standing up?

– Yes.

– And is it true that they crack walnuts on their husbands' heads?

– Unfortunately, yes. That's true as well. And not only walnuts, but almonds and hazelnuts too.

We were outraged. The conversation turned into a real debate on a wide range of issues, accompanied by the fresh rounds of cold beer, wine and brandy that the pub keeper Polančec kept bringing to our table. As one of our members himself, Polančec treated us generously with drinks on the house, and it didn't take us long to loosen up. Some of us got slightly drunk, others didn't need alcohol to look and act tipsy. The discussion strayed into licentious waters.

– What do you think, which one is a better lay, a majorette or a suffragette? – Bijelić grinned.

– A hostess or an air-hostess?! – Popivoda asked.

– On the ground or in the air? – Hlapec shouted and flapped his arms like a bird.

– Are feminists' pussies horizontal or vertical? – our thick-skulled Jug Ear asked confusedly, fed by all kinds of unbelievable nonsense by his toxic mother. Poor fellow, one cannot but laugh at him. The things he can say! Some complain that he and the likes of him are the reason why our men's studies do not have the necessary academic weight.

– I don't know about feminists, but hostesses and air-hostesses have vertical pussies.

– The position of a woman's pussy depends on whether she is standing up or lying down. And whether she is lying on her back or on her side.

– And whether you look at it in relation to the equator or in relation to the zero meridian.

– It is vertical to the equator when a woman is standing, not when she's lying on her side – Doctor Njegovan solved all dilemmas.

After that, the conversation took a different turn. As a group of men with the firsthand experience of the horrors of the newly arisen women's power and its open derision and defiance of every authority and established order, as the men who have themselves been objects of severe criticism and nagging, we gave vent to our feelings. The emotions ran high and our meeting turned into something like a protest.

– They want to rule over us, they want to strip us of our male power and pride!

– They want to exterminate our Catholic faith and forbid porn movies!

– They want to pass a law that would prohibit balls scratching and pocket pool!

– How dare they?

– The society teaches us that physical punishment is unacceptable and inappropriate. I'm not saying we should beat our

women, but what's wrong with giving them a sound spanking from time to time?

We all had one too many by then. And some of us more than just one. As they relieved their bladders, the guys pissed on the toilet seat, the floor, the walls; they did everything they were forbidden to do.

– If our wives could see us now – Doctor Njegovan winked with satisfaction.

Near the end of our meeting, when the conversation turned into small talk, the young man who only recently joined our ranks, our intern, or freshman if you like, spoke up for the first time all evening and asked:

– What's women's writing?

At the mention of women's writing, we all looked at each other and shrugged. Some heaved a discontent sigh, others murmured with disapproval. One of us laughed.

– Women's writing? Good question. Really, does anybody know what women's writing is?

A silence fell on the table. Then Pisarović answered the young man's question.

– I'll tell you what it is. Women's writing is writing with coloured pencils or felt pens, drawing circles instead of dots and little flowers and similar doodles on the margins of the paper. That's women's writing. I hope you don't do any of those things.

– Never.

We all shook our heads resolutely.

– Okay. And what is men's writing?

– Men's writing is a written account of all the things we have just talked about.

## The Thousand Year Dream

Ivić got up and went to the bathroom to wash his face and brush his teeth. Standing barefoot in his underwear on the cold tiles, he looked at his reflection in the wall mirror and frowned – he was not too happy with what he saw. He took a hard look at himself: he was pushing forty, he had grown a paunch and started to lose his once bewitching blonde mane. He was a short man and some would still find him handsome, but his looks were slowly leaving him. When was the last time someone called him the „pocket Apollo“? Ah, time – it did „plough furrows in the cheeks of beauty“. Misfortunes never come alone, and problems always come in twos, so Ivić was twice married and twice divorced, had two young sons, Tulip and Lilac, two ex wives who hated him and two child supports he was supposed to pay but didn't, because he was broke. Instead he had to deal with two lawsuits brought against him by the indignant mothers of his offspring. The life of a freelance poet took a heavy toll on him and left him drained, and now, at the threshold of forty, he had to go *somewhere*, knock on *a different door* and look for *a different*, this time steady job.

He had some connections, addresses and promises, but for days now had been putting off what he had to do. Today, however, he realized that he had no choice but to get off his backside and start looking for a job.

He showered, shaved himself, combed his hair and put on perfume. Then he got dressed: clean underwear, dark blue trousers, wide collared white shirt with the first two top buttons undone, and a pair of black, shiny ankle boots. He stood in front of the wardrobe searching for something to round his casual business look with. The choice was decent but very modest; several faded jackets, a black, somewhat threadbare suit jacket and the beautiful yellow coat he had bought for a bargain many years ago from his friend and best man, the

fashion designer Kićo Bubalo. He decided on the coat, of course, and put it on immediately, only to find out it was a little too tight in the waist.

That, however, was not a serious problem: he would take the coat to Kićo and have it let out. Forty five minutes later he was sitting in the back room of the Big Mug fashion design studio in Lower Dubrava. Although very busy with an important order for an important client, his best man Kićo promptly abandoned what he was doing to take care of Ivić first. Faced with his friend's dogged determination, Kićo could never stand up for himself.

– You just have to have it today! What's wrong with the wedding suit I made for you? Shrunk in the wash, did it? – Kićo asked as he worked on his coat. He had undone all seams and taken off the lining and the buttons.

– It's too formal – Ivić replied. – Not the best thing for a job interview.

– Job? You?!

– Yes – Ivić nodded dejectedly.

– You've touched the bottom, mate... How are your sons? Growing up fast, aren't they?

– Tulip and Lilac are fine. It's their mothers who can't be brought to reason.

– Too bad. But you get to see the boys?

– Well... yes. Every now and then.

Ivić hesitated at first, but then spilled his guts about his ex wives and child support lawsuits, his personal problems and the circumstances that had forced him to start looking for a job. The two friends described at length everything that had changed in their lives since the last time they saw each other, while Kićo's sewing machine purred under his magic touch.

– Many things have changed here too since your last visit – Kićo said. – The business has expanded. We're all working like crazy. And we have all moved.

– Really? Where to?

– Actually, we're still where we used to be, but since we are cramped for space in this studio, we use the house for storage. We've installed the central heating, so Mum and Dad now live in the cellar. I work all the time and have a nice little *boudoir* within the shop, Granny is in the attic, and Grandpa in the shed.

– Trouble in paradise? I don't believe it!

– The two of them? – Kićo laughed with relish. – They are still lovey-dovey like the day they were married. But the attic is too hot for Grandpa during the day, so he spends most of the time in his office in the shed. He still runs the business, and to be honest, it's starting to annoy me. I'm thinking about going independent. But then I'd have to hire someone and... you know.

– What happened to Ms Ružica?

– She died. Hard times for entrepreneurs...

– And freelance writers – Ivić added.

– And writers... The lady I hired when Ružica died was run over by a tram, right here at the terminus. Poor woman, she didn't see it coming... It's so hard to find a good worker these days. Besides, it's the creative part of the job that I enjoy. I'm not the office type. My three brothers? They have all divorced, like you, and returned home. They share our old room, but when I moved out, the bunk beds were replaced with a huge bed made to order in Slavenska Orahovica. Right now, they are on a business trip in Kosovo. Since Shiptars got their own state, it is a business heaven for all entrepreneurs

– I'm glad you are doing fine.

– It's not easy. We struggle, but that's the fate of the incorruptible who haven't given up on the Croatian dream. And you, still writing, are you?

– I've just finished a new book of poems. It will be called „The Thousand Year Dream“. I just have to find a publisher.

– Good for you. Go for it! Never give up.

Kiće gave him a thorough account of his business chances in Kosovo, and Ivić reciprocated with a thorough account of the situation on the Croatian literary scene and in publishing industry.

– You couldn't have chosen a worse day to come – Kiće said, finishing the job. – Here, I just have to iron it, but I'll do it in the house. I have to go there anyway, to collect the suit I've made for a very important lady. And then I have to pick up her fur cap...

– It's spring. She doesn't need a fur cap.

– True – Kiće answered calmly. – But she needs the suit. For the cap I have to drive to Brezovec Zelinski, where I've had it tailor-made by a furrier who is my business associate. Now you see what a busy day you've chosen to come bursting in.

They got into Kiće's green BMW and drove to Upper Dubrava. Once in the house, Kiće turned on his big steam iron and ironed Ivić's coat in the blink of an eye.

– Try it on.

Ivić put on the coat, stood in front of the mirror and turned in a circle, carefully inspecting his friend's work from all angles. Kiće was a wizard. The coat looked like new and it fitted him perfectly.

– Well? What do you think?

– I'm speechless.

Ivić was delighted, but when he wanted to button the coat, he realized that the buttons were missing.

– And the buttons?

– What buttons?!

Kiće looked at the coat and his face contorted in an expression of exasperation. The bloody buttons again! He left them in the shop.

– If I remember correctly, you badgered me about the bloody buttons the last time as well – he said angrily.

– Me? Badgered you?! – Ivić was utterly surprised at his friend's accusation. – Besides, it was not buttons, but button holes.

– Sorry.

– What shall we do now? – Ivić asked with a hint of fatalism in his voice.

– I'll stitch them on tomorrow.

– Tomorrow?! I have a job interview tomorrow. – Ivić was desperate. – You just have to fuck up every time.

– Me? Me?!

They would have locked horns, if Kićo's Granny hadn't called from the attic.

– Ivić, my dear boy, is that you? – she asked happily.

That question was enough to stop them from arguing further. They climbed to the attic to say hello to grandma. When they entered, they found her sitting in the armchair and knitting. The old woman had known Ivić since he was a little boy and was very fond of him. She was a petite lady with a kind face and a white cap that made her look like a big baby. When she saw Ivić at the door, she beamed, put her knitting down and kissed him on both cheeks.

– I'm so happy to see you. How is your dear mother?

– She's fine. Just a bit slower. And more forgetful.

– The years catch up with us all eventually. But tell me, what good brings you here? It's been ages since I last saw you.

They explained why he had come and mentioned the problem with the buttons.

– If that's the only problem, I'll fix it no time. Son – the old woman turned to Kićo – bring your granny a needle and thread.

Kićo rolled his eyes and went to get the sewing kit. Granny stood from the armchair and walked up to the cupboard. Ivić was lucky – she had the world's largest collection of buttons. She rummaged through the drawers and found three big, blue buttons similar to the original ones, but even more beautiful. Then she took Ivić's coat and inspected it with an expert eye.

– Granny is still sharp sighted like a falcon – Kićo said when he returned with the sewing kit. He handed it to his grandmother, and the old woman smoothly threaded the needle.

– I'll be finished before you know it. – But as soon as she started, she pricked herself with the needle. A drop of blood fell on the coat, and the old woman fell into blissful sleep.

– Granny...

– What's wrong with her?!

Kiće clasped his head with both hands. – Fuck...

– Is she sick?!

– She's fine. She just pricked herself again. And when she pricks herself, she falls asleep. Now she'll sleep... for a hundred years.

The old woman was motionless in the armchair, with her hands folded on her chest. With her rosy cheeks and the blissful expression on her face she looked almost radiant. Ivić felt panic rising within him.

– What are we going to do?!

– What do you think we can do? Help me carry her down to the garden. She sleeps best among her flowers. Grandpa will wake her up with a kiss. Grab her legs.

The two men lifted the old woman off the armchair.

– Shall I go in front of you? – Ivić asked.

– No! You are weaker – Kiće replied with irritation.

Ivić frowned.

– Well, I wouldn't say I'm weaker...

– You are and you know it. So shut up!

While they argued, the two men turned the sleeping old woman over several times. Kiće was seething with anger, and Ivić was hurt. They carried her facedown out of the attic and down the stairs. Kiće was boiling leading the way, and Ivić was struggling not to drop her. Sweating heavily, he quickened his step.

– Don't push, you ox, just carry her.

– I am carrying her...

– You are pushing...

– I'm not...

– Carry her, I said. You're not pushing a wheelbarrow.

They managed to carry her out of the house and into the garden, yelling at each other as they struggled down the stairs.

– Stop pushing!

– I'm not pushing!

– Carry her!

– I'm carrying her!

– Stop pushing my granny's head into my buttocks, you stupid idiot! Do you want me to trip and fall into these thorny garden rose bushes?

When they finally managed to lower the old woman to the ground, they carefully turned her on her back and left her to sleep among geraniums, gladiolas and gardenias. Catching his breath, Ivić stared pensively at the lovely sight of the little old woman sleeping peacefully among the flowers bathed in the sun of a beautiful spring day. A sensitive artist and a delicate soul, Ivić was fascinated by the scene he was witnessing and for a moment or two he forgot where he was. His friend Kićo, on the other hand, was seething with anger.

– What are you staring at, you stupid idiot?!

Lost in thought, Ivić didn't hear him.

– Why do you grow only the flowers that start with a „g“?

– You just have to know everything, don't you? Because of the European Union rules. Other flowers are forbidden. What do you care?

Ivić nodded as if that explanation made perfect sense, but he couldn't hide his surprise.

– How come you don't have gerberas? I don't see any gerberas.

– I swear I'm going to kill you!

– Just asking.

Kićo clasped his head in despair and then just waved his hand dismissively and ran back into the house. A few moments later he ran out of it with the mysterious lady's suit and Ivić's coat draped over his arm.

– Where are you going with those things?

– I've told you. I'm taking the suit to the shop and I'll stitch the bloody buttons on your coat when I get there.

– Can't you do it here? I don't have a whole day.

– I can't. – Kićo stopped in his tracks with the clothes in his hands and turned to Ivić. – I'm really going to kill you. Will you fuck off now? I've told you this suit and the fur cap are very important to me and everything has to be perfect. Now let me get on with my job.

– Do what you must. I'm not holding you... But tell me, why is that cap so special?

– Because it's made from the fur of a white Andorra rabbit. Are you satisfied now?

– What are you to that woman? Her personal fashion stylist?

– Yes. She's a really big shot, and if this goes well, all doors will be open to me.

– I've got my fingers crossed for you. Who is she?

Kićo gave him a drop-dead look.

– How stupid do you think I am? If I told you, it would be the talk of the town by the evening! The last thing I need is that my rivals learn about it. Forget it! I know you poets are loudmouths and gossipy cunts who can't keep anything to themselves. And if you keep me from my work a moment longer, you'll ruin everything. Me, my shop and all of us. This job is my chance to make a name for myself.

– Okay, calm down... – Ivić said placatingly. – Only, isn't that rabbit called *angora* rabbit?

Kićo made a few steps back and leaned into his face. – Listen here, you asshole. Shut your stupid mouth. Angora rabbit is one thing, *Andorra* rabbit another. They are similar, but not the same. *Andorra* rabbit is an *albano* rabbit...

– You mean albino? – Ivić was confused.

– No, I don't – Krešo barked decisively. – It's a whole new sort of rabbit that Kosovo zoologists managed to breed. I don't have the time to explain now. Next time, okay?

– Really? – Ivić was genuinely intrigued. – How interesting. I didn't know that such rabbits existed.

– Now you know. And I would be very grateful if you let me get on with my business.

– Go, I'm not holding you.

– Stay here and keep an eye on Granny and the house. I'll be back soon.

Kiće sat in his green BMW and drove away with lightning speed. Alone in the garden, Ivić first checked the grandmother, who was sleeping like a log. He bent over her, admiring the serene expression on her face and the bliss she was exuding. I wish I had such peace within me, he thought. Then he walked to the garden set, settled himself comfortably in a chair, lit a cigarette and enjoyed the balmy spring sun.

But the peace and quiet didn't last long. Two policemen strolled into the front yard. They came up to Ivić and greeted him formally. Ivić shuddered when he saw them. He stood up, stubbed out his cigarette and without waiting for any questions from them, offered them his identity card.

– Not so fast, sir. What's going on here? – asked the first policeman.

– What? Nothing's going on...

The second policeman gave him a sharp look.

– Where have you chucked the body?

– I don't understand.

The first policeman was checking his ID card.

– What do you do for a living, mister Ivić?

– I'm a poet.

– A poet? – the first policeman was surprised.

– What kind of poet? – his colleague asked.

Ivić caught a hint of derision in the policeman's voice and decided to enlighten the ignorant creature.

– I'm a poet of primordial inspiration and I sing about nature and love. I don't belong to the world of *-isms*, but you wouldn't be very wrong if you called me a romantic – he said with the Olympian calmness.

When he saw the childishly guileless, frightened expression on the poet's face, the first policeman decided to explain.

– We have received information about a murder at this address. Two men have been seen carrying a dead body out of the house and dropping it somewhere on the premises.

– There... Granny is there. She's sleeping among the flowers – Ivić managed to stutter.

The policemen looked at the garden and then back at the house. Then they looked at each other.

– Is this house number sixteen? – the first one asked.

– Is that Kićo's grandmother? – his colleague added.

– Yes – Ivić answered.

– Did she prick herself on the needle again and fall asleep?

– Yes. How did you know?

The policemen visibly relaxed and changed the tone.

– Everyone knows Kićo's grandmother – the first one beamed.

– The same thing happened when she was stitching the new insignia on our commander's uniform – the other one grinned.

The two law enforcement officers moved few steps away from Ivić to decide how to proceed.

– Everything's fine, sir. We are leaving now. Sorry to have bothered you – the first one said and saluted.

They bid their farewell, threw one last glance at the sleeping grandmother and walked away on tiptoes, not to wake her up.

Ivić remained in the garden, basking in the sun. He was sitting next to the sleeping granny, smoking and daydreaming. He couldn't recall the last time he had felt so good as he felt then, sitting among the flowers. All troubles and woes, all the world's misfortunes were far away at that moment; far away were his own romantic, financial

and family problems, his bristling ex wives, his sons Tulip and Lilac, the odious and humiliating thought of looking for a job, everything that had made his life a living hell in the last months and years. He stubbed out his cigarette and yawned. A moment later he, too, was sleeping in the spring sun.

They were sleeping and dreaming. Of some other, glorious times; of the nation they belonged to and its great, wise leaders; of the armies bravely fighting under the national flag and winning battles against the invaders – against Osmanlis and Ottomans, against Turks and Ghurkhas, Romans and Germans, and all other invaders. They were dreaming of victories, only victories from battle to battle, and of the sound of the battle bugle horn and triumphant fanfare; of the old, original, ethnically Croatian noble families and church dignitaries, and their magnificent robes, dizzying towers and luxurious castles; of cathedral belfries that pierced the clouds and touched the firmament, and the good Lord in heaven chanting *I and the Croats* in a voice that echoed louder than the majestic bells. They were dreaming of a thousand years of national history in which everything was the opposite than it had been, and there was no poverty, no hunger or slavery; of fairies dancing in a ring; of the Virgin Mary and all the national patron saints; of the long lines of sovereigns who bowed to nobody and kneeled to nobody, the assemblies of wisest men who led their people with nothing but its happiness and prosperity in mind. Ivić was dreaming of a laurel crown for his poetic achievement, Granny of the happiness of humble folk: of granaries full of golden corn and vineyards full of golden grapes, of immense herds and flocks calmly grazing on the hillsides of the free homeland. And the dream they were dreaming was so beautiful that it deserved to be painted on a canvas.