

THE UNDERGROUND MAN

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Translated from Bulgarian by David Mossop

Beneath Rome, Napoli, Alexandria, Sicily and North Africa there are thousands of kilometers of subterranean catacombs. Some people think that somewhere in the labyrinths there are people still alive, mutated descendants from the era of the Roman Empire.

The Underground Man (UM)

Vasko

Petio

Cleopatra

Sonya

Act One

Night. Darkness. The only thing that can be heard is a clock ticking and people snoring. Suddenly the silence is disrupted by a loud noise from below the floor: someone is breaking through the cement with a pneumatic drill. The sound of a woman whispering in the dark.

Sonya Vasko? Vasko?

Vasko *(sleepily)* What???

Sonya Vasko, what's that noise! Wake up!

She switches on the bedside lamp. Vasko and Sonya are in bed.

Vasko What is it?

Sonya What's that noise.

Sonya I don't know... Something in the cellar.

Vasko What cellar? We haven't got a cellar?

The noise is getting louder and more annoying.

Sonya Can you hear it?

Vasko Yes, I can.

Sonya What are we going to do?

Vasko There's nothing we can do. They'll go on for a while and then they'll stop... There, it's stopped.

Sonya You're right, it has.

Vasko Go back to sleep now. We'll go down and find out what it was in the morning. Good night.

Sonya Good night.

At that moment the noise starts again. This time even louder. It gets unbearably loud. The wooden floor begins to rise and with a crash of splintering wood, a gaping hole appears in the middle. The top half a man appears through the hole. He's got a miner's helmet on his head and he's holding a pneumatic drill. Sonya shrieks and curls up in the corner wrapped in a sheet.

They look on in stunned silence.

UM *(seriously)* Vasko Vladovski, is that you?

Vasko *(stunned)* YYYYes..., that's me.

UM Please sign here. *(hands him a book of receipts and a pen)*

Vasko What's this receipt for?

UM For the money... *(takes out a pile of notes and throws them down onto the table)* One million. Count it if you want to.

Vasko Who are you?

UM What do you mean? Didn't you get the letter?

Vasko No. No, I didn't.

UM What a nuisance!!! You should have got a letter. Now I'm going to have to explain.

He begins to explain in some annoyance, enunciating clearly to make himself understood.

UM Look now! We are from the underground. You understand?

Vasko No?

UM We are from the Roman Empire. Have you heard of the Roman Empire?

Vasko Yes.

UM (*encouraged*) Good. So, during the Roman Empire, our forebears were the first Christians. But they were cruelly persecuted by the Romans and they hid in the catacombs beneath the earth.

Vasko Yes.

UM That's where we come from. We got used to living beneath the earth, and that's where we stayed. We created a powerful civilisation down there. We've got modern technology, over-production and money... Lots of money!

Vasko What?

UM And so we set up a special charity to help all you people here... You see?

Vasko I see.

UM I work for this charity. We dig tunnels and hand out money. Our aim is to give money to everyone. You might have noticed that so far we've only managed to give money to some people, other people still haven't got any.

Vasko I had noticed.

UM That's our fault.

Vasko I see. So that's the reason.

UM But we will, we'll give money to everyone. It's your turn now. All you have to do is to sign here to get your million.

Vasko That much?

UM I'll give you less if you want. Only as much as you want. Just write down how much you want and sign here. But could you hurry up please!

Vasko Can I get you a drink?

UM No, thanks. I don't drink when I'm at work.

Vasko Just a snifter... (*pours a drink*) To raise the spirits...

UM That's enough. (*comes out of the tunnel*) Cheers!

Vasko Cheers! (*offers his hand*) Vaskomir.

UM Thanks. Hanibal Tiberius Claudius. (*drinks wearily*) So much work to do, Vasko! So much! I've got to get back to the bank to get more money and dig two more tunnels before sunrise. I've got to give money to everyone – no two ways about it. You can't live without money...

Vasko Yeah, tell me about it!! I'm an unemployed vocal pedagogue.

UM You mean a singing teacher?

Vasko That's right. I give private lessons sometimes but that's about all...

UM You mean you sing for free?

Vasko You haven't heard my singing. I start crying when I reach the high notes... Hanibal, didn't you say that you've been down there since the Roman Empire?

UM And what do you eat?

Vasko Mainly dog food. That's why my singing is more like howling. Is it true that you've been down there since the Roman Empire?

UM Aha, you've heard of Nero?

Vasko Yeah.

UM He was a nasty piece of work! Threw us to the lions alive... That's when we went underground.

Vasko How many are there of you? Down there?

UM There's lots of us. But we've grown in number over the centuries. If you've read history, every time there's been some progressive wave of historical development which has been persecuted...

Vasko And what now...

UM We know everything... And when the persecution starts, they join us underground. That's where they come. From the Inquisition, the Jewish pogroms, Communism, Democracy... Have you heard of the Parisian labyrinths?

Vasko Yes, I have...

UM We dug them. A lot of people fled from Hitler then... Writers, philosophers, physicists... And what about Stalin? We had to dig a tunnel to Siberia – 40 million members of the intelligentsia. They reckon they were “lost without trace”. We’ve got such a level of culture and civilisation down there, there’s never been anything like it above earth.

Vasko Down there?

UM Yes, we’ve got towns down there. If you could only see them you’d be amazed.

Vasko Would you like some more?

UM Oh, no! You’ll be getting me drunk. We only drink the most expensive drinks down there...

Vasko Some people drink them up here as well. I suppose the ones you’ve given you know what...

UM We’ve given money to quite a lot of people so far. I suppose about 2-3%.

Vasko You can tell. There’s people with money and we thought they’d got the money by... you know what I mean?

UM No, no, we’re the reason.

Vasko Does that mean everyone’s going to get some...

UM Yes, everyone. You just have to be patient.

Vasko Whoever can stand the wait, I suppose...

UM You’ll make it, most people do. Of course, there is a certain percentage of risk. But that’s life. Cheers!

Vasko Cheers! Do you print the money yourselves?

UM No, we don’t print it. The money’s got to have a value in the overground banks.

Vasko So where does it come from?

UM We got secret projects we're working on. With the Chinese for example – we've got contracts for underground research. You've heard about Arab petrol...?

Vasko What?

UM We discovered it. Uranium deposits in South Africa, cobalt, platinum, gold – all our work, and we get paid for it. We're digging an underground shipping canal for the Japanese to Asia. We're digging an underground railway for the Chinese under the Pacific. For the Australians we're mining plasma from the earth's core... You don't know anything... Just sign here and take the money...

Vasko All right. Just show me where. *(signs and takes the money)*

UM *(Raises his hand in a Roman farewell salute)*
Salve! Spend it well and we'll give you more.

Vasko Can I ask you something? Can I?

UM What?

Vasko You said you've got two more tunnels to dig by the morning?

UM Yes, why?

Vasko I could save you some trouble. Like instead of digging two more tunnels, couldn't I get a friend to come over here and get his money from my tunnel?

UM Of course.

Vasko That'll make life easier for you: one tunnel less to dig.

UM No, I'll still have to dig my quota. Do you know how many people can't make ends meet?

Vasko I know, I know. So can I get my friend over tomorrow night?

UM Who is he?

Vasko He's a good person. He's helped me out a lot.

UM He isn't from the government is he?

Vasko No, why?

UM Because we've given them plenty already.

Vasko No. He's not from the government. He's a friend of mine.

UM Tell him to be here at 11 o'clock. And to decide how much he wants.

Sonya What about me?

UM Wait a moment? Aren't you married?

Sonya No. We're not.

UM Tttt! Oh, dear! I seem to have made a mistake. (unfolds the map) According to the map, there should be a family with a child living here... I've made a mistake.

Sonya No, you haven't.

Vasko Sonya, don't make things more complicated. I'll give you half of mine.

UM Why yours? She'll get hers eventually, when we get down to her in the list. Tell her to wait here for me tomorrow. How much do you want?

Sonya 100 000? Is that all right?

UM That's fine. So. I'll see you tomorrow at 11. Salve.

Vasko OK! Good luck with the digging and I hope the ground's soft for you.

UM Thanks. So, I'll see you at 11.

Vasko Yes. Tomorrow at 11. We'll be waiting for you.

The underground man goes back into the tunnel.

Act Two

The next morning. Vasko and Petio – his brother in law.

Vasko Believe me, he's going to come out of that hole... don't you believe?

Petio (looking at the hole) Why shouldn't I believe? Things happen like that. So he's going to come out of that hole.

Vasko Yes. He came out of this hole and left the same way.

Petio And he's from the Roman Empire?

Vasko Yes... You don't believe me?

Petio I believe you, why shouldn't I? (*looks at the bottle on the floor*) Been drinking a lot, haven't you, Vasko?

Vasko I offered him a drink...

Petio I suppose so... it's not a good thing to drink on your own... What was his name?

Vasko Hannibal Tiberius Claudius.

Petio So there were three of them, were there? Did they come on horseback or on foot?

Vasko Petio! He gave me a million!

Petio All right, all right. I heard you.

Vasko A million.

Petio So where is it?

Vasko Here it is (*takes the money out of the wardrobe and pours it onto the floor. Petio looks on in shock*)

Petio Vasko, where did you get all that money from?

Vasko That's what I've been telling you? This man came out of the tunnel from down there. They've been living there since Roman times... I've told you everything and you still don't understand...

Petio I understand. I understand everything. I just don't understand where the money came from. There's something not quite right about this, Vasko?

Vasko You'll believe me. I've got a witness. (*He shouts into the kitchen*) Sonya? Sonya?

Sonya Enters.

Vasko I'd like you to meet Sonya.

Petio And is she from down there...?

Vasko No. She's a student. She's studying law.

Petio Roman law, I suppose.

Vasko No, she's at the university.

Petio Are they giving Roman courtesans away as well now, down there?

Vasko Petio! Don't make me angry. Sonya, will you tell him, because he thinks I'm mad.

Sonya How can I tell him? It's not something you can just believe. You shouldn't have told anyone.

Vasko I thought he was a friend... *(to Petio)*. All right, it's up to you if you want to believe me or not. You just have to say how much you want. A million, that enough for you?

Petio *(falling into the armchair)*
This is crazy! Who gives money like that away? I'll believe it more if they wanted to take it from you, not give it to you.

Vasko How could they take a million away from you, Petio? You've never had any.

Petio This friend of yours, is he a bank robber?

Vasko No, it would have been in the news.

Petio I suppose so... He could be a member of the underground Mafia.

Vasko There isn't an underground Mafia. The Mafia's above ground.

Petio What do I have to do now?

Vasko You just have to say how much money you want.

Petio Jesus! I must be dreaming...

Vasko That's what I thought to begin with, but when I got my hands on the money – I woke up with a bang. It doesn't matter where it comes from, under the ground or out of the sky, it's money, Petio, grab it and don't ask. I should have asked for more.

Petio You got a million, didn't you?

Vasko Yes, but there's so many things I have to do. What's a million worth after all, if you think about it. *(looks at*

his watch and jumps up) Quarter to eleven. Hannibal will be here any moment. Sonya, go and make some coffee for when Hannibal gets here. The money's coming!

Sonya exits. Vasko starts singing a song from a popular operetta. He begins slowly and gets quicker and quicker, clapping his hands in time and dancing.

I want to live my life
To travel and have fun
Before my life is done
Before my life is done
Before my life is done.

Then both of them sing the same refrain dancing and clapping.

Vasko

I'm thinking of buying a flat. I'll buy a Mercedes as well. And then I'll buy a country house with a 15x30 metre swimming pool. Then I'll go on a trip to Egypt, Cyprus, Malta, Jerusalem, Hawaii, Easter Island, Monaco, Luxemburg, Osaka, Pekin, Taipei, New York, Rio, Los Angeles, Australia, Indonesia, Honolulu, Machu Pichu, Mont Blanc, Everest, North Pole, South Pole, the Equator...

Petio

That's a lot of money...

Vasko

Not so much, Petio. Not at all. I've never been abroad. Ever since I was a little boy I've dreamt of seeing Australia. Petio, I just want to see it! I just want to see Easter Island... Why did they teach us that stuff at school, if they knew we would never get to see those places. Never!!! It would have been better if they'd taught us in our geography lessons that we were alone in the world. That way we could have died happy. Why did they have to tell us about the Amazon, the Missisipi, dogs called Dingo, Egyptian pyramids, Chinese walls, lagoons, reefs... I want to see them! We're only here once, and at least I want to see them. *(his monologue ends in tears)*

Petio

Use that money to get into parliament. Then you'll see the world and you'll have as much money as you need. When you're the head of the parliamentary committee on singing, your entire mandate will be like a song. Use your money to organise an election campaign and you're in. People don't know who to vote for anyway. Who knows, you might be just the one to save the country.

Vasko Save the country? Don't talk to me about that! I told you I've already spent enough time in our beloved country.

The doorbell rings. Petio looks through the spy hole.

Vasko Who could it be at this time of night? The Police?

Petio No. It's not the police.

Vasko Blackmailers? How could they have found out?

Petio No, it's not blackmailers.

Vasko Who is it then?

Petio Cleopatra.

Vasko Cleopatra who?

Petio Your wife.

Vasko Oh, my God! I didn't invite her.

Petio I did.

Vasko Petio, that's the last thing I expected from you. She left me, didn't she? I've got a court summons for Wednesday.

Petio I know. That's why I invited her. When you told me that you'd come into money. I thought that you'd won the lottery. That's why I invited her. I just thought that she might change her mind, because of the child.

Vasko Why on earth did you think that... What am I going to do now?

Petio Don't open the door then.

The door bell rings again.

Vasko She'll break the door down if she knows I've got money.

Petio She doesn't know about the money. I told her that we'd got something important to talk about.

Vasko Whatever. There'll still be an argument. Why did you invite her?

Petio Let her in for a bit. We'll hide the money. (*Stuffs the money into the cupboard.*)

The door bell rings again.

Vasko What about the hole?

Petio We'll pull the carpet over it. Just like that. (*pulls the carpet over the hole*) There you are! You wouldn't know it was there. Now put the armchair over there, so she can't come this way. That's right.

The door bell rings.

Vasko Shall I let her in?

Petio Let her in! I'll tell her I made a mistake. That the meeting should have been for tomorrow. What time is it now?

Vasko Ten to eleven. We haven't got any time! How could you done something so stupid! (*The door bell rings continuously. Vasko crosses himself and exits*)

Act Three

Cleopatra enters headlong.

Cleopatra Five minutes! I'll give you five minutes. Then I'm leaving. Say what you've got to say, then I'm going. I'm not going to say anything. And I'm not going to make any concessions. What do you mean by calling me out at 11.00... What on earth are these midnight meetings? Just because I'm divorced you think that...

Vasko You're not divorced you.

Cleopatra Just don't get your hopes up. You've burnt your bridges. And don't make me shout. I'm trying to save my voice. I've got an audition tomorrow.

Vasko Best of luck.

Cleopatra So don't waste your time. You've got five minutes. This place is an absolute tip. Why have you moved that chair? This house belongs to both of us and it's going to be mine. Remember that. And it will remain mine.

Vasko All right, all right...

Petio We'll tell you tomorrow. You've got to save your voice for tomorrow.

Cleopatra Tomorrow? Is this a trick? I know all your tricks. I learnt everything in five years with you. You drove me crazy! Crazy! This trick is going to cost you dearly, I tell you. You're going to have to explain yourself in court. You ruined my life. Five years with you and what's to show for it – a studio apartment and that's still not paid for. I had enough of rehearsing in the bathroom!

Sonya enters with coffee.

Cleopatra (*in shock*) And who's she? I asked you who she is.

Vasko That's Sonya...

Cleopatra What's she doing in my home? I'm asking you? Am I dreaming? (*She flops down into the armchair, but then jumps up again*). My clothes! Where's my fur coat?

Vasko It's in the wardrobe along with everything else.

Cleopatra My coat! (*Approaches the wardrobe.*)

Petio (*rushes towards her*) Cleopatra!

Cleopatra (*shouting*) My coat! (*Opens the wardrobe and the money falls out onto the floor. Cleopatra faints.*)

Sonya I'm sorry. I'd better leave.

Cleopatra (*from the floor*) Don't move! You're staying here! (*Gets up.*) I'm going to phone the police. Where did you get this money from? What sort of people have you got mixed up with, Vaskomir? Is she in the Mafia?

Vasko No, she's a student.

Cleopatra Student? Where's the money come from then? You're going to tell me she's been saving out of her student grant? Honest people don't have that sort of money.

Vasko The money's mine.

Cleopatra Yours? Your money! I'm going to faint... (*shouting*) Call me an ambulance!!! Get the telephone! Telephone...

Cleopatra grabs the telephone. Petio and Vasko grab it off her.

Cleopatra Let go of me! Let go of me!

A struggle begins. Cleopatra falls through the carpet into the tunnel.

Cleopatra Help! Help!

Petio and Vasko pull her out and sit her down. At the same moment the Underground Man appears out of the tunnel under the carpet. The carpet rises. Cleopatra begins to scream in fright. Petio stuffs her mouth and they roll her up in the carpet.

Act Four

The Underground Man enters and Petio goes weak at the knees.

UM I've brought the money. Hundred thousand for the girl. *(takes out the money, Petio presses himself against the wall)*

UM Is this your friend?

Vasko Yes. It is. Petio, Hannibal. Hannibal, Petio.

The Underground Man pats Petio amicably on the back and Petio collapses onto the floor.

Vasko Petio, Petio? Sonya, get some water! *(Sonya runs to the kitchen to get some water and splashes him)*

Sonya Petio!

Vasko *(shaking him)* Petio?

UM There's no point.

Vasko Why?

UM There's no point. He's had a heart attack.

Vasko You must be joking?

UM No. It's all the excitement and...

Vasko Jesus...! His turn was about to come and he had to go and die...

UM It's not uncommon in our job. We used to take a paramedic with us. But there was nothing much they could do. Once they're gone, they're gone.

The Underground Man falls onto his knees. He clasps his hands in prayer and begins to recite the Latin prayer, "Ave Maria". Vasko looks on in amazement.

Vasko Oh, My God! Petio! Petio!

UM It's a pity about the money, though. I'll have to take it back now...

Petio No!

Vasko He's alive! He's alive!

UM Hurray! Now I can write his name down on the list. *(to Petio)* Full name please?

Petio *(speechless)* Aaaaa...

Vasko Petio.

UM Petio. Profession?

Petio Aaaa...

Vasko Conductor.

UM *(writing)* Conductor. What sort of conductor?

Vasko Symphony orchestra.

UM How much money do you want?

Petio How much can you give me?

UM How much do you need?

Petio I don't need the money for myself... well not much. I need the money for the orchestra... I have to pay their wages.

UM Don't you pay them?

Petio Sometimes.

UM Where do you perform?

Petio Nowhere... We're looking for work. Can we come and perform down there?

UM I'm afraid you can't. We've got thirty-seven civilian orchestras from the former Soviet Union and 132 military orchestras. They're down as lost in Afghanistan. What sort of music do you perform?

Petio Mainly at funerals... Funeral marches, Chopin.

UM Where?

Petio At cemeteries. It's very sad and we get invited. All the relatives crying in grief, the orchestra sobbing from hunger... We're on the edge of starvation. When we go to the graveside, we sometimes don't want to come back.

UM That's all right, we've got a fund to cover that. I'll get you some money out of the "funeral rites" fund. How much do you need?

Petio Let's see. There's thirty-two of us... three have died... that's thirty five... and if any one else dies soon... that'll be about forty... 50 thousand each... that makes two million and a million for me. Is that all right?

UM That's fine.

Petio Three million pounds.

UM Sorry?

Petio If that's all right... We need new instruments, tail coats, sheet music. Music's very expensive. Two dollars a sheet. That's not even enough for Beethoven's ninth, and then there's another eight...

UM All right. I'll just have to let the bank know. *(takes out a mobile telephone)* Is that the bank? Hello? Can you put me through to the "Memento Mori" section, please?

Just at this moment, Cleopatra shouts out from inside the carpet.

Act Five

The carpet unrolls and Cleopatra appears.

Cleopatra I heard every single word. Everything!

UM And who are you?

Petio Cleopatra. She wanted to surprise you...

UM *(shaking her hand)* Pleased to meet you. Hannibal Tiberius Claudius.

Cleopatra *(suspiciously)* Cleopatra.

Petio Solo soprano... very promising voice. I'm sure you'll hear that for yourself.

Cleopatra I heard everything. I want my share, or I'm calling the police.

Petio No! Please. Don't do that.

UM The police don't bother me.

Petio That's because you don't know anything about them. There's no end to their greed...

Vasko Why don't you just check in the list to see if she's there?

UM Let's see... *(opens the register)* And what was your name?

Cleopatra Cleopatra.

UM Aha... Cleo... Cleo... Cleopatra *(stares at her in a slightly strange way)* You've had yours already.

Cleopatra When?

UM During the reign of Emperoro Gaius Julius Caesar.

Cleopatra What?

UM We've got the documents to prove it. According to our records, you were paid 40 000 gold talants in 56 B.C.

Cleopatra You must be joking! Do you think I look that old?

UM It's just what our records show. If our records say the money's been paid, there's nothing I can do about it. Our internal audit division is very strict about things like that.

Cleopatra I'm going to call the Police! POLICE!!!!

Petio No, don't do that! *(to the UM)* Can't you do something for her?!

UM There's absolutely nothing I can do about it. It's down here in black and white. 40 000 gold talants paid 2000 years ago by her lover Gaius Julius Caesar.

Vasko I didn't know that about Caesar.

UM Facts are facts. 40 000 gold talants paid 2000 years ago.

Petio She's had 2000 years to spend it. How do you expect her to live on 2 talants a year? Have you asked her that? The talant's really lost its value. She has to sing at funerals. Can you imagine that? Caesar's lover frozen to her bones at the graveside? The Roman Empire should be ashamed of itself.

UM It was an enormous sum of money. The Empire's entire budget for the year.

Cleopatra It might have been then. But it's not worth anything now. You used to be able to buy three pairs of really good stockings for a dollar... but now...

Petio And slaves were 20 cents each... but now everything's so much more expensive... devaluation!

UM can try and speak to the bank about compensation for inflation... *(to Cleopatra)* Banks understand about inflation. How much compensation do you want?

Cleopatra Well. As much as possible.

UM Just name an amount.

Cleopatra Five million.

UM Five million?!

UM Pardon?

Cleopatra Perhaps a bit more then...

UM No, I can't give you any more than that.

Cleopatra Well, ten then. *(shakes Hannibal's hand)*

Petio She's mad!

Vasko What would you do with 10 million?

Cleopatra Put it in the bank in our child's name. Have you forgotten that we've got a child?

UM Isn't it Caesar's child?

Vasko No, it's mine.

Cleopatra No, it's not yours.

UM Whose is it then?

Cleopatra It doesn't matter.

UM It does. If it's Caesar's then it will be entitled to its inherited allowance, backdated with interest.

Cleopatra (*bowing her head*) Yes. It's Ceasar's. I was young and reckless.

Petio Yes. They were very close...

UM And how old is the child now?

Cleopatra Two.

UM Thousand?

Petio Yes. Time passes so quickly.

UM Good Lord! Ten million pounds child allowance!

Cleopatra No, it wasn't ten!

UM You said ten, didn't you?

Cleopatra No, fifteen. Take notes, if you can't remember.

Petio Mad!

Cleopatra I might be mad, but I want my money! Fifteen million pounds. Or I'll scream. (*screaming*) I'll scream!!!

UM I'll give you what you want. Just be quiet. Poor Caesar! How did he live with her?

Petio Didn't he turn gay after meeting her? Give her the money and disappear before it's too late.

UM I'll give her what she wants. Then I'll have to resign from the foundation.

Cleopatra Resign, but give me the money first.

UM You'll get it, just calm down. *(takes out his mobile phone)* Hello? Is that the bank? Salve, bank, Salve. It's tunneling unit 264 here. Yes, that's right, it's me... 5 million dollars and 10 million pounds. Yes, you heard me correctly: words and figures. I know, I know we've got a timetable... but there's no way out of this. Sancta simplicitus, bank, sancta simplicitus. It's a compromise we'll just have to make. All right? Can you get approval from the "Sancta simplicitus" fund? Grazia, bank, grazia! *(to Cleopatra)* All right. *(he presses a button on his mobile telephone and the sound of an elevator comes from the tunnel)* The money's coming.

The sound of the elevator stopping.

UM The money's arrived. Just sign the register and I'll start unloading the money. *(he goes back down into the entrance to the tunnel and starts dragging out money bags)*

Act Six

A small room full of sacks. Petio and Cleopatra start sorting the money out. Sonya sits smoking in the corner listening to a walkman. Completely at a loss with the situation and the money.

Cleopatra Don't touch anything! *(grabs a bag out of Petio's hands)* That's mine. Let it go!

Petio No it's not! Can't you see it's one of mine?

Cleopatra Let it go, or I'll scream.

Vasko Give it to her, Petio. Just give it to her! You'll be no worse off, just for one bag.

Petio She's got her 15 million. Fifteen bags with a million in each.

Cleopatra I'm going to count it all. *(rips open a bag and begins to count)*

Petio How are you going to count up to fifteen million? You'll spend the rest of your life counting.

Cleopatra That's a sacrifice I'll just have to make. *(rips open a second bag)*

Petio Look at the mess you're making...

Cleopatra I'll sweep it all up. *(gets the dustpan and brush)* I like sweeping.

Vasko What are you sweeping mine up for as well? I've only got a million. You're sweeping it all up like a typhoon... *(he starts putting his own money to one side)*

Cleopatra Don't touch it, do you hear?! All this rubbish is mine!

Petio Vasko, just leave it! I'll give you one of my bags. Don't pay her any attention! *(Throws him a bag and it gets mixed up with the others.)*

Vasko It's all mixed up now. How are we going to sort it all out?

Petio We'll just have to sort it out as best we can. *(he begins to sort them out using the shovel, singing in rhythm)*

Cleopatra I want another shovel!

Vasko *(grabs it and starts shovelling furiously)*
Here's a shovel, and another one for you... Do you want another one? *(Raises the shovel to strike her with it, but then gains his self-control and lowers it)*

Cleopatra I should have asked for more...

Vasko He said you couldn't have any more.

Cleopatra He'll give me more if I scream.

Vasko He's gone...

Cleopatra The tunnel's still there... I'll go down and shout. I want more!

Vasko What for?

Cleopatra I want to put some in the bank for my grandchildren.

Vasko I haven't got any grandchildren yet.

Cleopatra I don't want to wait until they're born. It'll be even harder then. It's getting harder by the day. Vaskomir! I'm going down the tunnel!

Vasko *(grabbing her)* Cleopatra!

Cleopatra Let me go! If they're giving money away, I want as much as I can get.

Vasko We've got as much as we need, haven't we?

Cleopatra I want more... Let me go or I'll scream!

Vasko Cleopatra!

Cleopatra I'll scream!

Vasko lets go of her.

Cleopatra More, I want more... I want my grandchildren to live a normal life. I'm going down that tunnel!

She goes into the tunnel and starts shouting. Her voice gradually grows faint.

Act Seven

Petio Now that was just plain greedy...

Vasko What's going to happen now?

Petio She'll get what she wants...

Vasko I don't think so.

Petio You saw how weak their nerves are. All she has to do is start screaming in that bank of theirs and they'll shrug their shoulders and say, "O, Sancta Simplicitus!" and give her the whole fund. And then with all that money, she'll get herself killed. You know I'm beginning to wonder what we're going to do with all this money?

Vasko The most sensible thing to do is to spread it out over three month periods and...

Petio Use it to pay salaries.

Vasko Yes.

Petio And what am I going to do when it runs out?

Vasko Well... you'll have to ask whatshisname for more...

Petio Well, we'd be better off not performing at all. If he's just going to be handing out money left, right and centre. *(goes over to the centre of the room and tries to get his bearings)* Vasko, what do you reckon? Which way is the Roman Empire? Over there?

Vasko *(concerned)* The Roman Empire? No? That's North.

Petio What do you mean North? Where does the sun rise from?

Vasko I'm not interested in politics... It rises wherever they say it does.

Petio Can't you think sensibly for a moment? *(he tries to get his bearings again)* East, West, North, South... So West must be over there?

Vasko I don't know. I've never been anywhere.

Petio Vasko, something's happening to me... Everything's spinning around and I'm losing my bearings... Is it just me or is the lamp on the floor?

Vasko You should check your blood pressure.

Petio This is a very unpleasant feeling! I've got the feeling that the lamp is underneath me on the floor. Where did that underground man go? Didn't he go up there?

Vasko You're upset. I'm upset too. Have some vodka... That's right. I'll have some as well. You know what we can do with those dollars?

Petio Nothing.

Vasko No.

Petio There's nothing we can do then... *(tries to do a handstand)* That's better. Now the lamp's where it should be.

Vasko What are you doing?

Petio Something's happening to me... I've lost my sense of direction.

Vasko What sense of direction?

Petio Vertical. I feel like I'm drunk... Up feels like down and down feels like up. Jesus. It's a horrible feeling.

Vasko It's the money that's doing it to you. That Hannibal didn't know what he was doing, giving it all to us.

Petio Vasko. Why don't we go up there?

Vasko Where?

Petio Up there! Through the hole. I can't stand it any more down here. I need air and light. I feel as though I'm suffocating. Didn't you see, he went that way as well. He's tricked us. They're all up there and we're down here. Hanging.

Vasko Look. Up and down are relative concepts. Everything depends on gravity. If it wasn't for gravity we'd explode. If you look at things objectively, then we're all hanging in the universe.

Petio Not all of us. It's just us hanging here. And we're hanging downwards.

Vasko There's no up and down in the universe.

Petio There might not be for the universe. But for us there is... Everyone's trying to get out and go up, and we're trying to go down. Because we've lost our sense of direction. I'm leaving.

Vasko Where are you going?

Petio I'm going to throw myself up into that hole, just to see what will happen. *(throws himself head down into the hole)*

Vasko Petio! Petio!

Act Eight

In this act the presence of the hole becomes more active. It becomes illuminated with different and changing colours of light with occasional sudden flashes. There is smoke coming from the whole during the entire time. From time to time smoking geysers erupt blowing banknotes into the air. This is accompanied by the sound of Latin speeches and orations... Vasko and Sonya drink the last of Sonya's coffees and turn their cups over to read the coffee grounds and foretell their future.

Sonya Where is up and where is down?

Vasko People live everywhere. Don't you listen to Petio. He's lost his marbles.

Sonya I can see that.

Vasko It's really got out of hand. But they'll be back.

Sonya I'm frightened I don't go myself.

Vasko Sonya, please!

Sonya Why not? There's nothing here to stay for?

Vasko What do you mean? You're young, you've got a future... can you see this black spot here? (*shows the coffee grounds in the cup*)

Sonya You've got a future while you're young. And then? You look after Cleopatra, don't you worry about me...

Vasko You'll have to fight.

Sonya Who?

Vasko Who? People like yourself. (*shows the cup*). You see this here...

Sonya And what have they done wrong? They're just like me, they want to live.

Vasko Survival of the fittest. That's how it works.

Sonya That's not the truth.

Vasko You should have asked for more money. When you've got money, you can always work things out somehow. Survival of the richest.

Sonya And that's not the truth.

Vasko So what is the truth? If we're in a labyrinth, at least choose the brighter tunnel. That way you won't keep bumping into the walls. There's a wall here, and here and over there. (*pointing to the walls*) You find a door and go through it. You can go out, walk around the streets, go to the pubs. Even drive along the roads, leave the country if you want to – if they let you out. And all you have to do is to look around and you'll see it's the same everywhere, perhaps even worse. But you still end up coming back here. Because all the streets and the paths in the labyrinth are dead ends. Wherever you go,

you always end up back here. Wall. *(points to it)* Walls, walls... You can't go up, but you can go down... *(Looks at Sonya with the expression of an explorer discovering something)* That's the exit! That's the exit, Sonya! *(Rushes to the hole)*

Sonya

Vasko!

Vasko

That's the exit, Sonya, exit!

Sonya

Everyone's gone mad...

Vasko

They're not mad, Sonya, we're the mad ones. I've just realised that, Sonya, are you coming?

Sonya

No.

Vasko

Well, I am! I'm leaving! *(Sonya grabs him)*

Sonya

Vasko!

Vasko

I'm leaving! *(Sonya tries in desperation to stop him)*

Sonya

Vasko wait! I'm coming too!

Act Nine

Silence

Sonya

Vasko? Where are we?

Vasko

In the tunnel... that's where. There's other tunnels here, crossing each other. It's a complete maze. I think we're lost.

Sonya

Vasko. Where are you?

Vasko

I'm here. Hold on to me or we'll get lost.

Sonya

Vasko, I'm scared. Let's go back!

Vasko

How do you think you'll find your way back in this maze? We should have taken a reel of thread with us and let it out along our way. There's no way we can make it back now...

Sonya

So what are we going to do?

Vasko I don't know. I'm hungry. We should have brought some food with us.

Sonya *(whispering)* Vasko? Vasko? I can hear something? I think someone's coming?

Vasko Where?

Sonya Over there somewhere.

Someone coughs in the dark

Vasko I heard that as well.

Sonya What are we going to do now?

Vasko Give ourselves up. We'll ask for political asylum or something like that.... I'll say something like.... you know.... how do you say "friend" in Latin?

Sonya I don't know. I think it's "amigos"

Vasko That's Spanish.

Sonya They're all alike those languages.

Vasko Isn't Italian closest to Latin? How do you say it in Italian?

Sonya Don't know.

Vasko Let's try amigos. *(Shouting)* Salve amigos!

After a pause a voice replies

Voice Salve Amigos!

Vasko He understood me. *(Loud)* Vivat Roma!

Voice Vivat Roma!

Vasko Vivat Romano Imperium!

Voice Vivat Romano Imperium!

Vasko Do you hear that? We've made contact.

Sonya Tell him your name.

Vasko All right. *(Loud)* Meus nomen Vasilius.

Voice Meus nomen Pietros.

Vasko His name's Pietros. We've introduced each other.

Sonya You've got to have a conversation now.

Vasko I don't know any more Latin. I can only remember the university anthem.

Vasko (*singing*) Vivat Academia...

Voice (*singing*) Vivant professorer...

Vasko We've made contact (*continues the song*) Vivat Academia...

Voice Vivant professores...

All three sing the entire verse of the anthem

Vivat Academia,
vivant professores. (bis)
Vivat membrum quodlibet,
vivant membra quaelibet,
semper sint in flore. (bis)

Alma Mater floreat
quae nos educavit, (bis)
caros et commilitones
dissitas in regiones
sparsos congregavit. (bis)

Light from a candle. Vasko, Sonya, Petio and Cleopatra standing on the stage singing

Petio Is that you, Vasko?

Vasko It's us.

Petio Scared us to death! I thought they'd caught us.

Vasko Who?

Petio The Roman police. That's who. They've tightened up the visa procedures and they're expelling all emigrants. Where do you think you're going?

Vasko There. We saw you and we thought....

Cleopatra Goodness me!

Petio Better to go back. It's no place for us there.

Vasko What? Isn't there any work?

Petio The only work you can find without a work permit is at the Colliseum.

Vasko What, for musicians?

Petio No. Gladiators, Vasko! I had a go?

Vasko And what happened?

Petio I got a part in a reenactment of the battle between the Spartans and Xerxes.

Vasko What side were you on?

Petio I was Xerxes.

Vasko And did you fight?

Petio No, Vasko. I didn't.

Vasko So what happened?

Petio I ran away. When those Spartans came out I ran around the outside of the arena. There's me running and they're coming after me. I ran around the arena two, three, four times.... They just about caught up with me when the Emperor (that's what they call their president) stood up in his box, raised his hands and shouted out: "This is not the Olympic Games. We want Gladiatorial combat! If anyone wants the Olympics they can go up to the surface!" That's when I scuttled down one of the tunnels in the Colliseum and kept running 'til I got here.

Cleopatra I got a role singing in an early Christian opera as a martyr amongst the hungry lions. I sang and the lions roared... Then at the end the lions surrounded me and opened their mouths. At that moment I shouted out, "I'll scream!" and the lions ran away in fright into the orchestra and I ran off down the tunnels until I caught up with Petio here. It's a good job there's plenty of tunnels down there... The whole earth is like a labyrinth.

Vasko Quiet! I think I can hear someone coming.!

Vasko Is it the Roman police?

Petio Worse than that. I think they're Spartans... We'd better get out of here, it's going to get worse.

Act Ten

They exit the tunnel into Vasko's apartment panting.

Petio Ahhh! We got out at last! Turn the table over and put it over the hole, quickly!!!

They turn the table over and cover the hole

Petio We're a lot better off here, Vasko. You can't even say hello in Latin. But here you can swear as much as you like and you feel better. Go and get me a couple of bottles of whisky. I can't get those Spartans out of my mind. Get three bottles.

Vasko Where's the money?

Petio You've got a million haven't you?

Vasko That's right... I forgot I was rich. When you get used to being poor, it's hard to forget it. There's still some vodka left.

Petio Sit down then. Cheers?

All Cheers! *(They raise their glasses)*

At that moment the table covering the hole in the floor starts moving.

Vasko Quiet! Someone's coming up!

Petio It's the Spartans! Press down on the table!

They all press down on the table. Someone starts banging the table from below

Petio Back! Go back! Gladiatorial combat is forbidden here!

They hear the powerful sound of a pneumatic drill and they hide in the corners. Hannibal comes out of the tunnel

Hannibal Salve Amici!

They look at him silent and frightened.

UM Vivat Imperium Romanum!

Sonya Have you got more money for us?

UM No. I haven't got any more money to give you. I got fired. They fired me and expelled me from the Empire.

Petio What did you get fired for?

UM They accused me of trafficking in illegal immigrants.

Petio What immigrants?

UM You lot. They saw you down there and....

Cleopatra That's not true. We've just been sitting here...

UM Can I stay here, with you?

Petio Course you can. Have a seat. Vasko, give him a glass.... And something to eat.

Vasko All I've got is dog food.... It's what I bought when I was poor. I was thinking of getting a dog...

Petio Doesn't matter. Anything goes with brandy. Cheers *(They drink)* We'll have a drink and we'll have something to eat... and we'll have a bark... Woof, woof! *(Petio cheers up)* Ha, ha, ha! Woof, woof! Auuuuuu!

Vasko *(joins in the)* Uuuuuuu! Ha, ha, ha! Woof, woof!

Vasko and Petio are having fun, barking. Cleopatra also starts joining in slowly, howling in a high soprano voice. They imitate a four-legged canine dance. They begin to rip the money bags with their teet and to "bury" the money with their feet. The floor is covered with money and they roll around in it. This could be seen as an emotional release of tension, but Sonya sees it in a completely different way, and covers her ears with her hands.

Hannibal is amazed.

Sonya *(shouting)* That's enough! You see what you've done with your bags of money? What did you give us all that money for?

UM I had a mission and had to complete it.

Sonya But what did you chose us for?

UM Because you were poor.

Sonya So just because we were poor, that gave you the right to torment us, is that right?

UM I wanted you to have something and make you happier and better people.

Vasko You think it's right to give money to poor people?

Sonya I think we should give it all back, before we go completely mad.

Petio You reckon? If you give it back, we really will go mad.

Cleopatra Let's burn it! I can't stand the sight of that money any more.
(She tries to strike a match, but it won't light)

Vasko Stop it, you'll burn the house down!

Petio *(pointing at the Underground man)*
It's all his fault! He's to blame! He's the one we have to set fire to!

UM O, sanctus simplicitus!

Petio Sanctus simplicitus? You ruined our lives! *(He picks up a stack of money and throws it at the Underground man. The other start throwing money at him as well. The pile gradually grows higher and higher and completely covers him).*

Petio Burn him!
Cleopatra strikes a match

Sonya Stop it!
She begins to dig in the pile of money and when she gets to the floor, realises that the Underground man has disappeared. They all start looking for him but he's nowhere to be seen.

Sonya He's not there?! He just disappeared.

Petio He's right, you know. This is no fit place to live.

Sonya There's just the money left...

Vasko And we're left here as well. The money hasn't changed anything.

Cleopatra What can we do?

Vasko Nothing

Petio We could wait and see if something will change...

Cleopatra But will it?

Sonya Even if nothing does, there's nothing else we can do except wait. We'll just have to sit and wait.

Vasko So, we sit and wait.

Petio We'll sit and wait.

Sonya We'll sit and wait. Everything changes in this world. Day and night change, spring and winter, entire eras, governments... Everything changes but our waiting is going to be eternal. At night time we wait for the day to come, in the winter we wait for the spring to come. And day always comes after night. That's the only thing we still believe in. But even if it didn't ever come again, we'd still be waiting. We will wait!

During the monologue a divine radiance gradually begins to illuminate the stage from above. The distant sound of choral singing can be heard. The radiance and the singing gets closer.

Everyone We will wait!

The singing and the radiance reaches its apotheosis. A white throne slowly descends from the sky. There is a man dressed in white sitting on the throne. Everything is as beautiful and ephemeral as a vision. Everyone falls to their knees. Their hair and clothes are ruffled by a sudden wind.

Overground Man You will be rewarded. We will save you.

Vasko rises up slowly. His hair is ruffled.

Vasko Who are you?

Overground Man

We are from a world above the earth – the world of eternal goodness, love and happiness. Your waiting will be rewarded and we will save you. Come with me!