

Here, this suit is as good as new. Take it, I don't need it. I took it, thanked him and went home. He loves me; he has no children, no wife, he does not do anything, he has an independent income and he can tell that I am living from hand to mouth, that I'm always studying, that I need a wife and that I may unfortunately already have a child - so he said to himself: "Why not help him? After all, he is family, and he does study, he isn't stupid, doesn't eat much, writes poetry and dresses like a beggar." And I said to myself: "Not bad! I have a suit, a real gentleman's suit! I will not be forced to bear the pitying looks of acquaintances and the scornful looks of strangers like someone wrongfully convicted anymore. And not only that! This is wonderful! Just last night I was telling some gentlemen in the café that I dislike the cinema because of the vulgarity of the subject matter and the crudity of the plot, which my fragile artistic sensibility cannot bear, and I noticed immediately that they linked this fragile sensibility with my fragile behind. When walking with a young lady, I am forced to be clumsily silent for when I speak, I gesticulate, and if I spread my arms, my coat sleeves become so short (I am wearing my brother's suit) that they would be noticed even if I did have cuffs. The suit is too short in each and every way: if I stand tall, as befits my age, you can see my unwashed shirt, so to maintain a natural relation between the trousers and the coat I have to bend my shoulders

as much as possible, and then they say: "He walks like an old man."

Thus I am getting used to a hunched back and an old man's stride and am beginning to believe that I am falling into marasmus and that my youth is rapidly passing.

But, oh my! Do I love female company! It seems to me that it does not make one stupider, as is rightfully claimed, but that it clarifies and refreshes like cognac when you drink it from a small glass. Our sense of smell becomes more refined, our eyes sharper, our tongue more deft, our gesticulation more artistic. Just giving a kiss is true exercise: our muscles, our blood, our nerves - they are all stretched like on a stall bar. And the looks: the whisper, the squeeze, the dance of the eyes expands and constricts the heart like a great knee-bend; to know how to embrace a woman, to find the opportunity, the right place, to hold your breath at the right moment, this exercises the mind and our soul becomes an acrobat: you can feel and fall in love with each and every one and then forget them all, kiss them all and fall in love with none.

True, they say that the gentle sex finds all this flattering silly; but they don't stress enough that it is also untrue; that, for instance, "I'll die for you" is truly nonsense, but it is also a lie that this simple and silly lie connects the classical instinct and culture, which is something all the great minds and apostles of our lives strive for.

But I could show up in decent female company, where kisses are gymnastics: my suit was the only obstacle. "Pauper" - that's what the young ladies would think, listening to my poetic outbursts and looking at my vagrant's attire. And I just couldn't stand it: I would feel ashamed, and not only that: I would feel dishonest, a vulgar scoundrel, for today in the cultured world, the first prerequisite of male-female relations is that the man picks up the tab, and the individual who doesn't pay for love is considered the lowest of beings.

And the feeling of shame has fatally accompanied me throughout my life: the pity of my acquaintances and the obvious escape of poverty deprived me of all energy, confidence and merriment, degrading my male pride, my gentleman's honor and masculine conceit to pity, charity and tips from mistresses and waitresses.

So it is easy to imagine how the suit transformed and elevated me. Now I could look at the windows of jewelry stores which captivated me

with their refinement, glitter and cleanliness without embarrassment or self-consciousness. For now everyone would say: "There, he's wondering which ring to buy for his fiancée" and not like before, "He's trying to figure out what would be best to steal". And the fashion-shop windows that interested me as much as the papers, the press and the embroidery of contemporary literary production, I could stare at in peace without fear of comments like "There he is, staring like a calf and getting in people's way. He must have just arrived from the country." And in the theater I could for once enjoy the seat and the comfort with the assurance that my intense staring at the actors would not cause my neighbors to exclaim: "It must surely be the first time he's ever seen a production, that's why he keeps whispering 'hush' at any rustle", and the like. Until now I didn't even dare enter a better café, because it seemed to me everyone would notice I didn't know how to sit and the waiters would despise and ignore me, and I, knowing why they were avoiding me, would not dare order aloud, "Waiter, a cup of coffee, please", but would sit like that till kingdom come, chewed out by the other guests' looks. "He doesn't know how to order"... and that the waiters, seeing I had ordered nothing, would ask me to leave...

I put on the new suit and walked out enthusiastically. The hat and the shoes didn't quite go with the new style, but in decent places you take your hat off and you don't put your shoes under your neighbor's nose. I headed for the café. At the corner I ran into Mrzljak the dandy. He looked at me, came closer and exclaimed: "Wow!" My enthusiasm immediately vanished. He was dressed very elegantly, he even had a new velvet vest, and I was not at all surprised nor did I pay particular attention to the fact. Whereas I was just dressed decently and he couldn't help saying "wow" with surprise. What did it mean? So to him this was quite an event and he would tell everyone I was given a nice, classy suit. Yes, he would certainly say that I was "given" it, I could tell from his demeanor. And indeed he went on to say:

- Who gave it to you? I am so glad. You were really unspeakable. I'm so pleased.

My eyes filled with tears and rage, I was speechless; I held my tongue and began to pull at my mustache. (I had no tobacco and was going to ask Mrzljak for a cigarette.) Mrzljak noticed my embarrassment and said:

- Good-bye. Come to play chess tonight.

I ran home. Now my position seemed even worse, gloomier and even more annulled. Now they would say: he was given a suit like a beggar. It must show both on the suit and on me that we weren't exactly made for each other. Until now all my acquaintances could consider me a pauper, but a pauper with character, to whom you can offer charity but who turns it down, an original pauper to whom you can give a decent suit but he prefers to walk around in rags despising all etiquette and ridiculing social norms.

I undressed and put on my old suit. The thought that they could consider me original and eccentric made me feel good again: "See, Mrzljak invited me to play chess, whereas last night he left the café as soon as I walked in, just to avoid having to talk to me intimately and warmly in front of others. I'll show him now. I'm really elevated by the thought of our imminent meeting, of his surprise and my revenge, when he sees me in this old, worn-out suit."

But I changed my mind: "No. It's better to put on the new suit and show myself to people that way. Let them all see that I too have a decent, even elegant suit, then I can take it off and put on my old rags. That way they will see that, if I wanted to, I could become elegant overnight, but that - I don't want to."

I undressed again and put on my new suit. But when I saw my reflection in the mirror, my good spirits deserted me. Used to short sleeves, I found these too long; the suit seemed too wide, and the trousers themselves were proof enough that I was skinny and undernourished and that it would have been much wiser if I had bought a good dinner than an elegant suit, although it wasn't hard to tell that the suit wasn't really mine anyway.

Then even darker thoughts came: "If others saw me in this suit now, they would be as surprised as Mrzljak; faced with their wonder, I would naturally become embarrassed and my confusion would prove even more that the suit isn't mine. And tomorrow, when I showed up in my old suit, they would rightfully conclude that I am no pauper with style but just a pauper and bungler who doesn't know how to wear a new suit, and would add that I put back on the old one after I saw the impression I had made in the new one." I undressed and remained in my

briefs. Then I lay down and rolled on the bed. I was even more indecisive. "Mrzljak has already seen me - Mrzljak will expect me - Mrzljak will think I didn't come - because of this problem."

I got dressed and went out. In my old suit. I had a few sexters in my pocket; tomorrow I was to get the usual monthly allowance from my father. My father was a simple shop-keeper in a small town. I was forcing myself to produce a mood of lightheartedness, humor and idealism from the contrasts "father - a shop-keeper, I - a poet; the new suit in the wardrobe - the old one on me; fifty pennies in my pocket - thousands of ideas in my head", to make fun of people because you love them, of yourself because you respect yourself, of life because you appreciate it - and regard progress pessimistically because pessimism gives you more material for analysis, criticism and witty quips.

"You believe in bodily resurrection of the dead and in Judgment Day. But tell me, what about those whose legs were amputated or who were buried headless?" That is how skepticism expresses the joyful understanding of life and the total absence of any otherworldly concerns. "One kiss weighs ten lies, one embrace twenty, and the logical sequence - one truth which proves that all the joys of the pleasure and sweetness of life are an illusion." Such pessimism rises from real youthful idealism which disinterestedly enjoys only thoughts and phrases.

Thus I intended to see Mrzljak and shock him by saying: "You see, I sold the suit for a few florins. I only had a few sexters left in my pocket. My father is poor. I spent the money. That's what my life is like: forever living from hand to mouth and having a few moments of fleeting pleasure." And when I went to the café, when I told Mrzljak how I got five florins for the suit and how I spent almost all of it on tobacco, wine and a tip, and only a crown was left in my pocket, Mrzljak was shocked. He said:

- You're an eccentric.

I was very pleased with that. I had a cup of coffee, left all my money on the saucer and went home. "What does Mrzljak think now? And the waiter? And all the others whom Mrzljak doubtlessly will tell... An eccentric! An eccentric! Despises etiquette, money, wealth, all the things we respect and appreciate. Is he a cynic, a frivolous person, or an eccentric?"

But getting closer to home, I was more and more convinced that I had committed two great idiocies by telling one lie: "I sold the suit", and that the credibility of that lie was paralyzed by another truth: a tip of forty pennies.

But what shall I do now? Tomorrow my relative expects me to dinner. I am hungry already. I am penniless. What will it be like tomorrow? If I really sell the suit, I will offend a very sensitive relative and will not be able to count on his frequent five-crowners and, who knows, someday maybe even his estate... And if I put on the new suit and Mrzljak sees me, he will think very poorly of me: "That's a fellow who brags shallowly and thinks he's making an impression if he says he spent ten crowns all at once, while he never even had the money"...

My nerves were already tired but alert nevertheless. That wore me out even more. I felt a great burden on my soul, the weight of life, suffocation, the lack of air. My heart began to ache from it. My breathing was faster, the great emptiness in my breast felt the sharp pain as if I had been pierced by frost. All the stupid things I had done and the lies to which I tied my personality, convincing myself and others that I'm an eccentric, were now backfiring: I had to recognize that lies are identical to idiocies.

The next day I waited till dark to put on my new suit and then went furtively to visit my relative, ill-willed and with no appetite. At other times I would literally polish the plates, which made my relative very happy; I'd drink, talk about acting, philosophy, art, which pleased my relative and usually when I was leaving he'd give me five crowns. Now it was all different: I went there displeased with myself, afraid that Mrzljak might see me. My relative immediately noticed it and asked: "What's wrong with you?" His question put me in an even worse mood, so I just answered "Nothing".

But later, at the sight of the risotto and a bottle of white wine, I began to feel a peace of the stomach and a spiritual satisfaction, and precisely at that moment my relative said, displeased:

- I can see that you're in a bad mood today. I won't bother you - eat in silence and go.

That totally depressed me: that he would have noticed my bad mood again precisely at the moment when I was getting ready to be in a good mood - this damned coincidence upset me and I kept silent. We

parted without a word and without the five crowns. Once in the street, I was livid.

What kind of man is he? He thinks I have to entertain him with artistic impressions and reflections because he gives me dinner and that I have to smile and thank him ceaselessly for giving me a suit I didn't know what to begin with. Yes! He was so cold to me today probably just because I didn't kiss his slippers out of gratitude for his good deed. Did he expect me to praise to heaven the cut, the fabric, the elegance of his suit? And to exclaim: "How well it fits!" Now I see all the spiritual ugliness of my benefactor. He gave me the suit because of himself, so people wouldn't say: "Look how miserable Mr. N's relative looks. It is a disgrace for both of them." What's more, he gave me the suit to put me under obligation, to win my feelings, my company, etc.... since he has neither wife nor child. Isn't that already an usurpation of my individual olfactory and digestive rights: to give me rice and expect me to like anything he chooses to put on my plate - and an usurpation of my taste: asking me to wear a suit that he likes and that he gave me? For had I shown up in the old suit, he would have hated me and I would have offended him. He shows only too clearly that he wants to feed and dress me only so he can enjoy contemplating (he has nothing else to do anyway!) his own good deeds. So, willy-nilly, I have to eat copiously, wear elegant clothes and live comfortably - just for him! Thank you very much for that kind of benefaction! He is old, with nothing to do, with no intelligence to take an interest in the theater etc., so he took me, as good as bought me, like a horse and carriage for his idle hours. He doesn't have the talent, he doesn't know how to train a dog, watch him jump at his "hop!", eat and fetch his stick, so he took me in order to watch me wear his suit and, at his "hop", empty his plates. And I became mean as a dog: I smiled at his jokes, ate his meals and put on his suit just to please him! I even took his five-crowners not to offend him! How mean you are, mankind! If beggars and paupers didn't exist, you'd have to invent them just for the rich people's sport and luxury, just like you invented God for the comfort of the mind and the enjoyment of the imagination!

Thus I sold the suit for seven crowns and just like the other day I had been careful that Mrzljak didn't see me in the new suit, I now avoided my "benefactor" in the old one. But in this avoidance and fear, my anger cooled down.

Why am I avoiding my relative? Why am I hiding from him? Am I guilty then? I sold the suit he gave me, and I had no right to do that. For he gave it to me with the intention and under the condition that I wear it. I simply deceived him, I tricked him. And did he really deserve that? He's always been fond of me. He enjoyed treating me well, I enjoyed treating him badly. For had he known that gifts offend me, he certainly would not have tried offering me things like that. And I, knowing that I would offend him by selling his suit to the pawnshop, did it anyway. And if I now avoid him, it means that I'm guilty.

...Two days later, I got a letter and a parcel.

"My dear and only one, where have you been? You are probably studying, or maybe you are ill. Last time you were in a bad mood, so I didn't want to bother you with my questions. Let me know through the servant who brought you this letter and the parcel if you are ill, or are you able to come and see me tonight. I haven't been able to go out for a week now. You know of my unfortunate rheumatism. And I've been coughing all day. I won't live long. I'm sick and old. In the parcel you'll find a hat, some wool underwear and shoes. I could see that your old hat and shoes don't fit well with that suit. Now you'll be all set. Come. I'll be waiting for you. I have no one but you. Yours..."

The servant was waiting for my reply. "Yes!" I said aloud. My relative was expecting me, "only me, he has no one but me with all his thousands - ill - almost in the grave. Oh!" I ran out. "What now?" How can I go see him now without the suit and not offend him, anger him, make him sad in what are perhaps the last moments of his life?

I went to the pawn-shop. "If you don't find the suit, it will be the end of me. I'll say: Cousin, I sold it because I was hungry. I'll repeat: Hungry, you know, three days without a slice of bread. Can you imagine! Please forgive me, I'm a scoundrel, a pauper, forgive me. See, I'm weeping..."

But the suit wasn't sold. I was relieved. "How much?" I asked the owner. He hadn't recognized me. I was even more relieved.

- Twenty-five crowns.

I had thirty in all. But I never hesitated for a moment. My benefactor who has done so much for me may be dying - it was high time I paid him back and sacrificed these last crowns - as the saying goes, the left

hand mustn't know what the right hand's doing. I won't have to humiliate myself, to fawn to him and lie. I'll go to him happily and proudly, as befits my character.

So I said:

- I'll take it!

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Translated by Ljiljana Šćurić

I regret having to stop writing. But if I were to go on like this, I would spoil everything I had written so far, just as if I had clumsily pressed a wet hand over the still undry ink. For when I started on the first story, I never dreamed I would end up writing ten of them, a whole book, and call them "burlesques". Only after I had sent the first one off to a publisher did I become greedy for the royalties and said to myself: "Well, well. True, I had wasted a crown for a shave; but if I hadn't wasted it like that, I would not have been able to write so many lines, worth all of twenty crowns." And that put me in such a good mood that I decided to write another one, two, ten... I took hold of life and began to draw from it all those events which are so small and trite that everyone abounds in them and overlooks them; yet they are so great and unusual that they are worth underlining. Small as a material fact, great as psychological matter. Thus I conceived the "burlesques": to find in our psyche that which others have already found in life: the grotesqueness of the trite, the importance of the insignificant, the incredibility of normalcy, the coincidence in everyday life: "The Charmed Cupboard - Peasants in the City - An Hour After Midnight - The Mouse..." In all of them coincidence is the main factor, grotesqueness the only point, and the spirit depends more on the goodwill of the actor than on the effort of the writer. The author throws the burlesque on paper heedlessly: a coincidence can turn into