

The End of Myths

A fantastic story in sixteen scenes

Ironic prose from 1959–1960. First part of two scenes written by Tzvetan Stoyanov about the “sunset of the ancient gods under socialism”, where the “Olympians” have to be forcibly incorporated into a labor-production cooperative (LPC). An allusion to the fate of “foreign people” under “people’s power”, preceding the essay “Orpheus. Fooling around with mythology” (1963). Typescript from Tzvetan Todorov’s private archive kept by © Toni Nikolov. Published for the first time.

The introductory, Which acts as a prologue and is very calm, so it doesn’t count

The year is nineteen sixty-something. The time is August, before noon. Jupiter is walking along the path and suddenly notices three people who come out in front of him and block his path.

“I am from the administration,” says one, “and I wish to speak to you. Would you be so kind as to follow me?”

“With pleasure,” says Jupiter, “but my relatives will be looking for me and worried about me. If it were possible for me to let them know?”

“It’s only a few hours,” says the man from the administration. “But of course, I don’t want to cause you any trouble, so let your loved ones know, and we’ll wait for you.”

“Thank you very much,” says Jupiter. “I won’t be late.”

When he returns, he finds them in the same place.

“If it’s ready, let’s go,” says the man from the administration.

“Let’s go, let’s go,” says Jupiter.

The four of them set off and reach a cart road. A jeep has stopped in the middle of the road.

“Please get in the car,” says the man from the management.

“Couldn’t we talk here too?” Jupiter asks.

“We’ll just go down to the checkpoint,” says the man from the administration. “It’s more convenient there and no one will bother us. Then we’ll bring you back.”

“I’ve never been in a jeep before and I feel oddly excited” Jupiter replies, “but if you think it’s more comfortable down there and if it’s only to the checkpoint, fine!”

The car drives through the forest and finally stops in front of a rough, wooden shack. The manager invites Jupiter to come in. The other two stay outside. The shack is dimly lit, with a wooden table and chairs. The manager takes out a pack of cigarettes and hands it to Jupiter.

“Do you smoke?” he asks.

“Oh, no, thank you!” says Jupiter. “The vices of civilization have not yet reached us.”

“That’s why I envy you,” says the man from the administration. “I’ve tried so many times and I can’t give up.”

“Is it that difficult?” asks Jupiter. “Surely it’s bad for your health?”

“A lot” the man from the administration replies. “At night when I go to bed, I’m torn with coughing. I get short of breath easily. But I can’t give up.”

“Why don’t you try it gradually?” says Jupiter.

The man from the administration dodges the question. It seems that the topic of quitting no longer concerns him.

“You know what difficulties you created for us in the beginning,” he says.

“Us?” Jupiter is surprised. “What are you talking about?”

“Yes, it is you” the man from the administration replies. “When we found you, we simply could not investigate where you are from and what you are. You are not subject to classification. At first we thought that you were a sabotage center that was sending enemies all over the country. Only later, after careful investigation, did we realize that you had no dangerous intentions and were people like ourselves, only that you lived more secluded.”

“We are actually gods,” Jupiter notes. “Very, very old gods.”

“Well, yes,” says the man from the administration. – We have read about this in the “Iliad”. We know about the ancient Antaeus, and about the Procrustes’ bed and so on. But we have a theory on these matters and for us the word deity is unacceptable. We will have to replace it with something else. Remnants of the mythological era or something like that.

“That doesn’t sound very flattering,” says Jupiter. “You’ll have to agree that no one likes being called a relic. And besides, it’s a long and tedious thing to remember.”

“It’s true that it’s long,” the man from the administration agrees. “Nothing, it’s not that important. I want to talk about something else now.”

“I am listening to you very carefully,” says Jupiter.

“Thank you,” the man from the administration replies. “Let’s start by saying that your existence has in any case become known and you can no longer live in complete secrecy. Us becoming mutually acquainted will be inevitable. You will have to contact us, and we will be happy to accept you into our society as its full members.”

“Very nice,” Jupiter replies.

“So,” says the man from the administration. “So far we agree. Now, before I go any further, I want to ask you a question. Do you know what a state economic plan is?”

“Please, what do you think of us?” Jupiter replies. “We even have a radio up at the top. I assure you that over the past few years we have all been following the progress of your construction very closely.”

“Very good,” the man from the administration remarks. Since you know what a state plan is, I must tell you then that according to the state plan this entire area will be covered by large-scale construction. The valley below us will become a dam, the beginning of a hydroelectric power plant; deposits of non-ferrous metals have been discovered on the northwestern slope.

Jupiter is silent.

“Yes,” the man from the administration continues. “Under these circumstances, you understand that your current way of life will have to change. Don’t misunderstand me, we don’t hold any ill will towards you. But you must agree that your stay at the top will be difficult from now on. Leaving aside everything else, you will not be able to find the means of subsistence as before.”

“Okay, so what do you plan to do?” Jupiter asks.

“This question must be answered by both of us. That is why we have gathered now to discuss the situation amicably. If you join our society, it means that you will always have its support...”

“I really should thank you,” says Jupiter.

“But on the other hand,” the man from the administration continues – you too must be useful according to your strength and

abilities. In our country there is no place for laziness, for lounging, for breaking away from the general labor upsurge.

“I understand that,” says Jupiter.

“Then what do you plan to do?”

“You know, Jupiter replies,” I am not in a position to give an answer at the moment. All this is very interesting for us, but you are telling me this so suddenly. I will have to share it with my relatives. I have always consulted them on important matters. Even more so now. Then we could talk again.

“Of course, of course,” says the man from the administration. “At this meeting I just wanted us to get to know each other and exchange views. We will have other such meetings. After all, the deadlines are short and we don’t have much time. What do you say, for example, about tomorrow?”

“About tomorrow?” asks Jupiter. Isn’t it soon?

“No, it’s not,” says the man from the administration. “Talk to your relatives, and tomorrow I’ll go up there to you and we’ll continue our conversation.”

“I would be very pleased,” says Jupiter.

“Me too,” the man from the administration replies. “I’m actually glad we met.”

“Oh, believe me, the joy is mutual,” says Jupiter.

They shake hands, get out, get in the jeep, and return to the same place they started from. Jupiter gets out, the jeep turns around, and drives off in the opposite direction. Jupiter is left alone. The sun has long since set. He starts up the path, and as he walks, it gets completely dark. When it gets light again, it is already dawn the next day. In the large clearing below the peak, Jupiter has gathered his family. He has told them about the meeting the day before and about the conversation with the man from the administration.

“And so,” Jupiter begins, “our peace is no more. An answer is demanded of us, and unfortunately we no longer have the power we once had to answer as befits us. I think we are forced to step aside and join in, for the time being at least, while we wait for something better.”

The others move and speak almost simultaneously.

“We’ve been waiting for this for so long,” says Vesta. “It’s because of waiting that this fate befell us!”

“Because you are cowards,” says Mars. “You stood like mummies, waiting for them to climb on your heads!”

“Ridiculous courage,” says Apollo. “I would like to see it in action, not in words!”

“Why are you arguing?” Diana asks. “Can’t you see how pointless this is?”

“And now it turns out we’ll have to work, right?” says Venus.

“Yes, for people like you it will be difficult,” Vulcan replies.

“I can’t imagine that the world has changed so much,” says Juno.

“You have a lot to do with these old brains,” Mercury intervenes.

“And what exactly are you offering us?” Minerva asks.

“The thing is, I can’t offer you anything,” Jupiter replies. “I’m just letting you know so we can discuss the situation. The man from the administration will come today and ask the question bluntly. And we have to answer.”

Everyone is silent, looking grimly ahead.

“I wouldn’t say that our life has been incredibly happy so far,” Apollo declares, but we were used to it anyway. For centuries we have been lying on this grass, counting the pine cones on the branches of the fir trees, chasing the clouds with our eyes. No one knows better than us the pools where the trout jump and the places where the wild strawberries grow. No one can taste the taste of game roasted over a fire of pine branches more subtly. No one has ever achieved with such perfection the complete immersion in nothingness, the negation of manifestation, the great “far niente” whose ideal every elevated spirit has set for itself. There is no more beautiful place on the whole mountain, nor more suitable creatures to inhabit it. And now we must lose all this.

“And where we lived like kings,” says Mars “let’s build socialism.”

“Is it so bad to obey the government?” Diana asks.

“You will see,” says Mars, “you will see very soon.”

“You will understand,” Vesta intervenes, “that there are other things in this world, not just chasers on the trails!”

“Have you ever heard of labor?,” asks Mercury. Now you will not only hear, but also feel what labor is! And in its worst form: socially organized!

“Let’s not make things worse than they are,” Vulcan declares. “Labor is not that scary, it’s a matter of habit.”

“Is that so,” says Venus. “Thank you for such comfort!”

“There are people for everything,” Mercury intervenes “Some, gifted by nature with brute strength and a little brains, can stay in their forge all day!”

“Their existence is exhausted by their muscles,” Apollo declares. “But there are others who, having grown up amidst the vastness of the spiritual, will not accept such a fate!”

“If you call your laziness spirituality, I prefer to remain simple and ignorant,” says Vulcan.

“There is no point in arguing”, says Jupiter. “The question is not whether labor is acceptable or not; the question is that we are faced with a necessity that we cannot fight. If there is anything worth discussing, it is how to accept this necessity with our inherent dignity, without enduring unnecessary suffering and sacrifice. We must be true to our essence and arm ourselves with patience and inner harmony...”

“Nonsense,” Mars intervenes. “They are holding a knife to our throats, and he speaks to me of inner harmony! Ah, how could we have gotten ourselves into such a mess! What kind of a fool brought us here, to this country of the peasants, to be so foolishly trapped!”

“How dare you speak in such a tone?” Jupiter declares.

“The bad thing is that Mars is right,” Mercury replies.

“Really, why did we leave beautiful Greece?” says Juno.

“That was the stupidest thing ever”, Vesta declares. “Now let me pay for other people’s sins!”

“Ah, so you blame me”, says Jupiter. “Okay, I’m not afraid to take responsibility. I’ve always taken responsibility, because that’s my fate. But it’s a pity and a dirty thing that at this difficult moment you’re trying to pile all the blame on me. Back in the day, if you remember, you were all delighted with this place. It was full of game, fish, fruit, beauty, and back then, before it was even understood that in this life there are dangers, and troubles, and socialism, no one asked me why we came to this country and not another.

Vesta and Mars are grunting.

“Alas, so it was”, says Apollo. “We must admit that the place seemed peaceful and pleasant at the time, it had its advantages, and we were really drawn to it. The fascination was general. It did not spare Mars, who now wants to make himself the victim of someone else’s mistake. But in fact, if we think about it, we will see how unfortunate our choice was! Only now do I see that even from a purely aesthetic point of view this mountain hides some shortcomings that we did not notice before.

There is something primitive in it, something deeply vulgar, an ugly and irritating power, an abundance of contours and accumulation of substance, completely foreign to our feeling. It is tied in a stylistic unity with the people who inhabit the surroundings and who are now the bearers of the danger that hangs over us. Perhaps if we had shown more taste at the time and had descended further south, we would have avoided any contact with socialism!”

“Yes, if we had gone further south,” Juno joins in, “we would now be in lovely Hellas!”

“By the olive groves,” Diana adds.

“Perhaps you, but not me,” says Venus. “For me personally, olive groves are out of fashion. This whole peninsula has become deeply repugnant to me. When the time comes, we will have to communicate with people, but I would prefer to do this communication as far west as possible. I would rather go to the Riviera than to the olive groves.”

“If you were on the other side of the border,” Jupiter says, “you could go to Miami. But unfortunately you’re here, at the top, and we have no time to waste, because we have to decide something. And so far I haven’t heard anything meaningful from anyone.”

“You won’t hear it,” Minerva replies. “You’ve always been like that, when there was danger you threw yourself at each other, you whined, you did everything, but not what reason should have told you. And now you’re the same! You’d be a very, very sad sight if you weren’t so pitiful! By the way, I want to draw your attention to that black dot over there that’s creeping up the slope and gradually getting bigger. If my eyesight doesn’t deceive me, that’s the one in whose honor our gathering is today!”

Everyone looks up. Indeed, some creature is approaching the top. Shortly after, it appears in full growth.

“Yes, that’s him,” says Jupiter. And we haven’t decided anything! Tell me what we’re going to do now? Why did you keep quiet? Tell me, what are we going to tell the man?

“Don’t get so excited,” Minerva replies. “When he comes, we’ll continue the discussion together. It’ll even be easier for us that way, because he’ll probably make some suggestions. We’ll get our bearings better.”

“Just please be careful,” says Jupiter. “These are serious people, they’re not joking, you know. There’s no need to show your true

feelings to them. Tact is needed, after all, we represent the elite of a civilization!”

“Ah, if I lie in wait for him in the bushes,” Mars threatens. “Only the eagles will find his carcass.”

“Right?,” says Minerva. “And tomorrow two battalions arrive and in five minutes there will be nothing left of us. This is not the time when our father destroyed an entire army with a single bolt of lightning!”

“Oh, my dear, don’t remind me,” says Jupiter. “If I had my old strength, I would sing a different song! But the world has changed and I ask you to treat things realistically. Wow, the man is already very close. Stay calm and talk as if nothing had happened!”

The man from the administration finds himself on the lawn. He takes out a towel to wipe his sweat, smiles, and stands for a few minutes without speaking. Jupiter gets up to greet him. The two shake hands.

“Good afternoon, Comrades,” the man says.

“Good afternoon,” the others reply.

The man from the management sits down and smiles once more.

Jupiter introduces him to those present.

“So it’s you,” the man from the administration remarks. “Well, well, a connection has been established between your world and ours, and that’s very good, in my opinion. I must tell you that we down there are quite interested in your little society. Comrade Jupiter must have told you what the matter is.”

“Yes, let us know,” Vesta replies. And that, in our opinion, is not so good.

“The unpleasant thing is that we have been consulting up to this point,” says Jupiter, “and we have not reached a final decision. I must admit, I was expecting you later.”

“Oh, nothing, nothing,” says the man from the administration. “Actually, there’s no problem in discussing some things together, and whatever you want to say to each other, you’ll still have the opportunity to do so. We’re not here for an official conference, but simply to cement our new friendship.”

“A friendship that begins with an ultimatum,” says Mars.

“You are getting angry in vain,” the man from the administration replies. “We have not given you an ultimatum and although we are often slandered, violence is the last resort we use. I am convinced that with you we will never get there.”

“Of course,” says Jupiter.

“And yet you are driving us from the land with which we are connected by such fond memories,” Juno declares.

“Comrade”, says the man from the administration, “we have not come to an agreement. No one is chasing you. Even our wish is for you to stay and help us. But if you do not agree to this, it will be very difficult for you yourself. All these areas will be occupied by construction sites. You will simply remain confined at the very top and there will be nothing to live on.”

“And doesn’t the circumstance disturb you,” says Mercury, “that all these areas, as you call them, have been at our disposal and our property for centuries? And that now you have come with your plans for construction without even asking us if we give our consent?”

“We are building socialism,” says the man from the administration. And we have abolished many old property rights. There are many people in our country who used to be owners, but now they are no longer.

“Yes, but we don’t exploit anyone,” Apollo replies. “We just live here and take what nature gives us. We haven’t tortured, we haven’t grieved. On the contrary, we have strived to spread warmth and grace wherever we have been.”

“And I really cannot understand,” says Diana, “how you, who come in the name of the purest human ideals, to give bread to the hungry, to wipe away the tears of the weeping, you, who serve justice and dispense justice, can be so heartless and want to take away from us the places where we have lived since time immemorial!”

The man from the management starts to respond sharply, but sees that Diana is ready to cry, falls silent and lights a cigarette.

“I understand you well,” he says. “You are used to this place and this way of life. Everyone would like to live like this, in the midst of beautiful nature and with no worries. But you must also think about the thousands, millions of people down there who until recently were drowning in hunger and need. Can there be any doubt which is more valuable and which should be preferred: the empty peace of ten people or the prosperity of an entire nation? And do you know what will happen to these places? The new human labor will transform them in a way that no one has ever imagined. Big and brave men will burrow into the very depths of the mountain, will pierce it from the inside with corridors and shafts and will bring the expensive precious stones to the surface, so that the trolleys will then take them and fly them between

the ancient pines, all the way to the great furnaces in the plain, where streams of metal gushes out day and night. And those endless forests that descend to the south? There are places there where no one has ever set foot. When a storm knocks down the trees, they rot until they crumble to reddish dust. From now on, wide, paved roads will pass, connecting people with the forest, and fir trees will walk along them, and in the fir trees there is everything: formwork for buildings, and books, and bookshelves, and telegraph poles, and sleepers, and ship masts. And that beautiful grass – tall and soft like a carpet? Should it just stand there and only deer trample it? It can feed thousands of herds and will feed them. Mountain farms will develop here, providing milk and wool for the entire region. From one end of the ridge to the other, the woodpeckers will sing, and beautiful, protected animals will pluck the juicy shoots. And on the other side, where the narrowest place in the gorge is? There the dam wall will rise and block the valley. When the snow melts in the spring, the peaks will look out over the vast silver lake. A little further down at the hydroelectric power station, the water will fall with a thunderous roar and turn into light and power, hotels and holiday homes will spring up along the shore, and tourists from all over the world will come here to admire the charms of our homeland. In the evening, the white sails of sailboats will be chased over the waves, in the morning, skillful fishermen will go out to work singing, confident in their good catch. And on the other side of the lake, in the quietest and most secluded place, there will be a pioneer camp, and fifteen hundred children will camp there every year, filling the mountain with a cheerful noise, running across the meadows, and returning from the raspberries with their mouths not red. Yes, all this will happen, and very soon! What human joy is hidden in this hitherto forgotten land, a joy that is waiting to be discovered and deserved!”

Diana says nothing. The man from the administration looks excitedly at his interlocutors. Apollo leans over to Minerva and whispers.

“How tasteless this whole description is,” he says. “And yet it makes an impression. Did you notice that while he was talking he looked like a man possessed by a demon. A terrible fanatic! Any argument against such a man is meaningless. Look how everyone fell silent!”

“Yes, the happiness of thousands is something sublime,” says Jupiter. “Personally, I often think about it and it is close to my heart. But you must admit that, thinking about it, I also have a thought about myself; what to do, all living beings are so disposed and the opposite would be

unnatural. So at this moment, when we are all still fascinated by this poetic picture that our guest has so vividly painted before us, I would like to ask him the question: after all this, what will be our fate?"

"None!," replies Juno. "Don't you see that among these dams and trolley cars we will be superfluous? We will simply be sacrificed for the happiness of thousands!"

"A sacrifice for socialism," says Vesta.

"Why do you say that?," asks the man from the administration. "The situation is not so tragic. Let me repeat, no one wants to destroy you, on the contrary, we will help you. I told you, if you want, you can stay here, but I have no idea how you will live in the future. Therefore, it would be best for you to engage in some meaningful activity. Work will make you new people."

"You should not think," declares Venus "that we will be equated with ordinary laborers. Maybe you do not know it, but we are the bearers of an ancient and unsurpassed culture."

"We know this," says the man from the administration "and we respect your culture. Don't think that we neglect culture. Our aspiration is to take everything valuable that peoples have created over the centuries. You have no idea what care we take for the true flourishing of culture."

"Perhaps you really do care, and that does you honor," says Apollo, "but it still seems to me that your attitude towards culture remains, if I may put it that way, a bit *exoteric*."

"I don't understand that word," the man from the administration replies.

"Hmm, that's actually a more specific term," Apollo explains. How can I explain it to you? My point is that a person could be very affectionate towards an object and yet, throughout his entire existence, remain outside of it. Then his affection would only embrace the surface of the object, and what's inside, the core, would remain untouched.

"I don't know what you mean by inside and outside," says the man from the administration, "but I assure you that we all love culture with all our hearts and want it to serve everyone."

"Here, you see," Apollon notes. "You say "to serve everyone". And culture serves only itself, it is within itself and..."

"Excuse me," Minerva intervenes, "this topic is very interesting, but at the moment we are occupied with other, more practical problems and it is proper to return to them. Please forgive my brother, who

has a weakness for intellectual conversations. On another occasion, I believe that you will be pleased to talk to him. Our question, Comrade, was: what, in your opinion, could be our fate in the future?"

"Yes," says the man from the administration. "I..."

"One moment," Minerva continues. "I have not finished yet. We accept all that you have told us, because we cannot help accepting it. You have your reasons and your goals, and you are stronger and more numerous, so even for that reason your logic is more correct than ours. I will not speak here of the feelings we are experiencing at the moment; there is undoubtedly grief, insult, and irritation in them, you see them and it would be foolish to hide them. Each of us in the depths of our hearts would prefer to live, as we have done, far from your world, but it is quite clear that this is impossible. Out of necessity we come with you and agree to your conditions. Whether we will henceforth become sincere supporters of your cause or not is an interesting question, but it will be decided much later, and to talk about it now would be fruitless or hypocritical. If we do, so much the better for us and for you. If we don't, so much the worse for us. But in any case, the main thing is that we suddenly find ourselves in a reality that is little known to us and in which we are very helpless. You could expel us from here without asking at all what will happen to us next, but it would be more humane and more useful for both sides to help us, to orient us and even to take care of our accommodation in the new living conditions. As a representative of a powerful and authoritative authority, you are able to do this and we ask you to do it. Finally, I would like to remind you that we can be of service to your society in various ways, not only as bearers of bare physical strength. Many of us were patrons of crafts and arts in the past and master their general conditions. Others have devoted themselves to certain professions to kill time. Still others have undoubted talents. With some qualifications and familiarity with new technical achievements, we could find our place among people.

"This is called a reasonable conversation," the man from the administration declares. "It is a pleasure to talk to you, Comrade. Here is what I can say. Of course, the entire administration will deal with the settlement of your question, but I promise to report your case in the most favorable light and from now on I can assure you that you will not be left hungry and homeless. No one has ever been left hungry

and homeless here. By the way, when I came here I had several options in mind, given that you insist on staying here, in this place.

“Of course we do,” says Juno “it all sweetly and sacredly connects us to our peak.”

“In case you absolutely want to stay, I would recommend that you form a separate group and get involved in one of the construction projects: either the dam wall or the rest homes. This will help you get into the spirit of our new working life.”

“It wouldn’t be right for us to carry bricks and mix concrete,” says Mercury. “And that left us with this: to become general laborers.”

“Why don’t you go to the forest workers? The logging crews will be heading to the forest soon.”

“Oh, I couldn’t bear this horror,” says Diana. “Listen.” how the fir trees collapse and the squirrels run in terror from peak to peak. Is there anything more cruel than the destruction of a tree?

“In that case, you can only join the state farm,” says the man from the administration. It will constantly hire new workers to take care of the livestock.

“How lovely!,” Vesta intervenes. “Do you hear, brother, you and I are going to become cattle herders.”

“The way things are going, we might as well become cattle,” Mars replies.

“I think we have gathered to talk seriously,” the man from the administration says. “Taunts are inappropriate.”

“Please, ignore them,” says Jupiter. “They talk to each other in a peculiar way, without attaching much importance to their words. The thing is, all these proposals, no matter how objectively I examine them, seem unacceptable to me. What do you think, Minerva?”

“I agree,” she replies. “It turns out that the only options we have are the four worst and most thankless types of work: construction, mining, logging, and agricultural work. You are setting us very difficult conditions, Comrade from the administration.”

“If you want to stay here,” he says, “I don’t see any other option.”

“What if we don’t stay?” Minerva asks. “What if we settle down in the city?”

“That’s completely different,” says the man from the administration. “There’s a much broader field of activity there.”

“I don’t want to go to the city,” says Diana.

“No one is asking you what you want,” Jupiter replies. “At least now is the time for whims.”

“Why are you scolding the child?” asks Juno. “What heart could bear to part with these dear places?”

“I don’t want to move from here either,” says Vesta.

“If that’s the case,” Jupiter snapped, “go mix concrete or feed the cattle.”

“That won’t happen,” says Vesta.

“Well, if that won’t happen either, and if you don’t want us to go to the city,” Jupiter continues, “then let’s lie down here and die of hunger!”

“It is better to lie here and die of hunger,” declares Vesta, “than to let the barbarians make fun of us!”

“You are not speaking sensibly,” says the man from the administration.

“I’m not talking to you at all,” Vesta replies.

“Why don’t you put your emotions aside,” Minerva suggests. “This isn’t the first time we’ve changed our place of residence. Diana has no reason to whine. Everyone loves beauty, everyone has memories, everyone gets attached to their home, but you finally understand that in two weeks the excavators will be roaring here, the mountain will be teeming with workers, not to mention the herds that will reach the top. What will be left of our beautiful home then? We won’t keep it. We won’t get a good job either. Doesn’t it make more sense then to go to the city?”

“The most important thing is to understand,” says Jupiter “what exactly is being offered to us there?”

“The city has everything,” the man from the administration says, “and everyone can find an occupation according to their abilities and inclinations.”

“However, we would like not to be divided,” Jupiter notes, “and although we have different abilities and inclinations, to always be together.”

“That will be more difficult,” says the man from the administration. “We need to find a form of work that will encompass the entire family.”

“Couldn’t a museum be established?,” asks Apollo, “a great museum-palace of ancient culture? There would be visiting hours and people would come to see us and talk to us. We would give talks accompanied by light paintings, we would arrange recitals and performances in the

ancient Greek style, we would take care of the statues, vases and coins. A small stadium for athletic competitions could be built in the park, as well as philosophical alleys along which visitors could walk and comment on texts by Parmenides or Plato. Daedalian, Archimedean, Euclidian, Demosthenesian and Aesculapian could be organized circles, a wide-screen cinema-palace, a fashion show of the Graces, a Parisian beauty contest and many more things. All this would be a worthy occupation for us – which would give us both inner satisfaction and would bring invaluable benefit to the whole society.”

“The proposal is interesting,” says the man from the administration, “but unfortunately, the construction of such a museum is a matter of capital construction, and our capital construction is planned five years in advance. The administration could deal with such a project, but a result cannot be expected before the adoption of the next five-year plan, and your question is urgent and cannot be postponed.”

Let’s first clarify what you actually know how to do. You’ll forgive me for asking you so bluntly, but without that we’ll get nowhere. Let’s start in order. You, Comrade Mercury?

“I used to be a courier,” says Mercury. “I think I can handle any kind of trade and transportation.”

“That’s good,” the man from the administration notes. “We’ll arrange you easily, but unfortunately that doesn’t benefit the others. There are people here who are unlikely to work successfully in this field. You, Comrade Apollo?”

“I have a weakness for the arts,” Apollo notes. “Sometimes I indulge in literature. I understand a little about metaphysics.”

“With the exception of metaphysics, which we cannot accept, the same applies to you,” says the man. “You will advance, but what will the others do who do not have your abilities? You, Comrade Minerva?”

“Precise thought is my specialty,” says Minerva. “I was interested in the sciences. But obviously my qualities could not be the basis for a common activity that would encompass all of us.”

“Quite true,” says the man from the administration. “You, Comrade Mars?”

“I deal with wars,” Mars declares. “I know how to fight well. But for your information, I only fight for those who are sympathetic to me.”

“Bad,” says the man from the administration. “We are against wars. And it seems that you don’t like us either. You, Comrade Venus?”

“I thought I was famous enough,” says Venus. “I have awakened and distributed love among people. This is my calling.”

“Love is a good thing,” the man from the administration notes. “But it is inconvenient as a permanent profession. You, Comrade Diana?”

“I’m afraid I know almost nothing,” Diana admits. “I’ve collected pine cones and bark. I’ve gone hunting sometimes. That’s all.”

“Hunting in our country is a sport, not a profession” explains the man from the administration. “But it’s okay, you’re young, you’ll learn some more practical field. You, Comrade Vulcan?”

“I can do anything,” says Vulcan. “Work has always filled my life, so I will do whatever I have to do and do it well. Don’t worry about me.”

“Nice words,” the man from the administration whines. “If everyone were like you, we would have gotten along by now. You, Comrade Vesta?”

“First, I am not a Comrade,” Vesta replies. “I am older than you and do not accept this address. And, secondly, as for your question, I am unlikely to satisfy you. I have striven to watch over the home and pure, unsullied desires. These are probably things that are not included in your five-year plan.”

“You would make a good teacher,” the man from the administration remarks. “But you have a lot of prejudices against our system. It shouldn’t be like that. You, Comrade Juno?”

“I have been mainly a housewife so far,” explains Junona. “Family care has taken up a lot of my time and I haven’t had the opportunity to do anything else.”

“It’s a pity,” says the man from the administration. “We are now trying to free the housewife from the centuries-old slavery of the kitchen. See what new horizons will open before your eyes. And finally, you, Comrade Jupiter?”

“I am the leader,” says Jupiter. “I have always been the leader.”

“A difficult and worthy profession,” the man from the administration notes. “I have always respected the leaders. I have no doubt that in the future you will lead the new team that we will form from your family with the same skill. And besides leadership, haven’t you been involved in something else, in some specific type of activity?”

“I have often played with making artificial lightning,” Jupiter replies. “Lightning, thunder, all sorts of unusual noises and lights.”

– Lightning and thunder? – the man from the administration thinks. – Wait a minute, I remember something! Damn it, we finally found it!

“But that’s an empty thing!” Jupiter notes.

– On the contrary! – the man from the administration triumphs. On the contrary, with these very words you gave me the most successful idea for your future. How could I not have thought of it sooner?

“But what is it about?” asks Jupiter.

– When you mentioned lightning and thunder – says the man from the administration – I remembered that we want to develop a new labor-production cooperative in this industry this year. A cooperative that produces fireworks, rockets, sparklers, and generally props for large holiday illuminations. Well, okay, there are enough of you, you have experience in this regard. Aren’t you the ones who will do this job?

“This is better than excavators,” says Minerva.

– Yes! – the man from the administration continues. – That’s how it will be. You will leave this peak. You will go down to the city, we will settle you, we will find you housing. We will establish the cooperative. We will give you nice workshops. We will draw up a plan for you. Comrade Jupiter will become the director. The work is not hard, you handle chemicals, in a closed room, eight hours a day. The work is well paid, as long as the plan is carried out. You will see how satisfied you will be. This, it seems to me, is the only solution to your problem.

“Yeah, it doesn’t look that bad,” Jupiter notes. “I’m just not sure if I could handle it...”

“Come on,” says the man from the administration. “With your many years of practice, you will do great!”

“Maybe, maybe,” Jupiter replies. “Actually, that looks good!”

“I’m not particularly enthusiastic,” Vesta declares. “If you ask me, I won’t move from here.”

“I feel a kind of indifference,” says Diana. “Everything doesn’t matter to me anymore!”

“If we remain members of this cooperative,” Minerva asks, “doesn’t that mean we couldn’t indulge in something else?”

“Of course not,” says the man from the administration. “But the cooperative is something you can start right away. The future will decide everything else.”

“Well, my friends,” says Jupiter. “If that is the case, allow me to express the thoughts and feelings of everyone. This peak is dear to us, but life moves on and we must treat things realistically. Let there be cooperation!”

“Thank God!” says the man from the administration. “At one point I was beginning to fear that we wouldn’t reach an agreement!”

“Look at him, how he smiles!,” Mars snorts. “Look at him, how he triumphs, the scoundrel! Oh, stop me, I’ll flatten his face!”

“Quieter, so he doesn’t hear,” whispers Vesta. “Be patient, the day will come when we will smile too!”

“My poor meadow!” groans Juno.

The day passes, it gets dark. The man from the administration has left. Everyone is in bed. Minerva crawls up to Apollo and asks him quietly:

“Are you sleeping?”

“No,” he replies. “Do you suppose there is someone sleeping?”

“Vulcan is sleeping like a newborn,” Minerva tells him. “Jupiter is sleeping too, snoring as usual. Diana cried for a while, but then she fell asleep. I don’t know about the others. So, what do you think of this whole story?”

“I can’t say anything,” Apollo replies. “I feel very bad. It seems to me that we quickly and easily got carried away with this cooperative. We were so scared by the first proposals that we grabbed onto the last one like drowning men. And it’s not just the cooperative that bothers me. I feel like I’ve fallen into a huge, illogical, sticky web and the more I wave my hands, the more entangled I get. On the other hand – I don’t know if you’ve ever felt anything like this – I feel some excitement, some strange satisfaction from the premonition of the coming pain. Here, the bad is coming, I tell myself, and you have to strain all your strength and face it like a man!”

“Don’t worry,” Minerva says. “It’ll be a little difficult at first, while we get organized. But I’ve been gathering information about their society, there are ways to have a good time with them too. We’ll figure them out little by little.”

“I feel like a helpless stranger entering an unknown, nightmarish land,” Apollo admits. “They speak to me in a language I don’t understand. Things are happening in front of me that I can’t understand. And the worst thing is that I don’t want to understand them. I simply don’t have the taste for such understanding.”

“Yes, that is what is poisoning you all,” Minerva observes. “You take life immobile and never take into account its changes, and then you excuse this incapacity by being faithful to your taste. But what is taste? Taste is today’s meal, the dish that is served to you at this moment. You must always have an appetite for today’s meal!”

“You are smart!” says Apollo. “But I am made differently!”

“You are lucky that I am with you and I will not let you fall,” says Minerva. “You know that we have always been friends and you can count on me. The others are worse off than us. They will have a much harder time getting along, if they ever get along at all. But we both have brains, imagination, and talent. Let us join forces and see how we can get along. Do you think we will stay in this cooperative forever? For us, the cooperative will be only a temporary evil, a small unpleasant springboard to our real settlement. You must only follow my advice without question. Not because I put myself above you, but simply because I am better able to cope with the new circumstances. Do you agree?”

“Absolutely,” says Apollo. “We will work in the cooperative for a while, then we will find nice, quiet places: cultural work, little effort, lots of free time, material security. And we will be happy, right Minerva?”

“Yes,” Minerva replies. “You just have to follow my advice.”

A shadow moves behind them. They turn. It’s Mercury.

“Excuse me for eavesdropping on your conversation,” he says, “but I’m very interested in this. Why don’t you include me in your coalition?”

“I don’t understand what you mean,” Minerva replies.

“Look,” says Mercury. “I know you don’t love me, but let’s be practical. We’re the only smart people in this family. The others have no idea about life, they’ll stay in this cooperative until they turn blue. Only the three of us have brains in our skulls. Let’s make a trio.”

“I would help anyone in my family,” Minerva declares. “I would even help you if I saw you in need. But I have no desire to act together with you.”

“Why?” asks Mercury.

“Your ways of working disgust me,” Minerva replies.

“Don’t you understand that we have nothing in common?” says Apollo. “That our styles cannot be combined? Don’t you understand that it is impudent of you to put yourself on the same level with us, you, a cheap, unscrupulous trickster, completely devoid of spirit, an

excellent at grocer's arithmetic, a counterfeiter of pennies, a lion of petty theft, whose only courage is to lie on the scales! How can you have the audacity to offer us your cooperation? Get out of here!"

"You arrogant fools!," Mercury replies. "It is an honor for you to work with me and you have all the benefits of it. But I will do just fine without you, I assure you!"

"Very well," says Minerva. "And we without you!"

"We'll see who will be first in line," Mercury threatens. "I bet you that I will leave the cooperative before you. And that I will be much better off than you, I will have money, position and everything, while you are still writhing in menial work. Then you will come crawling before me and begging for forgiveness, but I will laugh in your face! I will remind you who is smarter and who has the right to be arrogant!"

"Even better," says Minerva. "Now clear the field!"

"Go to hell," Mercury hisses. "They'll fix you all down there!"

"Sleep well," says Minerva. "They won't forgive you either."

Mercury leaves. Minerva stays with Apollo. Finally the peak subsides.

Translated by Clive Leviev-Sawyer