

**Cimrman**  
**Smoljak/ Svěrák**

**The Conquest of the North Pole**  
**by the Czech Karel Němec on 5 April 1909**

translated by Craig Cravens

*Cimrman's northern drama will be introduced by the following lectures:*

A NEWLY DISCOVERED POEM  
TESTING NEW THEATER PERSONNEL  
THE DISCOVERY OF THE SNOW PERSON  
JARA CIMRMAN'S STILL LIFE  
COMMUNAL SCENE: HARM DOES NOT COME TO THOSE WHO ARE INSURED

*(The performance should begin exactly on time so that the disruption caused by latecomers can be used for the following situation.)*

*Svěrák:* Good Evening. Dear friends, today we will introduce our performance with a recitation of Cimrman's recently discovered poem, "My School Satchel." If you would, Mr. Brukner.

*Brukner:* Jára Cimrman: "My School Satchel"

My school satchel  
With a wooden pencil case ...

*Svěrák:* Shhh!!! *(Makes an apologetic signal to Brukner for interrupting him.)*

*Brukner:* Jára Cimrman: "My School Satchel"

My school satchel  
With a wooden pencil case,  
To school with you I used to hurry,

Through green fields of maize.

Inside of you I used to carry

*Svěrák:* Excuse me, please be quiet, there in the back. You're really interfering with the recitation. Excuse me, Mr. Brukner.

*Brukner:* Jára Cimrman: "My School Satchel"

My school satchel

With a wooden pencil case,

To school with you I used to hurry,

Through green fields of maize.

Inside of you I used to carry

Mostly As and Bs.

*Svěrák:* Friends, please don't be angry, but this is quite disrespectful both to the author and to the audience members who arrived on time.

*Brukner:* My father was quite overjoyed  
And mother, too, was pleased...

*Svěrák:* And finally to my colleague, as well, who cannot concentrate on his recitation. Excuse me, Mr. Brukner.

*Brukner:* Our teacher, Mr. Voříšek,  
Long beneath the ground  
Is huddled in a little grave

*Svěrák:* No! It makes absolutely no sense like this. Mr. Kalina, please turn on the lights. Thank you. And the audience members who came in late, please take your seats. We'll wait.

*(The lights are lit in the auditorium, and the latecomers find their seats. Everyone finally settles down.)*

Yes, thank you. We can turn off the lights now. Mr. Brukner...

*Brukner:* Is huddled in a little grave  
Within his tattered dressing gown.

*Svěrák:* Mr. Brukner, this doesn't really make any sense. Please start from the beginning.

*Brukner:* Jára Cimrman: “My School Satchel”

My school satchel  
With a wooden pencil case,  
To school with you I used to hurry,  
Through green fields of maize.

*Svěrák:* You see how nicely it sounds.

*Brukner:* Inside of you I used to carry  
Mostly As and Bs

*Svěrák:* This is how it should have gone from the start.

*Brukner:* My father was quite overjoyed  
And mother, too, was pleased...  
Our teacher, Mr. Voříšek,  
Long beneath the ground  
Is huddled in a little grave  
Within his tattered dressing gown.  
My school satchel  
With a wooden pencil case ...

*Svěrák:* You’re starting from the beginning again?

*Brukner:* This is the 4th verse. It starts just like the first.

*Svěrák:* Oh, excuse me.

*Brukner:* My school satchel  
With a wooden pencil case  
How can I, Mr. Voříšek,  
How can I repay you.

*(Svěrák begins to applaud, which surprises his colleagues on stage as well as, perhaps, the audience.)*

*Brukner (doesn't bow, merely stares reproachfully at Svěrák):* That’s not the end.  
There’s still one more verse.

*Svěrák:* Oh, I’m very sorry.

*Brukner:* Everything you taught me, sir,  
I'll give to Czechs of every station.  
And from the seeds of my school satchel  
Will blossom forth a new Czech Nation.

*(Finishes reciting and sits down annoyed.)*

*Svěrák:* Now can we applaud?

*(Brukner waves his hand dismissively.)*

*Svěrák (applauds):* Thank you, Mr. Brukner for an outstanding recitation.

#### TESTING NEW THEATRE PERSONNEL

*Svěrák:* And now, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to ask for a moment of your patience. As you all know, a theater cannot get along without workers who ensure the operation of the theater behind the scenes. Currently we are in need of a new engineer, and we have placed an ad in the newspaper. Seven people applied, and we'd like to interview all of them one after the other. Perhaps you're wondering why we would interrupt our show for this and not test them at some other time. The problem is that in an empty hall, the applicant might pass the test handily, but when you, the audience, arrives the mental strain might fluster him so much that suddenly he can no longer manage what he once was able to do so easily.

For example at the beginning of the theater season we hired a quite capable and clever engineer, but he was exceedingly shy. I won't embarrass him by giving you his name, but in vain we would shout to him: Mr. Novotný, don't be afraid ... He literally ruined our performance. When he was supposed to turn on the lights, he turned them off and visa versa. He would also mix up the tape recordings. During the fairy tale *Long, Wide and Shortsighted*, for example, he suddenly played a recording of a machine gun. The children in the audience recognized that this did not belong in a fairy tale, and my colleague Professor Vondruška wanted to save the situation and called out, "That's a

woodpecker, children!” But today children don’t know what a woodpecker is, but they certainly know what a machine gun is.

Since we’re on the subject of this engineer Bedřich Novotný ... Once an error of his resulted in a rather serious personal injury, a head injury. At the end of the show, he was supposed to close the curtain using a hand crank, but he was so unnerved he just held the crank tightly in his hand and shook and convulsed fitfully all over. Finally we had to hit him over the head with a pole. Today we have our fourth applicant, Mr. Roman Měcháček.

*(Svěrák turns to the wings and speaks to the applicant who remains hidden.)*

So, Mr. Měcháček, you would like to work in our theater, is that correct?

*Měcháček (almost inaudibly):* Yes.

*Svěrák: Fine.* And what compelled you to apply for this job?

*Měcháček:* I like to go to the theater ...

*Svěrák:* Could you speak a little louder, please?

*Měcháček:* No.

*Svěrák:* Aha. Then I’ll act as interpreter. Mr. Měcháček says he likes to go to the theater.

But you’re not satisfied with just going there as a spectator, is that right?

*Měcháček:* Yes.

*Svěrák:* You wanted to take an active part in the show.

*Měcháček:* Yes.

*Svěrák:* And you never wanted to be an actor?

*Měcháček:* No.

*Svěrák:* No. That’s fine. And what would you like to do in the theater?

*Měcháček (barely audible):* I’d like to work in the theater so that nobody sees me.

*Svěrák:* Aha. That’s an unusual desire. *(to the audience)* Isn’t it? Did you all hear that? No? He wants to work in the theater so that nobody sees him. But so that your work is seen, right?

*(Měcháček nods.)*

*Svěrák:* Where did you work before?

*Měcháček (inaudibly):* On the fright train.

*Svěrák:* On a train? I'm not sure I understand. Did you say ... on a freight train?

*Měcháček:* The fright train.

*Svěrák:* Aha. That doesn't belong to Czech Railways, does it ... for the time being. And what did you do there? What was your position?

*Měcháček:* I took hats.

*Svěrák:* Aha. You took people's hats. Yes. *(to the audience)* You see, he would take people's hats on the train as they traveled. But you would return them, wouldn't you?

*Měcháček:* Yes.

*Svěrák:* Yes, he would return them. So you were actually part of the entertainment program. And also hidden, so they wouldn't see you.

*Měcháček:* Yes. Because if they saw me, it wouldn't be so frightening.

*Svěrák:* Yes. If they could see you, it wouldn't be so frightening. Now let us proceed to the practical test. You have selected the question "beginning of the show." So, demonstrate for us what you're going to do. Bring the theater into the state it was before the beginning of the show, which means: the lights are on in the auditorium, only the work lights are illuminated on the stage, and the curtain is closed.

*(All of the aforementioned is carried out. All of the performers fall behind the closed curtain. The lights go off in the auditorium and then—by mistake—come on again. Then they immediately go out, and the floodlights appear on the curtain. The curtain begins to jiggle, but it doesn't open.)*

*Svěrák:* Open the curtain!

*(The curtain once again jiggles.)*

Open the curtain!

*(Further failed attempts. Svěrák goes behind the curtain to see what the problem is.*

*After a moment he comes back to the forestage.)*

*Svěrák:* Ladies and gentlemen, we are experiencing a slight problem. We can't get the curtain to open, and we request a moment of your patience while our people attend to it.

*(pause)* You see, one might call this a trifle, but in the operation of a theater there is no such thing as a trifle. In any other workplace, if the curtain doesn't open, work can proceed anyway. In a factory, for instance. But not in the theater. How many times has it been necessary to cancel a show because of something like this. And this is by no means pleasant. The show has barely begun, and the leader of the troupe comes on stage, apologizes, and the audience goes home. In this case, tickets are not returned. This is what is so unfortunate in such a situation. Because part of the show has already been performed ... In any case, it's problematic. Of course we cannot return the entire entrance fee, make no mistake. And if you wanted to take it to court, you'd most likely lose because the actors can claim that they did in fact perform the play, but you couldn't see it. And it's not their fault.

*(A tall ladder makes its way through the curtain carried by a technician who places it on the forestage. Then he climbs up and fusses with something on the curtain cable.)*

Well, this looks promising. They're already working on it. This is not the fellow we're testing; this is one of our most experienced technicians. How long have you been with us, Mr. Kotek?

*Kotek:* 13 years.

*Svěrák:* Would you like me to hold the ladder for you?

*Kotek:* Okay.

*Svěrák:* Because if you were to fall, not only might you harm yourself, you might kill several people here in the front rows.

Perhaps the viewers might be interested in where you worked before?

*Kotek:* In public lighting maintenance.

*Svěrák:* And why did you leave?

*Kotek:* Vertigo. I can't stand heights.

*Svěrák:* Aha. Ladies and gentlemen, before Mr. Kotek finishes his repairs, I have a brief announcement. In the event we are able to present *The Conquest of the North Pole*, during the intermission we will sell ice-cream bars—the only theater in the Republic to do so ... Of course, *we* won't be selling them ...

*(The technician drops his pliers.)*

*Kotek:* Could you hand me those pliers?

*Svěrák:* Certainly. *(Picks up the pliers and climbs up the ladder with them.)*

Other employees will be selling them. We're the actors, and we can't be doing everything here. *(He is high enough to hand the pliers to the technician.)*

*Kotek:* Could you please hold this right here for me.

*Svěrák climbs all the way to the top and holds the cable.)*

*Svěrák:* You see! Now if we fell, we'd kill twice as many people as before.

*Kotek:* Okay. Let's climb down.

*(They climb down.)*

*Svěrák:* Okay, ladies and gentlemen, it's fixed. Now we can continue.

*Kotek:* Unfortunately it can't be fixed. *(Exits with the ladder.)*

*Svěrák:* Aha, a change of plans. It can't be fixed. Perhaps we should take the intermission and try ...

*(Hraběta comes out and whispers something to Svěrák.)*

Yes, that's a good idea! My colleagues suggest that we could move in front of the curtain and continue with our program, so that actually the only thing you'll miss is the play.

*(Meanwhile all the "scholars" have moved their chairs in front of the curtain. As soon as the last one takes his seat, the curtain opens smoothly.)*

Oh please! You said it wouldn't work. What was the problem?

*Kotek (comes from the wings):* A chewed up korybut.

*Svěrák:* Aha. Ladies and gentlemen, it was a chewed up korybut. Is the new technician still there?

*Měcháček:* Yes.

*Svěrák:* Well, I think my colleagues will agree with me that you did well. You're not responsible for the curtain even though it's under your supervision.

*(All nod in agreement. Suddenly all the lights go out.)*

*Svěrák:* Mr. Kotek, if you're looking for the pole, it's right next to the hand crank.

*(A hollow thud is heard, and the lights come on.)*



And now, ladies and gentlemen, let us turn our attention to this evening's main topic, that is, the circumstances in which arose

## THE DISCOVERY OF THE ARCTIC SNOWPERSON

*Ing. Jan Hraběta:*

One evening in the Prague restaurant Pod Vyšehradem, where Cimrman used to go to dine on their fish specialties, the owner of the pub sat down at Cimrman's table and asked him if for the next meeting of the Branický Brewery Ice-Cutters, he would create a still life entitled "The Czechs at the North Pole." Cimrman accepted the offer and decided to study the polar subject on site. Only a few fragments of information have been preserved concerning Cimrman's Arctic expedition. In an article published in *National Politics* from March 1908, Cimrman writes of the invaluable service this paper provided him in the harsh north, when he stuffed his coat and trouser-legs with it.

Cimrman made another interesting remark in his ethnographic study "Nations and Filiations." On his Greenland trip, he learned of an interesting primitive tribe of Eskimos, in which the wife had the final word in the household. It was an extremely primitive tribe. He learned that the women of this tribe are very hospitable. In the family he stayed with, they gave him a bearskin pelt immediately upon his arrival. Then they selected the most well-fed seal they had, and organized a celebratory feast. That evening, the lady of the house, an extremely beautiful female Eskimo, by the way, personally made up his bed, and as a demonstration of the highest respect, brought her husband to him for the night. Luckily Cimrman had a pack of cards with him. He taught the clever Eskimo Crazy Eights, and the night passed quite pleasantly.

The most valuable contribution Cimrman's Arctic expedition made to science was the discovery of the Snow Person. Cimrman himself personally met this creature and describes it as a solitary shy mammal, distinguishing itself by its upright gait on the rear

extremities. Only when observing fish in the cracks between the ice-floes does he lean on his right front extremity, while his left is fixed on his hip.

In comparison with the Snow Man seen several years ago in the Himalayas, Cimrman lists several characteristics distinguishing it from his Snow Person. The Arctic version has a discernable bald spot on his left hip from constantly leaning his left arm on it while fishing. There are also differences in the hair covering of the two creatures. Whereas the hair of the Himalayan type sticks straight up from the ears, (the so-called punk style), the hair of the Polar variety flows down across the ears and is parted in the middle of the skull. The explanation for this is the differing wind conditions. The punk is caused by the fact that the Himalayan Snow Man faces winds blowing upwards from below, from the foot of the mountains to the peaks. The Polar Snow Person braves winds blowing horizontally against his inclined shoulders.

The size difference between the two is also quite noticeable. Himalayan experts estimate their Snow Man to be the height of a 10-year-old boy. Cimrman claims his Snow Person is the height of an 11-year-old boy.

Cimrman's description of the sex life of this creature literally shocked biologists of his time. It was commonly referred to as the sex bomb of the century. The more conservative Sigmund Freud coined the term: "Sexuelhandgranat."

According to Cimrman, the Arctic Snow Man is self-conjugal. It does not need a partner for reproduction. That's why in his case it is especially important to translate correctly the original English term "snowman" as "snow person," and not as has become customary among us, as "snowman." The snow person is a man and a woman at the same time.

The term "hermaphrodite," however, is not sufficient. The snow person's dual sexual nature goes much further. This is clear from its method of reproduction. Cimrman had the good fortune to observe the snow person during the mating season. He summed up his observations with the term: "Polar Onanism."

Still more surprising is the fact that not only does the snow person reproduce like a biological pair, it behaves like one too. Cimrman clearly both heard and saw this

creature gesticulating and speaking with itself. “Of course I didn’t understand his speech,” Cimrman writes, “but from his intonations and expressions, I realized I was not witnessing a monologue but rather an actual dialogue, which sometimes turned into an argument. First he would berate and accuse in a high, squeaky falsetto, and then assume a defensive and apologetic position, using deeper vocal tones. Were I to translate according to intonation and gesture, it would go something like this”:

What time was it when you came home?

I don’t know; it was still light out.

It’s always light. We’ve got the Polar Day, now.

I was celebrating your birthday.

Don’t lie! Who knows where you’ve been flitting about, and now my legs hurt because of it!

It is precisely the duality of this speech, this combination of the 1st-person pronoun *já* with the second person *ty*, which led Cimrman to coin the term “*játy*” for this creature, which the English later corrupted into “yeti.”

The solitary and shy nature of the snow person contrasts somewhat with the way in which behaves toward humans. Cimrman and later experts noticed that when the “*játy*” caught sight of a polar expedition, it would keep a respectful distance, but clap its hands joyfully. Sometimes it would even jump up and down and fling its right paw into the air. Amundsen compared this gesture to that of a soccer player who had just scored a goal. How can one explain this behavior? Cimrman reached the conclusion that the snow person does not see the polar explorers as enemies, but as creatures who bring him food and freeze to death.

Thank you for your attention.

## JARA CIMRMAN’S STILL LIFE

*Dr. Bořivoj Penc*

My colleague Dr. Hraběta mentioned in his lecture that the impetus for Cimrman's Arctic trip was an order for a still life for the Výšehrad restaurant. The very fact that the well-known restaurateur asked Cimrman himself is itself significant. Cimrman was actually among the recognized masters of this now-forgotten genre. Currently this type of art survives only in the form of parade floats. Of course, these are not genuine still lifes because they move. On the one hand, they bounce around due to the unevenness of the pavement, and on the other, the inside of the work itself moves—the farmer sharpens his scythe, the capitalist shakes his money-bag, George Bush trips over weapons of mass destruction, and so on.

A genuine still life differs from one on canvas only in that the material used is living people and real objects. In Cimrman's time, still lifes formed an inseparable part of the Czech National Revival. They were *de rigueur* for any dance or Sokol masked ball. Their popularity was doubtlessly due to the fact that even people with no artistic talent whatsoever could take part in them. Moreover, they were usually done on a mass scale, so that as many people as possible could take part in them. Sometimes the number of participants was so great that there was no one left to view the still life. This happened, for instance, at the Malostranská Beseda in 1904 with the scene, "Sokol Members Accompany Jan Amos Komenský into Exile." If it were not for the police patrols that entered the hall, who were attracted by the suspicious silence, there would have been no one to give testimony about the work.

Mention must be made of Cimrman's historical triptych "The Battle of Lipany," "The Battle of White Mountain," and "The Peasant Revolt at Chlumec," which bear the collective name "Our Glorious Defeats." First of all, however, we will concentrate on Cimrman's chamber still lifes. They were composed for households as something to occupy family members during the long winter evenings. We must keep in mind how people lived back then. They would come home from work, have a bite to eat, and then sit down and stare all evening at the wall. The television had not been invented yet. Cimrman's domestic still lifes were its precursor.

Cimrman thought up countless numbers of them—sometimes for two people, but usually for one. Perhaps your grandmothers remember such famous works as “Alois Jirásek Looks into the Past,” “Libuše Looks into the Future,” or “Jan Kollár look for a way to pronounce the Czech Ř.” For more numerous families, Cimrman created works such as “Jan Hus before the Council at Constance,” and for more numerous families with a fireplace, “Jan Hus After the Council at Constance.”

Cimrman also created serial works, for instance, the 3-part Palacký series: the first work is called “We were here before Austria,” the second, “We will be here After Austria,” and the third, “Who the Hell Knows?”

Now we’d like to demonstrate for you a few of these chamber scenes. But first must explain how one is to view these still lifes. When it first appears, we allow it to work its effect on us fully. As soon as we understand its meaning, we applaud. This will be the signal for us to conclude the picture. But if no one claps, there is the danger that the picture might, as we say, “seize up.” Please turn out the lights.

*(Within a large frame, a the figure of a man in a leather cap is illuminated looking into the distance.)*

“Jan Žižka Shortly Before His Left Eye is Shot Out.”

Yes, we’ll wait for the applause, and now we can turn off the lights.

*(Darkness, then light. A different actor in the same frame. He’s dressed in normal, civilian trousers but with a “wife-beater” shirt. He stands with feet apart and hands joined on top of his head.)*

“The Founder of Sokol, Miroslav Tyrš, discovers the position Feet apart, hands on Head.”

*(Darkness, then light. Two actors stand in the frame sticking out there front teeth like rodents.)*

“The Inventors of the Spike-Tooth Harrow, the Squirrel Brothers.”

Now we will display the so-called dual pictures—one picture following another, in which the second arises from the first with a minor change, often with only a change of name.

*(Darkness, then light. A man with a mustache wearing a vest is illuminated. He sits on a chair and stares fixedly at a human-sized skeleton.)*

“Karel Havlíček Borovský looks Death in the Eye.”

*(Darkness, then light. The same scene with no change.)*

“Doctor Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen at Work.”

## COMMUNAL SCENE: HARM DOES NOT COME TO THOSE WHO ARE INSURED

*Dr. Zdeněk Svěrák:*

To conclude this overview of Cimrman’s still lifes, we will attempt to display one of his larger images, one Cimrman created for the Mutual Insurance Bank Slavie, which he called “Harm Does Not Come to Those Who Are Insured.” The bank clerks would perform this picture every other hour in the hall of the bank as an advertising campaign.

*(Svěrák looks at a sketch.)*

In the center of the picture stands an insurance agent.

*(An actor assumes a position in the center of the scene, wearing a bowler hat and holding a briefcase.)*

In the back to the right are three uninsured people.

*(3 actors stand in the designated spot.)*

To the left stands an insured farmer.

*(A farmer with a pitchfork takes his place.)*

It seems we’re out of actors, so we’re going to need help from the audience. We need 3 men. Don’t be afraid, all you have to do is sit here on the bench. We just need to balance out the picture.

*(Volunteers are found in the audience.)*

The farmer’s wife is standing by his side. Thus I would ask one of the ladies. The age is not specified...

*(A volunteer comes on stage.)*

And now let us perform the picture. The representatives of the uninsured differ from one another in their dispositions. The first uninsured has already firmly decided to insure himself. Therefore he raises his hand, asking for the appropriate brochures. The second is hesitating whether or not to sign a full policy or only a partial one. He expresses this by looking thoughtfully out into the audience. Finally, the third would like to be insured, but just to make sure, he checks the amount of cash he has on hand. Please remain in these positions.

And now for the men on the bench. The first represents a stubborn opponent of the entire insurance mindset. And he has paid for it. He was not insured, and his house burned down. But this has taught him nothing, and he appears arrogant. He refuses to insure himself. This is a quite unsympathetic and negative character. Perhaps it would be better if you sat there next to this gentleman. You seem better suited to the role.

The house of the second also burned down. He was insured against fire, but he didn't pay his premium on time.

The third is unhappy. His house also burned down. He was insured, but against hailstones.

Now let us move to the left side of the picture. The insurance agent points out a happily insured family to the hesitating uninsured and the grief-stricken insured. Their house burned down, but they were insured and paid their premiums on time. Thus they can be happy after the fire. We'll give this young lady a scarf to give her a more rustic look, and your husband will be so kind as to make you a mother.

*(A stagehand brings the volunteer a doll.)*

And now we just need one more central figure to complete the picture. We have a pedestal prepared for you. This is Slavie, the symbol of the Slavie Bank. It should be a girl or a young woman, who is holding this model house on a tray and offering it to those whose house burned down. So I would like to ask for one more volunteer. It's a very simple role ... Except ... as I see here, there's one minor detail, the girl must be naked.

Not completely naked. She has a sash in the Czech national colors over, or between, her breasts.

So, who would like to volunteer? Are you volunteering? No? But you thought about it ... There's really nothing to be afraid of. This scene is always a great success.

But before you change your mind. Not long ago we received a letter from Pardubice in which a married couple told us how they met each other 2 years ago thanks to this picture. Apparently, the gentleman bought a ticket in the very back row and saw his future wife for the first time, and as the Slavie Bank, no less. Apparently he recalls the event quite often. His wife writes: "My husband often regrets that he didn't get a seat up front so that he could see better."

So, no one would like to volunteer? No? Then we'll have to resort to an emergency solution. Take off Dr. Penc's clothes!

*(Dr. Penc enters in swimming trunks with a sash across his chest. He receives a tray bearing a model of a house and with one foot forward holds it out to the family with the child.)*

And now we will allow Cimrman's still life to work its effect until the end of the scene. I'll also point out an interesting feature. The figure of the hesitating uninsured person. This one here. *(Goes to the figure mentioned.)* Has a certain peculiarity. From whichever side you look at it, it's always looking back at you. This is one of the mysteries of the old masters. Such a picture resides in Hluboká. Even today we still have no idea how Cimrman created this effect.

Let us try it. First, we'll try the left side of the audience... *(the actor obviously turns his eyes in the designated direction)*. There! Did you see that?! And now the right side. *(The gesture is repeated)*. Let us now reward Cimrman's still life with our applause and begin the play.



**The Conquest of the North Pole**  
**by the Czech Karel Němec on 5 April 1909**  
**/a northern drama/**

Cast:

Chief Karel Němec<sup>1</sup>

Teaching Assistant Václav Poustka

Pharmacist Vojtěch Šofr

Richard Schwarzenegger<sup>2</sup>

American Czech

Scene I

*(Empty stage. The sound of a halting train and slamming doors. Schwarzenegger enters with suitcase, places it on the ground, reaches out to the wings at the height of the window of a train car where someone hands him more luggage. Then the remaining members of the expedition enter: the teacher, pharmacist, and the chief, who help with the arrangement of the luggage and equipment. Then a sled and 4 sets of skis and ski poles is added to the pile of luggage. From the wings we hear the locomotive begin to depart. The members of the expedition shout farewell to and converse with the passengers in the train.)*

*Teacher:* Have a nice trip and thank you for everything.

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<sup>1</sup> Němec, of course, means German, and there is a play on this name near the end of the drama. It could conceivably be changed to another name that designated a nationality in English. Karel Dutch, for example.

<sup>2</sup> The original has Varel Frištenský, who is the cousin of the famous 19th-century Czech wrestler Gustav Frištenský. Varel is not a Czech name, but in the vocative case, Varle, it is the Czech word for testicle. I changed the name to Richard Schwarzenegger, who is known to English speakers, and his nickname is Dick, which is, of course, not as funny as the original testicle.

*Pharmacist:* Good-bye, gentlemen. Pardon? Yes, to the North Pole. Yes. By foot. We've got skis. Yes. Pardon? Yes, our chief here.

*Teacher:* Sobaky? [Russian for „dogs“] No, we don't have any. Instead of dogs, we've got him. He's a strongman. (*Points to Schwarzenegger*) He's like 10 dogs.

*Chief:* From Prague. Österreich, Austria. But we're also Slavs. Czechs.

*Pharmacist:* Yes, we've got food. 3 geese, bacon, bread. Everything. Sell it? We can't. We need it. We have a long way to go.

(*The train departs.*)

*Chief:* So, my friends, that might be the last people we ever see. Do we have everything?

*Teacher:* Yes, it's all here. Skis, food, compass, first-aid kit, cook stove, extra underwear ...

*Pharmacist:* The ball! I left the ball on the train!

*Chief:* The what?

*Pharmacist:* The inflatable ball! That's really annoying. But maybe we can get along without it.

*Chief:* What a wonderful start.

*Pharmacist:* That really bugs me, Chief.

*Schwarzenegger:* To hell with the ball. The main thing is we've got something to eat.

*Chief:* You'll see. We're going to miss that damn ball. Do you know how long the polar night lasts?

*Pharmacist:* 100 days.

*Chief:* That's right! 100 days of darkness, freezing weather, and solitude. You think melancholia is a joke? How many times have we read about what happens to people? Out of 36 polar expeditions, 8 died of starvation, 6 of exposure, 4 of exhaustion, and 17 of melancholia. 17!

*Pharmacist:* Excuse me, Chief, but that's 35. You're missing one expedition.

*Chief:* What do you mean? 8 starvation, 6, 4, 17, that makes ...

*Pharmacist:* 35.

*Teacher:* The chief is right. He was right not to include the American expedition of Professor MacDonald which disappeared for reasons unknown.

*Chief:* I'm not kidding, this is no joke! No ball!

*Teacher:* Chief, I wanted this to be a surprise, but since the ball is gone, I'll come right out with it. While you all were sleeping in the train, I composed a song to cheer us up in times of woe. And I think it came out pretty good. Besides that, I've prepared a funny costume, but I'm not going to show you yet. I don't think we're going to have to worry about melancholia at all.

*Chief:* This I've got to see. Amundsen, a man of steel, and he cried like a little boy. But we've been standing around long enough because of a stupid ball. Into your skis!

*(Everyone attaches their skis and grabs their poles.)*

Harness!

*(With their poles and skis interfering with one another, they place a dog collar on Schwarzenegger, the other end of which is attached to the sled. The skis and points of the poles make a racket as they bang on the floor of the stage.)*

*Pharmacist (softly to the teacher):* I don't want to criticize the chief, but first I would have given the order "harness," and only then "Into your skis!" That's the way I see it.

*(Finally everyone is stationary and preparing to head out stage left.)*

*Chief:* Let me establish north. ... Direction north *(looks at his compass)*...

Unfortunately... counter clockwise, 180 degrees, about FACE!

*(The confusion with the skis and poles repeats.)*

*Pharmacist:* I don't want to sound like a grumbler, but I would have established north first of all.

*Chief:* Polar expedition! In the following order: Chief Karel Němec...

*Teacher:* Chief! A point of order. May I? Is it going to be a problem that there's an embankment and railroad tracks over there?

*Chief:* Yes, yes, I see them. Unfasten, SKIS!

*Pharmacist:* It may seem as if I keep criticizing, but first of all I would have ...

*Teacher:* I know.

*Chief:* Polar expedition! In the following order: Chief Karel Němec. Here! Sled puller Richard Schwarzenegger...

*Schwarzenegger:* Here! (*lines up behind the chief*)

*Chief:* Pharmacist Vojtěch Šofr...

*Pharmacist:* Here! (*lines up.*)

*Chief:* Teaching Assistant Václav Poustka...

*Teacher:* Here! (*lines up.*)

*Chief:* Direction—the North Pole ... Double-time, forward, MARCH!

### *Before the Curtain I*

*Teacher:* Naturally, as a teacher, it was left to me to keep a diary of our polar expedition. I'll read you the first 37 pages:

Chapter One: The Birth of the Great Project.

Last Tuesday the pharmacist Šofr came up with the idea to conquer the North Pole. And when he announced it at the meeting of The Hardy Fellows Association of Podolí, everyone was excited about the idea, but no one wanted to participate in the expedition. Primarily due to family reasons. Finally, however, three brave souls were found: the head of the association, Karel Němec, the ice-cutter from the Branický Brewery, Richard Schwarzenegger, and myself, the teacher Václav Poustka, all of us old bachelors without the excuse of a family.

The date of departure was set for 9 December 1908. In the morning, we were still doing a little training on the Vltava ice floes by the National Theater, and at 13:00 a train was spiring us northward from platform number 2 of František Josef Train Station.

A shadow, however, fell upon the celebratory mood of our departure. The day of departure just also happened to be the day of the funeral of Brother Janouch, and thus Prague bid us farewell without music, for the music that was to be played at our departure had to be played at the funeral.

The only person to see us off was Schwarzenegger's cousin, Arnold. This famous Hollywood actor who terminated many a runaway robot, terminated a pig for us at home and brought us a wonderful snack to the train station.

While we're on the topic of Schwarzenegger, I cannot refrain from voicing one reservation. While it is true that this member of our expedition, Richard Schwarzenegger, can pull as much as 8 to 10 sled-dogs, I'm not sure whether his mental capacity is sufficient for the demanding work of a polar explorer. So far he's been acting as if we were on an afternoon excursion to Průhonice. And since Náchod, he's been constantly asking when we're going to get there and keeps saying that what he's most looking forward to, once we get to the land of eternal snows, is the snowball fights. Often when I'm listening to him, I think we should have taken dogs instead.

On the way from the northernmost Siberian railway station to the shore of the Arctic Ocean, nothing out of the ordinary happened, so I'll just read you the names of the chapters:

Chapter 5: Celebratory crossing of the 70th parallel.

Chapter 6: Both of Schwarzenegger's legs freeze

Chapter 7: Will we Return?

Chapter 8: The Malingerer is Taught a Lesson

Chapter 9: We Lost the Compass

Chapter 10: Wolves

Chapter 11: Wandering in the Fog

Chapter 12: A Tour of the Petersburg Hermitage

Chapter 13: Another Crossing of the 70th parallel

Chapter 14: Schwarzenegger Fakes Appendicitis

Chapter 15: A Successful Operation

Chapter 16: Schwarzenegger Fakes Post-operative Weakness

Chapter 17: Pull and Heal!

Chapter 18: Finally the Sea

## Scene II

*(The members of the polar expedition are standing on stage looking into the wings. The teacher is standing reading a newspaper entitled Teachers' Weekly, the chief is leaning on his skis, which are bound together, the pharmacist is sitting on the sled. The group gives the impression of riding on a city streetcar. For a long time nobody says anything.)*

*Schwarzenegger:* Listen, Chief, are you sure about this?

*Chief:* Yes, it's been proven.

*(Schwarzenegger grimaces in disbelief.)*

*Pharmacist:* What time is it?

*Chief (looks at the sky):* 2:20.

*(Another moment of silence.)*

*Teacher:* Listen to this. It says here that all schools in Austria must have baths... I can't imagine. Are they going to have showers or bathtubs?

*(He shakes his head and once again immerses himself in his reading.)*

*Pharmacist:* This is nice, just drifting along. But it's beginning to drag on a bit.

*Teacher:* It's some inspector Hruška who's writing this. People have some crazy ideas.

*Pharmacist:* But why not? Hygiene is important in schools too.

*Teacher:* Wait a minute! I must be blind! Math! Every school has to have math! I read it as bath. So that's why. Math. Of course. He didn't even have to say that. Everyone knows that.

*Schwarzenegger:* Look, I still don't believe it. If we were moving, we'd be bouncing or rattling around. Or we'd feel the wind as we cut through the air. And the countryside would be rushing by. Don't tell me we're moving!

*Chief:* That Richard is like a 7-year-old child. *(to the teacher)* Václav please, maybe you can explain it to him since you're a teacher's assistant.

*Teacher:* Chief, I don't think that here in the north we have to address each other by our full titles. It would be enough just to call me teacher.

*Chief:* Fine. Now explain things to Richard.

*Teacher:* Dick! This entire glacier that we're standing on is moving northward under the influence of the sea current. In specialized terminology, this is called "drifting." We didn't make it up. It's described in the literature. That's why nothing's bouncing or rattling and the countryside isn't rushing by. Everything here—the pharmacist, the luggage, the snow, the ice... everything is drifting northward.

*Schwarzenegger:* And me?

*Teacher:* You're drifting too.

*Schwarzenegger:* So, according to you, I'm standing here, not doing a thing, and drifting, right?

*Teacher:* Right.

*Schwarzenegger:* I've never done anything like that in my whole life, and no one's going to make me do it now.

*Pharmacist:* Václav, how much longer are we going to drift?

*Chief:* 10 to 12 days.

*Schwarzenegger:* I don't envy you that.

*Pharmacist:* Yeah, this is starting to drag on. Friends, I'm not sure what's wrong with me, but I think I'd like to turn around and drift back. Homeward! To Prague! To the pharmacy! To Podolí! ... To hell, I'm sad!

*Teacher (rejoicing):* And here it is! Melancholia! *(Goes to the sled and starts rummaging around.)*

*Chief:* See, if we had a ball, we could toss it around and cheer up right away.

*Teacher:* There's nothing left to do, Chief, but for me to sing the song I composed in the train for such occasions. Listen carefully, everyone, so you can learn the words and sing along.

*Sings to the accompaniment of the guitar:*

The Polar night  
Has a special might  
The sadness attacks one and all,

Christian and Muslim,  
British and German,  
The sadness, it makes one bawl.  
Even those crafty Japanese  
Are at their end and ill at ease.  
Only one nation will not succumb,  
The horrors of the north overcome.  
There, where wolves die in packs,  
*There, where wolves die in packs,*  
And caribou breathe their last,  
The Czech, he will adapt.  
The Czech, he will adapt.

Okay, that's it. Now let's learn it. Repeat after me children ... I mean, repeat after me, friends: The polar night, has a special might ...

*Schwarzenegger:* Hey Vašek, put something else on.

*Teacher:* But why? This is for the melancholia we're experiencing.

*Schwarzenegger:* Give me a break. I don't have any melancholia. Why don't you put on "Do you want to Know the Song of the North?" That's a nice one. Or how about this one, it's nice, too, "When the Salmon Swims Upstream."

*Teacher:* I'm sorry, but whoever doesn't want to sing, doesn't have to. But the rest of us will sing it gladly. Okay, here are the words: The polar night.

*Pharmacist and Chief:* The polar night...

*Teacher:* Has a special might...

*Pharmacist and Chief:* Has a special might...

*Teacher:* The sadness attacks one and all...

*Pharmacist and Chief:* The sadness attacks one and all...

*Teacher:* Christian and Muslim...

*Chief:* Hey, Vašek, I wasn't feeling bad at all, but after that song of yours I'm starting to feel ill.



*Pharmacist:* Me too. I feel really bad, and I've got these gloomy thoughts. I keep imagining that I'm going to the pharmacist Bouček's to play chess just like every Wednesday. I ring the bell, and his landlady answers the door. I ask if Mr. Bouček is home, and she shakes her head like this and says, "No, he's not." So I say I'm going to walk around in the park a little, and maybe he'll come back in the meantime. I come back in about a half hour, ring the bell again, and the landlady says he hasn't returned yet. So tell me, is that normal? He knows I come to play chess every Wednesday. He lets me walk all the way from Podolí to Smíchov. In the rain, no less! I forgot to mention that. And he's not home. If he'd left a message at least!

*Schwarzenegger:* He got caught up chatting somewhere, huh.

*Chief:* Bouček's not home! (*waves his hand in contempt*) I wouldn't wish *my* gloomy thoughts on you any day.

*Teacher (softly singing):* Only one nation will not succumb...

*Chief:* Would you kindly knock that off. This is serious. I was elected head of the association 9 times in a row. And now, right after the New Year we have a general meeting as usual. I'm present, nominated, but not elected. Not one of you raised your hand for me.

*Teacher:* But Karel, those are just gloomy thoughts. We still haven't had the 10th general meeting. How could we have voted for you?

*Chief:* I'll never forget. You all stared at the ground so you wouldn't have to look me in the eye. And I led you all the way past the Arctic Circle! That's what I get for all my troubles! Polar expedition! Pack up! We're going home.

*Schwarzenegger:* At first I thought you were speaking off the topic, Chief, but that's a good idea!

*(The chief, pharmacist, and Schwarzenegger begin preparing for the return trip. The teacher grabs a rucksack off the sled and exits.)*

*Pharmacist:* Homeward! To Prague! To Podolí! To the pharmacy! To ...

*Chief:* That's enough Vojtěch! We've heard it already. Former polar expedition! In the following order: Karel Němec. Here! Pharmacist Vojtěch Šofr...

*Pharmacist:* Here!

*Chief:* Sled puller Richard Schwarzenegger ...

*Schwarzenegger:* Here!

*Chief:* Teaching Assistant Václav Poustka...

*Schwarzenegger:* He's not here!

*Chief:* Where did he go?

*Pharmacist:* He grabbed his stuff and went north.

*Chief:* The madman! He wants to conquer the North Pole! In this weather! It's as cold as a well digger's ass! Do you hear what I'm saying? But we melancholics cannot let ourselves be swayed by one madman.

*Pharmacist:* I don't like saying it, but there are times when optimists should be executed.

*Chief:* Precisely!

*Schwarzenegger:* Look, shouldn't we wait a minute? Maybe he just went to take a piss.

*Chief:* He who pisses betimes, often gets left behind. Okay, behind me. Direction, south. Double time ... HOMEWARD!

*(Everyone starts heading for the wings when suddenly a human sized penguin appears in front of them. It sways back and forth on its squat legs and waves its wings. Before anyone can say anything a shot rings out. Schwarzenegger has quickly grabbed a rifle to ensure food for the expedition.)*

*Teacher (in the penguin suit):* Ouch! *(clutches at his elbow)* Schwarzenegger, you're such an idiot! Can't you see it's a joke? This is my comic disguise. I spend a week knitting it, and this nitwit nearly nixes me. Nincompoop!<sup>3</sup>

*Schwarzenegger:* Oh sorry, Václav, but how was I to know? When I see a bird, I shoot.

*(In the meantime the pharmacist has brought out a bandage and is attending to the teacher.)*

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<sup>3</sup> Obviously there's an untranslatable joke here, and my solution is not ideal.

*Chief:* Don't be angry Václav, but that was ill considered on your part. If you'd dressed up like a monkey, then of course we'd be able to tell it was a joke. But a penguin? That threw me off, too, not to mention such a simpleton as Schwarzenegger.

*Schwarzenegger:* Thanks for standing up for me, Chief.

*Teacher:* That could have been a lot of fun. But now I'm not in the mood anymore.

*Pharmacist:* Congratulations! Welcome, Václav, among us melancholics. Okay, now that everyone's here we can set off.

*Chief:* Former polar expedition! In the following order: Chief Karel Němec... Here! Teaching Assistant Václav Poustka...

*Teacher:* Here!

*Chief:* Pharmacist Vojtěch Šofr...

*(Majestic music resounds, and the stage is lit with an effect that is supposed to resemble the northern lights. Everyone is astounded by this unforeseen phenomenon. When their shouts have subsided, and the lights have gone out, their melancholy has vanished.)*

*Chief:* What was that?

*Teacher:* The northern lights! I read about it in *Teachers' Weekly!* That was something, wasn't it, friends! And we're only at the 86th parallel. Wait till we get to the Pole! Personally, I'm quite optimistic. What about you, Vojtěch?

*Pharmacist:* Me too. I'm a new man! To the Pole, friends! Onward to new adventures!

*Schwarzenegger:* Uh ... That was pretty, but I don't think I need to see it again ...

*Teacher:* What about you, Chief? Why are you so quiet?

*Chief:* We're going north. No doubt about it. But first we have to clean out our own nest. Who was it that sowed a seed of doubt into our ranks? Who was it that wanted to turn about 180 degrees? Who called out, "Homeward, to Prague, to Podolí, to the pharmacy?"

*Pharmacist:* Sorry, Chief.

*Chief:* And by the way, who said that bit about executing optimists?

*Pharmacist:* But it just slipped out, Karel.

*Schwarzenegger:* Yeah, somebody called out, Double-time, homeward ...

*Chief:* Exactly right. Who caused the leader himself to issue deviant orders?

*Pharmacist:* Chief, I'll pull the sled with Richard.

*Chief:* And nothing to eat for 2 days. Polar expedition! Direction north, after me, by platoon diagonally toward the standard-bearer, toward the pivot-man, counter-clockwise, about Face! Double-time, March!

*(Once again the confused turning with the poles and skis occurs as the curtain descends.)*

### *Before the Curtain II*

*Teacher (reading from his diary):* Misfortune has accompanied us for the past week. The pharmacist fell on some ice and slipped a disc. The chief caught a cold, my gall-bladder started acting up, and Schwarzenegger has lost his dog-collar. At first, we managed to soothe our troubles with the song I composed, but it now seems to have somehow lost its effectiveness. Whenever I start to sing, one of my friends sticks his leg out in front of me.

I almost forgot about another unpleasant circumstance that has been plaguing our journey. We're completely out of food.

At latitude 87° 54', the chief calls an important meeting.

### Scene III

*(Schwarzenegger unharnesses himself from the sled and everyone sits down around the chief.)*

*Chief:* Gentlemen! We are threatened with death from starvation. All night I pondered this, and I see no other way out. I move that we eat the dogs.

*(The others exchange looks of incomprehension.)*

*Teacher:* Dogs?

*Pharmacist:* But we don't have any dogs ... Oh, I get it!

*(He looks at Schwarzenegger who has his tongue hanging out panting like a dog.)*

*Schwarzenegger (in fear, he hides his tongue and stops panting):* What dogs?

*Teacher:* It's a sad day when you're compelled to lay a hand on your devoted friend, but there really doesn't seem to be any other way out.

*Pharmacist:* And it would be best not to eat them all at once. We'll eat them individually, so that the rest of the team will be able to pull.

*Schwarzenegger:* What are you babbling about? Are you seeing things or what? Where do you see any dogs?

*Chief:* I don't agree. If we're going to kill them, let's do it all at once. Immediately. Before they lose too much weight.

*Schwarzenegger:* It's finally here. They've gone insane! Gentlemen, pull yourselves together. We don't have any dogs. Remember, you originally wanted to take dogs but I talked you out of it. Remember, I said: "Take a strong fellow instead, like me." He'll be able to pull the sled and do other work as well. He could chop wood, for example. And do you remember how nicely I chopped up our skis. Unfortunately, that was the last of our wood, so now I'm only good for pulling. But I'm still pretty good at that. I'm still strong.

*Teacher:* Exactly. Let's not put it off.

*Schwarzenegger:* Yes, if we had dogs, then I'd understand that we could eat them. I've had dog before, it's not so bad. But since you've got me instead of dogs ... Chief, what was it you suggested?

*Chief:* Eat the dogs.

*Schwarzenegger:* Even though we don't have any.

*Chief:* Even though we don't have any.

*Schwarzenegger:* And all of you understand?

*Teacher:* Yes.

*Pharmacist:* We understand.

*Schwarzenegger:* Well, I don't.

*Teacher:* Perhaps that's better, Dick. The pharmacist here will give you some pills, and you'll fall to sleep ...

*Schwarzenegger:* No, wait a minute. We're not going to talk about sleep right now. I sleep fine. But I just had a thought. It's really silly, and maybe you'll be offended. But it seems like ... Do you want me to say it?

*Chief:* Out with it, Schwarzenegger.

*Schwarzenegger:* Well, you see, when you say you want to eat the dogs, and we don't have any dogs, perhaps you mean ... You won't be offended, right? Well, it seems that maybe you'd like to eat me. Is that right?

*Chief:* Well, yes.

*Schwarzenegger:* You're not angry I said that?

*Pharmacist:* Of course not. Who could be angry at you at a time like this?

*Teacher:* Chief, I think it would be appropriate to at least say a few words of thanks and appreciation and so on.

*(The chief nods.)*

*Teacher:* Dear friend, dear brother! In the name of our entire polar expedition, I would like to thank you for your personal bravery, your dedication, and the endurance with which you pulled us all the way here. You've been a good friend to us. All of us who have known you ... *(overcome with emotion)* I can't go on. Someone take over for me.

*Pharmacist:* I'd just like to say: You've been not only a good friend, but a good husband, father, uncle, and father-in-law. We will never forget you. Long will you remain within us ... at least for a little while, anyway.

*Schwarzenegger (with emotion):* I'm not sure, friends, but I think there will be time for such sentiments later on. Look, we haven't even reached the Pole yet. Let's forget about this till we get there. I've been pretty good so far, but now you're spoiling me.

*Chief:* Don't worry about that, Dick. Here in the cold north, nothing spoils.

*Schwarzenegger:* But still, look at what kind of Czechs we are. At home we fight, argue, practically devour each other. And here we almost want to eat each other up with kindness...

*Chief:* Okay, Schwarzenegger, where's the axe? You were chopping wood with it last.

*Schwarzenegger (reaches into a bag and pulls it out):* Here it is.

*Chief:* Let me borrow it.

*Teacher (gets up and walks away):* I can't bear to see this!

*Pharmacist:* Me neither!

*Schwarzenegger (follows them):* Me neither. I've seen you chop wood before, and it's not a pretty sight.

*Teacher (pushes him back):* No, not you, Dick, you've got to stay here.

*Schwarzenegger:* Okay, give me the axe (*takes the axe from the chief*). I'll chop it up myself. And if you can't bear to watch, wait here and I'll go over there. (*Takes the things off the sled.*) It was a nice sled. When things start to go downhill we'll be sorry. (*Pulls the sled offstage.*)

*Teacher:* And the worst thing is he's such a pure, simple-hearted soul.

*Pharmacist:* He's a good fellow.

*Teacher:* To the marrow. If I weren't so hungry ... Did you notice what a good egg he is compared to us?

*Pharmacist (thinking):* Yeah, let's fry him!

(*The sound of chopping wood is heard.*)

*Teacher:* Yesterday I was watching him pull the sled. He really is well developed.

*Pharmacist:* His buttocks, for example. I couldn't help myself when I was unharnessing him from the sled, and I slapped him on the butt.

*Chief:* Gentlemen, remember how we were talking about our Czechness? Let's not forget about our humanist ideals? You know, when I was holding that axe in my hand, I was suddenly ashamed. Let's let him freeze to death.

*Teacher:* You're right.

*Pharmacist (to the teacher):* Just so long as it doesn't take too long, Chief.

*Teacher:* The chief is over there. Why are you looking at me?

*Pharmacist:* Sorry, I guess I'm squinting from hunger.<sup>4</sup>

*Schwarzenegger (enters):* Okay, I'm done with the sled.

(*No one responds. All eye him silently.*)

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<sup>4</sup> This is another untranslatable joke: šilhat means to squint, šilet means to go insane.

*Schwarzenegger:* Now, I really don't know what I'll be good for.

*(Once again an odd silence.)*

*Chief:* You've gotten a little overheated from all that chopping, haven't you, Dick.

*Schwarzenegger:* Yes, I certainly have.

*Teacher:* Why don't you take off your scarf.

*Schwarzenegger (obeys):* Yeah, I guess I could.

*Pharmacist:* And unbutton your shirt there at the top. You'll feel better.

*(Schwarzenegger once again obeys.)*

*Teacher:* You should unbutton your coat as well.

*Schwarzenegger:* I don't want to overdo it. It's really not *that* hot.

*(Nevertheless he unbuttons his coat. Once again everyone is silent.)*

*Teacher:* Well, how do you feel?

*Schwarzenegger:* My toes are already numb.

*Teacher:* Perhaps your boot soles have holes in them. Take them off and let me have a look at them.

*(Schwarzenegger takes off his boots and hands them to him.)*

*Teacher (examining the boots):* Oh yes, there's a hole here. You'd best not put them back on. Better to go barefoot than wear shoddy footwear.

*Schwarzenegger:* You think so? Hey, you're right. It's almost as if my feet are on fire.

*Chief:* Listen Schwarzenegger, could you lend me your trousers for a moment?

*Schwarzenegger:* My trousers? Okay, but really only for a moment, because my underpants are really thin.

*(Schwarzenegger is now standing with neither boots nor trousers. The others watch him.)*

*Pharmacist:* So, how do you feel now, son?

*Schwarzenegger:* Actually, pretty invigorated. Just wait till I get home and tell everyone how I stood right near the North Pole wearing almost nothing ... It's a good thing these feathers are keeping me warm.



*Teacher:* Did you hear that? He's starting to go mad. He's got goose bumps, and now he thinks he's got goose feathers, as well!

*Pharmacist:* Perhaps this feeling of poultry will make it all easier for him.

*Teacher:* Schwarzenegger, can you still hear me?

*Schwarzenegger:* Yeah, yeah. I hear you.

*Teacher:* And those feathers you just mentioned. Can you feel them over your entire body? Even on your legs?

*Schwarzenegger:* No, just here on my side.

*(Schwarzenegger opens the side of his coat, and a chicken is hanging on the inside from a hook.)*

*Chief:* What's that?! You've got a chicken?

*Schwarzenegger:* No, a rooster, a cock.

*Chief:* Why didn't you say anything?! We're dying of hunger, getting ready to lay a hand on our best friend, and you've got a rat, you rooster! ... a rooster, you rat!

*Teacher:* You should be ashamed of yourself, Richard. Phooey!

*Schwarzenegger:* Why should I be ashamed? I've been telling you about it for a week. On Monday, the pharmacist says his stomach is rumbling. And I say, "Here's a cock."<sup>5</sup> And you, Chief, you yourself said, "We'll have none of your disgusting talk." And then on Tuesday, the teacher said he was so hungry he could eat nails. And I said, "How about this cock of mine." And you told me to knock it off again. On Wednesday, you were all whining with hunger, and I said, "I've still got a cock!" And what did the chief say? Go on, try to remember. You said, "One more word, and I'll write you down in the logbook, you blockhead."

*Chief:* Get dressed, you dolt, and lay out the fire.

*Schwarzenegger (mumbling as he exits):* Blockhead, blockhead. I've got crabs, and I don't complain.

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<sup>5</sup> In Czech the play is on the word *houser*, which means both a gander (male goose) and a backache.

*Before the Curtain IV*

*Teacher (reading from his diary):*

Yesterday I lost my red pencil, so from now on I can no longer underline the chapter titles with red. Of course, the diary is less clear this way.

As we get closer to the Pole, we are tormented more and more by the cold. Yesterday it was so cold we couldn't find the mercury in the thermometer. Only after 15 minutes of warming it with our breath did the mercury rise to minus 50. Such cold is practically fatal for a Central European. Therefore, with further breathing, we managed to raise the mercury to 42 degrees, which is still bearable.

It's no surprise that in such a situation one's thoughts incline to warmth and comfort. The chief recalled the infamous heat wave of 1888 when 3 fishponds dried up in his hometown of Třeboň. The pharmacist told us what would often happen in the summer between two and four o'clock in the afternoon. During this time, the sun would shine so brightly into his shop window that he was often sweating. Richard Schwarzenegger decided to tell us a similar story, but he couldn't remember any.

The next day the mercury sank so low in the thermometer that we couldn't get it to rise at all.

Scene IV

*(Two iced-over blocks rise from a flat plain, one shorter, the other taller. Three of the Czech polar explorers sit in front of them finishing what's left of the rooster. Now and then they toss their bones to Schwarzenegger who is lying on the ground near the luggage. During the explorers' conversation one can hear Schwarzenegger crunching on bones.)*

*Chief:* Musgrave stoves are really good, too. It takes them a while to get going, but then they heat for a long time.

*Teacher:* Or an American stove. What's wonderful about them is that you can savor the warmth not only with your skin but your eyes as well. You can see the fire burning wonderfully through the little window in the door.

*Pharmacist (through chattering teeth):* One of those little Hibachis would be enough for me, gentlemen. Once the pharmacist Bouček and I were playing chess, and I got that sucker red hot. Then Bouček says, “That sure is a small stove.” And I say, “That’s right. It’s the smallest stove you can get.” Then Bouček says, “But it seems to be getting smaller and smaller.” So I take a look, and that little Hibachi’s legs got so hot they burned right through the floor.

*Teacher:* That’s beautiful. When I get home I’m going to put four stoves in each room. Those we just talked about plus heated bricks.

*Pharmacist:* Excuse me, Václav, I don’t want to rain on your parade, but how are you going to ventilate all that?

*Teacher:* I’ll put a chimney in every corner. You can’t scrimp on chimneys.

*(During this conversation Schwarzenegger goes and stands off to the side in a position that could be taken as looking off into the distance or urinating. When he leaves that spot, a yellow arc arches from his waist to the ground. Schwarzenegger notices this when he walks back.)*

*Schwarzenegger:* This is some frost. Gentlemen, next time you want to go off to some pole or other, count me out. I’m downright disappointed with this excursion of ours. What’s around here, anyway? Snow, ice, cold, icicles ... Here’s one as big as an ox. *(Kicks the larger of the ice-blocks and topples it over.)*

*Teacher (jumps up):* Wait a minute! Let me see! *(bends over the ice mass)* Do you know what you’re kicking?! Stop it! *(He puts the ice-block in its former position.)* Friends, come here. I hope I’m not mistaken, but ... Yes! We’re standing face to face ... *(Turns the ice-block a little.)* Yes, now. We’re standing face to face with the American polar expedition of professor MacDonald.

*Pharmacist (examines the ice-block up close):* This is really Professor MacDonald?

*Teacher:* Yes, it’s been almost a year since this remarkable scientist and millionaire set off from the northern tip of Greenland for the North Pole. Since then, there’s been no word from him. He was a great explorer.

*Schwarzenegger:* Why is he so small?

*Teacher:* From the frost. Have a seat, gentlemen.

*(The others take a seat on the smaller ice-block.)*

*Teacher:* It's a remarkable coincidence that we met him here. I recently read about him in *Teachers' Weekly*. As a young man, Professor MacDonald inherited an enormous fortune. And he decided he would dedicate it all to science. At the Trade Union Congress of Millionaires in Washington, D.C., he expressed a beautiful thought. He said—I don't know if I'll be able to cite you precisely, Professor MacDonald—he said, "Science should give to the poor and take from the rich." Or give to the rich and take from the poor. Well, it was one of those. At fourteen years of age, he immersed himself in the study of biology, and emerged 8 years later as the author of the world-renowned book *Man and Frost*. He conducted numerous daring experiments on his own body to ascertain how much hypothermia the human organism could take.

*Schwarzenegger:* It looks like you've overdone it a wee bit.

*Teacher:* It is also of interest that Professor MacDonald paid a visit to the Czech lands, as well, where he conducted experiments at Lednice Castle. He took with him to the United States his Czech servant Koláč.<sup>6</sup> In MacDonald's service, Koláč reached the rank of Lieutenant of Biology. And as I now recall, Professor MacDonald's expedition was composed of 2 members. So, Lieutenant Koláč should be here. He couldn't have gotten lost. He was big as a horse. Gentlemen, get up!

*(The members of the expedition stand up from the smaller ice-block, and the teacher bends over it, dusts the snow off, and stands it next to the ice-block of the professor.)*

*Teacher:* Lieutenant Koláč!

*Schwarzenegger:* This one's nicely frosted over, as well.

*Teacher:* Gentlemen, I have a suggestion. The stalwart expedition of Professor MacDonald deserves to reach the North Pole, at least posthumously. Of course, it will be an enormous burden for us. After all, we ourselves are on our last legs. But let us

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<sup>6</sup> The original name is *Beran*, which means ram. When they decide to eat him later, there is a play on the name—*baked ram*. I think koláčeš are fairly well known to English speakers. It's not the best solution, but it's difficult to find a Czech-sounding name that also means a type of food in English.

undertake this sacrifice. Come on, let's tie them together to make it easier for Schwarzenegger to carry.

*Before the Curtain IV*

*Teacher (reading from his diary):*

Today the chief issued a prohibition against conversations about stoves, warm regions, eiderdown comforters, scarlet fever, and the like. He judged correctly that such thoughts were weakening us and the following day issued a list of topics allowed for conversation.

Monday's topic: The importance of cold in the battle against infectious diseases.

Tuesday: The beauty of windowpanes in the winter.

Wednesday: Ice-skating experiences.

Thursday: Bears—point out the advantages of the polar variety.

Friday: Black frost

Saturday: Frost—the best father.

As you can see, there is no end to the list topics of conversation. It's interesting that ever since the issuing of the topics, our usually voluble group has for the most part grown silent. But just the other day, when the chief fell asleep, Schwarzenegger, Šofr, and I crept beneath a blanket and talked about the fire at the National Theater.

Scene V

*(The teacher is at the head of the expedition with his head raised following the stars.)*

*Teacher:* A little further, a little further ... *(He tries a step to the right, a step to the left until he finds the right spot.)* Here it is! The North Star is precisely at its zenith.

Friends, now I am standing in the exact spot where the Earth's axis intersects the surface of our planet. We've conquered the North Pole!

*Pharmacist:* Wait, let me stand there! ... Conquered!

*Schwarzenegger:* Now me! Now me! ... That's it?

*Teacher:* Now let the chief stand there.

*Chief:* Gentlemen, friends, brothers! After months of hardship and suffering, the long-awaited moment has arrived when a Czech stands upon the most northern point of our planet. To be sure, it is somewhat dimmed by the fact that I'm Němec, but only in name. In my heart, head and legs I'm Czech.

*Schwarzenegger (prompting):* And your hands, Karel...

*Chief (waves him off):* It is we hardy Czechs who are the first to stand in the spot, dreamed of by all the hardy fellows of the world.

*Pharmacist:* Karel, cut it short. It's freezing here.

*Chief:* Here, in this place of eternal frost, it is no shame for a man to shed a hailstone. Let our Sokol cry resound among the racket of our falling tears. Nazdar!

*Everyone:* Zdar!

*Teacher:* And now, friends, I'd like to draw your attention to a certain geographical peculiarity. If I stand next to the chief and step off in any direction, I always go south.

*Pharmacist:* No!

*Teacher:* Yes, yes! Watch! *(stands next to the chief and steps off.)* I'm going south. *(He returns and sets off in another direction.)* And now I'm going south again. And now—once again south.

*Pharmacist:* That's unbelievable!

*Teacher:* Hold on, you haven't seen anything yet. Richard, stand here with your back to the chief. And now both of you, step forward.

*(Schwarzenegger and the chief, with their backs to each other, step forward.)*

Did you see that? They're both going south!

*Pharmacist:* That's really something else!

*Teacher:* And I've saved the best for last. Now, you'll really see something. Vojtěch, mark the Pole with an X and step aside.

*(Vojtěch obeys. The teacher sets off toward the mark.)*

Watch this. I'm going north *(he crosses the mark and continues walking)* and now I'm going south! And now back: north ... and now south.

*Pharmacist:* That's impossible!

*Teacher:* Try it yourself.

*Pharmacist:* This I've got to see. (*He walks towards the pole and then moment he crosses it his face lights up with joy.*) Wow! Friends, this was worth it! On the verge of death from hypothermia, from hunger, and from exhaustion, but it was worth it!

*Schwarzenegger:* Maybe there's something I'm not getting, but I don't really see what's so special. When I compare this with our trip to Kokořín, for example ...

*Pharmacist:* Come on, there's no comparison at all!

*Schwarzenegger:* At least there we had those sandstone cliffs, food ... What do we have here? Shit.

*Pharmacist:* Oh, please be quiet. This is an experience of a lifetime. I have to try it one more time. (*He walks across the Pole.*) North ... South. This is wonderful! You won't experience anything like this anywhere else in the world.

*Teacher:* Wait a minute. You could also experience it at the South Pole. In reverse, of course.

*Schwarzenegger:* Upside-down.

*Pharmacist:* Just wait till I tell the pharmacist Bouček. I can already hear him saying: "There you go pulling the wool over my eyes again."

*Schwarzenegger:* I'm hungry.

*Teacher:* How can you think of food at a time like this? I'm so full of emotion ... Aren't you, Vojtěch?

*Pharmacist:* Yes, I'm full of emotion, too, but of course I could fit in something small.

*Chief:* The emergency rations cannot be touched. And besides, we ate them yesterday.

*Teacher:* What do you mean? The emergency rations were for the trip back.

*Chief:* That's what I wanted to tell you, just in case you ever plan a trip like this again. You'll take care, so that what happened to us doesn't happen to you. I counted our rations precisely, and I kept telling myself, "When you finish counting, multiply by two." And in the confusion when we were packing, you all kept talking, and I forgot about it. So, I calculated it correctly, but the only thing missing was the multiplication. That's just so you'll know for next time.

*Teacher:* Yes, next time we'll be careful, but Chief, if I understand you correctly, we don't have anything to eat?

*Chief:* Well, that's what I've been saying! It should have been times two. Don't you get it?! What a stupid question ...

*Schwarzenegger:* You know what? Let's eat Koláč.

*Pharmacist:* You've got koláče? Our savior! You're always pulling something out of your sleeve ... Where are they?

*(Schwarzenegger points over his shoulder at the two frozen explorers.)*

*Teacher:* Oh, you mean Lieutenant Koláč? Our countryman?

*Schwarzenegger:* We could eat the professor, too, but he seems to me a bit small.

*Teacher:* That's a fine how-do-you-do. Things are so bad we're going to eat mortal remains?

*Chief:* Come on, what are we, fastidious little schoolgirls? After all, there was a suggestion to eat our own friend ...

*Schwarzenegger:* Who?

*Teacher:* You don't know him.

*Chief:* Someone we knew and who was alive. Koláč is frozen to the bone and none of us knew him.

*Pharmacist:* Yes, and maybe in his time he had a few character flaws.

*Schwarzenegger:* So how about it? We've got these ski poles left. Should I light a fire under him?

*(All hand him their poles.)*

*Pharmacist:* Save one pole, Schwarzenegger. We'll skewer him with it.

*(Schwarzenegger throws off his burden.)*

*Schwarzenegger:* First we'll heat him up a bit to thaw him out, and then we'll cut him up.

*(He attaches the snow mummy to a pole, and the others light the fire.)*

*Teacher:* Personally I will eat him only with extreme disgust.



*Pharmacist:* My mom always told me: Don't turn your nose up at any food. Eat at home what you have, and elsewhere what they give you.

*(Two of the explorers hold the mummy on the stick, the others warm their hands over the fire.)*

*Chief:* He's thawing out beautifully.

*Pharmacist:* His name helps, too: Baked koláč, that doesn't sound too bad. It would be worse if his name was Kratochvil, for example.

*Schwarzenegger:* I'd even eat a Kratochvil.

*Teacher (turns around):* I can't take it! He's looking at me!

*Schwarzenegger:* Isn't there any more wood around here?

*Pharmacist (grabs the guitar):* The guitar! That'll burn nicely.

*Teacher (snatches it out of his hands):* No, not the guitar! What are we going to do when we're depressed again?

*Chief:* Look, Václav, when you're hungry, art has to go out the window. Play on it one last time and then we'll use it for firewood.

*Teacher (begins to sing sadly):*

The Polar night  
Has a special might  
The sadness attacks one and all,  
Christian and Muslim,  
British and German,  
The sadness, it makes one bawl.  
Even those crafty Japanese  
Are at their end and ill at ease.  
Only one nation will not succumb,  
The horrors of the north overcome.  
There, where wolves die in packs,  
*There, where wolves die in packs,*

And caribou breathe their last,  
The Czech, he will adapt.  
The Czech, he will adapt.

*(During the song, a toasted lieutenant Koláč gets up. Smoke is rising from his clothes and a ski pole is sticking up behind his neck from beneath his coat. He stretches and looks around at the astounded explorers.)*

*Koláč:*<sup>7</sup> Hello, boys! Good evening everybody! *(He goes from one explorer to the other shaking his hand.)* My name is George Koláč. I'm very glad to see you.

*Pharmacist:* Šofr.

*Teacher:* My name is Václav Poustka. Teacher. Under ... underground teacher.

*Koláč:* Václav Pustka! It is a Czech name, isn't it?

*Teacher:* I'm just a beginner, I don't know what he's saying anymore.

*Koláč:*<sup>8</sup> Czechs! Are you Czechs?

*Chief:* Yes. We're a Czech polar expedition. I'm Němec.

*Koláč:* A German Czech! I'm an American Czech. Beautiful! *(He pulls out a golden cigarette case from his coat, and from it a piece of paper.)*

*Koláč:* Did you read this and then thaw me out?

*Pharmacist:* We thawed you out, but didn't read it.

*Koláč:* You didn't read it, yet you thawed me out. Wonderful! What a clever people. In that case I'll translate into Czech: Dear people of future generations. The two bodies you have found belong to scientists in the field of hibernation studies. If you heat up our mortal shells to 37 degrees Celsius, we will resume our life's journey and bear witness to previous centuries. Thank you. *(Folds the paper.)* By the way, where's the professor?

*Teacher:* The professor? Where is he? He was right here!

*Koláč (calling out):* Mr. MacDonald! Where are you? *(to the others)* He's always roaming around somewhere.

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<sup>7</sup> Koláč is speaking English in the original.

<sup>8</sup> Reverts to Czech in the original.

*Pharmacist:* Schwarzenegger, where did you put him? He was lying right here a moment ago. I tossed him amongst the luggage myself.

*Teacher:* Here he is. *(Lifts up the mummy.)*

*Koláč:* Oh, I see. He's still not thawed out ... Let me see him. My God, Professor, you're kind of shriveled up. Was I that shriveled up?

*Schwarzenegger:* Well, there wasn't much of you, but you were a better piece. That's why we chose you first.

*Koláč (stretches):* I feel great after all these centuries. But why are my boots all burned up? *(Tries to bend over, but the pole behind his neck prevents him).* And there's something wrong with my back. My spine is completely stiff!

*Teacher:* If you'll allow me. *(Pulls the pole out of his clothing.)*

*Koláč:* I had that behind my neck? What for?

*Schwarzenegger:* That's what we were preparing you on.

*Koláč:* Preparing me?

*Teacher:* Reviving you.

*Koláč:* Aha. The professor assumed it would be a complicated instrument, and you Czechs use a pole. Beautiful! Okay, let's put the professor on the pole.

*Schwarzenegger (grabs the professor into his arms like a toy someone wants to take from him):* No! Under no circumstance. What we did was just stupid. First we'll cut him up and then prepare him.

*Koláč:* I don't understand.

*Chief:* Dick wants to say that when reviving the professor we've got to be more careful than we were with you.

*Teacher (coquettishly):* After all, we almost burned you!

*Schwarzenegger:* Don't forget, we don't have another one!

*Teacher:* Lieutenant, don't take Schwarzenegger here seriously. He's a savage.

*Koláč:* He's a native? He's not Czech?

*Schwarzenegger:* No, I'm Czech but I'm a savage.

*Koláč:* A savage Czech, wonderful! So the Czechs have a colony here! So, friends, how is this new world of yours? What year is it?

*Pharmacist:* It's already the ninth year of the new century.

*Koláč:* 2009? Or 2109?

*Pharmacist:* What are you talking about! It's 1909.

*Koláč:* You've got to be pulling my leg. After all, we were frozen in 1908.

*Teacher:* Yes, we know. Last year you set out and disappeared without a trace.

*Koláč:* And you revived me after only a year? Thanks for nothing! This is really annoying. One year of hibernation! Like some animal. You idiots!

*Chief:* Look, brother Koláč. If you don't like it, you can just go freeze again. It's really not a problem here.

*Koláč:* You think that'll work? It's a complicated procedure, which only the professor knows how to do. But you just try and thaw him out! He'll let you have it. Frozen for only a single year. Do you think that's what he worked his whole life for? What he threw away millions of dollars for? He said to me: "George, once they thaw us out, once we're warm and gay again like we've always been, we'll see a different world. Your country will no longer groan beneath Austria, and you'll be able to go home.

*Pharmacist:* Well, it's true that we still groan a bit beneath Austria, but it's bearable.

*Chief:* Hey, Koláč, this is a matter of life and death. Are you coming with us south or not?

*Koláč:* What else can I do since you've made such a mess of things?! But let's leave the professor here. He'll hold out for at least a hundred years.

*Chief:* Brother Koláč, I don't think that's a good idea. Look, Professor MacDonald wouldn't have any peace and quiet here at the Pole. One expedition after another is headed this way: Amundsen, Nansen, Peary ...

*Teacher:* It's going to get very busy around here.

*Pharmacist:* Any minute someone could come along and thaw him out.

*Schwarzenegger:* Let's thaw him out on the way instead. Okay, you dried up prune!

*Chief:* Victorious polar expedition, on my command, direction south, after me in the following order: Chief Karel Němec. Here! Teaching Assistant Václav Poustka ...

*Teacher:* Here!

*Chief:* Pharmacist Vojtěch Šofr...

*Pharmacist:* Here!

*Chief:* Fellow countryman Jiří Koláč...

*Koláč:* Here.

*Chief:* Sled-puller, savage Richard Schwarzenegger plus Professor MacDonald ...

*Schwarzenegger:* All here!

*Chief:* Double time ... Homeward!

*(Everyone marches in place against a raging snowstorm. The lights gradually dim then completely go out. Then a voice from the speakers announces:)*

The Czech Polar Expedition left the North Pole on 5 April 1909. Just a day later, the American Robert Edwin Peary reached the Pole. The stalwart Czechs, however, did not announce the fact that they'd arrived first, so that the victory would not be attributed to detested Austria. Only several years later, in 1918, the sole surviving member of the expedition, Richard Schwarzenegger, revealed the truth to the doctors' consilium at the Kosmonosy Public Mental Institution in Mladá Boleslav. His statement was taken down and brought him an extended 10-year stay in the institution.

*(The stage is once again illuminated. All of the cast members are posing in the still life "Conquest of the North Pole. The chief is holding above them the Czech flag on a staff.)*

Konec