

THE DOCTOR

I delivered him in this house. Although, of course, that was before the war and the reconstruction. Perhaps not a single brick remains of that first house.

THE SOLDIER

Is it true, Doctor, that the cells in a man's body are replaced throughout his life?

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

This isn't the time for philosophy, with a man's life in the balance. [reflectively]
Well... you know what I mean.

THE SERVANT

Perhaps it's not my place, but I do think we should read the letter, now.
The Mistress makes a dismissive gesture.

THE SERVANT

Isn't it better to know the truth than not to know?

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

Confirm a truth we might all suspect - I speak hypothetically, Kotva, calm yourself! - even if it means ending this night in misery? Corporal Vachnadze, this man whose directions you obeyed without question - do you want to remember him as a liar? A charlatan?

A DISTANT RUMBLING IS HEARD

THE SERVANT

What a spasm of fright! Calm yourself, Simon.
The war is over. That is just thunder.

THE DOCTOR

How do you know?

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

They announced it on the radio. You heard them.

THE SOLDIER

[insistent] How do you know?

THE SERVANT

I was there. We were all there - you, Dr
Abashvili, you were there.

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

Enough of this. Give it to me, I will take the
letter.

THE SERVANT

And read it?

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

Oh, reading. It is a strange thing, reading,
you know. It listens but it does not speak.
Whereas the radio speaks but it does not
listen. You spoke of the radio...
[philosophically] but you did not speak on the
radio.

DISTANT SOUND OF DOGS BARKING

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

How can we know?

THE DOCTOR

What questions you have! The answers
lie in your hands - look, look!

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

Oh, I cannot read it. Kotva -- you
can read -- read the story of hands,
that is to say. What lines I can
trace, look, Kotva, like a river!

THE SOLDIER

The river that you can never cross
again? The river whose waters rush by
and never return? Doctor, if every
cell has been born anew -- Doctor,
you never answered me, I cannot
remember.

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

These cells! You speak of them so
often, Simon! You would deny that
this hand is the hand he -- touched.
You would deny everything.

THE DOCTOR

I have no wish to hold it.

THE SERVANT

Then who will?

THE SOLDIER

I have done enough, I think. I think I have done enough. *[he turns away]* I think sometimes that I have done too much, and that-- but the past is past, I have done my part, each morning we are born as new as the sunlight, and the blackbird, and the schoolboy who walks past and whistles. And yet the tune is always the same.

THE DOCTOR:

Vachnadze, you should rest.

THE SOLDIER:

[still turned away]

And yet if I am, as nobody will yet confirm, as new to the world as saplings and buttermilk, if I cast off my sin and my skin, can I after all be said to have done my part?

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

I would burn many things, and the letter as well, yet there have been fires enough this past year.

THE SERVANT

You who can speak of burning! You who could find out the truth if you only chose, yet take as your privilege this dalliance with ignorance. Is it I alone who wishes to understand? Oh, it is not my place, I know!

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

Oh? If you wish it then you of course
you should take the letter, Kotva.

THE SERVANT

You know it does me little good, like
a radio to the deaf; imagine that!

THE DOCTOR

You, deaf? Your hearing never suffers
at keyholes!

THE SERVANT

Oh, literalism, Doctor. Another
luxury for those who can afford it.
Give me the letter, then! I will look
upon his truth, even if I can never
understand it.

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

Perhaps that is why you have the
courage.

THE SERVANT

Do you not wish to know?

THE DOCTOR

She knows! All that she needs to
know...

THE DOCTOR

I have stood before in this place;
what should be special about this
time? Soon it will be past, and
forgotten as all the others.

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

So you say. Yet I have not forgotten.

THE DOCTOR

You have forgotten -- different
things, perhaps. I have forgotten
birth and life and happiness, and
sadness. I have forgotten death, and
armies, and the sound of a gavel that
falls.

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

You speak of these terrible things?
You would dare to?

THE DOCTOR

Falls like... like a conker, would
you say?

THE SERVANT

I have heard neither.

THE SOLDIER

Enough! We must decide. Or at any rate a decision must be made, and nobody else is here.

THE DOCTOR

Perhaps we could flip a coin. Fate!

THE SERVANT

Fate? Why, fate is like bread: there is rarely enough for me. But I see it, yes. I serve it, perhaps.

THE DOCTOR

And you, Grusha - a coin? Chance? You have been lucky sometimes.

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

Where should we get a coin at this time of night?

THE SOLDIER

A button, then.

THE SERVANT

And where should we get a button?

A BELL RINGS

THE DOCTOR

You have it, my dear. You have had it, perhaps, all along. In any case we should sleep, and leave this for another morning.

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

Sleep! It is necessary for a doctor, I suppose, to be callous. It is not necessary for a-- wife, nor a daughter. Well, sometimes.

THE SERVANT

Is it necessary for a mistress?

THE SOLDIER

It is necessary for a soldier. And yet the thunder... no, we ought not to sleep while a man's future lies undecided.

THE DOCTOR

Undecided? Unknown, maybe. There is nothing undecided whose purpose lies with us, Vachnadze!

THE SERVANT

Oh, this bickering! Enough! Take it, anyone... do as you will! It won't matter.

THE XXX

Aofnaofabnfioabfiafbafibf.
aalfafafafafafa aafafa afafafa
afafaf. his xxxxx all along.

THE SOLDIER

Some say that the worst part of war
is waiting. But it seems that here in
this house, waiting is all we have.

THE SERVANT

What time is it anyway? I should lay
the table for lunch ... or supper. I
lose track.

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

Without him, each day seems ...
disordered. Shuffled.

THE DOCTOR

It is natural for the human organism
to seek meaning in order and routine.

THE SOLDIER

And none more so than a soldier in
peacetime. The drills, the marches,
apple pie corners on our beds. And
yet, when the first shell of a battle
tears an order into scraps, we see
that it had no meaning.

THE SERVANT

But meaning is not within us, like
our blood. We can find our own
meaning. Does my service have a
meaning? Do I not... do I have
meaning?

