

## Emilia

### PAVOL JANIK

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*Pavol Janik, PhD., was born in 1956 in Bratislava, where he also studied film and television dramaturgy and scriptwriting at the Academy of Performing Arts. He has worked at the Ministry of Culture (1983-1987), in the media and in advertising. President of the Slovak Writers' Society (2003-2007) and the Secretary-General of the SWS (1998-2003, 2007-2013). He has received a number of awards for his literary and advertising work both in his own country and abroad. This virtuoso of Slovak literature, Pavol Janik, is a poet, dramatist, prose writer, translator, publicist and copywriter. His literary activities focus mainly on poetry.*



That day Dr. Grossmann woke up feeling decidedly ill at ease. His wife was still asleep. Something was wrong. He could tell that at a glance when he caught sight of the dawn in the orchard through the closely gathered net curtains. He could rely on his first impression. It had never failed him. Never ever. In all his life. And that was not in just any life, but in his life - in the life of Dr. Grossmann. Those who knew anything at all about the world in which Dr. Grossmann had lived in the course of six purposeful decades and one harmonious marriage, should know what that meant. Dr. Grossmann was not in the habit of being mistaken. It could be said that as a rule he wasn't mistaken, although it is true that he was never mistaken - on principle. Appreciation of this rare characteristic of his could be seen in a number of souvenirs presented to him by grateful bank employees.

Dr. Grossmann slipped on a shiny dressing gown with the coat of arms of the Krasnohorsky family that was such excellent proof of his dear wife's aristocratic roots. He was proud of her noble birth. Equis hungaricus - that never failed to raise his practical spirit to starry heights. At such moments he understood the nobility of his life's endeavours, he realised the historical significance of his existence. He was fond of lofty thoughts, but everything in moderation - that was his primary belief.







Emilia

Standing under the heavy chandelier, his back to the dawn, ignoring peacefully sleeping Emilia, he pondered that for a whole week now he had not left the house to go to the bank. That thought made him miserable. He had nowhere to hurry to, he had no reason to be irritable. Nothing was important, neither possessions nor honour, not even that pitiful carnation in the buttonhole of his jacket. It didn't matter what colour suit he chose. His life had lost its rules. There were no pivotal points in the calendar which had helped him manage his time so successfully. Not even the thought of his afternoon meeting with his friends in the Carlton Hotel could inspire him with any enthusiasm. He was looking forward to it, it was true, but surely that couldn't be his one and only prospect for the future.

He suddenly made a move without first ringing for Mancika. Who knows whether he had any reason for not ringing or whether he just didn't want to wake Emilia, but maybe it was because it had gone out of fashion, or because Mancika was no longer among the living.

Along the wall facing the window stood a row of heavy, dark wooden cupboards. Quite inexplicably, for the first time in many years, Dr. Grossmann went over to the one in the corner. It held all kinds of memorabilia. There was his grandfather's glass eye, which Dr. Grossmann, when he was not yet a doctor, but just a bright boy, had taken from his forebear's bedside table, so the respected pharmacist had had to procure a new prosthesis. Here was his school-graduation suit, in which he had so incredibly quickly been transformed from a school-leaver to an adult and respected gentleman. There were a hundred useless items here that he had never had time for. He had gradually stored his busy life in this cupboard, so that one day the cupboard would bear witness to the averted face of an active existence, would reflect the soul of a thinker, hidden beneath the fame of a renowned money man. The only important things in his life that were not in the cupboard were his love letters. Those did not belong in the bedroom. They lay at the back of the bottom drawer of his writing desk, tied up with a silk ribbon. As could be seen, Dr. Grossmann devoted as much attention to his emotional life as it deserved. Dr. Grossmann had an appreciation of spiritual values, even though service to the economy, nation and country pushed them into the background, into his little home museum, his modest corner reserved for memories. Even in the emotional sphere, Dr. Grossmann maintained order and style.







Emilia

He stared briefly at this valuable piece of furniture, before suddenly and resolutely opening the door. It creaked horribly. Emilia was torn from her sleep.

Emilia           Heavens! What was that?!

Grossmann     Sorry, dear! Go back to sleep.

Emilia           What's going on?! Is anything the matter?

Grossmann     No. Don't worry.

(Emilia sat up and looked around the room.)

Grossmann     Aren't you going to sleep any more? Should I wish you good morning?

Emilia           Good morning to you, too, darling. Are you looking for something?

(She cast a puzzled look at the open cupboard. Dr. Grossmann shrugged his shoulders as if at a loss.)

Grossmann     I think I should tidy things up here.

Emilia           As you like.

She sighed and lay down again. Dr. Grossmann reverently pulled a shiny watch out of his pocket. Pure gold shimmered in his smooth hands. Its owner saw his eyes mirrored in the lustre of the superior metal. His hand put the watch to his ear. It had stopped. It was silent. It didn't care what time it was, it could even be said it scorned it. Next it was the turn of the coal black school graduation suit. Dr. Grossmann examined it lovingly and gently stroked its dark texture. On an impulse, he slipped off his dressing gown and hurriedly pulled on the shabby jacket. No easy matter, but he managed it. He dived into those commemorative trousers, too. Then he went over to the large wall mirror and admired his reflection. He was delighted to see how well he had preserved his appearance and figure throughout his life. He set great store by that. He believed that it not only reflected his wise lifestyle, good taste and healthy habits, but he was also convinced that it was an indication of his personality, his firmness of will and adherence to principle. He was trying to make the last adjustments to his clothing, when he discovered that he couldn't fasten the trousers, because just at that point the cloth was in tatters, damaged by the destructive work of clothes moths. This distressed him considerably. He didn't hesitate and in a moment he was again back in the haven of his dressing gown. So, even mementoes can disappoint a person. Dr. Grossmann dropped his school graduation suit indifferently onto the carpet. The buttons quietly clinked as it fell. Emilia stirred.

Emilia           Do you need something, dear?

Grossmann     On the contrary, dear. I don't need anything.

Emilia           Not even my help?

Grossmann     Not even this useless school graduation suit.







Emilia

Emilia And what are you going to do with it?  
Grossmann Well... I don't know... We'll throw it away, won't we?  
Emilia That's a good idea. You're right. We won't.  
Grossmann Then I'll throw it away myself.  
Emilia That's where you're mistaken. You'll hang that suit up again where it was. In the cupboard. In its place, where it belongs.  
Grossmann But, dear, you agreed I should tidy up here a bit.  
Emilia Of course, but that doesn't mean you're going to throw away our property.  
Grossmann That can't be classed as property. It's an ordinary school graduation suit.  
Emilia It's not an ordinary school graduation suit, it's your school graduation suit.  
Grossmann Of course, my forty-year-old extra-ordinary school graduation suit.  
Grossmann I'm glad you've got the point at last. And now you can happily hang it up where it belongs.  
Grossmann It belongs in the dustbin. It's no use for anything.  
Emilia It will still come in handy.  
Grossmann Please, be so kind, don't be sentimental. We're not going to store things we don't need just because they remind us of something.  
Emilia Why because they remind us of something?  
Grossmann What other purpose could this useless suit serve?  
Emilia Wearing, of course.  
Grossmann Where on earth could I show myself in such an ancient suit?  
Emilia At a funeral.  
Grossmann Whose funeral?  
Emilia Whose funeral?  
Grossmann Whose funeral?  
Emilia You can guess.  
Grossmann Come on. I've no idea. Has someone died?  
Emilia Someone - that's for certain.  
Grossmann And we're going to their funeral?  
Emilia D'you want to go to just anyone's funeral?  
Grossmann Me? I don't want to go to any funeral at all. It was you who thought that would be a splendid opportunity to use my school graduation suit.  
Emilia And what don't you like about it?  
Grossmann Everything.  
Emilia That's just like you. You don't like anything about me.







Emilia

Grossmann Who's talking about you, for heaven's sake?  
Emilia You. Who else would add to my suffering?  
Grossmann But we're talking about a suit, not about you.  
Emilia Trust you to contradict me.  
Grossmann Are we talking about the suit?  
Emilia Yes.  
Grossmann I'm glad we're talking about the same thing.  
Emilia The pleasure is mine.  
Grossmann And the truth mine.  
Emilia What do I care about your truth. We're talking about the suit.  
Grossmann We're talking about the suit and about the dustbin.  
Emilia That's where you're mistaken. About the suit and a funeral.  
Grossmann What funeral?  
Emilia I've already told you, you must guess.  
Grossmann Is someone dying, or what are you on about?  
Emilia Everyone will die one day, won't they?  
Grossmann Yes, that's very true.  
Emilia I'm glad you agree I'm right. And now you can put that suit  
away in the cupboard with a clear conscience.  
Grossmann Listen here!  
Emilia I'm listening.  
Grossmann Listen carefully!  
Emilia Of course, I'm listening carefully.  
Grossmann Listen carefully to what I say.  
Emilia I'm listening carefully to what you say, but so far you haven't  
said anything.  
Grossmann Tell me...  
Emilia I'll tell you.  
Grossmann Tell me whose funeral I could show up at in this school  
graduation suit?  
Emilia You still haven't guessed?  
Grossmann Just imagine...  
Emilia I'm imagining.  
Grossmann Just imagine, I really haven't guessed yet.  
Emilia Well, just as I've already told you: I'm imagining. And there's  
nothing exciting about it. For heaven's sake. It should be something worth  
imagining. I'm imagining that you really haven't guessed yet. Well, so what?  
Grossmann Well, for heaven's sake tell me please, whose funeral I could  
show up at in this school graduation suit?  
Emilia At your own.





Emilia

The clock on the wall was just striking the quarter. Dr.Grossmann cast an uncertain look at Emilia, the suit, the mirror and the gilt clock face of the pendulum clock. His beloved wife's words sounded so natural. There was a lot of truth in them. They contained nearly the whole truth and almost all of them were sincere. Emilia was always sincere, truthful and wonderful. There was nothing special about that. But all the rest was fundamentally new and strange. It didn't suit their flat, it didn't match the colour of their furniture. Above the garden the sun became a blotch in a wet sky.

Grossmann So you seriously think I'm going to go to my own funeral in that school graduation suit, do you?

Emilia I don't know if you'll go there. I even doubt it, but you'll get there somehow. There's nothing to worry about. You won't be the first deceased. Leave that to the bereaved. It's their worry.

Grossmann Even so, there's one thing I don't understand. I don't understand why you think you will outlive me. That's not clear to me.

Emilia You see how many things are still not clear in our perfect family life.

Grossmann I do see.

Emilia There was never anything wrong with your sight.

Grossmann That's a fact, but even so, it's not clear enough to me why you presume you'll outlive me.

Emilia You see, and yet it's so simple.

Grossmann Simple?

Emilia Simple.

Grossmann Then explain to me why you think that.

Emilia Because it's so simple.

Grossmann But in spite of that, I don't understand.

Emilia Don't let that bother you, I don't understand it either.

Grossmann Then it really is simple. At last I can understand it, too.

Emilia What do you understand?

Grossmann Do you know, I don't know.

Emilia I know.

Grossmann You see how wonderful it is when we understand each other like this.

Emilia That's a good reason for thinking that you'll understand this suit belongs in the cupboard.

Grossmann Oh, no. That's out of the question.

Emilia Then tell me what, in your opinion, am I to bury you in? Be so kind and tell me, what I am meant to bury you in? You can't possibly think I...







Emilia

Grossmann You can't possibly think that you're going to bury me in my school graduation suit, which the moths have been living on for years and years.

Emilia Of course I think so. You can't possibly think that I'm going to have a new one made for you. Especially for a special occasion like a funeral. Made to measure, so you'll feel comfortable, is that it?

Grossmann To measure? I don't say that...

Emilia And what do you say?

Grossmann I say, it needn't be to measure. It can be narrow in the shoulders.

Emilia Look here...

Grossmann I'm looking.

Emilia Look here, dear!

Grossmann I'm looking, dear.

Emilia And what can you see?

Grossmann The same as usual.

Emilia Look, dear. Have you any idea how much trouble one ordinary funeral involves? You just can't imagine. To say nothing of the funeral of a retired governor of a bank!

Grossmann The fact that I'm retired is what's troubling me now.

Emilia Then have a bit of consideration for me, too. There simply won't be time for anything not absolutely essential, such as getting a new suit for the deceased.

Grossmann But why a new suit? Who said anything about a new suit? I've got a whole pile of decent black suits which haven't yet had time to live to a venerable age.

Emilia Surely you don't want to be buried in an undignified manner in a suit which has not yet had time to live, or at least wait, until it's a venerable age? I shall bury you in that commemorative and truly historical garment, reminiscent of your eternal youth and undying education.

Grossmann Out of the question.

Emilia You're mistaken, dear. I shall bury you in that school graduation suit. That will be right and proper - and economical. No one understands questions of economy better than you do.

Grossmann That's true, but it's not possible to save on everything and under every circumstance. There are times in life when magnanimity is called for, when economic interests do not have priority.

Emilia Am I hearing right? If I hadn't known you so well for so many years, I'd probably believe you. But I know those are only magic words which open the public purse.

Grossmann That's not fair. That really hurts.

Emilia Can you explain to me why we have looked after your ceremonial school graduation suit all these years? Why you have denied yourself all kinds of pleasures all your life, just so as to keep your slim figure?







Emilia

Grossmann But that's completely different. Those are things that matter to a person, they're to do with your aim in life.

Emilia You're right. My aim just now is to make you understand the value of this school graduation suit of yours. My conscience won't allow me to throw it away, just because I happen to have taken a momentary dislike to it. I have spent my whole life in the company of your suit. While you were away, it was everything to me.. It took your place. It stood in for you.

Grossmann And that's why you're going to bury me in it? Wouldn't the right thing be to keep it to remind you of me?

Emilia You haven't understood anything. You took turns in my private life. You and your school graduation suit. When one day you depart for ever, both of you will depart. In my eyes and in my heart you are joined by a bond that you can't begin to grasp. While you spent your time in bank offices, I lived my life with your suit.

Grossmann So that's why you're going to bury me in it. How strange fate is. And you'll put grandfather's glass eye in my pocket, to make my departure truly complete. So I'll disappear without trace, you could say. So nothing will be left to remind you of me. As if I had never been. Well, you needn't worry. We'll get rid of this suit here and now.

Emilia I shall bury you in it.

Grossmann When? When will you bury me in it? Now? As you please! I'm already lying on the carpet. I shall die the moment you give the order. Just give the sign and I'm ready.

Emilia There's no need to hurry. There's a time and a place for everything. You don't have to worry about that. Nature will take care of it.

Grossmann What do I care about your Nature?! I don't meddle with it, so be so kind and don't meddle with my school graduation suit. I'm going to throw it away now, without batting an eyelid. Do you hear that? And then one day in the future - in the very distant future - you will bury me in one of my decent black suits. Is that clear?!

Emilia Yes. It's clear. Quite clear. I shall bury you in whatever I consider suitable.

Grossmann At last you're talking sense.

Emilia And you know very well, that it's your school graduation suit that I consider suitable.

Grossmann You really are marvellous!

Emilia That's just what you've been telling me all your life. So now I'm convinced it's true. It's not an unpleasant conviction. On the contrary. It's more refreshing than coffee or peppermints. Such a conviction can help in every situation.

Grossmann I'm glad you regard my share in your life like that, that you appreciate so sincerely my humble contribution.

Emilia Why be so modest? Your deserts are much greater than you think.

Grossmann Don't exaggerate. Everything in moderation - that's the wisest approach.







Emilia

Emilia You've no idea how your affectionate words warm my heart.

Grossmann I'm glad you are beginning to be sensible about the misunderstanding you caused.

Emilia That's marvellous! The misunderstanding I caused?

Grossmann Of course. What's so surprising about that?

Emilia I can't believe my own ears. You couldn't possibly say that - ever. You just couldn't say such words. I mean, the idea wouldn't even occur to you.

Grossmann You're right. Until now I could never have said anything like that, or even secretly thought it, because it's a fact that until this moment you have never caused a misunderstanding. Never mind, it's never too late to start.

Emilia That's the kind of objective view you should take of your school graduation suit - and of course your funeral, too.

Grossmann Since when has my funeral got anything to do with my school graduation?

Emilia Don't change the subject. It's not so much the funeral itself, as your view - your objective view of it.

Grossmann Then don't worry your head about my view. I can see things only too clearly and in focus. It would be more to the point to test your eyes, if you can't see this old suit has long been no use for anything, to say nothing of an occasion such as a funeral and my funeral in retirement in particular.

Emilia At your funeral what will be important is not so much that you were retired as what you were before your retirement.

Grossmann You needn't try so hard. I understand you very well. I know what you want to hint at, or rather, say. Yes, I'm no longer what I've been up to now. Either in society or in the family. And if you want me to spell it out: either in the bank or in the bedroom. But that still doesn't mean you have to punish me by disgracing me entirely - shamelessly getting your revenge at my very funeral. In public, in the eyes of my friends and colleagues.

Emilia Strange, how suspicious you suddenly are. You never used to be like that. You were overflowing with confidence and now you don't trust me. You assume I have dishonest intentions. You give your friends and colleagues as an excuse, while they'll probably never even live to see your funeral. Just think of them, with all their complaints and ailments.

Grossmann Strange, how you're burying everyone all of a sudden. You never used to be like that. You were overflowing with joie de vivre and now you talk of nothing but death. You don't even give anyone else as a excuse.

Emilia You're wrong there! I'm not talking about death. I'm talking about life, which will go on even after the death of your friends and colleagues.







Emilia

Grossmann I'm sorry, but I don't intend to argue with you, and certainly not about such obvious things. It's the principle that matters to me. That suit will go in the dustbin. It won't hurt anyone. Believe me. No one will mourn. Not even you. I'll take care of that. After all, I haven't been anywhere in a week. I am retired, which is the same thing as resting, and I shall spend my retirement living with you in harmony. You must admit that suit no longer has a place in our household. I'm here - in person. It doesn't need to take anyone's place. To stand in for anyone.

Emilia We two will never agree. We've lived two completely different lives, even though they were in some way connected. We've lived close to each other, very close, yet next to each other. Even so, I would still claim that we've never stopped, and we never will stop, loving each other.

Grossmann I can't contradict you there. I should be contradicting myself.

Emilia I'm extremely glad we have at last, though in a roundabout fashion, come to an irrevocable decision to hang your suit up in the cupboard.

Grossmann Forgive me for being so blunt, but my reputation as a man who under all circumstances put forward the right opinion and had it accepted, does not allow me to agree with you in this case. That suit belongs in the dustbin and nowhere else. And, after all, we're not going to be the ones to go against that obvious logic. We'll throw it away.

Emilia I can assure you it won't make much difference if you pick that suit up and put it back in the cupboard.

Grossmann Don't worry, it won't make much difference if we throw this suit away.

Emilia That's impossible.

Grossmann It's unavoidable. Because it's impossible to do up the trousers of this suit, since the moths have destroyed them just at that point.

Emilia That's no obstacle. So far as I know, the deceased's hands are clasped in the coffin, so whether your trousers will or will not be buttoned up is neither here nor there.

Dr.Grossmann thought about this for a while and then spoke in a brooding tone.

Grossmann That's a fact. Actually, you're right.







Emilia

He had to admit, as a person who admired the language of facts and reasonable arguments, that there was relentless, but pure truth in Emilia's words. He asked his beloved wife what she would like for breakfast and left the room. His school graduation suit lay lifelessly on the floor. No doubt after a while Dr. Grossmann came back into the bedroom bearing breakfast for Emilia. Just like in their student days. The only thing we don't know is whether that school graduation suit found its way back into the cupboard or whether it met a different fate. It's easy to guess, but hard to be sure. Yet that was never the important thing, anyway. Meanwhile, the dawn broke on a clear day in Dr. Grossmann's fruit orchard and a breeze blew in through the half-open windows. People are usually touched by Nature. There is something incomparably sentimental about it.

In the Carlton Hotel that afternoon a pleasant meeting took place of elderly gentlemen, inseparable friends, who had in common the years they had lived through together, unforgettable memories and above all noble characters. Without doubt, Dr. Grossmann was present at that meeting. It could even be said that it is highly likely.

