

ILIJA TROJANOW

Dale

Photographs by Christian Muhrbeck

Translated from German by Philip Boehm

IF YOU'RE GOING TO A WEDDING you've got to shave.

That's how we live, *bratko*. Life moves fast.

Whoever has meat to butcher, shares it.

They call themselves "Dale."

Zanko's in charge of music for the wedding.

There's no water here, no electricity, see how the lines just dangle there, *bratko*.

The Gypsies are nothing but stooges in the pay of those in power.

If you leave the community no one can help you.

"Dale" presumably comes from the Indic word *Dalit*—the untouchables.

Those who live off garbage are no better than garbage themselves.

An invitation like that's a rare thing, worth its weight in gold, five hundred euros at least, the wedding's in Greece, it'll keep the family fed for months.

Some of the women sweep the streets for forty leva a month.

Anyone who's declared an enemy is fair game, and anything he owns is considered booty.

Makeshift shacks made of wooden boards covered with tarps against the rain.

They don't show up in any statistics.

They're sending the Gypsies, they'll rob your house, steal your cattle, lay waste to your fields.

People are generous at a wedding, everyone slips the singer a bill, especially if he's as impressive a figure as Zanko.

We fetch water from the spring, on foot it takes half an hour to get there, *bratko*, and then back carrying the full canister on your head.

But he has to find a razor, he can't show up at the wedding unshaved.

The dump never stops smoking; now and then the fire department comes and sprays it down.

You can file as many complaints as you want, even if a couple Gypsies



get caught red-handed, they just let them go the very next day.

The shacks are too low to stand upright when you're inside.

Some of the men go "on the game" by the bus station—selling themselves as day laborers off the street, if they're lucky they might land a grunt job—five leva for a whole day's work.

We can't sleep unless the wind is blowing in the right direction.

Bread soup, stale white bread, softened in herb tea.

His own razor disappeared, someone borrowed it and didn't give it back, he still has a few coins in his pocket, the children are hungry.

The state pays a children's allowance of twenty leva—but only if you're working.

Milky plastic sheets instead of windows.

School? What school? You can't go to school wearing rags.

The doctor swore an oath: no pay, no treatment.

Collecting scrap for twenty stotinki a kilo counts as legal work.

I'm not giving up the search, *bratko*, not until I find my happiness.

Where did they get those tiles, whose roof did they rob, why don't you ask them that some time.

My husband's a weakling, how is it I wound up with the only one who's too good for searching through the waste bins?

Milk? This isn't Switzerland here, *bratko*.

EUROMIX cement sack, blue lettering on a white background.

Porous concrete blocks, no plaster.

Sorting trash is life.

We function all the time, each day, seven days a week.

We're supposed to get welfare but it isn't always paid.

He needs a razor, it's okay even if the blade is worn, the children should stop looking for glass or metal and help find a razor instead.

Aid funds? Are you joking? What aid funds? (You can make good money off garbage, our family takes in about two hundred leva a month.)

The police serve the bigwigs, that's how it is here and everybody knows it, if they say it's OK then people can steal as much as they want.

Zanko keeps in shape with a barbell made from scrap metal that weighs twenty-five kilograms.

A proper banquet has to be planned. Whatever scraps of food get found are eaten, as long as they're not too moldy.

Zanko's strength came in handy as a laborer at a construction site in Greece.

The other Roma, the ones you see over there on the hill, are door-to-door peddlers.

As he sorts through the rubbish, Zanko dreams of a better life in another country.

The children are genuine treasure hunters: not only did they find a razor blade but a little perfume bottle as well.

The peddlers sell toy weapons and plastic devotional objects made in China.

Zanko shaves.

Pants and shirts are worth cash, the holes are patched, the tears temporarily mended.

They sell cotton candy, and one of their families is in charge of the carousel at the fairground, they keep it spinning.

Zanko spritzes himself with perfume.

EUROMIX cement sack, white lettering on a blue background.

No one's getting our vote, these assfuckers lie to us, they lie to us all the time, they lie to everybody.

I'm afraid that one day the kids are going to find a body.

We believed them every single time, now we're through with that, we aren't going to vote anymore, we've had it up to here.

A tattered magazine decorates the shack with the playmate of the month.

EUROMIX cement sack, red lettering on a white background.

At the entrance to the dump is a sign informing anyone who happens

to be strolling by that the EU has allocated twenty-three million euros for the construction of a sorting facility.

The complete correspondence and all communications between the parties bound by the present contract are considered valid and binding only when presented in written form.

The first phase resulted in a rough frame some twenty meters in length and three construction containers.

Primary managers are officials with title to receive funding directly from the council of ministers.

The BALKANSTROI company is owned by two brothers, that's all anyone knows.

Secondary managers are subordinate officials who obtain title from a primary manager.

For years they've claimed that the sorting facility would be ready in January.

Transfer to the subordinate official.

There were obstacles, but now the funds have been freed up, the second phase can begin.

This process was depicted as well.

In the evening, when the last Dale leave the dump, the seagulls come and fight for their share.

