Péter Hajnóczy: The Ant and the Grasshopper

The November winter was tearing the last shrunken and soggy leaves from the trees, when near the outskirts of the forest the grasshopper met the ant. The ant was wearing a slightly torn, panofix1-stuffed winter coat which reeked of naphthalene – a coat which he bought at a reduced price at the pawn-office, just like his waterproof ski boots - while the grasshopper was evidently shivering in his thin, uninsulated linen jacket. The grasshopper was standing with his hands in his pockets, as he didn’t have any gloves either.

“Good afternoon, neighbour”, said the ant. “By the looks of it, you aren’t sweating in that coat…”

“Indeed, it is very cold, neighbour,” answered the grasshopper. “The wind chills even my bones…”

The ant fixed his scarf on his neck with his leather-gloved hands. “My wife knitted it,” he said. “She’s a skillful lady. While watching the television, she’s always knitting or crocheting something.

“If I recall correctly, you are a bachelor, and you rent a house…”

“Well, yes,” nodded the grasshopper. “You know, I’m always just playing the violin. I don’t have much time for anything else.”

He scraped out a packet of cigarettes from his pocket, and offered it to the ant.

“Thank you...” The ant shook his head. "...but it’s been more than three months since I quit smoking. Not only is it a useless and destructive vice, but it also costs money. For the price of a cigarette, a physical worker like me can have breakfast or dinner." He cleared his throat.

"My wife and I are planning to get a bigger house next year. Central heating, telephone, direct underground tunnel to the trashheap…"

The grasshopper lit a cigarette.

"If one only plays his violin all summer while others toil hard to get somewhere in life..."

The ant shook his head. "Did you think, my dear neighbour, that there wouldn’t be a winter this year?"

"I’m going to depart in a week," said the grasshopper, "and I’m only returning around May…"

"Depart?" The ant shook his head. "Is this some kind of invitation from a relative, my dear neighbour?"

"I’m not one to go visiting," said the grasshopper, "I just play the violin at home, practicing…"

"Would you please tell me where are you going?" said the ant as he smiled at the grasshopper.

"To Paris," said the grasshopper.

"To Paris?" The ant was gazing at the grasshopper with eyes wide open. "Are you joking, dear neighbour?" he asked with his voice slightly raised. "How could you afford to spend the winter in Paris?"

"They invited me... the Conservatoire..." said the grasshopper. "I’m going to play the violin at concerts…"

The ant shifted his eyes to the ground and went silent for a bit, before speaking to the grasshopper in an imploring tone. "In light of knowing each other for so long... could you please help me with an important matter?"

"Oh, naturally..." urged the grasshopper. "Just tell me, neighbour."

"I’d like to ask you," said the ant, "that when you're in Paris, that you go to Mr. La Fontaine, and tell him to kiss my ass."

1 A specially prepared type of wool. (From the factory name “Pannonia” + Fix (As in “secure” “lasting”))