

# **THE BROKEN PROMISE**

**Blood revenge in Albania**  
**(translation by Anthony Heric)**

**Feature**  
**by**  
**Jean-Claude Kuner**

**Reader of the Kanun:**

**Storyteller:**

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**Music:**

**Original sound: Terezina narrates**

**Author:**

Terezina has been on the run since 1995. Since her husband, an immigrant worker in Italy, killed his brother-in-law there in a controversy.

According to the Kanun everyone related to the murderer can be killed in the first 24 hours after the act. Afterwards only the next of kin.

At the time Terezina was in Albania with her children and she had to hide themselves immediately. Even now. Even though her husband spent eight years in jail and in the meantime has been deported back to Albania. Nobody knows where he is.

Not even she.

**Music:**

**Reader of the Kanun:**

**One may not kill a person who leaves the car of another person.**

**Not if he leaves someone else's house.**

**Not if he is on someone else's property.**

**Not in a bar.**

**Not if he is with others.**

**Not without warning.**

**MUSIC:**

**(then:)**

**Atmo: City of Tirana, calls of the Muezzin in the distance**

**Original sound: Stavri in a book store**

**Author:**

Stavri Cifligu bends over the bookshop counter and asks for the new edition of a book. He is a student, 21

years old, and wears – as is today’s global fashion – short hair, jeans and a multi-coloured t-shirt.

He studies history and archaeology in Tirana and is crazy about books. Everywhere in town he is looking for good deals on them.

To support his family he works six hours a day in an international bookshop for a monthly salary less than 200 Dollars.

In the free time remaining to him the slim young man studies.

I came from Germany on a research trip to Tirana and met Stavri by accident at his workplace. He told me about his project to write an article that will be published in a student magazine. The subject of the article was the Kanun, the old Albanian common law that has been in existence since the 14th Century. It is one of Albania’s most important ethnological documents.

### **Original sound:**

#### **Stavri:**

**To go against the flow is not common in Albania. Especially not at university. You study neither theory nor practice. You read what is required and learn it by heart. This is preferably articles from the individual professors!**

#### **Author:**

To carry out independent research about the historical importance and effect of the Kanun as well as the associated blood revenge in today's country – as Stavri intends to do it – is totally uncommon there. He can only do this as private research.

Among other things he wants to travel to the north of Albania and speak to a family in order to better understand what really happens.

To find a family pursued by the blood revenge will definitely not be easy. They are on the run and live in constant fear of death.

Stavri allows me to accompany him for his research. Without his help it would be impossible for me to get a glimpse into a world where the Kanun has survived.

It will be not be an easy undertaking, and it will be dangerous to boot.

### **Reader of the Kanun:**

**He who provides the cartridge, makes the blood his own.**

**The rifle brings the blood over the house.**

**The rifle will fire, but not at children, women, houses and cattle.**

**If the rifle shoots at women, children, homes or cattle, it acts contrary to the Kanun ...**

Atmo university

Author:

Stavri took me to visit the famous Albanian writer Ismail Kadaré who in 1980 wrote a historical novel about blood feud titled **The Broken April**. It is a description of the past world of the Kanun. A world far removed from today's reality.

Original sound: Kadaré

Malheureusement c'est reapparu. Parceque le communisme avait interdit ce droit coutumier. Après la chute du communisme comme une sorte de reaction contre le communisme .....

Author:

Kadaré deplores that blood feud has returned as a backlash against communism. In his view the only good thing the communists ever did was to forbid it!

(Original sound: Kadaré)

Malheureusement c'est reapparu. Meme que c'était la seul chose bien que le communisme avait fait, meme il était tellement discredité .... complètement.

Music:

RADIO PLAY SCENE 1

**Gjorg:**

Over there by the bend in the road I killed a man.  
Turned him on his back and put his rifle by his head.

**Narrator:**

"Gjorg of the Berisha has taken back his brother's blood."

"The deputation is going to ask for the twenty-four-hour *bessa* – the word of honour - for the Berishas," someone said from a window.

The doors of all the houses of the clan, of kinsfolk near and distant, were closing, for this was the moment of danger, before the victim's family had granted either of the two periods of truce; according to the Code, the *Kryeqyqe*, blinded by the newly shed blood, had the right to take vengeance on any member of the Berisha family.

The victim's family has not yet granted the *bessa*.

Everyone knew it was the short truce, the twentyfour-hour *bessa*. As for the the long *bessa*, the thirty-day truce, no one spoke of it yet, for only the village could ask for it – and in any case it could not be requested until after the burial of the last victim.

(pg. 12-14)

**(Original sound:)**

**Stavri:**

There are good and bad sides of the Kanun. Before the country's founding it was a good thing. It provided order in the inaccessible mountain regions of Northern Albania where there was no national control, no army or police. But after the independence in 1912 it became the worst part of Albanian history.

It put the Kanun's antiquated laws on par with the existing public system of laws.

**Original sound: Gjin Marku**

**Author:**

I visit Gjin Marku together with Stavri. He is the chairman of the national committee for reconciliation, who mediates between families involved in blood feuds throughout the country.

Behind his large desk, he looks like a politician – well dressed in his suit and tie.

Left of him is a figurine of Skanderberg, a national hero. Prominently displayed on his right are three

small flags – of Albania, the USA and Europe.

**Author:**

The murderer will ask the family for permission to attend the funeral of his victim.

He will ask the family to grant him the 24-hour *bessa*, the promise that he will not be killed for that period of time.

When he visits the family to honour the dead the family will treat the murderer as a guest and offer him coffee.

When the 24 hour *bessa* expire it is open season on the murderer. Unless he asks for the great *bessa* – a grace period of 30 days.

**Original sound: Gjin Marku**

**Author:**

Marku shows us a pile of papers that he keeps locked in a cabinet. Carefully numbered. All the blood revenge cases of the year 2000.

174 persons died.

He speaks about them as if they were not humans but only documents.

Stavri asks if the dead from the year 2000 were all killed according to the rules of the Kanun?

Marku must answer in the negative.

**Stavri:**

The Kanun is a collection of empirically based rules and laws from the Middle Ages up to the modern day. Its rules were strict, logical and precise.

**(Original sound: one hears Stavri and Marku continuing their talk in Albanian (over it:))**

**Author:**

Marku does not want to tell us how exactly it is that he mediates between families. In fact he is not allowed to do so. A successfully resolved mediation that ends

with the reconciliation of the families involved may no longer be discussed.

It is reminiscent of a priest's seal of confidentiality in the sacrament of confession.

**Reader of the Kanun:**

"The peace of God (*bessa*) is a period of liberty and security that the family of the victim grants to the murderer and his family. They will not immediately pursue the murderer to exact revenge for a set period of time (before village elders could examine the case).

To send someone asking for the peace of God is Kanun; to grant the peace of God, an obligation for each man."  
(P. 202)

**Author:**

Today nobody knows the rules anymore and therefore they do not obey them.

Those who commit crimes these days make excuses based on the Kanun. Everyone uses it as he pleases.

**RADIO PLAY - SCENE 2**

**Narrator:**

That afternoon, after the funeral meal, there were once again unusual comings and goings in the village. In a few hours, Gjorg Berisha's one-day truce would be at an end, and now the village elders, as the rules required, were preparing to visit the Kryeqyqes to ask for the thirty-day truce, the long *bessa*, in the name of the village.

**Gjorg:**

Thirty days.

After that, death would lurk all around me. I would go about only in the dark like a bat, hiding from the sun,

the moonlight, and the flicker of torches.

The shot fired from that ridge above the highway had cut my life into two parts: the 26 years that lasted until today, and the 30 days that began on that very day, the seventeenth of March, and would end on the seventeenth of April.

April love, as the songs said.

My own unfinished April.

Despite everything, it is better this way.

**Narrator:**

Though he could not say what was better, that he avenged his brother or that he had shed blood in this season.

**Gjorg:**

March seventeenth, April seventeenth .... Aprildeath. Then on and on forever, Aprildeath, and no more May. Never again.

**Narrator:**

"Your brother's shirt", the father said, almost in a whisper.

Gjorg could not take his eyes from it. It fluttered white in the wind, waving, billowing joyously.

A year and a half after the day that his brother had been killed, his mother had finally washed the shirt, he had worn that day. For a year and a half it had hung blood-soaked from the upper storey of the house, as the Kanun required, until the blood had been avenged. When bloodstains began to yellow, people said, it was a sure sign that the dead man was in torment, yearning for revenge. The shirt, an infallible barometer, indicated the time for vengeance.

Now at last the shirt was hanging on the clothesline.

Meanwhile, like a new banner hoisted after the old one had been hauled down, on the upper storey of the Kryeqyqe tower, they had hung out the bloody shirt of the new victim.

The seasons, hot or cold, would affect the colour of the dried blood .... All those changes would be taken as mysterious messages, whose import no one dared question.

(pg. 17-22)

**Original sound: Bumpy drive to Shkodra  
(after awhile:)**

**Original sound: Stavri**

**Author:**

Gjin Marku sent Stavri up to Shkodra to see a colleague of his. His name is Fran Llesmi. He can help him find a family threatened by blood feud: Terezina and her two children.

**Original sound: Drive. Questions to the mediator Fran, which Stavri translates:**

**Stavri:**

Terezina's husband was sentenced to eight years of prison in Italy ....

**(one hears Albanian directions to the driver)**

He has now been released, but nobody knows where he is.

**(arrival, excited voices, the mediator departs)**

**Stavri:**

Fran is speaking to a bus driver he knows who drives Terezina to the village where she works each day.  
This is Albania!

**(mediators returns)**

**Original sound: Drive continues**

**Road, steps, on the way to the Human Rights Group Albania  
(over it:)**

**Original sound: Stavri**

**Stavri:**

It is important for me to hear a woman's point of view. Especially a woman who did not remain at home, as is often the case here, but one who left to study.  
One can see the collision of old and modern Albania at my university as well. More and more young people are fleeing the countryside to come to Tirana, bringing their backward mindset and their patriarchal ideas.  
The girls stand on one side, we boys on the other! It is depressing for a society that wants to belong to Europe one day. If a new mindset does not soon spread across the land then nothing will change in this country.

**Original sound: one hears knocking**

**Author:**

Elsa Ballauri is the president of the Albanian human right organisation in Tirana. The energetic blond woman quickly herds us into her small office where she gets right down to business.

She knows the Kanun very well. A magazine she published, also called Kanun, has criticised the return of this historical system of laws for years.

**Original sound: Elsa**

**Elsa:**

The laws of the Kanun returned because the state is too weak to function properly. Humans need guidance. Since the state does not provide this guidance they have taken the law into their own hands.

We are dealing here with a bastardised Kanun as its rules are no longer respected by anyone. For example, it says that women and children are excluded from the blood revenge. Unfortunately there have been cases in which women and children were killed in the name of the Kanun.

This occurs particularly in the north. And not because the use of the Kanun is more common there but because this region is extremely poor and badly governed.

But even in Tirana there were cases. The people involved in these cases usually came from the north into the capital because they hoped to more easily hide themselves here. A year ago there was a family living in one of the numerous bunkers – left over from the dictatorship – outside of the city, hiding there. Unfortunately it was in vain. They were found. The parents and their 13 year-old son fell victim to the blood revenge.

In Shkodra , a city in the north, there are so many cases that an area there is called the blood district.

**Original sound: Bumpy drive to Shkodra (after awhile, over it:)**

**Original sound: Elsa**

**Elsa:**

In former times the old Kanun was obeyed to the letter. Today's new interpretation of the Kanun however says: we do whatever we want with it.

This is the current situation.

**Author:**

The once flourishing city of Shkodra is falling apart even more rapidly than Tirana. The roads are full of people just standing about doing nothing. In the north there are almost no jobs and an extreme level of poverty.

Without Fran, the old mediator in his suit and grey hat,

which during this time he never removes, it would be impossible to find the hiding place of Terezina and her two children.

She is supposed to keep outside the city limits.

### **Original sound: Drive. Questions to the mediator Fran:**

#### **Author:**

Eight years of prison were not enough to placate the family of the victim?

#### **Stavri:** (translates)

No. They are not yet evolved enough to forgive the taking of blood just because the murderer has spent eight years in prison.

#### **Author:**

We continue our drive. Everyone is lost in their own thoughts.

Sand coloured mountains rise steeply on the horizon, a sharp contrast to the clear blue sky above. They appear ancient and insurmountable. Some villages in the mountain regions of Northern Albania can be reached only after several days of difficult travel.

It is the old world of the Kanun.

Outside of Shkodra the farmhouses are scattered throughout the valley. Fran nevertheless seems confident that he will find the family.

### **RADIO PLAY - SCENE 3**

#### **Narrator:**

When for the first time he had convinced himself that he had to kill a man, Gjorg had called to mind all that part of the Code that dealt with the rules of the blood feud.

During this evening he had become another person.

If only I don't forget to say the right words before I fire, he thought. That's the main thing.

If only I don't forget to turn him the right way up and put his weapon by his head. That's the other main point. All the rest is easy, child's play.

However, the rules of the blood feud were only a small part of the Code, just a chapter.

Rapidly Gjorg came to understand that the other part, which was concerned with everyday living and was not drenched with blood, was inextricably bound to the bloody part, so much so that no one could really tell where one part left off and the other began. The whole was so conceived that one beget the other, the stainless giving birth to the bloody, and the second to the first, and so on forever, from generation to generation.

(pg 27)

### **Original sound: Elsa**

#### **Elsa:**

The Albanian idea of honour is similar to that of the ancient Greeks in the time of Homer. Like the story of Agamemnon and Achilles. It is part of our psychology.

Albania has always been poor and very isolated from the rest of the world. People here always lived with the concept of honour and honesty and that if one got killed one had to avenge the blood of the victim. In the poorly accessible mountain regions this thinking has hardly changed in the past centuries.

This is due to the lack of education and the poor infrastructure of these remote regions.

### **RADIO PLAY - SCENE 4**

#### **Narrator:**

Unlike many peoples among whom the mountains were reserved to the gods, our mountaineers, by the very fact that they lived in the mountains themselves, were constrained either to expel the gods or to adapt themselves to them so as to be able to live with them. That explains why the world of the Highlands is half-real, half-imaginary, harking back to the Homeric ages. And it also explains the creation of demigods like the guest.

A guest is really a demi-god and the fact that any one at all can suddenly become a guest does not diminish but rather accentuates his divine character. The fact that this divinity is acquired suddenly, in a single night simply by knocking at a door, makes it even more authentic.

The moment a humble wayfarer, his pack on his shoulder, knocks at your door and gives himself up to you as your guest, he is instantly transformed into a extraordinary being, an inviolable sovereign, a law-maker, the light of the world.

(pg 78)

<p><b><u>Reader of the Kanun:</u></b> <b>The house of an Albanian belongs to God and his friends.</b></p> <p><b>For each friend one needs food to which he is accustomed. For the good friend one needs coffee, liquor and a covered table with an abundant meal. The house will be left to the friend.</b></p> <p><b>The Kanun dictates that the friend be accompanied so that nothing bad will happen or harm him.</b></p>	<p><b><u>Narrator:</u></b> Did not the gods of the ancient Greeks make their appearance suddenly and in the most unpredictable manner? That is just the way the guest appears at an Albanian's door.</p> <p>A knock on the door can bring about the survival or the extinction of whole generations. That is what the guest is to the Albanians of the mountains.</p> <p>(pg 78)</p>
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**Original sound: Village, then drive**

**Author:**

We are now in the north of Albania ten kilometres outside from Shkodra in a small village. The road is not paved. Horses are pulling carts carrying tall stacks of hay. The citizens of the village have assembled around the mosque for a celebration. We still have seen no trace of the family. Fran, the mediator, tries to find someone who might

know something about where Terezina is hiding.

**(Original sound: one hears the mediator return, car doors are being slammed)**

**Author:**

He returns without any new information.

**Stavri:**

Perhaps the woman does not have sufficient funds to pay for the bus ride and that explains her failure to show up for work.

## **RADIO PLAY - SCENE 5**

**Gjorg: (very quietly)**

'Until you have avenged your brother's murder don't think of anything else.'

What a laugh! Up until the day on which I kill there is no life for me. Only if I have killed and am pursued by death myself will I begin to live.

Away with the rebellious thoughts. Quickly back to the deadly set of rules.

The Albanian only takes blood with a rifle and doesn't dare to do differently. The Kanun does not speak of knives, stone or rope, nothing that doesn't spit fire and can be heard from far away.

So many regulations! Exhausting!

Father, who had it from his own father, had told me the story of their enmity with the Kryeqyqe family.

It was a story marked by twenty-two graves on each side, forty-four in all. With the grave of a woman killed by accident whose death was indemnified according to the rules, with the men of both families immured in the tower of refuge, with an attempt at reconciliation that failed at the last moment. And so on until that afternoon of March 17, when it had been my turn to join the grisly dance.

**Narrator:**

And all this had begun seventy years ago, on a cold October night, when a man knocked at their door and asked for shelter for the night. They had welcomed him as was the custom, had brought him food and prepared him a bed, and early next morning, still

according to custom, one of the family had escorted the unknown guest to the outer limits of the village.

Everything had begun seventy years earlier when during a cold night in October someone knocked at the gate of their tower and requested shelter for the night.

He had just left the man when he heard a shot. The stranger had fallen, dead, exactly at the border of the village lands. Now, according to the Kanun, when the guest whom you were accompanying is killed before your eyes, you are bound to avenge him.

And so, at the end of that October day, the Berisha found themselves in enmity with the Kryeqyqe. Gjorg's clan, which had lived in peace until this day, was irrevocably caught up by the great engine of the blood feud.

(pg 30-32)

**Music:**

**Original sound: Elsa**

**Elsa:**

If you visit Albanian villages today you can observe the discrimination of women as it has been from time immemorial. They work very hard as is prescribed by the Kanun. The woman there is as useful as a domesticated animal and takes care of everything. The husband is more like a sluggish, lazy excuse for a man.

The poverty only makes the situation worse.

**Reader of the Kanun:**

The woman does not fall in blood, the woman leaves her blood with her parents.

If the husband strikes his wife, then he is not guilty by law and her parents cannot hold him responsible for these actions.

There are two things a woman

**Elsa:**

During communism the role of women changed, at least in the cities. But I am afraid in the villages it is still exactly the same as in the past.

<p>may be shot from behind for ...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. being unfaithful</li> <li>2. betraying a friendship</li> </ol> <p>For these two acts of perfidiousness the husband must kill the wife; she remains without protection .... and her blood will not be avenged ...</p>	<p>One cannot forget that until 1990 60% of the Albanian population lived in villages.</p>
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**Original sound: discussion while waiting:**

**Stavri:**

They will go and ask for a telephone number. Fran and the farmer. He is one of the oldest mediators in this region.

**Author:**

Stavri remains sceptical as to why all these murder cases are treated equally? Were these acts committed strictly according to the Kanun or are they simply crimes being hidden under the cover of tradition?

<p><b><u>Reader of the Kanun:</u></b> The mediator of the blood is the one who tries to reconcile the house of the victim with the murderer.</p> <p>If his work succeeded the mediator of the blood has the right to shoes. The house of the killer pays the tribute of shoes to the mediator of the blood.</p>	<p><b><u>Author:</u></b> Did he find her?</p> <p><b><u>Stavri:</u></b> Yes. But she is still in Shkodra.</p> <p><b><u>Author:</u></b> We must drive back again.</p>
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**Original sound: Marku**

**Stavri:**  
**(translates)**

'The fights about domestic policies in the last years destroyed the people's confidence in the Albanian government.'

Gjin Marku starts his history lesson. During the reign of King Zogu and afterwards during the communist regime the people respected the state and its laws. Today the largest difficulty lies in re-establishing the lost respect for the government.

The committee for reconciliation encourages people involved in conflicts to solve their differences with the help of the legal system.

It also tries to present the laws as something that protects them and is part of progress.

**Author:**

We cannot tell how seriously he means what he says as Gjin Marku makes his living from blood revenge. And it provides him an important social and political role in society.

**Stavri:**

How do you punish a murder or solve a conflict – with the help of the Kanun or the civil laws? Can there be two different sets of laws?

Yes. The moral questions are solved with the rules of the Kanun. With all other conflicts Marku refers to the current legal system. For all the other problems an offence is both against the law of the Kanun and against constitutional law.

Reconciliation, however, always takes place within the traditional context of the Kanun.

There are families who absolutely want to take justice into their own hands. But both the Kanun and the current legal system forbid this.

**RADIO PLAY - SCENE 6**

**Narrator:**

From a far-off Banner, an aunt of theirs who had married there came unexpectedly.

'Don't do it', she said. 'Don't let the oak tree wither. Ask for the reconciliation of the blood.'

The request for blood settlement – so rare in the mountains – caused a sensation in the village and throughout the Banner. The mediators, together with friends and kinsmen of the Berisha, who were called

the 'masters of the blood', went to the home of the murderer, that is, to the Kryeqyqe, to eat the blood-compensation meal.

So they ate the noon meal with the murderer in keeping with the custom, and settled the blood price that the Kryeqyqes would have to pay.

But that money never came, for an aged uncle kept the business from being settled in that way.

Then the priest who was there as the chief mediator waved his hand. He said, "More blood must flow."

(pg 47/48)

**Original sound: at the bus station in Shkodra**

**Author:**

Is this the woman?

**Stavri:**

Yes.

**Author:**

And her son?

**Stavri:**

Yes. She must go to the embassy. The woman is very frightened.

**Reader of the Kanun:**

**The house of the victim has nothing to do with the women from the house of the killer, because women and priests are not tainted by the blood.**

**Also minors are safe; it has never been the case that they were killed.**

**Author:**

**But if she accompanies him then according to the Kanun nothing should actually happen to him, right?**

**Stavri:**

**If they would strictly follow the Kanun then the boy would be able to play outside. According to the Kanun he is too young to be a part of the blood revenge.**

**Author:**

Coincidentally we finally meet Terezina Ana at the bus station in Shkodra, the woman for whom we had searched half the day. She appears fearful, looks about and scrutinises the surroundings over and over again. Finally she leads us into the dark entrance of a house.

The small windows secured with bars hardly allow any light into the damp dwelling.

Terezina sits upright on a stool. She looks as decisive as she is desperate.

**Original sound: Terezina**

**Stavri:**

After her husband committed his crime in 1995 she fled into the mountains with her children who were still small at that time. It was terrible. There was nothing there. After nine months she was so exhausted that she thought she'd rather go back to Shkodra and die there and at least allow her children to live under better conditions.

**Stavri:**

Didn't you go to the police and ask for protection?

**Terezina:**

Of course! But they pretended they could not undertake anything. The other family is in Italy. Additionally there are no more men left in the family who could carry out the blood revenge so they hired killers, nobody knows whom. The police excused themselves from the case and said they don't know for whom they should be looking.

**Original sound: Elsa**

**Elsa:**

That is stupid. Naturally she should deal further with the police. Not the Kanun.

Why does such a thing even happen? Why does one person kill another? Because these people are tired, exhausted. Because they are poor. If they could lead a normal life this Albanian would have never killed.

(she gets agitated)

It is simply unacceptable to me to believe that all Albanians kill because of the Kanun or their culture. There are totally different problems that cause this.

This man spent eight years in prison. That is enough. The law here must take care of this case. Not the Kanun. She must go to the police and at the same time try through a mediator to solve the problem.

**Original sound: For some time one listens to the fight**

### **between Terezina and her mediator**

#### **Stavri:**

For two years Terezina has had Mr. Fran working on her case. The other family however rejects any attempts for mediation. According to the Kanun, mediator Fran explains to Terezina, nobody can be forced to a reconciliation.

#### **Author:**

Terezina asks what she should do then? Fran always speaks of the Kanun. But the others do not respect it at all.

As a woman she is not tainted by the blood feud, he says. But she is being threatened nevertheless.

### **Original sound: The heated discussion continues**

#### **Stavri:**

Fran replies that, in the end, it is not his responsibility that the family respects neither the Kanun nor the laws of the land.

#### **Author:**

Then this whole mediation is totally preposterous!, says Terezina.

### **Original sound: The controversy continues**

#### **Author:**

Fran tries to calm her down and explains that soon there will be a law that will send anyone who threatens another person to prison for ten years.

This is not a great comfort in a country where corruption prevails and law and state only have a very weak position. It has already been the case that prisoners have easily freed themselves through bribery. A vicious circle.

If a society does not respect civil order and laws then this means chaos and anarchy for any country.

Terezina seems to be hopelessly trapped by a cruel twist of fate.

All because nobody follows any of the rules.

### **Original sound: Elsa**

#### **Elsa:**

The courts do not work properly. This is really tragic. Albania was and is a very poor country and now everyone thinks only about his own profit.

Although each year the judges are being trained by their European colleagues they nevertheless remain corrupt and only want to become rich as quickly as possible.  
An additional problem is that they are not independent. They have obligations to politicians or clans and are themselves abused by the other side.  
There are no good role models in Albania.

## **RADIO PLAY - SCENE 7**

### **Gjorg:**

The last days of March have come. April would soon be coming in. With the first half white and the other half black. Aprildeath.  
If I am not killed I would be languishing in the tower of refuge. My eyes would weaken in the darkness, so that one way or the other, even if I was still alive, I would never see the world again.  
Was there a way of keeping myself from death and blindness?  
There is none.

(pg 159)

### **Original sound: Erion, the 11-year old son**

#### **Author:**

Can you also ask the son a few questions?

#### **Author:**

Today the eleven-year old Erion could be outside, an exception to the rule, because a relief organisation had sent him abroad for ten days together with other affected children. He had just returned from abroad as we met him at the bus station. He was still under the protection of this organisation.

**(Erion answers)**

#### **Stavri:**

He is very much afraid. Can never leave the house to meet others. He can only go into the small backyard where he can buy something through a connecting door to a little shop.

**(Erion answers)**

He does not go to school.

**(Erion answers)**

He does not have friends.  
Do you believe that all adults are crazy?

(Erion answers)

But with this whole situation with the Kanun? Don't you think they are crazy?

(long break)

**Author:**

Erion starts crying.

(one hears again the silence, into which Stavri asks)

**Stavri:**

His biggest desire is to attend school and finish it.

**Author:**

Suddenly he gets up and leaves the room crying.

**(one hears a door slam shut)**

**Silence, music, then**

**Original sound: Stavri**

**Stavri:**

Only after I met Terezina and her children in Shkodra did I understand how very bastardised the Kanun has become. I have read a lot about the topic ... however now, after I have seen the situation with my own eyes ... terrible! I can hardly find words to describe it.

That's how the situation looks in the year 2004, six centuries after the emergence of the Kanun.

It changed my view of it completely.

This is no longer the Kanun.

This here is merely an excuse for crime.

(giggling the whole time)

The mediator was funny ... When I asked him: How many cases of blood revenge there were in all of Albania? He answered: 1300. And how many mediators are out there? 1300...

(laughs)

Thus one per case ....

As helpless as Mr. Fran seemed I do not believe that such mediators can ever resolve the problem!

**Music:**

**Original sound: Stavri calls Gjin Marku and speaks with him for awhile**

**Author:**

Back in Tirana Stavri calls the mediator Gjin Marku again. He would like to hear the arguments of the opposite side now and therefore wants to speak with a family in favour of blood revenge.

**Stavri:**

Unfortunately it will not be possible. These people are afraid because they know that blood revenge is against the law. To speak with them will therefore be impossible.

**Music/Atmo**

**Stavri:**

I've heard the opinion of the mediators, they speak for the Kanun. Now I want to speak with a friend of mine, a young law student, who is originally from the north of Albania. His name is Hysni Ahmetaj and he is 27 years old.

What does a student of law think about the return of the traditional laws of the Kanun?

**Original sound: Law student**

**Law student:**

The law should apply equally to all. The Kanun as moral code and as representation of our customs is valuable for studying the social history, psychology and mentality of our country's citizens. But it is a really bad thing to use the Kanun in our time. A really terrible thing.

A substantial characteristic of the Kanun consisted of the fact that it has been used whenever there was no strong centralised state power.

When the laws were not respected then the uneducated people at least follow those of the Kanun. Without it, it would be even worse. Because if the law of the street would reign this would be even more devastating.

The future of our country is unclear. We live in chaotic times. Even our intellectuals are unable to describe from whence we came and to where we are going. Every day we hear something about our integration into Europe ... but nobody has a clear concept about what it really will mean. Not even the government. Our social reality is miles away from our desire for integration as fellow citizens of Europe.

But there are enough ambitious people who do not like the current situation and who wish to change our country. I am sure that our generation will change Albania one day.

**Original sound:**

**Stavri:**

I once read in the Economist: "Never underestimate your local knowledge".

We will not underestimate it but surely also not use it anymore.

The Kanun should be put into the museum like old armour. The

people can look at it there.  
However touching is strictly forbidden!

## RADIO PLAY - SCENE 8

### Gjorg:

My family will be waiting for me anxiously before noon, but will not get there in time.

Towards midday I will have to break off my journey and hide somewhere to wait for nightfall. Now I am a man stained with blood, and I could travel only by night like a thief and never on the main roads.

What else can I do?

There is a strange calm in my head, or rather a dull emptiness. Was that how it looked, the time beyond the truce? Eternal time, that was no longer mine, without days, without seasons, without years, without a future, abstract time, to which I had no attachments of any kind and am completely separate from.

"Gjorg, give my greeting to Zef Krye..."

My arm, in a sudden motion, tries to slip the rifle from my shoulder, but that gesture becomes confounded with the syllables "qyqe", the last half of the hateful name, which makes its way confusedly to my consciousness. I see the ground reel, and then rear up violently to crash against my face like a wall.

Two hands are moving my body. He is turning me on my back. I feel something cold at my right cheek, probably the barrel of his rifle.

God, according to the rules!

The footsteps, drawing away felt familiar. Yes, I know them, and the hands that have turned me on my back .... They're mine! The seventeenth of March, the road, near Brezftoht...

Lost consciousness for a moment .... again the footsteps .... that must probably be mine .... It is myself and no one else who is running now, leaving behind, sprawled on the road, my own body that I had just struck down.

(pg 209-16)