

VINKO MÖDERNDORFER

MEPHISTO'S REPORT

A play

(Translation: Erica Johnson Debeljak)

The play was inspired by T. G. Asha's text *Dossier* (MK 1994).

Although the events and all of the characters in the play are fictional, there is probably a good chance that similar stories took place in our country, though.

PROFESSOR VASILI, a grey-haired gentleman, just over seventy
GODFREY, a calm man, just over fifty
MRS. VERA, professor's wife, just over sixty

All of the following roles can be performed by four actors.

BIGGER MAN

SMALLER MAN

NINA

MALE PROFESSOR 1

MALE PROFESSOR 2

FEMALE PROFESSOR 1

FEMALE PROFESSOR 2

ELDERLY FEMALE JUDGE

FRIGHTENED LAWYER

DRUNKEN HEADMASTER

The professor's room. Books everywhere. Portraits of Pushkin, Prešeren, Byron and other giants of literature... Mrs. Vera appears and starts setting up a "liegenstuhl" - a big and comfortable chair, usually occupied by the elderly or by academicians...

MRS. VERA

The way I understood it you were looking forward to his coming here...

We hear professor Vasili's unintelligible grumbling from the next room...

MRS. VERA

You don't have to tell me about it, I know you cared about him.

In the next room professor rants incomprehensibly...

MRS. VERA

But of course! Everything's going to be just fine, you'll see...

Professor Vasili appears at the door... A grey-haired old man, dignified in his age, moving slowly... Mrs. Vera hurries towards him and leads him towards the "liegenstuhl".

MRS. VERA

He won't stay long. He's a considerate young man.

The professor does not even listen to her...

He mutters, as if talking to himself...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Shit. Shit. Shit!

MRS. VERA

I knew you'd be glad. You haven't seen each other for how many years?

PROFESSOR VASILI

(to himself)

Goddamn old accursed slut.

MRS. VERA

Right! Since Tito died. Well, and now, after more than twenty years the assistant felt the need to see his professor again.

The professor mumbles to himself in an infantile manner... He appears to be a demented old man, who does not know what is happening around him. Nevertheless, Mrs. Vera talks to him as if everything were in perfect order...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(to himself)

Stinking syphilitic cunt, yes, yes!

MRS. VERA

I know you've missed him all these years. You think I haven't noticed how your eyes would sparkle with tears every time we mentioned him. Do you know that sometimes I was *almost* jealous! Well, when you were still at the university. You and your assistant always stuck together. *What do they have to talk about all the time*, I thought to myself. And how often you forgot about me because of him! I would wait in the park behind the university for hours. My job would end ages ago, but you were still nowhere to be seen. But I didn't have the nerve to step into your office. I knew you wouldn't like that...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Shit, shit, shit...

MRS. VERA

Already back then I felt you were ashamed to have a secretary for your wife. Well, back then I was still your mistress... And now I know it. You were ashamed! You were hiding me from the students. And, especially, from your female students. All the time you acted like a *great* bachelor scientist! They would flutter around you; you wore a silk neckerchief and dyed your hair. Actually I dyed it for you. Ironical, isn't it? I dyed your hair so you could appear youthful to your female students. And I just agreed to go along with your game. I don't know why, probably I loved you.

The professor rants angrily, clenching his fists.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Cock and cunt, cock and cunt, yeah!

MRS. VERA

You're right! Of course I didn't *just care* for you! I was a secretary at the university, one of the twenty secretaries. And you were the most popular professor. I remember how I shed tears of joy because you chose me... *Me!* Small, plump, even back then I was a bit overweight and I had trouble with my hips... Naturally, deep down I knew that all you wanted was a servant-girl, something similar to **Ksantipa**¹ (Ana Jelovšek). You would come home drunk from the freshman party that they would unavoidably invite you to every year, you would have traces of lipstick all over your collar and you would say: "*You're my chubby little servant girl, my Ksantipa* (Ana Jelovšek)." **S TEM SI NAJBRŽ HOTEL POVEDATI, DA SE IMAŠ ZA**

¹ **Ksantioa - Xanthippe - Aristotelova žena**

ARISTOTELA. VEDNO SI BIL ZALJUBLJEN V SVOJO VELIČINO. MENE SI PA S TEM ŽALIL. VSI VEJO, KAKŠNA JE BILA KSANTIPA. BOLELO ME JE... It hurt me, you don't know how it hurt me. But now I have my satisfaction!

PROFESSOR VASILI

Puking piece of shit, yes, yes.

MRS. VERA

You heard me, *I have my satisfaction!* I am all you've got left, they forgot you, nobody reads your treatises anymore, look, just look what it says about your ponderings...

Mrs. Vera pulls an old newspaper from her pocket, old, folded and unfolded a countless number of times, and reads passionately...

MRS. VERA

...At the symposium the young explorers of literature carried out a thorough analysis of professor Vasili's work... Look, even your picture is here... Over half a page...

Mrs. Vera pushes the photograph in front of his nose sadistically, while professor Vasili keeps looking away, muttering to himself unintelligibly...

MRS. VERA

It's like a photo of a criminal, ha! Well, you want me to read on? You want that? But, then again, you've heard it a hundred times, the young explorers claim that everything was wrong, your analyses, your books... Everything was wrong!

(reads again)

...there should not be any political criteria for analysis as far as literature is concerned... You hear, do you hear! They've destroyed you completely...

While she was reading with satisfaction, the professor closed his eyes... It looks as if he fell asleep...

MRS. VERA

You see, this is my satisfaction! My revenge!

Mrs. Vera puts the newspaper into her pocket as if it were a priceless relic.

MRS. VERA

Everything fell apart! All of your haughtiness! Everything disappeared into nothingness! It's dust! And I can show it to you in black in white *(pats her pocket where she keeps the newspaper)* and tell you about it every day! True, I was only a secretary, a bit stocky, and I had to try hard to hide the fact that I had trouble with my hips,

while you were the *charismatic* professor with a neckerchief... But *I* am still a university *secretary*, I may be retired, but nobody erased *me*, wiped *me* out... Do you hear!!

Mrs. Vera leans over the professor's face sadistically...

MRS. VERA

But you are nothing! Not a professor anymore, not charismatic anymore! And everything you've written is worthless...

The professor snores.

MRS. VERA

Are you asleep?

Mrs. Vera covers his knees and hips with a blanket and places a pillow under his head as if he were a helpless child.

MRS. VERA

Fine. Just fine. Fine with me. I'm used to it already. I don't care at all... I know you at least heard some of it, I know that! I'm sure of it! But don't worry, I'll take care of you. I always will. I made you milk gruel and washed your favourite pyjamas. If you get too cranky I'll read to you again (*pats her pocket, where she keeps her newspaper*), what the young generations today think about your work...

The bell rings.

A moment after that the antique clock on the wall chimes.

MRS. VERA

He's as regular as clockwork. And it's been twenty years, unbelievable! I remember how he would come here when he was writing his doctoral thesis, and you would spend whole nights together, and I would serve you, well, and so I opened the door some day, I was going to the store, and I almost had a heart attack: he was sitting on the threshold, waiting... *Jesus*, I said, *what are you doing here!* *Nothing*, he said, *I'm waiting until it's three o'clock, I'm meeting the professor at three.* Poor man didn't have the nerve to ring the bell earlier.

The bell rings again.

MRS. VERA

I'm sure today he also waited at the door, looking at his watch...

Mrs. Vera limps towards the door.

MRS. VERA

...exactly as he did twenty-five years ago... How the time repeats itself, how it repeats itself...

Mrs. Vera leaves the scene.

Professor Vasili opens his eyes.

We hear the door opening in the background. Voices... Something resembling a greeting... The voices are drawing closer...

The professor closes his eyes.

Mrs. Vera and Godfrey enter the room.

Godfrey is an ordinary man, modestly but smartly dressed, likeable at the first sight, although nobody would stop to look at him on the street... He carries a briefcase...

MRS. VERA

Come in, come in...

GODFREY

I hope I'm not disturbing you...

MRS. VERA

You're not disturbing me, I can assure you. Nobody has come to visit us for years, so I'm actually quite glad to see you... After all these years! Let me look at you!

Mrs. Vera takes his hand and spins him around in front of her...

MRS. VERA

You know you haven't changed a bit! Well, you may be a bit bald, that's true, but otherwise you've remained the same!

GODFREY

It's been twenty-five years!

MRS. VERA

Yes, just a while ago I told Vasili: *Vasili, he hasn't been here for twenty-five years and now your faithful assistant and friend wants your company again...*

GODFREY

Yes, we were friends.

MRS. VERA

But of course you were friends! Co-workers and friends, it's a rare sight in the academic circles for the people of generations so different to become so close. You were an exception.

GODFREY

We were a really good collective then... Also the other professors...

MRS. VERA

Oh, not at all! I was a secretary and I heard many things. Gosh, how they hated each other! And what things they had to say about each other! Filth, all of it. As if they were truck drivers or something! They did nothing but slander... And they were academicians and professors, all of them. Such backstabbers. They said nothing at each other's face. Only smiling and bowing, showing respect... and spewing filth behind each other's backs.

Mrs. Vera steps towards professor Vasili, who sleeps in the reclining chair...

MRS. VERA

Vasili! Vasili! Your Godfrey is here! Your Godfrey!

GODFREY

Don't wake him up, please! I can stop by some other time.

MRS. VERA

(to Godfrey)

Don't worry, he sleeps all the time!

She shouts again, almost into professor Vasili's ear...

MRS. VERA

Hey! Hey! Why are you such fool, Vasili! You've missed him for years and now you're sleeping like some retired railwayman! Wake up.

Mrs. Vera grabs the professor by his shoulders and shakes him roughly a couple of times, but the professor does not wake up...

MRS. VERA

Vasili, don't pretend to be dead; you know very well that *I don't fall for such tricks anymore!*

Godfrey stands nearby, squeezing his briefcase in his arms.

GODFREY

I beg you, Mrs. Vera, I can really come some other time...

MRS. VERA

(to Godfrey)

He's acted dead before; once I even called an ambulance and it turned out he was making a fool of me... (confidentially) You know, the professor is not the man he used to be. Well, there's nothing wrong with him physically, he's got the heart of an ox, and all other internal organs as well, I mean: he's healthy, there are no problems... The doctors don't know what's wrong at all. Namely, sometimes he just fades away, I never know if he hears me, if he understands me at all... Although I can tell you, you're almost family... (whispers) Sometimes I have a feeling that he's only playing around with me... When he's not happy with something his brain is perfectly fine. I forgot to add salt to the salad the other day, and he said it loud and clear: *Salt! Where is the salt?* And then lectured about salt for half an hour, *salt as a symbol, salt as a proverbial phrase, salt as the essence of civilization, salt as Aristotle's favourite spice, salt as the topic of various novels, salt as the driving force behind wars and history...* I was glad that he is all right again, but he immediately faded away into absentmindedness again as soon as I suggested we go for a premiere to the theatre in the evening or at least for a walk...

GODFREY

I didn't know the professor was in such a state... If I knew, I wouldn't have called...

MRS. VERA

No, don't worry, he'll be happy to see you. Very happy.

GODFREY

Do you think he'll recognise me?

Mrs. Vera turns to the professor again...

MRS. VERA

Vasili! Open your eyes, your assistant is here! You know I told you he was coming! Wake up, you sloth of a professor!

GODFREY

Leave him, madam, leave him be!

MRS. VERA

(to Godfrey) Well, if I'm completely honest, I'm also pleased he's like that. After forty years of living together I have a lot to tell him, you can be sure of that! Sometimes it suits me just fine that he acts as if he didn't hear me, and then I can throw anything I want to into his face... You understand... If I say *throw*, I mean it strictly in a *literary sense...*

GODFREY

(a bit confused) Of course I understand... In a literary sense.

MRS. VERA

I can tell him everything I haven't told him for forty years. You don't know how relieved I am when I tell him that I've always known about all of his *most favourite students* that he fooled around with! Right, Vasili?!

Mrs. Vera turns to Vasili, his eyes still closed...

MRS. VERA

Remember that Karin, the blonde, the Slovenian language student, the topic of her B.A. thesis was something about the Baptism at the Savica, and you took her up there to Savica, so you could baptize each other in the roadside motels a bit... Or that Maggie who simply wanted to move in here when I was in the hospital having my operation, even, when they cut half of my stomach out, not to mention Nina, who was so badly interested in *Raskolnikov*, your favourite hero, and she phoned all the time, treating me like a servant...

Mrs. Vera calms down a bit, facing Godfrey again...

MRS. VERA

You don't know what a relief it is to tell him all of this. Then I can cook vegetable soups and wash his pyjamas in peace again for a while. We have our miserable lives sorted out just fine. Isn't that so, Vasili?! We'll go on like this for another couple of years and then finally get rid of each other, right?!

Mrs. Vera enthusiastically leaps towards the professor's face...

MRS. VERA

Look, look! He smiled! Did you see that, did you see!!

GODFREY

No... I don't know... I'm not sure...

MRS. VERA

But of course he smiled, I know him. Well, that means he's about to wake up... I'll leave you two alone. I'll make coffee... (enthusiastically) Ah! I remember, you drink tea, isn't that right?

GODFREY (*smiles*)

You haven't forgotten.

MRS. VERA

Of course. Intellectuals drink tea and ignorant people drink coffee. It's just that I don't know if I have any tea... The professor drinks coffee.

GODFREY

Don't bother, ma'am. I also don't...

MRS. VERA

(interrupts him) I'll go to the store! No problem! Just like the old times... I'll just put on my *shoes* and I'll just go across the street... I'll also buy cookies, so you'll be able to dip them in...

GODFREY

Ma'am...

MRS. VERA

I miss the old times, you know... You would sit like this, in this very room, twenty-five years ago, pacing about through the nights, debating... And I took care of tea and cookies. And there was something else I took care of, do you remember, perhaps?

GODFREY

It's been so long...

MRS. VERA

Pencils! Those thin red pencils the professor couldn't think without. He would always say: *When I don't have my red pencils I feel as if all of my brain cells dropped dead!* Well, I'm off. Tea and coffee and cookies!

Mrs. Vera leaves.

Nothing happens for a while. Godfrey stands next to the sleeping professor helplessly... He does not know what to do. He gets closer to the professor in order to wake him up and then changes his mind... He stands there for a while, then decides and heads for the exit. He wants to slip out unnoticed...

When Godfrey is almost at the exit, professor Vasili opens his eyes...

PROFESSOR VASILI

So she's finally gone, the old cunt!

Godfrey stops, surprised.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I thought she'd never sod off.

Godfrey goes back to the reclining chair.

GODFREY

Good day...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Good, my ass!

GODFREY

I beg your pardon?

The professor turns to Godfrey...

PROFESSOR VASILI

How long haven't we seen each other? Is it really been twenty-five fucking years already, or what?

GODFREY

Yes...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Damn, I'm so fucking glad to see you! Give me that fucking hand of yours, let me shake it!

Godfrey reaches out... They shake their hands.

PROFESSOR VASILI

When the old bitch told me you were coming, tears came to my eyes! You believe that?

GODFREY

(confused) Yes... Actually... I don't know if it's the right thing to do...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Of course it is! Motherfucker, of course it is! I'm happy to see you! I really am! As much as a mean old son of a bitch can be happy to see his long-lost prick!

GODFREY

Thanks... I mean... Sorry... Professor, I'm confused?

PROFESSOR VASILI

Why the fuck would you be confused?

GODFREY

I don't know... What I mean is... I sat with you in the same office, you were my mentor, I listened to your lectures, *antagonism and the choice of words in the dialogue between Alceste and Celimene*... I typed up your treatise on the *beauty of Lorca's collocations in view of the folk poetic form canto jondo*... But now...

PROFESSOR VASILI

What the fuck is bothering you?

GODFREY

Well, exactly that...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Fuck is what's bothering you, is it?

GODFREY

I may have no right whatsoever to be bothered by anything...

PROFESSOR VASILI

True, you don't, but, nevertheless, I can explain, I was a professor once...

Professor Vasili laughs loudly, almost too loudly and for too long. Then he falls silent.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Vulgar literature always went on my fucking nerves; *Tartuffe* is written without any god damn swearing, Prešeren's pornographic verse disappeared into motherfucking oblivion, all that remains are his Sonnets of Unhappiness... In those days if I as much as looked at a text that just hinted at the flesh, sweat or copulative organs, it made me sick...

GODFREY

(slightly ironically) And now you want to make up for what you've been missing?

Professor Vasili looks at him with a strict gaze...

GODFREY

Sorry. I didn't want to be ironic.

PROFESSOR VASILI

You didn't want to, but you did. Genuinely and *lusciously* ironic. Your words were bolstered with a fleeting smile. Bolstered with the thought that lurks in the background...

Professor Vasili stands up with a jerk, the blanket slides from his knees and falls to the floor... He strolls around the room youthfully, charmingly, like a professor in his middle age in front of an auditorium crammed with students... Godfrey sits down...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Every time we express a thought we can enrich it with a thought that remains *unsaid*. In the field of theatre they call this *subtext*... This is the advantage of spoken word in comparison to literature. But can this really be an advantage, I'm asking you? Is advantage also *valuable*? Can spoken word be richer than literature precisely because of interpretation? Well? What do you think?

The professor gazes at the auditorium.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I wonder if you have *any* idea. Whether you're thinking *at all*. And *how* correct your thoughts are if you're thinking. The thought is the proof that our brain functions. The thought is the proof of the stream of consciousness. The stream of consciousness defines us as sentient beings, as beings aware of where the thoughts come from and where they are taking us.

A moment of silence. The professor glances over the auditorium.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Well? I'm waiting? There are... How many of you here? A hundred? A hundred and fifty? This is not an exact question, it is literary, quasi-philosophical, and exactly such may also the nature of the answer be... Who is going to be the first to prove *that he or she thinks, exists*?

Silence.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Well? My dear young colleagues, in a couple of years you are going to write scientific papers, you are going to delve into literature down to its roots... That is what you wish for, is it not? To shape the science of literature, write criticisms, books, some of you might write new *Illusions Perdues*, the others climb up to the very summit of Parnassus and outshine even the greatest of the great... That is what you wish for, right? Those are your ambitions?

Silence.

PROFESSOR VASILI

As I look at you here before me, my dear students, I know very well what is going to happen to you in five, ten years... None of you is going to achieve anything, some of you might be averagely drunken poets, and most of you are going to teach at secondary schools where you are going to dream until your retirement about the landscapes of literature that so *unfairly* eluded you... And all of this because you *do*

not think! Because you are half human, children of post-consumer hippy society that does not see the facts...

Godfrey speaks suddenly...

GODFREY

...Spoken word is not stronger than written word.

A moment of silence.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(acting surprised) Ah! There seems to be someone among us who *thinks*, who *dares* to think, *who thinks that he thinks...* Well, my young colleague, *what* do you think? What have you *realized*?

Godfrey stands up.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Shall I repeat the question?

GODFREY

Comrade professor...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(interrupts him) Let us put formalities aside, it is the answer I'm interested in... Well?!

GODFREY

Despite the *interpretation*, spoken word cannot compete with written, literary word...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Why not?

GODFREY

Literature is an artistically organised text, that by its inner strength determines its own subtext, within which certain interpretations may be possible, but the artistic text is shaped in such a way that the choice of these interpretations is limited...

PROFESSOR VASILI

And what about the spoken word?

GODFREY

As far as spoken word is concerned, the possibilities of interpretation are practically unlimited. Spoken word comes to life instantly and instantly its life is also extinguished...

PROFESSOR VASILI

It cannot be repeated and it is not organised. That is why theatre is a huge fraud... A great manipulation that cannot be, precisely because theatre is caught in the moment, it cannot be subject to any serious and scientific analysis. Theatre is a circus, where anything is possible.

A moment of silence.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I am glad that in the year of seventy-three we have among us a student trying to think, in spite of the general consumer lethargy...

Professor Vasili turns to Godfrey...

PROFESSOR VASILI

What is your name?

GODFREY

Godfrey...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(interrupts him) Godfrey... Interesting... God... frey...

The professor offers him his hand, and in that moment the bell rings... The professor turns to the auditorium...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Until the lecture next Tuesday think about the etymology of the name *Godfrey*. What hides in the *back* of it? What kind of a man is named Godfrey? What can a man, who is *Godfrey*, bring us? While analysing you may use all of your imagination, if indeed you have any... Not all of what you write has to be real, what is important is that you are convincing. The criterion for truth is persuasiveness. The person who prepares the most provocative analysis of the name God-frey, the essay is to have at least five pages, will have this taken into consideration at the exam. See you next week!

Vasili sits back in to the reclining chair and covers his knees with the blanket. He is a seventy-years-old man again...

GODFREY

Once it was *you* who was a master of irony.

PROFESSOR VASILI

When you're young, irony means vitality... And when you're old anything that reminds you of vitality is *ironic*... And the most *ironic* thing of all is, of course, that in the end all of us are subject to the *irony of life*... You see, my dear fellow, only in the field of *irony* can life be a greater master than a writer. As far as irony is concerned, literature cannot compete with *life*! You probably still remember how back in seventy-four we...

GODFREY

I was already your assistant then...

PROFESSOR VASILI

How we defined an *old man* at the seminar...

GODFREY

(*smiles*) Yes, I remember... That was the most productive seminar. People from other universities also attended it. (*loses himself in thought*) The lecture room was completely crammed on Tuesdays. People were sitting in the corridor, all the way to the stairs.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Naturally, we *extracted* our definition of an old man from a thorough analysis of *commedia dell'arte*...

GODFREY

And Molière's comedies... From the characters of Pantalone, Gorbio, Graziano and others.

PROFESSOR VASILI

An old man is the one who *still wants to, but cannot do it anymore*. Who would still like to get it on, but can't get it up.

GODFREY

That's what you say today.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I said the same thing then, only my choice of words was different, I only harangued and expatiated, but the truth is this: *you're old, so you can't mount a piece of ass anymore, no matter how bad you want to*.

GODFREY

That's a huge and vulgar simplification.

PROFESSOR VASILI

In twenty-five years everything's going to become clear to you.

GODFREY

It's about vitality, which is actually the vitality of a young person trapped into an old body. That's what the character of Pantalone from commedia dell'arte is based on and later also Goldoni's characters are like that, this similarity is also visible in the twentieth century literature, and not only in drama, at that, but also in prose, for example, the old doctor Grushenka in Chekhov's novel is also like that...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(interrupts him) To hell with literature, if you can't get it up anymore!

They both fall silent.

After a while...

GODFREY

Those were beautiful times.

The professor lifts his finger into the air and wiggles it in a vulgar manner.

Godfrey does not react to the professor's vulgar gesture...

GODFREY

They really were. I mean... At the university... We worked on important things... At least, that's what we thought back then...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Yes, the society left us in peace...

GODFREY

Oh, well...

PROFESSOR VASILI

No commercials, no sponsors... Capitalism didn't interfere with our work. Ha! It couldn't interfere because it didn't exist.

GODFREY

(frowning) They interfered.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Shit.

GODFREY

In the evening after that seminar they waited for me at home...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Who?

GODFREY

Two men. Wearing raincoats.

PROFESSOR VASILI

It must have been raining. It rained all the time in the seventies. Grey and dull rain. And in the winter there was snow, so that you could hear silence.

GODFREY

They took me into the office.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(lost in his memories) And snow was so fucking white. In April seventy-four I trudged through the snow to my lectures. And the lecture room was hot. Hot from young bodies...

GODFREY

They interrogated me the whole night.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Jeez, what they were like! Pussies! Moist snatches in little wool *skirts*, and tits, their fragrant titties bulging out, tight... My god, sometimes I wonder how I could think about Sartre's Nausea while all that mouth-watering fucking was around, cocks looking out from everybody's eyes and sex oozing from under the benches, seeping right towards my desk...

GODFREY

They wanted to know if I was thinking of the Marshal...

The professor stares at Godfrey.

PROFESSOR VASILI

What with, if you were thinking...?

GODFREY

(repeats) An old man is the one who still wants to, but cannot do it anymore.

The professor and Godfrey are silent, and then the professor bursts out with laughter.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Ha, ha! A law was passed right at that time that made the Marshal president for life... We were condemned to the rule of a man, hooked to machines... Of course they wanted to know what people thought about it...

GODFREY

They beat me.

The professor falls silent.

GODFREY

Just in case! they said and broke my nose and five ribs.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Yes... I remember... You were gone for a week then... You said that you were hit by a *means of public transport*...

GODFREY

You have a good memory.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Memory is all I have left.

GODFREY

I never fathomed how they found out...

PROFESSOR VASILI

All of the pricks who study literature do not become writers and scientists, some of them also join up with the police, so they can control the writers and scientists.

The professor giggles... Then becomes serious...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Why didn't you tell me they beat you?

GODFREY

I don't know... I was confused, everything happened so quickly... They said I made a fool of the Marshal's age in public, that I was poisoning the young generations. The

more I tried to explain that it was just about the *analysis of a literary character, that it is just a metaphor that generalizes a certain trait and thus makes it comparable...* the more they eyed me suspiciously, and then the bigger one of them said:

From the background two men in raincoats appear...

BIGGER MAN

All right. I have a telephone directory here, who do I call?

GODFREY

(surprised) Who? Why?

SMALLER MAN

Someone who can confirm that *you have a good opinion about the Marshal and our society...*

GODFREY

I don't know. This is stupid.

The bigger man flips through the pages of the thick telephone directory.

BIGGER MAN

Why would it be *stupid*. We are just policemen, you know, we don't have such an education...

SMALLER MAN

...we're just dumb policemen, dumb cops, like in the jokes you like telling so much...

BIGGER MAN

...we're no experts in metaphors...

SMALLER MAN

...and besides, we have no reason to just take your word for it, we don't know you. But just like that, at the first glance, you're not exactly worthy of our trust... You know, the world today is full of scoundrels and dissidents...

BIGGER MAN

...that's why we would really appreciate it if you could give us a name of a person who would be able to persuade us that at the Tuesday evening seminar you weren't making fun of the Marshal, when you said, I quote:

He takes a piece of paper from his pocket and reads...

BIGGER MAN

An old man is the one who still wants to, but cannot do it anymore, which means that he with his ambitiousness, which is not in accordance with his physical capabilities, for biology takes its course, inflicts much damage especially on the young people... (stops reading) I don't understand how you intellectuals can complicate the sentences to such a degree...

SMALLER MAN

...Don't you tell me that you didn't mean that the Marshal is that old man who's going to fuck up the young generation...

GODFREY

This is not what it is about at all... When I said that the old man may harm the young people, I above all meant young lovers that in literature usually have an old man standing in the way of their love...

BIGGER MAN

(laughs ironically) Oh, no, not that! You meant something completely different. I feel it in my gut. *(turns to the smaller man)* Do you feel it too?

SMALLER MAN

In my gut and in my ass.

They both laugh. Godfrey covers his face with his hands. The bigger man plays around with the thick telephone directory...

BIGGER MAN

Well, it's late already, and since it's late, we all want to go home, right? Look, I have a thick telephone directory of the Socialistic Federative Republic here in my hand... It weighs at least two kilograms... You be a good chap and tell us the name and surname of the person who can confirm or not confirm that you're an honest and constructive citizen...

SMALLER MAN

We're only interested in who else thinks or doesn't think the same that you do...

BIGGER MAN

Maybe your mentor, professor Vasili?

GODFREY

(to professor Vasili, sitting in the chair) Then it dawned on me... It was you they were actually after...

Godfrey looks up and stares at his interrogators stubbornly...

GODFREY

I'm the only one that thinks this, nobody else. Just me.

BIGGER MAN

Then nobody can confirm that you're an OK guy?

GODFREY

No.

SMALLER MAN

Too bad.

GODFREY

(to professor Vasili) Then they broke my nose.

The bigger man suddenly slams the telephone directory into Godfrey's face.

BIGGER MAN

Here you go! Just in case!

The bigger man and the smaller man leave.

PROFESSOR VASILI

And why didn't you tell me all of this, why did you say that you were hit by...

GODFREY

A bus? I wanted to protect you. You were the most popular professor and I was an insignificant assistant. I was convinced that they were after you.

PROFESSOR VASILI

So you sacrificed yourself... How noble! A noble sacrifice is always rewarded by a broken nose! Fuck it! *(gets angry)* You should have told me! Why *the fuck* didn't you tell me?

GODFREY

I was ashamed. It's so humiliating if they beat you. Yes, I was ashamed. I didn't tell anybody. Not even Nina... Do you remember Nina?

PROFESSOR VASILI

No.

GODFREY

My girlfriend. She was a first year student. She adored you.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I don't remember.

GODFREY

Now she's my wife. We have two children.

Godfrey fishes a wallet from out of his pocket and flips through the photographs...

GODFREY

My oldest son is twenty-five and my daughter is sixteen...

Professor Vasili superficially glances at the photographs Godfrey shows him...

GODFREY

We got married soon after that. *(to himself)* I don't know, sometimes I have a feeling that everything went by so quickly... But after all of that I was so alone. I wanted to have someone... You've got to remember her, professor. She was one of the best students. You yourself drew my attention to her. Remember?

PROFESSOR VASILI

Then you were beaten, you say... And I thought that...

GODFREY

I'm talking about it for the first time now. Back then I wanted to forget all about it as soon as possible, even though it couldn't be done. I had a feeling that I'm being followed... And I really met them occasionally... They sat at the next table at the student canteen. They pretended that they didn't know me. Once I intentionally glared at them and kept glaring motionlessly for almost half an hour. I wanted them to look at me, to give me a signal that they knew me, that they knew that it was me, the one whose nose they had broken... I couldn't confuse them; they stood up, paid for their coffee and left... One of them had a coffee with milk, double, the other one had tea, I still remember now, it was in that place in the passage behind the university... I thought I'd go mad... Suddenly I wasn't sure that it was them anymore... It seemed to me that I was *making up* all of it... A terrible feeling... The whole world turned into fear... Do you understand? I couldn't tell anybody, I didn't want to get anybody involved. I was the loneliest man in the world. Then I wanted to get married, I wanted to have someone...

PROFESSOR VASILI

A really fucked up state of mind.

GODFREY

And the most perverse thing about it was that I felt that I really did something wrong. During the nights after the interrogation I went over that Tuesday seminar a

countless number of times... Over and over... My brains were burning and I thought I'd go insane... In the end I discovered that they were right... I really did think of the Marshal when I was talking about the *old man who still wants to, but cannot do it anymore, so he chooses to drag everything into his grave with him*. It was him exactly I was thinking about when I prepared the seminar and when I uttered those words.

PROFESSOR VASILI

That's crap! It was an excellent seminar... I remember... It had nothing whatsoever to do with politics...

GODFREY

You yourself said that *good literature always refers to the time without saying one concrete word about it...*

*Professor Vasili stands up and strolls around the room youthfully...
The distant past comes to life before us again.*

PROFESSOR VASILI

...why can Antigone still be topical today? Because the moment can be mirrored in it. The writer's genius discovered the general role of *ruling*, permeating every human society as something dangerous... In other words, every now and again in the human history the ruler is tempted by totalitarianism and the famous dialogue between Creon and Antigone comes to life as if it were written by a contemporary author...

GODFREY

Comrade professor, do you think that today is such a moment?

PROFESSOR VASILI

And what do you think?

GODFREY

I don't know...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Here is an assignment for the next Tuesday's seminar... Find that moment in the present time in which a literary work of art can be reflected. Of course, you may not use the discussed example of Antigone by Sophocles. (*complacently*) This is my example! Find your own one! And in order for you not to be bored, I also invited a younger colleague to participate; she's waiting in front of the office door...

Professor Vasili goes to the door and opens it...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Come in, miss...

A young girl with an armful of books enters shyly.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I've already explained to my assistant what I'm expecting of you... *(to Godfrey)* The colleague is very enthusiastic and hardworking... What's your horoscope sign, colleague?

GIRL

(confused) Virgo. I mean, September...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Everything fits together. Virgos are hardworking even when they don't need to work. Dostoyevski was a Virgo, and so was Chekhov... Well, I hope you'll get along fine... As I said: find those moments in literature that can *ironically, critically, polemically, anecdotically, and so on*, discuss the present time. I've already given some literature to the young madam...

The girl shows the title pages of the books to Godfrey...

GIRL

Commedia dell'arte, Goldoni, Molière...

PROFESSOR VASILI

I only want to say one other thing... Be attentive of the old man... Of the figure of the old man... And don't forget the time we live in... What day is today... The twenty-second of April nineteen seventy-four? Exactly. And what is in the news so often these days? What is the hot political topic of these times? Think!

GODFREY

Professor... you think...?

PROFESSOR VASILI

I don't think anything. I'll let myself be surprised... Art draws from life, thus it can come back to life anytime... Miss... What's your name again?

GIRL

Nina.

The girl leaves, the professor sits back into the reclining chair...

GODFREY

You have to remember her!

PROFESSOR VASILI

But I don't.

GODFREY

You introduced her to me.

PROFESSOR VASILI

That's possible.

GODFREY

We prepared the seminar together... Look at the photo... That's her...

Godfrey shows him the photograph again...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(angrily) Why do you keep pestering me with this family crap!

The professor grabs the photographs and throws them to the floor...

PROFESSOR VASILI

If I said I don't remember her, I don't remember her. You know how many cunts went through those lecture rooms, how many fat, thin, miserable, horny, anorexic students of Slovenian language sat at my exams? Some of them were morons and had nothing except boobs, an ass and a cunt! How could I now remember a broad that sat at a seminar twenty-five years ago.

GODFREY

She didn't just sit there. You told us to prepare it...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Yes, and you've succeeded excellently! I remember you, but I don't remember her. Amen. Full stop. The end of the story.

They both fall silent.

They remain silent for a while.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Ah! I'm a mean old fuck.

Godfrey stands up.

GODFREY

I think I'll go.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Wait a bit. You haven't come just to say goodbye like this...

GODFREY

True, I haven't.

Godfrey sits down again.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Sometimes I'm angry at myself, but it looks as if I were taking it out on others.

GODFREY

...taking it out on others...

PROFESSOR VAILI

Yeah, you've heard me. You were an innocent victim. The only difference is that I didn't bash your teeth in...

GODFREY

You've really changed, professor...

PROFESSOR VASILI

The biggest change is time. It leaves seams and scars.

GODFREY

Li-Tai-Po.

PROFESSOR VASILI

A miserable reflection of Li-Tai-Po's images. We Europeans undertook everything, even translating what cannot be translated.

GODFREY

I'm pleased you thought of poetry...

PROFESSOR VASILI

I constantly think about it. Poetry is everything!

GODFREY

I wouldn't say so... Regarding your... *(has difficulties saying it)* Obscenities...

PROFESSOR VASILI

You think that can't be poetry?

GODFREY

The essence of poetry is beauty. And beauty is not the gutter. Those are your words from twenty-five years ago.

PROFESSOR VASILI

So what! I've changed my opinion. Everybody does it these days. And in much shorter periods of time, too.

GODFREY

You haven't used them. I mean, those words...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Of course I haven't. That is why now I do it with even greater pleasure.

The professor grabs Godfrey by the sleeve and pulls him towards him confidentially...

PROFESSOR VASILI

You know, what I'm doing?

GODFREY

No.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(whispers as if it were the greatest secret) I write it down... Filthiness... Actually, words... And you know that, sadly, I'll soon be done? We don't have them. We simply don't have them. In thousands of years of history we managed to collect only a few really original curses, and shyly borrowed everything else from others. Do you know what this tells us? It tells us of the lack of confidence, energy, creativity... *If you get to know the language of a nation, you get to know their character*, wrote the anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss. And what would poor Claude say if he knew that our language has only a dozen words that we can express our anger with and another half-dozen words to give vent to our enthusiasm for indecency, which is the prologue to procreation? He would stretch out his arms, the confused Claude would, and say, *it's not surprising that their art is just a small heap of sobbing poetry... It's not surprising*, he'd also say, *that the poor sods are still reigned out of cells and confessionals, it's not surprising that every Friday evening about a dozen of them hang themselves and another dozen bite the dust because of a knife in a tavern or later in mangled metal in traffic accidents...* Poor Claude would just shrug like this and say, *well, to hell with a nation that doesn't even have curses. Even those profane words that they have are not theirs. They have to help themselves out with foreign ones.*

GODFREY

(smiles) I can't believe it. You're incredible, professor! You still surprise me...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Yes... And so I make them up, my dear, curses and vulgarities. In my old age I found out that it would be far better if I spent my life telling dirty stories, making up foul and juicy words and thus contribute to the *liveliness of our language and our nation*, instead of writing profound treatises that serve no purpose whatsoever...

GODFREY

If I were twenty-five years younger, I'd applaud, professor. But now I think you're a great cynic.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(agitated) Don't you talk about cynicism! We have already agreed that being old is the greatest cynicism of life itself. But now I really do what I like most. I speak without any restrictions. And I make up *sludgy words*. And not just words, also phrases, comparisons... Listen, I'll read something to you:

He pulls a small notebook from his pocket...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(reads passionately) Your cunt is like the Tito's Avenue... *(corrects himself)* Pardon me, the Slovenian Avenue... *(repeats passionately)* Your cunt is like the Slovenian Avenue; if I fling a banana at it, it'll only hit a wall by coincidence... You like it?

GODFREY

No.

PROFESSOR VASILI

How come? I was being expressive in conveying the idea that her...

GODFREY

(cold) Thank you. I understood it.

The professor falls silent.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Have I offended you?

GODFREY

No.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Why do you look like a sour ass then?

GODFREY

I'd prefer you didn't talk like that.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Fine. I won't *talk like that* anymore... I'll be able to restrain myself for as long as you're visiting. But it's a fact that it's no fun at all to use foul language with my *old cu...* (*restrains himself*) Pardon me... With my wife... Everything is wasted on her... She pretends not to hear me... Which is her way of getting back at me for pretending not to hear her! Complex, eh?

Godfrey smiles absentmindedly...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Fine. I'll sacrifice myself and not use the *incriminated* words. (*in a somewhat pathetic and superior manner*) So, my dear chap, what brings you here so suddenly after all these years? What is it that tortures your comparative soul? (*in a normal manner*) It was comparative literature you studied, wasn't it, or was it just Slovenian language? I always wondered how it's possible for boys to be Slovenian language students... A professor of Slovenian language, it's like a man wearing a skirt. So... How shall I put it... Like being a male nurse... So faggoty... Ha!

GODFREY

I see you just can't put mockery aside.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(*angrily*) I gave up as far as *filthiness* is concerned, but leave my mockery alone, or I'll die. So, where were you all these years?

GODFREY

You know... After that... *accident*... I had to retreat...

PROFESSOR VASILI

I was looking for you.

GODFREY

I didn't want to meet with you.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Why not?

GODFREY

I was sure that I'm only small potatoes, that they were really after you.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Don't worry, I would have been able to stand up for myself. Actually I could hardly wait for something to happen. I yearned for a fight! And when they accused you, I took it as a challenge. I fought for you... Like a lion!

Enter two men and two women... All of them are wearing clothes from the seventies... Men wearing ties... All of them have briefcases. Professor Vasili stands up... He speaks assertively and emphatically. Obviously their discussion has been going on for a while and has now reached the boiling point...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Comrades, we cannot do this! It's intolerable! It's not moral!

FEMALE PROFESSOR 1

What is *moral* then, my esteemed colleague? Your supporting your assistant's doctoral thesis? As his mentor you should have stopped him a long time ago. If I had any say in this, we would discuss *your* responsibility at this meeting.

MALE PROFESSOR 2

I couldn't agree more.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I won't allow this!

MALE PROFESSOR 1

(calming them down) Hold your horses! We're required to tell what we think. As far as I'm concerned the whole affair is more than clear, otherwise they wouldn't have warned us...

FEMALE PROFESSOR 1

It's intolerable that policemen are strolling around the university.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Of course it's intolerable, the university should be a place of freedom, but instead they are sending us notices and dossiers from the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

FEMALE PROFESSOR 1

Thank god, they are trying to warn us, otherwise what we've given so many lives for would start to crumble right here in these departments.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Oh please, stop being sentimental! This is the year seventy-five...

FEMALE PROFESSOR 1

(interrupts him, exasperated) What?! What is this sentimentality you talk about, colleague! I was there, I was there from the beginning, and I know how we suffered, how much blood had to be spilled before what we have now was created. *(she turns to the others)* Esteemed colleagues... I want professor Vasili to apologize to me! Right now! Our fight was no sentimentality, it was a heroic deed!

MALE PROFESSOR 1

Vasili! Please.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I apologize. Although I'm still sure that we'll do a great injustice if we throw the assistant to the street because of his research, like the comrades suggest...

MALE PROFESSOR 2

Let's wrap this up. I'm interested in finishing this as soon as possible.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Listen to me...

FEMALE PROFESSOR 2

I have a small baby at home.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(screams) Listen to me! We'll do a great injustice, first: *to our profession*, which has to explore all of the unexplored areas and there can be no limitations there...

FEMALE PROFESSOR 1

I'm sorry, there are limitations. We will not explore the literature of *traitors*.

FEMALE PROFESSOR 2

Ha! And, frankly, I doubt that there is anything *to explore* in this field, the best writers were in the woods, anyway.

PROFESSOR VASILI

The research will show whether this is true.

MALE PROFESSOR 1

No it won't, because we'll reject it!

FEMALE PROFESSOR 1

We'll vote and we'll reject it!

MALE PROFESSOR 2

Yes, let's vote. I only believe numbers.

PROFESSOR VASILI

You didn't let me finish...

MALE PROFESSOR 1

Please. Go ahead!

PROFESSOR VASILI

And secondly... If we throw him to the street because of his improper research, we'll do a young man injustice. And the young are everything!

FEMALE PROFESSOR 1

As far as this is concerned, I very much agree with you, colleague. *The young are everything*. Let us remember, how many young people we gave for what we have... Out of thirty-eight students in my senior year only six of us survived the war.

MALE PROFESSOR 1

Martha is right. The topic that your assistant chose for his doctoral thesis is harmful to the society and does not support its development. Instead it pushes us back into the past, which our nations have buried ages ago... Susan, would you draw up the minutes?

FEMALE PROFESSOR 2

Certainly.

MALE PROFESSOR 2

Come on, come on, please, it's two o'clock.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Think. Think about it again, I beg of you!

FEMALE PROFESSOR 1

Now you're being sentimental.

MALE PROFESSOR 1

Vasili, I know this is painful for you. You've nourished a snake in your bosom and now it's hard to admit it. I know that feeling. All of us had to come to terms with it once.

FEMALE PROFESSOR 1

(ironically) Why didn't you suggest some other topic to him, for example the relationship between Faust and Mephisto?

PROFESSOR VASILI

(also ironically) Since the year forty-five this has been the topic dealt with in greatest detail in our country.

MALE PROFESSOR 1

Let's vote. Susan, are you taking notes?

FEMALE PROFESSOR 2

Only the essential matters.

MALE PROFESSOR 1

Good. Who is in favour of him being thrown out... Susan, will you formulate this in the right way?

FEMALE PROFESSOR 2

Of course. All of these things are formulated in the same way.

MALE PROFESSOR 1

Well, who is *in favour*?

FEMALE PROFESSOR 1

I am.

FEMALE PROFESSOR 2

Of course. Me too.

MALE PROFESSOR 1

Same here.

MALE PROFESSOR 2

I'm a mathematician, I don't know my way around such things... But I'm *in favour*.

MALE PROFESSOR 1

What about you, Vasili?

PROFESSOR VASILI

I don't know.

MALE PROFESSOR 1

(angrily) Don't be a jerk, now! We have to be unanimous.

The professors leave.
Vasili sits down in his "liegenstuhl" again.

PROFESSOR VASILI
I was *against* it.

GODFREY
The minutes said that you were unanimous.

PROFESSOR VASILI
But I was *against* it. I wanted to keep you at my side. I thought you were talented. I invited you to be my assistant.

GODFREY
I know you were against it. They told me. The word gets out. The secretary was listening at the door and told her daughter, who studied at the department of archaeology, and so soon the whole university knew... You became even more popular. You were the lone warrior, a kind of a *Don Quixote*, and when you lectured about the *knight with a sad face* the next semester, everyone was convinced that it is you, that you are talking about your own struggle with the *windmills*...

PROFESSOR VASILI
(*complacently*) Yes, I felt that. Actually I received letters... Anonymous love letters of infatuated students... And visits. Delicious evening visits... There would be a soft knock on the door...

Knocking.

PROFESSOR VASILI
Yes?

Knocking again.

PROFESSOR VASILI
Come in!

The doors open.
Nina enters.

NINA
Excuse me?

PROFESSOR VASILI
Come in, young lady!

NINA
I came to...

PROFESSOR VASILI
(*interrupts her*) Virgo?

NINA
Sorry?

PROFESSOR VASILI
Horoscope?

NINA
Yes. Virgo. (*smiles*) You remember?

PROFESSOR VASILI
I have a nose for Virgos.

NINA
I won't bother you... I just came to...

PROFESSOR VASILI
(*interrupts her again*) I liked your reasoning...

NINA
I would just like to thank you...

PROFESSOR VASILI
I think you'll make a great researcher one day. You have a knack for details... You very smartly figured out that *Jerman's passiveness has ontological implications...*

NINA
You think so?

PROFESSOR VASILI
Of course, Jerman is not a person of action, he is no hero, he is an ordinary man. Without Lojzka he would be nothing. An ordinary bondsman of a teacher. Not before Lojzka, a woman, makes this possible, does he become a human being. And here, as you've correctly pointed out, Cankar discussed essential things. Although he himself never had a family, he clearly declared his life's credo in *The Bondsmen*,

especially in the character of Jerman: *a man without a woman is a bondsman. Every man is searching for his Lojzka.*

A moment of silence.

Professor Vasili gazes deep into her eyes.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I am, too.

Nina looks away.

Professor Vasili continues as if nothing happened.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Your thesis is worthy of continued development...

NINA

You think so?

PROFESSOR VASILI

I am sure of it. From the very beginning I knew you were born to see more and deeper than the others...

Professor Vasili gets closer to her...

PROFESSOR VASILI

That's why I invited you to the seminar.

NINA

Professor... I admire you...

PROFESSOR VASILI

You have such beautiful eyes...

NINA

We all admire you. Especially for what you did for...

PROFESSOR VASILI

The position of the assistant is open. I'm offering it to you.

NINA

No...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Nina, don't waste your life. Life offers no second chances. Life is not about the *freedom of choice*, life is about the right decision in the right moment... As far as this is concerned, I'm a fatalist.

NINA

I thought that... I wanted to... only wanted to thank you in my name and in the name of your assistant... I only wanted to tell you how thankful we are to you...

The professor interrupts her... Obviously he is not interested in Nina finishing what she wanted to say... He takes her hand...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Reach out for what life is offering you! Don't throw your talents away. As my assistant you'll be able to explore, I'm at your service, I know many people, there will be no problems with the publishing, I'll vouch for you...

NINA

I don't know, I really don't know...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Go your own way. Don't pay attention to others. Life loves some people and throws others away. Don't sympathize with the rejected. Bury yourself in work. Life is waiting for you...

Professor Vasili hugs her...

NINA

Professor, I...

PROFESSOR VASILI

How do The Bondsmen end? What does Jerman say to Lojzka?

NINA

Give me your hand, give me both hands.

PROFESSOR VASILI

And her answer is?

NINA

You've called out to me from your loneliness... Like golden treasures you lock up your suffering... Unlock it for faithful eyes!

Professor Vasili kisses her.

GODFREY

You were rejuvenated then. Everybody noticed it.

Nina leaves.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I fell in love.

GODFREY

The girls were crazy about you. You were their hero. Old heroes were dead and gone, and there were no new ones in that time.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Actually you were the hero. You wrote the treatise, you wanted to write a doctoral thesis on the forbidden subject...

GODFREY

I was the victim. And you, professor, you were the hero.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(sighs) Yes... I suppose so. That's life. Life is cynical, as we've figured out several times this evening.

GODFREY

But you have to get something good out of every misfortune, as Fyodor Dostoyevsky would say in his Notes from Underground... When my life was most difficult, I found the love of my life...

PROFESSOR VASILI

The love of your life... Ha! This reminds me of the post-war pathos! You never seemed to be pathetic and lamentable.

GODFREY

My world fell apart then. I was thrown into the street, I couldn't get a job anywhere... I was broke... You really don't remember Nina?

PROFESSOR VASILI

No.

GODFREY

She was your assistant for a while. You have to remember her!

PROFESSOR VASILI

I don't know...

GODFREY

At the time we were sure that you offered her a job because you wanted to help us...

PROFESSOR VASILI

That's possible...

Godfrey keeps pestering the professor. He wants the professor to remember...

GODFREY

Nina! She had black hair...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(annoyed) Yes, if you insist... I think I remember her...

GODFREY

It would be weird if you didn't... You liked her too and when I told you she's my girlfriend, you were very glad... You said that *you were glad it turned out that way, that you were very happy she'd chosen me...*

PROFESSOR VASILI

That I do not remember.

GODFREY

That morning, before everything fell apart... You said that *we made such a beautiful couple that you would be honoured to be my best man...* I was honoured, I was moved... I could hardly wait to tell her that... In the evening I rushed home, to the little rented room in Trnovo... Nina was supposed to come later... It was Tuesday, after your seminar... All terrible things in my life happened on Tuesdays... I ran up the stairs... Beneath the stairway window the river Ljubljanica flowed lazily... The surface of the water bathed in white neon light... It was beautiful... Magical... I was happy... I opened the door...

Bigger man and smaller man step out of the corner.

BIGGER MAN

Well, here we are again!

SMALLER MAN

Are you glad to see us?

GODFREY

(frightened) How... How did you come in...?

BIGGER MAN

We never come in...

SMALLER MAN

...That's because we're always there...

GODFREY

What do you want from me again...?

BIGGER MAN

I see you don't have a telephone directory...

GODFREY

Neither do I have a telephone.

BIGGER MAN

Too bad, the telephone directory is so handy...

The bigger man and the smaller man look at each other and laugh...

GODFREY

(frightened) Leave me alone! Leave me alone already, please!

BIGGER MAN

We could do that...

SMALLER MAN

We'd be happy to...

BIGGER MAN

But we can't help it if you are naughty.

SMALLER MAN

Very, very naughty!

BIGGER MAN

While we waited we were bored, so we rummaged around a bit... And look here, *damn it!* We found your notes...

The bigger man pulls a bunch of papers from behind his back...

GODFREY

Give me that! That's my research...

BIGGER MAN

We know, yes.

SMALLER MAN

It has been brought to our attention.

GODFREY

That's not against the law... I mean, if one has notes at home...

SMALLER MAN

You're really a joker!

BIGGER MAN

He who writes also *thinks*. And according to your notes, *you think in a wrong way*. And, you see, *that* is not right.

GODFREY

I write down whatever I want.

BIGGER MAN

If we've been notified correctly, this research is also your dissertation...

GODFREY

I don't know, maybe...

SMALLER MAN

And what about this?

He pulls some big books and magazines from behind his back...

GODFREY

That's the literature...

BIGGER MAN

Enemy literature. Nothing but Argentinean editions.

GODFREY

I got them in the library...

BIGGER MAN

Really? Interesting. And I thought that you smuggled them across the border...

GODFREY

That's not true! Prove it!

BIGGER MAN

Why would we have to prove it? We're not in capitalism! Ha!

They look at each other and snicker again.

SMALLER MAN

We believe what we see, we don't need any proof!

BIGGER MAN

We found forbidden books and magazines...

The smaller man gets closer to Godfrey, wearing a serious expression.

SMALLER MAN

We've been notified that you've smuggled, that you have all of this at home, that you're showing it to others, poisoning them, saying weird stuff... That you agree with what's written in these dirty books...

The bigger man also gets closer... Godfrey retreats into the corner, scared...

GODFREY

My girlfriend is going to be here any minute... If you do anything to me...

BIGGER MAN

No, she won't. Our female comrades are dealing with her as we speak...

The smaller man suddenly hits Godfrey in the face with a big book... Godfrey howls and falls to his knees...

BIGGER MAN

Too bad. A telephone directory would be more effective.

The smaller man and the bigger man leave.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I remember Nina... One day she just failed to show up at the university... She left without saying goodbye...

GODFREY

She got a job at a secondary school...

PROFESSOR VASILI

She could have said goodbye, at least.

GODFREY

They've also ransacked her room in the student home. They almost threw her out.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Yes, I phoned my classmate, he was the director of the student homes. An old partisan. A good man. Then they left her alone.

GODFREY

Oh! So you finally remembered her!

PROFESSOR VASILI

(angrily) I'm an old forgetful prick! *(remembers his promise)* Sorry... Just blurted it out... *(continues with the same anger)* I'm old and I forget. And we professors have the right to be forgetful!

GODFREY

Well, what's important is that you've remembered her.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I have, yes! If you're content now...

GODFREY

Those were tough years... After days of light, when it already looked like it was going to get warm, a period of greyness and darkness came...

PROFESSOR VASILI

What is this? A weather report?

GODFREY

The seventies.

A moment of silence.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(sighs) Yes... I believe that it was unpleasant... But I did what I could...

GODFREY

If Nina hadn't returned to me then, I would have died.

PROFESSOR VASILI

She was pregnant.

GODFREY

Did she tell you?

PROFESSOR VASILI

I suspected it.

GODFREY

She was gone for a while. When you offered her the position of an assistant... She simply didn't show up anymore. I thought she was frightened. She was interrogated. I wouldn't blame her if she really left me... I had a rope in the drawer. I stole it in the yard. A long, yellow plastic rope for hanging the laundry on... Every day I opened the drawer and looked at it... I was completely alone. I didn't have the nerve to come to you... I didn't dare to go anywhere... I felt as if I had the plague and that I would pass it on to anybody I met... The rope in the drawer was the solution. Something bright, something good... Can you imagine what times we lived in if the rope meant a solution, a good solution.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I've sent you money.

GODFREY

I knew it was you.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I couldn't sign the letter.

GODFREY

I couldn't thank you.

PROFESSOR VASILI

That was all I could do...

GODFREY

Then Nina came and knocked on the door... And I survived.

Enter an elderly female judge, holding a thick file... The lawyer approaches Godfrey.

LAWYER

(whispers) The judge is strict but fair... Please, don't say anything. Let me...

JUDGE

Is everyone here? Good. Let me begin by saying that in such cases as this one I rather rule before lunch, because they make me sick. *(to Godfrey)* I cannot understand... We put you through school, gave you a job, and you know no gratitude... Well, I won't say anything else... Regarding the evidence gathered... *(clears her throat)* ...my opinion is that we can conclude this case in peace...

The judge picks up a typed judgement...

JUDGE

(reads) ...because of the infringement of the national security law according to the Article 23/627b I make this sentence in the name of the people... The accused Godfrey... is found guilty according to the Articles 221/5 and 133, paragraph seven of the penal code... The accused has undermined the social order with his texts as well as with his statements and thus proved harmful to the society... Apart from that he smuggled forbidden literature from abroad, which was confirmed by witnesses...

GODFREY

Excuse me... I'd like to...

LAWYER

(whispers and tries to stop him) Wait...

JUDGE

Yes?

GODFREY

I'd like to know what witnesses confirmed...

JUDGE

Comrade... You had ample time for your defence...

LAWYER

Comrade judge... I apologise in the name of my client...

GODFREY

I'd like to know which one of my colleagues lied!

LAWYER

(quietly) Do you want to serve twenty years! *(to the judge)* I ask you to take the emotional state of my client into account...

JUDGE

I hope this doesn't happen again... I've already lost my appetite... *(reads on)* ...therefore he is found guilty... *(turns to Godfrey)* Regarding your lack of previous record and your youth I'll give you the lowest possible sentence... I think that eighteen months in prison will be an appropriate punishment... The case is hereby closed.

GODFREY

Excuse me... But.

LAWYER

(hurries) In the name of my client I declare that we are not going to file any complaint.

GODFREY

(confused) But... how...

LAWYER

But we do have a request...

JUDGE

Yes?

LAWYER

I ask the esteemed court for a one week postponement of the sentence. My client is expecting a child and he would like to get married before serving the sentence...

JUDGE

Write the request. We will grant it. Nevertheless, I congratulate you, young man. For the child, of course. Children are our greatest treasure, no matter who their parents are. Let this sentence be a lesson to you and be careful to bring up your child on sounder moral views.

The judge leaves.

GODFREY

(confused) A year and a half.

LAWYER

Consider yourself lucky. After half a year you can lodge an application for the shortening of the sentence. Your child is going to be born. They'll grant it.

GODFREY

If I ask for a pardon, it's like admitting that I'm guilty...

LAWYER

Don't be stupid! You only have one life. And socialism is not going to end for a long time.

The lawyer leaves.

GODFREY

(to professor Vasili) And so we got married before I went to prison.

PROFESSOR VASILI

So how old is your son?

GODFREY

Twenty-five. He's writing his doctoral thesis now... You won't believe where...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Where?

GODFREY

At our department.

PROFESSOR VASILI

A chip off the old block.

GODFREY

Indeed.

A moment of silence.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I'm glad you stopped by. I hope that Vera will bring us tea soon, just like old times.

GODFREY

I don't drink tea anymore.

PROFESSOR VASILI

A cup of coffee, then! You're right, let her bring us a cup of coffee, it suits our profession better. We'll hear quiet steps on the staircase and she'll appear in the doorframe, carrying a cup of coffee, and we'll turn around and turn it down harshly: *Leave us alone!... We don't want it now!*

GODFREY

I don't drink coffee.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Really? No coffee nor tea? We used to drink litres of tea. We would stare in the books and prove to each other that *roaring with laughter already appears* in the Iliad, and by no means as late as in the period of romanticism...

GODFREY

I haven't drunk tea since then... Tea also remained in *that time*.

PROFESSOR VASILI

How serious we are! Fine. What will you dip the cookies into? Eh?! That is the question!

GODFREY

I don't want cookies.

Godfrey sits down again, but doesn't let go of the briefcase...

GODFREY

I teach. At a secondary school.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Nice.

The professor gestures at the briefcase...

PROFESSOR VASILI

In view of how mysteriously you cling to that briefcase I suppose you write?

GODFREY

That is also one of the things I've left in the past.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I don't understand... If I had the power that you possess, if I were as young as you were back then, I wouldn't give in! I'd write. On purpose! Out of protest!

GODFREY

I wanted to forget it as soon as possible. After six months my son was born, I asked for pardon and they let me go. I got a job at the same secondary school as Nina.

PROFESSOR VASILI

That was when she disappeared. Without saying goodbye.

GODFREY

We started a new life. For a while I haven't even read the newspapers. As little as seeing those hypocritical titles made me sick... We moved and for a couple of years I haven't come to the city at all. Not until fifteen years later have I walked past the university for the first time. I stood on the pavement, looking at the windows where your office used to be and where we spent countless days talking...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Yes, those were great times!

GODFREY

Not for me.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Of course, not for you. You were fucked, they screwed you... Excuse me, I couldn't hold it back... Old men are frequently unable to hold it back. Ha, ha!

GODFREY

(persists in his seriousness) You said it well... I was screwed.

PROFESSOR VASILI

And now you intend to whine about it for the rest of your life? Unbelievable. I knew you when you were full of energy, enthusiasm, I loved you. Who would think that just one such thing can break you...

GODFREY

(upset) What do you mean *one such thing*? I was in prison for six months. When I came to apply for a job, the headmaster of the secondary school said...

A headmaster, wearing a moustache, appears in the background...

HEADMASTER

We'll be watching you. I have to admit that I wasn't too keen on accepting you. Frankly, I was against it, but the comrades want us to give you another chance...

GODFREY

(to professor Vasili) Although they let me out of prison, I was still in prison.

HEADMASTER

After all, you have a child to take care of...

GODFREY

(bitterly) They allowed me to get a job, they allowed me to take care of my child, they gave me another chance...

HEADMASTER

We'll be watching you...

GODFREY

They were holding me by the neck.

HEADMASTER

You and your wife...

GODFREY

I was alone, I was at their mercy... They were the masters of my life...

HEADMASTER

Do you drink? I drink. I've been treated for alcoholism twice without success. But that is allowed. Do we understand each other?

The headmaster leaves.

GODFREY

I didn't become a drunk.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(laughs) Ha! At least that!

GODFREY

I didn't feel like laughing at the time. Not until seven years have passed... Who would think that the secret of folk numbers really holds true... did I laugh again. It was at my son's birthday party... The boy told some innocent joke about blondes... *Why do blondes...* I laughed out loud... From my heart... Nina and I looked at each

other... At that moment we knew... The wounds finally began to heal... We dared to go among people again. I wasn't afraid that they were following me anymore, watching me... Something was happening. The society began to change. More and more people dared to tell out loud that what had happened to me was a great injustice. I was becoming stronger. I started to feel like a winner.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Time heals all wounds. That is also what a folk saying says.

GODFREY

Yes, you could say so.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Almighty time, covering all... Oblivion has come!

GODFREY

Oblivion? (*cold*) No.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(*inquisitive*) No? Just revenge, then?

GODFREY

I don't want any revenge. Who should I wreak vengeance upon? The poor miserable policemen? The professors who threw me into the street and discredited me morally... The judge? No.

PROFESSOR VASILI

What then?

GODFREY

My wounds don't hurt anymore, but what is left is curiosity. Pure human curiosity.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Write a book! A novel. You knew how to write well. Curiosity leads us into creativeness!

GODFREY

It's too late. Writing novels is like long distance running. I walked half the way, I don't have any strength left to run.

PROFESSOR VASILI

What then?

GODFREY

I'm just curious. Curious about who were the people who informed them against me, who sat in the auditorium, wrote everything down and passed it on to them still fresh. You see, professor, that is what doesn't stop bothering me!

PROFESSOR VASILI

People accused others for various reasons. Some out of conviction, some were blackmailed, to others it was their job... You think that you'll be able to find them after twenty-five years?

GODFREY

I found them.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Really?

GODFREY

I've gathered my courage for a long time... And then I finally paid a visit to the police archive... I filled out the forms and they brought my file from the basement.

A moment of silence.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I suppose you have it in your briefcase.

GODFREY

Yes.

Godfrey carefully places the briefcase on his knees and pulls out a thick file.

GODFREY

Many files were destroyed in the beginning of the nineties. They haven't destroyed mine. I was obviously too unimportant.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Oh! Now I get it! You haven't come unselfishly to visit your old professor, whom everybody has forgotten and whose treatises are nothing but a caricature of a certain period anymore, you've come to show me your file. Right?

GODFREY

To show it to you and to ask you...

PROFESSOR VASILI

I don't know if I'll be able to answer who really hides behind the secret police names. At that time I haven't concerned myself with who of our colleagues co-operates with the police. There were so many things more important than the poor police informers.

Godfrey opens the file...

GODFREY

How do you know that there are no real names in the file?

PROFESSOR VASILI

I do have that much imagination. I have also read Le Carré and things like that apart from Chekhov sometimes.

GODFREY

They've also assigned a special name to me. They weren't too imaginative. I was just a plain old *Assistant*.

PROFESSOR VASILI

That probably means that they weren't interested in you before you became an assistant.

GODFREY

Everything is equipped with exact dates. The quotations written down. The file contains a heap of documents, reports, I even found a lecture programme with my remarks on the edge, which I wrote down when I attended a lecture by a world-renowned theology expert L. V. Tom in seventy-five... I threw it away, but they found it and put it into the file...

PROFESSOR VASILI

And who was the one who so diligently wrote a report about you?

GODFREY

Mephisto.

A moment of silence, then the professor laughs from his heart...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Ha, ha! Who would think that policemen know Goethe.

GODFREY

You can't imagine, professor, what a weird feeling you get when you suddenly rummage through your own life. Reading words that you've uttered decades ago and forgot them the moment you've said them, but someone thought they were important... All my life in that time is in these pages, in this report. Nothing has been missed... Everything written in detail! When I visited my parents, which bus I took, then there is a record on my parents, on my father, what he did during the war, what my mother's family was like, there is even a record on my distant uncle, who was on the wrong side and disappeared God knows where, I've never seen him, I never even knew he existed, the distant relative, can you imagine, professor! This file contains more than I knew about myself and my family...

PROFESSOR VASILI

That's the secret of files!

GODFREY

And the university... Everything recorded... My words, discussions, conclusions... There is an exact date of when I met Nina... So that now after twenty-five years we had to *fix* our anniversary... It wasn't at her freshman's party on the twelfth of December nineteen seventy-four like we mistakenly celebrated all these years, it was two days later on the fourteenth of December in the student canteen... Several chapters in the file are dedicated to Nina... With written remarks on the edge...

Godfrey eagerly pulls papers from the folder. He reads...

GODFREY

According to Mephisto the student Nina has in no way grown attached to Assistant. Their relationship cannot develop into anything more serious, because love is merely one-sided. Therefore, according to Mephisto, there is no need to open a separate file on her... (to professor Vasili, almost enthusiastic) It's all here, all of it! My research, people I knew, my friends, sometimes it says even what I wore for example on the seventeenth of March, what I said at a national holiday celebration, what jokes I told... Somewhere I even found a note on my favourite food and the records I listened to in those days...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Heh, heh! Mephisto was obviously very thorough.

GODFREY

(seriously) But nowhere have I found one word about Nina being pregnant.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Which proves that the police can be superficial, nevertheless. No wonder that everything went down the drain so quickly.

GODFREY

Maybe *Mephisto* didn't want to report Nina's pregnancy.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I don't think so... Nina simply didn't seem important enough to them.

GODFREY

The parts of the file that discuss my dissertation are especially meticulously written and underlined in a red pencil. Moreover, all of the subjects I was thinking about when I searched for the topic of my investigation are described in tiny and orderly handwriting... I shuddered when I read this. I was frightened again: *is it possible that they read my mind?* Can investigators know the investigated so well as to know what he thinks... Crazy, right?

PROFESSOR VASILI

It's possible. A writer can also create a certain character in such detail that then he just has to write down what the character feels. *Characters become alive and write themselves*, as Proust put it. In a way every subject of an investigation is the investigator's creation. Interesting, right? A good hypothesis for a dissertation!

GODFREY

You're right. I was Mephisto's creation, I just wasn't aware of it.

PROFESSOR VASILI

If you were aware of it, then Mephisto would not be Mephisto, eh?

Godfrey stands up and paces around the room.

We're in the past again...

GODFREY

Comrade professor! I'm sure that my topic is worthy of a more detailed investigation...

Professor Vasili stands up and throws a bunch of papers in the air.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(*angry*) Rubbish! Nothing. Worthless! I didn't think you're so easily satisfied with yourself. *Baptism at the Savica* has been dealt with in thousands of ways already.

GODFREY

It's a brilliant work of art.

PROFESSOR VASILI

And you intend to say, *what? That Črtomir has betrayed his ancestors' beliefs... Or maybe that a woman is to blame for everything, that love is stronger than political, national, religious beliefs...*

GODFREY

Not only that... I want to say that *Baptism* is a monumental work...

PROFESSOR VASILI

We already know that.

GODFREY

Nobody has written about this yet... *Baptism as the myth of a traitor... As a myth of the national character...*

A moment of silence.

The professor puts his hands behind his back and calms down...

PROFESSOR VASILI

You made a good point there... This, about traitors...

GODFREY

I thought...

PROFESSOR VASILI

You thought nothing. You just blurted it out. But... *I think... I'm sure, even...*

GODFREY

Yes?

A moment of silence. Professor Vasili gazes at Godfrey...

PROFESSOR VASILI

I think I found the right topic for you. It demands boldness...

The professor steps up to Godfrey and holds his face with both hands... Really close...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(whispering) Are you bold enough...? Do you dare?

GODFREY

What?

PROFESSOR VASILI

To reach across. Across time... To where nobody has been before? Do you have the nerve...? To explore the *truth*?

GODFREY

What do you mean by this...?

PROFESSOR VASILI

It doesn't matter what *I* think... What's important is what *you* are going to think...

GODFREY

You're being ambiguous, professor...

PROFESSOR VASILI

That's why I'm a professor... Professors are allowed to be ambiguous. Professors provoke. What else is there to pedagogy than constant provocation? I provoke you to put *everything* at stake and dare to look *there*...

A moment of silence.

GODFREY

Where?

Professor Vasili lets go of Godfrey's face and retreats into the dark corner...

PROFESSOR VASILI

The last floor of the university library... The closed doors... No access to the public. The collection of emigrant literature...

A moment of silence.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Do you dare to?

GODFREY

It's interesting.

PROFESSOR VASILI

And unexplored. This could be the big bang, carrying you into the heights...

GODFREY

Or crush me into the ground.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I'm with you. I'll stand by you. It's time. The time is right. To dare, that's everything.

A moment of silence.

GODFREY

How will I get to the final floor...?

PROFESSOR VASILI

My classmate. Here, I have a piece of paper with his name in my pocket. I wrote it in the morning. Mention my name. You'll find enough material on the last floor, and you'll have to dig up the rest of it yourself... OK?

Godfrey nods... Professor Vasili approaches him slowly. He puts a piece of paper into his hand. Godfrey takes it and puts it in his pocket.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(whispers) You're the man. I knew it.

Silence.

PROFESSOR VASILI

And how is Nina?

GODFREY

I don't know.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Didn't you say you were together now...?

GODFREY

Yes. I don't know. Not at the moment. And, besides, I'm not sure that...

PROFESSOR VASILI

That she loves you?

GODFREY

Yes.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Don't worry. She's yours. *I'm glad it turned out this way! I'm very happy she chose you... You make such a beautiful couple. I would be honoured to be your best man some day...*

Godfrey smiles.

Professor Vasili sits in the reclining chair again. He is an old man again. Helpless and cynical... Godfrey stares at the file...

GODFREY

I'll never forget the tiny and orderly writing I loved so much...

Godfrey pushes a bunch of papers from the file under the professor's nose.

GODFREY

There is a bunch of papers in the file with the same writing... Words, underlined with a narrow red pencil... Want to see, professor?

The professor doesn't look, he keeps staring at the floor...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Did you really think they were so witty?

GODFREY

Who?

PROFESSOR VASILI

I thought of the name myself...

Bigger man and smaller man appear in the space.

BIGGER MAN

Mephisto! What a weird name. I don't know if I'm able to spell it right...

SMALLER MAN

Is that some kind of cheese?

BIGGER MAN

Don't be stupid. It's literature!

SMALLER MAN

It reminds me of mildew... You know, those French cheeses tasting like old socks...

BIGGER MAN

(interrupts him) Well, now you know that *Mephisto* is a fictional literary character...

SMALLER MAN

I like secret names like *Beautiful*, *Lover*, *Caring mother*, and *Sister* much better...

BIGGER MAN

(*laughs*) Do you remember that hippy...? Even at the meetings he insisted we call him Bob Dylan, eh?

SMALLER MAN

But he was a real piece of work! He wanted a hundred grams for every piece of information...

BIGGER MAN

God knows where he is now?

SMALLER MAN

He is the editor of a newspaper. And he cut his hair, too.

BIGGER MAN

Yes, things change!

SMALLER MAN

That's what I'm saying... All those names meant something... And you could easily remember them. But not Mephisto!

BIGGER MAN

Everybody chooses a name that suits his character best. And professor chose well, if we take into account that he looked for us himself...

SMALLER MAN

(*with admiration*) Yes, that is rare! Such *awareness* is rare in these times.

BIGGER MAN

You see how dynamic our profession is, you always meet interesting people, and you're always able to learn something new...

The smaller man takes a notebook from his pocket.

SMALLER MAN

Mephisto... How do you spell that? Two *fs*?

BIGGER MAN

That I don't know. I'll ask.

The bigger man turns to professor Vasili...

PROFESSOR VASILI

I made up my own secret name.

GODFREY

I knew it.

PROFESSOR VASILI

You didn't know it then.

GODFREY

There were moments when I suspected... Everything fit together so well... They knew what we were talking about... But, no... I didn't *want* to believe that, I couldn't... You fought for me. You were the only one who was against it... You gave Nina the position of the assistant, you sent me money... No... In reality *I didn't want to know*, until a couple days ago I read the file and found reports written in your handwriting...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(contented) Yes! You were my *creation*! I managed your life like a writer manages his hero... You were alive, you had a will of your own, but at the same time I sent you into labyrinths of ordeals. I felt like God! A fantastic feeling, I tell you!

Godfrey leaps up, drops the file, paper scattering everywhere... He grabs the professor by the collar and clenches his fist, lifting it above his face...

GODFREY

(screams) I'll punch you in the mouth!! In your lying snitch mouth!!!

Professor Vasili is not frightened, he just looks at Godfrey leaning over him with curiosity... Godfrey's fist above the professor's face is prepared to strike... A moment of silence...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Well? Won't you do it? Come on, it's not that hard...
Godfrey lets go of him and retreats...

GODFREY

You disgust me.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(screams angrily) I disgust you! A nice excuse, I'll give you that! But in reality you don't have the balls to hit your professor, your role model and your teacher... And you found an excuse immediately: *(grimaces)* I won't hit him because he disgusts me... Unbelievable!

GODFREY

I didn't come because of that...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(interrupts him) Why have you come then?

GODFREY

To see you.

PROFESSOR VASILI

And have your vengeance. Good. You're here. Avenge yourself! What are you waiting for!

GODFREY

You've disappointed me.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Not as much as I've disappointed myself.

GODFREY

Are you sorry?

PROFESSOR VASILI

You mean if I'm sorry for being *Mephisto*? For writing reports? No, I'm not sorry. (*enraged*) I'm disappointed in myself for being *wrong about you*. You had it all: youth, talent, energy... I thought you had the power to survive, that you would know how to fight... That you'd be better than me. And you just broke down and surrendered. You haven't done anything with your life! You could have become a writer, an adversary, a dissident, the leader! You don't know that in reality I pushed you into the arms of true freedom! The *freedom* that you have to prove with your blood all the time. And only such freedom is worth anything. Heroic freedom, tearing down the walls! You've had that chance! Everybody knew that it was injustice, everyone was on your side, but you shit your pants! You've traded your mission for a safe and quiet little job. I was mistaken about your character. I thought that the injustice would rouse you, I thought you'd do what I didn't have the strength to do anymore. And you yielded to despair. (*screams, enraged*) Coward! You retreated. Fell silent. With your tail between your legs! Fathered two children and threw in the towel. I'm disappointed because I made a mistake! That's it!

Godfrey paces around the room... He is angry... Upset... Pushed into the corner he leaps at the professor, full of wrath...

GODFREY

You too... You just keep trying to find miserable excuses!! Trying to justify your heinous act with empty babble. *A traitor finds his place in the last circle of hell*, says Dante. There is no excuse for the pain you inflict on others.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Perhaps.

GODFREY

I didn't know you were like that... I was young. I believed that you were a humanist then, I thought you saw more than the others, that you could read things into art that remained hidden to others... But in reality all you wanted was power. You wanted to possess our lives, our *souls*...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Every professor tries to *possess* his students... That's nothing new. From Aristotle on... And it is up to the students to tear themselves away from their teacher at the right

time and follow their own paths. Some succeed in doing that and others remain students for their whole lives, doing nothing. That's you! (*almost spits*) You miserable pupil! You haven't managed to free yourself... You didn't have the balls. You didn't understand that you had the chance to become a *teacher*, not only at some suburban secondary school, not only at some scheming university... You could have become *the teacher of the nation, the bringer of changes*...

GODFREY

You are pathetic! Miserable and pathetic!

PROFESSOR VASILI

And you still don't have the balls!

They both fall silent.

The professor sits into his "liegenstuhl" again...

Godfrey calms down...

GODFREY

These last few days I was considering turning you in. Write an article. Call the newspapers...

PROFESSOR VASILI

That's still an option.

GODFREY

In that case I would be just like you.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Exactly.

GODFREY

Although it would be right if the people found out...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Found out *what*? How *some professor*, whom nobody knows today, passionately and enthusiastically wrote reports about his assistant, using the pseudonym *Mephisto*... And who do you think you'll hurt with that? Me? Oh, I'll *shit* my pants, I'm so afraid... Oops, pardon me, I promised not to talk in such a manner in your presence...

GODFREY

People should know! That time has to be reflected upon... The file entitled *totalitarianism, persecution, intimidation*... should remain open, until everybody who is serious about democracy draws a clear line between totalitarianism and democracy in their individual and their group consciousness...

PROFESSOR VASILI

You talk like a nerd. Thank God you haven't remained at our department... It seems to me more and more that I did the right thing when I helped putting you away.

GODFREY

(does not let this bother him) It should be clear to people that our country was no island... The experience with snitches and totalitarianism was a European and a planetary experience! Without knowing about it, without individual names and destinies, without comparison our life is plain hypocrisy. Insisting on a past not reflected upon is a very bad starting-point. That's why I should expose you. Only because of that!

The professor laughs... From the heart and "broadly"...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Ha, ha, ha!! You're not only stupid, you're also naive. Who do you think is going to believe you? You'll go after an old man. A man departing, a man who has been sitting between four walls for a decade, who couldn't care less about the world and the world couldn't care less about him. You're going to become a *torturer of old men*. People will turn away from you. You'll disgust them. Nobody will stop to think about your suffering: what torture you went through, how it hurt when they broke your nose and who sexually *harassed* you during those six months in prison... But everybody will ask themselves about *my* suffering... About the suffering of some old man who means no harm to anybody, who like a poor vegetable awaits his well-deserved end. And besides: where does the file mention my name, where does it say that I was really *Mephisto*?

GODFREY

Your handwriting...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Shit, don't be absurd!

GODFREY

And your confession.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I also killed Robert Kennedy, and so what!

GODFREY

Cynicism won't get you anywhere.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I don't need any help. I'm only waiting... You know *what I'm waiting for?* Death. Yes, death, to complete the circle.

A moment of silence.

Godfrey sits back in his chair...

Both of them calm down completely...

GODFREY

(after a while) But I'm still glad I came and saw you...

PROFESSOR VASILI

So am I.

GODFREY

Although... I still don't understand...

PROFESSOR VASILI

We're not in this world to understand, we're here to wonder... Who said that again? I don't know. I must have made it up this very moment.

GODFREY

If we aren't able to discuss the past, we're not going to be able to live in the future.

PROFESSOR VASILI

And you've made that one up!

Godfrey smiles bitterly.

GODFREY

Yes. At this very moment.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Well, you see, we do agree on something. Interesting stories are the only thing that counts. Stories that we live a bit and make up a bit. Nothing else.

Godfrey stands up, puts on his coat...

GODFREY

Before I go I'd like to...

Professor waves him off and closes his eyes...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Let me be... I'm tired.

GODFREY

There is just one more thing I'd like to know... Then I'll disappear from your life and you'll never see me again.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(smiles bitterly) You won't even come to my funeral? That's not nice.

GODFREY

Why? Why did you do it?

PROFESSOR VASILI

You don't know?

GODFREY

You weren't their man, you always opposed them, your lectures, your analyses were completely different than the time we lived in then. That's why we loved you... *Why*, then...? Were you blackmailed? Did you get a raise for it? A better position? *Why??*

PROFESSOR VASILI

I've told you already.

GODFREY

You think that about *heroic freedom, tearing down the walls! How you wanted me to be a dissident and a rebel...* Professor, I'm not one of your naive students anymore. And I've stopped believing in such literary explanations a long time ago. In real life the reasons *why somebody does something* are always very prosaic... So, well then, professor, I want to know the simple and human truth: *why have you snitched on me?*

PROFESSOR VASILI

You'll be disappointed.

GODFREY

Even more than I already am?

PROFESSOR VASILI

All right, I'll tell you... *(the professor sighs)* It's simple... I was jealous.

GODFREY

Jealous?

PROFESSOR VASILI

I told you you'd be disappointed.

GODFREY

I don't understand.

PROFESSOR VASILI

You were gifted. You didn't have the knowledge, but you had that *sensitiveness* that I didn't have. I was in my mature age and I did nothing apart from writing a couple of treatises, which I charmed pimply girl students with. I knew that I'd never write *Crime and Punishment*, nor *The Three Sisters*, and, even less likely, *In Search of Lost Time*... But you had it all. Youth, the talent...

GODFREY

You denounced me just because of that... Because of jealousy.

PROFESSOR VASILI

No, not just because of that... I also had deeper, *more intimate reasons*. *A really good snitch is the one who has powerful personal motives*. Ideologies can always change. Men can be bought, they switch sides easily... Only *personal motives* are strong enough and always efficient...

GODFREY

Pathetic.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Human.

GODFREY

You only provoked me because I was young and talented...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Above all I provoked you into doing the things that also interested me. In reality I *myself* wanted to explore the motive of an old man, *who still wants to, but cannot do it anymore*, it seemed topical to me, I *myself* wanted to write about *the literature that was kept secret*... Those were *my topics*, but I never started working on them because I was too afraid...

GODFREY

So you sent me into battle instead.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Yes.

GODFREY

Why have you fought for me then, sent me money later...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Because I knew that it wouldn't help anyway, but it would make excellent camouflage. By *fighting for you like a lion* I only increased the myth of myself as a charming *quixotic* professor...

GODFREY

When you threw me into the street, you gave Nina a job...

Professor Vasili smiles...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Yes! And now, my dear, we came to the bottom of it all! That is my *most intimate reason!* That is the real answer to your *why!*

Professor Vasili stands up, upset...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(angrily) Nina has always been mine! I was the first to notice her! I invited her to the seminar for me, and she got involved with you! With a pimply provincial assistant! You wouldn't stay away, although she didn't like you, she loved me, but you just kept pushing and pushing... I wanted her besides me...

GODFREY

(surprised) I didn't know. You've never hinted at this...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Yes, you know now. She was meant for me, but you kept stepping on her heels! The poor girl was confused, torn in two... I had to help her. I wanted to get rid of you.

GODFREY

And so you talked me into delving into forbidden research... You knew how the things would unravel...

PROFESSOR VASILI

We fired you and the post of the assistant became available...

GODFREY

For Nina.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(screams) For *my* Nina!

GODFREY

And in the end you also lost her.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(contented) Ha! I see she hasn't told you everything.

*Nina appears from the background. She stands between professor Vasili and Godfrey...
Professor Vasili strolls around the room dynamically...*

PROFESSOR VASILI

(to Nina) Call off the Tuesday seminar. We'll go to the seaside. I've prepared a list of books that we'll take with us. Go and pick them up at the library. I've already phoned them. Mary, the librarian, has prepared them. They're waiting for you on the counter. You just have to pick them up.

NINA

(to professor Vasili) I'm pregnant.

PROFESSOR VASILI

(overhears it) Wait for me at the usual spot. I only have to pop by the dean's office... I'll pick you up in half an hour...

NINA

You've heard me.

Professor Vasili stops. A moment of silence.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Who with?

Nina turns away... She sobs. Just for a moment.

NINA

Bastard.

PROFESSOR VASILI

I have the right to ask... Everybody knows that our former assistant has been creeping around you...

NINA

You know very well that I haven't seen him since we...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(interrupts her with irony) That's not nice, not visiting him. The poor sod is going through difficult times, he is looking at a trial, maybe even prison...

GODFREY

(to professor Vasili) That was at the time when we separated... I felt she had somebody else, that she fell in love...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(to Nina) And what will you do?

NINA

I don't know...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Fine... Wait for me on the corner, and don't be late... I'm not allowed to stop at that crossing... Be there and just jump into the car... Be careful none of the students see you...

NINA

(resolutely) I'm not going with you.

PROFESSOR VASILI

What's that supposed to mean?

NINA

I'm not going with you... Not today, nor tomorrow...

Professor Vasili steps towards her...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Don't be stupid! I didn't mean it like this...

Nina pulls back from him.

NINA

Never again.

PROFESSOR VASILI

Wait... We'll take the time to think at the seaside... I'll read you a chapter from *Antudiring*... Everything will become clear to us... I'm fifty-five years old... I'll get a divorce...

NINA

(*interrupts him*) I was cleaning your table...

PROFESSOR VASILI

And?

NINA

I found your notes...

GODFREY

(*to Vasili*) She found the notes you've been sending...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(*to Godfrey*) She saw through me. Nothing helped. She was an intelligent girl. One of the few.

(*to Nina*) Don't be crazy! Those are notes... I'm writing something... A draft of a novel...

NINA

(*reads*) *The Report on the Discussion*... Who are these reports for? Who? Who are you sending *the reports* on the discussions with your *Assistant* to?

PROFESSOR VASILI

(*trying to be as convincing as possible*) Fiction! It's fiction, all of it! Drafts of chapters! I felt that our *Assistant's* story was worthy of literary treatment, so I wrote down a couple of fictional scenes...

NINA

And these *fictional* scenes of yours are precisely what they are accusing him of in the indictment. Because of your *drafts of chapters* he is going to be convicted...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(*ironically*) That's just another proof of what vision literature is capable of!

Nina retreats from Vasili into the background...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(*Godfrey*) Nothing helped. I couldn't persuade her... Women's intuition...

GODFREY

That's when she came back to me.

PROFESSOR VASILI

You were convicted, you got married... She dumped me without saying goodbye and sided with you... That's how it goes. Literature attempts to change things, life changes them!

GODFREY

Some of them, at least.

The professor's eyes gleam wickedly... He steps up to Godfrey... He whispers into his ear like "Mephisto"...

PROFESSOR VASILI

But... Nevertheless, I have my satisfaction...

GODFREY

(confused) What...?

PROFESSOR VASILI

(whispers) She chose you... But she hasn't told you... Not until today, even, has she betrayed the *traitor*. *(malevolently)* Well, what do you think about *that*? You have two children with her, you've been with her twenty-five years and she hasn't told you... She hasn't told you who ratted out on you at all.

Godfrey pulls away from the professor's gaze for a moment, confused...

PROFESSOR VASILI

(whispers) And now I have one more question... The last one... If you permit me? *(a moment of silence)* Who is *more of a traitor*? The one who betrays or the one who keeps the betrayal secret? Who is guiltier, the one who does the evil deed or the one who refuses to see it?

A moment of silence. Then Godfrey completely calmly steps up to professor Vasili and slaps his face... The professor grasps his cheek and smiles...

PROFESSOR VASILI

Why did you do this? Because I snitched on you? Or perhaps because I *helped* you father your firstborn?

Godfrey retreats to the wall and covers his face with his hands...

Mrs. Vera enters... She carries two cups of coffee...

MRS. VERA

A cup of coffee! Here you go!

PROFESSOR VASILI

(snaps)

Leave us alone!... We don't want it now!

MRS. VERA

Oh! I see that you made the old pest talk! I'm really glad of that! Really! Now I know, at least, that he hears me, that he understands me! He won't be able to fake it anymore!

Mrs. Vera steps to professor Vasili and offers him a cup of coffee...

MRS. VERA

Right, Vasili?

Profesor Vasili grumbles unintelligibly, sits back in his chair and covers his knees like a really old man...

MRS. VERA

So, you don't want coffee? Ah, I know, it's *tea* you gentlemen want. But I couldn't get it. They only have fruit tea in the store across the road, and, who knows what, supposedly *ice* tea, and then I ran down to the market, but it closed just in front of my nose. I ran from store to store like a headless chicken... Nothing! In the end I bought coffee.

She offers the other cup to Godfrey...

MRS. VERA

A cup of coffee will do you good, you'll see!

GODFREY

(calmly) No, thank you. I'm leaving.

MRS. VERA

How come?

GODFREY

The professor and I have told each other everything.

Mrs. Vera sees the pieces of paper from the file, scattered on the floor... She puts the cups away...

MRS. VERA

I see you've been working. Just like old times. The study was always a complete mess...

Mrs. Vera leans down and picks up a piece of paper...

MRS. VERA

What is this, then...? A red pencil... Vasili, your handwriting...?

GODFREY

I was cleaning up the attic at home, and I figured that professor would be glad to be able to look at some of his old notes...

MRS. VERA

Of course he's glad... You're glad, Vasili, aren't you?

Professor Vasili just grimaces and turns away...

MRS. VERA

I'll put them in order. Like old times.

Mrs. Vera has a closer look at the papers...

MRS. VERA

Darn it, I don't have my glasses... *(to Godfrey)* Is it something interesting, maybe an old, lost treatise?

GODFREY

I don't think it's anything important. Fiction. A draft of a novel, or perhaps of a play... Who would know?

MRS. VERA

Really?

GODFREY

The professor was also unable to remember.

MRS. VERA

Ah, that's all right. I'll type it up anyway. Vasili and I have nothing else to do anyway.

Mrs. Vera steps up to Godfrey, in a confidential manner...

MRS. VERA

(whispers) But did he talk to you? I mean, were you able to discuss anything reasonable with him?

GODFREY

Oh, yes, we had a really nice talk. We pondered about the past.

MRS. VERA

Of course, what else!

GODFREY

We haven't agreed on everything.

MRS. VERA

He was stubborn, was he, the old pest?

Godfrey speaks in such a way that in reality he is talking to the professor through Vera... The professor stares at the wall...

GODFREY

The professor is convinced that nothing but *personal motives* are the source of all human actions.

MRS. VERA

Ah, I never understood what you were talking about...

GODFREY

And I think that human actions depend on the society, on the time one lives in. Those were grey times, and people had to face terrible moral dilemmas...

MRS. VERA

Grey? How do you mean that?

GODFREY

I have two children...

MRS. VERA

Really?! Congratulations!

GODFREY

They're both adults already. If they're lucky they'll never have to live in a way that we lived. I hope that they will never have to decide in any other way than in

accordance with their own conscience... That they will never have to face the decisions we had to face in that grey time.

MRS. VERA

Bravo. Nicely put. Sounds like a lecture... Is that your analysis of some contemporary novel?

GODFREY

I'm leaving, ma'am.

MRS. VERA

Already? Stay a bit longer! I haven't even brought the cookies... Wait! I have them in the kitchen!!

GODFREY

Ma'am...

Mrs. Vera rushes out...

MRS. VERA

I'll bring them immediately... I haven't baked them myself, but I *bought them myself*... Wait, wait...

Mrs. Vera goes out of the room...

Godfrey and Vasili are alone...

GODFREY

Professor... We'll never see each other again...

The professor doesn't answer, he just shuts his eyes stubbornly...

GODFREY

I'll leave Mephisto's Report here. In fact it's not worth reading... Such reports only remind us that the best years of our lives are gone, and that we lost them among people, who have always belonged only to the past...

Godfrey turns and leaves... He stops in the back of the room...

GODFREY

But if you browse through it nevertheless, like you browse through an album of photographs that has been lost and found again, you'll also find a *report on Mephisto* somewhere in the end... A report on *the writer of the report*...

The professor slowly opens his eyes.

Somebody also *snitched* on *Mephisto*. Somebody very carefully, to the greatest detail, described his life... So that *Mephisto's* report is actually just an introduction to some other report, into the *Report on Mephisto*, assembled carefully for years and years by a snitch with a secret name of **Ksantipa**...

A moment of silence.

Godfrey smiles...

GODFREY

Actually this was all I came here to tell you.

Godfrey leaves quickly.

The professor is left alone.

Silence.

Mrs. Vera with a plate full of cookies enters the room.

MRS. VERA

Cookies! I hope they're good... This is all they had. It says on the box that they're best before as late as sometimes next year...

Mrs. Vera looks around the room...

MRS. VERA

Well, where is he? Has he left already? And without saying goodbye, too...

Mrs. Vera steps up to the professor...

MRS. VERA

Vasili, why did you let him?! And I only went to get cookies... Why didn't you stop him? He could tell us so many interesting things... I didn't know he had two children... Vasili!

Vasili stares into emptiness speechlessly with his lips pressed together and slowly begins to rock, like a lost and demented old man...

Mrs. Vera sits on the edge of a chair and stares in front of her desperately...

MRS. VERA

Well! Now we're alone again. Alone, like two old abandoned dogs...

Professor stares into emptiness, rocking...

PROFESSOR VASILI
(*quietly*) Shit. Shit. Shit.

THE END