

Viliam Klimacek

COMMUNISM

A normalization tragedy.

Written for the Arena Theatre.

*Dedicated to Juraj Kukura. I wrote this play based
on his story.*

V.K.

Characters:

HE Michal, former executive at Czechoslovak Film Studios, now works in the archives
SHE Alena, his wife, psychiatrist and daughter of a dissident writer
SON Viktor, their only child, a first-year medical student
NEIGHBOUR Building superintendent
MAN Officer in the State Security apparatus

The play takes place in the year 1984 in a satellite country of the Soviet bloc called Czechoslovakia.

Scene 1: AT HOME

The living room of a socialist cement-block apartment building. Doors to the balcony. From the balcony a ladder leads to the roof of the building. The woman is preparing a small celebration.

SON: *(enters)* Garlic canapés! *(takes one)* Who's coming?
SHE: We'll let ourselves be surprised. Can't you wait?
SON: I want to stink now.
SHE: Does it bother you? Then don't eat them.
SON: *(with his mouth full)* Where are we celebrating?
SHE: Here.
SON: *(points to the roof)* Why not at the airport?
SHE: Call your father.
SON: *(shouts from the balcony to the roof)* Mishko!
SHE: How's school?
SON: Why can't we go to the airport?
SHE: It's going to snow.

SON: A little snow won't hurt.

SHE: We'll start here and then....maybe...we'll have a cigarette on the roof.

SON: Later. Always later. Can Michal?

SHE: Don't call your father Michal.

SON: He is Michal. Misho. Mike. Miguel. No? You're the ones who taught me to question authority.

SHE: We didn't mean it like that.

SON: (*pointing to the roof*) What is he doing up there when his beloved family is down here?

SHE: How's school?

SON: You're changing the subject.

SHE: Just a minute. Now you're changing the subject. What's new at school?

SON: Amalka broke her arm. Life in the morgue stopped.

SHE: Who is Amalka?

SON: The woman who washes the cadavers. 130 kilos, shoulders this wide and a heart even bigger. Professors and deans are leaving, Amalka stays.

SHE: When I was studying in Prague, there was a guy who washed them.

SON: Amalka's as strong as an ox.

SHE: Did they cancel the lab session?

SON: No, but there were twenty of us for one corpse. Like vultures. They made me do the vagus nerve.

SHE: And?

SON: I managed to slice through it.

SHE: Slice through it?

SON: I didn't make my qualifying grades for the anatomy exam.

SHE: Qualifying grades?

SON: Yeah. If Amalka had been there, I would have done it. She's my good luck charm.

SHE: They'll fail you.

SON: Because of the qualifying? I'm going back tomorrow.

SHE: (*in hysteria*) Don't you see what they've done to your father?! Every reason is a good reason when they want to destroy you!

SON: Nobody wants to destroy me. Don't worry.

SHE: I'm already stressed out about everything. (*yelling up to the roof*) Michal! You'll catch cold up there!

SON: (*determined to say something*) Mom?

SHE: Did you cut through anything else that I should know about?

SON: Forget about it.

SHE: Is she pregnant?

SON: Jesus Mom no!

SHE: Jesusmom you're going to drive me crazy one of these days! Jesusmom doesn't know anything about you! Only that you have a girlfriend who Jesusmom hasn't even seen

yet! Oh yeah! I do know one thing about my own son who so loves to confide in me!
He severed the vagus nerve!

SON: Janka is in one piece.

SHE: One piece. Wonderful expression. He cut through and she's in one piece. Just keep it up.
I don't know where you heard that. Your father never talks that way. These days he says nothing at all. Excellent, guys, you make me happy. One of you is hiding something and the other is always up on the roof! *(yelling from the balcony)* Michal! Please! *(to her son)* Lovely birthday. Is it salty enough? *(the son takes a canapé and nods)* Is there too much garlic? *(the son shakes his head)* Should I grate some more cheese? *(the son nods)* What a lovely conversation we've been having. You've done something haven't you? *(mother and son stare at each other for a long while, neither one wants to start)*

HE: *(coming down the ladder from the roof and singing)* Happy Birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear Alenka, Happy Birthday to you! *(hands her a present)* All the best.

SHE: *(she unwraps the package and takes out an exotic scarf)* Michal, it's beautiful. It goes perfectly with my purse.

SON: *(hands his mother a bouquet of flowers)* Happy Birthday, Mom. Here's to not bothering your sons and husbands with unnecessary questions.

HE: You have more than one husband and son?

SHE: The two of you are enough. *(hands her son the bouquet)* Put those in a vase. *(to her husband)* I'm happy you've come down to join us, oh Holy Zeus!

HE: *(to his son)* What have you done to your mother?

SON: Nothing. Why?

HE: Whenever she starts talking about ancient history, there's something going on.

SHE: Nothing's going on. *(looks around)* Did you knit that up there?

HE: Zeus knows how to do everything. Knit and crochet.

SHE: You can't even mend a sock.

SON: In 2000, socks will be made of paper. When you get a hole, you'll just rip them up.

HE: Where do you get these pearls of wisdom?

SON: I read it in *World of Socialism*.

HE: They can't even make enough toilet paper, there definitely won't be paper socks. *(puts the scarf around his wife's neck)* I hid it up there. You find everything that's hidden in the apartment. *(to the son)* This is one of the reasons why one can't lie to Mama.

SHE: Can't? I thought we shouldn't.

HE: First of all, she figures everything out and you can't hide anything from her...and second, we love her and therefore we don't lie to her.

SHE: Maybe we'd just rather lie about not lying.

SON: Because we love her.

SHE: *(she puts the scarf around her neck, then folds it up, then puts it on again)* From Tuzex?

HE: From Peru.

SHE: You're lying.

HE: From Vienna.

SHE: From Vienna or Peru?

HE: Of course it's from Peru. From Vienna, from Mexikoplatz.

SHE: How did you get it?

HE: That's one of those unnecessary questions we were talking about. Do you like it?

SHE: But you can't even go to the newsstand without them following you.

HE: Are you happy or not?

SHE: I am.

HE: *(theatrically, like a travelling magician)* But that's not all, Ladies and Gentlemen! And now, the ultimate thrill, the piece de resistance! *(takes out a large gift box)*

SHE: *(She doesn't notice the box, takes off the scarf)* I asked you not to take any risks.

HE: The Director's driver brought it.

SHE: The one who used to drive you?

HE: *(nods)* One of the few who still says hello.

SHE: Must be an agent. Your friends stopped saying hello long ago.

HE: We got close when they stuck me in the archives. Apparently he's impressed with how far I've fallen. Maybe he has a class instinct that one should feel empathy for one's vanquished enemies. After all, they're still alive only thanks to his mercy. He's very friendly with me. *(He hands his wife the big gift box he was holding)*. This is for you.

SHE: *(unwrapping the box, there is washing powder inside)* Persil plus! *(she's excited and kisses her husband)*

HE: When I think of it, the only ones lower than me on the ladder are the guy at reception and the heating technician. They're really nice to me too. The other day they offered me head cheese.

SHE: You hate head cheese.

HE: I only ate the onion and vinegar. They thought it was great.

SON: I'd like to have your guts.

HE: It could be worse, I could be operating a digger.

SON: Careful! They would never give a digger to a class enemy. A digger is a weapon. Ever since that guy tried to ram through the ramp at the Austrian border.

HE: Supposedly, in this country, workers lead. Isn't it interesting that they try to use the machines they themselves manufacture to escape?

SHE: *(becomes frightened and turns on the water in the kitchen sink, and whispers)* Can't you talk about something else?!

SON: *(lowering his voice)* You know how one guy escaped from the Czech lands?

SHE: No. And I don't want to know.

HE: How?

SHE: I'm going to put a load of laundry in. (*the son takes off his sweater and hands it to his mother, she takes a whiff*) You stink. (*she leaves, washing powder in hand*)

SON: He took a week's vacation and every morning painted one of the milestones by the road white. Gradually, he painted his way to the border, got to know the guards, painted for a couple of days at the border crossing, made his way to the other side of the ramp and suddenly boom! He was running through West Germany.

SHE: (*returns and turns off the water*) So is it my birthday or not?

HE: It is. (*he kisses her*) I'm still so happy with you. I love you.

SHE: I love you too.

SON: A kiss? A contraction of the mouth muscles with an exchange of bacteria and saliva.

HE: What?

SON: You know that sex was invented by cheap men, so they wouldn't have to buy gifts for women?

HE: Is every doctor such a barrel of laughs?

SHE: Only the ones who didn't make their qualifying grades.

HE: Their qualifying grades?

SHE: Their grades.

HE: Viktor, is this true?

SON: Tomorrow I have a make-up dissection lab.

HE: You don't have your qualifying grades? You're risking being kicked out?!

SON: Jesus, they're not going to kick me out.

HE: What do I always tell you?

SON: Jesus. (*bored*) Please don't start philosophizing, you'll end up washing toilets.

HE: What else do I always tell you?

SON: Jesus. Don't study architecture, you'll end up designing cement block apartments.

HE: And stop saying Jesus! And what else?

SON: And definitely no arts school, do you want to end up pouring bronze stars?!

SHE: Did you practice this little show just for me?

HE: And what else?!

SON: (*remembering*) Jesus. Archaeology? Oh yeah, without Jesus. (*remembering with a bored expression*) Forget about archaeology, you'll have to write brochures about the worker's choir.

HE: (*yelling his manifesto*) Stay with medicine, it is an exact science that can't be spoiled by politics, because a cancer cell doesn't care whether you're a Marxist or an existentialist! I'm going to take out the garbage.

SON: I'll go.

SHE: Leave your father be, at least he'll calm down. (*Michal leaves with the garbage pail*) So what's going on? What have you done this time? Should I be worried?

SON: Yesterday, you know, when I was out...

SHE: All I know is that you were out. I don't know anything else about you. For a couple of years now I have had no idea how my child is, who he loves and what he wishes for!

SON: Janka. Malinovskeho street, number 22.

SHE: Janka? Good. Perhaps I am one of those ordinary, sentimental mothers who doesn't just take you off like a raincoat because the sun has come out. I'm interested in you at night, during the day, all the time. But I feel silly asking when I know you're not going to answer me anyway. You used to be totally different.

SON: What do you mean different?

SHE: I could read you. At least a little. Now I can't even make out one word.

SON: We were in the wine bar, with a group of friends. We were talking about who's reading what...I started talking about the books, you know, that you and Dad smuggled in from Yugoslavia...inside the empty spare tire...

SHE: You talk about that in the pub?! You're crazy!

SON: It's not a pub, it's a restaurant, they serve bull's testicles, fried or with eggs...(Alena is looking at him angrily) OK! At the table, I was saying....

SHE: I was bragging!

SON: I was talking at the table....

SHE: I was showing off in front of the girls!

SON: Do you want to hear it or not?! (*the mother nods*) So, I was talking at the table....showing off for the girls...how I just happen to be reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by Orwell.

SHE: I'm going to kill you. In front of strangers..

SON: They're my classmates.

SHE: You've known them for nine months! You don't know them from Adam! You're definitely the only one for miles whose father is being persecuted and who is actually at university!

SON: (*quietly*) That's the point.

SHE: What's the point?!

SON: Everyone thinks I'm an informant rat. That they're letting me study so I can report on my classmates! I had to show them the book, so that...get it?!

SHE: You, a rat?! They said that?

HE: Not directly. But they think it.

SHE: Idiots! At the medical faculty!

SON: Kids who have a father like mine are lucky if they graduate from vocational school.

SHE: Should we have made it easier for the communists?! Should we have protested that they let you go to university?!

SON: It's still strange that they accepted me at the medical school.

SHE: No, it's not strange! You had straight A's! You were a good student! And you won the Pushkin Memorial Prize! Was your girlfriend at the pub?

SON: Janka? Yeah.

SHE: They moved me to the worst part of town. Because of my father. When I matriculated, his books were in every library. When I graduated, they took them to the dump and shredded them. I know what it means to suffer because of one's parents. Do you have a picture of her?

SON: *(shaking his head)* Pretty, nice. Attractive.

SHE: Well, of course she's pretty, nice, attractive. Blonde?

SON: A little bit of a redhead.

SHE: I always wanted to have hair that was a little bit red.... Maybe I'm naive, but I'm telling you, my only crime is having the wrong father - sorry Daddy - and it should affect only me and it should stop with me and not overflow onto my children. When they suddenly accepted you, should we have refused? "Thanks" We don't want our son to be a doctor. He would rather pave sidewalks! Is she natural or does she colour her hair?

SON: Natural.

SHE: Next time no showing off at the pub. Not even in front of Janka. And bring her over.

SON: Here? But...

SHE: You were very lucky. *(the doorbell rings)* I'll get it. *(she opens the door, the neighbour enters)*

NEIGHBOUR: Hello...Am I interrupting?

SHE: Fred, come in.

NEIGHBOUR: I can't get onto the roof. The lock is jammed. Someone's always stuffing matches into it. Fortunately, your husband...*(pointing to the ladder)*...There's a live broadcast from Moscow and I can't see anything. Only snow on the screen.

SON: Maybe it's snowing in Moscow.

NEIGHBOUR: You're not watching?

SHE: Our outlet isn't working. It buzzes.

NEIGHBOUR: What do you mean it buzzes?

SHE: It crackles. It was shooting sparks too.

NEIGHBOUR: I'll fix the antenna and have a look at it.

SHE: *(handing him a jar of instant coffee)* For you. From Yugoslavia.

NEIGHBOUR: But you didn't have to do that. Nescafe! My wife will go crazy.

SHE: *(to the son)* Hold the ladder for Fred.

NEIGHBOUR: *(climbs up the ladder onto the roof, stops)* Do you know this one? *(she quickly turns on the tap)* They ask Radio Yerevan: is it true that in Leningrad they have a huge amount of meat of all kinds? Yes, it's true, it's a travelling exhibit.... *(he laughs and continues up the ladder onto the roof)*

SON: *(when the neighbour is gone)* Mom... in that restaurant... I was telling my classmates that I'm reading granddad's manuscript, the one the secret police agents are looking for all over town and that it's awesome, that there's so much stuff in there that they definitely have something to worry about. Then I started talking about Orwell...and a drunk guy at the next table stood up, he was dead drunk the whole time and then suddenly he was sober...he showed me his ID...I'll be called in for questioning.

SHE: What have you done... *(she starts to hit him in the chest, then she hugs him)* You'll kill us! And yourself!

HE: *(enters with the garbage can, in an excellent mood)* Hey little pigs, open up, it's me, your Mama!

SHE: *(to the son)* Not a word to your father!

HE: Taking out the garbage is an antidepressant. You should prescribe it.

SHE: My patients would have to take out all the garbage in Bratislava. Even Hercules couldn't handle that much trash.

HE: Hercules? *(to the son)* What did you do to Mom?

SHE: Everything's fine. *(she goes to empty the garbage – it's full)* Michal?

SON: *(laughing)* Dad! You forgot to take the actual garbage out!

SHE: OK, guys, it's my birthday. *(to the son)* You open the wine. *(to the husband)* You put on some music.

HE: *(takes a vinyl album off the shelf, to the son)* You can't put them back in the jackets? *(he puts on an album by Vanilla Fudge)* Who wants to hear the story of this album?

SON: *(bored)* Jesus... *(opens the bottle and pours a glass of wine for everyone)*

SHE: *(toasting)* Chin-chin! Don't argue with your father.

HE: *(looking at the album cover)* Vanilla Fudge. When the *Shop on Main Street* got an Oscar, we went to the U.S. to negotiate distribution. Of course I wasn't at the Oscars, but they didn't even let Kroner go or the other actors either, not because they didn't want to go, but for political reasons. They only let us go there later. For one artist there were five employees of Filmexport and Czechoslovak Film and more agents than there are extras in an American film. We walked down the street.

SON: What does that have to do with the album?

HE: Learn how to listen. There were five of us. And none of us was ashamed to be from Czechoslovakia. Not then. We were classy then, first prize at the Brussels World's Fair, up there with the best of Western Europe. Because out there people don't remember you by how many people your government has sent to the gallows or by how many children they've shot at the border, they remember you because of a movie that won an Oscar because that film is a thousand times more valuable than Emil Zatopek's sweaty shorts – and I like Zatopek! *(son sarcastically applauds)* In short, we walked down the street in L.A.... *(pours himself some more wine)* Aw, fuck it.

SHE: *(kissing him)* What's else did they say?

HE: I'm not going to make a fool of myself in front of him!

SON: Jesus sorry.

SHE: Can't you see he envies you? The farthest he's ever been is Lake Balaton.

SON: *(to Mom)* In Sekesfehervar. *(to Dad)* There were five of you. The sun was setting over L.A. The mulatto women in striped dresses pushed up against you in the trams. Their nipples stood out like nails.

HE: Your talents are wasted on medicine.

SHE: Viktor!

SON: There are trams in Los Angeles, aren't there?

HE: There were then.

SON: See?! And they go up and down the hills?

HE: Yes, but that's in San Francisco.

SON: Sorry, I wasn't in the delegation. *(the wife kisses her husband)*

HE: *(admiringly)* Nipples like nails.... *(he calms down)* A black guy was cooking on a metal sheet. It smelled so sweet. It was so colourful. Something between plasticine and marzipan he was mixing it and throwing it into the air and singing and then he gave everyone a taste and – yum! It was amazing! Good, sweet! It's called "fudge". That's when I bought this album. The group is called *Vanilla fudge*. *(the music begins to play)*

SON: Vanilla Fudge.

SHE: I guess you never taste it again in America.

HE: *(knocking his knuckle on his forehead)* I have it here. And no one can take it away from me. *(he embraces his wife)* Or you.

SHE: If you don't give me away... *(they begin to dance to the music, the neighbour climbs down from the roof)*

NEIGHBOUR: *(entering from the balcony)* The antenna is so temperamental that we lose the picture if a pigeon so much as lands on it!

HE: What is he doing at my airport?!

SHE: Fred is fixing our electrical outlet. *(to the neighbour)* Will you have a drink with us? It's my birthday.

NEIGHBOUR: Happy Birthday. *(looking at the wine label)* Sauvi... vi... gnon? This must be good wine if I can't even read it. Look, what a label! Why can't we make labels like that? *(to the son)* So they ask Radio Yerevan: can bugs make a socialist revolution? Yes because the blood of workers and farmers runs in their veins.

SHE: We don't tell those kinds of jokes at our house....

NEIGHBOUR: You don't have holders.

SHE: Excuse me?

NEIGHBOUR: You're the only apartment.

SHE: Holders?

NEIGHBOUR: For the flags. The holidays are coming and people will notice. Did you know that last year we were rated the cleanest apartment building?

SON: We don't even take out our garbage, right Dad?

HE: We eat it.

NEIGHBOUR: We're the worst with decorations. At the street committee meeting the comrades said – the cleanest building with the worst decorations? Like a beautiful woman with only one eye.

SHE: Cyclops.

NEIGHBOUR: Exactly, madam. Our building is like the ogre Cyclops. Do you know how visible it is when three windows are missing? Your...three windows? *(he takes some metal holders out of his pocket)* I could mount these...

HE: I'd rather you told us when they're going to connect the telephone.

NEIGHBOUR: That's a problem, the telephone.

HE: As our superintendent, you know that we had one.

NEIGHBOUR: Yes.

HE: And that they disconnected it suddenly.

NEIGHBOUR: I guess you know why.

HE: No one told us why.

NEIGHBOUR: The building's switchboard can't handle the volume?

HE: If you stop and listen for a minute, Fred, you're sure to hear a phone ringing somewhere.
Since they disconnected us, they've connected four new ones in the building. The switchboard can handle them, huh?

SHE: *(pointing at the electrical outlet)* Now it's buzzing.

NEIGHBOUR: *(to the wife)* Which outlet? *(the wife points)*

HE: All around us phones are ringing, our house is the only place where it's not. Listen.

SHE: *(to the neighbour)* It's buzzing.

HE: Shh! *(everyone falls silent, they listen for a moment)*

NEIGHBOUR: *(into the silence)* Grandma asks Husak who invented communism, scientists or communists? The communists, Grandma, said Husak. I knew it! said Grandma. The scientists would have tried it out on animals first!

HE: Fred, what if the little one brought it to school?

SON: *(offended)* Little one?!

NEIGHBOUR: *(to the husband)* Nothing rang.

HE: Yes it did.

SHE: You guys are like little boys. *(to her husband)* I didn't hear anything either.

HE: Everyone hears what they want to hear.

NEIGHBOUR: So Brezhnev is on an airplane and...

HE: OK, nothing rang! I won't make a mountain out of a molehill. It must have been an unusual moment for nothing to ring. Do you know that poem about how all the telephones in the neighbourhood rang at once? *(the neighbour shakes his head)* Do you read poetry? *(the neighbour laughs)* A poem should not be taken apart because the moment you do that it becomes just a dissected cadaver. I'd like to be a literary pathologist for just a moment now.

SHE: Michal, please...

HE: *(speaking into the telephone receiver)* Dear Renowned Author! You have an interesting metaphor in your poem, but you overuse the element of fantasy... All the phones in the neighbourhood can ring at once but not in every apartment! Because, if you are familiar with the Marxist dialectic, you know that there isn't a telephone in every apartment, even if we wanted there to be! In some apartments, my dear Mr. Poet, the telephone never rings because it has been disconnected in order to isolate the residents of that apartment from the world. From their acquaintances and friends. And they've confiscated their driver's licences because they ran a yellow light. And after that they took their passports as soon as they returned from Yugoslavia, where

they were mistakenly allowed to go, albeit without their son, because someone has to stay home as a hostage so they couldn't cross an ocean full of sharks and leave their beautiful home, which is just a pair of hands into which you can weep.¹

SHE: Are you drunk, Michal?!

HE: *(yelling into the receiver)* And rant and curse and hang yourself! So keep writing your fucking drivel, you asshole, because our phone, as opposed to the phones of others, never rings!

SHE: *(quietly)* Michal. Please. *(he hangs up the phone and smiles at everyone)*

NEIGHBOUR: You won't get your phone connected that way. *(to the wife)* I'll come and install a new outlet, OK?

SHE: You are sweet, Fred. *(neighbour leaves)*

SON: I'm going to take out the garbage. *(yelling)* Dammit, I have problems too, I have my own problems, OK?! And don't call me 'little one' in front of other people! *(leaves with the garbage can)*

HE: Is he losing it?

SHE: Are you surprised? He's young and sensitive.

HE: I'm old and I'm sensitive too. And I don't yell.

SHE: You should've heard yourself a minute ago! *(she imitates him)* So keep writing your....! You have to insult everybody who comes over! I could've had the outlet repaired already!

HE: The real communists tell the worst jokes about communists! Sorry. I'm ruining your party. *(they hug)*

SHE: Nobody comes over anymore. I can't take it any longer, Michal...*(she breaks into tears)* My father is totally upset too.

HE: We have to go see him.

SHE: I'll go alone. If you come, the two of you will get into another argument.

HE: I should go.

SHE: You'll lose your job in the archives too.

HE: He'll think I'm a coward. That I'm afraid to visit him.

SHE: He knows you don't like him.

HE: What about those memoirs of his?

SHE: He has them hidden everywhere. Twenty pages at one friend's house, another thirty somewhere else. They inspect his house all the time.

HE: Does he have something here too?

SHE: It's not complete. It's only the middle of the manuscript.

HE: Can I look at it?

SHE: He'd be furious. You know how he gets.

1

From the poem entitled *Home Is The Hands On Which You Can Weep* by Miroslav Valek, a highly renowned Slovak poet whose greatest tragedy was that he was Slovak Minister of Culture from the 1970s until the fall of communism in 1989.

HE: You won't tell him will you? (*quoting his father-in-law*) Books should be read in their entirety, Michalko. Even the bad ones. You can learn how not to do it...Why does he always call me Michalko? (*bowing to her*) May I have this dance? (*they dance, the son enters with the garbage can*)

SHE: Did it help? (*son shakes his head*) Apparently it only acts as an anti-depressant for your father. (*son listens to the Vanilla Fudge LP*)

SON: Fudge is good. Old, but good.

HE: That's true.

SON: Pretty good.

HE: The mulattas too.

SON: What?

HE: Like nails.

SON: Oh yeah.

HE: A good metaphor. Better than all the telephones in the neighbourhood ringing at once.

SON: Nipples.

HE: What?

SON: Those were some nipples. Like nails.

SHE: Am I interrupting?!

HE +SON: They're good.

SHE: As a society's level of civilization decreases, it loses its linguistic eloquence as well.

HE: Seriously, Comrade Psychiatrist?

SHE: Yes, Comrade Storage Worker. The more primitively people express themselves, the lower the level of emotional life in the society.

SON: Who wrote that?

SHE: I did.

SON: I mean for real.

SHE: Are you trying to piss me off?

HE: No. It was really good.

SHE: Can't I have a little moment of brilliance sometimes too?

HE: My dear, you have only grand thoughts. Constantly.

SHE: You're awful. (*pause, they listen to the music*) My father.

SON: What?

SHE: We say "excuse me"!

SON: Excuse me?

SHE: My – father – wrote – it.

SON: He's good.

HE: But banned.

SON: He is. And "nipples like nails", I believe, was Hrabal.

HE: Hrabal is good.

SHE: But banned.

SON: He is. And so is *Vanilla Fudge*.

HE: Banned? (*shrugging his shoulders, doesn't know*)

SHE: Good. (*the father and son look at her in surprise*)

HE: And Mama too?

SON: Good.

HE: The best.

SHE: Be this way all year long guys, not just on my birthday. (*father rises and looks at the mail, which the son has brought*)

SON: It's all for you. (*reading a postcard*) Best wishes, much love, the Chichvaks. (*reading another postcard, to the mother*) May I?

SHE: Read on.

SON: (*reading a postcard*) Dear Alenka, may your whole family have a better year this year than last. (*another postcard*) Please accept our warmest congratulations on your birthday and best wishes. Yours, Alice. (*another postcard*) Extra special wishes for an extra special day. May your birthday be special in every single way. (*opens an envelope*) You fu... (*he stops reading, looks at his parents*)

SHE: Keep reading.

SON: Out loud?

HE: Yes, out loud.

SON: I...can't.

HE: Then they've won. Read.

SON: (*hesitantly begins to read*) "You fucking Jewish whore. You went to university on our dime and now you and your traitor father spit on your homeland. We'll flush all his books down the toilet. We'll come for you and you'll hang from the lamppost." With a capital L..."Lamp-post" Even the agents from the USA won't be able to help you. USA is in lower case... "You'll hang from your own windows. Death to the homosexuals from Charter 77".

(*puts the letter back in the envelope, they sit in silence for a moment, then the mother rises in a deliberate way and starts to bring out various delicacies from the refrigerator, as well as fruit compote and chocolate. Then she begins to cut cheese and apples into half moons and when the table is full of food, she doesn't taste anything, but just sits down and tries to calm down. No one eats, everyone just sits*)

SON: (*hugs father and mother*) I'm sorry if I've been rude sometimes. I love you both so much...God, I'm ridiculous.

HE: So, I heard you have a girlfriend. (*to mother*) Does he have a girl? Do you know anything?

SHE: Something.

HE: Show us a picture.

SON: I don't have one.

HE: Come on, don't tell me you don't have a picture of your girlfriend.

SON: She doesn't like having her picture taken.

HE: *(walking, gesticulating, trying to warm up the mood a bit)* Your mother, she put on her contact lenses. They took her picture even when she didn't want it. I had a *Ljubitel'* then...

SON: What's a *Ljubitel'*?

HE: It's a camera, you don't know that? Your mother looked better than a Hollywood movie star in every picture, by which I don't mean to say that she looked better than she does now, because she'd kill me...

SHE: And I will. *(he kisses her)*

HE: *(to the son)* Are you embarrassed to show us your girlfriend?

SON: Jana doesn't like having her picture taken. Don't read anything into it.

SHE: I'm not reading into it.

HE: Look, she doesn't have to be beautiful. The main thing is for you to get along, and for her to be intelligent. Does she cook? *(the doorbell rings, the son opens the door)*

NEIGHBOUR: *(entering)* Madam, do you have a second? Come and choose a colour.

SHE: A colour?

NEIGHBOUR: For the outlet. I have cream and white. Come. *(they leave the apartment, then he pulls out a transistor radio)* My brother-in-law brought it from Munich. It's got full reception, our radios don't...I just got... *(the neighbour turns on the radio and they can hear Michal and the son's conversation being transmitted by the bugging equipment)*

HE: *(voice)* How far have you gone with Jana?

SON: *(voice)* Jesus.

HE: *(voice)* Come on, let's have it.

SON: *(voice)* We're doing fine.

HE: *(voice)* Are you already petting, or have you gone further?

SON: Jeeesus! *(Alena turns off the radio)*

NEIGHBOUR: You should be more careful.

SHE: Thank you. *(she returns to the apartment, turns on the water in the kitchen sink and the record player. It plays Vanilla Fudge very loudly. The father and son don't understand what's going on, so the mother writes on the edge of the newspaper and shows it to them – a subtitle is shown)*

TITLE: THEY'RE LISTENING TO US
(everyone is surprised except Michal, he writes something on the edge of the newspaper, she reads it)

TITLE: WE'VE KNOWN THAT FOR A LONG TIME
(she writes something and he reads it)

TITLE: THE NEIGHBOUR CAN HEAR US ON A WESTERN-TYPE RADIO
(he writes, she reads)

TITLE: THEY'RE RECORDING SOMEWHERE CLOSE, MAYBE IN THE BUILDING
(she writes)

TITLE: THIS IS HORRIBLE
(he writes)

TITLE: THEY KNOW WE KNOW, THEY WANT US TO BE AFRAID
(the son lies down on the sofa and does not participate in the writing – she writes)

TITLE: THEY CAN GO TO HELL
(he writes)

TITLE: WHEN YOU RESIST THEM YOU ARE SO TERRIBLY
(she reads, doesn't understand, he writes on the newspaper)

TITLE: BEAUTIFUL
(she writes back)

TITLE: DO YOU LOVE ME?
(he writes back)

TITLE: VERY,VERY MUCH
(she writes)

TITLE: HOW MUCH
(he writes)

TITLE: LET'S GO TO BED
(she gestures to show that he's crazy and points to the son on sofa, he writes)

TITLE: IN THE BEDROOM
(she writes)

TITLE: OUR CHILD IS HERE
(he writes)

TITLE: 19 YEARS OLD
(she writes)

TITLE: !!!!!!!
(he writes)

TITLE: ? ? ? ? ?
(then he finishes writing)

TITLE: THAT CHILD HAS A GIRLFRIEND
(she writes)

TITLE: YOU'RE CRAZY
(he writes)

TITLE: I WANT TO LICK YOUR PUSSY
(she shakes her head with a stern look, he writes)

TITLE: MEA CULPA MEA CULPA MEA MAXIMA CULPA
(she writes)

TITLE: WHEN
(he writes)

TITLE: TONIGHT UNDER THE OLD SYCAMORE TREE
(she writes)

TITLE: YOU MEAN THE ONE IN OUR BEDROOM?
(he writes)

TITLE: DO YOU KNOW OF A BETTER ONE?

(the doorbell rings, she turns off the music and goes to open the door, she comes right back)

SHE: The police are here.

SON: *(jumping up)* Sorry Dad. I'll go.

SHE: They've come for your father. *(the father puts on his blazer, kisses his wife and silently leaves, she goes to the table and starts to wolf down all the snacks – fruit, chocolate, nuts, cheese...)*

Scene 2: INTERROGATION

The office of an officer of the State Security Secret Police. Funeral music is coming from the television. The investigator is sitting. He looks for a long time in silence at the screen. The audience doesn't see the screen.

MAN: We have to continue working even during such sad moments. More during breaking points than other days. Anti-socialist elements don't stop at anything. Nothing gets in their way. Not even mourning. They are terribly mistaken. *(looking at the television)* Isn't it sad?

HE: Sorry?

MAN: To have less than two years for such a huge task. It's short for a man of his stature. Very short. Death takes the best ones from us because they stand out the most. What do you say?

HE: You're asking me?

MAN: After all, you don't simplify things. You are able to correctly analyse things. Even us. Even though you are sometimes unfair to us. Can't you find the courage to give a dead man at least a little credit for his effort? It has to be clear even to you that Comrade Andropov helped move the Soviet Union into more modern times. He wasn't an ordinary apparatchik. He began cleaning out some of the biggest dirt.

HE: From which end?

MAN: From both. He beat on the dissidents and the regional party secretaries. When they were too corrupt. Can't you give him credit at least for his effort to move the immovable? A small change?

HE: Is this what you wanted to talk to me about?

MAN: You haven't answered the question.

HE: I don't know what immovable things Andropov moved. Unless you consider it a change that a KGB official took over the highest position in one of the world's great powers.

MAN: You worked for a long time in film, didn't you? You were never as visible as the actors and directors, but those who knew how to look saw you. You have a talent for management. And now you are straightening boxes of films. I'm genuinely sorry that you are wasting your talent! *(with a push, he leads Michal to the screen, both watch*

the statue funeral) Children. Such serious faces they have. One's heart just has to be warmed by it. The whole world is watching this. Look at that old man! He has so many medals! Poor old guy. Eyes full of tears. I know when a cameraman is good. I make amateur films. On an 8-millimeter.

HE: I take photos. But you know that.

MAN: We love it when someone tells us what we already know. (*looking at the television*) It's reminiscent of Battleship Potemkin, don't you think? The same kind of urgency. The same slow rise and fall of the army guards' boots. Like steel scissors cutting the grass. Isn't it admirable how the Soviets can use even an act of grieving as a subtle demonstration of strength? It's shocking that while the state funeral of the Secretary of the Communist Party is taking place in Moscow, you and your family are celebrating.

HE: I had no idea whatsoever there was a funeral going on.

MAN: Don't you read the papers?

HE: I knew he had died, but not when they were burying him.

MAN: What were you doing before that?

HE: Before what? Before the funeral? Or before you put me in the archives?

MAN: We're not responsible for everything. We're not an octopus, Comrade Director. We only gather the facts, according to which other state organs function. They put you in the archives. We only wrote your ticket...So, what were you doing before that?

HE: I was responsible for selling films abroad. For subtitling them when they went into distribution. And for a bunch of other things.

MAN: I'm interested in knowing what you were doing before you started spending so much time on the roof. Why do you do it? Don't tell me you're looking for God up there at your "airport".

HE: No, not God.

MAN: What then?

HE: I'm afraid you wouldn't understand.

MAN: I'll try.

HE: I feel good up there.

MAN: Can you be more specific?

HE: I'm convinced that everything positive in people rises, like hot air. And all the crap stay's down by the earth like carbon monoxide. I'm happier up there.

MAN: How does your wife take it? During the last month you've seen each other maybe twenty, thirty minutes a day, otherwise you're always at the airport. Doesn't she feel like you're running away from her?

HE: I'm escaping from the carbon monoxide. I said you wouldn't understand.

MAN: You can't escape from yourself, Comrade Director. And from us...well, you know.

HE: I know.

MAN: Or from the questions that will come one day. Sit down. (*Michal continues to stand, the man shouts*) Sit down! (*Michal hesitantly sits on the chair, the man points to another chair*).

Here! (*Michal sits, the man stands behind him*) Why are you ruining your family's life? Your son is finally attending university. A good school. A miracle, no? A lot of similar children don't even get to solder cables. Why don't you think about your loved ones? I feel sorry for your pretty wife. She's damaging herself because of her selfish father. Writers have always only been interested in their books, rather than real people. And you're not making it any easier for her. Don't you love your family? (*he glances at the screen*) Only a Soviet person can weep like that. You will notice that in the front rows they've put loyal communists who are pretending to cry, but if you look carefully, there are young people standing in the back. A lot of young people. Isn't it admirable that they are crying? And so sincerely?

HE: Sincerely? Like when Stalin died.

MAN: There's always sincere weeping when a great leader dies. Didn't you weep sincerely?

HE: I was a child. I was afraid of what would happen to us. Who would protect us when he died.
I'm not ashamed of that.

MAN: Do you go to the cinema?

HE: There's nothing to see.

MAN: They just happen to be showing a progressive Italian film, *San Babilo. 20 hours*. Have you seen it?

HE: No.

MAN: It's about Italian neo-fascists, quite a critical film. I don't understand how the Italians can be so self-critical...but they do say "you Italian", don't they?

HE: They do say that.

MAN: Have you also said to someone, "you Italian" recently?

HE: I can't remember.

MAN: Try.

HE: I don't know what you're getting at.

MAN: Imagine, Comrade Director, that this anti-fascist film caused a group of vocational school students out in Kosice to attack pedestrians and shout "Heil Hitler!" and "long live heavy metal!"

HE: I haven't been to Kosice.

MAN: During your time as Director it wouldn't have happened.

HE: You think that if we had put "Hi, how's it going?" in the subtitles instead of "Heil Hitler!" those kids wouldn't have gone into the streets?

MAN: It's so good to work with you. You are so happy and you don't give a shit. (*shouting*) What did you smuggle into Yugoslavia?!

HE: You don't know?

MAN: I want to hear it from you!

HE: Myself. My wife. Five thousand in cash.

MAN: You took out a manuscript!

HE: What manuscript?

MAN: Your father-in-law's!

HE: That's a good one.

MAN: What did you bring in from Yugoslavia?!

HE: Groceries. You can get everything in Dubrovnik. My wife bought *Nescafé, Vegeta, Rakija...*

MAN: And books for your father-in-law, which he ordered from you?!

HE: He didn't order anything.

MAN: *(throws a book on the table)* We got it from your son.

HE: He has nothing to do with it. I bought Orwell for myself. Reading *Nineteen Eighty – Four* in 1984 had a certain style about it.

MAN: Style? Your child is giving this shit to students from the medical school at Comenius University to read. Is that stylish? Dissemination of anti-government literature. Don't you know the law? But that's not what we're interested in. The party knows how to be generous. You read. Even if I don't understand what you see in Orwell. I can't get past page 100.

HE: If you're so generous, why haven't you published it yet?

MAN: Why this, why that! Because you intellectuals abuse everything! You absolutely love that empty space between the lines. I suggested to my colleague that we start printing books that have only two lines on each page so people like you can put your own content in between them! Why do you look for a critique of socialism in everything? He's writing about England, which is about to degenerate into a regime like the one he's describing! They already have a police state now! But Orwell's not writing about it. For you Western Europe is the promised land. Open your eyes already. You think they're waiting for you and your anti-communism? There are more devout leftists in the west than here! Devoted but completely and totally naive. You know what supports any ideal the best? A well-oiled bayonette. *(leafing through Orwell)* We're not grown up enough for such books. People here aren't ready for them yet. They're not looking for literature. They're looking for criticism of their way of life. It's not enough that they are well-fed, have shoes to wear and work. That they have somewhere to live. That they live in peace. That we don't have drugs here. That no one lives for free off their hard work. That we have no racial or ethnic intolerance. That statistically we have the lowest number of suicides per capita...Why haven't you visited your father-in-law in so long?

HE: Your men are on the road to his house. They don't let anyone see him. His house is hermetically surrounded. You can't even get there through the woods.

MAN: We would let you in. But the problem is elsewhere. You don't like him. *(looking through his records)* In 1972 you said to your wife: "Your father has such an ego that if it weren't held up by talent, it would crush him immediately".

HE: *(laughing)* That's true.

MAN: What were you doing on June 26, 1983 at two-thirty in the afternoon?

HE: When?

MAN: June 26, 1983 at 14.30.

HE: Are you joking? I can't remember what I was doing an hour ago.

MAN: You were denouncing the Ministry of Culture.

HE: I wouldn't dare do that.

MAN: (*reading from his documents*) "All the telephones in the entire neighbourhood rang at once. Keep writing your fucking garbage, you asshole". What were you doing on June 26, 1983?

HE: What if I refuse to report to you anymore?

MAN: We'll call in your wife and son. We can detain them for 24 hours. 96 hours. Two weeks, ergo 336 hours.

HE: I was on vacation. That day at two-thirty. On vacation one rests, one doesn't pay attention to the time...but you know that...

MAN: I haven't had a vacation in a year and a half. We are talking about you. What did you do?

HE: What can one do in Yugoslavia?

MAN: I don't know.

HE: The sea, children, ice cream, dinner, Rakija... over and over again.

MAN: Italian. Fucking Italian. You said that then.

HE: Perhaps.

MAN: Those Italians, huh?

HE: What about Italians?

MAN: They don't leave us alone do they?

HE: I don't know what you mean.

MAN: Ah, but you know, Comrade Director. You gave them your father-in-law's memoirs and they took them over the border.

HE: This is really not fun anymore. I didn't give anything to anyone! What are you trying to get me into?

MAN: Why is Radio Free Europe suddenly broadcasting excerpts on a regular basis?

HE: How am I supposed to know? I've never read them in my life!

MAN: I don't know, I didn't give anyone anything and I don't know anyone. Why are you making it complicated? This is not a trial, get it? It's a conversation. We are alone in my office. I'm not even taking notes.

HE: I repeat, I don't know anything about any memoirs and I didn't give anyone anything. And I demand that you write that in the records!

MAN: How long have we two known each other?

HE: A long time.

MAN: Eleven years, Comrade Director. Eleven years. I took you over from First Lieutenant Chovanec. We're trying to help you. We did everything we could to keep you in the Director's job. But then at the review committee meeting you go and say that you don't agree with the brotherly help provided by the Soviet armies in 1968 and that it was occupation.

HE: It was.

MAN: (*gently*) Don't fight with me, Comrade Director.

HE: Don't call me 'Director'.

MAN: It's been over for a long time. You could have stayed in your job, but apparently you wanted to go down to the archives and be among the metal boxes.

HE: It's manageable.

MAN: (*looking at the television*) This is how eternity looks. I am an atheist. For me, eternity means something slightly longer than a human life. My life. Your life. You see those comrades at the podium? Even now the one who'll replace Andropov is standing among them. Don't you want to guess who?

HE: No.

MAN: Just for fun. Which one will it be? The one in the sheepskin hat? The military man? Or the one with the mark on his head? It will definitely be one of them. And when that one dies, another one will take over. Like when one of the empty shells in the chamber is replaced with a new one. That's eternity, Comrade Director. Communism is the certainty, that during our lifetime nothing will change. We will be here longer than you. Longer than your children. Than their children. You should try harder. (*he opens a cabinet full of paper records*) All of this is you. In a week it'll be twenty years that you signed the cooperation agreement, so cooperate dammit!

HE: I haven't cooperated for a long, long time.

MAN: (*he starts to project photos on the wall of Alena with an unknown man*) Handsome, huh? (*Michal looks*) The way he's holding her, no?

HE: People touch, by chance.

MAN: (*keeps putting up more and more compromising photos of Michal's wife with the foreigner*) Here. Here. And here. They're just touching by chance.

HE: Photo-montage. Your lab can make thousands of photos like that.

MAN: Your wife is still beautiful.

HE: Yes she is.

MAN: You have good taste.

HE: If you say so....

MAN: Don't be modest. Half the beach turned to look at her.

HE: You can say what you want. My wife loves me and is faithful.

MAN: (*pointing to the man at Alena's side*) Alessandro Raspatti. In addition to being a womanizer, or as you say, a playboy, he's also an editor at the publishing house in Milan that just happens to be publishing all kinds of losers from Czechoslovakia. A coincidence?

HE: There were Serbs, Croats, Hungarians and Italians on that beach. Everyone in bathing suits. Everyone the same. Bathing suits are a very democratic piece of clothing. I didn't notice that man.

MAN: She called him the day before from a phone booth in the hotel. (*reading from the record*) "Hi sweetie. I'm here in 211. Are you coming?"

HE: My wife would never call anyone "sweetie". She doesn't use those kinds of expressions.

MAN: Just because she doesn't call you that?

HE: You tried this on me in 1971.

MAN: I don't know what Major Chovanec tried with you...

HE: Is he a major already?

MAN: You wouldn't believe how one can make a career out of you. Don't ruin it for me.

HE: Somewhere in your archives you have a film of me and my secretary by the Danube. You wanted to blackmail me. We were just feeding the seagulls.

MAN: Let's get back to your wife.

HE: What if we left her out of this?

MAN: *(looking in the records)* "Ciao, dolce!" And so on. We have a record of her telephone call. I won't read it to you – Italian's not my language.

HE: You're more into Russian, huh?

MAN: *(jumping up in fury, throwing the chair over, he wants to hit Michal)* And you're not?! Weren't you in the Communist Party, you whore?! Didn't you have all the benefits? Didn't you throw people out? Didn't you travel the world?! *(Michal covers his head with his arms, waiting for a blow)* I love guys like you, turncoats forever! One minute pro-Russian, the next minute anti-?! You calculating little bastard! *(a long pause, they stand facing each other, after a bit Michal puts his arms down from his head, then the officer smacks him on the ear)*

HE: I refuse to report further. *(the neighbour from the apartment enters, shockingly changed – he's wearing an officer's uniform, the investigator snaps to attention)*

NEIGHBOUR: Let's calm down comrades, come on now *(to the investigator)* At ease. *(pointing to the wall)* Do you know this picture, neighbour?

HE: *(he is surprised, this is the first time he's seen the neighbour looking this way)* Fred...?! *(he laughs, the investigators quietly watch him, Michal becomes serious and apathetically sits down)*

NEIGHBOUR: Do you know why it's here? Because it's the most humorous of all Russian paintings. Repin. You would say that such a great people like the Russians wouldn't have a sense of humour. But they know how to laugh from the heart, just as they know how to get angry. Do you know what was in the letter the Don Cossacks are writing to the Turkish sultan? *(he moves to the painting and points to the letter)* Listen, you Turkish devil, accursed brother and partner of Satan, secretary of Lucifer himself. What the hell kind of knight are you if you can't kill a hedgehog with your naked ass? May the devil devour your army. You, son of a bitch, will not rule over the Christians. We are not afraid of your armies. We will fight you on land and by sea, fuck your mother! You Babylonian kitchen slave. You Macedonian criminal. You Jerusalem beer-brewer. You Alexandrian goat-carcass skinner. You pig shepherd from Great and Lesser Egypt. You pagan log. You horse's ass. You're not even fit to shepherd Christian pigs. We will end here. We don't know the date because we don't have a calendar, therefore you can kiss our asses. Signed, Ivan Sirko and his Zaporozhe regiment. *(he moves away)*

from the painting) Everything can be resolved, dear neighbour, don't worry. But there must be the desire. We have the desire. Now it's your turn. *(he leaves, the investigator hops to attention)* At ease. *(The investigator puts up more pictures of Michal's wife)*

MAN: Your wife loves life. And you? Never strayed? Swam in other waters? Let little willy play in another yard? Never hid the snake in a different bush? Huh? *(Michal jumps up, ready to strike, the agent just waits for it, with a provocative look on his face)* Done the nasty? Buried the one-eyed worm? Played hide the salami? *(he puts his face up to Michal's and whispers)* Hit me. If you were a man, you'd let me have it.

HE: *(calms down, steps back from the investigator, smiles)* I have been unfaithful.

MAN: *(excited)* Ah ha!

HE: The first time was with Claudia Cardinale. Two rounds in the Hilton, when I could still go to Cannes. Anita Ekberg was there too, but there wasn't enough time. And once with Brigitte Bardot, under the table in the restaurant, when Roger Vadim went to the men's room. But that was only oral sex. In our family that doesn't count.

MAN: As you wish... *(he turns on the tape recorder, we hear an older testimony by Michal)*

MICHAL'S VOICE: *(from the recording)* In 1965, I signed a cooperation agreement with the State Security Service in Prague. I was studying at Charles University then. I was assigned to observe the dissident group – subject FISH POND, of which subject NYMPH was also a part. I drew information from subject Fish Pond throughout his studies. I took part in the Prague university student May celebrations with him in 1965 so that you could monitor the unrest in the streets. My first kiss with object NYMPH was at a reading by Allen Ginsberg in the Viola cafe...

MAN: That Jewish faggot.

HE: Allen Ginsberg is an American poet.

MICHAL'S VOICE: *(from the recording)* I gathered information from subject NYMPH until her graduation and because of her I moved to Slovakia. So that I could get to subject STONE, her father...

MAN: By our order you made subject NYMPH your wife...

HE: That's not true! I married for love!

MICHAL'S VOICE: *(from the recording)* By order of the State Security Service, I made subject NYMPH my wife, so I could provide regular reports on subject STONE. I followed his anti-government publishing activities during the long-term project NEST, which then became the WALL project, which is still ongoing. I am listed as an active agent of the State Security apparatus with the cover name ROMEO.

MAN: *(turning off the recorder)* Twenty years. You've exchanged birthday gifts every year...with a total value so far of two-hundred thousand twenty-seven crowns.

HE: *(long pause)* It was just a mistake.

MAN: A pretty long mistake.

HE: Then! The first time! I love her. I don't live with her because of you!

MAN: You are the biggest romantic in the security service.
HE: I'm not going to do it anymore.
MAN: 'ROMEO' suits you.
HE: I demand that it be put in the record that I refuse to cooperate further! I'm finished working with you! I'm definitively finished! I'm already free!
MAN: Then we'll tell your wife.
HE: *(indifferently)* Go ahead. I have no problem with that. *(pause)* You won't do it. *(pause)* Are you serious? *(the investigator is silent, they look at each other, pause)* Why would you do it? You'd expose yourselves. I did everything you wanted.. for years I kept you well-informed...in detail, on everything! *(yelling)* I don't owe you anything anymore! I've already paid my dues! You know everything you wanted to know! This is not logical. Leave me alone! *(he bursts into tears)* Please...
MAN: *(watching the television)* It's ending now.
HE: *(getting down on his knees)* I've done everything you wanted. Cross me off your list. Forget about me.
MAN: *(watching the television)* That's how a great man takes his leave. We've let everyone know that we continue to be in power. That one death means nothing. *(Michal is weeping on the floor)* Get up. I had a higher opinion of you. *(he continues to kneel)* As you wish, Comrade Director. *(he leaves, and Michal remains kneeling, darkness)*

Intermission

Scene 3: UNDER THE STARS

The flat roof of an apartment building. There are several television antennas on it and a trap door. There is also an old armchair and an ashtray on a stand. This is Michal's "airport" where he escapes from the world. A ladder is sticking up at the side of the roof - it is used to get down to the balcony. It's daytime and the whole family is on the roof.

SHE: So it's not a joke.
HE: Unfortunately not.
SHE: And what do you do?
HE: I provide information.
SHE: Information? About what?
HE: About us.
SHE: About us?
HE: About your father.
SHE: About my father? That is, about us.
HE: I was assigned to you.
SHE: Since when? Since when has this been going on?

HE: When we were still in Prague. Since university.

SHE: Wait a minute. Before the May celebration or after? When did it start?

HE: With us?

SHE: With them!

HE: We met the first time before the May celebration.

SHE: With them?

HE: The two of us.

SHE: I know when the two of us first met! I know where it was, I know what time it was, how the sky looked and what you were wearing! And I know what we did! Don't tell me you informed them of what we did?!

HE: I'm totally ashamed.

SHE: And how is it for me, do you ever think of that?!

HE: Horrible. I know.

SHE: (*mimicking him*) Horrible! He knows! The love of my life is dragging me through the dirt and he says that it's horrible!

SON: (*terrified*) This is totally fucked up.

HE: Get a hold of yourselves, both of you.

SHE: Oh yeah, sorry. You can control yourself. You're well-trained.

SON: This can't be true! I must be dreaming!

SHE: (*to her son*) Quiet.

SON: I hate you!

HE: (*to his son*) I love you, Viktor. I've never done anything to hurt you. Or Mama. Just the opposite. I never reported on you with the intention of hurting you.

SON: It doesn't matter! But you were with them!

HE: I was with you. I protected you.

SON: How did you protect us? By being a swine! You always said that they were swine! Is that how you protected us?! So we'd be clean? But children of swine are also swine, covered with shit, did you forget that part?!

SHE: That's enough Viktor! Go downstairs please.

SON: (*to his mother*) Why did he do this to us....

SHE: Go. Go take out the garbage.

SON: I should take out the garbage?

SHE: Go. (*the son climbs down the ladder to the apartment*)

HE: Thank you.

SHE: Don't thank me. I want to save him.

HE: That's why I'm thanking you.

SHE: I'm surprised that I'm so calm. Why do you come up here? Is this where you figure out who you're going to report on?

HE: It's quiet up here.

SHE: There won't be any peace and quiet up here now!

HE: Yes. I know. *(she takes out a bag of peanuts and begins to devour them)* What are you doing?

SHE: I'm enjoying the peace and quiet.

HE: You'll be sick.

SHE: I already am. *(she finishes the bag, he watches silently)* When we first saw each other, were you already one of them?

HE: I was never one of them.

SHE: You were one of them from the beginning. And don't interrupt me! I can't find anything, anything, even if I wanted to, I would dig it out of this roof with my fingernails, but I cannot find anything that would excuse this. *(she goes to the edge of the roof)*

HE: You'll fall!

SHE: Go to hell! *(to her husband)* Did you start going out with me of your own accord, or was it an order from them?

HE: It can't...

SHE: Of your own accord?!

HE: I noticed you...before that...of course, I thought you were beautiful already before that. And I wasn't the only one.

SHE: I guess I'll kill him. And then they'll throw me in jail. I'll kill an agent...I'll get life. So you and I...we started going out because of an order issued by...the state security service?

HE: No, no. Not going out.

SHE: No?!

HE: Yes. *(she bursts into tears)* But no too.

SHE: Did you already have a signed agreement in your pocket then, in May?

HE: No.

SHE: Thank God.

HE: They kept the paper. On Bartholomew St. They keep those agreements, so that they can blackmail you later.

SHE: So you went after me because it's what Comrade Dzerzhinsky wanted.

HE: I went after you because I liked you.

SHE: Ah ha. So you combined the pleasant with the useful. You reported and you got laid.

HE: *(gently)* I never just fucked with you.

SHE: So what were we doing for all of May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December, January, February, March, April – from morning till night, huh?!

HE: *(tenderly)* We were making love.

SHE: *(calming down)* It's ideal when one's work becomes a hobby.

HE: They noticed that you also liked me. They wanted to know as much as possible about your father. I threw myself into it. It was supposed to be only a few months.

SHE: Summer love and see you later. Seduce, verify, break up.

HE: I thought it was no big deal. They promised that that would be it and they wouldn't want anything else after that.

SHE: Except.

HE: Except?

SHE: Except that then they did.

HE: The “except” is our fault, not theirs. I didn’t know we’d be together longer. That it would be so beautiful with you, that we’d start going out...that I would fall in love with you.

SHE: An agent in love. That would be a great title for a film. I knew it right away.

HE: What did you know right away?

SHE: When I tasted your saliva, I knew that I wanted to have children with this man. And he...*(she bursts into tears again)*

HE: This whole thing is a spider’s web that I can’t untangle. Because I’m a coward. I’m afraid.

SHE: Why didn’t you stop? Couldn’t you stop?! Why didn’t you stop doing it?

HE: I stopped, but they didn’t. I didn’t know they’d only leave me alone for a while. That they’d start again when it was convenient for them. I fell in love with you, we started going out and in the last year of school I married you. I avoided them, but you can’t do it for long. They find you. Every time. They dig you up from underground. They always get what they want.

SHE: I feel genuinely sorry for you.

HE: I was the key to your father. It was about him. *(they look down from the roof for a long time)*

SHE: *(she points down at the street)* They drove that kind of car. They sat in front of the house all day. They smoked like chimneys. It was winter, so they only opened the window for a minute. A cloud of smoke would always float out, I remember that. They didn’t bother to hide at all. On the contrary. They stuck out. They wanted you to know they were there, so you’d be afraid. You can’t ignore them, my father said, but everything they offer you, you have to refuse. You have to. Because they’ll blackmail you your whole life. Communism is a foreign word, which can be translated as “fear”, he used to say. You have to refuse. That didn’t occur to you, did it?

HE: Did you get those romantic notions of communism from your father’s books? I’d like to be you. Viktor goes to school and you conduct your armchair revolution while I’m out doing real battle and all this because they destroyed my life!

SHE: You screwed it up yourself! What’s horrible is that I’m here talking to you just as I do every Friday when we plan our weekend. You can’t throw twenty years of life together away just like that. I feel empty, cried out. Have you noticed that I’m not crying? Do you appreciate that? That there’s no screaming Mimi here in front of your face who wants to scratch your eyes out? I’m frightening myself. Cried out to the core. It’s flowing out of me somewhere. But it’s cold. Once upon a time tears were hot. Today they’ve gone cold. Strange, huh? Shouldn’t I be scaring myself?

HE: Alenka, my love, you are still the most important person in my life. I don’t have anyone else besides you.

SHE: You don’t have anyone anymore. Not even me! You’ve pushed your most important person to the wall and shat on them from head to toe.

HE: Please...

SHE: Shat on them! I have nothing more to say. Shat! Shat! In one moment you've killed everything that we had between us. You've ruined my life, a life that I – stupid idiot – put in these disgusting hands that are still blue from secret service ink! I am so dirty that not even your stupid Persil will wash away the dirt and the stink!

HE: I don't recognize you.

SHE: You don't recognize me? How could you? You're a stranger. An agent, with whom I've never lived! I lived with a completely different person who I loved. My God, where will I move to? Who will Viktor live with? But, it's totally clear. He won't stay with an agent.

HE: Take it easy, please.

SHE: How? My measuring cups have all overflowed! The rulers are broken! According to what am I supposed to measure? I don't have any more words, just simple sounds! Bu! Ha! Da! Tu! Hu! Hooooooooooooo! You've amputated the part of me that's a human being!

HE: Forgive me.

SHE: Hoo. I can't talk. Hooooo.

HE: I'm sorry.

SHE: You've made an animal out of me. Dooooooooooooo! Bu! Hu!

HE: Get a hold of yourself, please.

SHE: If I could just take you out like the garbage. Pour you into the metal garbage can that they come and take away on Mondays. But I can't because then I would have to get into the can as well. *(as calmly as she possibly can)* And now tell me, I promise not to yell, or I'll try not to, tell me why you did all of this. The first time.

HE: Because of my father.

SHE: *(laughing hysterically)* Daddy! Ah ha! *(she stops laughing)*

HE: He had leukaemia. There weren't any drugs here. They imported them for hard currency from Switzerland. The Head of the Department at the hospital told me that without those drugs he'd live only three months, but with them he could live several years. They let me go abroad. And it cost something...I didn't want my father to die. What would you have done in my place? What would you have done if you'd known that there were medicines for your father outside the country? Would you have let him die if you knew his pain could be amputated?!

SHE: *(laughing ironically)* So he ripped his heart out of his chest and placed it, burning, at their feet! While his wife was carrying....

HE: Yes, you were pregnant and my father was so excited to have a grandchild.

ONA: You sold me out. Me and Viktor and he wasn't even born yet! He wasn't even here yet and you managed to sell him out!

HE: You were my family. The only one I had. I wanted you to be happy, safe, I wanted to protect you. *(she takes out a package of pretzel sticks and eats the whole thing, he watches her closely)* It will be...

SHE: *(screaming)* Shut up! *(she eats the last pretzel sticks and is calm again)* So, you brought medicine from Switzerland. Is that right? *(remembering)* He died a week before our wedding.

HE: I don't think they gave him any of the drugs. They saved someone else, someone who paid for them.

SHE: So the whole thing was for nothing.

HE: It wasn't. I met you.

SHE: I have nothing against your father, may he rest in peace. But he died. He didn't need those drugs anymore. And you continued....

HE: I didn't. They left me alone for a year.

SHE: I didn't know about any of this. I trusted you so much. You totally eliminated all my instincts! My instinct for self-preservation! This can only happen to a stupid, love- struck cow. They stroke one end of it while they cut steaks off the other end.

HE: I tried to make it so we could live as if they didn't exist.

SHE: But there were tons of them. Everywhere! They knew how many orgasms I had a night under the old sycamore tree...*(laughing hysterically)* That was never a problem for us.

HE: *(tenderly)* Almost never.

SHE: What's horrible is that I still want to sleep with you. *(he tries to hug her, but she pushes his arms down)*.

HE: They only wanted your father. We didn't interest them. For a long time I didn't know they were listening to us.

SHE: They forgot to tell you. What terrible friends.

HE: For years I told them only what I wanted to.

SHE: He told them only what he wanted!

HE: I kept secret as much as I could. God knows how it would have turned out had it been someone else. Maybe it was good that it was me. I mitigated some of the potential damage.

SHE: So you improved my father's cadre profile? Hey, maybe they'll pardon him altogether! What if they give him the worker's medal of honour? Continue on this positive track and maybe they'll even give us back our telephone! Did it ever occur to you that you were killing him? Do you know what it means for a writer when he can't publish?

HE: Something like when they put a filmmaker in the archives.

SHE: In 100 years everything will be different and they'll publish Dad's books.

HE: Nothing will change here. The communists are here forever!

SHE: He can't even finish his books because they're always searching the house. They take his manuscripts and he hides pieces of them all over the city with friends where either they find them and confiscate them or he forgets where he hid them and that's why he still can't put together his opus magnum, his last book, the one every writer longs to write! It will kill him! He's started it three times and three times you secret police agents took the unfinished draft! You are killing my father!

HE: Now you've gone too far.

SHE: What is my cover name?

HE: What?

SHE: What am I called in secret police-speak?

HE: Please, don't ask me that.

SHE: Goddammit, tell me what my cover name is!

HE: Nymph.

SHE: Was that your idea?

HE: They set the cover names.

SHE: Nymph?

HE: You wanted to study ancient Greek, didn't you? Then you switched to medicine. They knew that.

SHE: They knew that.

HE: I had nothing to do with it. They figured it out themselves.

SHE: And that you and I have a son, have you figured that out yet? Have you noticed that we are married? Did you find that out? Huh??! *(she regains control of herself)* And your cover name?

HE: Romeo.

SHE: And my father is who?

HE: Stone.

SHE: And our son?

HE: They haven't given him one so far.

SHE: Romeo and Nymph. You couldn't get Julia? *(she jumps on him in fury and starts to hit him)*
Romeo and the Nymph! Romeo and the Nymph! Romeo and the Nymph!

HE: *(not defending himself)* I attempted suicide twice.

SHE: *(she stops hitting him)* When?

HE: In 1969. I ate an entire tube of...I don't know what. Then Viktor started crying in the bedroom. He was four. Then I realized that I couldn't do it. I vomited it all up.

SHE: That would be a good thing to do right about now. *(she tries to put her finger down her throat)*
I'm sick from those peanuts...

HE: Do you want an antacid?

SHE: Not from you! I want to feel sorry for you and hate you all at the same time. One minute I know that you are the one and only man of my life...and the next I don't know anything anymore.

HE: The only one? *(she nods)* And what about... Rigoletto?

SHE: *(stiffening)* Rigoletto?

HE: Raspatti. Did it bother you that I didn't take any pictures on our vacation? They took lots. You have some in the secret police album. With Raspatti.

SHE: *(quietly)* He took my father's manuscript to Italy.

HE: You didn't say anything.

SHE: You would have blabbed.

HE: What would I have blabbed? Until I confessed all this to you an hour ago did you know anything? You trusted me! What would I have blabbed? That he seduced you when you went to gather mussels in the evening?

SHE: Well – OK – he seduced me. So what?

HE: I've never been unfaithful to you.

SHE: So-what.

HE: So shit! (*sarcastically imitating*) Ciao, dolce! (*getting serious again*) This is not about me being an agent. This is about us.

SHE: It's always about us!

HE: Don't you get that whatever I did, I always loved you? That what happened was the better-case scenario?

SHE: Blah! Blah! Blahblahblah!

HE: Stop.

SHE: Buuuuu! HUUUU! Duuuuu!

HE: You are being childish.

SHE: Baaaaaaaaaaaa!

HE: I could have done it a hundred times. With Maja. Denisa. Lubica, Alice. With Kristina.

SHE: Which Alice?! With my best friend?!

HE: Duuuuuuuuuu! Buuuu!

SHE: A hundred! (*yelling*) I had a hundred! A different one every week! Whenever you were on a business trip, I was busy fucking anyone who wanted me! Fucking! Fucking! Fucking! And it was just exercise! Even with Alessandro! None of them even reached your hairy crooked knees, which I'd rather break right now! None of them! Because I only ever loved YOU!

HE: (*crushed*) A hundred?

SHE: You never figured it out?

HE: No.

SHE: (*surprised*) I'm that good?

HE: You're lying.

SHE: (*nodding*) I must have caught it from you.

HE: You know what the worst thing is? You chose your father over me! You gave him precedence and you threw away everything the two of us had. I chose the two of you and threw away my conscience!

SHE: My office is full of unhappy people! Do you have any idea how many unhappy people there are in this country? How many psychiatric cases? They're afraid to publish the statistics because it wouldn't fit the pretty picture of them building communism. (*gesturing to her body*) Here inside there's a track-switcher. Basically it has two options. Cancer or schizophrenia. For years we seem to be doing just fine, and then one day, something breaks. All those decades of suppressing our real selves. When

we were afraid to tell the truth. When we were choking back our helplessness. The switch is thrown and the cells begin to multiply, out of control. As you say, a cell doesn't care whether it's a Marxist or an Existentialist. Unfortunately, it also doesn't matter whether you're a decent person or not. It kills you all the same. I don't know what's worse. Dying of cancer or living with schizophrenia. *(she goes to the ladder)* I wanted to tell you so much and I've hardly told you anything. If your friends happen to connect the telephone some time...don't call me.

HE: Please, don't do anything rash. I love you.

SHE: I love you too...*(she slowly climbs down the ladder onto the balcony, he watches her until she is out of sight. A moment later, his son climbs up)*

HE: What did she say?

SON: She said we should make some scrambled eggs. *(a long pause, he hesitates as to whether to sit down with his father or not, in the end he remains standing)* so you come up here....to think? Or what?

HE: Something like that.

SON: You're an informant...but no one in the world...except for maybe Mama, has done as much for me as you. *(he turns to leave)*

HE: Before the war my father had a shop. He sold umbrellas and walking sticks *(the son stops and listens)*. He did repairs too. He had two employees. And because of them he was accused in the 1950s of taking advantage of the working people. He tried to leave the country, but they caught him. The state security forces tortured him. He ended up in the hands of a guy named Hlavachek. A former Gestapo operative who then became an investigator for the people's democratic republic. He tried out his new machine on my father. Electrodes in his shoes connected by wires to the power dial. My father had the honour of being the first one who Ludvik Hlavachek tortured by electric shock. He was a sadist, obsessed with technology. Later he proposed lining the Czechoslovak border with electric fences. Those fences are still there. But my father isn't. They sent him to the uranium mines in Jachymov. He was a "DEFLIQ". That's an abbreviation: DEFLIQ – "destined for liquidation". The first day he was there the head of the camp told him: "The only way you're going to leave here is in a coffin. You'll never go home. We'll make whores out of your women. We will re-educate your children and they'll spit on you. Ten murderers are worth more to us than one political prisoner". At Jachymov, they put him in the mill where they process pitchblende. That's where they put the worst enemies of the state - the priests, people from the London-based resistance, university professors. They worked from morning till night because the Russians needed uranium for an atom bomb. The highest levels of radiation were in the mill. Everything was covered with white, radioactive dust. He got leukaemia from it. When's your dissection?

SON: What?

HE: The make-up anatomy exam?

SON: Soon.

HE: When they gave him amnesty and he was home, once we were sitting in the kitchen. Mama went to the cupboard and the flour spilled on her. I laughed my head off. She was totally white. Then I saw my father, how he was staring at her and shaking. Just because she was covered with flour. For us it was only flour, for him it was dust from the camp. Funny, huh?

SON: *(annoyed)* OK, so Stalin was a bastard! Why are you telling me this?!

HE: Because sometimes what looks white isn't white.

SON: *(leaving)* I have to go to school. If I don't come back, it means I'm staying at Jana's.

HE: Come...sometime. This is your home. *(the son climbs down the ladder into the apartment. Michal sits for a moment. A drill can be heard and the lock on the trap door is drilled through. Through it the Neighbour and the Investigator enter onto the roof)*

NEIGHBOUR: We came to see you, neighbour.

MAN: Hello, Comrade Director...

NEIGHBOUR: *(to the investigator)* Leave us alone for a moment. *(the investigator leaves)* I know how you feel. I've been divorced twice. *(hands him an envelope)* This is truly our final offer. Permission to leave the republic, for the entire family. You can go to Italy. *(Michal takes the envelope, but doesn't even look inside before he slowly tears it up)* Fucking hell! I just lost a bottle of Stoli. I bet that you'd take it. *(to the investigator)*. Come by and pick it up when you're done. *(he leaves through the trap door)*.

MAN: *(gesturing to the roof)* So this is your ivory tower, Comrade Director?

HE: What do you want?

MAN: Just peace and quiet, I'm in an excellent mood. I just won a bottle of vodka.

HE: Cheers.

MAN: I'm not here for work, it's more personal.

HE: My family knows everything. I just lost my wife and son. You can't blackmail me anymore because I've lost everything. Good-bye.

MAN: There's still something to lose. Listen for a minute, OK? We've spent more time with you over the years than with our own children, you scumbag. We've followed you 24 hours a day, Saturday and Sunday. We've gotten used to you. You're not the one who decides when you're finished. We decide. Twelve people have worked on your case. For twelve years. Some of them have grown quite fond of you. It's not always you find such a lively rat. Take it as a farewell in their name. Break your arms and legs? Not enough. A car accident? We took your driver's license. So my colleagues and I had an idea. Do it yourself. However you want. Choose your method. And if you don't, someone else will have to go. But someone will go, that's for sure. No one walks away from us just like that without saying good-bye. Your son? They follow him regularly all the way to school. Or your wife? Her office is at the intersection, isn't it? Yesterday someone ran over a pensioner there. She was carrying cauliflower in a plastic bag. It rolled 20 meters - across the entire street. It's up to you. Decide.

Freely. This is your last chance to help your family. No one's going to fuck us over. *(the agent lights a cigarette and looks down from the roof over the apartment complex)* So many new buildings. We're bringing workers here from all over Slovakia. We're diluting you, so there will be as few of you as possible. Editors, professors, doctors. It's not good when there're too many of you in one place. The ones like you have to be culled. Bratislava will be a worker's town. And you'll be diluted. You already are, you just don't realize it. Like this one. *(he slowly lets down a string of spit)* You have until tomorrow. *(he looks at the sky, happily)* I haven't been in the garden for a month. They say the snowdrops are already out. *(he opens the trap door and leaves. Michal starts desperately looking for a cigarette in all the corners of the roof, finally he finds one and lights up. Slowly it grows dark outside and the stars begin to come out. He finishes his cigarette, squats down on the edge of the roof and looks at the sky. The stars silently observe the scene. The son comes up onto the roof)*

SON Dad! Dad? I decided to quit school. Just to make sure I wouldn't change my mind I went straight to the Dean and told him he's an idiot. He is anyway, a really big one. While I was waiting to see him, I saw those signs with slogans in the hallway. I have nothing to lose, I tell myself. So I start breaking them. But then it occurs to me, what am I doing? It's just styrofoam. Stupid styrofoam! *(he starts pulling styrofoam letters out of his jacket – he pulls out a 'K'. He breaks it. He pulls out an M. He breaks it. He pulls out a 'Z'. He just throws it away)* Then I went into his office and stood there...I took a breath...and then suddenly I heard myself saying...Comrade Dean...I am seriously interested in...joining...the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. *(a long pause, it begins to snow)* Mama's right, Dad. You have to live life the best you can. Now I'm going to protect you guys. *(He lights a cigarette. The stars in the sky slowly disappear. It continues to snow.)*

THE END

April – June, November 2008.