

Changing Stations

Victor Snaith

CAST (in order of appearance)

Third Man - an elderly American railway bum, a schizophrenic, speaks with a Southern drawl

Harvey - a middle-aged American railway bum, speaks with a New York accent

Vlov - an middle-aged English railway bum, slightly older than Harvey, no older than Third Man

ACT ONE

(The stage is in absolute darkness, there are sounds of a train which die down for a voice-over in the style of a North American television newsreader.)

News reader's voice:

Good evening, more on a story we are following. In Chicago today Brent Capodoccia, C.E.O. of Global Plastimex, was sentenced to a fine of \$5000 and one year's probationary community service for illegally riding aboard a freight train. Judge Helmut Kleever, after imposing the sentence, added: "What caught the attention of the media was the fact that Capodoccia was disguised as a rail bum when apprehended. I

realise that this fine only makes this a cheap weekend adventure for the defendant. If it was up to me the fine would've been \$50000! We get so many of these wealthy thrill-seekers up to this sort of thing - in itself a very dangerous game - soon we won't know who's a real bum and who's a fake".

(Lights come up to reveal the interior of a railway box-car, empty except for a few small boxes and a coffin on trestles, just off centre. Sounds of a train slowing down. The sliding door of the box-car is inched open and Third Man climbs in, out of breath. Third Man proceeds to have a conversation with the train. He speaks with a Southern drawl.)

Third Man

Jeeze, it's cold out there.

Third Man

Oh, you agree, do you?

Third Man

Sure do? Don't be dumb - what d'you think you know about how things are out there?

Third Man

The hell you do. You spend all your time in here. It's warm in here. Cosy and safe. Do you know how long I was waiting out there?

Third Man

One hell of a long while - that's how long. *(Pause.)* Three long hours.

Third Man

Don't blame you? For Chrissake, who should I blame then? *I* wasn't the one who was three hours late. Have you forgotten what a schedule means?

Third Man

I got no watch either. But when I need the time I can ask. Don't you know how to ask for Chrissake? Or to listen to the radio?

Third Man

Hell, there's a clock on every train station.

Third Man

Then you don't know how just lucky you are. I spend a lot of time on them. I'm always changing stations. (*Third Man starts to unpack and to hang a number of imaginary paintings on the walls of the box-car. He hums to himself while he works.*)

Third Man

In here? (*Shrugs.*) It's good enough, I suppose. You like it here because you spend all your time here.

Third Man

I don't need advice from you. I'll stay here if *I* like, O.K.?

Third Man

O.K. you were just being friendly. Thanks then. Not everyone is friendly these days.

Third Man

I have to stay alert. I have to watch out for unfriendly people. Otherwise things I do might be misunderstood, see?

Third Man

By unfriendly people, of course. Electric shock people!

Third Man

You bet they do.

Third Man

Misunderstand. They watch me, you see, to see what I will do. Then, when they think they know me, they begin to tell me how I am.

Third Man

Don't you start. (*Pause.*) Did you know that other people thinking about you all the time can make you do things?

Third Man

I dunno, all sorts of things (*Pause*) ... bad, mean, unkind ... (*Pause*) ... hazardous things.

Third Man(*Pause.*)

Do you like the paintings?

Third Man

Are you stupid or something? All *these* paintings? (*Indicates the empty walls with a proud sweep of his hands. Suddenly Third Man looks worried.*)

Third Man

Is it safe in here?

Third Man

I guess you're right. It's important to be safe, see. I mean, for the paintings. I don't exhibit them just any old place, you know. I wouldn't do it in the street, for example.

Third Man (*Third Man switches to a Dutch accent.*)

I am a practical and a modest man. I do not paint excess or extravagance. On the other hand, I have never been one to deny the merit of my art! And I don't exhibit in places which aren't safe.

Third Man

O.K. then. Do you want to know more? (*Pause.*) About my art?

Third Man(*Proudly, in a Dutch accent.*)

Unlike my famous paintings in the Prado, I fear that this fresco will not last for centuries. It is a feast of figures and to make them I have called not only upon my own reserves but also on the talents, aptitudes and opinions of my friends through the ages. See the fuzzy forms, like those of Fra Bartolomeo? Michaelangelo explained the technique to

me. One rainy April day in 1512. In the Sistine Chapel, waiting for the ceiling to dry. He painted two small figures on the wall of the nave. Children. Exquisite! My friends taught me a lot.

Third Man

(In a Dutch accent.) I did have a lot of friends. Can you see their influence? *(Points to different parts of the "fresco")* There Piero de Cosima? And there - see? - the great authority of Raphael and Andre de Manetagna, who helped me so much with oil on oak in 'The Crowning of Thorns', where I had such trouble with the noses. Here Hans Memlinc. Here Marco Zoppo. Over there Piero della Francesca, a genius with tempera on poplar. This reminds me of Andrea de Vecchio, who taught Leonardo da Vinci. There Giovanni di Paolo. There Paolo Uciello. Here Pesellino - a master at horses. There Giovanni Bellini. There Sandro Boticelli - his 'Venus and Mars' has great horses, too. There Filipino Lippi - courageous colours. See how I have chamfered gradually into that impressionistic surrounding aura I learnt from Claude Monet. See here, as a small tribute I have tried to replicate some of his waterlilies.

Third Man *(Resuming his American accent.)*

You bet that's one big picture. Do you like dogs? I sure do. *(In a Dutch accent again)* I included lots of them, copied in the different styles. Jean-Francois Raffaelli. Auguste Renoir. Camille Pissaro. Eugene Boudin and Barthe Morisot. Alfred Sisley higher up. Further to the right - can you see where I am pointing? Here Charles-Marie Lhuiller. Here Norbut Goenutte. Supreme dogs!

Third Man *(In a Dutch accent.)*

When I was young, art was simultaneously dragged on by progress and incarcerated by the Church in a labyrinth of superstition. One or the other had to be expurgated and relinquished. We artists chose to expose, exorcise and thereby jettison the superannuated elements of religious superstition. Just look at my 'Ship of Fools' or 'Garden of Earthly Delights'. Imagine the emancipating, purgative effect upon the

sixteenth century farmer's boy of the image of a dribbling cleric with diarrhoea spewing out of his ears. Ours was an iconoclasm at once both subtle and outrageous, I think, quite similar to that of your own Beatles in the 1960's. Today we are again in much the same situation. There is nothing left! Nothing is worth holding on to except mankind itself. However, the sheet-anchor of the human race consists in its accomplishments, both material and intellectual. The material sort comprise art - not dazzling-white-washing powders - and the intellectual consist of what art makes us feel, think and believe. Have you not noticed that something is missing?

Third Man (*In a Dutch accent.*)

Not really? Then I'll tell you what it is. Good faith is missing! Except in dogs! And *I* have been reincarnated in order to put that right. Metempsychosis – the transmigration of souls – would have man reincarnated differently. In practice we return just as we were, since that is the form in which we are needed. So here I am - here to help. For example, 'Save the Quails' I hear from the Greens, so I save them - they are up there in my art. Art to which I fix my celebrated signature.

Third Man (*In a Dutch accent.*)

What signature? Why here, of course. (*Pause.*) Are you so stupid you can't read. Here! Here! And here! Hieronymus Bosch! (*Spreading himself over the imaginary painting.*) Hieronymus Bosch! Hieronymus Bosch!

(*The train lurches, lots of train noises as the Third Man is flung against the wall. He falls, unconscious presumably, out of sight behind the coffin-box in the centre of the stage. Harvey climbs in, looks around and fails to see Third Man, who has fallen out of sight. Looks around, thinks himself alone. Takes out a cellular phone. Dials.*)

Harvey

Tyler? That you? Yeah, sure it's me. Donald? Who in hell's name is Donald? This is Harvey, you dope. Yeah, now you're cooking! Harvey

as in Goldstein. Goldstein, Cousins and Goldstein. That's right, your boss. Good. Now we got that straight, listen up. I got three things to tell you. I won't be in till noon on Monday so I want you to get Shelley to rework the Medco account. Yeah, that's the one, the sob touch - Mother and Son Reunion - weepy dame gets to the E.R. too late, the young guy's already O.D'd his way to the happy hunting grounds - long shots of bedlam in Chicago No Hope emergency, cuts to close up of the bewildered madonna, overdub with Simon and Garfunkel and then the lofty moral deep-voice to sell the product. "Use the right drugs and use 'em right!" Yeah, that's the one. You're with me? Well, tell Shelley it doesn't work. What? No. Believe me - haven't I got the nose for these things? Right! Then believe me this one more time. Tell Shelley that it's got too much angst. Angst. A-N-G-S-T. Yeah, angst. And get the spelling right. I don't care if you don't know what it means. That message is for Shelley, not you, dumbbo. Christ! Why did I ever let my Dad hire you. I know you're my cousin. If you weren't you'd have been let go years ago and replaced by a dame who could spell right, smell sweeter and cost half the price. Ugh? I know I'm trained as a lawyer - yeah, yeah - and this is about writing copy. For Christ's sake just trust me this one more time. O.K.? I gotta nose for this one and pipe down, will you? And what? What is that? I'm your boss. Got it? O.K.? You just get that message through to Shelley. No, don't leave it on her desk. I don't care if she's gone to the cottage. I want that revision ready to go by noon on Monday. Call her at the cottage, fax her the file and tell her to get right on it. I know she'll have to work Sunday. Too bad. What? Don't argue. Didn't your uncle tell you when he hired you that the first law of business is "Don't fuck with the Boss"?

Second of all, about the Cosmic account. Yeah, the one with the episodic story line. Yeah, I know that one is yours. Why else would I be wasting my time talking to you about it? Good. Now shut up and hear me good on this one. You'll have to scrap the last two episodes. Why?

‘Cos I say so! They stink! Too much like a re-run of the Maxwell House series ten years ago. You’re converging on their territory. If you don’t believe me get them out of the archives. Yeah. Yeah. The move from the Manhattan apartment block to the country upstate was swell but the truth is that the story is getting so close to theirs that anyone with half a neuron firing in their sophisticated cerebral cortex is going to start chiming in with the damn dialogue and finishing the frigging sentences. They are not going to be thinking about the product. Hell they are! They’re going to be laughing till they split their codpiece. Codpiece! That’s right, you got it, what Shakespeare used for underwear.

Yeah, that’s all. I know it won’t be easy but just do it. Take out the last two, save them for a rainy day, and put in one sex one and one with ominous suggestions of violence wrapped up in lots of orchestral rhapsody. Don’t understand? Well, think about it. I know it’s tough - life is tough - so just do it. There’s plenty of footage in the archives to get you started. Run through some of the old airline clips. Good man. You try it. I want to see what you’ve got Monday.

Eh? Oh, third of all? Third of all is that I’m going off line now. Incommunicado till noon Monday, O.K.? Where am I? Incommunicado’s where I am. No reason you should know more than that. I’ll let you know when I’m good ‘n’ ready. Right. Great, go to it. And Tyler, you there Tyler? I thought you’d rung off. Tyler, do me a favour. Take my Lotus to the car-wash. The keys are on Betty-Jo’s desk out front. And Tyler, don’t forget to retract the aerials, they snap real easy.

(Harvey puts away telephone. Inspects the box-car once again. This time, with an alarmed reaction, he spots the Third Man, who is unconscious.)

Harvey *(Kneels to inspect Third Man.)*

Hey, buddy, you O.K.? *(No reply.)* Out cold. *(Pause. Enter Vlov, climbs in. Takes a drink from bottle. Curses to himself for a while then notices Harvey with surprise.)*

Vlov

Damn! Damn! Blast and damnation! Oh, my God! (*pause*) You gave me quite a turn. I thought myself to be quite alone. (*pause*) Fancy a snifter from the old bottle?

Harvey

Thanks (*takes a sip*). Well, you're not alone. There's me and him. (*indicating the unconscious Third Man.*) Maybe he's high - otherwise he wouldn't sleep so good.

Vlov

The trains are too noisy for sleep I shouldn't wonder. I can't sleep at all without a drop of the old malt. The old malt from the moors - distilled in a plenitude of peaty pearls, destined to roll one by one down my gullet like sleeping pills. Not near the racket of railway trains for me. Bugger that for a proverbial lark! (*Pause*)

Harvey

To tell the truth, I think the guy's been K.O.'d. There's blood on his forehead.

Vlov (*Apparently paying no attention.*)

Have a care, he may be dangerous. (*Pause*) I know that a single malt is rather extravagant for one in my position and that many of my fellow gentlemen of the road manage perfectly on the purest ethyl alcohol. Myself, I'm inclined to be Ethyl the Unready. Can't stand the stuff. Not that I have abstained entirely from its usage. All too often I've been reduced to the filthy fire-water.

Harvey

Should we do something for him?

Vlov

Like what?

Harvey

Stop the bleeding.

Vlov

It'll stop soon enough (*Pause. Harvey shrugs, looks once more at the prostrate Third Man and then sits against the wall. Vlov continues.*) The trouble is that rot-gut disagrees with me. Instead of sending me blissfully under for forty winks permeated with pleasant wishful wanderings along the randy routes of remembered rogering, it gives me nightmares.

Harvey (*Getting up, almost as soon as he sat. Going over to look at Third Man again.*)

He might die.

Vlov (*Emphatically shaking his head.*)

Instead of inducing a pleasant warm wet dream, it makes me wake up screaming and cursing at that smelly old phantasmic grim reaper who is apt to interfere with the slumbers of anyone of my age. Not that I don't slag off at the old bastard when I'm wide awake - I was doing it as I crept in here, do forgive me, unnoticed as I thought - but then I do it as a matter of principle ... have a care, old boy, he may strike out .. the principle of looking Death in the face. It's the only way to be free of the ... doubts. I don't like to be plagued by doubts all the time. Do you?

(*Pause. Harvey sits down again, looking concernedly at the Third Man all the while.*)

No, neither do I. So I look the old bastard straight in the eyes, slag him off and give myself up for dead. Do your worst, I bellow at the fellow. That shuts him up! Works every time. Watch out, I think I saw him move. There is nothing like giving yourself up for dead to put some life into you. Another swig? No? Just as well really, I don't have an abundance. Not till I can get down South and get my hands on some more. I have a friend in West Virginia, you see. He supplies me. Generous man. The soul of discretion. Nice chap, really, although he has some awfully rum cohorts in Pittsburgh....

Harvey

Rum?

Vlov

What? Oh, terribly sorry. I suppose one doesn't often hear 'rum'. One of my more naughty native colloquialisms, I'm afraid. Rum? Weird without being wild.. eccentric without being concentric.. skewed without being lewd.. transverse without being transvestite. Perhaps you would prefer 'odd-ball'? In any case, my friend knows some exceptionally criminal individuals, capable of keeping a number of deserving cases such as myself in the finest Scotch at reasonable rates. I give you their health! To the rum cohorts of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania! (*Takes another sip from his bottle of whisky. Looks around.*)

What a remarkably pleasant conveyance in which to travel. I feel at peace here. I do so love the gentle pace of Uncle Samuel's fine, fine iron horse. It trots along. No hurry. No worry. Positively inviting stowaways by its snail's pace.

Harvey

It's not exactly business class on the 'City of New Orleans'.

Vlov

But comfortable enough for the likes of myself. I once saw the 'City of New Orleans'. In the Illinois Central one rather rainy autumnal day. It had de-railed itself while standing still! It was probably the lap of luxury inside, but I never had the opportunity to sample it before it was cashiered. I have to admit, just between you, I and the gatepost, that I like to feel safely at peace but not too comfortable. Too much comfort and I might begin to languish. I might never move again. One has to move on. How else to get matters accomplished? How else to get oneself fixed up? Sorted out? So please don't be alarmed. I may talk rather a lot, spilling the beans more than one ought, but I rarely stay long. I try not to impose. Not to stay too long with others. They wouldn't be too keen and neither would I. Therefore, without a word

of consultation, my acquaintances and I reach a mutual understanding whereby I do not stay long. I move on. I take my leave and depart. They stay but I depart. They wish to stay and me to go. For me it is a very happy state of affairs. I am not embittered. Rather I am consoled and comforted by the confirmation that I elicit from those I meet a uniform and unanimous indifference. Invariably I evoke attitudes of disinterest. I would not want it any other way. My God! I would be rather alarmed if, for example, you were to show any interest. You are, I suppose?

Harvey

What?

Vlov (*Comes very close to Harvey.*)

Indifferent to me?

Harvey

Christ yes! I prefer them younger.

Vlov (*Goes over to look at Third Man.*)

Thank goodness for that. Your reaction assures me that I am what I suppose myself to be. That I am still as fixed and unchanged as the Empire State Building. Any other - warmer - reaction would have caused me the most acute alarm. Needless to say, I would not have put my leading question to you had not the danger of a positive response been unthinkable remote.

Harvey (*Smiling.*)

I guess I may have changed my mind. I imagine you're in good shape for your age. Now that I come to think of it, I go for the older type. (*Gets up. Makes an advance*) Let me massage those little golden balls.

Vlov

Oh, dear. This has never happened before.

Harvey (*Smiling.*)

It's O.K. I'm back in my indifferent mode. It was just a passing subliminal urge. I doubt that it will happen again.

Vlov

I believe you are pulling my leg.

Harvey (*Smiling, still standing.*)

No, I swear I'm not pulling anything. Didn't I tell you, I'm back in my indifferent mode?

Vlov (*at some point during this speech Vlov begins to exercise, inducing Harvey to join in.*)

I must admit that I am considerably relieved. Relieved, I might add in order that I be not misunderstood, to have discovered in yourself a fellow traveller possessing both a sense of humour and the capacity for modest but not excessive conversation. I had taken you at first sight to be a reticent man, which is not unattractive, but the cultivation of discourse with an unusually reticent man can be dreadfully draining. I am mindful of a remote but hauntingly potent encounter which I had with an emigré Russian orthodox priest in a public house in Highgate village. Do you exercise?

Harvey

Used to.

Vlov

Come on. It's just what everyone needs. Mind the coffin. (*Indicates the big box. Pause. Reluctantly Harvey joins in, on his spot.*) He was quite the size of the proverbial Russian bear and being a man of the cloth one simply couldn't stop him talking. That might have been to my liking had he possessed more than two words of English. I'm uncertain which is the more wearing - an autistic who just won't return the ball or a grinning giant who can only reiterate "roubles, roubles, roubles, beer" all night long. I lived to regret having seated myself at his table. The place was packed and there was nowhere else. Of course, many men prefer to elbow up to the bar, comfortably resting an exquisitely polished brogue on the brass foot-rail, there to engage in congenial banter with

the bar boys. I suppose that I am not one for communal conversation. It's too hard to catch what is being said and hardly worth the effort when the catch is made. I prefer the tête à tête myself. This chap, the priest, seemed to me to offer significant prospects. (*After a while Vlov stops, out of breath, Harvey continues.*)

Harvey

Came on to you, did he?

Vlov

Oh, good heavens! I wasn't hinting at romance. Foolish of me not to have made that clear. Rather I perceived in the man that rare taint of the artist, that penumbra of creativity - I detect a suggestion of it in yourself. Had I not I would not have been emboldened to have engaged you like this. I don't usually talk to strangers!

Harvey

You don't say.

Vlov

Unfortunately, artistic though he might have been, I will never know because his repetitious "roubles, roubles, roubles, beer", charming though it was, led us into an enormous amount of drinking marred by my finally falling asleep. When I awoke the priest had departed, taking my wallet - whose contents were substantial in those days - with him. Alms for the Church! I feel confident that, if not artistic, he was at least an intellectual. Highgate lures to it many a Russian intellectual. They come to pay regards to Karl Marx, whose grave is to be found in Highgate cemetery.

Harvey (*Abruptly stops exercising.*)

I know where Karl Marx is buried.

Vlov

Of course you do old chap. Force of habit, you know, with you fellows I am never too sure about the level of ignorance. I'm sure you

understand? Apologies. Didn't mean to be condescending.

Harvey (*Smiling, with a touch of irritation.*)

I'm used to it from you guys! Sounds like you found an artist all right. What I believe you Brits would call a con artist!

Vlov

How did you so unerringly identify my ethnic origins? (*pause*) You're instincts are correct, of course. I am a Londoner (*Sings, with a bit more exercise.*)

Maybe it's because I'm Londoner,

That I think of her

Wherever I go-o-oh!

(*Vlov pretends to shower and towel off.*) I'm afraid that I can't remember any more of the song. My mother used to sing it to me when I was a child. She knew the whole thing. Everybody in Hackney used to know it by heart. Later, when I began to visit the "King George" with the rest of my contemporaries not a evening would pass without someone leading the assembly in the singing of that song. You see, in those days every true blue Cockney was overwhelmingly proud of his roots. It never occurred to us to doubt their value. There were no spoil-sports around to sneer. Any fellow who pointed out that being a Cockney - being born randomly in the East End rather than in one of the multitudinous alternatives - was a fluke that signified nothing more than a wishful whim of some swimming spermatazoon, who happened to have waggled his tail and breast-stroked up an inviting fallopian opening nine months before one's mother settled down in Hackney's connubial bliss. (*Pause.*) I don't suppose that you chaps have one?

Harvey

Pardon me?

Vlov

Do you New Yorkers have a song for the old city? A ditty for New Amsterdam?

Harvey (*angrily*)

Who says I'm from New York? Did I tell you I was from New York?

Vlov

I'm terribly sorry. (*Pause.*) Have another sip. (*Harvey drinks.*) It was cheeky of me, I suppose, to presume that you are from New York. It's just that everyone I meet in circumstances like this is invariably a New Yorker. I rather like the place myself. You may not take this as the intended compliment, but it reminds me of London. Particularly the upper West Side. I have spent many a pleasant summer evening in Central Park.

Harvey (*thoughtfully*)

My old man was from the Bronx. He grew up on 178th Street ... nothing much to sing about there any more. He liked it good enough ... always wanted to move up in the world. He fancied a big apartment for us around 160th Street – maybe even on the Grand Concourse. To him that area was the Park Avenue of the Bronx.

Vlov

I am drawn by the nobility of the architecture. Park Avenue has its noble aspects, too. Noble architecture is quite rare hereabouts, or so it seems to me.

Harvey (*thoughtfully*)

He was a Yankee's fan. Liked a drink when Mom wasn't around. Smart old guy - he used to say "I'd rather have a bottle in front of me than a frontal lobotomy". He was proud of his brains. They were gonna get us all to the Grand Concourse.

Vlov

The same goes for Madison Avenue, I believe. Fine architecture.

Harvey (*shrugs*)

Instead he put six kids through law-school on the profits from one miserable corner grocery store.

Vlov

Some persons deride the enormity of Madison Avenue – “big-so-what” they say. It’s too easy to deprecate, don’t you agree?

Harvey

Deprecate? Who’s deprecating? My old man put one hell of a lot of hard work into that shop. My old lady, too, after he died. For what? Just for five lawyers too many in the family and an unfulfilled life-long yearning to live kitty-corner from Joe di Maggio.

Vlov

What brings a lawyer from the Bronx to a place like this?

Harvey

Divorce.

Vlov

A divorce lawyer?

Harvey

Not their divorce – my divorce.

Vlov

Oh, I see.

Third Man*(In shrill woman's voice, giving them both a fright. The voice comes from behind the box.)* Why did you bring me to this damn party if all you want is to talk to that redhead?

Harvey*(to Vlov)*

Did you say that? *(Vlov shrugs in bewilderment.)*

Vlov

Since when did I sound like Little Miss Muffet?

Third Man*(He sits up, staring blankly at them, while apparently having a matrimonial argument with himself. He continues in a shrill woman's voice.)*

So she likes animals, does she? So what? She can like them well enough with her clothes on!

Harvey

It was him. He spoke.

Vlov*(Indifferently.)*

Little Miss Muffet is in need of a shave.

Harvey *(Getting up and approaching Third Man.)*

You O.K.? Hell of a bang you took. *(Harvey reaches to examine the wound on Third Man's temple.)*

Third Man *(In shrill woman's voice)*

Keep your filthy hands to yourself! *(Flaps hands at Harvey.)* The male animal. That's her style - with it's pants down and it's pecker up!

Vlov *(Waving Harvey away from Third Man, who sits motionless.)*

I'd leave him alone just now, if I were you. He doesn't seem too keen on you. I told you he was dangerous.

Harvey

Why's he talking like a woman?

Vlov *(Musing to himself.)*

I wonder whether he's armed?

Harvey

What was he talking about?

Vlov

It was some sort of matrimonial dispute. Perhaps your mention of divorce triggered it off?

Harvey

That was my divorce. Not his.

Vlov

Or hers? What do you make of Little Miss Muffet? (*Harvey moves towards Third Man*) Keep away from her!

Harvey

He's harmless. He's quiet now.

Vlov

Still might be dangerous.

Harvey

Once I read of a guy used to panhandle on the Broadway sidewalk. He could hold out his cup for money, motionless for as much as ten hours at a stretch.

Vlov

What is the moral of this fable?

Harvey

If anyone tried to put a coin in the cup he used to bite their hand off!

Vlov

Living hand to mouth! Rather ungrateful.

Harvey

Do you think this guy might be like that?

Vlov

Frankly, old man, I doubt whether anyone could be like that.

Harvey

It's true all right. I read it in the New York Times.

Vlov

This fellow's speech is like a donkey that won't budge. It sets off at a gallop once one turns one's back.

Harvey (*Looking straight into Third Man's entranced face.*)

I wonder what he's thinking about.

Vlov (*Musing.*)

I wonder whether he can even hear us. Hello in there? What's new today in the world of Little Miss Muffet? (*Pause.*)

Third Man (*Pause. Then blurts in his normal voice.*)

I know something that's real neat.

Harvey

Watch out for his teeth.

Vlov

He doesn't have any.

Third Man (*Getting excited.*)

I - I - I don't mean gay hookers.

Harvey

O.K. O.K. Calm down. We won't hurt you. We're you're friends, O.K.? Now what's it all about?

Vlov

What's all the fuss about, old chap?

Third Man

Rich guys ride the trains!

Harvey

Don't be stupid. Who the hell is gonna take Amtrak - boring, dirty and behind schedule Amtrak - when they can hop a plane?

Vlov

Don't make him angry. He might be armed.

Harvey

Are you armed?

Third Man

I'm not talking restaurant cars with bus boys and bars. I'm talking box-cars!

Harvey

Pardon me?

Third Man

Dressed like us.

Harvey

Like railroad bums, you mean?

Vlov

It makes sense, old chap. When and where did the great American adventures happen? I'll tell you. Excitement doesn't come about from the comfortable security of a weekend cottage dove-tailed in between Monday to Friday in the health spa, the squash court or the board-meeting. Excitement is not knowing what the hell is coming next. A thrill is about being

Third Man

.... Indiana Jones!

Harvey

It's sure as heck not about Indiana.

Third Man

They go off on the weekend, riding the rails.

Harvey (*Raising his voice.*)

It sounds like B.S. to me! Who's gonna put up with this squalour when they've got dough? What's with box-cars, anyway?

Third Man (*Rather timidly.*)

Box-cars, the Great Depression - legions of bold guys, threading their way back and forth across the country.

Vlov

I can see it! They leave their plump pension portfolios behind on the twenty-third floor of their skyscraper. They don't bother to stop off on the way home to get their kid's teeth capped or to buy into a time-share deal. They even leave behind their deodorants (*Harvey discretely sniffs his armpit.*) They are seeking adventure - it's a spiritual thing.

Third Man

Spiritual experience should be preserved in oils. I would like to paint these men.

Harvey (*Angry and sceptical.*)

They'd get the shit beat out of them by the railroad police. It's too dangerous.

Third Man

They'd have dogs for travelling companions. I like to paint dogs best of all.

Harvey

Paint away! They don't exist. No one's that crazy - they'd get killed!

Vlov

Danger is over-rated, old man. John Lennon got killed just crossing the street. You can get killed while deep in prayer! JFK was out for a ride with the wife. These hypothetical railway travellers, on the other hand, have the additional thrill of leaving the wife at home. It all sounds rather pleasant, liking taking the dog for a walk.

Harvey (*Shouting at Third Man.*)

Well, I think this story is just crap!

Vlov

Keep away from him, old man, he might be dangerous.

Harvey (*Scornfully.*)

Danger is over-rated, ... old man!

Vlov

Aahh! Yes, well. (*Embarrassed cough. Long Pause.*) It seems that the show is over. (*Snaps fingers in front of Third Man's face, no reaction. Pause.*) Perhaps you shouldn't have shouted at him?

Harvey

Can he hear?

Vlov

Probably. Better leave him alone, he might

Harvey

... be dangerous.

Vlov

Precisely. What was I going to say? (*Pause. They exchange glances, rather like actors who have dried up. Vlov delves into his bag and at once "remembers his lines".*) Ah, yes! You probably imagine that I am gung-ho for Frank Lloyd Wright? I'm afraid not, chum. I can't detect the taint of the artist in Frankie. Doubtless the fault lies within myself but, as I've tried to explain, I must always seek out the artist before I can penetrate the man. (*Pause.*) I hope that I am not boring you? (*silence*)

Harvey (*Thoughtfully, still with half a mind on the silent Third Man, sitting stock-still in a trance.*)

My old man was a big admirer of Frank Lloyd Wright - I wonder if this guy's had some sort of blackout? - (*Abruptly forgets about the Third Man.*) he used to rave something fierce about the poetry of the designs. Mom, who was more practical, used to peer over his shoulder at the

photographs and tell him he wouldn't be so goddam keen on Frankie's houses if he had to live in them. (*laughs*)

Vlov

When I worked in Broadstairs, which is in Kent and therefore is not as unspeakably far from London as we are now, I used to gather around me a fecund fraternity of young chaps. And ladies, too. Particularly poets, you know. Some painters, a sprinkling of writers, an occasional architect, but mostly poets. We used to meet in the upstairs backroom at the "Star and Garter" on Thursday nights. Why not Wednesday you may wonder? Come on, guess. An aficionado of the Muses like yourself, spoilt by familiarity with the galleries and poetic watering holes of New York, might fancy to wager a guess as to why the Broadstairs literati congregate on a Thursday. Why do they choose Thor, the thunderbolt, rather than, say, wooden old Woden or frigid old Fria?

Harvey (*angrily*)

I don't know.

Vlov

Of course you bloody well do! Guess! At once.

Harvey

Because it was fucking pay-day! And don't swear at me.

Vlov

Absolutely right! I told you that you could guess. Good guessers should never get married! (*pause*) Do you carry a gun?

Harvey

No.

Vlov

Good Lord! Then don't you swear at me, either. I thought all you chaps were armed to the teeth. What happened, did you lose it?

Harvey

I'm a pacifist.

Vlov

What about him? (*Indicating Third Man, sitting as if in a trance*)

Harvey

He doesn't look much like a pacifist.

Vlov

I meant, is he armed?

Harvey

Is this some sort of fixation? How should I know? Ask him.

Vlov

He's incommunicado. (*Pause.*) I don't often bump into conscientious objectors on my travels. However, I must admit that it is a relief to have found one on this occasion. I've been left for dead more than once by several of your fellow countrymen, who didn't subscribe to your creed of non-violence. In fact, I had formed the reluctant impression that the North American railway bum is just as dangerous as the rest of your murderous society.

Harvey

Hitching rides on trains isn't supposed to be a picnic. And who the hell are you to say that the U.S.A. is any more violent than anywhere else. Are you telling me that guys don't get mugged in foggy old London town?

Vlov

Don't be ridiculous. London is a society of scholars and artists.

Harvey

What about pickpockets masquerading as Russian Orthodox priests?

Vlov

I agree with you that it would be very dangerous for an Englishman to travel, as we are doing, by railway train without a ticket. If caught he would be subject to a swingeing fine.

Harvey

Swingeing?

Vlov

But, naturally, one is never reduced to railway bumming in a Socialist environment. Had I ever been short of the fare from Dorking to Dorset the Welfare State would have advanced me the cash.

Harvey

Oh, yeah! Who're you trying to kid? What's swingeing mean?

Vlov

My God! How illiterate you fellows can be! To swinge - an impetus, a forcible sweeping motion - now do you understand? Oh, Lord! A sweeping fine, then.

Harvey

Why didn't you say so in the first place?

Vlov

Perhaps I didn't explain myself clearly. (*Sighs.*) I love the Arts - painting, music, poetry, literature - and with that lifelong esteem it is not unusual to find a concomitant love of language. The English language, that is. If you knew a few more words yourself you might endorse the same point of view. (*silence*)

Do you know what concomitant means?

Harvey

Of course I do. "something coming along with" - its etymology is obvious. In Latin "con" means with when taking the ablative case, as

in “allegro con moto” for instance.

Vlov

Italian, actually, although Latin is near enough pro tem. By Jove! I do believe that I have misjudged you for an uneducated man. Were you once, perhaps, an Ivy-Leaguer? Did you once tread the halls of Harvard University in your Ivy-League boots? Did you once prance through the posterns of Princeton in your Ivy-League boots? Am I addressing, perchance, a graduate Magna Summa Cum Lauda (“cum” can also take the ablative and really is Latin, incidentally) of Sigma Alpha Kappa Pi? Which, by the way, is Greek.

Harvey

Cut it out.

Vlov

If so then this must really be my lucky day. I can see now why I detected in you that redolence of the artistic spirit. You are an educated man. (*Claps hands in delight.*)

Harvey

You’re the one who identified me as a lawyer. An ex-lawyer would be more accurate. Did you expect an uneducated lawyer? (*pause*) I told you that six of us kids were put through law school.

Vlov

You never said explicitly that the six included you. You might have been the lucky little rabbinical fellow selected for yeshiva. (*sighs*) But yes, I can see it now - once a big-business colonel in New York’s famous and much vaunted Wall Street. Yes, I detect it now in the refinement of your accent. That speech has none of the grating twang of the Bronx, rather you have the (*in deep voice*) big-deep-voice-boom-boom so much beloved of that vanishing species known as the Corporate White American Male. Maybe you will be able to advise me about what to do with my portfolio?

Harvey

Why don't you stuff it up the usual place?

Vlov

Not enough sunshine there, old boy. (*pause*) Perhaps your milieu was the divorce court rather than corporate taxation? (*pause*)

You never did sing me the old New Yorker song, did you? Surely you stock broker types have some sort of ditty? An old school song type of thing? Something about the delights of the rich and famous? No? (*pause*) There is that miracle of Manhattan minstrelsy which goes by the title of "New York, New York". (*Tries to hum something but fails.*) Perhaps I can make another suggestion? You must pardon the performance. If I could do any better I probably would not be so impecunious. If I could sing like Sinatra I wouldn't be so short of the ready. Anyway, here is my proposal - it's more about good ol' N.Y. family values, as seen from the distaff side, but it will have to do: (*Vlov accompanies his song with a rather grotesque imitation of a vocal group such as The Supremes.*)

My guy! My guy!
I'm talking about my guy.
He's an entrepreneu-r-rre,
He's safe but he's sure,
He's got a little business where
He deals in manure,
Does my guy!

Harvey (*Over the top of the end of the first verse.*)

Cut it out!

Vlov (*Louder.*)

My guy! My guy!
I'm talking about my guy.
He recycles ordure,

Which is hard to endure,
But he's clean and he's pure,
If a little obscure,
Is my guy!

Harvey (*Over the top of the end of the second verse.*)

Cut it out!

Vlov (*Undeterred. Louder than ever.*)

He scrubs his nails before he comes on home,
So he don't smell much when we're both prone,
Does my guy.
Manure may sound like shit to you
But it's money in the bank to the chosen few.
He puts the kids through college,
And piles the blue chips up,
He bought a cottage, two cars and all that stuff
And I'll get fifty per cent when the divorce comes up.
From my wonderful guy!

(*silence*)

Do I take it that you were not impressed. (*pause*) It usually goes down well with divorcees. (*pause*) If you're not so enthusiastic about the modern mores of New York, what about a touch of jingoism for Uncle Samuel and his All-A-Merican values? Aren't you fellows supposed to be a treasure house of patriotism? What about a triumphal song about the Gulf War?

Harvey

Piss off.

Vlov

Don't get irked, old chap. Just an innocent enquiry. Perhaps you carry a flag?

Harvey

No, I don't carry a flag.

Vlov

But I thought you all had to. Isn't it in the Constitution? Something about the Right to Bear Flags?

Harvey

That's the right to bear arms.

Vlov

Ah, yes. Armaments - we went over those earlier. You said that you weren't carrying arms, I believe. Now we find that you are not carrying a flag. (*moves towards the bag*) If you don't mind my saying so, old chum, what the devil do you carry?

Harvey

Leave that alone. O.K.?

Vlov

Just curious, old son. Are you telling the truth about having no flag? I was led to believe that you fellows are scrupulously honest. You're not lying to me?

Harvey

Leave off, will you? I have no frigging flags!

Vlov

No need to be down-hearted, my friend. As it happens I have flags enough for all. (*Vlov rummages in his bag and extracts a number of flags. The first is the Union Jack, then two more, then the Stars and Stripes*) There we are! I was beginning to think that perhaps I had forgotten to pack yours. It's rather delapidated, as you can see, the moths got at it. I used to know a fellow in Harrods. Ran the ling erie depart-

ment. Won prizes for managing the best one. He always had moth-balls. Excellent moth-balls. He must have given me a hundredweight! I never left Harrods after a visit without a few bags of moth-balls. Naphtha! It has such a heady aroma. Charming man, but misunderstood at home, I fancy. Last I heard of him, his wife had divorced him for sadistic cruelty - on account of the fact that she couldn't stand the unremitting smell of moth-balls. It's very hard to get rid of, you know, which is why the moths don't like it. Decree Nisi with no chance of conjugal visits, that was the verdict. It damn nearly killed the chap. I suppose fascination with moth balls crept up on him slowly. Step by step, starting with an aversion for moths, I should imagine, and escalating into a declaration of all out warfare. Rather like you and the Gulf War, wouldn't you agree? I never could understand how his old lady could bring herself to oust him. She was an otherwise charming woman, who used to attend our poetry evenings in the "Star and Garter". A tall lady, rather attractive in some ways - I can see her now, sipping her pint of mild-and-bitter, standing in the shadows by the casement in her long gown, gazing out over the car park. There was something about her reminiscent of Britannia, the beauty on the coins. (*Vlov wraps himself in the Union Jack and leans back alluringly*) She looked a bit like this, except that her dress was not as threadbare as this flag - diaphanous it may have been, but not threadbare. Through it - the gown - one could detect the finest lingerie.

Harvey

With a hint of moth-balls?

Vlov

How did you guess? Yes, just a hint. Not enough for her to have noticed. I think that one of her admiring poets from the "Garter" must have tipped her the wink- a hot-breather, grasping at an opportunity, momentarily coming upon her in the narrow corridor which led out to the lavatories. A lascivious frivoller hell-bent on touching the nape

of her neck while her husband dutifully called for his round and was therefore otherwise engaged. Such a gigolo, I believe, must have tipped her off to the stink of her ling erie.

Harvey

Can you be certain?

Vlov

Do I detect a hint of curiosity? One cannot expect certainty from a gentleman of my age. Can we be sure that she was ever in the "Star and Garter" on one of those artistic Thursdays? Can we say with unshakeable conviction that it was she - handsome, tall and alluring as she stepped adroitly between the casually reclining bodies in that upstairs backroom? Furthermore, should our instincts prove sound, she may have been oblivious to the redolence of moth-balls. She may have arrived in oblivion and left in oblivion. After all, what sort of clutching philanderer, interfering with her in the back passage to the lavat... - washroom - would be such a bounder as to tell her afterwards that she smelt. Worse still, to tell her afterwards that, rather than good honest ruddy sweat and erotic excretions, she ping-ponged of moth-balls!

Harvey

You would. You did!

Vlov

Absolutely right! Another good guess. (*pause*) Are you sure that you don't carry a gun?

Harvey

I told you. I'm a pacifist.

Vlov

Let's toast to that. (*drinks and passes the bottle*) When did you last have whisky for breakfast?

Harvey

In the Army, I suppose.

Vlov

Where were you posted?

Harvey

Germany. West Germany, as it was then.

Vlov

Whereabouts?

Harvey

You guess this time.

Vlov

Augsburg?

Harvey (*taking a second drink*)

Absolutely right! Good guessers should never get married, as Mom used to say.

Vlov

It was I who said that!

Harvey

And Mom.

Vlov (*momentarily hostile*)

Who told you that I was married? (*pause*) Oh, I see. Another guess. Well, it's a pretty rotten guess as it happens. I have *known* marriage - as in the case of my flirtations with moth-ball infestations.

Harvey

I getcha, you were the guy who came on with the old lady of your Harrods pal?

Vlov

You're guessing again. Actually, once I even had a wife - or two - or three - or lots. But I was never married to any them. You see, I have always contended that marriage is more of a posture than a pasture, more a bed of nails than a bucolic paradise, more a balancing act than a state of grace - although one may easily fall from either. I have known many chaps who professed to be married, but upon further examination I have generally concluded that such men are maintaining a facade of marital expertise, rather than the reality itself. I suppose that the rare real thing has something to do with capitalised LOVE, L-O-V-E! Myself, I've not had noticeably much of the stuff. In the British Army - Korea in my case - we were encouraged to dispense with all that. We were given a weekly chit for a visit to the clap-house and if the pox developed one was hauled before the M.O. for a chit-chat and a couple of rounds with the red hot catheter. He loved that bit, the M.O. - he was a remarkably sadistic fellow. Sad to say, he fondled one gonad too many, outside the line of duty, you understand. He took a fancy to a Geordie named Geordie, who didn't appreciate his favours. One night Geordie took a couple of rough types and ambushed the M.O. in his quarters. They took a sizeable A.B. nut and threaded it on the poor chap's John Thomas, then proceeded to excite the villain by taking a feather to his privates. His screams could be heard half a mile away in the N.A.A.F.I.! The recollection of those squeals still sends a shiver down my spine. I don't suppose that sort of thing is tolerated in the U.S. Army?

Harvey

Our Doc was a woman. She wouldn't have done stuff like that for sure. Now the Master Sergeant, McGregor was his name, he had a number of violent stunts he liked to pull. (*takes another drink*) They occurred in the latrines mostly. I know, because a pacifist usually draws a lot of latrine duty. I just used to keep my head down and stay out of

his sight as much as possible. If you pissed him off you were likely to get your head down in quite another sense.

Vlov

A believer in ritual flushing, was he?

Harvey

He was court martialled for it in the end. After an ugly incident in which a black guy was drowned. He might have gotten away with it, too, if the guy's buddies hadn't come after McGregor with an anti-tank gun one night. They were going to blow him away on the way into town. Stupid thing was that they staged the hit right outside the police station and when they missed with the first round it took out the entire front of the building. In seconds there were uniformed Fritzie everywhere. Boy were they ever mad! They beat the shit out of our guys before handing them back. It was at their trial that the whole story came out. They each got two years but McGregor got five and a dishonourable discharge for accidental manslaughter. The authorities were really pissed - right up to Numero Uno himself. You see, the base was pretty damn unpopular anyway, the Bavarians thought that getting rid of the army of occupation was well overdue. They were right! It was a real mess. The President was sore at the Pentagon for spoiling the flimsy entente cordiale and the Pentagon was mad at the White House for making them foot the bill for the police station. It was a fancy place to have to rebuild, it cost more than an Atlas missile.

Vlov

Did you have to carry a gun?

Harvey

Pardon me?

Vlov

When you were in the army did they make you carry a gun?

Harvey

Sure, everyone has to do that. I loaded mine with blanks.

Vlov

Did you learn to shoot?

Harvey

I never made the grade. In the end they settled for having me polish my weapon extra bright (*laughs*) and they arranged for me to have extra latrine duty.

Vlov

Isn't life rather mind-numbingly boring in the military bogs?

Harvey

Bogs?

Vlov

Antediluvian British Army slang for your latrines, old chap.

Harvey:

It could've been worse. There were a number of guys on the same ticket so we used to try and get done quick. Then we'd play bridge.

Vlov

Bravo! Yours must have been an unusually intellectual platoon. I suppose it goes to show that your average pacifist is a significantly intellectually superior creature.

Harvey

I dunno about that but I firmly believe in the converse - that all those hawks in the Pentagon are pretty dumb.

Vlov

As it happens I, too have played the odd rubber ...

Harvey

Wait a minute now, I didn't ask to listen to confessions about your sex life.

Vlov

Oh? Oh, I see! You feign to misunderstand, old chap. I'm referring to rubbers of bridge.

Harvey (*laughs*)

I know.

Vlov

Actually, I was the regimental duplicate champion for three years running - my partner being a fine Oxonian - educated at Rugby and Keble and a wizard with the Italian Blue Club. I tell you what, let's have a game right now.

Harvey

Sorry, buddy, I didn't bring any cards.

Vlov

Me neither. But we don't need cards, I'll tell you the hands. You're South and I'm your partner. You've got

Harvey

Cut it out! I'm too tired for this.

Vlov

Bollocks, old man. It's your opportunity to hold your end up - time to show that Yanks can play bridge. What system do you want to bid in? (*Deals invisible hands. They mime playing bridge. Harvey holds a piece of paper, later this will be realised to be a crib sheet for a previously rehearsed game of "mental bridge"!*)

Harvey

Oh, Christ, I dunno. How about Goram?

Vlov

All right, Goram with Blackwood - Roman Key Card, four no trumps asking for aces and kings. Here's the hand. Everyone is vulnerable and you've got ace, king, ex, ex in Hearts, seven clubs to the jack, queen, king and one apiece in Spades and Diamonds. East and West pass throughout and our bidding goes one Club, one Diamond, one Heart,

four Clubs, four Hearts, four No Trumps Blackwood, five Hearts for ..

Harvey

... two aces or one ace and one king

Vlov

... and we finish in six Hearts. My dummy is revealed to be a singleton Club ace, five Diamonds to the ace, jack, four Hearts to the jack and ace, jack, ex of Spades. You to play, the lead is a rubbishy Spade.

Harvey

Mmmm, what's the trump split?

Vlov

That's for you to find out.

Harvey

Hell, I dunno. (*pause*) I guess I can't make it without the Heart finesse. So here goes nothing. I take the first trick with the Spade ace, play the ace of Hearts, unblock dummy's Club ace and cash the Diamond ace, leaving me in dummy. O.K. so far?

Vlov

Super, no complaints yet.

Harvey

Next the finesse, jack of Hearts towards my king and then ...

Vlov

.. then East discards a Spade...

Harvey

Oh, shit! No trumps, eh? (*pause*) O.K. then it's simple. I go up with the king and take the winning Clubs. There's no defence. If West ruffs with the Heart queen I ruff the return, draw West's last trump with the ten and finish the Clubs. If West ruffs the third Club low then I over-ruff in dummy, cross back with a ruffed Spade and then finish the Clubs!

Vlov

Congratulations! (*Presents Harvey with an enormous, imaginary trophy. Harvey accepts with mock ceremony.*)

Harvey

Yeah, that was pretty neat. Now it's your turn.

Vlov

No thanks, old man. I think I have all that I need to know.

Harvey

Pardon me? All you need to know about what?

Vlov

Why, all I need to know about you, of course.

Harvey

What in Hell's name ...?

Vlov (*very quietly*)

Don't lose your cool, old man. I don't think that you should interrupt me - it tends to irritate one, as does being lied to. (*waves aside a protesting grunt*) You have failed to tell me the truth. Now what sort of basis is that for a relationship between fellow travellers? How are we going to foster mutual trust and understanding in the face of that sort of behaviour? Perhaps you think, as a superior type, that you are entitled to display mendacity to all the bums you meet in railway wagons because the flotsam and jetsam doesn't weigh very much in the pan of your grand cosmological scales? Right now, just remember that you are on parade before a former Brigadier General of Her Majesty's Armed Forces Education Corps - one who doesn't like being lied to by the N.C.O.'s!

Actually you weren't an N.C.O. much less a private swabbing out the privy. No army recruits pacifists - what for? I'm sure that Uncle Samuel has other activities reserved for the tiny minority of men who don't like to kill. Probably a choice between community service in a

leper colony in Arkansas (*he says Ar-kan-sa-ss*) ...

Harvey

Arkansas (*correct pronunciation*)

Vlov

Shut up and listen. In a leper colony in Arkansas (*he says Ar-kan-sa-ss*) or having their genitals torn off by wild, really wild, mustangs! Needless to say, most choose the mustangs. But you didn't. If you were in the U.S. Army at all - and I'm prepared to concede that, given the fact that you've played a lot of bridge somewhere - then you were an officer. Certain types of officers play bridge all the time and any recruiting system worth its salt would have spotted you for someone with an I.Q. higher than 170 - well outside at least three standard deviations - and have recommended you for officer training. That's one of the things which the Education Corps does - it classifies clever recruits according to their intellectual proclivities. You would have been promoted swiftly and assigned to the bridge playing battalion!

Am I right so far? (*silence*) I take that as affirmative. Therefore we have you in the Army. And what do white male officers do in the U.S. Army? They thrive, that's what they do. They keep their pink little noses clean and then they thrive. Army life is full of taboos - no gays, no high ranking women or as few as possible, ditto for coloured minorities, even those in the majority, and - last but not least - the "smart white guy shall do good", meaning not that he shall cure the sick or minister unto orphans but that he shall do well - for himself! Therefore, once you were in the regiment and Four-No-Trumping your way to the top you could not lose. Either you're still in the forces and doing all right jack or else you took some lucrative retirement package when you were between thirty and forty and now you've got a nice job in New York City which you picked up by virtue of your connections in the Army. Right? Or wrong?

Harvey

O.K. so I was once a Big Apple lawyer, why keep harping about it? A guy can be an ex-lawyer without every inquisitive Joe needing to peer up his ass!

Vlov

Ex nothing, old chap. In my experience, people who play bridge like you *enjoy* being a nasty little shit of a lawyer in the big city. They *enjoy* the proximity to rich clients, the social whirl and hobnobbing with society beauties. They enjoy greasing around the POSH - port out, starboard home! Park my Porsche (*pronounced Portia*), Shylock!

Harvey

Get lost, you stupid ass-hole. (*moves towards his pack, as if to pack up*) I don't give a shit about your theory - it's dangerous to go sticking your nose into other guys' affairs. Think yourself damn lucky that I'm gonna get off at the next steep grade.

Vlov

Don't touch that bag!

Harvey

Fuck off!

Vlov

No thanks! However, old man, I don't believe any of that nonsense about pacifism and your being unarmed. (*Takes out an old service pistol.*) If you turn around, my dear chap, you will catch what I hope to be an unsettling glimpse up the barrel of my former service revolver. You see, even in the Education Corps your British Tommy is taught to shoot.

Harvey

Put the goddam thing away. Don't be stupid! Bridge players don't shoot each other. For Christ's sake! - most of what you've said about me goes double for you.

Vlov

I never pretended otherwise. I made it clear just what I had been and, if you had been inclined to listen, I would have told you freely how I was reduced by circumstance to my current mode of travel. Not a pretty story, but nothing which I conceal from people. I certainly don't lie about it. On the other hand, Little Miss Muffet told us all about fellows like you - perfectly respectable, well-established senior management types - who get their occasional *frisson* by riding around like refugees from the "Grapes of Wrath". (*Pulls the bag over and starts carefully to pull out the contents*) Rest assured ... (*squints at a driver's licence*) ...my God, it's Harvey is it? (*Silence. Harvey appears not to have understood. Vlov repeats.*) Harvey is it? (*Harvey nods this time.*) Rest assured, my dear Harvey, that those of us who belong here need a stroke of good fortune once in a while and getting our hands on a marketable commodity like yourself qualifies admirably as such a fatalistic *volte face*. Consider yourself under military arrest until such time as a hearing can be held into your misconduct. It is customary for an officer to be treated in a gentlemanly fashion by his capturing officer. That being the case, I shall give you the choice of being quiescent or of wearing these (*holds up a pair of handcuffs*).

Harvey

Are you kidnapping me?

Vlov

You may call it kidnapping if you like. Personally I consider that expression to be rather infelicitous. As it happens the rules of conduct which govern the behaviour of we gentleman of the road delineate very precisely the punishments to be extended to those who abuse the system. In particular, I contend that the *petit bougeois* like yourself have no right to be here.

Harvey

I've got no right here? And you have? You expect me to take that from a fake like you? Real hobos don't drink single malt and talk like

someone out of a B.B.C. remake of “Jeeves and Wooster”.

Vlov

Sorry. old bean, but I do! I belong here and that’s the way it is. All right? Now, what is it going to be with regard to the cuffs, old chap? (*pause*) All right, I shall take that as a promise not to misbehave and accordingly shall leave these off. Mmmm? Not talking, eh? Not spaking, by Jove! Well, I imagine that if you were to spake you would only give tongue to some boring old chestnut like telling me that we British are also *petit bougeoisie* - Napoleon’s “Nation of Shopkeepers” - who have persisted in sticking our drooping, artistocratic, colonial imperialist noses into lots of places they were not wanted. Alas, that doesn’t wash with me, Harvey, old mate. At least not coming from you it doesn’t, representing as you do the last and most intrusive of all the Imperialist Powers. In fact, as a pair of latter-day imperialists, we should understand one another to perfection. Wouldn’t you say? (*still poking in Harvey’s bag*) What on earth have we here? Photos? Madonna with child? Probably the family?

Harvey

Ex-wife. Became tired of the money and me. Wanted something more worthwhile - like taking the kids and going to live in a women’s co-op.

Vlov

No big deal, Harvey, old mate. Fifty per cent of married couples split up.

Harvey

That’s easy for you to say. Your kids haven’t been taken off to Vermont.

Vlov (*finds telephone*)

Who’s a supposedly destitute ex-lawyer thinking of phoning?

Harvey

Possessing a phone isn't illegal.

Vlov (*still studying the photos*)

Nice house, Harvey. Very expensive by the looks of it. I've always wanted a two car garage with matching Mercedes! I jolly nearly had it once, too. Just after being demobbed, I was a rather wealthy chap. I used to breakfast each day at the Carlton Club with a former fellow officer who was in the City- with Cowpers and thingummy, you know. Charming fellow - he acted as my financial adviser. He was a bloody good type - fit as a fiddle and sound as a drum - or conversely - had played rucker for Wales Under Eighteens, a former prop forward for the Combined Services and the London Welsh. Out of season he was also not a bad medium pace bowler and a fair opening bat. Good with my money, too. Made pots of it for me - just seemed to have the knack. There was nothing he didn't tell me about money. Except, that is, that a fellow who is sound as a fiddle and fit as a drum might take a fancy to something when one shows it to him in a photo. That he might take a fancy to a trim figure and a ready smile. That he might randify - to the point of transgression of Commandments number seven and ten - after her auburn hair, her pearly teeth, her fetching breasts and buttocks as seen in a photo like this! And that wheresoever he fancieth, there may he adultereth, then there may he buggereth off with half the fortune thereof - the rest going on legal fees! That's what can happen if you flash around sentimental junk like this, Harvey! So don't you fucking well tell me about little wifey going off to a commune in Vermont. You can always bloody well phone her there (*waves phone*) and talk to your bloody kids! (*goes to tear the photo up and throw it away, the phone has gone into his pocket.*)

Harvey

Stop that! (*Harvey launches at him and they struggle*)

Vlov (*upon gaining the upper hand*)

I thought that you promised to behave. Put these on. (*Harvey*

puts his hands through the cuffs and Vlov clicks them shut) There! I hope that you like breakfast consultations, Harvey - for which you will be paying (*takes money out of a wallet he has found and waves it*) - because I think you are my financial consultant now. (*picks up a sliver of photo*) Is this the wife? (*pause*) Ex-wife? (*pause*) No comment, eh? Never mind, it won't take me long to find out who wants you back the most. (*taking out the phone*) Perhaps you could oblige me? I'll need the telephone number.

Harvey

You're a fucking madman! No fucking wonder your wife pissed off!

Vlov (*up close, gun under nose*)

Listen, Harvey - you are listening aren't you, Harv? (*muzzle into Harvey's mouth*) One little squeeze of the trigger - it's well looked after and a tiny jerk would suffice - one jerk to finish off another. Yes? Understand? I've had lots of money before - I agree that I could enjoy myself on the proceeds of ransoming you. But don't imagine for one moment that I need it so badly that I wouldn't pull this trigger. A chap can become very angry when taunted about his marital mistakes. Isn't that right, Harvey? So I'm not fixated upon the profit margin which is embodied in your sleek, marketable, Dow-Jones-ified person. Furthermore, I could probably get the ransom money merely by having all this clobber of yours to use as identification! So watch it mate, or else ...

Third Man (*who has come to his senses again some time earlier, enough to have overheard quite a lot. He brandishes a large, antiquated-looking six-gun.*)

Or else nothing. Freeze, dog-people. Heel! Good boy, make like statuary. One move and I'll blow away dog-brains. Scoop your poop! Just put down the gun. I repeat - lay down that firearm and step away.

(Harvey, still padlocked, grabs for Vlov's gun and the trio stare at each other - blackout, possibly train enters tunnel)

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

(train out of tunnel)

Harvey

Thank God for you buddy! This nut was going to fill me with bullets.
Crazy ass-hole!

Third Man

Whose disturbing my sleep? Dogs?

Harvey

You weren't asleep.

Vlov

Shhh!

Third Man

Are you no better than wild dogs? What's with the pistola, Brigadier?
There's too many doggone gun nuts in this dog-torn world.

Vlov *(dropping his gun on the floor, it lands quite close to Harvey, but not quite within reach)*

This one was only loaded with blanks. Mind you, I agree with you about the deleterious effects of fire-arms on society - how aptly you put it, Major! Dog-torn world! Tread carefully in the dog-world, Major. Watch your step. Don't besmirch your plimsoles. *(Mimes treading in something foul.)*

Harvey

What's with the plimsoles?

Third Man

What's with the Major? I was never in the army - they wouldn't let me in. I tried real hard to get in. I went to the recruiting kennel and asked for an entry form for Westpoint. The recruiting sergeant just laughed. "No Dogs Allowed" in Westpoint! Dog-pig! He was a slimy little pink-faced pig-dog. Pink as a pig's rear-end. Pink behind the ears, pink up the muzzle, pink all over his close-shaved head and a pinko deep

inside his dog-brain. He wouldn't even give me the damn application form. (*pause - continuing in a far away voice*) I don't like him. I don't like his attitude towards people. Especially women. But I can explain why he's like it, why he's been such a lot of trouble in his life. I can understand it, I don't excuse him. I don't excuse anybody. Least of all you. I can't fathom his thoughts, although I can feel him reading mine. It tickles. Well, it's something that seems so vague. There's nothing in it. I suppose I haven't got a clear definition of what I want to do next. If I have then I can't express it. That's the truth of it. I can't express myself as I would like to. Sometimes I seem to be just a blank. It's no use trying to search for a word that doesn't want to come to you. (*pause - returning to normal voice with a start*) I tried to grab the goddam form, but he held on to it and it got all tore up. The creep said he couldn't accept the responsibility for me stinking out the whole of Virginia.

Vlov (*wrinkling his nose*)

I have to agree with him, old boy. However, I have temporarily promoted you to the rank of major, Major, because I have a job for you to do, a bit of legalistic judging, which cannot be performed by one of lower rank. In fact, strictly speaking, a major is pushing the limits. Perhaps you should be a general. What do you think? What say, Harvey? Would you like to be court-martialed by a Major or a General?

Third Man

What's a court-martial?

Harvey

First of all, nobody's court-martialling nobody because I'm getting the hell out and second of all can't you see that this guy's weird? He's not got all his per cent, yeah? So lay off him, will you? And that goes double for me. (*tries to rise, only to be pushed back*)

Vlov

Sorry, Harv, old creep, old darling. No can do! You're as guilty as sin and not leaving here till I've proved it. As to our honoured guest here (*indicates Third Man*) I'll thank you not to be so patronising.

Harvey

Christ! Who's fucking patronising?

Vlov

You are patronising my friend here. Never patronise a chap with a gun, Harvey. By the way (*to the Third Man*), my old China, I'll hold the weapon, if you like. Rather heavy, isn't it?

Third Man (*alarmed, agitated*)

Keep back! I keep this. I can fire it, too. Not many people know that I'm a good shot. They think that I'm a poor shot – because of the other things. Imaginary things really. I know that they discuss my marksmanship behind my back. If we had a contest, me and them, we'd soon see (*waving the gun about, as if about to aim and fire*)

Harvey

It's O.K. We'll believe you. (*hisses at Vlov*) Leave him alone will you. I don't want to get a slug in me just because of your stupidity.

Third Man

What's a court-martial? (*Pause*) Would you like to see me shoot?

Vlov

Certainly, just point that thing at Harvey – over there.

Harvey

Aaiieeeee! Noooo ...

Vlov (*soothing voice*)

Perhaps we had better postpone the shooting pro tem, all right? Would you like to know more about court-martials? (*Third Man nods*) Well, it's like a trial on the television - remember O.J.? (*blank stare*) Perry Mason? (*Third Man nods, smiles*) It's just like that only you get to be the judge and Harvey is on trial.

Harvey

The hell he isn't!

Vlov (*whispered loudly*)

The hell he is – unless you want me to tell him to shoot? (*to Third Man at normal volume*) What say? How would you like to be a judge?

Third Man

Sounds like a hell of a lot of fun. I never been a judge.

Vlov

Didn't have the latin, eh? Too bad. However, I believe that you will enjoy the experience. It should be just up your street.

Third Man (*quite eagerly*)

I'll try my best. (*far away again*) I can't trust what I see, it doesn't get backed up. It doesn't get confirmed in any way. Just left to drift, you know. I think that's probably what my trouble is. Anything I might say, it has no backing up. It's all due to imagination, you know. I have a fine imagination - you have to paint, to conceive, no good without. But it doesn't work right, things I might try to do are just put a stop to. Cast away, sort of thing, whether it's because I know some truth about things, I can't defend it. Who does anyway? Nobody knows. I'm just not certain about what other people are saying. About me, you see, when my back is turned. I don't know if there is anything really wrong. Who knows? Maybe I can do it right (*alert again*) - be like a real judge, yeah? Although it ain't easy - just look how the Justice System in this country has gone to the dogs.

Vlov

Remarkably well put! Don't you agree, Harvey? (*sings*)

Knick knack, paddy whack, give the dog a bone,

This old man came rolling home!

Harvey

Talk sense, you jerk. I should smash your teeth in for pulling the

gun. Don't people have rights where you come from?

Vlov

Justice is served where I come from, Harvey. Just as tea is served - on the lawn with cucumber sandwiches - (*to Third Man*) and juicy bones for the four-legged fraternity. Incidentally, the accused is not permitted to make so free with the nasty old bunch of five (*clenches a fist*) in order to threaten the prosecuting officer.

Harvey

Nut case!

Third Man

What did dog-person say? I don't get it. I'm a bit hard of hearing, see. (*Pause*) What have you two been saying about me?

Vlov

I wouldn't discuss your personal affairs with the defendant.

Third Man

Who are you dog-pieces anyway?

Vlov

A good question, your Honour, and one worthy of consideration. It would be quite reprehensible of me, as prosecutor, not to introduce everyone to the court. I am Vlov - today I am inclined to the appellation "Vigilante Vlov", your Honour. After all, I am intending to plop onto the scales of justice an instance of what, to my mind, is a suppurating, stinking social scandal. Therefore, just call me Vigilante Vlov, your Honour.

Third Man

To me you're plain dog-Vlov, like anybody else.

Vlov

We're all dog-Vlovers under the skin, your Honour. How much better, eh, what, than overweening self-Vlov, don't you think?

Harvey

Are you crazy?

Vlov

What do you mean? I can't abide Narcissism - and who asked you anyway?

Harvey

Shit! Not crazy that (*Points at Third Man*), crazy all frigging this (*gestures all about him. Then to Third Man*) Cut out all that doggerel crap, man. Surely you can see that any guy found waving hand-guns around in a box-car and calling himself by such a lunatic single-syllable has to be out to lunch. Christ, whoever heard of a name like "Vlov"?

Vlov

I may be out to all my meals, Harvey, old sport - but Vlov is the most natural name. You have clearly missed the point, Harv - by the way, my God, that's a barmy single-syllable of a name if ever I heard of one - I take care of the Human Race. That is my strength, my identity and my purpose all rolled into one. Everyone else knows all about me and my unswerving purpose. I am renowned for putting right everything that is wrong. (*Vlov sings the song "Vlov changes everything", a grotesque parody of Andrew Lloyd Webber's hit song entitled "Love Changes Everything" from the musical "Aspects of Love".*)

Vlov, Vlov changes everything,
Hands and faces, earth and sky,
Vlov, Vlov changes everything

Harvey

Christ! It's horrible!

Third Man (*applauding*)

I thought it was very nice - but is singing permitted in a courtroom?

Vlov

As long as you, the judge, allow it, mate. After all, we can't just sit around in silence. Can we, Harv?

Third Man

But, gentle-dogs, there are many kinds of silence. For example, dogs don't talk.

Vlov

I grant you that they haven't got a lot to say. But if they had something on their minds, your Honour, then they might.

Third Man

True. They can think for themselves. They are very independent creatures. You should be able to think for yourself, work things out for yourself. I can't. Dogs can take things in but I can't. Even what I remember isn't true memory. You should be able to work things out for yourself. Be able to speak for yourself.

Vlov

Harv, here, has nothing to say - he does not care to speak for himself - but his silence and that of a dog's are not the same. We have respect for dogs...

Third Man

True. Lots of respect!

Vlov

... whereas we have lost our respect for Harv - a position which is not likely to improve if he won't speak to us ...

Third Man

True. Hot-dog, if it ain't!

Vlov

...of course, he might be dead! Or out of season. Consider first the silence of the man who is dead. Imagine going to the room where he is lying, where earlier that afternoon he was stretched out by a dusty old undertaker with attendant ungulata

Third Man

Has undulata got anything to do with dogs?

Vlov

Ungulata! I couldn't say, your Honour. I stole it from a poem by Samuel Beckett, although I seem to remember that Beckett owned a dog to which he was much attached.

Third Man

Fair enough, in that case "assistant undulation" is admissible evidence.

Vlov

Attendant ungulata, your Honour. And we haven't come to the evidence yet, sir. This is my prefatory summing up.

Third Man

Carry on.

Vlov

Imagine that it is pitch black, your Honour - in the dark one's senses are unusually sharpened - I don't just mean for lust, your Honour - there's nothing like being abandoned in an isolated wood on a moonless night to make your ears tingle as sharp as a bat's.

In the undertaker's we listen. What do we hear? (*pause*)

Third Man

What do we hear, Vlov-dog?

Vlov

Absolutely sod all, of course, because we're listening to a bunch of corpses!

Third Man

Ah!

Vlov

Getting stony silence out of a corpse suggests nothing at all - it is dead ordinary dead. It is a commonplace, which signifies absolutely zero, despite thousands of years in which the Church has tried to maintain otherwise. Tried to use dead-quotidian-dead to demonstrate all sorts of post-mortem goodies and baddies. Even Dante fancied that the after-life held a lake of black ice - bloody cold. You see, old Mister D. opted for the wrong kind of absolute zero. The quiet of dead-ordinary-dead imports nothing at all. That's what it is. Nothing. Nihil. Nowt! It is the silence of the grave - pure and simple. But consider another case. Suppose I were to pick up that gun again - setting aside for the moment the fact that it is only loaded with blanks - (*Vlov moves in that direction*) - and imagine that I were to make to kill the prisoner with it. Do you follow? (*moves a little closer to the gun*) What if your Honour, instead of shouting his head off or calling some lick-spittler to prevent me, just maintained your silence? That would jolly well be significant! It would signify a willingness that I should do it. This court would consider you to be as guilty as me. So silence can, according to circumstances, speak volumes. Consider now the circumstances of the prisoner's silence - Harvey thinks that we are too disdainful to speak to(*lunges for the gun*)

Harvey(*shrieks*)

For Christ's sake. Stop him, shoot him!

Third Man

Gun down, dog-Vlov! It's full of blanks. Remember? Quit trying to frighten the prisoner.

Vlov

Sorry, judgy, old chap. I just got carried away with a bit of mischief. Your Honour is quite right, that gun is no good for shooting people. (*throws it away again, once more it lands nearer Harvey, within reach this time*)

Harvey

What about taking these handcuffs off?

Vlov

Sorry, Harv - very remiss of me. Your Honour - no key! (*pulls pockets inside out*)

Third Man

The prisoner will just have to tough it out.

Vlov

Be dogged.

Harvey

Jeeze! These things chafe. They're uncomfortable!

Vlov

Who says that you are entitled to comfort in a railway goods van. Your whimpishness disgusts me. You should have stayed silent. You were far more eloquent in that mode. (*turning to the judge*) By what name should we address your Honour, your Honour?

Third Man

What's wrong with "Your Honour"? It's fine by me.

Vlov

That's A1, old boy, when we have you in mind as the judge presiding. Nothing better. However, I had in mind those occasions on which we might wish to address you as a member of the public.

Third Man

Ah, I see. When I'm John Doe?

Vlov

Absolutely! Average John! When we wish to get the opinion of the average man, with average finances, average losses, average lasses, average lusts, average busts....

Harvey

Average fucking tusks.

Vlov

Thank you Harvey, we'll take your cooperation into consideration.

Third Man

Then, man's best friends, I would like to be called Third Man.

Vlov

Excellent. Let the record show that here assembled in this courtroom are myself - qua counsel for the prosecution - Vigilante Vlov - also his Honour, the judge, and the defendant - Harvey, a pin-striped practitioner of poncified plenitude, straightway returned from renewing his erstwhile membership of the petit Bourgeoisie, and rather surprisingly dressed as a railway bum. Also here present are sundry representatives of the species *homo ordinarius* such as the Third Man and his dog, who went to mow a meadow!

Third Man

This is rather neat - the rough justice dispensed by two poor slob on a third slob. I like it. We can do it! It's not as if we're uneducated. My Christ, it would be hard to do a worse job than the professionals. After all, we're sort of plutocrat bums. It isn't as if we was always broke.

Vlov

Believe me, your Honour, as I will show you in due course, Harvey isn't your average down-er and out-er. He's doing very nicely thank you very much. There's not a clown in his sky.

Harvey

Except you.

Vlov (*wags finger admonishingly*)

Naughty, naughty.

Third Man

Just imagine the proletarian bums. The ones who have never known anything but poverty. (*pause*) I used to paint.

Vlov (*slightly impatiently*)

Good.

Third Man

Good enough. Made a swell living at it, until I had some medical problems.

Harvey (*shows concern*)

Expensive treatment?

Third Man

Hell no, never came to that. One day I goes for my regular check-up at Mount Sinai out-patients. Two days later I gets a phone-call. Some doctor rea

Vlov (*still slightly impatiently*)

Dog-tor.

Third Man

... real worried. Tells me to get over there real quick. An hour later this doctor is telling me that my time is up. Two months left - pancreatic cancer, with spots already showing elsewhere.

Vlov

You poor fellow. Was that recently?

Third Man

Heck, no. That was years ago.

Harvey

I thought you said ? Did you die? (*all laugh*) Was it the bills ...?

Third Man

Bills nothing! It wasn't medical bills that lost me my fortune. No way! It's strange when you're under the gun like that - you imagine that all you will be able to do is worry about a lot of great cosmic thoughts. What really happens is that your mind closes in to the size of a pup-tent. Your brain becomes full of the immediate stuff. You get on with those few small things which are real urgent. In my case, my finances were in a helluva a mess. I wanted to leave everything in order, to provide for my family. That becomes top priority for some reason. So I put my dough into the work of myself and my friends. A common error. Fatal. We had a show, see, a multi-media thing with the best scripts, rock-solid promises of TV contracts, twenty-five percent of the distribution and options on the movie. I did the art design and integrated the animation myself.

Harvey

Was it a bust?

Third Man

Trouble was that I imagined I had no time. I wasn't as careful as usual, the project was big - real big - and that means expense

Harvey

Sure, to make it big you've gotta push the envelope.

Vlov

My dear fellow, his Honour is not a postal strike.

Third Man

..... instead of making a pile I sunk the lot. I was left with scarcely enough to pay the alimony. In the end I couldn't even pay that.

Vlov

At least you're still alive, your Honour.

Third Man

When you're a celebrity being sick is not much fun - even rumoured to be sick. You get to read about your own goddam tumours in the press. What do they care how depressing it is to receive your negative progress report over the TV? Even when you find out that it was all a big screw-up - wrong X-ray plates! Who wants to find out from the Wall Street Journal that they've got a duck egg-sized piece of inoperable junk in their pancreas?

Vlov

Ah, too true. (*pause*) Perhaps we should get on with business, your Honour? What to do with this villain?

Harvey (*to Third Man*)

Why don't you just shut him up and let me out of these? (*holds up handcuffs*) This 'trial' is dumb crap! I haven't done anything to hurt you guys. Come on, lemme go! What about it?

Third Man (*quietly to himself, far away again*)

If I weren't self-possessed I'd be nowhere, because I'd be mixed up in a medley of other things.

Harvey (*looks at Vlov, as if concerned*)

What?

Third Man (*quietly to himself, still far away*)

I find it too hard to hold down a job, because I don't always know what is going on in other peoples' minds. And they seem to know what I'm thinking about. I don't like being questioned on anything because I don't always know what other people are thinking. I can't make out what they're after, and I don't want to. I don't think. The voices think. I used to be discussed a lot. People would often come up to me and say "You're this" or "Oh, you know, you're that". Sheer nonsense. You read articles about people like that. They should be locked up, put away. It ought to be a crime, eh?

Harvey

Are you feeling O.K.?

Third Man (*quietly to himself, still far away*)

When the roof was blown off in a storm Mom fell down and he kicked her. I told someone that - "Just nerves" they said. "He's had so much illness he's always been under a strain". My ass, he wouldn't know strain if it came and read his mind. Not that I can - but there are people who can. They are all about me. He kicked her and I kicked him, even though he was twice my size. I'm very sensitive and can get real upset over things. Very sensitive - don't know why, why I should have gotten like that. It's just my make-up, I guess.....

Vlov

Male judges shouldn't wear make-up, your Honour.

Harvey

Leave the guy alone, for Chrissake, can't you see he's a mess?

Third Man (*quietly to himself, still far away*)

.... I can't tell. Because I keep on flying up, you see, getting worked up in an effort to try and protect myself - if I don't I don't expect other guys to - but it gets misunderstood very often, I think. People think I'm suffering from a temper, or something, when all the time I'm trying to shield myself from attacks, yeah? I don't think I've got a real grasp of my situation. Who has, I say? How am I to get on my feet again? (*Immense pause - Third Man goes into a trance. He is holding the gun out in front of him. Vlov steps over and attempts to remove it gently. Third Man's hand and arm are rigid.*)

Harvey

Chrissake, leave him be. That frigging thing's pointing straight at me.

Third Man (*suddenly waking up*)

Get you hands off. Leave it alone or I'll blow your bastard head off.

Vlov

I was just trying to prevent you from hurting yourself, old chap.

Harvey

He's telling the truth, for once.

Vlov

Thank you, Harvey.

Harvey

So why not lemme go! What about it? I haven't hurt anybody.

Vlov

You've been extremely nasty to our friend here. Hasn't he, your Honour?

Harvey

The hell I have!

Vlov

Please watch your tongue.

Third Man

Why should Third Man trust the word of two dog-bones, anyway? I've been lied to plenty before.

Vlov (*visibly relieved, trying to make a joke*)

Think of it as more "hair-of-the-dog".

Harvey (*to Third Man*)

What the hell are you talking about? What do you mean? Are you referring to me? Do you think I'm some sort of liar?

Vlov

That's exactly what is being intimidated, Harv, old son. His Honour doesn't trust you.

Third Man

Third Man doesn't trust either of you dirty dogs!

Harvey

But I'm a lawyer, for Christ's sake. Lawyers don't go around lying to people.

Third Man

That's not what I've heard!

Vlov

Woof, woof! Well put, your Honour. You'll be all right with me, mate. But watch out for that one (*indicating Harvey*) - why do you think that New Jersey got all the lawyers and Texas got all the nuclear waste dumps?

Third Man

Why?

Vlov and Harvey (*Together – Vlov with animation, Harvey with a groan.*):

Because Texas got to choose first!

Vlov

Do you see, your Honour, even the defendant admits that lawyers are perjurers.

Harvey

Nuts! I'd just heard it before, that's all. Come on, guys. Joke's over, O.K.?

Vlov

Let the record show that the defendant admits to being a member of the legal profession - a profession so utterly riddled with mendacity and dishonesty that their presence is loathed even more than toxic waste

dumps. Furthermore, let it show that his Honour has heard of lawyers travelling about hither and thither solely for the purpose of lying to the general public.

Harvey

He didn't say that. He just said he'd heard different from me. So what?

Vlov

But you are the accused here, not the judge.

Harvey

Is this judge eccentric or mad?

Vlov (*frowning at Harvey in disapproval, while making light of the remark*)

Care is taken to ensure that judges are not eccentric!

Third Man

In general, far more judges are found to be mad than eccentric.

Harvey

You said you know nothing of judges.

Third Man

I know enough.

Vlov

So you have nothing to worry about, Harv! Perhaps you would like to tell us, one more time for the record of the court, just how you came to be here, Your Honour?

Third Man

Me? Why, like I said I was an artist. You'd say famous, I suppose. I completed my first commission in 1480 - a small altarpiece for the Brotherhood of Our Lady.

Harvey

Aaiieeee!

Third Man (*looking about him with a proud smile*)

I guess you'd say I was pretty famous.

Vlov (*Pause*)

Painting dogs, perhaps?

Third Man

Of course not. I painted life - impressionistic life - a dog's life.

Harvey (*Pause*)

My God! You're not the guy who painted that, are you?

Vlov(*bewildered*)

What are you two going on about?

Harvey(*pretending to be excited*)

It's a goddam enormous canvas - I remember it now, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, just inside the permanent postmodernist exhibit. That's yours, isn't it? The one called 'It's a Dog's Life'? (*Third Man nods.*) I knew it! Is he ever fucking well really famous! He's ... he's ... oh, what in hell is your name?

Third Man(*smiling*)

I just like to be called Third Man.

Vlov

Why aren't you living on the Paris Left Bank or in a villa overlooking the Mediterranean? You look like a bum, not a painter.

Third Man(*still smiling*)

Like I said, I lost all my dough. Also I didn't feel so good after the hospitalisation, even though it was all unnecessary. I am a bum - I'm the same bum I was when I was the artistic toast of New York. Only I'm a nicer guy.

Harvey

Why didn't you just paint some more pictures.

Third Man (*still smiling*)

Some painters could do it. Whenever Francis Bacon lost a packet at the gambling tables he'd get up early next day and dash off a couple of million dollars worth of masterpieces. I tried. It didn't work with me. I guess my colours went out of style. It happens.

Vlov

What happened to the millions you made from that painting in the Met?

Third Man

What millions? For that one I got a miserable twenty-five K. Hardly paid for the materials. If you think lawyers stink, you should look into your toxic waste dump and fish out a few art gallery owners. A pack of hounds!

Harvey

Why didn't you sue them?

Third Man

Because I'm fond of hounds - I forgive them.

Vlov

Poor bugger. You have my sympathy, old chap.

Third Man

Thank you.

Vlov

Don't mention it. As for you, Harv, you need not fear the irregular vagaries which so often accompany erratic, unconventional or eccentric judging. Not with His Famous Lordship in charge. He forgives dogs - top-dogs, gay-dogs, sea-dogs, the Great Dog and the Little Dog, canis major and minor. You're going to do just fine, young man. His Honour

is on your side. That is why, your Honour, I would like to call for the maximum sentence.

Harvey

What is the maximum sentence.

Vlov

I don't know for certain (*Giggles*) but I seem to remember that it involves the words 'flocchipaucinihilipilificatory antidisestablishmentarianism'.

Third Man

Not that sort of sentence. The other sort.

Vlov

Ah, of course, I momentarily forgot myself. You meant the other sort, eh, Harv?

Harvey

Don't pretend to be cretinous. You understood.

Third Man

Isn't death the maximum penalty? (*looks about for confirmation*)

Vlov

What sayeth Saint Paul?

Harvey

Don't be stupid, fellers! Who ever heard of the death penalty for free-loading a ride off of a dumb train?

Vlov

In the eighteenth century stowaways used to be thrown overboard - presumably to certain death.

Harvey

Shit! For God's sake, things have come a long way from the eighteenth century.

Third Man

In the U.S.? Are you sure? We've still got chain gangs.

Vlov

Absolutely, the case in favour of progressive Uncle Sam is not so cut and dried, Harvey, old chap. You're going to have to provide us with convincing proof complete with subject-object-verb, reductio-ad-absurdum, mutatis mutandis and all that sort of thing. (*Pause*) Go on then - imagine you are convincing a Socratic symposium of sceptical ancient Greeks. Provide, with justification, several examples of seminal progress by Uncle Saminal....

Harvey

There were no trains at all back then ...

Vlov

...without resorting to instances of a scientific or technological nature

...

Harvey

..so there couldn't have been a death penalty for riding one!

Vlov

...and without introducing examples which are prejudicial to your case...

Third Man

It was a dog's life back then, too.

Vlov

And his Honour, as our resident expert on dog-life, will therefore know just what to do with you.

Harvey

I beg your pardon? That was crap, it didn't make sense.

Vlov

Your Honour, the defendant claims that the last piece of evidence did not make sense. It seemed crystal clear to me. What about you?

Third Man

Somebody ought to be reproached and if I don't find somebody to reproach soon then I'm going to reproach myself. (*pause*) As for him (*pointing at Harvey*) I'll have to think about it.

Vlov

Ponder it in the kennel?

Third Man

Consult the oracle.

Vlov

Balance the scales.

Third Man

Sleep on it.

Vlov

Weigh the pros and cons.

Third Man

I think so.

Vlov

So do I. Therefore, in the meantime, I call upon the next witness.

Third Man

Who is the next witness?

Vlov

I am, your Honour. Do you mind if I take the stand?

Third Man

Take a stand - on dog-what now!

Vlov

Not a moral stand, your capital silent H-for-honour. I'm too old for idealistic stances accompanied, as it invariably is, with a lot of ideological and sociological posturing, tons of attendant brow-furrowing, and breast beating. There was a time, long ago in my "Star and Garter" days

Third Man

What's with the "Star and Garter"? Another song, perhaps?

Vlov

..... No, your Honour, it was a tavern or public hostelry of quite commodious proportions which served as the meeting place for an artistic society of my youth, which I described to my colleague, Harvey, while your Honour slept as I was saying, long ago in my "Star and Garter" days when I could pull off a fine weft of ontological tongue-wagging that would last far into the night. Quite a hit I was, too, with the many clever young ladies who gathered to listen to men engaged in serious intellectual argument.

Harvey

Come on, fellers, keep your mind on the job in hand! You're wandering off the point.

Vlov

My God, your Honour, I do believe the court is being chastised for sloppiness by the prisoner. Should that be taken note of somehow?

Third Man

The court expresses its gratitude to the defendant for keeping us in check. But don't do it again, dog-biscuit, or I kick you off the goddam train!

Vlov

I don't believe that we are empowered to carry out anything other than the sentence, your Honour. If found guilty by this court martial

we may exact the penalty - the prisoner to be shot, with or without the blindfold, according to Harvey's taste. But we are not allowed to duff him up while in detention. That would be interfering with the true course of justice.

Harvey (*Trying to rise and picking up the gun during the next exchange*)

Don't be stupid, guys. I could just leap out of here anytime I like.

Vlov (*Pushing Harvey back down with a foot*)

Hardly, old bean, you just stay there. And it's no use pointing that toy at me.

Third Man

Down with the gun, prisoner! My Christ, who trained this animal?

Vlov

It's all right, let him keep the stupid thing, if it will make him feel better. Now stop messing around, Harv, and let me get onto the stand. Where shall it be, your Honour? How about beside you? (*Vlov steps to the judge's side, the same side where the Third Man is rather inattentively holding his own gun*) Right-oh! Let's get on with my witnessing. Perhaps the defendant would like to cross-examine the witness?

Harvey

Which the hell side are you batting for? I thought you were a prosecution witness, so you should examine the witness first and then I get to cross-examine.

Third Man

It doesn't matter who goes first. Pitch first-dog and stop barking.

Vlov

Quite right, your Honour, we'll get to the same place in the end. Agreed, Harvey? In any case, I'd feel really bloody silly talking to myself up here.

Harvey

Is this your way of telling me that the decision is already presumed then?

Vlov

That would hardly be a tip-top way to run court martials, would it now? On the other hand, your guilt may already be established in the eyes of the people - as represented by the Third Man here - while there is still considerable room for doubt in the eyes of the law - as represented by his Honour here.

Harvey

But that's the same guy!

Vlov

Don't obfuscate matters, Harvey, just bear in mind that we are trying to be a court of law here. It's up to you to tip the scales.

Harvey

But I don't have any questions to ask.

Third Man

Nothing to ask? Don't trivialise the proceedings. You're wasting the court's time.

Harvey

I'm trying to save the court's time!

Third Man

No need to rush. We're not in a hurry. Anyone would think that you wanted to get out of here. As my Mom used to say: more haste, less speed.

Vlov

What a wise and clever lady she must have been.

Third Man

She still is. (*Quotes*) “He who goes too fast gets there too soon.”

Vlov

Marvellous! brilliant! Absolutely supex! Take a tip from this man’s venerable white-haired old Mum, Harvey. Don’t rush! Bear in mind the fable of the tortoise and the hare. (*sings*) You take the high road and I’ll take the low road - and I’ll be in Scotland afore you.

Harvey

Objection, your Honour, testimony concerning Scottish public transport is inadmissible because it has no bearing on the case.

Vlov

Bollocks, my dear Harv. The prosecution, in which persona I am addressing you now, will show that this whole business comes down *au fond* to an issue concerning public transport.

Third Man

I don’t think that the prisoner need worry about the propriety and expertise of the court. Many justice systems are quick - instantaneous even - but are they accurate?

Vlov

Quite so, your Honour. Harvey, old chap, you don’t want the cheap *frisson* of a race-track gallop in a tumbrel followed by the inevitable quick chop (*Imitates a guillotine*) do you? Just leave it to us. We’ll look after you. But you do have to come up with some questions. Nobody can help you if you can’t help yourself.

Harvey

Am I a defendant here, a prisoner or a free man?

Third Man

We need better questions than that. Come on, pursue the witness like a terrier. Confuse him, out-flank him, pen him in, pull him to the ground, force him to make mistakes, bite his leg off. Sniff out his

weaknesses, catch the scent!

Vlov

It's true, Harv, I'm afraid. You'll have to do better than that. Would you like to try again? Perhaps you'd like a little recess in which to gather your thoughts?

Harvey

Let me remind you two that kidnapping someone against his will is a felony carrying a minimum sentence of eight to ten. In addition, if you have an idea to ransom me then I can tell you right now that it's a no-no.

Vlov

Don't try scare tactics, old boy. We're not frightened of what may happen to us. Bear in mind that the future is just a dramatisation of the past.

Harvey

My wife and I have discussed this scenario plenty of times. Sure, she didn't like me taking rides on these freight trains but she knows I'm a big boy now and the danger is my responsibility. She and I know just where we stand on this. She has my signed affidavit, which she keeps in the family strong-box, in which I state clearly that I have no expectations of her in the event that I am attacked, kidnapped or maltreated anyhow else as a result of my joy-riding hobby. It says she is not to interfere - and she understands that. No question! So you can forget the ransom, fellers, she'd put down the phone before you'd've gotten half-way through your spiel.

Third Man

Could the prosecutor please explain to me why the defendant is so relaxed?

Vlov

I think, Your Honour, that Harvey here is too comfortably at home in the courtroom. The court should take care not to forget that he's a legal beagle.

Third Man (*angrily*)

Who's a beagle?

Vlov

Sorry, mate, I meant to say "a legal eagle"!

Third Man

That's better.

Harvey (*wrestling with his handcuffs*)

I've had it with all this dog-shit.

Third Man

Mind what you're saying.

Vlov

Tut, tut, Harvey. Wash out your mouth. You are taking the name of DOG in vain.

Third Man (*to Harvey*)

Do you realise how angry you are making me?

Vlov (*whispers into the judge's ear, loudly*)

That's the trouble, Your Honour. I don't think that Harvey is taking us quite seriously enough, yet. Perhaps he needs a little persuasion? Can I fetch him a belt round the ear-hole?

Third Man

He really pisses me off. Smug little bastard!

Vlov

You belt him then.

Third Man

I've a goddam good mind to ... - (*louder to Harvey*) Hey, dog-drizzle, did you get that? Listen up good and show some fright or you'll get hurt real bad.

Harvey

Oh, yeah? And which of you old farts is going to risk a cardiac arrest by trying a swing at me - cuffs or no cuffs?

Vlov

You are nothing better than a sodding Hound from Hell - sorry, Your Honour! Listen, you good-for-nothing fat-arse! By the way, I have just started my examination of the witness, just in case Your Honour hadn't realised. You're a bollocks, a no good bollocks. You get up on your high horse and blather - imagining that you're in court licking up to some jury or tickling up the tender parts of some numb-skull of a client. Well listen, Harvey, old mate, old darling - this time it is your jolly old arse-hole that is on the line. The railway line! And you can quit all that high-road, low-road, Scottish public transport tomfoolery! You have a serious crime to answer for - one demanding the ultimate penalty, old wacker, you pin-striped old tart!

Harvey

What crime?

Vlov

Why, being on this fucking train, of course!

Harvey

Up yours! What do you think this is - the frigging Orient Express? I've got every damn right to be here, same as you.

Vlov

No you bloody well don't!

Third Man

The hell you have!

Vlov

I suppose you imagine that everyone can ride a train - because it's a fucking public amenity?

Harvey

Sure.

Vlov

Well, don't you be so damn cock-sure, old cock. This train is no public amenity. Christ, it's no amenity at all. This damn thing can hardly fart it's way along at five miles an hour. And it's not here for you! It's not for you. (*screams, joined by Third Man*) It's not for you.

Vlov and Third Man

It's not for you. It's not for you. It's not for you. (*They approach and begin to strike Harvey, Third Man takes over while Vlov speaks. The Third Man hits Harvey until he drops with exhaustion. Harvey, despite the cuffs, fights back.*)

Vlov

This train is for us. It's for bums. It's for bag-ladies coughing their rings up in the winter cold. It's for pimps who crawl into the box-car after some pissed-off pusher has stolen their girls and split open their forehead. It's for laid-off auto workers from Flint, Michigan, who need a stroke of luck and an escape to somewhere less hostile. It's for the slime who couldn't be less lucky, who couldn't smell any worse, who couldn't look more like walking corpses. For them riding these rails is not an anti-social obscenity - as it is to see your fat bum in here - because we bums are doing society a favour by coming in here instead of expiring in the streets. We're bloody well not going to let rich bastards like you have for their toys the essentials of the poor. There's not enough to go around as it is. What price the wheezing, blood-spitting old bag-lady, prising open

the door of the wagon with the last ounce of her strength? She looks up into the black doorway, expecting to see the grinning broken teeth of her methylated kindred spirits, with their outstretched hands ready to haul her aboard. Instead what does she find? She finds a van load of pin-striped ponces like you, packed in like sardines. No more room for old ladies. Oh no! Instead a bunch of uncharitable plump wankers like you. Gold-capped teeth set in rows of hygenic smiles. Bollocks! (*Picks up the Third Man's gun, which he released when moving to strike Harvey*)

Third Man

Eh? What you say?

Vlov

I said 'Bollocks!', sir. Bollocks! Bollocks! Bollocks! Bollocks! (*Vlov raises his voice to a proclamation*) Sharpen the Axe of the Apostles and let's split some wood! That means you, Your Honour. The wood I have in mind to split is the Bench! (*Points gun. Harvey, too, has picked up the gun with the "blanks". Third Man sees only Harvey's weapon*)

Third Man

Don't wave that toy at me. I know it's not loaded! One stupid move with that thing and I'll shove it right down your throat. Let's see how that suits.

Harvey

Skip the anatomy lesson, Your Honour. Since you mention suits, what about a hand of bridge, fellows? (*Harvey takes out of his pocket the crib sheet which he previously used for the "mental" bridge game. Somehow he has rid himself of the handcuffs.*)

Third Man

For Christ's sake! Drop the toy, will you?

Harvey

Here's a challenge for you. You're South vulnerable, the dealer is North and you've six diamonds to the king-jack, king of clubs and a singleton heart. Got it?

Third Man

Eh?

(During the following exchange Third Man becomes very frightened, particularly when he realises that he has misplaced his gun, which is hidden behind Vlov's back. Harvey and Vlov close in on the Third Man – talking fast, spinning him round and round.)

Vlov

Listen, can't you. You have a long minor and a lot of junk. Understand?

Harvey

Quite right. North opens with a no bid, one heart from East, no bid from you ...

Vlov

... and a splinter bid of four diamonds from West. The rotter has apparently bid your suit ...

Harvey

... except that a splinter like that indicates anything but, you see ...

Vlov

... a bid that is not exactly what it seems. In fact, it means a shortage of diamonds and support for hearts.

Harvey and Vlov

Tell us what happened next (*Silence.*)

Vlov

I don't believe he knows.

Harvey

Knows what?

Vlov

Bugger all. He doesn't know that North doubled, East went four hearts ...

Harvey

... that he bid five diamonds doubled by West and North took them into a suicide pact of five hearts.

Vlov

Well, he was confused. So would you be when West bids four diamonds and your partner emerges with el doblé. If you or I doubled an artificial bid, we would jolly well be showing length in the suit, suggesting a lead or a possible sacrifice to partner, wouldn't we?

Harvey

Sure we would! But this North, stupid ox, meant it as a takeout double, showing length in spades.

Vlov

But His Honour was flummoxed, because he doesn't understand about lengths in spades. Do you, mate?

Harvey

Perhaps he understands the significance of the ace of spades.

Vlov

Suggestive of the judicial black cap. His Honour's mouth is opening and closing like a dribbling gold-toothed gold-fish. What are those noises he is making? Syllables! Silly little baubles strung together in the sentence of sentence.

Third Man

Hey, I get it. You guys know each other.

Harvey

Four no trumps!

Vlov

Doubled!

Third Man

Take that goddam thing out of my face. (Screams) It's not fucking well loaded!

Harvey

Oh, yeah? (*Fires the gun. Vlov fires his, too, a second later. The noise is immense. Blackout. Possibly train into tunnel*)

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

(train out of tunnel)

(Third Man is shackled to the wall. Prancing in front of him, Harvey and Vlov sing the "Vlov changes everything" song. Harvey has a camera, complete with flash, with which he is taking snapshots of their prisoner. He is not paying attention, his eyes are closed and he mutters to himself.)

Harvey and Vlov

Yes, Vlov, Vlov changes everyone,
We shall perish in his flame,
Vlov will never ever let you be the same!

Third Man *(starting in a far-away voice)*

I miss my children.

Vlov *(Harvey and Vlov ridicule Third Man, talking simultaneously with him.)*

Oh! He's got children now.

Third Man

They used to preach to me about God and what we're supposed to do with our lives. But no one believed it. Only children are supposed to believe it. I believe it.

Harvey

He misses them.

Third Man

I believe I have something special to do with my life. Nobody explained it to me. I had to arrive at my own conclusions. And they are very vague.

Vlov

He misses poor Tiny Tim.

Harvey

Crouching by the fire.

Third Man

I understand that we are all destined to do something in life. I am, anyway. Trouble is, I have forgotten what it is. No one else can tell me.

Vlov

For warmth.

Third Man

People are not supposed to live the lives of others, are they?

Harvey

It's so cold he's on the point of

Third Man

I would give way if they were nearer the truth, you know, about the importance of things. I'm willing to give way.

Vlov

.... burning his crutches!

Third Man

But I'm not the sort who would really hold big-time out for what I believed in. I'm too timid. I'd give way because they're stronger, you see I feel myself so very weak-willed, not strong at all. Not strong-willed. Weak-willed, rather.

Harvey

Wouldn't that be terrible?

Third Man

I'm not allowed to express my opinions - it's - it's shunned all the time. I'm not supposed to have an opinion because my opinion is sure to be no good, see?

Vlov

Quite! He's probably not insured.

Third Man

Everyone else seems to be right and I'm in the wrong and I wonder why? Can you explain that? (*pause*) Don't bother. I wouldn't believe anything you say. (*laughs and smiles to himself*)

Harvey

One false move and he might go up in flames.

Third Man

Everyone thinks about themselves a lot. They don't think about me.

Vlov

En flamme! One faux pas and it's up en flamme!

Third Man

Well, you see, I always was, and to some extent I guess still am, a happy person.

Harvey

What would God say to that?

Third Man

I appear to be a very happy guy on the surface but underneath there's always been a helluva lot of boiling up going on.

Vlov

He might take his own name in vain!

Third Man

Still is, and I don't know what to do about it. (*laughs*)

Vlov (*angry, smacking Third Man several times in the face*)

I'll get this wretch back to his senses. Cheer up, Your Honour, whose dog was it that died, eh, what?

Harvey (*pushing Vlov aside, they almost exchange blows*)

Move over and let me see to him. (*almost nicely*) Come on, Your Honour, give us a smile. Where's your sense of humour. (*hits Third Man in the stomach*)

Third Man (*returning to his senses, looks about - pause*)

Come on, fellers, let me down, eh?

Vlov and Harvey

Piss off!

Third Man

Do you guys know each other then? Is that it? (*They scream with laughter*) Is this some sort of set up?

Vlov (*still laughing, scarcely able to speak*)

Once again the gentleman wishes to know – he seems to have a very short memory! – whether, Harvey, we have previous acquaintance.

Harvey

Previous acquaintance (*laughs a lot more then stops suddenly*) I'll give you previous acquaintance! We're bloody blood brothers, you dog-licking five-cent faggot. We're fucking brothers!

Third Man

How can you be brothers? (*indicating Vlov*) He's from the goddam Brutish Isles.

Vlov (*Harvey and Vlov guffaw loudly and intermittently throughout the next exchanges*)

Oh, very clever. I think our dunce-head has come back to his senses with a vengeance, Harvey, old mate. (*still chuckling*) There you have it, old man. Brethren – not of the consanguinious nor of the Plymouth variety but rather more of the spiritual and commercial species. If you get my meaning?

Harvey

We're both with Goldstein, Cousins and Goldstein! Advertising, eh?
- “ You make it, we market.”

Vlov

I do believe I coined that expression.

Harvey (*They shake hands.*)

I do believe you did.

Vlov

We're as alike as the twin peas in the proverbial pod, you see. That's why we're such good guessers!

Harvey and Vlov

Good guessers should never get married.

Vlov

Their wives might turn out to be real cows!

Harvey

Bitches.

Vlov

Spiritually his old daddy, Daddy Goldielocks-stein, was my old daddy

....

Harvey

Quite an absentee daddy he was.

Vlov (*very amused*)

Liked his pint.

Harvey (*mock Vlov-like accent*)

Biffed the mater senseless at closing time.

Vlov (*very amused, pleased with the 'game'*)

Quite an unspeakable rotter.

Harvey

Given to violence.

Vlov (*laughing again*)

Robbery with violence.

Harvey

Used to take out his belt to the old lady and us kids.

Vlov (*laughing again*)

Swish, swish (*imitating thrashing with a belt*)

Harvey

Whacked us till the tears came.

Vlov (*laughing again, harder*)

Don't be daft.

Harvey

But mummy never cried.

Vlov (*laughing again, so hard it is beginning to hurt*)

Harvey, you're such a lying bar-steward!

Harvey

Neither did we (*laughs loudly*) But he used to bawl like a baby.

Vlov (*laughing again, almost in tears*)

Don't believe a word of it!

Harvey

He blubbered so much that he could hardly see where he was striking.

Sometimes he'd fetch us one across the face by mistake.

Vlov (*still laughing*)

Mercurial mendacity!

Harvey

He meant to be just a bum-belter, you see. So the school inspector wouldn't see the bruises. But he'd give the old girl a straight-arm in the face.

Vlov (*Still laughing, easing off. Gasping for breath. Grabbing for his ventilator.*)

Give over, Harvey, I can't take any more.

Harvey

Blood everywhere. The bath was overflowing with blood.

Vlov (*Still gasping for breath.*)

The bath was full of coal.

Harvey (*up very close to Third Man*)

Every bloody where.

Vlov (*stops laughing*)

Come away, Harvey, old man. Don't rile him, Your Honour. People are generally very wary of Harvey, Your Worship.

Harvey (*reaching for the bottle, laughing and pushing it aside. Instead he takes a brandy flask from his pack, also taking out a knife.*)

Only when I've had a drop.

Vlov

Don't cut him yet, Harvey dear.

Harvey

Where?

Vlov

I said don't. Not yet. Let's get to know the man. We only cut our friends, you see. We're rather civilised that way. I wonder whether it has occurred to you to wonder what we are going to do with you?

Third Man

This is just a joke, yeah? You guys are just having a joke, aren't you. You're gonna let me go now (*pause*), yeah?

Vlov

I'm afraid we are a little more serious than that, aren't we Harvey?

Harvey

Dead right.

Vlov

After all, Your Honour, I didn't pen our magnificent script and memorise it just so that you could fuck off unscathed, did I? How about (*Vlov and Harvey run through some of their bridge routine again*) ... and we finish in six Hearts. My dummy is revealed to be a singleton Club ace, five Diamonds to the ace, jack, four Hearts to the jack and ace, jack, ex of Spades. You to play, the lead is a rubbishy Spade.

Harvey (*Consulting his crib sheet again.*)

Mmmm, what's the trump split?

Vlov

That's for you to find out.

Harvey

Hell, I dunno. (*pause*) I guess I can't make it without the Heart finesse. So here goes nothing. I take the first trick with the Spade ace, play the ace of Hearts, unblock dummy's Club ace and cash the Diamond ace, leaving me in dummy. O.K. so far?

Vlov

Super, no complaints yet.

Harvey

Next the finesse, jack of Hearts towards my king and then ...

Vlov

.. then East discards a Spade... (*both Harvey and Vlov stop and laugh uproariously*)

Harvey

In fact, Vlov can only take partial credit for the script. But, rest assured he plagiarised it from some of the best writers of the twentieth century.

Vlov

I have to admit that my surrogate sibling is telling the truth. He doesn't do it very often (*laughs again*) As my, what shall we say, mmm,

(*pause, searching for the word*) “brother-in-law”, Harvey, what is your legal opinion? Does my plagiarism render those literary geniuses guilty of being accessories to murder?

Harvey (*smiling to himself, going close to Third Man, with the knife*)

I can't bring to mind a suitable precedent. (*traces a line on Third Man's bare neck with the blade*) It all depends. (*pause*) But it could be argued. After all, it was all written for His Honour's benefit.

Third Man

Christ! Why didn't you attack me the minute you saw me and get it over with?

Harvey (*Harvey and Vlov exchange astonished looks*)

Where's the fun in that?

Vlov

We're not rough thugs.

Harvey

We wanted you to relax.

Vlov

To take an interest in our narrative.

Harvey

To that end we were even prepared to drink cold tea ...

Vlov

Tasting like horse-piss.

Harvey

.... out of whisky bottles! (*He points at the bottle and bellows with laughter, taking a swig from the flask.*) We wanted you to voluntarily lay down your arms.

Vlov

And come to ours. We're your friends, old chum.

Harvey (*imitating Vlov again*)

We want to know all about you, mate. (*starts rummaging in the Third Man's belongings*) After all, chum, it was our bag-laden mummy that you and your cohorts turned away from the train. You and your gold-toothed cronies put the boot into our old mummy.

Third Man

It was him that mentioned the bag-lady. For Christ's sake, I never laid eyes on your goddam mother!

Harvey

What did you call my ma?

Vlov

Rather nasty man, who are you to call mummy a bag-lady? Do bag-ladies hold sherry parties on the lawn for the entire village?

Harvey (*still imitating Vlov*)

Quite right. Do bag-ladies do the football pools religiously every week, scraping a few bob together from their hard-won housekeeping money – the few pennies which they managed to weasel out of their drunken old spouse – hoping every week to win enough to take the little boys to the seaside?

Vlov

Certainly not. Bag-ladies don't even know what day it is, let alone care about what has become of their offspring.

Harvey

This little rat thinks that Mom didn't love us!

Vlov

It's unwise to refer to members of our family in that off-hand manner, Your Honour. After all, Harvey here would need very little persuasion to

take his primed pistola – your term, not mine – and blow your blankety blanks off. Rather painful, too!

Harvey

Shall I cut him now? Just a little, by way of an introduction?

Vlov

I think not. I want to hear what he has to say first.

Third Man

I've nothing more to say.

Vlov

For goodness sake, why not?

Third Man

What's the use? You'll only twist it somehow. I didn't say one bad thing about your mom.

Vlov

Not that nonsense again. Let's have no more of that or Harvey really will cut you. Believe me, he certainly knows how.

Harvey

Yeah, I really know how. So cough up or be cut up.

Third Man

I haven't got any money. I told you, my art never made a lot - even though it was famous.

Harvey

I remember. However, I wasn't referring to cash, old fruit. We want to know what a respectable business type like you is doing in our carriage.

Third Man

What's with the "business type"? I told you - I used to paint. Now I can't even afford a studio.

Harvey

Sure, real estate prices are sky-rocketting. But why should we believe all that crap about painting dogs?

Third Man

You said you'd seen my work.

Harvey

Anyone can claim to have painted that picture. It sure as hell didn't say "painted by Third Man" on it!

Third Man

Look, I got no dough. You wanna know my real name, I'll tell it to you. I have to ride the cars just like you. Sure I paint - I did all that. (*He seems to point to a vast gallery of paintings on the walls and ceiling, but Harvey and Vlov are confused as they look around and see nothing except for a previously unnoticed rough primitive 'stick-man' figure drawn on the wall.*)

Harvey

Don't try to tell me that they'd put that in the Met.

Third Man

What did you find in my stuff? You found nothing, right? No evidence did you? I'm just another bum like you guys - and I'm beginning to wish I'd gotten off at Evansville.

Harvey

We're experienced men, Your Honour. You should know that it is possible to sniff out the odour of guilt without evidence. After all, you were keen enough to give me the shaft as a corporate criminal.

Vlov

Better tell us a bit about yourself, old chap. Just because you're not carrying a briefcase, don't think that we are easily dissuaded from the belief that you are another of these company CEO's, sticking his rich nose in where it shouldn't go. What are these drawings, for instance?

(He points to some pieces of paper which Harvey had unearthed from the Third Man's luggage)

Third Man

If you must know, I *am* an artist. That bit is true. Very famous, in fact. These are sketches for decorations to go in the main chamber of an airship, which doubles as a bar. When finished it will be the main feature, dominant because it will cover every square inch of the wall. It will be the last fresco by me – Hieronymus Bosch. *(Stunned silence from the other two, who exchange meaningful glances)* I thought that you would be impressed. Look around you and behold what I and my apprentices have made for you. *(Vlov and Harvey stare at the pages and then at the rough, primitive 'stick man', suggesting no artistic talent at all. Harvey and Vlov react accordingly. They are not impressed.)*

Harvey and Vlov

What? Those? Yeah, sure!

Third Man *(during this long speech Harvey and Vlov will be made as inconspicuous as possible, by the lighting and their stillness.)*

(Dutch accent) My name is Hieronymus Bosch, Master Painter of the Guild of 's-Hertogenbosch. Dutch by birth and universal by significance, returned among you just as I always was, since that is the form in which I am needed. Around you, beside you, above you - in all directions - you are confronted by my latest mural, which has been commissioned to lend genius to genius, as a tribute to all the brilliant young artists of tomorrow, who will one day come here to marvel at my Olympiad.

Harvey and Vlov

Did he say Olympiad? My God! Barmy! Crazy! Stark raving mad!

Third Man (*Dutch accent, possibly a lighting change here to reflect the surreality of his words while looking as if caused by the train entering cutting.*)

Many people have called me insane. (*Pause.*) What about my artistic friends? Would you say that Hans Memlinc was a lunatic? Or Picasso? Claude Monet? Georges Seurat? Camille Pisaro? Auguste Renoir? (*He screams*) Noooooo! And what of myself? (*Pause, concluding with a smile to himself.*) Sometimes madness is within me, sometimes I within it. The body is weak after madness but the mind is strong. I have to strengthen the spirit.

Vlov

Crikey! I need a drink. A real one this time. (*Beckons for Harvey's flask and drinks from it.*)

Third Man

I have learnt that only art has the authority to scream out for change. When the end is close we must have change. Or else!

Harvey

I'll give you a change.

Vlov

For the worse, I fear.

Third Man

One night, long ago, I went for a walk by the sea along an empty shore. It was beautiful. The deep blue sky was flecked with clouds of a blue deeper than the fundamental blue of intense cobalt, and others of a clearer blue, like the blue whiteness of the Milky Way. In the blue depth the stars were sparkling, greenish, yellow, white, rose, brighter, flashing more like jewels than they do in my homeland; opals you might call them, emeralds, lapis, rubies, sapphires. The sea was very deep ultramarine - the shore a sort of violet and faint russet as I saw it, and on the dunes some bushes of Prussian blue. I still have my drawing of

it. That brings up the eternal question: is the whole of life visible to us, or isn't it rather that this side of death we see one hemisphere only?

.....

Harvey (*Shaken Harvey starts whispering to Vlov - over their whispers Third Man continues.*)

Did you get that?

Vlov

What?

Harvey

The death bit.

Vlov

What about it?

Harvey

Do you think it's a trap?

Vlov (*Vlov puts a reassuring arm round Harvey's shoulders.*)

Calm down, old boy. He's tied up.

Third Man

.... If so, then what are we to make of our half? Why work so hard? Why love? Why laugh? If we are merely an interglacial interlude, why try at all? After months and months of trying to paint one patch of skin, one temple, one eye I began to realise that my admirers and spectators could not imagine any of it. I began to reflect that next year they would return to see what were to them the same subjects, rendered over and over - orchards, harvest, figures and freaks. Who would notice that they had a different colouring, and above all a change in workmanship? Why not just copy out what I did the previous season? Why all that extra effort?

Harvey

The futility of all effort.

Vlov

Very philosophical.

Third Man

However, wisely or not, these shifts and variations will always go on in my art. This flux is all that I have to offer and without it I could not call my progression art. I feel that while persisting relentlessly in my work I must not hurry. After all, how would it be to put into practice the old saying - you must study for ten years, and then produce a few figures!

Vlov

That sounds like the motto of a slow-learning accountant.

Third Man

If we study a Japanese artist what do we see? Do we find a person who is undoubtedly wise? Probably. A person who is sophisticated, cultured, intelligent and philosophical - and how does she spend her time? In studying the distance between the Earth and the planets? No. In studying the policies of Machiavelli and Bismarck? No. She studies a single blade of grass!

Vlov

Perhaps she likes gardening.

Third Man

But this blade of grass leads her to draw one day a complete plant, then two, then a pasture full of them and so on until she has finally drawn every plant and then every season, all the wide aspects of the countryside, then all the animals, and at the very end - one human form. In this manner does the artist pass through his life. Life is too short to do the whole. Anything worthwhile must be done slowly. (*He sighs and shakes his head*) The relationship of the artist to his world is

one of special sacrifice. (*Pause. Harvey and Vlov break into applause*)

Vlov

Bravo, old chap. Quite the flow of erudition! What refined sensibilities. I fear that we've got a right rectangular nutter here, mate. (*sings in a lunatic manner*)

When I was a little lad
No bigger than my thumb,
I used to go to Heaven,
Shopping with my Mum

Harvey

(*Harvey and Vlov begin to make fun of the Third Man, imitating his posture, fastened to the wall, and speaking in lots of different accents, according to the reference they are making. They scream with mirth at one another's antics.*)

Unlike (*Dutch accent*) my paintings in the Louvre, my paintings on the wall of the gentlemen's toilet are, rather appropriately, utter crap.

Vlov

Mi amore (*Italian accent, blows a kiss, without moving the imagined tied hands*), Hieronymous, don-na you remember my advice what I give-a you on the Ponti Vecchio? Eh? Did-a not say, eef-a you try a lee-eetle bit hard, you could-a paint like-a my best-a apprentice, Leonardo. Instead-a you paint-a like Pinnochio!

Harvey

You (*French accent*) say zees zings to all zee li'l boys.

Vlov

To be perfectly honest, (*English upper class*) we decent chaps take exception to that sort of vulgar talk.

Harvey (*Harvey and Vlov pitch in their different accents, pell-mell*)

Olé Camille Pisaro (*flamenco gesture*) is not-a a vulgar man.

Vlov

Nicht zo ist Otto von Bismarck, ja wohl!

Harvey

Nor is Auguste Renoir.

Vlov

Mondo cane! Who is-a calling Monticelli a dirt-a dog?

Harvey

Or Machiavelli?

Vlov

Or Pablo Picassero?

Harvey

Or Claude the Monet-maker?

Vlov

Or Caesar Salad?

Harvey

Or Hans the Missing-link?

Vlov

Ay, ay, ay - why are all-a fettucines called-a Alfredo?

Harvey

Que stupido, eet iss-a all-a Alfredos which iss-a called-a fettucine.

After they papa!

Vlov

My God, it's the invasion of the killer tomatoes.

Harvey

Tell them to get back in the salad bar. (*they come to a halt, out of breath, laughing*)

Vlov (*still imitating Third Man in posture, a little more droopily*)

Did you catch the bit about metempsychosis?

Harvey

He claims to have been resurrected?

Vlov

Absolutely. He claims to have been very pally with a horde of dead geezers.

Harvey

And here he is again. Exactly as was.

Vlov

Presumably. Once a painter, always a painter, eh?

Harvey

None of this 'sire of my grandam coming back as a chicken' nonsense.

Vlov

Precisely. He claims to have been carbon copied and popped right back among us – “in practice we return just as we were, since that is the form in which we are needed”.

Harvey (*laughs*)

I wonder when they'll be needing us again.

Vlov

It makes you think, doesn't it?

Harvey

About whether it is possible to(*points to the Third Man and mimes slitting a throat*)

Vlov

Precisely. One might kill a member of the reincarnate species, but one could hardly call it murder, eh? What?

Harvey

I wonder whether the others were metempsychotics?

Vlov

Or just psychotics. Do you think there is any point to this. Maybe we should just let him go?

Harvey

The hell we do.

Vlov

I'm not so sure.

Harvey (*taking the upper hand, his manner is slightly menacing*)

Listen to me, listen good. First of all I don't believe in reincarnations, reincrysanthemums or reindaffodils or any of that bilge. Second of all, we are colleagues in this stuff now - and in this game colleagues don't take the early retirement package. (*taps the coffin*) There's only one way out - agreed?

Vlov (*sighs*)

I suppose you're right. I certainly don't want to provoke an argument between old chums, particularly in view of my agnosticism concerning this metempsychosis business. (*Pause. They look in silence at the Third Man*)

Harvey

So what do we do now?

Third Man

Come on, guys. Here we are, a penniless artist and two railway bums. Why don't you cut me down and we'll forget it ever happened, OK?

Harvey

Well, what do we do? (*Harvey pulls a large washer from his pocket, holds it up so that everyone but Third Man can see it.*) Can I put it on him now?

Vlov

Shut up, will you. I'm thinking.

Third Man

Let me go, Vlov.

Vlov

I don't know

Harvey

I'll put it on him now. (*Harvey goes as if to unbutton Third Man's fly, his body masks what he is doing.*)

Third Man

What the hell

Vlov (*wearily*)

That is Harvey's little toy.

Harvey (*proudly*)

I once used it on my old man, one night when he came home really pissed ...

Third Man

Get your hands off ...

Vlov (*resignedly*)

It's no use squawking, chum. Harvey does what he likes

Third Man (*Kicking Harvey in self-defence.*)

Shit! Ahh! Get off!

Harvey

Bastard! I'll teach you to kick.

Vlov

I told you to watch out where my bloody blood brother is concerned. I can remember his poor father's screams to this day. Harvey slipped that washer on the old fellow's John Thomas and then proceeded to wank him off.

Third Man

But you

Vlov

The army story? (*Laughs.*) Another fabrication, I'm afraid. But Harvey would have loved to do it to his Pappa and that's the stone cold truth.

Third Man

No! No! Please, not that ...

Vlov

The metal cuts into the flesh, you see. Rather unpleasantly, I imagine.

Third Man

No! No! For Christ's sake ...

Vlov (*taking out the cellular phone, which has rung. Screams from Third Man.*)

Tyler? Yes, It's me, Vlov. Speak up, there's a lot of noise. What? Is it time? O.K. Have you got our satellite location? Good. We'll be jumping off at check-point Charlie. Send Trevor with the car. Oh, one more thing, Tyler, tell Trevor to bring the Hexair account. Ciao! (*glances at an expensive watch produced from inside his rags*) Harvey.

Harvey

Yes, Vlov?

Vlov

You may cut him now.

Harvey

Great! You were saved by the bell! (*Instantly he slashes the neck of Third Man and steps away from him with a laugh, wiping his hands*) Did Tyler have anything to say about the Cosmic account?

Vlov

No, but it can wait.

Harvey

Vlov, there's something puzzling me.

Vlov

What?

Harvey

How did that guy know about us?

Vlov

You mean (*Imitating Third Man.*) "Rich guys ride the trains"?

Harvey

How did he know?

Vlov

He didn't know – otherwise he'd have fled.

Harvey

Oh, he knew. I'm sure of it. I could see it in his eyes.

Vlov

In that case, a good guess, perhaps?

Harvey

Good guessers should never get married! (*Laughs.*) Anyway, it's too late now to ask him.

Harvey (*Harvey and Vlov singing in the darkness, Harvey briefly dancing round about, or even on, the coffin in a poor imitation of a Gene Kelly/Fred Astaire soft shoe shuffle*)

Vlov makes fools of everyone,

All the rules we made are broken,

Vlov

Yes, Vlov, Vlov changes everyone,
We shall perish in his flame,
Vlov will never ever let you be the same!

(After the song ends Harvey and Vlov open the door and one after the other drop to the ground outside. Through the open door the flickering of moonlight on the passing trees can be seen. The scene within the freight car is one of beauty - the expired artist, almost like a crucifixion. If possible, surrounded by a gallery of the best of his works of art which is back-projected onto the wall visible over the top of the box-car set. Many of his paintings are religious of a Renaissance type, some even depict crucifixions. Perhaps, from within the Third Man's bag a telephone begins to ring, continues unanswered - the biter bit? This visual conclusion is maintained for a short time before the final curtain.)

Blackout, possibly train into tunnel — curtain