

Sometimes this business happens quick and word might not reach me in time. This is why I'm briefing you—in case I can't intercede. You're my old friend, and I'll always do what I can, but justice is swift. Also stay out of trouble and don't write anything subversive.

ISAAC. What does "subversive" mean?

NIKOLAI. You're the writer, you tell me.

ISAAC. It always means something different to someone else.

NIKOLAI. It means what it means. I didn't invite you over here to just drink wine.

ISAAC. I was wondering. It's been a long time. Seventeen years, I think.

NIKOLAI. Seventeen years?! No!

ISAAC. The war was what, 1920?

NIKOLAI. Yes, but...

He painstakingly does math in his head.

My God. Seventeen years!

ISAAC. Too long.

NIKOLAI. Which is why! I have to tell you: Things are going to become very difficult for writers.

ISAAC. What writers?

NIKOLAI. All writers. Especially creative-type writers like you.

ISAAC. Very difficult how?

NIKOLAI. Just stay out of trouble and don't write anything subversive.

ISAAC. Okay, and then?

NIKOLAI. Then, this is the most important part of everything. Remember this over anything else I ever tell you. Are you listening?

ISAAC. Yes.

NIKOLAI. Never confess.

ISAAC. Never confess what?

NIKOLAI. What did I just say?! Never confess! You need me to translate into your dirty Odessan street talk? Never confess! Doesn't matter what, never confess!

ISAAC. Okay. "Never confess." So lie?

NIKOLAI. I didn't say that I just said "never confess." Even if they torture you.

ISAAC. *(Almost laughing.)* They're going to torture me?

NIKOLAI. NEVER CONFESS.

ISAAC. Okay. Good advice.

NIKOLAI. But wait! I am not convinced that I can trust you.

VOVA. You can trust me!

NIKOLAI. (*Imitates him.*) *You can trust me!*

Leningrad accent! Coarse. It is the dialect of thugs, which is what you sound like to me: a thug.

VOVA. I am not a thug.

NIKOLAI. (*Reading his file.*) How can I be so sure? This file states that while attending KGB academy, you received fifteen citations of insubordination.

VOVA. That's not true!

NIKOLAI. It's clearly notated. Fifteen citations.

VOVA. Not once. Not once was I insubordinate.

NIKOLAI. Fine.

Nikolai crosses out another section of the file.

"Never...insubordinate..."

(*Reads.*) You were born in Moscow?

VOVA. No! Leningrad!

NIKOLAI. But here: States: Place of birth: Moscow.

VOVA. It's wrong. Again, it's wrong!

Nikolai uses the magic marker again, crosses out, writes.

NIKOLAI. (*Reads; surprised.*) You were born in a brothel?

VOVA. That's...No, that's absurd.

NIKOLAI. (*Reads.*) "To a brothel in Moscow|he was born."

VOVA. It's a lie!

NIKOLAI. (*Not reading; looking at Vova.*) So your mother was a whore!

Awkward, tense beat. Vova changes; this is unacceptable.

I say: Your mother: A whore.

VOVA. When I was eight years old I threw a brick at a man's head because he swore at my mother, for no reason, in the middle of the street. I wanted to kill him, but I missed his head and the brick hit his neck instead, and crushed his voice box. He was never able to speak above a whisper after that.

This is the thing I am most proud of in my life. That I took away a man's voice.

Beat.

Is *that* in my file?

Mariya & Feliks

FELIKS. You can't *stay* here.

MARIYA. Not forever! Just until...*all that*...is over.

FELIKS. No, you can't stay here! Police have already been by here once, and they said they're coming back and so—

MARIYA. The police have been here?

FELIKS. What do you think? Of course they came here. And I didn't know why...They're lookin' around so much, I think maybe they wanted to rent a car. And they're giving it to me, asking questions, and it was off, something was wrong, they were going to kill me I thought...

And then one of them gets a call, and they're out of here. But said they'd be back, so now I'm sitting around waiting for *that* pleasant experience to continue. And so *No*, Mariya Tokareva, you can't *stay here*. The last thing I need is for police to come back here and find I'm harboring a fugitive reporter.

Beat.

I don't like police, and I don't like soldiers, and I don't like people who like police and soldiers, and I don't like people in general.

Mariya & Feliks

Vova disappears.

MARIYA. I need to rent a car.

FELIKS. We're closed, get the fuck outta here!

MARIYA. Look, it's freezing out there. You can help me out, right? I can tell you're a good guy.

FELIKS. I ain't a charity!

MARIYA. I just need to—

FELIKS. *I don't need people pounding on my door today!*

MARIYA. No, I wanted—

FELIKS. You wanted what? Huh? You wanted what? We are CLOSED and so I want you out of here NOW before I—

MARIYA. NO! NO! YOU DON'T YELL AT ME! I'VE HAD A REAL FUCKING BAD DAY AND I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE CLOSED I NEED TO RENT A FUCKING CAR, SO LET ME DO THAT AND I WILL LEAVE YOU ALONE!

As if both startled by their respective ferocity, they just stand there in awkward silence...

FELIKS. I only have mid-size sedans.

MARIYA. Good yeah. That's fine.