

Audience

Václav Havel

CHARACTERS

Brewmaster Ferdinand Vaněk

PLACE

A Brewery Office

(Brewmaster's office. Stage right, there is a door. Above it hangs some sort of a framed certificate. A wardrobe and a filing cabinet, on top of which there is a collection of beer bottles, stand stage left. Upstage, on the back wall, a large crude painting portrays the good soldier Švejk and the inn-keeper Palivec. A decorative sign under it proclaims: LIVING IS EASY WHERE BREWERS KEEP BUSY. An office desk and three chairs take up the centre of the stage. The desk is littered with stacks of various forms, several empty beer bottles, and beer glasses. A case of beer lies on the floor beside the desk. An undefined mass of junk is piled up along the walls and in the corners – broken valves, an old radio, a broken-down coat rack, stacks of yellow newspapers, galoshes, and so on. As the curtain rises, the Brewmaster is sitting by the desk in a work smock, supporting his head in his hands, and snoring loudly. Moments later, someone knocks on the door. The Brewmaster wakes up immediately.)

BREWMASTER Come in –
(Vaněk enters, wearing a heavy workcoat and boots.)

VANĚK How are you –

BREWMASTER Oh, Mr. Vaněk! Come on in! Have a seat –
(Vaněk sits down timidly.) How about a beer?

VANĚK No, thank you –

BREWMASTER Oh, come on! Why not? Go ahead and have one –
(Brewmaster pulls a bottle out of the case, opens it, pours beer into two glasses, pushes one in front of Vaněk while downing the other one quickly.)

VANĚK Thank you –
(Brewmaster pours himself another glass. Pause.)

BREWMASTER Well? So how is it goin'?

VANĚK Fine, thank you –

BREWMASTER Like there was any choice, right?

VANĚK Right.
(Pause.)

BREWMASTER So what are you up to today? Rollin' the full barrels?

VANĚK No, the empties actually –

BREWMASTER A little better than them full suckers, ain't it?

VANĚK Yes, it is –

(Pause.)

BREWMASTER So who's pushin' the ballbusters today?

VANĚK Sherkezy¹ –

BREWMASTER He made it in this morning?

VANĚK Yes, he just came in –

BREWMASTER Plastered as usual?

VANĚK Somewhat maybe –
(Pause.)

BREWMASTER Drink up! Why ain't you drinkin'?

VANĚK Thank you, but I'm not used to drinking beer –

BREWMASTER You bein' serious?! Well, don't worry, we gonna break you in over here. Oh yeah, you gonna get used to drinking beer, no problem. We all drink it here, everybody – it's kind of like a tradition or something we got in this brewery –

VANĚK I know –
(Pause.)

BREWMASTER And don't you let it get you down –

VANĚK I am not down –
(Pause.)

BREWMASTER So how's everything else?

VANĚK Such as what?

BREWMASTER Like everything in general –

VANĚK Oh, not too bad, thank you –
(Pause.)

BREWMASTER So you like it here?

VANĚK I do –

BREWMASTER Things could always be worse, right?

VANĚK I guess –
(Brewmaster opens another bottle and pours himself beer.)

BREWMASTER A guy'll get used to just about anything, right?

VANĚK Yes –
(Pause.)

BREWMASTER So kill that, will ya!
(Vaněk empties his glass; Brewmaster refills it.)

VANĚK Oh no, not any more, please –

BREWMASTER What are you talkin' about? You ain't even started tastin' it yet!
(Pause.) So what about the people here? You gettin' along with everybody?

VANĚK Fine, thank you –

¹ Sherkezy, though he never actually appears on stage, is also mentioned in *Dienstbier's Reception*, where he is referred to as the prison's dope expert and expert tattooer.

BREWMASTER If you don't mind me givin' you a little tip, I wouldn't wanna get too close to any of these people here – Me, I don't trust anybody! People are real assholes! Real assholes! You'd better believe it. So you just do your job – don't get into no deep discussions – that really ain't worth it – especially in your case –

VANĚK I understand –
(Pause.)

BREWMASTER In point of fact, what the hell was this stuff you been writin' – if you don't mind me askin'?

VANĚK Theatre plays –

BREWMASTER Theatre plays, huh? So they played 'em in some theatre somewhere, or what?

VANĚK Yes –

BREWMASTER Oh, yeah, yeah – So theatre plays, huh? Listen, that bein' the case, you oughta write somethin' about our brewery here. Somethin' like about somebody like Bureš – D'you know Bureš?

VANĚK Yes –

BREWMASTER Hell of a character, ain't he?

VANĚK Yes –
(Pause.)

BREWMASTER But – anyway, I betcha this never even crossed your mind, right?

VANĚK What do you mean?

BREWMASTER Well, that you gonna end up rollin' em in a brewery one day –

VANĚK Well – (*noncommittal*)

BREWMASTER Them is the paradoxes of life, right?

VANĚK Well –

BREWMASTER Boy, I'll tell you!
(Pause.)

BREWMASTER You said you're rollin' the empties today?

VANĚK Yes –

BREWMASTER But yesterday it was them full suckers – I saw you myself –

VANĚK Sherkezy was off yesterday –

BREWMASTER Oh yeah, right –
(Pause.)

Well, we ain't never had a writer in here yet – And we've had 'em all, I tell ya! Like take Bureš! D'you know what he used to be? A gravedigger! That's where he learned to tip'em and that's why he came to us here – That guy's full of stories, I tell ya!

VANĚK I know –

BREWMASTER So what the hell were them plays about?

VANĚK Mostly about office people –

BREWMASTER Oh, office people, huh? For real? Well –

(Pause.)

D'you take your break yet?

VANĚK Not yet –

BREWMASTER Well, you can take it later. Just tell the guard at the gate that you been in my office –

VANĚK Thank you –

BREWMASTER And quit thanking me all the time, will ya?
(Pause.)

Anyway, I do respect you –

VANĚK Respect me? Why?

BREWMASTER It's gotta be a bitch – After you been sitting at home all your life – where it's nice and warm – sleeping as long as you wanted – to every morning – and now outta the blue this – Seriously now, that I gotta lotta respect for –
(Pause.)

Excuse me –
(*Brewmaster gets up and leaves. Vaněk quickly pours his beer into the Brewmaster's glass. A few moments later, the Brewmaster returns, zipping up his fly. He sits back down.*)

So you like used to actually know all kinds of actresses when you used to write for them theatres?

VANĚK Of course –

BREWMASTER So d'you know Bohdalová,² too?

VANĚK Yes –

BREWMASTER I mean you personally?

VANĚK Yes –

BREWMASTER So maybe you could invite her over one of these days for a few beers – We'd get Bureš in on it, too – Could be hell of a good time, what do you think?

VANĚK Well –
(Pause.)

BREWMASTER Don't you let it get you down!

VANĚK I'm not down –
(*Brewmaster gets up, opens another bottle, and pours himself beer. Pause.*)

BREWMASTER You know that young guy from upstairs? You know who I'm talkin' about?

VANĚK Mlynařík?

BREWMASTER Watch your step around that guy –
(Pause.)

And Karel Gott,³ d'you know him, too?

² Jiřina Bohdalová is a popular stage and television actress in Czechoslovakia.

VANĚK Yes, I do.
(*Pause.*)

BREWMASTER It's too bad you wasn't here some five years ago! You would've seen a hell of a gang here! Today, it ain't nothin' like it no more. Yeah, we used to have a good time around here. A bunch of us used to get together at the maltroom – myself, this guy Kája Mařánek, he's gone, Honza Peterka, the girls from the bottling plant – we even been known to party all night long – and we still got everything done, too? Just go and ask Honza Peterka, see what he says –

VANĚK He's already told me about it –
(*Pause.*)

BREWMASTER Is there a lotta dough in them plays?

VANĚK It varied a lot –

BREWMASTER Well, you gotta clear at least five thousand, right?

VANĚK It all depends on how many theatres produce it – Sometimes you make quite a bit of money – At other times, you don't make any at all –

BREWMASTER Like for a whole month even?

VANĚK Even several months –

BREWMASTER So it's got its drawbacks, too, don't it? Just like everything else, right?

VANĚK Yes –

BREWMASTER But anyway, them's the paradoxes, right?

VANĚK Uh, huh –

BREWMASTER Boy, I tell you –
(*Pause.*)
You're not drinkin' a goddam thing!

VANĚK But I am drinking.
(*Brewmaster opens another bottle and pours beer for both of them. Pause.*)

BREWMASTER Listen, I'm gonna tell you somethin' – strictly between you and me – if anybody else was sitting in my place here – you would not be working here today – I'll guarantee you that much –

VANĚK Was there a lot of problems with this?

BREWMASTER You can say that again!

VANĚK I feel really obliged to you –

³ Karel Gott is a successful popular singer, one of the few who move relatively freely across the border to the West and back. He has made numerous recordings in Czechoslovakia, Germany, and Austria. It may be of interest that Milan Kundera calls Gott an exponent of “music minus memory, the music in which the bones of Beethoven and Ellington, the dust of Palestrina and Schönberg, lie buried” (*The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* [New York: Knopf, 1981], p. 181).

BREWMASTER You understand I'm not out to make a big deal out of this – but when I see that I can help somebody, why wouldn't I help him? I just got this kind of a mentality even today still! In this situation – people should help each other in my opinion – today I scratch your back, the next time you scratch mine – ain't that so?

VANĚK Yes –
(*Pause.*)

BREWMASTER D'you take your break yet?

VANĚK Not yet –

BREWMASTER Well, you can take it later. Just tell the guard that you been in my office –

VANĚK Thank you –

BREWMASTER And quit thanking me all the time, will ya!
(*Pause.*)
Lemme tell ya, these days everybody's afraid of gettin' their tits caught in the wringer –

VANĚK I know –
(*Pause.*)

BREWMASTER The important thing is that we're all in the same damn boat here, so let's act like it –

VANĚK Yes –

BREWMASTER You know I don't know how you feel about it, but I've always said, you gotta have teamwork. A good team's the key to everything –

VANĚK I agree –

BREWMASTER So why ain't you drinkin'? You'd rather be sippin' a little wine, wouldn'tcha?

VANĚK Well –

BREWMASTER Here you're gonna get used to drinkin' beer. We all drink beer here, everybody – It's kind of like a tradition or something we got in this brewery –

VANĚK I know –
(*Pause.*)

BREWMASTER But Karel Gott's got it made these days, don't he?

VANĚK I suppose so –
(*Pause.*)

BREWMASTER You married?

VANĚK Yes –

BREWMASTER Any kids?

VANĚK No –
(*Pause.*)

BREWMASTER Like I said, you got my respect –

VANĚK Oh, please –
 BREWMASTER No seriously! This's gotta be a bitch to get used to –
 (Pause.)
 Excuse me –
(Brewmaster gets up and leaves. Vaněk quickly pours his beer into Brewmaster's glass. A few moments later, Brewmaster returns, zipping up his fly. He sits back down.)
 So how old is she?
 VANĚK Who?
 BREWMASTER Bohdalová –
 VANĚK About forty-three or so –
 BREWMASTER You serious? She sure don't look it on TV –
 (Pause.)
 No, but really: Everything will come out all right, so long we all hang in there together – so long we all act like we're all in the same boat – like I said: A good team's the key to everything –
(Brewmaster opens another bottle and pours himself more beer.)
 Too bad you weren't here about five years ago. Then you would've seen some teamwork around here. Today, shit! Today I don't trust nobody here –
 (Pause.)
 So who the hell is this guy Kohout?
 VANĚK What Kohout?
 BREWMASTER Some Kohout was supposed to visit you –
 VANĚK That's one of my colleagues –
 BREWMASTER Some kind of a writer, too?
 VANĚK Yes. Why do you ask?
 BREWMASTER No reason.
 (Pause.)
 Don't get the wrong impression, Vaněk. I got my share of problems here, too –
 VANĚK Yes?
 BREWMASTER Why d'you think they stuck me in this dump? But I'm sure you're not interested in any of that –
 VANĚK I am interested as a matter of fact –
 BREWMASTER You know what I was supposed to be doin'?
 VANĚK What?
 BREWMASTER I was supposed to be running a brewery in Pardubice –
 VANĚK Seriously?
 BREWMASTER And look at me! I'm here – Them is the paradoxes, right?
 VANĚK Why didn't you go there?
 BREWMASTER Let's just drop it.

(Pause.)
 You married?
 VANĚK Yes –
 BREWMASTER Any kids?
 VANĚK No –
 (Pause.)
 BREWMASTER Listen, it ain't any of my business, but you should tell that Holub⁴ guy not to come around –
 VANĚK You must mean my colleague Kohout –
 BREWMASTER And what did I say?
 VANĚK You said Holub –
 BREWMASTER Who cares! Look, it ain't none of my business – I don't even know that person – I don't know who he is or anything – I'm just tellin' you this, because it's in your own interest –
 VANĚK Well I'm sorry, boss, but I –
 BREWMASTER Man, you're suckin' on it like it was some French cognac, or somethin?
 VANĚK I've told you I wasn't used to it –
 BREWMASTER Gimme a break!
 VANĚK No, seriously –
 BREWMASTER Or maybe it's that I just ain't good enough for you to drink with–
 VANĚK Oh no, not at all –
 BREWMASTER Well, you know I ain't no pop star like Gott or nothin'. I'm just your everyday brewery hick –
 VANĚK You're a professional at what you do just like Gott is at what he does. So what happened that you didn't go to Pardubice?
 BREWMASTER Let's just drop it –
(Brewmaster opens another bottle and pours himself beer. Pause.)
 It'll all be okay, Vaněk! Don't you worry, I won't let you down! You're a quiet, hardworking guy. You check in regular every day, you don't talk crap like all the others, you don't beef about the pay – and considerin' the shortage of man-power, eh?
 VANĚK I am very grateful to you –
 BREWMASTER Besides, you are a decent guy, I can tell, I got a nose for that. I can spot a ripoff artist from a mile off. That Mlynařík from upstairs – know which one I mean?

⁴ Miroslav Holub (born 1923), a distinguished Czech scientist, is also a well-known poet whose work is available in English. The confusion of the names of Kohout and Holub provides linguistic humour in Czech which gets lost in translation: the Brewmaster mixes up not only writers but also bird species (Kohout means rooster and Holub means pigeon in Czech).

VANĚK Yes –
 BREWMASTER I got his number the moment he turned up. Watch out for him –
 (Pause.)
 VANĚK So why didn't you go to Pardubice?
 BREWMASTER Let's just drop it –
 (Pause.)
 Anyway, Vaněk, me you can count on! I'm standing by you –
 VANĚK Thank you –
 BREWMASTER All I need from you is to be sure I can count on you, too – that you ain't gonna pull the rug from under me – that I'm able to lean on you –
 VANĚK I'll do everything I can to make sure you're satisfied with my work.
 BREWMASTER Look, I didn't have to tell you a goddam thing! By rights, I shouldn't've even mentioned anything to you! In my position, everybody else would've –
 VANĚK Excuse me, but what were you not supposed to tell me?
 BREWMASTER Well, the stuff about that Holub –
 VANĚK Kohout –
 BREWMASTER Lookit, I dunno what kind of a guy he is, and I don't even wanna know either. I don't care about him – fuck him, okay – you are what's at stake here, right? All in all, you ain't got it so bad here – you roll your empties – everybody's stayin' off your back – that Kohout guy ain't gonna give you a job now, is he, if I can't swing keepin' you here, right? Or is he?
 VANĚK It's not very likely –
 BREWMASTER So you see my point! So why the hell not be sensible about it, man!
 (Pause.)
 VANĚK Boss –
 BREWMASTER What?
 VANĚK I am sorry, but I –
 BREWMASTER You what?
 VANĚK I can see whomever I want to, after all –
 BREWMASTER And am I tellin' you any different? You see whoever you feel like! That's your constitutional right! Don't let nobody bull-shit you about that! Don't let nobody take that away from you! Because you are a man and not some old sock or somethin'! This here is a matter of principle, damn it!
 VANĚK So you see yourself –

BREWMASTER And he's gonna understand it that way, too, that Kohout guy. He's gotta understand that you're gonna see whoever you wanna see! Or won't he?
 (Brewmaster opens another bottle and pours himself beer. Pause.)
 VANĚK Boss –
 BREWMASTER What?
 VANĚK It's time for me to go –
 BREWMASTER What's the big hurry?
 VANĚK They'll be looking for me in the cellar –
 BREWMASTER Fuck 'em if they can't take a joke! They got Sherkezy down there, don't they? You sit here and drink!
 (Pause.)
 You don't care why I never made it to Pardubice?
 VANĚK I do.
 BREWMASTER For real?
 VANĚK Really! Why didn't you go there?
 BREWMASTER You know what they did to me? They accused me of splitting five hundred barrels of lager – this surplus we had here – with this one restaurant manager. Ain't that somethin'? The whole thing didn't happen that way at all of course, but this son of a bitch – this Mlynařík from fermenting upstairs – you know who I'm talkin' about?
 VANĚK Yes –
 BREWMASTER That's just to show you what kind of folks you're dealin' with here! Me, I don't trust nobody here! People are assholes, you know! Real assholes! You better believe me! Just do your job and don't get into no deep discussions here – that really ain't worth it – especially in your case –
 VANĚK I understand –
 (Pause.)
 BREWMASTER D'you take your break yet?
 VANĚK Not yet.
 BREWMASTER Well, you can take it later. Just tell the guard that you been in my office –
 VANĚK Thank you.
 BREWMASTER And quit thanking me all the time, will ya!
 (Pause.)
 Excuse me –
 (Brewmaster gets up and leaves. Vaněk quickly pours his beer into the Brewmaster's glass. A few moments later, the Brewmaster returns, zipping up his fly. He sits back down.)
 So when you gonna bring her over?

VANĚK Who?
 BREWMMASTER Bohdalová, for Chrissake!
 VANĚK I'll ask her when I get a chance –
 BREWMMASTER So how about inviting her for this Saturday?
 VANĚK This coming Saturday?
 BREWMMASTER Why the hell not?
 VANĚK I don't know if she'd have the time –
 BREWMMASTER For you, she'll make the time, right?
 VANĚK You know actors have all kinds of commitments – their time is booked up way in advance – they can't just start changing everything –
 BREWMMASTER Well, of course if you don't think we're good enough for her here, then you don't have to invite her at all –
 VANĚK No, I don't – think that at all –
 BREWMMASTER I'm not gonna twist your arm about it – Seemed to me we could of had some fun here –
 VANĚK Well –
(Pause.)
 BREWMASTER And don't you let it get you down!
 VANĚK I'm not down!
(Pause.)
 BREWMASTER Listen, Ferdinand – you're Ferdinand, aren't you?
 VANĚK Yes –
 BREWMASTER Listen, Ferdinand, I wanted to have a word with you –
 VANĚK I know –
(Pause.)
 BREWMASTER Why the hell aren't you drinkin'?
 VANĚK As I said before, I'm not much of a beer drinker –
 BREWMASTER Over here, everybody's a beer drinker –
 VANĚK I know –
(Pause.)
 BREWMASTER Listen, Ferdinand – can I call you that?
 VANĚK Of course –
 BREWMASTER What would you say if we put you in charge of the warehouse here? That wouldn't be bad, would it? In any case, you are a pencil-pusher, you ain't no ripoff artist, so? You're not gonna keep on rollin'em ballbusters with the gypsies down there forever! The warehouse is warm – you'd close it up around lunchtime, tell 'em you're straightenin' stuff out – and you'd have a little time to dream up a few jokes for them plays of yours – hell, if you wanted to, you could even catch a nap in there – what do you say?

VANĚK You think that it would be possible?
 BREWMASTER Why wouldn't it be possible?
 VANĚK Naturally, I am not in a situation where I can pick and choose – but if there really should be such a possibility, I'd really think that it would be just outstanding – I am pretty much organized – I can type – I get by in a few foreign languages – and you know that it can get really cold down in the cellar – particularly if one isn't used to it –
 BREWMASTER That's just it. You understand what evidencing is?
 VANĚK I'm sure that I can learn – I do have four semesters of economics –
 BREWMASTER Oh yeah? So you understand evidencing then?
 VANĚK I'm sure I can learn –
 BREWMASTER It's warm in there – you'd lock up at lunchtime – you're not gonna keep on rollin'em ballbusters with the gypsies forever!
 VANĚK Well, if there were to be an opening like that –
(Pause.)
 BREWMASTER No, no, no Vaněk! I can spot a ripoff artist from a mile off! You're a straightshooter, I'm a straightshooter, so I don't see why we can't get together on this! What do you say?
 VANĚK Yes, of course –
 BREWMASTER So you're all for it?
 VANĚK Of course –
 BREWMASTER If you don't want to, then tell me! Maybe you don't care to form a team with me – maybe you got somethin' against me – maybe you just got some other plans –
 VANĚK I have nothing against you – on the contrary – you've done quite a lot for me – I feel obliged to you – particularly if the warehouse should work out – naturally, I'll do everything I can to make sure you're satisfied with my work –
(Brewmaster opens another bottle and pours beer into both glasses.)
 BREWMASTER So we can drink to that?
 VANĚK Yes –
(They both drink.)
 BREWMASTER Bottoms up!
(Vaněk struggles to empty his glass; Brewmaster immediately refills it. Pause.)
 And don't you let it get you down!
 VANĚK I'm not down –
(Pause.)
 BREWMASTER Listen, Ferdinand –
 VANĚK Yes –

BREWMASTER We're buddies, right?
 VANĚK Yes –
 BREWMASTER You're not just sayin' that?
 VANĚK No –
 BREWMASTER So you trust me?
 VANĚK Of course I do –
 BREWMASTER Hold it: No bullshit now, you trust me?
 VANĚK I trust you –
 BREWMASTER All right then – I'm gonna tell you somethin' – but this is strictly between you and me, okay?
 VANĚK Okay –
 BREWMASTER I can depend on you now?
 VANĚK You can –
 BREWMASTER So listen – (*He lowers his voice.*) They come here to ask about you –
 VANĚK Who does?
 BREWMASTER They do, who else –
 VANĚK Really?
 BREWMASTER I swear –
 VANĚK And you get the feeling that – as far as my job here at the brewery – that it may be on the line?
 (*Pause.*)
 Are they putting pressure on you to fire me?
 (*Pause.*)
 Or are they holding it against you that you've hired me?
 (*Pause.*)
 BREWMASTER All right – I'm gonna tell you somethin' – but this is strictly between you and me, okay?
 VANĚK Okay –
 BREWMASTER I can depend on you now?
 VANĚK You can –
 BREWMASTER All right – If there was anybody else sittin' here in my place, you wouldn't be workin' here, I'll guarantee you that! Need I say more?
 VANĚK Yes, of course – I feel very obliged to you –
 BREWMASTER I'm not fishin' for no compliments here –
 VANĚK I know that –
 BREWMASTER It's just to let you know how things stand –
 VANĚK Thank you –
 (*Pause.*)
 BREWMASTER Excuse me –

(*Brewmaster struggles to get up and exits on unsteady feet. Vaněk quickly pours his beer into Brewmaster's glass. A few moments later, Brewmaster returns, zipping up his fly. He sits back down.*)

You ever got it on with her?
 VANĚK With whom?
 BREWMASTER Bohdalová, for Chrissake –
 VANĚK Me? No –
 BREWMASTER You sure?
 VANĚK Yes –
 BREWMASTER Then you're just a wimp in my book!
 (*Pause.*)
 VANĚK Boss –
 BREWMASTER What?
 VANĚK It's time for me to go –
 BREWMASTER What's the big hurry?
 VANĚK They'll be looking for me in the cellar –
 BREWMASTER Fuck 'em if they can't take a joke! They got Sherkezy down there, don't they? You sit here and drink!
 (*Pause.*)
 Listen, Ferdinand – you're Ferdinand, aren't you?
 VANĚK Yes –
 BREWMASTER Listen Ferdinand – I can call you that, can't I?
 VANĚK Go ahead –
 BREWMASTER Hold it, I'm makin' sure I ask first, so you don't get pissed off at me, or somethin'.
 VANĚK Why would I get pissed off?
 BREWMASTER With you, I never know where the hell I'm at – you don't say shit – God only knows what the hell you're thinkin' – all you ever say is "yes, boss," "thank you, boss" –
 VANĚK I was brought up that way –
 BREWMASTER Whereas me, I'm just an ignorant brewery hick! That's what you meant, didn't you? Don't tell me you didn't –
 VANĚK I did not –
 BREWMASTER Right, let's cut out this bullshit – so at least I know where I'm at here –
 VANĚK I don't think badly of you, really I don't – on the contrary –
 BREWMASTER So we're buddies then, right?
 VANĚK Yes –
 BREWMASTER So you trust me?
 VANĚK I trust you –
 BREWMASTER All right then. Look, I happen to know one of them that come here on account of you – we went to school together – I know

him pretty good – his name is Tonda Mašek – he’s an all right guy, at least I get along with him okay –

VANĚK Good for you –

BREWMASTER It’s not like he is a big shot over there – because that he ain’t – but he did help me out a couple of times – and I don’t know when I’m gonna need him again – besides which, like I said, he’s an all right guy – so I just – well, to make a long story short – I just couldn’t leave him hangin’, you understand?

VANĚK I understand –
(Pause.)

BREWMASTER Well – why the hell you starin’?

VANĚK I’m not staring –

BREWMASTER Well, say it then, what you’re thinkin’! Go ahead and spell it out!

VANĚK I’m not thinking anything.

BREWMASTER Don’t tell me! I know exactly what you’re thinkin’ right now! Except you probably don’t realize that if I didn’t promise to do it, they would’ve found somebody else, and that would’ve been even worse, because then it wouldn’t ‘ve been nobody straight like me for sure! Because I’m always gonna level with you, unlike most other people, that’s just the kind of mentality I got – even today still! And that’s your only break, if you wanna know somethin’. Because people are real assholes! Real assholes! Or do you think you’re gonna run into another dumb fucker like me, who’s gonna spill the beans like this? You believe that and I’ll give you a great deal on a bridge downtown! Where the hell do you think you live anyway?

VANĚK I do value your honesty, of course –

BREWMASTER D’you have any idea of the chances I’m takin’ by levelling with you here? How am I ever gonna get even with you, if you doublecross me? I’m puttin’ myself completely into your hands here, for Chrissake!

VANĚK I won’t say anything to anybody –

BREWMASTER Then you’re gonna write it down somewhere! You’re gonna put it in one of them plays – they’ll confiscate it from you – and me, I’ll be completely washed up!

VANĚK I’ll keep this to myself, you can depend on that –

BREWMASTER For real?

VANĚK For real –
(Brewmaster opens another bottle and pours himself beer. Pause.)

BREWMASTER Boss –

BREWMASTER Uh huh –

VANĚK If it were to work out – I mean the warehouse business – what about old Šustr?

BREWMASTER What about him?
(Pause.)

BUT ANYWAY – Them’s the paradoxes, right?

VANĚK Well –

BREWMASTER Boy, I’ll tell you –
(Pause.)

VANĚK Boss –

BREWMASTER Uh huh.

VANĚK Getting back to the warehouse – you think that they’d allow it? They must know that it’s pretty warm in there –

BREWMASTER They don’t know shit!
(Pause.)

YOU MARRIED?

VANĚK Yes –

BREWMASTER Any kids?

VANĚK No –

BREWMASTER I got three myself. Just so you know –
(Pause.)

VANĚK If it came to it, you could argue that I’ll be more isolated from other people there –

BREWMASTER Listen, Ferdinand –

VANĚK That’s what they’re concerned about, isn’t it, that I don’t come into contact with people?

BREWMASTER Listen, Ferdinand –

VANĚK That could have the desired effect, right?

BREWMASTER Listen, Ferdinand –

VANĚK Yes?

BREWMASTER Do you play poker?

VANĚK No –

BREWMASTER I do – we used to have this pretty good bunch of guys – we’d get together every Thursday, you know – and what do you think happened? I had to blow it off, too, on account of this Lojza Hlavatý –

VANĚK Uh huh.

BREWMASTER Just to show you that none of us got it easy –
(Pause.)

LISTEN, FERDINAND –

VANĚK Yes?

BREWMASTER You know my old lady?

VANĚK No –

(Pause.)
 BREWMMASTER Listen, Ferdinand –
 VANĚK Yes?
 BREWMMASTER Everything's all fucked up –
 VANĚK I know –
 BREWMMASTER You don't know shit! You've got it made! You write your damn plays – you roll your barrels – and they can all go to hell for all you care! What more do you want? The fact is, they're even afraid of you, man!
 VANĚK That I would doubt –
 BREWMASTER They sure are! But what about me? Nobody gives a damn about me! Nobody's sendin' no reports about me nowhere! They can squeeze me every time they feel like! They got me by the balls! They can squash me like a bug – whenever they decide! Like a goddam bug! You – you got it made!
 (Pause.)
 Listen, Ferdinand –
 VANĚK Yes?
 BREWMASTER But you're gonna bring that Bohdalová around, ain't you? You're not gonna just blow it off? Right? You're not just gonna forget about it?
 VANĚK You can depend on that – I'm going to give her a call tonight and I'll set it up –
 BREWMASTER You think she'll come?
 VANĚK I'll do what I can –
 BREWMASTER You two are buddies, ain't you?
 VANĚK Yes, that's true –
 BREWMASTER Hold it. You said you were buddies –
 VANĚK We are –
 BREWMASTER Hold it. So are you buddies or are you not buddies?
 VANĚK I said we are –
 BREWMASTER So what's the hitch?
 (Pause.)
 She can see whoever she wanna see, damn it!
 VANĚK Of course –
 BREWMASTER That's her constitutional goddam right!
 VANĚK Of course –
 BREWMASTER This is a matter of principle, goddam it!
 (Pause.)
 And anyhow – nobody ever needs to know who brought her here! We'll just turn it into a Friendship-with-the-workin'-masses kind of thing! They can't find anything wrong with that!

VANĚK I agree –
 BREWMASTER So you gonna get her to come?
 VANĚK I'll do whatever I can – I'll give her a call tonight – we are friends – there is nothing wrong with this –
 (Pause.)
 BREWMASTER Listen, Ferdinand –
 VANĚK Yes?
 BREWMASTER If you only knew how sick I am of all this shit!
 VANĚK I understand that –
 BREWMASTER You don't understand didley! You're just sayin' to yourself – He's stupid – let him talk it out of his system –
 VANĚK I'm not thinking that –
 BREWMASTER Why ain't you drinkin'?
 VANĚK I am drinking –
 BREWMASTER D'you take your break yet?
 VANĚK Not yet –
 BREWMASTER Fuck the break –
 VANĚK I don't feel like eating anyway –
 BREWMASTER I may be stupid, but I'm callin' it like it is –
 VANĚK I know that –
 BREWMASTER I wanted to have a talk with you –
 VANĚK I know –
 BREWMASTER People are assholes! Real assholes! Why ain't you drinkin'?
 VANĚK I am drinking –
 BREWMASTER D'you take your break yet?
 VANĚK Not yet –
 BREWMASTER Hell you – You got it made –
 VANĚK I feel obliged to you –
 BREWMASTER Everything's all fucked up –
 (Brewmaster opens another bottle and pours himself beer. Pause.)
 Listen, Ferdinand –
 VANĚK Yes –
 BREWMASTER You don't mind me callin' you Ferdinand and all?
 VANĚK No –
 BREWMASTER If you do, just lemme know –
 VANĚK I don't mind –
 BREWMASTER Well, at least you don't mind –
 VANĚK On the contrary. I'm glad we became acquainted –
 BREWMASTER "I'm glad we became acquainted" – "I do value your honesty" – why the hell do you talk so – so –
 VANĚK Bookishly?
 BREWMASTER Yeah –

VANĚK Well, if it irritates you, then –
 BREWMASTER Nothing irritates me – I do value that we became acquainted –
 Shit!
 VANĚK Sorry?
 BREWMASTER Shit!
(Pause.)
 VANĚK Excuse me –
 BREWMASTER What?
 VANĚK I have to go –
 BREWMASTER What's the big hurry?
 VANĚK They'll be looking for me in the cellar –
 BREWMASTER Fuck'em if they can't take a joke! They got Sherkezy down there,
 don't they? You sit here and drink!
 VANĚK Seriously – They'll be upset –
 BREWMASTER I get it, now I'm borin' you, huh? I know that with Karel Gott
 and Bohdalová, you used to have better parties!
 VANĚK I feel good here talking with you, I wouldn't want people to start
 commenting about this – that wouldn't make sense – particularly
 now that there is the prospect of a job in the warehouse –
 BREWMASTER You really feel good here?
 VANĚK Really –
 BREWMASTER You're not just sayin' that?
 VANĚK No –
(Brewmaster opens another bottle and pours himself beer. Pause.)
 BREWMASTER Ferdinand –
 VANĚK Yes?
 BREWMASTER You know the worst thing about it?
 VANĚK What?
 BREWMASTER That I'm runnin' outta ideas about what to keep on tellin'em
 every damn week – I really don't know the first thing about you
 – I hardly ever even run into you around here – and the little
 bullshit gossip I do catch up here – that you go hide out in the
 lab – that they saw you downtown a couple of times with
 Maruška from the bottling plant – that the maintenance guys did
 some work on your heating system at home – that ain't shit! You
 tell me – what the hell am I supposed to tell 'em all the time?
 What?
 VANĚK I'm sorry, but I can hardly help you in this –
 BREWMASTER Sure you can! If only you wanted to –
 VANĚK Me? How?

BREWMASTER You're what they call an intellectual, right? You keep up with
 politics, don't you? You're writing stuff, ain't you? Who the hell
 should know whatever the fuck it is they wanna know if not you?
 VANĚK I'm sorry, but this would –
 BREWMASTER Look, in the warehouse, you'd have tons of time – so what's
 wrong with jottin' somethin' down on paper for me once a week?
 You could do that much for me, couldn't you? Look, I'm gonna
 take care of you! You'll be happier there than a pig in shit! You
 can even take beer back there – as much as you want, too! It
 would be child's play for you! You're a writer, damn it, right?
 This Tonda Mašek really is a decent guy and he really does need
 it, so we can't just leave him hangin'! Damn it, didn't we just
 finish sayin' that we're all in this together? That we gotta give
 each other a hand? That we're gonna be a team here? Didn't we
 just toast to that now? You tell me – did we or did we not just
 toast to that?
 VANĚK We did, but –
 BREWMASTER Right now it's all up to you, Ferdinand! If you take care of us,
 everything'll turn out great! You'll scratch my back, I'll scratch
 his, he mine and I'll scratch yours – so nobody's gonna get
 shortchanged in the deal. Let's not make life hell for each other!
(Pause.)
 Well, why you starin'?
 VANĚK I'm not staring –
(Pause.)
 BREWMASTER You'd have direct control over what – they're gonna know about
 you – that ain't too damn shabby either –
 VANĚK I know –
(Pause.)
 BREWMASTER And that warehouse would be pretty good for you, too, wouldn't
 it? It's warm – tons of time –
 VANĚK That would be excellent –
(Pause.)
 BREWMASTER So – what the hell's the issue here?
(Pause.)
 VANĚK Boss –
 BREWMASTER What?
 VANĚK I really am very grateful to you for everything you've done for
 me – I appreciate it, because I know better than anybody how
 rare this attitude is these days – you really gave me a lift, because
 I seriously don't know what I would have done without your
 help – that warehouse job would mean even more of a relief to

me than you might think – but I just – don’t be angry with me – I can’t be snitching on myself –

BREWMASTER What do you mean snitch? Who’s talkin’ about snitchin’ here?

VANĚK It isn’t because of me – it couldn’t hurt me any more – but it really is a matter of principle! I just cannot, as a matter of principle, become a part of –

BREWMASTER A part of what? Go ahead and spell it out! You can’t be a part of what?

VANĚK A part of a way of doing things that I don’t agree with –
(A short, tense pause.)

BREWMASTER Well. So you can’t. You can’t then. That’s great! Now you’re showin’ your true colours! Now you’ve really said it all!
(Brewmaster gets up and begins pacing nervously around the room.)
And what about me? You’re just gonna let me sink, right? You’re just gonna say, fuck you! It’s okay if I end up being an asshole! Me, I can wallow in this shit, because I don’t count, I ain’t nothin’ but a regular brewery hick – but the VIP here can’t have any part of this! It’s okay if I get smeared with shit, so long the VIP here stays clean! The VIP is worried about the principle! But he don’t bother thinkin’ about other people! Just as long as he comes out smellin’ like a rose! The principle is dearer to him than another human being! That’s typical of all of you!

VANĚK Who?

BREWMASTER You, damn it! You intellectuals. VIP’s! All that stuff’s just smooth bullshit, except that you can afford it, because nothin’ can ever happen to you, there’s always somebody interested in how you doin’, you always know how to fix that, you’re still up there, even when you’re down and out, whereas a regular guy like me is bustin’ his ass and ain’t got shit to show for it and nobody will stick up for him and everybody just fucks him and everybody blows him off and everybody feels free to yell at him and he ain’t got no life at all and, in the end, the VIP’s will say, hell, he ain’t got no principles! A soft job in the warehouse, you’d take that from me – but to take a piece of that shit I gotta walk knee-deep in every damn day along with it, that you don’t wanna! No way! You’re all too goddam smart, you got everything worked out ahead of time, you know exactly how to look out for yourselves! Principles! Principles! Damn right you gonna fight for your damn principles – they’re worth a fortune to you, you know just how to sell them principles, you’re makin’ a killin’ on them, you’re livin’ off them – but what about me? I only get my ass busted for havin’ principles! You always got a chance, but what kind of a

chance have I got? Nobody’s gonna take care of me, nobody’s afraid of me, nobody’s gonna write anything about me, nobody’s gonna gimme a hand, nobody’s interested in me, all I’m good for is to be the manure that your damn principles gonna grow out of, and to scare up heated rooms so you can play heroes! And lookin’ like a damn fool gonna be all I’m gonna have to show for it! You’re gonna go back to all your actresses one day – you gonna floor’em with how you rolled barrels – you gonna be a hero – but what about me? What can I go back to? Who’s ever gonna pay any attention to me? Who’s ever gonna appreciate anything I did? What the hell do I ever get out of life? What’s in store for me? What?

(Brewmaster is crushed. He drops back into his chair, puts his head on Vaněk’s breast, and begins sobbing loudly. After a few moments, he calms down, looks up at Vaněk, and says quickly)

Ferdinand –

VANĚK Uh huh.

BREWMASTER You my buddy?

VANĚK I am –

BREWMASTER Please go and get her – bring her over right now – I beg you –
(Pause.)

Tell her “Jiřinka – I got this one buddy back there – he’s a regular brewery hick – but he calls it the way it is” –
(Pause.)

I’m gonna fight like hell and get you the warehouse job – I’m not gonna ask you for no reports – just do this one thing for me, please –
(Pause.)

Are you gonna do that much for me? You are gonna do it for me, right? For one damn evening – I’ll be okay after that – everything’s gonna be different after that – I’m gonna know I didn’t waste my life after that – that fucked-up life I got ain’t been all the way fucked up – you gonna bring her?

(Pause; then Brewmaster grabs Vaněk’s clothes and begins to scream desperately into his face.)

If you’re not gonna bring her over here – I – I dunno – I might – I might –

(Brewmaster begins to sob again, quietly, and he puts his head on Vaněk’s breast. Pause. After a while, Brewmaster’s sobbing turns into loud snoring. Vaněk waits for a few moments, then gently lays Brewmaster’s head on the desk of the table, gets up quietly, and heads for the door. He stops there,

turns around, hesitates for a moment, and finally says to the sleeping Brewmaster)

VANĚK

Don't let it get you down –

(Vaněk exits. Soon thereafter, there is a knock on the door. Brewmaster makes up immediately, completely sobered up after his short sleep and behaving exactly the way he did in the opening scene of the play. He has evidently forgotten everything that has gone on.)

BREWMASTER

Come in –

(Vaněk enters, zipping up his fly.)

Oh, Mr. Vaněk! Come on in! Have a seat –

(Vaněk sits down.)

How about a beer?

(Vaněk nods; Brewmaster pulls a bottle out of the case, opens it, pours beer into two glasses, one of which he pushes in front of Vaněk. Vaněk downs it quickly.)

VANĚK

Well? So how is it goin'?

Everything's all fucked up –

(Curtain falls.)

THE END