

A TASTE YOU HAVEN'T TRIED BEFORE

DRAMATIS PERSONAE in the selected scene:

DEAN Metoda (Meta) **PRIESTER**, *full professor*

Rafael **BLAŽIN**, *full professor*

IVONA (Iva) Kalisch, *assistant professor, mid-30s*

DOROTEJA Luna Kovač, *associate professor, early 30s*

MALE COLLEAGUE, *associate professor*

FEMALE COLLEAGUE, *assistant professor*

Two administrative workers and three colleagues from Scene One

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SCENE ONE

An emergency department meeting.

Sitting around the oval table in the conference room are IVONA, DOROTEJA, BLAŽIN, FEMALE COLLEAGUE and MALE COLLEAGUE. Two ADMINISTRATORS (of any gender) bring in a new painting to hang. DEAN PRIESTER enters.

DEAN PRIESTER: On that wall over there. The nail is ready. (*To the colleagues around the table.*) Good morning, hello. (*Everybody nods.*) We will start immediately. Not everyone is here, is that correct? (*The Administrative workers leave the conference room.*) Thank you very much.

IVONA: Ooh, fresh art. Nice.

BLAŽIN: Hmmm. Is this something more modern?

DEAN PRIESTER: The 21st century, yes. We have this on loan for a year from the MSMA.

IVONA: The MSMA?

Three more colleagues enter. The greetings are reserved but polite. The three colleagues are here so that the department has at least nine people employed. If this were a film or a television series, this would not be a problem, but in theatre, this means extra people who only appear in Scene One. These are people who are silent, bodies that take up space, characters we don't notice. But they are there.

BLAŽIN: The Museum of Slovenian Modern Art.

IVONA: I was a bit shocked by the acronym.

DEAN PRIESTER: Everybody is here now, correct? I called today's emergency meeting because of the recent events here at the school, particularly in your department. Your department chair is, as you know, on a work-related trip, but I did speak to her yesterday. *(A brief silence.)* Well, this is unacceptable. *(She looks at her colleagues and waits for a potential reaction, a comment. They remain silent.)* You all know that there is less money allocated for public education. Far too little money. Today, several other people were supposed to be sitting here. People who teach here but could not come because they have obligations elsewhere as we cannot employ them full-time. It is unacceptable that you aggravate this already difficult situation further with student revolts!

She looks at her colleagues. IVONA wants to say something but changes her mind.

DEAN PRIESTER: Did you want to say something?

IVONA: I don't know, no. Perhaps. I'm wondering what the purpose of today's meeting is.

DEAN PRIESTER: The purpose is to discuss who is responsible for this situation, how it will not happen again, and how we can prevent similar occurrences in the future. Dr Kovač, what are your thoughts on these events?

DOROTEJA: So, we're supposed to be discussing today how to prevent future student activities?

IVONA: We could organise a week-long symposium on the question of responsibility.

BLAŽIN: The one most responsible is this government. Who else? And we ourselves could have demanded better working conditions more clearly and emphasised the importance of higher education for the country.

IVONA: Ah, it's hard to expect anything sensible from this government.

DEAN PRIESTER: Enough, colleagues. Today's meeting is not about the situation in

the country but about your role as an educator and your responsibilities to your students on the one side and the college on the other.

BLAŽIN: What do you mean by that, Dean Priester?

DOROTEJA: Why are these two opposing sides?

DEAN PRIESTER: These are not opposing sides, dear colleague. Your duty as educators is to be good teachers and convey knowledge to the students. Is that not right? Your other work obligation is to care for the reputation of this college and its smooth operation and be competent and responsible college educators.

DOROTEJA: And if students protest because of the privatisation of education, what has that do with us? With our responsibilities?

DEAN PRIESTER: The privatisation of education ... Are they really protesting because of the privatisation of education?

DOROTEJA: Yes, what else would it be?

DEAN PRIESTER: *Europe Now* writes they are protesting because of the terrible situation inside this college.

BLAŽIN: Ah, *Europe* ...

DEAN PRIESTER: (*takes a newspaper from her bag and reads*) "The students at the *School of Applied Humanities and Social Sciences* are protesting because *Free University* treats them like shit." That is what it says!

DOROTEJA: It says other things, too, though. That Free University wants to get rid of the students and sell them to a private university.

DEAN PRIESTER: But that is also not true.

DOROTEJA: Well, it's partly true.

DEAN PRIESTER: They want to get rid of us, in the first place, the professors, or you, your department and some other departments they believe cost too much.

DOROTEJA: And it is right that someone protests against such mentality!

DEAN PRIESTER: Protesting against such mentality. Exactly! Such protests are pointless and harmful. Against *whom exactly* were they protesting? Because if we read these naïve statements and, even more, the senseless reporting from the media, students object to private universities, more precisely, to Ivan Cankar University. Claiming that private universities are ideologically ... That students at public universities are well taken care of by the state as it is, blah, blah. And it all benefits the government that will decide our fate.

DOROTEJA: What's naïve about this? Our college belongs to a state university, and

now we are to be sold, I'm sorry, gifted to a private university where students will have to pay for the same things, and we'll probably have to work three times as much under worse conditions!

DEAN PRIESTER: So, were you the one who filled the students' heads with this nonsense?

DOROTEJA: What nonsense?

DEAN PRIESTER: The one about which you are blathering right now.

DOROTEJA: (*calms down and soberly states*) In my opinion, these are cogent standpoints that may save us from incorrigible consequences.

Even protagonists must occasionally resort to platitudes to defend themselves.

DEAN PRIESTER: Let me say this one more time, hopefully, the last time. And let us be clear that these are confidential things and that it is *for your own good* that they do not leak to the public. The Free University is in serious financial trouble. True, it has been for years, but this government is not turning a blind eye to it. The Free University will have to restructure. Do not think that the restructuring will affect the law or economics. It will not happen to computer scientists, athletes or biologists, either. The university will economise when it comes to us in the departments of humanities and social sciences. I ask you to ask yourself an honest question – would you prefer to be out of work or do the same as you do now, in a slightly different environment?

BLAŽIN: Nobody can guarantee us that we'd be able to do the same.

DEAN PRIESTER: Would you prefer to be let go a few years before retirement? Spend time in the street with your younger colleagues pondering how to run the country, reduce unemployment and implement a universal basic income? Will you entertain your female colleagues' young children with the adventures from the life of Michel Foucault for free?

BLAŽIN: Oh, come on, Dean Priestester, no need to be cynical. Nobody wants to be without work.

Scene continues ...