

SOMETHING HOLY IN CROATIA

A ten-minute play

by

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(ANTON and BOGDAN are meeting in an abandoned industrial neighborhood in Croatia. ANTON holds a satchel. BOGDAN wears a long coat.)

ANTON
You didn't bring it did you?

BOGDAN
Why wouldn't I bring it?

ANTON
I can see it in your face.

BOGDAN
Don't worry about my face. We'll get to that in a minute.

ANTON
No, we'll get to that now!

BOGDAN
What, my face?

ANTON
Did you bring it or not?! Tell me or I walk!

BOGDAN
Fine. Walk.

(No one moves.)

ANTON
Just tell me --

BOGDAN
Did you come alone?

ANTON
Yes. Did you?

BOGDAN
No.

ANTON
What?

BOGDAN

No, I did not come alone.

ANTON

Who's with you?! Where are they?! You're obviously not keeping up your side of the bargain!

BOGDAN

I told *you* to come alone. I said nothing about myself. You say you did come alone. I believe you. I did *not* come alone.

ANTON

Anyway! You brought it?!

BOGDAN

Did I say I would bring it?

ANTON

Yes.

BOGDAN

If.

ANTON

I came alone.

BOGDAN

Which.

ANTON

I did.

BOGDAN

So.

ANTON

You brought it.

BOGDAN

Maybe.

ANTON

Oh for Christ sake!

BOGDAN

Do not take the Lord's name in vain.

ANTON
Fuck you! Up the ass!

BOGDAN
Now you don't mean that. Take that back.

ANTON
Did you bring it or not!

BOGDAN
I understand your need to appear strong but try to remember how badly you want what I have.

ANTON
And this is the moment you fucking show me the fucking thing!

BOGDAN
This is inappropriate language considering the nature of the object.

ANTON
Are you fucking kidding?!

BOGDAN
Apologize to Jesus.

ANTON
What?!

BOGDAN
Do it! Apologize!

ANTON
Oh my God, I'm sorry, holy shit. You're a believer? I'm surprised.

BOGDAN
Why.

ANTON
I thought you were motivated by what motivates me.

BOGDAN
What motivates you.

ANTON
A mercenary impulse toward an object native to our land and sacred to our people.

BOGDAN

You are correct. I will require forgiveness. And so will you.

ANTON

Let's see it.

(BOGDAN takes a very small box from his pocket and hands it to ANTON. ANTON opens the box.)

ANTON

It's so big.

BOGDAN

For a toenail.

ANTON

And for the time.

BOGDAN

It is the toenail of the big toe.

ANTON

But this big toe's toenail is as big as mine and men averaged about 18 inches shorter back then. People must have thought he was huge.

BOGDAN

I imagine people looked up to him in many ways.
Money. Now.

ANTON

When will the monks discover it's missing?

BOGDAN

Tomorrow morning. You should leave the country tonight.

ANTON

Can you hold this a second?

(ANTON hands BOGDAN the box, keeping the box open. ANTON takes a picture of the relic with his phone.)

ANTON

It's basically face recognition software. We have another picture that the software compares it to. To verify the relic of the saint.

BOGDAN

This is unexpected. One minute. No more or I'm gone.

ANTON

No problem.

BOGDAN

If you are caught smuggling this out of the country and you mention me, even under torture, your wife will be killed.

ANTON

I didn't forget.

BOGDAN

And your daughter. The youngest.

ANTON

You didn't mention that before! Not the daughter!

BOGDAN

I know. But listen: 3425 Prince Edward Street.

ANTON

You said nothing about my children being in danger!

BOGDAN

Not every man loves his wife. But his children –

ANTON

You bastard!

(Ping on phone.)

ANTON

Hmm. Verified.

BOGDAN

Money.

(ANTON gives BOGDAN the satchel. BOGDAN gives ANTON the box, then looks in the satchel.)

BOGDAN

Your collector is Croat?

ANTON

You're hilarious. We're not talking about my client.

BOGDAN

Regardless there are one or two things he or she should know about this relic and the saint from which it came.

ANTON

Okay.

BOGDAN

The relic is a fake. It has nothing to do with St. Tomislav. This has all been an elaborate ruse.

ANTON

What?

BOGDAN

Yes.

ANTON

Give me my money!

BOGDAN

Alright.

(BOGDAN hands ANTON back his satchel.
ANTON stares.)

ANTON

What is going on?! Why did you do that?!

BOGDAN

Do what? Try to con you? Isn't it obvious?

ANTON

No, why did you *admit* it was a con?!

BOGDAN

Because you are a police officer. And now you cannot arrest me because I have committed no crime. At least no serious crime. I have not stolen your money. I have certainly not stolen a national treasure. I have not even sold a fake relic. I have wasted your time nothing more. Have a nice evening.

(BOGDAN starts off.)

ANTON

Stop!

(pause)

What did I do wrong?

BOGDAN

Why would you do a fake test to verify something you know is likely a fake? You are trying to catch a con artist. Don't you realize *I* know it is a fake? Unbelievably stupid. All you did was tell me *you* were a fake.

ANTON

Right. Fuck.

BOGDAN

You should have tried to convince me of your greed not professionalism. Had you played the part of a stupid broker for a corrupt collector you would now have your criminal. To deceive a deceiver like myself requires preparation and craft. But you are an incompetent undercover investigator, so you do not win the day. You should consider another line of work. I say this as a courtesy.

ANTON

Fuck you.

BOGDAN

Oh now why be like that? Don't you realize? You are an extremely lucky fellow!

ANTON

How?!

BOGDAN

First of all, you are relatively young. It is not too late to accept that this is not your true calling. Perhaps you should consider social work. Or selling insurance.

ANTON

Okay, now I mean it! Fuck you!

BOGDAN

Also you are born when you were born rather than a thousand years ago when people lived half as long and there was violence and disease and tyranny everywhere. For a man who is not so bright or strong it was a terrible time to be alive. Furthermore, you live in Croatia, a relatively rich country. You have something of an education. You are more fortunate than at least 90% of the people alive in the world today, which means you are more fortunate than 99.99999999999999% of the people who have ever lived. And yet you whine about a professional humiliation, one primarily due to your failure to be honest with yourself regarding the limits of your gifts. Be happy! Goodbye.

(BOGDAN starts off.)

ANTON

Wait.

BOGDAN

Yes?

ANTON

Why do you do what you do?

BOGDAN

What do you mean?

ANTON

Why are you a criminal. You are obviously intelligent. You even assume an air of piety –

BOGDAN

It is not an air. I am a believer.

ANTON

Well then?

BOGDAN

Is this a last-ditch effort to do something right? Obviously to go into detail about my circumstances could incriminate me for other crimes. Nice try.

ANTON

Just tell me what you like about it. It's a choice not desperation, I can see that.

BOGDAN

It's very simple. I'm good at it. I would be less than myself if I did not practice my true craft. I have another job, a normal job, which pays most of the bills, but on a regular basis I must commit a con or I would surely atrophy. One has a responsibility to one's passion or one's other responsibilities will be resented. Furthermore, the mark is always done in by their greed and dishonesty. I provide a service: humiliating arrogant swine and separating them from their money. And now, again, goodbye.

(BOGDAN starts off again.)

ANTON

Aren't you worried that I've seen your face?

BOGDAN

You haven't seen my face.

ANTON

What do you mean? I'm looking at it right now.

BOGDAN

This is a very elaborate mask that looks amazingly like a real human face.

ANTON

C'mon! Like Mission Impossible? Give me a break.

BOGDAN

Take a picture and put me in your face recognition app if you don't believe me.

ANTON

Really?

BOGDAN

Go ahead.

(ANTON takes BOGDAN's picture and waits for the app to come back with a match.)

ANTON

This might take a while.

BOGDAN

I don't think so.

(The app immediately dings. ANTON looks carefully. He is astonished.)

ANTON

What the hell? It says here that you are a lieutenant in the Zagreb Police Incompetence Special Investigations unit.

BOGDAN

Lieutenant Bogdan Crajic, Zagreb PISI. How do you do.

I am sorry to inform you that you are no longer a part of the Fraud Investigation Undercover Unit or FIUU. I should say you never really were, won't be, you have failed your probationary period. In fact, you're fired. You really suck at this.

ANTON

So ... that's not a mask?

BOGDAN

No, you moron, it's not a mask! You're fired! You are a horrible cop! Seriously, think about retail, or astrophysics! Anything but police work!

ANTON

Christ, what will I tell my wife?!

BOGDAN

Tell her you are lucky enough to avoid wasting your life! Don't even bother going to the station house! Just go home! Face the music! Be a man!

ANTON

Jesus Christ!

(ANTON starts off.)

BOGDAN

What are you doing?!

ANTON

What, the taking the Lord's name in vain thing? C'mon, man, I'm really depressed.

BOGDAN

You're walking away with the money! That money belongs to the department! It's bad enough you're an incompetent police officer don't become a thief as well!

(ANTON bows his head, hands over the satchel)

And your gun!

(ANTON sighs, hands over his gun)

Now go!

(ANTON walks off in absolute dejection)

Remember! Go straight home!

(BOGDAN takes out his phone. Dials.)

Honey? I'm on my way home. Do we need anything?

Oh, it went great. Your hack of the police database was a brilliant success. You can delete that now.

It's a fine haul, sweetie, cops tend to go overboard with sting money.

What?

Uh, no he did not take it well. And when he gets home and finds his wife in bed with his boss he'll be really upset. I think it's safe to say there will be a scandal!

(he listens, smiles, starts off, we notice for the first time a limp)

Of course, I took his gun. We wouldn't want anyone to get hurt.

(he continues limping off)

Which reminds me, darling. I need you to take a look at this toe.

(Exit BOGDAN.)

END OF PLAY