

+eZine
of Modern Texts in Translation



September 2019

Cristian Teodorescu

translated into English by
MTTLC graduate

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The eZINE consists of translations by graduate students of MTTLc, as a prolongation of their activity in class. They are meant to give the graduates a taste of their future profession, and also to increase their sense of responsibility for a translation they sign under their own name.

The texts are translated from or into English, and belong to all literary genres – fiction, poetry, literary criticism, as well as the drama, the essay. The focus is on Modern Literature, broadly meaning the 20th and the 21st centuries: Romanian, British, and American among others.

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Visit To The New World

In the plane he found out that this was the last flight to Europe of the PANAM company. The stewardesses were smiling like the pilot's announcement was the most beautiful news they have ever heard. The old company, which was the bridge to America for many Romanians and for those who accompanied them to the airport, America itself, went into bankruptcy. An optimistic bankruptcy, in the American style, among which Mielu Trafalet had spent the last 16 years. He got used to them, had made money among them, and also had a heart attack the day he got his citizenship but he couldn't understand the American lifestyle. Even now, when he was returning to Bucharest with a passport issued by Uncle Sam, Mielu was not thinking of himself as an American returning to his motherland but as Mielu from Crîngași, the house painter who had wagered, one night in a bar, that he will go to America. Now he was mister Trafalet, with credit cards and the accent of a Romanian living in Queen's, who speaks English with the nostalgia they got from home but trying to convince the others, when they are speaking Romanian, that they are O.K. being far away from their homeland.

When he got to the airport exit with his luggage, Mielu shrieked like he did long ago. Nothing happened, the taxis were parked with the drivers beside them who were listening through the radio to an angry voice which wheezed aggressively. Mielu sadly remembered the time when taxi drivers didn't have radio stations on which they could listen to slanging. He eavesdropped and recognized that the angry voice belonged to a sports commentator, who was a specialist in relating football games. It was a football stage!

Mielu forgot about the luggage and his Queen's accent - he went to the group of taxi drivers and asked them how was Rapid doing. He was about to cry of happiness. If he hadn't had the luggage, he would have shed some tears.

He pulled aside on the taxi drivers who were listening to the football game, promising him that he will pay in dollars for the fare.



“Yeah, we know! And after that you’ll go to the Police and report us. Little rascals you are!”

The next moment, Mielu heard himself saying something he would have never said:

“Have no worry, Ionașcu, we don’t we don’t fool anyone and we don’t complain.”

While he was wondering why did he say that, the driver went and took his huge pieces of luggage, put them in the car’s trunk and invited Mielu to get in in the back of the taxi.

Mielu got in in the front, next to the driver. He had said the first name it came to him and it was a match. What a fabulous thing! The American part of him felt proud: when you live 16 years in a free country, your mind broadens and you start talking freely...

The taxi driver took off quickly with a start-up that frightened Mielu.

“Easy, I’m not in a hurry.”

“I was showing you how good I am, mister. I wanted you to know that I have good driving skills.

“You’re telling me about taxi drivers? If I hadn’t taken taxis in Bucharest, then... I had my boys, who were waiting at night to take me home.

Yes, mister, but it would be a shame if we weren’t promoted!

Mielu, who knew the Romanian taxi drivers from New York, realized that nobody promoted them. One of them, Georget, had been the head of the Ciclop garage, which was in the heart of Bucharest. He had it all in Romania, but only one thing was missing and for that thing he got to New York to be a private taxi driver. He was living in a God-forsaken studio apartment, eating wherever he could and boasting about being the only white man who had the courage to go at night in Harlem, to take his clients home. He finished college and came from a good family. He hadn’t been to prison and found himself being head at Ciclop in a period when Ceaușescu was trying to convince the Romanians from abroad that the social class battles have ended. George ended with no friends after getting that job. He knew three foreign languages and had skills to be a mechanic that



brought him a lot of money. But he was under greater surveillance than Lenin's mausoleum because they didn't want him to sign a pact with the westerners. Besides that, once a month he was being summoned by the civil confessor of Ciclop, who always promised to leave him if he would sign a pact with the institution that meant Romania well. And Georgel, who had opportunities everywhere in the country and who had enough money to buy himself caviar and French champagne, when being sent to France, to specialize in the new cars that were going to be sent to Romania from Renault, he did not stop until he got to America. He felt old and finished. He wouldn't have liked to die in a country where no one asked him what was he thinking or where he wasn't despised by his friends and family. In New York, he found himself welcomed by the Romanians that were already there, but was also accused that he was a man of the institution of well-being of Romania. To close everyone's mouth, he became a taxi driver, enjoying the freedom of this ambiguous job, instead of becoming an engineer specialized in engines and customer relations at repair shops.

After thinking about Georgel, Mielu wondered why had he done that. He forgot what the taxi driver said.

"It's a point of view!" said the polite American part of him.

"Isn't that right? I will show you that a taxi driver is better than the boys from the secret services. Put me to test. Look at this!"

The driver sped again, going past 60 miles an hour.

"Boy, I'm not from the secret services. I don't work for them. Go slower and calm down."

Instead of slowing down, the driver sped even faster.

"Who said something about secret services, mister? I support the revolution. Ionașcu doesn't deserve a job as a driver at SRI (Romanian Intelligence Service)? You knew my name. And you saw that I don't accept foreign cash.

Because of the high speed, the car started shaking. The driver was skilful, but the Dacia wasn't helping him. It screamed from all its cylinders, protesting against the number of rotations it was forced to have.



“Stop the car! Pull over!!” shouted Mielu, but he realized that he was only provoking the taxi driver.

He fastened his seatbelt and when he heard the door being locked, he felt somewhat safe. But at the same moment, everything around him went black. The taxi driver disappeared, the taxi with its seatbelt disappeared. Mielu felt he was floating and while he felt the sensation growing, he expected something to happen. He heard a bloodcurdling voice. A combination of militiamen voices with whom he had had problems and his elementary school teacher’s voice:

“Mielu, I want you to see what’s happening in your country!” It was the Voice, and he received a mission from It. He didn’t come back from America to spend his well-earned dollars and his pension, like all Romanians who came back, but to observe the new world in his country. In the depths of the Voice, his own nostalgia awaited him, like he was the one who decided to come and see what was happening home.

The whole idea can be understood through the details that make it. This was being understood from what Mielu thought, after hearing the Voice. Then, despair overtook him because he realized he did not exist in the present world. He hadn’t flown with the PANAM airplane, he hadn’t been a passenger in a taxi and his idea that he was tied to a seat next to a driver existed only in the Ionaşcu’s bewildered mind, who thought he was a driver at SRI.

“Mister!” he heard in the distance and in the darkness he was floating in. “The man from the secret services has died in my car”, the driver panicked. “Mister!”

Mielu’s mind got clearer when he felt the driver slapping him over the face.

“Stop it, man! It hurts...”

“I’m taking you to the hospital.”

Mielu signalled that he didn’t want that, slicing the air with his hand, like he had a ladle in his hand and he threw mortar on a wall. After coming to his senses, he got off.

“Pull my luggage out from the trunk!”



"I didn't know you were afraid of speed, mister. The fare is free of charge!" He got away from the car with the keys in hand.

They reached common ground. Mielu was in the driver's seat and the taxi driver on his right.

He drove slowly, sometimes not shifting gears correctly that the cogwheels in the Dacia's belly screeched, but the engine did not stop. When the car got to the entrance to Intercontinental, Mielu was nervous and confident again.

He gave the taxi driver 25 dollars, in 5 dollar bills, so it will seem that there are more money, and told the driver in an accent of a Romanian from Queen's:

"Remember this, mate: Mielu the house painter is a Romanian from America born in Giulești! That's all!"

He rented a studio apartment in the hotel he dreamed about seeing when he was in the country. The room wasn't bad but it was overpriced. The price included the company's reputation but the company did not care about its reputation in Bucharest. All the legends Mielu knew about Intercontinental melted and started to course like bad paint job. This was the hotel known for its golden handles in the rest-room? As a specialist in house painting, dry walls and ornamental plaster, Mielu was disappointed when he saw the rooms, starting from the corridor and ending with the rest-room. He ordered some wine in an ice bucket and a snack. They were brought by a stout and clumsy young man. He was expecting a slim waitress, who he could feel up like he did when he stayed in the American hotels while being on vacation. He asked for a sour wine but he got Murfatlar Riesling. The salami from Sibiu was gooey but he ate it trying to remember the taste it had when he was painting the houses of bigwigs and eating their food. The cheese, brought in cardboard package, was imported from Greece, like there weren't any more shepherds in Romania. Only when he bit from a tomato, he felt like his stomach was also home: Mielu, American citizen, born in Giulești!

Mielu heard the neighbourhood's call. Even though his parents died, his sister ended up in Canada and he didn't know anything about his old friends.



He called a cab and went downstairs. He stopped at an exchange desk and exchanged 200 dollars. He hadn't had so much lei on him like he had now. He realized that the local currency was suffering from inflation, but when he saw the wad of Romanian bills he received in exchange for the two bill of 100 dollars, he took it nervously, like he had won the lottery meant only for him.

Night found him in a car, rolling down the boulevard. The companies have changed. Every kind of bling-blings were displayed in the windows of the shops but people that were passing by were had nothing in common with the bling-blings from the windows, nor with the luxury cars that were making their way on the lanes of the boulevard between Dacia cars and eastern second-hand automobiles. People on the sidewalk had the western anxiety but nothing from the safety or their love for life. Westerners are in a hurry, thought Mielu, not only because this is their pace but also because their daily life is sweeter. They are in a hurry because they want to live life to the fullest and they know what to expect. The rush of Romanian people seemed to him like the hurry of a human that wants a bad day to end so he could gather enough strength to face the unpleasantness of the next day.

The lights went dimmer as he approached the end of the boulevard. In the darkness of the streets that he went on, from time to time, there appeared an isle of light: a shop that awaited its clients or a bar in a one-story house that was facing the street. These lights had the lonely appearance of the buoys not of the happy adverts. In these streets, besides the drunkards and people in a hurry, there weren't even hookers, but only two or three policemen that were staying in groups like the old ladies at crossroad.

When he got to his neighbourhood, Mielu felt the happiness of the people from Giulești after being victorious. The weddings, funerals, and most of all football games, united his neighbours then and still does today. When Rapid won a game, everybody would go outside and discuss, like they did on holidays. Now, the only ones who were on the street were teenagers, in pairs or in groups. But they were always present, remembered Mielu. When he was a child, his parents would go



outside to talk with the neighbours when Rapid played, otherwise they would be singled out. Everyone did this until the blocks of flats appeared. With the blocks of flats, people did not need to share their interesting stories because they could be heard through the walls. Instead of going outside, they would go from one flat to another.

The appearance of the blocks of flats filled the bars with customers. People, discovered Mielu, can live stacked on top of each other, but when they want to feel comfortable they would go to the bar of dancing studios.

His parent's home did not exist anymore. Instead of it there was a block of flats with ten levels. Mielu stopped at several hundred feet from that block of flats, in front of one of the bar he knew. He signalled the driver to wait for him, and entered the bar.

He expected to find all his party friends in this bar full of tradesmen and men that had something to discuss when their wives weren't present. He discovered an international world of Arabs, Chinese and Indians, garnished with Romanians that talked about business.

He went to another bar but he finally found his friends in a recently founded bar. When he opened the door, the stench of stale alcohol hit him and the smoke from bad cigarettes got in his eyes for several seconds.

Everything was the same, only that this place was very small, the voices could be heard louder and you could feel the trouble in the air.

Mielu imagined this moment so very different. And he almost couldn't believe that no one noticed he was back.

He went to the house painter's table. When he was seen, he could only hear:

"Look! It's Mielu!"

The one who had seen him was his former master. His sight was blurry and he was indifferent, both induced because he drank strong alcohol. Mielu paid in advance for a few rounds of shots, and left. He did not find the hotel car where he had left it. The American part of him got frightened. But him, Mielu from Giulești, started walking, hoping he could find a taxi to take



him to the hotel.

He forgot why he had come back home. To pay for the rounds of the neighbourhood's drunkards. To stay here so he could hear people speaking Romanian? In this regard, he felt better in Queen's. And the happiness that he was home had been destroyed by the little dissatisfactions he had after getting out of the airport.

He got to the hotel on foot. Bucharest he knew no longer existed and the new one he could not understand. And he didn't want to understand. He had come home to find the happiness America lacked of. He didn't ask for a lot, but after all, he didn't know what to ask for from the people from home. What could these people do? To change the house paint because he came back?

He found the driver with whom he got here at the entrance.

"Mister Trafalet, you overpaid me..."

"It's your money, boss."

Mielu went past him and entered the hotel. He went to the reception to ask for the keys of his studio apartment. When he wanted to go to the lift, he saw the taxi driver beside him.

"Mister Trafalet, I don't want unearned money."

At first thought he wanted to call the guys from security that stood in the hallway. But, thinking that he will be alone, he invited the driver to the hotel's bar.

He got stabbed five times because of this. After the last hit, he continued to interrogatively look at the taxi driver that made holes in his stomach and chest. He couldn't believe that something like this is happening. He did not call for help, but watched the blood flowing from the holes in his clothing. The angel started floating to Heaven, it had seen the new world and left Mielu's body, like a moth eaten suit, in the hotel bar's chair.



Voices

“Georgie boy, the Foundation expects 50 million from you.”

It was a woman’s voice and this was already the fourth call about the same thing. Always the same voice at the same hour. 2 AM.

He held the mobile away from his ear, until he began to hear the click at the end of the call. Instead of putting his phone into the bathrobe’s pocket, he let it slip from his hand. This toy had cost a lot of money, otherwise he would have smashed it by now. He had hoped the phone would break. He had ordered floor tiles for this room. Italian tiles that were too fine to step on. But it was rather cold for the feet. What an unbreakable phone! Not even a crack. Noticing this gave him courage. Bitch! Georgie boy? The woman who kept annoying him with phone calls had a dry, cold voice. After she had told him what this Foundation expected from him, she would hang up. This took the pleasure out of his night walk through the 14 rooms of his villa. After taking a gulp of double refined Transylvanian plum brandy*, he’d go down to the cellar. There, he felt in control. The cellar had been arranged to his liking. On the walls, all the great men of the country were lined along the walls. They were done in stained glass and lit up in neon light. Those who didn’t know would think the cellar had an exit that led outside. Everyone from Zamolxes to Ceaușescu was there. Dracula was the only one life-sized, with explanations in English so all foreigners would understand that Vlad the Impaler had not been a vampire, but a Voivode, the ruler of Wallachia. On the floor he had laid bear skins. He’d lie on one of them after he had lit the glass cases and admire his collection of outstanding men.

Not long ago, he had had a collection of women. He’d given them up after discussions with Cosmescu, the chief-editor of his magazine. A european businessman shouldn’t have a harem! As if he had a harem!?! The problem was what possibly could he do with those girls!?! There were always two or three he couldn’t get rid of. When they began to bore him, he’d try to make journalists out of them. He’d send them to pester Cosmescu, who every time would threaten to quit. And then George would



Translation
Café

dump his proteges. Cosmescu wouldn't even give them a try, although during their long late night conversations, George would always recommend one of them.

But now he didn't go to the cellar. He sat down in an armchair and asked himself who this woman could be who kept pestering him on the phone.

Before dawn, he returned to his bedroom, where Violeta was sleeping across the bed. He didn't wake her. He lay down beside her. He placed his hand on her bottom and instantly fell asleep.

He woke up at 9, alone in bed. He found Violeta in the kitchen. She had made breakfast. She was wearing her nightgown. She looked awkward, as if he had caught her making love to his bodyguard. He kissed her, pushing her against the wall. This was one of his morning pleasures. But just when she grabbed him by the waist and wanted to go on, as always, he pulled back.

He sat down at the table. Ate the four boiled eggs that were mixed with bread in a cup. Instead of drinking tea, he drank juice. The juice is 100 times more expensive than his morning tea. And instead of his beloved lard, he had to eat that shitty margarine that smelled like a plastic bag. And Violeta, who could speak to him in Romanian, at least in the morning, addressed him in English. This was the pact so he could learn to speak English. A businessman who doesn't know English has a bad image. Violeta told him something again in her feline voice. He remembered about the woman who called her. What the heck is this Foundation? 50 millions! Boy, I'll be damned – it's like they asked five thousands! Did somebody had him in his pocket? Those who ask for money wouldn't have the guts to joke like this with him. He stood up. When exiting the kitchen, he ran into the maid. He angrily bullied her. Ninuța smelled of liquor again. A young lady drinking like an old one. He took her in his office one night, mostly out of curiosity. He wanted to know how she would react. If only she would say something. He just got married. He stupidly giggled, saying he was tickling her.

He went to the bedroom, got dressed, and went to his office downstairs. At nine o'clock he expected a partner to come. A fat Austrian, with a lot of money and with coattails in the government. They were almost of the same age. Huber was one or



two years younger but he talked to George like he was his uncle. When they meet, the Austrian hits him on the back:

“You prosper, Georgie boy. Gut job!”

Georgie boy looked forward to the moment when he will visit the Austrian so he could hit him on the back. He learned from Violeta how to say: “You’re not doing too bad, Huber, but you can do better!”

The newspapers and his bodyguard awaited him in his office. First, he read the headlines then asked Neluțu what happened new in the city. Neluțu was friend with the bodyguards of other bosses: the ones who had millions. He and Neluțu gave them code names; you don’t know who is listening. This villa is new, but you teach Gilu to bug it? Crucian went to the casino. He had lost two thousand dollars, had drank a bottle of champagne and had went home with one of the dancers. Pleșcaru went to a political event. He got tipsy and felt his ribs sore. He got punched when leaving by his political man:

“Tomato had hit him?”

“Yes, boss! Because he was ungrateful. He punched him really good. Unpaid honour debt.”

“What are you talking about? Pleșcaru ain’t got cash?”

“I don’t know, boss. We’ll find out...”

“Is fifty thousand enough?”

“Split in three.”

“Split in three! sighed George. Information is expensive. Neluțu boy, have you heard about any foundation?”

“There are a lot of them, boss. A particular one interests you? I’ll find out.”

“I’ll tell you... A good one but I don’t know which one...”

He waved him out. Huber had to arrive.

He had an excellent day. The business with the Austrian worked out. And at the evening meeting he found out about two fat hints. At nine o’clock in the evening he was interviewed by the Television. Then he sat in first row at a charity event in



which he invested some money. Paparazzi rushed to photograph Violeta. One of them told George that she was at the top. He married her almost a year ago. And now she was in top ten women from Bucharest, but God forbid, not in a tabloid top!

After taking a shower, he went to his office. He read again the contract signed with the Austrian: "That's how you make money!"

When was about 2 AM, he got restless. He went upstairs. He wanted to record the woman's voice. When he got upstairs, he dismissed the idea. He could not do anything with it. Take it to the Police station? He had a better idea, but to make it work he had to contact his coattails so a trusted man could listen to his calls.

When the phone started ringing in his bathrobe's pocket, he was on the hallway. He put the phone to his ear.

"Georgie boy! I hope you got it in your head, the Foundation expects fifty million from you!"

He heard the last couple of words after he closed the bedroom door.

"What did you say, Violeta?"

She took the phone from her ear, not seeming to be scared or intimidated because she was discovered. She told him on the phone with her cold and coarse voice she spoke on the phone:

"Fifty millions, Georgie boy." Then she shushed him, looking frightened by something that was in the room and only she knew about it.



The Premiere Dress

15 years ago, when they were brought in Romania, Lada cars were looked upon with special respect. Not because they were that good, but because they were sold on a list and you couldn't get on that list easily.

Engineer Tobă had been sent to specialize in Russia the same day he signed the import contract. They chose him for two reasons: he knew Russian and he wasn't a drunkard. A day before his departure, the institute confessor took him for a walk in the Botanical Garden and warned him not to marry a Russian woman or befriend someone from Moscow. "All friendly Russians are working for KGB. Maybe the other ones are the same but they can't manifest themselves." Then he warned him that his every move will be closely watched. The confessor was whispering like the bushes they passed by had ears.

Tobă liked Moscow and the Russians. If the Muscovites wouldn't have spoken in their language, which he understood better than spoke, and if they hadn't took care to prevent him that he was nice, but you don't know how things can be interpreted, he almost didn't feel like he left his own country. He was spending his separation allowance on late night calls with Adriana. As for the secrets of the Lada, he learned them in the first two weeks. This specialization course was not designed for engineers, but for mechanics. With him there were another scores of men sent to learn about these cars that were going to enter their countries. Most of them were mechanics, and the existing engineers had been selected, like Tobă, from the Institute. He was expecting to get an important job when he will have returned home. This thought helped him to spend the night nervously waiting like a lonely man whose only salvation were from time to time and embarrassingly, the dreams of Adriana. When he came back home, Tobă got to be the head of a garage, where, without him, there were three oder mechanics. They had been to the specialization courses at "Palmiro Togliati" the famous company where the Lada cars were made like peas from pea pods.

The garage was on a lonely road, paved with river stones, a dirty little appendage on the boulevard where the spiky



flower of the Romanian society lived or at least passed by. But on the garage's street, the most part of this inflorescence waited in line to get their test certificate. Some sent their chauffeurs, other would come themselves in these cars that looked like the Fiat cars from the better periods. They weren't Fiat cars but some half-breeds, and they were different from the Dacia cars you would see everywhere on our roads.

Tobă worked hard but did not earn a quarter of what a service mechanic earned. The one thing he could boast about would be that he was shaking hands with ministers, college teachers and ex-ambassadors or ambassadors in making. Besides them, here came normal citizens that had the luck to be put on the list. Although he wasn't a physiognomist, Tobă immediately every man from every social class. He became a man with connections. Home, he had a collection of calling cards. He would use them only in special circumstances.

He wasn't ambitious. His only weakness were women. From time to time he had problems because of that. Adriana, his first wife, was an actress. He had a sensibility which the characters she played did not blunt, but only sharpened. She liked the theater but not the actors. Her friends list was formed of writers, medics and art critics. They got married in college, she keeping her maiden name after they talked about it several nights in a row. Adriana's intelligence, mixed with her skills in bed, convinced Tobă that, for her, he was Pavel and sometimes Tobă. As she was for him, only sometimes, Filipescu. Pavel gave up under her professional arguments. Even to him, Adriana Tobă would have sounded like a weird name for his Juliet.

The most beautiful years in his life were spent next to Adriana. He designed cars at the Institute, so at night he could take Adriana to shows, and sometimes he would accompany her to the receptions after the premieres. They earned little but they started to be successful. She was waiting to be selected for movies and he made some car innovations and was working on an invention.

When Pavel was sent to Moscow, Adriana got her first role in a film. His specialization there lasted three months. The premiere took place after he became first-line manager. Pavel bought Adriana a dress that she ordered from the Fashion



House, from the money he received as consideration from his clients. The premiere night he gave her the dress. Adriana critically sniffed and sent him to take a shower. After taking the shower, she sniffed him again. She was as discontented as before: she told him the first thing she thought: “You smell like a worker!” The smell of vaseline mixed with iron grindings from the repair shop got in his skin. Adriana was dressed with that splendid dress – the manager of the Fashion House had a Lada. The premiere was successful but the movie had been pulled out of the market after a few days. One night, Pavel found Adriana cutting her in small strips with a tailoring scissor she took from the theater props. Tobă had a rough day at work. He cleaned a few carburetors and repaired some more steerings which meant he had to get under the car and change the used-up innards at the front wheels. His pockets were full of money and his belly full of whiskey. When he saw her, he reminded his family lesson: “Bitch, are you crazy?” Adriana responded with her family’s show-off: “If you can’t stint yourself, at least choose your words. The Filipescu family were magistrates, his old folks were CFR workers but the Filipescu family only got to buy a house in Tei neighborhood, meanwhile his old folks built a villa on Sebastian street. They started fighting, yelling at each other with a passion they didn’t know they had. They formed a couple for two more years. Adriana had become a movie star and he was only a rich mechanic. She hardly bore his smell which got into his clothing and also in hers. Both earned enough money to live separated without realizing it. She was buying champagne and dresses, meanwhile he was buying gifts for the girls he was meeting in hotel rooms on Sundays when Adriana had matinee. They were both so busy, that when they divorced, they forgot about their only child which had to be raised by one of them. The child went with Adriana. He was mainly raised by her parents.

After the divorce, Pavel received a lot of money. Many cars of the important persons had changed their owner. Their new owners were giving him fat tips, like they were ministers or generals or managers. Their new owners were managers, but smaller ones. They had calling cards, but they weren’t that sure of their importance, so they stuck them alongside 100 lei bills in his blue overall’s pocket.



Tobă bought an apartment on Turda street and married a student who looked like Adriana. She had the same weird beauty, same black hair, same blue eyes with a questioning look in them, but she lacked the glow Adriana had in her eyes. Tobă stood beside her for four years. He divorced her in 1991, and for that he used one of the calling cards he had in his collection. The new wife of Tobă accused him of being part of the nomenclature and used her name to get away after the revolution. To leave him alone, Tobă gave her the apartment and rented a studio apartment.

Sadly for him, the cars he was specialized in either got to their third owner, or kept the same owner but they grew poor after 1989. Even his Lada had been abandoned like a new car in a garage. His helpers, three guys that in 1990 went in the University Square and shouted against the nomenclature, were now heart and soul against what they were shouting then. Back then, Tobă was telling them, apolitically, that they were stupid. Then, he recruited them when he opened his private garage. Georgel was his godson, and shared 50% of the shares with him. He long knew that Georgel earned some extra cash telling others what he had been hearing in the garage's courtyard. A major from Internal Affairs sold Tobă this information for a carburetor. Tobă had given him the carburetor but had cut him from his clients list. He hadn't told Georgel nothing, but despite trying not to doubt him, Tobă was checking all of Georgel's handiwork. He also did this before, but lately he paid more attention. In his new garage he was repairing cars that only he knew how to fix. Six cylinder Mercedes cars and all kinds of cars with complicated engines inside shiny bodies. Again, he had so much money, that he didn't know how to spend it. His garage was better known subsidiaries that sold the cars he was repairing.

At his garage, the embassies got their cars fixed. So he bought the finest control instruments in the East, which he used to check the car repairs. He fixed the engines and the steering, the lynchpin and the suspension were being fixed by his helpers.

The Dutch's car, an old Toyota, had problems with the pushrod. The engineer climbed down the ramp after he repaired the engine. He discovered some dangerously loose screws at the front left wheel. He was happy that this part hadn't been



done by Georgel, who handled the screws on the right side of the car. Tobă took Liciu aside, because he was the one who took care of the screws on the left side. While they were talking, the car started going backwards. It barely missed them. Driving the car was Georgel, the one who took Liciu's place the other day.

They didn't hand Georgel to the Police. They forced him to sign a paper which stated that he was delivering his shares to his garage helpers. After two months, Georgel was head of a service and the boys were saying that he went to work in a Ford that was a recent model.

Engineer Tobă got to be again the mechanic for the same persons that had Lada cars 15 years ago. He has a brand new Opel and is seen with 18 years old ballerinas. Sometimes he meets his first wife. Adriana is famous, but, like many actresses, she wears shabby dresses and down at heels shoes. From time to time, she sleeps with Pavel, for their old love sake; she doesn't accept his gifts. But she asks monthly for several hundred dollars. Their son's school in England costs that much. There, Tobă junior is now Toby. Adriana is generally happy but she has moments when she cries without reason and takes out of the closet the dress from the premiere that she cut in countless places.



You know what, doc...

People had gathered at the junction in the market. In the middle of the junction was the dark red Fiat of doctor Capră. You could hear laughter. Titi, the newspaper seller, was joyfully cursing and fussing about behind those that gathered around the car of doctor Capră. Assuming what had happened, Vasile went to Miss Saegiu's pharmacy. He wasn't in the mood of giving an ascertainment process to the doctor. The pharmacy was empty, not taking the cashier and the pharmacist into account. Vasile sat on the couch. He sniffed the calming smell of medicines, he sighed in contempt and he stretched his legs to relax them.

He heard the door squeaking just as he was starting to think that he got away. Then Titi's voice was heard loud and impudent:

"Sarge, come quick, we have a case."

Titi, God blast your petty little soul and your newspapers and all! The sergeant rapidly remembered the few sins he could blackmail the newspaperman with – he could take him down to the precinct, fines and all. He got up off the couch and went disdainfully down to the crime scene.

At the crime scene, the doctor ran over the mayor with his car. And now they were arguing with the people surrounding them.

'Are you alright, doc?' Vasile asked him this question so that the people surrounding him could hear.

"The dog attacked me!"

The mayor was talking to the crowd surrounding them. He was inflamed, and for a good reason, too. His clothes were torn- and it was the exact suit he usually wore to officiate marriages.

"Did you attack mister Capră, mister mayor?"



„He said what? He's trying to intimidate me! This is a public assault! The police go hand in hand with the communists!” yelled the mayor.

The mayor was not wrong there, Vasile accepted in his mind, 'but he wasn't right about doctor Capră.

“Mister mayor, I have come here to observe, don't drag me into politics.”

“Everybody saw! The gentleman hit me with his car while I was crossing! I was on the crossing!”

“That's right”, admitted the doctor. And he blew some air right in Vasile's face, forgetting to at least keep his head down, because he was very drunk.

The sergeant had a breathalyser and he wanted to reach in his pocket to grab it. The doctor reeked of at least half a litre of vodka.

“Who witnessed this?”

Even Titi the newspaper man, who was the witness of all the happenings in town that had a touch of criminal offence, didn't open his mouth.

Vasile took the tape measure out of his pocket and started measuring the marks left on the road by the tires of the Fiat. When he was done, he looked at doctor Capră with admiration. The reflexes on this man! If anyone else was in his place, with so much alcohol in his blood, they would have flattened the mayor like a pancake.

“Mister mayor, where were you when the car hit you?”

“On the crossing. There are people who saw me and they're here! But they're too scared to testify, Sarge! Put the breathalyser on the doctor. Didn't you hear me, Vasile? Take that bladder out and make the doctor blow or else you can kiss the precinct good bye!”

“You can kiss your mother good bye”, said the sergeant in his mind.

“What bladder are you talking about, mister mayor? I only had one and I already put it into somebody else's mouth



earlier on. Has anyone seen the mayor when the accident happened?"

"I saw him", a woman shouted. "He wasn't on any crossroads! The doc hit the brakes, but the mayor jumped in front of him because he has more alcohol than blood in his system."

Vasile sensed that the mayor had also been drunk, but he dared not say it. He was the one that opposed, but in these situations, the Police almost always gets on the bad side of things. Until he became an anticommunist, the mayor was an organizational secretary at the cement factory. He put himself on the opposition's list just to show the party leaders that he's better than them. But what if the party leaders themselves asked him to candidate for the opposition?

Vasile took some testimonies, just to pass the time. Anyway he'd turn things, the doctor was drunk and he hit the mayor with his car. In the doctor's Fiat, the dog was sitting in the front seat. It hound, the large type of breed, which was waiting for the report to be over, sitting there with its mouth wide open from boredom.

After he finished the observation part, the sergeant suggested that the two of them should go back to his house. They jumped into the Fiat. Vasile took the wheel. He turned the car around, almost in place, ruining the marks from the accident and then he rushed towards the historical centre.

He got the car inside his yard, underneath the grape vine bower. He shouted for his wife, before getting out of the Fiat, to get some pigeons frying. He invited his guests around the table in the garden. He went inside, he got out of his uniform and put a top on and some shorts, and then he went down to the cellar for some wine. He fondled the two barrels of alms wine, from IAS, afterwards he got near the barrel of wine that he made. A nice, reddish wine. He turned the barrel's spigot. He let some wine drip on the ground, in memory of the dead, and then he placed the glass flagon to fill up.

The mayor and the doctor sobered up underneath the bower. They were talking when he put the wine flagon on the table. Until the wine settled in the big glass cup, his wife came along with a snack. When she placed the plate on the table, she said 'thank you' to the doctor. Then they all started digging in the sheep cheese and other cheese slices. The bread was so fresh that



they had to tear it. Vasile brought the tomatoes from his garden, after he rapidly washed them at the pump. Slowly, the scent from the roasted pigeons started to spread throughout the garden. The doctor and the mayor, with their throats all dried up, started drinking the wine as if it were water.

After each new glass of wine, the doctor was sobering up more and more. His voice was once again warm and calm, same voice he used to tell the ladies that would come to his cabinet in the hospital to sit down on that table, after they'd take of their underpants behind the curtain."

He explained the mayor that he would have hit the brakes on time, if the dog hadn't jumped on him.

"Cristache, mate, you saw that I was barely dragging along in that car."

"Never mind, doc. If you wanted it, you wouldn't have knocked me on the ground and have everybody laugh at me. The communists put you up to it. At least be honest and admit it."

"Damn you all and your politics! I performed curettages with the prosecutor breathing in the back of my neck back when Ceaușescu was at power, and now you're sitting here telling me that I'm a communist? You shouldn't have put up such a fuss, at least for the sake of your wife."

„What's your business with my wife?"

„Sod off, have you no shame? My business with her? She came to me and asked me not to tell you anything, after you told her you didn't want a third child. And until she reached me, she did a heck of a job with a knitting needle."

„That's why you ran me over with your car?"

„Didn't you hear that the dog attacked me? He's the Devil's breed. When one of these beasts goes over seven years, they kill their master."

Vasile tried get into the discussion, after filling their cups.

„Doc, you can leave the dog with me, if you say he's gone mad. I'll take care of him." Capră pet his dog.



“Dodo jumped on me because he wanted me to pet him, he didn't want to kill me.”

„How do you know?” the mayor asked.

„If he aimed for my neck, would I have reached for the brakes then?”

When the roasted pigeons arrived, Vasile's wife herself placed two pigeons on the doctor's plate. Instead of garlic sauce, she had brought some sort of mayo sauce, which the doctor used to garnish his roast, while the mayor and Vasile were getting busy in the garlic bowl.

„Doc,” asked the sergeant, „why does my wife keep saying "thank you"?”

„Did you bring me here to interrogate me, Vasile?”

The policeman shut up. His children were born under the supervision of doctor Capră. And there was no child in town that hadn't been born under his watch.

„But what about all your offsprings that you had me kill, did you think about them?” asked the doctor while taking a bite from his roast.

The mayor got angry. He left the garnished pigeon breast inside the garlic bowl.

„You know what, doc? You got loaded rich from the offsprings that you've killed. Now you kill them for nothing because you have no choice. Give me a break!”

'No offense, you're an ass! I would've gone to prison, had I not taken money. Because that would mean opposing that party you were in. You've forced everyone to get their hand dirty so that you could appear clean. And now you've infiltrated every party, making the opposition just as rotten as you were. I would've made a hero out of you for nothing, had I run you over!'

The doctor stood up from the table, with the sadness of a sobered up man. He got into the care and backed up, passing the gate poles with great precision. The dog guarded him in the front seat.



The mayor sat at the table for at least another half an hour. He didn't want to follow the doctor. After he left the premises, Vasile sat at the table to relax. He called his wife and children to sit by his side. He threw the leftover pigeon from the table to the cats. He went down to the cellar and he filled the flagon with wine again. He wasn't hungry anymore. He felt sorry that the doctor was angry when he left. He emptied a couple of wine glasses, worrying that the doctor might complain about him in the city.

When the phone rang, Vasile went into the house to pick it up. He put his uniform back on. He was called on a case! To get there faster, he took the car.

This time, only God could spare doctor Capră from prison. And him from any sort of punishment. He let him leave his house drunk, with the mayor present! Could he had stopped him? Two years ago, when he took his driver's license, hadn't he had his windows broken by all the women in the neighbourhood? The girl on the phone, the chief's inside person, knew only to tell him that the brand of the car was a Fiat, dark red (and she told him the number by letters and digits, she had no idea it was Capră's car), he was involved into a road accident with several live losses on the highway to Constanța. That was his evening drive.

The doctor's Fiat was turned upside down, with its tires upwards, beyond the ditch from the side of the road. Vasile saw it from a distance. He wished he'd find the doctor alive in his wrecked car. The vehicles driving in the opposite direction would slow down while passing by the car turned upside down, then the drivers would violently step on the gas pedal. Vasile pulled his club outside the window to stop the traffic. He places his Dacia car crossways on the road. What's the matter with this country? How come nobody stops when there's such an accident?

He leaped into the ditch, got close to the doctor's car and lay flat on his stomach to take a look inside.

Behind the wheel was Toni, the doctor's son. Next to him was Capră's dog. The doctor was not in the car. The dog had bit Toni from the neck. His throat was shred to pieces.



The doctor's son had his own car. The Dacia of clandestine abortions, made in the old days by Capră. But when he'd go to Constanța to pick up girls, Toni would take the old, dark red Fiat, because it was a lot flashier.

When he had returned into town, after nightfall, Vasile looked for Titi the newspaper man in all the pubs. He found him in the restaurant in the centre of the town. He pulled him aside, then he shoved him forcefully into his car. Titi quickly understood. The sergeant drove him to the doctor's house and after seeing him enter the front yard of Capră's house, he took off.

