

# THE POST

A play in two parts and three post-scenes  
for seven people and a female voice

by

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Translated from the Russian

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**THE SUPERIOR** — female voice

**FIRST** — man, 70

**SECOND** — man, 30

**FIRST'S SPOUSE** — woman, 65

**HOUSEKEEPER** — woman in black

**THE CHRONICLER** — a man of average height and age

**COURIER & TRAINEE**— two young people, one male and one female

# PART I

*Closer to the left wing, set on a soft diagonal toward the center of the upstage wall, stands the post house: two suggested walls, a floor, and a roof only hinted at, emphasizing the three-dimensionality and the abstract confinement of the location within the stage space. The post house stands under the canopy of a spreading red-and-yellow autumn crown of some tree.*

*Directly in front of the post house, nearer the downstage edge, a small decorative garden is laid out: several well-kept rose bushes. A bench stands there; a bicycle is leaned against it.*

*Behind the post house are massive gates, locked with a chain and a large padlock.*

*The post house is a rather large single space. In the middle stands a massive wooden writing desk, its tabletop covered with green baize. To the right of the desk is a fireplace. Above the fireplace, on wooden mounts, a sawn-off hunting shotgun rests horizontally. Above the sawn-off hangs a round lamp covered with a protective grille. Above the desk hangs a huge screen in a gilded moulding frame with a large red button set in the middle of the upper part of the frame. This is the Display. On the desk in front of the Display lies a large black microphone; also on the desk lies an open folio in a leather binding, a lit modernist desk lamp stands, and white paper sheets lie weighed down by a massive bronze brick. To the left of the desk stands a stove; opposite it, a small oval dining table with two Viennese chairs. After the stove stands a refrigerator; immediately after the refrigerator, a double bed, with two nightstands on either side. Further, behind the bed toward the audience, a door. The room may be realized by the set designer however they wish; the main thing here is the single space.*

*At the desk, in an office chair, sits a hunched old man with a smoking pipe clenched in his teeth. He writes something, dipping a pen into an inkwell, constantly glancing at the glowing screen.*

*A short ring sounds; the red, gridded lamp blinks. The man, leaving the pen in the inkwell, presses something on the Display, which, blinking for a while, begins to show white noise instead of the Object camera feeds.*

*From nowhere, a young female voice is heard.*

## **THE SUPERIOR**

Over, over. First, are you at your post? I repeat the question: First, are you at your post? What the hell?! Where are you, you half-baked veteran? Over!

**FIRST** *(taking the microphone from the desk, addressing the screen)*

First is at his post, Your Grace, over. Here I am—where else would I be?

## **THE SUPERIOR**

Can you see me, First? I can't see you, First, over.

## **FIRST**

I can't see Your Grace, over. Something's wrong with Your Grace's line—send the technicians to take a look, over.

**THE SUPERIOR**

Without you I never would've figured that out, over.

**FIRST**

Forgive me, Your Grace, over.

**THE SUPERIOR**

I'm kidding, First, over. You're a good lad.

**FIRST**

Thank you, Your Grace, over.

**THE SUPERIOR**

How's your mood? Getting ready?

**FIRST**

Getting ready, little by little. Squaring things away. When will the successor arrive, Your Grace? Your Grace, over?!

**THE SUPERIOR**

Over, over. During the Light. You'll meet, you'll hand over the duties. Calmly and without fuss.

**FIRST** *(with a sigh)*

Pray do not trouble yourself, Your Grace. I know the procedure. Your Grace, I only wanted to ask about the award pay. My spouse said the cashier is demanding a final letter with your signature dated today. And they're asking about the municipal lease as well. She was there just now.

**THE SUPERIOR**

Legal is drafting it as we speak. Don't worry—the process is well-practiced. Two months ago we processed the Twelfth. Reassure your spouse: there'll be both the percentage and the lease. We don't abandon our own.

**FIRST**

Thank you, Your Grace. You've taken a huge weight off my mind.

**THE SUPERIOR**

What are you talking about—for Fronk's sake?! All right, I don't have time. When the successor arrives—call me immediately. Now go on, finish squaring things away. End of transmission. Out. Wait—hold on. There'll also be this... We need to enter you into the Chronicle. Over?

**FIRST**

Affirmative, understood, Your Grace, over. Proud to serve! Your Grace, over.

**THE SUPERIOR**

All right then. Bye.

*The Display, blinking several times, returns to the Object camera feeds. The old man rises from the desk, takes a sheet of paper in his hands, and, pacing back and forth, reads what's written to himself.*

**FIRST** (*viciously, under his breath*)

It's all wrong, Your Grace. Your Grace... Hm. Still need the inventory one. Right... Parting words... Parting words? What parting words, for Fronk's sake? Bitch. Some last-minute fuck—

*Suddenly the red, gridded lamp hanging above the desk starts flashing; a bell rings. The old man hurriedly lays the sheets of paper on the desk, leans toward the Display, presses something, and the Object camera feeds switch to the view from one of them—specifically the one mounted outside the Object at the gates. On the monitor, a person in a soaked, gray cloak down to the heels, hood up, looks into the camera and, grinning ear to ear, waves energetically with one hand while pounding the gates with the other. A fairly roomy black leather bag on a long strap hangs from the person's shoulder, swinging below hip level.*

**FIRST** (*irritated*)

During the Light. Left it to the last minute, Fronking hell. Bitch.

*He speaks into the microphone.*

Over, over. First on the line, over. Stop banging—no one hears anything. Speak into the unit. You see the unit, over?

*A burst of technical crackle; through it, a brisk voice can be heard.*

**SECOND** (*on the monitor, brightly*)

Good Light! Proud to serve! The successor has arrived at the Object of assignment!

**FIRST**

Arrived... First of all: when you speak into the unit, you always end with "over." I'm First, over. Like that. Understand? Otherwise you'll get fined. Now repeat.

**SECOND** (*on the screen*)

First, First, I'm the successor, over. Could you let me in? I'm soaked through. It's really cold. Uh—uh—uh—over.

**FIRST** (*strictly*)

I'll let you in in due time, according to the instructions. Passwords with you, over?

**SECOND**

Yes, of course, forgive me. You see, I'm a bit nervous. Sorry, over.

*First sighs heavily and, taking matches from his pocket, lights his pipe.*

**FIRST**

Take it easy. Take them out calmly and read them out, over.

**SECOND**

Over, yes, yes, just a second...

*The person frantically rummages in the bag hanging from their shoulder and pulls out a crumpled sealed envelope, drops it into a puddle, snatches it up, tears it open, and, taking out a sheet of paper folded in half, begins to read it closely.*

**SECOND**

Which password exactly am I to announce? There are twenty passwords with countersigns here. It says: announce upon the predecessor's request. Over.

**FIRST**

Hold on, I'll check the instructions, over.

*First puts on his glasses, takes one of the sheets from the desk—those weighed down under the paperweight—and reads it.*

**FIRST**

Right... Dated the fifth. Exchange procedure... Right, new... Aha. Here it is. Successor, I'm First, over. Announce exchange password number eight, over.

**SECOND**

First, First, I'm the successor, over. Right. Nine five... Oh—that's number seven, sorry. Here's eight. Beginning announcement of exchange password number eight. I announce: nine two en dash colon Dark one waters dot dot sleep in the heavenly comma em dash silence question mark exclamation mark minus plus eight. First, First, I'm the successor, announcement of password number eight completed, awaiting the countersign, over.

*First draws on his pipe, blows out a cloud of smoke, squinting hard as he reads from the sheet.*

**FIRST**

Over, over, successor, I'm First, password number eight received, I announce the countersign: blessed by Fronk be the spirit of all fruits of life two hundred thirty-nine twenty eighty-one forty-two thirty. Successor, over, countersign announcement completed. Stay where you are—opening now. Have your ID ready for verification. Do you have an ID for verification?

**SECOND**

I do, over.

**FIRST**

I'm coming out. Wait.

*First slides the sheet back under the paperweight, reaches for the sawn-off mounted above the desk, takes it down, takes a huge ring of keys from a desk drawer, then goes to the doorway leading to the locked gates. He takes a cloak from the rack beside the doorway, puts it on, pulls up the hood, and, stepping out through the doorway, approaches the gates. Tucking the sawn-off inside his coat, First—keys and chain clinking—unlocks the padlock, removes the chain from the gates, swings the left gate inward with a creak, pulls the sawn-off back out, and aims into the opening.*

*The figure of Second, in the very same hooded cloak, appears for a moment—then vanishes back out of the opening.*

**SECOND**

For Fronk's sake, please don't shoot, over, over. First, First, it's me—the successor, over!

**FIRST** *(still aiming)*

Easy. Document check. Don't say "over" to me right now—say "over" into the unit afterward. Come up, take out your ID, and hand it to me.

*Second cautiously reappears in the gateway. Since First and Second are in identical hooded cloaks that fully cover their heads, the two figures are identical except that First is holding a sawn-off aimed at Second, while Second's hands are raised.*

**SECOND** *(frantically rummaging with one hand inside the inner pocket of the cloak; the other hand raised)*

Yes, yes, right now—sorry, over. I mean—no. Here.

*Second holds out a document in a black sleeve to First. First takes it carefully and opens it.*

**FIRST**

Show your face.

*Second pulls back the hood. First checks Second's face against the photograph in the document, reads what's written, lowers the sawn-off, and gives a tight smile.*

**FIRST**

Welcome to the Post. Come in—we'll get acquainted. Come on, come on. Don't be shy. This rain just won't stop.

**SECOND**

I'm soaked through. Hello.

**FIRST**

Hello, hello...

*First lets Second in through the gate, locks the gates with the chain again and hangs the padlock. Then he gestures to Second, and they enter through the opening into the post house.*

**FIRST**

Well then. This is where you'll be. Everything's here. Get out of those wet things, come in.

*Second hangs the bag on the coat rack by the entrance, then, taking off the cloak, hangs it there as well, and looks around with great interest.*

**SECOND**

It's so cozy and warm in here.

**FIRST** (*pointing Second toward the writing desk with the monitor*)

That's yours now. Sit here—we'll get you acquainted with the Superior. From the university?

**SECOND**

Just now I signed the papers with the rector, picked up my things—and straight to the Object. I also wanted... Well. Allow me, from the bottom of my heart, to congratulate you on this momentous Light—your seventy-rotation of life—and to solemnly promise I will not disgrace the Post's legacy or the Object's good traditions.

**FIRST** (*with a humorless smirk*)

Permission granted. Sit down.

*He takes the microphone from the desk and speaks into it, looking at the Display.*

**FIRST**

Your Grace, Your Grace, over. I'm First, over, over.

*Technical crackle. The Object camera feeds vanish from the screen; white noise appears.*

**THE SUPERIOR** (*irritated*)

What is it now? I told you—the award pay is being processed. Why are you distracting me?

**FIRST**

Forgive me, Your Grace, over. The successor has arrived, over.

**THE SUPERIOR** (*cheerfully*)

Ah! Excellent. A bit early for a successor this time. Is he a cute one?

**FIRST**

The password matched, Your Grace, over.

**THE SUPERIOR**

You've gotten so dull, First. Honestly.

**FIRST**

Forgive me, Your Grace, over.

**THE SUPERIOR**

Oh, don't start. I'm kidding. Still can't see you. Successor, do you hear me, over?

**FIRST** *(in a whisper)*

Take it—quick.

*First hands the microphone to Second. Second begins speaking into it, looking at the Display.*

**SECOND**

Affirmative, Your Grace, I hear you. I have arrived at my place of assignment. I swear I will not disgrace the Post's legacy or the Object's good traditions!

**THE SUPERIOR**

Look at you—quick on the draw! And who's going to say "over"—Fronk? That's a fine for violating the Object radio protocol.

**SECOND** *(thrown off)*

Oh—I... Forgive me, Your Grace, over...

**THE SUPERIOR** *(laughs)*

I'm kidding. Don't forget the rules—next time I'll fine you for real.

**SECOND** *(brightening)*

Affirmative, Your Grace, over!

**THE SUPERIOR**

All right—perform the succession for me, then get on with the handover. Come on, boys—we're up to our necks in work.

*First nods to Second and rises beside the desk, standing to attention.*

*Second also rises to attention opposite First. Clicking their heels, they turn their heads right, and with their left hands they salute one another.*

**FIRST**

Predecessor and successor are ready for the official succession of the Object guard duty! Awaiting Your Grace the Supervisor's directive command to open the execution of the post-guard succession of the Object guard duty!

**THE SUPERIOR**

The opening of the execution of the post-guard succession of the Object guard duty I hereby declare open by directive order. Come on, boys—don't disgrace yourselves, so to speak.

**FIRST**

I, First, in accordance with the Fronk Object Code, with the permission and under the supervision of Her Grace the Supervisor, conditionally execute the succession by transferring official, moral, property, and other obligations to my successor. Successor, I have conditionally transferred the succession; I ask you to accept it responsibly.

**SECOND**

I, the successor, in accordance with the Fronk Object Code, responsibly accept the succession conditionally transferred to me and undertake, with honor and pride, to bear the burden of constant presence, as well as the load of responsibility for the execution of all personal and official duties.

*First steps up to Second, hugs him hard, then takes his head in both hands and kisses him on the forehead for a long time.*

**FIRST** *(pulling away from Second's forehead)*

The succession transfer has been conditionally transferred.

**SECOND**

The succession transfer has been conditionally accepted.

**THE SUPERIOR**

Eagles! Your conditional ritual is credited—now don't let me down on the actual part of the shift. In short, I'll give orders now: they'll bring the Festives. After that, you'll have, uh—the Chronicler, and the Housekeeper will come as well, to meet the successor. Successor, you're coming to us without a female comrade, yes?

**SECOND** *(embarrassed)*

Affirmative, Your Grace—without. Somehow it was all studying; I never got one.

**THE SUPERIOR** *(cheerfully)*

Don't worry—we'll get you one. We've got a good selection here, and for now the Housekeeper will be visiting you. She's a seasoned broad—she's been on the Object for decades. All right then: First, instruct him, hand things over. By the way, I heard about that “bitch.”

**FIRST** *(embarrassed)*

But— I wasn't talking about Your Grace, I was talking in general... I was—

*First doesn't manage to finish, because the Supervisor's voice cuts him off.*

**THE SUPERIOR** *(cheerfully)*

Save your “in general” for the Chronicler. Oh, old man—if it weren't for the shift. All right, I'm swamped—I'll call later. End of transmission. Out.

*A burst of technical crackle. The Display stops showing white noise and begins transmitting the Object camera feeds.*

*First rubs his face awkwardly, takes the pipe from the desk, and lights it again.*

**FIRST**

Well... It is what it is. You hungry?

**SECOND**

Thanks, I had a bite at the university.

**FIRST**

Then straight to the handover. Ready?

**SECOND**

Affirmative, ready. I just need to call my mom—I didn't get to say goodbye. You don't mind if I call her? I'll be quick, literally a couple of words.

**FIRST** (*blowing smoke from his pipe*)

Your mom—of course. Of course, call her, Second. Call. I'll go breathe some rain.

*First goes to the coat rack, takes his cloak, puts it on, pulling the hood over his head. Leaving the post house, he walks slowly to the pale pink rose bushes, gently touches the buds, bends to them, smells them, then goes under the tree and, sitting on the bench beneath it, keeps smoking his pipe thoughtfully, stroking with his hand the saddle of the bicycle leaned against the bench.*

*Second goes to the coat rack, takes an iPhone from the inner pocket of his cloak, dials, and raises it to his ear.*

**SECOND**

Hello, Mom—over! I mean—hello, Mom, it's me.

*From somewhere on the Object comes bleating and the clatter of hooves; First, sitting on the bench, jerks to his feet, bolts, runs into the post house, yanks the sawn-off from its mounts above the fireplace, and runs toward the bleating.*

**SECOND**

Yes, Mommy, it's good here. Yes, everything's here. Sorry I didn't manage to stop by—I waited for the rector, then all this paperwork, and you see how it turned out. No, I'm not hungry. Yes, it's warm, Mom, everything's fine. Don't worry, Mommy.

*From outside comes the sound of a gunshot, then two more.*

We'll talk once every two months. I don't know yet—today it's just the handover; I start my duties at twelve of the Dark. Don't worry, Mom. Yes, Mom. Kiss my sister for me, please, before bed.

*First appears by the rose bushes, dragging a sheep carcass by the hind legs. He drops the carcass by the entrance to the post house and goes inside.*

**SECOND**

All right, I have to go, Mommy. Kiss Sis—don't forget. Goodbye.

*Second slips the iPhone into his trouser pocket.*

**FIRST** (*cheerfully*)

They've driven the flock past the posts a bit early. You know how to butcher?

**SECOND** (*briskly*)

I've actually got an "excellent-plus" in Object hunting.

**FIRST**

Hunting's one thing. But butchering? "Plus," huh.

**SECOND**

We had butchering in the course, and skinning as an elective. I passed early—half an hour faster than the standard. They credited me automatically, no exam.

*First takes off his cloak, hangs the sawn-off back on its mounts, and goes into the washroom. The sound of urination is heard.*

**FIRST** (*urinating*)

Top student, huh? Well, good for you. You'll figure it out yourself, then.

*A toilet flush, then the sound of hands being washed under running water.*

**SECOND**

I will. Affirmative.

**FIRST** (*coming out of the washroom, taking a chair and setting it by the desk next to the armchair*)

Hop in. Get used to it—don't be shy.

*Second sits down carefully in the armchair, places his hands on the desk in front of him, and looks with interest at the objects laid out there.*

**FIRST**

Careful—the armrest wobbles bad. Should've tightened it, didn't have time. You'll tighten it. Right. First—the Display.

**SECOND**

Excuse me—may I take notes? It helps me remember, and I'm used to it.

**FIRST**

Take all the notes you want—what do I care? There, grab the sheets, a pen—whatever else you need.

**SECOND**

If you don't mind, I'd prefer to take notes in my own notebook.

**FIRST** (*a bit irritated*)

For Fronk's sake—take notes however you want. Just faster.

*Second hurries to the coat rack, rummages in his bag for a moment, pulls out a red-covered notebook and a fountain pen. He returns to the desk and, glancing at First for approval, sits down in the armchair uncertainly. He opens the notebook, sets it in front of him, and, ready to write, looks at First, eager to please.*

*First sets his chair beside the armchair where Second is seated and, pressing the red button on the Display three times, sits down next to him.*

*The Display is split into two halves, showing two camera views: a line of horse-drawn carts with drivers and tank cisterns enters through one gate on the left side of the screen and exits through another gate on the right. In the red-brick arches above both gates, on black chains—like a strange pendant—hangs a forged red-yellow-green traffic light. The traffic lights sway slightly in the wind.*

*Depending on which color lights up, the line of horses pauses and then resumes. These days, such videography can easily be generated by a paid AI video generator.*

*First places his hand on Second's shoulder and confidentially begins to bring him up to speed.*

**FIRST**

Right in front of you on the Display is the first supervised point. *(pointing at the screen)* It's called, rookie, the "Fuel-and-Lube," and altogether we've got three supervised points on our post these days.

**SECOND** *(starts writing in his notebook)*

Three supervised points... Fuel-and-Lube... Could you go a little slower? I'm not quite keeping up.

**FIRST** *(displeased)*

You'll take notes later. Right now, watch the Display and listen to me, or we won't get through anything.

**SECOND** *(readily sets his notebook and pen aside)*

Well, if you... Yes, of course.

**FIRST**

Right. First task on this point: visually log the uninterrupted freight transport flow. That's one. Got it?

**SECOND**

Affirmative, got it. You mean the horses with the barrels? *(points at the screen)*

**FIRST**

Them—our wet nurses. Only it's not "horses with barrels," it's draft transport-and-cargo units with cisterns. Learn the terminology right away—we're strict on protocol here. See—on the left they come in with empty containers to get their fuel-and-lube. And out of those gates on the right they roll out loaded and haul the fuel-and-lube into the city. Off our fuel-and-lube, rookie, the whole city eats and glows—glory to Fronk. So this point is of special importance. You should understand that yourself.

**SECOND**

I do understand, of course. But how exactly do you "log uninterrupted flow"?

**FIRST**

Very simply. See that triple signal hanging on chains over the gates?

**SECOND**

I see it, affirmative.

**FIRST**

Well, it's not hanging there for decoration. The Fuel-and-Lube is big, but the workers don't always do things right. Sometimes the filling line stalls, sometimes something—or someone—on the loading side. Human factor, in other words. For instance: sometimes the light on the inbound side is green, but the gates are shut. Then the drivers with their horses start getting confused, can crash into each other, make chaos, so to speak. Sometimes the drivers start smashing each other's faces in. And you, rookie, in that case must immediately and without delay signal the Main Console via the unit: you see the line has stopped and disorder has started—you take the unit and call the Main Console. You say: Main, Main, this is First, over, I am logging a freight transport flow violation of

such-and-such degree under such-and-such code. Codes and degrees are all here, in the Code-and-Degree Book. *(points to a substantial, lavish black leatherbound volume with a large gold-embossed letter F on the cover, lying on the desk beside the brick paperweight)*

At first, keep it open; in a month or two you'll have it all memorized and you'll put it away in the desk.

## **SECOND**

Understood, affirmative—learn the codes. And what else out of the ordinary happens here?

## **FIRST**

Anything you like. For example, horses drop their containers and fall themselves. Fine if they're empty on the inbound side. But sometimes loaded ones go down on the outbound side too. Last month, for instance, the signal on the way out went dead altogether—so one cart plowed into another in a panic. Two cisterns of hard stuff tipped over on the outbound and spilled all over the ground—and the drivers, the sons of bitches, were smoking roll-ups in violation of the Fronk Object Code. One of them, spooked, tossed a butt—and of course the spilled hard stuff flared up. Nearly threw fire onto the flow. The first driver burned alive, and the second one I had to... After the extinguishers put the seat out and the transport flow resumed.

## **SECOND**

You had to what?

## **FIRST** *(smirks)*

What did they teach you at university, excellent-plus? I had to settle it. Because here's how it works: you spot an emergency—you signal the right code to the Main Console, grab your gear, sling the instrument, and double-time it to the site, personally, to sort it out. That's your official task number two: prevention and suppression of Object incidents of varying severity caused by violations of the Fronk Object Code. And your task number three is punishment of violators of the Fronk Object Code. In short: by the markers, the service bicycle gets you to the Fuel-and-Lube in two to five mers, depending on the weather. Under the Code, for a malicious breach of production discipline at an especially important supervised point, immediate liquidation is prescribed. As a lesson to the workforce, in accordance with the Fronk Object Code. Or did you only hunt sheep at university?

## **SECOND** *(intelligently furrows his brow, adjusts his glasses with a finger)*

We had drills with dummies once every seven days, and they delivered a few condemned for practice a number of times. Really, my only questions about execution are technical—how, where, and what to do with it afterward.

## **FIRST**

Right there—on the spot of the emergency Object incident. The instrument—there, hanging—you've already seen it today, heh-heh. *(nods toward the sawn-off)* Then right there: horizontal position, depth one seventy-five, no less than ten average paces to the right or left off the transport path. Digging and measuring tools are on every cart for these cases. Mark the spot with a signal flag; next Light, plant a sapling there from the Object arboretum. Everything per the Fronk Object Code—nothing complicated.

## **SECOND**

That's clear to me, thank you. And what do we do with the freed horse in that case?

**FIRST**

In accordance with the Fronk Object Code, a draft transport Object left without its controlling driver is harnessed into the next cart as harness number two and proceeds along the preplanned route; the width of the transport path allows double parallel travel. Read the Code carefully—and better yet, learn it by heart. You’ll be acting by it for thirty rotations. You’ll have time.

**SECOND**

Yes, of course, I’ll definitely learn it. And if the incident isn’t an emergency? What happens to the violator—how do you punish here?

**FIRST**

Non-emergency punishment is standard: buttstock to the jaw, or to the upper torso. Or lower—depends on the degree of production guilt. Only watch it—no hands. Hands aren’t allowed to be used on the Object. Punishment by hand—immediate fine of half-pay. In accordance with the Fronk Object Code. That’s all because of the rights types.

**SECOND** (*hotly, sincerely*)

What are you talking about—by hand! I would never... With my hands... Never even crossed my mind!

**FIRST** (*agreeably*)

Good lad. That’s Fuel-and-Lube in broad strokes—fine points you’ll figure out on the fly. Now the second point: Form Point. Want some chicory?

**SECOND**

Yes, thank you—I’d love a cup.

**FIRST**

We’ll brew a fresh pot.

*First starts to rise from the chair; but then, from the direction of the entrance, a melodic female voice is heard, belonging to a woman who has ridden in from somewhere offstage on a bicycle. Dismounting, she leaves it by the bench beside the bicycle already parked there, looks up at the sky, opens an umbrella over herself, and heads toward the post house.*

**HOUSEKEEPER (VOICE)**

First, you there? And what’s that—a little sheep under the stairs? Look at it, poor thing, all in blood. You post guards are beasts. No heart in you, that’s what. First, you here?

*In the doorway appears a tall, slim woman of indeterminate age in a black cloak and a black hat with a veil, holding an open black cane umbrella above her head. In her other hand she carries a black leather valise. Before entering the post house, the Housekeeper shakes the heavenly waters from the umbrella and folds it. Then the Housekeeper steps inside.*

**FIRST** (*grinning ear to ear*)

Here I am—at my post. Where else would I be? And who’s this honored visitor?

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*cheerfully*)

What, gone blind? First, I’ve missed you, by the way.

*First takes the umbrella from the Housekeeper, sets it behind the coat rack, helps her out of her things, hangs up her cloak, then opens his arms to her, hugs her gently, and carefully kisses her on both cheeks in turn—first the left, then the right.*

**FIRST**

Come in, my dear, come in—I'm just putting the chicory on. You see, I'm briefing the successor. We've got a shift. Here—lived to see it. Such is life.

*The Housekeeper crosses into the room and sits on the edge of the bed.*

**HOUSEKEEPER** *(with a sigh)*

Yes, I already know. And this, I take it, is the successor?

**SECOND**

Hello. Affirmative, madam—the successor is me.

**HOUSEKEEPER** *(fondly)*

What a good boy you are—still practically a child.

**SECOND**

Well... I...

**FIRST** *(cheerfully, setting the kettle on the stove)*

By the way—Straight A-plus in Object training. A child sweats under his mother's skirt in the city, but on our post there can only be a real post guard!

**HOUSEKEEPER** *(warmly, with feeling)*

Boy, I'll come to you twice in seven Lights. Which Lights do you want me to come?

**SECOND**

I don't know, madam. Please come whenever it's convenient for you—I haven't oriented myself yet, and I don't know the work very well.

**HOUSEKEEPER**

Nothing—you'll know it all soon enough. I've got a window in the first Light right after breakfast, and in the seventh closer to evening. So that's when I'll come.

**SECOND**

Yes, of course. Then come like that.

**HOUSEKEEPER**

So we have an agreement. And which one of you did the sheep? At least move it out of sight.

**FIRST** *(cheerfully)*

Where am I supposed to move it? Onto the bed, under the blanket? The hide's not off, the carcass isn't butchered—can't very well drag it inside, can I. Tell me, what difference does it make who did the sheep? Fine—I did the sheep. Next month—he does the sheep, or he'll be without meat on the Object. That's the order, you know it: they drive the flock past—go out and bag one, otherwise you'll be standing post on buckwheat and garlic potatoes for two months. Without a sheep you won't last two months on post.

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*smiling sadly, waving a hand*)

I'm not against it... I'm just being lyrical.

**FIRST** (*gently*)

If it's lyrical, then all right... Here—have a sip of chicory.

*First takes the boiled kettle off the stove, pours steaming chicory into small cups, and offers one cup to the Housekeeper sitting on the bed and the other to Second seated in the chair.*

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*takes it, sips*)

Thank you, First. You do the inventory form? It needs signing—I'll take it to the chancery.

**FIRST** (*scratching the back of his head, sitting down on the bed beside her*)

Did it. Spent two Lights writing. Better if it were all in the shift at once—and done. But no: count it, check it, write it down, hand it over. Parting words... You don't happen to know what these "parting words" are, do you? I've racked my brain over it. When I took the succession, I don't remember any parting words...

**HOUSEKEEPER**

It's a new addition. They changed out the Twelfth last month—he complained too. The Editorial Commission, you see, amended the Fronk Object Code: symbolic wishes to the follower, spoken freely—nothing concrete. Say whatever you want to him. Earning their pay, pen-pushers. Think they're smarter than Fronk. Like children, honestly.

**FIRST** (*smirks*)

Everyone's children to you.

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*smirks*)

Because you all are children. And I'm something like your mother.

**FIRST** (*slips an arm around her shoulders, leans to her ear*)

You, uh... perform a bit more functions than a mother is supposed to.

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*smirking, removing his hand from her shoulder*)

You're talking too much, First. How's yours, by the way? Said goodbye? Settled in?

**FIRST** (*sighs*)

Sent her off with Fronk. Third Light—moved into the district for veteran women of Object service. Happy with the place, doing her papers, filing for her pension. We had our last call this morning. It's hard, of course. Well—she knew who she was going with.

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*sighs sympathetically, gently strokes First's forearm*)

It's all right, First. What can you do, if that's your Object fate? Don't worry: the main thing is she's now always in repose and comfort. She'll live for her own pleasure and remember you with kind words.

**FIRST** ( *rubs his forehead*)

Sure, I get that—still, my heart is heavy. Nearly twenty-nine rotations together on the Object, and then—bang, all at once, done. All right, no point stirring it up. Let's sign off the inventory, or I still have to explain two points to the boy, and that one—what's his name—will be here soon.

**HOUSEKEEPER** *(standing up from the bed)*

All right. We won't cross-check it. If anything, the boy and I will sort it out ourselves later. *(winks at Second)*

**SECOND**

Sorry—sort out what, exactly?

**HOUSEKEEPER** *(smirks)*

Everything.

**FIRST**

Don't give it a second thought. It's an item inventory for the chancery. If we start cross-checking, we won't finish by tomorrow, so we'll sign it and that's that. Don't worry—no liability there. Pure formality.

**SECOND**

Of course—let me sign, no problem. Where do I sign?

**FIRST**

Right here.

*First goes to the writing desk, neatly pulls out from under the paperweight a stapled stack of pages, opens to the last page, takes a large black quill from the bronze desk set, dips it in the inkwell, scrawls his signature with a broad flourish, and sets the pages in front of Second seated in the armchair, holding out the quill to him. Second takes the quill uncertainly, carefully dips it in the inkwell, and painstakingly writes out his signature. When he's done, he looks up and offers the quill to the Housekeeper. She leans to the desk, quickly dips the quill in the inkwell, and signs the document as well.*

*Then the Housekeeper takes the inventory and puts it into the valise standing under the coat rack.*

**HOUSEKEEPER**

All right—done. Now I need to sweep and change the bedding, and then I'll move on.

**FIRST**

What do you mean—"move on"? We'll knock back some lamb soup, drink chicory. The Festives will be brought any minute—we'll have a proper chat.

**HOUSEKEEPER**

The Festives would be nice, but I can't. I've got four more posts—boys are waiting. So let me get on with things here, and you go get some air in the meantime.

**FIRST** *(with annoyance)*

What do you mean, "get some air"? I've only explained the Fuel-and-Lube. Form Point and the Park—we haven't touched. And it'll start getting dark soon.

**HOUSEKEEPER**

Then explain, and I'll work. I'll be careful—I won't get in the way. Come on. Get to it.

**FIRST**

Second—back in the chair. Quick. We're running out of time.

**SECOND**

Uh... Sorry, where is... Could I use the washroom for a second? I'll be right back.

**FIRST** *(strictly)*

Use of the washroom until the end of the first Object Dark is not permitted under the provisions of the Fronk Object Code.

**SECOND** *(thrown off)*

But what is to be done? Where must I go?  
Perhaps, then, I should step outside a while?

**FIRST** *(with a fatherly smile)*

I joke, I joke, I joke, I joke! Now go,  
Make haste and run straight back, there is no time.  
The door is there. Now go! *(points to the washroom door)*

**FIRST** *(thoughtfully, looking at the Housekeeper)*

Strange how it is... Right now I am talking to you, and tomorrow he will be here, and I will not, and you will come to him, and he will be with you, and I will never see you again.

**HOUSEKEEPER** *(strokes First's cheek)*

Do not think on it, First. You have things left to do, so think on those things, and what you speak of does not matter; there is no use speaking of what will no longer be.

*The Housekeeper rises on her tiptoes and kisses First on the cheek.*

**FIRST** *(thoughtfully, relighting his pipe)*

Yes, yes... You are right, as always...

**HOUSEKEEPER** *(thoughtfully, gently)*

You know—you are a good man, First. A real one.

**FIRST**

You really think so?

**HOUSEKEEPER**

Of course I do.

# PART II

*Second comes out of the washroom and hurriedly sits down in the armchair at the desk. The Housekeeper goes into the door Second has just come out of and immediately comes back out with a large broom. She begins to sweep the floor thoroughly and methodically.*

*Second sits in the armchair. First, pressing a button on the Display, sits down on the chair beside him.*

## **FIRST**

Well—Fronk be with us... Off we go to Form Point.

*First presses the large red button twice, and on the Display appears an old reddish brick wall, overlaid with rusty barbed wire. By the wall are pallets stacked with stale bricks; beside the pallets a shallow pit darkens; on one of the brick pallets lies a shovel; a telescoping ladder leans against the wall, reaching three-quarters of its height; nearby stands a pair of dented buckets. The image is absolutely static—there is no movement in it. In principle, it can be, and probably will be, a graphic image.*

## **FIRST**

Official duties for Form Point: remote observation of your assigned segment of the point's outer fence, plus its triple reversible patrol once every two Lights. But! Since, as you can see, this whole wall is full of holes and cracks, the Superior, in the fifth month, issued a mandatory order: all post guards are to take an active part in its repair. Each post guard—on his own assigned segment. An additional service task for four months. Am I explaining it clearly?

## **SECOND**

In general, yes. But what is this "Form Point"? What's inside?

## **FIRST** *(strictly)*

Form Point is a secret Object point. Post guards have no clearance for information about it—we only know the name. Your responsibility zone is the stretch of the wall's outer perimeter and the adjoining territory. What's inside—don't even think about it. And do not even try to ask—the Superior will punish you financially. Ask a second time, it may not be financial. I remember—ten rotations ago, the Fourth got replaced seven rotations early. Drank on his day off, called the Superior, started asking questions. Well—he asked for it.

## **SECOND** *(a bit taken aback)*

Uh... all right, if that's how it is... I just thought... And why repairs? We weren't trained for repairs at university, so I, actually... I'm not... sure...

## **HOUSEKEEPER** *(sweeping)*

You'll manage—there's not much to it: plug the holes and patch the cracks. Sorry, First.

**FIRST**

Yes—nothing complicated. Once every two days you go out on reversible patrol, follow the signs—Form Point is about thirty meters from the post house. When you reach your segment of responsibility, you perform the reversible patrol, visually log the damaged spots, and proceed to local repair of the fence. Tools and materials are all there on site—blocks on the pallets, substance in the pit. Digging kit with containers—there; the ladder—there. Just don't fall off it. I almost broke my neck not long ago. Careful: it's raining now—slick.

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*sweeping, gently*)

Don't scare the boy. Next time I'll line his work boots with sheepskin—he won't fall anywhere.

**FIRST** (*smirks*)

Line them, line them—Miss Fix-It...

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*sweeping, playfully challenging*)

And I will!

**SECOND** (*concentrated, jotting something in his notebook*)

How do I determine the boundaries of my segment? I take it I'm not the only one patrolling there?

**FIRST** (*patiently, indicating the screen*)

I'm telling you: you ride out from the post house on service transport, following the signs, right?

**SECOND** (*nodding eagerly*)

Right...

**FIRST**

You arrive at the landmark by the first Form Tower. Your responsibility segment starts there and ends at the second Form Tower, right?

**SECOND**

Well—right...

**FIRST**

Don't interrupt. That's about a thousand average paces of thoughtful non-reversible patrol, with parallel visual assessment of the degree of wear of the Object point—you'll manage it in no more than fifteen to twenty average counts. And you won't get lost on the Object: if you ride past other segments, someone will definitely be patrolling there too—you'll ask them, and you'll meet in person at the same time. The new Twelfth is patrolling right ahead of you, as it happens.

**HOUSEKEEPER**

I rode past just now—the new Twelfth is up on the ladder, working with blocks. A good boy.

**FIRST**

There are no bad ones on the Object. With bad ones, Your Grace keeps the conversation short.

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*bending to the floor with her back to the entrance, grunting as she picks at the broom*)

Yeah. Listen,—why’s my whole broom in white threads? Were you sewing?

**FIRST**

Did a bit, yeah. Stitched up a collar this morning.

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*standing bent over, back to the entrance, picking at the broom*)

So he was sewing. And why didn’t you wait for me?

**FIRST**

Oh, come on—why? It’s five average counts of work. Sweep, then. Successor—questions?

**SECOND** (*marks something in his notebook*)

Well, in general it all seems clear. I only wanted more detail...

*Suddenly, the front door opens noiselessly, and on the threshold behind the bent-over Housekeeper appears the Chronicler. The Chronicler is a man of average height and age, with a goatee and glasses, wearing a gray overcoat and a bowler hat. Over his clothes he has a transparent cellophane raincoat with a hood. On his back is a rather large sack with some rods sticking out of it. Heavenly liquid runs off him.*

**THE CHRONICLER** (*unctuously*)

Good Light. Allow me to introduce myself: the Object’s Chronicler.

**SECOND**

Hello.

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*straightening up, turning toward the voice, unfriendly*)

Why are you sneaking around? You scared me.

**THE CHRONICLER** (*bows slightly, lifting his hat*)

I trust you will forgive me, for I had no intention whatsoever of frightening anyone.

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*unfriendly*)

And you talk funny.

**FIRST** (*gives him a hard look*)

How did you get in?

**THE CHRONICLER**

I came in through the door and, it seems to me, you have just had the opportunity to observe my appearance. Tell me: where might I undress and prepare everything necessary for keeping the Chronicle?

**FIRST**

No, I mean—how did you even get onto the territory?

**HOUSEKEEPER**

He lives by the chancery. Since the Twelfth's shift—new rules. The Editorial Commission keeps rewriting the Code, parasites. Listen—don't you remember till what time the chancery's open today? I'd like to make it in time for dinner.

**THE CHRONICLER**

Regrettably, I do not possess such information, for I take my final meal in the middle of the Light.

**HOUSEKEEPER**

Look at you—"in the middle of the Light"...

**FIRST**

If you want, there's lamb soup in the fridge—help yourself.

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*changing the bedding*)

No time, First.

**FIRST** (*softening*)

Suit yourself. Object man—did you walk here from the chancery or what?

**THE CHRONICLER**

Precisely so. I made my way on my own legs, for walking is necessary for intensive blood supply to the brain, which has an extremely beneficial effect both on the organism's overall well-being and on the execution of Object service duties.

**FIRST**

All right, then. Just show your ID.

**THE CHRONICLER**

One moment.

*The Chronicler rummages with a rustle under the cellophane and finally pulls a document in black covers from an inner pocket of his overcoat. He opens it and shows it to First.*

*First tries to take it into his hands, but the Chronicler draws the ID back.*

**THE CHRONICLER** (*stepping back*)

I do not have the authority to place the Chronicler's identification into anyone else's hands under any circumstances—so states a special decree of the Object's Superior, number eight, dated the twenty-seventh Light of the eleventh month of the last rotation. Look, if you wish, like this—in my hands.

**FIRST** (*displeased*)

Fine. Show it to me from your hands.

*The Chronicler steps forward, thrusting the open ID close to First's face. First peers at it.*

**FIRST** (*straightening up*)

Get out of your wet things—coat rack's there.

**HOUSEKEEPER** *(looking down at the Chronicler's feet, grumbling)*

Hold on—I'll get you a rag to wipe your boots. Look at that—I just swept, and it's all black again. You've dirtied the whole ritual. Here—hold this.

*The Housekeeper hands the Chronicler the broom. He takes it and looks down at his feet.*

*The Housekeeper hurries into the washroom door and comes back out with a large red rag in her hands. She goes to the entrance and, bending down, wipes the floor at the door and around where the Chronicler is standing. Then she spreads the rag right in front of his feet and takes the broom back from his hands.*

**HOUSEKEEPER**

Wipe them well.

**THE CHRONICLER** *(obediently shuffling his feet on the rag)*

Thank you. I repeat: where may I set up for keeping the Chronicle?

**FIRST**

Undress there. *(points to the coat rack)* Set up on the table. *(points to the dining table)*

**THE CHRONICLER**

Thank you.

*The Chronicler takes the sack off his back, sets it by the coat rack, removes the raincoat and hangs it up, takes off his overcoat. He remains in a vertically striped vest.*

*He carries the sack to the dining table, sets it on the floor, opens it, takes out a set of rods, deftly assembles them into a folding canvas chair, and places the chair at some distance from the table.*

*Then he takes a small black case from the sack and sets it on the table. Everyone watches.*

**THE CHRONICLER**

I ask all present to continue attending to their affairs. I shall make the necessary preparations and begin recording what is occurring for subsequent entry into the Chronicle.

*The Housekeeper returns to sweeping. First sits down beside Second at the writing desk.*

**FIRST**

So, Second—what did you want to know about Form Point?

**SECOND**

Well, I wanted more about the wall repair. Say I arrive on site, perform reversible patrol with parallel visual assessment of wear—

**FIRST**

Right.

*Meanwhile the Chronicler opens the black case on the table and takes out a small mechanical film camera with manual control.*

*The Housekeeper sweeps thoroughly and methodically by the threshold.*

*On the Display—the same wall as before.*

**SECOND**

Say I've done the assessment—what next? Do I take the blocks and climb up the ladder to the worn spot? How many blocks can I take per climb? How do I fasten them?

*Meanwhile, the Chronicler takes the film camera and begins methodically filming the room, cranking the handle: walls, furniture, floor, ceiling. At first he films only the interior, avoiding the people. He crouches, rises, leans, to capture the full area of the space he is in.*

**FIRST**

That's case by case. I did it in stages. First decide: are you setting blocks, or sealing gaps with substance. Don't grab everything at once—you'll fall. Don't take more than one block up with you per climb. Take one—climb, set it, climb down. Take a container from the digging kit, scoop from the pit—climb, smear it, climb down. Then, say, you can do another reversible patrol of the area, and then go back up for repairs again. Do it however works best for you. The main thing is the result. Clear?

*Meanwhile, the Housekeeper finishes sweeping, passes the Chronicler filming the interior, goes into the washroom, and comes out without the broom but carrying a set of fresh bed linen. She goes to the bed, sets the clean linen on the nightstand, and begins stripping the old linen from the bed.*

**SECOND**

Clear. Affirmative.

*The Chronicler approaches First and Second with the camera. Coming almost right up to them, he points the camera at the backs of the two seated at the desk.*

**THE CHRONICLER** (*loudly*)

All right! Quick—turn to me! Smile!

*First and Second startle and turn around.*

**FIRST** (*viciously*)

What the hell are you doing, Fronk your mother's soul—have you lost your mind?

**THE CHRONICLER**

Forgive me. Yet I humbly beg for a smile! (*First and Second put on smiles.*) Thank you!

**FIRST** (*through his teeth*)

Unbelievable... That's how you get cracked in the head.

*Having filmed the insincere smiles of the post guards, the Chronicler moves off toward the Housekeeper, who is tucking in the bed. Coming up to her, he begins filming her from her feet up to her head.*

Now, madam, I ask you to turn and smile charmingly into the camera.

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*turning, angrily*)

And why would I? You're logging the post guards.

**THE CHRONICLER**

The matter is this: at the moment of filming the interior of the premises for subsequent entry into the Object Chronicle, all persons present in the premises must be recorded, as well as all actions performed by those present in the recorded premises. I operate strictly in accordance with the media section of the Fronk Object Code—no improvisation whatsoever. Therefore I ask for a smile, and continue making the bed; I shall also partially record the ritual.

**HOUSEKEEPER** (*with a sigh, grinning ear to ear—fake as can be*)

Well, if it's in the Code.

*The Chronicler films the smile for a while, then, continuing to film the Housekeeper, backs away. The Housekeeper, swaying her hips, begins to make the bed with fresh linen.*

*A short, sharp ring sounds. The red gridded lamp flashes. The Display begins to snow with white noise, and the Superior's brisk voice is heard.*

**THE SUPERIOR**

First, over. So—passed the craft on to the new generation? Can't see you again. What is this—when will they fix it? I'll replace them all, to Fronk.

*Reacting to the voice, the Chronicler moves briskly with the camera toward the hissing screen and films it, cranking the handle.*

**FIRST**

Over, Your Grace. I'm explaining the points to the successor. We signed the inventory, handed it to the Housekeeper—she's making the bed. The Chronicler is here, working, over.

*The Chronicler starts filming First as he speaks. Then, spinning and weaving around those present, he films everyone taking part in the conversation with the Superior, including the Superior herself—meaning the speaking Display with white noise.*

**THE SUPERIOR** (*cheerfully*)

Over! Now that's what I call teamwork. That's what I call the collective in action. You explained the additional repair authority for Form Point, over?

**FIRST**

In the process, Your Grace—wrapping up, over.

**THE SUPERIOR**

Good man, veteran. And you're not bored, from what I can see, over?

**FIRST** (*sighs*)

Over—no boredom, Your Grace. Just don't forget something. Your Grace, over?

**THE SUPERIOR**

Over, First—you won't. Successor, over—how are you doing there? Settling in? Absorbing Object information properly, over?

**SECOND** *(takes the microphone from First with enthusiasm)*

Over, Your Grace—I'm the successor, over. With great respect and interest I'm taking in the predecessor's rich post-guard experience, Your Grace, over!

**THE SUPERIOR** *(with a good-natured chuckle)*

Ha. I like the attitude, over. Go on, successor—take it in. Now—call me the Housekeeper, have her come over, over.

*Hearing the Supervisor's call, the Housekeeper abandons the bed that's almost made (she's finishing a pillowcase) and, accompanied by the Chronicler filming her, comes to the desk. She takes the microphone.*

**HOUSEKEEPER** *(extremely deferential)*

Your Grace, over. Listening attentively, Your Grace, over.

*The Chronicler pays special attention to the Housekeeper, filming her from entirely different angles—coming close, pulling away, stepping behind her, then to the side.*

**THE SUPERIOR** *(rudely)*

Over, house-mother. So how much longer are you? I need you here urgently—a new statue of Fronk has been delivered to the codex depot, it has to be booked in and everything tidied up there. And you remember the medical check, over!

**HOUSEKEEPER** *(gasps, covers her mouth with her palm)*

Oh! Over! Your Grace—I completely forgot about the exam... over...

**THE SUPERIOR**

Well, look at you, mother... The Esculapian's here until half-dark, and then he won't be around for half a rotation. You know you can't work with post guards under the Code without the exam. Lightning-fast here. Lightning. Or I'll replace you, ha-ha.

**HOUSEKEEPER** *(frightened, speaking quickly)*

What are you saying, Your Grace... over, over! I'm—Your Grace—I'm very quick. Just the pillowcase left, and then straight onto wheels—and over to you like a bird. *(waves a hand at the brazen Chronicler, who has shoved the camera almost into her mouth)* And you—back off. To hell with you, Fronk take you.

*The Chronicler backs off a little, but, changing angle, continues filming the dialogue between the Housekeeper and the Superior.*

**THE SUPERIOR** *(ominously)*

What? Was that to me?

**HOUSEKEEPER** *(flustered, waving her hand)*

What are you saying, Your Grace! Over, over! Not to you, Your Grace—never to you. To him! What's-his-name—filming everything here, nearly crawling into my mouth.

**THE SUPERIOR** (*strict, iron in her voice*)

Treat the Chronicler with all possible respect. He is not amusing himself at your place for nothing—he is carrying out an extremely important task: preserving Object history for the city's next generations. Therefore take what he is doing seriously and carry out, without reservation, everything he tells you. All present, over. Everyone hear that, over?

*First, Second, and the Housekeeper answer into one microphone in an uneven chorus.*

**FIRST, SECOND, HOUSEKEEPER**

We heard you, Your Grace, over.

*The Chronicler keeps filming what is happening.*

**THE SUPERIOR** (*cheerfully*)

You're my little bunnies. All right—give me the Chronicler. Over. So, you there—how is it? Everything all right? Is the Object Chronicle moving in the right direction?

*Having filmed the screen, the Chronicler gestures to the Housekeeper to hold the microphone up to him. When she realizes and brings it to his mouth, he turns the camera so the lens faces his own face and begins speaking while filming himself—then filming the screen when the Supervisor speaks.*

**THE CHRONICLER**

Your Grace, over. I have just filmed the interior, certain consultations, mundane communication microconflicts, the cleaning ritual in process. Next: a selective interview of our heroes, then filming again, notes, and the finale. Then editing. All per the Code—do not trouble yourself, over.

**THE SUPERIOR**

You'll cut it in ten light-darks?

**THE CHRONICLER**

Perhaps I will manage sooner, yet I would not undertake to guarantee exact timeframes. I do, however, dare to hope—

**THE SUPERIOR** (*cuts in sharply*)

Good. That's it—wrap up. Housekeeper—get here like a bullet. First, over! The Festives will be brought from the city now—so you sit nicely, but without excesses. Understood? Understood? With-out ex-cess-es.

**FIRST**

Affirmative, Your Grace, over—properly and without excesses.

**THE SUPERIOR**

That's more like it. Successor—absorb the knowledge more carefully. And call me before the actual part of the shift, over.

**FIRST**

Affirmative, Your Grace, over.

**THE SUPERIOR**

All right then—thanks, everyone. Dismissed. End of transmission. Out.

*On the Display, the view of the Form wall appears again. The Housekeeper returns to the final part of the bed ritual; First and Second sit where they were. The Chronicler keeps weaving around those present with the film camera.*

**FIRST**

All right, rookie—everything clear on Form Point?

**SECOND**

Affirmative—seems clear. If anything, I think I'll figure it out as I go.

*Meanwhile, the Housekeeper finishes making the bed, smoothing the coverlet with final touches, straightening the pillow. Then she goes to the coat rack and puts on her hat. The Chronicler follows her, filming her from different angles.*

**FIRST**

Of course you will. All right—on to the Park.

**HOUSEKEEPER**

Boys—I'm done. I have to go to Her Grace.

**FIRST** *(turning)*

Where? Already?

*First rises from the desk, goes to the coat rack, takes the Housekeeper's cloak, and helps her into it. The Chronicler films First and the Housekeeper in turn, then both of them together.*

**HOUSEKEEPER** *(wiping her eyes with a black lace handkerchief pulled from the inner pocket of her cloak)*

Second, you know—there's no one like you. Be calm and strong today. Be the way I knew you, and will keep you forever in my heart.

*The Housekeeper hugs First impulsively and kisses him on the lips. First returns the favor.*

**FIRST** *(holding the Housekeeper)*

There, there... *(sighs)* So you're leaving too...

*The Chronicler films.*

*Suddenly a short ring sounds; the red gridded lamp lights up, and the Display shows the view from the camera mounted outside the gates. Two figures in gray hooded cloaks are shifting their weight at the gate.*

*Still holding the dressed Housekeeper, First looks at the screen, then releases her and goes to the desk.*

**FIRST**

Hold on—must be the Festives delivery. *(takes the microphone)* Over, over. Who are you? Identify yourselves, over. This is First, over!

*One courier pulls back the hood, revealing long chestnut hair. The second figure stands beside her without removing the hood.*

**COURIER** (*snapping to attention*)

Pharmaceutical Courier Service. We have a special Festives parcel, ordered delivered to Object post house No. 1 personally, into the hands of the bearer of the order code, against signature. Order number two-six-seven-nine-three-zero. Permission to enter?

**FIRST**

Why two of you? Parcel heavy?

**COURIER**

Negative. Parcel is light. I have a trainee with me—first run. Gaining experience.

**FIRST**

Ah. IDs ready.

**HOUSEKEEPER**

All right, I'm off. Farewell, First. Boy, I'll come the way we agreed.

**SECOND**

Yes, of course. As we agreed—so you come.

**FIRST**

Farewell.

*First takes the sawn-off down from the wall. The Housekeeper takes her umbrella and valise, and both go outside. The Housekeeper mounts her bicycle and rides off somewhere into the wings, steering with one hand and holding her open umbrella over herself with the other.*

*First goes to the gates. Unlocking the padlock and removing the chain, First—aiming the gun into the opening—swings the gates open.*

**FIRST**

All right. Show me.

*The couriers simultaneously hold out their open red IDs. First studies them, lowers the sawn-off, gestures them through, and follows behind. They all enter the post house.*

*Right in the doorway, they are met by the Chronicler's camera aimed at their faces. The Chronicler backs away from the entering couriers, cranking the film camera. Once inside, the girl also pulls back her hood. Her hair is cropped short.*

**COURIER**

Forgive me. Under current pharmaceutical delivery rules, I do not have the right to hand over special parcels in the presence of devices that record what is occurring.

**FIRST**

Object man, you hear that? Maybe take a break?

**THE CHRONICLER** (*lowering the camera*)

I believe I can interrupt the recording for a short stretch of time without violating codex rules.

**FIRST**

Good lad. Go sit down—you're making my eyes cross. You two—over to the desk. I'll check the code.

*The couriers obediently come in and stand by the writing desk. The Chronicler goes over and, staring straight ahead, sits on the folding canvas chair he assembled earlier, first placing the camera on the dining table. First rummages through the papers on the desk and finally finds the right one.*

**FIRST**

Right. Order code... Order code two-one-five-five. Check it, kids.

**COURIER** (*to the trainee*)

The recipient has stated the order code; now we verify it against the one in our waybill.

**TRAINEE** (*irritated, fast*)

I know. Hurry up—hurry. Don't keep the recipient waiting.

*The courier obediently rummages in the inner pocket of the cloak and, addressing First, pulls out a small, dense black pouch with large white digits "2155" printed on it.*

**COURIER** (*looking at the pouch*)

Yes—two-one-five-five. Correct. Hold it, I'll get the receipt.

*The courier hands the pouch to the trainee. She takes it, but suddenly the pouch—together with one of her hands—drops to the floor.*

*With her remaining hand, the trainee grabs her cheek, shakes her head, then crouches, picks the pouch up with the remaining hand, and holds it out to the courier. He takes it. The trainee searches the floor with her eyes for the prosthesis but doesn't see it.*

**TRAINEE** (*disconcerted*)

Please forgive me. I must've forgotten to strap it on. How is that... I'm so sorry. This is so awkward... Please forgive me!

*Second, seated at the desk, bends down under it. Feeling around, he finds the prosthesis, straightens up, and hands it to the girl. The prosthesis is made of black wood, with hinged fingers that move, and ends in multiple leather straps with studs...*

**SECOND**

Here—you dropped it.

*The girl takes the prosthesis in her remaining hand, holding it by the straps so the wooden hand hangs down toward the floor.*

**TRAINEE**

Thank you—yes. And forgive me again, I—

**FIRST** (*gently*)

Don't worry, dear. It's nothing. So what—prosthesis hit the floor. But how are you going to work delivery like this, poor thing?

**COURIER** (*pleading*)

She does very well—this is the first time in the whole traineeship. If you wouldn't file a complaint, I wouldn't note the incident in the waybill.

**FIRST**

What am I, a monster? What complaints? All right—where do I sign?

**COURIER** (*holding out the receipt*)

Right here, please. Sign here.

*First takes the quill from the desk set, dips it in the inkwell, signs, and hands it back to the courier.*

**FIRST**

How did you end up without a hand, kid?

*The courier takes the signed receipt and hands the black pouch to First. First sets it on the writing desk.*

*Seeing the handover completed, the Chronicler comes alive—he springs up from the chair, grabs the camera, and resumes filming.*

**TRAINEE** (*cheerfully*)

As a child I went through a shop window with my hand. The glass chopped the hand off—so now I wear a wooden one. Forgive me again.

*An iPhone ringtone sounds. The trainee, handing the prosthesis to the courier, slips her one remaining hand into the inner pocket of her cloak, pulls out an iPhone, and looks at it.*

**TRAINEE**

Sorry. Hello. Mom? What? (*sobs*) When? (*through tears*) Yes—of course.

*The trainee sinks into a squat, covers her face with her hand, and cries. The Chronicler films her from every possible angle.*

**COURIER** (*alarmed*)

What happened?

**TRAINEE** (*sobbing*)

Dad just died. I need to... urgently... Sorry... Please forgive me.

*The courier helps the trainee stand up. The Chronicler films them.*

**COURIER**

Sorry... Sorry... Forgive us.

*The couriers hurry out of the post house. First, shaking his head, sees them off and locks the gates behind them, hanging the padlock on the chain. First returns into the post house. He goes to the desk, takes the black pouch in his hands, and examines it.*

*The Chronicler films First.*

**FIRST** *(sighs, searching for something on the table)*

Yours still alive, successor?

**SECOND**

My mother—yes. My father left in the last rotation. He was ill a long time, badly. The last half-rotation he never got out of bed—suffered a lot. And my mother and sister suffered with him.

*(sighs)*

*Meanwhile, First finds scissors on the table, snips open the black pouch, and pulls out a transparent bag with a red seal, packed tight with white powder. Weighing it in his hand, he squints and holds it up to the lamp. Then First goes to the kitchen block, sets two tumblers and a water carafe on the dining table, and lays a tablespoon beside them.*

**FIRST** *(sighs)*

Mine have been gone a long time. All right—so what do we... Let's do some Festives, you and me. Maybe you'll eat after all? Want some lamb soup? After the Festives you won't.

**SECOND**

Thanks, I'm not hungry.

**FIRST** *(pouring water from the carafe into the tumblers)*

All right, then—hold on. You've tried Festives before?

*First scoops powder from the bag with the spoon and stirs it into both tumblers of water.*

**SECOND** *(brightening, eyes shining)*

Of course. At university once a semester they'd award Festives to the top students. I got them every semester.

**FIRST** *(smirking)*

Well, look at you. Go on—award yourself. Chronicler, you joining us?

*The Chronicler, filming what's happening, comes up to the table.*

*Second also comes to the dining table and takes a tumbler in his hand.*

**THE CHRONICLER**

I am sincerely grateful for the offer, however I must decline, for the consumption of Festives is strictly contraindicated for me. You see, I have a secret perforation of the twelve-dimensional gland.

**FIRST**

Is that so... Fine. Then the successor and I will do your share. *(raises his tumbler, addressing Second)* Well, successor—as they say—don't disgrace yourself. You're a good lad, I can see, though a bit soft in that bookish way. That's university sediment—Her Grace will shake it off you fast. You just stay sharp. And if you doubt something, better check the Code-and-Degree Book one extra time, and don't be shy about asking Her Grace. She likes to bark, sure, but she won't punish you for nothing—and she'll always answer. Here. Good shift to you, successor—and, as they say, may your hand not tremble.

*First sticks his nose into the tumbler and takes a small inhale of the Festives solution. Then, coughing, he downs the rest in one gulp, shakes his head hard, and sets the tumbler on the table with a thud.*

*The Chronicler moves in close, filming tight shots of First.*

**SECOND** *(thrown off, staring at the tumbler in his hand)*

Thank you very much. But how did you do it with your nose? I've never tried that.

**FIRST** *(noticeably perked up, lively, cracking his knuckles and rolling his head like an athlete)*

Ah! That, rookie, is the post-guard way. If it's through the nose, Festives hit the nasal lining straight away and absorb right into the blood—meaning you feel the holiday through your nose immediately, ha-ha... Try it—just don't swallow too much or you'll choke. Just a little.

*Second carefully inhales a bit of the liquid from the tumbler and starts coughing; the cough passes quickly. He drinks the rest by mouth and perks up as well.*

**SECOND** *(drawing himself up, eyes shining, sets the tumbler down loudly; speaks fast, stumbling)*

You know, I'm so grateful for the reception—now I understand everything as it is. You... don't think—I catch on fast and I never doubt when making decisions. I only wanted to take notes out of respect for your experience and Object wisdom, but really I have a detailed memory—I remember forever everything I've seen or heard even once in my life. And I have no problems with punishment, no problems with execution—don't you worry. Honestly, I like both punishing and executing very much. Let me say a big thank you to you—for existing, for your years of service... And once again, from the bottom of my heart, congratulations on the seventy-rotation of your remarkable life. And... may I hug you? You're more than a father to me now.

**FIRST** *(moved, opening his arms to Second)*

Come here. Come. I can see they've sent me a real post guard to replace me. Come—I'll kiss you to bits. You've moved the old man, Fronk drop by your place.

*Second bursts into First's arms. They lock into a strong, post-guard embrace; First kisses Second for a long time.*

*Seeing one of the key scenes of the Light, the Chronicler hurries to capture it. He comes close to First and Second entwined in their professional embrace, circling them with the camera.*

**THE CHRONICLER** *(enraptured, filming the kissing post guards)*

Beautiful. A wonderful shot right now. Forgive me—could you continue a little longer? And if possible: your right hand to his nape, and gently stroke—like this, in a pastel, sensual half-tone.

**FIRST** (*pulling away from Second, displeased*)  
Alive again, are you—Fronk take your kiddies' souls!

**THE CHRONICLER** (*filming First, evenly*)  
Forgive, perhaps, a certain tactlessness on my part. Yet I must report that it is prompted in no way by insolence or, if you wish, licentiousness, but solely and only by the desire to capture as effectively as possible—for entry into the Chronicle—your first and last Object Light.

**FIRST** (*softening, sighs*)  
All right, I get it. What did you say—hand to the nape and stroke? Well then, rookie—shall we perform for the historical legacy?

**SECOND** (*wiping his lips with the back of his hand*)  
No problem at all.

**THE CHRONICLER**  
Then I beg you, I beg... Once again, everything as it was: embrace, kiss—and you, please, place your hand thus on his nape and gently stroke his honored gray hairs.

*First and Second lock into a staged embrace and perform what the Chronicler asks.*

**THE CHRONICLER** (*filming feverishly*)  
Yes. Exactly so. Perfect. Wonderful! Yes, yes—good. All right, all right.

*First and Second break apart. First, condescending but respectful, gives Second a fairly strong slap on the shoulder; Second, jokingly, snaps into a stance and throws First a playful pseudo-punch to the solar plexus.*

*The Chronicler films that too.*

**FIRST** (*smiling, takes a tumbler and dissolves another spoonful of Festives in it*)  
Eh—sent a good successor, Fronk take you. All right—one more half-and-half. I'll explain the Park, then we'll go—shift's coming up.

*The Chronicler films.*

**SECOND** (*with some doubt*)  
Won't it be too much?

**FIRST** (*cuts him off, cheerfully, stirring the tumbler with the spoon*)  
Don't worry. I know the measure. Come on.

*First drinks half the tumbler, grunts, and passes the remaining half to Second. Second takes it and downs it, wiping his mouth.*

**FIRST** (*shaking his head energetically*)  
All right. Off we go.

*First goes to the writing desk, reaches for the Display, and presses the red button three times in a row. The image of the Form wall remains unchanged.*

**FIRST** (*thrown off*)

There it is.

*First presses the button hard three more times. The Display answers with technical crackle and white noise.*

**FIRST** (*viciously, jabbing the red button at random*)

What is this, Fronk take their souls... There it is... Broke right in the shift. What can you do—sit down, I'll explain it to you without it. We need to tell Her Grace—she'll send technicians.

*First and Second go to the writing desk. Second sits in the armchair; First takes the chair beside him.*

**THE CHRONICLER** (*filming*)

Would you mind turning to face the Chronicle? As I understand it, the Display has lost its ordinary functionality and is therefore of no use to you now?

**FIRST**

It has—Fronk take its whole division. What can you do. Come on, rookie—face the Chronicle.

*First and Second turn their chairs to face the Chronicler. The Chronicler takes his folding canvas chair; sets it opposite them, and begins filming seated.*

**FIRST** (*speaking fast*)

Right then, rookie. Third point: the Post Park. Good place. Beautiful. You'll see it soon enough—we've got a shift there.

**SECOND** (*also speaking fast, over-articulating, working his jaw and lips*)

Ah—so that's where we'll be?

**FIRST**

There, there. Duties in the Post Park are few: point one—careful visual control from the post house; point two—functional patrol. On patrol you'll watch the places of repose and tend to them.

**SECOND** (*interrupting*)

What does it mean—watch and tend the places of repose? Could you be more specific?

**FIRST** (*a bit irritated, but somehow amused*)

Don't interrupt—I'm telling you now. The Festives are rushing in you, so rein them in.

**SECOND** (*cheerfully*)

Affirmative, sorry. I'm listening very, very carefully. But how do you—watch and tend? What do I do?

**FIRST** (*more irritated*)

I said don't interrupt, kid—I'm telling you now.

**SECOND** (*cheerfully*)

Affirmative, forgive me, listening attentively. And what ab—

**FIRST** (*cutting him off, viciously*)

Shut up, bitch. In the Park there are post-guard places of repose, each with an obelisk. In your responsibility zone there are about twenty. Your segment is between the Twelfth and the Second—marked by signs. You won't mix it up. Farthest segment, by the Object boundary with the forest. So: you must see that the obelisks don't tilt, the coating doesn't flake, and, in general, that the post-guard places of repose on your segment of the Object point remain in a permanent "premium-luxe" condition according to the catalogizer of object states of the Fronk Object Code—meaning: they must look freshly made, without the slightest blemish or damage; they must be tar-polished to a shine and smell pleasantly, but in moderation, of the aromatization liquid for places of repose, "Veteran-27".

**SECOND**

And where do I get it?

**FIRST** (*outright vicious*)

Get what, where?

**SECOND**

Tar, paint, the aromatizer, tools.

**FIRST** (*even faster and angrier*)

At the Park entrance there's a store—there you'll sign out tools, materials, and substances against receipt. The Superior will explain. That's not all. Point two on this point: tending Fronk's sacred oaks. On fresh places of repose, per the Fronk Code, Fronk's sacred oaks are planted. Your task on in-person patrol is to care for the sacred trees: water young saplings, carefully trim excess branches, and treat the trunks against pests.

**SECOND**

And—

**FIRST** (*completely vicious, faster*)

Silence.

**SECOND** (*cheerfully*)

Sorry. And—

**FIRST** (*cutting him off, driving the pace, practically rattling it off with hatred*)

Shut your mouth, you little shit. Patrol on your Park segment happens once a week and takes the entire Light, so you'll take food with you. Take a lamb portion from the soup, slice it thick. Take cold boiled potatoes, onions or garlic in segments, bread, salt, sugar. Don't forget cold chicory in the travel amphora. Pack the food in the field bag. Consume it outdoors during a break between Object tasks. Thank Fronk for the meal. Everything clear on the third point?

**SECOND**

Affirmative—everything clear. And—

*First springs to his feet, snaps to attention, raises his voice, almost shouting.*

**FIRST** (*shouting with fury*)

Are you fully prepared to carry out the actual part of the shift, successor?

*Second also springs to his feet and salutes, jerking his right hand—clenched in a fist—straight up. He speaks just as fast, cheerfully, over-articulating.*

**SECOND**

Fully prepared to carry out the actual part of the shift. Proud to serve! Glory to Fronk!

**FIRST** (*suddenly calm, also saluting with a fist; collected, energetic*)

Glory to Fronk! Good lad!

*First stands from the chair, takes the microphone from the table, presses it, and begins calling the Superior.*

**FIRST** (*shouting loudly*)

Your Grace, this is First, over, over—I am calling Your Grace, over.

*Technical crackle. The Superior comes on the line.*

**THE SUPERIOR** (*tired*)

Over, over. And why are you yelling like that, old man? Had a bit too much, from what I can tell. Over?

*First speaks a little quieter, but still loudly and very fast, accelerating toward the end of the line, over-articulating.*

**FIRST**

Over! Negative, Your Grace, over! The dosage of Festives we have consumed remains strictly within codex substance quotas, as evidenced by the visual record made by the Object's Chronicler, Your Grace, over. I called Your Grace in order to report completion of the transfer of practical-theoretical Object experience to the successor, over. We await Your Grace's directive blessing to advance to the performance of the actual part of the post-guard shift, Your Grace, over. Your Grace, hold on, over. Our Display has broken—shows no Object feeds at all, over. It must be repaired urgently, or the successor will be unable to carry out visual control, Your Grace, over! It must be repaired by sunrise, Your Grace, over! And the line!

**THE SUPERIOR**

Over, over. Got you, old man. We'll fix it right after sunrise—just don't yell. Successor—how are you? Ready for the actual part?

**SECOND** (*snapping to attention, taking the microphone, speaking just as loudly*)

Over, Your Grace! Ready for the actual part of the shift and subsequent Object service, Your Grace, over! I request Your Grace's directive blessing for the factual performance of the shift, over!

**THE SUPERIOR** (*iron in her voice*)

For the actual part of the shift, I hereby, by directive order, grant my most merciful blessing in the name of Fronk the All-Gracious, the Compassionate, to both post guards—First and his successor. That's it—I want it nice and quiet, no surprises. Hear me, First, over? No sur-pri-ses.

**FIRST** (*taking the microphone from Second; loud, energetic*)

Yes, yes, over, Your Grace—do not trouble yourself, Your Grace. I'm tired, Your Grace, honestly, over.

**THE SUPERIOR** (*cheerfully*)

So that's when you'll rest, over. All right—boys—so that, as they say, the heart doesn't flinch and the hand doesn't tremble. Don't offend the Chronicler—obey him. Successor: by the Light we'll fix the line and the Display, and for now start with the recordings, get some sleep—and start Object service with a clear head, over?

**SECOND** (*taking the microphone from First; cheerful, energetic*)

Affirmative, Your Grace, over. I, Your—

**THE SUPERIOR** (*cutting in*)

Chrony—you'll finish filming to the end and cut it properly.

**THE CHRONICLER** (*lowering the camera, taking the microphone*)

Over, Your Grace, do not trouble—

**THE SUPERIOR** (*cutting in*)

First—goodbye. That's it, boys—someone's here. End of transmission. Out.

*The Superior disconnects with a crackle.*

**FIRST** (*energetic, loud, vicious*)

The instrument is yours now—you carry it.

*Second gives a short nod, silently puts on his cloak, pulls up the hood, takes the sawn-off from the wall, and goes outside.*

*The Chronicler stops filming, cases the camera, folds up his little chair, puts on his cloak and raincoat, and goes outside as well.*

*First dresses quickly, then for a while wanders in distracted, nervous bursts around the post house: he goes to the desk, straightens papers, peers into the refrigerator, stirs the glowing coals in the fireplace with the poker. He does everything quickly and with a kind of anxious haste. Then, standing at the exit and looking the post house over one last time, First pulls up his hood—making him visually identical to the Second who went out earlier—switches off the light, and leaves last.*

# SHIFT

*In pitch darkness, a lone lamp hanging from a pole burns; in its sparse rays, a flurry of tiny rain droplets scatters across the figures.*

*Directly beneath the lamp stands the Chronicler, cranking the handle of his film camera. A short distance away, facing each other at attention, stand First and Second. First stands at the edge of a dug pit—its outline must be clearly visible to the audience. In the dim light, tree shadows sway across the stage; black silhouettes of obelisks are visible, vanishing into an imagined perspective.*

**FIRST** (*loud, vicious*)

Successor—pre-prepare—for the actual execution of the post-guard Object shift!

**SECOND** (*loud, cheerful*)

Prepared for the actual execution of the post-guard Object shift. Awaiting the predecessor's order for the final actual execution of the post-guard Object shift.

**THE CHRONICLER** (*pleading*)

I do apologize, but could the successor step a couple of paces to the right, toward the light source? The arrangement of light and shadow will be much more advantageous.

*Second obediently shifts a couple of steps toward the lamp.*

**FIRST** (*loud, vicious*)

Fuck off, Fronk your mother's soul. Shift execution instrument—on your shoulder!

**SECOND** (*loud, cheerful*)

Shift execution instrument—on shoulder!

*Second raises the sawn-off and aims at First.*

**FIRST** (*loud, vicious*)

I order the successor to actually carry out the post-guard Object shift in the name of Fronk the All-Gracious, the Compassionate, on the final count of three. I begin the execution count. One! Two! Three!

*On "three," a shot rings out. First drops like a sack into the pit. Second lowers the sawn-off and, after a moment, peers into the pit with a kind of bewilderment. A faint wisp of smoke curls above the pit.*

**THE CHRONICLER** (*unctuously*)

Captured. (*He lowers the camera and approaches the new First at the pit's edge.*) I dare to inform you that the recording of the Object post-guard shift—intended for subsequent entry into the Chronicle—has been completed. Allow me, from the bottom of my heart, to thank you for your sensitive participation in the chronicling process and to wish you, on your Object path, every possible blessing.

**SECOND** (*a little bewildered*)

Hm... Yes, thank you. But... what now?

## THE CHRONICLER

Now one must cover it over. There—the digging kit. (*indicates something on the ground to the new First*) And with that, allow me to take my leave—I have very much to do today.

## SECOND (*absently*)

Yes, yes. Goodbye.

*The Chronicler packs the camera into the sack, tips his bowler, exits toward the left wing, and disappears from the dramatic-literary work “The Post” entirely.*

*The successor bends, takes a shovel, and carefully begins to fill in the pit with the predecessor.*

*The stage light fades smoothly to black.*

# FAREWELL

*The post house. By the exit stand three suitcases of different sizes. On the bed sits a gray-haired woman bareheaded, with her face buried in her hands; a down shawl lies over her shoulders. She is quietly crying. At her feet, his head on her knees, First kneels.*

## FIRST (*dully*)

It's time. Transport's waiting.

## FIRST'S SPOUSE (*sniffing*)

The lamb pies are on the table under a towel—eat them while they're fresh. Sweep the floor at least, you'll get buried in filth.

## FIRST (*downcast*)

What's there for me—one week left. The Housekeeper will sweep now. And don't sob, for Fronk's sake—you're tearing my soul apart. You'll get to the city, you'll have things to do, you'll start that little cherry orchard.

## FIRST'S SPOUSE (*through tears, cradling her husband's head*)

To Fronk with that orchard, me alone.

## FIRST (*rising from his knees*)

Come on. Get up. We'll hug goodbye—and you'll go.

*The woman rises from the bed, unsteady, throws her arms around First and kisses him. They remain in an embrace for about two minutes. The Spouse is crying.*

## FIRST (*sighing heavily*)

Come on, my dear—don't break the rules. Transport won't wait, and you'll be in trouble. You know Her Grace.

## FIRST'S SPOUSE (*shouting, hysterical*)

To hell with her—our Grace. I'm not going anywhere without you. Let them finish us together.

*First pushes his spouse away and, swinging his arm, slaps her across the face. She jerks her head, starts sobbing even harder, and backs away from First toward the door, frightened.*

**FIRST** *(shouting with fury)*

Go, idiot! Into the transport—now—and to the city, bitch, or I'll cripple you myself. Go. Go—get out, now!

*First grabs the woman by the arm and drags her toward the door. After a while he returns, takes her outer clothes from the coat rack, grabs two suitcases, and goes out. Then he comes back once more, takes the last suitcase, and exits again.*

*The light fades smoothly to black.*

# LULLABY

*The post house. At the desk sits the new First. A desk lamp is lit. The Display hisses with white noise. In front of the new First lies an open black folio. The new First reaches for the quill, dips it in the inkwell, and begins writing in careful calligraphy.*

**NEW FIRST** *(carefully forming the letters in the folio, tongue-tip out, muttering to himself)*

In the seventh Dark of the five hundred twenty-eighth rotation since Fronk's repose, the new First, by this entry, opens the personal period of Object post-guard service. And signature.

*The new First flourishes his autograph in the book, closes it, and neatly straightens the desk. An iPhone ringtone sounds.*

*The new First takes an iPhone from the pocket of his vest, looks at it, and raises it to his ear.*

**NEW FIRST**

Why aren't you asleep, my dear? She's gone, has she? Mom will be back soon, my good girl. What? Just a bad dream, sis, so let's have you quickly back into bed, my dear, close your eyes, and count white sheep. What? Count up to five hundred and then start counting again. What? I'm on post, sis—I'm not allowed to sing on post. What? All right then—but you lie down in bed and close your little eyes.

*The new First brings the iPhone to his mouth and begins to hum, a little off-key, the melody of some lullaby. He hums for about a minute, then listens to the phone, hangs up, and slips it back into the pocket of his vest.*

*The new First switches off the desk lamp, the Display, then turns off the main light in the post house. He goes to the bed, takes off his glasses, sets them on the nightstand, undresses, gets under the blanket, and turns off the light above the bed.*

*The stage lights go out.*

# THE END

*AUTHOR'S NOTE ON THE PLAY "THE POST"*

*The video projection is a central element of the stage space and a continuation of the diptych's system of continuity. In the projection, formulas, fragments of regulations, recurring words and instructions, as well as elements of the Chronicle and of fixation may appear. The video functions as an architecture of language: the text is not so much read as it structures the stage space. The projection emphasizes the ritual and institutional character of what is happening and intensifies the impression of a closed system. Repetitions, delays, and visual monotony are permissible and functional. The projection does not comment on the action; it confirms its procedural character by turning the language of power into a visible, oppressive environment.*

*AUTHOR'S NOTE ON THE DIPTYCHON ON CONTINUITY ("THE CHASE" / "THE POST")*

*The video projection is a continuous element of the diptych and ensures continuity between both plays. In "The Chase" it appears as an overflowing, mythological, overheated text layer—as cosmogony, ideological noise, unformed doctrine. In "The Post" the same textual material transforms into a purified residue: code, formula, regulation, instruction. The projection fixes the evolution of one and the same language of power—from chaotic myth to institutionalized norm. Within the diptych it is understood as an autonomous bearer of meaning that is not subordinated to the dialogue and does not duplicate it, but makes the system as a whole visible.*

