

KATURIAN. No. Should I have?

TUPOLSKI. "Should I have?" Good answer. "Should I have?" Kind of lily-livered and subservient on the one hand, yet vaguely sarcastic and provocative on the other. "Should I have?"

KATURIAN. I wasn't trying to be provocative.

TUPOLSKI. Were you trying to be subservient?

KATURIAN. No.

TUPOLSKI. Then you were trying to be provocative. And now Ariel is going to hit you again ...

KATURIAN. Listen, I don't understand what I'm doing here. I don't know what you want me to say. I don't have anything against anybody. Any Jews or you or anybody. I just write stories. That's all I do. That's my life. I stay in and I write stories. That's it. *(Ariel stands, moves to the door.)*

ARIEL. This reminds me. I'm going to talk to the brother. *(Ariel exits, Tupolski smiles.)*

KATURIAN. *(Stunned, scared.)* My brother's at school.

TUPOLSKI. Me and Ariel, we have this funny thing, we always say, "This reminds me" when the thing hasn't really reminded us of the thing we're saying it reminds us of at all. It's really funny.

KATURIAN. My brother's at school.

TUPOLSKI. Your brother is one door down.

KATURIAN. *(Pause.)* But he'll be scared ...

TUPOLSKI. You seem a little scared yourself.

KATURIAN. I *am* a little scared.

TUPOLSKI. What are you scared about?

KATURIAN. I'm scared my brother is all alone in a strange place, and I'm scared your friend is gonna go kick the shit out of him, and I'm scared he's gonna come kick the shit out of me again although if he does it's okay, I mean I'd rather he didn't but if there's something in these stories you don't like then go ahead and take it out on me, but my brother gets frightened easily, and he doesn't understand these things and he's got nothing to do with these stories anyway, I've only ever read them to him, so I just think it's completely unfair you should've brought him down here and I think you should just fucking go and fucking let him out of here right now! Right fucking now!

TUPOLSKI. *(Pause.)* I bet you're all adrenaline now, aren't you, all "Ooh just shouted at a policeman," all "Ooh probably shouldn't've but ooh got really angry." Ooh. Calm the fuck down. Alright? Do you think we're animals?

KATURIAN. No.

TUPOLSKI. Well, we're not animals. We *deal*, sometimes, with animals. We're not animals. *(Pause.)* Your brother will be fine. I give you my word. *(Tupolski looks at another story from the pile.)* "The Tale of the Three Gibbet Crossroads." This does not have your theme, it seems.

KATURIAN. What theme?

TUPOLSKI. Y'know, your theme, "Some poor little kid gets fucked up." Your theme.

KATURIAN. That isn't a theme. Some of them have come out that way. That isn't a theme.

TUPOLSKI. Although maybe, in an oblique way, it *does* have your theme.

KATURIAN. I don't have themes. I've written, what, four hundred stories, and maybe ten or twenty have children in?

TUPOLSKI. Have *murdered* children in.

KATURIAN. So, what, this is about stories with murdered children in? Do you think I'm trying to say, "Go out and murder children"?

TUPOLSKI. I'm not saying you're trying to say "Go out and murder children." *(Pause.)* Are you trying to say, "Go out and murder children"?

KATURIAN. No! No bloody way! Are you kidding? I'm not trying to say anything at all! That's my whole thing.

TUPOLSKI. I know, I know, your whole thing, the first duty of a storyteller is to ...

KATURIAN. Yes ...

TUPOLSKI. ... Blah blah blah, I know. This "Three Gibbet Crossroads" ...

KATURIAN. If there are children in them, it's incidental. If there is politics in them, it's incidental. It's *accidental*.

TUPOLSKI. Except, the thing is, don't interrupt me when I'm talking ...

KATURIAN. No, I'm sorry ...

TUPOLSKI. If I ask you something outright, or if I go with my eyes, like, "Go ahead and say something," like with my eyes, then you go ahead and say something, but if I'm in the middle of something ...

KATURIAN. I know, I'm sorry ...

TUPOLSKI. And you're fucking doing it again! Did I ask you something outright?! Did I go with my eyes like, "Go ahead and say something"?!?

KATURIAN. No.