

J A M U
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Theatre Faculty

IT HAS TO BE DONE

Josef Nosál

1st prize in
“Havlovské aktovky”
Contest for the best mini-drama based on a play by Václav Havel
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Theatre Faculty JAMU in collaboration
with The Václav Havel Library Foundation v New Yorku

CHARACTERS:

HEADMASTER

SECRETARY

TEACHER

VOICES (male, female, children, adults)

Headmaster's office. Or a teacher's office. Secretary's office. A room we're all familiar with. A door on the left, a large glass window on the right, white winter light shining through and a distant sound of birdsong permeating. A table microphone near the window, a radio-like device next to it. A desk with a computer beside it, perpendicularly next to it another desk with stacks and folders. A coat rack at the back left, two armchairs, a small table between them, a painting hanging above them. To the right of them are bookcases, on one line a bust of Jan Amos Comenius. The door opens. The HEADMASTER enters, leaving the door open, the words "Headmaster is an asshole" scrawled on the door's panel.

HEADMASTER: *(on phone)* Yes, yes, today, I might do it today. Bye mum, bye, love you. *(hides the phone in his coat pocket; towards the open door)* Yes Georgina, coffee is a great idea, thank you. What? Yes, double, please. Triple, actually. Thank you. *(he is distracted; he takes off his coat, hangs it on the coat rack, but keeps his winter hat with the pompom, he doesn't notice it; sometimes he swallows loudly and clearly)* Okay, Boris, today is the day. Yeah, definitely yes. Good. What time is it? Eight thirty. Excellent. Excellent. I-deal timing. They're all already in class. The sooner the better. The sooner the better, Boris. *(knock on door)* Come in!

(SECRETARY enters.)

HEADMASTER: Come in, Georgina. Oh, you brought a dessert? You baked that? *(SECRETARY nods. Not once in this play will she speak.)* You've always been my loyal secretary. A good friend of mine. And you are still! Yes! And the kids know it. *(A little gloomily)* Yes, the children know that you are de facto my right-hand man. *(Sigh, during the following speech he takes a sip of coffee, a bite of the dessert, in the meantime pulling things out of his satchel, at the end he pulls out a red envelope that is obviously dear to him)* How many laughs have we had, haven't we, Georgie? How many bastards have I spoken to here when you've just walked in without knocking, as you always do. You have shown me that sometimes it is necessary to laugh, well, yes, you are my sun. The only one. They say that children are our little sunshine, but *(laughs)* our children here have long gone out and turned into black holes. Georgie, please, do you have any messages for me? *(SECRETARY hands him paper slips, HEADMASTER reads them, grows solemn)* Sure. Other pupils demand less homework, more time outside. Huh. They wish. THEY WISH. *(He taps the last piece of paper with his index finger)* And Mr Pudding again. Of course. Thank you. The coffee is excellent, as always! And the dessert as well. You can go now. And - wait! *(he opens a drawer, pulls out a transparent envelope, inside a pile of banknotes).* Here you go. Then lock yourself in the office. And the key... you can swallow the key. No, you cannot, you have to. *(Shakes her hand)* Farewell. May everything you've ever wanted come true. Probably it

was not to work as a secretary at the primary school, was it? *(A weak laugh, which quickly turns to silence)* Goodbye, Georgie.

(SECRETARY leaves)

HEADMASTER: *(Wipes his face, realises he's wearing the hat, slowly peels off the envelope)* Okay. Here we go. It's gonna be a fight, Boris, you might get killed, but it has to be. It's for their own good. For the good of us all. It has to be. Otherwise, they would have died in this, in this contemporary world. They will die anyway, of course, but they will be happier, happier... more educated! Which is, of course, a prerequisite for being happy. Of course, they will be educated. After today, they will be. There's, there's no other way. *(He finally opens the envelope. There's a knock at the exact moment when he's halfway through pulling out the papers that were hidden in the envelope)* Come in!

(TEACHER enters, before he can say anything, HEADMASTER sticks out a warning finger)

HEADMASTER: Oh, Mr Pudding. Let me do the talking, if you'd be so kind. I know what you're coming for. A little while ago, I read the note you left for me with Georgina. *(Pauses significantly)* But my answer is no. Just like last week, just like last month and just like the month before the last one, Mr Pudding. I won't permit outings with your pupils. No! Silence! Silence! You would always contradict me with something, you would always cut in on me, but not today, Mr Pudding, today I'll put a stop to all of you, lazy pupils and lazy teachers, once and for all on those muzzles of yours *(he gets angrier and redder with every sentence)*, who only make excuses, Mr Pudding, you don't want to teach, so you want to go out with the pupils *(he rummages through the slips, then grabs the right one and reads from it)* to "teach them real nature and, with real examples that they may encounter in life, teach them new things that they wouldn't pick up in a regular classroom." You keep bugging me about this, Mr Pudding. You're wearing - me - out! And you even have the nerve to come in here! Just today! You can't vanquish me, Mr Pudding! Neither with your personality, which tries to be funny at all costs, while being just as awkward, nor with your ideas for teaching! You've really gone mad, Mr Pudding! No, you didn't even have any sense in the first place, so how could you possibly go mad! NO is NO! And you think you'd try it a third time, maybe the clown headmaster will ease up, but, but I'm sick of you! *(HEADMASTER paces the room, stomping, raging. The white winter light outside the windows turns red, the birds singing intensifies into some unnatural haunting mixture of odd sounds. TEACHER standing at the door, shaking his head, not knowing whether to be amused or offended)* You and your outdoor education ideas! With your ability, those stinkers would have gone lost! The bastards take it as a free class! They're begging me for similar ideas as you do, every - day. Just to skive off! So they don't have to learn! What?! Are you laughing at me?! How can a teacher who is constantly receiving complaints from assholes, teachers and parents laugh in the face of the last solid pillar of our education system?! Where does he get the COURAGE?! *(He takes the statue of Jan Amos Comenius, but it is heavy, so before he can throw it at the TEACHER, it slips and shatters.)* OUT! Get out! And pack your things! You're fired by the end of the semester! No! Now! You're sacked without notice! Experts like you, that's all I needed. Out!

(TEACHER takes a breath, wants to say something, but when he sees the angry HEADMASTER, he just slams the door angrily. The light and the birds singing calm down, but the light still seems darker and the birds sound scarier. Headmaster returns to the envelope, takes out the papers, folds them on his desk to keep them neatly organised, takes a sip of coffee – slurps disgustingly – and sits down at the table with the microphone. He’s all red. He’s ready.)

HEADMASTER: *(clears his throat, chuckles ominously)* What did you hesitate about before, Boris? No big fuss. Why hesitate. Let’s bring it to them. *(Presses the button on the device next to the microphone. Somewhere in the distance, the sounds of speakers that have just been switched on can be heard. Throughout the speech there is a muffled distant echo of Headmaster’s words in the distance)* I beg your attention, I repeat, your Headmaster begs the attention of all pupils and teachers. *(Short pause)* Thank you. *(In an excessively pleasant voice)* My dear pupils. My dearest pupils, folks! First of all, I want to wish you a good Monday! And now to the point. Together with the teaching staff, I am guiding you not only on the path of growth, but also on the path of life. We teach you, we educate you. We teachers are still going against the current trends, against laziness! *(Pause)* My dearest pupils! *(Much more seriously)* I’m going to have to ask you to do something. It won’t be easy. But it’s not supposed to be. Let’s say goodbye to easy things. We, the teachers, and you, the pupils. No more looking for shortcuts. I need you to follow me. Entrust your future to your Headmaster and you will be the most respected people on the planet. Because there’s no other way. You’re stupid. Dumber than your parents. Dumber than any generation before you. The average of grades is increasing each term. Soon we won’t be good enough for a grade of five. Maybe not even six. We can’t have that. We cannot have that! And – no. I don’t admit any fault on the part of the teachers. We do our best, we work like dogs, we sweat our guts out, we don’t sleep, no, we don’t sleep, the teaching is our mission and you? What do you give us in return? Nothing. Nothing at all. That’s why we’re changing the schedules effective tomorrow. Classes will be starting at seven. To get more done in a day. Even first graders. Each course will take not forty-five minutes, but ninety. The first half will be devoted to a thorough oral examination. There will be at least ten pupils tested in this way every class. As for the breaks, their length remains. Ten minutes. We got rid of the 20-minute ones last year. However, in the last five minutes there will be a short test. Those who finish early will still be able to enjoy their time off. *(The echo is slowly drowned out by noise, the creaking of school desks, very distant whistling, booing, stomping)* Silence! I order you to be quiet! Or we’ll implement these changes with i-mme-di-ate effect. *(The noise dies down; HEADMASTER continues reading from the sheets)* There. I thought so. We’re adding more math, English, physics, chemistry, everything. Two foreign languages are not enough. The world is becoming more and more open, so we are adding a third. The ban on telephones remains in place. Classes end at six. That’s why we’re cancelling the leisure clubs. They’re already taking up a lot of your time. *(The noise gets louder again, it starts snowing outside, HEADMASTER speaks faster)* Silence! Sit down! I beg the teachers to calm their pupils down! I am asking you to trust me, to follow me on this enlightened path, my dearest pupils! Once we stand at the end of it, you become something incredible! To avoid taking a break from you, I’ll read the rest of the news quickly. Every day, even at the weekend, you enter everything you have learned that day into the

school system by 9 pm. The following class you will confirm your knowledge with a test. (*Knocking on the door, slamming the handle, locked, HEADMASTER is scared but at the same time determined to finish his speech*) The required reading list grows to one hundred and twenty-five books for the semester starting tomorrow. And to learn how to work with resources, each of you – (*a brick flies through the window, snow starts falling inside. HEADMASTER jumps up, takes the microphone in his hand*) RETURN TO YOUR PLACES AT ONCE! The pupil who just broke my window will be punished severely! Which reminds me! (*The door is now being banged on, more objects are being thrown through the window, including textbooks, cases, books*) We will physically punish you again! You can't dare to do what you are currently doing!

VOICES (*children, adults, men, women, through the door, outside*): Call everything off now!

HEADMASTER: (*He tries to speak into the microphone, but after the first two words the power goes out; he drops the microphone; from now on he speaks normally*) Hear me out, for God's sake! Damn it! We have to do it! It's a necessity! Teachers, calm them down! And turn the power back on! (*Peeks out the window*) Stop it, you bastards, or I'll expel you!

VOICES (*from the window*): That's exactly what we want!

VOICES (*from the door*): Call it off! Call it off! (*thunderous bangs, someone is hitting with a hammer, the painting is shaking*) Call it off!

HEADMASTER: No! Even if you had to tear me apart like a mangy dog! I won't call it off! It's pointless! You have no choice but to surrender to the future! After all, it is YOUR future! Give it up! If anything happens to me, my successor is arranged. He knows everything! He agrees with everything! (*The hammer tears through the canvas of the painting, soon a large compass foot appears in it, trying to stab him*) That's enough! I'm calling the police! Where's my phone? (*He tries to approach the coat rack, but there is the compass circling, the bangs continue, plaster is crumbling, books are falling from the bookcase*) Teachers, take the pupils to your classrooms and calm them down! We'll sort everything out calmly!

VOICES: The teachers are here with us! Call it off! CALL IT OFF!

HEADMASTER: (*He walks across the room, on one side things are still flying through the window, snow is appearing on the sill, occasionally something hits him, on the other side they've already kicked through the door, its boards are slowly splitting, soon it'll break off*) I'M NOT CALLING IT OF!

I'M NOT CALLING IT OF! OVER MY DEAD BODY!

(*Suddenly silence. Quiet. Then bang! BOOM. The door flies wide open. Lights out. Curtain.*)