

SAMPLE  
TRANSLATION

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IF I ONLY HAD TIME

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## Evald Flisar: If I Only Had Time

### What the host told his guest

The apartment at the top of the seven-story building looks across Central Park to the west. Although the sun has not risen so far as to shine through the big windows, the apartment is lit as if by the glow of an invisible light. The rugs are thick and soft; the antique furniture in the living room is massive and comfortable; the paintings look as if they are portraits of reputable ancestors. The bathroom is so spacious that it could hold ten fat Americans. The Jacuzzi is bordered with tiles, each one different, each mosaic square followed by a rectangular one, each composed of a different combination of colours. The mirror behind the four sinks covers the wall up to the ceiling. A fleeting glance in the mirror gives Simon the feeling that he has caught a thief; he quickly retreats into the hallway. The kitchen and dining area is completely white, modern, clean, sterile, furnished with all the newest appliances. The refrigerator is so tall it almost touches the ceiling. A crystal vase filled with fresh red roses stands on the table. A yellow envelope is propped against the vase. On it are written the words OPEN IT.

Simon hesitates. Maybe Vincent Vega left a message for the cleaning lady. Or for his lover, which would explain the rose. When he examines the envelope, he notices it isn't sealed. He pulls out the sheet of paper and unfolds it.

"Welcome to the Big Apple, Simon. I'm sorry I wasn't waiting for you. I will be away for several days. Make yourself at home. Avail yourself of anything you find in the kitchen; there is some excellent wine there. Don't be shy. Apex Catering will supply your meals. If you do not like something, let them know. For additional instructions, go into the living room and press the red button on the black answering machine next to the green phone on the mahogany cupboard in front of the French windows."

Simon places the letter down on the table and turns toward the living room. He stands in the doorway and looks around again. The luxury strikes him even more than it did the first time; but now he is more relaxed, feels safer. The seating arrangement alone, all in light brown leather, would cost more than a decent studio apartment in Ljubljana. A big screen stands in the corner by the window; Simon knows that this is called a home cinema. Under the screen, behind the glass doors of a two-meter wide cupboard, is a carefully sorted collection of DVDs. There are at least a thousand films there. A good guy, this Vincent Vega.

A padded easy chair with a high backrest is situated in front of the screen. Something that looks like a remote control sits on the small table next to it. In this chair, with a view onto Central Park, which looks more like a forest than a park, in front of a screen that is at least two meters wide, with a collection of what are probably the best films of all times, Simon could spend at least a half a year without missing a thing. Except for books. He is amazed that he doesn't see any books in the apartment. Apparently Vincent Vega is a visual type of person. Maybe he doesn't read at all, although he seems extremely literate. It is there, the mahogany cupboard, in front of the French windows, and sitting on it, the black answering machine next to the green telephone. Simon approaches it and reaches out his hand to press the red button.

Something holds him back. A feeling rises within him, a feeling he doesn't know how to name, and this causes him to hesitate. Everything is happening too fast. Everything seems hardly believable. His heart pounds. First he must make sense of his impressions. He must calm down. The harmony of all the different colours in the apartment fills him with anxiety: everything is too beautiful, too perfect. He still can only half believe that all of this is really happening. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out his cell phone to send a test message to Violeta. Or Soraya. Or at least his mother. Wish you were here. I am in New York. Something is happening that exceeds the boundaries of imagination. I am both exhilarated and filled with anxiety that might turn to panic at any moment. I think I need help. My life, always so ordinary, so Ljubljana ordinary, is slowly changing into fiction. And yet it is all very real.

Too long for a text message. He decides he would rather smoke a cigarette. He notices an ashtray beside the remote control for the home cinema on the table next to the easy chair. An unusual ashtray, cut from a multi-coloured stone that, though not glass, appears transparent. Simon reaches into his pocket and pulls out a box of cigarettes, lights one, and inhales deeply. He sits in the easy chair and rocks gently back and forth. Despite his fatigue, he suddenly feels as if he's just woken up, full of energy and hope, even trust. Life is happening to him.

He smokes two more cigarettes. While doing so, he stands up four times to press the red button, but each time he changes his mind at the last moment. He notices that his nails are dirty. He stands up and goes to the foyer where he left his baggage. He rummages for a key in the inside pocket of his jacket he hasn't yet taken off and uses it to unlock the suitcase on wheels. He looks for his toiletry bag, rummages through it, and pulls out a little pair of nail clippers. He returns to the living room with them, sits in the easy chair, and begins to clean his nails. All the while his cigarette is hanging between his lips. If he lowers his eyes, he can see that the tower of ash that has been accumulating at the burning end of the cigarette will fall any second. He takes hold of the cigarette to flick it into the object that he has identified as an ashtray but perhaps is not. Too late: when he leans forward the ash falls onto the precious carpet. And after it, the burning ember falls from the cigarette paper and, before Simon can put it out with the sole of his shoe, burns a big black stain into the carpet.

Simon stands up and looks at it. It measures about three centimetres across. Could he cover it if he moved the easy chair a bit? He reaches out his hand but then reconsiders. Sooner or later Vincent Vega would discover what happened: he would know who was at fault and who tried to hide the traces behind him. Simon decided he would apologize for the error as soon as Vincent Vega stepped across the threshold. But he wouldn't have to do it today. For several days he would be completely alone.

Almost unconsciously he pressed down on the button.

He hears a voice that is similar to Dustin Hoffman's voice. In fact it is so similar that Dustin Hoffman himself might have recorded the message.

"Hello, Simon. Vincent Vega speaking. First I would like to tell you this: smoking causes lung cancer and for that reason there is no smoking allowed in the apartment. I hope you will respect this rule. If you must smoke, do it on the balcony. You can lean against the balcony, look out at Central Park, and flick your ashes onto Fifth Avenue below. The wind will scatter them before they fall on somebody's head. Second: look around the apartment. Don't feel embarrassed. Go to sleep if you are tired. You can sleep in my bedroom. The bedding is clean. You can sleep in the library where the couch folds out. You'll also find a secret cupboard there. If you look at the shelves behind the door, third shelf from the bottom,

you'll find a mock copy of Conrad's novel *Nostromo*. Press very gently on the letter N and it will open on its own. Put the package that my friend gave you inside and press on the letter N again and the cupboard will close. That's the only mock book; all the others are real. If you want to read, read. If you want to watch films, you have certainly found them already. If you feel sick, call Dr. Barnard who is my personal physician. His number is saved in the telephone directory under Body. If you feel depressed, look under Mind for the number of my psychoanalyst, Dr. Woody Allen. You can trust him. He's good. He knows how to listen. One more thing before I finish. The cleaning lady comes each morning. Her name is Esmeralda. She's from Mexico. She won't trouble you. She has her own key. She knows you are here. She's young and very sexy. Enjoy. More later."

The light next to the button stops blinking. Simon is seized by a terrible fatigue. A sleepless night, the flight from his pursuers, the avalanche of novelties in the apartment, and no doubt also his sickness, have all overwhelmed him. He decided to have a couple hours of sleep. First he goes to the kitchen and pours a glass of water. Then he returns to the hall and opens the door to the room on the left. He looks at the bookshelves covering the walls up to the ceiling and they take his breath away. Apparently Vincent Vega loves more than just films.

Of course, this doesn't mean that he's read any of the books; maybe he inherited them, maybe he just collects them. Yet the arrangement is like a library, each area designated with a label: Poetry, Novels, Short Stories, Essays, Plays, Philosophy, Psychology, Ecology, Politics, Law, History, Biography, Humour. The room is perhaps even more spacious than the living room. A single sunbeam penetrates the half closed venetian blinds, illuminating a bronze statue of a mermaid standing on a table in the corner near the door. An enormous globe stands by the window lit from within by a discreet bulb. Somewhere in the middle of the room, between the mermaid and the globe, a piano waits, with a rotating stool in front of it and a pile of music on the upper shelf. A comfortable extendable couch built into the bookshelves is located along the right wall.

And the secret cupboard? The third shelf from the bottom right behind the door. Simon finds it with no difficulty, and the first book in the section of Novels is indeed a mock copy of *Nostromo*. He carefully presses on the letter N. And he waits. Nothing happens. He waits again. Nothing. Did Vincent make it up? Then Simon remembers that on the recording he emphasized that it should be pressed very lightly. He tries one more time; this time he only touches the button with the tip of his finger. Something moves to the left of the shelf: six rows of books silently slide into a recess, revealing an opening that is a meter and a half wide and two meters high. Simon studies the contraption and realizes that the bookshelves slid three meters into the interior of the wall along metal tracks extending along floor and ceiling. On both sidewalls there are additional narrow metal shelves. Carefully arranged upon the shelves are packages of the kind that Simon had brought for Vincent Vega. The only difference is that the packages are no longer wrapped in paper but instead are ordinary light-brown boxes, each the same size. There must be at least thirty of them. Simon cannot resist the temptation: he reaches for the nearest one and lifts the lid. The box is empty. So is the second, the third, the fourth.

The mystery only deepens. Who is the owner of the apartment? What does he do? What is in the package that Simon brought to him? He decides he will look. He goes back into the hallway, opens his suitcase, and pulls out his own little package. Although he's already done it three times, and especially carefully the time he picked up the box at Kompas in Ljubljana, he still hopes that something will jingle,

ring, or rattle; that he'll hear something that will help him to figure out what's inside. But the contents of the box don't make any sound. Actually the box is so light that it could be empty. Simon goes back to the secret cupboard and takes one of the empty boxes from the shelves. In his left hand he weighs one, in his right hand the other; surprisingly, the empty one seems to be about the same weight as the one that he brought. Had he brought Vincent Vega an empty box?

At the very instant that he begins to remove the wrapping paper, the doorbell in the hallway rings. Simon jumps up and then stiffens. After three seconds pass, the bell rings again. It is impossible to tell whether someone is ringing in front of the main entrance downstairs or in front of the door to the apartment. Simon lays the package with the half removed wrapping paper on the shelf and tiptoes into the foyer. He carefully presses his eye against the peephole and then quickly withdraws. Standing outside is the large man with the shaved head and the red windbreaker who had threatened him with a pistol in the airport bathroom.

How had he found him? What had he told the doorman to be let in? Simon rushes back to the library and softly presses the letter N on the mock copy of Conrad's novel *Nostromo*. The door to the secret cupboard quietly slides back into place and again there is the wall covered with bookshelves. Vincent Vega's package is safe. At least that. Because there is no indication that the stranger in front of the door is going to stop ringing; now he presses the doorbell every five seconds. Simon returns to the hallway and looks through the peephole. The bald man has just reached into the pocket of his windbreaker, pulled out his pistol, and is now pointing it at the door.

"Vincent, open the door. I know you're home. I'll count to five. If the door doesn't open, I'll shoot off the lock."

Simon instinctively withdraws and presses himself against the wall. Then he takes two steps and hides in the bathroom. He counts to five in his mind and waits for the sound of the shot. Instead of a shot, he hears voices. A man and a woman's voice. He returns to the hallway and cautiously looks through the peephole.

A woman is standing in front of the door to the neighbouring apartment with a shopping bag in her left hand and a bunch of keys in her right. The perspective from the peephole does not allow him to discern if she is beautiful or ugly. She is dressed in tight pants and a light knee-length coat, unbuttoned. He listens to the conversation.

"When did you last see him?"

"I don't spy on my neighbours," retorts the woman.

"We're friends. I need to find him."

"Call him. Surely you have the number of his cell phone."

"That's the problem. My cell phone was stolen. Do you have his number?"

"I have no reason to have it. I only know the man my sight. Excuse me."

She turns, takes the key to her apartment, unlocks it, and disappears from Simon's field of vision. Simon hears the keys turning in the lock. The stranger in the red windbreaker moves down the hallway toward the elevator. He presses the button, the doors open, and now only an empty hallway can be seen on the other side of the peephole.

Simon rushes to the kitchen and eagerly gulps down a glass of water. It's not clear why he is so thirsty all of sudden. Too much is happening and too quickly. How can he relax, how can he fall asleep

when the man with the shaved head might come back at any moment and shoot through the door? Should he notify the doorman? Call the police? Get Vincent Vega's number from the doorman and call him?

He returns to the library and presses on the letter N. He waits for the collection of novels to slide away and reveal the shelves with boxes. This time, he thinks, nothing will prevent him from opening the package that has put his life in danger; not the bell, not a threat, not his own thoughts.

But the package isn't there where he left it. Did it fall on the floor? There's nothing on the floor. He clearly remembers that he laid it on the shelf at the height of his head and in doing so had pushed the row of light brown boxes aside to make room. But the package with the half-removed wrapping paper is not there. As if it vanished into thin air. It isn't on the floor, isn't on one of the other shelves, not among the books, not on the ceiling. Simon feels a sudden chill. He retreats from the secret cupboard and for some time stands in the middle of the library to collect his wits. He goes to the couch and collapses on it. Something is roaring in his head. His heart is pounding. Something is happening to him that seems not just unusual, but quite simply impossible. Has his disease spread through his entire body? Has it started to metastasize in his brain?

He looks one more time in the cupboard, hoping that he will spy the package on the shelf where he left it.

It's not there.

He presses the letter N and waits for the door to close. Then he rushes to the bathroom, leans over the toilet, and vomits. The cheesy remains of the Lufthansa sandwich that he quickly ate as the plane was descending bursts out together with stomach acids that burn his throat and mouth. There's something red in it, blood maybe, or a half-digested piece of tomato. He slides down to his knees, kneels in front of the toilet, and waits for his stomach to stop heaving.

From this position, it suddenly seems to him that he hears the ringing of his cell phone. He recalls that it is in the shoulder bag that is still lying next to his suitcase in the foyer. But the next moment, he thinks he is mistaken and he only hears a murmur in the pipes. He vomits a last burst of slimy liquid. Then he stands up, goes to the sink, rinses out his mouth, and washes his face. An automatic censor causes the toilet to flush the moment he steps away from it. He thinks that the sound he hears might be his cell phone after all.

He rushes to the foyer and rummages through his shoulder bag. But he doesn't find his cell phone. He looks in the pockets of the light gray jacket that he still hasn't taken off; no cell phone. He picks up the shoulder bag and shakes its contents onto the floor of the foyer. Passport, airplane tickets, New York City Lonely Planet, toiletry bag, digital camera, paper tissues, two packs of cigarettes, plastic bag of pills: Paracetamol, Lexaurin, Ranital.

Where is his phone? Did it fall out of his pocket? He doesn't understand anything anymore. Whatever happened, the fact is he cannot call anyone since he had all his numbers saved in the phone. And nobody can call him. He is completely alone, locked in an apartment in New York that he cannot leave because a man with a shaved head and a red windbreaker is standing in front of the door. There is no doubt about that. And now the package is also gone, the package that might save his life.

For a while, he stumbles around the apartment in the blind hope that he will spot his cell phone or the package or both. He goes from the kitchen to the bathroom, from there to the toilet, from there to

the library, from there to the living room, from there back to the foyer where he opens the one door that he hasn't yet opened. Behind it is a spacious sleeping room with a large French bed. The sight of the bed reminds him that he is extremely tired and he should rest. Maybe his senses are betraying him because of exhaustion. Maybe some of the things that seem to be happening are merely temporary paranoid delusions.

Simon pulls his things into the bedrooms and leaves them on the floor. When he closes the door, he notices it has a bolt. He bolts the door, strips down to his underwear, and climbs into bed. The sheets are soft and silky, the blanket just the right weight, the two pillows not too soft or too hard. Everything is perfect, even the colour of the bedding, which is a soothing green. It's all the same, thinks Simon. One way or another, I'm already dead.

He closes his eyes and tries to sink into sleep. But he can't. He is hovering somewhere on the margins, trying to silence his troubling thoughts. Almost all come in the form of a question. Who was the homeless fellow in Ljubljana really? Was their meeting a coincidence or had fate taken a hand in his life? Is God a playwright who writes a personal script for each human being, assigning us the roles we play in the drama of our time? Or perhaps God gives us pre-existing patterns in myths, fables, novels, plays, and films, that we imitate, not even realizing that we are not the least bit original, that our lives are only a reprise of one of the many other lives lived by millions of people before us. Who is Vincent Vega? What does he do? Who is the man with the shaved head and the red windbreaker who claims he is Vincent Vega's friend? What is really happening? Apparently something different from what it seems. The real story is somewhere between the lines. Simon has become the victim of a game, but what kind of game, intended for whom? And why him?

And so on and so forth: until he passes over the border of consciousness into darkness and confused dreams. When he wakes he remembers nothing, although he vaguely realizes that he dreamed about something; as he vaguely realizes that he is not at home in his room but rather in the bed of a person he doesn't know at all, in a luxury apartment in a foreign city that he also doesn't know, in a haunted place where he fears that things disappear against the laws of physics, in a world of illusions where only the symptoms of his fatal disease exist. The fact that in a year or two he would also disappear forever struck him in the moments that he slowly ascended into wakefulness as something that did not affect him personally, but rather was an echo of a story about someone else, something he read somewhere, that he saw in some forgotten film.

But then reality flooded over him like a blow from a father who wants to punish his son for disobedience. He is shocked to realize where exactly he is and what exactly is happening to him. The sun is shining through the window that looks to the west, illuminating a blue bathrobe that hangs on a hook in the door to the bathroom. Simon flinches: the colour is the same as the bathrobe that Soraya usually wore when he came to visit her. Was the robe already hanging there when he came into the bedroom and locked the door behind him? How did he not notice it? Was he too confused, too tired?

Had things started to appear and not just to disappear?

From this distance, it is impossible to say for sure whether it is a man's or a woman's robe. Simon rolls out of the bed and walks to the door to confirm. He puts on the robe and concludes that it is too big for him. He opens the door to the nearest built-in closet. Men's suits are hanging inside: there are

certainly not less than twenty of them. He takes down a jacket from one of the hangers and measures it with his eye. The size is the same as the robe. There is no doubt that the clothing is the property of the mysterious owner of this luxurious apartment. Simon respectfully puts the jacket back on the hanger and opens another one of the built-in closets. The sheer number of undershirts, shirts, sweats pants, ties, bowties, pants, casual jackets and overcoats astonish him. How much does Vincent Vega earn that he can afford such a wardrobe? And why does he need it?

Simon returns to the bed to lie down. For the moment, he has no other desire but to rest awhile and collect his thoughts. The bed is in the corner of the room. On the wall beside him, Simon notices a built-in consul with a series of round black circles in a neat row. They are numbered from one to twenty. Inside two of the circles are somewhat larger, gray, unmarked buttons. More out of curiosity than anything else, Simon softly touches one of the buttons. He hears a half-squeaking, half-scratching sound as an oval space slides open on the ceiling. A large white screen slowly descends from the ceiling; it stops when its bottom edge reaches the foot of the bed. Simon thinks that he likes Vincent Vega even more now: he watches movies in bed. The twenty buttons on the wall consul offer access to twenty DVDs. What luxury.

He presses button number twenty and waits. After several minutes, just as it seems nothing is going to happen, images begin to dance on the screen. A man and a woman are kissing. Al Pacino plays the male role; the woman is an actress that Simon has never seen before. Or he has but he doesn't remember. Although he has seen every film with Al Pacino, he doesn't remember this scene. The actress is young, half the age of Pacino. She has short blond hair, almost white, and though she may not be among the most beautiful of Hollywood actresses, she possesses something that most of the others lack: emphatically sensuous features, a slightly turned-up nose which gives her the appearance of boldness, soft flushed cheeks, and a gently rounded face that has a slightly Oriental cast. In the beginning, the kisses are tender and tentative, the touch of lips alternating with looks and smiles. But then suddenly the lips are sealed together and the tongues engaged in a real duel. The scene is extremely erotic; Simon stiffens.

He becomes even stiffer as the camera moves down and reveals their bodies. Both actors are nude. Pacino kneads the actress's right breast with his left hand; she caresses him with her right hand and gently massages his swelling organ. Simon rubs his eyes. For a moment, he thinks he is not awake yet and must be dreaming. Al Pacino made a porn film? And Vincent Vega has it in his collection? Powerfully excited, Simon stares into the screen as the actress spreads her legs, revealing her unshaved pubis. When Pacino's left hand abandons the curve of her abundant, thought not too abundant, breast and slowly moves down along her flat stomach to her belly button and then, finger by finger, down to the trophy that, in impatient expectation, is being raised to him, Simon becomes dizzy and convulsively presses on the button to stop the film. In vain; only when he presses on the gray button and the screen slowly rolls back into the ceiling where the oval hides it, can he breathe again. And yet his heart still pounds wildly; the scene is still there in front of his eyes.

He stands up and restlessly paces the bedroom. Why didn't he continue watching? Why does he feel assaulted? Why does it seem to him that pornography does not belong here, in this apartment, which, from the beginning, had awakened in him less sensual and more intellectual associations? Is Vincent Vega, despite his years, and surely he must be at least forty, like an inexperienced youngster who



must satisfy his needs by watching clippings of others doing what he would like to do himself? That almost doesn't seem possible. Certainly he is a normal, healthy, sexually active man who uses pornography for variety, to stimulate the imagination, to heighten excitement, which, after all, many people do. Simon doesn't want to think of Vincent Vega in any other way. Although he has never met him, Simon respects him, even admires him. Somehow he knows he is the only person he can trust and he can only trust someone who is not the captive of a problematic sexuality but has such matters under control. Not like Simon himself who, in this moment more than ever before, realizes that such matters are not under control for him and indeed are extremely complicated. Just as everything else that has to do with the world and life is extremely complicated in his mind.

And yet in the same instant, it strikes Simon that it is not the sexual habits of Vincent Vega that bother him but that he is most shocked to find one of his favourite actors playing such an unexpected role. Why would Al Pacino do such a thing? He can't need the money. For fun? Or was he filmed secretly? Does Vincent Vega get all his money by blackmailing famous people? Is that his job? Could the package that Simon brought, and that mysteriously disappeared, contain images that would ruin the reputation and life of somebody if it fell into the unscrupulous hands of the media? Whose reputation and life? And why did he have to bring the package to New York? Anyone could collaborate in this criminal activity simply by sending it the package express mail.

Simon steps to the window and gazes through the venetian blinds at the crowns of the trees in Central Park. On the other side of the park, the sun is almost touching the tops of the towers that rise above the trees. Soon it will be evening. Night is coming, and what will it bring? He has never felt so lost before. Anxiety pulsates through him in rhythmic waves. He thinks about smoking a cigarette but then remembers Vega's warning. Anyway a cigarette would not be enough; he needs a tranquilizer. He rummages through his shoulder bag for the box that carries his Lexaurin tablets. He unwraps one and puts it in his mouth. He can't swallow it without water so he unbolts the bedroom door and goes to the kitchen.

The dining room table is set for dinner. Arrayed upon it are silver platters with five different Chinese dishes, a bowl of rice, a plate, a white napkin, a bottle of California red wine and a crystal glass. It is difficult to guess how long everything has been on the table; the candles under the warmers upon which the silver platters and the bowl of rice rest so the food won't get cold have burned down about halfway. Somebody brought all of this. Somebody has been in the apartment while Simon was sleeping. Someone has the key. Someone has access to the apartment whenever it is needed. Simon notices that the rose in the vase is no longer red, but white. Whoever brought the food changed it. A card leans against the vase. Written upon the card is the message: *With the Compliments of Apex Catering. Please report any dissatisfaction to Claire Hudson, your personal caterer. And a telephone number. Finally a number he can actually call.*

But not just yet. He pours himself a glass of wine and takes a sip, swallowing the Lexaurin tablet that he has been holding on his tongue the whole time. Then he goes back to the bedroom and puts on his pants. He returns to the dining room, sits at the table, and begins to eat. The smell of the food reminds him that he is actually hungry. The food tastes wonderful, worlds away from the Chinese food available in Ljubljana. They know how to do it here. And Vincent Vega accepts only the best. Please report any dissatisfaction to Claire Hudson. Actually, Simon thinks, everything is less horrible than it has

seemed up until this point. Food comes, somebody takes care of him, sooner or later it will become clear where the package and his cell phone disappeared to; sooner or later Vincent Vega will return and everything will be alright. For now, he will stay in the apartment, relax, read, watch movies, eat food that will be brought to him, bathe, enjoy a Jacuzzi for the first time in his life, maybe begin to write a diary. Not for the future, as he once did in primary school, firmly convinced that after his death his writings would end up as an exhibit in the National University Library. Nor would he do it to gain a perspective on his life when he grows old because, after all, he has no prospect of growing old. No, he will write a diary, if he does, for the most banal of reasons: so that he can arrange all that is happening into some kind of order. Otherwise it will begin to suffocate him.

He goes into the living room, lifts the receiver to the green telephone that is in front of the window, and calls the number on the card leaning against the vase at the table. A pleasant female voice responds immediately.

“Claire Hudson here. How can I help you, Mr. Vega?”

“I’m not Mr. Vega. I’m Barton Fink. I am living in Mr. Vega’s apartment at the moment. I just ate the Chinese food that was here. I don’t know when you left it. I was sleeping.”

“Was there anything wrong with the food?”

“I don’t remember when I last ate anything so delicious.”

“That’s very kind of you Mr. ... Fink, you said? Can I take down your breakfast order?”

“I’m not interested in breakfast. Maybe I’ll be dead tomorrow morning. I am interested in how I might get in contact with Mr. Vega. I lost his card. Someone stole my cell phone and I don’t know the number by heart.”

“You’re calling from his number, Mr. Fink.”

“His home number. I need his cell number.”

“Mr. Vega does not allow me to give information to unauthorized people.”

“Unauthorized! But, madam, I am living in his apartment!”

“May I take down your order for breakfast?”

Simon puts the receiver in the cradle. Only now does he notice that the red light on the telephone is blinking. He lifts the receiver and places it down again. The light is still blinking. Could that mean that there is a message? Simon hesitates though he doesn’t know why. He knows that the message is probably from Vincent Vega. He probably has something new to tell him, something important. But something tells him that new and important information is probably tiring. He has reached a sort of truce with himself. He has decided that he will not get excited, that he will not look for reasons and answers, that he will simply enjoy the pleasures offered by the apartment.

Curiosity wins: he presses the button.

“Simon, this is Vincent Vega. I hope you like the apartment. I didn’t know what kind of food you liked so I ordered Chinese. From now on, you can call Claire directly and order. They serve Indian food, Mexican, Creole, French, Italian, Brazilian, anything you like. It looks like I will be detained here longer than I expected. You’ll have to be on your own during this time. But you’re a resourceful young man, aren’t you? I ask only one thing of you: don’t form an opinion too quickly about what happens in the apartment. Allow for the possibility that things mean something other than what seems most likely. Everything will eventually become clear. Enjoy this time. If you get bored in the apartment, go for a walk.

Go to Central Park. Get some fresh air. Visit the museums and galleries. Walk the streets. Feel the pulse of city life. And don't forget: my doctor and psychiatrist are available twenty-four hours a day. Call Dr. Allen. Arrange to meet him. It can only help. Good luck."

Call Dr. Allen? His number was saved in the telephone memory under Mind. But where is the memory? Simon presses the button and looks at what his written on the little screen. There's no hurry to see Dr. Allen. But he'd like to find the number of the doorman so he doesn't have to go all the down from the eighth to the first floor. He can't find anything. The phone is too complicated. Menu after menu appear on the little screen, lists of numbers but no names, nothing that would tell him whom he would be calling if he selected one of them. Of course, he could call home. He could call his father. Or his mother. He also knew Violeta's number by heart. But what would he tell them? He could call the bum that gave him the package but he didn't have his number. It had disappeared along with his cell phone. He puts down the telephone and decides he will risk going out to the elevator and down to the first floor and the doorman. He must have Vincent Vega's cell phone number. There must be a way to call him.

He puts on his shoes and a fresh shirt. The shirt has become wrinkled in his suitcase but that doesn't trouble him. He's still a student, after all, he has not changed overnight into the kind of refined gentleman that Vincent Vega surely is, along with all the other residents in this building. Then he puts on his jacket and heads toward the door. He pulls out the key and suddenly wonders: how did people come into the apartment and bring food if the key was in the lock and the doors were locked? Is there another door? Did they come through the window? His stomach turns. Then he remembers Vega's words: "Allow for the possibility that things mean something other than what seems most likely."

Alright, he'll allow for that possibility. He won't get agitated. Before he unlocks the door, he presses his eye against the peephole and looks into the hallway. He notices a male figure restlessly pacing up and down the hall. He must be one of the other residents waiting for the elevator to come. He's wearing light pants and a dark three-quarter length coat. He has a hat on his head. Simon thinks that, in his presence, he would certainly arrive safely to the first floor and the doorman. Nobody would dare attack him in front of witnesses. He is already holding the key to unlock the door when he notices through the peephole that the man has taken off his hat and is scratching his head – his shaved head; all of a sudden, Simon recognizes the duck-like waddling figure. The man in the hallway is not waiting for the elevator; he is waiting for him! A couple of hours ago, he was wearing a red windbreaker. Now he has changed his clothes. Simon had almost walked directly in front of the barrel of his gun. He quickly steps back and hurries into the bedroom; he closes the door and bolts it behind him.