

4 THE PROFESSOR

4 A few days later, Ossipon was sitting at one of the little tables in the Silenus Restaurant early in the afternoon. He was trying to make conversation with a small man with glasses and old, dirty clothes. The small man, known as the Professor, didn't seem interested in talking to him, and this made Ossipon uncomfortable.

'Been sitting here long?' asked Ossipon.

'An hour or more.'

'Then maybe you haven't heard the news. Have you?'

The little man shook his head, but showed some curiosity.

'Do you give your stuff to anybody who asks you for it?' asked Ossipon.

'I never say no.'

'But what if a spy from the police asked you for your wares? Then they could arrest you with the proof in their hands.'

'Proof of what? Dealing in explosives without a licence? I don't think they want to arrest me. I know they don't.'

'Why?' asked Ossipon.

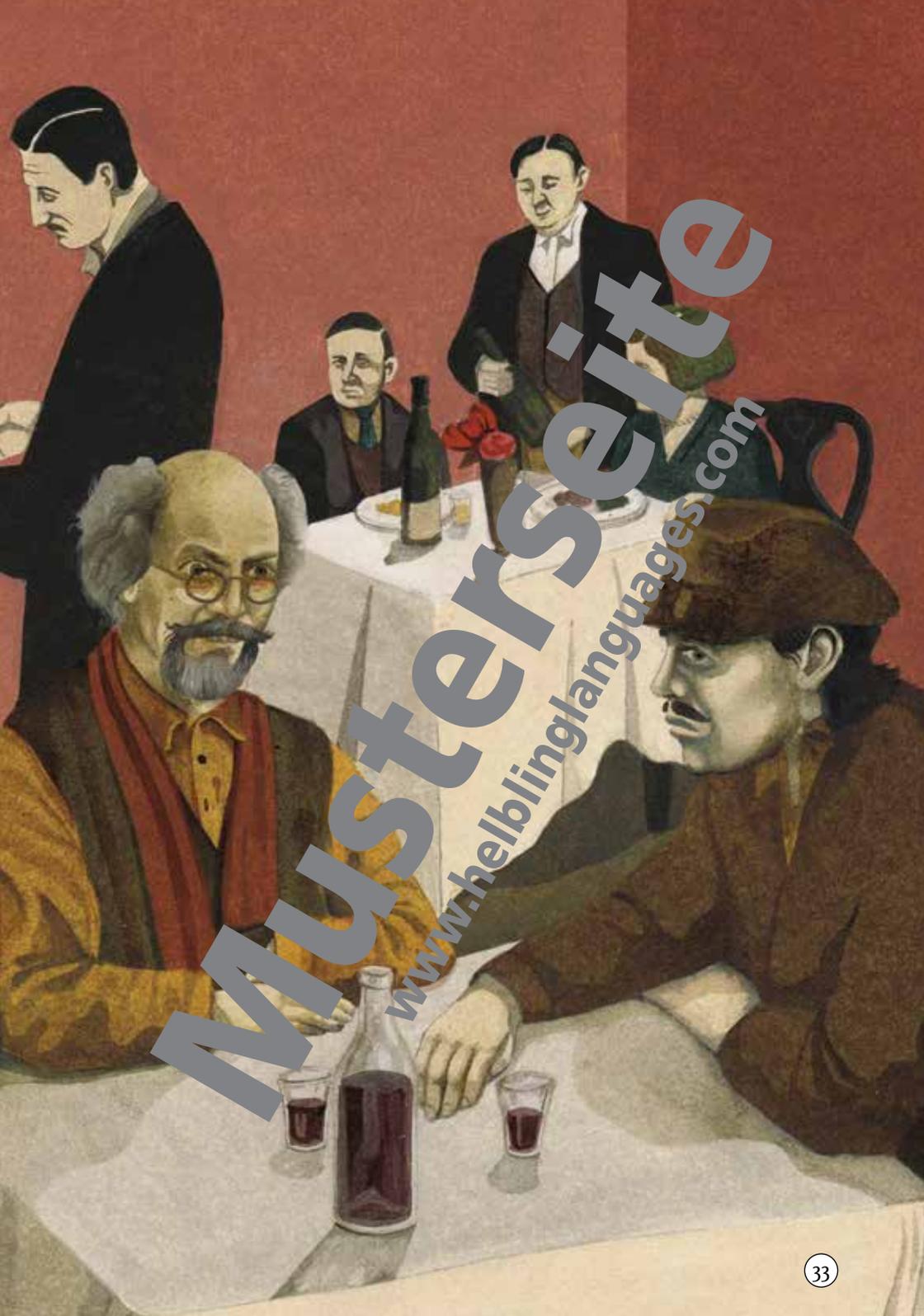
'Because they know very well I always carry some of my wares on me.' He touched the front of his coat. 'I'll never be arrested. Policemen aren't heroes.'

'They don't need to,' Ossipon replied. 'They only need to find a policeman who does. I know you carry enough explosives in your pocket to blow yourself and a lot of other people to pieces.'

'I've never said that. I could not be got rid of. But that's not an arrest. Anyway, the bomb I can detonate in a few seconds.'

- **be got rid of**: (someone) killed
- **dealing in**: buying and selling
- **detonate**: make something explode
- **licence**: government permission

- **proof**: something that proves something else
- **stuff**: (here) things
- **wares**: products for sale



Ossipon looked around the restaurant.

'Your bomb is enough to destroy this room and kill everybody in it.'

'You need to have a very strong character,' the small man continued, 'and very few people have it. The police know that I have it. They know that I am not afraid of dying nor of killing a lot of people. That's what makes me stronger and better than them.'

'There are individuals of character in the police, too,' said Ossipon.

'Maybe. But their character is built on middle-class morality. Mine is free from anything like that. They have to consider life, and life is complicated and open to attack. But I only have to consider death, which is simple and cannot be attacked. So I'm stronger and better than anybody else.'

'I am afraid I have to spoil that thought for you,' said Ossipon. 'A man blew himself up in Greenwich Park this morning.'

Ossipon pulled a newspaper out of his pocket.

'Here it is. Bomb in Greenwich Park. There isn't much so far. Half-past eleven. Foggy morning. Enormous hole in the ground under a tree. All around fragments of a man's body, blown to pieces. I don't understand the purpose of it. It may have negative results for us.'

There was a silence, then Ossipon spoke again.

'You've given a bomb to someone recently, haven't you? The day the police learn how to do their job, they will shoot you on sight, before you can detonate your ware.'

- **detonate:** to explode
- **fragments:** very small pieces
- **morality:** set of rules of what is good and bad behaviour

- **on sight:** as soon as they see you
- **purpose:** reason for
- **spoil:** destroy

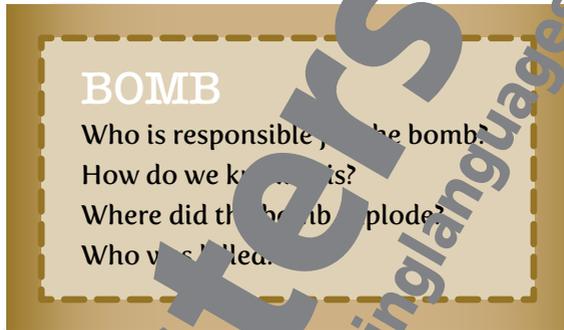
‘Yes,’ the little man agreed. ‘But isn’t that exactly what we want? We want them to forget their own rules and principles• of legality•. I will be very pleased when the police start shooting us in the streets and the public is happy. That will be when their morality starts to disintegrate• and will be the beginning of our victory. That is what we should try to achieve!’

‘But was it one of your bombs that exploded this morning?’ asked Ossipon. ‘We in the London group had no knowledge. Can you describe the person you gave the stuff to?’

‘Yes, with one word: Verloc.’

Ossipon sat back on his chair, shocked.

‘Verloc! Impossible.’



‘He was an important member of the group, as far as I understand.’

‘Yes,’ said Ossipon. ‘Important. No, not exactly. More useful than important. A man of means. Intellectually a nobody. His only talent was his ability to escape the attention of the police. He was married. Did he give you any sense of his intentions?’

- **disintegrate**: break into small pieces
- **principles**: rules and beliefs
- **legality**: what is allowed by the law

‘He told me it was for a demonstration against a building,’ said the Professor.

‘What do you think happened?’ asked Ossipon.

‘I don’t know. The timer was set for twenty minutes and he switched on the detonator. If you want a bomb to explode earlier, you may need to give it a sharp shock. So he either waited too long or he accidentally dropped the bomb. Only a fool could do something like that.’

Ossipon sat in his chair thinking. Verloc’s shop might already be a police trap, so he didn’t really want to go there. But if the man in the park was in pieces as the newspapers said, maybe he was impossible to identify. So perhaps the police had no special reason for watching Verloc’s shop.

‘I wonder what I should do now,’ Ossipon muttered.

‘Get as much as you can from his wife. There must be money somewhere,’ said the Professor.



• **detonator:** something that makes a bomb explode

• **sharp:** short and quick