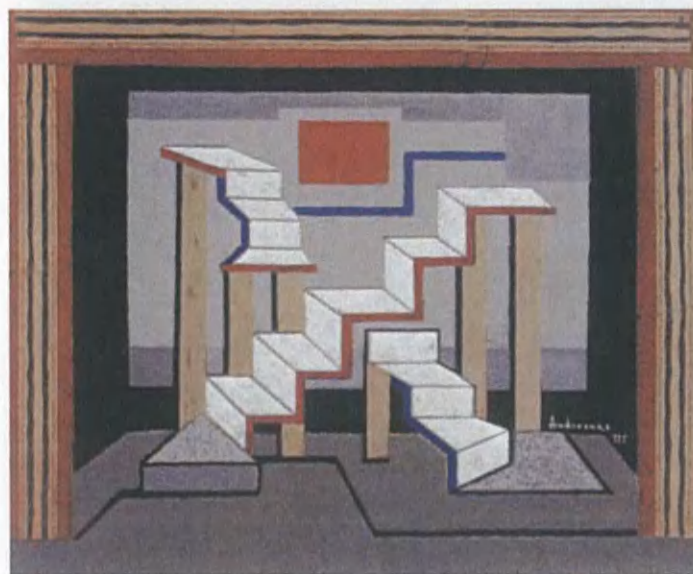


# AN ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN UKRAINIAN DRAMA



Compiled, edited, and with introductory essays by  
**LARISSA M. L. ZALESKA ONYSHKEVYCH**

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# Preface

The idea for this collection arose many years ago while I was teaching Ukrainian literature at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. As I was contemplating a course on Ukrainian drama in translation, I discovered that no Ukrainian plays, except for a few by Lesia Ukrainka, had been rendered in English. Consequently I started planning an anthology of translated plays that could be used as a college text.

Four of my students at Rutgers, Christine Oshchudlak, Roxolana Stojko, Charles Steck, and Don Boychuk, undertook to translate one play each for this anthology. It took several years and numerous revisions and editing to prepare their final versions. Three other plays were translated by the late George S. N. Luckyj, who was my professor at the University of Toronto, and his wife Moira; by the English poet and translator, the late Vera Rich; and by John Prasko, who wrote his thesis about Mykola Kulish's play *The People's Malachi*. Two of the plays—*Sonata Pathétique* and *Masters of Time*—were published previously but have been revised for this anthology.

I am grateful to Dr. Dale Coye (formerly the artistic director of Princeton University's Theater Intime), Dr. Fannie Peczenik, and other members of the Translation Section of the Princeton Research Forum for the many hours they devoted to discussions with me, and for their invaluable suggestions regarding the translations. I also thank the late Professor Valerian Revutsky for commenting on the introductions to the plays, and Lada T. K. Z. Onyshkevych for her professional and technical help. Lubomyr Onyshkevych was unstinting in his patience and encouragement. Special thanks are also due to the Shevchenko Scientific Society in the United States for providing an initial grant to cover part of the typing expenses.

I had the good fortune of discussing four of the translations with the plays' authors: my very good friend, the late Liudmyla Kovalenko; the late Eagher G. Kostetzky, with whom I corresponded for many years; Bohdan Boychuk; and Valerii Shevchuk. My frequent communication with these writers proved invaluable for understanding and interpreting their work and, in the case of Bohdan Boychuk, arriving at a final author-approved translation.

The selection of plays for this compendium was based partly on the availability of translated texts. Regrettably, only one play written after Ukraine regained its independence in 1991 is included. The original, Ukrainian-language version of this anthology was published as *Antolohiia modernoi ukrains'koï dramy* (Kyiv, Edmonton, and Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press and TAKSON, 1998). *An Anthology of Modern Ukrainian Drama* is that edition's English-language companion volume. The bibliographies therein have, of course, been updated and include English-language translations and works about the playwrights.

Larissa M. L. Z. Onyshkevych





# Introduction

During the last three centuries, Ukrainian drama has experienced several periods of rapid development as well as dormancy and deterioration. Many interrelated factors influence the merit, scope, and abundance of drama belonging to a particular literature. Two specific factors have continually affected the course and history of Ukrainian drama: the official political situation and the artistic and cultural climate. The political environment is usually manifested through such elements as a government's support or restriction of the arts. In an unrestricted atmosphere, the artistic and cultural climate often determines the breadth and quality of drama, which can develop when experimentation, exchange of ideas, publication, and staging is not hindered. In such situations individual dramatists are frequently able to form special, mutually beneficial, collegial relationships with particular directors or theatres. From time to time, playwrights appear who are blessed with enough genius to stimulate not only the revival of a nation's theatre but also its literature.

Since the seventeenth century, Ukrainian drama has undergone several periods of growth. There have been decades when the natural outlets for Ukrainian drama, both in print and on stage, were stifled by repression by a foreign government. Even in the twentieth century many playwrights were constrained by censorship or exile. Despite these impediments, modern Ukrainian literature has been endowed with such major playwrights as Lesia Ukrainka, Volodymyr Vynnychenko, Mykola Kulish, and Eaghor G. Kostetzky. Together with the other Ukrainian playwrights—Ivan Kocherha, Liudmyla Kovalenko, Bohdan Boychuk, and Oleksii Kolomiets, and Valerii Shevchuk—as well as many other outstanding writers, they were able to elicit and secure at least a sporadic appearance of plays, both in print and on stage, with considerable literary, dramatic, and historical significance. At the same time these playwrights and their works assured the continuing existence of the genre in Ukrainian literature.

## *Ukrainian Theatre and Drama before the Twentieth Century*

As in most countries of Europe, the contemporary roots of Ukrainian modern theatre and drama were manifested primarily in the seventeenth century. During that period, Ukraine was not under any foreign power, and scholarship and the arts were able to flourish. The plays that began appearing then were primarily religious Passion plays and Mystery plays (*misterii*); the secular aspect was expressed in improvised stock situations and parodies. In Ukraine, the Italian *commedia dell'arte* found its local rendering and form in the *intermezzo* or *intermedio* (Ukrainian: *intermediia* 'interlude'). The oldest extant one is from 1619. In 1705 the first Ukrainian historical play, *Vladimir* by Teofan Prokopovych, was performed in Kyiv. Afterwards, for several decades tragedies and comedies were printed and staged, quite often in academies, with students as actors. The technical aspects of staging developed to such an extent that by the middle of the century not only music and ballet were incorporated into theat-

rical productions, but also light effects and fireworks. At the same time, scholars at the academies wrote theoretical works on drama and theatre.

In the eighteenth century the greater part of Ukraine came under the rule of the Russian tsars, who eagerly relocated Ukrainian scholars and writers to the imperial capital of St. Petersburg. However, while the tsars built up their own cultural centre, neither they nor their administrations supported expressions of Ukrainian culture. Instead they prohibited them. The theatres that were built in Kharkiv (in 1789) and Kyiv (in 1803) were allowed to stage Russian plays only. Plays in Ukrainian could only be staged in private theatres. Vasyl Hohol (the father of the great writer Mykola Hohol, known in Russian literature as Nikolai Gogol) composed plays in Ukrainian and directed such a private theatre, where he performed with his wife in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Tsarist restrictions almost halted the normal development of Ukrainian drama. In 1863 Pëtr Valuev, the tsarist minister of the interior, forbade the printing of most books written in Ukrainian. In 1876 the tsarist Ems Ukase placed limitations on the Ukrainian theatre and allowed only Russian theatres to perform Ukrainian plays. From 1883 until 1893 a small number of Ukrainian plays was permitted to be staged in Russian-ruled Ukraine, but only in the provinces on the right bank of the Dnipro River and only if they depicted nothing except folkways and village life, with folksongs, folk dances, and folk costumes.

At the same time in Western Ukraine, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ukrainian plays and translations into Ukrainian could be freely published. From there they were brought across the border to Kyiv and other Russian-ruled towns. By the end of the century the situation in Russian-ruled Ukraine began to change. Permission to stage Lesia Ukrainka's first dramatic work, *Blakytna troianda* (The Azure Rose), was granted in 1899; the Russian press, however, criticized her use of upper-middle-class characters who engaged in philosophical discussions in Ukrainian.

## *Ukrainian Drama in the Twentieth Century*

The twentieth century initially brought a period of tremendous growth for Ukrainian drama, which was soon followed by very severe constraints and the repression of writers. The Russian Revolution of 1905 resulted in a minor improvement in the opportunities for publishing and staging of Ukrainian plays. Ivan Franko's plays were performed in both parts of imperially divided Ukraine, and Lesia Ukrainka's works were also published. During the brief years of Ukraine's independence (1917–20) there were no restrictions on literature. During the early years of Soviet rule, however, many Ukrainian works could not be published or staged, while those that were allowed were subjected to strict censorship and numerous revisions beforehand.

During the 1920s and early 1930s the works of better-known Ukrainian playwrights, such as Oleksander Oles, Vasyl Pachovsky, Liudmyla Starytska-Cherniakhivska, Spyrydon Cherkasenko, Volodymyr Vynnychenko, Ivan Kocherha, Yelysei Karpenko, Ivan Mykytenko, Liubov Yanovska, Mykola Kulish, Mykola Irchan, and Oleksander Korniiichuk, were published and staged in Soviet Ukraine. For a while, in the 1920s, the theatre began to blossom in many cities of the Ukrainian SSR. The dominant creative figure, Les Kurbas, a multi-talented actor, director, and theoretician of theatre arts, inspired the growth of the Ukrainian theatre to unprecedented heights. Many playwrights, particularly the outstanding Mykola Kulish, benefitted from a stimulating working relationship with Kurbas. During the first three decades of the twentieth century Ukrainian drama almost kept pace with developments in Western Eu-

rope. Almost all contemporary literary trends (though some belatedly), from realism, naturalism, and neoromanticism to symbolism and expressionism, were manifested in Ukrainian plays of the period.

Of specific sociological interest is a particular phenomenon related to Ukrainian drama and theatre outside of Ukraine. In the first quarter of this century, the Ukrainians who immigrated to North America created their own distinctive offshoot of literature, which included dramas. A very impressive number of new plays, most of them highly sentimental and patriotic, were published and often staged in large Canadian and American cities where Ukrainians had settled. Among the authors were Semen Kovbel, Mykhailo Petrovsky, Dmytro Hunkevych, Yelysei Karpenko, and S. Zinevych. Most of these theatres existed until 1940, staging also works by other Ukrainian writers and plays by foreign authors translated into Ukrainian.

In Soviet Ukraine the political situation changed significantly in the 1930s. Ideological restrictions were imposed on the content and style of all literary works, allowing only socialist realism to exist. Many writers tried to survive by revising their works, occasionally even more than once during the same year. Several hundred Ukrainian writers were arrested and perished in the Great Terror. A few émigré playwrights in Polish-ruled Western Ukraine and in Czechoslovakia (Yurii Lypa, Leonid Mosendz, Oleksander Oles, and Volodymyr Vynnychenko) continued writing, but the repression or liquidation of playwrights in Soviet Ukraine resulted in a period of stagnation in Ukrainian drama for at least twenty-five years. From the mid-1930s only two major Ukrainian playwrights remained active in Soviet Ukraine: Kocherha and Korniiichuk. The latter dominated the theatre scene throughout the USSR.

During the Second World War a few Ukrainian playwrights—Yurii Kosach, Eaghor G. Kostetzky (Ihor Kostetsky), Liudmyla Kovalenko, Yurii Tys, and Vasyl Chaplenko—emigrated from Ukraine. They and other Ukrainian émigré writers found few opportunities for publishing their works, and still fewer for having them staged. Nevertheless some plays were published in émigré periodicals or in book form (usually funded from the meagre savings of the writers themselves). In Western Europe between 1945 and 1948, the only theatres available to these writers were those in Displaced Persons' camps; later, in the host countries of postwar emigration—Australia, Canada, and the United States—occasional performances were possible. In the émigré situation, two basic elements for the continual existence of theatres were absent: government subsidies and an artistic milieu providing financial and professional support. Thus, while a few plays by the prolific and talented writer Yurii Kosach were staged in wartime Western Ukraine and in postwar West Germany, those by Kostetzky, were not. For years his contemplative, postmodernist, and controversial works failed to attract an audience within the dispersed émigré community. The only plays that a theatre group with no subsidies at all could afford to stage in such an irregular society had to appeal to the average theatregoer.

For almost twenty years after the Second World War no outstanding new playwright or significant new plays appeared in the Ukrainian SSR. This situation began to change with the publication of Korniiichuk's *Kryla* (Wings, 1954). By exposing the fossilized Soviet bureaucracy and its detrimental effect on the people and the country's future, the play performed a special role in Soviet literature and was one of the works that began the literary thaw in the USSR. However, in the decades that followed the state of Soviet Ukrainian drama did not improve. In 1960 Oleksandr Levada wrote a verse drama, *Faust i smert'* (Faust and Death). It was notable mostly for its plot: for the first time in the USSR, and perhaps also in Western literature, man's flight into space was represented in drama (a year before the actual event). Its timely topic and

the attempts at creating an intellectual discussion of the play raised unrealized hopes for a revival of Soviet Ukrainian drama. In the years that followed, however, Levada, Mykola Zhrudny, and Oleksii Kolomiets remained loyal to the conventions of Soviet theatre. Attempts at innovation were rare.

From the 1960s, as in the nineteenth century, plays depicting rural life and rural problems and unsophisticated comedies dominated the Soviet Ukrainian stage. Meanwhile Russian-language theatres in Ukraine, which were in the majority, were provided with better conditions and opportunities. Theatres for young audiences illustrate the predicament of the Ukrainian-language theatres: in 1987, out of eight such theatres in Ukraine, only one staged performances in Ukrainian (in Lviv) and only one was bilingual (in Kyiv). Even the repertoire reflected this inequity: only fifteen to twenty percent of the plays performed were in Ukrainian. On the whole, Ukrainian theatre was in decline because it was not provided with enough venues or good directors and because experimentation was discouraged. Tragedy became non-existent because the inner conflicts of the protagonists, who were required to be positive heroes and role models, could not be depicted. Even satire was rarely performed because, by its very nature, the genre deals with the weaknesses not only of individuals, but of society and government.

In the late 1970s writers who were prominent in other genres, for example, Ivan Drach in poetry and Yurii Shcherbak in fiction, turned to writing plays. Drach's dramas in verse and Shcherbak's plays reflected problems and dilemmas facing the intelligentsia. The return to grander themes and to characters from various professions certainly represented some improvement. Since 1986 new types of theatre (such as the theatre of poetry, or reading theatre) have appeared, and talented Ukrainian directors have returned from the Soviet metropole to Ukraine.

After the Second World War younger émigré playwrights, such as Dima, Ivan Kernytsky, and Mykola Ponedilok, settled in the United States. Since the 1960s, the then younger émigré poets Vira Vovk (Wira Wowk, in Brazil) and Bohdan Boychuk (in the United States) have also written plays. While most of the older émigré writers have tended to write in the realistic manner, Kostetzky's plays are postmodernist, Boychuk's are expressionist, and Vovk's contain elements of surrealism. No specific literary school or style has dominated among the Ukrainian playwrights in the West; nevertheless, elements of all Western literary movements and trends, including the theatre of the absurd (although without its nihilistic component), can be found in their works. Meantime socialist realism prevailed in the plays published in Soviet Ukraine; many of them also displayed touches of delayed romanticism. Of special interest in Ukraine and in the West was the reappearance of drama in verse by such writers as Levada, Drach, Vovk, Lina Kostenko, and Vasyl Barka.

During the first few years after the fall of the USSR Valerii Shevchuk dominated the literary stage both in terms of his plays and particularly his prose works. But soon many younger playwrights surfaced, often bedazzled by the belated appearance of postmodernism in independent Ukraine. Others have been more concerned with current identity and gender issues. All in all, many new plays and several collections of plays by Ukrainian playwrights (e.g., Shevchuk, Shcherbak, Bohdan Zholdak, Les Poderviansky, Oleksandr Irvanets, Yaroslav Yarosh, Valerii Herasymchuk, Volodymyr Dibrova, Yaroslav Vereshchak, Neda Nezhdana)

have appeared. What is more, as never before in the history of Ukrainian literature, several drama anthologies have been published in Ukraine since the late 1990s.<sup>1</sup>

### *Common Elements in the Plays*

Since the plays chosen for this anthology cover a span of over nine decades, their stylistic attributes vary, reflecting the period of their appearance and the individual preferences of their authors. However, even though the plays range from neoromanticism (*In the Wilderness*) and realism (*Masters of Time*) to expressionism (*A Play about a Great Man*), they share some common themes and dramatic devices and theatrical features.

While many Ukrainian plays written during the first three decades of the twentieth century directly depict contemporary social and political injustices or historical events, the plays in this collection, from *In the Wilderness* to *Hunger—1933* or *Birds from an Invisible Island*, deal with far broader themes and universal concerns—even when they have a specific historical setting. Some of the worst man-made disasters of the twentieth century occurred in Ukraine. They were experienced there more painfully, more thoroughly, and perhaps even earlier than in most other countries of Europe. In the nineteenth century, the pressures on the individual in relation to the community were widely reflected in Romantic literature; in the middle of the twentieth century, the emphasis on the individual and his own, freely chosen values were expressed in Western existentialist literature. Many Ukrainian plays of the period also reflect basic existentialist tenets. It is worth noting that from the plays of Lesia Ukrainka and Vynnychenko to those by Boychuk the optimistic or Christian variant of existentialism keeps reappearing; they stress the continuity of ideas through several generations, as well as personal sacrifices and efforts for the sake of chosen principles and values.

Closely associated with the idea of authentic individual existence is the element of time, of making one's life more meaningful within one's allotted years. Kierkegaard stressed that all existence is in time, and in numerous variations other existentialist thinkers have repeated this assertion. In their freedom humans make choices and decisions. The emphasis on making them in time in order to become true individuals involves a strong concern for the future.

In the plays in this anthology, from *In the Wilderness* to *Planet Speranta* and *Birds from an Invisible Island*, time appears in a variety of forms as one of the parameters for determining the protagonist's essence. Some characters manage to act according to their values, while others give up their strivings and compromise their values. Among the ancients, time was seen as a mysterious element. In Greek mythology, Time (*Chronos* or *Okeanos*), was depicted as circular, traversing the earth in the form of a serpent eating its tail (or eating others) and thus signifying an opportunity for renewal and a new beginning. The modern interpretation, however, seems to stress time's relative value, as Kocherha's *Masters of Time* illustrates. Such an

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<sup>1</sup> One of these anthologies contains plays written in the Ukrainian diaspora: Larysa M. L. Zales'ka Onyshkevych, ed., *Blyzniata shche zustrinut'sia: Antolohiia dramy ukraïns'koï diiaspory* (Kyiv: Chas, 1997). Another is the Ukrainian-language variant of the present anthology: idem, *Antolohiia modernoi ukraïns'koï dramy* (Kyiv: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press and TAKSON, 1998). Five others contain new plays: Nadiia Miroshnychenko, ed., *U chekanni teatru: Antolohiia molodoï dramaturhii* (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 1998); Iaroslav Vereshchak, ed., *Suchasni ukraïns'ki dramaturhy* (Kyiv: Hildiia dramaturhiv Ukraïny and Bilotserkivskiy muzychno-dramatychnyi teatr, 2000); *Nasha drama: Zbirnyk p'ies*, intro. by Bohdan Stupka (Kyiv: Natsional'nyi teatr im. I. Franka and Nadra Bank, 2002); Nadiia Miroshnychenko, ed., *U poshukakh teatru: Antolohiia molodoï dramaturhii* (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2003); and idem, *Straik iliuzii: Antolohiia suchasnoi ukraïns'koï dramaturhii* (Kyiv: Osnovy, 2004).

approach to time is not new, however; even in *Don Quixote*, Sancho Panza hints at such an understanding. Time flows at different rates, depending on the curvature of space; Einstein's theory provides the explanation for the interrelatedness of space and time.

In *Masters of Time* time is seen as both quantitative and qualitative. But the myth of Eternal Return, the primitive and classical belief in cyclical time, also appears in modern concepts. It is exactly this idea that we find in the postwar plays in this anthology by Kovalenko, Kostetzky, Kolomiets, and Shevchuk. Despite the horrors of both world wars and their after-effects in Ukraine, the protagonists and perhaps also the authors, probably as an expression of an intuitive clinging to their last hope, needed to assert a future for later generations. Hope in the future reminds one of a purpose in life, and perhaps also even allows one to consider some hidden harmony in the universe. There is, therefore, an opportunity to start all over again. In this respect, Ukrainian dramaturgy contradicts the basic premise of the theatre of the absurd, which sees no harmony and no real purpose in life.

While the pre-1945 plays in this anthology deal with the theme of sacrifice, which was often for the sake of one's community or nation, most of the later works add another, more explicit motivation for such an act. Sacrifice is offered as an expression of a basic belief in the goodness of humankind. In many instances this is depicted in terms of inner or outer beauty, especially in women. Young Ukrainian women have traditionally been portrayed with long, beautiful hair (e.g., in *Sonata Pathétique*, *The Heroine Dies in the First Act*, *Hunger—1933*, and *Planet Speranta*), symbolizing innocence, youthfulness, and classic beauty. Women also have other roles in most of the plays here. Perhaps even more often than the men, they are willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their loved ones, their country, or humankind (as in *The People's Malachi*, *The Heroine Dies in the First Act*, *Hunger—1933*, and *Planet Speranta*). The female protagonists appear also as leaders either in humane and humanitarian terms (in *The Heroine* and *Hunger—1933*); often they are also initiators of action (in *Sonata Pathétique*, *Masters of Time*, and *A Play about a Great Man*) or combine both roles (in *The Heroine Dies in the First Act*).

Specific observations may be made about the form and the stylistic and technical devices in the plays in this collection. For example, in *Masters of Time* or in *A Play About a Great Man*, the inclusion of the time element and related developments and their significance for an individual is presented in a rather innovative manner for Western drama. While many of these plays do not appear to have any Ukrainian elements in terms of the setting or subject matter, they do contain some specifically Ukrainian features. Meanwhile *Sonata Pathétique* places its protagonists on three levels of a building, as in the traditional Ukrainian *vertep* (Nativity puppet play); *Hunger—1933* takes place at a typical Ukrainian road crossing, in front of a crucifix. *A Play about a Great Man* features two *intermedii* typical of Ukrainian plays of the Baroque period. In the postwar plays in this anthology one can see a marked tendency to return to some of the theatrical devices used during the Baroque: music, songs, dance, masks, and other visual stage devices. Although similar devices have reappeared in theatres elsewhere in Europe, those used in the Ukrainian plays often contain traditional Ukrainian elements, possibly reflecting a conscious or subconscious desire to return to one's roots and to provide for and secure a continuity for the genre in Ukrainian literature and theatre.

In most cases the new plays do not indicate a specific trend or national style in Ukrainian literature. Most of them reflect when and where they were written, whether it was under certain official restrictions or historical pressures specific to Ukraine or all of Europe. The works in this anthology express universal concerns and values and reflect the vicissitudes that hu-

mankind faced in twentieth-century Europe. They include realist, modernist, and postmodernist plays that reflect many, if not most, literary trends of the last century.

## Selected Studies on Twentieth-Century Ukrainian Drama by Larissa M. L. Z. Onyshkevych

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## About the Editor, the Translators, and the Artist

LARISSA M. L. ZALESKA ONYSHKEVYCH graduated from the University of Toronto. In 1973 she successfully defended her Ph.D. dissertation, “Existentialism in Modern Ukrainian Drama,” at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Onyshkevych taught Ukrainian literature at Rutgers University, headed the Editing Division of the Princeton Research Forum, and served as the president of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in the United States (2000–2006). She is the editor of the anthologies and miscellanies *Kontrasty* (Contrasts, 1970), *Pershyi vinok* (The First Wreath, 2d ed., 1984), *Borys Antonenko-Davydovych: Lytsar neabsurdnykh idei* (Borys Antonenko-Davydovych: A Knight of Unabsurd Ideas, 1990), *Svity Tarasa Shevchenka* (The Worlds of Taras Shevchenko, 2 vols., 1991–2001), *Blyzniata shche зустринут'sia: Antolohiia dramaturhii ukraïns'koï diiaspory* (The Twins Shall Meet Again: An Anthology of Ukrainian Diasporic Drama, 1997), and *Antolohiia modernoi ukraïns'koï dramy* (An Anthology of Modern Ukrainian Drama, 1998). She received an honorary doctorate from Lviv National University in 2001. An edition of her selected articles on Ukrainian drama was published in 2009.

BOHDAN BOYCHUK is a Ukrainian poet, playwright, novelist, editor, and translator who has lived in the United States since 1949. The author of ten books of poetry, three dramas, five published novels, and a volume of memoirs, he has translated books of selected poems by Bohdan Ihor Antonych, Ivan Drach, and Boris Pasternak into English, and Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and editions of selected poems by Juan Ramón Jiménez, Stanley Kunitz, David Ignatow, and e. e. cummings into Ukrainian. He served as a long-time literary editor of the monthly journal *Suchasnist'* and was the founding editor of the Ukrainian literary journal *Svito-vyd* (1990–99).

DON I. BOYCHUK graduated from Rutgers University and Vanderbilt University’s Medical School. He is a neurosurgeon in San Diego.

GEORGE S. N. LUCKYJ (1919–2001) taught Ukrainian and Russian literature at the University of Toronto for many years (1952–84). The author and editor of many books about Ukrainian literature and Ukrainian history and the translator of Ukrainian literary works, from 1976 to 1982 he served as associate director of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies and the first managing editor of the *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*. His translation, together with his wife Moira (1918–2007), of Mykola Kulish’s *Sonata Pathétique* was published in 1975. It was revised for this anthology.

JOHN PRASKO wrote a master’s thesis for Villanova University on *The People’s Malachi* by Mykola Kulish. He teaches high-school English and social studies in Pennsylvania.

VERA RICH (1937–2009) was a British poet and translator. She translated many Ukrainian poems (published mostly in *The Ukrainian Review*); Taras Shevchenko’s *Song Out of Darkness: Selected Poems* (1961); and Lesia Ukrainka’s play *The Stone Host*, her verse dramas *The Orgy* and *Cassandra*, and her narrative poem *Robert Bruce, King of Scotland*, which were published in *Lesya Ukrainka: Life and Work. Selected Works* (1968).

CHRISTINE OSHCHUDLAK STAWNYCHY graduated from Rutgers University and is a teacher of German in a New Jersey middle school.

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CHARLES A. STEK graduated from Rutgers University and works as a legislative aide in Washington, D.C.

ROXOLANA STOJKO-LOZYNSKYJ graduated from Rutgers University and pursued post-graduate studies in history at New York University. An earlier version of her translation of *In the Wilderness* was published in *Lesia Ukrainka in Translations* (1988).

ANTHONY WIXLEY was an interwar British translator of Soviet literature. His rendition from the Russian of Ivan Kocherha's *Masters of Time*, originally published in *Four Soviet Plays* (New York, 1937), was revised for this anthology.



# Lesia Ukrainka

Larysa Kosach (1871–1913), better known by her pen name Lesia Ukrainka, was one of the most important Ukrainian writers at the turn of the twentieth century. Her works served as a bridge to modernism in Ukrainian literature, and introduced important issues to the dramatic as well as the cultural discourse. She was born into a family that was prominent in Ukrainian cultural life. Her mother, the writer Olena Pchilka, encouraged her daughter to start writing poetry at the age of nine. When Larysa was thirteen, her poems began appearing in various periodicals. Although Lesia Ukrainka is most popularly known for her ebullient and lyrical poems, it is her nearly twenty dramas in verse that constitute her significant contribution to literature.

Lesia Ukrainka's inclination towards the dramatic genre is evident already in her early poetry, which often contains implied or real dialogue, and dramatic action. Her narrative poems *Robert Brius, korol' shotlands'kyi* (Robert Bruce, the Scottish King, 1893) and *Ifigeniia v Tavrydi* (Iphigenia in Tauris, 1898) also reveal this tendency. Her first play, *Blakytna troianda* (The Azure Rose, 1896) was written in prose; *Oderzhyma* (A Woman Obsessed, 1901) was her first dramatic poem. Lesia Ukrainka completed her versified drama *U pushchi* (In the Wilderness) in 1909. *Orhiia* (The Orgy, 1912–13), *Lisova pisnia* (The Forest Song, 1911) and *Kaminnyi hospodar* (The Stone Host, 1912) are her best known and most often staged dramas. In all of her dramatic works she stresses the need to make choices for the sake of self-expression and individual principles.

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## About *In the Wilderness*

In her plays Lesia Ukrainka used various (Biblical, Greek and Roman) settings from antiquity. *In the Wilderness* is her only verse drama set in America and the first major work of Ukrainian literature to do so. This not only made it easier for her to circumvent the Russian censors and their disapproval of Ukrainian non-rural settings, but also stressed the universality of the issues she raised in the play.

This translation is based on the version of *U pushchi* published in the 1954 New York edition of Lesia Ukrainka's *Tvory*, vol. 9. In that edition, Pavlo Fylypovych's introduction provides information on Lesia Ukrainka's acquaintance with sources that influenced her in writing this play. Fylypovych writes that Lesia Ukrainka's uncle, the scholar Mykhailo Drahomanov, was very interested in the first Protestant colonists in New England. In 1893, Drahomanov published a brochure on the religious conflicts in Massachusetts and another on the Calvinist freethinker William Rogers, who later moved from that colony to Rhode Island. Apparently Lesia Ukrainka, who in 1895 received a biography of John Milton from Drahomanov, was also drawn to the history of the Puritans. Among the works found with her notes on *In the Wilderness* were "Footprints of Roger Williams" (by an unknown English author), quotations from the Bible, and the writings of a seventeenth-century Russian archpriest, Avvakum. Scholars have found various parallels between *In the Wilderness* and other works in world literature and art; Mykhailo Drai-Khmara suggested that Van Dyck's painting *The Old Puritan Lady* had probably inspired the figures of Edith and Davy.

John Milton (1609–74) is usually associated with the ideas of rational freedom and responsible choice. His friend Roger Williams (1603–84), a Calvinist chaplain and teacher, was a nonconformist who supported the separation of church and state, was tolerant of other religions, and respected the native Americans' right to their lands. When he was banished from Massachusetts, he settled in Rhode Island, where he purchased land from the Narragansett people. Rhode Island became a haven for people pursuing religious freedom and individual self-expression.

Williams's basic principles are much in tune with the ideas that Lesia Ukrainka presents. That she probably read rather extensively about the Puritans is reflected in her choice of the term "the wilderness"; the word was used by the colonists in reference to the clearing and cultivation of new lands. After Lesia Ukrainka died, her husband, the ethnographer Klymentii Kvitka, provided some details about the history of the play's composition. In 1898 Lesia Ukrainka began working on a verse drama called *Richard*, but she completed only the first and third acts. It was not until 1907 that she resumed work on the second act, which she finished on 14 October 1908 while in the Crimea. In 1909, she made some changes to the play and submitted it to the prominent Ukrainian journal *Literaturno-naukovyi vistnyk*, where it appeared in 1910 (issues 3–4). Afterwards she changed the name of the play to *The Sculptor* and later to *In the Wilderness*. Initially she wrote the work in iambic hexameter, but then switched primarily to iambic pentameter.

*In the Wilderness* was first performed in 1918 by the Molodyi Teatr troupe in Kyiv.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Klymentii Kvitka's introduction to Lesia Ukrainka, *Tvory*, vol. 33 (Kyiv: Knyhospilka, 1923), quoted by Pavlo Fylypovych in his "Henezha dramatychnoi poemy Lesi Ukraïny 'U pushchi,'" in Lesia Ukraïna, *Tvory*, vol. 9 (1923; New York: G. Tyszczenko and A. Bilous, 1954), 7–8.

## A Matter of Richard's Choice

The duality of human desires and the resulting conflict within the self were often discussed in nineteenth-century literature. Lesia Ukrainka, however, treated this subject in quite a different way than other authors. In almost all of her major works, the dominant theme is not the split personality or the conflict between good and evil in human beings; rather it is the conflict resulting from the conscious choice of alternatives that is often made in critical situations.

For the most part, her protagonists consciously base their life choices on specific principles and are willing to make personal sacrifices for them. In the course of the dramatic action each protagonist's options are usually determined after a series of steps: an unexpected situation helps bare the truth about a person's life, allowing one to undergo a kind of self-analysis and to make a choice of values. While in Lesia Ukrainka's early works the protagonist's choice often took into account the community or the country (with such heroes as Robert Bruce or Iphigenia), in her later writings the protagonist identified more with a group of like believers or individuals (except in *The Orgy*, where the group also has a national identity). While Robert Bruce and Iphigenia do not face any personal doubts or hesitations, most of Lesia Ukrainka's later protagonists have problems remaining steadfast on their chosen road and often compromise their principles.

In this respect, *In the Wilderness* still stands with Lesia Ukrainka's early group of dramas. In it Richard makes no compromises. But his inability to remain a creative artist in new circumstances points to another very important element for the author. The act of defending one's principles does not take place in a vacuum removed from other people. As Lesia Ukrainka matured as a writer, her focus shifted from stressing the principles themselves to highlighting the supporting factors and elements related to them. In her post-Romantic stand she is not satisfied with emphasizing only the individual and his heroic sacrifice for his or her nation. Lesia Ukrainka expanded this concept. She replaced the idea of sacrifice for the country or the community with the basic human need for a supporting group of individuals, of like-thinkers, or the promise of a future generation that would follow such ideas and thus make transcendence possible. In Lesia Ukrainka's presentation of the process Richard undergoes in making a choice, one cannot fail to notice a similarity with the basic concepts of existentialism.

*In the Wilderness* is the first dramatic work in which Lesia Ukrainka expresses some existentialist ideas.<sup>2</sup> With respect to the protagonist's desire to be true to his chosen values, it bears a resemblance to Henrik Ibsen's *Brand*. Pavlo Fylypovych noted how much Lesia Ukrainka liked Ibsen's play. He also hinted at the possibility that she was well acquainted with Ibsen's letter to Georg Brandes (published in 1882), in which he explained that Brand, the play's protagonist, could just as well have been a sculptor as a minister.<sup>3</sup> It therefore appears probable that Lesia Ukrainka deliberately chose Richard to be a sculptor, because the effect of his existentialist predicament could be visibly demonstrated in his works.

When, at first, Richard feels dissatisfied with his meaningless life, he chooses a new road; later he reconfirms it three times by changing his surroundings. Each time he has a chance to

<sup>2</sup> On the basis of her later play *Advokat Martiiian* (1911), Ihor Kachurovsky claims that she may be considered Europe's first existentialist writer. See his "Pokirna pravdi i krasi," *Pivnichne siaivo* (Edmonton) 5 (1971): 151.

<sup>3</sup> Fylypovych, "Heneza," 10. For the English text of Ibsen's letter, see Georg Brandes, *Henrik Ibsen Bjornstjerne Bjornson: Critical Studies*, trans. Jessie Muir (London: William Heinemann, 1899), 70.

give in to the ways and values of the surrounding community. Each time he makes the same decision and tries to find his authenticity in art, in helping other people, and in hoping to transmit some of his values to Davy. The need for the companionship of people who understand him and share his values is very important to Richard, and it is for the sake of his family that he leaves Italy. In Massachusetts, the Puritans' active opposition to him provides a stimulus for his work. In contrast, his spiritual isolation in Rhode Island, where he experiences no criticism or opposition, devastates him, leading him to doubt his talent and his goal in life. Because he is unable to share his dream with others, his life is like hell to him; this is reflected in the *tormentata* sculpture. Reminiscing about his past creativity brings him memories of self-expression and authentic existence that he can no longer recreate.

Richard arrives at this self-evaluation after seeing no other alternative to his mission and his burden. He believes that "no one alive has yet lived without a dream." While he was in Italy, his dream was true freedom for his inner self and for the new Christian community, "a dream of a new talent in the New Canaan."<sup>4</sup> This was to be that "fire of eternal beauty" that he craved, just as in the Bible Mary cared for the spiritual aspects of life, in contrast to the practical Martha. In the wilderness, during the hard daily toil for bread, Richard could stifle his creative desires to a point, but he always had to return "to human form." However, the lack of understanding and support from his own community, whether in Massachusetts or Rhode Island, made the dream distant and unachievable.

To the Puritans New Canaan represented a land clear of thorns and wild growth and ready for new dreams. In Lesia Ukrainka's work that new land symbolizes the potential essence of authenticity, which needs constant cultivation. Both in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, however, the communities soon revert to their accustomed ways rather than seeking their individual authenticity. They become the "wild growth" surrounding Richard. The Puritans are thus presented as actual pagans, with their own idol—Godwinson.<sup>5</sup> The Puritans thus compromise some of their concepts of freedom. Godwinson's dogmatism is not different from that of any other fanatical community or leader. A similar fanaticism is found in the autobiography of the Russian monk Avvakum, whose work Lesia Ukrainka had read. Avvakum and his followers also fell into shaman-like shaking and convulsions when confronting "sin," and in their righteousness they thought nothing of cursing those who held slightly different opinions on minor matters of religious ritual. Godwinson shares some of Avvakum's worst characteristics when calling for cutting away "any unworthy sprouts" and casting them into fire. The need to be on the side of what they see as righteousness becomes an obsession to the Puritans. The fear of being infected becomes so real that Godwinson's charlatanism is not perceived even by the wisest among them.

The Puritans' blind acceptance of Godwinson's decisions estranges Richard from the group.<sup>6</sup> However, he cannot achieve true authenticity without the presence and support of other people. Thus, although he knows he has chosen the right road, in his isolation he cannot

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<sup>4</sup> According to an earlier version of the text. See Lesia Ukrainka, *Tvory*, ccxxi.

<sup>5</sup> Harry S. Stout's *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) deals with a similar situation. An illuminating review of this book comments on the Puritan preachers' power and role, which is summarized in the review's title. See "When God Had No Competition," *Newsweek*, 20 October 1986, 73.

<sup>6</sup> In an earlier version, Richard describes himself as a foreigner among his own people, just as Christ was when He had nowhere to rest His head. See Lesia Ukrainka, *Tvory*, xcvi.



deal with his other doubts. This results in a barrier between Richard and his potential. When it appears to him that he has no future as an artist, he wants to have at least his dream remain alive in a way proclaimed by the inscription on the sculpture. With this statuette back in Italy, Richard's dream would be alive and would leave a mark in others. Unlike Faust, Richard gives up his battle with life. He does not succeed in clearing the thorns and wild growth from the souls of those who share the values of the biblical Martha rather than those of Mary. The introduction of the names of the two women indicates Lesia Ukrainka's emphasis on the dichotomy of humankind and the constant battle between Richard's life and his dream.

When Richard's precious statuette, which represents his soul, is about to be separated from him, he is doomed to die. Sending the statuette away represents his last symbolic stand against personal annihilation. Thus, while saving his dream, he accepts his physical end. A similar choice is made by the protagonists in Lesia Ukrainka's *Forest Song*, *The Orgy*, and many of her other plays. The only remaining symbol reflecting Richard's short-lived authenticity and his dream is expressed successfully through the statuette: it remains eternal because it continues to move and inspire people. Its place in the world promises a degree of transcendence for Richard. It is Davy who provides a hope that his uncle's principles and art will continue and that his own self-expression and authenticity will be achieved.

Lesia Ukrainka emphasizes that the decisions that Richard, Jonathan, and Davy make will affect not only them, but also others. During such moments the support of others is both desirable and crucial. Thus, while Richard expresses joy at Jonathan's first appearance, since together they could move mountains, it is not a group effort that is of concern here. As in the situation when Richard chooses to help Mrs. Rivers over the congregation, the practicing Christian virtue has to surface because of Richard's feelings and sense of duty. In contrast, the Puritans decide to ignore the plight of the woman and her children.

Richard always stresses that in order to "build a New Canaan" he needs the support of others; he can only exist in the eyes of others. He also needs the security of knowing that someone will follow his path, his values, and his principles. That is why he keeps referring to those "who will follow in my footsteps," stressing "for beauty's sake." This emphasis on "beauty" is implied not only in the values he chooses, but also in sharing and spreading them. Although the initial consideration is for the aesthetic aspect of sculpture, the more general reference is to expressing beauty as truth. In this light, Richard sees the betrayal of his art as similar to Peter's betrayal of Christ; there is even a reference to Judas's betrayal and the death of Christ that follows.

Through this equation of beauty with truth, one may understand Lesia Ukrainka's initial statement that Richard's profession is not of primary importance. The choice of art rather than music, for example, implies a stress on individual values and choices. The play emphasizes the choices an individual makes and how they affect not only his own self-expression but also that of other people.

# *In the Wilderness*

(1897–1909)

## CHARACTERS

RICHARD IRON, *a sculptor*

EDITH, *his old mother*

CHRISTABELLE, *his sister, a widow*

DAVY, *Christabelle's son, in his early teens*

JONATHAN, *a sculptor, Richard's friend*

JOSHUA CAMPBELL, *an old friend of the Irons family*

JOANNA (JENNY), *his young daughter*

AN INDIAN GIRL

WOMAN, *River's wife*

GODWINSON, *a teacher and preacher*

CALEB PADDINGTON, *the oldest citizen in the settlement*

*The most respected citizens in the settlement in Massachusetts:*

JEREMIAH ORTWIN

JOHN MILLS

MATTHEW FIELDING

ABRAHAM SMITH

MASTER, *a mathematics instructor in Rhode Island*

BRYDE, *an organist and singing instructor in Rhode Island*

BROOKLEY, *a seamstress*

CHARLIE, *Richard's pupil*

ANOTHER PUPIL

MACHARDY

*Citizens of Rhode Island:*

JONES

O'PATRICK

ANTONIO, *a Venetian commercial envoy*

*CITIZENS in Massachusetts*

*PUPILS in Rhode Island*

*The play takes place in the seventeenth century: the first two acts in a small settlement in Massachusetts, the last act in Rhode Island.*

## Act One

*A house crudely built of logs; a large fireplace with a bust, statuettes, and a few fragments of an ancient sculpture on it. EDITH and CHRISTABELLE are wiping a table and benches while softly humming the melody of a hymn. Coming from the outside are the clatter of axes, the drone of a saw, and the clamouring of workers. Finally a voice echoes:*

Enough for today. It's time to go home.

RICHARD and DAVY enter the house exhausted. RICHARD is wearing an apron with masonry tools, and DAVY carries a brush and pail.

RICHARD: The chimney's ready. We even whitewashed it.  
*(Removes the apron and hangs it along with the tools on a peg.)*  
 It's finished. *(Sits on a stool in front of the fireplace.)*  
 I'm very tired! And you, lad?

DAVY: Me? No, not really. Uncle, just wait,  
 I'll bring in some kindling, and liven up the fire.  
 It will be wonderful! We'll roast those chestnuts I have.  
 They'll be popping before you know it! *(Runs out.)*

RICHARD *(stretching his tired arms)*: There's fog outside.  
 It's cold and damp, just as by our Thames.

CHRISTABELLE *(sighing)*: Oh, the Thames! We will never see it again.  
 Why has the Lord punished us with banishment?

EDITH: Do not blame God, my Daughter! That is a sin!  
 He's led us not into exile, but to a promised land,  
 as He once led Israel into Canaan from Egypt,  
 from their house of labour. In those days, too,  
 there were those who complained about the difficult journey.  
 And what happened to them in consequence?  
 Remember that and be humble in spirit.

DAVY enters with the kindling and busies himself by the fireplace.

CHRISTABELLE: I do try to be humble, Mother. But sometimes,  
 It is so hard for me when I remember  
 that the grave of my John is out there somewhere.

EDITH: "Let the dead bury their dead!" His grave is there  
 beyond the sea, while here your son's alive,  
 as are your brother, mother, and the entire Christian community.  
*(CHRISTABELLE sighs, then begins poking around the house and straightening things.)*  
 Today, our Reverend Godwinson shall explain  
 in public what "New Canaan" means. Son, will you attend?

*At these words, DAVY quietly, but deftly, lies down on the bench and covers himself with a coat.*

RICHARD: No, Mother.

EDITH: Why not?

RICHARD: I'm tired and ... How should I say this?

I think that there will be very little that's new  
in his explanation.

EDITH: My Son, a freethinking spirit has crept into you.  
Your late father committed a grave error  
when he sent you on a journey to the papal land!  
Cunning Rome has poisoned you.

RICHARD: Dear Mother!  
Cunning Rome is not responsible for the fact that  
Master Godwinson is not very eloquent.

EDITH: For a sincere soul and a good heart  
eloquence is not necessary. Truth and God's word suffice.

RICHARD: I read the Bible. Eloquence can be found there.

EDITH: I don't know, Son, your words appear to be simple,  
yet somehow they ring of cunning.

RICHARD: Well then, forget them, Mother dear.  
And don't be angry. Don't you know your own Richard?  
He is a little like his father.

CHRISTABELLE: Our dad was always joking and smiling.

EDITH: But he was always God-fearing.

CHRISTABELLE: That is what I was about to say, Mother.

EDITH: We must go now, or else they will begin to read  
God's word without us. When the hour of rest is over,  
heavenly matters must be left, and earthly ones  
begun. Let us not miss God's hour.

CHRISTABELLE: I'm ready, but where is Davy?  
(*Sees him on the bench.*)

What is this? Has he fallen asleep? Get up, child!

RICHARD: Let the boy be, dear Sister. He is still young,  
and he truly worked like a grown man.

EDITH (*trying to wake DAVY, who is in a deep sleep*):  
He has fallen into a deep sleep and I cannot  
wake him. God be with him, we should not be late.  
Come, Daughter.

RICHARD: Wait a moment. Belle,  
where is my wax?

CHRISTABELLE (*taken aback*): Why do you ask?

RICHARD: I would like to sculpt a bit while I am resting.

EDITH: For toys you have the time and the desire.

RICHARD: For me they are not toys dear Mother! You know that.  
But there is no time for arguments. Where is the wax?  
Belle dear, you must have put it somewhere.

CHRISTABELLE: You have not mentioned it for such a long time!

RICHARD: Because I did not have a free moment here!  
More than once I have forgotten my own needs.  
All day I work so hard, and then at night  
I sleep like a dead man. I have become an ox,

yet, like the Babylonian King, I don't know why  
I am being punished. And, now, for a while, I can be  
human again. So where is that wax of mine?

CHRISTABELLE: Brother dear, please do forgive me!

They asked for it, and Mother ordered me to—

RICHARD: Belle dear, I'm afraid I don't understand you.

EDITH: The congregation took your wax for candles,  
so that God's word could then be read.

Our Reverend Godwinson's eyes have weakened from reading  
by the light of kindling.

RICHARD: Oh, Mother! Mother!

EDITH: Listen, my Son!

RICHARD: I cannot listen! Go, leave me alone!

I am not myself now! Get out of my sight!

EDITH: You say that to your own mother?

RICHARD: I am saying it to you, I would not say it  
to anyone else but simply—

EDITH: What? Strike them? Tell me!

RICHARD: Leave me alone!

CHRISTABELLE: Let him be, Mama. He shall calm down.

Come now, it is time.

EDITH (*looking at her son for a moment and then going to the door*):

He does not honour his own mother! And why?

Because of some useless wax! May God forgive you.

(EDITH and CHRISTABELLE leave.)

RICHARD (*alone and quiet for a moment*):

May God forgive whom? Surely the one  
who is not aware of what he is doing.

What can we do? To forgive or punish is God's  
concern, and of no use at all to people.

If I avenged a wrong or forgave it,

as our law demands, the wrong would still not change.

It would keep rubbing like a stone and gnaw away

at the heart, whether it is righteous or sinful makes no difference.

Now, for me to sit and look at these useless hands

deprived of their beloved work, the one thing

that beautified my life, is worse than an

unremitted transgression, or a tortured conscience ...

*The women have barely gone when DAVY jumps up from the bench, creeps up to RICHARD, and tries to catch his attention. But RICHARD does not hear him.*

DAVY: A question, Uncle: can you sculpt only with wax?

RICHARD: Why do you want to know?

DAVY (*sitting at RICHARD's feet and looking earnestly into his eyes*): Dear Uncle, please tell me!

RICHARD: I can also sculpt with clay, but there is none around.

DAVY: Really! There is not? But we used some to make the chimney.

RICHARD: It's not that kind of clay. A statue is not a chimney. Keep that in mind.

DAVY (*hurt*): I know, Uncle, I just wanted to say ... I will not now, because you'll get angry again.

RICHARD: I am not angry with you, Davy. Do not mind me.

DAVY: Well, Uncle, I have tried sculpting with bread.

RICHARD: You tried sculpting? Don't do it, Davy. Do not even try it.

DAVY: Why not? Do you think that it's bad?

I think I did it well. At least take a look.

(*Takes out of his pocket a figurine made from bread and shows it to RICHARD.*)

See? It is Godwinson. He has a long coat, a round head, a book in his hand and a mouth from ear to ear. And the ears—see how they stick out? Is not this what he truly looks like?

RICHARD (*examining DAVY'S figurine little by little and then taking it*):

Let me take a look. (*Smiling*) It really is Godwinson!

Is this the first time you have sculpted a figurine?

DAVY: No, the whole time we were at sea I sculpted things.

RICHARD: Then why didn't I notice?

DAVY: Well, I was hiding them from Mother and Grandma. They do not like it.

RICHARD: But why did you hide from me, Davy?

DAVY: I was embarrassed to show them. They were all bad.

RICHARD (*examining the figurine*): You see, Davy, his nose should be longer, and his head should be hanging.

DAVY: That is true. But it can be fixed.

The bread is still fresh.

RICHARD: ... and should be tilted

to one side like this (*fixing it*),

and his hands should be folded on the book.

DAVY: No, his finger should be in the book, as if

he is marking the place in the text. (*Mimicking a nasal voice*)

"Chapter 10, Hosea, verse one." (*Laughing*)

If only I could sculpt the way you do!

I would sculpt everyone: old Mrs. Stokeley,

that owl in the large glasses who will not let us play

games on Sundays, or stout Dick singing a hymn,

his face wrinkled up like a baked apple.

RICHARD: Why do you want to sculpt things like that?

DAVY: Because I like things that look funny.

RICHARD: What about those that are beautiful?

Do you not like them?

DAVY: Why would I not? It is

just that I would have to make them up.

And I am not good enough for that yet. (*Moving closer to RICHARD*)

Uncle, let me look at the statuette you made  
when we were still on the boat.

RICHARD: Are you really interested?

DAVY: I am!

RICHARD: Well, fetch it then. It's there, in the closet.

DAVY (*by the closet*): May I also get whatever you  
brought back from Italy?

RICHARD: No,

do not touch that. What are you doing there?

DAVY: I am reading the inscription, and  
it is hard to understand Latin. (*Reading slowly*)  
*Pereat mundus, fiat ars.* What does that mean?

RICHARD: "Let the world perish, but let art prevail."

DAVY: Art?

RICHARD: You know: sculpture, music, painting.

DAVY: Oh, I understand. Who said that?

RICHARD: It was a kind of saying in Venice  
at the sculptors circle, into which I was accepted.

DAVY: It must have been quite a merry life there, Uncle.

RICHARD: Oh yes, yes, my boy.

DAVY: How could you leave that circle?

RICHARD: Then who would have kept you from poverty  
and feed your grandmother, mother, and you?

DAVY: I would have managed alone, somehow.

RICHARD: Just like your father?

DAVY: Oh, Da! Da! Tell me, why did they kill him?

RICHARD: Because of a book.

DAVY: What was in that book?

RICHARD: He wrote that images should not be revered  
and that the Anglican Church is profane.

DAVY: But that is true! Grandma says that,  
and even the Holy Scriptures say that.

RICHARD: Do you think men are not punished for speaking the truth?

DAVY *stands holding the figurine silently, deep in thought.*

JENNY CAMPBELL, *a young girl, very plainly dressed, enters and pauses at the threshold.*

JENNY: Oh, excuse me! Are you alone?

RICHARD: Come in, please. My good mother  
and Belle will return shortly.

JENNY *remains standing. Embarrassed, she plays with the edge of her apron and does not enter the room.*

DAVY (*looking at the figurine he is holding and then at JENNY*):  
Miss Jenny, look this is your portrait!

JENNY: Where? (*Steps forward.*)

DAVY: Right here!

JENNY (*pretending she does not see the resemblance*):

How can this be a portrait of me?

She is dressed just like a princess.

RICHARD: Are clothes so important? You too could dress like a princess.

JENNY: How could I do that? I am but a simple girl.

RICHARD: Believe me, Miss Jenny, no one would be surprised to see you in clothes like this.

JENNY: Oh, Master Iron! You have grown accustomed to giving compliments to ladies.

RICHARD: Why do you think that I was accustomed?

JENNY: Well, you were always in the finest company, sometimes even at the royal court!

RICHARD: At royal artists' homes, you mean.

JENNY: It is all the same! Grand ladies come to the court to have their portraits painted.

DAVY: That is nothing! If only you could hear my uncle describing the balls, comedies, and masquerades he has seen around the world! That is worth listening to!

RICHARD: Don't prattle on so, Davy!

JENNY (*to DAVY*): Do you think your uncle is interested in telling me that?

RICHARD: Miss Jenny, if I only knew you'd be interested in hearing it—

JENNY: Everyone is interested in listening to a worldly man.

DAVY: Uncle, tell us about the carnival in that city on the water.

What is it called?

RICHARD: Do you mean Venice?

DAVY: Yes! Yes!

JENNY: They say that it is beautiful there.

RICHARD: They call that city "the Queen of the Seas," but I would call it the cradle of beauty.

When, on an azure night, I looked at the marble city, it seemed to me that human hands could not have built those white palaces, but that they lifted themselves out of the sea, the way silvery mists arise.

JENNY *listens intently, leaning on the fireplace.* RICHARD *stares at her and pauses.*

DAVY: Go on, Uncle! Why aren't you speaking?

RICHARD: Give me a knife and some wood.

DAVY: What for?

RICHARD: It is easier to talk while I am carving.

(*DAVY hands him a knife and wood. As RICHARD carves, he glances at JENNY.*)

Whenever the black gondolas were in sight and the boats' sails shimmered on the horizon as they sailed toward the city, it seemed to me that mystic stars were sending Venice a gift of incomparable dreams, and it was accepting them delicately rocking them to sleep so as not to frighten them.

(*The wood abruptly breaks in his hands. Annoyed, he throws it into the fire.*)



Give me some clay, Davy.

DAVY: The plain kind that we have?

RICHARD: If that is all we have.

DAVY *leaves and quickly returns with the clay.*

RICHARD (*continuing without DAVY and then, while not interrupting his tale, taking the clay and beginning to mould something from it*):

As dawn would break and I would still be looking  
at the enchantress that people call Venice.

As soon as the sun's first rays hit the stone walls,  
they would light up with a golden glow,  
and it seemed as if the sea began smiling as it awoke  
and saw the beauty of the magnificent queen.

The best time to behold her is when dawn is just breaking,  
before the people have risen or just gone to bed.

Venice does not like to sleep at night. It is then  
that the marble comes to life and the stone populace of statutes  
seems to be performing a mystery play. The marble faces  
change expression as though alive under the sun's rays.

What a handsome people! It is no wonder that simple folk  
believe nymphs and water sprites came from the sea  
and climbed onto the walls to see how wide that world is,  
but they became so engrossed in gazing at the beautiful city  
that they did not notice the moon disappear.

When the sun shot through its sharp rays,  
all the nymphs then turned to stone,  
for they are forbidden to look at the sun.

DAVY: Are there really nymphs in the sea?

RICHARD: For those who believe in them, yes, there are.

DAVY: If I believe in them, will I see them?

RICHARD: I am certain that you will.

JENNY: But Dad says it is a sin to believe in such things.

RICHARD: But what if one believes in them?

JENNY: Read the Holy Scriptures, and the mind will become enlightened.

RICHARD: But the dream will remain.

EDITH and CHRISTABELLE enter. *With them are GODWINSON and JOSHUA CAMPBELL. Both men have short hair. GODWINSON wears a long coat, like that of a cleric or a scholar. CAMPBELL is dressed in simple Puritan garb.*

GODWINSON: Peace to this household!

RICHARD *stands up silently and bows. DAVY and JENNY move to the side. JENNY exchanges greetings with the women, while DAVY hides in the alcove.*

CAMPBELL: Peace be with you!

RICHARD: How are you ... good Mr. Campbell?

CAMPBELL (*not replying to RICHARD but speaking to JENNY*):

Why are you here?

JENNY (*confused*): I just arrived ... to visit Mistress Christabelle.

CAMPBELL (*looking at* RICHARD): Listen, Daughter, stop that formality.

We are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

We should address each other always by name,

Even the King himself. Do you understand?

JENNY: I understand, Father.

GODWINSON (*to* RICHARD):

And you, young man, perhaps you are not accustomed  
to our simplicity, but now it is time for you  
to forget your impious practices.

RICHARD: I never had any.

GODWINSON: Whoever spent three years among the papists  
must have picked up their customs, too.

RICHARD: Italy may be behind us in matters of faith,  
but it could teach even us some customs.

EDITH (*to* CHRISTABELLE):

Prepare some food for your brother, for if we are  
to go, we must get ready now.

CHRISTABELLE *busies herself by the stove. JENNY helps her, and they converse softly.*

RICHARD: Go where? I am not planning to go anywhere.

CAMPBELL: Just now at the meeting we decided to build a house  
for pastor Godwinson.

RICHARD: But I thought—

GODWINSON: Yes, I do have a cottage, but the congregation,  
in its goodness, wants to build me a stone house in its stead.  
It is not for me—I would never agree to that—  
but for the good of the whole community,  
for people will gather at my house for pious discussions  
on Saturdays. Now it's cramped and hence not comfortable really.  
But I did say to the congregation  
that so much work would be a waste.

CAMPBELL: It is nothing, Father.

If the entire congregation performs the labour,  
it will be built in no time. Perhaps even before winter.

RICHARD: Winter is fast approaching and it is doubtful  
that all the citizens could do this work.

CAMPBELL: Why not?

RICHARD: Simply because not everyone has a home of their own yet.

EDITH: But at our minister's residence, a spiritual fire would burn for us all.

CAMPBELL: Yes, Richard, take your tools and the boy—

RICHARD: The boy is very tired, and too young for communal work.

CAMPBELL: Then come alone.

RICHARD: I do not know if I shall come.

CAMPBELL: Why not?

RICHARD: I do not have the time. I have already promised

our neighbour that I would build a fireplace in her cottage as soon as I have finished here.

Today I must go to her.

EDITH: It seems to me

that your neighbour can wait a bit.

RICHARD: I don't believe she can, Mother dear.

CAMPBELL: But the congregation decided that everyone should take part in this task.

RICHARD: I was not at the council meeting.

CAMPBELL: You could have come.

RICHARD: But no one called me.

EDITH: I called you.

RICHARD: You did not tell me that such deliberations would be taking place at that meeting.

I thought it was only for a prayer gathering.

CAMPBELL: That is exactly what it was, but at the same time we decided to settle certain matters. Nevertheless, whether you were there or not, when the entire congregation decides a matter everyone is obliged to observe the decision.

RICHARD: He who has the strength to oppose orders always works only when he has the desire to do so.

EDITH: I would think that you have the desire.

RICHARD: Please allow me to do the thinking about it.

CAMPBELL: But the congregation does not ask any opinions of those who go against its decisions. You may think whatever pleases you, but you must obey. The rule of the congregation is God's rule, and all other opinions must be silent before it.

RICHARD: It is not becoming for Puritans to speak this way.

CAMPBELL: Why is it not? Pray, explain.

RICHARD: For if we were not defending the freedom of thought, then I'd not know what it is we fought for.

GODWINSON: For God's word, and for civil freedom.

RICHARD: In your opinion, of what does civil freedom consist?

CAMPBELL: That neither the King nor Parliament dare violate the verdict of the congregation, which is a free and independent body.

GODWINSON (*with a threatening voice*): The congregation can then cut away any of its unworthy sprouts and throw them into the fire, and no one may defend them.

RICHARD (*to GODWINSON*): In such a congregation there is truly freedom for all Pharisees.

GODWINSON: Richard, why did you say that?

RICHARD: *Sapienti sat.*

GODWINSON (*rising*): Oh, what well-mannered language!

EDITH: Son, you forget that you are younger and that you

are speaking to a guest in our house. Good Teacher, forgive him,  
and do not be offended by his impulsive words.

RICHARD: Mother, I have not said *mea culpa* yet!

CAMPBELL: What manner of Catholic prattle is that?

GODWINSON (*taking his hat*): May God give you peace.

EDITH: Honoured Teacher! Do not leave my house in anger.

Do not punish me so harshly for my son's thoughtless words.

GODWINSON: Having regard for you, worthy Edith, I shall remain.

*A very poorly dressed woman arrives, pauses at the threshold, and bows a few times to those assembled.*

WOMAN: Peace to this worthy household!

RICHARD: And peace to you, good woman.

*(The woman remains at the threshold. She looks dejected and low-spirited.)*

Join us, please.

GODWINSON (*to CAMPBELL*): I seem to have forgotten this woman's face.

CAMPBELL (*to GODWINSON*): That is because she does not come to the meetings.

She is the wife of Rivers, the one who fled

to Rhode Island after our last elections.

GODWINSON: He was an evil man. He sought to mislead

the congregation. What does she want?

WOMAN (*to RICHARD*): Good Master, sir, I only came to ask you—

RICHARD: Yes, I know. I did not forget. I shall come today.

WOMAN: Forgive me ... for troubling you ...

I would not have dared, but times are so hard.

Autumn is here, while I have no place to light a fire

and keep my poor children warm!

GODWINSON: Have you no house?

CAMPBELL: They have one.

WOMAN: There is a house. My husband put together

a small hut, but it has no stove.

It is as damp there as in a cellar. My youngest

is in bed with a fever, and I myself

can hardly lift my head in the morning. We have lived

in misery, and now it seems the end has come.

There is no help from anyone ... or any advice.

The congregation is wrathful ... but how am I to blame?

If it were only me, but there are the children. (*Cries.*)

RICHARD (*to GODWINSON*): So, are infants responsible for the sins of their parents?

GODWINSON: I, Master, cannot speak for the congregation. It decides.

CAMPBELL (*to the WOMAN*): I advise you, poor woman, to wait awhile.

Once the congregation finishes its communal task,

we shall discuss the matter, and perhaps

then we shall help you, too.

WOMAN (*looking at RICHARD with a tearful expression, then at GODWINSON and CAMPBELL*):

I could wait ... but the child, I just hope he does not die.

RICHARD (*calling*): Davy! (DAVY comes out of the side room.)  
Gather the tools. We are going to do some masonry!

*In the corner DAVY gathers up the tools brought in at the beginning of the act.*

CHRISTABELLE (*calling from the oven*): Richard, you should eat something first.

RICHARD: Later. I am not hungry. Hurry up, Davy!

DAVY: I am ready, Uncle.

RICHARD (*to the WOMAN*): So, let us go.

(Silently bows to GODWINSON and CAMPBELL and leaves with DAVY.)

WOMAN (*bowing*): May God's grace be with you.

CAMPBELL: Farewell!

*The WOMAN bows again to everyone and follows RICHARD and DAVY.*

GODWINSON: Edith, it is plain that your son wishes to engage  
in a duel with the congregation!

CAMPBELL: Reverend, you are too hard on him. I see no sin  
in the boy taking pity on that poor woman.

Compassion for the poor is a Christian obligation.

GODWINSON: That family is poor owing to its own ignominy ...

Now that she is poverty-stricken, this woman  
is as obedient as a sheep. But she has

the soul of a wolf. (*To CAMPBELL*) She did not listen to you.

Obviously she needs the Master, not the congregation.

God shall punish her as He punished Sapphira,  
Ananias's sinful wife, who tried to hide  
her husband's sin from the congregation.

I am certain that Richard did not go to help her  
just from the kindness of his heart.

CAMPBELL: Do not attack him so, Reverend. He is brave!

And to be honest, I do like bravery.

He is like a bullock that is not yet used to the yoke.

All in all, he has a good nature. I have known him  
since he was a child. His late father, Jack, and I  
shared our bread and salt for many years. Edith,  
do you remember how your old husband and I  
gave the Anglicans some hard times?

EDITH: Yes, Brother Joshua, I will not forget  
the kind of friend you were to Jake.

*GODWINSON sits down beside the hearth to stoke the fire, bends to pick up the poker, and notices the bread figurine on the floor. He picks it up, looks at it, and then stands up and turns to Edith.*

GODWINSON: Edith! Your son made this, did he not?

(Shows the figurine to her and places it in front of her on the table.)

EDITH (*humiliated*): Oh, what can I do with him, Reverend Godwinson!

My heart is rent in two that he is heading toward ruin.

GODWINSON: I am sorry that the Lord has punished a most pious mother

with such a sinful son, but I can no longer  
abide in a home where your son is the head of the household.

EDITH: Oh, good Teacher!

GODWINSON: No, I cannot!

May God be with you! (*Leaves quickly.*)

EDITH (*clasp ing her hands*): O Lord! Why do You punish us?

CAMPBELL: What did he find there? (*Looking at the statuette*) Ha-ha-ha-ha!

That's very well done! It truly does resemble  
our teacher, Godwinson! True, perhaps it is sinful,  
but it came out beautifully! See that, Jenny?

JENNY (*coming closer and smiling*): Why did our honoured teacher become so angry?

People have their portraits painted so why  
Should not one make statues of them?

CAMPBELL: Well, Jenny, portraits are only paintings,

but anything that is moulded and carved is an idol, not a portrait.

JENNY: But Da, I thought that only likenesses of gods were idols.

CAMPBELL: No, it is said that no one should sculpt or mould

“any likeness,” because it is loathsome to God.

JENNY: But if someone should mould a figure just for amusement,  
is that a sin?

CAMPBELL: That? How should I say this?

It's not that ... Well, it's just not proper ... Why do you ask?

JENNY (*ashamed*): Oh, just because ...

CAMPBELL: I'm astonished at Richard!

A decent and honest boy, but he cannot seem to give up  
this foolishness.

EDITH: Brother, you are too kind.

This is more than mere foolishness.

It is a sin, and a serious one, mind you.

This is my cross to bear. This is the wound  
in my heart—this foolishness ...

CAMPBELL: Oh, Sister, now you are falling into sin,

the sin of despair. Richard is young. As he enjoys not drink  
or courts a girl, he needs something else to play with ...

it is his young blood. One day he shall marry,  
build his own nest, and forget his little toys.

EDITH: Please, God, let it be so! May your words come true.

Meanwhile, the blood in my veins runs cold when I see such “toys.”

*She points toward several statuettes in an open cupboard. CAMPBELL looks closely at another statuette and recognizes Jenny's likeness.*

CAMPBELL: Aha! And what is this, Joanna?

JENNY (*very embarrassed*): I don't know, Da.

CAMPBELL (*severely*): You should understand that I do not allow such toys!

This had better be the last time!

JENNY: Yes, Da.

CAMPBELL: I will tell Richard to destroy this so that it shall cease to be.

JENNY (*involuntarily*): Oh, Da!

CAMPBELL (*sternly*): Jenny!

JENNY: Nothing, nothing.

(*To CHRISTABELLE*) Sister Christabelle,

I am such a sinner! I'm sorry for the figurine. (*Goes to the alcove.*)

CAMPBELL: Where are you heading, Jenny? It is time for us to go home. I have not eaten since morning.

EDITH: Then stay here, Brother Joshua, and share whatever God has sent us for our meal.

CAMPBELL: No, Sister, I must go. It is high time to be at work. My axe will not come to me. I must go home for it.

EDITH: Brother Joshua, could you please take me to the place where they will be building?

CAMPBELL: Why do you need to go there?

EDITH: I would go to work with the congregation.

CAMPBELL: Women are not called to go. Building a house is not a woman's work.

EDITH: In need, even a woman must be able to do everything.

CAMPBELL: It is not yet of the utmost need.

EDITH: My family has never waited for the utmost need to arise. We have always been in the vanguard. If my son will not serve his congregation and God, his mother shall go in his place. Then no shame shall fall upon my family.

CAMPBELL: Edith, my Sister, that was beautifully said, but a woman's strength cannot match her words.

EDITH: I can carry bricks and mix the clay. The good settlers will not disdain me. I'm certain.

CAMPBELL: As you wish. Come to my house, and I shall lead you there, if that is your desire. Peace be with you for now.

EDITH and CHRISTABELLE: May God be with you!

CAMPBELL and JENNY *leave*.

EDITH: Daughter, give me whatever you have as a repast, and then get me a spade and some cloth and a rope.

CHRISTABELLE: Will you really go, Mother?

EDITH: Do I ever lie?

CHRISTABELLE: Mother dear, allow me to go and help.

EDITH: Whom do you want to help?

CHRISTABELLE: You, Mother.

EDITH: Then stay home.

CHRISTABELLE: Why?

EDITH: Because that is what I wish.

*Silence. CHRISTABELLE prepares the food. EDITH opens and reads the Bible. RICHARD and DAVY rush in out of breath.*

RICHARD: Belle dear, give us something to eat, and quickly.

CHRISTABELLE: You're back? So soon?

RICHARD: It's only for a moment. It is because of

Davy. I see he is almost fainting from hunger, but he would not go without me. I had to bring him here to eat.

*(Paces around the room visibly upset while CHRISTABELLE prepares the food.)*

O Lord! What misery there is upon this earth!

You cannot imagine, Belle, the misfortune of Rivers's wife and her children in that damp hut she calls a home.

And she is not the only one—there are countless others like her ...

*(Pacing silently, then pausing before EDITH)*

You know, Mother, I was thinking that perhaps it truly is a sin to live the way I do.

EDITH *(joyfully)*: Richard, have you finally come to that conclusion?

O, praise the Lord!

RICHARD: Today is the first time

I have seen human misery up close!

I have known just the poverty of artists. I have seen thrift, unending work, but I have never seen convulsions just from hunger or heard its stultified cries.

I did not see or hear or care! Mother, is not such terrible indifference a sin?

I lived amidst beauty and dreams. I lifted myself higher and higher on the wings of dreams, and now I have fallen to the ground. Oh, Mother, how terribly isolated I have been! It seems that a wing of my dreams has been broken ... And it used to beat so freely!

EDITH: My Son! You seem to regret your dreams, but now you understood that instead of dreams—

RICHARD: Yes, instead of dreams, it is bread they need here! I will not cast a stone at them for that.

EDITH: Not only bread is needed here, but God's word too. Do not forget this! We should sincerely serve those who give us the word of God.

RICHARD: Mother! Christ gave it to us long ago. He did not hide the word in a secret place under lock and key. Now everyone can take it. There is no need for intermediaries.

EDITH: Son, you speak just like a Rhode Islander. Rivers's wife has led you to this. God strike her dead!

RICHARD: Do not curse her! She has already been stricken



by misfortune. Mother, people who have called themselves  
saints and sons of God offer their brothers  
not bread, just stone! They shatter the wings  
of bright dreams! It is they who deserve to be cursed!

EDITH: Enough words, for every word you utter is a new sin!

RICHARD: Yes, enough. For every word is a new poison  
for you and for me.

CHRISTABELLE: The food is getting cold.

EDITH, RICHARD, *and* DAVY *sit down at the table.* CHRISTABELLE *serves them. They eat in silence.* EDITH *gets up first, takes the rope and spade, throws the cloth on her back, and goes to the door.*

RICHARD (*to* CHRISTABELLE): Where's Mother going?

CHRISTABELLE: Well ... to work ...

EDITH (*turning around at the threshold*):

I, Son, am going to do work in your stead. (*Slowly leaves.*)

CHRISTABELLE (*to* DAVY): Son, you should go and help your grandmother.

DAVY: What do you say, Uncle Richard?

RICHARD: Do as you wish.

DAVY: I shall go with you.

DAVY *begins eating diligently.* RICHARD *sits without touching his food.*

CHRISTABELLE: Richard, you should eat now.

RICHARD: I cannot, Belle dear. (*Silence.*)

CHRISTABELLE: Campbell has scolded his daughter about this figurine.  
He wants you to destroy it.

RICHARD (*with sudden vehemence*): I will not!

No one can order me to do so! (*Someone knocks at the door.*)

It is probably for me. (*Rises.*)

CHRISTABELLE (*opening the door*): Oh, my God!

Jonathan! Can you believe this, Richard?!

(*Leads JONATHAN by the hand into the house.*)

RICHARD (*rushing to JONATHAN and greeting him warmly*):

Where did you come from? I thought you had settled in Holland.

JONATHAN: I did settle there, but I could not stand it.

RICHARD: Why was that? Tell us everything that has happened to you.

Sit down, Jonathan!

(*Seats him at the table and puts some food in front of him.*)

And have some food, please.

JONATHAN: Thank you. I'm not hungry.

I had something to eat. My wife and I

have put up a tent, and we ate a little breakfast there.

CHRISTABELLE: What are you saying?! How can you live in a tent?

Until you build your own house, stay with us.

Right, Richard?

RICHARD: Of course, Belle. Naturally.

JONATHAN: But your mother—

CHRISTABELLE: Oh, Mama will be very happy  
to have you. I shall go and get your wife.  
Where did you set up camp?

JONATHAN: How can I describe the place to you?  
There, where the congregation is building something.  
That is where we have set up camp.

CHRISTABELLE: Alright, I'll find her. (*Exits.*)

RICHARD: Well now, tell me, my friend:  
why could you not stand it in Holland?  
Was there no employment?

JONATHAN: No, that was not it.  
I became disillusioned with the old world.  
That ancient world has grown old sinfully.  
It has become so set in its evil practices,  
and even the vital spirit of the new faith  
cannot resurrect that corpse! So it became clear to me  
why God led Israel out of Egypt to a new land.  
Had He not done so, that people would not have  
become the chosen one. The old Egyptian abomination  
would have taken hold of them like evil leprosy.  
One day I shall tell you about my adventures in detail,  
but now I do not even want to recall them.  
I am glad I no longer have to think about it.

RICHARD: Nevertheless, Holland paves the way for new talent.  
For this I would forgive even that "Egyptian abomination."

JONATHAN: You speak this way, but you have not forgiven Venice  
all its sins, despite the virtue of fine talent.

RICHARD: I have forgiven it no less than Christ forgave the harlot.

JONATHAN: You are admitting then that it is a harlot?

RICHARD: No, that is not what I meant. That would  
not only be improper, but also ungrateful.

JONATHAN: But nonetheless the truth! I was afraid  
that had I stayed any longer, I would never climb out  
of its licentiousness.

RICHARD: I did not fear  
that in the least.

JONATHAN: Then why did you flee from it,  
just like Joseph ran from Potiphar's wife?

RICHARD: Remember the Inquisition? Besides that, you know  
serious obligations called us both home.

JONATHAN: That is true, yet you left Venice without regrets.

RICHARD: You noticed that? I did not realize it then myself.  
(*Becomes slightly preoccupied.*)

And yet it is true! I was eager to leave. I was sated  
with that splendour, the banquets, the tender beauty  
of the Venetian women and the flatteries of the men.

And what is worse is that this Puritan neck did not know  
 how to bend in the Catholic manner. My feet  
 did not want to step through the Doge's high doorways  
 and slipped on the smooth floors of the patrons' palaces.  
 In those palaces select talents flourish like imported flowers,  
 but in a hothouse they languish rather than bloom.  
 Though they are descendants of giants, they have been diminished,  
 their beauty debilitated and pampered.

JONATHAN: It is true the artists there grow lazy, like the hirelings  
 of some rich lord unaccustomed to God's sun,  
 used only to the artificial light.

RICHARD: That talent has perhaps uttered its last words  
 and now, it seems, is ready to become mute.

JONATHAN: Yes, it seems that way. And is it not terrible,  
 Richard? Since we have linked our own fate to our talent.

RICHARD: But our destiny, dear Brother, shall not perish.  
 Italy is not the whole world! For us  
 the world has just begun here. We shall still fight.  
 Thank God were not born to be lackeys to magnates.  
 Other stars are in our horoscope.  
 While sailing here I gave much time to thought.  
 It became a great ocean of thoughts.  
 I remember how in the evenings our congregation would often  
 gather on the deck as one family. There, in the light  
 of the eternal bonfire that the Lord Himself  
 lit in the sky, and we sang hymns. The figures  
 of the singers looked as though cast from bronze:  
 severe, hard, full of strength and power.  
 Under the light of the stars they seemed immense,  
 and how much new beauty was there in them,  
 which was unknown in that Italian world  
 where I studied the rudiments of art!  
 It was then, I dreamt, that in this congregation,  
 in a new land, I would light a new fire of eternal beauty.  
 These were such passionate dreams ... If only you knew!

JONATHAN: What happened? Did they disappear?

RICHARD: No, they have not left me yet,  
 though they did fade a little. In this new land  
 I see that many thickets must be cleared out first,  
 and only then can a bonfire be lit—

JONATHAN: Thickets? What thickets? Are you speaking of the wilderness?

RICHARD: No, that wilderness frightens me the least,  
 though it destroys my strength the most.  
 You know, there isn't even any decent clay here.  
 But even that is not important. Perhaps we shall find  
 some later ...but here, among people evil thorns grow.

JONATHAN: Who are they?

RICHARD: After you've lived here for a while,  
you will see for yourself ... Oh, Jonathan,  
what a hard day this has been for me.  
Thank God it has ended so happily!  
(Puts his arm around JONATHAN'S shoulder.)  
My faithful friend! My sincere, dear friend!  
My brother in sacred talent. God himself  
has brought you here to help me.  
Together we will move mountains. Shall we not?  
(Laughs with joy and jokingly shakes JONATHAN by the shoulders.)

JONATHAN: Ouch! Ouch! Let go! I'm not a mountain!  
Well, Brother, you have gained the strength of Goliath here.  
The wilderness has been of benefit to you.

RICHARD: Everything has been of benefit! The wilderness as well  
as the thorns! Now there is nothing I fear!

## Act Two

*The same house as in Act One, only it is more orderly. On the fireplace mantle are many sketches, miniatures, and various sculptures. On the walls hang sculpting and masonry tools. There are many shelves, some filled with sculptures, others with new dishes. In one corner stands a potter's wheel. The entire house has the look of both a sculptor's studio and a pottery workshop. There are many unfinished works. Busts covered with wet cloths rest on moveable stands. In the interior of the house is an alcove, where, instead of a bed, there is a small platform. On it stands a young INDIAN GIRL in native garb. RICHARD is sculpting a life-size statue of her. He is doing this intently, stepping toward and back from the statue, taking a closer look, and making changes to the girl's pose or the sculpture. His passion and ecstasy are discernible in his swift and energetic hand movements.*

RICHARD (to himself): This way. That will be better. No, that way!  
That's right! Stand, girl, and do not move.  
Are you tired perhaps? (The INDIAN GIRL shakes her head.) Then stand a bit longer,  
and I will give you beads for this. Lovely,  
and shiny ones. Do you like beads? (Takes beads from the shelf and shows them to her.  
She smiles and claps her hands.)  
Eh, you ruined the pose! (Goes and corrects her pose.)  
You can smile, but do not move your hands!

*He gestures that she should not wave her arms and smiles. There is a knock at the door.*

VOICE (on the other side of the door): Is Master Richard home?

RICHARD: I am here!

*As soon as she hears the knock, the INDIAN GIRL jumps up and pulls the drapes around the alcove so the visitor cannot see her.*

JONATHAN: Good day, Richard!

RICHARD: Good day to you!

I have not seen you in such a long time.  
It seems that you have been avoiding my house,  
dear Brother.

JONATHAN: No, I have not!

RICHARD: Sit down then, please, and be my guest.  
I shall continue working for a while.

*He moves the curtain aside and brings the INDIAN GIRL into view. JONATHAN quickly turns away from RICHARD and the girl.*

RICHARD: Because the clay dries quickly, as you well know.  
Time does not stand still.

JONATHAN *silently opens a large book lying on the table and leans over it.*

RICHARD (*fixing the INDIAN GIRL's pose and then singing while starting to work*):

Lily white flowers  
I saw on the knoll.  
Fly to my darling,  
My yearning soul.

(*Speaking*) Oh, Jonathan, I am truly having a holiday!  
Look at the clay I was able to find here!  
Even sculptors in Italy would find it priceless!  
(*Hands JONATHAN a lump of clay.*)

JONATHAN: It truly is good clay.

I must take some for myself.

RICHARD: You are working again?

Thank God! I am very happy you have returned to work.

JONATHAN: I have, but with a different heart and soul.

Having cast pride aside, with humility in my soul,  
I have dedicated myself to the service of God.

RICHARD: And what exactly do you do?

JONATHAN: Whatever the congregation needs.

RICHARD: And what is that?

JONATHAN: Oh, each day brings new needs.

RICHARD (*listening inattentively because he is working, and then singing*):

Oh, azure bluebells  
I saw in full bloom.  
For whom d'you weave the garland,  
My beauty, for whom?

JONATHAN: What are you singing?

RICHARD: A Florentine song. (*Singing*)

"Red pomegranate blossoms." (*The INDIAN GIRL lowers her hand.*)  
Again? You must be tired? Well, just stand there  
one more minute, and then I will let you rest. (*Fixing her pose*)  
You know, my friend, this statue will be something new.

My heart has not been as inflamed as it is now.  
It seems to me that I could work day and night.  
A model like this is not so easily found!  
I searched all year and found her just today.  
What a lovely wild child! Look, Jonathan!

JONATHAN: Richard, to be honest with you, I never thought  
that you could ever come to this.

RICHARD: What do you mean, Jonathan?

JONATHAN: You know quite well what I mean.

RICHARD: No, indeed, I do not.

JONATHAN: Oh, that is enough!

Who does not know what models mean to a young sculptor!  
Had you chosen at least a Christian one.

RICHARD (*hurt, stopping his work*):

Oh, Jonathan! If Godwinson had said that  
I would not be surprised, but to hear you,  
an artist, say such a thing to a fellow artist,  
I am astonished, and I pity you.  
Had you been born a true artist, your thoughts  
your imagination, would be more chaste.  
You know that during that majestic time  
when we create, we are removed from the world  
of sin and are surrounded by a world of dreams,  
that Kingdom of God on earth that most  
people seek rather in vain.

JONATHAN: And you think you have found it?

RICHARD: I know I have.

JONATHAN: Then you are most fortunate.

RICHARD: I have had enough of being miserable!

Enough of weeping and wailing, moaning and gnashing  
of teeth. The earth is not hell, people are not cursed,  
and joy is not a sin. It is God's gift to man.

JONATHAN: If that joy truly comes from God.

But what has made it come to you now?

A woman's body is sinful beauty!

You wish to lure others with it.

What kind of Kingdom of God on earth is that?

RICHARD (*Without saying anything at first, walks away silently, gives the INDIAN GIRL beads  
and a string, closes the curtain around the alcove, and covers the statue with a wet  
cloth before turning to JONATHAN.*):

Then let not sinful beauty entice your saintly eyes.

Oh, Jonathan! Who clouded your vision with cataracts?

There was a time when you held a different view.

I was so happy when you came to our colony here!

Jonathan, I greeted you as a dear brother!

Do I now see an enemy before me?

JONATHAN (*thinking a while before giving RICHARD his hand*):

No, Richard, you do not see an enemy.  
 People do not become enemies so quickly, and I hope  
 to walk with you down the same road.  
 It appears to you that I have grown blind,  
 but I think you have not begun to see yet.

RICHARD: Well, all right then, let us abandon this dispute.

What were you reading there?

(*Looking at the book*) The Bible? About the Exodus?

JONATHAN: Well, I wanted to ask your advice about—

RICHARD: But I, Brother, am such a poor theologian.

JONATHAN: No, it is not about theology. It is something else.

The congregation needs a candlestick for the prayer meetings.

I think that perhaps here it would be possible  
 for the artist and the Christian to be in accord.

The congregation wishes to have a candlestick made  
 according to the description found in the Bible. Listen:

(*reading the description*) “And thou shalt make  
 a candlestick of pure gold. Its shaft and its branches,  
 its bowls, its knobs, and its flowers, shall be of the same.”

I cannot figure out how many bowls or what kind of knobs.

I can't understand it! Here, you read it.

RICHARD (*reading silently and then pushing the book away*):

My advice is this: if you wish to remain an artist,  
 close this book and do not read this text again.

JONATHAN: I wish to remain a Christian.

RICHARD: You are placing yourself into Egyptian captivity!

Along with Godwinson our congregation understands beauty  
 about as much as my walking stick, and perhaps even less!

JONATHAN: Richard, be thankful that you said this to a friend,  
 for if these words ever reach the ears of the congregation  
 and the pastor—

RICHARD: Oh my! And how you frighten me!

I am ready to say it to their faces:  
 there is no sin in the truth.

I told them something quite similar when they asked me  
 to mould date palms above the school's windows  
 and doors. In his wisdom, Godwinson devised this adornment  
 after reading about it somewhere in the Scriptures. (*Laughs.*)

JONATHAN: By the way, I wanted to tell you that it is  
 in vain that you have begun wrangling with the congregation,  
 and with Godwinson especially.

RICHARD: What Is Godwinson to me?

JONATHAN: It is enough that he has great power in the congregation.

RICHARD: Let him have his power in the congregation.

I am in seclusion, and that is enough for us both.

JONATHAN: You plan to stand alone against the congregation?

What is the point of your work then?

RICHARD: It is for beauty's sake.

JONATHAN: Who needs that kind of beauty?

RICHARD: Both I and those who will follow in my footsteps need it.

JONATHAN: Where do you see such people?

RICHARD: There is Davy, at least.

JONATHAN: That boy?

RICHARD: That boy.

And Davy's smile means more to me than all  
of Godwinson's curses. As for the congregation,  
I give it what it needs. (*Pointing to the earthenware*)  
I have settled all my accounts.

JONATHAN: No, Richard, not all your accounts. Your honourable mother—

RICHARD: That is enough! I am not accustomed to speaking  
about this with anyone. It is enough for you to know  
that I will never become a prisoner in my own home.

JONATHAN: Where does your obstinacy come from?

RICHARD: All of my kin were like that: followers of Wycliffe  
and Lollards, Dissenters, Independents. Such were my ancestors.  
All of my relatives strove for freedom from the King,  
the Church, and Parliament, as I do now. It is in my blood.

JONATHAN: These are proud words. But they do not reflect  
a tranquil soul.

RICHARD: Why do I need tranquility?

I am still alive. It is much too early to rest.

JONATHAN: I would like to know one thing: are you always as sure  
of yourself as you are now? Don't you ever  
know suffering or hesitation?

RICHARD: And why would I not know them?

Everything that you are saying I have told myself  
more than once. But I have overcome that hesitation  
and suffering. I have lived through them once and for all.  
My mind, my heart, and my faith tell me  
that my chosen path is true. Yet, there are other doubts.  
Overcoming them is much more difficult for someone  
so alone. Jonathan, a short while ago  
you gave me your hand in friendship. You are the only one  
in this wilderness who could really help me,  
if you would only want to.

JONATHAN: If only I could. The will is there.

RICHARD: Then you must tell me, Brother, truly (*uncovering the statue*)  
what is badly done in this statue?

JONATHAN: In my view, the whole thing is wrong.

RICHARD: Is it wrong, or is it just pagan?

JONATHAN: It is pagan.



RICHARD: For a moment, forget that you have already become a saint,  
and look at it with your former eyes.

When we still roamed together through Italian palaces,  
if someone had suddenly shown you this statue,  
what would you have said about it?

JONATHAN: I would have said, "It is a beautiful creation."

RICHARD: And if someone had asked you to indicate what to change in it?

JONATHAN: I would have said, "Nothing." But I would only have said  
this as a pagan. Now, as a Christian, I say, "Destroy it!"

RICHARD: Then I shall spare no cost to have it cast in bronze.

JONATHAN: Richard, I must warn you, before it is too late. (DAVY enters.)

DAVY: Uncle, some people are here to see you.

RICHARD: Then ask them in.

DAVY: I did, but they will not come in.

They say that they would speak to you in the orchard,  
because it is more comfortable there.

RICHARD: Who are these people?

DAVY: They are from Rhode Island. Go, they are waiting.

RICHARD: I am on my way. Stay a while longer, Jonathan. (Exits.)

JONATHAN: Does your uncle not know anything yet?

DAVY: But you were supposed to tell him.

JONATHAN: I did not get the chance. Tell him yourself.

DAVY: Do not worry about me! I know what to do without you.

JONATHAN: You are not very polite today, Davy.

DAVY: Oh, leave me alone! (Moves toward the door.)

JONATHAN: Where are you going, Davy?

DAVY: I am going to find out what is going on out there.

JONATHAN: Wait a minute, and I shall go with you.

*They both exit. The INDIAN GIRL leaves the alcove and walks about the house smiling and looking at the statue.*

JENNY (*rushing in*): Oh dear! And where is Richard? Help! (*Seeing the INDIAN GIRL*)  
Who are you? Why are you here?

(*The INDIAN GIRL remains silent and glares with hostility at JENNY while leaning against the statue's pedestal. JENNY suddenly notices the statue.*)

Oh!? So it is true then? You do live with him?

(*Aggressively approaching the INDIAN GIRL*)

Get out! Out, or I will kill you!

JENNY *grabs a walking stick and begins swinging it at the INDIAN GIRL. The latter cries out, grabs a sculptor's hammer, waves it about like a tomahawk, and advances on JENNY. EDITH and CHRISTABELLE run into the house upon hearing the clamour. The INDIAN GIRL immediately hides in the alcove. JENNY falls to the ground and begins weeping.*

CHRISTABELLE: Sister Jenny, what is the matter, dear?

EDITH: What happened here, and why do you cry, Daughter? (*Both approach JENNY.*)

JENNY (*pushing them away and squirming like a child*):

Leave me alone! Don't touch me! I shall never  
come here again. No wonder Father forbade me  
to come here ... Oh, misery, how unhappy I am!  
(*Runs out of the house crying.*)

EDITH: What is the matter with her?

CHRISTABELLE: Oh, that Jenny, she is still such a child.  
It does not take much for her to start crying.  
(*Becoming pensive and sighing*)  
Oh, Mother!

EDITH: Why are you sighing?

CHRISTABELLE: You know why, Mother!

EDITH: There is no use in feeling pity.

CHRISTABELLE: Oh, Mother dear, Mother! Are they coming today?

EDITH: Yes.

CHRISTABELLE: You must defend Richard.

EDITH: We must defend only the truth, the truth alone.

CHRISTABELLE: But Richard is your son, he is of your blood.

If anyone were to attack my Davy, I would throw myself  
at them like a flame.

EDITH: I have already lost a son,  
and now you are taking away my daughter?

CHRISTABELLE: Oh, Mother, what are you saying? God forbid!  
How can you renounce your own children?  
That is a sin, Mother. Christ does not want this.

EDITH (*taking the Bible from the table and opening it at a bookmarked page*):

Look here and read this carefully, Daughter.  
Read it aloud. Right here, read it!

CHRISTABELLE (*reading with a trembling voice*):

Think not that I come to send peace on earth:  
I come not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come  
to set a man at variance against his father,  
and the daughter against her mother, and  
the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.  
And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.  
(*Stops reading with a groan.*)

I do not have the strength to comprehend this, Mother!

EDITH: Go on reading! Do go on.

CHRISTABELLE: Oh Christ, Son of God!

(*Her voice gradually weakens.*)  
He that loveth a father or mother more than me  
is not worthy of me: and he that loveth a son or daughter  
more than me is not worthy of me. (*Her voice breaks.*)

EDITH (*finishing reading with a strong but solemn voice*):

And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me  
is not worthy of me.

RICHARD *enters. As he does, CHRISTABELLE jumps up and goes to the side room.*

EDITH *stands over the book at the table but stares ahead with a dark, solemn, look.*

RICHARD *(sitting down on the bench by the fireplace and looking at his mother while quietly saying to himself):*

For some reason Mother is so solemn today ...

I am probably the cause of her sorrow ...

This sadness becomes her face, however ... she is aging so beautifully. That look, those simple lines, even her clothes— a true Mater Dolorosa.

*(Takes some wax from the mantle and, studying his mother, begins moulding.)*

EDITH: Son! What are you doing?

RICHARD: Nothing, just keeping my hands occupied. *(Continues moulding rapidly.)*

EDITH: Are you playing again?

RICHARD: And what is wrong with that?

Children play, and Christ loves children.

EDITH: Yours are not children's toys, and you are not a child.

*(Silence.)* Listen, Son!

*More silence. RICHARD continues moulding.*

RICHARD: I am listening, Mother. Go on! Go on!

*(Begins moulding even more swiftly.)*

EDITH: You once said it is a sin to live the way you do.

RICHARD: That was long ago. I think differently now, Mother dear.

EDITH: And what exactly do you think?

RICHARD: I believe that everyone on this earth has his own purpose and his own cross to bear.

EDITH: What do you think your purpose is?

RICHARD: My talent and my dream.

EDITH: You said once that what is needed here is bread, not dreams.

RICHARD: But later, Mother, I learned differently.

EDITH: Where did you learn this?

RICHARD: From the very book you are holding now.

I carefully read there a parable—

EDITH: The one about talents, Son? You certainly misunderstood it.

RICHARD: No, Mother, I read a simpler parable, one that even a child can understand.

I read about Martha and Mary.

EDITH: Is that a parable?

RICHARD: It is the same thing, Mother. What matters here is how one understands it.

EDITH: And how did you understand it?

RICHARD: It's quite simple really: while Martha cared about the things that are of this world, Mary craved that which is eternal.

EDITH: So you think—

RICHARD: To follow in Mary's footsteps.

CHRISTABELLE *(calling out with a tearful voice from the side room):*

Come to me, Brother!

RICHARD: What's the matter, Belle?

*(Leaves his work on a stool in front of the fireplace and goes quickly to the side room.)*

EDITH *(hurrying to see the work RICHARD was moulding)*:

It is my face! Oh, God have mercy and save him!

He is lost forever and ever.

RICHARD *and* CHRISTABELLE *come out of the side room, arm in arm.*

CHRISTABELLE: Mother dear, look at me and him.

EDITH *waves them away and, with exasperation and her head bowed, leaves the house.*

RICHARD: What is the matter with Mother today, Belle?

You, too, are acting rather strangely.

CHRISTABELLE: It is nothing ...

It has passed. Richard, tell me, who were those people in the orchard?

RICHARD: They were merchants from Rhode Island.

CHRISTABELLE: Why were they here?

RICHARD: They invited me to come to Rhode Island to take a teacher's job there.

The pay is not so small.

CHRISTABELLE: What did you tell them?

RICHARD: That I will not go.

CHRISTABELLE: Why not?

RICHARD: Are you surprised?

CHRISTABELLE: No ... Yes ...

It seems to me that if the pay is good,

Then ... perhaps it is worth—

RICHARD: Are you saying

that I should leave my family for that salary?

CHRISTABELLE *(with forced self-restraint)*:

Don't think of us. Go to Rhode Island, Richard.

It will be best for you.

RICHARD: What is this?

Are you pushing me out? Are you tired of me too, Belle dear?

CHRISTABELLE *covers her face with her apron. RICHARD, astonished and troubled, comes up to her. Suddenly JONATHAN enters. He stands at the doorstep and looks around the entire house.*

JONATHAN: Has anyone been here yet?

CHRISTABELLE: No one.

JONATHAN *leaves quickly.*

RICHARD: Why did he ask that? Who was supposed to come?

CHRISTABELLE: Who? I don't know ... Perhaps ... No, no one!

*She bustles nervously around the house and then begins covering the statue with a cloth.*

RICHARD: What are you doing, Belle? Take hold of yourself!

CHRISTABELLE: Just so it would not dry up.

RICHARD (*laughing*): Oh, so you are concerned about it? I'm very pleased, but leave it just the same. I, Belle dear, had better cover it myself.  
 (*Covers the statue with a cloth. Someone knocks at the door the door. CHRISTABELLE shudders.*)

What is wrong? It is just the shutters. (*Silence.*)

CHRISTABELLE: Richard, perhaps you really should go there ...

RICHARD: Where?

CHRISTABELLE: To Rhode Island ... for a little while, at least.

RICHARD: Why? For what reason?

CHRISTABELLE: Well, not everyone here in the congregation likes you.

RICHARD: What news! I know that. I'm used to it.

CHRISTABELLE: You really are sharp-tongued. If only you would relinquish things from time to time.

RICHARD: Relinquish what? I cannot relinquish my talent.

CHRISTABELLE: Not completely, but perhaps for a while.

RICHARD: As Peter renounced Christ?

CHRISTABELLE: Oh, I do not know!

If only you wanted to, you would find a way.

Things would be good then and Mother would be happy.

RICHARD: Oh, now I see! You want me to renounce my sculpture?

I cannot do that because I was not born a traitor.

And if I were to betray it, as Judas did,

I would also surely hang myself, as he did.

*Suddenly DAVY runs in.*

DAVY: They're coming!

CHRISTABELLE: Oh!

RICHARD: Who?

DAVY: All of the elders and Godwinson! (*Runs into the side room.*)

RICHARD: So that is it! Now I understand.

So let them come. Do not be afraid, Belle!

GODWINSON, CAMPBELL, CALEB PADDINGTON, ABRAHAM SMITH, JOHN MILLS, JEREMIAH ORTWIN, MATTHEW FIELDING, *and a few other elders enter. EDITH and JONATHAN are behind them. There is a moment of awkward silence.*

CAMPBELL: Good day, Richard. You were not expecting company?

RICHARD: No, I was not. But I do welcome you. Please, be my guests.

GODWINSON: We do not come as guests into this house.

A higher duty can force one to enter even a pagan temple.

RICHARD (*furious, but restraining himself*):

Such language has never been heard in this house.

Verily, if it were not for these good citizens, I would know

how to respond to what you have said. (*To the others*) Fathers, please sit down.

*The elders sit in a row on benches behind the table. EDITH stands at a distance. JONATHAN sits on a stool closer to RICHARD.*

CALEB PADDINGTON (*to* RICHARD):

Son, you should thank the congregation,  
whose members care for you in such a fatherly fashion.  
Even I, the eldest one of all, have taken  
the trouble to come here to you.

RICHARD (*restraining himself*): I thank you for the honour.

CALEB: If we desired it, we would have the right  
to call you to a congregation trial.

RICHARD: To a trial? I am not a criminal!

JONATHAN (*quietly to* RICHARD): Come now, Brother, how can you interrupt an elder?

CALEB (*to* RICHARD): Your anger is in vain. The point is  
that we did not summon you to a trial, but decided first  
to come to you, to see how you live and to ask a few questions.  
All kinds of gossip are being spread about you.  
(*To* CAMPBELL) Go ahead, Joshua.

CAMPBELL: I would rather remain silent,

Brethren, because it is so—well, how should I put it.

(*To* RICHARD) Richard, you have brought dishonour upon my daughter.

RICHARD: I, Father Joshua?! I honour your daughter wholeheartedly.  
I have never said a frivolous word to her,  
for I would have considered it improper.

CAMPBELL: I do not know ... I thought that you are a decent lad.  
But you have befuddled Jenny all the same.

CHRISTABELLE (*coming out of the side room and addressing* CAMPBELL):

Father, you should be ashamed! What evil could have befallen Jenny  
in our house? You know my mother and me.

Do you think we would ever permit anything indecent here?

EDITH: The congregation knows that I am not hiding the sins of my son.  
So I say to you in all sincerity:

as far as I know, my son has never been a deceiver.

As for him making your Joanna lose her senses—

CAMPBELL (*hurriedly*): I do not say that he made my daughter  
lose her senses. She is not of such a stock.

(*Pauses, weighing his words and searching for the right ones to express his thoughts.*)

No. What I am saying is, he has befuddled Jenny ...

One time he shaped a likeness of her clothed as a princess.

Since then the lass has seemingly lost her senses.

(*Having gathered his thoughts, he becomes animated and begins speaking quickly.  
His embarrassment has left him.*)

She cares about nothing but her garments now.

I broke her mirror, so now she gazes at her reflection

in the water. She adores that likeness of herself so much

that it seems as if her very soul has entered into that cursed doll.

(*To* RICHARD) I blame you because you did not destroy  
that likeness, as I had requested, and thus you have led  
Jenny onto the road to eternal perdition.

RICHARD *is about to say something, but JONATHAN gets up before him.*

JONATHAN (*to the entire group*): Fathers, may I say something?

CALEB: You may, as long as it pertains to this matter.

JONATHAN: It is difficult for Richard to speak of this matter,  
but how is he to blame that the girl wants clothes?  
It may have been so even without that likeness here—  
we all know that such is a woman's nature.  
You, Father Joshua, have not truly proven that Richard  
has brought dishonour upon your Jenny.  
Why did you say such a thing then?

CAMPBELL: Fear not, my words are not baseless.

Why is it that all the women tease Jenny by calling her  
"Edith's daughter-in-law"? What can I say?  
I myself have seen how Richard looks at her.

Why did he make a likeness of *her*? Are there no other girls here?

CHRISTABELLE: Fathers, I know that my brother has never courted Jenny.

CAMPBELL: Indeed! He did not court her, but he has befuddled her!

CHRISTABELLE: Ask her yourself. If she fears God, she must tell the truth!

CALEB: Yes, Brother Joshua, let Jenny come and tell us  
if Richard ever promised to take her as his wife.

If she says so and proves that he really did promise,  
then he must marry her. The congregation will not permit deceit.

CAMPBELL: But it is embarrassing for a girl to speak of such things in public.

ABRAHAM SMITH (*haltingly, resolutely, sternly, but with a measure of kindness*):  
She should speak. This is a matter for the congregation.

We need to set an example. Otherwise young men  
will become wanton, and then what will we do?

CAMPBELL: If we could send someone—

CHRISTABELLE: I will send someone. (*Addressing DAVY in the alcove*)  
Run and fetch Jenny, Son, and quickly.

CAMPBELL: Tell her that her father orders her to come. (*To the others*)  
Otherwise she will not have the courage. I know. (*DAVY leaves.*)

CALEB: Meanwhile, let us proceed. We still have things to discuss. (*To RICHARD*)  
As I said before, there are nasty rumours about you:  
that you keep company with savages in the wilderness  
and that you bring them here ...

RICHARD: Father, I did not know,  
that Christians are supposed to scorn God's other creatures.  
Christ himself went to the Samaritans and the Canaanites.  
How are these savages any worse than those people?

GODWINSON: Observe, Brethren, how insolently he compares himself to Christ!  
(*To RICHARD*) Tell us, just why did Christ go to those non-believers?  
Was it to learn and adopt idolatrous profanity from them?  
Surely you will not say that you went to communicate  
Christ's teachings to those savages?

RICHARD (*to CALEB*):

Father, you had assured me that you did not intend to put me on trial, yet a judge has already been found here. You should know that I shall not answer him.

GODWINSON (*rising and addressing the elders*):

Brethren, you must judge either him or me. (*Pointing at RICHARD*) From the start, for me this man has been like a stumbling stone on the road, though I never wished him any evil. Just quite the opposite, I cared for his soul as for my own. What kind of thanks did I receive? Brother Joshua will bear witness to the kind of mockery this hateful creator of idols has made of me. (*To CAMPBELL*) Do you recall that likeness he moulded to mock me? I knew by its garb that it was my image.

CAMPBELL (*hiding an involuntary smile*):

Of course I recall it! He probably still has it. (*To RICHARD*) Show it to us!

GODWINSON (*quickly*): I do not insist that it be shown.

RICHARD: Why not? I can show it.

(*Goes to the closet and gets the figurine that Davy had moulded.*)

Here it is. See for yourselves.

*Some of the elders cannot hide their amusement and duck behind their neighbours.*

JEREMIAH ORTWIN (*quietly to FIELDING*): I would recognize it not just by its garb.

GODWINSON (*angrily*): Think you that he revealed his obedience to your will

by showing this thing? If his shameless, vile act does not find condemnation from the congregation, then I will take this as a sign that it is time for me to search elsewhere for a place to rest my weary head, because here any buffoon may freely cover it with shame.

CALEB: Calm down, good Teacher. You can

be sure that we shall not abandon you to young men's scorn.

(*Takes the figurine of GODWINSON.*) Richard, tell us why you made this figure.

RICHARD *stays silent. At that moment DAVY and JENNY enter into the house and pause at the door. DAVY freezes upon seeing CALEB holding his figurine.*

CALEB: We take your silence to mean that you have no excuse

and that you understand the baseness of your act.

Our fatherly counsel to you is to make amends for your wrongdoing through contrition.

Our Teacher, as you know, is full of brotherly love, and he shall forgive you as a Christian should if you apologize to him in public.

GODWINSON (*hurriedly*): And destroy this statuette.

CALEB (*to GODWINSON*): Of course! That goes without saying. (*To RICHARD*)

Son, there is nothing to ponder here. Go to him, bow humbly, and say, "I have sinned, Father, before God and against you." Well? Why do you balk at this?



RICHARD: I will not apologize to him.

CALEB: In that case there will be a trial!

(RICHARD *nods in agreement.*)

DAVY (*upset*): But I made it! It's not Uncle Richard's work at all!

GODWINSON (*to DAVY*): Truly, my Boy? And who taught you to make such things?

DAVY: No one did. I made it myself!

With God as my witness, I did it myself!

GODWINSON: Do not call upon God. It is an impious habit. (*To the group*)

Naturally, I do not wish to put the child on trial.

And I do hope that not everyone in his family  
will praise him for his action.

EDITH: The boy will receive the punishment he deserves.

CHRISTABELLE (*to CALEB*): Forgive him. He will apologize.

CALEB: Of course he shall, but, to set an example, the rod should not be spared

DAVY (*to CHRISTABELLE*): I will hang myself if you beat me!

CHRISTABELLE *tries to calm him quietly, but he shakes his head, with tears of anger in his eyes.*

RICHARD: My nephew is not being entirely truthful when he says  
that he made it himself. We made it together.

(DAVY *wants to say something, but RICHARD silences him with a gesture.*)

Since I am older, I must take responsibility, and I am  
ready to do so. I am asking for a trial myself.

But first, let us settle another matter. (*To CAMPBELL*)

Your daughter has come. It is not proper to leave a girl standing  
at the threshold for such a long time.

CALEB: That is true. We shall question her now.

*During the scene with JENNY, GODWINSON leafs through the Bible and marks some texts with bookmarks. CHRISTABELLE leads DAVY into the side room.*

CALEB (*to JENNY*): Did Richard Iron ever promise to marry you?

*The girl remains silent, her eyes lowered.*

CAMPBELL: Why are you silent? Answer when you are asked a question!

JENNY *covers her face with her sleeve and sobs.*

RICHARD: Miss Jenny, I ask you to answer the question clearly.

Your father has disparaged my honour  
by publicly accusing me of befuddling you.

JENNY (*sobbing but overcoming her shame*):

Of course! Who else compared me to a princess and a nymph ...  
and ... I don't know to whom else?...

Who spoke nonsense in order to detain me?

RICHARD: I assure you that my intentions were all innocent,  
but if I have carelessly disturbed the tranquility of your heart,  
I would like to know about that.

SMITH: Well, where is the difficulty? Marry, and the matter shall be settled!

JENNY (*with a rush of vicious stubbornness*): Never in my life would I marry him!

CAMPBELL (*confused*): Come, Daughter, this is not right! It appears you are being capricious.

JENNY: No! I do not wish to marry him!

Am I the lowliest of all girls for him to—

(*Again covers her face with her apron, and her words are muffled.*)

CAMPBELL (*thundering*): Joanna, stop blubbering! Speak properly!

What is wrong with you? Well? Speak!

RICHARD: Yes, Miss Jenny, verily, you should explain your words, for this is an insult to me.

JENNY (*addressing RICHARD threateningly*):

Well, all right, then. I shall explain. (*To the others*)

Good people, since Richard Iron already has a woman in the house, let him stay by her side.

*She runs to the alcove, draws back the curtain, and points at the INDIAN GIRL huddled in the corner. People gasp, some turn their backs, others spit from disgust, and still others clasp their hands in shock.*

CAMPBELL (*rising and going over to JENNY*):

Daughter, let us go home now.

May this house meet the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah!

*He takes JENNY by the hand and leaves in a rage. The INDIAN GIRL, seizing the moment before the others regain their composure, sprints out through the open door.*

EDITH: How could you commit a sin in our house?

You should at least be ashamed before your sister and me!

RICHARD: Mother dear, I can explain this.

EDITH *indignantly turns away*. CHRISTABELLE, *covering her face with her hands, goes into the side room.*

GODWINSON (*to the group*):

What more is there to ask, my Brethren?

I think we have seen enough. Call it by its name:

catching the thief in the act!

SMITH: That is true!

MATTHEW FIELDING: This is unheard of!

CALEB: It's an offence to God!

MILLS: We cannot permit something like this!

ORTWIN: Obviously!

GODWINSON (*taking the Bible from the table*): I think we should read what was done in Israel to men who sinned with pagan women.

RICHARD: I will not allow the matter to be presented this way!

GODWINSON: He still wishes to deny it! Who does he take us for!?

SMITH (*to the elders*): For fools, obviously!

JONATHAN: Fathers, let me speak.

FIELDING: Everyone knows that you are his friend and that you will stand up for him.

JONATHAN: Father, I have always been an obedient son to the congregation.

I believe it is a sin to mislead it. Besides,  
I value truth above all friendship.

CALEB: Well, speak then.

JONATHAN: I spoke with my friend  
about this pagan girl. And he assured me  
that he did not bring her here for sinful purposes.  
I'm certain that he'd admit the truth to his own friend.

CALEB: So why is she here, then?

JONATHAN: Honoured Father,  
I understand that his purpose is also not right,  
but it is not as repugnant as the one that you are thinking of.  
He brought the Indian girl here to make a statue of her.  
It is true. I myself saw him moulding it.

GODWINSON: You say that this purpose is not as repugnant? To make an idol  
of a good-for-nothing pagan is a greater sin!  
With this he has violated God's great and terrible commandment.  
For this God will wreak vengeance on us for generations to come  
if we do not avenge it ourselves. And the fact that Richard  
did not make this alone (*indicating the figurine DAVY made*), but led a minor  
to help in this abomination, is also  
an unforgivable sin. The Holy Scriptures state:  
"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones who believe in me,  
it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck,  
and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

RICHARD (*sarcastically pointing to GODWINSON'S likeness*):

You think that this, too, is an idol?

GODWINSON (*lowering his eyes to the Bible*):

Talking to the godless can defile even the lips of the righteous.  
(*Turning to the group*) Whoever carries such grave sins in a soul  
forged from baseness will find neither forgiveness nor redemption.

CALEB: So it states. Still, to be just, we should measure  
ten times before we cut the way we should.

JONATHAN: Yes, my Father. Holy wisdom itself speaks  
through your lips. It is true that my unfortunate friend has brought  
grave sins upon his soul!

RICHARD: Jonathan,

"is it with a kiss that you betray me?"

JONATHAN: No! My life may serve as proof here:

I once lived no better, but God tolerated my sins,  
and when I stood on the edge of the abyss  
He let me see the righteous path.

SMITH: There are times when God calls at the last moment.

JONATHAN (*to SMITH*): And thus Our Lord Jesus Christ said to forgive not only—

GODWINSON (*painstakingly searching through the Bible, occasionally stopping to make a comment. He then makes such a sudden gesture to JONATHAN that the latter stops talking from surprise.*

GODWINSON (to CALEB): Brother, you were wrong to let him speak in public.

See what is written here:

*(Pushes the book to CALEB and reads, omitting some phrases and stressing important words. CALEB follows what is being read with his eyes. He moves his lips silently, as if repeating after GODWINSON, and nods in agreement when the other makes an emphasis.)*

“The carver and work master ... give themselves to counterfeit imagery and watch to finish a work. The smith and ...

the potter set their minds to finish their work ...

All their desire is in the work of their craft, without these cannot a city be inhabited.”

But “they shall not sit on the judge’s seat ... they cannot declare justice and judgment.”<sup>1</sup>

CALEB (after reading, striking his forehead):

Yes, it is so! Oh, the memory of the aged!

It clearly states here that no artisan is to speak at a trial.

(To JONATHAN) Be silent, Son, and sit down now.

JONATHAN bows obediently, sighs, and sits down.

GODWINSON (taking the Bible again):

There is more (reading): “He that saith unto the wicked,

Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse,

nations shall abhor him.”

SMITH: O God, save and protect us!

JONATHAN: I did not call him righteous—

*He stops in mid-sentence after glancing with dread at CALEB, who makes a sign for him to be silent.*

CALEB (to JONATHAN, kind-heartedly):

Fear not, we shall judge everything justly.

But do be silent. It is not fitting for you to speak.

GODWINSON: So that you are not tempted, it would be better for you to leave.

JONATHAN, before leaving, looks sorrowfully at RICHARD, who responds with an ironic smile.

CALEB: That no one would call Richard righteous goes without saying,

but we would not want to deprive him of salvation.

RICHARD: I am not perishing!

FIELDING: What insolence!

CALEB (to RICHARD): No, Son, you are perishing, indeed,

even if you cannot see it yourself. (To the others)

Brethren, I think that we should give him respite.

God gave even Sodom respite. Perhaps he will come to his senses.

GODWINSON: Good Brother, if he has not yet come to his senses,

what still gives you hope? What signs of repentance do you see?

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<sup>1</sup> From the Apocrypha, which, although part of the Orthodox Bible, were not in the Puritan Bible.

CALEB (*troubled*): It is true there appear to be no signs ...

Nevertheless, it is still worth speaking to him.

Richard's mother is a virtuous, God-fearing woman.

Perhaps she will set him on the right path.

EDITH (*softly but resolutely*): I must confess that I have given up hope in my son.

He does not take my words to heart.

GODWINSON: Yet another commandment violated: he does not honour his mother.

RICHARD: Mother, how can you slander me this way?!

EDITH (*sternly*): It is true, Richard.

GODWINSON (*pointing to EDITH*): Did you hear, Brethren?

SMITH: His heart has turned to stone. I feel sorry for the boy.

His soul has petrified. He shall perish, indeed.

CALEB: All the same, let us not lose hope of saving him,

for after all God did give him more than enough ability.

When we were discussing the candlestick, I recalled the parable

about talents. Brethren, let us not allow those talents

that the Almighty gave to our children to go to waste

or be buried in the ground.

GODWINSON: This man has already

wasted his talent. He has misspent it like a drunkard.

Could he not have learned some decent skills or some useful

knowledge when he was abroad? No, he dedicated

himself to the devil's skill—to sculpture.

SMITH: Some say that even that art is from God.

GODWINSON: In all time there were only two masters who did not stray

from God's path: Bezaleel and Eliab, who worked

in the Jerusalem temple. The rest belong to Cain's tribe.

They are all descendants of Sidon and Tyre. They should

be subdued with an iron yoke! Who were the first artists?

Jubal and Tubal-Cain. And who was their father?

FIELDING: Cain, of course. Everyone knows that.

CALEB: I plead, as Abraham did, for the godless city. (*Pointing to RICHARD*)

This soul has perhaps not been totally consumed by sin.

Perhaps there is still one virtue within it,

one feeling that is not offensive to God!

RICHARD (*sarcastically*): Thank you for such a flattering thought!

CALEB (*to RICHARD, disregarding his sarcasm*):

It is difficult to hurl a stone at a brother. (*To the others*) I recommend,

Brethren, that we place him under the supervision of the congregation.

If within a year's time, he has not become obedient and has not begun

living according to our will and that of God,

as Jonathan has, then we shall treat him as the publican and the sinner.

SMITH: That is just!

MILLS: This is the law of Christ.

FIELDING: Do you think he shall repent?

SMITH: God is omnipotent. For God everything is possible.

ORTWIN: We should take him under our supervision.

CALEB: For a year.

FIELDING: A month is long enough!

SMITH: For half a year.

ORTWIN: Three months is time enough!

MILLS: For forty days!

RICHARD: How long will this go on?

You are haggling over my soul as if at a marketplace.

For the first time I must admit that he is right.

(*Pointing to GODWINSON*)

If I have not renounced my art by now,

then it is clear that I never will. My soul

has already conquered all and has become

as free as a deer in the mountains. And you would wish

to bridle it and lead it by the reins of your virtues to him (*pointing to GODWINSON*)

to be put in an iron yoke?

GODWINSON (*beginning to shake as RICHARD speaks, then staring straight ahead, extending his arms as if to some apparition, and, yelling out in an unnatural, ecstatic voice, cutting RICHARD short*):

Woe unto us! My Zion! Oh, new Jerusalem!

Whither are they leading thee? Oh, what do I see?

What do I hear? Oh, sorrow! Oh, woe!

Cymbals, drums, psalteries, and reed pipes ...

a youth dancing frantically before the figure of Moloch.<sup>2</sup>

A virgin in sumptuous garb being readied for the service

of Astoret.<sup>3</sup> Oh, shed tears, ye people!

*He grabs his head. The people are overcome by distress. Some cry, while others shake deliriously.*

CHRISTABELLE weeps. EDITH, her hands clasped, stares ahead in despair.

FIELDING (*rushing toward GODWINSON*):

Teacher! Our Father! Advise us! Save us! What should we do?

GODWINSON (*changing his sorrowful tone to a stern one*):

God is great in his wrath! Listen, Daughter of Zion!

Robbers with copper faces fly at thee ...

There is no salvation for thee ...

Thy God hath forsaken thee for thine idolatrous betrayal ...

*He lowers his arms and closes his eyes, as if exhausted by despair.*

CALEB: Teacher, are these terrible visions not of doom, but a warning?

Surely it is so?

GODWINSON *remains silent and does not open his eyes.*

<sup>2</sup> Moloch (Molech), or Baal in Hebrew: a false god to whom sacrifices were made.

<sup>3</sup> Astoret: in Finnish mythology, the goddess of bounty and love.

CALEB (*pushing the Bible closer to GODWINSON*): Open the Holy Book.

Let it advise us what to do.

GODWINSON (*supposedly opening the book randomly but actually opening it to an already chosen text, reading in a hollow voice*):

“Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image,  
an abomination unto the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman,  
and putteth it in a secret place.”<sup>4</sup>

(*Stops reading and addresses everyone.*)

Do you know what the nation of Israel answered?

CALEB (*sorrowfully and dryly*): “Let it be so.”

FIELDING (*fanatically*): Let him be cursed!

SMITH (*meekly*): Yes, let it be so.

MILLS: My own soul is dearer to me. I agree: let him be cursed!

ORTWIN: It cannot be otherwise.

EDITH (*loudly and clearly*): And I curse him!

CHRISTABELLE: Oh, Mother! Mother!

RICHARD (*to everyone*): So, you have cursed me already? But do you know why?!

CALEB (*pointing to the covered statue*): For the vile thing you keep in hiding.

RICHARD: Who told you that I hide my creation?

Here is my creation. Look!

*He suddenly removes the covering from the large statue. Silence ensues. It is obvious from the faces of the people that their sanctimonious aversion is in conflict with their natural admiration for a beautiful work. A triumphant look appears on RICHARD's face.*

GODWINSON (*to everyone*): Now his sin is even greater than before!

He seeks to entangle us in the web spun by the Prince of Lies himself.

He seeks to divert the holy congregation from the true path.

*The people turn away to avoid looking at the statue.*

FIELDING: He must have listened to the devil while making this!

RICHARD: I only listened to a higher inspiration.

But to whom did you listen? (*Pointing at GODWINSON*)

A whitewashed grave! You created an idol, not I!

You should curse yourself!

GODWINSON (*to the others*): Will you tolerate these loathsome words  
and deeds much longer? What are you waiting for?

What did Moses do with the golden idol?

FIELDING: He burned it and gave the ashes to idol-makers to drink.

GODWINSON: We should do the same! (*Pointing to the statue*) Burn it!

Burn all this loathsome idolatry gathered in this house.

RICHARD: I will not allow it!

*At that moment FIELDING knocks the statue off its pedestal with his walking stick. It falls and breaks. The people grab all sculpture-related objects that are at hand: sketches, busts, even im-*

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<sup>4</sup> A passage from the Apocrypha.

plements. They trample, break, and throw these items into the fireplace, where CALEB is lighting and fanning a fire.

GODWINSON (*springing to the cabinet that RICHARD is already guarding*):

Here are the worst idols! Behold!

RICHARD *struggles with him to stop him. The others rush to help GODWINSON. For several minutes, ever since the fight began, DAVY has been trying to open the door of the side room, where he has been shut in. CHRISTABELLE and EDITH have been holding the door shut so that he would not get out. But for a moment EDITH lets down her hands, shocked at what is happening by the cabinet. DAVY breaks through the door, grabs a sculptor's hammer lying by the broken statue, and, pushing through the crowd to RICHARD, gives him the hammer.*

DAVY: Uncle, here is a mallet!

RICHARD (*closely hugging with one arm the only statue he has saved from those hidden in the cabinet—the one with the inscription “Pereat mundus, fiat ars”—and taking the hammer from DAVY with his free hand and waving it around*):

Hey! Move back!

*He slightly injures GODWINSON, who lets out a piercing scream. Shouting ensues:*

He is possessed by the devil! Let's drive him away! Into the wilderness! Chase him away!

*The people advance upon RICHARD with sticks. Some throw broken pieces of the clay statue at him.*

RICHARD (*in a loud voice*): Silence! Silence, you miserable brood!

Philistines! I am leaving you myself!

The wilderness may be inhabited by savages,

but you are just as savage! Get out of my way!

Let me pass! Otherwise I will pave my own road! Watch out!

*He pushes through the crowd, clearing a path to the door with the hammer.*

CHRISTABELLE: Brother, come to your senses! Oh, Mother, dear! (*Rushes to EDITH.*)

EDITH (*firmly*): He is cursed by God: he is no longer a son to me  
or a brother to you.

DAVY (*rushing after RICHARD, through the crowd*): Oh, Uncle! Take me with you!

CHRISTABELLE: Davy! Dear Son! Don't go! Do not leave me!

I'll die without you! Davy! Oh!

*Her voice falters. She staggers. DAVY, after a moment of hesitation, turns back when she cries out and throws himself into her arms.*

DAVY: Mother, I will stay with you.

CHRISTABELLE *hugs DAVY. RICHARD reaches the door and opens it.*

GODWINSON and THE PEOPLE (*calling after him*): May you be cursed!

RICHARD (*turning around, laughing in anger*): May your curse return to haunt you!

*He disappears. The others pursue him with fierce cries, throwing pieces of clay and sticks after him*



## Act Three

*A schoolroom on Rhode Island. It also serves as RICHARD'S living quarters. Most of the room is filled with school benches, a teacher's desk, a blackboard, and so on. One-fourth of the room is separated from the rest by a curtain, and an alcove is filled with RICHARD'S things and sculpting implements. In one corner stands a cabinet; in the other, a small, unfinished statue of a woman and a skeleton for the study of anatomy and sculpture.*

RICHARD is sitting at his desk. In front of him stands a student reading from a book. Other students—both children and adults—are sitting on the benches.

STUDENT (*reading*):

*E disse lei: nessun maggior dolore  
che ricordarsi del tempo felice  
nella miseria!*

RICHARD: Now translate it.

STUDENT (*translating*): "And she said: there is no greater pain than to remember happier times in misery."

Maybe it would be better to translate it as "in misfortune?"

RICHARD: It is the same thing.

STUDENT: What strange words!

I would think that a pleasant memory would always remain pleasant.

RICHARD: May God grant that you never change your mind.

STUDENT: Should I read further or analyze it?

RICHARD: No. That is enough for today.

*The students gather their books, bow, and leave. One student stays behind and comes up to RICHARD.*

RICHARD: What is it, Charlie?

CHARLIE: I gave my father the figurine that you made,  
but he said that there is no reason for him to keep such goods  
in his store because you shall not find buyers for it  
around here. So I brought it back. (*Reaches into his bag.*)

RICHARD (*stopping CHARLIE with his hand*): Take it, if you wish, as a keepsake.

CHARLIE: If you allow it, I would like to give it  
to my little sister. She asked for a doll.

RICHARD: *Sancta simplicitas.*

CHARLIE: What did you say, Teacher?

RICHARD: Nothing. Yes, go ahead (*in thought*).

CHARLIE (*hesitantly*): So, will you permit me to give it to her as a gift?

RICHARD: As you wish.

CHARLIE: Thank you! (*Goes to the door and bows to RICHARD.*)

RICHARD: I wish you good health. (*CHARLIE leaves. RICHARD is alone.*)

Is there no power or desire in the world  
that can attract these people to beauty and art?  
If I can make a stone come alive, why can't I

do the same for these people's hearts? Their hearts are not of stone. They fought so sincerely for freedom, for truth, and God's holy word.

They do not live here just for bread alone.

I have seen their austere gazes glisten with tears like dew when the organ shook the walls and the people's souls with its majestic song. I was sad and envious that music rules both the walls and people while my beloved talent, my sculpture, is scorned, like a dethroned empress ... No, I will not believe that my empress has truly lost her power.

It is I who am at fault, and my impotent dream.

My mind, my artless hands, cannot find something that would move everyone like an organ's thunder.

What would it be, and where should I seek it?

*(Drawing back the curtain, walking up to the statue, and unveiling it)*

What is lacking in this work of mine? Who can tell me now?

People pass by it silently as if they were deaf and dumb, as if their eyes were filled with dark water,

eyes that behold but do not see! Was it not better

when the hands of fanatics crushed my works into dust?

At least it was an acknowledgement that my talent could truly have power. To them it was evil, inimical, impious,

but still powerful! They fought fiercely against me,

and then I fought too ... Now I would be happy

to have an enemy, but there is none ... *(To the statue)*

At least you should respond to me, you lifeless clay!

What are you missing, and me as well, so that we both

could be alive among living people? *(Making some changes)*

Will this make the line clearer? ... Perhaps this position

will make it more interesting to them? This gaze perhaps?

No, I should lower it ... No, this is a bad expression ...

It looks hypocritical. This way then? No,

it reminds me of ancient goddesses ... And this, of Madonnas ...

And this, of the shattered statue. *(Stops working.)* If I only knew

just what these people need, perhaps then I would be able

to mould it, but now—No, surely, for one's soul to speak

to another, it is necessary that both be kindred spirits.

But what will bring them together? O Holy Spirit!

Give my work another soul, or take mine away!

*(Someone knocks quietly at the door. RICHARD pays no attention at first. Someone knocks again.)*

Come in!

*(MRS. BROOKLEY, a seamstress, enters carrying a bundle. Silently they greet each other.)*

It is you.

BROOKLEY: I brought you my work. (*Pulls out and undoes a long sculptor's smock.*)

RICHARD: Ah, is it ready? Thank you. Here you are.

(*Taking out some money*) This is for everything that you have sewn for me.

BROOKLEY (*putting her hands to her chest and refusing to take the money*):

No, Schoolmaster Iron, I did not take it then,  
and I will not take it now.

RICHARD: Really?! Why is that?

BROOKLEY: I am so grateful to you because of my Thomas.

My boy respects you more than all the other schoolmasters.

RICHARD: I am very happy when students do not dislike me.

But take the money please, for otherwise  
I cannot take this work from you.

*He folds the smock and hands it to MRS. BROOKLEY. She puts the bundle on a chair.*

BROOKLEY: No, Schoolmaster, if that is the case, then there is something

I would like to ask of you ... But how could I ...  
it would be even more expensive ... then again,  
perhaps I could work it off when I have the time.

RICHARD: What is it that I could do for you?

I would do it willingly and without compensation.

BROOKLEY: Could you give me this figure?

(*Pointing to the statue*) It is unlikely that it may be of any use to you.  
But I certainly could use it.

RICHARD: And for what purpose?

BROOKLEY: Ladies are always capricious, you can never satisfy them ...  
Whose fault is it that they will not stand still?

RICHARD: What do you mean? Excuse me, but I don't understand.

We were talking about the statue.

BROOKLEY: I would fit dresses on it, so as not to tire the ladies.

RICHARD: What?! (*Becomes speechless, burning with anger.*)

BROOKLEY (*fearfully*): Forgive me ... I, I did not know ... I didn't want to ...

RICHARD (*slowly regaining his composure*):

Fine. It does not matter ... Leave me alone, please.  
I feel ill ... But do take the money. Goodbye.

*BROOKLEY, confused, takes the money, curtsies, and exits, leaving the door opened. Just after she leaves, three settlers enter: JONES, O'PATRICK, and MACHARDY.*

ALL THREE: Good evening!

RICHARD (*turning toward the statue to hide the fact that he is still upset*): Good evening,  
Gentlemen!

JONES: Are you working?

RICHARD: Well, yes!

O'PATRICK (*looking at the statue*):

What will this be? Did some congregation commission it?

RICHARD: No one commissioned it.

JONES: But you are probably planning to sell this work  
to some Catholic church far away?

RICHARD: I don't think that anyone would buy it.

MACHARDY: Then why are you making it?

RICHARD: To tell you the truth, I do not know myself.

MACHARDY: Meaning, for pleasure's sake?

O'PATRICK: What will it be? A saint?

RICHARD: How can I explain it? It's a dream.

O'PATRICK: All right, it's a dream. But what is it? What is it for?

RICHARD: It's hard to say why we need to have a dream

and what it is exactly, but it is certain

that no one in this world has lived without one.

MACHARDY: Of course! It is so when people are still young,

They are always full of all kinds of dreams.

O'PATRICK: Naturally, it is part of being young!

RICHARD: But a dream does not beautify life just for the young.

MACHARDY: Verily, someone may be grey-haired,

yet still play like a youngster.

RICHARD: A dream does not always simply entertain.

Sometimes people shed rivers of blood for a dream.

MACHARDY: May God protect us from such madness!

RICHARD: May God protect us, although He has not protected us!

Even in our own merry England a good deal

of blood was shed for dreams.

O'PATRICK: Are you saying that the Episcopal Church, the tithe,

and the prayer book are just dreams?

MACHARDY: What about the "right to petition"? Or the "articles"?

RICHARD: They are all dreams!

MACHARDY: Be fearful of God!

What are you saying, Master Iron?

O'PATRICK: Are you saying that we rushed all the way

across the sea just in pursuit of dreams?

RICHARD: Yes, a dream led us across the ocean.

To reach it we made our way through wildernesses.

For it that we suffered great hardships.

O'PATRICK: So, what kind of delusion was this, in your opinion?

RICHARD: A sacred, magnificent dream that perhaps people could be free ...

JONES (*Having not taken part in the discussion for quite some time and wandered around the room in boredom, takes advantage of the break in the conversation to address RICHARD.*):

I have come to you on business, Master Iron.

You see, I bought myself a piece of land

with a clay pit on it, but I need to know if the clay is good.

Look, here is a piece. You know about such things.

RICHARD (*examining the clay*): It is of no use for sculpture.

JONES: No, not for that ...

But would it be all right for making crockery?

The three of us want to set up a pottery partnership.

We do not want to sell simple dishes, only fine ones.  
 Praise God, people are prospering. Perhaps this trade  
 would go well for us. I have the clay,  
 he (*pointing to O'PATRICK*) will provide the building,  
 and this gentleman (*pointing to MACHARDY*) the money.  
 And I would ask you to make the models—  
 you are a skilled and worldly man.  
 In Italy you have seen all sorts of china ...  
 now those are some beautiful goods! So I thought:  
 instead of Master Iron making dolls for himself  
 for no reason at all—

RICHARD (*jumping up and grabbing his hat*):

Excuse me, Gentlemen ...

It is time for me to go to school ... I mean ...

I mean to church ... I have to go ... Farewell! (*Leaves quickly.*)

JONES: Has he gone mad?

O'PATRICK: He is offended.

MACHARDY: I told you that he is a strange one.

It really was not worth approaching him.

JONES: But what offended him?

O'PATRICK: Mention of the dolls.

JONES: That was an insult to him? Really?!

A person makes a little joke—

MACHARDY: He is the kind who cannot take a joke.

O'PATRICK (*looking through the window*):

Look at that: Master Iron has run into the organist  
 and the Master by the gate. They are discussing something.

MACHARDY (*looking through the window*): It looks like all three of them are coming here.

JONES: Let us take our leave, or I shall be

ill at ease with Master Iron now.

O'PATRICK: We really should go. They are learned men,

and we are not fit to talk with such people.

JONES: Maybe some of us are, but that is not important.

It is just not worth wasting our time.

*All three men leave. The MASTER and RICHARD enter, heatedly continuing the discussion they began outside. The ORGANIST follows after them. At first he does not join, but only listens or paces, looking around the house. RICHARD draws back the curtain that separates the main room from the side room.*

MASTER: You, Master Richard, should look further afield.

Your horizons are much too narrow here.

RICHARD: No, Master, we simply look in different directions:

I look upwards, while you look around.

MASTER: If that is so, though I doubt it ...

let us draw a parallel. For you your talent is dear.

I am not debating whether it deserves to be.

That is not the question. Your talent is dear to you,  
while for me learning is dear.

RICHARD: This is true.

MASTER: Yes. *Non dubitandum est*. Let us go further:  
in your art you reached the highest level  
at one time.

RICHARD (*with sorrow*): At one time!

MASTER (*moving with his hand as if to stop RICHARD*):  
In a discussion composure is essential.  
It is a *conditio sine qua non*.

RICHARD: Go on.

MASTER: You must know this, my honoured colleague,  
that the *universitas* gave me the title of *magister*.

RICHARD: Is it perhaps with an *honoris causa*?

MASTER: *Nunc prosequor*. And now I teach arithmetic,  
and you teach Italian and anatomy.  
Although I am a scholar and you are an artist.

RICHARD: Too bad for us.

MASTER: Perhaps for us,  
but not for knowledge and not for art.  
People and generations are simply links  
in the long chain of universal life, and that chain  
cannot be broken. Archimedes<sup>5</sup> was killed by  
an ignorant man and did not manage to complete  
his theorem. But a year later, or perhaps  
after a hundred years, someone was  
able to finish writing this theorem.  
And no one can say which is the work  
of the originator and which is the work of the follower.  
They are both blended in one theorem.

RICHARD: Master, I will answer also with an example.

An artist, whose name is not known, although he is famous,  
left us a statue without any arms. Years,  
centuries, and even millennia have passed ... And to this day  
that statue has no arms. I have seen many attempts  
to add new arms ... and by no means they were not  
inferior artists who made them ... But what of it?  
Nothing matches this statue. The work of generations  
has not blended with it.

ORGANIST (*joining the conversation*):

This only means  
that the sculpture's time has passed.  
And for that may God be praised!

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<sup>5</sup> Archimedes (287–212 BC), a Greek mathematician and thinker killed by a Roman soldier.

RICHARD: If that is so, what is there to rejoice in?

If music had disappeared completely from the world,  
I would not rejoice.

ORGANIST: But music shall not disappear.

Even a little song may live for ages. It changes,  
comes apart, grows together again, and it passes  
from the people to God's church. That is a Christian talent.

RICHARD: Do you mean that sculpture is cursed by Christ?

ORGANIST: I do not say that, but if in the Christian world  
it no longer take us back to paganism,  
then it merely amuses us.

RICHARD: What are you saying then?

That the great Michelangelo created only for amusement?

ORGANIST: I have not seen any statues by Michelangelo,  
and few people are able to. But all the hymns  
that I play here on the organ in church  
can also be heard throughout the Christian world.

MASTER: That is no argument, my friend.

ORGANIST: Perhaps that is so.

I am no artist when it comes to debates.  
However, no one lives in this world without songs,  
while only the rich can be owners of statues.

RICHARD: Dew glistens on every stalk, while diamonds sparkle  
on expensive ornaments. Both are God's gifts.

MASTER: That too is no argument.

RICHARD: What I meant

to say is: if that diamond were placed at a crossroads  
or in a church, everyone could gaze at it  
as they do at a dew drop.

ORGANIST: Our church is too poor to buy expensive diamonds.

MASTER: Friends, we have strayed from the topic. Let us begin  
*ab ovo* and accept *ad hoc*, without proof,  
that sculpture is eternal. It is possible, Master Richard,  
that you have ceased to exist here as a sculptor.

RICHARD: Would it not be better to die altogether then?

MASTER (*paying no attention, continuing calmly*):

As an anatomist, you give instruction to youths  
who some day may outweigh you in talent,  
and when the proper time comes, your labour, painstaking  
and unnoticed, will prepare the blossoming of brilliant  
talent in the community. And in this way,  
my friend, you will become the invisible  
foundation wall in the sanctuary of art.

RICHARD: Think you that people's souls are stone that they  
can be placed on foundation walls? Think you that

only the human body is afraid of death  
but that the living soul is not afraid to perish?

MASTER: Our faith teaches us that our soul is immortal.

RICHARD: Oh, Master! That is what I used to believe too,  
but now I see that it is possible to quash the soul.  
And even sooner than the body.

*He moves a bit to the side and, seized with remorse, leans on the window sill.*

MASTER (*not looking at RICHARD*):

My friend, who here among us quashes the soul?  
In foreign lands, yes. But here, in Rhode Island,  
a yoke is not placed upon the soul. Have you  
yourself ever experienced any bondage here?  
You came here freely, and you live in freedom.

RICHARD *shudders at these words.*

ORGANIST (*softly*): Let him be, Master, he is trembling  
like an untuned string. (*Loudly*) Master,  
it is time for me to go home now,  
and then to church for a rehearsal. Shall we go together?

MASTER: Let us go, my friend.

ORGANIST: You should come, Master Iron.  
I shall play *Stabat Mater* for you,  
the piece you have enjoyed so much.

RICHARD: Thank you, but I would request that you play  
the *Requiem* instead.

ORGANIST: Do not worry, Master Iron, no indeed!

RICHARD: I am not worrying.

ORGANIST: Well, then goodbye, Master.

*The MASTER and the ORGANIST shake hands with RICHARD and go to the door.*

MASTER (*while exiting*): We will finish our discussion some other time.

*The MASTER and the ORGANIST leave. RICHARD stands still for a moment, looking sad. Then he quickly goes to the window, opens it, and shouts.*

RICHARD: Mr. Bryde! My good sir!

ORGANIST (*coming up to the window*): What is it, Master Iron?

RICHARD: Do you know the little song about the grasshopper in the grass?  
It chirped and chirred but no one listened to it,  
and when it died, it was forgotten. There is a refrain,  
“Oh woe, woe, they forgot the grasshopper!”

ORGANIST: Why do you ask?

RICHARD: For no reason. Just that it is rather a nice song.

ORGANIST: I am an organist, not a singer. Goodbye! (*Goes away offended.*)

RICHARD: Mr. Bryde! ... He is not listening ... And he is angry!  
I have unwittingly offended the man. He did not understand ...  
But is it the first time that people did not understand me?



And why should they? They gave me sanctuary, a job,  
 peace, and truly freedom. Who is to blame  
 that in my breast my heart is restless,  
 that it has been burned by a great fire that is  
 of no use for cooking or baking. Perhaps it could burn  
 great offerings on a great altar ... Where are those altars?  
 I am like a captive in a foreign land who is  
 exalting God, unknown to anyone there.

*(Becomes pensive and then looks out the window.)*

It seems to be getting dark ... From the wilderness  
 a shadow has spread. The road stands out like a ribbon ...  
 It seems as though someone is coming by foot  
 or by horse. That is how I came here once upon a time.  
 It was a difficult road. Davy would not have made it.

*(Singing softly)*

“Where art thou going,  
 Oh, why dost thou stir  
 At such a late hour,  
 Dear Richard, good sir?”

“Pray to God,  
 This’ll ease your heart,  
 O Empress,  
 O my dear Queen.” *(Stops singing.)*

I have forgotten the words, but I do remember the tune.  
 Father often sang it ... But Mother hated ballads ...

*(Singing)*

“Where art thou going,  
 Oh, why dost thou stir,  
 At such a late hour,  
 Dear Richard, good sir?  
*(Stops again.)*

How night falls here so suddenly ... Why is that?  
 It’s the same in the wilderness ... I will never forget that road.

*(Singing)*

“T’is a dark night on the sea,  
 I’m sure thou would prefer  
 To stay until morning,  
 Dear Richard, good sir.”

*(Stops abruptly, peers out the window, then straightens up and stares attentively at the road.)*

Is someone really coming? Here? It seems ... How is it possible?  
 My God! It is Jonathan!

*(Rushes to the door, meets JONATHAN, and they fall into each others arms.)*

Dear friend! Jonathan!

*(Fusses over JONATHAN, sits him at the table, and offers him some food and drink, which he takes from a cupboard.)*

Sit, Brother, rest. Please help yourself.

You have surely been wandering a long time in the wilderness!

JONATHAN: No, not very long. After so much time the road has become well trodden. After all, it has been many years since you had left us. *(Looking closely at RICHARD)* And yet, it seems that it is much too soon for those years to have put so much silver into your black curls. Have I also changed much?

RICHARD *(looking at JONATHAN)*: You? No, not much ... What brings you here? Certainly not I?

JONATHAN: Yes, most of all. Also, I must visit Rivers. I have a matter to discuss with him. You see, he recently passed on a request to us, asking permission to return.

RICHARD: And?

JONATHAN: Permission was granted.

RICHARD: Oh, really? So, how is your family?

JONATHAN: Well, thank you.

RICHARD *(with obvious effort and agitation)*: And ... mine? Are they all alive?

JONATHAN: Alive and well. They send their greetings. Your sister asked me to inquire whether you would wish to return to her.

RICHARD: My soul yearns constantly to be with her.

JONATHAN: Well, then you should return!

RICHARD: Why are you saying that?

You know that I was banished by the judgment of the congregation.

JONATHAN: It was not so much a judgment as an impulse. If only you could have waited out that impulse.

RICHARD: I did not know how ...

JONATHAN: You did not want to.

RICHARD: It is useless to talk about it now.

JONATHAN: Yes, that is true. It is in the past.

But now the congregation is ready to forget its judgment.

RICHARD: If that is so ... But who asked them to do that? Was it my sister perhaps?

JONATHAN: No, with her tears Christabelle reawakened your mother's heart, and it was your honoured mother who agreed to go and beseech the congregation.

RICHARD: My Lord! So the mother recognized her son, after all.

JONATHAN: She hopes that you will still return, like the prodigal son.

RICHARD: Did she say that?

JONATHAN: She said it to the congregation.

RICHARD: To call me a prodigal son in public?!

JONATHAN: The congregation accepted it benevolently.

Godwinson himself said that if you would return humbly,  
with remorse and your heart filled with repentance,  
he will forgive you, as will the congregation.

RICHARD: Does he really think that I would ask his forgiveness?

JONATHAN: He will not demand words of contrition.

RICHARD: So I am supposed to repent through deeds?

JONATHAN: That is obvious.

RICHARD: You are right—it is obvious.

JONATHAN: I suggest that you accept it humbly,  
Richard. Believe me, my friend, you would find peace  
in such submission, that spiritual peace that you  
have never had before.

RICHARD: And never shall.

JONATHAN: There was a time when I thought that way too,  
until I overcame and broke my own conceit.  
But since the time that I renounced myself,  
I feel peace and benevolence in my heart.

RICHARD: How long it has been since I heard such things!

JONATHAN: Then listen to me now! Do not let my voice  
cry out in a desert. I say to you,  
I cry out and beg you: Richard, submit!

RICHARD: I do not know how, my Brother. Let God  
judge me and those people! My neck does not bend before  
Godwinson! My heart cannot stand falsehood, even when  
it is from my own mother!

JONATHAN: But for the sake of your own sister?

RICHARD: What good would a humble Richard be to her?  
Unless perhaps to lay him in a casket?

JONATHAN: Richard, you should cast away such proud words.  
They are like wasteful smoke! Think of the living!  
You have loved your nephew Davy like your own son.

RICHARD: How is he doing now?

JONATHAN: Alright. He is a good boy.

RICHARD: He does not sculpt?

JONATHAN: No, his love is painting. He would like to go  
to Holland with some friends to study there,  
but he does not have the money. It is a shame,  
for he does paint quite well. He has the desire,  
and his family is not opposed to it,  
for he does not paint anything sinful.

RICHARD: What does he paint?

JONATHAN: Mostly portraits.  
He painted his own. I brought it with me. Here.  
(*Takes out a small portrait painted on wood.*)  
He sends it to you as a gift.

RICHARD (*looking at it, his voice shaking*): My Davy ...

He has grown more handsome ... His beard is getting darker ...  
The same piercing and sincere eyes,  
the same sparkle in his gaze. My boy!  
My soul's dear son!

JONATHAN: Return to him. (*Silence.*)

RICHARD: Why would I return! To stifle the young soul?

At least now he will remember forever  
that once he had an Uncle Richard who was brave,  
and free, uncompromising, and submissive only to truth  
and beauty. I do not want to tarnish this memory.  
I do not want my dear Davy and his young friends  
to shake their heads at me and say, "Once he was strong,  
but life has worn him down." That would be the worst.

JONATHAN: It is just your pride. Richard, would you give up  
your soul's salvation for fame and glory.

RICHARD: For glory? Where is it? What glory do I have?

Oh please, do not break my heart!

JONATHAN: I am sorry, I meant to say—

RICHARD: What more is there to say?!

We have said all there is to say, I think.

JONATHAN: What I should add is that besides me and your family  
you also have some other friends at home.

RICHARD: Who are these righteous souls?

JONATHAN: There is Mrs. Thomson.

RICHARD: I do not think I know anyone by that name.

JONATHAN: She is Thomson's widow, the former Jenny Campbell.

She was not married long, and now she is already—

RICHARD: Enough! Do not continue! Be she Mrs. Thomson  
or Miss Campbell, is all the same. I do not know  
the woman.

JONATHAN: What should I say to your sister about you?

RICHARD: Simply say this: there is no going back.

JONATHAN: Is this is your last word?

RICHARD: Yes, my last. (*Turns away.*)

JONATHAN: No, Richard, do no hide your tears. I see them.

I will tell your sister: he cried when he said that.

RICHARD (*regaining his composure*): As you wish ... And tell my Davy that  
it is absolutely necessary that he go to Holland.

(*Goes to a trunk, takes out some money, and gives it to JONATHAN.*)

Here. Give him this money. Let my bitter earnings  
not be spent on daily bread this time.

Tell him this: Uncle Richard asked you to be an artist  
and not submit.

JONATHAN: I will give him the money.

RICHARD: And the message?

JONATHAN: No, they are sinful words.

RICHARD: So don't then! My Davy will understand everything,  
even without any words. (*Silence. JONATHAN puts the money away.*)

JONATHAN: I should leave now.

I see that I shall not accomplish anything else here.  
So I should leave.

RICHARD: Where are you going? Spend the night here!

JONATHAN: No, I will go to Rivers's place. I wish you well!

(*They shake hands. JONATHAN goes to the door.*)

And what should I say to your mother?

RICHARD: Nothing.

JONATHAN *exits. During their conversation night has slowly fallen. Now only faint starlight illuminates the house.*

RICHARD (*listening as JONATHAN'S footsteps recede outside, then sitting down at the end of the table*):

How alone I am! O righteous God!

So, I have achieved what I have always wanted—

I am free. I broke all the chains that bound my heart,  
and my heart with it. Yes, I am free.

In the darkness there is no stopping.

There is no road, not even a goal ...

I have reached the end ... Is it really possible that now,  
after I have overcome everything, I shall be overcome  
by languishing? No, let that for which I have renounced  
everything save me now. O heavenly spark!

You have burned down my native dwelling place.

Now serve as my light in this strange land  
and be the hearth in my home here.

(*Rises, lights a lamp, places it on a pedestal, draws open the alcove,  
goes up to a statue, uncovers it slightly, and then stops.*)

What did I want to change in this here statue?

What should I work on? Should I finish it? No ...

Should I make it more natural? But there is no model ...

Or should I let my imagination run wild?

My imagination does not beat its wings, because they are broken ...

(*Removing the covering*) My thought, why are you silent? Save me, please!..

My heart has stopped for some reason. Has it grown tired of beating?

Yes, it has ... And so have I. (*Sitting on the edge of the pedestal*)

Perhaps it was all just an illusion?

And maybe it was not a heavenly spark at all,

Just a firefly over the marshes, leading a traveller

astray ... And perhaps none of them were wrong, only I was ...

I have devoted my entire life to an unfaithful  
and ungrateful idol ... At a time of tribulation  
my idol has betrayed me ... May it be cursed!

Oh, what did I say! Is it not a sin to have lived  
to see this? Forgive me ... And whom am I beseeching?  
An impenetrable wasteland? How frightening it is here, God!

*He runs out of the house, leaving the door open. The light on the pedestal flickers from the draft, and dark shadows of the statue, the skeleton, and the school benches dart across the walls and floor. The house is empty for about a minute. Then the MASTER and MONSIEUR ANTONIO enter. ANTONIO is a man of many years, and his clothing and manners are those of a seventeenth-century Venetian nobleman.*

ANTONIO (*standing at the doorstep and scanning the house with surprise*):

Hgonourable Master! May I ask if you are certain  
that this is his home?

MASTER: There can be no mistake about this, my good sir.

ANTONIO: It is strange.

MASTER: May I leave you here  
since you are in such a hurry to leave Rhode Island.

ANTONIO: I am forced to make haste!

MASTER: And I must gather  
our congregation for an immediate consultation  
about some commercial laws. I must translate  
the Latin phrases because not everyone here  
has been educated in this language.

ANTONIO: I owe you immeasurable gratitude, my most praiseworthy  
Master, for having accepted my case so diligently.  
If your learning equals your courtesy—and in this  
there is no doubt—this new land may take pride  
in such a great and unusual beacon of scholarship.

MASTER: The learning and courtesy of this new land dares not  
compare itself from afar with the virtues of old Venice.

ANTONIO: I have no words to answer you as you deserve.  
I surrender to your kindness, dear Master, sir.

MASTER: My good sir, I am happy to be of service to you.  
(*Leaves after bowing ceremoniously.*)

ANTONIO: Is this an artist's studio? No, it is a deserted house.  
It does not look like the studio of young Riccardo,  
where once the muses and graces united lovingly.  
The solitary statue stands like a monument on a grave,  
and the skeleton smiles at it in silent mirth.  
Is it possible that the inhabitant of this house is one and the same?  
It is too terrible even to contemplate!

RICHARD *appears at the threshold. Upon seeing ANTONIO, he is taken aback.*

RICHARD: Heavenly Powers! *Monsieur* Antonio!  
I must have lost my mind! This is an apparition!

ANTONIO: Do not be frightened, my dear friend!  
Tonio has aged but he is still alive,  
and he even wants to enliven trade here with you.

RICHARD (*greeting him warmly without words*):

My honoured friend! Here in my house the sun  
of Italy has joyfully risen!

ANTONIO: Just at the right time, for it is dark here.

RICHARD *hurries to light more lamps. Through the open window an intense sound from the organ is suddenly heard.*

ANTONIO: What is that? *Gloria in excelsis*?

What kind of music is this!

RICHARD: There is a church nearby.

ANTONIO (*listening*): The local organist plays well.

RICHARD: In this entire colony he is the only artist.

ANTONIO: I see that you have learned humility, like a true Puritan.

RICHARD: Not humility but sincere truth. There is  
no other artist here except the one  
who plays now in the church.

ANTONIO: What about the master of this house?

RICHARD: I am not an artist here. I was a potter  
and a mason, and now I am a schoolteacher.

ANTONIO: When in need, an artist takes such jobs  
that come his way. Even Apollo once worked as a mason.

RICHARD: If Apollo had lost his lyre and his voice  
and only worked with masonry,  
he probably would have been called a mason, not a god.

ANTONIO: Now now, *Maestro*! Such humility is worse  
than conceit itself. Would you have me  
believe that you could have truly lost your talent  
in the wilds of New England?

RICHARD: My talent?

Oh, it's been so long since I heard that word!  
*Monsieur* Antonio, I will say to you what is  
so very hard to express ... My talent now seems  
like a meteor that has already burned out.  
It flashed so suddenly that it gave out  
neither light, nor warmth ...

ANTONIO: But it enchanted everyone who saw its luminous light.

RICHARD: But who managed to see it?

ANTONIO: We did, the academy. The flower of Venice.

RICHARD: You come to me like Ulysses, who called the dead Achilles  
out of Erebus and spoke with his ghost of past matters  
and heroic deeds. Between the dead and the living  
lay the threshold of Erebus's gate,  
and the discourse gave the bloodless shadow  
so much grief that his extinguished eyes  
kept weeping ... *Accademia delle Arti*.

That is another world that is now foreign to me.

ANTONIO: It could be yours. *Maestro*. In Italy you would not  
be a meteor. In our country you would become

another Michelangelo and would  
attain a glory to equal Donatello's.

RICHARD: I can tell these are Italian *conchetti*.

ANTONIO: No, these are not *conchetti*, not compliments.

I am just saying what my own memory tells me.

It has faithfully preserved everything that you once created  
and what you had said.

RICHARD: What I said I can no longer remember.

ANTONIO: Who was it in our *cenacolo* who lifted  
his enlightened forehead so high,  
who raised his gilded goblet so happily,  
who loudly proclaimed "*Evviva l'arte!*" louder  
than anyone else?

RICHARD: That is all in the past.

The golden goblets have all rolled away  
and good wine is now evaporating in vain,  
while a once young forehead has become stooped and withered.

ANTONIO: What keeps you from returning to Italy, to that happy land  
where laurel and myrtle were strewn in your path?

RICHARD: Not only laurel and myrtle were there,  
but also the Inquisition's decrees. You do remember that?

ANTONIO: Do not be concerned. Times have now changed.

RICHARD (*sadly*): Yes, they have. There will be no decrees  
or laurels now.

ANTONIO: This conversation is both  
sad and fruitless. It would be better to show me  
your work—I do not believe it does not exist.  
Even when an artist's hands may be chopped off,  
he will not cease creating.

RICHARD: But there is nothing much to show now.

Except for this, perhaps ...

(*Goes and unveils the statue.*)

My honoured friend,

among us you had long been the "judge of art."

Now I await your verdict. You do not realize

how dear to me your judgment is, and your every word!

It is as if I had been in the desert without hearing  
a single human voice, and suddenly then

here I hear my native tongue being spoken.

How could it not be dear to me even though  
it brings a death sentence?

ANTONIO: There is no point of speaking of death sentences.

*Nunc delectandum est.*

(*Attentively examines the statue for some time. RICHARD nervously follows his gaze.*)

Tell me, *Maestro*, when did you begin this creation?

RICHARD: When did I begin it? How can I  
describe it: the idea first arose in Venice.



It was then that I made some small models,  
 but the idea persisted no matter where I was.  
 When I was in Massachusetts, I made a statue.  
 However, it is no more.

ANTONIO: Where is it?

RICHARD: It would be a great kindness  
 to me not to make me answer that question.

ANTONIO: Do you expect to finish this one soon?

RICHARD: My road will probably end sooner.

ANTONIO: That would be a pity. The statue is a fine one,  
 though it is, as they say, a bit *tormentata*.

RICHARD: It is no wonder! I myself am extremely tormented.

ANTONIO: Do not take my words that way, *Maestro*.

My friend, I did not mean that you lack creative ability,  
 but only that you have allowed your deliberations  
 to rule over it, that hesitation is evident  
 in this work ...

*(Becomes silent, searching for words to express his thoughts.)*

RICHARD: *Monsieur*, do not feel sorry  
 for me. I am not asking to be spared!

ANTONIO *(trying to hide his discomfort)*:

And you have no need of it, my friend.  
 This is only a criticism, and criticism is usually  
 harsh, sometimes even excessively so ...  
 You said that you had made many models.  
 I would like to compare them with this statue.

RICHARD *(getting a little wax figurine from the cabinet)*:

This is the only one that remains.  
 I carried it out with me like the body of a friend  
 killed in the final battle.

ANTONIO *(examining the figurine, an ecstatic look quickly crossing his face)*:

*Maestro!* Listen! This is so exquisite!  
 It is a sin to hide something like this from the world!  
 As a Puritan who grew up on Biblical texts,  
 have you forgotten the parable about talents?

RICHARD: My honoured friend, I know that parable only too well..

ANTONIO: In the name of Apollo and all the Camens! Tell me,  
*Maestro*, when did you create this jewel?

RICHARD: When I was in Venice. Later I made some changes to the face a bit.

ANTONIO: I think this work is based on the figure of Carolina D'Orsi.

RICHARD: Quite possibly.

ANTONIO: It is not without reason  
 that a foreign man of genius courted this Italian woman.

RICHARD: No, you are mistaken. I did not court her.

I learned the religion of beauty from her. I would have  
 viewed any amorous advances as profanation.

ANTONIO: But the *signora* herself is not of this opinion about advances.

(*Placing the statue on the table*) She always has three *cicisbei* besides her husband.

RICHARD: Is she married?

ANTONIO: For quite some time now.

To that rich and corpulent Fiasci.

RICHARD: Is she still an epitome of beauty?

ANTONIO: She is holding on to her beauty quite well,  
though, of course, the years have taken their toll.

RICHARD: *Monsieur* Antonio, why are you tell me this?

ANTONIO: Dear friend, do not let my stories disturb you!

What I have recounted is life, while this, which enchants me

(*pointing to the figurine*)

is a dream! Life and dreams are not in agreement,  
and they are always in conflict, though they desire peace.

As a result of this battle, life passes, but the dream remains.

This is what "*Pereat mundus, fiat ars*" means.

(*Points to the inscription on the pedestal of the figurine. RICHARD does not answer and becomes pensive. ANTONIO takes RICHARD by the hand.*)

Maestro, I beseech and adjure you as my friend and an artist  
in the name of your art: go back to Italy!

I am certain that your dream and fame shall revive there  
and your talent shall flourish under our sky.

My ship and I myself are at your disposal.

(*Puts his hand to his heart and bows to RICHARD.*)

RICHARD: Thank you, my friend. But I cannot accept  
your most kind offer. Forgive me and please understand.

Though your Italian sun is bright, it cannot make  
a blind man see, but only bring tears to his  
unseeing eyes. It is too late now.

How can I return to the land where once everyone  
saw me in full bloom and had such great hopes for me?

What could I show there now? What could I be proud of?

This is how I began (*pointing to the figurine*) and look how I ended up!  
(*pointing to the statue*)

No, after this, one can no longer be resurrected.

And you are asking me aboard your ship?

No, my friend, do not take a corpse with you.

It would be bad luck, or so seafarers tell us.

(*Smiles bitterly.*)

A MAN (*entering*): Honourable sir! Could you please come to a meeting  
of the congregation to settle our business?

ANTONIO: I shall be right there. (*The MAN leaves.*) I must go,  
and then it will be time to sail. I have been  
travelling around the New World a long time now,  
and the road back to the Old World is not a short one.  
Seafarers have no time to waste. So,  
what do you say, *Maestro*?

RICHARD: It is hard to repeat  
 what was not easy to say even once.  
 Give my regards to Venice and to those sculptors  
 who still remember their friend. And please convey  
 my grateful greetings and deepest respect to *Signora*  
*Carolina*, if you do happen to mention me.  
 Of all the people I have ever known on this earth,  
 she gave me something quite unique—she gave me  
 my greatest dream. May God bless her for this!  
 And to you, my honoured friend, goes  
 my most sincere gratitude for your friendship.

ANTONIO: It is a pity that you have not benefited from it.

*They shake hands. ANTONIO starts to leave.*

RICHARD: *Monsieur Antonio!*

ANTONIO: What is it, my dear friend?

RICHARD (*giving him the figurine*):

Please take this dream. Let it go to that sacred land  
 that gave it its birth. I do not want my soul  
 to die with me. Take it and place it where once  
 I was crowned with laurels, and tell everyone, "This is Richard's soul."

ANTONIO *takes the figurine solemnly, almost religiously. Silent bows are exchanged,*  
*and ANTONIO leaves.*

RICHARD (*alone*): My soul will sail across the ocean, while I  
 remain here in a soulless body among bones  
 together with this stillborn monstrosity. (*To the statue*)  
 How repugnant you are! I hate you!  
 I am burning with shame just for showing you.  
 So die, accursed thing, together with me here.  
 I do not wish to be remembered after my death!  
 Let everything perish and not leave a mark.  
 (*Raises his arms to push the statue from the pedestal, but then drops them.*)  
 No, I cannot raise my own hand against you,  
 child of my own sorrow and grief. I feel sorry  
 for you, so deeply sorry, like a father  
 for his unfortunate child who was born to be a cripple forever ...  
 This creation of mine can never expect to be in  
 bronze or marble. It shall not outlive its creator.  
 Before my own dead body turns to dust,  
 this clay will dry out and fall apart. So let it  
 stand until then. And what about me?  
 My testament is ready. What else is there to wait for?  
 It is time to face eternity now. (*An organist playing Requiem is heard.*)  
 My good friend remembered my request after all  
 and is playing *Requiem*. I shall be

grateful and listen attentively. (*Sits by the window and listens.*)  
 What terrifying sounds ... they foretell eternal torment  
 in hell ... But I am there already ...  
 Oh! Is that an echo of heaven? ... It promises  
 eternal peace ... peace and nothing more ...  
 Once I wanted no peace. And now I feel  
 my strength dying like that very chord ...  
 I could not live by bread alone ...  
 What powerful thunder! It is an angel's clarion!  
 It is a call from heaven! When will  
 the angel of death call me to him?  
 I hear him now. The wait will not be long ...

*Translated by Roxolana Stojko-Lozynskyj*

### *Latin and Italian Phrases in the Text*

#### Act 1

*Sapienti sat* for the wise man, it is enough.  
*mea culpa* through my fault.

#### Act 2

*Mater Dolorosa* Mother of Sorrow (the Virgin Mary gazing at her  
 crucified son).

#### Act 3

*Sancta simplicitas* holy simplicity  
*Non dubitandum est* There is no doubt  
*conditio sine qua non* a necessary condition  
*Nunc prosequor* Now let us continue  
*ab ovo* from the beginning  
*ad hoc* for this case  
*Accademia delle Arti* Academy of Arts  
*concelli* compliments  
*cenacolo* company, circle, group  
*Evviva l'arte* Long live art  
*Nunc delectandum est* Now it is time to be delighted  
*tormentata* weary, tormented  
*Camens* Muses  
*cicisbei* lovers

# *Mykola Kulish*

Mykola Kulish was an eminent and innovative playwright who created the greatest achievements of twentieth-century Ukrainian drama. His plays reflect many European stylistic trends and innovations.

Born in 1892 in the village of Chaplynka just north of the Crimea, Kulish served in the Russian Imperial Army (1914–17) and the Red Army (1917–18), and then worked as a teacher in the town of Oleshky (now Tsiurupynsk) near Kherson. In 1918 he headed that town's council and was imprisoned for five months by Hetman Pavlo Skoropadsky's regime. When the Russian Volunteer Army invaded Ukraine in 1919, Kulish organized and led several partisan groups and the First Ukrainian Dnipro Revolutionary Regiment. That year he also joined the Bolshevik Party. In 1920 he was the chief of staff of the Red Army's Kherson Group. From 1922 to 1925 he lived in Odesa and worked there as a superintendent of elementary schools.

Kulish's first literary efforts were satirical verses and one-act plays. In 1918 he began writing a never finished autobiographical novel, "Lemish" (The Ploughshare). In 1924 Kulish completed his first multi-act play, 97. Thereafter he played a prominent role in the rebirth of Ukrainian drama as the author of the plays *Komuna v stepakh* (A Commune in the Steppes, 1925), *Otak zahynuv Huska* (Thus Died Huska, 1925), *Zoná* (Blight, 1926), *Khulii Khuryyna* (1926), *Narodnii Malakhii* (The People's Malachi, 1929), *Myna Mazailo* (1928), *Zakut* (The Nook, 1929), *Patetychna sonata* (Sonata Pathétique, 1929), *Proshchai, selo* (Farewell, Village, 1933; a.k.a. *Povorot Marka* [Marko's Return, 1934]), *Maklena Grasa* (1932), and *Vichnyi bunt* (The Eternal Revolt, 1932).

From 1925 Kulish lived in Kharkiv, the first capital of Soviet Ukraine, and was active there in the proletarian writers' group Hart (Tempering) and its successor, Vaplite (the Free Academy of Proletarian Literature, 1925–28), which he headed for the first two years. He also organized and headed the Association of Ukrainian Dramatists and Composers (1926–31); served on the editorial boards of the major literary journals *Chervonyi shliakh*, *Literaturnyi iarmarok*, and *Prolitfront*; wrote several poems; and translated Russian literary works into Ukrainian (his name was omitted from the Ukrainian-language edition of Maxim Gorky's *Egor Bulychov* [1934]).

Bolshevik critics castigated Kulish's activities and plays as "bourgeois nationalist" and "anti-Party" for several years before the NKVD arrested him on 8 December 1934. During the search of his apartment, his unpublished play "Taki" (Such Ones) and script for a subsequently cancelled feature film about the Paris Commune were confiscated (they were presumably later destroyed). On 28 March 1935 an NKVD tribunal sentenced Kulish to ten years' strict isolation in an Arctic prison on the Solovets Islands. On 3 November 1937 NKVD officers executed him, the Berezil Theatre director Les Kurbas (Kulish's close friend and collaborator),

and many other writers, scholars, and political prisoners in the Sandarmokh forest near Medvezhegorsk in Soviet Karelia.<sup>1</sup>

Kulish's name and plays were not mentioned publicly in the USSR until the post-Stalin Thaw. In 1957 *97* became the first of his plays to be republished since his arrest. This Russian translation was staged two years later, and *97* was finally republished in its original Ukrainian in 1960. *Patetychna sonata*, which premiered at the Moscow Chamber Theatre in December 1931, was first staged in Soviet Ukraine nearly three decades later—in Odesa in 1958—but was not published there until 1968.

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<sup>1</sup> Between 27 October and 4 November 1937 the NKVD shot or beat to death (in order to save bullets) 1,111 prisoners there, 300 of whom were Ukrainian. This mass-burial site, containing the remains of over 9,500 prisoners, was discovered in 1997.

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## About *The People’s Malachi*

The first plays that Kulish wrote received a very enthusiastic welcome from critics and audiences. However those that followed, specifically *Khulii Khuryyna* and especially *Narodnii Malakhii* (The People’s Malachi), were soon branded as reflecting “political insecurity” and other “undesirable” elements. *The People’s Malachi* was first performed at the Berezil Theatre in Kharkiv on 25 March 1928.<sup>2</sup> In order to satisfy his censors, critics, and various theatre repertoire committees, the author had made many changes in the play. In the spring of 1929 he finally received temporary permission to stage the third version; it stimulated an unprecedented public discussion of the play and the production by Berezil’s avant-garde director, Les Kurbas. That same year Kulish managed to publish the third version (which had an added scene about Malachi visiting the factory). The play was banned in 1929. Thereafter it was not staged in Ukraine until 1989, but only by postwar Ukrainian theatre troupes in West Germany and Canada.

After the first performance of *The People’s Malachi*, both Kulish and his play were attacked in the Soviet press. The primary criticism was that the play’s main character, Malachi, a social reformer in a socialist country, is not in step with the workers and is a deranged man and, even worse, a petit bourgeois. In this expressionistic work, Malachi gets away with numerous exposés and criticisms of Soviet reality. The play’s title is a satirical reference to the high prestige of “people’s commissars” in the USSR. In Kulish’s earlier play, *Zoná* (Blight, 1926), the protagonist is an old blind man who was not a revolutionary. In *The People’s Malachi* Kulish goes even further by choosing to present the protagonist as someone who is not a Party official and even not a sane man. Instead Malachi is an unbalanced agent of misfortune, whom Kulish uses as the vehicle for his satirical critique of the fruits of Communist teachings. Consequently it is hardly surprising that Soviet critics were up in arms.

Kulish’s literary contemporary, Yurii Smolych, even went so far as to claim that the author took “the repugnant idea” of demonstrating the need for social reforms from the Ukrainian

<sup>2</sup> Various dates have been provided for the premiere of *The People’s Malachi*, including 31 March 1928, and 2 March 1928 for the preview. See Valerian Revutsky, “Mykola Kulish in the Modern Ukrainian Theatre,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 49, no. 116 (July 1971): 359.



modernist writer Volodymyr Vynnychenko, who was unacceptable to Soviet critics. Smolych considered Kulish's choice a paradox, because Kulish did not admire Vynnychenko and even wanted Malachi to be played by Antin Buchma, who could be made up to look like Vynnychenko.<sup>3</sup> Later the Soviet drama scholar Yosyp Kyseliov detected the influence of Mykola Khvylovy's ideas in the play, especially when Malachi refers to the "azure yonder." In contrast to Kulish's earlier plays, which were marked by realism and simplicity, Kyseliov described *The People's Malachi* as abstract, with "obscure symbolism, decadent mannerism, deliberate complications, displaying indifference to the semantic and thematic unity of the work."<sup>4</sup>

In the West, however, the postwar émigré critic Yurii Sherekh was free to write about the play from a wider perspective and compared its protagonist and the play itself to Jean Giraudoux's *La folle de Chaillot* (*The Madwoman of Chaillot*, 1943, first performed in 1945).<sup>5</sup> Other critics noted similarities between Kulish's and Georg Grosz's stark and sordid presentations of reality.

In order to decode the play's various planes of reference, let us first consider its protagonist's name. Two of his most prominent namesakes are associated with religion and reforms. Malachi, the last of the Hebrew prophets in the fifth century BC, complained about his people's lax morals (including divorces and marriages to foreigners), "indifference to worship," and reluctance to pay sacred dues. As God's messenger, he was to "purge away" these attitudes and behaviour, bring back prosperity, and reward those who were religious and observed Moses's laws. Malachy, a twelfth-century Irish archbishop who was later canonized, also strove to reform the individual (he promoted monastic life), and society (he brought the Irish church into the Roman Catholic fold). In a somewhat similar manner, the eighteenth-century Ukrainian philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda travelled across the country on foot and preached spiritual reform of the individual, but on a more basic level. He made no promises of an "azure yonder."

Kulish's Malachi considers religion to be "the opium of the people." Thus he draws attention to Communist ideology and the Bolsheviks' promises of reforming humankind and providing a better future, albeit in the rather distant future. The Soviet critics did not miss these satirical juxtapositions or the play's ironic tenor.

In his play Kulish makes use of various dramatic and mythical imagery, supplementing them with a strong dose of irony and a Soviet setting. He replaces traditional drama's royal protagonist with a modern-day correlative—a commissar; and instead of a dove as a symbolic bird, he gives us a chicken, which is killed in the end. He substitutes traditional mythical settings—a garden or a forest—with the garden of a sanatorium; and instead of a temple, his play offers a factory and a brothel. Every image, every idea, and every dream is permeated with irony and irreality.

Malachi's quixotic reformist mission only appears to be directed at universal and social concerns. However, he is equally fixated on specific situations reflecting the state of contemporary cultural, social, and political affairs and issues in Soviet Ukraine.

<sup>3</sup> Iurii Smolych, *Rozpovid' pro nespokii* (Kyiv: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1968), 61.

<sup>4</sup> Iosif Kiselev, "Mikola Kulish," in his *Vstrechi s sovremennikom: Dramaturgi Ukrainy* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1979), 148.

<sup>5</sup> Iurii Sherekh [George Y. Shevelov], "Don-Kikhoty pomizh nas ('Narodnii Malakhii' Zhana Zhirodu)," in his *Druha cherha* (Munich: Suchasnist', 1978) 72–81. See also his "Druhe narodzhennia 'Narodn'oho Malakhiiia,'" in *ibid.*, 102–114. For an insightful discussion, see Mahdalyna Laslo-Kutsiuk "'Masky' Mykoly Kulisha," in her *Shukannia formy* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1980), 233–366. See also Oksana Kohut, "Mesiini vizii heroiv: Svoieridnist' dramatychnoi dii ukrains'koï prorochoï p'iesy," *Bibliia i kul'tura* (Chernivtsi), 2000, no. 1: 106–108.

While the play's New York edition of 1955 was based on its above-mentioned third version, it is the drama's first version that made more direct references to Ukrainians.<sup>6</sup> In most cases they are commentaries on matters of national consciousness, the Bolshevik restraints placed on scholarship, and the state and use of the Ukrainian language. Although Kulish made numerous revisions, even the expurgated final version of his play was held against him, and its stage life was cut short in 1930. Kulish was forced to recant the work, and in a public letter of apology (published in *Literaturna Ukraïna* on 28 February 1931), he denounced his use of "nationalist aphorisms" and the ideas his Malachi expressed as "reminiscent of Trotskyist theories." Nonetheless Kulish managed to write three other outstanding dramas in which he further developed several ideas he introduced and tested in *The People's Malachi*, emphasizing the individual in relation to his or her personal identity, society, the nation, and the world.

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<sup>6</sup> Sviatoslav Hordyns'kyi provides the sections that appeared in the first version in his article "Vypysky z pershoï ('bezrezil'skoï') redaktsiï 'Narodn'oho Malakhiia,'" in Mykola Kulish, *Tvory*, ed. Hryhorii Kostiuk (New York: Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the U.S., 1955), 446–49. Translations of these variants are provided in appendix 2 below. For a description of one staging of the play, see Larissa Onyshkevych, "On the Stages of Ukraine, 1990: From Shalom Aleichem to Mykola Kulish," *Slavic and East European Performance* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 48–57.

# *The People's Malachi*

## (1928)

### In the tragic mode

#### CHARACTERS

MALACHI MYNOVYCH STAKANCHYK, *a former mailman*

TARASOVNA, *his wife*

VIRA, *his eldest daughter*

NADIA, *his middle daughter (aka Nadiia)*

LIUBA, *his youngest daughter (aka Liubov and Liubunia, a diminutive of Liuba)*

GODFATHER, *Malachi's friend and godfather to his daughters*

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT

OLIA, *a pale girl, a nurse and later a prostitute*

APOLINARA, *a middle-aged madam in a brothel*

TROKHYM IVANOVYCH, *an old bachelor and hospital orderly*

AHAPIIA SAVCHYKHA, *an old woman pilgrim*

MILITARY MAN IN RIDING BREECHES

MATYLDA, *a prostitute*

LITTLE OLD MAN

A COURIER

FIRST PATIENT IN AN ASYLUM

SECOND PATIENT IN AN ASYLUM

THIRD PATIENT IN AN ASYLUM

FOURTH PATIENT IN AN ASYLUM

FIFTH PATIENT IN AN ASYLUM

FIRST WORKER

SECOND WORKER

THIRD WORKER

A SWEATING WORKER

FIRST VISITOR *in the brothel*

SECOND VISITOR *in the brothel*

THIRD VISITOR ("NO TIME") *in the brothel*

FIRST GIRL, *a prostitute*

SECOND GIRL, *a prostitute*

A MUSICIAN

A BASS

A TENOR

NEIGHBOURS, PATIENTS, WORKERS AND PROSTITUTES

## Act One

### Scene 1

MADAME<sup>1</sup> TARASOVNA STAKANCHYK *is sobbing from grief in her house at 37 Philistine<sup>2</sup> Street.*

TARASOVNA: Oh, who can tell, who can let me know—can you, Daughter, can you, Little Bird, or you, dear Mother of God—where, to what unknown place, he is fleeing and to what fate he is forsaking poor me-ee-ee? ...

*The canary in the cage hangs its head. The icon of the Holy Mother takes on a sorrowful appearance. Silence prevails. Only the MIDDLE DAUGHTER anxiously tends to her mother.*

MIDDLE DAUGHTER: Mama!

TARASOVNA: Don't interrupt!

MIDDLE DAUGHTER: Drink this, Mama dear.

TARASOVNA: What is it?

MIDDLE DAUGHTER: Valerian drops.

TARASOVNA: Go away! Leave me alone! How can mere valerian drops quell the drama that's in my heart? ... Poison is what I should be given!

MIDDLE DAUGHTER: Wouldn't it be better if you sat away from the window?

TARASOVNA: Why?

MIDDLE DAUGHTER: People are passing by the windows—

TARASOVNA: Get me some crushed glass. I'll poison myself!

MIDDLE DAUGHTER: The neighbours can see and hear.

TARASOVNA: Let them see! Let them hear! If they're friends, let them pity us; and if they're enemies, let them rejoice that there's such a drama in our house, that my lawful husband is running away-ay...

### Scene 2

*The ELDEST DAUGHTER enters.*

MIDDLE DAUGHTER: Did you call Godfather?

ELDEST DAUGHTER: He's on his way.

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the title is intentionally ironic.

<sup>2</sup> In the original, the name of the street is "Mishchanska," which means "Burgher," "Petit-Bourgeois," or, figuratively, "Philistine."

TARASOVNA (*abruptly seizing the moment*): Where is he? Far?

ELDEST DAUGHTER: He'll be here right away.

TARASOVNA: I'm asking you: where is he?

ELDEST DAUGHTER: And I'm telling you, Mama dear. He'll be here in a minute ... He had to make a quick stop in you know where, he got sick to his stomach—

TARASOVNA (*wiping herself*): For Heaven's sake, Girl! Why didn't you say so in the first place? Did any of you tidy up in there?

ELDEST DAUGHTER: I did, yesterday.

MIDDLE DAUGHTER (*to the ELDEST DAUGHTER*): Did you tell Godfather that Papa has already gone to get his passport?

ELDEST DAUGHTER: Of course.

MIDDLE DAUGHTER: And what did he say?

ELDEST DAUGHTER: He said he already knew about it.

TARASOVNA: Did you call the basses from the church choir?

ELDEST DAUGHTER: Liubunia ran to get them.

TARASOVNA: What about whiskey for the basses?

ELDEST DAUGHTER: She'll buy the whiskey, too.

TARASOVNA: Go make some hors d'oeuvres for the folks, dear. Cut up some onions and radishes and put some oil dressing on them.

ELDEST DAUGHTER (*exploding*): It's always me, always me! Go get Godfather, go invite the singers, and now go cut the onions! While she just stands there with her hands folded, doing nothing—

MIDDLE DAUGHTER: And who, pray tell, watered the flowers? Who got the valerian drops ready? You must be blind!

DAUGHTERS (*pinching each other, but in a way their mother cannot see*):

—Ouch!

—Ouch-ouch!

TARASOVNA: Oh, I'll die and die again because of such daughters. I see darkness before my eyes, the sun has turned pitch black, and they keep adding to my grief ... Get me my cards! I'll lay them out for him one more time ... Just one more time. (*Laying out her cards, looking at them, and suddenly drawing her hand to her bosom*) Oh, I see an open road again! ...

DAUGHTERS: Are you sure, Mama dear? It can't be!

(*One to the other*) You must be blind! Can't you see the red six?

TARASOVNA (*her eyes wide with profound, mystical terror*): I lay out the cards again and again, and as always this card appears ... And my dream confirms it: there is this road in a field and above it a crescent moon, so sad and so pale ... It rolls away beyond the horizon as if fleeing ... And I stand by the road like a solitary shadow ... The moon ... That's our father, Girls. I feel it in my soul, he'll flee ... He'll ro-o-ll away and perish on the way-y-y—

DAUGHTERS: Hush, Mama! ... The neighbours are coming.

TARASOVNA: I can't stay quiet! I have been quiet long enough! We've hidden this thing far too long. It's time to let everybody know the kind of drama that's in my house and in my heart.

## Scene 3

NEIGHBOURS *walk in quietly and solemnly, as is fitting on such an occasion. They stand there. The two DAUGHTERS are coddling their mother like two swallows.*

DAUGHTERS: Should I get you a compress, Mama dear? ... Shouldn't you lie down and rest, Mama?

NEIGHBOURS (*sighing, shaking their heads, and, as is fitting in such a situation, saying philosophically*):

—Perhaps one day we will all finally be able to rest at the cemetery<sup>3</sup>—

—You can be sure of that. There we'll sleep to our heart's content—

—Good day, Tarasovna!

TARASOVNA (*rising with utmost difficulty and exchanging greetings*): Sit down, dear neighbours. Although I am ill and there is great suffering in our home, I beg you, do sit down. (*Giving her handkerchief to the MIDDLE DAUGHTER*) Get me another hanky!

MIDDLE DAUGHTER: It's soaking wet ... Is it right to cry so much, Mama dear?

NEIGHBOURS (*smiling at such a question*):

—Hmm ... And why not?—

—She asks—

—It goes without saying: the younger they are, the greener they are—

TARASOVNA: I'm not as sorry for myself as I am for them, my poor children. One can't sleep. "Mama," she says, "I just can't." The second one can't sleep either, but lies there crying softly into her pillow. And the third, darling Liubunia, stands guard at my bedside all night long like a shadow ... But their father doesn't care: he's deser-r-ting us.

NEIGHBOURS: Is it possible that Malachi Mynovych would do such a thing at his ripe age? It's hard to believe.

TARASOVNA: He's already packed for the road. Look here: a walking stick and a bag of dried bread.

ELDEST DAUGHTER: He dried it himself.

TARASOVNA: Secretly he dried it ... Just now he's gone down to the Executive Committee<sup>4</sup> to get a Soviet passport. He'll be taking off today.

NEIGHBOURS: Where to? Though it's bad luck to ask, Tarasovna, but tell us where's he going!

TARASOVNA: Don't ask!

ELDEST DAUGHTER: He won't say.

TARASOVNA: He won't tell us, dear neighbours. Godfather tried asking him, I paid for a supplication in church, we even got him drunk, and still he won't say.

NEIGHBOURS (*even more amazed*): Hmm ... It must be true then: a walking stick and a bag. That's the way some people go on pilgrimages ... Maybe he's gotten ready to travel to Kyiv to fast and pray at some holy icon or something?

TARASOVNA: An icon? Not after the surprise he pulled, forbidding me to bake Easter bread—

NEIGHBOURS: You don't say!

<sup>3</sup> The original has "v komkhozha na dachi" (at the collective-farm director's dacha), one of the many Soviet euphemisms for the final resting place.

<sup>4</sup> A local governing body of the Communist Party.

TARASOVNA: To the pigs ... I dyed a basketful of Easter eggs and he threw them all to the pi-i-igs ... It's been like this for the past seven years—no peace or consolation in this house; now the seventh year is passing, and on top of that he's running away from ho-o-ome—(*Wails loudly.*)

DAUGHTERS: Oh, oh, Mama, oh! ...

NEIGHBOURS: Come now, Tarasovna! Come to your senses! You're carrying on as if he were dead already. Shame on you!

TARASOVNA: I can't come to my senses, dear neighbours. It would be better if he were dead already, better if I were seeing him off to the next world. Instead he's running off to who knows where ... You can at least go to the dead for consolation, you can lean on the cross and cry away your woe, but when he runs away, where shall I go? Where shall I look for him? In what lands, on what roads? ... He won't be seen dead or ali-i-ive—

NEIGHBOURS (*now also moved, blowing their noses into their handkerchiefs and aprons*): What a drama! It's so moving, who needs movies?! (*After a pause*) Tell us at least when all this began, how, and why?

DAUGHTERS (*eagerly*):

—It all started when the soldiers burned down our fence—

—That's a lie! It began when a bullet struck the vestibule—

—I'll tell the story!

—No, I will!

TARASOVNA (*stopping the DAUGHTERS*): No one can recount my husband's story better than I, his lawful wife. Only I ... But like a swallow, dear neighbours, I must flit through it quickly, for today is a working day ... It was back when the Revolution of 1917 broke out, when it broke out, oh, how it broke out—

DAUGHTERS:

—The soldiers—

—Don't interrupt, idiot!—

—Burned down our fence.

NEIGHBOURS: That was when the ruthless soldiers<sup>5</sup> of the Red Army slaughtered our pigs.

TARASOVNA *and her DAUGHTERS interrupt each other.*

TARASOVNA: That's when it all started, dear neighbours. At first, Malachi drank water secretly—

MIDDLE DAUGHTER: Until Papa's teeth chat—

TARASOVNA: Don't interrupt, because it was I and I alone who saw it ... Three daughters, three big girls at home, but only I saw how my Malachi drank water and how his teeth chattered—

ELDEST DAUGHTER: My teeth chattered too, Mama—

TARASOVNA: You're lying! You slept even through the Revolution. It was darling Liuba, poor thing, who clenched her teeth to keep herself from crying over the Revolution—

DAUGHTERS: We all clenched our teeth.

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<sup>5</sup> In the original, *krasnoholovi makedony* (red-headed Macedonians), a nickname for the Red Army referring to its rough conduct, but also to its success in conquering others.

TARASOVNA: Be quiet! ... And at night, before dawn, dear neighbours, when the Revolution had already begun to slumber, we huddled together and wept, and wept, and wept—

NEIGHBOURS (*becoming anxious*): The Revolution hit hard. It hit every single one of us!

TARASOVNA: But why did it hit me the hardest? Why?

DAUGHTERS (*one after the other*):

—Then when—

—Don't interrupt!—

—The postmaster was killed—

TARASOVNA: Quiet! Then when the postmaster was killed, Malachi began trembling and shaking and he walled himself up in the storeroom.

NEIGHBOURS: Huh?! What?

DAUGHTERS: —Papa—

—Walled himself up—

—and plastered up the door.

TARASOVNA: Two years he stayed there.

NEIGHBOURS (*so astounded that they rise to their feet*):

—You don't say!

—Two years in the pantry?

TARASOVNA: Just think what torment it was to stay silent ... I said nothing, and they said nothing, as though our lips were sealed.

NEIGHBOURS (*glancing at each other*): So it turns out that Malachi Mynovych did not go to visit his brother in the village as rumour had it?

TARASOVNA: No, no ... Only now can I reveal it to you, dear neighbours, only now can I tell the whole truth.

NEIGHBOURS: And he was not working there?

TARASOVNA: No, no! Only God knew that my Malachi was walled up, only God, and I, and the girls, and Godfather.

NEIGHBOURS (*vexed that they had not learned of this earlier*):

—Well, who would believe it!

—What a drama—

—We used to hear something at night—

—But how did he, pardon the question, answer the call of nature?

MIDDLE DAUGHTER: Through a little window.

TARASOVNA: Hush! ... Through a secret little window, into a little pot.

NEIGHBOURS: The one that's chipped? ...

TARASOVNA: The very same one. I bought it when I was still carrying little Liuba.

NEIGHBOURS (*shrugging their shoulders*):

—Hmm ... Every morning when I looked out—

—The pot was on the fence ... Who could have known that Malachi Mynovych was walled up in the storeroom?—

—Sitting—

TARASOVNA: Then when the New Economic Policy<sup>6</sup> began ... You remember, dear neighbours, when Godfather was allowed to deal in icons?

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<sup>6</sup> Lenin introduced this policy known by its acronym, NEP, in the spring of 1921 to enable the war-torn Soviet state to get back on its economic feet by allowing limited private enterprise. Having served its purpose, NEP was replaced by



NEIGHBOURS: How could we forget? For the first time since the Revolution began, we could finally buy incense—

MIDDLE DAUGHTER: Only then did Papa come out—

TARASOVNA: Hush! ... It would have been better if he had stayed walled up forever, because now, having read all those Bolshevik books, he's running away from ho-o-me.

## Scene 4

*Then LIUBA, the youngest daughter, rushes in. She puts her basket on the floor and her hands on her heart.*

LIUBA: You cry and you grieve here, not knowing that Papa has already left the Executive Committee. (TARASOVNA lets out a gasp.) He kissed me and was so happy and cheerful...

TARASOVNA: Did he get a passport?

LIUBA: I don't know ... He went to the district chief of police. In the meantime I ran into the church, fell to my knees, and prayed: "God," I said, "God, don't grant me a happy future, just make sure Papa stays home." Then I kissed the floor. (*Cries and demonstrates how she did it.*) Was it right that I did that, Mama dear?

TARASOVNA: Yes, child ... And what about the basses?

LIUBA: They'll be here any minute.

NEIGHBOURS: Did you ask for a supplicatory service, or what?

LIUBA: No. Godfather said we should ask a bass and a tenor from the church choir to try and stop Papa by singing church hymns. Oh, I forgot! ... Mama! Mokii Yakovych said that Papa's favourite hymn is not "The Grace of Peace," but "Why Hast Thou Rejected Me?"

TARASOVNA (*bustling about*): We must let Godfather know about this at once ... (*To the ELDEST DAUGHTER*) Run and get him!

ELDEST DAUGHTER: How can I get him if he had to ... make a quick stop!

## Scene 5

*But she bites her tongue because GODFATHER, quite exhausted, slowly enters.*

TARASOVNA (*as if to God*): How could you take so long ... when there is such misery, such great misery, Godfather!

GODFATHER (*still holding on to his stomach*): Calm down! ... I would have flown here on wings if I could have, Tarasovna, but I couldn't. Listen! (*Continues after a pause, when everyone has had a chance to listen.*) Do you hear it gurgling? ... Phew ... So, he's running away, you say?

TARASOVNA: He's already left the Executive Committee.

GODFATHER (*with authority*): I know.

LIUBA: He kissed me and was so happy and cheerful.

GODFATHER (*with more authority*): I know that, too.

TARASOVNA: He went to see the district chief of police.

GODFATHER (*with supreme authority*): That's no secret to me either.

TARASOVNA: But what have I done to deserve such a tragedy, Godfather? What?

GODFATHER (*deep in thought, pointing upward with his finger*): Only He knows.

NEIGHBOUR (*agreeing*): That's the truth, for sure ... Only He knows what.

GODFATHER (*to the NEIGHBOURS*): Good day to you all!

NEIGHBOURS: And a good day to you!

GODFATHER: What sorrows we must bear! Malachi is running away from us, but where to—he probably doesn't know it himself.

TARASOVNA: All the cards point to a journey—

GODFATHER: I know that, too, and I say: let that journey lead him to the graves rather than there.

TARASOVNA, DAUGHTERS, and NEIGHBOURS: Lord, where? Where, Godfather? Where?

GODFATHER (*to the cage, sadly shaking his head*): Hello, birdie! Are you sad? Are you also grieving because your master is running away? (*Turning to the NEIGHBOURS*) No wonder there's a song that says: "A canary warbles sadly."<sup>7</sup> (*Then, becoming completely dramatic, announcing gravely*) Listen, Tarasovna, and you, my godchildren, and you, neighbours! I have just found out that the executive committee has no power to stop Malachi from running away.

TARASOVNA (*tottering, then saying to GODFATHER and the others*): There's ringing ... in my ears ... There's a high-pitched ringing ...

GODFATHER (*noticing that LIUBA is staring strangely, motionlessly*): Are you holding up all right, Godchild?

LIUBA: Godfather, during the Revolution everyone drank water and their teeth chattered ... I was the only one who stood through the Revolution as if through the Passion. It just hurt here. (*Pointing to her jaw*) Now it hurts here (*pointing to her jaw*), and it hurts here (*clutching at her heart*), and it hurts in my knees and it hurts—

GODFATHER: And even the district chief of police told me, he did ... There is no Soviet law, he says, that would prohibit running away from home, even more so, says he, since your friend is a grown man.

TARASOVNA, DAUGHTERS, and NEIGHBOURS:

—What is to be done now, Godfather?

—Godfather, please advise us!

—What a tragedy! What a tragedy!

GODFATHER: Calm down! ... At last you've completely understood what caused my stomach, nerves, and everything else in this world, to ... It was because of Malachi! ... Did you invite the singers?

LIUBA: They said they'd be here right away.

GODFATHER: Listen to me again! ... Calm down—that is, don't cry, and most of all do not faint until I tell you to—that's point number one.

NEIGHBOURS: Listen to him! Listen to him!

<sup>7</sup> A quote from a Russian song. Many Soviet Ukrainian urban dwellers were Russified.

GODFATHER: Bring the canary here! Closer to the table! That's it ... Light the icon lamp!

TARASOVNA: He'll smash it, Godfather!

DAUGHTERS: Papa doesn't believe in the icon lamp any more.

GODFATHER: Light it, I say! ... Is there any incense in the house?

TARASOVNA: Yes, there is ... Get it, Daughter; it's on the icon case.

GODFATHER: Burn enough incense to shock his nerves. It makes no difference that today he is against religion. For twenty-seven years the man was fond of canaries, of the fragrance of incense, and he loved the sound of church singing. How could he not still be affected by it all? That's point number two—

NEIGHBOURS (*nodding vigorously*):

—Oh, yes, yes!

—Yes, of course!

GODFATHER: Now, which chicken did my good friend like best?

TARASOVNA: The yellow one, the one with the golden crest.

GODFATHER: Kill it!

TARASOVNA: Are you out of your mind, Godfather! A beautiful chicken like that!—

GODFATHER: Kill it, I say! And let's have one of the girls run into the house ... You, little Liuba! ... No, you will be playing the harmonium... You, dear Vira! ... Run into the house with the chicken and scream at the top of your voice that your neighbour Tukhlia has killed the chicken by hitting it on the head with a cudgel—

TARASOVNA: But the chicken is priceless, Godfather!

GODFATHER: So much the better! Kill it with a stake so that one of its eyes pops out and he becomes upset! Maybe, God willing, he will start a lawsuit, as he did before the war when his rooster was killed: that case dragged on for three years—

NEIGHBOURS: That's true! What a clever tactic ... One of you, hurry!

TARASOVNA: Hurry, Vira dear!

ALL (*to VIRA and VIRA to herself*): Run, run!

*She rushes out.*

GODFATHER: That was only point number three ... Here's point number four. Calm down. On my way here, I observed nature ... And do you know what I noticed? (*After a pause*) I noticed that nature, too, is not what it used to be under the old regime. (*After a pause*) Why is that? ... Because the Communists have damaged nature as well ... In this manner, with mere questions I will entangle Malachi. He won't run away. Not long ago a speaker from the centre spoke at the district community building, and I bombarded him with questions as though with rocks, I did. Oh, here come the singers.

## Scene 6

*As soon as the singers appear at the door, everyone makes way for them. The TENOR, who stutters, speaks first after exchanging greetings.*

TENOR (*stammering, bowing*): I-I-I heard th-th-that—

*Fortunately, the BASS takes over.*

BASS: Malachi Mynovych is running away?

GODFATHER: Had he committed suicide, my heart would not be as heavy, even if it had happened today. To think, the man is forty-seven years old, with a family and an untarnished reputation, and suddenly, out of the blue, he's running away.

TENOR: But wh-wh-wh—

BASS: Where is he running to?

GODFATHER: "I'm leaving, buddy," says he. "Where to?" I ask. "I'll tell you later," he says.

TENOR: Th-th-that's strange!

BASS: Strange indeed!

GODFATHER: I began to feel a sharp pain in my heart, as though he had struck me with nettles. We've been friends all our lives; we spent whole nights talking about what was in our hearts, and suddenly it's all over. He withdrew, became silent, immersed himself in dark thoughts and suddenly, it's all over! He's running away, and suddenly that's it! He's running away today.

TENOR: Wou-wou-wouldn't he react better to—(*Giving the pitch and singing*) "The wise thief who in a single moment was"—

GODFATHER: No, no! Only Dekhtiarov's Eucharistic canon "The Grace of Peace"! He likes "The Grace of Peace" best. Whenever we went fishing together he'd quietly sing "The Grace of Peace." He would say, "I'm enraptured by it, I have heavenly visions when I hear it sung."

## Scene 7

ELDEST DAUGHTER (*at the door*): It's Papa! ... Dear Papa's coming!

*There is general alarm. Everyone stirs.*

TARASOVNA: Is he far off?

ELDEST DAUGHTER: He's coming up to the yard.

TARASOVNA: Godfather, what should we do now?!

BASS: Should we begin?

TENOR: Do-sol-mi-do!

*Everyone turns to GODFATHER. He raises his hand as if holding a mace.*

GODFATHER: Calm down, everyone! I'll give you a signal ... Kill the chicken! Bring out the censor! ...

## Scene 8

MALACHI *enters. He stops in the doorway. Silence. Only the eyes rustle.*

GODFATHER: Why have you stopped in the doorway, my dear friend? Don't you recognize anybody? Your friends have gathered here having heard that you're running away today.

MALACHI (*dreamy-eyed, stepping across the threshold*): I'm not running away, I'm leaving.

GODFATHER: It's all the same. You're running away.

MALACHI: Oh, why can't we understand and not even see the rights, the glorious rights, that the Revolution has given man! Truly, one needs to have new eyes to see them.

GODFATHER: What are you getting at, friend? Although, I think I know.

MALACHI: He was going to deny me permission to go on a trip ... Some district chief of police he turned out to be! He, like you, my friend, can't comprehend that it's the Revolution that has given me the right to go on a great journey...

GODFATHER: So, that means you're going?

MALACHI: Yes, my old friend! Yes, my friends!

GODFATHER: Where to?

MALACHI: Where? ... Into the azure yonder.

NEIGHBOURS (*like rushes in the breeze—sh-sh-sh*): Where did he say he's going? Where? How's that?

GODFATHER (*drilling MALACHI with his eyes*): Don't joke! Tell us where you're going!

TARASOVNA: The people have come to see you off. At least tell them: where are you're going?

MALACHI (*his eyes flooded with dreams*): Oh, my dear friend, and you, good neighbours! If you only knew—I feel as if I were hearing music and really seeing the azure yonder. What ecstasy! I'm leaving! ... By the way, put out the icon lamp!

GODFATHER: Is it possible the icon lamp is hindering you from running away?

MALACHI: Not me, but it's hindering you from escaping from the captivity of religion. Put it out! ... Soon there'll be no need for the moon itself—because of electricity!<sup>8</sup> And you bother with an icon lamp—

GODFATHER: I have a question!

MALACHI: I smell incense ... How dare you burn it! Open a window!

TARASOVNA *makes a move, but GODFATHER stops her with his glance. Having noticed this, MALACHI himself opens a window and puts out the icon lamp.*

GODFATHER: Calm down. I have a question I'd like to ask you.

MALACHI: Go ahead.

GODFATHER: But calm down! Are you for socialism, Malachi?

MALACHI: I am.

GODFATHER: And even for co-operatives?

MALACHI: And are you for icon lamps?

GODFATHER: Calm down! Since you let me ask the questions, I'd like to hear your answers!

MALACHI: Go ahead. I'm listening!

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<sup>8</sup> The Soviet government promised to implement general electrification of the countryside by the end of the 1920s.

GODFATHER: How can you be for socialism, and even more so for co-operatives, when it's all completely false, down to the last button?

MALACHI: Meaning what?

GODFATHER: Calm down! Why was it that when I bought some Soviet fabric in the co-operative store, it faded and fell apart in less than a month? Now, that's a fact as plain as two times two equals four.

NEIGHBOURS: That's true? You get some blue fabric for a kerchief or a flag,<sup>9</sup> and, before you know it, it's faded and turned white.<sup>10</sup>

MALACHI (*smiling*): Go on!

GODFATHER: Why was it that when my wife bought a comb of Soviet make, deliberately choosing the finest grade, and had she combed her own hair one wouldn't have wondered, but ... (*Turning to the others, as if to witnesses*) It was little Nina, an innocent child, with hair as soft as silk ... (*The others begin nodding as if to say "We know."*) So why, I ask you, did three teeth fall out of the comb right away? And that's also a fact.

MALACHI: Three teeth. Go on!

GODFATHER: Why do the threads rot and why do stockings wear out on the third day after you buy them? Why isn't the bathhouse as clean as it used to be, and why can't you get hold of a doctor even if you were to die three times over?

MALACHI: Stockings and the bathhouse. Go on!

GODFATHER (*in a loud voice, like a tribune*): And why is it that for the third year in a row we've had no real spring, only some sort of freakishness in nature: it's cold, there'll even be snow, and then, all of a sudden—clap! bang!—like in the upper berth in the bathhouse! Is this not a fact?

BASS: It's a fact!

TENOR: It's a fact!

NEIGHBOURS: It is. Indeed it's a fact.

MALACHI: Is that everything?

GODFATHER: Let it be everything for now, although I have a million of such questions.

MALACHI (*his eyes filled with tears*): Tell me, why was it that before the Revolution I, you, my dear friend, and all of us were afraid to think, but today I can think about anything, anything I choose?

GODFATHER (*retreating to the canary*): Go on.

MALACHI: Tell me, why was I afraid to dream, even though I really wanted to take my bag, my walking stick, and go like that far away? I had to dispel such dreams, but now ... I can freely take up my stick, a bag full of dried bread, and depart—

GODFATHER (*sarcastically*): You mean flee. Go on!

MALACHI: Tell me, why did I tremble in front of the bosses at work and tiptoed about at home? (*Tiptoeing*) Like this, like this ... Why did I give flies the right of way, but now (*Looks queerly at everyone.*) I can write letters to the Council of People's Commissars<sup>11</sup> of Ukraine and get a reply? (*Taking out a letter and solemnly raising his voice*) Will everyone please rise! (*Reading*) "The Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic, The Admin-

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<sup>9</sup> An allusion to the blue-and-yellow Ukrainian national flag.

<sup>10</sup> An allusion to the anti-Bolshevik Russian White Army.

<sup>11</sup> The executive arm of the government of Soviet Ukraine.

istration of the Council of People's Commissars, Kharkiv, date, number. Dear Comrade: In answer to your questions, the Office of the Council of People's Commissars informs you that your projects and letters have been received and have been referred to the People's Commissariat of Education and to the People's Commissariat of Health" ... What ecstasy! The Council of People's Commissars of Ukraine, the Olympus of proletarian wisdom and power, advises me, a former mailman, that my projects have been received ... (*A bit grandly*) My projects! That's where I'm going. As for all of your questions, my friend, the answers are in my projects. As soon as they have been examined and approved, you, dear friend, and all of you, all of you, I say, will immediately receive answers to all your questions. I repeat—immediately; and now I must leave. Liuba dear! Get me a shirt and a pair of drawers for the road!

GODFATHER: Don't go, Malachi!

MALACHI: Don't you get it? The projects have been submitted for preliminary consideration ... I must hurry without delay because I'm afraid there may be a few items in the projects the People's Commissars might not understand and I'll have to explain ... My shirt and drawers, please! (*Exits into another room.*)

*Suddenly everyone falls silent.*

TARASOVNA (*whispering with deathly pale lips*): Dear Mother of God! Godfather! Neighbours! Help me! ... Help me, I implore you! ... I beg you, don't let him go! ...

GODFATHER: Calm down! ... A disclosure at last ... So that's what it is! So that's what he's been writing at night all year long and why he borrowed money from me to buy stamps...

LIUBA (*clinging to her mother*): Oh, Mama! Godfather! I'm scared! Today, as I prayed in church, I suddenly felt as if a breath of cold air was blowing at me ... I looked up, and in God's eyes I saw sadness and the shadow of the inevitable ... The shadow of the inevitable.

TARASOVNA: My heart has just skipped a beat! I, too, sense he's going on a fatal journey—

GODFATHER: Calm down! He's aiming to go to the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars. His conceit has gone to his head, and he's acting as if we're slaves and nincompoops ... Some dear friend he is! No! I won't let him go. I won't rest, I swear to God, until I bring him back home. I'll stop him in his tracks. I'll go to the Central Executive Committee myself! ... As for now, here's what we'll do: as soon as he comes out of the room, I'll make a speech, while you, Moki Yakovych, will start the others singing "The Grace of Peace"—

TENOR (*eagerly*): Do-do, sol, mi, do-do. Liuba! Na-dia-dia! Get your harmonium ready—

GODFATHER (*raising his arm as if holding a mace*): Calm down! Not yet, I say. We'll do it in this order: first my speech, then the canary, then "The Grace of Peace," then tears, and then the chicken! Make sure you keep this straight! I'll give the signal.

ALL (*repeating in a whisper*): The speech, the canary, "The Grace of Peace," tears, and the chicken.

## Scene 9

MALACHI *walks in ready to leave*. GODFATHER *blocks his way*.

GODFATHER: Are you really going, Malachi?

MALACHI: I am, my friend.

GODFATHER (*glancing at everyone, quietly*): Speech. (*Loudly*) Listen, Malachi—and not just you, but everyone who is present in this house! We all thought that you would reach your old age normally and that you would breathe your last in our—your friends'—arms, and that we would walk behind your coffin singing “Holy God, Everlasting, have mercy on us” ... Some water, please! (*Drinks, and then sighs heavily.*) Calm down! We all thought that I would be making this speech by your coffin—or you by mine, because it's all the same; but things have turned out differently. You have chosen to go in the wrong direction and betrayed your religion, the law, your wife and children, and us, your relatives and friends ... Man, just think where you're going! ... Drink some water, Tarasovna!

TARASOVNA (*drinking some water and then saying with great difficulty*): I won't be able to endure it alone; I'll die, Malachi darling.

*Someone else wants to have some water, but GODFATHER gives him a stern look and closes the decanter.*

GODFATHER: I simply don't believe it, I don't believe that you will embark on such a dark path, for who, if not you, was the most faithful Christian among us and sang for twenty-seven years in the church choir? As for the Holy Scriptures, you know them by heart, to the very last letter! Don't go! The church congregation implores you, they want to elect you President of the Parish Board, and that's a fact—

BASS, TENOR, NEIGHBOURS: As a matter of fact that's right, at our meeting this Sunday!

GODFATHER: As you leave, take a look around you, see how your wife grieves and how downcast your daughters are, like willows by a pond in the steppe ... Look, even the canary is sad!

MALACHI (*Going over to the cage, becoming pensive while everyone stands with bated breath, and then taking down the cage*): That's exactly what I have done—spent the best years of my life in a cage. (*Going over to the window and freeing the canary*) Fly away, little bird, fly into the azure yonder. (*Turning to the others*) Goodbye!

GODFATHER (*signalling to the TENOR and speaking to MALACHI*): Malachi, don't go; you'll perish!

MALACHI: So be it!

GODFATHER: For what reason, man?

MALACHI: For a higher cause.

*LIUBA begins playing on the harmonium, the TENOR flaps his arms as though they were wings, and singing resounds.*

CHOIR (*singing to Dekhtiarov's music*): “The grace of peace, a sacrifice of praise.”

*MALACHI stops and tries to say something. But the BASS won't have it: he drowns out all of the voices and the harmonium. The veins in his neck bulge as he sings.*

BASS: “We lift them up unto the Lord.”

MALACHI (*smiling painfully and speaking to GODFATHER*): I've swept the cobwebs of religion out of my soul, and yet, I know not why, this song still stirs me so wondrously—

CHOIR: “It is fitting and just to worship the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—the one and indivisible Trinity”—



MALACHI: I remember: when I was still a little boy and this hymn was sung in church on Whitsunday, I imagined that God Himself had descended to earth just beyond our town and walked up and down the sown field, incensing ... He looked like an ordinary little old man with grey hair, a white tunic, and very sad eyes ... He censed the rye, the flowers, and all of Ukraine ... (*To the NEIGHBOURS and GODFATHER*) Can you hear? The censer is jingling and the meadowlarks are singing!

GODFATHER: Malachi, on Sunday, the choir will sing “The Grace of Peace” even better! Stay with us! (*Takes MALACHI by the arm and is ready to take the bag from him.*)

MALACHI (*suddenly recovering*): Let go! ... Down with this noxious singing! Shut up!

GODFATHER (*with his hand*): Sing on!

MALACHI: I see! You’ve deliberately asked the church singers to come here to poison me again with hymns and incense. You will not succeed, I assure you! For you see: someone in red whose face is not visible is approaching your little old God and hurling a grenade.

CHOIR (*thundering*): “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of Thy Glory”—

MALACHI: Do you hear the thunder? Fire and thunder in the florid Ukrainian steppes ... It’s crumbling, look, the shattered sky is falling; there, the forty martyrs are topsy-turvy, Christ and Mohammed, Adam and the Apocalypse are plunging on all fours ... and the constellations of Cancer and Capricorn have been pulverized ... (*Singing at the top of his voice*) “Hark, the clarions have begun to sound...” I hear the clarions of the Revolution. I see the yonder of azure socialism. Off I go! (*To his wife*) May health and fortune be with you, my dear—

TARASOVNA (*starting to weep*): Don’t go, Malachi darling. I’ll perish without you! ... Grief will creep into our bedroom in the middle of the night like a hunchback, and will seat itself at the head of our bed ... It will wither me, it will smother me!

## Scene 10

*Suddenly the ELDEST DAUGHTER rushes in with the slaughtered chicken.*

ELDEST DAUGHTER: Mama! Papa! Our chicken’s been killed!

*Silence ensues.*

GODFATHER: Which one?

ELDEST DAUGHTER: The yellow one, the one with the golden crest...

MALACHI (*taking the chicken and examining it*): Who killed it?

ELDEST DAUGHTER: Vasyl Ivanovych Tukhlia. He bashed it on the head with a club.

GODFATHER (*to MALACHI*): See, my friend! You haven’t even left the yard and your enemies are already on a rampage. If I were you, I would never let Tukhlia get away with it. I’d immediately call the police and have him taken to court—

NEIGHBOURS: Of course, he must be taken to court!

TARASOVNA: That chicken was worth its weight in gold. Do you remember, Malachi darling, how you used to feed her millet porridge when she was just a little chick, and how, when she’d finish eating, she’d flutter up onto your shoulders?

GODFATHER (*seeing that MALACHI has become pensive*): Call the police! I will be your witness. Folks! Look at this barbarity! An innocent chicken is slaughtered, and for what!

MALACHI: Yes. It is barbarity.

GODFATHER: So call the police and have them make out an official report.

MALACHI: No, it's no use. You can neither destroy evil nor build socialism with official reports. This foul deed convinces me once again that I should immediately hasten to the CPC to speed up the approval of my projects. For the most important thing today is the reform of humankind, and that's precisely what my projects are about ... I'm off!

GODFATHER (*now also confused*): Don't go, Malachi! Remember, when we were just school boys, how we would eat Easter eggs on Good Friday?<sup>12</sup> (MALACHI *puts on his cap.*) Don't go, or I'll punch you in the nose, so help me! ...

LIUBA *falls to her knees before her father and entreats him with her eyes.*

MALACHI: You have moved me, you have shaken me ... But I can't, my Daughter, I can't, my dear friend, I can't remain here, for I have been moved and shaken by the Revolution a hundred times more.

## Scene 11

*In the meantime, TARASOVNA rushes in from the kitchen with a sweet babka.*

TARASOVNA: Malachi, darling! I've baked you your favourite babka ... Don't go, dear! It turned out so fluffy and so aromatic ... Look, there's even a five-pointed star on it that I made for you out of raisins.

*Three times more MALACHI staggers and then starts to leave. He walks with great difficulty, as though trudging through mud. Beyond the threshold his walk becomes freer. TARASOVNA drops her babka. Her knees buckle. She clutches the shards of the shattered bowl.*

NEIGHBOURS: The bowl has shattered.

TARASOVNA: Not the bowl, dear neighbours—it's my life that's been shattered. (*Sobs quietly but intensely. The DAUGHTERS have fainted. LIUBA is like a statue, petrified. GODFATHER, having opened the door, watches MALACHI depart.*)

NEIGHBOURS (*rustling like reeds at eventide*): What a drama! What a time to really cry one's eyes out!

## Act Two

### Scene 1

*The phones are ringing at the Council of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic. The SUPERINTENDENTS are complaining that MALACHI STAKANCHYK is causing trouble.*

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<sup>12</sup> In the Ukrainian Christian tradition, no meat, dairy products, or eggs are to be eaten on Good Friday. Early on Easter Sunday the faithful bring these foods in a basket to church to be blessed by a priest after the liturgy, and only then are they taken home and eaten.

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT: Is this the CPC duty secretary? I'm calling from the superintendent's office. Comrade, we request a directive. What is to be done with Malachi Stakanchyk? ... The crazy one, the one who invents projects. For three weeks he's been coming here day in and day out. If he came alone, it wouldn't be so bad, but he's been bringing others. Who? Well, for instance, a man had a fight with his wife, he brought him in; someone berated somebody else, he dragged them both here; a drunk urinated in an alley, he even convinced him to come. He demanded immediate reforms for them ... I'm listening, Comrade! Yes. Yes. Yes. But what if he doesn't pay attention? What then? (*Slamming down the receiver*) A fine directive!

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: What did he say?

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT: "Tactfully and delicately advise the old man to return home. The District Executive Committee has been sent instructions to give him a post" ... As the proverb says, "even the censor won't help an old woman if she has gone mad!"

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: You think he's insane?

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT: If he isn't, then either you or I must be; it can't be any other way.

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: Oh ... he's just an odd fellow!

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT: And what about his projects?

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: They transcend insanity. I've heard it said at the CPC that the man has simply created a mishmash, jumbling the Bible with Marx, an *acathistus*<sup>13</sup> with the *Anti-Dühring*.<sup>14</sup>

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT: Well, if it's that simple, please advise him tactfully and delicately to return home. There, he's coming.

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: Alone?

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT: Of course he's not alone. He'll make a mash of flies and oil—and you'll have to swallow it all, tactfully and gently.

MALACHI (*heard in the distance*): "O People, People!"<sup>15</sup>...

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT (*clutching his head*): Hear that? ... It's starting.

## Scene 2

MALACHI *enters with his walking stick. He is followed by a group of confused and frightened people who squeeze their way through the door. A LITTLE OLD MAN with a loosely hanging cloak and an umbrella, a FORMER MILITARY MAN IN RIDING BREECHES, a middle-aged madam (APOLINARA) in a hat with a quivering pink plume, a painted young woman (MATYLDA), a pale girl (OLIA), an old bachelor hospital orderly (TROKHYM IVANOVYCH), and an old peasant woman on a pilgrimage (AHAPIIA).*

MALACHI (*letting them pass in front of him*): "O People, People," wrote Taras Shevchenko. (*To the SUPERINTENDENTS*) And it's happening right here in the capital, I should add!

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT (*in the same tone*): What is happening? Tell us.

<sup>13</sup> A prayer of praise to Christ, the Virgin, or the Saints.

<sup>14</sup> The abbreviated title of Friedrich Engels's *Mr. Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* (1878), which presents a comprehensive summary of Marxist communism.

<sup>15</sup> The first three words of an 1860 poem by Taras Shevchenko, in which he chastises people for allowing inhuman conditions to prevail on this planet.

MALACHI: What? First, convey my greetings to the proletarian Olympus. To be more specific, to the People's Commissars and the Chairman. Venerable social Fathers! As I await the approval of my projects (it's already been three weeks) I greet you on this, my saint's day. How will you entertain me on this predestined and holy day? I ask you: How? ... Because the shadow of Ukrainian sorrow has fallen on my shoulders, too: a month has been lost, the wheat is scorched, the landlady threw me out of my room—

*An uproar ensues.*

VOICES: —Wheat?  
—What landlady?  
—What's that got to do with us?  
—Why have we been—

SOMEONE'S VOICE (*interrupting*): For what reason have we been—

TWO VOICES (*together*): Brought here?

MALACHI: Have I not untangled and solved enough questions and problems? A footnote: problems are the seals with which the doors to the future are shut tight. They include (1) The immediate reform of man, especially of the Ukrainian stock, because with the status of peasants and translators we will lag behind in that other world;<sup>16</sup> (2) The reform of the Ukrainian language from the standpoint of full socialism, and not like it is at the telegraph office, when, at night, a double rate is charged for each word—at night;<sup>17</sup> (3) An addendum: a plan for rebuilding Ukraine with its centre in Kyiv, because Kharkiv looks like an office building.<sup>18</sup> Social Fathers! Once again I urge you: make haste with my projects, especially with the one that deals with the urgent reform of humankind. The visual proofs of its urgency are here. (*Pointing to the people he has brought along*) One, two, three, four, five, six, seven! ... Yesterday there were five; the day before yesterday, three—

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT (*to all*): What happened? Why has he brought you here?

*The clamour becomes even louder.*

VOICES: We don't know ourselves—

LITTLE OLD MAN (*fussing*): We were standing by the church chatting about this and that, when suddenly...

APOLINARA (*her pink plume quivering*): Pardon! This girl felt faint in church, so I went in and led her out to get some fresh air. You know how pungent the air gets in church on Pentecost: birch branches, grass, flowers ... I led her out into the shade, when suddenly he walks up. (*Pointing to MALACHI*) "I'm taking you to the Council of People's Commissars," he says. "Me?" "You" ... "As you wish," I said. "Ordinarily, I would not leave the church, but going to the Council of People's Commissars will be a pleasure!"

<sup>16</sup> He is advocating original creative effort rather than dependence on translations or second-hand products.

<sup>17</sup> Although the Ukrainian language was to be officially used, it is hinted here that this came at a price. The Ukrainian word in the text is the adverb *vnochi* 'at night,' derived from the preposition *v* 'in/at' and the noun *nich* 'night' (locative case: *nochi*).

<sup>18</sup> From the time the Soviet government was established in Ukraine and until June 1934, Kharkiv, an important industrial centre, was the capital of Soviet Ukraine.

MILITARY MAN IN RIDING BREECHES (*shouting, as though barking*): I was standing there. This old woman, this citizen ... came along ... She asked me something ... Then suddenly I hear: "Go to the Council of People's Commissars!" ... I beg your pardon, I am a member of the Associations for the Advancement of Children, Aviation and Chemistry, and Co-operative Housing, and you want to take me to the Council of People's Commissars? Why? What for?

MALACHI: What for? ... Oh, People! It was even written in the ancient Indian books of Rig-Veda: "never strike a woman even with a flower." But what did you do? (*To the MILITARY MAN IN RIDING BREECHES and the OLD MAN*) On the eve of socialism you shoved a woman out of the way, smiting her with a disdainful word!

MILITARY MAN IN RIDING BREECHES: I? I hit her?

MALACHI: And you (*to APOLINARA and the ORDERLY*) did something even worse: you were hunting for a girl near the church. (*Pointing to the PALE GIRL*) Oh, People!

APOLINARA: Me? On the contrary, I ... I'm a woman myself!

MILITARY MAN IN RIDING BREECHES (*upset*): Excuse me, Monsieur! Did I hit someone? Whom did I hit?

MALACHI: Whom? (*To AHAPIIA*) Citizen, what did you want to ask them? I see you have come from the countryside.

AHAPIIA: Aye, dearie. People told me that the road to Jerusalem has now been cleared—

MALACHI: Excuse me for interrupting you, but what did you ask them?

AHAPIIA: I asked them if they knew whether there was a road to Jerusalem now.

MALACHI (*to the LITTLE OLD MAN and the MILITARY MAN IN RIDING BREECHES*): And you ... what did you tell her?

LITTLE OLD MAN: We?

MILITARY MAN IN RIDING BREECHES: Excuse me, do you mean me?

MALACHI: Yes! Both of you! ... Instead of telling her not to go to the tomb in Jerusalem but to Lenin's Mausoleum, the new Jerusalem plus new Mecca, to Moscow, you said contemptuously, bitterly, "Go away, go away, grandma." And to whom did you say that, I ask? To a woman, to a peasant!

MILITARY MAN IN RIDING BREECHES: I did not utter one unpleasant word! On the contrary, I have been in the military since childhood. Courtesy is part of my nature! It is my ideal!

MALACHI (*to the LITTLE OLD MAN*): And you ... Instead of proving and corroborating all of the aforesaid, that the time will soon come, very, very soon, when the universe will sing praises to Moscow—"Be blessed, be blessed, O new Jerusalem! For the glory of the Revolution shall shine upon thee!"—you said, "Leave us alone! Go to the employment office!"

LITTLE OLD MAN: I didn't know we were supposed to direct such people to Moscow.

MALACHI (*with even more zeal*): Aha! He didn't know! ... Here is visible proof, I say, and allow me to demonstrate further. (*To OLIA*) Please tell me, and forgive me for asking: what were they luring you with, to what work did they (*pointing to APOLINARA and MATYLDA*) entice you there, near the church today?

OLIA *remains silent.*

Didn't they offer you thirty *karbovantsi*<sup>19</sup> a month, good food, even sweets, nice underwear, and clothes?

APOLINARA (*her pink plume trembling*): Pardon! You should be ashamed. (To OLIA) Tell him, dear. (To MATYLDA) Tell him what I said, Matylida dear, what I talked about when we led her, the poor thing, out of the church. "My child," I said ... Tell them what I said, Matylida.

MATYLDA: "My child," you said, Madam Apolinara ... (*Lighting a cigarette and inhaling deeply*) "My child! Are you a typist by any chance?"

APOLINARA (*to OLIA*): And what did you answer, dear? ... Well? ... Well? (*Seeing that OLIA will remain silent, answering for her, imitating a youthful and sorrowful voice*) "No, I'm a nurse," the poor child said. I heaved such a heavy sigh, and asked ... Matylida, tell them, what I asked her.

MATYLDA: You asked, "In what hospital? How much do you make?"

APOLINARA (*for OLIA*): "At the Saburovka Psychiatric Hospital, eighteen a month," the poor child answered ... Dear Matylida was so startled that she exclaimed "My!" ... (To MATYLDA) Tell them, how you exclaimed?

MATYLDA: "Oh my! But one could go mad there" —

APOLINARA: Matylida exclaimed and I added: "You poor, unfortunate child! ... Once upon a time I, too, a poor unfortunate orphan, a pallid little girl, slaved and slaved, wept and wept, until I... realized, through tears, where my fortune lies" ... (To MALACHI) Well? Was that not what I said? Was that not how our discussion went? ... Pardon, and please! I know what I said and what I'm still going to say—

MALACHI (*following her every word, suddenly stopping her with his hand*): More precisely: "I slaved and slaved, wept and wept until I spat upon it all like this ... (*spitting*) and went to a sweet, old madam," you said. "And Matylida here has done the same; and look at you and her, her and you." That's what you said and even showed her. Oh, woman!

APOLINARA: I?

MALACHI: You lured her and you tempted her in the most cunning way, telling her that you would provide her with food and drink, fine clothes, fragrant soaps, hygienic care, chocolates...

APOLINARA: Matylida dear, did I ever say any such thing? Tell them, darling.

MATYLDA: On the contrary and nothing of the sort!

TROKHYM IVANOVYCH: I was there the whole time. This madam said nothing of the sort ... On the contrary, even though I have no knowledge of her social origins, I can assure you that her treatment of Olia was better than the way women are treated on International Women's Day.<sup>20</sup>

MALACHI: They preach and write that there is nothing besides classes, but I say to you there is. The classless solidarity of evil people. (To TROKHYM) Who was it, if not you, who first approached her with a handful of oranges like the Serpent in Eden, and tempted her

<sup>19</sup> The *karbovanets* (pl. *karbovantsi*) was the name of the currency of the Ukrainian National Republic (1917–20). The term was also a popular synonym for the Soviet ruble for about a decade after the Ukrainian SSR was established in 1922.

<sup>20</sup> In 1910, in Copenhagen, the Second International Conference of Socialist Women established March 8 as International Women's Day. On that day Soviet women received chocolates, flowers, and special attention from men.

under the tree by the church so that she would forget her precious Kyriusha and fall in love with you instead; and, who was it, if not Olia who, shedding bitter tears, dropped your oranges and ran into the church to forget her woes?

TROKHYM: So, according to you, I drove her to go to church? Ha, ha! ... Why, I know all of the antireligious propaganda by heart, and, on the contrary, at all times I tried to convince her to renounce everything and not to be afraid of God—

APOLINARA: And I led her out of the church.

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT (*coming over to OLIA and addressing her seriously and sympathetically*): Tell us please, Comrade, did they really try to persuade and coax you to leave your Soviet job and to ... well ... take another one, did they?

OLIA (*after a pause*): No.

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT (*raising his eyebrows*): No? ... Perhaps someone was being insistent, verbally abusive, or ill-mannered? ... Tell us frankly, don't be afraid, I assure you no one will cause you any trouble if you do.

OLIA: I'm not afraid of that. I said no! (*Her voice becoming strident with anger*) If you must know, he (*Pointing to MALACHI*) bothered me the most. He followed me around all morning. Like a phantom. (*To MALACHI, angrily*) Why were you following me? Tell me! Why?

MALACHI: I wasn't following you, I guarded you from those who were indeed following and stalking you.

OLIA (*angrily and scoffingly*): Have you ever been in an insane asylum by any chance?

MALACHI: For twenty-seven years.

*Everyone stirs.*

OLIA (*taking two steps toward MALACHI*): What? ... Where was that?

MALACHI: In my own family.

OLIA: And I thought you were serious—

MALACHI: Olia, I am serious, for the modern family is an insane asylum, the primary level of an insane asylum. It's the home of madness; in other words—a madhouse.

OLIA: But what about love?

MALACHI: It's a phantom! An azure phantom; in other words, a dream ... For wasn't it unrealized love that brought you to church today? ... (*OLIA looks down. MALACHI takes two steps toward her.*) And wasn't it they (*pointing to TROKHYM and APOLINARA*) who, exploiting your situation, tempted and lured you to go out onto the women's crossroads to play on the strings of universal love?

OLIA (*raising her head*): No! (*Indignantly turns and leaves.*)

TROKHYM (*to MALACHI*): Ha!

APOLINARA (*dashing after OLIA*): Olia! My child! (*OLIA gives her such a glare that APOLINARA bites her tongue. Then she turns to MALACHI.*) Go ahead, show her the way now! Go ahead! I have a livelihood of my own ... (*To the SUPERINTENDENTS*) Finally, I request protection from these and similar insinuations, especially in, of all places, the building of the People's Commissariat! Matylda! (*Walks away demonstratively.*)

MATYLDA: Me too! (*Walks away.*)

TROKHYM: This is slander! Provocation! (*Walks away.*)

LITTLE OLD MAN: So it is—(*Hobbles away.*)

MILITARY MAN IN RIDING BREECHES: And whatever for? (*Walks away.*)

### Scene 3

*Meanwhile, unshaven and grim, GODFATHER walks into the superintendent's office. LIUBA follows him timidly carrying a small bundle.*

GODFATHER: Calm down! He's here! (*Calmly, without uttering a word, walks up to MALACHI, stops, looks at him, goes past him, turns around, and walks up to him again.*)

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT: What is your business here, Comrade? Whom do you wish to see?

GODFATHER (*glancing sternly at the SUPERINTENDENT, walking away from MALACHI, standing there for a moment waiting for MALACHI to respond or to smile, then walking up to him for the third time*): How do you do, friend, even if you do refuse to speak to me, and I to you! (*To the SUPERINTENDENTS and everyone else*) How do you like that! ... A car nearly runs us over and this is the greeting we get!

LIUBA (*fearfully coming closer*): Papa dear! Mama— (*Her lips begin trembling, and she cannot continue.*)

GODFATHER: Calm down! ... Well, my friend! ... Your wife and mother of my godchildren sends you her respects—

LIUBA: She said, I'll curse you, Liuba, if you come home without Papa—

GODFATHER: Hush! She sends you her greetings. She wept and told me to convey to you that she has three daughters: Vira, Nadiia, and Liubov,<sup>21</sup> (*to everyone*) my godchildren. She is keeping Vira and Nadiia at home, but sends Lyubov after you.

MALACHI: Shadows of the past, vanish from my sight! Vanish from my sight!

LIUBA: Papa!

*She wants to say something, but GODFATHER interrupts her by handing her a glass of water.*

GODFATHER: Drink this, Liuba dear! Drink, my Godchild, for though the water is cold, it is nevertheless warmer than the heart and blood of your father ... (*To APOLINARA*) Would you have guessed that he's her own father?

APOLINARA (*quietly*): I feel for her ... Tell me, in what capacity is he serving here? What position does he hold?

GODFATHER: Him? ... He doesn't hold any position anywhere. On the contrary, although he's a grown man, he's a stray delinquent. Three weeks ago he ran away from home.

APOLINARA: Aha! ... So that's what he is! ... (*To her companions*) He's a nobody. Do you understand?

MILITARY MAN IN RIDING BREECHES: What?

APOLINARA: He ran away from home, and his daughter is looking for him—

TROKHYM: Aha, ran away ... With a mistress?

APOLINARA: Of course! He took all the money and his daughter has just caught up with him, you see? He has no right whatsoever to drag us from commissar to commissar, not to mention questioning us ... No right whatsoever, and I'm not staying here a minute longer. Matyllda! *Allons*<sup>22</sup> home! ... (*To the SUPERINTENDENT*) *Au revoir!* (*Leaves.*)

MATYLLDA: Me too! (*Leaves.*)

TROKHYM: And me all the more! (*Leaves.*)

<sup>21</sup> The Ukrainian equivalents of Faith, Hope, and Charity. Liubov literally means Love.

<sup>22</sup> "Let's go" in French.



LITTLE OLD MAN: Ha-ha! ... Me too. (*And he hobbles off.*)

MILITARY MAN IN RIDING BREECHES: And whatever for? (*And he leaves.*)

MALACHI: All of this, plus the preceding, plus those who ran off, convinces me even more how necessary is the immediate reform of humankind and only according to my projects— (*To the SUPERINTENDENTS*) Where are my projects? ... One and a half years I carried them around in my head, half a year it took me to write them down and copy them calligraphically. Where are they?—

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: I told you already—

MALACHI: Please pass them on immediately to the Council of People's Commissars for consideration! You must do it today! Do you hear me? No, do it this minute! This minute! ... Why are you standing there? How can you stand around when you have seen and heard what is being done to people even though all around us radios play, streetcars graze, and automobiles gallop!

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: Listen here, my dear man! You spent two years writing two beautiful and, let me say, exceptionally serious projects?

MALACHI: Yes.

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: And you want projects of this calibre to be examined and studied in a matter of only two weeks?

MALACHI: What are you driving at?

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: You see, the State Planning Committee needs more time to study your projects. So, I would advise you to take some kind of position (incidentally, there is a directive instructing the District Executive Committee to give you a position), to wait for the approval of your projects, and, in the meantime, perhaps to write a couple of new ones.

MALACHI (*having thought about it, smiling quietly to himself*): All right! I agree.

SUPERINTENDENTS (*overjoyed*):

—You do?

—How wonderful! And look, your daughter has come to take you home.

GODFATHER: And not only my goddaughter has come. So have I, his children's godfather!

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: And godfather. So you can all return to your district together.

GODFATHER: When we get back, my friend, what a congratulation I'll give you on the occasion of your saint's day! ... (*To the SUPERINTENDENTS*) He's forty-eight today. (*To LIUBA*) Just think how it must be at home because of this, how it must seem to the neighbours and to all the townsfolk, that the saint's day has come, but the man himself hasn't!

MALACHI: I agree, but with one stipulation: I want a position here in the capital, in the CPC. It can even be a doorman's position as long as it's here.

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT: Well, I declare! You must be kidding, my dear fellow! All of the positions in the CPC are filled, including the doorman's. To dismiss someone in order to give you a position, you yourself know, would be awkward. After all, real people sit in those positions.

MALACHI: Then I'll stand ... Give me a standing position, if everyone else is sitting down! Otherwise, I'll turn into Simeon Stylites and stand here until the CPC examines my projects. Furthermore, please stop smoking!

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: Pardon me.

MALACHI: It pains me to see this little sign; it shouts, and shouts, and no one pays attention to it. And this is the CPC! ...

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT: Don't shout!

GODFATHER: Calm down!

MALACHI: Millions gaze with reverence at this, their highest institution, at this mountain—the transfiguration of Ukraine, at the New Mount Tabor, and you walk right under the sign and break the first and most important commandment of socialism—Thou shalt not smoke! No, once again I am convinced that without my immediate reform of humankind all signs are nothing more than patches on old clothes ... Where are my projects? I shall personally hand them to the Chairman of the CPC at once. He will understand because he sees and hears how the Revolution is being harmed by people, people, and people.

GODFATHER: You first of all, for example. O my friend, my friend, who was it if it was not you who came here to the comrades, who are special people, who gained practice in the Revolution, and you are getting in their way?

MALACHI (*ignoring him*): A reform is needed immediately, right away, I say, for you can see what's happening to people, don't you? (*Pointing to the old pilgrim woman AHAPIIA, who has fallen asleep on a chair and is quietly snoring*) Do you see? Do you hear? She has just entered into her own Council of People's Commissars and already she's fallen asleep! A visual example of the urgent need for reform is before you ... Call the Chairman of the CPC here! But hurry, please! It will be an interesting and instructive scene: the best son of the people, the Chairman of the CPC, will rouse at his headquarters the darkest element of that people in the presence of the reformer of that same people ... O friends! Call the Chairman, quick! While we're on the subject, call a photographer too! ... (*Dreamily*) The Chairman will come in and touch her ... By the way, tell him not to forget to bring a mace, because the Chairman must have a mace ... He'll come in, touch her with his mace, and ask, "Who are you, citizen, who has come here and fallen asleep?"

AHAPIIA (*waking up*): I'm Ahapiia Savchykha! I'm all tired out, dear. I'm on my way to Jerusalem.

MALACHI: "To where?" the Chairman will ask.

AHAPIIA: To Jerusalem or to Mount Athos.<sup>23</sup>

MALACHI: "Dark is your path, citizen, and unprogressive!" the Chairman will say.

AHAPIIA: Yes dear, it's dark! So dark that you walk and walk and don't even know if there's a path there or not. And no one knows. People in our village said that the Soviet regime supposedly acquired the Lord's tomb from the Turks and opened up the road for pilgrims, but is it really so? ...

MALACHI: "O, People, People!" the Chairman will say and add very politely: "We should not be going to Jerusalem now, but toward a new goal."

AHAPIIA: Which one, dear?

MALACHI: "Which one? To the aforementioned great one, number 666,006,003, toward the azure goal" ... Then the citizen will return to her village, and on her way she'll preach the new good and beautiful word.

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<sup>23</sup> Only men are allowed into the monasteries on Mount Athos in Greece. Mount Athos has always held a place of special reverence among Ukrainians, and Ukrainian priests, monks, and scholars occasionally went to live there.

AHAPIIA: No, I vowed to go to Jerusalem. I sold my house and everything I owned, so that I could get there or to Mount Athos. I saw a painting of it: there was a radiance and the Mother of God in the clouds. So why would I return after all that?

MALACHI (*half dreamily*): "Oh, go back, citizen," the Chairman will say.

AHAPIIA: I will not.

MALACHI: Oh, go back, I will add myself.

AHAPIIA: No!

MALACHI (*angrily*): Go back!

AHAPIIA (*vehemently*): No!

MALACHI (*enraged*): You're nothing but a slave!

AHAPIIA (*delighted*): Some time ago, the monks at the Monastery of the Caves in Kyiv used to call me that: Ahapiia, God's slave.

MALACHI (*moving away*): Oh, you slaves! She sees socialism the way she sees plums at night. Too bad I don't have a mace.

GODFATHER: I have a question! ... (MALACHI *turns around*.) Not for you, Malachi! (To the SUPERINTENDENTS) A question! Put point blank!

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: As you wish! Point blank.

GODFATHER: Don't the People's Commissars have the power to force my friend to go home, under guard if necessary?

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT (*shrugging his shoulders*): We have no reason to do so.

GODFATHER: What do you mean you have no reason? ... The man ran away from home. His wife (who is also my friend) has been receiving blow after blow to her very heart, and his daughters are in a state of unconsciousness. (To LIUBA) I wonder, Godchild, if the chickens have not perished, for who will look after them, let us say today, when it's so hot and generally uncomfortable outside. (*Mopping his face with a handkerchief and turning to the SUPERINTENDENTS*) Moreover, all the neighbours and all the townsfolk are upset. They go around asking themselves: what kind of regime is this that allows fathers to run away from their homes?

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: Lodge a complaint against him in court.

GODFATHER: To such bureaucratic words of yours, permit me to reply that I am not satisfied with the Soviet regime!

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: What can you do.

GODFATHER: Calm down! ... I'm not satisfied and I have a legal right not to be ... But I didn't come here to talk to the People's Commissars about that.

SECOND SUPERINTENDENT: Then about what?

GODFATHER: Here's a petition. Please read it aloud immediately, in his, my, and my godchild's presence.

*The SECOND SUPERINTENDENT begins reading it silently. The FIRST SUPERINTENDENT comes over to him and finishes reading it aloud.*

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT: "... on the basis of the program of the Communist Party regarding free medical care by the state, on the one hand, and on the basis of the apparent mental illness of our father and friend on the other, I and my goddaughter collectively petition the People's Commissars to send our father and friend to an insane asylum for an assessment, and if he has lost even a little of his reason, then ..."

GODFATHER: As for what else is written, a pre-war lawyer said that the People's Commissars have no right to turn down not only my request, but also my goddaughter's.

LIUBA: Only it's not for real.

GODFATHER (*interrupting her*): Calm down!

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT (*finishing reading*): All right! We'll consider it.

GODFATHER: Yes, do consider it! ... But I implore you—do not consider it too long.

MALACHI (*to GODFATHER*): Me, to an insane asylum? Me? How dare you? I was sent by the people.

GODFATHER: You're lying, my friend! All of our neighbours, all of our townsfolk, have sent me here to bring you home.

MALACHI: More than a hundred villages, hamlets, and small towns I have passed on foot on the way to Kharkiv, the capital of the Ukrainian SSR; even today there is still dust on my feet from the steppe roads. From a hundred wells and springs, while resting, I drank water and chatted with ordinary folk ... I'm a delegate!

GODFATHER: You're lying! You ran away from home!

MALACHI: I am an all-Ukrainian delegate, my friend!

GODFATHER: On the contrary, even though soon all of Ukraine will consist of delegates, you and I—never in the world! So, I say, let us rather go home.

MALACHI (*to the SUPERINTENDENTS*): I demand that, one, you throw him out of here! And two, you summon the Chairman of the CPC and all the People's Commissars immediately. I take it upon myself, using Ahapiia here as an example, to demonstrate to you how to conduct the immediate reform of humankind. Well? ... What are you waiting for?

GODFATHER: And I demand! And not only I, but also my godchild here, his wife there, and as for the neighbours and the townsfolk, I've already said how they are concerned and also demand ... Send him there at once!

MALACHI (*offended, majestically*): Send me? The reformer? (*Goes to the telephone.*) Central exchange? Tell the Chairman of the CPC and all of the People's Commissars to fasten their badges to their buttonholes and proceed to headquarters for a conference immediately. Do you hear? Today's agenda is as follows: a lecture by the reformer Malachi on the immediate reform of humankind, visually demonstrated on Ahapiia—we have such an azure expanse today, and she stands there shelling sunflower seeds ... Don't interrupt! Who's interrupting there?

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT: Comrade Reformer! Order, please!

*He barely takes MALACHI aside when GODFATHER grabs the receiver.*

GODFATHER: Comrade Commissars! Don't listen to him! Don't listen, I say! Can't you see, he's not all there? His brain has turned to mush. Will you stop interrupting! ...

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT (*taking back the receiver and phoning again*): Hello ... a little tragedy has just occurred ... It's the same ones who came here from Yesterday ... No, Yesterday, the little town ... No, they're not drunk ... It will be cleared up shortly.

A COURIER *enters*.

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT (*to MALACHI*): I just got a call from the CPC asking you to go see the Deputy Chairman.

MALACHI (*overjoyed, to GODFATHER*): How about that, my friend! ... (*Grandly, to the FIRST SUPERINTENDENT*) Call them back and tell them I'm on my way. No, better still let me have the phone. I'll call them myself. From now on there will be no intermediaries between me and the government. That's that!

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT: He's no longer on the line. By the way, they request that you come immediately. They're waiting for you at the CPC villa.

MALACHI: How delightful! Off I go! ... You get ready to go, too, Ahapiia. I will present you to the Deputy Chairman of the CPC as visual evidence for my projects.

AHAPIIA: Maybe he'll tell me if there's a road to Jerusalem now?

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT: They requested to see you in private. You do understand?

MALACHI: Aha! Then you had better stay here for the time being, Ahapiia. I will be back soon ... Where should I go? Which way?

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT (*having addressed a package and given it to the COURIER*): This comrade will escort you there ... (*To the COURIER*) Take Comrade Reformer to the Saburov Villa.

MALACHI: Thank you! (*As he follows the COURIER out of the room, he gives GODFATHER the fico.*)

GODFATHER: Where are you sending him?

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT: As you requested, to see psychiatrists for an assessment.

AHAPIIA (*going to the telephone, timidly picking up the receiver, and saying quietly*): Comrades! Please tell me how I can get to Jerusalem.

## Act Three

### Scene 1

*Long-beaked rooks circle and caw above MALACHI in the orchard of the Saburovka Psychiatric Hospital in Kharkiv. PATIENTS jabber and scream all around him.*

FIRST PATIENT (*screaming sadly at the rooks*): Hey, blackies! Knock it off! ... God had hardly begun creating the world and they'd already covered the sky, and pecked the first golden star, and made a sieve out of the sun ... I'm in the dark, I'm cold! ... (*Addressing MALACHI*) Why don't you reform the sun!

MALACHI (*motioning with his head and arms*): I am reforming it!

SECOND PATIENT (*listening constantly and intently to everything, whispering mysteriously*): Quiet, I beg you.

### Scene 2

*OLIA the nurse appears, followed by TROKHYM IVANOVYCH, the old bachelor orderly.*

TROKHYM: Olia Manoilivna!

OLIA: I already gave you my answer—

TROKHYM: Olia!

OLIA: Leave me alone!

TROKHYM: He led you into disrepute, but I have a completely different kind of love in mind ...  
Come to my place, or I'll come to yours.

OLIA (*walking away*): I'll report you to the town committee.

FIRST PATIENT (*to MALACHI*): The Professor let them into the garden deliberately to peck at my head... Here, look what they've already done ... (*Kneeling*) Chase them away!

MALACHI (*with a single motion*): I shall!

### Scene 3

A THIRD PATIENT *comes over. He is continuously sweeping something around himself.*

THIRD PATIENT: Sweep up the crumbs. Look at how many crumbs they left.

### Scene 4

A FOURTH PATIENT *runs in holding a yellow flower.*

FOURTH PATIENT: Have you seen Olia? She's enchanting today. She's beautiful. She has such a delicate and fragrant sex gland. (*Smelling the flower*) I've never seen one like it even though I've had many lovers—

FIRST PATIENT: They'll peck at the gland, too!

THIRD PATIENT: Let them peck, as long as they don't trample it—

SECOND PATIENT (*fearfully*): Quiet! ... They'll hear.

FOURTH PATIENT: I've made love to girls, women, and old ladies ... And I remember where. First in the kitchen, then in the pantry, then in the cemetery, then in the churchyard—dewy grass and the bells, they're still tolling, a little white apron, a sharp new moon on the right side—

THIRD PATIENT: This was on the crumbs, on the bread!—

FOURTH PATIENT: Wait! It comes to one hundred seven women in fifteen years, fourteen thousand five hundred thirty ... thirty—

FIRST PATIENT: Help me scatter them! Shoo-oo-oo! (*Having shouted out sorrowfully, he starts running and skipping. The others follow him, each with a particular motion, shout, or song.*)

### Scene 5

TROKHYM *comes up. The FOURTH PATIENT speaks to him.*

FOURTH PATIENT: Have you seen Olia?

TROKHYM: Go that way! She's over there— (*Points in the direction opposite to where OLIA is.*)

FOURTH PATIENT: She has such an enchanting and fragrant sex gland; it's like a rose—I saw it.

TROKHYM: Where ... did you see it?

FOURTH PATIENT: I was sitting over there in the bushes ... And she came up—  
 TROKHYM: And?  
 FOURTH PATIENT: She was picking flowers—  
 TROKHYM: And?  
 FOURTH PATIENT: She stooped over—  
 TROKHYM: And-and?  
 FOURTH PATIENT: And I saw it ... On her leg, near the knee ... Then she came to me at night,  
 and if it weren't for the she-cat—  
 TROKHYM: What she-cat?  
 FOURTH PATIENT: The one that tonight again bore me three kittens ... Tell me, what right does  
 that she-cat have to meow to everybody that I'm the father of those kittens—  
 TROKHYM: Well, now he's rambling ... Go over there, to the others ...  
 FOURTH PATIENT (*after moving away*): Whenever I wake up at night, she's already with kittens  
 and is meowing, meowing to everyone: "Meow, meow, meow!" ...

## Scene 6

OLIA *comes over to calm the* FOURTH PATIENT. TROKHYM *blocks her way.*  
 TROKHYM: This little intellectual says that you visited him at night.  
 OLIA: Each day he's getting worse.  
 TROKHYM: Is there perhaps some truth to this?  
 OLIA: What? ... For goodness's sake, Trokhym Ivanovych!  
 TROKHYM: I'm innocent, but an even worse rumour than that could surface about you.  
 OLIA: A rumour?  
 TROKHYM: I know about everything, Olia: how and where you had a good time, how you  
 treated Kyriushyk to some ice cream, and how you strewed the bed with flowers and  
 slipped off your white nighty—  
 OLIA (*reeling*): It's not true!  
 TROKHYM: It's not? I know absolutely everything about your love life and can even tell you on  
 what date you tied Kyriusha to yourself with your braid and slept that way ...  
 OLIA: How did you ... find that out?! Good God! Who told you?  
 TROKHYM: Who, you ask?  
 OLIA: Tell me! ...  
 TROKHYM: You're so pretty right now. Your embarrassment becomes you, really it does. Your  
 eyes are like two heavenly planets, and so on—  
 OLIA (*barely moving her lips*): Who?  
 TROKHYM: About the ice cream a little bird told me, because it was perched in a tree and saw  
 absolutely everything; about the bed and the flowers, a moth; and about the braid, a  
 fly, ha-ha-ha. There, there ... I'm kidding, 'cause what's a fly, eh? A stupid little  
 insect, ha-ha-ha ...  
 OLIA: What should I do now?  
 TROKHYM: The only thing left to do is to spit on your precious Kyriusha, especially since he's  
 already cheating on you with another girl.  
 OLIA: But how can anyone spit on their love?  
 TROKHYM: If you don't, the rumour will spread—

OLIA: Trokhym Ivanovych! Do you really want to make me the laughingstock of the entire world so that my heart is consumed with shame? What have I done to you?

TROKHYM: Nothing. But I want you to make love to me, because I've already grown weak without it ... Do you hear me? ... It's time you thought about me as well.

OLIA (*wringing her hands*): Tell me, how did you find out?

TROKHYM: About what?

OLIA: Well ... about the ice cream, the bed, the flowers?—

TROKHYM: I already told you: a little bird, a moth, a fly—

OLIA: Trokhym Ivanovych! Tell me!

TROKHYM: Beg me.

OLIA: Trokhym Ivanovych—

TROKHYM: Beg!

OLIA: Come on, darling! Tell me! (*TROKHYM takes her by the hands and pulls her to himself.*)  
Let go!

TROKHYM: Now, now ... Don't be stubborn!

OLIA: You're hurting my hands!

## Scene 7

*Bending low and pressing his hands tightly, the FIFTH PATIENT approaches.*

FIFTH PATIENT: Help me!

TROKHYM (*to OLIA*): This one hallucinates that he's carrying on his shoulders a huge python whose tail is dragging somewhere on the other side of the world ... But my unrequited love is worse than that python, because it doesn't crush the hands, but the heart ... Like this! Like this!

OLIA (*screaming*): Don't torment me!

FIFTH PATIENT: I can't hold it anymore! I'm exhausted! I'm going to drop it. There'll be a catastrophe any second. Help!

TROKHYM: He told me ... Kyriukha.

OLIA: He did!

FIFTH PATIENT (*to MALACHI*): I can't heave it up anymore ... It's the python—the universal evil. The moment I release it, it will crush the whole world ... Help me!

MALACHI (*motioning with his hand*): I will help you!

OLIA: Was it really him?

TROKHYM: You still don't believe me? ... You have a birthmark here. (*Points to her back.*) Right? (*Points to her breasts.*) And the left one is a little larger than the right one ... Right? And you especially like it when ... (*Whispers something in her ear.*)

OLIA: But did he tell you that here I now have ... a child from him?

TROKHYM: It's not a big deal! You need a double abortion: Kyriukha from your heart and the child from your belly, and that's the end of the entire problem.

OLIA: And did he tell you about his disease?

TROKHYM: What disease? ... You must be kidding, Olia Manoilivna!

OLIA: Would you like to find out for yourself?

TROKHYM: There, there ... I bet he did that out of spite, for the money I owe him ... What a bastard! ... And why didn't you tell me about it right away? ... How could you toy with me like that. (*Leaves.*)



*OLIA falls to the ground and weeps bitterly.*

FIFTH PATIENT: There'll be a catastrophe any second! I'm letting it go! Help!

MALACHI (*pacing up and down while inconspicuously watching TROKHYM and OLIA and becoming agitated as never before*): At once ... The reform of humankind is needed at once! ... It's now or never, I say! At the same time I'm convinced that no one but I can make such a reform ... Yes. The only thing is I don't know where to begin ... There's a whirlwind of thoughts in my head—azure ones, green ones, yellow ones, red ones ... There's so many of them! A total blizzard! But the greatest number are azure ones and they, I think, are the best and most suitable for my reform. I must catch them ... Here's one! Here's another! Here's a third. They're like butterflies, but behold what issues from them!

*In his sick imagination, strange projects, reforms, and entire scenes appear and flourish. At first, from azure pulsations and butterflies, azure circles with bright yellow centres emerge and begin whirling about. The singing of Dekhtiarov's Eucharistic canon "The Grace of Peace" rings out mingled with the "Internationale," the sound of a censer, and the warbling of skylarks. Then, the following picture materializes: somewhere in the azure CPC, azure People's Commissars sit and listen to his lecture on the immediate reform of humankind. They applaud, cheer, and congratulate him. By visual demonstration he continues showing the People's Commissars how to reform people. One after another he is approached by the LITTLE OLD MAN in a loosely hanging cloak, the FORMER MILITARY MAN in riding breeches, MADAM APOLINARA, AHAPIIA, TROKHYM the ORDERLY, and the INSANE PATIENTS. He covers each one of them with an azure mantle, instructs, persuades, and then makes a magic motion with his hand, and from under the azure covering emerges a renewed person, terribly civil, extraordinarily good, and angelic. Then these people and many other people with him at the front march off carrying red poppies and yellow marigolds into the azure beyond. On their way they see Mount Tabor, OLIA carrying some apples to be blessed,<sup>24</sup> and people singing "Hosanna" to her, but in a somewhat novel way. After this, in an azure mirage, there shimmers a new Jerusalem. Farther away, there are azure valleys, azure mountains, valleys again, azure rains, downpours, and, finally, azure nothingness.*

## Scene 8

MALACHI comes to. OLIA is no longer there. Patients are wandering about and circling around him.

MALACHI: Aha ... On the basis of the unforeseen (*taking a pinch of soil, spitting on it, rubbing it, and daubing it on his forehead*) I anoint myself the People's People's Commissar. (*Loudly*) It has come to pass! Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye! ... In the name of the Azure Revolution, I have anointed myself the People's People's Commissar!

SECOND PATIENT: Quiet! I saw camel's ears growing in the grass.

MALACHI: Let them grow!

SECOND PATIENT: But they are listening.

MALACHI: Wonderful!

SECOND PATIENT: And they tell others!

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<sup>24</sup> In Ukraine on the Feast of Transfiguration (August 8), fruit and flowers were taken to church to be blessed.

MALACHI: Whom?

SECOND PATIENT: Everyone.

MALACHI: Marvellous! Hey, camel ears! Tell everyone—everyone—my first decree!

PATIENTS (*among themselves*): Everyone, everyone, everyone.

MALACHI: By the grace of our great mother—the Revolution, I have anointed myself the People's People's commissar. My application reads as follows: a walking stick and a bag of dried bread; my family status I've renounced; on foot I passed through my entire previous service and drank water from one hundred and seven wells; I've been a People's Commissar without portfolio; my external tokens and insignias are a red ribbon across my left shoulder, a walking stick, a clarion, and for Ukrainians, a straw hat and, on special holidays, a sacred crown of sunflowers in my hand.<sup>25</sup> Malachi, the People's People's Commissar. No, that's not right ... the People's Malachi,<sup>26</sup> with People's Commissar in parentheses. Abbreviated form: the PM ... No, the PMPC.

PATIENTS: The People's People's Commissar. The PMPC has appeared.

SOMEONE (*kneeling*): Lead us out of here!

SOMEONE ELSE (*agitated*): Don't believe him; he's an imposter!

THIRD PATIENT: If you're such a big boss, order them not to crumble holy bread. Make them pick up the crumbs. People like that cause famines. I was thinking of celebrating my wedding, when—bang!—both the bride and her mother withered away in the melon fields ... And instead of melons, children's heads sprouted. There was no end to screaming and lamentation, they say—

MALACHI: I'll order it! I'll lead you out of here! For I take all your requests and declarations to heart. In this regard, here is my second decree ... To everyone, everyone, everyone ... All briefcases and files are abolished forthwith. If government officials ask where they should keep declarations and grievances, give them this answer: from this day on all of the people's grievances, declarations, and requests are to be carried (1) in the head and (2) in the pericardial sac, rather than in briefcases or files. By order of the People's Malachi, People's Commissar. Abbreviated PMPC, Kharkiv. The Saburov Villa.

PATIENTS: Lead us out of here, O PMPC!

MALACHI: I'll lead you out and forward! Forward to the place where the heavens glow and the earth is azure, where beyond the horizon, on golden perches, crow the azure awakeners of the world, the socialist roosters ...

PATIENTS:

—They won't let us go!

—Don't believe him!

—The guards won't let us go.

—The two celestial guards and mother-hen won't let us go.

MALACHI: I'll tell you the word that will make them let you go—a password so powerful that it can raze a stone wall ... Come to me for the password!

PATIENTS:

—For the password!

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<sup>25</sup> The sunflower is popularly considered Ukraine's national flower.

<sup>26</sup> An allusion to Malachi, the author of the last book of the Old Testament and a moral and religious reformer.

—For the password!

—For the password!

MALACHI (*quietly to each patient*): Azure dreams ...

PATIENTS (*after repeating the password, rushing to the wall*): So lead us out! Lead us forward!

MALACHI: Climb over!

ONE OF THE PATIENTS: But what if they catch us?

MALACHI: They won't! ... The People's People's Commissar himself is guarding you ... Climb over, I say!

*The PATIENTS scramble up and over the wall. MALACHI waits till the last one is gone. Then he spits into his hands.*

MALACHI: In the name of our social mother—the Revolution! (*And he starts climbing over the wall.*)

## Scene 9

OLIA (*comes running*): Stop! Where are you going?

MALACHI (*from the wall*): It's bad luck to ask. You mean you still haven't understood? I must visit every home, farm, and factory to teach everyone about the azure dreams ...

OLIA: Aren't you ashamed to be climbing over the wall? Come down!

MALACHI: The People's People's Commissar has the right to climb over any wattle in Ukraine, any picket fence or stone wall. It is my prerogative.

OLIA: I request and entreat you: please come down.

MALACHI: Hm ... she's begging me. (*Climbing down*) If ever anyone from among the poor and the wronged should ever ask the People's People's Commissar to hang himself, he must do that at once, too ... You see, Olia, the People's People's Commissar has honoured your request. Now you honour mine? Let me go there.

OLIA: Go where?

MALACHI: There, to everybody else, but first of all to the hegemon, the real masters.

OLIA: Stay a little longer with us, rest a while, and then you shall go.

MALACHI: Olia! Is it possible you take me for a madman?

OLIA: Well, I declare ... No one, but no one takes you for a madman.

MALACHI (*shrewdly*): Olia! Your eyes are so pure and clear that I can see even a mere shadow of a white lie deep within them and can read there, "Of course, you're mad."

OLIA: Oh, no! That's only how it seems to you.

MALACHI: So that you'll know, Olia, I am not mad. A slight mistake occurred, which happens sometimes. Can you guess what it was?

OLIA: I don't know ... Tell me!

MALACHI: It was a teeny-weeny mistake. My escort made it. Instead of taking me to the villa of the CPC, he brought me to the Saburov Villa. That's all there is to it. But Olia should undo this error by letting me go.

OLIA: No, no! I can't. Ask the Professor. He is wise and good, he'll examine you ... And, generally speaking, they'll let you out for good soon. I heard you were sent here only for an assessment ... Is it really bad for you here? Look at how green it is, how beautiful the flowers are, how clean the air is.

MALACHI: It's not azure! Oh, Olia! It's now up to you for man to become renewed and for Earth to float along in azure space, like a white swan on a placid pond, musically and freely ... (*Somewhere beyond the orchard a factory whistle sounds loudly. MALACHI shudders.*) Do you hear that? That way, that way, to the masters! ... I shall indeed go mad if I am late and do not lead them to follow me—

OLIA: Oh, God! The factory whistle—it's twelve o'clock. Time for lunch. But where are the others? ... Where are they?

MALACHI: They have already gone.

OLIA: Really? They've gone to lunch?

MALACHI: Yes. They've gone for an azure lunch.

OLIA: Let's go, too, then. Hurry! (*Leaves.*)

MALACHI *follows after her. But soon he returns alone. He begins climbing the wall again. He hesitates.*

MALACHI: No ... She begged me not to.

## Scene 10

OLIA (*having returned*): People's Commissar!

MALACHI: Don't worry! I've given up and surrendered to your entreaty. Nevertheless, I must persuade you, Olia. I must expound the azure dreams to you first, the more so because they have not yet faded in your eyes; they resound, and at times there is a whole flood of them there. I'll begin with you—

OLIA: I'm going to call the orderly.

MALACHI: Olia! I'll get down on my knees, like this ... I'll bow to your feet, I'll implore you: please let me go—

OLIA: You're running a fever, People's Commissar. You should lie down.

MALACHI: On the contrary, I should get up. Olia, just one minute ... Just consider how my projects will benefit you personally. For if there's ever anyone who's always cradling azure dreams, it's you. If you don't let me go, you'll have to don a black shawl and bear them away to the cemetery.

OLIA: They're calling.

MALACHI: But if you let me go, he'll come back.

OLIA: Who?

MALACHI: Your darling Kyriushyk.

OLIA: No, he won't.

MALACHI: According to my projects, he will. Absolutely. At night in wintertime.

OLIA: Hmm ... But why not in spring?

MALACHI: In wintertime. You, Olia, having lit the lamp of loneliness, will be spinning the thread of female sorrow. And the cradle will creak and creak, and the child in the cradle will weep and weep; Mother Olia, the grieving woman, will be singing a lullaby, the same one her ... (*Singing*) "Oh, sleep, child, without swaddling. Till your mother returns from the field, till she brings you three little flowers: the first shall be dreamy, the second sleepy, and the third happy ... " (*Leaning toward OLIA*) Are there tears in Olia's eyes? ...

OLIA (*through tears*): Well, what happens next?

MALACHI: In wintertime, at night. There will be a blizzard throughout the steppes, throughout the world: hoo-hoo-ooo. The horses in the steppes will go clip-clop, clip-clop ... That will be him riding back from a revolutionary campaign.

OLIA: Who?

MALACHI: According to the projects, Kyriushyk.

OLIA: Really?

MALACHI: Honest. He'll stop by the little window and knock quietly: "Open up, Olia, my wife, my faithful mate ..." (To OLIA) And Olia?

OLIA (*quietly*): Will open up—

MALACHI: Covered with snow and frost, he'll stand in the doorway: "Hello," he'll say. And Olia will reply (*Singing a well-known soldiers' song, changing a few words*) "Greetings, greetings, my dear heart, won't you please come in" ... Then her beloved will say: "Olia, having been renewed after the reform of humankind, having done penance for my sins against you in campaigns and battles for azure-glowing dreams, I have returned to you; forgive me" ... And Olia will say—

OLIA (*in a reverie*): I forgive you! I forgive you!

MALACHI: Then her beloved will seat his Olia by the cradle ... Like this. (*Seats OLIA on a stump.*) Then he'll look lovingly at her, then at the adorable child; then he'll press her to his breast, then he'll peer into her eyes; then he'll kiss the cold kneecaps of her sacred legs ... Is Olia crying?

OLIA: No ... I'm just being silly. (*Dreamily*) Oh, how I've suffered while waiting for you, my love! ...

MALACHI: It will all come to pass, according to my projects ... I have to hurry, Olia. Off I go!

OLIA (*dreamily*): Go! Go!

MALACHI (*climbing up the wall and sitting atop it*): Let's go together, Olia. I will present you to the CPC as the best visual example of my immediate reform.

TROKHYM'S voice is heard nearby, calling "Olia Manoilivna!"

OLIA: They're calling me ... Flee!

MALACHI: I am not fleeing, I'm going. I'll await you, Olia, at the festival of the restoration of our Ukrainian stock, which will take place on the twentieth of August according to the new calendar and on the feast Day of the Transfiguration according to the old calendar. Details: a shower of confetti, paper streamers, etc., as per my decrees. (*Jumps down and disappears behind the wall and tramps off somewhere.*)

## Scene 11

TROKHYM (*running in*): Olia Manoilivna, Stakanchyk's relatives have come to take him home. (*Looking about*) So, where is he?

OLIA (*standing in front of the place where MALACHI has just climbed over*): I don't know.

TROKHYM (*suspiciously*): What do you mean you don't know? I have a good mind to make a written report to the doctor in charge about who and how has been frolicking with the patients in the bushes, and then—I don't know what ... (OLIA remains silent.) You lied to me about Kyriukha: he hasn't got any disease, he says ... (OLIA remains

*silent.*) Where is Stakanchyk? ... And where are all the other patients? Have they perhaps escaped?

OLIA (*recovering her senses*): The patients? They're over there.

TROKHYM: Where?

OLIA: They've gone to lunch, and Stakanchyk too.

TROKHYM: Nothing of the kind. They're not there.

OLIA: There they are, can't you see them? They've gone around the corner...

TROKHYM *runs off*. Somewhere nearby alarmed voices are heard: "Someone's let the patients out! The patients have escaped!" OLIA *climbs over the wall*.

## Scene 12

GODFATHER *and* LIUBA *are standing and waiting by the office. They are excited.*

LIUBA: It's hard to believe that Papa will be coming out presently and that we'll be taking him home now ... God! To think how much walking, pleading, and talking we've done ... Isn't that right, Godfather?

GODFATHER: Calm down! Although, I myself am really excited ... Here, put your hand on the heart, goddaughter.

LIUBA: Oh!

GODFATHER: Not on yours ... On mine.

LIUBA *puts her hand on* GODFATHER'S *heart*.

GODFATHER: Well?

LIUBA: Is it ever beating hard!

GODFATHER: It's not a heart at all, but a stamping mill. Hear it? Tra-dum, tra-dum, tra-dum! I'm really excited. (*After a pause*) How could I possibly not be excited when I can already see it: the willow tree over there, Zahnybohyn's dam, the reeds rustling ... He's sitting and I'm sitting; he's fishing and I'm fishing. Nature and everything around us is still and bright. Then suddenly—buzz! Zoom! ... Malachi, a mosquito! And Malachi: huh? And he slaps himself on the forehead.

LIUBA: Papa's forehead is always covered with bumps after he goes fishing.

## Scene 13

TROKHYM *comes out*.

TROKHYM: Are you the one who's come for patient Stakanchyk?

GODFATHER: Not only I, but also his daughter here.

TROKHYM: He isn't here anymore.

GODFATHER: What do you mean he isn't here?

TROKHYM: He escaped.

GODFATHER *freezes*. LIUBA *is seized by spasms*.

LIUBA: Oh ... Oh ... Oh—

GODFATHER: Stop screaming; I can't hear anything. (*To TROKHYM*) Say, did you hit me?

TROKHYM: Me? Nothing of the kind.

GODFATHER: Then why is my head ringing?

LIUBA (*seized by spasms again*): He escaped.

GODFATHER: Don't say that!

LIUBA: He escaped....

GODFATHER: Don't say that word!

LIUBA (*weeping*): Esca-a-ped.

GODFATHER (*to TROKHYM*): I've got a question!

TROKHYM: Go ahead.

GODFATHER: When did he escape?

TROKHYM: Fifteen minutes ago. But don't worry: we just called the police; they'll catch him in no time.

GODFATHER: Thank you—but they'll never catch him now.

TROKHYM: You think so?

GODFATHER: They won't catch him. When he took his neighbour to court over a rooster, it took him three years, but he won his suit.

TROKHYM: What does a rooster have to do with this?

GODFATHER: Well, young man, it shows what his character is like. Once he starts running, he'll run until he drops dead. Understand?

TROKHYM: I don't understand anything.

GODFATHER: What do you mean, you don't understand anything? He escapes from you and you don't understand! And what if I sue you and even the Council of People's Commissars for not watching my friend, so that he escaped and can do the devil knows what ... You're all nothing but bureaucrats! ... Anyway, you are of no use to us, young man ... It would have been better altogether if you had fired a twelve-inch cannon into my heart than to come with such news ... Go away, for I can't stand the sight of you!

TROKHYM: And I tell you the police will catch him. Check back tomorrow. (*Exits.*)

GODFATHER: I'll sit down now and mourn for a while ... I'll grieve and I'll worry about my friend. Oh, my dear, dear friend! I loved you, I honoured you like my very own brother. I carried you in my heart, and all I have to show for it is calluses ... (*After a pause*) But after mourning, I'll say: enough! Let's go home, Liuba dear, and moreover, right away!

LIUBA: Without Papa?

GODFATHER: Not only without Papa, but also without a dear friend.

LIUBA: Godfather!

GODFATHER: Let's go home!

LIUBA: Godfather!

GODFATHER: Enough!

LIUBA: Godfather! How can we face anybody without Papa?

GODFATHER: We'll arrive at night.

LIUBA: Mama will curse me ... And how will you go to church or to the market? Everywhere, they'll ask you: why have you returned without Papa?

GODFATHER: I won't go to church ... But then why am I upset when I've already decided to go home, get sick, and die.

LIUBA: We can't, not without Papa.

GODFATHER: Whether we can or can't—enough is enough, I say.

LIUBA: Who will you go fishing with now?

GODFATHER: I'll go alone!

LIUBA: But you can't, you can't go without Papa ... Who'll sit down to play checkers with you, who'll talk politics?

GODFATHER: I'll do it alone!

LIUBA: And who will you sing "My Lovely Green Orchards" with? ... And what about Christmas and Easter? ...

GODFATHER: Alone! I'll sing alone, I'll get sick alone, and I'll die alone! Alone!

LIUBA: Godfather! Remember how on your name day you were leading Papa home and got lost on your own street, and if it weren't for our Rex, you would have never found the gate ...

GODFATHER: Don't remind me! Am I saying your father is not a good man? Am I saying that? Am I?

LIUBA: No.

GODFATHER: There are calluses on my heart from love and vexation. Who are we, your father and I? Who? Little boys, little Pioneers<sup>27</sup> racing each other, or old men with one foot in their graves? ... (*After a pause*) He'll be running about from People's Commissar to People's Commissar, rushing to the CPC, and I'm supposed to sell my last piglets to bring him home? ... Enough is enough! Let's go home!

LIUBA: I'm not going, Godfather.

GODFATHER: What?

LIUBA: I'll search for him by myself. If I find him and bring him home, I'll be lucky; if I don't find him.

GODFATHER: You'll perish!

LIUBA: If I don't, I'll perish ... I'll kill myself.

GODFATHER: But my dear child, what if your dear mama, my friend, is already lying in bed sick and even dying ... of typhus?

LIUBA: When Mama gave me her blessing for the journey, she kissed my hands, drenched me with tears, begged and implored me, and put a curse on me not to come back without Papa.

GODFATHER: But what if your sisters, Vira and Nadia, are also in bed sick with malaria, and there's no one to give them water or put a compress on their hapless foreheads?

LIUBA: I can't! Even back then, when I ran into church and prayed, I felt that fate would separate us.

GODFATHER: And what if, without you, all the flowers on the window sills have dried out, and in the small flower bed in front of the house?

LIUBA: I've had the same dream every night, Godfather: I am alone in the steppe, it seems, weaving a garland of cornflowers and marigolds, and they seem dry, as dry as the kind that are placed next to a dead person's head ... Fate foretells the future. One can't elude it, Godfather.

GODFATHER: ... And the chicks are dying from lack of water, and the hen doesn't know what to do, where to look for water...

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<sup>27</sup> The name of the Soviet Communist organization for youngsters.



LIUBA: Godfather! ...

GODFATHER: Even after this you're not coming?

LIUBA: No!

GODFATHER: Aha! So you want to show me that you have your Papa's character ... Well mark this, and mark it well: I too am not just anyone. My character is three times more steadfast than Malachi's or yours. Farewell! (*Walks away enraged.*) You should reconsider! You'll perish. (*LIUBA remains silent. GODFATHER pulls his hat down over his eyes.*) You'll perish, I tell you!

## Act Four

### Scene 1

*The WORKERS of the Hammer and Sickle Factory are astonished when they see that, over the stone wall, a man wearing a straw hat is climbing toward them.*

FIRST WORKER: Look—someone's climbing over the wall! ... Hey, citizen!

SECOND WORKER: Shh! ... It's probably a spy or a thief wanting to break into our factory—

FIRST WORKER: Then he ought to be arrested!

THIRD WORKER (*solemnly and calmly*): No decent person would be climbing over that wall to us nowadays. That's a fact. But don't get excited, boys ... Keep your mouths shut and your eyes open. That way we'll find out who it is and of what hue.

*They resume their work and do not pay particular attention to their guest: as if to say, if he's climbing, let him climb, if he must.*

MALACHI (*from atop the wall*): Greetings, masters!<sup>28</sup> (*The WORKERS greet him silently and charily. Noticing this, MALACHI continues sarcastically.*) I greet you and at the same time I ask: could it be that even masters have been enclosed by stone walls? And what walls they are! (*Gesturing toward the factory walls*) If that's the case, please explain what differentiates you from those sitting in jails and insane asylums? There are walls there and there are walls here—

THIRD WORKER: There the walls confine. Here they protect our rights because there are still many enemies around.

MALACHI: It is time to get rid of enclosures, masters. The stone walls must be razed at once because they bar the way to you—

THIRD WORKER: For whom?

MALACHI: For your friends, I would say, O Hegemons.

THIRD WORKER (*to his people*): It seems to me that for our friends we have gates and doors—

MALACHI: They wouldn't let me pass through the gate.

THIRD WORKER: Did they not recognize you, or what?

MALACHI: They neither recognized nor acknowledged me, even though I showed them my badges and insignia, which I announced in my first decree and by which everyone in

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<sup>28</sup> An allusion to the claim that workers are the true masters of Ukraine and the Soviet state.

Ukraine should recognize me. (*Points at his walking stick and straw hat and looks round at the WORKERS*) Can it be that you don't recognize me either? (*Girding himself with a red ribbon that passes over his left shoulder*) Do you still not recognize me? That's what happens when people don't read decrees. Listen once more: By the grace of the great mother—the Revolution, we have been anointed Malachi, the People's People's Commissar.

SECOND WORKER: So what?

FIRST WORKER (*to the THIRD WORKER*): He's drunk.

THIRD WORKER: No, no.

FIRST WORKER: What do you mean no? Look ... if he had only drunk enough to claim he was a green dragon, it wouldn't be all that bad, but he fancies himself a People's Commissar.

THIRD WORKER: Listen more carefully!

MALACHI (*having in the meantime climbed down from the wall and walked over to the WORKERS*): What are you making?

THIRD WORKER: Can't you see? ... Forms.

MALACHI: And I came to you to make reforms.

THIRD WORKER: What kind?

MALACHI: Azure ones. More precisely—the immediate reform of humankind, for today, do you know what it has already come down to? Two old women were raped, the newsboys scream and scream.

FIRST WORKER: So someone was overcome by an urge.

MALACHI (*not catching the irony*): And this on the eve of socialism, in a country where the people have created the world's best songs about the green periwinkle, the moon and the star, and the red guelder rose,<sup>29</sup> where, at last, at night the People's People's Commissar himself guards the azure dreams—two old women have been raped. Oh, people, people! ...

A BOY'S VOICE (*clear as a bell and cheerful, from the other side of the wall*): Extra, extra! Two old women, the older one sixty-seven, were brutally raped today!

MALACHI: Do you hear that?

FIRST WORKER (*ironically*): So the grannies had a treat.

MALACHI: I'm sure that if questionnaires—flyers with one question—were handed out in the streets at night to find out who is thinking what at the time, what do you suppose most people would say they are thinking about?

THIRD WORKER: I can't say. All kinds of things go through people's heads.

MALACHI: But I can.

THIRD WORKER: Let's hear it.

MALACHI: They wouldn't be thinking and dreaming about the azure reforms, but about the shapes of women's legs, completely ignoring the fact that, as a consequence of such dreaming, love is limited to the legs and does not bloom in the eyes or sing in the heart. That is why the two old women were raped ... No, I can wait no longer. It's time to begin. (*Blowing the reveille into his fist as though into a bugle*) Toot-toot, toot-

<sup>29</sup> In Ukrainian folklore the guelder rose (Ukrainian: *kalyna*) symbolizes purity. It also became a symbol of the postrevolutionary Ukrainian independence movement. The periwinkle, the moon, and stars appear in numerous Ukrainian love songs.

toot, toot-toot, toot-toot, toot-toot, toot-toot, toot-toot; toot-toot, toot-toot, toot-toot, toot-toot, toot-toot, toot-toot, toot-toot, too-too. The sirens roar at the factories, the whistles blow, and the power lines hum, Ukraine sings beyond the barrows in the valley, and the golden bugle of the People's People's Commissar is heard above everything: it trumpets to you about the azure yonder and azure dreams, O Hegemons.

## Scene 2

*Other WORKERS arrive.*

WORKERS: Who is this orator? Who sent him? What is he talking about? ...

—He's from the People's Commissars—

—No he's not!

—He's a self-proclaimed commissar—

—If you ask me, he's a circus clown—

—You're mistaken! ... He's an actor from a Ukrainian troupe.

FIRST WORKER (*to the* THIRD WORKER): I'm sure he mixed his whiskey with beer.

THIRD WORKER: You think so?

FIRST WORKER: It's a fact!

THIRD WORKER (*smiling*): Listen to him more carefully, I say!

MALACHI: Masters, I have come to you to carry out the immediate reform of humankind. Obey me and no one else ... (SOMEBODY *whistles*.) Who's whistling at the speech of the People's People's Commissar? Who's interrupting me, I ask?

SOMEBODY: And who's interrupting us in our work?

MALACHI: There is so much whistling in Ukraine: dry, hot winds whistle, young men whistle at girls, the police whistle in the night, people urinate in the streets, old women are raped ... I have come to carry out the immediate reform of humankind and first of all the reform of the Ukrainian stock, because in the condition of peasants and translators.

*A hubbub spreads through the workers.*

WORKERS: He's crazy!

—He's pretending to be!

—Take him to the administration!

—Let the old man finish his speech!

THIRD WORKER (*calmly*): Listen to him more carefully, Comrades!

MALACHI: Listen to me, Hegemons, and I will lead you out of these smoke-ridden walls. Along the alleys and alleyways, past factories and plants, along furrows and trails, far beyond the barrows, into the azure yonder I shall lead you. Toot-toot, toot-toot! Arise, people, for I am bringing unto you a reform, not a form, but a reform! Toot-toot, toot-toot! Gather at the new Mount Tabor on the nineteenth of August—the sixth according to the Old Calendar—bring red poppies and marigolds, but most of all bring your little azure dreams. There we shall be consecrated, consecrated and made new ... At the same time also bring the Ukrainian language. By the way, do you

know why our language has been waiting at the threshold for ages?<sup>30</sup> God had forgotten about it when he was mixing the tongues at the Tower of Babel. Moreover, the Holy Spirit descended unto the apostles in all the languages, except it forgot about our Ukrainian language. The CPC has already directed its attention to this, but without me it's doubtful that anything will come of it.

THIRD WORKER (*loudly, mightily*): It is coming and will come!!! Comrades ... (*Stepping toward MALACHI*) Are you a peasant?

MALACHI: No.

THIRD WORKER (*determinedly*): And not a worker?

MALACHI: I am the People's Malachi.

THIRD WORKER: From alleys and alleyways, along winding paths, and even over these walls such Malachis worm their way to us. And who are they? It's fine when they're simply melancholic dreamers, for, to our great misfortune, many such types also exist amongst our brothers—they go around with Jesus-eyes, azure smoke in their heads, all the time collecting sins and riding around on that. It's fine, I say, when such little Jesuses are still on their little donkeys.

MALACHI: Hosanna to them! They cleanse the world.

THIRD WORKER: You want to cleanse? Get down from your donkey and get on...

SOMEONE (*interjecting from the side*): A sewage-disposal tank.

*Laughter breaks out.*

THIRD WORKER: Wouldn't mind being on the barrel at all, for it's better to be a sewage worker than a little Jesus like this one. It's fine, I say, when they are only little Jesuses; there's really no great harm in that. But when in one or two words of their weak sermons you begin hearing totally different music.

MALACHI: Azure music.

THIRD WORKER: Music not of our class, so it is necessary for us to say: Comrades! Their azure words hide bourgeois chauvinist stingers! Behind that azure fog our opponents lie in ambush, their gauges and forms wrapped in their azure reforms. Be on guard!

MALACHI: I proclaim the immediate reform of humankind, masters, and undertake to bring it about.

THIRD WORKER (*shaking his finger*): Oh, you'll do it, Brother, in your own spitting image. We know your kind ... No, it will be better if we do it, in the image and likeness of the proletariat.

MALACHI: Toot-toot ... And will you bring about the reform of the Ukrainian stock? ... Way over there he sits in his cottage by the window wrinkling his moccasins and peering out to see if little old God is bringing rain for his wheat, if his sons are returning home from the army and his daughters from their menial employment. The day passes, and night passes, God hasn't come—and the rain isn't falling, the rapids roar, the moon is rising as it rose before, the Sich is no more... The reeds ask the Dniro...<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> After the Russian Empire consolidated its control of most of Ukraine, in the nineteenth century several tsarist decrees gradually diminished and then forbade use of the Ukrainian language in publications, schools, and theatrical performances. The early Soviet government allowed Ukrainian to be the official language of Ukraine, at least on paper.

<sup>31</sup>The last phrase is borrowed from Taras Shevchenko's poem "To Osnovianenko," in which the author laments Ukraine's loss of freedom.

SEVERAL VOICES AT ONCE: That's an old story.

MALACHI: "Where have all our children gone, where do they all roam?"<sup>32</sup>

THIRD WORKER: Tomorrow, there where the rapids roar, it won't be the moon that rises. Tomorrow, one could say, electric suns, one could say, will rise and shine over the entire Cossack steppe, over our entire Ukraine, all the way to the sea—

MALACHI: I have a question: to what sea?

THIRD WORKER: Tomorrow, there where the soaring seagull once cried out,<sup>33</sup> the steamboat sirens will sing, one could say, and the whistles of new factories and plants will resound. Already today the dynamos of the Dnipro Hydroelectric Station are smashing that sadness of the reeds and the rapids' savage yearning, may the devil take it, which I heard during an outing.

MALACHI: Give up your Dnipro Hydroelectric Station! Can't you hear the shouting—two old women were raped, O Hegemons! It won't help!

THIRD WORKER: It will! That's where we are beginning our reform of the entire Ukrainian stock, there and here and everywhere, wherever there's a worker's hand.

### Scene 3

A WORKER (*running in soaked through with sweat*): Are the forms ready?

WORKERS (*becoming tense*): They're ready!

SWEATING WORKER: We're drawing off the cast iron! ... (*Shouting in the direction where a red glow is rising*) Ready! ... Pour! ...

*A fiery liquid starts flowing along channels and troughs, illuminating the entire foundry with hot, fire-red light. The blazing glow lights up everyone's face and is reflected in their eyes. Activity ensues. The WORKERS, jumping over the channels to the moulds, direct the molten metal with their shovels into the moulds, or carry it in ladles. They shout at MALACHI.*

WORKERS: Out of the way, old man!—

—Hey, watch out!—

—Hey, step aside you, what's your name! ... Malachi!—

—Someone show him the way out of here, or he'll melt.

MALACHI *rushes about in the smoke and blaze between the fiery streams until SOMEONE guides him to the exit.*

SOMEONE: There's no end of trouble with such reformers.

MALACHI (*having recovered his senses, looking at the fires, the smoke, and the glow*): They have their own red dreams. What a tragedy! (*Closes his eyes and leaves. A symphony of labour thunders behind him.*)

<sup>32</sup> A quotation from Shevchenko's "To Osnovianenko."

<sup>33</sup> In Ukrainian folk songs and oral literature, the seagull is often a metaphor for Ukraine.

## Act Five

*Madam APOLINARA is worried that the police might raid her establishment. She is particularly vexed at night.*

APOLINARA: Listen, Ahapiia, if the police happen to raid us, you say, "These are my granddaughters Olenka, and Liuba, who just arrived ... to prepare for Holy Communion," or something like that.

AHAPIIA (*agreeing to anything*): Oh, Lord! I'll say exactly that as long as you arrange to get me a passport to travel to Jerusalem.

APOLINARA: I will!

AHAPIIA: Will you do it soon?

APOLINARA: Wait awhile!

AHAPIIA: I've already been waiting a month ... (*Whispering to herself*) There's neither money nor Jerusalem.

*And on this night, as if to spite APOLINARA, suddenly disquieting whistles erupt.*

### Scene 1

*An agitated GUEST leaps out of a small room.*

GUEST: They're whistling! ... Oh, Madam Apolinara, how many times have I suggested to you to find more secure quarters, as far away as possible from the Soviet authorities ... (*Looks reproachfully and angrily at APOLINARA, then runs down the stairs and out the back door, forgetting to fasten his suspenders.*)

APOLINARA (*following him and wringing her hands*): Oh, I know it's torture, but what can I do—we're illegal now!

### Scene 2

*LIUBA emerges from the same small room.*

LIUBA: I'm bored ... Let's have some music.

APOLINARA: Not now, Myra dear! Can't you hear the whistles?

LIUBA: I'll run away!

APOLINARA (*to the musician*): Oh, all right, play! Only, I beg you, play softly, softly...

LIUBA (*coming over to AHAPIIA*): But what if Papa's home?

AHAPIIA: Only the Lord knows that ...

LIUBA: It just occurred to me and the whole world turned black: what if Papa's home and I'm here! ... (*To the musician*) Louder!

### Scene 3

*Two GIRLS with GUESTS and MATYLDA enter and stagger down the stairs.*

MATYLDA: There ... We've arrived.

FIRST GIRL: You won't be sorry, pussycats.

GUEST: "I've neither tears, nor ravings, nor regrets; all shall pass just like the virgin whiteness of the white apple trees ..." <sup>34</sup>

SECOND GIRL: Bravo!

GUEST: "The withering's caressed by gold."

APOLINARA (*to the GIRLS*): You've come, my precious children ... But where is Olia?

MATYLDA: Give us some wine! Then we'll talk about Olia.

SECOND GIRL (*to the GUEST*): May I have a pear?

GUEST: Help yourself ... "I shall be young no more" ... Take whatever your little heart desires!

GIRLS: Oh, how generous you are!

GUEST (*frightened by his own generosity*): But on one condition.

GIRLS: What condition is that?

GUEST: That you are allowed only half a minute to choose. (*Taking out a watch*) Half a minute for whatever you want. Half a minute! Ready, set, go! ...

GIRLS: Chocolate! Wine! Pastries!

GUEST: What kind of chocolate? What kind of wine?

GIRLS: Red and sweet! No, white!

GUEST: Well, which one do you want. Tell me?

SECOND GIRL: Candy! Turkish delights!

GUEST: What do you prefer?

SECOND GIRL: Candy!

GUEST: A hundred grams? Two hundred grams? Three hundred grams? Half a minute is up.

FIRST GIRL: So soon?

GUEST: "Life! Wert thou only an image in my dream? ..."

FIRST GIRL: But I wanted some chocolate.

GUEST: "As though on a vernal, resounding daybreak, I galloped by on a rosy horse ..." No, enough. (*Sits down at a table.*)

SECOND GIRL: Well, just you wait! We'll tell you the same thing: you can have whatever you want, but only for half a minute ... Ha, ha, ha. I can just imagine! Half a minute!

APOLINARA: Now, Musia, Musia! It isn't nice to joke like that. The guests really might think they have only half a minute. (*Pours wine into goblets. The GUESTS offer it to the GIRLS.*)

AHAPIIA (*to LIUBA*): If only you could find your papa, child, and I, the road to Jerusalem. Did you perhaps know Vakulykha, dear? ...

LIUBA: I didn't know her. I'm not from your parts, Grannie.

AHAPIIA: Oh, I'd forgotten that you're somewhere from the steppes ... Anyway, Vakulykha was the only one in the whole district who had been to Jerusalem.

LIUBA: My heart aches, Grannie. I'm probably going to die.

AHAPIIA: ...How beautifully she died—Vakulykha, that is! She came home from Jerusalem and passed away on the third day.

GIRLS (*jumping up from the table*): Madam Apolinara! Mama dear! The guests would like to dance. May we?

APOLINARA: Yes, dearies, but I implore you, do it softly! Pianissimo!

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<sup>34</sup> A quotation from Sergei Esenin (1895–1925), a popular Russian poet.

*The musician begins a foxtrot. Shadows flit across the walls and the ceiling as the GUESTS and the GIRLS start dancing.*

LIUBA: There's music and dancing here, but for some reason I keep seeing the windmills that are on the outskirts of our town. What if Papa's already approaching the windmills and I'm here?

AHAPIIA: It was as though she had fallen asleep: her face was so lucid and white. Honest to God, I'm not lying. And into her coffin they placed some fragrant shavings that she had brought from the Lord's Tomb and a small cypress cross ... May God let you, child, me, and everyone die the way Vakulykha died ... (LIUBA goes into the small room. AHAPIIA continues.) Maybe I should write a petition? Comrades, Vakulykha died thus and thus, and I would like to die the same way. You won't believe me, Comrades, but I already dream about it. I walk as though floating through the air by the warm sea, and the path is strewn with red flowers, and somewhere beyond the sea a radiance rises to the sky as it does at dawn in summertime ... And you know, Comrades, if I don't manage to get to Jerusalem, I'll—(Dozes off.)

## Scene 4

OLIA (*bringing in MALACHI and calling out from the threshold*): I too have brought a guest, and what a guest! ...

*The GIRLS and the GUESTS welcome OLIA with applause and hurrahs. The musician strikes up a fanfare.*

MALACHI (*stopping on the stairs*): So this is where I get recognition at last! ... (*Bowing majestically*) Greetings, faithful subjects! ...

APOLINARA (*to OLIA*): He looks like Myra's, Liuba's...

OLIA: Father.

APOLINARA: Why, Olia? ... To upset the poor child! ... Do we need the drama?

OLIA: Where is she?

APOLINARA: Shush! She's got a headache. She's asleep.

OLIA (*looking into the dressing room*): Myra, are you asleep? ... She's asleep! (*Going over to MALACHI*) Tell me, People's Commissar, what is dearer, a father or sleep?

MALACHI: Sleep, if it's after work.

OLIA (*smiling wryly*): So it is, after work. Excuse me, but I have to change; I'm soaked. (*To everyone*) It's raining out.

## Scene 5

*Another GUEST dashes in.*

GUEST: Greetings, Counter-revolutionaries!

APOLINARA (*glad and at the same time perturbed*): My God! Girls! Look who's come!

GIRLS (*to the new GUEST*): Ah-h! Oh! ... Our "No Time" is here.



GUEST (*looking at his watch*): Good heavens! A quarter past one already! The train is at two. I still have to send a telegram ... Yes! A bottle of beer for me and two bottles of wine and some candy for the girls. Hurry!

APOLINARA: Darling, would you like some dinner?

GUEST: No time! No time! Where's Myra?

GIRLS: Myra! Myra! "No Time" has come to see you!

APOLINARA (*becoming even more perturbed*): Shush! Girls, softly ... (*To the GUEST, entreatingly*) Perhaps you'd care to select a different companion for yourself today.

GUEST: No time, Counter-revolutionaries! I can only stay five minutes.

APOLINARA: She's ill.

GUEST: With what?

APOLINARA: A headache.

GUEST: Rubbish!

APOLINARA: Darling, there'll be a scene—

GUEST: No time! ... Myra! May I come in? (*Goes into the small room.*)

MALACHI (*to APOLINARA*): Who is he?

APOLINARA: An acquaintance of ours ... He's so cheerful and generous—

MALACHI: To whom did he go?

APOLINARA: I don't even know myself. You see, I board them; that is, they come here to eat and rest, and some come with a guest ... How can I watch them all? All I have with them is trouble and more trouble ... Having come out of the rain, perhaps you'd like some whiskey, or beer?

MALACHI: I forbid you to sell love in boxes!

APOLINARA: What love?

MALACHI: In boxes, I say! You think I can't see how you've partitioned the room into love boxes like small water closets! Where is the moon? Where are the stars? Where are the flowers, I ask you? (*Takes out a handmade reed pipe from his pocket and starts playing it.*) "Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye! A decree! Henceforth it is forbidden to buy and sell love packaged in wooden boxes, the more so in veneer boxes ... No, that's not it. In order not to violate the principles of our economic policy, we temporarily permit the buying and selling of love, only not in boxes, not packaged, but at night by the light of the moon and the stars, in the grass and the flowers. And if anyone should have the desire during the day, then it should for the most part be there where the sun rings in all its amplitude and the golden bees drone like this: buzz-zz-zz. The PMPC ... (*after some thought*) The First.

## Scene 6

LIUBA *runs in*. A GUEST *follows her*.

GUEST: Where are you going? I've no time, Myra darling!

LIUBA: It's Papa's voice! Let go! ... Papa dearest, my beloved, precious darling ... (*Kissing his hands*) At last, at last, I've found you.

## Scene 7

OLIA *rushes up, the other GIRLS crowd around, and the GUESTS stagger over.*

OLIA: It was I who found him for you.

AHAPIIA: I dreamt that an angel was playing on a golden flute ... When all of a sudden I look—it's dear Liuba's own father.

GIRLS: Her father? Really? ...

—Myra! Is it your father?

MALACHI: I'm not her father. I'm the People's Malachi. Is it possible you haven't read my first decree? I've renounced my family status.

A GUEST *looks at his watch, waves his hand in resignation, and runs off.*

LIUBA: Papa dearest! Pay no heed that I'm like this, that I'm dressed in such clothes.

MALACHI: I've renounced my family status, I said.

LIUBA: Forgive me, Papa! It isn't for real. I was simply earning some money to make it possible for me to find you.

AHAPIIA: Forgive her her transgressions, and God will forgive you even greater sins.

OLIA *does not take her eyes off MALACHI.*

LIUBA: The driver will be here right away, we'll get in, Papa, and off we'll go to the train station ... I have some money, fifty-three rubles in all! I'll buy us tickets for reserved seats, and some pop and oranges for the trip. You'll be able to lie down and rest, Papa, my darling and so grey already.

MALACHI (*moving away*): I said, there's no father ... and no friend either! There's only the People's Malachi, People's Commissar! The PMPC. The First!

LIUBA: What am I going to do now?

OLIA (*to MALACHI*): What is she going to do now? You calamity, you people's affliction!

MALACHI: Light the fires of universal love in the streets of your cities; warm the weary ones—in my azure lands they shall erect monuments to you for this.

LIUBA: What am I going to do now?

OLIA: We'll ask him to tell us another one of his azure yarns. Do you know which one? ... The one about the loved ones who will return to us in the winter at nights. Ha-ha-ha! So many of those loved ones have already slept with me that when the time comes to receive and warm them from the road, they'll smother me ... Musician! Play "The Ring"!<sup>35</sup>

LIUBA, *as if ill, heads for the small room.*

GIRLS and GUESTS (*grabbing OLIA*):

—Bravo! Bravo! ...

—"The Ring"!

—Olia will sing "The Ring."

OLIA (*singing, accompanied by the musician*):

I have lost my golden ring,

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<sup>35</sup> "Kolechko," a Russian song popular among the petite bourgeoisie.

I have lost my precious love,  
 Now because of that golden ring,  
 I shall weep both day and night.  
 My love has gone and left me, holding  
 A little baby in my arms.  
 When I look at the tiny thing,  
 Suddenly tears flood my eyes—  
 Because of you, my little one,  
 I'll go to the sea and drown.

MALACHI (*going down the stairs*): Hello, hello! Transmit by radio to all, all, all who abide in Ukraine—our people, poplars, and willows, steppes and ravines and the stars in the sky.

OLIA:

For a while her fair braid  
 Shivered in the giant wave  
 With her right hand she did wave:  
 Farewell, my love, farewell!

MALACHI (*lonesomely*): Transmit that the People's Malachi is now grieving, and that a silver tear is sliding from his grey moustache and dripping into the azure sea. How tragic it is: he is grieving atop his azure dreams.

*The GIRLS and the GUESTS surround him. They laugh and dance. At that moment AHAPIIA shrieks.*

AHAPIIA: Liuba has hanged herself!

APOLINARA: Hanged herself!

GIRLS (*peering into the small room*): She's hanged herself! ... She's hanged herself ... darling Myra! ... Honest to God!

*A panic breaks out. The GIRLS and the GUESTS rush helter-skelter down the stairs and out the door.*

AHAPIIA (*to MALACHI*): Your daughter has hanged herself!

MALACHI: Don't be alarmed, faithful subject; she did not hang herself, but sank in the sea ... More precisely, in the azure sea.

## Scene 8

OLIA (*emerging from the small room*): I took her down. She's already dead ... (*To MALACHI*) Do you hear? It was you who drove her ... to her death!

MALACHI: You had better catch that young man, because he's pissing into the sea.

OLIA: He's gone mad once and for all ... Where to now, after the azure dreams? (*Answering herself convincingly*) Why are you still thinking ... go over there ... Back. To work. (*Covers her head with a kerchief and leaves, stepping firmly.*)

## Scene 9

APOLINARA *rushes in with a small box, into which she is stuffing a necklace, gold rings, a piece of silk, and other items.*

APOLINARA: Whatever I am, but I'm still not as bad as this one. (*Spits at MALACHI and runs off.*)

MALACHI: And they spat on him and struck him on the cheeks. And he took his golden bugle and blew into it ... (*taking out his reed pipe*) and played a universal azure symphony. (*Plays on the reed pipe.*) I am the universal shepherd. I tend my flocks. I tend and tend, and then I'll play.

AHAPIIA *lights a candle. MALACHI continues playing. It seems to him that he is truly creating a beautiful azure symphony, even though the pipe drones and resounds with savage dissonance.*

## Addendum

*This is a translation of the play as it appears in Mykola Kulish, Tvory. Spohady pro M. Kulisha Antoniny Kulish, ed. Hryhorii Kostiuk (New York: Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the U.S., 1955), 11–104, which was taken from the text published in Literaturnyi iarmarok, no. 9 (August 1929). An earlier manuscript used in the staging of the play had several scenes that were omitted in the 1929 edition. They were published in Kulish's Tvory, 446–49.*

### 1. Act Two, Scene 3

*Instead of*

MALACHI: Millions gaze at ...

*the manuscript reads:*

MALACHI: Thirty million people gaze through the slumber of centuries, while you, an ordinary office worker, can't even produce a little poster for her?

### 2. Act Two, Scene 3

*After*

MALACHI: A reform is needed immediately ...

*the manuscript reads:*

MALACHI: Tell me citizen, what nationality are you?

AHAPIIA: What d'you mean?

MALACHI: I am asking whether you are Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish, or Tatar?

AHAPIIA: I am of the Rus' faith.

MALACHI: That means that you are Russian.

AHAPIIA: I suppose I'm Russian ... Well, yes, I'm Russian.

MALACHI: A *katsap*?<sup>36</sup>

AHAPIIA: Oh, no, no, we never had those in our family!

MALACHI: A perfect example for my projects ... Too bad there are no People's Commissars here ... How old are you, Ahapiia?

AHAPIIA: Fifty-seven ... No, I'm lying. Fifty-nine. During Lent I'll ... Well, yes, fifty-seven. No, no, no, fifty-nine. I think I'm fifty-nine.

MALACHI: Did the Revolution reach your village?

AHAPIIA: I don't know ... I'm illiterate, so I don't really know what you are talking about.

MALACHI: Did they take a forced requisition from you? Were there any Makhnovites or Petliurites about?

AHAPIIA: O, dear Lord, yes, they took it; and Petliuras came. Of course. They came on horses.

MALACHI: How about Reds? Communists? Bolsheviks?

AHAPIIA: Bolsheviks were there too ... They have all disappeared now, the Petliuras and Bolsheviks. Only the Communists haven't yet.

SECOND SECRETARY: We have to stop this comedy.

SECRETARY (*telephoning*): Headquarters? Send one of the guards here ... (*Turning to AHAPIIA*) Citizen, whom do you wish to see and in what matter?

AHAPIIA: How to get to Jerusalem, Comrade, or what is one to call you?

MALACHI: The Revolution leaped into the village on horses, but today only the dust cloud remains on the distant horizon ... An azure dust cloud ... You heard it! She is looking for the road to Jerusalem ... She sold her house ... It's tragic yet comical ...

AHAPIIA: That's true. If only the comrades would help ... At least tell me if there is a road thither?

MALACHI: Do you understand now how much a reform of humankind is needed first of all.

SECRETARY: Everybody already knows about this.

GODFATHER: They know this without you.

MALACHI: So together call the State Planning Committee and the Council of People's Commissars immediately ... Examine my projects ... They need to be renewed. And Ukraine. Ukraine too, I say, which, like a beggar woman, has stood by the beaten roads all dirty, covered with scabs, and holding a bag ... So what if the bag held Shevchenko's *Kobzar* and Hrinchenko's dictionary—all of our culture ... The distance is so azure today ... and she's shelling sunflower seeds. I hate the slave ... Renew her or kill her.

AHAPIIA: I keep asking—but no one knows if there is a road thither. Be merciful.

MALACHI: Why have my plans not been examined yet?

SECRETARY: I told you: in a month's time.

MALACHI: I demand that it be done now.

SECRETARY: You have no right to demand.

MALACHI: I was sent by the people.

GODFATHER: You are lying, my friend. All the neighbours, the entire people, sent me here to take you home.

MALACHI: I passed on foot more than a hundred villages, hamlets, and towns on the way to Kharkiv, the capital of the Ukrainian SSR. My feet are still covered with dust from the

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<sup>36</sup> A derogatory term for Russians.

steppe roads. While I rested, I drank water from a hundred wells and springs and chatted with the people ... Only near wells will our people open their mouths and utter the truth. I am their delegate.

GODFATHER: You're lying! You ran away from home!

*Further down:*

MALACHI: Who's interrupting there? Say it in Russian! Don't butcher the Ukrainian language!

SECRETARY: Comrade Reformer, please come to order!

MALACHI (*walking away*): I can't stand this ... This is how they have conducted Ukrainianization. They can't even pronounce *kryvyi* properly; they say either *krivyi* or *kryvii*. So I ask you: why do we need to Ukrainianize foreigners? Is it so that the driver would look like a Ukrainian and we won't notice that they consume twice as many calories?

### 3. Act Three, Scene 9

*After*

OLIA: Ask the Professor. He is wise and good, he'll examine you.

*The manuscript reads:*

MALACHI: Olia, are you a peasant?

OLIA: I think so ... I spent my childhood in the village.

MALACHI: You are Ukrainian. Soon I'll hate this race. It's hindering me in the matter of my reform of humankind; it is on guard and not allowing it ... If only it were worthwhile, but as it is, besides Shevchenko, it consists of sergeants-major, bandits, translators, and servants of other races.

OLIA: Don't be angry, you'll soon be released.

*MALACHI'S comment*

I shall indeed go mad if I am late and do not lead them to follow me.

*appears in the manuscript as:*

MALACHI: How can I be mad ... But I'll become a psychopath if I'm late getting there ... D'you hear the whistle? Renovations. They've even spattered the sky with whitewash ... Let me go. We still need a reform of humankind plus a reform of the Ukrainian language from the point of view of full socialism.

### 4. Act Three, Scene 10

*After*

OLIA: I'm going to call the orderly.

*The manuscript reads:*

MALACHI: Not plus, no, I'll answer ... I have to convince you, Olia! Without joking, I'll bare my soul to you ... I wrote projects about the immediate reform of humankind, you understand. These are projects for realizing azure dreams ... Everyone has such dreams ... they are the best ... the azure ones ... And so, you see, everyone rocks and

rocks these dreams in the cradle, that is, in the imagination, day and night, but they keep crying ... Then there is nothing to eat, so they die ... Then they are carried away to cemeteries. Especially in our waterless and naked steppes there were so many cemeteries of unrealized azure dreams, so many ... In my projects the key is G sharp for realization ... Only I made one mistake I didn't write that the reform should be started only after first X-raying man ... Let me go, I'll write this down, and then I'll go to the Council of People's Commissars.

OLIA: I can't.

MALACHI: Olia! I'll get down on my knees in front of you ... I beg you.

### 5. Act Five, Scene 3

*After*

GIRLS: The guests would like to dance. May we?

*The manuscript reads:*

APOLINARA: I am afraid, my dear guests. If the pigs [*in the original: makedony* ("Macedonians," *i.e.*, *Red Army soldiers or police*)] hear it ... I'll be lost.

GUEST: Madam Comrade, if anyone bothers you, just come to me. I am a policeman. Comrade Kazankov.

### 3. Act Five, Scene 7

*In the manuscript there is also a WORKER among the dramatis personae. After OLIA sings "I'll go to the sea and I'll drown," the following exchange takes place:*

MALACHI: Quiet, it is Ukraine singing.

WORKER: Little Russia, we should say.

*Translated by John Prasko*

## About *Sonata Pathétique*

*Sonata Pathétique* is the most outstanding Ukrainian drama of the twentieth century. The play's various versions and staging reflect not only Kulish's precarious position in the 1930s, but also the infinite number of interpretations that the play has inspired. Soviet censors and reviewers criticized *Sonata Pathétique* for its nationalistic content, while the non-Communist camp saw it as lacking a clear-cut "national," patriotic stance. Other critics found no basis for either claim, seeing only a universal message in the play. When Kulish was criticized for presenting the national problem in *Sonata Pathétique* as the dominant one, he responded: "Even in my next plays (and I am writing them) I shall continue to depict and illustrate the national problem."<sup>1</sup>

After Kulish completed *Sonata Pathétique* (Ukrainian: *Patetychna sonata*) in 1930, official Soviet censors did not allow the play to be staged in Soviet Ukraine. Kulish then rewrote parts of it and submitted it to a public discussion by critics. He also gave the play to Pavel B. Zenkevich, a Russian translator of his earlier plays, who translated the second version into Russian, thereby making it available to Russian theatres. The play's premiere took place in Leningrad at the Bolshoi Drama Theatre on 16 December 1931; it was followed by a performance in Moscow at Aleksandr Tairov's Kamernyi Theatre on 19 December 1931. The play ran for almost three months in Moscow.<sup>2</sup> Despite its success there, it was not allowed to be performed in Ukraine. But Soviet Russian theatres—in Omsk, Kazan, Baku, Kostroma, Tver, and Irkutsk—did stage the play before it was completely banned in the USSR in 1934. It was only in 1958, after Kulish was posthumously rehabilitated, that the play was performed (in one of its later versions) for the first time in Ukraine, at the October Revolution Theatre in Odesa under the direction of N. Orlov. In 1966 that version was first staged in Kyiv, at the Ivan Franko Ukrainian Drama Theatre.

While *Sonata Pathétique* ran in Moscow, the German writer Friedrich Wolf attended a performance and was immensely impressed by what he saw. He stated that the play could only be compared with Goethe's *Faust* and Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. Wolf asked Mariia Ovrutskia to translate *Sonata Pathétique* into German, and he staged an expurgated version of this translation in Berlin under the title *Die Beethoven Sonate* in 1932. It was performed again in 1968 in the German Democratic Republic. George and Moira Luckyj's English translation of the play was staged in 1974 by students of the University of Toronto Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama; the production was designed and directed by Tim Fort. An abridged version of a Polish translation by Edward S. Bura was performed by the Polish Radio Theatre in the early 1970s. The play has also been translated into Latvian, Czech, and Bulgarian.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Natalia Kuziakina, *Narysy ukrains'koï radianskoï dramaturhii*, vol. 1 (Kyiv: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1958), 86.

<sup>2</sup> A United Press report, dated 14 May 1932, states: "One of the outstanding artistic successes of the Russian theater in recent years, 'Sonata Pathétique,' by Nikola [sic] Kulish, has just been suppressed by the censors. After the forty-third performance at the Kamerny[i] Theater here, the play suddenly disappeared. The prohibition against this play, which is entirely pro-Soviet in subject matter and treatment, is especially curious in view of the recent revival of [Mikhail Bulgakov's] *Days of the Turbins*, which is not pro-Soviet either in form or content" ("Soviet Suppresses Play Hailed as Artistic Find," *The New York Herald-Tribune*, 15 May 1932).



## Variants of the Text

The original text of *Sonata Pathétique* was not published during Kulish's lifetime. The manuscript of the first version, which Kulish gave to Les Kurbas for the Berezil Theatre, became available to Sviatoslav Hordynsky in 1943 during the German occupation of Ukraine. Because Nazi censorship was also imposed on Ukrainian literature, Hordynsky had to delete several scenes dealing with the Bolsheviks before permission was granted to publish the play that year. This excised text was reprinted in New York in 1955.<sup>3</sup>

In her detailed study of Kulish and his works, Natalia Kuziakina notes that Kulish first planned to write *Sonata Pathétique* in 1924 as a novel. He completed the first version of the play in 1929. After it was translated into Russian, Kulish made various changes for the different Russian theatres that were to stage it. In a letter (8 February 1931) he notified Zenkevich that he would be sending him "a changed *Pathétique*. I still consider it not completed (act three and especially the ending)."<sup>4</sup> By October he had written a third version, in which the scenes with Stupai-Stupanenko and Maryna were significantly changed. The archives of the Kamernyi Theatre in Moscow, the Theatre Library in St. Petersburg, and Zenkevich apparently all contain different versions of the play, with minor variations throughout the text and an important difference in the finale.<sup>5</sup>

These numerous variants reflect the power and scope of Soviet censorship, which forced authors to rewrite their texts and left scholars and readers wondering which variant is the definitive version of a text. However, one may attempt to assess at least the total structure of Kulish's play, since the mood, tempo, and tone of the final scene may be compared to that of Beethoven's sonata.<sup>6</sup> The play is probably the first Western drama structurally based on a musical composition, namely Beethoven's *Sonata Pathétique in C minor, opus 13*.

For a true appreciation and understanding of the play and its variants, it is important to note that while Kulish wrote the play, he repeatedly asked his daughter to play Beethoven's *Sonata* or some of its parts. Not only is the music incorporated into the play, where it provides mood and texture to many scenes, but, in most cases, the drama itself follows the structure of the *Sonata*, thus allowing the play's various endings to be compared in terms of their parallelism to the music.<sup>7</sup> In the final act, for example, before the Rondo section, there is no di-

<sup>3</sup> Sviatoslav Hordynsky, "Ideas on the Scaffold: Mykola Kulish and His *Sonata Pathétique*," *The Ukrainian Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (Autumn 1949): 331–39.

<sup>4</sup> Natalia Kuziakina, "Patetychna sonata," in her *P'iesy Mykoly Kulisha: Literaturna i stsenichna istoriia* (Kyiv: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1970), 322.

<sup>5</sup> Several variants of the play's ending appear in Appendix A and B of this volume. For a discussion of the censorship pressure on Kulish and the resulting revisions, see Larissa M. L. Z. Onyshkevych, "The Problem of the Definitive Literary Text and Political Censorship," in *Perspectives on Modern Central and East European Literature: Quests for Identity*, ed. Todd Patrick Armstrong (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave, 2001), 25–37; and "Tsenzura, samotsenzura i shukannia ostatochnoho tekstu," in idem (Larysa Zales'ka Onyshkevych), *Tekst i hra* (Lviv: Litopys, 2009), 239–45.

<sup>6</sup> Natalia Kuziakina quotes from the Soviet Ukrainian literary discussion of 1931, in which the play was presented as "an attempt to introduce music into a dramatic work as an integral organic part and not just an accompaniment; it was an attempt at a rhythmic construction of a work from beginning to end" (Kuziakina, "Zahybel' skeptyka, proshchannia z romantykom," in her *Dramaturh Mykola Kulish: Literaturno-krytychnyi narys* [Kyiv: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1962], 139). For a discussion of the factor of music, see Luba Dyky, "Some Aspects of the *Sonata Pathétique* by Mykola Kulish," *The Annals of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the United States* 11, nos. 1–2 (1964–68): 109–28 and 12, nos. 1–2 (1969–72): 158–91.

<sup>7</sup> "Aspekty struktury i muzyky," in Onyshkevych, *Tekst i hra*, 234–38.

vergence between the text and the music. In the *con moto* part, drops of water count time for Maryna as they initially did for the Washerwoman. Then there is a final attempt at communication between Ilko and Maryna, in *molto espressione*. Under his sharp questioning (in *sempre crescendo*), Maryna admits that she is the leader of the insurgents, that she is the Gull. No falsehood, no discord is detected in the music. The last bars, played *con fuoco*, indicate the obvious verdict for her, while she identifies herself with the folkloric gull: standing at the crossroads and seeing her children trampled by passing travellers and enemies. She whispers her confession, frantically looks for a way out, and then courageously faces death. In her moment of *hamartia*, she faces the truth about her insincerity both to herself and to Ilko.<sup>8</sup> To use an existentialist term, she pays for previously acting in bad faith, for not being true to her values, and even making Ilko act untruthfully.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that when Beethoven named his sonata, “pathetic” had a more genuinely emotional connotation. It is, therefore, significant that the ending of the play’s first variant (in the 1943 and 1955 publications) are more emotional and more parallel to the tone and structure of the music than the ending in the later variants, where Maryna attempts to avoid facing reality.

## Interpretative Approaches

The first-person narrative by Ilko in this *Ich-Drama* stresses the importance of the individual in the play. The individual existentialist quest is evident as Maryna and Ilko bend under the demands that their respective groups make on them. Under such pressures both individuals sacrifice some of their personal values, face tragic dilemmas, and then pay for their copromises. The world, which at first appears senseless, finally appears quite sinister.

As Kulish himself acknowledged, he had consciously planned to base *Sonata Pathétique* on the organic relationship among words, rhythm, movements, light, and music. It was an experimental approach that also encompassed numerous other elements. Many studies of the play have already discussed these applications, as well as its other original devices (such as the *ver- tep* structure of the Perotsky building, or the medieval mystery-play puppet-theatre approach with one narrator and puppets), polyphonic structure, Quixotic elements, Petrarchian parallels, and classical mythological analogies. To this list, another element should also be added: the incorporation of many religious symbols and parallels.

## Putative Easter in the Play

The author indicates that the action takes place between Easter 1917 and Easter 1919. Thus at least two, if not three, consecutive Easters pass in the course of the play, as they are depicted metaphorically, however, one may well ask whether Easter has actually taken place.

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<sup>8</sup> Kuziakina points out that “In the last musical sentence of the Sonata, a sad, contemplative mood appears again, but the chord cuts it off (ibid., 117). Because the switches in mood appear to be rather sudden, another element should be considered here. Both Mahdalyna Laslo Kutsiuk and Nelli Korniienko have pointed out that Kulish employed a counterpoint structure in most of his works, whereby one episode seems to contradict the preceding one. See Nelli Korniienko, “Vohon' i popil,” *Vitchyzna*, 1968, no. 8: 161; and Mahdalyna Laslo Kutsiuk, “‘Masky’ Mykoly Kulisha,” in her *Shukannia formy: Narysy z ukrains'koï literatury XX stolittia* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1980), 257.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed discussion, see “*Sonata Pathétique*,” in Larissa M. L. Z. Onyshkevych, *Existentialism in Modern Ukrainian Drama*, PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1973 (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Microfilm Collection), 72–89.

There are several direct references in the play to Easter or situations usually associated with the Easter cycle. At the very beginning of the play, Ilko asks the reader to *imagine* an Easter night. In act one, scene four, Zinka teases Ilko about breaking the fast, and in scene two André and Maryna exchange the traditional Ukrainian Easter greetings (“Christ is Risen,” followed by a reply, “Truly, He is Risen”). But Maryna’s response to the greeting is rather premature, for scene twelve strikingly describes how “low over the horizon hangs the pale crescent moon—the crucified Christ.” The Resurrection is therefore in suspension, since Christ is referred to as still on the cross. All the references to Easter that follow are imaginary and whimsical. In scene thirteen Stupai-Stupanenko imagines he hears the Zaporozhians rising from their graves as he listens to Maryna playing the *Sonata Pathétique*; this inspires him to express an Easter greeting, in which he substitutes “Ukraine has risen” for “Christ is Risen.” This is done intentionally, in keeping with Stupai-Stupanenko’s *Weltanschauung*. But the substitution is symbolic for the whole framework of the play. In act five, which takes place in 1919, the references to Easter are subtler. In scene two Maryna tells André that it is only “just like Easter”: Christ is still in the grave, and soon André and Maryna come upon Stupai-Stupanenko’s corpse. In act six, scene one, two Russian women rejoice upon the return of Russian rule; one says, “You should be greeting me with ‘Christ is Risen.’” For them Easter also has a national and ideological meaning besides a religious one, and they equate their own experiences to those of Christ: “Christ was tortured by people, not by Bolshevik beasts.” Thus the play’s various political groups have differing perceptions of the implications of Easter.

In the Easter cycle, the period of Lent implies self-restraint and penitence, and the Holy Week, suffering and passion, followed by the sacrifice of one’s life for the redemption of others. The last stage, and the core of Eastern symbolism, is the Resurrection, which the numerous parties await in order to celebrate life or victory, the renewal of their party or their nation. Both of the Ukrainian political sides involved (the nationalists and the Communists), as well as the Russians, see themselves as past the first two stages of the cycle, that is, suffering and the sacrifice. All of them expect renewal and the promise of the new life that Easter portends. Ilko, Maryna, and Zinka seek this renewal on a personal level, while the rest seek it primarily in terms of their group, in a political or civic form. But for an “Easter” to occur, a situation of *agapé*, or self-sacrificing love, has to take place. The question is: who will be the willing sacrificial lamb?

None of the Perotskys offer themselves in this respect. Meanwhile Stupai-Stupanenko has not found any clear-cut goals for making a conscious sacrifice, but simply awaits an already consummated Easter when the Zaporozhian Cossacks would rise from their graves. Here the Easter imagery stresses both parts of Shevchenko’s message, “bury me and [then] arise.” This may also be a comment on Maryna’s commitment on a personal and patriotic level. Zinka, a prostitute, is presented as ethically pure and uncompromising, in contrast to Maryna’s political scheming for the purpose of a national resurrection. Because Maryna has prostituted her ethical innocence, she cannot be the sacrificial lamb; instead she is forced to remain the allegorical victimized gull. Ilko, a shepherd’s child, comes close to symbolizing the innocent lamb; he is suspended between heaven and earth, between the universal (on the personal level) and the political (or a group level), while he continues searching for a purpose. His gesture of sacrifice is only for the sake of one person, Maryna, and even then he sacrifices his credibility and ethics, soiling his hands almost as much as she does. The cock crows three times when Ilko lies to gain André’s freedom; he thus contributes to the many deaths that André brings about, as well as the death of Maryna and her cause.

In the finale both Ilko and Maryna reach *phronesis* (self-knowledge), and confession of their transgressions follows, as does, to some degree, repentance. Ilko forces Maryna to admit the truth about her military involvement and thus discharges an obligation and moves toward his own redemption by cleaning his hands. Initially both Ilko and Maryna want to save their own microcosmos before having the right to save the universe. At the end of the play they may both want their ideals to be victorious, and they are ready to face the scaffold or be sacrificed for the sake of a “cleaner” world. However, it is still night. The stage is set for sacrifice, and there are hints it will occur. But are their gestures really a sacrifice or only penance? Maryna mentions going to Passion services; even if one would accept her and Ilko’s confessions as a substitute for self-sacrifice. It is still only a self-cleansing after transgressions, and they are not performed consciously for the sake of others. Therefore no redemption of others follows. At best, Easter has been delayed. It is still a cosmic night with a promise, perhaps, of future redemption, but there is no actual celebration of life over death.<sup>10</sup>

The last act takes place in October, the month farthest away from Easter or spring. The 1968 Soviet edition of the play shows the coming of a dawn that is as red as the red flag. In it Easter and the Easter Liturgy (which exists outside of time, as an absolute present) do not really take place. There is no triumph of life over death. What remains is suffering—as was hinted in the very title of the play, the word *pathétique* stressing grief and sorrow as well as passion and sensitivity. There is another connotation, found in the word’s Greek roots, *pathos* ‘suffering’ and *pathetos* ‘having suffered, destined to suffer’ as well as meaning capable of feeling. The suffering and tragic end result from the choices the protagonists make and their own, ignored feelings.

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<sup>10</sup> In the play various phases of the moon also indicate that there was no actual Easter. Easter Sunday follows the appearance of the full moon; thus the moon would have a crescent shape at Easter. Only in act one, scene two, is a similar shape (“the silver horn of the moon”) imagined by Ilko. In scene twelve it is depicted as a “pale, jagged sickle” and equated with the image of the crucified Christ; this is a reference to the Easter cycle before the Resurrection, yet church bells already ring out Easter tunes. However, perhaps the moon appears only in Ilko’s mind. Stupai-Stupanenko, too, only imagines that it is Easter. Metaphors and similes of the moon keep reappearing. In act four, scene five, a red banner is depicted “as round as the moon.” In the play the moon is often red or clouded over, with only some rays coming through. Its importance cannot be overlooked. Mircea Eliade has pointed out that the moon is usually associated with the creation of destinies and the exposure of the “true human condition.” It is this aspect that is very forcefully developed in the play. See Larysa M. L. Zaleska Onyshkevych, “Rolia Velykodnia u ‘Patetychnii sonati’ Mykoly Kulisha,” *Suchasnist’*, 1990, no. 7–8: 61–68.

# Sonata Pathétique

(1930)

## CHARACTERS

I (ILKO YUHA), *a poet*

SHE (MARYNA STUPAI-STUPANENKO), *a music student and the leader of an underground group*

IVAN STUPAI-STUPANENKO, *aka STUPAI, Maryna's father and a teacher*

PEROTSKY, *a tsarist major general*

ANDRÉ, *Perotsky's older son, an officer*

GEORGES, *Perotsky's younger son*

ANNETTE, *Perotsky's housekeeper*

ZINKA, *a prostitute*

OVRAM, *a disabled worker and a revolutionary*

NASTIA, *aka WOMAN, Ovrarm's wife, a washerwoman*

LUKA, *a Bolshevik*

HAMAR, *aka ELDERLY MAN, a Bolshevik agitator*

A YOUNG MAN

SAILOR, *aka FATE, a Red partisan*

PARTISAN IN A LAMBSKIN HAT

PARTISAN IN A SHEEPSKIN JACKET

MYKESHA

MYKESHA'S FRIEND

A JUDGE

A PROFESSOR

TWO GUESTS, TWO BOOTBLACKS, THREE GUARDS, TWO LADIES AND THEIR HUSBANDS, AND  
NATIONAL PARTISANS

## Act One

### Scene 1

*Imagine, my friends, he started to say: (1) a street in an old provincial town, (2) a three-story building with a sign, "Residence of Major General Perotsky," (3) a revolutionary spring, (4) Easter night. The beginning of action: I am writing. A semi-attic in the building. A square window with a starry sky for a curtain. A gas lamp is burning. In the corner shines a brass coiled helicon.*

## Scene 2

*Next to me, behind a wooden partition, lives an unemployed milliner, ZINKA. She is combing her hair. There are visitors at her door.*

FIRST VISITOR (*reading a sign written in chalk on the door*): “Because it is Easter I am not receiving visitors.” (*After a pause, with annoyance*) Ha! That’s original!

SECOND VISITOR (*jealously, in a bass voice*): Why did you stop?

FIRST VISITOR: Where shall we go now?

SECOND VISITOR: At Easter every hostess has her door open to visitors.

FIRST VISITOR: So I’ll go to your hostess. All right?

## Scene 3

*ZINKA is laughing. The VISITORS, grinning, are leaving. I am writing. Below, in the general’s apartment, the clock strikes, as if from a distant age, evenly, nostalgically, elegiacally. Further below, on the first floor lives SHE. I can almost see it: the open window and the muslin curtain stretched like a sail. Below, as if floating, is a well-lit corner of the room with a piano, a bust of Shevchenko,<sup>1</sup> and flowers. SHE is practicing Beethoven’s Sonata Pathétique. SHE plays, repeating the first movement, the deep and mighty Grave, full of starry pathos. At that time I knew neither the composer nor the work.*

## Scene 4

ZINKA (*knocking on my door*): May I come in? Tell me, neighbour, can you guess what it means when many men visit a girl and suddenly she wants to run away from them to another man?

I: I don’t know.

ZINKA: And when they all want to break the fast and she wants to fast, do you know what that means?

I: I can’t say.

ZINKA: You really don’t know? And you can’t guess? Really now! It’s so simple. It means the arrival of... love, wouldn’t you think? It is Easter night! That’s all. And what did you think? (*I shake my head.*) Easter night has arrived, and behind it Madam Grief is pushing through to visit. Listen, neighbour. You see, I’ve donned a young woman’s light-blue dress, braided my hair modestly—I’m fasting, and you’re so poor and lonesome that you won’t start fasting today. So maybe we could go together, eh?

I: I also can’t say.

ZINKA: Ha-ha! Go to church, for example. What were you are thinking? (*Winking*) Don’t worry! You won’t break Lent because of me.

I: I am not worried. You see, I don’t have the time. I am writing a letter.

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<sup>1</sup> Taras Shevchenko (1814–61), Ukraine’s national poet.

ZINKA: You're writing. Excuse me. Keep writing. I could write a letter or something too. I would write: In the twenty-third year of my life, a red day in the calendar and a black one in my heart. People used to say that when freedom came it would be like my own mother to me. Don't worry, Girl, they said—you'll jump out of the pit. Then the world would be full of flowers and pleasant like sunshine. Now freedom has come. So this is what I am writing: my darling! ... beloved ... but no one answers ... Good night. By the way, you couldn't lend me some money—seven rubles? You see they're asking for my rent. I'll pay you back. I'll get the money for my room (*winking*) and pay you back. Don't have any? Keep on writing, go on.

## Scene 5

*Stone steps lead from the first floor down into the dark basement. Two people are sorting out illegal literature. To one side, a woman is ironing. Water is dripping from time to time, resonantly and persistently, from the ceiling into a bucket.*

ELDERLY MAN (*putting the leaflets aside*): This goes to the Vadon factory. Now for the dry docks: the brochures *When the War Ends*—one, two, three, four, five ... (*A drop falls: plink! He turns and looks at the ceiling, then at the bucket, and resumes counting.*) seven, eight, nine, ten. (*Another drop: plink! He frowns.*) Does your ceiling always drip like this?

WOMAN: This is the third year. It started back when they took my husband, Ovrām, to the front. Since then I have waited and counted the drops. It takes seventy drops to wash a shirt and ten to iron it. Do you know how many drops fall during a day? Four hundred and thirty times one hundred. How many is that, would you say?

ELDERLY MAN: Forty-three thousand.

WOMAN: I have waited and counted. My head is like a sieve. My whole life has been like a sieve: these drops have made holes in it. I remember I began counting them after seeing him off. (*Counting the drops*) One, two. When I saw him off I said: "But you are a boilermaker, Ovrām. You have grown hard of hearing in the factory, and yet they are still taking you." And he said to me ... three ... "That's why they are taking us, because we are deaf and even blind." And he went. There was a fog, and you couldn't see the gate. I called after him: "Ovrām!" He didn't turn around ... four ... "When can I expect you back?" He didn't turn around. But at the factory he stopped. I caught up with him. Just then ... five ... It was six o'clock and the sirens blew. He never used to cry, but there I saw him listening and crying ... Six ... Tell me, what is the biggest number?

ELDERLY MAN: A quadrillion, I think.

WOMAN: A quadrillion. If someone told me that when the quadrillionth drop fell the war would end and my Ovrām would come back, I would count every drop and not miss one! (*Passionately, with tears in her eyes*) I would collect each drop and string them together like beads in his memory. Like this. (*Standing, as if in prayer, and counting the drops*) Seven. Eight. Nine.

YOUNG MAN: Sister, again you—

WOMAN: Eight. Nine. Ten—

YOUNG MAN: See? ... (*To the ELDERLY MAN*) What can we do?

ELDERLY MAN (*sternly*): What? Distribute literature! Organize! Agitate! We must fire up the whole world with our slogans!

YOUNG MAN: I have a friend here. Shall I call him?

ELDERLY MAN: Who is he?

YOUNG MAN: A university student.

ELDERLY MAN (*frowning*): Hm!

YOUNG MAN: Not a regular student. He's studying at home through university extension. He came to town from the village to study. His father is a shepherd. The boy is a little bit of a dreamer, but he's reliable. One of us.

ELDERLY MAN: Seven! Call him!

## Scene 6

*My first and best friend and comrade, LUKA comes to see me.*

LUKA: Hello, Ilko, what are you doing?

I (*with pathos*): I am writing her a letter.

LUKA: The one hundred and thirty-first one?

I: Don't laugh, Luka!

LUKA: Are you going to tear it up soon?

I: Don't laugh! Can't you sense the mood I'm in? (*From below I hear the chords.*) High and stellar like the sky. First! (*Pointing to the helicon*) Do you see this? It is called a helicon. When you blow *forte* on it you can blow out a lamp. But I shall learn to play it well enough to blow out the stars in the sky.

LUKA (*with irony*): What for?

I: Just to keep myself busy.

LUKA: You'll be busy, but what about an income?

I: I'll have an income too. This helicon is from the orchestra that plays in the summer on the boulevards, in the fall at weddings, and in the winter at funerals—from the orchestra of humanism. There are helicon players who manage to get this boia not only to play, but to ring like a silver bell. Like this: boom, boom. (*Just then the clock strikes below as if on purpose.*) And I'll learn how! I must! But the most important thing is that I'm writing her a letter. (*From below I hear, after the Grave, the surge of the first wave of the brilliantly ardent Allegro molto e con brio.*) Listen! (*Reading and fantasizing*) "Perhaps I'll also tear this one up, but I write and shall go on writing because I believe in Petrarch and eternal love. In love eternal. Besides, golden figures cast black shadows in history, but from the monastic figure of Petrarch there falls a bright, golden reflection—that of eternal love. I believe and I write. You are playing something new today, I don't know what it is, but this music is certainly about a young man who is racing on horseback through the steppes in search of the land of eternal love. There a lonely girl stands at azure windows. When she smiles, she raises her left brow a little. Her eyes are azure. Tell me, winds or you, stars, will the girl go out to meet him, will she open the door, her beautiful little gate, to the land of eternal love? (*Teary yet smiling*) Guess, Luka.

LUKA: That is why girls have a little gate—so that it can be opened.

I: No, not that! Guess, whether I will send this letter or not?



LUKA: Whatever you did with the hundred and thirty earlier ones.

I (*solemnly and categorically*): I'll do it today. I'll deliver it myself.

LUKA: Today we have to hand out the literature, and you must help us. Let's go!

I: We'll take it tomorrow.

LUKA: You want to postpone the cause of social revolution till tomorrow?

I: Nothing of the sort! But remember, Luka: the flag of struggle fluttering over the world is bathed in blood. What for? So that tomorrow the banner of free labour may fly over us. But this will happen only when the flag of eternal love rises over the entire world.

LUKA: To hell with your eternal love! Today at the shop-floor meeting a comrade from Petrograd said, "We must do everything to let the train of the revolution go at full speed toward socialism." And you want to stop it at the station ... (*mockingly*) "Eternal Love."

I (*annoyed and offended, after he turns to go*): Only when the man who now beats his wife becomes a Petrarch will the universal social spring come. And you say to hell with it! To hell with the whole problem!

## Scene 7

*I almost follow LUKA. I am carrying a letter. Yes. At any other time I would have torn it up, as I did a hundred and thirty others before. But now I am forced to deliver it. So I am carrying it. Down the steps to where SHE lives. But how shall I deliver it? I walk further down. I see an elderly worker emerging from the basement, weighed down with bundles of literature. LUKA is behind him.*

NASTIA (*giving LUKA a piece of Easter bread and some Easter eggs, whispering*): Take it. For the road.

LUKA: There you go... (*To the ELDERLY MAN, pointing to the Easter eggs*) Should I take it, Comrade Hamar? Religion?

ELDERLY MAN: Take it. We'll eat it all the same!<sup>2</sup>

*In order not to run into LUKA, I go back upstairs. Through PEROTSKY'S door I can hear the clock striking. And then the electric doorbell.*

PEROTSKY'S VOICE (*to his HOUSEKEEPER*): It's a telegram from André from the front: "Obtained leave. Arriving on the first on train six." He's going to be here in half an hour. Annette, get the bath and the bedclothes ready! And please tell me how much you spent today. Don't be offended, Annette, I trust you and will go on trusting you, but when there's a revolution it is necessary to keep strict accounts. Thank you, Annette. (*Reading*) Three door locks: eleven rubles and seventy-three kopeks. And for smashing the Russian crown, Annette! Write it down. The revolutionaries should be charged for that. And for the strike at my mill charge the workers. Who was that for? Bromide. Who was that for? Us or them? Don't you dare buy it! Where there is the smell of bromide there will soon be the smell of corpses. Don't you dare! Receipts: rent from Stupai-Stupanenko—ten rubles and fifteen kopeks. That's all? What about the rent for the mezzanine? And for the basement? Evict them! I'm not afraid of their

<sup>2</sup> See appendix A1 for a variant of this scene.

revolution! The one thing I fear is that they will demolish the foundation on which Russia rests, its unity and indivisibility. But it will not be destroyed by Stupai-Stupanenkos. Russia will survive and weather all revolutions. Russia! The Russian land! Rus! Where is this beautiful music coming from? Annette, my dear! Get me my uniform from the closet. I shall go to church, Annette! Do you remember Easter morning of 1913, the birch tree outside the window, and the dawn? Russia was all fragrant then, Annette, and now! Attention! I'm trying to regiment my thoughts, Annette! What chaos! Annette, keep expenditures down! In a ceremonial march, my thoughts! Left march!

*It is quiet. He must have gone because I hear another voice. It is Perotsky's son, GEORGES.*

GEORGES: Well, my dear Annette?

ANNETTE: Georges, your papa has told me to keep expenditures down.

GEORGES: I'll give it back to you. I give you the word of a future officer. I'll give it back.

ANNETTE: Georges, you must understand, there is no money.

GEORGES: My word of honour, I'll give it back! You should know that in a month or two our senior class of cadets will become ensigns. I'll go to war! Against the Bolsheviks! I'll click my heels, jangle my spurs, look into the mirror, and see (*fantasizing*) a young officer with shining epaulettes and a black mustache.

ANNETTE: You are a dreamer, my little boy!

GEORGES: Little boy? (*Tries to be crude but only sounds naïve.*) A young officer with five condoms in his pocket and ... a beauty queen!

ANNETTE (*turning pale, her eyes wide open*): Georges!

GEORGES: *Entre nous soit dit.*<sup>3</sup> Annette, you will suffer like the Virgin Mary when your little boy goes to war. You will unbutton my tunic, hang a gold medallion around my neck and cry like my late dear mother used to.

ANNETTE, visibly moved, opens her handbag.

GEORGES: Outside the evening will be like a sad monk, and the star like a candle. My father will call me. Taking off his glasses, he'll say: "Georges, be a faithful servant of the tsar" ... and not a word more.

ANNETTE, *of course, takes out some banknotes.*

GEORGES: We'll ride quickly to the station. You'll be with me. Papa will be in the back. I'll enter a first-class carriage and will find there a beautiful stranger, a young woman, just like you, Annette. (*Kisses her.*) She will have round, white elbows and breasts like yours, Annette! It will be night, there will be a journey, conversations, and adventures. (*Kisses her passionately, the way a man kisses a woman.*)

ANNETTE (*both shocked and pleased, of course*): Georges! I'll call your papa!

GEORGES (*drawing back*): The engine will heave a sigh and move in the direction of the front. Its whistle will sound: to war, to war. The Emperor, Russia, hurrah! I have gone to war.

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<sup>3</sup> Let it remain said only between us.

## Scene 8

GEORGES *rushes by ME like the wind and knocks on ZINKA's door.*

ZINKA: Who is it?

GEORGES: It's me. Can I see you?

ZINKA: Why?

GEORGES: I've come ... Don't you know why?

ZINKA: Are you looking for a mommy or have you lost your way?

GEORGES: I've come ... Papa sent me! To collect the rent for the apartment. He said he'd evict you if you don't pay today.

ZINKA (*resigned*): Well, come in, Mr. Landlord.

## Scene 9

*Almost on tiptoe I approach my favourite door and stand in front of it. The first wave of the brilliant Allegro molto e con brio fades. SHE continues playing—it's the tone poem of a rebellious spirit, an eternal song of love. Suddenly she stops.*

SHE: Ah, my father, with a pinched Ukrainian mustache and a grey tuft of hair!

FATHER (*reading solemnly*): "The chronicle of the teacher of painting and calligraphy, Ivan Stepanovych Stupai-Stupanenko, a Ukrainian of Zaporozhian lineage."

SHE (*humorously*): Ouch!

FATHER: "And so! The seventh of March 1917 in Ukraine. A month ago I could not sleep at night, thinking all the time that the night was as big as Russia, and Russia was as big as the night, while nothing was heard or seen of our Ukraine. But today I read the declaration of our Central Rada<sup>4</sup>: To the Ukrainian people, the people of peasants, workers, and toilers ... A month has passed and what a change! I bless the Revolution!"

SHE: And I bless it, too!

FATHER: "The twenty-seventh of March. I read that on Sunday a large Ukrainian public gathering was held in Kyiv. Hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of Ukrainians swore before Shevchenko's portrait not to rest until our Ukraine is restored to full freedom. I swear it, too!"

SHE: I do too! Not only to Shevchenko, but to you, your mustache, and your grey tuft, Papa.

FATHER: "The thirtieth. I dreamt about the glorious hetman of all Ukraine, Ivan Stepanovych Mazepa."<sup>5</sup>

SHE: So did I! He was driving a car, wasn't he? And behind him there were many Zaporozhian Cossacks on bicycles.

<sup>4</sup> The supreme council of Ukraine after the February Revolution of 1917, and the parliament of the Ukrainian National Republic from November 1917 to April 1918.

<sup>5</sup> The hetman (1687–1709) of the Cossack state in Left-Bank Ukraine who sided with Charles XII of Sweden against Peter I of Russia in 1709. Peter's army defeated Charles and Mazepa's forces at the Battle of Poltava.

FATHER: “The thirty-first. The Bolsheviks write that there is no need for state borders. They are for internationalism. Does that mean that Ukraine has no borders? They should be ashamed of themselves!”

SHE: Yes, they should!

FATHER: “P.S. I must explain to them what is at issue and what Ukraine is.” (*Writing*) It’s essential! (*Reading*) “The first. Tomorrow is Easter. I wonder if Ukraine needs God now? I think, if it does, then it must be our own, Ukrainian God. Any other one would betray or deceive us. Maryna has been playing some wonderful music all evening. It must be Ukrainian because I can hear in it the grey-whiskered Zaporozhian Cossacks dashing through the eternal steppe, seeking good fortune for their Ukraine.” Especially when you play fast, Maryna, like this—(*singing*) “Tocky-tocky-tock-tock! Troo-too-too!” (*Kisses her.*) Play it for me!

*SHE plays. Again, a wave of brilliant emotion rises from the rebellious depths to the starry skies. Behind her, the illuminated corner of the room seems to float under the taut sail of the curtain: Shevchenko’s bust, the flowers, SHE, bent over the keyboard, her father with his chronicle, and I behind the door. We sail above life like on the ship Argo on a journey to infinitely wonderful lands, each in search of our own golden fleece.*

FATHER: Is this a sonata?

SHE: The *Sonata Pathétique*.

FATHER: What’s the composer’s name?

SHE: Beethoven.

FATHER: What? Not a Ukrainian?

SHE: A German.

FATHER: Then his mother must have been Ukrainian.

SHE: Father, you’re a comedian. He died nearly a hundred years ago and never lived in Ukraine.

FATHER: Hm. He must have heard Ukrainian music somewhere!<sup>6</sup> It’s a Ukrainian sonata. After all, the Russians stole Hlynka from us and say that he is theirs, Glinka! He’s not Glinka, but Hlynka. It’s a Ukrainian surname! He is Ukrainian. From now on, Maryna dear, we won’t give up any Ukrainians. We won’t, we won’t! Not one! I plan to go out into the streets at once, to churches, wherever there are people, and proselytize in favour of our free Ukraine. Now every Ukrainian, before he goes to sleep, must think about Ukraine and rise with the sun with his country as his chief concern. First let’s rebuild it, and then we’ll support internationalism. That’s the way to do it, not the way you write about it, Comrade Bolsheviks! How can internationalism exist without Ukraine, without the bandura?

MARYNA: Father, you’re a comedian. (*Kisses him.*)

FATHER: I’m going.

*I shove the letter between the door and the doorpost and dash upstairs to my door. I wait.*

<sup>6</sup> Beethoven became acquainted with Ukrainian folk music at the Vienna palace of Prince Andrei Razumovsky (a son of Hetman Kyrylo Rozumovsky) and incorporated several Ukrainian melodies in his compositions.

## Scene 10

STUPAI (*having opened the door*): Oh! A letter! It's for you, Maryna.

MARYNA: Without a stamp or a postmark?

STUPAI: It's probably the one that falls into the laps of Ukrainian girls—a golden letter.  
(*Leaves.*)

MARYNA (*alone*): Not a golden, but a naked one. (*Reading, repeating some words aloud*)  
“...This music is certainly about a young man who dashes on horseback through the steppes in search of the land of eternal love ...” (*With warm amusement*) There you are! Here's another comedian. On a horse, I bet, in calico shorts ... (*Reading*) “There, in a blue window stands a lonely girl.” Hm! (*Smiling, her left eyebrow raised*) “Tell me, winds or stars, will the girl come out to meet him? ...” (*Pauses.*) “Tell me, *messieurs* winds, whisper to me, *mesdames* stars, how to answer such a dear funny man—our hermit in the attic? (*Sits down. A desk. A pencil. Her left hand is on the piano keyboard. Her right hand writes down her thoughts.*) “The girl is lonely. Yes. She is waiting. For whom I do not know, but she has been waiting a long time! In her dreams and visions she has waited and still waits, somewhere as if in blue windows, for someone from beyond the Dnipro or from the three Cossack mounds, from Zhovti Vody,<sup>7</sup> or the Sich.<sup>8</sup> For whom? (*Touching the keyboard*) Perhaps for you, my dear poet. Certainly for you, if you are on a horse. Yes, only you if you are on a horse and armed.” No, I can't write that—it sounds like notes for a political program. Let me write from the heart. (*Touching several keys*) “A lonely girl waits for you, dear poet. In the land of eternal love.” No, better that it sound as it does in his letter. “In a land where gates have two rusty locks—one Russian and the other Polish ... waits a girl and dreams of giving her body and soul to the one who can smash these locks.” No, let it come from the heart! ...

## Scene 11

MARYNA *is playing*. I feel that in another second, one more touch of the keys, a wave of brilliant excitement will reach the sky and bounce off the stars, and then the sky, a stellar piano, and the silver horn of the moon will play an eternal symphony pathétique above the entire world. I can see incredibly clearly, I can see the distant stars in space and I can hear the music of the spheres, but I cannot see one thing—MARYNA is carrying a letter to me. A soldier runs past her on the stairs. He is an officer. He turns around and runs back down to her enthusiastically.

ANDRÉ: *Mon Dieu!* Is that you, Marine? How are you? Do you recognize your old high school *chevalier d'amour*, André? I haven't seen you for three years! More! Do you remember? I wrote a secret note to you at a dance, brought it to you myself, and

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<sup>7</sup> The place where a Ukrainian Cossack and peasant army led by Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky defeated the forces of the Polish Crown in May 1648.

<sup>8</sup> The Zaporozhian Cossacks' stronghold on an island below the Dnipro Rapids, near the present-day city of Zaporizhzhia.

introduced myself. Remember how we danced the waltz and the minuet? You are even more beautiful now.

MARYNA: Have you come from the front?

ANDRÉ: Just now. I am so happy. Imagine darkness, foxholes, trenches, everything covered in clay and mud, even the sky, day after day, month after month. A man himself turns into clay there without a woman, that is, without a soul, and has a single dark desire for her that weighs upon him like black quicksilver. And now what a contrast: I am on a train, there are city lights and Ukrainian stars...

MARYNA: But you are Russian?

ANDRÉ: But I love them because they are mine. I am on a train, there are lights and stars, a station, and I'm a coachman on rubber tires. Damn! To top it all, the bells are ringing and suddenly you appear, Marine, *ma première tendresse* ... I can't talk any more. (*With outstretched arms*) So, Christ is Risen!<sup>9</sup>

MARYNA (*recoiling*): Indeed, He is Risen!

ANDRÉ: Well, I guess I'll kiss your shadow instead. (*Kisses it.*) After this one moment, after this encounter, I am ready to go back to the front and fight for you a whole year without leave. For you!

MARYNA: And for the Ukrainian stars?

ANDRÉ: I am ready to fight against the whole world!

MARYNA: Thank you. But first you must visit your family, wash off the clay, and rest. That's an order.

ANDRÉ: Marine!

MARYNA: And come to see me tomorrow.

*The OFFICER, kissing her with his eyes, runs home. MARYNA is coming to see me. She slows down. One step forward, one step back.*

MARYNA: A poet, perhaps, can conquer your soul and the whole world, but not a kilometre of any territory, my Joan of Arc. (*Goes back.*)

## Scene 12

*For the third time I hear the Sonata Pathétique. Suddenly the accompaniment to the Allegro resembles the tolling of a hundred Easter bells. I look out of the little window. The belfries look like white poplars. From the nearest one emanates a chorus: "Christ is Risen!" Rockets of fireworks rise like comets, red, blue, and green. The world is dancing. It's a concert pathétique. Only low over the horizon hangs, pale, jagged sickle of the moon—the crucified Christ.*

## Scene 13

*STUPAI comes back so excited and uplifted that his tuft of hair is sticking up.*

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<sup>9</sup> At Easter Ukrainians and other Eastern-rite Christians kiss each other on the cheek after greeting each other with the phrase "Christ is Risen!" (Ukrainian: *Khrystos Voskres!*).

STUPAI: Maryna, play the *Pathétique*. Ukraine is rising from the dead! I have just recruited three more members to our Enlightenment society: a village school teacher, a carpenter from the neighbourhood, and a night watchman. Play! Yes! Like that! Holy Russia, you daughter of a bitch, we'll kick your big fat backside now! Listen how Ukraine is playing and ringing! The grey-haired Zaporozhians are rising from their graves and saddling their horses again. Can you hear them galloping?

MARYNA (*playing*): You can't win a war with only the help from the deceased. We need partisans, Father! Young ones!

STUPAI: They are racing across the eternal steppes of Ukraine in search of a golden destiny. And suddenly they see a star. They are flying over the ages brandishing their spears! Hey!

MARYNA: Hey! Instead of dreams, Father, we need cannons and machine guns!

STUPAI: What?

MARYNA: Never mind. I was saying that you're a poet, Papa.

STUPAI: I am a Ukrainian. Wait, Maryna. I'm going to exchange Easter greetings with them right away. (*Dialling the telephone*) Please give me 23-07. Is that the high-school principal? The Ukrainian Ivan Stepanovych Stupai-Stupanenko wishes you a happy Easter. Ukraine has risen! And you should reply "Indeed it has risen!" Ha! Play the *Pathétique*, Maryna! (*To the operator*) Please give me 17-00. I wish to speak to Major General Perotsky!

## Scene 14

PEROTSKY, *in uniform, picks up the telephone.*

PEROTSKY: With whom do I have the honour of speaking?

STUPAI: A Ukrainian, Ivan Stepanovych Stupai-Stupanenko, wants to wish you a Happy Easter. Ukraine has risen, your excellency!

PEROTSKY (*after waiting for his heartbeat to return to normal, answering in Russian*): My reply is: Atten-tion! Fall in behind one and indivisible Russia, Ukrainian Gentlemen!

STUPAI: It's different in Ukrainian. Attention, your excellency! Russian general get out of Ukraine, quick march! Maryna, play the *Pathétique*!

## Scene 15

ZINKA (*reading*): "This receipt is issued to our former chambermaid, Zinaida Masiuk, to certify that on the orders of my father, General Perotsky, I received from her the sum of seven rubles as rent, and that on my father's orders I returned the money to her as compensation for my first visit to her and paid her seven more rubles that my father owed her for his visit back in 1913, also at Easter. Signed: graduate of the cadet officer corps, Georges Perotsky." Right. So now you can go home, Georges.

GEORGES (*kneeling*): Tear it up, please. Tear it up, I beg you. At least promise not to show it to anyone. You won't will you?

ZINKA (*alone, after showing him out and closing the door*): Oh, God, how difficult it is. (*Picks up a guitar and plays, praying at the same time.*) God, dear God! Why won't you help me? Perhaps you don't want to?

## Scene 16

*In the basement NASTIA stands petrified like a statue: through the door a legless soldier wearing the St. George Cross<sup>10</sup> comes crawling.*

SOLDIER: Don't you recognize your husband, Nastia? Hello! As you can see, they've shortened me a bit, made me lower than everyone else. But it doesn't matter! I'll go back to my comrades in the factory, perhaps they'll lift me up. I guess I said I'll go, but I meant—crawl. For two months I've been crawling back. Why are you standing there, Nastia? Come and embrace the hero who's half the husband you had. (*Crawls to the middle of the basement and begins crying.*)

## Act Two

### Scene 1

*It's daytime. The helicon gleams in the sun. After a sleepless night, yet I pace tirelessly around my room. Underneath, the clock keeps striking from time to time. MARYNA is playing the same Sonata Pathétique, but today I don't hear the starry Grave or the brilliant Allegro, only, like flowers in the sun, the gay Adagio cantabile. However, as usual, I can visualize a limitless steppe and above, in the Argo, she is floating, with her left eyebrow slightly raised, her eyes azure, and there are flowers and dew on the oars. And then, for the second time, I am visited by my unromantic friend, LUKA.*

LUKA: Did you make it?

*I, pretending not to understand, remain silent.*

LUKA (*maliciously*): To her little gates?

*I remain silent.*

LUKA: I bet you tore up your letter.

*I (passionately)*: I delivered it, Luka, I swear I did!

LUKA (*impressed*): Well, and what happened?

*I*: Guess: down what path has the world tirelessly gone for thousands of years?

LUKA (*having understood that I am hopelessly in love, firmly*): The path of revolution!

*I*: The path of love! Guess, Luka, without what would the world have long ago wandered off like an old eunuch across the desert of life?

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<sup>10</sup> A Russian imperial military decoration awarded for distinguished service at the front.



LUKA: Without the path of revolution, just as you are now pacing like a eunuch right here. Listen, Ilko! Today there's a demonstration at eleven. The organizers are all those who are turning the Revolution into an operetta or a liturgy and the class struggle into a parade and kisses. At least our comrade from Petrograd says so, and I agree with him. I bet your Ukrainians will join them, greeting them with embroidered towels as if they were already betrothed. The Bolsheviks are organizing a counter-demonstration. Do you understand? The workers in our factory are all pro-Bolshevik. I have the task of distributing literature on our street and agitating against the war, for an eight-hour workday, and for subscribing to *Pravda*. Will you go with me? Into the street. You can help me distribute literature. Or simply just be there. So that there'll be more of us.

I: I can't.

LUKA: Why?

I: I ... I'm going to see her right now. You don't believe me? I would have gone long ago, Luka but two wild beasts were holding me back: shyness and unsociability. After pacing all night I've exhausted the cursed ones and made them drowsy. Now they're asleep. And I can go! At once! In my mind, I have picked the first words I'll say when we meet: "Don't be surprised that I come uninvited," I will say, "It is you who have entered my heart without an invitation." No, that's wrong. I'll simply say, "How are you? I've come without an invitation; this is a privilege of beggars and lovers."

LUKA: No, it's better if you say, "Please forgive me, but I am not all there. I've come so that you can see an idiot with an icon of eternal love around his neck and in a girl's apron rather than with the red flag. If only I were an idiot! I'm a bastard and a traitor!" That's what you'd say. But you had better realize, Ilko, that I've come to you for the last time, and for the last time I'm telling you: we wrote verses together, you taught me arithmetic and geography, we read books together, and we were friends, but if you won't come out into the street right now, that is, onto the path of the Revolution, I'm no longer your friend, nor are you mine! Ready! Set! Go! (*Leaves.*)

I (*after him*): Luka, you must admit it's easier to make three revolutions at once than to confess to a girl that you love her ... Right, Luka? Look, I'm going!

## Scene 2

*Indeed I do go. Downstairs. Again one current is carrying me to her door, while another is carrying me away and forcing me to go downstairs.*

## Scene 3

*An unheard conversation.*

MARYNA (*finishing playing*): Enough!

ANDRÉ: Play, Marine! More, more!

MARYNA: Do you like it, too?

ANDRÉ (*jealously*): Why too? Who else likes it?

MARYNA: Guess.

ANDRÉ: Oh yes, of course. Him!

MARYNA: That's right. Last night he even woke me up (ANDRÉ's eyes widen) and said, "Daughter, play the *Pathétique*, because I can't sleep."

ANDRÉ: I'd wake you too, if you'd let me.

MARYNA: When he hears this music he always dreams about some Zaporozhian knights, eternal steppes, and Ukraine. Tell me, and what do you dream about?

ANDRÉ: I? Guess!

MARYNA: Russia?

ANDRÉ: I honour it, but no, I don't dream about it.

MARYNA: Revolution?

ANDRÉ: I welcome it, but I don't dream about it.

MARYNA: Surely not Ukraine?

ANDRÉ: Ukrainian stars, bells, and stairs. I am walking along. Suddenly I meet someone. I kiss her shadow. The shadow of beauty! What a masterpiece! I want to take her in my arms and keep on carrying her.

MARYNA: You said you welcomed the Revolution. What for?

ANDRÉ: What we need now is a tricorne hat rather than a Monomakh's fur cap.<sup>11</sup>

MARYNA: Guess what I seem to see when I listen to this music?

ANDRÉ: Your father?

MARYNA: Something wonderful and unintelligible. A vision, dream, and reality all merged. The country seems so dark and wild, so oppressed, that it has even forgotten what happened yesterday and doesn't know what will happen to it tomorrow. The dream: two rusty locks hang on a door, one engraved with a white eagle, the other with a two-headed one.<sup>12</sup> The past and the future are locked. There is a lonely girl in that country. She dreams and waits. Do you know for whom?

ANDRÉ: For whom?

MARYNA: For a knight who loves the Ukrainian stars.

ANDRÉ: Really?

MARYNA: Day after day, night after night, she waits for him to come and break these locks and open the door.

ANDRÉ: For the girl?

MARYNA: For the girl and for the country. (*Strikes a few chords on the piano and lifts them in her hands like flowers.*) Perhaps it's a dream of mine: girl meets her knight. (*Pretends to be completely in love, like that girl.*) "My love, my darling, my long desired one!" And she will lead him, like a hetman, into her salon. And she will say, "Bells of St. Sophia, ring out so that people won't hear me kissing my lover."

ANDRÉ: Marine! Tell me! Is this only a dream, or is there an actual way to attain it, a concrete plan, a realistic program?

MARYNA: This is just a dream, a whimsical girl's musical fancy. But then, instead of a tricorne hat can there not be a hetman's mace? If so, then this is a program for Ukraine. You

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<sup>11</sup> André favours a military dictatorship (the tricorne is an allusion to Napoleon) over tsarist autocracy. Volodymyr Monomakh was the grand prince of Kyiv and all Rus' (1113–25).

<sup>12</sup> The white eagle is the national symbol of Poland, and the two-headed eagle was that of tsarist Russia.

are forming Free Cossack units in advance and I am organizing this movement.<sup>13</sup>

This is concrete plan. Something wonderful and unintelligible, isn't it?

ANDRÉ: The girl should wait for her knight!

MARYNA: Yes?

ANDRÉ: The knight will come! He is already on her threshold.

## Scene 4

*I open the door quietly.*

I: Forgive me! I came uninvited. It is the privilege of beggars and lovers ...

*I see the OFFICER'S back. He is kneeling and kissing the hem of her dress. "The knight has come, Marine. He asks your blessing, darling." I hear this and go away unnoticed.*

## Scene 5

*I return to my room in the attic. I am unbearably depressed. I cannot recognize objects. Everything has changed, grown dimmer and faded. Even the sun does not look like the sun, but like a bright yellow plaster on a wound. Flare-ups and pain all around. I whisper in agony:*

So? Remember when you were still a little boy, you chased dreams on a hobbyhorse and fell off, cutting your bare foot on some sharp broken glass all the way to the bone, all the way to your heart? Remember how you fell off the hobbyhorse into some garbage? It's the same now! It's a garbage dump all around you, and you have fallen off your galloping visionary horse! Is our world simply a garbage dump, and do dreams rise from it like vapours? Yes, Luka, all paths in this world are merely orbits. No matter which one you take, you will end up where you started from—a hole. The only difference is: when you are born you fall out of a hole, but when you die you fall into a hole. That's all. Why should I go? Where should I go? To go round and round in an orbit? (*I go up to the window.*) Should I jump out, or what? (*I look out the window.*)

# Act Three

## Scene 1

*Imagine, my friends, a street in an old provincial city, a sunny corner of a building, a cloud over a golden-domed cathedral, and the distant sound of the Marseillaise. A BOOTBLACK is, sitting and singing:*

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<sup>13</sup> The Free Cossacks were peasant militias formed in 1917 to maintain law and order in Ukraine's countryside. They fought against Bolshevik deserters from the Russian imperial army and, in 1918, the Red Army that invaded Ukraine.

On Saturdays and Sundays,  
Day after day,  
Men in boots  
Used to prowl  
Down city streets.

But now freedom has come,  
The street's not the same,  
There's no work for anyone  
From Saturday to Saturday.

## Scene 2

A SECOND BOOTBLACK *comes up and sits down: Bravo! Encore! You're like a singer in an opera house that is no more.*

FIRST: Do you have a ticket allowing you to occupy this spot? Off with you!

SECOND: Don't start thinking that this really is the opera and you are the ticket office seller.

FIRST: This is my spot.

SECOND: Now we have freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and freedom of place.

FIRST: They write, "Workers of all countries unite," and what are you doing?

SECOND: I've come to unite, of course!

FIRST (*singing and drumming with his brushes*):

I clean and I clean—  
Those boots shine like the sun.

SECOND (*louder*):

And I shall clean the sun  
Better than boots.

FIRST: So you've come here to compete with me? Get out, I say!

SECOND: Shh! Quiet! There's (*pointing to OVRAM*) our real competitor.

## Scene 3

OVRAM *crawls up carrying a box and brushes.*

SECOND: There's a wartime proverb: When two fight, the third should keep out. Isn't that the truth, citizen soldier?

OVRAM: The fight is over for me. That's why I am crawling.

SECOND: You're crawling to a place where the only work left to be done is polishing one's own boots.

OVRAM: If only I had a job like that! Then I would never have crawled here.

## Scene 4

*I see the street filling up with people. The sound of the Marseillaise grows louder and nearer. The cloud seems to be following it from the cathedral. Old PEROTSKY comes out onto the balcony. MARYNA and ANDRÉ stand on a lower balcony.*

MARYNA: What a wonderful day! This is the kind of day the girl will ask of God when she goes to meet her knight. (*Stopping ANDRÉ from moving closer*) Shh! Look: Papa's gone out to agitate. Let's listen! He has a blue and yellow flower in his buttonhole!<sup>14</sup> What a comedian!

FIRST BOOTBLACK (*meeting STUPAI*):  
I clean and I clean—  
This boot polish is like freedom.

SECOND BOOTBLACK:  
See how the sun's shining,  
That's what I can do.

STUPAI (*putting his leg out in front of the FIRST BOOTBLACK*): Go ahead and clean. No, wait a moment! Who are you?

FIRST: What do you mean who? I'm bootblack.

*A crowd gathers.*

STUPAI: Not that! What nationality are you?

FIRST: I am a citizen of the Russian state, obviously.

PEROTSKY (*from the balcony*): Bravo!

STUPAI (*withdrawing his foot and addressing the SECOND BOOTBLACK*): And you?

SECOND: Whatever you like.

STUPAI (*to OVRAM*): And you? (*Recognizing him*) Ah, our neighbour from below! Ovrarm the boilermaker! One of us! A Ukrainian! You can clean my boots!

MARYNA (*on the balcony, to ANDRÉ*): Didn't I say he was a comedian?

ANDRÉ: That's a good example for us! I approve!

SECOND BOOTBLACK (*to the FIRST BOOTBLACK*): Have you ever seen anyone as crazy as Malachi?<sup>15</sup>

FIRST: What does he want?

SECOND: He wants the nation to clean his boots now.

STUPAI: We Stupai-Stupanenkos don't want our nation to clean foreign boots. Enough of that! It's time for us to be free! We have to get on our horses and race across our Cossack steppes together with the eagles and the winds. (*He can almost hear the sound of horses' hooves as part of the Pathétique's Allegro.*)

MARYNA: Bravo, Papa! Bravo!

ANDRÉ: Bravo!

OVRAM: You may be able to get on a horse, but where are you going to put us?

STUPAI: Who is us?

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<sup>14</sup> Blue and yellow were the colours of the flag of the Ukrainian National Republic (1917–20), and are now the colours of Ukraine's national flag.

<sup>15</sup> This is a reference to the protagonist in Kulish's earlier play, *The People's Malachi*.

OVRAM: Me, for example—a legless Ukrainian proletarian—and (*pointing to the BOOTBLACKS*) them.

ZINKA (*coming out of the crowd, a little tipsy*): And what about me? Back under the saddle or on the mattress? Right? (*To the crowd*) They told me that when freedom comes it would be like your own mother. Don't worry, girl, you'll be out of the pit, they said. Life will be like a bed of roses, and you'll have a lover as nice as the sun. So, now I'm calling him: My darling, my love!

A VOICE FROM THE CROWD: Who?

ZINKA: Whoever answers! (*Laughter.*) Although they say I'm the type who will do it for five rubles, I haven't sold everything yet. I've kept something for when my love comes to me at least for one day. That will be my Easter Day.

LAUGHTER AND VOICES: Millions will answer your call.

ZINKA: Although there are millions of you, he's not among you. I lit a candle and put on a girlish blue dress, but he hasn't come. Then I thought I'd go to see a neighbour who's unhappy too. But he kept on writing letters. Then I decided to go out into the street and shout: My darling, my love! My love, my darling!

PEROTSKY (*from the balcony*): There's your freedom of speech, Gentlemen! And in general! The essence of freedom! A symbol of your freedom! (*Disappears from the balcony.*)

LUKA: Yes! That's the essence of bourgeois freedom. The symbol! A human being crying out... (*To the crowd*) Comrades!

ANDRÉ (*interrupting*): Citizens!

STUPAI (*gathering up his wits*): Fellow Ukrainians!

I can see three currents flowing through the crowd. Each one wants to gather round its spokesman. André is given an ovation. That's why he begins speaking first.

ANDRÉ: Who hasn't seen, who hasn't known, our land as it was yesterday. Our country ...

STUPAI: Ukraine!

LUKA: The working people, the proletariat!

ANDRÉ: The whole of Russia was an unmoving, oppressive monument: a throne with the steps of slavery leading up to it on which we, the slaves, stood. The golden collar, the senator, the chamberlain—they were all slaves.

LUKA: Comrades! That's a lie! We lived and continue to live as slaves—we the workers, the soldiers, the Russians, and the others! ...

STUPAI: There are no slaves more wretched than we, fellow Ukrainians!

ANDRÉ: Of course, the peasants and the Ukrainians were slaves. Citizens! This land of slavery and oppression ...

STUPAI: Ukraine!

ANDRÉ: This country of no national identity and prose ...

LUKA: Of crosses and gallows...

ANDRÉ: I wasn't able to see through my tears. (*With pathos*) And today?

*He pauses, and from somewhere one BOOTBLACK'S normal, matter-of-fact voice is heard.*

FIRST BOOTBLACK: It has to be cleaned, citizen!

ANDRÉ: And today we can see and smell from afar the road to freedom. The freedom star is blazing. The horizons glow. Yes! We must get on our horses and race to the west and

to the east. So that our country will no longer be borne by a troika,<sup>16</sup> but by a million brass and steel horses, so that the golden Cossack maces may gleam, so that the Dardanelles will fall into ruins before us, so that not only will all nations and states make way for us, but even the winds will fall reverent at our feet and the horizons will salute us!

*Applause. Shouts of "Glory." Noise.*

A YOUNG LADY (*enthusiastically to a sailor*): Sailor, so now you're going to break through the Dardanelles, right?

SAILOR (*with one eye missing, pock-marks and a voice like a broken accordion*): Your Dardanelles, Miss, we'll break through now, if you like, but let him (*pointing to ANDRÉ*) break through the Turkish ones.

A LADY (*the feathers in her hat shaking belligerently*): At our meeting we, the weaker sex, rejected the Bolsheviks' proposal to stop the war. We said: we are not fighting against the German people but against Kaiser Wilhelm's army! Forward! To the front!

SAILOR (*making way for her*): Please, after you!

LUKA: Instead of the golden hetman's mace, may the mace of proletarian dictatorship strike like lightning in Ukraine!

SAILOR: Drive the bourgeoisie, bowler hats, and Junkers into the earth's hold. Into the lower depths of freedom!

ANDRÉ: Our platform is: Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!

YOUNG LADY (*whose shoes are being cleaned by OVRAM*): Liberty! Equality! Fraternity! (*Stamps her foot in delight.*)

OVRAM (*suddenly throwing his shoe-cleaning box down*): For ten years I worked in a factory, and for three years I served at the front. For that, as you see, they gave me a cross. Now they offer me liberty—freedom to crawl with my cross into the grave. Liberty? I have no bread. Equality? Without my legs, I am lower than everyone else! Fraternity? I clean your shoes! Take your cross and give me back my legs! (*Rips off his St. George Cross and throws it away.*)

LUKA: Our platform is: All power to the Soviets! World revolution! Socialism!

GEORGES (*standing hatless on the roof of the building and holding the Russian flag, shouting out enthusiastically*): Long live Russia and the Emperor! Hurrah!

GEORGES *shoots into the crowd below. I see LUKA falter. I call out, "Luka!" and run as fast as I can downstairs. On the street I see people scattering in all directions. The street empties. In the middle is LUKA, who is wounded in the arm, ZINKA, who is bandaging his arm, OVRAM, and the SAILOR.*

<sup>16</sup> An allusion to the ending of Nikolai Gogol's novel *Dead Souls*, where a troika dashing madly into the snow-covered steppe functions as a metaphor for Russia's condition of backwardness and disarray.

## Act Four

### Scene 1

*Imagine, my friends, the same street and town late during the October Revolution. Artillery firing in the distance is heard. It's a windy night. I am secretly on watch outside the clandestine Red partisan meeting place, OVRAM'S flat in the basement.*

### Scene 2

*The window in the basement is shut. An oil lamp flickers. Water drips from the ceiling. HAMAR is writing. He is wearing a cap. Next to him a messenger, also in a cap, waits nervously. OVRAM is sitting in the corner on a plank bed. Next to him is NASTIA, like a shadow.*

HAMAR: To the Revolutionary Headquarters ... (*Stops to think and tears up what he has written.*) No, you'd better just tell them. There is military movement: the railway station is in the hands of partisans—they all seem to be pro-Bolshevik. The Whites are on this side. Their reserves are close by—about three hundred infantry men, armed with machine guns. They are in an angry mood. They are hanging people. They are holding a prayer service. Meanwhile, we are scattered in threes and fives in various apartments. Altogether there are about seventy of us. We are all ready to fight. But we have very few arms! We have three bullets per rifle, but our spirits are as if we had hundreds of bullets. We are full of enthusiasm! Still, I think it's dangerous to start an uprising before consulting with the partisans. I've sent Luka to contact them and I'm waiting for his return. If he doesn't come back, we have agreed to start the fighting alone before moonrise. That's it. Period.

NASTIA: I think someone's coming.

OVRAM (*after a pause*): It's the wind!

HAMAR (*immersed in his own thoughts*): What?

OVRAM: The wind!

HAMAR *glances at his watch.*

NASTIA: The seven-hundred-and-fifth drop has fallen since he went. Sixth, seventh, eighth ...

OVRAM: Hush!

*The MESSENGER sets off.*

### Scene 3

*In the meantime, upstairs.*

MARYNA (*writing*): Headquarters. To André Perotsky ... (*Tears up what she has written and turns to her father.*) No, you'd better go and tell them.

STUPAI: Perhaps we could phone?



MARYNA: What a comedian you are! Such matters aren't discussed on the phone. Tell them that the committee ...

STUPAI: What committee, Maryna?

MARYNA: He'll know ... That at the moment it can't give any assistance. But the committee will summon its village detachments right away. Tell them that in a day they'll get some help. What else? That there is unrest in the basements. He knows. But tell them there is a possibility of a workers' uprising. They must beware of an attack from the rear. Tell them that, Papa. The main thing is you must run, my Dear, and find out what is the situation and mood at the front and at army headquarters. That's all. *(Kisses him.)*

STUPAI: Run again! I don't know whether I'm a Ukrainian of Zaporozhian descent or a horse. And I don't understand anything. Some sort of committee. They should have a base of operations and a military council. Instead they have a committee. That's not the way the Zaporozhians fought. *(Runs out.)*

## Scene 4

*I signal "danger" to my people and hide behind a balustrade. An enemy patrol is walking along the street. Two of the SOLDIERS are furtively smoking, inhaling under the cover of their sleeves, their mustaches glowing, the badges on their caps flickering. One of them trips.*

FIRST SOLDIER: Damn! *(Sotto voce.)* They buried him but left his lower legs sticking out.

SECOND SOLDIER: You aren't sorry, are you? Those are Bolshevik legs!

FIRST SOLDIER: I'm not sorry, but if we have to run, we could trip over them.

THIRD SOLDIER *(obviously drunk, stopping in front of the buried body)*: How unique! How original! My antipode! His head's down, my head is up. When it's day for us, it's night for him, and vice versa. Long live geography! Let's piss on him!

## Scene 5

*At times I think I can hear someone playing. But surely it's because of tension that my ear is hallucinating. Or if not my ear, then perhaps it's the wind in the wires. Yes, that's it. Who else would dare to play on such a night. Only the wind. Or perhaps drunken ZINKA on her guitar. She has been partying with some officers all day. But what if it is not the wind or Zinka, but someone else? What if it is SHE? Her window is covered with a kilim. A candle is probably burning inside. It is as quiet as in a boat cabin. Only dull artillery fire can be heard in the distance. SHE is restless. SHE is listening and pacing quietly. Now SHE is trying to play even more quietly parts of the Rondo from the Pathétique. Yes, SHE is playing. Let her boat full of music float in the middle of this anxious black night disturbed by the wind, torn open by the wind.*

## Scene 6

*I feel strange: I am standing on guard, and all around me there is music. A yellowish streak of light flashes somewhere (MARYNA has lifted the corner of the kilim in the window) and disap-*

pears with a light blue afterglow. It is extinguished by the wind and the music of the Pathétique. (Moves away from the window and plays the Grave.) Behind the bass chords, nervous horses' hooves can be heard. Someone is lighting a fire. A horse is running through the dark steppe. Oh, but it is I, racing on a horse into the land of eternal love! Beyond the black horizon, near the azure window SHE is waiting. SHE is looking out for me. (Now MARYNA once again uncovers the window and looks out. SHE is going downstairs to meet me. SHE is going to meet ME.) SHE is holding out her arms, her left eyebrow a little raised and her eyes smiling. (I am sleepy and MARYNA looks at me.) We are engulfed by the music of the Rondo. A silvery serpentine melody. At the same time I can feel the wind and see the night. "The sun doesn't love the earth as much as I love you," I want to say to MARYNA, but I cannot. SHE seems to be moving away, floating away. The serpentine melody breaks off and is carried away by the wind. SHE seems to be in a boat. I see the mast, the billowing sail, the taut ropes. Instead of the Rondo, I hear the Grave once again. MARYNA stands under the sail.

"Is this the Argo?" I ask.

"This is an old Zaporozhian boat," she answers.

"Cossack boats had no sails," I mention.

"This is not a sail!"

I look more closely and see that it is a flag. A yellow and blue one. We sail off. LUKA comes to meet us. Bent over, he carries a red banner on his back. For some reason the banner is as round as the moon. I remember that I left my guard post, that to him I am a traitor. I am overcome with shame, restlessness, and alarm.

"Luka!" I cry out.

"Quiet!" admonishes Luka.

## Scene 7

Indeed, it is LUKA, bent over, running across the street. The moon is on the horizon. It is deep red and wind-blown and truly resembles a flag.

I (moving toward LUKA): Well?

LUKA (out of breath): The moon's rising! Faster! Where is Hamar?

I: He's here!

HAMAR meets us on the steps.

LUKA (out of breath): I got through behind the cemetery, where the gulley is. (To ME) You remember that's where we used to go for walks in spring, where you taught me to write verse ... The Whites didn't see me, but the partisans almost shot me. They thought I was a spy. At last their commander showed up. He believed me and asked who and how strong we are. I told him we are workers, but we lack arms. I told him everything ... They told me that as soon as the moon rises, we should definitely strike from the rear, and they will attack as well ... I ran as fast as I could because the moon was about to rise. (To ME) And this devilish wind—

HAMAR (enthusiastically): The moon is ours and the wind is on our side! Wait a little longer—the whole world will be ours.

## Scene 8

STUPAI *returns. He stops at the half-buried body, shakes his head, and runs to his apartment.*

MARYNA (*anxiously coming up to her father*): Did you pass the message on?

STUPAI: Yes.

MARYNA: Well, how are things there? What's happening?

STUPAI: The moon is rising.

MARYNA: Oh, God! He's on about the moon.

STUPAI: And the wind! The wind, Maryna, do you hear it?

MARYNA (*sarcastically*): From the south or from where?

STUPAI: From the north.

MARYNA: Pity! We need a western wind. Are the stars out?

STUPAI (*realizing she is being sarcastic*): The wind is coming straight from the front! From the partisans! (*Almost with delight*) They say there are many Ukrainians among them. (*Notices MARYNA'S sincere concern for him.*) Virtually all of them are Ukrainian, they say!

MARYNA: But are they aware that they are Ukrainians?

STUPAI: Hm! (*After a pause*) While among these, only a few are Ukrainians. At headquarters I heard no Ukrainian spoken. And the population is against it. I heard that four out of five who were hanged were Ukrainians. The one who lies half-buried was also a Ukrainian, on his mother's side. By the way, one of his boots is already missing. But there is no mention of Ukraine. Perhaps the red flag is better after all. Right, Maryna?

MARYNA: Even if the yoke turns red, it will still be a yoke. (*STUPAI sighs.*) Did you see anything apart from the moon?

STUPAI: Yes, I did.

MARYNA: And did you hear anything other than the wind?

STUPAI: Yes, I did.

MARYNA: Well?

STUPAI (*after a pause*): It seems that they won't hold out. They are getting ready to flee.

MARYNA (*excited*): Really? (*Telephones.*) Headquarters? Please call Ensign Perotsky to the phone.

*Suddenly the power goes out.*

## Scene 9

GENERAL PEROTSKY (*on the phone, ANNETTE by his side holding a candle*): Headquarters? Please call Ensign Perotsky. André, is that you? Why is there no electricity? Besides that, Georges has fled from home! Probably to the front. He asked Annette to give him the golden medallion with the Virgin Mary, do you understand? He took a rifle too. For God's sake find him and force him to come home. For God's sake! How are things at the front? I'm calm, but I had a dream: Russia was like an empty field covered with snow. In the middle of it was a stove and Christ wearing felt boots. Then Stupai came and sat on the stove. What arrogance! (*Upset*) Do you hear, André? André?

*The artillery barrage grows louder. ANNETTE drops the candle.*

PEROTSKY (*in the dark*): Headquarters! The telephone has been disconnected!

ANNETTE *uncovers the window. The moon casts red rays. The reflection in the mirror is red.*

PEROTSKY (*shouting*): Cover the window!

## Scene 10

NASTIA (*before the gunshot*): Tenth. Eleventh. Twelfth.

*A shot rings out.*

OVRAM (*loudly*): The last one! Open the door!

NASTIA: For whom?

OVRAM (*loudly*): For whom? For the socialist revolution!

## Scene 11

STUPAI (*wanting to uncover the window*): I'll go out to meet them!

MARYNA: They'll kill you!

STUPAI: I'm armed.

MARYNA: With what?

STUPAI: The Ukrainian language.

MARYNA: Language is persuasive only when it's backed up by weapons.

STUPAI: I will go out to meet them and remind them of Shevchenko's sacred, social words:  
"Embrace, my Brethren, the smallest brother."

MARYNA: Whom will you remind? The Bolsheviks? The bandits? The bloodthirsty scum who are destroying our loftiest ideals? (*Covers the window.*)

## Scene 12

*Along the street the Whites are fleeing in groups and individually. Someone again trips over the legs of the half-buried man and swears. The emptiness of the street continues to be frightening. There are no lights in the windows, no sounds. Distant firing is heard. The moon. The wind.*

## Scene 13

*Three crouching partisans run from shadow to shadow. One is a sailor, the second is wearing a Persian-lambskin hat with a red band, and the third is wearing a sheepskin jacket. Seeing the legs of the half-buried man, they come up to examine it.*

SAILOR (*blind in one eye, with a voice like a broken accordion*): You can see by his legs that he fell in a fight to the death. (*After a pause*) Once you kill somebody you should bury him properly or, if you want to be open about it, not bury him at all. A man is not a cigarette butt to be stuck in the earth like that! I can't look at this kind of civilization!

Universal pain seems to overtake me. (*Looks at the building.*) So I propose we turn this house into a coffin. Whoever agrees, follow me!

*They march off with their rifles cocked.*<sup>17</sup>

## Scene 14

*They come to STUPAI'S door. The SAILOR tries the door. It is unlocked and he throws it wide open.*

SAILOR: Prepare to die.

MARYNA (*calmly*): And my father wanted to go and meet you.

SAILOR (*looking around*): Who is your father?

STUPAI: A Ukrainian.

SAILOR: In appearance perhaps. But who are you in your heart?

STUPAI: A Ukrainian.

MARYNA (*quietly*): In his heart he is a teacher.

SAILOR (*while leaving, sullenly to the PARTISAN IN THE LAMBSKIN HAT*): They're intelligentsia. The door was unlocked. Tell the others to leave them alone!

PARTISAN IN THE LAMBSKIN HAT (*loudly, so that he can be heard downstairs*): Don't bother the intelligentsia! Pass it on!

## Scene 15

*They go further upstairs. The SAILOR reads the copper doorplate with Perotsky's name on it. He reads it slowly, syllable by syllable: "Pe-rots-ky."*

SAILOR (*suddenly, to the other two*): Halt! Don't move! (*In a whisper.*) Major General Perotsky. Here's a class enemy, mates! (*Placing his ear to the door*) I can tell by their breathing there are two of them. (*Knocks quietly.*)

ANNETTE (*hardly moving her lips*): Don't go, General!

PEROTSKY (*quietly*): What if it's Georges? Or André? (*Listens intently and puts his hand over ANNETTE'S wristwatch.*) Who is it?

SAILOR: It's Fate!

PARTISAN IN THE LAMBSKIN HAT (*no longer able to restrain himself, loudly*): Your fickle fate!<sup>18</sup>  
Open up!

SAILOR: Shh!

ANNETTE: One moment! I'll just find the key. (*Whispering to PEROTSKY*) We must flee!

PEROTSKY: Where to?

ANNETTE: To Russia.

PEROTSKY: To Russia from Russia? That must mean Russia does not exist? (*Follows ANNETTE through to the back door.*)

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<sup>17</sup> Scene 14 moved to appendix A2

<sup>18</sup> Sudba, the sailor's surname, is the Ukrainian word for "fate."

Soon after that the BOLSHEVIKS break down the door.

SAILOR: Mates, can it be that he's escaped from Fate? (*Searches the apartment.*)

## Scene 16

STUPAI'S *apartment.*

STUPAI: No! I think I shall support socialism!

MARYNA (*uncomprehending*): What do you mean?

STUPAI: At least he spoke to me in Ukrainian when he said, "Get ready to die." A simple sailor! While General Perotsky would sooner commit suicide than say one word in Ukrainian. No, the best ally is the one who understands our language and speaks Ukrainian.

MARYNA: The best ally is the one whose guns speak out in Ukrainian.

STUPAI: In a word, I am for socialism!

MARYNA: My darling comedian!

STUPAI: I am for socialism, for the winds, even if they are from the north, as long as they blow things out of our Cossack steppes.

MARYNA: For example, whom?

STUPAI: The Perotskys, for instance. I'd help the wind and blow myself to get rid of them. Like this. (*Begins blowing.*)

## Scene 17

PEROTSKY *appears on the doorstep.*

PEROTSKY: Excuse me, but the partisans are after me. I am in flight. May I come in?

STUPAI (*angrily*): It's high time you took to flight.

PEROTSKY: May I come in?

STUPAI: Here?

*There is a sound of a door banging and a rifle clanking.*

VOICE OF THE SAILOR: Has he really fled? Our principal enemy? Search for him! Don't let him get away!

VOICE OF THE PARTISAN IN THE LAMBSKIN HAT: Climb up to the heavens, crawl under the earth—search! Put sentries on every door, all the way to the sea!

PEROTSKY: I am fleeing from death, from fate. May I come in?

STUPAI (*hesitating*): Come in.

MARYNA (*to PEROTSKY*): Where is André?

PEROTSKY: I don't know. Everything is lost!

MARYNA *gets ready to go. She puts on a simple kerchief and looks into a mirror.*

## Scene 18

A GUARD is standing at the entry to Perotsky's building. A bonfire is being built in the street. Two men are escorting ANDRÉ. He is without his cap.

ESCORT: Is Comrade Fate here?

GUARD: He is. Why?

ESCORT: We've brought a prisoner.

GUARD: Up against the wall with him!

ESCORT: He says he's fled from the Whites and knows a secret.

SECOND GUARD (*looking at ANDRÉ*): Watch out, citizen. You can't fool Comrade Fate.

ANDRÉ is taken away.

## Scene 19

There is banging on STUPAI'S door. MARYNA opens it.

ESCORT: Where is Comrade Fate ... the commander?

MARYNA: He's upstairs, in the general's apartment. I will take you there. (*Shows him the way.*)  
Your commander is searching for the general who fled. Do you, by any chance, know Comrade Yuha?

ESCORT: No, I haven't heard that name.

MARYNA: How can that be? He is on the Bolshevik side, too. Pity! I guess I'll have to find him and send him (*Glancing at ANDRÉ*) to you.

## Scene 20

I (*coming up to the GUARD*): Can you tell me where the commandant of the advance partisan detachment is? (*The GUARD looks at ME silently and suspiciously.*) Where can I find Comrade Fate?

GUARD: You are very curious. Who are you?

I: I am a messenger from headquarters, from Hamar. (*I show the GUARD a small parcel. HE shows ME the way up.*)

## Scene 21

I pass some sentries and walk upstairs. Suddenly I hear: "Excuse me." I turn around and see HER. Quite close. So close that I stand back. I feel the Sonata Pathétique race through my blood with its chords of the setting sun flowing. The music stops. Her eyes turn azure.

SHE: I should be bringing you flowers, but instead I've come to ask you a favour. May I? (*I listen to her voice and stupidly remain silent.*) Could I lay my entreaty on your triumphal path? (*Quite stupidly, I continue my silence.*) It won't delay you. You can step around it and go on or trample it and continue on.

I: What if I pick it up?

SHE: If you do, then take it to the poet who wrote a letter to me. Is he still alive?

I: He is.

SHE: Tell me, is he still racing on horseback through the steppes and asking the winds where to go? Has he forgotten about the girl?

I: He has not forgotten and never will. But he raced on a hobbyhorse and lived on dreams. He lived in the past. Now he wants to live in the future, so he is changing horses.

SHE: For which one?

I: The one with the flaming mane. One of many horses of the Revolution.

SHE: Tell him that a lonely Ukrainian girl was, is, and will continue waiting for him near the Ukrainian well. Will he make a detour, if only for one hour, to see her? Will he come?

I: Yes!

SHE: Tell him that the girl waiting for him is lonely. But she is not alone. With her is her old mother waiting for her sons to return from the war on black Cossack horses—

I: Those horses are in a museum now.

SHE (*flaring up*): Those horses have been tied to somebody else's post. They have been chained and locked up by foreign powers. They are neighing! They want to get loose. Don't you hear them? Is the most sacred idea of national liberation alien to you?

I: I am for it, but—

SHE: There are no "buts." Have the blessed Cossack banners of Khmelnytsky, Doroshenko, Mazepa, Kalnysh, and Gonta completely wasted away for you? (*A pause.*)

*I am silent.*

## Scene 22

*Two men pass by us.*

FIRST MAN (*boasting*): I'm for internationalism, Mykesha! I am for all the languages, you know, because I want to learn them all. I already know some words.

MYKESHA: Like what?

FIRST MAN: What do you mean "what"? How about "Le Grand Hotel"? "Orient Bank"? Or "agrarian"? Or "nationalization"? "Garniture"? "Beau monde"? Or "requisition"? "Proletariat" even you know, that is a "class." How about "nation"?

MYKESHA: "Nation" is "nation."

FIRST MAN: Well, that's true: "nation" is "nation." But what about "panacea,"<sup>19</sup> or is it "progress" or just an "entr'acte."

MYKESHA: What's that?

FIRST MAN: What is it? Try making a revolution without an entr'acte! Then you'll see!

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<sup>19</sup> There is a play on words involved here; with "natsiia" (nation) being pronounced incorrectly as "natseia" so that it rhymes with "panatseia" (panacea).



## Scene 23

SHE: Tell me, are you in favour of internationalism too?

I: Yes, I am. I support the idea. And you?

SHE: I'm not against it. But I know that ideas can only be victorious if the people who hold them are ready to go to the gallows and face death. What about your people here?

I (*quietly*): They will face it.

SHE: Who, this riffraff and mob? One attack, one setback, and they'll scatter to the four winds, will drop the idea in the mud along with their dirty soldiers' caps, and trample on it. It's another thing to kill unarmed people and build gallows in every home! For this they have no entr'acte.

I: But they don't bury living people, only the dead and those whose time has passed.

SHE: In any case, forgive me, that was not what I was going to tell you. Not that at all! Not about politics, but something quite different. Something more important, human, warm, and simple. All of us looked out of windows when we were children, and dreamt that the world would always be so bright and warm as the Lord's day. As simple and intelligible as our school primer. We cried over the body of a frozen bird. But now we are stepping over human corpses and we can't tell or feel which is colder—the corpses or ourselves. Love! Where have you gone from this world? Are you simply an Easter visitor, or just plainly, a dream? (*After a pause.*) Tell me, does the poet still believe in Petrarch and eternal love?

I: Yes, as he does in his dream. And you?

SHE: I? I will speak for the girl. She trusted the poet and still trusts him. Tell him she guards her love for him.

I (*Obviously there is music—chords rising to the skies. I see stars and look into her azure eyes*):

God! And you said you needed a favour! It is joy, the greatest joy in my entire life!

SHE: I still have to ask you the favour. It's not joyful. It will be very difficult for you and for me.

I: No matter! I will take the burden and carry it with joy!

SHE: We must liberate André Perotsky! (*It is dark. I draw back. I remain silent.*) I know it's difficult. But otherwise his corpse will fall across your path. And across the path that leads from me to you. Neither you nor I wanted him to come and stand between us. But it happened that way. First the political program prevailed here. And now Fate. But I can't allow his corpse to lie between us. He must depart from us alive. Can you do it?

I: Do what?

SHE: Step over a corpse to me?

I (*hoarsely*): I'll try...

SHE: What?

I: I'll try to rescue this corpse.

## Scene 24

*I go to the Perotskys' apartment. The door is wide open. Fresh gusts of wind rush in from the street and threaten to blow out the flames of three candles (one of them on the window sill). I*

can see people's backs, caps, red bands, rifles, and smoke. André is being tried. He is capless. His pale face is calm, but at the same time cries out with the premonition of death.

SAILOR: What's your name?

ANDRÉ: Andrii.

SAILOR: Last name?

ANDRÉ: Anon.

SAILOR: Rank?

ANDRÉ: Ensign in the reserve.

SAILOR: Boys, go on interrogating him. I can't carry on! I know he's lying.

PARTISAN IN THE LAMBSKIN HAT: Why did you join the cadets?

ANDRÉ: I was called up.

PARTISAN IN THE LAMBSKIN HAT: I can't carry on either!

PARTISAN IN THE SHEEPSKIN JACKET: Is that your own overcoat, or is it army issue?

ANDRÉ (*weighing his words*): I was issued it.

PARTISAN IN THE SHEEPSKIN JACKET: And your boots?

ANDRÉ: The boots too.

PARTISAN IN THE SHEEPSKIN JACKET: They don't look like regular issue boots to me. He's lying. I can't carry on either!

MYKESHA'S FRIEND: Excuse me, what have you done with your epaulettes?

ANDRÉ: I didn't have any.

MYKESHA'S FRIEND: This is a stupid conspiracy. Perhaps if you had your epaulettes we'd believe you're an ensign. Without them what are we supposed to believe. Maybe you're a captain or even higher in counter-revolutionary rank? Boys, what shall we do with him? Be honest!

SAILOR: I'll tell you! (*To ANDRÉ.*) You say that you are Andrii, an ensign in the reserve forcibly called up. You say you escaped. Why didn't you answer the call of our mother, the Revolution, but ran to the other one? Who else wants to speak?

PARTISAN IN THE LAMBSKIN HAT: I do! I suggest that we sentence him to the highest punishment.

SAILOR: Say it!

MYKESHA (*to ANDRÉ*): Show me your hands. (*Looking at them*) Not one callus. I vote for that too!

PARTISAN IN THE SHEEPSKIN JACKET (*testing the material of ANDRÉ'S overcoat*): So do I!

FIRST PARTISAN: I'm for his demobilization. (*Waiting to see the impact of his words.*) Take off his overcoat and boots and put a red stamp on his forehead. No entr'acte! (*Raises his rifle. The partisans make way.*)

SAILOR: Don't touch him yet! Let's vote. Fate is still playing with this man. Who is for his death? (*Counts the votes.*) Who is for sparing him? No one!

ANDRÉ: Wait! Comrades! I joined the Whites to infiltrate them.

THE WHOLE TRIBUNAL: Ha-ha-ha! What a comedian! Just like Max Lindér!

ANDRÉ: I was sent to them.

FATE: Who sent you?

ANDRÉ *hesitates*.

PARTISAN IN THE LAMBSKIN HAT: God?

ANDRÉ: A secret revolutionary group.

FATE: Which one? Have you a witness?

ANDRÉ *hesitates*.

I (*stepping forward*): I'm a witness. I can vouch that he was mobilized and sent by us to the officer-cadets' headquarters. He was to report to us on their plans, quantities of arms, and so on.

FATE: Who sent him from your side?

I: The local secret revolutionary headquarters.

FATE: And who are you? (I *give him the package*. HE *opens it and reads*.) "Comrade Fate. I am sending Comrade Yuha to be your liaison between us. The Bolshevik detachments have forced the enemy from his position and are pursuing him. Hamar." (To his men) Let him go!

## Scene 25

ANDRÉ and I are walking in the corridor. We reach MARYNA'S door.

I (to ANDRÉ): Please step in here!

## Scene 26

ANDRÉ *enters*. He is met by MARYNA.

MARYNA: You are free?

ANDRÉ: It's a miracle! Help came just in time. I am turning my back on the past and I'm beginning a new life. A new life!

MARYNA: Hush! (*Ironically*) Don't begin so loudly!

ANDRÉ *meets his father in silence*.

## Scene 27

I walk downstairs. I feel cold and stop near the fire. GUARDS are warming themselves at it. I stretch out my hands to the fire.

FIRST GUARD: It's hard to believe—revolution and battle all around us, but the fleas don't pay any attention to it.

SECOND GUARD: It's night, that's why they're biting.

THIRD GUARD: I can hear cocks crowing.

FIRST GUARD (*with disbelief*): In the city?

THIRD GUARD: Can you hear them?

I listen. Indeed, somewhere behind a wall I can hear the pre-dawn legato of a hoarse cock. The ill-fated call is heard three times. I recall the biblical story about the apostle Peter when he betrayed and renounced Christ three times. I shudder and walk away.

## Scene 28

GEORGES *is running capless. Suddenly he comes up against the GUARDS.*

GUARD: Halt! (*Out of fear GEORGES freezes. HE is like a statue.*) Where are you going?

GEORGES: Th-there.

GUARD: Who are you?

GEORGES: I? I am Georgie.

GUARD: Do you live here?

GEORGES: No! I swear I don't. My sister lives here.

GUARD: Who is your sister?

GEORGES: She? ... She's Zinka. She lives in the attic.

GUARD: Who is she?

GEORGES: She's a prostitute.

*He is followed upstairs by one of the GUARDS all the way to Zinka's door.*

## Scene 29

GEORGES (*knocking*): Zinka!

ZINKA: Who is it? (*Opens the door*)

GEORGES: It's me. (*Walks in.*)

ZINKA: Has your father sent you again? Get out!

GEORGES: No, I came on my own. Only for a second! I had a big surprise downstairs—a whole regiment of guards! It wasn't easy, but I managed to fool them. I wasn't afraid of them. Honest! You don't believe me? No? Today I killed one of them. You know how it happened? Not as I would have thought. But I wasn't afraid. Honest! He ran from around a corner straight into me. My rifle went off. I looked—the moon jumped, and he fell. Have you got some chocolate? Just a little? By the way, the sign blew off the Regodé sweet shop. The wind tore it off. Later the wind dropped, just when my rifle went off. Why are you looking at me like that?

ZINKA: Why did you come? To hide?

GEORGES: Me? No! I'm not going to hide! Only don't tell anyone that I'm here. By the way, I told them you were my sister.

ZINKA: You've found a fine sister.

GEORGES: I wasn't serious, but I had to say that. Although you know I never had a sister. Look how the moon has suddenly appeared again! Just like over there. By the way, I saw no blood. Everything was so strange and unpleasant. If only my mother were alive. I should pray to God. May I?

ZINKA: Go on, pray!

GEORGES: God and my dear Mother! Make sure Zinka won't betray me! (*Suddenly turning to her*) You won't betray me? (*There is knocking at the door.*) Don't open it, my dear! I implore you! (*Kneels in front of ZINKA.*) I promise I won't fight any more. Honest! I'm scared and I feel awful!

ZINKA: But will you fire from the rooftop?

GEORGES: That's another matter altogether.

ZINKA goes to open the door. GEORGES grabs at the hem of her dress.

GEORGES: You are the Virgin Mary! You are like a dear mother to me! Don't!

ZINKA (*struck by the word "mother"*): Say that again, will you?

GEORGES: My dear mother.

ZINKA: Mother. Oh, baby. Don't cry! Would you like to suck my breast? No! ... There's no way I can be a mother ... (*Angrily*) Be quiet! (*Opens the door.*)

## Scene 30

FATE (*silently surveying the whole room and even looking through the small window*): I can see at once what this is.

ZINKA: Where?

FATE: They say you offer yourself to the bourgeois class.

ZINKA: And what can your proletarian offer me? It will come here, same as the other one.

FATE: That isn't the point.

ZINKA: So why did you come?

FATE: You saw the legs, didn't you? One of our comrades was half-buried, shoved in the ground like a cigarette butt. And now the general I caught has escaped from our clutches. A major enemy! (*Sits down in disappointment.*)

ZINKA (*offering GEORGES a piece of chocolate*): Here, you wanted some.

FATE: The worst thing is he escaped from Fate!

ZINKA: So, take his son instead! Here he is.

SAILOR (*looking closely*): He's too young. Where is your father?

GEORGES: I don't know.

SAILOR: Does your father know where you are?

GEORGES: No, he doesn't.

SAILOR: I say, what upbringing and what conduct! And now I have a problem: now I have to come up with a suitable disciplinary punishment. (*Thinks about it.*)

## Scene 31

STUPAI and PEROTSKY are separately pacing around the room. A shadow falls from the doorway of the second room. It is MARYNA sitting down. ANDRÉ'S shadow is pacing restlessly. STUPAI and old PEROTSKY slowly approach one another. They are almost tiptoeing.

PEROTSKY (*whispering*): Your Austrian idea of an autonomous Ukraine caused all of this!

STUPAI (*whispering*): It's the fault of your one, united Russia!

PEROTSKY: Independent Ukraine is to blame!

STUPAI: Indivisible Russia!

*They come together. Soon there will be a fight! Just then the rattle of a firearm is heard. FATE is escorting GEORGES, while the two, fingers to their lips—Hush!—part. They come together again, and again they part. PEROTSKY weakly goes up to the window, lifts the kilim a little and suddenly, as if struck by the cold, swordlike gleam of the moon, utters a dull shriek:*

STUPAI: That one is taking Georges somewhere! That Fate! Oh my God! André! Aren't you going to do something? Then I will! (*Runs downstairs, automatically shouting military orders.*) Halt! Don't move!

ANDRÉ goes up to the window and then suddenly covers his eyes with his hand. He moves back. MARYNA comes up to the window and looks out.

MARYNA (*to* ANDRÉ): Turn your back on the past. Or else they will kill you like they have the past. You and us. Your mistake was that you tried to foment a "Russian movement" in Ukraine. Now you must correct this mistake!

ANDRÉ: What is happening below the window?

MARYNA: A Bolshevik Revolution. This has to be corrected. Go to the neighbouring ranches instantly. There are people and arms. I'll write a letter immediately.

ANDRÉ: What's going to happen to them?

MARYNA: Them? (*Looks through the window and freezes, deeply shocked by what she sees. ANDRÉ is motionless. They both wait for a shot to ring out. At last MARYNA shudders.*) He lowered his rifle and took him away! (*Writing*) "To the Zakrutenko brothers of Chornoïar ranch, to Dmytro Kopytsia in Buhaïvka. I am sending you Ensign Perotsky on the orders of the Committee of the Golden Mace—

ANDRÉ: Let's drop that mace, Marine! Let's drop everything and escape together to a ranch, to some green haven in the country.

MARYNA (*writing*): "Assist him immediately to gather armed and mounted partisan detachments."

ANDRÉ: Is all this happening because I made the mistake of loving you?

MARYNA (*signing the message*): "Member of the committee. Gull." (*To* ANDRÉ) The password is "The pipe is lit." That's all. Go!

## Act Five

### Scene 1

*Once more imagine, my friends: a street lined with acacias. One can hardly see anything else. A flag of the Revolutionary Committee is billowing like red a sail on the balcony of Perotsky's apartment. It is sunny and calm. A Russian song is heard:*

A maiden sits on the shore  
Sewing a silk kerchief ...

NASTIA and ZINKA are singing. They are embroidering a flag in gold and stitching some letters on it.

LUKA rushes in.<sup>20</sup>

LUKA: How is our flag doing?

NASTIA: Look! (*Unfolds it.*)

<sup>20</sup> Scene fragment moved to appendix A3

LUKA: Is it ready, then?

NASTIA: Almost. I will be finished in an hour.

LUKA (*reading with great relish*): “Proletarians of All Countries Unite.” The hammer and sickle look engraved! “Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic.” (*Enthusiastically*) See how under the sign “Proletarians of All Countries Unite” the Ukrainian SSR comes out! It’s a pity Ilko isn’t here to see it. He used to vacillate between a dream and some kind of love. (*To ZINKA*) So you say that the flag will be ready in an hour? I’ll stop by. I’ll be back by then. (*Rushes out.*)

ZINKA: Wait, a minute! You said that Ilko’s love was a dream. What kind of dream?

LUKA: He fell in love with the one who plays the piano, and turned her into a dream.

ZINKA: So she’s the one who keeps playing? Have you ever seen her up close?

LUKA: No! I’ll be back. (*Runs off.*)

ZINKA: I must take a good look at her.

## Scene 2

MARYNA *is at the window*. STUPAI *is quietly prognosticating using the Bible, but so that she does not notice*.

MARYNA (*excited*): Father! Come here for just a moment! To the window! A man passed by on the other side of the street. I think he had a pipe in his mouth. Stand here and see if he comes back. I’ll run over to the dining-room window. You can see more from there. (*Runs out.*)

STUPAI (*Standing for a while at the window, then moving away.*): So, she’s decided to play Nat Pinkerton. I’ll tell the future again, for the last time. From the Bible. No! If it’s the last time, I’ll use the *Kobzar*.<sup>21</sup> What will be, will be. For the last time, Ivan! (*Taking out the Kobzar and removing all the blue-and-yellow bookmarks from it, he puts the book on the table and then solemnly places three fingers on the book.*) Will there or won’t there be a Ukraine?

MARYNA (*in the doorway*): Are you watching, Father?

STUPAI: Of course! (*After a pause, to himself.*) First column, line thirty-three. (*Opens the book and finds the place.*) “The Zaporozhians will not come back, the hetmans will not rise, Ukraine will not be covered in red Cossack tunics.” (*Bitterly shaking his head.*) Tocky-tocky tock-tock. Have I made a mistake? Are the old-timers truly fleeing on horseback from the Cossack steppe and disappearing over the horizon forever? Have they lowered their spears like crosses? No! I’ll try once more, this time for the last time. Second column, line seven.

MARYNA: Look, Father! I think it’s him!

STUPAI: Don’t interrupt, Maryna! (*Opens the Kobzar and reads.*) “You will perish, perish, Ukraine, and disappear from earth without a trace ...” (*In mystical fright*) So, for the third and definitely last time. Will there or won’t there be?—

MARYNA (*from the doorway of the other room*): There will be!

STUPAI (*angrily*): Don’t joke!

<sup>21</sup> *Kobzar* (The Minstrel, 1840), the famous early collection of poems by Taras Shevchenko, Ukraine’s most revered poet. Many readers consider his poems prophetic in regard to the Ukrainian nation.

MARYNA: Yes, there will be, my grey fortune teller!

STUPAI: So, you have become a Pythia, have you?

MARYNA: If you say so, yes! Ancient writers said that in the beginning Pythia was a very beautiful girl. She prophesied in a temple on the stone Omphalos, which means the centre of the earth. There was an inscription on the gate: "Know thyself." So, I shall now invoke it: "Ukrainian, know thyself." There will be a Ukraine! (*Overcome by an extraordinary rapture, to her father*) Come to the window, but stand there so that you won't be seen from the street!

STUPAI: What's all this for?

MARYNA (*behaving like Pythia*): The first thing you see will tell you whether or not there'll be a Ukraine. Look across the street at the man standing by the poster kiosk.

STUPAI (*amused*): You sure do pick them!

MARYNA: Look at him! (*With all her strength, she plays a few chords from the Sonata Pathétique.*)

STUPAI: He lit his pipe and went away. He pushed his hat to the back of his head. What impertinence! Is he the hero of your novel?

MARYNA: This hero just provided us with our password: "The pipe is lit." The pipe of the uprising. Today! (*Rapturously plays some chords of the Allegro.*) Do you hear, Father? Do you hear, my grey mustache, how our knights are racing from the neighbouring villages? We are ready! (*Gets up in even greater ecstasy.*) Omphalos! Omphalos! The pipe has been lit! (*Begins spinning around.*) Go ahead and blow, wind from the north, you won't blow out the fire! The more you blow the more you fan the flames! Blow until the sparks fly! (*Strikes the keyboard.*) Omphalos! Light your pipes so that the smoke spreads like a whirlwind across the steppes and into the heavens. Smoke until the sky is covered with it, until God sends you an angel who, as in the folk tale, will ask you: "What do you want, you race of Cossacks, that you keep on smoking and smoking?" I want our own state under this here flag. (*Her hair streaming across her back, she brings out the flag she has been hiding and unfolds it.*) Under this one!

STUPAI (*delighted by the flag*): When did you embroider it?

*There is a knock at the door.*

MARYNA (*rolling the flag up, calmly*): Come in!

### Scene 3

ZINKA (*holding a flag*): Sorry for bothering you! You don't happen to have thread like this, do you? I need it to finish embroidering the last letter. (*Unfolds her flag.*) If you have some, may I have or borrow it? (*Gazes at MARYNA.*)

STUPAI: Hm ... The inscription is in Ukrainian. (*Reading.*) "Workers of all countries, unite!" A hammer and sickle. What do the letters USSR stand for?

ZINKA: Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic. They say this is the emblem of our new state.

STUPAI: Hm ... Who is the flag for?

ZINKA: It's for the Revolutionary Committee. I have to have it finished in an hour.

STUPAI (*reading the inscription again*): Hm ... Not a single mistake. (*Reads it again and looks at MARYNA.*)



MARYNA: Not one.

ZINKA (*looking closer at MARYNA*): I thought you had blue eyes, but they are azure. You must look good in yellow.

MARYNA: I thought yours were brown, but for some reason they look red!

ZINKA: I haven't slept for three nights, that's why they are red. I've been embroidering for three nights now. Or perhaps it's from the red flag that my eyes are red, just as your eyes are blue from your flag. (*Leaves.*)

STUPAI (*after a pause*): Perhaps we do have some?

MARYNA: What?

STUPAI: The thread she needs.

MARYNA: You are a comedian, Father. You can't embroider an independent Ukraine on Russian red bunting. (*Goes to the other room.*)

STUPAI: What a pity! We don't even have our own fabric.

## Scene 4

*I am walking upstairs to the Revolutionary Committee Headquarters. ZINKA goes past ME. MARYNA steps out from her door. For one second we stop, exchange glances, and go separate ways.*

ZINKA: So she's your dream? I thought she must be something special. But she's just an ordinary girl in bloomers and a skirt. Good morning, neighbour!

I (*not understanding what ZINKA is talking about*): Good morning!

## Scene 5

STUPAI (*alone*): This is a flag and that is a flag! I am thinking of making the following proposal: on a yellow and azure background, the words "Long Live Soviet Ukraine." Let it be socialist, as long as it's a Ukrainian republic. Alternatively, on a red background with two stripes, yellow and azure. (*Ponders.*)

## Scene 6

*Imagine the Revolutionary Committee's headquarters in the Perotsky's apartment. The scene resembles a bivouac: MEN in overcoats, with and without rifles, a RED GUARD sleeping, a line of PETITIONERS. People are constantly coming and going. HAMAR, a member of the committee, is on duty. He is sitting by the telephone, and LUKA and I are taking down orders. Behind HAMAR, on a ladder, a WORKMAN is connecting a telephone line. On the other side of the partition, OVRAM is sitting on a stool by the switchboard.*

HAMAR (*on the phone*): I'm coming at once! (*To LUKA*) Something's odd. The Slobidska Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee wants me to come immediately. They won't say why. Some urgent matter they don't want to discuss on the phone. Take my place

while I'm gone. (*Before leaving*) Send a telegram to all the Revolutionary Committees: "First task—sow more wheat." (*With a wide sweep of his hand*) The steppe!

LUKA: What about seed?

OVRAM'S VOICE: Switchboard of the Revolutionary Committee!<sup>22</sup>

HAMAR: Buried in the pits on the ranches. (*Makes a digging gesture and runs out.*)

VOICE OF ALARM AT THE DOOR: Comrades! Some bandits are attacking the town. Cavalry with insignia! (*As if to confirm this, artillery fire is heard in the distance. The phone crackles. Then there is a pause, followed by silence.*)

LUKA: Who's first in line again? The bourgeoisie is giving up!

OVRAM'S VOICE: I'll connect you. (*The telephone rings.*)

LUKA (*into the receiver*): Hamar isn't here. You asked him to come to you. What do you mean you didn't? Then who? (*Buckles a bit.*) Don't panic! What? The bells are ringing in the monastery? What? Cavalry? Stop them! I'll dispatch an armed detachment right away.<sup>23</sup>

## Scene 7

STUPAI (*alone*): For the third and last time. Do you hear, Taras? For the last time. What kind of Ukraine will it be? (*A second artillery salvo; STUPAI is in despair.*) They won't let me finish my fortune-telling! (*Opens the book and reads.*) "Bury me and then rise up!" (*Runs away capless, holding the book up like a shield.*)

## Scene 8

STUPAI *comes out into the street. Only OVRAM is crawling along. Otherwise the street is empty. From the distance STUPAI hears desultory firing. STUPAI stands at the crossroads. He hesitates.*

STUPAI: Well, I've risen. But I don't know here I should go, which side I should join. So help me God. I don't know, truly I don't! (*Stops to think and hesitates.*) Actually, it's neither hither nor thither. (*Bullets whizz by.*) Hold off! You are all Ukrainians, on both sides. What are you doing? Give me a chance to think! They're beating up on each other, glad that they have firearms. (*Deliberates..*) I'll join the red banner. The Zaporozhians had a red flag too, it seems. The *dumy* say that dead Zaporozhians had red flags placed at their heads.<sup>24</sup> But then Kulish<sup>25</sup> writes that the Zaporozhians only had white banners with red crosses on them. I could join the yellow-and-blue colours, but these aren't Zaporozhian colours. If I suggested red with yellow and blue stripes, would they listen to me now? (*Some petals cut by a bullet fall to the ground.*)

<sup>22</sup> Scene fragment moved to appendix A4.

<sup>21</sup> Scene fragment moved to appendix A5

<sup>24</sup> The *dumy* (sg. *duma*) were epic narratives that wandering minstrels called *kobzari* sang to the accompaniment of a multi-stringed instrument called *kobza*. Thus the *kobzari*, who were often blind or otherwise disabled, relayed historical information and stories with moral content to the public.

<sup>25</sup> Panteleimon Kulish (1819–97), a prominent Ukrainian novelist, poet, and historian (no relation to the playwright).

STUPAI *picks some up.*) So, they'll destroy the flowers around us, riddle the earth, the wheat, the sunflowers. What are you doing?! Instead of thinking some more, you're ... *(A bullet strikes him in the chest.)* So this is it! *(Buckles and falls.)*

OVRAM *(crawling up)*: How are you, neighbour?

STUPAI *(trying to smile)*: It would be interesting—

OVRAM: What?

STUPAI: The bullet ... which side did it come from?

OVRAM *(tearing off a piece of his scarf)*: The main thing is you weren't hit in the legs—*(Wants to bind the wound but realizes that STUPAI is dying. Several RED GUARDS run by. One of them calls out: "Someone is attacking from the rear! Run!")*

OVRAM: You can't outrun death! Stay where you are!

STUPAI *hears the word "stay" and tries to repeat it, but can't. With his remaining strength he raises his hand. To him the world seems shrouded in fog. The fog grows denser—is it the sky or the steppe? Fleeing RED GUARDS jump over STUPAI, but he imagines they are old Zaporozhians on their horses. Tocky-tocky, tock. He hears music (from the Allegro molto). How enchanting! But the sun is really burning his chest. Soon it sets. He feels better, but it is getting dark, very dark, and the music is barely audible.*

## Scene 9

*Nationalist partisans come running up. OVRAM is sitting by STUPAI, who is dying. ANDRÉ stops nearby. He shouts: "Stretcher!" PARTISANS bring a stretcher.*

ANDRÉ *(pointing to OVRAM)*: Take him away!

A PARTISAN *(to OVRAM)*: Come on, get up!

OVRAM: You won't see the day I get up!

## Scene 10

*The red flag falls to the ground from Perotsky's balcony. One cannot see who pulled it down. In its place a yellow-and-blue flag appears. One cannot see who put it there.*

## Scene 11

MARYNA, *with a bouquet of flowers, comes out of the building to meet ANDRÉ.*

MARYNA *(hearing the bells)*: It's just like Easter. I hear that when the monks greeted you, you exclaimed, "Long live Ivanov's bell tower and, above it, the North Star." Does that mean Russia?

ANDRÉ *(seriously and firmly)*: Yes.

MARYNA: So, why did the knight keep silent about Ukraine?

ANDRÉ: Let's sidestep that!

MARYNA *(coming up to him and looking deep into his eyes to see if he is joking)*: Sidestep Ukraine?

- ANDRÉ: Watch out, step around the corpse. (*Gently steers her away from STUPAI'S corpse.*)  
Don't get dirty! (*They both recognize STUPAI.*)
- MARYNA: Papa! (*Cannot believe he's dead.*) You ... (*Realizing he is dead, she kneels and kisses his outstretched hand.*) You are a comedian, Father. (*Lowers his hand and stammers incoherently.*) My Papa, with your scrappy mustache and grey tuft of hair! Tocky-tocky, tock, my Father!

## Scene 12

*The yellow-and-blue flag falls silently to the ground from Perotsky's balcony. If it is not apparent who took it down. The Imperial Russian tricolour appears in its place. It is not apparent who hoisted it.*

## Act Six

### Scene 1

*The street where the Perotskys live is busy. A crowd gathers outside the house. Festive sounds of greeting are being exchanged, mostly by ladies. Parasols are blooming. The solemn ringing of church bells can be heard.*

FIRST LADY: Varvara Mykhailivna, how are you, dear?

SECOND LADY: You should be greeting me with "Christ is Risen."

FIRST LADY: Only now do I realize how glad He must have been when He rose from the dead, the poor dear.

THE SECOND LADY'S HUSBAND (*Zinka's visitor*): Still, Christ was tortured by people, not by Bolshevik beasts.

FIRST LADY: Oh, don't even talk about it! I feel as if I had spent these last three days in the grave.

SECOND LADY: My dear, I felt I was a corpse, too!

THE FIRST LADY'S HUSBAND (*also Zinka's visitor*): Yes, they drove us into the cellars. They wanted to make corpses out of us and graves out of our houses. It's very odd that they are going to be tried like normal people.

SECOND LADY: Are they actually going to try them?

ZINKA'S VISITOR: Imagine, they intend to try them before they execute them.

PROFESSOR: Liberalism all over again! Reforms again!

### Scene 2

OVRAM *is carried in by four stretcher-bearers. Seeing the crowd, he shouts out orders:*

Keep in step, stretcher-bearers! I am being paraded. One-two! Left-right! Sing! If you don't want to sing, I will sing myself. (*Sings a refrain from a well-known military song.*) "Go to sleep, go to sleep, I'll sing a song for you."<sup>26</sup>

OVRAM *is carried into a room where the court awaits. The presiding judge is addressing the public.*

JUDGE: Gentlemen, today we are trying a secret Chekist.<sup>27</sup> While he tried us in cellars, mostly at night, with no witnesses, we are bringing him out in daylight and in front of your eyes. This is a public trial, a people's trial. Moreover, while we are putting Bolshevism on trial, we are giving it an opportunity to defend its bloody doctrines in public. Furthermore, we are offering to everyone in this hall an opportunity to speak for or against this criminal. The statue of Themis, the symbol of justice that was buried by the Bolsheviks, is now restored to its position on this table. (*To OVRAM*) Accused, what is your name?

OVRAM Ovrām or Yakiv, it's all the same. It's not the name that you are going to execute.

JUDGE: What was your profession before you joined the Cheka?

OVRAM I crawled upon the earth on which you rode.

JUDGE: What did you do in the Cheka?

OVRAM Whatever you decide.<sup>28</sup>

JUDGE: Call witness General Perotsky. (*PEROTSKY stands up.*) Your excellency, the floor is yours.

PEROTSKY: It was through this very window that I saw the fellow with one eye and two others, one wearing a Persian lambskin hat. This legless man stayed where the legless body lay and pointed out where I live, and probably where Georges was hiding, too. Later, I stood near another window and saw the man with one eye lead Georges away. Gentlemen, my boy was crying. He was trying to kiss the man's hand, but was pushed away. I could no longer be incognito. I shouted a command: Halt! Halt, you bastard! He aimed his rifle at me. But he was stopped by the others, and they took me to Cheka headquarters.

JUDGE: What did you see there?

PEROTSKY: It was a nightmare! At night a monk was put into my cell, and he prayed the whole night. In Ukrainian! Imagine that, Gentlemen! I couldn't sleep. It was this monk who told me that a legless inquisitor hammers nails into epaulettes and is quite well paid for it. In fact he is set for life.

JUDGE: Did you hammer nails into epaulettes?

OVRAM: What for? I'd rather hammer them into your heads.

PEROTSKY: He is set!

OVRAM: Exactly. I am so set, that soon I won't be bothered by the fact that I am legless. I am going to be carried by others until I die.

JUDGE: You informed on Georges. How did you do that?

ZINKA (*popping out of the audience*): I'll tell you! I can testify! May I? (*Pointing to OVRAM*) I'll testify against him. So help me God! Just let me! (*Before the court makes a decision, she carries on.*) God! To inform on Georges, that innocent angel, was a crime for

<sup>26</sup> Scene fragment moved to Appendix A6

<sup>27</sup> A member of the Cheka, the original name of the Soviet secret police.

<sup>28</sup> Scene fragment moved to Appendix A7

which no punishment suffices. How could he (*pointing to OVRAM*) do it? Georgie was such a nice boy. He loved to eat chocolates, pray to God, and shoot pigeons. He even loved me. Remember how he once fired at a pigeon from the roof during a demonstration? He missed the pigeon and accidentally hit a man. (*Murmurs of approval in the hall.*) The little angel hit the pigeon. I know that for sure, just as I know who gave him away...

JUDGE: Please come closer to the table.

ZINKA: Georges came to me from the front, the dear boy. Gentlemen, he had killed a Bolshevik and was being pursued. He begged me to tell the partisans he was my brother or even my son. He mentioned his mommy. And prayed. So, I thought what if he was my little brother, or even my child? My heart bled for him. I swear. He wanted a chocolate, and then the partisan with one eye came in. He was searching for his excellency the general and was very worried that he'd fled. Then I gave Georges some chocolate and I said to the partisan: take his son instead. At first he did not believe that Georges was the son.

JUDGE: Whose son?

ZINKA: But I took out this note and read it to him. (*Reading*) "This receipt is issued to our former chambermaid Zinaida" ... (*after reading the whole note*) "that I, at the bidding of my father, General Perotsky" —

*An uproar breaks out in the audience. The JUDGE tells a GUARD to take ZINKA out.*

JUDGE (*to OVRAM*): You will be spared if you tell us which Bolsheviks are still in town. Will you? (*OVRAM remains silent.*) No? Then take him out and shoot him!

*On the stairs OVRAM suddenly stops his GUARDS.*

OVRAM: Hold on! I want to say ... something. (*The GUARDS stops.*) But before I do I want to smoke. For one cigarette, I'll tell you ... (*He is given a cigarette. He lights it, inhales, and puts on his cap.*) Go on, carry me!

## Act Seven

### Scene 1

*Again at the Perotskys. It's night. LUKA is telephoning.*

LUKA: Headquarters? I want to speak to the commander ... Comrade Hamar? This is Luka, the leader of the avant-garde. The bandits have been crushed. The town is in our hands. I've found some interesting documents. André Perotsky's raid was supported, it appears, by some local secret organization ... How many casualties? Quite a few ... Yes, I hear you ... I understand.

## Scene 2

*I come back from the battlefield. I go to see LUKA. I feel full of joy and exaltation. Indeed, it is an emotional meeting.*

LUKA: Hallo there!

I: How are you, brother?

LUKA: Now that victory is ours? Do you know who organized and led that raid? Perotsky! (*The candle jerks and items seem to be sliding.*) We found a letter on the body of a dead counter-revolutionary. Here it is. (*Reading*) "To the Zakrutenko brothers, Chornoiar ranch, to Dmytro Kopytsia in Buhaiivka. I am sending you Ensign Perotsky on the orders of the Committee of the Golden Mace. Assist him immediately to gather partisan armed and mounted detachments." It is signed by a "Member of the committee, Gull." Now we know why there were so many casualties.<sup>29</sup> Well, are you coming?

I: I? No! I mean yes, I'm going. I'll go—

LUKA: To your place?

I: Yes, to my place.

## Scene 3

*I walk up the staircase unconsciously and mechanically: Where to? Of course! I must go to my place. Yes. I'll go alone to my place and question my own soul about all of this. I have to have a talk with myself. Yes! There has to be another talk with myself about death. But first, about treason. I stand there. I go over Luka's information and I recall the details of my treason. Suddenly I realize that I am outside Stupai's door. It is half-closed. I hear snoring. I peek in. A hoarse voice asks "Who is it?"*

I: Could you tell me, please, if the Stupai-Stupanenkos used to live here.

VOICE: The young lady? She's been moved to the basement. This is Signals headquarters now.

## Scene 4

*At last, my friends, the finale. I am outside the door in the basement. I listen. My sense of hearing is so acute now that I can hear time and the stars in outer space. I hear a drop of water falling behind the door in the basement. But I cannot hear HER. Is SHE asleep? I knock. The door opens. A candle.*

SHE: You?

I: I.

SHE: By the knocking I could tell it was someone different, someone who was not like (*pointing upstairs*) them, someone quiet, someone very close.

I: Yes, this someone has come. Someone who, alas, is not like them, but also not one of you, nor is he himself now.

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<sup>29</sup> Scene fragment moved to Appendix A8

SHE: A dear poet with an open heart has come. I'm so happy. I was waiting for you! Forgive me for not coming out to meet you, for not opening the door (*pointing upstairs*) into my own land. But, you see, it is not my fault. They took my country away from me.

I: It doesn't matter. You and I will soon reach a land of our own.

SHE: You must be hinting at your poet's attic? (*Raises her left eyebrow.*) Thank you. But right here, (*with a sweep of her arm*) while I was waiting for you, I grew a garden of love. Can you see it? Here are the marble steps. Beautiful, aren't they? There (*pointing to the water leaking*) is a combination fountain and water clock. When you spend a night here, you will feel like you've heard the drumbeat of eternity.

I: They say that a worker recently lived here with his wife. He was at the front, and she waited for him, counting drops day and night.

SHE (*nervously*): Yes, yes. Here (*pointing to a small bench*) is a garden bench. (*A flicker of humour.*) Especially reserved for poets. Sit down, my dear guest! You must be tired. No? Then how should I receive you? I would play for you if they hadn't separated me from my piano. What good is it to them? Who among them can play? Tell me, who will play the piano?

I: Don't worry about them! They'll play!

SHE: Will they play the *Pathétique*?

I: First of all.

SHE: You think so? (*With sadness*) How I would like to play it now! The sonata about the young man racing on a horse through the steppes and, asking the winds where to go. Do you remember Easter night? (*Pretends she is playing on a keyboard.*) I was writing a letter to you then. Do you want me to show it to you? I saved it! How long I have waited for you! (*Her left hand as if playing on a keyboard, her right hand as if writing*) I saw you in my dreams. Somewhere in the distant azure ages, I kept flying and waiting for you.

*I begin to hear music (Rondo). What is this? A nervous breakdown? Hallucination? Hypnosis? I must bring this to an end! High time!*

I: Tell me, did you fly like a gull even then?

SHE (*her hands drop and she shrinks like a little girl who has been caught and does not know what to say*): No! No! I just flew...

I: Like a gnat?

SHE (*straightening up, feeling instinctively that she has appeared weak*): No! No! (*Then, quite emphatically*) Yes! I flew like a gull. (*Conquering her indecision incisively*) Tell me, have you come to sing praises to the gull or to take her away?

I: I came to ask her. Simply, without any allegories! Tell me, would you go with me upstairs right now, so that we both, together, could tell them about everything?

SHE: About what?

I: About what? For instance, about the legless worker who lived in the basement, the poet who lived in the attic, and a girl who lived for music, and that music inspired the poet's dreams. The worker had a water clock. The clock counted down until the start of the Revolution. The girl deceived the poet, began to play with a Golden Mace. About how, with the poet's help, she brought in the revolutionaries, how they took away the legless man and killed him? I'm going to tell them that I am a traitor, and you will tell them that you are the Gull.



SHE: You mean ... they don't know yet?

I: If they knew, we wouldn't have to go there. They would have come to fetch us long ago and reminded us that the only true fighter for ideals and whose ideals will be victorious, is the one who is ready to die for his ideals on the scaffold and declare them in the face of death. Would you do that?<sup>30</sup>

SHE (*defiantly*): I'll tell them myself! I'll tell them that I am the Gull. I'll say: I am the Gull that flew over Zhovti Vody, that followed the trade routes of Ukraine each summer (*more quietly*) and still lives in every Cossack heart. I'll tell them that.<sup>31</sup>

LUKA, *who was standing on the other side of the door while SHE utters her last words, opens the door, and gestures to the RED GUARDS to take MARYNA away.*

*Translated by George S. N. Luckyj and Moira Luckyj*

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<sup>30</sup> Scene fragment moved to Appendix A9

<sup>31</sup> Alternative finale in Appendix A10

# Appendix A1

*(Variants in the published texts of the play)*

## Act One

### Scene 7

HAMAR: They can put up as many gallows and crosses as they want.

NASTIA (*listening*): They are singing *Our Father*.

HAMAR: Let them hold liturgies and sing *Our Father*! The world, my friends, will be ours! We shall make triumphal arches out of the gallows. We'll tear down the crosses, bury them in the old cemeteries along with capitalism, and march forward at the dawn of socialism! (*To ME*) You must go to Revolutionary Headquarters. Tell them that we are starting ... (*Fixes his cap more firmly on his head.*) The world will be ours! Give them our greetings! (*To LUKA*) You have to show the partisans the way during the battle. Well ... (*Hesitates whether to say goodbye.*)

NASTIA: Perhaps we should all sit down?

OVRAM: I'd like to be able to stand up. Well, give my greetings to all my comrades from the factory. To the whole proletariat! (*Through tears*) But take care of your legs, Brothers! Your legs! (*Calming down*) But then, (*smiling*) the main thing is not to lose your head, never mind your legs. (*Noticing that LUKA'S shoes have fallen apart*) Nastia, give him my boots. Let them, at least, take part in an attack against the real enemy.

*Going behind the stove so no one can see, NASTIA takes off the boots, which she has been wearing, comes back, and gives them to LUKA.*

LUKA (*taking them*): I'll change on the way.

*We silently climb the steps. At the door we are met by the wind. The moon is rising. Before parting, LUKA and I romantically shake hands.*

I (*passionately*): The world will be ours, Luka!

LUKA: It certainly will! (*Saying to himself after I leave*) Should I take these boots or not? It's true there will be puddles on the way, but then Nastia won't have any boots. And someone will pull them off me if I am killed. Let them stay. (*Puts them by the door and runs off.*)

NASTIA (*after a pause*): They've gone. Will they come back before dawn, Ovrám?

OVRAM *is silent. Drops of water keep falling.*

NASTIA (*out of habit, mechanically*): One. Two. Three.

## Appendix A2

### Act One

#### Scene 14

OVRAM *crawls out of the basement. The partisans recoil in surprise. They look at each other.*

SAILOR (*in a bad mood, to OVRAM*): Are those legs perhaps yours, mate?

OVRAM: Mine are in the ground. Imperialism has buried them.

SAILOR: And those, I guess, were half-buried by the bourgeoisie.

OVRAM: Yes!

SAILOR: So there is no difference between them.

OVRAM (*crawling up to the legs and inspecting the remaining boot*): They differ only by one size. (*Lowers his head and remains that way.*)

SAILOR (*after a pause, shaking his rifle*): Show no mercy! Drive the bourgeoisie into the grave!

*The three partisans rush up the stairs.*

## Appendix A3

### Act Five

#### Scene 1

LUKA: How are you, Comrade Zinka?

ZINKA: You should give me some work to do.

LUKA: We shall! Now there'll be plenty of work. There was none during the first stage of the Revolution, when fighting and destruction were going on. But during the next stage there'll be work. For example, now that we're building a new way of life I think we'll start thinking of love. For love is not a diversion or a dream, as it was with Ilko, but a function. (*Flexes his bicep.*) A function! (*Releases his arm.*) That reminds me! One meeting of the Revolutionary Committee is about to start, and I have to report there about the new functions of my sub sections.

# Appendix A4

## Act Five

### Scene 6

A VOICE IN THE DOORWAY: Can you tell us, please, where the Bolshevik movement is?

OVRAM (*to someone on the phone*): Here. What is your business?

VOICES (*thinking that he is answering them, loudly*): What business? We walk upon the soil, but we don't own any.

OVRAM'S VOICE: I'm connecting you!

LUKA (*shouting toward the door*): All those without any land step forward! (*To ME*) Write this down: "Second: Organize the poor peasants. Tell the rich peasants that their houses and land won't be theirs much longer. "Third" ... (*To the WORKER*) Pops! Not like that and not there. The line's crooked! (*To ME*) "Third: On the other side of the Dnipro there are peat deposits" ... Who's snoring over there?

VOICES: Comrade, wake up! You'll sleep through the Revolution.

LUKA (*standing on the table*): Comrades! The Revolutionary Committee is not a bedroom. It isn't even a railway station where you can doze. It's a locomotive! Remember that! And when we...

NEW VOICES FROM THE DOOR: Comrade Luka! We've confiscated some arms. Seven rifles and three pistols. What should we do with them?

LUKA: Take them to the military commissariat!

A VOICE: We've dug up some rugs and clothes.

LUKA: Take them to the supply section!

VOICE: Ten corsets.

LUKA: Bury them! (*To ME*) You should take a look at the schools and see which of them need repairs. (*To the WORKER*) No, that's not the way to do it, pops. Let me do it. (*Climbs up the ladder and expertly hooks up the phone line.*)

OVRAM'S VOICE: Switchboard! What? What cavalry? You must be dreaming. It's probably not horses but fleas jumping over you.

LUKA (*climbing down, to ME*): Secondly: we need to print Ukrainian primers. We'll start with that. (*Notes something down.*) Who's come for land? (*To ME*) As for the teachers— (*To those at the door*) Come up! (*Continues writing while looking at his watch.*)

OVRAM (*in an alarmed voice*): They have insignia? One moment! I'll connect you.

LUKA (*to ME*): We must find out how many teachers know Ukrainian. (*To the lineup*) Who's first?

## Appendix A5

### Act Five

#### Scene 6

LUKA: Where are the arms you dug up?

VOICE: They're still here.

LUKA: Bring them to me. (*Climbs onto the table and addresses everyone.*) Comrades! As you have heard, the first to stand in line is the bourgeoisie? It has forced its way to the front of the line. What does it want? To block your road to socialism once again. Those who want to protect their place in line for land, grain, machines, primers, and culture must first line up for arms! We must fight! Who's first?

*Someone comes up. I try to stand second in line, but someone in a overcoat pushes me aside, as do others. At last, sixth in line, I grab a rifle. Some men line up unwillingly and others flee, either openly or furtively.*

LUKA: Fall in!

*We fall in.*

OVRAM: Those who have legs, fall in! Those who don't have to crawl.

LUKA: What's wrong with the telephone?

OVRAM: It's not working.

LUKA: That means someone's cut it off. Comrades! We must be vigilant! We must wage war on all fronts! Our class enemies are everywhere! Our goal is socialism! Remember that! Quick march with a revolutionary step!

*We follow LUKA downstairs into the street*

## Appendix A6

### Act Six

#### Scene 2

VOICES: What cynicism! What effrontery!

OVRAM: Now carry me to the throne!

VOICES: How dare he! Shut his mouth! (*A lady tries to poke him in the eyes with her parasol, but misses.*)

OVRAM: What a flirt! (*A second lady tries to poke him.*) Get away, you black crows! I'm not dead yet! Put your umbrellas away. They won't shield you from the storm of the Revolution!

## Appendix A7

### Act Six

#### Scene 2

JUDGE: How old are you?

OVRAM: Forty. How old I'll be when I die both you and I know.

JUDGE: Are you a Bolshevik?

OVRAM: Half of me is.

JUDGE: Meaning what? (*OVRAM points to himself.*) The legs don't matter. You are a Bolshevik.

Now tell us, why didn't you retreat with the Bolsheviks, but remained behind?

OVRAM: If my legs don't matter, then your question doesn't matter either.

JUDGE: You want to blame your legs?

OVRAM: What for, if your heads are not to blame?

JUDGE: We are to blame?

OVRAM: If you hadn't started the war, I would still have my legs and would have retreated with the Bolsheviks.

VOICES: What effrontery! What cynicism! Enough! To the gallows with him! Death to the Bolshevik!

JUDGE: But we know that you were left here for a purpose, to spy on us. What do you say to that?

OVRAM: What other work can I find while you're in power? I'm not going to be a hangman or hang myself!

JUDGE: But you wouldn't mind if we are hanged.

## Appendix A8

### Act Seven

#### Scene 2

LUKA [after saying "Now we know why there were so many casualties."]: Did you know that your neighbour Zinka was tortured to death and Ovrām was executed outside town, near a garbage dump? They say he ...

*Something soundless and dark is floating toward ME. The candle is flickering. It seems as if LUKA'S voice is far away and he is reading a death warrant to ME and I am half-dead.*

I: Luka! Wait! (I grab him.)

LUKA: What?

I: The candle isn't steady.

LUKA: The candle?

I: Is it almost out?

LUKA: They say that he said "Thank you for the funeral. I would give you a tip, but I have no money. Don't be upset—the proletarian class will repay you." And Nastia lost her mind when she heard the news. Well, are you coming?

I: I? No! I mean, yes, I'm going. I'll go ...

LUKA: To your place?

I: Yes, to my place ...

## Appendix A9

### Act Seven

#### Scene 4

SHE (*shrinking again like a little girl, her trembling hands clutching her apron*): I?

I: Legless Ovrarn carried his ideals all the way to the garbage pit and threw them into the face of death. So did Zinka. Would you be able to carry them at least to the registration table upstairs? Will you tell them?

SHE (*removing her hands from the apron*): Yes, I'll tell them! (*Clutching at the apron again*) I'll tell you. It would be better if I told you.

I: Then I will have to tell them for you. Will you let me do this?

SHE (*under control*): If you do that, your punishment will be reduced. Right?

I: That isn't the point! Right after I had helped to liberate André I walked all night through the steppes. That was when I first talked to myself about treason and death. I concluded that it wouldn't be enough of a punishment if I killed myself. It would have to be whatever Luka, society, and the working class gave me. I decided to go and tell them. But I didn't go because in my heart I still carried your darling image because I didn't know then that in the bright warmth of your eyes you hid the black cold of conspiracy.

# Appendix A10

## Act Seven

### Scene 4

SHE (*again like a little girl*): Perhaps I should change before I go?

I: Better go as you are.

SHE: Like this? No, I'd better change. I'll just be a moment. Tell me what I should put on.

I: You should wear sincerity and bravery.

SHE (*not understanding*): I should? ... Then I'll just be a moment ... Wait up! ... (*Finally understanding*) Oh, that's what you meant!

I: Let's go!

SHE: Let's. (*Follows behind ME.*) You see, I was in love with you and still am. Not because of some agenda, but with all my heart. (*Stops on the threshold.*) Perhaps we shouldn't go. Instead, better let's go away from here, far away, and let's give up everything, everything except life. Darling, let's go and live simply somewhere. Okay? In a house with a well outside and a field of rye. I would come out carrying empty pails, not having slept because I didn't want to, and you would be at the well. I would take you into the rye field. (*Moves with her hands as if spreading apart the rye and taking me into the field.*) Cornflowers and a broad white birch dot the field. Can you see? God! Can you smell the scent of love?

I (*walking up the stairs, grumbling*): All you're doing is retelling old sentimental songs.

SHE (*behind me*): You see, I hid my first love, and now it is wailing. Wait a moment, I'll put it to sleep. Quiet, my love. I'll buy you a Ukrainian reed-pipe and I'll sing to you:

Rockabye, baby,  
 Silken strands,  
 Golden reeds,  
 Silver bells,  
 You're safe in your cradle,  
 Sleep well, my child!

(*I take her by the hand.*) Where are you taking me? To the torturers? No, let me go, darling! I cannot.

I (*letting go of her hand, trying to persuade myself more rather than her*): You see, someone else lived here, and she ... she also prayed: my darling, my love ... She truly suffered tortures. Luka says that she ...

SHE: Who will tell my mother how I went to church for the Passion, how I carried a candle home (*pretending to carry a candle*), and you, my darling wind (*shielding her imaginary candle from me and going down*) want to blow out the candle of my life.

I (*feeling that in a moment I will give in to her*): Luka! (*I shout.*) Luka! (*Seeing LUKA on the stairs, I feel my determination grow. I seize her hand and take her upstairs to LUKA.*) Here is my dream: she's the Gull, Luka!

SHE: No!



I: Yes! Do you remember the first uprising? The wind, the moon? Then Ensign Perotsky fell into Comrade Fate's hands. Fate didn't know who he was, although he felt instinctively he was an enemy and wanted to do away with him. But I intervened. I had been sent by Hamar, but on the way she saw me on the stairs and asked me to save Perotsky. And I saved him. What else could I do? She was my dream, and for nearly two years I galloped toward her on my dream horse although she lived a few yards away from me. Then she asked me to save the man who was my rival. How could I not show kindness and true love? I had been detached from the masses, lost somewhere in the attic between heaven and earth. I had lofty thoughts in the cobweb of my dreams, that my mission was to be the link between heaven and earth, between the ideal and the mob, between the nation and its future! I was a typical whimsical dreamer. The result you know: the raid, ruin, and the death of our comrades—a dead interval in the revolutionary struggle. I am the author of that interval, Luka!

LUKA: Tell me one thing: did you know that she was the Gull?

I: No!

SHE: He did know ... I told him.

LUKA (*turning to ME after signalling to the Red GUARDS to take MARYNA away and waiting until they have escorted HER away*): Tell me as a friend, Ilko, did you know?

I: No, I didn't. But I knew who Perotsky was.

LUKA (*deep in thought, speaking more to himself*): Well, the raid would have taken place without Perotsky. But you freed Perotsky, and that is treason.

I: Yes, I admit it's treason, Luka! As long as I live and wherever I go, its shadow will hound me.

LUKA: True, it was not intentional. It's good it already happened, because ... it was unavoidable, the result of your attic dreams. (*Turning to ME*) You must learn a lesson from it, for many temptations, vacillations, and betrayals still await us on our campaign to our distant goal. Now go. I'll lock you up, and tomorrow you'll face the Revolutionary Tribunal. You must be tried. But I am your friend. You probably haven't eaten yet today. I'll bring you something. (*Takes ME into Perotsky's room. We shake hands. LUKA leaves and locks the door. I hear his sincere, comradely, moving words.*) Good night, Ilko!

I: No! Good morning, Luka! See, the sun's rising.

*I feel relieved. The window is like a fiery banner. I feel an extraordinary exaltation. I can hear the whole world playing a symphony pathétique, first on helicons, baritones, and trombones, then on clarinets, flutes, and violins. I know that at this moment LUKA is looking through the window too and hearing this symphony.*

## Appendix B

### Variants of Sonata Pathétique

*Because of Soviet censorship, Mykola Kulish wrote numerous variants of Sonata Pathétique in the hope that one of them could be staged in Soviet Ukraine or in Russian translation in Russia. But his play was not allowed to be staged or published during his lifetime. Its first two editions, based on Kulish's original text, appeared outside the USSR, in 1943 and 1955. In Ukraine the play was not published until 1968, in a later version. The main difference among the several existing variants is in the play's ending.*

*The following excerpt highlights both Maryna's and Ilko's split desires (the split "I"). While they dream of personal love and happiness, their diverse partisan political obligations makes them act against their own values or "in bad faith" (to use existentialist terminology). This, in turn, leads to a split in their respective personalities. Kulish shows this by using an approach that allows one part of a person to observe his or her other part, in a manner quite similar to Viktor Shklovsky's *ostranenie* (defamiliarization) technique and Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* ("defamiliarization effect").<sup>32</sup>*

*In 1931 Kulish sent the following variant to his Russian translator, Pavel Zenkevich. The original text is preserved in the archive (fond 148–61, pp. 54–61) of the Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in Kyiv. It was first published in the parallel Ukrainian-language volume to this anthology, *Antolohiia modernoi ukrains'koï dramy* (1998), pp. 528–32. In this later variant of the play, Ilko kills Maryna.*

### Act Seven

*And finally, my friends, the finale. It is night. The Revolutionary Committee is meeting again at the Perotsky residence. I'm going to see Luka. He is still in the hall. He is alone. He is on duty ...*

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#### **Kulish's note**

*This scene will be completed later. Its summary is as follows. After realizing his crime, resulting from his previous mistaken ideological way of thinking and Maryna's role in this thinking, as well as the crime and the events that followed (the Perotsky episode, the death of Ovrām, Zinka, and others), Ilko is still not convinced of his inner rebirth, and that is why he wants to test himself. He wants to do this by meeting with Maryna face to face, because he has begun suspecting that for him Maryna (her image) is not just a lover's desire or dream, but perhaps also that she represents a concept of certain ideas that are inimical to the Revolution. So he comes at night to Luka asking to see Maryna (who, once her identity has been revealed, has been arrested and, as Luka says, will be sentenced to death). Ilko wants to test his new feelings for her, armed with the new ideology (with the hidden thought of seeing whether he could kill her and*

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<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of this topic, see Larysa M. L. Zales'ka Onyshkevych, "Kulish i Brecht – samosposterezhennia heroia ta samosposterezhennia aktora," *Suchasnist'*, 1992, no. 1: 131–35.

whether he will kill her). Luka gives permission for such a meeting (although he is personally against it).

## Scene 2

*There is a GUARD at the door of the basement apartment. I hand him Luka's note. The GUARD gives ME the key and goes away. For a minute I stand there and listen. My sense of hearing is so clear and acute that I can hear and do hear how time and stars flow in outer space. I hear a drop of water dripping loudly in the basement. But I cannot hear HER. Is SHE asleep? A thought strikes me: to knock. But is this not a superfluous politeness? After all, I am in a completely different role now. I hold the key to the door and to life. I unlock the door and, for some reason, try to do so as quietly as possible, but the key seems to overturn the world and keeps thundering and thundering. I enter. A candle.*

SHE: You?

I: I.

SHE: You have entered without asking permission—that is a privilege of old beggars, lovers, and, it seems, also executioners. I've waited for him, but you've come instead. But I have waited for you too. I never stopped. Only it was not from this side and not from this door. I've waited for you over there, near the little window. Near the azure window of eternity. I've looked out to see whether you were galloping here on a horse... And finally you've come.

I: I have come.

SHE: Thank you. Forgive me for not coming out to meet you, for not opening the door, that beautiful little door to my land, to my land of eternal love. But, as you can see, it is not my fault: the door was locked and I don't have the keys. That's the way it is. Enter into this land. While waiting for you, I have grown an entire garden of love. Come in! (*I keep standing. Not a move. I keep thinking: is she just performing, pretending all of this, or is she sincere?*) Why are you standing at the threshold? Why don't you speak? Don't you want to? Can't you? I've waited for you. I've waited for you for such a long time. (*Comes up to ME and, as if taking ME by the hand, leads ME in her imagination after HER.*) Please enter, enter into the garden of my love. Look—it's in bloom. For you. You think these are just hallucinations? Oh, no! Here are the marble steps. Aren't they wonderful? When the azure moon is shining, they are so beautiful. I've stood on them waiting for you. Oh, how long I've waited for you! Do you know how long? For centuries. Don't be surprised—we all live in terms of centuries, because we precede ideas. You are the one who believed in Petrarch and eternal love, aren't you?

I: Everything flows along, everything passes by, and nothing remains the same.

SHE (*without turning around, speaking to me, my imaginary double*): I see! Yesterday you believed in Petrarch, today in Heraclitus, and tomorrow?

I: Tomorrow, it will be in socialism. The next great epoch.

SHE: Oh, dear, I forgot you are a materialist now. Forgive me! Nevertheless, let's say we are material parts, but we have grown with material roots for centuries and we live by means of centuries. I've waited for you for such a long time. I don't know whether it was in my dreams or whether it was a reality once, but I've waited for you and looked for you when you galloped past me through the entire Cossack age while looking for

me. It was windy, and the steppe was still covered in tall grasses. Remember? I used to fly over Zhovti Vody and look out for you in the Crimea while you wandered the beaten trade routes (which are now broken up) as a salt trader, and I travelled as part of your dream over the ponds in the steppe, where there are reeds and white swans swim on the evening waters. Come now into the garden of my love. Enter! See how it blooms? It is entirely at your service. See, here (*gesturing toward the drops and the little stream*) is a fountain and a water clock, all in one. Here eternity keeps time—it is the music of life and death. It is here, you see, that my flowerbed of hopes has already lost its petals, just like a poppy. And here is an azure window. And here (*gesturing*) is our nuptial bed ... The bed of eternal love. Sit down for a moment, you're tired, my darling. (*SHE seems to be sitting ME down. SHE looks into my eyes, the imaginary ME. SHE is very beautiful. My heart is trembling.*) I can see by your eyes how tired you are. You are looking at him (*pointing to ME*), at your double. What is he guarding? Let him guard. That is why he has weapons, isn't it? Right? ... Would you like me to play for you?

(*SHE sits down, facing the wall as if at a piano, and begins playing. I have never seen her play. She is even more beautiful because of these musical movements of hers. SHE plays with all her youthful, beautiful body. How touchingly girlish are her elbows! I can really hear music. But what kind? Even better than the music I'd heard before. My heart is pounding from over-exertion. SHE bends down, her head touching her hands, as if on a keyboard. Then SHE turns to ME, the imaginary ME. SHE has tears in her eyes.*)

Darling, why don't you ask your double why he has put me in this dark basement? Why has he chased his dream down from its mountain peak and locked it up? Take me there! I want to live there again! I want to live! (*SHE is glowing from love and desire as SHE walks past ME, as if my double is actually leading her. SHE goes up the stairs. SHE actually does. SHE is at the door.*)

I: Halt! (*I overtake HER and block her way to the higher steps. I recall a dream.*)

SHE: Don't be afraid! I will not run away. And could I actually I run away from you? From you?

I: But I will not let you go up there.

SHE: Why not?

I: You know why.

SHE: Is it because you have a gun?

I: Because this is where feelings end. Although you've lived through the centuries, and let's say you've even walked in mine, now you won't be allowed to go any higher, you, my former dream and love. Yes, I bounded through the entire Cossack age searching for you; as a salt trader I went to tranquil ponds where reeds grow; I galloped and dashed on wild dream-horses through the steppes until I saw that there is nothing eternal and that I'm galloping while seated on a hobbyhorse.

SHE: Motion is eternal, and that is beautiful! Why have you stopped? Go on! Go forward!

I: This very movement of mine was a backward one. Yes. I have lived through the centuries, but I also lived in the past. Now I want to live in today's world! I bless the coming future day and I am changing horses!

SHE: To which one?

I: To which one? At the dawn of the new day it is the Revolution that waters the horses. The Revolution has many of them.<sup>33</sup>

SHE (*imagining*): At the dawn of the new day it is the Revolution that waters the horses. It waters the horses from a Ukrainian well. At dawn. (SHE *is illumined by a new idea*.) Near the well is a bivouac, and then there are rye fields. My rye. And there I walk, sleepless from desire—a girl who has gone with pails to get water—and I'm watering your horse. From the window an old woman in a black cap is looking out—[she is] separation. She will come out and stand between us. Darling, let's hurry! My love is like a ripe berry ready to fall from the slightest breeze. Pluck it. Don't be afraid! Let your double stand a while there near the well and guard us ... from separation. And the rye fields, oh, what rye! You can smell it! (SHE *moves her arms as if actually parting the rye and goes up the stairs to the door of her apartment*. SHE *is leading the imaginary ME*.) Look—cornflowers and a small birch tree. My love! Until dawn there are battles, after daybreak there is death, and beyond the rye there is separation.\*

I (*having taken hold of myself—it's a wonder where I get the strength*): All this comes from old songs, parodied with sentimentality.

SHE: It's the soul crying out, it's the body roaring! I rock and rock my hungry love, I rock it day and night while it wails—my first love. Go on, take a Ukrainian reed pipe and play! (*To the imaginary ME*) Do you want a son? I do! God, how I do! (*Bending down toward the stair rails, as if to a cradle, and, saying "I am a mother, a suffering mother," SHE sings.*)

Lulla, lulla, lulla,  
in a painted cradle  
with silken beads,  
golden rails,  
and silver bells,  
Fall asleep, my little child.

Sleep until your father returns! He'll turn the land of sorrow into joy, or something. And then the knotgrass and thistles ...

I: Old songs parodied with sentimentality and fervour. Enough of that! These images are already dead. This is mould and not growth, a museum and not life. And you don't need a son. And don't rock him (that's what medicine says!). You'll poison his blood. You'll raise somebody again who will just stroll about and transport dreams on a hobbyhorse into the past.

SHE (*straightening fully*): No! He is not going to be like that! I'll nurse him with my own milk! A new kind of milk!

I: What kind?

SHE: Not the milk of Russian culture with which you were fed—this mixture of Byzantium and Saint Vasilii the Blessed [of Moscow] ...

I: And a mixture Bismarck and Saint Matrona. Or perhaps with milk from Spengler's factory?

SHE: Or the milk of dictatorship?

I: Yes.

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<sup>33</sup> In Ukrainian folklore, a girl watering man's horse symbolizes her sexual submission. When Kulish's text describes the Revolution watering many horses, it implies that the Revolution is a prostitute, with no ethics or loyalty.

\* The cry of the Bacchantes.

SHE: Which contains more blood than milk.

I: Which comes from young and new blood.

SHE: And isn't this why you came, to take it from me?

I: If only for research and the study of national bacteria.

SHE (*after a pause*): What sorrow! Instead of the road to love, there is night and the road to death. What passion, indeed. Now I can barely hold the candle of light in my hands. Who will tell my old mother, who awaits me in her dark, little house, how I went to church, how I stood during the Stations of the Cross, how I carried my candle home (*walking up the steps as if really carrying a candle*) while the wind, that wind (*shielding the candle from ME with her palm*) blew—foo-foo—and blew out the candle of my life and its own idea. It became dark. (*SHE almost reaches my door. Again I block her way. With determination.*) So, what now! Go ahead and shoot, my darling. Oh, wind! My dear wind ... (*Then suddenly, with scorn*) Oh, do forgive me, I am joking.

I: I'm not joking.

SHE: You do not joke. You are not joking now. So now tell me, who are you? To what nation do you belong? Where is your nation?

I: My nation is now where the class is. Where the oppressed class is—that is where my nation will be.

SHE: You need to understand that we have not lived a national life, we have not breathed yet, we have not created yet, we don't know yet who we are and where our own path lies in history, yet you are proposing that we renounce our own selves for the sake of socialist experiments and serve only as material for laboratory study. What tragedy!

I: In this tragedy you play the role of the nation beautifully, but you are not the nation. You are only that part of it that moves westward with the evening's shadows.

SHE: And rises over there (*pointing to the east, which is azure in the window*) with the morning's shadows.

I: You are mistaken. That is where our vanguard patrols of the Revolution go. One can see the stormy horizons, the reflection of lightning on their backs. Today Ukraine is not a stage, but a military staging area ...

SHE: A Russian bivouac.

I: A staging area for the great battle of ideas ...

SHE: A prison where you are the executioner of the national idea.

I: And where my executioner will be the national idea.

SHE: But I believe in it ...

I: In the international ...

SHE: As in God!

I: In the social axiom!

SHE: That's my soul!

I: My consciousness!

SHE: And you cannot kill it. (*Passionately*) I will live among the reeds, among the willow twigs! A shepherd shall make a reed pipe, and at dawn through that pipe I, your national, unconquerable idea, shall sing.

*I shoot. My ears ring. SHE slides down the stairs. SHE is dead. Somewhere someone is playing a reed pipe. Somewhere down below. Then I go upstairs to the attic. The little window looks like a fiery, square banner. I am overcome by extraordinary elation. I take the helicon. I am not playing, I don't know how to play yet, but nevertheless it seems like the whole world is beginning to*

*play, at first on the helicons, baritones, and trombones of the pathetic symphony, then moving on to the clarinets, flutes, and violins.*

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**Kulish's note**

*There is another variant ending. After MARYNA says "foo-foo—and blew out the candle of my life and its own idea. It became dark" she starts running, trying to escape.*

I: Stop! (*Taking out my revolver*) Stop! (*I aim but can't keep the revolver still.*) Luka! (*Shouting*)  
Luka! (*I shoot. SHE falls. Yes. I've killed her. I go up to LUKA'S.*) It's me, and that  
(*pointing*) was my dream, the Gull. Luka! ...

*Translated by Larissa M. L. Zaleska Onyshkevych*

# Volodymyr Vynnychenko

One of the most prolific and controversial Ukrainian writers and politicians of the twentieth century, Volodymyr Vynnychenko was born in Velykyi Kut, a village near present-day Kirovohrad, in 1880. He died in Mougins, France, in 1951.

Vynnychenko became a revolutionary soon after entering Kyiv University in 1901. As a member of the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party and then the Ukrainian Social Democratic Workers' Party (USDRP), he was imprisoned several times by the tsarist regime. During the 1917–19 struggle for Ukrainian independence, he was at the forefront of the Ukrainian government, serving as its secretary-general and deputy chairman of the Ukrainian Central Rada (1917) and first chairman of the Directory of the Ukrainian National Republic (1918–19). From 1919 he lived as an émigré in Vienna and Prague, and in 1924 he settled in France.

Vynnychenko's literary career began at the age of twenty-two with the publication of the first of his many short stories. His oeuvre also consists of eleven novels, twenty-three plays, three volumes of memoirs, political articles and pamphlets, and a treatise expounding his philosophy of "concordism." He served as the editor of the USDRP newspapers *Borot'ba* and *Robotnycha hazeta* (1917) and the émigré journals *Nova doba* (1920–21) and *Nova Ukraïna* (1923–24).

In his literary works Vynnychenko portrays the life of various classes in Ukrainian society, especially the working class. He often presents situations and problems in the manner of psychological case studies. In many works he stresses the freedom of choice and living one's life according to one's own morality. These works, particularly his first play *Dysharmoniiia* (Dis-harmony, 1906), exhibit basic elements of existentialism. Vynnychenko's characters struggle to achieve harmony between their values and beliefs and the needs of the community; this struggle is fully presented in his novel *Chesnist' z soboiu* (Honesty with Oneself, 1906). In his plays Vynnychenko portrays various individuals' strivings for meaning, values, and the fulfilment of their dreams. His Ukrainian, Jewish, and Russian characters' search for self-expression is often linked to the goals of social liberation and depicted in the context of political conflicts in tsarist-ruled society.

Vynnychenko presents the personal values and choices of his protagonists boldly, often naturalistically. Some of his contemporaries, both readers and critics, vehemently disapproved of his style and subject matter. Nonetheless his work enjoyed great popularity in Ukraine and beyond, and appeared in several editions. They were also translated into French, German, Polish, Dutch, Russian, Norwegian, Spanish, Hebrew, Bulgarian, Italian, Tatar, and English. His plays were staged in Ukraine and abroad. *Brekhnia* (Falsehood, 1910) for example, was performed in Italy over two hundred times and ran in Berlin for two months in the 1920s, and in 1922 his play *Chorna Pantera i Bilyi Vedmid'* (Black Panther and White Bear, 1911) was made into a film in Germany called *Die schwarze Panterin*.

The stories, novels, and plays Vynnychenko wrote as an émigré deal primarily with universal, quite often utopian ideas and issues, such as world peace, international political and economic co-operation, workers' strikes, terrorism, and Oriental religions. He also wrote the first Ukrainian utopian novel, *Soniashna mashyna* (The Solar Machine, 1928). His novel *Nova zapovid'* (A New Commandment), which he completed in 1932, was published in French translation in 1949 and in Ukrainian in 1950. In it Vynnychenko's message of peace is combined with his ideas of "collectocracy," that is, joint projects by capitalists and workers, espe-



cially in running industry. The French edition brought him several awards and was the subject of impassioned public literary debates in Paris.

Owing to their tremendous popularity, Vynnychenko's literary works were published in Soviet Ukraine until the early 1930s despite his vocal criticism of the Soviet regime. Thereafter his writings were banned in the USSR until the late 1980s. When Vynnychenko died, he left behind unpublished diaries, novels, and plays, several of which were later published in the United States and Canada. Vynnychenko's valuable personal papers are preserved in New York City.

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## The Ethics of Choice

Vynnychenko wrote the play *Prorok* (The Prophet) in 1929, although it was not published until 1960. Along with his novel *Soniashna mashyna* (The Solar Machine, 1928), it best represents the author's ability to sense the coming of certain trends in Western society. The play may also be considered as a further development of Vynnychenko's ideas about the role of the individual in terms of his social responsibility to his community. The author has a keen understanding of popular causes and the mass appeal of specific ideas and charismatic individuals. *The Prophet*, like most of his plays, is a thesis work: it utilizes his prediction and the theme of social responsibility in order to make a statement.

Vynnychenko's extensive archive contains numerous notebook diaries that he wrote from 1911 until his death. They record conceptions of his ideas for specific works, when and where he wrote them (with detailed hourly records), and his thoughts and hopes for them. Vynnychenko notes that he first started thinking about writing *The Prophet* on 31 July 1929, and wrote the play from 24 August to 8 September of that year. He spent ninety-three hours writing the play and forty hours rewriting it, completing his revisions on 16 September. The dates may be significant for tracking down contemporaneous political developments that influenced him and the parallels he foresaw (in *Soniashna mashyna*, for example, he hinted at the rise of Hitler). Several months before Vynnychenko began *The Prophet*, his diary notes show that he was occupied with the theme of the individual versus the community. He notes that personal happiness and a harmonious personal life require a correlation of one's values and acts, as well as of the welfare of an individual and a group. He concludes that "From the point of view of the community, the unification of an individual's interests with those of a group represent a moral (ethical) quality in a positive sense."<sup>1</sup>

Upon reading *The Prophet*, one understands what Vynnychenko meant by the above comment. After Amar, the prophet, loses his special powers, the resolution of his final conflict and the choice suggested by his closest associates illustrate the priorities that Vynnychenko preached. By stressing the primacy of universal or community concerns over personal ones, Vynnychenko expounds his concept of love and self-sacrifice. This brings to mind the obvious embodiment of love and self-sacrifice—Jesus Christ. In fact, Vynnychenko's play was initially titled *The Messiah*. Numerous other details and situations hint at the parallels between Amar and Christ: Amar's age, the disciples, and the miracles he performs. However, these similarities are rather superficial; Vynnychenko develops them only to make his idea more obvious. His use of irony indicates that he had no serious intention to present a parallel between Christ and Amar, and the similarities between them are not consistent. The author does not appear to be interested in portraying the mystical aspects of Amar, only in presenting a sceptical look

<sup>1</sup> Vynnychenko's diary entry for 16 March 1929; quoted in Larissa M. L. Z. Onyshkevych, "Prorok—ostannia drama Volodymyra Vynnychenka," *Slovo* (Edmonton) 5 (1973): 197.

at the fabrications of “supermen” and at the denial of basic human nature. By succumbing to such human desires as love and sex, Amar appears to be (or to have always been) mortal. Consequently he is judged for his failings and condemned by his friends not so much for misleading the public, but for undermining its beliefs and source of inspiration. In the play’s final act Amar’s commitment to honesty and truth is put to the test, and the staged “miracle” of his ascension parodies his teachings.

Almost all of the other major characters in *The Prophet* exercise their choices based on the principle of personal freedom. Many of the secondary characters, however, are only superficially attached to their principles; for them appearances seem more important. When Amar is placed in a similar position, he must choose whether or not to abide by his principles. It would have been more than a personal tragedy if he had chosen to preserve his honour and his life. However, the choice Amar makes is not quite tragic, because his final compromise does not act against what he considers the greatest value—the good of the people. For Amar, the means does seem to justify the end. Placed in an almost existentially extreme situation, Amar becomes an *engagé* actor with a mission to maintain the people’s faith. His act is grotesquely tragicomic rather than heroic and tragic. The bargain he agrees to may appear to favour the cynical and pragmatic Wright, the embodiment of a contemporary Mephistopheles, who provides all the solutions and, who, to a certain extent, deals with Amar’s “soul.” But Amar’s last deed gives the greatest good to the greatest number; individual machinations, humiliation, and compromises become secondary. The play thus presents an extreme demonstration of a very basic and simple principle.

# *The Prophet*

## (1929)

### CHARACTERS

KATE DRAYTON

RICHARD WRIGHT

MISS WEDD

BETTY

WILLIAMS

PROPHET, *or* AMAR

RANJIT

RAMA

SINDHU

SHANDRA

ARJUNA

HOTEL MANAGER

MUSTAFA

BLIND MAN

SENATOR

NATURALIST

PHILOSOPHER

BISHOP

GENERAL

PSYCHIATRIST

SALESMAN WITH A PACKAGE

SALESMAN WITH A SUITCASE

SALESMAN WITH TWO SUITCASES

TALL JOURNALIST

SHORT JOURNALIST

FIRST DELEGATE

SECOND DELEGATE

THIRD DELEGATE

SECRETARY *of the Committee*

SECRETARIES *in the Prophet's building*

HOTEL GUESTS

HOTEL EMPLOYEES

DOORMEN *and* PORTERS

THE PROPHET'S FOLLOWERS

PEOPLE IN THE CROWD

## Act One

### Scene 1

*The lobby of a big hotel leading to a wide terrace. Hotel guests are on the terrace, curiously and anxiously looking in the same direction, some of them through binoculars*

HOTEL EMPLOYEES *have gathered at the terrace door. They are excited and are whispering impatiently, The HOTEL MANAGER, a middle-aged, proper and dignified gentleman, is pacing in the lobby and gazing at the EMPLOYEES.*

*Suddenly there is a commotion on the terrace. Everyone looks down and to the side somewhere, shouting and asking questions. Then everyone rushes below in the excitement. Some people run through the lobby shouting:*

He's taking another route!

He's taking another route!

He's taking another route!

*The HOTEL EMPLOYEES follow the GUESTS some cutting through the terrace, others going through the entrance doors.*

HOTEL MANAGER: Where are you going? Where? Wait! Where are all of you running off to?

HOTEL EMPLOYEES (*not paying attention to the HOTEL MANAGER, wave their hands, and shout with delight*): He's coming! He's coming!

HOTEL MANAGER (*stopping MUSTAFA*): For God's sake, Mustafa, where are you running to? Did you bring the sick man in Room Ten hot water?

MUSTAFA (*in joyful rapture*): sir! The Prophet is coming! He's already approaching our village! (*Wants to rush off.*)

HOTEL MANAGER (*grabbing him by the arm*): But someone may die because of you, Mustafa! Do you hear me? Don't you dare leave your floor. The Prophet preaches love, while you are doing such a bad thing to a person because of him. What would the Prophet say to that?

*MUSTAFA is taken aback and stares at the HOTEL MANAGER.*

HOTEL MANAGER: Return at once! After you finish your work you will still have time to see the Prophet. Go, Mustafa, go! (*Pushes him back towards the staircase.*)

MUSTAFA, *slowly and unwillingly*, goes back. The HOTEL MANAGER helplessly looks around, rights the overturned chairs, and listens to the excited shouts of the people in the street running past the hotel. WILLIAMS runs in. He is a tall, stout, redhead with a ruddy face and small eyes.

WILLIAMS (*to the HOTEL MANAGER*): So? are you going to find rooms for me or not? I'm asking you for the last time.

HOTEL MANAGER: sir, I have already told you...

WILLIAMS (*impatiently*): Listen, my dear man, we're talking about Mrs. Drayton here, who is worth billions of dollars. Billions! Do you hear me?

HOTEL MANAGER: That's splendid, but ...

WILLIAMS: I would like you to know, sir, that kings and presidents feel honoured and fortunate to entertain her in their homes. So, I'd think that ...

HOTEL MANAGER: But I told you that not all only the rooms, but even all the bathrooms and corridors are occupied!

WILLIAMS: Then you must vacate them, damn it!

HOTEL MANAGER: How can I vacate them?! Where will I put the guests?

WILLIAMS: Wherever you want. In the basement, in the attic, on the roof, wherever you please.

But do it now, right away, my dear man. Mrs. Drayton might be here any minute.

HOTEL MANAGER (*offended, with dignity*): I can see, sir, that you don't understand with whom you're dealing.

WILLIAMS: I assume I'm dealing with the hotel manager and an intelligent person. Isn't that right?

HOTEL MANAGER: You're not mistaken, and you may add: with an Englishman and a gentleman, sir. How can I throw people out of the rooms I rented to them myself?!

WILLIAMS: You'll compensate them. Just let me know how much. Hurry up, there's no time!

HOTEL MANAGER: sir, I repeat: I am not an American but an Englishman, and I don't sell my honour.

WILLIAMS: Oh Lord! Listen, my friend: Mrs. Drayton is a good person, she's kind-hearted, but ... she can't stand any hurdles along her path. Understand? That's one unfortunate characteristic of her nature. She is just like a car that can't be bothered with the bugs and insects in its path as it moves across a lawn.

HOTEL MANAGER: sir, I'll tell you one more time: I am an Englishman and a gentleman. That is why I also possess a certain trait of the English personality: we cannot comprehend how one could put a price on one's work and honour.

WILLIAMS (*angrily*): In that case you'll understand soon enough. Do you think that Mrs. Drayton flew from America with her fiancé and an entire staff to this prophet of yours in order to sleep on the streets of your lousy village?! I tell you, in two months you'll be thrown out of your hotel for this and ruined completely! Do you hear me? The effort will cost us money but it'll happen! I advise you not to jest with the widow of Mr. Drayton. Do you hear?

HOTEL MANAGER (*becoming alarmed*): sir, I don't understand, what do you want from me?!

WILLIAMS: I want ten rooms. Name your price! Aren't they usually two, three, or five dollars a room? Do you want one hundred, two hundred, three hundred dollars? Listen, mister, I'm afraid that Mrs. Drayton's car will be here soon. So I'm offering five hundred dollars per room. Five thousand for ten rooms. Okay? Either that or complete ruin. Take your pick!

HOTEL MANAGER: But you understand ...

WILLIAMS: I understand everything. Hurry up!

HOTEL MANAGER: What will I tell the other guests?!

WILLIAMS: You'll tell them that you are an Englishman and a gentleman and that you couldn't refuse your hospitality to the representative of another country who is also a lady. As Englishmen and gentlemen, they will not barter on the question of national honour. Therefore ...

HOTEL MANAGER: But you should understand ...

WILLIAMS: Oh my God! I do understand. Seven thousand! Well? Seven thousand for one day. You won't make this much in a year!

*The sound of a car is heard from the street.*

WILLIAMS (*scared*): That's them! Well? Well, eight thousand, or you can go to hell! But hurry up!

HOTEL MANAGER: This is only between us?

WILLIAMS: My dear man! I'm an American! Business is business. A business secret is a question of our honour. (*Quickly.*) Oh yes, and give you'll me a receipt for ten thousand. Okay?

HOTEL MANAGER: What?! But ...

WILLIAMS: Don't worry, you'll get your eight thousand. But you'll give me a receipt for ten. A small business transaction. Understand?

*The car sounds impatient, importunate.*

WILLIAMS: Oh, she's getting mad! So, do you agree? Terrific!

WILLIAMS *shakes hands with the dumbfounded* HOTEL MANAGER. *The latter wants to say something, but WILLIAMS runs out of the hotel and onto the street.*

*Coming toward him are KATE with WEDD in front of her. BETTY and WRIGHT follow them. KATE is twenty-three years old, with a delicate, pretty face a bit on the thin side. When she is serious, her eyes take on a somewhat sad expression. She is friendly and has an indulgent sense of humour, but one can always sense her authority and indifference.*

KATE: Ah, Williams! Thank God! We thought that you had already fallen into the clutches of the Prophet. Are there any rooms?

WILLIAMS: Yes, Mrs. Drayton. Ten rooms, Mrs. Drayton. But please pardon the fact that they aren't completely ready yet.

KATE *raises her brows in astonishment and displeasure.*

HOTEL MANAGER (*rushing toward them and bowing*): I beg your pardon, madam. The problem is that all the help, including the cooks and the porters, have run off to greet the Prophet. In this situation, any sort of discipline is impossible. There was nothing I could say or do.

KATE (*with interest, energetically*): All of them? How interesting! Are they all Hindu?

HOTEL MANAGER: Oh, no. There are also Europeans, Chinese, and Muslims. But the Prophet preaches to everyone, honoured lady. Religion and nationality make no difference to him.



KATE (*enthusiastically turning to WRIGHT*): Ah, so that's the reason, Richard! (*To the HOTEL MANAGER.*) We were wondering why the streets of your village were so empty, as if the entire population had died. Will the Prophet definitely come this way?

BETTY (*a fair-haired, happy eighteen-year old*): Oh, Kate, we aren't going to miss him again, are we?

HOTEL MANAGER: Don't worry, dear Ladies, the Prophet will certainly be coming through this area. He was even supposed to walk past our hotel, but for some reason he is taking another route.

BETTY: Where exactly? Where? Kate, let's drive there right away!

WRIGHT (*a tall, erect, thin, clean-shaven thirty-four-year-old with light-coloured, intelligent eyes; speaking calmly*): We'll make it, Betty, we'll make it. Miss Wedd and Kate should rest awhile. The Prophet isn't a tiger. He won't escape into the jungle.

BETTY: But he hops around like a flea, without any kind of order. (*To the HOTEL MANAGER.*) Is he really a prophet? It isn't just a publicity stunt, is it?

HOTEL MANAGER: Oh, no!

KATE: And he really truly, performs miracles? He cures the sick?

HOTEL MANAGER: Yes, madam. The blind, the deaf, the paralyzed.

WRIGHT (*to KATE*): Well, it's a typical occupation of all prophets.

BETTY: Oh, Auntie, let him cure your stomach trouble!

WEDD (*a thin, rather flat, bespectacled forty-two-year-old woman with a stern demeanour who maintains an air of sacrifice, in a dry tone*): Please don't include me in your sacrilegious whims!

KATE (*to the HOTEL MANAGER*): Is he very dirty, this Prophet? He's hairy, isn't he?

HOTEL MANAGER: Dirty? Oh, I don't think so. I didn't see him myself. But they say that he is young and very pleasant.

WRIGHT: Who is he really? A peasant, a merchant, a shepherd? Or is he actually the son of a maharaja?

HOTEL MANAGER: I don't know. No one knows, sir.

KATE: Is it true what they write—that he came down from the Himalayas? And until then no one had ever seen him?

HOTEL MANAGER: That's what they say, madam.

KATE: And does he really speak every language?

HOTEL MANAGER: Yes, madam, he speaks many languages. Today I was told an entirely new version of his origin. If it interests you ...

KATE: Oh, very much!

BETTY: Oh, do tell us, please!

HOTEL MANAGER (*to KATE*): I, you must understand, can't vouch for the authenticity of this version. So many of them appear every day! In any case, it is no more incredible than the others. Madam, did you ever hear the legend of the Seven Hindu Wise Men?

KATE: The Seven Wise Men? No, I don't think so. (*To WRIGHT.*) Richard?

WRIGHT (*to the HOTEL MANAGER*): You mean the ones who are said to live somewhere in the depths of the Himalayas?

HOTEL MANAGER: Yes, sir. (*To KATE*) There is a legend about seven wise men who have lived in the Himalayas since the beginning of time. When one of them dies, a candidate who was groomed for this then takes his place. These wise men supposedly possess the secret of immense, superhuman power, which can even overturn our planet. This

secret has supposedly been preserved by them since the time of Atlantis, thirty or fifty thousand years ago. But up to now the wise men have never revealed this secret, only have awaited the coming of the Messiah. This prophet, Amar, is supposed to be that Messiah, and they passed on to him the secret of the "Great Knowledge." At this point this version is a bit unclear. How was the Messiah supposed to have come to earth? Was he born here or did he simply descend from heaven? True, this version states that the wise men raised Prophet Amar. Until he was thirty he lived in the Himalayas under their care and tutelage and never faced real life. However, these sages are said to possess knowledge of all the achievements of contemporary science and technology, and therefore nothing surprises Amar. It is said that Maharaja Ranjit gave his entire immense fortune for this knowledge. And now he has become one of the Prophet's disciples.

KATE: Is it true that officials tried to arrest him, but couldn't because an invisible wall surrounds him?

HOTEL MANAGER: That's true, madam.

BETTY: Does that mean that he is a god?!

WEDD (*sternly*): Betty! Enough blasphemy!

KATE: How interesting! Extremely interesting! I read that he wants to wage a campaign in Europe in order to save it.

HOTEL MANAGER: That's what they say, madam. His main strength, as he says himself, is in his power of love. It and his faith have given him this secret power of performing all kinds of miracles. You know that he never becomes angry at anyone. No one has ever seen him show a glimmer of anger. Not in any situation.

KATE (*laughing*): Well, this only truly proves that he never knew real life and never had closer contacts with people. And when he became a prophet, no one has dared to anger him.

HOTEL MANAGER (*wanting to say something to KATE, but then seeing MUSTAFA, who is running down the stairs*): The sick man hasn't got any worse, Mustafa?

MUSTAFA: No, sir. I gave him some hot water and did everything that was needed. Please allow me to go now, sir, because I'm afraid that even now I won't catch up with the Prophet. (*His eyes gleam with enthusiasm.*)

KATE (*looking at him curiously*): Do you really want to see the Prophet so badly?

MUSTAFA (*astonished*): Madam, who wouldn't want to see God?!

KATE: Hm? What if I offered you a thousand dollars not to go and see the prophet? Williams, how many pounds is that?

WILLIAMS: That's two hundred pounds, Mrs. Drayton.

KATE: Two hundred pounds. Well?

MUSTAFA (*looking at KATE in confusion*): Two hundred pounds?

KATE (*impatiently*): Then a thousand pounds! I'll give you a thousand pounds if you agree not to see the Prophet. Deal? I'm not kidding. Williams, give me my check book. Well, Mustafa? A thousand pounds?

*Everyone is astonished. WRIGHT smiles calmly.*

WEDD (*indignantly shrugging her shoulders and sighing*): Another prank!

MUSTAFA *stares with wide open eyes and struggles with himself.*

KATE: Well, Mustafa? OK, how about five thousand pounds!

WILLIAMS *heaves a sigh.*

WEDD: Kate!

KATE: So, Mustafa? Should I write out a check? Five thousand pounds!

HOTEL MANAGER: Are you insane, Mustafa?! Take it!

MUSTAFA (*suddenly frenziedly throwing himself with clenched fists at KATE*): You are the devil himself! You ... you—

BETTY *and* WEDD *cry out in fright.*

HOTEL MANAGER, WRIGHT, and WILLIAMS (*intercepting MUSTAFA, grabbing his arms, and shouting*):

What's the matter with you?!

What's your problem?!

Mustafa! Are you crazy?!

MUSTAFA (*screaming at KATE*): I spit on your money! Satan! Curse your money! (*Breaks away and runs out.*)

HOTEL MANAGER: Oh, dear God, forgive him, madam, he's simply gone insane. There's such a fanaticism now among the people that ...

KATE (*smiling*): I understand him, the poor man. It must have been terribly hard for him to refuse. My mistake was that I offered too little. But Gentlemen, Mustafa's fanaticism has affected me so much that I also have a burning desire to see the Prophet. Let's go! (*Gets up.*)

WILLIAMS: Pardon me, Mrs. Drayton, but I'm afraid I'll choose inappropriate rooms for you. Perhaps Miss Wedd or your sister would be kind enough to take a look at them? It will only take two minutes.

KATE: Auntie, Betty, please go help Williams. But hurry!

WILLIAMS (*to the HOTEL MANAGER*): Please show us our rooms! (*Then quietly to him.*) You see now what would have happened to you?

HOTEL MANAGER: Kindly, follow me! If you please! (*Walks ahead hurriedly, looking askance at KATE.*)

BETTY (*taking WEDD by the arm*): Faster, Auntie, faster! Or else we'll miss the Prophet.

WEDD: Betty, simmer down, will you please! You'll still have time to fall into the devil's clutches. (*They exit.*)

KATE (*cheerfully to WRIGHT*): It seems that you are displeased with me?

WRIGHT (*calmly*): Not a bit.

KATE: And you're not surprised?

WRIGHT: Don't I know you?

KATE: How true. You know everything, and nothing surprises you, or fools you. You could be a prophet. You know, you are absolutely faultless, Richard. Even physically. You're neither too dark nor too fair. Not too tall and not too short. Your facial features are mathematically perfect. You're a faultless director, an administrative genius, a terrific engineer, a famous inventor, Edison's successor on earth, and the most considerate and the most obliging fiancé in the entire world. I'm terrified that I won't be a very suitable wife for you, Richard. I feel that I'll make even more stupid mistakes than I have now. Oh, Richard, why don't you ever make any stupid mistakes? Don't you know how? Poor thing!

WRIGHT: It seems to me that dropping all business matters, both yours and mine, and flying to the other end of the world to look at a dervish isn't exactly a wise act.

KATE: But that was my idea not yours! You just carried out my request obediently. Listen, Richard, do you know how to kiss so that your lips hurt, so that ... God, what majestic and all-embracing calm! (*Suddenly, in a different tone of voice.*) But tell me, Richard, what do you think about the Prophet? Do you believe in his powers?

WRIGHT: It seems to me that you would give a lot to be able to believe in him, wouldn't you? A true, unfalsified prophet! Wouldn't you?

KATE: Well, what if that's true? What would you do then, with all your knowledge, your amazing logic, and your frightful ability to be always right? All of this is extremely wrong, illogical, unnatural—

BETTY (*running in and shouting*): Everything's ready! Let's go, Kate; otherwise they say we won't be able to break through the crowds. Hurry, for God's sake! (*Runs out onto the street.*)

KATE (*cheerfully*): Let's go! Auntie, aren't you afraid of the devil's deception? Ah, Auntie, unfortunately nowadays devils, like prophets, are found only in the Bible!

WEDD: Kate, please don't refer to the Holy Book in such a tone!

KATE: Sorry, Auntie! Richard has infected me with his flippancy and jocularly. Come on, let's go! I'm burning with the desire to see yet another Prophet who never gets angry! (*Takes WEDD by the arm and leads her away, glancing at WRIGHT who is smiling calmly.*)

*A car driving off is heard, followed by silence.*

## Scene 2

*A field. Mountains rise in the distance. Beneath them flows a stream with cliffs above it. The field is filled with people. On the right, on a big rock, stand the PROPHET, RANJIT, RAMA, SINDHU, SHANDRA, and ARJUNA.*

*The PROPHET is thirty years old. His face is unblemished and he has long dark, wavy hair that cascades down his back, a mustache, and a small beard. His face has a constant expression of joyful affection, majestic triumph and eternally burning inner ecstasy.*

*RANJIT is fifty years old. He has a thick, dark beard, a hooked nose, a commanding look, and a powerful build.*

*SINDHU is thirty-five years old. He has a narrow face, small eyes, a long nose, thin lips, and a gentle voice.*

*RAMA is thirty years old. He is beardless and has the face of an ascetic and big eyes with a look of suffering.*

*SHANDRA is thirty-eight years old. He is short and plump and has curly hair and a good, simple, round face.*

ARJUNA *is twenty-three years old. He is dark-skinned and has large, passionate eyes.*

*All of them are dressed in identical, simple, and somewhat dirty white and blue togas.*

PROPHET (*with a strong, resounding voice full of joyful confidence*): Furthermore listen to this, my beloved Brothers and Sisters! Listen, ye children of all nations, of all religions, of all languages. I, Amar, was sent to you by God, and I say to you: rejoice, because the time for your liberation has come. The time has come for a great all-saving and all-curing love. My poor Brothers, my beloved Brothers, I was not sent to you to admonish or punish you or to abolish the commandments of all the prophets who have guided you before me. I was sent to consolidate all the commandments and to fulfill them, my dear people. I have been sent to unite all of humanity into one family. All of the times of disunity that God indicated have now passed. From now on there are no Buddhists or Mohammedans or Jews or Christians. There is only one God and one faith: love, brotherhood, and peace among all nations. There is no higher law, my Brothers, or a stronger power than the power of love. Love is the sun, which heals all the sores made by hate, anger, violence, and scorn. (*Raising his arms with force and joy.*) There is not, I tell you! Come to me, all you who are infected by sores, all you who have crippled bodies and souls, and I will comfort you with my power of love! Can you feel my power, my Brothers?

SHOUTS FROM THE THRONG: We hear you! Save us! Free us! Praised be the Prophet! Praised be the one God!

PROPHET: I see a blind man there. Have you come to me? Come, my Brother, come closer to me. I will give you the joy of seeing the sun and the earth. Make way, allow the blind man to come to me!

*The throng makes way. But at that very moment shouts are heard to the left. Everyone turns their heads in that direction.*

VOICES: What is it? What is it?

*The PROPHET and his disciples also look that way.*

ARJUNA (*angrily*): Teacher! Some foreigners—Europeans—are causing a disturbance over there. They are driving through the throng in a car. They ...

PROPHET: Arjuna! There are no foreigners on earth.

ARJUNA: Forgive me, Teacher! But do people who behave like that ... look, look at what they are doing! They are trampling people! Oh! (*Clenches his fists and wants to run down to the crowd.*)

PROPHET (*holding him back by his arm*): Arjuna, do not show an example of anger. Look: you're doing greater damage than those Europeans. You are calling forth hostility. My Brothers! Calm yourselves. (*Stretching out his arm.*) Those unfortunate people there are infected with the sores of conceit and indifference. They want to drive past quickly. Make way for them with pity and forgiveness.

*The throng, which, following ARJUNA'S example, had become agitated and angry, calms down and moves aside.*

PEOPLE (*shouting*): The Teacher said to move aside! Make way! Let them go! Pass!

The shouting continues. RANJIT and RAMA quietly reprimand ARJUNA in a friendly manner. He listens in shame and guiltily looks at the PROPHET. The PROPHET cheerfully and lovingly smiles at Arjuna. ARJUNA brightens up.

PROPHET: But where's the blind man? Lead him to me. All who are blind, whether in their sight or in their soul, are equal in their misfortune before God. Make way for all of them, my Brothers.

PEOPLE (*shouting*): Lead the blind man, lead him!

A car arrives on the left. KATE, who is driving, and WRIGHT sit in front; WEDD and BETTY are in the back.

KATE (*yelling loudly and authoritatively*): Move aside! Give us the road! Hey, you over there! Slow pokes, get off the road, or I'll flatten you!

WRIGHT *tries to calm her*.

KATE (*laughing out loud*): Just let them try. Get off the road! (*To the PROPHET.*) Hey, you over there! What do you mean by letting your crowds block the road?!

BETTY, *frightened, whispers something to WEDD while looking askance at the crowd. WEDD helplessly shrugs her shoulders and also, looks with fright at the crowd.*

PROPHET (*with the same look of loving joy, speaking to the crowd*): Move aside for these people, my Brothers! Let these poor people go along their way. (*To KATE.*) Please drive through!

KATE: You have no right to take over the road! You and your comedy show should get out of here and move on to the mountains!

VOICES (*from the crowd, grumbling angrily and shouting*): How dare you insult the Prophet? She calls this a circus!

PROPHET (*to KATE*): Pardon us for occupying the road. It's free now. You can drive through.

KATE *turns the ignition, but the car won't start. She begins pulling at the gear shift, looks at the steering wheel and the starting mechanism, and tries again. The car doesn't start. Whispers and shouts coming from the crowd.*

VOICES: The Prophet stopped the motor! The Prophet stopped the motor!

WRIGHT *wants to help KATE, but she doesn't let him.*

*Increasingly louder and more joyful shouts are heard from the crowd.*

VOICES: A miracle! A new miracle! The Prophet stopped the motor. Praised be the Prophet!

KATE (*angrily to the PROPHET*): My motor won't start The crowd is shouting that you created a miracle and stopped the motor. You broke it. I demand that you make it run immediately!

*In the crowd, malicious laughter and shouts are heard.*

VOICES: Aha! Make it run? So that you can run over people? Right?

PROPHET: I didn't stop your motor, Sister.

KATE: That's not true! Everyone here witnessed it. (*To the crowd.*) The Prophet stopped it, didn't he? It's a miracle, isn't it? Why are you silent now? (*Laughing suddenly.*) Yes, I can also make miracles! Your prophet stopped the motor, but I can make it run again!

*(Touches something in the car and suddenly it jerks forward with a roar. The crowd jumps aside from fright. KATE laughs.)* So, what do you think? A miracle, isn't it?

*Low and unfriendly shouting is heard in the crowd again.*

VOICES: She's mocking the Prophet!

Get her out of here!!!

What do you want here, anyway?!

ARJUNA *(having forgotten the Prophet's teachings, becomes angry again)*: Teacher! What is this?! How dare this foreigner make fun of us?!

PROPHET *(with kind reproach)*: Arjuna! Arjuna!

ARJUNA *becomes embarrassed and stops talking.*

RANJIT *(loudly, to the crowd)*: Bring the blind man closer to the Teacher, my Brothers. *(To KATE.)* Do you want to drive through, Sister, or do you want to stay? The people may block the road once again.

KATE *(lighting a cigarette)*: We'll stay here. Are you the one handing out tickets for the show?

RANJIT: You can stay here without tickets, Sister. *(To the crowd.)* Come closer, closer, my Brothers!

*The PROPHET looks at KATE intently with a bright smile. WRIGHT whispers something to her again.*

KATE *(loudly, while puffing on her cigarette)*: Yes, it seems they learned their parts well!

PROPHET *(to the people who have lead up the BLIND MAN)*: Come a little closer, my Brothers! *(Leaning toward the BLIND MAN, he looks intently into his face, touches his eyes, and speaks quietly and commandingly.)* I say to you, open your eyes and look around you!

BLIND MAN *(opening his eyes, blinking, covering his eyes with his hand, and then looking around wildly)*: What's this?! Is this the earth? Is this the sun?!

PROPHET: This is the earth, my Brother.

BLIND MAN *(uncomprehendingly turning his head in all directions, touching his face, then bursting out with sobs of joy)*: I can see, my dear friends! I can see God's world, pleasant people, the bright sun! Is that the dear sun? That is the sun? Isn't it?

*In the crowd people are sobbing, shouting, and embracing from joy.*

VOICES: Praised be the Prophet! Praised be the one God! Our Saviour! Our Redeemer!

KATE *laughs out loud. The people stare at her with a look of misunderstanding, then with anger and indignation.*

KATE *(loudly)*: This man was as blind as my motor was broken. *(Sternly glaring at the PROPHET.)*

VOICES: What is she saying?!

How dare she?!

Teacher, punish her! Punish her!

PROPHET *(with a peaceful, radiant smile)*: My Brothers! Curb your anger. What is the reason for it? She is already punished, this poor woman. Don't be angry at her, only pity her. She is more of a cripple than this man who was blind. It is easier to cure blindness of the eyes than blindness of the soul. *(To KATE, who is smiling derisively.)* My dear Sister! Those who have no faith are not capable of believing in any miracle.

KATE: Quite right!

PROPHET: And, my dear Sister, those who are not capable of believing are not capable of loving. Those who are not capable of loving are not capable of feeling joy or happiness. You are unfortunate, my poor Sister! It's not for the sake of books or prayers, but for yourselves and for the sake of your lives that it is truly said: "Fortunate are they who can love those who hate them and bless those who curse them. For they are rich with joy and powerful in their love." It is said, my Sister, for the benefit of your own life and your own use: "Love and faith can move mountains."

KATE: Teacher! We poor people of little faith have heard this for almost two thousand years. But, unfortunately, we haven't yet seen in our lives how faith can move mountains. So, you say your faith and love are immense. Be so kind and, before all of us here, move, well, maybe not a mountain, but perhaps a cliff. That one, there. Let it break away from the mountain and fall into the abyss over there. Be so good as to convince me, a poor, non-believing woman. Give me faith. Please!

PROPHET (*looking at KATE with a peaceful, sorrowful smile*): Sister, you don't believe that human souls (*Pointing to the crowd.*) can be moved, so how can you believe that an inanimate cliff can be moved?

KATE (*laughing scornfully*): Oh, to move human souls! I can perform a miracle like that, too, and I do it as much as I want out of boredom. If you want, I'll throw them some gold and you'll see how "souls are moved." The effect will be greater than yours. But cliffs—well, I can't move them. I don't have the faith to do that. If your faith is so powerful, then move it. And I'll believe in you.

PROPHET: All right, Sister. If in this way I can revive your withered soul, I'll perform this little feat with pleasure. Behold, Sister.

*The PROPHET turns and stretches out his arms toward the cliff. For a moment he stands like that, concentrating then lowers his arms. The cliff slowly cracks apart, breaks off, and plunges into the abyss with a terrible noise. The crowd is dumbstruck and then with, religious awe, falls to its knees. WRIGHT involuntarily gets up and looks in the direction of the cliff. BETTY clings to WEDD with wide-open eyes. WEDD, crosses herself in terror and whispers a prayer. KATE broodingly looks at the PROPHET, not taking her eyes off him.*

PROPHET (*turning around, seeing the crowd kneeling, and then smiling sorrowfully*): Oh, you poor, dear people! Get up! Any one of you can do that if you have faith and love. Rise, I tell you!

*The people in the crowd hesitatingly get up and do not take their eyes filled with religious awe off the PROPHET. They whisper quietly among themselves.*

PROPHET (*to KATE*): Well, my Sister, did your soul feel even a little breath of faith?

KATE (*suddenly standing up without taking her brooding, cold eyes off the PROPHET*): Teacher! I heard that you wanted to go to Europe to preach.

PROPHET: I, Sister, have been sent to all people, to all the countries in this poor world that have withered because they have no faith.

KATE: I have a proposition for you. I have great power among people, the power of money. If you really are a prophet, then I am ready to use my power to help you. Come to our country, to America. It is the most withered, loveless, and faithless country. The greatest commandments of life there are heartlessness and love of money. Just the right place for you! If you can conquer our country, you can conquer the entire



world. I propose this to you: in one week I will transport you and your disciples to our country. I will ...

WRIGHT (*having risen when KATE proposed her help and then taking her by the elbow*): Kate! Calm down. What are you doing?

KATE (*glancing at him with a smile*): Oh? Even you are moved? I'm very happy. But I'm completely calm, Richard.

WRIGHT: Kate! You're doing a very foolish thing.

*Nervous whispering is heard in the crowd.*

WEDD (*pulling KATE by the arm*): Kate! Kate! For God's sake! What is this?!

KATE (*turning away from WRIGHT and facing the PROPHET, who is standing contemplating*): Well, are you willing, Prophet? I'm warning you, it will be hard to get to America on foot. There will be many obstacles. I will gladly get rid of these difficulties for you. And besides that, I'll give you the opportunity to carry on your preaching in the best of conditions.

PROPHET (*turning to his disciples, who are hotly debating Kate's proposition*): What do you say to this woman's proposal, my Brothers and friends?

RANJIT: Teacher, we think that this Sister is right.

WRIGHT and WEDD *whisper indignantly, and shrug their shoulders in disbelief.*

BETTY (*after getting up and grabbing KATE by the arm, whispering in delight*): Beautiful, Kate! Incredibly interesting! Kate, Kate I am deliriously glad! (*KATE smiles hurriedly at her and listens carefully to RANJIT.*)

RANJIT: The Sister speaks the truth, Teacher: one should first rejuvenate that which has withered the most. Accept her offer, Teacher!

PROPHET: You're right, my friends. (*To KATE*) We will go with you, Sister.

KATE: That's great. I'm at your service.

*Moans, cries, and shouts of despair are heard from the crowd.*

VOICES: Teacher, don't leave us! Don't leave us! Have pity, Teacher, don't go from us!

Oh, how unfortunate we are! Oh, what misfortune has befallen us! Oh, God!

RANJIT: My Brothers! Why are you crying? The Teacher is not leaving you. He is staying on earth, among you. His love will never leave you.

PROPHET (*in joyful ecstasy*): Oh, my dear Brothers and Sisters. I, Amar, the messenger of the one and only God, say to you: you should not cry, but rejoice. What kind of happiness can you have when you are healthy while your neighbours, your brothers, are dying from sickness? I will come back to you more than once. I will circle the entire world, from country to country. I will reunite the disjointed family of humanity and, with the power given me by God, I will lead humanity into the paradise that it forfeited once before. So rejoice, I tell you, my Brothers! Wipe away your tears and let joy play in your eyes and on your lips. I didn't come here for tears and lamenting, but for joy and happiness. Let there be rejoicing! (*Powerfully and joyfully he stretches out his arms to the crowd. The crying subsides and are replaced by smiles and happily outstretched arms.*)

VOICES: Praised be the Prophet! Praised be the Prophet!

## Act Two

### Scene 1

*The terrace of a mansion, divided by a glass wall with wide glass doors. The back half is a little lower than the front half. The front half consists of a garden with flowers, intimate corners, and comfortable furniture.*

*In the background one can see the skyscrapers of New York City, viaducts, and rooftops.*

*Through the glass wall, in the rear half of the terrace, stands the PROPHET in a blue and white toga. He is preaching to a crowd on the street below. Around him sit RANJIT, RAMA, SINDHU, KATE, BETTY, WILLIAMS, Christian Science women, and others.*

*The doors on the left side of the front half open, and a salesman, bent low, stealthily sneaks in with a suitcase. Right behind him is another SALESMAN WITH A PACKAGE.*

SALESMAN WITH A SUITCASE (*whispering angrily*): Don't you dare try jumping ahead of me! Got it? If you do, I'll hit you so hard you'll grow another nose! Wise guy!

SALESMAN WITH A PACKAGE: You're the wise guy! I paid as much as you did. And I've got just as much right to the Prophet's blessing as you do.

SALESMAN WITH A SUITCASE: I got here first.

SALESMAN WITH A PACKAGE: You're a liar. I got to the stairs first, but you pushed me down.

*The door opens again quietly, and a SALESMAN WITH TWO SUITCASES creeps in.*

SALESMAN WITH A SUITCASE: And this guy's here, too! What do you want?! You've got a cold. You're sneezing. You'll give us all away.

SALESMAN WITH A PACKAGE: Get out of here! Get out!

SALESMAN WITH TWO SUITCASES: You get out! I paid just like you did. (*Sneezes.*)

*They all jump behind the door and peer out from behind it.*

SALESMAN WITH A PACKAGE: What a damn fool! They'll chase all of us away because of him. Hide, goddamn it! And plug your nose. Hear?

*All of them hide behind bushes, trees, and sofas. The doors open again, and two JOURNALISTS enter carrying cameras and notebooks. They communicate through gestures and sneak behind the trees. WEDD comes in with a quick stride and a Bible under her arm. Immediately she starts looking around everywhere. She discovers THE SALESMAN WITH A PACKAGE and a JOURNALIST.*

WEDD (*sternly*): What is this?! Why did you come here? What do you want? Who are you?

SALESMAN WITH A PACKAGE: Pardon me, ma'am, I'm a salesman. I'm here to get the Prophet's blessing for my face powder.

JOURNALIST: I'm also here for the Prophet's blessing. I'm a correspondent for the newspaper ...

WEDD (*incensed*): What blessing?! Get out of here, right now! You should be ashamed! You're Christians, educated people ...

SALESMAN WITH A PACKAGE: The Prophet, does not forbid anyone to come to him, Miss Wedd.

WEDD: The Prophet, the Prophet! I am the owner of this house, and I do not allow anyone to get in here without my permission. Who let you in here? Which servant? Tell me, right now!

JOURNALIST: No one let us in, Miss Wedd, we got in on our own.

WEDD: No one? All right. I'll find out. You've corrupted all of my servants with your bribes. Get out of here! Now!

SALESMAN WITH A PACKAGE (*imploringly*): Miss Wedd, please ...

WEDD: If you don't get out of here right now, I'll call the police! Do you hear?

SALESMAN WITH A PACKAGE: Aaah! Well, then ... (*Turning toward the sofa*) Let's go, Mr. Smith. They're chasing us out, and they aren't allowing us to get a blessing—

WEDD: Ah, there's a Mr. Smith too? (*Peering behind the sofa.*) Oh! Come out of there right now! And is there someone over there? (*Running to the other corner.*)

SALESMAN WITH A SUITCASE (*crawling out, mad at the SALESMAN WITH A PACKAGE*): You are a nasty man, Mr. Schneider!

SALESMAN WITH A PACKAGE (*lunging at him*): What? What? What did you say?!

SALESMAN WITH A SUITCASE: I said that you are a nasty man. And a wretch too, I must add.

SALESMAN WITH A PACKAGE (*calming down*): Oh, yeah? Fine.

WEDD (*discovering the other JOURNALIST*): Come out! Hurry up! What is this?! Get out of here all of you! I'll send you all to jail for this! Everyone—out! Do you hear?

*Everyone slinks out and disappears behind the door. WEDD, incensed, goes and looks in all the corners. WRIGHT enters.*

WEDD (*seeing him, speaking with restrained anger*): Well, finally!

WRIGHT: Hello, Miss Wedd!

WEDD: Hello. How nice of you to go away for a whole week at a time like this. Phooey! I didn't expect this of you.

WRIGHT (*calmly*): I had to, Miss Wedd. Kate's business affairs demanded this of me. What's the problem?

WEDD: The problem, my good man, is that this band of Asians will soon take over the whole mansion and even New York City. That's what the problem!

WRIGHT: Their goal is to conquer all of America, Europe, and the entire world. This was known long ago.

WEDD: And they will conquer, and conquer if we keep behaving like this! Just look at what's happening here! Just look! Did you see the crowd surrounding the mansion?

WRIGHT: I did. It's the same as it was three months ago and a week ago. It's nothing new, Miss Wedd.

WEDD: Nothing new? You're mistaken. A week ago the crowd gathered once a day. Now it's here from morning till night. Yes, yes! You can't drive through our street or the square. All traffic has stopped here. "The Sermon" is given without interruption and at all ends of the terrace. The "Prophet" is here, and beside him are his "apostles." And our home? It's like a bazaar, like Babylon, like a stock exchange! I can't run a household like this. I can't vouch for anything here. Anyone who wants to can come in here, enter any room, and take whatever he wants. I've already lost two Japanese vases. And you say it's nothing new?!

WRIGHT: How's Kate?

WEDD: Don't you know this madwoman? She just keeps laughing boisterously. As you see, this is highly original entertainment. No one else in America has their own prophet. Except her. But they told me that you just saw her. You can judge for yourself.

*Suddenly a sneeze is heard in the corner.*

WEDD: Oh! Who's there? Another one?! (*Running over and finding the SALESMAN WITH TWO SUITCASES; sternly.*) Why didn't you come out when I was chasing the others away?

SALESMAN WITH TWO SUITCASES: Why should I have come out? I'm not a burglar. I came for a blessing from the Prophet.

WEDD: Get out of here right now! Right now!

SALESMAN WITH TWO SUITCASES (*shrugging his shoulders while walking away and mumbling*): They won't even let you hear the word of God. (*Exits.*)

WEDD: It's like this every day, every hour! Today I threw out twenty of these men. They have bribed all of my servants and turned the place into a stock exchange. They are all here for a "blessing." One for the lipsticks he's selling, another for face powder, the third for cigars, the fourth simply for his stocks. It's horrible. And then they advertise throughout the entire world "Use only the lipstick blessed by the Prophet." "Clean your shoes only with the Prophet's shoe polish." No, I'll have to leave. I can't serve an Antichrist. I can't do it even for Kate!

WRIGHT (*with a smile*): It hasn't been proven yet, Miss Wedd, that Amar is an Antichrist.

WEDD: And who could he be? Who, I ask you? A human being? Can a human being stop streetcars on the street? You're an excellent engineer, an inventor, but can you stop an electric train with one wave of your hand? And also, remember, he doesn't recognize the cross or the Bible. So who is he, pray tell?! Not an Antichrist? Who else can perform magic like that? You shouldn't laugh, but better watch your fiancée. Yes, yes, Mr. Wright! This toy of hers could cost you quite a lot. I won't be a bit surprised if some day Kate decides to give away her wealth and join the Amarites. You know how foolish she can be. Then you won't laugh, but cry. Besides Amarism may not be her only concern. The "Prophet" is a handsome and charming man, Mr. Wright.

WRIGHT (*calmly*): Did you notice anything in particular about Kate, Miss Wedd?

WEDD: Noticing something in particular in that crazy woman is as easy as noticing something in a stream that's rushing down a mountain. Why don't you notice something yourself? And let me be. I know that a catastrophe and the end of the world are approaching! I know that for sure. You Naturalists can laugh, but I'm telling you the kingdom of the Antichrist is nigh. (*Holding a Bible to her breast.*) I'm not parting for a minute from this Holy Book. All my hopes rest not on your science or your authority, but on this book. Yes, yes, Mr. Wright! What did your science or authority do against this ... demon? What? Nothing at all! You can't arrest him or send him away or kill him. You can't do anything. Who is the true ruler of America? Who?

WRIGHT (*seriously*): Don't get so upset, Miss Wedd. I understand you perfectly, and we all see the danger. Neither science nor the authorities are blind, and they have not given up. (*More emphatically.*) We won't allow our civilization to be destroyed without a fight! You can be sure of this, Miss Wedd! And I'll tell you that we might be near the end of this nightmare. (*With intensity.*) Very near! All right, Miss Wedd? But I ask you, please don't abandon Kate or the mansion now. Bear with us a little bit longer! I understand how difficult and repulsive it must be for you. It isn't easier for any of us.

But for now we must suffer through this. I tell you what, Miss Wedd. Don't stop the salesmen, the journalists, or the stockbrokers from coming to "The Prophet" and his "apostles." Don't stop them, let them come! In fact, send them to him.

WEDD: I don't understand. Aside from the fact that they steal and mess up the house, they only increase the popularity and power of these Asians, they ...

WRIGHT: That's very good, Miss Wedd, very good. Let them increase their popularity and power. Believe me, it will be better this way. But excuse me, Miss Wedd, here come Williams. I need to have a few words with him. I'll talk to you more, later.

WEDD *sighs deeply, shrugs her shoulders, and, holding the Bible to her breast, checks behind the chairs and bushes before exiting.*

WILLIAMS (*entering hurriedly from the rear part of the terrace, and running up to WRIGHT*): Good day, Mr. Wright! Welcome back! How are you, Mr. Wright?

WRIGHT: Very well, thanks, Williams! (*Quietly.*) So, what's new?

WILLIAMS (*spreading his arms guiltily and with despair*): Absolutely nothing! One could die trying! (*Seeing that WRIGHT is frowning.*) These aren't people, sir, they're some kind of intoxicated, crazy demons! They need nothing and nothing interests them! You can't tempt them with anything. They just preach! All they care about is that love of theirs, brotherhood, and other kinds of nonsense! I appealed to them in more ways than one, I followed all your instructions exactly. Nothing happened. I tempted them with food, with wine, with everything. They couldn't have cared less. I offered one of them partridge in mushroom sauce. He almost choked from horror at such a sin. You know what they want? A handful of rice, two bananas, and that's their meal. They don't need money or clothes. They have a home. How can one get to them? And do they know anything about this power? Love and faith. That's their entire answer. Furthermore, they don't trust me, Mr. Wright. They're all of one mind, even though one is a maharaja and another is some kind of shepherd, a monk, or student. It doesn't make any difference, they ...

WRIGHT: Well, then Williams, you'll have to join the Amarites.

WILLIAMS (*scared*): Join the Amarites?

WRIGHT: Yes. And you'll tell them that you'll turn everything you own over to them.

WILLIAMS: What?! Everything I own? Pardon me, Mr. Wright, but we didn't make any kind of deal about this. Becoming an Amarite is one thing ... But everything I own?!

WRIGHT: Wait! Obviously you won't be giving them your money.

WILLIAMS: Oh! Well, that's another story.

WRIGHT: You'll hand them the money that I'll give you. Twenty thousand dollars. Only under the condition that they open their own account. You'll convince them that you trust only the Prophet and them. It's absolutely necessary that they open their own account. All right? This is imperative! We'll talk more later. Mrs. Drayton is coming.

WILLIAMS *quickly leaves through the side door. KATE enters. She is in a happy, elevated mood.*

KATE: Well, Richard, were you tempted to listen to a sermon?

WRIGHT: Oh, no! I'm here for the same reason as before, Kate. I have to give the commission an answer.

KATE (*laughing*): Oh, God! How that dear government commission would like to put the poor Prophet in the electric chair. I say, no, Richard.

WRIGHT: Why are you so afraid of this experiment, Kate? If he's not human, then his power will be stronger than electric energy. If he's human, he'll refuse and won't have to sit in that chair.

KATE: I'm not afraid. But I know even without the commission's help that he is not human.

WRIGHT: Listen, Kate, you can't be serious. You simply don't want to part with this unique toy. But don't forget, Kate, that you are primarily responsible for the appearance of this Prophet among us and for everything that's happening in the country.

KATE: I'm sure that they'll put up a monument to me.

WRIGHT: The Amarites are spreading anarchism, Kate. They are causing chaos in our way of life; they are ignoring all our institutions and laws. All their teachings are absurd. How can you refuse to see that?

KATE (*with humorous seriousness*): Richard, my Brother, if God wants that, then ...

WRIGHT: Kate, you won't be laughing like that when this mess affects your personal fortune. And that may happen. I'll tell you, for example ...

KATE (*suddenly*): You know what, Richard? I'd give you all my money right now if you can prove to me that God exists. Not the church's God, but the other, real God. You know. God! God! But prove it undoubtedly, indisputably, truly. I'll give up all my fortune on the spot. If you please!

WRIGHT: I won't even try to prove it to you. But that Amar is not God or a messenger of God, but an ordinary human being, I will undertake to prove to you.

KATE: But you won't be able to prove it!

WRIGHT: Let's make a bet. If I do prove it, you won't give me your fortune, but you'll marry me without delay, that very day. All right?

KATE: And if you lose?

WRIGHT: Then take everything you want, even my life.

KATE: Oh! Are you that serious? Poor Richard, you've already lost! Amar is not human.

WRIGHT: Not human? Yet you're afraid to test this yourself?

KATE: You won't prove anything! Was Christ human? No. But they did kill him. So, you'll kill Amar. What will that prove?

WRIGHT: Aha! That means you're not certain whether he has superhuman power. Are you afraid of losing your own illusion?

KATE: Not a bit. I'm completely convinced. Amar is not human. There are no illusions about that!

WRIGHT: Listen, Kate, be serious now! You yourself probably want to find out, too. You really want that. But you're afraid of the truth. You fear it.

KATE (*suddenly*): All right! Be my guest! But I'm warning you: I'll go with him myself. I don't want you to kill him there.

WRIGHT (*holding back a smile*): All right. Do as you please. Let the apostles go too. In fact, it would be a very good idea if there were witnesses.

KATE: Good. I'll talk to him. When is the commission meeting?

WRIGHT: Tonight.

KATE: Good.

BETTY (*running in from the right, but, upon seeing WRIGHT, starting to turn back*): Oh, am I interrupting?

KATE: Not at all, Betty. What's the matter?

BETTY: Nothing. I've simply come by. I wanted to say something, but that can wait.

WRIGHT: Please stay, Betty. I have to leave right away to make some calls anyway. So, Kate, this means that I can count on it?

KATE (*with cheerful pride*): You can!

WRIGHT *waves goodbye and exits.*

KATE (*having immediately become worried and disturbed, even though she tries to hide this from BETTY*): So, Betty, you wanted to say something?

BETTY: Oh, it was nothing important! Is something bothering you, Kate?

KATE: No, no, nothing. So, what's new with you?

BETTY (*laughing and becoming embarrassed*): It's my apostle! Imagine, Kate, he's afraid of me, like a wolf's afraid of fire ... As soon as I show up, he immediately runs away. But at the same time, imagine, no matter where I am, he keeps staring at me with his huge dark eyes behind my back. It's extremely funny. And you know what, Kate? (*Looking around and then whispering*) I don't understand, and I wanted to ask you ... I have flirted with my eyes with many men. But when I meet Arjuna's gaze, and when he does something like this with his face (*sticking out her face slightly*), as if, you know, he wants to say something or move close to me, my heart starts beating really fast. Really fast! Could it be their supernatural power at work, Kate?

KATE: Do you believe that they have supernatural power?

BETTY (*astounded*): Of course I do. Is not the Teacher the messenger of God?

KATE: And do you also believe that if ... that the Teacher can't be killed?

BETTY: Of course, I believe that! What a question!

KATE: And do you think that if, let's say, he happened to sit in an electric chair, used to execute criminals, that nothing would happen to him? Do you believe that?

BETTY: Absolutely! What's an electric chair to him? Nothing! After all, he can stop electric trains. He stopped one then!

KATE: They say that the train conductor stopped it.

BETTY (*passionately*): It's not true, it's not true! The conductor and everyone else is lying if they say that! But, Kate, how can there be any doubt when every day and in front of our very own eyes he performs so many miracles?! How could you, you, question that?!

KATE (*happily embracing BETTY and laughing*): I just wanted to test you. You are a sport, Beth. So, you say your apostle is afraid of you? Watch out, Betty: you're tempting a disciple of the Prophet.

BETTY: Kate, I am not tempting him. Honest! He stares at me. How is that my fault?

KATE: But your heart beats faster then?

BETTY: How is that my fault? I don't know what it all means. Oh, Kate, what about you? You? What you must feel! The very idea makes me faint from terror: to fall in love with God, the real, living God who has descended to earth. Tell me, Kate, what do you feel? What?

KATE (*quietly, seriously*): Betty, don't ever say that to me again. You hear me?

BETTY (*frightened*): But you said so yourself, Kate.

KATE: I was speaking nonsense.

BETTY: I don't understand why it's nonsense. But if it's true, if you're in love with the Prophet, then what ...

KATE (*intensely*): Betty! That's enough! You don't realize what you're babbling.

BETTY (*persistently*): I realize very well what I'm saying. But I don't understand: why are you so afraid of that now? So you're in love. What's so bad about that?

KATE: How can one be in love with God, you idiot?! With God?! If he is God, what kind of love can one have? And if there is love, what kind of God is he then? You stupid girl!

BETTY: What kind of love? That's exactly what I'm asking you about. It seems to me that it should be something so extraordinary, something so powerful, so ardent, so intense, well, as if, for example, you were to kiss the sun. Kiss the sun right on the lips. I'm having a flirtation with a simple apostle and that's all. But this is love with God!

KATE: Betty! That's enough! Just go!

BETTY (*shrugging*): I don't understand you. I'm not horrified at all that I'm flirting with an apostle. What's wrong with that? If they're in human form, if they eat, drink, sleep, then why can't they be in love? It won't get in their way of being gods. So there!

KATE (*suddenly bursting out with laughter and strongly embracing BETTY*): My funny little idiot! You temptress. Look over there, Arjuna is staring at you again.

BETTY (*looking around quickly*): Where? Where? Where?

ARJUNA, *who is looking through the glass wall, walks away in fright.*

BETTY: He got scared! See? See?

KATE: Why did you scare him?

BETTY: It's nothing, he'll show up again somewhere! Besides, Kate, the Teacher himself teaches you better than anyone else.

KATE (*firmly, sternly*): Betty! Enough already!

SHANDRA *enters from the right. Bashfully, with a dejected look, he walks up to KATE and smiles unsurely.*

KATE: What's the matter, my Brother? Do you want to say something?

SHANDRA: Yes, I do. (*With discomfort*) Please, Sister, when you talk to the Teacher, put in a good word for me.

KATE (*astonished*): What's wrong? Is he angry at you?

SHANDRA (*animated*): Oh, no! Does the Teacher ever get angry? Of course not! But I ... I'm angry at myself. I ate some meat. It was delicious. Brother Williams gave it to me. Now I can't look the Teacher in the eye.

KATE: Oh, my dear fellow! Of course. By all means, I'll talk to him.

SHANDRA (*brightening up*): Well then, I feel better already. Thank you, Sister. Now I can go. (*Bows and exits cheerfully.*)

BETTY: You know, that poor man hasn't been himself all day today and yesterday. He likes good food, but he's not supposed to eat it. See: he didn't go to Ranjit, but to you.

KATE *once again suddenly paces around the room in anxiety.*

BETTY: Kate, what's the matter with you?

KATE (*listening inattentively and speaking assuredly*): No, I have to talk with him myself!

BETTY: Talk with whom, Kate? What's wrong with you, Kate?

KATE: Oh, if only I knew what was wrong with me! But hush, I think that the Teacher has already finished. Yes, he has. He's on his way here. Wonderful! (*Becomes agitated.*)

BETTY *glances at her and looks around, searching for ARJUNA. He gazes at her from behind some bushes and hides immediately.*



*The PROPHET enters. Behind him, walking up to the door, are RANJIT and RAMA, followed by the crowd that surrounded the PROPHET on the terrace trying to push its way in. RANJIT and RAMA stand in front of the door and allow no one to enter.*

RANJIT: You can't come in, my Brothers, you can't! The Teacher needs to rest.

RAMA: My Sisters and Brothers! You shouldn't come in here. Have pity on the Teacher. (*Closes the door.*)

PROPHET (*in loving and cheerful ecstasy*): "The Teacher needs to rest!" You're so sly! It's those poor people out there in the street who need to rest. Oh, Sister, why did God give me a human form, why can I not discharge my love with lightening? Thousands, tens of thousands, of people in front of this building perceive my fire. But this fire in me is ready to reach not just thousands, but millions, my Sister! Why can't I speak to millions at the same time?

KATE (*slyly*): You can, Teacher. But Brother Ranjit doesn't want it. We have equipment that can transmit your voice to millions of people all at once. Your voice, and your body, and your movement.

PROPHET: Ah, you mean radio, movies, photographs? Ranjit is right, Sister. I bring to people a living happiness and light. My soul, my power, refreshes the faces of human souls with a live wind. Your equipment will transmit only an image of my soul. Your machine dries up a person and deadens him. No, no, Sister, I have been sent to carry life, the living power of God. Look, how beautifully your face glows, Sister. Could a photograph transmit the soul of this radiance? It is so easy and joyful for me to look at you, the real you. I can touch you (*Touches her hand.*) and feel the warmth of your being. Could any of your machines transmit this to me?

KATE (*taking hold of the PROPHET'S hand*): And I like to feel your warmth, Teacher. (*Caressing his hand and looking at the PROPHET intently.*) You're so beautiful!

*The PROPHET tenderly strokes her hair with his other hand.*

KATE (*clutching his hand to her breast*): You ... you ... No, I can't say this to you. No, no!

PROPHET (*just as tenderly*): Say it, Sister. Say it! You can tell me everything.

KATE (*looking him in the face intensely*): Everything?

PROPHET: Everything, Sister.

KATE (*giving him a long gaze, and then whispering*): You excite me extremely. Do you know that?

PROPHET (*with the same innocent, tender, loving expression*): I'm happy, my dear Sister, that your soul is being enlightened. (*Caresses her head.*)

KATE *looks penetratingly into his face. Suddenly she covers her eyes with her hand, sits like that for a moment, and then pulls herself together.*

KATE (*in a different tone of voice, happy and lively*): Teacher! I want to ask you something!

PROPHET: Then ask, my good Sister, ask!

KATE: Teacher, would you agree to talk to our government? Its representatives, together with representatives of our scientific community, churches, and industry, as well as other people, want you to convince them and give them irrefutable proof that you are a messenger of God.

PROPHET (*smiling*): My Sister! There is no irrefutable proof for those who don't want to be convinced. But I have been sent to everyone. The drier the soil, the more water must be poured, Sister. I will gladly speak with them.

KATE (*hesitantly*): But ... but they will propose to you experiments that will endanger your life, Teacher.

PROPHET (*smiling indulgently*): People present no danger to a messenger of God. Until God calls me back, no one can take my life away from me. Don't worry, my radiant Sister, don't worry. (*Places his hand on her shoulder.*)

KATE (*firmly, while looking intensely at the PROPHET*): Does that mean I may tell them that you agree to everything?

PROPHET: Yes, Sister.

KATE *looks at him a while longer, then suddenly bows and kisses his hand. The PROPHET tenderly caresses her head.*

## Scene 2

*A large reception room, a long table covered with a felt cloth, and comfortable, deep armchairs. At separate desks sit stenographers. Beside the table, six armchairs have been placed for the PROPHET and his disciples. Engaged in heated dispute are a SENATOR (with a clean-shaven, thin, strong face; the chairman of the meeting), BISHOP (graying, dignified), GENERAL (not too tall, well-mannered), PSYCHIATRIST (thin, wearing glasses), NATURALIST (stout, red-haired, with bulbous eyes), PHILOSOPHER (bilious and swarthy), and WRIGHT (sitting across from the PROPHET'S chair next to an electric chair.*

SENATOR (*ringing the bell loudly, hitting the table with his hand, and trying hard to curb the inflamed members of the commission, who, not listening to him, are arguing, waving their arms, and trying to persuade one another*): Gentlemen, Gentlemen! Come to order! ... Will you please come to order!

A SECRETARY *enters and tries to get to the SENATOR.*

VOICES (*shouting*):

You're an atheist!

You're an atheist yourself! You're confusing the issues, General! You're confusing them!

And I'm telling you that in the course of one year we will all die. We'll die, I tell you, if we don't act decisively ...

SENATOR: Gentlemen! Gentlemen! I can't let the meeting continue like this. Enough! Calm down. Quiet, please! This isn't a meeting of a governmental commission, it's ... God knows what! We have been here for three hours now and still haven't reached any decision. Please let's forget the theoretical arguments and get to the point! I will ask each member in turn to present only his conclusion. And only that.

*The SECRETARY whispers something to the SENATOR.*

SENATOR (*banging hard on the table with his fist*): Gentlemen! Quiet, please! Mrs. Drayton requests permission to be present at the meeting. I've already explained to you why I have agreed to this. Does anyone object to her being here?

NATURALIST: She is welcome!

SENATOR (*to the SECRETARY*): Ask Mrs. Drayton to come in. (*To the others.*) But I implore you, Gentlemen, to conduct the meeting calmly. Amar should arrive shortly. We have to reach a consensus. Please do not interrupt the person speaking.

KATE *enters looking reserved and serious, and greets everyone.*

SENATOR (*to KATE*): Please sit down, Mrs. Drayton. (*Shows her a chair and then turns to the BISHOP.*) Now the Bishop has the floor. Just state your conclusion, please.

BISHOP: My conclusion is that Amar is a false prophet. He has defied all the tenets of our religion. He has contradicted the Christian teachings and Christ himself.

KATE *stands straight up in amazement but holds her tongue and glances at WRIGHT.*

NATURALIST: But how?! How?! By teaching of love, peace, and brotherhood?! By leading a saint's life?

SENATOR: Professor! Please don't interrupt!

BISHOP: By absolutely everything! First of all, by the very fact that he appeared and by his so-called messianism. Two thousand years ago our gracious Lord, in his everlasting grace, sent his own son down to earth for the salvation of the human race. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was and is the one and only messenger of God, the Messiah. The Hindu Amar, by calling himself a messiah, thereby denies the fact of the mission of the Son of God, contradicts the divine origin of Jesus Christ, and thus defies Christ himself as God and the saviour of the world. He thus also defies all the principles of our Christian religion. Taking into consideration his diabolical, secret power with which he tempts people and entices them to himself, and his plagiarizing of Christ's teachings, one can quite justifiably call him the Antichrist. (*Sits down.*)

WRIGHT *and KATE exchange glances.*

GENERAL: Absolutely so! I also want to say the same...

SENATOR: General, your turn will come. (*To the NATURALIST.*) I yield the floor to the representative of the scientific world. But keep it short and state only your conclusion.

NATURALIST: My dear Bishop! Tell me, what would you call the following ... Let's say you are put in prison for not paying your debts—

SENATOR: Professor!

NATURALIST: You don't think that a bishop can wind up in prison for not paying his debts? Fine. Then let's say that I wind up in prison. I'm sitting there, suffering and wasting away. Then suddenly the administration informs me that one of my rich and benevolent relatives felt sorry for me and sent his son to repay all my IOUs, pay all my debts, and free me. And let's say his son did just that, so I am now free and clear of debts. I, of course, rejoice. But a day passes by, two days, a month, ten months, a year, two years, ten years, twenty years, but I am still in prison and am still suffering in the same way, in distress and wasting away. Tell me, what would you call this message from the administration?

BISHOP: If that is an allusion to the teachings of Christianity, Professor, then I consider your words sacrilegious and I protest ...

NATURALIST: Gentlemen! You can finally judge for yourselves. How long is this going to last? For two thousand years the Christian Church has been assuring us that God sent us his Son for the redemption of humanity. The Son of God, it is said, sacrificed Him-

self, allowed himself to be crucified, and in this way bought off all our IOUs, all our sins. Terrific. You'd think that after that, humanity should come out of prison, should stop suffering, being in distress, and wasting away in sin? Correct? But is it so, Gentlemen? You be the judges! Haven't we, for those entire two thousand years, been wallowing in evil and suffering? Don't we remain imprisoned, just as we were before Christ came? So what does it mean?! Is it some kind of deception or what?

BISHOP: I protest against such words! I protest!

SENATOR (*to the NATURALIST*): Professor, please stick to the point. Present your conclusion! And only that.

NATURALIST: My conclusion is as follows: the Prophet Amar differs in no way from all the other prophets that we have been told about. And when you take into consideration

...

SENATOR: Wonderful. Your conclusion is absolutely clear. I yield the floor to the representative of the armed forces. General, your conclusion, please.

*The NATURALIST angrily shrugs his shoulders and sits down.*

GENERAL: I consider the Hindu Amar an adventurer, and his teachings harmful and even criminal. (Even though he may be preaching his naive commandments rather sincerely!) Here we've been comparing his teachings to the teachings of Christ. That is blasphemy. And besides that, it's foolishness. In His teachings Christ, the Son of God, gave us an ideal we should strive for. But Amar is taking these teachings to the absurd. Yes, Christ preached peace. But Christ said: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's." So Christ first of all recognized Caesar, meaning the government, and thereby the entire state apparatus. And I ask you, Gentlemen: how can this apparatus exist without an army?

NATURALIST: But Christ said: "He who lives by the sword will die by the sword!"

GENERAL: Yes, Professor—he who doesn't know how to behave with a sword will die. He said that to one of His disciples, who was a fisherman. Obviously, when fishermen and professors take up swords, they will die by them. Amar is taking Christ's teachings about peace to the absurd. He's preaching the liquidation of all swords, that is, of armies or, in other words, the defense of our native land. War is a great evil and misfortune. We know this well even without prophets. And without them we all work on behalf of peace. You all know how much time the high government officials of America and Europe are spending on this intricate and painful question. But Amar solves it quite easily. Don't take a sword into your hands and stop making swords altogether. And do it now, immediately! Can you imagine the direct consequences of such preaching? Imagine if the United States listened to Amar and demobilized its army and stopped producing weapons. Do you think that there would then be any progress in the matter of peace? On the contrary, a terrible war would start immediately, because right away there would be people who would want our wealth. And what about our treaties? What about our debts? And what about our international rights which were gained through such hard work? A simple, uneducated, fanatical Indian obviously can't understand all of this, but if there are professors who can't understand this, well, then ...

NATURALIST: Christ did not understand that either!

BISHOP: I protest against such comparisons!

GENERAL (*shrugging his shoulders*): That's Amar's way with everything. Naiveté, absurdity, and immediate implementation. And because of that, of course, terrible evil and crimes against the nation and all of civilization. He is an adventurer and a criminal. I have finished. (*Sits down.*)

SENATOR: I yield the floor to the representative of the applied sciences.

WRIGHT (*glancing at KATE*): Gentlemen, there are here some representatives of science—of science, Gentlemen—who have discovered essentially godly features in Amar. The first feature consists of his teaching peace, love, brotherhood, and people's happiness. Gentlemen, show me at least one political party, at least one candidate to Congress, who doesn't preach love, peace, brotherhood, and, most of all, happiness for all of humankind. Just elect that candidate, and all those blessings will be instantly realized on earth. I think that this "godly" feature is already so widespread here on earth that it's difficult to impress us with it. And what about his "saintly life?" His dedication to his ideals? His self-sacrifice? Gentlemen, these features aren't so rare among us ordinary, sinful people. One need not be a prophet or a messenger of God to abstain from wine and meat and to live on fruit, as Amar and his "apostles" do. In this sport our vegetarians can beat any record you want. What about his fasts? Here we also have our champions greater than any of the prophets! You've probably read about that oddball who not just for forty days and nights, but for sixty—and he was monitored!—didn't eat or drink anything.

NATURALIST (*to the SENATOR*): Mr. Senator, why aren't you stopping this speaker? This is not a concluding statement, but a boring polemic.

SENATOR (*to WRIGHT*): Come to the point, please!

WRIGHT: And his miracles? (*Looking at KATE.*) But Gentlemen, aren't the miracles of these prophets laughable and naïve in comparison with the miracles of our science? And healing of the sick? Why, our science cures hundreds of people every day without making much ado. Look at the wonderful surgical achievements of Professor Tucker. Can some prophet perform even a tenth of this? Can Amar talk to people at a distance of 100,000 miles? Can he fly from one end of the earth to the other in a week? The prophets never even dreamt of performing the miracles that our science does.

NATURALIST: And did Christ ever dream of this?

BISHOP: I protest against such remarks!

WRIGHT: Amar's followers stress his mysterious power and his, as they say, "true godly love," that never knows anger. It, they say, is even above Christ, because even Christ was angry at times. As far as his mysterious power, it obviously can't be denied. He does possess it. But, my dear Gentlemen (*looking at KATE.*), does one necessarily have to be a prophet, a messenger of God or God himself, in order to have such power? If, anyone of us here were to appear among primitive savages with a flashlight, he would become a god for them, the possessor of a mysterious, unseen power. Furthermore, if fifty years ago a man had appeared among us who alone knew the mystery of radio, we would have considered him a god. Yes, Amar does possess the secret of some energy still unknown to us. Perhaps this secret has actually been preserved since the time of Atlantis. But that's all. What's so godly about that? As for his exceptional love without anger, well, forgive me, but I simply don't believe it. All it means is that there has not been an appropriate occasion for it to arise. Aside from that there is his

upbringing, good self-control, and training especially for this role, as well as his constant exaltation. That is all there is to his godliness.

KATE, *smiling and holding her head upright, listens to WRIGHT without moving.*

NATURALIST (*angrily shrugging his shoulders and then jumping up*): Let me say something! What then do you consider to be godly features? What is God, for Christ's sake! Oh—pardon me! I mean what does one need to pass the test to be God, or at least a messenger of God?

BISHOP (*angrily*): This is intolerable!

WRIGHT: I'm not competent in matters of theology. In any case, such a test would be very difficult for you.

SENATOR (*to WRIGHT*): And what is your conclusion?

WRIGHT: My conclusion is clear to everyone, I think: there's nothing supernatural or godly in Amar. The gist of the matter is his mysterious power. Only this power has created this commotion, blinded the masses and hypnotized them. To the masses, power, simply raw power, always was and is something to be deified. To the simple-minded even boxers are demi-gods. But when this power is so mysterious, it fully appears like God. When this power has so much influence, then any kind of teaching can be passed off with it. Therefore, in my opinion, we should simply reveal the natural character of this power. It should be placed, for example, alongside another kind of power that we already understand. For example, electricity. (*Pointing at the electric chair*) Here is an electric chair that I built. Its current is so strong that it can turn human flesh into embers in a few seconds. I propose that we invite Amar to sit in this chair.

NATURALIST: Without warning him?!

WRIGHT: Oh, no! (*Glancing at KATE*) On the contrary. He and his followers should be told what he should expect.

NATURALIST: Meaning, we should simply kill him? Why? For teaching love, brotherhood, and peace? Think what you're saying!

WRIGHT: No one wants to kill him, Professor. Calm down. If Amar has a secret power and believes in it, he will stop the electric current. If he doesn't have such power, he simply won't sit in the chair. That's all there is to it, especially, if he's not human, but a messenger from God. (*Glancing at KATE*) Besides, he's already been warned about everything. Right, Mrs. Drayton?

KATE (*firmly, calmly*): Yes, he has been warned.

WRIGHT: Well, then.

SECRETARY (*entering the room*): Mr. Amar and his followers are here.

SENATOR: Please ask Mr. Amar to wait one minute. I'll ring for you.

*The SECRETARY exits.*

SENATOR: So, Gentlemen, all the members of our commission have voiced their opinions. Five members are in favour of the experiment with the electric chair, and two are opposed. I consider the motion passed. (*Presses the buzzer.*) Mr. Amar may come in. Are there any further statements?

NATURALIST: I wish to declare that I'm washing my hands of this entire matter.

PHILOSOPHER (*sarcastically*): Such a declaration is nothing new—Pontius Pilate said it ages ago, Professor.

*THE NATURALIST wants to answer him, but hesitates. PROPHET, RANJIT, RAMA, and ARJUNA enter.*

PROPHET (*walking in majestic, radiant exaltation and looking at the members of the commission amiably and without suspicion*): Greetings, my Brothers! (*Smiles at KATE brightly and tenderly.*)

SENATOR (*rising and bowing*): Greetings to you, Gentlemen. Pardon us for bothering you! Please sit down! Over here.

RANJIT *appear solemn and calm, but his tranquillity lacks the ease and sincerity of the PROPHET. Instead there is a certain tension. He keenly examines the faces of the commission members. RAMA looks grim and sullen; his glance is cold and feverish. ARJUNA has to defend blazing eyes with a look of readiness.*

SENATOR (*to the PROPHET, gently and ingratiatingly*): I don't want to take up too much of your precious time, so, with your permission, I'll come right to the point. Do you know why we invited you to come here.

PROPHET: I do, Brother. I'm very glad to see such eminent people of this country. (*Smiles brightly and warmly at everyone.*)

SENATOR: You were told that we are very interested in your power, which can paralyze electrical energy. Our scientific representatives ask that you demonstrate it to us. Here, on this electric chair. If it's not difficult for you, of course.

PROPHET: No, it's not difficult. I'll gladly show you, if need be.

NATURALIST: But keep in mind that this chair—

PROPHET (*with a kind and merry smile*): I know it's deadly. Don't worry, my Brother, no man-made power can be deadly for a messenger of God.

KATE *looks defiantly at WRIGHT, who responds with a scowl.*

PROPHET (*rising*): Where is this chair, my Brothers?

WRIGHT (*loudly and firmly*): Here, Mr. Amar.

PROPHET (*going lightly and slowly with the same kind smile up to the chair*): I have to sit in it, I assume?

KATE *makes a move to stand up, but immediately restrains herself and simply clenches her lips.*

WRIGHT: Mr. Amar, I consider my duty to warn you again: this chair is awfully powerful. Any person who sits in it shall be killed and reduced to embers in a flash. (*Stares at the PROPHET intently and sternly.*)

PROPHET: I know, my Brother. I know. May I sit down now?

WRIGHT: One second. (*Leans over the back of the chair, turns something, and then stands up.*) Now you may sit down.

*The PROPHET looks at everyone with a quiet and indulgent smile, turns to the chair, and starts to sit down.*

KATE (*unable to hold back, crying out in horror*): Teacher! Don't do it!

ARJUNA: Don't do it, Teacher!

RANJIT, *himself upset, restrains ARJUNA. RAMA, in ecstasy, stands transfixed.*

PROPHET (*with gentle reproach*): So such is your faith? (*Extending his hand to the chair.*) A child's cradle could not be gentler than this chair. (*Calmly sitting down and looking at WRIGHT with a kind smile.*) Your chair does not burn, my Brother. You see?

ARJUNA (*excitedly*): Praised be the Prophet!

KATE *sits down exhausted. Astonishment, confusion, fear, and satisfaction are expressed by different members of the commission.*

WRIGHT *stares with the same stern, penetrating look at the PROPHET. Seeming very shocked and incredulous, he quickly leans over to check the chair. Then he rises up in a sudden rage.*

WRIGHT (*to the PROPHET*): Charlatan! You're a charlatan! Do you hear?!

*All present become agitated and confused.*

PROPHET (*looking calmly but with surprise at WRIGHT; then with sincere sorrow*): What has caused you to be so bitter, my Brother?

KATE *gets up and takes a few steps toward WRIGHT.*

WRIGHT (*getting more indignant*): What impudent hypocrisy! Why did you move the knob? Why? (*To everyone.*) Did all of you see how this trickster put his hand on the back of the chair? Did you? That's when he turned off the current!

PROPHET: My Brother, there's no need to be angry. Wrath is never a sign of truth. I didn't turn this knob, my Brother. Maybe you yourself forgot to—

WRIGHT: No, this is unbelievable. So *I*, it appears, am the swindler?! Me?! (*Swings and punches the PROPHET in the face with all his strength.*)

KATE *screams in horror and anger and attacks WRIGHT.*

SENATOR: Mr. Wright!

ARJUNA *breaks away from RANJIT and runs at WRIGHT with a furious roar. Confusion, indignation, and fear descend on the of members of the commission.*

BISHOP (*hiding behind the GENERAL*): The Prophet will burn us all! He'll burn us all!

SENATOR: Wright! What is the matter with you?! Have you gone mad?!

WRIGHT *stands and glares at the PROPHET.*

PROPHET (*slightly astonished, rising and extending his hand to WRIGHT, with tender sympathy*): My poor Brother, it's difficult for you because of your rage.

KATE (*furiously rushing at WRIGHT*): You ... you! ... How dare you?!

PROPHET: Sister, Sister! You too?! So, what happened? Rage blinded our poor Brother. Should we be angry at him because of that? Should we not pity him instead of punishing him? And you, Arjuna?

KATE and ARJUNA *stop and fall silent. ARJUNA moves back in shame. KATE is moved and gazes in disbelief, mixed with sparks of fear and amazement, at the PROPHET. WRIGHT does not stop glaring at the PROPHET. Heated whispers full of indignation, amazement, and incomprehension pass among the members of the commission.*

PROPHET (*to everyone*): My Brothers, it appears there has been some kind of mistake. (*To WRIGHT.*) Turn the knob to where it should be, Brother. Then everything will be all right.



WRIGHT *hastily turns toward the chair.*

KATE (*suddenly, to the SENATOR*): Senator! I'd like you and the entire commission to know that there was no mistake on the part of Mr. Wright. He left the knob turned off deliberately! Yes, yes, Mr. Wright, I saw through your dirty trick. You did this with premeditation. Teacher! This man insulted you deliberately with the aim of provoking anger in you. To prove that you are human, and in that way to weaken your power.

*Expressions of surprise, further indignation, and embarrassment are heard.*

PROPHET: Sister, Sister! You need not say such things. (*Tenderly touches and moves her aside.*)

WRIGHT (*smirking*): Mrs. Drayton, are you trying to force us to call off the experiment? As you please. If Mr. Amar no longer wants to sit in the chair, we won't insist on it.

KATE (*indignantly*): You ... you ... I don't want to utter in front of everyone here the word that you deserve to be called. But you won't get what you want. Teacher! He wants you to weaken, to refuse to sit in the chair, and then they'll announce that you were afraid.

PROPHET (*deliberately and soothingly stroking her shoulder*): Fine, fine. But there's no need to be so upset and angry. I'll sit down again. It's as simple as that. And everyone will be satisfied. (*To WRIGHT*) My Brother, did you check the chair? May I sit down again?

WRIGHT (*loudly and menacingly*): Yes! You may. Gentlemen! All of you are witnessing the fact that Mr. Amar, after a double warning, without being forced to do so, will sit in the chair of his own free will. Sit down!

*Everyone becomes silent from the tension. KATE is horrified for a moment, but immediately stands up straight with proud determination and eagerly looks at the PROPHET.*

PROPHET (*after gently holding his arm above the chair and calmly sitting down, turning his face to WRIGHT*): Has there perhaps been another mistake, my Brother? Take a look!

WRIGHT (*morosely, after dashing over to the back of the chair, checking it, and standing up straight*): The current is on. There is no mistake. You can get up.

ARJUNA (*ecstatically*): Praised be Almighty God! Praised be the Teacher! (*Embraces RAMA and squeezes him from joy.*)

KATE (*to WRIGHT*): So, he is human? Is he?! (*Taking the PROPHET by the hand*) Teacher! Let's get away from here! Let's go! You don't have to be here any longer. If they want to, they can come to you. Let them get down on their knees before you and beg you to talk with them. Let's go, Teacher! Let's go, my Brothers!

PROPHET: Sister, Sister! (*Following KATE with a gentle smile, saying cordially to the commission members*) Goodbye, my Brothers!

KATE *triumphantly*): Goodbye, Gentlemen!

ARJUNA (*menacingly*): Goodbye!

*They exit.*

## Act Three

### Scene 1

*A large hall with a high, round cathedral-like ceiling, luxuriously decorated and painted in azure, white, and gold tones, columns, and tall windows. In the centre stands a large crescent-shaped conference table covered with gold-trimmed azure and white broadcloth. There are eight blue, white, and gold armchairs; in the middle is the Prophet's throne-like seat, and next to it a smaller throne-like chair.*

*To the side, stand small tables for secretaries and stenographers with telephones and typewriters.*

*On the wall above the Prophet's chair hangs a huge portrait of him in a white, azure, and gold frame. In the corners are statues of him.*

*There are doors to the left and right, and straight ahead. The latter are massive and wide, as in a church. They are carved and gilded. When they opened, one sees two large doormen in white, azure, and gold livery.*

*Behind these doors is a big waiting room, where elegantly dressed, important-looking people are waiting to be received. SECRETARIES are mingling among them, writing comments in their notebooks and giving explanations. The male SECRETARIES wear white- blue- and gold ties and badges with the same colours in their lapels.*

*There is no one in the hall. From outside the dull drone of a crowd occasional shouts are heard.*

*The first SECRETARY rushes in from through the centre doors, looks around searchingly, and runs out through the door on the left.*

*At that moment WRIGHT enters quickly from the right door, also looks about searchingly, and goes in the same direction as the SECRETARY.*

*SHANDRA enters from the left door, nervously drumming with his fingers on his belly. His face is clean-shaven, rosy, very smooth, and full; his eyes seem tiny in comparison. His hair is meticulously cut and combed back. He is dressed in a white, azure, and gold silk tunic under which expensive European trousers and patent-leather shoes are visible. He stops and listens to the street noise.*

*ARJUNA rushes in from the large centre doors. He is wearing a well-fitting tuxedo, a white-azure- and gold tie; in his lapel is a badge button with the same colours. His curly hair is neatly cut. His face is clean-shaven. Looking worried, he quickly approaches SHANDRA.*

ARJUNA: Where's Sindhu? Have you seen him?

SHANDRA: I thought he was just there, in the waiting room.

ARJUNA: He's not there. Where the hell is he, dammit! All these things happening here, and he ... *(Runs over to the desk of one of the secretaries and impatiently begins searching for some papers.)*

SHANDRA: Quite the hall, Arjuna! Isn't it? It's not like having a meeting somewhere under a tree. Is it? Look at how Sister Kate has honoured the Teacher. Will the meeting start soon, Arjuna?

ARJUNA: I don't know. The Teacher's conference with Ranjit and Rama is not over yet.

SHANDRA: Well, how much longer will they be conferring? I'm getting hungry.

ARJUNA (*incensed*): You're like a child, Shandra! Important events are taking place here! Perhaps even our fate is being decided, and you want to eat.

SHANDRA: At ten o'clock I am due to preach at Steiner's.

ARJUNA: What Steiner?

SHANDRA: The sausage king.

ARJUNA: Phone him and tell him that you'll be a little late.

SHANDRA: Phone him?! But my preaching is to take place during dinner. Do you expect hungry people to wait, or what?

ARJUNA: Well, you won't dine with him tonight. And that's that.

SHANDRA: Won't dine? That's easy for you to say. Oh, don't you have a nice tie on? Did Betty give it to you? Did she, Arjuna?

ARJUNA (*fixing his tie, pleased*): Nice, isn't it?

SHANDRA: Excellent! Is it from Betty?

ARJUNA: Of course. (*Finding the paper*) Aha! (*Hurrying over to SHANDRA*) If you see Sindhu, tell him to go immediately to Ranjit's study. Rama is acting like an idiot there.

SHANDRA (*frightened*): What's wrong? Is he not willing to agree?

ARJUNA: Ah! (*Gestures with his hand and runs out.*)

SHANDRA *shakes his head in perturbation. He listens to the street noise and then becomes solemn and goes to the centre doors. After opening them, he majestically stands still for a moment. Immediately, the PEOPLE waiting there move toward him. Greatly preoccupied, he shakes his head, parts the crowd, and walks into the centre of the waiting room. The SECRETARIES run over to him, bow down, and ask him something. SHANDRA answers them ceremoniously. The doors slowly close.*

SINDHU and WILLIAMS enter quickly from the right door. WILLIAMS is dishevelled and unshaven; he is dressed like Amar to the point of wearing sandals over his bare feet. SINDHU is wearing a new, expensive tunic, shoes, and trousers; he is clean-shaven and sports pince-nez with a gold chain.

SINDHU (*looking around and whispering quickly*): Three percent is too low, Brother Williams! Much too low! Tell them, tell Wright, that it's not enough! How could they?

WILLIAMS (*in the same quick whisper*): Dear Brother, I understand that it's too little. But there will be an additional two percent for you.

SINDHU: I'm not speaking about myself. Who am I? There's no need to pay me. It's for our treasury!

WILLIAMS: What do you mean there's no need to pay you? This matter, if I may say so, is of universal importance. The disarmament of America! It's not a joke! Ranjit should probably be paid, too.

SINDHU (*terrified*): God forbid! Don't breathe a word of this to Ranjit. Don't you know what he's like?

WILLIAMS: But I was thinking that if we offer him five percent, he might drop his demands.

SINDHU: No, no, no! You think Ranjit would back down? Never! And he shouldn't because then our treasury would only profit. Oh, Brother, it's frightening to even think of the power we'll attain if he reaches his objective!

WILLIAMS: He won't. He won't reach it. The government will never proclaim us the state religion! How could you even think so?

SINDHU: You don't think so? Then what's that? (*Motioning with his head to the street.*) And what about the Teacher's power? The populace would tear the government to pieces if we told them to. Don't you think the government knows that? But enough of this talk. The meeting's about to take place, and we have to settle this before it starts. Run and find Wright, and tell him that it's not enough, not enough! Go, go! (*Pushing him toward the doors.*)

*The grand centre doors open and three labour delegates push their way in. The SECRETARIES and DOORMEN try to stop them, but the delegates break through and run into the hall with shouts of despair.*

DELEGATES: We've come to see the Prophet! Let us go! We've come to see the Teacher! Where's the Prophet?

SINDHU and WILLIAMS *rush to confront them.*

SINDHU (*with kind reproach*): My God! How dare you burst in here like this, my Brothers?! How could you? Oh, my dear God! ...

FIRST DELEGATE: We've come to see the Prophet, Brother! We've been waiting three hours already.

SINDHU: You can't see the Prophet, my Brothers. He is praying.

SECOND DELEGATE: Earlier the Prophet was not so inaccessible to the people.

WILLIAMS (*also with gentle reproach*): My dear Brother! Have you ever stopped to consider that there is only one Prophet, while there are millions of people waiting to see him? Have you?

THIRD DELEGATE: Three hundred thousand of our comrades sent us to see him. We're workers in the arms industry.

SINDHU: We know, Brother, we know. But ...

THIRD DELEGATE: The Prophet has preached that we should not produce things that are harmful or bad for people. We believe the Prophet. We have decided not to produce weapons or anything that could be used in war or in the killing of people. We've come to the Prophet so that he would bless us for the decision we've made. This is a very important matter.

WILLIAMS: We know, Brother, we know everything. You have made a wonderful decision, my Brothers, and the Prophet will be delighted to hear this news. But, really, this matter is so important that the Teacher should pray beforehand.

FIRST DELEGATE: But the people are upset. They're waiting and don't understand what's happening. The government is threatening to fire at us and put us in jail. Have the Teacher tell the government ...

SINDHU: Don't be afraid, my Brothers. Don't be afraid. The Teacher won't allow any evil to be done. Go quietly and wait a bit longer. You will receive an answer very soon. Go, go. There is supposed to be a meeting of the Prophet's council here. Go, my Brothers! (*Gently pushes them toward the exit.*)

WILLIAMS: Just wait a little bit longer, only a little bit. (*Also pushes the delegates toward the exit and closes the door after them.*)

SINDHU: Oh, Brother, what a difficult situation. Very difficult! You see, here even ten percent won't do. What will the people say when the Teacher does not give them his blessing? What then? Can you imagine? And they want three percent! Run quickly to see

Wright, and I'll run to see Ranjit. That crazy Rama is still there ... Hurry! (*Runs out through the left door.*)

WILLIAMS *runs out through the right door.* ARJUNA *runs in at the same time and quickly begins preparing the big table for the meeting. The right door opens and BETTY peeks in. She looks cautiously around the room and then enters.*

BETTY (*calling quietly*): Arjuna!

ARJUNA *turns, is happy to see her, and rushes to greet her.*

BETTY: May I come in for a minute? Oh, how beautiful it is here! That's Kate for you! How happy she is to have joined Amar's religion ... Is that her seat next to the Teacher's? Oh, it's so wonderful here that I feel like praying or dancing. Your tie is crooked. Let me fix it. (*Lecturing*) You should always look in the mirror or check it carefully with your hand. But make sure that your fingers are clean. Wash your hands more often. Do you hear?

ARJUNA (*in a passionate whisper*): I hear and see nothing but you. I love you. Do you hear? (*Wants to embrace her.*)

BETTY (*stepping back in fear*): Arjuna?! My Brother! Are you insane? In here?! And you call yourself an apostle! Go away. Look at you! (*Confidentially*) Better yet, tell me, Arjuna, why has our Teacher seemed so sad these past few days? Why, Arjuna?

ARJUNA (*startled*): Sad?! Our Teacher is sad?! Never! He's never sad. Never. (*Shakes his head fervidly.*)

BETTY: What impudence. When a lady says that he is sad, you shouldn't shake your head so forcefully. (*Imitating him.*) "Never, never." Especially since I've seen him myself. And you've seen how Kate looks now! Haven't you, Arjuna? Have you noticed, how radiant her face is now? Like a lamp with a pink matte shade. Do you know what a shade is?

ARJUNA: Oh, Sister Kate is completely different now. Now she is a real apostle!

BETTY: Isn't that true? She's completely, completely different. I never would have believed that she could be that way. Like a saint, isn't she? Gentle as a ... a little lamb. And not so long ago she ... well, she didn't fully believe. But I'm telling you this confidentially because you're my... boyfriend. Do you hear? Don't you dare tell anyone! And that's why she didn't want to give away any of her fortune yet. But now she's decided to do just that. And not to marry or fall in love ever again. What an Amarite! Kate could never do anything halfway! Auntie and Wright are going crazy. You can imagine: they keep saying that she's mentally ill, that she'll have to be put in an asylum. Naturally this is unbearable for Wright: he was supposed to marry her, all her wealth was to be his, and then this happened. But, they're the ones who are crazy. Tomorrow I'll also join Amar's faith, so there! (*Suddenly slyly*) Only I'm not going to promise to renounce love and marriage. Do you hear? Oh ... oh! Already your eyes are on fire! Hush, my apostle, hush! You shouldn't get so ardent and excited ... at least not in the hall of the Prophet. (*Quickly turns when she hears a door.*)

KATE *enters from the left door. She is dressed in a white, azure, and gold dress. Her face is majestically peaceful, tender, and radiant.*

BETTY (*rushing toward KATE*): Oh, Kate, what a dress! What a dress!

KATE (*slightly embarrassed*): Do you like it? (*Timidly to ARJUNA*) Is the meeting starting soon?  
I was afraid I'd be late.

ARJUNA: Soon, Sister. Soon it will begin. Soon.

BETTY: When did you make the dress, Kate? Did you make it for the occasion, for your initiation? It really suits your complexion. Exceptionally well. You look like a saint in it, Kate!

*Briskly and angrily, WEDD enters holding keys and an umbrella in one hand and the Bible in the other. Dressed as if she is going on a trip, she is wearing a hat with a brim and a long coat. She speaks to KATE formally and very sternly.*

WEDD: I'm asking you for the last time ... (*Suddenly turning to BETTY and ARJUNA*) Please leave us!

BETTY: But, Auntie, Arjuna can't leave: He's the secretary of the council and there's going to be a meeting here very soon. So there!

WEDD (*sternly*): I'm telling you: get out! I'll be gone soon. Then you can have a meeting with all the devils you want.

KATE (*quietly and gently to BETTY and ARJUNA*): Please leave us for a moment!

BETTY *shrugs her shoulders, beckons to ARJUNA, and they both exit. At the door she turns around and makes a funny face at WEDD behind her back.*

WEDD: I'm asking you: is your decision final?

KATE (*in the same quiet, gentle tone*): Yes, it's final, Auntie. I'm very sorry I'm causing you so much unpleasantness, but I must, dear.

WEDD: In that case, here are your keys! I'm leaving this crazy house. You can give everything to the Antichrist—yourself, and your fortune, and my salary. Everything! I'm joining the army of Christianity. We'll start a crusade against you. With this! (*Shaking the Bible*) We'll see who will be victorious. Goodbye! (*Starts to leave.*)

KATE (*meekly and gently*): Auntie, you don't have to go away. You don't have to. How have I wronged you? Instead you, as a Christian, should rejoice. I have done nothing contrary to the Bible and the teachings of Christ.

WEDD: How have you wronged me? How? ...

WRIGHT *enters quickly.*

WRIGHT (*to KATE*): Kate, may I have five more minutes of your time, please.

KATE (*gently, pleadingly*): Richard, I told you—

WRIGHT: Kate! I will fight for you till the very end! Do you hear? Now he is even less a human than ever before. This is madness, Kate! Think what you're doing. Come to your senses, Kate! We are facing a catastrophe.

KATE: Richard, I can't and I won't be angry with you, but I beg you: that's enough!

WRIGHT (*forcefully*): No! I can't abandon you this way! I'll prove it to you! You are terribly mistaken, Kate. I tell you!

KATE *suddenly turns and quickly exits through the left door.*

WRIGHT (*hurrying after her*): No, you are going to listen to me! You will!

WEDD *surveys the hall with angry disdain, spits with disgust, and exits after them.*

*Pause. The muffled sound of the throng is heard from the street.*

*The right door opens and the PROPHET enters majestically with all his disciples. The PROPHET leads, RANJIT and RAMA follow, and behind them are SINDHU, WILLIAMS, SHANDRA, and ARJUNA.*

*The PROPHET is wearing a fine, exquisitely decorated, gilded, white and azure robe. He looks pensive, subdued, and somewhat sad.*

*RANJIT is also wearing an exquisite robe; his beard and hair are neatly groomed. He looks particularly solemn and in control.*

*RAMA is wearing an old, dirty robe; his hair is uncut and looks like it did in India. His face is sorrowful, and his eyes glimmer with pain and despair.*

*SINDHU and WILLIAMS are whispering.*

*ARJUNA is wearing an elegant robe over his tuxedo.*

*All slowly and quietly take their places. RANJIT sits to the right of the PROPHET. To the left, an armchair is left empty for KATE. Next to it sits SINDHU.*

*RAMA throws a sharp glance around the hall and sits down with disgust.*

RANJIT (*quietly and gently to ARJUNA*): So where is Sister Kate, my Brother?

ARJUNA: I don't know, Brother. She was just here.

*All of them piously bow their heads.*

RANJIT: Here is our dear Sister! Come closer, Sister, come closer! Take your place next to the Teacher, the place chosen for you by us all, wholeheartedly and with brotherly love. Over here, Sister.

*The PROPHET looks at KATE with a gentle and joyous smile and points at the chair next to his. KATE, blushing and her gaze lowered, goes there and sits down.*

RANJIT: There now our entire council has gathered. Bless our quiet deliberations, Teacher.

PROPHET (*in a quiet, pensive voice*): My Almighty God bless and enlighten our thoughts for the good of all people.

*All of them bow their heads piously.*

RANJIT: You all know, my Brothers, why we have gathered here this evening for deliberations. I don't need to tell you ... (*Stops and listens to sounds coming from the other side of the left door. An argument seems to be taking place.*) What's going on?

*Everyone else also turns and listens.*

RANJIT: Arjuna, my Brother, please go and ...

*The door is thrown open forcefully. WRIGHT enters and heads with a determined, controlled step straight to the table. KATE sits up straight and uneasily looks at WRIGHT.*

RANJIT (*with astonishment but softly*): Brother Wright, aren't you aware that we are having a meeting?

WRIGHT: I know. That's why I have come here. This is the only way I could get to see you and Mr. Rama. I want to talk with you.

RANJIT: My Brother, we don't have the time to talk with you now, because we are busy.

The PROPHET glances sideways at KATE, notices that she is tense, and momentarily places his hand on hers.

KATE glances at the PROPHET and immediately becomes more relaxed and calm.

WRIGHT (having glimpsed this little scene and with the same firm and controlled tone of voice): I want to talk precisely about the matter that concerns you now.

PROPHET (to RANJIT, who wants to answer WRIGHT): Let him speak, my Brother! Say what you have to say, Brother.

RANJIT shrugs.

The disciples, confused, excitedly whisper to each other.

WRIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Amar. Actually I would like to address this especially to you. At present you don't see reality around you, and it doesn't see you. You are kept hidden from it. You are surrounded by people who either can't see, because they are blinded by you (*glancing at Kate*) or don't want to see. Amar! Your teaching is ruining the world. Yes, yes, Gentlemen. You teach love, but you bring out hate. You sow peace, but out grows hostility. You preach brotherhood, but you stir up conflict.

KATE: Teacher! Stop him! How dare he say such things!

PROPHET (*quietly*): Let this poor man speak. Let him speak.

WRIGHT: I do believe that you honestly love everyone without distinction and unreservedly, and that you teach others to love their neighbour as they would themselves.

KATE: Those were also Christ's teachings, Richard! Also Christ's! The Teacher is simply introducing Christ's teachings into real life, consistently and honestly to the very end. You don't ...

WRIGHT: But what does introducing these teachings into real life give us? What? Look for yourself, Amar, look at this life. You don't realize what you have done. You don't know that by demonstrating love to some people you inevitably, with this same love, have revealed hostility to others. By giving hope to some people, you have pushed others into despair and fear. By protecting some, you have attacked others. Here's a small example. You once restored the sight of a blind bandit. Now this bandit is robbing and killing, and terrorizing the people of an entire state. And it's the same result everywhere. By giving to some, you consequently invariably take away from others. Because you know nothing about our way of life, you can't differentiate our good from our evil. You don't realize that what is good for some people here, is evil for others. And because you give to some today and to others tomorrow, you bring out insecurity, dissension, and chaos in the lives of everyone. Come down from your throne and take a look at what is happening in the country where you are preaching love. Everything is in turmoil and confusion. At every marketplace your name and your blessing are being pervertedly bartered away, Amar. In one quick moment fortunes are made for a few, while the wealth of millions is lost. Meanwhile you preach about giving away one's riches to the poor! The consequence is privation, suicide, crime, despondency, and immorality. The lower classes have lost their sense of civic discipline, respect for the law, and desire to work, and the higher classes their sense of security, justice, and generosity. Everywhere hostility and evil reign. No, Amar, I'm not the poor man. You are! You're not God or even a messenger of God,



but a wretched, self-deluded man who is doing great harm to people. You are human, Amar!

KATE: Teacher! Stop him! Or answer him! Or let's get out of here. I can't listen to this! ...

*The disciples exchange whispers of indignation, dissension, and anger. The PROPHET, without uttering a word, shakes his head and looks at WRIGHT intently and sadly.*

WRIGHT (*to the PROPHET*): Go ahead, please! Answer me, Amar. But use logic, reason, and facts. I don't need a sermon or miracles, just facts! But you won't answer me that way because you don't know the facts and you can't know them. As for you, Kate, I can provide you with stacks of figures, cold, plain statistics, that will demonstrate how much robberies, murders, drunkenness, poverty, swindles, bankruptcies, unemployment and all sorts of other evil have increased since the Prophet appeared here. Would you like that? Oh, I forgot something, Amar! At this very moment in front of the palace there are thousands of people who adore you. They believed you when you said that war isn't necessary, that weapons should not be made. They quit their jobs and are awaiting your blessing for doing so. Do you know what you can bless? An awful bloodbath, fratricide, and war among all of us. The government will not refrain from protecting its own country or using weapons. It will restore order. But how much suffering and blood will this cost? Do you know, or don't you?

RANJIT (*rapidly*): That's enough, my Brother! The Teacher knows everything. He has listened to you because of his goodness and love; but he knows that when a body is recuperating from its illnesses, it rids itself of them by breaking out in sores. Your statistics also tell the truth, Brother, only you don't understand their language.

WRIGHT (*to AMAR*): What do you say, Amar? Do you bless fratricide? Do you bless our terrible sore? The government is waiting for your answer. It's up to you whether or not a bloody holocaust will ignite.

RANJIT (*cautiously*): Certain things also depend on the government, my Brother.

WRIGHT: What you meant to say, will the government barter with you? See, Amar: even in your midst they are bartering with your faith.

RANJIT *makes an angry gesture.*

WRIGHT: Yes, you are bartering: if the government recognizes your faith as a state religion, you will not give your blessing. But if the government does not, you will.

PROPHET (*astonished, quietly to RANJIT*): Is he telling the truth, my Brother?

RANJIT: Teacher, any truth can be made into a lie, and a lie into a truth. (*To WRIGHT.*) Are you finished, Brother? You may go now. See, you have inflicted enough pain on the Teacher. Go! We shall ponder your words. (*Emphatically, looking at WRIGHT.*) I advise you to leave, Brother, for our common good! Do you hear?

WRIGHT (*looking intently for a moment at KATE, then glancing at the PROPHET, bowing dutifully to all, and resolutely, slowly leaving*): Good, I'll leave and await your reply. (*Suddenly stopping and turning to KATE.*) Kate, this is not my final word! (*Exits.*)

KATE *proudly raises her head. The PROPHET sits in deep thought, his head bowed. KATE regards him with pain and warm tenderness.*

RANJIT(*cautiously*): Teacher! Allow me to explain.

RAMA (*loudly and in great pain, after having restrained himself with all his strength while listening with an intense mien to everything WRIGHT said*): Teacher! Teacher! What have we come to?!

RANJIT (*in a soft voice but with a stern look*): Brother, allow me to say first—

RAMA (*unable to restrain himself*): Oh, no, you have told the Teacher enough, Brother Ranjit. Now let me say something. I can't remain silent nor bear it any longer, Teacher, I can't! Teacher, lend your ear to my words, to my suffering!

*The PROPHET raises his head and looks at RAMA.*

RAMA: Teacher! Our faith is dying! Dying, do you hear? We are drying up, we are withering away, we are wasting away all around you, Teacher! Do you not sense the spirit of our decay?! Do you not see the rot in our souls?! Why are you so sad in all your glory? Why?

*Everyone is astonished; and exclams softly are heard.*

VOICES: What is he saying?! Rama, what's wrong with you?!

RANJIT (*sternly*): Rama!

RAMA (*not noticing anyone around him; to the PROPHET*): Look at us, look around you. (*Motioning with his hand around the room.*) Look at what gold, what priceless gems, what this luxury is around us. Look at what silks, what exquisite robes we are wearing now. They have even dressed you in silk, Teacher. And how comfortably we sleep now, and how tasty our food is now. Oh, Teacher, you don't see this because we hide this from you.

*The others become more agitated. KATE looks with fear at RAMA.*

RAMA: And what do you see now, Teacher? What?! This stranger has spoken the truth. You don't see real life, reality. All you see now are machines. You preach the word of God to machines, you teach conduits, glass, and papers. You no longer know the living body of the people ... Oh, let me finish, let me! And the people no longer know you. You have become a machine yourself. You, our beautiful Teacher! Your love has been dried and is being sold in packages at our offices, departments by means of telephones, telegraphs, film screens, and phonographs ...

RANJIT: Teacher! As you see, poor Brother Rama has fallen ill. Will you allow him to be taken away and put to bed?

*The PROPHET doesn't answer; he looks at RAMA with melancholy and grief.*

RAMA: You are telling the truth, Brother Ranjit: I have fallen ill. I have been ill for a long time. My heart has been rent and bleeding a long time now as I have looked at you, my Brothers. Look at them, Teacher, with fresh eyes. Look at Shandra, at his face. Do you see? Do you think it looks like that from fasting and praying? And check how much money Sindhu has, Teacher, how many of your blessings he has sold!

SINDHU (*jumping up in rage, but then in a gentle, pain-stricken voice*): Rama, Rama, you really are ill!

SHANDRA *silently fearfully sits down and rubs his face.*

RAMA: Teacher! We are dying!!! Do you hear, Teacher?! Strangers have forced themselves among us and have infected us with their illnesses. They have undermined us, ex-

hausted us, poisoned us. They are all around us, they are everywhere. What do they want?! Why do we need this person among us at our council? (*Pointing to WILLIAMS*) What is his faith? He utters the most devout words, but in his heart there is deception, selfishness, falsehood, betrayal, and immorality.

WILLIAMS (*with a heavy sigh*): Poor brother Rama! Poor soul! Teacher, allow him to be taken to bed.

RAMA: Teacher! I beg you: let's go away from here! Let's go away from these palaces, silks, gold, and machines! Let's go to the people, Teacher, as we once did.

RANJIT: You can see he is completely ill, Teacher. Our poor Brother, calm yourself, come to your senses. Are the machines frightening you? But who do you think they're from, if not from God. You want our faith to spread throughout the world. Don't you? How can you talk to millions of people without using these machines? Wouldn't you like every soul on earth to see the bright face of God's prophet? How can you show it to thousands of millions without machines, telegraphs, or those screens that frighten you so much. Your soul is simple—it has little faith, and it is afraid of temptation. But what on earth could be frightening for the Teacher, for the messenger of God, you poor man of little faith?! How dare you say this to the Teacher?!

RAMA (*in despair*): It is frightening for the Teacher too. It is!

*The disciples react in horror and indignation.*

VOICES: He's insane! What's he saying?! Teacher, what is he saying?!

RAMA (*despondently*): We are what is frightening to him. We are! (*Pointing at KATE*) What does this woman want from us?!

KATE *starts to rise in fear but then sits down again.*

RAMA: When has there ever been a woman among us?! Why is she sitting next to the Teacher?

PROPHET (*quietly, in torment*): Rama, this woman is our Sister. That's enough, Rama, my Brother. Don't break your heart! (*More quietly*) Or mine, Rama. Enough!

RAMA: I can't, Teacher! I can't stop shouting when terrible pain is rending my breast.

RANJIT (*sternly*): Rama, that's enough! You're insane! You are slandering even our Teacher. Soon you'll be blaspheming God too.

RAMA (*angrily*): You are slandering him the most! You are destroying our faith, you are poisoning all of us and the Teacher! You, you are! You want power? Respect? Might? Don't you? This stranger spoke the truth and only the truth: we preach love but disseminate hatred. We preach simplicity but walk around in gold. We preach a life of labour but collect riches. We—

PROPHET (*in anguish*): That's enough, my Brothers, enough!

RANJIT (*sternly*): Do you hear, Rama? Enough! Be quiet!

RAMA (*in ecstasy*): I won't be quiet! I won't! Yes, we're sowing evil, not because our faith is like that, but because we ourselves are betraying our faith. It's because we have become non-believers, because the only thing we have kept from our faith is words. Our faith has become a business!

RANJIT: Teacher! You have heard yourself what kind of heresy Rama is spreading. He can't remain among us! He has been stirring up everyone for a long time. He sows distrust toward us among the people. He can't be our Brother. He is alien to us!

RAMA: Ah, so you want to banish me so that you can easily rule without opposition?! And you too, Sindhu? And you too, stranger? Am I in your way? Then banish me, Teacher,

banish me! I'll go. But you should know that they'll destroy our faith and you. It's already hard for you to breathe among them; you are already withering from grief. Oh, I can see, Teacher; I see your grief. Only they don't want to see it; it's better for them that way!

RANJIT (*ingratiatingly*): Teacher, you see yourself: he can't be our Brother now. He has already lost our faith. You have heard with what hate and anger he's talking to us.

SINDHU: He's a traitor!

WILLIAMS: He's a heretic, a traitor, a non-believer!

PROPHET (*with even greater anguish*): That's enough, my Brothers! Enough, I beg of you!

RANJIT (*to RAMA*): You are envious and hypocritical, Rama! You are jealous that others are smarter than you, and that is why you are angry. It's you who wants to rule over everyone, yet you accuse others of that. You even slander the Teacher because, instead of you, Sister Kate is now sitting next to him.

RAMA: You're lying! You are the hypocrite. It's you who desires power, and that is the only reason you joined us. You yourself...

PROPHET (*suddenly in a rage, banging his fist on the table and jumping to his feet*): That's enough!

*Everyone becomes numb from sudden fear.*

*The PROPHET, as if awakened, looks around wildly and uncomprehendingly at everyone. He glances around fearfully as if not recognizing where he is and what has happened. Then suddenly he covers his face with his hands and, horrified, runs out of the hall. Everyone begins whispering.*

VOICES: The Teacher has become angry.

Anger has possessed the Teacher!

Anger! Anger! Anger!

What will happen now?!

*KATE jumps to her feet, glares angrily at everyone, and runs out after the PROPHET.*

*The disciples stand immobile from shock and horror.*

## Scene 2

*The PROPHET'S room: bare, white walls and a simple table, chair, and small metal bed.*

PROPHET (*kneeling in front of the bed, his head resting on it for some time before raising his head; in anguish*): Forgive me, God! Forgive me! (*Shaking his head in despair and then resting it on the bed again before raising it once more ardently.*) Show me the way, God! Show me, Lord! Show me, teach me, direct me. And forgive me, forgive me, God. Don't deny me your favour, Lord! (*Lowers his head onto the bed and weeps without a sound.*)

*Quietly the door opens. KATE peers in through the crack. She does not move for a moment, then cautiously enters the room and closes the door. She stands by the door.*

KATE (*barely audibly*): Teacher!

*The PROPHET stops weeping, but does not get up or look around.*

KATE: Teacher! (*Quickly approaches him, falls to her knees, and strokes his hair ardently, with pain-ridden tenderness.*) Teacher, dear Teacher! My pure love, my sacred joy. You shouldn't suffer, you shouldn't! Forgive them, those wretches! Through your grace, return your grand, loving soul to them! My Teacher!

PROPHET (*raising his head and turning his face to KATE*): It is I who should be forgiven. I, my Sister.

KATE (*fervently*): You?! You?! (*Defiantly*) Who dares to forgive you? These poor people?!

PROPHET (*rising, standing silent for a moment, then lowering his head; quietly, as if in thought*): I should be forgiven.

KATE (*kneeling down, taking an edge of his robe, and ardently kissing it*): This is how we should forgive you!

PROPHET: You shouldn't do this, Sister. I have committed a grave sin. I felt anger. (*With pain and incomprehension*) Oh, my God, I felt anger! I—I felt anger! How are they, what are all of you supposed to feel when I set such an example?! What then is my love?

KATE (*on her feet, fervently*): No, not you, not you, Teacher! It's not your anger, not yours! It's their anger that was reflected in you. It's they, these poor people, who infected you. But even Christ got angry. And with a lash He drove the moneylenders from the temple. You drove the traders from the temple. Rama spoke the truth, Teacher: they have poisoned you. And that's that.

PROPHET: Alas, all of them spoke both the truth and untruth. My Sister, grievous exhaustion has fallen upon my soul. It is difficult for me, my Sister!

KATE (*caressing his shoulders*): Teacher, at times it is difficult even for God. You are great, you are tireless, you are invincible, Teacher! Your exhaustion will pass. It will pass, my beautiful one!

PROPHET: How pleasantly my soul relaxes when I'm next to you, my dear, my only, Sister. How gently your words soothe my burning torment. I thank you, my Sister!

KATE: Oh, Teacher! I am ready to shed my blood to the last drop to cleanse your wound. You gave me this life, and it belongs to you. You gave me love, you gave me the infinite happiness of faith, you gave me God, my divine Teacher!

PROPHET (*stroking her face with great tenderness*): Thank you, my Sister! My soul is coming back to life already. It is, I can feel it. Your love and faith are great, Sister. God himself is speaking to me through your words. (*Radiantly and joyfully*) Oh, what do dead, desiccated treetops matter when the roots are alive and strong! Thank you, Sister. Thank you, my dear, tender-hearted one. (*Embraces and kisses her passionately.*)

KATE: Oh, Teacher! (*Responds with a long, passionate kiss.*)

*They both release their embrace and stand for some time as if in shock.*

PROPHET (*quietly, in amazement*): How fantastically and sweetly your kiss has stirred my entire body and soul, my Sister! How strange! I can feel how profusely my strength is returning to me. God Himself was in your lips, my most beautiful Sister! Strangely, my entire face is burning. My heart feels sweetly faint.

KATE (*excitedly and awkwardly, experiencing both fear and bliss*): Teacher, you'll come to us for the deliberations now, won't you? We must tell those poor people waiting there.

PROPHET (*feeling elated, lovingly*): Of course, now I will come. I will go with you at once. Oh, Sister, it was God who has placed you on my path. Now I see!

*Someone knocks loudly and unhurriedly on the door. They both turn to face it.*

KATE: Come in!

WRIGHT *enters. Seeing KATE, he looks surprised for a moment.*

WRIGHT (*upset but restraining himself*): Ah, you're here too? All the better. All the better.

KATE (*quickly glancing at the PROPHET and then gently to WRIGHT*): Mr. Wright, the Prophet is going to the meeting now. We just took a break. Perhaps you could say what you want later?

PROPHET (*smiling brightly and merrily*): Sister, let him say it now! Let him speak now. Go ahead, Brother, tell me everything!

WRIGHT (*glancing at both of them sternly and questioningly as if trying to understand the reason for such a change in their mood; to KATE*): I won't bother the Teacher for long. I know that you're on a break now and I know why. But I've come to you with another matter, a personal matter, concerning me. Teacher, help me!

KATE (*regarding WRIGHT carefully and suspiciously*): Richard, if you have come with an evil purpose, then keep in mind that—

PROPHET: Sister, let him speak! (*Brightly and affectionately to WRIGHT*): What help do you need, my dear Brother?

WRIGHT (*as if in despair*): Teacher! Help me to regain the love of the woman I adore. I was thoughtless, cold, and much too reserved in love. In this way I insulted her passion, and she, this woman, left me out of pride. But I know that she still loves me. Return her to me! You can do everything. You know everything. You see how I am suffering. I no longer have strength to hold back my pain and despair. I'm going crazy. Oh, Kate! Oh, my darling, my love, my dearest. Don't do this! Don't. Stop tormenting me and yourself. Forget what happened! Give rein to your love! Give it!

WRIGHT *takes KATE'S hand. The PROPHET shudders, astonished.*

KATE (*pulling her hand away with difficulty*): Mr. Wright! Have you gone crazy?! Let go of my hand. Let go, I tell you! Go away!

WRIGHT: Teacher! Tell her! Tell her! Why aren't you saying anything? Help me! You can see how I'm suffering. Use your power to restore her love to me. Give it back!

KATE: Wright! Let go of my hand! I can't stand you. I never loved you. I only feel disgust toward you. I ... Let go of my hand! Teacher. Tell him!

WRIGHT: Teacher! Tell her! Tell her! You can see yourself how fiercely proud she is. Kate, Kate, for God's sake! I swear I love you! Remember your embraces, your kisses, and your passionate whispers! Kate, I love you madly, to distraction. And you love me, you love me, you damned woman! You love me!

*He forcefully grabs her, embraces her, and begins kissing her madly.*

KATE (*breaking away in a rage and calling to the PROPHET in despair*): Amar!

*Meanwhile the PROPHET had become increasingly more sullen but had tried to control himself running his hand over his face. When KATE screams, however, he throws himself at WRIGHT, grabs him by the hand, and squeezes it with such strength that WRIGHT immediately lets go of KATE and doubles over with a wild cry of pain.*

PROPHET: How dare you! (*Shoving WRIGHT toward the door.*) Get out of here!

WRIGHT (*barely able to stay on his feet, falling against the door, and with a look of spiteful joy, shouting to KATE*): Not human, is he?! Are you sure?!

The PROPHET, completely unaware of what he is doing, throws himself at WRIGHT once more and again pushes him in such a way that WRIGHT goes flying out the door. The PROPHET quickly shuts the door.

PROPHET: Out with you! (Suddenly stops, looks around wildly, comes to his senses, and exclaims in despair and despondency.) Again! I did it again! Oh, my God! Again! What's wrong with me?

KATE (having looked at the PROPHET with terror and throwing herself at him with intense pity): Teacher, Teacher! (Lovingly stroking his back and his hands.) It's nothing, my love. Nothing, O wonderful one ... it's nothing.

PROPHET (in torment): My God, what's wrong with me? I'm shaking now from all this anger, malice, and fury. I'm almost, almost ... (Angrily clenching his fists, then, immediately horrified by this act, looking around in fear.) My God, what is this?!

KATE: Forgive me, Teacher! Forgive me! It's because of me. Horrible, vile and worthless me! (Kissing his hands and robe.) Forgive me, Teacher! Well, look at me, say that you forgive me! ...

PROPHET: Forgive you?! You?! (Regains his senses and staring fervently at her.) Oh, my sweetest, my most beautiful!

KATE: Forgive me my dishonesty. I truly did love him once and kissed him, but now—

PROPHET (suddenly shuddering all over): You kissed him?! You?!

KATE: But now—

Suddenly, not aware of what he is doing, the PROPHET wildly embraces KATE and passionately kisses her lips. KATE looks him in the face in shock, breaks away, but then, herself aroused, embraces his neck and gives in completely to his kisses. The PROPHET lifts her up and carries her toward the bed while continuing to kiss her.

KATE (in horror, anguish, and bliss): Amar, Amar. We shouldn't! Amar, we are perishing! Perishing! Oh, my Amar!

She embraces him, and they both fall on to the bed.

## Act Four

### Scene 1

A large, tall film studio, full of equipment and sets. At the back, behind the wide glass doors, is a terrace. There are doors on the left and on the right. Next to the terrace there are windows that face the street.

ARJUNA is alone. Cautiously, so as not to be seen from the street, he gazes intently out one of the windows, then runs to another, listens and anxiously look out. He is dressed in an old robe and sandals. His sullen face is unshaven.

BETTY (rushing in): What's happening? What? Were they shooting again?

ARJUNA: No. But the crowd is getting increasingly larger. Do you hear the shouting?

BETTY (listening): But the police were shooting blanks, weren't they?

ARJUNA: For the time being, yes. But who knows what will happen next. So, what's going on?

BETTY: Kate, Ranjit, and Wright are discussing something. That's unusual. What could Kate and Ranjit be talking about with Wright?

ARJUNA: And did you find out where Sister Kate flew to?

BETTY: Oh, my God, Arjuna! You know that she flew the plane herself, without a pilot. So how could I find out? Do you think she'd tell anyone anything? She flew back, went to her rooms, asked not to be disturbed, and that was the end of that. It was as if she had been gone six minutes, not six days. But what is the problem Arjuna?! I don't understand anything. The Teacher also ... (*Apprehensively and quietly.*) Is he really not eating or drinking anything?! But it's already been seven days! Nothing? Nothing at all?

ARJUNA (*gloomily*): He has imposed a great fast upon himself. It has been six days since anyone has seen him. We only hear him moaning, praying and weeping in his room from time to time.

BETTY (*secretively*): Arjuna, did you know ... But I tell you this only in the strictest of confidence! Do you hear? Did you know that after the meeting Kate spent the entire night in the Teacher's room? Did you know that? No? Perhaps they were praying together? Do you think so? But, in the morning, after she returned to her rooms, she wrote him a long, long letter. And then she asked for a plane and flew off. The maid who delivered the letter to the Teacher told me this. Can you understand anything of this? Why the letter? And why did Kate disappear without waiting for an answer? And why has the Prophet locked himself up and begun to fast? What's going on, Arjuna?

ARJUNA (*gloomily*): I don't know anything. I only know that we have brought the Teacher to ruin, and we shall all suffer greatly for that. Both we and they out there. (*Pointing to the street.*)

BETTY (*frightened*): Why them? The Teacher will defend them. (*Secretively.*) Arjuna, do you know what I heard? Out there (*gesturing with her head at the street*) rumours are going around that the government has detained the Teacher, locked him up in some dungeon, and is keeping him there. And then, so that no one would see, it seems they want to take him away out of the palace and kill him somewhere. And not only that, Arjuna. Imagine this: they are saying that all of you apostles are helping the authorities! That's why the people have sworn not to leave the palace day or night. They'll be guarding it from all sides. Do you understand? But listen, Arjuna: why shouldn't the Teacher be told that the people are upset and want to see him? I don't understand. He should go out on the terrace, even if it's only for a minute, and state that no one has detained him away and that he is fasting. This would calm the people down. Otherwise God knows what will happen. Don't you agree, Arjuna?

ARJUNA (*remaining silent for a moment, then answering gloomily*): We can't tell the Teacher that.

BETTY: Why not?

ARJUNA (*silent once again, then looking around and hesitating before speaking very, very quietly*): The Teacher has lost his powers.

BETTY (*blinking in horror at ARJUNA, remaining silent for a few seconds and then whispering*): Lost them?

ARJUNA: But be careful, Betty: don't tell a soul. God forbid. You understand—



BETTY: Oh, Lord! Of course. But has he lost them completely?

ARJUNA: No, not entirely it seems. But they're not the same as before.

BETTY: How do you know? You said yourself that no one has seen him for six days.

ARJUNA: It became clear on the second day after the council meeting. (*Looking around and speaking even more quietly*) On the second day the Teacher went to visit the sick as usual. A blind man was brought to him. He was like any other blind man—the kind he used to cure by the dozen each day ... Already before that I had noticed the Teacher was ... well, not himself, as if he were tired or ... unsure of himself, or ... who knows what. He gazed and smiled in such a way that I got ... scared. So, the blind man was brought forth. The Teacher placed his hands on him and kept them there as usual ... But ... nothing happened! Just for a tiny, little bit the blind man saw a flash of light, but then nothing else. Nothing happened! The Teacher then grabbed his head like this (*showing her*), stood there, and then silently went like this (*showing her again*) and left the house. Since then he hasn't let anyone see him. So you see, he can't be told about the people out there, because then he would come out immediately. And then all the sick people would rush to him. But we don't know if he has gotten his powers back. What if he hasn't? A rumour would spread immediately that the Teacher has lost his powers, and then they would arrest him and all of us, drive us away, and our faith would be laughed at and trampled upon. See how terrible the situation is?!

BETTY: My God! What will happen now, Arjuna? What should we do?

ARJUNA: Do I know? Perhaps by fasting and praying the Teacher will redeem our sins and get his powers back? And if not, then ...

BETTY: Then you might be arrested, Arjuna?

ARJUNA: We could be arrested or deported from America.

BETTY: And you won't be an apostle anymore? But, maybe they wouldn't chase you out, Arjuna. Once you are no longer an apostle, there would be no reason to deport you, would there? Right? Then you could enter university and continue your studies. And then Kate would give you a job and we would get married. Right, Arjuna? So what: you'd be a former apostle, but an apostle all the same.

ARJUNA (*gloomily*): But what about our faith?

BETTY (*sighing*): If only the Teacher could get back his powers! (*Shaking herself off.*) But he will, Arjuna! He'll get them back, you'll see. It's only because he got angry ...

SHANDRA *enters, also in an old robe; he has lost some weight and is unshaven, unkempt, and depressed. He glances around the studio and sighs.*

SHANDRA: Has the Teacher come out, Arjuna?

ARJUNA: No.

SHANDRA: What will happen, Arjuna?

ARJUNA: All that will happen is that you won't be eating pheasant anymore.

SHANDRA (*pleadingly, in tears*): But I haven't been eating pheasant anymore; may they all go extinct. I won't eat anything except rice until I die, as long as the Teacher ... (*glancing with fright at BETTY*) as long as the Teacher comes back out to us. Oh, my God, my God! What punishment for us, what punishment! (*Grief stricken, shaking his head and looking about sadly, he leaves.*)

BETTY: Poor Shandra! It seems he's convinced that the Teacher lost his powers because of his pheasants. Arjuna, where's Rama by the way? No one has seen him. He hasn't been expelled from the council, has he?

ARJUNA: Rama has been lying on the floor by the Teacher's door day and night. He also hasn't taken any food or drink for the past six days.

BETTY: On a bare floor?! Like an ascetic? Oh, Arjuna, I want to take a look at him. I've never seen an ascetic. May I, Arjuna?

ARJUNA: Really, now! The man is fasting, and you want to look at him as if he were an animal—

BETTY: Why an animal? I want to see an ascetic. And maybe I'd like to fast like that myself? All right, all right! Come on, Arjuna, what's wrong with you? Come on, let me take a look at him! And for that ... (*Slyly*) I will kiss you ever so sweetly. Oh, how I'll kiss you ... Oh, my! So, how about it, Arjuna?

ARJUNA (*gloomily*): Will you really?

BETTY: Word of honour! Here is a deposit! (*Kisses him quickly on the cheek.*) Well? Now do you believe me?

ARJUNA (*resolutely*): Let's go then! (*Both of them exit quickly.*)

RAMA *enters through the other door. He looks thinner than he ever did before. His eyes are blazing. He looks around gloomily, then suddenly smashes a camera with all his might and it falls to the ground. He spits on it and leaves.*

*The cries of the crowd are heard from the street. SINDHU enters quickly, and WILLIAMS dashes in behind him. They are dressed simply and look unwell, tense, and worried.*

WILLIAMS (*in an excited whisper*): I tell you, Brother, that's the only way! They'll deport all of you from America, but they can't do that to me. I'm an American citizen. So the best thing to do is to sign all the money over to me. Then let them try.

SINDHU (*waving WILLIAMS away and trying to get away from him*): No, no, no! No way!

WILLIAMS: Wait a minute! Just listen! I'm telling you—

SINDHU: No, no, no! (*Runs out of the studio.*)

WILLIAMS: What a stupid Asian! Wait! (*Runs after him.*)

*The shouting in the street increases and then quiets down.*

KATE, RANJIT, and WRIGHT *enter.*

KATE *is dressed in plain clothes. She has lost weight. There are dark circles under her eyes. She has a stony cold, uniformly stern, and haughty look. She walks slowly, squinting her eyes. RANJIT is dressed as he was at the meeting, but his expression is gloomy and pensive.*

WRIGHT (*looking around the studio to see if anyone is there, and noticing the overturned camera*): Oh, who did this? (*Picking it up and examining it.*) It's broken. (*To KATE.*) Yes, Kate, it's the only positive solution. Why are you smiling? Yes, I consider Amarism a great power that could be very useful if it is given a form which is in harmony with our time. More than that it could even be an enormous power. Therefore showing the Teacher to the people in his present condition would not, you understand, be possible. Not showing him has also become impossible, for a riot might result at any moment. Should he be transported somewhere else in secret? First of all, the palace is being watched so carefully by the people that doing that

would be nearly impossible. Secondly, why do that? How would that benefit anyone? It won't return his powers, but only cause an extraordinary revolt among the people. Moreover, any other solutions are risky because various evil social elements might want to utilize Amarism for their own purposes. They would keep his name but, would turn the essence of his teachings upside down and begin using it for their activities. It's enough that this fanatic Rama might foment a movement in Amar's name. Can you imagine what could ensue if any of this happens? Can you imagine, Kate?

KATE *remains silent and looks somewhere into the distance with a stony, indifferent gaze.*

WRIGHT (*exchanging glances with RANJIT and seemingly not noticing KATE'S silence*): This solution, however, would not only save Amarism and preserve it in its entirety, Kate, but also raise it to exceptional heights. The government would immediately recognize it as the state religion. Christianity would bow its head, and the decaying Vatican would collapse. Amarism would rule the entire world. Can you imagine the power, the greatness, that would accrue to the centre of Amarism, that is, to put it simply, to you, Kate, to Brother Ranjit, and to me as members of the council. Can you imagine, Kate?

KATE *remains silent with the same severe expression, barely evincing a cold, bitter smile.*

WRIGHT (*again exchanging glances with RANJIT*): And the masses, Kate? You would save them from terrible disillusionment, strengthen their faith in Amar, and fill them with enthusiasm. This "miracle," Kate, this final miracle, would elevate the shaky authority of religion to a higher level, strengthen civic discipline, and subdue all sorts of rebellious tendencies. We can do it, Kate! We will not only save modern civilization, but also strengthen it by means of Amarism for millennia. Doesn't such a great role enthrall you, Kate?

KATE *still remains silent.*

WRIGHT: I won't even mention that this will save Amar's reputation. Frankly it is you who should save Amar as a messenger of God and not as a human, Kate! Yes, I now propose that you save him as a non-human being. But he can be saved only in the manner that I propose. Only through this miracle.

KATE: Through deception?

WRIGHT: What is deception, Kate? When Moses brought down his tablets with the Ten commandments from Mt. Sinai and told the people that God gave them to him, wasn't that a deception? But in the meantime, didn't these commandments bring a sense of peace, discipline, and order to those people? Hasn't this deception strengthened this discipline and faith in God in entire nations for millennia? What do you want, Kate? That he be arrested as a religious charlatan, brought to the police, and put in prison? That he be ridiculed throughout America and the entire world? Do you? And don't forget, Kate, that your name is closely connected to the name of the Prophet. The ridicule and mockery of Amar will also be directed at you. Can you imagine how your name will be smeared in all the newspapers, how they will burrow into your soul and into all your intimate affairs—

KATE (*shaking in anger*): Enough of that! I agree to it. Does anyone know about your invention?

WRIGHT: Aside from the three of us, not a soul. Only we three will be in command of this secret. I myself will set both cameras. However, Kate, the Prophet should name the three of us in this sermon as his ... earthly heirs or something like that.

KATE: But he'll never agree to it. No one would!

WRIGHT: If he really loves people, if he wants to save his teachings, he'll agree. He has no choice.

KATE: No human, I repeat, would agree to such a ... horrible thing. Or to such a cynical and terrible deception.

WRIGHT: If he is a great man, he'll agree. May I call him to you, Kate?

KATE (*remaining silent, looking into the distance, and then suddenly speaking coldly and resolutely*): Call him! But leave me alone with him.

WRIGHT (*keenly*): Of course! Come, Brother Ranjit. (*quickly leaves the studio. RANJIT follows him.*)

KATE, *paces around the studio in a grim exaltation. A door opens violently and in rushes WEDD with a Bible in one hand and an umbrella in the other, wearing a hat and coat. Her appearance is triumphant exultant, and gloating. She starts shouting as soon as she crosses the threshold.*

WEDD: Well, well! So?! Who won? Who? Huh? (*Shaking her Bible.*) With this you will conquer! With this!

KATE (*sternly, coolly*): I implore you, Auntie, leave me alone!

WEDD: So, it's getting unpleasant? Isn't it? Where is your "Prophet"? Huh? And why aren't you laughing now at our crusade against the Antichrist? Where is he? Hiding like a dog in his hut, hiding from Christ and this Holy Book?! Is there crying and gnashing of teeth in his kingdom? Huh?

KATE (*grimly and impatiently taking WEDD by the arm and leading her to the door*): Please, Auntie! I don't have time to talk to you now. Please!

WEDD (*carefully glancing at KATE*): Aha, so now you don't—

KATE (*emphatically and sternly*): Auntie! That's enough! Go!

WEDD (*frightened, looks at KATE and begins to leave, but stops at the door, exclaiming triumphantly*): But we have destroyed the kingdom of the Antichrist! We have destroyed it. (*Exits, slamming the door behind her.*)

Again KATE *paces around the study with a grim and sullen expression. The PROPHET enters wearing an old robe. He looks tired; his face is thin, his eyes large. Deep torment is visible on his face and body. He stops at the threshold looks silently at KATE with anticipation. As soon as he walks in, KATE stops and stonily, stiffly lifts her head and looks at him.*

PROPHET (*quietly, without emotion*): You wanted to talk to me, Sister?

KATE: "Sister!" How dare you say that word?! You?!

PROPHET: I read your letter, Sister. I did not deceive you. I deceived no one, not even myself, Sister. However, I didn't choose the right path.

KATE: Your deceit lies in the fact that you are human. And with that you have killed God within me. Do you hear? The very same God that you had revived in me.

PROPHET: God can neither be killed nor created, Sister.

KATE: And what did you do to those poor people out there? What will become of their faith? Look they lie out there on the street day and night waiting for you, the messenger of

God. They are ready to rip apart any person who dares tell them that you aren't God. What will you tell them?

*The PROPHET kneads his hands in torment and remains silent.*

KATE (*brutally*): Well, Amar? Tell me!

PROPHET (*in acute pain*): What can I do now?! I have begged God to return my powers. God has turned His face away from me. Let me be punished. But why them?! Whatever for?!

KATE (*after a brief silence*): You can save their faith. But you must sacrifice your life for them. (*Looks intently at the PROPHET.*)

PROPHET (*bitterly and painfully*): My life? For what was it given to me if not for the sake of their faith and their happiness?! What use is it to me now that my purpose has been taken away from me?!

KATE (*in the same merciless, cold tone*): You could not only save their faith, but also strengthen it for many years to come. More than that you could strengthen your teachings and your glory forever. To them you would always remain the messenger of God you were before. Your faith would spread throughout the entire world. But you, yourself, must die. Die immediately.

*The PROPHET looks silently at KATE.*

KATE: And die a horrible human death. Are you willing to do that?

*The PROPHET remains silent.*

KATE: You'll die like that only in your eyes, mine, Ranjit's, and Wright's. But for all the people and all nations you will die as a messenger of God, as a non-human. To them you won't even die, but go to heaven, to God. You will ascend alive into heaven. Just as you are standing here now. In front of thousands of people you will ascend into heaven right from this terrace. There will be an explosion of thunder, a cloud will envelop you, and you'll disappear. Are you willing to do this? But you should realize that it's not God who will be lifting you toward heaven, but our machine. Wright has invented a flying apparatus. He will fasten it under your robe. No one will know about it. This apparatus will lift you toward heaven. And another apparatus, which will be fastened to your body, will produce a blast of thunder and will blow your body apart into pieces. That's how you will ascend into heaven. Are you willing to go through with it?

*The PROPHET looks intently and wildly at KATE.*

KATE: With their own eyes the people will see that God summoned you and their faith in you, in your teachings, and in God will be strengthened forever after. You will save them from despair, despondency, and loss of faith. Or ... you can be arrested and humiliated, the people's faith in you will be destroyed, and you will bring them only despair and grief. The choice is yours!

PROPHET (*silent at first and then answering in a quiet, hoarse voice*): Can faith and happiness be saved by lies?

KATE (*bitterly*): Oh, Amar, so far people have only been living lies. What is falsehood and what is the truth? One truth aged and became falsehood, and then was thrown away and

replaced with a new “truth.” But what can you know? Or maybe this is precisely the truth that God is calling you back to him in this way? (*Smiling bitterly.*) You have done your part; you have left us your commandments, and we will ... continue to implement them. Well, Amar? Choose! (*Staring intently at the PROPHET.*) Do you hear? They are waiting for your answer.

*The PROPHET stands, his head bowed in deep thought.*

KATE (*with a bitter smile*): What? Is life dearer to you than your faith, their happiness, and even the glory of God after your death? So, you are human, Amar, you are human!

*The PROPHET looks strangely at KATE as if with unseeing eyes, covers his face, with his hands and unsteadily leaves the studio. KATE remains standing in the same place with a bitter smile.*

## Scene 2

*The same place in the early morning. RAMA, SINDHU, WILLIAMS, SHANDRA, and ARJUNA are crowded together on the terrace next to the door. They are peering into the studio and whispering with pious fear and anxiety. To all sides cameramen are standing holding photo and film cameras and tape recorders. From the street the muffled, thick hum of thousands of people is heard.*

*Enter the PROPHET, KATE, RANJIT, and WRIGHT. The PROPHET walks heavily and slowly, barely moving his feet, with a sad yet ecstatic expression on his tired face. KATE and RANJIT, looking sullen but solemn, support him under his arms and silently lead him onto the terrace. WRIGHT walks behind them with a superficially solemn expression, carefully watching the PROPHET, and inconspicuously checking the PROPHET’S back to see if the apparatuses are firmly attached.*

PROPHET (*suddenly stopping, with a painful smile*): My Brothers, leave me alone with the Sister for a minute. Only for a minute.

*WRIGHT and RANJIT quickly walk onto the terrace and close the doors behind them.*

PROPHET: Sister! ... (*Hesitating and smiling painfully.*) My Sister ... For my eternal journey, please give me a last earthly and human ... kiss! Bless me with earthly love!

*KATE suddenly and passionately embraces him around his neck and fervently kisses him.*

PROPHET (*for a moment standing with his eyes closed*): Now I’m ready. Let’s go, Sister!

*KATE (biting her lip, to hold back her tears, taking him by the arm and calling out): Ranjit!*

*WRIGHT and RANJIT quickly walk in. RANJIT takes the PROPHET by the other arm, and the PROPHET is led slowly onto the terrace. The disciples crowd around the PROPHET, but RANJIT pushes them away admonishingly. WRIGHT does not allow anyone to touch the PROPHET.*

*When the PROPHET appears before the people, the crowd explodes thunderously with joyful cries. The PROPHET extends his arms down to the crowd and blesses the people. The cries and screams become even louder.*

*KATE returns to the studio, leans back against some equipment, and stands there not moving; her eyes are closed, and she has an expression of extreme suffering.*

WEDD enters with a Bible in her hands and grimaces derisively while looking at the terrace and at KATE.

WRIGHT stands on guard behind the PROPHET, so that no one can get too close to him. From time to time he looks around at the cameramen and observes how they do the filming. RANJIT stands on the right, not allowing anyone to come closer.

The PROPHET waits for the crowd to calm down, but when this does not happen, he raises his hands and the noise of the crowd diminishes.

PROPHET: My Brothers! ... *(Falling silent for a moment)* My dear Brothers! My poor, beloved people. For the last time my fervent love speaks to you. For the last time I'm giving you my undying eternal commandment, my people: Love One Another! For the sake of love, don't be afraid to give up your fortune, your health, your honour, your name, or even your own life, my Brothers! For the happiness of humanity, don't be afraid to give up even truth, my Brothers! Do you hear me? Verily, I say unto you the greatest truth is in love and in happiness. Do you hear, my beloved Brothers? I have given you God's commandments, and now I am departing from you. Listen to and obey my disciples. Now God, in His almighty power, is summoning me from this earth. Farewell, my Brothers. Let peace and love be with you forever! Farewell, my dear people! *(Shouts these last words in a voice filled with ecstasy and love, extends his arms as if ready to fly, and, at that very moment, rises quietly upwards away from the ground.)*

*Despondent shouts of farewell are heard from the crowd, but when the PROPHET ascends from the terrace, a profound, dead calm ensues; in the background only the muffled hum of the city is heard. The disciples fall to their knees in pious fear, their faces uplifted.*

KATE opens her eyes, stares and immediately grabs hold of the equipment behind her, closes her eyes, and waits in terror.

WILLIAMS falls to the ground, looks upward at the PROPHET, then crawls into the studio.

WILLIAMS *(whispering in terror)*: God! God! God!

WEDD stops smiling as soon as the PROPHET starts to ascend from the terrace. Suddenly she drops the Bible, falls to her knees in terror, and extends her arms upward.

WEDD: My God! My God! Oh, my God!

*A thunderous blast is heard. KATE opens her eyes, starts to run, but then freezes on the spot. There is a pause, followed by frenzied cries of terror and devotion from the crowd.*

WRIGHT *(quickly walking in high spirits towards KATE)*: The great era of Amarism has begun on earth, Sister! *(Drops to his knees and piously raises his hands toward heaven.)*

*Translated by Christine Oshchudlak Stawnychy*

# Ivan Kocherha

The pressures of history and politics often leave their unexpected mark on a writer's professional life, on the choices he is forced to make, and on the resulting fate of his works. In the case of Ivan Kocherha, the very tool of his trade—the language in which he wrote—was subject to these pressures. Kocherha was born in 1881 in the town of Nosivka, Chernihiv gubernia. After graduating from Kyiv University's law school in 1903, he worked as a civil servant in Chernihiv (1903–14) and Zhytomyr. At first Kocherha wrote theatre reviews in Russian for the local press under the names Ivan Kochergin and Karfunkel or the initials I. K. and I. A. K. The first of his thirty-odd plays was *Pesnia v bokale* (A Song in a Wineglass, 1910), written in Russian, about a watchmaker who searches for a song in a wineglass that can make wishes come true. From 1923 on Kocherha wrote primarily in Ukrainian. From 1928 he was an editor of Zhytomyr's Ukrainian newspapers *Robitnyk* and *Radians'ka Volyn'*. Later he also edited the Kyiv magazine *Teatr*.

Kocherha's first published play was *Feia hirkoho myhdaliu* (The Fairy of the Bitter Almond, 1926). It was followed by *Almazne zhorno* (The Diamond Grindstone, 1927), *Marko v pekli* (Marko in Hell, 1930), and *Pisnia pro Svichku* (A Song about Svichka, 1930). The latter, a historical drama in verse, proved to be his best and most popular work. In many of his plays Kocherha's philosophical interests and mystical expressionism were conspicuously dominant. This caused Soviet censors and producers to be overly cautious, and his works were then labelled "idealistic" and even reactionary.

In 1933 Kocherha wrote *Hodynnnykar i kurka* (The Watchmaker and the Chicken). It was turned down by the censors in Soviet Ukraine's first capital, Kharkiv. He then renamed the play *Maistry chasu* (Masters of Time), translated it into Russian, and submitted it to the All-Union Drama Competition in Leningrad. Out of 1,200 works that were being considered, his play was awarded the third prize; another Ukrainian playwright, Oleksander Korniiichuk, received the second prize, but the first prize was not awarded. Kocherha's success at that competition changed his career. Very soon after, his play was published in both Ukrainian and in Russian translation, and staged in both languages. Later it was also translated into other Soviet languages as well as Bulgarian, Czech, and English.

In the late 1930s Kocherha's plays were not staged, so he turned to translating librettos, comedies, and other works from Russian, German, and French into Ukrainian, among them Charles Gounod's *Faust* and Maurice Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird*. In 1938, together with the poet Maksym Rylsky, he wrote the libretto to Borys Liatoshynsky's opera *Shchors*. In 1948 he produced an opera scenario based on his historical play *Yaroslav Mudryi* (Yaroslav the Wise), and in 1950 he wrote a libretto based on his play *Pisnia pro Svichku*.

While his earlier works continued to be published, Kocherha wrote numerous comedies, some agitprop plays, and a play for children, *Chorny val's* (The Black Waltz, 1938). His last play, *Prorok* (The Prophet, 1948, published in 1961), about Taras Shevchenko, is a tragedy in verse.

Kocherha's use of dramatic conflict, tension, comic relief, emotion, and symbolism make his works stageable and lively, especially when supplemented with laughter, lyricism, and mu-



sic. He masterfully employs satire, the grotesque, and folk legends. Whether dealing with trivial or sublime themes, he gives his characters a psychological dimension. In almost all of his plays there is a strong sympathy for the downtrodden, those unjustly treated, and those who stand up for other people and their own principles. His natural inclination was to write philosophical or “problematic plays,” as he called them, and to embody his philosophical ideas in dramatic form. However, abstract ideas and problems and quests for the intangible (such as searching for a song heard or for a taste experienced many years earlier) were not acceptable Soviet socialist realist subjects. Consequently Kocherha was criticized for engaging in excessive mysticism and reflecting an “insufficient knowledge of life.”

The official critics kept changing their opinions of Kocherha's works. During the years his plays were accepted, he received two Orders of the Red Banner (1937, 1947), the USSR State Prize (1947, for *Yaroslav Mudryi*), and the title of merited artist of the Ukrainian SSR (1950). He died in Kyiv in 1952.

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## About *Masters of Time*

### Textual Variants

The fate of *Masters of Time* throws some light on the times in which Kocherha lived. From 1940 until the early 1970s, the play was not staged, although it was printed in several editions, both in Ukrainian and in Russian. Initially the work was criticized for its “formalism,” and Kocherha was obliged to rewrite some politically sensitive parts. Thus the 1934 Russian edition, published in Moscow, and the 1938 and 1951 Ukrainian editions, published in Kyiv, differ. Variations and changes also appear in the posthumous 1956, 1963, and 1968 Ukrainian editions. The translation in this anthology is a substantially revised version of the 1938 translation by the British translator Anthony Wixley, who used one of the earliest versions of Kocherha’s play. In this anthology translations of several important excerpts, which appeared in other editions, have been added.

In the first two acts, the textual variants are rather minor. In the 1934 Russian edition, act one takes place on a Friday, and Lida is to marry in five days. In the 1951 Ukrainian edition, the day is Tuesday, and the marriage is to be in two days. There is also a minor difference in the numbering of scenes. In Acts Three and Four, however, marked differences occur.

The 1934 Russian and 1938 Ukrainian editions contain two scenes at the beginning of act three that are omitted in later editions. These scenes depict simple women who criticize and curse the Soviet regime and the Revolution of 1917 for bringing them neither money nor food. These proletarians are not on their best behaviour. Beginning with the 1938 edition, one of these women, Anna Usach, steals a chicken from Olia Cherevko and later sells it to Lundyshch. Other variations throw a different light on Olia’s husband and his priorities. While in the 1934 edition Cherevko’s son is only sick, from 1938 on he is depicted as seriously ill and dying, and his mother begs her husband to get the necessary medication. In later editions, Taratuta is very attentive to Olia and is the one who finds and brings the medication for the child. These additions make Cherevko appear more fanatical than heroic. He is unfeeling and, to a certain extent, irresponsible and inhumane in his behaviour towards his son and wife. In the 1938 edition Karfunkel states he is going to Heidelberg, “where the real people are.” Yurkevych is shown complaining to Lida about the Party devouring one’s individuality, liberty, and love, and lamenting the lack of liberty for which she had fought.

There are minor variants of act four. When Cherevko returns from the Party Congress, he announces the “five-year plan.” In the 1951 edition, this is called “the Stalin Five-Year Plan”; in later editions the reference to Stalin is deleted. In the final scene in the 1956 and later editions, Karfunkel says, in ungrammatical Ukrainian: “You’ll know yet what German rule is when they capture the whole world!”

The German-Soviet War of 1941–45 also affects the way Lida’s behaviour towards Karfunkel is presented in the postwar editions. Only in the 1934 and 1938 editions, in the final scene, does she make the slightly positive remark that Karfunkel probably knew more about time than we comprehend. In the postwar editions this remark is deleted. Instead, Lida comments that he wanted to turn back time and that the Germans in their collective insanity, want to rule the world, encroach upon Ukraine, and turn time back to the Middle Ages. Her remark is the only direct reference to Ukraine in the play.

Although the 1933 text of the prize Kocherha received from the All-Soviet Drama Competition notes that his work shows “the triumph of the socialist epoch and the victory of the Bol-

shevik way of life,” it is debatable whether the fanatical Lida and Cherevko are examples for others to follow. Kocherha stated that he based Lida and Taratuta on real people, but that Cherevko is a composite character derived from printed reports about contemporary Soviet heroes. At first, some Soviet critics and censors were unsure who the actual “masters of time” in Kocherha’s play were and how positive their role was. The depiction of Karfunkel, as well as the fact that his name was one of Kocherha’s pseudonyms, may have contributed to their confusion. Karfunkel’s purpose may have originally been to introduce Kocherha’s philosophical discussion on the perception of time. This topic was particularly dear to the author, given his interest in subjective perceptions and interpretations of reality. A revealing anecdote about Kocherha in this regard was provided by an acquaintance, Izabella Radovska. He told her that although he had not seen her in seven years, to him it seemed as if only one minute had passed. Although he may have identified with Karfunkel, in an article published in *Literaturna hazeta* (24 April 1935), Kocherha nonetheless branded this character as an enemy representative of bourgeois, “neo-Kantian and fascist” idealist philosophy.

## Background

*Masters of Time* begins in 1912 and ends in 1929. It thus reflects the general political and economic situation in Ukraine during the last years of tsarist rule, the civil war after the Revolution of 1917, and the first decade of Soviet power.

Kocherha’s *dramatis personae* represent various nationalities, occupations, and social classes. Count Lundyshch is Russian, like most of the members of the elite and senior civil service in Russian-ruled (both tsarist and Soviet) Ukraine. Lida Zvantseva, the leading Communist activist in the play, is also Russian. When the count suspects her of being Jewish, he voices a stereotypical view that Jews were among the leading revolutionaries and were responsible for disrupting the existing tsarist order. Karfunkel represents the many Germans who had been brought to the Russian Empire since the eighteenth century to help it develop politically, scientifically, economically, and militarily. In some of the characters’ remarks in the postwar editions (as in the 1956 edition quoted above), indirect references to Nazi expansionism and chauvinism have been added, perhaps by the editors. The play also alludes to Soviet centralized bureaucratic control by making Yurkevych first take a train from Kyiv to Moscow to get to Paris.

Class and nationality is also reflected in the characters’ speech. Lundyshch’s French expressions are typical of the Russian upper classes. Karfunkel’s language reflects the fact that many Germans in the Russian Empire could not speak Ukrainian or Russian well; they intermingled their speech with German words and were influenced by German syntax. Taratuta’s speech is replete with colloquialisms and slang expressions.

## The Element of Time in the Play

Some of the elements in the *Masters of Time* were first sketched in an earlier short work Kocherha wrote in the 1920s called “Satan’s Toothache.” That title and the discussion about stopping time (as in the play) hint at the Faustian bargain and discussion about contentment with inactivity. Kocherha’s interest in time may stem from his early years, when his father’s life as a railwayman was regulated by time. Clockmakers figure in some of Kocherha’s other works, including his first play. One of his biographers, Natalia Kuziakina, points out many examples of Kocherha’s fascination with time (e.g., as a young man Kocherha had an hourglass and was even photographed with it). Kocherha admitted in 1934 that he wished to

demonstrate “what time is, what its laws and whims are, who rules time, and who falls under its cruel control.”<sup>1</sup>

Discussions about time were not new in Kocherha’s day. In the nineteenth century people grew increasingly concerned with the temporal aspect of life’s meaning and content. The French philosopher Henri-Louis Bergson introduced the idea of reality existing in durational values. Later Martin Heidegger stressed differentiation and the significance of the moment, compared to lost and meaningless time. A moment can be extended and thus provide for a person’s authentic existence. Writers, too, discussed the concept of time. In Thomas Mann’s *Magic Mountain* (1924) the characters discuss time in terms of personal experience; thus time’s relative and distorted character is depicted, and the illusory aspect is stressed. Hans Castorp, Mann’s protagonist, speaks of grabbing time by the tail, an expression also found in Kocherha’s play. Although Kocherha’s concept of the relativity of time may not be new or limited to nineteenth-century thought (St. Augustine, for example, believed that time is experienced subjectively), his explanation of the phenomenon is opposite to that found in Mann’s work (Mann claimed that time shrinks when no special events take place). Kocherha’s concept of “condensed time” explains the subjective appreciation of time as an actual experience of life during important events, when relative time becomes real time.

In terms of actual time, Kocherha allowed thirty minutes for act one and twenty-five minutes for act two. Either of these two acts could also stand on their own as short plays. Acts Three and Four are not as concise and structurally could not exist independently. Kocherha explained that the first two acts are compact because their characters’ biographies and plot are not developed fully, contrary to the last two acts. Consequently, Yurkevych ends up with a minor role because he does not lead an eventful life. The Bolsheviki have taken over and have become the new masters of time. The train, which was a widespread symbol for the Bolshevik revolution, is theirs too. Whether the Bolsheviki are actually the “masters of time” is questionable. Are they successful and real, or are they faceless stereotypes with no feelings or personal lives? Although the title of the play may be interpreted as referring to the Bolsheviki, the play is imbued with irony. One of the more poignant examples is Lida, the revolutionary “firebird” who becomes a chicken breeder whose “wings”—her dreams—have been clipped.

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<sup>1</sup> Ivan Kocherha, “U maisterni dramaturha,” in his *Radist’ mystetstva: Zbirnyk teatralnoi publitsystyky, retsenzii, statti, promovy*, ed., with an intro., by M. A. Pryluts’kyi. (Kyiv: Mystetstvo, 1973), 32.

# *Masters of Time*

## (1933)

### CHARACTERS

OLEKSII STEPANOVYCH YURKEVYCH, a schoolteacher

LIDA *or* LIDIIA ZVANTSEVA

DOCTOR KARFUNKEL, a German scientist

TARATUTA

ANDRII TROKHYMOVYCH CHEREVKO, a machinist

OLIA CHEREVKO, his wife

COUNT VALERIAN SERGEEVICH LUNDYSHEV

SOFIIA PETRIVNA, *or* SONIA

COLONEL

A STATIONMASTER

ANNA USACH, *a railwayman's wife*

FOUR WOMEN, *other railwaymen's wives*

FIRST RAILWAYMAN, *or* [SEMEN/IVAN] TEREHTIOVYCH

SECOND RAILWAYMAN, *or* VASYL IVANOVYCH

THIRD RALWAYMAN, *or* ANOTHER RAILWAYMAN

AN OFFICER

A LIEUTENANT

A COMMISSAR *of a military train*

A LOCAL PARTY SECRETARY, *or* PETRO MYKHAILOVYCH

BANDMASTER HENN, *a Czech*

A COMRADE *from the Revolutionary Committee*

NINCHKA, *Yurkevych's daughter*

A PORTER

OTHER RAILWAYMEN, RED ARMY SOLDIERS, STATE-FARM PEASANTS, COUNTRYWOMEN, *and*  
MUSICIANS

*The play takes place at the same railway station: act one in 1912, act two 2 in 1919, act three in 1920, and act four in 1929.*

## Act One

### Scene 1

*The waiting room of a small railway station in 1912, with two windows, an upholstered bench, a table, and a clock. On the left is a door with a "Ladies' Room" sign; on the right, a the "Entrance." It is a summer evening. The greenish lights of the station shine outside the windows. DR. KARFUNKEL is sitting with his feet on the bench, drinking tea; he takes several different kinds of watches out of their cases and puts them away again. He is a thin, smartly dressed gentleman of unspecified age. His right cheek is bound in a red silk handkerchief. Typical railway noises come in through the windows. Lights flicker, and the train whistles resound loudly*

YURKEVYCH, a man of about twenty-five, enters, followed by a PORTER carrying a small suitcase, carefully packed in a sailcloth cover and tied with rope. The PORTER puts the suitcase down on the floor.

YURKEVYCH: I need a second-class ticket and seat reservation to Moscow.

PORTER: The ticket office isn't open yet. Are you going to check your luggage?

YURKEVYCH: No, no. I'll take my suitcase with me. Would you know if the train will be in soon?

PORTER: They haven't rung yet. I expect it'll be here soon. In half an hour if it isn't late. (*Leaves without closing the door.*)

KARFUNKEL (*irritated*): Donnerwetter!<sup>1</sup> How 'bout you the door shut. Draft, cold one!

YURKEVYCH: You mean fresh air!

KARFUNKEL: Air, air! *Salbaderei!*<sup>2</sup> Dumb talk! Doors are always open for air and fools. Shut the door! I have a cold, hear?

YURKEVYCH: God help you—there's a heatwave!

KARFUNKEL: Heat wave, heat wave... I not tell you I am sick? *Ich habe Zahnschmerz.*<sup>3</sup> I have toothache very bad. Ow-w-w—this damned country! Always colds perpetual toothache. Ow!

YURKEVYCH: Please excuse me, I didn't know. (*Shutting the door*) You have my sympathy. A toothache is a torture, such devilish pain ... I fully understand you, sir, but excuse me, I haven't had the honour of—

KARFUNKEL (*rising a bit and moaning*): Karfunkel, privy councillor and doctor of mechanical engineering.

YURKEVYCH: Very pleased to meet you. My name's Yurkevych, high-school teacher and somewhat of a writer. So you're a German and a privy councillor? That's a very high position!

<sup>1</sup> Ger.—Damn!

<sup>2</sup> Ger.—Empty preachings!/Sanctimonious prattling!

<sup>3</sup> In the original, Karfunkel has the habit of "doubling his speech"—saying something in German, then repeating it in a mixture of pidgin Ukrainian and Russian, or, alternatively, saying something in pidgin and then repeating it in German. The Ukrainian/Russian is rendered here in pidgin English. Instances in which the repetition is not accurate, an accurate translation of the German is provided.

KARFUNKEL: Yes, yes, *Geheimrat*.<sup>4</sup> Not the title that matters, but essence. My speciality is time. Watches, clocks, mechanisms.

YURKEVYCH: Oh, so you're a mechanic? A master watchmaker? And I thought—

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* Artisans make watches, fools who can't see past their noses. But I am a master of time. A master who understands life, life and its mechanisms. So there!

YURKEVYCH: My apologies. I did not mean to offend you. (*Aside*) Must be a bit of a nut.

KARFUNKEL: Making watches ... *Salbaderei!* For whom? For fools who can't tell time? (*Clutching at his cheek*) Ow-ow-ow!

YURKEVYCH: The pain hasn't stopped? You know, there was a time when I had terrible toothaches myself. The slightest draft and I would be in tears. Do you know what helped me? Drops! I was at a friend's house in the country, and an old doctor there prescribed some drops. One drop was enough: it stopped the pain as if by magic. Think of that! It's one of those ancient very powerful remedies, belladonna, or oil of cloves, or opium, but it really, really helped. And you know, that was a long time ago and my teeth no longer hurt, but I don't go anywhere without these drops? I always carry them with me.

KARFUNKEL (*jumping up and bowing while clutching at his cheek*): Oh, my dear sir, *mein lieber Herr*. Yuri—Yuri—Kevych! How lucky I am to have met you! Please no refuse me a drop of this medicine. I will be extremely grateful. Ow-w-w! Damned pain!

YURKEVYCH (*with alarm*): Oh, of course. Oh course. With pleasure. (*Rummaging through his shoulder bag*) But—but I'm sorry the medicine isn't in my bag. I must have put it in the suitcase. Yes, naturally I put it in the suitcase. Now I remember—in a little Japanese box.

KARFUNKEL: In a box? Splendid! I beg you, my dear friend— please, one drop!

YURKEVYCH (*getting irritated*): What do you mean? You want me to get the medicine from my suitcase? The box is at the very bottom! Can't you see how it's packed? There's no use even thinking...

KARFUNKEL: *Aber* I beg you, my noble young friend ... Ow! *Mein bester Herr!*<sup>5</sup>

YURKEVYCH (*thoroughly annoyed*): Don't you understand that I'm leaving? It would take at least half an hour to simply untie this suitcase. Not to mention to repack it and fastening it up again. And you heard them say the train would be here in half an hour. And if I miss that train, then... no, it's too horrible to contemplate!

KARFUNKEL: Ow-w-w! Ow ... what terrible pain! I beg you, dear sir, *mein süsser Herr*<sup>6</sup> ... if you only knew how horrible ... Ow-w-w! ... how ... Ow!

YURKEVYCH: But can't you understand it's impossible? Good Lord, to undo this suitcase now! I'd miss the train. And if I miss the train, I'll have to bid farewell to a life-long dream. The last train for Moscow leaves in half an hour.

KARFUNKEL: Ow-w-w ... ow! Just one drop!

YURKEVYCH: You heard it yourself—it's the last train to Moscow. And if I'm not in Moscow tomorrow morning, I won't get to Paris. Paris, which I've dreamt about so much!

KARFUNKEL: Paris? You are going to Paris?

<sup>4</sup> Ger.—Privy councillor.

<sup>5</sup> Ger.—My good man.

<sup>6</sup> Ger.—My sweet man.

YURKEVYCH: Yes, I've bought a ticket for an excursion to visit the Exhibition! The excursion is leaving Moscow at twelve o'clock. That means if I don't get there in time, all my money and my hopes will be gone. Can you understand why I am so agitated? To be able to go abroad, to Paris, to the Exhibition ... when would I get another opportunity like that? If you lived in a hole like this for ten years, you would understand what this dream means to me. It may determine my destiny. I write a bit ... and perhaps, in Paris—oh well, what's the use of talking!

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* Such stupid chattering. Determine destiny ... A wise person creating his own destiny. Ow-w-w! (*Sitting down at the table*) You simply no wish help me. One could tie and untie twenty times twenty such suitcases ... Ow! Ow ... damned pain! (*Moans.*)

YURKEVYCH paces around the room nervously. There is a pause.

KARFUNKEL (*yelling suddenly and bends down to look for something on the floor*): Ach! Donnerwetter! Stop, stop, he just by you ... It rolled away!

YURKEVYCH (*lifting his feet*): What rolled away? What? Where?

KARFUNKEL (*crawling on the floor*): Do not step! One ... Two ... Three.

YURKEVYCH (*stooping down to help in the search*): But what is it?

KARFUNKEL (*showing him a tiny gold box*): I spilled ... twelve ... twelve pills... Such tiny pill. Please help me to find! (*They both stoop down and search the entire floor.*) Careful, do not step with feet! Two ... three ... zwei ... drei—<sup>7</sup>

YURKEVYCH: I found one. I found one! One, two—and another one, and one more—

KARFUNKEL: Thank you. *Danke.* (*They continue searching.*) *Bitte noch!* Four, five ... *Danke sehr!* Thank you. Please, some more. Aha, *noch eine.*<sup>8</sup>

YURKEVYCH (*searching*): Is that all of them?

KARFUNKEL: No, two more. Aha—here is one! One more, please, one more. *Sieben, acht*<sup>9</sup>—one more still—

YURKEVYCH: There are no more that I can see.

KARFUNKEL: Perhaps it rolled under suitcase? Look for it, please, with your eyes.

YURKEVYCH (*pushing the suitcase aside*): No, there is nothing like it here.

KARFUNKEL: It isn't? What unpleasant accident. Perhaps under the threshold?

YURKEVYCH: Hold on. How many are missing?

KARFUNKEL: One.

YURKEVYCH: One? Is it worth worrying about one? It will be dirty by now anyway.

KARFUNKEL: But I can't leave it like this. I can't.

YURKEVYCH: You can't? Why not?

KARFUNKEL: *Das ist Gift.* It is poison. Very strong poison—*Karfunkelin.*

YURKEVYCH (*blowing on his fingers and getting out his handkerchief*): Poison?

KARFUNKEL: Yes, very strong poison—alkaloid. I extract it from one flower. (*Continuing to search*) If person swallow but one pill—he die in four seconds, like one fly, *wie eine Fliege.* Paralysis, stroke, no doctor will know of what. *De profundis e finita la comedia.* I cannot leave it here. (*Looks under the chairs.*)

<sup>7</sup> Ger.—Two ... three

<sup>8</sup> Ger.—*Bitte noch* = More please ... *Danke sehr* = Thank you very much ... *noch eine* = one more [interrupted speech] ...

<sup>9</sup> Ger.—Seven, eight.



YURKEVYCH: I can't see it anywhere. (*Wipes his hands with his handkerchief.*)

KARFUNKEL (*unhappily putting the little box back in his pocket*): Ow-w-w, again! (*Clutching his cheek*) Ow-w-w! This cursed pain! (*Dropping into an armchair and doubling over in pain*) Ow-w-w! What tor... Ow! *Aber das ist*<sup>10</sup> ... (*Jumping up suddenly*) I beg you, beg you, *Herr Teacher, mein lieber Schulmeister.*

## Scene 2

*At that moment the announcement bell starts ringing.*

PORTER (*entering in quickly with a railway ticket in his hand*): Here's your ticket, sir. Eleven seventy-five, if you please.

YURKEVYCH (*hesitating*): Eh? What? A ticket? Oh, yes. There's the bell. Hear it?

PORTER: It's announcing your train from Kyiv. (*Picks up someone's luggage from the floor.*)

YURKEVYCH: I see. Then take these things. Take them out on to the platform, quickly! (*Grabbing his suitcase*) Quickly!

PORTER: No, not yet. It's still early The train won't be here for another twenty-four minutes if it's not late. I'll come for them, don't worry. (*Exits.*)

YURKEVYCH: Wait a minute, Porter! Wait! (*Rushing to the door*) Porter!

KARFUNKEL (*grabbing YURKEVYCH by the arm*): Ask whatever you want, but give me just one drop!

YURKEVYCH (*indignantly*): You must be joking! Didn't you hear that the train would be here in twenty-four minutes? Didn't you hear that? Don't you know that this journey has been my life's goal? I told you I can't miss this train.

KARFUNKEL: Just one drop! (*Groaning*) Ow-w-w!

YURKEVYCH (*with anger*): It would take twenty minutes just to untie this suitcase. And I'd be soaked in sweat three times packing it up again, yet you want me to accomplish all this in twenty-four minutes. There's no way! Twenty-four minutes! (*Grabs his head, flings off his coat and, panting, dries his brow with his handkerchief.*) It's simply ridiculous, this putting pressure on an intelligent person.

KARFUNKEL (*having returned to the table while bent over and holding his cheek now turning around in anger and forgetting his toothache*): Ah, pressure on an intelligent person. *Das ist übermässig!* This is too much! Oh, but I would like very much for someone to really put pressure on you, on Russian intelligentsia, and force you to work. To work, and not to dream of a better life without raising a finger to conquer, to attain it.

YURKEVYCH: That's not true! It's not our fault that we aren't given the chance to work! Where could we work anyway? For the local government, or in the Duma?

KARFUNKEL: You aren't given the chance! What nonsense! It's you who are lazy and a shirker, you, Russian intelligentsia! You wait ten years where minutes would be suffice. Just now you begrudged twenty-four minutes for a sick man, insignificant minutes of your life. You said twenty-four minutes was not enough for you to untie a lousy suitcase. But do you know what time is? I have studied long the problem of time and I understand a few things in life. Have you ever heard of the law of "condensed time, "time full to the brim like a glass of water?

<sup>10</sup> Ger.—But this is ...

- YURKEVYCH (*clutching at his head*): The law of condensed time! How can time be condensed? It's not like a shoe, which can be tight or too big.
- KARFUNKEL: You do not even know that? You've been dreaming for ten years of a frivolous event like going abroad. But do you know how many events can be fit into one hour half if they want to be crammed in? You don't know? No, of course not, you need whole years to wait for single event. If you received letter or slept with someone's wife, you thought it is a great event enough for four years!
- YURKEVYCH: This is insane! I'm going. I've got no time to listen to your nonsense.
- KARFUNKEL: You have no time? Is that possible? (*Pulls out a watch from his pocket and winds it, whereupon the watch begins to play melodiously.*) And what about the twenty-four minutes you begrudged me? Watch out—ha! ha!—so that events you have trying so hard to hide from do not intrude on your twenty-four minutes. You didn't know yet how many things can happen in twenty-four minutes. In that time you can find happiness, can lose happiness, can meet the love of your life. Yes, yes, and you can even die, or kill someone—all in the same twenty-four minutes. But that's not the same thing as untying a suitcase. Ha! Ha! Well, we'll see if you'll succeed in keeping those twenty-four minutes for yourself that you begrudged to me. (*Exits chuckling.*)
- YURKEVYCH (*stupefied, falling into a chair*): Find happiness? Lose happiness? Meet the love of one's life? ... Kill someone? (*Jumping up*) The devil! This is some sort of nightmare! I'd better go out on the platform. (*Puts on his coat and drags his suitcase to the door with great effort.*) I'd better get out into the fresh air, quickly!

### Scene 3

*But the door opens and SOFIA PETRIVNA enters. A brunette, about thirty years old, she is dressed in a black cloak and a veil, which she throws back with an impatient gesture.*

- YURKEVYCH (*startled*): Sofia Petrivna! Can it be?!
- SOFIA PETRIVNA: You didn't expect to see me, did you? Why didn't you wait for me?
- YURKEVYCH: I ... I'm very glad ... I didn't know you'd come back from the country ... Good evening, my dear!
- SOFIA PETRIVNA (*not accepting his hand*): You really did not know? You thought I was at the dacha and I wouldn't find out anything and you would have plenty of time to leave quietly? Yes, to go away with that sweetheart of yours, Marusia, or someone else I don't know about.
- YURKEVYCH: Good heavens, what's gotten into you! What Marusia? I'm travelling alone, completely alone!
- SOFIA PETRIVNA: And here I found out, to your misfortune! But even if you don't love me, even if you never loved me, I'm ready to forgive you. I am. But did you ever think of my honour, did you once think of the terrible ...
- YURKEVYCH: But I assure you, dear Sofia Petrivna! Sonia!
- SOFIA PETRIVNA: What I've had to endure during these moments! The whole town was talking about you. At every corner they were shouting about your departure. Only I, I alone, knew nothing. (*Wringing her hands*) The shame! The disgrace!
- YURKEVYCH (*in despair*): But I really am going to the Paris Exhibition. Is this such a crime? This is a nightmare—a real toothache.

SOFIIA PETRIVNA: And this Marusia of yours, who's going with you ... is that a nightmare too?  
And a toothache?

YURKEVYCH: I swear by all the saints—

SOFIIA PETRIVNA: Don't lie! Mariia Ivanivna told me ... (*sitting down, bursting into tears and burying her face in her handkerchief*) ... everything! Everything. Leave me alone ...  
Don't touch me!

YURKEVYCH: But it isn't true, it's a lie! Sonia, darling, do calm down. I beg you, Sonia! Good Lord! It really would have been better to have untied three suitcases, four, even twenty suitcases and trunks.

SOFIIA PETRIVNA (*rising*): To run away secretly, to flee from me, who gave him all a woman has to give!

YURKEVYCH: Sonia! I beg you! (*Glancing around*) It's a scandal, and the train will be here any minute!

SOFIIA PETRIVNA: I gave you my love, my soul, my honour! And now, when everyone is talking about my scandal. Oh, someone is coming! (*Pulling down her veil*) To run away with another, with the first wench who comes along—

YURKEVYCH (*in despair*): I swear it's not true! I'm alone—don't you believe me?

SOFIIA PETRIVNA: People are coming. Farewell. You can go. You can run away alone or with someone—it's all the same to me now. When I saw how terrified you were, I became disgusted. Then again, had I found you two together ... (*taking out a small revolver from her bag*) I think ... I ... (*YURKEVYCH recoils in horror.*) Farewell!

*She leaves quickly, bumping into COUNT LUNDYSHEV who is hurrying in. Stupefied, YURKEVYCH sinks down on his suitcase.*

## Scene 4

YURKEVYCH: Well, after all this a toothache will simply be a pleasure.

LUNDYSHEV (*a lively old man in a stylish coat and a flat cap*): The devil take her! She nearly knocked me off my feet. She is not a woman, but a storm, a hurricane!

YURKEVYCH (*sitting on his suitcase, weak and numb*): A hurricane, exactly ... A toothache!

LUNDYSHEV (*noticing YURKEVYCH*): Thank goodness you're still here! *Pardon, Monsieur Yurkevych*, if I'm not mistaken?

YURKEVYCH (*rising*): Yurkevych it is. At your service.

LUNDYSHEV: I'm extremely delighted! I'm Count Lundyshev. I have been hoping for this opportunity. I guess you can say I'm an admirer of yours. I heard you lecture at our club last winter on mystical anarchism, or was it anarchistic mysticism. I forget which. Very nice, very nice, indeed. But that's not the point. I came here in a terrible hurry. Thank goodness you haven't left yet! Phew!

YURKEVYCH: You ... wanted to see me?

LUNDYSHEV (*sitting down*): Do you smoke? Help yourself. Well now. I've rushed here for over twenty kilometres from the country to see you. The point is this: Andrii Ivanovych, the headmaster of your school, dined at my place yesterday, and he happened to mention that one of his teachers, namely, you, was going to the Paris Exhibition. That made me jump. "When?" I asked him. "Why, tomorrow," he said, "if he hasn't gone already." So I got into my carriage and drove to the station as fast as I could.

YURKEVYCH: Is there something you want me to deliver?

LUNDYSHEV: Yes, exactly. I want to entrust you, if I may, with a small but very interesting undertaking. I would be eternally grateful if you would do it!

YURKEVYCH: Of course! With pleasure.

LUNDYSHEV: My dear fellow, you must bring me Princess Bulbul-el-Hazar from Paris.

YURKEVYCH: Pr—Pr—Princess Bulbul?

LUNDYSHEV (*laughing*): Ha-ha-ha! Don't be alarmed—it won't be very difficult. This princess is nothing but a wonderful—umm an enchanting—umm a charming pullet. A hen—you understand?

YURKEVYCH: Pu ... pullet?

LUNDYSHEV: Why, yes—a pullet. I must tell you that I'm a passionate poultry-breeder. On my estate, on Lundyshivka, I have an entire poultry town. It's something indescribable. It's a kind of park, you know, with cages, henhouses, water, and all the existing breeds of hens: Malays, Japanese, Brabanter, Cochin Chinas, Bantams, Plymouth Rocks, Langshans, yellow hens, red ones, blue ones, white ones, tiny ones and huge ones—in a word, an entire chicken kingdom. And what roosters! Oh, if you could only see my Duke of Guise! Entirely black, as if dressed in velvet, and what a splendid bearing—just like Chaliapin. He could go on the stage any time.

YURKEVYCH: You don't say. That's simply amazing!

LUNDYSHEV: Yes, isn't it? But back to our princess. Naturally you understand, naturally, that I keep track of all the exhibitions, all magazines on poultry-breeding, and so on. Many times I have sent hens to exhibitions; I've got quite a lot of medals, awards, and that sort of thing. But then a week ago I got the latest magazine from Paris, and guess what? I discovered that among other marvels at the exhibition, a most wonderful, charming, extraordinarily nice, unspeakably beautiful pullet was displayed. It's an Indian variety, the Princess Bulbul-el-Hazar. Do you understand? It's extremely rare, the only specimen in Europe. Neither Rothschild nor Lord Durley has anything like it. Can you imagine how excited I was when I read this?

YURKEVYCH: But what is so remarkable about it? Forgive me, but I'm an awful ignoramus when it comes to these things.

LUNDYSHEV: What do you mean what is so remarkable about it? It's a hen of an Indian breed, from Indore. Even in India it is almost unknown. What a beauty! What breasts, what legs, what a head! And what feathers! They're completely the colour of gold, as in a fairy tale. She's a poem, not a hen!

YURKEVYCH (*laughing*): Well, certainly, if she's a poem.

LUNDYSHEV: And her name! Princess Bulbul-el-Hazar, you know, out of the Arabian Nights. Well, as soon as I'd read about this marvel, I immediately sent one telegram to say I'm buying her, and another to my brother in Paris, Count Ivan, to tell him to pay for the bird. But just imagine my vexation when I found that my brother, Count Ivan, had left for Biarritz. I was in despair! I did not know to whom to send the money. You see? Then, quite unexpectedly, I heard that you were going there. Save me, my friend, take the money for me and bring back the princess!

YURKEVYCH (*hesitantly*): Of course... though, really, I don't know.

LUNDYSHEV (*producing a packet*): It's a pretty big sum, I must tell you—fifty thousand francs, or eighteen thousand five hundred in our money. And just in case, to make it even

let's say twenty thousand to also cover any duties, exchange rates, and so on. Twenty thousand *karbovantsi*.

YURKEVYCH: Twenty thousand for a hen?! For a hen?!

LUNDYSHEV: Of course for a hen, are we discussing an elephant? I can't see why you should be so surprised. You know, in order to catch the Princess Bulbul and bring her to Europe, an entire expedition had to be fitted out. It had to travel to the south of Indore, you know, scale the Satpura Range, sail down the river Chambal, cut through jungles, flee from tigers, experience many other adventures. I tell you, it was like something out of the *Thousand and One Nights*.

YURKEVYCH: Yes, of course. You must excuse my ignorance. Still, twenty thousand *karbovantsi* for a single hen!

LUNDYSHEV: A single hen! A single hen! Why don't you simply tell me whether you agree to do it or not?

YURKEVYCH: Excuse me, but I was going on a trip to amuse myself and relax, and now I'll have to hurry right back and with ... a hen to boot. Can you imagine how I feel?

LUNDYSHEV: Nonsense, it's nothing! It will only take a week to get there and back, and then you'll be able to return to Paris. I know you're a young man and you're not rich, so I'm offering you three thousand for expenses and as a commission. Do you agree?

YURKEVYCH: Three thousand *karbovantsi*? For me?! But that's an entire fortune!

LUNDYSHEV (*laughing*): There, you see, that means you agree. Let's shake on it. I'm extremely grateful, my dear fellow. Well, here's the packet. There are exactly twenty-three thousand *karbovantsi* in it. The address and everything inside. (*Handing him the packet*) I'm very pleased. (*Shaking his hand*) Very pleased.

YURKEVYCH: But, really, I am a bit embarrassed. This is truly like something out of the *Arabian Nights*!

LUNDYSHEV: Princess Bulbul-el-Hazar. Ha-ha-ha! Never mind, don't worry. The main thing is: bring me this phoenix. You know that anyone who does this is always rewarded. Well, adieu, and good luck! Oh, yes, I nearly forgot: you, my friend, are, of course, quite ignorant about poultry. So I've jotted down a few simple instructions for you. I beseech you, do, please, take care of the pullet and see that she, God forbid, doesn't get sick on the way.

YURKEVYCH: But, of course. Of course ... I shall take all necessary precautions.

LUNDYSHEV: The most important thing of all is, of course, her dwelling. The cage must be cleaned out at least twice a day. Then you cover the bottom with sand, pine needles, and ashes. Then there's her diet. Give her lettuce, cauliflower, and croquettes; better still, let her peck a bit of wheat now and again. This is what you should do, my dear fellow: give her a croquette and some buckwheat porridge, with a little lettuce for lunch. For breakfast and supper let her peck at some wheat or millet. She should, of course, have water or milk to drink. And you should give her some lime and crushed eggshells. But the main thing, *mon cher*, is to protect her from drafts. Reserve a separate first-class compartment.

YURKEVYCH: Of course, naturally, don't worry. I'll do all of that.

LUNDYSHEV: Well then, adieu, good luck! *Au revoir*! I still have to see the stationmaster, but I'll still drop in. By the way, it would better if all of this stays *entre nous*<sup>11</sup>, otherwise, you

<sup>11</sup> Fr.—Between us.

know, people will gasp as you did: “twenty thousand for a hen? Ough!” I haven’t even told my wife. It’s better that way. (*Going toward the door*) *Bonne chance!*<sup>12</sup>

YURKEVYCH: Farewell!

LUNDYSHEV (*turning around*): Oh, yes, I nearly forgot about the fleas! I’m asking you this as a special favour: check her for fleas, my dear fellow, in case she should get infested by these nasty things. If she should get intestinal problems, give her a little red wine. Now I must go! (*While he is shaking hands with YURKEVYCH, the door opens quietly and SOFIA PETRIVNA peeks in.*) Be vigilant, *mon cher*, take care of my princess, of my precious treasure. I’m entrusting my russet beauty to you.

SOFIA PETRIVNA (*to herself*): Ah, so that’s how he tells the truth! A princess! A russet beauty! I knew it!

YURKEVYCH: Of course, of course. I’ll take care of her as if she were the apple of my eye.

LUNDYSHEV: Remember to reserve a separate first-class compartment. If she wants a bath, let her have one. And you should rub down her chest and legs from time to time.

SOFIA PETRIVNA (*to herself*): What cynicism!

LUNDYSHEV: And search her for fleas at the same time.

SOFIA PETRIVNA (*to herself*): No, this is too much! You wait, you scoundrel! (*Disappears.*)

## Scene 5

LUNDYSHEV: Well, I’m going. *Adieu.* (*Exits.*)

YURKEVYCH (*alone*): What luck! What fantastic luck! Three thousand *karbovantsi*, freedom, joy, life! Why, I can send that cursed Gymnasium to the devil, travel for a couple of years, spend time in Italy, and get my book published. God, what luck! Oh, my dear little hen, dear Princess Bulbul! (*The long drawn-out whistle of a steam locomotive is heard from a distance.*) What luck not to have a care in the world and only have to listen to the distant whistle of the locomotive. A quiet evening, a soft couch, the glow of the sunset fading outside the window, blue fields floating past, golden sparks flying, the intoxicating, aromatic smoke of burning birch—and the locomotive keeps rushing onward with a piercing shriek, waking distant echoes, and the heart swoons so sweetly. And ahead is the enchanting expanse of the golden lights of Paris ... Palaces, museums, women, an endless celebration of art. And after that Italy, Venice, quiet canals, black gondolas ... the sea. No, this is some sort of fairy tale! Quickly, I must get some fresh air before I awake!

*He seizes the suitcase and drags it towards the door. At that moment a loud bell is heard, and a train rushing into the station with flashes of light and a din passes by the windows. The door of the waiting room opens, and two or three passengers with bundles and suitcases enter. Then another passenger rushes in.*

PASSENGER (*shouting*): Come on, hurry—it’s on another track! I’ve been looking for you everywhere!

*The passengers all rush out. Two ladies enter, followed by the PORTER pulling a mountain of baggage. The ladies go into the ladies’ room.*

<sup>12</sup> Fr.—Good luck!

PORTER (to YURKEVYCH): I'll take your things in a moment, sir. Don't worry. Your train is a little late.

*He exits. LIDA, a very young and pretty woman with auburn hair, enters. She walks up to the table, fixes her hair before the mirror, and then heads for the ladies' room. YURKEVYCH dashes toward her.*

YURKEVYCH: It can't be! Lida dear! Lidiia ... Pavlivna!

LIDA (turning): Oh! Oleksii ... Semenovych!

YURKEVYCH (taking her hands in his): Good heavens! It's you—you! (Kisses her hands.) You're here! What good wind brought you here? Lida!

LIDA: Is it possible that you remember me?

YURKEVYCH: You're surprised at my boldness and the tenderness of my words! And truly, do I have the right to behave like this? When one thinks how little I actually knew you! (Takes hold of her hands again and sits her down next to him.) I knew you for only four months of my life, even less, and it seems like such a distant fairy tale. It's been two whole years since I last saw you. Since then I've remembered every minute I spent so near to you, yet truly so far away—

LIDA: You—you, you're the one who didn't want—

YURKEVYCH: And when I was transferred from Kursk and I had to say goodbye to you, there was so much I wanted to say ... You held out your hand to me without saying a word and looked away. And I left ... left forever. Then suddenly we started writing to each other, and a belated tenderness flared up between us like an uncontrollable flame. But afterwards even the letters ceased.

LIDA: I was in St. Petersburg ... at the women's college. (The station bell rings for the third time, and the train, which had been standing beneath the windows, sets off.)

YURKEVYCH: If you only knew how often I've dreamed of meeting you—and now suddenly, today ... But tell me, why can't I read anything in your eyes? Tell me. Can it be that you didn't see then how madly I was in love with you? To distraction.

LIDA: Yet you went away. Left forever.

YURKEVYCH: Yes, I went away. I left. But why didn't you say to me, "stay"?

LIDA: Oh, Oleksii Semenovych, what's in the past can't be brought back! And I'm different now. The years in St. Petersburg and my studies there taught me a great deal and opened my eyes to many things.

YURKEVYCH: But how did you end up here? You know this is my town.

LIDA: My relatives live here.

YURKEVYCH: Yes, I remember. But they're somewhere out in the country, aren't they?

LIDA: Yes, about ten kilometres from here, in Polynivka.

YURKEVYCH: Why are you alone?

LIDA: I'm not alone. Mother and Katia are already there. Are you going away?

YURKEVYCH: Imagine my distress! For two years I've dreamed of meeting you, and now, just when this joy has finally come, I have to leave in ten minutes, leave to go so far away!

LIDA (sadly): You'll find other joy there, better than this one.

YURKEVYCH (profoundly moved): Other joy! Lida, Lida! Five minutes ago, before you came in, I was in a state of ecstatic joy. Fortune had smiled upon me: a rich gentleman gave me one ... single task and, can you imagine, three thousand *karbovantsi* to do this trifling commission. Three thousand just to go to Paris and bring back one ... one

thing. You remember how I dreamed of going abroad—and suddenly there's the opportunity! But now, Lida—now that I've seen you again—it all fades into insignificance. It really is just as that German said, "the law of condensed time," when one event crams out another. Lida, will I still see you? Will you be here long?

LIDA: Yes ... for a very long time. I'm getting married.

YURKEVYCH (*rising*): Getting married? My God, when? To whom? Lida!

LIDA: To a local zemstvo official from Polynivka. I met him in St. Petersburg. Kotelnikov is his name.

YURKEVYCH: Kotelnikov? You're going to marry that demagogue? But do you love him?

LIDA: What binds us is not love, but our views, our convictions. I told you I have learned a great deal since I last saw you. Above all, I have learned to respect those who have fought for the truth.

YURKEVYCH: Well naturally, how could I compare with a fighter for truth! He's suffered persecution, been in exile, in prison! I remember how you were always impassioned by revolution and things like that.

LIDA (*wanting to go*): You must excuse me, Oleksii Semenovych. I have to go now. Goodbye!

YURKEVYCH: No! This is some sort of nightmare! Truly a crowding of events! When is your wedding?

LIDA: On Friday.

YURKEVYCH: What! On Friday? In three days?

LIDA: It can't be later because the fast of Saints Peter and Paul begins soon.

YURKEVYCH: No, this is insane! I am going abroad in five minutes, and you are getting married in three days! All this after two years of absence, two years filled with dreams of you! Yet you speak so casually about it! She respects him! But what about love? What about love, Lida? Haven't you ever heard of it, at least in your newspapers?

LIDA (*rising, upset*): Love ... love. That's too much of a luxury, Oleksii Semenovych. Thousands of people haven't even got bread, let alone love!

YURKEVYCH: But they still love. You ought to be ashamed for renouncing love—you, who are so young and attractive! Can it be that you have never loved anyone? Not even then, in Kursk?

LIDA: Why do you say such things, Oleksii Semenovych? If you didn't see it, how could I? ... What's the use of reminiscing? I'm so heartless, aren't I? All I do is stay silent. I didn't know how to express my emotions as poetically, as musically as you. And if you didn't guess then—(*Sighs and turns away.*)

YURKEVYCH (*upset*): Could this be possible? Lida, my Lida! (*Seizing her hand*) Did you really love me? Do you still love me? No, no, that would be too much to hope for... Lida, my Lida! I love you—love you infinitely, to distraction!

LIDA (*rising*): Goodbye!

YURKEVYCH: Lida, though I was stupid then, let's not be foolish now. In ten minutes I'm supposed to leave for distant Paris, which has smiled to me so invitingly. But I won't go. Say the word and I'll stay with you. Be my wife! Lida, for you I'd give up all I value most. Only say that word which you've kept back so long.

LIDA (*throwing her arms around his neck*): Oh, my darling! My love!

YURKEVYCH: Lida ... Lida! (*Kisses her.*) What enthralling bliss! Let's go straight to your home, to your mother. All right?

LIDA: Yes, let's. And then to yours.



YURKEVYCH: Yes, to mine, to mine, my joy! What bliss! Could I have thought ten minutes ago that I would see your enchanting eyes so soon, the eyes I've dreamed of so often?

LIDA: But won't you be sorry to give up Paris?

YURKEVYCH: You are my one and only joy! You're my Princess Bulbul, my precious little hen. (*Laughing*) Oh, if I were to tell you! ... But it's you—you're the golden bird of Indore, it's you I found in the Satpura Range on the river Chambal, Princess Bulbul-el-Hazar. Tell me, have you been bitten by fleas?

LIDA (*naively*): Oh, terribly! You know there were so many of them in our railway car. But shame on you, you cheeky fellow!

## Scene 6

PORTER (*entering*) Are you the young lady from Polynivka? There's a carriage waiting for you.

LIDA: Yes, I'm coming. I'll be there in a moment.

YURKEVYCH: Let's go. Oh, but what about my things? And where are they?

PORTER: Your train will be here in a minute, sir. I'll just take the count some mineral water and then I'll bring your things ... In a second. (*Exits.*)

YURKEVYCH: Oh, yes, the Count. Is he still here? Good. I'll—

LIDA: Let's go, my love.

YURKEVYCH: Run along, darling, I won't be a second. I must have a word with this count.

LIDA: All right. I'll come back in a minute. (*Runs out.*)

YURKEVYCH (*grabbing his head*): The train! ... The train ... This is total confusion. A hen ... Princess Bulbul ... three thousand *karbovantsi* ... Lida ... and in five minutes ... my train. (*A train whistle sounds in the distance.*) The carriage-window, couch, golden sparks, the distant whistle of the locomotive. And the enchanting mirage getting nearer and nearer. But I won't go! I won't go! This means it's all over now. (*Squeezing his temples*) How tight—how insanely tight everything seems inside my head! But perhaps I could still go? Perhaps! No, no, it's out of the question. After all, the wedding date is set, and I have to talk to her mother. And the excursion leaves tomorrow. Away with such mean doubts! My happiness is here next to me. It's Lida, my Lida! And I won't give her up to anyone! (*Pacing around the room*) Well, it looks as though I'll have to give the count his money back. (*Taking the packet out of his pocket*) I must. Still, how distressing this is. (*Weighing the packet in his hand*) Twenty-three thousand *karbovantsi*! Twenty-three thousand! But why would he need them? ... the scoundrel will only throw them away on some other chicken. The injustice of it! I've never even dreamed of that much money, while for him it's just a capricious trifle, the price of one hen. Twenty-three thousand! It's a capital fortune, it means freedom, happiness, travel abroad, the sea ... But for him it's a stupid chicken. If he should be felled by a stroke, and he's been due for one for a long time, the money would be mine. He hasn't told anyone—not even his wife—that he gave it to me. (*Pacing around the room anxiously*) Who was it said something to me about stroke and paralysis? (*Rubbing his forehead*) Ah yes, it was that odd mechanics man with the toothache.

PORTER (*entering bearing a tray with a bottle of mineral water and a glass, and setting it down on the table*): Your train will be here very soon.

YURKEVYCH: Oh, right! I've changed my mind. I'm not leaving today after all. Here (*handing him some money*), this is for you.

PORTER: Thank you kindly, sir. Would you like me to get you a cab?

YURKEVYCH: Yes ... no ... That won't be necessary! Who is this mineral water for?

PORTER (*at the table, opening the bottle*): Count Lundyshev asked that it be brought here. (As YURKEVYCH *paces about the room*) Is this your candy, sir?

YURKEVYCH: What candy?

PORTER: That little round one the size of a pea.

YURKEVYCH (*upset*): Where?

PORTER (*raising his hand holding a pill between two of his fingers*): Here it is. It was on the table. It must have rolled over here earlier.

YURKEVYCH (*extremely agitated*): That's ... that's his. The twelfth pill belonging to the mechanics man with the toothache.

PORTER: What, sir?

YURKEVYCH: Yes, yes, it's mine. (*Snatching the pill from the PORTER*) I lost it. You may go now. (*The PORTER exits.*)

YURKEVYCH (*standing on the proscenium with the pill in his hand*): We were looking for it on the floor, yet he'd dropped it on the table and hadn't noticed ... The twelfth pill. What a dreadful temptation. You might think it had happened on purpose ... Especially now. (*Going up to the table*) The bottle's open ... A stroke or paralysis, the odd fellow said, and no doctor would be able to discover the poison ... And then ... Then the twenty-three thousand would be mine. I'll be rich, free. And Lida will be mine! Oh, what a disgrace! How could I sink so low! Sounds like someone's coming ... But then ... he doesn't have even a year to live anyway, the disgusting old fellow. They're coming here! May you be damned! (*He drops the pill into the bottle and, glancing around, corks it and shakes it.*)

## Scene 7

*The door opens. YURKEVYCH jumps away from the table as LUNDYSHEV enters.*

LUNDYSHEV (*gaily*): Well, your train will be here in a moment! Everything is working out wonderfully. (*Sitting down at the table*) How tired I am. I'm relying on you, my dear chap. See that you hurry back as quickly as possible. Bring me my pullet, and then you can go there again and enjoy your vacation. (*Grabs the bottle.*)

*At that moment OLIA CHEREVKO enters. She is a young and attractive woman, tidily but poorly dressed and wearing a kerchief. She approaches LUNDYSHEV timidly.*

OLIA: Valerian Sergeevich, may I speak to you, please?

LUNDYSHEV (*setting down the bottle and turning round*): Eh? What? Oh, it's you, Olia. (*Coldly*) What is it you want?

OLIA (*hesitantly*): I ... I don't want anything. But I'm worried about the children. Please help us, Valerian Sergeevich?

LUNDYSHEV: You? Help you? (*Spitefully*) But what's your husband, that famous striker, doing?

OLIA: You know he's been arrested, Valerian Sergeevich. We haven't had a kopek for two months now.

LUNDYSHEV: Aha! He's been arrested, you say? So that's how it is? .

OLIA: The children are hungry. There's not a thing left in the house. We have sold everything. Help us, Valerian Sergeevich! I'm not asking for money. If you'd only give us a couple of hens from your factory, the children would at least have a few eggs to eat. You have so many.

LUNDYSHEV: Aha! So that's what you want! Well, let me tell you this, my dear. (*Emphatically*) I'll give my hens to whomever I choose. I'd give them to the first beggar I see, but to you, never. You say the children are hungry? Why did you marry a rebel, then? Were you so badly off with us? Were you? Today I give you a hen, and tomorrow your husband will come and set fire to my estate? No, no, deary, you alone made your choice—you must suffer alone. You can go home. I have nothing to say to rebels and revolutionaries.

OLIA *sighs and exits.*

LUNDYSHEV: Did you see that? She was brought up by my wife. The girl lived as in paradise with us until she took up with a rebel. Some local railway engineer. Ha! And now he's been caught red-handed. Whew! It's made me so angry that I'm covered in sweat. Well, Godspeed! Off you go, my dear fellow. I wish you the best of luck. (*Taking the bottle again*) Whew!

YURKEVYCH (*to himself*): You miserable cur! I can see that plainly now! (*To LUNDYSHEV*) Pardon—excuse me, Count. (*To himself*) Good God, he's about to drink it! (*To LUNDYSHEV*) Perhaps you wouldn't mind if I didn't leave today, but three or four days from now?

LUNDYSHEV (*setting down the bottle and jumping up*): What, are you joking, mister? You must have taken leave of your senses! Whew! I'm afraid, as it is, she has been bought by now. By Lord Durley or the Prince of Wales ... Here every minute is precious and he's ... Say what you mean. Then I'll send our foreign tutor instead. Phew, I'm covered in sweat again! (*Sits down.*)

YURKEVYCH (*in fright*): No, no. It doesn't matter. I can go today. I can. I was only ... (*to himself*) Well drink then, you cad, and prepare to meet the devil!

LUNDYSHEV: Then why are you flustering me if you can go? Whew, am I thirsty! (*Tilts the bottle.*)

YURKEVYCH: Stop, don't drink it! I think I see a fly in the bottle!

LUNDYSHEV (*setting down the bottle*): A fly? Where? Oh, that reminds me: ought to give her a few insects now and again, my dear fellow. Catch a few flies for her, and some beetles. She likes that. (*YURKEVYCH raises a clenched fist and takes a step towards the table.*) Well, that's it, I guess. I hope you'll find a nice little pullet for yourself in Paris. He-he-he! (*Pours some water into a glass and raises the glass to his lips.*) To your pullet and mine!

## Scene 8

LIDA *enters without YURKEVYCH seeing and stops by the door.*

YURKEVYCH: To hell with you and your pullet, to hell with your Princess Bulbul! To hell with your money! (*Flings the heavy packet at LUNDYSHEV, knocks the glass out of his hand, and overturns the bottle. The COUNT springs up in horror.*) May you choke on your

thousands. They've driven me to the verge of killing you, you damned ape! Ah! The devil take your Paris—I'll never see it now! Ah!

LUNDYSHEV (*wiping himself and trembling all over*): You ... you're crazy! You've gone insane! Tomorrow I shall tell Andrii Ivanovych to dismiss you ... I'll ... I'll write to the superintendent.

YURKEVYCH *rushes at him with raised fists. The COUNT flees.*

YURKEVYCH (*looking around wildly and catching sight of LIDA, who is frozen in horror and bewilderment*): Lida! Lida! (*Runs up to her and grabs hold of her hands.*) Lida, I'm frightened! Save me, my damsel! Lida, if you only knew what I was about to do! (*Trembling and sobbing, he clings to her.*) Oh! Now I know ... It's all because of him ... that mechanics fellow with the toothache!

LIDA: Oleksii Semenovych, darling, calm yourself. I know why you're upset. Forget what we spoke about. I heard how angry you were that you wouldn't be going to Paris. What we just had was a moment, a moment of passion I won't be angry at you. Goodbye! I'll be your friend as I was before.

*At this moment a train comes flying into the station and roars past the windows on the right. Bells ring and commotion ensues.*

LIDA: Look! There's your train! Go quickly! Go!

YURKEVYCH (*crying out*): Lida! Lida! Are you casting me off too? (*The door opens and SOFIIA PETRIVNA enters and stands listening.*) Lida, my love, dearest! Don't leave me, you're the only joy I have left!

## Scene 9

SOFIIA PETRIVNA (*coming swiftly forward, throwing back her veil*): Aha! So here she is, your lover, your princess, the mistress you so carefully hid from me. And you weren't ashamed to lie to me, to tell me you were going alone; you weren't ashamed to run away from me with the first available painted beauty from a joy house!

LIDA: Oh! (*Running to the door*) What shame! What disgrace!

YURKEVYCH (*rushing at SOFIIA with his fist raised*): You despicable creature! Shut up or I'll kill you!

SOFIIA PETRIVNA (*scornfully*): You'll kill me, will you? (*LIDA flees.*) Go home at once!

*The bell rings for the third time, the whistle sounds, and the train moves out.*

YURKEVYCH (*clutching his head*): The train, Princess Bulbul ... Twenty-three thousand... twenty-three thousand! Venice! Paris! ... The enchanted mirage! ... Happiness, freedom, fame ... A myriad of twinkling lights ahead. Lidochka, Lida! Happiness found! Happiness lost! ... To fall in love forever ... All in twenty-four minutes. And the wheels-clatter, the engine rushes onwards ... The train, my train! Gone! I still have my excursion ticket. I'll still go. (*Pushes aside SOFIIA PETRIVNA and runs to the door, but suddenly recoils in horror at the sight of KARFUNKEL standing in the doorway, chuckling, and winding his watch.*)

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* Your train has gone already, my dear friend. I hope you was not bored these twenty-four minutes. There were enough events, it see seems?

YURKEVYCH (*screaming*): Satan! (*Faints.*)

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* Foolish babbling! If you don't something understand that must mean destiny or the devil are to blame.

*Curtain.*

## Act Two

*The same railway station in 1919.*

### Scene 1

A LIEUTENANT *and* a STATIONMASTER *enter.*

LIEUTENANT: Will the Kharkiv train be here soon?

STATIONMASTER: At five forty, as always.

LIEUTENANT: And the train to Shepetivka?

STATIONMASTER: At four twenty. Only it's arriving late. By half an hour.

LIEUTENANT: It's always late. Must be the comrades and committees running the locomotives. They're waiting for the Bolsheviks. Well, all right. Let's go into the office. I have to take over the station.

*The LIEUTENANT and the STATIONMASTER exit.*

### Scene 2

YURKEVYCH *enters. He is now about thirty-two or thirty-three. He is agitated. He pulls a letter out of his pocket and reads it. Then he paces nervously around the room, smoking.*

YURKEVYCH: Is it possible? She—Lida, my golden Bulbul-el-Hazar, my dream of dreams, whom I lost through my own stupidity at this very station seven years ago. She remembers me, and perhaps ... perhaps still loves me! How strange life is! And what joy it is to find her now after so many long years apart... And what years they've been!

KARFUNKEL *enters, still elegantly dressed but in a different coat. He still holding a suitcase. He looks at his watch and murmurs disapprovingly.*

KARFUNKEL: Hm! Der tausend! Die Uhr geht vor.<sup>13</sup> (Raising his watch to his ear and shaking his head) My watch is fast. (Pulling another watch out of his pocket) Aber nein. Sie geht recht.<sup>14</sup> Pardon, do you know when is the train to Warsaw?

YURKEVYCH (*absentmindedly*): I don't know exactly. I think it's thirty-five minutes late.

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<sup>13</sup> Ger.—A thousand. Time is going forward.

<sup>14</sup> Ger.—But no. It's working properly.

KARFUNKEL: *Was? Das ist unerhört.*<sup>15</sup> That's impossible! I must the day after tomorrow be home in Heidelberg. Without fail. *Oh, verfluchte Heidenlärm.*<sup>16</sup> Oh crazy country, which has never knew how to respect time! I cannot become late.

*Suddenly, melody, like that of a music box, is heard.*

YURKEVYCH (*glancing around in astonishment*): What in the world is that? Where's that music coming from? Like a clock chiming ... (*Passing his hand over his brow*) Where have I heard that music before?

KARFUNKEL (*pulling another watch from his pocket; the melody becomes louder*): *Alle tausend!*<sup>17</sup> I cannot become late.

YURKEVYCH (*stepping back in astonishment*): Good Heavens! It's you! You again. Another evil hour!

KARFUNKEL: *Was? Was wollen Sie?*<sup>18</sup> (*Winds his watch with a key.*)

YURKEVYCH: Of course it has to be you! The mechanics man with the watches and the tooth-ache, who ... whom ...

KARFUNKEL (*looking askance at YURKEVYCH*): Who seven years ago gave you a little lesson about the Russian intelligentsia and the law of condensed time. And taught you to value every minute of life.

YURKEVYCH: The devil take your lessons! They cost me dearly. They weren't lessons, but sorcery! I still shudder whenever I think of that evening.

KARFUNKEL: *Aber*<sup>19</sup> what has that to do with me? I am but a modest scholar and mechanics specialist. I told you then that I understand something of life of time, and its laws. But it is no strange that I can the dog lure from behind the stove—*den Hund aus dem Ofen locken*.

YURKEVYCH: Yes, but how did you know? How did you know all this?

KARFUNKEL: Know? What have I know?

YURKEVYCH: How did you know that so many things would happen to me? So many unusual and tragic things?

KARFUNKEL: Well, this is simple mathematics, ordinary calculation, a law. Events either happen very rarely or press like a crowd. Life is like a pack of cards—you either get the trumps one after another or none at all. Time is either empty—a whole year without a single event—or tight with various adventures that climbed one on top of another and dropped like snow on head.

YURKEVYCH (*pensively*): If you put it that way, it sounds simple enough, I suppose. But how did you know that so many things would happen to me that very evening?

KARFUNKEL: Well that was not difficult at all. You did told me yourself then that you did live very bored for many years. Then suddenly you were to go the abroad. To the attentive mind this means much. I had understood at once that for you a streak of condensed time is stationary, when events chase after each other and so like a school of fish that is come together to lay eggs.

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<sup>15</sup> Ger.—What? This is unheard of!

<sup>16</sup> Ger.—Damned hubbub.

<sup>17</sup> Ger.—All thousands!

<sup>18</sup> Ger.—What? What do you want?

<sup>19</sup> Ger.—But

YURKEVYCH: Again, that sounds very much like the truth ... But at that time it seemed as if you had caused all these events to pay me back for my indifference to your toothache. By the way, how are your teeth now? I have the drops with me if you want them.

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* Foolish babbling! You can dropping them on your own tongue. It's a train I need now, not drops.

YURKEVYCH (*laughing*): Just as I needed one then. Our roles have reversed, *mein Herr*. Now I can advise you not to hurry or to rely too much on time. Time is too tight for us now—there's war, revolution.

KARFUNKEL (*angrily*): *Salbaderei!* How can one to compare? *Ich bin der Meister der Zeit!* I am the master of my own time. I have kept it in my hand and moved my hours as I wished.

YURKEVYCH: Beware, *mein Herr!* There is a master here who is more powerful than you.

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* Foolish babbling! There is no master more powerful than I am.

YURKEVYCH: Yes, there is, *mein Herr*—our Revolution. It has stopped the watches and clocks of all kinds of people and forced them to live and die by its great timepiece without asking if they like it or not. It has put an end forever to the calm, lazy life we were bored by until now. Now we're no longer bored, dear sir—the Revolution has brought us so many adventures and events that in comparison your toothache and my adventures of that evening look like child's play. Now we know, without having to ask you, what really tight times are.

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* Revolution was necessary for you, for the rotten Russian intelligentsia, in order to driving out indifference and idleness out of you. It has not beat you nearly enough yet, but for me it is neither terrible nor necessary. (*Exits in anger.*)

YURKEVYCH: You don't like it. Wait, *lieber Herr*. Once upon a time you spoiled the show for me—see that you don't get into a mess yourself.

### Scene 3

COUNT LUNDYSHEV *enters, accompanied by a PORTER pulling a huge pile of luggage. The COUNT has changed very little.*

LUNDYSHEV: One, two, three, four—they're all here, I think. Take these two pieces to the baggage car. And come back quickly! Here are the tickets—hurry!

PORTER: Don't worry, sir. We'll make it. (*Exits.*)

LUNDYSHEV: You've nothing to worry about, of course. You probably can't wait till the Bolsheviks come. Phew! (*Catching sight of YURKEVYCH*) Who is it I see? Is that you, M'sieu Yurkevych? What an encounter!

YURKEVYCH (*coldly*): Excuse me, but I think that after everything that happened the last ... the last time we met.

LUNDYSHEV: Oh, let bygoness be bygoness ... We've lived through so much since then, that such a slight misunderstanding—

YURKEVYCH: Yes, that's true ... It's hard to believe that so many events have passed through our life.

LUNDYSHEV: Yes, war, revolution. (*Sighing*) I haven't seen you since then. Were you at the front, perhaps?

YURKEVYCH: Yes, of course ... But are you going somewhere?

LUNDYSHEV: Yes, for good to Paris, to my brother Ivan.

YURKEVYCH: Really? But what about your estate, and your famous poultry farm? Surely you aren't leaving all of this behind?

LUNDYSHEV: It's all gone, ruined. The farmstead was burned down, the poultry town destroyed. For a whole week the villagers roasted and cooked my fowl, my priceless bantams and Cochins, and my pure bred roosters that cost five hundred *karbovantsi* each. No, I've had enough. I've sold everything, taken my valuables, and I'm off to Paris.

YURKEVYCH: Will you start another poultry farm there?

LUNDYSHEV: Naturally. You know another Princess Bulbul pullet has appeared in Paris. I read about it myself. This time I'll acquire her for sure!

YURKEVYCH: I wish you every success!

LUNDYSHEV: Thank you. But tell me: where is that attractive maiden with the golden curls—your own Bulbul, which you exchanged then for my pullet? I guess you also lost her, as I did mine. Did you ever meet her again?

YURKEVYCH (*upset*): No. For seven years I searched in vain for her throughout Russia. I've heard she fought in the war; then, after the Revolution, someone saw her in Moscow. It seems she might even have become a Communist.

LUNDYSHEV: You must be joking? And she looked like such a modest girl.

YURKEVYCH: And imagine what happened: today, quite unexpectedly, I got a letter from her from Kharkiv.

LUNDYSHEV: You don't say!

## Scene 4

*Suddenly louder and louder sounds are heard. Alarm bells go off. Somewhere the telephone starts ringing urgently. Doors slam. Several perturbed railway employees and officers pass quickly through the room.*

LUNDYSHEV (*jumping up in alarm*): What's the matter? It's some kind of warning ... Perhaps something has happened at the front? God forbid.

YURKEVYCH: It's nothing in particular. Calm down.

LUNDYSHEV: It's easy to say don't worry. But I've heard things aren't going all too well for us. Believe me, I'm counting the minutes till I finally set out of this accursed country. But *pardon*, I interrupted you. So what's next? You got a letter from her ...

YURKEVYCH: Yes, just now. She wrote to say she's arriving today on the Kharkiv train. That means she'll be here in half an hour. You can tell how excited I am. Seven years of silence and fruitless searching, and suddenly today fate places her in my path once again.

LUNDYSHEV: Hm ... fate ... I haven't much faith in the gifts of fate, my young friend. It's like those children's toys. You know the kind. You open a pretty box thinking it has sweets in it, but then bang!—a devil with horns pops out.

YURKEVYCH: Really, Count, you ought to be ashamed to say such things!

LUNDYSHEV: Yes, but I'm quite right, my friend. After all, you haven't seen her for seven years. How do you know what she's like now? And she's a Communist besides. Heaven



help us. You think she's a quiet, demure little chick—cheep, cheep, cheep—and then bang!—she's bitten your head off. He-he-he!

YURKEVYCH: So be it. Even dying for her would be a joy.

*The LIEUTENANT comes in again, glances around, and goes up to LUNDYSHEV.*

LIEUTENANT: Ah, Your Excellency! Are you travelling somewhere?

YURKEVYCH *moves away and sits down at a table. A WAITER brings him a bottle of beer.*

LUNDYSHEV: Yes, I'm going to pay a visit to my brother Ivan in Paris. And how are you, Lieutenant?

LIEUTENANT: Just fine, Count. I'm not downhearted. I still have a pulse.

LUNDYSHEV: Yes, as long as there are girls to be had. But I've heard (*lowering his voice*) things are not going well at the front ... Is it true there's been a breakthrough? You wouldn't believe how upset I've been since I heard!

LIEUTENANT: There's been nothing of the kind! What breakthrough?

LUNDYSHEV: Why the Bolsheviks are pushing forward again. I hear they might even have taken Orel.

LIEUTENANT: Don't believe it, Your Excellency, it's all nonsense. We gave them such a drubbing recently with Baron Wrangel's tanks that they won't come to for a long time. When the Reds saw those tanks the blood froze in their veins. And they thought they were ready to fight!

LUNDYSHEV: Really! Thank God! But I've heard that they wiped out a whole corps of our cavalry at Kamenno-Chernovsky.

LIEUTENANT: But who says so? Their own agitators. Do you think there are so few of them? They're everywhere, spreading rumours ... That's the way they take over, by spreading disorder in their enemy's rear. Why only today (*glancing around and lowering his voice*) we received word secretly that a woman-spy of theirs is arriving on the Kharkiv train.

LUNDYSHEV: You don't say? So you're after her, are you? In pursuit?

LIEUTENANT: You bet! She's a prize catch!

LUNDYSHEV: How will you recognize her? She's probably made up—incognito?

LIEUTENANT: I'm waiting for my instructions right now. (*Looking at his watch*) For the moment nothing is known about her except her name.

LUNDYSHEV: But why do you need to know more?

LIEUTENANT: Because that's not very much. Do you think she's got only one passport?

LUNDYSHEV: She's a Jewess, no doubt?

LIEUTENANT: No, she's Russian, if you can imagine. Somebody called Zvantseva.

YURKEVYCH, *who was eavesdropping, drops his glass out of fright.*

## Scene 5

*Bells are ringing. KARFUNKEL enters in haste. The PORTER follows. The LIEUTENANT is pacing around the room.*

PORTER (*to LUNDYSHEV*): Everything's ready, Your Honour. I've checked in the luggage.

LUNDYSHEV (*jumping up*): Eh? Oh, wonderful, wonderful!

PORTER: There's no need to worry, sir. The train is thirty-five minutes late. I'll come back in twenty minutes. (*Exits.*)

YURKEVYCH (*rising in agitation*): How terrible! Lida ... Lida ... What shall I do? How can I warn her of the danger?

KARFUNKEL (*to YURKEVYCH*): Thirty-five minutes! I can't lost half an hour through your lack of order. This is preposterous! Unheard of! The devil know what to call this!

YURKEVYCH (*not paying attention*): The train is late. Thirty-five minutes late. That means ... there is still time. But what shall I do? I can't think of anything.

KARFUNKEL: Thirty-five minutes! I shall complain. *Salbaderei!* I shall demand!

YURKEVYCH: But what do you want from me?! Do I look like the stationmaster? I'm just a passenger like you.

*The telephone rings again. Alarm bells go off.*

KARFUNKEL: *Nein*, not like me. I should, *Ich soll*, I must be in Heidelberg on the thirteenth!

YURKEVYCH: Well, that's why you're the master of time. Make it happen.

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!*

LUNDYSHEV: Listen, you can hear, they're ringing again! Find out what's the matter, Lieutenant!

LIEUTENANT: That'll do, Count! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! You're starting a panic. (*Exits in haste.*)

LUNDYSHEV: Oh yes, it's all right for you to talk about panic. You only think of your pulse and girls. Lieutenant, wait! (*Runs after the LIEUTENANT.*)

KARFUNKEL: They dare not delaying me! Thirty-five minutes! Ha! I cannot losing half an hour. I will give a hundred—five hundred—dollars for these half hour so for the train to come in time. (*Exits.*)

YURKEVYCH: And I would give everything in the world to prevent its coming at all. But what shall I do? How can I save her? Should I send a telegram? But where? To whom? Oh, what horrible torment! Really, that cursed watchmaker only brings me misfortune.

## Scene 6

*The driver, TARATUTA, enters carrying a bottle and a glass. He is wearing a leather suit and a leather cap, with goggles pushed up onto its brim. He sets the bottle and glass on the table and sits down.*

TARATUTA: Too bad I didn't have enough money for some brandy. Now I'll have to drink this sour stuff. (*Filling his glass*) Bottoms up! (*Drinking*) Brr ... (*Catching sight of YURKEVYCH, he jumps up.*) Who is this I see! Comrade Yurkevych! Your grace! What a place to meet!

YURKEVYCH: Taratuta! Where did you come from? Aren't you supposed to be at the front?

TARATUTA: You guessed wrong! I've been a free Cossack for half a year! Ha-ha! A driver, a chicken-killer and make money on the side. Life is grand! I'm sated, drink, and my nose has its fill of snuff! Every day's a commodity hoax. I sell kerosene, buy butter, run over dogs, hens, geese, and everything else in the world. They even call me Taratuta the Chicken's Death! Ha-ha-ha! Here today and gone with the wind tomorrow! And a new girl every day!

YURKEVYCH: Wait a minute, I have an idea! Listen, Taratuta, can you help me?

TARATUTA: You? For you, butter, lard, chickens, girls—anything in the world. There's no way I'd forget how you helped me in the trenches!

YURKEVYCH: What's the next station on the way to Kharkiv?

TARATUTA: On the way to Kharkiv? Chabany.

YURKEVYCH: How many kilometres is it?

TARATUTA: Twenty-three.

YURKEVYCH: Twenty-three! Then she's saved! Listen, Taratuta. Do you see this gold watch? It cost a hundred and fifty *karbovantsi*. I'll give you this watch if you can get me to Chabany in twenty minutes, before the Kharkiv train arrives there. Deal?

TARATUTA: No problem. But why do you have to be there?

YURKEVYCH: Oh, let's go, Taratuta! It's a matter of life and death! Do you hear? Someone's life's at stake. I have to find a friend of mine on this train and warn her not to come here. (*Takes TARATUTA by the arm and glances about.*) The police are after her. Understand? They'll pounce on her as soon as she—

TARATUTA (*enthusiastically*): Let's go! I'll get there in fifteen minutes. But what do I want with your watch? I'll only sell it and drink away the money, same as I drink away everything else in the world. I'm not concerned about time.

YURKEVYCH: Quick, quick, Taratuta!

TARATUTA: You'll give me a bottle of brandy, and we'll be quits. As for time, I lost it long ago, like everything else in the world. Still back there, at the front.

YURKEVYCH: That's great! Let's get going, Taratuta!

TARATUTA (*springing to his feet*): I'll just change the tire, and we'll be off. Wait for me here.

## Scene 7

*At that moment there is a commotion outside the door and four women burst into the room. Three of them are bearing dead chickens in their hands, and the fourth, a dead cat. Upon seeing TARATUTA, they raise a terrible commotion.*

FIRST WOMAN: Aha, there he is, that killer, the Chicken's Death, may his soul be cursed!

YURKEVYCH (*fearfully*): What's wrong? What do they want?

SECOND WOMAN: You ran over them and didn't even give it a second thought! What, are you going to kill our chickens every day, you heathen?

FOURTH WOMAN: You murderer, why did you kill my cat?

YURKEVYCH: Come quick, Taratuta, or you'll be late!

FIRST WOMAN: And what a lovely hen he killed! Damn him! She was such a grey beauty, she'd eat out of my hand, and lay an egg every day. May you burn in hell, you bastard!

TARATUTA: Hiss! Go away! Beat it!

SECOND WOMAN: Oho, now we're supposed to beat it! No way, dearie, we've had enough!

THIRD WOMAN: There's no way we're going to let you leave, you brute!

YURKEVYCH: For God's sake, Taratuta, come quickly! Every minute counts!

SECOND WOMAN: I wouldn't accept a thousand as restitution for my lovely hen! I'll see you court forever, you godless Bolshevik chicken killer.

THIRD WOMAN: I'll rip your throat out for running over my rooster!

TARATUTA: Be off, you wretches! I'll run over you next time, you draggle-tailed jays. I'll take care of all of you hussies, you chicken-clan!

ALL THE WOMEN: Aha, and you abuse us to boot! Come on, Girls, get him, let's drag him to the police!

*A commotion ensues as they advance on TARATUTA.*

YURKEVYCH: Taratuta, quick, quick—all will be lost!

TARATUTA: Piss off, you hellions! (*Retreating towards the door*) Give them a Kerensky note<sup>20</sup> each, your honour, I haven't got any money on me.

*He pushes the women aside and disappears. They turn on YURKEVYCH.*

YURKEVYCH (*pulling out his wallet*): Here! Take the money and go!

FIRST WOMAN: One Kerensky for my grey hen! Why, the eggs alone—

SECOND WOMAN: I wouldn't even take a thousand for my crested beauty!

THIRD WOMAN: Or I for my rooster!

FOURTH WOMAN: There wasn't another tomcat like mine in the whole town; he could nearly talk, the darling!

*Clamouring, they surround YURKEVYCH.*

YURKEVYCH (*flinging notes right and left in desperation*): Here! Take it! Here's some more! (*The women snatch at the bills but continue advancing and shouting.*) Back off! Go away! This really is some sort of condensed time. Here! Take more and clear out! (*Throws the money to the floor.*)

*There is a scramble. The women grab the money and exit, shouting abuse.*

YURKEVYCH (*alone, dishevelled, rumped, and breathing heavily*): What a day! Lida, the police, Taratuta, dead hens, tomcats ... Just when every second is precious, when I've got to rush off as fast as I can to save Lida, the devil throws hens under my wheels again! Another chicken in my way!

## Scene 8

*The LIEUTENANT reappears accompanied by a COLONEL, followed by LUNDYSHEV and KARFUNKEL. The COLONEL looks around suspiciously.*

LUNDYSHEV: Finally we'll find out everything. My dear Colonel, could you tell us once and for all what all this is about. What's all the alarm mean? Will there be a train to Shepetivka today?

YURKEVYCH (*looking at his watch*): Five minutes left! Where on earth has he gone, the rogue?

KARFUNKEL: I, I *nach*<sup>21</sup> Shepetovka. I cannot waiting. (*Pulls another watch out of his pocket and begins winding it.*) *Salbaderei!*

<sup>20</sup> Russian currency circa 1917, named after Aleksandr Kerensky, the prime minister of the Provisional Government established after the fall of the tsarist monarchy.

<sup>21</sup> Ger.—[must go] to.

COLONEL: Excuse me, Count, but I can't explain! This is no time for that sort of thing. (*Leading the LIEUTENANT to the front of the stage*) It's bad news. Our men have been defeated near Dmitrovsk. There's been a breakthrough near Bilhorodka. But that's not the point. (*Glancing around at YURKEVYCH*) That Bolshevik woman, the spy, will be here any minute. She has to be eliminated immediately.

LIEUTENANT: Yes, sir, Colonel!

COLONEL: She has important information about our position and the Bolsheviks' plans.

YURKEVYCH (*pacing nervously around the room and glancing frequently at his watch*): Where has he gone? Seven minutes have passed. What shall I do? If I go there, we may miss each. The train will be here any minute.

KARFUNKEL (*looking at his watch*): Only seven minutes have passed. When will the train come? What shall I do? *Salbaderei!*

YURKEVYCH (*going up to KARFUNKEL and seizing him by the arm*): You're the master of time—you know its laws. Make it stop for twenty—even ten—minutes so that the train that's bringing me torment and death doesn't arrive?

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* What is time? For you it's passing too quickly. But for me it's passing very slowly. Such time is only what we feel. It does not exist at all.

YURKEVYCH: But is there any other kind of time?

KARFUNKEL: Yes there is, and I know it. It's real time, which people do not notice because they do not know how to measuring it. Only I, Tobias Karfunkel, know, and I shall build a watch that'll show not the time we think it is, but the time really is. Ha! *Die Uhr der wahrhaftigen Zeit.*<sup>22</sup>

YURKEVYCH: You're crazy! Listening to you ravings would drive anyone out of their mind.

KARFUNKEL: Out of their mind? *Salbaderei!* But the master does not need your mind—he listens to his own genius.

LIEUTENANT (*to the COLONEL*): But how will I recognize her, Colonel?

COLONEL: That's the gist of the problem. Do you see that civilian there in the grey hat? His name's Yurkevych. I have received information that she has written to him. He is to be searched and coerced—do you understand, Lieutenant?

LIEUTENANT: Aha! I do. He's to be the live decoy.

COLONEL: Exactly!

YURKEVYCH (*looking at his watch*): Two minutes left! No, this is impossible I'd better go there. (*Moves towards the door.*)

COLONEL (*blocking his way*): Excuse me, could you wait a minute? Is your name Yurkevych?

YURKEVYCH (*surprised*): Yes ... But allow me—

COLONEL: Would you be so kind as to show us the letter you received today.

YURKEVYCH (*flaring up*): Pardon me, but what right do you have to demand such a thing?!

COLONEL: What right? (*Loudly*) Lieutenant, please ask everyone to leave! Gentlemen, I must ask all of you to leave.

LIEUTENANT: Gentlemen, please! (*Showing LUNDYSHEV and KARFUNKEL to the door.*)

LUNDYSHEV: Pardon me, but on what ground?!

KARFUNKEL: *Das ist unerhört!* How dare you?

*The LIEUTENANT pushes both of them out.*

<sup>22</sup> Ger.—The watch that shows true time.

COLONEL (to YURKEVYCH): Did you hear me? Show me the letter!

YURKEVYCH: What letter? I protest!

COLONEL: What are you? A child or an idiot?! Don't force me to resort to other—(*Pulls out his revolver.*)

YURKEVYCH: This is an outrage! I shall lodge a complaint. (*Takes out the letter and hands it over.*)

COLONEL (*snatching it and reading it quickly*): Damn her! It's typed. She's a clever bitch! So, you correspond with her? Do you know what that smells like? You're under arrest. Lieutenant!

YURKEVYCH: Excuse me, but I haven't seen her in seven years!

COLONEL: Don't cause us any problems! Your only way to undo your crime is to help us arrest her.

YURKEVYCH: What? You must be mad!

COLONEL: If you don't want to be shot immediately, you had better go out on the platform and meet this person. Understand?

YURKEVYCH (*triumphantly*): Ah! That means you don't know what she looks like! Well, you can be sure I will not reveal her to you. I'm going home this instant.

TARATUTA *runs in breathless. Both officers point their revolvers at YURKEVYCH.*

TARATUTA: Comrade Yurkevych! Everything's ready! Let's go!

COLONEL: You're going to be shot this instant!

YURKEVYCH: So be it. But I'll never give her away.

TARATUTA: What's this? I'm too late! All because of those cursed hens! Pardon me, Your Honour, I have to speak to citizen Yurkevych.

COLONEL (*turning around threateningly*): Oh, you do, do you? Arrest him, Lieutenant! (*TARATUTA disappears in a flash.*)

## Scene 9

*At that moment another LIEUTENANT and two soldiers come in, escorting LIDA, who is now a well-dressed and extremely pretty woman of twenty-five or twenty-six.*

COLONEL (to YURKEVYCH): This is your last chance to go out on the platform and meet that woman! In five minutes it will be too late.

YURKEVYCH: No, I wouldn't do it for anything!

COLONEL: You'll be shot at once, then! Do you hear?

YURKEVYCH (*catching sight of LIDA and shuddering*): So be it! But I still won't give her away!

COLONEL (*shouting*): Shut up, or I'll shoot you like a dog! Shut up!

LIEUTENANT: Colonel, there are people present.

COLONEL: Shut up!

OTHER OFFICER: Colonel—

COLONEL (*wheeling around*): What? What do you want?

OFFICER: Permit me to report that we have arrested this lady. She has just arrived by car, from Chabany.

COLONEL (*becoming attentive*): Aha ... and what?

OFFICER: She seems a rather suspect person. (*To the COLONEL in a low voice*) Here are her papers. (*Handing them to the COLONEL*) Possibly, Colonel, this may be her ... permit me to draw your attention to this. (*Points to one of the documents.*)

COLONEL: Ah, wonderful! Wonderful! Hm ... (*Examining the documents*) Numbers, words, signs—it's a code, without a doubt. (*Quickly glancing at LIDA*) What's your name?

LIDA: Olena Zhdanova.

COLONEL (*promptly*): And not Lida Zvantseva?

LIDA (*calmly with a shrug*): I don't understand your question, Colonel.

COLONEL: Oh, don't you? What is this writing in code in your note book? These hieroglyphics.

LIDA: Writing? Why, those are my shorthand exercises.

COLONEL: Hm, these exercises are very suspect. What were you doing in Chabany?

LIDA: I was visiting my sister at her manor.

COLONEL: Visited a manor, and exited in a motor? Well, fine, we'll confirm all that later. By the way, this young citizen brought us a letter today from a certain Lida Zvantseva. (*Fumbling in his pocket*) You wouldn't happen to recognize this writing, would you? (*Takes his time, deliberately not opening the letter.*)

LIDA (*smiling*): How could I if it's typewritten.

COLONEL (*triumphantly*): Aha! I caught you! That means you wrote it yourself if you know it's typewritten.

LIDA (*laughing light heartedly*): Don't get excited, Colonel. I can see that the address on the envelope is typewritten.

COLONEL: Bah! (*Puts the letter away.*)

YURKEVYCH (*impatiently*): Excuse me, Colonel. All this is very interesting, but what does it have to do with me?

COLONEL (*looking interrogatively at YURKEVYCH and then at LIDA*): So you don't know this—er—lady at all?

YURKEVYCH: No, I don't, I'm very sorry to say.

COLONEL: Aha! Very sorry, you say?

YURKEVYCH: Yes, because she is very beautiful.

COLONEL (*perplexed*): The devil knows what to make of all this! It seems you messed up again, Lieutenant.

## Scene 10

LUNDYSHEV and KARFUNKEL enter and rush up to the COLONEL.

LUNDYSHEV (*bowing politely to LIDA*): Mademoiselle... Excuse me, Colonel, but you can't do this!

KARFUNKEL: *Das ist unerhört!* The stationmaster is nowhere to be found. There is no train. I cannot wait any longer.

LUNDYSHEV: I am getting anxious. Will our train come in or not?

COLONEL: I have already told you.

LUNDYSHEV (*to YURKEVYCH*): Ah, you're still here, my young friend. (*Glancing around at LIDA*) Oh, whom do I see? Why, of course, I thought the face seemed very familiar! So you—

YURKEVYCH (*starting forward in alarm and gripping LUNDYSHEV by the arm*): Excuse me, Count. I wanted to ask you something.

LUNDYSHEV: Please do, please do, my friend. So this must mean you've already met your charming pullet. You must excuse an old man's familiar tone, Mademoiselle. I envy this happy man, he-he-he. What a beauty she has turned out to be! Ouch! Stop squeezing my arm!

COLONEL: Wait a minute, Count. Do you know this lady?

LUNDYSHEV (*crying out*): Ow! Why are you pinching me? (*Rubbing his arm*) Of course I know her. It's our darling wanderer for whom *Monsieur* Yurkevych had been searching for a very long time. He got a letter from her today.

COLONEL (*swiftly*): Is she Lida Zvantseva?

LUNDYSHEV (*elated*): Yes, yes. That's it exactly. Lida! The pretty pullet whom—

COLONEL: Well, Count, you've done us a great service!

YURKEVYCH (*Unable to control himself any longer, rushes at LUNDYSHEV and seizes him by the throat.*): Scoundrel! Idiot! You've taken her from me again! My happiness!

LUNDYSHEV: What's all this! Guard! Ga ... Ga ...

*Taking advantage of the confusion, LIDA pulls out a revolver and rushes toward the door.*

COLONEL: Stop her! Catch her!

*An uproar ensues. LIDA flings a chair in the OFFICERS' path and runs out. The LIEUTENANT trips over the chair and falls. LUNDYSHEV breaks away from YURKEVYCH and runs, shouting, toward the door.*

LUNDYSHEV: Help! He's mad! (*Runs out.*)

COLONEL: Bolt the doors! So now we know the truth! They're to be arrested, locked up, and shot. (*Points to YURKEVYCH, and the soldiers seize him. A shot is heard outside the door, then another.*)

YURKEVYCH (*shouting*): Let go! They've killed her, the scoundrels! (*At that moment the two OFFICERS return holding LIDA, who is no longer struggling to get away.*)

LIEUTENANT: Here she is, sir. We caught her. (*Dabbing his cheek with his handkerchief*) The felon actually fired back at us.

YURKEVYCH (*striving to reach LIDA*): Lida! My dear girl, my one and only love!

COLONEL: Aha! So that's the kind of shorthand it is! Splendid! You'll both be shot within half an hour. See to that, Lieutenant.

KARFUNKEL (*who had been carefully observing the goings-on, coming forward*): *Ihr seid toll!*<sup>23</sup> You did lose your mind! I protest! Be good enough to cease your stupidities and let our train leave. I will *telegrafieren* the German ambassador.

COLONEL: What did you say?! You must be mad! I'll shoot you too in twenty-four hours... or in twenty-four minutes!

KARFUNKEL: Me? In twenty-four minutes? *Salbaderei!* Me?

COLONEL: What did you say?! Arrest him!

KARFUNKEL: In twenty-four minutes? And do you know what will happen to you in twenty-four minutes? Ha! I advise you to making better use of your time. *Alle tausend!* A thousand devils! (*Advancing on the COLONEL in a rage and dangling the watch before*

<sup>23</sup> Ger.—He is mad!



*the officer's nose*) Twenty-four minutes! You had better tell me what you have did with my train. Give me back my half hour, do you hear? The half hour I lost through your muddling. It is costing me ten years, the devil take you!

COLONEL (*retreating, nonplussed*): He's a lunatic! Arrest him!

KARFUNKEL: No, not a lunatic. (*Cannon fire is heard.*) Aha! Do you hear? Do you hear how this watch strikes? *Die Stunde hat geschlagen.* Your hour has struck. You should think about your remaining minutes.

COLONEL (*furiously*): Silence! Lieutenant! Arrest this man!

## Scene 11

*At this moment another OFFICER runs in, followed by two soldiers.*

OFFICER: Colonel! We're in danger! They have broken through our lines! They're firing at the station from an armoured train! (*A cannon shot is heard.*)

KARFUNKEL: Aha! I had told you! (*Calmly winds his watch.*)

COLONEL: From where? Where? You're crazy! There's no front here.

OFFICER: You're right. The Reds are advancing from Ternivka, from the north. But these must be partisans. An armoured train must have broken through to our rear. (*Another cannon shot goes off. Bells are ringing. The telephone rings.*)

KARFUNKEL (*calmly*): Hurry, Herr Colonel. Your twenty-four minutes will soon have run out.

COLONEL (*furiously*): But I'll shoot you all the same! Lieutenant, order a car. I'm going to town. You will remain here in charge of the station. Place guards over the prisoners. Give the necessary orders. Evacuate everything you can, and in twenty minutes have everyone shot.

LIEUTENANT: Do you mean the German as well, Colonel? Permit me to report that—

COLONEL: All right. Evacuate the German for now. We'll deal with him later. Just shoot these two. Let's go.

LIEUTENANT: Yes, sir!

*The COLONEL and two OFFICERS exit.*

LIEUTENANT (*to the soldiers*): Keep a strict watch over these prisoners. One of you stand at the door, the other under the window!

*He exits. The soldiers also leave, locking the doors behind them.*

## Scene 12

YURKEVYCH (*rushing to the window*): Guard! (*Trying the door*) It's locked! Lida, my dear Lida. (*Taking her hands*) Can it be that I'm seeing you again, seeing your lovely, dear eyes about which I had dreamed so often during all the years we've been apart?

KARFUNKEL (*who, in the meantime, had seated himself on the table and is examining his watch through a magnifying glass*): *Salbaderei!* Such empty chattering.

LIDA: My love! You did not give me away even though they tortured you!

YURKEVYCH: And now to find you after seven years only to ... to lose you again. No, no, this can't be. Time has stopped. It's ours, ours, Lida dear!

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei! Ein Narr!* Oh, but he is simply a fool. What does he know about time?

LIDA: Yes, yes!

YURKEVYCH: Twenty minutes of life and love—even that's an eternity!

KARFUNKEL: He has not forgotten my lesson. Hm ...

YURKEVYCH: Only philistines measure time by years—we're going to measure it by our heartbeats! And every beat, every single beat, we'll give to our love.

LIDA: Yes, yes, to our love! Oh, how I love you now, my one and only darling!

*Cannon fire rings out.*

YURKEVYCH: Lida, my beloved Lida! What joy it is... to cling to your lips ... to die ... and to remain with you forever! To taste to the fullest these last few minutes of our life!

KARFUNKEL (*still fiddling with his watch*): Oh, *Salbaderei!* What empty chattering! What last minute? Your last minute will come in thirty years. You will die together, indeed! She will still be deserting you, this girl, before you have died.

YURKEVYCH (*turning around*): You're lying!

KARFUNKEL (*calmly*): Well, then, you'll be deserting her, *und damit Punktum.*<sup>24</sup> (*There is a noise of breaking glass. A bullet knocks KARFUNKEL'S watch out of his hand.*)

YURKEVYCH: Good God! They're firing in here!

KARFUNKEL (*furiously*): Oh, *verfluchter Heidenlärm.* This damned hubbub! They have smashing my best time piece! Villains! Scoundrels! (*Crawls about the floor collecting watch bits.*)

*An alarm goes off, followed by gunshots.*

LIDA: Wait! Do you hear that? It's our people firing! They're close by. They won't let us be killed! (*Running to the window*) Yes, yes! There's panic everywhere. The soldiers are running away, there's a machine gun. Aha! The plaster's flying off the walls. Bullets are hitting the platform. An officer has gone down!

*Someone pounds on the door.*

YURKEVYCH: They're breaking down the door. We must block it with something. They might kill us before they retreat.

*He begins dragging the furniture to the door.*

LIDA: I have got another revolver. We can defend ourselves.

YURKEVYCH: Yes, yes! I must live, live! Breathe with my lungs full, live with you, Lida darling!

KARFUNKEL (*continuing to collect bits of the watch from the floor*): *Salbaderei!* He has already changed his mind about dying.

*A shot rings out on the other side of the door. A struggle is heard.*

## Scene 13

*A voice on the other side of the door: Open up! It's your friends! Comrade Yurkevych!*

YURKEVYCH (*delighted*): It's Taratuta! We're saved!

<sup>24</sup>Ger.—And that's the end of it.

*The door bursts open, and a squad of Red Army soldiers enter, led by TARATUTA.*

TARATUTA: Comrade Yurkevych! Miss, young lady! Hurrah! You're alive! I wasn't too late!

LIDA (*rushing toward the soldiers*): Comrades! My brothers! (*Shaking hands with them*) What regiment are you from?

YURKEVYCH (*grabbing TARATUTA's hand*): Taratuta, dear friend. Was it you who freed us?

TARATUTA: Well, it turned out that way. Thank God I ran into some pals of mine. They agreed to send an armoured train into the rear. It was for you, my friend, that they took the station and everything else in the world.

YURKEVYCH: But when did you manage to do all this, you rascal? (*Bursts out laughing from happiness.*)

TARATUTA: Do I ever measure or count time?

YURKEVYCH: That's true, true Taratuta—it can neither be measured nor counted.

## Scene 14

*A second squad of Red Army soldiers enters with their COMMANDER. They escort several prisoners, including LUNDYSHEV.*

COMMANDER: Guard all the exits! Yefimov, guard the telegraph. Lock up the prisoners here for now. And who are these citizens?

LIDA (*taking out a piece of thin, rolled-up paper she had hidden in her hair and handing it to the COMMANDER*): I'm a political worker of the eighteenth Division. We were sentenced to be shot... I and this comrade ... He refused to reveal my identity to the Whites.

COMMANDER: Lida Zvantseva? I'm glad to see you, Comrade.

KARFUNKEL: *Herr* Commander, please give orders to give my train. I cannot wasting any more time because of your war.

COMMANDER: And who is this German?

LIDA: He was arrested along with us because he protested against our execution.

COMMANDER: Thank you, Comrade. You're free to go.

KARFUNKEL: Vree, vree. I need a train, not your vreedom.

LUNDYSHEV: This is an outrage! I have a ticket and a reservation. Tell them to return my things! This is robbery!

KARFUNKEL: I cannot wasting any more time. I calculated every minute.

COMMANDER: Quiet, quiet! We're not interested in your calculations. The Revolution has its own clock. It always moves forward, and when it strikes, a new time begins.

*A cannon shot is heard.*

COMMANDER: Did you hear that?

YURKEVYCH: I told you, *mein Herr*, that there is a master more powerful than you—the Revolution. Your watch has been smashed.

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!*

*Curtain.*

## Act Three

*The same station in the winter of 1920.*

### Scene 1

*The waiting room is neglected and dirty. It has not been swept for a long time and is littered with cigarette butts and rubbish. Several women sit huddled together on the benches and take turns warming themselves at the crude little stove in the corner of the room.*

Two RAILWAYMEN in sheepskin jackets enter with travel sacks slung over their shoulders.

FIRST RAILWAYMAN (*to the women*): Greetings. The freight train hasn't come in yet?

ANNA: No, it hasn't. But it should be here soon.

THIRD WOMAN: Where are you off to, Semen Terentiiovych? To the village? Or perhaps the city, like my husband?

FIRST RAILWAYMAN (*gloomily*): What do you think? It's better than starving to death...

SECOND WOMAN: That's right. Everyone will leave.

SECOND RAILWAYMAN: Let the devil himself drive the locomotives.

ANNA: And Trokhymovych Cherevko. He's sold himself to the Soviet devil, the old rat!

CHEREVKO enters. He stares silently and reproachfully at the RAILWAYMEN. They turn away.

CHEREVKO: Where are you off to, Terentiiovych? Why are you silent? Are you ashamed to look me in the eye? As the workers' army is leaving for the front, you're deserting the locomotive? Fie!

ANNA (*angrily*): What business is it of yours? So he's leaving. Will you feed his children?

FIRST RAILWAYMAN: What do you want from me? I'm not in your way. If you want to be a commissar, that's your business. My children are more important to me.

CHEREVKO'S wife OLIA enters. She has aged and grown thinner, but still has an attractive, tender smile and the same gentle face.

OLIA: Andrii! Are you coming home soon? Serhiiko is getting worse.

CHEREVKO (*impatiently*): Wait, Olia. There's no time now. Later. You're such a fool, Terentiiovych. It's not even worthwhile talking to you. As for you, Vasyl Ivanovych, I must confess I didn't expect—

OLIA: Andrii—

CHEREVKO: In a minute, Olia. In a minute. I know.

OLIA (*in tears*): Serhiiko's in a bad state. His heart has nearly stopped. Go to town and find some camphor; maybe the Red Cross—

CHEREVKO: I'll go, Olia, in a minute. Yes, Vasyl Ivanovych, I didn't expect this of you. I didn't. We went on strike together in 1905, we saved the locomotives together from the Germans, and now, at a time like this, you are deserting your proletarian post?! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Vasyl Ivanovych. I really did not expect this.

SECOND RAILWAYMAN (*rising*): Oh, for God's sake stop harping on. It's sad enough as it is. Let's go have a smoke or something to cheer ourselves up.

CHEREVKO (*delightedly*): So you'll stay? Thanks, Vasyl. You haven't let us down.

OLIA: Andrii—

SECOND RAILWAYMAN: Let's go already.

ANNA: So, he has talked you into it, the scum. Like a commissar!

SECOND WOMAN: Just like a commissar. What an orator. A Party man.

CHEREVKO: I'll be back right away, Olia. Right away. Let's go, Vasy! I even got a locomotive all ready for you.

*The men exit.*

SECOND WOMAN: The freight train is here!

## Scene 2

*A freight train pulls in. Everyone rushes out onto the platform. OLIA sits down on a bench, her head lowered in sadness. YURKEVYCH enters; he is thinner and shabbily dressed. He sits down next to OLIA without saying anything and lights a cigarette.*

YURKEVYCH: Your little boy hasn't gotten better?

OLIA: If only ... His heart has nearly stopped. The doctor said that he needs camphor. But where can we get it? No drugstore has it.

*TARATUTA enters, merry and animated as ever, with a live hen under his arm. ANNA USACH enters after him.*

TARATUTA (*gesticulating as he tries to get away from ANNA USACH*): Get away from me! Leave me alone! They've told you it's not for sale.

ANNA: What do you need a hen for, you rotten chicken killer! I am offering you a good price—twenty thousand!

TARATUTA: Keep on moving! I don't deal in hens. Off with you! (*Seeing OLIA*) Olia dear, my forlorn beauty! And I was looking for you all over the station! I brought you a pullet for your little boy. So, how is he? Skipping about?

OLIA (*taking the chicken and putting it in her basket*): How can you say that, Taratuta? Shame on you. (*Kisses him on the cheek and starts crying.*)

TARATUTA: Oh, c'mon! Right away she turns on all the faucets!

OLIA: Things are very bad with Serhiiko, Taratuta. His heart is not working properly.

TARATUTA: Don't be sad Olia—we'll fix his heart too. No, can it be? Comrade Yurkevych. Your honour! Fancy meeting you here. Why do you look so sour and sad?

YURKEVYCH: That's how it is. Things are bad, Taratuta, my brother. Besides, I had pediculitis and lost a lot of energy. I'm waiting here for my wife. She's arriving today.

TARATUTA: Ah, my brother, that's why you're suffering—you're tied to a dame. I, on the other hand, drive go anywhere I please, and know no grief.

YURKEVYCH (*smiling*): Running over chickens as before?

TARATUTA: I haven't forgotten ... But no, not very much now. Nowadays, brother, a chicken is a rarity. Even if a stupid one falls under your tires, you have to resurrect it. (*Sits down next to OLIA.*) That's the way it is, Olia, my friend.

YURKEVYCH: Resurrect how? Why are you lying, Taratuta?

ANNA (*with real enthusiasm*): And he would lie, the damned chicken slayer!

TARATUTA: Where do you think I got this chicken? It fell under my tires, the poor thing.

YURKEVYCH: What do you mean under your tires?! It's alive!

TARATUTA (*slowly getting a bottle and a small metal tumbler out of his pocket*): This is where resurrection from the dead and other miracles begins ... (*Filling the tumbler*) Bottoms up. (*Drinking*) What good cognac. It's French. I poured some of this same stuff down the chicken's gullet, and it jumped up reborn. (*Refilling the tumbler*) You should have some too, my brother. If a chicken drinks it and is still alive, that means God wants you to have some too.

ANNA: All he does is keep on lying, the son of a bitch. He probably traded some gas for her. May he gag on a frog.

YURKEVYCH (*drinking*): Time doesn't seem to have had any effect on you, Taratuta.

ANNA *involuntarily swallows watching Yurkevych drink.*

TARATUTA: Time? It's you, educated folk who invented time; I gave up on it long ago. No time can keep up with me. I have only one measure—always today.

YURKEVYCH: You're a sage, Taratuta. You don't know your own value.

TARATUTA: Well, so long for now. Don't be sad Olia—we'll fix your boy too. (*Giving her the bottle*) Here, give him a tumbler of this, and his heart'll start working right quickly. For sure!

OLIA (*through her tears*): He needs camphor, Taratuta, but where can I get it? ... That's why I'm sitting here and waiting for Andrii, afraid to go home.

YURKEVYCH: Did you ask at the Red Cross?

OLIA: I've been everywhere. It's nowhere to be found.

TARATUTA: Hold on! I know where!

OLIA: Really? For God's sake, Taratuta, save us—you're our only hope!

TARATUTA: I'll drive there! I've got a guy. If he doesn't have it, that means no one does. You'll have to suffer a bit longer, Olia. I'll be back in a flash. (*Leaves.*)

ANNA: Slow down, Taratuta! You'll run down another chicken somewhere.

*She runs after him.*

### Scene 3

YURKEVYCH *get up and goes to the door.* COUNT LUNDYSHEV *enters. He has aged and become stooped. Dressed in tatters, he walks with difficulty, leaning on a cane.* YURKEVYCH *turns away from him and wants to leave.*

LUNDYSHEV (*stopping him*): M'sieur Yurkevych!

YURKEVYCH (*turning*): What do you want from me?

LUNDYSHEV (*insulted*): Are you running away? I suppose you're afraid I'll ask you for something! Ugh!

YURKEVYCH (*irritably*): Do you really not understand? ... Have you forgotten? ...

LUNDYSHEV (*angry in turn*): It's not for you to say such things to me, young man! You must have forgotten how you attacked me twice and nearly strangled me. My neck hurts to this day.

YURKEVYCH: Then more the reason. That means we have nothing to say to each other.

LUNDYSHEV: Even if I did that I knew your wife, this was advertent, nothing else. And what have commissars like your wife done to me. Don't you know? They've taken every-

thing: my money, my buildings, my things, my gold, my silver—everything. Only this ring is left—and I want to exchange it for some bread and butter. Ugh!

YURKEVYCH (*looking at LUNDYSHEV'S ring*): Look at that! An emerald. And what a big one!

LUNDYSHEV: Isn't it! Eight carats. An heirloom. It was my grandfather's ... Once upon a time Countess Seletska begged him, almost on her knees, to sell her the ring. She offered four thousand, then five thousand, but he wouldn't sell. They even quarrelled over it.

YURKEVYCH: But this is worth an entire fortune! What a sum! (*Admiring the stone*) You could live for two years off this stone.

LUNDYSHEV (*bitterly*): You think so? Do you know how much the local louts are offering me for it? Twenty thousand. Meanwhile a lousy chicken costs twenty-five thousand at the market. (*YURKEVYCH smiles.*) You're smiling! I know why you are smiling.

YURKEVYCH: Oh really? ... I just remembered something, that's all.

LUNDYSHEV: You remembered how I once offered twenty thousand for a Parisian pullet. In gold. And now I haven't even got an ordinary hen ... For weeks I haven't had dinner. (*Sits down on the bench next to OLIA.*)

OLIA (*recognizing him*): Good morning, Valerian Sergeevich. Excuse me for not recognizing you.

LUNDYSHEV: Huh? Who is it? Oh, it's you... Olia. (*Coldly*) Good morning. That's what we've come to, old chap. And where is your wife?

YURKEVYCH: She should be arriving today. I'm waiting for her. Excuse me. (*Tips his hat and exits.*)

LUNDYSHEV (*murmuring*): Twenty thousand for a chicken ... Bah!

OLIA: I haven't seen you for a long time, Valerian Sergeevich. How is your health?

LUNDYSHEV: Go ask your Bolshevik husband. And the rest of the commissars like him.

OLIA: Lord love you, Count, since when is Andrii a commissar?

LUNDYSHEV (*banging his cane on the floor*): Then who is, if he isn't? Who? Have you forgotten he was imprisoned back in 1912 and was one of the strikers from 1905 on. That sort of thing is regarded now as merit, a rank, similar to long-term service. That's why he's one of the bosses now. A commissar! Phoo...

OLIA: He isn't a boss at all. He's the same locomotive engineer he always was. We are starving too.

LUNDYSHEV (*without listening to her*): A commissar! A Bolshevik! And what names they've invented. Party Committee, Committee of Poor Peasants, Commissariat of Public Welfare, Cheka. Phooey! Marauders, robbers, bandits, that's all they are! They've confiscated my land and my estate and my building. My things, my clothes, my gold, and my silver. And I'm not allowed to leave the country. Sit and starve to death, that's all you can do. I haven't had lunch in two days. Not even anything with my tea.

OLIA (*sympathetically*): Poor Valerian Sergeevich ... (*Then, with some embarrassment*) Maybe you'll allow me to ... I've got a pullet... I am going to cook it today, so I could share it with you.

LUNDYSHEV (*appalled*): What?! You?! You're offering me a chicken?! You?! How dare you?!

OLIA (*frightened*): Why, are you saying that, Valerian Sergeevich? ... I was being completely sincere.

LUNDYSHEV: I'd rather die, I'd rather croak, I'd rather stand in the street with my hand out than take anything from you!

OLIA: But why, Valerian Sergeevich?

LUNDYSHEV: Have you forgotten that I had eighteen thousand hens, all of them purebred? As for the ordinary ones, no one even bothered counting how many there were? And when seven years ago you asked me for a single hen, did I give you one? Tell me—did I?

OLIA: You shouldn't get upset, Valerian Sergeevich. I don't remember a thing.

LUNDYSHEV: You have a short memory, it seems. You and I are even. Your commissars have received everything on your behalf. They have repaid me completely, in full!

## Scene 4

ANNA USACH *enters*.

ANNA: Your mother is looking for you in the office. Your son has gotten worse. He's dying.

OLIA (*jumping up*): Oh, my God! Oh Lord! (*Runs out, forgetting her basket.*)

LUNDYSHEV (*mumbling*): She wants to give me a hen ... me a hen ... (*Exits.*)

ANNA (*alone*): She ran out and forgot her basket with the chicken. Scatterbrain. (*Looking around*) Oh, well. (*Walking up to the basket*) The boy'll die anyway before he can get it. (*Taking the chicken and hiding it under her shawl*) It'll teach her a lesson—leaving things behind ... (*Going to the exit*) Oh dear, someone's coming!

*The COMMISSAR of the military trains enters.*

ANNA (*aside*): A commissar! I am doomed!

COMMISSAR (*looking around suspiciously*): What are you doing here?

ANNA: I ... nothing, really, nothing ... (*Aside*) That's it! I am doomed.

COMMISSAR: Whose basket is this? Yours?

ANNA: Well, no ... it's Che ... Olia Cherevko's.

COMMISSAR: Ah, Cherevko. I need to see him. Wait here.

*He quickly leaves through the left door. Seconds later we hear a telephone ringing and the COMMISSAR'S voice.* Yes, yes. I'm listening. Got it. A special mission. I understand.

ANNA (*pacing about in terror*): I am doomed. I can't run away now, yet it would be a shame to leave it here. If I could only hide it ... Aha! (*Going up to the ticket window*) In here! (*Raising the shutter, shoving the hen inside, and closing the shutter*) Stay here you foul thing, in place of the cashier! Phew...

COMMISSAR (*entering through the left door*): Do you know where Cherevko the engineer lives?

ANNA: How could I not know? Of course I do.

COMMISSAR: Take me to him. On the double.

*They exit. ANNA turns around and looks at the ticket window.*

## Scene 5

YURKEVYCH *returns from the platform and sits down on the bench.* LUNDYSHEV and KARFUNKEL *enter.* KARFUNKEL *is also in tatters. He is thinner than before, but as obstinate and irate as ever. He is carrying a suitcase.*



YURKEVYCH: Ah, it's you, *Herr* Karfunkel! Good morning. Waiting for the train as always?

KARFUNKEL (*angrily*): *Salbaderei!* What silly question at railway station. What trains are there today?

YURKEVYCH: Who knows nowadays?

LUNDYSHEV: The smugglers' express, the fast, heated "typhus to the other world." No transfers. Sleeping accommodations on the roof, under the stars.

KARFUNKEL: The shmugglers' express ... the other world"? *Salbaderei!* No. I do not need such a train.

YURKEVYCH: So you haven't lost hope yet? You still come by every day to find out about the trains?

KARFUNKEL (*angrily*): I already told you I had to be home in Heidelberg the day after tomorrow. I had to make there my clock. My marvellous timepiece for real, existing time. Only then people will know what time really is. What an instant—*der Augenblick*, which passes now unnoticed—really is.

YURKEVYCH: But can't it be made here, this timepiece of yours? In Moscow or Petrograd if not here?

ANNA *rushes in out of breath.*

ANNA: May you all gag on a frog! Again the station is packed (*Squeezes through to the ticket window.*)

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* There are only two people in the world who can to make such timepieces: I, Tobias Karfunkel, who invented them, and *Meister* Tobias Raminger, who knows how to make them. Tobias Raminger is the great watchmaker from Heidelberg. Ha! That is why I await at the station my train.

*Meanwhile ANNA has reached the ticket window and blocking it.*

YURKEVYCH: You've been waiting eleven months, haven't you?

KARFUNKEL: Eleven months, eleven years, eleven minutes. As before, you don't understand *auf*<sup>25</sup> time. (*To ANNA*) *Pardon, madame.* I need to the window. Oh, foolish student, you. Not remember not one of my lesson. You hear? I need to window!

ANNA (*confused but not moving*): Why the hell do you need to get to the window, you dawdler?!

KARFUNKEL: I must finding out about the train. (*To YURKEVYCH*) Eleven years! Eight years ago, didn't twenty-four minutes seem to you like a whole year? And when they had to shoot you, how did you measure time then—by which clock?

YURKEVYCH: Yes, that's true ... But then that was only a few minutes. You, mein Herr, have been waiting a whole year.

KARFUNKEL: Minutes, *Augenblicken*, an instant, a year! Where is the weigh scale, where is the measure for this calculation? Only on my future timepieces it will be possible to know this. Only then we will understand what is the real measure of this or that second, this or that half-hour, this or that decade. These timepieces will show that some half-hour occupies as much time as year and some other ten years are worth nothing at all and occupied no space.

<sup>25</sup> Ger.—on

YURKEVYCH (*clutching his head*): This is a crazy idea. My head starts to ache when I listen to you.

KARFUNKEL: That means you have stupid head. *Aber* I don't have time to chatter with you. I have to finding out my train. (*With anger*) Please let me get to ticket seller.

ANNA: What seller?! There is no one there!

KARFUNKEL: What do you mean there is no one? I myself heard conversation *und* sound. There is one cashier there.

YURKEVYCH: What are you talking about, *mein Herr*? There isn't any cashier!

ANNA: Beat it, you! He's frowning like the king of spades and keeps on creeping forward. There's no point looking wide-eyed. I'm the queen of clubs myself. Go away!

LUNDYSHEV: *Mein Herr*, the chickens will laugh at you.

KARFUNKEL: I don't need chicken—I need a cashier. (*Pushing ANNA aside and knocking at the ticket window*) *Die Kasse!*<sup>26</sup> *Das ist unerhört!* I'll make a complaint!

ANNA: My little dove is gone now. He got there after all, the damned German. (*Clucking is heard from behind the ticket window.*)

KARFUNKEL: *Was?* (*As he raises the shutter, the chicken flies out.*) What is this? *Was für eine Henne?*<sup>27</sup> What's this hen?! (*Catches it in mid-flight.*)

ANNA (*shouting*): Give me back my chicken, you barbarian!

KARFUNKEL: *Ich frage nichts danach! Ich bin ein Uhrmacher*<sup>28</sup>—I am a timepiece master, not a chicken farmer! I don't need any chicken!

ANNA: So give it back!

KARFUNKEL: It's not your chicken!

ANNA: It's not mine? And how would you know? Whose is it then? (*Snatches the chicken away from him and runs away.*)

YURKEVYCH: Why, it's the very same one that Taratuta—

LUNDYSHEV: Wait, madame! Sell me your chicken! (*Runs out after ANNA.*)

## Scene 6

KARFUNKEL (*looking inside the ticket window*): *Das ist ein Narrenhaus!*<sup>29</sup> Oh, what an insane time when a chicken is in ticket office, and there is no tickets or trains.

YURKEVYCH: Yes, *mein Herr*, our tickets are not at the ticket office.

KARFUNKEL: Not at ticket office? Then where?

YURKEVYCH: The Revolution hands them out together with a rifle and a revolver. And there's only one time table—to the front.

CHEREVKO *and the COMMISSAR enter.*

COMMISSAR: Are the locomotives in working order?

CHEREVKO: The locomotives aren't the issue. They'll last. It all depends on the people we have. There are enough railway cars too.

<sup>26</sup> Ger.—The ticket window!

<sup>27</sup> Ger.—What, for one hen?

<sup>28</sup> Ger.—I'm not asking about that! I'm a watchmaker

<sup>29</sup> Ger.—This is a madhouse!

COMMISSAR: All right then, carry on. (*Handing him a packet*) Here are your orders.

CHEREVKO: Very well. We'll call together our inner circle and then the others.

KARFUNKEL (*stepping forward*): *Herr Kommissar!* I need a train. I had to leave today.

COMMISSAR (*writing something in his notebook*): Yes.

CHEREVKO: There are no trains, Comrade.

KARFUNKEL: How can that be? I have important matter! I can't losing time.

CHEREVKO: There is only one important matter now, Comrade—the Revolution.

COMMISSAR (*still writing*): And there is only one time—that of the Revolution. Well, Comrade, I guess you're going?

CHEREVKO: I am.

COMMISSAR: Good. Well, I'm off to our local headquarters. (*Exits.*)

KARFUNKEL (*terribly upset*): Ah! You think you can be taking all the train and all time is for your Revolution and halted is all life. *Ausgeschlossen!*<sup>30</sup> *So bald nicht!* Not so fast! Life will still turn you back with a thousand troubles and sorrows. It is stronger than your Revolution!

CHEREVKO: Empty words, Comrade. The Revolution is more important than momentary matters.

KARFUNKEL: You talk! Just see that you are not sorry later about such a moment that no revolution in the world will return to you.

OLIA *rushes in even more upset than before.*

OLIA: Andrii, you're here? Serhiiko is in a really bad state. What am I to do?! What am I to do? The doctor says he needs camphor ... and if we don't get it, he'll die. (*Starts crying.*)

CHEREVKO: What can I do, Olia? What? You see it can't be found anywhere.

KARFUNKEL (*gloomily*): Aha—I told you. Here it is—this moment.

OLIA: Then he'll die. Let's go home. He's asking for you. He wants to see you.

CHEREVKO (*with great pain*): I can't, Olia. Please understand—I can't. Just now the local headquarters... issued an immediate order ... We have to get the trains ready for the front. Oh! (*Covers his face with his hands.*)

*The PARTY SECRETARY rushes in.*

SECRETARY: Andrii Trokhymovych, you're still here? Go see the duty officer at headquarters as soon as possible. They're waiting for you.

CHEREVKO: Huh? What? One moment. (*Stands there with clenched fists.*)

OLIA *sobs quietly.*

KARFUNKEL (*quietly*): Now you understood? What revolution will give you back this moment when your son is dying and is calling for you?

CHEREVKO (*pulling himself together, resolutely*): Let's go, Petro Mykhailovych. Go home Olia, go. (*Kisses her.*) I'll come later... You can see it's not possible now. (*He and the PARTY SECRETARY exit. OLIA follows.*)

YURKEVYCH: So, *mein Herr*, I guess there are people stronger than all of your wisdom. This time your hocus-pocus didn't work.

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* (*Exits, slamming the door.*)

<sup>30</sup> Ger.—Impossible!

## Scene 7

*The train pulls in, and YURKEVYCH goes toward the exit door. LIDA enters. She is wearing a sheepskin coat and has a revolver.*

YURKEVYCH: Lida! At last! If only you knew how I've been longing for you, dearest. (*Taking her hands*) I thought I wouldn't live long enough to see you ... Then again, it's probably too soon for me to die.

LIDA (*kissing him*): My poor little boy, you really do look miserable ... Your ears are so pale and waxlike. I don't know what to do with you anymore. Wait! I've brought you a chicken and leaf fat to eat ... My darling.

YURKEVYCH: Thank you, Lida. I'll feel much better and get healthier quickly as long as you're with me. Quite often I've had nothing to eat for dinner. I've lived on tea alone.

LIDA (*sighing*): Sadly, I have to go away again, and for a long time.

YURKEVYCH: What do you mean?! Where?

LIDA: To the front. You know the Whites have occupied the Donbas. We have to fight Wrangel and his troops for the Dnipro, for the coal, for wheat, for our freedom. The war isn't over yet, my love.

YURKEVYCH: But you're a woman, Lida. Aren't there any soldiers at the front?

LIDA: I'm a Communist, Les. That means I'm a soldier too. The Party calls, and I must go. It's as simple and inevitable as death.

YURKEVYCH: The Party, the Party ... What use is this freedom that you are defending with your own blood? What use is this freedom if the Party swallows up your individuality, your will, your love? Then it's coercion, not freedom.

LIDA: You're an anarchist, Les. Didn't your anarchism and your mysticism drive all of you into a blind alley? There was a time when you yourself wrote that individuality should be reborn in society.

YURKEVYCH: That's dialectics, Lida. But between you and me there stands only one judge—the heart. And if it is silent—

LIDA: And you—you!—can say this to me?! Why don't you consider my sufferings and what I've gone through. If I say nothing about my love, and I never do, must it mean—oh, forget it, I don't know how to talk about that. After all, I'm a woman. Do you think it's easy to keep up with men—and what men! In such terrible and great time as this? Do you think I don't have moments of hesitation, of female weakness? Have you ever thought I might want to take off this sheepskin coat and all the dirt that's covered me from travelling in freight cars, and be able to love, to enchant, to entice? For you our love is only an episode, but for me it's a great joy that gave me life. And yet I have to give it up, to renounce it of my own accord, and part from you for a long time, perhaps even forever. And just at a time like this, when the blood is draining away from my heart, you are thinking only of yourself. (*Covers her face with her hands.*)

YURKEVYCH: Lida! My darling Lida!

LIDA: Never mind ... I'll be fine in a moment. There, it's passed. Go along, dear, I'll be there soon. Give me your handkerchief. I haven't got one ... have to deliver some packets to the commissar. Come with me.

*They exit.*

## Scene 8

LUNDYSHEV (*entering*): I couldn't catch up with her ... The damned woman ran off ... And the hen looked so good ... so big ... probably one of my Wyandottes ... I have no strength left and how I want to eat ... (*Sitting down on the bench*) I can see it right before my eyes... a fried, juicy chicken ... golden potatoes ... a sparkling glass of ruby wine. Won't I ever be able to taste chicken again? (*Lowers his head into his hands.*)

ANNA USACH *enters*. *Under her shawl she has the chicken, now fried and wrapped in newspaper.*

ANNA: Even if I ditch in in the marsh, they'll figure it out. You can't escape trouble. I'd better return it. I'll say that I took it and fried it to help Olia out, so to speak. They said she'd dashed off here for the meeting. Speaking of which, there's her basket. (*Goes to the bench.*)

LUNDYSHEV: Glory be, it's her! Madame, sell me your chicken.

ANNA (*looking around*): Chicken? ... What chicken?

LUNDYSHEV: I can see it—under your shawl, wrapped in paper.

ANNA: Is the old guy ever quick. He probably sees chickens even in his sleep. (*Indecisively*) What a temptation ... Do you know how much a chicken costs nowadays?

LUNDYSHEV: You are selling it. So you tell me.

ANNA: Give me fifty thousand.

LUNDYSHEV (*shocked*): Fifty thousand for a chicken? A chicken?!

ANNA: Of course, a chicken. I'm not talking about an elephant. Just look at what a chicken it is. Look at all that dripping fat. Give me forty thousand then.

LUNDYSHEV: Forty thousand? To think that once I had a chance to pay a sackful of gold—twenty thousand—for an enchanting Parisian pullet ... And now...

ANNA: To hell with it! Give me thirty thousand.

LUNDYSHEV: Listen, how about taking this ring?

ANNA: This ring? Is it gold?

LUNDYSHEV: Of course it is. And it has an emerald. You can buy three hundred chickens for it.

ANNA: Lord Jesus! Try staying honest after something like this? Oh, Lord be with you—take it. (*Grabs the ring and gives him the chicken.*)

LUNDYSHEV (*taking the chicken*): A chicken! The costliest chicken of my life. (*Exits, pressing the chicken to his breast.*)

## Scene 9

ANNA (*alone, admiring the ring*): What a beautiful stone! I guess I'll have to find some other chicken for Olia now. Oh, dear! Someone's coming, probably for the meeting. I'm sure. (*Runs away.*)

*Several railwaymen enter, among them CHEREVKO and the PARTY SECRETARY, as well as three or four women married to the railwaymen. They all sit down gloomily.*

SECOND WOMAN: Not a scrap of bread, but there's a meeting every day. That's freedom for you.

FIRST WOMAN: You said it! I wish I'd never set eyes on such things.

THIRD WOMAN: They'll do some more coaxing, I suppose.

SECOND WOMAN: Yuck!

PARTY SECRETARY: Settle down, Comrades! We have to address a very important question today. An order's been received—

SECOND WOMAN: There are orders every day, but never any bread.

FIRST RAILWAYMAN: It would be better if you told us why they've stopped paying us.

THIRD RAILWAYMAN: That's right! What is that all about—not giving us our pay?

FIRST WOMAN: Looks like they want us to starve to death. A chicken costs twenty thousand. Potatoes, five thousand. And our children are swollen from hunger.

*An uproar ensues.*

PARTY SECRETARY: Settle down, Comrades! Let me say what I have to say. It's a serious matter. Wages have been stopped temporarily but there will be bread in a few days. Tomorrow we'll be giving out potatoes.

SECOND WOMAN: It's all lies! They haven't got any potatoes. He's lying.

PARTY SECRETARY: Calm down. I see, Comrades, that discipline has deteriorated among us. You must remember, Comrades, that we're at our posts. Railwaymen are just the same as soldiers now. We hold transportation and communication in our hands. We ought to be willing to sacrifice our lives for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Instead, what do we actually see? In fact we see engineers and stokers deserting their trains and going off to the village and the city. So who is going to run the military trains, Comrades? Here's the order we received today—"two engineers to be selected at once for special military trains."

FIRST RAILWAYMAN: Where to? To what cities?

PARTY SECRETARY: We don't know that. The itinerary is secret.

*An uproar ensues. KARFUNKEL enters.*

VOICES: We're not fools! No bread and no money! That's a nice state of affairs.

—And go where? To break our necks. There's no itinerary or profiles, the bridges have been damaged, and the stations burned down!

—And to top it all off, the enemy shoots at you from behind every tree. We know all about it.

PARTY SECRETARY: Comrades! Comrades! Listen to me! What do we actually see? The dictatorship of the proletariat is fighting for a workers' state. Do you mean to say that at a time like this...

TWO RAILWAYMEN (*rising to show their disapproval and going toward the door*): Do it yourself.

KARFUNKEL: Aha, I told them. The Revolution shall be losing.

CHEREVKO (*springing up from his seat*): Comrades! Comrades! Pull yourselves together. You're workers! Look at your hands—coarsened and blackened from oil, soot, wrenches, winches, drills, hammers, and steam. Wasn't it for us that the workers of St. Petersburg, Moscow and Tula fought for freedom and drove out Denikin, Yudenich, and Petliura? And can it be that now after all this, after all the efforts and sacrifices that have been made, we are going to betray the Revolution and the cause of the working class? When factories, every day thousands of Communists and thousands of workers are leaving their plants, and families to go to the front to fight for our freedom, we—we—are going to hold up their echelons and let the steam out of the

engines? Here I am, an old man, who never left his engine for twenty-two years. Can it be that now, when the Party calls us to battle, when Comrade Lenin says that Wrangel must be crushed, I'll desert my engine?

FIRST RAILWAYMAN: No, of course not. You're a Party member. There's no comparison.

OLIA *enters very upset and rushes toward CHEREVKO. She grabs his hand.*

CHEREVKO (*moving her hand away*): Yes, I'm a member of the Party, a Communist—that's true, Comrades. But aren't you all workers?!

OLIA: Andrii, Andrii! (*Drags him aside almost by force, and whispers something.*)

KARFUNKEL: Aha! I told them. Life has put its hand on the scale.

CHEREVKO (*unsteadily, returning to his former place as OLIA cries quietly on the bench*): Comrades ... my wife just came here and told me that my son ... my dear boy, is dying ... If he doesn't get an injection of camphor right away, he'll die before nightfall. But will this stop me, will this force me to leave my engine? No, Comrades. I'll press on the accelerator all the harder, because what good are the lives of me and my son if the enemies of the Revolution triumph?

*A great commotion ensues.*

THREE RAILWAYMEN (*jumping up from their chairs and going up to CHEREVKO, offering him their hands*): We're with you, Trokhymovych! Let's go!

CHEREVKO (*wiping his tears and shaking their hands*): Thank you, Comrades. Thank you. I never doubted you.

KARFUNKEL: *Alle Tausend!* These are people with a heart of iron.

## Scene 10

TARATUTA (*Enters noisily and starts shouting as soon as comes through the door*): Comrade Cherevko! Olia! Where are you? I got the camphor, damn it all to hell! Six ampoules of it!

OLIA (*exclaiming*): Oh, my God! Taratuta, where is it? Where? (*Throws herself at him.*)

TARATUTA: Here it is, Mummy. Here it is, beautiful. Just don't you bawl, or you'll get the camphor all wet.

OLIA *quickly kisses TARATUTA, takes the parcel, and runs out. Commotion ensues.*

VOICES (*shouting*): Hurray for Taratuta! Long live Trokhymovych! Your son'll get well now.

ANOTHER RAILWAYMAN (*jumping up*): To hell with you all! I'll go as well!

CHEREVKO: Good, for you, Prokopych!

TARATUTA: Go where? To the front? I'll also go with you, Comrades. Take me as a stoker at least. I work with an engine too. Will you take me, Comrade Cherevko?

CHEREVKO (*happily shaking hands with everyone*): Why not? But you heard, Comrade: our destination is a secret. We don't know where we're going or when we'll come back. And we'll have to drive at the highest speed the engine can endure.

TARATUTA: I don't need anything else. That's all I want. Blow and full speed ahead—to an unknown destination. As long as the wind's whistling in my ears and I don't have to look back.

CHEREVKO: Well, then everything's fine. I'm not sure about bread, but I can guarantee there will be wind. Thank you, my friend. I'll never forget this.

*Everyone rises and disperses noisily.*

## Scene 11

LIDA and YURKEVYCH enter.

LIDA: I feel sorry for you, Lesyk. But there's nothing one can do. I have to go.

YURKEVYCH: What! Today? Right away?

LIDA: You heard what they said—a military train on a special mission will depart. I'm being appointed a commissar. That way I'll get there faster and more easily. Don't be angry, Lesyk. Goodbye.

YURKEVYCH: Again ... I'll be alone. Again my dreams ... the fairy tale of my love ... has been destroyed.

LIDA: Don't torment me, Les ... It's hard for me as it is. (*Kisses his forehead.*) What can we do? ... You chose the wrong time to fall in love with me, my dear ... This isn't the sort of love you need.

YURKEVYCH: Yes, you're not the quiet flame of happiness, the golden dream I've been drawn to all these years, like a child to a candle. Only a fool like me could have mistaken your glittering feathers for solid gold, you fiery bird of the Revolution ... And how painfully I have been burned by your wings. Well, goodbye. (*Turning away*) Fly to your conflagrations, you elusive firebird.

CHEREVKO, TARATUTA, and the COMMISSAR of the military train enter.

COMMISSAR: So you're off, Comrade?

CHEREVKO: I'm ready to go.

COMMISSAR: You know that the train is on a special mission.

CHEREVKO: I know.

COMMISSAR: And its itinerary is secret.

CHEREVKO: I understand.

COMMISSAR: You're to drive at top speed.

CHEREVKO: Fine.

TARATUTA: Splendid!

COMMISSAR: You won't be relieved by anyone, you know. I have no idea when you'll return. And the condition of the tracks is unknown.

CHEREVKO: But we know the goal, Comrade Commissar. It's socialism.

COMMISSAR: You're right. And all our strength and time must be devoted to reaching this goal. (*Glancing up at the clock*) Only it's a pity we've got so little time.

CHEREVKO: Never mind. We'll force even time to work for us.

TARATUTA (*enthusiastically*): He'll do that, Comrade Commissar. You can be sure of that! After all, he's a master. The master of time. And I'm the master's apprentice.

KARFUNKEL (*off to the side*): *Salbaderei!* Only I am the master of time!

COMMISSAR: Well, off you go. (*Shakes hands with CHEREVKO.*)

CHEREVKO: For the good of the working class!

LIDA: Goodbye, Lesyk. (*Kisses YURKEVYCH.*)



TARATUTA: Goodbye, my brother. Don't be sad. We'll seize time by the tail and we'll be back home in no time. And now, look out world, we're taking off!

*Everyone exits except YURKEVYCH. He sits down at the table and buries his face in his hands. The conductor blows the whistle, the locomotive responds, and the train pulls out.*

## Act Four

*The year is 1929. We are at the same station, only now it is unrecognizable. The old, familiar one-story building is gone, except for one side wall, which has not yet been pulled down; behind it rises the tall structure of a new station. It is ready for use but still covered in scaffolding, so that only the top of the facade with the big station clock can be seen. The clock is just being installed by a master clockmaker and his assistant, who have climbed up the stairs onto the scaffolding. Construction is not yet over. Although all the finished walls are adorned with garlands and large red banners with slogans, and although the entire station has been swept and cleaned, barrels of cement, ladders, buckets, and lime kilns have not been removed. The festive banners are emblazoned in gold with the inscriptions "1929. Welcome Engine Driver CHEREVKO, the courageous fighter for socialism and our delegate to the Fifth All-Union Congress of Soviets!" and "Long live the Five-Year Plan for Socialist Construction!"*

### Scene 1

*The scene opens with the stentorian ring of the station bell. Immediately activity ensues. Several workers who are late dash past dragging shovels, buckets, and rolls of wire. The STATIONMASTER hurries past. Rushing to meet him is the local Party SECRETARY, who is buttoning his jacket on the go. Suddenly, from all sides, railwaymen start gathering. Among them are VASYL IVANOVYCH, IVAN TEREHTIOVYCH, and musicians of the railwaymen's concert band.*

PARTY SECRETARY (*while walking*): Hurry up, Comrades! Hurry up! There's an announcement! The train'll be here in twenty minutes.

STATIONMASTER: Where are we supposed to meet him?

PARTY SECRETARY: I already told you: on the platform. What's up with Vasyl Ivanovych? Where's he disappeared to? He supposed to give a speech.

STATIONMASTER: There he is. No need to panic, Petro Mykhailovych.

PARTY SECRETARY: Sure, it's all right for you to say: "Don't panic." Why haven't those barrels been cleared away? I told you to do that yesterday, didn't I?

*The bandmaster, a Czech named HENN, runs in.*

HENN: Where's the trombone player? Where's that sluggard? Has he run off to the market again?

PARTY SECRETARY (*calling out to the workers on the scaffolding*): Do you see that? They're still playing around with that clock! Do you want to do me in or what? I asked you to do it on time, Rabinovych!

CLOCKMAKER (*from the scaffolding*): Don't worry, Petro Mykhailovych. Everything's ready. The clock is a beauty! You won't see a clock like it even in Zhmerynka. It's not a clock, it's pure music!

PARTY SECRETARY: Oh yes, music. Good thing you reminded me. Make sure you don't let us down, Comrade Henn. As soon as the train pulls in, the whole band should blow precisely and in unison without anyone holding back. Not like on May Day, when the basses went hoo-hoo-hoo, but there was no proper music at all. It shows that you're cut off from the masses and that there's an absence of leadership.

HENN (*gloomily*): I know my job. But if the cornet clammed up...

CORNETIST: The music indicated a rest. Is it my fault if the notes are incorrect?

PARTY SECRETARY: That's what I'm saying: the notes are there, but there's no music. Just see you don't let us down, Comrade Henn.

HENN: All right. I know my job. Where is the trombone player? (*At that moment a clucking chicken is heard from somewhere.*)

PARTY SECRETARY (*astonished*): What's that? Is that a hen somewhere?

HENN (*enraged*): What's this mocking; who's teasing me?

PARTY SECRETARY: It's nothing of the kind, Comrade Henn. You imagined it.

HENN: What do you mean imagined? I heard it quite plainly.

## Scene 2

HENN: Where is the trombone player? Where is that sluggard? He's always late. He probably ran off to the market.

*Again a vigorous chicken clucking is heard. There is general astonishment, then laughter.*

PARTY SECRETARY: What an outrage! Where's the chicken? Comrade Henn, do something! This is a disgrace!

HENN (*furiously*): I won't allow such mockery! Who brought a chicken here?

BAND MEMBERS: It's nothing like that, Comrade Henn. We didn't do it.

*The clucking gets louder. The trombone player runs in out of breath, rushes to the couch, and drags out a basket from underneath it.*

TROMBONE PLAYER: Excuse me, Comrade Henn. It's mine. It's Sunday today, you know, when the big market takes place, so I bought her on the way. It was cheap. Two rubles. Now stop that cackling, you silly thing. Shush!

HENN: Clear out of here this very minute, you scoundrel! How can I conduct with folks like these. And a trombone player! Phooey!

TROMBONE PLAYER: I'll be here in a minute. I'll give this to my wife and be back right away. (*Runs out.*)

*Everyone laughs.*

PARTY SECRETARY: I told you—an absence of leadership. It's not leadership you've got, Comrade Henn, but chickenship.

## Scene 3

YURKEVYCH enters. He is now forty-two; he has aged, and his black curls are flecked with grey. But he looks wonderful. He is well-groomed, self-assured, and smartly dressed in an overcoat

*and hat, and is carrying a stylish suitcase. After looking about, he goes up to the PARTY SECRETARY.*

YURKEVYCH: Good morning, Comrade. Would you mind telling me who's getting a send-off here? Or welcomed, perhaps?

PARTY SECRETARY: We're welcoming someone, Comrade! We're welcoming one of our fellow workers, a railway engineer. He's been a delegate to the Fifth Congress of Soviets and a delegate in general. He's a leading shock worker. Now he's received a decoration. There have been articles in the papers about him. Cherevko is his name.

YURKEVYCH: Cherevko! Andrii—Andrii Trokhymovych? You're kidding! So he is still alive and well?

PARTY SECRETARY: Do you know him? Really?

YURKEVYCH: Of course I do! I lived in this town of yours for many years. And, how much I lived through... (*Sighing*) at this very station. Only where is it? (*Looking about*) The walls are new, the clock is new ... scaffolding everywhere. Everything has changed completely.

PARTY SECRETARY: We're bulding a new station, Comrade. A real, proper one. We're going to have a grand opening soon.

YURKEVYCH: Yes, it's unrecognizable ... (*Glancing about*) And to think that once in this very place ... But it was a long time ago ... I haven't been here in eight years.

PARTY SECRETARY: You don't say! And who, if you'll excuse my asking, might you be?

YURKEVYCH: I? I'm YURKEVYCH, the writer. Perhaps you've heard of me?

PARTY SECRETARY: Why, of course! We've read your books. Delighted to meet you.

*Several men carry in a long, coffin-like box. Behind them enters a foreign-looking man in a bowler hat.*

PARTY SECRETARY (*confronting the bearers*): What's this all about? Where do you think you're going? Get back! Have you lost your minds?! What a time to start dragging coffins about!

ONE OF THE MEN: But it has to go on the train.

PARTY SECRETARY: On the train? Then why are you shoving your way through here? You oaf! Go back! (*The men carry the coffin out.*)

YURKEVYCH: What is this about? Did someone die, or something?

PARTY SECRETARY: The louts! What a time to start dragging coffins in and out. It's a landowner who lived around here, a former, you know, count. A poultry-breeder.

YURKEVYCH: Lundyshev? You're kidding? So, he died? ... Here's an encounter for you!

PARTY SECRETARY: He died way back in 1925. But his brother from Paris or somewhere else petitioned to take his remains there, out of the country. Let him take them if he wants to. We won't miss that kind of goods.

YURKEVYCH: So he's dead. A queer old fellow he was. So, he didn't live to see his Princess Bulbul-el-Hazar.

PARTY SECRETARY: Excuse me, but what are you talking about?

YURKEVYCH: Oh, nothing. I was just thinking. Tell me ... you didn't happen to know a—a comrade—Zvantseva—Lida Zvantseva, did you?

PARTY SECRETARY: Zvantseva? Lida? Why of course! She was quite a militant woman. There won't be another like her. She fought on every front—against Denikin, against Wrangel, and in Central Asia. Who wouldn't know Lida Zvantseva? Pardon me, but I

think there is another announcement. Ivan Terentiiovych, go and see what's up, will you?

YURKEVYCH (*upset*): She was quite a militant ... I guess that mean's she's gone. She's dead. Poor Lida! Listen, you didn't finish telling me about Lida Zvantseva.

PARTY SECRETARY: Yes, she was quite a militant ... she was badly wounded at Perekop. They had a difficult time saving her.

YURKEVYCH (*grabbing the PARTY SECRETARY'S arm*): Saving her? That means she's still alive? Did you see her afterwards?

PARTY SECRETARY (*lighting a cigarette in a leisurely fashion*): Who? Lida? Lida Zvantseva, you mean? Why, yes, she's living here even now.

YURKEVYCH: What? Lida's here?! Tell me more!

PARTY SECRETARY: Well, of course. She's the director of the poultry state farm outside of town, on this here late count's estate. Almost all his equipment was preserved, you know: it's a complete poultry town. It's splendid!

YURKEVYCH: How extraordinary! Lida's breeding poultry ... so how can I get to see her?

PARTY SECRETARY: She's around here every day. She'll probably be here today as well. Well excuse me now. I've got to go. (*To the railwaymen*) So, Comrades, it's time. Let's go to the platform. The train'll be in any minute.

HENN: Everyone take your places! Attention! Keep your teeth on your mouthpieces and your fingers on the valves. Quick time, march!

*Everyone goes out to the platform except YURKEVYCH.*

YURKEVYCH: So this is where her destiny lay after all the storms in her life! On Count Lundyshev's poultry farm. It's as if she is the real golden Princess Bulbul-el- Hazar the old man dreamed of so much but never lived to see ... And what about me?

## Scene 4

KARFUNKEL *enters*. He is also unrecognizable. He is wearing a stylish coat and a fedora and is carrying a new suitcase.

YURKEVYCH: What, is that you? *Herr Far ...Fur ...* sorry—Karfunkel! You're still here?

KARFUNKEL: Oh, it's *Herr Yurkevych*! Yes, I'm still here, but today I am leaving. I told you that I am going home and will be in Heidelberg the day after tomorrow. I leave in exactly half an hour. (*Takes out a splendid gold watch.*) My watch is working again. I have wound it again, my watch, the watch of my life. *Die Uhr meines Lebens.*<sup>31</sup> I shall be in Heidelberg at six twenty on the thirteenth. So you see, I was right. *Ich hatte Recht.*

YURKEVYCH (*laughing*): Yes, but in what year? You told me this in 1919 and now it's 1929. A small difference—of ten years.

KARFUNKEL: Ten years, ten years! *Salbaderei!* In any case, you have been forgetting my lessons. You have been forgetting that ten years and half an hour are often equal on the real clock of time. Ten years. I have been crossing them out of my calculation—these ten years of your Revolution. I have my own calculation, my own time, and I trust only my own watch.

<sup>31</sup> Ger.—The watch of my life.

YURKEVYCH: You are too generous, *mein Herr*. Watch out or you may make a mistake in your calculation. But tell me, what have you been doing these past ten years? Why didn't you go home sooner?

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* That's insignificant! I was not counting. For me this was but the half hour my train was late. (*Taking out of his pocket a bundle of letters and telegrams*) But now I am going. (*Reading one of the telegrams*) Everything is in order. Time serves me again, as before. I am once more the master of time.

YURKEVYCH: Yes, but it looks as though things have not gone badly with you. Someone told me you were a chief engineer somewhere and had your own car, and so on. Why didn't you go home then?

KARFUNKEL: Why? Why? Because I had to wait.

YURKEVYCH: Where? Here at the station?

KARFUNKEL (*embarrassed*): No, in another—a different place.

YURKEVYCH: Ah, I see! In that kind of place—behind bars. Were you there ... a long time?

KARFUNKEL: I told you already I was not counting those stupid years. (*Turning away, displeased*) It is all gone past, and today I am going. I am going to Heidelberg, where at last I shall make my amazing watch. There! The great clockmaker Tobias Raminger is waiting for my designs, and the day after tomorrow we shall begin our work. And then—then the world will understand what time is. People will understand why half an hour sometimes lasts longer than ten years, and why ten years of old age are so different from ten years of youth. But we shall change all that. We shall make time submit to the strong and wise: to us, the masters of time, who shall reign over the earth. Then the world will glorify me, the first master of time. Tobias Karfunkel. Farewell, *mein Herr*, forever.

YURKEVYCH: Watch out so that you won't have to come back here.

## Scene 5

*The door opens and two workers enter carrying a huge crate covered with labels in foreign languages. Then LIDA enters. She is now thirty-six. She has not only aged, but grown thinner. Her features have softened, and at times a faint shadow of wisdom and sadness forms around her lips.*

WORKERS: Here it is, Comrade Director. The whole thing. (*Setting down the crate on the table*)  
It's damned heavy!

LIDA: Good, good. Now go and get the truck ready.

YURKEVYCH (*starting towards Lida*): Lida!

*LIDA turns to look. At first she is confused; then she cries out and goes up to YURKEVYCH. He takes her by the hands and leads her forward to the front of the stage. They stand there, holding each other's hands and looking at each other in silence. Music is heard in the distance.*

YURKEVYCH: Lida!—What an encounter! Lida! Can it really be you again? You again at this same station, where we experienced so much happiness and so much suffering? ... When was it? Yesterday? Or ten years ago?

LIDA (*smiling*): And are you still the same as you were then, waging war against time?

- YURKEVYCH: Oh, no. I only try to understand its whims, like the master clockmaker Karfunkel. But tell me all about yourself. Tell me, darling. (*Glances at the crate.*)
- LIDA: Are you wondering what it is? This, my friend, is a chicken incubator. We had to order it from abroad, but now we'll have a good look at it and learn how to make one like it ourselves. Oh, of course! You don't know! I'm the director of a poultry state farm.
- YURKEVYCH: Yes, I do. I already heard.
- LIDA: This incubator's too small for us. We need one for at least thirty thousand eggs, and this one holds only three thousand six hundred. After all, our farm is growing. A great future awaits the chicken, you know. She has to feed our workers, and feed them well! Poultry farming is the most convenient and quickest in terms of results.
- YURKEVYCH: You must be dreaming like Henry IV of a chicken in the pot of every family.
- LIDA: Forget about your Henry! No Henry ever dreamed of what just one state farm like ours can produce. Let's go see it. I'll show you around our farm, show you our incubators, the gardens where the chickens frolic, the henhouses where they winter, and the Bruderhaus pension for baby chicks. Almost every hen of ours lays a hundred and fifty to two hundred eggs a year. Just count how much meat and eggs that comes to. It's one hundred and forty-seven kilos of chicken meat and eight kilos of eggs per year from one hen alone! And we have fifteen thousand birds, all of them purebred. That means two thousand two hundred and eleven tonnes of meat alone per year. And this is only the beginning. In two or three years we'll be able to produce eight thousand two hundred tonnes of meat, or perhaps twice as much!
- YURKEVYCH: Darling Lida! You're as passionate as ever—be it in war or in peacetime.
- LIDA (*smiling sadly*): You're laughing at me ... Yes, there was a time when I fought. I rode across Siberia and the Trans-Baikal on horseback and fought Wrangel and Kolchak and the Japanese. And now I'm a poultry mama, a mother hen hatching chicks. (*Turns away.*)
- YURKEVYCH: What's wrong, my love? Surely you don't think I wanted to offend you?
- LIDA (*sighing*): It's nothing. So, how are you? But I know, I've read about you: you've become a well-known writer. I've heard about your success. People talk and write about you.
- YURKEVYCH: And they disparage me a great deal too.
- LIDA: You're probably worth something if they disparage you. Don't you stray from your path. Yes, it seems we have gone down different paths.
- YURKEVYCH (*gently*): You chose yours yourself, Lida.
- LIDA (*cheerily*): Yes, that's true. But where is that beauty of mine? Ahoy there, Comrade Taratuta!
- YURKEVYCH (*astonished*): What do you mean Taratuta? Is he here too?
- LIDA: Of course he is! He's our superintendent and transportation chief and poultry breeder.
- YURKEVYCH: Taratuta's breeding poultry?! Taratuta, the terror of all the chickens, the Chicken's Death, is now ... That's unbelievable! Now he's raising chickens!
- LIDA: And how! He keeps an eye on each one of them as if he were its nanny.
- YURKEVYCH: And he doesn't run them over?

## Scene 6

TARATUTA enters at this moment. As cheerful and lively as ever, he is carrying a medium-sized box with foreign labels.

LIDA: Well? So? How is she, Taratuta? Has our princess arrived safe and sound?

TARATUTA (*cheerfully*): Alive! Alive she is, that ex-princess and non-labouring element. She won't stop talking. We'll turn her into a proletarian and a shock-worker in no time. (*Catching sight of YURKEVYCH*) Hah! Who's this I see?! Comrade Yurkevych! Your honour! Well, I never! Ha-ha-ha! The world's full of surprises!

YURKEVYCH: Taratuta, my dear friend! (*They hug and shake hands.*) Is it true you've become serious and settled down?

TARATUTA: That's right, Comrade Yurkevych! I've settled down and how—like a hen on her eggs, you could say. The times and everything else in the world aren't what they were.

YURKEVYCH: But you conquered time, Taratuta.

TARATUTA: There's no way I could have conquered it! It functions by its own laws, buddy. You see where it's brought us. We're building socialism now.

YURKEVYCH: That's great. After all you fought for it at one time; you rushed out to meet it, regardless of whether there was a road or not.

TARATUTA (*enthusiastically*): And what times they were, Comrade, what times! Do you remember those days, Comrade Director, when we were young? How we dashed about, not fearing for our lives, where there were no roads, across the steppe, across time, across everything in the world? Only the wind whistled in our ears and the years whizzed by. Ah, even thinking about it now takes my breath away!

LIDA: Yes ... Those were years will never be repeated... Now it all seems like a legend ... a fairy tale.

YURKEVYCH: But this age isn't one for dashing about, Taratuta. You have to arrive sometime. That's why we make a revolution, so that we can build afterwards. Otherwise it turns out as Bernstein theorized: "Action is everything, the aim is nothing." It's enough if, as he said, we keep on moving.

TARATUTA (*sighing*): Yes, that's so, Comrade Yurkevych, but still, when you think about it ... What I was then and what I've achieved! My! How I dashed across the fields and mountains, how many chickens I'd run over in my time, and now I've become a sitting hen myself. I hatch out chickens in an incubator. I sit on the eggs like a chicken.

YURKEVYCH: That's your punishment, Taratuta, for all the chickens whose souls you released.

LIDA (*laughing*): That'll do, Taratuta. It's time you'd better show me our princess.

YURKEVYCH: What princess? Good heavens, not her?

TARATUTA: Former princess, Comrade Director. Allow me. (*Removing the front of the box and setting it on the table.*) Well, my chick, it's a good thing for you you didn't get in my way ten years ago! You'd be lying with your legs sticking up and that would have been it.

LIDA (*laughing*): Oh, what a beauty! Look, Les! Look! Look at how magnificent she is!

YURKEVYCH: It's a chicken!

LIDA: Why, of course it's a chicken. It's our Princess Bulbul-el-Hazar. Remember?

YURKEVYCH: You must be joking!

LIDA: Do you remember how once you chose a chicken over me? Well, and now—

YURKEVYCH: And now you're paying me back in the same way.

LIDA: You can interpret it as you like. Oh, what a lovely thing she is! Look at the feathers she has! What a breast! What a head! She gleams like gold!

YURKEVYCH: But can this really be the same Princess Bulbul-el-Hazar about whom our friend, the count, dreamed for so many years?

TARATUTA: Former count, Comrade Yurkevych.

LIDA: Of course! He certainly knew his chickens, if nothing else. It was I who got her from Paris—I found her! We paid dearly for her, I can tell you. Probably not less than what they wanted from the count back then. Of course, we paid in Soviet currency.

TARATUTA: Former, Comrade Director.

LIDA: Former what, Taratuta?

TARATUTA: A former count, I say.

YURKEVYCH: Yes, he's certainly former now, Taratuta. He's dead. How bizarre ... Ten minutes ago his coffin was being carried into the train the crate with his princess, his favourite dream, was being brought here.

TARATUTA: So, it was him they were lugging? That's amazing!

YURKEVYCH: Once again the same chicken! Thank God it didn't cross my path this time. And to think how many times she's flown, clucking, into my life. So, Lida, are you satisfied with your pullet?

LIDA: Of course! For us she'll be the progenitor of a new breed. Do you know how many eggs she lays per year? Three hundred. An egg a day, almost. Now figure it out. At that rate, in ten years she alone will have enough to feed our entire republic. Oh, my golden beauty! My joy!

TARATUTA: Do you hear the order our society has placed, ex-princess! Do you? You have to exceed all expectations. This isn't Paris. Do your best.

LIDA: You know, when I look at this pullet, I start to understand what time is. Time is what we want to make of it. What we are able to put into it. When your count ...

YURKEVYCH: What do you mean "your count"?

LIDA: Whatever. For decades your count bred chickens, and from it derived silly pleasure only for himself. And even if he had obtained this pullet, this princess Bulbul-el-Hazar, he would have enjoyed her only by himself, like some golden dream. Time would have passed in vain, and she, this wise pullet of time, would have laid her golden eggs in vain. These eggs would not have brought pleasure to others, would not have given life to anyone. Yet you know an egg is time, the sealed potential of time.

YURKEVYCH: Lida, you've become a philosopher.

LIDA: Go ahead, laugh. But for us every egg this pullet lays daily, we'll get months, years, of energy.

YURKEVYCH: Aha! A year for a day. What scales you operate with, Lida!

LIDA: These are the scales of the millions who have conquered time, Les.

TARATUTA: Well, I am off. (*Taking the cage and going to the exit*) Let's go, my beauty. Be sure you produce enough time to last us for long. (*Exits.*)

LIDA: Take her. We'll also be leaving in a mo... (*Stops in mid-sentence.*)

## Scene 7

*Just then a LITTLE GIRL about eight years old runs in and up to YURKEVYCH.*

LITTLE GIRL: Daddy! Daddy! Here you are! Mama and I been looking for you everywhere. Mama's in the garden, waiting.



LIDA (*dumbfounded*): You're ... married? ... This is your little girl?

YURKEVYCH *stares at the ground and does not reply. There is a long pause.*

YURKEVYCH: I'll be back ... in a minute. Wait here, Ninochka. I'll be back ... Sit here with Auntie. (*Hurries out.*)

LIDA (*passing her hand across her brow*): He's married ... For quite a few years.

*Another pause. Music is heard in the distance.*

LIDA (*drawing the child to her*): His little girl ... How old are you, child?

LITTLE GIRL: Eight.

LIDA: Eight ... Eight years old ... Nine years of happiness. Nine years ago I was young and loved ... Nine years! ... It's as if it were yesterday. Nine years that I gave to the Revolution ... Instead ... I could have had a little girl like this. (*Hugs and kisses the child.*) A child like this of my own.

## Scene 8

TARATUTA *enters noisily, shattering the lyricism of this scene.*

TARATUTA: Ready, Comrade Director. Let's go. Everything's in order, tip-top, everything in the wo... (*Looking at LIDA attentively*) What's wrong, Comrade Director? Why have your lights fogged up. Aha! I get it. Been remembering old times, and you feel sorry you haven't got a little girl like that. Forget it, sister, there's no point!

LIDA (*wiping away her tears*): Never mind, Taratuta. I'm over it.

TARATUTA: And where would you find a little girl like that? Comrade Yurkevych is a fine fellow, decent man, but, to be honest, he's not one of us. To be blunt, he's part of the rotten intelligentsia. You did right to dump him then. Now you can see for yourself.

LIDA: That's true, Taratuta. It's true. Time is the great judge. It judges people by their merits and assigns each his proper place. My place is here, while his ... So goodbye, child. (*Kisses the child.*)

## Scene 9

*At that moment a woman's voice is heard: "Ninochka! Nina! Where are you?" Just then SOFIIA PETRIVNA enters. Her appearance is even more distinctive and one must admit that she is helping nature a great deal in order to preserve her fading youth.*

SOFIIA PETRIVNA: Are you disobeying me again, you naughty girl? Mama's been worried to death, looking for you everywhere, while you ... Where's Papa? (*YURKEVYCH enters.*) There you are, at last. Where have you been? I've spent two hours searching the station for you.

YURKEVYCH: But I've been here all the time. I only went out for a minute to buy some cigarettes.

SOFIIA PETRIVNA: Do you want us to miss the train on account of your stupid cigarettes? God's punishing me with a husband like you!

YURKEVYCH: What do you mean, dear? The train won't be here for another forty minutes.

SOFIIA PETRIVNA: All you ever do is argue. Let's go!

YURKEVYCH: In a moment. (*Going up to LIDA*) Well, goodbye. (*Takes her hand.*)

SOFIIA PETRIVNA: Oleksii Stepanovych, I'm going!

YURKEVYCH (*with a sigh*): Farewell, Lida. (*Exits after SOFIIA PETRIVNA and his DAUGHTER*)

TARATUTA: See that? That's where his road has led him. Bah!

## Scene 10

*There is activity on the platform. The bell rings. We hear the distant, increasingly louder whistle of the locomotive. The band strikes up a ceremonial march to welcome the train. A moment later it flies into the station.*

CHEREVKO, OLIA, and the PARTY SECRETARY enter into the waiting room, followed by the other characters from the previous scenes except for the band, which continues playing beneath the window. Words of greeting and exclamations are heard. LIDA and TARATUTA go up to CHEREVKO and shake hands with him. The PARTY SECRETARY makes his speech of welcome, which is muffled by the music.

PARTY SECRETARY (*gesticulating towards the window at the band*): Keep it down, damn it! We can't hear anything! (*The music ceases.*) We have very little time, Comrades, so I'll say only what is important. Andrii Trokhymovych is going away again. He's off to the Dnipro Hydroelectric Dam and other new construction sites. He's going, Comrades, because he hasn't reached the end of his road yet and his train keeps moving forward. That road began nine years ago, in 1920, when Cherevko rushed to the front on his locomotive, leading the Red echelons into battle. He knew neither the route nor the stations he passed, and he didn't know exactly when he'd return home. He only knew and believed that the road he'd taken was the right one and would lead him to socialism, Comrades. He didn't keep track of time then, but forced it to serve the Revolution. So in a matter of weeks, months, he overtook the years in his smashed-up locomotive. What Comrade Cherevko and the Red Soldiers did at the front in a few weeks would have taken others years. That's because they harnessed time, Comrades. All those masters of the factories, locomotives and mines became the masters of time, Comrades. Now their train is moving onward. It's coming from the All-Union Congress of Soviets, Comrades, which adopted the Five-Year Plan for socialist construction for which, ten years ago, our workers and peasants—the masters of the great October Revolution—fought and died. So long live our best fighter and master, Comrade Cherevko, who without being relieved as the engineer, guided his train out of the flames of the October Revolution and is taking it ever forward along the roads and past the stations of our great construction—to socialism!

*Cheering is heard, and the band strike up. KARFUNKEL enters. He looks gloomy and depressed and is holding a crumpled telegram and a letter in his hand.*

CHEREVKO: Thank you, Comrades. Thank you. So we are masters of time, you say? That was a great thing you said just now, Petro Mykhailovych!

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* Again it's their time. Everything is lost. The factory is closed down. Raminger has left for Russia. They, not I, are the masters of time.

CHEREVKO: Masters of time... hm. And truly, I can hardly believe it when I recall now how much we managed to do in a short time when we fought against the Whites! But after harnessing time back then, Comrades, we won't let go of it now. At the congress, when we were shown a huge map of the Soviet Union on which all the plants we are to build during the period of the five-year plan were marked with bright, glittering dots, I tell you, Comrades, it took our breath away. For it's a great, a tremendous undertaking. I must say we know ... we know, Comrades. We know we shall build all those factories and plants and power stations within these five years, and perhaps even sooner, in four. Because, Comrades, we conquered time back then at the front when we fought and died for the October Revolution. And if we were able then to attain in one year what required ten years, then we'll be able now to lay the foundation for socialism in four years. And we will, Comrades, we will lay that foundation, because we know our goal and we believe in our Party, which is leading us on to this goal.

*There is more cheering, and the band plays on.*

KARFUNKEL: *Alle tausend!* For ten years I have not been able to move from this place, and they want to rebuild the world in four years!

PARTY SECRETARY: Come back soon, Trokhymovych! We'll have the station finished soon. The clock's ready now. Do you see it? Isn't it wonderful?

CHEREVKO (*smiling*): That's how it should be, Comrades. A clock should be the first thing to go up at a building site. It's the overseer, the eye, of the five-year plan. It keeps its own time now—a socialist one.

LIDA (*going up to CHEREVKO and taking him by the hands*): Yes, yes, you know. You heard at the congress how the millions reckon time, Trokhymovych. Tell us, where did they make the first notch? Where is our first minute, Cherevko?

CHEREVKO: The five-year plan, Comrade Zvantseva. The five-year plan!

KARFUNKEL: The five-year plan! *Salbaderei!* Again they want to steal my time from me, like they stole ten years of my life, like they stole my master, the great clockmaker of Heidelberg.

LIDA: And then what? What's next?

CHEREVKO: What's next? Another five-year plan. If you had only seen the scope, the scale it's calculated on. It takes your breath away!

KARFUNKEL: Their calculations, again their calculations. For what, then, for what did I give up my ten years of my life?

LIDA (*to CHEREVKO*): Yes, these are our own calculations; these are our notches that we are making on the clock of history. And from these notches, these shining moments, the face of the earth is changing. We already made such notches, Trokhymovych! We made them there at the front, when five years seemed a brief instant to us, but was worth a hundred years because we shook and changed the whole world.

KARFUNKEL: She has read my thoughts. (*Rushing up to LIDA*) Aha! It is you who stole my great idea! It's you who understood that an instant does not fit within time, that it may be either a second or ten years! Aha! Then give me back my ten years that your Revolution took away from me!

TARATUTA: What's with him? Has this German gone off his rocker? Go on, beat it, citizen!

LIDA: Wait! Don't touch him, Taratuta. What's the matter, *mein Herr*?

KARFUNKEL (*frantically looking around, then calming down and passing his hand across his brow*): Never mind ... *Salbaderei!* I have lost my time. I have lost my watch!

TARATUTA: So, that's it! His watch was swiped. It happens ...

KARFUNKEL: For ten years I am waiting for this moment. For ten years I dreamed of the moment when I would go to Heidelberg to make my great watch. And when at last my time came, when I was ready to get on the train to go where the work of my life awaits me, I received this letter.

LIDA: So? What about it?

KARFUNKEL: In Germany there is no more science; in Germany there is no more work for the learned mind or the dextrous hand. Raminger's factory, which made the most precise mechanisms in the world, now makes mousetrap and alarm clock for two marks twenty.

TARATUTA: And are the clocks pretty?

KARFUNKEL: And the great Raminger went to Russia to seek work. To Russia, where the Bolsheviks learned to make time, where they make clocks such as these clocks of the five-year plan! Oh! (*Tears off his collar.*)

LIDA: Calm yourself, *mein Herr!* Our country knows how to appreciate great masters if they want to work honestly.

KARFUNKEL: Go away! Never! I won't allow you to laugh at me! Give back my time! Give back my instant, which I captured from time and fixed in place with the golden nails of my will. Ah! If you do, I shall turn your time back. Time has neither an end nor a beginning. It contradicts itself; it can go backward. Ah! *Ich hatte Sie wiederverlangen.*<sup>32</sup> I shall turning it back twenty, two hundred years! You'll know yet what German rule is when they are capturing the whole world! (*Rushes to the scaffolding and starts climbing it.*)

LIDA: Stop him! He'll fall, the madman!

## Scene 11

*Truly, at this very moment KARFUNKEL, who has been running from plank to plank, suddenly stops shouting, and from somewhere above we hear the thud of a body. Everyone rushes to the scaffolding but stop halfway when they hear the sharp ringing of the station bell. The STATIONMASTER enters and goes up to CHEREVKO. Only TARATUTA has managed to scramble up the scaffolding.*

STATIONMASTER: It's time to go, Andrii Trokhymovych. I'll escort you to the train.

LIDA: So you're off, Trokhymovych. Well, goodbye!

CHEREVKO: Yes, I'm off, Comrade Zvantseva. I am. First to the Dnipro Dam, from there to the Nizhny Novgorod Automobile Plant, and from there to the Kharkiv Locomotive Plant. There I'll very likely stay. But no, I won't stay there either. I'd like to go on and on, ever forward, to the Urals and even farther. I'd like to go to every place where mills and factories will grow, where the fires of the five-year plan will blaze, where our train of socialism will pass through. For no one can stop it now, no one can turn it back, like that German wanted. Where is he, by the way?

<sup>32</sup> Ger.—I have reclaimed it.

TARATUTA (*quietly climbing down the scaffold*): He's dead.

LIDA: What do you mean dead? It can't be! What are you saying, Taratuta?

*Shouts. Commotion*

TARATUTA: He fell near the clock. He must have had a heart attack.

LIDA: How strange! He wanted to stop our time, to turn it back. He evidently believed he could do it too. There will probably be some insane people who will try to do it—if not now, then in ten years. You heard him shout “The Germans shall conquer the earth!” ... Probably they still have this insane idea in their minds ...

CHEREVKO: I guess, the year 1918 has not taught them anything, when they were forced to run away with all the trucks and cannons.

LIDA: Yes, they've had their eye on Ukraine for quite a while. They would really like to turn the world back hundreds of years, right to the Middle Ages. No way! Even if they had been successful in taking our country, all our people would revolt and protect our fatherland. The country we'd created and nourished during those happy years, when we've forced time to work for us, for the happiness of the revitalized people. There is no way for the clocks of history to be turned back!

CHEREVKO: Just let them try! We'll fight them, Lida, as we did before! And now goodbye, Lida. Goodbye, Comrades! We're off. Come along, Olia, it's time to go.

CHEREVKO, OLIA *and the others go to the train. We hear the bell and the train whistle.*

TARATUTA (*flinging his cap to the ground*): Damn it all to hell! I should chuck all these chickens and go too!

LIDA: Don't be sad, Taratuta. We'll go too, some day! What an expanse we have ahead of us!

*Translated by Anthony Wixley*

*Revised by Larissa Onyshkevych and Roman Senkus*

# *Liudmyla Kovalenko*

Liudmyla Kovalenko was born in 1898 near Mariupol in southeastern Ukraine, not far from the Sea of Azov. She died in 1969 in Trenton, New Jersey. After attending the Higher Courses for Women in Kyiv (popularly known as St. Olga's University), the only school of higher education for women in tsarist-ruled Ukraine, Kovalenko became involved in various civic causes and interrupted her education to serve in the Russian Red Cross during World War I.

Kovalenko's first literary works were short stories, published in the early 1920s in such prominent Soviet Ukrainian journals as *Nova hromada*, *Zhyttia i revoliutsiia*, and *Chervonyi shliakh*. After the Soviet regime arrested her husband, the writer Mykhailo Ivchenko, in 1929, her works were no longer accepted for publication, and she turned to translating works by such French authors as Maupassant, Balzac, Zola, Voltaire, and Georges Duhamel into Ukrainian. Some of these translations were reprinted in Ukraine in the late 1960s.

During the German occupation of Ukraine during the Second World War, Kovalenko was an active organizer of the Ukrainian Red Cross: she was in charge of aiding Ukrainian prisoners of war, especially the hundreds of thousands who were in German forced-labour and concentration camps. Making her way to the West with her daughter (the writer Lesia Olenko), she saw the end of the war in Germany. In the displaced-persons camps in postwar Germany she was active in the Ukrainian women's movement, serving as vice-president of the Alliance of Ukrainian Women and editing its organ, *Hromadianka*. Kovalenko continued writing and publishing short stories and plays; some of her satirical stories were published under the pen name L. de Marini.

After immigrating to the United States in 1948, Kovalenko worked for the Voice of America and remained active in Ukrainian émigré literary and community life. She headed the Ukrainian Orthodox Sisterhood in the U.S. for many years and was the only woman on the board of the Ukrainian Orthodox Consistory. She also compiled and edited *Ukraïna: Entsyklopediia dlia molodi* (Ukraine: An Encyclopedia for Young People, 1971).

In her postwar literary works Kovalenko depicts some of the immediate problems facing Ukrainian displaced persons. She also expresses hope that life will begin anew in a better world, in a peaceful utopia where technology and nature coexist harmoniously. This is featured particularly in her science fiction novel *Rik 2245* (The Year 2245, 1958) and her play *Heroïnia pomyraie v pershomu akti* (The Heroine Dies in the First Act, 1948). Some of the recurring themes in her work are the realization of personal dreams, the problems of human dignity, and concern for the future of the planet. Later, almost with a missionary zeal, Kovalenko undertook recording and describing the events in Ukraine she had experienced or observed. She considered it her responsibility as a writer in exile to leave for posterity information that could not be published in Ukraine at the time. In her historical trilogy *Nasha, ne svoia zemlia* (Ours but Not Our Own Land, 1964–68) she depicts the short period of Ukrainian independence after the Revolution of 1917 and the early Soviet years. Some of her other works delve into other centuries. Her last historical novel, *Tykha voda* (Calm Water, 1973) is about Oleksander Bezborodko, a Ukrainian nobleman who was an advisor to Catherine II.

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## The Play and the Chosen Reality

*The Heroine Dies in the First Act* was originally published in the Ukrainian émigré magazine *Arka* in 1948. Kovalenko's depiction of theatre as actual life and vice versa had precedents, particularly Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921). Although certain situations in *The Heroine* are reminiscent of Pirandello's play, which deals primarily with the conception and treatment of illusion and reality, Kovalenko's play stresses the individual's contribution to reality by way of one's own choices and actions. In his preface Pirandello writes that every character in his play must have his drama, his *raison d'être*. Kovalenko's characters see that their *raison d'être* is in themselves, in their individual self-expression.

Kovalenko shows that the road toward a crowning achievement is as demanding in life as it is in the theatre. She points out that while theatre reflects real life, it has a dual nature. At night its glittering façade is inauthentic yet enchanting, while in the light of day it is sombre and grey. Nevertheless all people "come to the theatre, whether they want to or not," as the Caretaker points out. By willing to be spectators, they hand over a certain power over their fate to the theatre. To paraphrase Heidegger, people enter life without having a choice, but they do determine whether their *raison d'être* is justified.

Finding themselves in a meaningless life or in an absurd situation, with fake costumes in a fake reality, the play's actors are immersed in pretense and existential inauthenticity. Their only real act is dying. The absurdity of their situation is stressed by the Mother, who still wants her son, who died in an accident, to be alive. The senselessness of the situation is exposed when the court jester intimates that all positive characters, all those who have a goal, die early (at least by the second act), while all others continue living lives filled with self-deception, absurdity, isolation, and selfishness without truly communicating with each other.

In act two the actors realize they cannot escape the truth about themselves and must choose to act. The changed setting in act three provides a different meaning for life and death. The Hostess explains that people die only when they desire to attain more beauty, and then they start over again. The new play about to be performed in act three demonstrates that being committed to some values, to a meaning in life, also demands sacrifice, and that sacrifice enhances the meaning and existential self-expression of each individual. Only those who aspire to be true individuals can show concern and responsibility for other people. The actors thus gain the right to start over again in a kind of self-understanding, without the need to escape into other people's lives or roles, and can thereby become their own authors.<sup>1</sup> Novice—the play's heroine—and, by extension, many of the other actors as well, are able to restore a natural order to their reality by constantly choosing, acting, and then starting all over again and thus creating or adding to their new world. In Goethe's *Faust* (part two), Faust and Helen live in Arcadia's Eden, where there are no rules or conventions and where they have freedom to begin life anew. But they also feel the pain that accompanies beauty. Certain parallels to it can be found in *The Heroine*. In Kovalenko's play, however, the Mother does not need to make the sacrifice that Helen does—following her son to his death. The natural order of things is restored, and the heroine's repeated sacrifice is accepted because she acts on a different level of self-knowledge than the Mother.

Kovalenko's new world—the world of her characters' dreams—is not created through human irrationality. If there is an irrational element, it may be the way the actors choose to do what they do, but not the reasons behind it. The play's acts are slightly fantastic, and their sequence is not quite rational. But they logically demonstrate the *raison d'être* of the protagonist and prove the author's premise. In *The Heroine* there is no escape into the world of illusions or into a Pirandellian ironic imitation of life. There is, however, a tragicomic tone; often it is reflected in the simple candid depiction of basic human aspirations and relations. The chasm between dreams and reality can decrease when there is a conscious willingness to move towards individual dreams.

Jean Genet's 1956 play *Le Balcon* (The Balcony) has a similar setting to that of *The Heroine*. There, too, play-acting serves as dream personification and reality replacement. The participants in a brothel (or a theatre) also choose their own roles and are later able to live in that manner when a revolution occurs. Genet's young heroine has a similar role, and her martyrdom also threatens the existing order. Unlike *The Balcony*, however, Kovalenko's immediately post-WWII play is not violent or typical of the theatre of the absurd. The world of her characters, in their true roles, stresses values, hopes, and reality rather than illusion.

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<sup>1</sup> The eighteenth-century Ukrainian philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda wrote: "The world is so much like theatre that in order to perform in it and achieve success, roles should be picked according to one's talent."



# *The Heroine Dies in the First Act*

## (1948)

CHARACTERS

STAGE MANAGER

SOUBRETTE

DICTATOR (*or* KING)

COSTUMER, *a woman*

NOVICE, *a young woman*

PROMPTER

FIRST GUARD

JUDGE

SECOND GUARD

OTHER GUARDS

THE ACCUSED

DICTATOR'S WIFE (*or* QUEEN)

THE PEOPLE

WOMAN IN THE CROWD

JESTER

MOTHER

SON

STAGEHANDS

WOMAN IN THE MOUNTAINS (*in Act Three*)

## **Act One**

*A large dusty stage, empty except for rays of indirect light and piles of props. The STAGE MANAGER is sweeping the stage with wide motions.*

SOUBRETTE (*rushing in out of breath*): What? No one's here yet? (*Displeased*) I'm always the first to arrive.

STAGE MANAGER: You're the last one. Everyone's putting on their make-up already.

SOUBRETTE: What? Is dress rehearsal today? My God! But my costumes aren't ready yet. The director is not going to be happy again.

STAGE MANAGER: The director is never happy.

SOUBRETTE: Then I'd better hurry! Don't tell him I was late. I'll get out of it, somehow.

STAGE MANAGER: You can't fool the director.

SOUBRETTE: I'll do it somehow. You just keep quiet. (*Rushes out.*)

STAGE MANAGER (*arranging the chairs*): Here's the throne for the dictator. Next to him is his wife. Over here are the judges' benches. (*Shouting to someone backstage*) How many judges are there—two or three?

A VOICE BACKSTAGE: Two. The third one's dead drunk.

STAGE MANAGER: A judge is dead drunk. I don't know why the director still keeps him on. He's always drunk. There's no one to pronounce the sentences ... The defendants' benches will be over here ... and this place will be for the crowd. But they don't get any chairs. That's it. (*Shouting backstage*) The stage is set!

*The DICTATOR enters. His costume is part medieval and part modern, with a definite military cut and gold braid, but simple in appearance.*

DICTATOR: Where's the costumer? What is she doing? Look! (*Pointing to his back*) The back of my parade uniform's been chewed away by mice, and she doesn't even know about it! Costumer! Costumer!

*The COSTUMER rushes in panting. She is holding a needle between her teeth, and has a pair of scissors in her belt. Pieces of thread in various colours are around her neck, and colourful swatches protrude from her pockets.*

COSTUMER: What happened? The uniform? Oh, it's nothing! I'll mend it right away!

DICTATOR: What do you mean it's nothing? Do you want me to make a fool of myself in front of the audience? I can't turn my back to them. The hole goes all the way down to the waist.

COSTUMER: A dictator never turns his back to the audience. All the brilliance is in the front.

DICTATOR: Even the front's gotten dull already. The ermine is faded.

COSTUMER: The ermine? There's nothing easier to fix. It'll be ready in one minute. (*Pulls some cotton stuffing out of her pocket, makes a black smudge on it, and pastes it on the bottom of the cape.*) See? Now it's ready!

DICTATOR (*grumbling*): The ermine is dirty. It's supposed to be white, not grey.

COSTUMER: We'll touch up the black spots. When the black is more intense, the background appears white. (*Exits.*)

DICTATOR (*looking at his wristwatch*): It's ten thirty. We'll never start on time. (*To the STAGE MANAGER*) Does your wife have any whiskey left?

STAGE MANAGER: We always have whiskey. How could a theatre exist without whiskey? You couldn't make it without a drink. Neither could the audience.

DICTATOR: Then I'm going to see her and have a drink. When they're ready to start, stomp on the floor to let me know. (*Exits.*)

STAGE MANAGER (*shouting backstage*): The stage is set for act one.

NOVICE (*entering and glancing around*): Hello ... Is this the set?

STAGE MANAGER: The set for the first act.

NOVICE: Is it supposed to look so gloomy? I didn't expect—

STAGE MANAGER: The stage looks gloomy all the time. There aren't any windows, as you can see. And we need to conserve electricity. These productions are already costing us a great deal.

NOVICE: I knew there weren't any windows, but why does it have to be so bleak, dirty and ...? But the main problem is: it's dull. Where are the props?

STAGE MANAGER: We don't use props in the daytime, only at night. We're about to have the dress rehearsal. This is the king's palace. And this is the throne.

NOVICE: Oh! This is really the throne? ... Is this what power looks like?

STAGE MANAGER: Don't look at it up close. You have to believe it's a throne.

NOVICE: Oh, I believe it. If I didn't I wouldn't have come here.

STAGE MANAGER: Everyone comes here whether they want to or not. Everyone comes through the theatre ... Otherwise they'd have nothing to do.

NOVICE: The director called me, and I came to act. I want to take part in a play. In this beautiful play.

STAGE MANAGER: All plays in the theatre are called beautiful.

NOVICE: Could you tell me who the author is?

STAGE MANAGER: The author is sitting somewhere in the auditorium and watching. He's fixing up your role ... Your role gets better every time. And you play it from the beginning every time.

COSTUMER (*running on stage looking perturbed*): Oh! Who is this?

STAGE MANAGER: A new actress who just arrived.

COSTUMER: Are you performing in this play? (*Looking her over*) Aha! Two blonde braids and naively serious eyes. You're the heroine. Yes, you must be the heroine. I have a beautiful costume for you for the first act.

STAGE MANAGER: The heroine dies in the first act.

NOVICE: What? I die? (*Laughing*) That can't be. I want to see your play to the very end, and then I'll stage my own. I think that your theatre needs a change. First of all, it needs a cleaning. How can a queen drag her splendid silk train on this floor? Ugh. If the author writes that this is marble, then it should be marble, and not some painted, dirty boards. I want the real thing. True beauty. Don't you have true beauty here?

STAGE MANAGER: We had props for true beauty somewhere, but nobody stages it any more.

NOVICE: Why not?

COSTUMER: It hasn't been in style for quite a long time, and we're very busy with a more modern repertoire. We never have the time ... We'd need a lot of time and money, and all our money goes for mass scenes.

NOVICE: What are mass scenes?

COSTUMER: Don't you know? Uprisings, revolutions, wars ... What magnificent productions of war we have. They're very expensive because we use authentic costumes.

NOVICE: Oh, please let me have an authentic costume. A splendid, sparkling, and clean one. How much I've dreamed of such a costume!

COSTUMER: Oh, child ... for heroines we make costumes from muslin. (*Trying to be persuasive*) If you starch it and paste shiny beads on it ...

NOVICE: Oh, no, no! I want a real costume made of real silk that will shimmer when I move. Please, would you give me a real costume?

STAGE MANAGER: Make her a real costume.

COSTUMER: But ... for only one act?

STAGE MANAGER: The costume will stay in the theatre. It will enrich our wardrobe.

COSTUMER: All right, I'll make you a real costume. I still have half of a parachute left over from the war. It's real silk. For wars we provide real silk. I'll make you a beautiful costume out of it. (*Exits.*)

PROMPTER (*entering, soaking wet*): Phew! What damned weather! I'm sopping wet. (*Pulling the script out of his pocket*) Even the script is drenched ... And to top it all off, I left my glasses at home. (*Squinting about*) Is there anyone on stage?

STAGE MANAGER: The stage manager.

PROMPTER: Go tell the director that he has to postpone the rehearsal. The script is soaking wet and I forgot my glasses.

STAGE MANAGER: The director never postpones anything. Once a rehearsal is scheduled, that means it will happen.

PROMPTER: How can there be a rehearsal when the actors don't know their parts, the script is soaked, and I forgot my glasses? It'll be a farce, not a rehearsal.

*Backstage, the director's piercing whistle is heard.*

STAGE MANAGER: The rehearsal's starting.

*One by one the actors drift onto the stage.*

DICTATOR (*in good spirits, having had a drink*): Let's begin, Ladies and Gentlemen. Where's my throne? (*Kicking the stool over to the STAGE MANAGER*) I've told you a hundred times to get me a high-backed chair. How can I look majestic without a high-backed chair?

*The STAGE MANAGER changes the chairs.*

SOUBRETTE (*to the FIRST GUARD, quietly*): I waited for you all night long.

FIRST GUARD: I was busy. I was sick. I couldn't make it.

SOUBRETTE: That's a lie. (*Pointing to the DICTATOR'S WIFE*) You were with her!

FIRST GUARD: That's news to me! Are you jealous again?

SOUBRETTE: I'm not jealous. You're a scoundrel and you have bad breath. When you kiss me it's so disgusting that I cringe.

FIRST GUARD: Then I won't kiss you anymore.

SOUBRETTE: But don't you dare kiss another woman with your stinking lips!

FIRST GUARD: And what if I want to? What if she wants me to?

SOUBRETTE: But I don't want you to. You're mine! And your stinking lips are mine. I won't give you up to her! Just to spite you I won't.

STAGE MANAGER: Listen, everybody! The rehearsal is about to begin.

*From this point on all the actors act in their roles.*

DICTATOR: What is this I hear? My subjects, my faithful subjects, whom I have loved like a father, wanted to revolt against me? Oh! Oh! This breaks the fatherly heart of their ruler! For thirty years I've sat on my throne amongst them, and they are so ungrateful.

JUDGE: O Great Sovereign! Their transgression was short-lived. It lasted only two months. The branches of State and Special Security had convinced them, and now they all wish to be under your fatherly protection. To attest to this, here are the signatures of twenty thousand peasants.

DICTATOR: Only twenty thousand? Why didn't the others sign?

JUDGE: There are no others, Great Sovereign. These are all the subjects who are left in the country.

DICTATOR: Aha! Then everything is in order. My faithful servants have performed well, and I shall reward them. Bring in the criminals that incited my faithful people.

GUARDS *bring in the prisoners*: NOVICE and the ACCUSED. NOVICE *wears the heroine's costume. Her hair flows loosely to her shoulders and is adorned with flowers.*

DICTATOR'S WIFE: My, how young they are. O Sovereign, have mercy on them! Have mercy on their youthful hearts. They committed an error only because they know not how noble you are.

DICTATOR: Oh, my faithful wife! Your heart is too soft. They wanted to ruin my country and take away my throne. Mine! Do you understand? And yours too, of course.

NOVICE: We fought for the freedom of our people.

FIRST GUARD (*out of character*): Who's the new babe? She's quite a dish.

SECOND GUARD (*out of character*): That's the heroine.

FIRST GUARD (*out of character*): I don't care that she's the heroine. She's a dainty morsel, I tell you. The script says I'm supposed to embrace her in a minute. Wait till you see how I'll embrace her.

DICTATOR: You incorrigible criminal! So you admit your guilt?

NOVICE: If loving my people and fighting for their freedom is a crime, then I admit my guilt.

DICTATOR (*to his wife*): My dear wife, do you see? So, she does not repent. She should die. I will not renounce my throne and power just so she can live. She would kill me then.

NOVICE: Set my people free. O Sovereign! Give up your rule over them, and we shall praise you forever.

DICTATOR: You're just saying that. (*Wilfully*) Besides, I don't want to do that; I enjoy being the ruler. For thirty years, renouncing my throne has never crossed my mind. And get this through your head. There is no such thing as "your" people. All the people are mine. They themselves want it that way. They all want to be my faithful subjects. Here are the signatures of twenty thousand peasants to prove it. And you, you rebel? You deserve to die!

DICTATOR'S WIFE: Oh, child, repent. Think of your youth. Life is so beautiful and so short.

NOVICE: No! Life is eternal! I cannot die. This I know. Perhaps I will die, but I know I shall live forever.

FIRST GUARD (*out of character, to the actor next to him*): I hate these modern plays. Just philosophy and more philosophy. Why the hell do we need it! What we should do is eat, drink, and make love ... and perhaps also sing and dance a bit—

DICTATOR'S WIFE: No. I cannot bear to see this flower wilt so sadly. You must be happy and live a long, long time.

STAGE MANAGER: The heroine dies in the first act.

PROMPTER (*emerging from his booth*): Hey, stage manager! Shut up! You don't have any lines.

STAGE MANAGER: I'll be quiet, but the heroine dies in the first act.

PROMPTER (*to the FIRST GUARD*): Why aren't you saying anything? Just now you were supposed to say: "O Lady, allow me." (*Returns to his booth.*)

FIRST GUARD (*falling to his knees*): O beautiful Lady! Allow me to save this flower. Give her to me as a wife, and I shall make her happy.

DICTATOR'S WIFE: Oh, how glad I am. Sovereign, permit her to be happy.

JUDGE: There is no law that states that people are supposed to be happy.

DICTATOR'S WIFE (*falling to her knees next to the FIRST GUARD*): O Sovereign! My great sovereign! I beg you, let her live and be happy.

DICTATOR (*moved*): Oh my faithful Wife! The purity of your heart has moved me, and I am ready to do what rulers never do. I'll try to make her happy. You have moved me ...

(*Searching in his pockets and shouting angrily, out of character*) Costumer! Where's my handkerchief? How will I show the audience that I'm crying if I don't have a handkerchief?

COSTUMER (*running onstage*): What? No handkerchief? I thought I put one in your pocket. Lord! Here, use this rag for the time being.

DICTATOR: You're always forgetting things. It's time you looked for another job.

COSTUMER: Oh, no! Don't say that. I do so love to make things pretty. In the theatre, everything is so beautiful. (*Exits.*)

DICTATOR'S WIFE (*still kneeling, turns to the FIRST GUARD, out of character*): Because of this old fool, I have to kneel on this rough floor. My knees hurt already.

FIRST GUARD: Your poor white knees. I'll kiss them all over tonight.

DICTATOR'S WIFE (*matter-of-factly*): I don't know if that will help any, but I appreciate your tenderness. There's no tenderness in this boring theatre.

DICTATOR: Attention! Let's continue. (*In character*) You have moved me. I agree. Let my knight take the criminal and make her happy. Guard! Set her free.

NOVICE (*stepping forward, to the FIRST GUARD*): Can this really be true? My hands are free from shackles; and life shines before me in all its glory. You've saved me with your love. Is it because you love me? Is it true you love me?

FIRST GUARD: Yes, I love you, O beautiful flower. I will take you away to my castle in the mountains, and we shall be happy.

THE ACCUSED: You are going to betray your people and our cause.

NOVICE: My people? No, I live for them. I will help the cause. We will give away your riches so that people can be happy, won't we, my love?

DICTATOR: What ingratitude! She does not repent and wants to continue weaving her conspiracy. She'll even drag my knight into it. I pardoned her in vain.

FIRST GUARD: I will do everything you wish, my treasure. (*Embraces her tightly for a long time.*)

NOVICE (*tearing herself away and screaming, out of character*): Let me go! Let go! How dare you! He pinched and groped me ... He thought I'd be quiet because of my role. (*Everybody breaks out laughing.*) What? You think this is funny? How dare he paw me! I won't stand for this!

SOUBRETTE: It's obvious you're new here. We all began this way, but in time we got used to it.

NOVICE (*disgusted*): Ugh! Never! I want love. How come you don't understand this? I want beautiful, pure LOVE. (*All laugh again.*)

SOUBRETTE: Don't be silly. You want love! You put on that kind of costume, and you want love? A long-sleeved dress with a train and a high collar, and she wants love! How can you inspire love when no-one can see your body? Show them your legs. (*Swiftly lifts up NOVICE's dress. A murmur of approval is heard in the theatre.*) Do you hear that? Do you hear the response? Now they're satisfied. The play got interesting when they saw your body. Don't be stupid. There isn't anything else. That's why we're acting.

NOVICE: There's nothing else? This is why you sew costumes, paint props, and put on make-up? Just for that? To have your body pinched and pawed? First by one actor, then another, then a third? ... Is there nothing more? ... What kind of fool writes such plays?

STAGE MANAGER: The playwright is in the audience.

NOVICE: Poor audience ... Don't believe him. Women, he's cheating you. Women, save LOVE! Think of yourself, look inside. When were you happy: when your lover pawed your body, or when you strolled side by side somewhere by a river or near a forest and his hand unexpectedly touched of yours and sent a spark through you?

FIRST GUARD: Thanks. A spark is fine at the beginning, but not for a lifetime. You could lose your health that way.

DICTATOR'S WIFE: But she has a point. There must be tenderness. To tell you the truth, I put up with your caresses only because of the tender words you whisper in my ear. Otherwise, I could survive without your embraces. I don't find great pleasure in them.

SOUBRETTE: There must also be faithfulness! I want faithfulness! I put up with your groping only because I need to know that a faithful man is next to me. My husband. One who will support me, who thinks of me ... one who is always beside me, and I am not alone ... If you need my body in exchange, there's nothing I can do. I'll give it to you ... even though you do have such disgusting breath.

DICTATOR'S WIFE: That's true ... I can't understand why you don't brush your teeth.

PROMPTER (*emerging from his booth*): Are you going to chatter much longer? It's nice that you are standing and lounging around while I am folded in half in that little booth. Get to your places and finish the first act.

DICTATOR: I'm dying for a smoke. Let's finish this stupid act. Where's the director? There's no order here!

DICTATOR'S WIFE (*to SOUBRETTE*): They'll never let us say what we think of them.

SOUBRETTE: That's because there's nothing good to say.

*Backstage, the director's whistle is heard. All actors take their places.*

FIRST GUARD (*continuing in his role, advancing with arms outstretched to embrace NOVICE*): I'll do everything you want, my flower.

NOVICE (*backing away*): Don't you dare embrace me. Don't you dare put your shameless hands on my body. And don't breathe on me with your stinking mouth!

PROMPTER: Stop! Could this be in the script? I lost my glasses and can't make heads or tails out of this.

NOVICE: It's in the script. But if it isn't, then I'll change the script! (*To the DICTATOR, in character*) Your Highness! I will not give myself to that kind of love. It would mean living endless years for one man without knowing whether he is worth it. Or having an infinite number of years and again not knowing whether it's worth it. Or speculating on love: turning it into a way of living comfortably and peacefully. It's not worth even one beautiful minute which I have lived through in the struggle for my people. I want to discover myself! To bloom, to shine in all the colours of the rainbow ... (*Out of character*) We have to change the play entirely. It doesn't make any sense.

DICTATOR (*out of character*): That's enough, damn you! You've come here for the first time and already caused disorder. Your ad-libbing has prolonged the rehearsal by two hours! You're supposed to act! Act, understand?! No one is interested in what you feel, and it's even indecent to shout about your feelings onstage. So let's continue. He loves you with an ideal love, while you love your people. Ergo the conflict. I, of course, take advantage of it. And this is what I say. (*In character*) You viper! So you want to take my faithful servant away from me? Under the guise of innocence you

mask your conspiracy against me. You have abused the kindness of my faithful wife. For this you must die. (*To the SECOND GUARD*) Shoot her!

STAGE MANAGER (*matter-of-factly*): Go and stand against the wall. People who are about to be shot go and stand against the wall on their own.

FIRST GUARD (*in character*): I will not allow her to be killed. Get away from her! She's mine!

DICTATOR: So, you're rebelling! Tie him up. We will try him later. Now execute the sentence I have imposed upon this criminal.

NOVICE (*going and standing against the wall*): You may kill me, but you won't kill my people. I believe in humankind. People are good and beautiful. I believe in my people. My people will be victorious. Women, believe in love. It's so beautiful!

PROMPTER: You're making it up again. That's not in the script!

NOVICE: It is, too! Go find your glasses. You may kill me, but I believe in truth and love. They exist! Open your eyes: they do exist! I shall die for truth, love, and freedom.

DICTATOR *gives the signal, and the SECOND GUARD shoots NOVICE. She falls to the ground and lies there until the end of the act. The actors walk around her, ignoring her.*

STAGE MANAGER: The heroine dies in the first act.

PROMPTER: End of act. There's an intermission before the next act.

DICTATOR (*out of character*): Phew! We barely made it to the end of this one. (*To the SECOND GUARD*) Let me have a cigarette.

SECOND GUARD: I'm on my last one.

DICTATOR: Cheapskate. At least let me have a drag.

DICTATOR'S WIFE (*out of character, to the FIRST GUARD*): So, you weren't having tender thoughts when you spoke those tender words to me?

FIRST GUARD: What difference does it make to you?

DICTATOR'S WIFE: It does make a difference. What do I need you for then? Do you think it gives me great pleasure to suffer having you next to me, with your bony knees and cold nose? Phooey! Don't come to me anymore. I want love. She had a point. I need love.

SOUBRETTE (*to the FIRST GUARD*): Give it to him! You're right! And if she doesn't want you, don't come to me either. It's not worth fighting about. Come on, Mariia, you won't regret it. We'll still find love for ourselves. Not all men are like this one here.

STAGE MANAGER: Please clear the stage. I have to sweep it before the next act.

*Everyone exits except NOVICE, the Heroine, who continues lying on the floor, her arms outstretched.*

PROMPTER (*emerging from his booth*): Ow, I barely managed to sit through this act. My poor bones. And God only knows what will happen in the next act.

STAGE MANAGER: It's not important. The audience will think that this is how it's supposed to be. Only we'll have to write on the posters in large letters that it's a fashionable play. No one would dare to admit that he does not like fashionable plays.



## Act Two

*The square in front of the DICTATOR's palace. A triumphal march accompanies the procession of the DICTATOR/KING, QUEEN, and JUDGES. The FIRST GUARD is being led in chains separately by an escort. THE PEOPLE gather across from the throne.*

DICTATOR (*sitting down on the throne*): Here I am.

THE PEOPLE (*running toward him*): Greetings, O Ruler!

DICTATOR: Greetings, my children. Where have you been?

THE PEOPLE: In the mountains.

DICTATOR: What were you doing there?

THE PEOPLE *gesture to show that they were fighting.*

DICTATOR: You were fighting. Did I guess right?

THE PEOPLE (*laughing and running to their places and then running again toward the KING*):  
Greetings, O Ruler!

DICTATOR: Greetings, my children. Where have you been?

THE PEOPLE: Out to sea.

DICTATOR: What were you doing there?

THE PEOPLE *gesture to show that they were fighting.*

DICTATOR: Fighting?!

THE PEOPLE (*laughing and running away and then again returning to the KING*): Greetings, O Ruler!

DICTATOR: Greetings, my children. Where have you been?

THE PEOPLE: In the sky.

DICTATOR: What were you doing there?

THE PEOPLE *gesture to show that they were fighting.*

DICTATOR: You were fighting! (*The PEOPLE laugh and run away.*) Oh, what good children you are. You were fighting and obeying your king. But this scoundrel here wanted to fight against me. Against your kind and generous ruler—your father and teacher! What does he deserve for that?

THE PEOPLE: Death! Give him to us and we will kill him.

FIRST GUARD: I never wanted to fight against you. I only wanted to marry the heroine.

DICTATOR: There was no heroine! She was a criminal, a terrorist. I've ordered all the newspapers to write that she was a terrorist, yet you dare call her a heroine?

FIRST GUARD: At that time the papers did not say she was a terrorist. Besides, she was very pretty. I fell in love with her. It's not a crime to love someone.

DICTATOR'S WIFE: She truly was very pretty. And she had beautiful natural braids, not like us with our moth-eaten wigs. Look, your bald spot is showing in the front.

DICTATOR: Please don't straighten my wig in front of my people. It undermines my authority. (*To the FIRST GUARD*) How could you dare to love her when you knew that I would order the papers to brand her a terrorist? What insolence!

DICTATOR'S WIFE: It was because of her beautiful eyes and her long hair, her braids. Forgive him, Your Majesty. Besides, she's already dead.

WOMAN IN THE CROWD: No, don't forgive him, Your Majesty. We have all cut off our braids. Don't forgive him because of her beautiful braids, because we don't have ours anymore.

FIRST GUARD: Then kill me. She died, and all the beauty in the world died with her. Kill me so that this moment may become beautiful. I shall die so that people will know how beautiful she was. So that people will remember her!

DICTATOR (*to his WIFE*): This is becoming dangerous. He wants to create a legend about her and her beauty. To create another legend! I was so glad that they had forgotten about legends. All they wanted was to eat, paw women, and fight. That heroine ... I shouldn't have had her executed. I should have let her marry him and nag him all day long with her jealous suspicions. Then nobody would have even given her a second thought.

DICTATOR'S WIFE: I begged you to do that. It would have been so noble of you, but you couldn't restrain yourself from giving that order. It would have been so noble and touching.

DICTATOR: That was stupid on your part. I know that your mission is to move the people to tears, because every now and then they should have a good cry. And they must believe that everything noble in the world is concentrated in me. But you, and now this lovesick fool too, have made a noble martyr out of her. That was stupid. (*Aloud*) Judges, what do our laws say about those who fall in love with terrorists?

JUDGE: Majesty, Article Fifty-Seven, Paragraph Eleven, states that anyone who speaks well of terrorists is also a terrorist, and should also die. The accused should die.

FIRST GUARD: But I tell you that the newspapers hadn't written yet that she was a terrorist. There's no way I could have known!

DICTATOR (*angrily*): Silence! That's casuistry and excuses. You should have known that once she rebelled against me, she was a terrorist ... You are my knight and courtier, and yet you didn't know? It is simply indecent of you to say so in my presence. You will die. Isn't that right, my People?

THE PEOPLE *remain silent.*

DICTATOR (*to his wife*): They are silent. See? They already dare to remain silent. That's bad. Where are my guards? Come here, my faithful servants! Defend me, because without me you are done for. I'll give each of you a hundred gold coins and a bottle of wine. Defend me!

SOUBRETTE (*rushing out from the crowd and covering the FIRST GUARD with a white cloth*): Your Highness, I have covered him with the white cloth of innocence. I am saving him from death. He is mine!

DICTATOR: What? You want to save him? But he loves another. He does not love you.

SOUBRETTE: So be it! I would be sorry if he died.

DICTATOR: If I listened to every woman's grievance, there would be a fine state of affairs in my domain with no order! The hearts of women are too soft.

DICTATOR'S WIFE: Try listening to us just this once. After all, there is no order in your domain in any case. You find reasons to kill people all the time. Try listening to us for a change.

DICTATOR: That makes no sense. She will be unhappy herself because of this.

SOUBRETTE: But who can guarantee that I'll be happy without it? Is there anyone, anywhere who is happy? (*To the audience*) Is there at least one person among you who is happy? (*To the PEOPLE*) Or perhaps among you? You see? There are no happy people. No one is concerned about making them happy ... and least of all themselves.

DICTATOR: That's not true. I'll make them happy. Day and night I labour at making them happy ... at some point in the future, of course. No one can be happy right now. Everyone can be happy only at some later date.

DICTATOR'S WIFE: To tell the truth, I don't know why people cannot be made happy right away.

DICTATOR: Oh, at least you be quiet! You keep blithering next to my ear at such an important moment! Don't you see that an uprising is about to begin? The people are silent, but they are thinking. Nothing can be more frightening. I have to throw them something that will confound them. They should begin to envy each other, to quarrel, and to fight.

*The JESTER appears from behind the curtain.*

COSTUMER (*running out after the JESTER with a costume in hand*): Where are you going?! Onstage without a costume?!

JESTER: So what? I'm late as it is. Besides, I'm fed up with your costume.

COSTUMER: You are fed up with this beautiful, wonderful costume?! That's half black and half red?! And with real silver bells?! How could anyone be fed up with such a costume?

JESTER: But I am fed up. I was in the mountains. I had gotten away from this theatre. It's so beautiful up there. The sun warmed my body, my muscles relaxed, my heart rejoiced in that beauty. I'm sorry that I came back here to this performance. I'll just play my part, but I won't put on any make-up. (*Puts on his costume.*)

COSTUMER: My God, in all the years I've been in the theatre this has never happened. No make-up?!

JESTER (*leaping out to the centre of the stage, his silver bells ringing; to the DICTATOR*): What's wrong, pal? Are you unhappy for some reason?

DICTATOR: Well, it's a good thing you showed up. You must save my realm. Fools always save realms. Entertain the people while I decide what to do.

JESTER: What do you have to decide? To kill someone?

DICTATOR: I need to have the First Guard dead, but in a way that he is not killed.

*JESTER sings, whistles, and spins about.*

JESTER (*to the KING, without anyone noticing*): I know what you should do.

DICTATOR: What?

JESTER: Order a tournament to be held. Everyone will watch the contest and forget about everything else. Order a tournament, and give me a gold coin for my suggestion.

DICTATOR: I'll give you two gold coins. Even three. (*Aloud to the PEOPLE, who have become restless in the meantime, shifting their weight from one foot to the other and murmuring in discontent*) My children! As you can see, this criminal should die. You begged me for his death. Yes, yes, you begged me. But I am noble and generous. The entreaties of my faithful wife have moved me, and the tears of this innocent soubrette have brought tears to my own eyes. (*Pulls a handkerchief out of his pocket, sees that it is a rag, and quickly puts it back in his pocket.*) Therefore, let fate alone decide if he is

guilty. My knights will challenge him to fencing duels, and I am graciously allowing all of you to watch this tournament.

THE PEOPLE: What luck! What joy! Glory to our sovereign! Glory to our wise, to our generous—

DICTATOR: Take your places! Everyone find a good place to see this exciting spectacle well. Everyone must choose a place.

THE PEOPLE *rush to grab chairs and carry them to the front, snatching them from one another, fighting and shoving.* THE GUARDS *try to force them to take their places, but the people don't notice, engaged as they are in fighting with one another.*

DICTATOR (*dancing on the throne*): Ooh-la-la! Now everything is fine. They're fighting amongst themselves and want to see a spectacle. I've given them this spectacle. The danger has passed. (*Calling the SECOND GUARD*) You will fight with him and kill him. Understand? You have to kill him.

*The SECOND GUARD and the FIRST GUARD take their swords, the music begins playing, and the combatants walk away from each other and take their positions.*

QUEEN (*throwing a handkerchief between them*): The contest has begun.

*The FIRST GUARD and SECOND GUARD begin duelling.*

A MOTHER (*entering with her SON*): See, Son, this is what a stage looks like. And this is the ruler. Don't be afraid of his beard. It's glued on. Oh! See, I've pulled his beard off!

DICTATOR: Please, madam, you're ruining the whole design for us. The audience is going to complain. (*Reattaching his beard*) There's absolutely no order here!

MOTHER: There's no need to get upset. I'm also from the audience. But my son was frightened by your beard, so I wanted him to see it up close.

FIRST GUARD: Please, madam, step aside a little. I have to fight, and I'm about to fall down dead.

MOTHER: Don't be afraid, Son. They're only acting; they're not fighting for real.

STAGE MANAGER: We are fighting for real! We fight and die for real. Everyone dies for real.

FIRST GUARD: Is that true? I didn't know that. I've been deceived! It doesn't say anywhere in our union contract that we have to die for real.

MOTHER: What? Does that mean my son will die too?

STAGE MANAGER: Even he. He will fight and die.

MOTHER: No, this can't be! Death is somewhere out there, I know ... but my son—

STAGE MANAGER: I'm certain. I've worked in this theatre since the beginning. Everyone has fought and died. Mostly in the second act. But there were some who lasted until the fifth act ... Not many, but some did.

MOTHER: In that case I don't want to have anything to do with this! Close this theatre! Where's the director? He must close this theatre! I don't want this kind of theatre to exist! Oh, they're fighting again! Son, come to me! ...

*The SON isn't listening. Engrossed in the duel, he runs after the actors and imitates their every move with a stick he is holding.*

SON: Mommy, this is fun! When I grow up, I will fight too.

STAGE MANAGER: You've been fighting for three minutes already. It's time someone got killed. The director doesn't like long scenes.

SECOND GUARD: Now you are going to die, you scoundrel! (*Lunges with his sword, killing the SON.*)

SON (*falling*): Oh, Mommy! I ... I haven't even seen anything yet! (*Dies.*)

MOTHER: What? What is going on? Why is he on the ground?

STAGE MANAGER: Your son has died. He died by accident, in the second act. This does happen sometimes.

MOTHER: But he's going to get up, isn't he? This is a theatre, isn't it? This is only a play, isn't it?

STAGE MANAGER: We die for real.

MOTHER: What? This can't be! My son ... He hasn't lived yet! You heard him say yourself he hasn't seen anything yet. No, he has to get up. I don't believe this is happening.

STAGE MANAGER: Then don't believe it. That is all you have left.

MOTHER: Where's the director? Call the director. Change the play!

STAGE MANAGER: The director is busy. Your son will be carried out to him. (*The STAGEHANDS start to take the SON, but the MOTHER won't let them.*)

COSTUMER: Wait! Hold on! I'll fix him up so he'll look so handsome! (*Leans over the boy.*)

DICTATOR: Silence! I'm supposed to be delivering my lines now! Because of you, the audience wasn't paying attention and missed them. (*In character*) Evil has thus been punished. You see, fate decides unerringly. (*To the FIRST GUARD*) Why are you still standing? Down! You're already dead. The scoundrel has fallen.

FIRST GUARD: No! I'm alive. I don't want to fall down. The pageboy died, a beautiful pageboy, but I'm alive. And I don't want to die.

DICTATOR (*to the SECOND GUARD*): Kill him. He must die. Evil should perish forever. It says so in the script.

FIRST GUARD: This is chicanery. You die here for real. I don't perform like that. It's only the second act.

DICTATOR: That's what's written in the play. Only the jester and I survive to the fifth act. You die in the second. According to the script ... you're a positive character. And those die early.

FIRST GUARD: But I'm only a positive character in the play. In reality, I'm dissolute, a liar, and a thief. I'm going to live! I don't give a damn about your theatre! I quit!

STAGE MANAGER: You can't quit until the curtain falls.

FIRST GUARD: To hell with your rules! I'll run away! (*Rushes backstage.*)

DICTATOR (*out of character*): Where's the director? I can't perform in a theatre where there's no order. All the lines are mixed up, and the prompter's not here.

PROMPTER (*crawling out of his booth*): Yes I am! Right here, in the booth. But the script got soaked and I can't make out the letters. Here, look. Everything's smudged. The devil himself couldn't make heads or tails of them.

COSTUMER (*stepping away from the SON*): See how nice he looks? (*Tenderly*) Like a little angel.

MOTHER: He was a little angel. Oh, child, what will I do without you?

COSTUMER: You'll take his picture and show everyone you know what a nice son you had. So beautiful, like a young page.

MOTHER: But he really was a beautiful young page.

COSTUMER: Yes, he was. He was. See for yourself what a fine costume I've dressed him in. You can tell at once that he must have been a page.

*The STAGEHANDS carry the SON out. The MOTHER and the COSTUMER exit after them.*

DICTATOR: Thank God it's quiet. Now I'll deliver my lines again. Prompter, supply me with my lines. The audience is getting restless.

PROMPTER: I'm telling you that everything is smudged. Why don't you speak from the heart?

DICTATOR: From the heart. (*Standing up on the throne*) Then I'll tell you I'm sick of this farce. Completely sick of it. I can't perform without order. I demand we have order. Otherwise I'll quit and leave.

*Offstage the director's whistle is heard. STAGEHANDS carry in the FIRST GUARD and lay him down at the designated place, extending his arms.*

STAGE MANAGER: Everything is in order now. Deliver your lines.

DICTATOR (*in character*): Evil has thus been punished. As you can see, fate has decided unerringly. The scoundrel has fallen. (*To the STAGEHANDS*) Where did he fall?

A STAGEHAND: Offstage.

DICTATOR (*to the audience*): See, even though he was offstage, he was punished nevertheless. The director understands order. Everything progresses in an orderly manner; in this theatre, the finest theatre in the universe.

PROMPTER: I think you skipped a whole page of monologue.

DICTATOR (*out of character*): That doesn't matter. Who listens to someone else's monologues anyway? Everyone has his own. All that matters is that the audience is quiet and that evil has been punished.

PROMPTER: The audience is always quiet.

DICTATOR (*in character*): Carry the traitor out into the square and leave him on display for three days. Let our faithful people see how I punish evil.

STAGE MANAGER (*entering from offstage and handing the PROMPTER his glasses and a script*): These glasses and this script are from the director. Now the act can proceed properly.

PROMPTER: But meanwhile they've killed a little boy by mistake. What a mess!

STAGE MANAGER: That wasn't a mistake. The author added an interlude. Everything is going according to plan. Everything has its reasons.

PROMPTER: To hell with interludes like that on stage. The audience already knows what happened without it. Every mother knows that her son will be killed.

WOMAN IN THE AUDIENCE: No, we don't know that. We don't want our sons to be killed. We want them to live a long and happy life.

DICTATOR: What? The audience is beginning to speak? And even women? That's rebellion! A women's rebellion! On stage they want to see happiness. And now they want happiness in the audience. This is dangerous! This is scary! Jester! Where's my jester? What should we do? Come up with something. We're going to perish. Women want a happy life!

JESTER: Take them to the mountains. There's such beauty there. One can be happy there!

DICTATOR: What? To the mountains? Beauty? Idiot! Hey, stagehands, let's have some music! Put some dance music on. Everyone dance! Grab the women and dance! Otherwise, if the women rebel we'll have to work. Do you understand? You'll all have to work for happiness. Not in the theatre, not during the play, but in real life! And they'll forbid us to fight. Grab them! Whirl them around, don't let them think. Make them happy. Shout that you are making them happy. (*Grabs the SOUBRETTE and dances with her.*) See how happy you are! You're dancing with the sovereign himself.

*Wild music plays as couples spin madly around the stage, exclaiming and gasping. The swirling couples become a blur.*

## Act Three

*A farm in the mountains. Fully visible, majestic mountains grow from the sun's rays. A WOMAN walks out of the house with a watering can and waters the flowers. She stops and looks at the mountains.*

WOMAN: Are you glowing again? Hey! Mountains! Are you glowing again? How did you know that I love to watch you when you glow? Why are you silent? Don't you care? It's all right. I'm glad that you're so beautiful!

NOVICE (*entering wearing a dress with green and black stains*): Good evening. (*Looking around*) It's so beautiful here. I dreamed about this kind of beauty when I was still alive.

WOMAN: You mean you're dead?

NOVICE: I died back in the first act. I'm the heroine.

WOMAN: That's all right. Plays are staged more than once. But now we die only when we desire even greater beauty.

NOVICE: Then maybe I could stay here with you? The director summoned me again, but the theatre is so dark and filthy ... Now that I've seen this beauty, I don't want to go back there.

WOMAN: Then stay with us. But take that dress off. It's filthy.

NOVICE: I don't have another one. It was nice when I first put it on.

WOMAN (*bringing a pile of costumes from the house*): Pick out something you like. We have plenty of clothes. As a matter of fact, we have too many costumes. Pick one.

NOVICE: But ... I don't know what role you'll give me.

WOMAN: Whichever one you wish. Think about which role you'd like.

NOVICE: Well, to be honest ... I'd like to teach people.

WOMAN (*laughing*): All new actors want to teach people, and each one starts this way ... What costume do you want to teach people in?

NOVICE: I don't know. Give me some advice.

WOMAN: It should be something special. Something that no one has ever seen. Here, take the Princess of Atlantis costume. No one has worn it for a long time, and it will look as good as new.

NOVICE: Oh, how beautiful! (*Changes into it.*) You know, now I'm certain that I'll be able to teach people.

WOMAN (*laughing*): And what do you want to teach them?

NOVICE: I want to teach them to be happy.

WOMAN: Then take off that costume. No one will feel happy when you're wearing such a lovely costume. Everyone will want one like it.

NOVICE: Then we'll make them some just like it ... But where are all your other actors?

WOMAN: They'll be here soon. We have many actors here ... They all choose and create their own roles ... Just like you.

*The echo of wild music, noise, laughter, and shouts reaches the stage. All the couples from Act Two burst whirling wildly onto the stage. Suddenly the music stops, and the couples, losing its pull, fall to the ground. Slowly they recover, rise, and look around.*

SECOND GUARD (*to a WOMAN IN THE CROWD*): What was that? Who are you?

WOMAN IN THE CROWD: It was music. You said that you would make me happy ... My head is still spinning and my legs are still shaking.

SECOND GUARD: How could I have said that I would make you happy, when I myself have never been happy?!

WOMAN: But you said—

SECOND GUARD: That's ridiculous. Women's fantasies. The sovereign commanded that I promise you that. (*Looking her over*) And you thought you'd be happy? In that costume? Don't make me laugh! (*Walks away from her.*)

DICTATOR (*to the SOUBRETTE, who has fallen into his arms*): Madam! Wake up. You've squashed my arm and it's becoming numb. I think you must weigh two hundred pounds.

SOUBRETTE: Stop grumbling. I'm totally fed up with your grumbling. And take off that ridiculous costume. How long are you going to play sovereign?

*She exits. All the couples separate, unsatisfied, irritated, and ready for an argument.*

DICTATOR: I hate those snobs and their pretenses. (*To NOVICE*) You must be the local ruler. Allow me to introduce myself. I'm the sovereign, the hero, and generally the candidate for the leading roles.

NOVICE: No, I'm only an actor. That lady over there is the owner of the theatre.

DICTATOR: So, this is only a costume? Hmm ... this is really strange. Are these stars made from real diamonds?

NOVICE: No, they're from real stars.

DICTATOR: Strange ... very strange. (*Turning to the WOMAN*) Madam, I am the King, the hero, and generally the candidate for the leading roles. What can you offer me?

WOMAN: I have nothing for you. (*Taking the leaf of a flower and shouting into it, as if into a microphone*) Listen, everybody! I'm going to tell you the new rules for performing in this theatre.

*Everyone falls silent.*

WOMAN: We do not have a director or a costumer. We all select our own roles and costumes ... Furthermore, we perform without any wars, without money, and without alcohol. That's all. The first act will begin right away.

*Everyone is confused and dejected and remains silent.*

WOMAN IN THE CROWD: But what will we eat?

WOMAN: Whatever you wish. There are all kinds of food over there on the table. The trees are full of fruit, and the cows are full of milk.

DICTATOR: And what is this idiotic play called?

WOMAN: It's called "We Will Be Happy." Women have all the leading roles.

DICTATOR'S WIFE: And can we choose our own costumes?

WOMAN: Yes. What would you like to be?



DICTIONATOR'S WIFE: I don't know ... I like tenderness ... I'd like to be loved and be taken care of by someone.

WOMAN: I'll give you a nineteenth-century costume. But find your own partner. The best place to search is on a chicken farm. Those who look after chicks usually have kind hearts and know how to use tender words. Find one.

SOUBRETTE: I want faithfulness. I want a man who would be mine alone and never glance at anyone else.

WOMAN: Pick a blind man then. But you'll have to make your own costume. No one has ever played a faithful role before.

DICTIONATOR: Listen, couldn't we have ... at least ... some beer?

DICTIONATOR'S WIFE: My, how prosaic! Don't you have any interest in feelings?

DICTIONATOR (*perturbed*): What feelings can there be without vodka?

FIRST GUARD: And I want to knead a body. A woman's body. I can't be happy without that.

WOMAN: Then you need Casanova's costume. But I don't know whether you'll find a partner for yourself here. (*Speaking into her leaf-microphone*) Hey, Ladies! He wants to keep touching a body. Which one of you needs this in order to be happy? He needs a partner.

ALL THE WOMEN: No, no time for that. We're trying on our costumes.

COSTUMER (*bashfully*): I'd like to try ... I've always embellished others, but I've never had time for myself ... Maybe it is pleasurable after all. I've read wonderful plays about it ... I'm a bit old, but if I dress up in a beautiful costume—

FIRST GUARD (*terrified*): No, no, don't bother! Don't bother! No costume will help in your case. I refuse. I'll find myself some other type of happiness.

MOTHER (*enters, looking distraught*): I'm looking for my son. I've looked everywhere for him. Did you see him? They killed him by mistake, and then said that it was an interlude.

WOMAN: He may be here with us. There are children playing in the fields over there behind the orchard. Look for him there.

*As the MOTHER exits, she runs into the STAGE MANAGER.*

STAGE MANAGER: Oh, there are completely new props. But we have already used them before. I have to sweep the stage. (*Sweeps away the flowers and the grass.*)

NOVICE: Oh, he'll sweep away all our beauty!

WOMAN: Stop! Stop! You don't have to sweep here. Look at the cloud you've raised.

STAGE MANAGER: The cloud is from the dust. I'll sweep it up, and there won't be any cloud.

WOMAN: No. We do things differently here. (*Throws to the ground a child's reed pipe, which begins playing, and all the dust and dry leaves move toward it as if drawn in by air.*) See, there's no need for your broom.

STAGE MANAGER: If you don't need my broom, then you don't need me. What am I without a broom?

NOVICE: And why do you say that? Here, take a new costume. Which one would you like? Would you like to be a sage?

STAGE MANAGER: I want to sweep the stage with a broom.

NOVICE: And do you want to be in the new play?

STAGE MANAGER: No. What new plays could there be? Only women's concoctions. The stage has to be swept with a broom. Otherwise I might as well die.

WOMAN: Then go over there to that hammock and die for the time being. You're in our way.

STAGE MANAGER: If there's no director, there's no point. (*Climbs into the hammock and dies.*)

DICTATOR: What role will you give me?

WOMAN: Which one would you like? What did you wish to be?

DICTATOR (*bashfully*): I ... I ... always wanted to feed female turkeys. You know, grate some cheese, blend it with yarrow, or grind some nuts. And then you call them: too-too-too! And they come running, going too-too-too, too-too-too!

WOMAN: You need a Bavarian farmer's costume and an apron. But you'll have to find the turkeys yourself.

FIRST GUARD (*to the DICTATOR*): What's this you've made up? What apron? What turkeys? Don't you see that we were doomed? Now we're doomed for sure. We have perished! Women have everything without us, and all we have left is old female costumers.

DICTATOR (*sighing*): If there's no war or vodka, then I'll at least take the turkeys. Too-too-too ... You can see she has all the power.

FIRST GUARD: But where from? Where did she get such power?

DICTATOR: I don't know. Ask her.

FIRST GUARD (*to NOVICE*): Tell us, O Sovereign, where did your servant get such power?

NOVICE: She's not a servant. She's our hostess. (*Looking closer*) I've seen you somewhere before ... I can't remember where. Since my death I have had such a bad memory for faces. Where have we met?

FIRST GUARD: I don't know. Until now I never had the good fortune of meeting you. I never would have forgotten your face. You're so beautiful. (*Goes toward her.*)

NOVICE: No, no! Stay away from me ... You have bad breath.

JESTER (*running down from the mountain*): So, didn't I tell you that we should go up into the mountains? It's so beautiful here, isn't it? (*Seeing NOVICE and stopping frozen in his tracks.*) So, you're the one? I didn't believe that women like you existed. I dreamed about someone like you and was afraid to dream. But you exist! Right here. In front of me. What are you doing here?

NOVICE: I want to make people happy.

JESTER: You've already made me happy. How wonderful that you exist. Why didn't I ever see you before?

NOVICE: Because I died in the first act.

JESTER: Let's leave everyone for a minute. Let's go, I'll show you how the mountains glow.

*Together they go slowly up into the mountains.*

FIRST GUARD (*enviously*): I saw that. It'll probably end up with him embracing her. I am sure of that. Yet she went with him.

DICTATOR: Maybe it's because he brushes his teeth?

FIRST GUARD: No, this can't go on. We'll really perish. We have to think of something. (*Going up to the WOMAN*) Tell me: where did you get such power? You picked up a leaf, and it became a microphone. You threw down a reed pipe, and it sucked in the cloud of dust. What is this? New technology?

WOMAN: Yes, it's new technology. Everything for a beautiful and joyous life. Everything for happiness. Absolutely new technology.

FIRST GUARD: How do you do it? Is it electric or atomic power? Did you push a button or flip a switch?

WOMAN: Neither. It's because I'm a woman. A woman can do anything. Anything in the world. So we have decided to become happy. (*To the audience*) We decided to become happy, didn't we? And that which you men have wasted on wars, we took to create our happiness.

FIRST GUARD: And every woman can do anything?

WOMAN: Every woman.

FIRST GUARD: Can she make a rifle, and a tank, and a bomb?

WOMAN: Anything. Only now we don't want weapons. We are tired of grieving and worrying about children. So we said: enough! And we changed everything. We want happiness.

MOTHER (*running in, radiant with joy, and leading her SON by the hand*): I found him! I found him! He's with me again. My son! My son! My—

WOMAN (*kind-heartedly*): See? I told you. Now choose a costume for yourself and for him.

MOTHER (*walking around all the actors, who are dancing ecstatically in their new costumes*): In a moment I'll pick out the finest costume for you, Son.

FIRST GUARD (*following her*): Dress him in Apollo's costume. He's beautiful, like a young god. Dress him up like a young Apollo.

MOTHER (*enraptured*): He truly is like a young god!

FIRST GUARD (*helping her*): This will be so exquisite. There. Now put a flower in his hair and a quiver in his hands.

MOTHER: A quiver?! That's dangerous. He might stab himself with an arrow.

FIRST GUARD: It's alright. We'll teach him how to use it properly. But he will be the ruler. You see, here no one has weapons. Only he will have weapons. Only he shall have power. Your son, so beautiful like a young god.

MOTHER (*like an echo*): A young god.

FIRST GUARD: Was that not why you gave birth to him, so that he would rule the entire world? Who else deserves to rule the entire world if not your son? Make him a quiver.

MOTHER: I would like him to rule the world ... As long as he doesn't prick his hands ... Perhaps I should make him a quiver from this lily.

FIRST GUARD: Yes, from this lily, as white as his hands. And instead of an arrow put in this rose. It's quite safe. Like this. Here, Junior. Shoot!

SON: I'll shoot the arrow straight up into the sky, to the sun. (*Shoots the arrow. It flies toward NOVICE, who is going up into the mountains with the JESTER, and pierces her heart. NOVICE sways and falls.*)

STAGE MANAGER (*jumping up from the hammock, in a thunderous voice*): Everything is in order now. The heroine died in the first act.

MOTHER: How well he managed to hit the target! (*Kisses her son.*) My little hero!

FIRST GUARD (*to the WOMAN*): What was that you said, madam? That women do not want war or weapons?

WOMAN: Never mind. I'm a woman. I will start everything from the beginning. Heroine, arise. We will start everything from the beginning, because we decided to be happy. (*NOVICE slowly rises.*) See? she is already getting up. (*To the audience*) Ladies and Gentlemen, now we will decide to be happy, won't we? And we will be. We'll start the play from the beginning.

NOVICE (*looking over her dress*): But I'll need a new costume! This one has gotten dirty. (*To the audience*) You can't perform in this theatre without getting a bit dirty! But changing costumes, improving the decorations, and performing everything from the beginning.

*(Offstage the director's whistle is blown.) Do you hear that? (Takes the JESTER by the hand and starts going slowly down the slope.) We have to go down again, to you, and perform everything from the beginning.*

*Everyone on stage turns to face NOVICE and, waiting, watches as she descends slowly. The curtain also falls slowly.*

*Translated by Charles A. Stek*

# Eaghor G. Kostetzky

Eaghor G. Kostetzky (Ihor Kostetsky, né Ihor Merzliakov) was born in Kyiv in 1913. He studied acting in Leningrad and Moscow and worked as an actor in Russia's Ural region. After the Second World War he lived as a political refugee in what became West Germany. He died there, in Schwaikheim, in 1983.

Kostetzky was sensitive to the fact that many important works of world literature had not been translated into Ukrainian, and he made deliberate attempts at filling that void. His literary translations into Ukrainian, primarily from German and English (Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Stefan George, Rabindranath Tagore, and Novalis) were published under his own imprint, *Na hori* (On the Mountain), in Munich. One of Kostetzky's major contributions is the first complete Ukrainian translation of Shakespeare's sonnets (1958). He was married to the German poet Elisabeth Kottmeier, with whom he also translated many Ukrainian and Russian literary works into German. In addition, he edited *Ukraina i svit* (Ukraine and the World), a magazine published in Hannover, and translated Ukrainian poetry into Russian. His own plays and essays have been translated into Bengali, Belarusian, Dutch, English, German, Italian, and Polish.

Kostetzky may be considered the first Ukrainian postmodernist writer. His first literary efforts were published in the postwar period. His short stories exhibit a combination of expressionism and surrealism and the strong literary influence of a fellow Ukrainian, Nikolai Gogol (Mykola Hohol). His unique brand of humour, parody, and unusual syntax attracted a select circle of émigré readers.

As a playwright, Kostetzky was influenced by German expressionist drama, particularly the works of Georg Kaiser and Carl Sternheim.<sup>1</sup> In his plays he playfully uses unusual words, phrases, syntax, and dialogue to reinforce his theme of the lack of communication among people—a theme that Eugène Ionesco and Harold Pinter used extensively several years later. Kostetzky's characters may seem ordinary, but they are unique individuals. He often parodies various European political systems and movements; this is especially evident in his play *Blyzniata shche zustrinut'sia* (The Twins Shall Meet Again, 1947), which was published together with *Spokusy nesviatoho Antona* (Temptations of Unholy Anthony) and *Diistvo pro velyku liudynu* (A Play about a Great Man) in his collection *Teatr pered tvoïm porohom* (Theatre at Your Threshold, 1963).

In the 1970s Kostetzky switched to writing in German and wrote such German radio plays as *Death of the Cardinal*, *The Party of Real People*, *Letitia*, *Judas or Blasphemy*, and *The Nuns*, which was also staged in Dutch in the Netherlands in 1967.

## Selected Works by Kostetzky

*Opovidannia pro peremozhstiv*. N.p., 1946.

*Sovetskaia teatralnaia politika i sistema Stanislavskogo*. Munich: Institute for the Study of the USSR, 1956.

*Teatr pered tvoïm porohom: Try p'iesy*. Munich: Na hori, 1963.

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<sup>1</sup> He confirmed this in a letter that he wrote to me on 12 May 1968.

*Ihor Kostets'kyi: Zbirnyk do 50-richchia.* Munich: Na hori, 1964.

*Die Nonnen.* Vienna: Universal Edition, 1966.

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“Blyzniata shche zustrinut'sia: Vystava v maskakh.” In *Blyzniata shche zustrinut'sia: Antolohiia dramaturhii ukrains'koï diiaspory*, 189–251. Ed. Larysa Zales'ka Onyshkevych. Kyiv and Lviv: Chas, 1997.

*Tobi nalezhyt' tsilyi svit: Vybrani tvory.* Ed. Marko Robert Stekh [Stech]. Kyiv: Krytyka, 2005. [A selection of Kostetzky's works and Stekh's essays about the writer and his style.]

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Pavlychko, Solomiia. “Nihilistychnyi modernizm Kostets'koho.” In her *Dyskurs modernizmu v ukrains'kii literaturi*, 301–41. Kyiv: Lybid', 1997.

Shevchuk, Hryhorii [George Y. Shevelov]. “Pravo na eksperyment i ioho mezhi.” *Ukrains'ka trubyna* (Munich), 16 February 1947.

## Structure and Time in *A Play about a Great Man*

*A Play about a Great Man* (1948) represents Kostetzky the playwright at his best. A dominant characteristic of the writer's style is his use of intertextuality, whether in a serious or parodied version, as well as of various literary forms. With a dose of playfulness, together they make up his kaleidoscopic structure, all very much a part of the early postmodernist style. Subtitled “A Mystery,” it has three acts, called “days,” which are separated by two interludes written in the style of Ukrainian Baroque drama. The play's structure copies that of a “crown of sonnets,” with the last words in each scene beginning the next scene. The final words in the play also repeat its first words, thus returning to the point of departure.

One may well ask whether the title of the play is meant to be ironic or not. That Kostetzky begins and ends the play with the same words—“Who are you?”—suggests the work is a philosophical one. Yet the tone is ironic throughout. Categorizing this play as a “mystery,” also represents a flirtation with the evasive answer to the leitmotif, thus stressing the issue of finding truth about oneself. The question “Who are you?” and the varied experiences of the protagonist, Maximus, and his final acceptance of his place in life allow us to infer that the play deals with self-education. Indeed, *A Play about a Great Man* is similar to a *Bildungsroman*.

The play also parodies the literary romance. Maximus's secret desire leads him to embark on a quest in which he faces various conflicts and even the threat of death. In the end, however, he discovers the truth about himself and about life. So do the adventurers at the top of the mountain. As in the romance, the adventures and the discovery all take place in three days.

The discovery deals with the question "Who are you?" The answer is: we are criminals or evildoers ("zlochynsi" in Ukrainian). The respondents are criminals in more than one sense. They not only are lawbreakers, but dare to enjoy that which is not commonplace, the "crimes" of total freedom and nonconformity. Here Kostetzky blends the obvious use of irony with comedy to present a disruption of the natural flow of events: a postal clerk is inspired to pursue a grand ambition. At the end of the play he resumes the routine, "natural," order of his life on his own initiative, with no special self-sacrifice. The play's title directs us where to look for the answer to the provocative question with which the play begins.

The first scene gives the impression that the play belongs to the theatre of the absurd. It seems that there is no purpose in life, no harmony in the surrounding environment. But this is not entirely true. In the end society is reorganized, and this change brings hope for the future. The play also contains typical elements of immediate post-World War II literature, especially in its depiction of shallow yet superhuman pretenses and personality cults. The spinelessness of political parties and the meaninglessness of their platforms is underlined by the instant transfer of their supporters' loyalty from one side to the other.

The play is structured using not only medieval but also classical literary forms. Kostetzky employs many elements found in the fifth-century BC comedies of Aristophanes. The latter also begin with an absurd initial act and a proclamation of dissatisfaction with the existing order that leads to the protagonist's strange actions. In Aristophanes' plays a chorus usually states the problem, and the protagonist gives his reply or argument in reference to the conflict, *agon*. Kostetzky's characters have their classical counterparts in Aristophanes: Maximus is the *alazon*, who claims qualities that are not rightly his; the "criminals" are *homolochoi*—buffoons or hangers-on; Bednarsky is a *poneiros*, an ingenuous person admiring himself, as is Valentyna; and Zvenybudlo (whose name literally means "Ringling Awakener") is a *spoudaios*, an earnest visionary, often detached from reality and not without comical traits.

Kostetzky also incorporates a medieval Palestrina song, Baroque interludes, and modern film clips, music, and masks. This pastiche of stylistic and structural elements underscores the timelessness of the problem he presents: the individual's personal quest for self and freedom. Through repetition and the crown-of-sonnets structure, the play's leitmotif—"Who are you?"—is emphasized. This rhetorical question also underlines humanity's existentialist quest.

This quest, in turn, is connected to *time* and its mystery. The three acts are called "days," but they do not seem to be contiguous. The time that passes between them serves as the catalyst for Maximus to feel dissatisfied with his old life. The scenes in days one and three are only a few hours apart; in day two, months and then years pass between the scenes. The duration of the time that passes is relative to events. For Maximus it seems to slow down whenever he is intensely involved in something. The unusual distribution of time in the three days, together with flashbacks, creates a stream-of-consciousness effect. Time is also presented as a deterrent to the quest for self. Even the moon, a symbol of time, complains, saying that time should slow down. Zvenybudlo cautions people about the real meaning of time and about the need to be free of an awareness of time passing, because to him the greatest human goal is freedom.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In a letter that Kostetzky wrote to me on 26 April 1973, he stated that Zvenybudlo considers the pursuit of power to

A *famille d'esprit* exists between Kostetzky's plays and those of Eugene Ionesco, which appeared somewhat later. Both authors imply that there is an opportunity to begin again (as does Liudmyla Kovalenko in *The Heroine Dies in the First Act*). Their stress on renewal and their flirtation with illusion and reality, which may also be found in the works of many other immediate postwar authors, is an expression of hope derived from living through the wartime devastation of Europe.

Kostetzky's unique treatment of time may also be an unconscious comment on the war years and their consequences. Day one, subtitled "A Battle for Time," reflects this probability. There time also becomes a catalyst for the protagonist's decision to make something of his remaining life. Two superimposed temporal planes are presented in the play: one progressive (with speed being relative to the events), the other both progressive and regressive, thus allowing for the last scene to return to the first one. The two planes finally unite, with the present becoming the past and vice versa. This manner of presenting and experiencing time is tied to subjective experiences and treats time as atemporal, cyclical, and relative. The characters demonstrate that one can begin life anew, especially if one has attained the essentials for "greatness," that is, self-expression and individuality.<sup>3</sup>

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be senseless: he wants time to stop so that he can simply be, simply exist aimlessly.

<sup>3</sup> Kostetzky wanted each of his characters to be unique. In this regard, he felt that Valentyna was most successful. He considered a man to be imperfect, "a geometrical creation stopped half-way, a triangle, while a woman is a full, complete, autarchic being, a complete circle. (In this case I am of the same opinion as Liudmyla Kovalenko.) ... [Valentyna] is a perfect circle, a world in herself, in the centre of which everything is in such perfect harmony that there are no other needs that have to be satisfied. Her need is to act on the outside, for other people, and not for herself or in herself" (Kostetzky's letter to me, 26 April 1973).



# *A Play about a Great Man*

## A Mystery

(1948)

### CHARACTERS

MAXIMUS

MAXIMUS'S WIFE

BEDNARSKY

BLEKHMEN

BARAN-SOKIL (*literally "Ram-Falcon"*)

SVYNIACHE VUKHO (*literally "Pig's Ear"*)

VAVYDLO

MARTYN

TAISA

LILI

MIMI

TALL PARTY COLLEAGUE

SHORT PARTY COLLEAGUE

VOICE OF FAITH

VOICE OF TRUST

VOICE OF SYMPATHY

VOICE OF CRITICAL EVALUATION

VOICE OF INFATUATION

VALENTYNA

ZVENYBUDLO, *a gracioso*

DICK ROBERTS, *a captain*

SID BURBAGE, *a boatswain*

SOBIBATKO, *proprietor of the Under the Four Winds tavern*

MARY, SOBIBATKO'S ASSISTANT

PALTIG PIGG

TORMOKRO

REPORTER

FIVE-PART MAIL CHOIR

CHARACTERS

THE MOON

A GIRL

A JUDGE

A LIAR

*Minimum Number of Participants: five women, thirteen men.*

## Day One: The Battle for Time

### Scene 1

BLEKHMEN: Who are you?

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: We're criminals.

BLEKHMEN: What are you looking for?

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: We're looking for the truth.

BLEKHMEN: Then why are you roaming about in broad daylight?

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: Haven't you ever heard, buddy, the story of the famous Schtitz? The bandit? He was usually recognized in the street by his walk.

BLEKHMEN: Cut the gab. Good day! Who are you?

BARAN-SOKIL: We're criminals, pal. How's it going?

BLEKHMEN: May I slap you on the shoulder, Baran-Sokil?

BARAN-SOKIL: You may. On the right one.

BLEKHMEN: The left one can't take it?

BARAN-SOKIL: I don't have a left shoulder at all.

BLEKHMEN: What have you done with it?

BARAN-SOKIL: I lost it in action.

BLEKHMEN: Too bad. Where's Bednarsky?

BARAN-SOKIL: He's standing over by the kiosk with the pointed top, cussing out the government.

BLEKHMEN: And you didn't join him? You're headstrong?

BARAN-SOKIL: 'Cause I'm a ram.

BLEKHMEN: But you almost split open Red Mack's skull.

BARAN-SOKIL: 'Cause I'm a falcon.

BLEKHMEN: Red Mack, the sergeant of the Seventh Police Precinct.

BARAN-SOKIL: 'Cause I'm a falcon.

BLEKHMEN: I praise you for that at least. May I slap you on your right shoulder?

VAVYDLO: God bless you all! The Arabian Desert does not thirst for a drop of water from the cloudless, red sky as much as I thirst for a chance to see, to talk, and to associate with Your Highnesses.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: Greetings, Vavydlo, you dog's soul, you button from a stranger's cloak, you poet of the midnight cats! What have you been doing, you dumpling? What's on your mind, you prince from beyond the sea? Where's Bednarsky?

VAVYDLO: I could answer your lofty question in three—three—ways. If you, you notorious duck killer and hunter of underwear in the attic, if you have such immeasurable yearning for the truth, then you should know this: your desired imperial being, who in everyday life is called Bednarsky—

BLEKHMANN: Stick your eloquence under your tongue, man. Hello!

BEDNARSKY: Aha! Greetings, everybody.

ALL: Greetings, Your Majesty.

BEDNARSKY: Who are you?

ALL: We're criminals.

BEDNARSKY: Are all of you criminals?

ALL: We're all criminals. Each and every one of us is a criminal.

BEDNARSKY: Are you ready to prove it by your deeds?

ALL: We're ready to prove it by deeds in the winter and in the summer, in the fall and in early spring. We're ready to prove it every minute of the day or night.

BEDNARSKY: And are you prepared to obey me?

ALL: We're prepared to obey you.

BEDNARSKY: And why is that?

ALL: Because we are people of the old cast. Because we are the soldiers of broad daylight.

BEDNARSKY: All right, kiddies. Then know you this: there won't be any business.

ALL: Oh!

BEDNARSKY: There won't. So scatter.

ALL: Oh?

BEDNARSKY: There'll be no action. I'm heartsick.

*Music. A pantomime. They all pull masks out from under their coats. Instead of eyebrows the masks have question marks. BEDNARSKY is the only one without a mask. He resolutely maintains his position. They plead with him. He resolutely maintains his position.*

BEDNARSKY: Children, no! Scatter in all directions. I'm heartsick.

ALL: Bednarsky is sick at heart. Daddy is heartsick.

VAVYDLO: Oh, you with the pelican's light touch on your forehead chiselled from alabaster! You are so wise and so experienced! What serves as your reason for such a sacred decision? And why are you depriving us, your hapless children, of the ineffable joy of seeing you at the helm of our cyclonic, lightning-creating business? Oh! Oh!

ALL: Oh! Oh!

BEDNARSKY: Because everything is stupid. You are stupid, too. I alone am wise. But of what use is my wisdom when everyone is stupid?

BARAN-SOKIL: Are you absolutely sure of this, Prince?

BEDNARSKY: I'm sure. I'm as sure of it as I am of the fact that there will no longer be anything in this world. Kids, the world has made a full circle and has driven its nose into its own ass. So it is written by the prophets. No one shall ever again discover the law of gravity. No one, because the theory of relativity has already been devised to cover all contingencies. No one will ever again proclaim a dictatorship. No one, because everyone knows: sooner or later even the most graceful dictator will be strung up by

his feet. Because, children, there no longer are any great people. There aren't any, nor will there ever be any. Yesterday I read in the paper that there will no longer be any superhumans or any subhumans. There will only be co-humans. So there.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: Your Majesty, how can you say there are no great people anymore. Why, even today there are many kings, military leaders, and prime ministers. They lead, cultivate ideas, speak on television, and even write memoirs. And, not to stray too far from home, there's you. Are you not a great man?

BEDNARSKY: My dear friend, Svyniache Vukho! I've always known of your inclination for flattery. You've constantly lied to my face while thinking the opposite. But in this instance, surprisingly, you are right. I am a great man. However, you must consider this: I am the last great man. We, you and I, are the knights of broad daylight, robbers, burglars, and safecrackers. We are the bearers of a mighty nature, resilient endurance, and rugged individualism. We are the last great people.

ALL: Oh, Bednarsky! Oh! Oh, Bednarsky! Oh!

VAVYDLO: We're touched by your remarks, Prince. You're forcing our limitlessly expanding hearts to tremble and flutter in the ocean of proud, sumptuous self-esteem.

BARAN-SOKIL: But if we're really great people, we must see to our heirs. We can't neglect that, Prince.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: We can't just spit on it all and pass into non-existence.

BEDNARSKY: You can't? Ha! Blekhman, do you have your watch?

BLEKHMEN: I dropped it down a drainpipe this morning and couldn't pull it out.

BEDNARSKY: Pity. I remember it well. It had a gold crown and ornate designs.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: Blekhman's watch was a bit old-fashioned.

BEDNARSKY: And there were three letters on it: M, D, K. Isn't that right?

BLEKHMEN: Absolutely.

BEDNARSKY: Pity. Ask that old man what time it is.

BLEKHMEN: Would you, sir, be so kind as to tell me what time it is?

MAXIMUS: Ah—of course: it's three minutes to twelve.

BLEKHMEN: I'm truly grateful to you, sir.

MAXIMUS: Oh, you're very welcome, very welcome.

BEDNARSKY: There are still three minutes left. The tragedy will be performed exactly at twelve. Eh, what the hell! Did you see that old man?

ALL: Of course we saw him, Bednarsky.

BEDNARSKY: Stop him, boys! Stop him!

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: Hey, sir! Hey!

BEDNARSKY: Here is an example for you. Here is an embodiment of the end of the world—this old morel. He's probably been a postal worker since time immemorial. Or a rat from the customs office. No, he's definitely a postman.

MAXIMUS: You called me, sir?

BEDNARSKY: Convince him that he's a great man. Convince him immediately.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: I beg your pardon, sir. Could you please give me your autograph as a keepsake? Here, in my notebook?

MAXIMUS: Ha, ha, young man. It's good when young people joke around.

BEDNARSKY: Convince him immediately that he's a great man. And if you succeed—

BARAN-SOKIL: We're not joking at all, sir. We know very well who you are, although your modesty is well-known to everyone ... I, too, would also like to ask you for your autograph.

MAXIMUS: My good fellow, what significance could my autograph have? I'm an old man who has worked in a post office for thirty-five years, day in and day out—

BEDNARSKY: Didn't I tell you?! And I bet he has no children.

BARAN-SOKIL: And how are your kids?

MAXIMUS: I have none.

BARAN-SOKIL: But you're married.

MAXIMUS: Of course, for thirty years. But I have no children. None.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: But sir, how is it that you, being as punctual a clerk as you are, left your place of employment today without waiting for twelve o'clock to arrive?

MAXIMUS: Ah! You're right, you're right. I asked the department head for permission. How else?

BARAN-SOKIL: You're a spiteful man, Svyniache Vukho.

BEDNARSKY: I've always said that his words hide what he really thinks.

MAXIMUS: I'm a person of discipline, young man. In thirty-five years I have never had a single reprimand. I'm a man of discipline, that I am.

BARAN-SOKIL: So much the better, so much the better. Your work is unnoticeable, but that incredible energy of yours, which—please don't refuse to give me your autograph—that incredible energy, which emanates from your eyes—

VAVYDLO: That blazing fire of eternally inextinguishable, creative tension that fills your soul, that gives you infinite inspiration and elevates you above the heads of ordinary people, that fire could only come from those perpetual springs where seers, discoverers, and revitalizers of humanity are born.

MAXIMUS: Ho, ho, you young people! It's good that young people joke around.

BEDNARSKY: Go on, convince him, convince him! Well? Did you succeed?

BARAN-SOKIL: You were right, Prince. He does embody it.

BEDNARSKY: The entire immeasurability of time and space has been incarnated in this human scarecrow. In his trousers, which stink from sitting on a rubber cushion. In his faded oversleeves. In his beard trimmed fourteen days ago. He has no illusions. No fantasies. He has made no attempts to break the pattern of his life and to start it anew. He has no ambitions to respond to people with a resounding voice. To show them a fairy tale. To tell each of them what they could uncover at the bottom of their wretched souls. I'm heartsick, children. Join me in this. There can be no action, children. Scatter to your nooks and crannies, you last distinguished people of the universe! Scatter, because your greatness is comical in the midst of the ordinary. You're only fit to be comedians, to be jesters onstage. So be jesters! It behooves us but to die loudly. With a bang. Accompanied by the mournful smashing of glasses. Scatter, fly, and cry out in a chorus, hoot in all directions: There are no great people!

ALL: Hee-hah! Hee-haw! To all ends of the earth! To all countries! To all, all, all: There are no great people! There are no great people!

## Scene 2

MAXIMUS: There are no great people.

MAXIMUS'S WIFE: You should make up for it with bread. Without mentioning that bread is a wholesome meal in itself, it serves as a touchstone. If you eat it and don't get heartburn, that means you have a healthy stomach. Speaking of the stomach that developed no heartburn after eating ordinary rye bread, my uncle—my father's brother—fared the best in my family. Even better than my grandfather's brother on my father's side. And the latter was renowned in our family for his legendary health. But you said something too?

MAXIMUS: I didn't say anything. It wasn't anything important. If only great people were hanging around in city squares at every step one took, and their autographs—ha, ha. A great person is a rich person. He has his own car, purchased not on an annual installment plan but paid off right away. A great person goes to the cinema and dancing, that's what. Ha, ha! A great person doesn't buy potatoes at the market.

WIFE: Potatoes are getting cheaper. I have good news for you: today potatoes are going for twenty-five.

MAXIMUS: See, the great are looking out for the small. By the way, who is our prime minister right now? Aha! A great person, indeed. He's the one who should be asked for an autograph.

WIFE: You should certainly make up for it with bread. We have enough bread.

MAXIMUS: One gets fuller with bread. You're right.

WIFE: I'm always right. But you don't always admit it.

*A shrill cry is heard: "There are no great people!"*

WIFE: Are you going already?

MAXIMUS: No—what time is it?

WIFE: Nine minutes to one. I think you still have time.

MAXIMUS: Of course! I still have time.

WIFE: Finish your meal. Why are you in a rush? There's no need to rush without finishing your meal.

MAXIMUS: You're right. What else is there?

WIFE: There's still the second course. Or don't you want the second course?

MAXIMUS: I'll eat it. You can serve it.

WIFE: Potatoes. And here is some tomato sauce. Eat. But I have to go and do some work around the garden.

MAXIMUS: Woman!

WIFE: You need something else?

MAXIMUS: No. Where's my towel?

WIFE: What do you need your towel for? The towel is in the bathroom. On the second of the six hooks, immediately on your right as you enter. There's some water on the floor. I didn't have time to mop it up. I'll do it when I come in from the garden. When you're in the bathroom, step forward with your left foot first and use your right one for support. Otherwise you might slip on the wet floor and really hurt yourself.

MAXIMUS: Is the towel clean? I'm just asking.

WIFE: It's clean, it's clean. I just changed it the day before yesterday. Today, will you be doing the usual in the evening? I must say, this is a rather strange question about the towel. You seem strange today. You usually aren't, you know. I'm going out to the garden.

MAXIMUS: I'll be doing the usual this evening. Did she notice anything? Or didn't she? Probably not. Definitely not. She only mentioned the question about the towel and nothing else. I've lived with her, with this being, for thirty years. In nine days it will be exactly thirty years.

*Music.*

Beyond the seas there lie vast continents. Robinson Crusoe and Friday.

*Music.*

I'm fifty-six years old. In one month and four days I will be exactly fifty-six years old. The second course: potatoes... and tomato sauce. There's no need to rush without finishing your meal. And the towel. Definitely the towel.

*Music.*

Beyond the seas there lie vast continents. A treasure island. Sparkling sand.

*Music.*

Sparkling, sparkling sand.

*Music.*

I wonder: when a person is losing his mind is he aware of it? A doctor once told me no. The doctor said that if a person is aware of his madness, it's a sure sign the person is not mad. Ha, ha! A towel and a treasure island. But where is that towel really? Will it fit into my pocket if I crumple it up? The clean one is in the bathroom, but an absolutely clean one is in the closet. A coat on the arm, across the arm. When a person is not fifty-six but thirty-six, for example, he walks much faster, I should think. Indeed, much faster and much more vigorously. And he doesn't walk straight ahead, but ducks, turns, looks about, and bows, like this. A coat on the arm. Like this. Aha—and a mirror! A small pocket mirror and a razor. These are all convenient items that fit into the side pockets. A mirror. My beard looks bushy in the mirror. My beard hasn't been trimmed for two weeks. How do they remove a beard? They cut it off. Then they shave it clean. It's a long procedure requiring warm water. But when a person is possessed by one constant thought, time flies unnoticed. Then time equals zero. For what is time if not a certain quadratic condition of the human brain? In the theatre they know it. That's why an actor, in order to undergo the miraculous act of rejuvenation right before the eyes of the audience, does not wait for time's justification. He simply takes hold of it, and—poof!—the beard's gone..

*Music.*

Now I'm a step higher. Several more steps, several more rungs. Five or six. Let's go!  
With eyes partly closed!

*Music.*

One more step. And another. And one more.

*Music.*

On more than one or two occasions I myself have met people whose age I could never guess. I gave them more years or less years. Exactly here is the area for the deepest mystery of masking. The tragedy began at twelve o'clock. The comedy begins at one. It is precisely four minutes after one. Hello! Hop!

*Music.*

May I leave half an hour earlier, Mister Supervisor? Pardon? Yes, all of the morning mail has been sorted. Thank you humbly. But you have grown accustomed to it, my dear, skinny old woman. You smell of the cedar chest and vanilla. Potatoes for twenty-five! It's a shame. A real shame! You will surely go mad because you won't recognize your own madness. But neither can I. Turning fifty-six happens only once in a lifetime. I'm not to blame that I was created a human being. I'm not to blame that I was created a free human being. I am to blame only for my own bondage. So farewell! Get over it, if you can. After all, you are always able to make an excuse in front of people. You can be sure that you can recognize someone else's madness at any given moment, even if it is your own husband's.

*Music.*

### Scene 3

MARTYN: ... You can recognize it at any given moment. It all depends on you. The wall separating people is thin, unreal. I would like to express it, but not all people have been given that gift. Are you not listening to me?

TAISA: Yes, I'm listening.

MARTYN: My child, my projects, my constantly unreal projects! My soul shudders with terror when I think of you. To be with me year after year. To observe the fleeting years in yourself. What you could have accomplished had you started on the right foot when you were nineteen. Are you crying?

TAISA: I'm not even thinking of it.

MARTYN: My projects are tearing me apart. Do you know how happy the human race would be if it lived in cities built by me? The thought tears me apart. I thought that here in the suburbs, far from the cinemas and streetcars, it would be easier for us. But stacks of paper continue growing in the corners, as before. And, just as before, no one but me looks at them. It's horrible, darling, horrible! If only I were alone.

TAISA: You can be alone anytime you want.

MARTYN: Do you want to leave me? Then leave me, darling. You'll be better off without me.

TAISA: And would you be better off too?

MARTYN: I have already imagined myself without you several times. There was nothing but infinite blackness. Do you want to leave me?

TAISA: I didn't mean what I said.

MARTYN: But you will leave me. I know it. You will leave me. Won't you?

TAISA: I don't know. I don't think so.

MARTYN: What?



TAISA: I don't think so. I don't think I would leave you.

MARTYN: You don't complain that I haven't taken a job?

TAISA: What job?

MARTYN: Any job that would pay money. You don't complain? No?

TAISA: No.

MARTYN: But do you know why I don't do that?

TAISA: No, I don't. I feel sorry for you.

MARTYN: When do you feel sorry for me?

TAISA: I don't know. When you're working on your projects.

MARTYN: But at other times you don't? Do you not love me? No?

TAISA: I don't know.

MARTYN: If only I could know you love me! The way you did before. During our first years together.

TAISA: And what would that give you?

MARTYN: Oh, what it would give me! It would give me a whole life.

TAISA: Don't talk like that. Let's go to sleep instead.

MARTYN: Why shouldn't I talk like that?

TAISA: Because I don't like hearing it.

MARTYN: Tell me, couldn't we reach a different state of affairs? If my projects are not becoming a reality for all people, then they could at least become our reality. At least ours. My projects. My dreams. And yours, too. You used to have full-blown, splendid fantasies. Why don't you tell me about them anymore? Every girl keeps dreaming of a prince who will come for her someday. Your prince, I know, had bright eyes and wore a sailor's jersey. Where is he, where? Why don't I hear about him anymore?

TAISA: My prince was stronger than anyone and better than anyone. He knew how to make everyone believe he was as he saw himself. It didn't matter that, in actual fact, he had thin arms and, in addition, was somewhat squat. They killed my prince out of jealousy and buried him in a barrel of herrings, which they placed in a desecrated cathedral. What else should I tell you about him?

MARTYN: So why don't you finish the story? Is it because the time will come when you too, so to speak, will hear a knock on your window—

TAISA: Because that will never happen. He will never knock on my window.

MARTYN: And if he does?

TAISA: He will never knock on my window, do you hear?!

MARTYN: Hold on! Someone is knocking on the window!

TAISA: Really? Ha, ha, it's him!

MARTYN: Don't laugh. Wait here. I'll get up ... Who is it?

MAXIMUS: It's me.

MARTYN: Just a minute ... What do you want?

MAXIMUS: Do you know me? Have you ever seen me before?

MARTYN: No. I don't think so.

MAXIMUS: Look at me more closely. The light from your lamp is falling directly on my face. Have you ever seen me before?

MARTYN: No. I don't think so.

MAXIMUS: How about your wife?

MARTYN: She's not dressed. Taïsa, throw something on and come take a look.

MAXIMUS: Have you ever seen me before?

TAÏSA: No. I don't think so.

MAXIMUS: Praise the Lord! I've only seen you once in my life. Four years ago, at your wedding. You were living in another part of town. I was just passing by and heard your voices through the window.

TAÏSA: Did you come from afar?

MAXIMUS: I've been walking all day. Since one this afternoon.

TAÏSA: It's now three minutes to midnight. You're welcome to spend the night here.

MAXIMUS: I don't know. Probably not. I haven't finished testing my capabilities yet. It is possible that my presence brings misfortune.

TAÏSA: I'm not afraid. We're not afraid. We prefer misfortune.

MARTYN: Well, all right.

TAÏSA: What's all right?

MARTYN: He'll spend the night here. It's better that way.

*Music.*

MAXIMUS: If you don't mind, I'll take the liberty of entering through the window.

MARTYN: I'll open the door for you right now.

MAXIMUS: If you want to do me one more favour, please allow me to execute this small exercise. A jump through the window. It's also part of testing my capabilities. Careful, look out! Something's scribbled in chalk here on the windowsill.

MARTYN: They're my notes. Don't worry, jump.

MAXIMUS: I wouldn't want to smudge them. I'll be careful. Hop! There, done!

*Music.*

MARTYN: Yes. Good. We've got another comforter somewhere.

TAÏSA: Over there. In the vestibule. In the large trunk.

*Music.*

MAXIMUS: Is your name Taïsa?

TAÏSA: And yours?

MAXIMUS: I'm Maximus.

TAÏSA: Maximus.

MAXIMUS: I remember you. I was on an assignment and stopped at a church. You were standing there like a peacock's feather. You were curly-haired and insatiable.

TAÏSA: Now I'm old.

MAXIMUS: So am I. Like the ocean. How old would you say I am?

TAÏSA: I don't know. Thirty. Perhaps thirty-five.

MAXIMUS: Oh, Taïsa!

*Music.*

MARTYN: Here's the comforter. Turn towards me. Turn around, both of you. Well, all right. Let it be so.

*Music.*

## Scene 4

LILI: Let it be so. How many can you manage to do this way before lunch?

MIMI: Eighteen.

LILI: There's no way I can keep up. I can only do fifteen, fifteen and a half. How does this finger of yours go?

MIMI: Like this. From here to here.

LILI: In other words, this move is connected to this one?

MIMI: This one to this one.

LILI: What technique! There's no way I could master that. I read there's a woman who can type with all twenty of her fingers and toes. Now that's something! You know, I'm in love with our editor.

MIMI: I know.

LILI: I'm dying to have a fling with him. But that witch, his witch, won't let him out of her sight even for a minute.

MIMI: Yes.

LILI: He's smart. Well educated. A man with charm. And he's one of those men whose age you can never guess. He sure is well preserved. I just adore men like that! And his anti-war speeches! He's got loads of supporters throughout the entire country.

MIMI: I know.

LILI: But she keeps on drilling him and drilling him. You know it looks to me like she wants to galvanize him.

MIMI: Not so loud.

MAXIMUS: I'm terribly happy. The hitherto invincible bastion collapsed with a crash. You must admit, I had a hand in that.

TAÏSA: You were incomparable.

MAXIMUS: My party colleagues will be pleased. Speaking of which, here they are.

TALL PARTY COLLEAGUE: Comrade Maximus, you were incomparable!

SHORT PARTY COLLEAGUE: Congratulations, Comrade Maximus!

TALL PARTY COLLEAGUE: We shall pin them to the wall now. The gang of privileged officers who want to exploit the sweat and blood of the people—

SHORT PARTY COLLEAGUE: And the bureaucratic machine, which has grown on the people's backs—

BOTH PARTY COLLEAGUES: But the people, the toiling people, will not stand for it—

MAXIMUS: Oh, the people! I'll now address the people directly. The people have gathered down below, in front of the editorial offices. Go out into the square. Hear my speech.

BOTH PARTY COLLEAGUES: We're going, Comrade Maximus. Good luck, Comrade Maximus. You will be incomparable, Comrade Maximus.

TAÏSA: Get ready. Fix your tie. No, don't! It's better this way. Rumples your hair a little. And this bang—flick it from time to time away from your forehead. But casually. Effortlessly. And not too often.

MAXIMUS: Oh, Taïsa! I've got so much energy! I shall tell them about the treasures that lie dormant at the bottom of their souls. About human dignity, and so on. About the people's right not to heed their government, and so on. I shall stir them. I shall open them up. You don't know what I am capable of. In the year I've lived with you, I have mastered what normally takes decades. I've read *The Divine Comedy*, *Das Kapital*,

and *The Decline of the West*. I've mastered world geography. I've memorized the biography of every prominent contemporary diplomat. I've learned English—

TAÏSA: Let's review yesterday's work.

MAXIMUS: All right. "*To get rid of all the terrible results of this event, which dis-stair-bed*"—

TAÏSA: Disturbed.

MAXIMUS: Dis-stair-bed.

TAÏSA: It's pronounced "urbd"! "Urbd"! Not "dis-stair-bed," but disturbed "Urbd," dis-turbed.

MAXIMUS: Dis-turbd.

TAÏSA: Good.

MAXIMUS: "*Disturbed all of society and created great interest within the scientific institutions, you*"—Oh, Taïsa, I want to live! Do you hear? Taïsa, the entire world, all the seas and all the molluscs in them, all the tigers, and all the cats can be ours! Oh—"you must first of all, you must first of all"—Taïsa, I want to live!

TAÏSA: Go, darling. The people are waiting for you. Go. Leave the tie as it is.

MAXIMUS: Forward! In a moment you shall see a miracle.

TAÏSA: So go. Miss, Editor Maximus requests that you become his private secretary.

LILI: Me?

TAÏSA: No, you.

MIMI: Me?

TAÏSA: You. He needs help. There's more work than he can handle.

MIMI: Certainly, madam. I understand, madam.

TAÏSA: Then you accept, right?

MIMI: I do, madam. Thank you, madam.

TAÏSA: Immediately after his speech, report to me for instructions. As for now, pay attention!

*Music. A film: a mask.*

A VOICE (*slowly*): He is addressing the people. I am the people. I'm cutting cogs using a machine tool from the greatest machine-building plant in the country. Every day I make thirty-eight cogwheels, eighteen before lunch, and twenty after. I'm a father of two children, eight and six years old. If the war machine, against which he is exhorting us to struggle, is put in motion, it could kill my children and me, too. But without my cogwheels, not one machine can move. I will not allow this war machine to be put in motion. I will fight against it with all my strength.

*Music. A film: a different mask.*

A VOICE (*slowly*): He is addressing the people. I am the people. I'm a father of twelve children, and I myself still have a father and a father's brother, and I must provide for them all. He is indeed speaking out against war, against the same war that had previously trampled on my already barren field and now wants to do it again. I now see that there are dignified people in the city who don't want war either. With new hope, I shall oppose the war. When this man finishes his speech, I shall give him a cheer: Hurrah!

*Music. A film: another mask.*

A VOICE (*slowly*): He is addressing the people. I am the people. Naturally, I am the people. I am not trained in anything, nor do I have a proper education. But everything I am entrusted with I do precisely, thoroughly, and on time. Without my thoroughness,

no war is possible. If I so desire, there won't be any war. And I won't want one. When he finishes, I will support him unconditionally, and I shall give him a cheer: Hurrah!

*Music. A film: yet a different mask.*

A VOICE (*slowly*): He is addressing the people. There can be no doubt—I am the people. I've never been inclined to give in to mass psychosis. I sneeze at all classes, the estates, and social superstitions. I can calmly sneeze at them all because I know that the nation cannot exist without my right to criticize everything that exists as harshly as possible. Without my consent there will be no war. And I will not give my consent. For I am mad as hell that alongside our government leader there stands a gang of rich officers, and that those advantages that are accessible to them are not accessible to me. I will quite consciously support the speech of this resolute and audacious man.

*Music. A film: another mask.*

A VOICE (*slowly*): He is speaking to the people. It shouldn't concern me. For I'm certainly not the people in any way. But I like the way he opens his mouth when he makes the "ee" sound so that I cannot keep from expressing my most ardent enthusiasm. With all my being I shall give him a cheer: Hurrah!

*Music. A film: countless masks.*

MAXIMUS'S VOICE: And that is why I conclude with a declaration of this, your simple, yet so immeasurably abundant right: the right to live! Against this inalienable right of yours a group of ignorant and brutal people have conspired. They want to drag you in an event that would again hurl you to the brink of disaster. Again a state of affairs that is odious and contrary to human nature would prevail: a state of war. In the special evening edition of the paper you will again read these words: never surrender to anyone your sacred right to live in peace! I call upon you: go forward! Down with irrational and criminal governments! Long live peace among the peoples of the world!

ALL OF THE VOICES: Hurrah!

*Music. A MALE CHOIR sings the five-part melody of Palestrina: "Terra tremuit et quievit, dum resurgeret in iudicio Deus, alleluja."*

*Music. A film in slow motion: countless masks.*

MAXIMUS'S VOICE: And that is why I do not wish to comfort you with an illusion. No, the enemy is strong. The enemy is mighty. The enemy is cruel. The bloody deeds of Attila the Hun and Genghis Khan together pale compared to his bloody deeds. Employing threats, lies, and intrigues, dividing and inciting, attacking without declaring war, he has already swallowed the small neighbouring countries one after another. Now his teeth are at our borders. We have already seen the glare of his predatory eyes from under his helmet's visor at the spring conference, where we strove to come to an agreement. And now we feel the icy breath of his insatiable mouth enveloping us. The war will be difficult. The war will be unbearable and, for many of us, fatal. I say fatal for many of us, but not for all. A nation is immortal. The coup d'état that took place half a year ago, that gave rise to a new government and a new way of life, that extracted from the innermost depths and developed to the fullest extent the creative

powers of the broadest masses—this coup d'état began a new era in the life of the nation. Let us remember that war is today the sacred duty of everyone among us who loves peace and honours liberty. Let us remember that the soldier, the officer, are the elite of the people. Let us remember that at this terrible, this grandiose time—

*Music. A film: a mask.*

A VOICE (*slowly*): He says that officers are the elite of the people. He is talking about me, because in the last war I had the rank of sergeant. I can throw grenades as well as I can cut cogs. I may die. My children may die too. But it's also possible that my children and I may survive. That's why I will go to war. For I never want the enemy to rule over me.

*Music. A film: a different mask.*

A VOICE (*slowly*): He says that officers are the elite of the people. He is talking about me and about my family. In the war before last I was a sergeant. In the last war my oldest son was a sergeant. It is possible that in this war my oldest son will be killed. It is possible that I, too, will be killed. But if we are not killed, then we, my son at the front and I through my toil in the field, will have been instrumental in vanquishing the enemy. I never want the enemy to rule over my field, even if it is barren.

*Music: A film: another mask.*

A VOICE (*slowly*): He says that officers are the elite of the people. Obviously he is referring to me. For even though I am not an officer, have never been one, and will never be one, none of the officers can do without my services during the war. Only because of my thoroughness will the war be waged expediently and according to plan. Certainly there can never be any doubt that I am a patriot and never want the enemy to rule over me.

*Music: A film: yet another mask.*

A VOICE (*slowly*): He says that officers are the elite of the people. I sneeze on all the elites, because the only elite I recognize is myself. But if now and again I am not pleased with the way things are in our country, they are, of course, children's fables compared to what would happen if our greatest enemy should win. Oh, no! Under his regime I would fare well only if I served him. And I would never want to do that. He is even stupider, denser, than our leaders. No. No. This man is a demagogue. Of course, he will never provoke me to take part in any great, military exploit. But, I will quite consciously give him my verbal support.

*Music. A film: a different mask.*

A VOICE (*slowly*): He says that officers are the elite of the people. Clearly he's not speaking about me. Yet he is so charming, and the sound of his "ee" is so delightful, that I passionately support him. Maybe I'll even enlist as a nurse in a military camp or something.

*Music. A film: countless masks.*

ALL VOICES: Hurrah!

TALL PARTY COLLEAGUE: Comrade Maximus, I greet you! The cause of freedom, the cause of the most radiant ideals of humanity—

SHORT PARTY COLLEAGUE:—this enthusiasm of the masses, this incomparable manifestation of patriotic feelings—

TALL PARTY COLLEAGUE:—brilliant, the style of your speech was absolutely brilliant ... We shan't bother you. You have loads of work.

SHORT PARTY COLLEAGUE: Good night, Comrade Maximus. Good night.

BOTH PARTY COLLEAGUES: Phenomenal! Phenomenal!

MIMI: Here are the two drafts of tomorrow's editorial. I'll stay, if you want me to.

MAXIMUS: I do. Just give me a moment ... to collect my thoughts, my thoughts.

MIMI: There are beads of sweat on your forehead. I can be of service to you with my hanky.

MAXIMUS: All right.

MIMI: Forgive me.

MAXIMUS: For what? Forgive you? For what?

MIMI: I bumped your cheek. But that's not what I wanted to say. May I ask you a question?

MAXIMUS: Please do. I wanted something—aha, my notebook.

MIMI: Here it is. Terrible events are approaching. And before anything happens, I would like to know one thing. When half a year ago I was told you wanted me to be your personal secretary, did—I must know this—did the initiative come from you or—

MAXIMUS: Or—Why do you need to know?

MIMI: Oh, just because. Because I love you.

MAXIMUS: You love me? Just how do you love me?

MIMI: The way a woman loves who lives for her one and only dream.

MAXIMUS: But I am married.

MIMI: For God's sake, what does that have to do with it? You of all people should know that there are times in one's life when one can be completely oblivious of sin.

MAXIMUS: Every professional assassin is always completely oblivious of sin.

MIMI: Oh, no! They're always quite worried. The only people who never worry about sin are those who partake of sin in such a way that others are not hurt. What could I take from your wife?

MAXIMUS: How did you become so wise, Mimi?

MIMI: Don't call me Mimi. I've chosen a different name for myself: Arivana. Lili and Mimi—we were two typists in the editorial office. But while she chattered constantly about you, I kept quiet. Already then I knew that my feelings for you weren't like hers at all. You've seen how faithful I am to you. I feel every line that you write. I inhale every word you utter as if it were oxygen. For the first time in my life and surely the last, I beg you: grant me the pleasure of spending this night with you.

MAXIMUS: I need to collect my thoughts ... Fifty-five thousand thoughts ... There has to be the right mood!

MIMI: I'll create the right mood for you. I'll create everything for you, because I have a great many abilities. Just give yourself to me for a fleeting moment.

MAXIMUS: All right. And then what?

MIMI: I'll go on being your secretary. Say Arivana.

MAXIMUS: Arivana. Arivana. Arivana.

MIMI: There. On the terrace. Where the planters with the cactuses are.

TAÏSA: My prince was the mightiest of them all. He was better than all the others. He knew how to make everyone believe in him as he saw himself. It didn't matter that he had thin arms. It didn't matter that he was also somewhat squat. They killed my prince out of jealousy. They buried him in a barrel of herrings, which they placed in a desecrated cathedral. What more can I tell you about him, Martyn? You said then that there is infinite blackness. But I didn't love you, Martyn.

*Music: a single note.*

Into the work, into the creation sent to you by God, the hands of a stranger have been thrust. And you—you put into this creation so many pieces of your sparkling spiritual fabric.

*Music: a single note.*

I didn't love you, Martyn. I only had boundless pity for you when you sat there working on your projects. We could have had a son, you and I. And other people could have believed in your plans. What would have happened then? Blackness. Infinite blackness.

*Music: a chord.*

Clearly, it is beyond my powers. It is totally and undeniably clear: it's beyond my powers. And at what time? At twelve o'clock. In three minutes, at twelve o'clock, you come out to meet me. Are you from afar, O wanderer?

*Music. Pantomime. TAÏSA. A very long, very thin silk string.*

## **Interlude with the Moon (In Masks)**

GIRL: Are you from afar, O wanderer?

MOON: Quite from afar. But I've been moving fast.

GIRL: Then don't drink the water. The water's harmful.

MOON: Not to me. I'm the Moon.

GIRL: Then drink from the front bucket. That's the custom. And may health be with you as you drink.

MOON: Isn't the water in the rear bucket the same?

GIRL: I do not wish to offend you, Moon.

MOON: Oh, it doesn't matter. You won't offend the Moon. Can't you see by my appearance that I can take any kind of offense?

GIRL: You wouldn't even blink an eye?

MOON: Fair maiden, I'm the Moon, after all.

GIRL: Then tell me a fairy tale.

MOON: But I'm a fairy tale myself, fair maiden.

GIRL: Really? I've never seen such a thing.

MOON: The braids are long, you see, and fluffy.



GIRL: The eyelashes are bushy.

MOON: Am I handsome?

GIRL: You are.

MOON: Then fall in love with me.

GIRL: When love is nigh, where art thou hate!

MOON: Tell me. How do people love?

GIRL: They take a handful of rue and put them in their bosoms. Some chamomile flowers can also be put there.

MOON: That's nice. I would never have known to do that.

GIRL: But you're nice, too.

MOON: Was there a war here?

GIRL: There was, and what a war it was!

MOON: Are your father and mother alive?

GIRL: They are, thank God. But my little brother—

MOON: What about your little brother?

GIRL: He was maimed. His arm is like this, from a grenade.

MOON: Like this?

GIRL: Up to here.

MOON: Are there many like him?

GIRL: Many indeed!

MOON: Give me more to drink, fair maiden.

GIRL: Drink from the front bucket. Drink and stay healthy.

MOON: Thank you, fair maiden. I see that it's already grown over here.

GIRL: Here yes, but over here not yet.

MOON: It's still black here and smells of scorched earth.

GIRL: Of wasteland. It's full of ashes.

MOON: And the land?

GIRL: What about the land? The land shall heal us all.

MOON: And there will be no more wars?

GIRL: I heard they're negotiating for universal peace.

MOON: It is good to live in peace, fair maiden. Peace is cold and pure and it's so good! You won't understand that, fair maiden. I'm always so sick at heart at the sight of war.

GIRL: Come with me to our village.

MOON: I can't, fair maiden.

GIRL: But why not?

MOON: I can't walk through the village with you, fair maiden. Everyone would come up to touch my shoulder. But I can't allow that because I'm the Moon.

GIRL: And what would happen if I embraced you?

MOON: You can't embrace me, fair maiden, so there's no use trying.

GIRL: Why is it that when you speak, it seems as if great bodies of water were murmuring, and I feel so good? As if I were sad. Or perhaps not.

MOON: That's good, fair maiden. That's very good.

GIRL: And, you know, when I think of you like this, my heart feels as if it's about to sing three songs at once. You're sad. But lovely, lovely.

MOON: Have you ever heard a conversation about the Moon?

GIRL: Of course I have.

MOON: Then you should know this: sometimes people pray to the Moon. I absolutely don't need that. Sometimes they pray to the Moon because they see it as a substitute for the Sun. But the Sun is the Sun. It has its own great paths. One may not like it, and there are many who flee to the shade lest they be burned. Or, if one has a weak heart, one sweats. It all depends on the individual. I myself love the Sun. I love it dearly. Not because it shines and warms. No. I love it with a special kind of feeling. Do you love the Sun, too?

GIRL: Of course.

MOON: So there. Oh! The cleat on my boot came off. Too bad I didn't notice it before. Love, love the Sun, fair maiden. Perhaps you too will live to see the day when it won't rise over the horizon as usual, but will be a little late. But what a glorious delay that will be! You can't imagine the surprises it is capable of. Just like an emperor's wife. But you'll see. Anyway, it's well worth it for us to stop and wait. For a while, perhaps, let's not go forward anymore.

## **Day Two: Around the Mountain**

### **Scene 1**

ZVENYBUDLO: Let's not go forward anymore. I could even sit down here. There. What should I call this valley? It's neither skewed nor round. Let me think a bit. I don't think I have anything to eat. Serves me right. Because I didn't vote in favour of the war, I evidently committed a crime against the overwhelming majority. At the present time the overwhelming majority does not eat. And since there is nothing more repulsive to me than emulating the overwhelming majority, let this emulation be my deserved punishment. To be honest, I suspect that in the given case my logic may be faulty. But so be it. The second thing I absolutely cannot stand is people's idle chatter. For the easily understandable reason that I can stand and, one might even say, really appreciate my own chatter. If anyone were to approach me now—

VALENTYNA: Hey, you! Are you from these parts?

ZVENYBUDLO: Well, I'll be damned! No, I'm not from these parts. Go to hell.

VALENTYNA: To hell, eh? Presently you will become convinced that you won't be talking to me in that tone of voice for more than two minutes. Do you wish to be convinced?

ZVENYBUDLO: And what do they call you?

VALENTYNA: That's not the problem. To tell the truth, my name is Valentyna.

ZVENYBUDLO: I heard of such a name, I think, in the last century.

VALENTYNA: And in which century are you?

ZVENYBUDLO: If you think that I am in the present one, then I'll prove to you, with equal success, that we are in the next century.

VALENTYNA: Prove it. But beware: I have already been in all situations and in all their variations. This is a mountain.

ZVENYBUDLO: A flint one at that. And birds are building their nests in it.

VALENTYNA: That's exactly what I need. What were you doing here?

ZVENYBUDLO: I wanted to eat.

VALENTYNA: You started frying something, or what?

ZVENYBUDLO: No. 'Cause I didn't have anything.

VALENTYNA: Good. I have some cans of crayfish in my pocket.

ZVENYBUDLO: Of crabs?

VALENTYNA: Of crayfish, you fool. Got a light?

ZVENYBUDLO: No, but I have some flint. You mean you smoke?

VALENTYNA: None of your business. Give it here. So, as I said, I am Valentyna.

ZVENYBUDLO: In that case I have a question.

VALENTYNA: Well?

ZVENYBUDLO: If you are Valentyna, why are you so small?

VALENTYNA: Compared to the length of your tongue, I am indeed small. Compared to the dimensions of your brain, I'm a giant. Is that all? I'm warning you: I can't stand other people's chatter. I recognize only my own.

ZVENYBUDLO: Just like me. I recognize only my own, too. In that case, forgive me.

VALENTYNA: I forgive you. But for what?

ZVENYBUDLO: For telling you to go to hell at the very beginning. You should not have been told to go to hell, and I regret having done so.

VALENTYNA: I pardon you. So give me a light. Do you have a dagger?

ZVENYBUDLO: I did, but it broke. I had a habit of swatting flies with it.

VALENTYNA: That's exactly what I need it for. You and I share a truly grandiose kinship. But all joking aside. This is a mountain.

ZVENYBUDLO: And a flint one to boot. With swallows.

VALENTYNA: But this mountain has no spine.

ZVENYBUDLO: Perhaps this is exactly where its spine is?

VALENTYNA: Fine, but then it doesn't have a belly. Have you tried going around it?

ZVENYBUDLO: I was just getting ready to do that.

VALENTYNA: Marvellous. You'll go with me.

ZVENYBUDLO: It's not worth the effort.

VALENTYNA: What, you lazybones, you're refusing?

ZVENYBUDLO: With you I'm prepared to go to the end of the world. But the point is I've come to understand something as far as this mountain is concerned.

VALENTYNA: What have you come to understand?

ZVENYBUDLO: There's no access to it from the other side.

VALENTYNA: So that's it. That's terrible. We'll have to go down into the valley.

ZVENYBUDLO: Why down into the valley?

VALENTYNA: Because that's where all those pigs have gathered. See that tavern down there? I'll grab one of them by the scruff of his neck and he'll show us the way to the top.

ZVENYBUDLO: Do you want to go there so badly?

VALENTYNA: Into the valley?

ZVENYBUDLO: No, to the top.

VALENTYNA: Do I want to go there? Certainly. Undoubtedly. Irrevocably. Even if this mountain were to crumble into dry buckwheat cereal, I have to set foot on its peak.

ZVENYBUDLO: Since you put it so categorically, there's nothing else we can do. It is precisely because of my fundamental abhorrence of all categorical imperatives that I shall go with you. Because today I am punishing myself. Only—

VALENTYNA: Only what? You want to eat?

ZVENYBUDLO: That's the fate of every gracioso. But that's not what's stopping me. I'm a stoic gracioso. The crayfish in your pocket are to me what a naked woman was to St. Anthony: I scorn them. I only want to be sure that it is really necessary to go down into the valley first in order to climb to the peak.

VALENTYNA: It is. Trust my expertise. I already saw a swinish mountain like this one in Abyssinia. It was exactly the same: without a belly or accessibility. And remember this from now till doomsday: to claw one's way to the top, one must first slide down to the bottom.

ZVENYBUDLO: You win. I am going with you. Help me up.

VALENTYNA: Give me your hand! What's your name?

ZVENYBUDLO: Simply Zvenybudlo.

VALENTYNA: A melodious name. I approve. Zvenybudlo, the descent into the valley is much too steep. Therefore I shall have to sit up on your shoulders as you carefully slither down on your madam-perch.

ZVENYBUDLO: On my madam-perch? Do you mean on my head?

VALENTYNA: On your posterior, stupid! Now then, slither down carefully on your rear end and, at the same time, brace your feet against all possible points of support.

ZVENYBUDLO: Said aptly and wittily. Have a seat, please.

VALENTYNA: Godspeed! Giddyup!

ZVENYBUDLO: Hee-haw!

## Scene 2

ALL: Hee-haw! Heigh-ho!

BLEKHMEN: Who are you?

ALL: We're criminals.

BLEKHMEN: You're lying. You're nothing. The job won't happen.

BARAN-SOKIL: May the Captain's soul rest in peace!

SID BURBAGE: To hell with peace! The Captain's alive.

MARY: Oh, for the love of God, explain it to the Boatswain!

DICK ROBERTS: They're not talking about me, Boatswain. They had a captain of their own.

SID BURBAGE: Then that's another matter, sir.

ALL: Hee-haw, haw! Hee-ho, ho!

BLEKHMEN: Quiet! Listen! Listen, you criminals of the past and perfect nothings of the present and future. I shall not be wrong if I say: after the death of our captain and general, our prince and sovereign, you do not recognize me as your commander.

ALL: No! No! We don't recognize you!

BLEKHMEN: No, I won't be wrong. You all know perfectly well that out of all of you I am the hardest, the most experienced, and so forth. But to elect me as your chief, the...

VAVYDLO: The swinish underside of our unfathomable souls will not allow it.

BLEKHMEN: Exactly. I'm a lousy speaker, so prompt me. I declare: the solemn transfer of the mace will not take place here because the mace itself has vanished someplace—

BARAN-SOKIL: Svyniache Vukho stole it.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: No, no, it wasn't me who stole it.

BLEKHMEN: It was either you or not you. In any case, there won't be any—

VAVYDLO: Ceremonies.

BLEKHMEN: Exactly. Ceremonies. Let Vavydlo deliver the eulogy now because I don't know how.

VAVYDLO: O maharanis! O Kshatriyas! On this pure lily-white day, when with a final cry of our souls we remember the king of kings, the emperor of emperors, that unforgettable, unobliterable from our memories, inexpungible from the convolutions of our brains—

SID BURBAGE: He stole it.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: What did I steal?

SID BURBAGE: The poker. Or that mace. There it is sticking out from under his jacket.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: Oh, my God! Explain it to the Boatswain!

MARY: Explain it to him, Captain Roberts.

DICK ROBERTS: Take it easy, Boatswain. That's not a mace.

MARY: It's a ladle stolen from the landlord. For your information, Boatswain, there's general anarchy here.

SID BURBAGE: But where's the landlord?

MARY: He's in the next room. He has plunged into uselessness, Boatswain.

SID BURBAGE: Then it's another matter.

VAVYDLO: As I was saying ... the kind that cannot be expunged from the convolutions of our brains. Friends, you saw that I did not drink, that I scarcely took part in your conversations. I sat apart from you. The great mystery with which the Caribbean Sea shines at night I could compare here to that state of high and intense alarm that seized my soul and, I'm sure, your souls too, back then, at twelve o'clock noon, when all of us—

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: The main thing is that when we recall the prince, we become, at the same time, most acutely aware of our own baseness, our repulsiveness, our loathsomeness, our doggishness, our cattiness—

BARAN-SOKIL: Listen, Svyniache Vukho, go to hell! The late Prince said you were a hypocrite. I agreed. But I never knew you were inclined to be bothered by a guilty conscience.

BLEKHMEN: Beat it! Vavydlo is delivering the eulogy.

VAVYDLO: That's right, I'm speaking. So, then, at the broad daylight hour of twelve, pregnant with the fatal fruit—

MARY: Of six!

ALL: Yes?

MARY: Six!

ALL: Really?

MARY: Something is coming from that side!

BLEKHMEN: You mean someone?

MARY: I mean something. A large human being. Or two small ones.

BARAN-SOKIL: From the sea side?

MARY: From the mountain side. It is sliding down.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: Call the landlord!

MARY: He won't come out. It's no use talking to him.

BLEKHMEN: Barricade the door!

MARY: It's too late—

ALL: It's Lady Valentyna! Oh! Oh!

BLEKHMEN: Your Majesty! Astride?

MARY: In a man's clothes?

ALL: Long live our Majesty!

VALENTYNA: Yes, it's me. This is my horse. You must love him.

ZVENYBUDLO: Hee-haw, haw!

ALL: Hee-haw, haw! Hee-ho, ho!

VALENTYNA: Who are you? Why are you silent, you curs' souls, you crow's carrion, you hyenas, you snails, you gasbags?

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: I said the same thing, Your Majesty, but not as poetically. They didn't believe me.

VALENTYNA: You said that? You said that? You've yet to answer to me about the forty-seven thousand metres of cloth used for flags during the postwar demonstration. Sit down over there by the chain and stay there until I call you. Who is in charge here?

BLEKHMEN: No one is, but it should be me.

BARAN-SOKIL: That's not true!

VALENTYNA: You'd better be quiet too, understand. Where is your Bednarsky?

BLEKHMEN: Bednarsky is no more.

VALENTYNA: What? Don't tell me he kicked the bucket?

BLEKHMEN: It's not that he has kicked the bucket. But all the same, it's as if he has.

VALENTYNA: What's all this gibberish, you cretin? Mary, you explain.

MARY: A month ago Prince Bednarsky sent a letter to Baran-Sokil, milady.

BLEKHMEN: To me, not to Baran-Sokil.

MARY: Well then, he sent a letter to Blekhman with an order to consider him dead.

VALENTYNA: Who, Blekhman?

MARY: No. Himself. To consider him, Prince Bednarsky, dead.

VALENTYNA: Aha! That's witty. It sounds like the Prince to me. Give me a light, someone. And you immediately acknowledged him as being dead?

MARY: No, milady. Not immediately. It took us a month to absorb the news and get used to it. Earlier today we met for the first time to hold a memorial.

VALENTYNA: The first time? How many times do you intend to celebrate those memorials?

MARY: About four times. But not more than that for sure.

VALENTYNA: I knew you were supposed to gather here for some kind of nastiness. Only I couldn't figure out: why here exactly?

MARY: So we could see the sea, milady. And the mountains. And also so there would be sailors here.

VALENTYNA: Where are your sailors?

MARY: They're here.

VALENTYNA: Show them to me.

DICK ROBERTS: I'm Roberts, ma'am. Captain Dick Roberts, a long-voyage navigator. And this is Burbage, Sidney John Burbage, my boatswain.

SID BURBAGE: May I be so bold as to inquire how you have been, madam?

VALENTYNA: Fine, thank you. Give me a light. You are free to go for the time being. That's not to say I won't need you in the future.

DICK ROBERTS: We're at your service, ma'am.

VALENTYNA: Hm. All of this is very interesting. But not in the way I thought. What do you think, Zvenybudlo?

ZVENYBUDLO: The stoic's main rule is: don't wonder. And please note: there's a lot of food here, yet I haven't even alluded to the subject of dinner.

VALENTYNA: That's true. I appreciate that. But we won't eat with these swine. We'll be served exquisite dishes. Where's the landlord?

MARY: He's not here, milady.

VALENTYNA: He's not here? Sobibatko, the landlord of this hole that the rains haven't finished off?

MARY: Well, he is. But it's the same as if he weren't. He has plunged into utter uselessness. We manage without him.

VALENTYNA: Then fix a dinner for me and Zvenybudlo. You know my tastes. There had better be beer and bread sticks. But I still need Sobibatko for something else. Fetch him for me, Blekzman.

BLEKHMEN: He won't come, Your Majesty. It would be a waste of time to go and get him.

VALENTYNA: What do you mean he won't come? Even if you tell him it is I who is asking for him?

BLEKHMEN: He has lost whatever mind he had left. The concept of authority has become meaningless to him.

VALENTYNA: I don't like this at all. What happened to him?

BLEKHMEN: He's heartsick, Your Majesty. He won't come out. There's no use trying.

VALENTYNA: I absolutely don't like this. Your jackal muzzles suit tragedy about as much as a marquise's wig suits the Boatswain. But he and the Captain are honest people, I can see that. As for the rest of you, I'll take you out on a raid, you can be sure of that. What kind of a Sumero-Babylonian formula is that: he is, but at the same time he isn't? This won't go on much longer. You all know me to that extent. Who was the last to see Sobibatko? Was it you, Mary?

BLEKHMEN: Your Majesty, only Paltig Pigg maintains contact with him.

VALENTYNA: Who? Who the devil is that?

BLEKHMEN: Paltig Pigg. The pale youth over there sitting motionlessly at the door to his room.

BARAN-SOKIL: He is also known by another name: Paltig Pear.

VALENTYNA: So which is better?

BARAN-SOKIL: Paltig Pear.

MARY: No, Paltig Pigg.

VALENTYNA: Oh, to hell with allop you! Hey, you, milksop!

PALTIG PIGG: Are you speaking to me, madam?

VALENTYNA: To you, to you, your brightness. Perhaps you would be so kind as to take the little stool you're sitting on into your dainty hands, bring it over here, and sit down beside me?

PALTIG PIGG: With pleasure, madam. The stool will later turn to dust anyway.

VALENTYNA: When later?

PALTIG PIGG: I don't know. Later. Perhaps a hundred years from now. When its time comes.

VALENTYNA: Do you always speak in axioms, my angel, or only now?

MARY: He's a terrible pessimist, milady. He immediately sees everything already in its final stage.

VALENTYNA: Aha. That's a very important trait. Fine, but as long as you are sitting next to me, and as long as the stool under you has not yet crumbled away, perhaps you'd be so kind as to weigh one matter in your lucid brain. Namely: I really, really, really need to

see your Sobibatko. You do know him, don't you? Beer-bellied. Red-nosed. Looks like all theatrical innkeepers do. Well?

PALTIG PIGG: I understand, madam. I will go to him, madam. Later they will wear out.

VALENTYNA: Who's "they"?

PALTIG PIGG: The shoes in which I shall enter that room. But I'll go there anyway.

VALENTYNA: I praise your heroic fatalism. Godspeed! Off you go! You can leave the stool here.

PALTIG PIGG: All right, madam. I'll leave the stool. It will be eaten by grubs anyway.

VALENTYNA: Brilliant. Finally something I like. Off you go! Bring me dinner! Beer, bread sticks, asparagus with oranges, kidneys cooked in honey, pudding with vinegar—vinegar on the side—kidney beans, crayfish—no, I have crayfish in my pocket. Here you are, Zvenybudlo, eat. Get yourself a dagger to open them. I myself have a pistol.

ALL: Oh! Your Majesty!

VALENTYNA: Never mind. I'm dispersing flies. Bang! Now I fight flies exclusively with gunpowder. To your health, Zvenybudlo! Sing me a song!

BARAN-SOKIL: Get ready! Test your voices!

ALL: Hee-haw, haw! Hee-ho, ho!

*Music. All take out masks from under their coats. Instead of noses, the masks have revolver barrels. A solemn song in honour of VALENTYNA.*

BARAN-SOKIL: Valentyna from the White Cliffs

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: was riding on a steed

ALL: prancing galloping prancing galloping  
prancing galloping prancing galloping  
prancing once again

BARAN-SOKIL: let the sheik come over here

VAVYDLO: let the sultan himself come

ALL: I will cut off, I will cut off  
all his beauty  
all his beauty

MARY (*in a bass voice*): his thick black beard

ALL: keep that in mind, sheik  
keep that in mind, sheik  
ho-la!

VALENTYNA: My, my. That's a very old song. Zvenybudlo, listen to it. It's a hundred years old. Two hundred years. From the days when I was still a little girl.

BARAN-SOKIL: Hey, squirrel from the White Cliffs

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: cried the sheik from the balcony

ALL: your reach is too short, your hands are too short  
your reach is too short, your hands are too short  
you won't get the beard

BARAN-SOKIL: I've grown and nursed it

VAVYDLO: a whole fifty years

ALL: it knows no razor, it knows no scissors  
my famous beard  
my famous beard

MARY (*in a bass voice*): like the thickest brush



ALL:                               so you'd better not trot  
                                       so you'd better not trot here  
                                       ho-la!

ZVENYBUDLO: What a moving song. A poignant song.

VALENTYNA: Eat, Zvenybudlo. Eat. It's a good song to daydream to. Of course, it wasn't like that at all. But listen anyway. There's still a third stanza.

BARAN-SOKIL:                 Our little bird from the White Cliffs

SVYNIACHE VUKHO:         leaped onto the saddle

ALL:                               on the go with her hand, on the go with her hand  
                                       on the go with her hand, on the go with her hand  
                                       she touched the beard

BARAN-SOKIL:                 how sumptuous is the beard

VAVYDLO:                       so fluffy so rough

ALL:                               'tis a pity to cut it, O glorious sheik  
                                       let's hasten to make peace  
                                       let's hasten to make peace

MARY (*in a bass voice*):   in honour of the beard

ALL:                               invite me to a feast  
                                       invite me to a feast  
                                       ho-la!

VALENTYNA: Bravo, kiddies! Sweetbriar has bloomed in my heart. Perhaps I do love you a little, kids. Many a year we have lived together! A hundred years. Two hundred years. It's been such a long time. You were once better, wittier. Of course, everything was different from the way it's sung in the song. There are different intervals of time between touching a beard and being a sheik's guest. Much more condensed. And much, much better. Where's your Vedmid? Where's Krasbyna? Where's Bulvyk? And finally, where is your Bednarsky? He was something! When did he abandon you?

BLEKHMANN: A year ago.

VAVYDLO: Two.

BARAN-SOKIL: Nonsense! Only a month ago.

MARY: Of course. A month ago we got a letter from him.

VALENTYNA: That's the whole point! It happened only yesterday, a day ago. You've lost a lot, a great deal of time. Each one of us is between thirty and forty. There's no one over forty, and I'm the youngest. Or—We've been totally deceived! We're performing theatre. At present we're only in the second day. But much has happened in that time! And the kind of things that have brought all of us here together again. What is this tavern of yours called?

MARY: Under the Four Winds.

SID BURBAGE: Under the Three Devils would be better.

MARY: Boatswain! Captain, explain it to the Boatswain.

VALENTYNA: Under the Four Winds. Under the Three Devils. Such a long time ago it all was! They shouted bravo and sang a ballad about a sailor of the empire. The words have been lost, God only knows when. No one remembers. The Boatswain couldn't understand it at all. They explained it to him. And so on.

MARY: Are you crying, milady?

ALL: Her Majesty is crying.

VALENTYNA: Zvenybudlo, have you at least had enough to eat? Go to hell, all of you! What time is it? Give me a light. Under the Four Winds! Sobibatko remains in his room in Under the Four Winds. Has what's-his-name returned from him? Let me look around. I'm not acquainted yet with some of you. Who is that silent girl? She's not drinking or singing.

MARY: She's insane, milady. She sits here for days on end.

VALENTYNA: How long?

MARY: A year. Two.

VALENTYNA: Call her over here. I have an irresistible attraction to the insane.

MARY: Arivana! Come here, Arivana!

VALENTYNA: In the meantime you go to blazes. I'll amuse myself.

MIMI: Did you call me, madam?

VALENTYNA: Sit down here, on the little stool. It hasn't crumbled away yet.

MIMI: I'm not afraid, madam.

VALENTYNA: Have we ever met?

MIMI: As far as I can remember, no, madam.

VALENTYNA: You answer like a trained secretary. I don't like that. But you aren't insane. If anyone should know that, it's me. I have a keen sense for such things.

MIMI: You're right on both counts. I'm not insane, and I was a secretary.

VALENTYNA: Aha! Zvenybudlo, listen. Hold on—what's your name?

MIMI: Arivana.

VALENTYNA: Arivana—Arivana—

MIMI: I gave myself that name.

VALENTYNA: Everything fits now. I now know who you are. Your name is in the letter from the man whom I—

MIMI: You knew him?

VALENTYNA: Zvenybudlo, observe carefully the expression on my face. If it should attract the landlords' attention, give me a sign.

ZVENYBUDLO: They're playing cards.

VALENTYNA: Observe just the same. Laugh, so that it would appear as if we are talking nonsense.

ZVENYBUDLO: There's no need to laugh because we're really doing that. However—hee-haw!

ALL: Hee-haw! Heigh-ho!

VALENTYNA: That's good. So, you'd like to know if I knew him. I see that he was everything in the world to you. It's because of him that you sit here. You live for him. Have I guessed right?

MIMI: Yes.

VALENTYNA: Everything fits now. Is he sitting on a cliff—in a cave or something?

MIMI: You know the truth.

VALENTYNA: Zvenybudlo, do you hear that? He's sitting on a cliff that has no belly. Do you take food up to him?

MIMI: No. He doesn't take anything from me.

VALENTYNA: Ah, yes. Hermits are fed by heavenly birds. But you are the only one he has any contact with?

MIMI: Yes. That's exactly right.

VALENTYNA: You must have to shout loudly to each other since it's rather high up there?

MIMI: There's a high, clear echo.

VALENTYNA: Aha. Then it's all right. So, there's no access to that place. The access to that place depends solely on his will, right? He himself got there by ... well, it doesn't matter. But to reach him, you need a tall pole or a ladder, right?

MIMI: No pole or ladder will help. If he doesn't let down his rope ladder, which he has—

VALENTYNA: So he has a rope ladder?

MIMI: A white rope ladder with hard, oak rungs for climbing.

VALENTYNA: Fascinating. I can see this ladder clearly. I've already fallen in love with this ladder. It smells of coconut, doesn't it? I'm astonished that you're telling me all this so willingly. You should have made it a mystery.

MIMI: What for? Everyone here knows he won't let down the ladder to anyone. And he'll only talk to me.

VALENTYNA: Wait. Who is everyone who know about you and him?

MIMI: Everyone. Sobibatko the landlord. Mary. Those gentlemen over there who want to see him today.

VALENTYNA: So that's it! Zvenybudlo, when the expression on my face changes, neigh loudly. All right? Why the devil, if I may ask, do those gentlemen have to see him?

MIMI: That I don't know. They say they have to inform him about something important. Something his life depends on.

VALENTYNA: Oh, I don't like that one single bit either. Do you have any matches?

MIMI: No, I'm afraid.

ZVENYBUDLO: You're welcome to use my flint and steel.

VALENTYNA: I had a feeling something was not right here. But they disguised themselves so skilfully that, in fact, I believed in their insignificance. Wait. Why did they tell me you were mad?

MIMI: I don't know, madam.

VALENTYNA: And you haven't the slightest suspicion? Try to remember, when they talked with you, was there anything in their tone of voices or gestures from which you could have deduced that they took you for someone who was not all there, so to speak? Did you talk with any of them?

MIMI: Only with Mary. And a little bit with Sobibatko, the landlord. When I moved in here, I told her everything right away. No, I didn't notice anything.

VALENTYNA: Yet it was precisely she who told me you're not all there.

MIMI: I don't understand it either, madam.

VALENTYNA: How did they gather here?

MIMI: One at a time. Only those two, the sailors, came together. Their schooner is over there.

VALENTYNA: Yes. Yes. Yes. But if they want to see him and you're not making a mystery of it, then what the devil are they waiting for? Why aren't they going there right now?

MIMI: Actually, they're waiting for someone. He was here this morning and is supposed to come back. Then we'll all go there together.

VALENTYNA: In that case, here is the final point. Do you happen to remember what they called the one who's coming back?

MIMI: They called him—I do remember something. That Mokro was in his name. Or something like that.

VALENTYNA: Mokro? Hm. Mokro, you say? Hm. ... Are you sure?

MIMI: It seems to me it ended with a “mokro.”

VALENTYNA: Was he short, pudgy—this man? With pig’s eyes and a thin moustache?

MIMI: Yes. On the whole, yes.

VALENTYNA: Was his name Tormokro?

MIMI: That’s it! That’s it exactly.

VALENTYNA: Zvenybudlo, what’s on my face?

ZVENYBUDLO: The composure and regality of Athena the victorious.

VALENTYNA: But then it’s a horse of a completely different colour, one that even I hadn’t suspected. An immeasurable ocean of the most phenomenal bastardism! Tormokro! The skunk I met just once in my life. But that was enough for me to remember him for the rest of my life. And he is supposed to appear here in person? Great Jehovah, our eyes reel when we begin pondering Thy fathomless ways! Did you hear that Zvenybudlo, you professional gracioso? And I, a professional conspirator, fell so easily for their sweet songs! I even started whimpering! Zvenybudlo, let’s take back at once all of the kind things we said about them. They’re scum whose legs should be shot off like flies’. A great judge is what you ought to be by profession. Imagine that I’m the mighty one of this world, and you dare to utter the truth to my face. Speak: may we wish them doom?

ZVENYBUDLO: It all depends on how they themselves would view such a matter.

VALENTYNA: All right. I’ll gladly listen to you, friend, but some other time. For at this solemn moment I wish them only pestilence, hail, plague, earthquake, flood, and so forth and so on. And you, Arivana, know nothing?

MIMI: I am, in fact, very surprised, madam. If you could explain it to me—

VALENTYNA: I will explain. I will explain. They were speaking the truth. It does concern life. It concerns the life of a great man. They’re mercenaries and servants of the most repugnant conspiracy that has ever existed since the earth began.

MIMI: They want to assassinate him?

VALENTYNA: Look into my eyes. Do you see me?

MIMI: Yes. I see you.

VALENTYNA: I want to return your hero to the people. That’s all.

MIMI: To the people? And to me, too?

VALENTYNA: No. To you, no. We’re nearing a climax, Arivana. When I’m excited, Arivana, I can’t express such subtleties in words. Thus, my words are inferior to my senses. Therefore just tell me: can you believe that I’m the type of woman to whom you should relinquish your place? Don’t answer right away. Think. And then decide. Can you believe that I’m the woman who should be sitting here instead of you? Think it over while I have a smoke. Zvenybudlo, give me a light.

ZVENYBUDLO: Here’s my flint and steel. Please excuse me. I’m now speaking to the audience. While she is thinking, I would like to take this opportunity for a brief credo, so to speak. For the first time in my life, other people’s chatter, with which I’ve had it up to my diaphragm, has brought me some good. I’ve reached the conclusion that they are all determined to drag a great man into some filthy affair. Meanwhile, I have sympathy for great people who stay up on mountain tops and do not meddle in earthly affairs. Besides, my devotion to her Highness has not been sincere. It has been completely insincere. So now I’ll go and fulfill my mission. Observe! I am inconspicuously vanishing. I’ve no remorse about it whatsoever.

VALENTYNA: Have you decided?

MIMI: Yes.

VALENTYNA: You understand that I'm not taking him away from you for myself?

MIMI: Yes.

VALENTYNA: You understand that had I been in your place, I would not have been able to sit here for a single minute? I have a fierce abhorrence of reclusion, martyrdom, and other such amusements. But your mission is to be not here. You should not love him for yourself. Otherwise, I will have been mistaken about you. If that is the case, then go to hell! Understand?

MIMI: I didn't understand it at first. Now I do.

VALENTYNA: Arivana has substance, understand? Not a hollow sound, but substance. Do you want to begin a new life? A completely new life? Do you know what a legendary woman is? It's a very pleasant thing to be a legendary woman. It seems to give you wings, a veil, you become a cloudlet, and so forth and so on. But at the same time you are flesh, intensely fragrant flesh. Understand? I have one question. It's indiscreet, so forgive me. How many times have you been with him?

MIMI: Only once.

VALENTYNA: Very good. Very becoming for a legend. Was it after that, then, that his wife strangled herself with a rope?

MIMI: She wasn't a wife to him.

VALENTYNA: It doesn't matter. What's important is that there are always lucky cards here for you. Well, what do you say? Will you begin everything from the beginning?

MIMI: All right.

VALENTYNA: Then quickly tell me the agreed upon signal.

MIMI: The signal?

VALENTYNA: After all, we're exchanging the crowns on our heads, aren't we?

MIMI: He answers when I shout: "I'm here!"

VALENTYNA: Marvellous. Quietly call the sailors over for me. You'll go with them.

MIMI: The sailors? The Captain is exceptionally nice. He has bright eyes.

VALENTYNA: Do you like him?

MIMI: I don't know.

VALENTYNA: Call them both over here. I'm taking everything into my own hands. Do you hear? I can do even more complicated tricks, I'll have you know. When I begin, I never know from which end a solution will come. So, when I do improvise, don't be surprised by anything. Do you trust me?

MIMI: Without a doubt. Without a shadow of a doubt.

VALENTYNA: Farewell. And remember for the rest of your life: Arivana is not just an invented name. Arivana has substance. Run along to the sailors. Hallo!

MARY: Milady?

VALENTYNA: Where's that ... Paltig boy? Hasn't he come back yet?

MARY: No. He's still in that room.

VALENTYNA: Is it interesting without me?

BLEKHMANN: Majesty, we're gambling at cards.

VALENTYNA: What a rare coincidence. It's interesting for me without you, too. Neigh!

ALL: Hee-haw! Hee-ho, ho!

DICK ROBERTS: Do you wish to talk to us, ma'am?

VALENTYNA: Quite so. What kind of cargo will you be shipping, Captain?

DICK ROBERTS: An ordinary wooden trunk, ma'am . There it is standing in the corner.

VALENTYNA: In its present state?

DICK ROBERTS: No, ma'am . It was supposed to be filled.

VALENTYNA: We're talking, no doubt, about contraband?

DICK ROBERTS: I am of the same opinion myself. But a special kind of contraband, because forty miles out we're to dump the trunk into the sea.

VALENTYNA: Marvellous. In what direction are you to be sailing?

DICK ROBERTS: South-southwest, ma'am .

VALENTYNA: And how much are you getting for the job?

DICK ROBERTS: Two hundred and fifty, ma'am .

VALENTYNA: Marvellous, couldn't be better. You'll receive two thousand five hundred and will sail in the same direction. But without the trunk.

DICK ROBERTS: Yes, ma'am .

VALENTYNA: Instead of the trunk, you'll carry a live person. A girl.

DICK ROBERTS: Aye, ma'am .

VALENTYNA: Under no circumstances should you dump the girl into the sea. On the contrary, you should guard her in every possible way. The girl should be put ashore as soon as she says she wants that. But there's a chance that she might not express such a wish. And that depends on you, Captain.

DICK ROBERTS: Aye, ma'am . Will there be any other orders, ma'am ?

VALENTYNA: Ah, yes! You'll sail off immediately after we all set out from this place. Anyone who shows up here after that should be tied up forthwith. For that there's an additional reward: five hundred. All together that's three thousand. Is that enough?

DICK ROBERTS: I'm a modest man, ma'am . My boatswain is also a modest man. We could do without the additional reward.

SID BURBAGE: Excuse me, sir. The struggle with whomever we would have to tie up might be protracted and life-threatening.

VALENTYNA: Of course, of course, Boatswain. I honestly suggest you accept the additional reward.

SID BURBAGE: We're happy to serve you just the same, ma'am . I am strongly suspicious of that swab who hid a poker under his jacket. But the struggle might indeed be protracted and life-threatening. Begging your pardon, sir.

ALL: Paltig Pigg! Paltig Pigg is returning!

VALENTYNA: The sun of my eyes! My baby carrot and my purring kitty! You're returning from your lord and mine. Shall we be granted the privilege of seeing his sparkling eyes? Or shall we be further shown only his heroic back through the cracks in the boards? Ho-la, a letter?

PALTIG PIGG: He gave me a letter for you, madam.

VALENTYNA: Did he convey anything orally?

PALTIG PIGG: He talked a great deal, but only about one thing. He said his own death does not seem frightening to him anymore. And he gave me this letter. After a while he'll turn yellow.

VALENTYNA: Who? The landlord?

PALTIG PIGG: No, I meant to say the letter. The landlord will probably grow pale.

VALENTYNA: I'll believe anything but that Sobibatko will grow pale someday. He'll even go to heaven with that beet-red colour. Even in the letter he states that everything smells red to him. There's nothing else written here.

PALTIG PIGG: That's probably the way it is supposed to be.

VALENTYNA: It seems he's the only decent person amongst us. But to hell with appraisals. Listen, you former criminals and current sacrificial lambs! Take off your pig masks. Take them off because I'm already acting uncovered. Well? You're glaring at me? Perhaps you're going to tell me again, so to speak, that there'll be no action?

ALL: Oh! Your Majesty!

VALENTYNA: You scum! You imagined there could be a job in this world in which you could take part without me? Or, perhaps, you're going to tell me, so to speak, that you need proof?

ALL: Your Majesty! Oh?

BLEKHMANN: Your Majesty! Oh?

VALENTYNA: You son of a bitch! As proof, one word suffices: Tormokro!

BLEKHMANN: Your Majesty! That's proof enough.

VALENTYNA: What? You're not ashamed?

ALL: We are ashamed. We're all ashamed!

VALENTYNA: I could have kept you in my sight even longer. You're good for nothing. The trunk's standing in the corner in plain view.

ALL: Your Majesty! Oh!

VALENTYNA: And Svyniache Vukho is incapable of hiding the tommy gun behind the curtain. Give it here! You don't deserve to handle it.

ALL: Oh! Your Majesty!

VALENTYNA: Now listen to me! Tormokro won't be coming. Instead of Tormokro, I came. I'm in charge of this business.

ALL: Long live Valentyna, our Queen!

VALENTYNA: The girl "who's not all there" will remain here. I know the signal. I'll climb up first. When I whistle from above, that will mean the ladder is at your disposal. Then don't just stand around. Zvenybudlo! Where's Zvenybudlo?

MARY: He's nowhere to be found, milady.

VALENTYNA: Ah, you traitor! You've fled? For everyone's information: I personally punish all traitors. You can ask Svyniache Vukho what that means.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: Long live Valentyna, our Queen!

ALL: Long live Valentyna, our Queen!

VALENTYNA: Raise your wineglasses! Sing a song to me!

BARAN-SOKIL: Attention! Test your voices!

ALL: Hee-haw! Hee-ho, ho!

*Music. Pantomime. Joyous singing in VALENTYNA'S honour: no words are heard. The sound of the voices is played by the orchestra alone. VALENTYNA is lifted up and carried. Then everyone's movements slow down, and they become emphatically grave.*

MARY: How can that be? You came?

TORMOKRO: Halt! What's this about? I don't understand. Mary, they sent Valentyna here—My God! She's going with them! It's a disaster! Miss—are you here? Are you still here? It's a total disaster!

SID BURBAGE: sir, doesn't it seem to you that this swabbie is fidgeting too much?

DICK ROBERTS: I know only one thing: he arrived later.

SID BURBAGE: Aye, sir. Hey, you!

TORMOKRO: Me?

SID BURBAGE: You, you. Come over here.

TORMOKRO: What are you doing? Aw! Mary, you whore—run after them! Tell them that Valentyna—ow! Ow, ow!

DICK ROBERTS: Mary, I'm very sorry. Although it's true, my instructions refer only to those who arrive later, I think I'll not be wrong if I extend them to include those who are in pursuit as well.

MARY: Captain! Shame on you! May you—Ow! Ow, ow!

DICK ROBERTS: No matter! Everything's in order. I reckon they'll enjoy sitting side by side, Boatswain. Miss, if I'm not mistaken, you're—

MIMI: Captain, you have a very sweet smile. Do you do everything in your life with a smile like that?

DICK ROBERTS: The sun and the sea, Miss, the sun and the sea. We have a great journey ahead of us. Boatswain!

SID BURBAGE: Aye, sir.

PALTIG PIGG: Farewell. Later, the sun will set and the sea will be engulfed by darkness. You may come out now, landlord. Isn't it beautiful here?

SOBIBATKO: I've always said: Valentyna is a great woman. It will be a very, very good thing if she saves him. He's praying for the people, and I do belong to the people. I do—oho-ho! Oho-ho, I do! The question was: who could best feign insignificance? I feigned it best. You believed me. And why, one may ask? Because when you were pretending, you kept thinking: We're disgusting, we're disgusting, we're disgusting. But not I. When I was pretending, I kept thinking to myself: I'm—oho-ho! Because I'm Sobibatko the landlord, a father unto myself, if you'd like to know. Everything begins anew from me, from me, just so you'll know. As for you, they tied you up. So how does it feel—good? It's not good say I, Sobibatko. It's not good. What's going to happen next, huh, Mary, you good-for-nothing girl?

MARY: Uhhh—uhhh—

TORMOKRO: Uhhh—uhhh—

SOBIBATKO: Now that's how it is. I always told you that. So, what's going to happen next?

PALTIG PIGG: Later, it will go up in smoke.

SOBIBATKO: It?

PALTIG PIGG: The tobacco.

SOBIBATKO: What tobacco?

PALTIG PIGG: Tobacco. Perhaps these two will fall in love with each other here. Having learned from their sad experience, perhaps they will feel a longing for a secluded life in the bosom of nature. They may have children. Together they will all cultivate tobacco in the bosom of nature. People will smoke the tobacco. The tobacco will go up in smoke. Of course, only in the event that they should feel a longing for a secluded life in the bosom of nature.



### Scene 3

MAXIMUS: ... for a secluded life in the bosom of nature. But dost Thou really think that I wish to see them all here beside me? Thou seest right through me. I've no desire to make them all hermits. The reason I'm here is so that Thou mayst observe me in all my daily preoccupations.

*Music.*

O, most profound One! Unfathomable One! I'm worthy only to touch Thee, nothing more. Still, it may yet come to pass that for the crown of Thine intentions, Thou mayst have a need for my forthright reasoning. That is why I weave it forthrightly. Thou knoweth it: no one does it but me. Or nearly no one. Hear me.

*Music.*

Hear me. I have laid an immeasurable responsibility upon myself. I think, I constantly think about those in whose hands rests the fate of the world. But what can I do alone? Thou, Thou shouldst endue my thought with power! Endue it with such power that those of whom I am thinking would suddenly sense that I am thinking of them. Let my thought awaken one who, like me, sees the impending menace but has the ability to turn it away. For if a person does not do this, there would have been no reason for creating the human world. We have here a strictly sportive question. There have been many horrors, but there have also been as many joys! So if people aren't completely convinced that they must exist, then they should do so because of sheer ambition! Isn't ambition reason enough, if one stops and thinks about it properly? Can't one muster enough ambition to continue refining this world slowly while relishing the leisurely tempo of that supreme refinement? Shouldn't ambition, sheer ambition, be reason enough, not to allow everything to stop abruptly because of a childish accident? That is what I am thinking of. Thou seest it. Hear me.

*Music.*

Am I pure before Thee? I did what no one does, or nearly no one. Thou knoweth it. Hear me then. I do not beseech Thee about those who are pure because of their ignorance. They shall be saved as they are. No, I entreat Thee for those few who have perceived their sin, as I have. I offer prayers for those who are the only ones capable of building Thy kingdom here on earth. Otherwise there will have been no reason for creating the human world.

*Music.*

I believe in Thee, O Great One. I believe that only I have the right to address Thee, I and those like me. Those who do not resort to the medium of altars, bells, or fragrances. I and those like me. I believe in Thee as I believe in my personal responsibility. For in what other way can I, a human being, believe? Tell me. Thou seest me.

ZVENYBUDLO: I see you too.

MAXIMUS: How difficult it is to break away from thinking about Thee! When my will does not mingle with Thine, that moment is lost. Who are you, man, and what do you want?

ZVENYBUDLO: Nothing in particular. I could say: I have come to save you, great man. But no. I don't like such phrases. And you don't have to lower your rope ladder to me.

MAXIMUS: Did you hear my prayer?

ZVENYBUDLO: I heard you addressing yourself.

MAXIMUS: You don't believe in my sincerity?

ZVENYBUDLO: Why shouldn't I?! When a man marvels at the beauty of his teeth in a mirror, and wishes they were even straighter, even whiter, he does that sincerely. Quite sincerely.

MAXIMUS: Don't you think it was precisely for you that I've been schooling myself here for such a long time? That is to say, that I knew that one day you'd come to eavesdrop on me?

ZVENYBUDLO: No. I don't think so. My, the echo here is loud indeed.

MAXIMUS: I assure you that the echo of a crowded square, when someone is speaking from a balcony, is a hundred times louder.

ZVENYBUDLO: See, the sounds of irritation in your words best bear witness to the fact that you're not at peace with yourself. But that still is the best way out of the situation. And I certainly don't wish to accuse you of hypocrisy. Do you have a beard?

MAXIMUS: Yes.

ZVENYBUDLO: There, you see. A mask nonetheless.

MAXIMUS: But I simply have nothing to shave with here.

ZVENYBUDLO: The airplane that dropped you here could also have parachuted in a shaving kit. So I say again: that still is the best way out of the situation.

MAXIMUS: You think so—

ZVENYBUDLO: Naturally. It would be best for you to remain up there on your mountain for the rest of your life. I've heard your speeches from the balcony, of course.

MAXIMUS: They were disgusting, weren't they?

ZVENYBUDLO: They weren't that disgusting. There have been worse ones. However—

MAXIMUS: Do you know about my sin?

ZVENYBUDLO: I've heard something or other. But I don't attach any importance to it. You see, I myself am an oddball. I, too, would have willingly remained sitting here like that. But I would serve no purpose. For me a rock is a rock. You're more fortunate than I am because you see an image in the rock.

MAXIMUS: Here's the ladder for you. I like you.

ZVENYBUDLO: I'll take advantage of it only in case of dire need. Though, in all probability, that dire need will come. I, like you, am threatened with danger.

MAXIMUS: Danger? From the same source?

ZVENYBUDLO: No doubt. From a small, two-legged woman.

MAXIMUS: In all of my extremely long life, I have never yet seen a four-legged one.

ZVENYBUDLO: Neither have I. But this one is particularly two-legged.

MAXIMUS: And what does she want from me—from both of us?

ZVENYBUDLO: Tell me, what would you do if they should get an urge to hurl you again into the so-called vortex of life?

MAXIMUS: I'd laugh, and that's all.

ZVENYBUDLO: With her it's difficult just to laugh. She's a tornado, a hurricane, plague personified, and, what's more, awfully pretty to look at. Don't give in under any condition. I

tried resisting. I had no luck. I saved myself only by fleeing. And it's not yet certain whether I've succeeded.

MAXIMUS: Then clamber up here. In my life one pessimist has never been enough.

ZVENYBUDLO: Who told you I'm a pessimist? I'm nothing of the kind. Today I saw a real pessimist. I'm convinced that I don't resemble him whatsoever. Yes. The dire need approaches. It's galloping up the mountain at full speed. I'm coming up to be with you.

MAXIMUS: Hold on tighter.

VALENTYNA: I'm here!

MAXIMUS: It's Arivana.

ZVENYBUDLO: It certainly is not Arivana! Don't let that ladder down for any reason.

VALENTYNA: From below, your mountain has a pensive appearance. With its patches of clouds and all.

MAXIMUS: If you're not Arivana, I haven't the slightest intention of talking to you.

VALENTYNA: That's all in vain. Arivana has transferred her prerogatives to me. I'm the guardian of your life now.

MAXIMUS: I hadn't authorized anyone to be that.

VALENTYNA: Obviously we'll never agree about anything this way. But if you think I'm going to stand here and serenade you, know this: I'm not the type! If it were simply a matter of your life, I couldn't care less. Stay up there as long as you like. But you should know one thing: I'm Valentyna. I'm an agent of a great conspiracy. The great conspiracy resolved to summon you to the highest post in society. That's all there is to it. Will you come or not? No answer? Don't you believe me? Say something, because I'm starting to get bored. No answer? Oh, well. Silence is a witty thing. Especially when wittiness is being cultivated aloft in solitude. But keep this uppermost in your mind: they're all wildly ecstatic about your past anti-war speeches. You don't believe me? And their ecstasy keeps on growing. From day to day. I dare to assure you that in their circle, the ecstasy is being stoked by the legendary distance from what was actually uttered. I'm authorized to inform you of this.

ZVENYBUDLO: Don't say a word!

MAXIMUS: No, let me speak. I want universal justice to reign. That's a prerequisite.

VALENTYNA: For heaven's sake, it's all the same to me! Let it reign. What business is it of mine?! Besides, as far as I understand, they want to pull something like that with universal justice. They want to elevate it from its primitive state to ... how did they put it? Elevate it to a heightened state, or something like that. I understand little about such matters and therefore can't convey it to you properly. But it's something in that spirit. They say that manual labour will be liberated. That goes without saying. But they also don't want liberated manual labour to enslave the mind, or something like that. Something in that spirit. That's why they call themselves a great conspiracy of intellectuals. They say that when every person will be self-reliant, that is to say, free ... Do you understand or not? Free, completely free—get it? So, when everyone is free, somebody, so to speak, still must build cities, churches, highways, and dams.

MAXIMUS: Are they engineers, or what?

VALENTYNA: There are all kinds among them. The most important thing is that they want to assume control over all sources of energy. So that those sources are not affected by

someone's arbitrariness. For example, mine. There. Something in that spirit. Will you come?

ZVENYBUDLO: Indeed not!

MAXIMUS: No. I won't. I'm against state construction.

VALENTYNA: Exactly. They want to replace the state with themselves. It's a matter of the whole world, as far as I understand. Will you come?

MAXIMUS: No.

VALENTYNA: Still no? How long must I mollycoddle you?! Pretty soon I'll lose my patience and quit everything, damn it. But listen. Maybe you think they sent me to tempt you with my feminine charm or something? Well, try it then. But I warn you: I'm not very feminine. I smoke, and besides that I'm slovenly. You'll have little pleasure.

MAXIMUS: It seems you're sincere. Still, I probably won't go.

VALENTYNA: Oh, what a bore you are! You just can't imagine! Fine. This is my last resort, and—or I'm not me! You should know one thing. While you're sitting here and holding the millstone of the world on your shoulders, another has assumed your name. He's a surrogate installed by those officers against whom you once fought. And your ideas are being distorted. Your name is being bandied about like a rag. For only very few people know that you're actually sitting here. That's how it is.

MAXIMUS: It's not true!

VALENTYNA: Go find out for yourself.

MAXIMUS: I'm going.

ZVENYBUDLO: In the name of everything holy, don't go!

VALENTYNA: If you're going now, then go quickly. Because they're waiting for you down there, at the foot of the mountain. I still have to deal with them.

MAXIMUS: No more crimes in my name!

VALENTYNA: Leave me alone! It won't be in your name. I have my own scores to settle with them.

MAXIMUS: We're coming down. I'm not alone up here. You mustn't do anything to this person.

VALENTYNA: Oh, you're up there too, my pet?

ZVENYBUDLO: I, too, have been carrying out a mission, Lady Valentyna.

VALENTYNA: So be it. We'll settle up someday. Let's see what you look like. Not bad, presentable. But with a beard?

MAXIMUS: Never mind the beard. It can be taken care of quickly. The beard is theatrical. Blink and it's gone. And don't be surprised. You yourself have given events their momentum in time. Look, I'm already wearing civilized clothes.

VALENTYNA: Excellent. But there's still one small matter that needs to be resolved. Both of you hide over there and wait. I'm going up. The ladder's wonderful. I knew it would be. Ho-la! Wow! There's an amazing amount of space up here! You could play soccer. Go and hide. Be on your guard. I'm going to whistle. (*Whistles.*)

BLEKHMEN: Your Majesty, we're here.

VALENTYNA: Come closer, closer. Be absolutely quiet.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: Should we climb up the ladder?

VALENTYNA: Of course, but be absolutely quiet. Good. One, two ... Where's Vavydlo?

VAVYDLO: Here I am, Your Majesty, in the flesh.

VALENTYNA: Four. All right. Now, you scum, confess. Do any of you have a premonition? Think hard. Plunge deep into your dastardly souls.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: I think—

VALENTYNA: What do you think?

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: It think, Your Majesty, that I have a premonition.

VALENTYNA: Marvellous. I expected as much—that it would be you who'd have the premonition. This means—I must first climb down. I, too, don't like what's going on in that ravine.

BLEKHMANN: Where, Your Majesty?

VALENTYNA: The signs are such that only I know how to interpret them. All of you wait here. I have a pistol.

BARAN-SOKIL: Where is it?

VALENTYNA: In my pocket.

BARAN-SOKIL: No, Your Majesty, I am asking about him.

VALENTYNA: Oh, you are asking about him? Well, you son of a bitch! You're interested in knowing where he is?

BARAN-SOKIL: No, God forbid! I'm no longer interested.

VALENTYNA: That's right. Watch yourselves. I want you to stay put until I return. Take heed! Ho-la! Yes. I knew it. We're being followed. Here's what: drop the ladder down to me for a while.

BLEKHMANN: What do you mean drop it?

VALENTYNA: Drop it, drop it, drop it all. Just like that. Untie it and throw it to me with your little hands.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: But how will we get it back up?

VALENTYNA: Who do you think you're dealing with, you idiot? Haven't you ever heard that the sea can part and the water of both halves can stand on end? Haven't you ever heard that dust can twist itself into a column and rise and link up with the clouds all by itself? And can't you imagine that a rope ladder can be made to stand up as easily as a perpendicular line in a geometrical figure? Don't you believe that a ladder can lie there and lie there and then stand up?

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: I—we—huh?

VALENTYNA: What do you mean "huh"? What do you mean "huh"? Why are you standing there with your mouth open?

BARAN-SOKIL: Truly, why are you gaping? Her Majesty requires absolute obedience. Didn't you hear?

VALENTYNA: That's what I say. Well put. And just at the right time. I recognize you, Baran-Sokil. So untie the ladder and become stronger in your faith. Be bolder. With your tiny, little hands! That's it! Good man. Ho-la! Splendid. Well, what do you all think now?

VAVYDLO: Oh, Queen, our faith in you is like the stone that surrounds us on all sides.

VALENTYNA: And your hearts?

VAVYDLO: They are overflowing with desire to be reduced to ashes in your honour and glory.

VALENTYNA: Good, Vavydlo. Tears are again welling up in my eyes. I won't betray you, oh no. I'll give you an effective way to realize your hearts' aspirations. I'll give you a unique opportunity to crown your earthly journey with a heroic demise in my honour and glory. You'll like it, you'll see.

BARAN-SOKIL: Is this true, Your Majesty?

VALENTYNA: As true as the fact that my name is Valentyna.

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: It's a certain death. There's absolutely nothing to eat here.

VALENTYNA: Precisely, precisely. You're becoming convinced that I'm not deceiving you.

BLEKHMEN: I don't know how I'll feel later, but so far a heroic demise does not look rosy.

VALENTYNA: Have more courage, Blekhen. Prove that along with you a great generation is dying out. In high spirits. With a song.

ALL: Hee—haw—haw—

BARAN-SOKIL: "Valentyna from the White Cliffs"

SVYNIACHE VUKHO: "was riding on a steed"—But, Your Majesty, what if we shape up?

VALENTYNA: It's not worth thinking about that now. You should have thought of that when you were still robbing trains and keeping your noses out of high politics.

BLEKHMEN: Perhaps we'll somehow get out of here yet?

VALENTYNA: Nothing is impossible. Rip up your theatrical thieves' cloaks. Rip up your shirts and trousers. Rip them up as a sign of your repentance and also you can make a ladder out of the pieces. I'm sorry, but I have no time for tending souls or for mountain climbing. Ho-la!

ALL:                   prancing galloping prancing galloping  
                          prancing galloping prancing galloping  
                          prancing once again

VALENTYNA: And for a farewell, I ask you: Who are you?

ALL: We're criminals!

## **An Interlude with a Liar (In Masks)**

JUDGE: We're criminals. When we're not willing to tell the truth, we're criminals. For truth, when confessed sincerely, can make it easier for a court to clarify the essence of a case.

LIAR: No, Your Honour, I'm not a criminal. I want to tell the truth. I'm ready to tell everything the way it happened. My memory and consciousness are perfect. I have a full, legal right to testify about the event. I'm ready to swear with my two fingers.

JUDGE: We'll see. Besides the witness's statement about his mental readiness, his intellectual equilibrium, and his self-perception, there also exists the judge's subjective self-confidence that he is dealing with an honest man. Remember that. It is on this principle that the institution of legal representation is grounded. Nothing else but hope in a lawyers' personal talents has engendered that situation where in the jury box there sit twenty stony-hearted individuals, while one head, impassioned by a fee, tries to soften their psyches with an eloquence broken down into the smallest monetary calculations. Tell us what you know about this case.

LIAR: We were lying in the pasture.

JUDGE: Are you a shepherd?

LIAR: Absolutely not. All my life, since the day I was born, I've been part of urban culture. So has my friend, the one to whom we are referring. We were lying in the pasture. We wanted to spend our day off inhaling the fragrances of hay, thyme, and something else, which we could not identify since we do not have adequate qualifications in the olfactory arts. We were lying in the pasture.

JUDGE: Yes. I would request that you refrain from influencing the court with allusions to personal tastes and preferences. That means you should state the facts exclusively. A pasture is a limited parcel of land with grasses and other vegetation left to grow wild. It has a certain number of square metres, in some cases, kilometres. You may continue.

LIAR: We were lying down. My friend was watching some girls from the village on the other side of the mountain—

JUDGE: Aha! Persons of the feminine gender, of a certain age and of a certain biological as well as social status, whom you quite frivolously call girls, persons whom, as you affirm, your friend was watching—so, those persons did not belong to urban culture?

LIAR: No. They were exclusively rustic.

JUDGE: Good. This is very important. Go on.

LIAR: My friend was watching them as they were bathing and trying to conceal themselves from those people who kept floating down the river in boats.

JUDGE: Good. And the facts? Did your friend have his own opinion of them?

LIAR: Entirely his own opinion. He guessed they were fashioned with an axe.

JUDGE: Please confine yourself to legal terminology. What does fashioned with an axe mean?

LIAR: Fashioned with an axe—he meant the way with which they dove into the water when a boat approached, and that that way of diving was not to his liking.

JUDGE: Not entirely to the point. But go on.

LIAR: Well, then that hulk walked up to us and hit my friend on the head.

JUDGE: Hulk? Again I must request that you confine yourself to legal terminology. What does hulk mean?

LIAR: Hulk means a man with a most powerful build.

JUDGE: Yes. But in the end that is not what we are talking about. We are talking about something more important. Did he strike your friend on the head before or after your friend struck him on the shoulder with such force that in the evening he was found lying unconscious in the meadow?

LIAR: It was before.

JUDGE: So your friend sustained a blow to the head?

LIAR: I don't know what you mean by sustained. My friend fell to the ground so hard that for a moment I saw the whites of his eyes.

JUDGE: You saw the whites of his eyes? What colour were they?

LIAR: Most likely white, I should think.

JUDGE: Be more specific, please.

LIAR: Well, white—white with bluish veins.

JUDGE: Good. What was the weather like at the time?

LIAR: The weather? The weather was beautiful. The sky was blue with a rosy tinge.

JUDGE: Why was there a rosy tinge?

LIAR: Because the sun was setting already.

JUDGE: Go on. You maintain that the person who walked up to you struck your friend on the head. What did he strike him with?

LIAR: With an iron rod. With all his might.

JUDGE: Was it in fact an iron rod?

LIAR: Yes. It was a steel rod that flashed in the sun, which was surrounded by a leaden cloud.

JUDGE: Wait. Was it iron or steel?

LIAR: Steel. It was steel.

JUDGE: Why did you first say it was iron?

LIAR: Why did I first say it was iron? I don't know why myself. I was probably talking about the kind of metal, about its collective concept. After all, we say: an ironclad army. But nowadays, for the most part, it's steel rather than iron. We also talk of iron discipline, meanwhile, we...

JUDGE: Dispense with the philosophy, please. I'm a doctor of laws, not a doctor of philosophy. In our field there are no general concepts. There are only concrete details. There are only facts separated from the rule, facts isolated from the type, facts that are unique each time and every time. Understand? And why didn't you initially mention the leaden cloud around the sun when you were describing the landscape?

LIAR: My God! Why didn't I mention it? Do I know why I didn't mention it? A detail appears along with action. A detail is born as action develops.

JUDGE: Again I caution you to refrain from philosophy. I'm a doctor of laws. I am not a doctor of philosophy. Please do not allude whatsoever to philosophy. Was there or was there not a cloud? Was the rod made of iron or steel?

LIAR: I have to think back. I want to relate the fact as accurately as possible. Yes, it was a dark, heavy, swingable rod.

JUDGE: So it was dark? That is to say, it was not polished? Right?

LIAR: I think so. I don't think it was polished.

JUDGE: In that case, how could it flash in the sun?

LIAR: For goodness' sake! That's what a person says in such circumstances. For example, when we say that someone has turned as pale as a sheet, it doesn't mean that he has really become pale. He could have convulsed, shuddered, become agitated, or something could have flashed in his eyes, and so forth. But a person never pales in a way that can be noticed. Of all people, you, a psychologist, should know such things.

JUDGE: Order! In my time I took exams in criminal psychology. And, in fact, I learned quite well how to deal with those who, within two minutes, make contradictory statements about one and the same fact.

LIAR: I see the fact before my eyes. I witnessed it. I would like to convey it to you in all its magnitude. But it seems it's impossible to do that. Whenever I try to remember the events precisely, to the very last millimetre, they get larger. There was a flash. I'm positive there was a flash. If not an actual flash, then at least a symbolic one. And, along with that, I remember well that the rod was dark.

JUDGE: Through this cheap attempt at playing a blatherskite you're trying to confuse me. What would you say to a month of interrogation in a prison?

LIAR: What? You're reclassifying me from a witness into a criminal?

JUDGE: What did you expect? When we dilute the gist of a case with pointless eloquence, then we are criminals.



## Day Three: Who Are You?

### Scene 1

MAXIMUS: We are criminals.

VALENTYNA: Are you not the one who was called?

MAXIMUS: So they say.

VALENTYNA: But you don't?

MAXIMUS: I used to say that.

VALENTYNA: And now?

MAXIMUS: Now I have my doubts.

VALENTYNA: Then you're a scarecrow.

MAXIMUS: Am I really a scarecrow?

VALENTYNA: You're a scarecrow who was summoned. You were summoned while you were sitting on your stupid cliff. I summoned you. So that you would climb the hell down. Did you or did you not climb down?

MAXIMUS: I did.

VALENTYNA: What else?

MAXIMUS: I'm scared.

VALENTYNA: What the long-tailed devil are you scared of?

MAXIMUS: Not the long-tailed devil, but the tailless one.

VALENTYNA: Explain that. Give me a light. And explain.

MAXIMUS: After the war ended, the officers came out on top. We, you and I, removed them again. Permanently. And now I'm scared.

VALENTYNA: But what long-tailed devil are you scared of?

MAXIMUS: Not of the long-tailed one! Of the tailless one, I said. I'm scared precisely because there aren't any tails left.

VALENTYNA: Whose tails? Tails where?

MAXIMUS: Tails to twist. Like the cows' tails are twisted.

VALENTYNA: I lived with milkmaids for a year and then another twenty-eight months. That's because I love milk. Cows' tails are twisted so they won't get too lazy to give milk. It's a daily nuisance.

MAXIMUS: That's what I'm talking about. There's no nuisance anymore. The nuisance has ceased. Just as the tail has ended, so has the backbone. Just as the backbone has ended, so has the need for nuisance. Do I have to explain?

VALENTYNA: Explain, damn it! I'm hopping with anticipation.

MAXIMUS: I'll explain. We have no tails to the future. We have no tails to the present. We only have the past. Those who have only the past don't exist.

VALENTYNA: We don't exist? Then what are we doing, if I may ask?

MAXIMUS: We're angering God. Angering Him with our non-existence. We're criminals. The chemical composition of our crime is this: We've created non-being in ourselves and all around us.

VALENTYNA: You're not just a scarecrow. You're a liar as well. Is this stupid top window without a top, this terrace, this sub-celestial thatched roof of ours, non-being?

MAXIMUS: Yes. Because it hangs over inertness.

VALENTYNA: Those millions of wonderful stout men in the foundries, the classless working class, or whatever else it is called, that *hopak*<sup>1</sup> over the seas of metal, are inert?

MAXIMUS: Yes. Because they have been freed from all labour conflicts.

VALENTYNA: And what about women? The legions of broads, the swarms of broads you let out of their kitchens for some damn reason—have they been freed from conflicts?

MAXIMUS: Yes. For they now have equal voting rights.

VALENTYNA: So be it. It's too bad they've been made equal, but so be it. And what about those masters? Those skillful artists? Those who in the tortures of creativity slapdash their masterpieces? What about the creators of monuments and bas-reliefs, the authors of all kinds of abstract and non-abstract art? Are they also equal?

MAXIMUS: They are. I have abolished the Ministry of Propaganda.

VALENTYNA: Good. Granted even that. What about those who fly? Those who, with your permission, soar into the stratosphere with thermometers up their posteriors? From a distance they look like insects. Close-up they look like louts. What about them—they also don't need propaganda?

MAXIMUS: They don't. They subdue nature without antagonism.

VALENTYNA: Extremely touching. They subdue it. And what about those who, on the contrary, don't fly, but lie around? Over there, on the coast. Louts from a distance, insects close-up. Ants with the guaranteed right of relaxation. When they get really burned at the beach, will they have at least some antagonism toward nature?

MAXIMUS: Even they don't have any antagonism in them. They also subdue. The uniform distribution of solar energy is guaranteed by law..

VALENTYNA: Well now, it appears your country is indeed conflict-free?

MAXIMUS: I haven't got a country.

VALENTYNA: Then what do you have?

MAXIMUS: A society consisting of all of humanity.

VALENTYNA: Ah, of course! I forgot. With milk and honey, and the sun never sets!

MAXIMUS: And never rises. It doesn't need to. It stands motionless at its zenith.

VALENTYNA: And it doesn't burn anyone?

MAXIMUS: No. Because it doesn't need to.

VALENTYNA: Well, just you wait! To be honest, I don't know how it is for you at the beach. It's been a long time since I've exposed my rear end to the sun. You'll expose it, of course, in the course of your presidential affairs! But never mind. If the sun doesn't get to you, then I will. You'll hear and feel it in a moment.

MAXIMUS: Should I get ready?

VALENTYNA: Get ready. Wait for it. Those marabous of yours with pricked-up ears, those designers of your cities. They design and think. I suppose you'll say it doesn't get to them either?

MAXIMUS: Them? No.

VALENTYNA: Aha, them no! But it does get to someone after all?

MAXIMUS: Someone—yes—

VALENTYNA: Aha, someone yes? One person?

MAXIMUS: One—of two.

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<sup>1</sup> A spirited Ukrainian folk dance.

VALENTYNA: Who? The one who stands here atop this inaccessible elevation and has become furious at his arrested azure harmony?

MAXIMUS: No—not that one. The one who's sitting in an inaccessible depth, locked in a dungeon, and has gazed, and stared at his dark, unjust fate.

VALENTYNA: That's just it. Look, this is how we'll slowly, very slowly, get to the bottom of the truth. Why is he sitting there in that dungeon?

MAXIMUS: Because of his active participation in the officers' conspiracy—a crime against the people—life imprisonment—

VALENTYNA: I see. But what constitutes the dark injustice of his fate? It seems the justice of his sentence is ironclad..

MAXIMUS: Not ironclad. The punishment could have been considerably reduced—

VALENTYNA: Then why wasn't it reduced?

MAXIMUS: Because someone had a need ... to take advantage of his genius.

VALENTYNA: Only of his genius?

MAXIMUS: Not only of his genius. There was also a need to take advantage of ... his memory.

VALENTYNA: And how was this accomplished technically?

MAXIMUS: He crawled down from the cliff, where he was atoning for half the crime, to complete the full crime at the bottom. And then to ascend to an even higher cliff.

VALENTYNA: Which of the two had this need? The one who stands here—

MAXIMUS:—and becomes furious at the harmony.

VALENTYNA: And now, at an inaccessible elevation, is atoning for the full crime, or what?

MAXIMUS: Yes—no—yes—

VALENTYNA: Yes? You mean—aha!—you mean, I did get to you after all?

MAXIMUS: No—yes—no—

VALENTYNA: No? I didn't get to you? Oh, I hate it when I'm trying to get under someone's skin and I can't! But it doesn't matter. You don't know who you're dealing with. Things will be how I want them to be, not how you want them. I hate conversations like this more than anything, but since you've driven me to it, I say: just wait! For when I have been driven to lose my temper, the earth will quake, I assure you. I guarantee one hundred percent that there will be an earthquake.

MAXIMUS: Would you like to get to the heart of the matter?

VALENTYNA: First of all, I'd like to ask you a question. Are you aware that the gap between a great person and a cretin is very narrow?

MAXIMUS: The great person is clearly you, and the cretin—I. But where is the gap?

VALENTYNA: Isn't there a gap between us? No, there is no gap between us. Between us, unfortunately, there is a significant lack of space.

MAXIMUS: You mean your widened dress?

VALENTYNA: It wasn't widened, dummy! I just let it out at the waist—here, see? I let it out because I can't breathe while arguing with you. Besides, it's not a dress at all, because only broads wear dresses. It's not a dress, but stylized cabbage leaves. If you can't figure that out, what am I supposed to do? And there's no reason to stare at my dress or my hairdo, because I'm not a broad. I'm sloppy and I smoke. So hurry up, give me a light. And my hair is always messy. And if you lift up the leaves of what you foolishly call my dress, under each one you'll always discover something unexpected. An apple peel is always attached there, see?

MAXIMUS: An apple peel? To what is it attached?

VALENTYNA: To my body, fathead, it attaches to my body. You could even say it fuses to it. Understand? Fuses to my back. Fuses to my neck. Fuses to my ribs. Don't you get it? I am terribly fond of giving myself rub-downs with apples. And my bed is always full of apples. Generally, you could say, I even sleep on apples. But then, what business is it of yours what my feminine secrets are?

MAXIMUS: This is big news to me. I really just now realized that you're a woman.

VALENTYNA: I'm a woman, a woman, don't worry. Only not like the one that you're used to. Until now only broads fluttered around you. Now you'll get to know a woman. What, you think I haven't noticed how you've been avoiding the subject? It won't work with me. You can't avoid it. The subject is the narrow gap. And it's not between us, because my cabbage leaves are not thin. The gap is between your own greatness and your cretinism. You'll find this out soon. Tell me about the construction of cities.

MAXIMUS: What shall I tell you about the construction of cities?

VALENTYNA: Just tell me, tell me, you great big architect. Tell me everything. How they are planned. How they are constructed. How they are populated. And everything else.

MAXIMUS: They're sketched with a drafting pen on thick paper, lightly shaded with sepia. And hundreds, thousands, millions of people walk down your streets. es of smokestacks. Domes of workshops. In the morning they throng to the factories you built. A symphony of smokestacks and workshops. They go to your movie houses. They drift under the trees, which you ordered to grow. All by way of an ideal expressed on drafting paper.

VALENTYNA: What comes next?

MAXIMUS: This hard reality of yours isn't yours.

VALENTYNA: Then whose is it?

MAXIMUS: You, who created reality, have been cast into its dungeon. And you, who have risen over the earth, have been given the genius of the creator. That is what public reasoning demanded, what it allowed. Your wife, whom you loved, has been taken away from you, and your memory of her has also been taken away. And she, whom you have hardly ever loved and whom you have almost sent into oblivion, has been given to you. That is what public service demanded, what it allowed. It was easy to turn the jump through a window into a jump into the editor's chair. And it was easy to turn an accidental crime into a universal crime—into a crime against the entire earth. And it was easy to run after the action, which began at twelve o'clock. And it is hard to force yourself to stop when the action stopped and became a motionless sun at its zenith.

VALENTYNA: Well, then—perhaps you'll also start weeping?

MAXIMUS: I never weep, Valentyna.

VALENTYNA: Then perhaps we should chuck everything to hell and confess?

MAXIMUS: Confess to whom?

VALENTYNA: To everyone. Trumpet it to everyone. So that their tails would grow back. You have said yourself that they're tailless.

MAXIMUS: I'm afraid.

VALENTYNA: Afraid of whom?

MAXIMUS: I'm afraid of the tailed one. Of the tailed one as well. It's sometimes frightening to renounce one's own tail. But it's probably even more frightening to renounce someone else's.

VALENTYNA: And that is why we are criminals?

MAXIMUS: When I say we, I'm not talking about you. That's how it is usually put: "By the grace of God, we the autocrat." I wasn't thinking of you at that moment. You are beyond such things.

VALENTYNA: I am beyond such things? Oho-ho! I'll have you know, I'm a first class expert in such things. For instance, I can differentiate exactly between a real criminal and someone who's just pretending to be one. Should I explain?

MAXIMUS: Do explain.

VALENTYNA: Here goes. The divide is negligibly thin. One half of you is afraid of its own greatness. The other half is afraid to lose that greatness. What kind of criminal are you? In our crowd, a criminal like that is called a suck. Yes, simply that—a suck.

MAXIMUS: A suck. That's a nice word. What's going to happen next?

VALENTYNA: Nothing special. You'll stay in power.

MAXIMUS: But even he who pretends to be a wolf cannot reign over lambs!

VALENTYNA: He can. And there's no reason for him to pretend. You did not commit those acts of your own free will. You were called. Mind you, it is I who is responsible for your fate.

MAXIMUS: Then you are a criminal?

VALENTYNA: No, again. For you committed the crime.

MAXIMUS: So we neutralize each other?

VALENTYNA: More or less.

MAXIMUS: Valentya, your logic is charming, but—

VALENTYNA: No buts. Everything's in order. It's charming precisely because I never studied logic. As for your lambs ... in the first place, when one man is confined to a dungeon, and another, who put him there, repents, it means ... that means that nothing is standing motionless at the zenith. On the contrary, it moves, gets up, goes to bed, eats, breeds, and attends the opera. Or our idiotic play. Especially when we are both practicing our logic.

MAXIMUS: And secondly?

VALENTYNA: And secondly, among your lambs it is hard to find even one that is not a swine. So watch out even today, when you speak near the monument—watch out that one of them doesn't make an attempt on your life.

MAXIMUS: You'd like that?

VALENTYNA: Not at all. But then, I'd have grounds for a peculiar occurrence of logic: I'd be chasing a criminal.

MAXIMUS: Do you love me at least a little?

VALENTYNA: Not at all. I'm in love with only one creature: the hummingbird that skips around inside the open jaws of an alligator. It is my sole and constant ideal. But since I have already scrambled up your charming, sturdy-runged ladder—I shall never forget it, that ladder. So, having scrambled up it and back down again, I've no choice: I'm responsible for your fate. So high-tail it to your monument, to the masses who love you, and deliver your speech. But be careful: don't speak to them about your pangs of conscience, but roar mightily saying that the projects were yours and that the people are obliged to you and you alone for the privilege of living and breathing under the sun. And don't forget to mention the sun: say that it moves from east to west. And even vice versa.

MAXIMUS: If even vice versa, then I agree in the end. But just the same, tell me: what do you need me for?

VALENTYNA: Are my feminine secrets any of your business. Don't forget I give myself apple rub-downs. Sing me a song, if you can. If you can't, let's just go. For this chattering bores me to death. And even worse.

MAXIMUS: Hold on a minute!

VALENTYNA: Now what?

MAXIMUS: Valentyna, how about a smidgen of lyricism from you.

VALENTYNA: What's lyricism—talking about oneself?

MAXIMUS: Something like that.

VALENTYNA: And I should talk softly to you?

MAXIMUS: As softly as possible.

VALENTYNA: That will be hard. And to the accompaniment of music, I suppose?

MAXIMUS: If possible, with music.

VALENTYNA: Oh, what the hell! Give me some music. (*Music.*) What should I start with?

MAXIMUS: With whatever your heart desires. (*Music.*)

VALENTYNA: How about some childhood reminiscences?

MAXIMUS: Childhood reminiscences. I'll reminisce about mine in unison.

VALENTYNA: What do you mean—we'll perform a duet?

MAXIMUS: No, I'll do it silently. I'll have questions for you only in between.

VALENTYNA: I'm allotting only three minutes for this. What time is it? Keep track.

MAXIMUS: Three minutes to twelve.

VALENTYNA: Godspeed.

*Music.*

Well. This is how it was. In my childhood I was, of course, finicky. I also distinguished myself by having an exceptionally hard stomach. Like a board. It was never round. It was just as flat as it is now. That's why my father called it a drum. And he drummed on it.

*Music. Two dry beats.*

Other children got "pears" on their head. It's done like this: with your thumb and two fingers you grab a small lock of hair, twist it a bit, and with those same fingers you simultaneously knock or drum lightly on the child's head. This is called giving a "pear." Meanwhile I always got "pears" on my hard-as-a-board stomach.

*Music. Two dry beats.*

My father used to say: "It's a drum." He thought my stubbornness was concentrated in my stomach. He imagined that in my stomach there was an acorn from which the oak of my future failures would grow. Mother agreed. He assured me that not all my whims would become laws for others, so to speak. Mother agreed. I had a falling-out with my parents over this. Not that you could call it a falling-out for life. I visit them from time to time. But nothing can break my irreconcilability with them. And that's the way it shall be forever. I was indeed stubborn. When my father drummed on my stomach, I deliberately distended it. By doing that, I made my stomach even harder. Sitting in his chair, Father would hold a lit cigar in his left hand. In the intervals he pensively inhaled the smoke. He kept his right hand free for drumming on me. And I

stood there before him with my distended rock-hard stomach, my legs apart to occupy the maximum area of support. Nothing, not even his sudden tickling, could make me flex. He tested his hypothesis about stubbornness on me. But I was testing myself. I really disliked the game, but I stood there to the end. Father would get up and, releasing pensive rings of smoke from his cigar, go out on the veranda. I would continue standing, legs apart, in front of the empty chair until I was finally convinced that Father was no longer there. I would wait until the last wisps of smoke vanished. That's what my stubbornness was like. But deep down I was frightened. And, secretly, I took measures to soften my stomach at any cost. One day it occurred to me that I could accomplish the task by rubbing my stomach with a squashed apple, with raw apple mush. An apple could be squashed on it with exceptional ease. My stomach was indeed like a board. The mightiest of apples disintegrated by merely touching my stomach. Apples—nothing! Even a nut would have broken apart on it. I have never had pains in my stomach. Perhaps they were there, but it was impossible to feel them because of the hardness of my stomach.

*Music: a flourish of strings.*

In time I became convinced that the rest of my body was also not soft enough: my arms, shoulders, and particularly the nape of my neck. So, I extended the rubbing to my entire body. Since that time I have had an ardent love of apples. I sleep with apples, sleep on apples, and cover myself with apples. When there aren't any, I suffer tremendously. I have suffered in the worst way when I have been in places where apples do not grow. That has happened frequently, since I've often been to places where apples don't grow. I have experimented with figs and pineapples, rubbed myself with bananas, and slept on tangerines. I have slept prone, supine, and on both my sides. Nothing gave me even a tenth of the apple effect. My body showed almost no reaction. Even fig leaves were of no benefit. Of what use could they be to me? When I rub myself, no one sees me. No one. And I am in no way ashamed of myself. Nor of my apples. How can anyone be ashamed in front of one's own emblem? Had I lived in another time, I would have been called the queen of apples. Perhaps even the goddess of apples. Almost without a doubt. And here at this point, I break off the story of my stomach. What happened to it later is part of my feminine secrets.

*Music. A flourish of strings.*

The only faultless thing I have is my skin. It is also both oaken and weathered. But it does not have and never had a rash, pimples, pustules, blackheads, or even freckles. There's no impurity of any kind in my skin. There's no fat under it either. There's fat only where it's impossible to avoid. The bare minimum, that's necessary for survival. My attitude toward my skin is cultish. When I wash it, I'm aware of every pore. I wash every pore with devout attention. I never use soap. I wash my skin with an abrader. It's as hard as sand, with grains individually set. Soap on my skin would do nothing. The abrader is my skin's authorized partner. My skin endures it with dignity even the most sensitive spots, behind the ears, under the arms—and generally it endures the entire contest with the abrader quite successfully and triumphantly. There are never any skin irritations. Never any scratches. After washing, never any red stripes or anything else that appears on broads from just a light touch of a small brush. That's what my skin is like.

*Music. A flourish of strings.*

But apple peels stay constantly on my skin. That's because I rub myself not only before washing, but afterwards as well.

MAXIMUS: What other things do you like?

VALENTYNA: In my later years I developed a passion for boots with spurs. I wore them during certain periods of my life, and wore them quite well. Of course, they were made to order. Size thirty-five. I have never been a "puss in boots." I'm messy, but at times I know how to raise that messiness to such perfection that people begin doubting whether I really am messy. During such periods or moments they're inclined to think that I'm elegant. And that's how it is. Also, I had a collection of swords. It was substantial. It contained, among other things, yataghans and Viking swords. There was even a spear. To tell the truth, it stood out, lonely and unsupported by its surroundings. There was nothing else there that suited it in size or character. Shaggy carpets and furry skins hung far away from it. And my thoughts were far away from my spear. Probably it was precisely then that my hatred for military officers, military dictatorships, and war originated. Out of competition. I'm a pacifist owing to my feelings of rivalry with war, a peacemaker to the end of my days. In another time I would have been called the mother of peace. Perhaps even the goddess of peace. In my dreams and in my daily deeds, I have given birth to peace many a time, and every time I was choking with delight from it. I don't know what suffering while giving birth feels like. My stomach has never ached. My deliveries of peace have always been a total celebration. I also love cats. Orange ones.

*Music. A melodious flourish of strings.*

MAXIMUS: What about your career?

VALENTYNA: In the beginning, it was so frightful one couldn't help but laugh. Intimidated by my parents, I fearfully eked out an existence in solitude with my apples. One day, as I flew into a rage, I let temptation take over and started screaming at people. My heart constricted from cold terror as I berated two policemen. That instant determined the rest of my life—its direction and its style. I have carried that instant with me through all the ups and downs that I ever encountered. The seemingly civilized creature who stands here before you lived in her moments of baseness on the crumbs of others. But later on, having shaken off the guardianship of strangers, I expressed my thanks to them with showers of unexpected gold. In truth, I came from an incredibly rich family. But I threw my initial capital, money and jewels, down a drain upon my exodus into the world.

MAXIMUS: Down a rainspout?

VALENTYNA: No, not down a rainspout! Down the kind of drain from which it was impossible to retrieve them. Into a sewer. From there, along with everything else that was there, they could flow only into the sea. And that's how it was.

*Music: a melodious flourish of strings.*

I thereby unburdened myself from the very start. Disencumbered, I encamped in a filthy saloon, in a stinking tavern. Several people, who tried to be good to each other, congregated there. But with every new event that took place there, the situation became worse and worse. Each subsequent step was absolutely worse than the previous



one. It was then that I screamed at the policemen. I was paralyzed with terror, but I assumed the right tone immediately, without having to prepare. The tone I use when talking to princes, maharajahs, and well—it can't be helped, the president as well.

MAXIMUS: To other presidents, too?

VALENTYNA: There were no other presidents. I avoided presidents. I had my own goal: to make my own president. There were all kinds of people around me. But no presidents.

*Music: a single note.*

But you didn't see the rags that used to cover my shoulders. Or the treasures, you didn't see the treasures in which my hands wallowed.

MAXIMUS: How old are you, Valentyna?

VALENTYNA: Oh, my president—you're wondering because of my childlike face, my teenage figure.

*Music: a single drawn-out note, then, a light flourish of strings.*

I look ridiculously young. And it will be so for a long, very long, time. I can wait calmly until I will no longer have to fear hiding that I am sixty. I'm petite, and I'm a dark woman. Of course, I'm not dark, nor even truly raven-haired. I'm a brunette and a chestnut-brown hybrid. I have chestnut elements, but in my essence, gender, and even in my bearing there are nuances of a brunette. I give the impression of being raven-haired because I move quickly. And because I have untidy black tresses. And also because I have narrow, somewhat slanted eyes that quickly grasp a situation. There are blondes with slanted eyes who are quick-witted too. But it's entirely different with them. What are blonds?! They're nothing! They soon puff out and become matronly. Just like dough. Never in the world would I even touch a blonde. Only a raven-haired woman. But not one I could sense is stronger than me. Actually, there aren't any who are stronger. And that is the sacred truth. Consequently, whenever I touch a woman, I invariably experience a fit of contempt for her. At best, a feeling of superiority. My dear Mr. President, I am descended from those who preserved themselves in the guise of a fifteen-year old girl. Meanwhile I'm as old as the world: at present, I'm twenty-eight. Several weeks ago, unnoticed by anyone, I celebrated my birthday. For company I had only my orange cat and a bottle of rum. I drained it to the bottom. That doesn't become me? You haven't heard yet how I can swear.

MAXIMUS: You mean what I have heard already wasn't the real stuff?

VALENTYNA: Only three-eighths real. Even two-and-a-half-eighths.

MAXIMUS: And what about love Valentyna?

*Music: a single drawn-out note.*

VALENTYNA: My first love I did not understand. He was sitting across from me a good distance away, even though we had come to hide in the bushes together. He sat there in silence and only occasionally blinked his eyes so hard that I thought he was getting ready to cry. I tried to imitate him as best I could. But I was still very young then. We sat there like that for an hour, far away from each other. But we went home together nevertheless.

*Music: an uncertain flourish of strings.*

My second love I simply didn't notice. After all, it seemed to last only half a second.

*Music: a single, exceptionally drawn-out note.*

My third love I prolonged for an unusually long time. It hung in mid-air. At least until now.

*Music: a single, false note.*

My fourth love. He tried to undress me:

MAXIMUS: Was he your fiancé?

VALENTYNA: He was not my fiancé. He was another woman's husband. She caught on. There was a scandal.

MAXIMUS: But did he manage to undress you?

VALENTYNA: No. I'm not that sort. Besides, his attempt was stupid in and of itself, because when I am disrobed there's absolutely nothing interesting about me. But there was a scandal. And then we made up.

MAXIMUS: With him?

VALENTYNA: No, with her.

*Music: a single, exceptionally drawn-out note.*

As for my fifth love—the fifth one bored me completely. And that's all there is to my romantic history.

*Music: a flourish of strings.*

MAXIMUS: Valentyna. Do you really not love me?

VALENTYNA: Not a chance. Why should I? What I am doing is enough to sustain your greatness. And as for me? You are of no use to me except as a president.

MAXIMUS: But why, Valentyna? Why only as a president?

VALENTYNA: Maximus! You may know, if you like, only part of the secret. I'll tell you what it is. You, Maximus, are the greatest dream of my life. I took it into my head that I would make a president. I fancied that I would hatch a president the likes of which had never existed before. What fault is it of mine that I was destined to see my wishes realized?! What fault is it of mine that I have always been fortunate to see the shore?

MAXIMUS: The shore. Granted. But then there still remains this question: would you be willing to go with me to the shore of death?

VALENTYNA: Why not? But if we did go looking for death, we would never find it. Everything would turn out according to my plans anyway. The biggest thing that might happen would be a failed coup. Just that—an assassination that would not succeed. And, one way or another, I would still catch the criminal red-handed. It's predestined.

MAXIMUS: So, living long enough to see your wishes come true means happiness! Therefore, the sun does stop at the zenith?

VALENTYNA: Happiness? Ho-la! Who told you that I am happy? I'm independent. I'm self-propagating. I'm self-sufficient. And finally, I'm in love with myself. I have everything I want. I shall have anything I ever want. Everything that I ever wish for shall come true. But am I happy? Where did you get the idea that I was happy?

MAXIMUS: Then you're not happy? Valentyna, what is happiness?

VALENTYNA: Hm ... Here we should start from the beginning again. But we have already explained that. Besides, it's time for you to speak at the monument.

MAXIMUS: Dear me! Are we that terribly late?

VALENTYNA: Terribly late for what?

MAXIMUS: We're terribly late getting to the monument!

VALENTYNA: It is never too late to get to the monument. Remember that, my dear Mr. President: it is never too late to get to the monument. We're not late. Look at your watch.

MAXIMUS: How is that possible?! Only three minutes have passed? In three minutes you have told me about your entire life? Can that be?

VALENTYNA: It can. The clock is tolling twelve. Exactly twelve strokes. Forward, Mr. President! Misfortune awaits the assassin. You don't want to sing me a song? All right, Mr. President. We'll go without a song. I, your loyal servant, shall follow you step by step.

*Music. A MALE CHOIR sings the five-part melody of Palestrina's "Ascendit Deus in jubilatione: et Dominus in voce tubae. Alleluja." Music. A film, with moving shots: a city, a monument, countless masks.*

VOICE (*slowly*): I shall follow you step by step, O great man. Some time ago you summoned me to war. I survived it, and so did my family. When the war for the just cause was won, you went to pray for our future destiny. Having returned, you have built a home for me ten times larger and better than the one I had before the war. And so when you finish your solemn speech, I shall cheer for you at the top of my voice: Hip, hip, hurrah!

*Music. A film with moving shots: a city, a monument, countless masks.*

VOICE (*slowly*): I shall follow you step by step, O great man. You have not deceived me, not once. You said that my oldest son would be killed in the war, and so he was. But you also said that you would save some land for me, and you did. And from your new great cities now machines, machines, machines go to our once barren fields. On our land we collect unheard-of harvests. My next son is growing up. I have come to tell you that I am happy. I have come to cheer for you! Hurrah!

*Music. A film with moving shots: a city, a monument, countless masks.*

VOICE (*slowly*): I shall follow you step by step. You may be sure of that. The monument is a grand one. It depicts horsemen and other such things. Beside, no one knows better than I do where it was cast and who made sure the details were perfect when it was being cast in the foundry. So, to some extent this monument is dedicated to me too. Of course, I do admit you deserve the lion's share. Needless to say, I have always admired you. Oh, I shall cheer for you! Hurrah!

*Music. A film with moving shots: a city, a monument, countless masks.*

VOICE (*slowly*): I shall follow you step by step. I have no choice. I can't say that I have become happier after all the known events took place. But a man with a right to criticize will never be happy, no matter what regime is in power. Meanwhile you have remained unchanged, playing on cheap emotions and primitive desires. However, I cannot deny that you're shrewd: you've gone from being an editor to a saint and architect all the way to president! Things like that don't happen every day. I must attest that all this, with all its diversity, is constructed according to one principle: everything here

reflects your spirit. And that's very pleasing to my aesthetic sensibility. Consequently, I don't mind saying to you, in my middle register: hurrah!

*Music. A film with moving shots: a city, a monument, countless masks.*

MAXIMUS'S VOICE (*slowly*): A pause. A second's pause. I must understand the danger. Those people—no. They are happy. This one's eyes have a sarcastic look, but even he would not dare. No. No.

*Music. A film with moving shots: a city, a monument, countless masks.*

VOICE (*very slowly*): I shall follow you step by step. Oh, yes! In all this time you have changed little. The only difference is the hint of bitterness that encircles your lips now. But that gives you even more charisma, and you still pronounce the "ee" sound as beautifully as you did before. Oh, yes, you are unequalled! I shall cheer for you! I shall! Hip, hip, hurrah!

*Music. A film with moving shots: a city, a monument, countless masks.*

MAXIMUS'S VOICE (*slowly*): A pause, a pause. The last pause. In that corner, under the columns. And here, right under the balcony. They will be shouting at the top of their lungs. Now then, where will the threat come from? From there? Or there? The last pause. The last sentence.

BEDNARSKY'S VOICE (*slowly*): I shall also follow you step by step. Stay calm, great man: I am not letting you out of my sight. No one here, even in the shadow of a thought, will stand up for your life. As for me—you don't know I exist. Those who knew about me have forgotten me. For powerful is your hold over them. I can stand here and, from below, accurately see your chin. There it is—the spot. It would suffice to put just a small hole there. A tiny hole in the lower jaw. The size of a fly.

ALL VOICES: Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!

*Music. A film with moving shots: countless monuments. The city flies upward and slowly dissolves. Blank screen. A large black dot.*

VALENTYNA: Don't get up, Mr. President. Don't get up, you silly fool.

MAXIMUS: My head—I need to prop up my head—

VALENTYNA: Is the bandage preventing you from talking?

MAXIMUS: No—It's all right—

VALENTYNA: The bullet only grazed you. Obviously he was agitated.

MAXIMUS: Where is he?

VALENTYNA: I have him. Don't worry. If you'd like to see him—

MAXIMUS: Right away—immediately—

VALENTYNA: Will you be able to stand it? Be careful.

MAXIMUS: Absolutely. Right away—immediately—Who is he?

VALENTYNA: That's exactly the question you should put to him.

MAXIMUS: Do you know him?

VALENTYNA: You should ask him if he knows me.

MAXIMUS: Valentyna, are you pleased? ... I'm happy for you—

VALENTYNA: I'm bringing him, bringing, bringing him to you.

MAXIMUS (*to ZVENYBUDLO*): And you, I see, are not pleased?

ZVENYBUDLO: No, not a bit. See what your game has led to?

MAXIMUS: Just wait a while. We'll have a talk with him in a moment.

ZVENYBUDLO: It is absolutely of no interest to me. Of course, I'll stay here. But I'll be pre-occupied with my own affairs.

MAXIMUS: Is there something you want to tell me?

ZVENYBUDLO: I don't know. I'll have to wait and see.

MAXIMUS: Good. They're coming.

VALENTYNA: May I present to you the reddest badger who, for his entire life, has been hiding behind an aristocrat's cloak. You are welcome to love and honour this janissary from under a dam, this undercooked swine, this prodigal star of nocturnal whistles, this meteor in a trash can.

MAXIMUS: Valentyna!

BEDNARSKY: No, that's all right. She's quite right.

MAXIMUS: Don't you believe in the righteousness of your act?

BEDNARSKY: I don't even deserve such epithets. Her Highness is wasting her eloquence. I'm simply worthless.

MAXIMUS: Do you know Valentyna?

BEDNARSKY: Oh, yes, we're old acquaintances.

VALENTYNA: See? I'm not even against that, of taking advantage of the praetorian prefect's protection.

MAXIMUS: And did you also know me before?

BEDNARSKY: I have seen you in the square a few times. That's all.

MAXIMUS: What is the reason for your—how did you put it?

BEDNARSKY: Worthlessness. Because I have lost my sense of humour.

MAXIMUS: When exactly?

BEDNARSKY: The instant I pulled the trigger. A minute before that, while studying your chin, the road to greatness was still open to me.

MAXIMUS: Fine. What are your reasons?

BEDNARSKY: I don't know. I don't like the style of your buildings. There's too much order.

MAXIMUS: You are against order?

BEDNARSKY: That goes without saying. I'm not against the freshness and originality of your streets and squares. But there is entirely too much order.

VALENTYNA: What profound familiarity with the problems of modern architecture! Well, what next?

BEDNARSKY: Next ... Why ... I've already said it.

VALENTYNA: Well?

BEDNARSKY: A road to greatness lay before me. I chose the opposite.

MAXIMUS: But perhaps you could have found your greatness right here? Think about it.

BEDNARSKY: I thought so when I was shooting. It turned out otherwise. A catastrophic loss of my sense of humour. The most definite proof of this is the fact that I missed.

MAXIMUS: You did not miss. Here it is, your pistol.

BEDNARSKY: We don't call that a hit. Ask Her Highness.

MAXIMUS: You are talking about your sense of humour. How could you have maintained it on such an occasion?

BEDNARSKY: Very simply. The same way I did in similar situations until now: by sending somebody else in my place. The loss of one's sense of humour is more horrible than physical death.

MAXIMUS: What are you going to do now?

BEDNARSKY: Sink even deeper into worthlessness. I shall, I expect, be hanged?

MAXIMUS: The death penalty does not exist. Don't you know that?

VALENTYNA: Unfortunately, it doesn't exist!

BEDNARSKY: I didn't know. Doesn't it exist? I'm really out of touch.

MAXIMUS: You may go, if you wish. Or, if you wish, you may still stay and tell me about the reasons that roused your hatred for me.

BEDNARSKY: I don't think I hated you. Perhaps, I only envied you. For a certain time I have wanted to become well-known. To leave a mark on the world, so to speak. But the most likely explanation is that I simply wanted to add to your fame. Because, after all, I'm a noble person. At least I was. I'm delighted when people appear about whom there is a lot of talk. That's all there is to it. May I really go?

MAXIMUS: Definitely.

VALENTYNA: Wait, Prince, wait! I'm still terribly curious about one thing. Is it true that you have never done anything by yourself?

BEDNARSKY: Your Highness, is your memory betraying you? A prince is a prince.

VALENTYNA: No, you bedbug, my memory is not betraying me. During the last affair at Under the Four Winds no one really saw your foxy face. But rest assured, you are a distinguished man. You simply didn't want your good name linked too closely with the officers' conspiracy. Isn't that right?

BEDNARSKY: Your Highness, your ability to read our hearts has been known to me for many a day. So do me a favour: believe me. And you too, Mr. President. In truth, today's attempt really has nothing to do with the officers' conspiracy. Nothing whatsoever. I tried to explain the reasons as best I could. For the first time in my life I wanted to do something by myself.

VALENTYNA: Well, you have never lacked wit. You were never a total nobody. What do you think?

BEDNARSKY: Why, of course, I wasn't. It couldn't be helped, Your Highness. What person has is never enough. But I remember too that I was also generous. I have never been miserly with my eminence. On the contrary, I was even ready to bestow it upon the first person I met. I remember, I once wanted to demonstrate to my men the paltriness of the contemporary world. So, right there on the spot I convinced an old man—I believe he was a postal clerk—I made him believe that he ... But then, here too I did not do it myself, but sent some of my men—

MAXIMUS: How's that?

BEDNARSKY: To continue: I ordered my men to convince an old clerk that he was a genius.

MAXIMUS: When was this?

BEDNARSKY: When? A long time ago. In any case, before the war.

MAXIMUS: And he? That clerk? That postal clerk?

BEDNARSKY: Well, Mr. President! He was a nobody. An absolute nobody. Even now I have a right to say so. And he! He chuckled timidly and went on his way.

MAXIMUS: Did this happen out in the street?

BEDNARSKY: Yes. On the corner of a square.

MAXIMUS: Do you remember his face?

BEDNARSKY: Not much. At first I did.

MAXIMUS: Was he very old?

BEDNARSKY: As old as Adam.

MAXIMUS: Like me, for example?

BEDNARSKY: May the Lord be with you, Mr. President! He was a completely worn-out shoe.

MAXIMUS: A worn-out shoe—

VALENTYNA: You're getting too upset, Mr. President. Would you like to get up?

MAXIMUS: Yes. Wait. Wait, all of you!

*Music.*

You called me, sir?

*Music.*

My good fellow, what significance could my autograph have? ... I asked the department head for permission. How else?

*Music.*

There are no great people! ... By the way, who is our prime minister right now?

*Music.*

Beyond the seas there lie vast continents ... Sparkling sand ... I wonder: when a person is losing his mind, is he aware of it? ... But when a person is possessed by one constant thought, time flies unnoticed ... One more step.

*Music.*

One more.

*Music.*

Have you ever seen me before? ... I've been walking all day. Since one this afternoon ... I'll take the liberty of entering through the window. Something's scribbled in chalk here on the windowsill ... You were standing there like a peacock's feather. You were curly-haired and insatiable ... Taïsa.

*Music.*

Taïsa, the entire world, all the seas, and all the molluscs in them, all the tigers, and all the cats can be ours! ... Taïsa, I want to live!

*Music.*

and that is why I conclude with a declaration of this, your simple yet immeasurably abundant right: the right to live!

*Music.*

But I am married ... Only professional assassins never worry about sin ... Arivana. Arivana. Arivana.

*Music.*

O Profound One! Unfathomable One! I'm only worthy to touch Thee, nothing else ... Hear me ... For, if a person does not do this, there would have been no reason for creating the human world ... I believe in Thee, O Great One.

*Music.*

We're criminals.

*Music.*

And that's my life.

*Music.*

VALENTYNA: Mr. President, you're getting too upset. He stopped being interesting long ago. I'll kick his ass out of here right away. Lie down. I'll talk to the press. They're already causing a ruckus over there.

BEDNARSKY: Farewell, Mr. President.

MAXIMUS: Good luck to you.

BEDNARSKY: It shall never be, Mr. President. And we shall never see each other again.

VALENTYNA: Get going, get going! I'll be back in a moment. But the one thing I don't like is that this scarecrow is still here with you. Never mind, I'll only be a second.

MAXIMUS: Did you understand anything?

ZVENYBUDLO: Of course! You wandered onto the wrong street.

MAXIMUS: And what—should I keep walking down this unfamiliar street? Or should I abdicate?

ZVENYBUDLO: As you please. I, for one, have always sensed something in me from Saint Augustine. But I didn't have your courage. And, most importantly, your brilliant ability to remake yourself professionally.

MAXIMUS: I wanted to break free of the obligation to run around like a horse in a riding school.

ZVENYBUDLO: He's older than me, but there's no way he can comprehend a simple thing. A great man is great even if he is riding a chair!

MAXIMUS: My real vocation is the most insignificant one in the world. What can a postal clerk accomplish?

ZVENYBUDLO: The vocation of postal clerk conceals within itself a myriad of great things. Collecting stamps of countries with names beginning with the letter M. Wearing shoes with platinum heels. Greeting everyone with your hand behind your back, like this. Pronouncing "r" in every word that contains it as a double "r." Teaching your wife recitation. Drilling jackdaws from neighbour's trees until they get used to saying: "Hello, stupid!" A myriad of great things. But the main thing is to be free, free as that cloud!

MAXIMUS: That may be. It even sounds captivating. And more variations could be found. But—

VALENTYNA: Aha, so you are conspiring after all! Let's have the low-down on what you have been talking about, you louse! Quick, because I've got one more interview.

ZVENYBUDLO: For the most part, about happiness, Your Majesty. About greatness too, of course.

VALENTYNA: Greatness doesn't interest me. Greatness has been achieved. There it is lying on the sofa and moaning.

ZVENYBUDLO: But what about happiness, Your Majesty? Happiness?

VALENTYNA: Happiness? You idiots! Do you really think I know nothing about happiness? Well, for your information, I do. I know exactly what it should be. The only problem



is: I myself am not sensitive to it. I don't have an organ for happiness. That's exactly why there's no way I can understand why the hell you need happiness. Here's one of my feminine secrets for you. A revelation: I don't have a happy nerve. Satisfied? What's next? Quick, let's have the low-down because I've got one more interview.

ZVENYBUDLO: What's next—That henceforth I shall submit to you in all matters, Your Majesty.

VALENTYNA: Sincerely?

ZVENYBUDLO: Insincerely.

VALENTYNA: Then why submit?

ZVENYBUDLO: Because I am immensely afraid of you.

VALENTYNA: Aha! Oh, oh, oh! Damn it all! I'm bloody sick of constantly hearing from everywhere: I'm afraid of you, I'm afraid of you! When will someone finally come along who will grab hold of me, bend me backwards, knock me flat on my back, pin my thin-as-a-rail butt to the ground, and with a fist under my nose say: lie still and don't even squeak! But, never mind, someone will come along. Everything I wish for comes true. It will be as I wish and not as you do. Listen here. The prime trait of a female sovereign is magnanimity. I give you the right to speak. The interview can wait. I'm simply curious. Go ahead.

ZVENYBUDLO: I?

VALENTYNA: Yes, you. You, your eloquent grace.

ZVENYBUDLO: My—I, you see, am not very eloquent today. I've heard too much of other people's chatter.

VALENTYNA: And?

ZVENYBUDLO: And so I'm punishing myself again. That's how it is, you see.

VALENTYNA: Then as a punishment you shall debate with me.

ZVENYBUDLO: I? With you? But about what?

VALENTYNA: Not—about what, but for what. For the soul!

ZVENYBUDLO: But whose?

VALENTYNA: Our president's.

ZVENYBUDLO: For his soul?

VALENTYNA: Of course, you louse. For his soul. The question is this: is he or is he not to continue as president.

ZVENYBUDLO: But perhaps we should ask him first? Maybe he doesn't want us to fight for his soul?

VALENTYNA: No one is going to ask him. The responsibility is still mine. Come around from the other side of the sofa. Stand over there. There, there. Stand still. Straighten out your back. Try to put on an imposing pose. More. More. Not like that, you fool! Like this! Good. Now stand still and don't move, and I'll come around from this side. It'll be just like the devil and the angel arguing for the soul of a pious man.

ZVENYBUDLO: I—I—

VALENTYNA: Don't be afraid. I'm giving you a warrant of security. I'm granting you the freedom of conscience, speech, the press, and assembly.

ZVENYBUDLO: But—But I request that you be the angel, Your Majesty.

VALENTYNA: What? Are you exploiting your newly granted freedom to toady to me? Oh, people, people! May the devil take you. That is, be the devil, for all I care. Let's use the

devil and the angel as provisional symbols. You begin. You prattled here about happiness. Present your arguments.

ZVENYBUDLO: I said—I said every individual, so to speak—well, yes, anybody—can be great, if he wants to. For collecting stamps. Pronouncing the double “rr.” And so forth.

VALENTYNA: Present your arguments for double “rr.”

ZVENYBUDLO: That was about words with an “r” sound. That is, one should pronounce the “r” twice.

VALENTYNA: Some arguments! Here is my counter-argument. There must always be someone who checks that an individual is not being lazy about being an individual. Who’s going to do that if there’s no president?

ZVENYBUDLO: In my humble opinion, a person will never become an individual until he wants to be one.

VALENTYNA: So? And if he really doesn’t want to?

ZVENYBUDLO: Then it’s no use. Because then it would mean that the world is rotten from the bottom up.

VALENTYNA: I know that better than you do. But the president is of a different opinion. He thinks that it is possible to forbid the world to be rotten. What do you say to that?

ZVENYBUDLO: Here is what I say. It’s worth trying to subdue the rottenness by first setting a good example. For instance, if one has power, one should give it up. This has never happened anywhere. Thus, one should set a good example.

VALENTYNA: And you’re certain that an example would have an impact?

ZVENYBUDLO: Of course I am certain. Just think of it, Your Majesty. If every individual were to say that to himself, there would no longer be anyone who would be tempted to rule the lives of others.

VALENTYNA: Quite so. What’s your plan for the president who has abdicated?

ZVENYBUDLO: Oh, boundless! First and foremost, he should leave the people in peace. Having built everything for them, he should swallow their gratitude and let them have absolute peace. He should turn to them only when he needs a light for his cigarette or to borrow a newspaper. But these are only general guidelines, so to speak. There’s a multitude of details.

VALENTYNA: Here’s my counter-argument. Having occupied a pitiful place in society, you’ll build a third-rate life rather than an exceptional one. What do you say to that?

ZVENYBUDLO: But I hold no position in society at all. Isn’t that so? Yet, it is an exception that I came here, to a great man’s sofa. What’s more, with the freedom I have been granted, I’m forced to play the part of the devil over him. What’s more, I’m trembling with fear.

VALENTYNA: Don’t tremble. Keep an imposing pose. Give me an additional argument.

ZVENYBUDLO: An additional one? Hm. How about this one: undertaking to write a book about greatness? Writing a book on the greatness of the individual. Writing a kind of handbook on how to become an individual. And let others read it.

VALENTYNA: And the president—does he really want to go home?

ZVENYBUDLO: Very much so.

VALENTYNA: How do you know?

ZVENYBUDLO: By intuition.

VALENTYNA: Is it that good?

ZVENYBUDLO: A *gracioso*’s must be.

VALENTYNA: Hmm .... Is that all he would be doing at home?

ZVENYBUDLO: Well—well, let's say he would also bring up a grandson.

VALENTYNA: Does he have one?

ZVENYBUDLO: He, no. But his wife has a stepsister. And the latter has a first cousin who has a niece who is devoted to raising her illegitimate son. So, he could certainly help with that.

VALENTYNA: How do you know?

ZVENYBUDLO: By intuition.

VALENTYNA: Fine. But tell me this. The president is lamenting that everything in his society has come to a halt because of prosperity. He says people have no goals. The sun has reached its zenith. It neither rises nor sets. Then why the hell should the grandson be educated? You're silent?

ZVENYBUDLO: My silence is eloquent.

VALENTYNA: What? Because the president's semblance is covered up? Do you mean to say that even in times of prosperity people wish for and suffer from unrealized desires? Then what, for Christ's sake, what is happiness actually? The chance to realize one's desires or only the possibility of having them?

ZVENYBUDLO: That I also do not know.

VALENTYNA: Neither do I, see?

ZVENYBUDLO: Hmm.

VALENTYNA: Hmm.

ZVENYBUDLO: Perhaps—

VALENTYNA: Perhaps what?

ZVENYBUDLO: Perhaps happiness is unattainable, after all?

VALENTYNA: It appears that that is very probable. But in that case you have defeated me.

ZVENYBUDLO: How so?

VALENTYNA: It's very simple. You've convinced me that our president is no president, but merely his grandson's mentor. It appears that I did not create a president. It appears that one of my desires was not realized. It appears that for the first time in my life I am happy!

ZVENYBUDLO: Maybe it does look that way somehow—

VALENTYNA: Aha! But despite that my second wish did come true! Only a minute ago I wished someone could defeat me, and here he is in person! It happens my case is not completely hopeless. But, goodness gracious, what a who-knows-what my victor is! Did I not ride on your shoulders once, you toad? But now what—should I leap into your arms? And will you break my spine? Will you squeeze apple juice out of me?

ZVENYBUDLO: Worse things can happen in this world, Your Majesty.

VALENTYNA: If we're going to be consistent, then let's be consistent. Hop over the sofa to me. Stick out your fist. Order me to lie down and be quiet. With all your fearsome freedom, dictate to me, my dictator, my colossus! Well?

ZVENYBUDLO: Your Majesty ... lie down—

VALENTYNA: And? And?

ZVENYBUDLO: and be qui—

VALENTYNA: Wait! Why are you crawling under the sofa?

ZVENYBUDLO: Because it's more convenient for me from here?

VALENTYNA: What's more convenient?

ZVENYBUDLO: To squeeze apple juice from you. Besides, I have another version.

VALENTYNA: Another version of what?

ZVENYBUDLO: It's actually not a version. It's a proposition for a version. A proposition for a version of an answer to the question: what is happiness.

VALENTYNA: Well?

ZVENYBUDLO: For it could also be that happiness is—

VALENTYNA: Well? Well?

ZVENYBUDLO: That all that happiness is is having a clear conscience.

MAXIMUS: Finally. That's what I've been waiting for. For now he, whose soul was being disputed, will respond himself. On my authority as the president, which I have not yet relinquished, I order you to do my bidding without fail. It will be done by the president's personal secretary and advisor. Go ahead.

VALENTYNA: There's no choice. One way or another I am beaten. Hello! Is this the prison warden? Warden, in one minute—What? Ah, yes, of course—good day. The day, incidentally, is beautiful. Now then, in exactly one minute the imprisoned architect, Martyn, must appear in the president's private suite on the roof of the palace. What? Yes, you understood correctly. The imprisoned architect, Martyn. Your most difficult prisoner. Yes, just as he is. Thanks. Goodbye.

*Music a chord that swells. MARTYN enters.*

MARTYN: Here I am.

VALENTYNA: Architect Martyn, there are three happy people here who do not know what happiness is. With the fullness of their unknown happiness they pardon you.

MARTYN: This is incomprehensible—

VALENTYNA: There's nothing incomprehensible about it. You are pardoned. That means you don't have to go back to the dungeon. On the contrary, you should return to your architectural projects. A lamentable violation of our public legality has occurred, responsible for which—Hmm.

MAXIMUS: The secretary voice shall not quiver when announcing the truth.

VALENTYNA: For the first time in my life I didn't know what to say. Oh, what the hell! Today everything is happening to me for the first time. Now then, Architect Martyn, you have heard that legality has been violated? Then know you this: President Maximus is guilty of the said violation, and now he, in turn, is begging you for your forgiveness. Did I say it right?

MAXIMUS: The president's secretary expressed it correctly.

VALENTYNA: Architect Martyn, are you willing to forgive President Maximus? Of course, an announcement about the project's true author does not need to be a precondition. Obviously that will be done. So, Architect Martyn, tell us what you think.

*Music: a single note.*

MARTYN: The wall separating people is thin, unreal. I would like to express it, but not all people have that gift. Are you not listening to me?

*Music: A single note.*

Do you want to leave me? Then, leave me darling. You'll be better off without me.

*Music: a single note.*

There was nothing but infinite blackness. You want to leave me?

*Music: a single note.*

He'll spend the night here. It's better that way.

*Music: a single note.*

Turn towards me. Turn around, both of you. Well, all right. Never mind.

*Music: a single false note, which stops suddenly.*

MARTYN: I cannot forgive you, Mr. President.

MAXIMUS: No?

MARTYN: No. Because I'm not worthy.

MAXIMUS: But I'm not worthy either.

MARTYN: That squares our accounts.

MAXIMUS: Wherein lies your guilt?

MARTYN: I joined the conspiracy.

MAXIMUS: For that you were punished and served your time.

MARTYN: There's still another transgression.

MAXIMUS: Tell me about it.

MARTYN: I thought I was sincere when I joined the conspiracy.

MAXIMUS: And how were you really?

MARTYN: I joined out of feelings of revenge.

MAXIMUS: For Taïsa?

MARTYN: Taïsa.

*Music: a chord that lasts unusually long.*

MAXIMUS: See how we perform tragedy together? One of us has bandaged jaw, and the ends of the bandage are sticking up above his head. Meanwhile the other one has not removed his prison garb yet.

VALENTYNA: Right. The architect's appearance is much too medieval. Therefore let the president's secretary intervene. She does not like to exercise logic. This has been proven. So, perhaps it isn't logic. Judge for yourself. First of all, let me say that even a secretary who has been defeated remains a woman. Based on the rights of women who are responsible for men's grooming, I bid the president to remain as he is—with his jaw bandaged up. Such is his tragic attire, and such will it be when he return home. At the same time, however, the president will share with the architect his rich experience with transformation. Do you know, Mr. Architect, how to part with your beard? I'll show you how the president does it. Just like this. Poof—and it's gone! Remove your rags too. Appear before us in appropriate modern attire. Like a well-groomed man. Now you look like you've just been hatched and are ready for all those press conferences that profusely await you. But the important part still remains. Please listen. Does the offender give everything back to the offended or not? The pillaged plans, stolen name, and so on? He does. This truth is as sacred as the fact that the president's secretary is called Valentyna. So, having gotten back his confiscated possessions, the rising star begins everything from the beginning. Instantly the past becomes the present and vice versa—the present becomes the past. Does he get

everything back that was confiscated? Everything: lock, stock, and barrel. That means Taïsa too—God damn it—Taïsa too!

*Music: an unmistakably affirmative chord.*

And generally speaking—Hey you, you tragic actors in lenten masks! Imagine, if you can, that because of a personnel shortage we shall have to fill in for someone. Then what—should Taïsa hang herself? Just let her try! If necessary, she'll take part in a crowd scene. If that's what the director wants, end of discussion. Our concern was purging passions with the aid of fear and compassion, not stifling living performers. Am I saying it properly?

*Music: an unmistakably affirmative chord.*

MAXIMUS: In the opinion of the president, the secretary has expressed herself correctly. If my partner doesn't object—

MARTYN: Dear God! But I'm a performer just like you.

MAXIMUS: Then how about this idea? If a tragedy without any deaths is possible, then I would like to learn of the fate of my first wife.

ZVENYBUDLO: I would like to say something about that. Are you quite sure she's dead? Did you read an announcement about her death anywhere?

MAXIMUS: No, but so much has happened since then—

ZVENYBUDLO: Never judge events from your own angle. I assure you nothing at all has happened to her. She's at home waiting for you to eat some potatoes with tomato sauce.

*Music. A film, with moving shots: a city, other cities, seas, sky, countless close-up masks, countless spots moving through space.*

A REPORTER *appears*.

VALENTYNA: Do you have a notebook?

REPORTER: At your service, ma'am .

VALENTYNA: Everything taken down so far should be circled with a red pencil. It will run separately. A sensational news item will follow. Here it is. Headline: "The President Resigns." Ready?

REPORTER: My pencil is shaking, ma'am .

VALENTYNA: Courage, courage, young man. The next headline: "A Noble Act by Former President." Here's the text. It was very difficult to compose. So, please don't change anything. I'm relying on your skill. Be sure to bring it to your editor's attention.

REPORTER: Rest assured, ma'am .

VALENTYNA: The story is about architect Martyn who operated under the name of Maximus during the officers' conspiracy. But the opposite is true. No one else but Maximus is called Maximus. However, Architect Martyn is the author of all the general construction projects. Moreover, here's Architect Martyn in person. You will interview him.

REPORTER: Thank you, ma'am . I'd like to begin by asking you, Mr. Architect, about your career up to this point. Were there any obstacles along the way, sir: failure to be understood, failure to be recognized, and so forth?

MARTYN: There were no obstacles of any kind. I went through my professional training confidently, and my first project was a success. If it were not for a precarious step I allowed myself to take by getting involved in politics—

VALENTYNA: And with Taïsa, too, as you can see, everything's all right. Most likely she didn't exist at all. Later you'll have a pleasant chat about all this. I really have no time. Here's an additional news item. Text: The former secretary to the president, Valentyna, is preparing to fly to Central Africa to study the folkways of a certain tribe. Sociologists claim that—In addition, the former secretary has, one way or another, signed a contract with a well-known newspaper to write a scholarly account of the trip. What is it?

REPORTER: Oh, ma'am !

VALENTYNA: That's all. Give me a light. By the way, do you have a dagger?

REPORTER: A dagger, ma'am ?

VALENTYNA: I'm used to chasing away flies with a dagger. But, my dagger got lost somewhere in the Bab el Mandeb Straits. And shooting flies with a pistol is probably too inhumane.

REPORTER: I'm sorry, I haven't got a dagger. All I can offer is this penknife.

VALENTYNA: If you like, you may give it to me as a farewell present. Thanks. That'll be all. If you like, I can kiss you.

REPORTER: Oh, ma'am !

VALENTYNA: Too bad I'm already in my travelling clothes. Otherwise, you would have been able to smell how my cabbage leaves are permeated with the scent of apples.

REPORTER: Apples, ma'am ? I'm very partial to apples. My particular weakness, if I may say so, ma'am , is the paper rennet variety.

VALENTYNA: You and I are somewhat related in spirit, but nevertheless rather distantly. I myself am mad about the St. Anthony's variety. But it doesn't matter. I shall now kiss you. Did you enjoy that?

REPORTER: Immensely, ma'am . I shall always remember it.

VALENTYNA: Oh, Architect! Were you watching the expression on my face when I was kissing him? For they say I'm very pretty today.

## Scene 2

MAXIMUS'S WIFE: They say I'm very pretty today.

MAXIMUS: We say so, too.

WIFE: I see. Your face is really wrapped up. If you've hurt yourself—which you could have done by bumping into the doorjamb because it's dark in our hallway, and how many times I've told the superintendent about that—before you bandaged it, you should have washed it with a clean sponge dipped in—

ZVENYBUDLO: I did do that.

WIFE: I'm much obliged. Actually, it's very good that you've come, because I have just finished frying potatoes and there's some tomato sauce to go along with them. Besides that, I really love company, and I keep telling my husband that. Now, about this other matter: for the life of me, I can't seem to find one of the towels missing from the linen closet. If I consider that you were asking me today for a really clean towel, instead of

the slightly used one that's hanging in the bathroom—by the way, I've already mopped up in there—and again, if I also consider that you've been acting strangely today, then—

MAXIMUS: My dear, it's a fatal combination of the two matters into one. The towel is wrapped around my face. But I can't take it off right now because I truly have a nasty scratch on my jaw. Zvenybudlo, that's this gentleman's name, is my witness.

WIFE: All right, but in that case what about your beard? I would be very sorry if it's gone.

MAXIMUS: The beard is all right, dear. Can't you see it sticking out in all directions from under the towel? The shaving kit and the mirror were right here in my pocket. But they were of no use.

WIFE: Well, put them over on that table. And please take off your coats, both of you.

ZVENYBUDLO: I don't own a coat. I'm a stoic, my dear Mrs. Maximus.

MAXIMUS: His name is Zvenybudlo. Feed him, dear. He's always hungry. And love him. It's possible he'll be living with us.

ZVENYBUDLO: No, I won't be living with you. I can't allow myself to do that because I must punish myself.

MAXIMUS: But he will be our guest from time to time. He has inspired me to write a book. A big one, maybe four hundred pages long. He also says I should teach you declamation.

WIFE: Fine. All right. See, when you talk to me like that, I start getting terribly excited. Declaiming. I know that word. It was such a long time ago! Why haven't you mentioned declamation to me before? My grandfather's brother on my father's side, who was known in our family for his fabulous health, was also a marvellous reciter. He taught me Shevchenko's "Cherry Orchard," and I recited it with great feeling and expression. See how excited you've made me? When you left after lunch today, people told me I was very pretty. But you both shall see how pretty I am when I'm declaiming. Then you'll understand the beauty of an older person. Please eat, both of you. Eat these potatoes. So, you'll be writing a book! How I have wanted you to write a big book. I didn't know how to say that to you because I was afraid you would have thought me a strange woman. It's a good thing that Mr. Zvenybudlo has suggested the idea of writing a book to you. I have no desire at all to see him go hungry. But if he has a habit of holding his fork in his right hand, all I can say is that I really respect originality. Besides, that way he can conveniently add more tomato sauce using his left hand. Do that, Mr. Zvenybudlo. Maximus, you will write your book. We will declaim together. These are, perhaps, somewhat strange ideas that are popping into my head. But you're the cause, because it was you who mentioned declamation. And we must also take into account that you are also strange today. It's entirely possible that after this you will also devote more attention to our family ties, which you have always scoffed at so much, especially when we gather for our annual family reunion. I assure you that each member of our sizeable family lives his own rich and meaningful life, which is concealed by what you so unjustly call a needless waste of time. For example, the grandson—

ZVENYBUDLO: The grandson, Mrs. Maximus? Didn't I tell you?

WIFE: So, you already know? Yes, it's that extraordinarily gifted boy, the son of a poor single mother, the niece of my stepsister's first cousin. His life dream is to become a postal clerk. He passed all of his examinations with honours, distinguishing himself es-



pecially in geography. But because of the wholehearted callousness of the vice-chairman of the selection committee, who despite—

MAXIMUS: What? Do you mean there's a conflict?

WIFE: I don't know that word. I don't understand it, and perhaps it's not worth remembering it, because otherwise I can't be sure that I won't begin repeating it mechanically sometimes, and that would interfere with fulfilling my domestic responsibilities. But the boy definitely needs help, and I'm convinced that you will not refuse to allow him to visit us and will give him the benefit of your experience. Precisely because your vocation is that of a postal clerk.

MAXIMUS: But of course.

WIFE: I also wanted to tell you that I would certainly not relish moving to one of those new buildings, so many of which have been built all around us. They're nice, but are we unhappy here? In nine days we'll be celebrating our thirtieth wedding anniversary here, and Mr. Zvenybudlo will be our guest. Look at how beautiful our orchard is. And potatoes have become so attractively inexpensive: they're going for twenty-five today. That's nice! Please eat. What a lovely evening. It's only three minutes of six. Did you come home earlier today?

MAXIMUS: I asked the department head to let me go early. There's pleasure in that, I think: I had finished all my work today with time to spare. Zvenybudlo, for one, maintains that each and every vocation can be turned into a parade.

*A shout:* "Latest news! The President Resigns!"

WIFE: Are you going somewhere again?

MAXIMUS: No—I still wanted to—

ZVENYBUDLO: He didn't want anything. He's simply still bedevilled, Mrs. Maximus.

WIFE: Finish your meal. Why did you jump up? There's no need to jump up before finishing your meal.

MAXIMUS: I simply wanted to go and buy a newspaper. Don't you read newspapers?

WIFE: I love reading newspapers. Just today I read about four hermits who were discovered on top of a cliff by an expedition. Bees brought them wild honey. The hermits absolutely refused to come down. This is very instructive. They are probably people with high moral values.

MAXIMUS: But they can begin everything from the beginning! Generally speaking, everything can still be begun from the beginning!

ZVENYBUDLO: Of course it can. One can always begin everything from the beginning. But for what purpose? Isn't it best to stop time and live by what is truly real and can never change: to live by remembrance? Your remembrance is always with you wherever you go. And now, for your twilight years, you even have your grandson's conflict. Now that's happiness! I have always envied you. I envy you even now. For I am also looking for a conflict, only I don't know what kind I need. It is precisely because of that envy that I must punish myself. I once wanted to live my life in complete tranquillity. But now I'll deliberately go where there's the most clamour. Moreover—oh, please forgive me. Here I've sat down and continued sitting, while I'm supposed to be delivering the epilogue. Oh, no, it won't be long. It won't be anything at all. It concerns only the sentence that was uttered at the beginning of this play. We had agreed to begin with what we had ended, and to end with what we had begun. We were just reminded of the hermits on the cliff. I am thinking about them. I under-

stand them better than I understand anyone else. For me they are an unattainable ideal: it is entirely possible for them not to hear other people's chatter but only their own, resonating with a clear perfect echo. As for us—what are we? Here you are looking at me. But I, as unpleasant as it may be for me, must remind you of our very first sentence. It went like this: Who are you?

*Music. A pantomime.*

*The REPORTER, who had been kissed, wears a solemn mask with a newspaper headline instead of a forehead. He walks past quickly but then halts. ZVENYBUDLO turns away from him with disdain. MAXIMUS'S WIFE affectionately waves her hand as if to say "I have already read it." And, after hesitating for a moment, MAXIMUS also waves his hand.*

*Music: a chord.*

*Translated by John Prasko*

# Bohdan Boychuk

Bohdan Boychuk was born in 1927 in Bortnyky (now Lisove), Buchach county, Galicia. A forced labourer in Germany during WWII and a post-war refugee there, in 1949 he immigrated to the United States. Forced to be on his own still as a teenager, he managed to complete college, graduating with an engineering degree from New York University. In the mid-1950s Boychuk and several other Ukrainian émigré modernist poets formed The New York Group. From 1959 to 1979 he edited *Novi poezii*, the group's journal of original and translated poetry.

Boychuk is the author of over thirty books (a dozen books of poetry, three books of plays, five novels, a volume of memoirs, and two books about actors. Two of his plays, *Pryrecheni* (The Condemned) and *Holod – 1933* (*Hunger—1933*), were published together in 1968. *Holod* was first staged in New York in 1969 by the Ukrainian-language Novyi teatr (New Theatre) directed by Volodymyr Lysniak. In 2001 the New York-based Studiia mystetskoho slova (Studio of the Oral Arts, directed by Lidiia Krushelnyska) staged *P'iat' kartyn dvotysiachnoho roku* (Five Scenes of the Year 2000), based on Boychuk's drama and poetry. He has translated several books of poetry and prose from Spanish and English into Ukrainian, including Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1972) and selected poems by Stanley Kunitz (1977), David Ignatow (1977) and e.e. cummings (2005); compiled editions of the Ukrainian poets Oleksa Stefanovych (1975) and Bohdan Kravtsiv (2 vols., 1978–80, 1994); co-translated into English the selected poems of Bohdan Ihor Antonych (1977), Ivan Drach (1978), and Boris Pasternak (1983, 2001), as well as some of his own works; and co-edited two anthologies of Ukrainian poetry, *Koordynaty: Antolohiia suchasnoi ukrains'koï poezii na Zakhodi* (Co-ordinates: An Anthology of Contemporary Ukrainian Poetry in the West, 1969) and *Poza tradytsii: Antolohiia ukrains'koï modernoi poezii v diiaspori* (Beyond Traditions: An Anthology of Ukrainian Modern Poetry in the Diaspora, 1993). For many years Boychuk served as the literary editor of the monthly journal *Suchasnist'*. In 1990 he founded *Svito-vyd*, a semi-annual Ukrainian literary journal published in New York and then Kyiv until 1999. Since the late 1990s he has resided mostly in Kyiv.

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## *Hunger—1933: The Theme of Freedom and Anti-Heroes*

The title of Bohdan Boychuk's play refers to the famine-genocide organized by the Stalinist regime in Ukraine in 1932–33, claiming from three to seven million victims. Although the play is neither documentary nor historical, it focuses on the horrible proportions of man's inhumanity in an no-exit situation.

The depiction of famine in *Hunger—1933* is universally applicable, not only in terms of genocide through starvation, but also in terms of an individual watching, analyzing, feeling, and embarking on a search for faith. The protagonists experience a quest for the hidden self, for a basis for interpersonal relations, and for an individual authentic existence and self-fulfilment. The play is not simply a representation of an extremely threatening human predicament, but also of an extreme baring of the soul. In terms of ideas, imagery, and style, *Hunger—1933* may be seen as a Ukrainian reaction not only to a specific historical occurrence, but also as a typical postwar literary work expressing a reaction to a horrendous situation, similar to the reactions expressed by Graham Greene, John Osborne, and Archibald MacLeish. When Boychuk presents or borrows a situation or phrase from another writer, it is intentional, just as the theme of Don Juan is intentionally depicted in a different light by different writers.

In his novel *The Power and the Glory* (1940; an earlier version was called, significantly, *The Labyrinthine Ways*), Graham Greene also includes a depiction of widespread famine resulting from the policies of a foreign totalitarian regime. It is obvious that Boychuk purposefully wanted to draw attention to a similar event. Because his play is extremely short, its compressed length strengthens its intensity and its characters' actions appear in much starker relief. Boychuk's strong poetic language heightens the play's mood as well as its thesis about faith and humanity. As in both Greene's novel, the starving protagonist in Boychuk's play, finds himself at the outskirts of civilization in the company of a woman holding a dead baby. In both works the protagonists approach a crucifix standing at the intersection of two roads in the hope that a miracle will occur. Both Greene's and Boychuk's protagonists are self-deprecating and beset by self-doubt about their capacity for self-sacrifice. Yet both of them come to admit that in the presence of strong faith a miracle is possible. While Boychuk's heroine is left with only two potatoes, Greene's protagonist has two lumps of sugar. Greene's Whiskey-Priest bares his thoughts, anguish, and self-analysis, while Boychuk's Man covers his up with elliptical cynical comments. Both have very low self-esteem and pretend to be cowards<sup>1</sup> while actually suffering both their own and others' pain.

In both works the male protagonists talk and appeal to God directly. In *Hunger—1933* the Man even strikes a personal bargain with God. Both protagonists respond with striking similarity when the supreme being seemingly "misses an opportunity" to perform a miracle. Boychuk's Man asks "Why punish the innocent with more life?" almost in the same words as Greene's Whiskey-Priest. As the difference in the tone of the two works' *cri de coeur* suggests, Greene's protagonist is somewhat tougher and more of a survivor. He even removes a lump of sugar from the dead baby's mouth. While both protagonists, in their respective solitudes, rebel

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<sup>1</sup> Greene introduced a similar character in his first play, *The Living Room* (1953)—Rose, who comments that God "seems to want heroes and I'm not a hero. I'm a coward. I can't bear too much pain. God died for the cowards too."

against death arranged by other men, Boychuk's Man may proclaim otherwise. However, his actions demonstrate a deeply buried belief in the redeeming value of human acts, particularly when facing an existentialist situation.

Boychuk's Man is also similar to the first well-known modern anti-hero—Jimmy Porter in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1957). Both of them display arrogant behaviour, their attitude towards people is bitter, and they consider all women to be sex-hungry while pretending to be prudes. In the final scene of *Hunger—1933*, however, the Man becomes a different person, and the play moves in an entirely different direction. *Hunger—1933* may also be compared to Archibald MacLeish's verse drama *J. B.* (1965). While MacLeish presents a "Distant Voice" to express God's comments, Boychuk employs "A Voice from the Crucifix" in the prologue to his play, in order to provide a poetic commentary on a mime performance with a similar purpose.<sup>2</sup> In both plays the basic premise is developed primarily by two characters (male and female). One is a stalwart believer in God's will, while the other is a nihilist almost to the end. In both works similar accusations are expressed that God allows the innocent to suffer. Also in both plays, God is petitioned to save a life. Similar tests of will with God appear in both situations, and fatalism and free choice are juxtaposed

Notwithstanding all of Boychuk's intended parallels with other works, his play is imbued with its own rhetorical and poetic power. In the first edition, "A Voice from the Crucifix" thrice repeats the provocative statement "[His/God's] mouth is gagged by indifference". It is a poetic commentary on the visual mime performance that expresses a counter-liturgical assertion that humankind is essentially alone and that individuals are ultimately responsible for their deeds. The early twentieth-century Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev wrote that God, "without destroying freedom ... could not conquer the potency of evil contained in it. That is why there is tragedy and evil in the world."<sup>3</sup> Boychuk's "Voice from the Crucifix" paraphrases this more poignantly and expresses it poetically. The Man repeatedly reminds us of his freedom to die until the moment he chooses to do so, when the meaning of his life for him and others is revealed.

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<sup>2</sup> "A Voice from the Crucifix" was not included in recent editions of the play at the author's request. It appears in the appendix on pp. 483–87 of this anthology.

<sup>3</sup> Nikolai Berdiaev, "The Destiny of Man," in *The Worlds of Existentialism: A Critical Reader*, 334, ed. Maurice Friedman (New York: Random House, 1964).

# *Hunger—1933*

## (1961)

### CHARACTERS

A BALLET *or* MIME COMPANY

A VOICE FROM THE CRUCIFIX

A MAN

A WOMAN

A POET

A DYING MAN

A SILENT FUNERAL PROCESSION

AN OLD WOMAN

HER GRANDSON

A MAN IN UNIFORM

### Scene One

*The stage is lit up. All around lie neglected fields. Their surface is cracked and choked with weeds. At one side hangs an age-battered crucifix, its Christ figure with broken knees and a chipped mouth.*

A MAN, *young but worn down by adversity, is pacing out the length of a plot of earth and marking it with stones. He does the same for the width.*

THE MAN: Yes. Four paces long, two or three wide. I think that's what I'm allowed.

*Not certain of his measurements, he paces it out again and moves the marker stones a little.*

### Scene Two

A WOMAN *approaches with a baby at her breast. THE MAN becomes alarmed and hides behind a wall. THE WOMAN'S gait is weary and unsure. Now and then she stumbles and clutches the baby closer as if wanting to push it back into her womb. She sits down exhausted. The baby begins crying.*

THE WOMAN (*quietly*): Shh.

Lulla, lulla, sleep,  
 my little one, sleep  
 May you dream of milk  
 Transformed from His river  
 Lulla, sleep, lulla, sleep.

*She pulls a piece of black bread from her bosom, chews it, and feeds it to the baby. The baby quietens down. Nauseated by the smell of the bread, the woman feels sick and lays the baby down under the crucifix. She begins to shake and convulse. Then the fit passes.. She smooths out her dress and bends over the child.*

THE WOMAN: There, there, sleep ... That's best ... Then you won't feel the hunger gnawing at your stomach. Best to go to sleep and wait. And not remember how they tore the cross from his hand, how they hanged and crucified him, and left us alone in the world. They did not crucify him, but in the garden, for thirty pieces of silver to his face ... no, for a piece of bread and a bag of flour! On the apple tree, and would not even let us take him down because they were afraid he would rise again. And the rains tore away his flesh, right down to the bones.

*She searches for something in her bag, pulls out an unpeeled small, boiled potato and gnaws at it. Seeing the potato, THE MAN approaches THE WOMAN, kneels beside her, snatches the potato, and devours it greedily. THE WOMAN becomes frightened and begins crying.*

THE MAN: Why are you crying? (THE WOMAN *does not answer.*) There's no reason to cry! Why don't you say something? I want to eat. I'm hungry. Haven't you got any more? (THE WOMAN *is still upset.*) Don't you know how to talk? I asked you if you have anything more to eat.

THE WOMAN (*searching in her bag and pulling out another potato*): This is the last one.

THE MAN: Give it to me!

THE WOMAN: No!

THE MAN: I said, give it to me! (THE WOMAN *turns away and bites the potato greedily. THE MAN snatches the potato, divides it in two, gives her half, and eats the other half himself.*) Ha, ha, ha. I don't have to be good; the uniforms taught us that if you want something, grab it. If you're good, they shoot you. Ha, ha, ha! I won't be good. I won't.

THE WOMAN (*eating the potato and wailing*): They crucified him on the apple tree, and on Judgment Day he will rise without flesh.

THE MAN: What?

THE WOMAN: To where they will judge the living and the dead, he'll rise up without flesh.

THE MAN: Without what flesh?

THE WOMAN: The wind and rain tore away his flesh, right down to the bones.

THE MAN: What are you talking about, you crazy woman?!

THE WOMAN: I'm worried about him.

THE MAN: Worried about whom? (THE WOMAN *glances at the crucifix.*) About Him? Ha, ha, ha. He's crucified, you don't have to worry about Him.

THE WOMAN (*frightened*): What did you say? He's crucified?

THE MAN: Are you delirious, or what? "On the apple tree without flesh, on Judgment Day." What does all that mean?

THE WOMAN: I was thinking about him.

THE MAN: About him, about him!

THE WOMAN: I'm always thinking about him.

THE MAN: About whom?

THE WOMAN: About my husband.

THE MAN: You had a husband?



THE WOMAN: Yes.

THE MAN: So what?!

THE WOMAN: He was good to me.

THE MAN: He had to be! With a young wife in bed with him, he'd have to be good. Right?

THE WOMAN (*shouting*): Shut up! Shut up!

THE MAN: What are you shouting for? Why should I shut up? What did I say? Did I say anything wrong?

THE WOMAN: You were hinting at indecent things. I won't let anyone dishonour his memory!

THE MAN: I don't need your permission. To dishonour his memory ... I take it?

THE WOMAN: Yes.

THE MAN: So he's dead ... and what I say won't help or hurt him at all. Isn't that so? Right? He's dead ... and I will die, and you will too! (THE WOMAN *despairingly bows her head to the crucifix.*) And he can't help you either. He's been crucified. Don't you see? But don't be afraid. (*Crawling toward her*) Sooner or later, everyone has to go; yes, everyone! (*Coming across the baby*) What's that?

THE WOMAN: That's my child.

THE MAN: Your what?

THE WOMAN: My child.

THE MAN: Ha, ha, ha, ha! A baby? What do you need a baby for?

THE WOMAN: It came from him, from our love.

THE MAN: From your love... what do you know about love! (*In thought, as if in a trance*) It was a cold and clear river; no, we were bathing in the river, she was still young, and her body was fresh from the water, fresh and cold, completely naked.

THE WOMAN: He loved children; he said to bring them to him.

THE MAN: What children?! We had no children!

THE WOMAN: I was talking about my child.

THE MAN: Ah, about yours ... Why did you bring it into the world?

THE WOMAN: He loved children.

THE MAN: But he died.

THE WOMAN (*praying*): Receive him on the Last Day, O Lord! On earth there was no resting place for his mortal remains!

THE MAN: That's enough, enough!

THE WOMAN: The earth did not receive him.

THE MAN: I can't listen to this whining! Just tell me why you brought this child into the world?

THE WOMAN: Children have to live.

THE MAN: What for? To lick the hands of the uniforms for a crumb of bread? To be "happy and equal" with them. That's insane!

THE WOMAN: Without children the world would be ugly and old.

THE MAN: It is ugly. But where do you come from?

THE WOMAN: I was a schoolteacher.

THE MAN: Where?

THE WOMAN: In a village.

THE MAN: In a village ... hm, yes. Or rather, no, it was a little town with a mountain river close by.

THE WOMAN: And he was a farmer ... he loved the earth.

THE MAN: The river was young, cold, and pure. And she too was still young and pretty.

THE WOMAN: He loved the earth and the earth did not receive him, the rains tore away his flesh.

THE MAN: Young and pretty, she lay there completely naked ... huh? I asked you where you came from!

THE WOMAN: I've told you.

THE MAN: When? You haven't told me anything.

THE WOMAN: I was a schoolteacher in a village.

THE MAN: In what village?!

THE WOMAN: That village no longer exists.

THE MAN: What, did it vanish into thin air?

THE WOMAN: They uprooted it.

THE MAN: Uprooted how? You're delirious.

THE WOMAN: I mean they burned it down.

THE MAN: The village?

THE WOMAN: Yes, the soldiers.

THE MAN: And what did you teach?

THE WOMAN: Nothing.

THE MAN: What do you mean nothing?! You must have taught them something.

THE WOMAN: I've forgotten.

THE MAN: Try to remember, we've got to talk about something! That way the end will come sooner.

THE WOMAN: I tried to teach them to love.

THE MAN: What? What's that? Ha, ha, ha, ha. (*Seized by pain, he groans and clutches his stomach.*) You're insane! You taught those children to love? Now?

THE WOMAN: And what should I have taught them?

THE MAN: To hate! To kill! What else?

THE WOMAN: It's you who's insane, not me! You!

THE MAN: That's enough. Enough. Don't shout! I'm in pain.

THE WOMAN: And where do you come from?

THE MAN: I didn't want ... what?

THE WOMAN: Where do you ...

THE MAN: I pushed away my friends, my women. They were pretty, had beautiful bodies, and they loved me. I think that they loved me, but I don't even remember their names. I've forgotten.

THE WOMAN: I'll never forget him.

THE MAN: I pushed them away so I could be free, and now everything has been taken away, even freedom. So what do I have? What have I got left?

THE WOMAN: But where are you from? Where did you live?

THE MAN: Nowhere!

THE WOMAN (*amazed*): Nowhere?

THE MAN: Nowhere, nowhere! Stop pestering me! I never had a home so I'd be free, so I wouldn't be tied down by a home. I simply roamed around. What's your name?

THE WOMAN: Kateryna.

THE MAN: I should have known! The maiden forever wronged and forlorn! I don't like that name. (*THE WOMAN is hurt and remains silent.*) Why are you pouting? It's not important. We don't have to like names. We don't even have to remember them. I

don't remember their names. I remember only their faces, the scent of their bodies, how they made love, even their eyes....

THE WOMAN: And what's your name?

THE MAN: What?

THE WOMAN: What's your name?

THE MAN: Whatever you want! What's the difference? The time when a person had a name is gone.

THE WOMAN: Forgive me, I didn't mean to offend you.

THE MAN: Why d'you need my forgiveness? We're here alone and we're as good naked, so there's no need for propriety. I'm not offended. It would be better if you told me something about yourself.

THE WOMAN: I want to eat.

THE MAN: We just ate! Tell me what you were like as a maid. I like to hear about things like that—one forgets about the uniforms, and hunger. You must have been pretty, right?

THE WOMAN: I was a bit younger.

THE MAN: And she was also still young and pretty then, she'd have gone with me, I love ... What? I didn't hear what you said.

THE WOMAN: I was younger, fresher and fuller.

THE MAN: With a full bust, right?

THE WOMAN: With a full belly, a full stomach! Not hungry. You're insulting. I won't talk to you any more.

THE MAN: You don't have to! I haven't said anything wrong. Beauty is always innocent. Tell me, you must have had boyfriends, you liked boys. (THE WOMAN *remains silent.*) Why don't you say something? Let's talk. Then we'll forget about bread. Tell me, did you like going with boys and ...

THE WOMAN: It would be better if you shut up!

THE MAN: I see. You were your mother's obedient and "respectable" daughter. Ha, ha, ha! (*Makes grotesque, half-dancing movements and sings in an ironic falsetto, imitating a girl's voice.*)

My mother said

I never should ...

THE WOMAN: I had no mother.

THE MAN: Huh? What?

THE WOMAN: I had no mother.

THE MAN: Neither did I. (*Both of them fall silent in embarrassment.*) So, tell me about your husband.

THE WOMAN: It's not interesting. How we got together was very ordinary.

THE MAN (*shouting*): What's the difference! Tell me anyway, so I can forget everything.

THE WOMAN: I was alone then. My father had died, and I didn't remember my mother. I was afraid to be on my own—that's why I married him. I didn't love him at the time, but he was a good man. Yes, he was a good man!

THE MAN *smiles wryly.*

MAN: So what? Why should I care?

THE WOMAN: He always said to trust the earth.

THE MAN: One should. Sooner or later it will cover everyone.

THE WOMAN: It didn't cover him. (*Falls silent pensively.*)

THE MAN: What's the difference?!

THE WOMAN: Later I did love him. He was big and strong, but gentle. He was always gentle with me, and he said that one must trust the earth. And he made me pregnant.

THE MAN: Ha, ha, ha! Because he was good—right?

THE WOMAN: And we had a child.

THE MAN: And then?

THE WOMAN: Then the soldiers came.

THE MAN: To take the grain.

THE WOMAN: Yes.

THE MAN: And what then?

THE WOMAN: My husband hid a little grain and flour, for the child at least.

THE MAN: And they found it, because dogs have keen noses. Right?

THE WOMAN: Yes, and they hanged him from an apple tree.

THE MAN: But you said they crucified him. (*The woman looks at the crucifix.*) I know! But you said that your husband was also crucified.

THE WOMAN: No, they hanged him. And they wouldn't allow us to take him down. And the wind tore off his flesh.

THE MAN: What happened to you then?

THE WOMAN: On Judgment Day he'll come without flesh.

THE MAN: But, what happened to ...

THE WOMAN: Where the quick and the dead shall be judged.

THE MAN: No one will be judged! What happened to you?!

THE WOMAN: He ripped apart her blouse and violated her, and he broke the cross the old man was holding, and on the tree he also ...

THE MAN (*shouting*): I want to know what happened to you!

THE WOMAN: Nothing. The child was crying in the cradle.

THE MAN: Where were you then?

THE WOMAN: They tore off my skirts and threw me down naked ...

THE MAN: And what? Tell me! (*THE WOMAN remains silent.*) What happened then? Tell me, do you hear?

THE WOMAN: I can't.

THE MAN: Why not? They threw you down, and then what?

THE WOMAN (*with difficulty*): They each took turns on top of me, and the child was crying in the cradle.

THE MAN (*pacing and muttering to himself, then shouting*): You women want it! All of you want it.

THE WOMAN: No, not like that! It was disgusting, I felt sick, as if snakes were slithering into my body.

THE MAN: Ha, ha, ha. Deep down in her soul every woman wants that.

THE WOMAN: You're depraved. You've no respect for anything!

THE MAN: I don't. What's there to respect?

THE WOMAN: I don't want to listen to this!

THE MAN: Then go away.

THE WOMAN: I'm afraid to be alone.

THE MAN *mutters to himself*. THE WOMAN *falls silent*.

THE MAN: Why are you silent?! Go on!

THE WOMAN: You're depraved!

THE MAN: You don't understand. I had to yell to get rid of what was inside me—because it was choking me. I didn't mean what I said.

THE WOMAN: After that I went away with the child to look for bread.

THE MAN: You weren't afraid?

THE WOMAN: I was, but the child was crying. There has to be a bit of bread somewhere.

THE MAN: Even if there is, they won't let you get at it.

THE WOMAN: Who won't?

THE MAN: Those in uniform. Who else?

THE WOMAN: If they don't, the child will die.

THE MAN (*turning aside as if to hide his pain, and then cursing unintelligibly, clenching his fists*):  
Ho! To hell with you! To the prince of darkness! To that fornicating mother of darkness! Who cares about that nowadays? Who cares about some child?

THE WOMAN: Children have to live.

THE MAN: I don't know if they do. What for? So they can go hungry and be harnessed to someone's will and herded into cemeteries? Life's hideous now. It's better to be under the ground, better to trust in the earth, ha, ha, like your husband said.

THE WOMAN: It will all pass, God willing.

THE MAN: I don't even want to hear about God's will. I'm tired. (*Sits down on the ground and stretches out his legs.*) Let's not fool ourselves! This is happening by man's blind and senseless will. If this was happening by God's will, I'd curse Him myself with this bony hand, see! I would! Myself!

THE WOMAN: Our curses won't reach him.

THE MAN: I know. Neither our curses nor our prayers can reach Him. Everything's worthless. It would be better to talk about something pleasant.

THE WOMAN: About bread, maybe?

THE MAN: Bread reminds me of my hunger. But nevertheless people used to have bread. As if it had been transubstantiated from something and descended on the table like the sun, round and crunchy. It's hard, almost impossible to believe that people used to have bread. But I don't want to talk about that.

THE WOMAN: Then maybe we should pray.

THE MAN: To whom? What for? He doesn't hear anyway. It would be better if we talked about women or about love, to forget everything. (*Stands up.*)

### Scene Three

A POET enters staring at something. Real objects don't exist for him. He does not notice them.

THE WOMAN: Someone's coming.

THE MAN: Where?

THE WOMAN: Over there. Like a shadow.

THE MAN: Looks like he has completely lost his marbles. (*Taps his forehead.*)

THE WOMAN: You have no compassion. How can you deride human suffering? You should feel sorry or a person.

THE MAN: Sympathy is of no use to anyone—it's a plague, a disease!

THE WOMAN: Don't yell.

THE MAN (to THE POET): Come over here. (THE POET stops, not knowing where the voice is coming from, and looks around.) Come over here. Yes, it's me calling you. Why are you looking around so stupidly? There's no one else here. Come here. (THE POET approaches uncertainly.) Who might you be?

THE POET: He told me to come here.

THE MAN: Then why didn't you come right away?

THE POET: To look for people—they have all gone somewhere.

THE MAN (to THE WOMAN): The ones in uniform have broken him. This is an example of their "happy, equal" man. Watch this. (To THE POET) Come over here. Closer! Stand on this rock.

THE POET *does not know what to do.*

THE MAN (*forcing THE POET up onto the rock*): Climb up! Now, turn around!

THE POET *turns around.*

THE MAN: Bend to the right.

THE POET *does not know what he wants of him.*

THE MAN: I said, bend to the right!

THE POET *looks inquiringly at THE WOMAN.*

THE MAN (*climbing up to him and forcing him to bend to the right*): Bend, bend!

THE WOMAN: Leave him alone, he's exhausted!

THE MAN (*shouting*): Bend to the left!

*To pacify him, THE POET obeys.*

THE MAN (to THE WOMAN): You see? I told you! They've broken him. That's how they'll take away everyone's willpower. They'll shove their fingers deep inside, all the way to the consciousness, and extract your willpower. And mummify it. (*Turning to THE POET*) What are you doing there? Huh?

THE POET: He told me to come here.

THE MAN: Who told you?

THE POET (*after looking around, noticing the crucifix, and staring at the Christ figure for some time*): He did. To look for people, because they have all gone somewhere from the earth. I want to tell them—

THE MAN: And what can you tell them now? Ha, ha, ha!

THE POET:       That God has wrung out the sodden night  
                  and set the bowl of darkness  
                  between the knees of the earth  
                  in which have drowned many  
                  blue  
                  and hazel ones;  
                  when the constellation of  
                  Libra bends down,  
                  when familiar death  
                  turns to face us,

to whom will we turn?  
For what?

VOICE FROM THE CRUCIFIX: HIS mouth is gagged by indifference.

THE POET (*to the crucifix*): I don't understand.

THE MAN: Whom are you talking to?

THE POET: He said something to me.

THE MAN: Ha, ha, ha! You're losing your mind.

THE POET: No, I heard him. He often spoke to me. He said to go forth and say: "And the word of the Lord came unto me saying, 'What seest thou?' And I said: 'I see a seething pot, and the face thereof is toward the north.' Then the Lord said unto me: 'Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land.'"

THE WOMAN: They have not broken him. No—

THE MAN (*pulling him down from the rock*): Then go ask him now.

THE POET (*walking up to the crucifix and touching the feet of Christ*): I did not understand you. Tell me again. (*The crucifix is silent.*)

THE MAN: Well!

THE POET: Tell me again, for I don't know what to say to people. (*A long, anxious pause. THE POET looks apologetically at the MAN.*) His body is cold. He's hungry.

THE MAN: It's you who's hungry.

THE POET *kneels before the crucifix.*

THE MAN: What are you doing?! Get up.

THE POET *hears and sees nothing.*

THE MAN: Speak to me! Do you hear? Get up! (*Pulls THE POET up by force and drags him.*)

THE WOMAN: Why are you badgering him? (*Pushes THE MAN away from THE POET.*) Leave him alone!

THE MAN: What concern is he of yours?

THE WOMAN: Let him go on his way. (*Goes up to THE POET, gently raises him, smooths his hair, and sets him on his way.*) Go now, go! No one needs you here now.

THE POET *exits alone.*

## Scene Four

THE WOMAN (*to THE POET*): May the Lord bless you with inspiration from the highest reaches of heaven.

THE MAN *talks to himself unintelligibly. He paces out the length of a patch of ground, marks something, paces out the width, and again marks something.*

THE WOMAN: What are you doing?

THE MAN *continues what he is doing without answering.*

THE WOMAN: Why won't you answer me?

THE MAN *marks a line on the ground with his foot but remains silent.*

THE WOMAN: Say something? I'm frightened.

THE MAN *ignores her.*

THE WOMAN: I feel lonely! Speak to me!

THE MAN: Then why did you send him away?!

THE WOMAN: Because you were abusing him.

THE MAN: So be lonely now.

THE WOMAN: I'm frightened! It's too quiet here.

THE MAN *goes through all his pockets but remains silent.*

THE WOMAN: What are you doing?

THE MAN *finds nothing, cannot believe it, and starts searching again.*

THE WOMAN (*in despair*): Speak to me! I had to send him away; maybe there are people somewhere who will love him; maybe there are people somewhere who need him. It's better for him to be there.

THE MAN: But, it's worse for me! With him around I could forget everything. But now? (*Shrugs.*) What now? Tell me!

THE WOMAN: I'm frightened. I want to pray.

THE MAN: Do whatever you want!

THE WOMAN: Maybe you could pray with me?

THE MAN: I don't want to.

THE WOMAN: Why not?

THE MAN: I'm not interested, simply not interested. I never pray.

THE WOMAN: What can we do then?

THE MAN: Yes, what can we do? What can you do?!

THE WOMAN: I'm hungry.

THE MAN: Go to hell! To the prince of darkness! (*Stopping himself*) Why am I swearing? All gestures are useless now. We'd better rest. Sit down here beside me. Yes, let's try to think about ... well, everything. There's very little time left.

*The WOMAN does as he bids, but without conviction. They sit silently beneath the crucifix. Finally the WOMAN looks at the MAN imploringly.*

THE MAN: Why are you looking at me?

THE WOMAN: I don't want to think anymore.

THE MAN: Why not?

THE WOMAN: It makes me feel sick and weak. I keep thinking all the time about—

THE MAN: About bread?

THE WOMAN: Yes.

THE MAN: So do I.

THE WOMAN: So what are we going to do?

THE MAN: How should I know! Think of something.

THE WOMAN: But what?

THE MAN: Whatever you want.

THE WOMAN: You think too.

THE MAN: I can't think. All I could still do is feel with my skin, my palms, caressing—

THE WOMAN: What?



THE MAN: A woman's body. I'd like just once more—you know.

THE WOMAN: What?

THE MAN: You have to have everything spelled out for you! To make love!

THE WOMAN (*frightened*): Where? With whom?

THE MAN: With you! Who else? There's no one else around.

THE WOMAN: I don't want to make love with you.

THE MAN: What's wrong? I suppose you're not a woman!

THE WOMAN: I don't want to talk to you!

THE MAN: Then don't! I prefer silence anyway. We have to get used slowly to silence, because it must be silent under the earth ... ONLY THE EARTH ENDURES FOREVER. Ha, ha, ha!

THE WOMAN: I don't want to be here with you any longer.

THE MAN: Then beat it! I've already told you to that before.

THE WOMAN *doesn't move*.

THE MAN: Why aren't you going? Go!

THE WOMAN: You have no feelings.

THE MAN: I don't need any feelings, or tearful tenderness, or sympathy. I don't! Do you hear?

THE WOMAN *gazes at the crucifix and moves her lips as if in prayer*.

THE MAN: Leave him in peace. He must be tired of all those whisperings, prayers and complaints. I would be! Anyway, what do you want from Him? Sympathy? He also taught love.

THE WOMAN: Not the kind you want!

THE MAN: There's no other kind.

THE WOMAN: There is, only you don't know it.

THE MAN: And I don't need to know. But I know the feeling of pleasure and oblivion when I caress firm breasts, when I smell the scent of a woman's skin. Her skin was also cold from the water, like marble in the coolness of the evening. She lay there with her eyes closed, waiting.

THE WOMAN: Who was she?

THE MAN: Huh? What?

THE WOMAN: I asked ...

THE MAN: You asked! And I'm asking you what we're going to do.

THE WOMAN: I don't know.

THE MAN: I have to do something or I'll go crazy. And you don't want—

THE WOMAN: What don't I want?

THE MAN: What, what! You know very well what! (THE WOMAN *hangs her head*.) I don't know how I'll get through to the end.

THE WOMAN (*moving closer to him*): We have to help each other somehow. There's only the two of us.

THE MAN: Yes, help ... but you don't want to.

THE WOMAN: Just we can survive, and tomorrow maybe—

THE MAN: Ha, ha, ha. Forget about tomorrow. Once and for all. There won't be a tomorrow for us. But don't be sad. (*Lifting her chin with her hand*) It's all the same: sooner or later ... But let's talk about something pleasant, all right? About love. You were pretty,

right? Maybe as pretty as ... did you ever lie in the summer by the river in grass steaming from the dew? I would have loved you then. (*Strokes her hair.*)

THE WOMAN *touches his hand and looks him straight in the eyes.*

THE MAN (*understanding her look*): What? Do you want to?

THE WOMAN: If you still want to.

THE MAN: Yes. (*Stroking her face*) You're starting to get wrinkles under your eyes, but your eyes are beautiful though sad. Your lips and arms are withering away. (*Rising, clenching his fists, and, while looking in the other direction, shouting*) I can't do it! Do you hear? How can I make love to you now? You're hungry. The child has sucked your breasts dry. And why? To grow up and become a dog like those in uniform or to become a dog that barks at them like we do. There's nothing left in you to love. I can't!

THE WOMAN *begins sobbing.*

THE MAN: Don't cry!

THE WOMAN *is crying so hard that her tears are choking her.*

THE MAN (*kneeling down beside her*): There, there, don't cry. I didn't mean it. It's just that my rage is eating away at me and I have to shout. Against everything that's happening around us; against what they did to you. I couldn't do it anyway. I'm too hungry. I just wanted the time to pass somehow.

THE WOMAN *quiets down a bit.*

THE MAN: You'd be pretty if you had a bit of bread and some sort of semi-human life. I know I'd love you then.

THE WOMAN *nods her head to show she understands.*

THE MAN (*not satisfied with his sincerity*): But I'm not sure. I'm not even sure of what I say and why I'm alive.

*The curtain falls or the stage goes dark for a few minutes.*

## Scene Five

*The MAN and WOMAN are in the same poses as in the preceding scene.*

THE WOMAN: How long have we been here already?

THE MAN: I don't know.

THE WOMAN: A day?

THE MAN: No, longer. Yesterday ... what was yesterday? Aha, the child was crying and you found it some bread crumbs.

THE WOMAN: That was today.

THE MAN: Are you sure?

THE WOMAN: It seems like it was.

THE MAN: Was it yesterday or the day before that that madman was here.

THE WOMAN: He wasn't mad; he just knew how to talk to God.

THE MAN: That's the same thing! What's the difference?

THE WOMAN: You're unfair.

THE MAN: It's enough that your God's fair, yet you see what's going on all around us.

THE WOMAN: It seems to me he was here yesterday. But when did the woman come?

THE MAN: What woman?

THE WOMAN: The one who wore her hair down.

THE MAN: There was no ...

THE WOMAN: At first I thought it was my sister.

THE MAN: No woman came by here. You must have imagined it.

THE WOMAN: Are you sure?

THE MAN: Yes, completely sure.

THE WOMAN: And I thought it was my sister.

THE MAN: You had a sister?

THE WOMAN: Yes, I did.

THE MAN: And where is she now?

THE WOMAN: What?

THE MAN: Where is your sister?

THE WOMAN: She died. There where they hanged him from that tree and where they tore the cross from the old man's hand. Remember?

THE MAN: How can I remember? Was it long ago?

THE WOMAN: What?

THE MAN: That she died.

THE WOMAN: I don't know. She lay in white with her hair undone.

THE MAN: You were imagining it.

THE WOMAN: I was sure that ...

THE MAN: I tell you there's been nobody here except that madman!

THE WOMAN: He isn't mad.

THE MAN: Let's not start that all over again. All right?

THE WOMAN: So then what?

THE MAN: I don't like going over the same thing ... oh!.. (*Clutches his stomach.*)

THE WOMAN (*going to him in alarm*): What's wrong?

THE MAN: Oh! It hurts! (*His entire body convulses.*) Don't touch me!

THE WOMAN: Lie down and tuck in your legs, and you'll feel better.

THE MAN: We'll feel better when we're dead. (*But he does as she says.*)

THE WOMAN (*feeling his forehead*): You've got a fever.

THE MAN: Don't touch me! I don't want your virtuous Good Samaritan charity. You're all the same. O-oh! I don't want your sympathy; it's humiliating.

*His pain eases a little, and he sits up against the crucifix.*

## Scene Six

*From the back of the stage on the left, a silent funeral procession advances. In it is an OLD WOMAN. On her left shoulder she holds a spade as if it were an icon on a pole. In her right arm she supports the corpse of a youth. She is barely able to drag him along, and his legs leave furrows in the field. A MAN IN UNIFORM observes her every movement, intently. Well fed and*

*even somewhat obese, he looks like a typical man of might, or even a regular dictator. He watches for any move the OLD WOMAN makes.*

THE MAN: Do you see something, too?

THE WOMAN: Where?

THE MAN: Over there.

THE WOMAN: Yes, some people, it seems.

THE MAN: Do you think they're real?

THE WOMAN: Yes, they're coming this way.

*As the OLD WOMAN approaches the centre of the stage, the MAN IN UNIFORM makes a gesture with his hand. The OLD WOMAN reacts in fear instantly and changes direction. She goes to the right side of the stage, glancing back constantly at the MAN IN UNIFORM.*

OLD WOMAN (*lamenting*):

Grant peace to his young soul,  
he brought me fruit  
from the orchards ... my grandson,  
and cover the valley gently  
with linen cloth  
and lay there Thy servant's  
and my grandson's soul ...  
grant him peace ... under the warm  
palm of Thy right hand,  
Grant him peace, O Christ our—

*Dissatisfied the MAN IN UNIFORM makes a stern gesture with his hand, and the OLD WOMAN breaks off her lament. THE WOMAN kneels down.*

THE MAN: What are you doing?

*The OLD WOMAN drops the spade from her trembling hand. Unable to bear the weight of the corpse, her legs buckle and she slumps to the ground. She whispers something in her grandson's ear, caresses him, is overcome with grief, and again whispers something and caresses him.*

THE WOMAN (*praying*):

Receive our  
ardent prayers,  
which flow from our hearts  
as if from great wounds  
in our breast;  
receive them from us  
like warm milk ...

THE MAN: That's beginning to turn sour! Ha, ha, ha.

THE WOMAN: That will drench  
with our supplication  
Thy hands  
pierced with compassion ...

THE MAN: Hands petrified from compassion!

THE WOMAN: O receive our love ...

THE MAN: Born of fear!

THE WOMAN: Like the blood of entreaty  
 from our hearts,  
 and leave us not  
 in fields  
 Where children's voices  
 do not grow  
 and which cast dew  
 like a chill;  
 and leave not  
 old women  
 at the end of the day  
 with the bodies of their children  
 who wish not to speak to them;  
 and send us  
 plenitude  
 between sunset and sunrise,  
 and send us our  
 daily bread  
 so that our children  
 need not die.

THE MAN (*shouting*): Give them bread!

THE WOMAN: Give us our daily bread.

THE MAN: This day!

THE WOMAN: So that our children ...

THE MAN: Will have bread!

THE WOMAN: Our daily bread,  
 our daily bread,  
 our dai ... ly

*The MAN IN UNIFORM makes an angry gesture with his hand: in his opinion, the OLD WOMAN has rested long enough. Trembling in fear, the OLD WOMAN picks up the spade, lifts her grandson's body, and begins dragging him off the stage. The MAN IN UNIFORM gestures to her to stop and bury the body. Satisfied with the outcome, he leaves. The presence of THE MAN and WOMAN did not bother him in the least. For him they did not even exist, because they did not enter into the equation of his responsibilities.*

*The MAN IN UNIFORM exits.*

## Scene Seven

THE WOMAN (*deliriously*):

Give us our daily bread, lest they die,  
 give us ... our daily bread,  
 bread, bread, bread, children.

THE MAN: What's the matter with you?!

THE WOMAN: Children give us lest the children die.

THE MAN (*shaking her by the shoulder*): What's the matter with you?! Slow down!

THE WOMAN: Give us this day and lead us not into temptation ...

THE MAN: You're going mad! What's the matter with you?

THE WOMAN: But deliver us lest the children die our daily bre ...

THE MAN: What's the matter with you? Who will I talk to? Wake up! Wake up! What am I going to do alone?

THE WOMAN *prattles on unintelligibly in a monotone.*

THE MAN (*obviously disturbed*): You're going mad! Wake up, pull yourself together! What am I going to do al ...? (*Slaps her face.*)

THE WOMAN *regains her senses and looks around, her eyes open wide.*

THE MAN: What's the matter with you?!

THE WOMAN: Why?

THE MAN (*more gently*): I guess you are exhausted and nodded off for a while. I woke you up by accident.

THE WOMAN: That's all right. I don't want to sleep.

THE MAN: What?

THE WOMAN: I'm afraid to sleep.

THE MAN: Afraid you won't wake up, eh?

THE WOMAN: Yes. Afraid that the child will be left alone.

THE MAN: Then let's try not to sleep, all right?

THE WOMAN: But where did she disappear to?

THE MAN: Who? Your sister?

THE WOMAN: No, that poor old woman.

THE MAN: The one with the spade?

THE WOMAN: The one with the boy who wouldn't speak to her.

THE MAN (*reluctantly*): She's gone!

THE WOMAN: Gone where?

THE MAN: To bury the boy.

THE WOMAN: What do you mean bury him! But why?

THE MAN: To cover him up so that he'll be comfortable and cosy.

THE WOMAN: She's gone to put him to bed.

THE MAN: Yes.

Lulla, lulla, lulla,

Sleep, baby, sleep

Mama's close beside thy cradle

Loving watch o'er thee doth keep.

THE WOMAN: Did she sing that over him?

THE MAN: No, that was Mother!

THE WOMAN: His mother?

THE MAN: No, it was my mother who sang that way to me ... lulla, lulla, lulla ... when I was little. Then later she left us, and I never thought about her again. Today was the first time.

THE WOMAN: Do you miss her?

THE MAN (*shrugging*): No. I didn't know her. But I knew many other women, who were pretty, some were ... and I think then they loved me. Now I don't even remember their names ... they're erased from my memory, like chalk from a blackboard. For some reason I couldn't live very long with any one of them. I left them all, as if I were searching for something else.

THE WOMAN: Yes, I know.

THE MAN: What could you know! I don't know myself what I was looking for.

THE WOMAN: For your mother.

THE MAN: You're on the wrong track. I didn't need a mother. I was simply afraid to get involved with people so as not to lose this foolish feeling of freedom! As in childhood, remember?

THE WOMAN: A little.

THE MAN: During my childhood I felt free. Do you remember that game where they all danced round in a circle and a girl, usually a pretty one, went to sleep in the middle and waited for a boy to kiss her—how did it go? Briar Rosebud was a ...

THE WOMAN, without even realizing it, begins singing along with him.  
Lovely child, Lovely child ...

THE MAN: Yes! You know it! We all held hands and sang. (*Takes her by the hand and walks around the crucifix and the child, singing faintly.*)

Briar-Rosebud was a lovely child,  
Lovely child,  
Lovely child,  
Briar-Rosebud was a lovely child,  
Love...ly child.

*Realizing what they are doing, they let go of each other's hand and, confused, stand on either side of the crucifix. Their faces reveal their longing and regret.*

THE MAN: Did you play like that in your village, too?

THE WOMAN *nods*.

THE MAN: And later, when you were a bit older, did you play hide-and-seek?

THE WOMAN: Yes. The boys most of all.

THE MAN: I loved that game. Once I hid with a girl under the bridge. She was a bit older than me.

THE WOMAN: And what?

THE MAN: Nothing. She said we should play mothers and fathers. Later, it seems to me, I'd been playing hide-and-seek all my life. I went from place to place, hid with some woman or another, left her and went off again. But why am I saying all this? For some reason the past is barging into my memory. For the first time in my life. It's very strange. I always left the past behind and never thought about it. They say that when a person's drowning his whole life passes through his mind. Do you think that there's any truth in this?

THE WOMAN: I don't know.

THE MAN: I don't think so! (*Starts pacing again and measures out a plot of ground while talking to himself.*) A bit farther away from the cross. I don't want to be next to it. Not much. A few paces long, two or three wide.

THE WOMAN: What are you doing?

THE MAN: What?

THE WOMAN: I'm asking what are you doing.

THE MAN: Where?

THE WOMAN: Just now, right here. You seem to be measuring the ground.

THE MAN: You must have been seeing things!

THE WOMAN: No, I saw you.

THE MAN (*shouting*): I didn't do anything! You were seeing things. You're losing your ... (*Points at his head.*)

THE WOMAN: Why are you getting angry? I was just asking. You already did the same thing before.

THE MAN: When? What did I do?

THE WOMAN: When the man who was talking to Him (*pointing to the crucifix*) went away.

THE MAN: Your imagination has gone screwy.

THE WOMAN (*offended*): I can still see, can't I.

THE MAN: Sure. You even saw your sister!

THE WOMAN (*disturbed*): Do you really think I was hallucinating?

THE MAN: What's the difference? (*Clasps his stomach and groans.*)

THE WOMAN *goes up to him.*

THE MAN: Don't touch me! I don't need sympathy.

THE WOMAN: Does it really hurt?

THE MAN: It'll pass soon. You don't think that when a person is drowning his whole life passes through his mind?

THE WOMAN: I don't know. I never heard anything like that.

THE MAN: You never heard it. Aha ... fine. (*A brief moment of awkward silence.*) Why don't you say something?!

THE WOMAN: I don't know what to say. Now everything seems faint somehow ...

THE MAN: Just like us, right?

THE WOMAN: But what about those women? Didn't you love them?

THE MAN: Why do you say that? I loved every one of them, but not for long. I couldn't love long. My love passed quickly, and I kept moving.

THE WOMAN: And nothing was left?

THE MAN: Where?

THE WOMAN: In your heart or in your feelings ... you know what I mean.

THE MAN: No. What could be left? When I look back I only see how the years pale like the bones of my own life, already leaching into the soil.

THE WOMAN: And who was that girl?

THE MAN: What girl?

THE WOMAN: The one you mentioned.

THE MAN: I didn't mention anyone!

THE WOMAN: The one who was lying by the river.

THE MAN: Bah! A young woman. That's all.

THE WOMAN: And where is she now?



THE MAN: How should I know? The last time I saw her—anyway, what's the difference. She was too young ... but now they're all dying, young and old alike. But she wanted me, and I wanted her too.

THE WOMAN: You miss her, don't you?

THE MAN: I don't miss anything.

THE WOMAN: But you loved her.

THE MAN: What's it to you?! I loved every one of them!

THE WOMAN: Not like that.

THE MAN: Then how? How?!

THE WOMAN: I think you were happy when you were with her. You always talk and think about her. She was your soul mate. You surely haven't forgotten her name.

THE MAN: I haven't but that doesn't mean anything! I was never close to anyone, or happy. I don't even know what that means. I'd just like to see her once more. That's all, although—what's the difference.

THE WOMAN: Then why did you leave her too?

THE MAN: Why did I leave her? Do I know? We leave them all, sooner or later. Or they leave us, go away, cover themselves with earth ... ha, ha ... ashes to ashes, dust to dust! After all, in the end, it's always empty and lonely. But maybe it's better that way, for she'll stay young and pretty in my imagination, young and pretty forever. A wrinkled face wouldn't suit her at all.

THE WOMAN: I know.

THE MAN: Wrinkles wouldn't suit her, I tell you!

THE WOMAN: No, they wouldn't ... I know. Is she still alive?

THE MAN (*shrugging*): I never saw her again. Though maybe ...

## Scene Eight

*Meanwhile a DYING MAN enters, hardly able to drag his feet across the field. Coming a bit closer he falls to the ground, like a cut-down sheaf of rye.*

THE WOMAN: Someone has fallen down over there.

THE MAN (*in thought, to himself*): Young and pretty ... If only people didn't pass through so quickly.

THE WOMAN: He's fallen and he's not moving!

THE MAN: If only they didn't push on. (THE WOMAN *comes closer*.) If only they really would meet from time to time.

THE WOMAN: Someone's fallen down over there! Look!

THE MAN: I'd like to see her once more ...

THE WOMAN (*shouting and shaking him*): There's someone over there!

THE MAN: What?

THE WOMAN: Someone has fallen down over there.

THE MAN: Fallen from where? From heaven?

THE WOMAN: He was coming this way, and he collapsed to the ground.

THE MAN: And he's measuring the ground, right? Your head's screwed up again!

THE WOMAN: You think I'm seeing things?

THE MAN: I'm not thinking anything.

THE WOMAN: But I can see him. He's lying there.

THE MAN: Let him lie.

THE WOMAN: Please look. It can't be a mirage.

THE MAN: Why are you pestering me? Leave me alone!

THE WOMAN: I'm frightened. Please look.

THE MAN: What do you want? Where am I supposed to look?

THE WOMAN (*pointing to the DYING MAN*): Over there, he's lying over there.

THE MAN (*looking*): So let him.

THE WOMAN: See? (*THE MAN does not respond.*) Do you see him?

THE MAN: I see him. So what?

THE WOMAN: He may be sick.

THE MAN: Who isn't sick? Everyone should have had their hearts removed and their black blood pumped out.

THE WOMAN: Go to him.

THE MAN: Simply tear open the chest and take a human heart in one's hands.

THE WOMAN: Go see what he's doing.

THE MAN: So that it would still be warm and beating in one's palms covered in blood.

THE WOMAN: Do you hear me?!

THE MAN: What?

THE WOMAN: Go to him.

THE MAN: Leave me alone, all right?

THE WOMAN: I don't understand you. You don't have any human—

THE MAN: Ha, ha, ha! Feelings, right? I don't have any. I've already told you that once. Full stop. Now leave me in peace.

THE WOMAN: You have to help a person sometimes, with a word or a gentle touch of the hand. Then he no longer feels so alone.

THE MAN: Go yourself. I'm tired. (*Sits down.*)

THE WOMAN: I'm frightened.

THE MAN: Why?

THE WOMAN: I don't know. Maybe he's dying.

THE MAN: Let him die. We'll measure out the length, and the width ... two or three paces.

THE WOMAN (*shouting*): Maybe he's sick, maybe he's dying!

THE MAN: So what! A person is free! Ha, ha, ha! Let him die, a person is free ... that's good, that's excellent. That sounds good today: a person is free and can die if he wants to. If he's not forced to. He's free ... What are you looking at?

THE WOMAN: You're crying.

THE MAN: Huh?

THE WOMAN: You're sorry about something. You're crying.

THE MAN: Where? Have you gone crazy.

THE WOMAN: I feel it in my heart.

THE MAN: Yes, because all my life I've tried to be free, I left everything, I tore apart my friendship with people ... and it hurt, and it still hurts. So what? What freedom do I have?

THE WOMAN: To help a person.

THE MAN: That's not freedom! On the contrary. (*Gets up and unwillingly shuffles over to the DYING MAN.*) Doesn't it hurt you?

THE WOMAN: What?

THE MAN: That you have no freedom, that in fact you have got nothing, nothing at all.

THE WOMAN: No.

THE MAN: I don't understand. Then you can't have any self-esteem.

THE WOMAN: I haven't thought about it. I believe that it is written for each one of us ...

THE MAN: Huh?

THE WOMAN: From the first day when we are moulded by the hands of God.

THE MAN: Are you starting again ...

THE WOMAN: The world until Judgment Day ...

THE MAN: What are you babbling about?!

THE WOMAN: Destiny.

THE MAN: What destiny?

THE WOMAN: I don't know.

THE MAN: Then who should know?

THE WOMAN: I believe.

THE MAN: In what do you believe?!

THE WOMAN: In human destiny, in some higher purpose of human life.

THE MAN: Life has no purpose.

THE WOMAN: It must have one.

THE MAN: Why must it? Because you'd feel better? With a purpose you'd feel a bit more secure? Then you tell me what it is.

THE WOMAN: What is what?

THE MAN: What purpose life has.

THE WOMAN: I'm not sure.

THE MAN: Ha, ha, ha!

THE WOMAN: Maybe to pass on life to a child.

THE MAN: What kind of purpose is that?! An ordinary function. You're simply afraid to see life as it really is: meaningless! (*Bending over the DYING MAN and addressing him.*) Right? You think so too. What do you say? Torn to pieces and hanged on the weeds ... What can you do? Huh? And you can't squeeze farther in through the earth. But is there a "farther in"? You don't know. I don't know either.

THE WOMAN: What is he saying?

THE MAN: Who?

THE WOMAN: That man.

THE MAN: When?

THE WOMAN: Just now.

THE MAN: Just now, what do you mean just now?! I don't know what's happening to you!

THE WOMAN: But why? He was just talking to you.

THE MAN: How could he if he's dead?

THE WOMAN: But I ... it seemed to me ...

THE MAN: It always seems to you. (*Begins going through the DEAD MAN's pockets.*)

THE WOMAN: What are you doing!

THE MAN (*sarcastically*): Looking for bread That's not a sin, is it? After all, he can't eat any longer.

*Weeping is heard from the crucifix.*

THE MAN (*to the crucifix*): Who are you crying for? For yourself or for us? Speak clearly. I can't hear you well. They were killing then too. I know. And crucifying. And they forgot you in the end. Even your Father forgot; even He forgot you then. He doesn't care, it appears, and you feel sorry for us.

THE WOMAN: The child was crying.

THE MAN: Huh? I don't think so! (*Continues going through the DEAD MAN'S pockets, finds a small book that looks like a prayer book, tosses it away, and abandons the corpse.*) There's nothing. May thunder crush it all! May a tempest shatter it and lightning cripple it! May the end come once and for all.

THE WOMAN: Don't curse!

THE MAN: Shut up! What business is it of yours?

THE WOMAN: Where are you going?

THE MAN: To sit down.

THE WOMAN: He can't lie there like that.

THE MAN: Ha, ha! That's the only thing he can do.

THE WOMAN: But I can't.

THE MAN: Can't what? Lie there?

THE WOMAN: No. I can't look at him. It makes me feel sick.

THE MAN: Then don't look.

THE WOMAN (*gagging, covering her face, turning away, and bending over*): Take him away!

THE MAN *ignores her*.

THE WOMAN (*weeping*): Take him away.

THE MAN (*unwillingly going over to the DEAD MAN while cursing*): The dead shouldn't disturb us, the living. They should leave us in peace. How much do we have left? There's no time now to bury the dead.

*He takes hold of the body under the arms and tries to drag it away, but can't. The body is too heavy. THE MAN falls, and as he does his face grazes the DEAD MAN'S face. In a rage he grabs the head of the corpse and beats it against the ground.*

THE WOMAN: What are you doing?! At least respect the dead.

THE MAN *hears nothing she says*.

THE WOMAN (*forcibly pulling him from the body*): Leave him alone! What did he do to you?

THE MAN (*coming to his senses*): Huh? What do you want?

THE WOMAN: What did he do to you?

THE MAN: He died. You hear? He died! And I've got to bury him. (*Standing up and facing the audience*) That's the only good thing a person does ... dies. If only he didn't bother the living; if only he took his body with him and the memory of him too. (*Sarcastically and derisively*) Everything ends this way. What is his death worth? Or mine, or yours? ... What's the difference? They'd have killed him anyway if he'd refused to grovel. (*Realizes something*.) But he's dead. (*With delight*) Yes, he was able to die, ha, ha, ha. He was able to die before they killed him. He was able to, he was able to! And he didn't have to grovel.

*He hops up and down on one foot like a boy, brushing the tears from his eyes.*

THE WOMAN: Let's go.

THE MAN: Where?

THE WOMAN: I'll help you.

THE MAN: I don't need help.

THE WOMAN: We'll bury him together.

THE MAN: I don't need anyone.

*They go together up to the body, take it under the arms, and drag it away.)*

THE WOMAN: They killed him by starving him ... he didn't die on his own.

THE MAN (*with anguish*): Yes, I hadn't thought of that.

*They drag the body off stage.*

## Scene Nine

THE MAN *curse*s behind the curtain and then returns onstage. THE WOMAN returns, kneels by the crucifix, and prays.

THE MAN (*singing*): Now you are no more.

THE WOMAN: Don't sing!

THE MAN (*singing*): Now you are no more.

THE WOMAN: Don't sing!

THE MAN: Huh? Why not?

THE WOMAN: Your singing makes me sad.

THE MAN: Then what should I do?

THE WOMAN: I want to pray.

THE MAN: It's good to pray after a meal.

THE WOMAN (*praying*):

Feed, O Lord,  
with sweet milk ...

THE MAN: And I want more corpses.

THE WOMAN: From Thine own hand  
and with bread ...

THE MAN: Do you hear? I want lots of corpses!

THE WOMAN (*frightened*): Why?

THE MAN: So I can bury them in the ground and have something to do.

THE WOMAN: I'm hungry.

THE MAN: Do you think I'm not hungry?! Let's go and find some food.

THE WOMAN: I can't stand up any longer. (*Sits down.*)

THE MAN (*walking around in a circle and searching*): I saw a potato here. I'm quite sure I saw a  
beetroot here ...

THE WOMAN (*hopefully*): A potato or a beetroot?

THE MAN: What?

THE WOMAN: What did you see, a potato or a beetroot?

THE MAN: Where?

THE WOMAN: But you said—

THE MAN: I didn't say anything! If only there were a cabbage stalk around, but there's nothing. (*Taking some earth in his hands*) The earth is good, like a girl, fresh and fertile. Only there's no seed to cast into its womb. They took it away. They took everything away. (*Crumbing the earth*) And soon we'll be scattered like dust.

THE WOMAN (*in despair*): No! Don't say that.

THE MAN: Yes, we'll be scattered. That's the only truth, the only thing we really have.

THE WOMAN: I don't want that. I won't leave my child like that.

THE MAN: There's no way out.

THE WOMAN (*getting up*): Let's go somewhere.

THE MAN: There is nowhere to go.

THE WOMAN: Let's go look for bread ... I won't leave the child like that, to die.

THE MAN: You just said that you can't stand up any longer.

THE WOMAN (*rising*): I must go somewhere.

THE MAN: Where? For what?

THE WOMAN: I must save the child at least.

THE MAN: Why?

THE WOMAN: What do you mean why? So it will live.

THE MAN: Why should it live?!

THE WOMAN: Why did you live? Why did I live?

THE MAN: I don't know. Truly, why did we live? It was some sort of mistake, simply an absurdity. Anyway, the fact that I have existed has no meaning. I didn't have to exist at all! And nothing would have changed. Nothing. And nothing will change when we all die of hunger. The men in uniform will remain. What's the difference?!

THE WOMAN: They're wicked.

THE MAN: What's the difference?

THE WOMAN: They're filth!

THE MAN: The end is the same, one way or another! Regardless.

THE WOMAN: The end is never the same.

THE MAN: It is the same ... we wave our arms about for twenty, forty, seventy, or however many years, and then we croak.

THE WOMAN: That's not the end yet.

THE MAN (*mockingly*): Ha, ha, ha! Because then we have to go either down to hell or up to heaven ... Right?

THE WOMAN: Later there's another life in which a person understands things.

THE MAN: Where?

THE WOMAN: I don't know. I don't understand things yet.

THE MAN: If such a life really does begin, then why are you so afraid to die?

THE WOMAN: Because I don't understand death. That's why I'm scared.

THE MAN: Such talk is like running a sack race blindfolded: You'll never get anywhere or understand anything. It's naive!

*The child wakes up and begins crying.*

THE WOMAN (*crawling up to the child and taking it in her arms*):

Ah-ah-ah,

Lulla, lulla—sleep,

Sleep, baby, sleep,

Mama's close beside thy cradle ...

*Sleep. That way it's easier to get through the days when hunger is licking you ... and they break crosses out of your hand and hang you from a tree like bells ...*

*The child does not quiet down. THE WOMAN searches in her bag, in her bosom, in her ragged clothes. She cannot believe it and searches again.*

THE WOMAN: It's all gone.

THE MAN: Why are you looking at me?

THE WOMAN: It's all gone.

THE MAN: That means it's all gone!

THE WOMAN: But what will I give the child to eat?

THE MAN: What business is it of mine?! Give it what you want.

THE WOMAN: Help me somehow.

THE MAN: What do you want from me?!

THE WOMAN: It's hungry.

THE MAN: I'm hungry too. (*Shouting*) In the desert, not yielding to temptation he could survive ... they say the nights there are cold, and probably pitch black ... forty days and forty nights! Ha, ha, ha! (*Laughs so hard he starts gasping for air.*)

THE WOMAN: What are you saying?

THE MAN: What I'm saying is that I'm hungry too. What do you think?! If I had some bread I wouldn't give it to the child! I'd eat it myself! Myself!

THE WOMAN: Why?

THE MAN: You naive woman! Who's closer to me: myself or some child?

THE WOMAN: But it's my child!

THE MAN: So what? What's the difference.

THE WOMAN: You've already seen life.

THE MAN: Unfortunately.

THE WOMAN: But the child hasn't seen anything yet.

THE MAN: And that's good! It's better if it doesn't see it. It's better if it dies.

THE WOMAN: Don't squawk, you evil man!

THE MAN: I don't have to be good.

THE WOMAN: No?

THE MAN: Of course not!

THE WOMAN: You've got no conscience.

THE MAN: What do you want? I don't have to have a conscience. I don't have to be good.

THE WOMAN: No, you don't have to.

THE MAN: Of course I don't! I'm free.

THE WOMAN *remains silent.*

THE MAN: Why are you staring at me? What do you want? I've got no bread; I'm hungry too.

THE WOMAN: Find some somewhere.

THE MAN: I've looked. (*Walks in a circle, checking once more the plot of ground he has paced out, kneels to gather up some earth, moulds it into the shape of a bread loaf, and raises his hands over it.*) What rises from the earth, let it rise ... not mountains and five thousand men, but a little piece.

THE WOMAN: What are you doing now?

THE MAN: Huh? Nothing.

THE WOMAN: I'm hungry.

THE MAN (*shouting*): I tried! To change the earth into a piece of bread, because He said: if we really believe, then even mountains ... it's all lies, lies!

THE WOMAN: It will die in my arms.

THE MAN: So what?

THE WOMAN: I have to do something.

*The child does not quiet down.*

THE WOMAN (*looking at THE MAN*): It's hungry.

THE MAN *turns away*.

THE WOMAN: What will I give him? My baby's going to die!

THE MAN: It will die. It will die. Maybe better that way.

THE WOMAN: No!

THE MAN: Why? Is it really worth living?

THE WOMAN: Yes, it is.

THE MAN: For what?

THE WOMAN: Because life is beautiful.

THE MAN: Ha, ha, ha, ha!

*He laughs so hard that he starts gasping for air and has a coughing fit.*

THE WOMAN: Life wasn't all like it is now.

*The child starts choking and goes into convulsions.*

THE WOMAN: Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do!

THE MAN *raises his fists, shakes them threateningly at the sky, and drops them.*

THE WOMAN: Lulla, lulla, lulla,  
Sleep, my baby, sleep ...  
(*To THE MAN*) Why are you turning away?

THE MAN: Leave me alone, you hear?

THE WOMAN: What'll I do?

THE MAN: Whatever you wish.

THE WOMAN: I can't rock him to sleep. A-a-ah, don't cry, baby.

THE MAN *clenches his teeth.*

THE WOMAN: Lulla, lulla ... Lord God, he's dying! Oh, God! He's dying! What shall I give him?  
(*Lays the child beneath the crucifix.*) I have to find something for him.

*She crawls around on her hands and knees looking for food.*

THE MAN (*to the crucifix*): Why are you staring at us?

THE WOMAN: I am going to go crazy. There is nothing left.

THE MAN (*to the crucifix*): She believes. Help her!

THE WOMAN: Help me, at least for the child's sake ...

THE MAN: Help her, you hear? Give her food and drink.

THE WOMAN: Oh, Lord!

THE MAN: Here's some earth, change it into bread. I couldn't do it.

THE WOMAN: Help me.

THE MAN: Into a little piece of bread, a very little piece.



THE WOMAN: Don't cry, little one ... I will ...

THE MAN (*to the crucifix*): Why don't you answer? Could it be that even you don't care about her?

THE WOMAN: O-o-oh!

THE MAN (*approaching the crucifix with great effort and beating with his fists against the nails piercing Christ's feet*): Help her, help her! (*His wounded hands start to bleed. Completely exhausted, he falls at the feet of the crucifix.*) Forgive me, forgive me ... (*Looking at his hands*) Blood ... forgive me ... I know you're sorry for them, for you died for them. You really loved them ... Blood ...

A VOICE FROM THE CRUCIFIX: HIS mouth is gagged by indifference.

THE MAN: Yes, yes ... gagged by indifference ... and we're alone. (*Gets up, his arms lowered; blood from his hand drips on the child's mouth, and the child grows quiet. THE MAN looks at it for a long time, then kneels and gives it blood to suck from his hands.*) There, suck ... suck on my blood. Maybe you'll survive. Suck.

THE WOMAN (*running in panic to the crucifix, having realized that the child has grown quiet*): What are you doing to my child! O, Lord! What's the matter with my child? Is it still alive?

*Seeing THE MAN beside the child, she grows calmer and sits down next to him. THE MAN's head bends and slowly drops to her knees.*

THE WOMAN (*gently stroking his hair*):

Grant him peace, Lord,  
and feed him  
with sweet milk  
and bread  
that rises from azure  
yeast ...  
In the endless baking tins  
of Thy infinite will.  
Tear off from Thine eyes

A soft warm silence for him,  
and place it  
on the wound of his heart  
and wrap him in  
the white linen  
of Thy breath.  
He was hungry  
on earth  
and alone,  
Lord.  
Grant him peace  
and feed him  
with the souls of the just.

*She places THE MAN's head on the ground, picks up her child, rises, and makes an effort to leave. Curtain.*

## Appendix:

### Text Variant of *Hunger*—1933

*Bohdan Boychuk decided to exclude the following text from the translation in this anthology. In the original Ukrainian publication of the play, it appears in a separate column alongside the text that is translated above. This variant should be read in parallel with the lines above, beginning with “Dwelling once built by human hands ...” Boychuk also chose to omit other sections of part one of the Ukrainian text from the above translation. These parallel parts are not repeated below.*

#### Part One

#### A Voice from the Crucifix

*(poetic accompaniment)*

I took upon myself  
 only my own wounds;  
 They ache from the burning  
 Hopes  
 Of people  
 Who squeeze their hearts dry,  
 Like cherries,  
 Till the squeezed-out longing and despair  
 Turns into lime  
 That heals the walls,  
 Wraps the apple-trees,  
 And saves the grain.  
 But all in vain.  
 I did not take their wounds upon myself.

\*

They are divided by love:  
 They stamp  
 Bruises  
 Into the black soil,  
 They plough down,  
 To the bones of the land,  
 And when they meet,  
 They grab each other's throats,  
 And struggle,  
 On the verge of the abyss  
 Where their memories are dying ...  
 For in my name  
 Or against my name,

From the earth they came,  
And thither shall return.

\*

They are divided;  
For the darkness which  
Swallows their  
Neighbour,  
Troubles their heart.  
And rather than rip  
The darkness,  
They rip  
Their neighbour  
Upon the sheet  
Between the nights and days.  
And the broken scaffoldings,  
The cracked shards  
Of pots,  
The weary garlands  
Of girls,  
Curse the river.  
For in or against my name  
They push each other,  
Where they must  
Depart one day.

\*

The cup of joyfulness  
Is not for them,  
They'll have to drink  
Sorrow,  
Unable  
To spread out the shirts  
Of longing.

\*

This is the wheel  
Of cycles:  
Sharp rays cut through  
The night,  
And the red dawn  
Pours out  
From its breast.  
And then the day  
Slides down beyond the horizon  
And is sucked in  
By the night.

\*

They are divided by love  
For whitewashed  
Huts,  
For the groans of the furrow,  
For the ripened grace  
Of women.  
But to divide the body  
From its consciousness  
Is not given to those  
Who cannot resurrect  
The man.

\*

Thus they will not make  
Men equal.  
For love  
Torn from the body  
Will swell with anger.

\*

They have plundered her youth.  
And the girl's song  
Is silent.  
O  
Lament!  
Over the corpse of youth  
Weep  
By the black waters.  
One grieves so only once  
In a lifetime.

\*

In my name  
Or against my name,  
They are straining  
Their yellow flesh  
That snaps  
Above the chasm  
Of the infinite void.  
And then,  
On the naked branches  
Grow  
Lonely fruits,  
Striking  
The azure bell  
Of the air  
In alarm.

\*

Then they will embrace the dead,  
Press them to their breasts  
And bear them to the valley,  
Where HIS lips,  
Gagged by indifference,  
Are silent.

\*

The wheel will turn,  
The red dawn will gush forth  
Like blood once more from night,  
Again will day slide down  
Beyond the skyline:  
They will slay themselves  
And will take women  
So that beneath their hearts  
They may leave a memory behind.

But pity still assails my eyes.  
For once I loved them ...  
And maybe even now I love them.<sup>1</sup>

*Translated by Vera Rich, in collaboration  
with Bohdan Boychuk and Larissa Onyshkevych*

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<sup>1</sup> The last twelve lines are omitted in some variants of the play, but they appear in the one published in the parallel Ukrainian-language volume to this anthology.

# Oleksii Kolomiets

Oleksii Kolomiets (1919–94) was a leading Soviet Ukrainian playwright of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. His plays were frequently performed in Ukraine. He was born in Kharkivtsi, now in Lohvytsia raion in Poltava oblast. After the Second World War he worked for several years as a Komsomol functionary and a magazine and newspaper editor until 1960.

Kolomiets began publishing short stories in various periodicals in 1953, and in 1960 his first collection, *Bila krynytsia* (The White Well), appeared. He also began writing plays. His first play, *Faraony* (The Pharaohs, 1961), was performed in theatres in Ukraine and in Russia. *Faraony* was a major theatrical success; in the 1965–66 season alone it was seen on stage by a quarter million people and was also shown on Soviet television. The play was also translated into numerous languages of the USSR and satellite countries. After such a popular response, Kolomiets devoted himself solely to dramaturgy and wrote twenty plays, including *Spasybi tobi, moie kokhannia* (Thank You, My Love 1966), *Holubi oleni* (Azure Deer, 1973), *Sribna pavutyna* (The Silver Spiderweb, 1977), *Dykyi anhel* (Wild Angel, 1978), and *Hrad kniazia Kyia* (The City of Prince Kyi, 1981). Most of his works are sentimental, melodramatic, and didactic; they exemplify Soviet socialist-realist writing and the officially sanctioned point of view.

Kolomiets's second play, *Planeta Spodivan'* (1965), also known as *Planeta Speranta* (Planet Speranta, from Latin *sperare* 'to hope'), shows he was capable of producing high-calibre works. The play's touches of intellectualism, non-traditional settings, and structure hinted that a Soviet Ukrainian "experimental" theatre might arise. The play was translated into numerous languages of the Soviet bloc and into Japanese. The play's song, "The Azure Stone," remained popular until the late 1970s. The plays Kolomiets subsequently wrote, however, never reached the qualitative level of *Planeta Speranta*. He received several literary awards, including the Ukrainian SSR State Prize (1977) and the Korniiichuk Prize (1986).

## Selected Works by Kolomiets

*Proshu slova s'ohodni: Zbirnyk p'ies.* Kyiv: Dnipro, 1967.

*Planeta Spodivan': Dramatychni tvory.* Kyiv: Dnipro, 1969.

*Dramatychni tvory v dvokh tomakh.* Kyiv: Dnipro, 1979.

*Horlytsia: P'iesy.* Kyiv: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1986.

*Vybrani tvory v dvokh tomakh.* Kyiv: Dnipro, 1988.

*Planeta Spodivan': Dylohiia.* Kyiv: Mystetstvo, 1995.

## Selected Works about Kolomiets

Burkatov, Borys. "Podykh suchasnosti." In his *Podykh suchasnosti: Statti i portrety*, 40–71. Kyiv: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1975.

Kysel'ov, Iosyf. "Oleksii Kolomiets'." In *Pys'mennyky Radians'koï Ukraïny: Narysy*, vol. 9: 240–65. Kyiv: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1979.

Onyshkevych, Larysa M. L. Z. "Planeta Speranta." *Suchasnist'*, 1971, no. 10: 50–59.

Veselka, Svitlana. *Oleksii Kolomiets': Vrazhennia i rozdumy.* Kyiv: Mystetstvo, 1979.

## Pawns or Choosers?

The subtitle of *Planet Speranta*, “A Dilogy,” makes us aware of the two components that reappear throughout the work in various forms. The first component is the play’s division into two acts, which are set twenty years apart in the same place. The second is the comparison of the worlds of two Soviet generations and life on two planets, Earth and Speranta. The play stresses the continuity of values from one generation to the next, even though the characters in act one never meet those in act two.

Within each act there are numerous striking images and parallels. In act one, which takes place in an army dugout at the Soviet-German front during World War II, a lone arm holds out a sheepskin jacket to each of the soldiers in turn, and an anonymous voice calls each of them out. The soldiers in the dugout are like chess pieces that someone takes and moves elsewhere. This parallel is strengthened when one of the characters compares life to a game of chess in which the soldiers are like pawns, having no control over their lives. The images of the bunker and a box of chess pieces blend into one. But there is a difference. While a poem by Omar Khayyám, which one of the soldiers quotes, speaks of pawns being tossed back into a dusty box, in Kolomiets’s play the soldiers actually do leave the bunker. Their willingness to perform their duty even though it means certain death, emphasizes the basic difference between them and chess pieces. The parallel is subordinated to the play’s prevailing theme—humankind’s desire to make the world a better place from one generation to the next.

The two generations in the play are similar in that they are both willing to sacrifice themselves in their hope for a better future for their descendants. The younger generation in act two, however, displays more initiative. In act one the legend about the sack filled with joy and sorrow is an allusion to Pandora’s box. The story also stresses the difference among individuals when they choose their lots. In both acts, however, the people are volunteers who decide who will be the first one to sacrifice his or her life. Another set of images also keeps reappearing: those of the world of the past (act one) and the world of the present (act two). Both the soldiers of the 1940s and the students of the 1960s dare to point to some of the negative aspects of Soviet life. In act two Serhii expresses hope that kindred spirits with similar dreams exist on Earth’s twin planet, Speranta. The parallel converges: Speranta in the present represents Earth in the future, thus implying that nothing ever changes, there will always be people with similar values.

The parallels Kolomiets draws are not hidden. On occasion he is quite frank about topics that had long been unmentionable. In 1969 one of his colleagues described that amidst all the waiting that takes place in both acts of *Planet Speranta*, “the truth about [Soviet] life is presented.” The truth includes class persecution, national discrimination, the cult of Stalin, the demands placed on writers to misrepresent reality, mass arrests, the deportation of peasants to the Soviet Arctic and Siberia, and so on. But the play’s optimism, beginning with its title, is not limited to meeting the expectations of socialist realism. It is an expression of the time when remnants of the post-Stalin literary “thaw” allowed mild criticism of former practices in the hope that the past would remain in the past.

*Planet Speranta* is the only Soviet Ukrainian play of its time that raised expectations that Ukrainian dramaturgy would improve and that the use of stereotypical subjects and technical devices would end. Like his theme, Kolomiets’s technique produces a striking effect. In both acts in the play the anxiety of waiting is as tense as in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1953). Kolomiets achieves this by using elements similar to the Japanese Noh theatre: the

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lone arm against a dark background, and silent scenes. These elements, as well as the comments about the silent song and the “silent” ancient stone *baba* statue, point to the parallel silence in the bunker (very much as in a box of chess pieces), where those who appear to be pawns actually demonstrate their freedom of choice.



# *Planet Speranta*

## A Dilogy

### (1965)

#### CHARACTERS

WHISKERS

INTELLECTUAL

MOUSTACHE

TOY SOLDIER

ZAPOROZHIAN

LARION

PAVLO

LESIA

SERHII

## Act One

### Scene 1

*A bunker with plank beds, a bench (apparently brought in from a park), and an overturned empty box. On the bench lies a soldier's overcoat. The bunker is dimly lit with a candle. WHISKERS is lying on a plank bed. MOUSTACHE is sitting and sewing a strap. INTELLECTUAL is on the edge of the bench, holding an old book in his hands. TOY SOLDIER is sitting on the box in the corner. ZAPOROZHIAN is leaning against the wall. The light falls on him.*

WHISKERS: They call us an army detachment, but what kind of a detachment are we with only five men?

INTELLECTUAL: Not five. There were six of us.

MOUSTACHE: What do you mean—were?

INTELLECTUAL: Pardon me, I meant to say that one is already absent.

WHISKERS: Just the same, this is not a detachment.

INTELLECTUAL: Oddly enough, right now I have no proof of belonging to society. It's not only documents I lack—I don't even have a soldier's identification number.

MOUSTACHE: You're on a reconnaissance mission.

INTELLECTUAL: I understand that, but we are not even supposed to become acquainted with each other. That's difficult!

MOUSTACHE: Our man must be pretty close to the frontline by now.

TOY SOLDIER: Why just to the frontline? Maybe he's already in no-man's land. When we were together last night, for every two steps I took, he took one. He takes big steps.

INTELLECTUAL: He's a regular.

WHISKERS: But a detachment should have at least twelve men.

MOUSTACHE: The nights are dark.

TOY SOLDIER: What good eyes he has. God bless him! When we were on the go last night, he said to me: step to the right, Toy Soldier, or you'll fall into a hole.

INTELLECTUAL: He was jingling something metallic—

MOUSTACHE: That was my heel, which came loose. In a minute I'll have the half-strap on my coat fixed and then I'll get to the heel.

WHISKERS: This isn't a detachment, but an assembled team.

INTELLECTUAL: Perhaps we should light another candle?

WHISKERS: Light it.

INTELLECTUAL lights a candle. The dugout becomes bright.

MOUSTACHE: Why are you so quiet, Zaporozhian?

INTELLECTUAL: Why is he a Zaporozhian?

MOUSTACHE: He's as strong as an oak. Give him a pair of Cossack trousers and a sabre, and he'll be a Zaporozhian.

WHISKERS (to ZAPOROZHIAN): Continue with your story.

ZAPOROZHIAN: In the end I didn't approach her that night.

MOUSTACHE: Were you scared?

ZAPOROZHIAN: I don't know myself.

MOUSTACHE: It happens.

ZAPOROZHIAN: And she went home alone. She even stood by the gate awhile. And the flowers on her blouse glimmered in the moonlight.

INTELLECTUAL: Nowadays they no longer wear embroidered blouses.

ZAPOROZHIAN: She did.

MOUSTACHE: And then?

ZAPOROZHIAN: The rest was the way they describe it in books ... My vacation ended the next day, and I went back to the Donbas. I seemed to have forgotten Mariia ... The Donbas area is full of young women. One of them checked me out ... Klavka. Or rather, I checked her out.

*A commotion is heard.*

MOUSTACHE: Artillery.

INTELLECTUAL: Katiushas.

MOUSTACHE: MIGs flew by.

TOY SOLDIER: Maybe one of ours will get through in this commotion. The Germans will be staring at the sky, and one of ours will get through, as scouts do.

MOUSTACHE: It's simple arithmetic: if he gets through, then we won't be called. If not, then—

WHISKERS: Tell us more, Zaporozhian.

ZAPOROZHIAN: Klavka had a powerful voice ... She liked this particular song very much.  
(Singing quietly)

My time as a maiden I want to spend enchanted by love,  
I want to live free as a bird  
With the freedom to love and freedom to choose,  
May the heart have free rein if love's what it wants!  
So long as my eyebrows stay silky and black,  
Let me enjoy life, let me live.

MOUSTACHE: It sounds like she's the type of woman who doesn't shut her heart in a cage.

ZAPOROZHIAN: Sometimes she'd look at me, and her green eyes would get dark. "Why?" I'd ask. "Because I love you so much," she'd say.

TOY SOLDIER: And you?

ZAPOROZHIAN: I told her frankly, you shouldn't love me. I told her about Mariia.

TOY SOLDIER: It's a good thing you were frank.

INTELLECTUAL (*listening*): It seems to have quieted down.

MOUSTACHE: Three rounds are coming, maybe even four.

TOY SOLDIER: Go on, and then what?

ZAPOROZHIAN: Somehow I got a letter from home. I read it when I was back at the coal mine. My sister had written it. They had a calf. It was very nice and bright. One of the neighbours, who lived next door, was ill and was sent to the hospital. And at the bottom she added: Mariia is getting married—the wedding is on Sunday.

MOUSTACHE: Mariia?

ZAPOROZHIAN: That's where it all began, as if it were straight from a book. I put the letter in my pocket, and she appeared before me. I thought I'd forgotten about her, but ... She was still in my heart. As I hammered away at the coal, I could see her standing in her embroidered blouse, the flowers glowing in the moonlight.

INTELLECTUAL: Is she beautiful?

ZAPOROZHIAN: Hazel eyes and everything ... I took them deep into my heart.

MOUSTACHE: That's how it goes.

ZAPOROZHIAN: Until then, I'd only held her hand once, but I can still feel her small warm palm.

TOY SOLDIER: You only held her hand once?

ZAPOROZHIAN: Only once.

INTELLECTUAL (*lighting a cigarette*): We won't suffocate while I smoke, will we?

MOUSTACHE: There's an opening in the ceiling. It will get rid of the smoke.

ZAPOROZHIAN: Her thin eyebrows are like arches.

INTELLECTUAL: You'll remember her forever?

ZAPOROZHIAN: I was boring away at the coal, and inside my chest was seething. It was as though someone had fatally offended me, and it was rising up to my throat, choking me.

*Knocking is heard from above.*

INTELLECTUAL: Someone's coming to see us.

MOUSTACHE: They wouldn't be bothering us for no reason.

INTELLECTUAL: Maybe he didn't make it.

MOUSTACHE (*listening*): It's something else.

*A long silence.*

WHISKERS: And you went to the wedding?

ZAPOROZHIAN: Like a character in a book. The world swayed before my eyes. I put on my new clothes and went.

MOUSTACHE: See how everything turned out?

ZAPOROZHIAN: Our village was like that (*gesturing*), in a valley. I made my way from the station by foot, and I had only begun to go down the hill when I heard wedding songs ... When I turned into the meadow, I saw them, and ran ... The reception was being

held outside—the tables and benches had been brought out, the front yard was green, covered in knotgrass ... Mariia was sitting with him.

TOY SOLDIER: Was she happy?

ZAPOROZHIAN: I couldn't think. There was a haze in front of my eyes, and by the time it lifted she had already seen me.

*Thundering sounds are heard again.*

INTELLECTUAL: That's already farther away.

WHISKERS: Our guns in the rear are working them over.

INTELLECTUAL: I didn't hear any machine guns. Perhaps it has passed.

MOUSTACHE: You won't hear machine guns here.

WHISKERS: There they go, three or four rounds again.

*A long pause ensues.*

TOY SOLDIER: So, what happened when she saw you?

ZAPOROZHIAN: The people in front of me stepped away, as if from a madman.

TOY SOLDIER: And she?

ZAPOROZHIAN: The flowers on her blouse and her necklace seemed to be forged from fire, while she was very pale.

*There is a roar so loud that dirt falls from the ceiling.*

INTELLECTUAL: That's artillery or land mines.

MOUSTACHE: The war is rumbling.

TOY SOLDIER: Go on with your story. She was pale ... and you? What did you do?

ZAPOROZHIAN: I didn't embrace her. I didn't even kiss her.

TOY SOLDIER: You didn't embrace her? You didn't kiss her?

ZAPOROZHIAN: I took her in my arms and carried her away.

TOY SOLDIER: Carried her away?

ZAPOROZHIAN: Across the meadow to my home ... At home I left her in the living room, and I stood by the gate with a scythe in my hands. However, no one even dared to try to get into my front yard.

*A thunderous assault is heard overhead.*

WHISKERS: Could it be airplanes?

MOUSTACHE: It's a heavy artillery assault.

TOY SOLDIER (*unsure*): Our man probably made it.

INTELLECTUAL: We don't even know his name.

TOY SOLDIER: He looks like a blacksmith.

WHISKERS: In what way?

TOY SOLDIER: We had a blacksmith who looked like him.

WHISKERS: Let's call him Blacksmith.

MOUSTACHE (*after a long silence*): Love is, well, how can I explain it? It's never the same. Once my Motria ... we were standing on a hill, by a mill ... She put a tobacco pouch in my hand, she had embroidered it for me, and you know, she gave it to me, and her heart began to pound like a trapped bird's. "Why?" I asked, and my voice went dead ... And she darted from my arms and ran home. And that's how we spoke of love for the first time.

TOY SOLDIER: Tell us more, Zaporozhian. Did she—Mariia—stay with you? Did she become your wife?

ZAPOROZHIAN: To make it short: I didn't go back to the Donbas. Mariia is even here with me now. (*Placing his hand on his heart*) Mariia even saw me off to the army.

*A long pause.*

INTELLECTUAL: It's a strange feeling when you await not a train, not your beloved, not a meeting, but ... to put it more delicately, a non-existence.

WHISKERS: How did you end up here? You should be an undertaker somewhere.

INTELLECTUAL: Don't be angry, Whiskers. I'm simply analyzing my feelings.

WHISKERS: When you keep it to yourself, you can think whatever you want.

MOUSTACHE: My wife saw me off to the army too ... On the last night I decided to have a nice long talk with her. So the children could sleep, we went to the kitchen.

INTELLECTUAL: What did you talk about?

MOUSTACHE: We really didn't have a talk ... For some reason I noticed that the stove needed repairing, and I started fixing it ... We were quiet most of the time ... Just as it was getting light, I left. My wife couldn't take it anymore, and as soon as we got past the village—she started to cry. She started to mourn as if someone had died. (*Pausing*) Women are strange.

WHISKERS: Maybe it's scarier for them to be left behind, than it is for us to be here, in combat.

MOUSTACHE: My wife was so grief-stricken that I can still hear her.

ZAPOROZHIAN: Mariia said nothing for a long time. We were walking across the field. Our path led through the rye. Mariia was in front, and I was behind her. Then suddenly she screamed. She turned towards me, her eyes wide—I had never seen anything like it. "It kicked," she said, "our child." (*Breathlessly*) "It's already alive... its heart has begun beating." She took my hand, and I felt it: it was alive. (*Unbuttoning his collar*) I'm sure it's going to be a son.

INTELLECTUAL: What name will you give him?

ZAPOROZHIAN: We didn't choose one.

WHISKERS: You should have. It's the father who names his son.

TOY SOLDIER: Maybe we'll come up with one together, and then Zaporozhian will write home.

MOUSTACHE: We'll be the baby's godfathers.

ZAPOROZHIAN: How about Victor—the conqueror?

MOUSTACHE: We don't need any more wars or conquerors.

WHISKERS: Then Peter.

INTELLECTUAL: That means a "rock."

WHISKERS: A rock? If that's the case, then no.

TOY SOLDIER: How about Serhii?

MOUSTACHE: Let's call him Larion. That's a good name.

INTELLECTUAL: In Greek, Larion means "happy."

ZAPOROZHIAN: Happy?

INTELLECTUAL: Happy, cheerful.

ZAPOROZHIAN: I like happy, cheerful people. Larion it is!

INTELLECTUAL: Then write your wife: if it's a son, name him Larion.

ZAPOROZHIAN: My son has probably already been born and is alive...

WHISKERS: Your sons will take after you.

ZAPOROZHIAN: Thank you, Whiskers. (*A long pause.*) Seventeen to twenty years from now Larion will be like me, broad-shouldered ... By then I will have strolled with him through forests and across fields, gone down into the coal mine, and had playful fistfights. I will have gone with him even to the institute and seen him as a scholar and a captain of a ship.

INTELLECTUAL: You've really gotten carried away. Your son has perhaps just been born, and you're already seeing him as a captain!

ZAPOROZHIAN (*smiling*): Yes, I've seen him as a captain, but not once have I imagined him in trouble.

MOUSTACHE: And we take all the trouble with us a hundred years in advance.

TOY SOLDIER: Hundreds of our compatriots fell at Berestechko.

WHISKERS: As long as Larion grows up to be honest.

ZAPOROZHIAN: It can't be any other way.

WHISKERS: May he be honest! ...

MOUSTACHE: I have three children. The eldest is ten, the middle one, Orysia, is five, and the youngest is two years old. He used to sleep only with me. He would put his little arms around my neck and sleep, and I'd be afraid even to move so as not to interrupt his sweet dreams.

WHISKERS: For the good of a child, I'd even stop my heart.

MOUSTACHE (*taking off his hat and pulling out a photograph from the lining*): I've sinned as far as the commander is concerned—he said not to take a single piece of paper, but I hid it. Here it is, my little family. We happened to be having lunch in the garden, and a neighbour's boy, a student, went and snapped it. Look at how they're eating with gusto!

*The photograph is passed around.*

INTELLECTUAL: From one bowl.

MOUSTACHE: So that they'll be better friends.

TOY SOLDIER: Orysia will grow up to be beautiful, and her braids—

MOUSTACHE: She's always asking her mother: "Dress me up like a bride, with as many ribbons as possible." She loves ribbons.

WHISKERS: Your house looks good.

MOUSTACHE: I built it myself.

ZAPOROZHIAN: What my son will be like ... I probably won't live to see.

MOUSTACHE: You have to see your son, Zaporozhian. You have to. (*Tries on the overcoat.*) I've sewed on the belt, and now it's fine. Could I sew anything for anyone? (*Everyone is silent.*) Then it's up to you. I'll fix my heel. (*Takes off his boot.*) You have to see your son, Zaporozhian.

INTELLECTUAL: Always busy fixing things, eh Moustache?

MOUSTACHE: And you're always reading. It's obvious you're an intellectual.

INTELLECTUAL: You guessed it.

*Again a rumbling noise is heard.*

WHISKERS: It's not getting any quieter.

INTELLECTUAL: They'll send someone else tonight, if Blacksmith...

TOY SOLDIER: But why aren't we supposed to know each other?

INTELLECTUAL: That's one of the million rules of war.

MOUSTACHE: That's how it has to be.

TOY SOLDIER: So what are we supposed to call each other?

INTELLECTUAL: We're already calling each other something. The one who went first was Blacksmith. That's Moustache, that's Whiskers, this is Zaporozhian. Moustache has christened me Intellectual, and you are Toy Soldier.

TOY SOLDIER (*walking up and picking up a belt*): The one we called Blacksmith has probably been in the army a long time. See, his belt is worn out.

MOUSTACHE: Put it down. You shouldn't touch it.

INTELLECTUAL: My only wish is that Larion be happy.

WHISKERS: And why not? No one will mistreat him. Those who will be left won't let anyone mistreat our children. (*Suddenly everyone becomes alert.*) Someone's coming.

INTELLECTUAL *puts his book in his pocket and stands facing the door*. WHISKERS *gets down with difficulty, turns toward the door, and puts on his overcoat*. Next to him, without an overcoat stands MOUSTACHE. TOY SOLDIER *straightens up but remains by the box*. Only ZAPOROZHIAN, deep in reverie, doesn't seem to notice anything. The door opens with a creak, and from there, from the emptiness, comes a voice: "Next! Get ready." From the darkness a pair of hands hold out a white sheepskin coat. INTELLECTUAL takes it. He holds it awkwardly somehow.

TOY SOLDIER: Did Blacksmith not make it? Did Blacksmith die?

INTELLECTUAL: Again a sheepskin coat, and again it's white, like the one they gave Blacksmith.

MOUSTACHE: It's warm and it doesn't stand out against the snow.

WHISKERS: Blacksmith didn't make it. One of us has to go.

ZAPOROZHIAN (*snapping out of his daydream*): Get ready, he says? I've been ready for a long time. Ever since I took that walk through the rye. Give me that sheepskin coat!

MOUSTACHE (*grabbing the coat and quickly putting it on*): I'll go.

TOY SOLDIER: Perhaps I should go?

MOUSTACHE: This one's too young, that one's too old, and I'm just right.

ZAPOROZHIAN: I said it first.

MOUSTACHE: You still need to see your son.

ZAPOROZHIAN (*going up to MOUSTACHE*): Take off the fur coat!

WHISKERS: There's no need to upset fate. Moustache will go! In any case, make arrangements about how your family is going to live.

INTELLECTUAL: His family? It's hundreds of miles away.

WHISKERS: No matter.

INTELLECTUAL: What mystification.

WHISKERS: Be quiet!

MOUSTACHE: But nonetheless arrangements can be made. (*Stares as if seeing his family.*) You, Motria, look after the children. Don't spoil them, but do take care of them. When they grow up, and one of them wants to leave the nest, don't hold him back. (*Pausing*) Your life ... (*Pausing*) don't share it with anyone—dedicate it completely to the children ... (*Pausing*) And furthermore, if someone mistreats our children, tell them that their father drank a full jug of sorrow for them down to the last drop ... (*Pausing*) May no one be astonished when my children demand happiness. They have the right. I drank a full jug of sorrow down to the last drop!

WHISKERS: Have you said everything you want to say?

MOUSTACHE: And may they never forget us, may at least a thought about us touch their hearts once in a while. Well, that's it. (*Putting down the photograph*) I leave my wife and children in your care. I don't want to take them with me. It's cold out there ... and they'll be afraid. I'll go alone, one-on-one with a German.

*A voice: "It's time."*

INTELLECTUAL: Good luck, Moustache.

TOY SOLDIER: Take care of yourself, old man!

ZAPOROZHIAN: I feel as if I'm indebted to you. Forgive me, and thank you.

MOUSTACHE: You have to experience it, Zaporozhian, what it's like when your dear son puts his little arms around your neck—

WHISKERS: That's enough. (*Handing him a canteen*) Take a swig.

MOUSTACHE (*after having a drink*): Thank you. Oh, it's like the song says: "Come, foes, attack, I myself challenge ye!"

*He exits. A long pause ensues.*

WHISKERS: What a song to recall... (*Begins reciting the words of the song, and then the others join in and start singing it.*):

"Good evening, green grove.

Here, just this night, let this young man spend."

"That you may not, for I've heard

Of your famous wild, Cossack ways."

"Good evening, dark gulley.

Here, just this night, let this free Cossack spend."

"That I will not, for sorry I'll be—"

In the mead, the grey dove is sorrowfully cooing,

And already thy foes 'bout thee are asking,

Each night, in the mead, they are searching for thee."

Then the young Cossack did shout to the woods, to the woods:

"Come, foes, attack, I myself challenge ye!"

*The light changes.*

## Scene 2

*The same bunker. INTELLECTUAL and WHISKERS are continuing their conversation. Resting his head in his hands and deep in thought, ZAPOROZHIAN is sitting on the box in the corner. TOY SOLDIER is straightening out the overcoats.*

TOY SOLDIER: Moustache even fixed the belt—

WHISKERS: Don't touch it, leave it alone.

TOY SOLDIER: I'm not touching it.

INTELLECTUAL: So you say they offended you, Whiskers?

WHISKERS: They poured bitterness into my soul ... I loved the land. I'd caress a clump of soil like the head of a child, it was so dear to me. And the earth was very generous to me. Twice—once by someone who twice wanted to show me contempt, and the second



time by lightning—fire wiped out our home ... And we had to dash from the flames practically naked ... We were wiped out—but I took everything from the earth again: both the farmstead and the livestock. It wasn't easy ... I had a dog. He could hear even a fly ... But even he slept more than I did. As for my children, as soon as they began walking, they knew not to trample the grass.

*A pause ensues.*

INTELLECTUAL: What sort of bitterness did they pour into your soul?

WHISKERS: Probably my metal roof and my pair of horses caused my downfall. There were people who were more than determined to get me. They classified me as a semi-rich farmer and had me slated for the concentration camps in the Solovets Islands in the White Sea.<sup>1</sup>

TOY SOLDIER: And did they exile you there?

WHISKERS: The third time I myself set fire to the place where my grandfather and great-grandfather had lived, and, I and my family went into hiding in the city.

INTELLECTUAL: And did you manage to live well there?

WHISKERS: What do I matter? Meanwhile my children ... have dispersed to the Donbas, to Moscow, and Kharkiv—all of them, thank God, have jobs. The eldest has an important position, not in the army but in science. My indignation grew weaker. But it didn't die.

INTELLECTUAL: And now?

WHISKERS: It's been extinguished. The war extinguished it. I felt it with my heart and soul. I felt it right away. Everything is mine! The earth, and the sky above it, and the wild thyme in the field, and the hundred-year-old oak—it's all mine. And I will fight for all of it! The German won't frighten me! No, he won't. I might bend, but I won't fall. I may spit blood, but I won't ask a foreigner for mercy. (*Pausing*) And my children won't fall, and they won't ask for mercy!

*A long pause ensues.*

INTELLECTUAL (*listening*): I think someone's coming.

WHISKERS: It's fear you hear.

INTELLECTUAL: I'm not afraid.

WHISKERS: Fear is furtive, it'll sneak up unnoticed and bite you.

INTELLECTUAL: I could use a smoke.

WHISKERS: The snow's really blowing outside!

TOY SOLDIER: I heard that when there's a blizzard you want to sleep more. The better for Moustache. The Huns, will be dozing, and he'll—

INTELLECTUAL: The Hun is silent.

WHISKERS: It looks like he's lying low!

TOY SOLDIER: Moustache's heel won't be clicking. He fixed it.

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1920s the Soviet state pressured all peasants to give up their land and livestock and join collective farms. Several hundred thousand who refused to do so were deported to the Soviet Arctic region or Siberia. There they were forced to live in primitive conditions and to perform forced labour. Many of them perished as a result. In addition, three million to seven million peasants starved to death during the *Holodomor*—the artificial famine-genocide that the Stalinist regime created in Soviet Ukraine in 1932 and 1933 by forcibly confiscating all of the farmers' grain, livestock, and other foodstuffs and preventing them and their families from leaving their villages.

INTELLECTUAL: What is it supposed to click against, the snow?

WHISKERS: It won't click in the snow.

TOY SOLDIER: There could be a weapon under the snow, or a large rock, or—

INTELLECTUAL: Or frozen people.

TOY SOLDIER: Moustache will get through, and then some.

ZAPOROZHIAN: It's only been about three hours since we met, yet Moustache went in my place.

TOY SOLDIER: They say happy people are brave.

INTELLECTUAL: What's that supposed to mean, Toy Soldier?

TOY SOLDIER: Moustache is happy—he liked songs.

WHISKERS: That he did.

TOY SOLDIER: So why isn't anyone singing? Maybe we should sing. It'll be easier for Moustache.

WHISKERS: Songs can make it harder or easier. It depends on which string is plucked.

INTELLECTUAL: Right now, all our strings are tuned to one key.

WHISKERS: Want to hear the *duma* about Baida, young fellow? (*Sings.*)

Oh, Baida drank and drank the mead

Not just one day or night,

Or just a single hour.

The Turkish sultan came to him:

“What dost thou here, my brave young man,

Baida the bold,” asked he.

“Of all the men I ever met,

None was so brave as thee.”

TOY SOLDIER: Did he really exist?

WHISKERS: Who?

TOY SOLDIER: Baida?

WHISKERS: If there's a folksong about him, then he must have existed.

INTELLECTUAL: In a hundred years someone will ask: did the one we have called Blacksmith exist? And did Moustache exist? ...

TOY SOLDIER: This time they'll record it.

WHISKERS: Using what pen? On what paper? With what ink?

INTELLECTUAL: What are you getting at, Whiskers?

WHISKERS: I'm just thinking.

TOY SOLDIER: I can't hear anything, there's no more rumbling.

WHISKERS: Four rounds now. Do you think you'll hear all of them?

*A great rumble is heard. Dirt falls from the ceiling.*

ZAPOROZHIAN: I should have gone ... I should have—

WHISKERS: Be quiet, we might all have to go yet.

TOY SOLDIER: Do the Germans really target one man at a time with their guns?

WHISKERS: It depends.

INTELLECTUAL: Whiskers, why did you say “Using what pen, what ink, on what paper?”

WHISKERS: So that it won't wear away. So that it won't fade. So that whatever it contains would only be the truth!

TOY SOLDIER: No one will forget this war.

WHISKERS: They shouldn't. But who knows? ...

INTELLECTUAL: The main thing is that Larion doesn't forget it.

WHISKERS: He shouldn't forget it.

INTELLECTUAL: But maybe he'll say "I am sick of old stories. Let's have some jazz."

WHISKERS: What are you saying?

INTELLECTUAL: I'm just trying to imagine.

WHISKERS: So stop it.

INTELLECTUAL: Someday they're going to portray people like us in the theatre. And Larion will say to his girlfriend: "I'm bored." And she'll say: "It would be better to go listen to some jazz." And they'll run out during intermission, and only grey-haired people ... will remain in their seats ... their bullet-riddled chests heaving. Someone will cover up the medal on his chest, that he dared to wear to the theatre. Ashamed he'll cover it up: it won't be fashionable to wear medals anymore.

WHISKERS *gets up and walks up to face* INTELLECTUAL.

WHISKERS: Don't try to scare me, d'you hear?! Don't scare me, because when they call me I won't be able to go. You hear me? Don't frighten me! (*Returns to his bed.*)

INTELLECTUAL: It's just my imagination.

WHISKERS: Don't you scare me. (*Pausing*) But then again ... go ahead! Set my soul on fire!

INTELLECTUAL: What?

WHISKERS: I said, set my soul on fire! Will they forget us?

INTELLECTUAL: Not completely, but they will forget.

WHISKERS (*getting down from his plank bed again to* INTELLECTUAL): So tell me: will no one wrong those who'll be left?

INTELLECTUAL: No.

WHISKERS: No Solovets Islands for anyone?

INTELLECTUAL: No.

WHISKERS: The Germans won't crawl into people's homes?

INTELLECTUAL: No.

WHISKERS: Then let them forget. I'm not fighting for the sake of memory, as long as they don't wrong the ones who're left. And they won't erase all traces of us. We'll live on through our children.

ZAPOROZHIAN (*as if he had just awoken*): He'll forget ... Why, my son will take the same roads I did, step by step. Forget?! He'll need two memories to carry forever within him, not only his father but Moustache as well. He'll forget ... One shouldn't joke like this. (*A long pause.*) You are an intellectual, yet you make bad jokes.

INTELLECTUAL: I'm sorry, Zaporozhian. I agree—this is a bad joke.

TOY SOLDIER: An hour has gone by.

INTELLECTUAL: Only an hour? And I thought the night was nearly over.

TOY SOLDIER: Moustache probably got through.

INTELLECTUAL: If only the time would go faster! Or if only they would say there's no need to go or send for us.

WHISKERS (*handing him some bread*): Here, smell this bread.

INTELLECTUAL: Does it help?

WHISKERS: It gets rid of fear.

INTELLECTUAL (*smelling the bread*): It's difficult to fathom the end of one's life. A person studies, loves, dreams, suffers, listens to music, tries to create, and then a bullet hits him or a shell explodes nearby, and that's it—there's nothing, just a void.

WHISKERS (*gets up from his plank bed, a canteen in his hand*): Here, have some.

INTELLECTUAL *drinks and passes the canteen to ZAPOROZHIAN, who passes it on to TOY SOLDIER, who holds the canteen the longest.*

WHISKERS: You drink a lot, Junior.

TOY SOLDIER: No, I don't, I take small sips.

WHISKERS (*taking back the canteen*): Leave some for tomorrow.

INTELLECTUAL:

Don't worry about tomorrow, my friend,  
Let the sunset shine for us today.  
For tomorrow, remember, we'll walk in the steps  
Of those who have departed for the other world.

### Scene 3

*Everyone seems to be asleep. INTELLECTUAL has a book in his hands. WHISKERS is on a plank bed. ZAPOROZHIAN is in the same pose as before, as though made of stone. TOY SOLDIER is sweeping out the bunker with a whisk broom. He takes a soldier's overcoat, holds it a while and very carefully lays it down. Then he takes another one, also holds it and very carefully lays it down. Again he begins sweeping.*

INTELLECTUAL (*without even moving*): Why are you sweeping? Stop it.

TOY SOLDIER (*putting down the broom*): I can't fall asleep. (*Sitting down next to INTELLECTUAL*)

The ones we named Blacksmith and Moustache won't let me sleep.

INTELLECTUAL: They no longer require your compassion, at least not the one we called Blacksmith.

TOY SOLDIER: Moustache will get through!

INTELLECTUAL: Are you afraid of death?

TOY SOLDIER: They'll kill me, and no one will even remember that I existed.

INTELLECTUAL: They'll remember.

TOY SOLDIER: Who will?

INTELLECTUAL: Your mother.

TOY SOLDIER: She'll cry her eyes out.

INTELLECTUAL: And the unit in which you served. In their report they'll be very precise: not just three hundred died, but three hundred and one. Although—

TOY SOLDIER: What?

INTELLECTUAL: The scribe won't write it that way. Scribes like to round off.

TOY SOLDIER: It'll be just three hundred?

INTELLECTUAL: Three hundred.

TOY SOLDIER: Three hundred—that's a round figure.

INTELLECTUAL: Those among whom you lived will remember you.

TOY SOLDIER: I haven't lived much.

INTELLECTUAL: Your schoolteacher will remember you, whether you were rowdy or studied well.

TOY SOLDIER: I was right in the middle.

INTELLECTUAL: Did you ever love anyone?

TOY SOLDIER (*passionately*): I did!

INTELLECTUAL: Did you really love her?

TOY SOLDIER (*sadly*): As much as Zaporozhian loves Mariia. (*Falls silent.*) But I feel sorry for Klavka.

INTELLECTUAL: Pity. (*No response.*) You didn't mention whom you loved.

TOY SOLDIER: A beauty. Blond hair, blue eyes, delicate hands—

INTELLECTUAL: What a cliché.

TOY SOLDIER: What do you mean—cliché?

INTELLECTUAL: A picture of beauty—blue eyes, blond hair—

TOY SOLDIER: You don't believe me?

INTELLECTUAL: No.

TOY SOLDIER: That's how she was ... How she kissed ... Every evening we—

INTELLECTUAL: You're lying.

TOY SOLDIER: When I was with her, it seemed we were the only ones on the entire planet.

INTELLECTUAL: What a trite phrase.

TOY SOLDIER: And you are some kind of—

INTELLECTUAL: What?

TOY SOLDIER: Either not too smart, or not too good, or maybe you just know something others don't.

INTELLECTUAL: Is that so?

TOY SOLDIER: What did you do before the war?

INTELLECTUAL: I taught others.

TOY SOLDIER: I'm serious.

INTELLECTUAL: I taught.

TOY SOLDIER: You taught math?

INTELLECTUAL: The mathematics of life. Did you ever hear of such a discipline?

TOY SOLDIER: Now I understand. You think you are smarter than everybody else, above everybody else, not like anybody else.

INTELLECTUAL: Are you offended?

TOY SOLDIER: "The mathematics of life"—

INTELLECTUAL: And higher mathematics at that! But now it turns out that I taught only simple arithmetic and solved problems the wrong way.

TOY SOLDIER: How did you solve them?

INTELLECTUAL: Rounding off the numbers so that the solution would come out as expected.

TOY SOLDIER: And did it?

INTELLECTUAL: It did, but most times there was a discrepancy.

TOY SOLDIER: And why did the answer have to conform?

INTELLECTUAL: The teacher demanded it.

TOY SOLDIER: Do you think I'm stupid?

INTELLECTUAL: I don't think that.

TOY SOLDIER: Were you a writer?

INTELLECTUAL: You guessed it.

TOY SOLDIER (*after a lengthy silence*): Why did you stop talking?

INTELLECTUAL: I don't know what to talk about.

TOY SOLDIER: Think aloud.

INTELLECTUAL: I don't know how to think aloud.

TOY SOLDIER: Read something from your poet.

INTELLECTUAL: Should I pick something out, or read at random?

TOY SOLDIER: At random.

INTELLECTUAL (*opening his book and reading*):

Life I'd compare to a game of chess:  
Upon its board you and I are pawns  
Moved hither and thither, checked, and slain,  
And tossed back in the dusty box again.

TOY SOLDIER (*after a brief silence*): What a long night!

INTELLECTUAL: They'll call one of us soon.

TOY SOLDIER: I'll go.

INTELLECTUAL: Death likes volunteers.

TOY SOLDIER: Here, smell some bread.

INTELLECTUAL (*breathing in the scent of bread*): I wanted to count something.

TOY SOLDIER: How long you've lived?

INTELLECTUAL: No.

TOY SOLDIER: How many fascists our side has destroyed?

INTELLECTUAL: Now I remember. I wanted to count how many people have entered this bunker.

TOY SOLDIER: There were six of us.

INTELLECTUAL: There were more: Mariia, Orysia, Larion—

TOY SOLDIER: And Klavka.

INTELLECTUAL: Klavka.

TOY SOLDIER: Moustache has three children.

WHISKERS (*deftly getting down off his plank bed and going up to INTELLECTUAL*): My, your poet is a bastard. A real bastard.

INTELLECTUAL: Have you gone crazy, or what?

WHISKERS: A bastard, a fascist follower.

INTELLECTUAL: He lived a thousand years ago. It's Omar Khayyám.

WHISKERS: Just the same, he's a bastard.

INTELLECTUAL: Let's calm down, Whiskers.

WHISKERS: That son of a bitch!

Life I'd compare to a game of chess:  
Upon its board you and I are pawns  
Moved hither and thither, checked, and slain,  
And tossed back in the dusty box again.  
What a bastard!

INTELLECTUAL: Whiskers, your memory is phenomenal. You only heard it once! ...

WHISKERS: I'm not a pawn!

INTELLECTUAL: That was a generalization about life.

WHISKERS: Maybe I was, maybe, God forbid, I'll be one! But in this war—no! No one moved me around. See, I have grey hairs in my beard. If I were sitting somewhere behind enemy lines no one would say a word to me. But I went. I chose to go. And who moved me here into this hole? I pleaded to be sent. And the one we called Blacksmith, and how about Moustache? They chose to go too. (*To TOY SOLDIER*) What about you?

TOY SOLDIER: I chose to go.

WHISKERS: Pawns ... Maybe we'll end up lying in a box, but not as pawns. (*Climbing back onto his plank bed*) Three times already I've passed through hell, and here I am crawling back a fourth time.

*A long pause ensues.*

TOY SOLDIER (*listening*): You see, they're not coming. Moustache made it ... It's obvious now that Moustache made it!

INTELLECTUAL: Are you happy that we won't be called?

TOY SOLDIER (*angrily*): Oh, you're a sourpuss. I could have gone with him or before him ... I would have protected him from a bullet, but you're just a sourpuss.

INTELLECTUAL: I believe you, I believe you.

TOY SOLDIER: When they call, I'll go.

INTELLECTUAL: Maybe it will be my turn.

TOY SOLDIER: You shouldn't.

INTELLECTUAL: Do you think I'm a coward?

TOY SOLDIER: They didn't force you to come here, of course, but—

INTELLECTUAL: Go on, finish.

TOY SOLDIER: You're a little scared.

INTELLECTUAL (*taking out a coin*): Toss it: heads or tails?

TOY SOLDIER: Why should I?

INTELLECTUAL: Whoever wins will go.

TOY SOLDIER: Let's do it.

WHISKERS: What are you doing wagering a human life on whether it's heads or tails? You snivellers—

INTELLECTUAL: Whiskers is upset!

TOY SOLDIER: You deserve it.

INTELLECTUAL: Let's be quiet.

TOY SOLDIER: Read from your poet.

WHISKERS: Don't read any more verses like that. We can do without them.

INTELLECTUAL: If you say it's enough, it's enough. (*Pausing*) I hear something rumbling. And it always seems they're coming towards us.

TOY SOLDIER: Don't listen.

WHISKERS: So, you're a writer?

INTELLECTUAL: And what of it?

WHISKERS: Under what name did you write?

INTELLECTUAL (*silent at first, then, as if by the way, reading quietly*):

To please fate, one should quell jealousy,  
To please people, flattering's helpful.  
Often in life I've been cunning and sly,  
But fate's judged my deeds to be shameful.

WHISKERS: Well, that's sincere.

INTELLECTUAL: What is sincere?

WHISKERS: You used someone else's words, but you admitted everything nonetheless.

INTELLECTUAL: You got that?

WHISKERS: Why wouldn't I? You quelled truth within yourself, you tried to dissemble, to deceive but in your heart you felt something else.

TOY SOLDIER: He made up everything in his head?

WHISKERS: He solved problems so that the answers would come out as expected, without a discrepancy! *(After a silence)* Whatever numbers didn't divide evenly became the remainder.

INTELLECTUAL: There was a remainder.

WHISKERS: Yet Blacksmith and Moustache solved their problem without a remainder.

TOY SOLDIER: It's time they came back.

INTELLECTUAL: Don't hurry.

TOY SOLDIER: Or let us know that everything is all right.

WHISKERS *(getting down again from his plank bed, to INTELLECTUAL)*: Will you listen to a fairy tale?

INTELLECTUAL: I will.

WHISKERS: Do you know how a person lives? It's as though he is climbing to the top of a mountain. He'll stand there, survey the whole wide world, and come back. One time people came up to the mountain and, so it would be easier to climb, decided to leave behind sadness, and grief, and pain, and joy. Only joy was kept separate. There was enough joy to make a small pile, but grief, sadness, and pain—what a mound rose out of them! Then t'was time to start going back whence they came. The people returned and began taking some of the things they had left at the foot of the mount. Whatever they wanted. And what do you think, Intellectual? Grief, sadness, and pain—they took it all apart and carried it all away. And joy? Joy, they just raked apart. It's true, it didn't glitter with gold anymore, but with time it became lightweight, and darkened, like old tin. *(Climbs back onto his plank bed.)*

INTELLECTUAL: You're philosophizing, Whiskers!

WHISKERS: More simply than a simpleton. By the pile that remained, poets throng and poke.

TOY SOLDIER: Could it be that people can live without joy?

WHISKERS: Flour you can sift, but joy—no. Great joy, my son, is melded forever with sadness, grief and pain. But joy that is slight, fades quickly.

INTELLECTUAL: So, are we going forward now or have we already returned?

WHISKERS: Right now we are standing on the mountain.

INTELLECTUAL: And can we see far?

WHISKERS: Far.

INTELLECTUAL: To Berlin?

WHISKERS: To the end of life.

*A long pause. Suddenly the door opens. A VOICE: "Next! Get ready!" Someone's arm holds out a white sheepskin jacket. No one has managed to comprehend what has happened when TOY SOLDIER (it seems he had been ready for this) quickly takes off his overcoat and puts on the sheepskin coat, which is a little too big for him. ZAPOROZHIAN is the first to realize what's going on.*



ZAPOROZHIAN: What do you think you're doing? Take it off!

TOY SOLDIER: Leave me alone.

ZAPOROZHIAN: So, you thought you'd make fun of me? (*Steps up to TOY SOLDIER.*)

WHISKERS (*stepping in between them*): Wait.

TOY SOLDIER: I'm the nimblest one here.

ZAPOROZHIAN: Are you laughing at me?

WHISKERS: Wait, I say!

INTELLECTUAL: I'll go—

WHISKERS: Aren't you in too much of a hurry, Toy Soldier?

TOY SOLDIER: No!

WHISKERS: Then ... (*Embraces and kisses TOY SOLDIER.*)

TOY SOLDIER'S *hat slips off, revealing a long braid. Everyone is shocked.*

TOY SOLDIER (*quickly trying to put her hat back on, but then smiling, straightening out her braid*): I've done this before more than once. Don't worry. I'll get through this time, too.

ZAPOROZHIAN: You?! I won't allow it!

TOY SOLDIER: I'm going for him, for Larion.

WHISKERS: Go, Daughter.

TOY SOLDIER: Forgive me, if I ... I must go now, otherwise I might start crying. (*With a guilty smile*) I'm that kind—(*Exits quickly.*)

*A pause.*

INTELLECTUAL (*following her with his eyes*): She is gone. What do you say to this, Khayyám? (*Picking up a hairpin*) She lost a hairpin: not in a warm bed with a lover, but in a bunker, Khayyám! And she didn't run off to a tryst, but into the night, into the cold. She'll fall on her breasts, which no one has touched yet, no one has kissed ... She'll fall with them onto the frozen ground, onto the snow, and crawl toward death. You have nothing to say, Khayyám?

## Scene 4

WHISKERS *is on his plank bed. INTELLECTUAL is standing. ZAPOROZHIAN is scratching something with a nail on his canteen.*

WHISKERS (*reciting, then singing*):

The sun had not yet set  
 When it became dark.  
 When it became dark ...  
 And hapless is that girl  
 Who loves a Cossack.  
 My Cossack is riding into a virgin field,  
 And I am left alone.  
 I am left alone—  
 Neither a maiden, nor a widow.  
 Neither a maiden, nor a widow ...

Neither a maiden, nor a widow,  
A recruit's young wife.

INTELLECTUAL: I didn't know that a song could be narrated.

WHISKERS: A song can even be dreamt.

INTELLECTUAL: Why does Zaporozhian look like he's turned to stone?

WHISKERS: Don't bother him.

INTELLECTUAL: In my opinion, it's more difficult for a person when he keeps silent.

WHISKERS: There are times when you have to be silent.

INTELLECTUAL: It seems to have turned cold.

WHISKERS: A song is like people—it can be flattering, belligerent, cunning, proud, or at times soulful. (*Getting down from the plank bed*) Intellectual, do you know how a song can be sung silently? Have you heard the strange voice with which songs are sung silently? Do you know which words speak in a song like that? (*A long pause.*) It was still during the first days of the war. They were moving through fire, filled with fear—you know that. Those days swept people from their familiar places, and people went far, far away or furrowed themselves deeper in their nests and burrows. At that time I—

INTELLECTUAL: Were you moving too, Whiskers, or did you furrow yourself?

WHISKERS: I didn't know what to do. During the day I milled around aimlessly, and at night I went outside, into the garden, into the field, and listened.

INTELLECTUAL: Listened where the shooting took place?

WHISKERS: Perhaps, though I was listening more to myself—what should I be doing.

INTELLECTUAL: Were you in the city?

WHISKERS: No, in the very first days of the war I headed for the village straight away.

INTELLECTUAL: I wish there was a bit of tobacco. I'd light up.

WHISKERS: So light up. There are three rolled cigarettes lying over there.

INTELLECTUAL: Where did they come from?

WHISKERS: Moustache left them.

INTELLECTUAL: For me?

WHISKERS: Who else? Zaporozhian and I don't smoke.

INTELLECTUAL (*finding the cigarettes*): They're so hard.

WHISKERS: It looks like he's been smoking a long time. He knows how to roll them.

INTELLECTUAL (*lighting up*): Well, continue.

WHISKERS: I kept thinking until it grew quiet on our side and theirs, and this silence was frightening, more frightening than when the cannons were firing. It was so prolonged that it wrung out my soul! Then a rumour flew around quietly—like a bat at night—that the Germans were coming ... Sometime around dusk we saw a cloud of dust. Motorcyclists! And then we didn't believe our eyes: they reached the bridge—we could see it all from the hill—and suddenly those in front, like in a film, fell over head first. Those in back stopped and then retreated. On the road four motorcycles remained. The women swore there was no one there, they had gone there during the day, but it wasn't an evil spirit that did the shooting. After the motorcycles, mortars began pommelling the woods—they cut them into firewood. And when the Germans attacked, again machine guns fired on them ... Everything quieted down at night.

INTELLECTUAL: The Germans didn't cross the bridge?

WHISKERS: They're afraid at night.

INTELLECTUAL: Now they're not afraid even of the night.

WHISKERS: They've become bold.

INTELLECTUAL: And then what happened?

WHISKERS: At dawn I made my way there ... and I saw him. He was average-looking, a thin neck and hands like a teenager's ... His legs were fractured below the knees, so much so that a white bone gleamed ... And above the knees they were bound tight: one with a wide strap, the other with a narrow one from a haversack. Apparently he bound them himself ... He was small, though and not young, already middle-aged—There were wrinkles on his face ... A commissar with senior insignia ... He was lying there with his eyes open and a handgun and cartridge drums next to him. All around had been plowed by bullets, but he was alive ... (*A long pause.*) The dawn turned out to be—it can't be put in words—clear, so clear it was azure ... I held up his head. At first he stared eagerly and then calmly at the morning, and I felt and even saw in his eyes, that he was singing ... He was singing about our land, which has no end, about our forests, rivers, about our sky, about our mornings, like the one he had just seen. He was singing ... He had apparently found words that others could not even think of, and his voice was strong, resounding, and that voice carried across the land, which stretched on without end, quietly, quietly, so as not to alarm the morning ... (*Pause.*) That's how he was singing. Silently.

*A long silence ensues.*

INTELLECTUAL: And then?

WHISKERS: Then just the mundane. I buried him, and myself ... ended up here. (*Lies down unhurriedly on the plank bed.*) That's how one sings silently.

*A long pause.*

INTELLECTUAL: Moustache had strong tobacco ... But why did he leave me three cigarettes? Three, not one, not six, and not even two? What was he thinking?

WHISKERS: Three cigarettes? One for each of us.

INTELLECTUAL: Let's suppose he thought that I smoked every twenty minutes ... Three cigarettes would last me an hour. And then? Then I wouldn't need them ... because ... they'd come for me ... He calculated it calmly and without fear.

WHISKERS (*angrily*): Stop it. Maybe he didn't have enough tobacco for more.

INTELLECTUAL: He had tobacco.

WHISKERS: Do you think he should have opened a cigarette factory here, or what?

INTELLECTUAL: I don't mean that.

WHISKERS: Just smoke and be thankful.

INTELLECTUAL: I'm smoking and I'm thankful.

WHISKERS: Your blood is thin. Obviously your kin, starting with your great-grandfather, made more use of words than their hands.

*No one speaks. A distant, thunderous explosion is heard.*

INTELLECTUAL: But perhaps you're mistaken.

WHISKERS: Perhaps.

ZAPOROZHIAN: When her braids fell down, she looked like Mariia ... Mariia also has braids like that. (*Pauses.*) And Mariia would have gone, too.

WHISKERS: Of course she would have gone.

ZAPOROZHIAN: Now, whatever happens, I'll go.

WHISKERS: You'll go last. Moustache said that you have to see your son ... and no one here wants to be worse than Moustache.

*A pause.*

INTELLECTUAL: Why are you constantly lying down, Whiskers?

WHISKERS: In peacetime I was always working and there was never time to sit down, so during the war I figure I will recline as much as possible ... Understand?

INTELLECTUAL: I understand. (*Pausing*) How about a song?

WHISKERS:

Oh, a Cossack, a young Cossack, lay dying  
By the Danube's waters,  
And an arrow took him  
Down from his horse.  
Oh, an arrow, yes, an arrow  
Of the accursed horde.

INTELLECTUAL: You shouldn't sing such happy tunes.

WHISKERS: If I shouldn't, then I shouldn't.

INTELLECTUAL: I'll take the third cigarette. Moustache probably didn't think that I would finish them off so quickly.

WHISKERS: But maybe he did. You smoke a lot.

INTELLECTUAL: This is the third and last one.

WHISKERS: Go ahead and smoke. I'm just talking.

INTELLECTUAL: And what if this is the last one in my life? It would be interesting to observe from the sidelines: a man is sitting and smoking, inhaling smoke, brushing off the ashes that fall on his knee, and he doesn't even know that it is his last cigarette.

*The door opens. None of the three had expected it. A voice calls out: "Next."*

INTELLECTUAL: I'll be the next. (*Takes the sheepskin coat.*)

ZAPOROZHIAN (*handing him the canteen*): Take a swig.

INTELLECTUAL (*examining the canteen*): You could have been an artist. Who is that? Toy Soldier or Mariia?

ZAPOROZHIAN: They look alike—they both have identical braids.

INTELLECTUAL (*taking a swig*): One shot is left.

WHISKERS: It's enough for us.

INTELLECTUAL: The cigarette is finished, the hat is on, everything is ready, like the poet said.

WHISKERS: Say it with your own words, not someone else's.

INTELLECTUAL: I am glad that I was with you.

*A voice: "It's time!"*

INTELLECTUAL: I'm coming ... And I'll always be with you! (*Exits.*)

*A long silence ensues.*

WHISKERS: He's gone. (*Gets down from the plank bed, picks up the bread, and takes a deep breath.*)

ZAPOROZHIAN: Intellectual is a good man.

WHISKERS: A good man. And strong.

ZAPOROZHIAN: And strong.

WHISKERS: After all ... he acknowledged everything. Obviously he wasn't scared.

ZAPOROZHIAN: Do you think he wrote well?

WHISKERS: If he'd stayed, he'd write well. He'd solve problems honestly.

ZAPOROZHIAN: He still wanted to say something else.

WHISKERS: We all didn't finish saying something, didn't finish doing something, didn't finish thinking something through. Those who will be left after us will have enough time to say and do everything.

## Scene 5

*Five overcoats lie on the bench. ZAPOROZHIAN is sitting, resting his elbows on his knees and scratching something on the canteen.*

ZAPOROZHIAN (*rising, taking a few steps across the bunker, and stopping*): So, you and I are the only ones left, son. Everyone else has gone, even Whiskers went, but I, you see, am left ... You and I are close, Larion, we can be frank. I burned with shame when they left and I stayed behind. I protested, but in my heart I really wanted to stay behind ... But don't think that I am a coward. I wanted to see you. We have a lot to talk about. Do you hear me? We'd have to live a thousand years to be able to thank them properly for going in our place. (*Taking the canteen and tipping it over—it's empty.*) If there were only a drop ... (*Standing deep in thought*) But will a thousand years be enough, son?

## Scene 6

*The same bunker. Six overcoats lie on the bench. The canteen is standing on the box next to a folded letter. The door is open. Curtain.*

# Act Two

## Scene 1

*Endless steppe. It is dusk, but everything is still flooded by the sun and exhausted by the heat. Even the azure horizon shimmers. Four people are in the steppe, and to one side a stone baba (an ancient Scythian female statue) is staring at them. A small white rock lies on the sun-scorched grass.*

LESIA: It seems as though we are the only ones, and there's no one else, in the entire world.

SERHII: We and the planet, one on one.

LESIA: There are only four of us in the entire world. Four young supermen.

PAVLO: Once Maksym comes, there'll be five of us. And there's still that stone *baba*—the sixth superman.

LESIA: She's not a superman, she's eternity.

SERHII: How silent it is.

PAVLO: The rumbling of a thousand streetcars would be better than this silence.

LESIA: But I rather like it—there's not a single telephone booth in sight!

PAVLO: Look, everything's yellowed, burnt, as though it were made from low-grade copper. This isn't a steppe, but a slice of hell.

LESIA: There once was hell here. See, there are old trenches, like wrinkles, across the entire steppe.

LARION: They say that during World War II they broke through the front here.

PAVLO: I agree: this is a heroic place, but it's a desert. What a place to go.

LESIA: Larion dragged us here.

PAVLO: Have you noticed, kids, that we've developed a stupid habit of always listening to Larion?

LESIA: This is how he described this steppe: "Here a soul can grow."

PAVLO: Larion? Could it be he knows how to talk?

LESIA: And how! He said the sun doesn't set here, but drowns in red lakes.

PAVLO: What a lofty style.

LESIA: Larion also said that here the nights are silvery ... silvery from the stars.

SERHII: So why are you all blaming Larion now? Everyone wanted to go, just to be anywhere rather than in the lab.

PAVLO: Well, all right. If we're here, we're here. After all, it's not that important where we are.

SERHII: Let's not waste time.

PAVLO (*indicating his disagreement*): Everything begins with a sign. (*Takes out a piece of paper and starts drawing.*)

LESIA: The *baba* seems to be listening to us.

SERHII: We can't keep any secrets from her.

PAVLO (*attaching the paper to a stick and shoving it into the ground*): Now everything's been done by the rules.

SERHII (*reading aloud*): "Bivouac of a Chukcha's<sup>2</sup> team of the Scientific Research Institute of Gerontology of the Ukrainian S.S.R." (*Everyone laughs.*) Splendid.

PAVLO: The sign is up, the staff is complete.

SERHII: Then let's do it—

PAVLO: Not so fast. First, let's rest.

*Everyone finds a place.*

LESIA (*after the pause*): Can you imagine what's going to happen tomorrow?

PAVLO: Tomorrow is Sunday.

LESIA: At exactly eight o'clock the Chukcha will be surveying his domains, and how astonished he'll be when none of his better, obedient, submissive assistants show up.

PAVLO: It's our own fault. We taught the chief to expect us to work like donkeys there even on our days off.

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<sup>2</sup> A member of the Chukchi, the indigenous people of the Chukchi Peninsula and the coasts of the Chukchi and Bering Seas in northeasternmost Siberia.

LESIA: “So that science will open its door even a crack for you, you must work forty-eight hours a day.”

PAVLO: I’m sure that when he’s listening to Beethoven he thinks about stimulators.

LESIA: The Chukcha once admitted that he conducts research even in his sleep.

PAVLO: What a fanatic.

LESIA: One day somehow he caught me in the laboratory without a lab coat. Do you know how many sparks flew from his narrow eyes? He even gave me a whole lecture: “White lab coats in a civilized society symbolize the constant striving for people’s health, for the prolongation of their lives ... I would make ministers, premiers, and presidents wear white lab coats to work, so that they’d remember what they have been called to do!”

PAVLO: He’s an obsessed oddball.

SERHII: And yet this obsessed oddball created such a powerful biostimulator.

PAVLO: It’s too early to call it powerful.

SERHII: Too early?

PAVLO: Too early. A mother never knows whom she has borne—a president or a thief, Einstein or an informer.

SERHII: Nevertheless, I believe our “unit” will bring people happiness: it will help them to shake off dozens of illnesses and will give them new stretches of life.

PAVLO (*ironically*): And there will be paradise, and well-being for all.

SERHII: Just think, if the “unit” had been created earlier, then maybe now, today, Kurchatov and Joliot-Curie would be breaking into the secrets of the atom ... And today a restless Wiener would be forging stern sages, and that magician Filatov would be giving the sun to the blind.

PAVLO: And now, Serhii, stretch out your wings (*gesturing*) like so and begin coming down slowly back to earth. So it will be easier for you to land, here is a quote from the Chukcha himself: “We have no guarantee that the “unit” will not cause a negative reaction in the human body, so before a person takes some “unit,” I must create a reliable antitoxic neutralizer. And for that I need a minimum of three years.”

SERHII: From the point of view of science, this is logical.

PAVLO: Now you are back on earth and we can have a discussion with you.

LESIA: Serhii’s convictions are made of putty. You can mould either into an eagle or a sparrow out of them.

SERHII: I wanted to say that the chief doesn’t have the right to do it any other way.

LESIA (*flaring*): Then we’ll take this right upon ourselves! (*Emphasizing every word*) We’ve already taken this right upon ourselves. (*More calmly*) Today one of us will test the “unit.” Today, and not in three years!

SERHII: I’m not against it.

PAVLO: Lesia—

LESIA: I find it funny whenever you strike up your old song, Pavlo.

PAVLO: Funny, you say? To make it completely entertaining, I’ll add: because of the “unit” hundreds of rabbits, dozens of dogs, and nineteen baboons have already kicked the bucket.

LESIA: Are you trying to scare us?

PAVLO: I’m simply reminding you that one of us could become the twentieth baboon.

LESIA: But they were animals. And we’re—

PAVLO: Homo sapiens.

LESIA: Yes, the human will is not an abstraction: even the most unshakable laws of physiology fade before it.

SERHII: And recently some experimental subjects have survived, Pavlo.

PAVLO (*ironically*): Some.

LARION: Yet all the same it's frightening!

LESIA: Are you afraid, Larion?

LARION: It's frightening to become the twentieth baboon.

LESIA (*pretending to laugh*): Are you leaving the track near the finish line? Then maybe we should put it off? What is it going to be, my Prometheuses in modern shirts?

*A pause.*

PAVLO: All right. Let's not drag this out. Let's get on with the election of the deceased-to-be, guys.

SERHII: You cynic.

PAVLO: We'll draw lots, as we agreed. It won't take long. (*Takes out a sheet of paper and tears it into four parts.*) There'll be a cross on one of them.

LESIA: Illiterates once used crosses.

PAVLO: If a cross doesn't suit you, I'll draw a rabbit. (*Draws.*)

SERHII (*examining the rabbit*): Millions of people, whose trembling fingers cannot even hold bread, for whom life now passes somewhere beyond a forbidding, impenetrable wall ... They don't know that this funny cross-eyed rabbit drawn on a scrap of paper—

PAVLO: Will become a bomb that'll blow up the forbidding, impenetrable wall.

SERHII: Exactly, it'll blow it up ... And three years sooner than the Chukcha thinks!

PAVLO: Either it'll blow it up or take one of us along with it into the unknown.

LESIA: Are you trying to scare us again?

PAVLO: I'm just reminding you again.

LESIA: Keep it to yourself.

PAVLO: This is for everyone's sake. If you don't mind, let's pick from my hat. (*Throwing the pieces of paper into the hat*) Help yourself!

SERHII: Wait, Lesia, I'm first.

LARION (*walking up and taking the hat*): Hold on, let's wait for Maksym.

LESIA: Lord, we forgot about Maksym! Pavlo has really filled our heads with his talk.

SERHII: And what if we do it without him?

LARION (*with surprise*): What do you mean without him? We agreed to do it together, so let's do it together.

LESIA: Otherwise it would not be very loyal.

PAVLO: Serhii, you did tell him where we're going to be didn't you?

SERHII *nods affirmatively.*

LARION: I wrote him a note. I named the station and mentioned the stone *baba*. Did you give it to him, Serhii?

SERHII: Yes, I did.

PAVLO: Let's get a fifth piece of paper ready for Maksym. (*Putting the piece of paper in the hat.*) You see, bunny, you'll have to wait. We'll call this stop number one.

SERHII: Are you against testing it?

PAVLO: I'm not in a rush to get to the next world either. It's more fun here. (*Pausing*) Let's listen to what's on the airwaves. (*Turns on the transistor radio.*)



*Voice of a radio announcer: "Italian scholars believe that the mummy had been buried for over fifteen hundred years." PAVLO changes the station. Voice of another announcer: "Love is one of the major themes in the author's works. After a series of works about the working class, he has again returned to this subject." PAVLO turns off the radio.*

SERHII: "Theme" and "love." These words are about as related as "song" and "sledgehammer" are.

LESIA: Once upon a time they'd put into the plans of my school's Communist Youth League organization: a lecture on the theme of love and friendship.

PAVLO: What terrific lectures. From them we learned that love is not kissing, not sighing, but first and foremost mutual help, mutual support. You might say I was raised on such lectures.

LESIA: My girlfriends and I supplemented our knowledge with the help of the cinema. We didn't miss one film labelled not suitable for children under sixteen.

PAVLO: I managed to see such films too, even back in the fourth grade.

LESIA: Hey, do you want me to tell you something about Larion? May I, Larion?

PAVLO: Let's pretend he said yes.

LESIA: Not long ago he and I were at the movies together, and when the hero and the heroine started kissing across the entire screen, as greedily as starving people swallowing bread ... I glanced at Larion, and he looked glum, as though someone had offended him.

PAVLO: The poor child, he was embarrassed. He can't stand watching people kissing ... You know Lesia, people like that grow up to become degenerates. Don't look at me like that, Larion. We do have freedom of speech.

SERHII: Notice that the sun is setting.

PAVLO: Hold on with the sun. We're not finished with love yet.

SERHII: It sets and gets bigger.

PAVLO: Listen, Serhii, listen, tear yourself away from the heavens for a minute and state your credo of love.

*A pause.*

SERHII: In my opinion, true love is just like it is in fairy tales.

LESIA: Like in fairy tales?

PAVLO: Make your brilliant definition more specific.

SERHII: Love should be like a piece of the sun.

PAVLO: That's an abstraction.

SERHII: It should be like our Maksym's love. (*Finding the right word.*) Sacred.

PAVLO: Just give me earthly love. I'm for love without oohing and aahing. When you meet a girl you like, hold her so she won't break away, and kiss her firmly, so she'll believe in your love.

SERHII: And what if you're not to her liking?

PAVLO: She'll get used to it. If not, I'll say: "Swim on, my child. In the great whirlpool of life, there are millions like you. I'll meet another." (*Sings.*)

What do we love?

Kisses.

What do we love?

Laughter.

What is our sin?  
 What?  
 We are young.  
 Our god is beauty.  
 And our prophet is love.  
*(Repeats the song.)*

SERHII: This is sacrilege.

PAVLO: Excuse me, Serhii, for insulting your lyrical soul. But you have to look at everything realistically. Love is just like sport, like a tasty dish, like a decent film: it should bring me satisfaction and delight several thousand times over.

SERHII: Bring you. And what about her?

PAVLO: Each is his own master, and it's none of my business whether she nourishes her feelings with butter or margarine. Or perhaps she likes some special brand of oatmeal cooked in water.

LESIA: Pavlo's feelings are so pot-bellied, jowl-faced, and epicurean—they only accept steaks and kebabs.

PAVLO: I'm afraid that your feelings are on a diet, Lesia. They suffer from dystrophy.

SERHII: "It's none of my business" ... *(Going up to PAVLO)* You know, Pavlo, a person who wipes his dirty shoes on flowers, who breaks a young tree in two, is a potential criminal, a gangster, a person who should be isolated.

PAVLO: I'm not a criminal or a gangster, but simply a believer in rational love.

SERHII: I would hate you for this, Pavlo, if I didn't know that you're kidding.

PAVLO: You behave as if you have grown up in some hothouse.

LESIA: We're all barbarians, but he's so good that you can use him to wrap around your wounds. He's not Serhii—he's little Serhiichyk.

*A pause. The distant whistle of a train is heard.*

PAVLO: What kind is it, Lesia?

LESIA: A passenger express.

PAVLO: It's going to the Crimea. It's like an army steam bath there right now.

SERHII: When I was a kid, they really did call me Serhiichyk ... But mostly they called me a bastard. *(Pausing)* Children are the cruelest of all ... In the sand, and in the snow, and on the school blackboard they would write in big letters: "Bastard." *(Pausing)* My mother was an orderly at the front. She carried out the wounded from the battlefield. She was demobilized in '45, and I was born on the third day after Victory Day.

LESIA: Please forgive me.

SERHII: For what? You guessed it. My mom still calls me Serhiichyk ... *(Gets out his letter.)* Here, listen: "My dear Serhiichyk ... the cherries are already ripe ... they're waiting for you."

LESIA: Where is your mother now?

SERHII: In the Vinnytsia region, working in a school.

LESIA: Is she a teacher?

SERHII: She's a cleaning woman.

*A pause.*

LESIA: My father works as a stationmaster. I get letters from my sisters everyday ... (*Proudly*) I have eight of them.

PAVLO: Eight?

LESIA: We're nine girls.

PAVLO: God! Watch out, the lives of nine guys are going to be ruined.

LESIA: That's not going to include you.

PAVLO: Oh, I'm careful.

SERHII: My mom lives alone. She didn't want me to have a stepfather.

*The distant whistle of a train is heard.*

LESIA: That was a freight train.

PAVLO: You recognize them by their sound?

LESIA: It's puffing heavily.

SERHII: I have a beautiful mother. She used to perform in a theatre group, may it be damned.

LESIA: Why "may it be damned," Serhii?

SERHII: They happened to be staging *Natalka from Poltava*. Mother was playing Natalka. She was so ... in an embroidered blouse ... Remember, when Petro returns from working out-of-town and meets Natalka? Petro rushes up to Natalka, and at that moment someone in the audience shouted for everyone to hear: "While you were earning money, she gave birth here to a bastard!" There was a hush in the hall. I don't know why I ended up on stage. Probably so my mother wouldn't fall, to hold her up. I was already seven years old. She left the stage and went home without changing. On the way there and at home she didn't say a word. And she didn't cry. She just kept on hugging me. In the morning I woke up in her arms. And believe it or not, I didn't recognize my mom.

LESIA: The one who shouted that should be an executioner. Who was he?

SERHII: Some guy. He proposed to my mom, but she turned him down. Maybe he had forgotten everything by the next day, but my mom didn't ... Somehow she wilted right away. She rarely even left the school grounds.

*A pause.*

PAVLO: In my life everything has been much too mundane and happy. Dad, mom, and me. I'm the only child they have. The best in the world. According to my parents, on the day after I was born I began recognizing my mom and dad. I remember demonstrating my talents to all their guests and acquaintances from the age of two. And now, do you think that to my parents I'm simply an assistant? No. I am a scientist, a scientist who's taken an oath of secrecy! Everyone knows about this in the theatre.

LESIA: Your parents are actors?

PAVLO: Reach a little higher. My mom runs the box office, and my father was the chief book-keeper. (*Pausing*) He's retired! But let our descendants study our biographies. For now, let's allow Larion to speak. (*LARION stares silently at PAVLO.*) Your name is Larion. That means the one who is happy, joyful. Come on, come up with something joyful ... You're not saying anything. Who gave you your name?

LARION: My father.

PAVLO: Your ancestor made a mistake.

LESIA: Someone told Larion that words are silver, but silence is golden. Golden Larion!

PAVLO: But one day, in order to declare his love he'll have to say a couple of words.

LESIA: He won't say anything. He doesn't even say anything when he goes to the dentist ... The dentist has to guess which tooth hurts.

SERHII: It's really stifling here.

PAVLO: It really is! It probably hasn't rained here once since the Flood.

SERHII: It will soon: if a person wants it, it will rain. If he wants it, the sun will fill the sky, just as it does now.

PAVLO: I would exchange all the rain that will fall someday for a single drop right now.

LESIA: Are you ever generous!

PAVLO: "Someday"—this word is as useless now as an old Kerensky banknote.

LESIA (*ironically*): Yet another discovery.

PAVLO: The past and the future are very similar dishes. As a rule, they are used by the old, the young, the infirm, and the lazy. But for those who are as healthy as a young stag, there is work, love, and sports.

SERHII (*to PAVLO*): Without thinking about what's going to happen tomorrow, in a year, or in a hundred years? ...

PAVLO: The twentieth century demands super-rationality from a person. Even dreams should be as exact as blueprints. You should be able to take them and build according to them.

LARION: The entire past and future are like a Kerensky note?

PAVLO: Each tonne of them was equivalent in value to one gram of gold.

LARION: And we also came here for a bunch of Kerensky notes? You can't kid around like that.

You seem to be an intelligent guy, but you tell lousy jokes.

LESIA: Enough talk. It'll be better if we say nothing for a while.

*A pause.*

PAVLO (*listening*): Do you hear? It's a motorcycle. It's Maksym.

LESIA (*also listening*): No. It's only a handcar.

PAVLO: Too bad.

LARION: Maksym will come. He'll come for sure!

PAVLO: I share your ... wishful thinking.

SERHII: Evening is almost here.

PAVLO: Lesia, is your hair naturally blond, or has it been bleached by the sun?

LESIA: I've been in the sun since I was born.

PAVLO: Somehow you remind me of a snow maiden. Of the one who comes with Grandpa Frost on New Year's eve. Even the dress you have on now is somehow—

LESIA: I wore it to my graduation ball.

PAVLO: And now into the steppe?

LESIA: Is it inappropriate?

PAVLO: It's appropriate, but today—

*A pause. Then LARION begins to sing softly. Everyone joins in.*

LARION:

A lad is rushing,  
running through each spring,  
and the lad doesn't know  
that in his heart is growing

the gem of the sun.  
 The gem of the sun,  
 an azure gem,  
 an azure gem.

The lad turned around,  
 and there were springs behind him.  
 And one spring  
 took from his heart  
 the gem of the sun.  
 The gem of the sun,  
 an azure gem,  
 an azure gem.

He kept on going and didn't see  
 how the springs passed.  
 Grey from sorrow,  
 he looked for the gem,  
 the gem of the sun.  
 The gem of the sun,  
 an azure gem,  
 an azure gem.

*A long pause.*

SERHII: Evening's coming, yet the sky is getting even deeper.

LESIA: It really is very relaxing here somehow.

PAVLO: I could get used to the steppe too if not for this silence. It doesn't give me any peace.

SERHII: It seems there is nothing but the sun in all that azure, but actually there are billions of suns, billions of planets. And, according to the law of probability, somewhere in the infinite cosmos there is a planet absolutely identical to ours—the planet Speranta. And it's possible that there at this very time, in a steppe like this, four people are sitting. They, like us, are all from the same laboratory.

LESIA: And they're waiting for their fifth companion?

SERHII: Yes, they're waiting.

PAVLO: And are they also getting ready to test the "unit" on themselves?

SERHII: Yes.

PAVLO: And they're not afraid?

SERHII: They are afraid.

PAVLO: But they're not hiding this?

SERHII: No. They're not.

PAVLO: The young lads on the planet Speranta are sincere.

SERHII: And why pretend? ... Just thinking that it's possible to plunge into oblivion, into non-existence, forever ... if you just think of it, your heart freezes.

PAVLO: Serhii, you should think that from non-existence you'll turn up somewhere in a square as a bronze bust inscribed with the words "A courageous scientific researcher."

*A pause. The distant sound of a train is heard.*

LESIA: A passenger train again.

SERHII: Going south, to the sea.

LESIA: I was also thinking of going to the sea this year.

SERHII: And I'm always promising to buy my mom a ticket to the Crimea.

LESIA: I don't want to go to the Black Sea, but to the Baltic. They say it's beautiful.

PAVLO: The Baltic ... I haven't seen it. I only know that on its shore one can find amber, which I can't stand.

LESIA: What has amber done to you?

PAVLO: It's colour doesn't appeal to me. Especially the one with a greenish tint. Like your eyes.

*A pause.*

LARION: One doesn't give one's life for a bronze bust.

PAVLO: If not for a bronze bust, then for what?

LARION: So that dreams may become blueprints.

*A pause.*

PAVLO: Guys, maybe we could dispense with the pompous words and get down to business? And maybe everyone could now grab his fate by the mane.

LESIA: You're not afraid?

PAVLO: I'm simply certain that the rabbit will wind up in Larion's clutches or Serhii's, or that slender, long fingers with a pale manicure will gently grab it by the ears. I don't exclude the possibility that the rabbit might even end up with Maksym, but ... our colleague has been delayed.

LESIA: He should have taken the train with us.

SERHII: We can do without him.

LARION: Let's wait some more.

LESIA: I'm sorry. It's time now.

SERHII: What do you mean?

LESIA: The "unit" begins to take effect in fifteen to sixteen hours. We can spend a peaceful night here and head back to the institute in the morning.

PAVLO: Yes, right. There is monitoring equipment there, and the Chukcha (*smiling*) ... and first aid on the spot.

LARION: We'll make it.

PAVLO: So, bunny, we're waiting some more. We'll call this transit stop number two.

*The light slowly fades.*

## Scene 2

*The huge orb of a sun is already hanging over the horizon. It is emitting, spraying scarlet unease and slowly drowning in it. Nothing has changed. As before, there are four people in the steppe. And the stone baba.*

PAVLO: The silence does crawl into your ears. Soon it will grab you by the throat.

LESIA: Planet Speranta ... The Planet of Expectations.

PAVLO: And what if we punch this silence in the snout? Here's how.

*He turns on the transistor radio. Loud music blares out.*

LESIA: It's a Charleston! O Lord, how we danced the Charleston.

PAVLO: Who's we?

LESIA: The girls from class B in grade twelve.

PAVLO: Shall we dance?

*PAVLO takes LESIA by the hand and leads her up to the baba. He hangs the radio around the baba's neck. They begin dancing lightly and with feeling. For some reason LARION stands up, shifts repeatedly from one foot to the other, and peers not at them, but somewhere into the steppe. On SERHII'S face there is admiration coupled with barely noticeable bitterness. The music breaks off. PAVLO and LESIA stop dancing, but silently remain facing each other for a while, as though they had been spellbound by the dance. LESIA is the first one to regain her senses. She runs up to the rock and sits down. Her chest rises and falls rapidly.*

PAVLO (*turning off the radio*): The girls from Class B danced well.

*A long pause ensues. PAVLO turns the radio back on. An announcer's voice is heard: "Already in grade ten she couldn't sleep at night and thought about what she should be: a milkmaid, a swineherd, or a beet-grower? Then once, in the spring, the steady singing of the nightingales beneath her window probably inspired her, and she said: 'Mama, I'll be like you—a milkmaid.' A year passed unnoticed after that, but her declared dream was realized—she became a member of a Communist work brigade ... More than that: she walked through the village, and a hundred voices followed after her: 'She is someone to look up to.'" PAVLO turns off the radio. A pause ensues.*

LESIA: How can anyone describe sacred things with such words? What a primitive. He even grates on my soul.

*A pause.*

SERHII: It's high time that lies and insincerity were punished the same way theft is.

PAVLO (*laughing*): I can imagine the police who catch liars. They'd all be wearing foam slippers so no one could hear them, and carrying microphones to catch even whispers. They'd grab a liar, and wham, bam, he'd get five years. That's for a big lie. For a little one, like it or not, he'd get fifteen days and a haircut.

LESIA (*exploding*): Can't you tell when a joke becomes an insult?

SERHII: Those who are on the planet Speranta also think about the great truth without joking. They think seriously. They dream. Their dream is already as precise as a blueprint: to live in a society where a person will be all-powerful and just, like God!

PAVLO: What about liars, careerists, bureaucrats, informers, egoists, demagogues, hypocrites, and like sinners—will you set up a hell for them? So that they won't run away, will you surround them with barbed wire?

LARION: We'll do without that.

PAVLO: Decipher this, Lesia.

LESIA: Larion is trying to say that there won't be people like that.

SERHII: Then truth will live in the soul of every person. Even the word "lie" will disappear. (*Pausing*) And even this will come to pass: whether you wear a yarmulke or a sombrero, whether your eyes are black as coal or as blue as the sky, you'll be a brother nonetheless. That day will come!

*A pause.*

PAVLO: It's either from this heat, or the silence, or maybe Serhii's dreams, but my throat is drying out.

LARION: Here (*throwing him a canteen*), take this.

PAVLO: You're a genius, Larion. (*Drinking*) A real talent. (*Drinks his fill.*)

LESIA: He's adapted to the steppe, like a Scythian.

PAVLO: That's true. See, he even brought along a canteen, and on a strap. Only it's really old and dented.

LARION: I found it here, in the trenches.

PAVLO: There's some sort of drawing on it.

LESIA (*taking the canteen*): No, it's just scratched.

PAVLO: Do you like the steppe, Larion?

LARION: I do.

PAVLO: Are you a native here?

LARION: Yes, from an orphan's home here.

LESIA: What happened to your father?

LARION: Missing in action ... I never knew him.

PAVLO: But you said that your father gave you your name.

LARION: On the same day the notice came that he was missing, a letter from him arrived. He wrote that I should be named Larion.

LESIA: What about your mother?

LARION (*looking at the canteen*): I only remember that she had long braids.

SERHII: On the planet Speranta there was also a war once. It was long ago, that's true. The inhabitants had already begun to forget it. And those four don't mention it. Unless they come across a buried trench.

*A pause.*

LESIA: Look over there. You can see a little hill. That was a trench too.

SERHII: There are a lot of all kinds of trenches here—deep ones and ones obviously dug in a hurry.

LARION: My mother had long, long braids.

PAVLO: From that war only trenches remain on earth, and even they are covered over, overgrown, but after the next war that, God forbid, occurs, the whole planet will be left as bare as a drum.

SERHII: And then everything will start again from the beginning?

PAVLO: From the beginning. The amoeba—dash; the Ichthyosaurus—dash; the gorilla—dash; the dreamer Serhii—dash; the man-god—period. The road is short, only several million years long.

LESIA: And what if you could be serious?

PAVLO: If you want me to be serious, then it'll probably be less crowded. It will become frightfully less crowded on earth.

LESIA: No, no, anything but war!

PAVLO: If these trenches could talk, they would say: let prime ministers and presidents wear white lab coats to work. Let there be more people as obsessed as our Chukcha, as the one who'll become the twentieth baboon ... So as not to cut short the road for bipeds, but to lengthen it by at least a metre.



*A pause.*

LARION: And my father would still live on and on. If I could at least know where he died. At least touch the clump of earth ... that my father touched ... (*Pausing*) I can't even imagine what he was like ... I can't imagine, but I talk with him so often.

*Pause.*

LESIA: It's getting dark. There are the red lakes ... Larion told the truth ... the sun does drown in them.

LARION (*to himself, standing up and staring at the horizon*): Not to cut short the road, but to lengthen it. By at least a metre.

### Scene 3

*Evening has arrived. The steppe seems to have grown smaller, and the horizon has come closer. A campfire is burning.*

SERHII: The evening star is shining. And I didn't even notice when it appeared.

PAVLO: I envy those who don't notice anything. They're happy. They're like a black grouse when it's looking for a mate—it doesn't care about a thing.

LESIA: Poor you. Is there something you're lacking?

PAVLO: I have everything ... a four-room apartment with air conditioning, a bathroom, a library, a spacious study. Every weekend I go to my summer home. I spend my vacations in Naples or on the Adriatic coast.

LESIA: Why are you putting on an act?

PAVLO: Really, I do have all this, but in a very distorted appearance. I have a place apartment stupidly called a bachelor apartment, furniture with the legs of a frightened calf, and a permit to travel, which I wheedled out of the local Party Committee.

SERHII: You never have enough do you?

LESIA: You shouldn't wonder. Pavlo has blue blood. Only in heaven will he—

PAVLO: Yes, I'm building a heaven on earth, yet I'll spend my whole life on the road to heaven. For a convenient formulation thrives in the world: we toll for the future, for coming generations. Whatever you apply it to, everything falls into place. Here I am living and working for those who will come after me. Into their fund I set aside seventy percent, and I myself get by on thirty percent.

LESIA: Poor Pavlo. He doesn't have a summer home, he wasn't sent to the Adriatic, and there's nobody to comfort him.

PAVLO: I'm not poor and don't want anyone to pity me, but, as Omar Khayyám said:  
 What use to us is heavenly bliss someday?  
 Pay up with wine and money now.  
 I don't believe in credit.

*Larion laughs.*

LESIA: What happened, golden Larion?

PAVLO: A bolt from the blue: Larion is laughing!

LARION: If you don't want to live for future generations, only for yourself, quit the laboratory and start planting raspberry bushes.

PAVLO: What do raspberries have to do with anything?

LARION: You'll plant them, and in a year you'll be eating as many berries as your stomach can hold ... even your mug will turn crimson.

PAVLO: By the way, one has to share raspberries, too.

SERHII (*jumping up*): Sit down. Sit down! Now I'll tell you ... tell you about the seventy and the thirty. Those who are here (*gesturing*) in the trenches ... set aside all one hundred into our fund ... all one hundred! (*Walking up to the hat*) I'm going to draw ... I don't want to wait. It's better to do it now.

LESIA: Are you itching to be first?

SERHII: We'll take away two pieces of paper and leave three. Right, guys?

PAVLO: What a pity, and she, you see, put on a ball gown. In case she has to charm the angels in the other world.

LESIA: It appears, Serhii, that you have courage and chivalry coming out of your ears! (*Goes up to the hat.*)

LARION (*resolutely*): Don't say that! (*Takes away the hat.*)

LESIA: You even know how to shout, Larion?

LARION: Let's wait some more.

PAVLO: For Maksym or for the dawn?

LARION: Both.

PAVLO: Learn, guys, learn from Larion. To think resolutely, to be stubbornly silent, and, to put it mildly, to hesitate tactfully or maybe even to withdraw ... Did you understand him, Lesia?

LESIA: Leave me alone! I wish I could send you to hell!

PAVLO: I'm afraid that before the dawn arrives our quartet won't be able to sing the song about ... the gem of the sun ... the azure gem. (*Pausing*) It'll be dawn soon ... and I haven't said everything yet.

LESIA: Go talk over there with the *baba*. She likes it when people confide in her, and if you bring a sacrifice she'll even help you.

*A pause.*

PAVLO: That's an idea, Lesia. I'll try it. (*Walking up to the statue and putting the canteen down next to her*) You see, old woman, I am bringing to you in sacrifice genuine Cuban rum. If you drink it, even your stone heart will warm up ... But I don't want to drink. I want to be completely sober, because we're going to have a really heavy conversation. We can't put it off anymore—there's no time. After all, the dawn is approaching. Don't scowl, old woman ... Don't think that I want to pass on a satchel full of grief to you and beg you to give me at least a small grain of happiness. I have it ... Happiness ... Not just a grain, but a whole field. One like this steppe ... One like this sky... because I love ... I love her eyes with the fire of amber, her hair bleached by the sun. I kissed her footprints ... There she is—a white snow-maiden. Do you see her? She's sitting on that rock, like a gull, like a swallow. (*LESIA gets up.*) My whole world is in that little swallow. My whole world! (*SERHII and LARION get up but don't take their eyes off PAVLO.*) But not just mine. You can see Serhii and Larion over there. Their world, together with the stars and the steppe, with the Chukcha and the baboon, is in her, in Lesia. (*Pausing*) It's not easy for us, guys. It was simpler for the Neanderthals. Whoever had the heavier club and a thicker skull, won ... I beg you, *baba*, let Lesia

take the gem from my heart, not theirs. The gem of the sun, an azure gem ...  
Otherwise, what will I do? Tell me, *baba!*

LESIA *freezes in agitation, waiting. A long pause ensues.* LARION *walks up to the statue as if he wanted to say something, but didn't dare. The steppe darkens, and the people are no longer visible. Only the statue is barely lit. Curtain.*

## Scene 4

*The dawn breaks ... in silence and peace. The stars fade, and the stage lights up.*

LESIA: There, the night is over.

SERHII: It even feels better.

PAVLO: To make it feel completely better, let's ... (*Gesturing toward the hat*) I don't think there will be any more stops.

LESIA: It's time. Dawn has arrived.

PAVLO: Yes, dawn has arrived, but Maksym hasn't.

LESIA: It would be better not to mention him.

SERHII: Don't blame him, it's me. (*Reaching into his pocket*) Here's your note, Larion. I didn't pass it on to Maksym ... (*Smiling guiltily*) It's not even a month since he got married. Can't we do without him?

*Everyone remains silent.*

PAVLO (*relieved*): Why did you keep the lid on for so long?

SERHII: I thought we'd draw lots, and then I'd tell you.

LESIA: Serhiichyk! I could kiss you all over!

PAVLO: You see, you earned it.

SERHII: Let's have the hat, and let's draw.

PAVLO: But before we do that, a little clarification. Yes, I want to live in paradise! I demand much from life! And my blood isn't blue, as you say, Lesia, but red. And I want no one to doubt this! No one!

LESIA: And now what?

PAVLO: We'll do (*pointing to the hat*) without the ritual. I'm taking the "unit"! Don't remonstrate, guys. My decision is final. I don't plan to back down.

SERHII: Do you think that I'm afraid?

PAVLO: No. I'm just the first to take a step forward. So you are left in line. I'm taking a risk not only for those who'll come after us, but also for all the bipeds living now. For the small tribe of which only over three billion are living on earth.

SERHII (*disconcertedly and resolutely*): I could also do without rituals.

LESIA (*laughing*): The number of heroes is growing catastrophically. (*Getting up*) You said it all, my Aristotles, my knights, my Prometheuses ... And now (*taking the hat*), without a lot of noise and emotion, we'll see who'll end up with the funny bunny.

PAVLO: Lesia.

LESIA: We'll do it alphabetically ... Larion will go first. Here you are!

LARION: There's no need.

LESIA: You—

LARION: No!

*A pause.*

SERHII: I don't believe it. Larion, you're kidding!

PAVLO: Let me look at you. (*Going up to LARION*) I've never seen cowards up close, or given it to them in the snout.

LESIA (*in an unusual voice*): Don't you dare!!! (*Throwing herself at LARION and looking intently into his eyes*) Larion, you've already taken the "unit"!!! When?

LARION: When the trenches started speaking.

LESIA: Way back then? ...

SERHII: And he didn't say anything.

PAVLO: We were deaf, we didn't hear.

LARION: Lesia, I—

LESIA: Hush ... When you're silent, I can still hear you ... I hear you like a song. (*Does not take her eyes off his.*) You ask if you will still see the steppe? You'll see it, Larion, and the red lakes, and the silvery nights, and mornings like this.

SERHII: How do you feel, Larion? (*Walks up to LARION and puts his hand on his shoulder.*)

LARION (*smiling*): You can transmit to the planet Speranta that the "unit" has been ingested, the subject feels satisfactory, and observations continue.

PAVLO: And also transmit that his stand-ins are all ready.

LESIA: And transmit a message from me! Transmit it to all the planets! I love Larion! I love him!!! (*More quietly*) Mine will be the gem of the sun, the gem of the sun, the azure gem, the azure gem.

*The song "Azure Gem" is heard. The curtain falls slowly.*

*Translated by Don I. Boychuk*

# Valerii Shevchuk

Valerii Shevchuk is one of contemporary Ukraine's most prolific, outstanding, and respected writers. Born in Zhytomyr in 1939, he began writing poetry and prose during his teens. While studying history and archeography at Kyiv University (1958–63), he actively participated in the literary life of Ukraine's capital. In 1962 thirteen of his short stories were published in various periodicals. Shevchuk was briefly a correspondent of the newspaper *Moloda hvardiia*, served in the Soviet Army, and then worked for the museology department of the Kyivan Caves Monastery Historical Preserve. From 1965 on he dedicated all of his time to writing, translating Cossack chronicles and Ukrainian literature of the Baroque period, and compiling and editing literary anthologies, particularly of the Baroque period. His stories and novels have been translated into Belarusian, Croatian, Czech, English, French, German, Georgian, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, and Russian.

Although Shevchuk wrote a great deal throughout the 1970s (the Brezhnev era), for most of that decade his prose works were not accepted for publication because a story of his had been published in West Germany and because his brother Anatolii was a Soviet political prisoner. Since the early 1980s, however, Ukrainian publishers and periodicals have been eager to issue his works, and he has received accolades for his novels. Shevchuk was awarded several literary prizes, including the 1988 Shevchenko State Prize for his trilogy *Try lystky za viknom* (Three Leaves outside the Window, 1986) and the U.S. Omelan and Tatiana Antonovych Foundation Award (1991).

Shevchuk's prose has noticeably evolved stylistically. Since 1968 many of his works have exhibited his own version of magic realism (falling somewhere between Gogol's, Emma Andrievska's, and that of Gabriel Garcia Marquez). He chooses to set his plays and novels in the historical past, claiming that he needs a certain distance from the present.

In addition to his many stories, novellas, and novels, Shevchuk has written plays: *Vertep* (Puppet Play, 1972), *Sad* (Garden, 1972–85; about the Ukrainian philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda), *Mizeriia* (Insignificance) or *Alimpiia* (1964–85), *Ptakhy z nevydymoho ostrova* (Birds from an Invisible Island, 1998), *Brama smertel'noi tini* (The Gate of the Deathly Shadow; 1993, pub. 1995, about Hetman Ivan Mazepa), *Kinets' viku* (The End of the Century, 1995, pub. 2000), *Svichennia* (Wake Games, 1995), *Panna kvitiv* (Young Lady of the Flowers, 2001), and the libretto *Strashna pomsta* (Terrible Vengeance, 2006, based on Gogol's story).

Shevchuk's *Vertep* was first staged in 1986 by the META Experimental Theatre in Lviv under the direction of Hryhorii Shumeiko. Soon after, Kyiv's Teatr na Podoli (Theatre in the Podil [district]) troupe performed it in Kyiv and on tour in the United States, Mexico, Greece, and South America. *Birds from an Invisible Island* is based on Shevchuk's 1975 novel of the same name, which was first published in 1989. The play was staged in 1991 at the Kin Theatre in Kyiv under the direction of Vitalii Sementsov; and in 1993 at the Mariia Zankovetska Theatre in Lviv under the direction of Hryhorii Shumeiko (under the title *The Eternal Slave*). Shevchuk's novella *Pochatok zhakhu* (The Beginning of Horror, 1993) was first adapted for the stage by Yaroslav Fedoryshyn at the Voskresinnia (Resurrection) Theatre in Lviv.

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## The Road of the Eternal Return

In literature, life is often depicted as a road one must travel. In Shevchuk's play *Birds from an Invisible Island* (as in his novel of the same title), the road the protagonist, Olizar, follows also follows the *mythos* of the eternal return to the moment of death and the point of never ending repetition, with only fleeting hints of the possibility of a new life or transcendence.

The narrative of the eternal return finds frequent expression in Ukrainian medieval literature and folklore. However, in that literature it is usually not a return from a pilgrimage or from an adventure-filled journey of self-discovery (as it is often depicted in other literatures). Instead, the theme of captivity occupies a particularly important place within it. Such themes are also present in the *dumy*, seventeenth and eighteenth-century Ukrainian epic narrative songs, many of which are about Cossacks captured by foreign invaders and taken as slaves to a foreign land. Those Cossacks' strong desire to be free and return home was often expressed as a return to their father and mother. A decision to remain in a foreign country was synonymous with the loss of one's identity, without which the protagonist could not complete the cycle of eternal return. In one narrative, the "Duma about Oleksii Popovych," the protagonist suffers spiritually and finds it hard to be ready to accept death because he did not receive abso-



lution from both his parents. In *Birds from an Invisible Island* only the father is mentioned as the one who can forgive Olizar's only sin. That the mother is absent in the play is one of many allusions to sterility and breakdown of the reproductive cycle in the island community.<sup>1</sup> Yet, by "omitting the mother," Shevchuk focuses our attention on the classic symbolic function of the father as the embodiment of traditional morality and principle, as well as the crowning element of Olizar's quest.

Olizar is a soul in exile (to use Paul Ricoeur's expression). Although he has committed no crime, he suffers as if in hell as he tries to return to the point where his life's experiences began. Despite all his present torments, he is not ready to face death until he is forgiven for the oath of bondage he was forced to take as a Turkish galley slave. He does not express repentance for this "crime" but only shame for defiling his honour—an ethical dread for the stain on his name and soul. For this he seeks catharsis. It is only in a dream that he receives forgiveness from his father, at the point when he almost escapes from the island in order to return home as a prodigal son.<sup>2</sup>

While Olizar is imprisoned on the island, his spirit is in constant battle with the body that imprisons it. From time to time his spirit submits not so much to his mind and will as to his body (or physical pain), and thus also to his old oath of bondage. Such a situation represents an internal conflict within Olizar, not with life and its continuity. He finds himself on the island and, like Odysseus, does not want to be there. But Olizar differs from the latter in a most important respect: he did not choose to set out on his long journey. It is only at the very end of his road that Olizar demonstrates his own spiritual freedom by choosing death. He does not accept eternal hell, nor does he turn away from hope. By means of his free will and free choice, by negating the island's order he triumphs in his battle with it by giving hope to others and reaching transcendence. Through his own death Olizar defeats evil, returns to his own reality, and thus completes his road by leaving hell. On a certain level, he thus also reaches his father's doorstep.

*Birds from an Invisible Island* is imbued with irreality and irony. The manner in which Shevchuk deploys numerous archetypes therein suggests that his play is a parody of life, specifically a parody of utopian ideas and their application in society. From the outset of the play, when Olizar first asks himself if he is only dreaming of being on the island, Shevchuk draws attention to its irreality. At the end even Rosenroch, the antagonist, refers to the lack of reality there and, almost in a mocking manner, keeps preaching that everything needs to be begun from the beginning.

Northrop Frye, the eminent theoretician of archetypes and metaphor, defined the demonic world of parody as "the world of the nightmare and the scapegoat, of bondage and pain and confusion." He associated it with "an existential hell, like Dante's *Inferno*, or with the hell that man creates on earth, as in 1984, *No Exit*, and *Darkness at Noon*, where the titles of the last

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<sup>1</sup> In one scene in the the novel (which Shevchuk wrote first), Olizar expresses a desire to "return" to a woman's womb, and only then to his father and grandfather. Thus life is negated by means of an unnatural *regressus ad uterum*, which is then passed along through the male line. Similarly, in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* the Buddhist belief that the soul wanders between death and birth until it enters a woman's (or an animal's) uterus, thus beginning a new cycle of life and thereby perpetuating suffering, is codified. See Northrop Frye, "The Journey as Metaphor," in his *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays, 1974–1988* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990), 220–21.

<sup>2</sup> Shevchuk has admitted that the image of the prodigal son's return is part of almost all of his works. See Agnieszka Piwowarska, "'Dim na hori': Rozмова z Valeriiem Shevchukom," trans. Natalka Bilotserkivets', *Suchasnist'*, 1992, no. 3: 56

two speak for themselves.”<sup>3</sup> Many aspects of Shevchuk’s play have much in common with Frye’s examples from the Western literary canon. As archetypes, birds are literature’s classic carriers of the symbols of the soul, freedom, and identity. In the demonic, parodic world of Shevchuk’s play, the White Bird is present only as a hypostatic figure, the reverse variant of the black Halshka, the traitor, who, together with the island’s other harpies, torments Olizar. The rest of the island’s devilish yet grotesquely comic menagerie, with suggestive and resonant names, includes an almost-bat (Rosenroch), an arachnid (Mrs. Spider), a wildcat (Bilynsky), crows (the girls), and a werewolf (Apty-Basha). Plant life is depicted in its final stage: dry leaves and dead bark. Prince Bilynsky and Rosenroch serve as perfect representatives of tyrannical-leader types. The victim, Olizar, finds himself in a nightmarish situation: although these two leaders torture him, the trinity of rulers treats each other with similar cruelty.

## References to Dante's Inferno

In his travels Olizar meets people and situations similar to those in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, where the protagonist is also in exile and also wants to return to his father, even to the underworld, just to hear what fate will be foretold for his son. However, the strongest references in Shevchuk’s play are to Dante’s *Inferno* and less so to his *Purgatory*.

In the *Inferno* God is shown in three images: representing power (meting out justice), wisdom (punishing sin), and love (stewardship over Creation). On Shevchuk’s island the parodic trio of demons—Bilynsky, Rosenroch, and Mrs. Spider—is shown claiming a similar distribution of duties. However, Shevchuk actually makes fun of the community of former revolutionaries who sought to create a better world but are afraid of the very word “God.” The islanders are surrounded by occult elements of the medieval cabala. The play thus mocks the Communist regime’s effort to replace Christianity’s system of symbols and numbers with its own. At the same time, Shevchuk also derides Dante’s highly serious treatment of numerology. Shevchuk also seems to flirt with another trio from the *Inferno*—the three beasts (lion, leopard, and she-wolf) representing three sins.

In his play, Shevchuk employs archetypes ironically. Together with the coloration of the imagery he creates, these archetypes point to the demonic world on the island. This world is an actual hell, as Dante’s inferno was for the souls there, with the various circles where people were tortured for their sins and where humans turned into animals. Both Dante’s and Shevchuk’s hells are places of eternal pain with no mercy, as the sign on the gate to Dante’s hell warns (“Abandon all hope, you who enter here”).

Olizar’s road is not that of an Orphic process of dying and cleansing. Rather, it represents an opportunity to be in the world of irreality and hell (and even purgatory), to look back on one’s pain and oneself. That is why there are constant reminders of the bird-soul and the tortures of the body. These images also serve as a commentary on the island and its inhabitants representing that irreality. Olizar carries an invisible branding of a slave, while Dante the wanderer has a visible mark symbolizing the sins he can wash off.

Olizar is *forced* to be on the road to death, and that is why the irreality of dreams is ever present. Olizar enters this hell unconsciously, unwillingly, and without a guide (in juxtaposition to Dante), though with some hope. Frye believes that a place without hope may not represent reality, since it is then only an illusion of hell (as in Dante’s work), while real hell is

<sup>3</sup> Northrop Frye, “Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths,” in his *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 147.

present where there is still hope.<sup>4</sup> Thus hell is similar to life, while suffering is still at its peak. Classical or biblical protagonists accept suffering because that is God's will. But in Shevchuk's play the castle's inhabitants accept torture because it was once their own will (or, rather, a short-lived enchantment with a given utopian ideology, an attempt at changing the world). In the end they have no power to stop the nightmare they themselves created and keep on repeating by dying and then beginning everything anew.<sup>5</sup> There was no opportunity to express one's will in Dante's hell, for there was no hope to die and end the sufferings. However, like Dante, Olizar is alive, unlike the souls in hell, and that is why he can express both pity and fear. What is most important is that by choosing death, Olizar demonstrates his own spiritual freedom. He does not accept eternal hell or turn away from hope. By means of his free will and freely choosing to negate the island's existing order, he thus manages to win the battle by providing hope for others. By means of his own death, Olizar wins over evil, returns to his own reality, and thus completes his road by leaving hell and, in a way, also reaching his father's doorstep. Although this scene takes place in a dream, Olizar sees his father when the leaves depict autumn—another reference to Dante's cycle of rebirth.

In his account of the poet's trip across hell, Dante describes typical problems in his society and some important people in it. Similarly, Shevchuk's play demonstrates the behaviour of people living under a totalitarian regime. The island's social structure and laws are an ironic commentary on Marxist ideology, including the rejection of Hegel's claim that history does not repeat itself: Rosenroch's system is perpetuated not by means of rejuvenation, but through repetition and the death of all the inhabitants. All the men there are sterile and are also each other's slaves. Shevchuk points out that a system that has placed itself outside history can have neither a history nor a future. It is only a world of illusion, a self-created anti-world.

By parodying utopian ideas and adventurous quests in philosophical and literary works and by employing obvious intertextual echoes and presenting them with irony, Shevchuk draws attention to the universality of the problems raised in his play, including those that surfaced in the twentieth century. He does this subtly, but with a touch of playfulness. Nevertheless, he does not delve into literary and word games for their own sake. Rather than using a simple or naïve allegory, by applying similar archetypes and systems as those of his predecessors Shevchuk chooses parallel situations and imagery (e.g., by ridiculing the utopian ideas of a new social order presented by Dante, Plato, Milton in *Paradise Lost*, or Thomas Moore in *Utopia*). However, Shevchuk consciously juxtaposes them to his own system of imagery. He does not parody his predecessors and their utopian systems as much as show these ideas in newer, nightmarish worlds.

## References to Orphism

Within his playful as well as serious allusions to philosophical and literary works, Shevchuk hints at some of the ideas expressed by the adherents of Orphism and Pythagoreanism (both of which emerged around the sixth century BC). According to Orphic beliefs, persons have to pay for the evil they committed much earlier in life, or even prior to it; and the Titans represented human evil, or rather "the anteriority of evil in relation to actual human

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<sup>4</sup> Idem, *"Spiritus Mundi": Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1983), 113.

<sup>5</sup> Frye points out that both the Nazis and the Italian Fascists considered cyclicity an important element in history.

evil.”<sup>6</sup> The Titans were associated with darkness, death, and Hades, and they represented the evil that was passed on to humankind. They were also the ones who, after their third attempt, tore apart Zeus’s son Dionysus.<sup>7</sup> In Shevchuk’s play the invisible island’s inhabitants also tear Olizar to pieces as his third and final punishment. In the Orphic system of beliefs, such dismemberment not only represents a ring in the chain of the life-and-death cycle: it is also an action of cleansing and elevation to another level. That belief system stipulates that the soul is involuntarily exiled in a body that is constantly being defiled.<sup>8</sup>

Pre-Platonic Orphism stressed the dual nature of humankind, whose weak bodies imprison the soul in involuntary exile. The Orphists claimed that humans and their bodies go through a cycle of life and death, during which the immortal soul is constantly being reborn. After the cruelest of tortures, Olizar is physically reborn twice on the island. After coming to understand that life there is a repetition of hell (a typical Orphic idea), he finally gathers enough strength and wants to inspire his colleagues from the galley by asking them to persevere in their task.

The word “Orpheus” means “dark.” Appropriately, Shevchuk’s play takes place in darkness<sup>9</sup> except for the torture scenes, which, significantly, are illuminated by an unnatural light. Sunlight occurs only in Olizar’s dreams. It is in darkness that he gains wisdom of himself and gathers enough courage to choose death rather than another defilement and further jailing of his soul were he to submit to the rules and behaviour his new captors expect.

The laws or specific cult practiced on the island demonstrate strong similarities to both Orphism and Pythagoreanism and are parodies of their newer applications there. While in Orphic teachings the human soul represents a fallen god or a demon, on the island there is only a temporary or fleeting sense of ambivalence about the inhabitants’ goodness. It is soon dissipated, and the demonic aspect comes through much more profusely, especially in its similarities with the practices of twentieth-century Europe’s totalitarian regimes.

The philosopher Pythagoras was fascinated by numbers and became the father of the cabbala. He began reforming society by creating a brotherhood whose members were ruled by strict observances of various taboos. Rosenroch copies these practices. Olizar is dismembered after trying to reach a promised transcendence by passing on hope to his friends through singing. In Pythagoreanism music was considered an aid to purification, and only pure souls were released from the flesh. In the Orphic doctrine of reincarnation, acts of dismemberment represented a sacramental unity with Dionysus and were used “to establish the twofold nature of mankind, good and evil.”<sup>10</sup> Olizar’s self-sacrifice also establishes his twofold nature and his ability to rise above the sinister cult, its laws, and power. In terms of Orphism, Pythagoreanism, or, later, Platonism, it is the soul that represents the real self; it is only temporarily jailed within a weak body, which becomes contaminated and serves as an instrument or object for punishment. In Shevchuk’s play Olizar gains redemption and has hopes of transcendence while his soul becomes purified. He thus escapes the Orphic cycle of hell and is liberated.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “The Exiled Soul and Salvation through Knowledge,” in *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 299. In other myths the Thracian women do the dismembering.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>9</sup> In Dante’s *Inferno*, hell is depicted as the place where “the sun is silent.”

<sup>10</sup> E. O. James, “Cosmology,” in *The Ancient Gods: The History and Diffusion of Religion in the Ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean* (New York: Putnam, 1960), 226.

The Lviv scholar Stefaniia Andrusiv was one of the first to point out the primacy of depictions of the polarity of good and evil in Shevchuk's works, as well as the circularity of the road in his protagonists' quests, which are always taken over by the next generation.<sup>11</sup> By relying on parables, intertextuality, mythologies, magic realism, and other means, Shevchuk draws attention not only to the eternal problem of how humankind deals with good and evil, but also to the contemporary immediacy of the problem. He highlights the balance between the two poles. Some of Shevchuk's younger colleagues also depict the world of cruelty, but they do so in more extreme forms and without the presence of hope or transcendence that Shevchuk always provides. While portraying a contemporary, temporary, or even local malaise, he treats the issue as an eternal polarity and eternal conflict between humankind's two natures.

Although Shevchuk's play has a long list of allusions to Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, Olizar's path is simply a descent into the grotesque and hellish irreality of totalitarian regimes. The play provides a reflection of the subconscious and demonstrates the distorted behaviour of people oppressed by such an environment.

By parodying utopian ideas and adventurous quests in other literary works and by employing obvious intertextual echoes with a subtle dose of irony, Shevchuk draws attention to the universality of the problems presented in his play. By applying similar archetypes and systems as those of his literary predecessors, he parodies their utopian systems using parallel situations and imagery. By showing their ideas in newer, nightmarish worlds, Shevchuk sends his own strong message and, at the same time, expresses his own aesthetics.

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<sup>11</sup> Stefaniia Andrusiv, "U lisi liuds'koi dushi," *Zhovten'*, 1988, no. 1: 108.

# *Birds from an Invisible Island*

(1992)

## CHARACTERS

OLIZAR NOSYLOVYCH, *a nobleman and a former galley slave*

PRINCE BILYNSKY, *the owner of the castle*

ROSENROCH, *a bookman living in the castle*

MRS. SPIDER, *the custodian of the castle*

HALSHKA, *a young woman also known as THE WHITE BIRD*

THREE GIRLS (HALSHKA'S look-alikes)

FOUR GUARDS *at the castle*

OLIZAR'S FATHER

APTY-BASHA, *the owner of a Turkish galley (may be played by the same actor who plays BILYNSKY)*

SERVANTS *in the castle*

## Act One

### Scene 1

*The stage decorations may be chosen arbitrarily. On one side of the stage is a watchtower, on top of which two GUARDS are standing back to back. From the tower stairs lead down to the stage. Next to the tower is a second tower, which is partly in ruins. The stage is surrounded by defensive walls. OLIZAR NOSYLOVYCH is lying unconscious on a bed. All around him, dozens of tiny lights on the floor and the walls, glimmer like golden beetles. There is also a table, chairs, an ancient psaltery, and hanging on the wall is a lute (very much like a clavichord).*

OLIZAR (*getting out of bed with difficulty, exhausted, dishevelled, and weak*): Is this a dream? Is anyone here?

*The sound of water splashing and mud squishing under someone's feet is heard.*

OLIZAR: Where am I? Can anyone hear me?

*The sound of weapons clanging and mud squishing under someone's feet is heard.*

OLIZAR: Can anyone tell me where I am?

FIRST GUARD (*facing the audience*): You are where you should be, sir.

SECOND GUARD (*the one with his back to the audience*): Here, sir, you'll get to know happiness!

OLIZAR: Happiness! What a strange word. Don't you think that happiness is a strange word?

Then again, to me everything in this world is strange. What is this, rain?

*Again the splashing of water and mud squishing under someone's feet is heard.*

THIRD GUARD (*off-stage*): He's as thin as a rail but as heavy as the devil himself.

FOURTH GUARD (*also off-stage*): Where should we carry him?

THIRD GUARD: You know where. To the guest room.

OLIZAR: Thank you, my good men. Thank you for your great kindness.

*The splashing of water and squishing of mud is heard.*

FIRST GUARD: Do you hear? He's thanking us. Who knows what he's going to be saying later on.

SECOND GUARD: Stop nattering! Keep your mouth shut. Or do you need to be reminded?

FIRST GUARD: I'm sorry, brother.

THIRD GUARD (*off-stage*): He's damned heavy—I don't have the strength ...

FOURTH GUARD (*off-stage*): Go on, carry him. There's no use loafing around!

OLIZAR (*lifting his head, his eyes closed*): Sometimes, in a dream, everything around you begins to change colours and flutter. Then you see yourself on grey waves in the grey water, on the back of a grey fish. That fish carries you through the grey expanse of the sea, and you look longingly at the ship that is rocking on the waves. This ship flaps its oars like a bird flaps its wings, and is getting ready to take flight in order to rise above the grey swell and fly away. We are all passengers on such a ship, we all sail into our worldly or unworldly dream, and that ship is the image of our heartache.

*It becomes dead quiet. The spots of light move about, their colours changing. Again there is a sound of water splashing, but this time as if hundreds of oarsmen were rowing. The overseer's shouts and the oarsmen breathing heavily, with straining lungs, are heard.*

## Scene 2

*A light flares up. OLIZAR looks around astonished. The tiny lights on the floor and the walls still flicker. He touches one of them and pulls his hand away—it has burned him. He goes to all the doors and tries them, but they are locked. Then he notices the GUARDS on the tower and calls out to them: "Good morning!" But the GUARDS are like pagan statues, neither moving nor speaking. OLIZAR glances back.*

OLIZAR (*loudly*): Is anyone in this building?

*A door creaks painfully and a burly man appears. His long moustache reaches below his heavy double chin. It is PRINCE BILYNSKY. OLIZAR bows deferentially.*

BILYNSKY: I can tell you are a nobleman, sir.

OLIZAR: Yes, Your Grace. I am one of the Nosylovyches from below Kyiv. Olizar Nosylovych. Would you be so kind as to—

BILYNSKY: Tell you where you're ended up? (*Laughing*) You are where you should be. Or perhaps where we'd—but one moment, sir. There's about to be a change of the guard.

*The THIRD and the FOURTH GUARDS appear from either end of the stage and salute BILYNSKY.*

BILYNSKY: To post number one, quick march!

*The GUARDS march to the tower and up the stairs. They relieve those who are there and then seem to turn into pagan statues. In the meantime, OLIZAR drags himself to the bed and sits down heavily on it.*

BILYNSKY: This is our morning ritual, sir. Everything will be told and explained to you. In the meantime, try to regain your strength. You'll be satisfied here. Where did you say you came from?

OLIZAR: From captivity, sir. From arduous captivity on a galley.

BILYNSKY: Then even more so it will be good for you here. This shall be a real paradise for you, sir.

*Prince BILYNSKY pushes the door open, and in a flash it shuts behind him with a creak. At that moment another door opens, and a pretty girl floats in carrying a tray. It is HALSHKA. OLIZAR jumps up from the bed—he is excited by her appearance.*

### Scene 3

HALSHKA: Good morning, sir! Oh dear, the way you look at me! Fie, don't eat me up with your eyes, for God's sake!

OLIZAR: Wonder of wonders!

HALSHKA: What wonders, dear sir?

OLIZAR: That I know you. (*Ardently*) You used to come to me during my captivity.

HALSHKA (*coquettishly*): Your captivity?

OLIZAR (*just as ardently*): Yes, during my captivity. When I was a galley slave. At night, when I constantly could not sleep. You ... used to break through the wall to me in the guise of ... a white bird ...

HALSHKA: Ha, ha, sir! What an odd imagination you have!

OLIZAR: Not odd, but painful. Actually it's white. The white wonder that came to me instead of sleep. And it was you, milady.

HALSHKA (*coquettishly*): Perhaps it was me, sir. But now I have come to give you this salutary tea because you are exhausted, and have been ill for such a long time. For a whole week. I have looked after you. That is why you imagined that I ... was a bird.

OLIZAR: A bird from an invisible island.

HALSHKA: To that extent? But then we are all birds from an invisible island. But sir, don't look at me like that, because you'll give me the evil eye. And drink your salutary tea, for God's sake.

OLIZAR: Still, I did know you before. It did not happen all that often, only during bright nights when, you know, the moon rules the sky. When the darkness fades and the light turns blue. When your body aches from the whippings you got during the day and it seems that you'll never return to your own home. It was at such moments that you would break through the walls to me—

HALSHKA: As a white bird?

OLIZAR: Just so. A white bird, milady!

HALSHKA: Well, then, you can consider that you have made it back to your own home.

OLIZAR: But where have I ended up really?

HALSHKA: Oh, sir! You are so impatient. You'll know everything in your own good time. I can say one thing now: you have ended up where you had to. Pardon me, I must go now.

OLIZAR: One moment, milady. I want to tell you how it was. During those pale nights on the thrice-cursed ship, when the white waves rose and fell, when the night was black and



the moon white, when fear drained my heart, when despair ate away at me ... it was you who came to me. How can you not know this?

HALSHKA: Ha, ha! But I do know. At least, I try to. After you drink up the herbs, rest a bit. Everything is still ahead of you. But for everything to be ahead of you, you need to regain your strength, sir!

*Her laughter rings out and she disappears playfully through the door, which shuts behind her with a creak. At the same time the door where PRINCE BILYNSKY stood earlier opens.*

## Scene 4

BILYNSKY: It occurred to me, sir, that you could already partake in our communal meals—that is, we would come to you here, and you, perhaps, could tell us your story during dinner. It seems to me that you have a lot to tell. Well, for example, about the ship with the galley slaves, as you called it. I can see that you have come to us from the world at large.

OLIZAR: Yes, indeed! I do have a lot to relate. And I did come to you from the world at large. Even too large, in fact. Or perhaps even too small. For when you are chained to a bench, and in front of you your friend's spine is glistening, and behind you another like him is puffing, and above your head a knout is cracking, you don't always realize, sir, that your ship is cruising the world at large.

BILYNSKY: I like what you said, Mr. Olizar! The world at large is truly something not larger than a small world ... That's what you should tell us all. Wait for us. All of us will visit you soon.

OLIZAR: Just what do you mean—us?

BILYNSKY: What a strange question. All the inhabitants of this castle. All of us!

OLIZAR: And what are these golden buttons, sir? I wanted to touch them, and I burned myself.

BILYNSKY (*laughing*): That means that you should not touch them. By the way, they are scattered throughout the premises. Whether they are some kind of fungi or whatever, no matter how hard we try, we can't get rid of them. Therefore, I suggest that it would be better not to touch them. It would be better to drink your brew.

*The door closes, hiding BILYNSKY. OLIZAR takes the brew, but does not drink it. He sits pensively, thinking that he hears whispering, distant conversations, rustling and mumbling, which are suddenly pierced by PRINCE BILYNSKY'S steely voice.*

BILYNSKY: Today dinner will be served in Mr. Olizar Nosylovych's room. We'll all leave together. Mr. Olizar Nosylovych promised to tell us about the world at large and the galley slavery that rules in that world.

*Upon these words all the doors open except one, and PRINCE BILYNSKY, MRS. SPIDER (a skinny woman with slender, long arms), and HALSHKA enter, followed by THREE GIRLS who look just like her, and by two GUARDS who are not on duty. Shadowlike SERVANTS appear, looking deceptively unreal, they begin setting the table and bringing in the food. Everyone sits down at the table.*

## Scene 5

BILYNSKY: Where is Mr. Rosenroch?

*The only closed door, which is lower than the others, opens. An old man with a large head appears with a large black book under his arm. He places the book on the table and bows before those assembled.*

BILYNSKY (*displeased*): You, sir, you are always late!

ROSENROCH: I am late exactly by as much as our statute allows.

*The SERVANTS serve various dishes.*

MRS. SPIDER: Today our dinner is quite special. I could hardly wait.

BILYNSKY: You, Mrs. Spider, should not be so impatient—it isn't healthy. Our guest, Mr. Olizar Nosylovych, has graciously consented to tell us about his adventures, but this does not mean that we necessarily must believe his story. In what captivity were you, sir?

OLIZAR: In Turkish captivity. I was chained to an oar on a galley for eight years.

MRS. SPIDER: What is a Turkish galley? (PRINCE BILYNSKY gives her a piercing look, and in fright she covers her mouth with her hand.) Please forgive me.

*The PRINCE lowers a spoon into a dish and everybody else follows suit. They eat as if on command. Again the sound of water splashing, as if a hundred oars are driving a galley: heavy breathing and the shouting of overseers are heard.*

OLIZAR: It was the same every single day. We rowed and rowed, and whenever anyone missed a beat or became incapacitated, the whip swished above us. We rowed because we knew that it was the only thing left for us in this world. From dawn to dusk we rowed, trying not to let despair and pain enter into our hearts. Then we'd fall into a dead sleep on the deck.

BILYNSKY: And what happened to those who became incapacitated?

OLIZAR: They grabbed them by their arms and legs and threw them into the sea as if they were carrion.

MRS. SPIDER: I don't think you should use such words at the table, sir.

ROSENROCH: Carrion is not a bad word, Mrs. Spider.

MRS. SPIDER: Perhaps not to your ears ... Well, you people should not have allowed yourself to get weak, but to row diligently, rather than be so shamefully thrown overboard.

OLIZAR: Yes, madam. It was better for us to row. And we did. We rowed and we sang. It wasn't only pain and doom that dwelled in our hearts. There was also a sense of anticipated freedom.

MRS. SPIDER: What is a sense of anticipated freedom, sir?

BILYNSKY (*severely*): What is a sense of freedom, sir?

ROSENROCH: May one ask about anything, Mr. Bilynsky?

BILYNSKY: To ask does not mean one has to tell. Do you understand, Mr. Rosenroch? That is why I did not reprimand our honoured lady, but also asked: "What is a sense of freedom?"

OLIZAR (*with a smile on his face*): The sense of freedom, Ladies and Gentlemen, is hope. Hope that everything will end happily.

BILYNSKY: And if there is no such hope?

OLIZAR: Then one should make it up.

BILYNSKY: And you did that?

OLIZAR: Yes, Your Grace. We decided to mutiny. One night, one of us, he was called Ivan, somehow crept across the entire galley and placed gunpowder between the boards at the stern, where Apty-Basha slept. He started striking a fire, but the guards noticed it. One of them shouted: "Hey, you cur, what are you burning there?" Ivan said that he was inhaling tobacco smoke. Then the guard chased him away from the stern.

FIRST GUARD: I think, Your Grace, that our guest is beginning to relate unseemly things.

SECOND GUARD: It would be wise, Your Grace, to end this story for today.

BILYNSKY: And what is your opinion, Mr. Rosenroch?

ROSENROCH (*sighing*): Our guest is tired.

MRS. SPIDER: But I think that it is quite an interesting story. I don't understand everything, though: what a galley is, who are Turks, and what is ... a sense of freedom. But Mr. Nosylovych is entertaining us nicely. Is it agreeable and comfortable for you here, sir?

OLIZAR: It is agreeable and comfortable. I am immensely grateful to all of you for your troubles, so if I'd be able to show my appreciation by telling you these stories, I'll be very happy. Since I have not been home in eight years, however, I'd like to ask you now to please let me go as soon as possible.

*After he says this, silence hovers over the room. Prince BILYNSKY stares somewhere above everyone's heads, MRS. SPIDER glumly shakes her head, the GIRLS sit there with their mouths open, and ROSENROCH begins flipping through his book. Only the GUARDS continue eating, while the SERVANTS become faint shadows.*

OLIZAR: Did I say something inappropriate?

MRS. SPIDER: No, no! I think I am the one who did. Or perhaps all of us did ... Isn't that so, Mr. Rosenroch?

ROSENROCH (*peering into his book*): The story that we heard today should be a lesson to all of us, although we should not forget that it is only fiction, if not a complete lie. Isn't that so, Mr. Nosylovych? For there really aren't any galleys, or bondage, or mutinies in the world, but only that which is. That is, only the world we see before our eyes exists, while everything else is simply made-up stories, even if Mr. Nosylovych would try to convince us that all this did happen to him. Perhaps it was once so, but it isn't so anymore. Isn't that so, Mr. Nosylovych? I want to say that whatever happened to you is no more. Therefore all tales are inventions, and if that is so, I see no basis for forbidding them, as our guards have suggested.

BILYNSKY: Mr. Rosenroch is right. Please continue, Mr. Nosylovych.

OLIZAR: That mutiny actually took place. We armed ourselves with stones, shovels, axes, and swords, twelve of which Mr. Silvestre of Livorno gave us. Then Ivan again crept to the stern to set the powder afire, this time dragging with him burning coal wrapped in a rag ... He succeeded and a deafening explosion shook the galley.

*There is a stroke of lightning and a deafening roll of thunder behind the wall, so frightening that everybody cowers. PRINCE BILYNSKY jumps up, MRS. SPIDER covers her head with her hands, and the GIRLS plug their ears with their fingers. OLIZAR raises his hand to cross himself, but one of the GUARDS grabs his wrist and presses his hand to the table.*

THE GUARD: Proper etiquette here is not to cross oneself, sir.

OLIZAR: Why is that?

BILYNSKY *and* ROSENROCH *exchange glances.*

ROSENROCH: We are non-believers, sir. We consider ritual to be idolatry, pagan worship. Then again, since we are on this topic, and I do have a right to say this, we are not total non-believers. We do believe, not in the outer world and its universal power and truth, but in ourselves, in the power of us. Have I expressed myself clearly?

OLIZAR: It is strange in here.

MRS. SPIDER: That's simply because you aren't used to this yet. Your amazement will pass quickly. Don't be angry if things are perhaps not as you would expect. And we'll indulge you too. If you do something untoward—

ROSENROCH (*sternly*): That is not in our statute. Mrs. Spider, you are forgetting that we are not preachers of tolerance and that we demand firm adherence to the rules of our communal life.

OLIZAR: Would you allow me to read these rules, sir?

ROSENROCH: They are not to be read, but only to be believed. You'll learn them gradually by living among us.

OLIZAR: But I've asked permission to leave as soon as possible!

*Again silence hovers, heavy and sombre. Again lightning strikes, only less intensely. In the thundering twilight, BILYNSKY stirs.*

BILYNSKY: You've already managed to violate one of our laws. The law of gratitude. And you, I believe, you should be grateful to us for saving your life. I believe that we greeted you hospitably and are treating you honourably, as a guest, and just for that you should not affront us.

ROSENROCH: Don't bring everything up all at once, Mr. Bilynsky, not all at once.

MRS. SPIDER: Isn't that what I wanted to say? Earlier ... but no, forgive me! (*Covers her mouth.*)

BILYNSKY (*getting up*): Dinner is finished! The gong!

*The gong is struck, the SERVANTS quickly begin clearing the table, and then everyone leaves through their own door. OLIZAR looks at everything with wide-open eyes. When he is finally alone, he goes cautiously to each of the doors and pushes them. They are all locked except ROSENROCH'S, which gives way and reveals a small, stooped figure inside. His wide nose is forcing the nostrils wider, and there is a crooked smile on his lips. He is now holding two books under his arms.*

## Scene 6

ROSENROCH (*entering*): It appears to me, sir, that you are getting a little restless. I was instructed, therefore, to entertain you with intelligent conversation, because there is nothing more soothing for the soul than an intelligent a conversation.

*While saying this, he walks around the room and covers up the burning buttons with caps, which he takes out of his pocket.*

OLIZAR: What are you doing, sir?

ROSENROCH (*continuing to do what he was doing, putting his finger to his lips secretively and speaking only when the last light is covered*): I, of course, will engage in conversations with you that are required of me by my duties in this castle. But why, sir, should others' ears hear this? (*Laughs silently, opening his mouth wide.*) So, sir, one of my books is *Sefer Yezira*, or *The Book of Creation*, and the other is *Zohar*, or *The Book of Splendour*.<sup>1</sup> I have been reading these books for many years now, and I can say that their wisdom is above interest or disinterest. Did you wish to say something?

OLIZAR: I feel strange here among you. I don't understand everything here, and at times I even feel frightened. What type of people are you, Mr. Rosenroch?

ROSENROCH: We are good people who only wish good for us and the world. We're people who in our time also rebelled against the world because it is frightening. And we wanted to improve it, as does everyone who rebels. Sir, have you heard of Pico della Mirandola or Reuchlin?<sup>2</sup> They are our great teachers.

OLIZAR: Have you been living here long? And who are you?

ROSENROCH: We have another important teacher, Guillaume Postel.<sup>3</sup> Their teachings are the highest thing that the human spirit has created. (*While ROSENROCH is speaking, there is alarm atop the tower. One of the GUARDS there says something to the other, and both of them turn toward the interlocutors.*) We have our own concept of God, although we claim that he does not exist. Our own concept of the truth, because truth is what serves our scholars, and of justice, for justice is what, suits us. And the like! (*At that moment loud sounds come from the stairs as one of the GUARDS runs down them.*) So, our main deity is *En Sof*,<sup>4</sup> that is, nothing, infinity. Please comprehend what I am saying, for only at the abyss of infinity do we truly sense fear. Take a look—is the guard coming toward us?

OLIZAR: He is.

ROSENROCH: That means that our first lesson has ended.

A GUARD *appears in the doorway of the tower. He stands at attention, not moving.*

GUARD: Mr. Rosenroch!

ROSENROCH: Yes?!

GUARD: Are you aware that you did something that is not allowed?

ROSENROCH: I did everything according to our statute.

GUARD: But you've covered up the button lights.

ROSENROCH (*angrily*): You know very well that this too is foreseen and allowed by the statute.

GUARD: Yes, but we couldn't hear a thing up there (*pointing to the tower*).

<sup>1</sup> *Sefer Yetzira* is the "Book of Creation," the oldest known Hebrew text (3d–6th century AD) about white magic and cosmology. *Sefer ha-Zohar*, or *Zohar*, is the thirteenth-century "Book of Splendour," a classic Hebrew text of esoteric Jewish mysticism, or Kabbala, that extensively discusses the ten *sefirot* (divine emanations) of God the Creator (see also n. 5).

<sup>2</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) was an Italian Renaissance scholar and Platonist who was the first Christian scholar to use Kabbalistic doctrine in support of Christian theology. Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522) was a German humanist and classicist who defended the preservation and study of Hebrew literature. He wrote *De Rudimentis Hebraicis* (1506) and one of the principal expositions of Kabbala, *De arte Cabbalistica* (1517).

<sup>3</sup> Guillaume Postel (1510–81) was a Christian humanist who promoted Kabbala in France.

<sup>4</sup> *En Sof* or *Ain Sof*: "Emptiness" or "Holy Nothing," the Kabbalistic term for the infinite, unknowable God.

ROSENROCH: Well, that is not my fault. (*Again taking his books under his arms and shuffling along to his door*) It's the fault of your deaf and dumb ears, heh-heh!

*The door closes with a bang, hiding ROSENROCH. The GUARD hurriedly removes the caps from the little golden lights.*

GUARD (*removing the last cap*): And you should be aware: it is categorically forbidden to cover the buttons.

OLIZAR: Why?

GUARD: They protect us from fire. We're all terribly afraid of fire, and you should be too, sir.

*The GUARD walks away stiffly, and a moment later he slams shut the door to the tower. At that instant the door from MRS. SPIDER'S room opens and she walks in backwards pulling a net.*

## Scene 7

MRS. SPIDER: While our wiseacre befuddled you with his silly wisdoms, I did not waste time, sir, and wove a beautiful net for you. (*Claps her hand, and SERVANTS appear from everywhere.*) Hang this net above Mr. Nosylovych's bed.

*The SERVANTS start putting up the net.*

MRS. SPIDER (*to OLIZAR*): How do you like my work?

OLIZAR: Thank you for your trouble, Mrs. Spider. But why do I need a net?

MRS. SPIDER: Well, perhaps it's my thanks for the tale that you began telling us. And perhaps the net, besides other things, will protect you. You know yourself: every building is inhabited by goblins. (*Calling out*) Am I saying this correctly Mr. Rosenroch and Mr. Bilynsky? At times these demons, you know, attack a sleeping person, just like that, you know they fall on his face and may, God forbid, even smother him, you know, and I do so pity all of you! Those heartless ones have smothered a wanderer such as you to death, and he, the poor man, never finished telling us his story. I cried my eyes out then, believe me. I was so very, well, very sorry for him!

OLIZAR: What are you saying, madam?! Are you trying to frighten me? I am already getting frightened anyway—it's so strange in your castle, so quiet! Tell me, why is it so frightfully quiet here?

MRS. SPIDER: Don't ask so many questions! I'll say one thing: you are loved here. And I love you, because I want to hear the rest of your story. So, keep on living and breathing no one here will bother you!

OLIZAR: Didn't you ever leave this place, madam?

MRS. SPIDER: Is it possible to leave? I don't even know the words "to leave." Can the heart, for example, leave the body, or can an arm tear itself away from the body? Or, pardon me, can a leg, sir, go for a walk, God knows where without the body?

OLIZAR: Mrs. Spider, are you Prince Bilynsky's wife?

MRS. SPIDER: Who am I? (*Pondering*) I don't know whether I am free to say this. (*Loudly*) May I say this, Mr. Bilynsky? (*Listens, but all around there is only silence.*) No, I am not the princess.

*At this moment the door from HALSHKA'S room is thrown open, and HALSHKA appears. She is wearing heavy, dark clothing, her hair is tied up on her head, and her eyes are burning with anger. In the meantime, the SERVANTS have finished putting up the net and disappear quietly.*

## Scene 8

HALSHKA: Mrs. Spider, it's almost dinner time, yet you are still hanging around with your nets, which nobody needs!

MRS. SPIDER: But Halshka, they are not nets that nobody needs.

HALSHKA: You are meddling in things that are of no concern to you!

MRS. SPIDER: But I am protecting all of you! It's my job to do that!

HALSHKA: To protect us, but not to wag your tongue unnecessarily. Do you understand what I'm saying, Mrs. Spider?

MRS. SPIDER (*shuffling backwards to her door in fright*): But I didn't say anything. I didn't say anything! (*Leaves.*)

## Scene 9

*HALSHKA no longer pays attention to MRS. SPIDER, and suddenly she turns from being angry and annoyed to being kind, gentle, and smiling.*

HALSHKA: I would like to ask you, Mr. Olizar, whether you will come out to have supper with those dull old people tonight or whether, perhaps, we shall dine in the company of the young?

OLIZAR: I don't know whether that's allowed! As much as I understand the customs that exist in this castle—

HALSHKA (*softly*): Oh, I doubt whether you comprehend these customs yet. We'd be happy to include you in our youthful company, for these oldsters are unbearably dull.

OLIZAR (*warmly*): I feel I can trust you, milady.

HALSHKA (*sitting down on a stool*): Mrs. Spider has frightened you. She has not be quite of sound mind, and I would not advise you to listen to her prattle. We would be delighted to have you as our guest, and your tales are of interest to us. Especially the one about the bird-woman. Do I really look like her?

OLIZAR: Unbelievably so. The girl in my dreams—is it really possible?

HALSHKA: Well, sir, everything is possible in this world. But let's not bore each other with talk. Let's have fun and enjoy ourselves.

*She jumps down from the stool with ease clapping her hands, and THREE GIRLS flutter in one after the other through her door. They all have identical hairdos and clothing. They walk in step in a trained manner, smile the same way, and ceremoniously sit down at the table. THE SERVANTS begin bringing in various dishes.*

## Scene 10

HALSHKA: You may continue your tale, Mr. Olizar. We are really interested in it, yet those oldsters, with their statutes and rules, won't let us hear the rest of it.

OLIZAR: I am glad to have such listeners. And what I am about to tell you is not a fairy tale, as Mrs. Spider thinks. It is as true as the fact that I am a live human being ... Apty-Basha heard shouting and commotion on the deck, took out his sword and led his soldiers against us. He bellowed out to us: "You dogs, you traitors! Get back to your places, or else I'll cut your heads off!"

*At this moment a cry is heard from deep within the castle: it is shrill and sharp like that of a deer that is falling from a cliff into an abyss.*

OLIZAR: What was that?

HALSHKA (*smiling enchantingly*): That's our oldsters playing. Go on, continue. We find it so interesting.

*The GIRLS eat ravenously, drink thirstily, and from time to time invitingly bat their eyelashes at OLIZAR and smile.*

FIRST GIRL: Don't forget to have some food, sir. The chicken's fantastic!

SECOND GIRL: We caught these chickens ourselves, slaughtered them ourselves, and roasted them ourselves.

THIRD GIRL: You should appreciate our efforts and trouble.

HALSHKA: Drink this, Mr. Olizar. It'll make you feel good. And do go on, continue with your story, please.

OLIZAR: I threw myself directly at Apty-Basha. Oh, my dear Girls, you have no idea what a recent slave's anger is like. I threw myself at the accursed man with my sword and I pierced his belly with such force that our tormentor keeled over and my sword got stuck in the deck. It was then that I felt released from the oath of bondage.

HALSHKA: What's an oath of bondage?

OLIZAR: That is what turns a free person into a slave. Because of bondage, a person who lived according to his own will becomes a person who acts without a free choice. That slave gradually grows into our souls, he grows inside us, but not all of us are overtaken by him.

HALSHKA (*enthralled*): And were you, sir, one of those whom he could not overtake?

OLIZAR: I would like to think so. Because I became free ... The battle raged on the galley, the janissaries struggled fiercely, not for their lives but to the death, but we fought no worse than they did because we were fighting for freedom to the death.

*Again a shrill cry is heard. OLIZAR breaks off his narration and jumps up from his seat. He runs to the door and throws himself against it, but it's locked. THE GIRLS sit calmly at the table, turn towards him, and look at him with interest and cool smiles.*

HALSHKA: What's wrong, Mr. Olizar? Why did you rush to the door like that?

OLIZAR: Who locked your door?

HALSHKA: It's so that no one can bother us, sir!

OLIZAR: What was that cry?

HALSHKA (*calmly*): They are punishing Mrs. Spider. Now they see that she is out of her mind. She's gone completely mad with those nets of hers.



OLIZAR: And because a person is out of her mind she is to be punished?

HALSHKA: Of course. Because she is becoming dangerous. After all, it's our physician who prescribed such a cure. You know him—it's Mr. Rosenroch. He's a terrible bore, but he does some things well. That woman has frightened you and said unseemly things—so why should you be feeling sorry for her?

OLIZAR (*dejectedly sitting down on a stool*): I can't go on with my story.

FIRST GIRL: Then eat, sir.

SECOND GIRL: Our chickens are fantastic, fantastic.

THIRD GIRL: Roasted with our own hands!

*Again a heavy, stifled cry is heard, like the painful sighing of the earth. OLIZAR plugs his ears with his fingers. Then, on HALSHKA'S signal, THE GIRLS jump up from their places. One of them sits down at the psaltery, another takes down the lute, and the third assumes the pose of a singer. The music begins to flow, and the THIRD GIRL sings in a silvery voice. HALSHKA goes up to OLIZAR and ceremoniously sits down next to him. He rises, offers her his arm, and they begin a slow dance in time with the singing.*

THIRD GIRL (*singing*):

Look at how touched by the heavenly fire,  
The snow melts, filling the streams,  
Where a carriage once crossed the ice,  
A broken floe quietly sways ...

HALSHKA (*dancing*): Make merry, sir, make merry! You'll feel fine and warm. And don't listen to those cries—they're the unseemly games of our oldsters. Plug your ears, sir, with our singing and our music. What do we care about those old people? What do we care about those geezers? We are young, good-looking, and merry. Keep on dancing, sir, faster, faster!

FIRST GIRL (*singing*):

At night, the grove was covered with dew.  
From the bare tree branches long braids will grow,  
And when the stars bloom,  
The nightingale shall warmly greet the good spring.

HALSHKA (*dancing*): We like you, sir. That is why we want you to calm down. We want you to feel happy among us, we want you to feel content. Whatever goes on in the dark, leave it to the darkness: our oldsters also have a right to enjoy themselves as they wish, so let them be.

OLIZAR, *however, stops dancing. He goes to the centre of the stage, shuts his eyes, and the stage plunges into darkness. When the light reappears, the GIRLS and the SERVANTS are no longer onstage. Instead, a fearful calm takes over.*

## Scene 11

OLIZAR (*whispering loudly*): O Great Lord! Gracious God! Could it be that I am still a galley slave? Was there really no mutiny and no liberation, and was all this just in my imagination, in my dreams? Have I not freed myself yet from the oath of bondage,

have I not washed away the mark of the slave on my forehead with my enemy's blood? Help me, God! Help me, God! Come to me, O bird from an unknown island, I call you and beseech you—come to me!

*The light grows dim, the golden buttons glow. OLIZAR moves about the stage like a sleepwalker. He lights a candle and walks with it around the stage.*

OLIZAR: It was during nights like this that she came to me. Or, more truthfully, flew to me. The little white bird would beat against my window, would break through the walls, just to remind me that the world is wide! The world is not just a narrow corridor between grey walls. The world is a sunlit steppe. That bird smelled of freedom, the steppe wind, the sun, the path through the steppe, and wild flowers.

*He stops and listens. In the depths of the building the GIRLS are whispering.*

FIRST GIRL: I guess he didn't care for our chickens.

SECOND GIRL: He didn't pay much attention to us either.

THIRD GIRL: Oh well! I think he's depressed!

HALSHKA: Hush! Don't you know he can hear everything?

OLIZAR (*using the lit candle to look around*): Who's there?

*From the shadows the bent figure of ROSENROCH appears.*

## Scene 12

ROSENROCH: Did he frighten you? Heh-heh! It's me again. (*Gesturing that he wants to cover the little golden lights again, he walks about the stage putting lids on them.*) I have come to you to have our next discussion. Of course, this is with the consent and wishes of the rest of the inhabitants of our castle. But please, speak quietly so the guard does not come down here again. And extinguish the candle so that no one interrupts our talk. (*Walks about covering more lights, which immediately go out.*) Don't think that I can't sleep at night because of some particular liking for you—it is my duty to hold preparatory conversations with our guests, who come to us so rarely. I am simply forced to explain certain things to them, so that they don't encourage a revolt in our world here, as you once did on the galley. We're not stupid here. First of all, you should know that you will have to spend more than one night here, and even more than a hundred—that is why the discussion that I am initiating is mandatory for you.

OLIZAR: But sir, I don't intend to spend much time here. There is a long road ahead of me, and I hope to see my father while he's still alive.

ROSENROCH: Speak more softly ... For if they find out what we're talking about, the same punishment that Mrs. Spider had to endure today will await me. We live here like trees, sir. One tree cannot come to another tree, but they all make up a grove or a forest. I'll reveal one secret to you: you'll never leave this place.

OLIZAR (*frightened*): What do you mean I'll never leave this place?

ROSENROCH: Heh-heh! No one has ever left this household, and no one ever will.

OLIZAR: I don't understand.

ROSENROCH: I don't know what you think of us, but I'll reveal another secret to you: we all know quite well, as you do, that outside these walls is a wide open world. But we

don't allow such thoughts to arise in our heads. So we've decided that no one will ever leave this place.

OLIZAR: But I am not a person of your world. I am only your guest.

ROSENROCH: If it weren't for us, you would not be a live being at all. You'd be, heh-heh, a pile of stinking carrion. We brought you back to life, so from now on you belong to our world.

OLIZAR: But what if I don't choose to live with you?

ROSENROCH: What do you mean you might not choose to?

OLIZAR: Each human being has free will.

ROSENROCH: I am astonished at your naïveté, sir! Didn't you spend eight years in captivity? Did you not learn the obvious? Human beings do not have free will ... So, I urge you: the sooner you accept the fact that you won't leave here, the better it will be for you.

OLIZAR: But I managed to escape from my previous captivity.

ROSENROCH (*laughing quietly*): And are we forbidding you to escape? Try and see if you'll succeed!

OLIZAR: I'll succeed. For after all, every human being has free will—I believe that—

ROSENROCH: Heh-heh! Free will! Heh-heh! And I am telling you: you'll never leave this place. Heh-heh! Perhaps you are smarter than I am. Heh-heh! He wants to escape! Let him try! So, go on, escape. Escape, because here you'll be lost forever! Remember, though: whoever took an oath of bondage, shall never escape at all!

*With that OLIZAR glances around as if he is being persecuted, and suddenly he is struck by an unfathomable fear. A savage cry erupts from his chest, and he throws himself with all his might against the wall that surrounds the stage in a half-circle. He jumps up, grabs the edge of the wall, and falls down. Again he runs at the wall, jumps up, and falls again. He rushes at the wall for a third and a fourth time. From the tower kettledrums are heard: one of the GUARDS is drumming. At the same time a door in the wall opens, and all of the castle's inhabitants appear, except for the servants. THE GUARDS rush at OLIZAR and tie his hands behind his back. Torches are lit, throwing an uneven red light on everything that is happening. The inhabitants of the castle line up to form a procession. In the front are two GUARDS holding torches and a rope by which they drag OLIZAR. They are followed by Prince BILYNSKY, who is also carrying a torch, and then the pensive and ceremonious MRS. SPIDER and ROSENROCH. ROSENROCH graciously supports MRS. SPIDER by the arm. Behind them are the FOUR GIRLS in their evening clothes. The drum continues beating atop the tower, and everybody in the procession marches around the stage in step to the beat. They are jerking the rope and pulling OLIZAR by it, while he keeps tripping and falling.*

## Scene 13

OLIZAR: Allow me to say something.

*The GUARDS pull at the rope, and OLIZAR falls down again.*

BILYNSKY: Let him speak.

OLIZAR: My good people, why are you tormenting me? I haven't done any harm to any of you!

BILYNSKY (*seriously and solemnly*): Did you not take an oath of bondage there, on the galley?

OLIZAR: I did take such an oath, but that was an oath taken under duress.

ROSENROCH: We saved you from apparent death, so you belong to us, and have to live the way we do.

OLIZAR: But I am your guest, not your captive. And until now, no one has asked me whether I want to live such a life and whether I wish to remain here.

BILYNSKY: Perhaps we really did make a mistake. We should have treated you as a prisoner from the very beginning. Then you would have gotten used sooner to your new situation. Didn't Mr. Rosenroch warn you that it's forbidden to escape from here?

ROSENROCH: Did I ever!

*The GIRLS giggle and begin straightening out each other's clothes, as if what is going on does not affect them. MRS. SPIDER stands formally erect.*

OLIZAR: Mr. Rosenroch truly did warn me. But you are living human beings and you must understand me. I spent eight years in captivity, and then, overcoming the greatest of difficulties, I reached my native land—inadvertently I have become a prodigal son. I have no idea how long I am destined to live, but I want to reach my father's house. I want to fall at his feet and ask him to forgive all my sins, first and foremost for taking the oath of bondage. Dear people, please let me go! I'll pray for you for the rest of my life. Please let me go, I implore and beseech you.

*The GUARDS tug OLIZAR by the rope, and he crashes to his knees.*

ROSENROCH (*angrily*): You have violated our laws and must be punished!

*Again the kettledrum sounds, and the GUARDS grab the wall and slide it apart at once, disclosing a torture chamber flecked with pale light, with a rack and various implements of torture.*

ROSENROCH (*entering the torture chamber*): Take a look, you wicked man. These are clamps, thumbscrews, shackles, barnacles, and pliers, and through these tubes sulphur or molten lead is poured into the mouth. Take a good look. Here are hooks and pincers and truncheons with nails. They are terrific for tearing the skin. So, what will it be: are you guilty?

FIRST GUARD: Of course, he is guilty. He who is brought here is always guilty!

SECOND GUARD: And invariably admits his guilt.

BILYNSKY: He who has taken an oath of bondage can never be released from it.

MRS. SPIDER: Listen to them, sir, they're giving you good advice.

OLIZAR (*in despair*): But good people! You know quite well that I am not guilty of anything!

*The GUARDS drag him to the rack, throw the rope over the upper rung and tie it there, secure the ends, and tie OLIZAR'S feet to the wheel. The wood starts to creak, and a long, horrible shriek erupts from OLIZAR'S throat.*

OLIZAR: For God's sake! I'll ... I'll do anything ... I'll admit anything ... Whatever you want... I'll admit to anything! For God's sake!

*OLIZAR is freed from the rack, and he collapses to the floor.*

BILYNSKY: So, you want to say that you completely and fully admit your guilt?

OLIZAR: I admit it.

BILYNSKY: What are you guilty of?

OLIZAR: Of whatever you wish, that is what I am guilty of.

BILYNSKY: You wanted to escape?

OLIZAR: I wanted to escape.

BILYNSKY: Why? Did we not treat you with the respect you deserved?

OLIZAR: I wanted to see my father and mother.

BILYNSKY: But they are not in this world. And besides, there is no world beyond these walls.

OLIZAR: Perhaps not.

BILYNSKY: Did you not take an oath that you would never relinquish your state of bondage?

OLIZAR: I did.

MRS. SPIDER: In my opinion, you behaved dishonourably. I wove such a nice net for you and then was punished for it, yet you, you ingrate, didn't even want to finish telling your tale.

ROSENROCH: Gentlemen, I conducted two conversations with him in accordance with our customs, that is, our statute. That was enough for him to find out that no one has ever tried to escape from this castle. Whoever dares to do that will face terrible punishment.

GUARDS (*sounding like crows*): Punishment! Punishment!

BILYNSKY: Do you acknowledge that you were justly treated?

OLIZAR: I do!

ROSENROCH: The world outside our walls—you made it all up, didn't you?

OLIZAR: Yes, I made it up.

BILYNSKY (*slapping OLIZAR on the shoulder*): Of course, it was just a tale. An interesting one, to be sure, but such things cannot really exist. I am pleased with you—you are not as stubborn and obdurate as some. Among us, within our nice and kind family, you'll live well. You just need to realize that we are a nice and kind family. I've thought about it all and decided that we are willing to give you back that which you had in your fairy tale. Is that not so, Gentlemen?

ROSENROCH *and* MRS. SPIDER *nod their heads joyously, and the GIRLS clap their hands. Only the GUARDS remain stern and unmoved.*

OLIZAR: But I don't think I fully understand you, Mr. Bilynsky.

ROSENROCH: It's all very simple. The problem is that you've lost, how to put it ... the sense of bondage. And that is what pushes you to make unwise moves.

MRS. SPIDER: Exactly, exactly, and you do yourself harm. I feel so sorry for you!

BILYNSKY: You have also forgotten your oath of bondage. Therefore, to convince you that we are kind to you, we'll seat you at the oar.

MRS. SPIDER: Exactly, exactly. Then we'll be able to listen to the rest of your tale.

OLIZAR (*hopefully*): And then what?

BILYNSKY: And then? (*Glances around at everyone while they stand there without moving.*) Mrs. Spider, do you know what will happen then?

MRS. SPIDER (*good-naturedly*): Then we'll let you go.

ROSENROCH: But don't forget, Mr. Olizar, that beyond these walls is a sea of calamity, which calls to people like you and then consumes them. Is it not humane to warn you of this? We have all become convinced that higher freedom is found in its very absence, in the strict sense that it is not necessary, therefore, to be truly free, it is best to think that freedom is the unswerving obeisance to duty. Then the desire for superfluous

whims and enticements will disappear. You'll get to know work for the benefit of us all and for yourself, and in self-sacrificing work you'll find freedom that is real, not imaginary. You'll achieve that when your goal is clear and your task is well defined. And besides, what more do you need than work and some legitimate diversions? Perhaps it is still hard for you to grasp this great wisdom because you have not endured enough suffering. But you will have enough time to wise up. We are relying on your good sense, Mr. Nosylovych!

OLIZAR (*raising his head*): I have endured a lot of tortures, Mr. Rosenroch. I have been punished more than once, and I have learned the rules of being a slave quite well.

ROSENROCH (*annoyed*): You have learned it poorly, Mr. Nosylovych. You should remember that you are not a slave but a free man, so free that there can be no freer man than that. Only then will you stop being involved in lunatic acts. And to illustrate this more concretely, we should let you experience a hot iron next to your skin. Or can we perhaps do without that?

A GUARD *is already pulling out a red-hot iron from the fire.*

OLIZAR (*jumping to his feet*): No, not that, for God's sake! I understand! (*Keeps walking in a circle, stopping by each inhabitant of the castle and shouting.*) I am free! I am free! I am free! I am free! Lord God, have mercy upon me—I am free!

*An uneven yellowish-red glow from the torches falls across the stage.*

*Curtain*

## Act Two

### At the Oar

#### Scene 1

*The stage setting is unchanged except for an opening in the wall where an oar has been inserted. By the opening is a bench for an oarsman, next to which are chains by which OLIZAR will be chained to the wall. It is nighttime. OLIZAR is asleep stretched out on the bed and moaning: he is dreaming of the BIRD from an invisible island. The BIRD breaks through the wall as if it were paper, and her glow illuminates the entire room. The BIRD is large, white, and human-like. She removes her white wings and hangs them on the wall, pulls off her beaked mask, and lets her splendid hair cascade down to her shoulders. She is a beautiful woman who looks very much like HALSHKA. She removes her white coat and her shoes, which look like birds' feet. OLIZAR is tossing in agitation on the bed, while the BIRD-WOMAN sits down next to him and calms him down with caresses.*

OLIZAR (*dreaming*): Your body is young and tanned. Your thighs are like golden music. Your brow is like a song sung by a man in love. Your eyes are blue like two lakes in the steppe. Your lips are like two tulips in that steppe. Your cheeks are like a lover's whisper in the dusk. Your arms are like swans floating on the two lakes. Your belly is

like a rain-starved valley sowed with wheat. Your hair is like quiet winds. And your womb is a gold-bearing orchard.

BIRD-WOMAN (*gently*): I am with you again, my beloved. Fear nothing! I am entering into your nights again because you are a captive once more. Again, I am your dream, because only the dream of a captive can create me.

OLIZAR: You appear from thin air, you white-feathered girl. You walk along a silvery path that winds through the entire world. Its beginning is in the orchard where I am wandering, and its end is at the threshold where my grey-haired father sits waiting for me while I am lost in the impenetrable wilderness of our mother earth.

BIRD-WOMAN: I'll tell you what he's thinking, your father sitting on the front veranda. "My son!" he whispers. "Son! I cannot die," he whispers, "without seeing you again. My lips and my eyes are dry, desiccated," he whispers, "and I fear that I won't last long enough to see you. My beard is grey like the reeds broken by the wind in the field. My head hurts from the whispering of that wind, for it whispers that it has long been time for me to die!"

*OLIZAR rises like a sleepwalker and walks over to the oar. He sits down at the bench, fastens the chains, and begins moving the oar while mumbling something. The BIRD-WOMAN slowly goes up to him, stands behind him, and raises her arms above his head.*

BIRD-WOMAN: When you sit down at the oar, you think that you are floating toward the place where your path ends. So, keep on rowing, keep rowing! And when you get so tired that your arms hang down like dead snakes, call out to me, but ever so gently, so that I can hear your cry. Then that dark window of yours, which was boarded up by the black man, will open, and the island will become real in the dusk. So, keep on rowing, keep rowing! In that dusk—in your thoughts, in that moon—in your cry, I'll be born and I'll come flying wherever you are, on whatever salty and bitter seas!

OLIZAR (*grumbling*): Only peace will save me! Only the certainty that my ship is really sailing in the world, even though there is only one oarsman aboard and even though he has only one oar. But I am not losing hope, my bird!

*Suddenly the gong sounds, causing the walls to shake. The BIRD bolts in fright, grabs her clothing, wings, and shoes that look like bird's feet, and breaks through to the other side of the wall. A pale light begins spreading through the room. OLIZAR rests his head on his arms, which are holding the oar, and becomes still. The door of PRINCE BILYNSKY'S room is already open, and his barrel-like figure appears in it.*

## Scene 2

BILYNSKY: Have I come too early to see you, sir? For some reason, I did not sleep well today, and I want to be certain that you don't hold a grudge against us.

OLIZAR (*beginning to row again*): I don't hold a grudge!

BILYNSKY: It was I who issued the order not to have an overseer with a whip standing over you. First of all, it was out of respect to you, and secondly, we don't have the manpower for this. We are all unbelievably busy here, sir. For example, I keep playing chess, because I have an important goal: to play a game where all the moves are infallible, whatever the opponent's moves may be.

OLIZAR: This really is a great undertaking, Mr. Bilynsky.

BILYNSKY: Indeed! I am telling you this only because you are gradually becoming one of us. Mr. Rosenroch is a learned man. He is the one who has substantiated, and keeps on substantiating the most truthful, most infallible knowledge about the world and its laws. All of us, even the women, study his teachings conscientiously, as you will too.

OLIZAR: Do you need my consent for this?

BILYNSKY: No! The regulations by which we live here are not submitted for our consideration, but must be carried out. Mrs. Spider is our famous weaver. She protects all of us like a mother, feels sorry for us, and cares for us because she is the mistress of the castle. The guards stand guard.

OLIZAR: Whom do they guard? And from whom?

BILYNSKY: They guard all of us as well as themselves. From ourselves. Very rarely do we have visitors. (*Suddenly looking around*) Don't think that we are so stupid that we consider your tale to be invented. However, our laws forbid us to admit that there is another world besides ours—as you already have been told, I believe.

OLIZAR: But everyone knows that I must have come from somewhere. After all, you even station one of the guards facing the steppe.

BILYNSKY: That is true. But you should not be thinking about this. Our teaching is built on faith, not on comprehension. That is why we say that beyond the castle there is a void. When fate sends us a guest, we consider his narratives to be fairy tales.

OLIZAR: So where are all those who came here before me?

BILYNSKY (*after a pause*): I can't answer all of your questions. Your kind are like wild animals, and it is difficult to make you get used to our laws ... There was one here ... But no, I can't tell you about this, sir, because then I'll be tortured.

OLIZAR: But you are the master of the castle!

BILYNSKY: The laws apply to me just as they do to all the others, and perhaps even more strictly.

OLIZAR: And those golden buttons—what are they?

BILYNSKY: You should already know what they are. Didn't Mr. Rosenroch explain them to you? Don't touch them—they help us to live together. Everything that you say we can all hear, and vice versa ... Now as to the girls. If, perhaps, one of them is to your liking, don't hold back. That is why girls are girls—to be liked. I won't object if you get together with the young people, or with one of the girls ... Did I say anything I shouldn't have, Mrs. Spider and Mr. Rosenroch?

*The doors of Mr. ROSENROCH'S room and MRS. SPIDER'S room open, and both of them enter calmly and sit down by the wall. Then the door of the GIRLS' room opens, and they fly in like butterflies and, laughing, sit down. The door of the GUARDS' room opens, and they enter and stand frozen.*

### Scene 3

BILYNSKY: You may continue your tale, Mr. Olizar. And you don't have to stop rowing—let it look natural, natural!

OLIZAR: Then I'll tell you about our mutiny one more time. Every slave dreams of it, though he doesn't always dare to mutiny. This spark remains alive even in the most down-



trodden being if he does not live according to his own will. A mutiny is like a fire that is blind and indiscriminating. That is why it burns the guilty and the innocent, the wise and the foolish.

FIRST GUARD (*to BILYNSKY*): Your Grace, I think that he's trying to spread harmful ideas, rather than tell his story.

BILYNSKY: Tell your story, only without such introductions.

OLIZAR: Very well. We fought like madmen: we clobbered and chopped, and stabbed. Some of the Turks hid between the sails, and when they were dragged out of there, they fell to their knees and became the captives' captives. Only eight of the heathens, together with the son of Apty-Basha, escaped in a half-sunken boat, and we knew that they would not stay afloat long.

*The wind begins wailing and blows through the artillery room, giving rise to a dry whistling sound. The clothing on OLIZAR and his listeners begin to tremble. ROSENROCH rests his chin on his hands, staring until his eyes glisten like those of a young man.*

ROSENROCH: And what happened next, next, Mr. Olizar?

OLIZAR: After that we were free. Joyfully we sailed the sea singing songs.

*He listens. Music strikes up and the singing of a powerful male choir erupts. The wind howls, wails, and whistles. The GIRLS huddle together. MRS. SPIDER opens her mouth wide in astonishment. OLIZAR suddenly jumps up from his place, rattles his chains thunderously, and stamps his foot on the deck.*

OLIZAR: Hey, did we ever sing and dance then! (*Stomps his heels, jingling the iron, and the sounds of a salty and joyful song burst from his throat.*)

Whoever is free is not in pain,

He's strong, sturdy, and bold.

Oh, freedom, our fate!

Oh, fate, our freedom!

Oh, wind, tear the grey clouds,

Let us sing heartfelt songs.

Oh, freedom, our fate!

Oh, fate, our freedom!

*OLIZAR'S eyes are on fire. He does not see the terror on MRS. SPIDER'S face, the anxiety in the PRINCE'S gaze, or the GIRLS' excitement. ROSENROCH looks at him incredulously and trembles as if in a fever. Suddenly two streams of tears begin flowing from his eyes. OLIZAR falls exhausted on the bench. Then, when BILYNSKY beckons, a GUARD walks up to OLIZAR and unlocks his chains.*

OLIZAR: Are you letting me go?

MRS. SPIDER: It's lunchtime, sir. Besides that ...

BILYNSKY: Besides that, you freed yourself from the fetters on the galley, although no one had released you from your oath of bondage.

ROSENROCH: As far as I'm concerned, I don't mind if we are a little late for lunch. Perhaps we should allow Mr. Olizar to continue with his story. So, what happened next? Well?

MRS. SPIDER: But Mr. Rosenroch, you're forgetting our statute's regulations. One should not complete the story at one sitting, because then ... well, you know quite well what happens then.

OLIZAR: What does happen then?

BILYNSKY (*angrily*): Mrs. Spider just can't learn to hold her tongue.

MRS. SPIDER (*indignantly*): I can so! I didn't say anything that he'd understand. Nevertheless, it is my duty to remind Mr. Rosenroch to stick to the rules. As the custodian of this castle, I have the right to do this.

OLIZAR (*thoughtful*): Let's see... What happened after that? We took over the Turks' galley by luring them into the hold. Thus, we had our own captives, and we sat them at the oars. However, since there were not enough oarsmen, we also took turns rowing. We were no longer chained, but we tried as hard as we could—to do a good job without an overseer and a whip.

BILYNSKY (*becoming interested*): Are you saying you rowed more diligently when you were unchained?

OLIZAR: Yes, because work that is willingly done is easier and more effective than the work a captive is forced to do.

BILYNSKY (*to the GUARDS*): From now on, Mr. Nosylovych should not be chained anymore. We had no idea that oarsmen can also work unchained.

OLIZAR: And how! We were more conscientious than captives. We intended to get to Italy and give our wonderful galley as a gift to Pope Urban the Eighth. But on the seventh day we were struck by a storm.

*The wind is blowing outside the walls. Everybody sits without moving. Only ROSENROCH stirs and begins rubbing his forehead.*

ROSENROCH (*sadly*): Autumn is approaching. When such a wind begins to blow, it means that autumn is approaching.

MRS. SPIDER: And you get ill in the autumn, Mr. Rosenroch. Should I brew some herbs for you?

ROSENROCH (*shaking his head and rubbing his forehead incessantly*): I am quite well, Mrs. Spider.

MRS. SPIDER: Nevertheless, I'll prepare a brew for you. Just don't throw it out as you did the last time, but drink it.

ROSENROCH (*pensively*): Autumn wafts with melancholy winds. When such winds blow, mushrooms grow exceptionally well and tree trunks begin to rot. During such winds the bark falls off trees.

MRS. SPIDER: That's wonderful! From the bark, mushrooms, and tree trunks, all chopped finely, I'll prepare a brew for you, Mr. Rosenroch! But enough of these tales for now, for Mr. Rosenroch is feeling ill. (*Even stamps her foot.*)

BILYNSKY (*rising noisily*): Fine. You are right, Mrs. Spider. Let us disperse.

*All exit through their respective doors. Only ROSENROCH remains for a while.*

## Scene 4

ROSENROCH: Doesn't your head hurt, Mr. Nosylovych?

OLIZAR: The calluses on my hands hurt, and so do the old wounds on my body.

ROSENROCH (*whispering*): Listen, Mr. Nosylovych, why have you been telling us all this? Do you think that a rebellion might be possible here, too? (*Begins laughing and then cries out and grabs his head.*)

OLIZAR: Why would it not be possible?

ROSENROCH: So, you are secretly expecting it. (*Giggling*) You are a naïve and strange man.

OLIZAR: Why naïve?

ROSENROCH: You see, I agree with you that every slave hopes to be free. But there is another element here: once he achieves freedom, he can't forget his bondage.

OLIZAR: I don't quite see what you mean, sir!

ROSENROCH: I don't mean to say anything in particular. Just that a freed slave does not rebel, even when his arms are chained.

OLIZAR: How can he be free when his arms are chained?

ROSENROCH: Well, you see, one could convince him that they are not chains, but ... bracelets. Golden ones, silver ones, or even iron ones—would it be hard? If these bracelets are attractive, that is easier to do. If they're ugly, all one has to do is to convince the slave that they're attractive. And when each man is given various kinds of bracelets, they can be viewed as designations of rank.

OLIZAR: What are you getting at?

ROSENROCH (*moaning*): Nothing. My head hurts terribly! Oh, how my head hurts. And when my head hurts, Mr. Nosylovych, I begin prattling nonsense. Where is that devilish Mrs. Spider with her damn herbs?!

*He grasps his head and leaves with a moan. The wind howls. OLIZAR listens with caution. And then voices are heard.*

## Scene 5

ROSENROCH'S VOICE: Adam Kadmon, created by the Sefirot. *Keter* is the crown, *hokhmah* and *binah* the eyes, *hesed* and *din* the arms, *tiferet* the torso, *netzah* and *od* the hips, *yesod* and *malkhut* the legs. And they comprise Adam Kadmon.<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Spider, my head hurts! I can't stand this pain! Mrs. Spider!

MRS. SPIDER'S VOICE: I'll brew those herbs, I will, my dear old man, but so far I have only water. I need to get some bark and bits of rotten stump. And do find some mushrooms, do you hear me? Mushrooms!

ROSENROCH'S VOICE: Tiferet is the wind that blows from the steppe! Mrs. Spider, do you remember that tree that used to grow here? From its stump one could get some bark and decayed wood.

*The clatter of footsteps is heard. Someone is using the squeaking, wooden stairs to go somewhere. Someone is breathing heavily, moaning, and whimpering. It's probably ROSENROCH. THE GIRLS begin whispering and start giggling. ROSENROCH'S door opens abruptly, and the oldster appears with his finger raised to his lips. He tiptoes across the room and covers up the golden buttons.*

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<sup>5</sup> *Keter, hokhma, binah, hesed, din tiferet, netzah, hod, yesod, and malkhut* are the ten *sefirot* (divine emanations or powers.) by which God the Creator was said to be manifest. They are symbolized by the body parts of Adam Kadmon, the "primordial man." Kabbalists used them as one of their principal subjects for mystical contemplation.

## Scene 6

ROSENROCH: I need to exchange a few words with you, sir. Otherwise my head will split. You've been here for a while now, so I would really like to know, um ... How do you like our castle?

OLIZAR: It is a strange castle.

ROSENROCH (*getting up and proudly pushing out his chest*): I came up with everything that's in it. And do you know, sir, there is nothing new under the sun that is only beneficial to humanity. It pained me that human beings are so alone, so distant even from those close to them. Just like us. We used to gather only for meals, and the rest of the time we used to spend alone. Now we guard each other like dogs. We try to hide from each other, but that is not possible. So we hate rather than love one another. But I wanted love, sir, not hate.

OLIZAR *sits down on the bench. He straightens up and looks fixedly at ROSENROCH.*

ROSENROCH: I frequently used to have great ideas, and I was pleased by that. But now I am beginning to fear great ideas. You have probably guessed that after we installed those buttons, we were forced to build a torture chamber. Now, sir, our life is a torment, but we have to go on living this way.

OLIZAR: That's easily solved. The world is large. So why don't you part company, and that will be the end of your problems.

ROSENROCH (*sorrowfully*): We can't part company anymore, sir. I wanted us to live freely just as you hope to live. However, it turned out badly. We started to torment each other. While living separately, there is no need to rub tightly against each other, and thus the friction isn't great. But if you live together, even the smallest inequalities hurt. That is why the torture chamber became necessary.

OLIZAR: So get together, talk everything over, and arrange to live differently.

ROSENROCH: We won't do that, because we've gone too far. We watch each other much too much. And if anyone would want to change something, he would be seized like a rebel and subjected to torture. How about you, do you no longer have a desire to escape?

OLIZAR: The blood of a captive has begun flowing in me again. But I am afraid that it is only for the time being. I am afraid that some kind of bird in the sky will suddenly awaken the longing in me, and then no reasoning will hold me back.

ROSENROCH: The fact that you and I are here together is a violation for which we can be tortured. We are only allowed to meet as a group. In addition, the girls are allowed to come to the men. But we, that is, the men, are infertile, and because of us, so are the girls. That is why we are so glad when outsiders show up—perhaps then the girls might bear children.

OLIZAR: But will that save you?

ROSENROCH: I don't know. More than one outsider has stayed here, but to no avail. Perhaps, we didn't behave properly? This is why my head hurts, sir. Do you understand? And it also hurts because I, whether I want to or not, am beginning to believe in the veracity of your narrative. I am beginning to believe that we do live on a tiny island, that it would be better to leave it and then a great world would open up before our eyes. Is this not so, sir?

OLIZAR (*ardently*): Yes! There is a great, fascinating, infinite world with no end in sight. Where one can breathe fully.

ROSENROCH (*laughing*): Excuse me, but this is where you're lying. Are there no torture chambers in that world? And were you not chained to a galley? Did you not rebel?

OLIZAR: I did rebel, Mr. Rosenroch. And there really are torture chambers there. But I had hope there.

ROSENROCH: Ha, ha! I thought so. And just what is your hope? The opportunity to destroy that world? I have thought and thought about that. A world that can be destroyed is no longer a world. No, my dear man, perhaps what you are saying is the truth, but for the time being I prefer to live in a world without hope. For nothing will destroy it!

*Again he begins moaning, grabs at his head, and then turns to OLIZAR.*

ROSENROCH: Remove the covers from the lights and take them. Let them replace your passion. At least you'll know that someday you'll be able to exchange a few words freely with someone.

*Again he moans or laughs, and disappears into the dark opening of his door. At that moment the gong sounds, announcing lunch. And again the castle's inhabitants come out from all the doors, and phantomlike SERVANTS begin bringing in food.*

## Scene 7

BILYNSKY: You may go on with your story, Mr. Olizar!

OLIZAR: Seventeen of our oars broke, and we were forced to go to Messina in Spain, where we left our galley and all the goods. The Spaniards called us to the palace and placed us under guard. We even had to buy our water there. All our requests to be released were in vain.

BILYNSKY: So you were not free for very long?

OLIZAR: They wanted us to enter the service of the Spanish king. They even offered high pay. But all of us had gotten a taste of freedom, and we were all eager to go home. Then they took all our goods, tore off our clothes, gave us beggar's rags instead, and only then issued a letter of release.

MRS. SPIDER: And I thought they chained you to the oars again, as captives.

*Quiet and pale, ROSENROCH sits without touching his food. He looks at his hands, in which he keeps twisting, unfolding, and folding a bird's or bat's wing. Everyone begins staring at the wing. Noticing this, ROSENROCH startles and hides the wing in his pocket.*

BILYNSKY: That's a funny toy you have, Mr. Rosenroch.

ROSENROCH: I'll get all of you one of these, if you wish. They're good for fanning oneself. (*Takes out the wing and waves it like a fan.*) Is it ever hot!

MRS. SPIDER: How can it be hot in the fall, Mr. Rosenroch? After all, the fallen leaves give off such a sad scent.

ROSENROCH (*exasperated*): I have lost my sense of smell. Ever since this man here (*poking OLIZAR*) began telling his lunatic stories, I can't smell anything.

BILYNSKY: Continue, sir.

OLIZAR: We crossed the whole of Europe half-naked and barefoot, begging for bread and water, which we did not always get. So we were forced to snatch some food by force, and then we were pursued by posses. Some of us lost their lives along those roads.

ROSENROCH: Quite the nice freedom in that wide world. Wonderful freedom!

BILYNSKY: I also don't envy you your freedom, Mr. Olizar.

OLIZAR: That was not freedom yet—we were still fighting for it. Real freedom can be felt only in one's native land and in the home of one's own father.

ROSENROCH (*jumping up*): I can't listen to this! I can't!

BILYNSKY (*coldly*): I did not give you permission to get up and disperse.

ROSENROCH (*sarcastically*): And what if my head aches?

MRS. SPIDER (*gets up also*): When a person is sick, we should help him. I am going with you, old man. I have the right to do this, because I am still the mistress of this house.

HALSHKA: Why don't you go too, Prince. Meanwhile we'll dance for a while with Mr. Nosylovych.

FIRST GIRL: Let those bores leave us alone.

SECOND GIRL: Phooey! The old fossils!

BILYNSKY (*turning red*): I did not give permission to disperse yet.

*However, ROSENROCH scoots through his door. MRS. SPIDER runs after him, but ROSENROCH manages to lock the door. With all her might, MRS. SPIDER begins pounding on the door with her fists.*

MRS. SPIDER: Come to your senses, sir! You know what awaits you! Come to your senses, I beg of you, otherwise I won't be able to treat you and your pain.

*At that moment the kettledrums are struck atop the tower. The unoccupied GUARDS and BILYNSKY jump from their seats at the table and begin bustling about the stage.*

## Scene 8

BILYNSKY: Where is he? Where?

ROSENROCH'S VOICE: I am here, Prince!

*ROSENROCH appears on the partially ruined tower. He has inserted his arms into large wings similar to those of a bat or a bird. He spreads them and laughs shrilly.*

MRS. SPIDER: Come down right now! What are you up to, you madman!

ROSENROCH: I won't come down, Mrs. Spider. Do you think I climbed up here to entertain you? Ha, ha! Or perhaps time has come for me to leave you? I am not so stupid not to know that no one can leave this house on foot, but one can fly away from it! Ha, ha! Do you know what I see beyond the walls? A huge, boundless field. It's so vast that our whole castle looks like a poppy seed. You are only ants in the face of the great world, so I say to you: drop dead right here, drop dead, although none of you, except for this newcomer, will ever drop dead!

*He spits three times from above, the GIRLS cry out, and MRS. SPIDER begins wailing.*

MRS. SPIDER: He's gone mad! Oh my, oh my! The wisest one among us has gone mad. Save the poor man! Oh, my, oh, my!

ROSENROCH *suddenly stops laughing. He flaps his wings and hurtles downward, right into the net above OLIZAR'S bed. He begins jumping up and down on it.*

ROSENROCH: Oh! Ooh! I'm flying! I'm flying! I'm flying and will fly away from here! The devil himself won't be able to keep me any longer in this madhouse, which I myself created. Oh! Ooh! I'm flying. Oh, I'm flying. Ha, ha, ha! Oh! Ooh!

*However, he miscalculated and shoots out of the net, falling directly at the GUARDS' feet. One of them calmly puts his foot on him, while another holds down his writhing legs. The kettle drums on the tower sound.*

MRS. SPIDER *wails again as if she is singing with her mouth wide open. She beats her chest, tears at her hair, falls to the floor, gets up, wrings her hands, pours dust on her head, and sings again with her mouth wide open.*

BILYNSKY (*calmly*): That's enough, Mrs. Spider. You did all you were supposed to do, and now let's form a row. Mr. Olizar, you will be behind Mrs. Spider—that is your place.

*The PRINCE goes first. He is followed by MRS. SPIDER, her hair a mess, then OLIZAR, and the indifferent GIRLS. Meanwhile the GUARDS bind ROSENROCH'S arms, shove a rope between them, and put a noose around his neck. ROSENROCH tries to say something, but the GUARDS tug on the rope and drag him away. Their faces look as if carved from wood. The procession ceremoniously approaches the wall. The GUARDS slide it apart, and again the torture chamber appears, suffused by a pale light. OLIZAR is paralyzed by terror. He can't take it anymore and suddenly falls to his knees and bends down. As if weeping, a shudder passes through his body.*

## Scene 9

BILYNSKY: Get up, sir!

MRS. SPIDER: Perhaps he is in pain. Sir! Are you ill? Tell them that they were wrong to think that you're feeling sorry for that criminal, that maniac and madman. Isn't that right?

OLIZAR (*raising his head*): I beg you! I implore you! There's no need for torture ... I implore you, I can't take this ... He hasn't done anything bad. He hasn't. There's no need for torture!

BILYNSKY: There, you see, Mrs. Spider? And you feel sorry for him. All the trouble you are causing us with this unnecessary and futile pity. Explain it to him, Mrs. Spider!

MRS. SPIDER: Come to your senses, Mr. Olizar! (*Whispering*) Don't rave, sir, or everything will end badly for you. It would be better if you claimed to be ill, because we also punish those who feel sorry for a criminal. We have a law here, sir, that whenever you feel sorry for a criminal, you yourself are declared to be a criminal. And why would you want that? For then we'd be forced to torture you too.

OLIZAR: But I haven't done anything wrong!

MRS. SPIDER: We want to believe you, Mr. Olizar. Perhaps you really haven't done anything wrong, but how can we make sure that you don't have any bad intentions? How can we ascertain that you have not been meeting secretly with this deceiver, this maniac, this lunatic, this good-for-nothing mad dog, and were not having forbidden discussions? We want to believe you because we hope you will become one of us. If you help us, then no one will touch you!

OLIZAR: How can I help you?

MRS. SPIDER: Well, at least spit at the guilty one. Despise him, as we all do, and if that is too hard for you (*whispering again*) then just pretend that you despise him! But do it so we will all see and be convinced.

ROSENROCH: You will spit at me. Right, Mr. Nosylovych? Spit at me and you'll remain pure and without sin. Isn't that so? Go ahead, spit, you torturer! There's no need to pretend you are a do-gooder.

*The GUARDS seize ROSENROCH and drag him to the ladder. OLIZAR just stands there dejected.*

MRS. SPIDER (*shrieking*): Spit at him!

*She goes up to ROSENROCH and spits at him. Then OLIZAR looks about and suddenly begins to run away. But a GUARD trips him, and in an instant another GUARD jumps on his back. They tie him up and drag him to the ladder. He yells and wriggles, but they tie him down to the ladder. The wheel begins creaking and a savage shriek erupts from OLIZAR'S chest. Next to him they are stretching ROSENROCH in the same manner, and he too shrieks frantically.*

OLIZAR: I can't take it, I can't! Let me go! I haven't committed any crime! I'll do anything ... you say.

*They put OLIZAR in front of ROSENROCH. The GUARD holds his hands, which are tied behind his back.*

BILYNSKY: Spit at the criminal!

*The SECOND GUARD is getting ready to place a mask on ROSENROCH'S face. The GUARD uses a pipe, down which molten lead can be poured into ROSENROCH'S throat.*

MRS. SPIDER: Spit at him, spit at him! He'll be in such searing pain. Even a drop of moisture, even spittle will help him. You're a captive, sir. Do you really want that lead to be poured down your throat too?

*And OLIZAR spits—actually he only makes a spitting sound—to perform the ritual. Then, exhausted, he collapses in the arms of the GUARD. The stage goes dark.*

## Scene 10

*When lights come back on, OLIZAR is lying on the bed under the net, and MRS. SPIDER is dabbing his head with a wet towel.*

MRS. SPIDER: You see where this has led you? It takes such a long time to break you. I am telling you this with heartfelt sympathy: you are living here, and will be living here for a long time, so go to the trouble of learning the laws by which we exist here. Mr. Rosenroch has always been our teacher, but until he comes to his senses ... You men can be so stupid!

OLIZAR: You mean Rosenroch is alive?

MRS. SPIDER: Why shouldn't he be alive? You newcomers are like that ... But what am I saying! I feel sorry for you all, because you're all such wretches here even though you live in such a beautiful castle. You're all like children without a mother, and who should be your mother, if not me?

OLIZAR: You want to be my mother, too?



MRS. SPIDER: Perhaps. I don't really know. But wait, I do know: you too are my child.

OLIZAR: Are the girls your children too?

MRS. SPIDER: Both the girls and the guards. That's why we don't allow them to mate, since they may be brothers and sisters.

OLIZAR: And who is their father? The Prince?

MRS. SPIDER: Maybe yes and maybe no. Who knows? (*Sighing*) Or perhaps both of them are the fathers—the Prince and Rosenroch. Or perhaps both the Prince and Rosenroch are my children. I don't know for sure. I look at you, and it seems to me that you too are my son. Is that not possible?

OLIZAR: Thank you for your trouble, Mrs. Spider.

MRS. SPIDER: Don't mention it! Here, I brewed some helpful herbs for you. You'll be back on your feet in no time. By nightfall, you'll be alright. Here, drink up. You'll feel better and you'll forget what was hurting you.

OLIZAR drinks. All around him streaks of colourful light and bright spots begin to move.

OLIZAR (*deliriously*): What a beautiful life!

MRS. SPIDER (*rising*): You see?! I told you everything would be fine. Just don't think that evil people have gathered here. No, sir. The Prince was so upset when he saw you were unconscious. For the time being, he has allowed you not to sit at the oar. The girls cried. They shed bitter tears because, silly them, they thought that you, like the others ... But why am I saying that?! And the guards carried you so carefully in their arms. And why did Mr. Rosenroch enter into forbidden discussions with you? Because he likes you, he does! Well, off I go, and you rest. Rest!

*SHE leaves quietly, tiptoeing because OLIZAR is lying down, his eyes wide open, and all around him colourful streaks of light are moving and the world is rocking like a boat.*

## Scene 11

OLIZAR: Everything is splendid! Much better than in that real slave labour. Don't I have a job? Don't they feed me well, don't they care for me? And at night I even have a woman! Are you still here, Mrs. Spider?

*But MRS. SPIDER is not there. Instead WHITE BIRD has broken through the wall. The BIRD-WOMAN rushes to him and begins kissing, caressing, and comforting him. But he pushes her away and sits up on the bed.*

## Scene 12

OLIZAR: Shoo! Shoo, you she-devil! Don't you know that everything is splendid! Do you hear me, Mrs. Spider, and all of you? Everything here is splendid, splendid, damn it, super-splendid! I am well fed and well taken care of. Everything is unbelievably super-splendid and ultra-splendid!

BIRD-WOMAN: Come to your senses, my darling. It's me, the one you always called out to when you were in captivity, the one you loved, and who loved you! Come to your senses, my darling!

OLIZAR: Shoo! I don't know whether I am drunk or just asleep, but everything is splendid! I don't want to know anyone. I'm not calling out to anyone, because sweet languor is overcoming my body. In my heart there is darkness, such luxurious darkness!

BIRD-WOMAN: Come to your senses, my darling, my love. I have come to kiss your wounds, wash them with my tears, and heal your soul!

OLIZAR (*shaking his head as tears flow from his eyes*): Shoo, you accursed one! Don't you see how splendid it is here! Oh, how terribly splendid it is here! (*Shouting*) Get out!

*Then the BIRD-WOMAN begins crying, lowers her head, and goes to the opening in the wall. She looks back once more, but OLIZAR sits on the bed and keeps shaking his head and neighing like a horse.*

BIRD-WOMAN: Farewell, my love, my darling! I'll come back to you. I will, as soon as you call me!

*SHE disappears. Then the GIRLS door opens, and they come out one after another.*

### Scene 13

HALSHKA: You have been saying such nice words that we just had to come.

OLIZAR: Longing is devouring my heart, dear Girls!

HALSHKA: Don't worry, sir, we'll soon delight you.

*ONE of the GIRLS goes up to the psaltery, opens its cover, and starts playing. SECOND GIRL takes the lute down from the wall. The THIRD GIRL goes up to the net. But as soon as she touches it to take it down, MRS. SPIDER'S stern figure darkens her door.*

### Scene 14

MRS. SPIDER (*angrily*): Don't you know that this net should not be touched? Don't you know that then *he* could lose his mind?

HALSHKA (*coldly*): Mrs. Spider, you are always forgetting to hold your tongue, and it is your greatest enemy.

MRS. SPIDER: But what did I say? Nothing that he could understand. Did you understand anything, Mr. Olizar?

OLIZAR *shrugs*.

MRS. SPIDER: So, please don't make me angry. If you touch that net again, I'll really be angry. I am the custodian of the nets in this house, and I have the right to protect them.

*She lifts her head proudly, turns around, and the door slams behind her.*

### Scene 15

HALSHKA: The problems we have with that Mrs. Spider. She'll ruin everything. I hope, sir, that you haven't lost your good mood.

*But OLIZAR did lose his good mood. He sits on the unmade bed, holding his head bowed low in his hands.*

HALSHKA: Mr. Olizar! Will you be dining with us or with the entire household? If it is to be just us, then you need to cheer up, but if it is to be with everybody, you'll need to be percipient.

OLIZAR: Dear Girls, I can't be cheerful today.

*Then HALSHKA claps her hands, and immediately BILYNSKY, MRS. SPIDER and two GUARDS who are not on duty appear in their doors. They all sit down at the table.*

## Scene 16

BILYNSKY: And where is Mr. Rosenroch?

*A door creaks, and the bent figure of ROSENROCH appears, with a book under his arm.*

BILYNSKY: You are always late, sir. Today we have to hear the rest of the story of our dear newcomer's wanderings. You may begin, Mr. Olizar.

OLIZAR: We crossed half of Europe. At first we went to France, and then we went on to the realm of the Holy Roman Emperor. There they detained us again and tried to persuade us to be in their service, offering us good pay. But again we refused, explaining that we longed for our native land. Only fifty of us remained when we set off for the seven towns of Transylvania.<sup>6</sup>

MRS. SPIDER: Are there really seven towns in Transylvania?

ROSENROCH (*didactically*): We don't care about cities, Mrs. Spider. We should know the seven truths and nothing more. Tomorrow, Gentlemen, (*slamming the book on the table*) we will start reaffirming that wisdom. I must say that ever since our newcomer arrived, we have become lax in our studies. Will your story take long, Mr. Olizar?

OLIZAR: Not long. So, from Transylvania we went on to Warsaw. We were given food and drink, and we were assigned to the royal billet of Chamberlain Andrii Zaklyka. We were also given money and wagons, and we reached Kamianets safely, where, by the way, Zaklyka was heading too.

BILYNSKY (*impatiently*): Go on, go on!

OLIZAR: Then I went to Medzhybizh and headed toward Bratslav, but along the way a Tatar detachment attacked us.

BILYNSKY: Go on!

OLIZAR: We were armed and rose to the challenge. But I don't remember the end of the battle.

BILYNSKY: And you don't remember how you ended up with us?

OLIZAR: I don't even have any idea in what country I am now.

*The PRINCE begins laughing. His entire portly body begins shaking, so much that the table vibrates, his eyes bulge, and he begins gasping for air.*

MRS. SPIDER: You're beginning to get upset, your grace. That's not good for you.

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<sup>6</sup> The German name of Transylvania is Siebenbürgen, named after the seven (*sieben*) medieval German towns (*Bür- gen*) established there.

BILYNSKY: He reminded me of a mouse. (*Again he explodes with laughter.*) And I, Ladies and Gentlemen, felt like a cat. Isn't that funny, Mrs. Spider? (*Laughs convulsively.*)

*Only the PRINCE continues to laugh. The others sit pensively at the table without moving.*

MRS. SPIDER: I'd advise you to come to your senses, your grace. (*Turning to ROSENROCH*) May I speak frankly?

ROSENROCH: No! That would violate our basic law. The Prince should not forget how to behave, even without our help.

MRS. SPIDER (*addressing OLIZAR sweetly*): How many amazing things you've told us! We thank you, and if you are tired, you may rest. (*Whispering*) Get behind the net, quick!

BILYNSKY: I am the master here, not you, Mrs. Spider. And only I can excuse someone from the table, not you!

MRS. SPIDER: Pardon me, your grace, but it is my duty to protect everyone.

*The PRINCE pushes away his stool so hard that it rolls over, and stands up. He looks huge and is red in the face with exasperation.*

BILYNSKY: Fine, all of you leave. I'll speak with him alone!

MRS. SPIDER (*shrieking*): No! Mr. Rosenroch, tell him! I beg you to tell him. You're our lawmaker!

ROSENROCH (*calmly*): Sit down, sir. We are forbidden to meet one on one without others present. The only exceptions are Mrs. Spider, who can come when someone is ill, because she is a mother for us all. I to, too, can come to someone whenever I have a duty to instruct. So sit down and keep quiet.

BILYNSKY: Scatter, all of you! Scatter! Like sand!

*All except MRS. SPIDER get up and leave through their respective doors.*

BILYNSKY: And you, Mrs. Spider! Don't you want to scatter like sand?

MRS. SPIDER: I'll leave right after you do, your grace.

BILYNSKY: To hell with you!

*BILYNSKY turns around briskly and leaves. His door slams shut. MRS. SPIDER quickly dashes over to it, gets out a key, and locks it.*

## Scene 17

MRS. SPIDER: Don't be afraid of anything, sir! Yet God forbid that you should leave the room right now. Besides, you have no reason to leave. It would be better to sit down at your oar and start rowing. Show us all that you work conscientiously and earn your keep. Go on, do it!

*OLIZAR crosses the stage and sits down at the oar. He swings it, and suddenly he hears a flowing melody—a MALE CHOIR is singing.*

MRS. SPIDER: I'm going, but you, sir, row harder! Don't leave the oar, and believe that this castle is sailing into the sea of life only thanks to your rowing.

*She walks to her door backwards gesturing as if she is conducting the choir. OLIZAR keeps on rowing, and the singing of the MALE CHOIR surges to its full strength.*

## Scene 18

OLIZAR (*interrupting his own humming*): Now I am alone. This feeling is at its worst when a person is alone. (*The CHOIR grows quieter as OLIZAR rows without stopping.*) There is no one here to whom I can teach the uplifting song that unites everyone. (*Quietly hums in time with the CHOIR.*) It seems that in this castle one can't do without the teachings of hate. (*Hums.*) I must understand this, but I can't! (*The CHOIR's singing is slow and drawn out.*) I am free from it only in my sleep. Sleep is the release of weariness and loneliness. (*The CHOIR stops singing, and a profound silence envelopes everything. OLIZAR stops rowing and, at that moment, shouts suddenly.*) The brand of captivity stings!

MRS. SPIDER *runs in, frightened.*

## Scene 19

MRS. SPIDER: Why are you shouting?

OLIZAR (*turning toward her*): I said that the brand of captivity stings, madam!

MRS. SPIDER: Phew! And I thought that that one had broken down the door. Why don't you behave more discreetly and quietly, Mr. Olizar. And when you lie down to sleep, check that the net hasn't slipped down. We'll tame him, sir, but until he commits a transgression we can't punish him. Of course, this is a great oversight, and we'll introduce some amendments in our laws. We already punish those who voice their intention to commit a crime or admit their crime during torture, but not yet for considering a crime in one's thoughts only. It is my duty to warn you, although you can see yourself ... he's really out to get you!

OLIZAR: But why, Mrs. Spider?

MRS. SPIDER: Don't you understand? You're not from our world, you've been punished twice, and this is not good, Mr. Olizar! That means that you can be considered an agent of danger to our way of life. No, sir, I can't tell you everything.

OLIZAR: But if he kills me ... perhaps that's how I'll gain my freedom?

MRS. SPIDER: You've just said something for which you could be punished by torture for the third time. You're thinking only of yourself and forgetting that there are others here—those who hope to gain their release with your help. So, consider that you haven't uttered that terrible word.

OLIZAR: Very well. I don't understand it all, but let it be so. But that brand of captivity really does sting, madam.

MRS. SPIDER: Drink the herbal brew I've prepared. It's in the jar by your bed.

OLIZAR: Is it the same brew that Mr. Rosenroch drank?

MRS. SPIDER: It is, sir. It works very well, or haven't you noticed?

OLIZAR: I have. But its aftermath is bitter.

MRS. SPIDER (*elated*): The sweeter the drink, the more bitter the aftermath. Just a second, I'll give you some.

*She offers him the jar, and he drinks from it. Again colourful streaks and bright bands of light with whimsical hues flutter before him. MRS. SPIDER walks backwards to her door, nodding her*

*head in satisfaction. As soon as she leaves the room, the door to the GIRLS' room opens, and they enter undressed with a rhythmical step and begin swaying in an enticing dance. OLIZAR abandons the oar, walks to the centre of the stage, moves away the table, and sits down on a stool. The GIRLS spin around him to a playful tune. In the doorway to their room, HALSHKA appears wearing a long, transparent nightgown, her hair loose. She is illuminated by the yellow light coming from the candle she holds in her hand.*

## Scene 20

HALSHKA: You've waited long, my love. I myself could hardly wait for it to turn dark.

OLIZAR *falls to his knees next to her, his head pressing against her as if he wants to return to the womb.*

OLIZAR: Save me, my Bird! The world is fading for me, and I am beginning to lose hope.

HALSHKA *bends down to him, gently lifts him, and takes him to dance. They dance amidst the colourful streaks of light and the naked, arching bodies of the GIRLS. They dance with their eyes closed, and darkness gradually envelops them. Then the music wails madly, and the GIRLS cry out like feral cats. Out of the night, flashes of light pluck out the GIRLS' OLIZAR'S bodies, all of them twisting in a frenzied rhythm until he collapses exhausted and unconscious. Then a uniform light floods the stage, and the GIRLS run laughing through their open door. HALSHKA goes to follow them, looking back several times. But she does not exit: she stops in the doorway and then tiptoes back to OLIZAR and sits down next to him as he lies there unconscious.*

## Scene 21

OLIZAR (*while moaning*): Save me, my Bird! Comfort me!

HALSHKA *strokes his hair.*

OLIZAR: Fly me to my father's home, my Bird! It has occurred to me for the first time that I will never see it again.

*In response HALSHKA starts gagging like a real bird, laughing or crying.*

OLIZAR: You've got wings, my Bird. If only I had wings, I would fly out of this pit. Be my wings, my bird! Be my wings and fly me away!

*Again the three naked GIRLS leap out of their door. They start jumping and cawing like crows and grimacing.*

## Scene 22

THE GIRLS: Caw! Caw! We are birds, and we'll carry you out of here. Caw! Caw! Caw!

*They take OLIZAR by his arms and legs and, without any civility, toss him on the bed under the net. Then they flap their arms, pretending to be birds, and again rush through their door.*

HALSHKA flaps her arms in the same manner, snorts with laughter, then suddenly becomes serious and sad and walks away, her head lowered in sorrow.

OLIZAR has a dream. At the same time, he gets up from the bed, goes up to the wall, slides it apart in the place where the torture chamber was, and sees there a house with white walls and, sitting on the porch, an OLD MAN as white as snow looking at him with the bright and wise eyes of an eagle. All around an autumnal orchard glows with yellow and red leaves, and there is so much sunshine that OLIZAR has to cover his eyes. He takes a few steps, falls to his knees, and presses his face to the ground. THE OLD MAN comes down from the porch, and lifts his son from the ground.

## Scene 23

OLIZAR: Father, receive your wasteful and prodigal son!

FATHER: You are not wasteful or prodigal, for you left your ancestral home not of your own accord.

OLIZAR: But I left it.

FATHER: An unexpected, hostile force took you away from me, my Son!

*At this moment another MAN in Turkish clothing appears on stage with a whip in his hand and a scimitar at his side. It is APTY-BASHA.*

## Scene 24

APTY-BASHA: I am that hostile force. (*Laughs and cracks the whip.*) And this man is mine even though he killed me. (*Laughs again.*)

FATHER (*swinging at him*): Be gone, apparition!

OLIZAR (*in despair*): I gave this unexpected, hostile force an oath of bondage, Father!

FATHER: It is not a binding oath if given under duress.

APTY-BASHA: An oath is an oath. It's a brand indicating to whom cattle belongs. Take a look. (*Tears off OLIZAR'S shirt, revealing a large brand on OLIZAR'S shoulder.*) Here is my mark. It cannot be cut out of the flesh or gotten rid of, even though, he did, perhaps, actually kill me. But he cannot get rid of that brand on his body. (*Roars with laughter again.*)

FATHER: Is what this heathen is saying true, Son?

OLIZAR: It's true, Father. But there is another truth. It is that, in spite of everything, I have come back to you, Father!

APTY-BASHA: And you've brought me with you. For wherever you go, I'll be right behind you, ha, ha! No matter how pleased you may be with yourself, my whip will still be whistling above you. (*Again he cracks his whip.*) You won't be free of me even in your dreams, because whoever takes an oath of bondage is a captive forever! And I will be your burden even if you kill me ten times over.

FATHER: My poor, poor Son! Rise and forget your heavy thoughts, forget this heathen, because he lives only in your thoughts. My Son, enter into the home where you've long been awaited—into your father's home.

*He embraces his SON by the shoulders and leads him onto the porch. APTY-BASHA suddenly falls to the ground on all fours and howls and laughs like a werewolf.*

APTY-BASHA: He thinks he'll run away from me so easily, ha, ha! But he won't run away from me. A-oo-ooo! No one ever runs away from himself!

*With those words the light fades, and in the dark the wall closes up and OLIZAR'S dream fades too. He stumbles in the dark to his bed, and falls heavily on it with a moan. And in the dark heavy, echoing footsteps are heard, as if someone were hammering and pounding the kettle-drums. OLIZAR jumps up. Meanwhile, the castle is asleep. MRS. SPIDER is puffing in her sleep. The GIRLS are wheezing and crying out softly, and the GUARDS not on duty are snoring. Only the GUARDS on duty atop the tower are not asleep. One of them shouts "Watch out!" and his shout echoes. ROSENROCH is also not asleep, but rustling the pages of his book. The footsteps become louder and louder, and then ROSENROCH speaks.*

## Scene 25

ROSENROCH: There is an invisible island amidst a forgotten sea. And on that island live the wisest, the most just, the best of the best.

OLIZAR (*loudly*): Mr. Rosenroch, do you hear those footsteps? Mr. Rosenroch!

*The rustling sound of pages being turned is heard.*

ROSENROCH: No one is fated to see this island. And if anyone does happen to see it, he has already entered the kingdom from which there is no return. He should then accept this and find the strength in himself to be appeased!

OLIZAR (*frightened*): Mr. Rosenroch! Tell me, what is going on?

ROSENROCH (*turning the pages*): Whoever has come to this island should burn his ships. He should leave his hope behind on those ships and burn it, too. He should extinguish his thoughts and desires, for he cannot think or desire anymore, only wait.

OLIZAR (*shouting*): Wait for what, Mr. Rosenroch?!

ROSENROCH: Wait for the sound of the footsteps that you are hearing. Sooner or later everyone who has made a false oath will hear them. And you have sworn falsely, Mr. Nosylovych! You always keep breaking your oath of bondage.

OLIZAR (*shouting*): Yes, I am a false oath-taker! I have done many bad and dishonourable things in my life. But there is one thing that no one can take away from me. Do you hear, Mr. Rosenroch?! And you, Mr. Bilynsky! It is your footsteps that I hear! I am always, always going to hope!

*His words are followed by silence. The footsteps cease, MRS. SPIDER sighs, and whispers something, the GIRLS moan as if dreaming of lovemaking, and MR. ROSENROCH rustles the pages.*

ROSENROCH: You are a naïve and funny man. (*Coughing*) Naïve because you hold onto things that have no value in any of the existing worlds, and funny because in this manner you want to overcome your fear. You are an instigator, Mr. Nosylovych, and for that alone you are doomed. All instigators are doomed, although perhaps it is because of the likes of you that this world does change a bit.

*In his room ROSENROCH gets up so suddenly that his stool falls over with a bang.*



ROSENROCH (*loudly, slamming his book shut*): May you be cursed, you sowers of unrest! May you be cursed, you discontented ones, for you do not change life but ruin it!

## Scene 26

*When the light comes back on, OLIZAR is rowing again. He presses on the oar and hums because he again seems to hear the powerful singing of the captives' choir. Suddenly, he jumps as a door creaks, this time somewhere inside the building. He rushes to the wall behind which the torture chamber was, and slides it apart. ROSENROCH is sitting in the torture chamber and examining the torture instruments. Astonished to see that OLIZAR has left his oar, ROSENROCH drops a pair of pliers used to tear living flesh, which land with a clatter on the floor. OLIZAR heads toward him, and ROSENROCH starts fleeing in fright. But OLIZAR catches up with him in just a few steps and, seizes him by the collar, almost lifting him into the air.*

OLIZAR: You knew that that prince of yours attacked me, so why did you not place a curse on him, but on me? You are smart and wise, you figured out how to make wings for yourself, so why did you not figure out that all this should be destroyed. (*Gestures with his head toward the wall on which the torture implements are hanging.*) Tell me, why do you need the tears of the innocent, why do you teach hatred and not love?

ROSENROCH (*with a piercing cry*): May you be cursed!

OLIZAR (*sadly*): Are you trying to provoke me, sir? But I am different.

ROSENROCH: You're the same as everyone else. (*His eyes burn with hate, and his lips form into a disdainful sneer.*) Go ahead, hit me, hit me! Take all that off the wall and torture me, torment me!

OLIZAR *lets go of ROSENROCH, moves several steps away from him, and observes him in silence.*

ROSENROCH (*shouting*): Go ahead, beat me, burn me, sting me, cut me, tear me to pieces! I hate you and everybody else, haven't you grasped that? I hate this world and curse it. May all evil befall you, and all misfortune, too. May you be in the throes of death but not be able to die. May you be in pain but unable to overcome it! Go ahead, beat me, cut me, trample me, sting me, stretch me on the rack! For however you depict yourself, you are a false oath-taker! You have transgressed all laws, and it is because of the likes of you that the world is in turmoil!

OLIZAR *kicks a piece of iron—it turns out to be a sabre. He picks it up and leans on it. He is calm and looks around in astonishment. At that moment MRS. SPIDER comes running into the torture chamber.*

## Scene 27

MRS. SPIDER (*shrieking*): What are you doing, sir?! You dared to leave your job! My dear sir, you are asking for trouble. Haven't you had enough torture?

ROSENROCH (*with a concealed smile*): He attacked me, but did not have the courage to hit me.

MRS. SPIDER: I implore you, sir, go back to your place, shut the door, and stay there quietly before the guards see you. Take the oar quickly, sir, and get back to your work! He is up already and walking around, sir, and I think that he's gone completely berserk.

OLIZAR (*wearily*): He tried to scare me during the night. Did you not hear him, Mrs. Spider?

MRS. SPIDER: I swear, I didn't. And neither the girls nor the guards heard anything, I don't think.

OLIZAR: Mr. Rosenroch heard it, didn't he?

ROSENROCH: I hear only what is real, not what appears to be real to cowards.

MRS. SPIDER: How did he behave?

OLIZAR: All night, he walked around in my room.

MRS. SPIDER: Well, this is not a crime yet. (*Bending down and whispering to him*) But you can write a complaint. Describe everything that took place, and perhaps that will be enough to have him punished. Then he'll calm down, and order will be restored here.

ROSENROCH: As long as instigators are living among us, we'll never have order.

OLIZAR: To whom should I address my complaint? To you or Mr. Rosenroch?

MRS. SPIDER: What are you saying? How could you? As if Mr. Rosenroch and I decide anything? The complaint should be addressed to the Prince. After all, he is our head here. Mr. Rosenroch is only the thinking head, and while I am the mistress, the head of the household. The Prince rules us all.

OLIZAR (*squatting near the wall, his hands on the sabre*): But you advised me not to meet with him. And now you tell me that he is mad. Would he want to accept a complaint against himself? After all, I am to lodge a complaint about him!

MRS. SPIDER: That doesn't mean anything. The main thing is that you will do it that way.

ROSENROCH: Of course, you should do as Mrs. Spider advises. This deed will prove that your spirit has been tamed.

OLIZAR: And if I do not do it?

MRS. SPIDER: Oh, sir! Is life not dear to you?!

ROSENROCH: That would prove that your spirit has not been tamed. Whoever writes complaints is tamed. Whoever does not write complaints carries evil inside him and is therefore dangerous.

OLIZAR *remains silent. He sits by the wall, leaning on the sabre and is either pondering something or is sad.*

MRS. SPIDER: You are so handsome, Mr. Olizar. That is why I feel so sorry for you. How I would like to help you!

ROSENROCH: I want to help him too. But he is so stubborn! I don't think that we have ever had here such a stubborn fellow before. Isn't that so, Mrs. Spider? He doesn't listen to good words or to good advice.

OLIZAR (*suddenly rising and passing his hand across his face, as if wiping off a spider web*): My good people, (*saying sadly*) allow me to go away from you. It is the only thing that will help me. I don't have much time to live, but with your help I could still reach my father's house.

ROSENROCH *and* MRS. SPIDER *are silent.*

OLIZAR: I will tell you what a father's house is. It is the place where we all have to return without fail when we no longer have the strength to go on living. It is the only place where one can die with a smile and where the brand of a slave can be washed off one's shoulder.

ROSENROCH (*exchanging glances with* MRS. SPIDER): It isn't easy for us to understand each other, Mr. Nosylovych. But we want to help you. Fine, you don't have to write any

complaints against the Prince, let's say. Let it be your way. Don't submit it to him, just give it to us. We promise you: he will be punished, and no less ardently as it was done to Mrs. Spider and me. By the way, he is really unconscious right now. (*Pauses.*) We'll let you torture him!

OLIZAR *glances at ROSENROCH and suddenly throws away the sabre. He leaves the torture chamber and slides the wall shut, leaving ROSENROCH and MRS. SPIDER inside the chamber. He goes back to his place and sits down at the oar. He begins rowing again and humming a slave song, and the CHOIR sings along.*

## Scene 28

OLIZAR: The only thing that I can still do is compose a song, my poor, suffering brothers.  
(*Singing*)

Whoever is free, is not in pain,  
He's strong, he's mighty, and bold.  
O freedom, you are our fate!  
O fate, you are our freedom!

I hope that we shall hear one another, my poor, suffering brothers. When we are gone, this song will be sung for us by the birds and the clouds, and the wind will whistle its melody on a million flutes. Perhaps these are the wings that will help carry away me and you, my poor, suffering brothers, into the wide world?

OLIZAR *stops rowing and looks around. Then he jumps to his feet and runs past the row of doors, knocking on all of them.*

OLIZAR: Do you hear me?! Freedom is our fate, and fate is our freedom! Do you hear me?!

*The response is dead silence. He listens, and then shouts again.*

OLIZAR: Do you hear me?! Freedom is our fate!

*Again he dashes alongside the wall as he did during his first attempt to escape. He jumps up to grab at the top of the wall, but loses his grip and falls. At that moment the GUARDS walk up atop the tower. Kettledrums sound. PRINCE BILYNSKY, ROSENROCH, MRS. SPIDER, THE GIRLS, and the GUARDS who are not on duty appear simultaneously in all the doors. The GUARDS dash toward OLIZAR, shove him to the ground, and begin tying him up.*

## Scene 29

BILYNSKY: Mr. Nosylovych, do you know that here newcomers are punished only twice?

OLIZAR (*rising to his feet*): I know that, sir!

BILYNSKY: And are you aware that you have committed a third transgression?

OLIZAR: I committed it consciously, Your Grace.

ROSENROCH: Why? Did we not give you an opportunity to save yourself?

OLIZAR: I have already set the bird free.

MRS. SPIDER: What bird, you madman? Did I not warn you?

OLIZAR: I have set free the song for my suffering, poor brothers!

MRS. SPIDER: He is mad, Gentlemen! He doesn't know what he's doing or saying!

BILYNSKY: What do we customarily do with the insane, Mr. Rosenroch?

ROSENROCH: The same that we do with the sane, only more cruelly.

MRS. SPIDER: But Mr. Rosenroch, we don't have such a law yet!

ROSENROCH: So we'll adopt one. Who is for it? (*All raise their hands.*) It's unanimous.

BILYNSKY: If that's so, then do your job, Gentlemen.

*And then something terrible happens to the inhabitants of the castle. The hair on their heads begins to move and stands, their eyes bulge, their mouths open savagely wide, and suddenly they begin screaming. They scatter about the stage. A moment later they begin gathering and encircle OLIZAR. When they jump apart again, OLIZAR is lying dead on the ground and beside him MRS. SPIDER is lamenting, her arms raised like the Pietà.*

MRS. SPIDER: Oh, oh, oh! He was so handsome, so wise. He was so young and brave, and now he has turned blue. Oh, oh, oh! He was so merry, and he told such wonderful stories! Oh, oh, oh!

*ALL of the castle's inhabitants go to their respective doors and stop there.*

BILYNSKY: Stop it, Mrs. Spider, that's enough! You have already done your duty. No one will reproach you.

MRS. SPIDER *gets up, submissively shuffles to her door, and stops there. All have frozen, stony expression on their face.*

ROSENROCH: Gentlemen, because of this newcomer, we have all become lazy and undisciplined. We have forgotten, Gentlemen, that we all have our individual duties and matters to attend to. We have even stopped studying daily the teachings of our life. I think it is time for us to come to our senses and resume our diligent study. I think that we need to begin everything from the beginning.

*Translated by Larissa M. L. Zaleska Onyshkevych*



# AN ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN UKRAINIAN DRAMA



This book is the first extensive anthology of modern Ukrainian drama to be published in English. It is an insightful textbook and invaluable source of information for students of Ukrainian literature in English-speaking countries. Dr. Onyshkevych developed the idea for this collection while teaching Ukrainian literature at Rutgers University, New Jersey. In preparing a course on Ukrainian drama in translation, she discovered that only a few Ukrainian plays had ever been translated into English. Consequently Dr. Onyshkevych started planning and compiling an anthology of the translated plays of a number of modern Ukrainian authors for use as a university textbook.

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