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FOUR SOVIET PLAYS

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MAXIM GORKY · YEGOR BULICHOV & OTHER

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V. VISHNEVSKY · AN OPTIMISTIC TRAGEDY

SOVIET

NIKOLAI POGODIN · ARISTOCRATS

PLAYS

IVAN KOCHERGA · MASTERS OF TIME



NEW YORK
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FOUR SOVIET PLAYS

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YEGOR BULICHOV AND OTHERS

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

By

MAXIM GORKY

Translated from the Russian by

ANTHONY WIXLEY

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CHARACTERS

- YEGOR BULICHOV
XENIA, his wife
VARVARA, his daughter by Xenia
ALEXANDRA, his illegitimate daughter
MELANIA, an abbess, his wife's sister
ZVONTSOV, Varvara's husband
TYATIN, Zvontsov's cousin
MOKEI BASHKIN
VASSILI DOSTIGAYEV
ELIZAVETA, Dostigayev's wife
ANTONINA } Dostigayev's children
ALEXEI } by his first wife
PAVLIN, a priest
A DOCTOR
A TRUMPETER
ZOBUNOVA, a sorceress
PROPOTTEI, a half-wit
GLAPHIRA, a housemaid
TAISSYA, Melania's servant, a novice
MOKROUSSOV, a policeman
YAKOV LAPTEV, Bulichov's godson
DONAT, a forester

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The dining-room of a rich merchant's house. The furniture is heavy and cumbersome. Beside a broad couch upholstered in leather, a staircase ascends to the second floor. In the corner on the right is a large bay-window and a door leading into the garden. It is a bright wintry day. XENIA is seated at the table washing some cups and saucers. GLAPHIRA is at the bay-window, arranging flowers. ALEXANDRA (SHURA for short) comes in. She is in a dressing-gown, her stockingless feet thrust into slippers. Her hair is uncombed, untidy and is red, like YEGOR BULICHOV's.*

XENIA: Oh, Shura, you do sleep. . . .

SHURA: Stop hissing at me, it won't help. Glasha—some coffee! Where's the newspaper?

GLAPHIRA: I've taken it up to Varvara Yegorovna.

SHURA: Bring it down, then. The devils, they only order one paper for the whole house. [GLAPHIRA exits.]

XENIA: Who're you calling devils?

SHURA: Is father at home?

XENIA: No, he's gone to see the wounded. Who do you mean by devils—the Zvontsovs?

SHURA: Yes, of course. [*At the telephone.*] Seventeen sixty-three.

XENIA: Now, I'll tell the Zvontsovs what names you call them!

SHURA [*over the telephone*]: Call Tonya to the 'phone, please!

XENIA: What will you come to, I wonder?

SHURA: Is that you, Antonina? Shall we go skiing? No?

Why? You've got to go to the theatre? Say you can't go!

Oh, you—illegitimate widow, you!—Well, all right, then.

XENIA: How can you call the girl a widow?

SHURA: Her fiancé is dead, isn't he?

XENIA: Still, she's a maiden.

SHURA: How do you know?

XENIA: Oh, you shameless creature!

GLAPHIRA [*serviug coffee*]: Varvara Yegorovna will bring the paper down herself.

XENIA: You know too much for your age. Take care—the less you know, the better you'll sleep. At your age I didn't know anything.

SHURA: You don't know so much even now. . . .

XENIA: Phew—there you are again!

SHURA: Here comes my sister, marching solemnly down.

Bon jour, madame! Comment ça va?

VARVARA: It's eleven o'clock already and you're not dressed and your hair's not done. . . .

SHURA: At it again!

VARVARA: You get more and more impudent every day: you're taking advantage of the fact that father spoils you . . . and that he's sick. . . .

SHURA: Going to keep this up for long?

XENIA: What does she care about her father's health?

VARVARA: I shall have to tell him about your behaviour. . . .

SHURA: Thanks in advance. Finished?

VARVARA: You're a fool!

SHURA: Don't you believe it. It's not me that's the fool.

VARVARA: You carrot-haired idiot!

SHURA: Varvara Yegorovna, you're wasting your energy, I can tell you.

XENIA: No use trying to teach her!

SHURA: You're getting very bad tempered.

VARVARA: Oh, all right, all right, my dear! Mother, let's go to the kitchen, the cook is going into tantrums. . . .

XENIA: He's not quite himself, his son's been killed.

VARVARA: Well, that's no reason for him to go into tantrums. There are so many people being killed these days. . . .

[*They go out.*]

SHURA: How she'd squeal if her lovely Andrusha were to be bumped off!

GLAPHIRA: What's the sense in provoking them the way you do? Drink your coffee quick, I've got to tidy up here.

[*Goes out, carrying the samovar. SHURA sits leaning back in the chair, with her eyes closed and her hands clasped at the back of her tousled red head.*]

ZVONTSOV [*comes downstairs softly in his slippers, steals up unnoticed and embraces her from behind*]: What were you dreaming of, ginger-haired goat?

SHURA [*without opening her eyes or stirring*]: Don't touch me.

ZVONTSOV: Why not? You like it, don't you? Say yes.

You like it?

SHURA: No.

ZVONTSOV: Why don't you?

SHURA: Drop it. You're only pretending. You don't like me.

ZVONTSOV: But you want me to like you, don't you?

[VARVARA *appears on the stairs.*]

SHURA: If Varvara finds out. . . .

ZVONTSOV: Sssh! [*Moves away and speaks in a reproving tone.*] M——yes——you ought to take yourself in hand.

You must study.

VARVARA: She prefers to be impertinent and blow soap-bubbles with Antonina.

SHURA: Well, why shouldn't I? I like blowing bubbles. You surely don't grudge me a bit of soap, do you?

VARVARA: I'm sorry for you, that's all. I really don't know how you're going to live. You were practically expelled from high school.

SHURA: It's not true.

VARVARA: Your girl friend is half-crazy.

ZVONTSOV: She wants to study music.

VARVARA: Who?

ZVONTSOV: Shura.

SHURA: It's not true. I don't want to study music at all.

VARVARA: Where did you get that notion?

ZVONTSOV: Didn't you tell me, Shura, that you wanted to?

SHURA [*going out*]: No, I never said such a thing.

ZVONTSOV: Hm . . . strange. I couldn't have made it up myself. Varya, you're too cross with her. . . .

VARVARA: And you're too amiable.

ZVONTSOV: What do you mean by "too amiable?" You know what my plan is.

VARVARA: A plan's a plan, but it seems to me you're a little *too* amiable.

ZVONTSOV: What silly things get into your head. . . .

VARVARA: Silly, are they?

ZVONTSOV: Well, can't you see it yourself: is this the moment for jealous scenes—in these grave times?

VARVARA: Why did you come downstairs?

ZVONTSOV: I? Here . . . there's an advertisement in the paper. And the forester's come, he says the peasants have rounded up a bear.

VARVARA: Donat is in the kitchen. What was the advertisement about?

ZVONTSOV: This is the limit! How can you speak to me like this? What am I—a baby? Damn it all. . . .

VARVARA: Now don't get into a rage! I believe father's come home. And look what a sight you are! [ZVONTSOV hurries upstairs. VARVARA goes out to meet her father. SHURA runs in to telephone. She now wears a warm green woollen sweater and cap. BULICHOV, coming in, intercepts her and crushes her to him in silence. FATHER PAVLIN, wearing a mauve cassock, follows BULICHOV into the room.]

BULICHOV [*sits down at the table with his arm around SHURA's waist. She strokes his coppery hair, which is going grey*]: So many people maimed and broken, it's terrible to see them. . . .

FATHER PAVLIN: How are you, Shura—blooming, I see? Excuse me for not greeting you as I came in. . . .

SHURA: I should have done that, Father Pavlin, but father got hold of me and hugged me like a bear. . . .

BULICHOV: Stop! Shurka, listen! What will those people do now? We had plenty of useless folk, as it was, before the war. We shouldn't have got mixed up in this war. . . .

FATHER PAVLIN [*with a sigh*]: Reasons of high policy. . . .

BULICHOV: The policy ended pretty badly when we fought the Japanese, too, and we disgraced ourselves before the whole world.

FATHER PAVLIN: But then, war not only ruins, but also enriches—both in experience and in. . . .

BULICHOV: Some fight, while others loot. . . .

FATHER PAVLIN: Nothing in the world can be accomplished without God's will—and of what significance are our murmurings?

BULICHOV: Now, look here, Savelyev Pavlin, stop this preaching. . . . Shurka, were you going skiing?

SHURA: Yes, I'm waiting for Antonina.

BULICHOV: All right. . . ! If you're still here—I'll call you in about five minutes. [*SHURA runs out.*]

FATHER PAVLIN: How the maiden has grown. . . .

BULICHOV: Yes, she's got a comely body and she's nimble, but her face is a bit of a failure. Her mother was ugly. As clever as the very devil, but ugly.

FATHER PAVLIN: Alexandra Yegorovna's face is . . . er . . . original . . . and . . . not without its charms. Where was her mother from?

BULICHOV: She was a Siberian. You say the highest authority comes from God and all the rest of it. Well, and what about the Duma? Where does that come from?

FATHER PAVLIN: The Duma is . . . well, it's as you might say . . . the self-diminution of authority. . . . Many people even regard it as a fatal mistake, but it is not seemly for a servant of the Holy Church to judge of such matters. Inasmuch as upon the clergy of our day has been laid the responsibility of kindling the flame of a courageous spirit . . . and enhancing love for the throne and the fatherland. . . .

BULICHOV: You kindle the flame and then it fizzles out!

FATHER PAVLIN: As you are aware, I have persuaded the elder of the temple of God wherein I serve to enlarge the choir, and I have also asked General Bethling to make a contribution towards a bell for the new church being built to the glory of your patron saint, the Blessed Yegor. . . .

BULICHOV: He didn't give you anything towards the bell, did he?

FATHER PAVLIN: No, he refused and even made a disagreeable joke: "I can't stand brass," he said, "even in the regimental band." Now how would it be if you subscribed something towards the bell, in view of your indisposition?

BULICHOV [*rising*]: Diseases can't be cured by bell-ringing.

FATHER PAVLIN: Who can tell? The causes of illness are not known to science. In some sanatoria abroad cures are effected by music, so I've heard. And we have a fireman—he plays a trumpet to sick people, too. . . .

BULICHOV [*chuckling*]: What kind of a trumpet?

FATHER PAVLIN: A brass one. Quite a large one, they say.

BULICHOV: Well, of course, if it's a large one . . . does it cure people?

FATHER PAVLIN: Very well, I believe. Everything's possible, my dear Yegor Vassilyevich! Everything's possible! We dwell among mysteries, in the darkness of countless, inscrutable mysteries. It seems to us that it is light, and this same light proceeds from our reason, but only to our physical sight is it light, our spirit may, perhaps, be even darkened by our reason, if not entirely extinguished.

BULICHOV [*sighing*]: Aye, what a lot of words you know. . . .

FATHER PAVLIN [*with increasing animation*]: Take, for instance, the blessed Prokopii; in what joy liveth this man, called by the ignorant—a fool.

BULICHOV: Ah, you're at it again—at your preaching! Good-bye, then. I'm tired.

FATHER PAVLIN: I wish you good health. Your prayer book. . . . [*Goes out.*]

BULICHOV [*feeling his right side, goes over to the couch, grumbling*]: The swine. . . fattened on the body . . . and blood of Christ. Glaphira! Heh!

[*Enter VARVARA.*]

VARVARA: What is it?

BULICHOV: Nothing. I was just calling Glaphira. Oh, my, don't you look smart! Where are you going?

VARVARA: To a benefit for the convalescent soldiers.

BULICHOV: And glasses on your nose? I don't believe your eyes need them, you only wear them to be fashionable.

VARVARA: You ought to talk to Alexandra, father, her behaviour is abominable. She's becoming really unbearable.

[*Exit* VARVARA.]

BULICHOV: You're a fine lot, all of you! Go along! [*Mutters to himself.*] Unbearable. Wait till I get better, I'll bear the lot of you!

[*Enter* GLAPHIRA.]

GLAPHIRA: Did you call me?

BULICHOV: Yes. Eh, Glakha, how fine you look! Healthy! Hardy! And Varvara—she's like an otter!

GLAPHIRA [*glancing up at the stairs*]: It's lucky for her she is. If she'd been good-looking, you'd have dragged her into your bed, too, before now.

BULICHOV: What? My own daughter? Think what you're saying, fool! What are you talking about?

GLAPHIRA: I know what I'm talking about! You go squeezing Shura as if you were a soldier and she a stranger.

BULICHOV [*dumbfounded*]: Have you gone plumb crazy, Glaphira! What, you're actually jealous of my daughter! Don't you dare to think of Shurka like that. Like a soldier . . . like a stranger! Have you ever been through a soldier's hands yourself? Eh?

GLAPHIRA: This isn't the place . . . nor the time, for that kind of talk. What did you call me for?

BULICHOV: Send Donat here. Wait!—Give me your hand. You do love me though, don't you? Ailing and all as I am?

GLAPHIRA [*flinging her arms around his neck*]: Oh, you're breaking my heart. . . . But don't be sick any more! Don't be ailing. [*Tears herself away and runs out.*]

[BULICHOV smiles, though his brows are knit in a frown. He licks his lips, then shakes his head. Lies down.]

[Enter DONAT.]

DONAT: I hope I see you in good health, Yegor Vassilyevich!

BULICHOV: Thanks. What's the news?

DONAT: Good news: we've rounded up a bear.

BULICHOV [*sighing*]: Ah, that . . . that's only something for me to envy, not to enjoy. A bear's no entertainment for me nowadays. Are they cutting down the trees?

DONAT: Very little. Can't get enough hands.

[XENIA comes in. She is well dressed and her fingers are loaded with rings.]

BULICHOV: What do you want?

XENIA: Nothing. You oughtn't to let yourself be tempted by the bear, Yegor, you're in no fit state for hunting.

BULICHOV: Shut up! There are no hands, you say?

DONAT: Only old men and small boys left. The Prince was given fifty prisoners, but they can't do anything in the woods.

BULICHOV: They can do a lot with the women, I bet.

DONAT: Yes, there's a bit of that going on.

BULICHOV: Yes. . . . Women are hungry nowadays.

XENIA: I've heard there's a terrible lot of immorality in the villages now. . . .

DONAT: Why call it immorality, Axinia Yakovlena? The muzhiks have been killed off, still, children have got to be born, mustn't they? So let those who killed off the men, beget the children. . . . Isn't that so?

BULICHOV: Looks like it.

XENIA: Pooh, what sort of children would the women have by prisoners? Although, of course, if the man's a strong, healthy fellow. . . .

BULICHOV: And the woman's a fool—he wont want any children from her.

XENIA: Our women are clever. But all the strong muzhiks have been driven to the war, and there's no one left at home but . . . lawyers!

BULICHOV: A terrible lot of folks done for. . . .

XENIA: Well, the rest will be better off, then.

BULICHOV: Just the sort of silly thing you would say!

DONAT: Tsars never have enough.

BULICHOV: What's that you say?

DONAT: Tsars never have enough. There's nothing to feed our own on, and still we want to conquer a lot of strange folks.

BULICHOV: That's true. That's quite true!

DONAT: There's no other way to explain why we are fighting. That's why we're getting it in the neck now, for being greedy.

BULICHOV: Everything you say is right, Donat! There's Yakov now—my godson—he says the same: greed is at the bottom of all trouble. How's he getting on over there?

DONAT: Oh, all right. He's a clever chap.

XENIA: Umph! He's nothing of the sort! He's just impudent, that's what he is, not clever at all.

DONAT: It's his cleverness makes him impudent, Axinia Yakovlevna. He's got hold of ten deserters or so, Yegor Vassiyevich, and set them to work, and they're working like good 'uns. Otherwise they'd still be thieving.

BULICHOV: Well—but this is—if Mokrousov hears of this—
—he'll kick up a row.

DONAT: Mokrousov knows. He's pleased. It's all the easier
for him.

BULICHOV: Well, now, be careful. . . .

[ZVONTSOV *comes downstairs.*]

DONAT: Well, as I was saying—what about the bear. . . .

BULICHOV: The bear—that's your good luck.

ZVONTSOV: Perhaps you'd let me offer the bear to General
Bethling? You know, he's useful to. . . .

BULICHOV: Yes, I know, I know. Offer it to him. Or to
the bishop, if you like!

XENIA [*laughing*]: I'd love to see a bishop shooting a bear.

BULICHOV: Well, I'm tired. Good-day, Donat. Things are
going badly somehow, aren't they, old chap? Since I've been
ill things have gone wrong. [DONAT *bows in silence and goes
out.*] Axinia, send Shurka to me. Now, Andrei, what's up
with you? Out with it, man!

ZVONTSOV: It's about Laptev.

BULICHOV: Well?

ZVONTSOV: I've heard he's got himself mixed up with . . .
doubtful people, and at Kopussovo Fair he made speeches
to the peasants against the government.

BULICHOV: Nonsense! What fairs could there be nowa-
days? What peasants? And why are you always complain-
ing about Yakov?

ZVONTSOV: He's a sort of member of the family, after all.

[SHURA *runs in.*]

BULICHOV: Sort of. . . ! You're not much inclined to

look upon him as one of the family. He doesn't even come to dinner on Sundays. . . . Go along now, Andrei, you'll tell me afterwards.

[*Exit ZVONTSOV.*]

SHURA: Been telling tales on Yakov?

BULICHOV: That's not your business. Sit down here. Everybody's complaining about you, too.

SHURA: Who's everybody?

BULICHOV: Axinia, Varvara. . . .

SHURA: Oh, they aren't everybody, by any means.

BULICHOV: I'm talking seriously, Shura girl.

SHURA: No, you don't talk like that when you're serious.

BULICHOV: You're very impudent to them all, and you don't do anything. . . .

SHURA: Well, if I don't do anything, where does my impudence come in?

BULICHOV: You won't listen to anyone.

SHURA: I listen to everyone. I'm sick of listening to them, Ginger.

BULICHOV: Ginger yourself—you're a lot more ginger than I am. And you don't talk properly to me, either! I ought to give you a good talking-to, but I don't want to.

SHURA: If you don't want to, then you needn't.

BULICHOV: Oho! If you don't want to—you needn't, indeed! Life would be quite easy like that, wouldn't it? But it can't be done!

SHURA: Who's hindering you?

BULICHOV: Everybody . . . everybody's hindering me. But that's more than you can understand.

SHURA: Well, teach me, so's I will understand, so's they won't be able to hinder me. . . .

BULICHOV: Oh, you can't teach anyone that! Is that you again, Axinia? What are you wandering up and down for? What are you looking for?

XENIA: The doctor's come. And Bashkin's waiting to see you. 'Lexandra, pull your skirt down. What a way to sit!

BULICHOV [*getting up*]: All right, call the doctor in. Lying down is bad for me, I get heavy—lying about. A-aye. . . ! Run off, Shurka! See you don't sprain your ankle.

DOCTOR: Good-morning! How are we feeling today?

BULICHOV: Not so well. You're making rather a poor job of curing me, Nifont Grigoryevich.

DOCTOR: Well, well, now, come along and let's have a look at you.

BULICHOV [*going out with him*]: Give me the vilest, the most expensive medicines you know of; I've simply got to get better. If you cure me, I'll build a hospital and make you head of it and then you can do what you like. . . .

[*They go out.*]

[*Enter BASHKIN.*]

XENIA: What did the doctor say?

BASHKIN: It's cancer, he says, cancer of the liver.

XENIA: God save us! The things they think of!

BASHKIN: A dangerous disease, he says.

XENIA: Oh, he would, of course.

BASHKIN: He's fallen sick at the wrong time. There's money lying around everywhere as if it were dropping out of a

torn pocket; people who were beggars yesterday are making thousands, and here he's. . . .

XENIA: Yes, that's it! Many people are getting so rich, so rich. . . .

BASHKIN: Dostigayev's grown that stout he can't button his coat; and he can't talk in anything but thousands. Whereas in Yegor Vassilyevich's case—it looks as if his mind's a bit clouded. The other day he says: "I've been living," he says, "and missing the real thing all the time." What could he have meant?

XENIA: Oh, and I've noticed, too, the things he says—they're no good.

BASHKIN: And he started life on your and your sister's money. He ought to have increased it.

XENIA: I made a mistake, Mokei, and I've known it for a long time—yes, I made a mistake. I married an assistant in my father's shop—but not the right one. If I'd only married you—how peaceably we'd have lived together. While he. . . . My goodness! How he carried on! The things I've had to stand from him! Brought in a bastard daughter from somewhere and burdened me with her. The son-in-law he picked out is no good—the worst he could get in fact. What I'm afraid of, Mokei Petrovich, is that this son-in-law and Varvara'll get round me somehow and cheat me out of my last kopek and turn me out a beggar. . . .

BASHKIN: Anything's possible. It's wartime. In war there's neither shame nor pity.

XENIA: You—you're an old servant of ours, my father put you on your feet—think about me. . . .

BASHKIN: That's just what I am doing. . . . [ZVONTSOV *appears.*]

ZVONTSOV: Has the doctor gone?

XENIA: No, he's still in there.

ZVONTSOV: Well, Mokei Petrovich, how about the cloth?

BASHKIN: Bethling won't have it.

ZVONTSOV: And how much would we have to give him to persuade him?

BASHKIN: About five thousand or so—no less.

XENIA: The robber! An old man, too.

ZVONTSOV: And it's to be handed to him through Jeanne?

BASHKIN: Yes—in the usual way.

XENIA: Five thousand rubles! What for? Eh?

ZVONTSOV: Money's cheap these days.

XENIA: When it's in someone else's pocket, yes.

ZVONTSOV: Does my father-in-law agree?

BASHKIN: That's what I've come to find out—whether he agrees or not. . . .

DOCTOR [*coming out at that moment and taking ZVONTSOV by the arm*]: Well now. . . .

XENIA: Oh, do tell us something to cheer us up. . . .

DOCTOR: The patient should lie down as much as possible. All business, excitement and annoyance are bad for him. He must have complete peace and quiet. Then . . . [*whispers something to ZVONTSOV.*]

XENIA: Why can't you tell me? I'm his wife.

DOCTOR: There are some things one doesn't speak of to ladies. [*Whispers to ZVONTSOV again.*] We'll arrange it for this evening, then.

XENIA: What's that you're arranging?

DOCTOR: A consultation with several other doctors.

XENIA: Goo-ood heavens!

DOCTOR: Oh, it's nothing very terrible. Well, goodbye. [*Goes out.*]

XENIA: What a stern fellow. . . . Five rubles for five minutes he takes. Sixty rubles an hour—how do you like that!

ZVONTSOV: He says an operation will be necessary.

XENIA: What, are they going to cut him up? Oh no, nothing like that! I won't allow anyone to cut him up. . . .

ZVONTSOV: Look here—this is downright ignorance. Surgery and science. . . .

XENIA: Pooh! I don't care a rap for your science. So there! You're very uncivil to me, too.

ZVONTSOV: I'm not talking about manners now—I'm talking about the dark depths of ignorance you. . . .

XENIA: You're none too bright yourself!

[ZVONTSOV *throws up his arms in exasperation and walks away. At this moment GLAPHIRA dashes through the room.*]

XENIA: Where are you going?

GLAPHIRA: The bedroom bell!

[XENIA *follows her into BULICHOV's room.*]

ZVONTSOV: My father-in-law's been taken ill at a bad time.

BASHKIN: Yes. It makes things awkward. At a time like this—clever folks are making money out of air, like conjurors getting rabbits out of a hat.

ZVONTSOV: M—yes. And then there's a revolution coming.

BASHKIN: I don't approve of that. There was one in nineteen hundred and five. A senseless business.

ZVONTSOV: In nineteen hundred and five there was a rebellion—not a revolution. At that time the peasants and the workers were all at home, now—they're all at the front. This time the revolution will be against the officials, the governors and the ministers.

BASHKIN: If that's the case—then it'd be something to be thankful for! The officials are worse than ticks: once they get into your skin you can't tear them off. . . .

ZVONTSOV: The tsar's evidently not fit to rule.

BASHKIN: There's talk about that among the tradespeople. They say that some muzhik or other has got round the tsarina.

[VARVARA appears on the staircase and pauses to listen.]

ZVONTSOV: Yes. Gregory Rasputin.

BASHKIN: I somehow can't believe in sorcery.

ZVONTSOV: And don't you believe in lovers, either?

BASHKIN: Sounds like a yarn to me. She's got hundreds of generals to choose from.

VARVARA: What rubbish you're talking!

BASHKIN: They all say the same, Varvara Yegorovna. For my part, I think we can't do without a tsar.

ZVONTSOV: We need a tsar—not in Petrograd—but in our heads. [To VARVARA.] Is the show over?

VARVARA: No, it's postponed. An inspector came; this evening a new batch of wounded, about five hundred, are expected, and there isn't room enough for them.

[GLAPHIRA comes in.]

GLAPHIRA: Mokei Petrovich, he's asking for you.

[BASHKIN leaves his cap on the table and goes out.]

VARVARA: Why do you talk so frankly to him? You know he spies on us for mother. He's been wearing that same cap for ten years, the miser! It's all greasy and filthy. I can't understand why you should take up with this crook and. . . .

ZVONTSOV: Oh, stop it! I want to borrow money from him to bribe Bethling. . . .

VARVARA: But I told you that Lisa Dostigayeva would arrange all this through Jeanne! And it'll be cheaper. . . .

ZVONTSOV: Lisaveta will cheat you.

XENIA [*from her husband's bedroom*]: Do come and get him to lie down! He keeps walking about and abusing Mokei. . . . Goodness me!

ZVONTSOV: You go, Varya. . . .

BULICHOV [*in a dressing-gown and felt slippers*]: Well, and what else? This unfortunate war?

BASHKIN [*following him*]: Who'd dispute it?

BULICHOV: Unfortunate for whom?

BASHKIN: For us.

BULICHOV: Whom do you mean by—us? You say people are making millions out of this war? Well?

BASHKIN: For the people, I mean. . . .

BULICHOV: To the poor folk, to the muzhik, say, it's all the same whether he lives or dies. That's the truth for you!

XENIA: Now don't get cross. It's bad for you. . . .

BASHKIN: What do you mean? What sort of truth do you call that?

BULICHOV: The real, genuine thing. That's what truth is. I'm telling you straight: my business is to make money, and the muzhik's business—to grow grain, and buy goods. And

what other truth is there besides this, I'd like to know?

BASHKIN: You're right, of course, but still. . . .

BULICHOV: Well, what do you mean "but still"? What are you thinking about when you're robbing me?

BASHKIN: How can you insult me like that?

XENIA: Varya, what are you thinking about? Talk to him, won't you? He's been told he must lie down.

BULICHOV: I'm asking you—do you think about the people?

BASHKIN: Insulting me right in front of everybody! I rob you, indeed! That'll have to be proved first.

BULICHOV: There's nothing to prove. Everybody knows that thieving is a lawful business. And there's no reason to insult you. Insult won't make you any better, it'll only make you worse. And if it isn't you who robs me, it's the ruble. The ruble is the greatest thief of all. . . .

BASHKIN: No one but Yakov Laptev could say that.

BULICHOV: That's just what he does say. Well, you can go now. Bethling's not to be given any bribes. We've given him enough, enough for his coffin and his winding-sheet, the old devil. [BASHKIN *exits.*] Why are the lot of you crowding in here? What are you waiting for?

VARYARA: We're not waiting for anything. . . .

BULICHOV: Hmph—not waiting for anything. . . . that's what you say. Well, if you're not, then go about your business. Haven't you got anything to do? Axinia, tell someone to air that room of mine. It's stuffy—smells of sour medicine. Yes, and tell Glaphira to fetch me some cranberry kvass.

XENIA: You mustn't have kvass.

BULICHOV: Be off, be off with you! I know myself what I can have and what I can't.

XENIA [*going out*]: If you only did know. . . . [*Everyone leaves the room.*]

BULICHOV [*hobbles round the table, holding on to it with one hand. Looks in the mirror and says, almost at the top of his voice*]: Things are in a bad way with you, Yegor. And that mug doesn't look like yours, either!

GLAPHIRA [*enters with a glass of milk on a tray*]: Here's some milk for you.

BULICHOV: Give it to the cat. And bring me some kvass—cranberry.

GLAPHIRA: They told me not to give you kvass.

BULICHOV: Never mind what they told you—you bring it. Stop! What do you think—will I die?

GLAPHIRA: It can't be.

BULICHOV: Why?

GLAPHIRA: I don't believe it!

BULICHOV: You don't believe it? Well, my dear, things look bad for me! Very bad. I know.

GLAPHIRA: I don't believe it.

BULICHOV: Stubborn, that's what you are. Well fetch me that kvass. And I'll have a drop of orange-vodka. . . . It does me good. [*Goes over to the sideboard.*] They've locked it, damn them. The dirty swine. Keeping an eye on me. You'd think I was a prisoner.

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE: *The BULICHOVS' drawing-room.
ZVONTSOV and TYATIN are sitting in a corner
at a small round table, on which stands a
bottle of wine.*

ZVONTSOV [*lighting a cigarette*]: Get me?

TYATIN: To tell the honest truth, Andrei, I don't like this. . . .

ZVONTSOV: But—you like the money, don't you?

TYATIN: Yes, unfortunately, I do.

ZVONTSOV: Who's it you're pitying, then?

TYATIN: Myself, naturally enough.

ZVONTSOV: Not worth it.

TYATIN: Still, you know, I'm the only friend I have.

ZVONTSOV: You'd better philosophize less and think more.

TYATIN: I am thinking. She's a spoilt young thing; it'll be no easy job with her.

ZVONTSOV: You can get a divorce.

TYATIN: And she'll keep the money. . . .

ZVONTSOV: We'll manage so that you'll get it. As to Shura, I'll tame her.

TYATIN: To tell the honest truth. . . .

ZVONTSOV: I'll manage things so that they'll be in a hurry to marry her off and her dowry will be increased.

TYATIN: That's pretty smart of you! And what'll the dowry be?

ZVONTSOV: Fifty.

RYATIN: Thousand?

ZVONTSOV: No. Buttons.

RYATIN: Really?

ZVONTSOV: But you'll write me an I.O.U. for ten.

RYATIN: Thousand?

ZVONTSOV: No. Rubles! Ass!

RYATIN: That's rather a l-lot. . . .

ZVONTSOV: Then let's stop talking about it.

RYATIN: Are you—serious about all this?

ZVONTSOV: It's only fools who aren't serious about money.

RYATIN [*chuckling*]: Damn it all. . . . It's really wonderfully thought out.

[DOSTIGAYEV *comes in.*]

ZVONTSOV: I'm glad you seem to be able to grasp something.

A proletarian member of the intelligentsia like you, can't in wild days like these. . . .

RYATIN: Yes, oh yes, of course. Well, I must be off for the court now.

DOSTIGAYEV: What are you upset about, Stepasha?

ZVONTSOV: We . . . we've been taking about Rasputin.

DOSTIGAYEV: What a fate, eh? An ordinary, Siberian muzhik—and he played draughts with bishops and ministers. Hundreds of thousands of rubles must have passed through his hands. Never took less than ten thousand as a bribe. I've had it from reliable sources—he never took a kopek less. What are you drinking? Burgundy? That's a heavy wine, it ought only be drunk at dinner-time, you ignorant people.

DOSTIGAYEV: How much of Melania's money is in it? Seventy thousand?

ZVONTSOV: Ninety.

DOSTIGAYEV: A tidy bit! Her personal fortune or the convent's?

VARVARA: How would you ever find that out?

DOSTIGAYEV: Oh, you can find out all right. You can find out anything. The Germans, for instance, they know not only the number of soldiers we've got at the front, but even the number of lice on each of them.

VARVARA: I wish you would say something more serious. . . .

DOSTIGAYEV: My dear Varyusha, you can't either trade or fight unless you know how to count the money in your pocket. We can find out about Melania's money this way: there's a certain lady called Secletia Poluboyarinova who helps the Right Reverend Nikandr to keep his nightly vigils, and Bishop Nikandr knows everything there is to know about everybody's money. Besides that, there's a man in the diocesan council—we'll keep him in mind, too. You must talk to this, Poluboyarinova, Varyusha, and if it turns out that the cash belongs to the convent—well, you can guess yourself!—Where's my lovely spouse slipped off to?

GLAPHIRA [*At the door*]: They sent me to ask you into the dining-room.

DOSTIGAYEV: We'll be there in a second. Come along, all of you.

VARVARA [*pretending the hem of her dress has caught in the armchair*]: Andrei, help me to get this out! . . . Do you believe him?

ZVONTSOV: Do I look like a fool?

VARVARA: Oh, what a crook he is. It wasn't bad, my plan about auntie, was it? And what about Tyatin?

ZVONTSOV: I'll coax him into it yet.

VARVARA: You'll have to hurry up with that. . . .

ZVONTSOV: Why?

VARVARA: Why, because after the funeral, you have to wait a long time. And father has a weak heart as well. . . . Besides, I have other reasons.

[*They go out, encountering GLAPHIRA on the way. She looks at them with hatred and begins to clear away the glasses, etc., from the small table. LAPTEV enters.*]

GLAPHIRA: There was a rumour yesterday that you were arrested.

LAPTEV: You don't say so? Can't be true, surely.

GLAPHIRA: Always joking, you are!

LAPTEV: Nothing to eat—but plenty of fun.

GLAPHIRA: You'll break your neck yet over that fun of yours.

LAPTEV: A good joke earns a good word, its a bad one that lands you in a mess.

GLAPHIRA: Carry on. Do you know who's in there with Shura? Tonka Dostigayeva.

LAPTEV: Br-r—I don't want her.

GLAPHIRA: Shall I call Shura in?

LAPTEV: That's a good idea. And how's Bulichov?

GLAPHIRA [*indignantly*]: He's not Bulichov to you! He's your godfather.

LAPTEV: Don't get mad, Aunt Glasha.

GLAPHIRA: He's in a bad way.

LAPTEV: In a bad way, is he? Wait half-a-minute! My pals are starving, Aunt Glasha, couldn't you get them a couple of poods of flour or maybe a whole sack?

GLAPHIRA: What, am I supposed to rob the master for you?

LAPTEV: It wouldn't be the first time, would it? It's nothing—you've sinned before—and the sins are on my head. The lads are badly in want of something to eat, honest to God. Considering the work you've done in the house, you've a right to more in it than your employers.

GLAPHIRA: Yes, I've heard these tales of yours before. Tomorrow morning they are going to send off the flour to Donat; you can take a sack from him. [*Goes out.*]

LAPTEV: Thanks for that much, anyhow! [*Sits down on the couch, yawns till the tears come into his eyes, wipes them away and looks about him.*]

XENIA [*comes in, grumbling*]: And away they run like devils from incense. . . .

LAPTEV: How do you do?

XENIA: Ooh! What are you sitting here for?

LAPTEV: Had I better walk about, then?

XENIA: Either he's nowhere to be found or he'll turn up all of a sudden—for no rhyme or reason. You'd think he was playing hide-and-seek. There's your godfather lying sick and you don't care a pin. . . .

LAPTEV: What should I do? Get sick myself?

XENIA: You've all gone crazy, and you're trying to drive other people crazy as well. Really, one can't understand a thing! Did you hear they're wanting to put the tsar in a cage like

Emilian Pugachev? Are they lying or what, tell me, you book-reading fellow.

LAPTEV: Everything's possible, everything.

GLAPHIRA [*calling from offstage*]: Axinia Yakovlevna, just a minute.

XENIA: Well, what now? I haven't a minute's peace. . . .

God help me! [*Goes out.*]

SHURA [*running in*]: Hello!

LAPTEV: Shura, I'm off to Moscow and I haven't a kopek —lend me some money, will you?

SHURA: I've got thirty rubles. . . .

LAPTEV: If I could have fifty, eh?

SHURA: I'll get it for you.

LAPTEV: For the night train? Could you manage it?

SHURA: Yes. Listen: is there going to be a revolution?

LAPTEV: Why, it's started already! Don't you read the papers?

SHURA: I can't understand them.

LAPTEV: Well, ask Tyatin.

SHURA: Yakov, tell me honestly, what sort of a fellow is Tyatin?

LAPTEV: How do you like that! You've been seeing him every day for nearly six months.

SHURA: Is he honest?

LAPTEV: Yes . . . he's all right.

SHURA: Why do you say it as if you weren't sure?

LAPTEV: Oh, he's a namby-pamby sort of chap. Can't make head or tail of him. Been badly treated, or something.

SHURA: By whom?

LAPTEV: He was chucked out of the university in his second year. Works for his brother as a clerk, and his brother. . . .

SHURA: Zvontsov—is he a crook?

LAPTEV: He's a liberal, a Constitutional-Democrat, and they're pretty crooked, on the whole. You hand the money to Glaphira and she'll pass it on to me.

SHURA: Do Glaphira and Tyatin help you?

LAPTEV: In what way?

SHURA: Don't pretend, Yashka! You understand quite well. I want to help, too, do you hear!

LAPTEV [*astonished*]: What's the matter with you, girl? You're acting as if you woke up only today.

SHURA [*indignantly*]: Don't dare to make fun of me! You fool!

LAPTEV: Maybe I am a fool, but still I'd like to understand. . . .

SHURA: Varvara's coming!

LAPTEV: Oh, I don't want to see her.

SHURA: Come on, then, quick!

LAPTEV [*putting his arms round her shoulders*]: What's got into you anyhow? [*They go out, shutting the door behind them.*]

VARVARA [*hearing the click of the lock, goes up to it, and turns the handle*]: Is that you Glaphira? [*A pause.*] Is anyone there? Very mysterious. . . . [*Goes away quickly.*]

[SHURA *appears, dragging DONAT by the hand.*]

DONAT: Wherever are you dragging me off to, Shura?

SHURA: Stop! Now tell me: is father respected in town?

DONAT: Rich folk are always respected. What a wild one you are!

SHURA: Do they respect him or are they just afraid of him?

DONAT: If they weren't afraid of him, they wouldn't respect him.

SHURA: And what do they like him for?

DONAT: Like him? I don't know.

SHURA: But do they like him?

DONAT: Him? Well—er—The cabbies seem to like him; he never bargains with them, but pays whatever they ask. And a cabby, of course, he'd tell another fellow, well—and. . . .

SHURA [*stamping her foot*]: Are you making fun of me?

DONAT: Why should I? I'm telling you the truth.

SHURA: You've grown very ill-natured. You're quite different from what you used to be.

DONAT: Now how could I grow different! It's a bit late for that.

SHURA: You used to praise father to me.

DONAT: I'm not running him down now either. Every fish has his own kind of scales.

SHURA: You all lie.

DONAT [*sighing*]: Don't be angry, you can't prove anything by getting into a temper.

[GLAPHIRA *enters.*]

SHURA: Go away! [*Donat exits.*] Listen, Glaphira. . . . Oh, someone's coming! [*Hides behind the curtain.*]

[ALEXEI DOSTIGAYEV *comes in. He is a foppish young man in*

riding-breeches, a Swedish tunic with innumerable belts, straps and pockets.]

ALEXEI: You're getting better looking every day, Glasha.

GLAPHIRA [*sulkily*]: Nice to hear that.

ALEXEI: It's not nice for me, though. [*Blocks GLAPHIRA'S way.*] I don't like anything nice unless it belongs to me.

GLAPHIRA: Let me pass, please.

ALEXEI: Yes, of course. [*Yawns and looks at his watch.*

ANTONINA comes in and then a little later TYATIN.]

SHURA [*coming out from behind curtain*]: You run after housemaids as well, it seems?

ANTONINA: It's all the same to him—he'd run after a fish.

ALEXEI: Housemaids are in no respect worse than ladies when they are undressed.

ANTONINA: Hear that! He always talks as if he'd been living in a pot-house instead of at the front.

SHURA: Yes. Although he was just as lazy formerly, he wasn't so bold—in his talk.

ALEXEI: I'm bold in deeds, too.

ANTONINA: Oh, what a lie! He's a coward, and what a coward! He's simply terrified his stepmother will seduce him.

ALEXEI: What are you making up that story for? Idiot!

ANTONINA: And he's abominably greedy. Do you know, I pay him a ruble twenty kopeks for every day that he doesn't say something horrible to me. And he takes it!

ALEXEI: Tyatin, do you like Antonina?

TYATIN: Yes, very much.

SHURA: And me?

TYATIN: Want me to tell the truth?

SHURA: Yes, of course.

TYATIN: Well, not much.

SHURA: So? That's the truth, is it?

TYATIN: Yes.

ANTONINA: Don't believe him, he's only repeating somebody else's words.

ALEXEI: Tyatin, I wish you'd marry Antonina. I'm so sick of her.

ANTONINA: You silly ass! Clear out! You look like a pregnant washerwoman.

ALEXEI [*putting his arm round her waist*]: And what an aristocrat you are. *Ne munchez pas les sunflower seeds, dearest. C'est mauvais ton.*

ANTONINA: Leave me alone.

ALEXEI: With pleasure! [*He puts on a phonograph record and dances with her.*]

SHURA: Perhaps you don't like me at all, Tyatin?

TYATIN: Why do you want to know?

SHURA: I must. It interests me.

ALEXEI: Why are you beating about the bush, Tyatin! The girl's trying to get you to propose to her, can't you see? All the girls are in a hurry now to become heroes' widows. The attraction being a good food ration, a halo of glory and a pension.

ANTONINA: He actually imagines that he's said something witty.

ALEXEI: Well, I'll be toddling along now. Tonka, see me to the vestibule, will you?

ANTONINA: I don't want to.

ALEXEI: But I want you to. I'm quite serious. Come on.

ANTONINA: Something silly, I suppose.

[ALEXEI and ANTONINA go out.]

SHURA: Tyatin, are you a truthful fellow?

TYATIN: No.

SHURA: Why?

TYATIN: It's unprofitable.

SHURA: If you say that, then you must be truthful. Now tell me, without stopping to think—have they advised you to make a match of it with me?

TYATIN [*after a pause, during which he lights a cigarette*]:
Yes.

SHURA: And you understand that it's bad advice?

TYATIN: Yes.

SHURA: So you. . . . Well, I never expected this. I thought you. . . .

TYATIN: You must have thought badly.

SHURA: No, you're . . . splendid! But perhaps you're sly, eh? Perhaps you're only pretending to be straightforward so as to make a fool of me?

TYATIN: That would be beyond my powers. You're clever, ill-natured and mischievous—just like your father. To tell the honest truth, you terrify me. And then you've got red hair like Yegor Vassilyevich. It's like a fireman's torch.

SHURA: Tyatin, you're fine! Or else you're a terrible rogue. . . .

TYATIN: And your face—is a most unusual one. . . .

SHURA: You're just trying to soften the blow, aren't you, by

saying this about my face? Oh, but you're cunning, after all!

TYATIN: Think what you like. My opinion is that you're bound to commit some crime. While I—I'm accustomed to living with my paws up—you know, like guilty puppies.

SHURA: Guilty of what?

TYATIN: I don't know. Of being puppies and having no teeth to bite with.

ANTONINA [*coming in*]: That idiot Alyoshka gave my ear such a painful tug. And took all my money off me—like a common crook. You know, he'll drink himself to death yet—that's certain. We're just a couple of good-for-nothing merchant's children. You find it funny?

SHURA: Tonya—forget everything bad I ever said about him.

ANTONINA: About Tyatin? What did you say about him? I don't remember.

SHURA: Well, that he wanted to make a match of it with me. . . .

ANTONINA: There's nothing bad about that, if you did say it, is there?

SHURA: For the sake of my money.

ANTONINA: Oh, yes! That's pretty filthy of you, Tyatin!

SHURA: It's a pity you didn't hear how he answered my questions.

ANTONINA: Did you begin every question with *Warum*? Do you remember Schubert's "*Warum*"?

TYATIN: Is it Schubert?

ANTONINA: *Warum* looks very much like a marabou, a gloomy kind of bird that lives in Africa.

SHURA: The things you invent!

ANTONINA: I love terrifying things best of all. When one's terrified, one isn't bored. I used to like to sit in the dark and wait until a huge serpent. . . .

TYATIN [*with a little laugh*]: The one that was in the Garden of Eden, you mean!

ANTONINA: No, much more horrible than that one.

SHURA You're awfully funny. You always invent something new, while everyone else talks of the same thing: the war, Rasputin, the tsarina and the Germans, or war and revolution. . . .

ANTONINA: Are you going to be an actress or a nun?

SHURA: A nun, indeed! What rubbish!

ANTONINA: It must be very difficult to be a nun—you always have the same role to play.

SHURA: I want to be a *cocotte* like Zola's "Nana."

TYATIN: What a way to talk! Phew!

SHURA: I want to corrupt people and revenge myself on them.

TYATIN: On whom? And what for?

SHURA: For my having red hair, and for father's being sick. . . . For everything! Wait till the revolution begins. . . then I'll show what I'm capable of! You'll see!

ANTONINA: Do you believe there'll be a revolution?

SHURA: Yes, I do! I do!

TYATIN: Yes, there's going to be a revolution.

[GLAPHIRA *enters.*]

GLAPHIRA: Shura, Mother Melania's come and Yegor Vasilyevich wants to speak to her in here.

SHURA: Ugh—Aunt Melania! Come on into my room, children! Tyatin, do you think much of Zvontsov?

TYATIN: He's—my cousin.

SHURA: That's no answer.

TYATIN: It seems to me that relatives think very little of one another on the whole.

SHURA: Now, that's an answer!

ANTONINA: Stop talking about boring things.

SHURA: You're awfully funny, Tyatin.

TYATIN: Well, what can I do about it?

SHURA: And you dress in a funny way, too.

[*They go out. GLAPHIRA opens a door covered by heavy curtains. At the same moment, in the doorway through which the young people have disappeared, BULICHOV appears. The ABBESS MELANIA comes in with slow, majestic steps. She carries a crosier in her hand. GLAPHIRA stands with bent head, holding the curtain back.*]

ABBESS MELANIA: So you're still traipsing about here, are you, fornicatress? They haven't thrown you out yet? Well, they will soon.

BULICHOV: Then you'll take her into the convent and make a nun of her—she has money.

ABBESS MELANIA: A—ah, you're—here? Oh, Yegor, you look as if you'd been turned inside out. God have mercy on you!

BULICHOV: Glakha, shut the door, and tell them not to come barging in here. Sit down, Reverened Mother! What kind of business are we going to talk about?

ABBESS MELANIA: The doctors can't help you, eh? Now you

see: the Lord stays His hand for a day, for a year, for a generation. . . .

BULICHOV: We'll talk about the Lord afterwards—lets have business first. I know you've come to talk about your money.

ABBESS MELANIA: The money isn't mine, it belongs to the nunnery.

BULICHOV: It's all the same, the nunnery, the mummery or the flummery. Why does the money worry you? Are you afraid I'll die and it'll be lost to you?

ABBESS MELANIA: Lost it can't be, but I don't want it to fall into strange hands.

BULICHOV: So you want to draw it out of the business? It's all the same to me—take it out if you want it. But mind you—you'll lose by it. Rubles are breeding now like lice on soldiers. And I—I'm not so sick yet as to die.

ABBESS MELANIA: For ye know not the day nor the hour when death shall come! Have you made your will?

BULICHOV: No!

ABBESS MELANIA: It's high time! Make it! Supposing the Lord was to call you suddenly?

BULICHOV: But what would He want with me?

ABBESS MELANIA: Give up this arrogance of yours! I don't care to listen to it, as you know—and my holy rank does not exactly. . . .

BULICHOV: Oh, drop it, Melania! We know each other well enough both by sight and by touch. You can take the money if you want to—Bulichov has plenty of it.

ABBESS MELANIA: I don't want to draw my capital out of the

business but I want the notes to be made over to Axinia's name. That's why I came to you.

BULICHOV: I see. Well, that's your business. Only, if I should die, Zvontsov will cheat Axinia. And Varvara will help him to do it. . . .

ABBESS MELANIA: So this is the way you talk? Something new for you. No spite in your tone, either.

BULICHOV: No, my spite's turned in another direction now. Let's talk about God, the Lord God, and the soul. "When youth has been spent in plunder and sin, in old age it behoves one to save one's soul."

ABBESS MELANIA: Well then, speak.

BULICHOV: Take yourself now, you serve the Lord day and night, as, for instance, Glaphira serves me. . . .

ABBESS MELANIA: Don't blaspheme, man! Have you taken leave of your senses? How does Glaphira serve you at night?

BULICHOV: Shall I tell you?

ABBESS MELANIA: Don't blaspheme, I'm telling you! Be-think yourself!

BULICHOV: Stop bellowing at me! I'm talking plain language, not saying official prayers, but human words. You told Glaphira she'd be thrown out soon. So it looks as if you believed I'd soon die. But why should you? Vasska Dostigayev is nine years older than me and a good deal more crooked, but he's healthy and he'll live a long time yet. He's got a wife—first-class. Of course, I'm a sinner, I treated people badly and—in general—well—I'm a sinner in every way. But then, everyone offends everyone else. Life's like that, there's no two ways about it.

ABBESS MELANIA: It's not before me, not before people, you must repent, but before God! People won't forgive you, but God is merciful. You know yourself how in olden times when robbers sinned, but rendered up what was God's to God, they were saved! . . .

BULICHOV: Oh yes, if you stole and gave something to the church, then you weren't a thief, but a righteous man.

ABBESS MELANIA: Yeg—o-o-o-r! If you scoff at what's sacred, I won't listen! You're not stupid, you must be able to understand; the Devil won't tempt you, if the Lord doesn't allow it.

BULICHOV: Well, thank you very much for that.

ABBESS MELANIA: What do you mean?

BULICHOV: You've set my mind at rest. It turns out—the Lord gives the Devil a free hand to tempt us, and that means the Lord's in partnership with the Devil and me in all our sinful deeds. . . .

ABBESS MELANIA [*rising*]: Words like these . . . words like these of yours . . . if I were to tell the Right Reverend Nikandr about them. . . .

BULICHOV: Why, where have I made a mistake?

ABBESS MELANIA: Heretic! What thoughts come into that unhealthy head of yours! Surely you understand that if God permits the Devil to tempt you—that means God has forsaken you?

BULICHOV: Forsaken me, has he? But why? Because I've been fond of money and I'm still fond of women, and married that fool sister of yours for her money, and have been your lover! Is that why he's forsaken me? . . .

You great gaping raven, coming here with your croaking, and not a scrap of sense in it all!

ABBESS MELANIA [*dumbfounded*]: Why, Yegor, have you lost your wits? Lord have mercy. . . .

BULICHOV: Praying day and night beneath convent-bells, and who're you praying to—you haven't the slightest idea!

ABBESS MELANIA: Yegor! You're heading straight for the bottomless pit! Into the jaws of hell. . . . In days like these. . . . Everything's crashing to ruin . . . the throne of the tsars is shaken by the powers of evil. . . . It's the day of Anti-Christ . . . maybe the Day of Judgment is even now drawing nigh. . . .

BULICHOV: You've just remembered it, have you? The Day of Judgment. The Second Coming of Christ. Aye, you—you raven, you've flown in and done your croaking! Now, be off with you to your lair to make love to your choir-girls! And instead of money, this is all you'll get from me—see! [*Makes a gesture of derision.*]

ABBESS MELANIA [*stunned, almost drops into the armchair*]: Oh, the scoundrel!

BULICHOV: Glaphira's a fornicatress—is she? And you? What are you? Eh?

ABBESS MELANIA: You're lying! Lying! [*Springs to her feet.*] Rogue! You'll rot soon! You worm!

BULICHOV: Be off! Out of sin's way!

ABBESS MELANIA: Snake . . . devil. [*Goes out.*]

BULICHOV [*alone, growls, rubs his right side and shouts*]: Glaphira! Heh!

[*XENIA enters.*]

XENIA: What's up with you? Where's Melania?

BULICHOV: Flown away.

XENIA: What, you've not gone and quarrelled with her again?

BULICHOV: Do you mean to settle here for long?

XENIA: Yegor, give me a chance to say a word. You've stopped talking to me altogether lately, as if I were no more than a piece of furniture. Well, what are you looking at me like that for?

BULICHOV: Get on with it, talk away!

XENIA: What's all this going on in the house? The end of the world or something? That son-in-law of yours has turned that place up there into a regular bar; people sit there and talk and carry on till all hours. Yesterday they finished off seven bottles of red wine, not to mention the vodka. . . . Our janitor, Ismail, is complaining that the police keep questioning him as to who comes to our house. And up there they are forever talking about the tsar and his ministers. And that's all they do, day in, day out. What are you hanging your head for?

BULICHOV: Carry on, carry on! When I was young I used to like sitting in a bar, while the music played.

XENIA: Why did Malasha come today?

BULICHOV: You're no good at lying, Axinia! You're much too stupid for that.

XENIA: Well! What lies have I told? When?

BULICHOV: Just this minute. Melania and you made it up between you that she should come here to talk about her money.

XENIA: When did I ever do that? What do you mean?

BULICHOV: Oh—all right. Shut up, then!

[DOSTIGAYEV, ZVONTSOV and FATHER PAVLIN come in, looking excited.]

DOSTIGAYEV: Yegor, listen to the news Father Pavlin's brought from Moscow. . . .

XENIA: You ought to go and lie down, Yegor!

BULICHOV: I'm listening to you, Father Pavlin.

FATHER PAVLIN: I've little enough good news to tell, yes, and in my opinion, the good is pretty bad, too, for so far no one has been able to think of anything better than the way we lived before the war.

DOSTIGAYEV: No, no, I beg to differ. No—o!

[ZVONTSOV whispers something to his mother-in-law.]

XENIA: Crying?

DOSTIGAYEV: Who's crying?

XENIA: The Abbess.

DOSTIGAYEV: What's wrong with her?

BULICHOV: Go and see what's frightened her. And you, Father, sit down here and tell us the news.

[Exit ZVONTSOV, XENIA and DOSTIGAYEV.]

DOSTIGAYEV [as he leaves]: I wonder what could have made Melania cry.

FATHER PAVLIN: Great confusion has set in in Moscow. Even mature minds assert that the tsar must be deposed, on account of his incompetence.

BULICHOV: He's been capable for over twenty years.

FATHER PAVLIN: Human powers become exhausted with the passing of time.

BULICHOV: In 1913, when they celebrated the three hun-

dredth anniversary of the rule of the Romanovs, Nicholas shook hands with me. The whole people rejoiced at that time. All Kostroma.

FATHER PAVLIN: Yes, it was so. It's a fact . . . the people rejoiced.

BULICHOV: Then what's happened? We've got the Duma too. . . . No, the tsar isn't the point here—it's something at the very root.

FATHER PAVLIN: The root—that is the autocratic power.

BULICHOV: Everyone maintaining himself—by his own power. Yes, but where is it—this power? When it came to the war—there was none of it.

FATHER PAVLIN: The Duma has contributed to the sapping of our power.

ELIZAVETA [*at the door*]: Are you confessing him, Father Pavlin?

FATHER PAVLIN: What sort of a question is that?

ELIZAVETA: Where's my husband?

FATHER PAVLIN: He was here.

ELIZAVETA: How severe you are today, Father Pavlin. [*Disappears.*]

BULICHOV: Father. . . .

FATHER PAVLIN: What were you about to say?

BULICHOV: We're all fathers. God's a father, the tsar's a father, you're a Father, and I'm a father. Yet none of us have any strength, and we all live to die. I'm not talking about myself, I'm talking about the war, about death on a large scale: like a circus where a wild tiger is let loose on people.

FATHER PAVLIN: Calm yourself, Yegor Vassilyevich. . . .

BULICHOV: What shall I calm myself with? Who'll calm me? How? Well, calm me then . . . Father! Show your strength!

FATHER PAVLIN: Read the Holy Scriptures. Read the Old Testament—the Book of Joshua, it's a good thing to remember. . . . War according to the law. . . .

BULICHOV: Give it up. What sort of law is that? It's all a yarn. You can't stop the sun's moving. You're lying. . . .

FATHER PAVLIN: To murmur against the Lord is a cardinal sin. We must try to submit humbly and with a meek and obedient spirit to the judgment visited upon us for our sinful life.

BULICHOV: Did you submit when the elder, Alexei Gubin, offended you? No, you brought him up before the court, you asked Zvontsov to be your lawyer, and the bishop took your side, wasn't that so? And I—what court shall I complain to about my disease? And about dying before my time? Will you die in humble submission? With a meek and quiet spirit? Eh? No, you'll roar and groan, too.

FATHER PAVLIN: My calling forbids me to listen to such talk. For such talk. . . .

BULICHOV: Drop it, Pavlin! You're a man. Your cassock is only your protective colouring—but underneath you're a man the same as I am. By the way, the doctor says your heart's no good, fatty degeneration. . . .

FATHER PAVLIN: What will this talk lead to? Think of it and you'll be smitten with fear! It has been established from time immemorial. . . .

BULICHOV: Established, yes, but not very firmly, it appears.

FATHER PAVLIN: Leo Tolstoy was a heretic, his name was anathema because of his unbelief, and he fled from death into the woods, even as a wild beast. . . .

[XENIA enters.]

XENIA: Yegor Vassilyevich, Mokei's here and he says Yakov was arrested by the gendarmes last night, so he wants to know. . . .

BULICHOV: Well, thanks, Father Pavlin . . . for your advice! I'll trouble you another time, I think. Call Bashkin here, Xenia. Tell Glaphira she can bring me my gruel. Yes, and the orange-vodka.

XENIA: You're not to have vodka. . . .

BULICHOV: I can have—everything! Go along with you.

[Exit XENIA and FATHER PAVLIN.]

[Left alone, he glances around, chuckles and mutters]:

Father . . . Pavlin. . . . The owl. . . . You should have taken to tobacco, Yegor. It's easier when you're wrapped in smoke, things are not so plain. . . .

[BASHKIN enters.]

BULICHOV: Well, Mokei?

BASHKIN: How's your health, Yegor Vassilyevich?

BULICHOV: Getting better all the time. So Yakov's been arrested?

BASHKIN: Yes, last night. What a shame!

BULICHOV: Only he?

BASHKIN: They say there was some watchmaker or other and Kalmykova, the school-teacher who used to give Alexandra Yegorovna lessons, and Yerichonov the stoker, who's known

to be a downright rebel. About ten altogether, it's said.

BULICHOV: And they're all for "Down with the tsar?"

BASHKIN: There's some for one thing and some for another, some against the tsar, some against all the rich and wanting the workers to run the country. . . .

BULICHOV: What rubbish!

BASHKIN: Of course.

BULICHOV: They'll sell the state for drink.

BASHKIN: For certain.

BULICHOV: Yes. . . . But . . . supposing they don't?

BASHKIN: And what would they do without the employers?

BULICHOV: You're right. They'd never be able to get along without you and Vasska Dostigayev.

BASHKIN: You're an employer yourself. . . .

BULICHOV: Well, what about it? So I am. What is it they sing, you say?

BASHKIN [*sighing*]: "We renounce the old world." . . .

BULICHOV: And then?

BASHKIN: "Shake its dust from our feet." . . .

BULICHOV: Sounds like a prayer. . . .

BASHKIN: What kind of a prayer's that? "We hate the tsar," they say, "and the palace."

BULICHOV: Aha, is that so! M—yes . . . the devils! [*Thinks a while.*] Well, and what did you want?

[GLAPHIRA *brings in some gruel and vodka.*]

BASHKIN: Me? Oh nothing.

BULICHOV: What did you come for, then?

BASHKIN: To ask whom I should put in Yakov's place.

BULICHOV: Sergei Potapov.

BASHKIN: He's got the same kind of notions, too—wants neither God—nor tsar. . . .

BULICHOV: Oh, he's like that, is he?

BASHKIN: Might I suggest—Mokrousov. He's very anxious to work for you. He can read and write and look after things.

GLAPHIRA: Your gruel'll get cold.

BULICHOV: A policeman? A thief? What's he after?

BASHKIN: It's dangerous now in the police, many are leaving it.

BULICHOV: Is that so? Dangerous for them, is it? Leaving it like rats. . . . All right, send Potapov here tomorrow morning. You can go. . . . Glakha, has the trumpeter come?

GLAPHIRA: He's sitting in the kitchen.

BULICHOV: When I've had my gruel, you can send him in. Why is the house so still?

GLAPHIRA: They're all upstairs.

BULICHOV [*taking some vodka*]: Well—all right. Why do you look so down-in-the-mouth?

GLAPHIRA: Don't drink, don't do yourself harm, don't be sick! Give up everything and go away from them. They'll eat you alive—like worms—they'll gnaw the life out of you. Let's go away to Siberia. . . .

BULICHOV: Let go of me . . . you hurt. . . .

GLAPHIRA: We'll go to Siberia, I'll work. . . . Why should you stay here? What for? No one cares for you—they're just waiting for you to die. . . .

BULICHOV: Stop it, Glakha. . . . Don't upset me . . . I

know it all. . . . I can see everything. . . . I know that you . . . you and Shurka . . . are all I've got out of life and the rest are just trying to get something out of me. . . . But perhaps I'll get better yet . . . call the trumpeter, go along, do.

GLAPHIRA: Finish your gruel first.

BULICHOV: Oh, devil take the gruel! Call Shurka in. . . .

[Left alone, he tosses off glass after glass of vodka greedily. The TRUMPETER comes in. He is a comical, thin, pitiful figure with a big trumpet in a sack slung across his shoulders.]

TRUMPETER: I wish your honour the best of health.

BULICHOV [*taken aback*]: How do you do. Sit down.

[Shouts.] Glakha! Shut the door! So this is what you're like?

TRUMPETER: Right, your honour.

BULICHOV: Well, you're not much to look at! Tell us, how do you cure folks?

TRUMPETER: My cure, your honour, is quite simple, only people are in the habit of dosing themselves with medicines from the chemist's and they don't believe me, so I take the precaution of asking for my fee in advance.

BULICHOV: It's not a bad idea, either. But do you cure people?

TRUMPETER: I've cured hundreds.

BULICHOV: You don't seem to have got rich on it, somehow.

TRUMPETER: No one gets rich on good works.

BULICHOV: Aha, listen to him, now! What diseases can you cure?

TRUMPETER: All diseases proceed from the same cause, foul

air in the belly, so my treatment is a cure for them all. . . .
BULICHOV [*laughing*]: Bravo! Well, now, show us that trumpet of yours. . . .

TRUMPETER: Could you pay a ruble?

BULICHOV: A ruble? I daresay I'll find one. Glakha, have you got a ruble? Here you are. You don't charge much.

TRUMPETER: That's just for a beginning. [*Unties the sack and drags out a brass trumpet. Shura runs in.*]

BULICHOV: Oo—oh—a regular samovar! . . . Shurka—what do you think of this for a healer? Well, give us a blow on it.

TRUMPETER [*clears his throat, blows a blast—but not very loudly, then coughs.*]

BULICHOV: And is that all?

TRUMPETER: Four times a day for five minutes—nothing more.

BULICHOV: And the patient uses up his breath and—pops off?

TRUMPETER: Never! I've cured hundreds.

BULICHOV: Is that so? Well, now tell me the truth: what do you consider yourself, a fool or a rogue?

TRUMPETER [*sighing*]: So you don't believe in it either, like the rest.

BULICHOV [*laughing*]: Don't put the trumpet away yet. Tell me straight: are you a fool or a rogue? I'll pay you if you'll tell me.

SHURA: You shouldn't offend him, father.

BULICHOV: I'm not going to offend him, Shurka. What's your name, doctor?

TRUMPETER: Gabriel Uvekov. . . .

BULICHOV: Gabriel? [*Laughing heartily.*] Oh, but damn it all! . . . Are you sure it's Gabriel?

TRUMPETER: It's a very ordinary name . . . never heard anyone laugh at it before.

BULICHOV: Well . . . what are you: stupid or crooked?

TRUMPETER: Would you give me sixteen rubles if I told you?

BULICHOV: Glakha—bring the money here! It's in the bedroom. . . . Why, sixteen, Gabriel?

TRUMPETER: I made a mistake! I should have asked for more.

BULICHOV: So you're stupid?

TRUMPETER: No, I'm no fool.

BULICHOV: So—then you must be a rogue?

TRUMPETER: I'm not a rogue either. But you know yourself you can't live without fooling people.

BULICHOV: That's true! It's not very nice, my lad, but it's true.

SHURA: But oughtn't you to be ashamed to fool people?

TRUMPETER: Why should I be ashamed, if they believe in it?

BULICHOV [*excitedly*]: And that's right, too! Do you understand, Shurka? He's absolutely right! That priest Pavlin would never say that. He wouldn't dare!

TRUMPETER: You ought to give me a bit extra for telling the truth. And—cross my heart—my trumpet does help some folks.

BULICHOV: That's right—give him twenty-five rubles, Glakha. Give him more. Give him the whole lot. [*GLAPHIRA gives him the money.*]

TRUMPETER: Much obliged. . . . Maybe you'd try the trumpet? Devil knows—it might do you some good!

BULICHOV: No, thanks. Eh, Gabriel, Gabriel! [*Laughs.*]

Now let's see, show us how it works. . . . Come on, blow!
A bit louder!

[TRUMPETER *blows a deafening blast.* GLAPHIRA *looks at BULICHOV in alarm.* SHURA *puts her fingers in her ears and laughs.*]

BULICHOV: Blow with all your might!

[*The DOSTIGAYEVs, ZVONTSOVs, BASHKIN and XENIA rush in.*]

VARVARA: What's all this, father?

XENIA: Yegor, what's this new freak of yours?

ZVONTSOV [*to the trumpeter*]: Are you drunk?

BULICHOV: Don't touch him! Don't dare! That's right, crack their ear-drums, Gabriel! It's the Archangel Gabriel trumpeting the end of the world!

XENIA: A—ah! He's gone plumb crazy!

BASHKIN [*to ZVONTSOV*]: You see for yourself!

SHURA: Father, do you hear? They're saying you've gone crazy! Go away, trumpeter, go away!

BULICHOV: No, don't go. Blow, Gabriel, blow! It's Armageddon! The end of the world! Blow your trumpet, blo—o—ow!

[*The trumpeting continues as the curtain falls.*]

ACT THREE

SCENE: *The dining room. Everything in it appears to have been moved out of its place. The table has not been cleared; it is littered with crockery, parcels and bottles. The samovar stands at one end. In a corner of the room lie several portmanteaus. TAISSYA, a young novice, in a tall, pointed hood, is unpacking one of them. GLAPHIRA lingers near her with a tray in her hand. The room is lit by a lamp hanging over the table.*

GLAPHIRA: Has Mother Melania come to stay for a long time?

TAISSYA: I don't know.

GLAPHIRA: Why didn't she put up at the church hostel?

TAISSYA: I don't know.

GLAPHIRA: How old are you?

TAISSYA: Nineteen.

[ZVONTSOV appears on the stairs.]

GLAPHIRA: And you don't know anything yet? What's the matter with you? Are you a savage, or something?

TAISSYA: We're forbidden to talk to lay people.

ZVONTSOV: Has the Abbess had her tea yet?

GLAPHIRA: No.

ZVONTSOV: Then better warm up the samovar, in case. . . .

[GLAPHIRA *picks up the samovar, and goes out.*]

ZVONTSOV: Did the soldiers frighten you—up at the Abbey?

TAISSYA: Yes.

ZVONTSOV: What did they do that frightened you?

TAISSYA: They killed one of the cows, and threatened to burn down the Abbey. Excuse me, I must go. [*She goes out with a pile of linen in her arms.*]

VARVARA [*from the vestibule*]: What mud and slush! Are you having a chat with the novice?

ZVONTSOV: You know, it's rather awkward having an abness in our house. . . .

VARVARA: The house isn't ours yet. . . . What about Tyatin—did he agree?

ZVONTSOV: Tyatin's an ass, or else he's pretending to be honest.

VARVARA: Wait. . . . That sounds like father calling. . . .
[*Listens at the door of her father's room.*]

ZVONTSOV: The doctors may say what they like about your father being perfectly all right in his head, but after that idiotic scene with the trumpet. . . .

VARVARA: He's made worse scenes than that in his time. Apparently Alexandra and Tyatin are on quite good terms with each other. . . .

ZVONTSOV: Yes, but I don't see anything good about that. That young sister of yours is a slippery customer. . . . One may expect—well, quite serious trouble from her yet.

VARVARA: It's a pity you didn't think of that when she was flirting with you. You seemed to find it rather pleasant.

ZVONTSOV: She was only flirting with me to annoy you.

VARVARA: Are you peeved? Here comes Pavlin, poking his nose in again. It's getting to be a habit with him.

ZVONTSOV: We've a surplus of clergy here, in my opinion.

[ELIZAVETA and FATHER PAVLIN come in, arguing. They are followed by MOKEI BASHKIN.]

FATHER PAVLIN: The papers are lying as usual. Good evening.

ELIZAVETA: I'm telling you, it's not true.

FATHER PAVLIN: It is established beyond doubt: the tsar has abdicated, not of his own free will, but under the threat of arms, having been detained on the road to Petrograd by members of the Constitutional-Democratic Party. . . .

M—yes!

ZVONTSOV: What conclusions do you draw from this?

ELIZAVETA: Father Pavlin is against the revolution and all for going on with the war, and I'm against the war. I want to go to Paris. . . . Enough of fighting. Don't you agree with me, Varya? You remember what *Henri Quatre* said: Better Paris than war. Yes, I know he didn't say exactly that, but he made a mistake if he didn't.

FATHER PAVLIN: I don't insist on anything, because everything is unstable.

VARVARA: Peace is what's needed, Father Pavlin—peace! You see how the lower classes are behaving?

FATHER PAVLIN: Ah yes, I see! Well, and what about our

invalid? How is he in this respect? [*Pressing his finger to his brow.*]

ZVONTSOV: The doctors found no symptoms of derangement.

FATHER PAVLIN: Well, it's nice to hear that. Though as a rule the doctors are only unerring in finding their fees.

ELIZAVETA: Aren't you spiteful! Varya, Jeanne's invited us to supper.

BASHKIN: The prisoners have been released and the police are having a bad time of it.

FATHER PAVLIN: Yes, that's so. A most surprising thing. What good do you expect to result from these events, Andrei Petrovich, eh?

ZVONTSOV: The social forces are organizing themselves as they should and will soon have their say. By social forces I mean people who have a sound economic. . . .

VARVARA: Listen, Jeanne's invited us. [*Leads him aside and whispers.*]

ZVONTSOV: Look here, this is a bit awkward for me. An abess on the one hand, and a *cocotte* on the other.

VARVARA: Sssh, will you!

BASHKIN: Andrei Petrovich—Mokrousov's here—you know—the police inspector.

VARVARA: Yes? What does he want?

BASHKIN: He's throwing up his job because it's getting too dangerous and he wants to work for us, in the woods.

ZVONTSOV: Will that be quite convenient for us, though?

VARVARA: Wait, Andrei. . . .

BASHKIN: Very convenient. Now Laptev'll begin to turn

up his nose at everything and make trouble. Donat—you know yourself—is not a suitable fellow and he's a dissenter too, always mumbling about the law of truth, and what kind of truth could you expect when . . . well, you can see for yourself!

ZVONTSOV: Oh, this is all nonsense. It's truth beginning to triumph that we are witnessing now. . . .

VARVARA: Oh, wait Andrei, can't you?

ZVONTSOV: And justice too.

VARVARA: So what is it you want, Mokei?

BASHKIN: I'm for engaging Mokrousov. I suggested it to Yegor Vassilyevich.

VARVARA: And what did he say? [ZVONTSOV frowns and leaves them.]

BASHKIN: He didn't say anything definite.

VARVARA: Take on Mokrousov, then.

BASHKIN: Maybe you'd like to have a look at him?

VARVARA: What for?

BASHKIN: Oh, just so's you'd know him. He's—here.

VARVARA: Very well, then.

[BASHKIN goes into the vestibule. VARVARA writes something in her notebook. BASHKIN returns with MOKROUSSOV. The latter has a round face with eyebrows raised in perpetual astonishment and, though smiling at present, looks as if he is ready to do some hard swearing. He is in police uniform, with a revolver at his hip. He clicks his heels and draws himself up smartly at attention.]

MOKROUSSOV: Permit me to present myself—Mokrousov—at your service. Very grateful to have the honour.

VARVARA: Delighted, I'm sure. So you're in uniform? I heard the police were being disarmed.

MOKROUSSOV: Quite true. It's dangerous for us to appear in the streets in our uniforms these days, so I wear an ordinary overcoat, although I'm armed. But just now, in view of the fact that unfounded expectations have been aroused, the mob has quieted down—that's why I've come without my sword.

VARVARA: When do you think you'll start working for us?

MOKROUSSOV: I have long been your obedient servant in thought, if not in deed. I'm ready to go to the woods tomorrow if you like. I'm single and. . . .

VARVARA: Do you think it's likely to last long—this rebellion?

MOKROUSSOV: All summer, I should think. Then the rains and frost will set in and it'll be unpleasant to loiter in the streets.

VARVARA [*with a little laugh*]: You think it'll only last out the summer? A revolution hardly depends on the weather, does it?

MOKROUSSOV: But—pardon me—of course it does. Winter cools things down.

VARVARA [*with another little laugh*]: You're an optimist.

MOKROUSSOV: The police are optimistic, as a rule.

VARVARA: Oh really?

MOKROUSSOV: Exactly. It's because they're conscious of their strength.

VARVARA: Have you served in the army?

MOKROUSSOV: Yes, I have. In the Busuluk Reserve Battalion. I was a sub-lieutenant.

VARVARA [*holding out her hand*]: Well, goodbye, good luck.
MOKROUSSOV [*kissing her hand*]: I'm sincerely touched.

[*Goes out backwards, clicking his heels.*]

VARVARA [*to BASHKIN*]: Seems an awful fool, doesn't he?

BASHKIN: There's no harm in that. Look at the clever folks—
give them the chance and they'll turn the world inside out
. . . as they would your pocket.

FATHER PAVLIN [*to BASHKIN and ELIZAVETA*]: The clergy
must be given the right to preach freely, otherwise nothing
will come of it.

[*GLAPHIRA and SHURA come in, leading YEGOR BULICHOV.*

Silence falls in the room. They all watch him. He frowns.]

BULICHOV: Well? What have you shut up for all of a sudden?

You've been jabbering and muttering. . . .

FATHER PAVLIN: We're astounded by the unexpected sight
of. . . .

BULICHOV: Of what?

FATHER PAVLIN: At the spectacle of a man dependent on
some one to lead him. . . .

BULICHOV: Dependent? When a man's legs give way, he's
got to be led about, hasn't he? Dependent, indeed! . . .

Has Yashka Laptev been released, Mokei?

BASHKIN: Yes, all the prisoners have been released.

ZVONTSOV: The political prisoners, that is.

BULICHOV: So Yakov Laptev's at liberty and the tsar's a
prisoner? What do you say to that, Father Pavlin, eh?

FATHER PAVLIN: I am inexperienced in such matters, but in
my humble opinion it would be well to ascertain first what
precisely these persons intend to say and do. . . .

BULICHOV: Choose a new tsar, of course. You'll be at each other's throats if you don't have a tsar. . . .

FATHER PAVLIN: Your face looks animated today; apparently you're overcoming your indisposition?

BULICHOV: That's it—I'm overcoming it. . . . You married couples and you, Mokei, can leave Pavlin and me alone for a while. You needn't go, Shurka.

[BASHKIN goes into the hall. The ZVONTSOVs go upstairs. Soon after VARVARA comes half-way downstairs and listens.]

SHURA: Lie down, father.

BULICHOV: I don't want to. Well, Father Pavlin, you've come about the bell for the church, I suppose?

FATHER PAVLIN: No. I just called in the hope of seeing you in a better condition, and in this I was not mistaken. But, remembering your lavish and generous gifts in the past, devoted to the beautifying of the town and its temple. . . .

BULICHOV: You don't pray for me properly. You see—I'm getting worse. I don't feel like paying any more money to God. What am I paying for, anyway? I've paid a lot already and what have I got for it?

FATHER PAVLIN: Your subscriptions. . . .

BULICHOV: Wait! I've a question to ask you: isn't God ashamed to do what he's doing? What is he sending me to my death for?

SHURA: Oh, don't talk about death—you musn't!

BULICHOV: You keep quiet! Just listen. It's not about myself.

FATHER PAVLIN: It's wrong to distress yourself with

thoughts like these. And what does death mean, when the soul is immortal?

BULICHOV: Then why is the soul squeezed into this dirty, cramping flesh?

FATHER PAVLIN: The Church considers this question not only vain and idle, but also. . . .

[VARVARA, on the stairs, presses her handkerchief to her lips to stifle her laughter.]

BULICHOV: Now then, no humbug! Tell us straight out. Shura, d'you remember the trumpeter, eh?

FATHER PAVLIN: In the presence of Alexandra Yegorovna. . . .

BULICHOV: Oh, never mind that! If she's got to live, she's got to know. I've lived a long time myself and I'm asking you now: what do you live for?

FATHER PAVLIN: I'm in the service of the Church. . . .

BULICHOV: Yes, I know that. I know you're in the service of the Church. But you'll have to die sometime, won't you? What does it mean? What is it—this death of ours, Pavlin?

FATHER PAVLIN: Your questions are illogical and fruitless. And forgive me for saying so—but it's not of earthly things you should be thinking now. . . .

SHURA: Don't you dare talk like that!

BULICHOV: I'm of the earth—I'm earthly through and through.

FATHER PAVLIN [*rising*]: The earth is but dust and ashes. . . .

BULICHOV: Dust and ashes! Then you—then you yourself understand that earth is only dust and ashes. Dust and

ashes. Dust and ashes—and you're wearing a silk cassock.
Dust and ashes—and a gilded cross! Dust and ashes—and
yet you're greedy and grasping. . . .

FATHER PAVLIN: You're betraying evil rancour and malice
in the presence of this young maiden. . . .

BULICHOV: Maiden, maiden—who made her. . . . [VAR-
VARA runs quickly upstairs.] They train fools like you same
as they train dogs to catch hares. . . . You made your-
selves rich out of Christ who was a beggar.

FATHER PAVLIN: Your disease spoils your temper and, be-
ing enraged, you bellow like a wild boar. . . .

BULICHOV: So you're going, eh? Aha. . . .

[Exit FATHER PAVLIN.]

SHURA: You shouldn't upset yourself, father, it only makes
you worse. Aren't you a terror!

BULICHOV: Never mind! I've nothing to regret! Ugh, how
I hate that priest! You watch—and listen. I'm showing
you—on purpose. . . .

SHURA: I can see it all myself. . . . I'm not a child . . . or
a fool!

[ZVONTSOV appears on the stairs.]

BULICHOV: After that trumpeter, they made up their minds
I'd gone crazy. But the doctors said no! You believe the
doctors, Shura, don't you?

SHURA: I believe you . . . only you. . . .

BULICHOV: Good girl! Oh, yes, my mind's all right. The
doctors know. It's true, I've come up against something
sharp. But everyone would like to know what death means.
. . . . Or, for instance, life? See?

SHURA: I don't believe you're so seriously ill. You ought to go away from home. Glaphira's right! You should try real hard to get well. You won't listen to anyone.

BULICHOV: I listen to everyone. Now we'll try the sorceress.

What if she were to do me good? It's time she came. The pain's gnawing at me . . . like . . . an awful yearning!

SHURA: Stop, dear! Oh don't—my own dear, dear father!

Lie down, do. . . .

BULICHOV: It's worse when I lie down. If I lie down it means—I give in. Same as in boxing. And—I want to talk. I've got to tell you something. You see—it's like this—I'm kind of living in the wrong street. I fell in among a lot of strangers . . . thirty years now I've been among strangers. And this is what I don't want you to have to go through! My father used to float rafts. And I—look at me. . . . This is what I can't explain properly to you.

SHURA: Take your time, talk quietly. . . . Talk like you used to when you told me stories.

BULICHOV: They weren't stories—I always told you the truth. See here. . . . These priests and tsars and governors . . . what the devil do I want with them? I don't believe in God. Where is God, anyhow? You see yourself. . . . And good people—there are none. They're as scarce as . . . false coin! You see what people are like? Now they've got into a mess with the war and what not—gone clean crazy! But what have I to do with them? What does Yegor Bulichov want with them? And you . . . now, how are you going to live with them?

SHURA: Oh, don't bother your head about me. . . .

Act III YEGOR BULICHOV & OTHERS

XENIA [*coming in at this moment*]: 'Lexandra, Tonya and her brother have come to see you and that other fellow's with them. . . .

SHURA: Let 'em wait.

XENIA: You go along to them. I've got to talk to your father.

BULICHOV: So—I've got to talk, have I?

SHURA: See that you don't talk much then. . . .

XENIA: Teaching me! The idea!—Yegor Vassilyevich, Zobunova's come. . . .

BULICHOV: Shurka, bring the young folks in here afterwards—will you? [*Exit SHURA.*] Well, fetch your Zobunova!

XENIA: In a minute. I just want to tell you that 'Lexandra's got very friendly with that good-for-nothing cousin of Andrei's. You must see yourself he's no match for her. We took in one beggar, and now look at the way he orders everyone about.

BULICHOV: Do you know, Axinia, you're like a bad dream—you really are!

XENIA: Oh, God help you, insult me if you want to! But you ought to forbid her carrying on with that Tyatin.

BULICHOV: Well, what else have you to say?

XENIA: Melania's here.

BULICHOV: Why?

XENIA: Something awful happened. Deserters attacked the nunnery, killed a cow, stole two axes, a spade and a coil of rope. . . . Terrible goings-on, I declare! And that Donat, our forester—he is sheltering some queer characters. They live in a barrack in the clearing. . . .

BULICHOV: It seems when anyone is agreeable to me, he's sure to be disagreeable to everyone else.

XENIA: You ought to make your peace with her. . . .

BULICHOV: With Melania, you mean? What for?

XENIA: Why of course you should. . . . Your health being so. . . .

BULICHOV: All right. . . . I'll make it up then. . . . "Forgive us our debts" . . . I'll say to her. . . .

XENIA: Be a bit gentler to her. . . . [*Goes out.*]

BULICHOV [*mutters*]: "And forgive us our debts—as we forgive our debtors." Lies all around one. . . . What devils. . . .

[*VARVARA comes in.*]

VARVARA: Father, I heard mother talking to you about Stepan Tyatin. . . .

BULICHOV: Yes. . . . You hear everything, and there's nothing you don't know. . . .

VARVARA: Tyatin's a modest fellow, he wouldn't demand a big dowry with Alexandra and he's a good match for her.

BULICHOV: Very considerate, aren't you. . . .

VARVARA: I've had my eye on him. . . .

BULICHOV: Who is it you're so anxious about? Aye—what a crew!

[*ABBESS MELANIA and XENIA come in, followed by TAISSYA, who remains in the doorway.*]

BULICHOV: Well, Malasha. So we're going to make up, are we?

ABBESS MELANIA: Now you're talking, you fighting-cock! Insulting everybody without rhyme or reason. . . .

Act III YEGOR BULICHOV & OTHERS

BULICHOV: "And forgive us our debts." . . . Malasha!

ABBESS MELANIA: We aren't talking about debts. None of your sauce now! Look at what's going on in the world! The tsar—the Lord's Anointed—cast down from his throne. And that means—what? The Lord has sent darkness and confusion among His people; they have gone mad, they are digging pits into which they themselves will fall. The mob is in revolt. The peasant women of Kopossovo actually screamed in my face that they, forsooth, were the people: "Our husbands, the soldiers, are the nation!" How do you like that? When did you ever hear of soldiers being regarded as the nation, I ask you?

XENIA: That's what that Yakov Laptev keeps saying. . . .

ABBESS MELANIA: The governor of the province has been deprived of his position and Osmolovsky the notary set up in his place.

BULICHOV: Another fat-belly.

ABBESS MELANIA: Yesterday Bishop Nikandr said: "We're on the eve of disastrous events; can it be," he said, "that the temporal powers shall rule? From Biblical times the nations have been ruled by the hand armed with the sword and the cross." . . .

VARVARA: They didn't worship the cross in Biblical times.

ABBESS MELANIA: You hold your tongue, Miss Clever. . . .

The New Testament and the Old are both in one binding, aren't they? And the cross is the sword! So there you are! The Bishop knows better than you, I hope, when and what was worshipped by people. You're an ambitious lot and you rejoice at the downfall of the throne. But wait,

your joy may turn to bitter tears after a while. I'd like to have a word with you in private, Yegorushka. . . .

BULICHOV: What, we're going to quarrel with each other again? Very well, we can have a chat afterwards, if you like. The sorceress is coming in now. I want to get well, Malasha.

ABBESS MELANIA: Zobunova's a famous healer. The doctors are nowhere near as clever as she is. And after that you might talk to the Blessed Prokopii. . . .

BULICHOV: What, the fellow the little boys call Propottei? He's a rogue, they say.

ABBESS MELANIA: Now, now, that'll do! How can you say such things? You have him come in here. . . .

BULICHOV: Well, we can have Propottei, as well. I feel a bit better today, except for my legs. . . . More cheerful, sort of. Everything seems kind of funny to me. . . . Call in the sorceress, Axinia.

[XENIA goes out.]

ABBESS MELANIA: Aye—Yegori, there's a lot . . . left in you yet!

BULICHOV: Yes, that's just it . . . there's such a lot. . . .

XENIA [returns]: She says everyone must leave the room.

ABBESS MELANIA: Well, we must go, then.

[*They all leave the room. BULICHOV sits chuckling, stroking his chest and side. ZOBUNOVA comes in. She screws up her mouth—not very noticeably but just enough to be detected—and blows to the right side, while her right hand is pressed against her heart and her left flapping like a fan. Then she stands still and passes her right hand over her face.*]

Act III YEGOR BULICHOV & OTHERS

BULICHOV: Are you praying to the devils?

ZOBUNOVA [*in a sing-song voice*]: Oi, all ye evil humours, and bodily ills! Begone, begone and leave the servant of God in peace! From this very day and from this very hour, I'm driving you away with my hard words forever and ever and aye! Good evening to your worshipful honour, by name—Yegori.

BULICHOV: Good evening, auntie. . . . Were you chasing the devils away?

ZOBUNOVA: Why, goodness gracious me, how can anyone have anything to do with them?

BULICHOV: If you've got to, you can. The priests pray to God, but you're not a priest, so you must pray to the devils.

ZOBUNOVA: Oh, how can you say such terrible things? It's only silly folks as say I've any dealings with the Evil One.

BULICHOV: If you haven't you won't be able to do anything for me, auntie. The priests have prayed to God for me, and God has refused to help me.

ZOBUNOVA: You must be joking, dear man, you're saying this because you don't believe me.

BULICHOV: I might have believed you if you'd come straight from the devils. But you're sure to have heard, of course, that I'm a rake, that I'm cruel to people and greedy about money. . . .

ZOBUNOVA: I've heard it, but I don't believe you'd grudge giving me a little bit o' your good money.

BULICHOV: I'm a great sinner, auntie, and God won't have anything to do with me. God's forsaken Yegor Bulichov. So, if you have no dealings with the evil spirits you'd better

go and do abortions for the country wenches. That's your trade, isn't it?

ZOBUNOVA: Aye, it's true words they speak that says you're a wild, mischievous fellow!

BULICHOV: Well, what lies were you going to tell? Out with them!

ZOBUNOVA: I've never been taught to lie. You tell me what ails you, and how, and where.

BULICHOV: It's my belly. It aches something cruel. Just here.

ZOBUNOVA: Well, you see it's like this . . . only don't you breathe a word to anyone of what I say. . . .

BULICHOV: I won't. Don't be afraid.

ZOBUNOVA: There are yellow sicknesses and black sicknesses.

A yellow sickness can be cured by the doctors, but the black sickness neither priest nor monk can pray away! The black sickness comes from the powers of darkness and there's only one thing against it. . . .

BULICHOV: Ah?—A case of either kill or cure, is that it?

ZOBUNOVA: It's a very dear cure.

BULICHOV: Of course! I guessed that.

ZOBUNOVA: This is a case where you have to have dealings with the Evil One.

BULICHOV: With Satan himself?

ZOBUNOVA: Well, maybe not with Satan himself, but still. . . .

BULICHOV: And can you do it?

ZOBUNOVA: Only—you mustn't breathe a word of it to anyone.

Act III YEGOR BULICHOV & OTHERS

BULICHOV: Oh, get the hell out of here!

ZOBUNOVA: Wait a minute. . . .

BULICHOV: Clear out, else I'll give you one. . . .

ZOBUNOVA: Listen to me. . . .

GLAPHIRA [*from the vestibule*]: You've been told to go, haven't you?

ZOBUNOVA: What sort of folks are you, anyway? . . .

BULICHOV: Kick her out!

GLAPHIRA: Clear out you—pretending you're a witch!

ZOBUNOVA: Witch yourself! What a mug you've got. . . .

Hey! May the two of you have neither sleep nor rest! [*The two women go out.*]

BULICHOV [*glancing about, gives a sigh of relief*]: Phe-ew!
[*ABBESS MELANIA and XENIA come in.*]

ABBESS MELANIA: So you didn't like Zobunova—she didn't suit you?

[*BULICHOV stares at her in silence.*]

XENIA: She's a quick-tempered one herself! She's been praised too much, and has grown impudent.

BULICHOV: Malasha—what do you think—does God ever have belly-aches?

ABBESS MELANIA: Don't act the fool, you. . . .

BULICHOV: I'm sure Christ often had belly-aches—he fed on fish. . . .

ABBESS MELANIA: Stop it, Yegor. Are you trying to provoke me?

[*GLAPHIRA returns.*]

GLAPHIRA: Zobunova wants to be paid for her trouble.

BULICHOV: Give her something, Axinia! You'll excuse me,

I hope, Malasha, but I'm tired—I'll go to my room. Nothing makes you so tired as talking to fools. Now then, Glakha, lend a hand here. . . .

[XENIA *exits.*]

[GLAPHIRA *leads him away.* XENIA *returns and looks enquiringly at her sister.*]

ABBESS MELANIA: He's pretending to be mad. It's all pretence.

XENIA: Is it, do you think? Why should he bother?

ABBESS MELANIA: It's nothing. Let him do it, if he wants to.

It'll turn against him afterwards, if his will has to be contested in court. Taissya will be a witness, and then there's Zobunova, Father Pavlin and that trumpeter—any number of people. We can prove that the man was not in his right mind when he made the will.

XENIA: Oh . . . I really don't know what to do. . . .

ABBESS MELANIA: Well, I'm teaching you what to do.

Umph, you . . . you were in such a hurry to get married! I told you to marry Bashkin.

XENIA: But that was ages ago! And Yegor was like an eagle—somehow—then. . . . You envied me yourself.

ABBESS MELANIA: I? Are you cracked, woman?

XENIA: Ah well, what's the use of casting things up at each other now. . . .

ABBESS MELANIA: Mercy on us! I envied her, she says! I?

XENIA: How about Prokofii? Perhaps we shouldn't call him in?

ABBESS MELANIA: Why not? We sent for him, we agreed on it—and then all of a sudden—you don't want him! Don't meddle with me. Go and get him ready and bring him in.

Act III YEGOR BULICHOV & OTHERS

Taissy! [TAISSYA comes in from the vestibule.] Well, what have you got to say?

TAISSYA: I couldn't find out anything. [XENIA leaves the room.]

ABBESS MELANIA: Why?

TAISSYA: She won't say anything.

ABBESS MELANIA: What do you mean, she won't say anything? You ought to have pressed her.

TAISSYA: I did, but she only splutters like a cat—and abuses everybody.

ABBESS MELANIA: Abuses everybody? What does she say?

TAISSYA: Calls them all crooks.

ABBESS MELANIA: Why?

TAISSYA: She says you only want to drive the fellow crazy.

ABBESS MELANIA: She said that to you?

TAISSYA: No, to Propettei the Blessed.

ABBESS MELANIA: And what does he say?

TAISSYA: He's sitting there, making up funny sayings. . . .

ABBESS MELANIA: Funny sayings? Eh . . . dunderhead!

He's a fanatic, those are prophesies, fool! Sit down in the vestibule and don't stir from there. . . . Was there anyone else in the kitchen?

TAISSYA: Mokei. . . .

ABBESS MELANIA: Well, go along now. . . . [Goes up to BULICHOV's door and knocks.] Yegori, the Blessed Prokofii's here.

[XENIA and BASHKIN escort the Blessed PROPOTTEI into the room. He wears bast sandals, a long unbleached linen shirt that reaches to his ankles, and a number of brass crosses and

small icons on his chest. His appearance is rather terrifying: his hair is thick and matted, his beard long, narrow and straggling, his movements are convulsive and jerky.]

PROPOTTEI: Ugh, what a stink of tobacco smoke! It'd smother your very soul. . . .

XENIA: Nobody's smoked in here. . . .

[PROPOTTEI *blows in imitation of the winter wind.*]

ABBESS MELANIA: Here, 'hold on, wait till he comes out. . . .

BULICHOV [*led out of his bedroom by GLAPHIRA*]: Ah, so that's you, is it? Look who's here now!

PROPOTTEI: Be not afraid! Fear not! [*Blows again.*] All is ashes, all must pass! "Grisha the monk climbed higher and higher, till he bumped his head on the ceiling. The devil was waiting and watching his dealing, and dragged him off into the fire."

BULICHOV: This is all about Rasputin, is it?

PROPOTTEI: The tsar is dethroned, his kingdom is going to ruin; from now on sin, death and stinking foulness will reign! Oo-oh! the blizzard howls, oo-oh! the melting of the snows and the filthy roads. [*Imitates the whistling of the wind. Points to GLAPHIRA with his staff.*] The Devil in female form is close beside you. Drive her away!

BULICHOV: I'll drive you away; that's what I'll do! Gab if you like, but know when to stop. Was it you, Melania, who taught him all this?

ABBESS MELANIA: What things you think of? Can the mad be taught?

BULICHOV: It looks as if they could. . . .

[*SHURA comes running downstairs followed by ANTONINA and*

Act III YEGOR BULICHOV & OTHERS

TYATIN. *Then the ZVONTSOVS and the DOSTIGAYEVS come down. PROPOTTEI draws signs on the floor and in the air with his staff, but says nothing. Stands thoughtfully with bent head.*]

SHURA [*running up to her father*]: Now what's all this? What kind of a show is it?

ABBESS MELANIA: You hold your tongue!

PROPOTTEI [*as if speaking with difficulty*]: No sleep for the heretic, but the clock goes, tick, tick—a tick. If there was a God . . . and if . . . He could . . . and He would . . . no, no. . . . And . . . whose misfortune? Play, Satan, you've been given . . . a free hand! Midnight strikes, the cock crows, cock-a-doodle-doo! . . . Tick, tick, tick—tick . . . here's the end of a heretic!

BULICHOV: Very nice; they taught you well, I must say. . . .

ABBESS MELANIA: Don't interrupt, Yegor, don't interrupt, I tell you. . . .

PROPOTTEI: What shall we do? What shall we tell people?

ANTONINA [*regretfully*]: Oh, but he isn't a bit terrible. No. . . .

PROPOTTEI: They've killed a nit and sung a mass for it. . . . But maybe we ought to dance? Come on then, we'll dance, to you—and to ourselves. [*Stamps his feet, humming softly at first, then louder and capers about.*] Astaroth, Sabatan, Askafat, Idume, Neume. . . . If you can't you're done, bim, bom, knock your head against the wall! Aye . . . piff, biff—what do you sniff? Hokey pokey, ain't it smoky! Satan's a-playing with his own-own-own, here in the world he's all alo-lo-lone! Zakatama the witch got him

in her loins, the bitch! He can't get away from sin and fornication, it's plain that Yegorro was born for sorrow. . . .
 SHURA [*screaming*]: Oh! Chase him out of here!

BULICHOV: So you—want to frighten me, devil take you!

ZVONTSOV: This disgusting scene ought to be stopped. . . .

[*GLAPHIRA runs up to PROPOTTEI, whereupon he, without pausing in his gyrations, tries to strike her with his stick.*]

PROPOTTEI: Hic, heck, hoc, hack! Evil spirit, turn you back!

[*TYATIN snatches the stick from PROPOTTEI's hand.*]

ABBESS MELANIA: What are you doing? Who are you—to. . . .

SHURA: Father, send them all away. . . . Why do you sit and say nothing?

BULICHOV [*with an impatient gesture*]: Wait . . . wait.

[*PROPOTTEI sits down on the floor, blowing and screeching.*]

ABBESS MELANIA: He mustn't be touched! He's under a spell of inspiration, he's gone into ecstasy!

DOSTIGAYEV: For going into ecstasies like that, Mother Melania, he should get it in the neck.

ZVONTSOV: Get up! And clear out—quick now!

PROPOTTEI: Eh . . . where? [*Imitates the howling of the wind again.*]

[*XENIA begins to cry.*]

ELIZAVETA: Doesn't he do that well . . . in two perfectly different voices!

BULICHOV: Out with the whole lot of you. . . . You've done enough gaping here. . . .

SHURA [*stamping her foot at the half-wit*]: Go away, you horrible creature! Stepa, chase him out!

Act III YEGOR BULICHOV & OTHERS

TYATIN [*taking PROPOTTEI by the back of the neck*]: Come along, saint, up with you! [*Both exit.*]

TAISSYA: He wasn't really very frightening today. He can make it much more awful than that—if he'd been given a drop of vodka. . . .

ABBESS MELANIA: You! How—dare you—blab? [*Gives the girl a resounding slap on the cheek.*]

ZVONTSOV: You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

ABBESS MELANIA: What? Before you?

VARVARA: Calm yourself, auntie. . . .

XENIA: Heavens above! . . . What's all this, anyhow?

[*SHURA and GLAPHIRA help BULICHOV to lie down on the couch. DOSTIGAYEV stands looking at him attentively. The ZVONTSOVs lead away XENIA and ABBESS MELANIA.*]

DOSTIGAYEV [*to his wife*]: Let's go home, Liza, let's go home. Bulichov's in a bad way. Very bad. And there's the demonstration. . . . We ought to join it.

ELIZAVETA: How did he manage to imitate the wind like that, eh? I've never imagined anything like it.

BULICHOV [*to SHURA*]: The Abbess thought it all out . . . this. . . .

SHURA: Are you feeling bad?

BULICHOV: She. . . . It's something like hearing the burial service . . . before a man's dead. . . .

SHURA: Tell me . . . are you feeling worse? Shall I send for the doctor?

BULICHOV: No, you needn't. He put it in himself—the clown—that bit about the kingdom. . . . "If there was a God, and if He could". . . you heard him? But He can't!

SHURA: You must forget all this. . . .

BULICHOV: We'll forget it all right! You ought to go and have a look at what they're all doing. . . . See that they don't do Glaphira any harm. . . . What's all that singing in the street?

SHURA: You mustn't get up!

BULICHOV: And it'll come to ruin—the kingdom where everything's foul and stinks. . . . I can't see anything. . . .

[*Rises, and clinging to the table with one hand, rubs his eyes.*] “Thy kingdom come!” . . . What kingdom?

Beasts; Kingdom. . . . “Our father, which art. . . .”

No . . . that's no good. What sort of a father are you to me, if you've condemned me to death? For what?

Everyone dies? But why? Well, let them all—But why should I? [*Sways.*] Well? What is it, Yegor?

[*Shouts hoarsely.*] Shura . . . Glakha . . . the doctor! Hey, somebody—devils! Yegor . . . Bulichov . . . Yegor!

[SHURA, GLAPHIRA, TYATIN and TAISSYA run to BULICHOV who sways and almost falls as he tries to go to them. Outside the window the singing grows louder and heartier. GLAPHIRA and TYATIN support BULICHOV. SHURA darts over to the window and opens it. The singing bursts into the room.]

BULICHOV: What is it? The burial service—again—singing me out of the world! Shura! Who is it?

SHURA: Come over here, come on and look!

BULICHOV: Eh, Shura. . . .

CURTAIN



AN
OPTIMISTIC
TRAGEDY

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

By

VSEVOLOD VISHNEVSKY

Translated from the Russian by
H. G. SCOTT and ROBERT S. CARR

C H A R A C T E R S

THE FIRST—later 1ST CHORUS LEADER
THE SECOND—later 2ND CHORUS LEADER
VÄINÖNEN, a Finnish sailor
SPOTTY, a sailor
ALEXEI, Able Seaman of the Baltic Fleet
TALL SAILOR
CHIEF, an anarchist
FOGHORN, the Chief's right-hand man
THE COMMISSAR
THE COMMANDER
BOATSWAIN
OLD SAILOR
OLD WOMAN
1ST OFFICER } returned prisoners
2ND OFFICER }
ODESSITE
PRIEST
SAILORS, GUARDS, WOMEN

ACT ONE

A musical prelude . . . surging, overwhelming in its mighty grief. Wild outbursts of exultation. Sounds of human movement. Anguished cries of "Why? Why?" Frantic searchings for answers . . . the finding of them.

There were eighty-five thousand of us Baltic sailors, and forty thousand more on the Black Sea. We, too, searched for answers. . . . And here are two of the sailors and their talk.

THE FIRST: [*surveying those who have come to see the Tragedy*]: Who're these people?

THE SECOND: Why, that's the audience. They're our descendants. That's our future sitting out there, man—don't you remember how we used to eat our hearts out, on the ships, wishing we could see it some time, this future of ours?

THE FIRST: Mighty interesting to see the future come to life. I guess there must be a thousand of 'em here, all staring at us. . . . Ahoy, you out there—haven't you ever seen a sailor before?

THE SECOND: They're keeping mum. They've come here to watch heroic deeds, and see heroic people.

THE FIRST: Then let 'em look at one another!

THE SECOND: What a polite silence! Can't somebody stand

up and say something? [*To a person in the audience.*] You there, comrade—you with the frown. This isn't the War Commissariat—it's a theatre. . . . Maybe you think a War Commissariat and a theatre have different purposes tonight? Aha, you don't think so!—Well, come on then, let's get started! [*Recites, like a prelude to a poem.*] Lay aside the affairs of the evening. The sailor's regiment travelled its road to the end. Now it turns to you—to posterity.

[*Slowly, with heavy rumblings, colossal armour-plates swing open upon a cloudless, incandescent day, its glare unbearable for Northern eyes. The face of the earth quivers in the heat. The regiment is marching on an ancient road. The dazzling light is intensified by the white uniforms the regiment wears. The men move down and array themselves like a huge chorus, facing the audience.*]

THE SECOND [*now CHORUS-LEADER*]: Each one of these men had a family. Each one of them had a woman who loved him. When the women were widowed they grew to love other men just as much. This is life. It does not die. Many of them had children. They are here tonight. And each of these men thought dimly of the coming generation. Eighteen years ago that was hard to imagine—but now it has grown up, this generation, and sits here strong and real. Hello, new generation! These fighters did not ask you to mourn their deaths. Whole armies of such fighters were laid away under the sod in the great Civil War but your hearts didn't stop beating. Life does not die. Why, men can laugh and eat their dinners over the graves of their fellow-men. And this is beautiful! When

our boys lay dying they'd say, "Keep smiling! Look lively, Revolution!" As I said, this regiment turns to posterity. But don't think you've come to a funeral—just forget all that, the crêpe and the last sad rites. We're only asking you to sit here tonight and think about, and understand, the meaning that struggle and death really have for us. And so, it begins when. . . .

[*The lights dim . . . evening shadows criss-cross the deck of a great battleship. The sea's silence is full of immeasurable melancholy that only music can express. The LITTLE FINN, VÄINÖNEN, begins.*]

VÄINÖNEN: Sunset, and not a soul to say a kind word to a lonesome sailor.

[*His despair, his foreign accent, his eyes from which tears trickle for no reason other than the vast inchoate stillness of the world . . . all this touches the heart. And suddenly, shattering the silence, and shocking everyone, a Russian drill-master's voice.*]

THE VOICE [*bellowing*]: 'Tenn-shunn! Heels together, toes apart! Riiii-ght dress! Front!

[*The LITTLE FINN is rudely brought back to reality.*]

VÄINÖNEN: What's that son-of-a-bitch doing there? Does he think the old regime is back? [*He draws himself up, scowling fiercely in the direction from which the bullying commands are heard.*] Pipe down over there! Three hundred years of that is enough.

THE VOICE: Left face! Right face!

VÄINÖNEN: Shut up, I say! We're sick of that! *Sàatana!*

[SPOTTY, a pock-marked sailor comes up calmly and deliberately and stands beside him.]

SPOTTY: Don't get excited. Let him alone. He's brought a woman on board, stripped her naked, and is marching her up and down. He just loves teaching military drill to naked women.

THE VOICE: About face! Forward march! Halt!

VÄINÖNEN: *Sáatana!* I'll cut his throat!

[*Able Seaman of the Baltic Fleet, ALEXEI, whose throat the LITTLE FINN wants to cut, strolls nonchalantly out from a gangway.*]

ALEXEI: Ah, Väinönen. . . . Feeling lonesome? D'you want a woman? [*Shouting into the dark gangway, where the woman is standing.*] Stand up straight, dearie, and keep still. I didn't give the command "At ease." Well, Väinönen, I'm making you an offer.

[*As he listens, the LITTLE FINN cuts curly shavings off the wooden table with his "pukka"—an eight-inch Finnish knife.*]

VÄINÖNEN: It ain't right.

ALEXEI: What ain't right?

VÄINÖNEN: To do that to a woman.

ALEXEI: Why ain't it right? And what is right, anyway? [*Draws his revolver.*] Blowing people's brains out with this thingamajig, maybe? But over there—[*Pointing to the gangway where the woman, rifle on shoulder, stands dim in the deep shadow*—in the first place you've got comfort, in the second place some nice loving, and in the third place—she's making a living at it!

VÄINÖNEN: So you've turned into a philosopher, have you?

ALEXEI: Now tell me—what *is* right? . . . [*Sharply.*] Before, I used to know it all, straight out of the hand-book. It was right to obey orders, right to honour your parents, right to love your bride, right to pray to God. All perfectly clear. Oh, everything was ship-shape in those days and I was an able seaman. And to be a seaman was right, too. But now? What is right, now?

SPOTTY: Say, what's eatin' you?

ALEXEI: I'm looking for the truth, that's all.

SPOTTY: You ain't the first.

ALEXEI: I spend an hour or so playing hell with that little angel over there, and then I sit up all night talking with her about life. . . . Now you tell me, what does "right" mean, these days.

VÄINÖNEN: Right—that'll be when everything's all right for everybody. When there's Socialism.

ALEXEI: How do you mean—"everybody?"

VÄINÖNEN: Well, later on, after a few years. Then it'll be all right. It's for the sake of the future that everybody's been torn up by the roots.

ALEXEI: For *everybody*? *Will* be? Everything is *going* to be, in the hereafter, like in the Holy Scriptures? But as for me—I'd just like to have a look, even once, at what *is*—not what's going to be, y'understand, but what *is*. As it is, everybody's trading on the future. They shovel out this talk by the ton, no end to it. [*To the darkened gangway.*] Steady, darling, stand at attention like a good little girl. . . . Well, all right then, suppose I grant you everybody'll have

it hunky-dory some day. But what about the guys who'll get shot?

VÄINÖNEN: They shall be remembered forever!

ALEXEI: Thanks for nothing. You're a big comfort.

VÄINÖNEN: There's nothing funny about it, you damn fool!

Those who die in this revolution will be dying like human beings, like men, for the first time. Up to now we've been driven to slaughter like sheep in the stockyards—man-meat, tripe, two kopeks a pound. . . .

ALEXEI: That's enough, I see your point. So everything's going to be all right, is it?

VÄINÖNEN: Yes. . . . [*He speaks a little more calmly, though still excited, and somewhat derisively.*]

ALEXEI: Oh, yes? You mean to say some day there'll be no more need to fight for anything? Is that it? Humanity simply arrives where it was bound for, eh?—just let down the gangplank and go ashore? Port of destination, the rosy future! And say—tell me—will a fellow be able to grab onto this future with his hands and feel the heft of it?

SPOTTY: If you and me are gone there'll be others to feel of it.

ALEXEI: E-e-e-ekh! A man never gets anywhere, he just goes on and on. We'll never reach port, and neither will anyone else. You sail through this world without making any stops. Nobody, anywhere, has ever yet reached the end. And this discovery was first made by me, Able Seaman Alexei. Write that down. [*To the woman.*] You're dismissed, little 'angel. Still at attention? Order arms! [*Thump of a rifle-butt dropped on the deck.*] Stand at ease! Fall out, have a smoke, and go ashore. But wait a

bit—I'll just say goodbye to you. [*And he goes out to take his leave of the woman.*]

SPOTTY: No use arguing with him.

VÄINÖNEN: 'There are them as will. You find that kind.

SPOTTY: Where'd he come from anyway?

VÄINÖNEN: From the Pacific. He was in America. Jumped ship somewhere.

SPOTTY: Thinks a lot about life.

VÄINÖNEN [*contemptuously*]: An anarchist!

[*The LITTLE FINN sits motionless. In the dusk sailors appear and drift gloomily about. Someone sings the mournful song of the dying stoker. . . .*]

“I'm done for, buddies, I can't stand watch,

Sighed the stoker's mate to the oiler,

'The fire in my furnace has gone clean out

And there's no more steam in my boiler.'”

[*In rushes Able Seaman of the Baltic Fleet, ALEXEI. Everyone becomes silent.*]

ALEXEI [*with suppressed fury*]: Sailors of the battle fleet!
Anarchists! Danger!

VÄINÖNEN: Where? What's up?

TALL SAILOR: Danger?

SPOTTY: Stand from under!

[*An excited buzz of voices follows the cry of alarm. All crowd around ALEXEI shouting "Where? What? Who?"*]

ALEXEI [*gloomily, his back to the crowd*]: A commissar has been appointed to our ship.

TALL SAILOR: High time!

VÄINÖNEN: He'll explain to you about life now!

[*In the crowd of waiting, listening men someone cries ominously, "So they don't trust us any more?" At this the men seem to see "Them" they hold guilty, and their bodies grow tense in eagerness to strike. Suddenly the hum of voices dies away, the tension is relaxed. The men change their positions, growing quieter and quieter. They back up making way. A ruddy, long-haired, broad-shouldered man is coming closer and closer. Wordlessly, he dominates them. This is the anarchist CHIEF. In the stillness he puts a deliberate, low-voiced question.*]

CHIEF: Why the noise?

FOGHORN [*the CHIEF's right-hand man*]: Answer!

ALEXEI: They've sent us a commissar!

CHIEF: That's nothing to howl about. What party does he belong to?

ALEXEI: The government Party. The Bolsheviks.

CHIEF: He'll get used to us. We'll take him in hand and bring him up right.

[*A WOMAN enters and approaches the tense, silent crowd of men. That she should appear aboard this ship at this time seems impossible and unbelievable; surely she will shrivel at the very first questions hurled at her by these rough voices. But the men stand looking her up and down, not deigning to ask questions.*]

ALEXEI: I'd advise this here commissar—

CHIEF: I'd advise you not to give me advice. [*Pause.*] You talk too much.

[*The WOMAN, divining who is leader in this mob, goes up to*

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the CHIEF and hands him a paper. He reads it . . . looks hard at the WOMAN, reads the paper a second time.]

CHIEF: So it's you that's been sent to be our commissar?

[With a quick nod the WOMAN gives him to understand that this is so clear there is no need even to speak of it. Nearby, a sailor's mouth plops open in amazement.]

A VOICE: Well I'll be. . . .

[The CHIEF reaches out deliberately and with his big fist chucks shut the sailor's sagging jaw.]

CHIEF: You're a Social-Democrat—a Bolshevik?

WOMAN: Yes.

CHIEF: Been one long?

WOMAN: Since nineteen-sixteen.

CHIEF: Hm. . . . Well, let's live together. . . . Make yourself at home, start your good work. *[To the sailors, who are crowding around them.]* Stand back! Don't bother her!

[The men slowly withdraw, craning their necks as they go, staring at the WOMAN.]

CHIEF: Maybe you'd like someone to help you with your baggage?

SPOTTY: Ain't no porters any more, you know.

WOMAN: I'll manage.

[They leave her alone on the deck.]

[Silence.]

[A new figure appears—a typical naval officer. Not knowing the situation, he is surprised; but he sees a woman and so hastens to offer his services.]

OFFICER: Permit me to assist you.

[*He carries her one small suitcase forward from the top of the gangway, studying her with lively curiosity.*]

OFFICER [*lowering his voice*]: Have you come to visit one of the officers of this—er—former battleship?

WOMAN: I—

OFFICER [*bowing*]: Lieutenant Behring. [*Begins confidentially and somewhat surprised at his own words.*] I have been sent here as commander. [*He doffs his cap, stoops to kiss her hand, which he takes himself rather than is given.*]

WOMAN: I am the Bolshevik Commissar appointed to this ship. Don't call yourself "lieutenant" any more.

[*She speaks with compelling simplicity. Neither the unexpectedness nor the awkwardness of the situation embarrass the OFFICER. He draws himself up calmly, replaces his cap, and, saluting more from force of habit than from any intention to do her honour, continues the conversation—but in a voice infinitely far removed from the cordial "society" tone in which he had begun.*]

OFFICER: Arrived ready to report for duty. War Seaman Behring.

[*Both turn at the sound of a threatening mutter and a commotion arising from the bowels of the ship. After a few seconds the LITTLE FINN appears, backing slowly, "pukka" in hand, retreating before someone to whom he speaks with pent-up fury.*]

VÄINÖNEN: Don't you dare! Don't you dare. . . . [*Pointing to the WOMAN.*] You want her, too, do you? *Sáatana!* [*Two men are advancing upon him—ALEXEI, and his ac-*

complice, a squat man. Soundlessly, with eyes and lips alone, they are trying to break the LITTLE FINN's resistance. Hunched up, knife in hand, he stands between them and the WOMAN. They advance upon him, overpower him, fling him far aside.]

VÄINÖNEN: We won't leave her like this!

[He picks himself up and rushes out to get help. The WOMAN is on the alert.]

OFFICER: Evidently you have some Party matters to discuss. Perhaps I'd better go.

[ALEXEI pays no attention to the OFFICER, whom he considers too insignificant to notice. He swaggers up to the WOMAN.]

ALEXEI: Let's get married, comrade. . . . What are you surprised at? Love is a highly respectable affair. We'll be reproducing our species and having a hell of a good time doing it.

OFFICER: What on earth is going on here? *[To ALEXEI.]*
Listen, you—

COMMISSAR *[to the OFFICER]*: Please go away, Comrade Commander. We'll have a talk by ourselves. This comrade is interested in the marriage question.

[Obeying, but no longer understanding anything, the former officer withdraws.]

ALEXEI: Again I say, let's have some fornication, comrade representative from headquarters. And you'd better make it snappy, because the next man is getting up steam, and there are plenty more waiting their turn below decks.

[The COMMISSAR senses not so much the meaning of the words as the nature of the situation. Each movement of the men

is met by a scarcely perceptible counter-move on her part.]

ALEXEI: Now then—?

[From all sides the anarchists are advancing slowly out of the gloom.]

SAILOR *[singing, to the COMMISSAR]*:

“In the scent of the blossoming lilacs,
I shall kiss you more hotly, my dear.”

[Hollow laughter from the men.] Pretty lady, have pity on the needy in their want. . . . I want to sleep with you.

SAILOR *[off-stage]*: Hey will you be through there soon?

[Comes in carrying a bed-sheet.] What are you staring at? Flop down on that deck!

COMMISSAR: Comrades—

ALEXEI *[mockingly]*:—and fellow workers!

COMMISSAR: Comrades—

SAILOR *[threateningly]*: Say, who do you think you’ve come to live with, anyway, Miss Commissar?

[Out of the open hatchway suddenly rises the naked torso of a huge man horribly tattooed.]

[Silence.]

COMMISSAR: You’re not joking? You really want to try me?

HALF-NAKED GIANT: We don’t joke here! *[Leaps out of the hatch at her.]*

COMMISSAR: Neither do we!

[And a bullet from the COMMISSAR’S tiny revolver pierces his belly. The sailors scuttle backwards.]

COMMISSAR: Now then. . . does anyone else want a try at the Commissar’s body? *[To the nearest.]* Do you? *[To*

another.] Do you? [*To a third.*] Do you? [*Not allowing time for a counter-blow to develop, the COMMISSAR advances upon them with her revolver in hand.*] Nobody, eh? And why not? [*The COMMISSAR checks herself, and after a moment's silence, which she needs to quiet the thumping of her heart, speaks.*] See here, men—when I feel the need—and I'm a normal, healthy woman—I'll manage, all right, don't worry. That's not so hard, and I certainly don't need a whole drove of stallions to urge me on.

SPOTTY [*with an ingratiating giggle*]: Now you're talkin'! [*VÄINÖNEN rushes in. With him are the TALL SAILOR, the OLD SAILOR, and two others.*]

VÄINÖNEN: Steady, Commissar! We'll help you!

COMMISSAR: No need to. Everything's all right here.

[*The men turn away and grow quiet, for the anarchist CHIEF is approaching. He enters without haste. Exchange of glances. The CHIEF looks at the corpse. He kicks it. It slides down the ladder out of sight, thudding dully on rung after rung to the bottom. The CHIEF looks at the COMMISSAR.*]

CHIEF: I hope you'll excuse him. He was just a brute—what could you expect of him?

ALEXEI: Let's go.

COMMISSAR: Members of the Communist Party, and sympathizers, will remain here.

FOGHORN [*instantly parrying*]: You can't do that—we're having a general meeting.

[*Without wasting words the CHIEF's henchman advances*

upon those who have remained behind in accordance with the COMMISSAR'S call. He shoulders up to the TALL SAILOR, whose face wears an expression both haughty and scornful.]
 FOGHORN: Oh, so we have a Communist sympathizer here, have we?

TALL SAILOR: And not the only one by a damn sight.
 [FOGHORN and another henchman jostle and drive away all the men but the LITTLE FINN, who obstinately dodges and remains behind. He is left alone on the vast sweep of empty deck.]

COMMISSAR: You're all alone?

VÄINÖNEN: You're alone, too, Commissar.

COMMISSAR: And the Party?

BLACKOUT

Enter the CHORUS-LEADERS of the regiment.

1ST CHORUS-LEADER: Let me ask you—do you remember how many Communists there were in the Red Army and Navy in those days? Come now! try to remember, you who were there! [Pause.] There were two hundred and eighty thousand. That was half the Party membership. Every second Communist was under fire at the front. And every Communist who remained behind was under fire too, whether he was in the city, or in the country, for in class war there is no rear, the front is everywhere. And the casualty lists—among the wounded Communists, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin;

among the killed, Volodarsky, Uritsky, the twenty-six commissars of Baku, whole regional committees, whole Party organizations wiped out to the last man. But did the Party flinch?

2ND CHORUS-LEADER: Can anyone stop a Party like this, or prevent its work—a Party that is armed, bold, flexible, that has roused the whole working class. A Party that has created the Soviet Union, the great rallying point for all the best elements in the human race. A Party that has created unity of proletarian will in a struggle that is both “bloody and bloodless, both violent and peaceful”—a struggle won against all the forces of the old world. [*Pause.*] Those who make bold to match their strength against a Party like this, against our country—they will be smashed, will be annihilated!

BLACKOUT

The stage is empty. Enter the anarchist CHIEF, followed by his hoarse-voiced henchman, FOGHORN, and ALEXEI. A heavy silence, electric with wariness.

ALEXEI: She's beginning to collect all kinds of people around her.

FOGHORN: We'll settle their hash for them soon enough. Sssh!—here comes the Finn. [*To the FINN as he passes.*] Hey you, big Party member, come here a minute!

VÄINÖNEN: I'm coming. I love to hear your angel voice—it sounds just like a nightingale.

FOGHORN [*controlling himself*]: What was she talking about in there?

VÄINÖNEN [*in a mocking sing-song*]: Oh, she was just talking. [*Grinning, he strolls leisurely off. The sound of his footsteps dies away.*]

ALEXEI: Did you ever hear tell of such a woman in all your born days?

FOGHORN: She ought to be chopped up into dog-meat.

CHIEF: Pipe down, you! [*Pause.*] Anyone who touches her now—[*A gesture of finality.*] Suppose we *do* toss her overboard? They'll simply send us another commissar. Can't you get that through your heads? [*Thinks a moment.*] And everybody seems to like this one. Why, come to think of it, this woman is really very valuable to us!

ALEXEI: Since when did you start thinking that way?

CHIEF [*not deigning to reply*]: And she's a mighty trim little ship too. When I look into her eyes, I can just feel that she and I are going to understand each other. I'll bet she's got a leaning toward anarchism . . . knows her own mind.

ALEXEI: I'll try her out on that—leave it to me.

FOGHORN: Haw-haw-haw! Go on—offer her one of Kropotkin's pamphlets.

COMMISSAR [*entering, looking around*]: Why didn't you tell me you were going to hold a meeting, comrades? Still, now that we're all here. . . . While you're about it, ask the new commander to come, too. Who'll go and call him?

[*Silence.*]

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COMMISSAR [*noticing a movement down the hatchway*]:

Hello, down below! Anybody there? [*A stout grey-haired man in uniform clammers puffing out of the hatchway.*]

Come here. Who are you, comrade?

THE MAN [*in a sepulchral voice*]: I ain the Bo'sun.

[*FOGHORN lets out a husky guffaw.*]

COMMISSAR: The Bo'sun? Go on—no bo'sun ever spoke in a voice like that. Once again now—who are you?

BO'SUN [*scenting something and abruptly assuming his best naval manner*]: Former boatswain of the warship Emperor Paul the First, Comrade Commissar!

[*ALEXEI grunts with surprise.*]

COMMISSAR: Ah, now I see you really are the Bo'sun. Go and ask the new commander to come here at once.

BO'SUN: Aye, Aye. [*On second thought, turns apprehensively to the anarchist CHIEF. CHIEF nods assent.*] . .

COMMISSAR: Well?

BO'SUN: Fetch the new commander, it is. [*Exit.*]

FOGHORN [*to the COMMISSAR*]: You sure know how to get along with us.

COMMISSAR: Yes.

FOGHORN: The female sex certainly has a refining influence on men's manners.

COMMISSAR: That's fine. Then everything's all right.

[*THE COMMANDER enters and makes a vague gesture of salute.*]

COMMISSAR: Get acquainted, comrades.

[*Exchange of hostile glances. Muttering. Vague hand movements.*]

COMMISSAR: Acquainted? Well then, let's get down to business. [*To the Commander.*] Read out the order.

COMMANDER [*drawing an official paper from his breast pocket*]: Order: "Effective today. The name of the crew 'Free Anarchist Revolutionary Detachment' is abolished. The crew is hereby reorganized into a regular regiment of three battalions. The regiment is to be called 'The First Naval Regiment.'" [*Replaces the paper.*] The regiment will be commanded by me.

ALEXEI [*bursts out*]: Say, evidently you haven't heard what happened to His Majesty Tsar Nicholas the Second, out in the Ural Mountains, the other day?

COMMISSAR: I'll tell you all about what happened to the person you mention, when we've got a minute to spare. [*To the COMMANDER.*] Generally speaking, this comrade—[*nods at ALEXEI*]—has a remarkable thirst for knowledge. Last time, if you remember, he was making a study of the marriage question [*To ALEXEI.*] Were you satisfied with the explanation you got?

[*Silence.*]

COMMISSAR: That seems to be all for the present. The detachment—we'll call it the regiment from now on—is simply bubbling over with strength and energy. [*To ALEXEI.*] That's true, isn't it? [*Pause.*] Tomorrow we leave for the front—that's an addition to the order. [*To the anarchist CHIEF.*] At the front you'll really have an opportunity to use your experience and abilities—don't you think? [*To the COMMANDER.*] Issue the necessary orders. Dismissed.

COMMANDER: Aye, aye.

COMMISSAR: Bo'sun, you may go.

BO'SUN [*with a sidelong glance at the CHIEF*]: Aye, aye.
[*When the BO'SUN and the COMMANDER have gone off, the*

CHIEF rises and strolls deliberately over to the COMMISSAR.]

CHIEF: Maybe we could have a little talk with you?

COMMISSAR: Let's.

[*The four of them sit down at a table. Oppressive silence.*]

ALEXEI: If you two are through talking. . . . Sort of unfortunate choice your Central Committee made—or whoever it is that does the appointing where you come from. Now in the Army, for instance, you'd've been just fine, really fine.

COMMISSAR: I've worked in the Army, too.

[*The CHIEF, his henchman and ALEXEI exchange glances.*]

FOGHORN: Aw, you did, did you?

ALEXEI: You're pretty young for your job, we're thinking.

Why, your nursie was wheeling you around the garden in a baby-carriage when he—[*with a familiar, yet deferential gesture toward the CHIEF*—was serving a hard-labour sentence in Siberia for leading a peasant uprising. . . . [*A pause while all four appraise this fact.*] It's damned hard—now don't get me wrong on this—it's hard, psychologically, I mean, this contrast [*gesture*] between you and us, see? We can't get over it. . . . [*Drawing his powerful frame up to full height.*] Just compare now, really, you and us. We're a bunch of bums—in the good old sea-farin' sense, I mean—bummed our way all over the world, broke out of jail, went through the war, been taken prisoner. . . .

FOGHORN [*grasping the COMMISSAR's hand*]: And had syphilis twice—first time the European sort, then the American kind. . . .

COMMISSAR: What of it? We have to work with the men we've got, not with some kind of imaginary people. By and large it looks like the men in our regiment are a good lot of fighters, with plenty of spirit. With men like that—ALEXEI [*interrupting*]: . . . Men who have forgotten once and for all how to click their heels and salute some stuffed shirt! [*Walks mincingly up and down, acting a parody.*] "Yes, Comrade Commissar"—"No complaints, Comrade Commissar"—"Please pardon me, Comrade Commissar"—"Hip, hip, hurrah, Comrade Commissar"—maybe that's what you're looking for here?

FOGHORN [*touching the COMMISSAR's hand again and speaking intimately*]: With us, lady, life is something all busted and mangled. That's what barracks and prisons do to a man. . . . They put us on these damn boats, soaked us in rotten booze, tattooed things all over us—and you—now you come around trying to feed us your "class-consciousness" mush by the spoonful. . . . What are you hanging around here for, lady, when all we want is to live the rest of our lives as we damn well please. . . . Or stop a bullet and find peace. [*Falls silent for a moment.*] Only inside here—[*tapping himself on the chest*],—there's a wish left, a sort of feeling—that people should live cleaner—in body and in soul. But you—you want to be teaching us things, to be sitting in judgment over us, when all we know is that it's high time for us to croak.

COMMISSAR: I'm not against learning from you—if I can.

CHIEF: That's fine! But you might explain one thing: Aren't we anarchists ready to give our lives for the Revolution? We are! But then this Bolshevik Party of yours, that's taken over the government, wants to lay down all sorts of rules and conditions for us—for us, who are laying down our lives. It looks mighty fishy. What's the idea, anyway?

COMMISSAR: It's very simple. We Bolsheviks know where we're going and how to get there. We fix the conditions and people accept them. If people didn't accept them, we couldn't fix them.

ALEXEI: Maybe you'll teach us how to die, too, eh?

COMMISSAR: If it comes to that, you'll see.

CHIEF: Yes, yes. . . . [*Changing his tone.*] Now listen, please don't hold it against my boys, the way they treated you when you'd just arrived. They didn't understand, that was all.

COMMISSAR: What's the good of raking up the past? I'm willing to let by-gones be by-gones.

ALEXEI [*springing up*]: What a pair of god-damned hypocrites you two are! Makes me sick, looking at you—or at myself either, for that matter. [*To the CHIEF, then to the COMMISSAR.*] You're lying! And you're lying, too! [*To the COMMISSAR.*] Listen to this. [*Points to the CHIEF.*] It was he who set us on to you, that first day you came. "Scare the life out of her"—that's what he said.

CHIEF [*laughing, but at the same time only half suppressing a nervous twitching of his face*]: He's just joking.

COMMISSAR: Sure, I know, he's a great joker.

ALEXEI: Joking, am I? Listening to you two makes me want to take a knife, cut my brains out, and rinse them clean again. . . . What am I doing here, anyway, with you scum? [*Pause. Then to the COMMISSAR.*] And you, too, sitting there all calm and pretty, talking everything over, being so damn wise and modest. . . . "I'm ready to learn from you. . . ." "I understand. . . ." You bitch! You're lying, too! We saw how you bump off our buddies—bang through the belly and down the hatch.

COMMISSAR [*to the CHIEF*]: This comrade gets excited easily.

[*To ALEXEI.*] Are you a member of the Anarchist Party?

ALEXEI: I'm my own party—the party of critical reason. My party is no party. [*Bursting out.*] What are you getting at, anyway? Did you bother to ask us what party we belonged to when we stormed the Winter Palace?

FOGHORN [*pushing ALEXEI aside*]: It means a whole lot, lady, to get to know each other like this. I bet you thought we sailors were just tramps, riff-raff in wide pants—like what the sissy-boys are wearing now, ashore. Why, us guys remember the old days—the Japanese campaign—Tsu-sima. . . .

COMMISSAR: So much the better. [*Rising.*] I guess we understand each other now.

CHIEF: We sure ought to. Let's shake. [*Self-confidently holds out his hand.*]

COMMISSAR: I'll shake—on one condition: Stop the joking. [*A searching, subtle hand-clasp. ALEXEI watches. The COMMISSAR leaves—the three men gazing after her. The light, quick sound of her footsteps dies away.*]

FOGHORN: Yeah . . . some wench!

CHIEF [*to ALEXEI*]: You know what happens to people who blab?

ALEXEI: And do you know what happens to traitors who sell out? Shook hands with the Bolshevik Commissar, did you? Want to get along with her, do you?

CHIEF [*significantly*]: That's just tactics. . . . What's wrong with you today, Alexei? Listen to me, and believe me—I'm telling you like a brother: shoulder to shoulder to the bitter end—for anarchy! [*Embraces and kisses his comrade on the lips, hard and sternly. The latter stares at him, not knowing whether to believe him or not . . . nods . . . goes out.*]

[*The CHIEF's henchman tiptoes off a few paces, stands listening.*]

CHIEF: Don't you trust either of them—him or her. [*Wipes his lips with his sleeve and spits in disgust.*] I've kissed a snake!

FOGHORN: Then whom can we trust? [*CHIEF shrugs his shoulders.*] Only you, Chief?

CHIEF: And don't trust me either. Don't trust anybody—all men are rats and liars. Everything has got to be torn out by the roots—every last trace of the old life that's rotting inside of us all, poisoning everybody.

[*Silence.*]

[*They go off moodily. Enter the CHORUS-LEADERS.*]

1ST CHORUS-LEADER: Recall these days and remember them well, for we must forget nothing. We must recall every word, every detail, so as to learn the lesson the past teaches.

We must study and learn while there is yet time, before a new war comes. Remember our enemies, the forces of counter-revolution! They were lurking in every shadow, around every corner. They betrayed us by day and by night. We were surrounded by them, they had us by the throat. Anarchy was eating into our ranks. The Whiteguards were only ten miles from Petrograd, and in their hiding places in Moscow more Whiteguards were crouching ready to strike, waiting only for the signal. . . . And we gave them a "signal"—a signal they never got over!

2ND CHORUS-LEADER: We clamped down. We stopped passenger traffic on the railways. We took our revolvers in our hands, roused the working class to a man, and smashed the skull of the counter-revolution. We have repeated these blows with crushing force, at the right times, throughout these eighteen years. Let our enemies remember the Far East! And if the day ever comes again when the enemy tries to attack us, we shall strike once more, this time a blow terrific beyond comparison. And so, remember well these days, when the human race, as Lenin said, "produced an extra high percentage of traitors."

BLACKOUT

*Enter the COMMANDER, followed by
the BOATSWAIN.*

COMMANDER: Well, Bo'sun, it seems that life has given us a new set of masters. Let's try to serve them.

BO'SUN [*warily*]: Aye, aye, sir. There's never any telling what life may bring.

COMMANDER: You know, Bo'sun, I could put up with anything, if only they had some notion of naval discipline. But they haven't any discipline at all. For instance, Bo'sun, do they obey your orders? Do they respect your seniority?

BO'SUN [*with a sigh*]: Far from it!

COMMANDER: All they know how to do these days is trample on a man's soul. And yet there used to be real people, and we used to have a real navy. . . .

BO'SUN: Yes indeed sir, we had a navy once, that we had. A real masterpiece of a navy, you might have called it.

COMMANDER: Well said, Bo'sun!

BO'SUN [*to the COMMANDER's surprise*]: And once I get these lads whipped into shape, I can die in peace.

COMMANDER [*changing his tone and manner*]: Ye—es. . . . I say, Bo'sun! . . . Clear lower deck!

BO'SUN: Clear lower deck, it is, sir. Bugler! [*Pipes up the bugler.*]

[*The bugle blares, its martial notes invoking visions of well-trained sailors drilling with snap and speed.*]

BO'SUN: Now then, clear lower de-e-eck!

[*The TALL SAILOR runs on and falls in smartly. The OLD SAILOR follows him at a slightly slower clip, then a second and a third. After them appears SPOTTY, strolling with idle and unworried nonchalance. His example is imitated by several others of the "free thinkers."*]

OLD SAILOR: Shake a leg there, you free-thinkers!

SPOTTY: What's all the fuss about, anyway?

BO'SUN: Didn't hear the bugle, eh? Forgot you're in the navy?
SPOTTY [*lounging comfortably*]: Yeah, clean forgot about it.
[*The bugler repeats the call. Some of the men obey and fall in.*

Others deliberately stroll about in front of the officer, put their hands in their pockets, yawn in his face, stretch themselves, make various insolent gestures. As usual, they all grow quiet when the CHIEF appears.]

CHIEF: Why the noise?

COMMANDER [*sharply*]: Where is your place? Get in line!
[*A frightened silence.*]

CHIEF [*with visible restraint*]: Bo'sun!

BO'SUN: Aye, aye!

CHIEF: Explain to this . . . [*indicates the officer*] that the detachment is going to take a little rest.

BO'SUN [*apologetically repeats*]: The order is: "Detachment at rest."

CHIEF: Sailors are entitled to their rest every day—says so right in the drill manual. Tomorrow we go on the march, don't we? Well then, let the boys save their strength. Don't disturb them for anything, you hear?

BO'SUN [*repeats*]: The order is: "Do not disturb the men for anything."

CHIEF: And let the band play something light and restful. Hey, Bandmaster!

BANDMASTER [*running up*]: Aye, aye!

CHIEF: Music—very light, and very restful.

[*The BANDMASTER rushes off to do the CHIEF's bidding.*]

SPOTTY [*lolling languidly*]: Relax, Bo'sun take a rest. Didn't you hear your own order?

[*The band begins to play. The BOATSWAIN stands sourly. Suddenly FOGHORN plunges in followed by several others. All are in a towering rage. The men stir, sensing that something serious has happened. FOGHORN drowns out the music with a roar. The music stops.*]

FOGHORN: Shut up! Listen! We've found the worst thing you can find among revolutionary seamen! [*Shouts down the hatchway.*] Don't let that dame, that there commissar in petticoats, come up here. [*A henchman obediently steps up on guard.*] An old woman has been robbed! Someone has stolen her purse! Bring her in!

[*Enter a little old woman in black, bent with age, supported by one of the sailors.*]

CHIEF: Well, ma, tell us about it.

FOGHORN [*taking her other arm*]: Look ma—which one of 'em did it?

[*The men look at one another.*]

FOGHORN [*urging her toward the men*]: Show us which one, ma.

CHIEF: Stand up, everybody! We're going to hold a court. [*Leaning heavily on FOGHORN's arm, the little old woman totters along the ragged ranks of excited men. Here and there she stops to peer long and intently at a man, then shakes her head and totters on. Someone snorts with rage. The TALL SAILOR stands watching the proceedings with his haughty, scornful expression.*]

FOGHORN [*suddenly turning the old woman toward the TALL SAILOR*]: Wasn't it this one, ma?

[*Pause.*]

Act I

AN OPTIMISTIC TRAGEDY

FOGHORN: This one, eh?

[*The old woman says nothing.*]

FOGHORN [*to the TALL SAILOR*]: D'ja take the purse?

[*Pause.*] What you got to say for yourself?

TALL SAILOR: Let me alone!

FOGHORN: You know the law?

TALL SAILOR: Whose law?

FOGHORN: Oh so? [*Glances at the CHIEF.*]

CHIEF: Go ahead.

FOGHORN [*to henchman*]: Go ahead.

[*With lightning speed the anarchists produce rope and canvas.*

The ranks sway and stir uneasily.]

FOGHORN: For the last time—what you got to say?

TALL SAILOR: I won't answer. I don't recognize the power of the anarchists.

FOGHORN: We'll take a vote!

COMMANDER [*who has been watching in the offing*]: But why do you do this? You've got a legal tribunal on board ship.

FOGHORN: Pipe down! Your job is just technical.

OLD SAILOR [*stepping out of line*]: Comrades! listen—!

FOGHORN: And your job is mooching around the Commis-sar—playing politics—lugging her little newspapers around for her.

COMMANDER: But this is lynch law!

CHIEF: The government courts are worse. They drag along with a lot of delays. Here it's all quick and simple. Vote!

[*Some hands are raised—clearly no majority. FOGHORN draws his big Mauser and goes along the ranks threatening the men*

AN OPTIMISTIC TRAGEDY

Act I

with short, jerky movements of its long barrel. He forces a few others to raise their hands.]

FOGHORN: The vote says—overboard!

TALL SAILOR: But—I—

FOGHORN: Now don't try to make a speech. This court's verdict is final, and no appeal allowed.

HENCHMEN: Overboard! Overboard!

[Several anarchists throw themselves on the TALL SAILOR. He knocks down one, two. . . . A fierce tussle, ending with the TALL SAILOR being shrouded in canvas, bound with rope, and dragged away to the ship's rail.]

TALL SAILOR: Avenge me, comrades!

[From below comes the funereal splash of his body in the sea.]

A VOICE FROM THE RANKS: One more gone west.

FOGHORN: We done what was right, ma.

OLD SAILOR: You'll answer for this!

FOGHORN: That's something else again. On with the music!

[Band strikes up. To the OLD WOMAN.] You can go now, ma. The wrong's been righted.

SPOTTY: Let's take up a collection for her. Everybody give what you can.

[Coins drop clinking into the old woman's withered hand. In gratitude and confusion she bows right and left, still not understanding what has happened, for the whole situation is utterly strange to her. Mechanically she gropes under her skirts to put the coins away—and takes out the "stolen" purse. . . . The music goes out of tune, dies. . . . A breathless silence. The old woman stares at the purse in her hand in surprise . . . then confusion . . . then fright.]

Act I

AN OPTIMISTIC TRAGEDY

FOGHORN: The purse?

SPOTTY: The purse?

[*Silence.*]

CHIEF: Show it to me.

[*Silently it is handed over, examined. Exchange of glances. Grim decision.*]

FOGHORN: Anarchy is the mother of order! More rope and canvas!

SPOTTY [*barring his way*]: Let her go!

A VOICE FROM THE RANKS: My God, can't you see she didn't do it on purpose!

OLD SAILOR: She just made a mistake, that's all.

OLD WOMAN: Dear lads . . . sons . . . God forgive me . . . I was wrong. . . .

FOGHORN: Justice! We want justice!

[*With diabolical swiftness the old woman is tied up in canvas and carried off the stage.*]

CHIEF [*quitting the scene*]: Handle her easy, boys.

[*Enter the COMMISSAR, the COMMANDER and the BOATSWAIN.*]

COMMISSAR [*addressing FOGHORN*]: Have you begun work?

FOGHORN: Why, yes—of course, of course! [*Glancing uneasily in the direction in which the old woman has been carried away.*] We're—we're loading meat. Since you came, the men have just been spoiling to get to work.

OLD SAILOR [*springing forward*]: Comrade Commissar, I've got to tell you—[*Anarchists thrust him aside.*]

SPOTTY: What in hell do you call this, anyhow, mates?

[*The strains of an accordion are heard. Dancing and whistling. A crowd of sailors, headed by ALEXEI, romps in.*]

ALEXEI [*swaggering up to the COMMISSAR*]: The crew demands—

COMMISSAR: Asks.

ALEXEI: Well, let's say—wants.

COMMISSAR: Yes?

ALEXEI: A farewell dance.

YOUNGEST SAILOR: Seeing as how we're leaving for the front in the morning!

COMMANDER [*to the COMMISSAR*]: New traditions are being created these days.

ALEXEI: We'll stick to our tradition—kill the officers!

[*Ripples off a dashing flourish on his accordion.*]

BO'SUN: Comrade Commissar, that—I don't know how to say it—that other commissar, of the anarchists, has ordered—I mean, asked—not to have the crew disturbed.

ALEXEI: *Wha-at?* Wants to stop us from having a dance, eh? Let's have it the way the crew wants it!

[*A pause. The COMMISSAR thinks, decides. On the whole the COMMISSAR observes and thinks much more than she talks.*]

ALEXEI: Well, got to ask you twice, have we?

FOGHORN [*coming up officiously*]: The order was to keep quiet.

[*It grows quiet.*]

COMMISSAR [*giving the order*]: A farewell dance.

BO'SUN: Farewell dance, it is. [*Sounds his pipe.*] All hands on deck for the farewell dance!

[*Melodious whistling of the pipes as the order is repeated over*

the ship. ALEXEI plays trills on his accordion. The young sailors begin to whistle and jig, their heels tap-tapping on the deck. Obeying some unclear feeling, the men grow quiet, as always, at the approach of the anarchist CHIEF.]

CHIEF [*silencing the BOATSWAIN's whistling pipe with his big paw*]: Why the noise?

[*All over the ship the piping dies away. ALEXEI's accordion grows still.*]

COMMISSAR [*with a steely ring of authority*]: Comrade Commander, why has the order not been carried out?

COMMANDER: Bo'sun, open the ship to visitors!

BO'SUN [*hesitates a moment, makes up his mind, pushes away the CHIEF's hand*]: Aye, aye! Open the ship to visitors, it is!

[*Once again merry music, tap-dancing, whistling. And the COMMISSAR, under the approving looks of some sailors and the frightened glances of others, unceremoniously slaps on the back the hitherto inviolate person of the CHIEF.*]

COMMISSAR: Listen to the music! Livclier!

[*The CHIEF says nothing.*]

ALEXEI [*playing his accordion under the CHIEF's nose*]: He loves to have the last laugh.

COMMISSAR: Then our tastes coincide. [*Exit.*]

[*The CHORUS LEADERS enter in spot-light while in deep shadowy background sailors, silently but with animation, make preparations for their farewell dance.*]

1ST CHORUS-LEADER: A dance—a farewell dance of the Red Fleet! How many of them there were in those years! A detachment is leaving for the front—three hundred

men marching as one, like tall pines swept by the sea wind. On and on crossing a whole continent with stormy tread, free sailors, their blue collars flapping in the wind, their white and black and gold insignia shining in the sun. And hearts pulsing with turbulent red blood! Farewell to home and kinsfolk! How few of them ever returned!

2ND CHORUS-LEADER: Aye, few of them ever returned. Others, the living, will understand. . . . And once again a regiment leaves its ship for the front. They march on under the blue sky, and the Cossack Don and the White Caucasus grow quieter. On their way to the Urals an officers' regiment crosses the seamen's path—Whiteguards who style themselves "The Invincibles." One night is all the sailors ask—they charge, and the officers' regiment is no more.

1ST CHORUS-LEADER: On and on they march, through the Ukraine, the Crimea. The tang of wormwood blends with the salt sea breeze, and the south wind flutters the sailors' cap-ribbons . . . how they fluttered in that southern wind! And thousands of seamen gave their lives to make the Ukraine a Soviet Republic! [*Tears off his sailor's cap.*] Listen, while one Red seaman remains alive, don't think our fleet is finished or our seas surrendered!

[*The dance begins. The first couples sway to the rhythm of a waltz that is martial and at the same time sad. The light-blue mist of night hangs over the sea. In the dancers' movements there is barely-suppressed grief, the long-drawn ecstasy of hand clasping hand, body pressed to body, lingering eyes. And slashing across the rhythm of the waltz, sailors with rifles hurry through from time to time, pulling ma-*

chine-guns. Everything blends in this farewell dance: abandon, alarm, love, someone's fit of jealousy, others' folly, dual allegiance.

The bugle blows, calling the men to form ranks. The time has come to say goodbye. Slowly the couples part. Women's faces are white, drained of blood. One woman clings to the departing men, another falls at their feet. A third makes the sign of the cross over her son and her husband. A fourth sobs broken-heartedly. . . . Minutes of war-time partings! The waltz swells into an agony. The COMMISSAR supports a woman who is frenzied with despair. The sailors' ranks begin to move forward. The women, now silent as if turned to stone, watch the regiment as it marches off. The glitter of brass. Like a peal of thunder the regiment breaks into song. In the gloom of the night moist eyes glint and white teeth gleam between parted lips; and the gold letters of the ship's name glitter on fluttering cap-ribbons. The line of the quay-side, where the women are left standing, gradually recedes. The distance increases with every second, but the men keep turning around for a last look at their loved ones . . . whom they salute with a ragged volley of rifle fire.]

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Tense, watchful silence. Moving masses of storm-clouds are felt rather than seen above the spacious sweep of dim horizon. A line of sailors advances in good order. Notes of music convey the first sounds of battle. Gaps appear in the seamen's ranks. Men fall at quick intervals, mowed down by machine-gun fire. Unable to withstand the hail of bullets, the sailors fall back in hasty retreat. Re-inforcements enter led by the COMMISSAR. With a simple command she stops the retreating men, among them Alexei. "Not that way—take cover!" commands the COMMISSAR. The men fall to the ground behind a low ridge and return the fire. Enemy troops advance like a grey avalanche. The COMMANDER springs up and gives a battle-cry. The sailors rise in a surge of fury and go over the top, flinging themselves upon the rock-grey troops like a rolling wave of the sea. The force of the counter-attack carries the hand-to-hand fighting off-stage. The roar of battle fades. The music conveys the last sounds in the dis-

tance . . . then the coming of the dawn by the sea.

[*Lights fade in.*]

[*The regiment's halting-place. The COMMISSAR is alone, sitting at a table, writing.*]

COMMISSAR [*reading over her letter*]: "My dear, here I am at my post. The climate in these parts is splendid, and my lungs are at last getting a chance to breathe. I don't know how I'll manage with the folks here—they're a little difficult sometimes. To tell the truth, I haven't slept a single night. I think the Central Committee will understand and send at least one comrade to help me—"

[*A knock. The COMMISSAR says quietly: "Come in." Enter the BO'SUN. He coughs, and takes off his cap.*]

BO'SUN: Permit me to report, Comrade Commissar.

COMMISSAR: Go ahead, Bo'sun.

BO'SUN [*taking out papers one after another*]: Here are orders for you to sign—military supplies and provisions for the newly-formed regiment in accordance with the regulation lists. And here—[*pointing*—no, here it is—a list of fancy groceries the men have written out for themselves.

COMMISSAR: Let's have a look at it. [*Reads down the list.*]

What on earth have they been ordering for themselves! "Fresh creamery butter." When there isn't enough butter for the children! We're going to need oil for our guns, more than butter. You better write out an order for gun oil.

BO'SUN: Aye, aye. Twenty-five years I was writing out orders—right up to the Revolution.

COMMISSAR [*pointing to the men's list*]: As for this, write it over again. Let's see the other lists. [*Looks them through.*] Correct . . . good. [*Signs them.*] Here you are.

BO'SUN: May I go, Comrade Commissar?

COMMISSAR: You may, Bo'sun.

[*The Bo'sun about-faces, marches a few steps toward the door, then turns around and comes back to her.*]

BO'SUN [*dropping his official tone and manner*]: Are we really beginning to have order in Russia?

COMMISSAR: We are.

BO'SUN: And—and is there really going to be a Fleet again?—even a little something like a Fleet—and an Army—so that there'll be some kind of discipline again and order—and so that the men'll smarten up and look like something? To be a great power, so's to smash anybody we want to?

COMMISSAR: We'll smash 'em, Boatswain, and *how* we'll smash them—anybody who attacks us.

BO'SUN: Aye, aye, sir! [*Salutes. Exit.*]

COMMISSAR [*turning back to her letter*]: “. . . Well, that's about all, my dear. Oh yes—give my regards to Petersburg. I read in the papers that you have typhus there. Take good care of yourself. . . .”

[*VÄINÖNEN enters without knocking. He wears a smile.*]

VÄINÖNEN: Good morning to you, Comrade Commissar.

COMMISSAR: Ah, good morning, Väinönen.

VÄINÖNEN: What are you doing, writing, writing, all the time. Look out your head don't bust. Is it a report?

COMMISSAR: Yes, something like that. I'm writing that the men of our regiment are good, or let's say, satisfactory fighting material; but they're not improving as fast as other units. They're falling behind, because they are under the influence of certain three individuals.

VÄINÖNEN: Those anarchist devils! The bastards! *Sàatana!*

COMMISSAR: Yes, the anarchists. Listen, Väinönen, how do you explain it—the influence that the "*Sàatanas*," as you call them, have over the men? And what have you done about it?

VÄINÖNEN: I—well, I—well, what could I—?

COMMISSAR: Not a very clear answer.

VÄINÖNEN: Ye—yes. . . . You see, I don't speak Russian so well. And what is there to do here? [*Philosophically.*] I don't really know, myself, why one man has power over others, while another hasn't. How does it happen, anyway?

COMMISSAR: I'm trying to talk to you about serious business. [*Stands up.*] The men are all right. You've seen how they can fight. If we don't make any blunders, the regiment is ours.

VÄINÖNEN: All right, let's do it! How?

COMMISSAR: How? Like this: first of all, get the Party members together. Next, we must set those two against one another—the Chief and that other fellow—what's his name?

VÄINÖNEN: Alexei.

COMMISSAR: And last but not least—get next to the officer, feel him out.

VÄINÖNEN: But—to set the Chief and Alexei against one another—is that . . . right?

COMMISSAR: You just forget that word, Väinönen. Forget it!

VÄINÖNEN [*rising*]: Well, that way you can justify anything. . . . Don't you be too quick about slinging around a fellow like the Chief. Don't forget that man served a hard labour sentence in Siberia. And why split the detachment?

COMMISSAR: The regiment, Väinönen—not the “detachment.” And not a split, but a sifting out. And get this into your head, as a Party member—I will do everything, and so will you, to save the healthy part of the regiment, even if that means destroying the worthless part. Understand?

VÄINÖNEN [*thoughtfully*]: But that chief of theirs . . . you don't know him . . . that man's got strength . . . and he's so shrewd and crafty!

COMMISSAR: I don't doubt that in the least.

VÄINÖNEN: And as for this here officer—say, all he needs is to be stood against the nearest wall. Why, he's just ripe for the firing squad! I'm going to search his duffle-bag tonight!

COMMISSAR: You hold on a bit—I'll deal with him myself.

VÄINÖNEN: Wring a confession out of him!

COMMISSAR: Go along now, Väinönen. He'll be here right away.

VÄINÖNEN: And if he's “counter,” we'll just stand him up and let the daylight into him, once he starts any mischief. That'll fix him quick enough!

COMMISSAR: Go along, I told you. I'll straighten this out.

[*The LITTLE FINN starts out. At the door he passes the COM-*

MANDER *coming in and glares suspiciously after him—then exits.*]

COMMISSAR: Please come in. You're very punctual.

COMMANDER: An old naval custom.

COMMISSAR [*joking*]: Surprising people, you seamen. Of course all the virtues are naval customs, aren't they?

COMMANDER [*in the same tone*]: If not quite all the virtues, then certainly most of them.

COMMISSAR: How long have you served with the fleet?

COMMANDER [*correcting her, rather challengingly*]: In the fleet—we say, *in* the fleet. . . . Twenty years. Since I was ten. Or, counting in another way—two hundred years.

COMMISSAR: Two hundred years?

COMMANDER: Yes. We—my family—served under Peter.

COMMISSAR: Yes?

COMMANDER: Yes. The Emperor Peter. Peter the Great. There are a number of such old naval families.

[*Pause.*]

COMMISSAR: You made an excellent showing for yourself in the battle yesterday.

COMMANDER: Professional behaviour, no more. [*Smiling.*]

And then, too, the presence of a lady. . . .

[*Pause.*]

COMMISSAR: Answer me frankly: what is your attitude toward us Bolsheviks and the Soviets?

COMMANDER [*dryly and soberly*]: Calm, for the moment. [*Pause.*] Why are you asking me, anyhow? You Bolsheviks are supposed to be famous for your ability to fathom the secrets of whole classes. But then that's so simple—you

have only to turn the pages of our literature, and you will see—

COMMISSAR: "When mutiny flares up on board
Whip forth your pistols, one, a brace,
While gold is spilled in glitt'ring hoard
From braided cuffs with gilded lace. . . ."

COMMANDER [*staggered*]: How strange—that you should know by heart my favourite poet! But not only Gumilev wrote about the Russian officers—Lermontov wrote about them too, and Leo Tolstoy—

COMMISSAR: Yes, but as it happens, Lieutenant Lermontov and Lieutenant Leo Tolstoy were not on the friendliest of terms with you officers. We—the working class—will preserve these great writers whom we consider largely our own. Incidentally, do you think your old naval families would have preserved, if they could, the art of the proletariat?

COMMANDER: Well, hardly. However, if the afore-mentioned proletariat can create a second Renaissance, a second Italy, and a second Lieutenant Tolstoy—

COMMISSAR: But we don't need a second anything, you know. We'll have firsts of our own. And we shan't take two hundred years to do it, as your class did.

COMMANDER: You're counting on a speeding-up of the production of culture—on the conveyor system, perhaps?

COMMISSAR: I am counting on elementary seriousness and good manners.

COMMANDER: You Bolsheviks have taken upon yourselves a very hard task—educating grown-up people. Really, I'm

awfully sorry for you. I have had to educate men too—raw recruits in the old navy. I used to explain to them—*[gesturing ironically.]* “Here is your faith, here is your tsar”—(just between you and me, he was pretty soft)—“and here is your fatherland, Russia!” And then of course something about the hereafter. Oh, that part was absolutely indispensable—“the beautiful, beautiful life to come!” And now you, poor thing, have to do the same: “Here, comrades, is your faith, here are your leaders, and over there is the beautiful, beautiful future.” *[Paces back and forth.]*

COMMISSAR: If nothing at all has changed, why are you so annoyed with everything?

COMMANDER: Perhaps because your Soviets are no different from any other regime. You try to justify your hasty actions, just as all governments before you have done, by talk about the “happiness and welfare of all humanity.” That’s nothing new! *[Bitterly, vengefully.]* The happiness and welfare of all humanity, including me and the members of my family, lined up and shot down with such charming nonchalance by one of your firing squads. . . . Oh, but how can mere human beings be worthy of your attention when you’re orating about all humanity?

[In the distance, scarcely audible, someone is playing an accordion . . . probably ALEXEI.]

COMMANDER: Am I dismissed?

COMMISSAR *[picks up the telephone receiver]*: Send Väinönen here.

COMMANDER *[stiffening]*: Am I arrested?

COMMISSAR [*slowly, after a moment's pause*]: I am very glad that you have spoken so frankly and honestly. [*She goes up to him and presses his hand in hers.*]

COMMANDER [*confused*]: Thank you.

[*Staring at the COMMISSAR, the COMMANDER goes out. The LITTLE FINN enters.*]

VÄINÖNEN: A hopeless case, eh?

COMMISSAR: Hopeless, you think? Maybe it was just such hard-headed comrades as you who shot his family. . . .

Don't touch that man, do you hear?

VÄINÖNEN: So you've made sure of him already, have you? Watch out!

COMMISSAR: Do you know what I think of him, Väinönen? I think he's in a muddle, blustering and floundering, but just the same he'll serve us.

VÄINÖNEN: That don't make sense to me. Maybe you're wrong?

COMMISSAR: In any case, we can count on him as being against those three anarchists. And, on the other hand—that is, to some extent, and for the time being—we can use the three anarchists against him, if he starts anything on his own account. Is that clear?

VÄINÖNEN: Not very. You know I don't understand Russian very well.

COMMISSAR: You stop that talk about "I-don't-understand-Russian—I-can't-speak-Russian" once and for all, or I'll—!
[*Gives him a stern look.*]

VÄINÖNEN [*flaring up*]: Say, what d'you think you're doing today—giving us all an examination, teaching us our les-

sons? [*Pauses, grins.*] That's fine. "Learning, he is light, but ignorance, he is—is—darkness." Isn't that the way it goes in Russian?

COMMISSAR: More or less, Väinönen. I see you even know some Russian proverbs. Did you call Alexei?

VÄINÖNEN: I called him. He's outside. [*Nods in the direction from which the music of the accordion grows louder.*]

COMMISSAR: Send him in.

[*The LITTLE FINN goes out and calls ALEXEI, who strolls in playing on his accordion. He is more interested in improvising little new trills than in conversation. He speaks in the intervals between his musical flourishes.*]

ALEXEI: . . . Accordion, it's called, or sometimes concertina . . . very popular musical instrument, beloved by the common people . . . this one's from Hamburg . . . a wonderful thing to keep a man's spirits up. . . .

COMMISSAR: I wanted to have a talk with you. Hope I didn't interrupt your music exercises.

ALEXEI: That's all right, don't be bashful, fire away. I love to talk about life with the female sex.

COMMISSAR: Yes, it's a delightful subject. By the way, what did you have in mind when you ran away from the battle yesterday? Were you trying to lure the enemy on?

ALEXEI [*struck with confusion, stops fingering the accordion, stands up*]: Why—I—

COMMISSAR: Or perhaps your class hatred blazed up to such a high pitch that you couldn't even bear the sight of the Whiteguards, eh? Just had to turn your back on them, didn't you?

ALEXEI: Aw, what the hell. I did wrong, that's all. Any old war-horse may come a cropper.

COMMISSAR: Old war-horse indeed! [*Draws close to him.*]
Let talk it over. Tell me about yourself. Where do you come from?

ALEXEI [*sees through her approach and begins ironically*]:
Aha! Where is he from? What is his social origin? I am of the lower middle class—the toiling lower middle class. As for callouses, I have 'em—take a look. I'm lower middle class by passport and by persuasion. And all my ideas are, you might say, of the kind that is officially forbidden.

COMMISSAR [*matches his irony*]: Aha! An unusual personality! An anarchist?

ALEXEI: Yes, kind of. . . . Well, what else do you want explained? When I fight, I fight for myself, because I'm from the toiling lower middle class. And as for my Russian fellow-citizens—the hundred and fifty million Peters and Ivans, the Marias and Olgas—there's no love lost between us. My attitude toward them is, you might say, one of reserve. You'd probably like it better if we all had flaming proletarian hearts, and were all united—like those people who get together over a glass of workers' and peasants' tea. They guzzle it down and then all say in chorus: "Long live the Party of Bolsheviks!" After which they heave a sigh, down another glass of tea, and say the same thing all over again. "Long live the you-know-what!" And then everybody heaves another big sigh, just to show they're unanimous. Sure—why not?—there's nobody to object!

COMMISSAR: What makes you think so? There are plenty who object. . . . Try.

ALEXEI: Yeah. . . . [*Pause.*] You're tooting your own horn because nobody'll toot it for you. You've hoisted a couple of yards of red calico and think you've made the whole world happy.

COMMISSAR: Let me ask you one question before you go on: Which party did you vote for at the elections?

[*Pause.*]

ALEXEI [*suddenly at a loss for words*]: . . . For you Bolsheviks. Ticket number five. You're better than the others, at any rate—even if you are pretty slick yourselves.

COMMISSAR: Comrade, do you always begin a conversation by tossing a lot of verbal bouquets? Why do you talk this way—trying to make an impression?

ALEXEI: You figure it out as best you know how.

[*He looks steadily at the COMMISSAR. It is not clear whether he is speaking seriously or whether he is mocking her. Then he begins to play again on his accordion, tenderly and sadly.*]

COMMISSAR: Well, how about the new commander—do you think he's a suspicious character?

ALEXEI: You be more careful with that noble sir. I remember him.

COMMISSAR: And he remembers, too. Well, and the Chief?

ALEXEI [*stops playing*]: What about the Chief?

COMMISSAR: Friends with him, aren't you?

ALEXEI [*plays again*]: Don't know. Couldn't say. We fought

through the Kaledin campaign together. Friendship—but somehow a funny kind of—

COMMISSAR: That's what I thought. He's got a strong hold on you.

ALEXEI [*with a quick glance at the COMMISSAR*]: Who, me? Afraid of that old bull?

COMMISSAR. Sure you're afraid of him! . . . It's about time things were straightened out here. We've got to have order.

ALEXEI [*leaping up*]: Order? You've learned that word? You've got it down pat. You keep on talking "order." Say, after all the "order" we've had, we want a taste of freedom, at least something that looks like freedom—anything but order. We're fed up with order—right up to here. [*Draws his forefinger across his throat.*] After five or ten years of order—why, we've even forgotten how to talk!

COMMISSAR: You don't seem to have forgotten.

ALEXEI [*smiling*]: That's right, I haven't. I keep repeating like a poll-parrot, after the others: "Oh, there'll be no more private property. Oh, everything is going to be wonderful"; "*Will be*"; it's always "will be." We're all lying. All we're looking for is a chance to get rich some way, to grab something and drag it away for ourselves. Even in our sleep we hang on to the trash we've collected. *My* accordion, *my* socks, *my* wife, *my* smoked herring. On account of a purse they murdered a man, and—an old woman, too! And whom are you fooling? Yourselves! Just one little word—"mine" and it will trip us all up. You just watch the things that are going to happen! [*Tears at his collar.*]

COMMISSAR: Steady there—you'll tear your uniform. . . .

What makes you believe that we Bolsheviks don't see this? We're not blind! Do you think we don't see how people fly at one another's throats like devils, foaming at the mouth, over this trash you mention? . . . "I" . . . "My" . . . We'll make an end to this!

ALEXEI: You'll break your necks. The Russian peasant—the muzhik—won't follow you on that.

COMMISSAR: He will. Oh, I know there are philosophers like you in the villages, little chiefs who sit around the stove and hold forth: "Me and mine. We'll manage by ourselves. May the goblins fly away with them as bothers us. What the muzhik wants is his own freedom." But what can they really do for the economic—you understand the word?—[ALEXEI *nods*]—for the future economic needs of the muzhik? Well?

ALEXEI: How should I know?

COMMISSAR: Whom can the muzhik rely on? The Liberals? The Constitutional-Democrats? They've sold out the muzhik, sold him for a kopek. Four Dumas there were, and four times they sold out the muzhik. And the Socialist-Revolutionaries? They talked up their sleeves about giving the muzhik land—and then drove him into the war, into the trenches.

ALEXEI [*gloomily*]: I don't deny it.

COMMISSAR: So who's left, of the different parties? Well? [ALEXEI *remains silent.*] Come now, answer. Let's have it out clean. Why don't you say something? Answer this: who talked to the muzhik against the war, and stopped the war? Over there in the West at this very minute the

war is still going on, the cannons are still making mincemeat out of men. Who spoke to the muzhik about the land—and gave him that land? Well? Are you going to dispute the facts? You say the muzhik won't follow us Bolsheviks. I say he will. Not right away, of course. We'll give him plenty of time to think it over. And in the meantime we'll take him by the hand and lead him out into the sunlight! We'll tell him, "Fill your lungs with fresh air, old-timer, and start putting some meat on those poor old bones." And your muzhik will join us—he's nobody's fool, he's got mighty sharp eyes in his head. "Can't I be your partner?" he'll ask.

ALEXEI [*jokingly, yet with deep meaning*]: As a partner—sure. That way he'll join.

COMMISSAR: For an unusual personality you've got lots of rubbish in your head.

ALEXEI [*cunningly*]: Maybe I was just putting that all on? [*The COMMISSAR is standing before him, poised, erect, glowing with good health.*]

ALEXEI: I look at you, while we're arguing here about politics, and all the time I'm thinking—I'm not ashamed to admit it—how come such a woman isn't mine. Get away, or I'll grab you.

COMMISSAR: So you've taken up the marriage question again?

ALEXEI: Don't start that. I'll get you yet. I'm letting you know my most secret thought. [*Coming closer.*] Say, listen to reason, won't you?

COMMISSAR [*dashing water into a glass*]: Say, have a drink, won't you?

ALEXEI: [*tosses the water down like vodka*]: And maybe I was just putting it on, all that stuff I said. . . . I've got my eye on you. . . .

[*The COMMANDER and the BO'SUN appear in the doorway. They halt, wait a moment. Then the COMMANDER marches forward with a determined air. ALEXEI turns around, catches sight of the officer, scowls, and begins playing a mocking and derisive doggerel tune on his accordion.*]

COMMANDER: [*flaring up*]: Silence! Do you hear?

[*ALEXEI goes on playing. The COMMISSAR stops him. There is silence.*]

COMMANDER [*reading crisply from a paper in his hand*]:

"Military service requires unity and complete subordination to the will of the commander. The plurality of command at present established in the regiment is no longer tolerable—"

COMMISSAR: What is it you want?

COMMANDER: Complete command!

[*ALEXEI is so surprised he whistles. THE COMMISSAR becomes wary.*]

COMMISSAR: Complete command? But why are you reading it from a paper? What kind of a document is that?

COMMANDER: I am reading aloud because in the Naval Academy we were taught not to chatter about matters connected with the Service. Discipline is not a matter for casual discussion—although nowadays the ability to chatter is highly prized. [*He nods sharply toward ALEXEI.*]

ALEXEI [*leaping at him*]: I'll chatter you, you white-collared bastard!

[*For an instant all eyes involuntarily turn to the COMMANDER'S*

*clean white collar. . . . The anarchist CHIEF enters, amb-
ling in his invariable manner. With him is FOGHORN, who
rasps out his words with pent-up rage.]*

FOGHORN: In the detachment—

COMMISSAR: In the regiment!

FOGHORN: In the what is not important. The important thing is—what. . . . We revolutionary seamen have a clean record, we've killed off all our officers, but now one or two lickspittles of the tsar have appeared among us. [*Glar-
ing first at the COMMANDER, then at the BOATSWAIN.*] Scabs, louse-eggs! The detachment has found out what these two are demanding. We're not asleep. [*To the COM-
MISSAR.*] Now it's like this, comrade—the detachment has got to be saved from infection before it is too late. We had our own spirit here—the revolution has no cause to complain—a fine healthy spirit—

COMMANDER: Healthy! You—syphilitic!

FOGHORN: A syphilitic revolutionary is better than a healthy counter-revolutionary. [*Smacking his clenched fist into his palm.*] Answer, Commissar, answer!

COMMISSAR: I—

COMMANDER: I demand an answer too, Commissar!

ALEXEY: Well? Why don't you say something?

CHIEF: Who are you for?

COMMISSAR [*slowly*]: I am for the regiment.

FOGHORN: On your word of honour?

COMMISSAR: On my word of honour.

CHIEF: You'll repeat that before everybody. [*Snatches the paper out of the COMMANDER'S hand, crumples it up and*

flings it on the floor. To the COMMISSAR.] I'll send you my own paper, in place of that thing. And you'll sign it! [*To FOGHORN with a nod toward the COMMANDER and the BOATSWAIN.*] Don't let those two out of sight! I'll decide their fate later on.

[*They all go out, FOGHORN convoying the COMMANDER. The COMMISSAR is left alone.*]

COMMISSAR: Hmm. . . .

VÄINÖNEN [*coming in*]: Things look bad, Commissar.

COMMISSAR: Call our men here, Väinönen.

VÄINÖNEN [*thinking aloud*]: . . . Anyhow, that officer . . . just ripe for the firing-squad. . . .

COMMISSAR: Call in our men, Väinönen.

VÄINÖNEN: You're going to go against the Chief? We'll start an open battle?

[*The LITTLE FINN goes out quickly.*]

COMMISSAR [*her glance travelling around the room*]: Yes . . . this is the way you must learn your lessons, Comrades Commissars. . . .

[*One by one, the OLD SEAMAN, SPOTTY and several others come in.*]

OLD SEAMAN: What's up Commissar?

COMMISSAR: Have you heard?

OLD SEAMAN: That we have.

COMMISSAR: What do you think about the officer?

SPOTTY: A snake.

VÄINÖNEN: I told you so—why, he's all ripe and ready for the firing-squad.

COMMISSAR: Will you be quiet?

VÄINÖNEN [*turning away*]: I could leave altogether, you know.

COMMISSAR: Is that so?

[*The LITTLE FINN sits down. The others follow his example.*]

SPOTTY: Let's get down to brass tacks. Whose mug we got to smash?

COMMISSAR: That's just the question. Once we strike, we mustn't miss. And we've got to pick the right moment. News has come that the Chief has sent for reinforcements—another detachment of anarchists. They may arrive at any minute. Under other circumstances we could find some way of handling this chief of theirs—we could try to influence him. He was a good fighter in the past. But now we're up against it. We've got no time left to "educate" such people now.

SPOTTY: Shoot 'em all!

COMMISSAR: All who?

[*Enter ALEXEI. Silent play of glances.*]

ALEXEI: Hatching your little plots, are you? Guess I'm not wanted here, am I?

[*He goes out dejectedly, playing a few wistful bars of "Yablochko" on his inseparable accordion.*]

OLD SEAMAN: There's a lonely lad.

ONE OF THE OTHERS: It's his own fault he's lonesome.

VÄINÖNEN: I want to say a few words about that officer.

COMMISSAR: You've got the officer on the brain. The trouble is not with the officer, but with us, the Party organization. You fellows have let things slide.

SPOTTY: Yes, but how many of us are there? One, two, a handful—that's all.

VÄINÖNEN: How many did you say? Why, we've half a world in front of us, a whole world behind us, and Comrade Lenin in the middle! Isn't that enough for you?

SPOTTY: Maybe we should go now and have a little "talk" with them. [*Draws his revolver, stands up.*]

[*Enter FOGHORN. SPOTTY halts.*]

FOGHORN [*sweeping them all with his glare*]: The Chief of the detachment orders you all to get a move on. [*To the COMMISSAR.*] And here's an order for you to sign, my friend, just sign 'er on the dotted line. What you all goggling at? It's about the officer. We're giving him a one-way ticket back to where he came from. [*Puts the order in front of the COMMISSAR. To the others*]: And what's the matter with you—breaking away from the masses? Mates, it's better when we're all together. [*He feels the cold eyes of the Communists.*] Well, make it snappy. . . . [*Exit.*]

[*The COMMISSAR reads the order written by the anarchist CHIFF. Folds it and tears it up into small pieces.*]

COMMISSAR: Who's ready to sacrifice his life?

[*Silence.*]

VÄINÖNEN: What for?

COMMISSAR: There are times when you don't ask questions of the Party. [*To the rest.*] Well?

[*The men stir.*]

OLD SEAMAN [*rising*]: I am ready.

COMMISSAR: From Petersburg, are you?

OLD SEAMAN: From Petersburg.

COMMISSAR: We'll put things to rights here. . . . We must. [*To the OLD SEAMAN.*] You seem to be the strongest. You will get up and speak before the regiment. If they kill you, the next to speak will be [*looking around at all of them*—Väinönen. . . .

VÄINÖNEN. Aye, aye. But what shall I talk about? Give me some instructions.

COMMISSAR: So you know how to act only when you have a piece of paper to read from? How about acting according to circumstances? Understand?

SPORTY: What is there to understand? They'll kill him, and him they'll kill too—but what are *you* going to do yourself?

COMMISSAR: I? I'll speak first, comrades.

BLACKOUT

*The CHORUS-LEADERS of the Regiment
are on the stage.*

2ND CHORUS-LEADER: Order of the Revolutionary War Council number one thousand, two hundred and fifty: "In event of a partisan detachment refusing to submit to discipline, showing license or anarchy, and attempting to incite sedition among the regular bodies of troops, said detachment must be punished severely. Commanders must time the blow with strict exactitude. The disarming and liquidation of the mutineers must be accomplished in the

shortest possible time—in no case more than twenty-four hours.”

1ST CHORUS-LEADER: Yes, that's all very well, but how many absolutely reliable Party members do we have in the regiment? Hardly six or seven all told. The anarchists will simply shoot them down.

2ND CHORUS-LEADER: It is the duty of Commissars and all other Communists to set personal examples of courage and self-sacrifice under any and all circumstances, to conduct themselves as Party members by doing all that lies within their power regardless of difficulties.

BLACKOUT

The anarchist CHIEF, FOGHORN, and some of their henchmen. The CHIEF gloomily hums "The Warshavyanka." FOGHORN is cleaning a rifle. Several times he snaps the trigger of the empty gun, producing a cold, sharp, expressive click.

CHIEF: How about having a drink?

FOGHORN: Not me. I have to take care of my health.

CHIEF: Vanity, nothing but vanity all around me. . . . My heart-burn is rising into my throat, choking me. . . . There is no God, there are no men. [*Looking at his followers.*] Can you call these men? There is nothing anywhere.

FOGHORN: But just look what a woman we've got with us.

I'd like to marry one like her, when all this trouble is over.

CHIEF: Ha! Want to atone for your sins with her, do you?

. . . Atone for the man we killed, and the old woman.

. . . That's anarchy for you.

[*Enter a SAILOR. He approaches the CHIEF and reports.*]

SAILOR: We've arrested a couple of men—don't know who they are.

[*The CHIEF makes a motion indicating that the prisoners be brought in. Anarchist guards bring in two middle-aged men, haggard, unshaven, wearing ragged overcoats of the old Russian Army. The first holds himself erect and dignified; the second stands peculiarly blank-faced, only his eyes alive. The sailors, attracted by the catch, gather round. The prisoners look about them, see no sympathy.*]

FOGHORN: Who are you?

1ST PRISONER: A human being.

FOGHORN: A mortal, you'd better say.

1ST PRISONER: The same as you.

FOGHORN: What have you got to say for yourself?

1ST PRISONER: My friend here and I—

FOGHORN: Speak only for yourself.

1ST PRISONER: I repeat, my friend and I were prisoners of war in Germany. We were released from a concentration camp in Schleswig. We have come on foot across all of Poland and Little Russia—

FOGHORN: Now called the Ukraine!

1ST PRISONER: And we are trying to get home. Your men have got our papers there. [*He motions toward the guards.*]

Some pocket-worn documents are handed to FOGHORN, who passes them on to the CHIEF.]

CHIEF: What rank did you hold in the old army?

1ST PRISONER: We were both officers.

[The sailors stir and growl.]

FOGHORN: Do you know what's happening in Russia?

1ST OFFICER: I do, and so does the whole world. But why do you look at us like this? So—un—unfriendly? I own no property—that's what seems to irritate people most of all these days. I was drafted into the army by the mobilization. *[More slowly.]* And I quite refuse to understand this monstrous hate of one part of the people toward the other. It's absurd. It's—it's as if *[he gropes for a simile]*—fishes hated birds. Why should one fly while the other swims? Because they're made that way.

CHIEF: Go on.

1ST OFFICER: I thought. . . . I'm afraid I'm a little excited—but I did so much thinking—back there. . . . May I speak? *[One of the sailors stands up and moves close to the OFFICER.]* Everybody's glaring at me so strangely. Don't—please don't look at me like that! May I speak?

FOGHORN: You may speak.

[The sailor moves away from the prisoner and sits down.]

1ST OFFICER: I used to dream that when our Russian Revolution came it would be full of beauty and light, full of love for mankind. For if it is not, then what difference will it make, after all? The persecutions of the Christians—the Inquisition—and now your Terror? *[The sailors exchange sullen glances.]* It's all simply destruction, isn't

it? No matter what name you give it, or however you justify it? I—I thought, as I walked over this dear Russian earth of ours, that here in Russia, in our Russia, we would see the first gleam of human kindness.

CHIEF [*roughly*]: Kindness! I've forgotten that word. And you forget it too!

1ST OFFICER: But how do you mean?—forget kindness? Oh no, you are wrong! Human kindness ought to be everywhere. It—it's hard for me to speak—how you *look* at me!—but all the same I will speak. I must speak! I—you—you yourselves have been through the war, you were in the old military service, and so you too know how horrible violence is. Surely you couldn't want to use it against others.

FOGHORN: What a pleasant delusion!

[*Several of the anarchists laugh.*]

1ST OFFICER: The world will be won over by setting an example, don't you understand? Won over by ideas, not by force . . . you understand . . . how can I explain it? Well, as Christ and his twelve disciples did.

CHIEF: That's enough of that. Now let's go over to logic. Have you studied that subject?

1ST OFFICER: Yes.

CHIEF [*indicating the other prisoner*]: Why doesn't he say anything?

1ST OFFICER: He's deaf. Shell-shock.

[*The sailors all look at the deaf man. Some faces change their expressions.*]

CHIEF: And so you're both officers, and you've been prison-

ers of war in Germany. And you're trying to get home, are you?

1ST OFFICER: Yes.

CHIEF: How about him?

[*The DEAF MAN smiles in uncomprehending confusion. His companion conveys to him, in sign-language, that the question concerns him and should be answered in the affirmative. Eagerly he nods, smiling at the CHIEF.*]

CHIEF: I see. And so it is perfectly clear that you are going home, and will then join the Whiteguards!

1ST OFFICER: We will not! We'll not leave our homes, once we get there.

CHIEF: If you don't join the Whites, they'll take you by force. You ought to know that law of the state machine by now. It's all logical, isn't it?

1ST OFFICER: But my friend is stone-deaf, and as for me—
[*He opens his overcoat and reveals a mangled arm swinging in a sling.*] And then, why should we join the Whiteguards? After all, many have joined you! [*With a nod he indicates Lieutenant Behring, whom he has noticed in the background.*]

CHIEF: Us? There's no way for you to join us. We got only one representative of the officer class here—[*searching out the COMMANDER with his eyes, finding him, and addressing him; a shift in the crowd shows that the COMMANDER is guarded by an armed sailor*—and it just happens that we're saying goodbye to him today. [*Some of the men look at the COMMANDER.*]] Well, now, let's go further with our logic. All your breed have to be uprooted and exterminated

down to the last man. If we don't do that, we'll lose the revolution. Now isn't that logical?

[*Silence.*]

DEAF MAN [*unexpectedly*]: Is he letting us go home?

1ST OFFICER [*through tears of desperation*]: But wait—just a minute! Why—why, you're the people who have been issuing proclamations about the most wonderful thing in life—proclamations about man's humanity to man. I wanted so much to see—back there, we were reading about—the New Russia. Then why is everything so different here? Why all this cruelty?

CHIEF: Cruelty. . . . Ha! Why, you won't find kinder folks on this earth than me and him. [*Pointing to FOGHORN.*]

1ST OFFICER: Let me say one last word—I implore you!

CHIEF: That's a prejudice of the bourgeois courts—a snare and a delusion. And it's unnecessary. [*To henchmen.*] Take them away and—overboard.

1ST OFFICER [*straightens up*]: In that case I have the honour to pay you my respects. I thank you humbly for this last lecture, delivered in the hour of my death.

DEAF MAN [*to his friend, plucking him by his empty sleeve*]: Is he letting us go home? What is he saying?

CHIEF: Take 'em away!

DEAF MAN: He's letting us go home? [*Addressing the CHIEF.*] You're letting us go? Yes? Thank you, thank you! They're expecting me at home!

OLD SEAMAN [*coming out in front of the regiment*]: Why should these men be killed?

[*The sailors stir uneasily.*]

A VOICE: Let 'em alone!

ALEXEI [*coming up to the CHIEF and pointing to the 1ST OFFICER*]: I like that man!

CHIEF: Take 'em away!

ALEXEI: Don't touch them!

CHIEF [*shouldering his way into the crowd and taking up a position between the main body of the sailors und the prisoners*]: Anybody who interferes with this will be shot too. Take 'em away, I say!

[*Anarchist guards lead the two men away.*]

ALEXEI [*to the CHIEF*]: You better look out!

[*Enter the COMMISSAR, the LITTLE FINN, SPOTTY and a couple of others.*]

CHIEF: Have you signed the Order?

COMMISSAR [*slowly*]: Yes.

CHIEF: Then hand it over.

ALEXEI: Did you see?

COMMISSAR: See what? What's the matter?

FOGHORN: Aw, he's all worked up because we're just liquidating a couple of men here.

OLD SEAMAN: They are prisoners!

ALEXEI: And you call yourself a commissar!

COMMISSAR: Stop this murder!

[*It is the moment in which the fate of the regiment is being decided. The COMMISSAR weighs all the elements: herself, her Party comrades and the regiment. ALEXEI, the BOATSWAIN, the OLD SEAMAN, VÄINÖNEN and several others rush out to stop the execution. Their excited shouts are*

heard; "Halt! Stop!" A moment of tense expectancy. Then two shots in the distance. Silence. . . .]

COMMISSAR [to the CHIEF]: The Red Army does not shoot prisoners. Did you know that?

CHIEF: If they don't, they're too damned soft. Everybody joins one side or the other.

COMMISSAR: They might have joined our side. More and more such men will be coming over to us. In the Red Army today there are already twenty-two thousand officers of the old army.

CHIEF: Twenty-two thousand traitors!

[Again he searches out the COMMANDER with his eyes. Several of his henchmen do the same. The COMMANDER stares back at them coldly.]

COMMISSAR: Lenin says—

CHIEF: I'm not interested in the newspaper editorials written by the new prime minister.

OLD SEAMAN: But you should be interested in the orders issued by the Soviet government!

CHIEF: Oh, is that so? My own orders are enough for me.

[The anarchist guards return, having carried out their CHIEF's order.]

ONE OF THE GUARDS [mumbles in a dazed way]: One of them shouted "Long live the Revolution!"

CHIEF: Well, what of it? He was lying—he showed his yellow streak.

ALEXEI [wild with fury]: But suppose he wasn't lying!

COMMISSAR [stopping ALEXEI and several others]: Let's talk this over quietly.

FOGHORN: That's right. How I love sensible people! Sit down.

CHIEF: Yes, let's talk it over. I'll submit to general opinion.

[*Slowly they all sit down—not at random, but each selecting among the haphazard furnishings of the place a position which seems to him or her to be somehow strategic.*]

CHIEF: Well, fire away.

[*The men of the regiment move closer hesitantly, exchanging glances.*]

A VOICE: Just try to say something here!

COMMISSAR [*to the CHIEF*]: Your superiority is so respected that no one ventures to contradict you.

OLD SEAMAN [*coming forward*]: Oh no?

ALEXEI [*stepping in front of the OLD SEAMAN*]: Whose superiority are you talking about? [*Pointing to the CHIEF.*]

Him? Superior to whom? To us? [*To the CHIEF.*]

You "granted us permission" to talk, did you? Want to listen, do you? We're too quiet in your presence, eh? [*Mimicking him derisively.*] "Why the noise?"

CHIEF [*to FOGHORN*]: Alexei is sick.

ALEXEI [*pointing to FOGHORN*]: It's him that's sick—this syphilitic boot-licker of yours. I throw it in your teeth, in your dirty mug—you're a traitor!

CHIEF: Who has taught you to talk like that? [*Looks searchingly at the COMMISSAR, at the OLD SEAMAN, at VÄINÖNEN.*]

OLD SEAMAN [*to the CHIEF*]: Yes, have a good look around, you bullying bastard. And don't think we haven't had an eye on you for a long time now.

CHIEF: I see, I see. . . .

VÄINÖNEN [*as he moves along a line of sailors who stand in irresolute silence*]: Not a peep out of you—and yet you are supposed to be war seamen! [*Spits in disgust.*]

[*The men begin to stir angrily.*]

A VOICE: What d'ya mean, we're not war seamen?

SPOTTY: Who are you throwing dirt at—us?

A SECOND VOICE: Who are we afraid of, mates? Him? [*An arm gestures at the CHIEF.*]

ALEXEI [*accusingly to the CHIEF*]: Did you ask us our opinion when you had our buddy thrown overboard on account of that old woman's purse?

THIRD VOICE: No!

[*The CHIEF does not move.*]

ALEXEI: And did you ask us how we felt about it when you threw the old woman overboard, too?

FOURTH VOICE: No!

ALEXEI: And that's not all. Did you pay any attention when you were asked to keep hands off her? [*Pointing to the COMMISSAR.*]

FIFTH VOICE: No!

BO'SUN [*pointing to the COMMANDER*]: Or him? Not to mention myself?

ALEXEI: Yes, and them too. Did you ask the consent of the Commissar and the others when you said we were going "to say goodbye" to him? [*Gestures toward the COMMANDER.*] And how about those two cripples you shot just now? What did you murder them for?

[*An angry wave of voices.*]

CHIEF: Stop this disorder! You don't know everything.

[*Stands up.*] A plot has been discovered. The details will be made known immediately. Commissar, read out the order!

[*The CHIEF takes up a self-confident pose beside the COMMISSAR. The men show heightened attention and surprise.*]

COMMISSAR [*pretending to read out a written order but actually making it up as she goes along*]: "In the name of the proletarian Revolution, the court-martial, consisting of the Commissar of the regiment and persons appointed by her—"

FOGHORN: What persons?

CHIEF: Don't interrupt!

COMMISSAR: "Having considered the case of the former—"

[*All eyes turn to COMMANDER BEHRING*] "—Chief of the detachment—" [*the close-packed men stir*]—"and having found him, the Chief, guilty of executing without trial or investigation certain sailors of the regiment; and further, of executing in aforesaid manner an unknown woman, and also two prisoners; and further, of insubordination to the Commissar, who is the representative of the Soviet government—sentences the above-mentioned former Chief of the detachment to the highest measure of social defence, namely, death by shooting."

[*While the COMMISSAR "reads" the order, FOGHORN watches the changing expressions on the faces around him. This is his way of reading the order. As its meaning grows plain, he backs farther and farther away from the CHIEF, deserting him more plainly than words could express.*]

CHIEF [*draws his pistol*]: Double-crossed! Help!
[*Six sailors hurl themselves upon the CHIEF. His shot is fired in the air and the pistol torn out of his hand. He struggles to throw them off, at the same time looking for help from FOGHORN.*]

CHIEF [*shouts to FOGHORN*]: Where are you?

FOGHORN [*whom ALEXEI has forced to his knees*]: I—he [*indicating the CHIEF*] made me do all those things!

CHIEF: Somebody read what she's got there in her hand! That's not the right paper! This is all a double-cross!

[*Silence.*]

[*The COMMISSAR stands fingering the blank sheet of paper. ALEXEI looks at her, takes the paper, turns it over and around, gets the idea.*]

ALEXEI: It's all written here just the way she read it. And don't forget you agreed to submit to general opinion.
[*Dragging FOGHORN with him, he strides over to the CHIEF, lifts FOGHORN up like a puppet and prompts him.*]
Now then, what is it you always used to say in cases like this?

FOGHORN [*his face held uncomfortably close to the CHIEF's*]: The verdict is final and no appeal allowed.

ALEXEI [*to the COMMISSAR and those who stand nearest her*]: Right?

COMMISSAR: Right.

[*Silence . . . broken after a moment, by the sound of VÄINÖNEN slipping a cartridge into his rifle and throwing the bolt.*]

VÄINÖNEN: Shall I carry out the sentence?

COMMISSAR: I think Comrade Alexei here can do everything that is necessary.

[ALEXEI whirls around in surprise. The CHIEF struggles helplessly in the grasp of the six sailors.]

CHIEF: Let me have my last word! Alexei, brother! Alyosha!

[ALEXEI nods to the CHIEF's captors and himself removes their hands, setting the CHIEF free.]

ALEXEI: The last word is a prejudice of the bourgeois courts—a snare and a delusion. And it's unnecessary. [Draws his pistol.] Come on, let's go.

CHIEF: Long live the Revolution!

ALEXEI: Aw, cut it out!

[ALEXEI leads the CHIEF out. Everyone waits. A shot is heard.]

BO'SUN [crossing himself quickly]: Receive, O Lord, the soul of thy departed servant!

VÄINÖNEN [to the COMMISSAR who is standing deep in thought]: Say, what are you thinking about this time? Honest to God your head'll split!

COMMISSAR: What business is that of yours, Väinönen? [To the COMMANDER.] Comrade Commander, you are released. Take over the command of the regiment!

COMMANDER [snapping to attention]: Aye, aye!

[Suddenly a loud burst of rowdy song is heard off-stage, coming swiftly nearer and nearer.]

A VOICE: The anarchist reinforcements!

[Noisily, in wild disorder, a group of sailors pour in. Their uniforms and equipment are in slovenly disarray. The leader of this crowd, a tall, gangling man, lets out an awful sound

halfway between a neigh and a roar. His voice is raucous, and he speaks with a thick Odessa accent.]

ODESSITE: Hello, Comrades of de free detachment! Greetings to our brudder anarchists! Here we are, me and my beauties! Ready for de slaughter! Come to stand by our dear Chief! [*He notices BEHRING and the COMMISSAR.*] Ha, ha, ho, ho, where did you catch dese birdies? [*Suspecting nothing of the real situation, he swaggers towards them with a leer of cruel anticipation.*] An officer and his little lady, eh? In a pretty fix, ain't you now? We'll take care of you in just a minute. [*To FOGHORN*]: Hi, brudder, how're you? Where's de Chief? Ain't seen him for a tousand years! How's his healt'? Dat heartburn of his was always giving him trouble. How is he now?

FOGHORN: His heartburn doesn't bother him any more.

ODESSITE: What you lookin' so glum for?

COMMISSAR [*to FOGHORN*]: Explain to him. And make it short.

FOGHORN: Um, um—it's like this. We just bumped off that chief of yours, so we did. Put him out of the way. He was a bastard anyhow.

ODESSITE: Say, your syph ain't worked its way up to de attic already, has it? [*Taps FOGHORN significantly on the top of his head.*]

FOGHORN [*slapping away his hand*]: All right, all right, where it's worked its way to is my business. . . .

[*Re-enter ALEXEI. He flings down the CHIEF's cap, belt and holster.*]

FOGHORN [*to the ODESSITE*]: Recognize 'em?

[*The new arrival stares, craning his neck with a convulsive twist. He whirls to his followers.*]

ODESSITE: Brudders! Treachery!

[*The newly-arrived group begins an uproar. The sailors of the regiment close in on them. There are a few seconds of hand-to-hand fighting before the anarchists are disarmed.*]

VÄINÖNEN: Pipe down there, you tramps! Your monkey-business is over, see? From now on you're in the Navy. Or you get an extra hole drilled in your head.

[*The group feels the organized power of the disciplined naval regiment that faces it. . . .*]

COMMISSAR: Bo'sun, take charge of the reinforcements!

BO'SUN: Aye, aye! [*Marches over, faces them.*] Fall-I-I in!
 [Startled, the anarchists form ragged lines.] Atten-SHUN!
 Ri-i-ight dress! [*He moves along the ranks, straightening men none too gently.*] Pull in those bellies! Heads up!
 Heels together! Throw out your chests! Hold your breath!
 Steady! All together now—front!

[*The dazed group fronts and stands stiffly at attention. The COMMISSAR approaches.*]

COMMISSAR: Welcome, comrades!

ODESSITE [*shortly*]: Howdy.

COMMISSAR [*sternly, coming closer*]: Once more—learn it. Welcome, comrades!

[*The group makes discordant sounds. The First Naval Regiment, across the stage from the newcomers, moves forward with a threatening murmur.*]

COMMISSAR [*to the group*]: Still pretty bad. Once again—Da zdrastvuyete, tovarishchi!

[*The group pauses, then, feeling the full force of her authority, shouts the correct Red Army response—zdras-s!*]

COMMISSAR: Very good. I congratulate you, comrades, on your joining the First Naval Regiment of the Regular Red Army!

THE GROUP [*together, in full voice, the response they had once known*]: We serve the toiling people!

BO'SUN [*with relish*]: Ah-ha, so you remembered it, did you?

COMMANDER [*aside, to the COMMISSAR*]: It's simply amazing, how quickly this is all happening!

COMMISSAR: Yes, somewhat less than two hundred years.

FOGHORN [*joining in familiarly with the COMMISSAR*]: Yes, you see what we're made of now. If we only had more such Communists!

BO'SUN [*noticing him*]: Get in line!

[*With slinking step he obeys.*]

COMMISSAR: We're going on the march, comrades.

[*The regiment, now a compact mass in even ranks, begins to mark time . . . to march . . . its movement is free, swinging, spirited.*]

COMMISSAR: Now then comrades, let's hear your first "Hurrah" in the regular Red Army!

[*And the thunder of the regiment's "Hurrah" is the first born cry of a mighty army. . . . Marching magnificently, they move off. . . .*]

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

Twilight. Another camping place. The COMMISSAR, the BO'SUN, the OLD SEAMAN and VÄINÖNEN.

COMMISSAR [*finishing a conversation over a field telephone*]:
Yes, yes. I see. Exactly. [*Replaces the receiver.*] See here, comrades. There's been too much talk and not nearly enough military action. It's high time to act. Time is precious for us. While we were on the march I consulted with the Commander on a number of questions. [*To the OLD SEAMAN.*] You, my friend, will take command of a battalion.

OLD SEAMAN: But what kind of a commander will I make?
After all, I'm only a stoker.

COMMISSAR: Right now all of us are only stokers. So we're not going to talk any more about *that*.

BO'SUN: But this fighting on dry land isn't what we're used to —let alone taking command. We sailors were always finicky about hoofing it.

COMMISSAR: And now you're going to get over being finicky.

BO'SUN: Aye, aye.

[*Enter the COMMANDER.*]

COMMANDER: I have received news of the highest military significance.

COMMISSAR: I'm listening.

[*The COMMANDER looks doubtfully at the OLD SEAMAN, uncertain whether he should report in the presence of a rank-and-file sailor.*]

COMMISSAR: What's the matter?—does this comrade's being here embarrass you? Let me introduce him: this is the new battalion commander you and I were talking about. He's your assistant.

[*The COMMANDER shakes hands with the sailor.*]

VÄINÖNEN: What a pity there's not some kind of a little battalion for me to command!

COMMISSAR: Wait a bit—we'll hunt one up for you, when you've learned enough. And now, Comrade Commander, let's hear the news.

COMMANDER [*handing a telegram to the COMMISSAR*]: The message is short but sufficiently eloquent. An Imperial German infantry brigade, transferred from the Western Front by the enemy, is now being moved against our sector.

BO'SUN: The Imperials! I saw them in 1908, when the fleet was on a foreign cruise.

COMMANDER: Quite right.

COMMISSAR: And what do you propose to do, Comrade Commander?

[*VÄINÖNEN and the OLD SEAMAN move closer to the COMMANDER.*]

COMMANDER [*turning to a field map on the wall and demonstrating each phrase with the pointer in his hand*]: My plan is as follows: Here is our position. We have three battalions. I propose moving two battalions forward—there is good cover here. I would leave one battalion in reserve.

This could be the battalion led by—[*a nod*]*—the new commander.*

[*Silence.*]

COMMISSAR [*repeating his words reflectively*]: Move two battalions forward. One battalion in reserve. So. Everything perfectly correct—from the standpoint of the old army's rules and regulations. But is it right under our present conditions?

[*Enter ALEXEI.*]

ALEXEI [*looking around at them all*]: Maybe I'm not wanted here, as usual?

COMMISSAR: That's not so. Sit down. Well, how are our seafaring friends getting along on dry land?

ALEXEI: All alive and kicking. Enjoying the fresh air. Casting an eye over the local female population. [*Seriously.*] There's a rumour that something's on foot. Is that right?

COMMISSAR: Something is on foot—a brigade of German infantry regulars and they're advancing straight towards us!

ALEXEI [*bounding forward*]: Give it to 'em!

OLD SEAMAN: What are you going to give 'em—how are you going to give it to 'em—where are you going to give it to 'em? [*Ironically.*] Just give it to 'em any old way, eh?

ALEXEI [*sitting down*]: Well, what am I, a strategist or something? [*Indicating the COMMANDER.*] He's the specialist here.

COMMISSAR: The Comrade Commander has already made his proposal—that we should wait for the enemy to advance,

and then meet him. What do you say to that? [*The others are silent.*] In my opinion, this proposal is no good. [*To the COMMANDER.*] Don't be offended. Once the enemy has been located, and is advancing on us, we must attack without waiting for him. We must strike unexpectedly, and knock him off his feet so hard he'll never get up.

ALEXEI: Put 'er there, mate! [*They shake hands.*]

BO'SUN: That's real navy style!

COMMISSAR: We've had enough of the old Russian military tactics—a thin line of men stretched out across the field, lying on their bellies in the mud, and somewhere in the rear a pitiful handful of reserves sitting, and all of them waiting, waiting, till the enemy charges and grabs whatever he wants, right and left. I propose—for the present this is only my personal opinion—to begin by outflanking the enemy at once.

ALEXEI: Oho!

COMMISSAR: And your opinion?

COMMANDER [*wrily*]: Your alternate proposal is a radical one, and I should have thought. . . . however, since this comes from the side of the Party. . . .

COMMISSAR: Then we'll adopt the second proposal. Issue your orders.

COMMANDER: One minute, please. [*Using callipers on the map.*] The scale is two miles. So. Just a moment. . . . [*Sketches the whole operation deftly on the map.*] The first battalion will remain here in our position and post sentries. When the enemy attacks, they must take the full

force of the blow without retreating. Meanwhile, two battalions, the second and third, will advance under cover. . . . So. . . . They will make a flanking march—fifteen miles—and deliver a joint attack at this point.

COMMISSAR: We must select reliable people to carry out this plan.

COMMANDER [drily]: Undoubtedly. That is your function.

COMMISSAR: I think you had better command the two flanking battalions yourself, taking your new assistant with you. As for the first battalion [*looking around*] I shall remain with it, and with me the Bo'sun and Alexei.

VÄINÖNEN: Well, and what about me? [*To the COMMISSAR*]: Let me go with that officer . . . honest to God!

COMMISSAR: And how about your staying here with me, Väinönen?

VÄINÖNEN: All right.

COMMISSAR [*to VÄINÖNEN*]: Take a look there. Anybody hanging around?

[VÄINÖNEN *goes to the door, looks about and makes a sign that no one is there.*]

COMMANDER: We will make the joint attack as follows: the first battalion will deliver a frontal attack; the second and third battalions, an attack on the enemy's rear. The time for the attack will be five o'clock, just before dawn. Please see that your watches agree. It is now eleven-twenty-nine.

[*They all take out their watches, compare them and set them.*]

OLD SEAMAN: At five o'clock.

[*All watches set by the COMMANDER's time, they wind them and replace them.*]

COMMISSAR: I would like you all to remember that this battle will be the first real test of our regiment. . . . Our plan of operations has to be kept an absolute secret. If anyone falls into the enemy's hands, he must not say a word, whatever they may do to him. Our attack can be successful only if it comes as a complete surprise to the enemy.

VÄINÖNEN: Aye, aye. We'll keep the secret. To the death.

COMMISSAR: Well, what do you think? Will the regiment stand the test?

COMMANDER: Unfortunately I do not possess the gift of prophecy. One thing I would advise, however, is that we start at once. Every minute counts now.

BLACKOUT

From the dark stage are heard subdued commands and the tramp of many boots. The two battalions are beginning their secret march by night. Suddenly the slender beams of two spotlights find the CHORUS-LEADERS at either end of the stage.

1ST CHORUS-LEADER: They're marching, they're marching!
[*Listens, repeats softly.*] One, two, three, four! Left!
Left! Left, right, left! Hear them, those first swinging, rhythmic steps. That's the way an army moves when every

man in it knows where he's going and why! The romance of those night marches still beats strong in our hearts. O Red Army, you were our youth! When we were eighteen years old we used to call out to the whole world, "Listen, everybody, everywhere." We remember all our marches and campaigns, and how in the last terrible hour the shouts of the Baltic sailors were raised in victory. How well we recall the great roads our comrades travelled, infantry divisions and cavalry corps. . . . We remember everything. . . . And when one fell, it was as if a piece of our own body had been torn out.

2ND CHORUS-LEADER: The sun shone for us, and great names blazed before us—Lenin, Stalin, Voroshilov. And how we smiled when the six-gun volleys of our army rang out over hill and valley. We knew how to march. We marched year after year, day and night, fifty miles a day. . . . We swam across all the rivers from the Vistula to the Amur. And everywhere we posted our men on watch.

BLACKOUT

*The dark stage grows a little lighter,
revealing FOGHORN and VÄINÖNEN on
sentry duty in the night.*

FOGHORN: Keep your eyes open, Väinönen.

VÄINÖNEN: I got 'em open.

FOGHORN: And look behind you just as sharp as in front.

VÄINÖNEN: Why behind me?

FOGHORN: Why? Because a good old comrade was murdered, that's why. There's treachery in our regiment.

VÄINÖNEN: You think so? Of course—that—officer—the devil only knows!

FOGHORN: What a man we've lost—and they've put an officer in his place! Our comrades are going blind, they're forgetting the old days. . . . And something will happen to that woman, too.

VÄINÖNEN: No, nothing will happen to a woman like her. And keep still—we're not supposed to talk on duty. We've got to look sharp—those Germans may attack any minute now.

FOGHORN: Whether you keep watch or not—the regiment is done for now anyway—you can take my word for it. Better quit while the quitting's good.

VÄINÖNEN: No, it isn't. Don't you worry.

FOGHORN: Lets run away, Väinönen—let's go out to the steppes, and through the salt marshes, and along the paths by the sea. We'll find our way to friends who don't betray—we'll go and find the truth, Väinönen.

VÄINÖNEN: I'm finding that right here. Tomorrow we're having an organizational meeting of the Party members. We've got groups of Party members and sympathizers organized already. That Commissar—she's got things all turned around the right way now, so that there's no turning them back.

FOGHORN: Say, why did she call you and the Commander and the others together, a while ago? What were you talking about at your conference?

VÄINÖNEN: I don't know.

FOGHORN [*gritting his teeth*]: Don't know, eh? You don't trust an old comrade? You've forgotten the revolution of nineteen-five, have you?

VÄINÖNEN: All right, you nineteen-fiver, sit still and keep quiet now, or I'll—

FOGHORN: Let's have a smoke.

[*They turn around to light up. FOGHORN leans close to pass his lighted match over VÄINÖNEN's shoulder. As he does so, he catches sight of the knife in the LITTLE FINN's belt. Swiftly and stealthily he draws it and fells VÄINÖNEN with a sudden stab in the back. He pauses, then plunges the knife a second time into the motionless body.*]

FOGHORN [*crouching over the corpse*]: What do you think you're conquering, anyway, you Bolsheviks? Why as long as there's one free master on free soil, we'll be at your throats! [*Slowly in the dimness he wipes the knife with his fingers.*]

[*As FOGHORN turns to go, he looks once more at VÄINÖNEN's body, comes back and places it in a sitting position; but it droops limply, sags over, and falls on its side, the head knocking against the stones. Cunningly, he props it up against the bank in a life-like sleeping posture. When satisfied with his grisly handiwork, he shoulders his rifle, counts his bullets, and slinks off, the one idea that fills his mind flung out in a snarl, "Long live anarchy!"*]

VÄINÖNEN's body slowly stiffens in death. A stifled cry is heard from the direction in which FOGHORN has disappeared . . . Crawling figures appear. A soldier in a spiked

steel helmet creeps noiselessly up to the motionless sentry. In the dark he bayonets the body—touches it gingerly—rises in surprise. Several other soldiers come crawling up. As they stare at the dead sentry, a line of troops advances swiftly and silently through the gap.

After a moment, startled cries are heard off-stage. Scattered shots. Shouts of alarm. Brokenly a bugle tries to blow "To arms" but is chopped off on a half-note. Sounds convey the desperate struggle of the first battalion, taken by surprise; and although the fighting is unseen, it is painfully clear what is happening after the enemy has broken through. Figures appear, seeking cover. It is the COMMISSAR with a handful of sailors.]

COMMISSAR: Lie down here.

[A searchlight's glaring beam sweeps above their hiding-place. Rifle volleys off-stage tell the fate of the remnants of the first battalion.]

ALEXEI *[wagging his finger reproachfully in the enemy's direction]*: Hey, why should you want to spoil relations?

COMMISSAR: Alexei, come here!

ALEXEI *[crawling up to her]*: What's the matter?

COMMISSAR: Did you bring your accordion?

ALEXEI: You bet I did!

COMMISSAR: Can you play "Arise, ye prisoners of starvation"?

ALEXEI: No, I've always specialized in love songs and ballads. Why do you ask?

COMMISSAR: You're going to play now. . . .

BO'SUN *[shouting]*: Here they come!

[The enemy advances. The men left from the first battalion

hug the ground, sighting along their rifles, while ALEXEI jauntily ripples off the first chords of a tune and shouts.]

ALEXEI: Listen to me, boys, listen to me!

[The enemy opens fire. ALEXEI is inspired by the danger and the attention he is attracting.]

BO'SUN *[shouting]*: They're coming!

[The enemy fires steadily, pitilessly.]

ALEXEI: Hold on hard, mates! Don't show your sterns! Take aim and give it to 'em hot! The first number on our program will be the popular sailors' song about the Far East, entitled "The Sinking of the Varangian."

[The enemy continues to advance. The seamen are now down to their last cartridges.]

BO'SUN: We're out of ammunition.

ALEXEI: To your feet, men!

[The seamen spring up from under cover. ALEXEI plays more and more furiously, drawing himself up to full height, swaying like a drunken man. The sailors hold their empty rifles by their sides. ALEXEI flings his accordion into the faces of the enemy. He tears his sweat-drenched shirt from his back, twists it into a heavy knout and lashes at the advancing soldiers. In a close-packed group, the seamen fight with whatever comes to hand. Laboured breathing and hoarse groans as teeth bite through cloth, skin, flesh. Several sailors are knocked to the ground. Their resistance is broken. They are led away as prisoners within a line of soldiers.]

ALEXEI *[throwing off his guards]*: What are you staring at? Carry me in your arms, you bastards, in your arms!

We're not going to walk over to you! [*Derisively, challengingly, he throws himself down on the ground.*]

COMMISSAR: Hurrah for the Red Army, Hurr—

[*Her mouth is stopped first with a fist, then with a gag. In answer to the COMMISSAR comes an indomitable "Hurrah!" from the captured seamen. The enemy soldiers do everything to stop the captive's mouths; they choke them, yet through the grappling fingers of the enemy the sailors' "Hurrah! Hurrah!" bursts forth louder and stronger. . . .*

[*Silence.*]

[*Enter the CHORUS-LEADERS. This time, before speaking, they survey one another sombrely.*]

2ND CHORUS-LEADER [*to the first*]: Our comrades are taken prisoner.

1ST CHORUS-LEADER [*to the audience*]: What do you think, is their cause lost?

2ND CHORUS-LEADER: Listen—as long as there is one breath left in his body, as long as he can lift a hand—even his left hand—a Communist fighter keeps on fighting. If you cannot move, you still have your voice to persuade, to encourage, to compel others to act. . . . If you can't speak—make signs. If you are taken away and beaten to unconsciousness—do not flinch. If you can't move a muscle, while you lie tied hand and foot, and gagged—spit the gag into the hangman's face. Should you die, as the axe falls on your neck, give your last thought to the Revolution. Remember that even death can be Party work.

BLACKOUT

Music . . . feverish with the emotions of the previous scene . . . excitement and expectation of sudden death. Wild night birds are crying over the steppe. The captured seamen lie fast asleep, embracing the earth. Only four are awake, pacing to and fro like caged animals. Around them stand the guards, gloomy and forbidding like the shades of an empire. In his dreams, ALEXEI is re-living the battle; he tosses about, crying, "Carry me, carry me, you bastards!" He wakes up, sees the COMMISSAR. She sits silent and unbowed.

ALEXEI: Where am I? Hm—oh, yes. Well, life is sometimes disappointing. [*To the COMMISSAR.*] Keeping watch, are you?

COMMISSAR: I'm thinking. . . . What happened? Whom did we have on guard?

ALEXEI: Väinönen.

COMMISSAR: Väinönen. What could have happened to him?

ODESSITE: Maybe someone betrayed us? What do you t'ink, Bo'sun? Maybe we were double-crossed, I say. You bumped off our chief, left dat officer alive, and we were caught napping, dat's what.

ALEXEI [*shoving him away*]: Go on, you. . . .

BO'SUN [*to ODESSITE*]: Don't you try to start trouble here—you're still on Soviet territory, remember!

ODESSITE: Go to hell, old hide-bound! [*Pointing at the COMMISSAR.*] Aha, de silent t'inker!

COMMISSAR: Yes, I have to think both for myself and for those who can't think.

ODESSITE: I'll show you who can't t'ink!

SPOTTY [*giving him a hard shove*]: Shut up, you louse!

ALEXEI: Oh, if only our regiment is able to get here!

COMMISSAR: *Ssh!* [*ALEXEI stops, looks around quickly.*]
Keep a grip on yourself.

ALEXEI: Keep up the traditions of the Fleet, eh?

COMMISSAR: Yes, keep up the traditions of the Fleet.

BO'SUN: It's about time to wake the crew.

COMMISSAR: That's right, Bo'sun. You're keeping to the navy regulations even here, are you?

BO'SUN: Aye, aye—especially when the enemy is only infantry. We'll never surrender to infantry in a hundred years!

COMMISSAR: We won't, Bo'sun, we won't. This territory is ours.

ALEXEI: Yes, damn it, ours!

COMMISSAR: Sound reveille.

[*And the BO'SUN, remembering all his long years of naval service, puts his fingers to his lips, in lieu of his pipe, and blows reveille—a strikingly good imitation delivered in a low, clear whistle.*]

BO'SUN [*in his best naval manner*]: All hands heave out, heave out, heave out! All hands to cocoa and biscuits, cocoa and biscuits!

[*The bruised, prostrate bodies begin to stir. Some of the men,*

from force of habit, repeat the reveille whistle to themselves. They fall in, fresh and rested. The BO'SUN goes along the short line, straightening a uniform here, pointing to an unbuttoned collar there. When satisfied, he about-faces and reports to the COMMISSAR, "All hands heaved out."]

COMMISSAR: Good morning, comrades!

[Softly, in unison, the survivors answer the COMMISSAR.]

ODESSITE: Sssh! What de hell—you wanta get us all shot wit' dis "Good morning" of yours?

COMMISSAR: Quiet there! *[To them all.]* We don't know whether the other two battalions will come to our rescue or not, but there is one thing we do know, and that is, that every last one of us will keep a still tongue in his head. Not a word must be said about where the other two battalions have gone, or what their plans are.

ALEXEI: Silence to the death, you get that?

ONE OF THE MEN: But maybe we could say something that would throw them off the track? *[Nods in the direction of the stolid sentries, who do not understand a word of what is being said.]*

ALEXEI: You'll only throw yourself off the track. They'll cross-question you and get you so mixed up in your own lies that you'll let the cat out of the bag. The only thing to do is keep mum—to the death, as I said. We'll stick together, and above all, play for time.

COMMISSAR: That's right, Alexei.

ALEXEI: We've got to stall, gain time, drag it out any way we can till five o'clock. And then—! . . . Fu, what am I blabbing! I'd better knock on wood!

ODESSITE: Honest to God I never in my life set eyes on such simple-minded people as you. . . . What d'ya expect, anyway—you let dat officer go away alone, and you t'ink he'll come back on his own hook and risk his neck on a tough job like dis? Why, hell, dat gallant young commander of yours has flew de coop long ago!

[*The men look questioningly at the COMMISSAR.*]

A VOICE: Maybe he has, huh?

[*Enter an enemy OFFICER, accompanied by a guard.*]

OFFICER: *Achtung!* Vell, who vill giff information? [*A close silence.*] You haff not understood your situation. You are prisoners. Who giffs information, will save his life. Who vill speak? [*Unbroken silence.*] Ach, só? Vell, you vill speak soon.

[*A guard leads in FOGHORN, who stops short when he sees the sailors. A murmur of surprise from the prisoners.*]

OFFICER: You know this man?

[*Hard-faced, stony silence.*]

ODESSITE: First time I ever seen him.

OFFICER [*to FOGHORN*]: You vill explain me ver iss the rest of your regiment. [*FOGHORN says nothing.*] Vell! If you do not speak, you vill go in with them [*points down at the prisoners*] and vill share their [*grotes for a word*] their fate, yes? Haff I 'Russisch spoken clearly, yes?

FOGHORN: Who you trying to scare, anyway? "Fate," huh? I spit on it. [*Pointing to the COMMISSAR.*] And on her, too—that long-haired creature. Nobody's going to tell me what I have to do!

OFFICER [*to FOGHORN, with cold military explicitness*]: Then

why haff you deserted to our front, after killing your sentry and leaving your front open?

[*At the OFFICER's words the captive sailors fling themselves toward the traitor, but are brought to a standstill by the bayonets of the guards.*]

COMMISSAR: Where is Väinönen?

FOGHORN: Gone for good.

[*Again the sailors lunge toward FOGHORN, again they are stopped.*]

FOGHORN: If anybody touches me I'll bite his throat in two!

OFFICER: Leave him here!

[*The guards lead FOGHORN down into the midst of the prisoners.*]

FOGHORN [*shouting*]: But they'll kill me here! I don't know anything, honest I don't! Ask her, the Commissar here! She knows all about it!

OFFICER: *Abführen.* [FOGHORN is led away.] Who is Commissar here?

[*A tense pause. Some of the men move to shield the COMMISSAR.*]

COMMISSAR: I am the Commissar.

OFFICER: You? Ach, so! Follow me!

[*The COMMISSAR leaves the men, comes up to the OFFICER and starts off.*]

ALEXEI: Take us all!

COMMISSAR: Steady, comrades! It looks like we shall have to have a talk. [*By her enunciation of this phrase the COMMISSAR clearly conveys the meaning: "Gain time!"*]

[*The guards lead the COMMISSAR away.*]

OFFICER: I giff you five minutes to think it over.

ALEXEI: Excuse me, what is the correct time now?

OFFICER [*glancing at his wrist-watch*]: Fifteen minutes auf five. [*Exit.*]

ALEXEI: Listen, mates—

ODESSITE [*Losing his nerve*]: My God, my God! Five minutes! [*To ALEXEI.*] Why, dey'll hang me. Say couldn't we tell dem somet'ing?

ALEXEI: Shut up!

A VOICE: And stay shut up!

ODESSITE: My God, my God, how quick time goes. A minute, anot'er minute. Dat's my whole life flying away right now. . . . How quick de seconds run past. . . . One, two, tree, four—listen to dem, listen to dem—five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. . . .

[*The ODESSITE rolls his eyes wildly, begins to tremble, breaks out in loud laughter, which grows more and more terrible. He falls to the ground, foaming at the mouth, writhing in convulsions that double him up.*]

A VOICE: There's one done for—gone batty.

BO'SUN [*closely watching the performance*]: That's it, come on, you're doing fine. Let's have some more, now, wallow like a good one. Keep it up—work hard. I'm an old psychologist with twenty-five years' practice treating cases like you, and not a one has ever fooled me.

ODESSITE [*abruptly stops kicking, gets up as if nothing had happened*]: Won't work. . . . You see, dey don't shoot crazy people. If you were smart, we could all play crazy.

ALEXEI [*seizing the ODESSITE by the scruff of the neck*]: The

woman knows how to keep a hold on herself, but you, you bastard—[*Throws him to one side.*] Keep both eyes on him!

[*Re-enter the OFFICER and the guard.*]

OFFICER: The time is up. Vell, haff you thought it over? Who vill giff information?

[*The sailors exchange lightning glances, and demonstratively all sit down together. ALEXEI clears his throat and spits at the OFFICER'S polished boots. Two others do the same. The OFFICER hastily withdraws.*]

ALEXEI: Get ready for the end, mates. Bo'sun, what do you think—will the Commander betray us, or will he make it?

BO'SUN: I can't answer for him. . . .

[*Enter a priest in vestments. All fall silent. It is clear that he is a chaplain of the enemy army and has been sent to perform the last rites. Slowly the priest draws nearer, blessing the seamen with his cross. ALEXEI, behind his hand, makes a sound "Tsss!"—which conveys to the others that he is going to play a game with the priest.*]

PRIEST [*begins sadly, with rich churchly intonation*]: They have told me that you are lost, poor souls, and they are preparing to send you to meet your Maker. They want to do it all with military exactitude, and in silence. Yet, after all, are they not right? Brave people like them have nothing to say to brave people like you. [*Approaches BO'SUN.*] What rank do you hold?

BO'SUN: Bo'sun.

PRIEST: Do you believe in God?

BO'SUN: I believe in one God, the Father Almighty.

PRIEST: You have seen much service, Bo'sun, and could easily merit pardon and trust.

[*The prisoners listen anxiously.*]

BO'SUN: Thank you humbly, but it's not necessary. I've taken the oath. . . .

PRIEST: As you once swore allegiance to your tsar—

BO'SUN: And when his imperial highness abdicated in February, nineteen-seventeen, he thereby released me from it.

PRIEST: As you will. I wanted only to help you. I wanted to save your life, but it seems that you prefer death. [*Approaches ALEXEI.*] Death is an awful thing, my boy—you have seen what it does to a man. The flesh tears apart, the body grows stiff . . . then the first worm comes creeping, creeping up your throat, up your throat. Your eyes dry up to nothingness. And the silence—everywhere the silence of the grave. After all, nobody has a second life to live—only this one, and it's so real and dear to us. [*Softly, in ALEXEI'S ear.*] One word, my boy, and you are saved. Try to see the error of your ways. Confess your sins, dear boy, and we will help you!

[*ALEXEI plays his part: listens awe-stricken to the PRIEST and pretends to be smitten with repentance. He makes a sign behind his back to the others: "Just watch this!"*]

ALEXEI: Oh, holy Father, we have fallen so low that we don't understand anything. It's a shame. [*He makes a quick sign, and two other sailors join in the game.*]

VOICE: Yes, yes. . . . We don't understand. It's a shame, a regular shame. We're ignorant sinners.

PRIEST: I will do anything to help you, brave sailors. These

same lips that have spoken of awful death can pronounce other words too—words of simple human kindness. . . . Do you not remember them? [*Acting for all he is worth, ALEXEI drops to his knees, and the PRIEST strokes his head, soothing him.*] Poor boys, you all know these words. They sound the same in all the languages of the earth.

ALEXEI [*sniffing*]: The same, Father, the same!

PRIEST: Repeat them after me. . . . “Our Father, which art in heaven. . . .”

ALEXEI [*aside, nudging the nearest sailor*]: Come on there, cough it up. . . . “Our Father which art in heaven. . . .”

[*The other sailors are acting splendidly. The PRIEST spreads out his hands in blessing. . . . Suddenly a terrific rumbling of guns in the distance. The kneeling sailors look up, crane their necks hopefully. . . . The guards fall into a panic and rush away pell-mell. ALEXEI springs up from his knees and seizes the PRIEST by the collar.*]

ALEXEI: That’s enough out of you, old sky-pilot! [*He throws the PRIEST aside and dashes forward, out of the place of confinement.*] Come on, we’ve got to save the Commissar!

[*Guards come rushing in to restore order. The rush of sailors sends the first guard flying head over heels; only his upturned legs are seen waving in the air. The sailors charge the guards, taking them by surprise. A few scattered shots bring down one sailor, then another. ALEXEI and several others break through, rush out. Off-stage the din of battle rises in a crescendo. FOGHORN tries to escape in the confusion, but is sighted by one of the sailors, who shoots him down with a*

rifle torn from a guard. Panic in the night . . . fleeing soldiers. Then the measured tramp of the regiment.

Sailors carry in the COMMISSAR. She is bleeding to death. Gently they lower her to the ground. Off-stage the roar of the two battalions fighting their way through, louder, nearer, like an approaching avalanche.]

ALEXEI [*raising his hand*]: Quiet!

[Flushed and excited, the sailors of the two flanking battalions rush in. They are led by the COMMANDER and the OLD SEAMAN. At a sign from ALEXEI and the BO'SUN, the shouting is quickly silenced. A small group stands over the COMMISSAR. Gradually a hush descends.]

ALEXEI: She kept still until the end. She didn't say a word.

COMMANDER: The assigned flanking operation has been executed. [*Bending down.*] Do you hear me?

[*Silence.*]

BO'SUN: . . . If only—you'd come—ten minutes sooner!

COMMANDER: I did all that was required of me. . . . More than I could.

ALEXEI [*kneeling beside the COMMISSAR*]: Comrade . . . darling . . . how—? Ekh, brothers, can't you see whom we're losing? Do you hear me? [*The COMMISSAR nods feebly.*] We've knocked them to pieces, do you hear? We've won. . . . Look—I've got back my accordion. . . .

[The COMMISSAR makes a gesture that she wants to speak. It has grown unusually quiet.]

COMMISSAR: Telegraph—to the Revolutionary War Council—that the First Naval Regiment—is formed—and has—routed the enemy. . . .

[*She speaks with great effort. The men stand motionless, stricken dumb with grief.*]

COMMISSAR: But why is it so still? [*Through the fog of death her gaze falls on the COMMANDER, the BO'SUN, on the OLD SEAMAN—and on ALEXEI, who stands with his battered accordion dangling from one hand.*]

COMMISSAR: Alexei . . . did you get back . . . your accordion. . . .

ALEXEI: Sure I did, Commissar. . . . Look, dear—here it is. . . .

[*And ALEXEI, in an agony of grief mingled with deathless exaltation, softly starts playing an old tune on his accordion . . . a tune that workers sang on the barricades in the 1905 Revolution. The regiment stands grouped about the COMMISSAR. ALEXEI plays . . . bit by bit his playing grows softer and softer. As she sinks in death, the COMMISSAR scans the faces of her comrades for the last time.*]

COMMISSAR [*with her last breath*]: Hold high—the traditions—
— of the Red Fleet—

[*And as the men stand with bared, bowed heads, a mighty burst of music, sombre yet triumphant, promises that this is not the end. . . .*]

CURTAIN



ARISTOCRATS

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

By

NIKOLAI POGODIN

Translated from the Russian by

ANTHONY WIXLEY

and

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C H A R A C T E R S

CHIEF	GIPSY
GROMOV	ALYOSHA
KOSTYA, THE CAPTAIN	LOVEY
SONYA	FATHER BARTHOLOMEW
SADOVSKY } engineers	DEACON
BOTKIN }	PETIN Ex-Red Army
COMMANDANT	PIZHOV men
MITYA	GUARDS
DIRECTOR	REGISTRATION CLERK
SADOVSKY'S MOTHER	CHURCH ARCHITECT
MARGARITA IVANOVNA	FOREMAN
LADY NIURKA	MAX, a draughtsman
NINKA	TATTOOED GIRL
TAMARA	WOMAN
KULAK'S WIFE	MAKHNO
THEOPHILA	TRIBE FACE
WOMAN ON DUTY	SANITARY ORDERLY
BERET	ATTENDANT
LEMON	SKIPPER
CARP, kulak	PRISONERS
LITTLE MAN (Sasha)	

ACT ONE

SCENE I

The headquarters of the White Sea Prison Camp. A motley crowd of prisoners, complete strangers to one another, appear on the stage and line up. They have been sent here to work.

GUARD: Step lively there! Step lively!

ALYOSHA [*appears with a burly Gipsy*]: It's just plain, ordinary, wet weather, I'm telling you.

GIPSY: Man—look at that sky—and tell me if it isn't made of stone! And the earth, wet and rusty—with warts all over it. What sort of a place is this they've driven you to, Gipsy! And what for? Look at the sky—is that an honest sky? That's a low-down thief of a sky, that is!

ALYOSHA: Just plain, ordinary, wet weather, I tell you.

GUARD: Step lively there! Step lively!

BERET [*enters*]: I wonder what they're selling in the Moscow shops today? This is Petrovka Street, isn't it?—corner of Kuznetsky? Give us a green traffic light, will you please? I want to cross the avenue. [*Sings a snatch of song and dances a few steps.*] Exchange of purchase: woollen stockings, lump-sugar, grandmother's blessing—hall-marked solid silver, peasants' underdrawers, hand-made, practically unworn—splendid watch, with the name of a reputable firm engraved upon it. . . .

CARP [*suddenly from his place in the line*]: What a place! Why, it must be daylight long ago in the world outside but here it's still night. [*To SADOVSKY.*] I say, your honour, what's this province called?

SADOVSKY: Karelia.

CARP: Never heard of it.

DEACON: A historic country, but judging by all accounts, a terrible place to live in.

ALYOSHA: Just plain, ordinary, wet weather. There's worse things.

CARP: Ten years—in these parts—whew! Might just as well have killed me outright. I suppose this is what's called “a lingering death.”

BERET [*to SADOVSKY*]: Wouldn't you like to sell me your hat?

SADOVSKY: No.

BERET: Honest to God—it doesn't suit you a bit. [*Picks SADOVSKY's hat off and puts it over his own beret.*] My type of face demands a good felt.

SADOVSKY: Stop this nonsense!

LEMON: Give the poor fellow the hat! What's it to you?

BERET [*flaunting the hat*]: Get an eyeful of me while you can. Under the grey curling brim of the hat, two eyes, soft as the first sweet dreams of night, shone starrily. To put the matter in a peanut-shell, this hat's mine from now on.

SADOVSKY: What the devil's going on here? I protest!

LEMON: Ah, you protest? What are you going to protest about? About us?

[*The COMMANDANT enters.*]

COMMANDANT: What's the matter here? Whose hat is this?

ARISTOCRATS

Act I, Scene I

LEMON: Hey, Beret, give the guy back his hat—to keep his hair on.

BERET: Citizen Commandant, that person has a mouldy liver-sausage where a warm heart should beat.

COMMANDANT: Don't make so much noise.

LEMON [*declaims*]: "And silence fell upon the trembling crew."

COMMANDANT: Yuri Nikolayevich Sadovsky, engineer—

SADOVSKY: Yes, here I am.

COMMANDANT: Come with me. The Chief wants to see you.

SADOVSKY: Yes. Coming. [*Lights a cigarette, slips his cigarette-case back into the pocket of his overcoat. LEMON, who is hovering nearby, suddenly stumbles behind SADOVSKY. SADOVSKY follows the COMMANDANT out, disclosing LEMON who stands admiring the cigarette-case he has just picked from SADOVSKY's pocket. At once LEMON is approached from behind by a pleasant, polite personage, known as KOSTYA, THE CAPTAIN, who has been standing unnoticed in the lineup until now.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Excuse me, but that's my cigarette-case, one of the old family heirlooms. [*Silence.*] Perhaps you don't recognize me? [*LEMON hands over the cigarette-case.*] Ah, so you do. How nice. [*Offers LEMON a cigarette from the case.*] I fancy we'll be able to pass the time quite profitably here. [*Then in a rough, familiar tone.*] You stick by me, Lemon.

FATHER BARTHOLOMEW [*watching the scene with horror*]:

By the Holy Trinity! Where am I?

REGISTRATION CLERK: All here?

SECOND GUARD [*coming in with the rest of the prisoners*]:

Yes, we're all here.

REGISTRATION CLERK: Now then, let's start. . . . [*To the first in line.*] Last name, first name, patronymic? . . .

[*The usual process of registration begin. THE CAPTAIN catches sight of a handsome young woman and steps forward to bar her path.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Sonya! Is it you or your double? How did you happen to pick this particular health resort?

SONYA: Who can that be talking? Surely I know that voice! Kostya! Hell, I'm glad to see you!

THE CAPTAIN [*to LEMON and the others who are following him*]: May I request you to retire for a moment? [*They move off. THE CAPTAIN embraces SONYA tenderly, pressing her hand.*] Well, Sonya, where did they get you?

SONYA: In the Crimea. And you, Kostya?

THE CAPTAIN: In Batum. . . . I was intending to go to Turkey, but I seem to have turned up on the borders of Finland instead. . . . It's a stormy life: you never know where it'll cast you ashore.

SONYA: It's awful here, Kostya. Worse than awful.

THE CAPTAIN: What do you think of doing, Sonya?

SONYA: Running away.

THE CAPTAIN: It's a terribly out-of-the-way place. . . .

Forests all around. It would be hard to get away from here.

SONYA: Don't I know it?

[*They move off. The rest of the people are still in the line-up.*

LEMON, who has been hovering around the priest, moves away with downcast eyes and gives his sleeve a shake. An

old-fashioned purse drops into his hand. He opens it and examines its contents: little crucifixes, amulets, tiny images of saints. LEMON sighs heavily.

LEMON: The Old Testament, so to speak. [*Carries the open purse back to the priest.*] Don't lose your merchandise, citizen. Is this your stuff?

FATHER BARTHOLOMEW: Oh—thank you ever so much! Would you like a cigarette?

LEMON: No, thanks, I don't smoke. [*Goes over to BERET.*] Slip us a fag, will you?

BERET: Sure! Here you are. [*He holds out his cigarettes in his left hand, slipping his right into LEMON's pocket. LEMON takes a cigarette with his left hand, dipping into BERET's pocket with his right. They part.*]

LEMON: You can always depend on me, pal.

BERET: I wouldn't doubt it for a minute, buddy.

[*When they are some distance away from each other, they examine their stolen goods. Each has secured a watch.*]

LEMON [*to himself*]: Cripes, a lobster-pot with cast-iron wheels!

BERET [*to himself*]: Well, I could hardly call this a 17-jewel Swiss movement. Looks more like a work of art from an Odessa brass foundry!

[*The line is breaking up. CARP, the PRIEST, the DEACON, and some men who look like peasants move off. Only "Article Thirty-Fivers," i.e., criminals, remain.*]

[*GROMOV and SADOVSKY come out of the office together.*]

GROMOV: The cart will be 'round in a minute.

SADOVSKY [*fumbling in his pockets*]: My cigarette-case seems to have been stolen.

GROMOV: Has it? You'll have to keep a sharp look-out here.

This camp isn't a nursery for little children. However, you're to be given a separate room. By the way, what are you here for?

SADOVSKY: For nothing. I never had anything to do with it.

My colleagues at the Institute were mixed up in something, that was all. They were caught, they confessed. And I was arrested along with them.

GROMOV: Do you happen to know an engineer called Botkin?

SADOVSKY: Yes, he's an old friend of mine—and my colleague at the Institute.

GROMOV: He's here, too. I suppose you know what we're building?

SADOVSKY: Yes, I heard something about it in the Butyrka jail.

GROMOV: That's a bad source of information. We're going out on the canal now.

SADOVSKY: Very well.

GROMOV: Plenty of work here for a hydraulic engineer like yourself. We're going to blast the rocks, turn whole rivers from their courses, raise the lakes, build locks, shut off the waterfalls. . . . You're to take charge of construction on my section beginning today.

SADOVSKY: How do you mean?

GROMOV: You take charge of the job in the same way that engineers usually do. You're a well-known hydraulic engineer, Sadovsky. Have a smoke, won't you? Your cigarettes are gone.

SADOVSKY: But I can't understand this at all. I was sent here for ten years. I'm a prisoner—a criminal!

GROMOV: Did you hear, by the way, that while you're here with us your term of imprisonment might be considerably reduced?

SADOVSKY: Yes, I heard this.

GROMOV: Or that, on the other hand, you might get capital punishment?

SADOVSKY: How's that?

GROMOV: That's if you commit an additional—of course. . . . Shall we get down to business?

SADOVSKY: Very well. I'm here to obey your orders.

GROMOV: You'll be giving orders yourself tomorrow. Now let's go and see how the work is getting on.

SADOVSKY: Very well. [*They go off as SONYA and THE CAPTAIN appear.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*tearing open his collar*]: There's one sort of people I can't stand—these Chekists!* They make you work!

SONYA: Not everyone!

THE CAPTAIN: What is it they're digging here?

SONYA: The White Sea Canal, it's called.

THE CAPTAIN: What's it for?

SONYA: I don't know.

THE CAPTAIN [*bursts out laughing*]: I'd like to see myself working for them. Me—Kostya, The Captain—slaving like a hod-carrier for the Soviet government. . . . Sonka, you haven't signed a pledge to build Socialism, have you?

SONYA: What, me? Signed a pledge? . . . [*She whispers*

* Chekist: One who worked for the Cheka, Extraordinary Commission.

something into THE CAPTAIN'S ear that sends him off into fits of laughter.]

THE CAPTAIN: I always recognize a true aristocrat when I meet one. That's the right line to take, Sonya. See that you keep the honour of the gang unspotted. Look here, Sonka, you stick by me, and we'll hold out yet. Crooks should hang together.

LEMON [*coming up*]: Kostya, go and register yourself.

SONYA: Remember, Kostya, we're together in this.

THE CAPTAIN: Oh, absolutely. Anywhere you like, including a sleeper in the de luxe express to Manchuria and back again. [*SONYA goes off.*] About this registration—let's see, what name was I tried under? Schmidt, Blum, Ovchinnikov? My biography seems to have got all muddled up. Funny question—to ask a fellow's name. I'll register myself under my father's name—Kostya Dorokhov. . . . Ten years hard labour, nine times married. [*To the clerk.*] I say, are you the Recording Angel in this Paradise? Tell me, is it free or do I have to pay a tax? [*Then, with sudden enthusiasm.*] Laddie, laddie, surely I've had a drink or two with you somewhere? Let's see—you were managing the dining-car on the Leningrad-Tiflis express. So you're here too?

REGISTRATION CLERK: Yes. I got five years.

THE CAPTAIN: I feel for you. Life's a funny business. Well, write down: thirty-seven years of age, given name—Kostya, patronymic—Constantinovich, family name—no kidding, Dorokhov. Profession—hard at work from morn till night—and vice-versa. . . . And in a pinch, a damned good specialist on fire-proof safes!

[*A young man comes in, wearing an armband with a Red Cross on it.*]

SANITARY ORDERLY: Guests are invited to take their first bath.
Citizens, follow me!

SCENE II

The Men's Barrack

GIPSY [*after observing KOSIYA closely*]: Who is this guy?
Behaves like the boss of the place.

LEMON: That's just one of his little ways. Always comes in like the boss whether it's a prison or a bank. He goes by the name of "The Captain"—but keep mum about it, 'cause the big shots here don't know who he is.

THE CAPTAIN [*with kind condescension*]: How do you do, hoodlums!

LITTLE MAN [*from his place*]: Go to hell!

THE CAPTAIN [*his face expressing faint astonishment*]: Who said that? [*Politely.*] Oh, it was you, was it? [*With a swift jiu-jitsu movement, he gives the LITTLE MAN's neck a twist and sends him sprawling on the floor.*] When you come 'round, you can apologize. . . . Again—How do you do, hoodlums!

CHORUS OF VOICES: How do you do, boss!

THE CAPTAIN: I like the people around me to be well-bred, high-minded and honest. Isn't that so, Lemon?

LEMON: We like the people around us to be well-bred,

high-minded and loyal to the last. Have a seat, Captain,
VOICES [*to each other*]: Captain. . . ? Is it Kostya, The
Captain? The Captain!

[BERET *appears from somewhere.*]

BERET: Some dirty, low-down skunk has robbed me.

LEMON: And some cracked idiot of a pimp with the heart
of a mongrel dog and an eye like a cod-fish has robbed
me.

[*They take up positions opposite one another, put their hands
in their pockets, pull out their knives and fence for an open-
ing.*]

BERET: To put the matter in a peanut-shell, what's your offer?

LEMON: The deal's off. Take back your own watch and hand
over mine.

BERET: I've always been a respectable citizen. [*Gives back
LEMON's watch and receives his own in exchange.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Really, you're worse than street boys. Stealing
from each other right in front of me. And such useless work!
There's going to be some needless blood-letting here in a
minute.

BERET: I don't understand. . . . Are we in the Academy of
Sciences or something? Can't a fellow even steal?

LEMON: Shut your trap and give those boots back to the guy
you pinched them from.

BERET: Will the person I took these boots from please come
and claim them?

ALYOSHA: Bastard. . . . I only picked up your looking-glass
—a good-for-nothing little looking-glass, mind you, for
one minute—and you actually stole the boots off my feet!

BERET: I can't confess to any pangs of conscience [*Hands over the boots.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*to no one in particular*]: This is a hell of a dull spot. Got a deck of cards, anyone?

GIPSY: What stakes?

THE CAPTAIN [*to GIPSY*]: I'll play for your boots. [*The GIPSY grabs the legs of his high boots and hangs on to them.*]
Who wants to win these boots?

LEMON: Chuck it, Kostya. . . . He's one of us—it's not worth it.

[*Enter MARGARITA IVANOVNA.*]

MARGARITA IVANOVNA [*to the ATTENDANT*]: You're asked to find out how much skilled labour you've got among the new arrivals.

ATTENDANT: Skilled labour? Oh, yes, there's quite a bit of that among the new people, I should think. What kind did you want particularly?

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: Well, for instance, carpenters, stonemasons, electricians and so on.

ATTENDANT [*humorously*]: Oh, well, we'll try and find some of 'em.

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: Yes, find out and let me know—at the office.

ATTENDANT: I'll do my best. [*They go out.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Who's that young lady, I'd like to know? I've taken quite a fancy to her. Who is she?

LITTLE MAN: That young lady is a clerk in the camp office. She's called Margarita Ivanovna. Used to be a cashier in the Torgsin.

THE CAPTAIN: What do you say to playing for this young lady, boys? Who wants to win a cashier from the Torgsin?

LEMON [*spreading his cards fanwise*]: I'm out for Margarita Ivanovna.

THE CAPTAIN: What if you lose?

LEMON: I'll pay up, I've got plenty. [*He pulls out money and various other things from his pockets.*]

LITTLE MAN: Someone's coming: [*The cards disappear as if by magic.*]

ATTENDANT: Come on now, hand over those cards. I've no time to waste.

LEMON: Where've you dropped from—heaven?

ATTENDANT: Look here, boys, I'm a prisoner myself. Give me the cards, I tell you.

LEMON: Look for them. [*Slips the deck into the ATTENDANT'S pocket.*]

ATTENDANT [*searching*]: But I was told. . . . Have you swallowed them, or what?

LEMON: That silly girl!

ATTENDANT: You won't be able to fool me, boys. . . . I know a thing or two myself. [*Another search.*] Yes, you're telling the truth, there don't seem to be any. [*As he turns to go, LEMON picks the cards from his pocket.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*to the ATTENDANT*]: Better apologize to us, hadn't you? [*Silence.*] I'm simply suggesting it for your own peace of mind. . . .

ATTENDANT: Excuse me. [*Goes off.*]

THE CAPTAIN: First we'll play for her cute little boots, then for her slippers, then her stockings, then for all her other

ARISTOCRATS

Act I, Scene II

bits of lace—and then for her love. Whoever fails to win her love must deliver her alive to his winning partner. Is it a go?

LEMON: It's a go.

THE CAPTAIN: Honest play?

LEMON: Absolutely.

[All the others crowd 'round the players. Even the hitherto indifferent and dull prisoners brighten up. Many climb on to the upper bunks to get a better view. The game begins, and grows more exciting every minute. The voices of LEMON and THE CAPTAIN can be distinguished from those of the crowd.]

Her coat!

What else?

Her sweater!

I've won.

It's yours!

[A hum of voices. Gasps. Silence.]

Now her fur cap!

Good!

You've won!

GIPSY: The Captain'll win . . . I'm backing The Captain.

BERET [*wistfully*]: Can I put a side-bet on The Captain?
Sh—sh!

CAPTAIN'S VOICE: Now for Margarita Ivanovna—herself.

LEMON'S VOICE: For—Margarita—Ivanovna. . . .

[Silence. Someone whispers. "Three . . . seven . . . eleven." The crowd gives a sigh.]

GIPSY: The Captain! [*The LITTLE MAN, sweating and*

trembling with excitement, springs out from the crowd.]

LITTLE MAN [*exultingly*]: Gambling for a real live mamma!

These are certainly swell guys!

SCENE III

GROMOV'S office. The electric-light burns unheeded in a shaft of pale morning sunlight.

GROMOV: Well, what have you to say, Citizen Commandant!

COMMANDANT: The Chief has arrived on the morning train.

GROMOV: Where is he now?

COMMANDANT: Our railway clerk sent word from the station to say he's on his way and we're to meet him.

GROMOV: Now, don't get excited and run around in circles, understand?

COMMANDANT: Yes.

GROMOV: Is that all?

COMMANDANT: Yes, nothing else has happened—except that our caretaker Chaikovsky broke into the women's barrack at half-past one this morning while drunk and took two of the ladies out, no one knows where.

GROMOV: Well, Commandant, you've worked in the O.G.P.U., haven't you? Do you mean to say you don't know what to do? Chaikovsky must be put under arrest, the matter will be brought up before the Board, the guilty man will get an additional sentence and you—a severe reprimand for your negligence. That's all. You can go. [*The*

COMMANDANT *goes out.*] Ah, Commandant, Commandant!—I can't liven the fellow up—but then he's a prisoner, and afraid to exert his authority. [MARGARITA IVANOVNA *rushes in.*]

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: They have been gambling for me at cards.

GROMOV: Sit down.

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: I'm serious, it's quite true.

GROMOV: I'm not disputing it.

[*The CHIEF enters.*]

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: Perhaps you don't believe me, though. Those awful bandits gambled for me at cards, and yesterday evening, outside the club, some fellows caught hold of me and started to push me around the corner on to the muddy road. . . . Mind you, with all their might, and in dead silence! One tried to put his hand over my mouth, but I managed to scream and they ran away without saying a word.

CHIEF: Hello, Comrade Gromov. Well, go on, don't let me interrupt you.

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: Even if I am a prisoner and all that, I don't think I ought to be left absolutely unprotected like this at the mercy of. . . .

GROMOV [*calling out*]: Commandant, come here a minute! [*To MARGARITA IVANOVNA.*] My instructions to you are: go back to work at once, go to the club and home evenings without any escort. You can go now—and there's no need for you to cry. [*The COMMANDANT enters.*] Fifteen days under arrest!

COMMANDANT: Who?

GROMOV: You.

COMMANDANT: Right away?

GROMOV: As from tomorrow morning.

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: So your orders are for me to go about entirely alone?

GROMOV: Those are my orders.

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: Much obliged. [*Goes out in a huff.*]

GROMOV [*to the COMMANDANT*]: Deliver this note, please.

Nothing else has happened, has it? What sort of a Chekist were you, I wonder? Managing a cabbage-patch somewhere, maybe? Fifteen days you get. You can go now.

CHIEF: What's all this, Gromov? It seems there's a regular Monte Carlo here with gambling for high stakes.

GROMOV: It's a choice selection you sent me, I must say. The cream of society. The flower of youth.

CHIEF: We send you the material you deserve. You ought to appreciate that, at least.

GROMOV: Yes, I do.

CHIEF: It's just as well. It'll be interesting to watch how you'll remake specimens like these.

GROMOV: It's got to be done.

CHIEF: The canal's got to be built, too.

GROMOV: And the canal's got to be built, too.

CHIEF: We must always bear in mind why we've been sent here.

GROMOV: I've picked out some chaps I think can be depended upon.

CHIEF: A good many?

GROMOV: Not so many—yet. But there'll be more by-and-by. I'm rather short of ordinary casual offenders. You might send me a sprinkling if you can.

CHIEF: Very well, we'll do that. There are some really talented folks among them. Now show us your engineers. I've no idea what they're like; I haven't seen them yet.

GROMOV: The engineers? . . . Oh, if you'd only show some sympathy for me about these engineers! What people you send me! I'd sooner make a thousand bandits into blacksmiths for you, than one of these. . . . [*The COMMANDANT enters.*] Send the engineers here. [*COMMANDANT goes out.*]

CHIEF: You seem to be whining about everything, Gromov. Are you complaining, or what?

GROMOV: Well, you know how it is—I'm the only one in charge on the section. Sometimes my head's ready to burst with questions.

CHIEF: Whenever your head's ready to burst with questions, ride over to see me. Gromov, this is no way to talk. I don't care for this sort of talk, Comrade Gromov!

GROMOV: I was talking as one comrade to another.

CHIEF: I don't care for this sort of comradely talk at all. If Comrade Gromov had been fit for nothing else but to manage a children's home we wouldn't have sent him out here. I suggest that you show up at the Head Office in a few days. Call round at my place first thing in the morning, though, for a cup of tea.

GROMOV: Right.

[Enter a church architect of a distinctly pre-war type. He goes over to the corner and sits down with his hands folded over his stomach.]

GROMOV [to the CHIEF in an undertone]: This is a construction engineer—a specialist in building churches. Up for fraud and embezzlement. [The CHIEF stares hard at the church-builder, who is not in the least embarrassed. Two rather unobtrusive persons enter next, bow, and sit down alongside him. Then BOTKIN enters. His appearance is smart, his bearing urbane.]

BOTKIN [doffing his hat]: Good morning. [Sits down, places his hat beside him on a chair and rests his hands on a severely plain foreign walking-stick.]

GROMOV [to the CHIEF]: This is Botkin—a prominent engineer. Comes from the aristocracy, is an inventor, a rank counter-revolutionary and a traitor.

CHIEF [to BOTKIN]: Your clothes are not entirely suitable to the season.

BOTKIN [politely]: I'm accustomed to working in my office. [SADOVSKY enters, carrying a large, bulging briefcase. He has a breezy, democratic manner. Divests himself noisily of his coat, and flings it over a chair. Then sits down, puffing and blowing.]

GROMOV [to the CHIEF]: This is Sadovsky—a prominent expert—and a prominent traitor. He began to sabotage openly.

CHIEF [rising]: Well, are all the engineers here now?

SADOVSKY: Yes.

CHIEF: Have you noticed that work on your section is very

much behind schedule? You can't see it? Have you made no attempt to account for this disgraceful state of things? Here we have a number of prominent engineers. Why is it, then, that things are so bad? I may tell you frankly that in my opinion this simply amounts to a flat refusal to work.

[*He glances at BOTKIN, who gives a faint, elusive smile.*]

And, if you like, to downright sabotage. [*Silence. They sit like dignified members of a corporation—stiff and correct.*] I demand businesslike answers to my questions; when are you going to build the dykes, when are you going to erect the dam, when are you going to get the sluices made?

[*Silence. BOTKIN drops his pencil on the floor. As he stoops to pick it up, he glances around at the engineers and then stands up.*]

BOTKIN: I haven't got my figures with me, unfortunately.

[*Smiles.*] Will you permit me to go and get them?

GROMOV: Do, please.

[*BOTKIN picks up his hat and stick and walks leisurely out of the room.*]

CHURCH ARCHITECT: I should like to go out for a moment, if I may?

GROMOV: Yes, do.

[*The two of them go out.*]

CHIEF [*ironically*]: Perhaps you'd all better go for your figures and come back as quickly as you can. [*All the engineers go out.*]

GROMOV: Quite open about things, aren't they?

CHIEF: They've gone to talk things over and to come to an understanding.

GROMOV: Such insolence. . . .

CHIEF: Don't be angry, my lad. After all, we caught them—you and I—arrested them, and sent each of them up for ten years. What do you expect of them? I must say they rather took my fancy. They hold their tongues—boldly, and work boldly. If—with fellows like these at your disposal—you don't get your construction work completed in time, I'll wring your neck.

SCENE IV

The women's barrack. In the foreground SONYA, "LADY" NIURKA, a TATTOOED GIRL, NINKA and TAMARA. LADY NIURKA is sitting darning stockings. The TATTOOED GIRL is teaching NINKA how to strike a person in the temple with the maximum effectiveness. SONYA and TAMARA are lying on their cots. In the corner is THEOPHILA.

[Enter a peasant woman, a former KULAK'S WIFE. She sings mournfully.]

NINKA: Singing away like a bird, auntie?

KULAK'S WIFE: Singing like a bird, I am.

NINKA: Well, sing away. [She begins to sing to herself.]

It's all very well for the bird to sing, they say, but where will she perch? Where'll you perch, auntie?

KULAK'S WIFE: I've found my perch, all right.

NINKA: Oh, you have? Well, sit on it. [The KULAK'S

WIFE *goes on singing.*] Tell me, auntie, why did you set fire to the collective farm, eh?

KULAK'S WIFE: Think I'm going to answer your silly questions? Well, I'm not.

NINKA: Are you sorry you set fire to the collective farm?

KULAK'S WIFE: I'm sorry I didn't burn it to the ground, that's what I am.

NINKA: It wasn't burned to the ground, then?

KULAK'S WIFE: It was not.

NINKA: But you were?

KULAK'S WIFE: Yes, I was.

NINKA: So you're out against the Soviet government?

KULAK'S WIFE: I'm not going to answer your silly questions, I tell you.

LADY NIURKA: Aye, when I think of it! These stockings were the best silk once upon a time. Half-a-dozen pairs I got off an Italian boat—'way back home in Odessa. Dear old Odessa. Give us a song, girls. Something with a bit of sentiment in it.

RHEOPHILA: Holy Father in Heaven, have mercy on us!

TATTOOED GIRL: As for you Ninka, you're only a chicken at this trade. Why, you can't hardly spit straight yet. I don't suppose you could even cut a fellow up with a butcher-knife without making a mess of it.

NINKA: Don't worry, my dear, I've been brought to court twice already—and the last time, in Tashkent, I got five years!

TATTOOED GIRL: Whew! Hot stuff, aren't you—Mary Magdalene—I don't think! Up twice already! Twice! Five

whole years she got, indeed. . . . Sonya, I'm getting goose-flesh all up my sides just thinking of it!

NINKA: I could kill anybody if I felt like it.

TATTOOED GIRL: I love to hear the young and innocent talking. Now, how would you start to bump somebody off, supposing you had the chance, say?

NINKA: Oh, just the usual way—get mad and stick him wherever I could.

TATTOOED GIRL: Well, and you'd be a fool!

NINKA: Same to you!

TATTOOED GIRL [*threateningly*]: Say that again!

NINKA [*shrinkingly*]: I say I know I'm a fool.

TATTOOED GIRL: You look out, or I'll tickle you till you wet the bed!

NINKA: Sonya, why doesn't she ever leave me alone—tormenting me all the time. . . .

TATTOOED GIRL: I'm trying to make a real woman out of you, silly. You've all your life ahead of you. Listen to me and remember what I say. There's no need to get mad if you want to bump somebody off—see what I mean? There's a dumbbell for you! Why are you blinking like a ventilator? Supposing now, for instance, I was going to strangle you—well, I'd do it without letting myself get mad. Quite the contrary, my dear, I'd give a quiet, demure little smile and finish the job off as calm as if I was cracking an egg. Now, then, smile!

NINKA: Y—yes. I—I'm smiling.

SONYA [*casually*]: Show her how to paste somebody properly under the heart.

ATTENDED GIRL: We'll show her. [*To NINKA.*] Ah you're only a chicken yet.

THEOPHILA [*chanting in the corner*]: O God Almighty, Our Eternal Father, have mercy on us! . . .

SONYA [*dreamily*]: In Moscow I used to wear a real sealskin coat. . . . Niurka, sew a few buttons on this blouse for me, will you? Well, and then I traded my sealskin coat for cocaine. . . . Niurka, for God's sake, sew a button on my blouse. I've only a couple more years left to live, anyway. Then one day I'll take a whacking big dose of cocaine and finish myself off. [*Sings.*]

"Found on the boulevard, a shapely wench
(So the morning papers said),
At five a.m. on a frosty bench,
And the ambulance took her for dead."

[*THEOPHILA is in the corner chanting prayers in the Slavonic church language. SONYA picks up a stick of fire-wood and flings it at her. The chanting ceases instantly.*]

SONYA: God, what a place! Not even a bed-bug to brighten it up. . . . Everything so damn spick-and-span. Hey, tell us, Lady Niurka, why do they keep this place so clean?

LADY NIURKA: What a question! Hygiene, of course.

SONYA [*screams*]: But what the hell for? What do I want with hygiene? What does a corpse want with music? It's all lies, lies! I know all about it—I've known it since I was a kid. I was brought up in an orphanage—slept under sky-blue blankets in a snow-white cot every night—so I did. And I was taught to kiss icons and lick little Jesus Christ's navel and the rest of it, and kneel down with dried peas

under my poor little bare knees for a penance. And then, when I was fourteen, Madame Aglaya, the Mother Superior, taught me Lesbian love! Lesbian love! That's why I loathe all these clean pillows and things—hated them ever since I was a kid. It's all claptrap, lies—every bit of it—to hell with all this talk about moulding people's characters over again, making new people out of 'em, training 'em—its newspaper bunk—these are just the new Soviet icons, that's all. Who do they think they'll fool? A prison's a prison—and that's all there is to it!

TAMARA: Sonya, you may not believe me, but I was a film actress once.

LADY NIURKA: Tamara, dearie, I believe you. With those brown eyes of yours. . . . You're a comfort to me.

TATTOOED GIRL: Sonya, go to hell!

NINKA: The bosses are coming!

[*The TATTOOED GIRL and NINKA sit down together and pretend to read the newspaper. SONYA sprawls on the bunk. The CHIEF, GROMOV, the DOCTOR, SADOVSKY and the EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR pass through the room.*]

CHIEF: Well, does anyone have anything to complain about?

NINKA: Yes. We all want to complain about everything!

CHIEF: Ah. . . . That's rather a large order. It must be a hard life for you. But has anyone reason to complain about you?

NINKA: No. We've never given anyone any reason to complain about us.

LADY NIURKA: Light dinners they give here. Light as air, you might say.

ARISTOCRATS

Act I, Scene IV

KULAK'S WIFE: And the shoes they give us are full of holes.

CHIEF: What's this, Comrade Gromov? You're giving them scanty dinners and worn-out shoes? You'll offend the ladies.

GROMOV: They refuse to work.

TATTOOED GIRL: Even horses die of overwork.

CHIEF: You've no respect for yourself, my girl.

TATTOOED GIRL: Oh, haven't I? That's just what I have got, see?

CHIEF: And still you compare yourself to a horse? Think of something a bit more clever next time. There are better dinners and shoes to be had here than you're getting. You're not children; you know who get good shoes and meat dinners here—the ones who work! Those are the rules, so it's no use grumbling. [*They go out.*]

SONYA: Ugh, I thought they'd come to give us another pep-talk. They don't understand that you can't patch up a convict's soul with sticking-plaster. Bah! They're just kids!

[*The CHIEF suddenly re-appears.*]

CHIEF: I've heard about you. So you're still quite young?

SONYA: Depends what for.

CHIEF: Why, for living.

SONYA: Who with?

CHIEF: Pretty brazen, aren't you?

SONYA: I don't hide it.

CHIEF: For two months now you've been refusing to work.

SONYA: You're wrong. For fifteen years I've been refusing to work.

CHIEF: You smoke, of course?

SONYA: Now, now, keep off, don't try your subtle approach on me. I'm a thief, I'm a bandit, see? Soviet generals don't smoke and hobnob with the likes of us.

CHIEF: It's true you're a thief—we know that. How many years did you get?

SONYA: Here till the bell rings, I am.

CHIEF: Thinking of running away, I suppose?

SONYA: Well, now, what would you advise me to do?

CHIEF: Hardly worth while, I should think. We're sure to catch you, anyhow.

SONYA: You've got it all nicely fixed, haven't you?

CHIEF: Well, we aren't fed for nothing.

SONYA: Easy to see that by your looks.

CHIEF: We're not ashamed of them. Have a smoke, I know you haven't anything to smoke.

SONYA [*takes a cigarette*]: Thanks.

CHIEF: Was your father a peasant or a worker?

SONYA: A worker.

CHIEF: A metal worker?

SONYA: No, a railwayman. Killed in a big wreck.

CHIEF: Ah, I see. . . . My father was a worker too. Died of consumption. . . . It's all easy enough to understand now. Well, so long. [*Goes out. Silence. Then THEOPHILA begins to pray—"Our Father, which art in heaven"—But SONYA cannot find a missile near within reach.*]

SONYA: Shut up or I'll choke you! What is it he finds so easy to understand, I wonder? What does he mean by saying "*my father was a worker, too?*" Niurka—tell me

what he means, for Christ's sake. Niurka, you know everything—you're a regular newspaper.

TAMARA: My father was . . . [*crying*] was the spitting image of that fellow. I was his only child. I didn't have any mother . . . I remember him taking me by the hand down to the river—the Dnieper—to look at the rapids. . . . He might have been the double of that military fellow. . . . Do you understand what I'm saying, you people, just the very image of him? In the army he was, too.

TATTOOED GIRL [*to NINKA*]: Aw, these folks are all cracked. Don't take any notice of them. Come on out with me.

SONYA [*to NINKA*]: Ninka, stay here.

TATTOOED GIRL: You're sick, Sonya, you're not normal. You're worse than that holy bitch over there. [*Pointing to THEOPHILA. Goes out.*]

LADY NIURKA [*to SONYA*]: Want me to tell you your fortune? Look, here's a grand king of spades for you!

SONYA: Go ahead.

LADY NIURKA [*handing her a card*]: This card is the military gent. Take it and wish. There's a surprise coming to you or else it's your wishes coming true. Now, have you thought of something?

SONYA [*picks up the card and ponders for a moment*]: Yes, I've thought of something.

NIURKA: What is it, Sonya?

SONYA: That you're dumb as hell, that's all. Leave me alone. Go to the devil. I don't know what's come over me.

NIURKA: Sonya, my girl, you'll end up by poisoning yourself, I swear to God you will. [*Moves away.*]

SONYA: Ninka, come here. Run to Kostya, The Captain, and tell him Sonya wants some vodka so bad that if she doesn't get it she'll go and lie down under a train this very day. Tell him just exactly what I'm telling you—and without cracking a smile, or I'll wring the soul out of you.

[*The other women who live in the barrack enter, wearing work clothes. They are weary and silent.*]

SONYA: Oh, here you are, are you? The heroines of the Far North! They're training the sea to flow another way. Where are you training it to go, tell me? [*The women pass her by in silence.*] Hey, Saint Theophila, sing 'em a nice little march.

THEOPHILA: O God Almighty, Eternal Father, have mercy upon us, we beseech thee!

SCENE V

A remote corner of the camp. Evening. THE CAPTAIN is in earnest conversation with a WOMAN who sells illicit liquor.

THE CAPTAIN: Yes, yes, I know you're a poor defenceless widow, but tell me, why must you rob honest folk of their last kopek? Fancy! Seven rubles a bottle! . . . Do you believe in God, woman?

WOMAN: Buy it, fetch it, hide it—you think it's a joke, do you? What do you think I'm running, a co-operative store?

THE CAPTAIN: I'm ruining myself with alcohol before my

very eyes. Good heavens, this is the last ten rubles my poor wife wrung out of her very soul. In profile she looks a bit like you—that stately type, you know. Hand over the stuff then—and my change. What's that? For God's sake—a patrol!

WOMAN: Slip your right hand under my apron and take the bottle. Here's your change. I take things in exchange as well—I live over yonder behind the station. A black cross on the gate, don't forget—that's how you'll know my house.

THE CAPTAIN: We'll get to know each other better, I am sure, my dear, but if your vodka is phoney stuff you'll find me a pretty tough customer. Well, shake! [*Goes off.*]

WOMAN: That's a clever fellow. A student, eh? [*Takes out the money he has given her and looks at it.*] Oi! I was dead certain it was a ten-ruble note by the feel of it—it actually crackled. And I saw it, too, and now it's gone and turned into a bit of wallpaper on me. On me! That's a crook for you! That's a smart one! A regular bandit! Fancy, doing me! *Me!* [*Goes off, thoroughly upset. Enter THE CAPTAIN and SADOVSKY. The latter has a parcel under his arm.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Funny you've never heard of me. I'm a geologist. Got sent out here all because of my friends. You don't happen to have a cigarette about you, do you?

SADOVSKY: Yes, certainly. Excuse my asking you—your name?

THE CAPTAIN: Valentine Ivanovich Berg.

SADOVSKY: Mine's Sadovsky.

THE CAPTAIN: Don't seem to have heard it. Let me carry that box for you. Nice to get parcels by mail. Books, I sup-

pose? [SADOVSKY gives him the box to hold while he gets out his cigarettes.] Yes, very nice to get parcels.

SADOVSKY: Well, colleague, what are you doing up here?

THE CAPTAIN: Oh, studying minerals. Prospecting for ores [Takes a cigarette.] Thanks. Do you mind if I go a bit of the way with you?—one gets terribly lonely here, you know.

SADOVSKY: Are you a prisoner, too?

THE CAPTAIN: Yes, I am. . . . Better keep to the right here, walk ahead of me. Look out, there's a mud-hole in the road there. . . .

SADOVSKY: Where? No—the hole's further to the right. I say, have you had to work with these crooks yet? But what am I doing, letting you carry that parcel all the time. Let me carry it myself [turns]—er—I say! Where are you? Citizen Berg—Gone! And taken my mother's parcel with him. Stop! Stop, you scoundrel! You ought to be put in chains, people like you! You ought to be given penal servitude for life and beaten with knouts every day! [Goes off. SONYA enters.]

SONYA: Told me to meet him, and hasn't turned up yet. But The Captain'll come through. [Sits down on a log.] At the end of your tether, Sonya? Yes. And not a whiff of cocaine within a thousand miles. . . . What's vodka to me, anyway? As bad as taking a physic. [THE CAPTAIN appears, extends the parcel.]

THE CAPTAIN: For a dear friend—complete with home-made dainties!

SONYA: You're taking a risk—be careful, Kostya.

THE CAPTAIN: Nonsense. [*Opens the parcel swiftly with a knife.*] Smoked sausage. Not bad. We'll accept it. What's this? A photo of his beloved wife? I hate to meddle in people's private affairs, but why, oh why, is she such a dear, gentle-faced old lady? [*Examines the photograph and reads the inscription: "To my dear Yuri from Mother."*] So it's his mother? [*Impulsively* THE CAPTAIN *replaces the things and fastens up the parcel.*]

SONYA: What's got into you, Kostya? Are you ill or something?

THE CAPTAIN: Sonya . . . [*face twitches nervously*] if my mother was to send me the few morsels she could spare and some skunk went and mauled my mother's present about, I'd . . . I'm an honest thief, after all. Sonya, you understand me, don't you?

SONYA: Yes, Kostya, I understand you all right, but I see some cigarettes there.

THE CAPTAIN: You don't say so? Some fellow called Yuri smokes perfectly good cigarettes, while we can't even lay our hands on a bit of shag. It's not right. Take the cigarettes out.

SONYA: Listen, Kostya, I haven't got a mother—I'm an orphan—so couldn't I take the sausage too?

THE CAPTAIN: Why, of course, just imagine a sabotaging engineer eating sausage. Let's divide it equally: we get the food, he gets the letters. What's this? Ah, winter underwear. A mother's hand packed these. Sonya, I'll take him the old woman's picture and this warm lingerie. Sonya, grab the eats, will you? Someone's coming. I'll be with you in a mo-

ment. [SONYA snatches up the food, disappears. Enter a man wearing spectacles.]

THE CAPTAIN: I say, would you mind telling me where Engineer Sadovsky lives?

MAN IN SPECTACLES [*vaguely gesturing*]: Over there. . . .
[*Goes off.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Over there?—Why, that's Finland over there.

You must be mentally defective, my dear man. [THE CAPTAIN goes off. The COMMANDANT and SONYA come on.]

COMMANDANT: You're supposed to be confined to barracks and not out picknicking in the woods.

SONYA: I need lots of fresh air—I've got weak lungs.

COMMANDANT: You've got to go and see the Chief now.

SONYA: Which one?

COMMANDANT: You'll see when you get there.

SONYA: Do I have to go right now?

COMMANDANT: Yes, you're coming along with me.

SONYA: I want to powder my nose first.

COMMANDANT: It's not necessary.

SONYA: The Chief must be getting hot about me—hot at which end, I wonder?

COMMANDANT: Citizen, please do not be vulgar.

SONYA: Don't shout. I'm a stickler for politeness.

[THE CAPTAIN appears, coming toward them.]

THE CAPTAIN: I say, where does this Sadovsky chap live?

COMMANDANT: What do you want with him?

THE CAPTAIN: He's my cousin.

COMMANDANT: And what's that you've got under your arm?

THE CAPTAIN: It's a parcel from his mother—she's my aunt

—it was sent to me by mistake. Must have got our names mixed up—they're so much alike.

COMMANDANT: Are you from the technical office? Are you one of the engineers?

THE CAPTAIN: No, I'm an aviator. One of the conquerors of the Arctic. A former friend of the great airman, Chukhnovsky. You've heard of me, probably?

COMMANDANT: You'll find Sadovsky in the first building on the right.

THE CAPTAIN [*saluting smartly*]: Much obliged.

SCENE VI

GROMOV'S office. The CHIEF and SONYA.

CHIEF: Sonya, let's have a frank talk, as one human being to another.

SONYA: A talk about what?

CHIEF: You called me a Soviet general a while ago. Well, according to the old way of counting ranks, I suppose I'm a full general. But in point of social origin you and I are the same flesh and blood. Now, whose fault is it that you became a . . .

SONYA: Yes, I'm a thief, a lump of carrion. . . .

CHIEF: Keep calm. I know you're a thief.

SONYA: We hate you! We're wolves! [*Rage, tears, utter helplessness.*] And there's no need for you to "understand" us. We're done for and we know it and we are not asking you for anything. We hate you, I tell you, so don't you

dare to come and stroke us and pat us on the head. . . . You're just making fun of me. [*She accidentally sweeps a glass of water off the table and becomes hysterical.*] Poison! Give us all poison! Kill us—instead of tormenting us!

CHIEF: Don't be foolish. You're a grown-up woman—but you don't act it. Whom do you think you'll scare with your screams? Hush! You're only a silly girl, a little thief. You were in your cradle when I was sentenced to penal servitude for life. I had to sleep with my chains on, and once the jailers tried to smother me with sacks in a dark cell. And why—for whose sake, do you think? Stop your noise. Wipe your eyes. Don't have your hysterics here. I know it's not your fault. . . . But remember, you're talking to a man, not to a little boy. [*Calls through the door.*] Commandant! [*The COMMANDANT appears.*]

COMMANDANT: What are your orders?

CHIEF: Send someone in to clear up this mess and bring some tea.

COMMANDANT: For two?

CHIEF: Yes, for two.

COMMANDANT: Right.

SONYA: Could I have mine strong, please?

COMMANDANT: Strong. Right. [*Goes off.*]

CHIEF: Now, calm down. Sit over there. . . . Your name? Sonya?

SONYA: Yes, Sonya.

CHIEF: Pull yourself together and tell me your life story.

SONYA: What can I tell you? If anyone even dreamt of my life, he'd wake up in a cold sweat.

ARISTOCRATS

Act I, Scene VI

CHIEF: This isn't an official examination, you know.

SONYA: I understand that.

CHIEF: Did you ever take part in raids?

SONYA: Armed robberies.

CHIEF: Ever kill anyone yourself?

SONYA [*quite frankly and clearly*]: Oh yes, of course.

[COMMANDANT *appears.*]

COMMANDANT: Here's some strong tea.

Lights dim and then come on in SADOVSKY'S room. SADOVSKY and THE CAPTAIN. A parcel lies open on the floor.

THE CAPTAIN: You understand me, I hope? I'm a bandit.

SADOVSKY: How do you mean?

THE CAPTAIN: Well, you've seen how already, haven't you?

I dislike unnecessary talk. Here's the letter, here's the photograph. I don't want to interfere with your private affairs.

SADOVSKY: Thank you very much.

THE CAPTAIN: Here you are, warm underwear, razor-blades —the rest we can't account for. You know what curious things happen in these quaint, out-of-the-way resorts.

SADOVSKY: Yes, yes, of course.

THE CAPTAIN: And it's a long way to the grocery stores.

SADOVSKY: You robbed me, and now, as if that wasn't enough, you're making fun of me.

THE CAPTAIN: What, you're offended? 'Then I robbed you dishonestly, did I? Well, I can do it honestly, if you like.

SADOVSKY: Get out or I'll call for help.

THE CAPTAIN: I don't advise you to, else the red juice will begin to ooze out of you. Goodnight. . . . I repeat, good-night.

SADOVSKY: The same to you.

THE CAPTAIN: That's the proper tone of voice. [*Goes off.*]

SADOVSKY: Good God, what a world! What people to live among! [*Takes the things out of the parcel, comes upon the picture of his mother, reads the inscription and then kisses it.*] Shall I ever see you again, my poor mother? Everything gone, life smashed up, mutilated. [*Bursts into tears. Suddenly BOTKIN appears on the threshold. He is wearing a stylish overcoat and jaunty hat and carries his walking-stick as usual.*]

BOTKIN: I've come to ask you whether Yuri Sadovsky, the friend of my boyhood, is a scoundrel or not? [*Silence.*] How much did they buy you for, Sadovsky? [*Silence.*] Stop pretending. You were appointed chief engineer as soon as you got off the train. You make yourself important at conferences, you're a builder of Socialism, an enthusiast, a toady. . . .

SADOVSKY [*upon whose face melancholy, alarm, and bewilderment give way to amusement—bursts into unrestrained laughter*]: What, I a builder of Socialism? I—an enthusiast! Vitya, it's all bunkum, it's all a sham, a double game, my friend!

BOTKIN: I came here to slap your face.

SADOVSKY: I swear in the name of my mother that what I say is true. Botkin, surely you can't have forgotten me? Pull

yourself together. You've not forgotten everything?

BOTKIN: I don't know . . . it's so painful to think of. I knew you so well, and know you now. No, no, it is you, it's the old Yurka still. Dear old Yurka. . . . I've been living for a whole year in a vacuum. I see nothing before me, I see no space or horizon. I've lost the sense of time. It's frightful to live like this. [SADOVSKY embraces BOTKIN and they kiss three times.]

SADOVSKY: Look I've just got a parcel from my mother.

BOTKIN: Ah, I've no one at all. There was a girl once . . . but that's all gone, like smoke. I'm completely alone.

SADOVSKY: Let's have supper together. There's so much to talk about.

BOTKIN [*taking off his coat*]: I've been silent for so long. What newspapers are these? Ah! "Re-forging!" [*Reads.*] "Engineer Botkin has been made responsible for the design for the wooden locks." Yes, so he has.

SADOVSKY: Are you designing them?

BOTKIN: Designing, and designing. . . .

SADOVSKY: It's just an expensive toy. A whim of the new tyrants. A senseless gesture—and thousands of human lives ground to ashes.

BOTKIN [*ironically*]: No, my boy. You're mistaken, they're simply obsessed with glorious ideas, ideas as beautiful as the sun, with the purging and cleansing of people from capitalistic filth. Take this "re-forging," it's the very essence of their ideas. Just imagine how they'll re-forge you and me, Sadovsky. Oh, how stupid and tedious!

In GROMOV'S office again. The CHIEF and SONYA are still talking. The COMMANDANT is just carrying out the empty tea-glasses.

CHIEF: No, you give me your word of honour, honest and truly.

SONYA: I can't give you my word. . . . Anyway, I'm not going to gallop about with a wheelbarrow. I just couldn't do it.

CHIEF: Wait a minute. Sit down again. Listen.

SONYA: It'd be all the same if you were to talk at me for a whole year. . . . You're like a gramophone, by God, you are. I've never worked in my life, and I don't ever want to.

CHIEF: Now you listen to what your elders tell you. I know more about life than you do.

SONYA: Hardly. Well, go on.

CHIEF: Just tell me, whom are you going to rob here? Have you thought of anyone you could steal from?

SONYA: The usual respectable citizens.

CHIEF: But who are they? Answer me.

SONYA: That's no concern of mine.

[The COMMANDANT, who has been observing the scene from a distance, now gives the audience the benefit of his conclusions.]

COMMANDANT: Pooh! . . . Chief of the camp and he's wasted four hours talking to a low-down little snake like her. . . . Why, the tea and biscuits she's swallowed are worth more to the State than she is. What the hell sort of politics are these, anyhow? It beats me! *[Spits viciously and dozes off.]*

ARISTOCRATS

Act I, Scene VII

SONYA [*to the CHIEF*]: I don't want to hear any more talk about our life. It gives me the pip.

CHIEF: And what about your promise?

SONYA: I'll promise you faithfully I won't drink any more vodka.

CHIEF: And that's all?

SONYA: That's all. [*Goes out.*]

CHIEF: Well, we haven't done much this evening, comrade, but still, it seems as if we've broken the ice.

SCENE VII

*The women's barrack. Night. KOSTYA,
THE CAPTAIN, comes in.*

WOMAN ON DUTY: Halt! Stand back! Who are you?

THE CAPTAIN: Who are you talking to? Me? Why, I'm the electrician, if you want to know. Here are my tools, see? I was told your light's out of order. Show me where the fuse box is.

WOMAN ON DUTY: Yes, the light's pretty bad, that's true.

THE CAPTAIN: Ah, you see, and there you go bawling at me and ruining your youthful good looks. Show me where the fuses are, I say.

WOMAN ON DUTY: Over there in that corner.

THE CAPTAIN: By the way, could I trouble you for a screw driver? . . . I seem to have lost mine and it's too dark. . . .

WOMAN ON DUTY: Just a minute, I'll see if I can find you one.

THE CAPTAIN [*hums happily to himself*], *slips under the blanket on SONYA'S bed and wraps his head in a shawl. NINKA turns over. Warningly, to NINKA*]: Tsi! Sh!

WOMAN ON DUTY [*returning*]: Here you are, here's a screw driver for you. Why, where's the electrician gone to?

NINKA: Gone back to look for his screw-driver, he said.

WOMAN ON DUTY: A-a-h, I see. Well, goodnight. I suppose I'll see him later. [*As she goes out, she meets SONYA coming in. To SONYA*]: Where've you been so late?

SONYA: I never answer silly questions. You know yourself where I've been. Shut up. [*WOMAN ON DUTY leaves. SONYA goes to her bed.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Here I am, waiting for you. Let's have a drink together. Have you got a bite to eat with it? [*Silence.*] Sonya, what's the matter—have they—has anyone been bothering you?

SONYA: No.

THE CAPTAIN: Well, come on, let's have a drink then.

SONYA: Kostya, I'm not going to drink any more.

THE CAPTAIN: What's the matter with you Sonya? Are you sick?

SONYA: Kostya, I've given my word. I gave it of my own free will. I promised faithfully. . . .

THE CAPTAIN [*recoiling*]: The best people are going to hell before my very eyes! The salt of the earth is being ruined! [*He springs up, tears the shawl off his head, gulps down the bottle of vodka without stopping for breath, sniffs his palm.*] I'd like to see 'em reform me!

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE I

A room of the Cultural and Educational Department. The LITTLE MAN and the EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR.

LITTLE MAN: Trying to make me see my wickedness, are you? Well, I can see through you without any specs. You're the Educational Director? Well, come and educate us . . . reform us if you can. We'd never think of playing cards, and we always treat the ladies with the greatest respect. I really can't imagine how anyone could gamble for a woman. Woman—the mother, the sister, our gentle companion through life, ah!

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: What's the sense in all this chatter of yours? As if I don't know your ways. I've been seven years in these camps. The very first day I arrived, thieves gambled away my luggage, my overcoat and all my money. I've done my time, too. I've been through this school. You think I believe you?

LITTLE MAN: Why should I think?

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: We understand one another all right. Let's have a straight talk.

LITTLE MAN: Why should I talk straight?

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: I know perfectly well you're not telling the truth.

LITTLE MAN: Why should I tell you the truth?

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: What are those bruises on your neck? Has someone been trying to strangle you?

LITTLE MAN: No. I fell out of the cradle when I was a kid.

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: What can you do?

LITTLE MAN: Nothing.

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: You can steal, I suppose?

LITTLE MAN: Oh, no, I'm no thief. I'm a counterfeiter. I fake stamps and seals.

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: Let's see how you do it.

LITTLE MAN: With pleasure! [*Picks up a pencil and uses it with careless ease. MITYA comes in.*] Here you are, this is just a sketch—of the militia's stamp on a passport. My fee—one hundred rubles. Why should I work? [*Glances 'round, recognizes MITYA, is delighted.*] Mitya, old chap! So you're here too!

MITYA: Hullo, Sasha.

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: Sasha's from the gangsters' barrack.

You understand? Some criminal big shot there has them all under his thumb. But they won't tell who he is.

MITYA [*the thief in him cropping up again*]: Sasha, it's me you're looking at. It's Mitya talking to you, and not some lawyer or other. It's barely possible that you remember me, isn't it?

LITTLE MAN: I remember you all right.

MITYA: I have an idea, Sasha, that an old pal of mine has arrived in this camp. What do you think, Sasha?

LITTLE MAN: Upon my life, I don't know.

MITYA: I only ask once, Sasha.

LITTLE MAN: Perhaps. It's likely enough.

MITYA: You gambled for a woman at cards. That was a hell of a rotten thing to do! Sasha, what's the use of hiding it? I know it was Kostya, The Captain.

LITTLE MAN: Mitya, what harm did I ever do you?

MITYA: Is Kostya at home just now?

LITTLE MAN: Yes, he's home asleep.

MITYA [*to the EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR*]: Let him go this time. It's only the past cropping up for a minute. Sasha's a swell chap.

LITTLE MAN [*looking MITYA over and speaking sarcastically*]: You're a shock-brigader now, are you?

MITYA: Now, Sasha, don't you worry, everything's all right and the time will come when you'll be a shock-brigader, too. [*To the EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR.*] Didn't you tell me you were looking for an artist? Sasha's a grand artist and I can swear to his being honest. Well, I'll go and see The Captain now, he's an old pal of mine.

LITTLE MAN: Don't give me away, boys, whatever you do! The Captain'll have no mercy on me. . . . Oi, I've given the show away. . . . Mitya . . . I don't want to die yet. . . . Mitya, give me a chance.

MITYA: What do you think I am, Sasha, a kid? Poor old Sasha, why should we want you bumped off? You'll be given a chance to live here. [*To the EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR.*] Don't be hard on Sasha . . . he's taken an awful lot of beating in his time. Sasha, will you do some art work for us? I've gone bail for you, so to speak. Now I must hurry and catch The Captain while he's asleep. [*Goes out.*]

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: Do you want to work on our newspaper and do cartoons for us?

LITTLE MAN: Cartoons? . . . Haven't done any for the last ten years. . . . I'm a pretty sad-looking cartoon myself now, I guess. . . .

SCENE II

The bed of the canal far out in the woods. LADY NIURKA and SONYA with wheelbarrows.

LADY NIURKA: Sonya, my child, take care of yourself, you should value your life more. All this'll pass like a midsummer night's dream.

SONYA: Go ahead, sing. You're a good girl.

LADY NIURKA: I was pretty as a picture post-card when I was little. Did my poor mother ever think, when she blessed me in my cradle, that I'd be building this canal?

SONYA: Chuck the confessions, Niurka—that's all past and gone now. Let's get going. [*They pass on, followed by all the inmates of the women's barrack except THEOPHILA and the TATTOOED GIRL. SADOVSKY and BOTKIN come on the scene.*]

SADOVSKY: Well, anything new, comrade counter-revolutionary?

BOTKIN: They're giving me extra food. Have you met the camp doctor? He is a gambler. He ruined his hospital at the mines, but he's doing some very fine work here. He's a clever, cynical fellow, believes in nothing whatsoever and

works like the very devil. . . . However, this is of no interest to anyone at all. How are your affairs going?

SADOVSKY: I am uniting the seas.

BOTKIN: Well, go on uniting.

SADOVSKY: Wait a minute. Does that nonsense you're doing promise anything?

BOTKIN: I've nothing else to do, so I just let my fancy roam. I find it cheers me up.

SADOVSKY: Wooden sluices. A wooden canal. The Panama Canal—Soviet style.

BOTKIN: Well, I'm a wrecker: it's all the same to me.

[*Goes off.* GROMOV *enters.*]

GROMOV [*to SADOVSKY, pointing to the side*]: Show them how to manage their wheelbarrows. They're wearing themselves out for nothing, working the wrong way. Give orders for them to be provided with overalls.

SADOVSKY: I don't understand.

GROMOV: Engineer, you ought to know how to look after people. You ought to know how they work and live and eat and rest. Were you never in touch with the masses, Engineer? And you're supposed to be a practical engineer, aren't you? What a joke! . . . [*Goes off.* CARP *enters.*]

SADOVSKY: Say, my good man, go and show those women how to manage their wheelbarrows.

CARP: Certainly, sir.

[SADOVSKY *goes off.* *The women with the wheelbarrows come on.*]

CARP: Stop a minute, ladies, if you please. The Chief has

given me orders to show you how to run your wheelbarrows properly.

SONYA: Come on then, show us.

CARP: God save us all, why should you be tortured like this?

I wouldn't be surprised if some of you ain't from a young ladies' school?

SONYA: That's right. Straight from finishing school we are, and they brought us here. . . . Show us what to do, will you?

CARP: We're living through infernal torment these days. . . .

The foreign powers don't know what's going on here—else they'd declare war. [*To LADY NIURKA.*] Now, my dear, if you've only got your bare hands to grip with, don't leave 'em dry. Spit on them and don't be stingy with your slaver. Above all things, try not to bend your back, because when you're not used to it, it's hell! Ah—[*bursting into tears*] every bone, every bit of gristle will ache something cruel. You won't be able to utter either a moan or a groan or raise an eyelash. . . . Infernal torment, that's what it is!

LADY NIURKA [*also bursting into tears*]: And they came talking to us about honest labour and Socialist competition. . . .

Why, we'll pass out! [*The TATTOOED GIRL comes up.*]

TATTOOED GIRL [*laughing*]: I'm starting out to earn an honest living at last. I say—what's up? Whose funeral is it?

SONYA [*takes CARP by the shoulders, turns him around and gives him a hard punch on the back of the neck*]: Get the hell out of here! [*GROMOV appears.*]

GROMOV: Well?

SONYA: What the devil is he blubbering for?

GROMOV [*to CARP*]: What sort of people do you come from?

CARP [*falling on his knees*]: Beg pardon most humbly, sir.

GROMOV [*furious*]: Stand up! . . . [CARP *jumps to his feet in fright.*] Who are your people, I'm asking you?

CARP: I'm a kulak—a Kursk kulak.

GROMOV: Well, and are you going to stay a kulak all your life? Or will you think it over? Chuck the anti-Soviet propaganda, Remember!

CARP: Yes, all right. I'm thinking about it. [*Retires, bowing obsequiously, and disappears.*]

GROMOV [*to the women*]: Is it hard for you? [*Takes hold of SONYA's wheelbarrow and shows her how to get a proper grip on the handles.*] Here, look, this is the best way. See? Load it so that the weight falls here, and not so near the handles. Then the weight's properly balanced and all you have to do is guide it. And you ought to sprinkle the boards with sand and shavings.

SONYA: I see.

GROMOV: It's no use pitying yourselves, girls—it won't help. Everyone's got to work in our country. We've made an honest agreement; we'll keep our promises, see that you keep yours. We'll have to get you some practical clothes to work in, though.

LADY NIURKA: Everything'll pass like a midsummer night's dream!

GROMOV: Quite right!

NINKA: May I have a word with you, Chief?

GROMOV: Let's hear it.

NINKA: Is falling in love permitted in this camp?

GROMOV: What are you driving at?

NINKA: It's quite an innocent question.

GROMOV: Well, how do you mean? Give me an example.

NINKA: Supposing I wanted to get married, for instance?

GROMOV: No, you couldn't.

NINKA: Why?

GROMOV: It's not the season for it.

NINKA: But could you?

GROMOV: Yes, I could.

NINKA: And supposing I wanted to marry you?

GROMOV: We'll talk about that in another place, when it's in season. How many years did you get?

NINKA: Six.

GROMOV: Better work hard and try to get it reduced to a third of that, else I won't wait. I'll marry some one else, I'm just that sort. So hurry up. [*Moves off.*]

NINKA: So I'll have to go on loving you in vain?

GROMOV: That will be healthier for you. [*Goes off.*]

TATTOOED GIRL: Just you let me get out of here again, Mister Officer and we'll show you how we work. [*Picks up the handles of a wheelbarrow.*] Remember Mustafa in "The Road to Life"! Come on girls!

SONYA: Off for the shavings—one, two, three!

[KOSTYA, THE CAPTAIN, comes on, accompanied by MITYA. They are followed by FATHER BARTHOLOMEW and the DEACON carrying a saw.]

THE CAPTAIN: Look here, Mitya, how did you come to be such a Marxist? You were a famous bandit once. Now you're ruined forever.

MITYA [*pointing to a bulletin board where there hang a series of caricatures of the people who have refused to work*]: Kostya—look, they've got your number.

THE CAPTAIN: I'm not interested in pictures.

MITYA [*pointing to the caricatures*]: Stop pretending. Stand here a minute and read it.

THE CAPTAIN: Reading's bad for the eyes.

MITYA: Here, have a look at our newspaper.

THE CAPTAIN: No, thanks, I always prefer clean paper. [*They go off.*]

DEACON: Shall we start with this pine, Father Bartholomew?

FATHER BARTHOLOMEW: Let us remember King David and his humility. [*They set to. The DEACON works like a Trojan, but the priest scarcely touches the saw on his side. The result is a comical disparity. GROMOV appears once more and observes the scene quietly for some minutes.*]

FATHER BARTHOLOMEW: I notice there are a considerable number of adulteresses about us.

DEACON: Yes, plenty of 'em. [*Works away.*]

FATHER BARTHOLOMEW: And as in olden times, they are unfailingly endowed with beauty.

FATHER BARTHOLOMEW: And as in biblical times, before the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah, they continue their sinful practices in the face of disaster.

DEACON: Yes, all kinds of goings-on.

GROMOV [*to DEACON*]: Come here for a minute, Citizen.

DEACON: Is it me you're calling? [*Goes up to GROMOV.*]

GROMOV: What position did you hold formerly?

DEACON: I was a Deacon.

GROMOV: Like to change your partner?

DEACON: Oh, I can't do that.

GROMOV: Why not?

DEACON: Why, Father Bartholomew and me are both from the same parish. We were tried together, sent up together, and we're going to die together.

GROMOV: That's a pity. You've the makings of a good workman, I can see. [*Then, as he moves away, he turns his head.*] Could make an exemplary workman out of you.

DEACON [*fingering his beard; to the priest, in a depressed tone*]: Now, Father, let's have another go at this tree.

[*KOSTYA and MITYA appear again.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Mitya, do you honestly think I'll ever actually shovel dirt? I, Kostya, The Captain?

MITYA: You bet you will, Kostya!

THE CAPTAIN: Mitya, you must have a screw loose. [*Taps his forehead.*] Mitya, is that a badge you're wearing? Are you a policeman?

MITYA: That's a shock-brigader's badge.

THE CAPTAIN: And what does that mean in real life?

MITYA: It means that instead of the ten years I was sentenced to, I've got only six to do now. [*Hands THE CAPTAIN his identification ticket.*] It's written down right there, you can see for yourself. [*THE CAPTAIN examines the ticket.*] I'll build the canal, and then I'll go away.

THE CAPTAIN: And I'll spit on all that and run away.

MITYA: You'll be caught and hauled back here, while I'll leave the place a free man.

THE CAPTAIN: Mitya, get away from me quick. I'm sick of this sort of talk. I'm asking you, Mitya, get out of my sight.

MITYA [*retreating*]: Look here, Captain. . . .

THE CAPTAIN: We used to understand one another at a glance.

MITYA: Well, so long. . . . [*Goes away.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*alone*]: The bastard, he's got a mighty convincing line of talk. [*Then, in a startled tone.*] God almighty, what do I see! The world's reeling under my feet. . . . Sonya! [*SONYA comes to a halt with her wheelbarrow opposite THE CAPTAIN.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Sonya, have you gone crazy? . . . Sonya, where are you? Who are you? Sonya, wake up! [*He strokes SONYA tenderly, and passes his fingers over her eyes.*] Why, your face is wet, your hands are black. . . .

SONYA [*flinging aside her wheelbarrow*]: To hell with. . . . [*As THE CAPTAIN is leading SONYA away, the COMMANDANT comes up, accompanied by a guard.*]

COMMANDANT [*to SONYA*]: Leave this prisoner at once. [*To THE CAPTAIN.*] You go on ahead.

THE CAPTAIN: If you'll pardon my asking—where to?

COMMANDANT: To the S.R.C.

THE CAPTAIN: What might that mean, I wonder?

COMMANDANT: You know perfectly well that the S.R.C. is the Special Regime Corps—the detention camp.

THE CAPTAIN: Yes, my boy, I fancy I've heard of it, only

I can't for the life of me see what you'll gain by putting me there. You might as well let everybody know that, even if I have to go through a thousand detention camps, I'll never agree to scratch this filthy, rotten ground, never!

[Marches proudly and nonchalantly ahead.]

SONYA: They've arrested The Captain. That means they see through everything, much better than we do. What shall we do now without The Captain?

[They all go off.]

DEACON: Listen here, Father Bartholomew, this looks as if you and me were acting the old fable of the swan, the crab and the pike setting out to draw a cart. . . .

FATHER BARTHOLOMEW: Aha-a—you're hankering after a bigger ration, I can see. Those meat dinners tempt you!

DEACON: Jesus Christ himself, when he was in the flesh, thirsted and hungered just as we do.

FATHER BARTHOLOMEW: So you're denying me as the Apostle Peter denied His Lord?

DEACON: I can't help it; we can't pull together.

FATHER BARTHOLOMEW: You heretic, you!

DEACON: And if I was to tell the truth about you, Father, you've Satan himself inside you!

FATHER BARTHOLOMEW: Well, God bless you, anyhow.

DEACON: And you too, Father.

[They spit viciously after one another and depart in different directions.]

SCENE III

BOTKIN's work-room. The table is littered with plans and drawings. There is a model of the sluice. The room is lighted by a huge window looking out on the forest. SADOVSKY and BOTKIN are talking.

SADOVSKY [*examining the model*]: Nice bit of work. Broadly conceived. When did you find time to do all this?

BOTKIN: The evenings are terribly long here, and I can't sleep.

SADOVSKY: I've noticed you've stopped coming 'round to have tea with me evenings. I was slandering you to myself, thinking maybe you'd discovered some Northern Dulcinea. And it turns out you're busy with inventions all the time, imitating Edison. Very praiseworthy indeed. Shows spirit. You look as if you'd just been awarded your diploma. I won't conceal from you that I think it's a very big thing, very important. A victory, in fact. Congratulations! I sincerely envy you your original mind. . . . Daring—very—you old fox! That's the sort of thing people are awarded the Nobel Prize for.

BOTKIN: Advise me what to do. I've invented the thing, worked it out, solved the problem. What next?

SADOVSKY: It's your own business, you know best.

BOTKIN: I'd like to see it carried out.

SADOVSKY: You don't say so! Indeed!

BOTKIN: Yuri, chuck this funny tone of yours and tell me straight out what you think.

SADOVSKY: I'm thinking of how Botkin came one day to give me a slap in the face, and asked me how much they'd bought me for and whether I was a scoundrel or not. That's how you put it, I think. You wanted me to tell you straight—and I did.

BOTKIN: That was quite a different thing. It seemed to me then as if you were changing your colour. But I . . .

SADOVSKY: It only seemed to you, did it? But I can see with my own eyes a brilliant piece of engineering that you've done at the command of the Chekists!

BOTKIN: Well, I'm an engineer and not a psalm-singing priest who knows nothing but his prayers. Can't you understand that? If I'm not going to think and create and solve problems then I'd better go to the devil altogether.

SADOVSKY: You can remain an engineer without being a slave.

BOTKIN: You mean I should burn my drawings and smash up my model? That's what it amounts to, doesn't it? Say it—say what you were going to say!

SADOVSKY: Yes! If there's nothing else left, then do just that!

BOTKIN: Sadovsky, do you understand what you're saying? We're letting ourselves be carried into sheer barbarity and sectarian fanaticism!

SADOVSKY: You didn't talk about barbarity when you were free, you did what was expected of you!

BOTKIN: When I was free I never did anything at all, and I'm sick to death of it—of doing nothing. My mind protests. I'm tired of believing in a future I can't see. I can't live any longer in this vacuum.

SADOVSKY: Say it straight out—you're working to have your sentence reduced, aren't you?

BOTKIN: Fool!

SADOVSKY: Goodbye, old chap. . . . [*Is going out.*]

BOTKIN: Yuri!

SADOVSKY: Well, go on fawning on the government, Botkin. Be their lackey. The Russian intelligentsia always grasped at high-sounding phrases to hide their complete insignificance. Go ahead. A Red career will satisfy both your belly and your ambition. You've made a brilliant beginning! [*Goes out.*]

BOTKIN [*opens the window*]: Supposing it really turns out like that. . . . Supposing I'm lying to myself, as cowards do. Supposing I am really trying to get my sentence reduced? [*SONYA comes up to the window.*]

SONYA: Say, Mr. Chemist, hand me down a couple of cigarettes.

BOTKIN: Here, take as many as you like.

SONYA: Thanks, Mr. Chemist.

BOTKIN: Why do you call me "Chemist"?

SONYA: I've seen you through the window night after night, sitting, thinking out some new kind of salts. I think about salts at night, too. . . . Nights are getting longer, you know, and life's getting shorter. Ekh, how dreary it all is!

[*Glancing towards the table.*] What's that toy you've got there?

BOTKIN: This is a model of the locks that are going to be built here.

SONYA: So you're working?

BOTKIN: Out of sheer boredom.

SONYA: I've got a friend, an awfully clever chap, who says there's no need to work.

BOTKIN: And I've got a friend who's also an awfully clever chap, and he, too, says there's no need to work.

SONYA: Well then, what about it?

BOTKIN: That's just what I'm wondering when I look at you.

SONYA: Then what the devil's the good of all your learning if you can't figure out anything? [*Goes away.*]

BOTKIN [*goes over to the table and takes up the receiver*]: Comrade Gromov's office, please. Hello. Could you see me at once, please? This is Engineer Botkin speaking.

SCENE IV

The quarters of the Special Regime Corps. There is a window high up under the ceiling and bunks all along the walls. This guard-house is occupied by people who have committed crimes in the camp. THE CAPTAIN, LEMON and their gang are here.

BERET: Why are you hanging your heads, my birdies? Here

we've landed and it looks as if here we're going to stay. I don't care, I'm going to play cards for whatever stakes I like, and steal and smash and fight—[sings]:

“Oh, we don't give a hang
For any old canal
We never have worked
And damned if we shall. . . .”

[A GUARD comes in.]

GUARD: Stop that singing. This is the Special Regime Corps, not a club-house. [Goes out again.]

THE CAPTAIN: You're getting on my nerves! Shut up! [To LEMON.] Who gave me away? How did they find out what I was doing? Could it have been Mitya, who came here trying to persuade me to dig that dirt?

LEMON: It wasn't really worth it, after all, to risk gambling for that girl. To have to sit in a dull hole like this all because of an innocent joke—it sticks in my throat. Kostya, let's go and work.

THE CAPTAIN: Never!

LEMON: Kostya—just think, we'd be let out of here then.

THE CAPTAIN: I'll set fire to this shed, first, and either burn up with it or leg it out of this camp for good.

GIPSY [to ALYOSHA]: What are you fidgeting around for? Damn it, there's little enough room without you!

ALYOSHA [waking up]: Where are we?

TRIPLE-FACE: Same place as last time.

ALYOSHA: And I dreamed I was. . . .

LOVEY: Never believe in dreams, Alyosha.

LEMON: Kostya, why risk your life? Take me along with you when you run away.

THE CAPTAIN: No!

LEMON: Kostya, I know I'll come to no harm if I'm with you. I can show you something, too—a nice little toy I've got.

THE CAPTAIN: Show me.

LEMON: Here you are—a pocket compass! With this we can get through any woods, even at night. I swiped it, and hung onto it all seven times I've been searched.

THE CAPTAIN [*enthusiastically*]: Why, I'd give a chap like you another million years to live!

LEMON: I'm an artist in my own way, I admit. You know what Pushkin said: "To myself a monument I raised, so pray, ye skunks, you'll never see Pushkin again," or words to that effect. We'll rot away here and the world'll never see the likes of us again. There'll be all sorts of parasites, but not our kind, because we—why, we're real aristocrats!

THE CAPTAIN [*meditating*]: That's true.

LEMON: Are you going to take me with you?

THE CAPTAIN: Yes, I'll be the commander of the escape, you and Sonya will be the crew. It'll be a world-famous cruise. Just think: an escape from the North Pole! [*Suddenly THE CAPTAIN dives under his bunk.*] I'm not at home to anyone.

[*MITYA comes in.*]

LEMON [*with a snicker*]: The boss isn't at home.

MITYA: You don't say! Who's home then? Kostya! What do I see? How do, Kostya! What have you come to, eh?

How you've let yourself down! Kostya, aren't you ashamed of yourself? [THE CAPTAIN *scrambles out from underneath the bunk.*] Time to chuck it, Kostya. [THE CAPTAIN *springs onto the bank, makes a dramatic gesture.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Hoodlums and friends! [*The crooks run up from every side and surround THE CAPTAIN.*] Whoever's on my side, hold up your hand. [*They all raise their hands.* THE CAPTAIN *points to MITYA.*] Who's on his side? Nobody. Mitya, you've lost! [*With another effective gesture* THE CAPTAIN *dismisses the crooks. He moves away from MITYA, goes up to the wall and stares at the poster on it. A pause.*] A knife! Give me a knife, quick! [*The LITTLE MAN starts to run up with a knife.*] [THE CAPTAIN *pointing to the poster.*] Who drew that? I know! I know who did it! [*Makes a furious rush at the LITTLE MAN, who, before reaching THE CAPTAIN, drops his knife and recoils in terror. LEMON and the others hold back THE CAPTAIN.*] Chuck him out, he's a traitor! [*They seize the LITTLE MAN and his belongings and fling them into a corner. The EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR comes in, and, together with MITYA, goes up to THE CAPTAIN.*]

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: Come along with us.

THE CAPTAIN: What do you want?

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: The Chief's been asking about you. He wants to have a talk with you, it seems.

THE CAPTAIN: What, again? . . . You've come back again to claw at my soul!

MITYA: Look here, buddy, I've been a criminal myself, you know.

THE CAPTAIN: I've been one and I'll keep on being one. I don't want to be honest. I'm a killer.

MITYA: Now, now, why all that?

[THE CAPTAIN *tears his shirt open and slashes himself on the chest, the shoulders, and the arm.*]

THE CAPTAIN: I'm not going to work. . . . I won't work I'll see myself damned first! [*Tears roll down his face.*] Clear out. . . . I'll kill every one of you . . . and myself too. . . . I won't work!

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: Run for the doctor. . . . [LEMON *whispers something in the EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR'S ear, and the latter hurries out.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*to LEMON*]: Get away from me . . . [*To another.*] Go away! . . . [*He is left alone.*] Oh, for a mouthful of alcohol and—the grave!

[*The DOCTOR comes in.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Listen, saw-bones, I won't answer for my actions.

THE DOCTOR: Then you'll bleed to death, you fool!

THE CAPTAIN: Keep away from me, saw-bones, keep away!

THE DOCTOR: Tie him up, somebody.

LEMON [*to the DOCTOR*]: A bit green, ain't you, Doc? We ain't though. [*Runs out. A grim silence. Then SONYA runs in followed by the EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*to SONYA*]: They won't leave me alone till they see my blood. . . . If I have to—

SONYA [*sternly*]: You know me, Kostya, don't you?

THE CAPTAIN: I do.

SONYA: You believe me, don't you?

THE CAPTAIN: Yes, I believe you.

SONYA: Right now you're making a fool of yourself.

THE CAPTAIN [*astomished*]: Really?

SONYA [*to the DOCTOR*]: Bandage him—don't be scared.

[*The DOCTOR points to the knife in KOSTYA'S hand. SONYA takes it away from him.*] Bandage him, I say. [*To the people standing around.*] There's nothing to stare at here. [*They disperse.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Sonya, I can't understand what they want of me. Why did they think up this canal? Why should they want crooks to work? [*SONYA goes out. With one hand THE CAPTAIN picks the doctor's pocket, extracts cigarettes and matches, and lights up.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Listen, saw-bones what's this canal business all about?

DOCTOR: Lie still.

THE CAPTAIN: Doctor, have you any drops?

DOCTOR: Yes, I'll measure out a dose for you in a minute.

THE CAPTAIN: Why measure it? [*Snatches the bottle, pours a quantity into a glass, tosses it off, spits.*] Get out now, Doctor—please. [*The DOCTOR retires. THE CAPTAIN lies still.*] Why should they want crooks to work?

SCENE V

GROMOV'S office. The model of the locks stands on the table. BOTKIN is working on it. SADOVSKY comes in.

SADOVSKY: Is the Chief here?

BOTKIN: You can see he isn't.

SADOVSKY: Well, then I'll wait for him.

BOTKIN: Have a seat.

SADOVSKY: Thanks.

BOTKIN: Let's have a talk, Yuri Nikolayevich.

SADOVSKY: My tobacco's all gone—can't talk unless I smoke.

BOTKIN: Do you know who resolved to carry out this idea and make it technically possible?

SADOVSKY: I wasn't interested.

BOTKIN: This canal is part of a tremendous plan. Just think, why wasn't it built a year or so ago and why is it going to be built now?

SADOVSKY: I was not interested.

BOTKIN: Yuri, I always took you for a serious fellow.

[GROMOV comes in.]

GROMOV [to SADOVSKY]: Engineer, when will the rivers freeze?

SADOVSKY: When the weather changes.

GROMOV: You don't know then?

SADOVSKY: No, I'm not a meteorologist.

GROMOV: And what am I? [*Silence.*] Do you know that Engineer Botkin's design has been scientifically tested and approved?

SADOVSKY: So I heard.

GROMOV: How much timber will you need?

SADOVSKY: I could reckon it up.

GROMOV: Too late.

SADOVSKY: The work's new for me.

ARISTOCRATS

Act II, Scene V

GROMOV: And for me? [*Silence.*] Do you know where to get the timber?

SADOVSKY: Oh, around here, I suppose.

GROMOV: So you don't know how much timber you need, or where to get it, or when to float it down. There's nothing to talk to you about. [*SADOVSKY goes out.*]

BOTKIN: Well, I've handed in my design. What shall I do next?

GROMOV: You can go and blast the rocks out where the locks are going to be.

BOTKIN: Who will work with me?

GROMOV: The thieves. Funny, eh? Designs and plans are all very well, but the rivers will freeze in a week's time. The timber's lying out and ready on an island up-river. You can start on the blasting work today, Engineer. Sit down and I'll bring you in touch with the masses. [*GROMOV rings a bell. MITYA and the EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR enter.*]

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: All your orders have been carried out, Comrade Gromov.

GROMOV [*to MITYA*]: They'll let us down, sons of bitches.

MITYA: Not a chance. Not after all our preparations—there's not a chance.

GROMOV [*to BOTKIN*]: Do you know this chap?

BOTKIN: I don't know him personally, but I've heard that he's an expert at reforming crooks.

GROMOV: His life story sounds like something out of the *Count of Monte Cristo*.

MITYA: Count be damned! Just an ordinary crook, nothing else.

GROMOV: Tell us how you held up the bank in Rostov.

MITYA: That's an old story.

GROMOV: Tell us, don't be bashful.

MITYA: We pulled it off in broad daylight, wearing masks.

We yelled "Lie down!" and they lay down. Of course, civilians like those, clerks and so on—they're terrified of masks. They could have knocked us cold with their inkstands, because we only had one revolver among the lot of us, and that wouldn't shoot. A matter of psychology.

GROMOV: There's a tougher customer than any bank-clerk going with you on this trip.

MITYA: Yes, he's a bit classier stuff.

GROMOV: Is he well, now?

MITYA: Yes, he's been well looked after. But he's keeping mum.

GROMOV: Bring him here to me. Let him come in by himself.

Tell the Commandant to bring enough ammunition for a couple of guards. Quick, there's no time to waste!

[*The EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR and MITYA go out.*]

GROMOV: See that? He's a splendid diver, invaluable. I'm training him for salvage work.

BOTKIN: Does he actually work? It's hard to believe.

GROMOV: Why? You work, don't you?

BOTKIN: But I'm not a thief.

GROMOV: And he isn't a wrecker.

BOTKIN: Hm. . . . That's true.

[*KOSTYA, THE CAPTAIN, comes in. He removes his cap, then puts it on again and stands waiting. A pause.*]

GROMOV: So it's you who play cards for girls?

ARISTOCRATS

Act II, Scene V

THE CAPTAIN: No familiarity, please. Prisoners are supposed to be treated with courtesy.

GROMOV: I wanted to have an unofficial talk with you.

THE CAPTAIN: Well, you're the big shot here.

GROMOV: I'm about the same age as you. What year were you born?

THE CAPTAIN: 1898.

GROMOV: And I was born in 1899.

THE CAPTAIN: Ain't it funny, the kind of mugs who get to be Red generals?

GROMOV: You gamble for girls, you get locked up . . . and for what? For petty hooliganism. You're a clever chap and yet how you've let yourself slip down in the world. Just look at yourself. A plain tramp—a caricature of a man. . . . I'm ashamed of you before this engineer sitting here.

THE CAPTAIN: Then shoot me! Lead me out, stand me up against a wall, and get this over with!

GROMOV: So that's all life is for, you think—just to get a bullet in you? Taking cheap risks—"Let's stake our youth on a flip of the cards," er—that sort of thing? Bah! You talk like a cheap novel: "Nothing left in life, no joy, no honour, no friends, no family . . . nothing but filth, vodka, whores." Rot! You're a strong man full of energy. You have a good mind, talent, organizing ability. How are you any worse than me?

THE CAPTAIN: Cut it out, Chief, and start your quiz.

GROMOV: Sit down. [THE CAPTAIN *sits down ready for cross-questioning.*] You're appointed commander of the rock-

blasting expedition. [*To* BOTKIN.] Show him why we need this blasting work done.

BOTKIN [*to* THE CAPTAIN]: Look here, please. [*Points to the model.*] Do you know anything about hydraulic engineering? [*Silence.*] You see, these are the sluices. . . .

THE CAPTAIN: Very interesting. I wonder if I could tell a cow from an airplane.

GROMOV: [*Jumps up from his desk. COMMANDANT and DOCTOR enter. To* DOCTOR.] You are under the orders of the head of the expedition, who is personally responsible for these firearms. [*To* THE CAPTAIN *personally.*] By the way, you know this blasting work, with high explosives, is very dangerous. Takes nerve. Are you sure you're not afraid to risk it? [*THE CAPTAIN casts a scornful look around, hurries out.*]

SCENE VI

The banks of the river. A steamer lies downstream. Only the mast, the flag, the funnel and the captain's bridge are visible. KOSTYA, THE CAPTAIN, is receiving supplies and arms from the SUPPLY MAN and is bringing them down to the shore. The COMMANDANT is present too.

SUPPLY MAN: Here you are. What's your name? Cases of tobacco—that's untold wealth for these parts. What are

ARISTOCRATS

Act II, Scene VI

you feeling them for? They haven't been opened. [KOSTYA examines everything skilfully and with the utmost care.] First time I ever see such a suspicious customer, I declare.

THE CAPTAIN: If all your customers had been like me, captain, your kids would have had their daddy sitting at home with them tonight.

SUPPLY MAN: Ah, that's true, too. . . . Well, it's all fate, I suppose. . . .

[An unfamiliar figure strolls about near the supplies and sings.]

THE CAPTAIN [signing the receipt and speaking over his shoulder]: Listen, young fellow-me-lad, this isn't Old Spain, you know. I never trust serenades.

[The same gang of incorrigibles appears, with some unfamiliar faces among them. The old offenders from the barrack occupy the foreground.]

LEMON: What's all this, Kostya? What are these provisions for? What are you going 'round collecting folks for? Put your cards on the table.

THE CAPTAIN: This very minute. [Leaps on to a packing case.] All hands on deck! [They are all silent, watching. In the background the loading of provisions continues throughout this scene.]

LEMON [shouting]: You want us to work, is that it?

THE CAPTAIN: What are you trying to do—argue with me?

You very easily forget your own words. [LEMON retreats.]

I dislike beating about the bush, as you know. Do you believe me or not?

LEMON: We all believe you.

THE CAPTAIN: I love you all dearly, children, and my heart goes out to you when I look at you. You're losing the most precious thing in the world—your health. What you need is fresh air and an outing on the river. Of course, you're experienced people, and you know such outings aren't for nothing. I quite agree with you. Stop worrying, boys. If I let you down, you can tear me to shreds. Customs and honour are sacred. There's no guard over us, no commander, no boss. The whole show's in my hands and in mine only. You get me? Would it be too much to ask you to raise your hands, I wonder?

[A pause.]

VOICES: Right you are, Captain.

THE CAPTAIN: Then kindly board that cruiser. One man from each barrack must make out a list of those who are to get tobacco. Dinner will be the same for everyone, but tobacco will be awarded according to individual merit. Now—are you folks Young Pioneers or kulaks? I want to see you on that ship in double-quick time. [*The provisions have been loaded while THE CAPTAIN was speaking. While the gang is getting aboard, the DOCTOR runs up, followed by the EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR and BOTKIN.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*at sight of BOTKIN.*]: You? I've been double-crossed! Now I'm not going. Why are they sending you with me?

BOTKIN: My dear fellow, I'm just as much of a prisoner as you are. I've no rights at all.

THE CAPTAIN: Why are you going then?

BOTKIN: Why are you?

ARISTOCRATS

Act II, Scene VI

THE CAPTAIN: I am going to work.

BOTKIN: So am I.

THE CAPTAIN: Well, if you should happen to be robbed, don't get upset. Just let me know, and you'll have everything returned to you. And now please go aboard that schooner.
[BOTKIN goes away.]

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: Here you are—something for you to read. [*Thrusts some pamphlets into THE CAPTAIN'S hand.*]

THE CAPTAIN: I was always fond of Russian literature.

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: You might as well say straight out you're not going to read them.

THE CAPTAIN: Speaking frankly, I'm not.

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: Then give them back. [*Takes the books back, selects a newspaper and offers it to THE CAPTAIN.*] But you must read this one article. Gromov ordered you to.

THE CAPTAIN: Gromov? Then I'll read it.

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: Will you really?

THE CAPTAIN: Now, don't start making a speech. I couldn't stand it.

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: I only wanted to wish you luck! I hope you'll come back covered with glory.

THE CAPTAIN: If they should bring back only a button as a souvenir of me, send my mother a line or two.

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: Nothing like that will happen.

THE CAPTAIN: I don't know—life's a trifle worse than the movies show it, I can tell you.

COMMANDANT [*to THE CAPTAIN*]: Look sharp, boys, GROMOV's coming.

THE CAPTAIN [*calling from the river-bank*]: Petin! Pizhov! [*Two young men who, judging by their khaki coats, are ex-Red Army men, leave the steamer and approach THE CAPTAIN.*]

THE CAPTAIN: You're appointed to guard the public property against these burglars.

PETIN: Guard it?

PIZHOV: What with?

THE CAPTAIN: With rifles in your hands. [*GROMOV comes up.*]

COMMANDANT: We've picked out the best. They're trustworthy.

GROMOV [*to the COMMANDANT*]: Names?

COMMANDANT: Petin and Pizhov.

GROMOV: Have you served in the Red Army?

BOTH: Yes.

GROMOV: Sent up for stealing, of course? [*The boys squirm with embarrassment.*] Prisoners Petin and Pizhov, you are to be entrusted with rifles and included in the ranks of the camp guard. You will carry out your duties and conduct yourselves in an honourable and manly way so as to earn back the title of sons of the Red Army! [*He hands a rifle to Pizhov, who takes it timidly and suddenly bursts out laughing from sheer joy. Then he draws himself up at attention and about-faces with military snap.* GROMOV places a second rifle in PETIN's hands. PETIN grasps it eagerly, tests the lock.]

ARISTOCRATS

Act II, Scene VI

PETIN: Comrades, I swear—*[breaks down and sobs.]*

GROMOV: Now go and join the expedition, guards.

PIZHOV: Right you are!

[They all go off. The SKIPPER appears on the bridge. He is followed by KOSTYA, THE CAPTAIN, carrying a newspaper in his hand. The gang can be heard brawling gaily below on the deck.]

THE CAPTAIN: I wonder why you don't sound the first whistle?

SKIPPER: I'm in no hurry.

THE CAPTAIN: How long is it since you had a bath in this river, Skipper? *[With a sinister smile.]* My boys might feel inclined to duck you. *[The SKIPPER gives a single shrill blast on his whistle.]* Skipper! *[KOSTYA shakes the paper at him.]* I'm on a government job, I want you to know. Give us two blasts on that whistle of yours if you don't want a ducking.

SKIPPER: Don't think you can bully me!

THE CAPTAIN: Skipper, I warn you—I've nothing to lose. *[The SKIPPER gives two blasts.]* Listen here, don't make any unnecessary movements. Let's go right now! *[The SKIPPER gives three ferocious blasts, and blows the siren—the signal for putting off.]*

THE CAPTAIN: That's the way. Now we won't harm a hair of your head. *[KOSTYA leaves the bridge. The steamer puts off.]*

SKIPPER: What passengers! What bandits!

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

SCENE I

The river bank. Forests. A wild spot. The whole gang is here. A general atmosphere of depression, discomfort and boredom.

GIPSY: Sky like a woman's petticoat—white.

ALYOSHA: Just an ordinary wet sky, I'm telling you.

GIPSY: And the ground, brother, look at the ground. You could die here like a fly—simply disappear.

ALYOSHA: Just plain, ordinary, damp earth, that's all.

GIPSY: Ordinary—ordinary—that's all you can ever say. . . .

Wonder what they made you of, you ordinary devil? But I was born in Bessarabia, I want you to know!

ALYOSHA: Why should I want to know?

BERET [*singing*]: "O calm me, tell me
This is but a jest! . . ."

MAKHNO: Shut your trap!

LOVEY: I would never have thought you had nerves, Makhno.

MAKHNO: I'll give you nerves in the eye in a minute.

BERET: What a lovely seaside resort we've picked!

TRIBE FACE: Doesn't look as though there'd be much to swipe around here. Kind of quiet, ain't it?

[*The rest sit or lounge about in gloomy silence. Then THE CAPTAIN appears, followed by BOTKIN, LEMON and others.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Can you tell me, Doctor, if there are sick ones among the population here?

DOCTOR: They're all perfectly well.

THE CAPTAIN [*addressing them all*]: Then what's the matter with you? Why the sudden gloom? Snap out of it! To begin with, I need two barbers. [*Two barbers step forward.*] And two cooks. [*Two cooks step forward; one of them is TRIPE FACE.*] Without food and barbers a man sinks to the bottom like an axe. What you have to do now is to set up a camp here and begin to live!—Life, I can tell you young chaps, can be quite a pleasant thing. [*He drops his oratorical manner and turns to GIPSY.*] Pitch the tents! [*To the cooks.*] Cook a supper with an aroma that will make their mouths water over on the Finnish border! [*To the barbers.*] Give these frowsy-looking photographs a polishing up!

[*They all fall to, pitching camp. Improvised white chef's hats appear on the cooks' heads. Eager clients line up outside the hastily-erected "barber-shop." The tent-flap is adorned with a scrawled sign: "JEAN OF PARIS."*]

THE CAPTAIN [*to LOVEY*]: Show me your hands. [*LOVEY shows them.*] I see. Very talented-looking hands, those. Just go over to those rocks, will you? Don't be shy. You're among friends here. [*THE CAPTAIN observes from a distance how they set about working. Mutters to himself.*] "No, that kind of work isn't worth a damn." [*To BOT-*

KIN.] You couldn't call that work—it's only a bad imitation. Show them what blasting means, will you, Engineer?
BOTKIN: But I've always worked inside—in my office—in the draughting room.

THE CAPTAIN: How very, very sad. [*Comes upon ALYOSHA.*]
Alyosha, how many times have you been sent to the Far North?

ALYOSHA: Three.

THE CAPTAIN: Why, Alyosha, you must be a regular expert! We can't get along without you. Alyosha, take these gladiators in hand.

ALYOSHA: I can just do that little thing! [*ALYOSHA goes off to the "gladiators."* THE CAPTAIN looks about the camp anxiously, then calls LEMON to him.]

THE CAPTAIN: I need one ex-Party member.

LEMON: There aren't any here.

THE CAPTAIN: That's a pity. [*To BOTKIN.*] Queer sort of company I've got into! These crooks simply don't want to work. You don't happen to have been a member of the Communist Party?

BOTKIN: No, never.

THE CAPTAIN: Can you compose soul-stirring appeals to people?

BOTKIN: No, I can't.

THE CAPTAIN: My God, how much like me you are! [*BOTKIN leaves him.* THE CAPTAIN sits down on a tree-stump.] I've got to do something about this. [*Writes, composing his appeal aloud.*] "Comrades hoodlums!" [*Crosses it out.*] "Comrades gangsters!" [*Crosses this out too.*]

“Comrades crooks!” [*Crosses it out, spits violently and tears up the paper.*] No, these crooks will never work, that’s sure. [*He is thoughtful for a few moments and then takes up another sheet of paper and begins to write with great rapidity and decision. Reads aloud.*] “All for each and each for all! We’ll do the job up brown and sail home smothered in honour and glory! Long live the White Sea Canal! Hurrah!” [*Considers it a while.*] That’s hardly enough. [*Writes something more, reads it.*] “Those who don’t work, don’t get any grub!” That’s convincing, surely. [*Thinks a few moments.*] Yes, but I’ve been told the Chekists have a different approach. They divide people up into categories. But what’s the use of talking. I’m not a Chekist, am I? I’m dealing with bandits, with my own family, so to speak. Let’s have another shot at it!

Say, pals!

Do you feel like missing your feed?

Then don’t work!

Do you want to do without tobacco?

Then don’t work!

Want to lounge about this Far Northern Paradise

Looking like poor old Adam without any Eve?

Then don’t work!

That’ll convince ’em, don’t worry! [*Gets up, calls the LITTLE MAN to him.*] Here, you, draw some pictures to go with this—and make it snappy or I’ll wring your neck! [*At this moment BOTKIN rushes up. His appearance is di-*

shevelled. He has cast to the winds his restraint, dignity and studied elegance.]

BOTKIN: What do you think those fellows are doing? They want to blast the whole cliff at one go! They don't want to work according to plan!

THE CAPTAIN [*taking BOTKIN by the arm*]: Don't get upset, please. They're really only children. What do you expect of them? They never worked before. In time they'll learn to work according to plan. You have to know the proper approach to people.

BOTKIN [*as if to himself*]: Yes, indeed, the proper approach. That's what I need.

THE CAPTAIN: Why don't you put on high boots? This place, God knows, isn't exactly Old Madrid.

BOTKIN: Where were you educated?

THE CAPTAIN: I have spent eighteen years in institutions of higher learning. [*THE CAPTAIN'S poster makes its appearance. The prisoners crowd around it, reading aloud and laughing. Then they drift away.*]

BERET [*after reading it*]: Calculated to awaken our consciences. A nice bit of work. [*Goes off. LOVEY runs up.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Lovey!

LOVEY: Yes, that's me.

THE CAPTAIN: Show me your hands!

LOVEY: Chuck it, boss. . . . We'll do what we've promised.

THE CAPTAIN: That's what I'm saying—you've got such clever hands.

[*LOVEY disappears. BERET is seen hopping about on one leg.*]

ARISTOCRATS

Act III, Scene I

He sits down for a minute to fix his shoe. THE CAPTAIN swoops down on him like a hawk on its prey.]

THE CAPTAIN: What do you think you are—a ballerina? You don't happen to be giving a performance of "Swan Lake," do you, Madame Geltzer? [BERET scurries away. GIPSY and MAKHNO halt for a moment to light their cigarettes. They exchange a few words in low tones. THE CAPTAIN reaches them in a few strides.] Talking politics? Just arrived for the Peace Conference, have you? Do you need white kid gloves, perhaps? [The men retreat before KOSTYA and disappear. KOSTYA observes the people awhile. Then he goes up to a tree. There is a pause. He leads ALYOSHA out from behind the tree. ALYOSHA is holding a newspaper in his hands.] Alyosha, you've been sitting behind that tree for fully fifteen minutes by my watch—you're too dreamy, my lad. This is no reading-room for you, Alyosha.

ALYOSHA [*folding up the newspaper*]: And what are you doing yourself, I'd like to know? Trying to do the big boss stuff?

THE CAPTAIN: Are you trying to pick a quarrel with me?

ALYOSHA: Chuck these old tricks of yours, Captain. This doesn't go with us. [*Moves away.*]

THE CAPTAIN: What doesn't go with you? Alyosha, do you think we're actually going to work on the canal? What a naive fellow you are!

ALYOSHA: Just you think things over, Captain. [*Goes off.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*alone*]: Think? Why, there's nothing I'm

better at. I've already made up my mind. I'll win their confidence—and escape. . . .

BOTKIN [*appearing on the scene*]: Why, they're wonderful people! How they work! They're so deft and handy.

THE CAPTAIN: I told you—all you needed was the proper approach. They're real gladiators. They're a circus in themselves: two hundred and fifty daredevils on life's trapeze!

SCENE II

GROMOV'S *office*. GROMOV and SADOVSKY.

GROMOV [*in a humorous tone*]: What's that noise on the wharf? Perhaps it's a drowned man that's been washed up, like in Pushkin's poem, you remember, and the children are calling for their father to come and look.

SADOVSKY: It's Engineer Botkin returning from the expedition.

GROMOV: Where has he been? Who went with him? Did you hear?

SADOVSKY: They say he went with the thieves.

GROMOV: Dear me, what our engineers have come to, eh, travelling with thieves. Doing their best, evidently. Sit down—er—Yuri Nikolayevich—that's your name, if I'm not mistaken?

SADOVSKY: Yes, I used to be called that at one time.

GROMOV: Well, and how about the rivers, Yuri Nikolayevich? Will they freeze soon, do you think?

SADOVSKY: There's a crust of ice on the lake.

GROMOV: So the bear is sucking his paw already?

SADOVSKY: Just starting.

GROMOV: And when will the bear wake up?

SADOVSKY: In the spring.

GROMOV: And when may we look for spring?

SADOVSKY: I put everything in my report.

GROMOV: Yes, you put it in—all the way out of sight.

SADOVSKY: You can put it that way if you like.

GROMOV: Or perhaps *buried* everything in it? May I put it that way?

SADOVSKY: I am accustomed to this accusing tone of voice. I was sentenced to be shot, the sentence was commuted to penal servitude, and if you consider that this was a mistake, it's in your power to dispose of me as you like.

GROMOV: We're not in court now, we're building a canal, doing a job that's been set us by the Soviet government. You don't seem to be able to believe that yet.

SADOVSKY: We two have different social origins.

GROMOV: So that's why you write ridiculous reports? You found out long ago, Engineer, that I understand you perfectly well—so what's the use of playing Punch and Judy any longer? Here's your report—look at the paper in it. [*Weighs the paper in the folder.*] Only a thousand or so foreign words: "Gromov won't understand them, anyhow." And then it turns out that Gromov is studying English, and carries a technical dictionary about with him. So you can't always hide behind foreign words, Yuri Nikolayevich; things are in an awful muddle. I'm going to collect the en-

gineers and read your report to them, together with my own notes on it, and make a laughing-stock of you. Then you'll have to admit either that you didn't know what you were writing, or that you *did* know and . . . see? You think the country's being run by irresponsible, ignorant people. You see nothing of what's going on around you. You, an educated man, can't understand why your sentence was commuted, why you were given a job of tremendous importance, and why I, a Chekist, should talk to you on such a subject. You write ridiculous reports for me. It's terrible. You're getting behind the times, tomorrow you'll be old-fashioned, then you'll seem quaint and ridiculous, then you'll be of no use to anyone—and in the end you'll be a dead man in the midst of life.

SADOVSKY: Are conversations like this included in the program of mutual relations between jailor and prisoner?

GROMOV: Bolsheviks, as you know, always act according to program. You may go now, Engineer. [*Glances out of the window.*] The people are back from the rock-blasting expedition. Thieves. . . . Been out working for the first time. Worth noting!

[*Goes out. SADOVSKY remains behind, alone.*]

SADOVSKY: He's right, of course. He's building Socialism. He's got a program. [*Picks up his report from the table, tears it up and throws it into the wastepaper basket.*] Not a kindred soul anywhere within reach, not one. Stuck in a blind alley and no way out.

[*GROMOV and KOSTYA, THE CAPTAIN, come in.*]

GROMOV [*ignoring SADOVSKY's presence, to THE CAPTAIN*]:

For your good work on this job we have reduced your sentence by one year. Sit down here. Write a report—only without any thieves' jargon in it. [*To SADOVSKY.*] What have you to say, Engineer?

SADOVSKY: I've torn up that report of mine. Forget this if you possibly can. I'll write it all out for you right away—in two pages.

GROMOV: Very well, sit down here and write—only without any foreign words in it. [*To THE CAPTAIN.*] I've heard you're a crack performer on the accordion.

THE CAPTAIN: Well—yes; I used to play Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody once upon a time.

GROMOV: I'll send to Moscow for an accordion for you. [*To SADOVSKY.*] What were you going to say?

SADOVSKY: I've a great favour to ask—my mother is left alone. May I send for her to come here and live with me?

GROMOV: You'll be given an answer in a few days.

[*Goes out, THE CAPTAIN and SADOVSKY set to work on their respective reports. After a minute*]:

THE CAPTAIN: We've had the pleasure of meeting before, I believe?

SADOVSKY: Tell me, who are you?

THE CAPTAIN: I'm Kostya, The Captain.

SADOVSKY: Are you a sailor?

THE CAPTAIN: No, a thief.

SADOVSKY: Why have they remitted a year of your sentence?

THE CAPTAIN: For honest work.

SADOVSKY: Let's be frank, shall we?

THE CAPTAIN: Delighted, I'm sure.

SADOVSKY: Now you, for instance, are a thief—no offence meant.

THE CAPTAIN: Haven't taken offence for eighteen years—only committed them.

SADOVSKY: Then tell me, thief, how did you begin to work? How did you come to it?

THE CAPTAIN: What are you asking me for? Who do you think I am—Dostoyevsky?

SADOVSKY: Don't you see—it's terribly important for me. [*Flinches under THE CAPTAIN'S scornful smile.*] But you don't understand anything.

THE CAPTAIN: I see by the way your heart is pounding that you don't understand anything, either. The Chekists aren't magicians. Before every man they simply set a ladder and say—"Climb it." The higher you climb, the better life becomes. One rung gives you better boots and clothes, another—better food. Then there is the shock-brigade rung: when you get on that you forget you're in a prison camp and you're allowed to send for your wife. But there is still a higher rung, when your entire ten-year sentence is cancelled and vanishes like a night-mare after a spree. [*SADOVSKY is about to interrupt.*] But . . . but . . . allow me—the Chekists do not wait until you make up your mind yourself to climb the ladder. They know our characters too well: some of us have to be shown how to start, others need a boost, some a good shove, while others—you, for instance—have to be given two or three hard knocks and then they're off up the ladder with violent palpitation of the heart.

SADOVSKY: You must have read or heard this somewhere—
how did you find it out?

THE CAPTAIN: I've had a few unpleasant experiences here.
And, speaking generally, if a thief can't paint life in bright
colours, then it's better for him to go and be a dentist. I
know one thing—a secret: if you climb to the very highest
rung of the ladder and for some reason or other drop down,
that'll really be a terrible fall!

SADOVSKY: Yes, there's a good deal of truth in your words.

THE CAPTAIN: As I said before, I'm no Dostoyevsky, but I
do understand this. [*They write a while in silence. A
fountain pen on GROMOV's desk catches THE CAPTAIN's
eye.*] This youngster has a very attractive fountain pen, I
must say.

SADOVSKY: What was that you said?

THE CAPTAIN: Oh, I was just—er—passing through a sort
of psychological crisis. . . .

SCENE III

*The barracks where THE CAPTAIN lives.
He is reporting to GROMOV. The whole
gang is present.*

THE CAPTAIN [*reading*]: "I, Constantine Dorokhov, sen-
tenced to ten years, have carried out the work you entrusted
to me. The rocks have been blasted before the time limit
fixed—to be exact, to twelve days and six hours ahead of
schedule. The whole expedition has returned in perfect
health, with the exception of one freak, who obtained from

an unknown source a bottle of denatured spirits and drank it alone, and without the usual accessories, namely, snacks, whereupon he was taken ill and lay dying for three days and three nights, without, however, succumbing in the end as expected. In conclusion, permit me to state that we found the process of blowing up rocks extremely interesting and we are ready to work as borers and blasters at any time now. There are no mountains big enough to scare us."

GROMOV: Everyone of you gets three months knocked off his sentence for this job.

VOICES: Let's toss the boss!

GROMOV: Wait a minute. Are you going to fill in the dyke?

VOICES: Sure we are!

GROMOV: Then toss away!

[*They toss him in the air.*]

THE CAPTAIN: And what about me? . . . Oh, well, no use expecting gratitude from these people.

GROMOV: So long. [*Catches sight of MAKHNO and comes to a halt.*] Why don't you ever take a bath? Where's the Sanitary Commission?

THREE OF THE MEN [*stepping forward*]: That's us!

GROMOV: So you're breeding lice here? You want to pay a fine?

THE THREE: We'll give him a bath, Chief.

GROMOV: The quicker the better.

THE THREE: Instantly, Chief.

[*GROMOV leaves the barrack.*]

THE THREE [*to MAKNO*]: Where'd you pop up from?

MAKHNO: Well, never mind, I'd like to see *your* brassieres.
No cleaner than mine, I bet.

THE THREE: To the bath-house! Quick time march! At a gallop!

[*They go out. THE CAPTAIN lies down.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*meditating*]: Sonya and I will run away from here just the same. But what'll I say to Sonya when she asks me—"So you're working, Kostya?" This confidence trick of theirs must have hypnotized me. Oho, someone's creeping in. It's her—oh well, what's the use? [*Covers himself up and pretends to be asleep.*]

SONYA [*sitting down on the bed*]: Who do you think you're kidding?

THE CAPTAIN: Oh, its you? . . . I didn't recognize you.

SONYA: Kostya, there's an article about you in the paper. . . .

[*Shows him the paper.*] They call you "A hero of toil," Kostya.

THE CAPTAIN: It's simply a misprint . . . an annoying misprint in my life. Sonya, I give you my word of honour as a thief . . . these crooks can work if they like, but I—never!

SONYA [*wearily*]: Then there's nothing to talk about?

THE CAPTAIN: Nothing at all.

SONYA: Goodbye.

THE CAPTAIN: Why?

SONYA: And I came to challenge this so-called "hero" to compete with me.

THE CAPTAIN: What did you say? I can't see you very well, somehow.

SONYA: Just imagine writing about rubbish like you in the newspapers. . . . I can't understand it.

THE CAPTAIN: Oh, so you envy me?

SONYA: Other people did the work for you. You're only trying to make a career; it's just your cheek!

THE CAPTAIN: Sonya, I never beat women. I choke 'em.

SONYA: Come on, compete with me.

THE CAPTAIN: It's a go.

SONYA [*producing a sheet of paper*]: Sign this.

THE CAPTAIN: Certainly.

SONYA: One hundred and fifty per cent of the plan!

THE CAPTAIN: Two hundred!

SCENE IV

A COOK is busy over huge iron pots.

KOSTYA, THE CAPTAIN, *appears.*

THE CAPTAIN [*taking a drink of water*]: You see that battalion of women? The woman who leads it has the heart of a wild beast. We're playing for tremendous stakes. I gave her a start of a hundred points. No joke. I wonder if this woman will beat us after all?

COOK: Anything can happen.

THE CAPTAIN: Cook, you're a jinx—a hoodoo! Take back what you just said, or I'll make mincemeat of you!

COOK: I take it back.

[*SADOVSKY appears.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*to SADOVSKY*]: Thanks for your advice.

I'm greatly indebted to you. I'm at your service.
SADOVSKY: I want you to write a little paper for me. . . .

THE CAPTAIN: Faking documents isn't my line.

SADOVSKY: I only want a note from you saying that I was in your brigade, and organized the work.

THE CAPTAIN: Lend me your pen for a minute. [*Writes out the required paper and deftly replaces the pen in SADOVSKY's breast-pocket, then takes it back again unnoticed.*]

SADOVSKY: Thanks.

THE CAPTAIN: You're welcome.

[*Goes out. SONYA comes in.*]

SONYA [*taking a drink of water*]: Surely Kostya won't carry off the banner, after all!

COOK: Impossible!

SONYA: Keep your sympathy for yourself, we don't need it. [*Goes out. SADOVSKY tastes the stew in one of the kettles and smacks his lips appreciatively like a gourmet. He is satisfied.*]

COOK: Don't you worry—there's a real French touch about my cooking. [*SADOVSKY goes over to another kettle and tastes its contents. Spits out violently and advances threateningly upon the cook with the ladle in his hand.*]

SADOVSKY: And what sort of a touch did you put in that? [*While they are engaged in complicated dodging movements among the kettles, GROMOV appears and stands in the background observing them unnoticed.*]

SADOVSKY: I'm asking you—what sort of a touch could make stew taste like that, eh? Why, I'll send you to the marshes! You're no cook. You're a wrecker!

[GROMOV smiles, goes away. SADOVSKY collides with BOTKIN as the latter enters.]

BOTKIN [*handing him a paper*]: Here, these are our specifications.

SADOVSKY: Very well.

BOTKIN: When will you give us your reply?

SADOVSKY: In the morning. [BOTKIN turns to go.] Are you going to build your sluices yourself?

BOTKIN: Yes, I am.

SADOVSKY: I wish you success.

BOTKIN: Thank you.

[*They part. The two brigades, one led by SONYA and the other by the THE CAPTAIN, come on the scene. They stand there wearily, in unfriendly silence. The FOREMAN appears with papers in his hand. He settles his glasses on his nose with painful slowness.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Look here, Julius Cæsar, couldn't you hurry just a little?

FOREMAN [*siding away*]: Upon figuring up the work we find that—[*Coughs.*]

THE CAPTAIN: You're a bloodless runt!

FOREMAN: Upon figuring up the work done we find that the women's brigade has accomplished a hundred and fifty per cent of the plan. Yours—[*to THE CAPTAIN*] a hundred and twenty per cent. [*Goes away. General stupefaction reigns. BERET grabs the banner and runs off with it.*]

LADY NIURKA: Help! Murder! Stop, thief! Of all the nerve!

NINKA: He swiped our banner!

TATTOOED GIRL: Go for him! Give him hell! [*They rush after BERET. THE CAPTAIN sits a little apart, deep in thought. BERET is hauled back a prisoner.*]

LADY NIURKA [*gripping BERET's arms*]: You seven-months' brat!

TATTOOED GIRL: Knock him cold!

LADY NIURKA: He's lower than a snake's belly!

TATTOOED GIRL: Paste him in the nose.

LADY NIURKA: You repulsive little pickled toad, you insignificant scrap of a mongrel pup, you low-down little devil, do you know what we've had to do to get this banner? [*Slaps his face resoundingly.*] Can you feel my caressing hand?

BERET: Madame, this behaviour isn't at all nice. Madame, I quite believe all you say.

LADY NIURKA: If you want the banner, get it honestly.

BERET: I was only joking, Madame.

LADY NIURKA: Hear that, Sonya? He was joking. The banner's just a joke for them; Sonya, how can you keep still?

SONYA: He's only a burnt-out cigarette-stub—throw him away.

BERET: I give you my word . . . honestly. . . .

TATTOOED GIRL: Next time show us where you'd like to be buried. I'll thrash you with my own hands.

LADY NIURKA: Clear out, and don't let me catch even the smell of you around here again. [*The women move away.*]

BERET [*to SONYA, who is now some distance off*]: A cigarette-stub, she called me . . . and what do you call your-

self, I wonder? We could get a dozen of such-like banners if we wanted to!

THE CAPTAIN [*alone*]: Why am I sitting here like Stenka Razin on his lone crag, thinking? [*Gets up.*] Alyosha! [*ALYOSHA comes up.*] You see what's happened?

ALYOSHA: I warned you, didn't I?

THE CAPTAIN: Will I be able to make a working-commune out of our hoodlums?

ALYOSHA: You can if you act quickly!

[*The gang comes up, wrangling as before.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Stop the arguments, please. I'm going to organize a working community of ex-thieves. Do you get that? Anyone guilty of drunkenness will be excluded and disgraced. I'll be the first to agree to this condition. Anyone guilty of thieving will be excluded and disgraced. I'm going to push a wheelbarrow myself. Kindly remember that my name is Dorokhov—Constantine Constantinovich. Nicknames are not to be used from this day on. [*To LEMON.*] Constantine Constantinovich, remember.

LEMON: I don't believe a damned word of your serenade!

THE CAPTAIN: Will the Kiev pickpocket popularly known as the Lemon take back his words?

LEMON: And supposing I don't, what then?

THE CAPTAIN: You'll be boycotted.

ALL: Boycott him!

LEMON: We'll meet again, Captain Kostya. [*Goes out.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Listen, Beret, what do they call you when you're among human beings?

BERET: Kolya.

THE CAPTAIN: Kolya, go and bring the Educational Director to our barrack. Tell him we're going to start a commune and we want advice. Go along, comrades, and think it over. It's a big step in our lives. There's no use wasting words. [They all go out. GROMOV comes in. THE CAPTAIN goes up to him.]

THE CAPTAIN: This fountain-pen belongs to Engineer Sadovsky. I swiped it for fun. Sadovsky asked me to write out a statement. . . .

[SADOVSKY comes in sight. THE CAPTAIN says something to GROMOV in a low voice and goes out.]

GROMOV [to SADOVSKY]: Engineer, may I have a word with you in private?

SADOVSKY [going up close to him]: Yes.

GROMOV: You ought to be ashamed of yourself! To go and apply to a thief for a statement saying that you're in touch with the masses. . . . Here, take this pen. It's yours, isn't it?

[An awkward moment. An embarrassed silence.]

SADOVSKY: Shall I tell you the truth?

GROMOV: Yes, do.

SADOVSKY: I've been collecting signed statements—little papers like these—for fifteen years.

GROMOV [smiling]: And it didn't help?

SADOVSKY [laughing]: And it didn't help.

GROMOV [moving away]: You asked permission for your mother to be allowed to come and live here with you?

SADOVSKY: Yes. . . .

GROMOV: Permission's been granted.

SCENE V

The bed of the canal. Night. A band can be heard playing somewhere in the distance. ALYOSHA and SADOVSKY'S MOTHER appear on the scene.

MOTHER: Of course, penal servitude is always penal servitude, no matter what they say. The most God-forsaken places are always chosen for it.

ALYOSHA: Who're you looking for, mother?

MOTHER: My son.

ALYOSHA: Whereabouts would he be, do you think?

MOTHER: In the camp.

ALYOSHA: It's a big camp, mother. What's your son's name?

MOTHER: Ex-Engineer Sadovsky.

ALYOSHA: A—ah—yes, we know him. Wait a minute, the folks'll come around and I'll tell someone to look for him. They're all in this part just now.

MOTHER: What are they doing here?

ALYOSHA: It's "all hands to the pumps" today!

MOTHER: And who might you be, young man?

ALYOSHA: A bandit.

MOTHER: God bless my soul . . . what are you saying?

ALYOSHA: Why should I hide it, mother? If I'm a bandit, I'm a bandit and that's all there is to it.

MOTHER: You don't mean to tell me you ever killed anyone?

ALYOSHA [*with magnificent calm*]: It sometimes happened

so. [SADOVSKY'S mother crosses herself.] Well, mother, I'll go and call a fellow who knows your son.

MOTHER: Bring whomever you like.

[ALYOSHA goes away and returns with THE CAPTAIN.]

THE CAPTAIN: Good-evening, mamma. I've known you for quite a long time.

MOTHER: Excuse me, but I've never met you before.

THE CAPTAIN: Ah, mamma—life's a very touching affair, after all. Your son's superintending work on the canal-bed. The Panama Canal was child's play compared to this.

MOTHER: I've forgotten my geography long ago. Bring my son here, will you, please?

THE CAPTAIN: Your geography would be out-of-date now, anyhow. Why have you brought so much dried bread? You'd better have brought cognac.

MOTHER: I have, I'll make you a present of some. Only bring my son here.

THE CAPTAIN: Don't show me cognac, I beg you. [Takes out his cigarette-case and starts to smoke.]

MOTHER: Where did you get that cigarette-case?

THE CAPTAIN: I bought it in the Torgsin in Moscow.

MOTHER: Excuse me, but it's my husband's.

THE CAPTAIN: Really? It's a pity your husband sold it to the Torgsin.

MOTHER: My husband died ten years ago.

THE CAPTAIN [roughly]: So much the worse for him. [Goes away.]

MOTHER: They're all convicts and bandits here, they'd

rob you and strangle you before you'd have time to open your mouth!

[ALYOSHA reappears.]

ALYOSHA [*shouting to some invisible person*]: Tell Engineer Sadovsky everything's O.K. He needn't worry.

MOTHER: Good gracious, what is it you're doing here?

ALYOSHA: It's "all hands to the pumps" today, mother.

MOTHER: What's he talking about? I can't make head or tail of it. "All hands to the pumps?"—I never heard of such a thing. What's Sadovsky doing in this place?

ALYOSHA: Oh, he's a big man, Sadovsky—he's the head of the works here.

MOTHER: A big man? The head of the works? So he's been pardoned after all. He always said he wasn't mixed up with that business. Botkin was but my Yuri wasn't.

[BOTKIN appears.]

BOTKIN: Where's Sadovsky?

MOTHER: Why, it's Botkin! . . . Botkin, my dear boy!

BOTKIN: Who's a dear boy? Where's Sadovsky? What's he doing with me?

MOTHER: Botkin—don't you know me?—It's Antonina Ivanovna. . . .

BOTKIN: But I want Sadovsky. Where is he? [*Darts away.*]

[GROMOV and the COMMANDANT come up.]

GROMOV: You've come to see your son? What name?

MOTHER: Sadovsky.

GROMOV [*to the COMMANDANT*]: Send her in my car to where Sadovsky is working.

COMMANDANT [*to her*]: Come with me, please. [*To him-*

self.] In the car, indeed! When we're so tired we can hardly drag a leg after us. He's losing his senses, I do believe.

[*They go off as BOTKIN appears once more.*]

BOTKIN [*excitedly*]: They refused!

GROMOV: Why do you look so wild?

BOTKIN: It's sabotage—it's abominable—sheer stupidity!

GROMOV: Don't be in such a hurry; it's too hot. We're getting on grand . . . even the stars have come out . . . and yet you get so panicky.

BOTKIN: No, I'm far from being panicky, but the devil take these muzhiks—they don't want to build a bridge over the bog for me. I have to run all round the damned place with wheelbarrows. If I could get the bridge built, I'd be able to get the work done forty times sooner, but there are gaps in the ice and they don't want to work on it.

GROMOV: Is that so? And why don't they want to?

BOTKIN: They're such blockheads—they're terrified of the bog. "It'll suck us in," they keep saying. So stupid!

GROMOV: You shouted at them, I suppose?

BOTKIN: Yes, I did.

GROMOV: But they don't want to do it?

BOTKIN: They flatly refuse.

GROMOV: Did you try persuasion?

BOTKIN: Any amount of it.

GROMOV: And they won't go?

BOTKIN: They won't go.

GROMOV: Did you promise them a prize?

BOTKIN: I don't know what I haven't promised them.

GROMOV: And they don't want anything?

BOTKIN: They don't want anything.

GROMOV: Well, look after the office for me a while, will you?

BOTKIN: What are you going to do with them?

GROMOV: You want to know what I'm going to do with them? I'm simply going down on the bog and start to work myself. [*Turns to go.*]

BOTKIN: Oh, no, Chief! Don't do that.

GROMOV: What!—then you were deceiving the men? It is really dangerous?

BOTKIN: No, no, but this solution never entered my head. Such a simple thing and yet. . . . The kind of tactics old General Suvorov used.

GROMOV: Well, there's something to be learned from Suvorov, too. Let's go together.

[*They go out and the COMMANDANT comes in.*]

COMMANDANT: Sluices, dykes, rocks, dynamite, boulders, marshes, crooks, bandits, wreckers, kulaks, ex-ministers, Provisional Governments, colonels, pickpockets . . . thousands of them with spades and shovels and wheelbarrows and saws—like a battle tonight. And where and why the water's flowing when by rights it should be frozen, I don't know. Where's Gromov gone, I wonder? He's never still a minute. Even noticed that old woman. Sees everyone, thinks of everyone. . . .

THE CAPTAIN [*behind the scenes*]: Commandant!

COMMANDANT [*as THE CAPTAIN appears*]: Here I am!

THE CAPTAIN: Where's the Chief?

COMMANDANT: I'm not obliged to answer your questions.

THE CAPTAIN: You don't seem to have been given your proper share of cod-liver oil in your childhood. You'll soon waste away.

[Sits down on the spot where he was standing.]

COMMANDANT: No jokes, please.

THE CAPTAIN: Wit is wasted on you, evidently. [Lies down where he was sitting.]

COMMANDANT: You ought to be at work. [THE CAPTAIN dozes off.] Why our chiefs bother with people like these, is more than I can understand.

[GROMOV comes in.]

GROMOV: Who's asleep?

THE CAPTAIN [jumping up]: I am.

GROMOV: Now, then. . . . [Shakes him with rough friendliness.] You look dazed.

THE CAPTAIN: See here, Chief, can we stand it any longer?

We shovelled away at that trench for twelve hours, without even allowing ourselves a smoke. Sadovsky reckoned up our work and said that anyone in his right mind should go down on his knees to us. We earned the banner as heroes of the storm-attack and yet they won't give it to us. Look here, Chief, if ex-kulaks get to sobbing, you can imagine how stirred they are!

GROMOV: Wipe your eyes and don't get excited. It isn't time yet for celebrations, but when the time does come I'll present you with the banner on the platform and there'll be a band playing. Now I want to tell you a secret, but you mustn't spread it about until I say you may.

THE CAPTAIN: You don't take me for a gossip, do you?

GROMOV: It's like this: we're through with this "all hands to the pumps" business. Now we've got to tidy the whole job up and make it look pretty.

THE CAPTAIN: When you talk like this, Chief, I can feel myself shooting up like a palm-tree.

GROMOV: But not a word about it till I give you leave!

THE CAPTAIN: These lips shall be as silent as a tomb, this man shall be as a marble monument.

GROMOV: Better disappear now.

THE CAPTAIN: I'm disappearing. [*Goes out.*]

GROMOV: Where's Sadovsky's mother?

COMMANDANT: She went off.

GROMOV: How?

COMMANDANT: In a cart.

GROMOV: What the devil do you mean by sending her in a cart when I ordered you to send her in the automobile?

COMMANDANT: I thought you'd need the car yourself.

GROMOV: It's a pity I'm in such good humour, else I'd teach you to think to some purpose! Can't you see how it is: here you have an old woman coming to visit her son in a prison-camp; it's practically certain she's cried all the way, and then—she arrives. She is met by someone in a motor-car, her things are taken care of, she is politely helped into the auto and driven to her destination. After treatment like that she'll sing the praises of the Chekists to her dying day. Now, tell me, don't you see you've been a fool?

COMMANDANT: Yes, quite a bit of a fool.

GROMOV: And then again, didn't Sadovsky deserve attention after all the efforts he made during our big push? He thinks,

of course, that the Chekists are quick enough at noticing when an engineer does any mischief, but we want to show him that we are quite as observant when an engineer works well. You sent his mother in a cart, but think what a wonderful surprise it would have been for the old woman if you had sent her in the car. I suppose you can appreciate the effect a wonderful surprise has?

COMMANDANT: Yes.

GROMOV: Well now, jump into that car, find the old woman and deliver her safely to Sadovsky.

COMMANDANT: Right you are.

GROMOV: Only don't start palavering to her when you see her. Be polite but reserved, as a military man should.

[*They go off, SADOVSKY'S MOTHER enters.*]

MOTHER: Well, they've driven me here, there and everywhere about this hell and still I haven't found my son. This seems a quiet spot though. I'll sit here and wait.

[*SADOVSKY appears.*]

SADOVSKY: Where the devil's Botkin?

MOTHER: Yuri!

SADOVSKY: Haven't any of you seen Botkin?

MOTHER: Yuri, dear!

SADOVSKY: Mother, how did you get here?

MOTHER: I don't know. . . . So you. . . . It's really him. He's alive and well—and he's got high boots on and he's a chief engineer.

SADOVSKY: Mother, mother, this is such a critical moment. . . . Where on earth can Botkin be? I haven't a moment to spare—I must fly—I'll be back soon. [*Hurries out.*]

MOTHER: Good heavens, can all this be real!

[SONYA, LADY NIURKA, NINKA and the TATTOOED GIRL appear.]

LADY NIURKA: Never in all my thirty-seven years, never from my cradle, have I worked like I've done here!

TATTOOED GIRL: At your whining again, are you?

LADY NIURKA: What harm has it done anyone if I happened to get upset and hankered after a bit of human feeling?

NINKA: You know, Sonya, I believe in this White Sea Canal.

SONYA [*laughing*]: You don't say so!

[*Enter MARGARITA IVANOVNA.*]

NINKA: Well, Miss Torgsin Cashier, you've soon learned to run a wheelbarrow, haven't you? Nothing like a rush job for showing what you can do!

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: Where's Sadovsky? I've been asked to find him.

MOTHER: He went off in that direction. May I come with you?

[*MARGARITA IVANOVNA has gone already.*]

TATTOOED GIRL: I say, auntie—are you a nun or what? Take this bucket and fetch us some drinking-water!

MOTHER: Excuse me—I've come on a visit to my son. He's the chief engineer here.

SONYA: What of it? Go on for the water, quick! You can see we're hot and thirsty as hell.

MOTHER: Good heavens! Well, all right then. [*Picks up the bucket.*] Keep an eye on my things while I'm away, will you please? [*Goes off. The work-gong is heard.*]

SONYA: Cooled off now, girls? [*NINKA and LADY NIURKA*

turn to go, but the TATTOOED GIRL holds SONYA back.]

TATTOOED GIRL: To tell you the truth, Sonya, I'm upset, too.

SONYA: I bet you are.

TATTOOED GIRL: Oh, if you only knew how I long for a taste of life again, to be free once more, away in Yalta or somewhere! Oh, how glad I'd be if I could start out thieving again, Sonya. Why, every night in my dreams I see expensive foreign suitcases plastered with bright-coloured baggage labels . . . and big gold rings with sparklers in 'em, the size of walnuts . . . and old hags with wads and wads of money lying around loose. . . . Sonya--the very first day I'm let out of here I'll commit a robbery that'll make the whole country sit up and take notice!

SONYA: Go on talking. It's nice to hear you at it.

TATTOOED GIRL: There's nothing reformed or reformed about me and all this play-acting isn't worth a god-damn. I feel like spitting at it over my shoulder, that's all! Look here, Sonya, what's the idea of acting the conscientious citizen? Want to make an impression? Who do you think you're kidding? Not me, surely? Let's admit straight out to each other—we're working to get our sentences reduced. . . . You're one of us. . . . Sonya, chuck it!

SONYA: All right, I will! [*At the top of her voice.*] I'll knock you down! [*tries to fling the TATTOOED GIRL to the ground*]*—and trample you under my feet!*

TATTOOED GIRL [*springing to her feet*]: No, you won't! No one'll ever trample me under foot! Wait till we meet—outside. I'll give you a kiss and a hug that'll knock the breath out of you.

[MARGARITA IVANOVNA returns.]

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: Why, what on earth have you been doing?

TATTOOED GIRL: Oh, we just had a little argument over a fellow of ours. [SONYA goes off. SADOVSKY'S MOTHER comes back with a bucket of water.]

MOTHER: Well, did you find Sadovsky?

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: No.

MOTHER: What are you doing here, my dear? Surely you're not a prisoner too?

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: I'm Engineer Sadovsky's secretary.

MOTHER: Oh, is that so? And who's that young man—can you see him—the one running towards us?

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: He's an ex-aviator, I'm engaged to marry him.

MOTHER: An airman? How strange.

[THE CAPTAIN comes up to them.]

THE CAPTAIN: Ah, there you are, mamma! Fatal encounters, these of ours, aren't they? May I have a drink of this marvellous mineral water?

MOTHER: Please.

THE CAPTAIN: If you only knew, mamma, how full of burning enthusiasm we are, you'd feel twenty-five years younger. [After a long drink.] Much obliged. Now, mamma, you'd better carry this remarkable beverage of yours around to our girls, else they'll be looking old and haggard and we don't want that. Go on now, be a shock-brigader, mamma. [Starts her off.] Margarita Ivanovna, I'm as happy as a

poet. I'm blazing like a rocket. And I love you, Margarita Ivanovna.

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: Tell me truly, did you really fly to the North Pole?

THE CAPTAIN: I've flown many a time, and always came down, but I feel today as though I was flying and was never going to land. But if I fall from this height, then stretch out the tender hand of friendship to me. I've loved you Margarita Ivanovna, ever since our first meeting, when my heart was smashed like a piece of the rocks I've blasted.

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: You talk in riddles.

THE CAPTAIN: Tell me, what excites you most? The mists of the past or the dawn of the future?

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: The future, of course.

THE CAPTAIN [*kissing her*]: Here's to our future! May we fly high! What more is there to say? Enough of idle words!

[THE CAPTAIN'S *brigade comes on the scene.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Regiment, off with your jackets! [SADOVSKY'S MOTHER *returns.*] Just a moment, mamma, you stay here and look after our overalls, won't you? We've got to join forces with dear Sonya and go out on the last attack. Here's a spade for you, mamma. If anyone shows any interest in our dinner-jackets, just give him a crack on the head.

[*They go off and SADOVSKY comes on.*]

SADOVSKY: Mother, what are you doing here? What have you got a spade in your hand for?

MOTHER: I'm working.

SADOVSKY: What, you too?

MOTHER: Yes, some crazy folks asked me and I couldn't very

well refuse. Good gracious, Yuri, my dear, how dirty you look!

SADOVSKY: We're changing geography here.

MOTHER: More geography! Yuri, what are you talking about?

What's this geography you're changing? Just imagine it: they arrested him, sentenced him, put him in a prison-camp and now he's altering geography.

SADOVSKY: Yes, it's not easy to grasp at first.

MOTHER: They made me fetch water for them and watch their clothes for them. . . . "All hands to the pumps!" . . . they kept shouting. But what kind of pumps they meant, I'm sure I don't know. And then there were some women who cried, and music, and a lot of running hither and thither. Oh, yes, and—before I forget, where's your father's gold cigarette-case?

SADOVSKY: What does it matter?

MOTHER: Well I declare! Some low creature is using his father's gold cigarette-case and it doesn't matter to him! Really, Yuri, you'll excuse me, dear, I hope, but you [*looks at him*]. . . . Well, I never! Here he is in penal servitude and he looks strong and healthy and actually sunburnt. I can't understand a thing. . . .

[*As they are going away, the COMMANDANT comes in.*]

COMMANDANT: Kindly step into this car, if you please.

SADOVSKY: What car? Where are you taking my mother?

COMMANDANT: The Chief's orders. He told me to take your mother home in the car. Allow me—your luggage. Allow me—er—take my arm, will you? It's slippery here.

MOTHER [*to SADOVSKY*]: Do you go home in the car every day, Yuri?

SADOVSKY: No. I usually go on horseback.

COMMANDANT: Don't be shy, mother, don't be shy. [*A pause.*] It's a surprise—a wonderful surprise for you. [*They go off. The horn of the car is heard. The brigades come running in.*]

GROMOV: Now, Dorokhov, you tell them.

THE CAPTAIN: All thoroughbred girls may now line up and kiss me. My lips are more tender than choice Ukrainian cherries, my heart is like a tulip. Life is a gay and splendid ball in a wonderful palace, and this old planet has not grown too chilly yet for human love!

SONYA: Kostya, what are you raving about?

THE CAPTAIN: Sonya, you're much too prosaic, child. I'm trying to sing you a Hungarian Rhapsody—to express my feelings about this glorious night, and instead of appreciating my efforts, you ask me questions like a lawyer. Sonya, the Big Push is over! We've laughed in the face of the frightful elements, we can now lay our hands on wild nature and say: "That'll do, you dirty snake, no more drinking of our blood for you!" That is the reason, girls, why I called you all to kiss my fiery lips. But you didn't understand me. Here comes ex-Father Bartholomew with his musical ensemble. My Romans are interested in dancing. Play us the "Peter the Great Fox Trot."

FATHER BARTHOLOMEW [*conducting a jazz band*]: The next number will be "Memories of the North."

[*Music and dancing.*]

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

SCENE I

The banks of the canal. Evening. The people from THE CAPTAIN'S Commune are lounging about, resting. THE CAPTAIN is playing upon a new accordion with exultation, making incredible improvisations.

THE CAPTAIN: So we are a Commune, now. A Red Banner Collective. [*Pause.*] Builders of life—that's what we are! [*Plays a flourish, but breaks off suddenly as ALYOSHA appears on the scene and sits down. THE CAPTAIN advances toward him.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Stand up! [*ALYOSHA gets up.*] Tell your comrades where you were yesterday evening. We didn't see you at work today. You bought vodka yesterday in the village.

BERET: The cavalier wanted to go strolling with the little ladies.

GIPSY: It's the first time: first offences aren't punished.

BERET: This isn't a public law-court. 'The first offence, eh? [*Indignantly.*] Suppose I was to go and rob the station or

start a hell of a row somewhere. All I'd have to do would be to say: "It's my very first offence, you ought to let me out on parole." How'd that be? Pretty cheap rules, yours.

LITTLE MAN: We're delicate ladies, aren't we? Tenderness, psychology? Eh? . . . Who do you think you're talking to? Let's hear what the chairman has to say.

THE CAPTAIN: Let's vote, comrades!

BERET AND THE REST: Let's vote!

THE CAPTAIN: Who's for excluding him from the Commune? [*Raises his hand. BERET, the LITTLE MAN, and the others follow his example.*]

ALYOSHA [*in a very low voice*]: My wife came to see me, came from way back home. [*They listen to him in silence.*] I wrote to tell her we were starting a new life. [*A pause.*] Comrades, brothers, men . . . my wife came to see me—from a long way off, because I wrote to tell her we were starting a new life. . . .

THE CAPTAIN: Swear it.

ALYOSHA: I swear it—cross my heart.

THE CAPTAIN: Who's for giving a comrade a chance? [*They all drop their hands and then raise them again. THE CAPTAIN finishes playing the flourish he had started.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*to ALYOSHA*]: How's this for a Commune, eh? The new life, eh? No joke? [*Begins playing his elusive variations and suddenly stops on a wheezy note. One of the valves of his accordion has come loose and fallen off.*] It must have been a heartless bastard who made this instrument. The valves are dropping off it. [*He lays the accordion*

carefully away in its case.] Let's go to bed, friends; tomorrow there'll be plenty of work to do on the dam.

BERET: That's right. . . . Don't be sore at me, Alyosha. I never thought of you having a wife.

ALYOSHA: It's nothing out of the ordinary.

BERET: Springtime, love . . . one glance from beneath those black brows! Ah, I'm a pure young thing, I am.

LITTLE MAN: Would you like me to draw you a picture post-card of a beautiful lady?

BERET: Why not? That's a fine idea.

THE CAPTAIN: Come along home, boys. Tomorrow we've got to do some real work. [*They are dispersing when SADOVSKY comes in.*]

SADOVSKY [*to THE CAPTAIN*]: Kostya, we started out on this life together. Be a pal and stand by me the last few days. Do first-class work on the dam I'm building.

THE CAPTAIN: Yes, we started this life together. [*Pulls out SADOVSKY's cigarette-case.*] Here, take this. It's the last stolen thing I have. [*Gives it back. Silence.*]

SADOVSKY: It's all past . . . a mistake . . . a joke. Thanks. But what are you so downhearted about?

THE CAPTAIN: I've had a misfortune. A valve has come loose on my accordion.

SADOVSKY: Oh, that's nothing much. Go and get some glue from Margarita Ivanovna and stick the valve back on.

THE CAPTAIN [*going away*]: Tomorrow we'll show you some first-class work on your dam.

SADOVSKY: There's a fellow who is making good!

SCENE II

SADOVSKY'S office, where work is over for the day. The clerks are leaving.

KOSTYA, THE CAPTAIN, comes in.

THE CAPTAIN: Good evening, Margarita Ivanovna. [*She gives him a curt nod by way of reply.*] I quite understand that this isn't the place for conversation, but I'm in great trouble. Would you let me have a drop of glue? [*Silence.*] What, don't you know me?

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: Who are you?

THE CAPTAIN: Go on—say what you were going to say.

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: You've insulted me . . . me—a respectable girl from a decent, respectable family. You said you were an aviator and I believed you. . . . What a disgrace! . . . You're nothing but a "Thirty-Fiver," a common thief. [*To a draughtsman.*] I'm ready now, Max.

THE CAPTAIN [*smiling*]: Well, but, Mademoiselle, you can surely lend me a drop of glue. [*Silence.*] I'm in great trouble, Mademoiselle. A valve of my accordion has come off.

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: Max, tell this citizen we can't give glue to everyone.

MAX: Look here, citizen, this isn't Moscow. . . . We've no chance of either buying or pinching glue here, you can see for yourself.

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: I'm ready, Max.

MAX: Coming! [*They go out together.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Ah, Mademoiselle . . . what a low-down little skunk you are, Mademoiselle.

[SADOVSKY and MITYA come in.]

SADOVSKY: Did they give you the glue, Kostya?

THE CAPTAIN: Oh yes, they gave it to me all right. They're all respectable people from decent families.

SADOVSKY [to MITYA]: Here are the plans: let's go. [*He goes out.*]

MITYA: What are you laughing at, Kostya?

THE CAPTAIN: It's all so damned funny, Mitya. That I—a hardened criminal should get to be the chairman of a commune, and a famous shock-brigader, one of the people who are shaking the world. Mitya, my boy, how splendidly you've remade me. Mitya, I'll be grateful to you all my life. Hurrah, Mitya!

MITYA: Hurrah, Kostya! [*Shakes hands warmly with him, then goes out.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*in a lower tone*]: Hurrah! [*In a whisper.*]
Hurrah! [*Breaks down and sobs.*]

SCENE III

The banks of the canal. Morning.

SONYA: Where's Kostya?

BERET: We don't know.

[SADOVSKY comes up, looking for KOSTYA.]

BERET [to SADOVSKY]: No use looking.

SADOVSKY: Why?

ARISTOCRATS

Act IV, Scene III

SONYA: [*to BERET*]: What's up? Has The Captain gone off the rails, do you think?

BERET [*to SONYA*]: Looks like it. [*To SADOVSKY.*] It's spring-time, you know. The roads have dried up. . . . And The Captain's made a run for it.

SADOVSKY: Who told you that?

BERET: I'm telling you.

SONYA: If Kostya's disgraced this banner, I'll kill him, I swear it.

ALYOSHA: Quite right, too. We'll crush him like a worm. [*Demonstrates how to crush a worm with the heel of his boot.*]

SADOVSKY: Wait. We must find out—perhaps the man is ill. [*BOTKIN comes up.*]

BOTKIN [*to SADOVSKY*]: I protest—I really do—you take all the very best brigades for your own work. You've got to transfer this collective to me.

SADOVSKY: You don't happen to have come across the chairman of this collective, have you?

BOTKIN: Why, what's up?

SADOVSKY: They say he's run away.

BOTKIN: How—who says so?

SADOVSKY: They probably know what they're talking about.

BOTKIN: I don't believe it!

SADOVSKY: Neither do I, but. . . .

[*MARGARITA IVANOVNA comes in.*]

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: Yuri Nikolayevich, something awful's happened. My typewriter's been stolen.

SADOVSKY: Last night?

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: He did it . . . we know it's him . . . because he came round to beg some glue from me yesterday evening.

SADOVSKY: Who? Oh, yes, I know who came to ask you for glue. Well, and what about it?

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: We didn't give him any. We haven't enough for ourselves, and anyhow he asked for it just as an excuse to get in. . . . He hid in the office afterwards and stole my typewriter.

SADOVSKY: How do you know it was he?

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: Because he stole the glue as well.

SADOVSKY: That's no proof.

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: But he had the impertinence to leave a note, too.

SADOVSKY: A note? Show it to me.

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: He actually insults me in it.

SADOVSKY [*takes the note and reads it*]: "Ah, Mademoiselle, what a low-down little". . . . [*Reads to the end.*]

Yes, but this doesn't explain. . . . I can't understand a thing. Come along, let's have a talk. [*As they are going off.*]

Have you offended him in some way, Margarita Ivanovna?

MARGARITA IVANOVNA: Nothing of the kind, Yuri Nikolayevich . . . we simply. . . .

SADOVSKY: Simply, simply! These people never do anything *simply*! I'm asking you—why didn't you give him the glue he wanted? [*They go out.*]

BOTKIN [*to the brigade*]: Citizens, supposing your friend. . . .

ALYOSHA: Then it's all lies, there's no sense in it any longer. . . . I don't want to go on. . . . [*Flings down his spade and walks away.*]

SONYA: What, are we to slip back then, all because of one bastard who isn't worth that drop of sweat—are we to fall back again into the same old dens we used to live in, into the prisons and everlasting disgrace?

ALYOSHA: But why did Kostya let us down? We trusted him. . . . We followed him in everything, he was an example for us. [*Then suddenly shouts.*] Give us back our Kostya, you snakes!

SONYA [*after waiting until the excitement has cooled down a little*]: From now on, Kostya's dead to us! But we're going to live. Whoever agrees, raise your hand! [*They glance at each other and with great solemnity raise their hands.*]

[*The LITTLE MAN appears.*]

LITTLE MAN: Kostya The Captain's been arrested!

SCENE IV

The special Regime Corps. Some strangers are lying on the bunks. LEMON is here, too. The guards lead in KOSTYA, THE CAPTAIN.

THE CAPTAIN: How do, hoodlums!

LEMON: How do, boss! [*Silence.*] Don't you recognize your old pal?

THE CAPTAIN: Yes. . . . Have you taken up boxing or something?

LEMON: I laid my hand on your shoulder like a comrade. Chuck it, Kostya—we all go the same way home. Don't believe any of them. It's just a cheap way of playing on a decent thief's feelings. There's hope, so don't fill yourself up with their lies. [*In an undertone.*] Let's escape, shall we?

THE CAPTAIN: Well, if you're thinking of it, why don't you start?

LEMON: Your word on it?

THE CAPTAIN: I've given you my word.

LEMON: They're going to let me out of here in a few minutes. Lie down and wait. I know all about your case. You're in a hopeless fix.

THE CAPTAIN: Nobody knows my case.

LEMON: You stole something from the office.

THE CAPTAIN: Yes.

LEMON: You'll get a second sentence.

THE CAPTAIN: I brought the typewriter back again, brought it back myself. . . . I told them. . . . No, nobody knows my case. Don't touch me, I want to get to sleep. Hey, sentry, I want some water . . . water's allowed here, isn't it?

LEMON: Got drunk last night, did you?

THE CAPTAIN: Something like that.

[*Enter the ex-Red Army man PETIN, who accompanied THE CAPTAIN on the expedition.*]

PETIN: The water's right there—can't you see?

THE CAPTAIN: A-ah . . . thanks.

PETIN: Citizen.

LEMON: Well?

PETIN: You can go now.

LEMON: Much obliged. [*Sings.*]

“I stare like a snake at her old black shawl

And my heart's fit to break and I feel I could bawl.”

PETIN: What kind of a song is that?

LEMON: I'm singing for joy—can't you see? So long, Captain.

[*Goes out with the guard.*]

PETIN [*to THE CAPTAIN*]: Chief, brother is it you?

THE CAPTAIN: It's me.

PETIN: How did it all happen, buddy? Why, it was you who set us back on our feet—and now it turns out you're not fit to be spoken to. . . .

THE CAPTAIN: Yes, that's it.

PETIN: You went off the rails a bit, is that it?

THE CAPTAIN: No, I didn't go off the rails.

PETIN: Shall I fetch you some grub?

THE CAPTAIN: Don't bother.

PETIN: Look here, don't take it so hard. Everything'll come out all right yet. Well, so long, I'm going now. If you want anything, just call me. What tough luck! Shall I leave you something to smoke?

THE CAPTAIN: Thanks. [*PETIN goes out.*] Ah, Mademoiselle, why were you such a mean little skunk?

SCENE V

Evening. GROMOV's home. GROMOV, his WIFE, the EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR and the COMMANDANT.

GROMOV [*walking 'round and 'round the table*]: Go on, go on, quick! What next, Commandant?

COMMANDANT: Well, they didn't give it to him. . . .

GROMOV: What, do you mean to say they couldn't find a drop of glue?

COMMANDANT: I don't know. And in the morning he came back straight from the bootlegger's carrying the typewriter and said—just what's down in the report—that there'd been a misunderstanding. But what sort of a misunderstanding do you call that. . . .

GROMOV: In the report—who wrote the report?

COMMANDANT: I did.

GROMOV: Bring the prisoner here.

COMMANDANT: Right [*Goes out.*]

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: Here is the note that was sent to him.

[*GROMOV takes it and reads it.*]

GROMOV: Who wrote this?

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: Margarita Ivanovna. He's been insulted, called a "thief."

GROMOV: Who insulted him?

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: Margarita Ivanovna.

GROMOV: Put Margarita Ivanovna under arrest for fifteen days:

[*The COMMANDANT rushes in.*]

COMMANDANT: The prisoner has escaped! Someone gave him a signal: the "Black Shawl" song.

GROMOV: You know what to do. [*Exit COMMANDANT.*]

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR: He's not worth bothering with any longer. We've got thousands of them.

GROMOV: Thousands. . . . They're just figures for you—zeros, are they?—these human lives the Party's entrusted to us. . . .

[*KOSTYA, THE CAPTAIN, jumps in through the window tattered and dripping wet.*]

GROMOV: You ran away?

THE CAPTAIN: Yes.

GROMOV: Where to?

THE CAPTAIN: To you.

GROMOV: Why are you wet?

THE CAPTAIN: Had to fight for my life in the canal.

GROMOV: With whom?

THE CAPTAIN: With the man I was leading to freedom. I turned back, and he tried to drown me in the canal.

GROMOV: Tell us all about it.

THE CAPTAIN: You gave me a lovely accordion. One of the valves came off. It was a question of my personal happiness. I went to ask for a drop of glue and I was told . . . that I was a thief.

GROMOV: I know the rest.

THE CAPTAIN: Think of my life. Try to understand! Tell me, am I done for? Am I never to be anything but a criminal—a thief?

GROMOV: Cut out your whining! This isn't a young ladies' boarding school.

[EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR *and the breathless* COMMANDANT *appear.*]

COMMANDANT: Got clear away! [*Catches sight of THE CAPTAIN.*] [*To GROMOV.*] Shall I call the guards?

GROMOV: No punishment is to be administered. Give him back his accordion—and a bottle of glue.

SCENE VI

A holiday scene on the banks of the completed canal. All the characters are present.

BERET: How do I strike you in the bright sunlight? Do you mean to say you haven't noticed anything? I've even had my hair cut in a new style.

[SADOVSKY *and his* MOTHER *pass by.*]

SADOVSKY: How do you do!

BERET: Ah, there you are, Comrade Sadovsky, and in the very same hat, I declare, as when I saw you for the first time. Tell me, how long have you had it? Is it an imported hat?

SADOVSKY: Oh, I've had it quite a long time. Yes, it's a foreign one.

BERET: Where from? Paris or London?

SADOVSKY: Paris.

BERET: You don't say so! And it looks as good as if it had

just come straight out of the shop. A marvellous hat, really.
SADOVSKY: Would you like me to make you a present of this marvellous hat?

BERET: You bet I would!

SADOVSKY: Well, here you are. I hope it'll bring you luck. It looks well on you.

BERET: Thank you very much—that's what I call a real present. What a beautiful felt. It's a dream. . . . [*Calls after SADOVSKY.*] I'm very touched.

[*THE CAPTAIN comes forward.*]

THE CAPTAIN: Excuse me, but that's a favourite old hat of mine. Perhaps you don't recognize me? Ah, you do? How nice. Follow me. [*When they are a little distance away.*] Where did you swipe that hat?

BERET: Kostya!

THE CAPTAIN: Tell me where you pinched it or I'll shove you into the canal.

BERET: Kostya, it's a present. Kostya, give me back my present!

THE CAPTAIN: Who gave it to you?

BERET: Kostya, I could have stolen it twenty times over if I'd wanted to but I didn't. And now I've just had it given to me . . . Kostya. . . .

THE CAPTAIN: What are you crying for, I never said I objected to presents, did I? Wear your hat, if you like it so much, Kolya. [*Puts it on BERET's head.*] Kolya! Why, you look swell!

BERET: Seriously?

THE CAPTAIN: Absolutely.

GROMOV: I'd like to speak to you, Yuri Nikolayevich.

MOTHER: Will I be in the way?

GROMOV: Not at all.

SADOVSKY: Well?

GROMOV: There's going to be a big meeting. You'll have to speak at it. I wanted to let you know beforehand. We've done a great deal of work together—you and I—and lived through a lot. Now a radio message has come through from the centre. From this day on, Yuri Nikolayevich, you'll not be considered an inmate of the camp any more. You've been released before the expiration of your sentence. Besides this, I must tell you that you and Botkin have been decorated by the government.

MOTHER: I always said he couldn't have been mixed up in that dirty business.

GROMOV: I decided to tell you this beforehand because they'll announce it at the meeting and I know we're all rather on edge these days, and we've gone through so much. . . .
[Turns to go.]

SADOVSKY: Don't go! [To his mother.] Mother, do you mind leaving us alone for a little while?

MOTHER: Why? Surely I can stay and listen now.

SADOVSKY: Very well, then. Citizen Gromov, I tried several times to write what I'm going to say to you now, but I could never get it down on paper straight. I was cowardly, I got into a muddle, I deceived you and myself too. The knot must be cut once and for all. I was a real wrecker. I committed a crime.

MOTHER: Yuri what are you saying?

SADOVSKY: And now you tell me I'm to be awarded a decoration by the government?

GROMOV: Yes.

MOTHER: Why are you trying to blacken yourself in their eyes, Yuri? Comrade Gromov, don't believe him. He's gone crazy. Why, I've seen him break down and cry here, when things went wrong with his work. He used to complain that people don't believe him. Night after night he'd. . . .

SADOVSKY: Hush, mother, keep quiet, please.

MOTHER: No, no, I can't keep quiet about the truth.

SADOVSKY: Botkin, come over here a moment, will you? Tell them, Botkin, how I suggested to you, here on the canal, that you should destroy the plans and models you'd made of the wooden structures.

MOTHER: He's gone out of his mind!

SADOVSKY: Well, Botkin?

BOTKIN: What does it all matter now, anyhow?

SADOVSKY: Didn't I say you were my enemy?

BOTKIN: What of it?

MOTHER: That's what I say!

SADOVSKY: This isn't just affectation. It's a burden—a load on my mind that I could never get rid of. If a written statement should be necessary, I promise I'll make a detailed and exact list of my crimes.

GROMOV: It won't be necessary. We knew all this. It would have been strange if you had been an enthusiast as soon as you arrived. Then we probably *wouldn't* have believed you. After all, we tried you, sentenced you, put you in a prison camp. We're no believers in miracles. We knew

everything all along and I may tell you that this page of your life has been turned over long since, both for you and for us. Permit me to congratulate you both, Comrade Sadovsky and Comrade Botkin.

MOTHER: Now kiss and make up. Wait a minute though. Ask forgiveness for hiding such a thing from your mother. . . . Go down on your knees and beg my pardon, else I'll give you a downright good thrashing, you rascal!

GROMOV: Dorokhov!

THE CAPTAIN: Here I am!

GROMOV: I want you to speak at the meeting, so think out a speech. Tell them all in a comradely, sensible, earnest way how you broke yourself in, where your world began, and what kind of a life you're going to build up for yourself without us. You needn't praise the Chekists; talk about life, and the way it breaks people in. Be perfectly calm and self-possessed on the platform. Now go and collect your thoughts, be alone a while.

THE CAPTAIN: I've been thinking about this speech for six months. It's ready to come out at a touch, like a tune from a piano. Comrade Gromov—do you imagine I've nothing to tell? I'll make a speech that even old maids will cry over. . . .

GROMOV: But no confessions, mind.

THE CAPTAIN: I couldn't confess if I tried.

GROMOV: But you understand what I want?

THE CAPTAIN: Absolutely.

ARISTOCRATS

Act IV, Scene VI

GROMOV: I declare this, our last meeting, open. Constantine Constantinovich Dorokhov will speak first.

THE CAPTAIN [*in an undertone*]: No, no, I'm not ready yet.

GROMOV: The speaker isn't ready yet. Hurry up and get ready then. Next, please, Sonya Patipova.

SONYA: When I was told. . . . When Comrade Gromov told me as he might have told a sister that the government was sending me a decoration. . . . When he said to me, just as if I was his sister, that. . . .

GROMOV: Now, then, a bit bolder, military style.

SONYA: You must understand, I . . . for eight years was a dope fiend. . . . Fifteen years I went in for stick-ups. . . . When I was fourteen Madam Aglaya. . . .

THE CAPTAIN: Sonya, you're actually crying! It just shows how weak women are!

SONYA: What are you all looking at me like that for? Can't you see—you must understand. . . . I've said everything.

GROMOV: Constantine Constantinovich Dorokhov will now speak.

THE CAPTAIN: Do you mind if I wait just a minute more?

ALYOSHA: May I speak instead?

GROMOV: Certainly.

ALYOSHA:

“A bandit's life I used to lead,
A life as black as night:
To work I thought there was no need,
I robbed and shot at sight.

A life like this was sure to bring
A sentence on the new canal.
For me it's been a second spring,
I want to live and work and sing.
The past is but a dreadful dream,
A thing I must forget.
Now tears of joy begin to stream—
Mine aren't the only tears, I bet."

GROMOV: Now you, Dorokhov.

THE CAPTAIN: Once upon a time when I was very young, I heard a violinist in some concert-hall or other. He was a poor little Jew with big white cuffs, and I remember looking upon him as his parents' great mistake in life, but when that boy's eyes fixed themselves on his violin, I suddenly saw him as clearly as a portrait in the Tretyakov gallery. I remember the people sobbing—I'm not going to flatter the Chekists, but I want to say—I've been given, as it were, a violin-bow with which to play on the strings of my heart, and I shall tell you. . . . The sun's very strong, and the water dazzles me—there's something gone wrong with this speaker, I'm afraid. I must request you to turn your heads away for a second, please. Something's wrong—excuse me—[*Turns away and wipes his eyes.*] Everything's fine now, thanks. Let's try to get upset less, friends, and talk openly.

The rhapsody isn't finished yet, there are still a few notes to be struck, still a few bars out of tune. The Bolsheviks know this very well. To go through the conservatory of

life is no easy job, especially for folks like us. Sonya, you're not pleased with my speech, I can see. Sonya, I can't sing a Soviet serenade with a cheap tune now. This serenade of mine has cost me a great deal. Now I look at Sonya and feel I'd like to present her with a bouquet of flowers. Sonya, you're a very attractive woman, you've got particularly nice eyes. You—oh, excuse me, Sonya's blushing for the first time in fifteen years! Yuri Nikolayevich, my friend, what are you looking at, what are you waiting for? Now you're getting red, too? How queer! There was a time when you were just a pale-faced wrecker. . . .

MOTHER: Now, young man, that'll do!

THE CAPTAIN: Mamma, I'm getting as red as a beet myself.

Once you sent your son a package in the mail and I ate all the smoked sausage in it. You'd never have expected that, would you? You'd never have expected that the destiny of your remarkable son would be mixed up with that of a notorious crook. And I never expected that my destiny would be interwoven with the life of the famous Chekist, Comrade Gromov. And Comrade Gromov never expected that his fate would be interwoven with thousands of people who have built the White Sea-Baltic Canal.

[*They all stand up and applaud Gromov.*]

GROMOV: Yes, comrades, it's true, our destinies have become intermingled and in this intermingling of thousands of lives there is much that is touching, much of the highest and best in humanity. Why will the White Sea Canal be famous? Because here the forces that have drawn people like Sadovsky and Dorokhov to participate in socialist work,

are operating with unheard-of daring, with true Bolshevik austerity, and on the broad scale Comrade Stalin has taught us. These people, once rejected by society, outcasts, lost, and even enemies, are today recognized and highly valued by their country. Perhaps no one can understand this quite so well and feel so deeply about it as we do, who have trodden the glorious path of the White Sea Canal. For all of you with whom I have quarrelled and worked and won through to victory and united in firm friendship, for all of you I have the warmest regard and I shake your hands now one and all!

THE CAPTAIN: Quiet, comrades! The first steamer is passing through, from the Baltic to the White Sea. And its name, for posterity to know is "The Chekist." Only let's not shout "hurrah." Instead, lets just listen to the water singing in the locks!

CURTAIN



MASTERS OF TIME

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

By

IVAN KOCHERGA

Translated from the Russian by
ANTHONY WIXLEY

*(Performed in the Soviet Union under the title of
"WATCHMAKER AND THE HEN")*

C H A R A C T E R S

LIDA

DOCTOR KARFUNKEL

TARATUTA

ENGINE-DRIVER CHEREVKO

OLYA, his wife

LUNDISHEV

SOPHIA PETROVNA

THE COLONEL

AN OFFICER

A LIEUTENANT

THE COMMISSAR of the armoured train

THE SECRETARY of the Party Nucleus

BANDMASTER HENN

A COMRADE from the Revolutionary
Committee

A LITTLE GIRL

A PORTER

Wives of workers on the railway station, regular railway employees, passengers, Red Army men, employees from the State farm, profiteers with sacks of provisions, countrywomen with hens, etc.

ACT ONE

The waiting room of a small railway station in 1912. It is lighted by two windows, and the furniture consists of chairs, a smooth ash table and a clock. On the left is a door with "LADIES' ROOM" written over it, on the right 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. As he drinks his tea, he takes a number of watches of different kinds out of their cases and puts them away again. He is a thin, dry-looking gentleman, of uncertain age, very smartly dressed. His right cheek is bound up in a bright red silk handkerchief. The noises peculiar to railway stations come in through the windows. Lights flash, and the whistles of the engines echo.

I

[YURKEVICH, a young man of about twenty-five, comes in followed by a porter carrying a small trunk, carefully packed in sail cloth and tied with rope. This article he sets down on the floor.]

YURKEVICH: Second-class to Moscow.

PORTER: The booking offices aren't open yet. You're going to check your luggage, then?

YURKEVICH: No. I'm taking this trunk with me. Now see that you're at hand as soon as the train comes in. Eighteen minutes to eight. Will it be in soon, do you know?

PORTER: They haven't rung up yet. I expect it'll be here soon. In half an hour, if it isn't late. [*Goes out without closing the door.*]

KARFUNKEL [*in an irritated tone*]: *Donnerwetter!* If you will be so good as to shut the door. It blows—a draught.

YURKEVICH: Oh, well—a breath of fresh air is needed in here.

KARFUNKEL: Air, air! *Salbaderei!* Such stupid talk! To air and fools doors are always open. Shut the door, I have a cold, do you hear?

YURKEVICH [*good-naturedly*]: God help you—it's such a warm evening.

KARFUNKEL: Warm indeed! I tell you I am sick. *Ich habe Zahnschmerzen.* I have toothache very bad. O-o-o—this horrible pain. This horrible country! This horrible cold! Everlasting colds, everlasting toothache. O-o-h!

YURKEVICH: Oh, I'm sorry. [*Shuts the door hastily.*] I can feel for you. Yes, I can quite understand you, Sir—I haven't the honour of knowing your—er—name. [*Fumbles for something in his bag.*]

KARFUNKEL [*bowing sideways to him*]: Karfunkel, *Geheimrat** and Doctor of Science.

* *Geheimrat*: Privy Councillor.

YURKEVICH [*with a bow*]: Delighted. My name's Yurkevich, I'm a high-school teacher, and incidentally a writer in a modest way. So you're a *Geheimrat*? That's a very high position!

KARFUNKEL: Yes, yes, a *Geheimrat*. But it's not the title that matters—it's the essentials. My speciality is watches; I'm a master of time.

YURKEVICH: Oh, so you're a watchmaker? I thought. . . .

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* What nonsense. A watchmaker repairs watches for fools who don't know what time is. But I am a *Meister der Zeit*. I study time and it's springs.

YURKEVICH [*aside*]: Must be a bit of a freak.

KARFUNKEL: A watchmaker, indeed! A watchmaker. . . .
Ach! Ach! [*Puts his hand to his cheek.*]

YURKEVICH: It's still aching, is it? I used to be tormented with toothaches myself at one time, do you know? The slightest draught and I would be in agony. And do you know what gave me relief? Some drops I was given. I was at a friend's house in the country, and there was an old doctor there who gave me some medicine. One drop was sufficient: it stopped the pain as if by magic. Just fancy! Its one of those old-fashioned remedies, belladonna, or oil of cloves or opium, or something. I forget which, but anyhow it gave me instant relief. Astonishing, really. I never travel without those drops, although I've never had toothache since.

KARFUNKEL [*jumping up and bowing, with his hands to his cheek*]: Oh, my dear sir, *mein lieber Herr*, Yuri—Yuri—Kevich! What luck I am in! You wouldn't refuse me a drop of this valuable medicine, I'm sure. Believe me, my

gratitude. . . . Just one drop. O-o-oh! The agony of it!

YURKEVICH [*a little confused*]: Oh, of course. With pleasure. [*Rummaging feverishly in his bag.*] But—er—how vexing, the medicine isn't in my bag. I must have put it in the trunk, now I remember—in a little casket.

KARFUNKEL: In a cats-ket? Splendid! May I beg you, my dear friend, to get it for me? Just one drop.

YURKEVICH [*with rising irritation*]: What! Search for that medicine in my trunk? Why, the casket's at the very bottom of the trunk and you can see yourself how that's packed. . . . There's no use even thinking about such a thing.

KARFUNKEL: Oh, but I beg you, noble young man. . . . Oh-o-oh, my good man!

YURKEVICH [*thoroughly annoyed*]: But I'm just leaving, you must understand. It would take at least half an hour to undo this trunk. Not to mention packing it and fastening it up again. And you heard them say the train would be here in half an hour. Suppose I missed that train? Oh, I can't bear to think of it!

KARFUNKEL: O-ooh! But the agony I'm in! Dearest sir, *mein süßer Herr*, if you only knew how frightful my pain is—I pray you! O-o-oh!

YURKEVICH: But can't you see it's impossible? Heavens, to undo this trunk now! I'd miss the train. And if I miss this train, I'll have to say goodbye to the dream of my life. The last train for Moscow goes in twenty minutes. Then there's an express at eleven o'clock, but it doesn't stop here.

KARFUNKEL: Just one drop, though. O-oo-oh!

YURKEVICH: But you must understand, it's the last train to Moscow. And if I'm not in Moscow tomorrow morning, I won't get to Paris. Paris, that I've been dreaming about so long.

KARFUNKEL: Paris? Are you going to Paris?

YURKEVICH: Yes, I'm going on an excursion with a party to see the Exhibition. The excursion is leaving Moscow tomorrow at 12 o'clock. I've bought my ticket and if I don't get there in time all my money and my hopes will be gone. . . . To go abroad, to Paris, to the Exhibition—where would I get another chance? If you'd lived in a hole like this for ten years, you would understand what this dream means to me. It may change my whole destiny. I write. Perhaps, in Paris—oh well, what's the use of talking!

KARFUNKEL: Oo-oh! [*Sits down at the table.*] Such stupid *Salbaderei!* You simply do not wish to help me. Twenty times one could untie and tie up twenty such trunks as these. . . . Oh! Oh, what agony! [*Moans softly.*]

[YURKEVICH *paces up and down the room in agitation.*]

KARFUNKEL [*with a sudden yell, bending down to look for something on the floor*]: Ach! Donnerwetter! Stop, stop, he's just by you. . . . He rolled away.

YURKEVICH [*stepping gingerly aside*]: Who rolled away? Who? Where?

KARFUNKEL [*crawling over the floor*]: Do not step this way, please. Do not put down the feet on the floor, I say—one two, three. . . .

YURKEVICH [*stoops down to help in the search*]: But what is it you've lost?

KARFUNKEL [*showing him a tiny gold box*]: I have spilled—a dozen—a whole dozen—of such pills . . . pellets. Exactly a dozen, please help me to found them—find them. [*They both stoop down and search the floor.*] Careful, do not step on them with the feet. Two . . . three . . . *zwei . . . drei . . .*

YURKEVICH: I've found one, two—and there's another. Here you are.

KARFUNKEL: Thank you. [*They go on searching.*] *Bitte noch!* Three, four. *Danke sehr!* Much obliged. Please, some more. Aha, *noch eine.*

YURKEVICH [*searching diligently*]: Have you got them all now?

KARFUNKEL: No, there must be two more. Aha—here is one.

One more, please, one more. *Fünf, sechs*, one more still.

YURKEVICH: I can't see any more anywhere.

KARFUNKEL: Perhaps it has rolled under the trunk. Look with your eyes.

YURKEVICH [*pushing the trunk aside*]: No, it isn't here.

KARFUNKEL: No? What a very unpleasant accident. Perhaps, then, you should look under the threshold?

YURKEVICH: Oh, never mind. How many are missing?

KARFUNKEL: One.

YURKEVICH: One? It's not worth while bothering about one. It will be dirty now, and not fit for anything.

KARFUNKEL: Yes, but it must not be thrown away so. It must not.

YURKEVICH: Must not? Why?

KARFUNKEL: It is poison. A very strong poison—Karfunkelin.

YURKEVICH [*blowing the dust from his fingers, and getting out his handkerchief*]: Poison?

KARFUNKEL: Yes, a very strong poison—alkaloid. I obtained it from one flower. [*Continues his search.*] If a man should swallow but one pellet—he will die in four seconds like one fly, *wie eine Fliege*. Of the paralysis, the stroke—not one doctor will know of what. *De profundis e finita la comedia*. I cannot throw such a thing away. [*Looks under the chairs.*]

YURKEVICH: There's nothing to be seen anywhere. [*Wipes his hands with his handkerchief.*]

KARFUNKEL [*putting the little box back in his pocket with a dissatisfied air*]: O-o-oh! Again. [*Clutches his cheek.*] This cursed pain again. [*Drops into an armchair, writhing with pain.*] O-o-oh! What torments I go through. No, this, this is. . . . [*Jumps up suddenly.*] I beg and pray you, Mr. Teacher, get the medicine for me, *mein lieber Meister!*

2

[*Station-bell rings.*]

PORTER [*coming in quickly with a railway ticket in his hand*]: Here's your ticket, Sir. Eleven rubles seventy-five kopeks.

YURKEVICH [*fussily*]: Eh? What? Is that my ticket? Oh, yes. There's the bell, can you hear?

PORTER: Yes, the Kiev train is coming; it's just left the last station. [*Picks up someone's luggage from the floor.*]

YURKEVICH: Well, take these things out on the platform, quick! [*Seizes his trunk.*] Quick!

PORTER: Why, there's no hurry. Plenty of time. It won't be here for another twenty-four minutes yet. I'll come for them, don't worry. [*Goes away.*]

YURKEVICH: Here, wait a minute! Porter! [*Rushes after the man to the door.*]

KARFUNKEL [*catching him by the arm*]: Ask whatever you wish of me, but give me just one drop of the medicine.

YURKEVICH [*losing control of himself*]: You must be joking, surely? Didn't you hear them say the train would be here in twenty-four minutes? Didn't you hear? Don't you know that this journey means everything to me? I told you I daren't miss this train. It's the last train to Moscow.

KARFUNKEL: Just one little drop—O-o-h!

YURKEVICH [*indignantly*]: It would take twenty minutes at the very least to unpack this trunk. It would throw me into three sweats to pack it again, and you want me to accomplish all this for you in twenty-four minutes. Think of it! Twenty-four minutes! [*Clutches his head, flings off his coat and mops his brow with his handkerchief.*] It's preposterous! You're trying to impose on me because I'm an educated, refined person.

KARFUNKEL [*who was about to move back to the table, holding his cheek with his hand, now turns 'round, forgetting his toothache in his indignation*]: Imposing on an educated, refined person. *Das ist übermässig!* That is too much! Oh,

but I would like very much if only you would be properly imposed upon, you and the rest of the Russian intelligentsia, and made to work at last. Yes, to work and not simply to dream of a better life without raising a finger to win it.

YURKEVICH: That's not true. It's no fault of ours; we aren't allowed to work. Where could we work, anyhow? In the local government, or in the Duma?

KARFUNKEL: You aren't allowed? What nonsense! It's your own fault, because you're lazy and idle, you Russian intelligentsia. You are capable of waiting ten years where a few minutes would be sufficient. Just now you grudge twenty-four minutes to a sick man, twenty-four minutes of perfectly useless time. You have said that twenty-four minutes was not enough for you to undo a rotten little trunk and tie it up again. But do you know what time really is? I have studied the problem of time and I understand something of life. Have you ever heard of the law of condensed time, time full to the brim like a glass of water?

YURKEVICH [*clutching his head again*]: The law of condensed time. . . . How can time be either condensed or expanded?

KARFUNKEL: You do not even know that? You've been dreaming for years of a trifle like going abroad; it seemed a great event to you. But do you know how many events can be crowded into one half hour. You don't know? No, of course not, you spend whole years waiting for a single event. You receive, let us say, a letter, or sleep with some one else's wife and you have thought it is a great event, it will be enough for four years.

YURKEVICH: This is a madhouse! I'm going. I've no time to listen to your balderdash.

KARFUNKEL: You have no time? Is it possible? [*Pulls out a watch from his pocket and winds it up, whereupon the watch begins to strike melodiously.*] And what about the twenty-four minutes you grudged me? Take care, or else perhaps some of the events you are trying so hard to hide from may intrude on your twenty-four minutes. You don't know yet how many things can happen in twenty-four minutes. In that time one may find happiness, one may lose happiness, one may meet the love of one's life. Yes, yes—and one may even die, or cause someone else to die—all in the same twenty-four minutes. That's not quite the same thing as opening a trunk. Ha-ha-ha! Well, we'll see if you'll succeed in keeping your twenty-four minutes for yourself, since you grudged them to me. [*Goes out, laughing softly to himself.*]

YURKEVICH [*drops down thunderstruck into a chair*]: Find happiness? Lose happiness? Meet the love of one's life? . . . Kill someone? [*Jumps up.*] Devil take it! This is like a nightmare! I'd better go out on the platform and wait. [*Puts on his coat and with a great effort drags his trunk to the door.*] Let me get out into the fresh air, quick!

3

[*The door opens and SOPHIA PETROVNA comes in. She is a dark woman of about thirty, dressed in a black cloak and a veil, which she now throws back with an impatient gesture.*]

YURKEVICH [*recoiling in fright*]: Sophia Petrovna! Can it be?

SOPHIA PETROVNA [*trying to control her rage*]: You didn't expect to see me, did you?

YURKEVICH: I . . . I'm awfully glad. . . . I didn't know you'd come back from the country. . . . How are you, my dear?

SOPHIA PETROVNA [*ignoring his hand*]: No, you didn't know. You thought I was safe in the country and wouldn't be likely to hear anything, and you would have plenty of time to get away quietly? Yes, to go away with that sweetheart of yours, Marussya, or whatever she's called.

YURKEVICH: Good Heavens, what are you talking about? What Marussya? I'm travelling quite alone.

SOPHIA PETROVNA: And I found out, unluckily for you. But never mind, even if you don't love me any more, even if you never really loved me, I'm ready to forgive you—yes, ready and willing. But have you thought of the blow to my pride, have you thought of the terrible. . . .

YURKEVICH: I assure you, dear Sophia Petrovna—Sonya. . . .

SOPHIA PETROVNA: Can you even remotely imagine what I've lived through? The whole town was talking about you, everybody, except me, knew you were going away. I was the only one you didn't tell! [*Wringing her hands.*] Oh, the shame of it!

YURKEVICH [*desperately*]: But I'm really going to the Paris Exhibition—surely it's no crime! This is a regular nightmare—it's worse than a toothache.

SOPHIA PETROVNA: And this Marussya of yours, the woman

who's going with you— is she part of the nightmare, too?
Is she like a toothache, too?

YURKEVICH: I swear by all the saints. . . .

SOPHIA PETROVNA: Don't lie! Maria Ivanovna told me [*sits down and, burying her face in her handkerchief, bursts into tears*] . . . everything! Go away!

YURKEVICH: But it isn't true. Sonya, do calm down, please. Sonya! Good Lord, it would have been better to have undone three trunks, four trunks, even twenty—than this.

SOPHIA PETROVNA [*rising*]: To run away—secretly, from me, from the woman who gave you all a woman has to give!

YURKEVICH: Sonya! Please! [*Glancing 'round.*] What a scene, and the train will be here any minute!

SOPHIA PETROVNA: I gave you my love, my whole soul, my honour, and now, when everyone is talking scandal about me. . . . What? Someone coming? [*Pulls down her veil.*] To run away with another girl!

YURKEVICH [*in despair*]: But—my God! It's not true! I'm quite alone—can't you believe me?

SOPHIA PETROVNA: There are people coming. Well, you can go. Goodbye. I don't care whether you're running away alone or with someone. It's all the same to me now. When I came in and saw how terrified you were, I felt disgusted. I'd meant, if I found you together. . . . [*She takes out a small revolver from her bag*] I . . . thought . . . I . . . [*YURKEVICH recoils in horror.*] Goodbye—for ever!
[*Runs out, bumping into COUNT LUNDISHEV who is just*

hurrying in. YURKEVICH *sinks down, quite overcome, on his trunk.*]

4

YURKEVICH: Well, after a scene like that, a toothache would seem a pleasure.

LUNDISHEV [*a lively old man in a smart coat and a very flat cap*]: Devil take her! She nearly knocked me off my feet. A regular hurricane—not like a woman!

YURKEVICH [*sitting on his trunk—weak and numb*]: A hurricane. A toothache!—One and the same agony!

LUNDISHEV [*noticing YURKEVICH*]: Oh, thank goodness, you're still here. I beg your pardon, Mr. Yurkevich, I believe?

YURKEVICH [*rising*]: Yes, my name is Yurkevich—at your service.

LUNDISHEV: Delighted, delighted. I'm Lundishev—Count Lundishev . . . er . . . have been hoping for an opportunity, an admirer of yours in a way—heard you lecture at our club last winter, you spoke on mystical anarchism—or was it anarchistic mysticism, I forget which. Very nice, very nice, indeed. But that's not what I wanted to say. I came here in a terrible hurry—thank goodness, you haven't gone yet though! [*Stops out of breath.*]

YURKEVICH: You wanted to see me?

LUNDISHEV [*sitting down*]: Do you smoke? Well now—I've rushed here twenty versts from the country to see you. The point is this: Andrei Ivanovich, the headmaster of your high-school, dined with me yesterday and he hap-

pened to mention in the course of conversation that you were going to the Paris Exhibition. That gave me an idea. "When?" I asked him. "Why, tomorrow," said he, "if he hasn't gone already." So upon that I got into my carriage and drove to the station as fast as I could.

YURKEVICH: Is there some commission you want me to do for you?

LUNDISHEV: Yes, yes, that's it, that's it exactly. I want to entrust you, if I may, with a small but very interesting commission. I shall be eternally grateful to you if you would do it.

YURKEVICH: I'll do it with pleasure.

LUNDISHEV: If you wouldn't mind, my dear fellow, bringing me Princess Bulbul-el-Ghazar from Paris.

YURKEVICH: Pr—Pr—Princess Bulbul? [*His eyes bulge with astonishment.*]

LUNDISHEV [*laughing*]: Ha-ha-ha! Don't be alarmed—it won't be very difficult. This princess is nothing more than a charming—a—a—an enchanting—a—a—a—fascinating—a most wonderful hen. A hen—you understand?

YURKEVICH: A hen?

LUNDISHEV: Why, yes—a hen. I must tell you that I'm a passionate poultry-breeder. My estate, Lundishevka, is a veritable poultry town—it's something indescribable. There's the garden, you know, wire-netting, hen-houses, water and all the breeds of hens there are: Malays, Yokohamas, Brahmas, Cochin-Chinas, bantams, Plymouth-Rocks, Langshans, yellow, red, blue, white, tiny and huge ones—in a word, a poultryland. And what roosters! Oh, if

you could only see my Duc de Guise! Entirely black, as if dressed in black velvet, and such a splendid carriage—why, your Chaliapin is nothing to him, he could go on the stage any time.

YURKEVICH: Amazing, really.

LUNDISHEV: Yes, isn't it? And as to our princess. You'll understand, naturally, with what interest I follow the exhibitions and the news in magazines on poultry-raising, and so on. I used to send specimens to the exhibitions, I've got quite a lot of medals, diplomas and that sort of thing. Well, just about a week ago I got the latest magazine from Paris and what do you think? I discovered that among other marvels, a most wonderful and fascinating hen was to be exhibited. It's an Indian species—the Princess Bulbul-el-Ghazar, extremely rare, the only specimen in Europe; neither Rothschild nor Lord Durley have anything like it. Can you imagine how excited I was when I read this?

YURKEVICH: But what is there so remarkable about it? Forgive me, I'm an awful ignoramus, you know, about these things.

LUNDISHEV: What is there so remarkable about it? It's a bird of an Indian species, from Indore, not very well known even in India, but what a beauty! What a chest, what legs, what a head! And her feathers—a deep golden colour. She's a perfect poem!

YURKEVICH [*laughing*]: Oh, of course, if it's a poem. . . .

LUNDISHEV: And her name! Princess Bulbul-el-Ghazar, you know, out of the Arabian Nights. Well, as soon as I'd

read about this charmer, I sent a telegram to say I'd buy her, and another to my brother, Count Ivan, who's in Paris 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. How could I send the money when I did not know to whom I was to send it? You see? Then, quite unexpectedly, I heard that you were going there. Now, if you want to save me, my friend, take the money to Paris for me and bring back the bird. . . .

YURKEVICH [*hesitating*]: I don't know what to say—really. . . .

LUNDISHEV [*producing a letter*]: It's a pretty big sum, I must tell you—fifty thousand francs, that's eighteen thousand five hundred rubles in our money. Then, allowing for the box, the journey, and one thing and another—that'll make it about nineteen thousand rubles, let's say twenty thousand, perhaps, including the duty you'll have to pay and so on. Twenty thousand rubles altogether.

YURKEVICH: Twenty thousand rubles for a hen? For a mere hen?

LUNDISHEV: For a hen, of course, and not for an elephant. I can't see why you should be so surprised, either. Do you know that in order to catch the Princess Bulbul and bring her to Europe, an expedition had to be fitted out. It had to travel to the south of Indore, cross the Satpura Range, sail the River Chambal, penetrate the jungle, go through hair-raising experiences, escaping from tigers and

so on and so forth. I can tell you, the story reads like something out of the Thousand and One Nights.

YURKEVICH: Yes, yes, of course. You must excuse my ignorance. Still, twenty thousand rubles for a single hen!

LUNDISHEV: For a single hen? Why not? But I would like you to tell me whether you agree to do it or not?

YURKEVICH: Well, you see, I was going on a holiday, just to amuse myself, and now I'll have to hurry back with this hen. . . . You can see yourself. . . .

LUNDISHEV: Nonsense, it's a mere nothing. It'll only take a week and then you'll be able to afford to go back to Paris again, and stay as long as you like. You're a young man, I know you can't have too much spare cash, so I'm offering you three thousand for expenses and commission. Do you agree?

YURKEVICH: Three thousand rubles? It seems a fortune to me!

LUNDISHEV [*laughing*]: So you see—then give me your hand on it. I'm greatly obliged to you, my dear fellow. Well, here's the envelope, there are exactly twenty-three thousand rubles in it. The address and everything are inside. [*Hands him an envelope.*] I'm very pleased, very pleased, indeed. [*Shakes hands with him.*]

YURKEVICH: No, really, I couldn't. It's really like something out of the Arabian Nights.

LUNDISHEV: Princess Bulbul-el-Ghazar. Ha-ha-ha! Never mind, don't be nervous. The main thing is: bring me my phoenix at all costs—you know that according to the fable 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 left you a few simple instructions in here. Do, please, take care of the bird and see that she doesn't get sick on the way, for God's sake.

YURKEVICH: Oh, of course. I shall take the greatest care.

LUNDISHEV: The most important thing of all is her dwelling. The cage must be cleaned out at least twice a day. Then it must be sprinkled with sand and pine-needles and ash. Then there's her diet. Give her plenty of vegetables, lettuce, cauliflower, and an occasional cutlet; best of all, let her peck a bit of wheat now and again. This is how you ought to arrange it, my dear fellow: give her a cutlet and some buckwheat porridge and a little lettuce salad for her dinner. For breakfast and supper let her peck at wheat or millet. She should have either water or milk to drink. Yes, and you should give her a little lime and some crushed eggshells. But the main thing, *mon cher*, is to beware of draughts. Reserve a first-class carriage for her.

YURKEVICH: Oh, of course, don't worry about that. I shall do everything you wish.

LUNDISHEV: Well, *adieu* for the present. *Au revoir!* I have to see the station-master for a minute, but I'll run in to see you again before I go. Oh yes, and see that this remains a secret between us, otherwise, you know, people will begin to gasp and groan like you did: "What, twenty thousand for a mere hen? How sinful!" I haven't even told my wife. Better keep it dark. [*Goes toward the door.*] *Bonne chance!*

YURKEVICH: Good luck!

LUNDISHEV [*returning*]: Oh, yes, I was nearly forgetting—about fleas. I'm asking you this as a special favour: do search her well for fleas, my dear fellow, in case she should get any of those vile insects on herself. But the main thing is to avoid draughts. If she should get diarrhea, give her a little red wine. Now I must go! [*He shakes hands with YURKEVICH. At that moment the door opens softly and SOPHIA PETROVNA peeps in in time to catch the following words.*] Take care of her, *mon cher*, take care of my princess, my treasure, my precious, I'm entrusting my red-haired beauty to your tender care.

SOPHIA PETROVNA [*to herself*]: Ah, so that's how it is?

There's a princess in it! And she's red-haired! I knew it!

YURKEVICH: Oh, I'll take as much care of her as if she were the apple of my eye, you can be sure.

LUNDISHEV: Mind you reserve a separate first-class carriage.

. . . If she wants a bath, let her have one, and you might rub down her chest and legs from time to time.

SOPHIA PETROVNA [*as before*]: Oh! shameless! Absolutely lost to all sense of decency!

LUNDISHEV: Yes, and don't forget to search her for fleas from time to time.

SOPHIA PETROVNA [*as before*]: Really, this is too much! You wait, you scoundrel! [*Disappears.*]

5

LUNDISHEV: Well, I'm going. *Adieu.* [*Disappears.*]

YURKEVICH [*alone*]: What luck! What extraordinary,

miraculous luck! Three thousand rubles, freedom, joy, life! Why, I can send that cursed high-school to the devil, travel for a couple of years, go to Italy, and get my book published. God, what luck! And it has all come about through this dear little hen of a Princess Bulbul! [*The long drawn-out whistle of the engine is heard at a distance.*] How wonderful to be without a care in the world and listen to the distant whistle of the engine calling—calling— A quiet evening, a soft couch, the sunset glow fading outside the carriage-window, glimpses of twilight, blue fields, golden sparks flying out from the engine into the dusk, the scented smoke of birch-logs rising, the engine rushing onward with a shriek wakes the echoes, the clack-clack of the wheels—sending a thrill through the heart. And ahead—a magic world of glittering lights. Paris! Palaces, elegant carriages, women, a rainbow-hued holiday of art. And after that Italy, Venice, quiet canals, mysterious black gondolas . . . the blue sea. No, this must be a fairy-tale, a dream. Quick, let me get away before I awake. [*Seizes the trunk and drags it towards the door. At that moment a sharp ring can be heard and a glimpse of a lighted train as it puffs and rattles past. The door of the waiting-room opens and two or three passengers with bundles and valises enter. Then another rushes in, crying.*] “Come along quick—it’s on another line, I’ve been looking for you everywhere!” [*Upon which they all rush out. Two ladies enter, followed by a porter carrying a mountain of baggage. The ladies pass on into the Ladies’ Room.*]

THE PORTER [*in passing*]: One moment, sir, and I’ll take

your things. Don't worry, yours is a little late. [*Goes out.*
LIDA *enters.* *She is a very young and pretty girl with red-gold hair. She goes over to the table and begins to tidy her hair before the glass, after that she moves away in the direction of the Ladies' Room. YURKEVICH hastens up to her.*]

YURKEVICH: Do my eyes deceive me or—is it Lida? Lydia Pavlovna!

LIDA [*turning*]: Ah! Alexei Semyonovich!

YURKEVICH [*taking both her hands in his*]: Good Heavens! it's you—you. . . . [*Kisses her hands.*] You here? What brought you here, Lida? . . .

LIDA: Fancy you remembering me!

YURKEVICH: You're surprised at my boldness, at my tenderness. Yes—when you come to think of it—how very little I actually knew you. [*He takes hold of her hands again and makes her sit down.*] Do you remember that time in Kursk? To think that I knew you for only four months, even less—of my life, and that it was so long ago. It's two whole years since I've seen you. I remember every minute, every single minute that I spent near you, so near and yet so far from you. . . .

LIDA: You—you, yourself didn't want. . . .

YURKEVICH: And when I was transferred from Kursk and I had to say goodbye to your people, there was so much I wanted to say to you. . . . You held out your hands to me and turned your head aside and I went away for ever. And then we started to write to each other and a belated tenderness flared up between us like an uncon-

trollable flame. And afterwards the letters ceased.

LIDA: I was in St. Petersburg . . . at college. [*The station-bell rings for the third time; the train, which has been standing by the windows, moves out.*]

YURKEVICH: If you only knew how often I've dreamed of meeting you—and now, to see you today. . . . But tell me, why can't one read anything in your eyes? Can it be possible that you didn't know then how madly in love I was with you? You must have known.

LIDA: Still, you went away—for ever.

YURKEVICH: Yes, I went away, but what of it? Why didn't you tell me, then, to stay.

LIDA: Ah, Alexei Semyonovich, what's past and gone can't be brought back again! I'm different now. These years in St. Petersburg, and the courses I've taken there have taught me a great deal, and opened my eyes to things I've never noticed before.

YURKEVICH: How do you happen to be here? You know, this is my home town.

LIDA: My people are living here.

YURKEVICH: Oh, yes, of course, I remember. But they're somewhere out in the country, aren't they?

LIDA: Yes, at Polynovka, ten versts from here.

YURKEVICH: Why are you alone?

LIDA: I'm not alone—Mamma and Katya are there. Are you going away?

YURKEVICH: Yes, what a nuisance! I've been dreaming for two years of meeting you and now, just when my wish is gratified, I have to leave in ten minutes for a far country.

LIDA [*sadly*]: You'll find other pleasures there, better than this.

YURKEVICH [*profoundly moved*]: Other pleasures! Lida, Lida—five minutes ago, before you came in, I was in a state of wild delight. Fortune had smiled on me, a rich gentleman offered me three thousand rubles for doing a trifling little commission. Three thousand rubles just for going to Paris and bringing him—er—something he wanted. You remember how I always dreamed of going abroad—this three thousand rubles seemed straight from heaven! But now, Lida, now since I've met you again, it all fades into insignificance. You'll be staying a long time, I suppose? I'll see you when I come back, won't I?

LIDA: Oh yes, I'll be here a long time. I'm getting married.

YURKEVICH [*rising*]: What? Getting married? My God, when? To whom? Lida!

LIDA: To a local government official from Polynovka. I got to know him in St. Petersburg. Kotelnikov is his name.

YURKEVICH: Kotelnikov? Are you going to marry that agitator? Can it be that you love him?

LIDA: We are linked not by love, but by our convictions. I told you St. Petersburg had taught me a great deal. I learnt, above all things, to respect those who fight for the truth.

YURKEVICH: Oh, well, of course, I can't hope to compare myself with a fighter for truth. Why, he's probably suffered persecution, been in exile, in prison. I haven't forgotten how you were always dreaming of revolution and all that sort of thing.

LIDA [*about to go*]: You must excuse me, Alexei Semyonovich, I have to go now. Goodbye!

YURKEVICH: No, no. It must all be a bad dream. When is your wedding?

LIDA: On Wednesday.

YURKEVICH: What, this Wednesday? In five days?

LIDA: Yes, it can't be postponed any longer because the fast of St. Peter and St. Paul begins soon.

YURKEVICH: But this is preposterous! Here am I going abroad in five minutes—and you going to be married in five days. And this after two years of absence, two years filled with dreams of you! You speak so casually about it. You respect him, you say. But what about love? What about love, Lida? Haven't you ever heard of it? Is there nothing about it in your newspapers?

LIDA [*rising from her seat and speaking under stress of emotion*]: Love, love? That's too much of a luxury, Alexei Semyonovich. Thousands of people haven't even bread, let alone love.

YURKEVICH: But still they love. You ought to be ashamed to deny love, you, who are so young and beautiful! Can it be that you never have loved anyone—not even then—in Kursk?

LIDA: Why do you say such things, Alexei Semyonovich? If you didn't see it yourself, how could I speak. What's the use of going over all that now? I'm heartless, am I not? I can only be silent, I can't express my emotions so poetically, so musically, as you. And if you didn't guess then.
. . . [*She sighs and turns away.*]

YURKEVICH [*excitedly*]: Oh, Lida, it can't be! It's impossible. Lida, my Lida! [*Seizes her hands.*] 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 with a boundless love. I love you madly, Lida!

LIDA [*rising*]: Goodbye.

YURKEVICH: Lida, if I was stupid then, let us not be unwise now. In ten minutes I have to leave for distant Paris. Paris, that once smiled so invitingly at me. But now I'm not going. Say the word and I shall stay with you for ever. Be my wife! Lida, I'd willingly give up all I value most for you. Only say the word you've kept back so long.

LIDA [*Impulsively throwing her arms around his neck*]: Oh, my darling, my love!

YURKEVICH: Lida . . . Lida! [*Kisses her.*] What marvellous, magical happiness! Let's go straight home to your mother, shall we?

LIDA: Yes, let's and then home, to you.

YURKEVICH: Yes, home to me, to me, my joy! Oh, how glorious! Could I have thought ten minutes ago that I would see those wonderful eyes so soon, the eyes I've dreamed of so often?

LIDA: But won't you be sorry to give up Paris?

YURKEVICH: You are all the happiness I want! You're my Princess Bulbul, my precious little hen. [*Laughs.*] 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-Ghazar. Tell me, have you ever been bitten by fleas?

LIDA [*naively*]: Oh, terribly. Do you know there are such hosts of them in the train. But how can you mention such things, you horrid boy!

6

PORTER [*enters*]: Are you the young lady from Polynovka? There's a conveyance been sent for you.

LIDA: Yes, I'm coming. [*To YURKEVICH.*] I'll be back in a moment.

YURKEVICH: Come on. Oh, but what about my things? and where?

PORTER: Your train will be here in a minute, sir. I'll just take the Count a bottle of mineral water he's asked me for and then I'll collect your things. . . . I won't be a second. [*Disappears.*]

YURKEVICH: Oh, yes, the Count. He's still here. Very well, I'll. . . .

LIDA: Come along, dear.

YURKEVICH: Run along, my love, I won't be a second. I must have a word with my . . . with this Count.

LIDA: Oh, all right. I'll come back in a minute. [*Runs out.*]

YURKEVICH [*left alone, clutches his head*]: . . . The train . . . the train. . . . I'm in a frightful muddle . . . it's all so strange. . . . A hen . . . Princess Bulbul . . . three thousand rubles . . . Lida. . . . The train will be here in five minutes, my train. . . . [*A whistle is heard far off.*] . . . Golden sparks flying past the carriage-

window . . . a soft couch . . . the distant whistle of the engine and the enchanted mirage coming nearer and nearer. But not to me: I'm not going. . . . I'm not going. . . . It's all no use now. [*Clutches his head.*] But perhaps I might still be able to go. Perhaps! No, no it's out of the question, her wedding-day is fixed. Away with such thoughts. My happiness is here—it's Lida, I won't give her up to anyone! [*Paces up and down the room.*] Well, it looks as though I'll have to give the Count his money back. Yes. [*Takes the envelope out of his pocket.*] I've to give him back the twenty-three thousand rubles. Twenty-three thousand rubles—and what does he want with them. . . . He'll only throw them away on something else, the swine. The injustice of it! I've never seen such a sum—not even in my dreams—while for him it's just a trifle, the price of a hen, he'd throw it away on a moment's caprice. Twenty-three thousand rubles. It's a fortune, it means freedom, happiness, travel abroad, the sea. And for him—a silly little hen. Supposing he should have a stroke just now—he should have had one long ago by right—the money would be mine. He hasn't told anyone—not even his wife—that he gave it to me. [*Walks up and down in great agitation.*] Who was it said something a little while ago about a stroke, or paralysis? [*Rubs his forehead.*] Ah yes, it was that queer German with the toothache.

PORTER [*comes in bearing a tray with a bottle of mineral water and a glass, and sets it down on the table*]: Your train will be here right away.

YURKEVICH: I've changed my mind. I'm not going today, after all. Here you are. [*Hands him some money.*]

PORTER: Thank you kindly, sir. Would you like me to get you a cab?

YURKEVICH: Yes . . . no. I don't want one! Who is this mineral water for?

PORTER [*at the table, opening the bottle*]: The old gentleman, Count Lundishev, ordered it. He said to serve it in here. [*YURKEVICH paces about the room.*] Is this your pill, sir?

YURKEVICH: What pill? [*Excited.*] Where?

PORTER [*stretching out his hand and exhibiting the pill*]: Here on the table. It must have rolled away.

YURKEVICH [*hardly able to control his excitement*]: That's it, that's it. The twelfth pellet—belonging to the German with the toothache.

PORTER: What, sir?

YURKEVICH: Yes, it's mine, it's my pellet. [*Snatches it from the porter.*] I lost it. Thank you. You needn't wait. [*The porter goes out.*]

YURKEVICH [*stands well to the front of the stage, with the pellet in his hand*]: We were looking for it on the floor and all the time it was on the table, he'd dropped it without noticing. The twelfth pellet. The twelfth pellet. What a fearful temptation. One might almost think it had been done on purpose. [*Goes up to the table.*] The bottle's open. A stroke or paralysis, that freak of a fellow said, and not a single doctor would be able to discover the poison. And then . . . then the twenty-three thousand

would be mine. Riches, freedom and Lida! All mine! But what a dreadful disgrace! Could I really sink so low? Someone's coming. He hasn't more than a year to live, anyhow, this disgusting old fellow. People are coming. Well, here goes, curse you! [*Goes swiftly up to the table, puts the pill into the bottle and, glancing around, corks it and shakes it. The door opens. YURKEVICH starts back from the table, as LUNDISHEV enters.*]

7

LUNDISHEV [*gaily*]: Well, your train will be here in a moment. [*Sits down at the table.*] I'm relying on you, my dear chap. See that you hurry back as quickly as possible, and then you can go there again and enjoy your holiday. [*Takes hold of the bottle.*]

[*At that moment OLYA CHEREVKO enters. She is a young and pleasant-looking woman, tidily but poorly dressed. She approaches LUNDISHEV timidly.*]

OLYA: Valerian Sergeyeovich, may I speak to you a moment, please?

LUNDISHEV [*setting down the bottle and turning round*]: Eh? What? Ah, it's you, Olya. [*Coldly.*] What is it you want?

OLYA [*hesitating*]: I don't want anything, but the children, it's pitiful to see them. Won't you help me a little, Valerian Sergeyeovich?

LUNDISHEV: You? Help you? [*Spitefully.*] But what's your husband, the famous striker, doing?

OLYA: You knew he'd been arrested, didn't you, Valerian Sergeyeovich. We haven't had a penny for two months now.

LUNDISHEV: Aha! So he's been arrested, you say? That's how it is, is it?

OLYA: The children are hungry. There's not a thing left in the house to sell. Help us, Valerian Sergeyeovich. I'm not asking for money. If you'd only give us a couple of hens from your farm, the children would have a few eggs to eat at least. You have so many.

LUNDISHEV: Aha! That's how it is, is it? Well, let me tell you, my dear. [*In a more energetic tone.*] I'll give them to whom I choose, and I'd give them to a beggar on the road sooner than to you. You say the children are hungry? Why did you marry that rebel, then? Were you so badly off with us? Were you? I'm to give you a hen, am I, and tomorrow your husband will come and set fire to my estate. No, no, my dear, you've made your bed—now lie in it. You can go home. I've nothing to say to rebels and revolutionaries. [*OLYA sighs and goes away.*] Did you see that woman? She was brought up by my wife. The girl lived in a perfect paradise with us until she took up with the local engine-driver, an out-and-out rebel. Ha! And now he's been caught red-handed. Phew! It's made me so indignant to think of it, I'm actually sweating. Oh well, goodbye, my dear fellow, I wish you the best of luck. [*Takes up the bottle again.*] Phew!

YURKEVICH [*to himself*]: What a swine! I can see it plainly now. [*Louder.*] Sorry—er—excuse me, Count. [*To himself again.*] Good God, he's just going to drink it. [*Nerv-*

ously.] Perhaps you wouldn't mind if I didn't go today, but in three or four days instead?

UNDISHEV [*sets down the bottle and jumps up*]: Look here, are you joking? You must have taken leave of your senses. Phew! I'm afraid, as it is, the hen has been bought up before now, and you'll be too late. Lord Durley or the Prince of Wales may have bought her. Every moment is precious and he's. . . . Tell me definitely you're not going and I'll send the French tutor instead. [*Sits down again.*]

URKEVICH [*in alarm*]: No, no. It doesn't matter, I can go today. Yes, of course I can. I was only. . . . [*To himself.*] Well, drink then, you swine, and go to the devil!

UNDISHEV: What are you bothering me for if you can go? [*Tilts the bottle.*]

URKEVICH: Stop, don't touch it! I think I see a fly in your glass.

UNDISHEV [*setting down the bottle again*]: A fly? Where? Oh, yes, and, by the way, you ought to give her some insects now and again, my dear. Catch a few flies for her, a May-bug or so, and worms—hens are so fond of worms, you know. [YURKEVICH *raises his clenched fist and takes a step towards the table.*] That's all, I believe. I hope you'll be able to catch a nice little "chicken" for yourself in Paris. He-he-he! [*Pours out the water and raises the glass to his lips.*] To your "chicken" and mine!

8

[LIDA *enters, unobserved by YURKEVICH and lingers on the threshold.*]

YURKEVICH: To the devil with you and your hen and your Princess Bulbul. To hell with your money. [*He flings the heavy envelope at LUNDISHEV, knocks the glass out of his hand and overturns the bottle. The Count springs up in horror.*] Here are your thousands and I hope they choke you, they've driven me to the verge of killing you, you confounded ape! Ah-ah! To hell with your Paris—I'll never see it now! A-ah!

LUNDISHEV [*wipes his face; he is trembling all over*]: You. . . you must be mad! You must be quite crazy! Tomorrow I shall tell Andrei Ivanovich, the headmaster, to dismiss you. . . I . . . I'll write to the trustee.

[*YURKEVICH rushes at him with upraised fist. The Count runs away in terror.*]

YURKEVICH [*looks wildly around and catches sight of LIDA standing horror-stricken and bewildered*]: Lida! Lida! [*Runs up to her and catches hold of her hands.*] Lida, I'm frightened. Save me, my little girl! Lida, if you only knew, oh, if you only guessed what I was about to do! [*Trembling and sobbing he falls on her neck.*]

LIDA: Alexei Semyonovich, calm yourself, my dear. I can see you're terribly upset. Forget what we were speaking of. I heard you—you were angry because you thought you wouldn't be able to go to Paris. There was a moment—but—. It was only a moment's distraction. Goodbye. [*At this moment the train flashes and rattles past the windows from the right. Bells ring. People begin to hurry past.*] See, there's your train! Go quickly! Go!

YURKEVICH [*gives a despairing cry*]: Lida! Lida! Are you

casting me off too? [*The door opens and SOPHIA PETROVNA glides in and stands listening.*] Lida, my love, don't leave me, don't desert me, you're the only joy left to me in life.

9

SOPHIA PETROVNA [*comes swiftly forward, throwing back her veil*]: Aha! So this is your princess, this is the mistress you hid from me. And you were not ashamed to lie to me, to tell me you were going alone, you weren't ashamed to run away from me with a painted hussy you picked up in the street!

LIDA [*running to the door*]: Oh, how terrible! What a disgrace!

YURKEVICH [*rushing at SOPHIA with his fist raised*]: You low, despicable creature! Silence, or I'll kill you! I'll kill you, I say!

SOPHIA PETROVNA [*scornfully*]: Oho, you'll kill me, will you? [*LIDA runs out.*] Go home at once!

[*The bell rings for the third time, the whistle sounds, and the train moves slowly out.*]

YURKEVICH [*clutching his head*]: The train, the Princess Bulbul. Twenty-three thousand rubles . . . twenty-three thousand . . . Venice! Paris! The enchanted mirage! Happiness, freedom, fame. The myriad twinkling lights ahead. Lida, Lida, Lida! "Time to find happiness and lose it again, time to meet the love of one's life . . . in twenty-four minutes." And the clack-clack of the wheels and the engine rushing onwards. Through night and day. The

train, my train. Away with you, my train! [*He pushes aside the astounded SOPHIA PETROVNA and runs to the door, but suddenly recoils in horror at the sight of KARFUNKEL standing in the doorway, laughing softly and winding his watch.*]

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* Your train has gone already. I hope they have not been tedious these twenty-four minutes, young man. Is your watch right? It is not a little fast, is it? And my toothache has gone already.

YURKEVICH [*screaming*]: You're the devil himself! [*Falls down in a faint.*]

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* What nonsense! It's the easiest thing in the world to blame everything on the devil.

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

The same railway station in 1919.

I

[*A LIEUTENANT and a STATION-MASTER appear on the scene.*]

LIEUTENANT: Will the Kharkov train be in soon?

STATION-MASTER: As usual—five-forty.

LIEUTENANT: And the Shepetovka train?

STATION-MASTER: Four-twenty. Only it's half an hour late.

LIEUTENANT: It's always late. Must be comrades and committees running the locomotives. Waiting for the Bolsheviks. Well, we'll see. Come along into the office, I have to take over the station.

[*They go off.*]

2

[*YURKEVICH appears. He is now about thirty-two or three. He is evidently in a disturbed state of mind. He pulls a letter out of his pocket and reads it. Then he puts it away and paces nervously up and down the room, smoking.*]

YURKEVICH: Can it be possible? Lida—my golden Princess Bulbul-el-Ghazar, my dream-girl, whom I lost through

my own stupidity on this very station seven years ago. She remembers me, perhaps even loves me still. . . . What pleasure it will be to see her again after all these years . . . and what years!

[KARFUNKEL enters, elegantly dressed as before but in a different coat. He has a valise in his hand. He looks at his watch and clicks his tongue disapprovingly.]

KARFUNKEL: Hm! *Alle tausend!* [Raises his watch to his ear, listens and then shakes his head.] My watch is slow. [Pulls another watch out of his pocket.] *Aber nein. Sie geht recht.* Pardon, do you know when the Warsaw train will be in?

YURKEVICH [absently]: I don't know exactly. I think it's thirty-five minutes late.

KARFUNKEL: *Was? Das ist unerhört.* I won't stand for it! I must the day after tomorrow be at my home in Heidelberg. Without fail. Oh, *verfluchte Heidenlärm*, oh, impossible country, which has never known how to value time! I cannot be late. [Suddenly, a melodious tinkling, as of an old music-box, is heard.]

YURKEVICH [glancing around in astonishment]: Whatever's that? Where's that music coming from? Like a clock chiming. . . . [Passes his hand over his brow.] Where have I heard that music before?

KARFUNKEL [pulling another watch from his pocket as the tinkling becomes louder]: *Alle tausend!* I cannot be late.

YURKEVICH [retreats in astonishment]: Good Heavens! It's you! You've crossed my path again.

KARFUNKEL: *Was? Was wollen Sie?* [*Winds up his watch with a key.*]

YURKEVICH: Of course it's you! The watchmaker with the toothache, who. . . .

KARFUNKEL [*looking at YURKEVICH from under his brows*]: Who gave you a little lesson seven years ago not to hurry and taught you to value every minute of your life.

YURKEVICH: I wish I'd never seen you or your lessons! They cost me dear. I shudder still, whenever I think of that evening.

KARFUNKEL: *Aber* what has that to do with me? I am but a modest scholar and watchmaker. I have told you then that I understood something of life and its laws. But there is nothing surprising in that I am able to tempt the dog out from behind the stove.

YURKEVICH: Yes, but how did you know, how did you discover all this?

KARFUNKEL: Know? What did I know?

YURKEVICH: How did you know that so many things would happen to me? So many tragic and astonishing things?

KARFUNKEL: Well, but this is simple mathematics, ordinary calculation, a law. Events are either few and far between or come crowding in. Life is a pack of cards, in which the trumps either come one after another or are absent, and perhaps only a six or a deuce is there. Time is either perfectly empty—a whole year without a single event—or crowded with different adventures that come one after another quite unexpectedly.

YURKEVICH [*meditatively*]: Yes, that sounds simple enough,

I should think. But still, how did you know that all those things would happen to me that very evening?

KARFUNKEL: But it is not difficult at all. You told me yourself then that you had lived a dull existence for many years. And suddenly—you are to go abroad. To the attentive mind this means much. I understood at once that for you a zone of condensed time was at hand, when events would race after each other as closely as a shoal of herrings on their way to the breeding ground.

YURKEVICH [*laughing*]: Yes, it sounds very much like the truth. . . . But at that time it seemed to me as if you had sent all these events on my head to pay me back for my indifference to your toothache. Oh, by the way, how is your toothache now? I have the drops with me if you want them.

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* You can drop them on your own tongue, if you like! Such stupid talk. It's a train I want, not drops, just now.

YURKEVICH [*laughing*]: Exactly like I was then. Our roles have been reversed, *mein Herr*. Now I can advise you not to hurry or to rely too much on time. Time is too crowded now for us—full of war, revolution.

KARFUNKEL [*growing angry*]: *Salbaderei!* How can one compare? *Ich bin der Meister der Zeit!* I am the master of time. I have kept him in my hand and made my watch move as I wished.

YURKEVICH: Beware, *mein Herr!* There is a master who is stronger than you.

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* What nonsense! There is no master stronger than I am.

YURKEVICH: Yes, there is, *mein Herr*—and it is the Revolution. It has stopped the watches of all kinds of people and forced them to live and die by its great timepiece, without consulting their wishes. It has put an end for ever to the easy-going lazy life we have been leading until now. Oh, now we shall never be dull any more, the Revolution has brought us so many adventures and events which make your toothache and my adventures of that evening look like child's play. Now we know, without having to ask you, what condensed time is; the days are too crowded now.

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* The Revolution was badly needed for you, for the rotten Russian intelligentsia, in order to drive the laziness and idleness out of you. The Revolution has not given you nearly enough knocks yet, but for me she is neither terrible nor necessary—*alle tausend!* [*Goes out angrily.*]

YURKEVICH: You don't like it. Wait, *lieber Herr*. Once you spoiled the show for me—see that you don't get into a mess yourself.

3

[COUNT LUNDISHEV comes in, followed by a PORTER carrying a huge pile of luggage. The COUNT has altered very little.]

LUNDISHEV: One, two, three, four—yes, they're all here, I think. Take these two pieces to the luggage-van. Come back quickly. Here are the tickets, look sharp!

PORTER: Don't worry, sir. There's plenty of time! [*Goes out.*]

LUNDISHEV: You've nothing to worry about, of course. You're probably counting the hours till the Bolsheviks come. Phew! [*Catches sight of YURKEVICH.*] Bah! Whoever's this? Is it you, M'sieu Yurkevich? How strange we should meet like this!

YURKEVICH [*coldly*]: Excuse me, but really, after what happened the last time we met. . . .

LUNDISHEV: Oh, let bygones be bygones. We've lived through so much since then that a slight misunderstanding. . . .

YURKEVICH: Yes, that's so. . . . It's hard to believe that so many things have passed over our heads. . . .

LUNDISHEV: Yes, and *what* things! War! Revolution! [*Sighs.*] I haven't seen you since then. You were out at the front, very likely?

YURKEVICH: Yes, of course. . . . But are you going away?

LUNDISHEV: Yes, I'm going to Paris for good. To my brother Ivan.

YURKEVICH: Not really? But what about your estate then, and your famous poultry farm? Surely you aren't going to give it up?

LUNDISHEV: Oh, but it's all ruined, you know. The estate's been burned down, the poultry farm destroyed. If you only knew the damage those scoundrelly muzhiks have done. The village roasted and boiled my fowls for a whole week. Beggars and vagabonds, who hadn't set eyes on meat for ten years, gorged themselves on my White Wyandottes

and Rhode Island Reds. They stewed my priceless bantams and Cochinchinas, and valuable breeds of cocks that had cost two hundred rubles apiece. Six men died of over-eating. No, I've had enough of all this. I've sold out, collected what valuables I had and now I'm off to Paris!

YURKEVICH: Will you start another poultry-farm there?

LUNDISHEV: You may be sure I shall. On my brother Ivan's estate. Oh, and by the way, the Princess Bulbul—you remember the famous hen I told you about—has appeared in Paris again. Yes, I read the news myself in the papers. I'll secure her this time, for certain.

YURKEVICH: Well, I wish you every success!

LUNDISHEV: Thanks. Yes, and what about you? Do you mean to say you haven't found your own little hen yet? Your runaway with the golden curls? Did you never meet again?

YURKEVICH [*growing agitated*]: No. For seven years I've searched Russia for her—in vain. They told me she was in the war; then, after the Revolution, someone saw her in Moscow. It was even said that she became a Communist.

LUNDISHEV: No! You don't say so? And she looked like such a modest girl.

YURKEVICH: And a curious coincidence, I got a letter today quite unexpectedly from her, from Kharkov.

LUNDISHEV: You don't say so!

4

[*Suddenly disturbing sounds are heard. Bells, especially the telephone, ring imperiously. Doors bang. Several worried-*

looking railway employees and officers pass quickly through the room.]

LUNDISHEV [*jumping up in alarm*]: What's the matter? Some kind of an alarm. Perhaps something untoward has happened at the front? God forbid.

YURKEVICH: It's nothing special. Don't be alarmed.

LUNDISHEV: It's easy enough to say don't be alarmed, but I've heard things aren't going any too well with us. Believe me, I'm counting the minutes till I see the last of this accursed country. But, pardon me, I interrupted you. What next? You say you had a letter from her?

YURKEVICH: Yes, today. She writes to say she's coming on the Kharkov train. Within half an hour, that means. You can imagine how excited I am. After seven years of silence and useless searching, suddenly today fate has placed her in my path once more.

LUNDISHEV: Hm . . . fate . . . Yes. I haven't much faith in the gifts of fate, my young friend. They're something like those children's toys—you know the sort of thing: you open a pretty box, thinking it has sweets in it and then bang—to your great surprise—a devil with horns pops out of it.

YURKEVICH: Really, Count, you ought to be ashamed to say such things.

LUNDISHEV: Yes, but I'm quite right, my dear chap. After all, you haven't seen her for seven years. How do you know what she's like now? Heaven help us, she may even be a Communist. You think she's a quiet, demure little chick, chu-u-uck, chuck-chuck, chuck-chuck, chuck-chuck

and for all you know she may fly out at you and bite your head off. He-he-he!

YURKEVICH: Well, I don't mind if she does. It would be a pleasure to die for her.

[*If he LIEUTENANT comes in again, glances about, and goes up to LUNDISHEV.*]

LIEUTENANT: Ah, how do you do, Your Excellency? Are you going far?

[*YURKEVICH retires and sits down at the table. The waiter brings him a bottle of beer.*]

LUNDISHEV: Yes, I'm going to pay a visit to my brother Ivan, in Paris. How are you getting on, Lieutenant?

LIEUTENANT: Oh, all right, Count, we aren't down-hearted yet. Everything's in order. Our pulses are still throbbing, so to speak.

LUNDISHEV: Yes, your mind is running to girls, I expect. But I've heard [*lowers his voice*] things are not going well at the front. Is it true there's a breach there? You wouldn't believe how upset I was to hear of it.

LIEUTENANT: Nonsense, there's been nothing of the kind. What sort of a breach?

LUNDISHEV: But the Bolsheviks are driving us back again. They say even Oryol's been taken by the Bolsheviks.

LIEUTENANT: Don't believe it, Your Excellency, it's all nonsense. We gave them a lesson at Tsaritsin with Baron Wrangel's tanks that they won't forget in a hurry. When the Reds saw those tanks their hearts stood still. The blackguards! Think of them taking themselves seriously.

LUNDISHEV: Is that so? Well, I hope you are right. Although

I've heard that they wiped out a whole corps of our cavalry at Kamenno-Chernovsky.

LIEUTENANT: 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 fight, by spreading sedition in the enemy's rear. Only today we received word [*glances 'round and lowers his voice*], secretly, that a woman-spy of theirs is arriving on the Kharkov train today.

LUNDISHEV: No? So you're after her, are you? Hot on the scent, eh?

LIEUTENANT: You bet! She's some game!

LUNDISHEV: How will you recognize her? She's probably in disguise, incognito, made up with a false wig and all that sort of thing.

LIEUTENANT: Yes, I'm waiting for instructions. [*Looks at his watch.*] At present I know nothing beyond her name.

LUNDISHEV: Well, and what more do you need?

LIEUTENANT: Oh, that's not very much. You don't suppose she's got only one passport, do you?

LUNDISHEV: She'll be a Jewess, of course?

LIEUTENANT: No, she's Russian, surprisingly enough. Her name's Zvantzeva.

[YURKEVICH, *who is listening, gives a start and lets his glass fall.*]

5

[*Bell rings. KARFUNKEL hurries in. The PORTER follows. The LIEUTENANT paces the room.*]

PORTER [*to LUNDISHEV*]: Everything's ready, Your Honour.
I've checked the luggage.

LUNDISHEV [*jumping up*]: Eh? Oh yes, that's right.

PORTER: Yes, no need to worry, sir. The train is thirty-five minutes late. I'll come back in twenty minutes. [*Goes out.*]

YURKEVICH [*stands up, looking desperate*]: How terrible!

Lida. . . . Lida. . . . What shall I do? How can I warn her of her danger?

KARFUNKEL [*to YURKEVICH*]: Thirty-five minutes! I cannot afford to lose half an hour through your lack of order. It is preposterous! Disgusting!

YURKEVICH [*without paying any attention*]: The train is late. Thirty-five minutes late. That means. . . . 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 the explanation.

YURKEVICH: But why are you bothering me? I'm not the station-master, I'm a passenger like yourself.

[*The telephone rings impatiently once more.*]

KARFUNKEL: No, not like me. I must, *ich soll*, I must be in Heidelberg on the thirteenth. *Salbaderei!*

LUNDISHEV: Listen, listen, they're ringing up again! Find out what's the matter there, Lieutenant.

LIEUTENANT: That'll do, Count, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, you're starting a panic. [*Hastens out.*]

LUNDISHEV: Oh yes, it's all right for you to talk about panic. You only think of your pulse. Stop, Lieutenant! [*Runs after the LIEUTENANT.*]

KARFUNKEL: They will not dare to delay me. I shall *telegrafieren* to the ambassador. Thirty-five minutes. Ha! I cannot lose half an hour. I will give a hundred—five hundred dollars for this half hour, if the train will only come in time. [*Goes out.*]

YURKEVICH: And I would give everything in the world to prevent its coming in at all. What shall I do? How can I save her? Should I send a telegram? But where? To whom? Oh, what a frightful situation!

6

[TARATUTA, a chauffeur, comes in with a bottle and a glass in his hands. He wears a leather suit and goggles pushed up on the brim of his leather cap. He sets the bottle and glass on the table and sits down.]

TARATUTA: Pity I didn't leave enough money for some brandy. Now I'll have to drink this stuff. [*Catches sight of YURKEVICH and jumps up.*] Why, who's this? Comrade Yurkevich—your honour. Well, this is a bit of luck, seeing you!

YURKEVICH: Taratuta! Where've you come from? How is it you aren't at the front?

TARATUTA: Oh, don't remind me of it. I've been a free cossack for six months now. Ha-ha! A driver, a chicken-killer and fork out your money, please. This is the life for me. Eat, drink and be merry—for tomorrow! . . . Every day brings a new bargain: I buy up all the kerosene and all the butter, run over all the dogs, hens and ducks in Christendom. No wonder they call me "Taratuta—

the chicken-pest!" Ha-ha-ha! Here today and gone tomorrow! And a new girl every day!

YURKEVICH: Wait a minute, I have an idea! Listen, Taratuta, can you help me?

TARATUTA: You? You bet I can. Butter, oil, bacon, chickens, girls—anything in the world. You don't suppose I've forgotten how you saved me in the trenches?

YURKEVICH: What's the next station before this on the Kharkov line?

TARATUTA: On the Kharkov line? Chabany.

YURKEVICH: How many versts?

TARATUTA: Twenty-three.

YURKEVICH: Twenty-three! Then we're saved. Listen, Taratuta. Do you see this gold watch? It cost a hundred and fifty rubles. I'll make you a present of it if you'll drive me to Chabany in twenty minutes, before the Kharkov train comes in. Will you?

TARATUTA: You bet your life I will. But what for?

YURKEVICH: Oh, look sharp, Taratuta. It's a matter of life and death, you must understand, someone's life's at stake. I have to meet a friend of mine on this train and warn her not to come here. [*Clutches TARATUTA by the arm and glances about furtively.*] The police are after her. They'll pounce on her as soon as ever she. . . .

TARATUTA [*with lively interest*]: Come on! I'll be there in fifteen minutes. But what do I want with your watch? I'll only sell it and drink up the money, same as I drink up everything in the world. I don't want to know the time, do I?

YURKEVICH: Quick, quick, Taratuta!

TARATUTA: All right, stand me to a bottle of brandy, and we're quits. As for time, I lost count of it long since, way back at the front.

YURKEVICH: Let's start, Taratuta.

TARATUTA [*springing up from his place*]: This very minute! Just let me change the tire . . . and we're off. Wait here for me.

7

[*At that moment there is a noise outside the door and four women burst into the room, three of them bearing the mangled bodies of hens in their hands, and the fourth, a dead cat. At the sight of TARATUTA they give vent to terrifying howls of indignation.*]

1ST WOMAN: Aha, here he is, the curse of Christ on him, the murderer! The chicken-killer. God blast his soul!

YURKEVICH . [*alarmed*]: What's this? What do they want?

2ND WOMAN: Running over people's hens with never so much as a "by your leave." Are you going to kill off our poor fowls every day, then, you heathen?

YURKEVICH: Come on quick, Taratuta, else we'll be late!

1ST WOMAN: And such a lovely hen as he ran over, blast his soul, she'd eat out of my hand, so she would, and lay every blessed day of her life. May he burn in hell for it!

TARATUTA: Be off with you! Clear out, do you hear!

2ND WOMAN: Oho, now we've got to clear out, have we? Oh, no, my boy, you've made a mistake this time!

3RD WOMAN: We're not going to let you slip away so easily, young Satan!

YURKEVICH: For God's sake, Taratuta, come quick! Every moment's of value!

2ND WOMAN: I wouldn't take a thousand for my lovely hen. I'll fetch you up before the court, you godless Bolshevik, for destroying our fowls.

3RD WOMAN: I'll cut your throat for running over my best rooster!

TARATUTA: Just listen to them, the sluts! I'll run over the lot of you next time, you draggie-tailed hussies. I'll bump you all off.

ALL THE WOMEN: Aha, and you're giving us a lot of lip into the bargain! Come on, lasses, go for him, let's drag him to the police!

[*With shrieks and abuse they advance on TARATUTA.*]

YURKEVICH: Taratuta, quick, quick—oh, it's too late!

TARATUTA: Be off with you, damn your souls. [*Retreats towards the door.*] Give them a Kerensky note each, your honour, I haven't any money on me. [*Thrusts the women aside and disappears. They immediately transfer their attention to YURKEVICH.*]

YURKEVICH [*pulling out money*]: Here you are! Take the money and go!

1ST WOMAN: What—a "Kerensky" for that grand layer of mine? . . . Why, the eggs alone. . . .

2ND WOMAN: I wouldn't take a thousand for my lovely hen! . . .

3RD WOMAN: And my rooster's worth. . . .

4TH WOMAN: There wasn't another tom-cat like mine in the whole town; he'd nearly talk to you, the darling!

[*They press around YURKEVICH, who is deafened by their raucous cries.*]

YURKEVICH [*flinging notes right and left in desperation*]:

Here! Take this [*The women grab the notes, without discontinuing their shouts.*] Here, here's more for you and for God's sake, clear out!

[*There is a scramble and then the women go out abusing the men.*]

YURKEVICH [*stands there alone, panting and dishevelled*]:

What a day! Lida, the letter, the police, Taratuta, the mangled hens, the tom-cats. Just when every moment is precious, when I've got to rush off in a car to save Lida, the devil throws hens under my wheels again.

8

[*The LIEUTENANT reappears accompanied by a COLONEL.*

They are followed by LUNDISHEV and KARFUNKEL. The COLONEL casts suspicious glances about him.]

LUNDISHEV: Now at last we'll find out the truth. My dear Colonel, won't you please tell us what it's all about. What is the matter? What's all the alarm about? Will there be a train to Shepetovka today?

YURKEVICH [*Looking at his watch*]: There are still five minutes left. But where on earth has he got to, the rascal?

KARFUNKEL: I, I am *nach* Shepetovka. I cannot wait. [*Pulls a watch out of his pocket and winds it up.*] *Salbaderei!*

COLONEL: Excuse me, Count, I'm afraid I can't explain just now. This is no time for that sort of thing. [*Leads the LIEUTENANT down to the front of the stage.*] Bad news. Our men have been defeated near Dmitrovsk. There's a breach in the front at Belgorodka. But that's not the point just now. [*Glances around at YURKEVICH.*] That woman-Bolshevik will be here any minute. She's got to be put out of the way at once.

LIEUTENANT: Yes, sir.

COLONEL: She has very important information about our position and the plans of the Bolsheviks.

YURKEVICH [*walks nervously up and down the room, glancing frequently at his watch*]: Wherever can the fellow be? Seven minutes gone already. What shall I do? We may miss each other if I go. The train will be here right away.

KARFUNKEL [*looking at his watch*]: Only seven minutes have passed. Will the train ever come? What shall I do?
Salbaderei!

YURKEVICH [*going up to Karfunkel and seizing him by the arm*]: You said you were a master of time—you know its laws, you say. Tell me, is there no means of holding it back for, say, twenty, for even ten minutes, to prevent the train that's bringing me torment and death—from coming in at all?

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* But what is time? For you it goes too quickly, yes? And for me the other way around, very slowly. Such time is only what we feel, it does not exist in reality.

YURKEVICH: But is there any other kind of time, then?

KARFUNKEL: Yes, there is, and I know it. It is the real, true time, which other people do not notice because they do not know how to measure it. Only I, Tobias Karfunkel, know it. I, who have made my own watches, watches that show, not what you think is the time, but the time that really is. Ha! *Die Uhr der Wahrhaftigen Zeit.*

YURKEVICH: You're crazy! It would drive anyone out of his mind to listen to your ramblings.

KARFUNKEL: Drive anyone out of his mind? *Salbaderei!* But it is not your mind the master requires, he listens only to the voice of his own genius.

9

LIEUTENANT: But how shall I know her, sir?

COLONEL: That's just the point. Do you see the civilian there in the grey hat? His name's Yurkevich. I have received information that she has written to him. He is to be searched and made to—you understand me, Lieutenant?

LIEUTENANT: Yes, I see. He's to be the decoy.

COLONEL: Exactly.

YURKEVICH [*to himself*]: I can't stand it any longer. I'd better go there. . . . [*Moves towards the door.*]

COLONEL [*blocking his path*]: Excuse me—one moment. Is your name Yurkevich?

YURKEVICH [*surprised*]: Yes. . . .

COLONEL: Will you please be good enough to show me the letter you received today.

YURKEVICH [*flaring up*]: But what right have you to demand such a thing?

COLONEL: What right? [*In a louder tone.*] Lieutenant, send the other people away please. Gentlemen, I must ask you to leave the room. Lieutenant!

LIEUTENANT: Now, then, gentlemen, please. [*Accompanies LUNDISHEV and KARFUNKEL to the door.*]

LUNDISHEV: But, look here—what reason have you for. . . .

KARFUNKEL: *Das ist unerhört!* How dare you?

[*The LIEUTENANT pushes both outside.*]

COLONEL [*to YURKEVICH*]: You heard, didn't you? Now show me the letter.

YURKEVICH: What letter? I protest.

COLONEL: Don't behave like a child—or an idiot. Don't oblige me to resort. . . . [*Pulls out his revolver.*]

YURKEVICH: This is an outrage. I shall complain. [*Takes out the letter and hands it over.*]

COLONEL [*snatches it and reads it quickly*]: Devil take her! It's typed. She's a clever hussy. So—you correspond with her? And do you know what that looks like to us? You're under arrest. Lieutenant!

YURKEVICH: But. . . . I haven't seen her for seven years.

COLONEL: Don't try to throw dust in our eyes. Your only chance now is to help us catch her.

YURKEVICH: What? You must be mad!

COLONEL: If you want to save yourself from being shot immediately, you must go out on the platform and meet her. See?

YURKEVICH [*triumphantly*]: Ah, so you don't know her by

sight. Well, you may be quite sure I'm not going to give her away to you. I'm going home this very minute.

[TARATUTA *runs in breathless. Both officers point their revolvers at YURKEVICH.*]

TARATUTA: Comrade Yurkevich! Ready! Come on!

COLONEL: You're going to be shot this instant.

YURKEVICH: Shoot me then. But I'll never give her up to be butchered by you.

TARATUTA: So that's it? I'm too late. All because of those cursed hens! Excuse me, your honour, I must speak to Comrade Yurkevich.

COLONEL [*turning round threateningly*]: Oh, you must, must you? Arrest him, Lieutenant! [TARATUTA *disappears at once.*]

10

[*At that moment a LIEUTENANT and two soldiers come in, escorting LIDA, who is now a well-dressed and an extremely pretty girl of twenty-five or twenty-six.*]

COLONEL [*to YURKEVICH*]: Will you go out on the platform and meet the woman? This is the last chance you'll get, do you hear? In five minutes it will be too late.

YURKEVICH: I'll never do it, never!

COLONEL: You'll be shot at once, then. Do you hear?

YURKEVICH [*catches sight of LIDA and gives a little start*]: Shoot then. And still. . . .

COLONEL [*shouting*]: I'll shoot you like a dog. I'll kill you myself. Silence!

LIEUTENANT: There are people present, sir.

COLONEL: Silence!

OTHER OFFICER: Er. . . Colonel!

COLONEL [*wheeling round*]: Eh? What do you want?

OFFICER: Permit me to report that we have arrested this lady.

She has just arrived by car—from Chabany.

COLONEL [*more attentively*]: Eh? Well, what about it?

OFFICER: She seems a distinctly suspicious sort of person.

[*Gives the COLONEL further information in a low voice.*]

Here are her papers. [*Hands them to the COLONEL.*] Possibly, sir, this may be the . . . er . . . Permit me to draw your attention to this. . . . [*Points to one of the pages.*]

COLONEL: Ah—very nice, ha! excellent. Hm. [*Examining the documents.*] Figures, words, signs—a code, that's evident. [*Casts a rapid glance at LIDA.*] What's your name?

LIDA: Elena Zhdanova.

COLONEL [*promptly*]: Not Lida Zvantzeva?

LIDA [*with a little shrug*]: I don't understand your question, Colonel.

COLONEL: Oh, don't you? What are these notes in code in your exercise book? Hieroglyphics of some kind?

LIDA: They're—my shorthand exercises.

COLONEL: Hm—Funny sort of exercises. What were you doing at Chabany?

LIDA: I was staying with my sister on her farm.

COLONEL: Staying on a farm, and you came in a motor-car?

Well, let it pass, we'll look into all that later. [*Quickly.*]

Oh, yes, by the way, this young man brought us a letter

today from a certain Lida Zvantseva. [*Fumbles in his pocket.*] You don't happen to recognize this writing, do you? [*Toys with the letter without opening it.*]

LIDA [*smiling*]: Well, hardly, it's typewritten.

COLONEL [*triumphantly*]: Aha, you're caught, you're caught!

You must have written it yourself if you are so sure 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 again.*]

YURKEVICH [*impatiently*]: All this may be very interesting,

Colonel, but what has it to do with me, may I ask?

COLONEL [*with a penetrating look first at YURKEVICH, and then at LIDA*]: So you don't know this—er—lady at all?

YURKEVICH: No, I'm sorry to say, I don't.

COLONEL: Aha—Sorry, you say?

YURKEVICH: Naturally. She is very beautiful.

COLONEL [*completely bewildered*]: I don't know what the devil to make of all this. You seem to have muddled things up again, Lieutenant.

II

[LUNDISHEV and KARFUNKEL enter and go straight up to the COLONEL.]

LUNDISHEV [*bowing politely to LIDA*]: Ah, Mademoiselle!

But look here, Colonel, this is becoming impossible.

KARFUNKEL: *Das ist unerhört!* The station-master is no-

where to be found. There is no train. I cannot wait any longer.

LUNDISHEV: I am getting very anxious. Will our train come in or not?

COLONEL: I have already told you, gentlemen. . . .

LUNDISHEV [*to YURKEVICH*]: Ah, you're still here young man. [*Glances around at LIDA.*] Oh, whom do I see? Why, of course, I thought the face seemed very familiar. So you. . . .

YURKEVICH [*starts forward in alarm and grips LUNDISHEV by the arm*]: One moment, Count, I just wanted to ask you. . . .

LUNDISHEV: Delighted. So you met your charming little "chicken" after all. You must excuse an old man's familiar tone, Mademoiselle. I envy the happy man from my heart, he-he-he. What a beauty she has turned out to be! Don't squeeze my arm so hard.

COLONEL: Do you happen to know this lady, Count?

LUNDISHEV [*utters a shriek of agony*]: Oh! What are you pinching me so hard for? [*Rubs his arm.*] Why, of course. It's our charming traveller. She wrote to Mr. Yurkevich only today. I know her very. . . .

COLONEL [*swiftly*]: It is Lida Zvantseva, then?

LUNDISHEV [*enthusiastically*]: Yes, that's exactly who it is. Pretty Lida, the girl who. . . .

COLONEL: Well, Count, you've done us a great service.

YURKEVICH [*unable to control himself any longer, rushes at LUNDISHEV and seizes him by the throat*]: You scoundrel! You blithering old idiot! You've snatched her from me again, you've ruined my happiness again!

LUNDISHEV: What's all this, I'd like to know! Help—
H-e-l-p!

[*Taking advantage of the confusion, LIDA pulls out a revolver and makes for the door.*]

COLONEL: Stop her! Catch her!

[*General confusion. LIDA flings a chair in the OFFICER'S way and runs away. The LIEUTENANT trips over the chair and falls, LUNDISHEV tears himself out of YURKEVICH'S clutches and runs, shouting, toward the door.*]

LUNDISHEV: 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 YURKEVICH; the soldiers seize him by the arms. A shot is heard outside the door, then another.*]

YURKEVICH [*shouting*]: Let go! They've killed her, the blackguards! [*At that moment the two OFFICERS return with LIDA, who is no longer struggling.*]

LIEUTENANT: Here she is, sir. We caught her. [*Dabs his cheek with his handkerchief.*] The vicious bitch actually fired at us.

YURKEVICH [*striving to reach LIDA*]: Lida! My love, my girl!

COLONEL: Aha! So much for the shorthand! Splendid! You'll

both be shot within half an hour. Lieutenant, you'll see to all that. [KARFUNKEL, who has been observing the scene quietly, now comes forward.]

KARFUNKEL: *Ihr seid toll!* You have gone out of your mind! I protest. Be good enough, please, to cease your stupidity and send out our train, or else I *telegrafieren* to the German ambassador.

COLONEL: Eh, what? You must be mad. I shall shoot you myself in twenty-four hours, or in twenty-four minutes if you're not careful.

KARFUNKEL: You will shoot me? In twenty-four minutes! *Salbaderei!* Shoot me, indeed!

COLONEL: What's that? Arrest him!

KARFUNKEL: In twenty-four minutes? And do you know where you yourself will be in twenty-four minutes? Ha! If you will take my advice you will make better use of your time than that. *Alle tausend!* A thousand devils! [*Advances on the COLONEL in a rage, dangling the watch before his nose.*] Twenty-four minutes! You had better tell me what you have done with my train. Give me back my half hour, do you hear, my half hour which I have lost through your muddling.

COLONEL [*retreats, nonplussed*]: This is a raving lunatic! Arrest him at once.

KARFUNKEL: No, he is not a raving lunatic. [*Gunfire is heard.*] Aha! You heard how this watch strikes? *Die Stunde hat geschlagen.* Your hour has struck. Think for yourself what you will do with your minutes.

COLONEL [*furiously*]: Silence! Lieutenant! Arrest this man!

[*At this moment an OFFICER runs in followed by two soldiers. In a few moments another OFFICER appears.*]

OFFICER: The station's being fired on from an armoured train!

[*A gun booms in the distance.*]

KARFUNKEL: Aha! I told you so! [*Begins to wind his watch in a leisurely fashion.*]

COLONEL: From where? Where? You're crazy. There's no front anywhere near here.

OFFICER: Yes, sir. The Reds are attacking from Ternovka, from the north, and these must be partisans. An armoured train must have broken through to our rear.

[*The gun booms again. Bells ring. The telephone rings.*]

KARFUNKEL [*calmly*]: Hurry up, Herr Colonel. Your twenty-four minutes have nearly gone.

COLONEL [*furiously*]: Never mind, I'm going to shoot you all the same. Lieutenant, order the car. I'm going to town. You will remain here in charge of the station. Set a proper guard over the prisoners. Give the necessary orders. Evacuate everything you can and in twenty minutes take the whole lot out and [*Makes an expressive gesture.*]

LIEUTENANT: What, including the German, sir? Permit me to report that. . . .

COLONEL: Very well. Evacuate the German for the present. We'll see later. . . . Just those two, then. Come along.

LIEUTENANT: Yes, sir.

[*The COLONEL goes out with two OFFICERS.*]

LIEUTENANT [*to the soldiers*]: Keep a strict watch over these prisoners. One of you stand at the door, the other under the window! [*Goes out.*]

[*The soldiers go out, shutting the doors after them.*]

14

YURKEVICH [*rushes over to the window*]: Sentry! [*Tries the door.*] Locked! Lida, my dear, dear Lida. [*Takes her hand.*] Can it be that I'm seeing you again, seeing your sweet eyes, after dreaming of them, longing for them all the years we've been parted?

KARFUNKEL [*who in the meantime has seated himself at the table and is examining his watch through a magnifying glass*]: *Salbaderei!* Such idle chatter!

LIDA: My dear—they tortured you—and you would not give me away.

YURKEVICH: To find you after seven years—only to lose you again. No—this is impossible. Time is standing still for us. It's ours, ours, my Lida!

KARFUNKEL: *Einer Narr!* Oh, but he is a fool, what does he know of time? !

LIDA: Yes.

YURKEVICH: Twenty minutes of life and love—why, it's an eternity.

KARFUNKEL: He has not forgotten my lesson. Hm. . . .

YURKEVICH: Only fools reckon time by years—we're going to reckon it by heartbeats. And devote every beat, every single beat—to love.

LIDA: Yes, yes—to our love. Oh, if you knew how I love you now, my dear, my precious, my only love!

[*A gun booms.*]

YURKEVICH: Lida, my longed-for, my beloved! What perfect happiness to cling to your lips . . . and die . . . and thus remain . . . together for all time. To taste these last few moments of our life to the full!

KARFUNKEL [*still fiddling with his watch*]: Oh, *Salbaderei!* What foolish nonsense! Of what last moments are you talking? Your last moments will only come in thirty years. You will die together, indeed. She will desert you, this girl, before you die.

YURKEVICH [*turning swiftly*]: You lie!

KARFUNKEL [*calmly*]: Well, then, you'll desert her. *Und damit Punktum.* [*There is a noise of breaking glass. A bullet knocks KARFUNKEL's watch out of his hand.*]

YURKEVICH: Good God! They're firing in here!

KARFUNKEL [*furiously*]: Oh, *verfluchter Heidenlärm.* This damned confusion! They have smashed my best watch. The dogs! The scoundrels! [*Gropes about on the floor for the mechanism. An outburst of firing follows.*]

LIDA: Wait! Can you hear? It's our people firing. And they're quite near. They won't let anyone kill us. [*Runs to the window.*] Yes. There's panic everywhere. The soldiers are running away and leaving the machine-guns. The plaster's flying off the walls. Bullets are hitting the platform. An officer has just been hit.

[*There is a loud knocking on the door.*]

YURKEVICH: They're breaking down the doors. We must

block them up with something. They'll try to come in and kill us before they go away.

[*Begins to drag the furniture to the door.*]

LIDA: I've got another revolver with me. We can defend ourselves a while.

YURKEVICH: Yes, we want to live, to live together, you and I, my Lida, and take great, deep breaths of life!

KARFUNKEL [*continues to collect little bits of mechanism from the floor*]: *Salvaderei!* He has already changed his mind about dying.

[*A shot under the door. Sounds of a sharp struggle.*]

15

[*Voices outside the door. Shouts of "Open the door!" "We're friends." "Comrade Yurkevich!"*]

YURKEVICH [*delightedly*]: It's Taratuta! We're saved!

[*The door bursts open, and a company of Red Army men enter, led by TARATUTA.*]

TARATUTA: Comrade Yurkevich! Hurrah, Miss, Madame— Hurrah! You're still alive! I wasn't too late, after all.

LIDA [*darting forward excitedly*]: Comrades! Our own lads, at last! Thank you, boys. You're just in time. [*Shakes hands warmly with them.*] What regiment?

YURKEVICH [*seizing TARATUTA's hands*]: Taratuta, old chap. You've saved our lives.

TARATUTA: Well, it just turned out lucky, you know. I happened to get hold of some pals of mine, and they agreed to send an armoured train to the rear. They took the station and all for you, old chap.

YURKEVICH: But when did you have time to do all this, you devil?

TARATUTA [*bursts out laughing from sheer happiness*]: Ever know me to figure up time?

YURKEVICH: That's true, Taratuta, time can't be figured or measured.

16

[*A second company of Red Army men enter with their*
COMMANDER. *They escort several prisoners, including*
LUNDISHEV.]

COMMANDER: Guard all exits! Efimov, guard the telegraph. Lock up the prisoners here for the present. Who are these people?

LIDA [*disentangling a thin rolled-up paper from her hair and handing it to the* COMMANDER]: I'm on the staff of the political department of the 18th Division. They were going to shoot us . . . this comrade and myself. . . . He refused to betray me to the Whites.

COMMANDER: Lida Zvantseva? Glad to meet you, comrade.

KARFUNKEL: *Herr* Commander, please give orders for my train to come in. I cannot waste any more time on account of your war.

COMMANDER: Who is this German?

LIDA: He was arrested along with us because he protested against our being shot.

COMMANDER: Thank you, comrade, you're at liberty.

KARFUNKEL: At liberty, indeed? What do I want with your liberty! I want my train.

LUNDISHEV: This is an outrage! I have bought my ticket and

received a sleeping-berth. Tell them to return my things to me. This is robbery.

KARFUNKEL: I cannot waste any more time. I have calculated every moment.

COMMANDER: Keep calm. We're not interested in your calculations. The Revolution has its clock, which is always moving forward, and when it strikes, a new era opens.

[*Firing is heard.*]

COMMANDER: Can you hear that?

YURKEVICH: I told you, *mein Herr*, there is a master—more powerful than you—the Revolution. Your watch is smashed.

KARFUNKEL: *Salvaderei!*

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

The same station. Time: the winter of 1920.

I

[The waiting-room looks neglected. It has evidently not been swept for a long time, and is littered with cigarette-stubs and rubbish of all kinds. A few women sit huddled together on the benches, warming themselves by turns at the ugly little stove in the corner of the room.]

1ST WOMAN: We went off to bed yesterday without a bit in our stomachs. There isn't a potato nor a spoonful of meal nor a crust of bread to be had for love or money. Even the mice have cleared out.

2ND WOMAN: Still, we've got our freedom, as they call it. . . .

3RD WOMAN: And the way they talked . . . at the meetings. It was the landowners and the rich merchants, they said, did all the harm. Now everything would be better, they said.

2ND WOMAN: This is what they call better, is it? We're half-starved—we are. Potatoes are being sold by the pound! A miserable little chicken costs twenty thousand. Pooh! That's revolution for you!

1ST WOMAN: And the way we used to live at one time; good heavens, it's hard to believe now when you look back on it! We had ten thousand rubles in our bankbook alone. We baked every day, and had as much pork and butter as we liked. We never had tea without jam. And now? Why, there isn't a crust in the house.

3RD WOMAN: Let their Chinamen work for them if they want to. My man isn't going to work for them any more. He's going to town tomorrow to see if he can get something else to do.

2ND WOMAN: They'll all be going yet, you'll see. Everyone of them. Who's going to work for them for nothing, curse them. Zenchenko's gone, Pechenka's gone, and your man's going. Well, let them drive the engines themselves. They're Party men!

2

[*Another woman comes in.*]

VOICES: Heard the news? They aren't going to pay any wages.

Not going to pay? For what month?

They're not going to pay at all. There's a notice hung up in the office and in the depot as well to say that all pay is stopped till further notice. Senka read it.

So that's what it's come to. Have you ever seen anything like it!

Well, let the devil himself work for them. We won't. To the devil with them all!

3

[Two railway workers in leather jackets come in with heavy walking-sticks over their shoulders.]

1ST RAILWAYMAN [to the women]: Good-day. Has the freight train come in yet?

1ST WOMAN: No, it hasn't. But it should be here soon.

3RD WOMAN: Where are you off to, Simon Terentyevich? Not back to the village, surely? Or is it to the town you are going, like my man?

1ST RAILWAYMAN [gloomily]: Well, what about it? No use staying here to starve, is it?

2ND WOMAN: That's right. All the men are going.

2ND RAILWAYMAN: Let the devil himself drive their engines for them.

1ST WOMAN: Yes, and Trofimich Cherevko, who's sold himself to the Soviet devil, the dirty old dog!

4

[CHEREVKO comes in. He stares in silent reproach at the railwaymen; they avert their faces.]

CHEREVKO: Where are you off to, Terentyich? You don't want to say? Ashamed to look at me? The workers' army is going out to the front and you're deserting the engines? Is that it? That's a dirty trick.

1ST WOMAN [angrily]: What business is it of yours if he does go. Will you feed his children for him?

CHEREVKO: You want the Whiteguards to feed them, I suppose? With bullets and knouts. Do you think my children

aren't hungry, too? How is it that I don't chuck engine driving, then, nor never will?

1ST RAILWAYMAN: What are you bothering me for? I'm not meddling with you, am I? If you want to be a commissar, that's your business. I think more of my children, see?

CHEREVKO: You're a fool, Terentyich, a fool, I tell you. It's not worth while talking to you. But as for you, Vassili Ivanovich, I must say I didn't expect it of you. We went on strike together in 1905, we saved the engines from the Germans, and now, at a critical time like this, you're deserting your proletarian post. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Vassili Ivanovich. I didn't expect that of you.

2ND RAILWAYMAN [*getting up*]: Oh, for God's sake stop harping on the same string. It's all sickening enough without that. Come on, let's have a smoke to cheer ourselves up a bit.

CHEREVKO [*delightedly*]: So you're staying after all?

2ND RAILWAYMAN: Ah, come along, devil take you, and let's hear no more about it.

CHEREVKO: Much obliged, Vassya. You didn't let us down.

[CHEREVKO'S wife, OLYA, comes in. Her face looks faded and worn, but wears the same gentle, winning smile, the same mild expression as before.]

OLYA: Andrei Trofimich! Are you coming home?

CHEREVKO [*impatiently*]: Wait, Olya, I've no time now. A bit later on, perhaps.

OLYA: Seryozha seems very feverish. You might go for the doctor.

CHEREVKO: All right, presently. I'll be back soon. Come along, Vassili Ivanovich.

[*They go out. OLYA goes out sadly after them and then returns.*]

2ND WOMAN: Did you see that fellow? He's sold himself to the Bolsheviks. And, not content with that, he's trying to lead other folks astray. Making speeches, too! And his own children are swollen with hunger; the boy's terrible weak, you heard her say.

1ST WOMAN [*scornfully*]: Cherevko wants to be a commissar. He's a Party man.

3RD WOMAN: I'm sorry for poor Olya. See what she looks like now.

[*The freight train comes in.*]

1ST WOMAN: The train!

5

[*All the women except OLYA hurry out on to the platform. OLYA sits down on a bench. Her head droops sadly. COUNT LUNDISHEV comes in, looking very old, feeble and bent. He walks with difficulty, leaning heavily on his stick. He is carrying a valise.*].

LUNDISHEV: Not a single food smuggler in sight. If I could only exchange my books for a bit of butter,

OLYA [*recognizes him*]: Good morning, Valerian Sergeevich.

LUNDISHEV: Eh! Who is it? Oh, it's you, Olya. [*Coldly.*] Good morning.

OLYA: I haven't seen you for a long time, Valerian Sergeye-
vich. How do you feel these days?

LUNDISHEV: Better ask your Bolshevik husband that. And
the rest of the commissars like him.

OLYA: Lord love you Count, what sort of a commissar is
Andrei Trofimich?

LUNDISHEV [*thumping his stick on the floor*]: And who is
then, if he isn't? Who, I'm asking you? You've forgotten
that he was in prison in 1912, and was one of the strikers
in 1905. That sort of thing is regarded by the Bolsheviks
as a service, the same as in the Civil Service. That's why
he's one of the bosses now. A commissar.

OLYA: He isn't a boss at all. He's an engine-driver, same as
he always was. And we're starving.

LUNDISHEV [*without listening to her*]: Commissar! Bolshe-
vik! The names they've invented. "Partcom"—for Party
Committee; "Compoor"—Committee of Poor Peasants;
"Compub"—Commissariat of Public Welfare! "Cheka."
Phew! A gang of robbers, bandits, that's all they are!
They've taken my land and my house away from me. All
my things, my clothes, my gold and silver. And I'm not
allowed to leave the country. Sit and starve, that's all
you've got to do. I haven't had any dinner for two days.
Nothing to eat with my tea, either.

OLYA [*in a sympathetic tone*]: Poor Valerian Sergeye-
vich. . . . [*Then, with some embarrassment.*] Maybe, you
wouldn't mind taking a trifle from me. I've got a little
bread and some peas. [*Gets them out of the sack.*] Or per-
haps you'll come along over to us and I'll lend you a few

eggs and a chicken, I've still got two or three young ones. You'd get a drop of broth to eat, anyhow.

LUNDISHEV [*recoiling in dismay*]: What! You! You're offering *me* a chicken! You! How can you get your tongue to utter the words?

OLYA [*frightened*]: Why what's wrong, Valerian Sergeevich, I meant no harm.

LUNDISHEV: I'd rather die, I'd rather beg in the streets than take anything from you.

OLYA: But why, Valerian Sergeevich?

LUNDISHEV: You must have a short memory. Go away! Don't annoy me. We've parted for good. Your commissars have taken all that I had. Go away!

[OLYA goes away with a sigh.]

6

[YURKEVICH comes in looking very ill and worn. Upon catching sight of LUNDISHEV, he turns to go out.]

LUNDISHEV [*stopping him*]: M'sieu Yurkevich! M'sieu Yurkevich!

YURKEVICH [*turning*]: What do you want with me?

LUNDISHEV [*bitterly*]: Trying to avoid me, are you? I suppose you're afraid. I'll ask you for something.

YURKEVICH [*irritably*]: Really, can't you understand that it's simply unpleasant for me to see you? Surely you realise what both my encounters with you cost me. Particularly the last when you betrayed us to the police.

LUNDISHEV [*becoming angry in his turn*]: It's not for you to say such things to me, young man. You must have forgotten, surely, how you attacked me twice and nearly strangled me. My neck hurts to this day.

YURKEVICH: The more reason why you shouldn't want to speak to me, then. We've nothing to say to each other. Things like this are not so easily forgotten.

LUNDISHEV: Forgotten? I should think not! Even if I did happen to let a word or two slip that time—without meaning any harm—I only said I knew your wife. After all, I was merely incautious, nothing else. Look at the way commissars like your wife have wronged me. They've deprived me of everything: my money, and my house, all my things, my gold and silver—everything. I have only this ring left—and I want to exchange it for bread and maybe a little butter. In times like these. . . .

YURKEVICH [*examining the ring*]: Oho! An emerald. And what a big one!

LUNDISHEV: Yes, isn't it! Eight carats. An heirloom. It was my grandfather's. . . . Once Countess Seletskaya begged him—almost on her bended knees, they say—to sell her the ring for four thousand. Then she offered five thousand—but he wouldn't sell. They even quarreled about it. I believe.

YURKEVICH: But this is worth a fortune. It's what you might call capital. [*Admires the stone.*] You could live for two years on this stone.

LUNDISHEV: Do you know how much the local louts of-

ferred me for it? Twenty thousand. Why, a miserable little fowl costs twenty-five thousand in the market.

[YURKEVICH *cannot restrain a smile at this point.*]

You're smiling. I think I know what makes you smile.

YURKEVICH: No, no, I'm just—I happened to remember something, that's all.

LUNDISHEV: You remembered how once I was going to give twenty thousand for a special hen from Paris. Twenty thousand gold rubles. And now I haven't even got an ordinary hen. . . . Yes, times have changed!

YURKEVICH: Times—and values. Say what you like, but it's only now we've learned to set the right value on things. Formerly your emerald was worth a thousand rubles, say, a thousand poods of flour, and yet—what is it, actually? Only a pinch of clay and silicon, useless dust of the earth. . . .

LUNDISHEV: But it's a rarity, a thing of beauty.

YURKEVICH: Yes, but of no earthly use to anyone. Now, take bread for instance: bread, an indispensable article of food, which cost the peasant such heavy labour, was worth no more than two kopeks. The stupid old system had rendered it of such little value that even beggars did not want to take it and were vexed when they were given a piece of bread instead of a copper. And now—only give us that bit of bread now, and we'd be delighted; we'd gladly pick it up from the floor. That's what we mean by the real and not the conventional value of things.

LUNDISHEV: Well, I don't think it's any use arguing with you, nor do I think that you look particularly prosper-

ous under Communism. Why do *you* look so worn out?

YURKEVICH: I've had spotted typhus. I've not been out of bed long.

LUNDISHEV: Where's your wife, by the way?

YURKEVICH: I'm expecting her on the train now.

7

[KARFUNKEL *comes in, looking shabby and thin, but as obstinate and irate as ever. He carries a valise.*]

YURKEVICH: Ah, is that you, *Herr* Karfunkel! Good morning. Waiting for the train as usual?

KARFUNKEL [*crossly*]: *Salbaderei!* What a silly question to ask anyone at a railway station. What trains are there today?

YURKEVICH: Who can tell—nowadays?

LUNDISHEV: There'll probably be a food-smugglers' express, and a "typhus-and-morgue" through train. All with splendid sleeping accommodations—on the roof.

KARFUNKEL: A food-smugglers' express, a morgue—? *Salbaderei!* No. I do not need such trains.

LUNDISHEV: But I do. I'll go and see if I can find some smugglers and perhaps exchange something for a chicken. . . . [*Goes out.*]

YURKEVICH: So you haven't lost hope yet? You still come every day to find out about the trains?

KARFUNKEL [*crossly*]: I told you I have to be home in Heidelberg the day after tomorrow. I must make my watches there, my marvellous watches and clocks that tell the real,

true time. Only then will people learn what time really is. The instant—*der Augenblick*—what it really is, the instant that passes now unnoticed.

YURKEVICH: But can't they be made here, these clocks and watches of yours? In Moscow or Petrograd, at least?

KARFUNKEL: *Salvaderei!* There are only two people in the world who can make such watches: I, Tobias Karfunkel, who invented them and Meister Tobias Reminger, who can make them. Tobias Reminger—he is the great Heidelberg watchmaker. Ha! That is why I must go. That is why I await my train at the station.

YURKEVICH: You've been waiting eleven months now, haven't you?

KARFUNKEL: Eleven months, eleven years, or eleven minutes—what are they? As ever, you understand nothing of time. Oh, foolish scholar, who has forgotten all my lessons. Eight years ago did it not seem to you that twenty-four minutes were like a whole year? And when you were about to be shot, how did you measure time then?

YURKEVICH: Yes, that's true. . . . But that was only a few minutes, while you, *mein Herr*, have been waiting a whole year.

KARFUNKEL: Minutes, instants, years! Where are the weighing-scales, where is the measure for them? Only my watches—the watches of the future, will enable you to know the time. Only then will we learn the real measure of this or that instant, of this or that half hour, of this or that decade. These watches will show that half an hour may take up more time than a year, that ten years may be

worth nothing and take up no place at all in the true reckoning of time.

YURKEVICH [*clutching his head*]: This is madness. It makes my head ache to listen to you.

KARFUNKEL: Then it must be a stupid head—yours. When your Revolution deprived me last year of the half hour by which my train was late, it is quite possible that this half hour was really ten years in the true reckoning of time. And if it is so, I shall wait. I shall wait ten minutes, ten years—it does not matter. While I have not my real watch with me, I stop all the rest. I shall wind them up in Heidelberg. [*Shows his watch.*] I am the master of time. I wait for my train, and as for what is going on around me, it does not concern me. My time is there—ahead of me.

YURKEVICH: But all this won't come about so soon. And in the meantime, today, for instance, one must live somehow.

KARFUNKEL: Today! *Salbaderei!* There is no today for me, only tomorrow. And that is in Heidelberg, where my work is, and where my watches are, and the real people for whom I work.

YURKEVICH: Aha, so that's it! Real people, in your opinion, are the German bankers and burghers. You are not making you watches for the workers, or for the Revolution.

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* When I make my watches, revolution will not be necessary. For we shall then reconstruct time, so that. . . .

YURKEVICH [*laughing*]: . . . So that the workers will do nothing but work, without noticing how the years go by, and the bourgeoisie will gain ten years of enjoyment for

themselves out of every hour. You've hit the nail on the head!

KARFUNKEL: The bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie! You are *ein Narr*, a fool who has not been able to win ten satisfactory minutes for himself in ten years. *Salbaderei!* Farewell! [*Goes out in a surly mood.*]

YURKEVICH: That damned German, he never misses an opportunity of saying something unpleasant.

8

[TARATUTA *enters. He is as gay and noisy as ever.*]

TARATUTA: Ah, Comrade Yurkevich. Fancy meeting you, your honour. [*Shakes hands with him.*] But what's the matter? Why do you look so sour and unhappy?

YURKEVICH: Oh, it's nothing. Nothing much, Taratuta, old man. I've been ill and it's pulled me down a good deal. I'm just waiting for my wife, she's coming home today.

TARATUTA: Aye, no wonder you're so down in the mouth, it all comes of taking up with a woman. I drive about the roads, chasing the wind, with never a care in the world.

YURKEVICH [*smiling*]: Running over hens as usual?

TARATUTA: Not much of that nowadays. For one thing there are no hens—they've all been eaten up; and for another thing—it's unprofitable. Twenty thousand for a hen—it's no joke, you know. So don't be downhearted, Comrade Yurkevich, come along with me, I'll set you on your feet in no time. Here, have some chocolate. It's the best English chocolate, and very good for you.

YURKEVICH: Thanks, Taratuta. That's plenty, don't give me any more.

TARATUTA: Have some more, I can get plenty for myself. Now let's have a drop of brandy. [*Pours some out into a small glass.*] Here you are, old fellow. It's the best French brandy and very good for you.

YURKEVICH [*drinking*]: Time doesn't seem to have any effect on you, Taratuta.

TARATUTA: Time? What does it look like, time? Ever seen it? Educated folks like you invented time; I took and spat on it long ago. No watch can keep time with me. That's as true as I'm standing here. I only think of today.

YURKEVICH: You're very wise, Taratuta. You don't know your own value.

9

[*The train comes in, and YURKEVICH goes towards the door. LIDA enters. She is dressed in a leather jacket, with a revolver at her belt.*]

YURKEVICH: Lida! At last! Oh, if you only knew how I've been longing for you, dearest. [*Takes her by the hand.*] I thought I'd never live to see you. I'm very ill, I can hardly walk.

LIDA [*kissing him*]: My poor boy, you look so miserable. . . . Your ears are as pale as wax. Wait, though, I've brought you a chicken, you'll have something nice to eat.

YURKEVICH: Thank you, Lida, it'll all be much easier now you've come home. I'll soon get better when you're with

me. I've hardly ever had dinner. I've lived on tea mostly.

LIDA: Oh, but I have to go away again for a long time.

YURKEVICH: Go away again? Where?

LIDA: To the front. The Whiteguards have occupied the Don.

We'll have to fight Wrangel and his troops—for the Dnieper, for the Don coal, for the Don wheat, for our freedom. The war isn't over yet, my dear.

YURKEVICH: But you're a woman, Lida. Are there no soldiers at the front then?

LIDA: I'm a Communist, Alexei. That means I'm a soldier, too. The Party calls me and I must go. It's as simple and inevitable as death.

YURKEVICH: It's always the Party, the Party. . . . The Party swallows up your personality, your will, your love. This is compulsion, not freedom.

LIDA: You're an anarchist, Alexei. Your anarchism, your mysticism must have driven you into a blind alley long ago, haven't they? There was a time when you yourself wrote that the individual should be reborn in society.

YURKEVICH: That's all dialectics, Lida. But for us there is only one judge—our own hearts, and if our hearts are silent. . . .

LIDA [*seizing his hands impulsively*]: To think that you—you—should say such a thing to me! If I say nothing about my love, and I never do say anything, must it mean—oh, well, I can't talk about that. After all, I'm a woman. I have my moments of weakness, too. It isn't so easy you know, to keep step with men—and what men

—in terrible times like these. Sometimes I feel I would like to rest, you know, and throw off this leather jacket and all the dirt that I've got on myself, travelling in freight cars. For you our love is only an episode, while for me it's a great joy. And I am obliged to give it up, to renounce it of my own accord, and face hardship and deprivation and perhaps even death, and to part from you for a long time, perhaps for ever. And just at a time like this, when my heart is bleeding, you are thinking only of yourself. [*Covers her face with her hands.*]

YURKEVICH: Lida! My dearest Lida!

LIDA: Never mind . . . I'll get over it in a moment. There now—it's passed. Go along, dear. I'll come right away. Give me your handkerchief, I haven't got one.

10

[*Several railway workers come in. Among them we recognize CHEREVKO, the secretary of the Party local, and others. There are also three or four women—the wives of railway workers. OLYA is one of them. They sit down moodily on the benches. It is a meeting.*]

2ND WOMAN: Not a scrap of bread, and a meeting every day. Call that freedom?

1ST WOMAN: You said it! I wish I'd never set eyes on such things.

3RD WOMAN: They're going to do a bit more coaxing today, I suppose.

2ND WOMAN: Pff. [*Spits contemptuously.*]

SECRETARY: Sh-Sh! Comrades, we've got to consider a very important question today. An order's just been received. . . .

2ND WOMAN: There are orders every day, and never a scrap of bread.

1ST RAILWAYMAN: You'd better tell us why our pay's been stopped.

3RD RAILWAYMAN: That's right. What do you call that, not giving us our pay?

1ST WOMAN: Looks like they want us to die of hunger. Potatoes cost five thousand rubles and the children are swollen with hunger.

[*An uproar ensues.*]

SECRETARY: Order, order! Be a bit quieter, comrades. Let me say what I have to say. It's very serious. Wages have been stopped for the present, but we'll be getting bread in a few days. Tomorrow we're going to distribute potatoes.

2ND WOMAN: It's all lies! They haven't any potatoes. He's lying.

SECRETARY: Silence! It's plain to see, comrades, that discipline's very slack amongst us. You must remember, comrades, that we're on duty, we can't desert our posts. Railwaymen are just the same as soldiers now. We hold transport and communications in our hands. We ought to be ready to lay down our lives for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Instead of that, what do we see, actually. We see the engine-drivers and stokers deserting the trains and making off to the village and the town. Now, if you do that,

who is to drive the military trains, comrades? Here's the order we've just received today—"two drivers to be selected at once for special military trains."

1ST RAILWAYMAN: Where are they bound for?

SECRETARY: We don't know. It's a secret.

[*An uproar follows.*]

VOICES: Don't think we're such fools as that! We're not going to be fools any more. No bread, no money—it's a nice state of things.

Who's going to break his neck for you, eh? With the bridges smashed up and the roadbed ruined, and the stations burnt down, and on top of that—not to know where the train's bound for!

And the enemy shooting at you from every wood. We know all about it.

SECRETARY: Comrades! Listen to me! What do we see, what is the actual situation right now? The dictatorship of the proletariat is fighting for the workers to get the upper hand. Do you mean to say that at a time like this. . . .

TWO RAILWAYMEN [*rising to show their disapproval and going toward the door*]: It's your government—so you do the work.

CHEREVKO [*jumping up from his place and coming forward quickly*]: Comrades! Comrades! Aren't you ashamed? You're workers yourselves—! Look at your hands—coarsened and blackened with oil and soot and hot steam, and handling jacks and drills, hammers and wrenches. Wasn't it for us, then, that the workers of St. Petersburg

and Moscow and Tula fought for freedom and drove out Yudenich, Denikin and Petlura? And can it be that 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? Every day thousands of Communists, thousands of workers are giving up their jobs and their families to go to the front to fight for our freedom, and we—we—are actually going to hold up the trains and desert the engines. I'd have spat in the eye of anyone who told me such a thing about you. Here am I, an old man, never left the engine for twenty-two years. I take any grade, tear along any track, no matter what state it's in. Can it be that now, when the Party calls us to battle, when Comrade Lenin says that Wrangel must be crushed at all costs, I'll desert my engine?

SECRETARY: No, of course, not. You're a Party member. There's no comparison.

CHEREVKO: Yes, I'm a member of the Party, a Communist—that's true, comrades. But aren't we all workers, just the same? After all, the only difference between us is that I've got to keep ahead. I've got to be where there's most danger and most work. All right, then, I'll drive this train, the one that's going on a secret route, but there'll be other trains. They've got to be looked after, too, comrades.

2ND RAILWAYMAN [*getting up*]: Oh, well, we'll come along.

CHEREVKO: Vassili Ivanovich!—I knew you wouldn't let me down. I won't forget it.

3RD RAILWAYMAN [*standing up*]: Well, then, blast your

soul, I'm coming too. We'll get somewhere sometime.

CHEREVKO: Prokofyevich, old chap! That's the stuff.

3RD WOMAN [*springing up from her seat*]: What! You've gone clean off your head, you old fool! Ivan Prokofyevich! You were wanting to go to town tomorrow.

3RD RAILWAYMAN [*waving her aside*]: Hold your tongue and don't bother me, wife.

2ND WOMAN: They've let this anarchist talk them round, the poisonous old devil!

[*There is a stir and the meeting becomes noisy.*]

TARATUTA [*springing up*]: Aye, you've given my soul such a shaking up—it's humming like an engine. I'll go with you, comrades, take me on as a stoker, at least. I'll learn the job somehow. I've got a car, too. Will you take me with you, Comrade Cherevko?

CHEREVKO: Why not? Only—you heard what we said, comrade, our destination is a dead secret. We don't know where we're going, nor when we'll come back. And we'll have to drive at top speed.

TARATUTA: Why, I couldn't ask for anything better. It'll suit me fine! All I want is to hear the wind whistling in my ears—! Pouff—and away, you don't know where!

CHEREVKO: Well, then everything's all right. I am not sure about bread, but as for wind, there'll be plenty of it in your ears.

[*The people stand up and begin to drift out, grumbling to one another.*]

VOICES: That old Cherevko's a regular nuisance. Knows how

to get a hold on a workingman's soul, and hangs on till he gets what he wants.

Yes, he knows how to get a hold on you; he can lift you up all right! He doesn't have to use a jack either.

I I

[*They all move toward the exit. OLYA goes up to her husband.*]

OLYA: When are you going?

CHEREVKO: Today, maybe, Olya.

OLYA: For a long time?

CHEREVKO: I don't know, Olya. I should think it'll be for a long time.

OLYA: Seryozha's sick. . . . There's no money. How can I manage here alone with the children? I can hardly get about myself.

CHEREVKO: It can't be helped: you'll have to manage somehow, Olya—you can see there's a war on.

[*All the people leave the room.*]

KARFUNKEL [*entering at this moment*]: All the trains are going either east or north or south. There are no trains going westward to Europe. *Alle tausend!* Am I not master of time? Why then does it slip past me and not obey my will? The Revolution has broken my watch, and confused time and its laws, which I, I alone studied and understood. Revolution has introduced her own time and this time works only for them and laughs at me and my power. Ah, if only it were possible to stop their clocks,

as they stopped mine. [*The station clock strikes twelve.*]
Salbaderci! [*Climbs on a chair and stops the clock.*] Stop,
you cursed clock! No more of your idle chattering.

[*A COMRADE from the Revolutionary Committee comes in
and catches sight of KARFUNKEL.*]

COMRADE: That's the man, surely. Listen, comrade, what are
you doing with that clock?

KARFUNKEL [*without climbing down from the chair*]: Eh?
With this clock—what am I doing? Nothing. It is no
concern of yours.

COMRADE: Yes, it's the very man, the German. I've been
looking for you, comrade. You're the German engineer,
aren't you? [*Looks in his notebook.*] Kar-kar-fun-
ker?

KARFUNKEL [*jumping down from the stool*]: No, not Kar-
funker but Karfunkel. . . . *Aber was wollen Sie von
mir?* What is it you want?

COMRADE: Splendid! Let's go to the Revolutionary Com-
mittee. We've got work for you to do.

KARFUNKEL: Work? What work? I cannot work.

COMRADE: Oh, but this is grand work, and in your own
special line, too. We're drawing up a plan for the restora-
tion of industry. In a word, you'll see for yourself. Let's go.

KARFUNKEL: I can't—I am going away.

COMRADE: We shall provide you with a flat, fuel, a full
ration: flour, sugar, meat, bread, fat, shoelaces, and a
free pass to the theatre every day.

KARFUNKEL [*irritably*]: *Salbaderei!* What do I want with
flour and a theatre when I have told you I am going

away. I must be home the day after tomorrow. In Heidelberg.

COMRADE: You must be crazy. Who's going to let you go abroad now? There aren't any trains.

KARFUNKEL [*stubbornly*]: I must go. I shall wait.

COMRADE: What a queer chap! Well, but while you're waiting, you might as well be working.

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* Idle talk! I cannot risk missing the train. I shall await my time.

COMRADE: He's a bit cracked, that's certain. Do you mean you're going to wait at the station for three months? Without eating anything?

KARFUNKEL: Month or year—I didn't count. I told you I must go—*und Punktum*. I await my train and that is all. [*The whistle of a steam-engine is heard.*] Aha, a train. [*Goes towards the door.*] A train.

COMRADE: Yes, he's definitely cracked. [*Goes out.*]

12

LUNDISHEV [*comes in, shivering with cold*]: There's not a scrap of bread anywhere, not a scrap. Oh, and I'm so hungry. I hardly know what to do with myself. [*Sits down on a bench.*] Oh, for a warm, cosy room, the table laid with a white cloth and the cheerful candlelight playing on the china, the silver and cut-glass. And on a silver dish in the centre of the table, a steaming pullet garnished with truffles. Crisp golden potatoes, ruby-red wine. But never

mind about the pullet. I'd be glad of an ordinary chicken, a fat chicken with macaroni and cucumbers. Oh, I'd give anything in the world for it.

[*Three or four food-smugglers enter, carrying sacks filled to bursting.*]

1ST SMUGGLER: Phew, I could hardly get here, blast it!

2ND SMUGGLER: Never mind, they'll take half of it off you in the train and it'll be easier to carry.

1ST SMUGGLER: All right. Let them try. It won't be the first time I've given people like that more than they bargained for.

[*They all settle down on the benches.*]

2ND SMUGGLER: It's not so bad here. Tolerable. You can get pretty good terms, and exchange your food profitably.

[*Pulls out a big crust of bread and spreads it with butter in a leisurely fashion.*] Two loaves of bread, forty pounds of peas and three pounds of butter, in exchange for a gramophone. It's not so bad. You can still manage to live.
[*Munches his bread.*]

1ST SMUGGLER: Pooh, that's nothing. What do you think I got for a trombone? Two pounds of butter and a roast chicken. And what a chicken? Dripping with fat, by God!

2ND SMUGGLER: What the devil did they want with the trombone, the fools?

1ST SMUGGLER: It's long and twisted, don't you see, and they want to fix it up for a still, and make their own vodka.
[*Takes out the chicken.*] Oo-oh! It's nearly as good as a turkey!

LUNDISHEV [*jumping up from his seat in excitement*]: That's surely one of my White Wyandottes! Look here, sell me your chicken, will you?

1ST SMUGGLER [*with a suspicious glance at him*]: This chicken? Any idea how much a chicken costs nowadays?

LUNDISHEV: You're the man who's selling it, you name your price.

1ST SMUGGLER: Fifty thousand.

LUNDISHEV [*horrified*]: What, fifty thousand rubles for a chicken! You mean to say you want fifty thousand for a chicken!

1ST SMUGGLER: Yes, for a chicken, of course. What did you think it was for—an elephant? Just you look at it, though. Dripping with fat. Well, give us forty thousand, then.

LUNDISHEV: Forty thousand! And to think that at one time I could afford to give a whole sackful of gold—twenty thousand gold rubles for a marvellous Parisian chicken. . . . And now?

1ST SMUGGLER: Well, I'll take thirty thousand then and to hell with you.

LUNDISHEV: Look here, take this ring instead.

1ST SMUGGLER [*dubiously*]: A ring? Is it gold?

LUNDISHEV: Of course it's gold. And it's set with an emerald. For a stone like that you could buy three thousand chickens like yours.

1ST SMUGGLER: Three thousand chickens! You don't say! What a son of a bitch! It's a green stone, I see. Well, the hell with you—take the bird.

MASTERS OF TIME

Act III

LUNDISHEV [*taking the chicken*]: Give me a little bit of bread as well, will you?

1ST SMUGGLER [*handing him a big crust*]: Here you are. It's plain to see you haven't had a meal for a long time, old fellow.

LUNDISHEV: So I've got the chicken! The costliest chicken I've ever bought in my life. . . . [*Hugs it to his breast.*] And now—I'll eat—and eat! [*Goes out.*]

13

[*A bell rings. The train is coming in. The food-smugglers rush out on the platform. LIDA and YURKEVICH appear once more.*]

LIDA [*hurriedly*]: Well, goodbye, Alexei.

YURKEVICH: What! Must you go today? Now?

LIDA: You heard what they said—that there was to be a special military train. I'm being sent by the political department to the Southern Front. I've got to go as soon as possible.

YURKEVICH: So I'll be alone again. . . . My dreams are all ruined once more.

LIDA: Don't torment me, Alexei. . . . [*Kisses him on the brow.*] You chose the wrong time to fall in love with me, my dear. This isn't the sort of love you want.

YURKEVICH: Yes, you're not the quiet bird of domestic bliss, the golden dream I've been looking forward to all these years, like a child to a Christmas tree. Only a fool like myself could have mistaken for calm, quiet gold your

glittering feathers, the feathers of the fiery bird of revolution. . . . And how painfully I scorched myself on those flaming wings. Well, goodbye. [*Turns away.*]

14

[*Enter* CHEREVKO, TARATUTA, the COMMISSAR of the military train and OLYA. KARFUNKEL is seen standing apart from the rest.]

LIDA [*to* OLYA]: Olya, do look after him for me, please.

Take care of him, won't you?

OLYA: Don't worry, Lida, I'll do all I can.

COMMISSAR: So you're off, comrade?

CHEREVKO: Yes, I'm ready.

COMMISSAR: Its destination is to be kept a dead secret.

CHEREVKO: That's understood.

COMMISSAR: You're to drive at top speed.

CHEREVKO: Right you are!

TARATUTA: That's the style!

COMMISSAR: You'll be on duty all the time—without a break.

No men to relieve you. When you'll return, I can't tell.

What state the line is in—is unknown.

CHEREVKO: But the goal is well known, Comrade Commissar, it's—Socialism.

COMMISSAR: Right. And all our strength and time must be devoted to reaching this goal. It's a pity we've so little time, though. [*Glances up at the clock.*]

CHEREVKO: Never mind, we'll force time to work for us, too.

MASTERS OF TIME

Act III

TARATUTA [*enthusiastically*]: He'll do that, Comrade Commissar, you can be sure! He's a great hand at that. A regular master—a master of time you might call him. And I'm an apprentice.

KARFUNKEL [*apart*]: *Salbaderei!* I alone am the master of time!

COMMISSAR: Well, now you're off. [*Shakes hands with CHEREVKO.*]

CHEREVKO: For the cause of the working class! Goodbye, Olya. Everything will be all right. Don't worry, we'll see each other again.

LIDA: Goodbye, Alyosha. [*Kisses YURKEVICH.*]

TARATUTA: Goodbye, old chap, don't take things too hard. We'll catch time by the tail—and home again. And now, look out, we're off, hell bent for leather!

[*They all go off. Only YURKEVICH remains. He sinks down on a chair by the table and buries his face in his hands. The whistle of the engine is heard. Then the train puffs out.*]

CURTAIN

ACT FOUR

1929. *The scene is the same station, which is now, however, quite unrecognizable. The old one-storied building has practically disappeared. All that remains of it is one side wall, which the builders have not yet had time to pull down, and behind which rises the tall mass of the new station. This is complete but is still hidden by scaffolding, which only allows the top of the façade with the big station clock to be seen. The clock is just being wound and set to rights by a clock-maker and his assistant who are seen on the scaffolding. Building operations are not yet over. Although the walls are adorned with garlands and red streamers with slogans, and although it has been swept and cleaned, barrels of cement, ladders, buckets and lime-kilns are to be seen everywhere. The gay streamers are inscribed with the following greetings, in letters of gold: "1929—Welcome to Engine-Driver CHEREVKO, a bold and tireless fighter for Socialism and our del-*

egate to the Fifth All-Union Congress of Soviets!" "Long live the Five-Year Plan for Socialist Reconstruction!"

I

[*There is a sharp ring at the station bell and the station becomes busy. Belated workers dash about clearing away spades, buckets, and rolls of wire. The STATION-MASTER hurries past. He is met by the secretary of the Party local, who comes along fastening his jacket and straightening himself up on the way. Then from every side the railwaymen rush up. Among them we see VASSILI IVANOVICH, IVAN TEREITYEVICH, and other faces familiar to us. They are followed by the musicians of the railway band.*]

SECRETARY [*without stopping*]: Hurry up, comrades, hurry up; the train'll be here in twenty minutes.

STATION MASTER: And where are we to meet him?

SECRETARY: At the station, where I said. Where's Vassili Ivanovich? Now where's that fellow got to? He has to make a speech. . . .

VASSILI IVANOVICH: Here I am. No need to get into a sweat, Peter Mikhailovich.

SECRETARY: Oh, it's all right for you to talk about not getting into a sweat. Why haven't you cleared away all those barrels? I told you yesterday, didn't I?

[*The Bandmaster, a Czech named HENN, comes in.*]

BANDMASTER HENN: Where's the trombone? Where's that

lazybones got to, eh? Run off to the market again, very likely.

SECRETARY [*calling out to the men on the scaffolding*]: Good God, they're still playing about with that clock! Do you want to disgrace me or what? I asked you to do it on time, Rabinovich.

WATCHMAKER [*calling down from the scaffolding*]: Don't upset yourself, Peter Mikhailovich. Everything's ready. It's a grand clock! A regular beauty! You wouldn't see a clock like it even in Zhmerinko. It's not a clock, it's music.

SECRETARY: Oh, yes, what about the music? Good thing you reminded me. See you don't let us down, Comrade Henn. As soon as the train comes in, the whole band should strike up as one man, without a moment's delay. Not like it was on May day, when only half of them were playing, all the basses going goo-goo-goo, and no proper music at all. It shows you're cut off from the masses and there's no proper leadership.

BANDMASTER HENN [*gloomily*]: I know my job all right. But is it my fault if the cornet stopped all of a sudden?

CORNETIST: And is it my fault if the notes aren't written correctly? It said "stop" and I stopped.

SECRETARY: That's what I'm saying; there were plenty of notes, but no music. Anyhow, see you don't let us down, Comrade Henn.

BANDMASTER HENN: All right. I know my job, I hope.

[*At that moment the clucking of a hen is heard from somewhere.*]

MASTERS OF TIME

Act IV

SECRETARY [*astonished*]: Whatever's that? Where's the hen?

BANDMASTER HENN [*furiously*]: Someone's trying to make fun of me. Who is it?

SECRETARY: Nothing of the kind, Comrade Henn, it's just your imagination.

BANDMASTER HENN: Just imagination? But I heard it quite plainly.

2

[At this moment a vigorous outburst of clucking is heard. General astonishment, then everyone laughs.]

SECRETARY: What's all this? Where's the hen? Comrade Henn, do something about it, can't you. We can't have this sort of thing; it's a disgrace.

BANDMASTER HENN [*furiously*]: I won't allow people to make fun of me! Who brought this hen here?

SECRETARY: Oh, it's nothing like that, Comrade Henn. Nobody did it on purpose, I'm sure. We didn't do it, anyhow.

[The clucking grows louder. Another musician, the trombone player, runs in breathless, dives under the couch and drags out a basket.]

TROMBONE PLAYER: Excuse me, Comrade Henn, but this is mine. It's Sunday today, you know, a big market-day, so I bought her on the way. Two rubles. Now then, less of the clucking, you.

BANDMASTER HENN: Clear out of here this very minute, you blackguard! Fancy trying to conduct with folks like these. A trombone player into the bargain!

TROMBONE PLAYER: I'll just give this to my wife and then I'll be back right away. [*Runs out.*]

[*Laughter.*]

SECRETARY: I told you it was leadership that was lacking. This isn't a band you've got, Comrade Henn, it's just a hen-coop.

3

[YURKEVICH *enters. Although he is now forty-two and his black curly hair is flecked with grey, he looks very handsome and assured. He is well-groomed and smartly-dressed, and carries an expensive looking brief-case. After looking about him in surprise, he goes up to the SECRETARY.*]

YURKEVICH: Good morning, Comrade. Would you mind telling me what's going on here? Are you seeing someone off, or welcoming someone, perhaps?

SECRETARY: Welcoming, comrade, welcoming one of our old employees, an engine-driver. He's a delegate to the Fifth Congress of Soviets and a shock-brigader. Now he's been awarded a decoration. There was a piece in the paper about him—Engine-driver Cherevko is his name.

YURKEVICH: Cherevko! Andrei—Andrei Trofimovich! What, is he still on the go?

SECRETARY: Why, do you know him?

YURKEVICH: Of course I do. I lived in this town of yours for many years. Ah, how much I suffered in this very station. [*Sighs.*] Oh, and by the way, where is it? [*Looks*

about him.] The walls are new, and the clock is new . . . scaffolding everywhere. Everything is changed. . . .

SECRETARY: We're building a new station, comrade, a real first-rate one; we're going to open it soon.

YURKEVICH: Yes, you wouldn't know the place. [*Glancing about.*] And to think that once in this very place. . . . But it's a long time ago. . . . I haven't been here for eight years.

SECRETARY: No? You don't say so? And who, if you'll excuse my asking, might you be?

YURKEVICH: I'm Yurkevich, the writer. You may have heard of me, perhaps?

SECRETARY: Yurkevich? Why, yes, of course, I've read your books. Yurkevich, yes. [*Aside.*] Never heard of him.

[*Several men are seen carrying in a long, coffin-like box. Behind them comes a foreign-looking man in a bowler hat.*]

SECRETARY [*rushing at the bearers*]: What's that? Where do you think you're going? Back with you! You must have gone clean out of your heads! What a time to start dragging coffins about!

ONE OF THE MEN: But it has to go by this train.

SECRETARY: Then why do you come butting in here for? Go back!

[*The coffin is carried out.*]

YURKEVICH: What is it? Somebody died, or what?

SECRETARY: The louts! Such a time to start dragging coffins in and out. It's a landowner who lived hereabouts, one of those ex-counts, you know, a poultry-breeder.

YURKEVICH: Oh, that must be Lundishev, surely. Is he dead?

So—we meet once more. . . .

SECRETARY: He died way back in 1925. But his brother—from Paris I think it is—asked to be allowed to take the body there. Let him, if he wants to, that's what I say. We don't grudge anyone their fill of that kind of goods.

YURKEVICH: So he's dead. Queer old chap he was. And he didn't live to see his Princess Bulbul-el-Ghazar, after all.

SECRETARY: Beg pardon, what was that you were saying?

YURKEVICH: Oh, nothing. I was just thinking. Tell me, you didn't happen to know—a—a comrade—called—Zvantseva—Lida Zvantseva, did you?

SECRETARY: Zvantseva?—Lida? Of course. She was a grand fighter—not another like her. She fought on every front against Denikin and Wrangel, and in Central Asia. Yes—who doesn't know Lida Zvantseva, I wonder? I think I can hear the telephone again. Perhaps it's a telegram. Go and see what's up, Ivan Terentyevich, will you?

YURKEVICH [*hardly able to control his agitation*]: She was a grand fighter? Then she must be dead. Listen, you didn't finish telling me about Lida Zvantseva.

SECRETARY: Yes, she was a plucky one, a fighter. Badly wounded at Perekop, she was. They had a difficult time saving her.

YURKEVICH [*clutching the SECRETARY's arm*]: Saved her, did they? Then she's still alive? Did you ever see her afterwards?

SECRETARY [*lighting a cigarette in a leisurely fashion*]: Who?

Lida? Lida Zvantseva, you mean? Why, yes, she lives hereabouts.

YURKEVICH: Here? Lida here? Tell me quick!

SECRETARY: Yes, she's the director of the Soviet poultry-farm outside the town, on that old Count's estate. It was all preserved, you know: his equipment, hen-houses and everything—a regular poultry-town, you might call it. It's a pleasure to look at it.

YURKEVICH: How extraordinary! To think of Lida breeding poultry. How can I get to see her, I wonder?

SECRETARY: She's about here every day. She'll be here today as well. I hope you'll excuse me now, I've got to go. Come along, comrades, the train'll be in right away.

YURKEVICH: So that's where her destiny lay, after her stormy life . . . on Count Lundishev's poultry-farm. It's as if she herself was the golden Princess Bulbul-el Ghazar the old man was dreaming of but never saw. And what about me?

BANDMASTER HENN: To your places! Keep your teeth on the mouthpiece and your fingers on the stops. Quick time, march!

[*All go out, except YURKEVICH.*]

4

[KARFUNKEL enters. He is unrecognizable. He is wearing a smart coat and a felt hat and is carrying a new valise.]

YURKEVICH: Ah, that's you, Herr Var—Var—er—sorry—Karfunkel. You're still here?

KARFUNKEL: Oh, it's *Herr* Yurkevich! Yes, I'm still here, but today I am leaving. I told you that I am going home and must be in Heidelberg the day after tomorrow. I shall leave in half an hour. [*He takes out a splendid new gold watch.*] My watch is going once more. I wound it again, the watch of my life. *Die Uhr meines Lebens*. I shall be in Heidelberg at six-twenty on the thirteenth. So you see I was right. *Ich hatte Recht*.

YURKEVICH [*laughing*]: Yes, but in what year? You told me in 1919 and now it's 1929. There's a bit of difference—ten years.

KARFUNKEL: Ten years, ten years. *Salbaderei!* You forget my lesson. You forget that ten years and half an hour are often of equal length in the real measurement of time. Ten years. I have crossed them out of my reckoning—these ten years of your Revolution. I have my own reckoning, my own time and I believe only my own watch.

YURKEVICH: You are too generous, *mein Herr*. Look out or you may make a mistake in your reckoning. But tell me, what have you been doing these ten years? Why did you not go home sooner?

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* What nonsense! I did not reckon at all. This was for me but the half hour my train was late. [*Takes out of his pocket a bundle of letters and telegrams.*] But now I am going. [*Reads one of the telegrams.*] Everything is in order. Time serves me again as before. I am once more the master of time.

YURKEVICH: Yes, but it looks as though things have not gone badly with you. Someone told me you were appointed chief

MASTERS OF TIME

Act IV

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.

YURKEVICH: Where? Here, at the station?

KARFUNKEL [*a little embarrassed*]: No—in another—a different place.

YURKEVICH: Oh, I see—behind bars. Were you—kept—there a long time?

KARFUNKEL: I have told you that I did not count those foolish years. [*Turns away, displeased.*] It is all past and gone, and today I go away. I go to Heidelberg, where I shall make at last my wonderful watches. Oh yes. The great watchmaker Tobias Reminger is waiting for my designs and the day after tomorrow we shall begin work. Then—then the world will discover what time really is. People will know at last why half an hour is sometimes so much longer than ten years, and why ten years of old age is so different from ten years of youth. But we shall change all that. Yes. We shall make time submissive to the strong and wise. We, the time experts, we shall reign over the earth. Then the world will acknowledge my greatness and I shall become famous as the first master of time. Farewell, *mein Herr*, forever.

YURKEVICH: See that you don't have to come back here yet.

5

[*The doors open and two workers come in carrying a huge crate, almost all covered with labels in foreign languages.*]

Then LIDA enters. She is now thirty-six years of age and looks faded, rather than old. Her features have softened and there is a touch of sadness and wisdom about the lines of her mouth.]

WORKERS: Here it is, Comrade Director, whole and sound.
[*They set down the crate on the table.*] Heavy as lead, blast it!

LIDA: Very well. Now go and get the lorry ready.

YURKEVICH [*starting towards her*]: Lida! [*She looks around in surprise, then gives a little cry and runs up to YURKEVICH. He takes her by the hands and leads her forward to the front of the stage. They stand like that for a few moments, holding each other's hands. The band is heard playing in the distance.*] Lida!—To think of meeting you here! Lida—can it be you again? You, on this same station, where we lived through so much, suffered to much. When was it? Only yesterday? Or ten years ago?

LIDA [*smiling*]: You're just the same as you were then, always at loggerheads with time. . . .

YURKEVICH: Oh, no. I only try to understand its caprices, like Mr. Karfunkel. But tell me all about yourself, my dear. [*Glances at the crate.*]

LIDA: You're surprised? This, my friend, is an incubator. We've had to send abroad for them so far, but now we'll have a good look at them and learn how to make them ourselves. Oh, of course, you don't know—I'm the director of a Soviet poultry farm.

YURKEVICH: Yes, I heard.

LIDA: It is not big enough for us yet. We need at least thirty

thousand eggs, and this only gives us three thousand six hundred. But our farm is growing. There is a great future in store for the hen, you must know. She is destined to feed our workers, and feed them well. Poultry farming is the most profitable, and gives the quickest results. . . .

YURKEVICH: Like Henry IV, you're dreaming of a chicken in the pot for every family!

LIDA: Oh, but no Henry in the world ever dreamed of what one Soviet farm like ours can produce. Come and see it. I'll show you over our farm, all the incubators, hen-houses and brooders. Almost every hen of ours lays from a hundred and fifty to two hundred eggs a year. Just count up how much meat and eggs that comes to in a year. It's three hundred and sixty pounds of chicken meat and twenty pounds of eggs a year from one hen alone. We have fifteen thousand, all good breeds. That means five million pounds of meat alone in a year. And this is only the beginning. In two or three years we'll be able to produce two hundred or perhaps three hundred million pounds of meat.

YURKEVICH: Darling Lida, you're just the same, bubbling over with energy—in peace-time as in war-time.

LIDA: You're laughing at me. . . . Yes, there was a time when I fought. I rode all over Siberia, all through Trans-Baikal on horseback, and fought Wrangel and Kolchak and the Japanese. And now I'm a poultry-keeper, a domestic hen, hatching out chickens. . . . [*Turns away quickly.*]

YURKEVICH: What is it, dear? Surely you don't think I wanted to hurt you?

LIDA: Never mind, tell me about yourself. Oh, yes, of course I read about you; you're a well-known writer now, people talk about you and you're discussed in the papers. . . .

YURKEVICH: And they run me down a great deal, too.

LIDA: Well, you have to be scolded if you stray from the path. Yes. Our paths seem to have led in different directions.

YURKEVICH [*gently*]: You chose yours, yourself, Lida.

LIDA: Yes, that's true. Oh, but I was forgetting. Where is my newly arrived beauty? Comrade Taratuta, where are you?

YURKEVICH [*astonished*]: What, is Taratuta here, too?

LIDA: I should think he is. He's our head-caretaker, garage-keeper, and poultry-breeder.

YURKEVICH: Do you mean to say Taratuta has turned poultry breeder? Taratuta—the terror of all the hens in the neighbourhood, the “chicken-pest”— Well, that's what I call a miracle! Taratuta hatching chickens!

LIDA: Oh, you should see him at it. He takes as much care of each one as if he were a nurse.

YURKEVICH: And he doesn't strangle them?

6

[TARATUTA enters at this moment. He is as cheerful and lively as ever, and is carrying a medium-sized box plastered with foreign labels.]

LIDA: Well, tell us, how is she, Taratuta? Has the Princess arrived safe and sound?

TARATUTA: [*gaily*]: Alive! Alive and kicking, that ex-princess of ours. She sends you her regards. She's not of the toiling class but we'll soon turn her into a proletarian and a shock-brigader—[*Catches sight of YURKEVICH.*] Bah! Who's this? Comrade Yurkevich, your honour! Well, I never! Ha-ha-ha! Well, that's fate! The world's full of surprises, I declare.

YURKEVICH: Taratuta, old chap! [*They kiss and shake hands.*] You don't mean to say you've grown serious and settled down on the land?

TARATUTA: That's right, Comrade Yurkevich! Settled right down like a broody hen on her eggs, as you might say. The times aren't what they were, Comrade Yurkevich. Everything in the world's changed.

YURKEVICH: Yes, but you got the upper hand of time, Taratuta.

TARATUTA: There's no getting the upper hand of time, believe me. It goes its own way. You see where it's brought us—it's brought us to building Socialism.

YURKEVICH: Well, you fought for it, you rushed out to meet it half-way, regardless of whether there was a way or not.

TARATUTA [*enthusiastically*]: Ah, what times those were, comrade, what times those were! Do you remember those days, comrade director—when we were young? How we galloped through life, through everything in the world, like through a steppe, without thinking of time or roads or our heads. Only the wind whistling in our ears and the years whizzing by. Eh, when I think of it now, it fairly takes my breath away.

LIDA: Yes. . . . Those were memorable years . . . it all seems like a fairy-tale now.

YURKEVICH: But we can't gallop on for ever, Taratuta. We've got to arrive sometime. That's why the Revolution was made, so that we'd be able to set to work and build afterwards. Otherwise it'll turn out as that renegade Bernstein said: "The strife is everything, the aim is nothing."

As much as to say: the only thing is to keep on travelling.

TARATUTA [*sighing*]: Yes, it is like that, Comrade Yurkevich, but still, when you come to think of it—what I was then and what I've come to! Aye, how I galloped through fields and across mountains, how many hens I've run over in my time, and now I'm like a sitting hen myself; I hatch out chickens in an incubator . . . sitting on the eggs like the commonest old hen you ever saw.

YURKEVICH: It's a judgment on you, Taratuta, for all the hens you've sent to their death.

LIDA [*laughing*]: That'll do, Taratuta. Show me our princess now.

YURKEVICH: What princess? Good heavens, not a real. . . .

TARATUTA: Ex-princess, if you don't mind, Comrade Director. [*He removes the front of the box and sets it on the table.*] Well, my lady, it's a good thing for you, you didn't get in my way ten years ago! You'd be lying with your toes turned up to the daisies, and that would be the end of you.

LIDA [*laughing*]: Oh, and what a beauty she is. Look, Alexei, look. Isn't she wonderful!

YURKEVICH: It's a hen!

MASTERS OF TIME

Act IV

LIDA: Why, yes, of course. It's our Princess Bulbul-el-Ghazar, do you remember?

YURKEVICH: You don't mean to say! . . .

LIDA: Do you remember how you once preferred a hen to me? Well, and now?

YURKEVICH: And now you're paying me back in the same way.

LIDA: Take it as you like. Oh, what a lovely thing she is! Look what feathers, what a chest! And her little head gleams like burnished gold.

YURKEVICH: But can this be the same Princess Bulbul-el-Ghazar the Count was longing for?

TARATUTA: The *ex*-Count, Comrade Yurkevich.

LIDA: Well, he certainly knew a thing or two about hens, that can't be denied. I sent to Paris for her and found her. Oh, we didn't get her cheap, I can tell you. We probably paid no less for her than the Count was ready to pay at one time—Soviet rubles, of course.

TARATUTA: *Ex*-, Comrade director.

LIDA: What "ex," Taratuta?

TARATUTA: The *ex*-Count, I say.

YURKEVICH: Yes, he's certainly "ex" now, Taratuta. He's dead. How strange that they should be putting his coffin into the train just as they're taking out the crate with the hen he dreamed of possessing. So this is how he met his princess in the end.

TARATUTA: Ah, was it him they were dragging out just now? That's funny!

YURKEVICH: So the hen comes on the scene once more, but

not across my path this time. And to think how many times she's flown, clucking, into my life. Well, are you satisfied with your hen, Lida?

LIDA: I should think I am. She'll be the progenitress of a new breed. . . . Do you know how many eggs she lays a year? Three hundred. An egg a day, almost. Now reckon it up. At that rate in ten years her descendants will be sufficient to feed a whole republic. Oh, you beauty, you golden beauty!

TARATUTA: Now see that you meet us half-way, ex-princess! Do you hear? It's your public duty. This isn't Paris. Do your best. Well, I'm going. [*Picks up the cage and goes towards the door.*]

LIDA: Carry it out . . . we're coming. . . .

7

[*At this moment a LITTLE GIRL of about eight years old runs up to YURKEVICH.*]

LITTLE GIRL: Daddy! Daddy! Oh, here you are. We've been looking for you everywhere. Mama's in the garden waiting.

LIDA [*the words die on her lips. She is struck dumb*]: So. . . you . . . you're married? This is your little girl?

[*YURKEVICH stares at the ground and does not reply. A long pause follows.*]

YURKEVICH: I'll . . . be back . . . in a minute. [*To the child.*] Wait here, Ninochka. I'll be back in a moment. . . . Sit here with auntie. [*Hurries out.*]

LIDA [*passing her hand over her brow*]: Married . . . a long time. . . .

[*A pause. . . . Music can be heard in the distance.*]

LIDA [*drawing the child to her*]: His little girl. . . . How old are you, little one?

LITTLE GIRL: Eight.

LIDA: Eight. Eight years old. . . . Nine years ago I was young and was loved by him, and I renounced that love. Nine years I gave to the Revolution. . . . [*Draws the child to her and kisses her passionately.*]

8

[*TARATUTA breaks in noisily upon the sentiment of this scene.*]

TARATUTA: Ready, Comrade Director? Let's go. Everything's in order. Come on. [*Looks at LIDA attentively for a moment.*] What's up, Comrade Director? Looks as though your headlights had been sweating. Aha . . . so that's how it is, is it? Been remembering old times. You feel sorry you haven't a little girl like that? Oh, that's all rubbish.

LIDA [*wiping her eyes*]: Never mind, Taratuta, it's over now.

TARATUTA: Yes, and to tell the truth, where would you find a little girl like that? Yurkevich is a nice chap, a terribly decent chap, but he's not our sort—he's an outsider when all's said and done. To put it plainly, one of the rotten intelligentsia. You did right to throw him over then. Now you can see for yourself.

LIDA: That's true, Taratuta, very true. Time is the great judge of all. It judges people by their services and shows each his proper place. My place is here, and his. . . . Goodbye, child. [*Kisses the child once more.*] Run away now. . . .

9

[*At that moment a woman's voice is heard calling "Nimochka, Nina, where are you?" SOPHIA PETROVNA comes in. Her appearance is still more pronounced than it used to be, and it must be admitted that SOPHIA PETROVNA has begun to assist nature a little to preserve her fading youth.*]

SOPHIA PETROVNA: You're disobeying me again, you naughty girl? Mamma's worried to death, looking for you everywhere, while you. . . . Where's your daddy? [YURKEVICH *comes in.*] Oh, there you are at last. Where ever have you been? I've spent about two hours searching the station for you.

YURKEVICH: But I've been here all the time. I only went out for a minute to buy some cigarettes.

SOPHIA PETROVNA: You want us to miss the train, all on account of your old cigarettes, do you?

YURKEVICH: But, my dear, the train won't be here for another forty minutes.

SOPHIA PETROVNA: Oh, you always argue about everything. Come along.

YURKEVICH: I'll come in a moment. [*Goes up to LIDA.*] Well, goodbye. [*Takes her by the hand.*]

SOPHIA PETROVNA: Alexei Semyonovich, I'm going. . . .

YURKEVICH [*with a sigh*]: Goodbye, Lida. [*Follows SOPHIA PETROVNA and the LITTLE GIRL.*]

TARATUTA: See that? That's where *his* road led him. Well. . . .

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[*There is a stir on the platform. The bells ring. The train is heard in the distance. The noise increases, and the band strikes up a march, ready to welcome the newcomers. A moment later the train comes rushing in. CHEREVKO, OLYA and the SECRETARY appear, followed by the rest, with the exception of the band, which remains playing beneath the windows. Cheers and exclamations are heard. LIDA and TARATUTA go up to CHEREVKO and shake hands with him. The SECRETARY makes his speech of welcome, which is drowned by the music.*]

SECRETARY [*gesticulating violently out of the window at the band*]: Not so loud there, blast you, we can't hear ourselves speak. [*The music ceases.*] We have very little time, comrades, so I shall only be able to say the most important things. Andrei Trofimovich is going away again; he's off to Dnieprostroy, to other places where construction is being started, because, comrades, he hasn't come to the end of his run yet and his train goes on and on ahead. That run started nine years ago, in 1920, when Cherevko rushed his train full of Red troops to the front. He didn't know a single station on the way, he didn't even know 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. So for weeks and months on end he overtook the years in a broken engine, and what Comrade Cherevko and the Red Army men did at the front in those weeks was more than could have been done in years. Why? Because they put time in harness and bridled it, comrades. . . . All those workmen from the workshops, the engines, and the mines . . . and forced it to serve the Revolution. They got the better of time, comrades. They're masters of time. Now their train is going farther. It's coming from the All-Union Congress of Soviets, comrades, where the Five-Year Plan for Socialist Reconstruction was set up—the Plan for the sake of which, ten years ago, our workers and peasants, the masters of the great October Revolution, fought and died. So let's conclude by wishing long life to our best fighter and worker, Comrade Cherevko, the constant, reliable engine-driver who guided his train through the flames of the October Revolution and is taking it ever onwards past the milestones of Socialist construction—to Socialism.

[*Cheers and music. KARFUNKEL enters. He looks gloomy and depressed and holds a crumpled letter in his hand.*]

CHEREVKO: Thanks, comrades. It's very good of you. We are masters of time, you say? That was a great thing you said just now, Peter Mikhailovich.

KARFUNKEL: *Salbaderei!* It is their time again, it seems. Everything is ruined. The watch-works is closed down. Reminger has left for Russia. They, not I, it seems, are the masters of time.

CHEREVKO: Masters of time—hm—And true enough, you can hardly believe it, when you remember how much we managed to do in a short time, in the fighting against the Whiteguards. Well, we harnessed time in those days, comrades, and we aren't letting go of it now. When we were shown, at the Congress, a huge map of the Soviet Union, with all the works and factories we were to build during the period of the Five-Year Plan marked on it with lights like glowworms—well, I can tell you, comrades, it took our breath away. It's a tremendous scheme. But we know and believe that we shall build all those factories and works and power-stations in even less than five years—in four, in fact. Because, comrades, we got the better of time way back in those years at the front, when we fought and died for the October Revolution. And if we were able then to win in one year what required ten years, then we'll be able now, in four years, to lay the groundwork for Socialism. And we shall, comrades, mark my words, we shall lay it, because we know what we are aiming at and we believe in our Party, which is leading us on to our goal.

[*Cheers and music.*]

KARFUNKEL: *Alle tausend!* For ten years I have not been able to move from this place and now they want to move the whole world in four years!

SECRETARY: Come back quick, Trofimich. We'll soon have the station finished; the clock's ready and up in its place. Look! Grand, isn't it?

CHEREVKO [*smiling*]: That's how it should be, comrades, the clock on the job is of first importance. It's the control,

the eye of the Five-Year Plan. It keeps new time now, Socialist time.

LIDA [*going up to CHEREVKO and taking him by the hand*]: Yes, you know, don't you? You heard at the Congress how the millions reckon time. Can you tell us where we made the first notch, where time began for us, Cherevko?

CHEREVKO: With the Five-Year Plan, Comrade Zvantseva.

KARFUNKEL: The Five-Year Plan! *Salbaderei!* Again they want to steal my time from me as they have stolen ten years of my life, as they have taken away my watchmaker, the great watchmaker of Heidelberg.

LIDA: Well, and what next?

CHEREVKO: Another Five-Year Plan. If you had only seen the breadth, the scale it's calculated upon.

KARFUNKEL: Their calculations, their calculations again. For what, then, have I given up my ten years?

LIDA [*to CHEREVKO*]: Yes, these are our own calculations, these are our notches that we have hacked out in history, and these notches, these glittering moments have changed the face of the earth. We've already made these notches, Trofimich! We made them in the old days at the front, when five years seemed like one short instant to us, and was worth a hundred years because in that moment we shook the whole world and changed the face of it.

KARFUNKEL: She has actually read my thoughts. [*Rushes up to LIDA.*] Aha! It is you who have stolen my great idea. You have found out that there is no fixed place for an instant in the measurement of time, that it may be

either a second or ten years! Ah! Then give me back my ten years, the years your Revolution took away from me!

TARATUTA: He's gone clean off his head, this German. Clear out of here, citizen!

LIDA: Wait, don't touch him, Taratuta. What's the matter, *mein Herr*?

KARFUNKEL [*comes to himself, looks around, and passes his hand over his brow. His excitement has died down*]: Never mind . . . *Salbaderei!* I have lost my time. I have lost my watch.

TARATUTA: Ah, that's it, is it? Had his watch pinched. Well, these things do happen. . . .

KARFUNKEL: For ten years I have been waiting for this moment. For ten years I have been dreaming of the time when I would go to Heidelberg and make my wonderful watches. And when at last the hour has arrived, I receive this letter. . . .

LIDA: Well, and what about it?

KARFUNKEL: In Germany there is no more science, there is no more work for the learned head and the dexterous hand. Reminger's factory, which made the finest precision instruments in the world, is now making mouse-traps and alarm-clocks for two-marks-twenty-pfennings.

TARATUTA: And are they any good?

KARFUNKEL: And the great Reminger has left for Russia to seek work. The damned traitor. *Salbaderei!* He is going to make watches for the Bolsheviks, watches and clocks like those of the Five-Year Plan! Oh! [*Tears open his collar.*]

LIDA: Calm yourself, *mein Herr*. Our country will be able

to appreciate these great craftsmen of yours if they want to work honestly.

KARFUNKEL: Away with you! Never! Give me back my time! Give me back the instant that I snatched from the heart of time and transfixed with the golden nails of my will. Ah! If it is to be so, I shall turn your time back for you! Time has neither end nor beginning, it can therefore go back. Ah! I shall turn it back twenty years—a hundred years! [*With these words KARFUNKEL rushes towards the scaffolding and starts to climb it.*]

LIDA: Stop him! He'll fall! He's crazy!

I I

[*At this very moment KARFUNKEL'S shouts are cut short, and from somewhere above comes the thud of a falling body. They all run towards the scaffolding, but are stopped half way by the sudden sharp ringing of the station bell and the appearance of the STATION MASTER. The latter goes up to CHEREVKO, and only TARATUTA has time to scramble up the scaffolding.*]

STATION MASTER: Time's up, Andrei Trofimich. The train's ready to leave.

LIDA: So you're off, Trofimich? Well, goodbye.

CHEREVKO: Yes, I'm off, Comrade Zvantseva. First to Dneprostroy, from there to the Nizhni-Novgorod Automobile Works, and from there to the Kharkov Engine Works. There I'll very likely stay. Or—no, may be I shan't stay there either. I'd like to go on and on, always

ahead, to the Urals and farther. I'd like to go to every place where steel-mills are growing up, where the lights of the Five-Year Plan glow, where the train of Socialism passes. No one can stop it now, no one can turn it backwards, as that queer old German wanted. Yes, and where is he, by the way?

TARATUTA [*coming down the gangway quietly*]: He's dead.

LIDA: Dead? Oh, he can't be! What are you saying, Taratuta?

[*There is a stir, exclamations are heard on all sides.*]

TARATUTA: He dropped down there by the clock; must have had a heart attack.

LIDA: How strange! He wanted to stop the clock, to turn time back; he evidently believed he could do it, too. He knew a great deal about time that we don't know.

CHEREVKO: Still, it wasn't he who got the better of time, Lida. We did.

LIDA: Yes. Because he was saving his knowledge for the pick of the craftsmen, while here there are millions of us and we are all masters of time. And because time is only what we ourselves put into it, and if we put into it all our enthusiasm and all our will to conquer, it will do for us what thousands of years and thousands of clever folk like this German cannot do for us. And when all the brief evanescent pleasures of those who live only for themselves have died, we shall still go on living for ever in the toil and happiness of regenerated humanity.

CHEREVKO: Well, goodbye, Lida. Goodbye, comrades. We're off. Come along Olya, time's up.

Act IV

MASTERS OF TIME

[CHEREVKO, OLYA and the others get into the train.]

TARATUTA [*flinging his cap down on the ground*]: Damn it! I feel like chucking all these hens and clearing out too!

LIDA: Don't get upset, Taratuta, we'll go too, some day.

Look at the great wide road before us!

CURTAIN

VARIANTS OF NAMES OF CHARACTERS

YEGOR BULICHOV

Yegor, Yegor Vassilyevich, Yegorushka, Yegori

Alexandra, 'Lexandra, Shura, Shurka

Xenia, Axinia

Varvara, Varya, Varyusha

Elizabeth, Lisa, Lisaveta

Glaphira, Glakha, Glasha

Antonina, Tonka, Tonya

Yakob, Yashka

Alexei, Alyoshka

Stepan, Stepasha, Styopochka

Prokopii, Prokofii, Propottei

Andrei, Andrusha

MASTERS OF TIME

Alexei, Alyosha

Sophia, Sonya

Terentyevich, Terentyich

Vassili, Vassya

Lida, Lydia

