

MAXIM GORKY

Collected Works
in Ten Volumes

Volume IV

Plays

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The Petty Bourgeois

Characters in the Play

VASILY VASILYEVICH BESSEMENOV, 58 years old, a
well-to-do house painter who is head of his guild

AKULINA IVANOVNA BESSEMENOVA, 52 years old, his
wife

PYOTR BESSEMENOV, 26 years old, his son, a student
expelled from the university

TATYANA BESSEMENOVA, 28 years old, his daughter, a
schoolmistress

NIL, 27 years old, his foster-son, an engine-driver

PERCHIKHIN, 50 years old, a distant relative, a bird-man

POLYA, 21 years old, Perchikhin's daughter, a seamstress who
works by the day for the Bessemenovs

YELENA KRIVTSOVA, 24 years old, a jail warden's widow
who has lodgings at the Bessemenovs'

TETEREV, a choir singer
SHISHKIN, a student

} lodgers at the Bessemenovs'

TSVETAYEVA, 25 years old, a schoolmistress and friend of
Tatyana's

STEPANIDA, the cook

AN OLD WOMAN

A YOUNG BOY, a house painter's apprentice

A DOCTOR

The action takes place in a small provincial town.

Setting

A room in the house of a prosperous petty-bourgeois family. The right corner upstage is partitioned off: this narrows the back of the stage and forms a small room downstage right which is separated from the large one by a wooden archway hung with chintz curtains. A door in the back wall of the large room leads into the entrance hall and the other half of the house, where the lodgers' rooms and the kitchen are. To the left of this door stands a huge sideboard and in the corner—a trunk. An old-fashioned clock is placed to the right of the door. Its pendulum, big as a moon, swings slowly in its glass case, and when all is quiet it can be heard to repeat in a cold, detached way: going-gone! going-gone! There are two doors in the left wall, one leading into the room of Bessemenov and his wife, the other into the room of their son Pyotr. Between these doors is a large white-tiled stove. An old sofa upholstered in oilcloth stands in front of the stove, and a big table at which the family dines and has tea stands in the middle of the room. Cheap straight-backed chairs are placed at annoyingly exact intervals around the walls. A china-closet downstage left contains fancy boxes, Easter eggs, a pair of bronze candlesticks, tea and soup spoons, a few wineglasses and silver goblets. A piano and an étagère with sheet music on it stand against the wall facing the audience in the small room separated by the archway. One corner of this room is taken up by a philodendron in a tub. In the right wall are two windows with potted plants on the sills. A couch is placed under the windows, and beside the couch, downstage, there is a little table.

ACT I

About five o'clock in the afternoon. An autumn twilight glances in at the windows. It is almost dark in the big room.

TATYANA, half-reclining on the couch, is reading a book. POLYA is sitting at the table sewing.

TATYANA (*reading*):

"The moon came up. And it was hard to believe that such a sad little moon could throw so much tender, silvery-blue light upon the world." (*Drops the book into her lap.*) It's too dark to read.

POLYA:

Shall I light the lamp?

TATYANA:

Don't bother. I'm tired of reading.

POLYA:

How nicely he writes! So simply and ... touchingly! Makes you want to cry. (*Pause.*) I'm dying to know how it ends. Do you suppose they'll get married?

TATYANA (*vexed*):

What difference does it make?

POLYA:

I could never love a man like him.

TATYANA:

Why not?

POLYA:

He's such a bore. Always complaining. And sort of—shilly-shally. A man ought to know what he wants.

TATYANA (*softly*):

Does Nil?

POLYA:

He certainly does.

TATYANA:

What does he want?

POLYA:

I can't explain—not in the simple way he does. But I know one thing: he'll make it unpleasant for wicked, greedy people. He hates them.

TATYANA:

Who is bad and who is good?

POLYA:

He can tell you. (*Tatyana says nothing, and does not look at Polya, who, with a smile, takes the book out of her lap.*) It's awfully well written. She's so attractive—so simple and straightforward, and without any airs. When you read about a woman like that, it makes you seem better yourself.

TATYANA:

You're very naive and amusing, Polya. Stories of this sort simply annoy me. There never was a girl like that. Or a house, or a river, or a moon, either. It's all made up. Books never paint life as it really is—my life and yours, for instance.

POLYA:

They write about what's interesting. As if there was anything interesting about the way we live!

TATYANA (*irritably, ignoring what she says*):

I often get the impression that the people who write books hate me and want to pick a quarrel with me. They seem to say: "This is better than you think, and that's worse."

POLYA:

It seems to me all writers must be good, kind men. What wouldn't I give to set eyes on a writer!

TATYANA (*musingly*):

They never describe the loathsome, irksome things as I see them. They do something to them—enlarge them—make them seem tragic. And as for the good things—they just make them up. Nobody ever makes love the way the books describe it. And life isn't tragic at all. It just flows on quietly and monotonously, like a big murky river. Your eyes get tired from watching it, and your mind gets so dull that you don't even bother to ask yourself what makes it flow.

POLYA (*lost in reverie*):

I *would* love to see a writer. All the while you were reading, I kept thinking to myself: what's he like? young? old? dark?

TATYANA:

Who?

POLYA:

The author.

TATYANA:

He's dead.

POLYA:

What a pity! Has he been dead long? Was he young when he died?

TATYANA:

Middle-aged. He drank.

POLYA:

Poor thing. (*Pause.*) What makes clever people drink? Take that lodger of yours, the choir singer—he's clever and he drinks. I wonder why?

TATYANA:

Because he's sick and tired of everything.

PYOTR

(*coming out of his room looking the worse for sleep*):

It's dark as the grave in here. Who's sitting over there?

POLYA:

Me. And Tatyana Vasilyevna.

PYOTR:

Why don't you light the lamp?

POLYA:

We're enjoying the twilight.

PYOTR:

The smell of icon oil seeps into my room from the old man's room. Maybe that's why I dreamt I was swimming down a gummy sort of river. It was hard going, and I lost my bearings—couldn't make out the shore-line. Bits of things kept floating past, but the minute I caught on to them they crumbled to dust because they were rotten. A crazy dream. (*Walks back and forth whistling.*) Time for tea, isn't it?

POLYA (*lighting the lamp*):
I'll bring it in. (*Goes out.*)

PYOTR:

Somehow this house of ours gets particularly dull and dreary in the evening. All these antediluvian things seem to swell up and get bigger and heavier and fill up space until there's no air left to breathe. (*Hammers on the sideboard with his fist.*) Take this hippopotamus—it's been standing in one and the same place for eighteen years. Eighteen years! They say life goes rocketing ahead, but this sideboard hasn't budged an inch since the day it was put here. I kept banging my head against it when I was a little chap and I still keep banging into it morally, so to speak. An idiotic piece of furniture. More of a symbol than a sideboard.

TATYANA:

How tiresome you are. Pyotr! You ought not to live the way you do.

PYOTR:

What way?

TATYANA:

Never going anywhere. Except upstairs to see Yelena. You go there every evening, and that's a great worry to mother and father. (*Pyotr doesn't answer, just keeps walking up and down and whistling.*) You can't imagine how tired I get these days! The noise and disorder at school wear me out. Here, at home it's quiet and orderly, although it's become more cheerful in the house since Yelena moved in. I tire so easily. And the winter holiday is still a long way off. November ... December..... (*The clock strikes six.*)

BESSEME NOV

(*putting his head through the door of his room*):

Chattering away, chattering away, and I don't suppose you've written that petition yet.

PYOTR:

I have so.

BESSEMENOV:

You certainly took your time about it! Tck, tck, tck.
(*Disappears.*)

TATYANA:

What petition?

PYOTR:

Suing merchant Sizov for seventeen rubles fifty kopeks—
the cost of painting the roof of his shed.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*enters with another lamp*):

Raining again. (*Goes to the sideboard, takes out the tea-things
and lays the table.*) It's chilly in here. The stove's been
lighted, but it's chilly just the same. The house is old and
full of cracks. Oh, Lordy, Lordy! Your father's pettish
again, children. Says his back aches. He's getting old. And
everything's going wrong—so many cares and expenses!

TATYANA (*to her brother*):

Were you at Yelena's last night?

PYOTR:

Ye-es.

TATYANA:

Was it lively?

PYOTR:

The usual thing. We drank tea, sang songs, got into an
argument....

TATYANA:

Who against whom?

PYOTR:

Nil and Shishkin against me.

TATYANA:

Naturally.

PYOTR:

Nil grew ecstatic, as usual. He gets on my nerves. Prophet of courage and love of life! Absurd. To hear him talk you'd think this unheard of life he describes so avidly was a sort of Uncle Sam who at any minute would shower blessings on us. Shishkin expounded on the beneficial effects of milk and the harmful effects of tobacco. And he accused me of having a bourgeois outlook.

TATYANA:

The same old thing.

PYOTR:

Quite.

TATYANA:

Do you like Yelena very much?

PYOTR:

Not a bad sort—cheery and attractive.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

A giddy creature, if you ask me. She does nothing but fritter her time away. Company every blessed evening—sipping and munching, singing and dancing. She'd do better to go out and buy herself a wash-stand—washes in a basin and splashes the water all over the floor. The boards'll rot.

TATYANA:

I went to a social at the club last night. Somov was there—you know him, member of the Town Council and

patron of our school. He barely nodded to me—barely nodded, mind you, but when Judge Romanov's mistress came into the room he rushed over to her and bowed and kissed her hand as if she were the governor's wife!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Think of that, now! Instead of taking the arm of a decent girl and walking proudly down the hall with her for everybody to see!

TATYANA (*to her brother*):

It's the limit! In the eyes of such people a schoolmistress deserves less respect than a loose, painted woman!

PYOTR:

Forget it. It's beneath you. As for that woman, she may be loose, but she doesn't paint.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

How would you know? Have you licked her cheek? A fine thing! Your sister's insulted and you stand up for the woman who's the cause of it!

PYOTR:

Please, mother!

TATYANA:

It's impossible to talk in front of mother. (*Heavy steps are heard in the hall.*)

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Tut-tut! None of your lip! Instead of marching up and down like that, Pyotr, you might carry in the samovar. Stepanida's been complaining it's too heavy for her.

STEPANIDA

(*brings in the samovar, puts it on the floor beside the table, straightens up, and says to her mistress in a gasping voice*):

Like it or lump it, I'm telling you once again I've not got the strength to carry such a weight. My pins won't hold up under it.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

I suppose you'd like us to hire somebody special to carry in the samovar?

STEPANIDA:

That's your business. Let the choir singer carry it in—won't do him no harm. Pyotr Vasilyevich, be so kind as to lift it up on the table. I just can't.

PYOTR:

Here. Umph!

STEPANIDA:

Thanks. (*Goes out.*)

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

That's an idea, Pyotr; you speak to the choir singer. Let him carry in the samovar. It really—

TATYANA (*sighing*):

Oh for goodness' sake. mother!

PYOTR:

Perhaps I ought to ask him to fetch the water, scrub the floors, clean the chimney, and wash the clothes while he's at it?

AKULINA IVANOVNA

(*with a disparaging wave of her hand*):

Now why should you run on like that? All those things get done in good time and without his help. But as for the samovar—

PYOTR:

Every evening you raise the vital question of who is to bring in the samovar. Nothing will be done about it until you hire a man-of-all-work, mark my word!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

What do we need a man for? Your father looks after the house and yard himself.

PYOTR:

That's what I call being stingy. And it's not pretty to be stingy when you've got all that money in the bank.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Sh! Hold your tongue! If your father hears you, he'll give you a taste of money in the bank! Was it *you* put it in?

PYOTR:

Listen, mother—

TATYANA (*jumping up*):

Oh, Pyotr, must you? I can't stand it another minute!

PYOTR (*going up to her*):

Sorry. A fellow gets drawn into these squabbles before he knows it.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

A fine thing to say! As if it was a crime to talk to your mother!

PYOTR:

The same thing, day after day! It damps a person's spirits. Makes him feel as if he was lined with soot. Or rust.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*calling*):

Father! Come and have tea!

PYOTR:

When my time's up I'll go back to the university and never come home for more than a week at a time, as I used to. Three years in Moscow made me forget what life at home was like, with all its petty meanness and fuss over nothing. It's wonderful to live alone, not to be under your parents' roof.

TATYANA:

Unfortunately, I have nowhere to go.

PYOTR:

I told you to go away and study.

TATYANA:

Why should I? I don't want to study—I want to live. To live! Can't you understand?

AKULINA IVANOVNA

(burning her hand as she takes the teapot off the samovar):

Ouch! Devil take it!

TATYANA *(to her brother)*:

I don't know what it means to really live. I can't even imagine what it's like. How does one go about living?

PYOTR *(pensively)*:

It's not easy, and you've got to be cautious.

BESSEME NOV

(comes out of his room, inspects his son and daughter, sits down at the table):

Have you called the lodgers?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Call them, Pyotr.

(Pyotr goes out, Tatyana walks over to the table.)

BESSEME NOV:

Humph! Lump sugar again. How many times have I told you—?

TATYANA:

Oh, what difference does it make, father?

BESSEME NOV:

I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to your mother. Nothing makes any difference to you, I know that.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

We only bought a pound, father. There's a whole head of sugar untouched—we didn't have time to break it up. Don't be angry.

BESSEME NOV:

I'm not angry, I'm just saying lump sugar is too heavy and not sweet enough, which means there's no saving in it. You must always buy head sugar and break it into pieces yourself. Grumbs will be left and the crumbs can be used in cooking. The sugar itself is light and very sweet. (*To his daughter.*) What are you sighing and pulling a face about?

TATYANA:

Nothing.

BESSEME NOV:

Nothing? Then there's no reason to sigh. Or perhaps it's painful for you to listen to what your father has to say? It's not for my own sake I talk, but for the sake of you young folk. I've lived my life; yours is still ahead of you, and when I look at you I can't help wondering how you're ever going to get on in this world. What's your aim? You don't like our way of living, I can see that plain enough, but what new way have you thought of? That's the question.

TATYANA:

Father! Do you know how many times you've said the same thing?

BESSEME NOV:

And I'll say it again, and I'll keep on saying it over and over until I'm in my grave. Because I have no peace—all on your account. A great mistake I made when I gave you an education. Here's Pyotr expelled from the university, and you—an old maid.

TATYANA:

I have a job, I—

BESSEME NOV:

So I've heard, but what's the good of it? Nobody needs those twenty-five rubles you earn—not even you. Get married and settle down like a respectable girl ought to, and I'll give you *fifty* rubles a month.

AKULINA IVANOVNA

(throughout the old man's talk she has been fidgeting nervously, now and then attempting to put in a word; at last she says gently): Would you like some cheese-cake, father? There's some left over from dinner.

BESSEME NOV

(turns to her, glares at her a moment, then gives a wily smile): Very well. Bring in your cheese-cake, we'll have some. *(Akulina Ivanovna hastens to the sideboard and Bessemenov turns to his daughter.)* See how your mother holds me off? Like a goose keeping the dogs off her goslings. Trembles all over for fear something I say may hurt your feelings. Ah, the bird-man! Turned up again after all this time!

PERCHIKHIN

(appears in the doorway with Polya standing silently behind him): Peace be unto the grey-haired master of this house, his handsome wife and his respected offspring, now and forevermore.

BESSEMENOV:

So you've been drinking again?

PERCHIKHIN:

Drowning my troubles.

BESSEMENOV:

What troubles?

PERCHIKHIN (*bows to everyone as he talks*):

Sold a goldfinch today that sang with a yodel. Had it for three years, and went and sold it. That was a low-down thing to do, and so I felt real heartbroken. Too bad about that birdie. Got used to it. Loved it.

(Polya smiles and nods to her father.)

BESSEMENOV:

Then what did you sell it for?

PERCHIKHIN

(*holds on to the backs of the chairs as he makes his way round the table*):
Got a good price for it.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

What's money to you? You just squander it away.

PERCHIKHIN (*sitting down*):

True. Can't hold on to money. True enough.

BESSEMENOV:

And so there was no reason to sell it after all.

PERCHIKHIN:

Yes, there was. The birdie was going blind. It would have died soon.

BESSEMENOV (*chuckling*):

So you aren't quite the fool you look.

PERCHIKHIN:

You think it was cleverness made me do it? Oh, no—it was the vileness of my nature.

(Enter Pyotr and Teterev.)

TATYANA:

Where's Nil?

PYOTR:

He and Shishkin have gone to a rehearsal.

BESSEME NOV:

Where's the play to be given?

PYOTR:

In the riding hall. To the soldiers.

PERCHIKHIN (*to Teterev*):

My respects to God's piper. Shall we go and catch titmice, you and me?

TETEREV:

Let's. When?

PERCHIKHIN:

Tomorrow if you like.

TETEREV:

Not tomorrow. I've got to sing at a funeral.

PERCHIKHIN:

Then let's go before mass.

TETEREV:

That suits me better. Call for me. Akulina Ivanovna, was there anything left over from dinner? Some porridge, or something?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

There was. Polya, go fetch it.

(Polya goes out.)

TETEREV:

Thank you for that. Today, as you are aware, a funeral and a wedding deprived me of my dinner.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

I know.

(Pyotr takes up a glass of tea and goes through the archway into the little room, followed by the piercing eye of his father and the hostile eye of Teterev. For a few seconds all eat and drink in silence.)

BESSEME NOV:

You must be making a lot of money this month, Terenty Khrisanfovich. Not a day passes but somebody dies.

TETEREV:

Not bad. A streak of good luck, you might say.

BESSEME NOV:

And lots of weddings.

TETEREV:

True, they're marrying hard this month.

BESSEME NOV:

Save up your money and get married yourself.

TETEREV:

No, thank you.

(Tatyana joins her brother and they begin talking in undertones.)

PERCHIKHIN:

That's right, don't get married. Marriage is not for queer ducks like us. Let's go and catch bullfinches.

TETEREV:

Let's.

PERCHIKHIN:

A glorious thing, that bullfinch-catching! Down comes the first snow, decking out the earth like a priest at Eastertide. Everything pure and shining and still as still. If it's sunny in the bargain—ah! then your heart fairly leaps up with joy! The autumn leaves still glinting with gold, the boughs silver with snow, and suddenly in the midst of all that loveliness—whir! whir!—out of the clear sky comes a flock of bright red birds that perch like poppies on the branches—chirp! chirp! chirp! Sweet little birdies, fat little birdies, strutting about like brigadier-generals, peeping and chirping—the prettiest sight you ever saw! Makes you want to be a birdie yourself for the joy of playing in the snow with them, it does indeed.

BESSEMENOV:

The bullfinch is a foolish bird.

PERCHIKHIN:

I'm foolish myself.

TETEREV:

A pretty picture you painted.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*to Perchikhin*):

You've got the mind of a two-year-old.

PERCHIKHIN:

I do love to catch birds. Could anything be prettier than a song-bird?

BESSEMENOV:

It's a sin to catch birds, don't you know that? .

PERCHIKHIN:

I do, but I can't help it. It's the only thing I love to do or know how to do, and any job is made better by loving it, seems to me.

BESSEMENOV:

Any job?

PERCHIKHIN:

Any at all.

BESSEMENOV:

And what if you love slipping other people's things into your own pocket?

PERCHIKHIN:

That's not a job; that's thieving.

BESSEMENOV:

Hm. Maybe.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (yawning):

Oh-ho-ho! Very tiresome. Funny how long and tiresome the evenings are. You might cheer us up by bringing your guitar and singing something, Terenty Khrisanfovich.

TETEREV (*placidly*):

On agreeing to become your lodger, respected Akulina Ivanovna, I did not take upon myself the obligation of supplying you with entertainment.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*not catching it*):

What's that?

TETEREV:

That's that.

BESSEMENOV (*surprised and exasperated*):

I can't understand you, Terenty Khrisanfovich. You're not worth your salt, if you'll excuse my saying it, but you put on the airs of a fine gentleman. Where do you get them?

TETEREV (*placidly*):

I was born with them.

BESSEMENOV:

Just what are you so proud of, if you don't mind telling me?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

He's just showing off. What's there for a man like him to be proud of?

TATYANA:

Mother!

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*with a start*):

Eh? What's that?

(Tatyana shakes her head reproachfully.)

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Have I said something I oughtn't to again? Ah me! Very well, I'll keep my mouth shut if I must!

BESSEMENOV (*offended*):

Watch what you say, mother. There's educated people here. They'll criticise anything and anybody, what with all the learning they've got. You and me are just old and foolish.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*placatingly*):

That's all right. They really do know a lot.

PERCHIKHIN:

It's true what you said, brother. You said it in fun, but it's true just the same.

BESSEME NOV:

I said nothing in fun.

PERCHIKHIN:

But old folk really are foolish.

BESSEME NOV:

Especially you.

PERCHIKHIN:

I don't count. If you ask me, there wouldn't be no foolishness if there weren't no old folk. An old man thinks the way a damp tree burns—more smoke than fire.

TETEREV (*smiling*):

Right you are!

(Polya gazes affectionately at her father and strokes his shoulder.)

BESSEME NOV (*sullenly*):

Humph. Well, go on with your fabrications.

(Pyotr and Tatyana stop talking and watch Perchikhin with a smile on their lips.)

PERCHIKHIN (*vivaciously*):

Old folk are stubborn—that's the main thing. An old man knows he's wrong, and that he don't understand nothing, but he won't admit it. He's too proud. "Is it possible," thinks he, "to have lived all these years and worn out forty pairs of breeches, and still not know nothing? Oh, no!" It's too hurtful to admit a thing like that, so he goes on pounding his fist and shouting: "I'm old! I'm right!" But it don't do no good. His mind's gone

groggy. As for the young—their minds are light and quick.

BESSEME NOV (*rudely*):

A liar if there ever was one! But look, if we're so foolish, oughtn't we to be taught sense?

PERCHIKHIN:

Oh, no! What's the good of flattening bullets against a rock?

BESSEME NOV:

Wait, don't interrupt—I'm older than you. Here's what I say: why is it the ones with light, quick minds run away from us, the old folk, and hide in corners and make faces at us and don't even want to talk to us? Think that over. And I'll think it over, too—all by myself, beings as I'm too foolish for this company. (*Pushes back his chair with a loud noise, goes to his room and says from the doorway*): Too foolish for my educated offspring.

(Pause.)

PERCHIKHIN (*to Pyotr and Tatyana*):

What did you have to go and hurt your father's feelings for?

POLYA (*smiling*):

It's you who did that, father.

PERCHIKHIN:

Me? I never hurt a flea!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Oh, Lordy, Lordy! What's the matter with us? Why did you offend the old man? You're all so puffed up and peevish. And he's old. All he needs is peace and quiet, and to be paid respect. After all, he's your father.

I'll go and speak to him. You wash up the tea-things, Polya.

TATYANA (*going over to the table*):

Why should father be angry with us?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*from the door*):

Because it's so thoughtful of you to avoid him all the time, clever girl!

(As Polya washes the dishes Teterev puts his elbows on the table and gazes at her heavy-eyed. Perchikhin goes over to Pyotr and sits down at the little table. Tatyana goes slowly to her own room.)

POLYA (*to Teterev*):

What makes you look at me like ... like that?

TETEREV:

Nothing in particular.

PERCHIKHIN:

What you thinking about, Pyotr?

PYOTR:

How to get away from here.

PERCHIKHIN:

There's something I've been wanting to ask you for a long time. What's "sewerage"?

PYOTR:

What do you care? I can't be bothered explaining—it would take too long to make you understand.

PERCHIKHIN:

Do you understand?

PYOTR:

Of course.

PERCHIKHIN (*glancing suspiciously into his face*):

Hm.

POLYA:

I wonder what's keeping Nil Vasilyevich so long.

TETEREV:

What remarkable eyes you've got!

POLYA:

You told me that yesterday.

TETEREV:

And I'll tell you the same tomorrow.

POLYA:

Why?

TETEREV:

I don't know. Perhaps you think I'm in love with you?

POLYA:

Heavens, no! I don't think anything.

TETEREV:

Don't you? Too bad. Try thinking.

POLYA:

About what?

TETEREV:

Oh, anything—why I keep forcing myself upon you, for instance. Think it over and tell me your answer.

POLYA:

You're very odd.

TETEREV:

I know. You've told me that before. And so I'll tell you once again: go away from here. You mustn't stay in this house. Go away.

PYOTR:

Is this a love scene? Had I better withdraw?

TETEREV:

Don't bother. I class you among the inanimate objects.

PYOTR:

Rather flat.

POLYA (*to Teterev*):

How scrappy you are!

(Teterev walks away and begins to listen attentively to what Pyotr and Perchikhin are saying. Tatyana comes out of her room with a shawl wrapped round her and sits down at the piano.)

TATYANA (*as she leafs through the music*):

Hasn't Nil come yet?

POLYA:

No.

PERCHIKHIN:

Not very cheery in this house.... Here's another thing I wanted to ask you, Pyotr: not long ago I read in the paper like as if the English had built a flying boat. Looks like any other boat, but if you get in it and press a certain button—zing!—up it goes like a bird to the very clouds and carries people goodness knows where. They say lots of Englishmen have disappeared this way. Is it true, Pyotr?

PYOTR:

Nonsense.

PERCHIKHIN:

But it was in the paper.

PYOTR:

Lots of nonsense gets in the paper.

PERCHIKHIN:

Does it, now?

(Tatyana plays something soft and sad.)

PYOTR (*tetchily*):

Yes, it does.

PERCHIKHIN:

Don't be angry. I don't see why all you young folk should be so uppity with us back numbers. You don't even want to talk to us. That's not nice, is it?

PYOTR:

What next?

PERCHIKHIN:

Why, the next thing is: it's time for me to be going, beings as you're sick of me. Are you going home soon, Polya?

POLYA:

As soon as I tidy up. (*Leaves the room; Teterev follows her with his eyes.*)

PERCHIKHIN:

Have you forgot, Pyotr, how you and me used to catch titmice together? You had a soft spot in your heart for me those days.

PYOTR:

Even now I—

PERCHIKHIN:

Oh, it's clear how you feel now.

PYOTR:

I was fond of gingerbread and lollipops in those days, but they make me sick now.

PERCHIKHIN:

I see. Eh, Terenty, shall we go and have a mug of beer?

TETEREV:

I'm not in the mood.

PERCHIKHIN:

Then I'll go alone. Nobody's grumpy in the pub. Nobody puts on airs in the pub. A man could die of the blues with you folk, and it's not to your credit my saying so. You don't do nothing, don't want nothing. What if we have a game of cards? There's just four of us. (*Teterev looks at Pyotr and smiles.*) Don't feel like it? Just as you say. So it's good-bye. (*Walking up to Teterev he goes through the motions of tossing down a drink.*) Come along?

TETEREV:

No.

(Perchikhin gives a hopeless wave of his hand and goes out. Silence. The notes of the piece Tatyana is picking out on the piano sound very distinctly. Pyotr, who is lying on the couch, listens and whistles the tune. Teterev gets up and paces the floor. Out in the hall a pail or a samovar-pipe falls with a crash, and Stepanida is heard to say: "Who let *you* in here?")

TATYANA (*going on with her playing*):

I wonder why Nil doesn't come?

PYOTR:

Nobody comes.

TATYANA:

Are you waiting for Yelena?

PYOTR:

For anybody.

TETEREV:

No one will come and see you.

TATYANA:

You're always so morbid.

TETEREV:

No one will come, for you have nothing to offer anyone.

PYOTR:

Thus spake Terenty-the-Oracle.

TETEREV (*insistently*):

Has it ever occurred to you that that "back number", the tipsy bird-man, is alive, body and soul, whereas you two, who are just on the threshold of life, are already half-dead?

PYOTR:

And you? What might be your appraisal of yourself?

TATYANA (*getting up off the piano stool*):

Oh, stop it! The same thing over and over! You've had this out before, you know.

PYOTR:

I like your style, Terenty Khrisanfovich. And I like the role you play—the role of our judge. But why have you

chosen it? You always sound as if you were administering extreme unction to us.

TETEREV:

Extreme unction is not administered by such as me.

PYOTR:

That's not the point. What I wanted to say was that you dislike us.

TETEREV:

Very much.

PYOTR:

Commendable candour. Thanks.

(Enter Polya.)

TETEREV:

You're welcome.

POLYA:

To what?

TATYANA:

Insults.

TETEREV:

The truth.

POLYA:

I want to go to the theatre. Won't someone come with me?

TETEREV:

I will.

PYOTR:

What's on tonight?

POLYA:

Second Youth. Won't you come, too, Tatyana Vasilyevna?

TATYANA:

No, I'm not going to the theatre this winter. I'm sick of it. I can't stand those melodramas, with all their shooting and shouting and sobbing. (*Teterev strikes a key of the piano with one finger, calling forth a sad clear note.*) It's all so false. Life twists people into knots without any noise and shouting. Without any tears. Imperceptibly.

PYOTR (*morosely*):

They dramatise the tortures of love, but nobody gives a damn for the drama of a man torn between duty and desire.

(*Teterev, smiling, goes on striking bass notes.*)

POLYA (*smiling self-consciously*):

I'm just mad on the theatre. Take don César de Bazan¹, the Spanish grandee—he's simply wonderful! That's my idea of a hero.

TETEREV:

Am I like him?

POLYA:

Heavens! Not the least little bit!

TETEREV (*chuckling*):

What a pity!

TATYANA:

It makes me sick to hear actors make love on the stage. It's never like that in real life. Simply never!

POLYA:

Well, I'm going. Are you coming, Terenty Khrisanfovich?

TETEREV (*stops striking the keys*):

Not now—after being told I don't resemble a Spanish grandee.

(Polya goes out laughing.)

PYOTR (*watching her go*):

What's a grandee to her?

TETEREV:

She finds something wholesome in a grandee.

TATYANA:

She likes his fine clothes.

TETEREV:

And his cheerfulness. Good people are always cheerful; rascals rarely are.

PYOTR:

According to your theory, you must be the greatest rascal on earth.

TETEREV

(*again bringing forth soft rich notes from the piano*):

I'm just a drunk. Do you know why there are so many drunks in this Russia of ours? Drinking makes life easier. We Russians love a drunk. We hate innovators and people who are daring, but we love a drunk. That's because it's easier to love something petty and worthless than something great and good.

PYOTR (*pacing the floor*):

"This Russia of ours"! How strange it sounds! Is Russia really ours? Is it mine? Is it yours? Who are "we"? What are "we"?

TETEREV (*singing*):

"Free-winged birds are we...."²

TATYANA:

For heaven's sake, stop pounding on the piano, Terenty Khrisanfovich! It sounds like the tolling of a funeral bell!

TETEREV (*continuing*):

I'm playing an accompaniment to my mood.

(Tatyana flounces out into the hall.)

PYOTR (*reflectively*):

Do stop it, it really does get on one's nerves.... It seems to me that when a Frenchman or an Englishman says "France" or "England", the word means something real, something concrete and comprehensible. But when I say "Russia", it means nothing at all to me. I'm quite incapable of giving it any clear meaning. (*Pause.*

Teterev goes on sounding notes.) There are lots of words we use by force of habit, without taking stock of their meaning—"life", for instance. "My life." What meaning is hidden in those two words? (*He paces the floor in silence.*

Teterev softly strikes the keys, filling the room with moaning sounds, while he watches Pyotr with a smile frozen on his face.)

What the dickens ever made me get mixed up in that student movement? I went to the university to study, and that's what I was doing.... For God's sake, stop your hammering!... I was quite unaware that any "regime" was keeping me from studying Roman law—quite unaware of it, to be perfectly frank. But I was aware of the pressure of my comrades, and I yielded to it. And so two years of my life have been struck out. That's what I call violence—violence done to me; can you deny it? I dreamed of completing my studies, becoming a lawyer, getting a job, reading, studying life—in a word, of living!

TETEREV (*prompting him ironically*):

To the delight of your parents, and the benefit of church and state,³ as befits a humble servant of society.

PYOTR:

Society? That's the one thing I loathe! It keeps raising the demands made on the individual without giving him an opportunity to develop normally and unimpeded. Society in the person of my comrades, shouted at me: "A man must be, above all other things, a citizen!" Well, I tried being a citizen, damn them! I have no desire and am under no obligation to submit to the demands of society! I'm an individual, and an individual must be free. I say, stop that damned pounding!

TETEREV:

I'm accompanying you, most respected petty bourgeois who made the mistake of being an honest citizen for—how long?—half an hour? (*Noise out in the hall.*)

PYOTR (*irritably*):

Don't go too far!

(With a mocking glance at Pyotr, Teterев goes on striking the keys. Enter Nil, Yelena, Shishkin, Tsvetayeva, and, a bit behind them, Tatyana.)

YELENA:

What's the meaning of the funeral bell? Good evening, Monster. Good evening, Lawyer—or rather, would-be Lawyer. What are you doing here?

PYOTR (*sullenly*):

Talking nonsense.

TETEREV:

And I am tolling the knell of him who has taken leave of life before his time.

NIL (*to Teterев*):

Will you do something for me? (*Whispers something in his ear. Teterев nods.*)

TSVETAYEVA:

It was a marvellous rehearsal, simply marvellous!

YELENA:

You should have seen how fiercely Lieutenant Bykov flirted with me tonight, Mr. Lawyer!

SHISHKIN:

Bykov's a milksop.

PYOTR:

What makes you think I care who flirts with you?

YELENA:

Oh dear, I didn't know you were so out of sorts.

TSVETAYEVA:

Pyotr Vasilyevich is always out of sorts.

SHISHKIN:

He's that sort.

YELENA:

And are you, too, in your usual mood, Tanya? Gloomy as an autumn night?

TATYANA:

Yes, I am.

YELENA:

And I'm feeling ever so gay. Why is it I'm always so gay?

NIL:

I can't answer that, I'm always gay myself.

TSVETAYEVA:

So am I.

SHISHKIN:

I'm not *always*, but—

TATYANA:

—all the time.

YELENA:

Was that an attempt at being funny, Tanya? Good for you! Tell me this, Monster, why am I always so gay?

TETEREV:

Oh, thou embodiment of Frivolity!

YELENA:

What's that? Very well, I'll remember those words the next time you make love to me!

NIL:

I wouldn't mind having something to eat. I've got to go to work in a little while.

TSVETAYEVA:

And work all night long? Poor dear!

NIL:

All night and all day. Twenty-four hours. I think I'll go into the kitchen and pay my respects to Stepanida.

TATYANA:

I'll tell her to feed you. (*Goes out with Nil.*)

TETEREV (*to Yelena*):

Look here, young lady, am I too supposed to fall in love with you?

YELENA:

Yes, you are, you brazen man! Yes, you are, you grouchy monster. You are, you are, you are!

TETEREV (*backing away from her*):

Then I will. It won't be hard. I was once in love with two young girls and a married woman at the same time.

YELENA (*creeping up on him threateningly*):

And what came of it?

TETEREV:

Nothing. All in vain, alas!

YELENA

(*under her breath, nodding in the direction of Pyotr*):

What went on between you two? (*Teterev laughs. They talk quietly together.*)

SHISHKIN (*to Pyotr*):

Could you let me have a ruble for three or four days? My boots have burst open.

PYOTR:

Here. You owe me seven already.

SHISHKIN:

I haven't forgotten.

TSVETAYEVA:

Pyotr Vasilyevich! Why don't you take part in our plays?

PYOTR:

I can't act.

SHISHKIN:

Do you think we can?

TSVETAYEVA:

You could at least come to the rehearsals. The soldiers are just darlings. There's one called Shirkov—he's just too

funny for words. So sweet and innocent, with such a shy smile. And so adorably stupid.

PYOTR (*watching Yelena out of the corner of his eye*):

How you can find anything interesting in a person who's stupid, is more than I can see!

SHISHKIN

Shirkov's not the only one—

PYOTR:

I don't doubt the whole company's just as bad.

TSVETAYEVA:

How can you say such a thing? What makes you so nasty? Is that what you call being aristocratic?

TETEREV (*suddenly speaking in a loud voice*):

I'm incapable of pitying others.

YELENA:

Sh!

PYOTR:

As you know, I belong to the middle-class.

SHISHKIN:

Which makes it all the harder to understand your attitude towards the common people.

TETEREV:

Nobody ever pitied me.

YELENA (*under her breath*):

But you ought to return good for evil.

TETEREV:

I have nothing to return.

YELENA:

Not so loud.

· PYOTR (*listening to what Yelena and Teterev are saying*):

Why should you pretend to feel sympathy for the common people?

TSVETAYEVA:

We don't pretend. We share with them whatever we have.

SHISHKIN:

It's not even that. We just find pleasure in being with them. They're unaffected. And there's something wholesome about them, like the air in the woods. Bookworms like us need to fill our lungs with fresh air every once in a while.

PYOTR (*insistently, with suppressed annoyance*):

You like deceiving yourselves. You have unacknowledged motives for making up to these soldiers. It's absurd, if you don't mind my bluntness. To seek fresh air among soldiers is ... er... begging your pardon....

TSVETAYEVA:

But not only among soldiers. We give performances at the railway depot, too.

PYOTR:

It's all the same. What I'm saying is that you just deceive yourselves when you try to make some lofty "cause" out of all your fuss and bluster. You're convinced you are helping to develop the individual. Sheer self-deception. Tomorrow some officer or foreman will come along and give your "individual" a sock in the jaw that will knock everything out of his head that you've put into it—if you've really put anything into it.

TSVETAYEVA:

It's very discouraging to hear you say such things.

SHISHKIN (*glumly*):

And very disagreeable. It's not the first time I've heard you say them, and I like them less each time. One of these days you and I are going to have a good talk. Pyotr—once and for all!

PYOTR (*in sarcastic drawl*):

You alarm me. But still I'm dying to have that talk.

YELENA (*vehemently*):

What makes you like that? (*To the others*): Why should he want people to think him a beast?

PYOTR:

Sheer affectation on my part.

TSVETAYEVA:

It really is. You're just trying to be different. All men try to be different in front of women. Some of them make themselves out to be pessimists, others Mephistopheles. But really they're just a lot of lazybones.

TETEREV:

Short and sweet. Very well put.

TSVETAYEVA:

Perhaps you're fishing for compliments? You'll have a long wait. I know you too well.

TETEREV:

Which is more than I can say about myself. By the way, if you know so much, maybe you know this: ought one to return good for evil? In other words, do you consider good and evil to be coins of equal value?

TSVETAYEVA:

Always twisting things into paradoxes!

SHISHKIN:

Wait, don't interrupt. That's an interesting question. I for one am always ready to listen to Teterrev. Give him time and he's sure to drive a nail of truth into your head. Most of us think very ordinary thoughts—as flat and worn as old coins.

PYOTR:

You're too generous. You credit others with your own virtues.

SHISHKIN:

Come, come, why shouldn't we face the truth? We ought to be honest even in little things. As for me, I frankly confess I've never expressed a single original idea, and oh! how I long to!

TETEREV:

You've just done it.

SHISHKIN (*briskly*):

What's that? Do you mean it?

TETEREV:

I do. You've just expressed one, but I'll let you guess what it was.

SHISHKIN:

It slipped out by chance.

TETEREV:

One can't be original on purpose. I've tried it.

YELENA:

Let's hear what you have to say about good and evil, you Inquisitor, you.

SHISHKIN:

Let off some philosophical steam.

TETEREV (*striking a pose*):

Worthy bipeds! You are greatly mistaken when you say you must return good for evil. Evil is a quality you are born with, and therefore it is of little value. Good is something you yourselves have acquired, and at so great a price that it has become rare and dear and lovelier by far than anything else on earth. Hence the conclusion that there is no point to, and no profit in, returning good for evil. Good must be returned only for good. Never must you give more than you receive, if you would not develop in others the instinct of the usurer. Man is a greedy creature. Once having received more than his due, he will demand more and more ever after. Nor must you give him less than his due, for if you once cheat him (man, mind, never forgets an injury!), he will proclaim that you are bankrupt. He will lose all respect for you and the next time, instead of paying you the good you have earned, he will offer you alms. Be punctilious in returning good for good, brothers, for no one on earth is more piteable and obnoxious than he who gives alms to his neighbour. But when you receive evil, return it many times over. Be cruelly lavish in paying back the evil your neighbour does you. If, when you ask for a crust of bread, he gives you a stone, bring the entire cliff down on his head.

(Teterev begins his speech in a light vein, but he grows more and more serious as he goes on, ending up in strong, fervent accents. When it is over he walks away with heavy step. No one speaks, everyone feels uncomfortable, aware of the sincerity and gravity of what he has said.)

YELENA (*softly*):

People must have made you suffer horribly.

TETEREV (*grinning*):

Yes, but I have the hope that in time *they* will be made to suffer by me. Or rather, for me.

NIL

(entering with a bowl and a slice of bread in his hands. As he speaks he keeps one eye on the bowl to see that he doesn't spill its contents. Tatyana follows him in):

Philosophy, philosophy! You have a bad habit of philosophising over every trifle, Tanya—the rain, a cut finger, or a smoking stove. When I hear philosophy wasted on such flea-bites I can't help thinking that learning does some people a lot of harm.

TATYANA:

You're very rude, Nil!

NIL *(sitting down at the table and beginning to eat):*

Am I really? If you're bored, begin to do something. A person who works has no time to be bored. If you're unhappy living at home, go and live in the country and teach the kids there. Or go to Moscow and study.

YELENA:

Good for you, Nil. And scold this wretch too *(indicating Teterév)*.

NIL *(throwing him a sidelong glance):*

Another specimen. A second Heraclitus.

TETEREV:

A second Swift, if you don't mind.

NIL:

Too good for you.

PYOTR:

Much too good.

TETEREV:

A pity. I'd love to be called a Swift.

TSVETAYEVA:

You don't want much!

NIL (*without raising his eyes from his bowl*):

Come, don't lose your temper. By the way, has ... er ...
Polya been here? Or rather, where has she gone?

TATYANA:

To the theatre. Why?

NIL:

Nothing, I was just asking.

TATYANA:

Do you want her for something?

NIL:

No. That is, not at the moment, but in general, I ... er ...
always want her. Oh, damn it all! What am I saying?
(*Everyone but Tatyana smiles.*)

TATYANA (*insistently*):

What do you want her for?

(Nil goes on eating, ignoring her question.)

YELENA (*quickly, to Tatyana*):

What was he scolding you for? Do tell me.

TSVETAYEVA:

Oh, yes! That ought to be interesting.

SHISHKIN:

I like the way he scolds.

PYOTR:

And I—the way he eats.

NIL:

Whatever I do, I do well.

YELENA:

Come, Tanya, speak up.

TATYANA:

I don't want to.

TSVETAYEVA:

She never wants to do anything.

TATYANA:

How do you know? Maybe I want terribly to ... to die.

TSVETAYEVA:

Ugh! How horrid!

YELENA:

Brrr! I can't bear to hear people talk about death!

NIL:

What can you say about death until you die?

TETEREV:

That's true philosophy for you.

YELENA:

Let's go up to my room. The samovar must be boiling by this time.

SHISHKIN:

Just the thing—a glass of tea! And something to go with it, I hope?

YELENA:

Of course.

SHISHKIN (*pointing to Nil*):

The sight of him has filled me with envy, sinner that I am.

NIL:

Nothing to envy any more—I've gobbled everything up. I'm coming too—I have an hour or so to spare.

TATYANA:

Hadn't you better take a nap before going to work?

NIL:

No, I hadn't.

YELENA:

Pyotr Vasilyevich! Are you coming?

PYOTR:

If you'll allow me to.

YELENA:

With pleasure! Give me your arm!

TSVETAYEVA:

Form pairs! Nil Vasilyevich, you come with me!

SHISHKIN (*to Tatyana*):

And you with me.

TETEREV:

They say there are more women than men in the world, but I've lived in many a town in this country, and never, not once, has there been a woman left over for me.

YELENA

(*laughing, makes for the door, singing as she goes*):

Allons enfants de la patri—i—i—i—e!⁴

SHISHKIN (*giving Pyotr a push in the back*):

Get a move on, enfant de la patrie.

(They go out noisily, singing and laughing. For a few seconds the room is empty. Then the door of Bessemenov's room opens and Akulina Ivanovna comes out. Yawning, she puts out the lamps. From inside the room comes the voice of the old man droning his prayers. In the darkness the old woman stumbles over chairs as she makes her way back to her room.)

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same setting

Noon of an autumn day. BESSEME NOV is sitting at the table. TATYANA is slowly and silently pacing the floor. PYOTR is standing in the archway between the two rooms gazing out of the window.

BESSEME NOV:

For a full hour I've been talking to you, my dear children, but my words don't seem to reach your hearts. One of you stands with his back to me, the other walks back and forth like a crow on a fence.

TATYANA:

I'll sit down. (*Does so.*)

PYOTR (*turning to his father*):

Come straight out with it: what is it you want of us?

BESSEME NOV:

I want to know what you're like. As for you, Pyotr, I want to see what sort of man you are.

PYOTR:

Wait a bit. You'll see in time. You'll see and understand, but first let me finish my studies.

BESSEME NOV:

Hm, studies. Well, go ahead and study! But you don't. You waste your time bucking and balking. You've learned to turn your nose up at everything, but you haven't learned a sense of proportion. They threw you out of the university. Unjustly, you think? Not at all. A student is a student, and it's not up to him to say how things ought to

be. If every young whipper-snapper tried to lay down the law, everything would be in a muddle and there would be no place in this world for sane and sensible people. First you've got to learn, and when you're an expert at your job it will be time enough to begin criticising. Until then, anybody has a right to say "bah!" to your criticism. I tell you this not to find fault, but from the bottom of my heart, because you're my son, flesh of my flesh, and all that. I wouldn't say it to Nil, although goodness knows I've tried hard with him, even if he is my foster-son, but he's got different blood in him. He's not my sort, and the older he gets, the less like me he is. I can see he's cut out to be a scoundrel—an actor, or something just as bad. Maybe he'll even be a Socialist. Well, let him. Serves him right.

AKULINA IVANOVNA

(peeping in at the door and speaking in a meek, plaintive voice):
Isn't it time for dinner, father?

BESSEMENOV *(sternly):*

Get out of here! Don't poke your nose in where it don't belong. *(Akulina Ivanovna shuts the door. Tatyana glances reproachfully at her father, gets up, and begins to pace the floor again.)* See that? Your poor mother hasn't a minute's peace—always on her guard—scared to death I'll hurt your feelings. I don't want to hurt nobody. But you've hurt mine and hurt them deeply. I walk around my own house on tiptoe, as if there was broken glass on the floors. My old friends have stopped coming to see me. "Your children have got to be so educated," they say, "we're afraid they'll laugh at simple folk like us." And you have laughed at them more than once, making me blush with shame. All my friends have dropped me, as if educated children were the plague. You don't pay the least attention to your father, never say a kind word to him, never tell him what's on your mind, never confide your plans to him. I'm like a stranger to you. And yet I love

you—yes, love you! Do you understand what that means—to love somebody? They threw you out of the university, and I suffer for it. For no good reason Tatyana is pining away, an old maid, and I resent it. I don't even know what to say to people. Why is my Tatyana any worse than the girls who get married and all the rest? I want to see you a man, Pyotr—not a student. Look at the son of Philip Nazarov—he finished his studies, married a girl with a good dowry, gets a salary of two thousand a year, and is about to be elected a member of the Town Council.

PYOTR:

I'll get married too, in time.

BESSEME NOV:

Oh, I don't doubt that! You're ready to get married tomorrow, but who is it you want to marry? A widow. A flighty, loose woman!

PYOTR (*flaring up*):

You have no right to call her that!

BESSEME NOV:

Call her what? A widow? Or a loose woman?

TATYANA:

Father! Please, oh please! Pyotr, leave the room or else keep quiet. I keep quiet, so why can't you? I don't understand anything. When you talk, father, it seems to me you're right. You *are* right, of course; I don't doubt it, but what is right for you is not right for us—for Pyotr and me. Can't you see that? We have our own way of looking—Wait, father, don't be angry. Both of us are right.

BESSEME NOV (*jumping up*):

That's a lie! Only one of us is right. I'm right! How can you be right? Show me how! Prove it!

PYOTR:

Don't shout, father. I say the same thing. You're right, but your way of seeing things is a way that's too tight for us. We've grown out of it, as we grew out of our clothes. It stifles us, holds us down. Your way of life won't do for us.

BESSEME NOV:

It won't, won't it? Who do you think you are? Oh, yes—you've had an education, while I? I'm a fool. You're—

TATYANA:

It's not that, father.

BESSEME NOV:

Yes, it is. It's just that. Your friends come to see you—the house is so noisy a person can't even get his sleep at night. (*To Pyotr.*) You make eyes at that tart from upstairs in my very face. (*To Tatyana.*) You go about looking as if you'd lost your last friend. Me and your mother get squeezed into the corner—

AKULINA IVANOVNA

(*bursting into the room and crying pitiably*): Ah, my dears! As if I—Come, husband, do I ever complain? Me in the corner? I'd gladly stay in the corner, or out in the shed, if only you wouldn't quarrel! Don't snap at each other, dears! Don't, please don't!

BESSEME NOV

(*holding her with one hand, pushing her away with the other*): Get out of here, old woman. They don't need you. They don't need either of us. They're too smart for us. We're not their sort.

TATYANA (*groaning*):

How horrible! How simply ghastly!

PYOTR (*white with despair*):

Can't you see, father, that this is stupid? Abominably stupid. All of a sudden, out of a clear sky—

BESSEME NOV:

All of a sudden? Oh, no! Not all of a sudden. This has been coming to a head for years deep down inside of me.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Let him have his own way, Pyotr. Don't argue with him. Take pity on your father, Tatyana!

BESSEME NOV:

Stupid? Oh no, you fool! Not stupid. Tragic! All of a sudden—father and children—both right! Beasts, that's what you are!

TATYANA:

Pyotr, leave the room! Calm yourself, father—do, I beg of you.

BESSEME NOV:

Heartless beasts! Squeezing us out. What are you so proud of? What have you ever done to be proud of? As for us, we've lived. And worked. Built houses—for you. Committed sins—for you. More sins than you'd think—all for you!

PYOTR (*shouting*):

Did we ever ask you to?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Pyotr! For mercy's sake—!

TATYANA:

Leave the room, Pyotr! I can't bear it! I'm going away.
(*Wearily sinks into a chair.*)

BESSEME NOV:

Aha! Running away from the truth! Like the devil from incense. The voice of your conscience at last!

(Nil throws the door wide open and stands in the doorway. He has just come from work. His face is dirty, streaked with dust and soot. His hands, too, are dirty. He is wearing muddy kneeboots and a short belted jacket shiny with dirt and grease. He holds out one hand as he speaks.)

NIL:

Give me twenty kopeks for the cabby. *(At his sudden appearance and the sound of his calm voice, everyone instantly stops shouting and stares at him in silence. Noticing the effect his entrance has made, he quickly guesses the reason.)*

NIL *(with a reproachful smile):*

Another row?

BESSEME NOV *(shouting rudely):*

You heathen! Where do you think you are?

NIL:

Why, where am I?

BESSEME NOV:

Your cap! Take off your cap!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

The very idea! Bursting into the dining-room in those filthy clothes! It's the limit!

NIL:

Give me some money, quick!

PYOTR *(in a whisper as he gives him the money):*

Come back as quickly as you can.

NIL (*with a smile*):

Need my help? Hard going, eh? Be with you in a second.

BESSEME NOV:

Another one who does things in fits and starts, and who's picked up crazy ideas. There's not a soul on earth he has respect for. That's Nil for you!

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*copying his tone*):

Not a soul. A rowdy, that's what he is! Run along, Tatyana, go ... er ... go and tell Stepanida we're ready for dinner.

(Tatyana goes out.)

BESSEME NOV (*with a wry smile*):

And where will you send Pyotr? Tck, tck, tck, you foolish old woman! Can't you see it's not because I'm mad; it's because I'm worried—worried about *them*. It's not rage, but the pain in my soul, makes me shout like that. Why do you keep chasing them away?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

I know husband, dear. I see how things are, but I feel sorry for them. You and me are old. We are what we are, you and me. Oh, Lordy, Lordy! What're we good for any more? Who's got any need of us? But they've got their whole lives ahead of them. All the knocks they'll be taking, poor darlings!

PYOTR:

I don't really see why you should upset yourself so, father. You've got this idea in your head—

BESSEME NOV:

I'm afraid. Afraid of the times. Bad times. Everything's cracking up. Breaking down. Life's in an upheaval. I'm afraid for you. What if...? Who'd support us in our old

age, then? You're the only arm we've got to lean on. Watch out for that Nil—you can see what he's like. And Teterov too. He's a bird of the same feather. Steer clear of them both. They hate us. Watch out.

PYOTR:

Nonsense. Nothing will happen to me. I'll wait a little longer and then I'll write to the university and ask to be pardoned.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Do it soon, Pyotr, to set your father's mind at rest.

BESSEME NOV:

I believe in you, Pyotr, when you talk like that—serious and sensible. I'm sure then that you'll live your life no worse than I've lived mine. But at other times—

PYOTR:

Let's drop the subject. We've gone over it all again and again.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Bless your hearts! You're all I've got in the world!

BESSEME NOV:

And then there's Tatyana. She'd ought to give up that teaching! What good does it do her? Just wears her out.

PYOTR:

She really is in need of a rest.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

So she is, so she is.

NIL

(he has changed into a blue blouse, but has not washed yet):

Dinner ready?

(On seeing Nil, Pyotr goes quickly out into the hall.)

BESSEME NOV:

You'd better wash that mug of yours before you ask for food.

NIL:

My mug's not so big—I can wash it in a jiffy, but I'm hungry as a wolf. A cold rain and wind and a battered old engine—had a hell of a time last night. I'm worn to a frazzle. Wouldn't I like to put the boss on that engine and take him for a ride in weather like this!

BESSEME NOV:

Blow off a little more steam. I've noticed you've been talking pretty free about your bosses of late. Look out, or something may happen.

NIL:

Not to the bosses.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Father wasn't thinking about them, he was thinking about you.

NIL:

Ah, about me.

BESSEME NOV:

Yes, about you.

NIL:

Uh-huh.

BESSEME NOV:

None of your uh-huhs! You listen to me!

NIL:

I'm listening.

BESSEMENOV:

You've got a swelled head.

NIL:

Have I had it long?

BESSEMENOV:

And a sharp tongue.

NIL:

Have I? (*Sticks out his tongue.*)

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*shaking her head*):

For shame, for shame! Think who you're sticking your tongue out at!

BESSEMENOV:

Wait, mother; don't interrupt. (*Akulina Ivanovna goes out, still shaking her head.*) You're a very smart feller. I'd like to have a little talk with you.

NIL:

After dinner?

BESSEMENOV:

No, now.

NIL:

Can't you wait till after dinner? I really am tired and hungry and chilled to the bone. Put it off if you don't mind. And then—what's there to talk about? You'll only pick a quarrel, and I don't like to quarrel with you. I'd rather have you ... well ... tell me straight to my face that you can't stand the sight of me, and that I'd—

BESSEMENOV:

Go to the devil! (*Enters his own room, slamming the door behind him.*)

NIL (*mumbling*):

Good. I prefer the devil's company to yours. (*Walks about the room humming to himself. Enters Tatyana.*) Had another scrap?

TATYANA:

You simply can't imagine—

NIL:

Yes, I can. A dramatic scene from the endless comedy: "Neither Here Nor There".

TATYANA:

It's easy for you to talk like that. You know how to keep off to one side.

NIL:

I push all this fuss off to one side. And very soon I'll be out of it for good. I'm trying to transfer to a mechanic's job in the depot. I'm sick and tired of driving goods trains night after night. It'd be different if they were passenger trains—expresses—flying through the air, full steam ahead! But this way—crawling along like a snail with no one but your fireman? Dull as ditch-water. I like to be among people.

TATYANA:

And yet you want to get away from us.

NIL:

Forgive me, but anybody'd want to get away from you. I like noise, excitement, work, simple cheery people. Do you think you live? You just hang on the outskirts of life, and

for some unknown reason keep groaning and moaning.
Who or what you're dissatisfied with is beyond me!

TATYANA:

Is it really?

NIL:

It really is. When a person finds himself lying in an uncomfortable position he turns over on the other side, but when he finds life uncomfortable he does nothing but complain. Why don't you make the effort to turn over?

TATYANA:

A certain philosopher once said that only fools found life simple.

NIL:

Philosophers seem to know a lot about what's foolish. I don't set myself up to be a sage. I simply find living here inexpressibly dull for some reason. It must be because of your endless complaints. Why complain? Who's going to help you? Nobody. There isn't anybody who could do it, and—it would hardly be worth his while if there was.

TATYANA:

What makes you so hard, Nil?

NIL:

Do you call that being hard?

TATYANA:

Cruel. You've caught the infection from Teterev, who hates everybody for some reason.

NIL:

Not everybody. (*Laughing.*) Did it ever strike you that Teterev looks like an axe?

TATYANA:

An axe? What do you mean?

NIL:

An ordinary steel axe with a wooden handle.

TATYANA:

Stop joking, please do. It's a pleasure to talk to you, you have such original ideas, but you're so ... so indifferent.

NIL:

To what?

TATYANA:

To people. To me, for instance.

NIL:

Hm ... not to everybody....

TATYANA:

But to *me*.

NIL:

To you? (*Both fall silent. Nil studies the toe of his boot. Tatyana gazes at him expectantly.*) You see, I ... you.... (*Tatyana strains towards him, but he doesn't notice it.*) I ... er ... like you, and ... respect you, but I don't see why you should be a schoolmistress. You don't like the work. It irritates you and wears you out. And it's a great work, teaching. Children are the men and women of the future. You have to love and appreciate them. You have to love any job if you want to do it well. Take me—I love to work on an anvil. It thrills me to swing the hammer down on a sputtering formless red mass that spits fire at you, trying to put your eyes out and leap out of your hands. It breathes, it's alive, and you come swinging down on it, pounding it into anything you like.

TATYANA:

One has to be strong to do that.

NIL:

And skilful.

TATYANA:

Don't you ever pity people, Nil?

NIL:

Who, for instance?

YELENA (entering):

You haven't had dinner yet, have you? Good. Come and have it with me. You should see the pie I've baked! Where's the lawyer? A simply heavenly pie!

NIL (*going over to Yelena*):

Only too glad to. I'll gobble up your whole heavenly pie. I'm dying of hunger and they're not giving me anything to eat on purpose. They're mad at me for some reason or other.

YELENA:

On account of your tongue, I guess. Come along, Tanya.

TATYANA:

I must let mother know first. (*Goes out.*)

NIL:

How did you know I stuck my tongue out at the old man?

YELENA:

I didn't. Did you? Tell me all about it.

NIL:

I'd much rather have you tell me about your heavenly pie.

YELENA:

Don't worry, I'll find out. As for the pie—do you know who taught me to bake pies? A prisoner who was up for murder. My husband let him help in the kitchen. He was such a poor frail little chap—

NIL:

Your husband?

YELENA:

Good heavens, no! My husband was six foot five!

NIL:

Such a little fellow?

YELENA:

Very bright, you are. And he had whiskers this long.
(*Holds up her fingers.*) Six inches on each side.

NIL:

I've never heard of a man's virtues being measured in inches before.

YELENA:

Alas! His whiskers were his only virtue.

NIL:

Very sad. Go on about the pie.

YELENA:

The prisoner was a cook, and he murdered his wife. But I was awfully fond of him. I don't think he really meant to kill her—

NIL:

Of course not. Just an accident.

YELENA:

Oh, get out of here! I don't want to talk to you! (*Tatyana*

appears in the doorway and watches them. Pyotr enters by another door.) Hullo, Lawyer! Come upstairs and taste my pie!

PYOTR:

With pleasure.

NIL:

His papa scolded him today for not showing proper respect.

PYOTR:

Oh, drop it!

NIL:

I don't know how he dares call on you without first getting permission.

PYOTR

(glancing nervously at the door of his parents' room):

Let's go if we're going.

TATYANA:

Go ahead. I'll come in a minute.

(Nil, Pyotr, and Yelena go out.)

AKULINA IVANOVNA

(just as Tatyana is about to enter her own room):

Tatyana!

TATYANA

(stopping and lifting her shoulders impatiently):

Yes?

AKULINA IVANOVNA *(in the doorway):*

Come here. *(Almost in a whisper.)* Has Pyotr gone up to see that woman again?

TATYANA:

Yes. And I'm going too.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Lordy, Lordy! She'll catch him in her snare, you see! I feel it in my bones. Speak to him Tanya. Tell him to keep away from her. Tell him she's no match for him—she hasn't got a kopek over three thousand and her husband's pension. I know it for sure.

TATYANA:

Don't interfere, mother. Yelena doesn't show the least interest in Pyotr.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

She does that on purpose—on purpose, I tell you. To stir him up. She just pretends she isn't interested in him, but all the time she watches him like a cat a mouse.

TATYANA:

What do I care? Speak to him yourself if you want to, but leave me alone. I'm tired, can't you see that?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

You don't have to talk to him this very minute. Lie down, dear, and have a rest.

TATYANA (*almost shouting*):

Rest! I'm tired for the rest of my life—for the rest of my life, do you hear? Tired of you. Tired of everything.

(Rushes into the hall. Akulina Ivanovna takes a step as if to stop her, then makes a helpless little gesture and stands still, looking dazed.)

BESSEME NOV (*glancing through the door*):

Another tiff?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

No. Nothing to speak of. She just—

BESSEMENOV:

Just what? Did she answer you back?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*hastily*):

Oh, no! What makes you think so? I just said it was time to have dinner, and she said she didn't want any dinner, and I said why not, and she said—

BESSEMENOV:

You're not telling the truth, mother.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Yes, I am, really.

BESSEMENOV:

All the lies you tell for their sake! Look me in the eye. You can't, eh? Tck, tck, tck! (*Akulina Ivanovna stands silently before her husband with drooping head, and he stands silently stroking his beard. He sighs.*) We made a mistake when we built that wall between us by giving them an education.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*softly*):

It's not that, father. These days simple folk are no better than educated ones.

BESSEMENOV:

It doesn't do to give children more than you've got yourself. The hardest thing of all is that they've got no backbone, no guts. A person ought to have something that makes him different from others. They don't. They've got no character. Take Nil—he's brazen, he's a scoundrel, but he's got character. He's dangerous, but you can understand him. (*Heaves a deep sigh.*) When I was a young man I loved church music and I loved to gather mushrooms in the forest. Is there anything Pyotr loves?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*with a meek sigh*):

He's visiting the lady upstairs again.

BESSEMENOV:

He is, is he? Just you wait, I'll show her! (*Enter Teterev, looking more dissolute and sullen than ever. He has a bottle of vodka in one hand and a glass in the other.*) At it again, Terenty Khrisanfovich?

TETEREV:

Last night, when vespers were over—

BESSEMENOV:

What's the reason?

TETEREV:

No reason. Will dinner be ready soon?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

As soon as I lay the table. (*Begins laying it.*)

BESSEMENOV:

It's a great pity, Terenty Khrisanfovich! A clever man like you ruining himself with drink!

TETEREV:

You're wrong, most honourable bourgeois. It's not drink that's ruining me; it's an excess of energy. Too much strength—that's my ruin!

BESSEMENOV:

There's no such thing as too much strength.

TETEREV:

Wrong again. What's the good of strength these days? It's slyness that's wanted these days. Cunning. One has to wriggle and squirm like a snake. (*Turning back his sleeve, he*

exhibits his muscle.) Look at this: one blow and the table's smashed to smithereens. But what good are such biceps these days? I can chop wood with them, but I can't—let's say—write with them, and it would be foolish to try. What am I to do with so much strength? The only use I could make of it would be to show it off at the fair—lift weights, break iron chains—that sort of thing. But once I was a student, and a bright one at that—for which I was thrown out of the theological seminary. And now I don't want to be turned into a showthing for people like you to stare at with quiet satisfaction. I want you to stare at me with unquiet dissatisfaction.

BESSEMENOV:

You're a dangerous character.

TETEREV:

Animals as big as me are never dangerous—you don't know your zoology. Nature is too clever. If, big as I am, I were to be vicious as well, how could you ever escape me?

BESSEMENOV:

I wouldn't try to. Why should I? I'm in my own house, aren't I?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Don't talk to him, father.

TETEREV:

Quite right! You're in your own house. The whole world is your own house. Of your own building. That's why there's no room in it for me, most honourable bourgeois!

BESSEMENOV:

What's the sense in living as you do? No sense. But if you wanted to—

TETEREV:

I don't want to. I loathe everything too profoundly. I find it nobler to drink and go to the dogs than to live and work for the likes of you. Can you picture me sober, decently dressed, and talking to you in the obsequious language of a humble servant? You cannot. (*Polya comes into the room, but on catching sight of Teterev she backs away. He sees her, grins broadly, and holds out his hand.*) Hullo, don't be afraid. I won't say another word because I know everything.

POLYA (*embarrassed*):

What? You couldn't know.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

So here you are! Go and tell Stepanida to bring in the soup.

BESSEME NOV:

High time. (*To Teterev.*) I certainly do enjoy hearing you air your ideas, especially when they're about yourself. Just look at you—a frightening sight I must say! But the minute you begin to spout I see all your weaknesses. (*He gives a soft, gloating chuckle.*)

TETEREV:

I like you. You're middling wise and middling stupid, middling good and middling bad, middling honest and middling false, middling brave and middling cowardly—in a word, a model petty bourgeois. The commonplace finds perfect expression in you, and that is a force which even heroes bow before—a force that lives on and on and is forever triumphant. So let's drink to the cabbage soup. O admirable mole!

BESSEME NOV:

Wait till they bring it in. But why be so rude? You oughtn't to hurt people's feelings without cause. You

ought to say what you think modestly, prettily, so that people will be glad to listen. Nobody wants to listen to insults. Nobody, that is, but a fool.

NIL (*entering*):

Has Polya come?

TETEREV (*with a little laugh*):

She has.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

What do you care?

NIL (*to Teterev, ignoring her question*):

At it again? You've been going at it pretty strong of late.

TETEREV:

It's better to drink vodka than human blood, especially now that people's blood has got so thin and stale. There's very little good rich blood left. It's all been sucked up.

(Enter Stepanida carrying the soup tureen and Polya with a platter of meat.)

NIL (*going over to Polya*):

Hullo. Is your answer ready?

POLYA (*under her breath*):

Not here, in front of everybody.

NIL:

Why not? What have we to be afraid of?

BESSEME NOV:

Who are you talking about?

NIL:

Me. And her.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

What's that?

BESSEMENOV:

I don't get you.

TETEREV (*with a little laugh*):

I do.

(Pours himself out a glass of vodka and begins to drink.)

BESSEMENOV:

What's it all about? What's happened, Polya?

POLYA (*embarrassed*):

Nothing.

NIL (*sitting down at the table*):

It's a secret—deep and dark.

BESSEMENOV:

If it's a secret, go off and whisper it in some corner, and not here in front of everybody. Smirking in our very faces! It's enough to drive a man out of his own house. All these secret signs and whispering and plotting, and me sitting there and gaping like a fool. Who do you think I am, Nil?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Really, Nil, it's just—

NIL (*calmly*):

You are my foster-father. But there's no reason for getting excited and making a scene. Nothing in particular has happened—

POLYA (*getting up*):

Nil ... Vasilyevich ... made me ... told me last evening ... asked me....

BESSEME NOV:

Well, out with it!

NIL (*calmly*):

Don't try to frighten her. I asked her if she didn't want to marry me.

(Bessemenov, his spoon stopped in mid air, stares incredulously at him and Polya. Akulina Ivanovna, too, is thunderstruck. Teterev gazes into space, slowly blinking his eyes. The hand on his knee jerks spasmodically. Polya stands with drooping head.)

NIL (continuing):

And she said she would give me her answer today. That's all.

TETEREV (*with a wave of his hand*):

As simple as all that. Very plain and simple.

BESSEME NOV:

So that's it. Hm. Simple indeed. (*Bitterly.*) And very modern. In the latest style. But then, what's there to talk about?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

I never heard of such a thing! It's a reckless lad you are. You might have spoken to us about it first.

NIL (*vexed*):

Why in the world did I tell them!

BESSEME NOV:

Leave him alone, mother. It's none of our business. Eat your dinner and say nothing. And I won't, either.

TETEREV (*getting tipsy*):

But I will! Or perhaps I had better hold my tongue for the present.

BESSEMENOV:

All of us had better hold our tongues. But I can't help saying it's a poor return for all I've done for you, Nil. You're always doing underhand things like this.

NIL:

I've paid you in work for all you've done for me, and I'll keep on paying, but I have no intention of bowing to your will. You wanted to marry me to that simpleton of a Sedova because she has a dowry of ten thousand rubles. What do I want with her? It's Polya I love. I've loved her a long time and haven't tried to hide it. I've always lived open and above-board and always will, and you have nothing to reproach me with.

BESSEMENOV (*with restraint*):

I see, I see. Splendid. Well, then, go ahead and get married. We won't stand in your way. But perhaps you wouldn't mind telling us on whose money you intend to live? Do tell us, if it's not a secret.

NIL:

We'll work. I'm being transferred to the depot. And she—well, she'll find something to do. You'll keep on getting the thirty rubles a month I've been paying you.

BESSEMENOV:

We'll see. Promises are easily made.

NIL:

I'll give you a note of hand if you want it.

TETEREV:

That's right, bourgeois, make him give you a note of hand.

BESSEMENOV:

Who asked you to butt in?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

A fine person to offer advice!

TETEREV:

Make him, by all means. But you won't—you've got too sickly a conscience. Give it to him yourself, Nil. Give him a note saying: I, the undersigned, agree to pay on the first of every month—

BESSEMENOV:

I could make him. I have a right—I've fed him, clothed him, housed him from the age of ten. And now he's twenty-seven.

NIL:

Wouldn't it be better to settle our accounts later?

BESSEMENOV:

Just as you like. (*Flaring up.*) But remember one thing, Nil! From this day on, you and me are enemies! I'll never forget the insult of this—never, and you may as well know it!

NIL:

What insult? How have I insulted you? You didn't think I was going to marry you, did you?

BESSEMENOV

(*too excited to hear what he has said*): Remember! Thumbing your nose like this at him who has fed and clothed you! Acting in secret. Behind my back. Without so much as asking. (*To Polya.*) And you! Such a meek, quiet little thing! What are you hanging your head for? Nothing to say, eh? Do you know what I can do to you?

NIL (*getting up*):

You can't do anything to her. Stop shouting. This is my house too if you want to know it. For ten years I've been working and handing over my pay to you. Not a little of my money has gone into all this. (*Stamps on the floor with his foot and indicates the walls with a wide sweep of his arm.*) It's the one who works who's the master.

(While Nil is speaking Polya gets up and goes out. She meets Pyotr and Tatyana in the doorway. Pyotr glances into the room and disappears, but Tatyana stands there holding on to the jamb.)

BESSEME NOV (*gazing wide-eyed at Nil*):

What's that? You, the master!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Come away, father. Come away, do. (*Shaking her fist at Nil.*) Just you wait, Nil! (*Tearfully.*) You'll get what you're looking for!

NIL (*determinedly*):

It's the one who works who's the master, and don't you forget it!

AKULINA IVANOVNA

(*trying to pull her husband after her*): Come along, old man, come along. Forget them. Don't speak, don't shout, they won't listen to you anyway.

BESSEME NOV

(*yielding to his wife's efforts*): Try and be the master! We'll see who's the master! We'll see!

(Bessemenov and his wife go into their room. Nil paces the floor excitedly. Somewhere far down the street a barrel-organ is playing.)

NIL:

Now I've done it! What the devil made me open my mouth, fool that I am! I just can't keep anything to myself—everything comes out in spite of me!

TETEREV:

That's all right. A very interesting little scene. I got the greatest enjoyment out of watching and listening. Very interesting, very. Don't you worry, young fellow. You have a gift for being heroic. And at the present moment heroes are needed. They are, indeed. In our day all people ought to be divided into two categories: heroes—which is to say fools; and rascals—the clever ones.

NIL:

Why did I have to let Polya in for such a disgusting scene? Frightened her, I guess. But she's not one to get frightened easily; more apt to get angry.

(On hearing Polya's name, Tatyana, who is standing in the doorway, gives a start. The barrel-organ stops playing.)

TETEREV:

It's easy enough to divide people into fools and rascals. The world's full of rascals. Their minds work like the minds of animals. Strength is the only thing they recognise—not *my* kind of strength—not the strength that's in my chest and my good right arm, but the strength of cunning. The mind of a beast is all cunning.

NIL (*not listening to him*):

We'll have to hasten the wedding day now. All the better. She hasn't given me her answer yet, but I know what it will be, bless her heart! How I hate that man! And this house! And the life here—rotten to the core! All the people who live here are freaks. And they don't seem to realise that they themselves are the ones who have made life what it is—turned it into a prison, a torture, a curse.

How they have done it is more than I can say, but I hate them for it. I hate anyone who spoils life.

(Tatyana checks herself as she is about to come forward. Soundlessly she goes over to the trunk in the corner and sinks down on it. All hunched over, she looks very small and more pathetic than ever.)

TETEREV:

It's the fools who make life worth living. There aren't many of them, and what they seek is not just for themselves. It's mostly for others. They're fond of thinking of schemes for achieving universal happiness and such-like nonsense. They try to find the beginning and the end of all things. In a word, they are very foolish.

NIL (*thoughtfully*):

Foolish. I'm the one that's foolish. She's more sensible than I am. She, too, loves life, but hers is a calm, quiet sort of love. We'll get on famously, she and I. We're daring, both of us, and once we set our hearts on a thing, we're sure to get it. She reminds me of a ... a new-born babe. (*Laughs*.) We'll get on famously, she and I!

TETEREV:

A fool will spend his whole life wondering what makes glass transparent, but a rascal just takes the glass and makes a bottle out of it.

(The barrel-organ begins playing again, now very close, almost under the window.)

NIL:

Your mind runs to bottles.

TETEREV:

No, to fools. A fool asks himself where the fire is before it's lit and where it goes when it's put out, but a rascal just sits down by the fire and warms himself.

NIL (*thoughtfully*):

Warms himself....

TETEREV:

As a matter of fact, both of them are fools, But the foolishness of one is beautiful and heroic, while the foolishness of the other is loutish and beggarly. Their paths are different, but they both lead to the same place: the grave. Nothing but the grave, my friend. (*He laughs. Tatyana slowly shakes her head.*)

NIL (*to Teterev*):

What's the matter with you?

TETEREV:

I'm laughing. The fools who remain alive gaze-upon their dead brother and ask themselves where he has gone. But the rascals just appropriate the property of the deceased and go on living their warm, comfortable, well-fed lives. (*Laughs.*)

NIL:

Drunk as a lord. Hadn't you better go to your room?

TETEREV:

My room? There' no room for me.

NIL:

Enough of your philosophising. Shall I help you there?

TETEREV:

You can't help me, friend. I don't belong to either the accused or the accusing. I'm in a class of my own. I'm material evidence of the crime. Life has been spoilt: it's a bad fit—too small for decent folk. Your petty bourgeois has cut it down and taken it in, and now it's too tight. And here am I, material evidence of the fact that a decent man has no room to stretch in; no reason and no excuse for living.

NIL:

Come along, come along.

TETEREV:

Hands off! Are you afraid I'll fall? I fell long ago, you fool! I was about to struggle back to my feet, but you came along and quite unintentionally knocked me down again. That's all right. Keep going, keep going. I'm not complaining. You're well and strong and have a right to go wherever you like, however you like. I, who am fallen, follow you with an approving glance. Keep going.

NIL:

What are you raving about? It sounds interesting, but I can't make head or tail of it.

TETEREV:

Don't try. It's better not to understand some things. Understanding them can't help matters. Keep going, keep going.

NIL:

Very well, I'll go. (*Goes out into the hall without noticing Tatyana, who shrinks into the corner.*)

TETEREV (*bowing to him*):

Best wishes, Thief. Without knowing it, you have stolen my last hope. Well, to hell with it! (*Goes over to the table where he has left his bottle, and in doing so notices Tatyana.*) And who might this be?

TATYANA (*softly*):

Me.

(The barrel-organ suddenly stops playing.)

TETEREV:

You? Hm. And I thought.... It seemed to me....

TATYANA:

No, it's me.

TETEREV:

I see. But ... why you? And why here?

TATYANA

(*softly, but clearly and distinctly*): Because I have no reason and no excuse for living. (*Teterev walks towards her slowly and in silence.*) I don't know why I should be so tired and miserable, but I am. Desperately miserable. I'm only twenty-eight years old. I'm ashamed, I really am—frightfully ashamed to feel like this—so weak and contemptible. I'm all empty inside, dried up, burnt out, and it's very painful. I never noticed how it happened—how this emptiness came to take possession of me. But why should I be telling you this?

TETEREV:

I don't understand. Too drunk. Don't get you at all.

TATYANA:

Nobody talks to me the way I want them to. The way I long to have them talk. I hoped *he* would. I waited for a long time—without saying anything. But then all this quarrelling, pettiness, triteness—the stuffiness of it all. It got me down. Little by little. And now I haven't the strength to go on. There's no strength even in my despair. I'm frightened. Now—all of a sudden—I'm frightened.

TETEREV

(*shaking his head, goes away from her towards the door, and when he has opened it he turns and says thickly*): A curse upon this house! A curse upon this house! A curse, I say!

(*Tatyana gets up and goes slowly into her own room. For a moment the stage is silent and empty. Quickly and soundlessly*

Polya comes into the room followed by Nil. Without speaking they go over to the window, where Nil seizes her hand and speaks in a low voice.)

NIL:

Forgive me for what happened today. It was stupid and disgusting. I don't know how to keep my mouth shut.

POLYA (*almost in a whisper*):

It doesn't matter. Nothing matters now. What do I care for them? It's all the same to me.

NIL:

I know you love me. I can see you do. I won't even ask you. You're so funny. Last night you said: "I'll tell you tomorrow, I've got to think it over." What's there to think over, silly? You love me, don't you?

POLYA:

Yes, oh, yes! I have for ever so long. (*Tatyana steals to the door of her room and stands there listening.*)

NIL:

We'll get on famously together, you'll see! You're such a good comrade—not afraid of being poor—always making the best of your troubles....

POLYA (*simply*):

What's there to be afraid of with you? Even by myself I'm not meek. I'm just quiet.

NIL:

And stubborn. You're strong, there's no bending you. Well, I'm happy. I knew this was how it would be and I'm no end happy.

POLYA:

I knew it too.

NIL:

You did? You really did? It's grand to be alive, isn't it?

POLYA:

It is, dearest. It is, my dearest love.

NIL:

What's that? Say it again. How pretty it sounded!

POLYA:

No compliments, if you please. But we must go. Someone may come.

NIL:

Let them!

POLYA:

No, no, we must go. Here, kiss me again.

(He does, after which she escapes from his arms and runs past Tatyana without noticing her, but Nil, who follows with a smile on his lips, catches sight of her and stops, stunned and indignant. She stares at him in silence with lacklustre eyes and with a crooked little smile on her lips.)

NIL (*contemptuously*):

Eavesdropping! Peeping through the keyhole. Ugh! (*He goes out quickly. Tatyana remains standing as if turned to stone. Nil leaves the hall door ajar, and into the room comes the rough voice of Bessemenov, saying: "Stepanida! Who spilled this coal? Are you blind? Sweep it up!"*)

CURTAIN

ACT III

The same setting

Morning. AKULINA IVANOVNA is washing the tea-things, STEPANIDA is dusting the furniture.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Seeings as there's not much fat on today's meat, skim the grease off the gravy from yesterday's roast and put it in the soup. That'll make it good and fat, hear?

STEPANIDA:

Uh-huh.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

And when you fry the veal, don't be too free with the butter. I bought five pounds on Wednesday, and yesterday there was scarce a pound left.

STEPANIDA:

We've used it all up.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

You don't have to tell me that. You've used as much on that hair of yours as would fill a tinker's tin.

STEPANIDA:

Nothing of the sort. I grease my hair with lamp oil—can't you tell by the smell?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Can't I just! (*Pause*). Where did Tatyana send you this morning?

STEPANIDA:

To the chemist's for some ammonia water. Buy me twenty kopeks' worth, she says.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Another one of her headaches, I s'pose. (*Sighs.*) She's always ailing.

STEPANIDA:

Why don't you marry her off? She'd get well quick enough then.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

It's not so easy to marry your daughters off these days—specially, educated ones.

STEPANIDA:

Give her a good dowry and somebody'll take her, education and all.

(Pyotr's head is seen for an instant in the doorway of his room.)

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

I'll never live to see that happy day. Tatyana doesn't want to get married.

STEPANIDA (*scoffingly*):

I'll bet she don't—at her age!

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*sighs*):

Who was at the lady's upstairs last night?

STEPANIDA:

The teacher—the red-headed one.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

The one whose wife left him?

STEPANIDA:

Him. And then that exciseman—you know, the skinny one with a yellow face.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Oh, yes. He's married to the niece of Pimenov, the merchant. He's got consumption.

STEPANIDA:

You don't say! Well, he looks it.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Was the choir singer there?

STEPANIDA:

He was, and so was Pyotr Vasilyevich. The choir singer bawled till two o'clock in the morning. Roared like a bull.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

When did Pyotr come home?

STEPANIDA:

It was getting light when I opened the door for him.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*shaking her head*):

Dear me!

PYOTR (*entering*):

Hurry up, Stepanida, finish what you're doing and get out.

STEPANIDA:

The sooner I finish, the better I'll like it.

PYOTR:

Then talk less and work more. (*Stepanida snorts and flounces out.*) Mother! How many times have I told you not to talk

to her! Don't you realise it's bad taste—talking your private affairs over with the cook? And asking her about ... er ... all sorts of things. How can you stoop so low?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*offended*):

And am I to ask you who I can talk to? If my own son don't want to talk to me, nor to his father either, I might be allowed to talk to the cook.

PYOTR:

But don't you understand she's not your equal? You won't hear anything but gossip from her.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

And what do I hear from you? You've been home for six months now, and not an hour have you spent with your mother. Not a word have you told her about Moscow, or about—

PYOTR:

But listen—

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

And when you do talk, it's nothing but: "don't do this", and "don't do that". Teaching and scolding and making fun of your poor mother as if she was a schoolgirl! (*Pyotr gives a disgusted grunt and goes into the hall. Akulina Ivanovna calls after him.*) See that? A nice little chat we've had now, haven't we? (*She whimpers and wipes her eyes on the hem of her apron.*)

(Perchikhin enters wearing an old quilted jacket tied at the waist with a piece of string, and with tufts of cotton-wool peeking out of the holes. He has bast sandals on his feet and a fur cap on his head.)

PERCHIKHIN:

What're you snivelling about? Did Pyotr say something he oughtn't? He whizzed past me like a martin. Didn't even say how-d'ye-do. Is my Polya here?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*with a sigh*):

She's in the kitchen chopping up cabbage.

PERCHIKHIN:

The birds have the right idea of how to live: soon's the little ones get their wings, off they fly without any preaching from their parents. S'pose there might be a swallow of tea left over for me?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

And it's the ideas of the birds you follow, isn't it?

PERCHIKHIN:

It is, and mighty fine ideas if you ask me. I own nothing and trouble nobody. It's as if I was living up in the air instead of down on the earth.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*contemptuously*):

Nobody respects you for it. Here. (*Placing a glass of tea in front of him.*) But it's cold, and not very strong.

PERCHIKHIN

(*holding the glass up to the light*): Hm, weakish. But we're thankful for each small thing. If it was strong it might get the better of me. As for people's respect—what do I want with it? I don't respect nobody, neither.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

As if anybody cared about having *your* respect!

PERCHIKHIN:

And a very good thing they don't. I've noticed that folk as get their daily bread on the earth, snatch it out of each other's mouths. But my food comes from up above, from the heavenly birds, and so it's pure as the sky.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Well, is the wedding to take place soon?

PERCHIKHIN:

Whose? Mine? The cuckoo marked as my mate ain't flown into our woods yet, the scamp! If she don't look out, she'll be too late: I'll be dead afore she gets there.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Stop talking nonsense and tell me straight: when are you giving her away?

PERCHIKHIN:

Giving who away?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Your daughter. As if you didn't know!

PERCHIKHIN:

Polya? Whenever she wants, if she's got anybody for me to give her to.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Have they been planning this long?

PERCHIKHIN:

Who? What?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Stop pretending. Surely she told *you*.

PERCHIKHIN:

Told me what?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

About the wedding.

PERCHIKHIN:

Whose wedding?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Bah! An old man like you ought to be ashamed to make himself out an idiot.

PERCHIKHIN:

Come, now, you just tell me plain and simple what's on your mind without getting mad.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

As if a person could talk to you!

PERCHIKHIN:

Well, you're talking, and been doing it a good long time without getting nowhere.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*dryly and enviously*):

When are you going to marry Poly to Nil?

PERCHIKHIN (*jumping up in amazement*):

Poly to Nil?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Do you really mean to say she hasn't told you? A fine lot, these young folk! Her own father!

PERCHIKHIN (*joyfully*):

Do you mean it? You must be joking. Nil? Crimpety crimpens! Think of that now! The monkeys! What a girl that Poly is! But you're sure you're not fooling? And here was me thinking Nil meant to marry Tatyana. Cross my heart. Everything pointed that way.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*offended*):

As if we'd let Tatyana marry Nil! A good-for-nothing like him!

PERCHIKHIN:

Nil? If I had ten daughters I'd close my eyes and hand

the whole lot over to him. Nil? Why he ... he could feed a hundred mouths all by himself. Nil? Ho, ho!

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*ironically*):

When I look at you I think to myself: what a fine father-in-law Nil's getting!

PERCHIKHIN:

Father-in-law? Ho, ho! This father-in-law don't want to be a burden to him nor to no-bo-dy! See that? My legs just dance of themselves! I'm free as a bird now! I'll live as I like now! Nobody'll catch a sight of me now! Off to the woods I'll go—farewell, everybody! What a girl that Polya is! Used to be I'd sit and think: what's to become of my poor little girl? It made me feel real bad, it did. I gave her birth, but that's all I *could* give her. And now? Now I'll go wherever I please! Right about face, and off to the ends of the earth in search of the fire-bird!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Right about face? People don't turn their backs when luck comes their way.

PERCHIKHIN:

Luck? The best luck I could have is to be able to go wherever I please. And Polya will be happy. She's sure to be with Nil. Such a strong, cheerful, simple lad! My brains are jumping for joy and my heart's full of larks. Was there ever such a lucky old man? Tra-la-la! Tra-la-la! Polya caught her Nil, hurrah!

(Bessemenov enters. He is still in his coat and is carrying his cap in his hand.)

BESSEME NOV:

Drunk again!

PERCHIKHIN:

Drunk with joy! Have you heard about Polya? (*Laughs gaily*). She's going to marry Nil! Fine, eh?

BESSEME NOV (*hard and cold*):

That don't concern us. We'll get what's due us anyhow.

PERCHIKHIN:

And here was me thinking Nil meant to marry Tatyana!

BESSEME NOV:

Wha-a-at?

PERSHIKHIN:

Cross my heart. Anyone could see Tanya was all for it—first she'd cock one eye at him, then the other—you know how they do. And then all of a sudden—

BESSEME NOV (*calmly, to hide his fury*):

Here's what I have to say to you, my good man: you may be a fool, but it's high time you knew it's not decent to say such things about a girl. That's the first thing. (*Raising his voice.*) It's no concern of mine who your daughter looks at and how she looks at him and what sort of girl she is, but I do say one thing: if she marries Nil, good riddance, because neither of them are worth their salt, and from this day on I spit on both of them, even if they are both knee-deep in debt to me. That's the second thing. And here's the last: you and me may be distant relatives, but take a look at yourself—what do you look like? A tramp, that's what! Whoever allowed you to come into a respectable house in that state? In those filthy rags and muzhik sandals?

PERCHIKHIN:

What's got into you, Vasily Vasilyevich? What are you saying? Is this the first time I've been here?

BESSEME NOV:

I haven't counted the number of times and have no mind to. But one thing I do know: you can't have any respect

for the master of this house if you come here looking like that. Again I say, what are you? A beggar, a tramp, a ragamuffin. That's my say. Get out!

PERCHIKHIN (*dumbfounded*):

Vasily Vasilyevich! What have I done? What—

BESSEMENOV:

Get out, I say! None of your talk!

PERCHIKHIN:

Think what you're doing! I've never hurt—

BESSEMENOV:

Get out! Get out before I—

PERCHIKHIN (*reproachfully, as he goes out*):

For shame, old man! It's sad to see you like this. Makes me feel real sorry for you. Good day to you.

(Bessemenov squares his shoulders and paces the floor in silence with firm, heavy steps. Akulina Ivanovna watches him furtively as she washes the tea-things. Her hands are shaking and she is muttering something to herself.)

BESSEMENOV:

What are you muttering? A spell?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

I'm praying, father, praying.

BESSEMENOV:

Well, looks like I'm not to be mayor after all. Looks like it, damn them!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

What's that? Good gracious me, how can that be? But maybe you—

BESSEME NOV:

Maybe I what? Fedka Dosekin, head of the locksmith guild, is aiming to be mayor. The upstart! The puppy!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Maybe they won't elect him. Don't lose heart yet.

BESSEME NOV:

They will. It's clear they will. When I got there today he was sitting in the office blowing off steam. "Times," he says, "is hard; all of us," he says, "have got to hang together; everything," he says, "has got to be decided by all—all of us artisans, that is. What with the factories springing up," he says, "us workmen can't do things separately." But I says: "It's the Jews are to blame! It's the Jews as have to be kept in check. We ought to write a complaint against them to the Governor—tell him how they don't give us Russians a chance and ask him to send them packing."

(Tatyana opens the door softly and staggers over to her room.)

And he gives that smile of his and says: "And what are we to do with Russians as are worse than the Jews?" And I could tell by his voice it was me he had in mind. I let on I didn't understand, but I could see very well what he meant, the bastard! I listen a little and then I walks off to one side. "Just you wait!" thinks I to myself, "I'll cook your goose for you yet!" And just then Mikhail Kryukov, the stove-maker, comes up to me and says: "Looks like Dosekin had ought to be mayor," he says, and turns away, ashamed to look me in the eye. I felt like calling him the cheap jelly-boned Judas, he is!

(Enter Yelena.)

YELENA:

Good morning, Vasily Vasilyevich! Good morning, Akulina Ivanovna!

BESSEMENOV (*coldly*):

Ah, so it's you. Come in. What is it?

YELENA:

I just wanted to give you the money for my lodgings.

BESSEMENOV (*more civil*):

Very good. How much is here? Twenty-five rubles? You owe me another forty kopeks for two panes of glass in the hall window, and something—shall we make it twenty kopeks?—for the hinge your cook broke on the woodshed.

YELENA (*laughing*):

How very exact you are! But I'll have to give you three rubles. I have no change.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

You've had a sack of charcoal from me—that is, your cook has.

BESSEMENOV:

How much does it cost?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Charcoal? Thirty-five a sack.

BESSEMENOV:

Which makes, altogether, ninety-five. Two rubles and five kopeks change—here you are. As for being exact, you're quite right, young lady. It's exactness makes the world go round. The sun rises and sets exactly as has been laid down for it since the beginning of time, and once exactness is the law in heaven, it certainly ought to be the law on earth. Take you, for instance—you always pay your rent regular, right on the dot.

YELENA:

I don't like to be in debt.

BESSEMENOV:

Very commendable, very commendable. And so everyone trusts you.

YELENA:

Well, good-bye. I must be going.

BESSEMENOV:

Good day to you. (*Watches her go out.*) A pretty piece, drat her! And yet I'd like nothing better than to throw her out.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

It *would* be a good thing, father.

BESSEMENOV:

On the other hand, so long as she's here we can keep an eye on her. If she moves, Pyotr's sure to go training her, and it'll be easier for her to catch him without us in sight. And you mustn't forget she's regular with her rent and is always ready to pay these little extras. Hm ... Pyotr, of course, is in danger, and a big one....

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Maybe he don't think of marrying her. Maybe he's just—you know.

BESSEMENOV:

If we could only be sure of that we could be easy in our minds, there'd be nothing to worry about. Better to have him here at home than going to brothels.

(A hoarse moan comes from Tatyana's room.)

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*softly*):

Oh!

BESSEMENOV (*just as softly*):

What's that?

AKULINA IVANOVNA

(*she speaks under her breath and keeps glancing about as if listening for something*): Out in the hall, wasn't it?

BESSEMENOV (*loudly*):

Must be the cat.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*hesitantly*):

There's something I wanted to say to you, father....

BESSEMENOV:

Well, go ahead and say it.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Don't you think you were a little hard on Perchikhin today? He's an inoffensive soul.

BESSEMENOV:

If he's inoffensive, he won't take offense, and if he does, we haven't lost much. It's no great honour to have *him* as our friend. (*The moan is repeated—louder this time.*) Who's that? Mother—

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*flustered*):

I don't know. Who could—what could it be?

BESSEMENOV (*rushing to Pyotr's room*):

Anybody in here? Pyotr!

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*rushing after him in horror*):

Pyotr! Pyotr!

TATYANA (*calling hoarsely*):

Save me! Mother! Save me! Save me! (*Bessemenov and Akulina Ivanovna rush out of Pyotr's room and towards*

Tatyana's without a word, hesitating at the door for a second as if afraid, then pushing it open simultaneously. They are met by Tatyana's cries.) Oh-h-h, how it burns! A drink! Save me!

AKULINA IVANOVNA

(rushes out of the room and shouts into the hall): Help! Help, good people! Pyotr! *(From Tatyana's room comes the dull voice of Bessemenov, saying: "What is it, daughter? What is it? What's the matter with you, lovey?")*

TATYANA:

Water. I'm dying. Everything's burning up inside me. Oh, God!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Hurry! Come quick! Help!

BESSEMENOV *(from inside the room):*

Call the doctor! Quick!

PYOTR *(running up):*

What's the matter? What's happened?

AKULINA IVANOVNA

(clutching his sleeve and gasping): Tatyana! She's dying!

PYOTR *(wrenching free):*

Let me go!

TETEREV

(pulling on his jacket as he comes in): What is it, a fire?

BESSEMENOV:

The doctor! Run for the doctor, Pyotr! Offer him 25 rubles!

PYOTR

(rushing out of Tatyana's room and speaking to Teterev): The

doctor! Go for the doctor! Tell him—poisoning. A young woman. Ammonia. Hurry! Hurry!

(Teterev runs out into the hall.)

STEPANIDA (*running in*):

My stars!

TATYANA:

Pyotr! I'm burning up! I'm dying! I don't want to die! Save me! A drink!

PYOTR:

How much did you take? When did you do it? Speak!

BESSEME NOV:

My own daughter! My little girl!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

To do such a thing to yourself! My poor little dove!

PYOTR:

Go away, mother. Take her out, Stepanida. Go away, I tell you. (*Yelena runs into Tatyana's room.*) Take mother out.

(An old woman comes into the hall and stands in the doorway glancing furtively into the room and muttering to herself.)

YELENA

(*leading Akulina Ivanovna out of Tatyana's room and whispering to her*): That's all right, don't worry, it's not dangerous.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

My treasure! My own darling girl! What have I done to her? How have I wronged her?

YELENA:

It will pass. Everything will be all right when the doctor comes. What a thing to have happened!

OLD WOMAN

(*taking Akulina Ivanovna's other arm*): Don't lose heart. Worse things happen. Merchant Sitanov's coachman, for instance—the horse bashed his whole side in—

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

My darling, my precious. What shall I do? My only one!

(They take her out. Tatyana's cries mingle with her father's hoarse voice and Pyotr's sharp, nervous interjections. A chair is overturned; there is a clatter of dishes, a squeaking of bed-springs, the thud of a falling pillow. Several times Stepanida, her hair on end, her mouth hanging open, her eyes popping out of her head, rushes out of the room to snatch a cup or a plate out of the sideboard, invariably breaking something. Gaping faces are seen in the doorway of the hall, but no one dares to come into the room. A young lad, a house painter's apprentice, hops through the door, peeks into Tatyana's room and runs back, announcing in a stage-whisper: "She's dying!" A barrel-organ strikes up a tune out in the street, but is instantly hushed. From the hall comes a low murmur of conversation: "Killed her?" "Who?" "Her father?" "He warned her—'You watch your step, young lady,' he says." "On the head." "Do you know what with?" "That's a lie—she cut her own throat." A woman's voice asks: "Was she married?" Someone is heard to cluck sympathetically. The Old Woman comes out of Bessemenov's room, snatches up a bun as she passes the table and hides it under her shawl, then joins the crowd out in the hall.)

OLD WOMAN:

Sh! She's dying.

MAN'S VOICE:

What's her name?

OLD WOMAN:

Liza.

WOMAN'S VOICE:

What made her do it?

OLD WOMAN:

Far back as Assumption Day he says to her: "Liza", he says—

(Movement in the crowd. The doctor and Teterev enter. The doctor goes directly to Tatyana's room without taking off his hat or coat. Teterev glances into the room, then walks away frowning. Moans, voices, sounds of people moving about, come from the sick chamber. From Bessemenov's room comes the wailing of Akulina Ivanovna and her cries: "Let me go! I've got to go to her!" Out of the murmur of the crowd in the hall rise individual voices, saying: "He's the choir singer." "You don't say!" "Yes, he is." "From John the Baptist's.")

TETEREV (*going toward the hall*):

What are you doing here? Get out, all of you!

OLD WOMAN (*at the door*):

Move along, good people, move along. This is none of your business. None of your business, this.

TETEREV:

Who are you? What do you want?

OLD WOMAN:

I'm a vegetable vendor—spring onions, cucumbers—

TETEREV:

What are you doing here?

OLD WOMAN:

I was on my way to Semyagina's—she is my son's godmother—

TETEREV:

What are you doing here, I say?

OLD WOMAN:

Just happened to be passing and heard a noise, thought it might be a fire—

TETEREV:

Well?

OLD WOMAN:

And came in. Came to have a look at trouble.

TETEREV:

Get along with you. Clear the hall.

STEPANIDA (*running up to Teterev*):

Fetch a pail of water—quick!

(An old graybeard with his face tied up in a handkerchief looks through the door, winks at Teterev, and says: "She stole a bun off your table!" Teterev strides into the hall, pushing people out into the street. Noise and confusion. A boy cries: "Ouch!" Somebody laughs, somebody else says reproachfully: "Stop pushing.")

TETEREV (*unseen*):

Out you go! Quick!

PYOTR (*poking his head through the door*):

Quiet! (*Turning back into the room.*) Go, father, mother needs you. Do go. (*Calling into the hall.*) Don't let anyone in!

(Bessemenov walks unsteadily out of Tatyana's room. When he reaches the table he sinks into a chair and sits staring dully into space for a few seconds, then gets up and goes into his own room, where Akulina Ivanovna and Yelena can be heard talking.)

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

As if I didn't love her! As if I didn't take the best of care of her!

YELENA:

Calm yourself.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Father! Oh, father! What—

(The speech is cut off by the closing of the door. Now the big room is empty. From the left comes the sound of a muffled voice in Bessemenov's room, from the right the groans of Tatyana, low talk, and the little noises made by those attending her. Teterév brings in a pail of water, puts it down outside Tatyana's door, and knocks gently. Stepanida opens the door and takes the pail, then comes out into the big room, wiping the sweat off her forehead.)

TETEREV:

Well?

STEPANIDA:

Looks like everything'll be all right.

TETEREV:

Is that what the doctor says?

STEPANIDA:

Uh-huh. But—(*Gives a disparaging wave of her hand.*) He says not to let her father and mother in.

TETEREV:

Is she better?

STEPANIDA:

Who knows? She's stopped moaning. Her face is green as green and her eyes are this big! Lies dead still. (*Reproachfully.*) I told them so! How many times did I tell them to get her a husband! A husband, I says, is what she needs. But they didn't listen to me, and here's what they get for it! As if a girl could go on this long without a

husband! And then she didn't believe in God. "None of your prayers for me!" says she. "None of your bowing and crossing for me!" Well, and so here you are!

TETEREV:

Hold your tongue, you crow!

YELENA (*entering*):

How is she?

TETEREV:

I don't know. The doctor seems to think there's no danger.

YELENA:

What a blow for her father and mother! I feel so sorry for them!

(Teterev shrugs his shoulders without commenting.)

STEPANIDA (*running out of the room*):

Goodness, I've forgot the stove!

YELENA:

Whatever made her do it? What happened? Poor Tatyana! It must have hurt horribly. (*Makes a face and shudders.*) It must have, don't you think?

TETEREV:

I don't know. Ammonia is one thing I've never drunk.

YELENA:

How can you joke at such a time?

TETEREV:

I'm not joking.

YELENA

(goes over to Pyotr's room and peeps through the door):

Is Pyotr—Pyotr Vasilyevich—still in her room?

TETEREV:

Must be if he hasn't come out.

YELENA *(thoughtfully):*

I can imagine how hard he's taking it. *(Pause.)* Whenever I ... if I happen to see something of this sort I ... oh, I just *hate* misfortune!

TETEREV *(smiling):*

Very praiseworthy!

YELENA:

Do you understand what I mean? I feel like taking it and stamping on it—trampling it to death!

TETEREV:

What? Misfortune?

YELENA:

Yes. I'm not afraid of it. I hate it. I like to be happy, to have lots of people around me, and to be always doing something new. I know how to make life pleasant for myself and those around me.

TETEREV:

Ultra-praiseworthy!

YELENA:

And something else—I'll confess to you: I'm dreadfully hard-hearted! I don't like people who are unfortunate, and some people are always unfortunate, no matter what you do for them. If you put the sun on their heads instead of a hat—could anything be lovelier?—they'd still go about sighing: "Ah, I'm so miserable! So lonely!"

Nobody loves me! Life is a bore! Ah! Oh! Oo!" Whenever I meet a person like that I have a mean desire to make him more miserable than ever.

TETEREV:

Bless your heart! Listen, I'll make a confession too: I can't bear to hear women philosophise, but when *you* philosophise I could kiss your hand.

YELENA (*coily*):

Only my hand? And only when I philosophise? (*Catching herself.*) But goodness! What am I doing? Joking—making fun, when in there—someone is suffering—

TETEREV (*nodding towards Bessemenov's door*):

And in there, too. And wherever you point your finger someone is suffering. It's a bad habit people have got into.

YELENA:

But they really *do* suffer.

TETEREV:

They do.

YELENA:

And so they ought to be pitied.

TETEREV:

Not always. And perhaps never. It's much better to help them than to pity them.

YELENA:

You can't help everybody. And you can't help *anybody* if you don't pity him first.

TETEREV:

This is how I look at it, young lady: suffering is born of desire, and there are two kinds of desire—that worthy of

respect and that unworthy of it. A man should be helped to satisfy desires that make him well and strong and that, ennobling him, raise him above the animal.

YELENA (*not following him*):

Perhaps. Perhaps you're right. But what's happening in there? Do you suppose she's gone to sleep? It's so quiet. They're whispering. The old folk, too—they've hidden themselves away in their corner. How strange! All of a sudden—noise, confusion, cries, moans! Then, just as suddenly—not a sound, not a movement.

TETEREV:

That's life for you. People shout until they get tired, then they take a rest. When they've had a rest they start shouting again. Here, in this house, everything quiets down very quickly—shouts of pain and shouts of laughter alike. Every shock is like the slapping of a mud puddle with a stick. And the last sound is always the outcry of the Commonplace, the household god of these people. It's she who always has the last word here, be it of triumph or of rage.

YELENA (*thoughtfully*):

I had a better time when I lived in the jail. My husband was a gambler; he drank, too, and often went hunting. Ours was an out-of-the-way little town and most of the people in it were sort of—well, passé. I had lots of free time, but I didn't go anywhere or see anybody but the prisoners. They were fond of me. An amusing lot when you get to know them. Awfully sweet and simple, really they are. Sometimes when I looked at them I couldn't believe they were thieves and murderers and all sorts of criminals. Once I said to one of the murderers: "Did you really kill somebody?" "Yes, I did, Yelena Nikolayevna," he said. "I really did. Can't be helped." And it seemed to me that he—that murderer—had taken somebody else's guilt upon himself, that he was only a stone that

somebody else had thrown. I used to buy them books and I saw to it that there were playing cards and draughts-boards in every cell. And I gave them tobacco. And wine, the least bit. When they were let out for exercise they would play ball and nine-pins. They were just like children. Whenever I read them funny stories they would roar with laughter—like children. I bought some song-birds and cages and put one in every cell. They loved their birds almost as much as they loved me. They adored to have me wear bright clothes—a red waist or a yellow skirt. They like bright, cheerful colours. I used to dress up for them on purpose. (*Sighs.*) It was very pleasant living with them. Three years went by before I knew it. When my husband was killed by a horse I cried less at losing him than at having to leave the jail. It was such a pity! And the prisoners were sorry, too. (*Glancing about the room.*) It's not nearly so nice living here. There's something—something sinister about this house. It's not the people who are bad, it's something else. But there, I've got myself into an awful mood—feeling quite low. Here we are talking away, you and I, while in that room a woman may be dying.

TETEREV (*serenely*):

And we're not sorry.

YELENA (*quickly*):

Aren't you sorry?

TETEREV:

No. And you aren't either.

YELENA (*softly*):

No, I'm not. I suppose it's wrong, but somehow I don't feel that it is. That happens sometimes: you know a thing's wrong, but it doesn't seem to be. Strange as it may seem, I feel more sorry for him—for Pyotr Vasilyevich—than for her. I feel awfully sorry for him. He's miserable here, isn't he?

TETEREV:

Everybody's miserable here.

POLYA (*entering*):

Hullo!

YELENA (*jumps up and goes over to her*): •

Sh! Do you know what's happened? Tatyana has taken poison!

POLYA:

Wha-at?

YELENA:

Yes, she has. The doctor and her brother are in there with her now.

POLYA:

Is she dying? Is she going to die?

YELENA:

Nobody knows.

POLYA:

What did she do it for? Did she say?

YELENA:

I don't know. I don't think so.

PYOTR

(*thrusting a frowzy head through the door*): Yelena Nikolayevna, just a minute. (*Yelena hurries over.*)

POLYA (*to Teterev*):

Why are you looking at me like that?

TETEREV:

How many times have you asked me the same thing!

POLYA:

Naturally—if you keep looking at me in the same way. What do you do it for? (*Going over to him and speaking sternly.*) Do you think I'm to blame for this?

TETEREV (*with a little laugh*):

Do you feel guilty?

POLYA:

I feel that I dislike you more and more—that's what I feel! But tell me, how did it happen?

TETEREV:

Yesterday she was given a little jolt, and, being rather shaky on her legs, today she fell down. That's all.

POLYA:

It's not true.

TETEREV:

What's not?

POLYA:

I know what you're hinting at, but it's not true. Nil—

TETEREV:

Nil? What's Nil got to do with it?

POLYA:

Nothing. Nor have I. Neither of us has. You—but you're wrong. I know you think it's our fault but what could we do? I love him and he loves me. It began long ago.

TETEREV (*gravely*):

I don't blame you in the least. It's you who feel guilty and that makes you try to explain. Why should you? I like you. Who was it told you over and over—constantly, insistently—to get out of this house, to keep away from it?

There's something unwholesome here that poisons the spirit. I was the one who told you.

POLYA:

Well?

TETEREV:

Nothing. I just wanted to say that if you had taken my advice, you wouldn't have had to go through what you're going through now. That's all.

POLYA:

I see. But how could she have done such a thing? Is her life in danger? What did she take?

TETEREV:

I don't know.

(Pyotr and the doctor come out of the room.)

PYOTR:

Please go and help Yelena Nikolayevna, Polya.

TETEREV (*to Pyotr*):

How is she?

DOCTOR:

Nothing serious. If the patient weren't so unstrung there would be hardly any ill effects. She drank very little—burned her oesophagus slightly and some of the alcohol got into her stomach, but it was instantly thrown up.

PYOTR:

You must be tired, doctor. Sit down.

DOCTOR:

Thanks. She'll not be feeling herself for a week or so. I had an interesting case the other day: a house painter drank a glass of varnish instead of beer—

(Bessemenov opens the door of his room and stands there without a word, staring in gloomy expectation at the doctor.)

PYOTR:

Don't worry, father. There's no danger.

DOCTOR:

No, there isn't, I assure you. In two or three days she'll be back on her feet.

BESSEME NOV:

Do you mean it?

DOCTOR:

I do.

BESSEME NOV:

Thank you. If you mean it, if it's true there's no danger, I'm very grateful to you. Pyotr ... er ... come here.

(Pyotr goes over to him. They both disappear inside the room, from which comes the sound of whispering and the clink of coins.)

TETEREV (*to the doctor*):

And what happened to the house painter?

DOCTOR:

Eh? What's that?

TETEREV:

The house painter—what happened to him?

DOCTOR:

Him? Oh, nothing. He got well. Uh ... it seems to me I've met you before, haven't I?

TETEREV:

Perhaps.

DOCTOR:

Weren't you once in hospital with typhoid fever?

TETEREV:

I was.

DOCTOR (*with satisfaction*):

See that? I was sure I had seen you somewhere before. Wait—it was last spring, wasn't it? I think I even remember your name.

TETEREV:

And I remember you.

DOCTOR:

You do?

TETEREV:

Yes. When I was getting well I asked you to increase my food rations and you made a face and said: "Be thankful to get this much. There are more than enough tramps and drunks like you in the world."

DOCTOR (*flabbergasted*):

But that's ... that's ... I beg your pardon, but you ... your name ... that is, I'm Dr. Nikolai Troyerukov, and—

TETEREV (*going over to him*):

And I'm Terenty-the-Oracle, Cavalier of the Green Bottle. (*The doctor backs away from him.*) Don't be afraid, I won't hurt you.

(Teterev walks past him into the hall. The doctor watches him open-mouthed, fanning himself with his hat. Enter Pyotr.)

DOCTOR (*glancing furtively towards the hall*):

But I must be going.

Others are waiting for me. If she complains of pain, repeat the drops. But there shouldn't be any great pain. Good day. Oh ... er ... that gentleman who was just here—a very interesting type. Is he ... er ... a relative?

PYOTR:

No, a lodger.

DOCTOR:

I see. Very interesting. Highly original. Good day. Thank you.

(Pyotr sees him out. Bessemenov and Akulina Ivanovna come out of their room and cautiously tiptoe over to Tatyana's door.)

BESSEME NOV:

Wait. Don't go in. There's not a sound. Maybe she's asleep. We mustn't wake her up. (*Leads Akulina Ivanovna over to the trunk in the corner.*) Well, mother, we've lived to see the gala day! All the talk, all the gossip there'll be now! No end of it!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

For shame, father. What are you saying? Who cares? Let them talk their heads off so long as she gets well. Let them shout the news from the house-tops if it gives them any pleasure.

BESSEME NOV:

Yes, of course. You're right, only ... tck, tck, tck! Don't you see? We're disgraced.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Disgraced? Why?

BESSEME NOV:

To have your own daughter take poison! What does that make us, you and me? What did we do to her? How did

we treat her? Were we beasts to her? They'll say all sorts of things about us. I don't mind, I can stand anything for the sake of my children, only why should I? What have I done to deserve it? That's what I'd like to know. My children! Not a word can I get out of them. What goes on inside of them? I don't know. What's on their minds? I can't guess. That's what hurts.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

I know. It hurts me too. After all, I'm their mother. Day after day I wear myself out for them, and not a word of thanks for it. I know. It wouldn't be so bad if they were well and happy, but to have a thing like this happen!

POLYA (*coming out of Tatyana's room*):

Shh! She's going to sleep.

BESSEME NOV (*getting up*):

How is she? Can we go in to see her?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

I'll be ever so quiet! Just her father and me?

POLYA:

The doctor said not to let anyone see her.

BESSEME NOV (*suspiciously*):

How do you know? You didn't see the doctor.

POLYA:

Yelena Nikolayevna told me so.

BESSEME NOV:

Is she in there? How do you like that? Strangers can see her, but her own folk can't. Very strange.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

We'll have dinner in the kitchen, so's not to disturb her, poor dear! And me not allowed so much as a peep at her!

(With a despairing wave of her hand she goes out into the hall. Polya stands leaning against the sideboard gazing at the door of Tatyana's room. Her brows are drawn, her lips compressed, her body taut. Bessemenov sits at the table as if waiting for something.)

POLYA (*softly*):

Was father here today?

BESSEME NOV:

It's not your father you want. What's your father to you? I know who you want. (*Polya looks at him in amazement.*) Yes, your father was here in his filthy rags, not a trace of decency about him. And still you'd ought to respect him as your father.

POLYA:

I do. Why should you tell me that?

BESSEME NOV:

To let you know it. Your father's a tramp, but even so it's up to you to bow to his will. But how can you be expected to appreciate what a father is? You have no feelings—none of you young folk have. Look at you—a girl without any means, without so much as a roof over your head. You'd ought to be humble, to be kind and considerate to everybody, and instead of that you air your own opinions and make yourself out to be as good as educated folk. And now you're about to get married, while in that room lies one as almost took her own life—

POLYA:

What do you mean? Why should you say such a thing?

BESSEME NOV

(*with the irritation of one who has lost the thread of his thought*):

Think it over. Try to understand. That's why I'm saying it,

so's you'll understand. Who are you? A nobody, and yet—you're getting married. And there's my daughter.... What are you standing there for? Go into the kitchen! Get busy! I'll keep watch, you get out. (*Polya looks at him in perplexity, then turns to go out.*) Just a minute. I ... er ... was sharp with your father today.

POLYA:

Why?

BESSEME NOV:

None of your business. Run along.

(The amazed Polya goes out. Bessemenov goes softly over to Tatyana's door and opens it a crack to peep in. Yelena comes out and closes the door behind her.)

YELENA:

Don't go in, she seems to be sleeping. Don't disturb her.

BESSEME NOV:

Hm. All of you can distrurb us as much as you like, but we have no right to disturb anybody.

YELENA (*surprised*):

But she's ill.

BESSEME NOV:

I know. I know everything.

(Goes out into the hall. Yelena shrugs her shoulders as she watches him. Then she goes over to the window, sits down on the couch, clasps her hands behind her head, and becomes lost in thought. A smile plays over her lips and she closes her eyes dreamily. Pyotr comes in looking glum and dishevelled. He tosses his head as if to free it of something. On seeing Yelena he stops.)

YELENA (*without opening her eyes*):

Who's there?

PYOTR:

Why are you smiling? Strange to see anyone smiling now, after—

YELENA (*glancing at him*):

Grumpy? 'Tired? Poor boy! I feel so sorry for you!

PYOTR (*sitting down beside her*):

I feel sorry for myself.

YELENA:

You ought to go away somewhere.

PYOTR:

I know I ought. What am I doing here? I can't bear this life.

YELENA:

What kind of life would you like to live? Do tell me. I often ask you that, but you never answer.

PYOTR:

It's hard to be frank.

YELENA:

Even with me?

PYOTR:

Even with you. How do I know what you think of me? Or how you'll take what I say? Sometimes it seems to me that you....

YELENA:

That I what?

PYOTR:

That you....

YELENA:

That I like you. I do, I do! A lot! You're a dear, darling boy.

PYOTR (*impetuously*):

I'm not a boy. I've done a lot of thinking. Listen, tell me honestly—do you approve of all the fuss Nil, Shishkin, Tsvetayeva and all those other loud-mouths make? All this reading aloud of weighty books and this staging of plays for the workers? Do you think it's a sensible way of spending your time? And all their activities—are they really so important? Worth devoting one's whole life to? What do you think?

YELENA:

I'm ignorant, darling. I can't judge. I'm so frivolous, you know. They seem nice to me—Nil and Shishkin and all the others. They're bright and cheerful and always doing something. I like cheerful people. I'm cheerful myself. But why do you ask?

PYOTR:

Because they get on my nerves. If they enjoy living that way, let them—I don't object; I don't object to anything, but why should they object to the way *I* live? Why should they accord some special significance to what they do? Why should they call me a coward and an egoist?

YELENA (*putting her hand on his head*):

Poor dear, you're worn out.

PYOTR:

No, I'm not. I'm just annoyed. I have a right to live the way I want to—the way *I* want to!—haven't?

YELENA (*playing with his hair*):

That's much too deep for me. I *do* live the way I want to, according to my own lights, and nobody could talk me

into going into a convent for love or money. If they forced me into one I'd run away or jump in the river.

PYOTR:

You spend more time with them than with me. You like them better than you do me. I feel it. But what I wanted to tell you was—they're empty barrels.

YELENA (*surprised*):

They're what?

PYOTR:

Empty barrels. Remember the fable about the empty barrels?⁵

YELENA:

Yes. But then—am I an empty barrel too?

PYOTR:

Oh, no! You're full of life. You're refreshing, like a cold spring deep in the woods.

YELENA:

Brr! Am I really so cold?

PYOTR:

Please don't make a joke of it. For me this moment is ... is ... ahem. And you find it funny. Why? Am I so amusing? I want to live, to live as I like, as I see fit!

YELENA:

Then why don't you? Who's stopping you?

PYOTR:

There *is* someone—or something. Whenever I make up my mind to live alone and independent I seem to hear someone say I mustn't.

YELENA:

Your conscience?

PYOTR:

Oh no. I haven't.... Well, I wouldn't think of committing a crime. I only want to be free ... that is....

YELENA (*bending over him*):

That isn't what you want to say. It's so much simpler than you make it. I'll have to help you, poor boy, so that you won't get all tangled up in such simple things.

PYOTR:

You're laughing at me, Yelena Nikolayevna! It's cruel of you. What I want to say is: here am I, baring my soul to you....

YELENA:

That's not it either.

PYOTR:

I suppose I'm a weak sort. Life is too much for me. I'm aware of the commonplaceness of my surroundings, but I can't change or improve them. I want to go away, to live alone—

YELENA (*taking his head in her hands*):

Repeat what I say after me: "I love you."

PYOTR:

Oh, I do, I do! But again you're joking.

YELENA:

No, I'm not. I'm perfectly serious. I've had my mind made up for a long time to marry you. Maybe I oughtn't to, but I want to dreadfully.

PYOTR:

God, how happy I am! I love you like—(*Tatyana is heard to moan. Pyotr jumps up and looks about him wild-eyed. Yelena, unperturbed, gets up too.*) That must have been Tatyana. And here we are—

YELENA (*going to Tatyana's room*):

We aren't doing anything wrong.

TATYANA:

A drink. Give me a drink.

YELENA:

I'm coming.

(Smiles at Pyotr and goes out. Pyotr stands clutching his head in his hands and staring in front of him. The hall door opens and Akulina Ivanovna stands in the doorway.)

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*in a loud whisper*):

Pyotr! Pyotr, where are you?

PYOTR:

Here.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Come and have dinner.

PYOTR:

I don't want any. I'm not coming.

YELENA (*coming out of Tatyana's room*):

He's coming with me.

(Akulina Ivanovna darts a look of displeasure at her and goes out.)

PYOTR (*throwing himself at Yelena*):

How wicked of us! Here we are ... while she's....

YELENA:

Come along. What's wicked about it? In the theatre they always give you something light after the heavy scenes. We need it even more in real life.

(Pyotr presses close to her as she takes his arm and leads him out.)

TATYANA (*moaning hoarsely*):

Yelena! Yelena!

(Polya comes running in.)

CURTAIN

ACT IV

The same setting

Evening. A lamp is lighted on the table. Polya is laying the table for tea. Tatyana, recuperating, is lying on the sofa, almost beyond reach of the lamp light. Tsvetayeva is sitting beside her.

TATYANA (*softly, reproachfully*):

Do you think I don't *want* to face life as cheerfully and bravely as you do? I do, but—I can't. I was born without faith. I learned to think.

TSVETAYEVA:

That's it—you think too much. And is it worth while improving your mind just for the sake of pondering things? Thought is a good thing, but you've got to have imagination, too. Otherwise life will be an insufferable bore and a burden. You've got to be able to catch a vision of the future—at least from time to time.

(Polya smiles affectionately as she listens to Tsvetayeva.)

TATYANA:

And what do you see in that future?

TSVETAYEVA:

Whatever you wish to see.

TATYANA:

That's it, you've got to have a good imagination.

TSVETAYEVA:

You've got to have faith.

TATYANA:

In what?

TSVETAYEVA:

In your dream. Whenever I look into the eyes of my schoolboys, I think: here's Novikov—when he finishes school he'll go to the gymnasium and then to the university—probably become a doctor. He's a capable child, very good and serious, with a broad brow. He takes to people easily. He'll work very hard, with no thought of gain, and people will come to love and respect him, I'm sure. And some day, when he's looking back on his childhood, he'll remember how his teacher Tsvetayeva hit him on the nose when she was playing with him during the break. Or maybe he won't. It doesn't matter. But he probably will; he's very fond of me. And then there's that ragged, dirty-faced, absent-minded Klovov. Always arguing and getting into mischief. An orphan—lives with his uncle, a night watchman. They're poor as church mice, but he's a proud, bold little fellow. I think he'll be a journalist when he grows up. If you ever knew how many interesting boys there are in my class! I'm always guessing what will become of them—what role they're destined to play in life. It's great fun. A mere trifle, Tanya, but you can't imagine what pleasure it gives me!

TATYANA:

And you yourself? Perhaps your pupils have brilliant futures awaiting them, but you? Where will you be then?

TSVETAYEVA:

Are you hinting that I'll be dead? Oh, no! I mean to live a good long time!

POLYA (*breathing the words softly*):

What a darling you are, Masha!

TSVETAYEVA (*smiling at Polya*):

Thanks, linnet! I'm not sentimental, Tanya, but when I think of the future, of the people of the future and the sort of lives they'll live, a sweet and solemn feeling comes over me—the feeling that comes on one of those clear, crisp autumn days—you know the kind I mean, when a placid sun shines in a clear sky and the air is heady and transparent, lending sharpness to distant outlines—bracing, but not cold; sunny, but not hot.

TATYANA:

Dreams! Dreams! Perhaps you and Nil and Shishkin and others of your sort can live on dreams, but I can't.

●
TSVETAYEVA:

But look, they're not just dreams—

TATYANA:

Nothing has ever seemed real to me. Nothing. Except perhaps this me and those walls. When I say "yes" or "no" it isn't because of conviction. It's just because I have to say something. And sometimes when I've said "no" I stop and wonder whether I was right. Shouldn't I have said "yes"?

TSVETAYEVA:

You enjoy being like that. Be honest: aren't you the least bit enamoured of that "dual personality"? Or perhaps you're afraid to put faith in anything. After all, faith carries obligations.

TATYANA:

I don't know—I just don't know. Convert me to your faith. You convert others. (*Laughs softly.*) I feel sorry for the people who believe you. After all, it's only an illusion. Life always has been and always will be just as it is now—murky and stifling.

TSVETAYEVA (*smiling*):

Will it? Perhaps it won't.

POLYA (*as if to herself*):

It certainly won't.

TATYANA:

What did you say?

POLYA:

I said it won't.

TSVETAYEVA:

Good for you, linnet!

TATYANA:

Another one of your unfortunate believers! But ask her why it won't? What is going to change it? Ask her that!

POLYA (*going over to them softly*):

It's got to change because ... because ... at present life isn't for everybody. Very few people really live. Most of them have no time to. All they have time to do is work—earn their bread. But when they too—

SHISHKIN (*entering briskly*):

Hullo, everybody! (*To Polya*) Good evening, fair daughter of King Duncan!⁶

POLYA:

Of King who?

SHISHKIN:

Caught! So you haven't read the Heine I left you two weeks ago? Good evening, Tatyana Vasilyevna.

TATYANA (*holding out her hand*):

She has no time for books now. She's going to get married.

SHISHKIN:

She is? Who to?

TSVETAYEVA:

Nil.

SHISHKIN:

In that case I congratulate you, but in general I don't see much point in getting married, raising families, and all that sort of thing. Marriage, in modern conditions—

TATYANA:

Oh, don't! Spare us! We've already heard your views on the subject.

SHISHKIN:

Very well, I'll spare you. I have no time, anyway. (*To Tsvetayeva.*) Are you coming with me? Good. Where's Pyotr?

POLYA:

He's upstairs.

SHISHKIN:

Hm ... no, I won't go for him. You just tell him, Tatyana Vasilyevna, or perhaps you, Polya, that I ... er ... that my lessons with Prokhorov ... that is, that I'm without anyone to tutor again.

TSVETAYEVA:

You certainly have no luck.

TATYANA:

Have you quarrelled with him?

SHISHKIN:

Not particularly. I tried to be civil.

TSVETAYEVA:

But how did it happen? I thought you were pleased with Prokhorov.

SHISHKIN:

I was, damn it all. And when you get down to it, I suppose he's better than most. He's not stupid, but he's a braggart, and a windbag, and—(*Suddenly exploding.*) a beast!

TATYANA:

I'm afraid Pyotr won't get you any more tutoring to do after this.

SHISHKIN:

He'll probably be angry with me.

TSVETAYEVA:

What came between you and Prokhorov?

SHISHKIN:

Can you believe it? It turns out he's a Jew-hater.

TATYANA:

What do you care?

SHISHKIN:

But that's indecent! A person who pretends to be cultivated can't harbour feelings like that. He's just a foul bourgeois, that's what he is! Take this, for instance: his parlourmaid began to attend school on Sundays. Excellent! He himself gave me a long and tiresome harangue on the value of these schools—God knows I didn't ask him to. He even boasted of being one of the initiators of the movement. Well, one Sunday he came home, and—oh horror!—instead of having the door opened to him by the parlourmaid, it was opened by the nursemaid! Where's the parlourmaid? says he. At school,

says she. What a row there was! And that was the end of the parlourmaid's schooling. How do you like that?

(Tatyana shrugs her shoulders and says nothing.)

TSVETAYEVA:

And all the talking he does!

SHISHKIN:

Pyotr's always finding cads like him for me to tutor.

TATYANA (*dryly*):

If I'm not mistaken, you were pleased with the treasurer you gave lessons to.

SHISHKIN:

I was. He's quite a decent old fellow, but a numismatist. He was forever poking coppers under my nose and raving about Caesars and the Diadochi⁷ and Pharaohs in their chariots. I stood it as long as I could, and one day I said to him, "Listen, Vikenty Vasilyevich, you're wasting your time on nonsense. Why, any old cobble-stone out in the street is more antique than your coins." That was a shock to the old boy. "Do you mean to say I've been devoting fifteen years of my life to nonsense?" he says. There was no denying it, and so.... When he paid me off he held back half a ruble. Kept it for his collection, I guess. But that was nothing. This affair with Prokhorov ... hm.... (*Glumly*.) It's deucedly hard to be like me. (*Briskly*.) Marya Nikitishna, it's time for us to be going!

TSVETAYEVA:

I'm ready. Good-bye, Tatyana. Tomorrow's Sunday, I'll come and see you in the morning.

TATYANA:

Thanks. Sometimes I feel as if I were a sort of weed that people trip over—nothing pretty or useful about

me—I just grow underfoot for people to catch their toes in.

SHISHKIN:

Ugh, what a horrid idea!

TSVETAYEVA:

It hurts to hear you say such things, Tatyana.

TATYANA:

But wait. I think—or rather I know—yes, at last I know one bitter truth: he who is without faith is not fit to live; he must die.

TSVETAYEVA (*smiling*):

Must he really? Perhaps he mustn't?

TATYANA:

You're making fun of me. Have you nothing better to do?

TSVETAYEVA:

But I'm not, darling, really I'm not. It's your illness makes you say such things—you're tired and ill. Well, good-bye for the present. And don't think we're really so cruel and hard-hearted.

TATYANA:

Run along. Good-bye.

SHISHKIN (*to Poly*):

Well, when are you going to read Heine? Oh, I forgot, you're getting married. I could say a thing or two against that, but ... ahem! Good-bye.

(Goes out behind Tsvetayeva. Pause.)

POLYA:

Mass will be over soon, I guess. Shall I have the samovar heated?

TATYANA:

I don't think mother and father will want tea. But do as you like. (*Pause.*) Silence used to get on my nerves, but now I crave for it.

POLYA:

Isn't it time for you to take your medicine?

TATYANA:

Not yet. There's been so much noise and confusion. Shishkin's a noisy creature.

POLYA (*going over to her*):

He's very nice.

TATYANA:

Kind-hearted, but not very bright.

POLYA:

He's decent, and he's got courage. He's always ready to stand up for what he thinks is right. See how he stood up for that parlourmaid? Most people don't give a straw how parlourmaids and other servants of the rich live. Even if they did, they wouldn't take the trouble to put in a good word for them.

TATYANA (*without looking at Polya*):

Aren't you afraid to marry Nil, Polya?

POLYA (*surprised*):

Why should I be? Of course not.

TATYANA:

Well, I would be, in your place. I say this to you because I'm fond of you. You aren't like him. You're a simple girl, but he has read a lot. He's educated. He may get tired of you. Have you ever thought of that, Polya?

POLYA:

No, I know he loves me.

TATYANA (*tetchily*):

As if one could ever know that!

(Teterev comes in with the samovar.)

POLYA:

Thanks. I'll go for the milk. (*Goes out.*)

TETEREV

(*his face is puffy with a hangover*): As I was coming through the kitchen, Stepanida spied me and asked me to bring in the samovar. "Be so kind," says she. "I'll give you a pickle for it—a nice juicy pickle." I couldn't resist, glutton that I am.

TATYANA:

Have you been to mass already?

TETEREV:

No, I didn't go today. I've got a headache. How are you, feeling better?

TATYANA:

Yes, thank you. I get asked that twenty times a day. I'd feel better still if this house weren't so noisy. All this hurly-burly upsets me—everybody shouting and rushing about. Father is always scolding Nil, mother is always sighing, and I just lie here watching them, unable to see any point to what they—all of them—call living.

TETEREV:

Why not? It's a curious business, living is. I'm an outsider, I take no part in the affairs of this earth—just go on living out of curiosity—and yet I find that life here is not without interest.

TATYANA:

You make no demands on it, I know. But what do you find so interesting about it?

TETEREV:

People are just tuning up. I like to hear musicians tune their horns and fiddles before the curtain goes up. You catch certain true notes—sometimes a lovely phrase. It makes you anxious to know what's coming—what they're going to play, who the soloists will be, what the opera will be about. The same thing is happening here—people are just tuning up.

TATYANA:

That may be true of the theatre. The conductor comes in, waves his baton, and the musicians give a poor, soulless rendition of some outworn piece. But here? What are these musicians capable of rendering? Nothing, it seems to me.

TETEREV:

Something *fortissimo*.

TATYANA:

Time will tell. (*Pause. Teterev lights his pipe.*) Why do you smoke a pipe instead of cigarettes?

TETEREV:

More convenient. I'm a tramp, you know. I spend most of the year on the road. I'll be off again soon—as soon as winter sets in for good.

TATYANA:

Where?

TETEREV:

I don't know. It doesn't matter.

TATYANA:

You'll freeze to death in some ditch when you're drunk.

TETEREV:

I never drink when I'm on the road. And what if I do freeze to death? Better to freeze on the go than rot sitting still.

TATYANA:

Is it me you have in mind?

TETEREV (*jumping up in alarm*):

Good Lord, no! How could you think such a thing! I'm not that cruel!

TATYANA (*smiling*):

Don't let it upset you. I don't mind. I've become immune to pain. (*Bitterly.*) Everyone seems to know that. Nil, Polya, Yelena, Masha—they all behave like rich people who eat their dainties without a thought for the feelings of the beggar who watches them.

TETEREV

(*making a face and speaking through clenched teeth*): Why do you humiliate yourself so? You ought to have more self-respect.

TATYANA:

Let's change the subject. (*Pause.*) Tell me something about yourself. You never talk about yourself. Why don't you?

TETEREV:

It's a very big, but very uninteresting subject.

TATYANA:

Tell me this: why have you chosen such a strange way of life? You strike me as being clever and gifted. What made you what you are?

TETEREV (*grinning*):

The story would be too long and tiresome if I told it in my own words.

*I went in search of happiness,
And came back naked, barefoot,
Bereft of my habiliments,
Of all my hopes and dreams....*⁸

A simple explanation, but too pretty for me. I must add that in Russia a tramp or a drunk enjoys more ease of mind than a sober, honest fellow. (*Enter Pyotr and Nil.*) Only people as hard and sharp as swords can make their way in this world. Ah, Nil! Where have you been?

NIL:

At the station. I just won a very good fight. That thick-skulled chief of ours—

PYOTR:

You'll get the sack one of these days, I can see that.

NIL:

I'll find myself another job.

TATYANA:

Pyotr, Shishkin has quarrelled with Prokhorov and was ashamed to tell you himself.

PYOTR (*vexed*):

Damn it all, that's the limit! How can I face Prokhorov now? And what's worse, I can't help any of the other fellows. Prokhorov will turn down anyone I suggest.

NIL:

Don't be in such a hurry. You don't know who's in the right yet.

PYOTR:

Oh, yes I do!

TATYANA:

Shishkin was shocked to discover Prokhorov was down on the Jews.

NIL (*laughing*):

God bless him!

PYOTR:

You *would* find that noble in him! You, too, as any barbarian, have no respect for other people's point of view.

NIL:

Do you respect Jew-haters?

PYOTR:

I wouldn't lay hands on anybody for his ideas, no matter what they were.

NIL:

Well, I would.

TETEREV

(*after calmly surveying both parties to the quarrel*): Go ahead and do it.

PYOTR:

Who gives you the right?

NIL:

Nobody. Rights aren't given, they're taken. A person's got to win rights for himself if he doesn't want to be crushed under a weight of obligations.

PYOTR:

Oh, I say!

TATYANA (*petulantly*):

Do stop quarrelling! These endless quarrels! Don't you ever get sick of them?

PYOTR (*restraining himself*):

Forgive me, I won't do it again. But it's true, Shishkin has placed me in a confoundedly—

TATYANA:

I know. He's stupid.

NIL:

He's a decent chap. He won't let anyone step on his toes, but he's not afraid to step on theirs if necessary. It's a fine thing to know your own worth.

TATYANA:

To be childish, you mean?

NIL:

I don't. But it's a good thing, whatever you call it—childishness or anything else.

PYOTR:

Absurd.

NIL:

You think so? When a fellow throws away his last crust of bread because the hand that gave it to him is not to his liking?

PYOTR:

He can't be very hungry if he does. Oh, of course you'll deny it. You're no better than he is—just as childish. You

make a point of showing father how much you despise him. Why should you?

NIL:

Why shouldn't I?

TETEREV:

Decency demands the telling of white lies, my boy.

PYOTR:

What's the good of it? Tell me that.

NIL:

We'll never understand each other, you and I. Why should I explain to you? Everything your father says and does is repulsive to me.

PYOTR:

Maybe it is to me, too, but I try not to show it, while you make a point of it. And he takes it out on us—on my sister and me.

TATYANA:

Oh, stop it.

(Nil glances at her and walks over to the table.)

PYOTR:

Does it upset you so much?

TATYANA:

It bores me. The same thing over and over.

(Polya, who enters with a jug of milk, is struck by the dreamy smile on Nil's face.)

POLYA:

Doesn't he look like a saint?

TETEREV:

Why the blissful smile?

NIL:

I was just recalling the tongue-lashing I gave the chief.
Very amusing, this life of ours.

TETEREV (*in a deep bass voice*):

Amen!

PYOTR (*shrugging his shoulders*):

Are they born blind, these optimists, or what?

NIL:

I don't know whether you'd call me an optimist or not,
but I certainly do enjoy life. (*Gets up and paces the floor.*)
It's a grand thing to be alive!

TETEREV:

It is.

PYOTR:

Two comedians—if you're not just making believe.

NIL:

As for you—I don't understand you. Everybody knows
you're in love, and that she loves you too. Isn't that
enough to make you want to turn somersaults? To give
you at least a little joy in life?

(Polya looks proudly out from behind the samovar. Tatyana
twists on the couch trying to catch a glimpse of Nil's face.
Teterev smiles as he knocks the ashes out of his pipe.)

PYOTR:

You forget that, first of all, students aren't allowed to get
married; secondly, I've got a big battle with my parents
ahead; and thirdly—

NIL:

Good Lord! Was ever anything more absurd? There's only one thing left for you, Pyotr: run off into the desert!

(Polya smiles.)

TATYANA:

Don't try to be funny, Nil!

NIL:

You're on the wrong track, Pyotr. Life's a great thing even if you're not in love. Even if you're driving a rattletrap locomotive on an autumn night, in the rain and the wind—or in winter, with the blizzard roaring, snow blotting out the world and closing you in. It's exhausting to sit in the cab on a night like that—exhausting and dangerous. And even so it has its charms. The only thing that has no charms is that honest people have to take orders from pigs—from thieves and imbeciles. But life wasn't made for them. They'll pass. They'll disappear like a sore on a healthy body. There's no such thing as an order of the day that's not subject to change.

PYOTR:

We've heard these speeches of yours often enough. Wait and see what answer life has in store for you.

NIL:

I'll make it give the answer I want. You can't frighten me. I know better than you that life is hard, that sometimes it's sickeningly cruel, that a fierce, unbridled force is pressing people down. I know all that and don't like it. It gets my dander up. I don't want to accept things as they are. Life is a serious business, and it's out of shape. It will take all the strength and ability I have to help put it into shape. I also know I'm no hero—I'm just a strong honest fellow. And even so I say: just you wait—we'll win out in the end! And all my powers will go to satisfying my longing to

change life—to throw myself into its very vortex—push it this way and that, mould it, help one thing, hinder another. That's what you call living! That's the joy of life!

TETEREV (*with a little laugh*):

Therein lies the secret of learning; therein philosophy's lesson.⁹ And all other philosophy is claptrap!

YELENA (*from the doorway*):

What's all this shouting and waving of arms about?

NIL (*rushing towards her*):

Here's one who will understand me! I've just been singing a hymn to life. You tell them what a pleasure it is to be alive.

POLYA (*softly*):

Oh it is, it is!

YELENA:

Does anyone doubt it?

NIL (*to Polya*):

My blessed little mouse!

YELENA:

Come, now, no love-making in my presence.

PYOTR:

God knows what's got into him. He must be drunk.

(Tatyana throws her head back on the cushion and covers her face with her hands.)

YELENA:

Oh, you're about to have tea? And I came to ask you to have it with me. Well, then, I'll have it with you. It's lively here for a change. (*To Teterev.*) You're the only one, you

wise old owl, who seems to be in the dumps. How's that?

TETEREV:

I'm as gay as anybody else, only I like to be quiet when I'm gay and noisy when I'm sad.

NIL:

Like all big, clever, sulky dogs.

YELENA:

I've never seen you either gay or sad—only philosophical. What do you think, everybody?—what do you think, Tanya?—he's teaching me philosophy! Last night he read me a long lecture on the law of ... of sufficient reason¹⁰ How does it go? Oh, dear, I've forgotten. Come, tell me again.

TETEREV (*smiling*):

All life phenomena spring from—

YELENA:

Hear that? Just see what clever things I'm learning! I don't suppose any of you ever heard that that law represents ("represents" is a philosophical term, mind you)—represents something like a ... like a tooth, because it's got four roots. Am I right?

TETEREV:

Who am I to call you wrong?

YELENA:

Exactly. You just try it! The first root (or maybe it's not the first)—is primary cause. Existence—that's matter in form. Take me, for instance: I'm matter which has taken (not without cause) the form of a woman, but (and this time without any cause whatsoever) is deprived of being. Being is eternal, but matter in form appears on this earth and then—it's gone. Am I right?

TETEREV:

We'll let it go at that.

YELENA:

And besides this I know there are such things as causal relationships, *a priori* and *a posteriori*, but what they are I can't for the life of me remember. I'll probably get bald from all this wisdom. But the most profound problem posed by all this philosophy is: why in the world did you decide to teach me philosophy, Terenty Khrisanfovich?

TETEREV:

Firstly, because I take pleasure in looking at you.

YELENA:

Thank you for that. Don't bother about the "secondly"—it can't be interesting.

TETEREV:

Secondly, because a person can't lie when he philosophises, for philosophy is merely a figment of the imagination.

YELENA:

Which means nothing to me. Oh, yes, Tanya! How do you feel? (*Without waiting for an answer.*) Pyotr ... er ... Pyotr Vasilyevich, what are you so displeased with?

PYOTR:

Myself.

NIL:

And everybody else?

YELENA:

I feel a sudden urge to sing. What a pity today's Saturday and mass isn't over yet! (*Enter Bessemenov and Akulina Ivanovna.*) Ah, here come the pious folk! Good evening.

BESSEMENOV (*dryly*):

Good evening.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*in the same tone*):

Good evening, young lady. But we've exchanged greetings once today.

YELENA:

So we have. I had forgotten. Er ... how was church? Was it hot?

BESSEMENOV:

We don't go to church to take the temperature.

YELENA (*embarrassed*):

I see. But I—that wasn't what I meant. I meant to ask if there were many people there.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

We didn't count them, young lady.

POLYA (*to Bessemenov*):

Will you have tea?

BESSEMENOV:

First we'll have supper. Go and get something ready, mother. (*Akulina Ivanovna goes out with a sniff. Silence.*

Tatyana gets up and Yelena helps her over to the table. Nil takes Tatyana's place on the couch. Pyotr walks up and down. Teterev, who is sitting at the piano, watches them all with a smile on his face. Polya is at the samovar. Bessemenov sits on the trunk in the corner.) Suprising how thievish folk have become! A while back, when mother and I were going to church, I laid a board down at the gate—over the mud, that is. When we come back, the board's gone. Some thief stole it. Corruption has got into the people. (*Pause.*) There was less petty thieving back in the old days—more highway robbery, on account the people were on a bigger scale.

They wouldn't put a smudge on their souls for anything as petty as a board. (*The sound of singing and the playing of an accordion comes from out in the street.*) Hear that? Singing. The eve of the Sabbath, and they're singing. (*The singing draws nearer. It is part-singing.*) Must be workmen. Went to the pub soon's they knocked off, drank up all their pay, and now they're stretching their gullets. (*The singers have reached the house. Nil leans on the window-sill and looks out.*) They'll go on living that way another year—two at the most, and all's over. Tramps they'll be, or petty thieves.

NIL:

Perchikhin, it seems—

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*at the door*):

Supper's ready, father.

BESSEMENOV (*getting up*):

Perchikhin. Another one of those good-for-nothings. (*Goes out.*)

YELENA (*following him with her eye*):

Wouldn't it be better to have tea at my place?

NIL:

Very amusing, your talk with the old folk.

YELENA:

I—he makes me feel uncomfortable. He doesn't like me, and that's very unpleasant—even hurtful. Why shouldn't he like me?

PYOTR:

He's good enough at heart, but he's too proud.

NIL:

And the least bit greedy and cantankerous.

POLYA:

Sh. You shouldn't say such things about a man behind his back. That's not nice.

NIL:

It's not nice to be greedy.

TATYANA (*dryly*):

Let's drop the subject. Father may come in any minute. He hasn't scolded anyone for the last three days. He's been trying to be pleasant.

PYOTR:

It hasn't been easy, you can be sure.

TATYANA:

We ought to appreciate it. He's old. It isn't his fault if he was born years before we were and doesn't see things as we do. (*With irritation.*) How cruel people are! How rude and heartless we are to each other! We're taught to love one another, to be meek and kind—

NIL (*copying her tone*):

So that others can climb up on our backs and ride to town on us.

(Yelena laughs. Polya and Teterev smile. Pyotr goes over to Nil as if to say something to him. Tatyana shakes her head reproachfully.)

BESSEMENOV

(*casting a hostile glance at Yelena as he comes in*): Polya, your father's in the kitchen. Go and tell him to ... er ... come back another time, when he's ... er ... sober. Tell him to go home.

(Polya goes out, Nil follows her.)

BESSEME NOV (*to Nil*):

You go too. Have a look at your future ... er.... (*Cuts himself short and sits down at the table.*) Why the silence? I notice soon's I come into the room, everybody goes mum.

TATYANA:

We don't talk much when you're not here either.

BESSEME NOV (*scowling at Yelena*):

What were you laughing at?

YELENA:

Nothing in particular. Nil—

BESSEME NOV:

Nil! He's at the bottom of everything. I could tell that without your saying so.

TATYANA:

Shall I pour you out some tea?

BESSEME NOV:

Go ahead.

YELENA:

Here, Tanya, I'll do it.

BESSEME NOV:

Don't trouble yourself. My daughter will do it, thank you.

PYOTR:

I don't see what difference it makes who does it. Tatyana's not feeling well.

BESSEME NOV:

I'm not asking you your opinion on this matter. If strangers mean more to you than your own folk—

PYOTR:

Father! Aren't you ashamed?

TATYANA:

There you go! Pyotr, can't you hold your tongue?

YELENA (*forcing a smile*):

Is it worth—?

(The door is flung wide open and in comes Perchikhin, slightly tipsy.)

PERCHIKHIN:

Vasily Vasilyevich! Here I am! Don't think you can get rid of me by walking out of the kitchen!

BESSEME NOV (*without looking at him*):

Well, sit down, once you're here. Have some tea.

PERCHIKHIN:

It's not tea I want. Drink it yourself. I've come to have a talk with you.

BESSEME NOV:

Talk? Nonsense!

PERCHIKHIN:

Nonsense, eh? (*Laughs.*) You're a funny one! (*Nil comes in and stands leaning against the sideboard glaring at Bessemenov.*) Four days I've been making up my mind to come and have a talk with you, and—well, here I am!

BESSEME NOV:

Oh, drop it!

PERCHIKHIN:

No, I won't! You're a clever man, Vasily Vasilyevich; you're a rich man, but it's—it's your conscience I've come to talk to.

PYOTR

(*going over to Nil and speaking in an undertone*): What did you let him in here for?

NIL:

Leave him alone. It's none of your bussiness.

PYOTR:

You're always stirring up trouble.

PERCHIKHIN (*drowning out Pyotr*):

You're an old man, too, Vasily Vasilyevich. Just think of all the years I've known you!

BESSEME NOV (*angrily*):

What do you want of me?

PERCHIKHIN:

Here's what: tell me this, what did you put me out of your house for? I've thought and thought and can't make no sense out of it. Tell me why, brother. I've come to you without any bad feelings—with love in my heart.

BESSEME NOV:

And fog in your head!

TATYANA:

Pyotr, help me up—no, call Poly a. (*Pyotr goes out.*)

PERCHIKHIN:

Take Poly a, now. That sweet little girl of mine, that pretty little bird. Is it on her account you put me out? Because she took Tatyana's beau away from her?

TATYANA:

How preposterous! How degrading!

BESSEMENOV (*slowly getting up*):

Watch out, Perchikhin! Say that again and I'll—

YELENA (*to Nil, under her breath*):

Take him out. There'll be trouble.

NIL:

I don't want to.

PERCHIKHIN:

You won't put me out a second time, Vasily Vasilyevich! There'll be no reason to. Poly, she's a good girl and I love her, but she hadn't ought to have done it—no, brother, she hadn't ought to. It's not right to take what belongs to somebody else.

TATYANA:

Yelena, help me to my room. (*Yelena takes her arm. As they pass Nil, Tatyana says softly*): You ought to be ashamed! Take him out!

BESSEMENOV

(*restraining himself with an effort*): Hold your tongue, Perchikhin. Sit down and hold your tongue, and if you can't, get out! (*Enter Poly followed by Pyotr.*)

PYOTR (*to Poly*):

Wait, don't let it upset you so.

POLYA:

Vasily Vasilyevich! Why did you put my father out the last time he was here?

(Bessemenov looks at her with stern disapproval, then at everyone else in turn.)

PERCHIKHIN (*shaking his finger*):

Sh-h, daughter! Not a word! You'd ought to understand.

Tatyana took poison, didn't she? What for?... See? I don't spare nobody, Vasily Vasilyevich—judge them all equal, as they deserve. I don't make no difference—

POLYA:

Wait, father—

PYOTR:

Polya, can't you—?

NIL:

You keep out of it!

BESSEME NOV:

As for you, Polya, you're a bold and insolent—

PERCHIKHIN:

Her? Oh, no, she's—

BESSEME NOV:

Shut up! I seem to have lost my bearings. Whose house is this anyway? Who's the master here? Who's to say what's right and what's wrong?

PERCHIKHIN:

I am. And I'll tell each of you in turn. First of all, it's wrong to take what belongs to somebody else. Secondly, once you've taken it, give it back.

PYOTR (*to Perchikhin*):

Stop chirping and come into my room a minute.

PERCHIKHIN:

I don't like you, Pyotr! You're a hollow fellow. And too proud. And you don't know nothing, neither. What's sewerage, eh? There you are! I had to find out from somebody else. (*Pyotr pulls him by the sleeve.*) Hands off! Don't touch me!

NIL (*to Pyotr*):

Don't touch him.

BESSEME NOV (*to Nil*):

What are you here for? To sick the dog on?

NIL:

I want to know what it's all about. What did Perchikhin do? Why did you turn him out? And what has Polya got to do with it?

BESSEME NOV:

Are you cross-examining me?

NIL:

What if I am? You're only a human being like myself.

BESSEME NOV (*furious*):

Like you? You're not a human being, you're ... you're poison! You're a cur!

PERCHIKHIN:

Sh-h! Let's talk quiet-like, friendly-like—

BESSEME NOV (*to Polya*):

And you, you sly hussy—

NIL (*through his teeth*):

Less noise, you!

BESSEME NOV:

What's that? Get out, you ingrate! Turning on me who's fed you all these years by the sweat of my brow—

TATYANA (*from inside her room*):

Papa! Don't! '

PYOTR (*to Nil*):

Have you got what you wanted? You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

POLYA (*quietly*):

Don't you dare shout at me. I'm no slave of yours. Not everybody will take your insults. Tell me what you turned my father out of the house for.

NIL (*calmly*):

Tell me, too. This is no insane asylum. People here are expected to answer for what they do.

BESSEME NOV

(*more quietly, taking himself in hand*): Get out, Nil. Get out before something happens. Don't forget—I'm the one as fed you. I'm the one as brought you up.

NIL:

Will you ever stop throwing that in my teeth? I'll pay you for all I've eaten.

BESSEME NOV:

It's my soul you've eaten. you ingrate!

POLYA (*taking Nil's hand*):

Let's get out of here.

BESSEME NOV:

That's it, crawl away like the snake you are. You're the one that's to blame. It's all on account of you. You stung my daughter. And now him. It's because of you my daughter....

PERCHIKHIN:

Vasily Vasilyevich! Soft there! Soft!

TATYANA (*calling out*):

That's not true, father! Pyotr, can't you do something?

(*Appears in the doorway and staggers into the centre of the room with outstretched arms.*) This is horrible! Good God! Terenty Khrisanfovich! Tell them ... tell them.... Nill Polya! For God's sake, go away! Go away! Why do you allow it?

(The room is full of confused movement. Teterev, grinning, gets up slowly. Bessemenov retreats before his daughter. Pyotr seizes her by the arm and looks about him distractedly.)

POLYA:

Come along.

NIL:

Very well. (*To Bessemenov.*) We're going. I'm sorry it had to end like this.

BESSEMENOV:

Get out! And take her with you!

NIL:

I won't come back, you know.

POLYA (*loudly, in a trembling voice*):

To accuse me of such a thing! To blame me for Tatyana! As if it were my fault! How shameful!

BESSEMENOV (*infuriated*):

Well, go if you're going!

NIL:

Not so loud, if you please.

PERCHIKHIN:

Don't be angry, children. We must be meek.

POLYA:

Good-bye. Come, father.

NIL (*to Perchikhin*):

Come along.

PERCHIKHIN:

I'm not going with you. I want to stand on my own two feet. Alone. Terenty, I stand alone! I've done nobody no harm.

TETEREV:

Come into my room.

POLYA:

Come along before they put you out again.

PERCHIKHIN:

No, I'm not coming. Terenty, I don't belong with them. I understand—

PYOTR (*to Nil*):

For God's sake, go!

NIL (*to Pyotr*):

A fine one you turned out to be!

POLYA (*to Nil*):

Come along, come along! (*They go out.*)

BESSEME NOV (*shouting after them*):

You'll come back—come crawling back!

PYOTR:

Drop it, father.

TATYANA:

Poor father! Don't shout, father.

BESSEME NOV:

Just wait! We'll see!

PERCHIKHIN:

Well, now they've gone, thank goodness. Let them.

BESSEMENOV:

I'd like to tell them what I think of them, the blood-suckers! Fed them, clothed them.... (*To Perchikhin.*) And you, you old fool! Had to come and have your say, didn't you? What are you after? What is it, I say?

PYOTR:

Don't start all over again, father.

PERCHIKHIN:

Vasily Vasilyevich! Don't shout at me. Why, I think the world of you, you funny man! I'm foolish, it's true, but I understand a thing or two.

BESSEMENOV (*sinking down on the sofa*):

That's more than I do. I don't understand a thing. What happened? One of them left—as sudden as a fire springs up in the dead of night. Says he'll never come back. Just like that. But I don't believe him.

TETEREV (*to Perchikhin*):

What are you here for?

PERCHIKHIN:

To get things plain. It's a simple way I have of looking at things: two and two makes four and that's that. She's my daughter, isn't she? Good. That means she's obliged.... (*He suddenly falls silent.*) It's a bad father I've been to her, so she's not obliged. Let her live her life as she sees fit. But I feel sorry for Tatyana. I feel sorry for you, Tatyana. I feel sorry for all of you. (*Sighs.*) Truth to tell, you're a set of fools.

BESSEMENOV:

Hold your tongue!

PYOTR:

Tatyana, has Yelena Nikolayevna gone?

YELENA (*from Tatyana's room*):

No, I'm here. I'm mixing medicines.

BESSEME NOV:

My head's in a whirl. Can't make anything out of it. Can Nil really have gone? For good?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*enters in agitation*):

What's happened? Nil and Poly are out in the kitchen ... I was in the shed....

BESSEME NOV:

Have they gone?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

No, they're waiting for Perchikhin. Poly says ... tell father, she says, and her lips are trembling.... Nil's growling like an angry dog. What's happened?

BESSEME NOV (*getting up*):

Now I'll go and tell them!

PYOTR:

Don't, father. Stay here.

TATYANA:

Father, please don't!

BESSEME NOV:

Don't what?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

What is it? What's happened?

BESSEME NOV:

Nil's leaving. For good.

PYOTR:

What of it? Good riddance. What do you need him for? He's getting married. He wants to have his own family.

BESSEME NOV:

His own? What am I, a stranger to him?

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Don't be so upset, father. Forget him, let him go. We've got our own children to think of. You still here, Perchikhin? They're waiting for you.

PERCHIKHIN:

Their way's not my way.

BESSEME NOV:

It's not his going I mind. Let him go if he wants to. It's the way he went. Did you see the look he gave me?

(Yelena comes out of Tatyana's room.)

TETEREV

(*taking Perchikhin by the arm and leading him to the door*):

We'll have a glass of something, you and me.

PERCHIKHIN:

That's talking sense now!

(They go out.)

BESSEME NOV:

I knew he'd leave us some day, but not like this. And her! The way she shouted! That beggar girl! Oh, no, I've got to give them a piece of my—

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Let them be, father! They're not our sort! Why should you bother with them? If they want to go, let them.

YELENA (*softly to Pyotr*):

Come with me.

TATYANA (*to Yelena*):

Me too. Take me with you.

YELENA:

Of course. Come along.

BESSEME NOV (*hearing her invitation*):

Where to?

YELENA:

Upstairs.

BESSEME NOV:

Who are you inviting? Pyotr?

YELENA:

And Tatyana.

BESSEME NOV:

Tatyana don't count, and Pyotr's not to go.

PYOTR:

But, father, I'm not a child. I'll go or not, as I—

BESSEME NOV:

You're not to go.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Give in to your father, Pyotr. Give in, that's a good boy.

YELENA (*indignant*):

I beg your pardon, Vasily Vasilyevich, but—

BESSEME NOV:

No, it's me as begs yours—even if you do happen to be educated young folk, even if you do happen to have lost all sense of decency, all respect for your elders—

TATYANA (*hysterically*):

Father! Stop it!

BESSEME NOV:

Hold your tongue! If you can't manage your own affairs, be so good as to hold your tongue at least. Wait, where are you going?

(Yelena makes for the door.)

PYOTR

(*rushes after her and seizes her hand*): Just a minute. We ought to have it out—now—once and for all!

BESSEME NOV:

You ought to hear me out. Be good enough to listen to me for once. Give me a chance to see what's what. (*Perchikhin comes in beaming, followed by Teterev, who is also smiling. They halt in the doorway and exchange glances. Perchikhin winks in Bessemenov's direction and gives a disparaging wave of his hand.*) Everybody running off like this without so much as a by-your-leave! Very hurtful and wanton! There's no place for you to go, Pyotr. Who do you think you are? What can you do? How can you make a living? (*Akulina Ivanovna goes red in the face. Pyotr, Yelena and Tatyana form a solid little group facing Bessemenov, but on his words: "There's no place for you to go," Tatyana leaves them and goes over to the table where her mother is standing. Perchikhin makes signs to Teterev—shakes his head and flaps his arms as if scaring up a flock of birds.*) I have a right to ask. You're still young and foolish. For fifty-eight years I've been working myself to the bone for the sake of my children—

PYOTR:

I've heard all that before, father. A hundred times.

BESSEMENOV:

Hold your tongue!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Ah, Pyotr, Pyotr!

TATYANA:

Hush, mother, you don't understand.

(Akulina Ivanovna shakes her head.)

BESSEMENOV:

Not a word! What can you tell us? What can you teach us?
Not one thing!

PYOTR:

I can't stand much more of this, father. What do you want
of me?

AKULINA IVANOVNA

(suddenly speaking in a loud voice):

Wait! I, too, have feelings; I, too, have a right to speak!
Think what you're doing, son! Have you asked us?

TATYANA:

This is ghastly. Like a blunt saw. (To her mother.) You're
hacking me to pieces—body and soul.

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Your mother—a blunt saw! Your mother!

BESSEMENOV:

Wait, old woman. Let him speak.

YELENA (to Pyotr):

I've had enough. I'm going.

PYOTR:

Just a minute, for God's sake! Everything will be clear in a minute!

YELENA:

It's a mad-house, a—

TETEREV:

Go away, Yelena Nikolayevna! To hell with them—the whole lot of them!

BESSEME NOV:

As for you, my fine gentleman—as for you—

TATYANA:

Will it never end? Go away, Pyotr!

PYOTR (*almost shrieking*):

Father! Mother! Look! This is the woman I'm going to marry!

(Silence. All eyes are on Pyotr. Akulina Ivanovna puts her hand over her mouth and looks in horror at her husband. Bessemenov falls backward as if pushed and drops his head on his chest. Tatyana gives a deep sigh and walks slowly towards the piano, her hands hanging limply at her sides.)

TETEREV (*under his breath*):

He chose the right moment.

PERCHIKHIN (*stepping forward*):

So there you are! All the birdies flying off! Good for you, young folk. Fly out of your cages like the birds on Lady Day!

YELENA (*snatching her hand out of Pyotr's*):

Let me go! I can't bear it!

PYOTR (*murmuring*):

Everything's clear now—once and for all!

BESSEMENOV (*bowing to his son*):

Thank you, son, for such good tidings.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*tearfully*):

You're ruined, Pyotr! As if she was your equal!

PERCHIKHIN:

Her? Pyotr's? Come, come, old woman! What's he worth?

BESSEMENOV (*slowly to Yelena*):

Thank you, young lady. So now he's done for. He was to go on studying, and now? Very slick of you. But I saw it coming. (*Viciously*.) Congratulations on your catch! But you'll not have my blessing, Pyotr! So you caught him, did you? Crept up on him and seized him, you damned she-cat!

YELENA:

How dare you!

PYOTR:

Father! Have you gone mad?

YELENA:

You're right! I took him away from you! Yes, I did! I was the one to propose, hear that, you old screech-owl! I'm the one snatched him away from you! Out of pity for him. You'd have tortured him to death! You're not human beings, you're a sort of rust that eats people up! Your love would have been his ruin. You think—oh, I know what you think!—you think I did this for my own sake. Well, think what you like. How I hate you!

TATYANA:

Yelena! What are you saying?

PYOTR:

Yelena! Let's go!

YELENA:

Maybe I'll never marry him—you'd be glad, wouldn't you? It's very likely I won't. Don't lose hope. I'll just live with him—without any wedding-ring. But I won't give him to you, you can be sure of that! I'll never let you torture him again. He'll never come back to you—never! never!

TETEREV:

Vivat, young lady! Vivat!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Merciful heavens! What's happening, father? What is it?

PYOTR (*pushing Yelena towards the door*):

Go. Do go. Hurry.

(Yelena goes out and draws Pyotr after her.)

BESSEME NOV (*glancing about helplessly*):

How's that? (*In a sudden burst of fury.*) Call the police! (*Stamping his feet.*) I'll put her out! This very day! The slut!

TATYANA:

Father! Take yourself in hand!

PERCHIKHIN (*astounded, uncomprehending*):

Vasily Vasilyevich! What's the matter? What're you shouting for? You'd ought to be glad.

TATYANA (*going over to her father*):

Listen—

BESSEME NOV:

You? You still here? Why don't you go too? Go ahead! Nowhere to go? Nobody to go with? Missed your chance, eh?

(Tatyana staggers back, then turns and goes quickly over to the piano. Akulina Ivanovna—piteous, distracted—rushes over to her.)

PERCHIKHIN:

Vasily Vasilyevich, think what you're saying! Pyotr won't go on studying now—why should he? (*Bessemenov gazes dully at Perchikhin and shakes his head.*) He's got enough money to live on—you've saved it up. His wife's a very daisy, and here you are shouting and carrying on! What's the sense of it, you funny old fellow?

(Teterev bursts out laughing.)

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*wailing*):

They've all gone and left us! All gone away!

BESSEME NOV (*glancing round*):

Hush, mother. They'll come back. They haven't the guts to go away. Where'll they go? (*To Teterev.*) What are you grinning at, you pestilence? I'll put you out too! So's there's not a smell of you left on the premises this time tomorrow! You and the likes of you!

PERCHIKHIN:

Vasily Vasilyevich!

BESSEME NOV:

You get out too, you miserable tramp!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

Tanya! Tanechka! My blessed daughter! My poor unfortunate! What are we coming to?

BESSEME NOV:

You knew what was happening, daughter! You knew it all the time and never said a word! A conspiracy against your father, eh? (*Suddenly a look of fright comes over his face.*) What if he never leaves her—that skirt! A whore to wife!

My son! Oh, there's a curse on the lot of you, wretched, immoral creatures that you are!

TATYANA:

Stop it, father! Don't make me hate you!

AKULINA IVANOVNA:

My poor darling! My poor unfortunate! They've wore you out. They've wore us all out, the Lord only knows why!

BESSEMENOV:

Who has? It's all that rascal of a Nil. He's the one spoiled our son! He's the one hurt our daughter! (*Catching sight of Telerev standing at the sideboard.*) What're you doing here, you sot? Get out, I say!

PERCHIKHIN:

Vasily Vasilyevich! What's *he* done? Good Lord, the old man's gone clean off his chump!

TETEREV (*serenely*):

Save your wind, old man! You've got no power to stop the storm that's breaking over you. But have no fear, your son will come back.

BESSEMENOV (*quickly*):

How do you know?

TETEREV:

He won't leave you for long. He raised himself ever so slightly for the time being. He got pulled up. But he'll sink back again. As soon as you're dead he'll make over this sty of yours, move the furniture about and go on living as you've been living—calm, cosy and respectable.

PERCHIKHIN (*to Bessemenov*):

See? You flew off the handle for no good reason, foolish man! He wishes you well, Terenty does, wants to comfort you, and you shout at him! He's a wise fellow, Terenty is.

TETEREV:

He'll just rearrange the furniture and go on living in the same old way, convinced he's done his duty before God and man. He was made in your image and likeness.

PERCHIKHIN:

As like as two peas!

TETEREV:

Exactly alike—as big a coward, as big a fool.

PERCHIKHIN (*to Teterev*):

Wait, what's that you're saying?

BESSEME NOV:

No insults, if you please. How dare you?

TETEREV:

And in due time he'll be just as greedy, just as hard-hearted, and just as self-complacent. (*Perchikhin stares wonderingly at Teterev, trying to understand whether he's comforting or upbraiding the old man. Bessemenov, too, is nonplussed, but he takes an interest in what Teterev is saying.*) And he'll be just as miserable in the end as you are now. Life is moving ahead, old man, and whoever is unable to keep up with it will find himself left behind—alone.

PERCHIKHIN:

Hear that? In other words, everything is as it ought to be, and here you are, bellowing and snorting!

BESSEME NOV:

Can't you keep out of it?

TETEREV:

And in just the same way there'll be no pity shown him, that miserable son of yours. He'll be asked straight to his face, as I'm asking you now: "What have you lived for?"

What good have you ever done?" And, like you, he'll be unable to answer.

BESSEME NOV:

Very pretty it sounds when you say it—you always could put things pretty. But search your own soul and see what's there! I'll never put any faith in what you say! And ... well ... I'm giving you notice. Clear out of here. I've taken enough from you. A lot of this has been your doing. You've brought enough harm on my house.

TETEREV:

If only it had been me! Unfortunately it wasn't. (*Goes out.*)

BESSEME NOV (*tossing back his head*):

We've got to take things as they are. It's been this way all these years—I guess we can stand it a little longer. (*Goes into his room.*)

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*running after her husband*):

Father! My poor old man! Why have our children done this to us? What have we done to deserve it? (*She goes into her room.*)

(Perchikhin stands in the middle of the room blinking his eyes. Tatyana, who is sitting on the piano stool, gazes wildly about her. The sound of muffled voices comes from Bessemenov's room.)

PERCHIKHIN:

Tanya! Tanechka! (*Tatyana does not so much as look at him.*)

Tanya! What's the reason for it—the running away, the crying—what's the reason, eh?

(*Looks at Tatyana and sighs.*)

Queer birds! (*Glances at the door of Bessemenov's room, then goes out into the hall shaking his head.*) Guess I'll go and sit with Terenty a spell. . . Queer birds!

(Slowly Tatyana collapses, dropping her arms on the keyboard, her head on her arms. There is the discordant sound of many keys striking at once. Gradually it dies out.)

CURTAIN

Dedicated
to Konstantin Petrovich Pyatnitsky

The Lower Depths

Characters in the Play

MIKHAIL IVANOVICH KOSTYLYOV, *54 years old,
owner of a lodging-house*

VASILISA KARPOVNA, *26 years old, his wife*

NATASHA, *20 years old, her sister*

ABRAM MEDVEDEV, *50 years old, their uncle, a policeman*

VASYA PEPEL, *28 years old*

ANDREI KLESHCH (Mitrich), *40 years old, a locksmith*

ANNA, *30 years old, his wife*

NASTYA, *24 years old, a streetwalker*

KVASHNYA, *something under 40 years old, a woman who
peddles dumplings*

BUBNOV, *45 years old, a hatter*

THE BARON, *33 years old*

SATIN

THE ACTOR

LUKA, *60 years old, a tramp*

ALYOSHKA, *20 years old, a cobbler*

KRIVOI ZOB

THE TATAR (Asan)

Several tramps

} *approximately the same age, about 40*

} *dock hands*

ACT I

A cellar resembling a cave. The heavy vaulted ceiling is smoke-blackened and in places the plaster has fallen off. Light descends from a square window upstage right. A thin partition turns the right corner of the stage into a room for Pepel. Near the door of this room is Bubnov's bunk. A large Russian stove occupies the upper left corner. A door in the stone wall to the left leads to the kitchen where Kvashnya, the Baron, and Nastya live. A wide bed enclosed by dirty cotton hangings stands against the wall between the stove and this door. Bunks are built against all the walls. Downstage left stands an upturned log to which are attached a vice and an anvil. In front of the anvil on a block of wood sits KLESHCH, trying keys in an old lock. The floor about him is cluttered with rings of miscellaneous keys, a battered tin samovar, a hammer and files, etc. The centre of the lodging is occupied by a large table, two benches and a stool, all of them dirty and unpainted. KVASHNYA is busy at a samovar standing on the table, the BARON is chewing a piece of black bread, and NASTYA is sitting with her elbows on the table, poring over a dog-eared novel. ANNA can be heard coughing behind the curtains of the bed. BUBNOV is sitting on his bunk with a hat block between his knees, calculating how to cut a cap out of strips of cloth ripped from an old pair of trousers. Near him lie bits of rags and oilcloth and pieces of cardboard for making the visors of caps. SATIN, who has just awakened, is lying on his bunk and snarling. The ACTOR is coughing and tossing about on top of the stove,* out of sight of the audience. It is a morning in early spring.

BARON:

What next?

* A Russian stove is so constructed that the space above the oven is large enough to serve as a bed.— *Ed.*

KVASHNYA:

Oh no, you don't, my darling, says I. Keep your distance, says I. I've already had my try at that sort of thing, and you couldn't drag me to the altar again for a hundred baked crawfish, says I.

BUBNOV (*to Satin*):

What're you grunting about?

(Satin snarls.)

KVASHNYA:

Me, a free woman as is her own boss, to go and have herself writ into somebody else's passport? says I. That I should become the slave of some man? Not on your life! Oh no! Not if he was the King of America himself!

KLESHCH:

That's a lie!

KVASHNYA:

What's that?

KLESHCH:

That's a lie. You'll marry Abram!

BARON

(*snatching Nastya's book and reading the title*): *Fatal Love.*¹
(*Laughs.*)

NASTYA (*reaching for the book*):

Here, give it back! Come on! No fooling!

(The Baron teases her by waving the book in the air.)

KVASHNYA (*to Kleshch*):

You're a redheaded old goat, that's what you are! A lie! How dare you insult me like that!

BARON

(*striking Nastya over the head with the book*): You're a fool, Nastya!

NASTYA (*snatching the book away*):

Give it to me!

KLESHCH:

What a fine lady! But you'll marry Abram all right! That's all you're waiting for!

KVASHNYA:

Oh yes, of course! What else? The way you've rode your wife to death!

KLESHCH:

Shut up, you bitch! That's none of your business!

KVASHNYA:

O-ho! Don't like to hear the truth, eh?

BARON:

There they go! Nastya, where are you?

NASTYA (*without raising her head*):

Oh, get out!

ANNA (*peering out from behind the curtains*): The day's begun! For God's sake, don't shout. Don't quarrel!

KLESHCH:

Whining again!

ANNA:

Every blessed day! Let me at least die in peace!

BUBNOV:

Can't scare death off with a little noise.

KVASHNYA (*going over to Anna*):

How'd you ever live with that fiend, my poor dearie?

ANNA:

Leave me alone. Go away.

KVASHNYA:

Hm. There's a martyr for you! Any easier in your chest today?

BARON:

Kvashnya! Time to go to market!

KVASHNYA:

Just a minute! (*To Anna*) Wouldn't you like some nice hot dumplings?

ANNA:

What for? It would just be a waste.

KVASHNYA:

You just try them. Good and hot—they'll loosen up your cough. I'll leave them here in this bowl so's you can help yourself when you feel like it. Come on, me lord! (*To Kleshch.*) Br-r-r! You hobgoblin! (*Goes into the kitchen.*)

ANNA (*coughing*):

Oh, Lord!

BARON (*slyly giving Nastya's a push*):

Drop it, you little fool!

NASTYA (*muttering*):

Let me be! I'm not in your way, am I?

(Baron whistles a tune as he goes out on the heels of Kvashnya.)

SATIN (*raising himself on his bed*):

Who gave me a beating last night?

BUBNOV:

What difference does it make to you?

SATIN:

None, I suppose. But what did they give me a beating for?

BUBNOV:

Were you in a card game?

SATIN:

I was.

BUBNOV:

That explains the beating.

SATIN:

The scoundrels!

ACTOR

(*poking his head over the edge of the stove*): They'll beat you to death one of these days.

SATIN:

You're an ass.

ACTOR:

Why?

SATIN:

You can't kill a person twice.

ACTOR (*after a pause*):

Why not? I don't see why not.

KLESHCH (*to the Actor*):

Get down off that stove and tidy up. Afraid of spoiling your hands?

ACTOR:

That's none of your business.

KLESHCH:

Wait till Vasilisa comes in. She'll show you whose business it is!

ACTOR:

To hell with Vasilisa! It's the Baron's turn to tidy up today. Baron!

BARON (*entering from the kitchen*):

I haven't time to tidy up. I'm going to market with Kvashnya.

ACTOR:

What do I care? You can go to jail for all I care, but it's your turn to sweep the floor. I'm not doing another man's job for him.

BARON:

To hell with you! Nastya will sweep the floor. Hey, there, "fatal love"! Come back to earth! (*Snatches the book out of her hands.*)

NASTYA (*getting up*):

What do you want? Give it back! Funny, aren't you? And you call yourself a gentleman!

BARON (*handing back the book*):

Sweep the floor for me, Nastya. That's a good girl.

NASTYA (*going into the kitchen*):

Oh, won't I just! I'd love to!

KVASHNYA (*at the kitchen door, to the Baron*):

Come on! They'll manage here without your help. Hey,

there, Actor! It's you they're asking, so be so kind. It won't break your back.

ACTOR:

Humph! Always me. I don't see why....

BARON

(entering from the kitchen with a wooden yoke on his shoulders from which are suspended two baskets containing crocks covered with dirty rags): Heavier than usual today.

SATIN:

Was it worth getting yourself born a Baron?

KVASHNYA *(to the Actor):*

You begin that sweeping, now!

(She makes for the passage, letting the Baron go out first.)

ACTOR *(climbing down off the stove):*

It's harmful for me to inhale dust. *(Proudly.)* My organism is poisoned with alcohol. *(He becomes meditative, sinking down on one of the bunks.)*

SATIN:

Organism.... Organon....

ANNA:

Andrei Mitrich....

KLESHCH:

Now, what do you want?

ANNA:

Kvashnya left me some dumplings. Take them and eat them.

KLESHCH *(going over to her):*

What about you? Don't you want them?

ANNA:

No. Why should I eat? But you're a working man. You need food.

KLESHCH:

Are you afraid? Don't be afraid. You can't tell, maybe....

ANNA:

Go ahead and eat them. I'm feeling bad. I guess it'll be soon now.

KLESHCH (*going out*):

Don't fret. Maybe you'll get better. It sometimes happens.
(*Goes into the kitchen.*)

ACTOR (*loudly, as though he had suddenly awakened*):

Yesterday the doctor in the clinic said to me: Your organism, he said, is completely poisoned with alcohol.

SATIN (*smiling*):

Organon....

ACTOR (*insisting*):

Not organon. Or-gan-ism.

SATIN: Sicambri! ²

ACTOR (*waving his hand at him*):

Idiocy! But I'm talking serious. Yes, I am! If your organism is poisoned, it must be harmful to sweep the floor, to breathe that dust.

SATIN:

Macrobiotics! ³ Hah!

BUBNOV:

What's that you're garbling?

SATIN:

Words. Then there's that: transcendental.⁴

BUBNOV:

What does that mean?

SATIN:

Don't know. Forgot.

BUBNOV:

Then what do you say it for?

SATIN:

Just for fun. I'm sick of all the words people use, brother. I'm sick of all our words! I've heard them all a thousand times!

ACTOR:

In *Hamlet* they say, "Words, words, words!" A wonderful play! I acted the part of a grave-digger.

KLESHCH (*entering from the kitchen*):

When are you going to start acting the part of the floorsweep?

ACTOR:

Mind your own business! (*Striking his breast.*) "Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered!"

(At some distance off stage is heard a confusion of voices, cries, police whistles. Kleshch sits down to work, making a rasping noise with his file.)

SATIN:

I love odd, incomprehensible words. When I was a boy working in a telegraph office I did a lot of reading.

BUBNOV:

Were you a telegraph operator, too?

SATIN:

I was. (*Gives a little laugh.*) There are some fine books, and a great many curious words. I was once a well-educated man, did you know that?

BUBNOV:

Heard it a hundred times. What if you were? A lot of difference it makes now! Take me, for instance. I was a furrier once. Had my own shop. My hands used to be all yellow from dyeing the fur—hands and arms, right up to the elbow. I thought they'd stay that way to the day of my death. I thought I'd die with those yellow arms, and now look at them. Just plain dirty. Humph!

SATIN:

Well, what of it?

BUBNOV:

Nothing. That's all.

SATIN:

Then what was the point of your speech?

BUBNOV:

There wasn't any. Just an idea. It turns out that no matter how carefully you paint your outside, it all rubs off. It all rubs off. Humph!

SATIN:

Oh, how my bones ache!

ACTOR (*sits hugging his knees*):

Education is nothing; it's talent that counts. I once knew an actor who could only read out his role by syllables, but when he acted, the theatre rocked and roared with the rapture of his audience.

SATIN:

Bubnov, give me five kopeks!

BUBNOV:

I've only got two.

ACTOR:

I'm telling you it's talent you need to be an actor. And talent means believing in yourself, in your ability.

SATIN:

Give me five kopeks and I'll believe you're a genius, a hero, a crocodile, a police officer! Kleshch, give me five kopeks!

KLESHCH:

Go to the devil! Too many like you around.

SATIN:

No swearing, if you please. Don't I know you haven't got a kopek to your name?

ANNA:

Andrei Mitrich ... I can't breathe ... so stuffy....

KLESHCH:

What do you expect me to do about it?

BUBNOV:

Open the door into the passage.

KLESHCH:

Oh, yes, of course. You up there on your bed and me down here on the floor. Change places with me and you can open the door. I've got a cold as it is.

BUBNOV (*calmly*):

It's not me that wants the door open. It's your wife that's asking.

KLESHCH (*sullenly*):

There are plenty of things a person can ask for.

SATIN:

How my head's humming! Why should people lam each other over the bean?

BUBNOV:

Not only over the bean, but over the whole remaining territory of the body. (*Getting up.*) I'm going out to buy some thread. Wonder what's keeping our landlord and his wife so long today? Maybe they've kicked the bucket. (*Goes out.*)

(Anna coughs. Satin lies motionless with his hands under his head.)

ACTOR

(*glancing miserably about him, goes over to Anna*): Feeling bad?

ANNA:

It's so stuffy.

ACTOR:

I'll take you out into the passage if you like. Come, get up. (*He helps her rise, throws some rags about her shoulders and leads her out.*) That's it. Steady. I'm sick myself — poisoned with alcohol.

KOSTYLYOV (*in the doorway*):

Out for a walk? How pretty the two, the lamb and the ewe!

ACTOR:

Out of the way! Can't you see we're sick?

KOSTYLYOV:

Oh, yes! By all means! (*Humming a church tune through his nose, he glances suspiciously about the lodging, turning his head as if listening for something in Pepel's room. Kleshch viciously jangles the keys and rasps with his file, watching the movements of the landlord from under lowered brows.*) Scratching away?

KLESHCH:

What's that?

KOSTYLYOV:

I say, scratching away? (*Pause.*) Hm. Now then, what was it I wanted to ask? (*Speaking quickly and in a low voice.*) Has my wife been here?

KLESHCH:

Didn't see her.

KOSTYLYOV

(*stealing toward the door to Pepel's room*): You're taking up a lot of space for two rubles a month, aren't you? A bed, and a place to sit besides. Hm. Worth at least five rubles. I'll have to throw on another half-ruble.

KLESHCH:

Throw on a noose and choke me to death! On your last legs, and still wondering how you can snatch another half-ruble!

KOSTYLYOV:

Why should I choke you? Who'd profit by that? Live on, and may the Lord help you. But I'll throw on that extra half-ruble just the same! I'll buy some oil for my icon lamp and let it burn before the holy image, a sacrifice in retribution for my sins, and for yours too. You never think of your sins, do you now? Oh, it's a wicked man you are, Andrei! Your wife has wasted away from your

meanness. Nobody likes you, nobody respects you. Scraping away at that iron of yours, getting on everybody's nerves....

KLESHCH (*shouting*):

Did you come here just to poison my life?

(Satin roars.)

KOSTYLYOV (*with a start*):

Good gracious, my good man....

ACTOR (*entering*):

I fixed her up out there in the passage, wrapped her up.

KOSTYLYOV:

You have a kind heart, brother. That's a good thing. It'll all be counted to your credit.

ACTOR:

When?

KOSTYLYOV:

In the next world, brother. There everything, every little deed, is counted.

ACTOR:

Maybe you'll reward me for my kindness here and now?

KOSTYLYOV:

How could I do that?

ACTOR:

By crossing out half my debt.

KOSTYLYOV:

Hee-hee! You will have your fun, your little jokes! As if a kind heart could be rewarded with money! Goodness is

the highest of all blessings. But a debt's a debt, which means it must be paid. As to the kindness you show an old man like me, you shouldn't seek reward for it!

ACTOR:

A rascalion, that's what you are, old man!

(Goes out into the kitchen. Kleshch gets up and goes out into the passage.)

KOSTYLYOV (*to Satin*):

The scraper here, he ran away. Hee-hee! He don't like me.

SATIN:

Who but the devil could like you?

KOSTYLYOV (*playfully*):

Now why should you say such things to me! Me, as loves you all so! Don't I know you're all my brothers, my poor, unfortunate, fallen brothers? (*Suddenly and quickly.*) Er ... a ... Vasya—is he home?

SATIN:

Go and look.

KOSTYLYOV

(*going over and knocking at the door*):

Vasya!

(The Actor appears in the kitchen door chewing something.)

PEPEL:

Who's there?

KOSTYLYOV:

It's me. Me, Vasya.

PEPEL:

What do you want?

KOSTYLYOV (*moving away*):

Open the door.

SATIN (*without looking at Kostylyov*):

He'll open the door and there she is.

(The Actor gives a snort.)

KOSTYLYOV

(*uneasily, in a lowered voice*): What? Who's there? What did you say?

SATIN:

You speaking to me?

KOSTYLYOV:

What was it you said?

SATIN:

Nothing special. Talking to myself.

KOSTYLYOV:

Watch your step, brother! A joke's a joke, but in the right place! (*Knocks sharply at the door.*) Vasya!

PEPEL (*opening the door*):

Well? What do you come here bothering me for?

KOSTYLYOV (*peeping into the room*):

I ... you see ... you....

PEPEL:

Did you bring the money?

KOSTYLYOV:

I have some business with you.

PEPEL:

Did you bring the money?

KOSTYLYOV:

What money? Wait a minute.

PEPEL:

The seven rubles for the watch. Where is it?

KOSTYLYOV:

What watch, Vasya? My goodness....

PEPEL:

Careful, careful! People saw me sell you that watch yesterday for ten rubles—three rubles down, seven to come. Let's have it. Why do you stand there gaping? Hanging around, disturbing everybody instead of going about your business!

KOSTYLYOV:

Sh-h-h! Don't be angry, Vasya! The watch, it's....

SATIN:

Stolen goods.

KOSTYLYOV (*sternly*):

I don't handle stolen goods! How dare you....

PEPEL (*taking him by the shoulder*):

What are you pestering me for? What do you want?

KOSTYLYOV:

Me? Why, nothing. Nothing at all. I'll be going if you're like that.

PEPEL:

Get out, and bring me that money!

KOSTYLYOV (*leaving*):

Bah! Such coarse people!

ACTOR:

A real comedy!

SATIN:

Good. That's what I like.

PEPEL:

What was he doing here?

SATIN (*laughing*):

Can't you guess? Looking for his wife. Why don't you bump him off, Vasya?

PEPEL:

As though I'd ruin my life for a swine like him!

SATIN:

Be smart about it. Then you could marry Vasilisa and collect our rents.

PEPEL:

Wouldn't that be fun! Before I knew it you'd guzzle down all my property and me in the bargain, out of the goodness of my heart. (*Sitting down on one of the bunks*) The old devil! He woke me up. And I was having such a nice dream! I dreamt I was fishing and caught a huge pike. Couldn't find a pike that size outside of a dream. There it was on the end of the line, and me scared the rod would snap, so I get a net ready—here, thinks I, I'll catch it now....

SATIN:

That wasn't a pike. It was Vasilisa.

ACTOR:

He caught Vasilisa long ago.

PEPEL (*angrily*):

You can all go to the devil, and take her with you!

KLESHCH (*entering from the passage*):

Devilishly cold!

ACTOR:

Why didn't you bring Anna in? She'll freeze out there.

KLESHCH:

Natasha took her into the kitchen.

ACTOR:

The old man will chase her out.

KLESHCH (*sitting down to work*):

Then Natasha will bring her back.

SATIN:

Vasya! Give me five kopeks!

ACTOR (*to Satin*):

Five kopeks? Vasya! Give us twenty kopeks!

PEPEL:

I'd better hurry and give it to them before they ask for a ruble. Here.

SATIN:

Thermopylae! Thieves are the finest people in the world!

KLESHCH (*sullenly*):

Money comes easy to them. They don't work.

SATIN:

Lots of people get money easy, but not many give it up easy. Work? Find me work it's a pleasure to do, and maybe I'll do it. Hm. Maybe. When work is a pleasure, life

is a joy. When work is a duty, life is slavery! (*To the Actor.*)
Come, O Sardanapalus!⁵ Let us be going!

ACTOR:

Let us be going, oh Nebuchadnezzar! I'll get as soused as
forty thousand sots!⁶

(They go out.)

PEPEL (*yawning*):

How's your wife?

KLESHCH:

You can see it won't be long now.

(Pause.)

PEPEL:

Why in the world do you keep on scraping away there?

KLESHCH:

What else should I do?

PEPEL:

Nothing.

KLESHCH:

Then how'd I feed myself?

PEPEL:

Other people manage.

KLESHCH:

Who, these here? Do you call them people? Tramps!
Ragamuffins! Scum of the earth! I'm a working man, and
it makes me ashamed just to look at them. I've been
working as long as I can remember. You think I won't
pull myself out of here? I will! I may scrape all the skin
off my body, but I'll crawl out of here. Just you wait—my

wife will die soon. I've only been living here six months, but it seems like six years.

PEPEL:

You're no better than the rest of us, so there's no sense in talking like that.

KLESHCH:

No better! You have no honour, no conscience!

PEPEL (*indifferently*):

Who wants them—honour and conscience? You can't wear honour and conscience on your feet in place of boots. It's only those in power who can afford to have honour and conscience.

BUBNOV (*coming in*):

Br-r-r! I'm frozen.

PEPEL:

Bubnov! Have you got a conscience?

BUBNOV:

What's that? A conscience?

PEPEL:

Yes, a conscience.

BUBNOV:

Why should I have? I'm not rich.

PEPEL:

That's what I say: it's only the rich who need honour and conscience. But Kleshch here is bawling us out. No conscience, he says....

BUBNOV:

Would he like to borrow a conscience?

PEPEL:

Oh no, he's got a fine one of his own.

BUBNOV:

So he's selling it! Well, he won't find a customer here. If it was some old cards now, I might be interested—and then only if he'd let me have them on credit.

PEPEL (*instructively*):

You're a fool, Andrei! When it comes to conscience, you'd do well to listen to Satin—or even the Baron.

KLESHCH:

There's nothing they can teach me.

PEPEL:

They've got more brains than you have, even if they are drunks.

BUBNOV:

The man who's drunk as well as wise, has won himself a double prize.

PEPEL:

Satin says everybody wants others to have a conscience, but nobody wants one himself. That's the truth.

(Natasha comes in. She is followed by Luka, with a stick in his hand, a knapsack on his back, a pot and tea-kettle tied to his belt.)

LUKA:

Greetings to you, honest folk.

PEPEL (*stroking his moustache*):

Ah, Natasha!

BUBNOV (*to Luka*):

We were honest in the past, the year before last.

NATASHA:

Here's a new lodger.

LUKA:

It's all the same to me. I have respect for crooks too. Not a flea but has its merits, the way I look at it. They're all of them black, they all of them jump. Now where were you thinking to put me up, my dear?

NATASHA (*pointing to the kitchen door*):

In there, grandad.

LUKA:

Thank you, my girl. If you say there, then it's there I go. Any place that's warm is home to old bones.

PEPEL:

A queer old fellow you've brought in, Natasha.

NATASHA:

He's better than you are. Andrei, your wife is sitting in our kitchen. Come and get her in a little while.

KLESHCH:

All right. I will.

NATASHA:

You might be a little gentler with her now. You can see it won't be long.

KLESHCH:

I know.

NATASHA:

It's not enough to know. You've got to understand. After all, it's dreadful to die.

PEPEL:

I'm not afraid.

NATASHA:

Aren't you now? Such a fine brave fellow!

BUBNOV (*giving a little whistle*):

The thread's rotten!

PEPEL:

Honest to goodness I'm not. I'm ready to die this very minute! Take that knife and stick it in my heart. I'll die without so much as a gasp. I'll even be glad, because it's by a spotless hand.

NATASHA (*going out*):

Expect me to swallow that?

BUBNOV (*with a wail*):

The thread is rotten!

NATASHA (*at the door to the passage*):

Don't forget about your wife, Andrei.

KLESHCH:

I won't.

PEPEL:

There's a girl for you!

BUBNOV:

Not bad.

PEPEL:

Why is she like that with me? Always putting me off. She'll be ruined if she stays here.

BUBNOV:

It's because of you she'll be ruined.

PEPEL:

What makes you say that? I ... I pity her.

BUBNOV:

Like the wolf pities the lamb.

PEPEL:

That's a lie! It's hard for her to live here. I can see that.

KLESHCH:

You just wait until Vasilisa catches you talking to her!

BUBNOV:

Vasilisa? She's not one to give away things for nothing. She's a ferocious dame!

PEPEL (*lying on the bed*):

To hell with the two of you! A couple of prophets!

KLESHCH:

You'll see. Just wait.

LUKA (*singing in the kitchen*):

Midnight glo-o-om ... the road is lost in da-a-rkness....

KLESHCH (*going into the passage*):

What's he howling about? Another one!

PEPEL:

What a bore life is! Funny, how I get like this at times. A bloke lives along day after day, without noticing anything, and then all of a sudden he feels as if he had caught a chill. Very tiresome.

BUBNOV:

Tiresome? Hm.

PEPEL:

Very.

LUKA (*singing*):

Ah-h! No pa-a-th in sight!...

PEPEL:

Hey! Old man!

LUKA (*peering through the door*):

Is it me you're calling?

PEPEL:

Yes, you. Stop singing.

LUKA (*coming out*):

Don't you like it?

PEPEL:

I might if it was good.

LUKA:

You mean to say it's no good?

PEPEL:

Exactly.

LUKA:

Fancy that! And here was I thinking I had a good voice. It's always like that: a person thinks to himself—my, don't I do that nice; and then somebody comes along and says it's no good.

PEPEL (*laughing*):

True enough.

BUBNOV:

A minute ago you were bored to death, and now you're laughing.

PEPEL:

What do you care, you old croaker!

LUKA:

What's that? Who's feeling bored?

PEPEL:

Me. I'm the one.

(The Baron comes in.)

LUKA:

Fancy that! There's a girl sitting out there in the kitchen reading a book and crying. Really crying. Tears running down her cheeks. I says to her, "What is it, dearie?" And she says, "The poor man!" And I says, "What man?" "Here in the book," she says. Now what would make a person spend time on things like that? She must be bored, like you.

BARON:

She's a fool.

PEPEL:

Ah, the Baron! Had your tea?

BARON:

I have. What next?

PEPEL:

Would you like me to stand you a half-pint?

BARON:

I would. What next?

PEPEL:

Get down on all fours and bark like a dog.

BARON:

Blockhead! Do you take yourself for a rich merchant? Or are you just drunk?

PEPEL:

Go ahead and bark to amuse me. You're a gentleman, and once upon a time you didn't look on people like us as human beings.

BARON:

Well, what next?

PEPEL:

Well, so now I'm telling you to get down on all fours and bark like a dog, and you're going to do it, do you hear?

BARON:

I do, you fool, and I'm going to do it. But I don't see what pleasure it can give you, once I myself realise I've become almost worse than you are. You wouldn't have tried to make me get down on all fours when I was your superior.

BUBNOV:

True enough.

LUKA:

Very well put.

BUBNOV:

What's past is past and nothing left but chicken feathers. There's none of your fine gentlemen here. All the colours have been washed off. Nothing but naked people.

LUKA:

In other words, everybody's equal. But were you really a baron once, my good man?

BARON:

What's this? Who are you, you hobgoblin?

LUKA (*laughing*):

I've seen a count and a prince, but never before have I seen a baron, and a mangy one at that.

PEPEL (*laughing*):

A baron! You make me blush!

BARON:

It's time you had more sense, Vasya!

LUKA:

Dear, dear, dear! When I look at you, brothers, the way you live! Ah, me!

BUBNOV:

We wake with a groan, and sleep with a moan—that's the way we live.

BARON:

We lived better once upon a time. I remember waking up in the morning and having coffee served to me in bed. Coffee and cream.

LUKA:

It's human beings we are, all of us. No matter what airs we put on, no matter how we make believe, it's human beings we were born, and it's human beings we'll die. People are getting wiser, the way I see it, and more interesting. The worse they live, the better they want to live. A stubborn lot, human beings!

BARON:

Who are you, old man? Where did you come from?

LUKA:

Me?

BARON:

Are you a pilgrim?

LUKA:

We're all pilgrims on this earth. I've heard it said that this very earth of ours is a pilgrim in the skies.

BARON (*sternly*):

Let that be as it may, but you—have you a passport?

LUKA (*after a pause*):

And who might you be, a nark?

PEPEL (*joyfully*):

Good for you, old man! He took a pretty nip out of you that time, you Baron, you!

BUBNOV:

Yes, he put out fine gentleman in his place!

BARON (*embarrassed*):

Well, what of it? I was only joking, old man. I don't own one of those documents myself.

BUBNOV:

Liar!

BARON:

That is, I have some papers, but they're no good.

LUKA:

They're all the same, those papers. None of them's any good.

PEPEL:

Let's go and have a drink, Baron.

BARON:

I don't object! Well, good-bye, old man. You're a rascal, that's what you are!

LUKA:

Takes all kinds of people to make the world.

PEPEL (*at the door to the passage*):

Come on if you're coming! (*Goes out. The Baron hurries after him.*)

LUKA:

Was he really a baron once?

BUBNOV:

Who knows? It's true he's from the gentry. Even now, all of a sudden, he'll do something that shows he's from the gentry. He don't seem to have got out of the habit yet.

LUKA:

Belonging to the gentry's like having the smallpox—a person may recover, but the scars remain.

BUBNOV:

He's all right on the whole—just gets up on his hind legs once in a while, like about your passport.

ALYOSHKA

(*enters slightly drunk, whistling and playing on an accordion*):

Hey, lodgers!

BUBNOV:

What are you bawling about?

ALYOSHKA:

Excuse me. Forgive me. I'm very polite by nature.

BUBNOV:

Been on a spree again?

ALYOSHKA:

Haven't I, just! The policeman Medyakin just threw me out of the station and said, "Don't let me catch a sniff of you in the street again!—Not a teeny-weeny!" says he. But I'm a person of character. My boss snarls at me, but what's a boss? Pooh, pooh! A mere misunderstanding! He's a drunk, my boss is, and I'm a person as doesn't care about nothing. I don't want nothing! Here, take me for half a ruble. I don't want nothing! (*Nastya enters from the kitchen.*) Offer me a million—I won't have it! And do you think I'll let anybody, especially a drunk, tell me what to do? Not on your life!

(As she stands in the doorway, Nastya watches Alyoshka and shakes her head.)

LUKA (*kindly*):

What a muddle you've got yourself into, young man!

BUBNOV:

Crazy, that's what he is!

ALYOSHKA

(*throwing himself on the floor*): Here, gobble me up! I don't want nothing! I'm a desperate fellow! Try and prove to me who's my betters! Why am I any worse than the rest? That Medyakin says to me, "I'll smash your mug in if I catch you in the street!" But out I'll go! Out I'll go and lie down in the middle of the street—here, run over me! I don't want nothing!

NASTYA:

Poor fellow! Twisted and knotted at such an early age!

ALYOSHKA

(catching sight of her and getting up on his knees):

Mademoiselle! Parlez français! Merci! Bouillon! I've been on a spree!

NASTYA *(in a loud whisper):*

Vasilisa!

VASILISA

(opening the door quickly and speaking to Alyoshka):

You here again?

ALYOSHKA:

How d'ye do! Be so kind....

VASILISA:

I warned you not to show yourself again, you puppy, and here you are!

ALYOSHKA:

Vasilisa Karpovna! Here, I'll play you a funeral march, want me to?

VASILISA *(taking him by the shoulder):*

Get out!

ALYOSHKA *(making for the door):*

Wait a minute! The funeral march! I just learned it! A brand-new tune! Wait a minute! You can't do that!

VASILISA:

I'll show you whether I can or not! I'll set the whole street against you, you heathen! You're too young to go around yapping about me!

ALYOSHKA *(running out):*

I'm off!

VASILISA (to Bubnov):

Don't let me catch him here again, hear?

BUBNOV:

I'm not a watchdog.

VASILISA:

What do I care what you call yourself. Don't forget you're living on charity. How much do you owe me?

BUBNOV (*undisturbed*):

I haven't counted.

VASILISA:

Well, I'll count it for you!

ALYOSHKA

(*opening the door and shouting*): Vasilisa Karpovna! You can't scare me! You can't scare me-e-e! (*Disappears.*)

(Luka laughs.)

VASILISA:

And who might you be?

LUKA:

A wanderer. A pilgrim.

VASILISA:

For the night or to stay? -

LUKA:

I'll have a look around first.

VASILISA:

Passport?

LUKA:

If you like....

VASILISA:

Give it to me!

LUKA:

I'll deliver it ... er ... to your chambers in person.

VASILISA:

A pilgrim? A tramp's more like it!

LUKA (*with a sigh*):

You're not a very gentle soul.

(Vasilisa goes over to the door of Pepel's room. Alyoshka pokes his head through the kitchen door and whispers, "Has she gone?")

VASILISA (*turning to him*):

You still here?

(Alyoshka gives a piercing whistle and disappears. Nastya and Luka laugh.)

BUBNOV (*to Vasilisa*):

He's not here.

VASILISA:

Who?

BUBNOV:

Vasya.

VASILISA:

Did I ask you where he was?

BUBNOV:

Well, you were sniffing about.

VASILISA:

I'm looking to see that everything's in order, see? Why hasn't the floor been swept? How many times have I ordered you to keep this place clean?

BUBNOV:

It's the Actor's turn to sweep.

VASILISA:

I don't care whose turn it is! If the sanitary inspector comes and fines me I'll throw you all out!

BUBNOV (*calmly*):

And then what'll you live on?

VASILISA:.

Don't let me find a speck on the floor! (*Going towards the kitchen and speaking to Nastya.*) What are you moping here for with your mug all swollen? Standing there like a dummy! Sweep up this floor! Have you seen Natasha? Has she been here?

NASTYA:

I don't know. I didn't see her.

VASILISA:

Bubnov! Was my sister here?

BUBNOV (*indicating Luka*):

She brought him in.

VASILISA:

And that one—was he home?

BUBNOV:

Vasya? He was. But Natasha only spoke to Kleshch.

VASILISA:

I'm not asking you who she spoke to! Dirt everywhere! Filth! A lot of swine! Get this place cleaned up, do you hear? (*Goes out quickly.*)

BUBNOV:

Was there ever a woman as nasty as her?

LUKA:

She's not the one to fool with!

NASTYA:

Anybody'd get nasty from such a life. Tie anybody up to a husband like hers....

BUBNOV:

She's not tied very tight.

LUKA:

Does she always go about exploding like that?

BUBNOV:

Always. She came to see her lover, and he wasn't here.

LUKA:

That is annoying, of course. Dear, dear, dear! The number of people as try to run this earth of ours, all of them threatening fearful threats. And still there's no order and no cleanliness!

BUBNOV:

They want order, but they haven't got the brains to make it. Still, the floor's got to be swept. Nastya! Why don't you do it?

NASTYA:

Why do you suppose? Am I your chambermaid? (*After a*

moment's silence.) I'm going to get drunk today—crazy drunk.

BUBNOV:

At least that's something.

LUKA:

Why, my girl? Just a little while back you were crying and now you say you want to get drunk.

NASTYA (*challengingly*):

I'll get drunk and start crying all over again. That's all.

BUBNOV:

Not very much.

LUKA:

But what's the cause? Even a pimple has its cause.

(Nastya shakes her head in silence.)

LUKA:

Dear, dear, dear! Such people! Whatever's going to become of you? Here, I'll sweep the floor for you. Where's the broom?

BUBNOV:

Behind the door in the passage.

(Luka goes out into the passage.)

BUBNOV:

Nastya!

NASTYA:

What?

BUBNOV:

Why did Vasilisa go after Alyoshka like that?

NASTYA:

He's been telling everybody that Vasya was sick of her and was going to throw her over for Natasha. I'd better get out of here—move to another place.

BUBNOV:

What's that? Where to?

NASTYA:

I'm sick of it all. I'm not wanted here.

BUBNOV (*complacently*):

Nor anywhere else. Nobody's wanted on this earth.

(Nastya shakes her head, gets up and quietly goes out into the passage. Medvedev enters, followed by Luka with the broom.)

MEDVEDEV:

I don't think I know you.

LUKA:

And do you know all the others?

MEDVEDEV:

I'm supposed to know all the people on my beat. But I don't know you.

LUKA:

That's because not all the earth falls within your beat, uncle. There's a wee little bit left over.

(Goes out into the kitchen.)

MEDVEDEV (*going over to Bubnov*):

My beat may not be big, but it's worse than a big one. Just now, before knocking off, I had to take Alyoshka the cobbler to the station, and what do you suppose he did? Laid down in the middle of the street, started playing on

his accordion and yelling "I don't want nothing!" There was horses going by, and carts and things. He might have got run over or something. He's a noisy youngster. But I've fixed him up, all right. He seems to like making a row.

BUBNOV:

Coming over for a game of draughts tonight?

MEDVEDEV:

All right. Hm.... What about that Vasya?

BUBNOV:

Nothing special. Same as ever.

MEDVEDEV:

In other words, alive and kicking?

BUBNOV:

Why not? No reason why he shouldn't be alive and kicking.

MEDVEDEV (*doubtfully*):

You think so? (*Luka goes out into the passage carrying a pail.*) There was some gossip going round about Vasya. Haven't you heard it?

BUBNOV:

I hear lots of gossip.

MEDVEDEV:

About him and Vasilisa. It seems ... er ... haven't you noticed anything?

BUBNOV:

What, for instance?

MEDVEDEV:

Well ... anything. Maybe you know and won't tell.
Everybody knows. (*Sternly.*) No lying, now!

BUBNOV:

Why should I lie?

MEDVEDEV:

That's it, the dirty dogs! They say, Vasya and Vasilisa ... you know. But what do I care? I'm not her father—only her uncle. Why should folk laugh at me? (*Kvashnya comes in.*) Whatever's come over people lately—laughing at everybody. Ah, it's you! Back already!

KVASHNYA:

My most respected police force! He kept pestering me at the market again, Bubnov. Nothing will do but I must marry him!

BUBNOV:

Go ahead. Why not? He's got money, and isn't too rickety yet.

MEDVEDEV:

Me? Ho-ho!

KVASHNYA:

You, old wolf, you! Don't touch my sore spot. I tried it once, getting married. It's like jumping through a hole in the ice. Once you've done it, you'll never forget it.

MEDVEDEV:

Oh, come—husbands are different.

KVASHNYA:

But I'm the same. As soon as my darling better half passed out—may he sizzle in hell!—I sat there blissfully

for a whole day all by myself: just sat there trying to believe my good luck.

MEDVEDEV:

If your husband beat you without good cause, you should have complained to the police.

KVASHNYA:

I complained to God for eight years. He didn't help.

MEDVEDEV:

It's forbidden to beat your wife nowadays. They're very strict nowadays. Law and order! Mustn't beat anybody without good cause—only to preserve order.

LUKA (*leading in Anna*):

Now you see, we made it. How can a body like you go walking about all by herself—so shaky on her legs? Where's your place here?

ANNA (*showing him*):

Thank you, grandad.

KVASHNYA:

There she is, a married woman. Look at her!

LUKA:

She's put together very shaky, poor little thing! I heard her moaning and found her clutching the wall, trying to make her way through the passage. You shouldn't let her walk about by herself.

KVASHNYA:

Forgive us such an oversight, good sir. Her chambermaid, it seems, is having a day-off.

LUKA:

Look at that—turning it into a joke! You can't do that

to a person. Everybody's got some worth, however slight.

MEDVEDEV:

You'd ought to keep an eye on her. What if she should die all of a sudden? That would be a great nuisance. Don't let her out of your sight.

LUKA:

Quite right, Sergeant.

MEDVEDEV:

Well, now, I may not quite be a sergeant as yet....

LUKA:

Think of that, now! From the looks of you....

(Noise and confusion in the passage. Stifled cries are heard.)

MEDVEDEV:

A row?

BUBNOV:

Sounds like it.

KVASHNYA:

I'll go and have a look.

MEDVEDEV:

I've got to go too. Oh, these duties! I don't see why we should pull people apart who are fighting. They'd stop of themselves when they got tired. It'd be better to let them slug each other as much as they liked. They'd remember it and wouldn't be so quick to pick a fight the next time.

BUBNOV (*climbing down off his bunk*):

You speak to your chief about that.

KOSTYLYOV

(*throwing open the door and shouting*): Abram! Come quick! Vasilisa's after Natasha. She'll kill her! Hurry up!

(Kvashnya, Medvedev and Bubnov rush into the passage. Luka shakes his head and gazes after them.)

ANNA:

Oh, Lord! Poor Natasha!

LUKA:

Who's fighting?

ANNA:

Our landladies. They're sisters.

LUKA (*going over to Anna*):

What are they fighting over?

ANNA:

Nothing special. They've got too much energy, that's all.

LUKA:

What's your name?

ANNA:

Anna. I keep looking at you—you remind me of my father, so soft and gentle.

LUKA:

I've been pushed around a lot. That's what makes me so soft. (*He gives a crackling laugh.*)

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same scene. Evening. SATIN, KRIVOI ZOB, the BARON and the TATAR are playing cards near the stove, while KLESHCH and the ACTOR look on. BUBNOV and MEDVEDEV are having a game of draughts on Bubnov's bunk. LUKA is sitting beside ANNA. The lodging is lighted by two lamps, one of them on the wall near the cardplayers, the other on Bubnov's bunk.

TATAR:

Once more I play. That's all I play....

BUBNOV:

Zob! Sing us a song! (*Sings.*)

Every morn the sun arises....?

KRIVOI ZOB (*joining in*):

Still my cell is filled with gloom....

TATAR (*to Satin*):

Shuffle cards. Shuffle good. We know how you play.

BUBNOV and KRIVOI ZOB (*together*):

Day and night the prison sentries,

Ah-h!

Watch the window of my room....

ANNA:

Fights ... insults ... nothing else.... That's all I've seen ... all I've known.

LUKA:

Ah, my poor dearie, don't fret!

MEDVEDEV:

Hey, where are you moving! Watch out!

BUBNOV:

Hm. Well....

TATAR (*shaking his fist at Satin*):

Why you hide them cards? I see! You god-damn....

KRIVOI ZOB:

Forget it, Asan! They'll cheat us all the same. Bubnov, start up the song again!

ANNA:

I never had enough to eat ... counted every crumb ... always trembled with fear ... scared to eat more than the other person ... never had anything to wear but rags. Why?

LUKA:

Poor little thing! Tired, that's what you are. Everything will be all right.

ACTOR (*to Krivoi Zob*):

Throw on your Jack—your Jack, damn you!

BARON:

And we've got the King!

KLESHCH:

They always go one higher.

SATIN:

It's a habit of ours.

MEDVEDEV:

King!

BUBNOV:

Me too. Well, now?

ANNA:

And now I'm dying....

KLESHCH:

See that? See that? Quit the game, Asan! Quit it, I say!

ACTOR:

Can't he think for himself?

BARON:

You watch out, Andrei, or I'll send you flying straight to hell!

TATAR:

Come on. Deal again. The pitcher bring water and broke herself. Me too.

(Kleshch shakes his head and goes over to Bubnov.)

ANNA:

I keep thinking: dear God, will this torture go on in the next world too? There too?

LUKA:

No, no. You won't suffer there, my pretty. Sleep in peace. Everything will be all right. You'll have a good rest there. Be patient just a little longer. Everybody has got to be patient—each in his own way.

(He gets up and goes into the kitchen with quick little steps.)

BUBNOV (*singing*):

Guard my window at your pleasure—

KRIVOI ZOB:

I will never run away!

(*In unison.*)

*Though I languish for my freedom,
Ah-h!
Chains are forcing me to stay!*

TATAR (*shouting*):

Aha! Put card up sleeve!

BARON (*in some embarrassment*):

Well, where do you expect me to put it—up your nose?

ACTOR (*convincingly*):

You're mistaken, Asan. No one has ever....

TATAR:

I see! Cheat! I no play!

SATIN (*gathering up the cards*):

All right, get out, Asan. You knew we were cheats. Why did you start playing with us?

BARON:

Lost twenty kopeks and makes a noise like three rubles!
And calls himself a Tatar prince!

TATAR (*angrily*):

Gotta play fair!

SATIN:

What for?

TATAR:

What you mean, what for?

SATIN:

Just what I said—what for?

TATAR:

You don't know?

SATIN:

No, I don't know. Do you know?

(The Tatar spits in anger, the others laugh at him.)

KRIVOI ZOB (*undisturbed*):

You're crazy, Asan. Can't you see that if they tried living honestly, they'd starve to death in three days?

TATAR:

I no care. Gotta live honest.

KRIVOI ZOB:

Harping on the old string. Come on, let's go and have our tea. Bubnov!

Ah, my chains, my iron halter....

BUBNOV:

Unrelenting iron guard....

KRIVOI ZOB:

Come along, Asan! (*He goes out singing.*)

I can neither loose nor break them....

(The Tatar shakes his fist at the Baron, then follows his friend out.)

SATIN (*laughing and addressing the Baron*):

Once again, your honourable honour, it seems you have been dumped in a ditch. Hm, an educated gentleman, and don't know how to slip a card up your sleeve!

BARON (*shrugging his shoulders*):

How the devil it ever happened!

ACTOR:

No talent. No faith in yourself. Without that—nothing. Failure.

MEDVEDEV:

I've got one King, but you've got two.

BUBNOV:

You can still win if you're smart. Your move.

KLESHCH:

You've lost already, Abram Ivanych!

MEDVEDEV:

Keep out of this, hear? Shut up!

SATIN:

Winnings—fifty-three kopeks!

ACTOR:

Three of them go to me. But what do I want with three kopeks?

LUKA (*entering from the kitchen*):

Well, now you've stripped the Tatar, I suppose you'll be going out for a drink?

BARON:

Come with us.

SATIN:

I'd like to see what you're like when you're drunk.

LUKA:

No better than when I'm sober.

ACTOR:

Come on, old man. I'll recite some verses to you.

LUKA:

What's that?

ACTOR:

Poetry.

LUKA:

Poetry? What do I want with poetry?

ACTOR:

It can be amusing. But it can also be sad.

SATIN:

Well, poet, are you coming? (*Goes out with the Baron.*)

ACTOR:

Coming. I'll catch you up! Listen to this, old man. It's from some poem. Ugh ... I can't remember the beginning. Can't remember! (*Rubs his forehead.*)

BUBNOV:

Here goes your King! Your move!

MEDVEDEV:

I shouldn't have moved there, damn it all!

ACTOR:

Formerly, when my organism was not yet poisoned with alcohol, I had a good memory, old man. But now—? Everything's over for me now, I always brought down the house with those lines—tremendous applause! And you don't know what applause means, my friend. Applause is like vodka! I used to come out and stand like this. (*Strikes a pose.*) I'd stand like this... and.... (*He is silent.*) Can't remember a word—not a word. And it was my favourite poem. That's pretty bad, isn't it, old man?

LUKA:

It is, once it's your favourite. All your soul goes into your favourite.

ACTOR:

I've drunk up my soul, old man. I'm ruined. And why? Because I had no faith in myself. I'm done for.

LUKA:

That's nothing. All you have to do is take a cure. They cure people of drunkenness nowadays, haven't you heard? Cure them free of charge. They've opened up a kind of healing centre, so to speak, where they cure them for nothing. That's because they see a drunkard's also a human being, and they're even glad when he wants to be cured. So you just go there. Go and try it, do.

ACTOR (*pensively*):

Where? Where is this place?

LUKA:

It's in some city or other. What do they call it? A funny name. Let me see ... never fear, I'll find out the name. Meantime, you be getting yourself ready. Drop the vodka. Take yourself in hand and hold on, and then you'll go for a cure and begin life all over again. Won't that be fine? All over again. Just make up your mind, once and for all!

ACTOR (*smiling*):

All over again. All from the beginning. Yes, that sounds fine. All over again. (*Laughs.*) Of course! I can do it! Don't you think I can do it?

LUKA:

Of course you can. A person can do anything, if he wants to badly enough.

ACTOR (*as though suddenly waking up*):

You're a little cracked, aren't you, old man? Well, good-bye for the present. (*Whistling.*) Good-bye, old man. (*Goes out.*)

ANNA:

Grandad.

LUKA:

What is it, dearie?

ANNA:

Talk to me.

LUKA (*going over to her*):

Very well. You and me'll have a nice little chat.

(Kleshch watches them, then silently goes over to his wife, looks at her and makes movements with his hands as if there were something he wanted to say.)

LUKA:

What is it, brother?

KLESHCH (*under his breath*):

Nothing. (*Goes slowly towards the door to the passage, stands in front of it in hesitation a second or so, then suddenly goes out.*)

LUKA (*following him with his eyes*):

It's hard for that man of yours.

ANNA:

I can't be thinking of him now.

LUKA:

Did he often beat you?

ANNA:

Something awful. It's because of him I got like this.

BUBNOV:

My wife had a lover once. The rascal played a good game of draughts.

MEDVEDEV:

Hm.

ANNA:

Grandad, please tell me something.... I'm feeling so bad....

LUKA:

That's nothing. That's just before you die, pigeon. It'll be all right, dearie. You just keep hoping. This is how it'll be—you'll die soon, you see, and everything will be quiet and peaceful. You won't have to be afraid of nothing any more, nothing at all. Just lie there in peace and quiet. Death's kind to us poor mortals. He smooths out all the wrinkles, death does. That's why they say: eternal rest. And that's the truth, lovey, because where can a person hope to get any rest in this world?

(Pepe! comes in. He has had a drink, looks dishevelled and is in a sullen mood. He sinks down on a bunk by the door and sits there silent and motionless.)

ANNA:

But what if we'll be tortured in that other world too?

LUKA:

There won't be nothing there. Nothing at all. You just believe me. Peace and quiet and nothing else. They'll summon you before the Lord God and say: See, Lord, it's your faithful servant Anna who has come.

MEDVEDEV (*sternly*):

How do you know what they'll say there? You're a fine one, you are!

(On hearing Medvedev's voice, Pepel lifts his head and listens.)

LUKA:

If I say it, I must be knowing it, Sergeant

MEDVEDEV (*appeased*):

Hm. Maybe. I suppose that's your business. But I told you I'm not a sergeant. Not yet.

BUBNOV:

Double jump.

MEDVEDEV:

You devil. I hope you....

LUKA:

And the Lord God will look at you so gentle and tender like, and say: Of course I know Anna. And He'll say: You just lead our Anna right into Paradise, that's what He'll say. Let her rest up a bit. I know what a hard life she's had. I know how tired she is. Let her have peace and quiet now.

ANNA (*gasping*):

Oh, grandad ... dearest grandad ... if it would only be like that! If only ... peace and quiet ... not to feel anything....

LUKA:

You won't feel anything, my pretty. Nothing at all. Believe me. You must die now gladly, without any fear. Death, I'm telling you, is a tender father to us, his children.

ANNA:

But ... maybe ... maybe I'll get well?

LUKA (*smiling deprecatingly*):

What for, dearie? To be tortured again?

ANNA:

To live ... just a little ... just a little longer. Once you say there won't be any suffering there.... I could bear it here ... I could.

LUKA:

There won't be nothing at all there. Just....

PEPEL (*getting up*):

You're right. But maybe—you're wrong.

ANNA (*startled*):

Good heavens!

LUKA:

What's that, my handsome fellow?

MEDVEDEV:

Who's shouting?

PEPEL (*going over to him*):

Me! What of it?

MEDVEDEV:

You oughtn't to shout, that's what. A person should conduct himself peaceful.

PEPEL:

Blockhead! And their uncle! Ho-ho!

LUKA (*to Pepel, under his breath*):

Stop shouting, hear? The woman's dying. The earth colour has come to her lips already. Be quiet.

PEPEL:

Out of respect for you, grandad. You're a smart feller, grandad. You lie beautifully. Nice to listen to your fairy-tales. Go ahead and lie. That's all right. Not many pleasant things to listen to in this world.

BUBNOV:

Is it true she's dying?

LUKA:

I think so.

BUBNOV:

That means the end of her coughing. A nasty cough she had. Double jump.

MEDVEDEV:

Pooh! Devil take you!

PEPEL:

Abram!

MEDVEDEV:

Who said you could call me by my first name?

PEPEL:

Abram! Is Natasha sick?

MEDVEDEV:

What business is it of yours?

PEPEL:

You'd better tell me. Did Vasilisa beat her bad?

MEDVEDEV:

It's none of your business. It's a family affair. Who are you to butt in?

PEPEL:

Whoever I am, you'll never get another look at Natasha if I don't want you to.

MEDVEDEV (*leaving his draughts*):

What? What's that? Who are you talking about? She's my niece, you thief, you!

PEPEL:

I may be a thief, but you haven't caught me!

MEDVEDEV:

Just wait! I'll catch you, all right. And soon!

PEPEL:

If you catch me, it'll be the end of this little nest of yours. Do you think I'll keep my mouth shut in court? The wolf will bare his fangs. They'll ask me: Who taught you to steal and showed you where? Mikhail Kostilyov and his wife! Who handled your stolen goods? Mikhail Kostilyov and his wife!

MEDVEDEV:

You're a liar. Nobody'll believe you!

PEPEL:

They'll believe me because it's the truth! And I'll drag you in, too—hah! I'll ruin all of you, you bastards! You'll see!

MEDVEDEV (*taken aback*):

Liar! You liar! What harm have I ever done you? Throwing yourself on me like a mad dog!

PEPEL:

What *good* have you ever done me?

LUKA:

Hm!

MEDVEDEV (*to Luka*):

What are you croaking about? What business is it of yours? This is a family affair.

BUBNOV (*to Luka*):

Keep out of it. The noose isn't for you and me.

LUKA (*meekly*):

Yes. I'm just saying if a person hasn't done his neighbour good, he's done him bad.

MEDVEDEV (*missing the point*):

Blah! We here, we all know each other, but you—who are you? (*Gives an angry snort and hurries out.*)

LUKA:

The gentleman seems to be angry. Dear me! Your affairs here, brothers, are a bit tangled, as I see it.

PEPEL:

He's run off to tell Vasilisa.

BUBNOV:

You're a fool, Vasya. Showing off how brave you are! Watch out! It's all right to be brave when you go to the woods for mushrooms, but there's no sense in it here. They'll snap off your head in an instant.

PEPEL:

Oh, no, they won't! Nobody's taking a fellow from Yaroslavl with his bare hands! If it's a fight they want, they'll get it!

LUKA:

But really now, don't you think you'd do well to clear out of here, lad?

PEPEL:

Where'll I go? Tell me that.

LUKA:

Well now, Siberia for instance.

PEPEL:

Not me. No, thank you. I'll wait to be sent to Siberia free of charge.

LUKA:

Take my advice and go out there. Out there you'll find the right path to follow. They need people like you out there.

PEPEL:

My path has been laid out for me. My father spent most of his life in jail and ordered me to do the same. Ever since I was a kid I've been called a thief, or the son of a thief.

LUKA:

It's a fine place, Siberia. A golden land. If a person is strong and has a good head on his shoulders, he'll feel as snug there as a cucumber in a hot-house.

PEPEL:

Why are you always telling lies, old man?

LUKA:

Eh?

PEPEL:

Deaf. What do you tell lies for, I say?

LUKA:

What lies have I told?

PEPEL:

Everything you say's a lie. Everything's good, according to you: this place, that place. A pack of lies. What makes you tell them?

LUKA:

You just believe what I say and go out there to see for yourself. Then you'll say thank you. Why should you stay here? And why should you be so anxious to know the truth? The truth may turn out to be an axe on your neck.

PEPEL:

It's all the same to me. If it's an axe, it's an axe.

LUKA:

Foolish lad. There's no sense in killing yourself.

BUBNOV:

What are you two arguing about? Is it the truth you're after, Vasya? What for? You know it without being told. Everybody knows it.

PEPEL:

Quit your croaking. Let him tell me. Listen, old man—is there a God?

(Luka smiles, but says nothing.)

BUBNOV:

People are like chips of wood floating on the river—and chips fly off as houses are built.

PEPEL:

Well, is there? Speak up.

LUKA (*quietly*):

There is if you believe there is; there isn't if you don't. Whatever you believe in, that's what there is.

(Pepel stares at the old man in silent wonder.)

BUBNOV:

I'm going for my tea. Anyone coming along?

LUKA (*to Pepel*):

What are you staring at?

PEPEL:

Nothing. Listen, you mean—?

BUBNOV:

Then I'll go alone. (*Goes to the door and is met by Vasilisa.*)

PEPEL:

In other words, you....

VASILISA (*to Bubnov*):

Is Nastya here?

BUBNOV:

No. (*Goes out.*)

PEPEL:

Ah, here she is.

VASILISA (*going over to Anna*):

Still alive?

LUKA:

Don't disturb her.

VASILISA:

What are you doing here?

LUKA:

I can leave if you want me to.

VASILISA

(*going to the door of Pepel's room*): Vasya, there's something I want to speak to you about.

(Luka goes to the door into the passage, opens it and slams it shut. Then he cautiously climbs from one of the bunks up on to the stove.)

VASILISA (*from Pepel's room*):

Vasya, come here!

PEPEL:

I don't feel like it.

VASILISA:

What's the matter? What are you sore about?

PEPEL:

I'm fed up. I'm sick of all this business.

VASILISA:

Sick of me too?

PEPEL:

Yes, you too.

(Vasilisa pulls her shawl tight, pressing her hands to her breast. She goes over to Anna's bed, glances through the curtains, and crosses to Pepel.)

PEPEL:

Well, say what's on your mind.

VASILISA:

What's there to say? I can't make you love me, and it's not my nature to go begging. Thanks for telling me the truth.

PEPEL:

What truth?

VASILISA:

That you're sick of me. Or maybe it's not the truth?

(Pepel stares at her in silence.)

VASILISA (*going up to him*):

What are you looking at? Don't you recognise me?

PEPEL (*with a sigh*):

You're too damn good-looking, Vasilisa. (*She puts her hand on his shoulder, but he shrugs it off.*) But you never won my heart. I lived with you, and all the rest, but I never liked you.

VASILISA (*under her breath*):

So that's it! Well....

PEPEL:

Well, and there's nothing for you and me to talk about! Nothing at all. Get away from me!

VASILISA:

Have you fallen for somebody else?

PEPEL:

What business is it of yours? If I had, I wouldn't ask you to help me get her.

VASILISA (*significantly*):

Too bad. Maybe I *could* help you get her.

PEPEL (*suspiciously*):

Get who?

VASILISA:

You know. Why pretend? I'm used to talking straight, Vasya. (*Lowering her voice.*) I won't deny it—you've hurt me. It's as if you'd given me a lashing for no good reason and to no purpose. You said you loved me, and then all of a sudden...

PEPEL:

Not all of a sudden. It's been like this for a long time. You have no heart, woman. A woman ought to have a heart. Us men are beasts, and you've got to ... you've got to tame us and teach us. What did you ever teach me?

VASILISA:

Let bygones be bygones. I know a person's not free in himself. If you don't love me any more, I can take it. That's how it'll be.

PEPEL:

So now it's all over between us? And we part peaceable, without any scenes? That's good.

VASILISA:

Oh, no! Wait a minute! It's just that I always hoped you'd help me throw this yoke off my neck, I thought you'd help me get away from my husband, my uncle, from all this life. And maybe it wasn't you I loved so much as this hope, this idea of mine, see? I was waiting for you to pull me out.

PEPEL:

You're no nail, I'm no pliers. I, too, thought that one as smart as you—you *are* smart, you're a clever one....

VASILISA (*straining towards him*):

Vasya, let's help each other.

PEPEL:

How?

VASILISA (*forcefully, in lowered tones*):

My sister ... I know you like her.

PEPEL:

And so that's why you beat her? You watch out, Vasilisa! Keep your hands off her!

VASILISA:

Wait. Don't flare up. We can arrange everything quietly, without getting mad. How would you like to—to marry her? I'd give you some money—three hundred rubles. If I get more, you can have that too.

PEPEL (*moving away*):

What? What's behind this?

VASILISA:

Help me get rid of my husband. Take that noose off my neck.

PEPEL (*whistling softly*):

So that's it! Oho! You *are* smart! Your husband in his grave, your lover in jail, and you yourself....

VASILISA:

Vasya! Why in jail? Don't do it yourself—get somebody else to do it. And even if you did do it yourself, who'd know? Natasha ... think it over.... You'll have money.... You can go away.... I'll be free forever.... As for my sister—it'll be good for her to get away from me. It's hard for me to see her all the time. She makes me sore because of you. I can't stop myself. I torture her. I beat her. I beat her until it makes even me cry to see her. But I beat her just the same, and I'll keep on beating her.

PEPEL:

You're a brute, and you boast of it.

VASILISA:

No, I don't. I just tell the truth. Think, Vasya. Twice they threw you in jail on account of that husband of mine—on account of his greediness. He sucks my blood like a leech—been sucking it for four years. What kind of a husband is he? And he keeps squeezing Natasha out, nagging her, calling her a beggar. He's poison for everybody.

PEPEL:

You're a sly one.

VASILISA:

It's clear as day. You'd have to be a fool not to understand what I'm after.

(Kostilyov comes in quietly and steals forward.)

PEPEL (to Vasilisa):

Get out!

VASILISA:

Think it over. (*Catches sight of her husband.*) What do you want? Have you come for me?

(Pepel starts up and stares wildly at Kostilyov.)

KOSTYLYOV:

It's me, just me. You two here... alone? Having a little talk? (*Suddenly he stamps his foot and begins to screech.*) God-damn you, Vasilisa! You beggar, you! (*He is frightened by his own shouts and by the frozen silence with which they are received.*) O Lord, forgive me! Leading me into sin again, Vasilisa! Here I am searching for you everywhere. (*Again raising his voice.*) It's high time you were in bed! Forgot to fill the icon lamp again, damn you! You pig! You pauper! (*He shakes a trembling finger at her. Vasilisa goes slowly to the door of the passage, her eyes fixed on Pepel.*)

PEPEL (*to Kostylyov*):

Get out of here! Get out, I tell you!

KOSTYLYOV (*shouting*):

It's me who owns this place. Get out yourself, you thief!

PEPEL (*in a strained voice*):

Get out, I say.

KOSTYLYOV:

Don't you dare! I'll show you! I'll....

(Pepel takes him by the collar and starts shaking him. Suddenly someone is heard to move about on top of the stove and to give a loud and long-drawn yawn. Pepel lets go of Kostylyov, who runs with a cry into the passage.)

PEPEL

(*jumping up on to the bunk by the stove*): Who's there? Who's up on the stove?

LUKA (*poking his head up*):

Eh?

PEPEL:

You!

LUKA:

Me. Me myself. Oh, dear Lord in heaven!

PEPEL

(*shuts the door into the passage and looks vainly for the bar which secures it*): Damn it all! Climb down, old man!

LUKA:

Ri-ight away! I'm coming!

PEPEL (*roughly*):

Why did you crawl up on the stove?

LUKA:

Where should I have crawled?

PEPEL:

You went out into the passage.

LUKA:

That's a cold place for an old man like me.

PEPEL:

Did you ... hear anything?

LUKA:

Deed I did. How could I have helped hearing? Did you think I was deaf? Ah, lad, luck comes your way. You're a lucky one.

PEPEL (*suspiciously*):

What makes you say that?

LUKA:

It's lucky for you I crawled up on that stove.

PEPEL:

Why did you make all that noise?

LUKA:

It was getting too hot for me, that's why. And you can be thankful for that. The lad will be forgetting himself, thinks I. He'll be squeezing the breath out of that old feller.

PEPEL:

I would have for sure. Ugh, how I hate....

LUKA:

I know. Easy as sitting down. Lots of times people make slips like that.

PEPEL (*smiling*):

Maybe you made such a slip yourself once upon a time?

LUKA:

Listen, lad, listen to me. Keep away from that woman. Shoo her away. Shoo! Shoo! She'll get rid of that man of hers without your help, and better than you could do it. Don't listen to her, to that she-devil. Look at me—see how bald I am? And what might be the cause? Women. I've known more women in my time than I had hairs on my head. But this Vasilisa here is worse than any harpy.

PEPEL:

I don't know whether I should say thank you or....

LUKA:

Don't say nothing. You'll not find better words than those I've spoken. Listen to me—the lady that you're fond of—you just take her arm, right about face, and forward march! Get away from here! As far away as you can go!

PEPEL (*sullenly*):

There's no knowing people—who's good and who's bad. There's no knowing.

LUKA:

What's there to know? A person's not always the same. It all depends on how his heart's tuned. Today he's good, tomorrow he's bad. But if that girl has got a real grip on your soul, then be off with her, and that's that. Or else be off alone. You're young yet. You've got plenty of time to get a woman.

PEPEL (*taking him by the shoulder*):

Tell me the truth. Why are you saying this?

LUKA:

Here, let me go. I'll just have a look at Anna. She was

breathing hard a minute ago. (*He goes over to Anna's bed, opens the curtains, looks in, touches her. Pepel watches him with a thoughtful, perplexed look on his face.*) Have mercy, o Lord! Mercifully receive the soul of Thy servant Anna.

PEPEL (*under his breath*):

Dead? (*He strains forward to get a better look at the bed, but he does not go over to it.*)

LUKA (*softly*):

It's all over now, her torture. Where's that man of hers?

PEPEL:

In the pub, I suppose.

LUKA:

He's got to be told.

PEPEL (*shuddering*):

I hate corpses.

LUKA (*going to the door*):

Why should you like them? It's the live ones we ought to like. The live ones.

PEPEL:

I'll go with you.

LUKA:

Afraid of the corpse?

PEPEL:

Hate it.

(*They hurry out. The stage is empty and silent. Dull incomprehensible sounds come from beyond the door into the passage. At last the Actor comes in.*)

ACTOR

(he does not close the door, but stands on the threshold leaning against the jamb, calling out in a loud voice):

Old man! Where are you? It's come back to me! Listen!
(He takes two uncertain steps forward, strikes a pose, and recites).

*If no path can be found that leads
To the realms of sacred truth,
Then blessed the crazed mind
That brings men soaring dreams.*

(Natasha appears in the doorway behind the Actor.)

ACTOR: Old man!

*If tomorrow the sun should cease
To light the earth with its rays
Tomorrow some madman's dream⁸
Would illuminate the world.*

NATASHA *(laughs)*:

Pie-eyed. The simpleton!

ACTOR *(turning to her)*:

Ah, it's you. Where's the old man? The lovely old man?
Nobody here, it seems. Farewell, Natasha! Fare thee well!

NATASHA *(entering)*:

Saying farewell before you've said hullo?

ACTOR *(blocking her path)*:

I am ... going away. When spring comes I shall be no more.

NATASHA:

Let me pass. Where are you going?

ACTOR:

In search of a certain town. To take a cure. You, too,

must leave. Ophelia, hide thee to a convent! There exists, it seems, a healing centre for organisms—for drunkards. A marvellous place. Everything marble—even the floors. Very bright. And clean. And lots of food. All for nothing. Marble floors—fancy that! I'll find it and get well and then ... I am about to be reborn, as the King said.... King Lear. My stage name is Sverchkov-Zavolzhsky, Natasha, but nobody knows it. Nobody. Here I have no name. Can you understand how it hurts to lose one's name? Even dogs have a name....

(Natasha passes the Actor at a safe distance and goes over to Anna's bed, looking through the curtains.)

ACTOR:

No name, no man.

NATASHA:

Look! Oh, dear! She's dead!

ACTOR (*shaking his head*):

It cannot be.

NATASHA (*stepping back*):

She is. Look.

BUBNOV (*in the doorway*):

Look at what?

NATASHA:

Anna. She's dead.

BUBNOV:

At last she's stopped that coughing of hers. (*Goes over to Anna's bed, looks through the curtains, goes to his own bunk.*) Kleshch will have to be told. That's his business.

ACTOR:

I'll go. I'll say—she's lost her name! (*Goes out.*)

NATASHA (*from the centre of the room*):

And me too ... some day ... that ... driven down into some basement ... downtrodden....

BUBNOV

(*spreading some old rags out on the planks of his bunk*):

What's that? What're you muttering about?

NATASHA:

I was just thinking out loud.

BUBNOV:

Waiting for Vasya? Watch out! You'll break your neck over that Vasya.

NATASHA:

Does it make any difference what I break it over? Let it be him. He's better than most.

BUBNOV (*lying down*):

That's your business.

NATASHA:

It's a good thing, of course, her dying ... but a pity. What does a person live for?

BUBNOV:

It's the same for all of us: we get born, live our lives, and die. I'll die, and you will too. Why feel sorry for anybody?

(Luka, the Tatar, Krivoi Zob and Kleshch come in. Kleshch is the last. He walks slowly and all hunched over.)

NATASHA:

Sh! Anna....

KRIVOI ZOB:

We know. May she rest in peace, now she's dead.

TATAR (*to Kleshch*):

Have to drag her out. Have to drag her into passage.
Can't have dead people here. Live people sleep
here.

KLESHCH (*in a quiet tone*):

We'll drag her out.

(They all go over to the bed. Kleshch stares at his wife over
the shoulders of the others.)

KRIVOI ZOB (*to the Tatar*):

Do you think she'll smell? There's nothing to smell. She
dried up while she was still alive.

NATASHA:

Good Lord, you might at least feel sorry for her! Say one
little word of pity! But not you!

LUKA:

Don't mind them, dearie. How can they—how can any of
us be expected to pity the dead if we don't pity the living?
We don't even pity ourselves, let alone the dead!

BUBNOV (*yawning*):

You can't scare death off with words. You can sickness,
but not death.

TATAR (*moving away*):

Call the police.

KRIVOI ZOB:

Yes, we've got to do that, Kleshch! Have you notified the police?

KLESHCH:

No. They'll make me bury her, and I've only got forty kopeks.

KRIVOI ZOB:

In that case, borrow something. We can take up a collection—five kopeks—whatever a man's able. But hurry and notify the police or they'll be thinking you killed her or something.

(Goes over to the bunks and is about to lie down beside the Tatar.)

NATASHA (*going over to Bubnov*):

Now I'll dream about her. I always dream about dead people. I'm afraid to go home alone. It's dark out there in the passage.

LUKA (*following her out*):

It's the living ones you have to be afraid of, take my word for it.

NATASHA:

See me out, grandad.

LUKA:

Come along, come along. I'll take you.

(They go out. Pause.)

KRIVOI ZOB:

O-oh-ho! Asan! It'll soon be spring. At last we'll get warm. The muzhiks in the village have begun to mend their

ploughs and their harrows. Getting ready to turn the soil. Hm. And us? Eh, Asan? Snoring away, the damn Mohammedan.

BUBNOV:

Tatars are good at sleeping.

KLESHCH

(standing in the middle of the lodging and staring dully in front of him):

What am I to do now?

KRIVOI ZOB:

Go to sleep, that's what.

KLESHCH *(softly)*:

And what about her?

(Nobody answers. Satin and the Actor come in.)

ACTOR *(shouting)*:

Old man! Come here, my loyal Kent!

SATIN:

Make way for Miklukho-Maklai!

ACTOR:

It's decided, once and for all. Old man! Where's that town? Where are you?

SATIN:

Fata Morgana! The old fellow lied to you. There's nothing of the sort. No towns. No people. Nothing.

ACTOR:

That's a lie!

TATAR (*jumping off his bed*):

Where's boss? I go for boss. No can't sleep, why for I pay money? Dead people. Drunks.

(Goes out quickly. Satin whistles after him.)

BUBNOV (*sleepily*):

Go to bed, fellows. Stop your noise. A man's supposed to sleep at night.

ACTOR:

Ah! Here lies a corpse! "Our fishing nets have caught a corpse!" Poetry, Béranger!

SATIN (*shouting*):

A corpse hears nothing! A corpse feels nothing! Shout as much as you like! A corpse hears nothing!

(Luka appears in the doorway.)

CURTAIN

A back yard littered with rubbish and overgrown with weeds. A high brick fire-wall upstage cuts off a view of the sky. Against this wall grow elder bushes. To the right is a dark log wall—perhaps of a shed or a stable. On the left is Kostlyov's house with the lodging in the basement. It is grey and ramshackle, with the stucco crumbling off. It stands at an angle, so that the far corner reaches almost to upstage centre, leaving only a narrow passage between the brick wall and the house. There are two windows in the house, one a basement window downstage, the other about six feet higher and upstage. A log some 12 feet long lies near the house; beside it—a dilapidated and overturned wooden sledge. Old boards and beams form a pile of wood near the building on the right. Day is drawing to a close and the rays of the setting sun cast a red glow upon the brick wall. It is early spring; the snow has just melted and the black branches of the elder bushes are as yet without buds. NATASHA and NASTYA are sitting on the log; LUKA and the BARON on the sledge; KLESHCH is lying on the pile of wood to the right. BUBNOV'S face is seen at the basement window.

NASTYA

(closing her eyes and nodding her head in rhythm to the sing-song chanting of her tale):

So he comes at night to the garden, to the summer-house, like we planned. I've been waiting so long I'm all a-tremble with fear and sorrow. And he's all a-tremble, and white as sheet, and in his hand he holds an involver....

NATASHA *(chewing sunflower seeds):*

See? So it must be true what they say about students being daredevils.

NASTYA:

And he says to me in a fearful voice: My precious love, he says....

BUBNOV:

Ho-ho! Precious, did you say?

BARON:

Shut up! If you don't like it, don't listen, but don't interfere with her lying. Next!

NASTYA:

My precious, he says, my beloved! My parents, he says, do not consent to my marrying you. They threaten to lay their curse on me forever for loving you. And for that reason, he says, I must take my own life. And there he has that big involver with all them ten bullets in it. Farewell, he says, beloved of my heart. There's no changing my mind. I can't go on living without you! And I says to him: My adored friend! My Raoul!

BUBNOV (*in amazement*):

What? How's that? Growl?

BARON (*roaring*):

You're forgotten, Nastya! Last time he was Gaston!

NASTYA (*jumping up*):

Shut up, you scum! You homeless pups! As though you could understand love—true love! But me—I've known it, true love! (*To the Baron.*) You're a nobody! You, as used to drink coffee in bed!

LUKA:

Ju-u-ust a minute! Don't go stopping her, now! Let her go on. It's not the words that count, but what's behind them—that's the thing. Go on, my girl! Don't mind them.

BUBNOV:

A crow in peacock's feathers. Well, let's hear the rest.

BARON:

Go on. What next?

NATASHA:

Don't listen to them. Who are they? They're only jealous because they've got nothing to tell about themselves.

NASTYA (*sitting down again*):

I don't want to go on. I won't tell you any more. Once they don't believe me and laugh at me.... (*Suddenly she stops, is silent a minute, and then, closing her eyes, continues in a loud, impassioned voice, beating time with her hands as if listening to distant music.*) And I say to him: Joy of my life! Sun of my soul! Nor can I go on living in this world without you, because I love you with all my soul and will go on loving you as long as this heart beats in this breast. But don't end your life, which your dear parents need so bad, since you're all the joy they've got. Throw me over! Better my life should wear away with pining for you, my beloved! I'm all alone. I'm.... I'm that sort. Let me go to my ruin. It's all the same. I'm not worth anything. There's nothing left for me.... Nothing left.... Nothing left.... (*She covers her face with her hands and weeps silently.*)

NATASHA (*turning away and speaking softly*):

Don't cry. You mustn't.

(Luka smiles and strokes Nastya's head.)

BUBNOV (*laughing*):

She's a fine one!

BARON (*also laughing*):

You think that's the truth, grandad? That's all out of that book *Fatal Love*.⁹ A lot of nonsense. Let her be!

NATASHA:

What do you care? Keep your mouth shut, once the Lord saw fit to make you what you are.

NASTYA (*furiously*):

You lost soul! You emptiness! Where's your heart?

LUKA (*taking Nastya by the hand*):

We'll go away from here, dearie. Don't mind them. You're the one that's right, not them. I know. Once you believe you had that true love, you really did. You did indeed. But don't get angry with the fellow you live with. Maybe it's jealousy makes him laugh. Maybe he never knew that true kind. Maybe he never knew any kind at all. Come away.

NASTYA (*pressing her hands to her breast*):

Believe me, grandad! I swear it was like that! Everything I said.... He was a student, a Frenchman. They called him Gaston. He had a black beard and wore patent-leather boots. Strike me dead this minute if it's not the truth! And how he loved me! How he loved me!

LUKA:

I know. I believe you. Patent-leather boots, you say? Fancy that! And you loved him too?

(*They disappear around the corner.*)

BARON:

A stupid wench! She's got a good heart, but there never was anyone so stupid.

BUBNOV:

Why should a person want to lie like that? And swear it's truth, like in court.

NATASHA:

It's more pleasant to lie than to tell the truth. Me, too....

BARON:

You too? Next?

NATASHA:

I keep dreaming and dreaming. And waiting.

BARON:

What for?

NATASHA (*smiling self-consciously*):

I don't know. I just keep thinking that tomorrow ... somebody will come ... somebody special. Or else something will happen.... Something unusual. And I keep waiting. Always waiting. But when you come to think of it, what could happen?

(Pause.)

BARON (*with a wry smile*):

There's nothing to wait for. Me, for instance, I'm not waiting for anything. Everything's over. Passed. Finished. Next?

NATASHA:

Or else I imagine tomorrow I'll die all of a sudden. And then everything goes cold inside me. Summer's a good time to imagine you'll die, because of the thunderstorms; you could easily get struck by lightning.

BARON:

Yours is a poor sort of life, and it's all the fault of that sister of yours—a devilish temper she's got.

NATASHA:

Who's got a good sort of life? Everybody has it bad. Don't I see it?

KLESHCH

(*until now he had been lying motionless and detached, but at these words he springs up*): Everybody? That's a lie! Not

everybody. If it was everybody it wouldn't be so bad. Then you wouldn't mind.

BUBNOV:

What devil stuck his fork in you this time? Yelping like that!

(Kleshch lies down again, muttering to himself.)

BARON:

I'd better go and make my peace with Nastya. If I don't, she'll hold out on the drink money.

BUBNOV:

Hm. How people love to lie! Nastya, now, you can understand her. She's used to painting her mug, so she thinks she can do the same to her soul. Rouge her soul. But what do the others want to lie for? That Luka, for instance. He lies without getting anything out of it and him an old man. What does he do it for?

BARON (*with a snort, as he goes out*):

They've all got grey little souls. They'd all like to rouge them a bit.

LUKA (*entering from around the corner*):

Why did you go and upset the girl, your lordship? Let her cry to her heart's content. If it gives her pleasure to let the tears flow, why should you mind?

BARON:

She's a dunce, old man. She gets on your nerves. Today it's Raoul, tomorrow Gaston, but the story's always the same. I'd better go and make my peace with her just the same. (*Goes out.*)

LUKA:

That's right. Be nice and gentle with her. It never does any harm to be gentle with a person.

NATASHA:

You've got a good heart, grandad. What makes you so kind?

LUKA:

Kind, you say? Very well, if that's the way you see it. (*The soft music of an accordion and singing comes from the other side of the brick wall.*) Somebody has to be kind in this world. You've got to have sympathy for people. Christ loved everybody, and told us to do the same. And I can tell you truly that you can often save a person by pitying him in time. Like, for instance, that time I was a watchman on a country estate belonging to an engineer near the town of Tomsk. This estate, now, stood in the middle of the woods. It was wintertime—very beautiful—and me all alone on the estate. One day I hear noises—somebody breaking in!

NATASHA:

Thieves?

LUKA:

Thieves they were. Breaking in. I pick up my gun and go out. There they are, two of them, opening a window, and so busy at it they don't notice me. "Hey, you!" I shout. "Get out of here!" They turn on me with the axe. "If you don't keep back, I'll shoot!" I cry and point my gun first at one, then at the other. Down they go on their knees, begging me to let them go. But me, I'm mad by then, on account of the axe, and I says to them: "I chased you away, you pixies, but you wouldn't go, so now." I says, "one of you go and cut a good switch off those bushes." They bring the switch. "Now," says I, "one of you get down, and the other give him a thrashing." And that's how, according to my orders, they flogged each other. And when the flogging was over they say to me: "Grandad," they say, "give us something to eat for the love of Christ. We've been tramping the countryside on

empty bellies." There's your thieves for you, my dear! (*Laughs.*) There's your axe for you! Both of them fine chaps at heart. I says to them: "Now why couldn't you have come and just asked me for something to eat at the very start?" "We're sick and tired of asking," they say. "We asked and asked and nobody gave us anything." After that they lived with me for the whole winter. One of them, Stepan by name, used to take the gun and go off to the woods. The other, Yakov they called him, was sick all the time. Kept coughing. All three of us kept watch over that estate. And when spring came they said: "Farewell, grandad." And off they went. Set out for the west.

NATASHA:

Were they escaped convicts?

LUKA:

That's what they were. Escaped convicts. Escaped from the place where they were deported. Fine lads they were! If I hadn't taken pity on them, now, they might have killed me or done something else just as bad, and that would have meant a trial, and jail, and Siberia. What for? A jail can't teach a person what's right, and Siberia can't teach a person what's right, but a man—he can teach a person what's right, and very easy at that.

(*Pause.*)

BUBNOV:

Hm. Take me, now—I'm no good at lying. Why lie? The way I see it, go ahead and speak the whole truth. What good does it do to hide it?

KLESHCH (*jumping up again as if stung and crying out*):

The truth? What truth? (*Tearing at the rags that cover him.*) Here's the truth! No work. No strength. That's the truth! No shelter! Not even a roof of my own! Nothing left but to die like a dog! There's your truth for you, the devil take it! What do I want with your truth? All I want's a

chance to take a breath—to take a living breath! What wrong have I ever done? What do I want with your truth? I want a chance to live, god-damn it! They don't let you live, and there's your truth!

BUBNOV:

Just see how the fellow's touched!

LUKA:

Mother of God! But listen, my friend. You....

KLESHCH (*trembling with agitation*):

All of you babbling about the truth! You, old man, trying to comfort everybody! Well, I hate everybody, and that's the truth, may it be cursed and damned forever! Do you understand? It's high time you understood! To hell with your truth! (*Runs around the corner of the house, looking back and shouting.*)

LUKA:

Dear, dear, dear! How upset the fellow is! Where has he gone?

NATASHA:

He's gone off his chump.

BUBNOV:

Very amusing. As good as play-acting. That happens every once in a while. He hasn't got used to life yet.

PEPEL (*entering slowly from behind the house*):

Greetings, friends! Well, Luka, you sly old fox, still telling your fairy-tales?

LUKA:

You should have heard how that man went off just now!

PEPEL:

Who, Kleshch? What's got into him? I met him running as if the devil was after him.

LUKA:

Anybody'd run if his heart was touched like that.

PEPEL (*sitting down*):

I don't like the fellow. Too proud and vicious. (*Imitating Kleshch.*) "Me—I'm a working man!" As though that made him better than anybody else! Go ahead and work if you like it, but why be so proud of yourself? If a person's worth depended on how much work he did, a horse would be better than any human—goes on hauling day in and day out without a word. Natasha! Your folks at home?

NATASHA:

They've gone to the cemetery. Then they intended to go to vespers.

PEPEL:

So that's why you have nothing to do for a change!

LUKA (*turning thoughtfully to Bubnov*):

The truth, you say? The truth doesn't always cure a person's ailments. You can't always help a soul with the truth. Once, for instance, there was a case like this: a certain man I knew believed in a true-righteous land.

BUBNOV:

In a what?

LUKA:

In a true-righteous land. "There ought to be," says he, "a true-righteous land in this world. And that land," thinks he, "must be inhabited by special people—good people, people who honour each other, and who in every little

thing help each other. Everything," thinks he, "must be wonderfully fine in that land." And so he thought to go in search of the true-righteous land. He was a poor man and had a hard life. Sometimes things got so bad it looked as if there was nothing left for him to do but lie down and die. But he didn't give up. He would just smile to himself and say: "That's all right, I can bear it. I'll wait just a little longer and then I'll quit this life and go to the true-righteous land." That was his only joy in life—his faith in the true-righteous land.

PEPEL:

Well, did he ever get there?

BUBNOV:

Where? Ho-ho!

LUKA:

And then to the village where he lived—this all happened in Siberia—they exiled a very learned man, with books, and charts, and all the things that go with a man of learning. And this poor man says to the man of learning, he says: "Be so kind as to tell me where this true-righteous land lies, and how to get there." Then and there the learned one gets out his books and opens up his charts and looks and looks, but he can't find the true-righteous land anywhere. Everything is in its place, all the lands are on the charts, but the true-righteous land is nowhere to be found!

PEPEL (*in a hushed voice*):

Nowhere to be found?

(Bubnov laughs.)

NATASHA:

Stop laughing. Go on, grandad.

LUKA:

The man can't believe it. "It must be somewhere," says he. "Take a better look, because if there's no true-righteous land, then all your charts and books are of no account." The learned one doesn't like this. "My charts," says he, "are the very best, but there's no such place as your true-righteous land." That makes the poor one furious. "What's that?" says he. "Here I've gone on living and bearing it all these years just because I was sure there was such a place, and now according to the charts it turns out there isn't any such place! A swindle, that's what it is!" And he says to the learned one: "You wretch! It's a rascal you are, and not a man of learning!" And he gives him a whack over the ear—bang! Then another one—bang! (*A moment's pause.*) And after that he goes home and hangs himself.

(Everyone is silent. Luka, smiling, glances at Pepel and Natasha.)

PEPEL (*under his breath*):

The hell you say! A dreary sort of a story!

NATASHA:

He couldn't stand being fooled.

BUBNOV (*sullenly*):

Another fairy-tale.

PEPEL:

Hm.... So it turns out there isn't any true-righteous land!

NATASHA:

It's a pity about the man.

BUBNOV:

All grade up. Ho-ho! A true-righteous land! Spun out of his head. Ho-ho! (*Withdraws from the window.*)

LUKA

(*nodding in the direction of Bubnov's window*):

Laughing. Tck, tck, tck! (*Pause.*) Well, friends, I wish you well. I'll soon be on my way.

PEPEL:

Where are you going?

LUKA:

To the Ukraine. I heard as how they've opened up a new faith there and I want to look into it. People are always seeking, always wanting something better. May the Lord give them strength.

PEPEL:

Do you think they'll ever find what they're looking for?

LUKA:

Indeed I do. He who seeks always finds. He who wants a thing bad enough always gets it.

NATASHA:

If only they would! If only they would think of a better way of life!

LUKA:

They will. But we've got to help them, my dear. We've got to respect them for their seeking.

NATASHA:

How can I help them? I need help myself.

PEPEL (*determinedly*):

I'm going to speak to you again, Natasha. I'm going to ask you again. Here, in front of him, who knows everything. Come away with me.

NATASHA:

Where shall we go? To jail?

PEPEL:

I told you I'd give up stealing. I swear to heaven I'll give it up. And once I've said it, I'll do it. I know how to read and write. I'll work. He says we ought to go to Siberia of our own free will. Shall we? Do you think I don't hate this life? Oh, Natasha, I understand.... I see it all. I console myself by saying that people who are called honest steal more than I do. But it doesn't help. That's not what I want. I don't regret anything, and I don't believe in a conscience. But there's one thing I do believe: this is no way to live. A man ought to live better. He ought to live so that he can respect himself.

LUKA:

That's the thing, my lad! May the Lord help you! May Christ show you His mercy. That's the thing: a man has to respect himself.

PEPEL:

From my earliest years I've been a thief. I've never been called anything but Vasya the thief; Vasya, the son of a thief. So that's what you think of me, is it? Very well, then that's what I'll be: a thief! See? Maybe it was just for spite I became a thief. Maybe I'm a thief just because nobody ever thought of calling me anything else. But you, Natasha? If you—?

NATASHA (*sadly*):

Somehow I don't believe all these words. And I'm uneasy today. I have a sinking feeling, as if something was going to happen. You shouldn't have brought this up today, Vasya.

PEPEL:

But when? This isn't the first time I've said it.

NATASHA:

Why should I go with you? As for loving you—I can't say I love you so much. Sometimes I like you, and then again I just can't stand the sight of you. I don't suppose I love you. When you love a person you can't see the bad in him. But I see it in you.

PEPEL:

Don't be afraid. I'll teach you to love me. You just say the word. I've had my eye on you for more than a year now, and I see you're a serious, upright girl, one who can be depended on. I've fallen hard for you, Natasha.

(Vasilisa appears in the window in all her finery and stands listening, half-hidden by the window-frame.)

NATASHA:

You've fallen for me—and what about my sister?

PEPEL (*uneasy*):

Well, what about her? There are lots like her.

LUKA:

Don't you think about that, my dear. When there's no bread, a person'll eat grass.

PEPEL (*moodily*):

Take pity on me. This is no life. A dog's life, with no joy in it. It's like living in a bog where everything you snatch at gives way because it's rotten. That sister of yours—I thought she was different. If she hadn't been so greedy for money I'd have done anything for her sake. If she'd been all mine. But she wanted something else—money. And a free rein. A free rein to live a wanton life. She couldn't help me. But you—you're like a young tree that bends but doesn't break.

LUKA:

Take my advice and marry him, my girl. He's not a bad

chap. You just keep reminding him that he's good—don't let him forget it. He'll believe you. You just say to him over and over again: "You're a good man, Vasya, and don't you forget it." Think, my dear: what other way out is there for you? That sister of yours is a wicked beast. And as for her husband—the old man is worse than any words can say, and so is this whole life here. What other way out is there? And he's a strong lad.

NATASHA:

There's no other way out for me. I know. I've thought about it. Only—I don't believe anybody. But still, there's no other way out.

PEPEL:

Yes, there is, but I won't let you take that path. I'd rather kill you.

NATASHA (*smiling*):

I'm not your wife yet, but here you are ready to kill me.

PEPEL (*taking her in his arms*):

Forget it, Natasha! That's how it's got to be.

NATASHA (*nestling against him*):

I must tell you one thing, Vasya, and I swear it before God. The first time you lift your hand against me or do me other wrong I'll not spare myself. I'll either kill myself or....

PEPEL:

May my hand wither and drop off if ever I lift it against you!

LUKA:

Don't worry, dearie, he needs you worse'n you do him.

VASILISA (*from the window*):

So the match is made! From now on it's love, honour and obey!

NATASHA:

They've come back! My God! They've seen us! Ah, Vasya!

PEPEL:

What are you scared of? Nobody'll dare touch you now!

VASILISA:

Don't worry, Natasha, he won't beat you. He can no more beat you than love you. I know!

LUKA (*under his breath*):

That woman! A snake if there ever was one!

VASILISA:

He just knows how to make pretty speeches.

KOSTYLYOV (*entering*):

Natasha! What are you doing here, you lazy-bones? Spreading gossip? Complaining about your relatives? And you haven't got the samovar ready? Haven't set the table?

NATASHA (*going out*):

But you intended going to church.

KOSTYLYOV:

It's none of your business what we intended doing. See that you do what you're told to, what you're ordered to.

PEPEL:

Hold your tongue! She's not a servant to you any more! Natasha, don't go! Don't do anything for them!

NATASHA:

Don't tell me what I'm to do. Your time hasn't come yet!
(*Goes out.*)

PEPEL (*to Kostilyov*):

Leave her alone: you've had your way with her long enough. She's mine now.

KOSTYLYOV:

Yours? When did you buy her? How much did you pay?

(Vasilisa laughs.)

LUKA:

Go away, Vasya.

PEPEL:

Take care, or you'll be laughing on the other side of your face!

VASILISA:

Aren't I scared, just! Frightened to death!

LUKA:

Go away, Vasya! Can't you see she's just egging you on, trying to get your dander up?

PEPEL:

Ah.... Oh yes. She's lying. You're lying! You won't have things the way you want them!

VASILISA:

And I won't have them the way I *don't* want them, Vasya!

PEPEL (*shaking his fist at her*):

We'll see! (*He goes out.*)

VASILISA (*disappearing from the window*):

I'll see you have a proper wedding!

KOSTYLYOV (*going over to Luka*):

What are you doing here, old man?

LUKA:

Nothing, old man.

KOSTYLYOV:

They say you're going to leave us?

LUKA:

High time.

KOSTYLYOV:

Where are you going?

LUKA:

To follow my nose.

KOSTYLYOV:

Like the tramp you are. Makes you uneasy to stay in one place very long, eh?

LUKA:

A rolling stone gathers no moss, as the saying goes.

KOSTYLYOV:

That's said about a stone, but a person ought to settle in one place. People aren't supposed to live like roaches—scuttling here and there and everywhere. A person ought to make himself at home in some place and not be a stranger everywhere.

LUKA:

And what if a person's at home everywhere?

KOSTYLYOV:

That means he's a tramp and a useless creature. There has to be some use got out of a person. He ought to work.

LUKA:

Think of that, now!

KOSTYLYOV:

Yes, he ought. What's a stranger? A stranger's a strange person, one who isn't like others. If he's a pilgrim with knowledge—that is, if he's learned things ... things nobody cares to know ... not even if it's the truth he's learned, because ... well, people don't always want to know the truth—let him keep it to himself. If he's a true pilgrim, he'll hold his tongue, or else talk so that nobody knows what he's talking about. And he shouldn't want to change things, or interfere in anything, or upset people to no good purpose. It's none of his business how people live. It's for him to lead a pious life. He ought to live in a cave in the forest where nobody can see him. He has no right to mix in people's affairs, trying to tell them what's right and what's wrong. But he ought to pray for everybody ... for all our worldly sins ... for yours and mine and everybody else's. That's why he renounces the vanities of this world—so he can pray. (*Pause.*) But you—what kind of a pilgrim are you? You haven't even got a passport. A respectable person ought to have a passport. All respectable human beings have got passports....

LUKA:

Some of us are humans, some—just beings.

KOSTYLYOV:

None of your cleverness, now. None of your riddles. I guess I'm as smart as you are. What's that you're saying—humans and beings?

LUKA:

There's no riddle here. I'm just saying as there's barren soil,¹⁰ and there's fertile soil, and whatever you sow on fertile soil is bound to bear fruit. That's all.

KOSTYLYOV:

Well, what of it?

LUKA:

Take you, for example. If the Lord God himself should say to you: "Mikhail! Be a human!" it wouldn't make any difference at all. You'd just keep right on being what you are.

KOSTYLYOV:

Hm. Listen, my wife's uncle, he's a policeman. If I....

VASILISA (*coming in*):

Tea's ready, Mikhail Ivanovich.

KOSTYLYOV (*to Luka*):

Get out of here. Don't let me catch you in my house again!

VASILISA:

You'd better clear out, old man! You've got a long tongue. Who knows but what you're an escaped convict.

KOSTYLYOV:

Get out of here this very day, or I'll....

LUKA:

Call your uncle? Go ahead and call him. Tell him you've caught an escaped convict. Maybe the uncle will get a reward—three kopeks or so.

BUBNOV (*at the window*):

Selling something? What's that for three kopeks?

LUKA:

They're threatening to sell me.

VASILISA (*to her husband*):

Come along.

BUBNOV:

For three kopeks? Watch out, old man. They'll sell you for half a kopek!

KOSTYLYOV (*to Bubnov*):

So you've crawled out? Like a goblin from under the stove. (*Goes out with his wife.*)

VASILISA:

How many thieves and rascals there are in the world!

LUKA:

May you enjoy your teal

VASILISA (*turning around*):

Hold your tongue, you shrivelled mushroom!

(She and her husband disappear around the corner of the house.)

LUKA:

I'll be leaving tonight.

BUBNOV:

That's good. It's always well to leave in good time.

LUKA:

A truer word was never spoke.

BUBNOV:

I know what I'm saying. I probably escaped jail by leaving in time.

LUKA:

Did you, now?

BUBNOV:

Yes, I did. Here's how it was: my wife got mixed up with a furrier, an able master—good at turning dog pelts into racoon. Cats, too—in kangaroos, or muskrats or anything else. A smart chap. It was with him my wife got mixed up, and they clung so tight to each other I had to look sharp so they didn't poison me or get rid of me in some other way. Sometimes I'd beat my wife; then the furrier'd beat me. He was a fierce fighter. Once he pulled half my beard out and broke a rib. I used to lose my temper, too. One day I lammed my wife over the head with an iron poker, and a big war was on. But I see nothing will come of it—they're sure to get me—so I makes up my mind to bump off the wife before she bumps off me. I had it all thought out, but I caught myself in time and went away.

LUKA:

Good for you—leave them alone to turn cats into muskrats as much as they like.

BUBNOV:

But the shop belonged to the wife, and I got left in the state you see me in now. Truth to tell. I'd have drunk up the shop. It's the drink that makes me....

LUKA:

The drink, eh?

BUBNOV:

I'm a ferocious drinker. Once I go on a jag, I drink up everything but my own hide. And I'm lazy. You wouldn't believe how I hate to work!

(Satin and the Actor come in. They are arguing.)

SATIN:

Nonsense! You won't go, you know you won't. You're just fooling yourself. Old man! What twaddle have you been pouring into this fellow's ear?

ACTOR:

That's a lie! Grandad, tell him he's lying. I *will* go. I worked today—swept the street. And I haven't had a single drink. Think of that! Here they are—my thirty kopeks, and I'm sober!

SATIN:

Idiotic. Here, give me that money. I'll drink it up, or else lose it in a card game.

ACTOR:

Hands off! That goes towards buying my ticket.

LUKA (*to Satin*):

Why should you be wanting to set him off the right path?

SATIN:

"Tell me, O wizard, beloved of the gods, just what is the fate that the future conceals!"¹¹ I've been cleaned out, brother! Lost all I had! But there's still hope for the world, grandad; there's cleverer sharks than me left.

LUKA:

You're a gay fellow, Konstantin, and a likeable one.

BUBNOV:

Actor! Come here!

(The Actor goes over to the window and stoops down to talk to Bubnov in a low voice.)

SATIN:

I was amusing when I was young. Nice to recall those times. A rakish lad, I was. Danced superbly, acted on the stage, was always making people laugh. A charming young fellow.

LUKA:

And how did you get switched off the track, eh?

SATIN:

You're an inquisitive creature, old man. You'd like to know everything, wouldn't you? What for?

LUKA:

I'd like to understand this human business. But when I look at you, I don't understand a thing. You're a good fellow, Konstantin, and a clever one, and yet....

SATIN:

It was jail did it, grandad. I spent four years and seven months in jail, and nobody will have you after a jail sentence.

LUKA:

Oho! And what were you put in jail for?

SATIN:

For killing a rascal. I killed him in a burst of wrath and indignation. It was in jail I learned to play cards ... and other things.

LUKA:

Did you kill him on account of a woman?

SATIN:

On account of my own sister. But don't you go prying. I don't like to be asked questions. And that all happened long, long ago. My sister died. Nine years ago. She was a lovely sister.

LUKA:

You don't take life so hard. You should have heard that locksmith howl a while back! Ai-i-i!

SATIN:

Kleshch?

LUKA:

Him. "No work!" he shouted. "No nothing!"

SATIN:

He'll get used to it in time. Well, what am I to do with myself now?

LUKA (*softly*):

Look. Here he comes.

(Kleshch comes in slowly, with hanging head.)

SATIN:

Hey, you widower! What've you got your nose between your knees for? What're you thinking about?

KLESHCH:

I'm thinking about what I'm going to do. No tools. They all went for the funeral.

SATIN:

Take my advice and don't do anything. Just be a burden to the world.

KLESHCH:

It's all right for you to talk, but I have shame.

SATIN:

Get rid of it. People aren't ashamed to have you lead a dog's life. Think it over. You stop working, I stop working, hundreds and thousands of others—everybody does the same. See? We all stop working. Nobody will raise a finger to do a thing! What will happen then?

KLESHCH:

We'll all die of starvation.

LUKA (*to Satin*):

You should join the Runaways, with such ideas.¹² There's a kind of people called Runaways.

SATIN:

I know. They're not such fools, grandad.

(From the window of the Kostilyovs' flat can be heard the cries of Natasha: "Stop! Oh, stop! What have I done?")

LUKA (*anxiously*):

Natasha? Is it her screaming like that?

(From the Kostilyovs' flat comes a crashing of dishes, a murmur of voices, and the shrill cries of Kostilyov: "You bitch! You whore!")

VASILISA:

Stop! Wait! I'll show her! Take that! And that!

NATASHA:

They're killing me! Killing me!

SATIN (*shouting at the window*):

Hey, you in there!

LUKA (*rushing hither and thither*):

Vasya! It's Vasya we want here! O Lord! Good people! Brothers!

ACTOR (*running off*):

Here, I'll go and get him.

BUBNOV:

They beat her all the time now.

SATIN:

Come, old man. We'll be witnesses.

LUKA (*following Satin*):

A poor sort of witness I make. That's not for me. It's Vasya we need, and need him quick.

NATASHA:

Sister! Sister! Ah-h-h!

BUBNOV:

They've gagged her. I'll go and have a look.

(The commotion in the Kostylyovs' flat dies away as the people evidently move out into the hall. The old man is heard to cry "Stop!" A door slams, and this chops off the noise like the blow of an axe. Silence on the stage. Spring twilight.)

KLESHCH

(*he is sitting on the overturned sledge with an air of detachment, rubbing his hands tensely. He mutters something unintelligible which focuses into the following lines*): But how? A man's got to live, hasn't he? (*In a loud voice.*) A roof! I need a roof over my head! I haven't got a roof! I haven't got anything! A man's alone—all alone. That's where the trouble lies. No one to help him.

(He goes off slowly, all bent over. An ominous silence reigns for a few seconds. Then from off stage comes a vague murmur which grows into chaotic sound as it draws nearer. Separate voices can be distinguished.)

VASILISA:

I'm her sister! Let me at her!

KOSTYLYOV:

You have no right.

VASILISA:

Jail-bird!

SATIN:

Call Vasya! Hurry! Beat him, Zob!

(A police whistle blows.)

TATAR

(*running on, his right arm in a sling*): What kind of law—to kill in day-time.

KRIVOI ZOB (*followed by Medvedev*):

Hah! I gave him a good one!

MEDVEDEV:

You—how dare you fight?

TATAR:

And you? What duty you have?

MEDVEDEV (*running after the Tatar*):

Stop! Give me back my whistle!

KOSTYLYOV (*running on*):

Abram! Seize him! He killed....

(From behind the corner come Kvashnya and Nastya supporting the dishevelled Natasha between them. Satin walks backward, pushing off Vasilisa who is trying to get at her sister. Alyoshka leaps about her like an imp, whistling in her ear, shouting, howling. They are followed by a small and ragged crowd.)

SATIN (*to Vasilisa*):

What's the idea, you damned slut?

VASILISA:

Get away, jail-bird! It may cost me my life, but I'll tear her to pieces!

KVASHNYA (*leading Natasha away*):

Enough, Vasilisa! Have some shame! You're behaving like a brute.

MEDVEDEV (*seizing Satin*):

Here you are! Caught at last!

SATIN:

Lam into them, Zob. Vasya! Vasya!

(They gather in a crowd near the passage between the brick wall and the house. Natasha is led over and seated on the pile of boards to the right.)

PEPEL

(*coming suddenly through the passage and silently pushing everybody aside with strong vigorous movements*):

Where's Natasha? You....

KOSTYLYOV (*hiding behind the house*):

Abram! Catch Vasya! Brothers, help catch Vasya! Thief! Robber!

PEPEL:

You old fornicator!

(With a great sweep of his arm he strikes the old man, who falls in such a way that only his head and shoulders can be seen from behind the corner of the house. Pepel rushes over to Natasha.)

VASILISA:

Thrash Vasya, fellows! Thrash the thief!

MEDVEDEV (*shouting to Satin*):

Keep out of this! It's a family affair! They're all relatives! You don't belong here!

PEPEL:

What is it? What has she done, stabbed you?

KVASHNYA:

Just look what the brutes have done! Scalded her legs with boiling water!

NASTYA:

Upset the samovar on her!

TATAR:

Maybe accident. Have to know for sure. Mustn't make mistake.

NATASHA (*almost fainting*):

Vasya, take me away. Hide me.

VASILISA:

My God! Look here! He's dead! Killed!

(Everyone rushes to the passage where Kostylyov is lying. Bubnov separates himself from the crowd and goes over to Vasya Pepel.)

BUBNOV (*in a low voice*):

Vasya! The old man—he's done for.

PEPEL (*looks at him without comprehending*):

Call an ambulance. We'll have to take her to the hospital. I'll get even with them for this!

BUBNOV:

I'm saying that somebody's finished off the old man.

(The noise on the stage goes out like a fire flooded with water. Separate remarks are passed in hushed tones: "Really?" "That's bad." "Hm." "Let's get away from here." "What the hell!" "Watch out!" "Beat it before the police come." The crowd dwindles. Exit Bubnov and the Tatar. Nastya and Kvashnya rush over to the body of Kostylyov.)

VASILISA

(*rising from the ground and crying triumphantly*): Murdered! There's the one who murdered my husband! Vasya did it! I saw it myself! I saw it, friends! Well, Vasya? The police! Call the police!

PEPEL (*leaving Natasha's side*):

Let me pass. Out of my way! (*Takes a look at the old man, then turns to Vasilisa.*) Well, are you satisfied? (*Touches the body with his foot*). Done for, the cur. So you got what you wanted. Humph! Maybe I ought to bump you off, too. (*Throws himself at her. Satin and Krivoi Zob quickly intercede. Vasilisa runs into the passage.*)

SATIN:

Think what you're doing!

KRIVOI ZOB:

Take your time!

VASILISA (*reappearing*):

Well, friend Vasya, there's no escaping your fate. The police! Abram, blow your whistle!

MEDVEDEV:

The devils snatched my whistle away.

ALYOSHKA:

Here it is!

(*He gives a blow. Medvedev runs after him.*)

SATIN (*leading Pepel over to Natasha*):

Don't let it trouble you, Vasya. You killed him in a fight. That's nothing. That won't cost you dear.

VASILISA:

Hold Vasya! He killed him! I saw him do it!

SATIN:

I had a whack at him three or four times myself. It didn't take much to finish him off. I'll be a witness, Vasya.

PEPEL:

I don't want to slip out of it. I want to drag Vasilisa into it. And I will, so help me God! That's what she wanted. She talked me into killing her husband. She talked me into it.

NATASHA (*suddenly, in a loud voice*):

Ah!... Now I see! So that's how it is, Vasya! Oh, good people, they did it together! They planned it all! Very well, Vasya! So that's why you talked to me today? So she could hear? Good people, she lives with him. You all know that. Everybody knows it. They did it together. She ... she talked him into killing her husband. He stood in their way. And I stood in their way. That's why they've made a cripple of me.

PEPEL:

Natasha! What are you talking about!

SATIN:

Hm, devil take it!

VASILISA:

Liar! She's lying! I—he's the one! Vasya killed him!

NATASHA:

They did it together! Curse you! Both of you!

SATIN:

Look what's going on! Watch out, Vasya! They'll have a rope round your neck before you know it!

KRIVOI ZOB:

Can't make head or tail out of it! A fine business.

PEPEL:

Natasha! Do you really.... Are you serious? ... How can you think that I ... with her....

SATIN:

Think what you're saying, Natasha!

VASILISA (*from the passage*):

They've murdered my husband, sir. Vasya Pepel, the thief ... he did it. I saw him, Inspector. Everybody saw him.

NATASHA

(*tossing about in a half-conscious state*): Good people, it was my sister and Vasya Pepel who did it! Listen to me, Inspector. It was my sister—she showed him how. She talked him into it. He's her lover. There he is, damn his soul! They killed him! Take them both. Take them to jail! And take me, too! Put me in jail! For the love of Christ, put me in jail!

CURTAIN

ACT IV

The scene is the same as in Act I, except that the partition which once formed Pepel's room has been taken down and Kleshch's anvil is gone. The TATAR tosses and moans on a bunk in the corner which was Pepel's room. KLESHCH sits at the table repairing an accordion, occasionally trying the keys. At the other end of the table SATIN, the BARON and NASTYA are sitting. There is a bottle of vodka, three bottles of beer and some black bread in front of them. The ACTOR is moving about and coughing on top of the stove. Night. The stage is lighted by a lamp standing in the centre of the table. The wind is blowing outside.

KLESHCH:

He disappeared in all the hubbub.

BARON:

Separated himself from the police like smoke from fire.¹³

SATIN:

Like the sinful from the righteous.

NASTYA:

He was a good old man. But you—you're not humans. You're dung!

BARON (*drinking*):

To your health, my fine lady!

SATIN:

A queer bird. Nastya, here, she fell in love with him.

NASTYA:

Yes, I fell in love with him. That's the truth. He saw everything and understood everything.

SATIN (*laughing*):

He was like mush for the toothless.

BARON (*laughing*):

Like a plaster for boils.

KLESHCH:

He had pity, but you—you don't know what pity is.

SATIN:

What good would my pity do you?

KLESHCH:

I don't mean you. You do, well, not exactly pity folk, but at least spare their feelings.

TATAR

(*sitting down on one of the bunks and rocking his sore arm like a baby*): He was good old man. He know law of soul. Who know law of soul—he good. Who lost law—he lost himself.

BARON:

What law, Asan?

TATAR:

Different law. You know what.

BARON:

Next!

TATAR:

Don't hurt people. That's law.

SATIN:

That's called: "Penal Code for Criminals and Miscreants." ¹⁴

BARON:

And then there's that "Statutes of Penalties Imposed by Justices of the Peace".¹⁵

TATAR:

Koran is law. Your Koran also law. Every soul must have Koran, yes!

KLESHCH (*trying out the accordion*):

Wheezes, damn it! What the Tatar says is right. People ought to live according to the law. According to the Bible.

SATIN:

Why don't you?

BARON:

Just try it.

TATAR:

Mohammed gave Koran, Mohammed said: here—the law! Do what it say here. Then come time—Koran too little. New time, new law. Every new time give new law.

SATIN:

Right you are. Now the time's come for the "Penal Code". A good strong law. It'll take a lot of time to wear out that law.

NASTYA (*banging a glass on the table*):

Why, oh why should I go on living here with you all? I'll go away—anywhere—to the ends of the earth!

BARON:

Barefoot, my fine lady?

NASTYA:

Naked! Crawling on all fours!

BARON:

A sight for sore eyes, my fine lady! Fancy that! On all fours!

NASTYA:

That's how I'll go. I'll go any way at all, just to get rid of the sight of you. If you only knew how sick I am of everything! Of everybody and everything!

SATIN:

Take the Actor with you when you go. He's planning the same trip. He just found out that half a mile from the end of the earth there's a hospital for organs.

ACTOR

(thrusting his head over the edge of the bunk on top of the stove):

Organisms, fool!

SATIN:

For organs poisoned by alcohol.

ACTOR:

Oh, he's going, have no fear. He's going! You'll see!

BARON:

Just who is he, my good sir?

ACTOR:

Me!

BARON:

Merci, votary of the goddess—what's her name? Goddess of the drama, tragedy. What d'you call her?

ACTOR:

Muse, you dolt! She's not a goddess, but a muse.

SATIN:

Lachesis? Hera? Aphrodite? Atropos?¹⁶ The devil only knows which. It's all the doings of that old man, Baron. He got the Actor all stirred up.

BARON:

The old man's crazy.

ACTOR:

Ignoramuses! Barbarians! Mel-po-me-ne! Oh, he'll go away, you can be sure of that! Heartless creatures! "Gorge yourselves, benighted minds!..."¹⁷ That's from Béranger. He'll find a place for himself where there is no ... no....

BARON:

No nothing, my good sir?

ACTOR:

That's it. No nothing. "That yawning hole shall be my grave. This wasted frame, no hand can save."¹⁸ And why should you go on living? Why, oh why?

BARON:

Hey you—"Edmund Kean, or Genius and Dissipation." Stop shouting!

ACTOR:

I'll shout all I want to!

NASTYA

(raising her head from the table and waving her hands): Go on shouting. Make them listen.

BARON:

What's the sense of it, my fine lady?

SATIN:

Leave them alone, Baron! To hell with them! Let them yell! They'll split their heads open. The important thing is: don't interfere with people, as the old man said. It was him, like a cake of yeast, put the ferment in our fellow lodgers.

KLESHCH:

He lured them to enchanting places, then slipped away without showing them the road.

BARON:

The old man was a faker.

NASTYA:

You're a faker yourself!

BARON:

Shut up, my fine lady!

KLESHCH:

As for the truth—the old man had no use for it. He was very set against the truth, and so he should be. When you come to think of it, what talk of truth can there be? Life's hard enough without it. Take the Tatar here—got his arm smashed at work and now he'll have to chop it off. There's your truth for you!

SATIN (*pounding on the table*):

Silence! You're a lot of cattle! Blockheads! Shut up about the old man! (*More calmly.*) And you're the worst of them, Baron. You don't understand anything. And you lie. The old man wasn't a faker. What is the truth? Man!—that's the truth. He knew this, but you don't. Your heads are

like bricks. I understand him. Of course, he lied, but he did it out of pity for you, devil take you! Lots of people lie out of pity for their brothers. I know. I've read books. They lie beautifully, with inspiration, stirring you up. There are lies that console, that reconcile a person to his lot. Lies find an excuse for the weight that smashed the worker's arm; lies blame a man for starving to death. I know your lies! Only those who are faint-hearted or live at other people's expense have need of lies. Some people are supported by lies, others hide behind them. But the person who is his own boss—the person who is independent and doesn't suck other people's blood—what need has he of lies? Lies are the religion of slaves and bosses! Truth is the god of the free man!

BARON:

Bravo! Well said! I agree with everything you say! You talk like ... like a respectable gentleman.

SATIN:

Why shouldn't a cheat sometimes talk like a respectable gentleman, if your respectable gentlemen so often talk like cheats? There are lots of things I've forgotten, but I still remember a thing or two. That old man was a smart fellow. He acted on me like acid on an old, dirty coin. Let's drink to his health! Fill my glass.

(Nastya fills Satin's glass with beer and hands it to him.)

SATIN (*with a short laugh*):

The old man lives by his own wits. He sees everything with his own eyes. One day I said to him, "Grandad, what do people live for?" (*Imitating the voice and manners of Luka.*) "They live to make life better, my friend. Now, for instance, let's say we have some carpenters—junk, all of them. And then from among them is born one carpenter—a carpenter the likes of whom the earth has never seen; outshines all the

others, he does, and none can even hold a candle to him. On all carpentering he leaves his own mark, so that craft moves forward twenty years in one jump. The same it is with all the others—tinsmiths, cobblers, all the working folk, and all the peasants too—and even the gentlefolk. All of them live for the better. Each thinking it's for himself he's living, but really he lives for the better. For a hundred years they live—maybe even for more, and all for the better."

(Nastya looks intently at Satin. Kleshch, too, stops working on the accordion and listens. The Baron drops his head on his chest and softly drums on the table. The Actor quietly lets himself down off the stove on to one of the bunks.)

SATIN:

"All of them, my good friend, every last one of them, lives for the better," says the old man. "We ought to be considerate of one another. For you see, it's not for us to know who a person is, and why he was born, and what he can do. Maybe he was born for our good fortune, to be some great help to us. And particular it's the children we must respect—the little ones. It's freedom they need, the little ones. We mustn't interfere with them; we must be considerate of them." (*Laughs.*)

(Pause.)

BARON (*meditatively*):

Hm. For the better? That reminds me of my family—an old family, dating back to Catherine the Great. Nobles. Warriors. Came from France. Served the tsar and kept climbing up and up. During the reign of Nicholas I, my grandfather, Gustave Débile, held high office. Wealth, hundreds of serfs, horses, servants....

NASTYA:

Liar! That's all bunk!

BARON (*jumping up*):

Wha-at?

NASTYA:

Humbug!

BARON (*shouting*):

A mansion in Moscow! A mansion in St. Petersburg!
Carriages with our coat of arms on them!

(Kleshch takes up his accordion and walks off to one side,
from where he observes the scene.)

NASTYA:

Claptrap!

BARON:

Shut up! Dozens of lackeys, I'm telling you!

NASTYA (*enjoying it*):

Poppycock!

BARON:

I'll kill you!

NASTYA (*about to run away*):

You never had a carriage!

SATIN:

Drop it, Nastya! Don't make him mad.

BARON:

Just wait, you scum! My grandfather....

NASTYA:

You never had a grandfather! You never had anything!

(Satin laughs.)

BARON

(*sinks down on a bench, weak with fury*): Satin, tell her—that bitch—or are you laughing too? Don't you believe it either? (*Shouting in despair, banging the table with his fists.*) It's all true, god-damn you!

NASTYA (*triumphantly*):

Aha! Howling! See what it's like when nobody believes you?

KLESHCH (*returning to the table*):

I was sure there'd be a fight.

TATAR:

Ah, stupid people! Very bad!

BARON:

I ... I won't have people making fun of me! I have ... I can prove it. I have papers, you devils!

SATIN:

Forget them! And forget about your grandfather's carriages. They won't get you very far, those bygone carriages.

BARON:

How dares she!

NASTYA (*mockingly*):

Hear that? How dares she!

SATIN:

Well, she does. And why is she any worse than you are?

Even if she never had any carriages, or grandfathers, or even a mother and father.

BARON (*more composed*):

Devil take you! You always take things calmly. I'm afraid I have no character.

SATIN:

Get one. It'll come in handy. (*Pause.*) Nastya, do you ever go to the hospital?

NASTYA:

What for?

SATIN:

To see Natasha.

NASTYA:

A little late, aren't you? She left the hospital long ago. Left it and disappeared. Gone without leaving a trace.

SATIN:

That means—all gone.

KLESHCH:

I wonder who'll give it to the other harder: Vasya to Vasilisa, or the other way round.

NASTYA:

Vasilisa will wriggle out of it somehow. She's foxy. But they'll send Vasya to hard labour in Siberia.

SATIN:

Oh no, he'll only get jail for killing in a fight.

NASTYA:

Too bad. They ought to send him away—to send all of

you away. Sweep you out like garbage. Throw you on some dump.

SATIN (*surprised*):

What's that you're saying? Have you gone clean off your chump?

BARON:

I'll give her a smack on the ear. What nerve!

NASTYA:

Go ahead and try. Just touch me!

BARON:

I'll try it, never fear!

SATIN:

Stop it! Don't touch her. You mustn't hurt people. I can't get that old man out of my head. (*Laughs.*) You mustn't hurt people! But what if they hurt me—hurt me so bad I'll never get over it? What then? Am I supposed to forgive them? Never! Nobody!

BARON (*to Nastya*):

Don't forget you're not my equal! You're ... you're the scum of the earth!

NASTYA:

Ugh, you louse! You live on me like a worm on an apple.

(Burst of laughter from the men.)

KLESHCH:

You little fool! An apple!

BARON:

How can anybody get mad at her? She's an idiot.

NASTYA:

Laughing, are you? Fooling yourself. You don't really think it's funny.

ACTOR (*sullenly*):

Give it to them!

NASTYA:

If only I could! I'd ... I'd.... (*Picks up a cup and smashes it on the floor.*) That's what I'd do to you!

TATAR:

Why break dishes? Eh ... bad woman!

BARON (*getting up*):

Now I'll teach her some manners!

NASTYA (*running toward the door*):

You can go to hell!

SATIN (*calling after her*):

Enough of this! Who are you scaring? What's it all about, anyway?

NASTYA:

Wolves! I hope you choke! Wolves!

ACTOR (*sullenly*):

Amen!

TATAR:

O-o-o! Bad woman—Russian woman. Nervy. Too free. Tatar woman not like that. Tatar woman knows law.

KLESHCH:

She needs a good shaking.

BARON:

The slut!

KLESHCH (*trying out the accordion*):

Good. But the lad doesn't come for it. He's going to the dogs fast.

SATIN:

Here, have a drink.

KLESHCH:

Thanks. Time to turn in.

SATIN:

Getting used to us?

KLESHCH (*drinks, then goes over to a bunk in the corner*):

I suppose so. It turns out there are human beings everywhere. At first you don't notice it, then you have a better look and there they are—human beings.

(The Tatar spreads a cloth of some sort on his bed, kneels on it and begins to pray.)

BARON (*pointing to the Tatar and speaking to Satin*):

Look at that.

SATIN:

Leave him alone. He's a good fellow. Don't disturb him. (*Laughs.*) Why should I be feeling so kind-hearted today?

BARON:

You always get kind-hearted when you've had a drink—and clever, too.

SATIN:

When I'm drunk everything looks rosy. He's praying? Fine. A person can be a believer or not, just as he pleases. That's his business. A person's free to choose. He pays for everything himself: for believing, for not believing, for loving, for being clever. A person pays for everything himself, and that's why he's free. Man—there's your truth! What's a man? Not you, nor me, nor him. Oh no! But you and me and him and the old man, and Napoleon, and Mohammed—all in one! (*Drawing the figure of a man in the air.*) Comprehend? That's tremendous! It includes all beginnings and all endings. All things are part of Man; all things are for Man. Only Man exists; the rest is merely the work of his hands and his mind. How marvellous is Man! How proud the word rings—MAN! A man should be respected. Not pitied—pity is degrading. Respected! Baron, let's drink to Man! (*Stands up.*) How good to feel oneself a Man! Here am I—ex-convict, murderer, card-sharper—all of that! When I go down the street people take me for a thief. They step aside and steal furtive glances at me. Often they call me a rascal, a faker! Work, they say! Work? What for? To fill my belly? (*Laughs.*) I've always despised people who think too much about their bellies. The belly isn't the main thing, Baron. Indeed it isn't. Man is superior to that. Man is superior to his belly!

BARON (*shaking his head*):

Good for you—thinking things out like this. It must warm your heart. As for me—I can't. I don't know how. (*Glancing about and speaking under his breath.*) Sometimes I'm afraid. Understand? Scared. I keep thinking—what'll happen next?

SATIN (*walking up and down*):

Nonsense! What should a man fear?

BARON:

As long as I can remember there's been a sort of fog in my head. I never could understand anything. I ... it's strange, but ... it seems to me I've just been changing my clothes all my life. What for? Can't make it out. First I was a student—wore the uniform of the Institute for Sons of the Nobility. What did they teach me there? Can't remember. Got married. Put on a dress suit, then a dressing-gown. But the wife I chose was a bad one. Why did I marry her? Can't remember. I squandered all my means—wore some kind of a grey jacket and faded pants. How did I lose everything? Can't remember. Worked in a government office—uniform again, cap with a badge on it. Embezzled government money. They put me in convict clothes. After that I donned these rags. And that's all. Like in a dream, isn't it? It's even funny.

SATIN:

Not very. More stupid than funny.

BARON:

It is. I, too, think it's stupid. After all, I must have been born for something.

SATIN (*with a short laugh*):

You must have. "Man is born to make life better!" (*Nodding his head.*) Good words.

BARON:

Drat that Nastya! Where did she run off to? I'll go and have a look. After all, she's.... (*Goes out. Pause.*)

ACTOR:

Tatar! (*Pause.*) Asan!

(The Tatar turns his head.)

ACTOR:

Pray for me.

TATAR:

What?

ACTOR (*softly*):

Say a prayer for me.

TATAR (*after a pause*):

Say your own prayers.

ACTOR

(*quickly climbs down off the stove, goes over to the table, pours himself out a glass of vodka with shaking hands, swallows it down, almost runs out into the passage*):

I'm off!

SATIN:

Hey, you! Sicambri! Where are you going? (*Whistles.*)

(Bubnov and Medvedev come in, the latter wearing a woman's quilted jacket. Both are slightly drunk. In one hand Bubnov is carrying a string of pretzels, in the other a couple of smoked fish. One bottle of vodka is thrust under his arm, another, sticks out of the pocket of his coat.)

MEDVEDEV:

A camel is something like a donkey, only without ears.

BUBNOV:

You're something like a donkey yourself.

MEDVEDEV:

A camel doesn't have any ears at all. He hears with his nose.

BUBNOV (*to Satin*):

So here you are, friend! I searched the pubs for you. Take this bottle. All my hands are busy.

SATIN:

Put those pretzels on the table and one of your hands will be free.

BUBNOV:

Quite right. Just look at him. He's a smart fellow, ain't he?

MEDVEDEV:

All cheats are smart. I know! They couldn't get on if they weren't. A good fellow can be stupid, but a bad fellow has got to be smart. But about that camel, you're all wrong. It's a beast of burden. No horns, no teeth....

BUBNOV:

Where's everybody? How is it nobody's here? Hey, crawl out! The treat's on me! Who's that in the corner?

SATIN:

How long will it take you to drink up your last kopek, you old scarecrow?

BUBNOV:

Not long. This time the capital I saved up wasn't very big. Zob! Where's Zob?

KLESHCH (*coming over to the table*):

He's gone.

BUBNOV:

Gr-r-r! You bulldog, you! Grrr! Woof! Woof! No barking! No grumbling! Drink, you dunce. Don't stand there hanging your head! I'm treating tonight! And how I love it! If I was rich, I'd open up a pub and serve drinks free of charge! Honest to God! With music and a chorus for sure. Come on in, everybody! Eat, drink, and listen to the songs for your soul's ease! No money? Here you are—a free pub! As for you, Satin, I'd.... I'd give you half my money besides! That's what I'd do!

SATIN:

Give me all of it—this very minute!

BUBNOV:

Everything I have? This very minute? Hah! Here you are—a ruble ... another ... twenty kopeks ... chicken feed....

SATIN:

Good. It'll be safer with me. I'll gamble with it.

MEDVEDEV:

I'm a witness that the money was given out for safe keeping. How much?

BUBNOV:

You? You're a camel. We don't need witnesses.

ALYOSHKA (*enters barefoot*):

Fellows! I got my feet wet!

BUBNOV:

Come on and get your throat wet! That's all you need. Your singing and playing is all very good, my lad. But your drinking—that's no good. That's harmful, brother. Drinking's harmful.

ALYOSHKA:

You're a good example. The only time you're at all like a human being is when you're drunk. Kleshch! Is my accordion ready? (*Sings and dances.*)

*Oh, if I had a mug,
As ugly as a bug,
My lady fair
Would give me the air!*

I'm cold, brothers. I'm fro-o-zen!

MEDVEDEV:

Hm.... May I ask who your lady fair is?

BUBNOV:

Leave him alone. Mind your own business. You're not a policeman now—not a policeman and not an uncle.

ALYOSHKA:

You're just the aunt's husband.

BUBNOV:

One of your nieces is in jail, the other is dying.

MEDVEDEV (*proudly*):

That's a lie. She's not dying. She simply disappeared.

(Satin laughs.)

BUBNOV:

What difference does it make? Once you've lost your nieces, you're no longer an uncle.

ALYOSHKA:

Your Excellency! Retired drummer-boy to the goat!

*The dame—she's got money,
And me—I'm dead broke,
But still I'm a jolly,
A marvellous bloke!*

It's damned cold in here.

(Krivoi Zob comes in. Throughout the rest of the act other figures of men and women drift in. They take their things off and lie down grumbling on the bunks.)

KRIVOI ZOB:

What did you run away for, Bubnov?

BUBNOV:

Come here. Sit down and let's have a song. My favourite, eh?

TATAR:

Must sleep night-time. Sing songs day-time.

SATIN:

That's all right, Asan. Come over here.

TATAR:

What you mean, that's all right? Make noise. Make big noise when you sing songs.

BUBNOV (*going over to him*):

How's the arm, Asan? Did they cut it off?

TATAR:

What for? Wait. Maybe don't cut it off. Arm isn't old iron. Cut it off easy when time come.

KRIVOI ZOB:

You're done for, Asan. No good for anything with one arm. People like us are worth as much as our arms and our backs, brother. No arm, no man. Done for. Come on, have a drink and forget it!

KVASHNYA (*coming in*):

Hullo, dearies! What weather! Cold and slush! Is my policeman here?

MEDVEDEV:

Here I am!

KVASHNYA:

There! You've taken my jacket again! And it looks as if you'd had a nip or two, eh? What do you mean by it?

MEDVEDEV:

On the occasion of Bubnov's birthday... and the cold ...
and the slush....

KVASHNYA:

Watch your step! The slush! None of your monkey
business! Come to bed!

MEDVEDEV (*going into the kitchen*):

I really could sleep. It's high time.

SATIN:

Aren't you pretty strict with him?

KVASHNYA:

That's the only way, friend. You've got to keep a tight
hold on a man like him. When I took him in to live with
me, I thinks to myself: I may get some good out of him,
seeing as he's on the force and you're all such a bunch
of rowdies and I'm a poor defenceless woman. But he
starts drinking straight off. I can't be having a thing like
that!

SATIN:

You picked a poor helpmate.

KVASHNYA:

There aren't any better ones. You wouldn't live with
me—such a swell you are! And even if you did, it
wouldn't last more than a week. And you'd gamble me
away in no time—me and all my claptrap.

SATIN (*laughing*):

Right you are, woman. I'd gamble you away for sure.

KVASHNYA:

See? Alyoshka!

ALYOSHKA:

Here I am.

KVASHNYA:

What's this gossip you've been spreading about me?

ALYOSHKA:

Only the truth. There's a woman for you, I says! Simply a marvel! Ten poods of fat, bones, and muscle, and not an ounce of brains!

KVASHNYA:

That's a lie now. I've got a very lot of brains. But why did you say I beat that policeman of mine?

ALYOSHKA:

I thought you gave him a beating that time you dragged him off by the hair.

KVASHNYA (*laughing*):

Fool! You ought to pretend not to see. Why hand out your dirty clothes for everybody to gape at? And besides, you've hurt his feelings. He's took to drink because of your gossip.

ALYOSHKA:

Proof of the saying: even a chicken drinks.

(Satin and Kleshch laugh.)

KVASHNYA:

Ooh, what a tongue you've got! What sort of a person are you anyway, Alyoshka?

ALYOSHKA:

The best in the world! I try my hand at anything, and follow my nose wherever it goes!

BUBNOV (*beside the Tatar's bunk*):

Come on! We won't give you a chance to sleep anyway!
We're going to sing all night long! Zob!

KRIVOI ZOB:

Sing? Why not?

ALYOSHKA:

And I'll accompany you.

SATIN:

We'll see how.

TATAR (*smiling*):

Well, shaitan Bubno, bring some wine. We drink. We have good time. We die, once upon time.

BUBNOV:

Fill up his glass, Satin! Sit down, Zob! It's not much a fellow needs, friends. Here am I with a drink in me and happy as a lord! Zob! Start up the song—you know, my favourite! I'm going to sing—and bawl my eyes out.

KRIVOI ZOB (*singing*):

Every morn the sun arises....

BUBNOV (*joining in*):

Still my cell is filled with gloom....

(Suddenly the door bursts open.)

BARON

(*shouting from the doorway*): Hey, folks! Come here! Come quick! The Actor has hung himself! Out in the vacant lot!

(Silence. All look at the Baron. Nastya appears from behind him and walks slowly, wide-eyed, towards the table.)

SATIN (*softly*):

Tck! Spoiled the song, the fool!

CURTAIN

Summer Folk

(scenes)

Characters in the Play

BASOV, SERGEI VASILYEVICH, 40 years old, a lawyer
VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA, 27 years old, his wife
KALERIA, 29 years old, Basov's sister
VLAS, 25 years old, Varvara's brother
SUSLOV, PYOTR IVANOVICH, 42 years old, an
engineer
YULIA FILIPPOVNA, 30 years old, his wife
DUDAKOV, KIRILL' AKIMOVICH, 40 years old, a doctor
OLGA ALEXEYEVNA, 35 years old, his wife
SHALIMOV, YAKOV PETROVICH, 40 years old, a writer
RYUMIN, PAVEL SERGEYEVICH, 32 years old
MARIA LVOVNA, 37 years old, a doctor
SONYA, 18 years old, her daughter
DVOYETOCHIYE, SEMYON SEMYONOVICH, 55 years
old, Suslov's uncle
ZAMYSLOV, NIKOLAI PETROVICH, 28 years old,
Basov's assistant
ZIMIN, 23 years old, a student
PUSTOBAIKA, 50 years old, a night watchman
KROPILKIN, another night watchman
SASHA, the Basovs' serving-girl
WOMAN WITH A TIED-UP FACE
SEMYONOV
WOMAN IN YELLOW
YOUNG MAN IN A CHECKED SUIT
YOUNG LADY IN BLUE
YOUNG LADY IN PINK
A CADET
MAN IN A TOP HAT

} Amateur actors

ACT I

A house in the country which has been taken for the summer by the Basovs. A large room, serving as dining and sitting room. There are three doors in the back wall. The one on the left is open and gives a glimpse into Basov's study. The one on the right is to Varvara Mikhailovna's room. The centre door leads into the hall, and is hung with dark portières. In the right wall, one window and a wide door leading out onto a veranda; in the left wall, two windows. There is a big table in the centre of the room and a grand piano opposite the door of the study. The rest of the furniture (except for a large sofa with a grey cover on it, which stands near the hall door) is made of wicker. It is evening. BASOV is in his study, sitting at the writing-desk, which is lighted by a lamp with a green shade. We see him in profile. He hums to himself from time to time as he writes, and keeps glancing into the darkness of the big room. VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA comes noiselessly out of her room and strikes a match, which she holds up in front of her face as she looks about. The match goes out. She walks softly over to the window in the darkness and stumbles over a chair.

BASOV:

Who's that?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Me.

BASOV:

Uh.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Did you take the candle?

BASOV:

No.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Ring for Sasha.

BASOV:

Has Vlas come?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*at the door of the veranda*): I don't know.

BASOV:

A crazy house. Electric bells all over the place, but the walls are full of chinks and the floor creaks. (*Hums something cheerful.*) Still there, Varya?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Yes.

BASOV (*putting his papers away*):

Are there draughts in your room too?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

There are.

BASOV:

I thought so.

(*Enter Sasha.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Bring a light, Sasha.

BASOV:

Sasha, has Vlas Mikhailovich come?

SASHA:

Not yet.

(*Sasha goes out, comes back with a lamp which she puts on a table next to an armchair. She empties an ashtray and*

straightens the cloth on the big table. Varvara Mikhailovna pulls the curtains, takes a book off a shelf and sits down in the armchair.)

BASOV (*good-naturedly*):

Vlas has become very careless of late. And lazy. I can't make him out, that's a fact.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Will you have tea?

BASOV:

No, I'm going to the Suslovs.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Sasha, run over to Olga Alexeyevna's and ask her to come and have tea with me.

(Sasha goes out.)

BASOV (*locking away his papers*):

So that's that. (*Comes out of his study stretching himself.*) I wish you'd tell him that for me, Varya—tactfully, of course.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Tell him what?

BASOV:

That he ought to ... er ... be more conscientious about his work.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I will. But I don't think you ought to speak about him in that tone in front of Sasha.

BASOV (*examining the room*):

Oh, it doesn't matter. There's no hiding anything from the servants. It's sort of—sort of bare in here, Varya. You

might hang something on those walls—some frames. And pictures. Make it cosier. Well, I'm off. Your hand, ducky. You're very chilly and untalkative. Why is that? And what makes you look so glum?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Are you in a great hurry to get to the Suslovs?

BASOV:

Yes, I must run along. Haven't had a game of chess with him for ages—or kissed your hand, either. Strange. I wonder why.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*hiding a smile*): And so we'll put off discussing me until you're not so busy. It's not of any particular importance, I suppose.

BASOV (*placatingly*):

I'm sure it isn't. Couldn't be serious—I don't know why I mentioned it. You're the perfect wife—clever, sincere, and all the rest. Fact. If you had a grudge against me you'd tell me, wouldn't you? What makes your eyes so glittery? Aren't you feeling well?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Oh, I'm all right.

BASOV:

You want to find something to keep you busy, dear. You read too much—always reading, and any overindulgence is harmful, don't forget.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Don't *you* forget when you and Suslov are tipping.

BASOV (*laughing*):

A nasty dig! But to tell you the truth, these spicy modern

books are more harmful than wine. Like taking narcotics. And the gentlemen who write them are a set of neurotics. (*Yawning.*) Very soon we are to be visited by what the children would call an "honest-to-goodness" writer. I wonder what he's like now. Probably conceited. All these chaps who get into the limelight are painfully conceited. Not normal. Take Kaleria—she's not normal either, although you could hardly call her a writer. She'll be glad to see Shalimov. Wouldn't it be nice if she married him? But she's too old and she whines all the time, as if she had chronic toothache. And she's not exactly a beauty.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

You always let your tongue run away with you, Sergei.

BASOV:

Do I? It doesn't matter this time. We're alone. I suppose I do like to talk. (*Someone is heard to cough on the other side of the portière.*) Who's there?

SUSLOV (*unseen*):

Me.

BASOV (*going to meet him*):

I was just coming over to your place.

SUSLOV (*bowing to Varvara Mikhailovna*):

Come along. That's what I'm here for—to get you. Were you in town today?

BASOV:

No. Why?

SUSLOV (*with a wry smile*):

They say that assistant of yours won 2,000 rubles at the club last night.

BASOV:

Oho!

SUSLOV:

From a merchant who was soaked to the gills.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Why do you always say that?

SUSLOV:

What?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

You always make a point of saying the person who lost was drunk.

SUSLOV (*with a little laugh*):

I wasn't aware of it.

BASOV:

And what if he does? It isn't as if he had said Zamyslov dosed his victim first and then took his money away from him. That, of course, would be in bad taste. Come along, Pyotr. Varya, when Vlas comes—ah, here he is!

VLAS

(*comes in carrying a worn brief-case*): Have you been missing me, my noble patron? Glad to hear it. (*To Suslov, in an exaggerated tone of warning*.) You are being searched for by a gentleman who seems to have just arrived. He goes from house to house asking in a loud voice where you live. (*Going over to his sister*.) Hullo, Varya.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Hullo.

SUSLOV:

Botheration! It's probably my uncle.

BASOV:

Perhaps you'd rather I didn't come then?

SUSLOV:

Oh, I say! Do you think I'd enjoy being left alone with an uncle I hardly know? I haven't seen him for ten years.

BASOV (*to Vlas*):

Just a minute, Vlas. (*Takes Vlas into his study.*)

SUSLOV (*lighting up*):

Will you come with us, Varvara Mikhailovna?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

No, thank you. Is your uncle poor?

SUSLOV:

No, he's rich. Very. Do you think it's only poor relations I dislike?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I don't know.

SUSLOV (*clearing his throat testily*):

That Zamyslov is going to get Sergei into trouble one beastly day. He's a scoundrel if there ever was one, don't you think so?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*calmly*):

I don't care to discuss him with you.

SUSLOV:

Very well, we'll leave it at that. (*Pause.*) It seems to me that this candour of yours is ... er ... something of a pose. Watch out. It's hard to play the role of one who always says what he thinks. It takes a lot of courage, and a lot of brain. I hope you don't mind my saying so?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Not at all.

SUSLOV:

Wouldn't you like to argue the point? Or perhaps in your heart of hearts you agree with me?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*very simply*):

I don't know how to argue, or even to express myself properly.

SUSLOV (*glumly*):

Don't be angry. I find it very hard to believe that there really are people with the courage to be themselves at all times.

SASHA (*entering*):

Olga Alexeyevna said she would be over soon. Shall I put on the tea?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Do, please.

SASHA:

Here comes Nikolai Petrovich. (*Goes out.*)

SUSLOV (*going to the door of the study*):

Hurry up there, Sergei. I'm going.

BASOV:

So am I. This very minute.

ZAMYSLOV (*entering*):

Good evening, Varvara Mikhailovna. Hullo, Pyotr Ivanovich.

SUSLOV (*coughing*):

Good evening. Aren't you the gay young man, just!

ZAMYSLOV:

Oh, yes. Light-hearted, light-minded, light-pocketed!

SUSLOV (*with harsh irony*):

Quite right as to the heart and the mind, but as to the pocket—they say you stripped somebody at the club last night.

ZAMYSLOV (*mildly*):

“Stripped” is said of thieves. I won some money.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

The news of you is always sensational. That, they say, is the fate of all exceptional people.

ZAMYSLOV:

When I hear the gossip spread about me, I can't help thinking I must be exceptional. As to the money—unfortunately it was only forty-two rubles.

(Suslov, coughing quietly, goes over to the window at left and stands looking out.)

BASOV (*entering*):

Is that all? And I was entertaining dreams of champagne! Well, have you anything to tell me? I'm in a hurry.

ZAMYSLOV:

Leaving, Chief? Then I'll save my news till you come back. Nothing urgent. What a pity you weren't at the play, Varvara Mikhailovna! Yulia Filippovna's acting was marvellous! Superb!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I always enjoy seeing her.

ZAMYSLOV (*enthusiastically*):

Off with my head if she isn't a born actress!

SUSLOV (*with a little laugh*):

Too bad if you lose the wager. It would hardly be decent to go about with no head at all. Come along, Sergei. Good-bye, Varvara Mikhailovna. Good-bye. (*Bowing stiffly to Zamyslov.*)

BASOV

(*glancing into his study, where Vlas is sorting papers*):
So I can hope you'll have it all copied by nine o'clock in the morning, Vlas?

VLAS:

You can—and may you be plagued by insomnia, my noble patron.

(Suslov and Basov go out.)

ZAMYSLOV:

I, too, must go. Your hand, Varvara Mikhailovna.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Stay and have tea with us.

ZAMYSLOV:

With your permission I'll come back later. I've got to go now. (*Goes out quickly.*)

VLAS (*coming out of the study*):

Is there any hope of getting tea in this house, Varya?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Ring for Sasha. (*Putting a hand on his shoulders.*) What makes you look so pale?

VLAS (*rubbing his cheek against her hand*):

Tired. From ten to three I was in court, from three to seven I ran about town on various errands. Sasha! I didn't even have time for dinner.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

A clerk. Surely you could do something better than that, Vlas.

VLAS (*with mock pathos*):

Oh, I know, one ought to seek the heights, and all that. But, Varya, being fond of examples, I turn to the lowly chimney-sweep—he climbs higher than all others, but can he climb higher than his own self?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Do be serious. Why don't you look for some other occupation—something more useful, more important?

VLAS (*feigning indignation*):

My dear girl! Here am I, a vital, albeit a humble, link in the mechanism of guarding and protecting the sacred institution of private property! And you call it useless labour! What perverted ideas you have!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

You just won't be serious. (*Sasha comes in.*)

VLAS (*to Sasha*):

Take pity on me, fair lady. Bring me some tea and something to eat.

SASHA:

Directly. Would you care to have a meat cake?

VLAS:

A meat cake and a fish cake and anything else you can find. Only hurry up.

(*Sasha goes out. Vlas puts his arm about his sister's waist and they walk up and down.*)

VLAS:

Well, what's the matter?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I'm in the dumps, Vlas. Sometimes without any particular reason I suddenly feel as if I were in prison. Everything looks strange, hostile, unwanted—by me or anybody else. Nobody is serious. Take you, for instance—you're always facetious, mocking at everybody and everything.

VLAS (*striking a pose*):

*Reproach me not, beloved friend,
For my frivolity.
A weight of woe is hid behind
This seeming jollity.*

Lines of my own inventing, and ever so much better than Kaleria's if you ask me. I won't read them all to you—they're miles long. So you want me to be serious, darling? I suppose all who are one-eyed would like others to be the same.

(Enter Sasha with the tea-things, which she deftly places about the table. The rattle of the night watchman is heard.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Don't, Vlas. You oughtn't to let yourself prattle on like this.

VLAS:

"Very well," said he, "and hung his head." But you're unkind, sister. All day long I'm so busy making copies of their slanderous claptrap that I have no time to talk. Naturally I want to indulge myself when evening comes.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

And I want to go away. I want to find a place where there are plain wholesome people who have a different way of talking and are doing something big and important. Do you understand what I mean?

VLAS (*thoughtfully*):

I suppose so. But you'll not go anywhere, Varya.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Perhaps I will. (*Pause. Sasha brings in the samovar.*) We're expecting Shalimov tomorrow.

VLAS (*yawning*):

I don't like what he's been writing of late. Dull, empty, lifeless stuff.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I saw him once at a party we had at school when I was a girl. I remember how firmly and resolutely he walked out on the stage; I can still see his thick unruly hair, and the look of his face, so bold and candid—the look of a person who knows what he loves and what he hates, and who is aware of his own strength. It was thrilling. I remember how he kept tossing back his hair like a dark mane, and the inspired look in his eyes. That was six or seven—no, eight years ago.

VLAS:

You're as anxious to see him again as a schoolgirl is to see the new teacher. Watch out, sister! Writers, they say, are great hands at seducing women!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

That's a horrid thing to say, Vlas. So commonplace.

VLAS (*simply, sincerely*):

Don't be angry.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

You don't understand. I look forward to his coming as to the spring. I can't go on living like this.

VLAS:

I do understand. I can't either. I'm ashamed to, somehow. Ashamed and uneasy. And there doesn't seem to be anything better ahead.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

That's the whole trouble. But then why do you always—

VLAS:

Make a fool of myself? I can't bear to have people see my real feelings.

(Kaleria enters.)

KALERIA:

A glorious night! And you two sitting indoors! It smells of smoke in here.

VLAS (*shaking off his mood*):

Good evening, Dreamer of Dreams.

KALERIA:

The woods are rapt and still, with a gentle moon smiling down, and warm thick shadows everywhere. Night is always more lovely than day.

VLAS (*imitating her tone*):

Ah, yes! As old ladies are gayer than girls, and crabs swifter than swallows.

KALERIA (*sitting down at the table*):

As though you could appreciate anything! Pour me out a cup of tea, Varya. No one has been here, I suppose?

VLAS (*facetiously*):

"No one" could not have been here, for "no one" does not exist.

KALERIA:

Don't you ever get sick of that?

(Vlas bows and goes into study, where he leafs through the papers on the writing-desk. In the distance can be heard the watchman's rattle and a soft whistle.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Yulia Filippovna was here and asked for you.

KALERIA:

For me? She wanted to find out about the play, I guess.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Were you in the woods?

KALERIA:

Yes. I met Ryumin. He spoke to me about you.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

What did he say?

KALERIA:

Can't you guess?

(Pause. Vlas sings softly through his nose.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*sighing*):

I'm very sorry.

KALERIA:

For him?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

He once said that falling in love with a woman was a man's tragic obligation.

KALERIA:

You used to treat him differently.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Are you blaming me for that?

KALERIA:

Oh no, Varya! Not at all!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

At first I tried to cheer him up. It's true I gave him a lot of my time, but then I saw what it was leading to, and—he went away.

KALERIA:

Did you have it out with him?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

No. Neither he nor I said a word.

(Pause.)

KALERIA:

His must be a lukewarm sort of love—all expressed in pretty words, without any joy in it. A woman resents love that brings no joy. Has it ever struck you that he's hunchbacked?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*surprised*):

Oh, no! Is he? Surely you're mistaken.

KALERIA:

There's something mis-shapen about him—about his soul. And whenever I notice that in a person, it seems to me he is mis-shapen in body as well.

VLAS

(*slapping some documents against his hand as he comes out of the study, looking very doleful*): Considering the amount of this claptrap, and basing my conclusion on said consideration, I have the honour of announcing to you, wife of my patron, that however much I so desire, I am

physically unable to fulfil this unpleasant task within the time limits imposed.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I'll help you later. Come and have tea.

VLAS:

Sister! Dear, true sister! Dreamer of Dreams, take lessons in love from my sister and me while we are yet with you.

KALERIA:

You, it seems, are definitely hunchbacked!

VLAS:

In what respect, may I ask?

KALERIA:

You have a hunchbacked soul.

VLAS:

That, I hope, does not spoil my figure?

KALERIA:

Rudeness is as much a deformity as a hump. Stupid people are like the lame—

VLAS (*imitating her tone*):

—and the lame are like your aphorisms.

KALERIA:

Vulgar people always look pock-marked to me, and they are almost always blonds.

VLAS:

All brunettes get married early, and all metaphysicians are blind and deaf. What a pity they have the power of speech!

KALERIA:

Very flat. I don't suppose you even know what metaphysics is.

VLAS:

I do. Tobacco and metaphysics were invented for the sole purpose of giving pleasure to those who indulge. I do not smoke, and know nothing about the ill effects of tobacco, but I have tried metaphysics and know that it brings on giddiness and nausea.

KALERIA:

Some people are made giddy even by the scent of flowers.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Haven't you had enough of this?

VLAS:

I have. I'm going to eat—much more sensible, I find it.

KALERIA:

And I'm going to play the piano—much more interesting. How stuffy it is in here, Varya!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I'll open the door of the veranda. Here comes Olga.

(Pause. Vlas has tea. Kaleria sits down at the piano. The whistle of the night watchman can be heard faintly and is answered by an even fainter whistle. Kaleria runs her hands lightly over the keys of the middle register. Olga Alexeyevna thrusts back the portières and rushes into the room like a great frightened bird.)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA

(*snatching the shawl off her head*): Here I am! I thought I'd never get away. (*Kisses Varvara Mikhailovna.*) Good evening, Kaleria Vasilyevna. Go on playing, do. We don't have to shake hands, do we? Hullo, Vlas.

VLAS:

Good evening, Olga Alexeyevna.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Sit down. Shall I pour you out some tea? What kept you so long?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*nervously*):

Wait a bit. It's fearfully dark out. I had the feeling that someone was hiding in the woods. The watchmen kept blowing their whistles. They make your blood run cold. What do they do it for?

VLAS:

Hm, very suspicious. Maybe they're blowing them at us?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

I wanted to come earlier, but Nadya was peevish—she's probably coming down with something, too. Did I tell you that Volka was laid up? Yes, he has a fever. And I had to give Sonya a bath. Misha ran off into the woods directly after dinner and just came back—torn and dirty and starved, of course. And my husband came down from town in a bad mood—scowls and doesn't open his mouth. My head's in a perfect whirl! That new maid of mine is worse than nobody at all. She poured boiling water over the baby's bottles and they all cracked.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*smiling*):

You poor dear! You must be worn out.

VLAS:

Oh, Marpha! Marpha! Too many are thy cares! ¹ And so everything is either over-cared-for or undercared-for. What wisdom lies in those words!

KALERIA:

Very ugly words. "Over-cared-for"—ugh! how clumsy!

VLAS:

Begging your pardon. It wasn't I who invented the language.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*slightly piqued*):

I suppose you find me absurd—or tiresome. I understand. But what's to be done about it! Everyone talks about the things on his mind. Children! The very thought of them makes a bell ring inside of me. Ding, dong! Children, children! They're a great trial, Varya. If you only knew what a trial they were!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Forgive me, but I think you exaggerate.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*roused*):

No, I don't. You're no judge. You've never been weighed down by that horrible sense of responsibility a mother feels. Some day my children will come and ask me what the proper way of life is, and what shall I tell them?

VLAS:

Why worry in advance? Maybe they won't. Maybe they'll have their own views on the subject.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Oh, but you don't know! They're asking already. They're asking all the time. All sorts of impossible questions that neither you nor I nor anyone else can answer. It's a torture to be a woman.

VLAS (*softly and gravely*):

A human being—that's what you want to be.

(Goes into the study, sits down at the desk and begins to write.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Stop it, Vlas.

(Gets up and walks slowly over to the door of the veranda.)

KALERIA (*pensively*):

The smile of the dawn put out the stars, one by one....

(She too gets up and goes over to stand beside Varvara Mikhailovna.)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Oh, dear! I seem to have put a damp on everybody—like the hooting of an owl in the night. Very well, I won't say another word about my troubles. Why have you gone away, Varya? Come here, or I'll think you're trying to avoid me.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*coming back quickly*): How can you say such a thing, Olga! I feel dreadfully sorry for you.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Don't. Sometimes I hate myself—and pity myself. I seem to have the disposition of an old lap-dog. They're vicious, those lap-dogs—they hate everybody and are always looking for a chance to take a nip out of somebody's calf on the sly.

KALERIA:

The sun rises and the sun sets, but it's always twilight in men's souls.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

What's that?

KALERIA:

Nothing in particular. I was just talking to myself.

VLAS:

(*sings in a nasal voice as he copies documents, putting the words to the tune of a dirge*): Family joys ... family joys....

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Do stop, Vlas.

VLAS:

I've stopped.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

I'm the one who has spoilt his mood.

KALERIA:

Some people have just come out of the woods. A pretty picture they make. Pavel Sergeyevich is waving his arms comically.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Who else is there?

KALERIA:

Maria Lvovna, Yulia Filippovna, Sonya, Zimin, and Zamyslov.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*putting on her shawl*):

I'm such a dowdy! That chic Yulia Filippovna is always making fun of me. I can't bear her.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Ring for Sasha, Vlas.

VLAS:

Don't forget that all these little interruptions are keeping me from fulfilling my duty!

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

A remarkable woman. She pays hardly any attention to her children, but they never seem to be ill.

MARIA LVOVNA

(*entering from the veranda*): Your husband said you weren't feeling well. What's the matter?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I'm glad to see you, but I don't need your services. I'm quite all right.

(Noise and laughter out on the veranda.)

MARIA LVOVNA:

Your face looks a little strained. (*To Olga Alexeyevna.*) You here? I haven't seen you for a long time.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

As if there were any pleasure in seeing my sour face!

MARIA LVOVNA:

For all you know I may be fond of sour things. How are the children?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA

(*entering from the veranda*): Just see all the company I've brought you! But don't get frightened—we've only come for a minute. Hullo, Olga Alexeyevna! Why don't the men come in? Pavel Sergeyevich and Zamyslov are out there, Varvara Mikhailovna. May I invite them in?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Certainly.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Come along, Kaleria Vasilyevna.

MARIA LVOVNA (*to Vlas*):

You've got thinner. Why is that?

VLAS:

I don't know.

SASHA (*entering*):

Shall I heat the samovar again?

All
together

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Yes. And as quickly as possible.

MARIA LVOVNA (*to Vlas*):

Who are you making faces at?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

He just—

VLAS:

That's my profession.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Always trying to be funny and never quite being it. (*To Varvara Mikhailovna*) That Pavel Sergeyevich of yours is sure to have nervous prostration one of these days.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Why do you call him mine?

(Enter Ryumin, followed by Yulia Filippovna and Kaleria. Vlas, frowning, goes back into the study and closes the door. Olga Alexeyevna draws Maria Lvovna aside left and whispers something to her, pointing to her chest.)

RYUMIN:

Forgive us for invading at such a late hour—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I'm always glad to have visitors.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

The nicest thing about living in the country is that you can dispense with ceremony. You ought to have heard them quarrelling!—him and Maria Lvovna.

RYUMIN:

I can't speak calmly about things that are so important and demand being made clear—

(Sasha brings in the samovar. Varvara Mikhailovna, who is standing at the table, quietly gives her orders as she herself arranges the tea-things. Ryumin is standing at the piano staring hard and thoughtfully at her.)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

You get too excited to be convincing. (*To Varvara Mikhailovna.*) Your husband and mine are having a go at the cognac, and I suspect they're going to get good and tight. An uncle of my husband's has suddenly turned up. He sells meat or makes vegetable oil or something else in the manufacturing line. He's got a lot of curly grey hair and is always laughing and joking—quite an amusing chap. But where's my worthy knight, Nikolai Petrovich?

ZAMYSLOV (*from out on the veranda*):

Here, 'neath your window, lovely Inezilla! ²

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Come in here. What are you talking about out there?

ZAMYSLOV (*entering*):

I'm corrupting youth. Sonya and Zimin have been trying to tell me that man's purpose in life is to commit himself daily to the solving of problems—social, moral, and the like. But I maintain that life is an art—the art of seeing with your own eyes, hearing with your own ears—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Twaddle!

ZAMYSLOV:

I made the theory up on the spur of the moment, but accept it as my firm conviction. Life is the art of finding joy and beauty in everything, even in eating and drinking. They quarrel like savages.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Kaleria Vasilyevna... Oh, stop you blabbering!

ZAMYSLOV:

Kaleria Vasilyevna! I know you are a lover of beauty, and yet you have no love for me. How is such an inconsistency to be explained?

KALERIA (*laughing*):

You're so noisy and—and dazzling.

ZAMYSLOV:

Ahem! But that's not what we were saying. We were saying that this charming young lady and I—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Enough of that! We've come—

ZAMYSLOV (*bowing to Kaleria*):

—to you—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

We've come to ask—

ZAMYSLOV (*bowing even deeper*):

—you—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

He won't let me ask. Let's go into that pretty little room of yours. I just adore it.

ZAMYSLOV:

Do let's. At least nobody will interrupt us there.

KALERIA (*laughing*):

Come along.

(They make for the middle door.)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Just wait till you see that uncle! He's too sweet for words!

ZAMYSLOV:

Sweet, did you say?

(Laughing, they disappear behind the portières.)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

She's always so cheery, and yet I know her life isn't a bed of roses. She and her husband—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*dryly*):

I really don't think that's any of our business, Olga.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Why, have I said anything I oughtn't to?

RYUMIN:

How many unhappy marriages there are these days!

SONYA (*putting her head in through the door*):

I'm going for a walk, Mummy.

MARIA LVOVNA:

But you've just come from a walk.

SONYA:

I know. But this house is full of women, and they're always such a bore!

MARIA LVOVNA (*banteringly*):

Careful what you say, young lady! Your mother's a woman too.

SONYA (*running in*):

You? really? Since when?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

What does she mean by that?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

At least you might say how-d'ye-do.

MARIA LVOVNA:

You're disgracing me, Sonya.

SONYA (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*):

Haven't I said it? Excuse me. I'll even kiss you, and with pleasure. I'm always kind and generous when it gives me pleasure—or doesn't cost anything.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Stop your nonsense and get out of here.

SONYA:

What do you think of my mother? Calling herself a woman all of a sudden! I've known her for eighteen years, but this is the first time I've ever heard that. Extraordinary!

ZIMIN (*peeping through the portières*):

Are you coming or not?

SONYA:

Meet my slave.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Why don't you come in?

SONYA:

He's not fit to be seen in polite society.

ZIMIN:

Because she's torn the sleeve of my jacket—that's the only reason.

SONYA:

The only reason! It's not enough, it seems—the lad wants

more! Well, he'll get it! I'll call for you later, Mummy, shall I? Now I can't wait to hear what Max has to say about eternal love.

ZIMIN:

You'll have a long wait!

SONYA:

We'll see, youngster! Good-bye. Is the moon still up?

ZIMIN:

I'm no youngster! In Sparta—I like that! Pushing a man who—

SONYA:

You're not a man yet. Forward, Sparta!

(For some time their voices and laughter are to be heard outside.)

RYUMIN:

A fine daughter you have, Maria Lvovna.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

I used to be like that.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I like your relationship. Come and have tea, everybody.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Yes, we're good friends—

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Friends. How is that achieved?

MARIA LVOVNA:

What?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Friendship with your children.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Very simply. Be honest with them—never hide the truth from them, never deceive them.

RYUMIN (*with a little laugh*):

Rather a risky business, that. The truth is harsh and cold and contains the subtle poison of scepticism. A child can be ruined at the very outset by showing him the fearful face of truth.

MARIA LVOVNA:

And you prefer poisoning him by degrees? To spare yourself the shock of seeing how you injure his mind?

RYUMIN (*heatedly, nervously*):

But that's not what I said. It's just that I'm against all efforts—foolish, uncalled-for efforts, it seems to me—to strip life of the veils of poetry that soften its harsh and ugly lines. Life must be adorned. And we mustn't strip it of its old garments until we have new ones ready.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Sorry, but I don't understand what you're talking about.

RYUMIN:

What if a person *wants* to be deceived. You're always talking about life. What is life? The word calls up before me the image of a huge, formless monster that's always demanding a sacrifice—a human sacrifice. Day after day it gobbles up human brain and brawn and swills human blood. (*Varvara Mikhailovna listens to him attentively, and gradually a look of consternation comes over her face. She makes a little movement, as if to stop him.*) Why, I don't know. I see no meaning in it, but I know that the longer a man lives, the more filth and vulgarity—crude, loathsome vulgarity—

he sees, and therefore the more intense grows his longing for the Beautiful and the Pure. He is unable to overcome life's contradictions or to purge life of its filth and evil. Well, then, at least let him close his eyes to all that crushes his spirit! Let him turn his face away from whatever offends him. He wants to rest, to forget. He wants to live in peace and tranquillity. (*Catching Varvara Mikhailovna's eyes upon him, he gives a start and breaks off.*)

MARIA LVOVNA (*calmly*):

Is the person you have in mind so lacking in spirit? What a pity! Is that why you think he has a right to peace and tranquillity? Not very flattering.

RYUMIN (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*):

Excuse my ... er ... vehemence. I see you are displeased.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Not with your vehemence.

PYUMIN:

With what?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*calmly and slowly*):

I remember your saying something quite different two years ago—just as vehemently, just as convincingly.

RYUMIN:

But a man changes, and so do his ideas.

MARIA LVOVNA:

They dart hither and thither like a terrified mouse, those little dark thoughts of his.

RYUMIN (*still agitated*):

They advance in a spiral, but they advance all the same. You seem to doubt my sincerity, Maria Lvovna.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Oh, not at all. I see that you are ... er ... shouting sincerely, and while hysterics don't have much weight with me, I'm sure that something has given you a great fright. That's why you want to hide. And you aren't the only one. There are lots of frightened people in this world.

RYUMIN:

There are, because people are coming to have a more keen and sensitive appreciation of the horrors of a life in which all things are strictly predetermined. The only chance thing is human existence, and that is without aim or meaning.

MARIA LVOVNA (*calmly*):

Try to elevate the chance fact of your existence to the level of social necessity, and then life will take on meaning for you.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Oh, dear, I simply cringe when people become harsh and accusing. It's as if it was me they were talking to, me they were accusing. There's so little kindness in the world! But it's time for me to be going. I like to come here, Varya—I always hear something interesting, something that ... what shall I say? ... something that makes the finer strings vibrate. But it's late, I must be going.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Don't go yet, darling. Why do you want to, all of a sudden like this? They'll send for you if you're needed.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

I suppose they will. Very well. I'll stay a little longer.

(Goes over and sits on the sofa, tucking her feet up under her. Ryumin stands at the door of the veranda, tapping nervously on the glass with his fingers.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*pensively*):

How strange our lives are! We just talk and talk without doing anything. We form countless opinions that we're much too hasty in accepting and rejecting. But we have no real desires—clear, strong desires.

RYUMIN:

Are you referring to me?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

To everybody. Our lives are dull, sham, ugly.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*running in followed by Kaleria*):

Help me, everybody!

KALERIA:

But really, this is not the time—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

She's written a new poem and promised to read it at our recital for the benefit of the Children's Home. But I want her to read it now. Do beg her to!

RYUMIN:

Why not, Kaleria Vasilyevna? I'm very fond of your poetry. I find it soothing.

MARIA LVOVNA:

I'd like to hear it, too. All this arguing makes us rude and rough. Read it, dear.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Something new, Kaleria?

KALERIA:

Yes. Prose. Very tiresome.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Read it, that's a love! Why shouldn't you? Let's go and collect the others.

(Goes out, drawing Kaleria with her.)

MARIA LVOVNA:

Where's Vlas Mikhailovich?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

In the study. He has a lot of work to do.

MARIA LVOVNA:

I'm afraid I was a little brusque with him this evening. It's a pity to see him playing the fool all the time.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Isn't it? I wish you would be nice to him. He deserves it. Lots of people have preached to him, but no one has ever shown him any affection.

MARIA LVOVNA (*smiling*):

We've all had the same experience, haven't we? That's what makes us so rude and unforgiving towards one another.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

He lived with Father who was always drunk and beat him.

MARIA LVOVNA:

I'll go in and speak to him.

(Walks to the door of the study, knocks, and goes in.)

RYUMIN (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*):

Your friendship with Maria Lvovna seems to be growing.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Yes, I like her.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*softly*):

How decided she is in her opinions! Simply downright!

RYUMIN:

She has the ruthlessness of a true believer. A cold blind ruthlessness. How anyone can like that is more than I can see.

DUDAKOV (*coming in from the hall*):

Good evening. Sorry if I've interrupted. So here's where you are, Olga! Coming home soon?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

I can come straightaway if I'm needed. Have you been out for a walk?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

What about a glass of tea, Kirill Akimovich?

DUDAKOV:

No, thanks. I don't take tea so late. Pavel Sergeyevich, I'd like to speak to you. May I call tomorrow?

RYUMIN:

Oh, yes.

DUDAKOV:

It's about the Home for Juvenile Delinquents. They're always up to something out there, damn it all! Now it seems they beat the brats! You and I got hauled over the coals for it in yesterday's paper.

RYUMIN:

The fact is, I haven't been out there lately. I have no time.

DUDAKOV:

Hm ... none of us have any time. We're always rushing

from one place to another without getting anywhere. How do you account for it? As for me, I'm completely worn out. I just took a little turn in the woods to quiet my nerves. They're all on edge.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

You are looking a bit drawn.

DUDAKOV:

Not strange. I had another little unpleasantness today. That fool of a chief of ours complained that we weren't economical—that the patients eat too much food and we prescribe too much quinine. First of all, it's none of his blasted business. Secondly, if they'd drain the lower part of the town I wouldn't need to use any quinine at all. Does he think I eat it? I loathe quinine—and impertinence.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Is it worth letting such trifles upset you, Kirill? I should think you'd be used to them by this time.

DUDAKOV:

My whole life is made up of such trifles. And what do you mean by being "used to them"? To what? To having any fool who comes along poke his nose into your business and keep you from doing what you want to do? I certainly am getting used to that! Once the chief says I must be more economical, you can be sure I will be—even to the detriment of my work. I don't have a private practice, so I can't throw over this job.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*reproachfully*):

Because you have such a large family—that's why, isn't it, Kirill? I've heard you say that before, but I hardly think this is the place to repeat it. How tactless! How unfeeling! (*She throws her shawl over her head and goes quickly towards Varvara Mikhailovna's room.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*running after her*): Olga! What are you saying?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA

(*almost sobbing*): Let me go! I've heard all that—

(The two women go into Varvara Mikhailovna's room.)

DUDAKOV:

A pretty kettle of fish! I had nothing of the sort in mind. I apologise, Pavel Sergeevich—I couldn't have foreseen such a thing. I'm ... I'm quite upset.

(Goes out quickly, meeting Kaleria, Yulia Filippovna and Zamyslov in the doorway.)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

The doctor nearly knocked us off our feet. What's wrong with him?

RYUMIN:

Nerves. (*Varvara Mikhailovna comes in.*) Has Olga Alexeyevna gone home?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Yes.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

I have no confidence in that doctor. There's something unhealthy about him. He stammers and is so absent-minded—puts his tea-spoon into his spectacle-case and stirs his tea with his lancet. He could just as easily make a mistake in a prescription and give you poison.

RYUMIN:

I have an idea he'll end up by putting a bullet through his head.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

You say that in such an offhand way!

RYUMIN:

Doctors are given to suicide.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Words touch you more than people, don't they?

RYUMIN (*starting*):

Varvara Mikhailovna!

(Kaleria sits down at the piano, Zamyslov stands beside her.)

ZAMYSLOV:

Enough light?

KALERIA:

Quite.

ZAMYSLOV:

Attention, everybody!

(Maria Lvovna and Vlas come in in lively spirits.)

VLAS:

So we're to have poetry, are we?

KALERIA (*annoyed*):

If you want to hear it, you'll have to stop making so much noise.

VLAS:

Begone, ye wanton spirits!

MARIA LVOVNA:

We won't say a word.

KALERIA:

Good. This is poetry in prose. It's to be set to music.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

A recitation to music! How nice! I love anything original. I'm like a baby—get pleasure out of such things as picture postcards, automobiles—

VLAS (*imitating her*):

—earthquakes, gramophones. influenza—

KALERIA (*loudly and witheringly*):

May I begin? (*Everyone sits down hastily. Kaleria fingers the keys softly for a minute or two.*) It's called "Edelweiss".

The summits of the Alps are eternally wrapped in a shroud of snow and of ice, and above and about them reigns a cold silence, the silence of wisdom, breathed down from proud heights.

Boundless the heavenly wastes o'er the peaks of the mountains, and countless the stars winking sad o'er the snows.

At the foot of the mountains, on the crowded plains of earth, Life, all atremble with fear, is growing apace, while Man, weary Lord of the Plain, is bowed down by a burden of suffering.

From the caverns of earth issue laughter and groans, outcries of fury, whisp'rings of love—the grim and the many-voiced music of life. But silent are the mountain peaks, unimpassioned the stars, deaf to the moanings of men.

The summits of the Alps are eternally wrapped in a shroud of snow and of ice, and above and about them reigns a cold silence, the silence of wisdom, breathed down from proud heights.

But as if to recount, as if to confide the suff'rings of earth and the travail of men, a lone flower springs up at the foot of the peaks, in the kingdom of silence. And the name of this flower is—the edelweiss.

High in the boundless wastes of the sky sails a proud and silent sun, while at night a speechless moon shines coldly down on the earth, and the stars look down in mute trepidation.

And day in and day out cold blankets of silence descend from the heights to gently embrace the lone little flower—the edelweiss.

(Pause. All are lost in thought. The rattle and whistle of the night watchman can be heard in the distance. Kaleria sits staring into space with wide-open eyes.)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*softly*):

How lovely! So sad ... so pure....

ZAMYSLOV:

You want to recite that in costume, in a fluffy white frock suggesting the edelweiss. Picture it? Deuced effective.

VLAS (*going over to the piano*):

I like it too, really I do. (*Laughing self-consciously.*)
Splendid! Marvellous! Like a drink of cold syrup on a hot day!

KALERIA:

Go away!

VLAS:

But I mean it. Don't be angry.

SASHA (*entering*):

Mr. Shalimov has come.

(A stir in the room. Varvara Mikhailovna goes towards the door but stops on catching sight of Shalimov. He is bald.)

SHALIMOV:

Have I the pleasure of—?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*softly, and after a pause*): Come in ... do. Sergei will be here in a little while....

CURTAIN

A sweep of lawn in front of the Basovs' house. It is encircled by pines, firs, and birches. The veranda is hung with linen curtains. Downstage left are two pine-trees with a round table and three chairs under them. A wide bench with a back to it stands in a clump of trees downstage right. Behind the trees is a road leading into the woods. An outdoor stage with a few benches in front of it can be seen upstage right; a path connects it with the Suslovs' house. It is evening, the sun is setting. KALERIA can be heard playing the piano. Slowly and laboriously, PUSTOBAIKA is arranging the benches in front of the stage. KROPILKIN, a gun slung over his back, stands watching him.

KROPILKIN:

Who's taken the house over there this year?

PUSTOBAIKA (*in a surly tone*):

An engineer named Suslov.

KROPILKIN:

So they're new, eh?

PUSTOBAIKA:

What's that?

KROPILKIN:

New, I say? Not the same as lived here last year?

PUSTOBAIKA (*taking out his pipe*):

The same. They're all the same.

KROPILKIN (*sighing*):

Oh, I know that. All swells.

PUSTOBAIKA:

All summer folk are the same. In the last five years I've seen more'n you can count. Like bubbles in a puddle on a rainy day—pop up and burst, pop up and burst.

(Some noisy young people with guitars and mandolins and balalaikas come out from behind the house and go down the path into the woods.)

KROPILKIN:

Hear that? Music. Are they going to play-act too?

PUSTOBAIKA:

Why not? They're not hungry.

KROPILKIN:

I've never seen their play-acting. Must be funny. Have you seen it?

PUSTOBAIKA:

I've seen everything, brother.

(From off stage right comes the hearty laugh of Dvoyetochiye.)

KROPILKIN:

What's it like?

PUSTOBAIKA:

Nothing much. They just dress themselves up and make speeches—whatever comes into their heads. Then they shout and rush about like they was doing something—like they'd gone off their chumps over something. One chap gives himself out to be honest and upright, another to be brainy, a third to be down and out. Anything you like—take your choice.

(Someone off stage left whistles to a dog and calls: "Here Spot, here Spot!" Pustobaika hammers a nail into a bench with the blunt end of a hatchet.)

KROPILKIN:

Think of that now! Hm! And do they sing?

PUSTOBAIKA:

Not much. Sometimes the engineer's wife has a go at it, but it's a measly little voice she's got.

KROPILKIN:

Here they come.

PUSTOBAIKA:

Let them.

(Dvoyetochiye enters right, near the outdoor stage. Behind him comes Suslov.)

DVOYETOSHIYE (*in genial tones*):

Who are you to laugh at me? You're bald before you're forty, while I've got a headful of hair at sixty, even if it is grey. Ha, ha!

(Pustobaika goes on fussing with the benches in a lazy, clumsy way. Kropilkin slips behind the outdoor stage.)

SUSLOV:

All the better for you. Well, go on with what you were saying.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Let's sit down. So just about this time the Germans put in an appearance. Mine is an out-of-date little factory with a lot of worthless machinery in it, while theirs is the very latest. Naturally the goods they put out were better and

cheaper than mine. I could see I was going up the flue—no competing with those Germans. So I decided to sell out. (*Falls to thinking.*)

SUSLOV:

Did you sell everything?

DVOYETOSHIY:

Everything but my house in town—a great big old place. And now there's nothing left for me to do but sit and count my money. Ho-hum! No fool like an old fool, as the saying goes. The bottom seemed to drop out of everything as soon as I sold out. I'm bored to death—don't know what to do with myself. These hands of mine—funny, but I never noticed them before. Now they keep dangling at the ends of my arms and getting in the way. (*Laughs. Pause. Varvara Mikhailovna comes out on the veranda and walks up and down lost in thought, her hands clasped behind her.*) Look, Basov's wife. A gem of a woman! If only I was ten years younger!

SUSLOV:

But you're married, aren't you?

DVOYETOSHIY:

I was. More than once. Some of my wives died, some of them left me. And I had children—two girls. Both of them died. And a boy. He drowned. I had good luck with the women—found all my wives here in Russia. It's easy to take wives away from you Russians. You're not much as husbands. Whenever I came here on a business trip I'd look for a pretty woman with a nonentity for a husband, and—well, it never took me long to bring her round, ha, ha! (*Vlas comes out on the veranda and stands watching his sister.*) But that's all a thing of the past. Nothing and nobody left.

SUSLOV:

What do you think of doing?

DVOYETOSHIY:

I don't know. Maybe you can give me some advice? I don't think much of that fish soup of yours. Nor the pork either. Who eats pork in summer?

VLAS:

What's on your mind, Varya?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Oh, nothing. I'm a pathetic creature, aren't I?

VLAS (*slipping his arm round her waist*):

I'd like to say something comforting, but I don't know what.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Leave me alone, dear.

DVOYETOSHIY:

Vlas is coming our way.

SUSLOV:

That clown?

DVOYETOSHIY:

A lively chap, but not very ambitious.

VLAS (*coming up*):

Who isn't?

DVOYETOSHIY:

A ... er ... my nephew here, ha, ha! But you don't seem to have much taste for business either.

VLAS:

If I can judge on so slight an acquaintance, the word "business" means for you squeezing the juice out of your

fellow-men, am I right? In that sense, alas! you are right: I have no taste for it.

DVOYETOSHIY:

Ha, ha! Don't let that trouble you. Plenty of time ahead. It's hard to be businesslike when you're young—your conscience hasn't hardened yet and your head is stuffed full of pink pudding instead of brains. But as soon as you grow up you'll find it very convenient to live on your neighbour's juices. Ha, ha! That's the quickest way to get fat.

VLAS:

You seem to have had extensive experience in this line. I must take your word for it.

(Bows and goes out.)

DVOYETOSHIY:

Ha, ha! Very pleased with himself for putting me in my place! Charming lad. Thinks himself a hero. That's all right, let him, if it amuses him. (*Drops his head and sits on in silence.*)

KALERIA (*coming out on the veranda*):

Still so shocked by the change you found in him?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*softly*):

Yes.

KALERIA:

What have you to look forward to now?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*pensively*):

I don't know.

(Kaleria shrugs her shoulders and comes down off the veranda, walks to left, disappearing behind the house.)

DVOYETOSHIY:

Hm. Well, so what's your advice, Pyotr? What am I to do?

SUSLOV:

That can't be decided in a hurry. We must think it over.

DVOYETOSHIY:

Think it over? Pshaw!... What did you say?

SUSLOV:

Nothing.

DVOYETOSHIY:

And you never will, I guess. Here come the writer and the lawyer. (*Shalimov and Basov emerge from the woods on the right. They nod to Suslov and Dvoyetoshiy and go over to the pines on the left, where they sit down at the table. Basov has a towel round his neck.*) Out for a walk?

BASOV:

We had a bathe.

DVOYETOSHIY:

Water cold?

BASOV:

Not very.

DVOYETOSHIY:

Think I'll follow suit. Come along, Pyotr. Maybe I'll drown and you'll get my money sooner.

SUSLOV:

I can't go yet. I want to speak to them.

DVOYETOSHIY:

Well, I'm off.

(Gets up and goes into the woods right. Suslov watches him, then, with a little laugh, goes over to Basov.)

BASOV:

Varya, ask them to bring us a bottle of beer—or rather, three. Well, how do you find your uncle?

(Varvara Mikhailovna goes inside.)

SUSLOV:

A bit stuffy.

BASOV:

Old men aren't very amusing.

SUSLOV:

He's angling for an invitation to live with me.

BASOV:

That so? And how do you feel about it?

SUSLOV:

I can't say exactly. I suppose he'll have his way.

(Sasha brings in the beer.)

BASOV:

What are you so silent about, Yakov?

SHALIMOV:

I'm a little out of sorts. What did you say was the name of that belligerent lady?

BASOV:

Maria Lvovna. You ought to have heard the battle we had at dinner today, Pyotr!

SUSLOV:

Maria Lvovna again?

SHALIMOV:

She's a ferocious fighter, I will say that for her.

(Varvara Mikhailovna comes out on the veranda again.)

SUSLOV:

She's not the woman for me.

SHALIMOV:

I'm very mild by nature, but I confess I could hardly keep myself from being insulting.

BASOV (*laughing*):

Which was more than she could.

SHALIMOV (*to Suslov*):

Put yourself in my place: here am I, a writer, a man who goes through all sorts of emotional experiences, and who, in the end, gets worn out by them. I come here to have a rest, to live in complete relaxation and collect my thoughts, and all of a sudden a lady swoops down on me and begins searching my soul: What do you believe in? What do you live for? Why don't you write about this? Why do you write about that? Your ideas on this are hazy, on that are wrong, on the other are ugly. Good God! Do your own writing, madam, if you know so well how to make everything clear and right and beautiful! Write the finest book that ever was written, but for God's sake leave me in peace!

BASOV:

A writer's fate! When people travel down the Volga, they make a point of eating sturgeon, and when they meet a writer, they show off their brains. Grin and hear it, old man.

SHALIMOV:

She shows neither brains nor tact. Does she often come to your house?

BASOV:

No. That is, pretty often. I don't encourage it. She's too opinionated for me. And too straight-laced. It's my wife that makes friends with her. She has a bad influence over my wife. (*Glances up on the veranda and sees Varvara Mikhailovna.*) Oh, you here, Varya?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

As you see.

(Zamyslov and Yulia Filippovna come quickly down the path from Suslov's house. They are laughing. Shalimov notices Basov's discomfiture and laughs to himself.)

ZAMYSLOV:

Varvara Mikhailovna! We're getting up a picnic! We're going in boats!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Hullo, darling!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Come inside.

(They go in. Suslov gets up and follows them slowly.)

ZAMYSLOV:

Is Kaleria Vasilyevna at home?

SHALIMOV (*laughing*):

You're a bit afraid of your wife, aren't you, Sergei?

BASOV (*sighing*):

Nonsense. She's an awfully good sort.

SHALIMOV (*with a little laugh*):

Why do you say that so ruefully?

BASOV

(*under his breath, with a nod in the direction of Suslov*): He's

jealous. Of my assistant. His wife—have you noticed her?—she is quite a beauty.

(Sonya and Zimin pass in the background.)

SHALIMOV:

Really? I must be more observant. Although, to tell you the truth, that Maria Lvovna has put a damp on my desire to meet any more women.

BASOV:

Oh, but she's different. She's—but you'll see. (*Pause.*) You haven't come out with anything new in a long time, Yakov. Writing something big?

SHALIMOV (*grumpily*):

If you must know, I'm not writing at all. Who can write in times like these? There's no making head or tail of what's going on. People are all so hazy and mixed up—you can't put your finger on them.

BASOV:

Write just that—that you can't make head or tail of it all. Sincerity is the main thing in a writer.

SHALIMOV:

Thanks. Sincerity, indeed. It's not a matter of sincerity. If I were really sincere, there would be just one thing for me to do: drop everything and sow cabbages, like the venerable Diocletian.³ (*From behind the house comes the doleful chant of some beggars: "A crust, good people, in the name of Christ and in memory of the dear departed."*

Pustobaika comes in and chases them away.) But one must eat, and so one must write. For whom? I don't know. A writer ought to see his reader very clearly in his mind's eye. Who is he? What is he like? Five years ago I was sure I knew who he was and what he wanted of me. But all of a sudden I lost sight of him. That's it—lost sight of him.

Are you aware of the drama in those words? They

say a new sort of reader has been born. Perhaps, but I don't know him. Who is he?

BASOV:

I don't quite follow you. What do you mean—lost sight of your reader? What about me? And all the intellectuals in the country? We're your readers, aren't we? How can you lose sight of us?

SHALIMOV (*reflectively*):

Oh, yes—the intellectuals. I'm not speaking of them. I'm speaking of that other—that new type of reader.

BASOV (*shaking his head*):

I don't understand.

SHALIMOV:

Neither do I, but I have a feeling. Whenever I walk down the street I see people of a new type. There's something special in their faces—and in their eyes. I look at them and think to myself: they won't read me, they're not interested in what I have to say. This winter I read my work at some sort of a gathering. I saw them there, too. They kept looking at me—looking at me with all their eyes—attentively, searchingly, but I could see they weren't my sort. They don't like me. They have about as much need of me as of Latin. They find me outworn—and my ideas too. Who could they be? Who do they like? What is it they want?

BASOV:

Hm, very curious. But isn't it just nerves with you? After you've been here awhile and had a good rest, you'll calm down and find your reader. The important thing is to take things calmly. That's how I see it. Let's go inside. But there's one thing I'd like to ask of you, Yakov: show off a bit ... er ... act the peacock, so to speak.

SHALIMOV (*taken aback*):

What do you mean, act the peacock?

BASOV (*mysteriously*):

...Er ... spread your tail and show off your feathers. For Varya's sake—my wife. Catch her eye ... make her sit up and take notice. That's a good friend.

SHALIMOV (*after a pause*):

In other words, I'm to act as a lightning rod, is that it? Funny fellow you are. Very well, if that's what you want.

BASOV:

Oh, don't go thinking things. She's a good wife and all that, but she seems to be brooding over something. Everybody's brooding these days. Moods are the vogue—serious talks on strange themes, etcetera. In a word, something's wrong somewhere. By the way, are you married? That is, I heard you had left your wife.

SHALIMOV:

I married again, and left again. It's hard to find a woman who is a good companion.

BASOV:

Oh yes, that's true enough. Very true indeed.

(They go into the house. The Woman in Yellow and the Young Man in a Checked Suit come out of the woods.)

WOMAN:

What? Nobody here yet? And we were told to come at six. How do you like that?

YOUNG MAN:

To be frank with you, I'm used to being the leading man—

WOMAN:

Simply the limit! But I expected as much.

YOUNG MAN:

—the leading man, and he gives me a comedy part. I consider that an affront.

WOMAN:

They keep all the best ones for themselves.

(They go off into the woods right. From the opposite side come Sonya and Zimin. In the back, Suslov is seen returning slowly to his own house.)

ZIMIN (*under his breath*):

I won't come in, Sonya. And so it's settled: tomorrow I'm leaving.

SONYA (*in the same tone*):

Settled. But do be careful, Max, I beg you to.

ZIMIN (*taking her hand*):

And you too.

SONYA:

Good-bye. I suppose it'll be three weeks before we see each other again, won't it?

ZIMIN:

Yes, darling. Good-bye. When I'm gone, don't—(*Breaks off, embarrassed.*)

SONYA:

Don't what?

ZIMIN:

Oh, nothing. Foolishness. Good-bye, Sonya.

SONYA (*holding on to his hand*):

No, finish what you began to say. When you're gone, don't what?

ZIMIN (*softly, dropping his head*):

Don't marry somebody else.

SONYA:

How dare you say such a thing, Max! Or think such a thing! It's stupid, and ... horrid! Can't you see it?

ZIMIN:

Yes, but ... well, don't be angry. Forgive me. Such thoughts pop into your head without being invited. They say a person can't control his feelings.

SONYA (*vehemently*):

That's not true! It's not, and you ought to know it. People say such things just to excuse their weakness of character, but I don't believe them. Remember, Max: I don't believe them. Now run along.

ZIMIN (*squeezing her hand*):

Very well, and I will remember, Sonya—I will. Good-bye, sweetheart.

(He goes quickly behind the house. Sonya watches him, then climbs the verandâ slowly and goes inside. Dudakov, Vlas and Maria Lvovna come out of the woods right; just behind them comes Dvoyetochive. Maria Lvovna sits down on the bench, Dvoyetochiye sits beside her and yawns.)

DUDAKOV:

How can people take things so easy when life's so hard?

VLAS:

Can't say, doctor. To continue: my father was a cook, and a person with a vivid imagination. He loved me cruelly and dragged me with him wherever he went, like his pipe. Several times I escaped and ran back to my mother, but each time he turned up at the laundry, knocked down anyone who got in his way, and took me in tow again. Once when he was working for the bishop he got the fatal

idea of giving me an education. That's how I found myself in a seminary, but a few months later he went to work for an engineer, and I was sent to a technical school. In a year's time I was studying in an agricultural college because father went to work for the Chairman of the Rural Land Administration. An art school and a commercial college are among the other educational institutions that had the honour of finding me within their walls. In a word, by the time I was seventeen I had developed such an aversion to study that I couldn't make myself learn anything, not even to smoke or play cards.... Why are you looking at me like that, Maria Lvovna?

MARIA LVOVNA (*pensively*):

A very depressing story.

VLAS:

Depressing? But it's all a thing of the past.

WOMAN WITH A TIED-UP FACE:

Has anyone seen our Zhenya? Has he come this way? A little boy in a straw hat. Fair-haired—

. MARIA LVOVNA:

We haven't seen him.

WOMAN:

The little scamp! He's the Rozovs' boy. Are you sure you haven't seen him—a lively little fellow with—

VLAS:

Quite sure, nanny.

(The woman goes off mumbling.)

DVOYETOCHIYE:

Do you know, Vlas, I rather ... er....

VLAS:

What?

DVOYETOSHIYEV:

Like you.

VLAS:

Not really!

DVOYETOSHIYEV:

Yes, really!

VLAS:

That does you credit.

(Dvoyetoshiyev laughs.)

DUDAKOV:

You're going to have a hard time, Vlas.

VLAS:

When?

DUDAKOV:

Always.

DVOYETOSHIYEV:

Of course he is, because he's straight, and people will amuse themselves by trying to put crooks in him.

VLAS:

That remains to be seen. But let's go in and have tea, shall we? It must be ready by this time.

DUDAKOV:

An excellent idea.

DVOYETOSHIYEV:

I wouldn't mind, but—the hostess?

VLAS:

The hostess will be glad to have you. Come along.

(Vlas runs into the house, the others following him leisurely.)

DVOYETOSHIY:

A fine chap.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Yes, but he's never himself.

DVOYETOSHIY:

That's all right. That'll pass. He's honest to the very core. Most people wear their honesty on the outside, like a necktie, and they go about shouting: "I'm honest, I'm honest, I'm honest!" But when a girl keeps saying over and over: "I'm still a maid, I'm still a maid," you can be sure she's been plucked. Ha, ha! Begging your pardon, Maria Lvovna.

MARIA LVOVNA (*smiling*):

What's to be expected of the likes of you?

(They go up on the veranda and into the house. Suslov meets them as he comes out.)

DVOYETOSHIY:

Where are you going, Pyotr?

SUSLOV:

Oh, I just came out for a smoke.

(He saunters off in the direction of his own house. The Woman with a Tied-up Face comes running up the path in his direction. The Man in a Top Hat comes out of the woods, stops, shrugs his shoulders.)

WOMAN:

I'm looking for a little boy. You haven't seen him, have you? Zhenya's his name. In a jacket.

SUSLOV (*under his breath*):

No, I haven't. Go away.

(The Woman runs off.)

MAN IN A TOP HAT (*bowing graciously*):

I beg your pardon, sir, but is it me you're looking for?

SUSLOV (*in surprise*):

I'm not looking for anybody. That woman was looking for a child.

MAN IN A TOP HAT:

I was invited, you see, to come and play the leading part in a play—

SUSLOV (*walking away*):

That doesn't concern me.

MAN IN A TOP HAT (*offended*):

But who *does* it concern? Where's the stage manager? For two hours I've been wandering about waiting. (*Noticing that Suslov has gone.*) Walked off, the boor!

(Goes over to the summer stage and disappears behind it. Olga Alexeyevna comes down the path from the Suslovs.)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Good evening, Pyotr Ivanovich.

SUSLOV:

Good evening. Very warm, I find it.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Do you? I don't.

SUSLOV (*lighting up*):

Suffocating. A pack of lunatics seem to have been set loose on the premises. They go about looking for little boys and stage managers.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

I know. You must have had a hard day. Your hands are shaking.

SUSLOV

(*walking back with her to the Basovs' house*): That's because I drank too much and slept too little last night.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

What makes you drink?

SUSLOV:

A man's got to get some joy out of life.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Have you seen my husband?

SUSLOV:

He's having tea at the Basovs'.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*coming out on the veranda*): Coming in, Olga?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

I was just taking a little walk.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Why did you leave us, Pyotr Ivanovich?

SUSLOV (*with a little laugh*):

I wanted to get down to earth. I'm sick of listening to the highfalutin speeches of Maria Lvovna and that man of letters.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Are you? I don't mind listening.

SUSLOV (*with a shrug of his shoulders*):

Very glad. Good-bye for the present. (*Goes off to his house.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*under her breath*):

What do you suppose makes him like that?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I don't know and don't care. Shall we go inside?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

No, let's sit here awhile. They can get on without you.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Very nicely. You're upset about something again, aren't you?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

How can I help being, Varya? He didn't stay home five minutes after coming down from town this evening. How would you like it?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

He's here.

(*They walk slowly over to a clump of firs.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*irritably*):

He avoids me and the children. Oh, I know he works hard and needs a rest, but so do I. If you ever knew how tired I am! I can't work properly—I do everything wrong, and that upsets me more than ever. He ought to realise I've sacrificed my youth and my strength for him.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*gently*):

Poor Olga! You love to complain, don't you?

(*A murmur of voices raised in argument comes from the house. The sound increases.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

I don't know, perhaps I do. I want to tell him that I think I ought to go away—take the children and go away.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Quite right. A brief separation would do both of you good. I'll lend you the money.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

I owe you so much as it is!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Oh, it's nothing. Don't let it trouble you. Let's sit down.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

I hate myself for not being able to get on without you. Hate myself! Do you think it's easy for me to accept your money—your husband's money? A person loses all his self-respect when he finds he can't live independently—always has to be helped and supported. Sometimes I even hate you for it—for being so tranquil; inwardly disapproving, but never coming out with it, never really living and feeling.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

But, darling, I don't know how to do anything but keep quiet. I won't allow myself to complain.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

In the bottom of their hearts those who give must despise those who take. I wish I were the one who did the giving.

(Ryumin walks briskly up to the house.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

So that you could despise those who took?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Yes. I don't like all these people. I don't like Maria

Lvovna. Why is she always criticising others? And I don't like Ryumin. He spends all his time philosophising and hasn't the courage to do anything at all. And I don't like your husband. He's soft as dough, and he's afraid of you. Do you approve of that? And your brother. He's in love with that woman preacher, that termagant of a Maria Lvovna.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*surprised and reproachful*): Olga! What are you saying? That really isn't nice.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Maybe it isn't, but it's the truth. And that conceited Kaleria. She keeps raving on about beauty, but what she really wants is a husband.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*coldly and severely*): You oughtn't to let such feelings run away with you, Olga. They'll lead you into a bog.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA

(*softly, but vengefully*): I don't care. I don't care where they lead me so long as it's out of this insufferable boredom! I want to get a taste of life! I have as much right as anybody else. I'm not so stupid as not to see what's going on. I can see that you, too—oh, I understand. Yours is an easy life. Your husband is rich—he's none too scrupulous in business matters. Everybody says that about him, and you ought to know it. And you, too—you've done something so as not to have children—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*gets up slowly and stands looking at Olga Alexeyevna in astonishment*): What are you implying?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*uneasily*):

Nothing. I just meant to say that ... my husband says lots of women don't want to have children.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I don't know what you mean, but you seem to be accusing me of something loathsome, I don't want to know what it is.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Don't speak like that, Varya: don't look at me like that. After all, it's the truth. They do say nasty things about your husband.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*shudders and speaks pensively*): You and I have been like sisters, Olga. If I didn't know how unhappy you were, if I didn't remember that once you and I dreamed of quite a different way of life....

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*sincerely*):

Forgive me. Please forgive me. I'm hateful.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Our lives were to be full and beautiful. And together we wept over our lost dreams. You've hurt me, Olga. Was that what you wanted to do? Hurt me awfully.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Don't say that, Varya!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I'm going away. (*Olga Alexeyevna gets up.*) No, don't come with me. I don't want you to.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

For good, Varya? For good?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Stay here. I can't understand why you had to hurt me so.

(*Dvoyetochiye runs down the steps of the veranda and takes Varvara Mikhailovna's arm.*)

DVOYETOSHIYE (*laughing*):

I've run away, young lady! That handsome philosopher of yours, Mr. Ryumin, has got me in a dither. I don't know all the learned words, and so I can't answer back. He drowned me in the flood of his eloquence like a cockroach in treacle. And so I took to my heels. To hell with him! I much prefer talking to you. This old codger's quite gone on you, my dear. But why that abstracted look? (*Catches sight of Olga Alexeyevna and gives a dissatisfied grunt.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*meekly*):

Shall I go away, Varya?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*firmly*):

Yes. (*Olga Alexeyevna goes off quickly. Varvara Mikhailovna watches her go, then turns to Dvoyetoshiye.*) What were you saying? Forgive me, I—

DVOYETOSHIYE (*amiably*):

You feel like a fish out of water here, don't you? This is no place for you, my dear. (*Laughs.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*with a withering look*):

Who has given you a right to use that tone with me, Semyon Semyonovich?

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Now, now, none of that! It's my age and my experience that's given me the right.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I beg your pardon, but it seems to me they don't give anyone the right to intrude in—

DVOYETOSHIYE (*good-naturedly*):

I'm not really intruding. It's just that I can see you're not their sort, and I'm not their sort either, and I had a

longing to speak to you. But I guess I made a blunder, in which case I beg your pardon.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*laughing*):

And I beg yours. I was rather rude, I'm afraid, but I'm not used to being spoken to like that.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

I can see you're not used to it. How are you to get used to it in a place like this? Let's go for a walk, shall we? Do an old man the favour.

(Semyonov rides swiftly up on a cycle and nearly falls at Dvoyetoshiye's feet.)

DVOYETOSHIYE (*startled*):

Where are you going, young man? What's this?

SEMYONOV (*breathing hard*):

I beg your pardon. Is everything over?

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Is what over? Are you mad?

SEMYONOV:

Such a pity! A tyre blew. I had two rehearsals today.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

What do I care?

SEMYONOV:

Why, aren't you taking part? I beg your pardon. I thought you were in a wig and make-up.

DVOYETOSHIYE (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*):

What's he talking about?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*to Semyonov*):

Have you come for the rehearsal?

SEMYONOV:

Yes, and on the way—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

It hasn't begun yet.

SEMYONOV (*joyfully*):

Oh, thank you. I was so put out! I'm always very punctual.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

What were you put out about?

SEMYONOV (*graciously*):

That is, I would have been put out if I had been late. I beg your pardon. (*Goes to the summer stage, bowing.*)

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Queer sort of insect. Nearly ran us down—how do you like that! Let's get away from here, Varvara Mikhailovna, before some other conundrum bumps into us.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*disconcerted*):

Very well. I'll get a scarf. Just a minute.

(*Goes into the house. Semyonov comes up to Dvoyetoshiye.*)

SEMYONOV:

Some others are riding up—two girls and a cadet.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Think of that, now! Very glad to hear it.

SEMYONOV:

They'll be here in a minute. That cadet—do you know who he is? He's the brother of the girl who shot herself.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Think of that now!

SEMYONOV:

Very sensational, wasn't it? A kid like that to go and shoot herself!

DVOYETOSHIY:

Very sensational indeed.

SEMYONOV:

I really did think you were in make-up. All that hair. And your face, too.

DVOYETOSHIY:

Thanks. Very flattering.

SEMYONOV:

Oh, I didn't mean to be flattering, really I didn't!

DVOYETOSHIY:

I'm sure you didn't. Only I don't see where the flattery comes in.

SEMYONOV:

You don't? Why, a person's always better-looking when he's made up. You don't happen to be the settings artist, do you?

(Suslov comes out of the woods. In the background can be seen the Woman in Yellow and the Young Man in a Checked Suit.)

DVOYETOSHIY:

No, I happen to be the uncle of that gentleman.

WOMAN IN YELLOW:

Mr. Sazanov!

SEMYONOV:

It's me she's calling. Strange: I've got a very ordinary name, but nobody ever remembers it. Good-bye.

(Goes towards the Woman, bowing quickly.)

SUSLOV (*coming up*):

Have you seen my wife? (*Dvoyetochiye shakes his head and gives a sigh of relief.*) The actors seem to be collecting.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

That young bur fastened himself on me. Called me a settings artist or something of the sort, the bandy-legged amoeba! There they are, quarrelling again!

(Out of the house come Kaleria, Shalimov, Ryumin, and Varvara Mikhailovna. Dvoyetochiye goes over to them and listens attentively. Suslov sits down on a bench and watches them with a sullen look on his face.)

SHALIMOV (*exhausted*):

I'd like to flee to the North Pole to escape her hot temper.

RYUMIN:

What gets me is that she's so despotic! It's criminal to be so intolerant. Why do people like her assume that everybody ought to think as they do?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*giving all of them a searching look*): Prove to them that there is something greater and more beautiful than the things they believe in.

KALERIA:

What do you see great or beautiful in dreams of full bellies for all?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*moved*):

I don't know. But I don't find anything more appealing. (*Shalimov is interested.*) I can't express myself, but I feel in my heart that we ought to instil in people a sense of their human worth—in all people, without exception. Then we would stop insulting each other. We don't respect one

another's feelings, and that's so hurtful, so regrettable.

KALERIA:

But good God! It isn't Maria Lvovna who is to teach us that!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Why are you all so dead set against her?

RYUMIN:

It's her own fault. She gets on people's nerves. Whenever someone tries to explain the meaning of life to me I feel as if I were caught in a vice and being squeezed out of shape.

KALERIA:

It's impossible to live with such people!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

And is it possible to live with people who do nothing but complain, Kaleria? Let's be honest: is it possible to live with people who do nothing but talk about themselves and fill the air with their complaints and yet do nothing to improve life? What do we do, you and I?

RYUMIN:

And she? Maria Lvovna? All she does is stir up bad feelings.

KALERIA:

And dig up old mottoes that are better forgotten. The living cannot be guided by dead precepts.

(The amateur players gather about the summer stage. Pustobaika is up on the stage arranging chairs.)

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Don't take it so to heart, Varvara Mikhailovna. Let's drop the subject and go for a walk. You promised to.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Yes, and I will. It's so awful not to be able to put one's thoughts and feelings into words! I'm a sort of intellectual mute.

SHALIMOV:

But you're not, Varvara Mikhailovna. May I join you?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

If you wish.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Let's go to the summer-house down by the river. What are you so wrought up about, my dear?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I feel that there's been some sad misunderstanding—

(They go off into the woods. Suslov watches them go, then gives a little laugh).

RYUMIN (*watching them*):

She certainly has perked up since that Shalimov arrived. The way she talks! And what is he, after all? She can't help seeing that he's written himself out. When he expresses his opinions so confidently he's just lying to himself and deceiving others.

KALERIA:

She knows this. I saw her crying like a disappointed child after she had talked with him last night. Before he came she was sure he was strong and brave, and she expected him to bring novelty and interest into her barren life.

(Zamyslov and Yulia Filippovna come out from behind the house. He whispers something that makes her laugh. Suslov sees them.)

RYUMIN:

Let's go in. Perhaps you'll play something for us? I'm in the mood for music.

KALERIA:

Just as you like. Yes, it's very sad when everything about you is so—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Look! The players have come! The rehearsal was called for six, and now it's—?

ZAMYSLOV:

Half past seven. You used to be the only one who came late. Now everybody does. That's your influence.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Are you being impudent?

ZAMYSLOV:

I'm being flattering. But I've got to run in and see the chief a moment. Will you excuse me?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Don't be long!

(Zamyslov goes into the house. Yulia Filippovna hums to herself as she strolls over to the clump of trees. She catches sight of her husband.)

SUSLOV:

Where have you been?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Down there. And out there.

(The Woman in Yellow, the Young Man, Semyonov, the cadet and the two girls are standing near the stage. Pustobaika is putting a table in place with a great deal of noise. Laughter,

exclamations of: "Listen, everybody!" "Where's the regisseur?" "Mr. Stepanov!" "He's here somewhere, I saw him." "We'll miss the train back to town!" "I beg your pardon, but my name's not Stepanov. It's Semyonov."

SUSLOV:

With him all the time? With that ... that ... And so openly. Think what you're doing, Yulia! Everybody's laughing at me.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

They are? How horrid.

SUSLOV:

We've got to have it out, you and I. I can't allow you to—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

I certainly don't want to be the wife of a man everybody laughs at.

SUSLOV:

Be careful, Yulia! I'm capable of—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

— being a boor. I know that.

SUSLOV:

How dare you say such a thing, you slut!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA

(*calmly, and in lowered tones*): We'll finish this little scene at home. People are coming. Go away. If you could see your face!

(Gives a little shudder of disgust. Suslov takes a step towards her, then backs away quickly and hurries off down the path into the woods, muttering through his teeth as he goes.)

SUSLOV:

Some day I'll shoot you!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*calling after him*):

Why not today? (*Singing.*) "The weary day draws to a close ..."⁴ (*Her voice quivers.*) "... recedes in crimson waves...."

(She stares into space with wide-open eyes for a moment, then slowly drops her head. Maria Lvovna comes out of the house in a state of excitement. Behind her come Dudakov and Basov with fishing-rods in their hands.)

BASOV (*untangling his line*):

You want to be gentler, Maria Lvovna. More amiable. We're all human beings like yourself. Damn it all! Who could have got this in such a tangle?

MARIA LVOVNA:

But you don't understand!

DUDAKOV:

Can't you see he's tired?

BASOV:

You aren't right. According to you, once a man's a writer, he ought to be one of the minor deities. Not every writer has such aspirations.

MARIA LVOVNA:

We've got to demand more and more of life and people.

BASOV:

I understand that. But within the limits of the possible. Everything develops gradually. Evolution! That's a thing we must never forget.

MARIA LVOVNA:

I don't ask for the impossible. But we live in a country where the only person who can voice the truth, the only one who can judge impartially of the vices and virtues of

our people and carry on a struggle to improve their condition, is the writer. He alone can do this, and this alone is what he ought to do.

BASOV:

True enough, but—

MARIA LVOVNA (*coming down the steps*):

I can't see that your friend is doing this. What are his aims? What are his ideals? What does he hate? What does he love? What does he call right and wrong? Is he friend or foe? I don't know.

(Goes off quickly, disappearing behind the house.)

BASOV (*still untangling his line*):

I respect you for your ... er ... ebullition, Maria Lvovna, but—gone? Why in the world do you suppose she gets all that steam up? Every schoolboy knows that a writer's supposed to be honest and ... well ... work for the good of the people and all that; and a soldier's supposed to be brave; and a lawyer's supposed to be clever. But this incorrigible woman insists on hammering you over the head with her platitudes. Well, Doc, let's go and see how the perch are biting. Who the hell could have got my line in such a state?

DUDAKOV:

Hm. She says a lot of things that set you to thinking. But then she has an easy life. She has her own practice and doesn't need many patients.

BASOV:

That Yakov's a rascal. Did you see how adroitly he slipped out of the corner she pushed him into? (*Laughs.*) He talks very prettily when he's in good form. Yes, he talks prettily, but after the death of his first wife, with whom, by the way, he only lived six months before he threw her over—

DUDAKOV:

One doesn't say that in polite society. One says that he and his wife parted.

BASOV:

Let's say they parted. But now that she's dead he's put in a claim to her little estate. Not bad, eh?

DUDAKOV:

Tck, tck, tck! Very bad indeed. Going a little too far, I should say.

BASOV:

He doesn't seem to think so. Well, let's go down to the river.

DUDAKOV:

Know what I've been thinking?

BASOV:

No. What?

DUDAKOV (*slowly and thoughtfully*):

Aren't you surprised—that is, don't you find it strange that we haven't come to hate each other?

BASOV (*stopping*):

Wha-at? Are you joking?

DUDAKOV:

Not at all. After all, we're a worthless lot, don't you think so?

BASOV (*walking up and down*):

No, I don't. I take a healthy view of life. I'm a normal person on the whole, if you don't mind my saying so.

DUDAKOV:

Don't try to laugh it off.

BASOV:

Me? Listen, Doc, I'm afraid you're a little ... ahem! In a word, you're in need of your own professional services. Are you sure you won't push me into the river when we get there?

DUDAKOV

(gravely, with a shrug of his shoulders):

Why should I?

BASOV *(walking away):*

How do I know? You're in a very odd mood.

DUDAKOV *(glumly):*

It's hard to talk seriously with you.

BASOV:

Don't try. Your idea of serious talk is a very queer one. Let's avoid it.

(Basov and Dudakov go out. Sonya and Vlas come in right. Zamyslov comes out of the house and runs over to the stage, where he is greeted noisily. The players crowd round him as he tries to explain something to them.)

SONYA:

I don't believe you're really a poet.

VLAS:

Too bad. I've written some very good things, as, for instance:

*Cognac and caviar, alas!
Are dainties of the upper class.
And so poor Vlas must let them pass
Cognac and caviar. Alas!*

SONYA (*laughing*):

Why do you waste your time on such nonsense? Why don't you take yourself more seriously?

VLAS (*softly and mysteriously*):

Ah, my dear Sonya, I've tried that, too, I even have poetry to prove it (*sings through his nose*):

*Too great to stoop to little things,
Too little to attempt the great—*

SONYA (*earnestly*):

What makes you like that? You don't want to be ridiculous, I'm sure. What *do* you want?

VLAS (*brightly*):

To be happy!

SONYA:

And what are you doing about it?

VLAS (*crumpling*):

Nothing. Not the least little thing.

MARIA LVOVNA (*from the woods*):

Sonya!

SONYA:

Here I am! What is it?

MARIA LVOVNA:

Some friends have come to see you.

SONYA:

I'll be along! (*Maria Lvovna appears on the path leading out of the woods.*) Here, take over this clown. He talks nothing but nonsense and needs a good spanking for it. (*Runs off.*)

VLAS (*meekly*):

Well, begin. Your daughter spanked me all the way from the station, but I'm still alive.

MARIA LVOVNA (*gently*):

Don't talk like that. You only lower yourself in your own and everyone else's estimation. You oughtn't to.

VLAS (*avoiding her eyes*):

You say I oughtn't to, but everybody's so damned serious. Why don't they ever laugh? (*Suddenly speaking simply, sincerely, vehemently.*) I'm fed up with it all, Maria Lvovna. I have no love or respect for any of these people. They're as small and insignificant as mosquitoes. I can't talk seriously to them. They make me want to assume a pose, and do it more openly than they do. My head is stuffed full of all sorts of trash. I want to shout and brawl and complain. Damn it all, I'll start drinking soon if something doesn't happen! I can't help doing as they do when I'm with them, and that's why I've become such a monstrosity. I'm poisoned by their vulgarity. There they are—hear them? They're coming this way. Sometimes I can't bear the sight of them. Come away. I want terribly to talk to you.

MARIA LVOVNA (*taking his arm*):

If you only knew how glad I am to see you like this!

VLAS:

Sometimes it is all I can do to keep myself from insulting them to their faces.

(They go into the woods. Shalimov, Yulia Filippovna and Varvara Mikhailovna come on right.)

SHALIMOV:

Serious talk again? Spare me! I've had all the philosophy I can stand. Let me vegetate awhile, at least until my nerves

are in order. All I want is to take walks and flirt with the ladies.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Doesn't flirting with the ladies upset your nerves? Strange. Why don't you flirt with me?

SHALIMOV:

I shall be only too glad to take advantage of your gracious consent.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

I haven't given my consent. I've only asked you a question.

SHALIMOV:

Allow me to accept the question as a sort of consent.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Enough of this. Answer my question, and answer it truly.

SHALIMOV:

I admit the possibility of being friends with a woman, but not for long. Nature will have her way.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

In other words, you consider friendship as merely a preface to love?

SHALIMOV:

I take love very seriously. When I love a woman, I wish to elevate her, to shower upon her the flowering of my thoughts and feelings.

ZAMYSLOV (*from the stage*):

Yulia Filippovna! Come here!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Coming! Good-bye for the present, Monsieur horticulturist! See that your orchids are put in order!
(*Goes over to the stage.*)

SHALIMOV:

Oh, that I shall, and as soon as possible! What a gay and attractive little piece she is! Why that strange look, Varvara Mikhailovna?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

That moustache suits you perfectly.

SHALIMOV (*smiling*):

Does it? Thank you. You seem to be shocked by my tone. You're very strict. But you'll admit it would be difficult to adopt any other tone with her.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I'm afraid nothing will shock me any more.

SHALIMOV:

I see. You didn't expect to find me like this, did you? But one can't go around shouting out his ideas like that hysterical Ryumin. Oh, I beg your pardon—it seems he's your friend.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*shaking her head*):

I have no friends.

SHALIMOV:

I set too high a value on my inner world to expose it to the first person who comes along. The followers of Pythagoras revealed their secrets only to the chosen.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

And now your moustache seems superfluous.

SHALIMOV:

Drat this moustache! You know the saying: When among wolves, howl like a wolf. A very wise saying, especially for one who has drunk the cup of loneliness to the dregs. You, it seems, have not yet had your fill, and so it is hard for you to understand one who—but I'm afraid I'm keeping you.

(Bows and goes over to the benches where a few onlookers are watching Zamyslov who, with a book in his hand, is stealing silently across the stage, showing Semyonov how a certain scene should be acted. Basov comes towards the house with his fishing-rods.)

BASOV:

Varya! What fishing! Even the doctor, bungler that he is, got a bite straight off! How is this for a perch, eh? The uncle caught three. (*Glances about.*) Listen, as I was coming up the path I saw Vlas down on his knees to Maria Lvovna! Near the summer-house. Think of that! Kissing her hands! You'll have to speak to him, dear. After all, he's scarcely more than a boy. She's old enough to be his mother.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*softly*):

Sergei, promise not to mention this—not to a soul! You don't understand. You see it in the wrong way. I'm afraid you'll tell everybody and that will be dreadful.

BASOV:

What are you so upset about? If I'm not to mention it, I won't, that's all. But isn't it ridiculous? That Maria Lvovna—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Promise me on your word of honour to forget all about it. Promise!

BASOV:

I promise. To hell with them. But explain it if you can.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I can't. But I know it isn't what you think it is. It's not a flirtation.

BASOV:

Humph! Not a flirtation? Tck, tck! Then what is it, Varya? Very well, I'll not say a word, have no fear. I'm off to catch more perch—I hear nothing, see nothing, know nothing. Oh, yes, by the way—Yakov turns out to be rather a beast.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*alarmed*):

Why, what's happened, Sergei? Something new?

BASOV:

You're terribly nervous, Varya. This is quite a different story.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*softly, recoiling*):

I don't want to hear it. Really I don't, Sergei.

BASOV (*quickly, in surprise*):

But it's nothing in particular, you silly puss! What's the matter with you? It's just that he's trying to get his late wife's estate—take it away from her sister.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*with pain and repulsion*):

Don't! Please don't! Can't you understand? I don't want to hear such things, Sergei!

BASOV (*offended*):

You ought to do something about those nerves of yours,

Varya. You behave very strangely—almost insultingly, if you don't mind my saying it.

(He walks away quickly. Varvara Mikhailovna goes slowly over to the veranda. Noise and laughter from the summer stage.)

ZAMYSLOV:

Watchman! Where's the lantern?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Mr. Somov! Have you got my part?

SEMYONOV:

Semyonov, if you don't mind.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

I don't.

ZAMYSLOV:

Attention, everybody! We're about to begin!

CURTAIN

ACT III

A clearing in the woods. Under the trees in the background a carpet has been spread and bottles and food placed on it. Around the carpet BASOV, DVOYETOSHIYE, SHALIMOV, SUSLOV and ZAMYSLOV are sitting. To the right of them and at some distance stands a big samovar, near which SASHA is washing dishes and PUSTOBAIKA is stretched out, smoking his pipe. On the ground beside him are a pair of oars, a basket, and a tin pail. Downstage left is a haystack and a stump. KALERIA, VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA and YULIA FILIPPOVNA are sitting in the hay. Basov is recounting something in a low voice and the men are listening attentively. From time to time can be heard the voice of SONYA, the strumming of a balalaika and guitar coming from offstage right. The day is drawing to a close.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

A very dull picnic.

KALERIA:

As dull as our lives.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

The men seem to be enjoying themselves.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Probably telling dirty stories after getting nice and mellow.

(Pause. Sonya: "Not like that—slower." The guitar strums. Dvoyetochiye laughs.)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

I drank quite a lot myself, but it hasn't cheered me any. On the contrary, a glass of strong wine always sobers me and makes me unhappy. Makes me feel like doing something wildly reckless.

KALERIA (*pensively*):

Everything's a blur and a tangle, and I'm afraid.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Of what?

KALERIA:

People. They're not to be depended upon—not to be trusted.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

That's true. They're not. I understand you.

(Basov, with an Armenian accent: "But why, pet? Couldn't be better!" A burst of laughter from the men.)

KALERIA:

No, you don't understand me and I don't understand you, and nobody understands anybody else, or cares to. People just drift about aimlessly, like ice floes in a cold northern sea, bumping into each other—

(Dvoyetochiye gets up and goes off right.)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*singing softly*):

*The weary day draws to a close
Recedes in crimson waves...*

(When Varvara Mikhailovna begins to speak, Yulia Filippovna stops singing and looks at her intently.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Life is a market-place where everyone is cheating, trying to get as much and give as little as possible.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

*The vault of heaven darkens,
Soft the shadows steal....*

KALERIA:

What ought people to do to make themselves less tiresome?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

They ought to be more honest and to have more courage.

KALERIA:

They ought to be more definite, Varya. At least their relationships ought to be more definite.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Oh, stop philosophising! It's not the least bit amusing. Let's sing.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I liked that duet you sang the other day, Yulia Filippovna.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

It was nice, wasn't it? Very sweet and pure. I love all that is sweet and pure. Don't you believe me? I really do: sweet pure sights, sweet pure sounds.... (*Laughs.*)

KALERIA:

Indignation is gathering inside me like a big grey cloud in autumn. It's choking me to death, Varya. I don't love anybody, and don't want to. And I'll die an absurd old maid.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Don't say such things, dear. It's so dreary—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Marriage is also a doubtful blessing. If I were you I'd marry Ryumin. He's got a dour disposition, but—(*Sonya: "Wait! Now you can begin. No, the mandolin first." The mandolin and the guitar play a duet.*)

KALERIA:

He's made of rubber.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

The words of a sad song I used to know keep coming into my head for some reason. The laundresses who worked for my mother used to sing it. I was just a little girl then—studied at the gymnasium. I remember coming home and finding the laundry full of suffocating steam and seeing the half-naked women bobbing up and down indistinctly and singing in soft, tired voices:

*Pity me, o mother dear,
Weep to see my misery.
Never a glimpse of loving face,
Nothing but endless drudgery....*⁵

It used to make me cry. (Basov: "Sasha, let's have some more beer—and port.") But they were happy days. The women loved me. In the evenings, when work was over, they'd gather for tea round a big well-scrubbed table. They used to let me sit with them.

KALERIA:

What dull things you say, Varya. You and Maria Lvovna.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

It really is awful the way we live now.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*thoughtfully*):

Yes, it is. And we don't know what to do about it. My mother worked hard all her life, yet how kind she was, and how cheerful! Everybody loved her. She saw to it that I got an education. I think the day I finished the gymnasium was the happiest in her life. By that time she couldn't walk at all—she was crippled with rheumatism. She died very quietly. "Don't cry, Varya," she said to me. "It's time for me to go. I've lived my life and done my work. It's time." There was more point to her life than

there is to mine. I always feel out of place. It's as if I were in a strange country, among strange people. I don't understand this sort of life—the life of the intelligentsia. It's as shaky and temporary as the stalls put up at a fair. Or like the chunks of ice that float on top of the river: they're hard and they have a shine, but there's a lot of filth frozen into them—a lot that is ugly and shameful. Whenever I read a bold honest book it seems to me that the truth must surely send out warm rays to melt the ice and release the filth frozen into it, so that the waters of the river can wash it all away.

KALERIA (*impatiently*):

Why don't you leave your husband? He's a vulgar beast, not nearly good enough for you.

(Varvara Mikhailovna looks at Kaleria in astonishment.)

KALERIA (*insistently*):

You ought to leave him. Go away and study, or find a lover, or anything else you like, but leave him by all means!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*getting up in disgust*):

How very crude, Kaleria!

KALERIA:

There's no reason why you shouldn't. Dirt doesn't frighten you. You like laundries and things like that. You could live anywhere.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

The things you say about your brother are simply charming!

KALERIA (*calmly*):

If you want me to I can say things quite as charming about your husband.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*laughing*):

Do. I don't mind. I often tell him charming things myself, and he pays me back in kind. Quite recently he called me a slut.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

What did you say to that?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Nothing. I'm not quite sure what a slut is, but perhaps he has grounds. I'm inquisitive—keenly, morbidly inquisitive about men. (*Varvara Mikhailovna walks away a few paces.*) My great misfortune is that I have a pretty face. When I was only in the sixth form the men teachers used to look at me in a way that made me blush and feel ashamed, and they liked it, and would smile and smack their lips, like gluttons at a feast.

KALERIA (*shuddering*):

Ugh, how loathsome!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Isn't it? After that my married friends instructed me. But the person I am most indebted to is my husband. He's the one who really polluted my mind. He's the one who made me inquisitive about men. (*Laughs. Shalimov gets up and comes slowly over to join the women.*) And in return, I pollute his life. There's a saying that goes: Take a handful, give an armful.

SHALIMOV (*coming up*):

And a very good saying it is! The man who invented it must have been very kind and generous. Wouldn't you like to take a stroll down to the river, Varvara Mikhailovna?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I would, rather.

SHALIMOV:

May I offer you my arm?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

No, thank you.

SHALIMOV:

What makes you look so mournful? You're not the least like your brother. He's a jolly fellow—quite amusing.

(They go out right.)

KALERIA:

There's not a person among us who is happy. Take you, for instance—you're always very lively, but underneath—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Do you like that man? I feel there's something underhand about him. He's as cold and slimy as a frog. Let's go down to the river too.

KALERIA (*getting up*):

Let's.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

I think he's interested in her. She really does seem to be a stranger among us. She looks at everybody so strangely—so ... searchingly. What is it she's looking for? I like her, but I'm afraid of her. She's very upright and wholesome.

(They go out. From the right come loud cries and laughter: "A boat! Hurry! Where are the oars? Bring the oars!")

Pustobaika gets up very deliberately, puts the oars over his shoulder and is about to go out when Zamyslov snatches them from him. Suslov and Basov run off in the direction of the voices.)

ZAMYSLOV:

Stir your stumps, you lazy devil! Hear those cries?

Something may have happened, and you move like a snail! (*Runs off.*)

PUSTOBAIKA (*follows him out, muttering*):

That's not the way they'd shout if anything had happened. Thinks himself a hero because he raises a cloud of dust.

(For a few seconds the stage is empty. Cries are heard: "Don't throw stones! Hold it! Catch it on the oar!" Maria Lvovna and Vlas come on left. Both of them are greatly disturbed.)

MARIA LVOVNA (*in lowered tones*):

Leave me alone. I don't want to listen to such a thing. Don't dare repeat it! Have I given you any reason to think you could?

VLAS:

I will say it! I will!

MARIA LVOVNA

(*holding out both arms as if to push him away*): Have you lost all respect for me?

VLAS:

I love you—love you, I say! I love the way you think and feel. I love that strand of grey hair. I love your eyes, the way you talk. I love everything about you—madly, with my whole being!

MARIA LVOVNA:

Hush! How dare you?

VLAS:

I can't live without you. You're as necessary to me as the air I breathe.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Good heavens, must you?

VLAS (*clapping his head with his hands*):

You've raised me in my own eyes. You've awakened my self-respect. I was groping in the darkness, without aim or purpose. You taught me to believe in myself.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Do go away, don't torture me like this. Don't, dear boy.

VLAS (*on his knees*):

You've given me much, but not enough. Be generous, be munificent. I want to believe that I'm worthy of your love. I beg and implore you not to rebuff me.

MARIA LVOVNA:

It's I who implore. Go away. I'll speak to you later. Not now. Get up—oh, please get up!

VLAS (*getting up*):

Believe me when I say I can't live without your love. My heart has become so contaminated by contact with these paltry people that I need to cauterise it with some great pure flame.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Have you no respect for me at all? After all, I'm an—an old woman. You can't help seeing that. Please go away, please, please!

VLAS:

I will if I must. But promise to speak to me later.

MARIA LVOVNA:

I will. Later. But now go away.

(As Vlas goes quickly into the woods left, he runs into his sister.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Careful! What's the matter with you?

VLAS:

Sorry.

MARIA LVOVNA

(holding out her arms to Varvara Mikhailovna):

Varya! Come here!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

What's the matter? Has he insulted you?

MARIA LVOVNA:

No. That is—yes. Insulted? I don't know. I can't tell.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Sit down. Tell me what has happened.

MARIA LVOVNA:

He told me—*(laughs and looks distractedly at Varvara Mikhailovna.)* He told me that he—that he loves me! And I've got grey hair and three false teeth! I'm an old woman! Can't he see that? My daughter is eighteen years old! It's impossible! Absurd!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA *(moved)*:

You darling! But compose yourself and tell me everything. You're such a—

MARIA LVOVNA:

Such a nothing. Just a woman, like all the rest. Help me. I've got to refuse him, and I can't. I'll go away.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I see. You feel sorry for him. You can't stand him, poor Vlas.

MARIA LVOVNA:

That's not so. It's not him I feel sorry for, it's myself.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*quickly*):

But ... but why?

(Sonya comes out of the woods and stands for a few seconds behind the haystack. Her arms are full of flowers which she intended to drop upon her mother and Varvara Mikhailovna. She hears what her mother says, takes a few steps towards her, then turns round and softly goes away.)

MARIA LVOVNA:

I love him! Does that sound ridiculous to you? Yes, I love him. My hair is turning grey, and still I want to live life to the full. I'm starved. I haven't had a real taste of life yet. My marriage was three years of torture. Never have I loved anybody before, and now ... I'm ashamed to admit it, but I long to be loved—loved by someone strong and gentle. Too late! Too late! I know that. That's why I beg you to help me. Convince him that he's mistaken, that he doesn't really love me. I was unhappy once. I suffered terribly. I don't want to again.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

But, darling, I don't understand why you should be so afraid. If you love him and he loves you, why not go through with it? Are you afraid of the future? Who knows how far away that future is?

MARIA LVOVNA:

So you think it's possible? What about my daughter? My Sonya? And my years? Curse my age! And this grey hair? He's so very young! He'll leave me before a year is up. Oh, no! I couldn't bear such humiliation!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Why weigh things, why calculate? We're all so afraid to take life as it comes! Why should we be? But I scarcely know what I'm saying. Perhaps not what I ought to say at all. I don't understand. I keep beating my head against

the wall like a big foolish fly against a window-pane, trying to get free. I feel sorry for you. I'd like to see you happy. And I'm sorry for my brother. You could do him so much good! He never had a mother. He's been so terribly wronged and humiliated! You would be a mother to him.

MARIA LVOVNA (*dropping her head*):

A mother. Yes, only a mother. I understand. Thank you.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*hastily*):

Oh, you didn't understand me! I didn't say—

(Ryumin comes out of the woods from the right. On seeing the women he stops and coughs into his fist. They do not hear him. He comes closer.)

MARIA LVOVNA:

Without meaning to, you've told me the simple sober truth. I must be a mother to him. A mother and a friend. Oh, darling! I feel like crying. I'll go now. Look, Ryumin is standing there. My face must be a sight. The old lady's had quite a shock.

(Goes slowly, wearily, into the woods.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I'm coming with you.

RYUMIN (*quickly*):

Just a minute, Varvara Mikhailovna! I won't keep you long.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I'll catch you up, Maria Lvovna. Walk in the direction of the watchman's lodge. What is it, Pavel Sergeevich?

RYUMIN (*glancing about*):

I'll tell you in just a minute. (*Drops his head and is silent.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

What made you glance about so mysteriously? What's the matter?

(In the background Suslov crosses the stage from right to left, humming to himself. Basov is heard to say: "You were going to read us some verse, Vlas. Where are you going?")

RYUMIN:

I ... I won't mince words. You've known me for a long time—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Four years. Has anything happened?

RYUMIN:

I'm not quite myself. I haven't the courage to come out with it. I wish that you would ... that you would....

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

What in the world are you getting at?

RYUMIN:

Guess. Do try!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Guess what? Can't you put it simply?

RYUMIN (*softly*):

What I have long wanted to tell you. Do you understand now? Now can you guess?

(Pause. Varvara Mikhailovna frowns and looks coldly at him for a moment, then walks off to one side.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*involuntarily*):

What a queer day!

RYUMIN (*softly*):

I feel as if I had loved you all my life—even before I ever met you! You were the woman of my dreams, the glorious image youth always creates for itself and searches for—sometimes a lifetime in vain. But I did find you, the woman of my dreams.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*calmly*):

Please don't say such things, Pavel Sergeyevich. I don't love you.

RYUMIN:

But perhaps ... allow me to say....

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

What? And to what purpose?

RYUMIN:

What am I to do? (*Laughs softly*.) So this is the end? How simple! How long it took me to make up my mind to tell you this! With what joy and fear I looked forward to the moment when I would tell you I loved you! And now—it's all over!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I'm sure I'm sorry, Pavel Sergeyevich.

RYUMIN:

Oh, I understand. But all my hopes were placed in you, in your feeling for me, and now there is no hope left. Nothing left to live for.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Don't talk like that. It hurts me to hear you. Is it my fault?

RYUMIN:

Do you think it doesn't hurt me? I'm crushed under the weight of unfulfilled promises. In my youth I swore to

myself and to others that I would dedicate my whole life to fighting for what I considered right. Now the best years of my life are over and I haven't done a thing, not a single thing! At first I spent my time getting ready, seeing how the land lay, waiting for the right moment. Before I knew it I had grown accustomed to a tranquil life and liked it—was, in fact, afraid of having it disturbed. Are you aware of how frankly I am speaking? Allow me the pleasure of being sincere for once. I'm ashamed to say all this, and yet there is a pang of pleasure in the shame—the pleasure a believer gets out of confession.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

But ... what can I do to help you?

RYUMIN:

It isn't love I ask, but compassion. I am frightened by the persistence with which life presses its demands upon me. I cautiously evade them, hiding behind a screen of various theories. You see that, I know you do. When I first met you a wonderful hope flared up in my heart that you would help me fulfil my promises, that you would inspire me with strength and courage, so that I could devote myself to making life better.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*vehemently, despairingly*): But I can't! Believe me, I can't! I myself am a pauper, I myself am baffled. I keep searching for the meaning of life, but I can't find it. And indeed, do you call this life at all? Is it possible to go on living as we are? My soul cries out for something vital and beautiful, but all I find is the triviality of our existence. It's horrid, disgusting, shameful to live like this! People are afraid, they clutch at each other, seeking support, they shriek and cry out—

RYUMIN:

I, too, seek support. At present I am weak and irresolute, but if you would—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*impulsively*):

That's not true! I don't believe it! You just say that to rouse my compassion! Even if I were strong, I couldn't put my own heart in your breast! I don't believe there is any force outside of a man which is capable of transforming him. Either it exists within him, or it doesn't exist at all. But I mustn't go on. I feel myself growing hostile—

RYUMIN:

To me? But why?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

No, not to you—to everything. We have estranged ourselves from everything. We don't know how to make ourselves needed. I have a feeling that soon—sooner than we think—a different sort of people—brave, strong people—will take things over and sweep us away like refuse. It's our lies and illusions that make me hostile.

RYUMIN:

And I want to live with my illusions. Now that you have scattered them, there is nothing for me to live for.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*repulsed*):

Don't bare your soul to me like that. I feel sorry for a pauper if he has been robbed, but not if he has squandered his means or was born a pauper. I can't feel sorry for such a one.

RYUMIN (*offended*):

That is cruel. You yourself are sick, you're wounded.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*emphatically, almost proudly*):

The wounded are not sick, their bodies are just broken. The sick are those who are poisoned.

RYUMIN:

Pity me! After all, I'm a human being.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

And I? Am I not a human being too? Or am I just something you need to make your life easier? Isn't that being cruel? You are not the only one who made vows and promises in your youth—thousands upon thousands have broken their vows.

RYUMIN (*distracted*):

Good-bye. I see that I have spoken too late. But Shalimov, too—take a good look at him—just take a look, and you'll see—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*coldly*):

Shalimov? You have no right to—

RYUMIN:

Good-bye. I'll say no more. Good-bye.

(Goes quickly into the woods left. Varvara Mikhailovna takes a step as if to follow him, but with a decided shake of her head stops and sits down on the stump. Suslov enters upstage, near the carpet on which the lunch is spread, and helps himself to a drink. Varvara Mikhailovna gets up and goes off left. Ryumin quickly comes on right, glances about, and with a gesture of despair sinks down on the hay. Suslov, slightly tipsy and whistling to himself, goes over to Ryumin.)

SUSLOV:

Did you hear that?

RYUMIN:

What?

SUSLOV (*sitting down*):

The argument.

RYUMIN:

No. What about?

SUSLOV (*lighting up*):

Vlas versus the writer and Zamyslov.

RYUMIN:

No.

SUSLOV:

A pity.

RYUMIN:

Careful, you'll set fire to the hay.

SUSLOV:

To hell with it. Yes, quite an argument. But it's all bluff. I once went in for philosophy myself. I, too, used all those fancy words, and I know what they're worth: conservatism, intelligentsia, democracy, and all the rest. Dead words. A pack of lies. Man is first and foremost a zoological phenomenon, and you know it. Whatever airs he puts on, there's no hiding the fact what he wants most is to eat, drink and have a woman. That's the truth and the whole truth! I understand Shalimov's raving on—he's a writer; playing with words is his profession. And I understand Vlas—he's still young and foolish. But when that polecat of a Zamyslov begins, I feel like jamming my fist down his throat! Have you heard? He's got Basov mixed up in a pretty affair! They'll make a cool fifty thousand out of it, Basov and that swindler, but their reputations are ruined for good. And that haughty Varvara, who can't decide who she wants as a lover—

RYUMIN:

That's foul! (*He walks swiftly away.*)

SUSLOV:

The wishy-washy ass! (*Pustobaika comes on right, takes the pipe out of his mouth and stares intently at Suslov.*) What are you gaping at? Never seen a man before? Go away!

PUSTOBAIKA:

I'm going. (*Walks off slowly.*)

SUSLOV (*stretching out on the hay*):

"Behold the race of humans!" (*Coughs.*) Nothing but a set of rascals underneath. "Money is the root of all evil...." Nonsense! Money's nothing—when you've got it.... (*Drowsy.*) And to be afraid of what people think of you ... that's ... that's for those who are sober ... all of you are rascals underneath, 'pon my word!

(*Sleeps. Dudakov and Olga stroll on, arm in arm. She is leaning on his shoulder and looking up into his face.*)

DUDAKOV:

Both of us were in the wrong. We let our work and worries get the better of us. We mustn't lose respect for each other, Olga. But then I don't know why you should respect me. Who am I?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

My beloved Kirill, father of my children. I do respect you. I love you.

DUDAKOV:

I get worn out and let myself go—can't control myself, and you take everything so to heart, and there you are—a row.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

You're the only one I've got in all the world. You and the children. I have nobody at all.

DUDAKOV:

Think of the old days, Olga. Was it this sort of life we dreamed of, you and I? (*Yulia Filippovna and Zamyslov appear among the trees left.*) Hardly.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

But what's to be done about it? There are the children. We've got to think of them.

DUDAKOV:

Yes, the children. I know. But sometimes I think—

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

You poor dear! What *are* we to do?

(*They disappear in the woods.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA

(*coming forward, laughing*): Very solemn and touching! A lesson for me!

ZAMYSLOV:

Prelude to the fifth baby—or is it the sixth? And so, Yulia darling, I'm waiting for your answer.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*mockingly*):

I don't know what to say now. They were so sweet. Perhaps I, too, should become virtuous; what do you think, ducky?

ZAMYSLOV:

Later, Yulia.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Yes, later. My decision is to keep to the path of vice and allow this summer's affair to run its natural course. What were you shouting about with Vlas and the writer?

ZAMYSLOV:

Vlas seems to be half-crazy today. We were talking about our beliefs.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

And what do you believe in?

ZAMYSLOV:

I? Only in myself, Yulia. And my right to live as I please.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

As for me, I don't believe in anything.

ZAMYSLOV:

I was half-starved as a child, and as a youth, too. Starved and mortified. Yes, my dear Yulia, it's an unpleasant past I have to look back upon. I saw too much hardship and ugliness. I suffered too much. And now I'm the one who is to say how I shall live and what is right and wrong. Well, I must be off. Good-bye, sweetheart. But we must be careful not to be seen too much together.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA

(*with exaggerated sentiment*):

What matters it whether we be together or apart, my gallant knight? What have we to fear? We, the mad lovers!

ZAMYSLOV:

I'm off, dear! (*Goes into the woods. Yulia Filippovna watches him go, then glances about her with a carefree air. She walks over to the haystack, singing softly:*

*As a mother comforts her babe,
So comfort my tormented soul....*

(Suddenly she catches sight of her husband. She stops, shudders, stands for a second gazing at him motionless. Then

she makes a movement as if to withdraw, but instead smiles and sits down beside him, tickling his face with a blade of grass. Suslov grunts.)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Very musical.

SUSLOV:

Who the devil—? Oh, is it you?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

What a breath! A whole stack of hay can't drown out that aroma! Expensive wines will be your ruin, my good man.

SUSLOV (*holding out his arms to her*):

You? So close to me? I can't remember when that happened last!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

And there's no point in trying to remember. Look, would you like to do me a favour?

SUSLOV:

Just say what it is. You know I'd do anything for you.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

The ideal husband!

SUSLOV (*kissing her hand*):

Say what it is. What do you want me to do?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA

(*taking a little revolver out of her pocket*): Let's shoot ourselves, darling. First you, then me.

SUSLOV:

What a grim joke, Yulia! Put that ghastly thing down—do, I beg of you.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Wait. Take your hand off! Don't you like my suggestion? But you've already made up your mind to shoot me. I'd shoot myself first, but I'm afraid you'll fool me and remain alive, and I don't want to be fooled a second time, and I don't want to part with you. You and I must be together for ever and ever, amen. Are you glad?

SUSLOV (*overwhelmed*):

You can't do that, Yulia—you can't!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Yes, I can. You'll see. Here, do you want me to shoot you?

SUSLOV (*covering his face*):

Don't look at me like that. God knows you could do it. I'll go away. I can't stand it.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*gaily*):

Go ahead, I'll shoot you in the back. Oh, dear, now I can't. Here comes Maria Lvovna. She's a darling. Why don't you fall in love with her, Pyotr? She has such pretty hair!

SUSLOV (*under his breath*):

You'll drive me mad. And why? What have I done to make you hate me so?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*contemptuously*):

One can't hate you.

SUSLOV (*softly, gasping*):

Why do you torture me like this? Tell me why!

(Maria Lvovna comes in slowly, lost in reverie. Suslov is standing in front of his wife, his eyes fixed on the revolver in her hand.)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Maria Lvovna! Come here! Go away, Pyotr; you've made a vile woman out of me. Go away. Are we going home soon, Maria Lvovna?

MARIA LVOVNA:

I don't know. Our party seems to be scattered all over the place. Have you seen Varvara Mikhailovna?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

She's probably with the writer. I thought you were going down to the river, Pyotr. Go on. We can get on very nicely without you.

(Suslov goes away without a word.)

MARIA LVOVNA (*absent-mindedly*):

How cutting you are!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

It will do him good. I was told that some philosopher once said a man should take a whip with him whenever he went near a woman.⁶

MARIA LVOVNA:

That was Nietzsche.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Was it? He was mad, wasn't he? I don't know any philosophers, mad or otherwise but if I were a philosopher I would say that a woman should take a good stout club with her whenever she went near a man. (*Olga Alexeyevna and Kaleria appear in the background left. They sit down beside the carpet on which the food is spread.*) I was also told there's a tribe of savages who have the following charming custom: before plucking the flowers of delight, they strike the woman over the head with a club. Our people are more civilised—they do it after the wedding. Were you struck over the head?

MARIA LVOVNA:

I was.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*smiling*):

The savages are more honest, don't you think? But why are you looking so unhappy?

MARIA LVOVNA:

Don't ask. Are you unhappy, too?

(Dvoyetochiye comes on right. He is hatless and carries his fishing-rod.)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*laughing*):

Has anyone ever heard me complain? I'm always bright and gay. Here comes the uncle. Do you like him? I do, awfully.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Yes, he seems pleasant.

DVOYETOSHIYE (*coming over*):

I've lost my hat. The young folk set out in a boat to rescue it but only succeeded in sending it to the bottom. Has anyone an extra kerchief I could tie on my head to keep the mosquitoes out of my hair?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*getting up*):

Wait, I'll bring you one.

(Goes to the back of the stage.)

DVOYETOSHIYE:

That Vlas was just putting on a show for us. A nice chap.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Do you find him amusing?

DVOYETOSHIY:

Oh, very. Sparkles with fun. He read his poetry to us. One of the girls asked him to write something in her album, so he writes: You looked at me, he writes, with laughter in your eyes, and the glance, he writes, went straight to my heart, and so night and day I am pining away ... you know—that sort of thing.

MARIA LVOVNA (*hastily*):

Yes, I know. You don't have to go on, Semyon Semyonovich, I know the poem. Tell me, do you intend to stay here long?

DVOYETOSHIY:

Well, here's how it is: I was thinking of settling down with my nephew for good, but he doesn't seem to be any too anxious. There's nowhere else for me to go. I haven't got a soul in the world. Plenty of money, but nothing else.

MARIA LVOVNA

(*absent-mindedly and without looking at him*):

Are you really, then, so rich?

DVOYETOSHIY:

I've got about a million, if you want to know it—about a million, ha, ha! It'll all go to Pyotr when I die, but that doesn't seem to mean anything to him. He takes no pains to be nice to me. In general he's sort of flabby—there's nothing he seems to want very bad. I can't understand him. Maybe it's because he knows he'll get the money anyway—why put himself out? Ha, ha!

MARIA LVOVNA (*with more interest*):

You poor thing! Why don't you donate your money to some cause? It would be used to better purpose.

DVOYETOSHIY:

There was a young dandy who suggested the same but he

rubbed me the wrong way, he did. Gave himself out to be a liberal, but he was nothing but a mountebank, I could see that. To tell you the truth, it does seem a pity to leave all that money to Pyotr. What good'll it do him? He's too puffed up as it is. (*Maria Lvovna laughs and Dvoyetochiye darts a sharp look at her.*) What are you laughing at? Think I'm a fool? I'm not really; it's just that I'm not used to living alone. (*Sighs.*) I groan and moan and my heart's like a stone—it's a sad thing to lose your friends, Maria Lvovna. By the way, I like you. (*Laughs.*)

MARIA LVOVNA:

Thank you.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

For nothing. It's you who are to be thanked. For instance, you just called me "poor". Ha, ha! I never heard that before. Everybody else calls me rich. Ha, ha! And I myself thought I was rich. But it turns out I'm poor.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA

(*comes up with a kerchief in her hand*): Are you making love, uncle?

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Sorry to say I'm out of the running. All I'm capable of at my age is a little sympathy. That's it, tie it in a pretty bow. Think I'll go over and have a bite before we leave.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

There. It's very becoming.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

That's a fib. Mine is a manly mug. Will you come with me? By the way, I've been meaning to ask you if you love your husband.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Do you think it's possible to love my husband?

DVOYETOSHIY:

Then what did you marry him for?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

He pretended to be interesting.

DVOYETOSHIY:

Ha, ha! You're the limit!

(All three go to the carpet at the back of the stage, and the low sound of their talk and laughter accompanies the following scene. Shalimov, Dudakov, Vlas and Basov, who is tipsy, come in left. Vlas goes upstage to join the people round the carpet, the other men go over to the haystack.)

ZAMYSLOV (*calling from the woods*):

Time to go home, everybody!

BASOV:

A pretty spot, isn't it, Yakov? A very nice outing, I'd say.

SHALIMOV:

You've done nothing all day but sit and drink. You're quite sodden.

(Sonya, at the carpet, reties the kerchief on Dvoyetoshiy's head. Laughter. Zamyslov comes out of the woods near the carpet, picks up a bottle of wine and some glasses, and comes down to Basov. He is followed by Dvoyetoshiy, who waves his arms to beat off Sonya.)

BASOV (*collapsing on the hay*):

Think I'll sit down again. It's easier to admire the beauties of nature sitting down. Fact. The woods, the fields, the trees ... this hay ... how I love the out-of-doors! (*Maudlin.*) And I love people. I love this big, beggarly, baffling

country of ours—Russia, my native land! I love everybody and everything! My soul's as tender as a raspberry! That's a nice figure, Yakov—remember it. You can make use of it sometime—a soul as tender as a raspberry!

SHALIMOV:

I'll be sure to make use of it.

SONYA:

Semyon Semyonovich! I haven't finished tying it.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Enough of your nonsense. Making a fool out of an old man like me! You've hurt my feelings—ha, ha!

BASOV:

Ah, a bottle of wine! Pour me out a glass. This is the life, friends! Life's a joy for those who take it in a simple, friendly way. That's it, friends, you've got to be friendly and trusting if you want to get on in life. You've got to look at things with the frank, trusting eyes of a child, and then everything will be fine. (*Dvoyetochiye, who is standing next to the stump, laughs at Basov's volubility.*) All we have to do, gentlemen, is to look into each other's hearts with the frank, trusting eyes of a child. What's the uncle laughing at? He caught a gay young perch and I went and threw it back into its native element. Because I'm—I'm a pantheist. Fact. And I love perches. And the uncle lost his hat in the river, so there!

SHALIMOV:

You're talking through yours, Sergei.

BASOV:

Judge not, that ye be not judged. I'm as good a talker as you are. You're an eloquent man, and I'm an eloquent man. Hear that? That's Maria Lvovna talking. Wonderful woman. Deserves to be respected.

SHALIMOV:

I don't like machine-guns of her type. And in general I'm not an admirer of women who deserve to be respected.

BASOV (*delighted*):

Quite right! Respectable women are worse than the other kind. Fact!

DVOYETOSHIY:

A fine thing for a man to say who's married to a ... to a very queen.

BASOV:

My wife? Varya? Oh, there's a purist for you, there's a Puritan! A saint if there ever was one! But it's no fun to live with her. She reads all the books and is always quoting some sage or other. Let's drink to her health!

SHALIMOV:

An unexpected conclusion. But that Maria Lvovna—

BASOV (*interrupting*):

Did you know she was having an affair with my clerk? Fact. I caught him when he was talking love to her.

DVOYETOSHIY:

Hm—that, it seems, would be better left unsaid. (*Walks away.*)

BASOV:

Oh, yes, I forgot. It's a deep secret.

KALERIA (*coming up*):

Sergei, have you seen Varya?

BASOV:

Here's my sister. My dear little poetess. Has she read you

her poetry, Yakov? Wait till you hear it! All very lofty—clouds, mountains, stars—

KALERIA:

You've been drinking, haven't you?

BASOV:

Only one glass.

ZAMYSLOV:

From *this* bottle.

SHALIMOV:

I should like very much to hear what you've written, Kaleria Vasilyevna.

KALERIA:

What if I should take you at your word and bring you four fat notebooks?

SHALIMOV:

Have no fear, I'm not easily intimidated.

KALERIA:

We shall see.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*from the woods*):

Time to go home! Time to go home!

(Kaleria goes out right, meeting Sonya on the way. Zamyslov goes in the direction from which Yulia's voice has come. Basov winks as he watches him go and bends over to whisper something into Shalimov's ear. Shalimov laughs.)

KALERIA:

Ready to go home?

SONYA:

Yes, everybody's tired.

KALERIA:

Whenever I leave the house I am accompanied by some vague hope. But I always come back disappointed. Have you had the same experience?

SONYA:

No.

KALERIA:

You will have.

SONYA (*laughing*):

You seem to enjoy saying morbid things.

KALERIA:

Do I? I should like to throw a disturbing shadow of thought over your bright eyes. I often see you in the company of coarse, dirty people and marvel at your stoicism. Don't you find such people revolting?

SONYA (*laughing*):

Their dirt is just on the outside. It washes off with soap and water.

(Their words become indistinct as they walk to the back of the stage.)

SHALIMOV (*getting up*):

You've got a vicious tongue, Sergei. Be careful—you're a husband yourself.

BASOV:

Me?

SHALIMOV:

A beautiful spot, but why must there be mosquitoes? I left my rug somewhere.

(He goes off right. Basov stretches himself and hums a tune. Upstage Sasha, Sonya, and Pustobaika are gathering up the

food and dishes. Varvara Mikhailovna comes on left, near the haystack, carrying a bouquet of flowers.)

VLAS (*from the woods*):

Who's going in the boat?

BASOV:

Varya! That you? I'm all alone. Everyone's gone and left me.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

You've had too much to drink again, Sergei.

BASOV:

Oh, not so much.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

You shouldn't drink cognac. You'll be complaining of your heart again.

BASOV:

I drank mostly port. Don't scold me, Varya. You're always so strict with me, I'm very sensitive. My love is as soft and tender as a baby's. Sit down beside me, dear, and let's have a heart-to-heart talk. We need to have a good talk, you and I.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Oh, stop it! Everyone's getting ready to go home. Get up and go down to the boat. Get up, Sergei!

BASOV:

Just as you say. Where am I to go? Down there? Very well.

(He goes out with too deliberate a step. Varvara Mikhailovna watches him with a stern look on her face. Suddenly she

catches sight of Shalimov, who goes quietly up to her with a tender smile on his lips.)

SHALIMOV:

Your face is drawn and there's a sad look in your eyes. Are you tired?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

A little.

SHALIMOV:

I'm very tired. Tired of being with these people. And it hurts me to see you among them. But forgive me.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

For what?

SHALIMOV:

Perhaps you object to my saying such a thing?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I would have told you if I did.

SHALIMOV:

I watch you moving silently in the midst of this noisy throng, your eyes seeking the answer to some question. And your silence is more eloquent than words. I, too, have known the chill of loneliness.

SONYA (*shouting*):

Mummy! Are you going by boat?

MARIA LVOVNA (*from the woods*):

No, I'm walking back.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*holding out a flower to Shalimov*):

Would you like to have it?

SHALIMOV (*with a bow and a smile*):

Thank you. I jealously guard flowers presented to me with such friendly simplicity. (*Vlas, calling from the woods right*: "Hey watchman! Where's the other pair of oars?") I'll put it between the pages of a book. Some day in the future I shall find it there and think of you. Does the thought appeal to you? Or is it sentimental?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*softly, dropping her head*): No. Go on.

SHALIMOV

(*gazing searchingly into her face*): You must be unhappy among people who are so tragically at a loss.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Teach them how they ought to live.

SHALIMOV:

I lack the self-confidence of a teacher. I'm a stranger in this world, a lonely observer of life. I don't know how to make pompous speeches, and nothing I said would have the power of inspiring these people with courage. What are you thinking of?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Me? Thoughts that show people in a repulsive light, and therefore ought to be killed as soon as born.

SHALIMOV:

And turn your mind into a graveyard? Wouldn't it be better to simply withdraw from people? Believe me, the air is more clear and wholesome and everything takes on more definite form when one stands at a distance from them.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I see what you mean, and it makes me feel as dejected as if someone very dear to me were incurably ill.

(Preparations for departure are being made noisily in the woods right.)

SHALIMOV (*not listening to her*):

If you only knew how desperately I mean what I say! You'll hardly believe it, but I must confess that being with you makes me want to be sincere, to be a better and a wiser man.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Thank you.

SHALIMOV (*kissing her hand in agitation*):

It is as if when I am standing beside you I were on the threshold of some great happiness, as deep and unplumbed as the sea. As if you possessed some magic power that penetrates others as the power of a magnet penetrates steel. And a bold, insane idea takes possession of me. It seems to me that if you—

(He breaks off and glances round. Varvara Mikhailovna watches him closely.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

If I—what?

SHALIMOV:

Varvara Mikhailovna ... you ... you won't laugh at me, will you? Shall I go on?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

No, I know what you want. You're not a very subtle seducer.

SHALIMOV (*embarrassed*):

No, you don't understand. You—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*simply, sadly, softly*): If you ever knew how I loved you when I read your books! How I looked forward to meeting you! I was sure you were great and good and that

everything was clear to you. I was sure of it that evening when you read your works at our school—I was only seventeen then. And your image has been shining in my heart ever since, like a bright star.

SHALIMOV (*dully, dropping his head*):

Please don't. I apologise.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I would think of you whenever this life got too much for me, and that made it easier to bear. At least there was some hope.

SHALIMOV:

Be merciful. Try to understand—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

And then you came here. And you were just the same as everybody else—just exactly the same. How dreadful! What has happened to you? Can't a person ever preserve his strength of spirit?

SHALIMOV (*excitedly*):

But why should your demands on me be different from those on other people? Why use a different measuring-road? All of you can live as you please, but I, because I happen to be a writer, must live not as I please, but as *you* please, is that it?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Don't talk like that. And throw my flower away. I gave it to that other, to the one I believed to be above ordinary people. Throw it away.

(She goes out quickly.)

SHALIMOV (*watching her go*):

I'll be damned! (*Crushes the flower in his hand.*) A spiteful woman!

(Nervously wipes his face with his handkerchief, then goes off in the direction Varvara Mikhailovna took. Dudakov and Olga come quickly out of the woods left.)

ZAMYSLOV (*singing in the woods*):

"Oh, hasten, night, to draw...."

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*continuing the song*):

"... thy dark transparent veils...."

VLAS (*in the woods*):

For goodness' sake, sit down!

DUDAKOV:

We almost got left behind.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

I'm so tired! Kirill, darling, you must never forget this day.

DUDAKOV:

Nor you—your promise not to give way to your feelings.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

I'm so happy, love! Life is going to be different from now on.

(They go out. Pustobaika comes on right with a basket over his arm and searches for something on the ground.)

PUSTOBAIKA:

Rubbish everywhere. That's all they leave behind them—waste and rubbish. Just clutter up the earth. (*Goes out left.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*in the woods*):

Who else hasn't come?

SONYA:

Mummy!

BASOV:

Mummy!

MARIA LVOVNA

(*comes on left; she looks tired and distracted*): Here I am, Sonya!

SONYA (*running on*):

We're going, Mummy! But what's the matter with you?

MARIA LVOVNA:

Nothing. I'm going to walk. Tell them not to wait for me. Run along.

SONYA

(*running off to one side and calling, with her hand to her mouth*): Go ahead, don't wait for us! We're walking. What? Good-bye!

DVOYETOSHIYE (*from the woods*):

You'll be worn out.

SONYA:

Good-bye!

MARIA LVOVNA:

Why didn't you go in the boat with them?

SONYA:

Because I wanted to go with you.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Well, come along.

SONYA:

Let's take a little rest first. Feeling low, Mummy? My precious Mummy! Sit down here—like this. Let me put my arms round you—like this. Well, now tell me what the trouble is.

(Laughter, talk, shouts come from the woods.)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*from the woods*):

Stop rocking the boat!

ZAMYSLOV:

No, don't sing. Let them just play.

BASOV (*from the woods*):

The musicians are to sit in the bow.

(The guitar and the mandolin can be heard tuning up.)

VLAS (*from the woods*):

We're off!

MARIA LVOVNA:

Sonya, darling! If you only knew!

SONYA (*simply*):

I do know.

MARIA LVOVNA:

No, you don't.

SONYA:

Listen, Mummy—remember how, when I used to cry as a child because I couldn't do my arithmetic problems, you'd take my head on your breast, like this, and hum a lullaby:

*Lulla-lulla-lullaby,
Sleep, my Mummy, sleep!*

It's you who can't do your problem this time, Mummy dear. If you really love him—

(Dvoyetochiye laughs.)

MARIA LVOVNA:

Hush, Sonya! How did you find out?

(The guitar and the mandolin begin to play.)

SONYA:

Sh. Lie still.

*Lulla-lulla-lullaby,
Sleep, my Mummy, sleep....*

Mine is the cleverest mummy in the world. She taught me to think simply and clearly. He's a dear, Mummy—don't send him away. He'll be even better once you take hold of him. You've already produced one first-class human specimen—I really am first-class, don't you think? And now you'll produce another.

MARIA LVOVNA:

But, darling, it's impossible!

SONYA:

He'll be a brother to me. He's inclined to be rude; you'll teach him to be mild and gentle—there's so much gentleness in you! You'll teach him to work with zest, as you work yourself, and as you taught me to work. He'll be a good companion for me, and we'll get on famously together—at first the three of us, and then the four, because I intend to marry that crazy Maxim. I love him, Mummy. And he deserves it.

MARIA LVOVNA:

You're sure to be happy, you blessed child. You can't help being.

SONYA:

Don't get up. He and I will finish studying and we'll live full, interesting, eventful lives. The four of us. Mummy—four brave, honest people!

* MARIA LVOVNA:

My darling! My joy! The three of us—you and your

husband and I. And he—if he wants to join us, it must be as your brother—and my son.

SONYA:

And we'll do things worth doing! Oh, we will! But rest a bit first, Mumsy. Don't cry.

*Lulla-lulla-lullaby,
Sleep, my Mummy, sleep!*

(Sonya's voice trembles. In the distance can be heard the music of the guitar and the mandolin.)

CURTAIN

ACT IV

The setting is that of Act II. The sun has already set. BASOV and SUSLOV are playing chess under the pines. SASHA is laying the table for supper on the veranda. The hoarse sounds of a gramophone come from the woods right. Inside the house KALERIA is playing a sad tune on the piano.

BASOV:

What our country needs is well-intentioned people. Such people are evolutionaries. They don't go rushing into things.

SUSLOV:

I'm taking your bishop.

BASOV:

Go ahead. Well-intentioned people change the forms of life slowly and imperceptibly, but theirs are the only changes that last.

(Dudakov comes hurriedly out from behind the house.)

DUDAKOV:

Hullo! Is my wife here?

BASOV:

Haven't seen her. Sit down, doctor.

DUDAKOV:

Can't. Have no time. I've got to get the teacher's report ready for print.

BASOV:

If I remember correctly, you've been getting it ready for the past two years.

DUDAKOV (*going out*):

Can't be helped if I'm the only person who does anything. There are lots of people around, but no one to do anything. How do you account for that?

BASOV:

A foolish figure that doctor cuts.

SUSLOV:

Your move.

BASOV:

Hm. What I was saying, was: you've got to be well-intentioned. Misanthropy is a luxury we cannot afford. It's been eleven years since I first arrived in these parts, and all I brought with me was a brief-case and a carpet. The brief-case was empty, the carpet worn thin. And I was thin myself.

SUSLOV:

Here goes your queen.

BASOV:

Pshaw! How did I ever miss the move of your knight?

SUSLOV:

A person who philosophises always loses.

BASOV:

A fact's fact, as the ducks say.

(They become absorbed in their game. Out of the woods right come Vlas and Maria Lvovna. They don't see the chess players.)

MARIA LVOVNA (*softly*):

It will soon pass, my dear boy; it will, believe me. And then in the bottom of your heart you will thank me.

VLAS (*loudly*):

It's hard. Unspeakably hard.

(Basov listens, motioning Suslov to be silent.)

MARIA LVOVNA:

Go away. Go quickly, dear. I promise to write to you. Work hard. Make a place for yourself in the world. Be courageous, and never surrender to the trivialities of life. You are fine by nature, and I love you. Yes, I love you. (*Basov grows round-eyed. Suslov looks at him with a smile.*) But my love may injure you, and it frightens me. Yes, I'm not ashamed to admit it—it frightens me. You will soon get over your infatuation, but I—I would only love you the more as time went on, and the end would be comical, even vulgar. At least it would be very painful for me.

VLAS:

I swear to you—

MARIA LVOVNA:

Don't. I don't want you to.

VLAS:

I will always admire you, even if love passes.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Ah, that is not enough for a woman who loves. And besides, I'm ashamed to give myself up to personal happiness. That may sound silly and unnatural, but in our times it seems shameful to seek personal happiness. Go away, dear, and if ever the time comes when you need a friend, I shall be waiting for you. You will be as a son to me—a dearly beloved son. Good-bye.

VLAS:

Give me your hand. I want to get down on my knees to you. How I love you! I feel like crying. Good-bye.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Good-bye, my dear, good friend! Remember my advice: fear nothing and bow down to nothing—ever, ever, ever!

VLAS:

Good-bye, my love! My first love, so good and pure. Thank you. (*Maria Lvovna goes quickly into the woods right. Vlas goes toward the house. Suddenly he sees Basov and Suslov and realises they have overheard. He stops. Basov gets up and bows and is about to say something. Vlas goes up to him.*) Not a word! Not a single word! Don't so much as open your mouth! (*Goes into the house.*)

BASOV (*taken aback*):

A ferocious youngster.

SUSLOV (*laughing*):

Give you a fright?

BASOV:

How do you like that? I knew about it, but I never expected such ... er ... lofty sentiments. The silly fools! (*Bursts out laughing. Yulia Filippovna and Zamyslov come down the path from Suslov's house. Yulia goes over to her husband. Zamyslov into the house.*)

SUSLOV:

She said all that on purpose, just to tighten her hold on the chap.

BASOV:

Good Lord, what a comedy, eh?

SUSLOV (*frowning*):

She's sly as a fox. Did me a dirty trick. On her advice my uncle gave away all his money.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Pyotr, a man has come—

BASOV (*interrupting*):

Ask him what just happened, Yulia Filippovna.

SUSLOV:

Who is he?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*to Basov*):

What's that? (*To her husband.*) Some contractor. He says it's urgent—something has gone wrong somewhere.

SUSLOV (*going off quickly*):

What next?

BASOV:

How do you like this, my dear? We're sitting here, your husband and I, and suddenly Maria Lvovna—(*Bursts out laughing.*) It seems that she—that they are in love!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Who? Maria Lvovna and my husband? (*Laughs.*)

BASOV:

No, Vlas. That clown.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Oh that. Thanks to you, everybody's known that for a long time.

BASOV:

But the details! That's what's interesting.

(From behind the house come Ryumin and Dvoyetochiye, the latter with some parcels in his hands.)

DVOYETOTCHIYE:

Is Varvara Mikhailovna home? See who I've brought.

BASOV:

Back from your wanderings? Glad to see you. Looking fine—a becoming coat of tan, and you've lost some weight. Where have you come from?

RYUMIN:

The south. I saw the sea for the first time in my life. How do you do, Yulia Filippovna.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Your looks really have improved, Pavel Sergeyevich. I think I'll take a trip to the seaside, too.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

I'm going inside. (*Goes.*) I've brought you a box of chocolates as a farewell gift, niece.

BASOV:

I saw the sea.

With greedy eyes I took its measure,

And tested, as I gazed,

My fortitude of spirit.⁷

Isn't that how it goes? Well, well, so here you are! Go into the house, my wife will be glad to see you.

RYUMIN:

It's glorious down there. I suppose music is the only thing capable of expressing the majesty of the sea. It dwarfs a man as thoughts of eternity do, making him feel as tiny and insignificant as a straw.

(Varvara Mikhailovna comes out from behind the house.)

BASOV:

I'll gather up the chess-men. Varya, did you know Pavel Sergeyevich had come back?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Is he here?

BASOV (*going over to her*):

Yes. And he seems to have made some additions to his store of pretty phrases. If you only knew what has happened, Varya! Suslov and I were sitting here playing chess, and suddenly Maria Lvovna and Vlas—get what I mean? They really are having an affair! (*Laughs.*) And you were so sure it was something different. Well, it isn't, it's just that. Fact!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Stop it, Sergei! I don't want to hear any more of your gossip.

BASOV:

But wait, Varya. I haven't told you anything yet—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I asked you not to mention what was happening between my brother and Maria Lvovna, and you told everybody about it. Can't you see how disgusting it is?

BASOV:

Confound it all! I had better not talk to you at all, I can see that!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

You certainly had better talk less and think more about what you're doing. You ought to hear what other people are saying about you, Sergei.

BASOV:

About me? It's beneath me to listen to their gossip. Let them say whatever they like. But it surprises me that you, Varya, my wife—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

The honour of being your wife is not as great as you think, and it weighs heavily on me.

BASOV (*indignant*):

What are you saying, Varvara?

(Dvoyetochiye and Vlas come out on the veranda.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I'm saying what I think, and what I feel.

BASOV:

But I must ask you to explain.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I will. Later.

(With a snort, Basov goes into the house. Vlas follows him with a hostile glance, then sits down on a lower step of the veranda.)

DVOYETOTCHIYE:

I've brought you some chocolates, Varvara Mikhailovna.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Thank you.

DVOYETOTCHIYE

(*also sitting down on a step*): I've brought all the ladies chocolates, so that they'll remember me kindly. Don't forget you promised to give me your picture.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Oh, yes. I'll go and get it. (*Goes into the house.*)

DVOYETOTCHIYE:

Well, Uncle Vlas, so we're off, are we?

VLAS:

I wish we were gone already.

DVOYETOSHIYEV:

Less than a day left. Hm. If we could only get that sister of yours to come with us! This is no place for her.

VLAS (*glumly*):

This is no place for anybody.

DVOYETOSHIYEV:

I'm glad you're coming with me. Ours is a pretty little town, with a river running through it and woods all round. I've got an enormous house—ten rooms. Cough in one of them, and the sound goes echoing through them all. It's very lonely there in the winter, with the wind blowing outside. (*Sonya comes quickly on right.*) Loneliness is good for a fellow when he's young, but it's better to have somebody beside you when you're an old codger like me. Ha, ha! (*To Sonya.*) Good-bye, minx! I'm leaving tomorrow, and you'll have forgotten all about me the day after.

SONYA:

No, I won't. I couldn't forget you, you have such a funny name.

DVOYETOSHIYEV:

Is that the only reason? Well, we're grateful for each small thing.

SONYA:

Oh, no, that's not the only reason. You're a plain person without any airs, and I like plain people. But you haven't seen my Mummy anywhere, have you?

DVOYETOSHIYEV:

Haven't had the pleasure.

VLAS:

She isn't here. Let's go and look for her. Maybe she's in the summer-house, down by the river.

KALERIA:

Do you mind if I go with you?

SONYA:

Come along.

(The three of them go into the woods. Dvoyetochiye sighs and hums to himself as he watches them go. Varvara Mikhailovna comes out with a snapshot in her hand. Ryumin comes behind her.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Here's the picture. When are you leaving?

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Tomorrow. Thanks for the message. I've quite fallen in love with you, my dear.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Why should anyone love me?

DVOYETOSHIYE:

There's no why or wherefore to love. True love's like the sun—you can't tell what it hangs on to.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I'm not so sure about that.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

I can see you're not. Why don't you come away with me? Your brother's coming. You'd find something for yourself to do there.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

What? I don't know how to do anything.

DVOYETOSHIY:

Because you haven't learned. Now you can learn. Vlas and I are going to build two schools—a girls' school and a boys' school—

RYUMIN (*absent-mindedly*):

If life is to have meaning, one must do something great and noble, something that will live through the ages: build great temples—

DVOYETOSHIY:

All that highfalutin stuff is beyond me. I didn't even think of the schools, but a kind person came along and put a flea in my ear.

RYUMIN:

The very highest institutions of learning offer nothing but a set of contradictory theories, mere hypotheses touching on the mystery of life.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

How tiresome! How trite and commonplace!

RYUMIN

(*glancing at all of them and smiling in a queer, quiet way*):

I know. Dead words, like autumn leaves. I don't know why I say them. Out of habit, I guess, or because autumn has set in. The contemplative murmur of the green waves has been sounding in my ears ever since I got my first sight of the sea. Everything man has ever spoken is drowned out by that music, like raindrops in the ocean.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

How oddly you speak! What's the matter with you?

(Kaleria and Vlas come out of the woods right.)

RYUMIN (*laughing*):

Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

KALERIA:

To stand firmly on your feet means to stand knee-deep in mud.

VLAS:

And would you rather hang in the air? All you want is to keep your frock and your soul unsullied. But who has any use for cold immaculate people like you?

KALERIA:

I have use for myself.

VLAS:

You just think you have.

KALERIA:

I don't want to talk to you. You're uncouth. (*Goes into the house.*)

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Well, Uncle Vlas, are you pleased with yourself for telling off the young lady?

VLAS

(*sits down beside his sister on the lower step of the veranda*): I'm sick of her. (*Imitating her tone.*) "Ah, me! I'm dying of boredom!" I told her a person ought to live with others, but die all by himself.

RYUMIN (*quickly*):

Quite right. That may sound cruel, but it's true. Very true.

(*Basov and Yulia Filippovna come out on the veranda.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*as if to herself*): Life passes us by without touching our hearts—merely stirring our thoughts.

BASOV:

Varya, I told Sasha we'd have supper out here. (*Suslov comes walking quickly down the path from his house.*) We'll give you a little send-off, Semyon Semyonovich. A good excuse to drink champagne.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

I'm quite touched.

SUSLOV:

Yulia, please come here a minute.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Why, has something happened?

(Suslov leads his wife away, whispering something in her ear. On hearing it she starts away from him. He takes her arm and leads her to the right, where they stand talking in undertones for a few seconds, returning to the veranda after Basov has gone away.)

BASOV:

I'll treat you to some first-rate sausage, friends. You've never tasted anything like it. A client sent it to me from the Ukraine. But where's that assistant of mine? (*Under his breath.*) He happens to be the assistant of Yulia Filippovna's husband as well.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*in quiet indignation*): Sergei! That's foul!

BASOV (*defiantly*):

But everybody knows it, Varya. I don't see why you should.... Sasha! (*Goes inside.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*floatingly*):

Uncle, a wall of the jail Pyotr just built fell down on two working men.

SUSLOV (*with a little laugh*):

And she's tickled to death.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*frightened*):

Not really! Where did it happen?

SUSLOV:

In a little district town.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Congratulations. (*Contemptuously*.) You young folk! I don't suppose you ever went near it while it was being built, did you?

SUSLOV:

Yes, I did. It's that rascal of a contractor who's to blame.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

That's a lie. He didn't go near it—not once. He had no time.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

What you need's a good wallop. Bah, you young folk! You're such good-for-nothings.

SUSLOV (*with a little laugh*):

I'll shoot myself, that'll be good for something.

RYUMIN (*shaking his head*):

No, you won't. You'll never shoot yourself.

SUSLOV:

And what if I should? All of a sudden?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

What about those two working men, Pyotr Ivanovich? Were they killed?

SUSLOV (*glumly*):

I don't know. I'll have to go up there tomorrow.

(Enter Olga Alexeyevna.)

VLAS (*out loud*):

Revoltng.

SUSLOV (*baring his teeth*):

Easy there, young man, easy!

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*coming up*):

Good evening. You're perched about like birds in autumn. I think I've seen everybody today. Oh, Pavel Sergeyevich! When did you get back?

(Suslov takes his wife aside and whispers something to her. His face wears an angry look. She gives him a mocking bow and comes back to the veranda. Suslov, whistling defiantly, goes off to his own house. Dvoyetochive, after a glance at Yulia Filippovna, goes after him.)

RYUMIN:

Today.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

And came straight out here? What a devoted friend you are! Isn't the air oppressive, somehow? Summer will soon be over. We'll all move back to town and there, fenced in by stone walls, we'll be more inaccessible to each other than ever. We'll be quite like strangers.

VLAS (*disapprovingly*):

Complaining again!

BASOV

(*from the door on to the veranda*): Pavel Sergeyevich! Come here a moment, will you?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*to Vlas*):

Well, isn't it the truth?

(Ryumin goes into the house and meets Kaleria and Shalimov on the way. Without answering Olga Alexeyevna, Vlas gets up and goes over to the pines.)

SHALIMOV (*with bored indifference*):

People expect great things of democracy, but who can say what sort of a beast your democrat is?

KALERIA (*roused*):

Yes, yes, you're right; right a thousand times! He's still a beast. A savage, whose one desire is to fill his belly.

SHALIMOV:

And wear squeaky boots.

KALERIA:

What does he believe in? What is his credo?

VLAS (*irritated*):

And yours? What do *you* believe in? What is *your* credo?

KALERIA (*ignoring Vlas*):

New inspiration is given to life by people who believe in something. By the aristocrats of the spirit.

VLAS:

Who are those aristocrats? Where are they to be found?

KALERIA:

I'm not talking to you, Vlas. Come, Yakov Petrovich, let's sit down.

(They come down off the veranda and sit under the pines, resuming their conversation in lowered tones. Kaleria is nervous, Shalimov calm. His movements are slow and languid, as if he were very tired.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*going over to Vlas*): You're terribly touchy today, Vlas.

VLAS (*dully*):

I'm miserable, Varya.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Come down to the river with me, Vlas Mikhailovich.

VLAS:

I'd rather not, if you don't mind.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Please do. There's something I must tell you.

VLAS (*going reluctantly*):

What is it?

(Yulia Filippovna takes his arm and whispers something to him as they walk away. Varvara Mikhailovna goes up on the veranda.)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA

(*taking Varvara Mikhailovna's arm*): Varya, are you still angry with me?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*pensively*): Angry? No.

VLAS

(*in a loud voice from the depths of the stage*): He's a cad! If he weren't my sister's husband—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Sh. (*Draws him into the woods.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*frightened*):

Heavens! What has happened?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Our friend Yulia is probably gossiping. But I can see you are still angry, Varya. You ought to realise that what a person says in a moment of irritation—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*pensively*):

Do let's forget that, Olga. I don't like things that are patched up—not even friendship.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*getting up*):

I didn't think you were one to bear a grudge. Can't you forget? Or at least forgive?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*coldly and firmly*): We forgive too much. That's a weakness. It destroys our respect for one another. There's a certain person whom I forgave so much that now I am as nothing in his eyes.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA

(*after a pause*): Do you mean your husband? (*Varvara Mikhailovna gazes into space without answering.*) How quickly people change! I remember him as a student—poor and gay and carefree. Everybody loved him. But you've hardly changed at all—still so serious and thoughtful. When we heard you were going to marry him, I remember Kirill saying Sergei couldn't go wrong with a wife like you. He said Sergei was frivolous and inclined to be vulgar, but you—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*simply*):

Why do you tell me that, Olga? To prove how ineffectual I am?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Varya! How can you think such a thing? It just happened to come to my mind—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(softly, but very distinctly, as if pronouncing a sentence): Yes, I'm weak and ineffectual. Is that what you wanted to say? I know it without your saying so, Olga. I've known it for a long time.

SASHA *(on the veranda):*

The master's asking for you, Varvara Mikhailovna.
(Varvara Mikhailovna goes without a word into the house.)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA *(following her in):*

But you misunderstood me, Varya....

KALERIA *(softly):*

For me, a person who thinks he knows the truth is as good as dead. *(Pause. Shalimov smokes.)* Tell me, do you find life a burden?

SHALIMOV:

A heavy one at times.

KALERIA:

Often?

SHALIMOV:

It's never a joy. I've seen too much to be joyful. And the times do not tend to make one joyful.

KALERIA *(quietly):*

The life of every thinking person is a great drama.

SHALIMOV:

Oh, yes. By the way....

KALERIA:

What?

SHALIMOV (*getting up*):

Tell me truthfully, do you like my stories?

KALERIA (*eagerly*):

Oh, awfully! Especially your latest ones. They are not so realistic, there is less of the gross flesh in them. They are veiled in the tender mists of melancholy that envelop the soul as clouds envelop the sun at sunset. Few are capable of appreciating them, but those few are your ardent admirers.

SHALIMOV (*smiling*):

Thank you. Er ... you were telling me about your poems. Won't you read them to me?

KALERIA:

I will. Later. (*Shalimov bows his head in silent acquiescence. Pause. Vlas and Yulia Filippovna come out of the woods right and walk over to the pines. Vlas sits down at the table, puts his elbows on it, and whistles to himself. Yulia Filippovna goes into the house.*) Or perhaps now?

SHALIMOV:

What's that?

KALERIA (*with a sad smile*):

Have you forgotten already? How soon!

SHALIMOV (*frowning*):

Come now ... let me see....

KALERIA (*getting up*):

You asked me to read you my poems. Shall I read them now?

SHALIMOV (*quickly*):

Oh, yes, do. Such a beautiful evening! Very appropriate. But you're mistaken: I didn't forget, I was just lost in thought and didn't catch your question.

KALERIA (*going into the house*):

Very well, I'll bring them, although I'm sure you won't find them interesting.

SHALIMOV (*following her with his eyes*):

I'm sure I will.

(Kaleria runs quickly up the steps, Shalimov lifts his shoulders and makes a face. Turning round, he sees Vlas. Dvoyetochiye and Suslov come down the path leading to Suslov's house. They are silent and seem to be annoyed with each other.)

SHALIMOV (*to Vlas*):

Day-dreaming?

VLAS (*without being rude*):

Whistling.

(Out on the veranda come: Olga Alexeyevna, who sits down in a wicker chair near the railing; Ryumin, who stands beside her while she tells him something in a low voice; Basov, who goes over to the table and examines the food; Varvara Mikhailovna, who stands leaning against one of the pillars; Zamyslov, who takes up a position in front of her.)

BASOV:

Everybody here? Vlas? Maria Lvovna?

VLAS:

I'm here.

(Yulia Filippovna comes out of the house humming to herself, and sits down on one of the steps.)

ZAMYSLOV:

We're all very complicated people, Varvara Mikhailovna.

BASOV (*leaning over the railing*):

You here, Yakov? Good.

ZAMYSLOV:

It's just because our psychical processes are complicated that we are the elect, the intelligentsia. And you—

(Dvoyetochiye stands listening to Zamyslov. Suslov, with a glance at the orator, goes over to where Shalimov and Vlas are sitting. Sonya and Maria Lvovna come out of the woods right.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*nervously*):

We're not the intelligentsia. We're something quite different. We're just summer folk—people who come and go. We're too busy looking for a cosy nest to settle ourselves in to really do anything—anything, that is, but talk.

BASOV (*mockingly*):

You give brilliant proof of your own theory.

(Kaleria comes out with a notebook in hand, stands beside the table and listens.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*waxing vehement*):

And our talk is full of lies. We dress ourselves up in pretty phrases, in tawdry book learning to hide the nakedness of our souls. We talk about the tragedy of life without really living, and we wallow in the pleasure of moaning and complaining.

(Dudakov comes out on the veranda and stands where his wife cannot see him.)

RYUMIN (*nervously*):

That isn't fair. There is beauty in complaint. It is cruel to doubt the sincerity of a person's lamentations, Varvara Mikhailovna.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I'm sick of hearing them. It's time we had the courage to keep quiet. We have no right to keep talking about our

little griefs. We know well enough how to keep quiet when we're content with life, don't we? Each of us nibbles his happiness in secret, but he takes his pricks and pains out into the street to be displayed to everybody and bemoaned from the house-tops. We poison the air with the refuse thrown out of our kitchens. In just the same way we throw out the garbage of our souls. Oh, there's no doubt but that hundreds and thousands of healthy people perish from the poison of our moans and groans. Who ever gave us the right to make a display of our sores?

(Pause.)

VLAS (*quietly*):

Bravo, Varya!

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Very true. Good girl.

(Maria Lvovna strokes Varvara Mikhailovna's hand in silence. Vlas and Sonya stand beside her. Ryumin jerks his head nervously.)

RYUMIN:

A word. Allow me to speak—for the last time.

KALERIA:

It's time we had the courage to keep quiet.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*to Basov*):

How boldly and harshly she speaks these days!

BASOV:

Thus spake Balaam's—

(He breaks off and covers his mouth with his hand. Varvara Mikhailovna is too excited to notice, but many of the others

hear it. Zamyslov quickly goes down the steps and over to the pines, laughing. Shalimov smiles and shakes his head reprovingly. Vlas and Sonya look at Basov contemptuously. The others pretend not to have heard. A strained silence. Suslov coughs and smiles. Noticing that something is wrong, Varvara Mikhailovna looks anxiously about her.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Did I say something rude—something I shouldn't? Why does everyone act so strangely?

VLAS (*in a loud voice*):

It isn't you who was rude.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA

(*with an innocent look*): Why, what's the matter?

MARIA LVOVNA (*quickly and quietly*):

Don't, Vlas. (*She begins to speak in order to counteract the effect of Basov's words, but warms to her subject as she goes on. Shalimov, Suslov and Zamyslov make a point of not listening to her. Dudakov keeps nodding his head approvingly. Basov looks at her gratefully and signs to the others to listen.*) We ought to be different—all of us. We're the children of cooks and laundresses, of wholesome working people, and we ought to be different. Never before have Russians of education been connected with the masses by ties of blood. These blood ties ought to fill us with a desire to improve and brighten and expand the lives of those, our kith and kin, who sweat in darkness and dirt from morning to night. Not for pity of them, nor for charity's sake, should we seek to improve life, but for our own sakes, to escape an accursed isolation, to annihilate the yawning precipice out of which our kith and kin gaze up at us on the heights as at their enemies, who live by their labour. They sent us ahead to find a road leading to a better life for all; we went ahead and got lost. And in this isolation of our own

creating our lives are filled with alarm and torn by contradictions. That is the real drama of our lives. But we ourselves are to blame for it. We deserve the suffering we have brought on ourselves, and, as you say, Varya, we have no right to poison the air with our groans.

(Exhausted by her effort, she sits down beside Varvara Mikhailovna. Silence.)

DUDAKOV (*looking at the others*):

There you are. There's the truth for you.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*quickly*):

You? Come here.

SHALIMOV (*lifting his hat*):

Have you finished, Maria Lvovna?

MARIA LVOVNA:

Yes.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA

(*leading her husband over to a corner of the veranda*): Did you hear? Did you understand? What a fool Basov is!

DUDAKOV (*softly*):

Why Basov?

(Movement on the veranda. Varvara Mikhailovna looks round at everybody. No one is sure that Basov's break has been forgotten.)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Sh. Varya said a lot of nasty things, and he called her Balaam's ass.

DUDAKOV:

He's a blockhead. Listen, Olga, when I left home—

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Wait, Kaleria is going to read her poetry to us. But it's a good thing, I'm glad. Varya's become very high and mighty of late.

(Ryumin, depressed, goes down off the veranda and begins pacing up and down.)

SHALIMOV:

Attention, everybody! Kaleria Vasilyevna has kindly agreed to read some of her poems to us.

BASOV:

Very nice. Begin, dear.

KALERIA (*bashfully*):

If you like.

SHALIMOV:

Here's a chair.

KALERIA:

No, thank you. How do you explain such interest in my poetry all of a sudden, Varya? I'm quite overcome.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I don't know. Somebody must have made an indiscreet remark and everybody's anxious to cover it up.

KALERIA:

Well, I'm going to begin. My poems will meet the same fate as your words, Varya. Everything is sucked down into the mire of this life of ours.

*Pale, immaculate snow-flakes
Flutter like dead little flowers,
Blown by the breath of autumn
Out of their chilly bowers.*

*Softly they settle, a coverlet
Drawn o'er the sickly earth,*

*Hiding its sores 'neath a whiteness
Pure as an infant at birth.*

*Lifeless the trees and the bushes,
Soulless the days and nights,
Soundless the pale little snow-flakes,
Falling from frozen heights.*

(Pause. Everyone looks at Kaleria as if expecting more.)

SHALIMOV:

Charming.

RYUMIN (*contemplatively*):
*Blown by the breath of autumn
Out of their chilly bowers.*⁸

VLAS (*impetuously*):

I, too, write poetry; I, too, want to read it.

DVOYETOSHIYE (*laughing*):

Let's hear!

SHALIMOV:

An interesting competition

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Must you, Vlas?

ZAMYSLOV:

Indeed he must if it's to be amusing.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Don't forget, my dear boy: always be yourself. (*All eyes are on Vlas' excited face. Silence.*)

VLAS:

I want to prove to you how simple it is to clutter up the minds of your fellow-men with poetry. (*Recites in a strong, clear voice that rings with challenge*):

*Little, lugubrious people,
Shrinking from storm and strife,
Wander the earth in search of
A means of escaping life.*

*Drab little cowards and liars,
With nothing but moans in their breast.
They hope to get happiness gratis—
Comfort, satiety, rest.*

*Empty their high-sounding phrases,
Stolen their trivial thoughts—
Little, lugubrious people,
Born of miasmal grots.*

(When he finishes he stands motionless, looking in turn at Shalimov, Ryumin, and Suslov. Pause. Everyone feels uneasy. Kaleria shrugs her shoulders. Shalimov slowly lights a cigarette. Suslov is wrought up. Maria Lvovna and Varvara Mikhailovna go over to Vlas as if to shield him.)

DUDAKOV (*quietly and distinctly*):

Very apt. Quite to the point, I should say.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Bravo! That's the sort of thing I like!

DVOYETÓCHIYE:

A nice little slap in the face, deuced if it isn't!

KALERIA:

Coarse and vicious. What makes him like that?

ZAMYSLOV:

Not the least bit amusing, not the least.

SHALIMOV:

Did you like it, Sergei?

BASOV:

Me? Oh, I don't know—that is, of course, the rhymes are weak, but as a bit of humorous verse—

ZAMYSLOV:

Very serious humorous verse indeed.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*to Shalimov*):

You're a past master at pretending.

SUSLOV (*with spleen*):

Allow me, one of your "little, lugubrious people", to give my answer to that ... that ... I'm sorry, but I don't know what to call that particular genre. But it's not you, Vlas Mikhailovich, that I'll answer. I'll address myself to the source of your inspiration: to Maria Lvovna.

VLAS:

What's that? Mind what you're saying!

MARIA LVOVNA (*proudly*):

To me? Very odd. But go ahead.

SUSLOV:

Not odd at all, for you, I know, are this poet's muse.

VLAS:

Don't be a cad.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*gently*):

He doesn't know how to be anything else.

SUSLOV:

Don't interrupt. When I finish, I'll answer for all I've said. You, Maria Lvovna, are what is called a person of high principles. You've devoted yourself to some mysterious cause—maybe a great one, even a historic one—I can't

say, but evidently you think your activities give you the right to look down on other people.

MARIA LVOVNA (*calmly*):

That's not true.

SUSLOV:

You try to exert influence over everybody, to teach others how they ought to behave. You've made this boy think he has a right to judge others—

VLAS:

What piffle are you talking?

SUSLOV (*viciously*):

Patience, youngster! I've borne your mocking long enough. What I want to say is, that if we don't live as you think we ought to, respected Maria Lvovna, there's a good reason for it. We starved and suffered enough in our childhood. It's only natural that on growing up we should want to eat and drink and enjoy ourselves to our heart's content, that we should want to make up for all the hunger and hardships behind us.

SHALIMOV (*dryly*):

And who, may I ask, do you mean by "we"?

SUSLOV (*growing more vehement*):

We? You, and I, and he, and all of us. Yes, we're all children of the poor. We all worked and starved in childhood. And now that we're grown up we want to eat and take life easy—that's our psychology. You may not like it, Maria Lvovna, but it's only natural, and nothing else is to be expected of us. The human nature in us comes first, Maria Lvovna, and then all the tinsel and furbishing. And therefore I say, leave us alone! Do you think that by rating us day in and day out, by getting others to rate us, by calling us cowards and loafers, you

can make us social-minded? Oh, no! Not a single one of us—

DUDAKOV:

How cheap! Hadn't you better make it short?

SUSLOV (*more vehement than ever*):

As for myself, let me say that I'm no child, Maria Lvovna, and there's no sense trying to teach me! I'm a grown man. I'm the ordinary run of Russian—that's it, the ordinary run, and nothing more! That's what I am and what I mean to be. I *like* being it, if you want to know it. I intend to live as I please in spite of all your sermons, your preaching, your lofty ideas!

(He slaps his hat on to his head and goes off swiftly in the direction of his house. General consternation. Zamyslov, Basov and Shalimov withdraw to one side, whispering together excitedly. Varvara Mikhailovna and Maria Lvovna remain standing together. Yulia Filippovna, Dvoyetochiye, Dudakov and his wife form another group. General distress. Kaleria, depressed, stands alone under the pines. Ryumin walks quickly up and down).

VLAS

(*going off to one side and clutching his head*): Good God! What ever made me do it?

(Sonya goes over and says something to him.)

MARIA LVOVNA:

An attack of hysterics. Only a person who is mentally unbalanced could let himself go like that.

RYUMIN (*to Maria Lvovna*):

Now do you see how horrible the truth is?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

How very sad!

DVOYETOSHIYE (*to Yulia Filippovna*):

I don't understand a thing—not a thing.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Has he hurt you, Maria Lvovna?

MARIA LVOVNA:

Me? Oh, no. Only himself.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

A fine state of affairs, ladies and gentlemen! A fine state!

DUDAKOV (*to his wife*):

Just a second. (*To Dvoyetochiye.*) An abscess has burst. An abscess of the heart. The same thing might happen to any of us. (*He stammers in his excitement and is unable to go on.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Nikolai Petrovich—

ZAMYSLOV (*coming over*):

Has this upset you?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Not in the least. But I don't think I want to stay here. Take me home.

ZAMYSLOV:

Idiotic, isn't it? And a pity. The chief had got such a delicious surprise ready for us.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

We've had surprise enough for one day.

(*They go out.*)

SHALIMOV (*going over to Kaleria*):

How did you like it?

KALERIA:

Horrible! As if the muck had risen from the bottom of a bog and were choking me ... choking me!...

(Basov goes over to Vlas and takes his arm.)

VLAS:

What do you want?

BASOV (*leading him aside*):

A word with you.

RYUMIN

(*distracted, going over to Varvara Mikhailovna*): I've been overwhelmed, swept away by this regurgitation of middle-class bile, Varvara Mikhailovna. I'm going away. Good-bye. I only came to say good-bye to you. I wanted so badly to spend a quiet evening together—my last evening! I'm going away forever. Good-bye.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*not listening to him*): Do you know what I've been thinking? Perhaps Suslov is more honest than the rest of you. I mean it. He put it crudely, but what he said was the bitter truth, and nobody else has the courage to say it.

RYUMIN (*recoiling*):

Is that all? Is that your farewell? My God! (*He goes into the woods upstage.*)

BASOV (*to Vlas*):

Well, you've distinguished yourself, my fine fellow! What's to be done about it now? You've insulted my sister, and Yakov, who's a writer, and a well-known one at that. And Suslov. And Ryumin. You'll have to apologise.

VLAS:

Wha-at? Me apologise? To them?

BASOV:

Don't take it so hard. Just say you wanted to have some fun and put it on a bit too thick. They'll forgive you—they're used to your tricks—they all know you're eccentric.

VLAS (*shouting*):

You go to hell! It's you who are eccentric! A clown, that's what you are!

SONYA:

Heavens! Can't you stop it!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Vlas, what are you saying?

MARIA LVOVNA:

We've been caught up in a wave of madness.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Go away, Vlas, go away, lad.

BASOV:

Not so fast. It's me he's insulted this time.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Don't, Sergei. Vlas!

BASOV:

I'll teach him to call me a clown!

VLAS:

It's only respect for my sister keeps me from telling you—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Vlas! Not another word!

(Kaleria comes up.)

SASHA (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*):

Shall I serve supper?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Go away!

SASHA (*under her breath, to Dvoyetochiye*):

It'd be better to serve it. The master would get over his anger if he saw food on the table.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Get out of here! Shoo!

BASOV (*to Vlas*):

I'll teach you! (*Suddenly shouting.*) You young upstart!

KALERIA:

Sergei, are you crazy?

BASOV:

An upstart, that's what he is!

SHALIMOV

(*taking Basov's arm and leading him into the house. Sasha follows them*):

Drop it.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Vlas Mikhailovich! How could you?

VLAS:

Am I to blame? Am I?

SASHA:

Shall I serve the supper, Sergei Vasilyevich?

BASOV:

Be off with you! I'm nobody here—in my own house!
(*Goes inside.*)

MARIA LVOVNA (*to Sonya*):

Take him to our place. (*To Vlas.*) Go, Vlas.

VLAS:

Forgive me. And you forgive me, sister. It's all my fault.
My poor sister! Leave this place. Go away somewhere.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*softly*):

Where shall I go?

DVOYETOSHIYE:

With us. That would be ripping.

(Nobody hears what he says. With a deep sigh he turns and goes down the path to Suslov's house.)

MARIA LVOVNA:

You come to my place too, Varya.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I will ... later. Vlas ... I'll come.

(Varvara Mikhailovna goes into the house. Maria Lvovna follows her. Vlas and Sonya go into the woods. Kaleria, crushed, staggers into the house.)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

What a scene! And so unexpected! Do you understand how it happened, Kirill?

DUDAKOV:

Me? Oh, yes. The time was sure to come when we'd fly at

each other's throats. Vlas hit the nail straight on the head, Olga. But it's time for you to go home.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Wait. It's so exciting. Maybe something else will happen.

DUDAKOV:

For shame, Olga. And besides, it's really time to go home. The kids are wailing their heads off. Volka screamed at the nursemaid and she's in a huff. He says she pulled his ear. In a word, pandemonium. I told you long ago you ought to go home.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

You did not. You didn't say a word.

DUDAKOV:

I did so. Don't you remember, when we were standing up there and you told me something about Basov?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Not a word! You didn't say a single word!

DUDAKOV:

I don't know why you argue with me. I remember distinctly telling you to go home.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

You couldn't have. Only children and servants are told to go home.

DUDAKOV:

What a scrappy wench you are, Olga!

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Kirill! You promised me you wouldn't let yourself go.

DUDAKOV (*marching away from her*):

Oh, bother! It's all so stupid! So like a woman!

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*at his heels*):

Stupid, you say? Like a woman? (*Tearfully.*) Thank you for that.

(They disappear in the woods. For a few seconds the stage is empty. Darkness deepens. Basov and Shalimov come out on the veranda.)

SHALIMOV:

You ought to be a bit of a philosopher, old fellow. It's silly to fly off the handle at every little thing.

BASOV:

The young upstart! The whipper-snapper! But I hope you're not angry, are you?

SHALIMOV:

Oh, we often come up against things like that—couplets written by would-be poets in the trashy papers, but nobody takes them seriously.

(They come down off the veranda, and stand under the pines. Suslov goes over to them quickly.)

SUSLOV:

Sergei Vasilyevich! I've come back to ... I know I owe you an apology.... (*To Shalimov.*) And you, too, but I just couldn't contain myself. She raises my gorge—simply can't stand her and her kind. Can't stand her face, or her way of speaking, or anything else.

BASOV:

I understand you, old man; I understand you perfectly. A person ought to show tact and understanding.

SHALIMOV (*dryly*):

You went a little too far.

BASOV (*hurriedly*):

What of it? I endorse everything he said. In his place I'd have told her—

SUSLOV:

The thing is that all women are actresses—Russian women, tragediennes for the most part. They like to make heroines of themselves.

BASOV:

Hm, women. It's very hard to get on with them.

(Varvara Mikhailovna and Maria Lvovna come out on the veranda.)

SHALIMOV:

We ourselves make it hard. We must simply look upon them as of a lower species.

BASOV (*as if voicing another's thoughts*):

Quite right. Yes, old fellow, you're right. Women haven't climbed as high in the scale as we have. And if we are to subjugate them to our will, we must use a gentle despotism with them—gentle, but strong, with beauty in the strength.

(A shot rings out in the woods right. No one pays any attention to it.)

SUSLOV:

No, all we have to do is keep them pregnant, then we've got them where we want them.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*softly, but forcefully*): How revolting!

MARIA LVOVNA:

Good heavens, there's an odour here like the decay of dead bodies! Come away, Varya!

(Suslov slinks away, coughing into his hand.)

BASOV (*hastening over to his wife*):

Come now, Pyotr, that's going a little too far—that's stooping pretty low.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA

(*to Shalimov*): You! You!

SHALIMOV

(*taking off his hat and shrugging his shoulders*): Me, as you see.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Come quickly, Varya. Come away. (*Draws her after her. Basov watches them go in dismay.*)

BASOV:

Damn it all, they must have heard everything.

SHALIMOV (*with a little laugh*):

A fine friend you turned out to be!

BASOV (*vexed and disturbed*):

Whatever got into him, the poisonous brute! You can't say a thing like that just anywhere!

SHALIMOV (*dryly*):

I'm leaving tomorrow. It's getting damp and chilly out here. Let's go inside.

BASOV (*glumly*):

My sister's crying in there, you can be sure.

(They go inside. Everything is quiet. Pustobaika and Kropilkin come out from behind the house, both of them dressed warmly and carrying whistles and rattles. Someone in Suslov's house is heard to play a few chords on the piano, then Yulia

Filippovna and Zamyslov sing a duet: "The weary day is dying."

PUSTOBAIKA:

You show yourself on that path, I'll show myself on this, and then we'll go into the kitchen to have tea with Stepanida.

KROPILKIN:

We came out too early: nobody's asleep yet.

PUSTOBAIKA:

It's just a matter of showing ourselves. Get along.

KROPILKIN (*going off left*):

Off I goes, O Lordy, Lordy!

PUSTOBAIKA:

All the rubbish they leave, the swine! Like picnickers, these summer folk—come, clutter things up and go away, leaving you to sweep and pick up after them.

(In exasperation he makes a lot of noise with his whistle and rattle. Kropilkin whistles in reply. Pustobaika goes out. Kaleria comes out of the house and sits down under the pines, mournful and pensive. She hums an accompaniment to the singing and nods her head in tune to it. From the woods on the right comes the voice of Pustobaika.)

PUSTOBAIKA (*in alarm*):

Who are you? What? Good Lord!

(Kaleria listens with a startled look on her face.)

PUSTOBAIKA (*leading in Ryumin*):

Is it to the Basovs' you want to go?

KALERIA:

Sergei! Sergei!

RYUMIN:

A doctor! Call a doctor!

KALERIA:

Pavel Sergeyevich! You? What happened? What's the matter with him?

PUSTOBAIKA:

I goes down the path and sees him crawling towards me on the ground. Says he's wounded.

KALERIA:

Wounded? Sergei, go for Maria Lvovna! He needs a doctor, quick!

BASOV (*running out of the house*):

What's the matter? What has happened?

RYUMIN:

Forgive me.

KALERIA:

Who wounded you?

PUSTOBAIKA (*muttering*):

Who'd wound a person here? Nobody but himself. Here's the weapon. (*Takes a revolver out of the breast of his coat and surveys it calmly.*)

BASOV:

You? I thought it was Zamyslov. I thought Pyotr had—(*Runs off, calling.*) Maria Lvovna!

SHALIMOV (*wrapped in a rug*):

What? Has something happened?

KALERIA:

Are you in great pain?

RYUMIN:

I'm ashamed. Frightfully ashamed.

SHALIMOV:

Perhaps it isn't dangerous?

RYUMIN:

Take me away from here. I don't want her to see me.
Take me away, please do.

KALERIA (*to Shalimov*):

Go and call somebody. Why do you stand there?

(Shalimov hurries off to the Suslovs' house. The noise of people running, excited outcries. Maria Lvovna, Varvara Mikhailovna, Sonya and Vlas come in.)

MARIA LVOVNA:

You? Sonya, help me. Take off his jacket. Quiet, quiet, don't get excited.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Pavel Sergeyevich!

RYUMIN:

Forgive me. I intended to end it once and for all, but when a person's heart is very small and is beating very hard, it's not easy.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

But why? Why?

KALERIA (*to Ryumin, hysterically*):

How cruel of you! (*Catching herself*.) But what am I saying?
Forgive me.

VLAS (*to Kaleria*):

Go away, you shouldn't see things like this. Go away.

(She goes over to the pines. Dvoyetochiye, hatless, in a vest without a jacket and with a top-coat thrown over his shoulders, comes running in with Suslov; behind them come Zamyslov, Yulia Filippovna, Dudakov, untidy and irritable, and Olga Alexeyevna, meek and dismayed.)

MARIA LVOVNA:

Here's the wound, I don't think it's serious.

RYUMIN:

People are coming. Varvara Mikhailovna, give me your hand.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

But why?

RYUMIN:

I love you. I can't live without you.

VLAS (*between his teeth*):

Damn you and your love!

KALERIA (*in a loud whisper*):

How dare you say such a thing! How dare you give a final blow to one who is dying!

MARIA LVOVNA (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*):

Go away. (*To Ryumin.*) You have nothing to fear, the wound is a trifle. Here's another doctor.

DUDAKOV:

What is it? A gun wound? In the shoulder? Why shoot yourself in the shoulder? You want to do it in your left side, or in your temple, if you're really serious.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Think what you're saying, Kirill Akimovich!

DUDAKOV:

Quite. I beg your pardon. Bandaged him up? Good. Take him inside.

BASOV:

Into our house. Our house, Varya?

RYUMIN:

Don't lift me. I can walk.

DUDAKOV:

Can you? Good.

RYUMIN

(*staggers away, supported by Basov and Suslov*): I made a hash out of my life and couldn't even die gracefully. A pathetic specimen.

(They lead him into the house. Dudakov goes with them.)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

He's right.

ZAMYSLOV (*drearily*):

What a sorry farce!

PUSTOBAIKA (*to Dvoyetochiye*):

I'm the one as found him.

DVOYETOSHIYE:

Good for you. Very good indeed.

PUSTOBAIKA:

Oughtn't I to get something for my pains?

DVOYETOSHIYE (*reproachfully*):

You unfeeling man! (*Gives him a coin.*)

PUSTOBAIKA:

Thanks.

KALERIA (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*):

Is he going to die? I'm the one who should have done that, aren't I, Varya?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Hush. Don't say such things. (*Hysterically.*) What disgusting creatures we are! Why, o why?

SHALIMOV (*to Maria Lvovna*):

Is it a dangerous wound?

MARIA LVOVNA:

No.

SHALIMOV:

It's all very unpleasant. Varvara Mikhailovna, allow me—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*starting*):

What?

SHALIMOV:

Just a few minutes ago you heard me say—(*Basov, Suslov and Dudakov come on.*)

BASOV:

We've put him to bed.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Leave me alone! I don't believe you; I don't want to hear

your explanations. I hate all of you with all my heart!
You're miserable, contemptible monstrosities!

VLAS:

Wait, sister, let me tell them. I know what they are—they're mummies. And I'll spend the rest of my life tearing off the costumes they wear to cover up their lies, their vulgarity, the poverty of their feelings and the obscenity of their thoughts!

(Shalimov shrugs his shoulders and walks off to one side.)

MARIA LVOVNA:

Stop it. It won't do the least good.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

No, let them hear. I've paid dearly for my right to tell them what I think of them! They've twisted my soul out of shape and ruined my life. Was I like this before? There's nothing I believe in any more—nothing at all. I have no strength left, and nothing to live for. Is that what I used to be? That's what they've brought me to.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*agonisedly*):

I, too, can say that!

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*to her husband*):

Look at Varya. Take a good look at her face. Did you ever see anything so vicious?

(Dudakov shakes off his wife's arm.)

BASOV:

Don't, Varya. Must we have this? After all, nothing in particular has happened. Ryumin has done a foolish thing, but is it worth—?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Don't come near me, Sergei!

BASOV:

But, darling—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

I never was your darling, or you mine. We have never been anything to each other but husband and wife. Now there is nothing at all between us. I am going away.

BASOV:

Where? For shame, Varya! In front of everybody! Out in the street, so to speak—

(Suslov stands motionless at the back of the stage.)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

There's nobody here.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Come away, Varya.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

Don't interrupt her. Let her have her say.

DVOYETOSHIYE (*bitterly*):

Ah, good folk, you've upset me bad today, indeed you have.

KALERIA (*to Maria Lvovna*):

What is it? Do you understand what's happened?

MARIA LVOVNA:

Calm yourself. Help me take her away.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA:

Yes, I'm going away—as far away as possible from this

place where everything is rotten and corrupt. Away from these people with nothing to do. I want to live! And I intend to live. To live and work—to undo the harm you've done. (*Looks at them and cries out in despair.*) May you be accursed forever!

VLAS:

Come, sister. Don't. You've said enough. (*Leads her away.*)

BASOV (*to Shalimov*):

This is outrageous! Why don't you help me do something about it?

SHALIMOV (*sarcastically*):

Give her a glass of cold water. What else can you do?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA

(*going over to Varvara Mikhailovna*): If only I could go away too!

BASOV:

Varya! Where are you going? I wouldn't have expected this of you, Maria Lvovna! You're a doctor. You ought to do something to quiet her nerves.

MARIA LVOVNA:

Don't talk to me.

DVOYETOSHIYE (*to Basov*):

Tck! A fine one you are!

(*Follows Varvara Mikhailovna and Vlas into the woods right.*)

KALERIA (*sobbing*):

And me? What is to become of me?

SONYA (*going over to her*):

Come to our house. (*Leads her away.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*with grim tranquillity*):

Well, Pyotr Ivanovich, let's go on living.

(Suslov grins and follows her.)

BASOV:

What's happening? Everyone suddenly gone clean off their chumps! Was there ever an idiot like that Ryumin? Just because his nerves happened to be unstrung.... Why don't you say something, Yakov? What are you laughing at? Do you think it'll all pass over? It happened so suddenly—bang!—and everything blown to smithereens. What are we to do now?

SHALIMOV:

Take it easy, old fellow. It's nothing but a display of oratory inspired by hysterics.

(Takes Basov's arm and leads him to the house. Dudakov, with his hands clasped behind him, comes out of the house and goes slowly to the right where his wife is waiting for him under the trees.)

BASOV:

Damnation!

SHALIMOV (*mockingly*):

Come, come. The Suslovs, as you see, have decided to go on living; let us calmly do the same.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA:

Kirill, is he going to die?

DUDAKOV (*testily*):

No. Come along. Nobody's going to die.

(They go into the woods.)

SHALIMOV:

It's all so unimportant, old fellow. Everything. People as well as events. Pour me out a glass of wine. So utterly meaningless, old fellow. (*Drinks. From the woods comes the long low whistle of the watchman.*)

CURTAIN

Enemies

(scenes)

Characters in the Play

ZAKHAR BARDIN, *aged 45*

PAULINA, *his wife, aged something under 40*

YAKOV BARDIN *aged 40*

TATYANA, *his wife, aged 28, an actress*

NADYA, *Paulina's niece, aged 18*

PECHENEGOV, *a retired general, uncle of the Bardins*

MIKHAIL SKROBOTOV, *aged 40, a merchant, partner of the
Bardins*

CLEOPATRA, *his wife, aged 30*

NIKOLAI SKROBOTOV, *his brother, aged 35, prosecuting
attorney*

SINTSOV, *a clerk*

POLOGY, *a clerk*

KON, *an ex-soldier*

GREKOV

LEVSHIN

YAGODIN

RYABTSOV

AKIMOV

} *workmen*

AGRAFENA, *the housekeeper*

BOBOYEDOV, *captain of gendarmes*

KVACH, *a corporal*

AN ARMY LIEUTENANT

CHIEF OF POLICE

A POLICEMAN

Gendarmes, soldiers, workmen, clerks, servants

ACT I

A garden shaded by large ancient limes. In the depths of the garden stands a white army tent. Under the trees to the right is a wide seat made of turf with a table in front of it. Another table laid for breakfast stands under the trees to the left. A small samovar is boiling. Wicker chairs are placed about the table. AGRAFENA is making coffee. KON is standing under a tree smoking a pipe and talking to POLOGY.

POLOGY (*speaking with clumsy gestures*):

Of course, you know better. I'm a person of no importance; my life is insignificant enough. But every cucumber was raised with my own hands, and no one shall steal them without answering to me for it.

KON (*sullenly*):

Nobody's asking your permission.

POLOGY (*pressing his hand to his breast*):

But listen, if somebody takes your property, haven't you a right to ask the protection of the law?

KON:

Go ahead and ask. Today they take your cucumbers, tomorrow your head. There's your law for you!

POLOGY:

That's a strange thing to hear you say, and even dangerous. How can you, a retired soldier wearing the Order of St. George, allow yourself to speak so contemptuously of the law?

KON:

There is no law. There's only a command. L-e-f-t face! Forwar-r-rd march! And off you go. When they say "halt!" it means halt.

AGRAFENA:

You might stop smoking that makhorka, Kon; it's enough to make the leaves curl up.

POLOGY:

If they stole because they were hungry, I might be able to excuse them. Hunger justifies a great many things; one might say that all villainy was done for the sake of satisfying hunger. When a man wants to eat, then of course....

KON:

The angels don't eat, but Satan went against God just the same.

POLOGY (*happily*):

I would call that mere mischiefmaking.

(Enter Yakov Bardin. He speaks quietly, and as though he were listening to his own words. Pology bows to him. Kon gives a careless salute.)

YAKOV:

Hullo. What are you doing here?

POLOGY:

I've come to Zakhar Ivanovich with a dutiful request.

AGRAFENA:

He's come to complain. Last night some fellows from the factory stole his cucumbers.

YAKOV:

That so? You'll have to tell my brother.

POLOGY:

Exactly. It's to him I'm going.

KON (*glumly*):

I don't see you going anywhere. Just standing here and grumbling.

POLOGY:

I'm not interfering with you any, am I? If you were reading the paper or something, then of course you might accuse me of interfering.

YAKOV:

Kon, I want to speak to you.

KON (*crossing over*):

You're a stingy son of a gun, Pology, an old pettifogger.

POLOGY:

Spare your words. Man was given a tongue for the making of complaints.

AGRAFENA:

Oh, stop it, Pology. You're more like a mosquito than a human being.

YAKOV (*to Kon*):

What's he doing here? Why doesn't he go away?

POLOGY (*to Agrafena*):

If my words offend your ear and fail to touch your heart, I shall be silent. (*He goes out, sauntering down the path, touching the trees as he passes.*)

YAKOV (*embarrassed*):

Well, Kon, it seems I hurt somebody's feelings again yesterday?

KON (*with a grin*):

I'm afraid you did.

YAKOV (*walking up and down*):

Humph! Very strange. Why do I always insult people when I'm drunk, Kon?

KON:

Sometimes people are better drunk than sober. They're braver, drunk—not afraid of anybody; don't even spare themselves. We used to have a noncom in our company who was a tattletale and a toady when he was sober, and always getting into a fight. When he was drunk he would cry like a baby. "Brothers," he would say, "I'm a man like the rest of you. Spit in my eye, brothers," he would say. And some of them did.

YAKOV:

Who was it I insulted yesterday?

KON:

The public prosecutor. You called him a blockhead. And then you told him the director's wife had a string of lovers.

YAKOV:

Think of that, now! As if it was any business of mine!

KON:

Certainly. And then...

YAKOV:

Very well, Kon; that's enough. I don't want to know how many people I've insulted. It's all that accursed vodka! (*Goes over to the table and stares at the bottles; then he pours himself out a tall glass of wine and sips it. Agrafena glances at him out of the corner of her eye and sighs*). You feel just a little bit sorry for me, don't you?

AGRAFENA:

It's such a pity. You're so plain and simple with everybody. Not at all like most gentlefolk.

YAKOV:

But Kon here doesn't pity anybody. He only philosophises. It takes a lot of abuse to make a person begin to think, isn't that right, Kon? (*From the tent comes the voice of the General, crying: "Hey, Kon!"*) I guess you've had rather rough treatment and that's why you're so smart.

KON (*leaving*):

The very sight of that General is enough to turn me into an idiot.

GENERAL (*emerging from the tent*):

Kon! To the river! Lively! (*They disappear in the garden.*)

YAKOV

(*sitting and rocking back and forth on a chair*):

Is my wife still sleeping?

AGRAFENA:

No; she's up and had a swim.

YAKOV:

So you pity me, eh?

AGRAFENA:

You ought to take treatments.

YAKOV:

Well, pour me out a drop of cognac.

AGRAFENA:

Perhaps I oughtn't to, Yakov Ivanovich?

YAKOV:

Why oughtn't you? Refusing me one drink won't do me any good.

(With a sigh, Agrafena pours him out a large glass of cognac. Mikhail Skrobotov enters in a state of excitement. He pulls nervously at his pointed black beard and toys with the hat in his hand.)

MIKHAIL:

Is Zakhar Ivanovich up? Not yet? I might have known as much! Give me ... is there any cold milk? Thanks. Good morning, Yakov Ivanovich! Have you heard the news? Those rascals are insisting that I fire foreman Dichkov. They threaten to stop working if I don't, devil take them.

YAKOV:

Go ahead and fire him.

MIKHAIL:

That would be easy enough, but you see—that's not the point. The point is that concessions corrupt them. Today they demand that I fire the foreman, tomorrow they'll want me to hang myself for their amusement.

YAKOV (*gently*):

You think they'll wait for tomorrow to want that?

MIKHAIL:

You seem to find it funny. I'd like to see you try to handle those grimy gentlemen—about a thousand of them with their heads turned by all kinds of people, including your dear brother with his liberalism, and a pack of idiots who write leaflets. (*Looks at his watch.*) Almost ten o'clock, and they threaten to begin the fun after lunch. Oh yes, Yakov Ivanovich, your brother certainly made a nice mess of things at the factory while I was away on leave. He completely corrupted the men with his lack of firmness.

(Sintsov comes on right. He is about thirty years old. There is something calm and impressive in his face and figure.)

SINTSOV:

Some representatives from the workers have come to the office and demand to see the owner, Mikhail Vasilyevich.

MIKHAIL:

Demand? Be good enough to send them to the devil!
(*Paulina comes on left.*) Forgive me, Paulina Dmitriyevna.

PAULINA (*graciously*):

You have a habit of swearing. But what is the occasion this time?

MIKHAIL:

It's all this "proletariat"! They "demand"! Formerly they came to me with humble "requests".

PAULINA:

I must say you're very harsh with people.

MIKHAIL

(*making a futile gesture with his hands*):

There you are!

SINTSOV:

What shall I tell the representatives?

MIKHAIL:

Let them wait. Run along.

(Sintsov goes out unhurriedly.)

PAULINA:

That man has an interesting face. Has he been working for us long?

MIKHAIL:

About a year.

PAULINA:

He gives the impression of being well-bred. Who is he?

MIKHAIL (*shrugging his shoulders*):

Earns forty rubles a month. (*Looks at his watch, sighs and glances about, catching sight of Pology under one of the trees.*) What are you doing here? Have you come for me?

POLOGY:

No, Mikhail Vasilyevich, I've come to see Zakhar Ivanovich.

MIKHAIL:

On what business?

POLOGY:

In respect to a violation of property rights.

MIKHAIL (*to Paulina*):

This is a new employee with a bent for gardening. He is firmly convinced that everything on earth was created for the sole purpose of injuring his interests. Everything annoys him—the sun, England, new machinery, the frogs....

POLOGY (*smiling*):

Allow me to observe that the frogs annoy everybody when they begin croaking.

MIKHAIL:

Get back to the office! What's this habit you have of dropping everything and coming to complain? I won't have it. Be off with you!

(Pology bows and leaves. Paulina smiles and stands watching him through her lorgnette.)

PAULINA:

How strict you are! He's an amusing type. It seems to me that Russians are more original than people of other nationalities.

MIKHAIL:

If you said more aboriginal I'd agree with you. I've been managing men for fifteen years, and that has given me an excellent understanding of the noble Russian people as painted by our clerical writers.

PAULINA:

Clerical?

MIKHAIL:

Your Chernyshevskys, Dobrolyubovs, Zlatovratskys, Uspenskys.... (*Looks at his watch.*) What a long time Zakhar Ivanovich is in coming!

PAULINA:

Do you know what's keeping him? He's finishing last night's chess game with your brother.

MIKHAIL:

And down at the factory they're threatening to quit work after lunch! You can be sure that no good will ever come of Russia, and that's a fact. It's a land of anarchy! People have an inborn disgust for any kind of work and complete inability to maintain order. There's not the slightest respect for law!

PAULINA.

But that's only natural. How can there be respect for law in a country where there is no law? Between you and me, our government....

MIKHAIL:

Oh, I'm not justifying anybody. Not even the government.

Take the Anglo-Saxons. (*Zakhar Bardin and Nikolai Skrobotov come in.*) There could be no better material from which to build a state. An Englishman prances before the law on his hind legs like a circus horse. He had a feeling for law in his very bones and muscles.... Good morning, Zakhar Ivanovich! Hullo, Nikolai! Allow me to inform you of the latest result of your liberal policy: the workers are demanding that I fire Dichkov immediately. They threaten to walk out after lunch if I don't. How do you like that?

ZAKHAR (*rubbing his forehead*):

Hm, Dichkov? The fellow who's always using his fists and going after the girls? Of course we'll have to fire him. That's fair enough.

MIKHAIL (*excitedly*):

Good Lord, can't you talk seriously? It's not a question of justice, but of policy. Justice is Nikolai's province. Your conception of justice, let me repeat, is ruinous to business.

ZAKHAR:

But how can that be? That's a paradox.

PAULINA:

Talking business in my presence! And so early in the morning!

MIKHAIL:

Sorry, but I've got to. This matter must be made clear. Before I went on leave, I held the factory in my hand like this (*holds up a tight fist*), and nobody dared to let-out so much as a peep! As you know, I never saw anything beneficial in these Sunday amusements—reading circles and the like—under our conditions. The raw Russian mind is not illuminated by the light of reason when a spark of knowledge falls upon it. It only smokes and smoulders.

NIKOLAI:

One should always speak calmly.

MIKHAIL

(*restraining himself with difficulty*): Thanks for the advice. It is perfectly sound, but unfortunately I cannot accept it. In six months, Zakhar Ivanovich, your attitude towards the workers has shaken and undermined the firm structure which it took me eight years to build up. I had won the respect of all the men. They looked upon me as their master. Now it is clear that there are two masters, a good one and a bad one. You, of course, are the good one.

ZAKHAR (*embarrassed*):

But ... er ... I don't understand you.

PAULINA:

That's a very strange thing to say, Mikhail Vasilyevich.

MIKHAIL:

I have reasons for saying it. You have placed me in an idiotic position. The last time this question came up I told the workers I would close down the factory sooner than fire Dichkov. They saw I meant what I said and they became resigned. On Friday, Zakhar Ivanovich, you told that fellow Grekov that Dichkov was a roughneck and you meant to fire him.

ZAKHAR

(*conciliatingly*): But, my dear fellow, he goes around punching people in the jaw and that sort of thing. Surely we can't allow it. We're Europeans. We're civilised.

MIKHAIL:

First of all, we're factory owners. On every holiday the workers beat each other up; what business is that of ours? But you'll have to postpone teaching the workers good

manners for the present. At this very moment their representatives are waiting for you in the office and they will demand that you fire Dichkov. What do you intend to do?

ZAKHAR:

Do you find that Dichkov is so indispensable?

NIKOLAI (*dryly*):

It seems to me this is not a question of an individual. It's a matter of principle.

MIKHAIL:

Exactly! It's a question of who is master at the factory—you and I, or the workers.

ZAKHAR (*at a loss*):

I understand, but....

MIKHAIL:

If we give in to them this time, there's no knowing what they'll demand next. They're a brazen lot. Six months of these Sunday schools and other things have done their work. They glare at me like wolves, and some leaflets have put in an appearance. It savours of socialism.

PAULINA:

Socialism in an out-of-the-way place like this! It sounds almost funny, doesn't it?

MIKHAIL:

Does it? My dear Paulina Dmitriyevna, children are amusing as long as they are small. But gradually they grow up, and all of a sudden you find yourself face to face with full-grown rascals.

ZAKHAR:

What do you intend doing?

MIKHAIL:

Closing down the factory. Let them go hungry for a while and they'll cool off. (*Yakov gets up, goes over to the table and has a drink, then he goes slowly off.*) As soon as we shut down, the women will put in an appearance. They'll begin to cry, and women's tears act like smelling salts on those who are dizzy with dreams. They immediately bring them to their senses.

PAULINA:

That's a harsh thing to say.

MIKHAIL:

Perhaps, but life demands such harshness.

ZAKHAR:

But ... er ... such a measure—do you think it's absolutely necessary?

MIKHAIL:

Can you suggest anything else?

ZAKHAR:

What if I go and speak to them?

MIKHAIL:

You are sure to give in to them, and then my position will be intolerable. Your wavering, if you'll forgive my saying so, is almost an insult to me. To say nothing of the harm it does.

ZAKHAR (*quickly*):

But, my dear fellow, I don't object. I'm just trying to think it out. You must understand I am more of a country gentleman than an industrialist. This is all so new to me, and so complicated. I want to see justice done. Peasants are more gentle and good-natured than workmen. I get on famously with them. To be sure there are some

interesting types among the workers, but on the whole I agree with you. They are too presumptuous.

MIKHAIL:

Especially since you have made them so many promises.

ZAKHAR:

As soon as you left I began to notice a sort of restlessness; there were even disturbances. Perhaps I was not very cautious, but the workers had to be quieted down. Things have been written about us in the papers, and very sharp things, I must say.

MIKHAIL (*impatiently*):

It is now seventeen minutes past ten. We've got to come to some decision. As the matter stands, either I close down the factory or I withdraw from the firm. We will not suffer any loss if the factory is closed down. I have taken the necessary measures. All our rush orders are ready and we have reserve stocks in the warehouses.

ZAKHAR:

Hm. Must it be decided immediately? Oh, yes. Well, what do you think, Nikolai Vasilyevich?

NIKOLAI:

I agree with my brother. If we value civilisation, we must hold strictly to principles.

ZAKHAR:

That is, you also think we should close down? What a pity! My dear Mikhail Vasilyevich, please don't be offended with me. I shall give you my answer in, let's say, ten minutes. Will that do?

MIKHAIL:

Quite.

ZAKHAR:

Please come with me, Paulina.

PAULINA (*following her husband*):

Goodness, how unpleasant all this is!

ZAKHAR:

In the course of centuries the peasant has developed an inherent respect for the gentry.... (*They go out.*)

MIKHAIL (*through his teeth*):

The milksop! He can say that after the agrarian massacres in the south! ¹ Fool!

NIKOLAI:

Easy, Mikhail! Why should you let yourself go like that?

MIKHAIL:

My nerves are shot to pieces, can't you see? I'm going to the factory, and ... look! (*Takes a revolver out of his pocket.*) They hate me, thanks to that idiot. But I can't drop everything. You would be the first one to blame me if I did. All our capital is in that factory. If I withdraw, that bald-headed idiot will ruin everything.

NIKOLAI (*calmly*):

That's bad, if you're not exaggerating.

SINTSOV (*entering*):

The workers are asking for you.

MIKHAIL:

For me? What do they want?

SINTSOV:

There are rumours the factory will be closed down after lunch.

MIKHAIL (*to his brother*):

Hear that? How did they find out?

NIKOLAI:

Probably Yakov Ivanovich told them.

MIKHAIL:

Damn it all! (*Looking at Sintsov with an irritation he cannot suppress.*) Why are you so concerned, Mr. Sintsov? Coming here—asking questions....

SINTSOV:

The book-keeper asked me to come for you.

MIKHAIL:

He did, did he? Where did you get that habit of staring and grinning? What are you so happy about?

SINTSOV:

That, I think, is my own business.

MIKHAIL:

I don't agree. And I advise you to show more respect in the future, do you hear?

(Sintsov fixes him with his eye.)

MIKHAIL:

Well, what are you waiting for?

TATYANA (*coming on right*):

Oh! The director! In a hurry as usual!? (*Calling to Sintsov.*)
Hullo, Matvei Nikolayevich!

SINTSOV (*warmly*):

Good morning. How do you feel? Aren't you tired?

TATYANA:

Not in the least. Only my arms ache from rowing. Are you going to the office? I'll go with you as far as the gate. Do you know what I want to tell you?

SINTSOV:

Hardly.

TATYANA (*walking beside Sintsov*):

You said lots of clever things yesterday, but you spoke too emotionally, too pointedly. The more unemotionally some things are said, the more convincing they are. (*Their talk becomes inaudible.*)

MIKHAIL:

How do you like that? The employee I have just called to account for his impudence flaunting his intimacy with Yakov's wife in my face! He's a drunkard and she's an actress. Why they ever came here the devil only knows.

NIKOLAI:

She's a strange woman—good-looking, well-dressed, rather tempting—and yet she seems about to have an affair with that pauper. Highly original, but foolish.

MIKHAIL (*ironically*):

That's what you call being democratic. She's the daughter of a village teacher, you know, and she says she always feels drawn to the common people. Damn it all, I wish I had never got myself mixed up with these country gentlemen!

NIKOLAI:

I don't think you should complain. You're the head of this business.

MIKHAIL:

Not yet, but I *will* be.

NIKOLAI:

I have an idea she's easy pickings. Seems very sensual.

MIKHAIL:

That liberal of ours—he must have gone back to bed. No, Russia will never get anywhere. I tell you. People wander about in a daze, talking and day-dreaming. Nobody knows his place in life. As for the government—it's made up of malicious morons who don't understand anything and can't do anything.

TATYANA (*returning*):

Are you shouting too? For some reason everyone has begun to shout.

AGRAFENA:

Zakhar Ivanovich is asking for you, Mikhail Vasilyevich.

MIKHAIL:

At last. (*Goes out.*)

TATYANA (*sitting down at the table*):

What is he so upset about?

NIKOLAI:

You would hardly find it interesting.

TATYANA (*calmly*):

He reminds me of a policeman who often used to be on duty in our theatre in Kostroma: tall and thin, with bulging eyes.

NIKOLAI:

I fail to see the resemblance to my brother.

TATYANA:

I'm not speaking of a physical resemblance. This policeman, too, was always in a hurry. He never walked;

he ran. He never smoked; he gobbled up cigarettes. He had no time to live at all. All his time was taken up by rushing somewhere, but not even he knew where.

NIKOLAI:

Do you think he really didn't know?

TATYANA:

I'm sure he didn't. When a person has a clear purpose, he pursues it calmly. That fellow was always rushing. And it was a special kind of a rush. Something seemed to be goading him on, and in his hurry he got in his own way and everybody else's. He wasn't greedy—not in the narrow sense. He was only greedily anxious to get rid of all his duties, including the duty to take bribes. He didn't *take* bribes—he *snatched* them, and in such haste that he even forgot to say thank you. Finally he was run over and killed by a carriage.

NIKOLAI:

Do you wish to imply that my brother's energy is directed to no purpose?

TATYANA:

Is that the impression you got? It isn't what I wanted to say. Your brother simply reminds me of that policeman.

NIKOLAI:

Not very complimentary, I should say.

TATYANA:

I had no intention of paying your brother compliments.

NIKOLAI:

You have an unusual manner of flirting.

TATYANA:

Have I?

NIKOLAI:

And not a very gay one.

TATYANA (*calmly*):

Is it possible for a woman to be gay with you?

NIKOLAI:

Come, now!

PAULINA (*coming in*):

Nothing seems to go right today. Nobody is having breakfast, nobody seems to have got enough sleep. Early this morning Nadya went to the woods for mushrooms with Cleopatra Petrovna. Yesterday I asked her not to. Dear me! How difficult everything is!

TATYANA:

You eat too much.

PAULINA:

Why that tone, Tanya? Your attitude toward people is abnormal.

TATYANA:

Really?

PAULINA:

It's easy enough to take things calmly when you have nothing, and so are free of all responsibility. It's quite a different thing when nearly a thousand people depend on you for their food.

TATYANA:

Stop feeding them, let them live as they like. Turn over everything to them—the factory, the land, and live in peace.

NIKOLAI (*lighting up*):

From what play did you get that?

PAULINA:

I don't know why you should say such things, Tanya. You should see how upset Zakhar is. We have decided to close down the factory for a while, until the workers come to their senses. But just imagine how hard it will be! Hundreds of people will be thrown out of work. And they have children. It's horrible!

TATYANA:

Why do you do it if it's so horrible? Why torture yourselves?

PAULINA:

Oh, Tanya! How irritating you are! If we don't close down, the workers will go on strike, and that will be even worse.

TATYANA:

What will?

PAULINA:

Everything. We certainly can't concede all their demands. And actually they aren't their demands. It's just that a pack of Socialists have put ideas into their heads and so they go about shouting. (*Fervently.*) I can't understand it! Abroad, socialism is in its proper place and its leaders conduct activities quite openly. But with us, here in Russia, they get the workers off in corners and whisper to them, ignoring the fact that socialism is out of place in a monarchy! It's a constitution we need and not socialism.² What do you think, Nikolai Vasilyevich?

NIKOLAI (*with a short laugh*):

I take a slightly different view of it. Socialism is a very dangerous phenomenon. And it is bound to find fertile

soil in a country which has no independent ... er ... so to speak, race philosophy; in a country where everything is borrowed on the run. We are extremists. That is our weakness.

PAULINA:

Oh, that's true enough! We are extremists.

TATYANA (*getting up*):

Especially you and your husband. And the prosecutor here.

PAULINA:

What do you know about it, Tanya! Zakhar is considered to be a Red in our gubernia.

TATYANA (*walking up and down*):

I think he only turns red from shame, and not very often at that.

PAULINA:

Tanya! What in the world has got into you?

TATYANA:

Why, have I offended you? I didn't mean to. Your life, it seems to me, is like an amateur performance. The roles have been wrongly assigned, nobody has any talent, everyone acts abominably. And the play doesn't make sense.

NIKOLAI:

There is some truth in what you say. Everyone complains that the play is boring.

TATYANA:

We ourselves make it so, and the extras and the stage hands are beginning to see it. Some day they'll drive us off the boards.

(Enter the General and Kon.)

NIKOLAI:

Aren't you carrying it a little too far?

GENERAL (*calling*):

Paulina! Some milk for the General! See that it's ice cold!
(*To Nikolai.*) Hullo, you old coffin of laws! Your hand, my
charming niece! Kon, recite your lesson: what is a soldier?

KON (*bored*):

Whatever his superior wants him to be, sir.

GENERAL:

What if he wants him to be a fish, eh?

KON:

A soldier must be able to be anything.

TATYANA:

My dear uncle, you amused us with this scene yesterday.
Must we have it every day?

PAULINA (*with a sigh*):

Every day after his swim.

GENERAL:

Yes, indeed, every day. And always something different.
That old joker should make up the questions and answers
himself.

TATYANA:

Do you enjoy it, Kon?

KON:

The General enjoys it.

TATYANA:

And you?

GENERAL:

He enjoys it too.

KON:

I'm too old for the circus, but once you've got to eat, you've got to grin and bear it.

GENERAL:

You sly old rascal! Right about face! Forwar-r-d march!

TATYANA:

Don't you ever get tired of making fun of that poor old man?

GENERAL:

I'm an old man myself. But I get tired of you all right. An actress should be entertaining, but you certainly are not.

PAULINA:

Uncle, do you know....

GENERAL:

I know nothing.

PAULINA:

We're closing down the factory.

GENERAL:

What? Good for you! No more whistles! Early every morning, right in the middle of a sound sleep—o-o-o-o! That's right, close it down!

MIKHAIL (*entering quickly*):

Nikolai, just a minute! (*Taking him aside.*) The factory is closed down, but we had better take measures, just in case. Send a telegram to the Vice-Governor; tell him briefly the situation and ask him to send soldiers. Sign my name.

NIKOLAI:

He's my friend as well.

MIKHAIL:

I'm off to send those representatives to the devil. Don't tell anyone about the telegram. I'll tell them myself when the time comes. You won't?

NIKOLAI:

I won't.

MIKHAIL:

It makes you feel fine to have things your own way! I'm older than you in years, but younger in spirit, don't you think?

NIKOLAI:

It's not youth, but nervousness, if you ask me.

MIKHAIL (*ironically*):

I'll show you whether it's nervousness or not. You'll see!
(*Goes out laughing.*)

PAULINA:

So they've decided to do it, Nikolai Vasilyevich?

NIKOLAI (*going out*):

Seems so.

PAULINA:

Good heavens!

GENERAL:

What have they decided to do?

PAULINA:

To close down the factory.

GENERAL:

Oh, that. Kon!

KON:

Here, sir.

GENERAL:

The fishing-rods and the boat!

KON:

Everything's ready.

GENERAL:

I'm off to be amused by the fish. I prefer it to being abused by humans. (*Laughing.*) Well put, eh? (*Nadya runs in.*) Ah, my pretty butterfly! What's up?

NADYA (*happily*):

We've just had an adventure! (*Turning back, she calls.*) Do come here please! Grekov! Don't let him go, Cleopatra Petrovna! Just as we were coming out of the woods, Auntie, we suddenly came upon three drunken workmen.

PAULINA:

There now! I warned you....

CLEOPATRA (*followed by Grekov*):

Can you imagine anything more disgusting?

NADYA:

Why disgusting? It was so funny! Three workmen, Auntie, all of them bowing and smiling and saying, "Good morning, dear ladies!"

CLEOPATRA:

I shall certainly ask my husband to dismiss them.

GREKOV (*smiling*):

What for?

GENERAL (to Nadya):

Who is that ... er ... smudgeface?

NADYA:

He's the one who saved us, grandfather, don't you see?

GENERAL:

No, I don't.

CLEOPATRA (to Nadya):

As though anyone *could*, the way you tell it.

NADYA:

I tell it just the way it was.

PAULINA:

It's impossible to make head or tail out of what you're saying, Nadya.

NADYA:

Because you keep interrupting me! They came up to us and said, "Let's sing a song, shall we?"

PAULINA:

What impertinence!

NADYA:

Nothing of the kind! "We've heard you sing very well," they said. "Of course," they said, "we're a little tipsy, but we're better that way." And it's the truth, Auntie. When they're drunk they aren't sullen, as they usually are.

CLEOPATRA:

Fortunately for us, this young man....

NADYA:

I tell it better than you do! Cleopatra Petrovna began scolding them—and you needn't have, I'm sure

you needn't! And then one of them, the tall thin one....

CLEOPATRA (*grimly*):

I know who he is.

NADYA:

... took her by the hand and said in such a sad voice:
"You're such a pretty well-bred lady, it's a pleasure just to look at you. Why should you scold? Have we done anything to hurt you?" He said it so nicely—from his very heart! But then another one, a gruff one, said: "Why do you talk to them? As if they could understand anything! They're not people, they're beasts!" Us—beasts! She and I. (*Laughs.*)

TATYANA (*laughing*):

You seem to be very pleased with the title.

PAULINA:

What did I tell you, Nadya? If you insist on running off to all sorts of places....

GREKOV (*to Nadya*):

May I go now?

NADYA:

Oh, no. Please don't. Won't you have some tea? Or milk? Please do!

(The General laughs. Cleopatra shrugs her shoulders. Tatyana watches Grekov and hums quietly. Paulina drops her head and concentrates on the spoons she is wiping.)

GREKOV (*smiling*):

No, thank you, I don't care for anything.

NADYA (*insisting*):

Don't be bashful. These are all very nice people, really.

PAULINA (*protestingly*):

Nadya!

NADYA (*to Grekov*):

Don't go yet. I haven't finished telling about it.

CLEOPATRA (*displeased*):

In a word, this young man put in a timely appearance and talked his drunken friends into leaving us in peace. I asked him to see us home, and that's all there is to tell.

NADYA:

Oh, the way you tell it! If it had been that way it would simply have been tiresome!

GENERAL:

Well, now, what are we to make of this?

NADYA (*to Grekov*):

Sit down! Auntie, why don't you invite him to sit down? And what are you all so glum about?

PAULINA

(*to Grekov, from where she is sitting*): I am very grateful to you, young man.

GREKOV:

Don't mention it.

PAULINA (*more dryly*):

It was very good of you to defend these young women.

GREKOV (*calmly*):

There was no need to defend them. No one wanted to do them harm.

NADYA:

Auntie! How can you say such a thing!

PAULINA:

Don't try to teach your elders!

NADYA:

But of course nobody defended anybody. He simply said to them, "Leave them alone, comrades. That isn't nice." They were so glad to see him! "Grekov!" they cried. "Come along with us! You're a clever chap!" And he really is clever, Auntie. Forgive me, Grekov, but that's the truth.

GREKOV (*smiling*):

You have placed me in a very embarrassing position.

NADYA:

Have I? I didn't mean to. It isn't me, it's them, Grekov.

PAULINA:

Nadya! I can't endure your exuberances. You make yourself ridiculous. But enough of this!

NADYA (*excitedly*):

Laugh if I'm so funny! What are you sitting there like owls for? Go ahead and laugh!

CLEOPATRA:

Nadya has a talent for making mountains out of molehills—and doing it very noisily. That's particularly unpleasant now, in front of a stranger who, as you see, is laughing at her.

NADYA (*to Grekov*):

Are you laughing at me?

GREKOV (*simply*):

Not at all. I am admiring you.

PAULINA (*overwhelmed*):

What? Uncle....

CLEOPATRA (*with a short laugh*):

There you are!

GENERAL:

Enough of this! Too much of a good thing! Here, young man, take this and be off.

GREKOV (*turning away*):

Thank you, but that is quite unnecessary.

NADYA (*covering her face with her hands*):

Oh! How could you!

GENERAL (*stopping Grekov*):

Wait a minute! I'm offering you ten rubles!

GREKOV (*calmly*):

What of it?

(For a second all are silent.)

GENERAL (*confused*):

Er ... a ... who are you anyway?

GREKOV:

One of the workers.

GENERAL:

A smith?

GREKOV:

No, a fitter.

GENERAL (*sternly*):

That's all the same. Why don't you take this money, eh?

GREKOV:

Because I don't want it.

GENERAL (*irritated*):

Nonsense. What *do* you want?

GREKOV:

Nothing.

GENERAL:

Maybe you'd like to ask the hand of the young lady, eh?

(He laughs. Everyone is embarrassed.)

NADYA:

Oh! Think what you're saying!

PAULINA:

Please, Uncle....

GREKOV (*calmly, to the General*):

How old are you?

GENERAL (*amazed*):

What? Me? How old?

GREKOV (*in the same tone*):

Yes. How old are you?

GENERAL (*glancing about*):

I'm ... er ... sixty-one. What do you want to know that for?

GREKOV (*leaving*):

You're old enough to have more sense.

GENERAL:

What? More sense? Me?

NADYA (*running after Grekov*):

Please—please, don't be angry. He's just an old man. They're really very nice people. Honest to goodness.

GENERAL:

What the devil do you call this?

GREKOV:

Don't trouble yourself. This is only what is to be expected.

NADYA:

It's just because of the heat. It's put everyone in a bad mood. And I told about our adventure so badly.

GREKOV (*smiling*):

They wouldn't have understood no matter how you told it.

(They disappear.)

GENERAL (*overwhelmed*):

How dared he say such a thing to me!

TATYANA:

You had no business to offer him money.

PAULINA:

Oh Nadya! That Nadya!

CLEOPATRA:

The nerve of him! There's a proud Spaniard for you! I'll certainly ask my husband to....

GENERAL:

A puppy, that's what he is!

PAULINA:

Nadya's impossible! Walking off with him like that! She upsets me so!

CLEOPATRA:

These Socialists of yours keep getting more impudent every day.

PAULINA:

What makes you think he's a Socialist?

CLEOPATRA:

I can see it. All the decent workers are Socialists.

GENERAL:

I'll tell Zakhar to throw that young upstart out of the factory on his ear.

TATYANA:

The factory is closed.

GENERAL:

On his ear just the same!

PAULINA:

Tanya, go and call Nadya. That's a dear. Tell her I'm simply overwhelmed.

(Tatyana goes off.)

GENERAL:

The scum! "How old?"—eh?

CLEOPATRA:

Those drunkards had the impertinence to whistle at us. And you pamper them with reading circles and the like!

PAULINA:

Just imagine, on Thursday I had to go into the village, and all of a sudden I heard someone whistling at me. Even at me! They might have frightened the horses, to say nothing about the insult of it!

CLEOPATRA

(*pedantically*): Zakhar Ivanovich is much to blame! He doesn't place the proper distance between himself and those people, as my husband says.

PAULINA:

He's too soft-hearted. He wants to be kind to everyone. He thinks that keeping on good terms with the common people is advantageous to both sides. In respect to the peasants, he is right. They lease the land and pay rent, and everything runs smoothly. But these.... (*Enter Tatyana and Nadya.*) Nadya! Can't you understand, darling, how improper....

NADYA (*hotly*):

It's you who were improper! You! The heat has affected you—made you hot and irritable. You don't understand a thing! As for you, grandfather—oh dear, how stupid you are!

GENERAL (*infuriated*):

Me? Stupid? Must I listen to this a second time?

NADYA:

Why did you say that about ... about asking for my hand? Aren't you ashamed?

GENERAL:

Ashamed? Well, that's the limit! I've had just about enough for one day! (*Goes out shouting at the top of his voice.*) Kon! The devil take the likes of you! Where under the sun have you got to, you dolt, you dunderhead!

NADYA:

And you, Auntie! You! You travel abroad and make fine speeches about politics! Not to have invited him to sit down, not to have offered him a cup of tea!

PAULINA

(*jumping up and throwing down a spoon*): This is impossible! Do you realise what you're saying?

NADYA:

And you too, Cleopatra Petrovna! On the way back you were sweet and polite to him, but as soon as we got here....

CLEOPATRA:

What was I supposed to do, kiss him? Sorry, but his face was dirty. By the way, who ever gave you the right to reprove me? There you are, Paulina Dmitriyevna. There's your democracy for you, or what do they call it—humanism? And my husband is the one who has to answer for it all. But you'll have to answer for it too, you'll see!

PAULINA:

I really must apologise, Cleopatra Petrovna, for Nadya's behaviour....

CLEOPATRA (*leaving*):

Quite unnecessary. It isn't a question of only Nadya. We're all to blame!

PAULINA:

When your mother was dying, Nadya, and entrusted me with your upbringing....

NADYA:

Don't speak of my mother! You never say the right things about her!

PAULINA (*in amazement*):

Nadya! Are you ill? Think of what you're saying. Your mother was my sister. I knew her a bit better than you did.

NADYA (*unable to restrain her tears*):

You don't know anything. Poor people and rich people have nothing in common. My mother was poor, but she was good! You don't understand poor people! You don't even understand Aunt Tanya!

PAULINA:

I must ask you to leave, Nadya. Go at once!

NADYA (*as she goes off*):

Very well. But I am right just the same. I'm right and you're wrong.

PAULINA:

Good heavens! A strong, healthy girl having a fit like this all of a sudden! Almost hysterics! Forgive me, Tanya, but I'm afraid you've been having a bad influence on her. You talk to her about everything as though she were a grownup. You take her among our employees—those people from the office—those queer workers. That's absurd, you know. And then these boating parties....

TATYANA:

Don't take it so hard. Perhaps you'd better have a drink or something. There's no denying that you didn't show much tact with that worker. Nothing would have happened to the chair if you had asked him to sit on it.

PAULINA:

You're all wrong. Certainly nobody can accuse me of having a wrong attitude towards the workers. But everything within limits, my dear!

TATYANA:

And I don't take her anywhere, in spite of what you say. She goes herself, and I don't consider it necessary to stop her.

PAULINA:

Herself! As if she understood what she was doing!

(Yakov enters slowly, slightly drunk.)

YAKOV (*sitting down*):

There's going to be trouble at the factory.

PAULINA (*long-sufferingly*):

Stop it, Yakov Ivanovich!

YAKOV:

Yes, there is. There's going to be trouble. They're going to burn down the factory and roast us all in the fire—like rabbits.

TATYANA (*with vexation*):

You've been drinking already!

YAKOV:

I've always been drinking by this hour. I just saw Cleopatra. There's a low woman for you! Not because she's got so many lovers, but because there's a vicious old dog sitting right where her heart ought to be.

PAULINA (*rising*):

Everything was going along so nicely, and then all of a sudden.... (*Walks aimlessly about the garden.*)

YAKOV:

Vicious and mangy. Not a big dog, but a greedy one. There it sits, baring its teeth. It's gobbled everything up, but it wants more, and it doesn't know what. That makes it restive.

TATYANA:

Hush, Yakov! Here comes your brother.

YAKOV:

What do I care? I realise very well, Tanya, that it's

impossible to love me any more, and that hurts. Yes, it hurts, but it doesn't stop me from loving you.

TATYANA:

You had better freshen yourself up a bit. Go and have a bathe.

ZAKHAR (*entering*):

Have they announced that the factory is being closed down?

TATYANA:

I don't know.

YAKOV:

No, they haven't, but the workers know it anyway.

ZAKHAR:

How? Who told them?

YAKOV:

I did. I went and told them.

PAULINA (*coming up*):

Why did you do that?

YAKOV (*shrugging his shoulders*):

Just for the fun of it. They're interested. I tell them everything—everything they'll listen to. I think they like me. They enjoy knowing that their boss's brother is a drunk. It impresses them with the idea of the equality of men.

ZAKHAR:

Hm. You often go to the factory, Yakov, and of course I have nothing against it. But Mikhail Vasilyevich says that sometimes when you are talking with the workers you criticise the management.

YAKOV:

That's a lie. I don't understand anything about management. Or mismanagement.

ZAKHAR:

He also says that sometimes you bring vodka with you.

YAKOV:

That's a lie. I don't bring it; I send for it, and not sometimes but every time. They wouldn't pay any attention to me if I didn't give them vodka.

ZAKHAR:

But, Yakov, judge for yourself—after all, you're the owner's brother.

YAKOV:

That's not my only shortcoming.

ZAKHAR (*offended*):

Very well. I'll say nothing more. Nothing. For some reason I find myself surrounded by hostility....

PAULINA:

Very true. You should have heard what Nadya just said!

POLOGY (*running in*):

Allow me to report ... the director ... they have just killed the director!

ZAKHAR:

What!?

PAULINA:

You ... what did you say?

POLOGY:

Killed him outright. He fell down....

ZAKHAR:

Who? Who shot him?

POLOGY:

The workers.

PAULINA:

Did they catch them?

ZAKHAR:

Is there a doctor there?

POLOGY:

I don't know.

PAULINA:

Yakov Ivanovich! Go immediately.

YAKOV (*with a helpless gesture*):

Where?

PAULINA:

How did it happen?

POLOGY:

The director was excited. He kicked one of the workers in the stomach.

YAKOV:

They're coming here.

(Confusion. Mikhail Skrobotov is led in by Nikolai and Levshin, a bald middle-aged worker. Several workers and office employees come with them.)

MIKHAIL (*in a tired voice*):

Let go of me.... Put me down.

NIKOLAI:

Did you see who did the shooting?

MIKHAIL:

I can't ... go on ... I'm ... tired.

NIKOLAI (*insistently*):

Did you notice who did the shooting?

MIKHAIL:

You're hurting me.... Some red-headed fellow.... Put me down.... A red-headed fellow.

(They place him on the turf seat.)

NIKOLAI (*to a Policeman*):

Do you hear? A red-headed fellow.

POLICEMAN:

Yes, Your Honour.

MIKHAIL:

What difference does it make now?

LEVSHIN (*to Nikolai*):

Wouldn't it be better not to trouble him for the present?

NIKOLAI:

Hold your tongue! Where's the doctor? I'm asking you where the doctor is!

(Everyone starts whispering and moving about aimlessly.)

MIKHAIL:

Don't shout.... The pain.... Let me rest.

LEVSHIN:

That's right, rest a bit, Mikhail Vasilyevich. Ah, me! It's all

a matter of money, this life of ours! Money's our breath, money's our death.

NIKOLAI:

Policeman! Ask everyone who doesn't belong here to leave.

POLICEMAN:

(*in a low voice*): Be off, fellows. Nothing to watch here.

ZAKHAR (*quietly*):

Where's the doctor?

NIKOLAI:

Misha! Misha! (*Bends over his brother; the others do the same.*)
It seems to me he's gone....

ZAKHAR:

Impossible! He's just fainted!

NIKOLAI (*slowly and quietly*):

No, he's dead. Do you understand what that means, Zakhar Ivanovich?

ZAKHAR:

But ... but maybe you're mistaken.

NIKOLAI:

I'm not. *You're* the one responsible for this. *You!*

ZAKHAR (*overwhelmed*):

Me?

TATYANA:

How cruel ... and absurd!

NIKOLAI (*aggressively*):

Yes, you!

CHIEF OF POLICE (*running in*):

Where's the director? Is he seriously wounded?

LEVSHIN:

He's dead. He, as was always making others stir themselves—just look at him now.

NIKOLAI (*to the Chief of Police*):

He managed to tell us that the fellow who killed him was a red-head.

CHIEF OF POLICE:

A red-head?

NIKOLAI:

Yes. You must immediately take measures.

CHIEF OF POLICE (*to the Policeman*):

Round up all the red-heads.

POLICEMAN:

Yes, sir.

CHIEF OF POLICE:

See that you don't miss anybody!

(The Policeman goes out.)

CLEOPATRA (*running in*):

Where is he? Misha! What's the matter, has he fainted? Nikolai Vasilyevich, has he fainted? (*Nikolai turns away.*) Is he dead? Is he?

LEVSHIN:

He's quiet now. He threatened them with his pistol, but the pistol was turned against himself.

NIKOLAI (*angrily, under his breath*):

Get out of here! (*To the Chief of Police.*) Take this fellow away!

CLEOPATRA:

The doctor—what does the doctor say?

CHIEF OF POLICE

(*under his breath to Levshin*): Clear out, you!

LEVSHIN (*quietly*):

I'm going. No need to shove.

CLEOPATRA (*quietly*):

Have they killed him?

PAULINA (*to Cleopatra*):

Darling!

CLEOPATRA (*quietly but vengefully*):

Don't touch me! This is your work! Yours!

ZAKHAR (*despondently*)

I understand that this is a dreadful blow to you, but why ... why say such a thing?

PAULINA (*tearfully*):

Oh, my dear, think what you're saying!

TATYANA (*to Paulina*):

You had better not stay here. Where's the doctor?

CLEOPATRA:

It's your accursed softness that killed him!

NIKOLAI (*dryly*):

Come, Cleopatra, Zakhar Ivanovich is well aware of his guilt without your rubbing it in.

ZAKHAR (*despondent*):

But.... I don't understand. What are you saying? How can you make such an accusation?

PAULINA:

This is horrible! And how cruel!

CLEOPATRA:

Cruel you say? You poisoned the workers against him, you destroyed his influence over them. They used to be afraid of him. They used to tremble at the very sight of him. And now they've killed him. And it's you, *you* who are to blame. His blood is on your hands!

NIKOLAI:

Enough of this. You mustn't shout.

CLEOPATRA (*to Paulina*):

Crying, are you? Good. Go ahead and cry! Cry all his blood out of your eyes!

POLICEMAN (*coming out*):

Sir....

CHIEF OF POLICE:

Sh!

POLICEMAN:

All the red-heads are rounded up.

(Through the garden in the background comes the General pushing Kon in front of him and laughing loudly.)

NIKOLAI:

Sh-h-h!

CLEOPATRA:

Well, you murderers?

CURTAIN

ACT II

A bright moon throws heavy shadows in the garden. On the table is a disorderly array of bread, cucumbers, eggs, and bottles of beer. Candles are burning in lanterns. AGRAFENA is washing the dishes. YAGODIN is sitting with a stick in his hand and smoking. TATYANA, NADYA and LEVSHIN are standing left. All speak in lowered voices, as if listening for something. The general atmosphere is one of tense anticipation.

LEVSHIN (*to Nadya*):

Everything human carries the taint of copper, miss. That's why your young heart is heavy. All people are chained to a copper kopek—all but you, and so you don't fit in. To every man on this earth the kopek jingles its message: "Love me as you love yourself." But that doesn't apply to you. A lily neither sows nor reaps.

YAGODIN (*to Agrafena*):

Levshin has started teaching his betters, the old simpleton!

AGRAFENA:

Why not? He tells them the truth. A little truth won't do his betters any harm either.

NADYA:

Do you have a hard life, Levshin?

LEVSHIN:

Oh, not very. I have no children. I have a woman—a wife, that is. But our children all died.

NADYA:

Aunt Tanya, why does everyone speak in whispers when there's a dead body in the house?

TATYANA:

I don't know.

LEVSHIN (*smiling*):

Because we're all guilty before the dead, miss. Guilty on every count.

NADYA:

But it isn't always like this, that the dead man's been ... been killed. But people speak in whispers anyway.

LEVSHIN:

We kill them all, miss. Some with bullets, others with words. We kill everybody with our doings. We drive people from the sun into the soil without even knowing it. But we begin to sense our guilt, once we've thrown a man into the arms of death. We begin to feel sorry for the dead one and to feel ashamed of ourselves, and a great fear rises up in us. Because, don't you see, we ourselves are being driven the same way; we ourselves are headed for the grave.

NADYA:

That's a dreadful thought.

LEVSHIN:

Don't let it worry you. Today it's dreadful, tomorrow it's forgotten. And people begin pushing each other about again. When one of them falls down everybody is quiet and ashamed for a moment. Then they give a sigh and begin all over again, in the same old way. It's all their ignorance. But *you* need feel no shame, miss. Dead people won't disturb you. You can talk as loud as you like in front of them.

TATYANA:

How do you think we ought to change our way of living, Levshin?

LEVSHIN (*mysteriously*):

We've got to do away with the kopek. Got to bury it. Once the kopek's gone, why should we push each other about? Why be enemies?

TATYANA:

And that's all?

LEVSHIN:

It's enough to begin with.

TATYANA:

Wouldn't you like to take a walk in the garden, Nadya?

NADYA (*pensively*):

Perhaps.

(They disappear in the depths of the garden; Levshin crosses to the table. The General, Kon and Pologiy appear near the tent.)

YAGODIN:

You're sowing your seeds on stony soil, Levshin, you simpleton!

LEVSHIN:

Why?

YAGODIN:

No sense in trying to teach them anything. As though they could understand! What you say would reach the heart of a working man, but not of the gentlefolk.

LEVSHIN:

The young miss is a nice little thing. Grekov told me about her.

AGRAFENA:

Will you have another glass of tea?

LEVSHIN:

I don't mind if I do.

(Pause. Then the General's voice is heard; the white dresses of Nadya and Tatyana glimpse through the trees.)

GENERAL:

Or you take a piece of string and stretch it across the road so's nobody can see it. Somebody comes along and all of a sudden—flop!

POLOGY:

It's such a pleasure to see somebody fall, sir!

YAGODIN:

Hear that?

LEVSHIN:

I hear it all right.

KON:

We can't do a thing like that today, with a dead man in the house. You can't play jokes with a dead man in the house.

GENERAL:

Don't teach me! When you die I'll do a handspring.

(Tatyana and Nadya approach the table.)

LEVSHIN:

The General's in his dotage.

AGRAFENA (*going towards the house*):

Always up to some tricks!

TATYANA (*sitting down at the table*):

Tell me, Levshin, are you a Socialist?

LEVSHIN (*simply*):

Me? No. Me and Timofei—we're weavers. That's what we are—weavers.

TATYANA:

Do you know any Socialists? Have you heard about them?

LEVSHIN:

Yes, we've heard about them. We don't know any, but we've heard about them.

TATYANA:

Do you know Sintsov who works in the office?

LEVSHIN:

Oh yes, we know him. We know all the men in the office.

TATYANA:

Have you ever spoken to him?

YAGODIN (*uneasily*):

What should we speak to him about? He works upstairs, we downstairs. If we have to go to the office, he tells us what the director wants and that's all. That's all we know about him.

NADYA:

You seem to be afraid of us, Levshin. Don't be afraid. We're really very much interested....

LEVSHIN:

Why should we be afraid? We haven't done anything wrong. They asked us to come here and keep order, so we came. Down there the people are mad. They swear they'll burn down the factory and everything else—won't leave anything but a heap of cinders. Well, we don't approve of such mischief. There's no point in burning things down.

Why burn them down? We built them ourselves, we and our fathers, and our grandfathers. Why should we go and burn them down?

TATYANA:

I hope you don't think we're questioning you so as to do you harm.

YAGODIN:

Why should you? We don't wish anybody any harm.

LEVSHIN:

Here's what we think: whatever people have built with their own hands is sacred. You have to value human labour, and not go burning things down. The people are dark-minded. They love a fire. And they've been sore tempted. The deceased was hard on us, there's no denying that. He kept waving that pistol of his to put the fear of God in us....

NADYA:

Is my uncle any better?

YAGODIN:

Zakhar Ivanovich?

NADYA:

Yes. Is he any kinder? Or is he just as hard on you?

LEVSHIN:

I wouldn't say that.

YAGODIN (*sullenly*):

They're all the same, seems to me—strict or easy. All alike.

LEVSHIN (*gently*):

The strict one's a boss and the easy one's a boss. A cancer don't care whose flesh it eats.

YAGODIN (*with a bored air*):

Zakhar Ivanovich is kind-hearted.

NADYA:

You mean he's better than Skrobotov?

YAGODIN (*softly*):

Don't forget the director's dead.

LEVSHIN:

Your uncle's a good man, miss. Only—that don't make it any easier for us.

TATYANA (*irritated*):

Let's go, Nadya. Can't you see they don't want to understand us?

NADYA (*softly*):

Yes.

(They go off in silence. Levshin watches them go, then looks at Yagodin; they both smile.)

YAGODIN:

Get on your nerves, don't they?

LEVSHIN:

Hear that? They're "very much interested".

YAGODIN:

Maybe they think we'll spill something.

LEVSHIN:

I think the young miss is a nice little thing. Too bad she's rich.

YAGODIN:

We'd better tell Matvei Nikolayevich about this—that the lady was trying to pump us.

LEVSHIN:

We'll tell him. And we'll tell Grekov.

YAGODIN:

I wonder how things are going. The management ought to give in to us.

LEVSHIN:

It will. Then in a little while they'll start squeezing us against the wall again.

YAGODIN:

Squeezing our guts out.

LEVSHIN:

Uh-huh.

YAGODIN:

Hm. Oh, to have a good sleep!

LEVSHIN:

Not yet. Here comes the General.

(The General comes on. Pology walks beside him deferentially. Behind them comes Kon. Suddenly Pology seizes the General's arm.)

GENERAL:

What's that?

POLOGY:

A hole in the ground. Don't step in it.

GENERAL:

Oh. What's all this on the table? Such a mess. Have you been eating here?

YAGODIN:

Yes, sir; us and the young miss.

GENERAL:

So you're guarding the place for us?

YAGODIN:

Yes, sir. We're on duty.

GENERAL:

Good. I'll speak to the Governor about you. How many of you are there here?

LEVSHIN:

Two of us.

GENERAL:

Idiot! I can count to two. How many are there altogether?

YAGODIN:

About thirty.

GENERAL:

Are you armed?

LEVSHIN (*to Yagodin*):

Where's that pistol you had, Timofei?

YAGODIN:

Here it is.

GENERAL:

Don't hold it by the muzzle! Damn it, Kon, teach these blockheads how to hold a revolver. (*To Levshin.*) Have you got a revolver?

LEVSHIN:

Not me.

GENERAL:

If the rebels come, do you intend to shoot?

LEVSHIN:

They won't come, sir. They didn't mean anything—just flared up for a minute.

GENERAL:

But if they *do* come?

LEVSHIN:

They were sore, you see—about closing down the factory. Some of them have children.

GENERAL:

What are you raving on about? I'm asking you if you intend to shoot?

LEVSHIN:

Well, we're willing to, sir. Why not? Only we don't know how. And besides, there's nothing for us to shoot with. If we had rifles or, say, a cannon....

GENERAL:

Kon! Come here and teach them. Go down to the river.

KON (*sullenly*):

Allow me to report that it's dark, sir. People will get frightened if we start shooting. They'll rush out to see what's up. But just as you say. It's all the same to me.

GENERAL:

Very well. Put it off until tomorrow!

LEVSHIN:

Tomorrow everything will be quiet. They'll open up the factory tomorrow.

GENERAL:

Who will?

LEVSHIN:

Zakhar Ivanovich. He's talking to the workers about that now.

GENERAL:

Damn it all! If I had my way, I'd close down the factory forever. I'd put a stop to those pesky whistles early in the morning!

YAGODIN:

We wouldn't mind either if they blew them a little later.

GENERAL:

And I'd starve you good and proper. No more of your riots!

LEVSHIN:

Do you call this a riot?

GENERAL:

Hold your tongue! What are you doing here anyway? You ought to be making your rounds along the fence, and if anybody comes crawling up—shoot on the spot! I'll be responsible!

LEVSHIN:

Come, on, Timofei. Bring your pistol.

GENERAL (*muttering after them*):

Pistol! The stupid asses! Don't even know a revolver when they see one!

POLOGY:

Allow me to inform you, sir, that the common people are, for the most part, coarse and bestial. Take my case, for instance: I have a garden and cultivate vegetables with my own hands....

GENERAL:

Very commendable.

POLOGY:

I devote all the free time at my disposal to this work.

GENERAL:

Well, everybody's expected to work!

(Tatyana and Nadya come on.)

TATYANA (*from a distance*):

Why are you shouting so?

GENERAL:

Ugh, these people! (*To Pology.*) Well?

POLOGY:

But almost every night the workers steal the fruits of my labour.

GENERAL:

Steal, you say?

POLOGY:

Exactly. I have sought the protection of the law, but the law is represented in these parts by the honourable Chief of Police, an individual who displays the greatest indifference to the needs of the population.

TATYANA (*to Pology*):

Why in the world do you use such high-flown language?

POLOGY (*embarrassed*):

Do I? I beg your pardon, but for three years I studied at the gymnasium and I read the paper daily.

TATYANA (*smiling*):

Oh, so that explains it!

NADYA:

You're very funny, Pology.

POLOGY:

I am happy if it gives you pleasure. An individual should strive to make himself pleasant.

GENERAL:

I suppose you love fishing?

POLOGY:

I've never tried it, sir.

GENERAL (*shrugging his shoulders*):

A strange answer!

TATYANA:

What haven't you tried—fishing or loving?

POLOGY (*confused*):

The former.

TATYANA:

And the latter?

POLOGY:

I *have* tried that.

TATYANA:

Are you married?

POLOGY:

I only dream of married bliss. But since I earn only twenty-five rubles a month (*Nikolai and Cleopatra enter quickly*), I dare not venture upon such an undertaking.

NIKOLAI (*angrily*):

Simply amazing! Utter chaos!

CLEOPATRA:

How could he! How *dare* he!

GENERAL:

What's the trouble?

CLEOPATRA (*shouting*):

Your nephew is a milksop! He has granted all the demands of the insurgents—the murderers of my husband!

NADYA (*softly*):

But all of them aren't murderers.

CLEOPATRA:

He is making a mockery of his dead body! And of me! Just to think of it! Opening the gates of the factory before the man is buried whom those rascals killed just because he closed them!

NADYA:

But uncle is afraid they will burn down everything!

CLEOPATRA:

You're a child and should hold your tongue!

NIKOLAI:

The speech that young boy made! The most obvious socialist propaganda!

CLEOPATRA:

It's that clerk who is at the head of them and gives them advice. He had the nerve to say the crime was provoked by the deceased himself.

NIKOLAI

(jotting down something in his notebook):

That fellow rouses my suspicions. He's too clever for a mere clerk.

TATYANA:

Are you speaking of Sintsov?

NIKOLAI:

Yes.

CLEOPATRA:

I feel as if someone had spit in my face.

POLOGY *(to Nikolai)*:

Allow me to remark that Mr. Sintsov reads the newspapers and he always comments extensively on politics and is strongly prejudiced against the authorities.

TATYANA *(to Nikolai)*:

Are you interested in hearing such tales?

NIKOLAI *(challengingly)*:

Yes, I am! Are you trying to shame me?

TATYANA:

I don't think Mr. Pology belongs here.

POLOGY *(confused)*:

I beg your pardon. I shall go at once. *(Hurries out.)*

CLEOPATRA:

Here he comes. I don't want to see him. I couldn't bear it!
(Hurries off.)

NADYA:

What is happening?

GENERAL:

I'm too old for such excitement. Killings. Uprisings. Zakhar should have foreseen all this when he invited me to come here for a rest. (*Zakhar comes in, excited but pleased. On seeing Nikolai he stops in embarrassment and adjusts his glasses.*) Listen, my dear nephew, do you realise what you've done?

ZAKHAR:

Just a minute, Uncle. Nikolai Vasilyevich!

NIKOLAI:

Ye-es.

ZAKHAR:

The workers were in such a state of excitement that ... I was afraid they would destroy the factory ... and so I ... I conceded to their demand not to close down. And their demand about Dichkov, too. But I did it on condition that they hand over the criminal, and they are looking for him.

NIKOLAI (*dryly*):

They needn't trouble themselves. We'll find the murderer without their aid.

ZAKHAR:

I would rather have them find him themselves. That would be better. We agreed to open the factory after lunch tomorrow.

NIKOLAI:

Who do you mean by "we"?

ZAKHAR:

I....

NIKOLAI:

Ah! Thank you for the information. But I feel that after

the death of my brother his place should be taken by me and his wife. Certainly you should have consulted us in this matter instead of making the decision yourself.

ZAKHAR:

But I asked you to come! Sintsov even came for you, but you refused.

NIKOLAI:

I could hardly be expected to think of business matters on the day of my brother's death.

ZAKHAR:

But you went to the factory anyway.

NIKOLAI:

I did. I went to listen to their speeches. What of it?

ZAKHAR:

But don't you see? The deceased, it turns out, wired the town authorities to send troops. A reply was received saying they would arrive tomorrow morning.

GENERAL:

Aha! Soldiers! That's talking! No nonsense when there's soldiers on the scene!

NIKOLAI:

A very wise measure.

ZAKHAR:

I'm not sure. If troops come the workers will grow more excited than ever. The Lord only knows what they may do if we don't open up the factory! It seems to me that I did the right thing. At least there will be no bloodshed.

NIKOLAI:

I take a different view of the matter. You should not have

conceded everything to those ... er ... creatures, if only out of respect for the memory of the deceased.

ZAKHAR:

But don't you see this may lead to further tragedy?

NIKOLAI:

That doesn't concern me.

ZAKHAR:

True, but what about me? It's me who has to live with the workers. And if their blood is shed ... why, they might tear down the factory!

NIKOLAI:

I don't believe they would.

GENERAL:

Neither do I!

ZAKHAR (*despondent*):

And so you blame me for what I've done?

NIKOLAI:

Yes, I do.

ZAKHAR (*sincerely*):

Why should there be all this hostility? I want only one thing—to avoid the horror that is only too possible. I don't want bloodshed. Is it really impossible to achieve a peaceful, reasonable way of life? You look upon me with hate, the workers with distrust. I want to do what's right—only what's right!

GENERAL:

Who knows what's right? It isn't even a word. Just a collection of letters. R for rat, T for tat. But business is business. Isn't that how it goes?

NADYA (*tearfully*):

Hush, grandfather. Uncle, don't let it upset you so. He doesn't understand. Oh, why don't you understand, Nikolai Vasilyevich? You're so clever. Why don't you trust uncle?

NIKOLAI:

Sorry, but I am going, Zakhar Ivanovich. I'm not accustomed to having children interfere in business matters. (*Goes off.*)

ZAKHAR:

See that, Nadya?

NADYA (*taking his hand*):

It doesn't matter. The important thing is that the workers should be satisfied. There are so many of them, lots more than us.

ZAKHAR:

Just a minute. I'm very much displeased with you, Nadya. Very.

GENERAL:

So am I.

ZAKHAR:

You sympathise with the workers. That's only natural at your age, but you mustn't lose your sense of proportion, my dear. This morning, now, you brought that fellow Grekov to the table. I know him. He's an intelligent chap. But you had no right to cause a scene with your aunt on his account.

GENERAL:

Go on! Give it to her!

NADYA:

But you don't know how it all happened.

ZAKHAR:

I know more than you do, you can be sure. Our people are coarse and uncultivated. If you give them a finger they seize the whole hand.

TATYANA (*softly*):

Like a drowning man clutching at a straw.

ZAKHAR:

They are as greedy as animals, and they mustn't be spoiled. They must be cultivated—that's it, cultivated. Be so good as to think this over.

GENERAL:

And now I'll have my say. The devil only knows how you behave toward me, you little vixen. Let me remind you that it will take you forty years to catch up to me in age. You'll have to wait that long before I'll let you talk to me as an equal. Remember that, Kon!

KON (*from among the trees*):

Here.

GENERAL:

Where is that ... what's his name? ... that corkscrew.

KON:

What corkscrew?

GENERAL:

That ... I forget his name. That flat and slippery man.

KON:

Oh, Pology. I don't know.

GENERAL (*going toward the tent*):

Go and fetch him.

(Zakhar walks up and down with bent head, polishing glasses with his pocket handkerchief. Nadya sits deep in thought. Tatyana is standing and watching them.)

TATYANA:

Is it known who killed him?

ZAKHAR:

They say they don't know, but they promise to find him. Of course, they know. I think ... (*He glances about and lowers his voice.*) ... I think they have a tacit agreement. It's a conspiracy. It's true that he exasperated them.... He stopped at nothing. Love of power was a kind of disease with him. And so they just killed him. Awful, isn't it? Awful in its very simplicity. And still they look at you with such clear, candid eyes, as though they don't realise they have committed a crime. It's all so shockingly simple!

TATYANA:

They say Skrobotov was about to shoot when somebody snatched the revolver out of his hand and....

ZAKHAR:

That isn't important. It was they who did the shooting, not he.

NADYA:

Why don't you sit down?

ZAKHAR:

Why did he send for troops? They found out as they find everything out, and that hastened his death. Of course I had to throw open the gates of the factory. If I hadn't, my relations with them would have been spoiled for a long time to come. At a time like this one has to show them

more attention and consideration. Who knows how it may end? At such a time a sensible person must make sure to have friends among the common people. (*Levshin appears upstage.*) What's that?

LEVSHIN:

It's us. We're on duty.

ZAKHAR:

Well, Levshin, now that you've killed a man you've become meek and peaceable, eh?

LEVSHIN:

We're always that way, Zakhar Ivanovich; we're always peaceable.

ZAKHAR (*reprovingly*):

Aren't you just! And you kill people peaceably, eh? By the way, I hear you're spreading ideas, Levshin; some newfangled ideas about not needing money and bosses and such things any more. That's forgivable—that is, it's understandable—in Lev Tolstoy, but you'd better drop it, my friend. Nothing good will come of such talk.

(Tatyana and Nadya go out right, from whence the voices of Sintsov and Yakov come. Yagodin appears from behind the trees.)

LEVSHIN (*calmly*):

What talk? I've lived a bit, thought a bit, and say what I think.

ZAKHAR:

Bosses aren't beasts. You've got to understand that. I'm not really a bad sort. I'm always ready to help you. I want to do what is best.

LEVSHIN (*sighing*):

Is there anybody who wants to do himself harm?

ZAKHAR:

Don't you understand? I want to do what's best for *you*!

LEVSHIN:

We understand that....

ZAKHAR (*looking closely at him*):

No, you're wrong. You don't understand. What strange people you are! Sometimes you're like beasts, sometimes like little children.

(He goes out. Levshin stands leaning on his stick watching him go.)

YAGODIN:

Another sermon?

LEVSHIN:

He's a Chinaman. A real Chinaman. What's he trying to say? He can't understand anybody but himself.

YAGODIN:

He says he wants to do what's best, what's right.

LEVSHIN:

That's it.

YAGODIN:

Let's go. Here they come.

(Levshin and Yagodin withdraw into the depth of the garden. Tatyana, Nadya, Yakov and Sintsov come on upstage right.)

NADYA:

We keep walking round and round in circles, as if in a dream.

TATYANA:

Would you like something to eat, Matvei Nikolayevich?

SINTSOV:

I'd rather have a glass of tea. I've talked so much today that I have a sore throat.

NADYA:

Aren't you afraid of anything?

SINTSOV (*sitting down at the table*):

Me? No, I'm not.

NADYA:

Well, I am. Things have got so mixed up! I can't make out who is right and who is wrong.

SINTSOV (*smiling*):

They'll get straightened out. Don't be afraid to think. Think fearlessly straight through to the end. On the whole, there's nothing to be afraid of.

TATYANA:

Do you think everything has quieted down?

SINTSOV:

Yes. The workers hardly ever win, and even a small victory brings them great satisfaction.

NADYA:

Are you fond of them?

SINTSOV:

That's hardly the word. I've lived with them a long time; I know them and am aware of their strength. I believe in their intelligence.

TATYANA:

And that the future belongs to them?

SINTSOV:

Yes. I believe that, too.

NADYA:

The future. What's the future?

TATYANA (*smiling*):

They're a sly lot, your proletarians. Nadya and I tried to talk to them, but nothing came of it.

NADYA:

It wasn't very nice. The old man talked to us as if we were wicked—spies or something. But there's another man, Grekov—he looks at people differently. The old man keeps smiling as if he pitied us, as if we were sick.

TATYANA:

Stop drinking, Yakov. I can't bear to see you.

YAKOV:

What am I supposed to do?

SINTSOV:

Is there nothing else to do?

YAKOV:

I have an aversion, an irresistible aversion to business and everything connected with it. You see, I belong to the third category.

SINTSOV:

To what?

YAKOV:

The third category. People are divided into three categories: the first consists of those who work all their lives, the second of those who save money, the third of those who refuse to earn their bread because

there's no sense in it, and can't save money because it's foolish and beneath them. That's me—the third category. To this category belong all the lazy loafers, the tramps, monks, beggars and other parasites of this world.

NADYA:

Why do you say such tiresome things, uncle? And you're not like that at all. You're just kind and soft-hearted.

YAKOV:

In other words, good-for-nothing. I realised that when I was still in school. People get into these three categories before they grow up.

TATYANA:

Nadya was right when she said you were tiresome, Yakov.

YAKOV:

I agree with her. Matvei Nikolayevich, do you think life has a face?

SINTSOV:

It may have.

YAKOV:

It does have. And its face is always young. Not long ago life looked at me indifferently, but now it looks at me sternly and keeps saying: "Who are you? Where are you going?"

(He seems to be frightened by something, and when he tries to smile his lips quiver and his face is distorted into a pitiful grimace.)

TATYANA:

Oh, drop it, Yakov. Here comes the prosecutor. I shouldn't like you to say such things in front of him.

YAKOV:

Very well.

NADYA (*softly*):

Everybody's expecting something awful to happen. Why don't they let me make friends with the workers? It's so stupid!

NIKOLAI (*coming up*):

May I have a glass of tea?

TATYANA:

You may.

(For a few seconds everyone sits in silence. Nikolai is standing, stirring his tea.)

NADYA:

I should like to know why the workers don't trust uncle, and in general....

NIKOLAI (*sullenly*):

They only trust those who make speeches on the theme: "Workers of All Countries, Unite!" They trust them, all right.

NADYA

(*quietly and with a shrug of her shoulders*):

Those words—that challenge to the workers of all countries—they make me feel out of place, as if people like us were not wanted.

NIKOLAI (*roused*):

Quite right! Every civilised person should feel like that, and then I'm sure another challenge would soon be heard: "Civilised People of All Countries, Unite!" It's high time to cry that. High time! The barbarians are coming to trample in the dust the fruits of thousands of years

of civilisation. They're on the way, impelled by their greed!

YAKOV:

They wear their souls in their bellies, in their empty bellies, and that's a sight to make anyone drink. (*Pours himself out a glass of beer.*)

NIKOLAI:

The mob is coming, impelled by greed, marshalled into unity by their one desire—to guzzle!

TATYANA (*pensively*):

The mob. Everywhere the mob. In the theatres, in the churches....

NIKOLAI:

What can these people contribute? Nothing but destruction. And note that the destruction will be more fearful here, among us, than anywhere else.

TATYANA:

It always seems strange to me when I hear the workers referred to as advanced people. That's far from my understanding of them.

NIKOLAI:

And you, Mr. Sintsov? I don't suppose you agree with us.

SINTSOV (*calmly*):

No, I don't.

NADYA:

Aunt Tanya, do you remember what the old man said about the kopek? How simply he put it!

NIKOLAI:

Why don't you agree with us, Mr. Sintsov?

SINTSOV:

Because I think differently.

NIKOLAI:

A reasonable answer. But perhaps you would share your views with us?

SINTSOV:

I don't think I care to.

NIKOLAI:

Very sorry to hear it. I hope when we next meet, your attitude will have changed. Yakov Ivanovich, if it isn't asking too much, see me to the house. My nerves are shot to pieces.

YAKOV (*rising with difficulty*):

With pleasure, with pleasure.

(They go out.)

TATYANA:

That prosecutor is a loathsome man. It's hard to agree with anything he says.

NADYA (*rising*):

Then why do you?

SINTSOV (*laughing*):

Yes, why do you, Tatyana Pavlovna—

TATYANA:

Because our views are the same.

SINTSOV (*to Tatyana*):

You think as he does, but you feel differently. You want to understand, but he doesn't. Understanding means nothing to him.

TATYANA:

He must be very cruel.

SINTSOV:

Yes, he is. In the city he handles the political cases, and his attitude towards those who are arrested is disgusting.

TATYANA:

By the way, he jotted down something about you in his notebook.

SINTSOV (*with a smile*):

I don't doubt it. He's had many a talk with Pology. He never misses anything. Tatyana Pavlovna, I should like to ask a favour of you.

TATYANA:

I shall be glad to do anything I can.

SINTSOV:

Thank you. I suppose the gendarmes have been called.

TATYANA:

They have.

SINTSOV:

That means they will search the houses. Could you hide something for me?

TATYANA:

Do you think they will search your house?

SINTSOV:

Of course.

TATYANA:

And they may arrest you?

SINTSOV:

I don't think so. What for? Because I make speeches? Zakhar Ivanovich knows that in all my speeches I call the workers to order.

TATYANA:

And is there nothing ... in your past?

SINTSOV:

I have no past. Will you help me? I wouldn't trouble you if I didn't think the houses of all those who might hide these things were sure to be searched tomorrow. (*Laughs quietly.*)

TATYANA (*embarrassed*):

I shall speak frankly. My situation in this house does not allow me to use the room I have been given as though it were my own.

SINTSOV:

In other words, you cannot? Well, then....

TATYANA:

Please don't be offended.

SINTSOV:

Oh, I'm not. Your refusal is quite understandable.

TATYANA:

But wait. I shall speak to Nadya.

(*Goes out. Sintsov drums with his fingers on the table as he watches her go. Cautious steps are heard.*)

SINTSOV (*softly*):

Who's there?

GREKOV:

Me. Are you alone?

SINTSOV:

Yes, but there are people about. What's new at the factory?

GREKOV (*with a short laugh*):

As you know, they agreed to find the one who did the shooting. An investigation is being carried on. Some are shouting that the Socialists killed him—those who are trying to save their own skins.

SINTSOV:

Do you know ... who did it?

GREKOV:

Akimov.

SINTSOV:

Really? Hm. I didn't expect that. He's a decent, sensible fellow.

GREKOV:

Hot-tempered. Wants to give himself up. He has a wife and child, and another coming. I just spoke to Levshin. He, of course, talks nonsense—says we ought to substitute somebody less important for Akimov.

SINTSOV:

Queer duck! But I'm sorry to hear this. (*Pause.*) You'll have to bury everything in the ground, Grekov. There's no other place to hide it.

GREKOV:

I've found a place. The telegraph operator agreed to take everything. But you'd better get away from here, Matvei Nikolayevich.

SINTSOV:

I'm not going anywhere.

GREKOV:

They'll arrest you.

SINTSOV:

Let them. The workers will get the wrong impression if I leave.

GREKOV:

True enough, but I feel sorry for you.

SINTSOV:

Nonsense. Akimov's the one to feel sorry for.

GREKOV:

And there's nothing we can do to help. Wants to give himself up. Funny to see you in the role of guardian of the bosses' property.

SINTSOV (*smiling*):

Can't be helped. I suppose my fellows are asleep?

GREKOV:

No, they're talking things over. The night's fine.

SINTSOV:

I'd be glad to go along with you, but I must wait here. They'll probably arrest you too.

GREKOV:

So we'll serve our sentence together. I'm off.

(Goes out.)

SINTSOV:

Good-bye. (*Tatyana comes in.*) Don't bother, Tatyana Pavlovna: I've arranged everything. Good-bye.

TATYANA:

I'm awfully sorry.

SINTSOV:

Good night.

(Goes out. Tatyana walks quietly up and down, studying the toes of her shoes. Yakov comes in.)

YAKOV:

Why don't you go to bed?

TATYANA:

I don't feel like it. I'm thinking of going away from here.

YAKOV:

Hm. As for me, there's nowhere for me to go. I've sailed past all the continents and islands.

TATYANA:

It's depressing here. Everything keeps swaying and makes me dizzy. I'm forced to lie, and I can't bear to lie.

YAKOV:

True, you can't bear to lie. Unfortunately for me. Unfortunately.

TATYANA (*to herself*):

And I just told a lie. Of course Nadya would have agreed to hide those things. But I have no right to start her along that road.

YAKOV:

What are you talking about?

TATYANA:

Nothing in particular. How strange! Yesterday everything seemed so clear and simple. I thought I knew what I wanted.

YAKOV (*quietly*):

Talented drunkards, handsome loafers and other

members of the jolly professions have ceased to attract attention. As long as we offered a contrast to the boredom of everyday life, people took an interest in us. But now everyday life is becoming more and more dramatic. And people are shouting at us: "Hey, you clowns and comedians! Off the stage!" But the stage is your field, Tanya.

TATYANA (*moved*):

My field? Yes, I once thought I stood firmly on the stage, and that I could attain to great heights there. (*Forcefully, and painfully.*) I feel hurt and ashamed when people watch me coldly, silently, as if they were saying: "We know all that. It's old and stale." They disarm me. I can't capture their hearts and rouse their emotions. I want to tremble with joy and fear, I want to speak words full of fire, passion, and hate! Words sharp as a knife, flaming as a torch! I want to pour them lavishly before people—let them catch fire! Let them shout and rush away! But there are no such words. I would stop them by tossing other words to them—beautiful ones this time, beautiful as flowers, full of hope and love and joy! They would weep, and so would I. Weep such lovely tears. They would give me an ovation, bury me in flowers, lift me into the air! For a moment I should have held them in my power. For a moment I should have been vitally alive. All of life in that one moment! But there are no such living words.

YAKOV:

We all know how to live only for a moment.

TATYANA:

The best things in life are always for just a moment. How I should like to see people different—more responsive! And life different—less vain. A life in which art would be indispensable to everyone, always. So that I would have a place in life. (*Yakov is gazing wide-eyed into the darkness.*)

Why do you drink so much? You have killed yourself.
Once you were handsome.

YAKOV:

Forget it.

TATYANA:

Can't you understand how hard it is for me?

YAKOV (*with horror*):

No matter how drunk I am, I understand everything.
That's my misfortune. My mind keeps going on and on
with accursed persistence. All the time. And all the time I
see a leering face, broad and unwashed, with enormous
eyes that keep saying: "Well?" Just that one word:
"Well?"

PAULINA (*running in*):

Tanya! Come here, Tanya. It's Cleopatra—she's gone
mad—she's insulting everybody. Perhaps you can bring
her to her senses.

TATYANA (*miserably*):

Leave me out of your squabbles. Gobble each other up if
you must, but don't keep getting in other people's way.

PAULINA (*startled*):

Tanya! What's the matter with you? What are you saying?

TATYANA:

What are you after? What do you want?

PAULINA:

Look at her. Here she comes.

ZAKHAR (*off stage*):

Be quiet, I beg of you!

CLEOPATRA (*also off stage*):

It's you who should be quiet in my presence!

PAULINA:

She'll start shouting here, with these muzhiks around. It's awful, Tanya. Please...

ZAKHAR (*entering*):

I'm afraid I'm losing my mind.

CLEOPATRA (*following him*):

You can't run away from me. I'll make you listen to me. You played up to the workers because you needed their respect. You threw them a human life as you would toss a piece of meat to snarling dogs. You're humane at other people's expense, at the price of other people's blood!

ZAKHAR:

What is she saying?

YAKOV (*to Tatyana*):

You'd better go away. (*He goes out.*)

PAULINA:

Look here, my fine lady, we're respectable people and we won't have a woman of your reputation shouting at us.

ZAKHAR (*startled*):

Paulina! For God's sake!

CLEOPATRA:

What makes you think you're respectable? Because you babble about politics? About the misery of the masses? About progress and humanity? Is that why?

TATYANA:

Cleopatra Petrovna! Enough of this!

CLEOPATRA:

I'm not talking to you. You don't belong here. This is none of your business. My husband was an honest man—frank and honest. He knew the common people better than you. He didn't go around babbling like you. And you betrayed him. You murdered him with your vicious stupidity.

TATYANA (*to Paulina and Zakhar*):

Go away, you two.

CLEOPATRA:

I'll go away myself. You're loathsome—all of you! (*Goes out*)

ZAKHAR:

There's a crazy woman for you!

PAULINA (*tearfully*):

We must drop everything and go away. To insult people like that!

ZAKHAR:

What has got into her? If she had loved her husband, or even lived contentedly with him! But to have taken on at least two lovers a year and then to go about shouting like this!

PAULINA:

We must sell the factory.

ZAKHAR (*in vexation*):

Nonsense! That's not the way out. We have got to think things over, and think them over well. I was speaking to Nikolai Vasilyevich when that woman tore in and interrupted us.

PAULINA:

Nikolai Vasilyevich hates us too. He's a horrid man.

ZAKHAR (*more composed*):

He's angered and shocked, but he's a clever person and has no reason for hating us. There are very practical considerations binding him to us since the death of Mikhail.

PAULINA:

I am afraid of him, and I don't trust him. He'll deceive you.

ZAKHAR:

Nonsense, Paulina. He has very good judgement—yes, he has. The fact of the matter is, I really did assume a dubious position in my relations with the workers. I must confess that. When I spoke to them that evening—you can't imagine how dead set they are against us, Paulina!

PAULINA:

I told you so. That's just what I said. They'll always be our enemies! (*Tatyana laughs quietly and goes out. Paulina looks at her and purposely raises her voice as she continues.*) Everyone is our enemy! They all envy us, and that's why they're all against us.

ZAKHAR (*walking quickly up and down*):

You're partly right, of course. Nikolai Vasilyevich says it isn't a struggle between the classes, it's a struggle between the races—black and white. That's putting it a bit crudely—going to extremes, so to speak. But when you stop to think that it is we, the cultivated people, who have created science and art and all sorts of things, then equality—physiological equality—hm ... er ... well, all right. But first let them become human, let them become civilised, and then we shall speak about equality.

PAULINA (*alert*):

I've never heard you speak like this before.

ZAKHAR:

My ideas are schematic as yet. I haven't thought things through. Know thyself! That's the main thing.

PAULINA (*taking him by the arm*):

You're too softhearted, darling. That's what makes it so hard for you.

ZAKHAR:

We know very little and that's why we are so often amazed. Take that Sintsov, for instance—he amazed me and made me like him. Such a clear mind! Such logical thinking! It turns out he's a Socialist, and that's where he gets his logic and clarity.

PAULINA:

There's no doubt but that he attracts a great deal of attention. Such an unpleasant face! But you ought to rest. Don't you think we had better go?

ZAKHAR (*following her*):

And then there's another worker—Grekov. An insolent fellow. Nikolai Vasilyevich and I were just talking about the speech he made. He's no more than a boy, but he speaks with such arrogance....

(They go out. Silence. A song is heard off stage, then soft voices. Enter Yagodin, Levshin and Ryabtsov, a young chap who frequently tosses back his head. His face is round and good-natured. The three of them stop under the trees.)

LEVSHIN (*quietly and secretively*):

It's for the common cause, Pavel.

RYABTSOV:

I know.

LEVSHIN:

For the common cause, the human cause. There's a high price on every good man these days. The people are pulling themselves up with their minds. They're listening and reading and thinking. And those of them who have come to understand are priceless.

YAGODIN:

That's true, Pavel.

RYABTSOV:

I know it. Why the talk? I'll do it.

LEVSHIN:

But not just for the fun of it. You've got to understand why. You're young and this means penal servitude.

RYABTSOV:

That's all right. I'll run away.

YAGODIN:

Maybe it won't mean that. You're too young to be sentenced to penal servitude, Pavel.

LEVSHIN:

Let's think he's not. The worse we make it, the better. If a fellow's willing to suffer the worst, that means he's made up his mind once and for all.

RYABTSOV:

I've made up my mind.

YAGODIN:

Don't hurry. Think it over.

RYABTSOV:

What's there to think over? He's been killed, so somebody's got to pay for it.

LEVSHIN:

Yes, he has. And if nobody comes forward and gives himself up, many will be called to account. They'll call our best people to account, Pavel; those who are more valuable to the cause than you are.

RYABTSOV:

I'm not objecting, am I? I may be young, but I understand. We have to keep a strong grip on each other—like the links of a chain.

LEVSHIN (*sighing*):

That's true.

YAGODIN (*smiling*):

We'll join hands, encircle them, close in tight, and there you are!

RYABTSOV:

I've made up my mind. I have no one dependent on me, so I'm the one to go. Only it's too bad to pay such a price for such rotten blood.

LEVSHIN:

Not for the blood, but for the sake of your comrades.

RYABTSOV:

Yes, but I mean he was a beast. Scum, that's what he was.

LEVSHIN:

And that's why he got killed. Good people die a natural death. Nobody wants to get rid of them.

RYABTSOV:

Well, is that all?

YAGODIN:

That's all, Pavel. So you'll tell them tomorrow morning?

RYABTSOV:

Why should I wait until tomorrow?

LEVSHIN:

It would be better to. The night's as good a counsellor as a mother.

RYABTSOV:

All right. May I go now?

LEVSHIN:

God be with you!

YAGODIN:

Go ahead, brother. Be firm.

(Ryabtsov goes out unhurriedly. Yagodin regards the stick he is toying with. Levshin stares at the sky.)

LEVSHIN (*quietly*):

There's a lot of fine people growing up these days, Timofei.

YAGODIN:

Good weather, good crops.

LEVSHIN:

It looks as if we were going to pull ourselves out of this hole.

YAGODIN (*unhappily*):

Too bad about the lad.

LEVSHIN (*quietly*):

Isn't it? Off you go to prison—and on such a charge. The only consolation is—he did it for his comrades.

YAGODIN:

Yes.

LEVSHIN:

But hold your tongue. Tck! Tck! Whatever made Akimov pull that trigger! What good is a killing? No good at all. Kill one dog and the boss buys another, and there's an end to the tale.

YAGODIN (*sadly*):

How many of our men pay with their lives!

LEVSHIN:

Come along, sentry! We've got to guard the bosses' property! (*They go off.*) Damn it all!

YAGODIN:

What's the matter?

LEVSHIN:

This accursed life! If only we could hurry and do something about it!

CURTAIN

ACT III

A large room in the Bardin house. In the back wall are four windows and a door opening on to a veranda. Through the glass windows can be seen soldiers, gendarmes, and a group of workers, among whom are LEVSHIN and GREKOV. The room seems not to be lived in: the little furniture it contains consists of worn, odd pieces; the wallpaper is peeling off. A large table has been placed to the right. When the curtain rises, KON is angrily pushing chairs about the table and AGRAFENA is sweeping the floor. There are large double doors in both the left and right walls.

AGRAFENA:

Well, you needn't be angry with *me*!

KON:

I'm not angry. They can all go to devil for all I care. Thank goodness I'll be dying soon. My heart's running down.

AGRAFENA:

Don't boast. We'll all be dying.

KON:

I've had enough—I can't take any more. At sixty-five I've got no teeth for their low tricks, any more than for walnuts. Fancy rounding up all those people and drenching them out there in the rain!

(Captain Boboyedov and Nikolai enter through the door left.)

BOBOYEDOV (*happily*):

So this will serve as the courtroom? Splendid! I suppose you are acting in a professional capacity?

NIKOLAI:

I am. Kon, call the Corporal!

BOBOYEDOV:

Now this is how we shall serve up this dish: in the centre that ... er ... what's his name?

NIKOLAI:

Sintsov.

BOBOYEDOV:

Sintsov. Very touching. And grouped around him, the united workers of all countries, eh? That will be a sight to warm the heart! The owner of this place is a charming man. Very. We had quite a different impression of him. I know his sister-in-law from the theatre in Voronezh. Wonderful actress. (*Kvach enters from the porch.*) Well, Kvach?

KVACH:

Everyone's been searched, sir.

BOBOYEDOV:

And what did you find?

KVACH:

Nothing. Everything was hid. Allow me to report that the Police Inspector is in too much of a hurry to do the job thoroughly, sir.

BOBOYEDOV:

I might have expected it. The police are always like that. Did you find anything in the houses?

KVACH:

A few things behind the icons in Levshin's place, sir.

BOBOYEDOV:

Bring everything to my room.

KVACH:

Yes, sir. That young gendarme who has just come from the dragoons....

BOBOYEDOV:

What about him?

KVACH:

He isn't thorough either.

BOBOYEDOV:

Well, you'll have to see to that yourself. Be off with you now. (*Kvach leaves.*) He's a sharp one, that Kvach. Not much to look at, and seems a bit stupid, but he's got a nose like a bloodhound.

NIKOLAI:

I advise you to pay special attention to that clerk, Bogdan Denisovich.

BOBOYEDOV:

Oh, yes. Yes indeed. We'll make him squirm, have no fear.

NIKOLAI:

I'm not speaking of Sintsov, but of Pology. I think he can be of use to us.

BOBOYEDOV:

That fellow we were talking to? Yes, of course. We'll draw him into it.

(Nikolai goes to the table and carefully arranges the documents.)

CLEOPATRA (*at the door right*):

Will you have another glass of tea, Captain?

BOBOYEDOV:

Yes, thank you, if it isn't too much trouble. Beautiful country here. A lovely place. It turns out that I am acquainted with Madame Lugovaya. Didn't she use to act in the Voronezh Theatre?

CLEOPATRA:

I believe she did. Did you find anything when you made your searches?

BOBOYEDOV (*graciously*):

Everything. We found everything. And we shall always find everything, have no fear of that. Even if there's nothing to find.

CLEOPATRA:

My late husband did not take these proclamations seriously. He always said papers didn't make a revolution.

BOBOYEDOV:

Hm. That, of course, is not entirely correct.

CLEOPATRA:

He said leaflets were secret orders issued to fools by idiots.

BOBOYEDOV (*laughing*):

Very clever—but just as incorrect.

CLEOPATRA:

And now you see they have advanced from issuing proclamations to taking action.

BOBOYEDOV:

You can rest assured they will be punished severely—most severely.

CLEOPATRA:

That's a great comfort. As soon as you came I felt relieved.

BOBOYEDOV:

It's our duty to keep up people's spirits.

CLEOPATRA:

I can't tell you what a pleasure it is to see someone who is wholesomely contented with life. Such people are a rarity these days.

BOBOYEDOV:

Oh, the gendarmes in our corps are all handpicked!

CLEOPATRA:

Let's go to the table.

BOBOYEDOV (*going*):

With pleasure! In what theatre is Madame Lugovaya to act this season?

CLEOPATRA:

Sorry, but I don't know.

(Tatyana and Nadya come in from the veranda.)

NADYA (*agitated*):

Did you notice how that old man Levshin looked at us?

TATYANA:

Yes.

NADYA:

I don't know but somehow it all seems so dreadful, so shameful! Nikolai Vasilyevich, why must you do it? Why were these people arrested?

NIKOLAI (*dryly*):

There were more than sufficient grounds for their arrest. And I must request you not to use the veranda as long as those....

NADYA:

Oh, we won't!

TATYANA (*looking at Nikolai*):

Has Sintsov been arrested too?

NIKOLAI:

Sintsov has been arrested too.

NADYA (*walking about the room*):

Seventeen people! Their wives are standing at the gates crying, and the soldiers push them about and laugh at them. Tell the soldiers they should at least be polite.

NIKOLAI:

That's none of my business. Lieutenant Strepetov is in charge of the soldiers.

NADYA:

I'll go and tell him.

(Goes out right. Tatyana smiles and crosses to the table.)

TATYANA:

Listen, you graveyard of laws, as the General calls you....

NIKOLAI:

I don't find the General particularly witty. I shouldn't repeat his jokes.

TATYANA:

Oh, no. I made a mistake. A coffin of laws—that's what he calls you. Don't you like it?

NIKOLAI:

I'm not in a mood for joking.

TATYANA:

Would you have me believe you're so serious-minded?

NIKOLAI:

Let me remind you that they killed my brother yesterday.

TATYANA:

What's that to you?

NIKOLAI:

I beg your pardon, but....

TATYANA (*with a sarcastic smile*):

Don't pretend. You aren't sorry for your brother. You never are sorry for anybody. Not as I am, for instance. Death—that is, a sudden death—is always a shock. But I assure you that not for one moment have you felt genuinely, humanly sorry for your brother. It isn't in you.

NIKOLAI (*constrained*):

This is interesting. What do you want of me?

TATYANA:

Haven't you observed that you and I are kindred spirits? No? That's a pity. I'm an actress—a cold-blooded creature, possessed of one desire—to have a good role to play. You, too, are hard-hearted, and just as anxious to get a good role. Tell me the truth, do you really want to be a prosecutor?

NIKOLAI (*quietly*):

I want you to stop this.

TATYANA (*laughing, after a brief pause*):

I'm a bad diplomat. I came to you with the purpose of—that is, I intended to be pleasant and charming, but as soon as I saw you I began to be insulting. You always

make me want to hurt you. Always. Whether you're sitting or standing, talking or silently passing judgement on people. I intended to ask you....

NIKOLAI (*with a short laugh*):

I can guess what.

TATYANA:

Perhaps. But I suppose I'm too late?

NIKOLAI:

Any time would be too late. Mr. Sintsov is too deeply involved.

TATYANA:

I think it gives you satisfaction to tell me that, doesn't it?

NIKOLAI:

I don't conceal it.

TATYANA (*sighing*):

That just shows how much we resemble each other. I, too, am very mean and petty. Tell me, is Sintsov completely in your power? I mean particularly in *yours*?

NIKOLAI:

Yes, he is.

TATYANA:

And if I should ask you to let him off?

NIKOLAI:

Nothing would come of it.

TATYANA:

Even if I asked you very earnestly?

NIKOLAI:

It would make no difference. You amaze me.

TATYANA:

Do I? Why?

NIKOLAI:

You are a beautiful woman and you undoubtedly have an original mind. You are a personality. There are innumerable chances for you to secure an easy, luxurious life, and yet you interest yourself in this nobody. Eccentricity is a disease, and any cultivated person would feel indignant at your conduct. No one who admires women and prizes beauty could forgive you for it.

TATYANA (*looking at him curiously*):

So that's the judgement you pass on me! Alas! And on Sintsov?

NIKOLAI:

Tonight that gentleman goes to jail.

TATYANA:

Is that final?

NIKOLAI:

Yes.

TATYANA:

With no concessions as a favour to a lady? I don't believe it! If I wanted it badly enough, you would release Sintsov.

NIKOLAI (*thickly*):

Try wanting it badly. Very badly.

TATYANA:

I can't. I don't know how to do such things. But tell me the truth—it shouldn't be so hard to tell the truth once in your life—would you release him?

NIKOLAI (*after a pause*):

I don't know.

TATYANA:

I do. (*A pause, a sigh.*) What rotters we both are!

NIKOLAI:

There are things that are unforgivable even in a woman.

TATYANA (*carelessly*):

Oh, what of it? We're alone. No one can hear us. I have a right to tell you and myself that we're both....

NIKOLAI:

Please. I don't want to hear any more.

TATYANA (*calmly and persistently*):

The fact remains that you place a lower price on your principles than on a woman's kiss.

NIKOLAI:

I have already said I don't care to listen to you.

TATYANA (*calmly*):

Then go away. I certainly don't wish to keep you.

(He goes out quickly. Tatyana wraps herself in her shawl and stands in the middle of the room gazing out on the veranda. Nadya and the Lieutenant come in right.)

LIEUTENANT:

I give you my word that a soldier would never insult a woman. For him a woman is sacred.

NADYA:

Well, you'll see.

LIEUTENANT:

Impossible. Only in the army has a chivalrous attitude to women been preserved.

(They cross over to the door left. Paulina, Zakhar and Yakov come in.)

ZAKHAR:

You see, Yakov....

PAULINA:

But how could it be otherwise?

ZAKHAR:

We are up against reality, inevitability.

TATYANA:

What are you talking about?

YAKOV:

They are singing a dirge over me.

PAULINA:

So amazingly unfeeling! Everyone is blaming us, even Yakov Ivanovich, who is always so mild. As though it were our fault that the soldiers came! And nobody invited the gendarmes either. They always come of themselves.

ZAKHAR:

Blaming me for those arrests!

YAKOV:

I'm not blaming you.

ZAKHAR:

Not in so many words, but I feel....

YAKOV (to Tatyana):

I was sitting there when he came up and said: "Well brother?" and I answered, "Rotten, brother." That's all.

ZAKHAR:

But can't you understand that to preach socialism in the form it is presented here would be impossible anywhere else? It simply couldn't happen!

PAULINA:

Everyone should be interested in politics, but what has socialism to do with politics? That's what Zakhar says, and he's right.

YAKOV (*sullenly*):

What kind of Socialist is old man Levshin? He's simply gone daffy from overwork, from sheer exhaustion.

ZAKHAR:

They're all daffy.

PAULINA:

You must show some pity, gentlemen. We have gone through so much!

ZAKHAR:

Do you think I don't mind having my house turned into a law court? It's all Nikolai Vasilyevich's doing, but you can't argue with him after such a tragedy.

CLEOPATRA (*entering quickly*):

Have you heard? The murderer has been found. They're bringing him here.

YAKOV (*mumbling*):

Oh, for goodness' sake....

TATYANA:

Who is it?

CLEOPATRA:

A young boy. And I'm glad. Perhaps that doesn't sound

very humane, but I'm glad. And if he's just a boy, I'd have them give him a good thrashing every day until the trial. Where is Nikolai Vasilyevich? Have you seen him?

(Goes to the door left, where she is met by the General.)

GENERAL (*sullenly*):

Here you are, standing around like a bunch of wet hens.

ZAKHAR:

It's very unpleasant, Uncle.

GENERAL:

The gendarmes? Yes, that Captain's cheeky. I'd like to play a trick on him. Are they spending the night here?

PAULINA:

I don't think so. Why should they?

GENERAL:

Too bad! If they stayed, I'd see that he got a pail of cold water dumped over him when he crawled into bed. That's the way I had faint-hearted cadets treated in my corps. Nothing funnier than to see somebody all wet and naked hopping around and shouting.

CLEOPATRA (*standing in the doorway*):

Why in the world should you say such a thing, General? The Captain is a very respectable person and extremely energetic. As soon as he arrived he began rounding up the offenders. That should be appreciated. (*Goes out.*)

GENERAL:

Hm. For her, any man with big moustaches is respectable. But people should know their place. That's the thing. That's the secret of respectability. (*Goes to the door left.*)
Kon!

PAULINA (*quietly*):

You'd think she was in charge of everything! Just see how she behaves! So rude and uncivil!

ZAKHAR:

If only they'd hurry and get it over with! How I long for peace and quiet!

NADYA (*running in*):

Aunt Tanya, that Lieutenant is too stupid for words! I think he beats his soldiers. You should see him rushing about, shouting and making hideous faces! They certainly ought to allow those who have been arrested to see their wives, Uncle. Five of those men are married. Go out and tell that gendarme—he's the one in charge....

ZAKHAR:

But you see, Nadya....

NADYA:

I see that you're not moving. Go on. Go out and tell him. They're crying. Go on, I tell you.

ZAKHAR (*leaving*):

I'm afraid it won't do any good.

PAULINA:

You're always upsetting everybody, Nadya.

NADYA:

It's you who are always upsetting everybody.

PAULINA:

Us? Think what you're....

NADYA (*overwrought*):

Yes, us—all of us—you and me and uncle. We're the ones who keep upsetting people. We don't do anything,

but it's because of us the soldiers and gendarmes have come and all this business has started. And those people have been arrested, and the women are crying—all because of us!

TATYANA:

Come here, Nadya.

NADYA (*going up to her*):

Here I am. What do you want?

TATYANA:

Sit down and compose yourself. You don't understand anything and there's nothing you can do.

NADYA:

See, there's nothing you can say. I don't want to compose myself. I don't want to.

PAULINA:

Your poor mother was right when she said you were a difficult girl.

NADYA:

Yes, she was right. She earned the bread she ate, but you—what do you do? Whose bread do you eat?

PAULINA:

There she goes again! I must ask you to change your tone, Nadya. How dare you raise your voice when speaking to your elders?

NADYA:

You're not my elders. You're just old, that's all.

PAULINA:

Tanya, this is all your influence, and you ought to tell her she's just a stupid little girl.

TATYANA:

Do you hear? You're a stupid little girl. (*Pats her on the shoulder.*)

NADYA:

Is there nothing else you can say? No, there isn't. Nothing. You can't even defend yourselves. Such people! What *can* you do? Nothing. You are not wanted anywhere. Not even here, in your own house. Simply nowhere.

PAULINA (*severely*):

Do you realise what you're saying?

NADYA:

All these people have come here—gendarmes, soldiers, fools with big moustaches—and all they do is give orders, drink tea, band their swords, clink their spurs, tramp about laughing—and seizing people, shouting at them, threatening them, making the women cry. And you? What good are you here? They've pushed you into the corner....

PAULINA:

But you're talking nonsense. These people have come to protect us.

NADYA (*bitterly*):

Oh, Aunt Paulina! Soldiers can't protect anybody from stupidity! Really they can't!

PAULINA (*indignant*):

Wha-at?

NADYA (*holding out her arms*):

Don't be angry. I mean everybody. (*Paulina goes out quickly.*) Oh, dear, she's run away. She'll tell uncle that I'm rude and unmanageable and uncle will read me such a long lecture that even the flies will drop dead of boredom.

TATYANA (*thoughtfully*):

How you are ever going to live in this world I can't imagine!

NADYA (*with a sweeping gesture*):

Not like this! I wouldn't live like this for anything! I don't know what I am going to do—but I won't do anything the way you do it. I just walked past the veranda with that officer, and there was Grekov standing there smoking and watching us, and his eyes were laughing. And yet he knows they are sending him to jail. See that? Those who live the way they want to aren't afraid of anything. They're always cheerful. I'm ashamed to look at Levshin and Grekov. I don't know the others, but those two—I'll never forget them. Oh, here comes that idiot with the moustache. Gr-r-r!

BOBOYEDOV (*entering*):

How terrifying! Who is it you're trying to scare?

NADYA:

I'm afraid of you. Will you let the women go to their husbands?

BOBOYEDOV:

No, I won't. I'm a villain!

NADYA:

Of course you are if you're a gendarme. Why don't you want to let the women go to their husbands?

BOBOYEDOV (*politely*):

For the present that is impossible. Later, when the men are led away, I shall allow them to say good-bye.

NADYA:

But why is it impossible? It all depends on you, doesn't it?

BOBOYEDOV:

Upon me ... that is, upon the law.

NADYA:

What has the law to do with it? Let them go, please do.

BOBOYEDOV:

What has the law to do with it? You, too, are defying the law? Tut! Tut!

NADYA:

Don't talk to me like that. I'm not a child.

BOBOYEDOV:

Aren't you now? Only children and revolutionaries defy the law.

NADYA:

Then I'm a revolutionary.

BOBOYEDOV (*laughing*):

Oho! Then I've got to put you in jail! Arrest you and put you in jail!

NADYA (*unhappily*):

Don't make a joke of it. Let them go.

BOBOYEDOV:

That I cannot do. It's the law.

NADYA:

Absurd law.

BOBOYEDOV (*seriously*):

Hm. You shouldn't say that. If, as you claim, you are not a child, you must realise that laws are made by those in power, and without them there could be no state.

NADYA (*hottly*):

Laws, power, the state! But for goodness' sake, weren't all these things made for the sake of the people?

BOBOYEDOV:

Well, now ... er ... of course. That is, first of all for the sake of order.

NADYA:

But such order must be wrong if it makes people cry. We don't need power and the state if they make people cry! The state! How stupid! What do I want with it? (*Goes to the door.*) The state! Why do people talk about things they don't know anything about?

(*Goes out. Boboyedov is confounded.*)

BOBOYEDOV (*to Tatyana*):

A remarkable young lady, but with dangerous tendencies in her thinking. Her uncle, it seems, is a man of liberal views. Am I correct?

TATYANA:

You should know better than I. I don't know what is meant by liberal views.

BOBOYEDOV:

Don't you, now? Everybody knows that. Contempt for those in power—that's what liberalism is. But to change the subject. I have seen you in Voronezh, Madame Lugovaya. Yes indeed, I was enchanted by your acting. Simply superb! You may even have noticed me—I always sat next to the Vice-Governor. At that time I was an adjutant in the local administration.

TATYANA:

I see. But I don't remember you. There are gendarmes in every town, I believe.

BOBOYEDOV:

Oh, yes indeed. In every town, without exception. And let me tell you it's us, the officials, who are the true lovers of art. Well, maybe the merchants, too. Take, for example, contributions to buying a gift for a favourite actress on the occasion of her benefit performance—you'll find the names of all the officers of the gendarmerie on every list. That is, so to say, a tradition with us. May I ask where you intend to act during the coming season?

TATYANA:

I haven't yet decided. But of course in a town where there are sure to be true lovers of art. That, it seems, is inevitable?

BOBOYEDOV (*missing the point*):

Oh, yes indeed. You'll find them in every town. After all, people are becoming more cultivated.

KVACH (*from the veranda*):

They are bringing that fellow, sir—the one who did the shooting. Where do you want him?

BOBOYEDOV:

In here. Bring them all in here. Call the prosecutor. (*To Tatyana*) I beg your pardon, but I must tend to business for a little while.

TATYANA:

Are you going to interrogate them?

BOBOYEDOV (*politely*):

Just the least little bit. Quite superficially—only to make their acquaintance. A sort of roll call, so to speak.

TATYANA:

May I be present?

BOBOYEDOV:

Hm. It isn't, of course, the accepted practice. Not in political cases. But since this is a criminal case, and we are not on our own premises, and I should like to afford you this pleasure....

TATYANA:

No one will see me. I shall watch from over here.

BOBOYEDOV:

Good. I am happy to be able to repay you in some measure for the delight your acting has afforded me. I must just go and fetch certain papers.

(He goes out. Two middle-aged workers bring Ryabtsov in from the veranda. Beside them walks Kon, stealing glances into the prisoner's face. They are followed by Levshin, Yagodin, Grekov and several other workers. Gendarmes.)

RYABTSOV (*angrily*):

What did you tie my hands for? Untie them! Hear me?

LEVSHIN:

Untie his hands, fellows. Why humiliate him?

YAGODIN:

He won't run away.

ONE OF THE WORKERS:

We're supposed to. The law demands that we tie his hands.

RYABTSOV:

I won't have it! Untie them!

ANOTHER WORKER (*to Kvach*):

May we, sir? The fellow is quiet enough. It's hard to believe he could have been the one....

KVACH:

Very well. Untie them.

KON (*suddenly*):

You've got the wrong fellow! This one was on the river when the shooting took place. I saw him myself and so did the General! (*To Ryabtsov.*) Speak up, you fool. Tell them it wasn't you. Why don't you speak?

RYABTSOV (*firmly*):

I'm the one who did it.

LEVSHIN:

He ought to know best, soldier.

RYABTSOV:

I'm the one.

KON (*shouting*):

That's a lie! You're up to some mischief! (*Enter Boboyedov and Nikolai Skrobotov.*) When that happened you were rowing on the river and singing. Deny it if you can!

RYABTSOV (*calmly*):

That was later.

BOBOYEDOV:

This fellow?

KVACH:

Yes, sir.

KON:

No, not him.

BOBOYEDOV:

What? Kvach, take the old man out. How did he get in here?

KVACH:

He's attendant on the General, sir.

NIKOLAI (*scrutinising Ryabtsov*):

Just a minute, Bogdan Denisovich. Leave him alone, Kvach.

KON:

Keep your hands off. I'm a soldier myself.

BOBOYEDOV:

That's all right, Kvach.

NIKOLAI (*to Ryabtsov*):

Are you the one who killed my brother?

RYABTSOV:

I am.

NIKOLAI:

Why did you do it?

RYABTSOV:

He treated us bad.

NIKOLAI:

What's your name?

RYABTSOV:

Pavel Ryabtsov.

NIKOLAI:

I see. What is it you were saying, Kon?

KON (*greatly disturbed*):

He didn't kill him! He was on the river when it happened!

I'm ready to swear to it. The General and I both saw him. The General even said, "Wouldn't it be nice if we could upset his boat and give him a ducking?" That's what he said. Do you hear me, you young whipper-snapper? What is it you're up to?

NIKOLAI:

Why are you so sure he was on the river at the time of the murder, Kon?

KON:

It's a good hour's walk from the factory to the place where he was.

RYABTSOV:

I ran.

KON:

He was rowing a boat and singing. You don't sing when you've just killed a man.

NIKOLAI (*to Ryabtsov*):

Do you realise that the law is very severe towards anyone giving false evidence and attempting to shield a criminal? Do you realise that?

RYABTSOV:

I don't care.

NIKOLAI:

Very well. So you are the one who killed the director?

RYABTSOV:

Yes, I am.

BOBOYEDOV:

The brute!

KON:

He's lying!

LEVSHIN:

You don't belong here, soldier!

NIKOLAI:

What's that?

LEVSHIN:

I say he don't belong here and keeps interfering....

NIKOLAI:

What makes you think *you* belong here? Perhaps you're implicated in the murder?

LEVSHIN (*laughs*):

Me? Once I killed a rabbit with a stick and couldn't get over it for a week.

NIKOLAI:

Then keep your mouth shut. (*To Ryabtsov.*) Where's the revolver you used?

RYABTSOV:

I don't know.

NIKOLAI:

What kind was it? Describe it.

RYABTSOV (*uneasy*):

What kind? The usual kind.

KON (*rejoicing*):

The son of a gun! He never saw a revolver!

NIKOLAI:

How big was it? (*Indicating half a yard with his hands.*)
About this long?

RYABTSOV:

Yes. Oh no, less.

NIKOLAI:

Bogdan Denisovich, just a second. (*He leads Boboyedov aside and lowers his voice.*) There's something underhanded being done. We'll have to be more severe with this boy. Let's leave him alone until the coroner comes.

BOBOYEDOV:

Why should we? He confesses to everything.

NIKOLAI (*impressively*):

You and I suspect that this boy is not the murderer, but merely a shield for the true culprit, understand?

(Yakov, obviously drunk, comes in and stands near Tatyana, silently looking on. From time to time his head drops on his chest as though he were drowsing off, then, jerking it up suddenly, he glances about with a frightened look on his face.)

BOBOYEDOV (*uncomprehendingly*):

Ah-h-h. Hm. Yes, yes. Fancy that!

NIKOLAI:

It's a frame-up. A collective crime.

BOBOYEDOV:

The rascal!

NIKOLAI:

Let the Corporal take him out now, and see that he is kept in strict solitary confinement. I'm going out for a minute. Come with me, Kon. Where's the General?

KON:

Digging worms.

(They both go out.)

BOBOYEDOV:

Kvach, take this fellow away, and keep an eye on him! A sharp eye, mind!

KVACH:

Yes, sir. Come on, youngster!

LEVSHIN (*affectionately*):

Good-bye, Pavel. Good-bye, friend.

YAGODIN (*unhappily*):

Good-bye, Pavel.

RYABTSOV:

Good-bye. It's all right.

(They lead Ryabtsov out.)

BOBOYEDOV (*to Levshin*):

Do you know him, old man?

LEVSHIN:

Of course, I do. We work together.

BOBOYEDOV:

What's your name?

LEVSHIN:

Yefim Yefimovich Levshin.

BOBOYEDOV (*quietly to Tatyana*):

Watch developments now. (*To Levshin.*) Tell me the truth.

Levshin; you're an old and sensible man. You should always tell your superiors the truth.

LEVSHIN:

Yes, indeed. Why should I lie?

BOBOYEDOV (*gloating*):

Good. Well, then, tell me honestly, what's hidden behind the icons in your house, eh? The truth, remember!

LEVSHIN (*calmly*):

Nothing.

BOBOYEDOV:

Is that the truth?

LEVSHIN:

Yes, it is.

BOBOYEDOV:

Shame on you, Levshin! Here you are, grey-haired and going bald, and yet you lie like a little boy. Your superiors know even what you think, let alone what you do. For shame, Levshin. What are these things in my hand?

LEVSHIN:

I can't see. My eyesight's bad.

BOBOYEDOV:

I'll tell you what they are. They're books which have been prohibited by our government, books challenging the people to rise up against their tsar. These books were found behind the icons in your house. Now what have you to say?

LEVSHIN (*calmly*):

Nothing.

BOBOYEDOV:

Do you admit that they belong to you?

LEVSHIN:

Maybe they do. All books look alike.

BOBOYEDOV:

Why do you lie in your old age?

LEVSHIN:

I told you the honest truth, sir. You asked me what was behind the icons in my house, and once you asked me such a question I knew there couldn't be anything there because you'd have taken them. So that's what I said: nothing. Why are you trying to make me feel ashamed? I've done nothing to be ashamed of.

BOBOYEDOV (*confused*):

So that's the way you look at it! But I must ask you not to talk so much. I'm not a person to be fooled with. Who gave you these books?

LEVSHIN:

Why should you want to know that? I can't tell you, because I've already forgotten where I got them. Don't let a little thing like that worry you.

BOBOYEDOV:

Wha-at? Very well! Alexei Grekov! Which of you is Grekov?

GREKOV:

I am.

BOBOYEDOV:

Were you arrested in Smolensk in connection with the spreading of revolutionary propaganda among the craftsmen?

GREKOV:

Yes, I was.

BOBOYEDOV:

Such a young person, and so talented! Very glad to make your acquaintance. Gendarmes, take these people out on the veranda. It's getting stuffy in here. Yakov Viripayev? Good. Andrei Svistov?

(The gendarmes lead them all out on the porch and Bohoyedov follows with the list in his hand.)

YAKOV (*softly*):

I like those people.

TATYANA:

I understand. But why is everything so simple for them? Why do they speak so simply and look at things so simply? Why? Have they no passions? No heroism?

YAKOV:

They have a calm faith in the justice of their cause.

TATYANA:

It can't be that they are without passions—or heroism. I can fairly feel their contempt for everybody here.

YAKOV:

That Levshin is splendid. What sad, affectionate, understanding eyes he has! He seems to be saying, "What's the sense in all this? If you'd only get out of the way and give us our freedom! If you'd only get out of our way!"

ZAKHAR (*glancing through the door*):

The stupidity of these gentlemen who represent the law is simply amazing. A fine trial they've cooked up! Nikolai Vasilyevich acts like a world conqueror.

YAKOV:

The only objection you have, Zakhar, is that all this business is being carried on under your nose.

ZAKHAR:

Well, they might have spared me the pleasure! Nadya has gone stark mad. She was insolent to Paulina and me, called Cleopatra a wildcat, and now she is sprawling on the divan in my room crying her eyes out. Heaven only knows what is going on!

YAKOV (*thoughtfully*):

I am growing more disgusted every minute. Zakhar.

ZAKHAR:

I sympathise with you, but what else could we do? When a person's attacked, he has to defend himself. There's not a corner in the house that seems like home any more. Everything is upside down. And the rain makes everything so cold and damp. Such an early autumn!

(Nikolai and Cleopatra come in in an excited state.)

NIKOLAI:

Now I am convinced that they bribed him!

CLEOPATRA:

They couldn't have thought that up themselves. There's someone with a good head on his shoulders involved here.

NIKOLAI:

You suspect Sintsov?

CLEOPATRA:

Who else? Ah, Captain Boboyedov.

BOBOYEDOV (*entering from the veranda*):

At your service!

NIKOLAI:

I am convinced that that young boy has been bribed.
(*Speaks in a whisper.*)

BOBOYEDOV (*softly*):

Oh-h! Hm-m.

CLEOPATRA (*to Boboyedov*):

Do you understand?

BOBOYEDOV:

Hm. Fancy that! The rascals!

(Nikolai and the Captain disappear through the double doors in animated conversation. Cleopatra glances about and sees Tatyana.)

CLEOPATRA:

Oh! So here you are!

TATYANA:

Has anything else happened?

CLEOPATRA:

I don't suppose it makes any difference to you. Have you heard about Sintsov?

TATYANA:

Yes.

CLEOPATRA (*challengingly*):

He's been arrested. I'm very glad they've weeded out all the bad elements at the factory at last. Aren't you?

TATYANA:

I don't think it matters to you how I feel.

CLEOPATRA (*with malicious pleasure*):

You were in sympathy with that Sintsov. (*Her face softens as she watches Tatyana.*) What a strange look you're wearing! And your face seems drawn. Why is that?

TATYANA:

The weather, I suppose.

CLEOPATRA (*coming up to her*):

Listen, perhaps this is stupid, but I'm the one who always speaks her mind. I've seen a lot of life; I've suffered a lot, and become embittered. I know that only a woman can be a woman's friend.

TATYANA:

You want to ask me something?

CLEOPATRA:

Tell you something. I like you. You're always so free in your manners, so well dressed, and so at ease with men. I envy you, your walk and your manner of speaking. But sometimes I don't like you. I even hate you.

TATYANA:

That's interesting. Why?

CLEOPATRA (*in an odd voice*):

Who are you?

TATYANA:

That is....

CLEOPATRA:

I can't make out who you are. I like to have a clear picture of people and to know what they want. It seems to me that people who aren't sure of what they want are dangerous. They can't be trusted.

TATYANA:

That's strange thing to say. But what do I care about your views?

CLEOPATRA (*impetuously and with alarm*):

People ought to live in close friendship, so that they could trust each other. Can't you see what's happening? They're killing us off! They want to rob us! Haven't you noticed the thievish faces on those men who have been arrested? Oh, they know what they want! They live in close friendship! *They* trust each other! I hate them and I'm afraid of them! We live at enmity, not believing in anything, not bound by anything, every man for himself. We depend on soldiers and gendarmes—they depend on themselves. And they're stronger than we are.

TATYANA:

I, too, should like to ask you a question. Were you happy with your husband?

CLEOPATRA:

Why do you ask that?

TATYANA:

Sheer curiosity.

CLEOPATRA (*after a moment's consideration*):

No. He was always too busy with other matters to think of me.

PAULINA (*entering*):

Have you heard? It turns out that that clerk Sintsov is a Socialist. And Zakhar always told him everything and even wanted to make him assistant book-keeper! Of course that isn't of any great importance, but just think how complicated life has become! Your born

enemies can live beside you without your ever suspecting it!

TATYANA:

Thank goodness I'm not rich!

PAULINA:

You won't say that when you're old. (*Gently.*) Cleopatra Petrovna, they're expecting you for a fitting. They've sent the crêpe.

CLEOPATRA:

Very well. My heart is beating so! I can't bear to have anything the matter with me.

PAULINA:

If you wish, I can give you some drops for your heart. They really help.

CLEOPATRA (*going out*):

Very kind of you.

PAULINA:

I'll join you in a second. (*To Tatyana.*) We must be more gentle with her—it acts as a sedative. I'm glad you spoke with her. I envy you, Tanya. You have the knack of always finding a comfortable, neutral position. I'll go and give her some drops.

(When she is left to herself, Tatyana looks out on to the veranda where the soldiers have lined up the men who have been arrested. Yakov pokes his head through the door.)

YAKOV (*teasingly*):

I was standing here eavesdropping all the time.

TATYANA (*absent-mindedly*):

They say it isn't nice to eavesdrop.

YAKOV:

It's very unpleasant to overhear what people say. It makes you pity them. Well, Tanya, I'm leaving.

TATYANA:

Where are you going?

YAKOV:

I don't know yet. Good-bye.

TATYANA (*affectionately*):

Good-bye. Write to me.

YAKOV:

This place has become detestable.

TATYANA:

When are you leaving?

YAKOV (*with an odd smile*):

Today. Perhaps you'll leave too?

TATYANA:

Yes, I intend to. Why are you smiling?

YAKOV:

For no reason in particular. We may never see each other again.

TATYANA:

Nonsense!

YAKOV:

Forgive me. (*Tatyana kisses his forehead. He laughs lightly as he pushes her away.*) You kissed me as if I were a corpse.

(*He goes out slowly. As Tatyana watches him, she has an impulse to follow him, but she checks it and makes a weak little gesture. Nadya comes in. She has an umbrella.*)

NADYA:

Come out into the garden with me, please do. I have a headache from crying. I've been crying like a fool. If I'm alone I'll begin again.

TATYANA:

Why should you cry, child? There's nothing to cry about.

NADYA:

It's all so vexing. I can't make head or tail of it. Who's right? Uncle says he is, but I don't believe him. Is he a kind person—uncle? I always thought he was, but now I'm not sure. When he talks to me I feel wicked and stupid. And when I begin to think about him and ask myself questions I don't understand a thing!

TATYANA (*sadly*):

If you begin asking yourself questions you'll become a revolutionary, and you'll never be able to weather that storm, darling.

NADYA:

Well, I have to become something, don't I? (*Tatyana laughs softly.*) What are you laughing at? Of course, I do. A person can't go on living with his mouth hanging open, not understanding anything!

TATYANA:

I'm laughing because everybody is saying that today—everybody—all of a sudden.

(They go out, and are met on the way by the General and the Lieutenant. The latter nimbly steps out of their way.)

GENERAL:

Mobilisation is essential, Lieutenant! It serves a double purpose.... (*To Nadya and Tatyana.*) And where might you be going?

TATYANA:

For a walk.

GENERAL:

If you meet that clerk ... er ... what's his name? Lieutenant, what was the name of that fellow I introduced you to a while ago?

LIEUTENANT:

Pology, sir.

GENERAL (to Tatyana):

Send him to me. I'll be in the dining room, having tea with cognac and the Lieutenant, ha-ha-ha! (*Claps his hand over his mouth and glances about guiltily.*) Thank you, Lieutenant! You have an excellent memory. Very commendable. An officer should remember the name and face of every soldier in his regiment. When a soldier is a green recruit, he's a sly brute—sly and stupid and lazy. The officer crawls under his skin and rearranges everything to make a man out of the brute—a sensible man, one who knows his duty.

(Zakhar comes in looking worried.)

ZAKHAR:

Uncle, have you seen Yakov?

GENERAL:

No, I haven't. Are they serving tea in there?

ZAKHAR:

Yes. (*The General and the Lieutenant go out. Kon, angry and dishevelled, enters from the veranda.*) Kon, have you seen my brother?

KON (sullenly):

No. I'm keeping my mouth shut from now on. I

wouldn't say so even if I had seen him. I've had my say, thank you.

PAULINA (*entering*):

Those muzhiks have come again to ask you to postpone the payment of their rent.

ZAKHAR:

They've chosen a fine time!

PAULINA:

They complain there was a bad harvest and so they have nothing to pay with.

ZAKHAR:

They're always complaining. You didn't happen to see Yakov anywhere, did you?

PAULINA:

No. What shall I tell them?

ZAKHAR:

The muzhiks? Let them go to the office. I don't intend talking to them.

PAULINA:

But there's nobody in the office. You know yourself that everything's in an upheaval. It's almost lunch-time, but that corporal keeps asking for tea. The samovar hasn't been taken out of the dining room since morning. We're living in a mad-house!

ZAKHAR:

Do you know that Yakov has suddenly taken it into his head to go away?

PAULINA:

It's a good thing, even if I shouldn't say so.

ZAKHAR:

You're right, of course. He's become very annoying of late—always talking nonsense. Just a while back he kept pestering me to know if one could kill a crow with my revolver. He was very insulting. Then he went off and took the revolver with him. He's always drunk.

(Sintsov enters from the veranda in the care of two gendarmes and Kvach. Paulina looks at him through her lorgnette and goes out. Zakhar adjusts his glasses in some embarrassment, and moves away from him as he speaks.)

ZAKHAR (*reproachfully*):

Very unfortunate, Mr. Sintsov. I am extremely sorry, extremely.

SINTSOV (*smiling*):

Don't let it trouble you. It isn't worth it.

ZAKHAR:

Yes, it is! People should sympathise with one another. Even if a person whom I trusted has proved unworthy of my trust, I still consider it my duty to sympathise with him when he is overtaken by misfortune. That is how I see it. Good-bye, Mr. Sintsov.

SINTSOV:

Good-bye.

ZAKHAR:

You have no complaints to make of me?

SINTSOV:

None whatever.

ZAKHAR (*embarrassed*):

Good. Well, good-bye. Your salary will be forwarded to you. (*Going out.*) This is unbearable! My house has

been turned into a kind of headquarters for the gendarmes.

(Sintsov chuckles. Kvach keeps studying him intently, especially his hands. On noticing this, Sintsov stares back at him. Suddenly Kvach smiles.)

SINTSOV:

Well, what's so amusing?

KVACH (*happily*):

Nothing. Nothing at all.

BOBOYEDOV (*coming in*):

Mr. Sintsov, you are being sent into town.

KVACH (*happily*):

He isn't Mr. Sintsov at all, sir. He's somebody quite different.

BOBOYEDOV:

What's that? Be more explicit.

KVACH:

I know him. He used to work at the Bryansk factory,³ and there his name was Maxim Markov. We arrested him there two years ago, sir. He has no nail on his left thumb. I know him. He must have made an escape if he's living under a false name.

BOBOYEDOV (*pleasantly surprised*):

Is that the truth, Mr. Sintsov?

KVACH:

It's the honest truth, sir.

BOBOYEDOV:

So you aren't Sintsov at all! Well, well, well!

SINTSOV:

Whoever I am, you're obliged to be civil. Don't forget that!

BOBOYEDOV:

Oho! It's easy to see you're not a person to be fooled with! You'll be in charge of him, Kvach. Keep your eyes open!

KVACH:

You can be sure I will, sir!

BOBOYEDOV (*happily*):

Well then, Mr. Sintsov, or whatever your name is, we're sending you into town. (*To Kvach.*) As soon as you get there, tell the authorities all you know about him and immediately demand his police record ... but I had better see to that myself. Stay here, Kvach. (*Hurries out.*)

KVACH (*amiably*):

So here we meet again!

SINTSOV (*smiling*):

Are you glad?

KVACH:

Why not? An old acquaintance.

SINTSOV (*with disgust*):

I should think you'd have had enough of this by now. Your hair's gone grey, and still you go on tracking people down like a dog. Don't you find it degrading?

KVACH (*amiably*):

Oh, I'm used to it—been at it for twenty-three years. And not at all like a dog! The higher-ups have a good opinion

of me—promise me a decoration. Now they're sure to give it to me.

SINTSOV:

On my account?

KVACH:

Yes. Where did you run away from?

SINTSOV:

You'll find out in due time.

KVACH:

That we will. Remember that dark-haired fellow in glasses at the Bryansk factory—Savitsky? He was a teacher, I think. We arrested him again, too. Not long ago. But he died in jail—very sick, he was. After all, there aren't many of you.

SINTSOV:

There will be lots of us—just wait.

KVACH:

Glad to hear it. The more politicals, the better for us!

SINTSOV:

More awards?

(Boboyedov, the General, the Lieutenant, Cleopatra and Nikolai appear in the doorway.)

NIKOLAI (*looking at Sintsov*):

Somehow I expected this. (*Disappears.*)

GENERAL:

A fine chap he turned out to be!

CLEOPATRA:

Now it's clear who the instigator was.

SINTSOV (*sarcastically*):

Doesn't it seem to you that you are conducting this very clumsily, Captain?

BOBOYEDOV:

Don't try to teach your betters!

SINTSOV (*insistently*):

But I must. Do put an end to this absurd show!

GENERAL:

Hear that?

BOBOYEDOV (*shouting*):

Kvach! Take him away!

KVACH:

Yes, sir. (*Leads Sintsov away.*)

GENERAL:

Must be a real tiger, eh? Does he roar?

CLEOPATRA:

I'm certain he started everything.

BOBOYEDOV:

That's probable—highly probable.

LIEUTENANT:

Will there be a trial?

BOBOYEDOV (*smiling*):

Oh, no. We gobble them down without any sauce. They're just as good without it.

GENERAL:

Like an oyster—smack!

BOBOYEDOV:

We'll make quick work of dividing up the game, sir, and relieve you of all this nuisance. Nikolai Vasilyevich! Where are you?

(Everyone goes out. The Chief of Police enters from the veranda.)

CHIEF OF POLICE (*to Kon*):

Will the interrogation be held in here?

KON (*sullenly*):

I don't know. I don't know anything.

CHIEF OF POLICE:

A table, papers ... evidently it is to be held in here. (*Addressing someone out on the veranda.*) Bring them all in here! (*To Kon.*) The deceased made a mistake. He said it was a red-head who shot him, but it turns out the criminal is dark.

KON (*muttering*):

Even the living make mistakes.

(Again they bring in the men who have been arrested.)

CHIEF OF POLICE:

Line them up over there. Take your place at the end of the line, old man. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you old devil?

GREKOV:

Why should you use such language?

LEVSHIN:

Don't bother, Alexei. He isn't worth it.

CHIEF OF POLICE (*threateningly*):

I'll show you!

LEVSHIN:

That's his job—to insult people.

(Nikolai and Boboyedov come in and sit down behind the table. The General takes his place in an armchair in the corner with the Lieutenant standing behind him. In the doorway stand Cleopatra and Paulina who are later joined by Tatyana and Nadya. Zakhar looks unhappily over their shoulders. Pology appears, hitching in cautiously, bowing to those sitting at the table and stopping in confusion in the middle of the room. The General beckons to him. He goes over on tiptoe and stands by the General's armchair. They bring in Ryabtsov.)

NIKOLAI:

Attention! Proceedings have begun. Pavel Ryabtsov!

RYABTSOV:

Well?

BOBOYEDOV:

Not "Well," you fool, but "Yes, Your Honour."

NIKOLAI:

Do you insist that it was you who killed the director?

RYABTSOV (*annoyed*):

I've already told you so. What else do you want!

NIKOLAI:

Do you know Alexei Grekov?

RYABTSOV:

Who's he?

NIKOLAI:

The fellow next to you.

RYABTSOV:

He works at our place.

NIKOLAI:

You are acquainted with him?

RYABTSOV:

We're all acquainted with each other.

NIKOLAI:

I understand. But do you visit him and spend your free time with him? In other words, do you know him well? Are you his friend?

RYABTSOV:

I spend my free time with all of them. We're all friends.

NIKOLAI:

Is that so? I'm afraid you're not telling the truth. Mr. Pology, be so good as to tell us just what is the relationship between Ryabtsov and Grekov?

POLOGY:

A relationship of close friendship. There are two groups represented here. The younger one is headed by Grekov, a young man who is most insolent in his attitude toward people incomparably his superiors. The elder group is headed by Yefim Levshin, a person of fantastic speech and foxy manners.

NADYA (*softly*):

The wretch!

(Pology looks around at her, then turns enquiringly to Nikolai, Nikolai also glances at Nadya.)

NIKOLAI:

Go on.

POLOGY (*sighing*):

They are linked by Mr. Sintsov, who is on good terms with all of them. This individual does not resemble the average individual with a normal mind. He peruses all kinds of books and has his own views on everything. His flat, which I might add is just across the hall from mine, consists of three rooms....

NIKOLAI:

You may omit details.

POLOGY:

I beg your pardon, but truth requires completeness of form. All types of people visit his apartment, including some who happen to be present here—namely, Grekov, and.....

NIKOLAI:

Grekov, is that true?

GREKOV (*calmly*):

Ask me no questions. I refuse to answer them.

NIKOLAI:

To no good purpose.

NADYA (*loudly*):

Good for you!

CLEOPATRA:

What does this mean?

ZAKHAR:

Nadya, my dear....

BOBOYEDOV:

Sh!

(Confusion out on the veranda.)

NIKOLAI:

I see no reason why we should tolerate the presence of those who do not belong here.

GENERAL:

Hm. Just what do you mean by those who do not belong here?

BOBOYEDOV:

Kvach, go and see what all that noise is.

KVACH:

Someone is trying to force the door, sir. Swearing and trying to get in, sir.

NIKOLAI:

What does he want? Who is he?

BOBOYEDOV:

Go and find out.

POLOGY:

Is it your desire that I go on, or shall I discontinue my testimony?

NADYA:

Loathsome creature!

NIKOLAI:

Discontinue. I must ask those who do not belong here to leave!

GENERAL:

Just how am I to take that?

NADYA (*shouting energetically*):

You are the one who doesn't belong here! Not me, but you! You don't belong anywhere! This is my house! I have a right to demand that you get out!

ZAKHAR (*to Nadya in exasperation*):

Leave at once, do you hear me? At once!

NADYA:

Do you mean it? Very well. And so I really don't belong here. I'll go away, but first let me tell you....

PAULINA:

Take her in hand, or she'll say something dreadful!

NIKOLAI (*to Boboyedov*):

Tell the gendarmes to close the doors.

NADYA:

You have no conscience! No heart! You're all miserable and contemptible!

KVACH (*entering joyfully*):

Another one wants to confess, sir!

BOBOYEDOV:

What?

KVACH:

Another murderer has given himself up!

(Akimov, a young chap with reddish hair and a long moustache, walks unhurriedly over to the table.)

NIKOLAI (*involuntarily starting up*):

What do you want?

AKIMOV:

I'm the one who killed the director.

NIKOLAI:

You!

AKIMOV:

Yes, me.

CLEOPATRA (*quietly*):

You wretch! So you've got a conscience!

PAULINA:

Good heavens! What horrible people!

TATYANA (*calmly*):

These people will win out in the end.

AKIMOV (*sullenly*):

Well, here I am. Are you glad?

(General embarrassment. Nikolai whispers something to Boboyedov, who smiles in confusion. Those who have been arrested stand silent and motionless. Nadya stands looking at Akimov from the doorway and crying. Paulina and Zakhar whisper together. The quiet voice of Tatyana is distinctly heard in the silence.)

TATYANA (*to Nadya*):

Don't cry: these people will win out in the end.

LEVSHIN:

Tck, Akimov! You oughtn't to have....

BOBOYEDOV:

Silence!

NADYA (*to Akimov*):

Why did you do it? Why?

LEVSHIN:

Don't shout, sir. I'm older than you are.

AKIMOV (*to Nadya*):

You don't understand. You'd better go out.

CLEOPATRA:

And what a saint that wretched old man pretended to be!

. BOBOYEDOV:

Kvach!

LEVSHIN:

Well, what are you waiting for, Akimov? Speak up.
Tell how he stuck a revolver in your chest, and that's
why....

BOBOYEDOV (*to Nikolai*):

Do you hear what he's teaching them, the old liar?

LEVSHIN:

I am *not* a liar!

NIKOLAI:

Well, how do you feel now, Ryabtsov?

RYABTSOV:

Quite all right. ,

LEVSHIN:

Don't say anything. Keep your mouth shut. They're sly.
They can use words better than we can.

NIKOLAI (*to Boboyedov*):

Throw him out!

LEVSHIN:

Oh, no, you don't! There's no throwing us out! Enough of your rowdy methods! We've been kept in the dark without any rights long enough! Now we've caught fire, and none of your threats can quench our fire! None of them—
ever!

CURTAIN

Yegor Bulychov and Others

(scenes)

Characters
in the Play

YEGOR BULYCHOV

KSENIA (Aksinya), *his wife*

VARVARA (Varya), *his daughter by Ksenia*

ALEXANDRA (Shura), *his illegitimate daughter*

MELANYA (Malasha), *an abbess, his wife's sister*

ANDREI ZVONTSOV, *Varvara's husband*

STEPAN TYATIN, *Zvontsov's cousin*

MOKEI BASHKIN

VASILY (Vasya) DOSTIGAYEV

ELIZAVETA (Liza), *his wife*

ANTONINA (Tonya)

ALEXEI

PAVLIN, *a priest*

} *Dostigayev's children by his first
wife*

A DOCTOR

A TRUMPETER

ZOBUNOVA, *a witch doctress*

PROPOTTY (the Blessed Prokopy), *a half-wit*

GLAFIRA (Glasha), *a housemaid*

TAISYA, *Melanya's servant, a novice*

MOKROUSOV, *a policeman*

YAKOV (Yasha) LAPTEV, *Bulychov's godson*

DONAT, *a forester*

(The names given in brackets are the Russian
diminutives used familiarly i.)

ACT I

The dining room in the house of a rich merchant on a bright wintry day. Heavy bulky furniture. A wide couch upholstered in leather, next to it a staircase leading to the second storey. Upstage right, a large bay window opening on to the garden. KSENIA is seated at the table, washing up the tea-things. GLAFIRA is at the window, arranging flowers. Enter ALEXANDRA (SHURA) in a dressing-gown and slippers on bare feet. Her hair, red, like Yegor Bulychov's, is unkempt.

KSENIA:

You *are* a great one for sleeping, Shura....

SHURA:

Stop nagging. It won't help. Glasha—coffee! Where's the paper?

GLAFIRA:

I've taken it up to Varvara Yegorovna.

SHURA:

Well, bring it down. They have one newspaper in for the whole house, the devils!

KSENIA:

Who are the devils?

SHURA:

Is Dad in?

KSENIA:

He's visiting the wounded. Who are the devils—the Zvontsovs?

SHURA:

Yes. (*At the telephone.*) One seven six three.

KSENIA:

You wait, I'll tell the Zvontsovs what names you call them.

SHURA (*into the telephone*):

Call Tonya to the phone.

KSENIA:

You're getting worse and worse!

SHURA:

That you, Antonina? Are we going skiing? Why not? A show? Can't you make up some excuse? Ugh, you—unlawful widow, you! Oh, all right.

KSENIA:

How can you call the girl a widow?

SHURA:

Didn't her fiancé die?

KSENIA:

Still, she's a girl.

SHURA:

How do you know?

KSENIA:

Faugh, you shameless creature!

GLAFIRA (*serving coffee*):

Varvara Yegorovna will bring the paper down herself.

KSENIA:

You know a sight too much for your age, you do. You be

careful—the less you know the better you'll sleep. At your age I didn't know anything....

SHURA:

You still don't.

KSENIA:

You're disgusting!

SHURA:

Here comes sister, strutting down. Bonjour, madame!
Comment ça va?

VARVARA:

It's eleven o'clock and you're still not dressed, and your hair's not done....

SHURA:

Off we go.

VARVARA:

You're getting cheekier because Father spoils you ... and because he's ill....

SHURA:

Going to keep this up for long?

KSENIA:

What does she care about her father's health?

VARVARA:

I'll have to tell him about your behaviour....

SHURA:

Thanks in advance. Have you finished?

VARVARA:

You're a fool!

SHURA:

You're mistaken. It's not me that's the fool.

VARVARA:

You gingerhead fool!

SHURA:

Varvara Yegorovna, you're just wasting your breath.

KSENIA:

Go and teach her after that!

SHURA:

You're getting a bad temper, too.

VARVARA:

All right, my dear, all right! Mother, let's go to the kitchen, the cook's gone into one of his tantrums again....

KSENIA:

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

VARVARA:

That's no reason why he should go into tantrums. So many people are being killed these days.¹

(They go out.)

SHURA:

If that handsome Andrei of hers had gone west, she'd throw a fit!

GLAFIRA:

You shouldn't tease 'em, though. Hurry up and drink your coffee, I've got to tidy up here. (*Goes out with the samovar.*)

(Shura sits back in her chair, her eyes closed and hands clasped behind her tousled red head.)

ZVONTSOV

(comes downstairs softly in his slippers, creeps up to her from behind and embraces her):

A penny for your thoughts, Ginger!

SHURA

(without stirring, her eyes still closed): Keep your hands off me.

ZVONTSOV:

Why? You like it, don't you? Say yes. You do?

SHURA:

I don't.

ZVONTSOV:

Why not?

SHURA:

Drop it. You're only pretending. You don't like me at all.

ZVONTSOV:

You'd want me to like you, wouldn't you?

(Varvara appears on the stairs.)

SHURA:

If Varvara gets to know....

ZVONTSOV:

Shsh! *(Moves away and speaks in a didactic tone.)* Yes, you ought to pull yourself together. You must study.

VARVARA:

She prefers to be cheeky and to blow soap bubbles with Antonina.

SHURA:

So what? I like blowing bubbles. You're not sorry about the soap, are you?

VARVARA:

I'm sorry for you. I just can't imagine how you are going to live. At high school they practically told you to leave....

SHURA:

It isn't true.

VARVARA:

Your girl-friend is a dim-wit.

ZVONTSOV:

She wants to study music.

VARVARA:

Who?

ZVONTSOV:

Shura.

SHURA:

It isn't true. I don't want to study music.

VARVARA:

Where'd you get it from?

ZVONTSOV:

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

SHURA (*going out*):

I never said anything of the sort.

ZVONTSOV:

Hm ... strange. I couldn't have made it up! You're too brusque with her, Varya....

VARVARA:

And you're too amiable.

ZVONTSOV:

What do you mean "too amiable"? You know my plan, don't you?

VARVARA:

I'm not saying anything about the plan, but it seems to me you're being a bit too amiable.

ZVONTSOV:

What silly ideas have got into your head.

VARVARA:

Silly, are they?

ZVONTSOV:

Just think a moment—fancy making jealous scenes at such a serious time!

VARVARA:

Why did you come down here?

ZVONTSOV:

Me? There's an advert here in the paper. And the forester has arrived, says the peasants have tracked a bear to his den.

VARVARA:

Donat is in the kitchen. What's the advert about?

ZVONTSOV:

This is the limit really! I don't like the tone you use! What do you take me for—a schoolboy? Damn it all....

VARVARA:

Keep your hair on. I believe Father has arrived. And look what a sight you are.

(Zvontsov hurries upstairs. Varvara goes out to meet her father. Shura in a green jumper and green knitted cap runs

to the telephone. Bulychov intercepts her and presses her to him in silence. He is followed in by Father Pavlin, wearing a mauve cassock.)

BULYCHOV

(sits down at the table, his arm round Shura's waist: she strokes his coppery greying hair):

So many people made cripples, it's terrible....

PAVLIN:

How are you, Shura—blooming, I see? Excuse me for not greeting you....

SHURA:

I should have been the first, Father Pavlin, but Dad grabbed me like a bear....

BULYCHOV:

Wait a minute, Shura! Attention! What will those people do now? We had plenty of useless people, as it was, before the war. We should have kept out of it....

PAVLIN (*sighing*):

Policies of the higher powers....

BULYCHOV:

Our policies went wrong with the Japanese too, and the result was we disgraced ourselves before the whole world.

PAVLIN:

But war does not only cause destruction, it makes a man richer both in experience and in....

BULYCHOV:

Some do the fighting, others the fleecing.

PAVLIN:

Moreover, everything in this world is performed by the will of God, and of what significance are our murmurings?

BULYCHOV:

Look here, Pavlin Savelyev, drop your sermonising....
Were you going skiing, Shura?

SHURA:

Yes, I'm waiting for Antonina.

BULYCHOV:

All right. If you're still here, I'll call you in about five minutes.

(Shura runs out.)

PAVLIN:

She *has* grown up! Quite a maid....

BULYCHOV:

Yes, a neat little body, but her face is a failure. Her mother was ugly. Clever as the devil, but ugly.

PAVLIN:

Alexandra Yegorovna's face is er ... striking, and not unattractive. Where did her mother hail from?

BULYCHOV:

Siberia. You talk about the higher powers ... the will of God and all that. But what about the Duma? Where does that come in?

PAVLIN:

The Duma is—in a manner of speaking—a self-diminution of authority. Many people even assume it to be a fatal error, but it is unbecoming for a minister of the Church to inquire into such matters. Moreover, it is incumbent upon the clergy in our day to fire a spirit of good cheer ... and cultivate a love for King and Country.

BULYCHOV:

Up in fire and down in smoke.

PAVLIN:

As you are aware, I have persuaded the churchwarden of my temple to enlarge the choir, and I have also had a talk with General Betling concerning a donation towards a bell for the new church that is being built to the glory of your patron saint, the Blessed Yegor.²

BULYCHOV:

And he gave you nothing?

PAVLIN:

He refused and even made an indelicate joke. "I don't like brass even in the regimental bands," he says. Now a donation from you towards the bell would be just the thing, considering your ill-health.

BULYCHOV (*rising*):

You don't cure illnesses by bell-ringing.

PAVLIN:

You never know. The causes of illness are not known to science. In some foreign sanatoriums, I hear, they cure disease by music. We, too, have a member of the fire brigade—he ministers to the sick by playing the trumpet.

BULYCHOV (*smiling*):

What trumpet?

PAVLIN:

A brass trumpet. A very large one, they say.

BULYCHOV:

Well, of course, if it's a large one.... And does it work?

PAVLIN:

So I understand. Everything is possible, my dear Yegor Vasilyevich! You never know. We dwell in mystery, in the

darkness of countless baffling mysteries. We believe we see light, a light that proceeds from our mind, but only to our physical sight is it light; our spirit may, perhaps, be even darkened, if not quenched, by our mind.

BULYCHOV (*sighing*):

My, what a lot of words you know....

PAVLIN (*warming to his subject*):

Take, for instance, the Blessed Prokopy. In what joy liveth this man, whom the ignorant call a witling.

BULYCHOV:

You're off again, sermonising! Goodbye. I'm tired.

PAVLIN:

I sincerely wish you well. I shall pray for you.... (*Goes out.*)

BULYCHOV

(*feels his right side, goes over to the couch, growling*):

The great fat hog ... gorged on the blood and body of Christ. Glafira! Hey!

(Enter Varvara.)

VARVARA:

What is it?

BULYCHOV:

Nothing. I was calling Glafira. My, you're all toffed up! Where are you going?

VARVARA:

I'm going to a show for convalescent soldiers.

BULYCHOV:

And specs on your nose too? I don't believe you need them, you only want to be fashionable.

VARVARA:

You ought to talk to Alexandra, Father. She's behaving atrociously. She's simply unbearable.

BULYCHOV:

You're a fine lot, all of you. Get along! (*Varvara goes out. Muttering to himself.*) Unbearable! Wait till I get better, I'll show you bearable!

(Enter Glafira.)

GLAFIRA:

Did you call me?

BULYCHOV:

I did. Ah, Glasha, you're good to look at! Bursting with health. In fine fettle! That Varvara of mine's a scarecrow!

GLAFIRA (*glancing up at the stairs*):

It's her good luck. If she'd been good-looking you'd have had her in your bed too.

BULYCHOV:

My own daughter? You fool, what are you talking about?

GLAFIRA:

I know what I'm talking about! You squeeze Shura like she was a stranger—just like a soldier!

BULYCHOV (*dumbfounded*):

You're crazy, Glafira! You're not jealous of my daughter, are you? Don't you dare to have such ideas about Shura. Like a soldier.... Like a stranger! Have you ever been in the hands of soldiers yourself? Eh?

GLAFIRA:

Here's not the place ... nor the time, for such kind o' talk. What did you call me for?

BULYCHOV:

Send Donat to me. Wait! Give me your hand. You do love me, don't you! Ailing though I am?

GLAFIRA (*clings to him*):

You're breaking my heart. Don't be ill! Oh, don't be ill....
(*Tears herself away and runs out.*)

(Bulychov smiles mirthlessly, passes his tongue over his lips, shakes his head. He lies down.)

DONAT:

How do you do, Yegor Vasilyevich. Keeping well, I hope.

BULYCHOV:

Thanks. What's the news?

DONAT:

Good news. We've tracked a bear.

BULYCHOV (*sighing*):

I feel envy instead of joy. A bear is no sport for me these days. How's the tree-felling getting on?

DONAT:

So-so. Not enough hands.

(Enter Ksenia, dressed up, be-ringed.)

BULYCHOV:

What is it?

KSENIA:

Nothing. I hope you're not thinking of any bear-hunt, Yegor—not in the state you're in.

BULYCHOV:

Wait a minute. No hands, you say?

DONAT:

Only old men and kids left. The prince has been given fifty war prisoners, but they're not fit for work in the woods.

BULYCHOV:

I bet they're fit for work with the women, though.

DONAT:

You said it.

BULYCHOV:

Yes.... Women are starved these days.

KSENIA:

Morals are very loose in the villages these days, I hear.

DONAT:

Why call it loose morals, Aksinya Yakovlevna? The men have been killed off, but children have got to be born, haven't they? It works out that those who did the killing have got to do the begetting....

BULYCHOV:

Looks like it.

KSENIA:

Nonsense, what sort of children can you get from war prisoners! On the other hand, if the man's strong and healthy....

BULYCHOV:

And the woman's a fool, he wouldn't want to have any children from her.

KSENIA:

Our women are no fools. The trouble is all the strong

men have been driven off to the war, and no one's left at home but ... advocates.

BULYCHOV:

No end of people have been maimed and killed.

KSENIA:

The rest will be all the better off.

BULYCHOV:

Of all the crazy ideas!

DONAT:

Tsars have never got enough people.

BULYCHOV:

What's that you said?

DONAT:

Tsars, I say, have never got enough people. We've got nothing to feed our own people with and are still out to conquer others.

BULYCHOV:

True. That's true!

DONAT:

This fighting now doesn't make any other sense. That's why we're getting it in the neck now—for being so greedy.

BULYCHOV:

You're quite right, Donat! That's what Yakov, my godson, says too. "Greed's at the bottom of it all," he says. How's he getting on there?

DONAT:

He's all right. Clever chap.

KSENIA:

Clever your grandmother! He's simply cheeky!

DONAT:

That's on account of his cleverness, Aksinya Yakovlevna. He's picked up a dozen or so deserters out there, Yegor Vasilyevich, and put 'em to work. They're doing fairly well. At least it keeps them from thieving.

BULYCHOV:

Humph! If Mokrousov gets to know about that he'll kick up a row.

DONAT:

Mokrousov does know. He's glad, if anything. Makes things easier for him.

BULYCHOV:

Well, well, that's your lookout.

(Zvontsov comes downstairs.)

DONAT:

So what about the bear....

BULYCHOV:

The bear—that's your good luck.

ZVONTSOV:

Allow me to offer the bear to General Betling. You know, he renders us....

BULYCHOV:

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

KSENIA (*chuckling*):

I'd love to see the bishop taking a shot at a bear.

BULYCHOV:

Well, I'm tired. Good-day, Donat. Everything seems to have gone wrong, old chap, eh? Soon as I got ill the trouble started.

(Donat bows in silence and goes out.)

BULYCHOV:

Send Shura to me. Aksinya, will you. Now Andrei, what is it you want to say? Out with it!

ZVONTSOV:

It's about Laptev....

BULYCHOV:

What about Laptev?

ZVONTSOV:

I've heard he's got himself mixed up with ... political suspects and has made antigovernment speeches to the muzhiks at Koposovo Fair.³

BULYCHOV:

Nonsense! Who ever heard of fairs nowadays? What muzhiks? Why do you all complain about Yakov?

ZVONTSOV:

Well, he's a member of our family, sort of....

(Shura runs in.)

BULYCHOV:

Sort of.... You don't exactly fall over yourselves to recognise him as one of the family. That's why he doesn't come to dinner on Sundays. Go along, Andrei. You'll tell me about it afterwards.

(Exit Zvontsov.)

SHURA:

Has he been preaching on Yakov?

BULYCHOV:

That's none of your business. Sit down here. Everyone is complaining about you, too.

SHURA:

Who's everyone?

BULYCHOV:

Aksinya, Varvara....

SHURA:

They're not everybody.

BULYCHOV:

I'm talking seriously, Shura.

SHURA:

You don't talk like this when you're serious.

BULYCHOV:

You're cheeky to everybody, you don't do anything....

SHURA:

If I don't do anything how can I be cheeky?

BULYCHOV:

You don't listen to anybody.

SHURA:

I listen to all of 'em. I'm sick of listening, Ginger!

BULYCHOV:

Ginger yourself—you're a lot more ginger than I am. You're being saucy to me too! I ought to be scolding you but I don't feel like it.

SHURA:

If you don't feel like then you needn't.

BULYCHOV:

I like that! If you don't want to you needn't! Life would be easy that way, but it can't be done!

SHURA:

What's to prevent you?

BULYCHOV:

Everything, everybody.... You wouldn't understand.

SHURA:

Well, teach me so's I'll understand, so's they won't prevent me....

BULYCHOV:

It's not a thing that can be taught. What is it, Aksinya? What are you mooning around, what are you looking for?

KSENIA:

The doctor has arrived, and Bashkin's waiting to see you. Alexandra, pull your skirt down, how are you sitting?

BULYCHOV (*getting up*):

All right, send the doctor in.

(Exist Ksenia.)

Lying down is bad for me, it makes me put on weight. Heigh-ho (*To Shura.*) Beat it, girlie. Don't sprain an ankle!

DOCTOR:

Good morning! How are we today?

BULYCHOV:

Poorly. Your treatment doesn't do much good, doctor.

DOCTOR:

Well, well, let's go to your room.

BULYCHOV (*going out with him*):

Give me the vilest, the most expensive medicines you can. I must get better, old chap, I simply must! If you cure me I'll have a hospital built and make you head of it to do what you want....

(Exit. Enter Ksenia and Bashkin.)

KSENIA:

What did the doctor say?

BASHKIN:

Cancer, he says, cancer of the liver.

KSENIA:

My God! The things they think of!

BASHKIN:

It's a dangerous illness, he says.

KSENIA:

He would! Everyone thinks his job's the hardest.

BASHKIN:

What a time to fall ill! Here's money dropping about all over the place like out of a torn pocket and beggars making thousands, while he....

KSENIA:

That's just it! People are getting so rich, so rich!

BASHKIN:

Dostigayev's gone that stout, he goes about all unbuttoned and can only talk in thousands. If you ask me, Yegor Vasilyevich is getting sort of clouded in the mind. The

other day he said, "I've missed the real thing in life," he says. What does he mean?

KSENIA:

Ah, I've noticed it too—he does say odd things!

BASHKIN:

Mind you, he started life on your and your sister's capital. He should have increased it.

KSENIA:

What a mistake I made, Mokei. I've known it all along. I married a salesman, but the wrong one. If I'd have married you—how peacefully we would have lived! But he.... My God, the things he's been up to! The things I've had to put up with from him! Brought a bastard daughter into the house for me to look after. And picked himself a son-in-law the worst of a bad lot. I'm afraid they'll get round me, Mokei, swindle me—that son-in-law of mine and Varvara. They'll ruin me.

BASHKIN:

Shouldn't be surprised. War, you know what it is! In wartime people have no shame or pity.

KSENIA:

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

BASHKIN:

I *am* thinking.

(Zvontsov appears.)

ZVONTSOV:

Has the doctor gone?

KSENIA:

He's still in there.

ZVONTSOV:

How about the cloth, Bashkin?

BASHKIN:

Betling won't take it.

ZVONTSOV:

How much must we give him?

BASHKIN:

Five thousand, at least.

KSENIA:

The robber! An old man too!

ZVONTSOV:

Through Jeanne?

BASHKIN:

Yes, the usual way.

KSENIA:

Five thousand! What for?

ZVONTSOV:

Money's cheap these days.

KSENIA:

In somebody else's pocket.

ZVONTSOV:

Does my father-in-law agree?

BASHKIN:

That's what I've come to find out.

DOCTOR

(*coming out taking Zvontsov by the arm*): Well, I have to tell you....

KSENIA:

Oh, I hope it's something that will gladden us....

DOCTOR:

The patient should lie down as much as possible. All business, excitement, irritation are very bad for him. He must have complete rest and quiet. Then.... (*Whispers to Zvontsov.*)

KSENIA:

Why can't I be told? I'm his wife.

DOCTOR:

There are things one doesn't speak of to ladies. (*Whispers again*). We'll arrange it this evening then.

KSENIA:

Arrange what?

DOCTOR:

A consultation with several other doctors.

KSENIA:

Goodness me!

DOCTOR:

It's nothing terrible. Well, good-day. (*Goes out.*)

KSENIA:

Strict fellow. Mind you, he's no better than the rest of 'em. Charges five rubles for five minutes. Sixty rubles an hour—think of that!

ZVONTSOV:

He says an operation is needed.

KSENIA:

What, the knife? No fear! I won't have him go under the knife—not if I can help it!

ZVONTSOV:

But, look here—this is sheer ignorance! Surgery, science....

KSENIA:

I don't care a hang about that science of yours. There! You're none too civil to me either.

ZVONTSOV:

I'm not talking about the decencies, I'm talking about your ignorance.

KSENIA:

You're very brainy, aren't you?

(Zvontsov, with a gesture of annoyance, moves away. Glafira runs through the room.)

KSENIA:

What's the hurry?

GLAFIRA:

The bedroom bell....

(Ksenia follows her into Bulychov's room.)

ZVONTSOV:

My father-in-law has chosen the wrong time to be ill.

BASHKIN:

Yes. It's a bit awkward. Smart people are making money out of air these days, just like conjurers.

ZVONTSOV:

Mm—yes. And then there's a revolution coming.

BASHKIN:

The more's the pity. We had one in nineteen five. A stupid business.

ZVONTSOV:

In nineteen five we had a riot, not a revolution. The peasants and the workers were at home then, but now they're at the front. This time the revolution will be against the officials, the governors and the ministers.

BASHKIN:

If it were only that! The officials are worse than ticks—once they get stuck to you there's no tearing 'em off.

ZVONTSOV:

The tsar is obviously unfit to rule.

BASHKIN:

There's talk about that among the merchantry too. They say some muzhik or other has got round the tsarina.

(Varvara appears on the stairs, listening.)

ZVONTSOV:

Yes. Grigory Rasputin.

BASHKIN:

Somehow I don't believe in witchcraft.

ZVONTSOV:

What about lovers—d'you believe in that?

BASHKIN:

Sounds like a tall story. She's got hundreds o' generals to choose from.

VARVARA:

What nonsense!

BASHKIN:

Everybody's talking about it, Varvara Yegorovna. If you ask me, though, we can't do without a tsar, we must have a wise head at the top.

ZVONTSOV:

That head should be not in Petrograd but on our own shoulders. (*To Varvara.*) Is the show over?

VARVARA:

It's been put off. An inspector came, saying a trainload of wounded is expected in the evening, about five hundred men. And there's no room for them.

(Enter Glafira.)

GLAFIRA:

Mr. Bashkin, he's asking for you.

(Glafira and Bashkin go out. Bashkin leaves his cap on the table.)

VARVARA:

Why are you so outspoken with him? You know perfectly well that he spies on us for Mother. He's been wearing that cap for ten years, the miser! It's all greasy and filthy. I can't make out what you and this crook....

ZVONTSOV:

Oh, stop it! I want to borrow some money from him to bribe Betling.

VARVARA:

But I told you Liza Dostigayeva would fix that up through Jeanne! It'll be cheaper too.

ZVONTSOV:

She'll cheat you, Liza will.

KSENIA (*from her husband's bedroom*):

Do come and get him to lie down. He keeps walking about, swearing at Bashkin. Ah, my God....

ZVONTSOV:

Go along, Varya.

BULYCHOV (*in dressing-gown and felt slippers*): Well, and what else? This unfortunate war?

BASHKIN (*following him*):

Who'd dispute it?

BULYCHOV:

Unfortunate for whom?

BASHKIN:

For us.

BULYCHOV:

Who's the "us"? You say people are making millions out of the war? Well?

BASHKIN:

For the people, I mean.

BULYCHOV:

The people's a muzhik—he doesn't care whether he lives or dies. That's what your truth amounts to!

KSENIA:

Don't work yourself up, for God's sake! It's bad for you.

BASHKIN:

I didn't mean that at all. What sort of truth do you call that?

BULYCHOV:

The real truth! The honest truth. I say straight out—my

business is to make money, and the muzhik's business is to raise crops and buy goods. What other truth is there besides this?

BASHKIN:

That is so, of course, but still....

BULYCHOV:

Well, still what? What are you thinking about when you're robbing me?

BASHKIN:

You don't have to insult me.

KSENIA:

Why don't you do something, Varya? Tell him—he's been told to lie down.

BULYCHOV:

Is it the people you're thinking about?

BASHKIN:

Insulting me in front of everybody! Me rob you! It has to be proved!

BULYCHOV:

There's nothing to prove. Everyone knows that thieving is a lawful business. And there's no sense in insulting you. It won't make you any better, it'll only make you worse. And it isn't you who robs, it's the ruble. The ruble is the greatest robber of all....

BASHKIN:

Only a Yakov Laptev could say that.

BULYCHOV:

And so he does. Well, you can go now. Betling is not to be

given any bribes. He's had enough from us, enough for his coffin and his graveclothes, the old devil.

(Bashkin goes out.)

What's all this crowd about? What are you waiting for?

VARVARA:

We're not waiting for anything.

BULYCHOV:

Aren't you? In that case go about your business. Haven't you anything to do? Aksinya, have my room aired, will you. It's stuffy in there, smells of sour medicines. Yes, and have Glafira fetch me some cranberry kvass.

KSENIA:

You mustn't have kvass.

BULYCHOV:

Get along with you! I know myself what I may have and what I mayn't.

KSENIA (*going out*):

If you only did know....

(Everybody leaves the room.)

BULYCHOV

(*walks round the table, holding on to it with one hand. Looks in the mirror and speaks aloud*): You're in a bad way, Yegor. And that dial of yours, too—doesn't look like your own!

GLAFIRA

(*enters with a tray on which stands a glass of milk*): Here's some milk for you.

BULYCHOV:

Give it to the cat. And bring me some kvass. Cranberry kvass.

GLAFIRA:

They told me not to give you any kvass.

BULYCHOV:

Never mind what they told you—you bring it. Wait a minute! What d'you think—will I die?

GLAFIRA:

That can't be.

BULYCHOV:

Why not?

GLAFIRA:

I don't believe it.

BULYCHOV:

You don't believe it? No, my dear, I've got 'em bad. Very bad, I know.

GLAFIRA:

I don't believe it.

BULYCHOV:

Obstinate woman. Come on, let's have that kvass. And I'll have a drop of orange vodka. Does me good. (*Goes to the sideboard.*) They've locked it, damn 'em. The dirty pigs! Watching over me! You'd think I was a prisoner, sort of jailbird.

CURTAIN

ACT II

The Bulychovs' drawing room. ZVONTSOV and TYATIN sitting in a corner at a small round table. On the table a bottle of wine.

ZVONTSOV (*lighting a cigarette*):
Get me?

TYATIN:
Frankly, Andrei, I don't like it....

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

TYATIN:
I'm sorry, but I do.

ZVONTSOV:
Who are you sorry for?

TYATIN:
Myself, of course.

ZVONTSOV:
Not worth it.

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

ZVONTSOV:
You'd better do some thinking instead of philosophising.

TYATIN:
I am thinking. She's a spoilt young lady. She'll be a difficult problem.

ZVONTSOV:

You can divorce her.

TYATIN:

And let her keep the money....

ZVONTSOV:

We'll fix it so that you'll get it. As for Shura, I'll break her in....

TYATIN:

Honestly I....

ZVONTSOV:

When I'm through with her they'll be in a hurry to marry her off and give a bigger dowry too.

TYATIN:

Good idea, that! What's the dowry?

ZVONTSOV:

Fifty.

TYATIN:

Thousand?

ZVONTSOV:

No, buttons.

TYATIN:

Really?

ZVONTSOV:

But you'll give me an I O U for ten.

TYATIN:

Thousand?

ZVONTSOV:

No, rubles! Silly ass!

TYATIN:

That's rather a lot....

ZVONTSOV:

Let's drop the subject, then.

TYATIN:

Are you serious about this?

ZVONTSOV:

Only fools aren't serious about money.

TYATIN (*chuckling*):

Dash it! A splendid idea!

(Enter Dostigayev.)

ZVONTSOV:

Glad to see you understand something. In these wild days a proletarian intellectual like you can't afford....

TYATIN:

Yes, of course! Well, I must be going to the court now.

DOSTIGAYEV:

What are you upset about, Stepan?

ZVONTSOV:

We've been talking about Rasputin.

DOCTIGAYEV:

What luck, eh? A common Siberian muzhik, playing draughts with bishops and ministers. Hundreds of thousands of rubles must have passed through his hands. Never took a bribe of less than ten thousand!

It's fact—I've had it at first hand. What are you drinking? Burgundy? A heavyish wine, that, it's drunk at dinner time, you ignorant people!

ZVONTSOV:

How did you find my father-in-law?

DOCTIGAYEV:

I didn't have to find him, he wasn't hiding. Bring me a glass, Stepan, will you. (*Tyatin goes out unhurriedly.*) Bulychov's in a bad way, I must say. His condition's dangerous....

ZVONTSOV:

Yes, I'm afraid he's....

DOSTIGAYEV:

Yes, that's just it! Mind you, he's scared of dying, so you may be sure he will die. You bear that in mind. These are the days of our life when you mustn't be caught gaping with your hands in your pockets. That will never do. The hogs are rooting up the government fence from all sides. That a revolution is brewing, even the local governor realises.

TYATIN (*re-enters with a glass*):

Yegor Vasilyevich has come out into the dining room.

DOSTIGAYEV (*taking the glass*):

Thanks, Stepan. He's come out, you say? Well, let's go there, then.

ZVONTSOV:

The industrialists understand their role, I believe....⁴

(Varvara and Elizaveta come in.)

DOSTIGAYEV:

The Moscow industrialists? I should say they do!

ELIZAVETA:

They sit here drinking like so many sparrows, while Bulychov is roaring his head off in there. Simply dreadful!

DOSTIGAYEV:

Why is America prospering? Because the bosses there are in power.

VARVARA:

Betling's Jeanne seriously believes that cooks in America go shopping in motor cars.

DOSTIGAYEV:

It's quite possible. Probably a cock-and-bull story, though. Still busy with the military, Varya? Want to get a job under a colonel?

VARVARA: ·

Ouch, that's an old one! A penny for your thoughts, Tyatin.

TYATIN:

Oh, they're nothing much....

ELIZAVETA

(*before the mirror*): Yesterday Jeanne told me a marvellous joke. A beauty!

DOSTIGAYEV:

Come on, then, let's have it.

ELIZAVETA:

Not in front of men, I couldn't.

DOSTIGAYEV:

Must be some beauty!

(Varvara whispers something to Elizaveta.)

ELIZAVETA:

Hubby! Are you going to sit here till you've drained the bottle?

DOSTIGAYEV:

I'm not in anybody's way, am I?

ELIZAVETA (to Tyatin):

Stepan darling, you know that psalm, don't you: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the council of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners"?⁵

TYATIN:

I seem to remember something like that....

ELIZAVETA (*slips her arm through his*):

Well, all these are ungodly sinners, and you're a gentle youth made for moonlight, love and all the rest of it, aren't you? (*Leads him away.*)

DOSTIGAYEV:

What a chatterbox of a woman!

VARVARA:

Vasily Yefimovich, you know Mother and Bashkin have sent for Aunt Melanya.

DOSTIGAYEV:

The abbess? Oho, the big gun! She'll be against the firm of Dostigayev and Zvontsov, she will. She stands for the signboard "Ksenia Bulychova and Dostigayev".

ZVONTSOV:

She may want to draw her money out of the business.

DOSTIGAYEV:

How much of Melanya's money is there in it? Seventy thousand?

ZVONTSOV:

Ninety.

DOSTIGAYEV:

A tidy sum! Her own or the convent's?

VARVARA:

Who knows?

DOSTIGAYEV:

Oh, you can get to know, all right. You can get to know anything. Take the Germans—they know the number of soldiers we have at the front, and even the number of lice on each of 'em.

VARVARA:

Can't you be serious for a change?

DOSTIGAYEV:

My dear Varya, you can't carry on trade or war unless you're able to count the money in your pocket. We can find out about Melanya's money in this way: there is a lady by the name of Sekleteya Poluboyarinova, who shares with the Right Reverend Nikander his nightly vigils, and this Nikander knows all there is to know about other people's money. What's more, there's another man on the diocesan council—we'll keep him in reserve. I want you to have a chat with this Poluboyarinova, Varya, and if it turns out to be the convent's money—well, we know where we stand! Hullo, where's my charming wife gone to?

GLAFIRA:

You are invited into the dining room.

DOSTIGAYEV:

We'll be there in no time. Come along, everybody.

VARVARA

(*making believe her skirt has caught in the armchair*): Give me a hand here, Andrei, can't you? Do you believe him?

ZVONTSOV:

Take me for a fool.

VARVARA:

What a swindler he is! That was a good idea of mine—about Aunt. What about Tyatin?

ZVONTSOV:

I'll talk him into it.

VARVARA:

You'll have to hurry up.

ZVONTSOV:

Why?

VARVARA:

Because after the funeral you have to wait a long time. And Father has a weak heart too. Besides, I have other reasons.

(Exit. They pass Glafira, who follows them with a look of hatred, then begins to clear the table. Laptev comes in.)

GLAFIRA:

There was a rumour yesterday that you were arrested.

LAPTEV:

Was there? I don't think it's true.

GLAFIRA:

Always joking.

LAPTEV:

Hungry as a hawk, cheerful as a lark.

GLAFIRA:

You'll break your neck one o'these days with those jokes of yours.

LAPTEV:

A good joke wins praise, it's for the bad ones that poor Yakov will get it in the neck.

GLAFIRA:

Oh, you blab-mouth! Shura's got Tonya Dostigayeva with her.

LAPTEV:

Brr—not for me!

GLAFIRA:

Shall I call Shura out here?

LAPTEV:

Good idea. How's Bulychov?

GLAFIRA (*angrily*):

He's not Bulychov to you! He's your godfather!

LAPTEV:

Don't be cross, Aunt Glafira.

GLAFIRA:

He's very poorly.

LAPTEV:

Poorly? Wait a minute! My pals are bad off for food. Couldn't you get some flour for them, Aunt Glafira, a couple of poods, say, or maybe a sack?

GLAFIRA:

Am I to steal from my employers for your sake?

LAPTEV:

As if it's the first time! You've sinned before in any case—the sins are on my head. No, really, the boys are hungry. More belongs to you in this house for the work you've done than to your employers.

GLAFIRA:

I've heard those stories before! Flour is going to be sent off to Donat tomorrow morning, you can take a sack from him. (*Goes out*).

LAPTEV:

Thanks awfully! (*Sits down on the couch, yawns till the tears come into his eyes, wipes them away and looks about him.*)

KSENIA (*comes in, grumbling*):

Running away like devils from incense....

LAPTEV:

Good afternoon.

KSENIA:

Oh! What are you sitting here for?

LAPTEV:

Had I better walk about, then?

KSENIA:

Either he's nowhere to be found, or he suddenly pops up! Playing hide-and-seek. Here's your godfather lying sick, and you don't care a hang.

LAPTEV:

What do you want me to do—get sick myself?

KSENIA:

You've all gone crazy and are trying to drive other people crazy. I can't make head or tail of it all! Did you hear that about their wanting to put the tsar in a cage, like Pugachov? Now, you're one of the educated ones—tell me, is that true?

LAPTEV:

Everything's possible, everything!

GLAFIRA (*calling from off stage*):

Aksinya Yakovlevna, just a minute.

KSENIA:

What is it now? I haven't a moment's peace. Oh dear!
(*Goes out.*)

SHURA (*running in*):

Hullo!

LAPTEV:

Shura. I'm going to Moscow, but I haven't a kopek. Help me out.

SHURA:

I have thirty rubles.

LAPTEV:

Couldn't make it fifty, could you?

SHURA:

I'll get it for you.

LAPTEV:

By this evening—the night train? Can you make it?

SHURA:

Yes. I say, is there going to be a revolution?

LAPTEV:

Why, it has started already! Don't you read the papers?

SHURA:

I don't understand the papers.

LAPTEV:

Ask Tyatin then.

SHURA:

Yakov, tell me honestly, what do you make of Tyatin?

LAPTEV:

I like that! You've been seeing him every day for nearly six months.

SHURA:

Is he honest?

LAPTEV:

Well ... yes.

SHURA:

You don't sound very sure.

LAPTEV:

He's a bit of a lamb. Sort of vague. Nursing a grievance, maybe.

SHURA:

Against whom?

LAPTEV:

He was kicked out of the university in his second year. Works for his cousin as a clerk, and his cousin....

SHURA:

Zvontsov's a crook, isn't he?

LAPTEV:

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

SHURA:

Are Glafira and Tyatin helping you?

LAPTEV:

Helping me in what?

SHURA:

Stop beating about the bush, Yakov! You know what I mean. I want to help, too—do you hear!

LAPTEV (*astonished*):

What's the matter with you, girly—you act as if you have only just woken' up.

SHURA (*angrily*):

Don't you dare make fun of me! You're a fool!

LAPTEV:

I may be a fool, but, still, I'd like to understand....

SHURA:

Varvara's coming!

LAPTEV:

Oh, I don't want to meet her.

SHURA:

Come on, then, quick!

LAPTEV

(*putting an arm round her shoulders*): No, really, what's got into you?

(Exit, shutting the door behind them.)

VARVARA

(hearing the lock click, goes up to the door and turns the handle): Is that you, Glafira? (A pause.) Is anyone in there? Very mysterious.... (Goes away quickly.)

(Shura appears, dragging Donat by the hand.)

DONAT:

Where are you dragging me, Shura?

SHURA:

Stop! Now tell me—is Father respected in town?

DONAT:

A rich man is respected everywhere. You're always up to something.

SHURA:

Is he respected or feared?

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:

They do like him, don't they?

DONAT:

Him? Well, the cabbies, maybe, like him. He never haggles with them, pays 'em what they ask. And one cabby, of course, tells another, and so it goes on....

SHURA (*stamping her foot*):

You're making fun of me!

DONAT:

I'm not. I'm telling you the truth.

SHURA:

You've turned nasty. You've become a different man!

DONAT:

It's a bit late in the day for me to become a different man.

SHURA:

You used to praise Father to me.

DONAT:

I'm not running him down either. Every fish has its own kind o' scales.

SHURA:

You're all liars.

DONAT (*sighing*):

It's no good getting angry. Anger can't prove anything.

(Glafira enters.)

SHURA:

Go away. (*Exit Donat.*) I say, Glafira. Hush, someone's coming! (*Hides behind the curtains.*)

(Enter Alexei Dostigayev, a foppish young man in riding-breeches and a Swedish jacket, with innumerable belts, straps and pockets.)

ALEXEI:

You're looking prettier every day, Glafira.

GLAFIRA (*sullenly*):

Glad to hear it.

ALEXEI:

But I am not. (*Blocks Glafira's way.*) I don't like anything nice unless its mine.

GLAFIRA:

Let me pass, please.

ALEXEI:

Certainly. (*Yawns, glances at the clock.*)

(Exit Glafira. Enter Antonina followed a little later by Tyatin.)

SHURA

(*coming out from behind the curtain*): You make love to housemaids, too, I see?

ANTONINA:

He doesn't care if it's a fish.

ALEXEI:

Housemaids, when you undress 'em, are no worse than ladies.

ANTONINA:

Hear that? He always talks like that now, you'd think he'd been living in a pigsty instead of at the front.

SHURA:

Yes. He was just as lazy before, but not so brave with his tongue.

ALEXEI:

I'm brave in deeds, too.

ANTONINA:

What a liar! He's a coward, and what a coward! He's dead afraid his stepmother will seduce him.

ALEXEI:

She's just making it up! Silly fool!

ANTONINA:

And he's disgustingly greedy. You know, I pay him a ruble twenty kopeks for every day that he doesn't say something nasty to me. And he takes it!

ALEXEI:

Tyatin, do you like Antonina?

TYATIN:

I do, very much.

SHURA:

And me?

TYATIN:

Frankly?

SHURA:

Why, of course!

TYATIN:

You not so much.

SHURA:

I see. That's the truth, is it?

TYATIN:

Yes.

ANTONINA:

Don't you believe him, he's just echoing somebody else.

ALEXEI:

I wish you'd marry Antonina, Tyatin. I'm fed up with her.

ANTONINA:

What a dolt! Go away! You look like a pregnant washerwoman.

ALEXEI (*encircling her waist*):

Oh, what an aristocratic young lady! Ne munchez pas les monkey nuts, my dear. C'est mauvais ton,

ANTONINA:

Leave me alone.

ALEXEI:

With pleasure! (*He dances with her.*)

SHURA:

Maybe you don't like me at all, Tyatin?

TYATIN:

Why do you want to know?

SHURA:

I must. It's interesting.

ALEXEI:

What are you beating about the bush for, Tyatin. She wants you to marry her. All the girls now are falling over themselves to become heroes' widows. It means good rations, a halo, a pension and what not.

ANTONINA:

He thinks he's being witty.

ALEXEI:

Well, I'll be toddling along now. Tonya, see me to the hall, will you?

ANTONINA:

I won't!

ALEXEI:

I want to tell you something. Seriously, come on.

ANTONINA:

Something foolish, I suppose.

(Alexei and Antonina go out.)

SHURA:

Tyatin, are you a truthful person?

TYATIN:

No.

SHURA:

Why?

TYATIN:

It doesn't pay.

SHURA:

If you say that, you must be truthful. Now tell me straight—are they advising you to marry me?

TYATIN (*taking time, lighting a cigarette*):

They are.

SHURA:

And you realise that it's bad advice?

TYATIN:

I do.

SHURA:

Why, you're.... I never expected this! I thought you....

TYATIN:

You must have had a low opinion of me?

SHURA:

Not at all, you're splendid. But maybe you're just artful, eh? Maybe you're only pretending to be on the square? Pulling the wool over my eyes?

TYATIN:

That's a bit beyond me. You're far too clever for me—you've got a temper and you're full of devilment, just like your father. Frankly, I'm afraid of you. And you're ginger, too, like Yegor Vasilyevich. Something like a firebrand.

SHURA:

Tyatin, you're a brick! Or else you're a terribly crafty beggar....

TYATIN:

And your face, too, is very arresting.

SHURA:

That about the face is just to soften the blow, isn't it? You're a sly old dog after all!

TYATIN:

Think what you like. In my opinion you're bound to end up doing something ... criminal. As for me, I'm used to living paws upward, you know—like guilty puppies.

SHURA:

Guilty of what?

TYATIN:

I don't know. Of being puppies and having no teeth. All bark and no bite.

ANTONINA (*coming in*):

That idiot Alexei gave my ear such a painful tweak. And took all my money, the crook! You know, he'll drink

himself to death, I'm sure of it. He and I are 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:

You mean Tyatin? What did you say about him? I don't remember.

SHURA:

Well, that he wanted to marry me.

ANTONINA:

Why should that be bad?

SHURA:

For the sake of my money.

ANTONINA:

Oh, yes! That's disgusting, Tyatin!

SHURA:

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

ANTONINA:

Your *Warums*? Remember Schubert's "Warum"?⁶

TYATIN:

Is it Schubert?

ANTONINA:

Warum sounds like marabou, you know, that moping bird ... in Africa.

SHURA:

The things you think of!

ANTONINA:

Most of all I love terrifying things. When you're terrified you don't feel so bored. I got to like sitting in the dark, waiting for a great big serpent to creep in....

TYATIN (*grinning*):

You mean the one in the Garden of Eden?

ANTONINA:

No, something more ghastly.

SHURA:

You're amusing. Always thinking up something new, while everyone else talks about the same things—the war and Rasputin, the tsarina, the Germans, the war and revolution.

ANTONINA:

You'll be an actress or a nun.

SHURA:

A nun? Tommyrot!

ANTONINA:

It's very difficult to be a nun—you always have the same part to play.

SHURA:

I want to be a cocotte, like Zola's Nana.

TYATIN:

The way you talk! Ugh!

SHURA:

I want to corrupt people, take my revenge.

TYATIN:

On whom? What for?

SHURA:

For being ginger, for Father's being sick—for everything!
Wait till the revolution starts—I'll show you! You'll see!

ANTONINA:

You think there'll be a revolution?

SHURA:

Yes! I do!

TYATIN:

There *is* going to be a revolution.

(Enter Glafira.)

GLAFIRA:

Shura, Mother Melanya has come, and Yegor Vasilyevich wants to receive her in here.

SHURA:

Ouch, Aunt Melanya! Beat it, children, into my room!
Tyatin, do you respect Zvontsov?

TYATIN:

He's my cousin.

SHURA:

That's no answer.

TYATIN:

Generally, relatives have little respect for one another, it seems to me.

SHURA:

Now, that's an answer!

ANTONINA:

Can't you two find something more exciting to talk about!

SHURA:

You're very funny, Tyatin!

TYATIN:

Sorry, can't help it.

SHURA:

And you dress funny, too.

(They all go out. Glafira unlocks a door concealed by the hangings. Bulychov appears in the doorway through which the young people had gone out. Mother Melanya, carrying a staff, enters slowly and majestically. Glafira stands with bent head, holding back the curtain.)

MELANYA:

So you are still hanging about here, you fornicatress? You have not been kicked out yet? But you will be soon.

BULYCHOV:

Take her in as a nun then, she has money.

MELANYA:

Ah, you are here? Tut, tut, Yegor, what a wreck you look, God help you!

BULYCHOV:

Shut the door, Glafira, and don't let anybody in. Sit down ... Your Reverence! What business are we going to discuss?

MELANYA:

The doctors don't help, eh? Now you see—the Lord stays His hand a day, a year, an age....

BULYCHOV:

We'll talk about the Lord afterwards. Business first. You've come to talk about your money, I know.

MELANYA:

The money is not mine, it belongs to the nunnery.

BULYCHOV:

It makes no difference—nunnery, mummary, robbery. Why's the money worrying you? Afraid I'll die and you'll lose it?

MELANYA:

It can't get lost. I don't want it to fall into strange hands.

BULYCHOV:

So you want to take 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 these days are breeding like lice on soldiers. And I'm not going to die—I'm not that sick.

MELANYA:

We know not the day nor the hour when death shall come! Have you made your will?

BULYCHOV:

No.

MELANYA:

It's high time you did! What if the Lord were to suddenly call you?

BULYCHOV:

What does He want me for?

MELANYA:

Drop these flippancies! You know that I don't like listening to them, and besides, my holy office does not allow me....

BULYCHOV:

Oh, come off it, Malasha! We know each other by sight

and feel. You can take your money if you want—
Bulychov has plenty of it.

MELANYA:

I don't want to take my money out of the business, but I want to make over the bills in Ksenia's name. That's what I've come to tell you.

BULYCHOV:

I see. Well, that's your business. In the event of my death, though, Zvontsov will swindle Ksenia. And Varvara will help him do it.

MELANYA:

So that's the way you talk now? Something new for you. No spite in your tone either.

BULYCHOV:

I've turned my spite the other way. And now, let's talk about God, the Lord, and the soul.

*When youth is spent in plunder and sin,
Old age shall be spent in saving one's soul.⁷*

MELANYA:

Well, well. Speak, then!

BULYCHOV:

Take yourself now—you serve God day and night, the way Glafira does me, say.

MELANYA:

Don't blaspheme! Have you taken leave of your senses, man? Glafira serves you at night—how?

BULYCHOV:

Want me to tell you?

MELANYA:

Don't blaspheme, I tell you! Bethink yourself!

BULYCHOV:

Keep your hair on! I'm speaking plain human words, not official prayers. You told Glafira she'd be kicked out soon. That means you believe I'm going to die soon. But why should you? Vasya Dostigayev is nine years older than me and a far bigger rogue, but he's fit as fiddle and he'll live a long time yet. His wife's a topnotcher. I'm a sinner, of course, I treated people badly, and in general, I'm an all-round sinner. But then all people treat each other badly. Life's like that, you can't help it.

MELANYA:

Don't repent before me, before people—repent before God! People won't forgive you, but God is merciful. You know yourself how robbers sinned in the old days, but if they rendered unto God what was God's they were saved!

BULYCHOV:

To be sure, if you robbed people but gave something to the church, then you weren't a thief, you were a righteous man.

MELANYA:

Yegor! Your blaspheming I don't want to listen! You're no fool, you must understand—the Devil won't tempt if the Lord doesn't allow it.

BULYCHOV:

Thank you very much.

MELANYA:

What do you mean?

BULYCHOV:

You've set my mind at rest. It works out that the Lord

gives the Devil a free hand to tempt us. That means He's a partner in sin with the Devil and me....

MELANYA (*rising*):

Words like these ... words like yours ... if I were to tell the Right Reverend Nikander about it....

BULYCHOV:

Why, where have I gone wrong?

MELANYA:

Heretic! Just think—what thoughts get into that unhealthy head of yours! Don't you understand that if God allows the Devil to tempt you, that means God has forsaken you?

BULYCHOV:

Oh, he has, has he? Why? Because I loved money, because I love women, because I married that fool woman, that sister of yours, for the sake of her money, and have been your lover—is that why he has forsaken me? Ugh, you ... great gaping crow! Stands there croaking, and not a scrap of sense in it!

MELANYA (*stunned*):

Why, Yegor! What's the matter with you? You've gone mad! Lord have mercy....

BULYCHOV:

Praying day and night, with the bells ringing, and who you are praying to you haven't the faintest idea!

MELANYA:

Yegor! You're heading for the bottomless pit! Into the very jaws of hell.... In days like these.... When everything's going to wrack and ruin ... the throne is toppling, shaken by the powers of evil ... the time of Antichrist ... maybe the Day of Judgement is drawing near....

BULYCHOV:

What will you think of next! The Day of Judgement. Doomsday.... Ugh, you crow, you! Hops in, croaking! Go on, go back to your den and those girls of yours, slobber over the choir-girls. And this is what you'll get from me instead of money—see! (*Bites a thumb at her.*)

MELANYA

(*struck all of a heap, collapses into a chair*): Oh, the scoundrel!

BULYCHOV:

If Glafira is a fornicatress, then what are you? Eh?

MELANYA:

It's a lie! You're a liar! (*Jumps up.*) Swindler! You'll peg out soon! You worm!

BULYCHOV:

Get out! Get out before I....

MELANYA:

Viper! Fiend! (*Goes out.*)

BULYCHOV

(*growls, rubs his right side and shouts*): Glafira! Hey!

KSENIA (*coming in*):

What's the matter? Where's Melanya?

BULYCHOV:

The bird has flown.

KSENIA:

You two haven't quarrelled again, I hope.

BULYCHOV:

D'you intend to sit here long?

KSENIA:

Give me a chance to say a word, Yegor! You've stopped talking to me altogether lately, like I was a piece of furniture. What are you looking at me like that for?

BULYCHOV:

Go ahead. Fire away!

KSENIA:

What on earth is happening here lately? The place is like a madhouse! That son-in-law of yours has gone and turned his rooms upstairs into a pub, with crowds hanging around, holding meetings and things. Yesterday they drank seven bottles of red wine, to say nothing of the vodka.... Our janitor, Ismail, is complaining that the police are pestering him, wanting to know who comes to the house. And up there they keep harping on the same subject—all about the tsar and his ministers. Every day it's like a pub. What are you hanging your head for?

BULYCHOV:

Go on, spout away! When I was young I loved to sit in a pub, listening to the music.

KSENIA:

What did Melanya come for?

BULYCHOV:

You're a bad liar, Aksinya. You're too stupid to be a good one.

KSENIA:

What lies have I told? When?

BULYCHOV:

Just now. Melanya came here by arrangement with you to talk about her money.

KSENIA:

Who said I made any arrangement with her—what an idea!

BULYCHOV:

Oh, all right. Shut up!

(Dostigayev, Zvontsov and Father Pavlin come in, looking excited.)

DOSTIGAYEV:

Yegor, just listen to the news Father Pavlin has brought from Moscow.

KSENIA:

Hadn't you better lie down, Yegor?

BULYCHOV:

Well, Father Pavlin, I'm all ears.

PAVLIN:

I haven't much to tell in the way of good news, and in my opinion even the good news is bad, because no one can think up anything better than the way we lived before the war.

DOSTIGAYEV:

Oh, no! I don't agree!

(Zvontsov whispers something to his mother-in-law.)

KSENIA:

Crying?

DOSTIGAYEV:

Who is crying?

KSENIA:

The Abbess.

DOSTIGAYEV:

What's the matter with her?

BULYCHOV:

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

DOSTIGAYEV:

I wonder what could have moved Melanya to tears?

PAVLIN:

A great commotion has started in Moscow. Even mature minds assert that the tsar must be deposed on account of his incompetence.

BULYCHOV:

He's been competent enough for twenty odd years.⁸

PAVLIN:

A man's strength wanes with the years.

BULYCHOV:

In nineteen thirteen, when the Romanovs celebrated their tercentenary, Nicholas shook hands with me. The whole nation rejoiced. It was a real gala day in Kostroma.⁹

PAVLIN:

Indeed, it was. The people did rejoice.

BULYCHOV:

Then what's happened? We've got our Duma now.... No, it's not the tsar, it's something at the very root.

PAVLIN:

The autocracy is the root.

BULYCHOV:

Everyone stands by himself—by his own power. But where is that power? In the war it was lacking.

PAVLIN:

The Duma was responsible for sapping that power.

ELIZAVETA (*appears in the doorway*):

Are you holding confession, Father Pavlin?

PAVLIN:

What a question!

ELIZAVETA:

Where is my husband?

PAVLIN:

He was here.

ELIZAVETA:

How serious you are today, Father Pavlin. (*Disappears.*)

BULYCHOV:

Father....

PAVLIN:

What were you about to say?

BULYCHOV:

All fathers. God's a father, the tsar's a father, you're a father, I'm a father. And we have no strength. We are all living for death. I don't mean myself, I mean the war, the Big Death. Like a caged wild tiger in the circus let loose on people.

PAVLIN:

Calm yourself, Yegor Vasilyevich....

BULYCHOV:

Tell me how? Who's going to calm me? Calm me then, Father! Show your strength!

PAVLIN:

Read the Holy Scriptures, the Bible—the Book of Joshua is a good thing to remember. War's in the Law....

BULYCHOV:

Come off it! What sort of law is that? Nonsense! You can't stop the sun. You're talking out of your hat.

PAVLIN:

To murmur against the Lord is a grave sin. We must accept punishment for our sinful life with resignation and a meek and contrite heart.

BULYCHOV:

Did you take it lying down when church-warden Alexei Gubin wronged you? You brought an action against him, invited Zvontsov to be your counsel, and the Bishop took your part. And in what court shall I lodge a complaint against my illness? Against dying before my time? Will you die resignedly? With a meek and contrite heart? Eh? No, you won't—you'll moan and groan.

PAVLIN:

My clothes forbids me to listen to such speeches. For these speeches....

BULYCHOV:

Come off it, Pavlin! You're a man. The cassock's just so much paint on you, underneath you're a man just like me. The doctor was saying that your heart was tricky, fatty degeneration....

PAVLIN:

Where does this kind of talk lead to? Just think, and let fear enter your heart! It has been established from time immemorial....

BULYCHOV:

Established none too strongly, it seems.

PAVLIN:

Lev Tolstoy was a heretic, he was as good as anathematised for his irreligion, and he fled death into the woods, like a wild beast.¹⁰

(Ksenia comes in.)

KSENIA:

Mokey has come, Yegor. He says the gendarmes arrested Yakov last night, and he wants to know....

BULYCHOV:

Well, Father Pavlin, thanks for the sermon. I'll trouble you again ... some time. (*Pavlin goes out.*) Call Bashkin in, Aksinya. Tell Glafira to bring my gruel. Yes, and the orange vodka.

KSENIA:

You're not to have any vodka.

(Exit Ksenia.)

BULYCHOV:

I can have everything. Run along. (*Looks around, chuckles and mutters.*) Father.... Pavlin.... Goblin.... You ought to smoke tobacco, Yegor. It's easier in a smoke-cloud—some things can't be seen.

(Bashkin enters.)

BULYCHOV:

What is it, Mokci?

BASHKIN:

How are you getting on, Yegor Vasilyevich?

BULYCHOV:

Better and better. So Yakov's been arrested?

BASHKIN:

Yes, last night. What a scandal!

BULYCHOV:

He alone?

BASHKIN:

Some watchmaker or other, they say, and Kalmykova, the schoolteacher, the one who used to give Alexandra Yegorovna lessons, and Yerikhonov, the fireman—he's a well-known rebel. About a dozen in all, they say.

BULYCHOV:

All of the down-with-the-tsar kind?

BASHKIN:

All kinds—some against the tsar, others against all the rich, wanting the workers to run the state.

BULYCHOV:

Nonsense!

BASHKIN:

Of course.

BULYCHOV:

They'll drink the state away.

BASHKIN:

That's just it.

BULYCHOV:

Yes.... But what if they don't?

BASHKIN:

What else can they do without the bosses?

BULYCHOV:

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

BASHKIN:

You're a boss, too.

BULYCHOV:

To be sure I am! Now what is it they sing, you say?

BASHKIN (*sighing*):

We have done with the old world....¹¹

BULYCHOV:

And then?

BASHKIN:

Shake its dust from our feet....

BULYCHOV:

Sounds like a prayer.

BASHKIN:

What sort of prayer is it? We hate the tsar, they say, and palaces....

BULYCHOV:

You don't say so! The cheeky devils eh! (*Muses.*) Well, what do you want?

(Glafira brings in gruel and vodka.)

BASHKIN:

Me? Nothing.

BULYCHOV:

What did you come for, then?

BASHKIN:

To ask whom I'm to put in Yakov's place.

BULYCHOV:

Sergei Potapov.

BASHKIN:

He's got the same ideas—doesn't believe in God or the tsar....

BULYCHOV:

He's one of them, too?

BASHKIN:

Might I suggest Mokrousov. He's keen to work for you. He's an efficient, sensible man.

GLAFIRA:

Your gruel will get cold.

BULYCHOV:

That policeman? The thief? What's he after?

BASHKIN:

It's becoming dangerous these days—serving in the police. A lot of men are leaving the force.

BULYCHOV:

Dangerous, eh? The rats! All right, send Potapov here. Tomorrow morning. Run along. Glasha, has the trumpeter come?

GLAFIRA:

He's sitting in the kitchen.

BULYCHOV:

When I've had my gruel, send him in. Why's the house so quiet?

GLAFIRA:

They're all upstairs.

BULYCHOV (*drinks vodka*):

Oh, all right. You look upset, what's the matter?

GLAFIRA:

I wish you wouldn't drink! Don't do yourself harm, don't be sick! Chuck it all up and go away from them. They'll eat you up alive—like worms! Let's go away ... to Siberia....

BULYCHOV:

Let go, it hurts.

GLAFIRA:

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

BULYCHOV:

That'll do, Glasha. Don't upset me. I know everything, I see everything. I know that you ... you and Shura are all I have gained from life, the rest has been a dead loss.... Maybe I'll get better yet. Call that trumpeter in.

GLAFIRA:

Finish your gruel.

BULYCHOV:

Damn the gruel! Call Shura in. (*Left alone, he tosses off glass after glass of vodka.*)

(Enter the Trumpeter. He is a comical, skinny, abject figure with a big trumpet in a sack slung across his shoulders.)

TRUMPETER:

Good health to you, Your Honour!

BULYCHOV (*taken aback*):

Good day. Sit down. Shut the door, Glasha! So that's you.

TRUMPETER:

Yes, sir.

BULYCHOV:

Not much to look at, I must say. Well, let's hear—how do you cure the sick?

TRUMPETER:

It's a simple cure, Your Honour. Only people are used to taking medicine from the chemist's and don't believe me, so I always ask to be paid in advance.

BULYCHOV:

Not a bad idea, that. Do you cure people, though?

TRUMPETER:

I've cured 'em by the hundred.

BULYCHOV:

And are none the richer, I see.

TRUMPETER:

One doesn't get rich on good deeds.

BULYCHOV:

Is that what you think? What ailments do you cure?

TRUMPETER:

All ailments come from the same cause—bad air in the guts, so my cure is good for all of 'em.

BULYCHOV (*chuckling*):

Spoken like a man! Well, well, show us that trumpet of yours.

TRUMPETER:

Can you pay a ruble?

BULYCHOV:

A ruble? I daresay I'll find one. Have you got a ruble, Glasha? Here you are. You don't charge much.

TRUMPETER:

That's for a start. (*Unties his sack and draws out a bass trumpet.*)

(Shura runs in.)

BULYCHOV:

A regular samovar.... A healer with knobs on, eh, Shura? Come on, give her a blow!

(Trumpeter clears his throat, gives a toot, then coughs.)

BULYCHOV:

Is that all?

TRUMPETER:

Four times a day for five minutes—and the trick's done!

BULYCHOV:

The patient passes out? Turns up his toes?

TRUMPETER:

Not on your life! I've cured 'em by the hundred!

BULYCHOV:

I see. Well, now tell me the truth—what do you consider yourself to be, a fool or a rogue?

TRUMPETER (*sighing*):

You're like the rest of 'em, you don't believe it either.

BULYCHOV (*smiling*):

Don't put that thing away yet. Tell me straight—a fool or a rogue? I'll give you money.

SHURA: ♫

Don't bully him, Daddy!

BULYCHOV:

I'm not bullying him, Shura. What's your name, doctor?

TRUMPETER:

Gabriel Uvekov.

BULYCHOV:

Gabriel, eh? (*Laughs.*) Well, of all the.... So it's Gabriel, eh?

TRUMPETER:

It's just an ordinary name as names go ... no one laughs at it!

BULYCHOV:

Well, what are you—a fool or a rogue?

TRUMPETER:

Would you give me sixteen rubles?

BULYCHOV:

Glasha, bring the money here! It's in the bedroom. Why sixteen, Gabriel?

TRUMPETER:

My mistake. Should have asked more.

BULYCHOV:

So you're foolish, then?

TRUMPETER:

No, I'm no fool.

BULYCHOV:

A rogue then?

TRUMPETER:

I'm not a rogue either. You know yourself—a man can't live unless he cheats.

BULYCHOV:

You never said a truer word! It isn't very nice, old chap, but it's true.

SHURA:

But isn't it a shame to cheat people?

TRUMPETER:

Not if they believe in it.

BULYCHOV (*excitedly*):

He's right again! Don't you see it, Shura? He's right! Father Pavlin would never say a thing like that! He wouldn't dare!

TRUMPETER:

You ought to pay me something extra for the truth. Take my word for it—my trumpet does help some folks.

BULYCHOV:

I believe you. Give him twenty-five rubles, Glasha. Give him some more. Give him the whole lot!

TRUMPETER:

Much obliged, sir. Maybe you'd try the trumpet? The devil knows how she does it, but she does, really!

BULYCHOV:

No, thanks! Ah, Gabriel, Gabriel! (*Laughs.*) I tell you what, show us how the thing works. Come on, go it! Give her a blast!

(Trumpeter blows a deafening blast. Glafira looks at Bulychov in alarm. Shura covers her ears and laughs.)

BULYCHOV:

Blow with all your might!

(The Dostigayevs, Zvontsovs, Bashkin and Ksenia rush in.)

VARVARA:

What's this, Father?

KSENIA:

Yegor, what are you up to again?

ZVONTSOV (*to Trumpeter*):

Are you drunk?

BULYCHOV:

Leave him alone! Don't you dare! Go on, Gabe, deafen 'em. Why, this is Gabriel the Archangel trumpeting the end of the world!

KSENIA:

Oh, my God! He's gone crazy!

BASHKIN (*to Zvontsov*):

I told you, see?

SHURA:

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

BULYCHOV:

No, don't go! Blow away. Gabe! The Day of Judgement! The end of the world! Blow like billyo!

CURTAIN

ACT III

The dining room. Everything seems to have been shifted.

The table is cluttered with unwashed dishes, a samovar, shopping parcels and bottles. In a corner several suitcases, one of which is being unpacked by TAISYA, a young convent novice in a tall pointed hood. Next to her stands GLAFIRA, holding a tray. The room is lit by a lamp hanging over the table.

GLAFIRA:

Has Mother Melanya come to stay long?

TAISYA:

I don't know.

GLAFIRA:

Why didn't she put up at the church inn?

TAISYA:

I don't know.

GLAFIRA:

How old are you?

TAISYA:

Nineteen.

(Zvontsov appears on the stairs.)

GLAFIRA:

And you don't know anything! What are you—a savage, or what?

TAISYA:

We're not allowed to talk to the laity.

ZVONTSOV:

Has the Abbess had her tea?

GLAFIRA:

No.

ZVONTSOV:

Then warm up the samovar, just in case.

(Glafira goes out with the samovar.)

ZVONTSOV:

What happened out there—did the soldiers frighten you?

TAISYA:

They did, sir.

ZVONTSOV:

What did they do to frighten you?

TAISYA:

They slaughtered one of the cows and threatened to burn down the abbey. Excuse me. (*She goes out with a pile of linen.*)

VARVARA (*from the hall*):

The mud outside! Having a chat with the nun here?

ZVONTSOV:

Having an abbess in our house is rather an awkward thing, you know.

VARVARA:

It isn't our house yet. Did Tyatin agree?

ZVONTSOV:

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

VARVARA:

Wait. That sounds like Father shouting. (*Listens at the door of her father's room.*)

ZVONTSOV:

Though the doctors say he's in his right mind, but after that idiotic scene with the trumpet....

VARVARA:

He's made worse scenes than that in his time. Alexandra and Tyatin seem to be getting friendly.

ZVONTSOV:

Yes, but I see nothing good in it. That sisterkin of yours is as sly as they make 'em. She's going to give us a lot of trouble.

VARVARA:

Pity you didn't think of that when she was flirting with you. But then, of course, you liked it.

ZVONTSOV:

She flirted with me only to annoy you.

VARVARA:

Does this upset you? Here comes that Pavlin. He's becoming a regular visitor.

ZVONTSOV:

We've got more than enough of the clergy here.

(Elizaveta and Pavlin come in, arguing. They are followed by Mokei Bashkin.)

PAVLIN:

The papers are lying, as usual. Good evening!

ELIZAVETA:

I tell you it isn't true!

PAVLIN:

It is definitely established that the tsar has abdicated, not of his own free will, but under pressure of brute force, having been seized on the road to Petrograd by members of the Constitutional-Democratic Party. Yes, Madam!

ZVONTSOV:

And what follows from this?

ELIZAVETA:

Father Pavlin is against the revolution and all for the war, and I'm against the war! I want to go to Paris. We've had enough fighting. Don't you agree, Varya? Remember what Henri Quatre said: "Paris is better than war." I know he didn't say that exactly, but that was his mistake.

PAVLIN:

I don't insist on anything, because everything is uncertain.

VARVARA:

What we need is peace, Father Pavlin, peace! Don't you see how the rabble is behaving?

PAVLIN:

All too clearly, alas! And how is our patient? How is he here? (*Putting a finger to his forehead.*)

ZVONTSOV:

The doctors have found no symptoms of derangement.

PAVLIN:

I'm glad to hear it. Though doctors, as a rule, make no mistakes only where their fees are concerned.

ELIZAVETA:

How unkind of you! Varya, Jeanne's invited us to supper.

BASHKIN:

The prisoners have been set free, and the police are having a tough time.

PAVLIN:

So they are. It's extraordinary! What good do you expect from events, Andrei Petrovich?

ZVONTSOV:

The social forces are rallying systematically and will soon have their say. By social forces I mean people who possess a sound economic....

VARVARA:

Look here, Jeanne is inviting us.... (*Draws him aside and whispers.*)

ZVONTSOV:

I say, this is rather awkward for me, what with an abbess on one side, a cocotte on the other....

VARVARA:

Hush, not so loud!

BASHKIN:

Andrei Petrovich, Mokrousov is here—you know, the police officer?

ZVONTSOV:

Yes. What does he want?

BASHKIN:

He's leaving the force because it's become too dangerous and wants a job with us, in the woods.

ZVONTSOV:

Will that be proper?

VARVARA:

Wait, Andrei....

BASHKIN:

Quite proper. Laptev now will be getting his tail up and kicking over the traces. Donat, as you know, is not a suitable man, and he's a dissenter, too—always mumbling about the law of right. Talk about right, when ... well, you can see yourself!

ZVONTSOV:

But that's all nonsense! We're witnessing the first steps of a process in which right will triumph....

VARVARA:

Oh, wait, Andrei, can't you!

ZVONTSOV:

Right and justice.

VARVARA:

What is it you want, Mokei?

BASHKIN:

I'm for engaging Mokrousov. I suggested it to Yegor Vasilyevich.

VARVARA:

And what did he say?

(Zvontsov, frowning, leaves them.)

BASHKIN:

Nothing definite.

VARVARA:

Take on Mokrousov.

BASHKIN:

Wouldn't you like to have a look at him?

VARVARA:

What for?

BASHKIN:

Just to see what he's like. He's here.

VARVARA:

Very well, then.

(Bashkin goes out into the hall. Varvara writes something in her pocket diary. Bashkin returns with Mokrousov, a round-faced little man with surprised-looking uplifted eyebrows and a smirk on his face. Nevertheless he gives the impression of a man who is about to swear hard. He is in police uniform, with a revolver at his hip. Clicks his heels.)

MOKROUSOV:

The pleasure's mine, Madam. At your service, Madam.

VARVARA:

Glad to meet you. You're in uniform, I see. I heard the police were being disarmed.

MOKROUSOV:

Quite right, Madam. It's dangerous for us to be seen in the street in our natural shape, so I wear a civvy overcoat, although I'm armed. But just now the mob's quieted down a bit, seeing as false hopes had been raised, and that accounts for my not wearing my sword.

VARVARA:

When do you think of starting work with us?

MOKROUSOV:

I have long been your obedient servant in thought,

Madam. I'm ready to start work in the woods tomorrow if need be. I'm a single man and....

VARVARA:

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

MOKROUSOV:

Through the summer, I should think. Then the rains and frost will set in, and it'll be impossible to loiter in the streets.

VARVARA (*smiling*):

Only for the summer? A revolution hardly depends on the weather.

MOKROUSOV:

I beg your pardon, Madam, but it does! Winter is a cooler.

VARVARA (*smiling*):

You're an optimist.

MOKROUSOV:

The police are optimistic, generally speaking.

VARVARA:

Are they?

MOKROUSOV:

Absolutely, Madam! It's because they know their strength.

VARVARA:

Have you been in the army?

MOKROUSOV:

Yes, Madam. Served in the Buzuluk Reserve Battalion. Sublieutenant.

VARVARA (*giving him her hand*):

Well, good-bye, I wish you luck.

MOKROUSOV (*kisses her hand*):

I'm deeply grateful. (*Bows himself out, clicking his heels.*)

VARVARA (*to Bashkin*):

Looks a fool, doesn't he?

BASHKIN:

No harm in that. Just look what the clever ones are up to. Give 'em a chance and they'll turn the world inside out. Like a pocket.

PAVLIN (*to Bashkin and Elizaveta*):

The clergy must be given the right to preach freely, otherwise nothing will come of it.

(*Glafira and Shura come in, supporting Bulychov. All stop talking and look at him. He frowns.*)

BULYCHOV:

Well? Why have you all shut up? You were just mumbling and bumbling....

PAVLIN:

We were astonished at the sudden....

BULYCHOV:

Sudden what?

PAVLIN:

At the sight of a man being conducted....

BULYCHOV:

Conducted! When a man loses the use of his legs he has to be led! Conducted! Has Yakov been released, Mokei?

BASHKIN:

Yes. All the prisoners have been released.

ZVONTSOV:

The politicals.

BULYCHOV:

So Yakov Laptev's at liberty and the tsar's a prisoner? ¹²
What do you say to that, Father Pavlin?

PAVLIN:

I'm a novice in these matters, but in my humble opinion, it would be well to ascertain first what exactly these persons intend to say and do.

BULYCHOV:

Choose another tsar, of course. You'll all be at one another's throats if you don't have a tsar.

PAVLIN:

You have an animated countenance today. Apparently you are overcoming your illness?

BULYCHOV:

That's it—overcoming! You, married couples, and you, Mokei, leave me alone with Pavlin for a while. You stay, Shura.

(Bashkin goes out into the hall. The Zvontsovs and Dostigayevs go upstairs. A minute or two later Varvara comes halfway down the stairs, listening.)

SHURA:

Lie down, Daddy.

BULYCHOV:

I don't want to. What is it, Father Pavlin? Come about the bell for the church, I suppose?

PAVLIN:

No, I just called in the hope of seeing you in a better state, and in this I was not mistaken. But, of course, bearing in mind your generous and magnanimous gifts in the past contributing towards the splendour of the town and its church....

BULYCHOV:

You don't pray for me properly, that's why I'm getting worse. Besides, I don't feel like paying any money to God. What's there to pay for? I've paid a lot, but what's the use of it?

PAVLIN:

Your donations....

BULYCHOV:

Wait a minute. I have a question—oughtn't God to be ashamed of Himself? What's he sent death for?

SHURA:

Don't talk about death, please!

BULYCHOV:

You keep quiet. You just listen. I'm not talking about myself.

PAVLIN:

You should not distress yourself with thoughts like these. What does death matter, when the soul is immortal?

BULYCHOV:

Then why is it squeezed into such dirty, cramping flesh?

PAVLIN:

The Church considers this question not only idle, but—
er....

(Varvara, on the stairs, laughs into her handkerchief.)

BULYCHOV:

Don't hum and haw! Speak out straight. Shura, remember that trumpeter?

PAVLIN:

In the presence of Alexandra Yegorovna....

BULYCHOV:

Oh, drop it! She's got to live, and she's got to know. I've been living and living, and now I ask you—what do you live for?

PAVLIN:

I officiate in the Church....

BULYCHOV:

I know you do! But you'll have to die sooner or later. What does it mean? What is it—this death of ours, Pavlin?

PAVLIN:

Your questionings are ... illogical and fruitless. And forgive me—it is not of earthly things you should now be....

SHURA:

Don't you dare say that!

BULYCHOV:

I'm of the earth—earthly down to the core!

PAVLIN (*rising*):

The earth is but dust and ashes....

BULYCHOV:

Dust and ashes? Then you're a ... you ought to realise yourself that the earth is only dust and ashes. Dust and

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

PAVLIN:

You are perpetrating evil and wickedness in the presence of this adolescent....

BULYCHOV:

Adolescent your grandmother!

(Varvara retreats quickly upstairs.)

BULYCHOV:

They train you fools like dogs to hunt hares. You've grown rich on Christ the beggar.

PAVLIN:

Your illness has made you bitter, and in your resentment you roar like a wild boar....

BULYCHOV:

You're going, eh? Aha....

(Father Pavlin goes out.)

SHURA:

You shouldn't upset yourself, Daddy. It doesn't do you any good. What a fidget you are!

BULYCHOV:

Never mind! I've nothing to regret! Ouch, how I hate that priest. You keep your ears and eyes open. I'm doing this for your benefit....

SHURA:

I can see it all myself.... I'm not a baby, not a fool!

(Zvontsov appears on the stairs.)

BULYCHOV:

After that trumpeter they've decided I've gone crazy, but the doctors gave 'em the lie! You believe the doctors, Shura, don't you?

SHURA:

I believe you ... only you.

BULYCHOV:

You'd better! No fear, my head's all right. The doctors know I've really come up against something sharp. But then everyone likes to know what death means. Or life, say. Get me?

SHURA:

I don't believe you're seriously ill. You ought to go away from here. Glafira is right. You should take a proper cure. You won't listen to anyone.

BULYCHOV:

I listen to everyone. We'll try that witch doctor next. She may do me good, you never know. It's about time she was here. The pain ... it's like a gnawing misery!

SHURA:

Don't, darling! Oh, don't! Lie down, do!

BULYCHOV:

It's worse when I lie down. It means giving in. It's like in fist fighting. And I want to talk. I want to tell you things. You see what it is—I'm living in the wrong street! I've got in with the wrong people—all strangers. I've been living with strangers these thirty years. I don't want this to happen to you. My father used to drive rafts. And I—look at me.... I can't explain it to you.

SHURA:

Take it easy, speak quietly. Speak the way you did when you used to tell me stories.

BULYCHOV:

They weren't stories, I always told you the truth. It's like this.... Priests, tsars, governors—who the devil wants 'em! I don't believe in God. Where is there a God? You see yourself.... And there are no good people either. The good ones are scarce—like false coins! You see what they are all like? And now they've got into a mess with this bloody war and have gone clean off their heads! What do I care about them? What does Yegor Bulychov want with them? And you ... how are you going to live with them?

SHURA:

Don't you worry about me.

KSENIA (*coming in*):

Alexandra, Tonya and her brother have come to see you with that other fellow....

SHURA:

They can wait.

KSENIA:

You'd better go along. I want to talk to your father.

BULYCHOV:

You'll have to ask me if I want to!

SHURA:

Don't talk too much, please.

KSENIA:

Don't teach me! Yegor Vasilyevich—Zobunova has come.

BULYCHOV:

Shura, bring them in here afterwards—the young folks.
(*Exit Shura.*) Come on, let's have that Zobunova of yours!

KSENIA:

In a minute. What I was going to say—Alexandra has got friendly with that scalawag, Andrei's cousin. I don't have to tell you he's no match for her. We took in one beggar, and now look at the way he bosses the show.

BULYCHOV:

You're just like a bad dream, Aksinya, really!

KSENIA:

Insult me, I don't care! You ought to forbid her carrying on with that Tyatin.

BULYCHOV:

What else?

KSENIA:

Melanya's staying here.

BULYCHOV:

What for?

KSENIA:

She's in trouble. Soldiers, deserters, attacked the nunnery, slaughtered a cow and stole two axes, a spade and a coil of rope. Would you believe it! And Donat, that forester of ours—he's sheltering some ugly customers—they're living in the bunk-house at the cutting area.

BULYCHOV:

I notice that when I take a liking to some person, everyone else dislikes him.

KSENIA:

You ought to make it up with her.

BULYCHOV:

With Melanya? What for?

KSENIA:

Well—I mean to say—your health....

BULYCHOV:

All right. I'll make it up. I'll tell her: "Forgive us our debts" sayeth the Lord.

KSENIA:

Be nice to her. (*Goes out.*)

BULYCHOV (*mutter*s):

"Forgive us our debts" ... "As we forgive our debtors". A pack of lies.... Oh, the devils!

(*Varvara comes in.*)

VARVARA:

Father, I heard Mother telling you about Stepan Tyatin....

BULYCHOV:

Yes. You hear everything, you know everything....

VARVARA:

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

BULYCHOV:

Thoughtful, aren't you?

VARVARA:

I've been studying him closely.

BULYCHOV:

Who are you so thoughtful of? Ugh, what a crew!

(Enter Melanya and Ksenia, followed by Taisya, who stops in the doorway.)

BULYCHOV:

Well, Malasha? Shall we make up?

MELANYA:

That's better. Fire-eater! Insulting everybody without rhyme or reason.

BULYCHOV:

"Forgive us our debts", Malasha!

MELANYA:

It isn't a question of debts. Can't you be serious? Look what's going on! The tsar, the Lord's Anointed, has been dethroned. Do you know what that means? The Lord has plunged His people into darkness and confusion; they are crazed with fear and are digging pits beneath their own feet. The rabble is in revolt. The peasant women at Koposovo shouted into my face that they were the people, if you please. Their husbands, the soldiers, were the people! How do you like that? Did you ever hear of soldiers being regarded as the people?

KSENIA:

That's just what Yakov Laptev keeps saying.

MELANYA:

The Governor has been stripped of his power and Osmolovsky, the notary, has been put in his place.

BULYCHOV:

Another fat belly.

MELANYA:

Yesterday the Right Reverend Nikander said: "We are on the eve of calamitous events. There can be no such thing as a civil authority," he says. "From Biblical times the peoples have been ruled by a hand wielding the sword and the cross."

VARVARA:

They didn't worship the cross in Biblical times.

MELANYA:

You hold your tongue, Miss Cleverdick. The New Testament and the Old are bound together in one Bible, aren't they? And the cross is the sword! The Bishop knows better when and what was worshipped. You ambitious people rejoice at the downfall of the throne. Mind your joy does not turn to bitter tears. I'd like to have a word with you in private, Yegor.

BULYCHOV:

And end up again by quarrelling with each other? All right, I don't mind having a talk—but not now. The healer woman's coming in now. I want to get well, Malasha.

MELANYA:

Zobunova's a famous healer. The doctors come nowhere near her! I'd try the Blessed Prokopy, too, if I were you.

BULYCHOV:

Is that the fellow the kids call Propotty? He's a rogue, I heard say.

MELANYA:

Good heavens, no! How can you say such a thing? You have him in.

BULYCHOV:

Ah, well, let's have Propotty too. I feel a bit better today ...

except for my legs. More cheerful sort of. Everything's funny ... seems funny. Call that witch doctor in, Aksinya.

(Ksenia goes out.)

MELANYA:

Ah, Yegor, you still have in you a lot of that....

BULYCHOV:

That's just it—quite a lot.

KSENIA (*coming in*):

She says everyone must leave the room.

MELANYA:

Well, let's go then.

(All exit. Bulychov sits chuckling, stroking his chest and side. Zobunova comes in. Surreptitiously, but in a way to attract notice, she blows to the right side with twisted mouth, her right hand pressed to her heart, and her left hand making flapping movements like the fin of a fish. She stops and draws her right hand across her face.)

BULYCHOV:

What'yer doing—saying prayers to the devils?

ZOBUNOVA (*in a singsong voice*):

Oh, all ye ills of the flesh and body aches! Away, begone, flee the body of the servant of God! From this day, this hour, I cast ye out with my powerful word for evermore to the end of time! Good evening, noble sir, by name Yegory!

BULYCHOV:

Good evening, missus! What was that you were doing—casting out the devils?

ZOBUNOVA:

Bless your heart, no! Whoever heard of anyone dealing with devils!

BULYCHOV:

Oh, I don't know! The priests pray to God, but you're not a priest, so you must pray to the devils.

ZOBUNOVA:

Goodness me, the frightful things you say! It's only silly folks as say I have anything to do with the Wicked One.

BULYCHOV:

In that case, missus, you won't be any good. The priests have prayed to God for me, but He has refused to help me.

ZOBUNOVA:

You're joking, my dear man. You're saying this because you don't believe me.

BULYCHOV:

I would believe you if you'd come from the devils. You must have heard, of course, that I'm a fast man, that I treat people harshly and am money-mad.

ZOBUNOVA:

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

BULYCHOV:

I'm a great sinner, woman, and God won't have anything to do with me. God has forsaken Yegor Bulychov. So, if you don't hobnob with the devils, you'd better go and do abortions for the wenches who've been knocked up. That's your trade, isn't it?

ZOBUNOVA:

Oh, it's true, then, what they say about you—that you're a lively card and a hustler!

BULYCHOV:

Well, what lies were you going to tell? Fire away!

ZOBUNOVA:

I haven't been taught to lie. Now tell me, what pains have you got and where?

BULYCHOV:

In the belly. The pain is bad. Just here.

ZOBUNOVA:

Here's the way it is—only not a word of this to anybody, mind!

BULYCHOV:

I'll keep it under my hat, you needn't worry.

ZOBUNOVA:

There are yellow sicknesses and black sicknesses. The yellow sickness even a doctor can cure, but the black one no priest or monk can pray away! The black sickness comes from the Evil One, and there's only one remedy for it.

BULYCHOV:

It's kill or cure, eh?

ZOBUNOVA:

It's an expensive remedy.

BULYCHOV:

Naturally. I guessed as much.

ZOBUNOVA:

This is a case when you really have to deal with the Evil One.

BULYCHOV:

With Old Harry himself?

ZOBUNOVA:

Well, not exactly directly with him....

BULYCHOV:

And can you do it?

ZOBUNOVA:

But not a word to anybody.

BULYCHOV:

Go to hell, missus!

ZOBUNOVA:

Wait a minute....

BULYCHOV:

Get out or I'll do you an injury.

ZOBUNOVA:

But you just listen....

GLAFIRA (*from the hall*):

You've been told to go, haven't you?

ZOBUNOVA:

What's the matter with you, people?

BULYCHOV:

Kick her out!

GLAFIRA:

Now then, hop it! Pretending you're a witch!

ZOBUNOVA:

You're a witch yourself! What a mug! Ugh, you.... May you have neither sleep nor rest!

(The two women go out.)

BULYCHOV (*glances around, sighs*):

Phew!

(Enter Melanya and Ksenia.)

MELANYA:

You didn't like Zobunova, she didn't please you?

(Bulychov stares at her in silence.)

KSENIA:

She's got a quick temper too. Praise has spoilt her, she gives herself airs.

BULYCHOV:

What do you think, Malasha, does God ever have bellyaches?

MELANYA:

Don't play the fool....

BULYCHOV:

Christ must have had bellyaches, though ... he lived on fish....

MELANYA:

Stop that, Yegor! Are you trying to taunt me?

(Glafira comes in.)

GLAFIRA:

She asks to be paid for her trouble.

BULYCHOV:

Give her something, Aksinya. Excuse me, Malasha, but I'm tired—I'll go to my room. Nothing makes you so tired

as talking to fools. Give me a hand here, Glasha, will you....

(Glaſira leads him away. Ksenia returns and looks enquiringly at her sister.)

MELANYA:

He's pretending to be mad. Just pretending....

KSENIA:

I'm not so sure. Not in the state he's in....

MELANYA:

Never mind. Let him do his play-acting. It'll be worse for him if his will has to be contested in court. Taisya will be a witness, and there's Zobunova, too, and Father Pavlin, and that trumpeter—lots of people. We can prove that the testator was not in his right mind.

KSENIA:

Oh, I don't know what to do, really....

MELANYA:

That's why I'm teaching you what to do. Ugh, you.... In what a tearing hurry you were to get married! I told you to marry Bashkin.

KSENIA:

But that was such a long time ago! And Yegor was such a dashing fellow—you envied me yourself.

MELANYA:

Who, I? Are you crazy?

KSENIA:

Ah well, what's the use of raking up the past.

MELANYA:

Good heavens! I envied her! I?

KSENIA:

How about Prokopy? Maybe we should drop it?

MELANYA:

Drop it—why? After sending for him and making all the arrangements? Now don't you interfere. Go and prepare him and bring him in. Taisya!

(Taisya comes in from the hall.)

MELANYA:

Well?

TAISYA:

I couldn't find out anything.

(Exit Ksenia.)

MELANYA:

Why?

TAISYA:

She won't say anything.

MELANYA:

What do you mean, she won't say anything? You should have got it out of her.

TAISYA:

I tried, but she just sniffs like a cat. Swears at everybody.

MELANYA:

What does she say?

TAISYA:

Calls them all crooks.

MELANYA:

Why?

TAISYA:

She says you're trying to drive the man crazy.

MELANYA:

She said that to you?

TAISYA:

No, to Propotty, the holy idiot.

MELANYA:

And what did he say?

TAISYA:

He just keeps saying funny things....

MELANYA:

Funny things? You clod, you! He's a holy man, he is soothsaying, you fool! Sit down in the hall and don't stir from there. Was anyone else in the kitchen?

TAISYA:

Mokey was there.

MELANYA:

Go along now. (*Goes up to the door of Bulychov's room and knocks.*) Yegor, the Blessed Prokopy is here.

(The Blessed Prokopy is ushered in by Ksenia and Bashkin. He wears bast sandals and a heel-length rough linen shirt with numerous brass crosses and small icons on the chest. He is of rather fearsome aspect: his hair is thick and matted, he wears a long, sparse, straggling beard and his movements are jerky and convulsive.)

PROPOTTY:

Faugh, a stink of tobacco! The soul suffocates!

KSENIA:

Nobody smokes here, Father.

(Propotty howls in imitation of a winter's wind.)

MELANYA:

Wait till he comes out.

BULYCHOV (*comes out of his bedroom supported by Glafira*):
Look at him!

PROPOTTY:

Don't be afraid! Have no fear! (*Howls.*) All is perishable, all will pass! Grisha climbed well, practised healing, hit the ceiling—and was dragged off to hell.

BULYCHOV:

He means Rasputin, I suppose?

PROPOTTY:

Lo, the tsar is dethroned, the kingdom is perishing, and the kings that now reign are Sin, Death and Stench! The blizzard howls, rumbling bowels. (*Howls. Points his staff at Glafira.*) The Devil stands beside thee in the shape of a woman—drive him away!

BULYCHOV:

You just try it! You've got too much to say for yourself. Who put him up to this—you, Melanya?

MELANYA:

What next! Can the mad be taught?

BULYCHOV:

Looks like they can....

(Shura comes running downstairs, followed by Antonina and Tyatin. Gradually the Zvontsovs and the Dostigayevs come down. Propotty draws signs in the air and on the floor with his staff. He stands musing, with bent head.)

SHURA (*running up to her father*):

What's this? Another show?

MELANYA:

You hold your tongue!

PROPOTTY (*as if speaking with difficulty*):

No sleep for the heretic, tick-tock goes the clock! If God could, and if He would, and it were good ... aye, aye! And who's to blame, 'tis Satan's game, thy will be done! Midnight strikes, the cock sings cock-a-doodle-doo, and with tick, tock, tick, that's the end of the heretic!

BULYCHOV:

Pretty neat that! Learnt your lesson well....

MELANYA:

Don't interrupt, Yegor, don't interrupt!

PROPOTTY:

What shall we do? What shall we tell people?

ANTONINA (*ruefully*):

Oh, he isn't a bit gruesome!

PROPOTTY:

They killed a nit and buried it. Maybe we ought to dance? Come on, let us make whoopee! (*Taps his heels, humming, at first softly, then louder, and begins to cut coppers.*) Astaroth, Sabatan, Askafat, Idumei, Nevermay. Never may, kara tilly—bom, knock your head on the dead! Heigh, whiffy, biffy, what did you sniffy? Hokey pokey, ain't it smoky! Satan's playing with him—grim, whim, seraphim, all lost to his kin! Hell's hag Zakatize holds him in her thighs. From sin and lechery there is no escape! There's your Yegor, born for scorn....

SHURA (*screams*):

Drive him away!

BULYCHOV:

What's this ... damn you ... trying to frighten me?

ZVONTSOV:

This disgusting scene ought to be stopped.

(Glafira runs up to Propotty, who while continuing his gyrations, brandishes his stick at her.)

PROPOTTY:

Fee, fie, fo, fum! Jezebel get thee back to hell!

(Tyatin snatches the stick from Propotty.)

MELANYA:

What are you doing? How dare you!

SHURA:

Father, send them all away. Why don't you say something?

BULYCHOV (*with a wave of his hand*):

Wait a minute ... wait a minute....

(Propotty sits down on the floor, howling and screeching.)

MELANYA:

You mustn't touch him! He's in a trance, an ecstasy!

DOSTIGAYEV:

For ecstasies like that, Mother Melanya, he ought to get it in the neck.

ZVONTSOV:

Get up and clear out! Lively now!

PROPOTTY:

Eh, what? (*Howls.*)

(Ksenia begins to cry.)

ELIZAVETA:

How clever he does it—sounds like a duet!

BULYCHOV:

Go to ... go away, all of you! You've had your eyeful...

SHURA (*stamping her foot at the half-wit*):

Go away, you freak! Stepan—chase him out!

TYATIN (*taking Propotty by the scruff of his neck*):

Come along, holy man, get up!

(Exit Tyatin and Propotty.)

TAISYA:

He wasn't half so frightful today—he can do it much better on a drop of vodka.

MELANYA:

Keep your mouth shut! (*Smacks the girl's face.*)

ZVONTSOV:

You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

MELANYA:

Ashamed? Before you?

VARVARA:

Calm yourself, Auntie....

KSENIA:

Good heavens! O dear!

(Shura and Glafira help Bulychov to the couch. Dostigayev looks at him closely. The Zvontsovs lead away Ksenia and Melanya.)

DOSTIGAYEV (*to his wife*):

We'd better go home, Liza! Bulychov's in a bad way. Very bad. And the demonstration has started. We'd better join it.

ELIZAVETA:

The way he howled, eh! Never heard anything like it!

BULYCHOV (*to Shura*):

That was all the Abbess's doings.

SHURA:

Are you feeling bad?

BULYCHOV:

She.... A sort of service for the dead ... over a living person....

SHURA:

Tell me, are you feeling bad? Shall I send for the doctor?

BULYCHOV:

No. That bit about the kingdom—he put that in himself, the clown.... If God could and if He would—you heard him? He can't!

SHURA:

You must forget all this.

BULYCHOV:

We'll forget it! See what they're doing out there ... see they don't do Glafira any harm.... What's all that singing in the street?

SHURA:

Don't get up!

BULYCHOV:

And it'll perish, the kingdom of stench.... I can't see

anything.... (*Rises, gripping the table, and rubs his eyes.*)
Kingdom come.... What kingdom? Beasts! Kingdom....
“Our Father, which art....” No, that’s no good. What sort
of father are you to me if you’ve condemned me to death?
What for? Everyone dies? Why? All right, let ‘em—but
why should I? (*Sways.*) Well? What is it, Yegor? (*Shouts
hoarsely.*) Shura! Glasha! The doctor! Heigh, answer
somebody—damn you! Yegor ... Bulychov ... Yegor!

(Shura, Glafira, Tyatin and Taisya come running up to
Bulychov, who all but collapses in their arms. The singing
outside swells. Glafira and Tyatin support Bulychov. Shura
runs to the window and throws it open. The strains of a
revolutionary song burst into the room.)

BULYCHOV:

What’s that? A funeral service again! Shura! Who is it?

SHURA:

Come over here, come on ... look!

BULYCHOV:

Ah, Shura:...

CURTAIN

Vassa Zheleznova

(Second version)

Characters in the Play

VASSA BORISOVNA ZHELEZNOVA, *about 42, looks younger*

SERGEI PETROVICH ZHELEZNOV, *her husband, age 60, a retired sea captain, served on the Black Sea, later on river boats*

PROKHOR BORISOVICH KHRAPOV, *her brother, age 57*

NATALYA (Nata)—18 } *her daughters*
LUDMILA (Luda)—16 }

RACHEL, *her daughter-in-law, nearly 30*

ANNA ONOSHENKOVA, *over 30, her secretary and confidant*

MELNIKOV, *district court official*

YEVGENY, *his son*

GURY KROTKIKH, *manager of the Zheleznou-Khrapov Steamship Co.*

LIZA } *maids*
POLYA }

PYATYORKIN, *age 27-30, ex-soldier, now serves the company. He has a turban of thick, coarse hair and a well-groomed moustache*

ACT I

A large room at the corner of the house where Vassa has lived and spent most of her time for the last ten years or so. There is a light, hard-seated armchair in front of a massive desk. Near it, a safe. On the wall, a large brightly-coloured map of the upper and middle reaches of the Volga, from Rybinsk to Kazan. Below the map, a broad couch with a rug and a pile of cushions on it. In the middle of the room, a medium-sized oval table and high-backed chairs. French doors lead on to a veranda; two windows also look out on the garden. A large leather armchair. Geraniums on the windowsills. Against the wall, in the space between the two windows stands a bay-tree. A small shelf holds a silver pitcher with gilded cups to match. A door near the couch leads to a bedroom. Another door, near the table, to other rooms. It is morning. The room is radiant with the late March sun streaming in through the windows and French doors. It is, in any case, a very light, spacious, cheerful room. Enter VASSA and KROTKIKH.

VASSA:

Three and a half rubles for a thousand poods—just over a third of a kopek per pood. That's hardly enough, of course, for stevedores on the freight and passenger lines. They have to hump their loads forty yards or more. They may earn a ruble a day, but they eat a lot and they want meat for their dinner. You ought to draw attention to that. Get an article in the paper about it, find someone to talk to the men. Can you do that?

KROTKIKH (*cheerfully*):

We'll find someone.

VASSA:

Good. These big shipping lines deserve to be squeezed. But ours is a small company and we don't carry much

freight. And what we do carry the crews just drop over the side on to the wharf, so we don't have to use stevedores too often, as you know.

KROTKIKH:

Even so, two rubles a thousand is not enough for the crews.

VASSA:

Why give them more? Now, if you see to it that Caucasus-Mercury and the others put their price up to five rubles a thousand, then people will be more willing to ship their stuff on our little boats and we shall be able to give our crews more. That's how to go about it! As for this little memorandum of yours, I'm sorry but I'm not going to accept it.

KROTKIKH (*frowning*):

But can't you see....

VASSA:

Why don't you talk to the potters, the small millers—all the small people. Offer them lower rates, give them an incentive to ship with us. That would be some use.

KROTKIKH (*rather proudly*):

We finished up well last year, you know. Quite a good profit!

VASSA:

Good is not enough. It should be better and better. We'll soon get tired of having everything good. Well, I wish you good morning! My work is waiting for me.

(Krotkikh bows silently and goes out.)

VASSA (*listening*):

Anna, dear!

(Anna comes in.)

VASSA:

Here, be quick and make a copy of this! Was Gury grumbling?

ANNA:

Yes, he wasn't pleased.

VASSA:

What did he say?

ANNA:

I didn't quite hear. Something about conservatism.

VASSA:

He would! He's a Socialist, isn't he? Socialism to him is what God is to Prokhor. He prays out of habit—not because he really believes. Don't pay any attention to his high falutin' talk.... What did you discuss last night?

ANNA:

He was telling me how the German Socialists get along with their king.¹

VASSA:

Mind he doesn't give you a fat belly with that socialism of his.

ANNA:

Oh, no! I've learnt my lesson. He's courting Natalya.

VASSA:

I know. But Nata's no fool.

ANNA:

He's after Ludmila too....

VASSA:

Versatile, isn't he? (*Telephone rings.*) Yes, speaking. Certainly. I'll be expecting you. It's our tenant—Melnikov.

(She motions Anna out of the room, then stands staring thoughtfully in front of her while her hands move papers and other things about the desk.)

MELNIKOV (*from Anna's room*):

Good morning, Madam.

VASSA:

Good morning. Come in and close the door. Please, sit down. What have you to tell me?

MELNIKOV:

Not very cheerful news, I'm afraid. The findings of the preliminary investigation have gone to the public prosecutor. The inspector assures me he toned them down as far as possible.

VASSA:

For three thousand he could have toned them down altogether.

MELNIKOV:

Quite impossible. I read the testimony of that woman, the procuress. She poured her heart out as though she were at confession.

VASSA:

So there'll be a trial?

MELNIKOV:

That is inevitable.

VASSA:

What is the penalty?

MELNIKOV:

It could be hard labour.

VASSA:

What do you call this ... this thing?

MELNIKOV:

What thing exactly?

VASSA:

This messing about with children?

MELNIKOV:

Depravation.

VASSA:

It's horrible! Now what will happen?

MELNIKOV:

The prosecutor will draw up an indictment, then charge and arrest the accused.

VASSA:

All three of them? The procuress as well?

MELNIKOV:

Of course.

VASSA:

Can the prosecutor do any ... toning down?

MELNIKOV:

Yes, he can. But ours is bent on making a career for himself. I doubt whether he would risk it. Although there is a rumour that some of those implicated in this er ... affair are trying to come to an arrangement.

VASSA:

Ah! Then let us try as well. Do, please, do what you can. Make the prosecutor an offer for avoiding a scandal. I've got to hush up this business, hush it up completely! I have two daughters, you know.

MELNIKOV:

Vassa Borisovna, I respect you. and am deeply grateful for your generosity....

VASSA:

Oh, cut it short! We'll discuss gratitude when this affair is quietly and decently disposed of. Do something!

MELNIKOV:

It is quite impossible for me to.... I simply can't do it.

VASSA:

Money is no object in this case, remember that! If you bring it off, I return your IOUs. And I can add another fifteen hundred or so. That'll make five thousand. Isn't that enough?

MELNIKOV:

Yes, but.... You see, I....

VASSA:

Out with it!

MELNIKOV:

It would be better if you yourself....

VASSA:

No, that's asking too much. I'm willing to pay the prosecutor, but I won't go down on my knees to him. Besides I'm too outspoken. I couldn't bring it off. Act at once, today, please! Then ring me and tell me how much. I wish you luck. Well?

MELNIKOV:

Allow me to take my leave.... I'm in a hurry to get to court.

VASSA:

Yes, of course. Hurry!

(She sits for a time with closed eyes, then opens a drawer and searches. Having found a small box, she examines its contents, stirring them with a pen nib. There is a noise at the door. She slips the box quickly into her pocket. Ludmila enters.)

LUDMILA:

Hullo, Mummikins! I've just had such a wonderful dream, dear. It was so beautiful!

VASSA (*kissing her*):

You see beauty everywhere even when you're awake, Luda dear.

LUDMILA:

But just listen....

VASSA:

Tell me about it at dinner.

LUDMILA:

Nata will laugh at me then, or someone will interrupt, or I'll forget what it was about. Dreams are so terribly easy to forget. Won't you listen?

VASSA:

No, Luda, be off now. And tell Liza to come rightaway.

LUDMILA:

Oh, dear! How unkind you are today!

VASSA (*grumbling now that she is alone*):

Unkind.... The little fool.... (*Enter Liza.*) My brother complains that you are disobedient. You didn't oil his locks.

LIZA:

Vassa Borisovna, I don't have time. It's too much for me to look after everyone, and the whole house as well! Give me a girl to help out.

VASSA:

You needn't expect that! I can't bear having useless people about the house. The young ladies help you. You're paid good wages. Make an effort. Don't sleep so much. Is my brother at home?

LIZA:

No.

VASSA:

Tell Sergei Petrovich I want to see him.

(*She stands in the middle of the room, thinking, snapping her fingers and feeling her pocket. Zheleznov enters in a dressing gown, his curly hair uncombed, his cheeks and chin badly in need of a shave. He has a heavy grey moustache.*)

VASSA:

Just got up or about to go to bed?

ZHELEZNOV:

What do you want?

VASSA

(*firmly closing the door of Anna Onoshenkova's room*): Don't shout. You won't frighten anyone.

(*Zheleznov turns to leave the room.*)

VASSA (*steps past him and closes the other door too*): The charge against you has been confirmed by the public prosecutor.

ZHELEZNOV

(*clutches at the back of a chair*): I don't believe it! You're lying!

VASSA (*calmly*):

He has confirmed it.

ZHELEZNOV:

I lost nine thousand to him at cards, the scoundrel. I hinted I'd give him another eleven....

VASSA:

In a few days you'll get the indictment, then they'll come and arrest you, lock you up in gaol.

ZHELEZNOV:

So you grudged the money! Wouldn't pay up! And didn't pay Melnikov enough either. Come on, tell me how much you gave him.

VASSA:

For depravation of children the penalty is hard labour.

ZHELEZNOV

(*sits down shaking his head, then speaks huskily*): You're glad, aren't you?

VASSA:

You have two daughters who will want to get married one day. What will it be like for them with you a convict? What decent man will marry them? You have a grandson. He'll soon be five. I would rather you had murdered someone than got mixed up in this filthy business!

ZHELEZNOV:

I ought to have murdered you—that's what I ought to have done! Murdered you, torn out your cruel heart, thrown it to the dogs. It was you who corrupted me, you got me into this mess. You....

VASSA:

Don't lie, Sergei. That won't help you. And who are you lying to? Only yourself. It makes me sick to listen to you. *(She goes up to her husband, places her hand on his forehead and, pressing his head back, looks into his face.)* I ask you not to let this get into court, not to disgrace the family. There's not much that I have asked in our life together—a dreary, shameful life with a drunkard and a lecher. And I'm asking now not for myself but for the children.

ZHELEZNOV *(frightened)*:

What do you want of me?

VASSA:

You know what I want.

ZHELEZNOV:

No! Never!

VASSA:

D'you want me to go down on my knees? Have I to kneel before you?

ZHELEZNOV:

Keep off! Let me go! *(Tries to get up.)*

VASSA

(gripping his shoulders and forcing him down into the chair): I have a powder you can take.

ZHELEZNOV:

Go away!

VASSA:

Think—you'll go to gaol, then the whole town will come to the court to stare at you, and after that you will die a long, slow death as a convict, doing hard labour. You will die in disgrace, in misery—a terrible, shameful death. But this way there is no misery and no shame. The heart just stops beating—it's like falling asleep.

ZHELEZNOV:

Get out ... leave me alone. Let them try me. I don't care!

VASSA:

What about the children? The disgrace?

ZHELEZNOV:

I'll ask to be sent to a monastery. I'll become a monk. A hermit. I'll live underground, in a cave—but I'll live!

VASSA:

You're just blathering. Take the powder!

ZHELEZNOV (*stands up*):

No ... I won't! I'm not taking anything from you....

VASSA:

Take it voluntarily.

ZHELEZNOV:

Or else? Or else you'll poison me, eh?

VASSA:

Sergei, remember your daughters! They've got their whole lives before them.

Children shouldn't be made to pay for their fathers' filthy tricks.

ZHELEZNOV:

And for their mothers'?

VASSA:

Now you're talking like a fool. Realise this, Sergei, I shan't keep quiet in court. I'll tell them about the whores you used to bring to my house, and how you lechered with them, and showed Natalya and Ludmila to that pack of lechers. I'll tell them how you taught your daughters to drink....

ZHELEZNOV:

That's a lie! It was Prokhor, your own brother, taught them that. Prokhor!

VASSA:

You frightened Ludmila so much she's not quite right in the head any more. She can't learn, she's no good at anything.

ZHELEZNOV:

And Natalya takes after you—she's your image!

VASSA:

So get it into your head—I'll tell the court all about it, and everyone else too!

ZHELEZNOV (*faces up to her and bellows*):

Step aside! It frightens me to look at you! Let me pass!

(He pushes her aside and walks to the door.)

VASSA (*following him*):

Take the powder, Sergei....

ZHELEZNOV:

No!

(They go out. Liza appears in the doorway. She is carrying a tray with several different types of locks on it. Prokhor Khrapov follows her into the room, carrying a huge padlock.)

PROKHOR (*gloomily*):

What was the row about?

LIZA:

I don't know. She was persuading him to take some powder or other—that's all I heard.

PROKHOR:

What powder?

LIZA:

Medicine, I suppose.

PROKHOR:

What medicine?

LIZA:

How should I know?

PROKHOR:

You're a fool! Sergei doesn't need any medicines. He's as fit as a fiddle. We were playing cards till four this morning and swigging cognac all the time.

LIZA:

Perhaps she meant bicarbonate.

PROKHOR:

You're still a fool! No one needs bicarbonate after cognac. What are you hanging about here for? Put the locks on the table. You never spot a thing! What do I give you presents for?

LIZA:

Some present you've given me! Everybody will soon be able to see it.

PROKHOR:

Better from me than Pyatyorkin. Move the armchair. The sun is bad for the leather and it cost sixty-five rubles.

LIZA:

What did—the sun?

PROKHOR:

The chair, my present to my sister! The sun costs nothing. Now look here! Are you trying to joke with me? Mind you don't get above yourself! The sun! My sister has spoiled you, like an old maid spoils her cat. Get out! (*He scans the papers on the desk and sneezes, then begins to sing like a priest.*)

*In autumn's dreary twilight
A maiden roamed alone
The secret fruit of luckless love
She held....³*

NATALYA (*entering the room*):

What a lovely day....

PROKHOR:

That we don't know, the day's only just begun. Why are you running about like a weasel for? Your hair's all tousled!

NATALYA:

They've decided to try Father.

PROKHOR (*frightened*):

Who said so?

NATALYA:

Yevgeny Melnikov.

PROKHOR (*sitting down*):

Damn and blast.... So the captain didn't get away with it.

The Zheleznovs! The Khrapovs—once an old and honoured name! And this is what we've come to! A fine course the captain has steered for us. Well, now we're in for it. We'll never live this down.

NATALYA:

Perhaps he'll be acquitted?

PROKHOR:

It's not that. It's the trial, the public disgrace. And they'll probably find him guilty anyway. That's the fashion nowadays—the rich are always in the wrong. It's a misfortune to be rich! Try to understand it's not so much Captain Zheleznov they'll be trying as us, the Khrapovs.

NATALYA:

Can't anything be done?

PROKHOR:

Run away to America, where all the crooks go.

NATALYA:

What about bribing the court?

PROKHOR:

That's been done already. My sister has spent thousands on hushing up this scandal. The police have had some, the prosecutor has had some. But it hasn't worked, I suppose. Now I shan't stand a chance of being mayor, and you and Ludmila won't stand a chance of finding husbands of your own class, even with a dowry like yours. Tarred you properly, your dad has, the upstart bastard! What an idiot she was....

NATALYA:

Who—my mother?

PROKHOR:

Of course.

NATALYA:

She's not an idiot.

PROKHOR:

Then why the hell did she have to marry that captain?
Nearly twenty years older than herself.

NATALYA:

You persuaded her. He's your friend.

PROKHOR:

My friend? Oh, well, I'm a dreamer! I'm the easy-going type. An artist by nature. When I was young I wanted to be the funny man in musical comedy. But he was sailing the seven seas! So what? There's plenty of shit floating on the sea.

NATALYA:

Did she love him?

PROKHOR:

Oh, go to hell! It's not love when a huzzy breaks away from her own herd. It's madness! Just because the aristocracy used to marry gypsies and actresses, it's no example for our class to follow!

VASSA:

Who's no example for you to follow?

PROKHOR:

Natalya and I were just talking....

VASSA:

I can see that.

PROKHOR:

How is Sergei?

VASSA:

Not too bad. Complaining of his heart. Nata, go and tell them to bring me some tea.

NATALYA:

Why don't you say straight out I'm in the way?

VASSA:

Yes, you're in the way. And I haven't had any tea yet. (*To Prokhor.*) What were you bawling about?

PROKHOR:

It's enough to make anyone bawl! You haven't been able to prevent the trial.

VASSA:

Don't talk to the girls about that yet. I'll tell them myself.

PROKHOR:

Natalya knows already. She told me about it.

VASSA:

Who told her?

(Ludmila enters quietly.)

PROKHOR:

Melnikov's son. The girls shouldn't have him round as they do.

LUDMILA:

He's interesting and we're bored. Our girl-friends are always getting ill and don't come to see us.

VASSA:

Go and help Liza tidy up the rooms, Luda.

LUDMILA:

I want to be with you. Why do you keep sending me away?

VASSA:

Because I'm busy, dear. I have business to attend to.

LUDMILA:

You and your business! And for your own daughter you haven't a minute to spare!

VASSA:

Well, come back when I get my tea and we'll have a talk. But not just now.

LUDMILA:

It makes me want to cry. I know you're going to tell Uncle Prokhor off for calling Father wayward, I know you will!

VASSA

(stroking her daughter's head, sees her to the door):

Wayward isn't a bad word. It just means finding the way. Someone has lost the way and he finds it for them. Like me. I've been finding the way out of muddles all my life....

LUDMILA:

Now you're joking. I know what wayward means. It means being like Uncle Prokhor.

(Vassa tries to close the door behind her but fails.)

LUDMILA *(evading her mother's grasp):*

He's wayward. He's made Liza pregnant. And he keeps cursing Daddy, he isn't really fond of him.

PROKHOR:

You're making it all up! Old people haven't much time for being fond of each other anyway.

LUDMILA:

And you aren't fond of him either, are you, Mummy?

VASSA:

Now, that's enough, really.

LUDMILA:

Why aren't you fond of him? Uncle is a drunkard too, but you're fond of him.... Drinking is an illness. Yevgeny Melnikov says....

PROKHOR:

Ah, the source of all wisdom! Confound him!

LUDMILA:

It's like tummy-ache....

(Liza comes in with a small samovar. Natalya follows with a tray of tea things. Vassa puts her arm round her daughter and walks about the room, as though listening for something. She is agitated, but hides her agitation. Eventually she stops and turns her attention to the locks.)

VASSA (*to her brother*):

Still enjoying your game? Aren't you tired of it yet?

PROKHOR:

It's not a very expensive game. In fact, it may not be a game at all, eh?

VASSA:

Then what is it?

PROKHOR:

Who knows? No one collects old locks except me. So among a thousand red-heads I'm the one brunette! A lock stands for something! Everything in the world is under

lock and key; it's all locked up. If people hadn't learned to lock up their property, there would never have been any. You can't train a horse without a bridle.

VASSA:

So that's your idea! And there's some sense in it for a change. Pour the tea, Natalya.

PROKHOR (*watching her closely*):

You say I'm wasting my money, but I gave seven rubles for that padlock and someone is already offering me twenty-five. I'll collect a thousand locks and sell them to a museum—for about twenty thousand.

VASSA:

All right, spare us the rest. One day, perhaps, our calf will catch a wolf. (*To Ludmila suddenly, in a loud voice.*) I fell in love with your father when I was only fifteen. When I was sixteen, we married. Yes, sixteen. And at seventeen, when I was expecting Fyodor, at tea on Trinity Sunday—the holiday all girls are fond of—I happened to spill some cream on my husband's boot. He forced me to lick it off with my tongue. And I did it—in the presence of strangers too. Our family—the Khrapovs—wasn't very popular, you see.

LUDMILA:

Oh, why did you tell us about it?

(*Natalya is watching her mother intently from behind the samovar.*)

VASSA:

He used to be a gay one. Kept us all amused.

LUDMILA:

Did he tell a lot of jokes?

VASSA:

Natalya, do you remember how you bored a hole in the wall and admired the way your father amused himself?

NATALYA:

Yes, I do.

VASSA:

And then came running to me in tears and shouted, "Turn them out of the house!"

NATALYA:

I remember. Is this a family trial you're holding?

PROKHOR:

Oh, the viper!

VASSA:

So you do remember, Natalya? That's good. People shouldn't live without memories. I had nine children by him: there are only three left. One was still-born, two girls didn't live a year, two boys died before they were five, and another at the age of seven. That's how it was, daughters! I'm telling you all this so that you won't be in a hurry to get married.

LUDMILA:

You've never told us anything like this before.

VASSA:

I've never had time.

LUDMILA:

Why did they all die and we're still alive?

VASSA:

You were—lucky. The others died because they were

born weak, and they were born weak because your father drank too much and beat me too often. Your Uncle Prokhor knows that.

PROKHOR:

Yes, he used to thrash her all right. There were times when I had to rescue her from the captain's hands. He learned how to thrash people at sea, so he did the job ... thoroughly.

LUDMILA:

And why aren't you married?

PROKHOR:

I was once. There's a song about it in one of the musical comedies:

*We find it so easy to marry,
But living together is hard....*³

LUDMILA:

You sing all your songs to the same tune.

PROKHOR:

It's easier that way—I can remember the words better. I lived with my wife four years. Couldn't take any more. It's more peaceful living alone—you're your own master. Why keep horses when there are plenty of cabmen?

NATALYA:

Will Fyodor be living with us?

VASSA:

When he gets better, of course.

NATALYA:

And Rachel?

VASSA:

Surely—she's his wife.

LUDMILA:

Rachel is so nice, isn't she?

NATALYA:

Will they come to live with us—after Father's trial?

VASSA (*flaring up*):

You ask too many questions, Natalya! I don't like your kind of curiosity.

LUDMILA:

Oh, don't! Don't be angry.

LIZA (*badly frightened*):

Vassa Borisovna.... Sergei Petrovich is...

VASSA

(*she appears to start but remains calm*): What? Is he calling?

LIZA:

He seems to be dead....

VASSA (*angrily*):

You're mad!

(She goes out quickly. Ludmila follows. Natalya rises to her feet and looks at her uncle. He returns her look with a confused stare.)

PROKHOR:

Well, I'm ... my legs are trembling! Go on, Nata. Go and find out what's happened.

NATALYA:

If he's dead, there won't be anyone to try, will there?

PROKHOR:

Go on, I say! (*Left alone he drinks cold tea and mutters to himself.*) Well, I'll be damned.... Brrr!

LIZA

(*runs in, talking in a frightened whisper*): Prokhor Borisovich, what happened? He was as right as rain....

PROKHOR:

What happened? He was once, but not any more! Or perhaps he's just fainted?

LIZA:

Right as rain he was..... Prokhor Borisovich—that powder....

PROKHOR (*in consternation*):

Wha-a-t? Are you.... (*In a frenzy he seizes her by the throat and shakes her*). You little slut, if you don't forget ... if you—why, you little snake! What are you making up, eh? How dare you? (*Pushes her away and wipes the sweat from his bald spot.*)

LIZA:

But you yourself ordered me to tell you everything.

PROKHOR:

Tell what? What you see and hear—tell me that. But what did you see? You've invented this! In-ven-ted it! Not seen it. Get out, you idiot! Powder! I'll give you powder! Forget the sound of that word altogether....

(He drives her out, then darts wildly about the room. On reaching the door he seems unable to go any further. Vassa and Ludmila enter, followed by Pyatyorkin.)

PROKHOR:

Well, Vassa? Is it true?

VASSA:

Yes. He's dead.

LUDMILA:

Mummy, shall I put the bay-tree in his room?

VASSA:

Yes, do.

(Pyatyorkin carries out the tub with the bay-tree in it. Ludmila takes the flowers off the windowsill and goes out, but returns immediately.)

PROKHOR:

I wonder what happened to him? He was quite well. Till four o'clock this morning we were....

VASSA:

Drinking cognac.

PROKHOR:

That's right. Liza has just been telling me—you wanted to give him a powder....

VASSA:

He was complaining of heartburn. He asked for bicarbonate.

PROKHOR (*eagerly*):

Bicarbonate? Uh-huh!

LUDMILA:

How awful you are, Uncle Prokhor! Daddy has only just died and you're smiling. How can you?

PROKHOR:

Never mind, Luda, my girl.

VASSA (*telephoning*):

Six five three. Yes. Thank you. Who? Is that you, Yakov Lvovich? Please, come at once. Yes, at once. Yes, Sergei Petrovich has died. No, he was quite well. All of a sudden. No one saw how it happened.... Please do.

PROKHOR (*quietly, with admiration*):

You're a hero, Vassa, you really are!

VASSA (*astonished*):

What are you burbling about? Come to your senses! You fool....

CURTAIN

ACT II

A few months later. The same cheerful room. VASSA is sitting in the leather armchair. LUDMILA, NATALYA, ANNA and YEVGENY MELNIKOV are on the sofa. They have finished tea, but the samovar and tea-things are still on the table. It is evening. A lamp is burning but most of the room is in soft shadow. There is a moon and black trees in the garden.

VASSA:

Well. I've told you about the old marriage customs, I've told you about the life husbands and wives used to live in the old days....

ANNA (*softly*):

And a grim life it was too.

NATALYA:

And a very stupid one.

LUDMILA:

Why are people unhappy, Vassa?

YEVGENY:

Because they're stupid.

VASSA:

I don't know why they're unhappy, Luda. Onegin and Natalya here know⁺—because of stupidity, they say. But some say—and I've seen it myself—that clever people are more unhappy than fools.

YEVGENY:

If we accept the fact that the rich are cleverer than the poor....

VASSA:

Of course, they are, but they live mean, wretched lives. And a rich man can never really make merry and enjoy himself like a poor one.

ANNA:

That's true.

NATALYA:

So the best thing is to live in poverty.

VASSA:

Yes, indeed. And just you try it, Nata. Marry Onegin and see what it's like. He'll be a sublieutenant in the infantry and you'll be a regimental lady. You won't get any dowry out of me, so you'll be living on forty rubles a month. And out of that you'll have to keep yourselves in clothes, food and drink, and entertain your guests and feed them. And your children, when you have them, will have to be kept out of the same amount....

NATALYA:

I shan't have any children. Why make more unhappy people in the world?

VASSA:

That's very wise, of course. Why, indeed? So there are your prospects, Onegin. You can look forward to forty rubles a month and a batman making rissoles for you every day out of stringy meat.

YEVGENY (*gloomily*):

I might get a transfer to the Navy....

LUDMILA:

I'm never going to get married either—I'd be afraid to! I think I'd rather travel, and see all the botanical gardens and hot-houses and alpine meadows....

NATALYA:

It's all got to be changed—all this marriage business, life itself, everything!

VASSA:

Set about changing it then. Gury Krotkikh will show you how to begin.

NATALYA:

I don't need him to tell me—there's got to be a revolution!

VASSA:

We had a revolution and it fizzled out—there's nothing but fizz left.

ANNA:

You mean the State Duma?

VASSA:

Yes, and why not? It's just a heap of fizzling sticks. Damp wood never burned well. But Gury Krotkikh will show you the way. He's showing me how to manage my business for two hundred rubles a month, and he'll show you how to make a revolution for about fifteen—a ruble a lesson. When I took him on, his trousers weren't even properly creased, but I saw him at the theatre the other day and his wife had a few bits of gold on her. That's how it's done, girls! So you're going to be a sailor, Onegin?

YEVGENY:

I've not decided yet. Why do you call me Onegin?

VASSA:

Well, make up your mind. It's time you were an officer, and you're still only a cadet. And I call you Onegin....

NATALYA:

He's not a bit like Onegin.

VASSA:

Isn't he? He's just as stuck up. Well, never mind. Of course, Nata, you're the one who ought to know what he's like.

NATALYA:

He's not like anyone.

VASSA:

Like nothing on earth, eh?

YEVGENY (*offended*):

I utterly fail to understand when you are joking and when you are serious. You are really very odd!

VASSA:

Well, you needn't get hot under the collar about it. If you'll try to understand, I'll explain to you. When we had a strike down at the docks and the troops were sent in, one of the fitters, Vezlontsev, said to the sublieutenant there: "You get forty rubles a month, Your Honour, and I get seventy-five, and I can push it up to a hundred, if I try. So there you are," he says, "since you serve the rich, and I am richer than you, you've no right to shout at a rich man like me."

YEVGENY:

I see nothing whatever of interest in that story.

NATALYA:

Mother likes teasing people.

VASSA:

Yes, that's one of my vices. I'm no friend of people.

LUDMILA:

That's not true, Mummy!

VASSA:

It's quite true. Well, never mind! We've had a talk, had a yap at each other. Run along now, girls. I've work to do—managing our affairs. You stay with me, Anna. Now then, off you go! We'll see each other at supper. (*To Anna.*) Is it true that Yevgeny's father has joined the "League of the Russian People" ⁵?

ANNA:

Yes, it is.

VASSA:

He did that because of his son, the fool; they want to kick that Yevgeny out of the Cadet Corps. I'm afraid that young fop will corrupt my daughter for me.

ANNA:

I don't think Natalya would look at him if she wasn't bored.

VASSA:

Spiteful people are never bored.

ANNA:

Since her father's death she's grown very bitter. Of course, these rumours....

VASSA:

Are they still going around?

ANNA:

Yes.

VASSA:

Do you believe them?

ANNA:

No. The only thing that upset me was Liza's suicide. I can't understand why she did it. Such a fine, jolly girl. She had been with you since she was a child. We were all fond of her.

VASSA:

That was Prokhor's doing. He must have scared her in some way.

ANNA:

Had she been living with him?

VASSA:

He made her. Do people not believe that Liza was overcome by fumes in the bathhouse?

ANNA:

Very few believe it.

(Polya comes in.)

VASSA:

What do you want? Why do you stand there dithering? Speak up.

POLYA (*quietly*):

There's a woman at the door.

VASSA:

What woman? At this time of night?

POLYA:

I can't pronounce the name.... Somebody Moiseyevna, I think.

VASSA:

Who?! (*She walks quickly to the door, but stops to address*

Anna.) Don't say anything to the girls. Let it be a surprise for them. Don't let anyone into this room. (*To Poly*a.) Take that samovar away and boil up the small one. (*She goes out.*)

ANNA:

Well, getting used to things?

POLYA:

It's hard work. I thought I'd only have to look after the girls, and the mistress would have her own maid. Prokhor Borisovich needs a servant to himself, I can't cope with him.

ANNA:

Does he make a nuisance of himself?

POLYA:

He's the limit, he is—no shame at all! At this very moment he's capering around in his vest singing the same old thing over and over again. When everyone had gone to bed last night, he was still making that clanking noise and singing away. It upsets me, it does. What's wrong with him, Anna Vasilyevna?

ANNA:

He's not quite right in the head. He's an alcoholic. In other words, a drunkard.

POLYA:

But I'm very grateful to you. It's a good house.

ANNA:

Except for the people in it, you mean?

POLYA:

That's not for me to judge. I've been judged myself, in court. They acquitted me, but I've been in prison. And

what's more, they say the maid before me hung herself in the bathhouse.

ANNA:

That's a lie. She was overcome by fumes. It happened while she was heating the water. She was pregnant.

POLYA:

There you are, you see—she was pregnant!

LUDMILA

(enters carrying a stool, followed by Pyatyorkin with a plant in a large pot): Set it down here, it needs a lot of sun. No, not there—in the middle.

PYATYORKIN:

Yes, miss. Like that? *(He is down on one knee as he asks the question.)*

LUDMILA:

Good. What awful hair you have. It must be so stiff!

PYATYORKIN:

It isn't a hit. Feel it.

LUDMILA *(touching his mane):*

Just like a lion's.

PYATYORKIN:

You're right there. Everyone says that.

LUDMILA:

Who's everyone?

PYATYORKIN:

People I know. Most people.

LUDMILA:

What are you kneeling for?

PYATYORKIN:

I like kneeling in front of you.

LUDMILA:

Now you're making things up! I'd never go down on my knees before a man.

PYATYORKIN:

You don't have to. He'll do that himself.... You can do anything to a man your curiosity desires.

LUDMILA:

I don't want to do anything. And I won't.

PYATYORKIN:

That is for you to decide.

LUDMILA:

Wait a minute, and I'll go and ask the gardener what to take from here. (*She goes out.*)

ANNA (*from her room*):

You're biting off more than you can chew, Pyatyorkin.

PYATYORKIN:

Don't be jealous. You never know what may happen. Everything is worth trying.

ANNA:

If Vassa hears about your little speeches....

PYATYORKIN:

Who will she hear from?

ANNA:

You'll be out of this house like lightning.

PYATYORKIN:

You won't tell her, and when Ludmila catches on, it'll be too late. Don't you interfere, that's all. You won't do yourself any good by it. You're making a nice little profit as it is, and if they chucked me out tomorrow you'd be a lot worse off....

ANNA:

It doesn't matter to me. But I shouldn't quite like to have you as a master.

LUDMILA (*coming back into the room*):

You can go, Pyatyorkin. There's nothing else to be done.

PYATYORKIN:

I wish you happiness today and all the days of your life.

LUDMILA:

How obliging he is!

ANNA:

He is, isn't he?

LUDMILA:

And the way he dances! It's wonderful!

ANNA:

Still, you'd better be careful with him, Luda.

LUDMILA:

What harm can he do me?

ANNA:

He can give you a baby.

LUDMILA:

Oh, how horrible!

ANNA:

A baby?

LUDMILA:

You—you're saying horrible things! (*Goes out.*)

ANNA:

I was only telling you there might be a baby!

VASSA

(*with a sweep of the arm she motions Anna and Polya out of the room. Rachel is a little under thirty. She is elegantly but simply dressed. Her beauty is striking*): Now, come on, Rachel, sit down and tell me how you got here, and where you've come from.

RACHEL:

From abroad.

VASSA:

Yes, of course. Legally?

RACHEL:

No, I came with a woman musician, as her companion.

VASSA:

Using someone else's passport, eh? You're a brave woman. A proper heroine. And you're more beautiful than ever. A beautiful creature like you and ... oh well, it doesn't matter. How's Fyodor? Tell me

RACHEL:

I had no intention of hiding it. There is no hope for Fyodor. His strength is waning rapidly. The doctors say he has only two or three months to live.

VASSA:

So this is the end of Captain Zheleznov's son.

RACHEL:

Yes. He is so thin, almost transparent. He knows he is doomed. But he is still as gay and witty as ever. How is my Kolya?

VASSA:

So Fyodor Zheleznov is finished. My son and heir. The man who was to be head of the whole business.

RACHEL:

Is Kolya in bed?

VASSA:

Kolya? I don't know. I expect so.

RACHEL:

May I just have a peep at him?

VASSA:

No.

RACHEL:

Why not?

VASSA:

He's not here.

RACHEL:

Pray, what does this mean?

VASSA:

Oh, there's nothing wrong. Kolya is living in the country, in a pinewood. It's dry and sandy there. And very healthy, too. It's not good for him to live in town. He has bad tonsils. His parents bestowed on him the gift of poor health.

RACHEL:

Is the place far away?

VASSA:

About sixty miles.

RACHEL:

How can I get there?

VASSA:

You needn't. Very well, Rachel, let's have it out straight away!

RACHEL:

He's dead?

VASSA:

Then there would be nothing to talk about—one word would do. No, he's alive and well, a nice boy and a clever one. What do you want him for?

RACHEL:

I have decided to send him abroad. My sister there is married to a professor of chemistry. They have no children.

VASSA:

Just what I thought—Rachel will be sure to drag the boy into her circle. No, I won't give you Kolya! That's flat!

RACHEL:

What do you mean? I'm his mother!

VASSA:

And I'm his grandmother! The founder of the family. My children are my hands, my grandchildren are my fingers. Understand?

RACHEL:

I'm sorry, but I don't understand you. Are you serious? It sounds almost prehistoric.... But you're an intelligent woman. you can't possibly think that.

VASSA:

To save us wasting our breath you just keep quiet and listen. I won't give you Kolya.

RACHEL:

But this is impossible!

VASSA:

I won't give him to you. Think! What can you do against me? Nothing! As far as the law is concerned, you just don't exist. You are an outlaw, a runaway revolutionary. The moment you show yourself, you'll be thrown into gaol.

RACHEL:

Are you actually going to profit by my situation? I can't believe it! You wouldn't do that. You will give me my son.

VASSA:

You're talking rubbish. Nothing you say will make any difference. I shall do as I have decided.

RACHEL:

No!

VASSA:

Don't shout! Keep calm. I won't give you Kolya. There is a different life in store for him.

RACHEL:

What are you—an animal?

VASSA:

Don't shout, I tell you! What's the use of shouting? I'm no animal. An animal feeds its young, then sends them out to forage for themselves. They eat what they can catch, whether it's a chicken or a calf. I'm talking about beasts of prey, of course, not bunny rabbits. But you wouldn't make your child fend for itself. Neither will I, my grandchild. My grandson is to inherit the Khrapov and Zheleznov shipping company. The sole heir to a company worth millions! His aunts, Natalya and Ludmila, will be given a small share of five thousand each—too much for them anyway. All the rest goes to him.

RACHEL:

You are mistaken if you think you can bribe or console me in this way. You are quite mistaken. That is impossible!

VASSA:

Why should I bribe or console you? You know, Rachel, I never considered you an enemy, even when I saw you were taking my son away from me. What use was he to me, an invalid? I felt no affection for him and I could see you loved him. So I said to you—go on, love him, I don't mind. A sick man is entitled to a little joy in life. I was even grateful to you for Fyodor.

RACHEL (*flaring up*):

There's not a word of truth in it! It's loathsome. I can't believe it.... It's brutal!

VASSA:

Why curse if you can't believe it? Still never mind, go on cursing. You're cursing only because you don't understand. Think! What you can give your son? I know you, you're obstinate. You won't part with your little dream. You want to stir up another revolution. And I

want to build up my business. You'll be pushed around in prison and exile. And the boy will live with strangers, in a strange land—an orphan. Humble yourself, Rachel. I won't give you your son! Never!

RACHEL

(more calmly and with contempt): Yes, you are capable of that, I know. You could even give me up to the secret police.

VASSA:

Yes, even that! Anything! If it's a fight you want, you'll get it!

RACHEL:

How can I touch your savage brain? Your brutal heart? *

VASSA:

Still on about the animals! If you ask me, people are worse than animals! Yes, worse! I know that! There are some people about that make you want to turn on them in frenzy—tear down their houses, burn everything, strip them naked, starve them, freeze them out like cockroaches!

RACHEL:

Damn you, but there's something of value in this hatred of yours.

VASSA:

You're a clever woman, Rachel. I almost regret you weren't my daughter. I think I even told you so once. I always say what I think.

RACHEL *(looking at her watch)*:

Can I spend the night here?

VASSA:

Of course. I won't give you away to the police. The girls will be glad to see you—very glad. They're fond of you. But I won't give you Kolya, mind you!

RACHEL:

We'll see about that.

VASSA:

Going to try and steal him? Rubbish!

RACHEL:

I don't want to discuss this any more. I'm tired, my nerves are on edge, and you've given me the shock of my life on top of it all. What a frightful person you are! Listening to you it makes me think there really is such a thing as the criminal type.

VASSA:

Of course, there is. You won't think of anything worse than what exists.

RACHEL:

You and the people of your class—you masters—have not much time left. A new master, a new force is growing. It's a tremendous force and it will crush you. Crush you utterly!

VASSA:

Oh, how frightening! Ah, Rachel, if I believed that, I would say to you—take all my wealth and all my cunning, you can have it all!

RACHEL:

Now you're just pretending.

VASSA:

Yes, I am—I don't believe in your prophecies. I can't

believe them. Things won't go your way, I know they won't!

RACHEL:

Are you sorry they won't?

VASSA:

Suppose I were? How about that? Ah, you don't understand.... When that husband of mine gambled away all our ships, our wharves, our houses, the whole business, at cards, you won't believe it—but I was actually glad. Then he pulled the last ring off his finger, staked that and won it all back, and a lot more besides.... And after that, you know, he started drinking and lechering, and for fifteen years or more now I've been carrying this burden, this huge business of ours for the sake of the children. If you only knew how much energy I've spent! And now I place all my hopes in the children. My grandson is the justification of all I've lived for.

RACHEL:

Can you imagine how pleasant it is for me to hear that my son is to be the justification for your shady dealings—the martyr to a vile cause.

VASSA:

You don't like the idea, eh? Never mind, one or two things I've heard from you haven't been very pleasant either. Let's have some tea. In front of the girls we'll keep up appearances, shall we?

RACHEL:

There's no need to tell them I entered the country illegally. And they needn't know about our quarrel either. It's not for them to decide.

VASSA:

No need whatever!

(Polya appears in the doorway.)

VASSA:

Go and call the girls. Tell them we don't want the cadet. But say it quietly, so that he doesn't hear. Bring us a samovar. Go along. So this is how we've met, Rachel!

RACHEL:

Yes, a most unpleasant meeting.

VASSA:

Can't be helped. Only children lead pleasant lives—and not for long either.

RACHEL:

It all seems so incredible.

VASSA (*kicking a chair in irritation*):

What's so incredible about it?

LUDMILA (*runs in, followed by Natalya*):

Oh, look who's here! It's Rachel ... Rachel!

NATALYA:

You didn't send a telegram—why not?

VASSA:

Nata loves asking questions. If you say hullo to her, she'll ask you why.

RACHEL:

You haven't changed, Luda. You're just as sweet as ever. You hardly seem to have grown up at all in these past two years.

LUDMILA:

Is that bad?

RACHEL:

Of course, not. But Nata....

NATALYA:

Has aged.

RACHEL:

I suppose "seasoned" is hardly the right word to use about a girl, but that's exactly the impression you give.

NATALYA:

People usually say "matured".

RACHEL:

That's not the same thing.

(The girls are delighted to see Rachel, but she speaks wearily, with her eyes fixed on Vassa most of the time. The sisters pull her over to the couch with them. Vassa is calm as she sits at the table, making the tea.)

LUDMILA:

Sit down and tell us everything.

NATALYA:

How is Fyodor? Is he getting better?

RACHEL:

No, he's very poorly.

NATALYA:

Then why did you go away and leave him?

RACHEL:

I came to fetch my son, Kolya.

VASSA:

And I won't let him go abroad.

LUDMILA:

Oh, he's such a lovely boy now. Clever and brave.... He lives in the woods at Khomutovo. It's a lovely place. There's a big pinewood there.

NATALYA:

Have they moved him from Bogodukhovo?

LUDMILA:

And Bogodukhovo's lovely too! There's a whole grove of lime-trees and beehives....

RACHEL:

So you don't even know where he is?

VASSA:

Come to the table, girls.

RACHEL:

Tell me how you are getting on.

LUDMILA:

Oh, everything's wonderful with me. You see, it's spring and Vassa and I have started working in the garden. She comes to wake me ever so early in the morning, "Up you get!" she says. Then we have some tea and out we go into the garden. Oh, Rachel, what a wonderful garden it is now!

(Anna comes in, nodding a greeting to Rachel. She speaks to Vassa and they both go out.)

LUDMILA:

We go out when it's all covered with dew and sparkling in the sunshine, like priestly robes, like hrocade. It takes your breath away, it's so beautiful! The year before last we ordered over a hundred rubles' worth of seeds. No one

else in the whole town has such lovely flowers as we have. And I have some books on gardening and I'm learning German. So, you see, we just go on working in silence, like nuns. We don't say a word, but we know what each other is thinking. Then perhaps I'll start singing something. And if I stop, Vassa calls out to me to go on. And I can see her face in the distance, so kind and gentle.

RACHEL:

So you're enjoying life, are you?

LUDMILA:

Yes, I am! Though I'm almost ashamed to say it. It's so wonderful!

RACHEL:

What about you, Nata?

NATALYA:

I am also in a constant state of wonder.

PROKHOR

(*drunk and carrying a guitar*): Well, well! If it isn't Rachel! (*Sings.*) "Whence comest thou, o lovely child!"⁶ And more beautiful than ever!

RACHEL:

You're just the same.

PROKHOR:

No better, no worse. Still got trumps in my hand.

RACHEL:

Having plenty of fun?

PROKHOR:

Oh, yes. That's my trade. My great quality is a simple love of fun. It's part of my nature. Captain Zheleznov is dead,

so I'm keeping up the family's honour by making merry for the two of us.

RACHEL:

Was he very ill at the time?

PROKHOR:

Yes, very—he was dead.

(Ludmila laughs.)

RACHEL:

I meant, had he been ill for long?

PROKHOR:

The captain? He wasn't ill at all. He died all of a sudden. Pop! And "with the saints may he rest in peace".

NATALYA:

Stop it, uncle! It's disgusting!

PROKHOR:

Disgusting to be with the saints? Don't try to teach me, my girl! You're too young for that! And where did you spring from, destroyer of life? From Switzerland? Is Fyodor still alive?

RACHEL:

Yes.

PROKHOR:

Very ill?

RACHEL:

Very.

PROKHOR:

Not a very sturdy race the Zheleznovs. We, Khrapovs, will

last longer! But your son, Kolya, is a fine lad, the little imp! Picks things up quickly. One day Zheleznov and I had a bit of a row over dinner. The next day I say hullo to Kolya, and back he comes at me, "Get out of here, you drunken clot!" Floored me, that did! It was quite early in the morning and I was still sober.... What are you up to here? Drinking tea? Only the cabbies drink tea. Self-respecting people quench their thirst with wine.... We have some on the way. An excellent port! Finer than any Spaniard ever tasted. Natalya knows.... (*As he goes to the door Vassa comes in.*)

VASSA:

What has been going on down at the club?

PROKHOR:

At the club? How do you know about it?

VASSA:

Someone telephoned.

PROKHOR:

At the club there has been a brawl over politics. Just that and nothing more.

VASSA:

And your name will be in the papers again?

PROKHOR:

Why should it? I only hit him once. He started snarling at the Duma, so I socked him on the jaw.

VASSA:

Listen to me, Prokhor....

PROKHOR:

I'll be back in a moment. Then I'll listen to your lecture on the subject (*sings*): "Don't tempt me without cause...."⁷

LUDMILA:

Isn't he funny? He's been drinking even more lately. And he's teaching Natalya....

NATALYA:

He has taught me already.

RACHEL:

Do you mean that seriously, Nata?

NATALYA:

Yes. I like wine very much. And I like the feeling of being drunk.

VASSA:

And you might as well add that there's no one to punish you for it.

NATALYA:

There's no one to punish me for it.

VASSA:

Natalya! Take care!

NATALYA:

You told me to add it, so I added it.

VASSA:

Think yourself lucky I have no time to knock the devilment out of you!

LUDMILA:

Nata is very impudent to Mother, as you can see, Rachel. I think it's a bad thing.

VASSA:

You put on all these fine airs. You claim to be so intellectual, but you act like a pig!

NATALYA:

Thoroughbred pigs are considered very valuable.

VASSA (*angrily*):

And that's the kind of life we live here, Rachel.

RACHEL:

Yes, it's a rotten life, but you aren't worthy of anything better. It's exactly the senseless kind of life that you deserve.

VASSA:

That I deserve? Nonsense!

RACHEL:

Not just you personally, your whole class.

VASSA:

Now she's off!

RACHEL:

It's just as bad abroad. Perhaps even worse, because they're more calm about it and torture each other less than you do.

NATALYA:

Is that true? Or are you just consoling us?

RACHEL:

It's true, Natalya. I'm not a consoling person. The world of the rich is falling apart, though they are better organised over there. Everything is falling apart, starting with the family, and over there the family used to be an iron cage. Here it's a wooden one.

VASSA:

Rachel!

RACHEL:

Yes?

VASSA:

Stay here with us. Fyodor will die, you said so yourself. Haven't you had enough of wandering, enough of hiding! Come and live with us. You can bring up your son. And there are my girls here. They're fond of you. You love your son, don't you?

RACHEL:

There is something immeasurably higher than our personal ties and affections.

VASSA:

I know. There's work, business aim in life. But there are times, you know, when there is something within your grasp, right there for the taking, something worth having, but you just have no desire to take it.

RACHEL:

You're not referring to yourself, are you?

VASSA:

How do you mean?

RACHEL:

You may sometimes feel tired of handling your affairs, but to feel the senselessness, the cruelty of it—no, of that you are incapable. I know you. When all's said and done, you are really just a slave. Clever and strong, but a slave all the same. Things are corrupted by rot and rust, and you have been corrupted by things.

VASSA:

How profound! But it's not true. I'll tell you what I wanted, I'll tell you in front of my own daughters. I

wanted to have the governor of this province taking the chamber-pots out for me. I wanted to have the local priest holding services not in the name of the saints, but in my name, the name of my black and sinful soul.

RACHEL:

That comes from Dostoyevsky and it doesn't suit you.

NATALYA:

Mother doesn't know any Dostoyevsky. She doesn't read books.

VASSA:

From Dostoyevsky—whoever he is? No, from the humiliation I suffered. The undeserved humiliation.... The girls know about it, I told them today how I was....

PROKHOR

(*carrying two bottles of wine*): Here it is! Come on now, let's take the matter seriously. Some for you, Vassa? May I? You won't regret it. It's rare stuff, this is....

VASSA:

All right, then! Pour it out. Come to table, girls. Why shouldn't we anyway? My daughter-in-law has ... come to see me. Pour it out, Prokhor. Who is it you've been beating up?

PROKHOR:

Melnikov, your tenant. I gave him one on the jaw. And someone else too..... Lot of nonsense really! It'll heal.

VASSA:

Did you know Melnikov has enlisted in the "League of the Russian People"?

PROKHOR:

So what? As if that mattered! I've got my name down in the phone book, but I don't put on airs. Glasses!

(The phone rings.)

VASSA:

That's for me. (*At the phone.*) Who is it? Yes, speaking. What boat? Why? The idiots! Who loaded it? In Ufa? Terentyev? Sack the fool at once! My presence required—whatever for? They've impounded the whole barge? What else was there? Besides hides.... Damn them! The sanitary inspectors are there, you say? Another inspector too? I'll come at once. (*Slams down the receiver.*) Well, you people stay here and be good. There's a great row on for me. One of our barges has been impounded. The fool of an agent allowed hides to be loaded without a sanitary inspection, and without markings. And the barge was also carrying sheepskins, bast, and bast fibre. I'm going there now. (*She goes out catching Rachel's glance as she does so.*)

PROKHOR:

She's gone to give the river police a bribe. The river police here are a lot of crooks. So are those on dryland. But to hell with it all! I'm serving the wine. Natalya, my sweet, this will be a little better than your favourite. (*Sings in his high-pitched voice.*)

*Fill it up, lad, fill it up,
Fill it full, leave never a drop....⁸*

CURTAIN

ACT III

VASSA has just left. PROKHOR is smoking a cigar. LUDMILA is enjoying herself eating sponge fingers, which she dips in a saucer of jam. NATALYA is sitting beside RACHEL, glass in hand. RACHEL is thoughtful.

PROKHOR:

That's the kind of life we lead, Rachel—never any peace. The police have got their knife into us. (*Guffaws*)

RACHEL:

Are you mayor now?

PROKHOR:

In my dreams I held the post, then I suddenly asked myself—why the devil should I saddle myself like that? I'd rather stay as I am, free as a bird.

NATALYA:

That's not true. You're not free. And you stood down from the elections out of cowardice.

PROKHOR:

It's terrible the way Natalya loves to bully me. And everyone else too.... So young and such a witch. Very much like—Ahem! But she's quite right—I am a far-sighted person. After the captain's death....

NATALYA:

After father's death there were rumours that he had poisoned himself. And even that we had poisoned him to avoid the scandal of a trial.

LUDMILA:

What silly nonsense!

PROKHOR (*uneasily*):

Of course, it's nonsense! And the whole wretched business was quashed by the prosecutor anyway....

NATALYA:

For lack of evidence. But uncle was scared of the rumours and thought he wouldn't be elected mayor.

PROKHOR:

That's enough, Nata!

NATALYA:

But he ought to have gone on against the rumours, against everyone.

PROKHOR:

She's always like that—against everything!

RACHEL (*stroking Natalya's hand*):

And so she should be!

NATALYA:

Rachel, if a charge isn't proved it doesn't necessarily mean that the accused was not guilty, does it?

RACHEL:

No, it doesn't.

LUDMILA:

But is that how we ought to be, Rachel—against everyone? Can't a person just be....

NATALYA:

A fool, like Ludmila Zheleznova.

LUDMILA:

You needn't be rude, you won't make me lose my temper!
Oh, Rachel, I do dislike all this—anger and spitefulness.

NATALYA:

She likes sponge fingers with jam on them!

LUDMILA:

Does it make you envious? You're so spiteful because you have no appetite. If you ate more, you wouldn't be so cross!

PROKHOR (*singing*):

"I'm not angry, though my heart aches in my breast."⁹
Besides sponge fingers and all kinds of sweets Ludmila adores anything military, especially with feathers, like the Indians.

LUDMILA:

That's not true at all.

PROKHOR:

Now, to hell with all this family tittletattle, the past and everything else. Let's bury it! And while the mistress is away we'll have a little orgy. I'll show you a dancer, Rachel—he'll make you gasp! Luda, call Pyatyorkin!

LUDMILA:

That's a good idea!

PROKHOR:

And tell him to bring the guitar! (*to Rachel*) When are you going to see your son?

RACHEL:

Is he far away?

PROKHOR:

Twenty-three versts—twenty-five perhaps. Nice little fellow. Not very strong, but a fine boy!

RACHEL:

Grandmother doesn't want me to have him.

PROKHOR:

She's right about that! A son is no use to you with the runaway life you're leading.

RACHEL:

What do you think, Nata?

NATALYA:

Tell her you insist on having him. And if she won't give him up, steal him!

PROKHOR:

Oho!

NATALYA:

Yes, kidnap him, carry him off and hide him. You see what we're all like here! You can see that, can't you?

RACHEL:

Kidnap him ... carry him off. I couldn't do a thing like that.

NATALYA:

Why not?

RACHEL:

I have other, more serious things to do.

NATALYA:

More serious than your own son? Is that it? Then why did you have him? Why?

RACHEL:

That was my mistake.

NATALYA:

And what is it you have to do? What you told me about two years ago? I remember. I remember it very well.

RACHEL:

But you don't believe in it?

NATALYA:

No.

RACHEL:

That's because you don't understand. But for me—I can't live without the cause. And even if I lose ... if I never see Kolya again....

PROKHOR:

Wait! That's an idea, you know, to kidnap him! That's a fine idea, Rachel! What a knock it would be at my sister! Get on with it, Rachel! Natalya and I will help you, count on us. And I've got Pyatyorkin—he can do anything!

RACHEL:

Oh, leave off!

PROKHOR:

Lyoshka Pyatyorkin? Why, he could kidnap an archbishop, let alone a little boy!

RACHEL:

You want to make sport with my son....

PROKHOR:

Here he is, Pyatyorkin, a soldier brave—served gallantly in the quartermaster's stores! Lyoshka, let's do "Little Bird

of God"! And remember, this is for abroad, for Europe!
So it's got to be perfect!

(Prokhor takes the guitar from Pyatyorkin, and tries the strings. Ludmila brings in a tambourine and a balalaika. She hands the tambourine to her sister.)

PROKHOR:

Now then, girls, very soft and sad! Particularly, the tambourine! It must hum, not bang.

LUDMILA:

We know.

PROKHOR:

Off we go, then. (*He sings, as usual, in his high-pitched voice. Ludmila and Pyatyorkin accompany him.*)

*Little bird of God so small,¹⁰
You know neither toil nor care.
You never bother us at all,
No matter when, no matter where!*

*All night you slumber in the dark
But when the sun glows bright and strong
The voice of God you gladly hark
And raise your voice in merry song:*

*Oh, lady, lady fair!
Lady with the dashing air!
Tell us when, tell us who,
Tell us what you want to do!*

Lyoshka! Go it! Make it fierce! Madd^{er} still! Wow!

*All the way from Rostov town
Came a lady of renown.
Came another from Orel
No one knew her very well.*

Oh, lady, lady fair....

(Pyatyorkin does the Russian dance amusingly and well. Ludmila sings and is quite carried away. Prokhor is delighted. Natalya bangs the tambourine mechanically and looks at Rachel. Rachel sits as if in a trance.)

*Now the lady's occupied,
Gone abroad to have a spree,
When she got to gay Paris,
A red-haired Frenchman she espied.*

Oh, lady, lady fair....

NATALYA:

Enough!

PROKHOR:

Why?

NATALYA:

I don't want any more.

LUDMILA:

Pooh, you are hard to please!

(Rachel rises and walks away; Natalya, taking her time, follows; they stop by the window.)

NATALYA:

Well?

RACHEL:

Terrible.

NATALYA:

I'd rather kill any son of mine than leave him here.

RACHEL

(*putting her arm round Natalya's shoulders*): I can't take him away abroad without Vassa Borisovna's help.

NATALYA:

Uncle will arrange it. He's glad of any chance to hurt Mother. If he kidnaps Kolya we'll hide him, then send him on to you.

RACHEL:

But where? I don't know where I shall be living. If I manage to get back to Switzerland, I shall stay only a few weeks.... I must live in Russia. I have no facilities for bringing up Kolya. But in Lausanne, at my sister's ... that would be very good....

PROKHOR

(stops Pyatyorkin and shouts): Didn't you like it?

RACHEL:

No.

PROKHOR:

You have no feeling for art!

RACHEL:

And your singing is unbearable.

PROKHOR:

Now you're talking. When it comes to drinking or cards, I am all but invincible, but by nature I am not fited for singing. I have a gentle heart, but my throat is always dry; it rasps. Pyatyorkin, go away, you miserable failure! We are not appreciated. Rachel, come to my room. I'll show you my collection of locks.

RACHEL:

I have seen it.

PROKHOR:

But when was that? You should see it now. I have

thirty-seven barn-door locks, four fortress locks, forty-two musical locks. You'll never see that anywhere. And come anyway. I've got something important to tell you. (*He takes her arm and she follows him reluctantly.*)

NATALYA (*looking at her sister*):

What's the matter with you?

LUDMILA:

Nothing. I'm sleepy.

NATALYA:

Go and sleep then.

LUDMILA:

I'm fed-up. I want to cry.

NATALYA:

Get into bed, have a cry and go to sleep.

LUDMILA:

It's always like this. I'll wait for Vassa. I don't like it when she's not at home.

NATALYA:

You're always calling her Vassa nowadays.

LUDMILA:

That's because I love her. But you don't.

NATALYA:

No, I don't love her.

LUDMILA:

She knows that.

NATALYA:

Of course, she does.

LUDMILA:

But you're like her, very like her!

NATALYA:

That's why we don't like each other.

LUDMILA:

She's fond of you.

NATALYA:

Fond of tormenting me.

LUDMILA:

You torment her yourself.

NATALYA:

Yes, I pay her back.

LUDMILA:

Aren't you silly! And Uncle is silly too—fancy his suggesting kidnapping Kolya!

NATALYA:

Don't tell Mother about that.

LUDMILA:

Of course, I shall.

NATALYA:

What for?

LUDMILA:

No, I won't tell her. I don't want to upset her.

NATALYA (*with a sigh*):

You're a saint, aren't you.... A freak. Not made like the rest of us.

VASSA (*entering the room*):

What's all this—have you been quarrelling?

LUDMILA:

No, just chatting.

VASSA:

You use some very strong words to chat with. Prokhor has been smoking his cigars—how many times have I asked him not to smoke cigars in my room. Natalya, I believe you have had too much to drink.

NATALYA:

I can still stand.

VASSA (*pouring herself a glass of port*):

Is the tea cold? Pour me some.

(Natalya pours the tea.)

VASSA:

Seven hundred rubles—I might as well have thrown it into the fire. Corruption everywhere! All on the look-out for bribes. What have you been doing?

NATALYA:

We had tea.

LUDMILA:

Pyatyorkin did a dance. Uncle told Rachel she ought to kidnap Kolya.

VASSA:

That was very amusing of him! What did she say?

LUDMILA:

She didn't agree. She's grown awfully moody. Not half so

nice as she used to be. So disagreeable. All clever people are disagreeable.

VASSA:

I see. And what am I in your opinion—a fool?

LUDMILA:

You're not clever and you're not a fool, you're just a woman and human.

VASSA.

Well, I don't know what that means, I'm sure. Worse than a fool, I suppose. All right, let's leave it at that—a woman and human. Take out the samovar and tell them to heat it up. Natalya, do you want to go abroad?

NATALYA:

Yes, I do. You know that.

VASSA:

Well, you can go. Take Anna with you.

NATALYA:

I won't go with Anna.

VASSA:

Why not?

NATALYA:

I've had quite enough of her here.

VASSA:

I won't let you go alone. Now, my girl....

NATALYA:

Yes?

VASSA:

I haven't time to talk to you.

NATALYA:

Have you time to bring up Kolya?

VASSA:

He doesn't need much of my time.

NATALYA:

He'll need more than I do.

VASSA:

Go abroad with Anna. You'll be able to see Fyodor.

NATALYA:

That doesn't attract me.

VASSA (*at the top of her voice*):

You devil! Be silent!

NATALYA:

Very well.... I shall be silent.

RACHEL (*entering the room*):

What was all that about?

VASSA:

Yes. I shouldn't have shouted. That was wrong of me. They've made me so upset. It's given me quite a pain in the heart. Well, Rachel? So Prokhor has been suggesting you kidnap Kolya?

RACHEL:

He's drunk.

VASSA:

When he's sober, he can be just as.... Why don't you girls go to bed? It's rather late.

LUDMILA:

What about supper?

VASSA:

I had forgotten about supper. I want something to drink. I want some hot tea. All right, go and tell them to lay the table. What have you got to say, Rachel?

RACHEL:

Listen to me, Vassa Borisovna. Give me my son and I'll send him abroad.

VASSA:

So you want another argument, do you? No, I won't give him to you!

RACHEL:

I just can't imagine what you will do with him. How will you bring him up?

VASSA:

Don't worry, we'll manage it. We're well established folk. We have money. We'll hire the best governesses, the best professors.... We'll give him an education.

RACHEL:

You won't teach him the things a decent person ought to know. Kolya will have to live in this house with its balalaikas and guitars, its rich food, and half-tipsy Prokhor Khrapov and the two girls—one of them a permanent adolescent, the other, too embittered. Vassa Borisovna, I have a fair knowledge of your class both here, in Russia, and abroad. It is a hopelessly sick class! You just live like robots, enslaved to your businesses, obeying the power of things that you did not create. You live in contempt and hatred of one another without ever asking yourselves what you are living for, what use you are to anyone.... Even the

best and most intelligent people of your circle go on living only because they are repelled and frightened by death.

VASSA:

Have you finished your tune? Now have a rest and listen to me. If there's one thing I don't understand about you, it's this: how is that this daring brain of yours is so blind and feeble when it comes to talking about life? Class.... My dear woman, Gury Krotkikh—the manager of my shipping company—knows a lot more about class than you do. Revolutions, he says, are legitimate when they benefit this stupid thing called class. But you keep talking about some illegitimate kind of revolution, about something out of this world. Krotkikh has the thing all cut-and-dried: Socialists must unite the workers for the sake of industry and trade. That's what he proposes, and he's right! He's no fool—over that kind of thing anyway. But he's still a fool in matters of business.

RACHEL:

He is not the only one who advocates training the proletarians to be meek and humble. There are plenty of his kind about. And since they are your loyal slaves, you allow them to climb quite high....

VASSA:

Can't you see that I, Vassa Khrapova, am not at all concerned with this class! You say it's dying out? That doesn't worry me, I'm quite healthy. I'm my own boss. And no one can interfere with me or frighten me. There is enough here to last me my lifetime and I'll save up a huge fortune for my grandson. That's all I have to say, and all there is to it! And I won't give you Kolya. So let that be the last of it. It's time for supper. I'm tired.

RACHEL:

I don't want any supper. Your food is hateful to me.... Where can I rest?

VASSA:

Go and rest, then. Natalya will show you. (*She rises from her chair with difficulty, sits down again and calls.*) Anna! (*There is no answer.*) My food is hateful to her.... Who else would dare to say such a thing to me? ... Oh, the viper! (*Rings.*)

POLYA:

Did you ring?

VASSA:

No, it was the devil under the stove. Where's Anna?

POLYA:

With the young ladies.

VASSA:

Call her. (*She sits listening to something, feels her throat and coughs. Anna enters.*) What happened here while I was away?

ANNA:

Prokhor Borisovich suggested kidnapping Kolya.

VASSA:

Did he suggest it himself?

ANNA:

Yes. At first he said: "She's right about that. A son is no use to you", then the idea suddenly appealed to him. "That'll be a knock at my sister," he said.

VASSA:

And what about Natalya?

ANNA:

It was she who suggested it...

VASSA:

You're muddling things! You're lying!

ANNA:

I'm not muddling. That's how it was. When Rachel Moiseyevna said you were keeping Kolya here, Prokhor Borisovich said, "She's right", and when Natalya suggested kidnapping, he was all for that too.

VASSA:

I see. He's just longing to put his teeth into me. Even if he can only do it from behind.

ANNA:

"I have Pyatyorkin here," he said. "He could kidnap an archbishop, let alone a little boy."

VASSA:

He's a dangerous cur, that Pyatyorkin.

ANNA:

A vile creature! He has neither honour nor conscience. And so impudent, so rough....

VASSA:

We'll soften him.

ANNA:

Are you unwell?

VASSA:

Why?

ANNA:

I can see from your face.

VASSA:

My daughters didn't notice anything. Very well! You shall go abroad, Anna.

ANNA (*astonished*):

I?

VASSA:

Yes, you. With Natalya. Or perhaps alone.

ANNA:

Oh, but I'm so pleased! I can't find words to thank you!

VASSA:

There's no need for any. You've deserved it. You never lie to me, do you?

ANNA:

Never.

VASSA:

That's what matters. You will take Fyodor a letter. Don't show it to Natalya. And write to me at once how Fyodor is. Ask the doctors. Do you remember your German?

ANNA:

Yes, I do.

VASSA:

Good! If Fyodor is very bad, wait till it's all over. But we'll discuss all this later. Now listen to me! You will now go to the police, to the Special Branch, and ask for Colonel Popov. You must find him! Make them send for him. Say it's a matter of great urgency.

ANNA:

Vassa Borisovna....

VASSA:

Listen! Tell him that Rachel Topaz, the émigré, has come to visit me from abroad. He knows who she is. He has

arrested her before. And if she is to be arrested now, let them do it in the street, not in this house. Understand?

ANNA:

Yes, but....

VASSA:

Listen to me, will you! If they come to the house, it will be obvious that you betrayed her. Or that I did. And I don't want any more foolish rumours going round the town. Now do you understand?

ANNA:

I—I can't....

VASSA (*surprised*):

You can't? Why not?

ANNA:

I wouldn't dare.

VASSA:

Sorry for her, are you? Aren't you sorry for Kolya? She'll be arrested tomorrow or the day after anyway. Why do you refuse to do me a favour? This is very strange! I can't believe it.

ANNA:

No, it's not that, for goodness sake! I'd give my life for you! Why should I be sorry for that Jewess? She has always despised me, you know.

VASSA (*suspiciously*):

What are you mumbling about, eh? I don't understand!

ANNA:

I'm afraid to go to the police at night.

VASSA:

That's foolish! Do you think they'll eat you? (*Looks at her*

watch.) But perhaps you're right—it is late. Popov will be playing cards somewhere by now. All right, you can do it tomorrow morning. Early—about seven. Make them wake him up for you.

ANNA:

Oh, thank you, I'm so grateful.... (*Clasps her hand and kisses it.*)

VASSA (*wiping her hand on her skirt*):

Why, you're actually sweating, you silly creature. It's dripping off your face....

(Anna wipes her face.)

VASSA:

Rachel keeps trying to frighten me with her croaking about class! What class? I am a class! It's me she hates. Yes, me! She stole my son, like a gypsy stealing a horse. And now I shan't let her have her son! No! (*Lapses into a thoughtful silence.*) I don't feel very well. I must be tired.... Make me a hot drink of raspberries.

LUDMILA:

Vassa, supper time!

VASSA:

You are fond of eating....

LUDMILA:

Yes, I am. Very fond.

VASSA:

I have a pleasant surprise for you, but it's not something to eat—it's to make your life happier.

LUDMILA:

You're always....

VASSA:

I've made up my mind. I'm going to buy old Princess Kugusheva's house—her estate will make a fine addition to our garden, won't it?

LUDMILA:

Oh, Mummy, how lovely!

VASSA:

Ah! The young prince, I believe, has been losing heavily at cards....

LUDMILA:

Oh, how lovely!

VASSA:

The princess is selling in a hurry. I'll pay the deposit tomorrow. There's a treat for you.

LUDMILA:

How do you find time for all these things? Come on, let's have supper.

VASSA:

I don't want any. I don't feel well. I think I'll have a hot drink and go to bed. Have supper without me.

LUDMILA:

Won't you have any tea?

VASSA:

Yes, bring the samovar in here. I feel so thirsty. Is Rachel there?

LUDMILA:

She has locked herself up in the yellow room. She doesn't want any supper either. How disagreeable she has grown. So stuck-up!

VASSA:

Go along, dear.... (*She is left alone. She moves cautiously about the room, as though treading on ice; holds on to the backs of chairs, coughing and gasping.*) Work to do.... So much work to do.... (*She makes as if to sit down, but changes her mind and stands with her back to the door.*) Ought I to call the doctor?

(Pyatyorkin, drunk, his hair even more unruly than usual, puts his tongue out at his mistress and makes a terrible face, then picks up the guitar and plucks the bass string.)

VASSA (*with a start*):

Oh.... What's that? Who.... What do you want?

PYATYORKIN (*thickly*):

I've come for the guitar....

VASSA:

Get out, you devil!

PYATYORKIN:

I'm going. Why shouldn't I? I'm not a dog. I don't live in my master's rooms.

VASSA:

The fool.... What a ... devil... (*She sits down heavily on the couch, tries to unbutton her blouse, but slumps sideways. For a few seconds there is no sound.*)

ANNA

(*holding a tray with a teapot and a cup on it*): Shall I take it into the bedroom? (*She stands waiting for a reply. The tray begins to shake in her hands and a cup rattles. She puts the tray down carefully on the table, bends over Vassa and looks into her face, then straightens up at once and speaks in a loud whisper*). Oh, God, God.... Vassa Borisovna.... What's the matter? (*She listens for a moment, then rushes to the desk and opens a*

drawer. She rummages, finds money there and hides it in her bosom. She then opens a casket on the table, where there is also money. She hides this, too, finds some keys and puts them in her pocket, then snaps down the lid of the casket and runs out of the room. A pause. Natalya comes in quickly, followed by Prokhor. After them, at intervals, come Anna, Polya, Pyatyorkin.)

NATALYA

(feeling her mother's face with her hand and speaking in an unnaturally loud voice): She is dead.

PROKHOR:

Well, I'm.... Zheleznov went out like a light. Now Vassa! There'll be more tittle-tattle all round the town. Pah! Well, I'll be damned!

NATALYA:

Silence!

PROKHOR:

Why should I be silent! Nata, we've got to watch Anna. We need the keys. The key to the safe. She knows everything, Anna does! Look in the pocket of Vassa's skirt and see if the key is there....

NATALYA:

I don't want to. Go away.

PROKHOR:

Not likely!

ANNA (*in tears*):

Natalya Sergeyevna, Luda has fainted.

NATALYA:

Call the doctor.

ANNA:

I've telephoned. Oh dear, what shall we do now?

PROKHOR:

Where are the keys? The key to the safe?

NATALYA:

Has Rachel been told?

ANNA:

Need she be, Natalya Sergeyevna?

NATALYA:

You're a swine! (*Walks out quickly.*)

ANNA (*with a sob*):

What was that for?

PROKHOR:

None of that, no slobbering! The key to the safe! Where is it?

ANNA:

Prokhor Borisovich, I have been with you thirteen years, don't forget. I have served loyally....

(*Rummages in Vassa's skirt.*)

PROKHOR:

You'll get what you are worth....

ANNA:

I gave you my whole youth. Here is the key!

PROKHOR (*speaking to Pyatyorkin as he goes to the safe*):

Lyoshka, don't let anyone in.... I say just a minute! (*Obviously delighted.*) They're still minors and I'll be their guardian! Well, I'll be damned! What d'you think of that! Eh? (*He leers at Anna.*) Get out of here, Anna! You're finished, you old cat! Go to the devil! Tomorrow! I'm fed up with you, you eavesdropper! You tell-tale!

ANNA:

Prokhor Borisovich, you'll be sorry! You're making a big mistake....

PROKHOR:

Go! You've had your due, you've stolen it. So now get out!

ANNA:

I beg your pardon. but I won't! I have something....

PROKHOR:

Yes, I know you have! That's what I'm talking about....

(Enter Rachel and Natalya.)

RACHEL

(*to Prokhor, who is rummaging among the papers on the desk*):
So now you are stealing?

PROKHOR:

Why? Just taking what belongs to me.

(Polya brings in Ludmila.)

LUDMILA

(*breaks away and rushes to the couch*): Mummy! Mu-u-mmy!

RACHEL:

What belongs to you! What does belong to you?

CURTAIN

THE PETTY BOURGEOIS

First published in book form: M.Gorky. *The Petty Bourgeois*. Scenes in the Bessemenovs' Household. A dramatic sketch in 4 acts. St. Petersburg, Znaniye Publishers, 1902.

The play was conceived at the end of 1900 and the first two acts completed by mid-April, 1901. Gorky's work on the play was interrupted by his arrest on the night of April 16, 1901, when he was charged with taking part in illegal revolutionary activities. He returned to the play again in September and finished it in a matter of a few days.

Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, stage-director, dramatist, and one of the founders of the Moscow Art Theatre (1898), came to see Gorky in Nizhni Novgorod late in September 1901. He appreciated the play, which Gorky read to him, and took the manuscript away with him.

Anton Chekhov was among the first to read the play and wrote in a letter to Gorky on October 22, 1901: "Just as I expected, the play is very good. It is written in your distinctive Gorkian style, so original and arresting. If I had to point out any drawbacks, so far I have noticed only one—a certain conservatism of form."

Gorky fully agreed with Chekhov's remarks on the play.

The tsarist censors gave Gorky's first play "special treatment". Konstantin Stanislavsky noted that "even the slightest hints at subversion were ruthlessly crossed out".

It soon became known that the play was first to be staged in St. Petersburg, not Moscow. In March 1902 the Moscow Art Theatre company went on tour to St. Petersburg where on March 25 the play had its première.

The police took unheard-of precautions: the ushers in the theatre were replaced by plainclothesmen, a double-strength police detachment was posted to guard the theatre and its grounds, and mounted gendarmes pranced back and forth in the square in front of the house.

"The Petty Bourgeois" came out in a separate edition on March 12, 1902, which almost coincided with its first stage performance. Petty-bourgeois mentality and its interpretation by Gorky provoked heated discussion. Reviews by bourgeois critics betrayed their anxiety for the future of the Bessemenovs' world and their obvious enmity towards Nil. Some strove to gloss over the main conflict in the play by proclaiming it a run-of-the-mill drama of fathers and sons.

This attempt to distort the true meaning of the play was rebuffed by a number of writers and Marxist critics. Anton Chekhov wrote on February 26, 1903: "...We treasure Gorky not because he makes pleasant reading but because he was the first in Russia and the whole world to condemn petty-bourgeois mentality and to do so precisely at the time when 'society was most prepared for protest'."

Anatoly Divilkovsky was one of the first Marxist critics to give a correct assessment of "The Petty Bourgeois". He wrote that the play "outlines, with striking vividness, the contrast between the decaying past and the free-born, vibrant future.... Nil is like a man from another planet,... a living manifestation of a bright future" (*Pravda*, April 1905, p. 133).

In 1919 Anatoly Lunacharsky recalled: "We, the young Social-Democrats, who followed closely the work of Gorky, were greatly impressed by the figure of Nil in 'The Petty Bourgeois'. What most appealed to us was his respect for human toil...." (*Vestnik Teatra*, No. 17, April 1-3, 1919).

1. Don César de Bazan—a character in Victor Hugo's play "Ruy Blas". It may, however, be that Polya had in mind "The Spanish Grandee" by Dumanoir and d'Ennery, whose hero bore the same name. The play was in the repertoire of many Russian theatres at the turn of the

century and Gorky often referred to it in his other works.

2. "Free-winged birds are we...."—a line from "The Prisoner" by Pushkin set to music by Anton Rubinstein.

3. "To the delight of your parents, to the benefit of church and state"—the concluding words from a prayer recited daily before classes in all the schools of tsarist Russia.

4. "Allons, enfants de la patri-i-i-i-e!"—the first line of the Marseillaise.

5. "Remember the fable about the empty barrels?"—this reference is to Ivan Krylov's fable "Two Barrels" (1818), the gist of it being that an empty barrel makes a lot more noise than a full one.

6. "...fair daughter of King Duncan!"—Shishkin apparently has in mind Heinrich Heine's poem "Die Botschaft" ("The Messenger").

7. Diadochi (Gk: successors)—the generals in the army of Alexander the Great who after his death in 323 B.C. divided up the empire he had created.

8. "I went in search of happiness...."—from the first stanza of Heine's poem "Sterbende" ("The Dying").

9. "...therein philosophy's lesson."—a quotation from Heine's "Doktrin" ("The Doctrine").

10. "...the law of ... sufficient reason."—the logical principles of consistency and sufficient reason first formulated by the German philosopher Gottfried Leibnitz (1646-1716). Teterev apparently lectured Yelena on Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788-1860) book *Über die Vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde*.

THE LOWER DEPTHS

Originally put out as a separate volume: M. Gorky. *The Lower Depths of Life*. Sketches. Four acts. Verlag Dr. F. Marchlewski and Co. in München. Von Manuskript 1903. At about the same time it was published as:

M. Gorky. *The Lower Depths*. St. Petersburg, Znaniye Publishers, 1903.

The play stems from the writer's observations of life and his philosophical seekings. Tramps, the dregs of society described in the play, were a widespread social phenomenon in the Russia of the 19th and early 20th century. In 1901 some 4,000 tramps were officially registered in Nizhni Novgorod alone.

Gorky began his work on the play in December 1900, in Nizhni Novgorod. Two years later, in January, he wrote to Konstantin Stanislavsky: "I have started writing a new play. It will be a story about tramps. All in all there will be some 20 characters in it. I'm very curious to know what comes of it."

The theatrical version of "The Lower Depths" was considerably distorted by the censorship. Numerous deletions and substitutions made in the seven copies that underwent censorship testify to this.

Some time later Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko wrote on this account: "I had the impression that the only reason the play was not banned was that the authorities were sure it would be a complete failure on the stage."

The first performance was presented by the Moscow Art Theatre on December 18, 1902. It was an overwhelming success. "The fall of the curtain was followed with thunderous applause. Gorky was called to the stage more than fifteen times," wrote the newspaper *Russkoye Slovo* on December 19, 1902.

The Moscow Art Theatre production of "The Lower Depths" was met with enthusiastic reviews in the press, which contained, however, very different interpretations of its meaning.

Bourgeois critics regarded the inhabitants of "the lower depths" if not exactly personally responsible for their own misfortunes then at least as victims of some abstract "life's injustice". (*Kuryer*, Nos. 351 and 354 for December 20 and 23, 1902). In the opinion of these critics the main subject of the play was a world of people denuded of all

social coloration, a world revealed in its unfeigned meaning and inner truth (*Novosti Dnya*, No. 7015 for December 18, 1902).

Most of the reviewers connected the key meaning of the play with the image of Luka, though each had a different conception of the character. Some of them asserted that Luka "brought to light all that was good but had formerly lain dormant" (*Sanct-Petersburgskiyē Vedomosti*, No. 4, January 5, 1903), others voiced the opinion that Luka was "no other than a Danko* given realistic features" (from the same magazine) and that "the whole world lives a lie for it alone makes life bearable. We are grateful to Luka-Gorky for his lyrical poem" (*Russkoye Slovo*, No. 350, December 20, 1902).

Gorky was most displeased by this interpretation of his play. In an interview he gave in 1903 Gorky said: "The main question I wanted to ask in my play was: what is better, compassion or the crude truth? What do we have more need of? Does compassion serve any end if man begins to resort to lies like Luka? This is not a subjective matter; it is a question of philosophical import."

Gorky intentionally put this question in a setting of utmost extremity, showing people in the most appalling circumstances, men who have lost all hope and been driven to despair. Will passive, compassionate humanism and consoling lies ever remedy their ills?

The wanderer Luka is the apostle of comforting illusions and lies that reconcile people with life. In actual fact Luka's humanism rests on his secret conviction that there is nothing that can be changed in the human condition. For Luka all men are equally insignificant, weak and contemptible and need no other doctoring but compassion and consolation.

To Luka's philosophy is juxtaposed the dream of a free Man with a capital "M" proclaimed by Satin. In 1928

* A character in Maxim Gorky's story "Old Izergil", who dedicated his life to serving the people.—Ed

Gorky wrote that there was "a signal for revolt" in his play. "This signal can be discerned in the words of Satin, in his appraisal of man."

On these grounds some of the critics saw Satin as a positive character on the whole, while in fact Satin's romantic dream is in total contradiction to the reality of his life and to his nature as a "has-been". Gorky simply had no other choice than to make a character who is far from the author's personal ideal of Man, the mouthpiece of his own ideas.

Through the images of Luka and Satin Gorky exposed the futility of the passive, anarchic forms of protest so typical of tramps and the backward strata of the oppressed population.

In 1903 the play began its tour of the world. It was produced in Germany, England, Italy, Austria, Holland, Japan and a number of other countries.

"The Lower Depths" was held in high esteem by prominent figures in the revolutionary movement and in culture and art.

Nadezhda Krupskaya made special note of how much Lenin appreciated "The Lower Depths". "I recall," she said, "how Vladimir Ilyich was once virtually possessed with the desire to go and see 'The Lower Depths' in the Moscow Art Theatre."

Vatslav Vorovsky considered "The Lower Depths" to be one of Gorky's major works, "the consummation of his series of stories about tramps".

1. *Fatal Love* (*Eijernde Liebe*—novel by the German writer Ernst von Wildenbruch (1845-1909). p. 184

2. Sicambri—the name of an ancient Germanic tribe living along the Rhine. p. 190

3. Macrobiotics—the science of prolonging man's life-span. One of its originators was the German physician Christoph Hufeland (1762-1836). The title of his book *Macrobiotik oder die Kunst des menschliche Leben zu verlängern* was subtitled *Macrobiotics* in translation. p. 190

4. Transcendental (Latin: *transcendens*—beyond

limits)—one of the fundamental concepts in Kant's idealist philosophy designating something a priori immanent to reason and determining sense experience. p. 191

5. Sardanapalus (Ashurbanipal)—the last king of Assyria (669-626 B.C.). The king's taste for luxury made his name a symbol. p. 202

6. "...as forty thousand sots!"—a paraphrase of Hamlet's words about the "forty thousand brothers" that "could not with all their quantity of love" rival his feelings for Ophelia. p. 202

7. "Every morn the sun arises...."—this folk song became widely popular after "The Lower Depths" was staged. Its tune was written down by A. Goldenweizer. p. 227

8. "If no path can be found that leads"—the first lines of the 5th and 6th stanza of Pierre Béranger's "Les Fous" ("Madmen"). p. 254

9. "That's all out of that book *Fatal Love*."—Nastya mentions in her story names and events that are not to be found in Wildenbruch's *Eijernde Liebe*. Some of the details must have been borrowed from Klavdia Gross' story in *Severný Kuryer*, No. 13, 1899. p. 263

10. "I'm just saying as there's barren soil...."—Luka refers to images from the parable about the sower (Matt. 13). p. 280

11. "Tell me, O wizard, beloved of the gods...."—from Alexander Pushkin's poem "The Lay of Prince Oleg". p. 284

12. "You should join the Runaways, with such ideas."—the Runaways, or Wanderers, were an Old Believers' sect founded by a runaway soldier named Yevfimy at the end of the 18th century. The growing oppression of the serfs in Russia was one of the reasons provoking the emergence of this sect. The social protest displayed by the Runaways was anarchist in nature and it gradually developed increasingly anti-social, anti-cultural and parasitical forms. The cornerstone of their teaching was the assertion that the end of the world was near and

in order to save one's soul one had to break off all ties with society, renounce one's family and withdraw into the wilderness or some secret hiding-place. The Runaways accorded vagrancy the status of dogma. After the October Revolution the Runaways showed themselves to be fanatics and obscurantists, bitter enemies of Soviet power.

p. 287

13. "...like smoke from fire."—cf. Psalm 68, v. 2: "As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God."

p. 295

14. Penal Code for Criminals and Miscreants—the basic legal document of the criminal code in tsarist Russia (collection of laws and statutes) instituted on May 1, 1864.

p. 296

15. Statutes of Penalties Imposed by Justices of the Peace—a collection of laws on crime and the system of punishment that came under the jurisdiction of Justices of the Peace.

p. 297

16. "Lachesis?... Atropos?"—two of the three Greek goddesses of fate: Clotho spun the "yarn" of a man's life, Lachesis decided which path he was to take, and Atropos entered all that lay in his fate in a long scroll.

p. 299

17. "Gorge yourself, benighted minds!...."—the first line of the third stanza in Béranger's "Les Gourmands" ("The Gobblers").

p. 299

18. "That yawning hole shall be my grave...."—the first line of Béranger's "Le Vieux vagabond" ("The Old Vagabond").

p. 299

SUMMER FOLK

First published in book form: M. Gorky. *Summer Folk*. Scenes. Verlag "Snaniye". Berlin, 1904. Some months later published in "Znaniye Anthology for 1904".

The first mention of "Summer Folk" dates back to 1899. However, Gorky's work on the play was put back two years, while he was writing first "The Petty Bourgeois" and then "The Lower Depths".

In September 1904 he handed over the play to the recently-founded Kommissarzhevskaya Theatre in St. Petersburg. "I wanted," he wrote, "to depict that section of the Russian intelligentsia which emerged from the democratic strata and which, once it had gained a certain social status, lost contact with its roots, with the people whose blood flowed in its veins; they forgot all about the needs of the people and the necessity of broadening their life's scope...."

The production of "Summer Folk" by the theatre in November 1904 was, in spite of the imperfections in the staging, an important event both for the intellectual life of the city and for its author. "'Summer Folk' caused quite a rumpus", Gorky telegraphed to Peshkova after the first performance.

The debate in the press over Gorky's new work took a long time to die down. "Gorky's new work," wrote *Sanct-Petersburgskiye Vedomosti* (No. 311, November 12, 1904) provoked such sharp differences of opinion because everything it has to say hits the bull's eye." Another paper noted that "...hostility to Gorky's play could arise only out of ideological disagreement. And there is no doubt that it was indeed the 'Summer Folk', i. e. those who were hardest hit by its truthfulness, who showed their distaste for the play" (*Novosti i Birzhevaya Gazeta*, No. 317, November 16, 1904).

Lunacharsky assessed the play as "an important and encouraging work of literature", as a "symptom", "one of the first swallows of a real spring" in the life of society (*Pravda* magazine, April 1905).

1. "Oh, Martha! Martha! Too many are thy cares!" — See Luke. 10. 41. p. 343

2. "Here, 'neath your window, lovely Inezilla"—a poem by Pushkin (1834), set to music by Glinka. p. 349

3. "...sow cabbages, like the venerable Diocletian...."—the Roman Emperor Diocletian (284-305), who made a success of affairs of state, later went into voluntary retirement at his villa where he spent his time gardening. p. 375

4. "The weary day draws to a close...."—from Zhukovsky's poem "Night" (1823), set to music by Rubinstein (1852). p. 398

5. "Pity me, o mother dear...."—a lyrical folk-song for a female voice. p. 412

6. "...a man should take a whip with him whenever he went near a woman."—from Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*. p. 432

7. "I saw the sea...."—an inaccurate quotation from Polezhayev's poem "The Sea" (1831). p. 456

8. "Pale, immaculate snow-flakes..."—these lines of Gorky's were set to music by F. Bobrov (1904) and N. Volkov (1909). p. 477

ENEMIES

First published in book form: M. Gorky. *Enemies*. Verlag von J. Dietz Nachfolger. Stuttgart, 1906, and at about the same time in the "Znaniye Anthology for 1906", book 14. St. Petersburg, 1906.

The idea of writing a play about workers came to Gorky as early as 1901, and by March 1905 he had started work on "Enemies".

An active participant in the workers' movement, Gorky was able to collect a vast amount of factual material on the life of the Russian proletariat, and this play was based upon a portion of that material. The writer made use, for instance, of the events of February-November 1905 at the Morozov cotton-mills in Orekhovo-Zuyevo. He was personally acquainted with many of those who took part in these events (about 20,000 workers were active in the political movement at the Morozov mills).

"Enemies" was completed in the summer of 1906. It was banned from the stage by the censor.

The play had its first performance in German in Berlin, at the Reinhardt Theatre on February 16, 1907. In spite of the censor's ban, it was staged by several companies in Russia.

On September 25, 1933 the first performance of "Enemies" was given in Leningrad's State Drama Theatre. On October 10, 1936 it had its first night at the Moscow Art Theatre, produced by Nemirovich-Danchenko.

As soon as it appeared, "Enemies" was attacked by bourgeois critics, who announced that Gorky was hostile to the intelligentsia, that his characters were untypical, that the play as a whole was lacking in artistry, etc.

The most significant analysis of the play was made by Plekhanov in his article "On the Psychology of the Workers' Movement (Maxim Gorky: 'Enemies')". "This new play by Gorky is excellent. It is rich in content that one could miss only by closing one's eyes to it on purpose."

Lunacharsky brought out the basic meaning of the play and its place in Gorky's work in 1926: "Works like 'Enemies' and 'Mother' are among the greatest in all of Gorky's writings...."

1. "He can say that after the agrarian massacres in the south!"—this would appear to be a reference to the peasant revolts in Poltava and Kharkov Gubernias in the spring of 1902. p. 521

2. "It's a constitution we need and not socialism."—such views, typical of the Russian bourgeoisie, found expression in the ideology and the programme of the Constitutional-Democratic (Cadet) Party, formed in October 1905. p. 527

3. "He used to work at the Bryansk factory"—the plant producing rails, steel plates and engines that belonged to the Bryansk Limited Joint-Stock Company and was situated in Yekaterinoslav (now Dniepropetrovsk.) p. 637

YEGOR BULYCHOV AND OTHERS

First published as a separate volume: M. Gorky. *Yegor Bulychov and Others. Scenes*. Berlin, Verlag "Kniga", 1932, and in its final version in the book *The Sixteenth Year*, Almanach One, Moscow 1933, pp. 5-48.

Gorky conceived the play at the end of 1930, while he

was undergoing treatment in Italy. Apparently at the beginning of April 1931 Gorky sent "Yegor Bulychov" to Berlin. Further work was put into it when the Vakhtangov Theatre undertook its production. In Autumn 1931 Gorky read "Yegor Bulychov" to the theatre's actors, there was a discussion and Gorky promised to introduce certain changes. He also slightly modified the play's message and style when it was published in the almanach *The Sixteenth Year*.

The first performance of "Yegor Bulychov" was given in the Vakhtangov Theatre on September 25, 1932. It was part of the celebrations of Gorky's fourtieth year in politics and literature and was acclaimed by the audience.

"Yegor Bulychov and Others'", wrote Vsevolod Ivanov, "is the wisest of all Gorky's works of drama.... How vividly it reveals the hopelessness and the impasse which awaits even the most talented members of the merchant class!"

"A few days ago I saw 'Bulychov' at the Vakhtangov", Alexei Tolstoy wrote to Gorky in January 1933. "You have risen to a new height of simplicity in your art. This is what art should be—concerned with the most vital things in life, speaking in words that come straight from the mind, direct and simple, with no artificiality of form. The play has a great and lofty effect. It is marvellous that your long road in life has culminated in an art so fresh and young."

At the same time—September 25, 1932—the play had its Leningrad première in the Bolshoi Drama Theatre, after which it was staged in most of the theatres in the country.

1. "So many people are being killed these days"—the reference is to the First World War, 1914-1918. p. 658

2. "Your patron saint, the Blessed Yegor."—St. Yegor, the Russian variant of St. George, one of the best-loved Christian saints, patron of agriculture and animal husbandry. p. 664

3. "...at Kopusovo Fair."—Kopusovo, a village near the

town of Sormovo. Many of its inhabitants were Sormovo workers, who had a revolutionary influence on the local peasantry. p. 671

4. "The industrialists understand their role. I believe...."—the reference is to the First Congress of Military-Industrial Committees, which took place at the end of 1915. They were formed in May 1915 at the suggestion made by the capitalist Ryabushinsky at the Ninth Trading and Industrial Congress. The Congress of Military-Industrial Committees showed that these organisations, since they were representative of the Russian bourgeoisie, were not prepared to confine their activities, as expected, to supplying the army with arms and ammunition, but aspired to an active part in shaping state policy. p. 688

5. "Blessed is the man that walketh...."—Psalm 1, v. 1. p. 690

6. "Remember Schubert's 'Warum'?"—from the piano cycle "Fantastic Pieces", by Schumann and not Schubert. p. 705

7. "When youth is spent in plunder and sin...." from the folk-tale of Vasily Buslayev. p. 710

8. "He's been competent enough for twenty odd years."—Nicholas II became tsar on October 20, 1894. The coronation ceremony took place in Moscow in May 1896. p. 716

9. "The whole nation rejoiced. It was a real gala day in Kostroma."—in 1913, during the official celebrations of the three-hundredth anniversary of the Romanov dynasty, Nicholas II and the imperial family, accompanied by a huge suite of retainers, travelled over the country. In May 1913 they visited Kostroma. p. 716

10. "Lev Tolstoy ... fled death into the woods...."—this is a reference to Tolstoy's departure from Yasnaya Polyana on October 28, 1910. In his farewell letter to his wife he wrote: "I am doing something often done by old men of my age: leaving this world to live out my last days alone and in quietude." p. 719

11. "We have done with the old world...."—lines from the "Russian Marseillaise", sung to the same tune as that written by Rouget de Lisle in 1792. The text of the "Russian Marseillaise" was written by the Narodnik Pyotr Lavrov, and first printed in the newspaper *Vperyod* No. 12, June 1, 1875, under the title "A New Song".p. 721

12. "...and the tsar's a prisoner?"—on the demand of the Petrograd Soviet, the now-abdicated Nicholas II was arrested on March 8, 1917. At first he and his family were confined to the palace in Tsarskoye Selo, then they were dispatched to Tobolsk.

VASSA ZHELEZNOVA

(Second version)

First published in the book *The Nineteenth Year*. Almanach Nine, Moscow, 1936.

The play was re-written in December 1935 in the Crimea. In the late months of that year the Moscow Art Theatre company had started rehearsing the play in its pre-revolutionary version (1910). On December 22, 1933 Gorky sent a telegram to Bersenev, the director of the theatre, saying, "Please stop rehearsals. In January I will send you a completely new text with new characters. I see no point in staging the play in its old form."

When he had read the new text which Gorky sent him, Bersenev wrote an article for *Pravda* called "'Vassa Zheleznova' at the Moscow Art Theatre". In it he said: "The play has been written anew....

"What is this new play about? About the same frightful and appalling realities of Russia before the revolution that the writer had unmasked in his greatest works.

"The play starts very forcefully. The opening scenes depict the turgid atmosphere of putrescent family life. Events mount up, the spring of the action tightens, and the characters are revealed ever more fully" (*Pravda*, No. 19, January 19, 1936).

Rehearsals were started by many of the country's

theatres. But Gorky was not fated to see his last play presented on the stage.

1. "...how the German Socialists get along with their king."—Gury Krotkikh is evidently referring to the petty bourgeois socialist trend led by Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-1864) who compromised with the Prussian monarchy.

p. 769

2. "In autumn's dreary twilight...."—from Pushkin's poem "Romance" (1814). "Romance" became very popular in the 19th century, and was widely sung as a folk-song.

p. 780

3. "We find it so easy to marry...."—from Gorky's unfinished libretto "Smart Guys".

p. 788

4. "Onegin and Natalya here know...."—the reference is to the hero of Pushkin's poem "Eugene Onegin" or, as in Russian, "Yevgeny Onegin".

p. 793

5. "League of the Russian people"—a pogrom-organising league, better known as the "Black Hundreds", was formed in October 1905, and existed until the February revolution of 1917, with branches in many towns.

p. 797

6. "Whence comest thou, o lovely child!"—the last line of Pushkin's drama "The Mermaid" (1832).

p. 814

7. "Don't tempt me without cause...."—from a poem by Baratynsky set to music by Glinka (1821).

p. 816

8. "Fill it up, lad, fill it up...."—from a well-known student song.

p. 821

9. "I'm not angry, though my heart aches in my breast."—from a poem by Heine set to music by Schumann (1840).

p. 824

9. "Little bird of God so small...."—Prokhor's song is a deliberate misquotation from Pushkin's poem "The Gypsies" (1827).

p. 827

