

Savva and the Life of Man eBook

Savva and the Life of Man by Leonid Andreyev

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INTRODUCTION

For the last twenty years Leonid Andreyev and Maxim Gorky have by turns occupied the centre of the stage of Russian literature. Prophetic vision is no longer required for an estimate of their permanent contribution to the intellectual and literary development of Russia. It represents the highest ideal expression of a period in Russian history that was pregnant with stirring and far-reaching events—the period of revolution and counter-revolution. It was a period when Russian society passed from mood to mood at an extremely rapid tempo: from energetic aggressiveness, exultation, high hope, and confident trust in the triumph of the people's cause to apathetic inaction, gloom, despair, frivolity, and religious mysticism. This important dramatic epoch in the national life of Russia Andreyev and Gorky wrote down with such force and passion that they became recognized at once as the leading exponents of their time.

Despite this close external association, their work differs essentially in character. In fact, it is scarcely possible to conceive of greater artistic contrasts. Gorky is plain, direct, broad, realistic, elemental. His art is native, not acquired. Civilization and what learning he obtained later through the reading of books have influenced, not the manner or method of his writing, but only its purpose and occasionally its subject matter. It is significant to watch the dismal failure Gorky makes of it whenever, in concession to the modern literary fashion, he attempts the mystical. Symbolism is foreign to him except in its broadest aspects. His characters, though hailing from a world but little known, and often extreme and extremely peculiar, are on the whole normal.

Andreyev, on the other hand, is a child of civilization, steeped in its culture, and while as rebellious against some of the things of civilization as Gorky, he reacts to them in quite a different way. He is wondrously sensitive to every development, quickly appropriates what is new, and always keeps in the vanguard. His art is the resultant of all that the past ages have given us, of the things that we have learned in our own day, and of what we are just now learning. With this art Andreyev succeeds in communicating ideas, thoughts, and feelings so fine, so tenuous, so indefinite as to appear to transcend human expression. He does not care whether the things he writes about are true, whether his characters are real. What he aims to give is a true impression. And to convey this impression he does not scorn to use mysticism, symbolism, or even plain realism. His favorite characters are degenerates, psychopaths, abnormal eccentrics, or just creatures of fancy corresponding to no reality. Frequently, however, the characters, whether real or unreal, are as such of merely secondary importance, the chief aim being the interpretation of an idea or set of ideas, and the characters functioning primarily only as a medium for the embodiment of those ideas.

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In one respect Gorky and Andreyev are completely at one—in their bold aggressiveness. The emphatic tone, the attitude of attack, first introduced into Russian literature by Gorky, was soon adopted by most of his young contemporaries, and became the characteristic mark of the literature of the Revolution. By that token the literature of Young Russia of that day is as easily recognized as is the English literature of the Dryden and Pope epoch by its sententiousness. It contrasts sharply with the tone of passive resignation and hopelessness of the preceding period. Even Chekhov, the greatest representative of what may be called the period of despondence, was caught by the new spirit of optimism and activism, so that he reflected clearly the new influence in his later works. But while in Gorky the revolt is chiefly social—manifesting itself through the world of the submerged tenth, the disinherited masses, *les misérables*, who, becoming conscious of their wrongs, hurl defiance at their oppressors, make mock of their civilization, and threaten the very foundations of the old order—Andreyev transfers his rebellion to the higher regions of thought and philosophy, to problems that go beyond the merely better or worse social existence, and asks the larger, much more difficult questions concerning the general destiny of man, the meaning of life and the reason for death.

Social problems, it is true, also interest Andreyev. “The Red Laugh” is an attack on war through a portrayal of the ghastly horrors of the Russo-Japanese War; “Savva,” one of the plays of this volume, is taken bodily (with a poet’s license, of course) from the actual revolutionary life of Russia; “King Hunger” is the tragedy of the uprising of the hungry masses and the underworld. Indeed, of the works written during the conflict and for some time afterward, all centre more or less upon the social problems which then agitated Russia. But with Andreyev the treatment of all questions tends to assume a universal aspect. He envisages phenomena from a broad, cosmic point of view; he beholds things *sub specie aeternitatis*. The philosophical tendency of his mind, though amply displayed even in works like “Savva”—which is purely a character and social drama—manifests itself chiefly by his strong propensity for such subjects as those treated in “To the Stars,” “The Life of Man,” and “Anathema.” In these plays Andreyev plunges into the deepest problems of existence, and seeks to posit once more and, if possible, to solve in accordance with the modern spirit and modern knowledge those questions over which the mightiest brains of man have labored for centuries: Whence? Whither? What is the significance of man’s life? Why is death?

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If Spinoza's dictum be true, that "a wise man's meditation is not of death but of life," then Andreyev is surely not a wise man. Some philosophers might have written their works even without a guarantee against immortality, though Schopenhauer, who exercised a influence on the young Andreyev, was of the opinion that "without death there would hardly be any philosophy"; but of Andreyev it is certain that the bulk of his works would not have been written, and could not be what they are, were it not for the fact of death. If there is one idea that can be said to dominate the author of "The Life of Man," it is the idea of death. Constantly he keeps asking: Why all this struggling, all this pain, all this misery in the world, if it must end in nothing? The suffering of the great mass of mankind makes life meaningless while it lasts, and death puts an end even to this life. Again and again Andreyev harks back to the one thought from which all his other thoughts seem to flow as from their fountain-head. Lazarus, in the story by that name, is but the embodiment of death. All who behold him, who look into his eyes, are never again the same as they were; indeed, most of them are utterly ruined. "The Seven Who Were Hanged" tells how differently different persons take death. Grim death lurks in the background of almost every work, casting a fearful gloom, mocking the life of man, laughing to scorn his joys and his sorrows, propounding, sphinx-like, the big riddle that no Oedipus will ever be able to solve.

For it is not merely the destructive power of death, not merely its negation of life, that terrifies our author. The pitchy darkness that stretches beyond, the impossibility of penetrating the veil that separates existence from non-existence—in a word, the riddle of the universe—is, to a mind constituted like Andreyev's, a source of perhaps even greater disquiet. Never was a man hungrier than he with "the insatiable hunger for Eternity"; never was a man more eager to pierce the mystery of life and catch a glimpse of the beyond while yet alive.

Combined with the perplexing darkness that so pitifully limits man's vision is the indifference of the forces that govern his destiny. The wrongs he suffers may cry aloud to heaven, but heaven does not hear him. Whether he writhe in agony or be prostrated in the dust (against all reason and justice), he has no appeal, societies, the bulk of mankind, may be plunged in misery—who or what cares? Man is surrounded by indifference as well as by darkness.

Often, when an idea has gained a powerful hold on Andreyev, he pursues it a long time, presenting it under various aspects, until at last it assumes its final form, rounded and completed, as it were, in some figure or symbol. As such it appears either as the leading theme of an entire story or drama, or as an important subordinate theme. Thus we have seen that the idea of death finds concrete expression in the character of Lazarus. The idea of loneliness, of the isolation of the individual from all other human beings, even though he be physically surrounded by large numbers, is embodied in the story of "The City." Similarly the conception of the mystery and the indifference by which man finds himself confronted is definitely set forth in the figure of *Someone in Gray* in "The Life of Man."

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The riddle, the indifference—these are the two characteristics of human destiny that loom large in Andreyev's conception of it as set forth in that figure. *Someone in Gray*—who is he? No one knows. No definite name can be given him, for no one knows. He is mysterious in "The Life of Man," where he is *Man's* constant companion; he is mysterious in "Anathema," where he guards the gate leading from this finite world to eternity. And as *Man's* companion he looks on indifferently, apparently unconcerned whether *Man* meets with good or bad fortune. *Man's* prayers do not move him. *Man's* curses leave him calm.

It is Andreyev's gloomy philosophy, no doubt, that so often causes him to make his heroes lonely, so that loneliness is developed into a principle of human existence, in some cases, as in "The City," becoming the dominant influence over a man's life. Particularly the men whom life has treated senselessly and cruelly, whom it has dealt blow after blow until their spirits are crushed out—it is such men in particular who become lonely, seek isolation and retirement, and slink away into some hole to die alone. This is the significance of the saloon scene in "The Life of Man." The environment of the drunkards who are withdrawn from life, and therefore lonely themselves, accentuates the loneliness of *Man* in the last scene. It is his loneliness that Andreyev desired to bring into relief. His frequenting the saloon is but an immaterial detail, one of the means of emphasizing this idea. To remove all possible misunderstanding on this point, Andreyev wrote a variant of the last scene, "The Death of Man," in which, instead of dying in a saloon surrounded by drunkards, *Man* dies in his own house surrounded by his heirs. "The *loneliness* of the dying and unhappy man," Andreyev wrote in a prefatory note to this variant, "may just as fully be characterized by the presence of the *Heirs*."

However, for all the gloom of his works, Andreyev is not a pessimist. Under one of his pictures he has written: "Though it destroys individuals, the truth saves mankind." The misery in the world may be ever so great; the problems that force themselves upon man's mind may seem unanswerable; the happenings in the external world may fill his soul with utter darkness, so that he despairs of finding any meaning, any justification in life. And yet, though his reason deny it, his soul tells him: "The truth saves mankind." After all, *Man* is not a failure. For though misfortunes crowd upon him, he remains intact in soul, unbroken in spirit. He carries off the victory because he does not surrender. He dies as a superman, big in his defiance of destiny. This must be the meaning Andreyev attached to *Man's* life. We find an interpretation of it, as it were, in "Anathema," in which *Someone* sums up the fate of *David*—who lived an even sadder life than *Man* and died a more horrible death—in these words: "David has achieved immortality, and he *lives immortal* in the deathlessness of fire. David has achieved immortality, and he *lives immortal* in the deathlessness of light which is life."

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Andreyev was born at Orel in 1871 and was graduated from the gymnasium there. According to his own testimony, he never seems to have been a promising student. "In the seventh form," he tells us, "I was always at the bottom of my class." He lost his father early, and often went hungry while studying law at the University of St. Petersburg. In the University of Moscow, to which he went next, he fared better. One of the means that he used to eke out a livelihood was portrait painting to order, and in this work he finally attained such proficiency that his price rose from \$1.50 apiece to \$6.00.

In 1897 he began to practise law, but he gave most of his time to reporting court cases for the "Courier," a Moscow newspaper, and later to writing *feuilletons* and stories. He tried only one civil case, and that one he lost. His work in the "Courier" attracted Gorky's attention, and the older writer zealously interested himself in Andreyev's behalf.

In 1902 his story named "The Abyss" appeared and created a sensation immediately. Even Countess Tolstoy joined in the dispute which raged over this story, attacking it as matter unfit for literature. But the verdict of Andreyev's generation was in his favor. Since then nearly every new work of his has been received as an important event in Russia and has sent the critics scurrying to his attack or defence. His first drama, "To the Stars," appeared while the Russians were engaged in fighting for liberty (1905), and, naturally enough, it reflects that struggle. "Savva" was published early the next year, and "The Life of Man" later in the same year. The production of "Savva" is prohibited in Russia. It has been played in Vienna and Berlin, and recently it was staged again in Berlin by "Die Freie Buehne," meeting with signal success.

A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF PLAYS

By LEONID ANDREYEV

TO THE STARS (K Zvezdam), 1905;
SAVVA (Savva), 1906;
THE LIFE OF MAN (Zhizn Chelovieka), 1906;
KING HUNGER (Tzar Golod), 1907;
THE BLACK MASKS (Chiorniya Maski), 1908;
THE DAYS OF OUR LIFE (Dni Nashey Zhizni), 1908;
ANATHEMA (Anatema), 1909;
ANFISSA (Anfissa), 1909;
GAUDEAMUS (Gaudeamus), 1910;
THE OCEAN (Okean), 1911;
"HONOR" ("Chest"), 1911 (?);
THE PRETTY SABINE WOMEN (Prekrasniya Sabinianki), 1911;
PROFESSOR STORITZYN (Professor Storitzyn), 1912;
CATHERINE (Yekaterina Ivanovna), 1913;
THOU SHALT NOT KILL (Ne Ubi), 1914.



SAVVA or IGNIS SANAT

(SAVVA)

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

1906

PERSONS

YEGOR IVANOVICH TROPININ, *innkeeper in a monastic suburb. An elderly man of about fifty, with an important manner and a item, dignified way of speaking.*

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ANTON (*Tony*), anywhere from thirty-five to thirty-eight, bloated from drinking and always under the influence of alcohol. His face is bloodless, sad, and sleepy. He has a sparse beard, speaks slowly and painfully, and never laughs.

OLYMPIADA (*Lipa*), twenty-eight years old. She is fair and rather good-looking. There is a touch of monastic severity in her dress.

SAVVA, twenty-three, large, broad-shouldered, with a suggestion of the peasant in his looks. He walks with a slight stoop, elbows out, feet in. The motions of his hands are rounded and graceful, his palms being turned up as if he were carrying something. His features are large and rough-hewn, and his cheeks and chin are covered with a soft light down. When agitated or angry, he turns gray as dust, his movements become quick and agile, and his stoop disappears. He wears the blouse and boots of a workingman.

PELAGUEYA, a freckled, colorless woman, of about thirty, wearing the ordinary dress of her class. She is dirty and untidy.

SPERANSKY GRIGORY PETROVICH, an ex-seminarist; tall, very lean, with a pale, long face, and a tuft of dark hair on his chin. He has long, smooth hair parted in the middle and falling on each side of his face. He is dressed either in a long, dark overcoat or in a dark frock-coat.

FATHER KONDRATY, a friar, forty-two years old, ugly, narrow-chested, with swollen, animated eyes.

VASSYA, a novice, a strong and athletic youth of nineteen. He has a round, cheerful, smiling face, and curly, lustrous hair.

KING HEROD, a pilgrim, about fifty. He has a dry, emaciated face, black from sunburn and road dust. His gray, dishevelled hair and beard give him a savage appearance. He has only one arm, the left. He is as tall as Savva.

A FAT MONK.

A GRAY MONK.

A MAN IN PEASANT OVERCOAT. Monks, pilgrims, cripples, beggars, blind men and women, monstrosities.

The action takes place at the beginning of the twentieth century in a rich monastery celebrated for its wonder-working ikon of the Saviour. There is an interval of about two weeks between the first and the last act.

SAVVA

THE FIRST ACT

The interior of a house in a monastic suburb. Two rooms, with a third seen back of them. They are old, ramshackle, and filthy. The first one is a sort of dining-room, large, with dirty, low ceiling and smeared wall-paper that in places has come loose from the wall. There are three little windows; the one giving on the yard reveals a shed, a wagon, and some household utensils. Cheap wooden furniture; a large, bare table. On the walls, which are dotted with flies, appear pictures of monks and views of the monastery. The second room, a parlor, is somewhat cleaner. It has window curtains of muslin, two flower-pots with dried geraniums, a sofa, a round table covered with a tablecloth, and shelves with dishes. The door to the left in the first room leads to the tavern. When open, it admits the sound of a man's doleful, monotonous singing.



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It is noon of a hot and perfectly still summer's day. Now and then the clucking of hens is heard under the windows. The clock in the belfry of the monastery strikes every half-hour, a long, indistinct wheeze preceding the first stroke.

Pelagueya, who is pregnant, is scrubbing the floor. Seized with giddiness, she staggers to her feet and leans against the wall, staring before her with a vacant gaze._

PELAGUEYA

Oh, God! (*She starts to scrub the floor again*)

LIPA (*enters, faint from heat*)

How stifling! I don't know what to do with myself. My head seems full of pins and needles. (*She sits down*) Polya, say, Polya.

PELAGUEYA

What is it?

LIPA

Where's father?

PELAGUEYA

He's sleeping.

LIPA

Oh, I can't stand it. (*She opens the window, then takes a turn round the room, moving aimlessly and, glancing into the tavern*) Tony's sleeping too—behind the counter. It would be nice to go in, bathing, but it's too hot to walk to the river. Polya, why don't you speak? Say something.

PELAGUEYA

What?



LIPA

Scrubbing, scrubbing, all the time.

PELAGUEYA

Yes.

LIPA

And in a day from now the floors will be dirty again. I don't see what pleasure you get from working the way you do.

PELAGUEYA.

I have to.

LIPA

I just took a peep at the street. It's awful. Not a human being in sight, not even a dog. All is dead. And the monastery has such a queer look. It seems to be hanging in the air. You have the feeling that if you were to blow on it, it would begin to swing and fly away. Why are you so silent, Polya? Where is Savva? Have you seen him?

PELAGUEYA

He's in the pasture playing jackstones with the children.

LIPA

He's a funny fellow.

PELAGUEYA

I don't see anything funny about it. He ought to be working, that's what he ought to be doing, not playing like a baby. I don't like your Savva.

LIPA (*lazily*)

No, Polya, he is good.

PELAGUEYA

Good? I spoke to him and told him how hard the work was for me. “Well,” he says, “if you want to be a horse, pull.” What did he come here for? I wish he’d stayed where he was.



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LIPA

He came home to see his folks. Why, it's ten years since he left. He was a mere boy then.

PELAGUEYA

A lot he cares for his folks. Yegor Ivanovich is just dying to get rid of him. The neighbors don't know what to make of him either. He dresses like a workingman and carries himself like a lord, doesn't speak to anybody and just rolls his eyes like a saint. I am afraid of his eyes.

LIPA

Nonsense. He has beautiful eyes.

PELAGUEYA

Can't he see that it's hard for me to be doing all the housework myself? A while ago he saw me carrying a pail full of water. I was straining with all my might. He didn't even say good morning; just, passed on. I have met a lot of people in my life, but never anybody whom I disliked so much.

LIPA

I'm so hot, everything seems to be turning round like wheels. Listen, Polya, if you don't want to work, don't. No one compels you to.

PELAGUEYA

If I won't work, who will? Will you?

LIPA

No, I won't. We'll hire a servant.



PELAGUEYA

Yes, of course, you have plenty of money.

LIPA

And what's the use of keeping it?

PELAGUEYA

I'll die soon and then you'll get a servant. I won't last much longer. I have had one miscarriage, and I guess a second child will be the end of me. I don't care. It's better than to live the way I do. Oh! *(She clasps her waist)*

LIPA

But for God's sake, who is asking you to? Stop working. Don't scrub.

PELAGUEYA

Yes, stop it, and all of you will be going about saying: "How dirty the house is!"

LIPA *(weary from the heat and Pelagueya's talk)*

Oh, I'm so tired of it!

PELAGUEYA

Don't you think I feel tired too? What are you complaining about anyhow? You are a lady. All you have to do is pray and read. I don't even get time to pray. Some day I'll drop into the next world all of a sudden just as I am, with my skirt tucked up under my belt: "Good morning! How d'you do!"

LIPA

You'll be scrubbing floors in the next world too.

PELAGUEYA

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No, in the next world it's you who'll be scrubbing floors, and I'll sit with folded hands like a lady. In heaven we'll be the first ones, while you and your Savva, for your pride and your hard hearts—

LIPA

Now, Polya, am I not sorry for you?

YEGOR IVANOVICH TROPININ (*enters, still sleepy, his beard turned to one side, the collar of his shirt unbuttoned; breathing heavily*) Whew! Say, Polya, bring me some cider. Quick! (*Pause*) Who opened the window?

LIPA

I did.

YEGOR

What for?

LIPA

It's hot. The stove in the restaurant makes it so close here you can't breathe.

YEGOR

Shut it, shut it, I say. If it's too hot for you, you can go down into the cellar.

LIPA

But what do you want to have the window shut for?

YEGOR

Because. Shut it! You have been told to shut the window—then shut it! What are you waiting for? (*Lipa, shrugging her shoulders, closes the window and is about to leave*) Where are you going? The moment your father appears, you run away. Sit down!



LIPA

But you don't want me.

YEGOR

Never mind whether I want you or not—sit down! Oh, my! *(He yawns and crosses himself)* Where is Savva?

LIPA

I don't know.

YEGOR

Tell him I'll turn him out.

LIPA

Tell him so yourself.

YEGOR

Fool! *(He yawns and crosses himself)* Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us sinners! What was it I was dreaming about just now?

LIPA

I don't know.

YEGOR

Who asked you? You stupid, how could you tell what I was dreaming? You've got brains, haven't you?

PELAGUEYA *(handing him cider)*

There.

YEGOR

There. Put it down and don't "there" me. (*Takes the jug and drinks*) What was I talking about? (*Pelagueya finishes scrubbing the floor*) Oh yes, about the Father Superior. A smart fellow he is. You'll have to go a long way to find another like him. He had the old coffin exchanged for a new one. The pilgrims chewed the old one to pieces, so he put a new one in its place. He put a new one in place of the old one. They'll chew this, one to pieces too, the fools! Anything you give them, the fools! Do you hear or don't you?



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LIPA

I hear. What's so remarkable about it? A swindle, that's all.

YEGOR

What's remarkable about it is that, he didn't ask your advice. They chewed the old one to pieces, so he put a new one in its place exactly like it; Yes, just exactly like the one in which the saint lay before. Remember us in heaven where thou dwellest, O Saint! (*He crosses himself and yawns*) You can lose your teeth on this one too. They chewed the old one to pieces completely. Where are you off to? Sit down!

LIPA

I can't, it's so hot in here.

YEGOR

But I can. Sit down, you won't melt. (*Pause*) They chewed up the old one, so he put up a new one. Where is Savva?

PELAGUEYA

He's playing; jackstones with the children.

YEGOR

I'm not asking you. What time is it?

PELAGUEYA

It just struck two.

YEGOR

Tell him I'll turn him out. I won't stand it.

LIPA

Stand what? Be reasonable.

YEGOR

I won't stand it. Who is he anyway? Never at home in time for dinner. He comes and feeds like a dog by himself—knocks about at night and doesn't lock the gate. I went out yesterday and found the gate wide open. If we are robbed, who'll pay for it?

LIPA

There are no thieves here. What thieves have you ever seen in this place?

YEGOR

What thieves? A lot. When all people are asleep, he is knocking about. Who ever heard of such a thing?

LIPA

But if he doesn't want to sleep, what is he to do?

YEGOR

What, you too? He doesn't want to? Let him go to bed, and he'll sleep. No one wants to sleep, but once you lie down you fall asleep. He doesn't want to? I know him. Who asked him to come? He was making bank-notes over there—then why didn't he stay where he was and do what he pleased? What business has he here?

LIPA

What bank-notes?

YEGOR

What bank-notes? Not real ones. Nothing is done to you for making real bank-notes. Counterfeit bank-notes, that's what. Not the sort of thing you get patted on the head for, when you are caught, no sirree! It's very strict now. I'll go to the police captain and tell him: "It's like this—just search him."



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LIPA

Oh, nonsense.

PELAGUEYA

You are the only, one who doesn't know it. Everybody else knows it.

LIPA

Oh, Lord!

YEGOR

Well, about the Lord we know better than you. You needn't appeal to Him. I want you to tell Savva that I am not afraid of him. He didn't strike the right person. I'll just make him skip. I'll turn him out. Let him go where he came from. The idea of my having to be responsible for his robberies. Who's ever heard of such a thing?

LIPA

You are not quite wide awake, father, that's what's the matter with you.

YEGOR

I am wide awake all right, and have been for a long time. What I'd like to know is, are *you* wide awake? Look out, Lipa, don't let it happen to you too.

LIPA

What?

YEGOR

It. (*He yawns and crosses himself*) If mother were to rise from her grave now and see her children, she would be delighted. Fine children, she would say. I have nursed you, and brought you up, and what's the result? Regular good-for-nothing scamps. Tony'll soon begin to drink again. I can see it on his face. Who's ever heard of such a thing?



People will soon be coming here for the feast-day, and I'll have to work alone for the whole bunch. Polya, hand me that match from the floor—there. No, not there, you blind goose. There, you stupid.

PELAGUEYA (*hunting for the match*)

I don't see it.

YEGOR

I'll take you by the back of your neck and give you such a shaking that you'll see mighty quick. There it is, damn you!

LIPA (*faint*)

Oh, God, what a blistering heat!

YEGOR

There it is. Where are you crawling? Under the chair. There, damn you!

SAVVA (*enters gayly, the pocket of his blouse full of jackstones*) I won six pair.

YEGOR

Well, the idea!

SAVVA

I finished that rascal Misha, cleared him all up. What are you mumbling about there?

YEGOR

Nothing. Only I wish you'd address me a little more politely.

SAVVA (*paying no attention to him*)

Lipa, I won six pair.

LIPA



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How can you play in such heat?

SAVVA

Wait, I am going to put the jackstones away. I have eighteen pair now. Misha, the little rascal, plays well. (*He goes out*)

YEGOR (*rising*)

I don't want to see him any more. Tell him to get out of here at once.

LIPA

All right, I will.

YEGOR

Don't say "all right," but do what your father tells you. A fine lot of brats—that's a sure thing! Yes, yes. (*Goes*) If mother saw them—

PELAGUEYA

He speaks of mother as if he weren't the one that drove her to an early grave. He talked her to death, the old scold! He just talks and talks, and nags and nags, and he doesn't know himself what he wants.

LIPA

To be with you is like being caught in the wheel of a machine. My head is spinning round and round.

PELAGUEYA

Then why don't you go away with your Savva? What are you waiting for?

LIPA

Look here, why are you angry with me?



PELAGUEYA

I am not angry. I am telling the truth. You don't want to marry. You are disgusted with all your beaux. Why don't you go into a convent?

LIPA

I won't go into a convent, but I will go away from here, soon enough, I think.

PELAGUEYA

Well, go! No one is keeping you. The road is wide open.

LIPA

Ah, Polya, you are angry and sulky with me. You don't know how I spend my nights thinking about you. At night I lie awake and think and think about you, and about all the people that are unhappy—all of them.

PELAGUEYA

What do you want to think about me for? You had better think about yourself.

LIPA

And no one knows it. Well, what's the use of talking? You couldn't understand anyhow. I am sorry for you, Polya. (*Pelagueya laughs*) What's the matter?

PELAGUEYA

If you are sorry for me, why don't you carry out that pail? The way I am, I shouldn't be lifting heavy things. Why don't you help me, if you are so sorry for me?

LIPA (*her face darkening, then brightening again*) Give it to me. (*She picks up the pail and starts to carry it away*)



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PELAGUEYA (*spitefully*)

Hypocrite! Let go! Where are you going? (*She carries out the pail and returns for the other things*)

SAVVA (*entering; to his sister*)

Why is your face so red?

LIPA

It's hot.

[Pelagueya laughs.]

SAVVA

Say, Pelagueya, has Kondraty inquired for me?

PELAGUEYA

Kondraty! What Kondraty?

SAVVA

Kondraty, the friar; he looks something like a sparrow.

PELAGUEYA

I didn't see any Kondraty. Like a sparrow! That's a funny way of putting it.

SAVVA

Tell Tony to come here, won't you?

PELAGUEYA

Tell him yourself.



SAVVA

Well, well!

PELAGUEYA (*calls through the door before she goes out into the tavern*) Anthony, Savva wants you.

LIPA

What do you want him for?

SAVVA

What a queer habit you have here of plying a person with questions all the time. Where, who, why, what for?

LIPA (*slightly offended*)

You needn't answer if you don't want to.

TONY (*enters, speaking slowly and with difficulty*)

Who wants me?

SAVVA

I am expecting Kondraty here—you know Kondraty, don't you? Send him in when he comes.

TONY

Who are you?

SAVVA

And send in two bottles of whiskey too, do you hear?

TONY

Maybe I do and maybe I don't. Maybe I'll send the whiskey and maybe I won't.



SAVVA

What a sceptic. You've grown silly, Tony.

LIPA

Leave him alone, Savva. He has got that from the seminary student, from Speransky. Anyhow, he is full of—

TONY (*sitting down*)

I didn't get it from anybody. I can understand everything myself. The blood has congealed in my heart.

SAVVA

That's from drink, Tony. Stop drinking.

TONY

The blood has congealed in my heart. You think I don't know what's what. A while ago you weren't here with us, and all of a sudden you came. Yes, I understand everything. I have visions.

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SAVVA

What do you see? God?

TONY

There is no God.

SAVVA

How's that?

TONY

And no devil either. There's nothing, no people, no animals, nothing.

SAVVA

What is there then?

TONY

There are only faces, a whole lot of faces. It's faces, faces, faces. They are very funny, and I keep laughing all the time. I just sit still, and the faces come jumping and gliding past me, jumping and gliding. You've got a very funny face too, Savva. *(Sadly)* It's enough to make one die of laughter.

SAVVA *(laughing gayly)*

What kind of a face have I?

TONY

That's the kind of face you have. *(Pointing his finger at him)* She also has a face, and she. And father too. And then there are other faces. There are a lot of faces. I sit in the tavern and see everything. Nothing escapes me. You can't fool me. Some faces are small and some are large, and all of them glide and glide—Some are far away, and some are as close to me as if they wanted to kiss me or bite my nose. They have teeth.



SAVVA

All right, Tony, now you can go. We'll talk about the faces later. Your own face is funny enough.

TONY

Yes, of course. I, too, have a face.

SAVVA

All right, all right. Go now. Don't forget to send in the whiskey.

TONY

As in the daytime so at night. A lot of faces. (*From the door*) And in regards to whiskey, maybe I'll send it and maybe I won't. I can't tell yet.

SAVVA (*to Lipa*)

Has he been that way a long time?

LIPA

I don't know. I think so. He drinks an awful lot.

PELAGUEYA (*going*)

No wonder. You're enough to drive a man to drink. Cranks. (*Exit*)

LIPA

My, how stifling! I don't know what to do with myself. Say, Savva, why aren't you nicer to Polya? She is such a wretched creature.

SAVVA

A slavish soul.

LIPA

It isn't her fault if she's that way.

SAVVA (*coldly*)

Nor mine either.



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LIPA

Oh, Savva, if you only knew the terrible life people lead here. The men drink, and beat their wives, and the women—

SAVVA

I know.

LIPA

You say it so calmly. I have been waiting very much to have a talk with you.

SAVVA

Go ahead.

LIPA

You'll soon be leaving us, I suppose.

SAVVA

Yes.

LIPA

Then I won't have any chance to talk to you. You are scarcely ever at home. This is the first time, pretty nearly. It seems so strange that you should enjoy playing with the children, you a grown man, big as a bear.

SAVVA (merrily)

No, Lipa, they play very well. Misha is very good at the game, and I have a hard time holding my end of it. I lost him three pairs yesterday.



LIPA

Why, he is only ten years old.—

SAVVA

Well, what of it? The children are the only human beings here. They are the wisest part of the—

LIPA (*with a smile*)

And I? How about me?

SAVVA (*looking at her*)

You? Why, you are like the rest.

[A pause. Being offended, Lipa's languor disappears to some extent.]

LIPA

Maybe I bore you.

SAVVA

No, you make no difference to me one way or another. I am never bored.

LIPA (*with a constrained smile*)

Thank you, I am glad of that at least. Were you in the monastery to-day? You go there often, don't you?

SAVVA

Yes, I was there. Why?

LIPA

I suppose you don't remember—I love our monastery. It is so beautiful. At times it looks so pensive. I like it because it's so old. Its age gives it a solemnity, a stern serenity and detachment.



SAVVA

Do you read many books?

LIPA (*blushing*)

I used to read a lot. You know I spent four winters in Moscow with Aunt Glasha. Why do you ask?

SAVVA

Never mind. Go on.

LIPA

Does what I say sound ridiculous?



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SAVVA

No, go on.

LIPA

The monastery is really a remarkable place. There are nice spots there which no one ever visits, somewhere between the mute walls, where there is nothing but grass and fallen stones and a lot of old, old litter. I love to linger there, especially at twilight, or on hot sunny days like to-day. I close my eyes, and I seem to look far, far into the distant past—at those who built it and those who first prayed in it. There they walk along the path carrying bricks and singing something, so softly, so far away. (*Closing her eyes*) So softly, so softly.

SAVVA

I don't like the old. As to the building of the monastery, it was done by serfs, of course; and when they carried bricks they didn't sing, but quarrelled and cursed one another. That's more like it.

LIPA (*opening her eyes*)

Those are my dreams. You see, Savva, I am all alone here. I have nobody to talk to. Tell me—You won't be angry, will you?—Tell me, just me alone, why did you come here to us? It wasn't to pray. It wasn't for the feast-day. You don't look like a pilgrim.

SAVVA (*frowning*)

I don't like you to be so curious.

LIPA

How can you think I am? Do I look as if I were curious? You have been here for two weeks, and you ought to see that I am lonely. I am lonely, Savva. Your coming was to me like manna fallen from the sky. You are the first living human being that has come here from over there, from real life. In Moscow I lived very quietly, just reading my books; and here—you see the sort of people we have here.

SAVVA

Do you think it's different in other places?



LIPA

I don't know. That's what I should like to find out from you. You have seen so much. You have even been abroad.

SAVVA

Only for a short time.

LIPA

That makes no difference. You have met many cultured, wise, interesting people. You have lived with them. How do they live? What kind of people are they? Tell me all about it.

SAVVA

A mean, contemptible lot.

LIPA

Is that so? You don't say so!

SAVVA



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They live just as you do here—a stupid, senseless existence. The only difference is in the language they speak. But that makes it still worse. The justification for cattle is that, they are without speech. But when the cattle become articulate, begin to speak, defend themselves and express ideas then the situation becomes intolerable, unmitigatedly repulsive. Their dwelling-places are different too—yes—but that’s a small thing. I was in a city inhabited by a hundred thousand people. The windows in the house of that city are all small. Those living in them are all fond of light, but it never occurs to anyone that the windows might be made larger. And when a new house is built, they put in the same kind of windows, just as small, just as they have always been.

LIPA

The idea! I never would have thought it. But they can’t all be like that. You must have met good people who knew how to live.

SAVVA

I don’t know how to make you understand. Yes, I did meet, if not altogether good people, yet—The last people with whom I lived were a pretty good sort. They didn’t accept life ready-made, but tried to make it over to suit themselves. But—

LIPA

Who were they—students?

SAVVA

No. Look here—how about your tongue—is it of the loose kind?

LIPA

Savva, you ought to be ashamed!

SAVVA

All right. Now then. You’ve read of people who make bombs—little bombs, you understand? Now if they see anybody who interferes with life, they take him off. They’re called anarchists. But that isn’t quite correct. (*Contemptuously*) Nice anarchists they are!



LIPA (*starting back, awestruck*)

What are you talking about? You can't possibly be in earnest. It isn't true. And you in it, too? Why, you look so simple and talk so simply, and suddenly—I was hot a moment ago, but now I am cold, (*The rooster crows-under the window, calling the chickens to share some seed he has found*)

SAVVA

There now—you're frightened. First you want me to tell you, and then—

LIPA

Don't mind me, Savva, it's nothing. It was so unexpected. I thought such people didn't really exist—that they were just a fiction of the imagination. And then, all of a sudden, to find you, my brother—You are not joking, Savva? Look me straight in the eye.

SAVVA

But why did you get frightened? They are not so terrible after all. In fact, they are very quiet, orderly people, and very deliberate. They meet and meet, and weigh and consider a long time, and then—bang!—a sparrow drops dead. The next minute there is another sparrow in its place, hopping about on the very same branch. Why are you looking at my hands?

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LIPA

Oh, nothing. Give me your hand—no, your right hand.

SAVVA

Here.

LIPA

How heavy it is. Feel how cold mine are. Go on, tell me all about it. It's so interesting.

SAVVA

What's there to tell? They are a brave set of people, I must admit; but it is a bravery of the head, not of the hands. And their heads are partitioned off into little chambers; they are always careful not to do anything which is unnecessary or harmful. Now you can't clear a dense forest by cutting down one tree at a time, can you? That's what they do. While they chop at one end, it grows up at the other. You can't accomplish anything that way; it's labor lost. I proposed a scheme to them, something on a larger scale. They got frightened, wouldn't hear of it. A little weak-kneed they are. So I left them. Let them practise virtue. A narrow-minded bunch. They lack breadth of vision.

LIPA

You say it as calmly as if you were joking.

SAVVA

No, I am not joking.

LIPA

Aren't you afraid?



SAVVA

I? So far I haven't been, and I don't ever expect to be. What worse can happen to a man than to have been born? It's like asking a man who is drowning whether he is not afraid of getting wet. *(Laughs)*

LIPA

So that's the kind you are.

SAVVA

One thing I learned from them: respect for dynamite. It's a powerful instrument, dynamite is—nothing like it for a convincing argument.

LIPA

You are only twenty-three years old. You have no beard yet, not even a moustache.

SAVVA *(feeling his face)*

Yes, a measly growth; but what conclusions do you draw from that?

LIPA

Fear will come to you yet.

SAVVA

No. If I haven't been frightened so far by watching life, there's nothing else to fear. Life, yes. I embrace the earth with my eyes, the whole of it, the entire little planetoid, and I can find nothing more terrible on it than man and human life. And I am not afraid of man.

LIPA *(scarcely listening to him; ecstatically)*

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Yes, that's the word. That's it. Savva, dear, I am not afraid of bodily suffering either. Burn me on a slow fire. Cut me to pieces. I won't cry. I'll laugh. I know I will. But there is another thing I am afraid of. I am afraid of people's suffering, of the misery from which they cannot escape. When in the stillness of the night, broken only by the striking of the hours, I think of how much suffering there is all around us—aimless, needless suffering; suffering one doesn't even know of—when I think of that, I am chilled with terror. I go down on my knees and pray. I pray to God, saying to Him: "Oh, Lord, if there has to be a victim, take me, but give the people joy, give them peace, give them forgetfulness. Oh, Lord, all powerful as Thou art—"

SAVVA

Yes.

LIPA

I have read about a man who was eaten by an eagle, and his flesh grew again overnight. If my body could turn into bread and joy for the people, I would consent to live in eternal torture in order to feed the unfortunate. There'll soon be a holiday here in the monastery—

SAVVA

I know.

LIPA

There is an ikon of the Saviour there with the touching inscription: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden—"

SAVVA

And I will give you rest." I know.

LIPA

It is regarded as a wonder-working ikon. Go there on the feast-day. It's like a torrent pouring into the monastery, an ocean rolling toward its walls; and this whole ocean is made up entirely of human tears, of human sorrow and misery. Such monstrosities,



such cripples. After witnessing one of those scenes, I walk about as in a dream. There are faces with such a depth of misery in them that one can never forget them as long as one lives. Why, Savva, I was a gay young thing before I saw all that. There is one man who comes here every year—they have nicknamed him King Herod—

SAVVA

He is here already. I've seen him.

LIPA

Have you?

SAVVA

Yes, he has got a tragic face.

LIPA

Long ago, when still a young man, he killed his son by accident, and from that day he keeps coming here. He has an awful face. And all of them are waiting for a miracle.

SAVVA

Yes. There is something worse than inescapable human suffering, however.

LIPA



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What?

SAVVA (*lightly*)

Inescapable human stupidity.

LIPA

I don't know.

SAVVA

I do. Here you see only a small fragment of life, but if you could see and hear all of it—
When I first read their newspapers, I laughed and thought it was a joke. I thought they
were published in some asylum for the insane. But I found it was no joke. It was really
serious, Lipa, really serious. And then my head began to ache with an intolerable pain.
(*He presses his hand to his forehead*)

LIPA

Your head began to ache?

SAVVA

Yes. It's a peculiar pain. You don't know what it is like. Few people know what it is.
And the pain continued until I resolved—

LIPA

What?

SAVVA

To annihilate everything.

LIPA

What are you saying?



SAVVA

Yes, yes, everything. All that's old.

LIPA (*in amazement*)

And man?

SAVVA

Man is to remain, of course. What is in his way is the stupidity that, piling up for thousands of years, has grown into a mountain. The modern sages want to build on this mountain, but that, of course, will lead to nothing but making the mountain still higher. It is the mountain itself that must be removed. It must be levelled to its foundation, down to the bare earth. Do you understand?

LIPA

No, I don't understand you. You talk so strangely.

SAVVA

Annihilate everything! The old houses, the old cities, the old literature, the old art. Do you know what art is?

LIPA

Yes, of course I know—pictures, statues. I went to the Tretyakov art gallery.

SAVVA

That's it—the Tretyakov, and other galleries that are bigger still. There are some good things in them, but it will be still better to have the old stuff out of the way. All the old dress must go. Man must be stripped bare and left naked on a naked earth! Then he will build up a new life. The earth must be denuded, Lipa; it must be stripped of its hideous old rags. It deserves to be arrayed in a king's mantle; but what have they done with it? They have dressed it in coarse fustian, in convict clothes. They've built cities, the idiots!



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LIPA

But who will do it? Who's going to destroy everything?

SAVVA

I.

LIPA

You?

SAVVA

Yes, I. I'll begin, and then, when people get to understand what I am after, others will join in. The work will proceed merrily, Lipa. The sky will be hot. Yes. The only thing not worth destroying is science. That would be useless. Science is unchangeable, and if, you destroyed it to-day, it would rise up again the same as before.

LIPA

How much blood will have to be shed? Why, it's horrible!

SAVVA

No more than has been shed already—and there'll be rhyme and reason to it, at least. *(Pause; the hens cluck in the yard; from the same direction comes Tony's sleepy voice: "Polya, father wants you. Where did you put his cap?")*

LIPA

What a scheme! Are you not joking, Savva?

SAVVA

You make me sick with your "you are joking, you are joking."

LIPA

I am afraid of you, Savva. You are so serious about it.

SAVVA

Yes, there are many people who are afraid of me.

LIPA

If you would only smile a little.

SAVVA (looking at her with wide-open eyes and a frank face, and breaking abruptly into a clear, ringing laugh) Oh, you funny girl, what should I be smiling for? I'd rather laugh. *(Both laugh)* Are you afraid of tickling?

LIPA

Stop it! What a boy you are still!

SAVVA

All right. And Kondraty, isn't here yet. I wonder why. Do you think the devil has taken him? The devil is fond of monks, you know.

LIPA

What strange fancies you have. Why, now you are joking—

SAVVA (somewhat surprised)

They are not fancies.

LIPA

My fancies are different. You are a dear now, because you talk to me. In the evening I'll tell you all about myself. We'll take a walk together, and I'll tell you everything.

SAVVA

Very well, I'll listen. Why shouldn't I?

LIPA



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Tell me, Savva, if I may ask—are you in love with a woman?

SAVVA

Ah, switched around to the subject of love after all—just like a woman! I hardly know what to say. I did love a girl, in a way, but she didn't stick it out.

LIPA

Stick out what?

SAVVA

My love, or perhaps myself. All I know is that one fine day she went away and left me.

LIPA (*laughing*)

And you?

SAVVA

Nothing. I remained alone.

LIPA

Have you any friends, comrades?

SAVVA

No.

LIPA

Any enemies? I mean is there anyone whom you particularly dislike, whom you hate?

SAVVA

Yes—God.



LIPA (*incredulously*)

What?

SAVVA

God, I say—the one whom you call your Saviour.

LIPA (*shouting*)

Don't dare speak that way! You've gone out of your mind!

SAVVA

Ah! I touched your sensitive spot, did I?

LIPA

Don't you dare!

SAVVA

I thought you were a gentle dove, but you have a tongue like a snake's. (*He imitates the movements of a snake's tongue with his finger*)

LIPA

Good Lord! How dare you, how can you speak like that of the Saviour? Why, one dares not look at him. Why have you come here?

[Kondraty appears at the door of the tavern, looks around, and enters quietly.]

KONDRATY

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!

SAVVA

Amen! You're very late, my gracious lord!



KONDRATY

I did the will of him who sent me. I was picking young little cucumbers for the Father Superior. He has them made into a dainty dish which he loves dearly for an appetizer. My, what infernal heat! I was in pools of perspiration before I got through.

SAVVA (*to Lipa*)

You see, here is a monk. He likes a drink. His cussing vocabulary isn't bad. He is no fool, and as to women—

KONDRATY



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Don't embarrass the young lady, Mr. Tropinin. In the presence of a lady—

SAVVA

And furthermore, he doesn't believe in God.

KONDRATY

He is joking.

LIPA

I don't like such jokes. What have you come here for?

KONDRATY

I am here by invitation.

SAVVA

I have some business with him.

LIPA (*without looking at Savva*)

What have you come here for?

SAVVA

For nothing that concerns you. You had better have a talk with him. He is a chap that possesses a great deal of curiosity. He's not a fool, either, but knows what's what.

LIPA (*looking searchingly at Savva*)

I know him well, I know him very well.

KONDRATY

To my regret I must admit it's true. I have the unenviable fortune of being known as a man who does not observe the outer forms of conduct. It is on account of that



characteristic I was fired from my position as government clerk, and it's on that account I am now frequently condemned to live for weeks on nothing but bread and water. I cannot act in secret. I am open and above-board. In fact, I fairly cry aloud whatever I do. For example, the circumstances under which I met you, Mr. Tropinin, are such that I am ashamed to recall them.

SAVVA

Don't recall them then.

KONDRATY (*to Lipa*)

I was lying in a mud puddle in all my dignity, like a regular hog.

LIPA (*disgusted*)

All right.

KONDRATY

But I am not ashamed to speak of it; first, because many people saw it, and of course nobody took the trouble to get me out of it except Savva Yegorovich, and secondly, because I regard this as my cross.

LIPA

A fine cross!

KONDRATY

Every man, Miss Olympiada, has his cross. It isn't so very nice to be lying in a mud puddle. Dry ground is pleasanter every time. And do you know, I think half of the water in that puddle was my own tears, and my woeful lamentations made ripples on it—

SAVVA

That's not quite so, Kondraty. You were singing a song: "And we're baptized of him in Jordan"—to a very jolly tune at that.

KONDRATY

You don't say! What of it? So much the worse. It shows to what depths a man will descend.



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SAVVA

Don't assume a melancholy air, father. You're quite a jovial fellow by nature, and the assumption of grief doesn't go well with your face, I assure you.

KONDRATY

True, Savva Yegorovich, I was a jolly fellow; but that was before I entered the monastery. As soon as I came here I took a tumble, so to speak; I lost my joviality and serenity and learned to know what real sorrow is.

[Tony enters and remains standing in the doorway gazing ecstatically at the monk.]

SAVVA

Why so?

KONDRATY (*stepping nearer and speaking in a lowered voice*) There is no God here—there's only the devil. This is a terrible place to live in, on my word it is, Mr. Savva. I am a man with a large experience. It's no easy thing to frighten me. But I am afraid to walk in the hall at night.

SAVVA

What devil?

KONDRATY

The ordinary one. To you, educated people, he appears in a nobler aspect of course; but to us plain, simple people, he reveals himself as he really is.

SAVVA

With horns?

KONDRATY

How can I tell? I never saw the horns; but that's not the point, although I may say that his shadow clearly shows the horns. The thing is that we have no peace in our



monastery; there is always such a noise and clatter there. Everything is quiet outside; but inside there are groans and gnashing of teeth. Some groan, some whine, and some complain about something, you can't tell what. When you pass the doors, you feel as if your soul were taking leave of the world behind every door. Suddenly something glides from around the corner.—and there's a shadow on the wall. Nothing at all—and yet there's a shadow on the wall. In other places it makes no difference. You pay no attention to such a trifle as a shadow; but here, Savva Yegorovich, they are alive, and you can almost hear them speak. On my word of honor! Our hall, you know, is so long that it seems never to end. You enter—nothing! You see a sort of black object moving in front of you, something like the figure of a man. Then it stretches out, grows larger and larger and wider and wider until it reaches across the ceiling, and then it's behind you! You keep on walking. Your senses become paralyzed. You lose all consciousness.

SAVVA (*to Tony*)

What are you staring at?

TONY

What a face!

KONDRATY

And God too is impotent here. Of course we have sacred relics and a wonder-working ikon; but, if you'll excuse me for saying so, they have no efficacy.

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LIPA

What are you saying?

KONDRATY

None whatever. If you don't believe me, ask the other monks. They'll bear me out. We pray and pray, and beat our foreheads, and the result is nothing, absolutely nothing. If the image did nothing else than drive away the impure power! But it can't do even that. It hangs there as if it were none of its business, and as soon as night comes, the stir and the gliding and the flitting around the corners begin again. The abbot says we are cowards, poor in spirit, and that we ought to be ashamed. But why are the images ineffective? The monks in the monastery say—

LIPA

Well?

KONDRATY

But it's hard to believe it. It's impossible. They say that the devil stole the real image long ago—the one that could perform miracles—and hung up his own picture instead.

LIPA

Oh, God, what blasphemy! Why aren't you ashamed to believe such vile, horrid stuff? You who are wearing a monk's robe at that! You really ought to be lying in a puddle—it's the proper place for you.

SAVVA

Now, now, don't get mad. Don't mind her, Father Kondraty, she doesn't mean it. She is a good girl. But really, why don't you leave the monastery? Why do you want to be fooling about here with shadows and devils?

KONDRATY (*shrugging his shoulders*)

I would like to leave; but where am I to go? I dropped work long ago. I am not used to it any more. Here at least I don't have to worry about how to get a piece of bread. And



as for the devil (*cautiously winking to Savva as he turns to the window and fillips his neck with his fingers*) I have a means against him.

SAVVA

Well, let's go out and have a talk. You, face, will you send us some whiskey?

TONY (*gloomily*)

He isn't telling the truth. There are no devils either. The devil couldn't have hung up his picture if there's no devil. It's impossible. He had better ask me.

SAVVA

All right, we'll speak about that later. Send us whiskey.

TONY (*goes*)

I won't send you any whiskey either.

SAVVA

What a stupid fellow! I tell you what, father. You go out into the garden through that door. I'll be, with you in a moment. Don't lose yourself. (*He goes out after Tony*)

KONDRATY

Good-bye, Miss Olympiada.

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[Lipa doesn't answer. When Kondraty has left, she walks around the room a few times, agitated, waiting for Savva.]

SAVVA *(entering)*

Well, what a fool!

LIPA *(barring his way)*

I know why you came here. I know! Don't you dare!

SAVVA

What's that?

LIPA

When I heard you talk, I thought it was just words, but now—Come to your senses! Think! You've gone crazy. What do you mean to do?

SAVVA

Let me go.

LIPA

I listened to you and laughed! Good Lord! I feel as if I had awakened from a terrible dream. Or is it all a dream? What was the monk here for? What for?

SAVVA

Now that will do. You have had your say; that's enough. Let me go.

LIPA

Don't you see you have gone crazy? Do you understand? You are out of your mind.



SAVVA

I'm sick of hearing you repeat that. Let's go.

LIPA

Savva; dear, darling Savva—No? Very well, you won't listen to me? Very well. You'll see, Savva, you'll see. You ought to have your hands and feet tied. And you *will* be bound, too. There are people who will do it. Oh, God! What does this mean? Stay! Stay! Savva!

SAVVA (*going*)

All right, all right.

LIPA (*shouting*)

I'll denounce you. Murderer! Ruffian! I'll denounce you.

SAVVA (*turning round*)

Oho! You had better be more careful. (*Puts his hand on her shoulder and looks into her eyes*) You had better be more careful, I say.

LIPA

You—(*For about three seconds there is a struggle between the two pairs of eyes, after which Lipa turns aside, biting her lips*) I am not afraid of you.

SAVVA

That's better. But don't shout. One should never shout. (*Exit*)

LIPA (*alone*)

What does this mean? What am I to do? (*The hens cluck*)

YEGOR TROPININ (*in the door*)

What's the matter? What's the row here—hey? I was gone just half an hour, and everything has gone topsy-turvy. Lipa, why did you let the chickens get into the raspberry bushes? Go and drive 'em away, damn you! I am talking to you—yes, to you! Go, or I'll go you, I'll go you, I'll—

CURTAIN

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THE SECOND ACT

Within the enclosure of the monastery. In the rear, at the left, appear the monastery buildings, the refectory, monks' cells, parts of the church and the steeple, all connected by passageways with arched gates. Board-walks run in different directions in the court. At the right the corner of the steeple wall is seen slightly jutting out. Nestling against it is a small monastic cemetery surrounded by a light, grilled iron fence. Marble monuments and slabs of stone and iron are sunk deep into the earth. All are old and twisted. It is a long time since anyone was buried there. The cemetery contains also some wild rose-bushes and two or three rather small trees.

It is evening, after vespers. Long shadows are falling from the tower and the walls. The monastery and the steeple are bathed in the reddish light of the setting sun. Monks, novices and pilgrims pass along the board-walks. In the beginning of the act may be heard behind the scenes the driving of a village herd, the cracking of a herdsman's whip, the bleating of sheep, the lowing of cattle, and dull cries. Toward the end of the act it grows much darker, and the movement in the yard ceases almost entirely.

Savva, Speransky, and the Young Friar are seated on a bench by the iron fence. Speransky is holding his hat on his knees, and now and then he strokes his long, straight hair, which is hanging in two mournful strands over his long, pale face. He holds his legs together speaks in a low, sad tone, and gesticulates with extended forefinger. The Friar, young, round-faced, and vigorous, pays no attention to the conversation, but is smiling continually, as if at his own thoughts._

SAVVA (*preoccupied, looking aside*)

Yes. What kind of work do you do here?

SPERANSKY

None at all, Mr. Savva. How can a man in my condition do any work? Once a man begins to doubt his own existence, the obligation to work naturally ceases to exist for him. But the deacon's wife does not understand it. She is a very stupid woman, utterly lacking in education, and, moreover, of an unlovely, cruel disposition. She insists on making me work. But you can imagine the sort of work I do under the circumstances. You see, the situation is this. I have a splendid appetite. That appetite began to develop while I was yet a student in the seminary. Now this deaconess, if you please, makes a fuss about every piece of bread I eat. She doesn't understand, the ignorant woman, the possibility of the non-existence of this piece of bread. If I had a real existence like the rest of you, I should feel very bad, but in my present condition her attacks don't affect me in the least. Nothing affects me, Mr. Savva, nothing in the wide world.

SAVVA (*smiling at the Friar's unconscious joy, but still preoccupied*) How long have you been in this condition?



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SPERANSKY

It began in the seminary while I was studying philosophy. It is a dreadful condition, Mr. Savva. I have grown somewhat accustomed to it now, but at first it was unendurable. I tried to hang myself once, and they cut me down. Then I tried a second time, and they cut me down again. Then they turned me out of the seminary. "Go hang yourself in some other place, you madman," they said. As if there were any other place! As if all places were not the same!

THE FRIAR

Mr. Savva, let's go fishing to-morrow at the mill.

SAVVA

I don't like fishing. It bores me.

FRIAR

I'm sorry. Well then, let's go into the woods and knock down the dry branches of trees. It's fine sport to walk about in the forest and knock off the branches with a stick. And when you shout "Ho-ho-ho!" the echo from the ravine answers back "Ho-ho-ho!" Do you like swimming?

SAVVA

Yes, I like it. I am a good swimmer.

FRIAR

I like it too.

SPERANSKY (*with a deep sigh*)

Yes, it's a strange condition.

SAVVA (*smiling at the Friar*)

Eh? Well, how are you now?



SPERANSKY

When my uncle took me to his house, he made me promise I would never attempt suicide again. That was the only condition on which he would consent to let me live with him. "All right," I said; "if we really exist, then I won't make any further attempt to hang myself."

SAVVA

Why do you want to know whether you exist or not? There is the sky. Look, how beautiful it is. There are the swallows and the sweet-scented grass. It's fine! (*To the Friar*) Fine, isn't it, Vassya?

FRIAR

Mr. Savva, do you like to tear up ant-hills?

SAVVA

I don't know. I never tried.

FRIAR

I like it. Do you like to fly kites?

SAVVA

It's a long time since I tried to. I used to like it very much.

SPERANSKY (*patiently awaiting the end of their conversation*)

Swallows! What good is their flying to me? Anyhow, maybe swallows don't exist either, and it's all a dream.

SAVVA

Suppose it is a dream. Dreams are very beautiful sometimes, you know.

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SPERANSKY

I should like to wake up, but I can't. I wander around and wander around until I am weary and feeble, and when I rouse myself I find I am here, in the very same place. There is the monastery and the belfry, and the clock strikes the hour. And it's all like a dream, a fantasy. You close your eyes, and it does not exist. You open them, and it's there again. Sometimes I go out into the fields at night and close my eyes, and then it seems to me there is nothing at all existing. Suddenly the quail begin to call, and a wagon rolls down the road. Again a dream. For if you stopped up your ears, you wouldn't hear those sounds. When I die, everything will grow silent, and then it will be true. Only the dead know the truth, Mr. Savva.

FRIAR (*smiling, cautiously waving his hands at a bird; in a whisper*) It's time to go to bed, time to go to bed.

SAVVA (*impatiently*)

What dead? Listen, my dear sir. I have a plain, simple, peasant mind, and I don't understand those subtleties. What dead are you talking about?

SPERANSKY

About all the dead, every one without exception. That's why the faces of the dead are so serene. Whatever agonies a man may have suffered before his death, the moment he dies his face becomes serene. That's because he has learned the truth. I always come here to attend the funerals. It's astonishing. There was a woman buried here. She had died of grief because her husband was crushed under a locomotive. You can imagine what must have been going on in her mind before her death. It's too horrible to think of. Yet she lay there, in the coffin, absolutely serene and calm. That's because she had come to know that her grief was nothing but a dream, a mere phantom. I like the dead, Mr. Savva. I think the dead really exist.

SAVVA

I don't like the dead. (*Impatiently*) You are a very disagreeable fellow. Has anybody ever told you that?

SPERANSKY

Yes, I have, heard it before.



SAVVA

I would never have taken you out of the noose. What damn fool did it anyway?

SPERANSKY

The first time it was the Father Steward, the next time my classmates. I am very sorry you disapprove of me, Mr. Tropinin. As you are an educated man, I should have liked to show you a bit of writing I did while I was in the seminary. It's called "The Tramp of Death." It's a sort of story.

SAVVA

No, spare me, please. Altogether I wish you'd—

FRIAR. (*rising*)

There comes Father Kirill. I had better beat it.



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SAVVA

Why?

FRIAR

He came across me in the forest the other day when I was-shouting “Ho! Ho!” “Ah,” said he, “you forest sprite with goat’s feet!” To-morrow after dinner, all right? *(Walks away, sedately at first, but then with a sort of dancing step)*

FAT MONK *(approaches)*

Well, young men, having a pleasant chat? Are you Mr. Tropinin’s son?

SAVVA

I am the man.

FAT MONK

I have heard about you. A decent, respectable gentleman your father is. May I sit down? *(He sits down)* The sun has set, yet it’s still hot. I wonder if we’ll have a storm to-night. Well, young man, how do you like it here? How does this place compare with the metropolis?

SAVVA

It’s a rich monastery.

FAT MONK

Yes, thank the Lord. It’s celebrated all over Russia. There are many who come here even from Siberia. Its fame reaches far. There’ll soon be a feast-day, and—

SPERANSKY

You’ll work yourself sick, father. Services day and night.

FAT MONK

Yes, we must do our best for the monastery.

SAVVA

Not for the people?

FAT MONK

Yes, for the people too. For whom else? Last year a large number of epileptics were cured; quite a lot of them. One blind man had his eyesight restored, and two paralytics were made to walk. You'll see for yourself, young man, and then you won't smile. I have heard that you are an unbeliever.

SAVVA

You have heard correctly. I am an unbeliever.

FAT MONK

It's a shame, a shame. Of course, there are many unbelievers nowadays among the educated classes. But are they any happier on that account? I doubt it.

SAVVA

No, there are not so many. They think they are unbelievers because they don't go to church. As a matter of fact, they have greater faith than you. It's more deep-seated.

FAT MONK

Is that so?

SAVVA

Yes, yes. The form of their faith is, of course, more refined. They are cultured, you see.

FAT MONK

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Of course, of course. People feel better, feel more confident and secure, if they believe.

SAVVA

They say the devil is choking the monks here every night.

FAT MONK *(laughing)*

Nonsense. *(To the Gray Monk passing by)* Father Vissarion, come here a moment. Sit down. Mr. Tropinin's son here says the devil chokes us every night. Have you heard about it? *(The two monks laugh good-naturedly as they look at each other)*

GRAY MONK

Some of the monks can't sleep well because they have overeaten, so they think they are being choked. Why, young man, the devil can't enter within our sacred precincts.

SAVVA

But suppose he does suddenly put in an appearance? What will, you do then?

FAT MONK

We'll get after him with the holy-water sprinkler, that's what we'll do. "Don't butt in where you have no business to, you black-faced booby!" *(The monk laughs)*

GRAY MONK

Here comes King Herod.

FAT MONK

Wait a while, Father Vissarion. *(To Savva)* You talk about faith and such things. There's a man for you—look at him—see how he walks. And yet he has chains on him weighing four hundred pounds. He doesn't walk, he dances. He visits us every summer, and I must say he is a very valuable guest. His example strengthens others in their faith. Herod! Ho, Herod!



KING HEROD

What do you want?

FAT MONK

Come here a minute. This gentleman doubts the existence of God. Talk to him.

KING HEROD

What's the matter with yourself? Are you so full of booze that you can't wag your own tongue?

FAT MONK

You heretic! What a heretic! *(Both monks laugh)*

KING HEROD *(approaching)*

What gentleman?

FAT MONK

This one.

KING HEROD *(scrutinizing him)*

He doubts? Let him doubt. It's none of my business.

SAVVA

Oh!

KING HEROD

Why, what did you think?

FAT MONK

Sit down, please.

KING HEROD

Never mind. I'd rather stand.



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FAT MONK *(to Savva, in a loud whisper)*

He is doing that to wear himself out. Until he has reduced himself to absolute faintness he'll neither sleep nor eat. *(Aloud)* This gentleman is wondering at the kind of chains you have on your body.

KING HEROD

Chains? Just baby rattles. Put them on a horse and he too would carry them if he had the strength. I have a sad heart. *(Looks at Savva)* You know, I killed my own son. Yes, I did. Have they been telling you about me, these chatterboxes?

SAVVA

They have.

KING HEROD

Can you understand it?

SAVVA

Why not? Yes, I can.

KING HEROD

You lie—you can't. No one can understand it. Go through the whole world, search round the whole globe, ask everybody—no one will be able to tell you, no one will understand. And if anyone says he does, take it from me that he lies, lies just as you do. Why, you can't even see your own nose properly, yet you have the brazenness to say you understand. Go. You are a foolish boy, that's what you are.

SAVVA

And you are wise?



KING HEROD

I am wise. My sorrow has made me so. It is a great sorrow. There is none greater on earth. I killed my son with my own hand. Not the hand you are looking at, but the one which isn't here.

SAVVA

Where is it?

KING HEROD

I burnt it. I held it in the stove and let it burn up to my elbow.

SAVVA

Did that relieve you?

KING HEROD

No. Fire cannot destroy my grief. It burns with a heat that is greater than fire.

SAVVA

Fire, brother, destroys everything.

KING HEROD

No, young man, fire is weak. Spit on it and it is quenched.

SAVVA

What fire? It is possible to kindle such a conflagration that an ocean of water will not quench it.

KING HEROD

No, boy. Every fire goes out when its time comes. My grief is great, so great that when I look around me I say to myself: Good heavens, what has become of everything else that's large and great? Where has it all gone to? The forest is small, the house is

small, the mountain is small, the whole earth is small, a mere poppy seed. You have to walk cautiously and look out, lest you reach the end and drop off.



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FAT MONK (*pleased*)

Fine, King Herod, you are going it strong.

KING HEROD

Even the sun does not rise for me. For others it rises, but for me it doesn't. Others don't see the darkness by day, but I see it. It penetrates the light like dust. At first I seem to see a sort of light, but then—good heavens, the sky is dark, the earth is dark, all is like soot. Yonder is something vague and misty. I can't even make out what it is. Is it a human being, is it a bush? My grief is great, immense! (*Grows pensive*) If I cried, who would hear me? If I shouted, who would respond?

FAT MONK (*to the Gray Monk*)

The dogs in the village might.

KING HEROD (*shaking his head*)

O you people! You are looking at me as at a monstrosity—at my hair, my chains—because I killed my son and because I am like King Herod; but my soul you see not, and my grief you know not. You are as blind as earthworms. You wouldn't know if you were struck with a beam on the head. Say, you pot-belly, what are you shaking your paunch, for?

SAVVA

Why—the way he talks to you!

FAT MONK (*reassuringly*)

It's nothing. He treats us all like that. He upbraids us all.

KING HEROD

Yes, and I will continue to upbraid. Fellows like you are not fit to serve God. What you ought to do is to sit in a drinkshop amusing Satan. The devils use your belly to go sleigh-riding on at night.

FAT MONK (*good-naturedly*)

Well, well, God be with you. You had better speak about yourself; stick to that.



KING HEROD (*to Savva*)

You see? He wants to feast on my agony. Go ahead, feast all you want.

GRAY MONK

My, what a scold you are. Where do you get your vocabulary? He once told the Father Superior that if God were not immortal he, the Father Superior, would long ago have sold him piece by piece. But we tolerate him. He can do no harm in a monastery.

FAT MONK

He attracts people. Many come here for his sake. And what difference does it make to us? God sees our purity. Isn't that so, King Herod?

KING HEROD

Oh, shut up, you old dotard. Look at him; he can scarcely move his legs, old Harry with the evil eye. Keeps three women in the village; one is not enough for him. (*The monks laugh good-naturedly*) You see, you see? Whew! Look at their brazen, shameless eyes! Might as well spit on them!

SAVVA

Why do you come here?



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KING HEROD

Not for them. Listen, young man. Have you a grief?

SAVVA

Perhaps I have. Why?

KING HEROD

Then listen to me. When you are in sorrow, when you are suffering, don't go to people. If you have a friend, don't go to him. It's more than you'll be able to stand. Better go to the wolves in the forest. They'll make short work of it, devour you at once, and there will be the end of it. I have seen many evil things, but I have never seen anything worse than man. No, never! They say men are created in His image, in His likeness. Why, you skunks, you have no image. If you had one, the tiniest excuse for one, you would crawl away on all fours and hide somewhere from sheer shame. You damned skunks! Laugh at them, cry before them, shout, at them. It doesn't make any difference. They go on licking their chops. King Herod—Damned skunks! And when King Herod—not I, but the real one with a golden crown—killed your children, where were you—hey?

FAT MONK

We weren't even in the world then, man.

KING HEROD

Then there were others like you. He killed. You accepted it. That's all. I have asked many the question: "What would you have done?" "Nothing," they always reply. "If he killed, what could be done about it?" Fine creatures! Haven't the manliness to stand up even for their children. They are worse than dogs, damn them!

FAT MONK

And what would you have done?

KING HEROD

I? I should have wrung his neck from off his royal gold crown—the confounded brute!

GRAY MONK

It says in the scripture: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

FAT MONK

That is to say, don't interfere with other people's business. Do you understand?

KING HEROD (*to Savva in despair*)

Just listen, listen to what they are saying.

SAVVA

I hear what they are saying.

KING HEROD

Just you wait, my precious! You'll get what's coming to you, and mighty quick. The devil will come and hurl you into the fiery pit. To hell, to gehenna, with you! How your fat will melt and run! Do you get the smell, monk?

FAT MONK

That's from the refectory.

KING HEROD



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You are on the run, fast as your feet can carry you! Ah! but where to? Everywhere is hell, everywhere is fire. You refused to hearken unto me, my pet; now you shall hearken unto the fire. Won't I be glad, won't I rejoice! I'll take off my chains so that I can catch them and present them to the devil—first one, then the other. Here, take him. And the howl they'll set up, and the weeping and lamentation. "I am not guilty." Not guilty? Who, then, is—who? To gehenna with you! Burn, you damned hypocrites, until the second Advent. And then we'll build a new fire, then we'll build a new fire.

GRAY MONK

Isn't it time for us to go, Father Kirill?

FAT MONK

Yes, we had better be moving along. It's getting dark, and it's time to retire.

KING HEROD

Aha! You don't like to hear the truth. It isn't pleasant, is it?

FAT MONK

Hee-hee, brother, talk is cheap. A barking dog doesn't bite. Scold away, scold away. We are listening. God in heaven will decide who is to go to hell and who elsewhere. "The meek, shall inherit the earth," says the Gospel. Good-bye, young gentlemen.

GRAY MONK (*to King Herod*)

Let me give you a piece of advice, however. Talk, but don't talk too much. Don't go too far. We are only tolerating you because you are a pitiful creature and because you are foolish. But if you give your tongue too free a rein, we can stop it, you know. Yes, indeed.

KING HEROD

All right, try—try to stop me.



FAT MONK

What's the use, Father Vissarion? Let him talk. It doesn't do any harm. Listen, listen, young gentlemen. He is an interesting fellow. Good night.

[They go. The Fat Monk is heard laughing heartily.]

KING HEROD *(to Savva)*

Fine specimens. I can't stand them.

SAVVA

I like you, uncle.

KING HEROD

Do you? So you don't like their kind either?

SAVVA

No, I don't.

KING HEROD

Well, I'll sit down for a while. My legs are swollen. Have you got a cigarette?

SAVVA *(handing him a cigarette)*

Do you smoke?

KING HEROD

Sometimes. Excuse me for having talked to you the way I did before. You are a good fellow. But why did you lie and say you understood? No one can understand it. Who is this with you?



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SAVVA

Oh, he just happened along.

KING HEROD

Well, brother, feeling bad, down in the mouth?

SPERANSKY

Yes, I feel blue.

KING HEROD

Keep still, keep still, I don't want to listen. You are suffering? Keep still. I am a man too, brother, so I don't understand. I'll insult you if you don't look out. (*Throws away the cigarette*) No, I can't. As long as I keep standing or walking I manage somehow. The moment I sit down, it's hell. Oh! Ow-w! (*Writhing in agony*) I simply can't catch my breath. Oh, God, do you see my torture? Eh? Well, well, it's nothing. It's gone. Oh! Ow-w!

[The sky has become overcast with clouds. It turns dark quickly. Now and then there are flashes of lightning.]

SAVVA (*quietly*)

One must try to stifle one's grief, old man. Fight it. Say to yourself firmly and resolutely: "I don't want it." And it will cease to be. You seem to be a good, strong man.

KING HEROD

No, friend, my grief is such that even death won't remove it. What is death? It is little, insignificant, and my grief is great. No, death won't end my grief. There was Cain. Even when he died, his sorrow remained.

SPERANSKY

The dead do not grieve. They are serene. They know the truth.



KING HEROD

But they don't tell it to anybody. What's the good of such truth? Here am I alive, and yet I know the truth. Here am I with my sorrow. You see what it is—there is no greater on earth. And yet if God spoke to me and said, "Yeremey, I will give you the whole earth if you give me your grief," I wouldn't give it away. I will not give it away, friend. It is sweeter to me than honey; it is stronger than the strongest drink. Through it I have learned the truth.

SAVVA

God?

KING HEROD

Christ—that's the one! He alone can understand the sorrow that is in me. He sees and understands. "Yes, Yeremey, I see how you suffer." That's all. "I see." And I answer Him: "Yes, O Lord, behold my sorrow!" That's all. No more is necessary.

SAVVA

What you value in Christ is His suffering for the people, is that it?

KING HEROD

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You mean his crucifixion? No, brother, that suffering was a trifle. They crucified Him—what did that matter? The important point was that thereby He came to know the truth. As long as He walked the earth, He was—well—a man, rather a good man—talking here and there about this and that. When He met someone, He would talk to him about this and that, teach him, and tell him a few good things to put him on the right track. But when these same fellows carried Him off to the cross and went at Him with knouts, whips, and lashes, then His eyes were opened. “Aha!” He said, “so that’s what it is!” And He prayed: “I cannot endure such suffering. I thought it would be a simple crucifixion; but, O Father in Heaven, what is this?” And the Father said to Him: “Never mind, never mind, Son! Know the truth, know what it is.” And from then on, He fell to sorrowing, and has been sorrowing to this day.

SAVVA

Sorrowing?

KING HEROD

Yes, friend, he is sorrowing. (*Pause. Lightning*)

SPERANSKY

It looks like rain, and I am without rubbers and umbrella.

KING HEROD

And everywhere, wheresoever I go, wheresoever I turn, I see before me His pure visage. “Do you understand my suffering, O Lord?” “I understand, Yeremey, I understand everything. Go your way in peace.” I am to Him like a transparent crystal with a tear inside. “You understand, Lord?” “I understand, Yeremey.” “Well, and I understand you too.” So we live together. He with me, I with Him. I am sorry for Him also. When I die, I will transmit my sorrow to Him. “Take it, Lord.”

SAVVA

But after all, you are not quite right in running down the people the way you do. There are some good men also—very few—but there are some. Otherwise it wouldn’t be of any use to live.



KING HEROD

No, friend, there are none. I don't want to fool you—there are none. You know, it was they who christened me with the name of King Herod.

SAVVA

Who?

KING HEROD

Why, your people. There is no beast more cruel than man. I killed my boy, so I am King Herod to them. Damn them, it never enters their minds how terrible it is for me to be burdened with such a nick-name. Herod! If they only called me so out of spite! But not at all.

SAVVA

What is your real name?

KING HEROD

Yeremey. That's my name—Yeremey. But they call me Herod, carefully adding King, so that there may be no mistake. Look, there comes another monk, a plague on him. Say, did you ever see His countenance?



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SAVVA

I did.

KING HEROD

And did you see His eyes? No? Then look, try to see them—Where is he off to, the bat? To the village to his women.

KONDRATY (*enters*)

Peace be with you, honest folks. Good evening, Savva. To what lucky chance do I owe this meeting?

KING HEROD

Look, monk, the devil's tail is sticking out of your pocket.

KONDRATY

It isn't the devil's tail, it's a radish. You're very clever, but you didn't hit it right that time.

KING HEROD (*spitting in disgust*)

I can't bear to look at them. They turn my stomach. Good-bye, friend. Remember what I told you. When you are in sorrow, don't go to people.

SAVVA

All right, uncle, I understand.

KING HEROD

Rather go to the forest to the wolves. (*Goes out; his voice is heard out of the darkness*)
Oh, Lord, do you see?



KONDRATY

A narrow-minded fool. Killed his son and puts on airs. You can't get by him. He won't let you alone. It's something to be proud of, isn't it, to have killed one's own son? A great thing.

SPERANSKY (*with a sigh*)

No, Father Kondraty, you are mistaken. He is a happy man. If his son were brought to life this moment, he would instantly kill him. He wouldn't give him five minutes to live. But of course when he dies, he'll know the truth.

KONDRATY

That's what I said, you fool. If it were a cat he killed, he might have some reason to be proud—but his own son! What are you thinking about, Savva Yegorovich?

SAVVA

I am waiting. I should like to know how soon this gentleman will go. The devil brought him, I think. Now, here comes someone else. (*Peers into the darkness*)

LIPA (*approaching. She stops and hesitates*)

Is that you, Savva?

SAVVA

Yes, and is that you? What do you want? I don't like people to follow me everywhere I go, sister.

LIPA

The gate to this place is open. Everybody has a right to come in. Mr. Speransky, Tony has been asking for you. He wants the seminarist, he says.

SAVVA

There, go together—a jolly pair. Good-bye, sir, good-bye.

SPERANSKY



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Good-bye. I hope I'll see you soon again, Mr. Savva, and have another talk.

SAVVA

No, don't try, please. Abandon the hope. Good-bye.

LIPA

How rude you are, Savva. Come, Mr. Speransky. They have business of their own to attend to.

SPERANSKY

Still I haven't given up hope. Good-bye. *(Goes out)*

SAVVA

Just grabbed me and stuck—the devil take him!

KONDRATY *(laughing)*

Yes, he is a sticker from the word go. If he likes you, you can't shake him off. He'll follow you everywhere. We call him the "shadow"—partly, I suppose, because he is so thin. He has taken a fancy to you, so you'll have a time of it. He'll stick to you like a leech.

SAVVA

I am not in the habit of wasting a lot of words. I'll give him the slip without much ceremony.

KONDRATY

They have, even tried beating him, but it doesn't do any good. He is known here for miles around. He is a character.

[A pause. Lightning. Every now and then is heard the roll of distant thunder.]

**SAVVA**

Why did you tell me to meet you here in this public place where everyone may come? They fell on me like a swarm of fleas—monks and all sorts of imbeciles. I'd rather have spoken to you in the woods, where we could be let alone.

KONDRATY

I did it to escape suspicion. If I went with you to the woods they'd say: "What has a God-fearing man like Kondraty got to do with such a fellow?" I hope you pardon! "Why is he so thick with him?" I purposely timed my coming so that they'd see us together with others.

SAVVA (*looking fixedly at him*)

Well?

KONDRATY (*turning away his eyes and shrugging his shoulders*) I can't.

SAVVA

You are afraid?

KONDRATY

To tell the truth, I am.

SAVVA

You're no good, old chap.

KONDRATY

Perhaps not. You have a right to draw your own conclusions. (*Pause*)

SAVVA

But what are you afraid of, you booby? The machine is not dangerous. It won't hurt you. All you have to do is to put it in the right place, set it off, and then you can go to the village to your mistresses.



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KONDRATY

That's not the point.

SAVVA

What then? Are you afraid of being caught? But I told you, if anything should happen, I'll take the guilt on myself. Don't you believe me?

KONDRATY

Why, of course I believe you.

SAVVA

What then? Do you fear God?

KONDRATY

Yes, I do.

SAVVA

But you don't believe in God—you believe in the devil.

KONDRATY

Who knows? Maybe some day I'll suddenly discover that He does exist. In that case, Mr. Savva, I thank you, but I'd rather not. Why should I? I live a nice, quiet existence. Of course, it's all a humbug, an imposition. But what business is it of mine? The people want to believe—let them. It wasn't I who invented God.

SAVVA

Look here. You know I could have done it myself. All I need have done was to take a bomb and throw it into the procession. That's all. But that would mean the killing of many people, which at the present juncture would serve no useful purpose. I therefore ask you to do it. If you refuse, then the blood will rest on you. You understand?



KONDRATY

Why on me? I am not going to throw the bomb. And then, what have I got to do with them—I mean the people that get killed? What concern are they of mine? There are plenty of people in the world. You can't kill them all, no matter how many bombs you throw.

SAVVA

Aren't you sorry for them?

KONDRATY

If I were to be sorry for everybody, I should have no sympathy left for myself.

SAVVA

That's right. You are a bright man. You have a good mind. I have already told you so. And yet you hesitate. You are clever, and yet you are afraid to smash a piece of wood.

KONDRATY

If it is nothing but a piece of wood, then why go to so much trouble about it? The point is, it is not a piece of wood, it is an image.

SAVVA

For me it is a piece of wood. For the people it is a sacred object. That is why I want to destroy it. Imagine how they'll open their mouths and stare. Ah, brother, if you were not a coward, I would tell you some things.

KONDRATY



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Go ahead and talk. It's no sin to listen. I am not a coward either. I am simply careful.

SAVVA

This would only be the beginning, brother.

KONDRATY

A good beginning, I won't deny it. And what will be the end?

SAVVA

The earth stripped naked, a *tabula rasa*, do you understand? And on this naked earth, naked man, naked as his mother bore him. No breeches on him, no orders, no pockets, nothing. Imagine men without pockets. Queer, isn't it? Yes indeed, brother, the ikon is only the beginning.

KONDRATY

Oh, they'll make new ones.

SAVVA

But they won't be the same as before. And they'll never forget this much—that dynamite is mightier than their God, and that man is mightier than dynamite. Look at them; see them yonder praying and kneeling, not daring to raise their heads and look you straight in the face, mean slaves that they are! Then comes a real man, and smash goes the whole humbug. Done for!

KONDRATY

Really!

SAVVA

And when a dozen of their idols have gone the same way, the slaves will begin to understand that the kingdom of their God is at an end, and that the kingdom of man has come. Lots of them will drop from sheer terror. Some will lose their wits, and others will



throw themselves into the fire. They'll say that Antichrist has come. Think of it, Kondraty!

KONDRATY

And aren't you sorry for them?

SAVVA

Sorry for them? Why, they built a prison for me, and I am to be sorry for them. They put me in a torture chamber, and I am to be sorry for them. Bah!

KONDRATY

Who are you to be above pity?

SAVVA

I? I am a man who have been born. And having been born, I began to look about. I saw churches and penitentiaries. I saw universities and houses of prostitution. I saw factories and picture galleries. I saw palaces and filthy dens. I calculated the number of prisons there are to each gallery, and I resolved that the whole edifice must go, the whole of it must be overturned, annihilated. And we are going to do it. Our day of reckoning has come. It is time.

KONDRATY

Who are "we"?

SAVVA

I, you Kondraty, and others.



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KONDRATY

The people are stupid. They won't understand.

SAVVA

When the conflagration rages all around them, they will understand. Fire is a good teacher, old boy. Have you ever heard of Raphael?

KONDRATY

No, I haven't.

SAVVA

Well, when we are through with God, we'll go for fellows like him. There are lots of them—Titian, Shakespeare, Byron. We'll make a nice pile of the whole lot and pour oil over it. Then we'll burn their cities.

KONDRATY

Now, now you are joking. How is that possible? How can you burn the cities?

SAVVA

No, why should I be joking? All the cities. Look here, what are their cities? Graves, stone graves. And if you don't stop those fools, if you let them go on making more, they will cover the whole earth with stone, and then all will suffocate—all.

KONDRATY

The poor people will have a hard time of it.

SAVVA

All will be poor then. What is it that makes a man rich? His having a house and money, and the fact that he has surrounded himself with a fence. But when there are no houses, no money, and no fences—



KONDRATY

That's so. And there won't be any legal papers either, no stocks, no bonds, no title-deeds. They will all have been burnt up.

SAVVA

No, there will be no legal papers. It's work then—you'll have to go to work even if you are a nobleman.

KONDRATY (*laughing*)

It's funny. All will be naked as when coming out of a bath.

SAVVA

Are you a peasant, Kondraty?

KONDRATY

Yes, I am a peasant, sure enough.

SAVVA

I am a peasant also. We have nothing to lose, brother. We can't fare worse than we do now.

KONDRATY

How could it be worse? But a great many people will perish, Mr. Tropinin.

SAVVA

It makes no difference. There'll be enough left. It is the good-for-nothings that will perish, the fools to whom this life is like a shell to a crab. Those who believe will perish, because their faith will be taken away from them. Those who love the old will perish, because everything will be taken away from them. The weak, the sick, those who love quietness. There will be no quietness in the world, brother. There will remain only the free and the brave, those with young and eager souls and clear eyes that can embrace the whole universe.

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KONDRATY

Like yours? I am afraid of your eyes, Savva Yegorovich, especially in the dark.

SAVVA

Yes, like mine. And emancipated from everything, naked, armed only with their reason, they will deliberate; discuss, talk things over, and build up a new life, a good life, Kondraty, where every man may breathe freely.

KONDRATY

It's interesting. But men are sly creatures. Something of the old will be left over. They'll hide it, or try some other trick, and then behold! back they slide to the old again, everything just as it was, just as of old. What then?

SAVVA

Just as of old? (*Gloomily*) Then they will have to be wiped clean off the face of the earth. Let there be no living human being on earth. Enough of it!

KONDRATY (*shaking his head*)

But—

SAVVA (*putting his hand on his shoulder*)

Believe me, monk, I have been in many cities and in many lands, Nowhere did I see a free man. I saw only slaves. I saw the cages in which they live, the beds on which they are born and die; I saw their hatreds and their loves, their sins and their good works. And I saw also their amusements, their pitiful attempts to bring dead joy back to life again. And everything that I saw bore the stamp of stupidity and unreason. He that is born wise turns stupid in their midst; he that is born cheerful hangs himself from boredom and sticks out his tongue at them. Amidst the flowers of the beautiful earth—you have no idea how beautiful the earth is, monk—they have erected insane asylums. And what are they doing with their children? I have never yet seen parents that do not deserve capital punishment; first because they begot children, and secondly because, having begot them, they did not immediately commit suicide.



KONDRATY

Good heavens, how you talk! Hearing you, one hardly knows what to think.

SAVVA

And how they lie, how they lie, monk! They don't kill the truth—no, they kick her and bruise her daily, and smear her clean face with their dirt and filth so that no one may recognize her, so that the children may not love her, and so that she may have no refuge. In all the world—yes, monk, in all the world—there is no place for truth. (*Sinks into meditation. Pause*)

KONDRATY

Is there no other way—without fire? It's terrible, Savva Yegorovich. Consider what it means! It's the end of the world.

SAVVA

No, it can't be helped, partner. It must be. The end of the world must come too. They were treated with medicine, and it did no good. They were treated with iron, and it did no good. Now they must be treated with fire—fire!

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[Pause. Lightning flashes. The thunder has ceased. Somewhere outside a watchman can be heard striking his iron rod.

KONDRATY

And there'll be no drinkshops either?

SAVVA (*pensively*)

No, nothing.

KONDRATY

They'll start drinkshops again all right. Can't get along without them, you know. (*A prolonged pause*) Ye-es. What are you thinking about, Savva Yegorovich?

SAVVA

Nothing. (*Draws a light breath, cheerfully*) Well, Kondraty, shall we begin?

KONDRATY (*swaying his head to and fro*)

It's a mighty hard problem you have put up to me. It's a poser.

SAVVA

Never mind, don't get shaky now. You are a sensible man; you know it can't be helped; there is nothing else to do. Would I be doing it myself, if it were not necessary? You can see that, can't you?

KONDRATY (*heaving a sigh*)

Ye-es, hm! Why, Mr. Tropinin—why, my dear fellow—don't I know, don't I understand it all? It's a rotten, cursed life! Ah, Mr. Savva, Mr. Savva—look here. If I were to tell anyone that I am a good man, they'd laugh and say: "What are you lying for, you drunkard?" Kondraty a good man! It sounds like a joke even to myself. And yet I swear to you, by God, I am a good man! I don't know how it happened the way it did, why I am what I am now. I lived and lived, and suddenly! How it came about, what the reason of it is, I don't know.



SAVVA

And you are still afraid?

KONDRATY

What am I now? I am neither a candle for God nor a poker for the devil. Sometimes when I think matters over—ah, Mr. Savva, do you think I have no conscience? Don't I understand? I understand everything but—I am not really afraid of the devil either. I am just playing the fool. The devil—nonsense! If you were in the place of us in there, you would understand. Not long ago, when I was drunk, I cried: "Get out, devil—out of my way—am a desperate man!" I don't care for anything. I don't care if I die. I am ready. You have worked at me, Mr. Savva, until I have grown quite soft. *(Wipes his eyes with his sleeves)*

SAVVA

Why should you die? I don't want to die either. We are going to live for some time to come, we are. How old are you?

KONDRATY

Forty-two.

SAVVA

Just the right age.

KONDRATY

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I am sorry for the ikon. They say it appeared miraculously in the river, and that's how it came to be here.

SAVVA

Nonsense. Don't waste your feelings. It's supposed to be a wonder-working ikon and hasn't one miracle to its credit. Why, it makes one feel like a fool just to say it.

KONDRATY

They say it has been replaced by the devil, so that it isn't the real one.

SAVVA

So much the better. And yet you crack your heads in front of it and fool the people about it. There is no use wasting words, my friend. It's agreed then.

KONDRATY

You have to go now. The gate will soon be closed. And all of a sudden—

SAVVA

What "all of a sudden"?

KONDRATY

And all of a sudden I'll be going to the ikon, and it will strike me down with lightning and thunder. Won't it?

SAVVA (laughing)

Don't be afraid. It won't strike you. That's what everybody thinks. They are all afraid they'll be struck by lightning and thunder. But it won't happen. Believe me, a man may blow up the ikon and no lightning will strike him. Do you need money?

KONDRATY

Have you got any?

SAVVA

I have.

KONDRATY (*suspiciously*)

Where did you get it?

SAVVA

What business is that of yours? Suppose I killed a rich man, or cut somebody's throat—are you going to report me to the police?

KONDRATY (*reassured*)

What are you thinking of, Savva Yegorovich? That's your concern. As to your offer, of course, money always comes in handy. It will enable me to leave the monastery. I'll tell you in confidence, I have long been nursing a scheme—it's my dream—to settle somewhere along the road and start an inn. I like company. I am a talkative chap myself. I know I'll succeed. It doesn't hurt a host to have a drink now and then. The guests like it. With a jolly host you'll spend every penny you have, and your pants besides, and you won't notice it. I know by personal experience.

SAVVA

Why not? You can start an inn if you want to.

KONDRATY

And besides, I am still in the full vigor of manhood. Instead of sinning here, I'd rather get legally married.

SAVVA

Don't forget to invite me to the wedding. I'll act as your godfather.



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KONDRATY

You are too young. As to the money—when shall it be, before or after?

SAVVA

Judas got his before.

KONDRATY (*offended*)

There now, when you should be doing your best to persuade me, you call me Judas. It isn't pleasant. The idea of calling a living man Judas!

SAVVA

Judas was a fool. He hanged himself. You are going to start an inn.

KONDRATY

Again? If that's what you think of me—

SAVVA (*slapping his shoulders*)

Well, well, uncle, don't you see I'm joking? Judas betrayed a man, and you are not going to betray anything but lumber. Is that right, old man? *Speransky and Tony appear, the latter walking very unsteadily.*

KONDRATY

There—brought by the devil! With us carrying on this kind of conversation, and they—

SAVVA

It's agreed then?

KONDRATY

Oh, you're too much for me.



SPERANSKY (*bowing*)

Good evening once more, Mr. Savva Tropinin. Mr. Anthony and myself have just been at the other end, in the cemetery. A woman was buried there to-day, so we wanted to have a look.

SAVVA

To see if she hadn't crawled out of her grave? What are you dragging him along with you for? Tony, go to bed, you can't stand on your feet.

TONY

I won't go.

SPERANSKY

Tony is very excited to-day. He sees all kinds of faces.

SAVVA

Funny faces?

TONY

Yes, funny. What else can you expect? (*Sadly*) Your face, Savva, is very, very funny.

SAVVA

All right, go along with you! Take him home. What are you dragging him about with you for?

SPERANSKY

Good-bye. Come along, Mr. Anthony.

[Speransky goes out. Tony follows him, looking back at Savva, and stumbling as he goes along. They disappear in the dark.]

KONDRATY

It's time for us also to be going. Have you got that money at hand?

SAVVA

Yes, I have. Now listen. Sunday is the feast-day. You are to take the machine Saturday morning and plant it at night at half past eleven, four days from now. I'll show you how to do it and everything else that's necessary. Four days more. I am sick of staying in this place.



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KONDRATY

And suppose I betray you?

SAVVA (*darkly*)

Then I'd kill you.

KONDRATY

Good heavens!

SAVVA

Now I am going to kill you if you merely try to back out. You know too much, brother.

KONDRATY

You are joking.

SAVVA

Maybe I am joking. I am such a jolly fellow. I like to laugh.

KONDRATY

When you first came here, you were gay. Tell me, Mr. Savva (*looking around cautiously*), did you ever kill a man, a real live man?

SAVVA

I did. I cut the throat of that rich business man I told you about.

KONDRATY (*waving his hand*)

Now I see that you are joking. Well, good-bye, I am going. Don't you hang around here either. The gate will soon be closed. Oh, my—I am never afraid—but just as soon as I begin to think of the hall, it's awful. There are shadows there now. Good night.



SAVVA

Good night.

[Kondraty disappears in the dark. Lightning. Savva remains leaning on the railing to stare at the white tombstones that are momentarily revealed by the flashes of lightning.]

SAVVA *(to the graves)*

Well, you dead ones, are you going to turn over in your graves or not? For some reason I don't feel very cheerful—oh, ye dead—I don't feel the least bit cheerful.
(Lightning)

CURTAIN

THE THIRD ACT

A festively decorated room with three windows to the street. One window is open, but the curtain is drawn. An open door, painted dark, leads into the room seen in the first act.

It is night and dark. Through the windows can be heard the continuous tramp of the pilgrims on their way to the monastery for the next day's celebration. Some are barefoot; some wear boots or bast shoes. Their steps are quick and eager, or slow and weary. They walk singly or in groups of two or three, the majority in silence, though now and then suppressed, indistinct talking may be heard. Starting from somewhere far off to the left, the sound of the footsteps and the talking, muffled at first, approaches and grows louder, until at times it seems to fill the whole room. Then it dies away in the distance again. The impression is that of some tremendous movement, elemental and irrepressible.

At the table, lighted only by a flickering stump of a tallow candle, sit Speransky and Tony. The latter is very drunk. Cucumbers, herring, and bottles of whiskey are on the table. The rest of the room is entirely dark. Occasionally the wind blows the white curtain at the window and sets the candle flame tossing.



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Tony and Speransky talk in whispers. A prolonged pause follows the rise of the curtain._

TONY (*bending over to Speransky, mysteriously*)

So you say it is possible we do not exist, eh?

SPERANSKY (*in the same manner*)

As I have already stated, it is doubtful, extremely doubtful. There is very good reason to suppose that we really do not exist—that we don't exist at all.

TONY

And you are not, and I am not.

SPERANSKY

And you are not, and I am not. No one is. (*Pause*)

TONY (*looking around, mysteriously*)

Where are we then?

SPERANSKY

We?

TONY

Yes, we.

SPERANSKY

That's something no one can tell. No one knows, Anthony.

TONY

No one?



SPERANSKY

No one.

TONY (*glancing around*)

Doesn't Savva know?

SPERANSKY

No, Savva doesn't know either.

TONY

Savva knows everything.

SPERANSKY

But even he doesn't know that.

TONY (*threatening with his finger*)

Keep still, keep still! (*Both look around and are silent*)

TONY (*mysteriously*)

Where are they going, eh?

SPERANSKY

To the elevation of the ikon. To-morrow is a feast-day—the day of raising the ikon.

TONY

No, I mean where are they really going—really—don't you understand?

SPERANSKY

I do. It isn't known. No one knows, Anthony.



TONY

Hush! *(Makes a funny grimace, closes his mouth with his hand and leans on it)*

SPERANSKY *(in a whisper)*

What's the matter?

TONY

Keep quiet, keep quiet. Listen. *(Both are listening)*

TONY *(in whisper)*

Those are faces.

SPERANSKY

Yes?

TONY

It's faces that are going. A lot of faces—can't you see them?

SPERANSKY *(staring)*

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No, I can't.

TONY

But I can. There they are, laughing. Why aren't you laughing, eh?

SPERANSKY

I feel very despondent.

TONY

Laugh. You must laugh. Everybody is laughing. Hush, hush! (*Pause*) Listen, nobody exists, nobody—do you understand? There is no God, there is no man, there are no animals. Here is the table—it doesn't exist. Here is the candle—it doesn't exist. The only things that exist are faces—you understand? Keep quiet, keep quiet. I am very much afraid.

SPERANSKY

What are you afraid of?

TONY (*bending near to Speransky*)

That I'll die of laughter.

SPERANSKY

Really?

TONY (*shaking his head affirmatively*)

Yes, that I'll die of laughter. I am afraid that some day I'll catch sight of a face which will send me off roaring with laughter; and I'll roar and roar until I die. Keep quiet. I know.

SPERANSKY

You never laugh



TONY

I am always laughing, but you don't see it. It's nothing. The only thing I am afraid is that I'll die. I'll come across a face one of these days which will start me off in a fit of laughter, and I'll laugh and laugh and laugh and won't be able to stop. Yes, it's coming, it's coming. (*Wipes his chest and neck*)

SPERANSKY

The dead know everything.

TONY (*mysteriously, with awe*)

I am afraid of Savva's face. It's a very funny face. One could die laughing over it. The point is that you can't stop laughing—that's the principal thing. You laugh and laugh and laugh. Is there nobody here?

SPERANSKY

Apparently no.

TONY

Keep quiet, keep quiet, I know. Keep quiet. (*Pause; the tramp of the pilgrim's footsteps grows louder, as if they were walking in the very room itself*) Are they going?

SPERANSKY

Yes, they are going. (*Pause*)

TONY

I like you. Sing me that song of yours. I'll listen.

SPERANSKY

With your permission, Anthony. (*Sings in an undertone, almost in a whisper, a dismal, long-drawn-out tune somewhat resembling a litany*)

Life's a sham, 'tis false, untrue,
Death alone is true, aye, true.



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(With increasing caution and pedantry, shaking his finger as if imparting a secret)

All things tumble, vanish, break,
Death is sure to overtake
Outcast, tramp, and tiniest fly
Unperceived by naked eye.

TONY

What?

SPERANSKY

Unperceived by naked eye,
Wheedling, coaxing, courting, wooing,
Death weds all to their undoing
And the myth of life is ended.

That's all, Anthony.

TONY

Keep still, keep still. You have sung your song—now keep quiet.

*[Lipa enters, opens the window, removes the flowers, and looks out into the street.
Then she lights the lamp.]*

TONY

Who is it? Is that you, Lipa? Lipa, eh, Lipa, where are they going?

LIPA

They are coming here for the feast-day. You had better go to bed, Tony, or father will see you and scold you.

SPERANSKY

Big crowds, aren't they?



LIPA

Yes. But it's so dark, you can't see. Why are you so pale, Mr. Speransky? It is positively painful to look at you.

SPERANSKY

That's how I feel, Miss Lipa.

[A cautious knock is heard at the window.]

LIPA *(opening the window)*

Who is there?

TONY *(to Speransky)*

Keep quiet, keep quiet.

KING FRIAR *(thrusting his smiling face through the window)* Is Savva Yegorovich in? I wanted to ask him to come with me to the woods.

LIPA

No. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Vassya? To-morrow is a big feast-day in your monastery and you—

YOUNG FRIAR *(smiling)*

There are plenty of people in the monastery without me. Please tell Mr. Savva that I have gone to the ravine to catch fireflies. Ask him to call out: "Ho, ho!"

LIPA

What do you want fireflies for?

YOUNG FRIAR

Why, to scare the monks with. I'll put two fireflies next to each other like eyes, and they'll think it's, the devil. Tell him, please, to call: "Ho, ho, ho!" *(He disappears in the darkness)*

LIPA *(shouting after him)*

He can't come to-day. *(To Speransky)* Gone already—ran off.

SPERANSKY

They buried three in the cemetery to-day, Miss Olympiada.



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LIPA

Have you seen Savva?

SPERANSKY

No, I am sorry to say I haven't. I say, they buried three people to-day. One old man—perhaps you knew him—Peter Khvorostov?

LIPA

Yes, I knew him. So he's dead?

SPERANSKY

Yes, and two children. The women wept a great deal.

LIPA

What did they die of?

SPERANSKY

I am sorry, but I don't know. It didn't interest me. Some children's disease, I suppose. When children die, Miss Olympiada, they turn all blue and look as if they wanted to cry. The faces of grown people are tranquil, but children's faces are not. Why is that so?

LIPA

I don't know—I've never noticed it.

SPERANSKY

It's a very interesting phenomenon.



LIPA

There's father now. I told you to go to bed. Now I've got to listen to your brawling. I'll get out.

(Exit. Enter Yegor Tropinin)

YEGOR

Who lighted the lamp?

SPERANSKY

Good evening, Mr. Tropinin.

YEGOR

Good evening. Who lighted the lamp?

SPERANSKY

Miss Olympiada.

YEGOR *(blowing it out)*

Learned it from Savva. *(To Tony)* And you, what's the matter with you? How long, how long, for Christ's sake? How long am I to stand all this from you, you good-for-nothing loafers? Eh? Where did you get the whiskey, eh?

TONY

At the bar.

YEGOR

It wasn't put there for you, was it?

TONY

You have a very funny face, father.



YEGOR

Give me the whiskey.

TONY

I won't.

YEGOR

Give here!

TONY

I won't.

YEGOR (*slaps his face*)

Give it to me, I say.

TONY (*falls on the sofa, still holding on to the bottle*)

I won't.



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YEGOR (*sitting down, calmly*)

All right, swill until you bust, devil. What was I saying? That fool put it out of my head. Oh yes, the pilgrims are going, it strong this time. It's been a bad year for the crops. That's another reason, I suppose. There's no grub, they have nothing to eat, and so they'll pray. If God listened to every fool's prayer, we'd have a fine time of it. If he listened to every fool, what chance would the wise man have? A fool remains a fool. That's why he is called a fool.

SPERANSKY

That's correct.

YEGOR

I should say it is correct. Father Parfeny is a smart man. He flim-flams them all right. He put up a new coffin—did you hear that? The old one has all been eaten away by the pilgrims, so he put a new one into its place. It was old, so he put a new one instead. They'll eat that one away. No matter what you give them—Tony, are you drinking again?

TONY

I am.

YEGOR

I am! I am! I'll hand you out another one in a moment and we'll see what you say then.

[Enter Savva, looking very gay and lively. He stoops less than usual, talks rapidly, and looks sharp and straight, but his gaze does not rest long on the same person or object.]

SAVVA

Ah, the philosophers! Father! A worthy assemblage. Why do you keep it so dark here, like some hell-hole with a lot of rats in it? A philosopher has to have light. The dark is good only for going through people's pockets. Where is the lamp? Oh, here it is. (*He lights the lamp*)

YEGOR (*ironically*)



Perhaps you'll open the windows too?

SAVVA

Quite right. I'll open the windows also. (*Opens them*) My, how they keep pouring in!

SPERANSKY

A whole army.

SAVVA

And all of them will die in time and acquire peace. And then they'll know the truth, for it never comes except in the society of worms. Have I got the essence of your optimistic philosophy down right, my thin, lean friend?

SPERANSKY (*with a sigh*)

You are always joking.

SAVVA.

And you are always moping. Look here now. What with the poor, scanty fare the deacon's wife doles out to you and your constant grieving, you will soon die, and then your face will assume an expression of perfect peace. A peaked nose, and all around, stretching in every direction, a vast expanse of peace. Can't you get some comfort out of that? Isn't it a consolation to you? Think of it, a tiny island of nose lapped in an ocean of peace.



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SPERANSKY (*dejectedly*)

You are still joking.

SAVVA

The idea! Who would joke about death? No, when you die, I'll follow your funeral and proclaim to all: "Behold, here is a man who has come to know the truth." Oh no, I'll rather hang you up as a banner of truth. And, the more your skin and flesh decompose and crumble, the more will the truth come out. It will be a most instructive object lesson, highly educative. Tony, why are you staring at me?

TONY (*sadly*)

You have a very funny face.

YEGOR

What are they talking about?

SAVVA

Father, what's the matter with your face? Have you sooted it? It looks as black as Satan's.

YEGOR (*quickly putting his hand to his face*)

Where?

SPERANSKY

They are just making fun. There is nothing on your face, Mr. Tropinin.

YEGOR

The fool! Satan? You are Satan yourself, God forgive me!

SAVVA (*making a terrible face and holding up his fingers in the shape of horns*) I am the devil.



YEGOR

By God, you are the very devil himself!

SAVVA (*glancing round the room*)

Isn't the devil going to get any dinner to-day? I have had all I want of sinners. I am surfeited with them. I should like to have something more appetizing now.

YEGOR

Where were you knocking about at the regular dinner hour? You'll have to do without dinner now.

SAVVA

I was with the children, father, with the children. They told me stories. They tell stories splendidly, and they were all about devils, witches, and the dead—your specialty, philosopher. They trembled with fear as they told them. That's why we stayed so long. They were afraid to go home. Misha was the only one who wasn't scared. He is a brick. He's afraid of nothing.

SPERANSKY (*indifferently*)

What of it? He'll die too.

SAVVA

My dear sir, don't be so funereal. You are like an undertakers' trust. Don't be forever croaking: "Die, die, die." Here, take my father, for instance. He'll soon die; but look at his face, how pleasant and cheerful it is.

YEGOR

Satan! You're the devil incarnate!

SPERANSKY

But since we don't know—

SAVVA



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My good friend, life is such an interesting business. You understand—life. Come, let's have a game of jackstones to-morrow. I'll provide the jacks, first-class jacks. (*Enter Lipa, unnoticed*) And then you should take gymnastic exercises. I mean it seriously. See how sunken your chest is. You'll choke of consumption in a year or so. The deaconess will be glad, but it will create consternation among the dead. Seriously now. I have taken gymnastic exercises. Look. (*He lifts a heavy chair easily by the leg*) There, you see!

LIPA (*laughing aloud*)

Ha, ha, ha!

SAVVA (*putting the chair down, with a touch of embarrassment*)

What's the matter? I didn't know you were here.

LIPA

You, ought to join the circus as an acrobat.

SAVVA (*glumly*)

Don't talk nonsense.

LIPA

Are you offended?

SAVVA (*suddenly bursting into a good-natured, merry laugh*) Oh, a trifle! All right, the circus, why not? We'll both join it, Speransky and I. Not as acrobats though, but as clowns. How about it? Can you swallow hot junk? No? Well, I'll teach you. As for you, Lipa, won't you please let me have something to eat? I haven't had anything since this morning.

YEGOR

A regular Satan, a regular Satan! Hasn't had anything to eat! Who has ever heard of eating at this hour of the night? Who has ever seen such a thing?



SAVVA

I'll give you a chance to see it now. It's very interesting. Wait, I'll teach you also how to swallow hot junk. I'll make you an expert. You'll be a wonder.

YEGOR

Me? Fool, you can't teach me anything any more. Tony, give me the whiskey.

TONY

I won't.

YEGOR

The devil take you all! Brought up and fed a lot of—*(Exit)*

LIPA *(handing him milk and dark bread)*

You seem to be happy to-night?

SAVVA

Yes, I am, and you are happy too.

LIPA *(laughing)*

I am.

SAVVA

And I am happy. *(He drinks the milk with avidity; the footsteps in the street grow louder, filling the room with their sound, and then die away again)* What a treading and a tramping!

LIPA *(looking out of the window)*

The weather will be fine to-morrow. As long as I can remember the sun has always been shining brightly that way.

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SAVVA

Hm, yes. That's good.

LIPA

And when they carry the ikon, it sparkles all over with the precious stones like fire. Only His face remains gloomy. All the gems don't give him any pleasure. He is sad and gloomy like the people's woe.

SAVVA (*coolly*)

Hm, yes. Is that so?

LIPA

Just think how many tears have fallen upon Him, how many sighs and groans He has heard! That alone is enough to make the ikon holy for all who love and sympathize with the people and understand their soul. Why, they have nobody except Christ, all those unfortunate, miserable people. When I was a little girl, I was always waiting for a miracle—

SAVVA

It would be interesting.

LIPA

But now I understand that He Himself is waiting for a miracle from the people. He is waiting for the people to stop fighting, hating, and destroying each other.

SAVVA

Well, what of it?

LIPA (*fixing her gaze upon him*)

Nothing. To-morrow you'll see for yourself when they carry Him in the procession. You'll see what effect the mere consciousness that He is there with them has upon them, how it transforms them, what it does to them. The whole year round they live a



dog's life, in filth, quarrelling with each other, suffering. On that day all the ugliness seems to vanish. It is an awful and a joyous day when suddenly you cast away from yourself all that is superfluous and when you feel so clearly your nearness to all the unfortunates that are and ever were, and your nearness to God.

SAVVA (*abruptly*)

What time is it?

SPERANSKY

The clock has just struck a quarter past eleven, if I am not mistaken.

LIPA

It's still early.

SAVVA

Early for what?

LIPA

Nothing. It's still early, that's all.

SAVVA (*suspiciously*)

What do you mean?

LIPA (*defiantly*)

What I mean.

SAVVA

Why did you say it's still early?

LIPA (*paling*)

Because it's only a little after eleven; but when it's twelve—

SAVVA (*jumping up and going to her quickly; fixing her with his stare, he speaks slowly, pronouncing every word separately and distinctly*) So? Is that it? When it's twelve— (*He turns to Speransky without removing his eyes from Lipa*) Listen, you go home.



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LIPA (*frightened*)

No, stay, Mr. Speransky. Please stay, I beg you.

SAVVA

If you don't go at once, I'll throw you out of the window. Well?

SPERANSKY

Excuse me, I never had the faintest idea—I was here with Mr. Anthony Tropinin. I am going instantly. Where is my hat? I put it here somewhere—

SAVVA

There's your hat. (*Throws it to him*)

LIPA (*feebly*)

Stay here awhile longer, Mr. Speransky. Sit down.

SPERANSKY

No, it's late. I must go to bed. Good night, Miss Olympiada. Good night, Mr. Tropinin. Your brother is asleep already, I believe. You ought to take him to bed. I'm going, I'm going. (*Exit*)

SAVVA (*speaking in a quiet, calm tone; his movements are heavy and slow, as if his body had suddenly stiffened*) You know it?

LIPA

I do.

SAVVA

You know all?



LIPA

All.

SAVVA

Did the monk tell you?

LIPA

He did.

SAVVA

Well?

LIPA (*drawing back a little, and raising her hand for protection*)-Well, nothing will happen. There'll be no blowing up. You understand, Savva, there'll be no explosion.

[Pause. Footsteps are heard in the street, and indistinct talking. Savva turns around. Stooping more than usually, he takes a turn around the room with peculiar slowness.

SAVVA

Well?

LIPA

Then you had better believe me, brother. Believe me.

SAVVA

Yes?

LIPA

Why that was—I don't know what it was—it was a piece of madness. Think it over.

SAVVA

Is it really true?

LIPA

Yes, it's true. It's all over. You can't help it any more. There is nothing for you to do.

SAVVA

Tell me how it happened. *(Sits down deliberately, his eyes fixed on Lipa)*

LIPA

I guessed a little something long ago—that day when you spoke to me—only I didn't know exactly what it was. And I saw the little machine too. I have another key to the trunk.



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SAVVA

Evidently you have been cut out for a spy. Go on!

LIPA

I am not afraid of insults.

SAVVA

Never mind, never mind—go on.

LIPA

Then I saw that you had frequent talks with that fellow—Kondraty. Yesterday I looked in the trunk again, and the machine wasn't there. So I understood.

SAVVA

You say you have another key?

LIPA

Yes. The trunk is mine, you know. Well, and to-day—

SAVVA

When to-day?

LIPA

Toward evening—I couldn't find Kondraty anywhere—I told him that I knew all. He got very much frightened and told me the rest.



SAVVA

A worthy pair—spy and traitor.

LIPA

If you are going to insult me, I won't say another word.

SAVVA

Never mind, never mind—go on.

LIPA

He was going to tell the Father Superior, but I didn't let him. I didn't want to ruin you.

SAVVA

No?

LIPA

When it was, all over, I understood what a crazy scheme it was—so crazy that I simply can't think of it as real. It must have been a nightmare. It's quite impossible. And I began to feel sorry for you—

SAVVA

Yes.

LIPA

I am sorry for you now too. *(With tears)* Savva, darling, you are my brother. I have rocked your cradle. My dear angel, what idea is this you have got into your mind? Why, it's terrible—it's madness. I understand how hard it must be for you to see how people live, and so you have resolved on a desperate deed. You have always been good and kind, and so I can understand you. Don't you think it's hard for me to see this life? Don't you think I suffer myself? Give me your hand.

SAVVA *(pushing her hand away)*



He told you he would go to the Superior?

LIPA

But I didn't let him.

SAVVA

Has he got the machine?

LIPA



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He'll give it back to you to-morrow. He was afraid to give it to me. Savva dear, don't look at me like that. I know it's unpleasant for you, but you have a lot of common sense. You can't help seeing that what you wanted to do was an absurdity, a piece of lunacy, a vagary that can come to one only in one's dreams at night. Don't I understand that life is hard? Am I not suffering from it myself? I understand even your comrades, the anarchists. It's not right to kill anybody; but still I understand them. They kill the bad.

SAVVA

They are not my comrades. I have no comrades.

LIPA

Aren't you an anarchist?

SAVVA

No.

LIPA

What are you then?

TONY (*raising his head*)

They are going, they are going. Do you hear?

SAVVA (*quietly, but ominously*)

They are going.

LIPA

There, you see. Who is going? Think of it. It's human misery that's going. And you wanted to take away from them their last hope, their last consolation. And to what purpose? In the name of what? In the name of some wild, ghastly dream about a "naked earth." (*Peers with terror into the darkness of the room*) A naked earth! It's terrible to think of it. A naked earth! How could a man, a human being, ever conceive such an idea? A naked earth! Nothing, nothing! Everything laid bare, everything



annihilated. Everything that people worked for through all the years; everything they have created with so much toil, with so much pain. Unhappy people! There is among you a man who says that all this must be burned, must be consumed with fire.

SAVVA

You remember my words to perfection.

LIPA

You awakened me, Savva. When you told me all that, my eyes were suddenly opened, and I began to love everything. Do you understand? I began to love it all. These walls—formerly I didn't notice them; now I am sorry for them—so sorry, I could cry. And the books and everything—each brick, each piece of wood to which man has applied his labor. Let's admit that it's poor stuff. Who says it's good? But that's why I love it—for its defects, its imperfections, its crooked lines, its unfulfilled hopes. For the labor and the tears. And all who hear you talking, Savva, will feel as I do, and will begin to love all that is old and dear and human.

SAVVA

I have nothing to do with you.

LIPA



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Nothing to do with us? With whom then have you to do? No, Savva, you don't love anyone. You love only yourself and your dreams. He who loves men will not take away from them all they have. He will not regard his own wishes more than their lives. Destroy everything! Destroy Golgotha! Consider: (*with terror*) destroy Golgotha! The brightest, the most glorious hope that ever was on earth! All right, you don't believe in Christ. But if you have a single drop of nobility in your nature, you must respect and honor His noble memory. He was also unhappy. He was crucified—crucified, Savva. You are silent? Have you nothing to say?

SAVVA

Nothing.

LIPA

I thought—I thought—if you succeeded in carrying out your plot—I thought I'd kill you—that I'd poison you like some noxious beast.

SAVVA

And if I don't succeed—

LIPA

You are still hoping?

SAVVA

And if I don't succeed, I'll kill you.

LIPA (*advancing a step toward him*)

Kill me! Kill me! Give me a chance to suffer for the sake of Christ.
For the sake of Christ and for the sake of the people.

SAVVA

Yes. I'll kill you.



LIPA

Do you suppose I didn't think of it? Do you suppose I didn't think of it? Oh, Lord, to suffer for Thee! Is there higher happiness than that?

SAVVA (*with a contemptuous gesture, pointing at Lipa*)

And that's a human being! That's one counted among the best! That's the kind in which they take pride! Ah me, how poor you are in good people!

LIPA

Insult! Mock! That's the way it has always been. They have always heaped insults upon us before they killed us.

SAVVA

No, I don't mean to insult you. How can I insult you? You are simply a silly woman. There have been many such in the past. There are many such to-day. You are simply a foolish, insignificant creature. You are even innocent, like all insignificant persons. And if I mean to kill you, there is no reason to be proud of it. Don't think you are an object specially worthy of my indignation. No, it would merely make matters a little easier for me. When I was chopping wood, and the axe in my raised arm struck the threshold instead of the log of wood, the jar was not so hard as if someone had arrested the motion of my arm. A raised hand must fall on something.

LIPA

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And to think that this beast is my brother!

SAVVA

Whose cradle you rocked and whose diapers you changed. Yes. But to me it doesn't seem in the least strange that you are my sister, or that this bundle there is my brother. No, Tony! They are going. *(Tony turns his head and stares stupidly without making any answer)* And it doesn't seem in the least strange to me that any insignificant chit and piece of nothingness calling itself my brother or my sister should go to the chemist's and buy a nickel's worth of arsenic on finding out who I am. You see, they have even attempted to poison me. The girl who left me tried to do it, but she lost her nerve. The point is that my sisters and brothers, among other things, have the characteristic of being cowards.

LIPA

I would have done it.

SAVVA

I don't doubt it. You are a little hysterical, and hysterical people are determined, unless they happen to burst into tears first.

LIPA

I hysterical? All right, have it your way, have it your way. And who are you, Savva?

SAVVA

That doesn't interest me.

LIPA

They are going, they are going. And they will find what they need. And that is the work of an hysterical woman. Do you hear how many of them there are? And if they found out—if I were to open the window this minute and cry out: "This man here has tried to destroy your Christ"—If you want it, I'll do it this instant. You need only say so. Shall I? *(She takes a step toward the window in a frenzy of rage)* Shall I?



SAVVA

Yes, it's a good way of escaping the crown of thorns. Go ahead, shout. But look out, don't knock Tony down.

LIPA (*turning back*)

I am sorry for you. You are beaten, and one doesn't like to kick a man who is down. But remember, remember, Savva, there are thousands, thousands of them coming in, and each one is your death!

SAVVA (*smiling*)

The tramp of death.

LIPA

Remember that each one of these would consider himself happy in killing you, in crushing you like a reptile. Each one of these is your death. Why, they beat a simple thief to death, a horse thief. What would they not do to you! You who wanted to steal their God.

SAVVA

Quite true. That's property too.

LIPA

You still have the brazenness to joke? Who gave you the right to do such a thing? Who gave you power over people? How dare you meddle with what to them is right? How dare you interfere with their life?

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SAVVA

Who gave me the right? You gave it to me. Who gave me the power? You gave it to me. And I will cling to it with grim determination. Try to take it from me. You gave it to me—you with your malice, your ignorance, your stupidity! You with your wretched impotence! Right! Power! They have turned the earth into a sewer, an outrage, an abode of slaves. They worry each other, they torture each other, and they ask: “Who dares to take us by the throat?” !! Do you understand? !! (*Rises*)

LIPA

You are a mere man like everybody else.

SAVVA

I am the avenger! Behind me follow in pursuit all those whom you stifled and crushed. Ah, they have been pursuing their wicked trade in all quietness, thinking that no one would discover them—thinking that they would get away with it in the end. They have been lying, grovelling, and sneaking. They have been cringing and abusing themselves before their altars and their impotent God, saying: “There is nothing to be afraid of—we are among ourselves.” Then comes a man who says: “An accounting—I want an accounting! What have you done? Out with it. Give me an accounting. Go on now! Don’t try to cheat, for I know you. I demand an account for each and every single item. I will not condone a single drop of blood, I will not absolve you from a single tear.”

LIPA

But to destroy all. Think of it!

SAVVA

What could you do with them? What would *you* do? Try to persuade the oxen to turn away from their bovine path? Catch each one by his horns and pull him away? Would you put on a frock-coat and read a lecture? Haven’t they had plenty to teach them? As if words and thoughts had any significance to them! Thought—pure, unhappy thought! They have perverted it. They have taught it to cheat and defraud. They have made it a saleable commodity to be bought at auction in the market. No, sister, life is short and I am not going to waste it in arguments with oxen. The way to deal with them is by fire. That’s what they require—fire! Let them remember long the day on which Savva Tropinin came to the earth!

LIPA

But what do you want? What do you want?

SAVVA

What do I want? To free the earth, to free mankind, to sweep the whole two-legged, chattering tribe out of existence. Man—the man of to-day—is wise. He has come to his senses. He is ripe for liberty. But the past eats away his soul like a canker. It imprisons him within the iron circle of things already accomplished, within the iron circle of facts. I want to demolish the facts—that's what I want to do: demolish all facts! To sweep away all the accumulated rubbish—literature, art, God. They have perverted mankind. They have immortalized stupidity. I want to do away with everything behind man, so that there is nothing to see when he looks back. I want to take him by the scruff of his neck and turn his face toward the future.

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LIPA

Look here, Savva. You are not immortal, and the two-legged animal has arms also.

SAVVA

Do you think I don't know that every one of these stupid asses would be glad to kill me? But it won't happen, it won't happen. The time has come for my arrival, and I have arrived. Prepare yourselves. The time has come. You little insignificant thing there—you thought that by stealing one little possibility away from me you could rob me of all? Oh no—I am as rich as ever.

LIPA

I am your sister, but oh! how glad I am that you are not immortal.

SAVVA

I see that you are a thoroughgoing anarchist. They too think that all is done if one man is killed. But if they kill me, hang me, break me on the wheel, there will come another purer than I. Where there's an itch, there is always somebody to scratch it! Yes, sister! If not I, then someone else, and (*clenching his fist*) it will fare ill with your world.

LIPA

You are a terrible man. I thought you would be crushed by your failure, but you are like Satan. The fall has only made you blacker.

SAVVA

Yes, Lipa, only a sparrow can fly straight up from the ground. A large bird must descend to adjust and spread its wings for its upward flight.

LIPA

Aren't you sorry for the children? Think of the number of children that will have to perish.



SAVVA

What children? Oh yes, Misha. (*Tenderly*) Misha is a fine boy, that's true. When he grows up, he will show you no mercy. Yes, the children—You are beginning to be afraid of them, and you have good reason for it. Never mind. It's true that I love children. (*With pride*) And they love me. But they don't care for you.

LIPA

I don't play jackstones with them.

SAVVA

How silly you are, sister. But I like to play with them.

LIPA

Then go ahead and play.

SAVVA

Well, I *will* play.

LIPA

When you talk like that I have the feeling once more that it has all been a dream—all that we were saying just now. Is it really true that you want to kill me?

SAVVA

Yes, if it must be done. But perhaps it won't be necessary.



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LIPA

You are joking!

SAVVA

Every one of you will have it that I am joking. You keep constantly telling me so. You seem to have utterly lost the sense for what is serious.

LIPA

No, it's not a dream. They are going.

SAVVA

Yes, they are going. *(Both listen)*

LIPA

You still seem to believe. What do you believe?

SAVVA

I believe in my destiny. *(The hour begins to strike in the belfry of the monastery)* Twelve.

LIPA *(counting)*

Seven—eight—and to think that this is the hour when it should have happened—the very idea of it—*(A muffled report as of a powerful explosion is heard)* What was that?

SAVVA

Yes, what was it?

[Both rush to the window, waking Tony, who moves his head sleepily. The tread of the footsteps in the street stops momentarily. Then all begin to run. Frightened cries are heard, weeping, loud, abrupt ejaculations of "What's the matter?" "Oh, Lord!" "Fire, fire!" "No, something has fallen down!" "Let's run!" The word "monastery" is frequently heard.]



TONY

They are running! Where are they running to? Why is nobody here?

PELAGUEYA (*entering the room, half dressed*)

Oh, Lord! Oh, heavens! Is it possible the monastery is on fire! Good gracious! Heavens! And you here, you drunken sot! You monster!

TONY

Oho! They are running? Faces, mugs, eh?

[The bell begins to toll the alarm. Then the strokes follow each other in more rapid succession; hasty, disquieting, uneven, they blend with the noise of the street and seem to creep through the window.]

PELAGUEYA (*crying*)

Good God, I don't know where to turn.

[She runs out. The cries in the street grow louder. Someone yells in one prolonged note "Oh-oh-oh!" until the sound is drowned in the general noise, excitement, and ringing.]

LIPA (*moving away from the window, very pale, stupefied*) What does it mean? It cannot be. It is impossible. Tony, Tony, get up. Tony, brother, what does it mean? Tony!

TONY (*reassuringly*)

It's nothing. They are all faces.

SAVVA (*leaving the window, calm and stern, but also pale*) Well, sister?

LIPA (*flinging herself about the room*)

I want to run with the rest. I'll run. Where is my scarf? Where is my scarf? My God, My God! Where is my scarf?



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SAVVA

Your scarf? There it is. But I won't give it to you. Sit down; you have nothing to do there.

LIPA

Let me have it.

SAVVA

No, sit down, sit down. It's too late now anyway.

LIPA

Too late?

SAVVA

Yes, too late. Don't you hear the noise the crowd is making and the way they are running and pushing?

LIPA

I'll run, I'll run.

SAVVA

Keep still—sit down. *(Forces her to sit down)* Tony, did you hear? They've exploded God.

TONY *(looking at Savva's face in terror)*

Savva, don't make me laugh. Turn your face away.

[Savva smiles and walks around the room with buoyant step, without his usual stoop.]

LIPA *(faintly)*



Savva.

SAVVA

What is it? Speak louder.

LIPA

Is it, really true?

SAVVA

It's true.

LIPA

And doesn't He really exist?

SAVVA

He does not.

[Lipa begins to cry, at first low, then more and more loudly. The sound of the ringing bells and the noise of the crowd continue to swell. The rolling and clatter of wagons is also heard.]

SAVVA

They are running. My, how they are running! *(Lipa says something, but her words are inaudible)* Louder. I can't hear you. My, how they are ringing.

LIPA *(aloud)*

Kill, me, Savva.

SAVVA

Why? You'll die anyhow.

LIPA

I can't wait. I'll kill myself.

SAVVA

Go ahead, kill yourself, kill yourself quick!

[Lipa cries, burying her head in the armchair Tony, his face distorted with fear, looks at Savva, holding both his hands in readiness at his mouth. Loud peals of the bell. The disquieting sound blends with the loud tone of Savva's speech.]

SAVVA (*shouting*)

Ah! They are ringing. Ring on! Ring on! Soon the whole earth will ring. I hear! I hear! I see your cities burning! I see the flames. I hear the crackling. I see the houses tumbling on your heads. There is no place to run to. No refuge! No refuge! Fire everywhere. The churches are burning. The factories are burning. The boilers are bursting. An end to all slavish toil!



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TONY (*trembling with fear*)

Savva, shut up, or I am going to laugh.

SAVVA (*unheeding*)

The time has come! The time has come! Do you hear? The earth is casting you out. There is no place for you on earth. No! He is coming! I see him! He is coming, the free man! He is being born in the flames! He himself is fire and resolution! An end to the earth of slaves!

TONY

Savva, shut up!

SAVVA (*bending down to Tony*)

Be prepared! He is coming! Do you hear his tread? He is coming! He is coming!

CURTAIN

THE FOURTH ACT

Near the monastery. A broad road crosses the stage obliquely. On the far side of the road is the river, beyond which opens a wide prospect of the surrounding country—meadows, woods, and villages, with the crosses of the churches burning in the sun. In the distance, at the right, where the mountain projects over a glistening bend of the river, is seen a part of the walls and the towers of the monastery. On the near side of the road is a hilly elevation covered with trampled grass. It is between five and six in the morning. The sun is out. The mist over the meadow is scattering slowly.

Now and then a pilgrim or group of pilgrims may be seen hurrying by on their way to the monastery. Wagons carrying cripples and other monstrosities pass along the road. The noise of thousands may be heard from the monastery. The crowd is evidently moved by some joyous emotion. No individual voices are heard, but it is as if one could feel the singing of the blind, the cries, and the quick, glad snatches of conversation. The general effect is that of an elemental force. The noise decreases at regular intervals, like a wave, and then the singing of the blind becomes distinctly audible.

Lipa and the Young Friar appear on the near side of the road: Lipa is sitting on the hillock, dressed as she was the night before, but her head is covered with a white scarf carelessly tied. She is exhausted with joy and almost dropping off to sleep. The Friar stands near her. On his face there is a troubled, vacant look. His movements are



irresolute and aimless. He tries to smile, but his smile is twisted and pitiful. He is like a child who feels hurt without knowing the cause._

LIPA (*untying her scarf*)

Heavens, but this is splendid! I should like to die here. I can't get enough of it. Oh, it's splendid, it's splendid!

FRIAR (*looking around*)

Yes, it is splendid. But I can't stand it in there. I can't. They push and jostle and press and jam. They crushed the life out of one woman, absolutely crushed her. She had a child with her. I couldn't look at it. I—I'll go to the woods.

LIPA



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How splendid! Oh, Lord!

FRIAR (*looking dejectedly into the distance*)

I'll go to the woods.

LIPA

And to think that only yesterday everything was just as usual. There was nothing of all this, no miracle, nothing. There was only Savva—I can't believe it was yesterday. It seems to me a whole year has passed, a century. Oh, Lord!

FRIAR (*his face clouding*)

Why did he do it? Why?

LIPA

Can't you guess, Vassya?

FRIAR (*waving his hand*)

I asked him to come to the woods with me. He should have come.

LIPA

Did he tell you anything?

FRIAR (*waving his hand*)

He should have come. Yes, he should have come.

LIPA

Ah, Vassya, Vassya, on account of your woods you missed one of the greatest events that ever happened—so great, in fact, that no man remembers the like of it. Ah, Vassya, how can you be speaking about anything else when right now, right here—right here—a miracle has happened. Do you understand? A miracle! The very mention of it fills one with awe. A miracle! Oh, God! Where were you, Vassya, when the explosion occurred? In the woods?

FRIAR

Yes, in the woods. I didn't hear the explosion. I only heard the ringing of the alarm bell.

LIPA

Well?

FRIAR

Nothing. I ran back and found the gate open and everybody crying like mad. And the ikon—

LIPA

Well, well? Did you see?

FRIAR

Yes, it was in the same place as before. And all around—(*Growing animated*) You know the iron grating over there—you know it, don't you? It was twisted like a rope. It's funny to look at. It looks like something soft. I touched it, and it wasn't soft, of course. What power! It must have been something tremendous.

LIPA

Well, and what about the ikon—the ikon?

FRIAR

What about it? Nothing. It's there in its place, and our people are praying to it.

LIPA

Oh, Lord! And the glass is whole too?

FRIAR

The glass is whole too.

LIPA

That's what they told me, but I can't believe it yet. Forgive me, O Lord! Well, what are they doing? They are overjoyed, I suppose.

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FRIAR

Yes, they are overjoyed. They act as if they were drunk. You can't make out what they are saying. A miracle, a miracle. Father Kirill keeps grunting like a pig "Oui, oui, oui." They put cold compresses on his head. He is fat, and he may pass out any moment. No, I can't stand it here. Come, let us go. I'll take you home, Miss Olympiada.

LIPA

No, Vassya dear, I'll go in there.

FRIAR

Don't go, for heaven's sake. They'll crush you, as they did that woman. They are all like drunk. They are carrying on and shouting like mad, with their eyes wide open. Listen. Can't you hear them?

LIPA

You are still a boy, Vassya. You don't understand. Why, it's a miracle. All their lives these people have been waiting for a miracle. Perhaps they had already begun to despair, and now—O Lord! It's enough to make you mad with joy. Yesterday, when I heard the cry of "a miracle," I thought: "No, it's impossible. How could it happen?" But then I saw them crying, crossing themselves, and going down on their knees. And the ringing of the alarm bell stopped.

FRIAR

Oh, it was Afanassy who rang. He's terribly strong, a regular giant.

LIPA

And the only thing heard was "A miracle, a miracle!" No one spoke, and yet one kept hearing "A miracle, a miracle," as if the whole earth had become articulate. And even now, when I close my eyes, I hear "A miracle, a miracle!" (*She closes her eyes and listens with an ecstatic smile*) How splendid!

FRIAR

I am sorry for Mr. Savva. Listen to the noise they are making.

LIPA

Oh, don't talk about him. He'll have to answer to God. Are they going to sing "Christ is arisen" instead of the usual hymn when they carry the ikon in the procession to-day? Vassya, do you hear? I am asking you a question.

FRIAR

Yes, they say that they are. Go home, Miss Olympiada, won't you?

LIPA

You can go, if you like.

FRIAR

But how can I leave you alone? They'll come tearing down here soon. For heaven's sake, there is Mr. Savva!

[Savva comes in hatless. His face is dark and stormy. There are lines under his eyes. He looks sideways with a steady stare. Frequently he glances around and seems to be listening to something. His gait is heavy, but quick. Noticing Lipa and the Friar, he turns and walks toward them. At his approach Lipa rises and turns away.]



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SAVVA

Have you seen Kondraty?

FRIAR

No, he is in the monastery.

[Savva remains standing in silence. The noise in the monastery has subsided and the sad, pitiful singing of the blind is heard.]

FRIAR

Mr. Savva.

SAVVA

Have you got a cigarette?

FRIAR

No, I don't smoke. *(Plaintively)* Come to the woods, Mr. Savva. *(Savva remains immovable and silent)* They'll kill you, Mr. Tropinin. Come to the woods—please come! *(Savva looks fixedly at him, then silently turns and walks away)* Mr. Tropinin, on my word you had better come with me to the woods.

LIPA

Leave him alone. He is like Cain. He can't find a place on the earth. Everybody is rejoicing, and he—

FRIAR

His face is black. I am sorry for him.



LIPA

He is black all through. You had better keep away from him, Vassya. You don't know whom you are pitying. You are too young. I am his sister. I love him, but if he is killed, it will be a benefit to the whole world. You don't know what he wanted to do. The very thought of it is terrible. He is a madman, Vassya, a fearful lunatic. Or else he is—I don't know what.

FRIAR (*waving his hand*)

You needn't tell me all that. I know. Of course I know. Don't I see? But I am sorry for him all the same, and I am disgusted too. Why did he do it? Why? What stupid things people will do! Oh, my!

LIPA

I have only one hope—that he has understood at last. But if—

FRIAR

Well, what's the "if"?

LIPA

Oh, nothing, but—When he came here, it was as if a cloud had passed across the sun.

FRIAR

There you go also! You should be happy—Why don't you rejoice? Don't be "iffing" and "butting."

[A crowd begins to collect gradually. Two wagons with cripples stop on the road. A paralytic has been sitting for some time under a tree, crying and blowing his nose and wiping it with his sleeve. A Man in Peasant Overcoat appears from the direction of the monastery.]

MAN IN OVERCOAT (*officially*)

We must get the cripples over to Him, to the ikon—we must get them over there. What's the matter, women, are you asleep? Come on, move along. You'll get your rest over there. What's the matter with you, gran'pa? Why aren't you moving along? You ought to be there with your legs. Go on, old man, go on.



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PARALYTIC (*crying*)

I can't walk.

MAN IN OVERCOAT (*fussily*)

Oh, that's it? That's what's the matter with you, eh? Come, I'll give you a lift. Get up.

PARALYTIC

I can't.

PASSER-BY

Won't his legs work? What you want to do is to put him on his feet, and then he'll hop away by himself. Isn't that right, old man?

MAN IN OVERCOAT

You take hold of him on that side, and I'll take this one. Well, old man, get a move on you. You won't have to suffer long now.

PASSER-BY

There he goes hop, hop. That's right. Go it, go it, old man, and you won't get left. (*He goes away*)

FRIAR (*smiling happily*)

They started him going all right. Clever, isn't it? He is galloping away at a great rate too. Good-bye, old gran'pa.

LIPA (*crying*)

Lord! Lord!

FRIAR (*pained*)

What's the matter? Don't cry, for pity's sake. What are you crying for? There is no cause for crying.



LIPA

No cause do you say, Vassya? I am crying for joy. Why aren't you glad, Vassya? Don't you believe in the miracle?

FRIAR

Yes, I do. But I can't bear to see all this. They all behave like drunks, and shout and make a noise. You can't understand what they are talking about. They crushed that woman. *(With pain and disgust)* They squeezed the life out of her. Oh, Lord, I simply can't! And the whole business. Father Kirill keeps grunting "Oui, oui, oui." *(Laughs sadly)* Why is he grunting?

LIPA *(sternly)*

You learned that from Savva.

FRIAR

No, I didn't. Tell me, why is he grunting? *(Laughs sadly)* Why?

[Yegor Tropinin enters dressed in holiday attire, his beard and hair combed. He looks extremely solemn and stern.]

YEGOR

Why are you here, eh? And in that kind of dress? You're a fine sight.

LIPA

I had no time to get dressed.

YEGOR

But you found time to get here. What you have no business to do you have time for, but what you should do you have no time for. Go home and get dressed. It isn't proper. Who has ever seen such a thing?

LIPA

Oh, papa!

YEGOR



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There is nothing to “oh” about. It’s all right, papa is papa, but you see I am properly dressed. I dressed and then went out. That’s the right way to do. Yes. It’s a pleasure to look at myself sideways. I dressed as was proper, yes. On a day like this you ought to give a hand at the counter. Tony has disappeared, and Polya can’t do all the work herself. You needn’t be making such a face now.

MERCHANT (*passing by*)

Congratulate you on the miracle, Mr. Tropinin!

YEGOR

Thank you, brother, the same to you. Wait, I’ll go with you. You are a goose, Olympiada. You have always been a goose, and you have remained a goose to this day.

MERCHANT

You’ll have a fine trade now.

YEGOR

If it please the Lord! Why are you so late? Have you been sleeping? You keep sleeping, all of you, all the time. (*They go out*)

FRIAR

I scattered all the fireflies I caught on the road when I ran last night. And now the crowd has trampled them down. I wish I had left them in the woods. Listen to the way they are shouting. I wonder what’s the matter. They must have squeezed somebody to death again.

LIPA (*closing her eyes*)

When you talk, Vassya, your words seem to pass by me. I hear and I don’t hear. I think I should like to stay this way all my life without moving from the spot. I should like to remain forever with my eyes shut, listening to what is going on within me. Oh, Lord! What happiness! Do you understand, Vassya?



FRIAR

Yes, I understand.

LIPA

No. Do you understand what it is that has happened to-day? Why, it means that God has said—God Himself has said: “Wait and do not fear. You are miserable. Never mind, it’s nothing, it’s only temporary. You must wait. Nothing has to be destroyed. You must work and wait.” Oh, it will come, Vassya, it will come. I feel it now, I know it.

FRIAR

What will come?

LIPA

Life, Vassya, real life will come. Oh, mercy! I still feel like crying for joy. Don’t be afraid.

[Speransky and Tony enter, the latter very gloomy, glancing sideways and sighing. In a queer way he sometimes recalls Savva his gait and look.]

SPERANSKY

Good morning, Miss Olympiada. Good morning, Vassya. What an extraordinary event, if we are to believe what people say.

LIPA



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Believe, Mr. Speransky, believe.

SPERANSKY

You judge in a very simple offhand manner. If, however, you take into consideration the fact that it is highly probable that nothing exists, that even we ourselves do not exist—

TONY

Keep quiet.

SPERANSKY

Why? There is no miracle for me, Miss Olympiada. If at this moment, for example, everything on this earth were suddenly to be suspended in the air, I shouldn't regard it as a miracle.

LIPA

As what then? You're a very peculiar man.

SPERANSKY

I should look on it simply as a change. It was first one thing and then it became another. If you wish, I'll admit that for me the very fact that things are as they are is in itself a miracle. All are glad and rejoicing but I sit and think: "Time is blinking his eyes now, and there is a change. The old people are dead, and in their places appear the young. And they are apparently glad and rejoicing too."

TONY

Where is Savva?

LIPA

Why do you want him?



SPERANSKY

He has been looking for Mr. Savva ever so long. We have looked everywhere, but have not been able to find him.

FRIAR

He was here awhile ago.

TONY

Where did he go?

FRIAR

To the monastery, I think.

TONY (*pulling Speransky*)

Come.

SPERANSKY

Good-bye, Miss Olympiada. How they are shouting over there! The time will come when they will all be silent. (*They go off*)

FRIAR (*disturbed*)

Why are they looking for Mr. Savva?

LIPA

I don't know.

FRIAR

I don't like that seminarist. Always nosing about where there are dead around. What does he want? He is a dreadfully disagreeable fellow. Never misses a funeral. He smells death miles away.

LIPA

He is an unhappy creature.

FRIAR

Unhappy? Why is he unhappy? Even the dogs in the village are afraid of him. You don't believe it? It's so, upon my word! They bark at him, and then slink away behind the gate.

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LIPA

What does all this matter anyway, Vassya? It's of no account, mere trifles. To-day they are going to sing: "Christ is arisen from the dead. Death has conquered death." Do you understand? "Death has conquered death."

FRIAR

I understand. I understand. But why does he say "All will become silent" and that sort of stuff? I don't like it, I don't like it. They have crushed a woman to death—perhaps others too. (*Shaking his head*) I don't like it. In the woods everything is so quiet and nice, and here—I'd prefer that no miracle had happened. I'd rather have things nice and pleasant. What's the use of it? What's the use of the miracle? There is no need of a miracle.

LIPA

What are you talking about, Vassya?

FRIAR

Savva Tropinin! The idea. It shouldn't have been done. There was no need of it. He said he'd go with me to the woods and then—I liked him a lot, but now I am afraid of him. Why did he do it? Why? My, what a fearful crowd! More cripples coming, and more and more.

LIPA

What is the matter, Vassya? What are you so excited about?

FRIAR

Everything was so nice and fine. Oh, my! Why *don't* you go home, Miss Olympiada? Do go, please. You have seen all there is to be seen. It's enough. What can you gain by staying here? Come, I'll go with you. Oh, God, there comes Mr. Savva again!

LIPA

Where?



FRIAR

There he is. For heaven's sake!

SAVVA (*enters and sits down*)

Has Kondraty been here?

FRIAR

No, Mr. Savva.

[Pause. Again the piteous singing of the blind can be heard.]

SAVVA

Got a cigarette, Vassya?

FRIAR

No, I haven't. I don't smoke.

LIPA (*harshly*)

What are you waiting for, Savva? Go away. You are not wanted here. Look at yourself. You are a terrible sight. Your face is black.

SAVVA

I didn't sleep all last night. That's why it's black.

LIPA

What are you waiting for?

SAVVA

For an explanation.

LIPA



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You don't believe in the miracle?

SAVVA (*smiling*)

Vassya, do you believe in the miracle?

FRIAR

Yes, of course I do, Mr. Savva.

SAVVA

Wait. You'll find out. What are they doing down there? They have already crushed three to death.

FRIAR Three?

SAVVA

And they'll kill many more. And they all keep shouting: "A miracle, a miracle!" At last it has come. They have got what they have been waiting for at last.

LIPA

And it's you, Savva, who gave them the miracle. It's you who are to be thanked for it.

SAVVA (*gloomily*)

Well, Vassya, the monks are glad, aren't they? Tell me, don't be afraid.

FRIAR

They are very glad, Mr. Savva. They are crying.

SAVVA (*looking at him*)

Crying? Why are they crying?



FRIAR

I don't know. I suppose for joy. Father Kirill grunts like a pig "Oui, oui, oui." They all act as if they were drunk.

SAVVA (*rising, agitated*)

As if they were drunk? What does that mean? Perhaps they really are drunk.

FRIAR

Oh no, Mr. Tropinin. It's all on account of the miracle. They are mad with joy. Father Kirill keeps grunting "Oui, oui, oui." He vows that if he remains alive he'll swear off liquor and live as a hermit.

SAVVA (*eyeing him*)

Well?

FRIAR

That's all.

SAVVA

What do they say?

FRIAR

They say they'll do penance and stop sinning. They hug each other and behave as if they were drunk.

SAVVA (*walking up and down, stroking his forehead with his hand*) Yes, hm. So that's the way! Yes.

LIPA (*following him with her eyes*)

Go away from here, Savva. You are not wanted here.

SAVVA

What?

LIPA (*reluctantly*)



They may recognize you and then—Why don't you put on a hat at least?
You look like—

FRIAR

Yes, go—please go—dear Mr. Savva. Why, they—why, they might kill you!

SAVVA (*in a sudden outburst of anger*)

Leave me alone! No one will kill me. It's bosh! (*Pause. Sits down*) I wish I could get a drink of water or something. I am very thirsty. Isn't there a pool or something of the kind around here?



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FRIAR (*looking in terror at Savva*)

No, it's all dried up.

SAVVA (*frowning*)

Sorry.

FRIAR

Oh, that woman there has a jug of water. (*Gleefully*) I'll go and ask her for it. (*Runs*)

LIPA

You ought not to have that water. Go away from here, Savva, go away. Look what gladness there is all around you. Everybody, everything rejoices. The earth is glad. The sun is glad. You are the only one who is not—you alone. I still can't forget that you are my brother. Go. But wherever you go, bear with you the memory of this day always. Remember that the same fate awaits you everywhere. The earth will not surrender her God to you; the people will not surrender to you that whereby they live and breathe. Yesterday I still feared you. To-day I regard you with pity. You are pitiful, Savva! Go! Why are you laughing?

SAVVA (*smiling*)

Isn't it a little premature, sister, for you to be delivering my funeral oration?

LIPA

Aren't you frightened yet?

SAVVA

Why should I be frightened? At your tricks and jugglery? I am used to the lies and frauds, Lipa. You can't frighten me with them. I still have a lot of stupid confidence left. It will help. It will come in handy the next time.

LIPA

Savva!



FRIAR (*bringing the jug of water*)

I had the hardest time getting it from her. She was like flint. She said she needed it herself. She was a hard case.

SAVVA

Thank you, boy. (*Drinks with avidity*) Fine! (*Drinks the last drop*) That was fine water. Take it back and tell the woman her water was fine and that there is none like it in all the world.

FRIAR (*merrily*)

All right, I'll tell her. (*Goes off*)

LIPA (*in a whisper*)

You are the enemy of the human race.

SAVVA (*smacking his lips*)

Very well, very well. Just wait. We'll hear what Kondraty has to say. The blackguard! I'll give it to him!

LIPA (*with emphasis, but still in a whisper as before*)

You are the enemy of the human race! You are the enemy of the human race!

SAVVA

Louder! No one hears you. It's a spicy bit of information.

LIPA

Go away from here.

[*The Friar returns.*]

SAVVA (*looking into the distance with narrowed eyes*)

It's nice out there, isn't it, Vassya? Whose woods are they? Vazykin's? Have I ever been there with you?



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FRIAR (*gleefully*)

Yes, they're Vazykin's. I was there yesterday, Mr. Savva. I caught a whole handful of fireflies, but as I ran—(*He grows sorrowful at the memory*) My, how they are shouting! What are they up to anyway? Did you say they killed three, Mr. Tropinin? Was that what you said?

SAVVA (*coolly*)

Yes, three.

FRIAR

What are they pushing and jostling for anyhow? He'll be carried in the procession and they can all see Him.

SAVVA

When will they carry Him?

FRIAR (*looking up*)

It won't be long now.

LIPA

They'll sing "Christ is Arisen" to-day.

SAVVA (*smiling*)

Is that so? Didn't I arrange a feast-day for them though?

[*Tony and Speransky appear.*]

FRIAR

Are these fellows here too? For goodness' sake, what do they want? What are they looking for? I don't like it. Mr. Tropinin, come; let's go away from here.



SAVVA

Why?

FRIAR

They are coming this way, Speransky—

SAVVA

Aha! The “Tramp of Death” is approaching.

[Lipa looks at him in astonishment. The Friar presses his hand to his bosom in a state of agitation.]

FRIAR (*plaintively*)

What are you saying? Oh, God! Why did you say that? You mustn't do it. This is no tramp of death, nothing of the kind.

SAVVA

It's a kind of story he has written—Good morning, good morning. What can I do for you?

SPERANSKY

Mr. Anthony Tropinin is looking for you, Mr. Savva.

SAVVA

What do you want?

TONY (*very sadly, hiding a little behind Speransky*)

Nothing.

FRIAR (*listening attentively and then speaking with passion*) What are you running around for then, and whom are you hunting? If you want nothing, do nothing. But you are running around and hunting, hunting. It isn't nice, I tell you!

TONY (*after a passing glance at the Friar he fixes his gaze on Savva*) Savva.

SAVVA (*irritated*)

What do you want?

[Tony makes no answer, but hides behind Speransky, looking over his shoulder. In the course of what follows he keeps steadily looking at Savva. His lips and eyebrows twitch, and at times he presses both his hands hard against his mouth.]



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SPERANSKY

The crowd is in a state of great agitation, Miss Olympiada. They broke the old gate opening on the other side of the woods and rushed in. The Father Superior came out and asked them to behave. They shout so you can't hear anything at all. Many are rolling on the ground in convulsions. I suppose they are sick. It's very strange, quite unusual in fact.

LIPA

Will they carry Him out soon? I must go. *(Rises)*

SPERANSKY

They say it'll be soon now. One wagon with cripples in it was upset—cripples without hands or feet. They are lying on the ground crying. It's all so strange.

FRIAR

What? Did you see it yourself?

[Kondraty appears on the road coming from the monastery. He is walking in the company of two pilgrims, who are listening attentively to him. Catching sight of Savva, Kondraty says something to his companions, who remain standing where they are while he goes up to Savva.]

SAVVA

Aha!

KONDRATY *(clean, spruce, beaming)*

Good morning, Miss Olympiada. Good morning to you too, Mr. Savva Tropinin.

SAVVA

Good morning, good morning. You have come after all? You were not afraid?

KONDRATY *(calmly)*



Why should I be afraid? You won't kill me, I suppose, and if you should, it would be sweet to die at your hands.

SAVVA

What bravery! And how clean you are! You are positively painful to look at. You didn't make quite so smart an appearance when you lay wallowing in the puddle. You were a little the worse for the mud, and so on.

KONDRATY (*shrugging his shoulders and speaking with dignity*) It's no use recalling that incident now. It's quite out of place. Mr. Tropinin, it's time for you to have done with your spite and malice, high time.

SAVVA

Well?

KONDRATY

That's all. There is no "well" about it. You have had your shot. Be satisfied.

SAVVA

Are congratulations upon the miracle in order?

KONDRATY

Yes, Mr. Tropinin, upon the miracle—the miracle, indeed. (*He weeps with a bland air, wiping his face with his handkerchief*) God granted that I should live to see the day.

SAVVA (*rising and advancing a step toward the monk; peremptorily*) Enough now! Stop your hocus-pocus. You have played your trick. Now stop, or I'll knock all that jugglery out of you. Do you hear?



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FRIAR

Mr. Savva, good Mr. Savva, please don't.

KONDRATY (*drawing back a little*)

Not so loud, not so loud. We are not in the forest where you can kill rich merchants and get away with it. There are people here.

SAVVA (*lowering his voice*)

Well, tell me all about it. Come on.

KONDRATY

What's the use of going away? I can tell you everything right here. I have no secrets. It's you who have secrets. I am all here.

SAVVA

You'll lie if you tell it here.

KONDRATY (*heatedly, with tears*)

Shame, Mr. Tropinin! Shame! Shame! Why do you insult me? Is it because you saw me lying in the puddle? It's a sin, a shame!

SAVVA (*perplexed*)

What's the matter with you?

KONDRATY

Do you think I am going to lie on a day like this? Miss Olympiada, you at least ought to know—Good God! Good God! Why, Christ has just arisen! Do you understand?

[The crowd increases. Some cast glances at the group with the two monks before they pass on.]

LIPA (*excitedly*)

Father Kondraty—



KONDRATY (*beating his breast*)

Do you understand? I have lived all my life like a scoundrel, so why, why did God do this with me? Do you understand, Miss Olympiada? Do you understand? Eh?

SAVVA (*perplexed*)

Talk sense. Stop blubbering.

KONDRATY (*waving his hand*)

I am not angry with you. I bear you no grudge. Who are you that I should bear any resentment against you?

SAVVA

Talk sense.

KONDRATY

I'll tell Miss Olympiada. I won't speak to you. You knew me as a drunkard, Miss Olympiada, a mean, worthless creature. Now listen. (*To Speransky*) And you, young man, may listen also. It will teach you a lesson. It will show you how God works His will unseen.

LIPA

I see, Father Kondraty. Forgive me.

KONDRATY

God will forgive you. Who am I to forgive you? So that's the way it was, Miss Olympiada. I followed your advice and went to the Father Superior with the infernal machine. It was indeed an infernal machine! And I told him everything, just the way I felt, with a perfect candor and purity of heart.

SPERANSKY (*guessing*)

Is that how it happened? What a remarkable event!

FRIAR (*quietly*)

Keep quiet. What are you butting in for?

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KONDRATY

Ye-es. The Father Superior turned pale. “You scamp,” he said, “do you know with whom you have had dealings?” “I do,” I said, trembling all over. Well, they called together the whole brotherhood and discussed the matter in secret. And then the Father Superior said to me: “It’s this way, Kondraty,” he said. “God has chosen you as the instrument of His sacred will. Yes. (*Weeps*) God has chosen you as the instrument —”

LIPA

Well? Go on.

KONDRATY

Ye-es, hm. “Go,” he said, “and put down the machine as you were told to do, and set it going according to the directions. Carry out the devil’s plot in full. I and the other brothers will sing a hymn quietly as we carry the ikon away. Yes, that’s what we’ll do. We’ll carry the ikon away. And thus the devil will be made a fool of.”

SAVVA

Ah!

LIPA (*astonished*)

But, Father Kondraty, how can that be?

[*Savva laughs heartily.*]

KONDRATY

Patience, patience, Miss Olympiada. “And when,” said the Father Superior, “the devil’s plot shall have been carried out, then we’ll put the ikon—the dear, precious ikon—back in His place.” Well, I won’t attempt to describe the scene that took place when we carried the ikon away. It’s beyond my power. The brothers sobbed and wept. Not one of them was able to sing. The little candles burned with tiny little flames. And then when we carried Him out to the gate, and when we began to think and remembered—who is now in His sacred place—we lay around the ikon, our faces on the ground, and cried and wept bitter, bitter tears, tears of pity and contrition. “O Thou, our own, our



precious idol, have mercy on us, return to Thy place.” (*Lipa cries; the Friar wipes his eyes with his fist*) And then—bang! went the machine, and the sulphurous smoke spread all around so that it was impossible to breathe. (*In a whisper*) And then many beheld the devil in the smoke, and they were so terrified that they lost consciousness. It was horrible! And then, as we carried Him back, all of one accord, as though we had agreed beforehand, began to sing “Christ is arisen.” That’s how it happened.

SAVVA

You hear, Lipa? But what’s the matter with you? Why are you all crying?

FRIAR

It makes one feel so sorry, Mr. Savva.

SAVVA

Why, they fooled you, they played a trick on you. Or else you are all lying, lying with your tears.

[Kondraty makes a gesture of indifference.]



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LIPA (*shaking her head, weeping*)

No, Savva, you don't understand. Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!

KONDRATY

You have no God, that's the reason you don't understand; You have only reason, and pride, and malice. That's why you don't understand. Ah, Mr. Savva, you wanted to ruin me too. And I tell you as a Christian—it would have been better if you had never been born.

SAVVA

Oh, fiddlesticks! Whom do you think you can hoodwink? Do you think I have turned blind?

KONDRATY (*turning away with a wave of his hand*)

You can shout as much as you like.

FRIAR

Mr. Savva, you mustn't shout, you mustn't. We have already attracted the attention of the crowd. They are looking at us.

SAVVA (*laying his hand on Kondraty's shoulder and speaking in a low voice*) Look here, I understand. Of course, in the presence of people—but you understand, don't you, Kondraty? You are a clever man, a very bright man. You understand that all this is nonsense. Just consider, brother, consider a moment. Didn't they carry the ikon away? Then where is the miracle?

KONDRATY (*twisting himself free from Savva's grasp, shaking his head and speaking aloud*) Then you don't understand? No, you don't understand. What of it?

SAVVA (*in a whisper*)

Listen, remember our talk.

KONDRATY (*aloud*)

Don't whisper to me. I have nothing to hide from anybody. How do you think miracles happen anyhow? Say, you are a smart man too, and yet you can't comprehend a



simple matter like this. Why, it's all your work, all your doing, isn't it? You gave me the machine. You planned the explosion. Your orders have been carried out. And yet the ikon is untouched; it's whole. That's all I have to say. It's the plain, simple statement of fact. Yet you come here with your arguments and try to get away from those facts by mere reasoning.

LIPA (*looking around in a paroxysm of excitement*)

How simple it is! And how terrible! O Lord, O Lord! And to think that it was I who did it, I, with my own hands! O my God! (*She falls on her knees, turning her eyes toward heaven*)

SAVVA (*looking at her savagely, then at Kondraty*)

Well!

KONDRATY (*drawing back in fright*)

Why are you staying here? Why haven't you left already?

SAVVA (*shouting*)

What a — fool you are!

KONDRATY (*paling*)

Lower, lower, I say. Don't talk like that, or I'll shout.

SAVVA (*turning quickly toward Speransky*)

What are you staring at with your mouth wide open? You are a philosopher. You, you are a philosopher. Can you understand the stupidity of these people? They think it's a miracle. (*Laughs*) They think it's a miracle.



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SPERANSKY (*stepping back*)

Excuse me, Mr. Tropinin, but from their point of view—I don't know.

SAVVA

You don't know?

SPERANSKY

Who does know? (*Cries out, in despair*) The dead alone, Mr. Savva, the dead alone.

KONDRATY

Ah! You are cornered—Antichrist!

LIPA (*in terror*)

Antichrist?

[Hearing the cry, the two pilgrims who were with Kondraty approach. They are gradually joined by others, among whom is the Man in Peasant Overcoat.]

FIRST PILGRIM

What is it, father? Has he revealed himself?

KONDRATY

Look at him, look at him!

SAVVA

Vassya, you dear, fine boy—Vassya, what is the matter with them? Hear what they are saying. Hear the nonsense they are talking. You good, nice boy!

FRIAR (*drawing back*)

Mr. Savva, don't, don't. Go away from here. Leave this place.



SAVVA

Vassya, Vassya, you, you—

FRIAR (*crying*)

But I don't know. I don't know anything. I am afraid.

LIPA (*ecstatically*)

Antichrist! Antichrist!

SECOND PILGRIM

Hear! Hear!

KONDRATY

Ah! You are cornered. Here is your money—take it! It has burned holes in my pockets, your accursed money. Here, take it, take it, you brood of Antichrist! (*Throws the money at him*)

SAVVA (*raising his fist as if to deal a blow*) I'll teach you—

FIRST PILGRIM

Boys, don't be afraid. Here boys, here!

SAVVA (*pressing his head between his hands*)

Oh, it hurts, it hurts! Darkness is closing in.

KONDRATY

It's beginning to get you, is it? That's right, that's right.

LIPA

Antichrist!

TONY (*shouting*)

Savva, Savva!



SAVVA (sinking for a moment into profound, terrible meditation; then he straightens himself suddenly and seems to grow in stature; he cries out with a wild joy as if speaking above the heads of all to reach somebody far off) I am right! Therefore I am right! It was all necessary! All! All! (He stands as if petrified in an upward-striving posture)

KONDRATY



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Boys, it's he who did it. That's the fellow.

MAN IN OVERCOAT (*pushing himself forward, officiously*)

What's the matter, boys? Aha! He is caught! Which one? This one? Come on with you! (*Takes hold of Savva by the sleeve*)

SAVVA (*shaking him off with such violence that the man falls down*)
Get away from me!

VOICES

Don't let him go!

KONDRATY

Hold him!

FRIAR (*crying*)

Run, Mr. Savva, run.

[During the following scene Lipa prays. Speransky looks on with keen curiosity, while Tony stares over his shoulder. All the voices become blended into one raging, frightened, savage roar.]

CROWD

Get at him from that side! Yes, go yourself! You have a stick! Oh, hang it, there isn't a single stone around! Hold him, hold him, he'll escape!

MAN IN OVERCOAT (*getting to his feet again and assuming the leadership*) Surround him, boys, surround him! Block the way to the river! Don't let him run away! Well, now, get a move on you!

CROWD

Go yourself—I've tried once! Push that way! Get hold of him! Grab him! Aha!

KONDRATY (*shouting at the top of his voice*)

Beat him! Beat the Antichrist! Beat him!



SAVVA (*the danger brings him back to his senses. He looks around, takes in the path to the river with a quick glance, and gray as dust with rage, he makes for it with a single abrupt movement*) Get out of the way, you monsters!

CROWD

He is getting away! He is getting away! Hold him! Boys, he is getting away! He is getting away!

[As Savva advances, the crowd falls back in a semicircle, tumbling against one another. Kondraty begins to make the sign of the cross at Savva and continues to do so throughout the remaining scene.]

SAVVA (*advancing*)

Get out of the way! Get out of the way! So you're scared now, you dogs? You've pulled in your tails? Get out of the way! Go on!

CROWD

He is getting away.

[King Herod issues from the crowd, and plants himself in front of Savva so as to obstruct his way. There is a terrible look on his face. Savva comes up close to him and stops.]

SAVVA

Well?

[A brief pause. The conversation is carried on in a sort of undertone, almost calmly.]

KING HEROD

Is that you?

SAVVA



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Is that you? Let me go.

KING HEROD

A man?

SAVVA

Yes, let me go.

KING HEROD

Did you want the Saviour? Christ?

SAVVA

They fooled you.

KING HEROD

People may fool, Christ never. What's your name?

SAVVA

Savva. Get out of my way, I tell you.

KING HEROD

Surrender Thy servant Savva. Hold!

[He strikes a heavy, swinging blow with his left fist whence Savva did not expect an attack. Savva sinks on one knee. The crowd rushes at him and tramples him down.]

CROWD

Beat him! Aha! So! He is turning back! Beat him!



FRIAR

What does this mean? Oh! Oh! Oh! *(He clutches his head with both hands, cries, and runs away)*

SAVVA *(fighting desperately, he appears for a moment looking fierce and terrible)* Let go—Ho-o-o! *(He sinks back again)*

CROWD

That's the way. One, two—Ah! Strike! Got him? Not yet! Got him? What are you waiting for? Strike! Done!

A VOICE

He's still moving.

CROWD

Strike!

MAN IN OVERCOAT

Peter, got a knife? Finish him with your knife. Cut his throat.

PETER

No, I'd rather do it with my heel. One! Two!

KONDRATY *(cursing him)*

Lord Jesus Christ! Lord Jesus Christ!

[Loud cries are heard from the background: "They are carrying Him! They are carrying Him!" The mob begins to disperse and thins out quickly.]

CROWD

They are carrying Him! Yes, it's enough. It's done. No, let me at him—once more. There! I gave him one good one in his face. They are carrying Him! They are carrying Him!

KING HEROD

Enough, enough. A grand feast for you, you accursed beasts!

CROWD

I tell you, they are carrying Him! Lie there, you! Oh my, am I going to be late? Enough now. Are you sorry for him, eh? Is it *your* head? One more! Come on!

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[They run away so that Savva's mangled body becomes visible.]

MAN IN OVERCOAT

It ought to be taken away from here. It isn't right to leave it here on the road. It's dirty. Boys! Say, boys!

[He goes off following the rest, but is met by the procession pouring in upon the stage. There is a great din and humming of talk. Speransky and Tony approach the body cautiously, bend over it on their knees, one on each side, and stare at it eagerly.]

SPERANSKY

Dead! His eyes are gone.

TONY

Shut up! *(He bursts into a groaning laugh, pressing his hands hard to his mouth)*

SPERANSKY

But his face is calm. Look, Mr. Anthony. It's because now he knows the truth.

TONY

Shut up! *(Bursts out laughing)* What a funny face he has!

[He laughs behind his hand. Then his laugh bursts through his fingers, so to speak, grows in intensity, becomes irresistible, and passes into a whine. The crowd begins to fill the stage, concealing the body, Speransky, and Tony. The bells are rung in the monastery as at Easter, and at the same time the singing of thousands of voices is heard.]

CROWD

"Christ is risen from the dead. He has conquered death with death and given life to those lain in their graves. Christ—"

LIPA *(flinging herself into the crowd)*



“Christ is risen!”

[The crowd continues to pour in, filling the entire stage. Gaping mouths and round, wide-open eyes are seen everywhere. Shrill shrieks are uttered by the crazed epileptics. A momentary outcry is heard: “Somebody crushed!” Tony’s laughter dies away somewhere. The triumphant hymn rises, spreads, passes into a titanic roar that drowns every other sound. The bells continue to ring.]

CROWD *(shouting at their utmost power)*

“Christ is risen from the dead. He has conquered death with death and given life to those lain in their graves. Christ is risen—”

CURTAIN

THE LIFE OF MAN

(ZHIZN CHELOVIEKA)

A PLAY IN FIVE SCENES WITH A PROLOGUE

1906

TO THE BRIGHT MEMORY OF MY FRIEND, MY WIFE

I DEDICATE THIS COMPOSITION

THE LAST

ON WHICH WE WORKED TOGETHER

PERSONS

Someone in Gray called He

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Man

His Wife

Man's

Father

Relatives

Neighbors

Friends

Enemies

Guests

Servants

Musicians

Physicians

A Bartender

Drunkards

Old Women

PROLOGUE—*Someone in Gray called He, speaking of the Life of Man*

SCENE I—*The Birth of Man and the Mother's Travail*

SCENE II—*Love and Poverty*

SCENE III—*Wealth. Man's Ball*

SCENE IV—*Man's Misfortune*

SCENE V—*The Death of Man*

THE LIFE OF MAN

PROLOGUE

SOMEONE IN GRAY CALLED HE, SPEAKING OF THE LIFE OF MAN

A large, rectangular space resembling a room without doors or windows and quite empty. Everything is gray, monocolored, drab—the watts gray, and the ceiling, and the

floor. A feeble, even light enters from some invisible source. It too is gray, monotonous, spectral, producing neither lights nor shadows.

Someone in Gray moves noiselessly away from the wall, close against which He has been standing. He wears a broad, gray, formless smock, vaguely outlining the contours of His body; and a hat of the same gray throws the upper part of His face into heavy shadow. His eyes are invisible. All that is seen are His cheekbones, His nose, and His chin, which is massive, heavy, and blunt, as if hewn out of rock. His lips are pressed tight together. Raising His head slightly, He begins to speak in a firm, cold, unemotional, unimpassioned voice, like a reader hired by the hour reading the Book of Fate with brutal indifference._

SOMEONE IN GRAY

Look and listen, you who have come here to laugh and be amused. There will pass before you the whole life of Man, from his dark beginning to his dark ending. Previously non-existent, mysteriously hidden in the infiniteness of time, neither feeling nor thinking and known to no one, he will mysteriously break through the prison of non-being and with a cry announce the beginning of his brief life. In the night of non-existence a light will go up, kindled by an unseen hand. It is the life of Man. Behold the flame—it is the life of Man.

Being born, he will take the form and the name of Man, and in all things will become like other men already living. And their hard lot will be his lot, and his hard lot will be the lot of all human beings. Inexorably impelled by time, he will, with inavertible necessity, pass through all the stages of human life, from the bottom to the top, from the top to the bottom. Limited in vision, he will never see the next step which his unsteady foot, poised in the air, is in the very act of taking. Limited in knowledge, he will never know what the coming day will bring, or the coming hour, or the coming minute. In his unseeing blindness, troubled by premonitions, agitated by hope and fear, he will submissively complete the iron-traced circle foreordained.

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Behold him a happy youth. See how brightly the candle burns. From boundless stretches of space the icy wind blows, circling, careering, and tossing the flame. In vain. Bright and clear the candle burns. Yet the wax is dwindling, consumed by the fire. Yet the wax is dwindling.

Behold him a happy husband and father. But see how strangely dim and faint the candle burns, as if the yellowing flame were wrinkling, as if it were shivering with cold and were creeping into concealment. The wax is melting, consumed by the fire. The wax is melting.

Behold him, an old man, ill and feeble. The stages of life are already ended. In their stead nothing but a black void. Yet he drags on with palsied limbs. The flame, now turned blue, bends to the ground and crawls along, trembling and falling, trembling and falling. Then it goes out quietly.

Thus Man will die. Coming from the night, he will return to the night and go out, leaving no trace behind. He will pass into the infinity of time, neither thinking nor feeling, and known to no one. And I, whom all call He, shall remain the faithful companion of Man throughout his life, on all his pathways. Unseen by him, I shall be constantly at hand when he wakes and when he sleeps, when he prays and when he curses. In his hours of joy, when his spirit, free and bold, rises aloft; in his hours of grief and despair, when his soul clouds over with mortal pain and sorrow, and the blood congeals in his heart; in the hours of victory and defeat; in the hours of great strife with the immutable, I shall be with him—I shall be with him.

And you who have come here to be amused, you who are consecrated to death, look and listen. There will pass before you, like a distant phantom echo, the fleet-moving life of Man with its sorrows and its joys.

[Someone in Gray turns silent. The light goes out, and He and the gray, empty room are enveloped in darkness.]

THE FIRST SCENE

THE BIRTH OF MAN AND THE MOTHER'S TRAVAIL

Profound darkness; not a stir. Like a swarm of mice in hiding, the gray silhouettes of Old Women in strange headgear are dimly discerned; also vaguely the outline of a large, lofty room. The Old Women carry on a conversation in low, mocking voices.

OLD WOMEN'S CONVERSATIONS

—I wonder whether it'll be a boy or a girl.



—What difference does it make to you?

—I like boys.

—I like girls. They always sit at home waiting till you call on them.

—Do you like to go visiting?

[The Old Women titter.]

—He knows.

—He knows. (*Silence*)

—Our friend would like to have a girl. She says boys are so restless and venturesome and are always seeking danger. Even when they are little, they like to climb tall trees and bathe in deep water. They often fall, and they drown. And when they get to be men, they make wars and kill one another.

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—She thinks girls don't drown. I have seen many girls drowned. They look like all drowned people, wet and green.

—She thinks girls don't get killed by stones thrown at them.

—Poor woman, she has such a hard time giving birth to her child. We have been sitting here sixteen hours, and she is still crying. At first she cried out loud. Her screams pierced our ears. Then she cried more quietly, and now she is only moaning.

—The doctor says she'll die.

—No, the doctor says the child will die and she will live.

—Why do they bear children? It is so painful.

—And why do they die? It is still more painful.

[The Old Women laugh suppressedly.]

—Yes, they bear children and die.

—And bear children again.

[They laugh. A subdued cry of the suffering woman is heard.]

—Beginning again.

—She's recovered her voice. That's good.

—That's good.

—Poor husband. He's lost his head completely. You ought to see him. He's a sight. At first he was glad his wife was pregnant and said he wanted a boy. He thinks his son will be a cabinet minister or a general. Now he doesn't want anything, neither a boy nor a girl. He just goes about grieving and crying.

—Every time she is seized with pain he begins to labor, too, and gets red in the face.

—He was sent to the chemist's shop for medicine, and he hung about there for two hours without being able to remember what he was sent for. He returned without it.

[The Old Women titter. The cries grow louder and die away. Silence.]

—What's the matter with her? Maybe she has died already.



—No. If she had, we'd hear crying, and the doctor would come running and begin to talk nonsense. They'd bring her husband out in a faint, and we'd have to work over him. No, she's not dead.

—Then what are we sitting here for?

—Ask Him. What do we know?

—He won't tell.

—He won't tell. He never tells anything.

—He orders us about as he pleases, gets us out of bed, and makes us watch; and then it turns out that our coming wasn't even needed.

—We came of our own accord, didn't we? We must tell the truth. There, she's screaming again.

—Haven't you had as much of it as you want?

—Are you satisfied?

—I keep my mouth shut and wait.

—You're an angel.

[They laugh. The cries grow louder.]

—Listen to her. What fearful pain she must be suffering. Have you any idea of what the pain is like? It's as if your insides were being torn to pieces.

—We all have borne children.

—It's just as if she were not herself. I don't recognize our friend's voice. It's naturally so soft and gentle.

—Her screaming is more like the roar of a wild beast.

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—You feel the night in it.

—You feel the boundless black forest and hopelessness and terror.

—You feel solitude and grief. There are other people with her. Why can't you hear other voices beside that savage, dismal wail?

—They are talking, but you can't hear them. Have you ever noticed how solitary man's cries are? Any number of men will talk, and you won't hear them. But let one human being cry, and it seems as if the others were all silent, listening.

—I once heard a man scream who had been run over by a Carriage and had his leg crushed. The street was full of people. Yet he seemed to be the only one there.

—But this is more terrible.

—Say rather it is louder.

—I should say it is more prolonged.

—No, it's more terrible. You feel death in it.

—You had a feeling of death then, too. In fact, the man did die.

—Don't dispute. It's all the same to you.

[Silence. Cries.

—How strange man's crying is! When you yourself are ill and cry, you don't notice how strange it is. I can't imagine the mouth that produces such sounds. Can it be a woman's mouth? I can't imagine it.

—It's as if it got twisted and crooked.

—As if the sound issued from some depth. Now it's like the cry of someone drowning. Listen, she's choking.

—A heavy person is sitting on her chest.

—Someone is choking her.

[The crying ceases.

—At last she has quieted down. You get tired of crying. It's monotonous and not beautiful.



—You're looking for beauty here too, are you?

[The Old Women titter.

—Hush! Is He here?

—I don't know.

—He seems to be.

—He doesn't like laughing.

—They say He laughs Himself.

—Whoever heard Him laugh? You are simply repeating hearsay. So many lies are told about Him.

—He hears us. Let us be serious.

[They laugh quietly.

—After all, I'd like to know whether it'll be a boy or a girl.

—I admit, it's interesting to know whom you'll have to deal with.

—I wish it died before it was born.

—What a kind creature you are.

—No better than you.

—I hope it turns out to be a general.

[They laugh.

—You are too merry. I don't like it.

—And you are too sad. I don't like that.

—Don't wrangle. Don't wrangle. We are all both sad and merry. Let each be what she pleases. (*Silence*)

—When they are born, they are so funny. Babies are very funny.

—And self-satisfied.

—And very exacting, I don't like them. They begin to cry at once and make demands, as if they expected everything to be ready for them. Even before looking, they know there is a breast and milk, and demand them. Then they demand to be put to sleep and

rocked and dandled and patted on their red backs. I like them better when they die.
Then they're less exacting. They stretch out of themselves and don't ask to be rocked.

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—No, they are very funny. I like to wash them when they are born.

—I like to wash them when they are dead.

—Don't dispute. Don't dispute. Each will have her way. One will wash the child when it is born, another when it dies.

—But why do they think they have a right to make demands the moment they are born? I don't like it. They don't *think* they have. It's their stomachs that make the demands.

—They're forever demanding.

—But their demands are never granted.

[The Old Women laugh. The cries begin again.]

—She is screaming again.

—Animals give birth to their offspring more easily.

—And they die more easily, and live more easily; I have a cat. You ought to see how fat and happy she is.

—I have a dog, and I tell him every day: "You are going to die." His only reply is to show his teeth and to wag his tail gayly.

—But they are animals.

—And these are human beings.

[They laugh.]

—Now she'll either die or be delivered. I feel that the whole remnant of her strength is in that wail.

—Eyes wide open.

—Cold perspiration on her forehead.

[They listen.]

—She is giving birth to the child.

—No, she is dying.

[The cries cease.]



—I tell you—

SOMEONE IN GRAY (*speaks in a resonant, powerful voice*)

Silence! Man is born.

[Almost simultaneously with His announcement the crying of an infant is heard and the candle in His hand lights. A tall candle. It burns hesitatingly and feebly. Gradually the flame grows stronger. The corner in which Someone in Gray stands motionless is always darker than the other corners, and the yellow flame illumines His blunt chin, His tightly closed lips, and His massive, bony face. The upper part of His face is concealed by His cap. He is somewhat taller than an ordinary man.]

He puts the long, thick candle in an antique candlestick. His hand comes into relief against the green bronze. It is gray, firm, with long, thin fingers.

Gradually the room grows brighter. The figures of five hunch-backed Old Women emerge from the gloom, and the room becomes visible. It is rectangular, with high, smooth, monotonously colored walls. Two curtainless windows in the background and two on the right. The night glooms through them. Straight, high-backed chairs against the walls._

THE OLD WOMEN (*talking rapidly*)

—Hear them running about. They're coming here.

—How bright it is! Let's go.

—Look, the candle is tall and bright.

—Let's go, let's go. Quick!

—But we'll come back. We'll come back.

[They laugh quietly, mockingly, and disappear into the dusk with odd, zigzagging movements. As they leave, the light grows brighter, but still it remains dim, lifeless, and cold. The corner in which Someone in Gray stands motionless with the burning candle is darker than the others.]

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Enter the Doctor in a white uniform, and Man's Father, whose face wears an expression of extreme exhaustion and joy. There are lines under his eyes; his cheeks are sunken and his hair is dishevelled; he is very negligently dressed. The Doctor looks very learned._

DOCTOR

Up to the very last moment I didn't know whether your wife would pull through or not. I used all the means at the disposal of medical skill and science. But science can do very little unless nature helps too; I was really excited. My pulse is still going hard. Though I have assisted at so many births, yet I can't rid myself of a sense of uneasiness. But you are not listening to me, sir.

MAN'S FATHER

I'm listening, but I can't hear. Her screams are still ringing in my ears, and it's hard for me to pull myself together. Poor woman, how she suffered! I was a fool, I was stupid and wanted to have children. But hereafter I will renounce. It is criminal.

DOCTOR

You will call me again when your next child comes.

FATHER

No, never. I'm ashamed to admit it, but just now I hate the child for which she suffered so. I didn't even see him. What sort of a boy is he?

DOCTOR

He's a well-fed, strong little youngster, and if I'm not mistaken he resembles you.

FATHER

Me? Fine! Now I'm beginning to love him. I always wanted a boy to look like me. Did you see—his nose is like mine, isn't it?

DOCTOR

Yes, his nose and eyes.

FATHER

His eyes too? Ah, that's good. I'll raise your fee.

DOCTOR

You'll have to pay me for using the instruments also.

FATHER (*turning to the corner where He stands motionless*)

God, I thank Thee for having granted my wish and given me a son who resembles me. I thank Thee for preserving my wife from death, and bringing my child into the world alive. I pray Thee that he may grow up big, healthy, and strong; that he may be wise and honest, and that he may never cause us grief, but be a constant joy to his mother and me. If Thou wilt do this, I will always believe in Thee and go to church.

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[Enter Relatives, six in number. An elderly woman, uncommonly stout, with a double chin and small, proud eyes and an air of extreme haughtiness and self-importance. An elderly man, her husband, very tall and uncommonly thin, so that his coat hangs loosely on his body; a short goatee, long, smooth hair, as if wet, reaching to his shoulders; eye-glasses; has a frightened; yet pedantic expression; a low black silk hat in his hand. A young girl, their daughter, with naively upturned nose, blinking eyes, and open mouth. A weazened woman, with contracted features and a sour expression, in her hand a handkerchief, with which she frequently wipes her mouth; Two young men, looking absolutely alike, with extremely high collars that stretch their necks; glossy hair; a hesitating, embarrassed expression. The characteristics of each of the Relatives is exaggerated in the extreme.

ELDERLY LADY

Let me congratulate you on the birth of your son, dear brother. *(Kisses him)*

ELDERLY MAN

My dear brother, I heartily congratulate you on the birth of your son, to which you have been looking forward so long. *(Kisses him)*

THE REST

We congratulate you, dear uncle, on the birth of your son.

[They kiss him. Exit the Doctor.

MAN'S FATHER *(greatly moved)*

Thank you! Thank you! You are all very good, very nice, dear people, and I love you very much. I had my doubts beforehand thought that you, dear sister, were a little too much rapt up in yourself and your own worth and importance; and that you, dear brother, were somewhat too pedantic. The rest of you I thought were too cold to me, and came here only for the sake of the dinners. Now I see I was mistaken. I'm very happy. I get a son who resembles me, and then all at once I see myself surrounded by so many good people who love me. *(They kiss)*

GIRL

Uncle dear, what are you going to call your son? I hope you'll give him a lovely, poetic name. So much depends on a man's name.



ELDERLY LADY

I should advise a simple, solid name. Men with nice names are usually frivolous and rarely successful.

ELDERLY MAN

It seems to me, brother, you should name your son after some older relative. Keeping the same names in the family tends to preserve and strengthen the line.

FATHER

Yes, my wife and I have already discussed the subject, but have not been able to reach a decision. You see, there are so many new things to think of when a child comes, so many new problems to solve which never arose before.



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ELDERLY LADY

It fills up your life.

ELDERLY MAN

It gives life a beautiful purpose. By properly educating a child, preventing it from making the mistakes which we had to pay for so dearly, and strengthening its mind with our own rich experiences, we produce a better man and advance slowly but surely toward the final goal of existence, which is perfection.

FATHER

You are quite right, brother. When I was little I loved to torture animals. That developed cruelty in me. I won't allow my son to torture animals. Even after I had grown up I often made mistakes in my friendships and love. I chose friends who were unworthy and women who were faithless. I'll explain to my son—

DOCTOR (*enters and says aloud*)

Your wife is feeling very bad. She wants to see you.

FATHER

Oh, my God! (*He and the Doctor leave*)

[The Relatives seat themselves in a semicircle. Solemn silence for a time. Someone in Gray stands motionless in the corner, His stony face turned toward them.]

RELATIVES' CONVERSATION

—Do you think, dear, she may die?

—No, I don't think so. She is a very impatient woman and makes too much of her pains. All women bear children and none of them die. I have borne six children.

—But the way she screamed, mamma?

—Yes, her face was purple from screaming. I noticed it.



—Not from screaming, but from laboring. You don't understand about these things. My face got purple too, but I didn't scream.

—Not long ago an acquaintance of mine, the civil engineer's wife, gave birth to a child, and she scarcely made a sound.

—I know. There's no need for my brother to be so upset. One must be firm and take things calmly. And I'm afraid, too, he'll introduce a lot of his fantastic notions in the bringing up of his children and indulge their every whim.

—He's a very weak character. He has little enough money, and yet he lends it to people who don't deserve to be trusted.

—Do you know how much the child's layette cost?

—Don't talk to me of it! It gets on my nerves, my brother's extravagance does. I often quarrel with him because he's so improvident.

—They say a stork brings babies. What sort of a stork is it?

[The young men burst out laughing.]

—Don't talk nonsense. I gave birth to five children right in your presence, and I'm no stork, thank the Lord.

[The young men burst out laughing again. The Elderly Woman eyes them long and sternly.]

—It's only a superstition. Children are born in an absolutely natural way, firmly established by science. They've moved to new quarters now.



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—Who?

—The engineer and his wife. Their old place was chilly and damp. They complained to the landlord several times, but he paid no attention.

—I think it's better to live in a small place that's warm than in a large place that's damp. You are liable to catch your death of cold and rheumatism if you live in a damp house.

—I have a friend, too, who lives in a very damp house. And I too. Very damp.

—There are so many damp places nowadays.

—Tell me, please—I've been wanting to ask you a long time—how do you remove a grease stain from light-colored material?

—Woollen?

—No, silk.

[The child's crying is heard behind the scene.]

—Take a piece of ice and rub it on the spot hard. Then take a hot iron and press the spot.

—No? Fancy, how simple! I heard benzine was better.

—No, benzine is good for dark material. For light goods ice is better.

—I wonder whether smoking is allowed here. Somehow it never occurred to me before whether one may or may not smoke where there is a new-born baby.

—It never occurred to me either. How strange! I know it isn't proper to smoke at funerals, but here—

—Nonsense! Of course you may smoke.

—Smoking is a bad habit just the same. You are still a very young man and ought to take good care of your health. There are many occasions in life when good health is highly essential.

—But smoking stimulates.

—Believe me, it's a very unhealthy stimulant. When I was young and reckless, I was also guilty of using, or rather abusing, tobacco—

—Mamma, listen to him crying. My, how he's crying! Does he want milk, mamma?

[The young men burst out laughing. The Elderly Woman looks at them sternly.]

CURTAIN

THE SECOND SCENE

LOVE AND POVERTY

The entire place is filled with a warm, bright light. A large, very poor room, high walls, the color of old rose, covered here and there with beautiful, fantastic, roughly drawn designs. To the right are two lofty windows, eight panes in each, with the darkness of night glooming through them. Two poor beds, two chairs, and a bare table, on which stands a half-broken pitcher of water and a pretty bunch of flowers.

In the darkest corner stands Someone in Gray, the candle in His hand now reduced by a third, but the flame still very bright, high, and white. It throws a powerful light on His face and chin.

Enter the Neighbors, dressed in light, gay dresses, their hands full of flowers, grasses, and fresh branches of oak and birch. They run about the room, scattering them. Their faces are merry, simple, and good-natured._

NEIGHBORS' CONVERSATION

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—How poor they are! Look, they haven't even a single spare chair.

—And no curtains in the windows.

—And no pictures on the walls.

—How poor they are! All they eat is hard bread.

—And all they drink is water, cold water from the spring.

—They don't own any clothes at all except what they have on. She always goes about in her rosy dress with her neck bare, which makes her look like a young girl.

—And he wears his blouse and loose necktie, which makes him look like an artist, and makes the dogs bark at him.

—And makes all the respectable people disapprove of him.

—Dogs hate the poor. I saw three dogs attack him yesterday. He beat them off with a stick and shouted: "Don't you dare to touch my trousers; they're my last pair!" And he laughed, and the dogs flung themselves at him and showed their teeth and barked viciously.

—I saw two respectable people, a lady and a gentleman, meet him on the street to-day. They were terribly frightened and crossed to the other side. "He'll ask for money," said the gentleman. "He'll kill us," piped the lady. From the other side of the street they looked back at him and held on to their pockets. He shook his head and laughed.

—He's such a jolly good fellow.

—They're always laughing.

—And singing.

—It's he who sings. She dances.

—In her rosy dress, with her little bare neck.

—It does one good to look at them. They are so young and wholesome.

—I am sorry for them. They're starving. Do you understand? They're actually going without food.

—Yes, it's true. They had more clothes and furniture, but they sold every bit, and now they've nothing more to sell.



—I know. She had such pretty earrings, and she sold them to buy bread.

—He had a beautiful black frock-coat, the one in which he was married, and he sold that too.

—The only thing they'll have left is their engagement rings. How poor they are!

—That's nothing. I was once young myself, and I know what it is.

—What did you say, grandpa?

—I said it's nothing, nothing at all.

—Look, the mere thought of them makes grandpa want to sing.

—And dance.

[They laugh.]

—He is so kind. He made my boy a bow and arrow.

—She cried with me when my daughter was ill.

—He helped me mend the rickety fence. He's strong.

—It's nice to have such good neighbors. Their youth warms our cold old age. Their jolliness drives away our cares.

—But their room is like a prison, it's so empty.

—No, it's like a temple. It's so bright.

—Look, they have flowers on the table, the flowers she picked on her walk in the country in her rosy dress with her little bare neck. Here are lilies-of-the-valley. The dew hasn't dried on them yet.

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—There is the burning campion.

—And violets.

—Don't touch; don't touch the flowers, girls. Her kisses are upon them. Don't throw them on the floor, girls. Her breath is upon them. Don't blow them away with your breath. Don't touch, don't touch the flowers, girls.

—He'll come and he'll see the flowers.

—He'll take the kisses.

—He'll drink her breath.

—How poor they are! How happy they are!

—Come, let's leave.

—Haven't we brought our dear neighbors anything?

—What a shame!

—I brought a bottle of milk and a piece of white, sweet-smelling bread. (*Puts them on the table*)

—I brought flowers. (*Scatters them*)

—We brought branches of oak and birch with green leaves. Let's put them up around the walls. The room will look like cheerful green woods.

[They decorate the room with the branches, concealing the dark windows and covering the pinkish nakedness of the walls with leaves.]

—I, brought a good cigar. It is a cheap one, but it's strong and fragrant and will give pleasant dreams.

—And I brought a ribbon, a red ribbon. It makes a very pretty fancy bow for the hair. It's a present my sweetheart gave me; but I have so many ribbons and she hasn't even one.

—What did you bring, grandpa? Did you bring anything?

—Nothing, nothing, except my cough. They don't want that, do they, neighbor?

—No more than they want my crutches. Hey, girls, who wants my crutches?



—Do you remember, neighbor?

—Do *you* remember, neighbor?

—Come, let's go to sleep, neighbor. It's late already. *(They sigh and leave, one coughing, the other knocking the floor with his crutches)*

—Come, come!

—May God give them happiness. They are such good neighbors.

—God grant that they may always be healthy and merry and always love each other. And may the hideous black cat never pass between them.

—And may the good man find work. It's bad when a man is out of work. *(They leave)*

[Enter immediately the Wife of Man, very pretty, graceful, and delicate, wearing flowers in her luxuriant hair which is hanging loose. The expression on her face is very sad. She seats herself on a chair, folds her hands in her lap, and speaks in a sad tone, turned toward the audience.]

MAN'S WIFE

I've just returned from the city, where I went looking for I don't know what. We are so poor, we have nothing, and it's very hard for us to live. We need money, and I don't know how in the world to get it. People won't give it to you for the asking, and I haven't the strength to take it away from them. I was looking for work, but I can't get work either. There are lots of people and little work, they say. I looked on the ground as I walked to see if some rich person hadn't lost his purse, but either nobody had lost one or somebody luckier than I had already picked it up. I feel so sad. My husband will soon come from his search for work, tired and hungry. What am I to give him except my kisses? But you can't satisfy your hunger on kisses. I feel so sad I could cry.

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I can go without eating for a long time and not feel it, but he can't. He has a large body which demands food, and when he's gone a long time without it, he gets pale, sick, and excited. He scolds me and then begs me not to be angry at him. I never am angry at him, because I love him dearly. It only makes me feel so sad.

My husband is a very talented architect. I even think he's a genius. He was left an orphan when a mere boy, and after his parents' death his relatives supported him for some time; but as he was always of an independent nature, sharp in his talk and prone to make unpleasant remarks, and as he showed them no gratitude, they dropped him. He continued to study, nevertheless, supporting himself by giving lessons, and so made his way through college. He often went hungry, my poor husband. Now he is art architect and draws plans of beautiful buildings, but no one wants to buy them, and many stupid persons make fun of them even. To make one's way in the world one must have either patrons or luck. He has neither. So he goes about looking for a chance, and maybe with his eyes on the ground looking for money like me. He is still very young and simple. Of course, some day fortune will come to us, too. But when will it be? In the meantime it's very hard to live. When we were married we had a little property, but we soon spent it. We went to the theatre and ate candy. He still has hopes, but I sometimes lose all hope and cry to myself. My heart breaks when I think he'll be here soon and I have nothing to give him again except my poor kisses.

O God, be a kind, merciful Father to us. You have so much of everything, bread and work and money. Your earth is so rich. She grows corn and fruit in her fields, covers the meadows with flowers, and yields gold and beautiful precious stones from her bowels. And your sun has so much warmth, and your pensive stars have so much quiet joy. Give us, I pray you, a little from your abundance, just a little, as much as you give your birds. A little bread, so that my dear good husband may not be hungry; a little warmth, so that he may not be cold; and a little work, so that he may carry his beautiful head erect. And please do not be angry with my husband because he swears so and laughs, and even sings and makes me dance. He is so young and not a bit staid or serious.

Now, after I have prayed, I feel relieved and hopeful again. Why, indeed, should God not grant one's request when one asks Him for it so earnestly? I'll go and hunt a little to see if somebody hasn't dropped a purse or a diamond. (*Exit*)

SOMEONE IN GRAY

She knows not that her wish has already been fulfilled. She knows not that this morning two men in a rich house were bending eagerly over a sketch by Man and were delighted with it. They searched for Man the whole day; wealth was looking for him as he was looking for wealth. And to-morrow morning, after the neighbors have gone to work, an automobile will stop in front of this house, and two men bending low will enter the poor

room and bring wealth and fame. But neither he nor she knows it. Thus fortune will come to Man, and thus also it will go.



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[Enter Man and his Wife. He has, a beautiful proud head, bright eyes, a high forehead, dark eyebrows parting at the root of the nose like two bold wrings, and wavy black hair carelessly tossed back. A low, white, turndown collar reveals a well-formed neck and part of his chest. He is light and quick in his movements, like a young animal.]

MAN

Nothing again. I'll lie down and remain in bed the whole day. Anyone wanting me will have to come here. I can't go to him. I'll stay in bed the whole of to-morrow too.

WIFE

Are you tired?

MAN

Yes, I'm tired and hungry. I could eat a whole ox, like the Homeric hero, but I shall have to content myself with a piece of hard bread. Don't you know that a man can't live all the time on bread alone? I want to tear, bite, chew!

WIFE

I'm sorry for you, dear.

MAN

I'm sorry for myself, but that doesn't satisfy my hunger. I stood a whole hour in front of a restaurant to-day, looking at the chickens, pastry, and sausages, as people look at works of art. And then the signs. They describe ham so well that you could eat sign and all.

WIFE

I like ham too.

MAN

Who doesn't like ham? How about lobster? Do you like lobster?



WIFE

Yes.

MAN

You should have seen the lobster I saw. It was a painted one, but it was even more beautiful than a live one. Red like a cardinal, majestic, stern. You could kneel down and do homage to it. I think I could eat two such cardinals and a priest of a carp besides.

WIFE (*sadly*)

You didn't see my flowers, did you?

MAN

Flowers? You can't eat flowers, can you?

WIFE

You don't love me.

MAN (*kisses her*)

Excuse me, but really I'm so hungry. Look, my hands are trembling and I haven't even the strength to throw a stone at a dog.

WIFE (*kisses his hand*)

My poor husband!

MAN

Where do those leaves, on the floor come from? They smell so good. Is that your work too?

WIFE

No, the neighbors must have done it.

MAN

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Fine people our neighbors are. It's strange, there are so many good people in the world, and yet a man can die of hunger. Why is it?

WIFE

You've turned so sad. Your face is growing pale. What is the matter? Do you see anything?

MAN

Yes, as I was joking, the terrible image of poverty glided in front of me and stopped there, in the corner. Do you see it? Arms stretched out in complaint, a child abandoned in the woods, a praying voice, and the stillness of a human desert. Help! No one hears. Help, I'm dying! No one hears. Look, wife, look! See the dark, gloomy shadows there, quivering and rising like black smoke from a long, terrible chimney leading into hell. Look! And I'm in the midst of them!

WIFE

I'm afraid. I can't look in that dark corner. Did you see all that in the street?

MAN Yes, I saw it in the street, and soon it'll be that way with us.

WIFE

No, God will not permit it.

MAN

Then why does He permit it to happen to others?

WIFE

We're better than others. We are good people. We never offend Him.

MAN

You think so? I do a lot of swearing.



WIFE

You're not bad.

MAN

Yes, I am bad. When I walk along the street and see all the things that don't belong to us, I feel as if I had tusks like a boar. Oh, how much money I haven't got! Listen, my dear wife. I was walking in the park to-day, that lovely park, where the paths are straight as arrows and the beech-trees like kings wearing crowns—

WIFE

And I was walking in the city streets. Shops everywhere, such beautiful shops!

MAN

I saw men, beautifully dressed, carrying canes, and I thought: "I haven't anything like that."

WIFE

I saw elegantly dressed women, wearing dainty shoes that make your feet beautiful, and pretty hats from under which your eyes shine impenetrably, and silk skirts that make such a mysterious rustle; and I thought: "I haven't a good hat or a silk skirt."

MAN

A ruffian jostled me. I showed him my tusks, and he fled in disgrace to hide himself in the crowd.

WIFE

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A well-dressed lady jostled me, but I didn't even look at her, I felt so embarrassed.

MAN

Men rode by on proud, fiery horses. And I have nothing like that.

WIFE

She had diamonds in her ears. You felt like kissing them.

MAN

Red and green automobiles glided past noiselessly like phantoms with burning eyes, and people sat in them and laughed and looked lazily from one side to the other. And I have nothing like it.

And I have no diamonds, no emeralds, no pure white pearls.

MAN

I saw a fine restaurant on the Island. It was brightly illuminated, like heaven, and they were eating there. Black-coated monsters carried around butter and bread and wine and beer, and people ate and drank. My little wife, I'm hungry! I want something to eat!

WIFE

Dearie, you're running around all the time, and that makes you still hungrier. You'd better sit down. I'll kneel beside you, and you can take a piece of paper and draw a beautiful, beautiful building.

MAN

My inspiration is also hungry. It draws nothing but edible landscapes. My palaces are like portly cakes with fat stuffing, and my churches like sausages. But I see tears in your eyes. What is it, my dear wife?

WIFE

I feel so miserable not to be able to help you.



MAN

You make me ashamed of myself. I am a strong man with a good mind; I am able, talented, and healthy, and yet I can't do a thing. My dear wife, my little fairy is crying, and I am not able to help her. A woman's tears are her husband's disgrace, I am ashamed.

WIFE

But it isn't your fault that people don't appreciate you.

MAN

My ears are burning just as they used to when I was a boy and had had them boxed. Why, you are hungry too, and I, egoist that I am, haven't noticed it. It's mean of me.

WIFE

My dear, I don't feel hungry.

MAN

It's unfair, it's contemptible. That ruffian who jostled me was right. He saw I was a fat pig and that's all, a boar with sharp tusks but a stupid head.

WIFE.

If you are going to keep on reproaching yourself, I'll cry again.

MAN

Don't, don't. No tears! Tears in your eyes frighten me. I am afraid of those shining crystal drops, as if some other, some terrible person were shedding them, not you. I won't let you cry. We have nothing, we are poor. But I'll tell you of what we are going to have. I will charm you with a bright fairy tale, my queen. I will array you in dazzling dreams as in roses!

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WIFE

You mustn't be afraid. You are strong, you are a genius, you will conquer. Your momentary despair will pass away, and divine inspiration will again quicken your proud head.

MAN (*assumes a challenging attitude and throws an oak leaf into the corner where the Unknown stands, saying*) Ho, you, whatever your name, Fate, Devil, or Life, I fling my glove down before you, I challenge you to combat! The poor in spirit bow before your enigmatic power. Your stony face inspires them with fear; in your silence they hear the approaching tread of misery and terrible ruin. But I am strong and bold, and I challenge you to combat! Come on! Let the swords glitter, the shields clang! Deal and receive blows so that the earth trembles! Ho, come forth to battle!

WIFE (*nestling up at his left, somewhat behind, speaking solemnly*) Bolder, my husband, still bolder!

MAN

To your evil-boding inaction I oppose my living, daring strength; to your gloom my clear, resonant laugh! Ho, repel the blows! You have a stone brow, devoid of reason. I will throw the glowing balls of my sparkling thought at it. You have a stone heart, devoid of pity. Take care, I will pour into it the poison of my rebellious outcries. The dark cloud of your grim wrath overshadows the sun. We will light the darkness with our swords. Ho, repel the blows!

WIFE

Bolder, still bolder, my proud knight! Your squire is behind you.

MAN

Victorious, I will sing songs which the whole world will reecho; fallen under your blows, my only thought shall be to rise again and rush into battle. There are weak spots in my armor, but when my red blood is flowing, I will gather my last strength and cry: "You have not conquered, evil Enemy of Man!"



WIFE

Bolder, my knight! I will wash your wounds with my tears. I will stop the flow of your red blood with my kisses.

MAN

And dying on the field of battle as the brave die, with one cry I will destroy your blind joy: "I have conquered!" I have conquered, O cruel Enemy. Unto my last breath I did not recognize your power!

WIFE

Bolder, my knight, bolder! I will die beside you.

MAN

Ho, come forth to battle! Let the swords glitter, the shields clang! Deal and receive blows to make the earth tremble! Ho, come forth!

[For some time Man and his Wife remain in the same posture; then they turn around, facing each other, and kiss.]

MAN

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That's the way we'll deal with life, my dear, won't we? Let it frown like a blind owl in the sun—we'll compel it to smile.

WIFE

And to dance to our songs—so we will, we two.

MAN

We two. You're a good wife, you're my true friend, you're a brave little woman, and as long as you are with me I fear nothing. Poverty, what does it amount to? To-day we're poor, to-morrow rich.

WIFE

And what is hunger? To-day we are hungry, to-morrow satisfied.

MAN

Do you think so? It's quite possible. But I'll eat a lot. I shall need so much to satisfy my hunger. Tell me, do you think this will prove enough? In the, morning, tea or coffee or chocolate. You can have your choice. It's free. Then a breakfast of three courses, then lunch, then dinner, then—

WIFE

More fruit. I like fruit.

MAN

Very well. I'll buy fruit by the barrel, direct from the wholesale market. It's cheaper and fresher. Besides, we'll have our own garden.

WIFE

But we have no land.

MAN

I'll buy land. I've always wanted to have my own piece of land. By the way, I'll build a house for us and design it too. Let the rascals see what sort of an architect I am.

WIFE

I should like to live in Italy, close by the sea; in a white marble villa in a grove of lemons and cypresses, with marble steps leading straight down to the blue water.

MAN

I understand. That's all right. But I intend, besides, to build a castle in the mountains of Norway. Below, the fjord; and above, on the steep mountain, the castle. We have no paper. But look, I'll show it to you on the wall here. Here is the fjord, you see?

WIFE

Yes, beautiful.

MAN

Here, sparkling blue water gently beating against the green grass; here, beautiful cinnamon-colored stone; and there, in the recess, where this spot is, a bit of blue sky and serene white clouds.

WIFE

Look, there is a white boat floating on the water—it looks like two swans swimming side by side.

MAN

And up there rises the mountain. Bright and green below, it turns gloomier and sterner as it ascends—rugged crags, dark shadows, fallen boulders, and patches of clouds.



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WIFE

Like a ruined castle.

MAN

And there, on that spot—the middle one—I'll build my royal castle.

WIFE

It's cold up there, and windy.

MAN

I'll have thick stone walls and large windows with all the panes made out of a single piece of glass. At night, when the winter snowstorms begin to rage and the fjord below to roar, we'll draw the curtains and make a fire in the huge fireplace. It is such a tremendous fireplace that it will hold a whole log. It will burn up a whole forest of pines.

WIFE

How nice and warm.

MAN

And how quiet too, if you will please notice. Carpets covering the whole, floor and lots of books will make it cosy and quietly lively. And we'll be there, the two of us. The wind howling outside and we two sitting before the fireplace on a white bear-skin rug. "Wouldn't you like to have a look at what's doing outside?" you'll say. "All right!" And we'll go to the largest window and draw aside the curtain. Good heavens! What a sight!

WIFE

See the snow whirling.



MAN

Galloping like white horses, like myriads of frightened little spirits, pale with fear and seeking safety in the night. And what a howling and roaring!

WIFE

Oh, it's cold. I'm shivering.

MAN

Go back to the fireplace, quick! Hey there, fetch me grandfather's goblet—not that one, the golden one from which the vikings drank. Fill it up with sparkling wine—not that way—fill it to the brim with the burning draught. Venison is roasting on the spit. Bring it here. I'll eat some. Quick, or I'll eat you. I'm hungry as the devil.

WIFE

There, they have brought it. Now, go on.

MAN

Go on? I'll eat some, of course. What else do you expect? What are you doing to my head, little wife?

WIFE

I am the goddess of fame. I have woven a crown of the oak leaves that our neighbors scattered here, and I'm crowning you. It's Fame that has come to you, the beautiful goddess Fame. *(Puts the wreath on his head)*

MAN

Yes, fame; loud, noisy fame. Look at the wall. Do you see this? It's I, walking. And who is this next to me? Do you see?



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WIFE

I.

MAN

Look, they are bowing to us; they are whispering about us; they are pointing their fingers at us. There is a venerable old gentleman saying with tears in his eyes: "Happy the land that has such children!" See how pale this youth here has turned. Fame looked at him and gave him a smile. That's after I built the People's House, which is the pride of the whole country.

WIFE

You are my famous husband. The oak wreath suits you so well. A laurel wreath would become you still better.

MAN

Look, look, there come the representatives of the city where I was born. They bow to me and say: "Our city is proud of the honor—"

WIFE

Oh!

MAN

What is it?

WIFE

I found a bottle of milk.

MAN

Impossible!



WIFE

And bread, soft, sweet-smelling bread. And a cigar.

MAN

Impossible! You are mistaken. It's the dampness from that damned wall, that's what it is. It isn't milk.

WIFE

But it is.

MAN

A cigar? Cigars don't grow on windows. They are sold for fortunes in tobacco stores. It's a black stick, a piece of a branch, I'm sure.

WIFE

Look and see. I suppose our neighbors brought it.

MAN

Our neighbors? I tell you they're people—they're not human—they're divine. But even if the devil himself brought it—quick, give it here, my sweet little wife.

[Man's Wife seats herself on his knees, and so they eat. She breaks off pieces of bread and puts them in his mouth. He feeds her the milk from the bottle.]

MAN

Seems to be cream.

WIFE

No, it's milk. Chew better. You'll choke.

MAN.

Give me the crust. It's so brown.

WIFE

I told you, you'd choke.

MAN

No, it went down. I swallowed it.

WIFE

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The milk is running down my chin and neck. Oh, it's tickling me.

MAN.

Lean over. I'll lick it off. We mustn't let a drop go to waste.

WIFE

You're a cunning one.

MAN

There! Quick work. All good things soon come to an end. This bottle seems to have a double bottom. It looks so large. The glass manufacturers are terrible cheats.

[He lights the cigar with the air of a man relaxing into beatific repose. His Wife ties the red ribbon in her hair, looking at herself in the dark pane of the window.]

WIFE

Don't you see?

MAN

I see everything. I see your ribbon, and I see, you want me to kiss you on your dear little bare neck.

WIFE.

No, sir, I won't permit that. You've grown too forward of late anyway. You take such liberties. Please go on smoking your cigar and leave my neck—

MAN

What, isn't your neck mine? I'll be jiggered! Why, it's an attack on the sacred rights of property (*She runs away; he catches her and kisses her*) So, the property rights have been restored. Now, my dear, we'll dance. Imagine that this is a magnificent, a luxurious, a wonderful, a supernatural, ah exquisitely beautiful palace.



WIFE

Very well. I'm imagining it.

MAN

Imagine you're the queen of the ball.

WIFE

All right. It is imagined.

MAN

And that counts, marquises, and dukes come up and ask you to dance. But you refuse. You choose that one—What's his name?—the one in uniform—the prince. What's the matter?

WIFE

I don't like princes.

MAN

Indeed? Then whom do you like?

WIFE

Talented artists.

MAN

Very well. Here's one for you. Why, girl, what are you doing? Are you flirting with the air?

WIFE

I am imagining.

MAN

All right. Imagine a wonderful orchestra. Here is the Turkish drum—boom, boom, boom! (*He strikes his fist on the table as on a drum*)

WIFE



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Why, dear, it's only in the circus that they attract crowds by beating drums, but in a palace—

MAN

Oh, hang it! Stop imagining that, then. Now imagine something else. The violins are playing a melodious plaint; the flutes are singing gently; the double bass drones like a beetle.

[Man sits down, still wearing his oak wreath, and strikes up a dance tune, clapping his hands in accompaniment. The melody is the same as in the next scene at Man's ball. The Wife dances. She is well-formed and graceful.]

MAN

Oh, you darling!

WIFE

I am the queen of the ball.

[The song and dance grow ever jollier. Man rises slowly and begins to dance lightly on the spot where he is standing; then he seizes his Wife and dances with her. The oak wreath slips to one side. Someone in Gray looks on indifferently, the candle burning brightly in his petrified hand.]

CURTAIN

THE THIRD SCENE

A BALL AT MAN'S HOUSE

The ball is in the drawing-room of Man's large mansion. It is a very lofty, spacious, perfectly rectangular room. The floor is bright and smooth. There is a certain irregularity about the room due to the disproportionate size of the parts. Thus, the doors are very small in proportion to the windows. This produces a strange, irritating impression, as of something disharmonious, something lacking, and also of something superfluous and adventitious. The whole is pervaded by a chilly white, the monotony of which is broken only by a row of windows in the rear wall. They are very high, reaching almost to the ceiling, and dense with the blackness of night. Not one gleam, not a

bright spot shows in the blank spaces between the window frames. Man's wealth shows in the abundance of gildings. There are gilded chairs, and very wide gold frames enclose the pictures. These constitute the only furniture as well as the only ornamentation. The lighting is from three chandeliers shaped like tings, with a few electric lights placed at a great distance apart. At the ceiling the light is bright, but considerably less so below, so that the walls seem grayish.

The ball is in full swing. The music is furnished by an orchestra of three pieces. The musicians resemble closely their respective instruments; the violinist, a violin—lean neck, small head, a shock of hair brushed to one side, back somewhat bent, a handkerchief correctly adjusted on his shoulder under the violin; the flute-player, a flute—very, tall, with a thin, elongated face, and stiff, thin legs, the bass-violinist, a double-bass—stumpy, round-shouldered, lower part of his body very stout,

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wide trousers. The uncommon effort with which the musicians play is painfully evident. They beat time, swing their heads, and shake their bodies. The tune is the same throughout the ball, a short polka in two musical phrases, producing a jolly, hopping, extremely insipid effect. The three instruments do not quite keep time with one another, producing a sort of queer detachment, a vacant space, as it were, between them and the sounds which they produce.

Young men and girls are dancing dreamily. All are handsome, distinguished-looking, with good figures. In contrast to the piercing notes of the music, their dancing is smooth, noiseless, light. At the first musical phrase, they circle around; at the second, they gracefully part and join again. There is a slight mannerism in their dancing.

Along the walls, on the gilded chairs, sit the Guests, stiff and constrained. They scarcely venture to move their heads. Their conversation is also constrained. They do not whisper to one another; they do not laugh, and they scarcely look at one another. They speak abruptly, as if chopping out the words of a text. Their hands hanging superciliously over their laps make their arms look as if they had been broken at the wrists. The monotony of their faces is strongly emphasized. Every face bears the same expression of self-satisfaction, haughtiness, and inane respect for the wealth of Man.

The dancing girls are all in white, the men in black. Some of the Guests wear black, white, and brightly yellow? flowers.

In the near corner, which is darker than the rest, Someone in Gray called He stands motionless. The candle in his hand is reduced two-thirds and burns with a strong, yellow light, casting a yellow sheen on His stony face and chin._

THE GUESTS' CONVERSATION

—It is a very great honor to be a guest at Man's ball.

—You may add, it is an honor of which very few have been deemed worthy. The whole city tried to get themselves invited, but only a very few succeeded. My husband, my children, and I are quite proud of the honor Man has showed us.

—I am really sorry for those who were not able to get here. They won't sleep the whole night from sheer envy, and to-morrow they'll say nasty things about the ball and call it a bore.

—They never saw such magnificence.

—Or such wonderful wealth and luxury.



—Or, I dare say, such charming, free and easy gayety.

—If this isn't gay, I should like to know what is.

—Oh, what's the use of talking? You can't convince people consumed by jealousy. They'll tell us we didn't sit on gilded chairs, absolutely not.

—They'll say that the chairs were of the commonest sort, bought at second hand.

—That the illumination was not by electricity, but just by tallow candles.

—Say candle stumps.



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—Or dirty lamps.

—They'll have the impudence to maintain that the mouldings in Man's house are not gilded.

—And that the broad picture frames are not made of gold. It seems to me I can hear the very ring of it.

—You can see its glitter. That's quite sufficient, I should think.

—I have rarely had the pleasure of hearing such music.

—It is divine harmony. It transports the soul to higher spheres.

—I should think the music good enough, considering the money paid for it. It is the best trio in the city. They play on the most important and solemn occasions.

—If you listen awhile, it compels your absolute attention. After a ball at Man's, my children keep singing the tune a long time.

—I sometimes think I hear it in the street. I look around—no musicians, no music.

—What I like especially in these musicians is the great effort they make when they play. They know the price they're paid and don't want to get the money for nothing. That's very decent of them.

—It seems as if they became a part of their instruments, their efforts are so great.

—Or as if the instruments became part of them.

—How rich!

—How magnificent!

—How brilliant!

—How rich!

[For some time the two expressions, "How rich! How magnificent!" are repeated from different parts of the room, uttered abruptly, like a bark.

—Beside this ballroom there are fourteen other magnificent rooms in Man's house. I have seen them all. The dining-room has such a huge fireplace that you can put a whole log into it. There are magnificent guest-rooms and a beautiful boudoir. A large bedroom, and over the pillows on the beds—just fancy!—canopies!



—Why, how wonderful! Canopies!

—Did you hear? Canopies!

—Permit me to continue. For their son, the little boy, they have a beautiful bright room of golden yellow wood. It looks as if the sun were shining into it all the time.

—He is such a fine boy. He has curly hair that looks like the rays of the sun.

—That's true. When you look at him you wonder whether the sun has risen.

—And when you look at his eyes you think: "Autumn is, gone, and the blue sky is here again."

—Man loves his son madly. He bought him a pony for horseback riding, a nice snow-white pony. My children—

—Pray, let me continue. Have I told you yet about the swimming-pool?

—No. No.

—A swimming-pool, a perfect marvel.

—What, a swimming-pool!

—Yes. And further on is Man's study, full of books, books, books. They say he's a very learned man.

—You can see it by the books.

—I have seen his garden.

—I haven't.

—It was entrancing, I must say. Imagine an emerald-green lawn kept beautifully mowed and trimmed at the edges. In the middle a path of fine red sand.



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—Flowers—even palms.

—Yes, even palms. And all the trees trimmed as carefully and precisely as the lawn, some cut in the shape of pyramids, others in the shape of green columns. There's a lovely fountain and little plaster elves and deer scattered all around in the grass.

—How rich!

—How magnificent!

—How brilliant!

—How rich!

—Man did me the honor of showing me his stables and barns. I had to tell him how much I admired his horses and carriages. I was particularly impressed by his motor car.

—Think of it, he has seven servants; seven—a chef, a woman-cook, two maids, gardeners—

—You forget the coachman and the chauffeur.

—Yes, of course, the coachman and the chauffeur.

—And they themselves do nothing at all. They are too fine.

—You must admit, it is a great honor to have been invited to Man's ball.

—Don't you find the music somewhat monotonous?

—No, I don't, and I'm surprised you do. Don't you see what kind of musicians they are?

—I should like to hear such music all my life. That's what I say. There's something, in that music that stirs me.

—Me too.

—Me too.

—It is a delicious sensation to abandon oneself to dreams of happiness under the influence of this music!

—To transport oneself in fancy to the astral spheres!

—How fine!

—How rich!

—How magnificent!

[These phrases are repeated.]

—I notice a stir at that door. Man and his Wife will soon pass through the hall.

—The musicians are working away for dear life.

—There they are!

—They're coming! Look, they're coming!

[Man, his Wife, his Friends, and his Enemies appear in the door on the right, cross the room diagonally to the door on the left. The dancers go on dancing, but part to make way for them. The musicians play desperately loud and out of tune. Man has aged greatly. His long hair and long beard are beginning to turn gray. But his face is manly and handsome, and he walks with calm dignity and an air of coldness. He looks straight ahead of him, as if not noticing those around him. His Wife has also aged, but she is still beautiful and walks leaning on his arm. She too seems not to notice the people around her, but looks straight ahead, with a rather strange, almost fixed expression. Both are richly dressed.]

His Friends follow directly behind Man. They resemble one another very much—noble faces, high and candid foreheads, honest eyes. They walk proudly, throwing out their chests, stepping firmly and confidently, and looking, now to this side, now to that, with condescension and slight disdain. They wear white roses in their buttonholes.



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Following them at a slight distance come Man's Enemies, also very much resembling one another—mean, cunning faces; low, heavy foreheads; long, ape-like arms. They walk uneasily, pushing, bending, and hiding behind one another, and casting sharp, mean, envious, sidelong glances from beneath lowered lids. Yellow roses appear in their buttonholes. Thus they pass through the room, slowly and in perfect silence. The sounds of the steps, the music, and the exclamations of the Guests produce a sharply discordant noise._

GUESTS' CONVERSATION

—There they are. There they are. What an honor!

—How handsome he is!

—What a manly face!

—Look! Look!

—He isn't looking at us!

—He doesn't see us!

—We are his guests!

—What an honor! What an honor!

—And his wife! Look! Look!

—How beautiful she is!

—How proud!

—I tell you, just look at her diamonds!

—Her pearls! Her pearls!

—And her rubies!

—How rich! What an honor!

—Honor! Honor! Honor!

[The same phrases are repeated again.]

—Here are Man's Friends!



—Look, look, there are Man's Friends.

—Noble faces!

—Proud gait!

—They shine with the reflected splendor of his fame.

—How they love him!

—How faithful they are to him!

—What an honor to be one of Man's Friends!

—They regard everything here as their own!

—They're at home here!

—What an honor!

—Honor! Honor! Honor!

[Same phrases are repeated.]

—And there are Man's Enemies!

—Look, look, Man's Enemies!

—They walk like whipped curs!

—Man has subdued them!

—He's put a muzzle on them!

—They're wagging their tails!

—They're sneaking behind one another.

—They're pushing one another.

—Ha-ha! Ha-ha!

[Everybody laughs.]

—What mean faces!

—What greedy looks!

—Cowardly!



—Malevolent!

—They're afraid to look at us!

—They feel we're at home!

—Let's frighten them.

—Man'll be thankful to us for it.

—Ho-ho!

[They shout at Man's Enemies, mingling their shouts with laughter. The Enemies huddle closer together and cast sharp, timid, sideward glances.]

—They're going! They're going!

—What an honor!

—They're going!

—Ho-ho! Ha-ha!

—They're gone! They're gone! They're gone!

[The procession disappears through the door on the left. A pause of silence. The music plays less loudly, and the dancers begin gradually to fill the hall.]



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—Where did they go?

—I believe they went to the dining-room, where supper is being served.

—I suppose they'll soon invite us in. Do you see anybody looking for us?

—Yes, it's time for supper. If you eat too late, you can't sleep well.

—I always serve supper early.

—A late supper lies heavy on your stomach.

—And the music is still playing.

—And they're still dancing.

—I wonder they don't get tired.

—How rich!

—How magnificent!

—Do you know for how many guests they have prepared the supper?

—I didn't get a chance to count all the covers. The caterer came in, and I had to get out.

—Could they possibly have forgotten us?

—Man is so proud, and we are so unimportant.

—Don't say that. My husband says we do him an honor by accepting his invitation. We are rich, too.

—When you consider the reputation of his wife—

—Do you see anyone looking for us? Maybe he's looking for us in the other rooms.

—How rich!

—If you are not careful with other people's money, it's easy to get rich, I think.

—Oh, now, it's only his enemies who say that.

—Well, after all, there are some very respectable people among them. I must admit that my husband—



—It is late, though.

—It's clear there must be a mistake somewhere. I can't believe we've simply been forgotten.

—Evidently you know people and life very little if you think so.

—I am surprised. We are rich enough ourselves.

—It seems to me someone called us.

—You're mistaken, no one called us. I don't understand it. To be quite frank—why did we come to a house like this, with such a reputation? One should be very careful of the friends one chooses.

A LIVERIED LACKEY (*appears at the door*)

Man and his Wife beg the honored guests to step into the dining-room.

GUESTS (*rising quickly*)

—What a livery!

—He asked us to come in!

—I said there must be a mistake somewhere.

—Man is so good. I'm sure he hasn't had a chance to sit down at table himself.

—Didn't I say someone was looking for us?

—What a livery!

—They say the supper is grand.

—Everything at Man's is done in a grand style.

—What music! What an honor to be at Man's ball!

—Let those envy us who—

—How grand!

—How magnificent!

—What an honor!

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[They go out one after the other, repeating the last phrases. One couple after the other stop dancing and follow the Guests in silence. For some time a single couple remain circling on the floor, but they too join the others at last. The musicians, however, continue to play, making the same desperate effort. The lackey turns out the electric lights, leaving only one light in the farthest chandelier. The figures of the musicians are vaguely seen in the dim light, swaying to and fro with their instruments. The outline of Someone in Gray is sharply visible. The flame of the candle flickers, illuminating His stony face and chin with a garish, yellow light. He turns around without raising his head, walks slowly and calmly through the whole length of the room, and disappears through the door through which Man passed out.]

CURTAIN

THE FOURTH SCENE

MAN'S MISFORTUNE

A large, gloomy, quadrangular room, with dark walls, dark floor, and dark ceiling. There are two high, curtainless windows with eight panes in the rear wall, and between them a small, low door. Two similar windows appear in the right wall. Night glooms through the windows, and when the door opens, the same deep blackness of night stares into the room. In general, however bright Man's rooms may be, the vast darkness of the windows engulfs the light.

On the left wall there is nothing but a small, low door leading to the rest of the house. At the window on the right stands a broad sofa covered with dark oilcloth. Man's desk is very simple and poor. On it are seen a dimly burning, shaded lamp, a sheet of yellow paper with a sketch drawn on it, and a lot of toys—little peaked cap, a wooden horse without a tail, and a red, long-nosed clown with bells. Between the windows there is an old dilapidated bookcase entirely empty. The visible lines of dust left by the books show that they must have been removed recently. The room has only one chair.

In the darkest corner stands Someone in Gray called He. The candle in his hand is now no longer than it is thick. The wax is running over a little. The stump burns with a reddish, flickering light, and casts a red sheen on His stony face and chin.

The only remaining servant of Man, an Old Woman, is sitting on the chair. She speaks in an even voice, addressing an imaginary companion._

OLD WOMAN

There! Man has slipped back into poverty. He had a lot of valuable things, horses and carriages, and even an automobile. Now he has nothing. Of all his servants I am the only one left. There are still some good things in here and in two other rooms. There's the sofa and the bookcase. But in the other twelve rooms there's not a thing. They are dark and empty. Rats run around in them day and night and fight and squeak. People are afraid, but I'm not. It's all the same to me.

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An iron sign has been hanging on the gate for ever so long, saying the house is for sale. But no one wants to buy it. The sign's rusty already, and the rain has worn the letters away. But no one comes to buy the house. No one wants an old house. Yet maybe someone will buy it. Then we'll be going to look for another place to live in. It'll be a strange place. My mistress will begin to cry, and I dare say, the old gentleman will too. But I won't. It's all the same to me.

You wonder what's become of all his riches. I don't know. Maybe it seems strange, but I've been living with other people all my life, and many is the time I've seen money disappear, quietly running off through some leak or other. That's the way it has happened to these folks too. They had a lot, then it got to be a little, and then nothing at all. People came and bought things. Then they stopped coming. I once asked my mistress how it came about. She answered: "People have stopped liking what they used to like; they have stopped loving what they used to love." "How is that possible?" says I. "How can people stop liking what they once liked?" She didn't answer and fell to crying. But I didn't. It's all the same to me. It's all the same to me.

People say they are surprised at me. It's terrible, they say, to live in this house; terrible to sit here at night with only the wind whining in the chimney and the rats squeaking and scuffling. Maybe it is terrible, I don't know; but I don't think about it. Why should I? There they sit, the two of them, in their room, looking at each other and listening to the whining of the wind; and I sit in the kitchen alone and listen to the whining of the wind. Doesn't the same wind whine in our ears? Young folks used to come to see their son, and they would all laugh and sing and go through the empty rooms to chase the rats. But nobody comes to me, and I sit alone, all alone. There's no one to talk to, so I talk to myself, and it's all the same to me.

I'm sure they had a hard enough time of it—no need of more ill luck. But three days ago another misfortune happened to them. The young gentleman went out walking, his hat cocked, his hair dressed in latest fashion. And a bad man went and threw a stone at him from behind a corner and broke his head like a nut. They brought him home, put him to bed, and now he's dying in there. Maybe he'll recover and live—who knows? The old lady and the old gentleman cried, and then they put all the books on a wagon and sold them. With the money they hired a nurse, bought medicines, and even grapes. So the books, too, were of some good. But he doesn't eat the grapes. He doesn't even look at them. They just lie there on the dish, just lie there.

DOCTOR (*enters through the outer door; his face looks red and his manner is uneasy*)
Can you tell me if I am in the right place? I'm a doctor. I have many visits to pay, and I often make mistakes. I'm called here and there and everywhere, and all the houses look alike and the people in them are all sad. Have I struck the right place?



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OLD WOMAN

I don't know.

DOCTOR

I'll consult my note-book. Is there a child here choking with a sore throat?

OLD WOMAN

No.

DOCTOR

Is there a man here who suddenly went insane from poverty and attacked his wife and two children with a hatchet? Four patients in all, I suppose.

OLD WOMAN

No.

DOCTOR

Is there a girl here whose heart stopped beating? Don't lie, old woman, I think she is here.

OLD WOMAN

No.

DOCTOR

Well, I believe you. You seem to speak the truth. Is there a young man here whose head was broken by a stone and who is dying?



OLD WOMAN

Yes. Go through that door on the left, but don't go any farther. The rats will eat you up!

DOCTOR

Very well. They keep ringing, ringing all the time, day and night. Here it is, late at night. All the lights in the street are out, and I am still on the run. Often I make a mistake and enter the wrong house. Yes, old woman, I do. (*Exit through the door leading inside*)

OLD WOMAN

One doctor has already treated him, but didn't cure him. Now there's another, and I guess he won't cure him either. Well! Then their son will die, and we'll remain alone in the house. I'll sit in the kitchen and talk to myself, and they'll sit in there keeping quiet and thinking. Another room vacated, another room for the rats to scuffle in. Let them squeak and scuffle. It's all the same to me. It's all the same to me. You ask me why that bad fellow threw the stone at our young gentleman. I don't know—how could I know why people want to kill each other? One threw a stone from behind a corner and ran away; the other one fell in a heap and is now dying—that's all I know. They say that our young gentleman was a fine chap, very brave, and very kind to poor people. I don't know anything about it—it is all the same to me. Whether they are good or bad, young or old, quick or dead, it is all the same to me. It is all the same to me.

As long as they pay, I'll stay with them; and when they stop paying, I'll go to other people to do their housework, and finally I shall stop altogether—when I get old, and my eyesight gets poor, so that I can't tell salt from sugar. Then they'll turn me out and say: "Go where you please. We'll hire another one." What of it? I'll go. It's all the same to me. Here, there, or nowhere, it's all the same to me. It's all the same to me.

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[Enter Doctor, Man and his Wife. Both have aged greatly and are completely gray. Man's long bristling hair and beard give his face a leonine appearance. He walks slightly stooping, but holds his head erect and looks sternly and resolutely from beneath his gray eyebrows. When he looks at anything closely, he puts on large, silver-framed eye-glasses.

DOCTOR

Your son has fallen into a deep sleep. Don't wake him. It may bring on a turn for the better. You go to sleep too. When one has a chance to sleep one should grab it and not stay up talking.

WIFE

Thank you, doctor, it's been such a relief. Will you call to-morrow again?

DOCTOR

Yes, to-morrow and the day after to-morrow. Old woman, you go to bed too. It's late, it's time for all to go to bed. Is that the door to leave by? I often make mistakes.

[He goes out. The Old Woman goes also. Man and his Wife are left alone.

MAN

Look, wife, I began to draw this while our son was still well. I stopped at this line and thought I'd rest and resume the work later. See what a simple, placid line it is, yet horrible to look at. It may be the last line I shall have drawn in our boy's lifetime. What malicious ignorance there is graven in its simplicity and placidity.

WIFE

Don't get excited, my dear. Don't think those evil thoughts. I believe the doctor told the truth and our son will recover.

MAN

Aren't you excited too? Look at yourself in the mirror. You're as white as your hair, my old friend.

WIFE

Of course, I am a little excited, but I'm convinced there's no danger.

MAN

Now, as always, you encourage me and fool me so sincerely, so guilelessly. My poor squire, true guardian of my dulled sword, your knight is a poor, broken-down man. He cannot hold a weapon in his feeble hand. What do I see? Our son's toys. Who put them there?

WIFE

My dear, you put them there yourself long ago. Have you forgotten? You said you found it easier to work with the child's innocent toys beside you.

MAN

Yes, I had forgotten. But now it's terrible to look at them, as terrible as it is for a convict to look at instruments of torture. If the child dies, his toys will remain as a curse to the living. Wife, wife, the sight of them is terrible to me!

WIFE

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It was when we were still poor that we bought them. How touching it is to look at them, those poor, dear toys!

MAN

I can't help it, I must take them in my hands. Here's the horse with the tail torn off. Hop, hop, horsie! Where are you galloping off to? I'm going far, far away, papa, to where the fields are and the green woods. Take me along, horsie. Hop, hop, hop! Sit down, dear papa. And there's the soldier's cap, the cheap cap I tried on myself in fun when I bought it. Who are you? I'm a knight, papa. I'm the bravest, the strongest knight. Where are you going, my little knight? I'm going to kill the dragon, dear papa. I'm going to free the captives, papa. Go, go, my little knight. *(The Wife cries)* And there's our everlasting clown, with his kind, stupid face. But how ragged he is, as if he had come out of a hundred frays. Tinkle, friend, the way you used to tinkle. What, you can't? Only one bell left, you say? Well, I'll throw you on the floor. *(Throws down the toy)*

WIFE

What are you doing? Remember how often our boy kissed his funny face.

MAN

Yes, that was wrong of me. Forgive me, friend, forgive me. *(He bends down with difficulty and picks up the clown)* Still laughing? Don't. I'll put you away, out of sight. Don't be angry, I can't bear your smile now. Go and laugh in a place where I can't see you.

WIFE

It breaks my heart to hear you speak like that. Believe me, our son will get well. It wouldn't be just if the young were to die before the old, would it?

MAN

Just? Where have you ever seen justice, wife?

WIFE

Please, dear husband, I beg you, kneel down beside me, and let us both pray to God.

MAN

It's hard for an old man to bend his old knees.

WIFE

Bend them. You should—you must.

MAN

He will not hear me, He whose ear I've never troubled with either praise or entreaty.
You pray. You are the mother.

WIFE

You pray—you are the father. If a father is not to pray for his son, who is? To whom are you leaving him? Can one person tell the same things in the same way as the two of us together?

MAN

Very well. Maybe eternal justice will answer the prayers of an old man who bends his old knees.

[Both go down on their knees, their faces turned to the corner where the Unknown stands motionless; their arms are folded over their breasts while they pray.]



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THE MOTHER'S PRAYER

God, I beg you, let my son live. I can understand only one thing, I can say only one thing, only one thing—God, let my son live. I have no other words, all is dark around me, everything is falling. I understand nothing, and there's such a terror in my heart, O Lord, that I can say only this one thing—God, let my son live! Let him live! Forgive me for praying so poorly. But I cannot pray in any other way. You understand, O Lord, I can't. Look at me! Just look at me! Do you see? Do you see how my head shakes, do you see how my hands shake? But what are my hands, O Lord! Have pity on him. He is so young—he has a birthmark on his right hand. Let him live, even if only a little while, a little while. He is so young, such a mere foolish child—he's still fond of sweets. I bought him grapes. Pity—have pity!

[She weeps in a subdued way, covering her face with her hands. Man speaks without looking at her.]

THE FATHER'S PRAYER

Here I am praying, you see. I've bent my old knees. I've prostrated myself in the dust before you. I'm kissing the ground, do you see? Maybe I have sometimes offended you. If so, forgive me, forgive me. It is true, I was haughty, arrogant. I demanded and did not beg. Often I condemned—forgive me. And if you wish, if this be your will, punish me, but spare my son. Spare him, I beg you. Not for mercy, not for pity do I pray you. I pray for justice. You are old, and I am old too. You will understand more easily than I. Bad people wanted to kill him, people who insult you by their deeds and defile your earth—bad, heartless people, who throw stones from behind corners. From behind corners, the scoundrels! Do not then, I pray you, permit the fulfilment of this evil deed. Stay the blood, give back the life—give back the life to my noble son! You took everything away from me, but did I ever ask you like a beggar: "Give me back my wealth, give me back my friends, give me back my talent"? No, never. I did not even ask you for my talent, and you know what his talent means to a man. It is more than life. I thought perhaps that's the way it ought to be, and I bore everything, bore everything with pride. But now I ask you on my knees, in the dust, kissing the earth: "Give back my son's life." I kiss your earth!

[He rises. Someone called He listens indifferently to the father's and mother's prayers.]

WIFE

I'm afraid your prayer was not humble enough. There was a certain tone of pride in it.

MAN

No, no, my wife, I spoke well to Him, the way a man should speak. He cannot love cringing flatterers better than brave, proud men who speak the truth. No, wife, you cannot understand. Now I believe also and feel reassured—in fact, I am happy. I feel that I too still signify something to my boy, and it makes me glad. Go and see if he's asleep. He needs a lot of good, hard sleep.



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[The Wife goes out. Man, with a friendly look to the corner where Someone in Gray stands, picks up the toy clown, plays with it, and gives its red nose a quick kiss. At that instant his Wife enters and Man speaks shamefacedly.]

MAN

I was begging his pardon. I insulted this fool. Well, how is our dear boy?

WIFE

He is so pale.

MAN

That's nothing. It'll pass away. He lost a lot of blood.

WIFE

It makes me so sad to look at his poor shorn head. He had such beautiful golden curls.

MAN

They had to be cut so that the wound could be washed. Never mind, wife, his hair will grow again and be still finer. Did you keep what was cut off? Be sure to keep it. His precious, blood is on it.

WIFE

Yes, I put it away in the chest, the last one left of all our wealth.

MAN

Don't worry about wealth. Just wait until our son begins to work. He'll restore all we've lost. I feel well again, wife, and I firmly believe in our future. Do you remember our poor little rosy room? The good neighbors scattered oak leaves in it, and you made a wreath of them and put it on my head and said I was a genius.



WIFE

I say so still. Other people have ceased to appreciate you, but not I.

MAN

No, my dear little wife, you're wrong. What genius creates outlives the old dirty bundle of rags known as the body, whereas I am still living, and my productions—

WIFE

No, they're not dead and they never will die. Do you remember that corner house you built ten years ago? Every evening at sunset you go to look at it. Is there a more beautiful building in the whole city, is there any with more depth to it?

MAN

Yes, I purposely built it so that the last rays of the setting sun should fall upon it and set its windows aglow. When the whole city is in darkness, my house is still taking leave of the sun. It was well done, and perhaps it will survive me a little while at least. What do you think?

WIFE

Of course, my friend.

MAN

The only thing that hurts, wife, is that the people have forgotten me so soon. They might have remembered me a little longer, just a little longer.

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WIFE

They have forgotten what they knew, and ceased to love what they loved.

MAN

They might have remembered me a little longer, a little longer.

WIFE

I saw a young artist near that house. He studied it carefully and made a sketch of it in his sketchbook.

MAN

Ah, why didn't you tell me that before? It's highly significant, highly significant. It means that my ideas are accepted and handed down by others, and even if I am forgotten, my ideas will live. It is tremendously significant.

WIFE

Yes, my dear, you are not forgotten. Do you remember the young man who bowed so reverently to you on the street?

MAN

Yes, that's so, wife. He was a fine, very fine youth. He had such a nice young face. It's good you reminded me of his bow. It has sent a ray of brightness into my heart. But I feel sleepy. I must be tired. I am old too, my dear little gray wife. Have you noticed it?

WIFE

You're just as handsome as ever.

MAN

And my eyes are bright?



WIFE

Yes, your eyes are bright.

MAN

And my hair is black as pitch?

WIFE

It's so white, so like snow that it's even more beautiful.

MAN

And no wrinkles?

WIFE

Yes, there are little wrinkles on your face, but—

MAN

Of course, I know I'm a beauty. To-morrow I'll buy myself a uniform and enter the light cavalry. Yes? *(His Wife laughs)*

WIFE

There, you're joking too, as in olden times. But lie down here and sleep a little. I'll go to look after our boy. Don't worry, I won't leave him. I'll call you when he wakes. You don't care to kiss an old wrinkled hand, do you?

MAN *(kissing her hand)*

Go, you're the most beautiful woman I've ever known.

WIFE

And the wrinkles?

MAN

What wrinkles? I only see a dear, kind, good, sensible face. Nothing else. Don't take offence at my stern tone. Go to the boy, watch him, stay with him like a quiet shadow of gentleness and love. And if he is disturbed in his sleep, sing him a song as you used to do. And put the grapes nearer, so that he can reach them.



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[The Wife goes out. Man lies down on the sofa, his head toward the spot where Someone in Gray stands immobile, so that His hand almost touches Man's gray, dishevelled hair. Man falls asleep quickly.]

SOMEONE IN GRAY

Man has fallen into a sound, sweet sleep, deceived by hope. His breath is soft as a child's, his heart beats calmly and evenly, bringing him relief. He knows not that in a few moments his son will die. In mysterious dream-fancies a picture of impossible happiness arises before him.

It seems to him that he and his son are drifting in a white boat along a beautiful, quiet stream. It seems to him that it is a glorious day, and he sees the deep sky and the transparent crystal water. He hears the rustling of the reeds as they part before the boat. It seems to him that he is happy and glad. All his feelings betray him.

Suddenly he is disturbed. The terrible truth has entered through the thick veil of sleep and stung his thoughts.

"Why is your golden hair cut so short, my boy? Why?"

"I had a headache, papa, that's why."

And deceived once more, he feels happy again, sees the deep sky, and hears the rustling of the parting reeds.

He knows not that his son is already dying. He hears not how, in a last senseless hope, with a child's faith in the power of adults, his son is calling him without words, with his heart: "Papa, papa, I am dying! Hold me!" Man sleeps soundly and sweetly, and in the deceptive, mysterious fancies there arises before him the picture of impossible happiness. Awake, Man! Your son is dead.

[Man lifts his head, frightened, and rises.]

MAN

Ha! What is it? I thought I heard someone call me.

[At that moment many women behind the scenes burst into a wail—the loud, long-drawn wail over the dead. The Wife enters, frightfully pale.]

MAN

Dead?

WIFE

Yes, he is dead.

MAN

Did he call me?

WIFE

No, he never awoke. He didn't call anyone. He is dead—my son, my dear, darling boy!

[She falls on her knees before Man and sobs, clasping his knees. Man puts his hand on her hand and, turning to the corner where Someone in Gray stands indifferently, speaks in a sobbing, but terrible voice.]

MAN

You insulted a woman, scoundrel! You killed a boy! *(His Wife sobs. Man softly strokes her hair with his trembling hand)* Don't cry, my dear, don't cry. He will scoff at our tears, just as He scoffed at our prayers. And you—I don't know who you are—God, Devil, Fate, or Life—I curse you!

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[Man speaks the following in a loud, powerful voice, one arm about his wife as if to protect her, the other arm fiercely extended toward the Unknown.]

MAN'S CURSE

I curse everything that you have given. I curse the day on which I was born. I curse the day on which I shall die. I curse the whole of my life, its joys and its sorrows. I curse myself. I curse my eyes, my ears, my tongue. I curse my heart and my head, and I fling everything back at your cruel face, a senseless Fate! Be accursed, be forever accursed! With my curses I conquer you. What else can you do to me? Hurl me to the ground, I will laugh and shout in your face: "Be accursed!" Seal my mouth with the clamps of death, with my last thought I will shout into your stupid ears: "Be accursed, be accursed!" Take my body, tear at it like a dog, drag it into the darkness—I am not in it. I have disappeared, but disappearing I shall repeat: "Be accursed, be accursed!" Through the woman whom you have insulted, through the boy whom you have killed, I convey to you the curses of Man!

[He turns in silence, with fiercely uplifted hand. Someone in Gray listens passively to the curses. The flame of the candle flickers as if blown by the wind. Thus they stand for some time in tense silence confronting each other, Man and Someone in Gray. The wailing behind the scenes grows louder and more prolonged, passing into a doleful chant.]

CURTAIN

THE FIFTH SCENE

THE DEATH OF MAN

An uncertain, unsteady, blinking light, so dim that at first nothing is distinguishable. When the eye grows accustomed to it, the following scene becomes visible.

A long, wide room with a very low ceiling and windowless. The entrance is down a flight of steps from somewhere above. The walls are bare and dirty and resemble the coarse, stained hide of some huge animal. Along the entire back wall up to the stairs runs a bar with a top of smooth glass. This is covered with bottles full of differently colored liquors that are arranged in regular rows. Behind a low table sits the Bartender, immobile, with his hands folded across his paunch. His white face is blotched with red. His head is bald, and he has a large, reddish beard. He wears an expression of utter calm and indifference, which he maintains throughout, never changing his seat or his attitude.

Drunkards, both men and women, sit at small tables on wooden stools. Their number seems to be augmented by their shadows dancing on the walls and ceiling.

It is one endless monotony of repulsive ugliness and desolation. The men's faces resemble masks with the various features disproportionately magnified or reduced: big noses, or no noses at all; eyes staring savagely, almost starting from their sockets, or eyes narrowed to scarcely visible slits and points; huge Adam's apples and tiny chins. Their hair is tangled, frowzy, dirty, covering half the face on some of them. Despite their differences, a horrible sameness is stamped upon their faces: a greenish, ghastly tinge of decay and an expression that appears grotesque in some, gloomy and stupidly timid in others.

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They are dressed in dull rags, with here a bony arm bared, there a sharp knee, and there again a frightfully sunken chest. Some are almost entirely naked. The women differ little from the men, except that they are even uglier and more uncouth. All have trembling heads and hands and walk with an uncertain step, as if on a slippery, or hilly, or sliding surface. Their voices, too, are all alike, rough and hoarse. They speak as uncertainly as they walk, as if their lips were frozen and refused to obey.

In the centre, at a separate table, sits Man, his gray, unkempt head leaning on his arms. In this position he remains throughout the scene, except during the one moment when he speaks. He is dressed very poorly.

In the corner stands Someone in Gray, with the candle burned nearly to the end. The slender blue flame flickers, now bending, now striving upward with its sharp little tongue. Its blue throws a ghastly glare on His face and chin._

THE DRUNKARD'S CONVERSATION

—Oh my! Oh my!

—Look, everything is swaying so strangely. There's nothing to rest your eyes on.

—Everything is shaking as in a fever—the people, the chair, the ceiling.

—Everything is floating and rocking as on waves.

—Do you hear a noise? I hear a kind of noise, as if an iron wheel were rumbling, or stones falling from a mountain, large stones coming down like rain.

—It's the ringing in your ears.

—It's the tingling of your blood. I feel my blood. It flows heavy through my veins, thick, thick, black, smelling of rum. And when it gets to my heart, it all falls down, and it's terrible.

—It seems to me I see flashes of lightning.

—I see huge, red woodpiles and people burning on them. It's disgusting to smell the roasting flesh.

—Dark shadows circle around the piles. They are drunk, the shadows are. Hey, invite me! I'll dance with you.

—Oh my! Oh my!



—I am happy, too. Who will laugh with me? Nobody. So I'll laugh by myself. *(He laughs)*

—A charming woman is kissing my lips. She smells of musk and her teeth are like a crocodile's. She wants to bite me. Get away, you dirty hussy!

—I am not a dirty hussy. I am an old pregnant snake. I've been watching a whole hour to see little snakes come out of my body below and crawl around. Say, don't step on my little snakes.

—Where are you going?

—Who's walking there? Sit down. You make the whole house shake when you walk.

—I can't. I feel awful sitting down.

—I too. When I am sitting I feel a horror running through my whole body.

—So do I. Let me go.

[Three or four Drunkards reel aimlessly about, getting tangled up In the chairs.]

—Look what it's doing. It's been jumping for two hours, trying to get on my knee. It just misses by an inch. I drive it away and it comes back again.



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—Black cockroaches are creeping under my skull and buzzing.

—My brain is falling apart. I feel the gray matter separating. My brain is like rotten cheese. It stinks.

—There's some sort of a corpse here. I smell it.

—Oh my! Oh my!

—I'll sneak up to her to-night and cut her throat.

—The blood will flow. It's flowing already. See how red it is.

—I am constantly being followed by three men. They are calling me into a dark corner of the vacant lot, and they want to kill me. They are already at the door.

—Who is walking on the walls and ceiling?

—Good Lord! They have come to take me.

—Who?

—They.

—My tongue is getting paralyzed. I'll cry. (*Cries*)

—My whole body is coming out. I'll soon be turned inside out, and then I'll be all red.

—Listen, listen. Ho! Somebody! A monster is going for me. He's raising his hand. Help! Ho!

—What is it? Help! A spider!

—Help!

[For some time they shout "Help!" hoarsely.]

—We are all drunkards. Let's call down all the people from above. It's so disgusting up there.

—No, don't. When I leave here and go out on the street, it rampages and tears about like a wild beast and soon throws me off my feet.

—We've all come here. We drink rum and it gives us joy.

—It gives us fright. I shiver the whole day from fright.



—Fright is better than life. Who wants to return to life?

—I don't.

—I don't. I'd rather croak here. I don't want to live.

—No one!

—Oh my! Oh my!

—Why does Man come here? He drinks little and just sits still. We don't want him.

—Let him go to his own house. He has a house of his own.

—Fifteen rooms.

—Don't touch him. He has no place to go to any more.

—He has fifteen rooms.

—They're empty. Only rats run around and fight in them.

—And his wife.

—He hasn't any. Seems she died.

[During this conversation and the following, Old Women in strange headgear enter quietly and replace unnoticeably the Drunkards, who quietly depart. The women mingle in the conversation, but in such a way that no one notices it.]

CONVERSATION OF DRUNKARDS AND OLD WOMEN

—He'll soon die, too. He can scarcely drag himself along, he's so weak.

—He has fifteen rooms.

—Listen to the beating of his heart. It's uneven and faint. It'll soon stop beating altogether.

—Hey, Man, give us an invitation to your house. You have fifteen rooms.

—It'll soon stop beating altogether, that old, sick, feeble heart of Man!

—He's asleep, the drunken fool. It's dreadful to sleep, and yet he sleeps. He might die in his sleep.

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—Hey, there, wake him up!

—Do you remember how it used to beat when it was young and strong?

[A low laugh is heard.]

—Who's laughing? There are some here who have no business to be here.

—It just seems so to you. We are all alone, only we drunkards.

—I'll go out on the street and start a fight. I've been robbed. I'm stark naked, and my skin is green.

—Good evening.

—The wheel is rumbling again. Oh, Lord, they'll crush me! Help!

[No one responds.]

—Good evening.

—Do you remember his birth? I believe you were there.

—I must be dying. Good Lord! Good Lord! Who will carry me to the grave? Who will bury me? I'll be lying like a dog on the street. People will step over me, wagons will ride over me. They'll crush me. Oh, my God! Oh, my God! *(Cries)*

—Permit me to congratulate you, my dear friend, on the birth of your child.

—I am positive there is a mistake here. For a circle to fall out of a straight line is an absurdity. I'll demonstrate it on the spot.

—You're right.

—Oh my! Oh my!

—It's only ignoramuses in mathematics who will permit it. I won't. I won't permit it, do you hear?

—Do you remember the rosy dress and the little bare neck?

—And the flowers? The lilies-of-the-valley on which the dew never dried, and the violets, and the green grass?

—Don't touch, don't touch the flowers, girls.



[They utter a low and suppressed laugh.

—Oh my! Oh my!

[The drunkards have all gone. Their places are taken by the Old Women. The light grows steady and very faint. The figure of the Unknown is sharply outlined, and so is Man's gray head, on which a, faint light falls from above.

OLD WOMEN'S CONVERSATION.

—Good evening.

—Good evening. What a splendid night!

—Here we are together again. How are you feeling?

—I cough a little.

[They laugh suppressedly.

—It won't take long now. He'll die soon.

—Look at the candle. The flame is blue and thin and spreading sideways. There's no more wax. It's only the wick that's burning.

—It doesn't want to go out.

—When did you ever see a flame that did want to go out?

—Don't dispute, don't dispute. Whether it wants to go out, or doesn't want to go out, time is flying.

—Do you remember his motor car? He once almost ran me down.

—And his fifteen rooms?

—I was there a little while ago. The rats almost ate me up, and I caught a cold in the draught. Someone had stolen the window frames, and the wind was blowing through the whole house.

—Did you try the bed in which his wife died? Isn't it soft and nice?



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—Yes, I went through all the rooms and let my fancy play a little. They have such a pretty nursery. It's a pity the window frames are knocked out there too, and the wind makes a racket with the litter on the floor. And the child's bed too is so dear. Now the rats have made their nest in it and breed their children there.

—Such dear, naked little rats.

[They titter.]

—And in his study the toys are lying on the table: a horse without a tail, a soldier's cap, and a red-nosed clown. I played a little with them. I put on the soldier's cap. It was very becoming to me. But there's such a lot of dust on the things. I got all dirty.

—But did you go into the drawing-room where the ball was given? It's so gay there.

—Yes, I did. Fancy what I saw. It was dark, the windows were broken, and the wind was playing with the wall-paper—

—Making a sound as of music.

—And in the darkness the guests were squatting on their knees at the wall—and you should have seen how they looked!

—We know.

—And they barked: "How rich! How magnificent! How brilliant! How rich!"

—You're joking, of course.

—Of course I'm joking. You know I have a funny disposition.

—How rich! How magnificent!

—How gay!

[They titter.]

—Let's remind him of it!

—How rich! How magnificent!

—Do you remember how the music played at your ball?

—He's going to die soon.



—The dancers circled about, circled about, and the music played so gently, so beautifully. They played this way.

[They make a semicircle about Man and hum the tune played by the musicians at the ball.]

—Let's get up a ball. It's so long since I've danced.

—Imagine that this is a palace, a magnificent, an exquisitely beautiful palace.

—Call the musicians. Why, you can't have a ball without music.

—Musicians!

—You remember?

[They sing. At that instant the three musicians who played at the ball come down the stairs. The one with the violin adjusts his handkerchief on his shoulder with great precision, and all three begin to play, making an exaggerated effort. But the notes are soft and gentle as in a dream.]

—There you have the ball.

—How rich! How magnificent!

—How brilliant!

—You remember, don't you?

[Singing softly to the music, they begin to circle about Man, imitating in a wild, monstrous fashion the movements of the girls in the white dresses who danced at the ball. At the first musical phrase they circle, at the second they join and part gracefully and quietly, whispering:]

—Do you remember?

—You're going to die soon—do you remember?

—Do you remember?



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—Do you remember?

—You're going to die soon—do you remember?

—Do you remember?

[The dance grows brisker, the movements sharper. Strange, whining notes mingle into the singing of the Old Women. An equally strange laugh passes around the circle of dancers, suppressed and quiet at first. As each one glides past Man, she flings an abrupt whisper into his ear:

—Do you remember?

—Do you remember?

—How gentle! How exquisite!

—What balm to the soul! Do you remember?

—You're going to die soon, you're going to die soon.

—You're going to die soon—

—Do you remember?

[They circle more quickly, their movements growing still more abrupt. Suddenly there is silence and they halt. The musicians grow rigid with the instruments in their hands. The dancers remain fixed in the game position in which they were when the silence fell. Man rises, straightens himself, throws back his gray, beautiful, terribly majestic head, and calls out in a surprisingly loud voice, full of sorrow and wrath. After each short phrase a brief but profound pause follows.

MAN

Where is my squire? Where is my sword? Where is my shield? I am disarmed! Come to me quick! Quick! Be accurs—

[He sinks down on the chair and dies, his head falling backward. At the same moment the candle flares up brightly and goes out. All objects are buried in a dense twilight which seems to be descending the stairs until it gradually covers everything. The face of dead Man alone remains bright. Low, vague conversation, whisperings and derisive mockery are heard from the Old Women.



SOMEONE IN GRAY

Silence! Man has died!

[Profound silence. Then the same cold, indifferent voice repeats from a remote depth, like an echo:

Silence! Man has died!

[Profound silence. The twilight thickens, but the mice-like figures of the Old Women are still seen standing rigid. Presently they begin to circle about the dead body mutely, quietly; then they begin to sing softly, and the musicians begin to play. The gloom thickens, the music and the song grow louder and louder, and the wild dance grows more unrestrained, until finally it ceases to be a dance, the Old Women merely whirling about the dead man arm in arm, stamping their feet, screeching, and laughing a wild, prolonged laugh. Complete darkness descends. Only the face of Man is still lighted up. Then this light too is extinguished. Black impenetrable darkness prevails.

In the darkness are heard the movements of the mad dancers, their screeching and laughter, and the discordant, desperately loud sounds of the music. Just when they have reached their highest pitch, all the sounds and noises withdraw rapidly somewhere and die away. Stillness._

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CURTAIN