

Old Man

(1915)

by Maxim Gorky



*Liberated from
capitalist control
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by
Socialist Stories*

CHARACTERS

Ivan Vasilyevich Mastakov, 40-45 years old, a merchant

Pavel, 20-22 years old, his stepson

Tanya, 18 years old, his stepdaughter

Zakharovna, an old servant who brought up the children

Stepanich, 60 years old, a watchman

Sophia Markovna, 33 years old, widow of an army colonel

Kharitonov, 48 years old, a merchant

Yakov, 25 years old, his nephew

A Stone-Mason

An Old Man

A Young Girl

ACT I

A three-storied brick building under construction is seen in the background. In front of it are barrels of lime, piles of boards and building materials, a clump of trees with broken branches. Under the trees a straight-backed bench; on the left of the stage—a fence with a gate in it leading into a garden. Beside the gate—a lodge with another bench at the entrance door. On the right of the stage—trees and bushes. Noon of a Sunday in summer. A group of stone-masons are standing in front of the new building. Mastakov, a sturdy dark-haired man with a smattering of grey in beard and moustache, is addressing them. At the garden gate: Kharitonov, a red-haired, fidgety little man; Yakov, his foppish nephew; Pavel, a glum, awkward lad; Tanya, dressed loudly and in the latest style; Zakharovna and Stepanich.

Kharitonov (*calling to the stone-masons*): Quiet, plebs!

Mastakov (*glancing at him reproachfully*): Just a minute, Yakim. Well, men, one job's done with, thank the Lord, and on Monday we'll begin another. You worked hard and honestly and deserve to be thanked for it. I do thank you, fellows; I do indeed.

Kharitonov (*to Pavel*): There's no spirit in his words. If I was to thank them, now!

Mastakov: Have you any complaints to make to me?

Stone-Masons: Oh, no. We thank you in turn. No complaints.

Mastakov: Good. It wasn't only for me you worked—you worked for yourselves as well. Your children and grandchildren will study in this school. Future generations will enjoy the fruits of our labour.

Kharitonov (*to Yakov*): It's the colonel's widow put those ideas in his head.

Yakov: Uh-huh.

Tanya: Hush, I can't hear what he says.

Mastakov: As a matter of fact, work is always of more value than money. I myself come of simple folk and I appreciate

the value of all kinds of work. (*He speaks haltingly, searching for words, and his hesitation increases as he goes on.*)

K h a r i t o n o v : Why doesn't he wind it up? They don't understand what he's talking about anyway.

M a s t a k o v : And so the building of this trade school is over. Heaven grant that the lives of our children may be better and happier than ours. Say what you will, the fortunate are more deserving of God's help than the unfortunate.

K h a r i t o n o v : That's all the colonel's widow.

T a n y a : Please stop talking!

Z a k h a r o v n a : Oh, deary me!

M a s t a k o v : And now go and have dinner. Drink to our final success, and—well, congratulations on the finishing of this job.

S t o n e - M a s o n s (*in enthusiastic chorus*): Many thanks, Ivan Vasilyevich! Many thanks to you! Come along, fellows! Wait! Thanks, master.

M a s t a k o v : You each have three rubles coming to you as a further mark of gratitude.

S t o n e - M a s o n s (*even more enthusiastic*): Hear that? . . . A thousand thanks! . . . Well, come along. . . . Wait a minute! Thanks!

O l d S t o n e - M a s o n : Wait! Quiet, men! I, too, have a word to say, Ivan Vasilyevich. Very kind it is of you to treat us to dinner—another would have handed us each a ruble for a drink and sent us off. But not you—you do everything different and better. Most folk fall flat when they try to be different, but not you. It's a pleasure to work for such a master. If everybody acted like you, there'd be less hard feelings. Folk do like to have a little pleasure once in a while. We're content, too, Ivan Vasilyevich, and we make you a bow to show our thanks. Bow to the master, mates. (*He makes a low bow, the stone-masons mutter: "Thanks, master." "May you be successful in all you do!" "Many thanks!" A consumptive lad falls on his knees and bows to the earth in obvious mockery.*)

T a n y a (*smiling*): How silly!

K h a r i t o n o v : The brat!

M a s t a k o v : That's not nice, my boy. Well, be off with you, men. If you need anything, Nikita Semyonov, ask Zakharovna for it.

S t o n e - M a s o n : Thank you, don't trouble yourself any more on our account.

(The workmen go out, followed by Kharitonov, Pavel, Yakov and Zakharovna. Tanya puts her foot on the bench to tie her shoe-lace.)

Kharitonov *(to the young folk)*: Come along, let's watch them guzzle.

Mastakov *(to the old stone-mason)*: I'm particularly grateful to you.

Stone-Mason: Don't mention it.

Mastakov: Why are you grinning?

Stone-Mason: It's a pleasure to look at you. I've seen lots of folk in my day, but I'd rather look at you than at most of them.

Mastakov: Get along. You'll be late for dinner.

Stone-Mason: You're always building something, always doing something. Real talent you've got, but you're in too much of a hurry. You'll wear out quick.

Mastakov: We've been told not to hide our light under a bushel.

Stone-Mason: Who told us?

Mastakov: Christ, in the Bible.

Stone-Mason: Oh, then of course. But the more haste, the more waste, as the saying goes. Well, good day to you. And so we begin the new job on Monday?

Mastakov: On Monday.

Stone-Mason: Good day to you.

(Goes off. Mastakov looks about him wearily.)

Tanya *(coming up to him)*: Let's go and have dinner.

Mastakov: You here alone?

Tanya: Everyone else went to watch them eat. There's no fun in that.

Mastakov *(softly)*: You're always alone, dear. You oughtn't to be.

Tanya: It was nice, what you said to them. And the old man is nice, too.

Mastakov: Talks too much, but he's clever. And he knows his job.

Tanya: I don't like most muzhiks, but some of them are nice.

Mastakov: Why shouldn't you like them? I'm a muzhik myself.

(Pavel appears among the trees.)

Tanya: You a muzhik? You're a merchant.

Mastakov: We're all alike. We're muzhiks, only we dress differently and talk differently. But people aren't to be judged by their clothes and their speech—it's their work that counts. The person who knows how to work is the one who deserves respect. You, for instance, are a lazy little loafer. Why is that?

Tanya: I don't know. Am I?

Mastakov (*ruminatively*): A muzhik, that's what I am—a real, honest-to-goodness muzhik.

Tanya: Why do you call me lazy?

Mastakov: Ask yourself that question. Do you like Yakov?

Tanya: Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't.

Mastakov: Hm. It would be better if you liked him all the time. What answer will you give when he asks you to marry him?

Tanya: I've given it already. I told him to wait.

Mastakov: For what?

Tanya: I don't know. Maybe . . . oh, we'll see. Why hasn't Sophia Markovna come?

Mastakov: She said she'd be late for mass. Why? What do you want her for?

Tanya: She's so awfully nice.

(Pavel disappears. Zakharovna comes in.)

Mastakov: You have too few friends, Tanya.

Tanya: Why are you so glum today?

Mastakov: Am I? I don't know.

Zakharovna: Dinner's ready.

Mastakov: Good. Here, this money is for the workmen, Zakharovna. Give it to Nikita. Come along, Tanya.

(Stepanich appears near the lodge with a gun in his hand.)

Stepanich: (*singing to himself*):

Poor old Vanya, there he's sitting
In the blessed pen again. . . .

Zakharovna: What are you doing with a gun in broad daylight?

Stepanich: Scaring off thieves. There's a suspicious-looking character prowling about. Keeps asking about the master—who he is, where he's from. . . .

Zakharovna: What does he want?

Stepanich: He don't say. Seems to me he's been sent scouting by a band of thieves.

Zakharovna: Don't you go telling him nothing.

Stepanich: Have no fear. I've spoken to the master about him.

Zakharovna: Call the Kharitonovs to dinner.

Stepanich: Here they come without any calling.

Kharitonov (to Pavel and Yakov): Learn from him how to manage your affairs.

Zakharovna: Dinner's ready, Yakim Lukich.

Kharitonov: Coming. He runs his business smooth as oil, while I'm plagued by strikes and creditors.

Yakov: The colonel's widow helps him.

Kharitonov: Fiddlesticks. A woman's no help when it comes to business.

Pavel: She'll suck him dry. He gave her seven hundred rubles' worth of silver as an Easter present and a ruby bracelet for her birthday.

Kharitonov: You know all the figures, don't you? Aren't you smart!

Stepanich (*winking in their wake*): It's a mean little skunk you brought up, Zakharovna.

Zakharovna: A mother's own children don't always turn out to be saints.

Stepanich: Nothing ever puts a damp on you. A very bright and chipper old lady you are.

Zakharovna: I wept all my tears long ago. Come what may, I'm always gay.

Pavel (to Stepanich): Hey, you! My stepfather left the bills somewhere. Go and look for them.

Zakharovna: For shame! What do you mean by talking to your elders like that!

Pavel: Get out of here, nanny!

Zakharovna: A fool, that's what you are.

(She goes into the garden. Pavel sits down on the bench and lights a cigarette. He hears the voice of Sophia Markovna coming from the bushes and tries to catch the words.)

Sophia Markovna (*off stage*): Don't unhitch the horses. I'll soon be back. (*Comes out of the bushes, pushing them back with her parasol. She is slightly over thirty, dressed with*

piquant simplicity.) Did I see you shake your fist at me? Or turn up your nose?

Pavel (*surprised*): You did not.

Sophia Markovna: Are you sure?

Pavel: I was just looking to see who was coming.

Sophia Markovna: Swear to it?

Pavel: Why should I?

Sophia Markovna: Oh, dear! Can't you take a joke?

(Pavel grows silent.)

Sophia Markovna: Have many guests come?

Pavel: Only the Kharitonovs.

Sophia Markovna: What are you doing here?

Pavel: Nothing.

Sophia Markovna (*taking his arm*): That's very little indeed.

Pavel: You tease me as if I were a child.

Sophia Markovna: Do I? Poor chap! Come along.

Stepanich (*with the bills*): Here, I found them. How do you do, my lady.

Sophia Markovna: How do you do, my gentleman.

(She goes out, taking Pavel with her. Stepanich sits down on the bench and watches them go with a smile on his face.

From behind the lodge comes the old stone-mason.)

Stepanich: Where are you going?

Stone-Mason: The men are too noisy for me.

Stepanich: Having a good time?

Stone-Mason: I'm not feeling up to scratch. Old age, I guess.

Stepanich: Hm.

Stone-Mason: A good man, Ivan Vasilyevich. And a good merchant, too. Where's he come from?

Stepanich (*with a little laugh*): Funny. Do you think there's some special land where all the good folk come from? As if never a good man was born among us.

Stone-Mason: There is no such land.

Stepanich: No, there isn't. There's another chap keeps asking where the master comes from and how he got rich.

Stone-Mason: He got rich from his brains. A fool'll never get rich. What makes him ask?

Stepanich: What makes you?

Stone-Mason: Me? Oh, I just asked out of curiosity.

Stepanich: He did too.

Stone-Mason: Curiosity's a sign of foolishness.

Stepanich: You ought to know.

Stone-Mason: A sure sign of foolishness. Who's that coming?

Stepanich: The master and the colonel's widow.

Stone-Mason: I'll just step into the lodge. How does the saying go? "A guest is best when seen to the door, your boss—when seen at a distance."

(He goes out, followed by Stepanich. Through the gate come Sophia Markovna and Mastakov, who seems preoccupied.)

Sophia Markovna: I don't think you ought to have left the table.

Mastakov: Oh, Yakim's an old friend of mine. You said you were in a hurry, but I wish you'd sit down here for a minute.

Sophia Markovna *(smiling)*: What about your new job?

Mastakov: Yakim is holding us up with the bricks—his creditors seized them. Sophia Markovna. . . .

Sophia Markovna: What is it? I can see something's troubling you. You're so absent-minded and—

Mastakov: There's good reason for it. I hardly know how to tell you—

Sophia Markovna: Out with it. Well?

(She sits down on the bench, Mastakov stands in front of her showing marked agitation.)

Mastakov: For over ten years I've been living according to your teachings. You've lent me money besides. And moral support.

Sophia Markovna: Sit down. *(Looks with a smile at her watch, then at him.)* Can't you come to the point?

Mastakov: You see . . . I just can't say it. It's too much for me.

Sophia Markovna *(studying him gravely)*: You surprise me! You, who are always so composed and self-confident.

Mastakov: On the surface. I'm very unlucky, Sophia

Markovna. (*Resentfully.*) It's—it's preposterous! Why should I find myself in such a position? I'm honest and hard-working and not grasping—

Sophia Markovna: But what has happened? Tell me!

Mastakov: You mean so much to me! You've become so much a part of my life, that if... For years I lived like a lone wolf, afraid of people, avoiding them. And then I met you. You helped me get over it. You made a man of me.

Sophia Markovna: There's no reason for saying all this now.

Mastakov: I have such deep respect for you—

Sophia Markovna: Thank you, I'm very glad, but—what is it you want of me?

Mastakov (*throwing himself on his knees*): Your mercy! Your help!

Sophia Markovna (*jumping up and glancing about*): Are you mad? Get up this very minute! You might as well make love to me in the market-place! Like a hot-headed schoolboy!

Mastakov (*getting up*): You won't judge me too harshly, I know. You are compassionate—

Sophia Markovna: Enough of this. I'm not a child. I know that you like me. I'm very outspoken—perhaps even rude at times. I like you too. Isn't that enough? I can't say more at present. You've chosen a very bad time for an exchange of confidences.

Mastakov (*dully, meekly*): I thought—

Sophia Markovna: At seven o'clock I'm leaving for the country. When I come back we'll have a talk. That will be in three days.

Mastakov: Don't go, please don't. I beg you not to. My life... everything's upset—

Sophia Markovna: What nonsense you are talking!

Mastakov (*almost in despair*): I must tell you!

Sophia Markovna: Hush. Somebody's coming. Look, you've got dust on your knees.

Mastakov (*under his breath*): My God!

Kharitonov (*tipsy*): Your hand, Sophia Markovna!

Sophia Markovna: But you and I just exchanged greetings.

Kharitonov: What of it? You're like a bank-note—always met with pleasure. (*To Mastakov.*) What are you looking so sour about, old man?

Mastakov (*nodding in the direction of the unfinished building*): We're behind with the building.

Kharitonov: Pooh, pooh! Things always turn out all right for you. You're lucky. Sophia Markovna, can't you do something to make him marry his stepdaughter to my Yakov? Why shouldn't you, Ivan Vasilyevich? It'd make things easier for you and be doing me a good turn at the same time.

Mastakov: This is no time to talk of that.

Kharitonov: It's always time to marry off the girls. Except during Lent. We're quarrelling over a mere twenty thousand rubles, Sophia Markovna. A disgrace!

Sophia Markovna: Bargain with him.

Kharitonov: I'm ready to, but he's neither here nor there nor up in the air. What's twenty thousand in these days of corruption? A pot of cream, no more. On the other hand, my Yakov's a suitor to be proud of. Sleek as a pedigreed bull. More like a tiger than a suitor.

Mastakov (*glumly*): You'll take all the money away from him.

Kharitonov: Time will tell. In money matters friendship and kinship don't count.

Mastakov (*testily*): You're a greedy son of a gun.

Kharitonov: Me greedy? A lot you know about me!

Sophia Markovna: Do you know a lot about yourself?

Kharitonov: I know myself through and through. Me greedy? Pshaw!

Sophia Markovna: Are we going to take a look at the building?

Mastakov: Yes.

Kharitonov: I'll come too. Me greedy! At Eastertide I lost nine thousand at cards and didn't even blink, while you—

Mastakov: You've been drinking, Yakim.

Kharitonov: I have. Because I live such a paltry sort of a life. I'm not much to look at, so the women won't have me without money. Life's a bore, so I try to put a kick into it by drinking and gambling.

Mastakov: You'll come to a bad end.

Kharitonov: Anybody can go down a beaten path, but it's the unbeaten ones I like—over the bumps and the stumps, over the bogs that threaten to suck you down, so that you're always saying to yourself: going to get out of this, Yakim, or going to go under? That's the only way to get any fun out of life.

Sophia Markovna: You're talking well today.

Kharitonov: I'd talk better if some nice woman would fall in love with me. Ah, Sophia Markovna, there's enough beauty in you to give a man all the twelve fevers at once. If only you'd love me now, I'd—

Mastakov (*roughly*): Shut up, you clown!

Sophia Markovna (*shocked*): What!? Think what you're saying!

Kharitonov (*frightened*): What's that?

Mastakov: Let him hold his foul tongue.

(*Sophia Markovna takes his arm.*)

Mastakov: Forgive me, Yakim. I had something on my mind, and you—

Kharitonov: On your mind! A fine thing! The way you shot that out! Aren't you afraid of him, Sophia Markovna? I confess I am at times.

(*They go off in the direction of the building. Pavel stands at the gate and watches them. Zakharovna's voice comes from the garden. Tanya appears.*)

Tanya (*to Pavel*): Let me pass.

Pavel: Don't push, you little rowdy!

Tanya: Who are you spying on?

Pavel: None of your business.

Tanya: What a boor! Why are you always so nasty?

Pavel: Just because.

Tanya: You don't know why yourself.

Zakharovna (*grumblingly*): If you've got a headache you oughtn't to go out in the sun.

Tanya: Leave me alone! Has Sophia Markovna gone, Pavel?

Pavel: I don't know.

Tanya: I forgot to tell her—

Zakharovna: Always forgetting! Where are you going? You'll sprain your ankle climbing over all that rubbish, you little minx! Running off like this and leaving your sweetheart all alone!

Tanya: I told you I have no sweetheart!

Zakharovna: But you have.

Tanya: I have not!

Zakharovna: Don't fly off the handle. A sweetheart's not a wart—no reason to boast of not having one.

Tanya: Why do you keep pestering me?

Zakharovna: Why do you keep pestering *me*?

Pavel: What a fool!

Tanya: Mind your own business if you're so wise! Go and see if she's gone, Zakharovna.

Zakharovna: Why didn't you say that in the first place? You're too lazy to go yourself.

Tanya: You told me not to!

Zakharovna: Don't listen to me—out of respect for my old age.

Tanya: You're impossible.

(*Stepanich comes shouting down the path.*)

Stepanich: Zakharovna, where's the money for the workmen?

Zakharovna: Here it is. Stop making so much noise. Why don't you give it to them yourself, Tanya? They'd like to have it from you.

Tanya (*walking off*): What makes you think so?

Zakharovna (*going after her*): The little vixen!

Yakov (*from the garden*): Where are they going?

Pavel: To give the workmen their tips.

Yakov: A lot of money?

Pavel: I don't know. Something over a hundred all together.

Yakov: If only somebody'd give *me* a hundred-ruble tip!

Pavel: Hire out as a butler.

Yakov (*lighting a cigarette*): Thanks. A student I know writes jingles for the humorous papers, and one of them goes:

Wait on people—you're no gent;

Do it well, and then you'll see:

No money is more wisely spent

Than that on tips to servantry.

That's saying it with a smile, not lamming people over the head with insults as you do.

Pavel: Who's it meant for, that jingle?

Yakov: Anybody. Have a smoke?

Pavel: No thanks. I'm not fond of jokes.

Yakov: Then let's be serious. Shall we go and see the girls tonight?

Pavel: I'm not in the mood. (*Frowning.*) How's that? Here

you are thinking of marrying my sister, and yet you ask me to go wenching with you.

Yakov (*surprised*): I like that! Is this the first time I've invited you to go? Where were you last Sunday?

Pavel (*morosely*): My stepfather wants to send me to a commercial school.

Yakov: What's the objection? You'll live alone—be your own boss.

Pavel: If I go away he's sure to marry that—

Yakov: He's sure to marry her anyway. What can you do to stop him? Forget it! Let him marry whoever he likes. All you want is your share of the money.

Pavel: That's it. I'm afraid he won't give it to me.

Yakov: Let's go for a walk. And take Tanya with us.

Pavel: I don't mind. (*They go towards the building.*) I wish you'd talk about the widow to Tanya more often.

Yakov: I talk about her often enough, have no fear.

Pavel: If only we could break things off between them!

Yakov: Tanya's quite gone on her.

Pavel: She's young and foolish—has no mind of her own.

Zakharovna (*coming to meet them*): A handsome pair of drakes! The heat's quite gone to the head of that uncle of yours, Yakov Savelich. There's no sense to what he says, but his language is enough to make the bricks blush. Go and take Tanya away from him.

(She goes into the garden. Pavel and Yakov disappear among the trees. Presently Mastakov is seen in the bushes gazing at the building and wiping the sweat off his forehead with his handkerchief. He looks distraught.)

Mastakov (*under his breath*): She didn't understand . . . didn't guess. . . .

(After a moment's consideration he goes resolutely over to the bench, takes his wallet out of his pocket and writes a note, leaning on his knee.)

Mastakov (*calling*): Stepanich! Hey, Stepanich!

Stepanich (*coming out from behind the lodge*): Here I am, master!

Mastakov: Harness Beauty and drive into town to Sophia Markovna's. If you overtake her on the road—

Stepanich : No chance of that.

Mastakov : Then go straight to her house, and if she's not at home, go to the station. She's leaving for the country by the seven o'clock train. Be sure to find her. Hurry.

Stepanich : And who'll take over?

Mastakov : Don't stop to talk. Nikita will see to the workmen. I'll tell him to.

Stepanich : They're in a state to set the house afire.

Mastakov : Hurry, I tell you!

(Stepanich hurries out.)

Mastakov *(under his breath)*: What's going to happen? God knows I'm innocent.... I'm innocent.... *(He sinks down on the bench and sits rocking back and forth, clutching his head in his hands.)*

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same scene on the same day. Five o'clock in the evening. In the fields beyond the building site someone is playing an accordion. Nikita, the old stone-mason, is drowsing on the bench in front of the lodge. Out of the bushes come Pavel, Yakov and Tanya, who is carrying a bouquet of wild flowers.

Yakov (*winking in Nikita's direction*): Want to see me give him a scare?

Pavel: He's not asleep.

Tanya: Don't.

Yakov: I'll give you a laugh.

(He goes over to Nikita and stands staring at him intently.)

Stone-Mason (*getting up*): What do you want, young man?

Yakov: I seem to know you.

Stone-Mason (*smiling*): Everybody around here knows me.

Yakov: But I seem to have known you for a long, long time.

Stone-Mason: I've known you just as long.

Yakov: Who are you?

Stone-Mason (*still smiling*): Why do you ask if you know me?

Yakov (*sharply*): I'm not joking. There's something I know about you that—

Stone-Mason (*solemnly*): What do you know? There's nothing to know about me.

Yakov (*lowering his voice*): What were you doing in March 1903? Remember?

Stone-Mason (*searching his memory*): In March? 1903?

Yakov: Yes. Now do you remember?

Stone-Mason: Just a minute, just a minute....

Yakov: Where were you then? Tell me that.

Stone-Mason (*growing confused*): Wait ... let's see ... seems I was in hospital then.

Yakov: Seems! I want to know where you *really* were.

Stone-Mason (*frightened*): Listen, what are you getting at, young man?

Yakov: No side-tracking! Remember what you were doing then?

Stone-Mason: What the devil are you up to? (*Snatches off his cap.*) There's nothing for me to remember, youngster. Leave me alone.

(*Tanya smiles as she watches the old man, Pavel bursts out laughing. Seeing this, Nikita puts his cap back on and gives a disgusted wave of his hand.*)

Stone-Mason: To hell with you! I thought you was in earnest. Such tricks, and me three times your age! (*Goes angrily into the lodge.*)

Yakov (*triumphantly*): Well, it worked, didn't it?

Pavel: Very slick.

Tanya: Why should he have been so frightened?

Yakov (*proudly*): I can scare anybody like that. Just go up to him and look him in the eye and say: "Oh, what I know about you!" I don't know anything, of course, but the person's sure to get scared—after all, everybody's got something he hides from people, and I just pretend to know his secret. See how it works?

Pavel: People are such fools.

Yakov: It works best with girls. I can make any girl cry in half an hour.

Tanya: But that's horrid! Aren't you ashamed?

Yakov: What's there to be ashamed of?

Tanya: Of teasing the girls.

Yakov: What do you do to us boys? Humph! Well, you liked the way I fooled the old man, didn't you?

Tanya: No, I didn't.

Yakov: Then what did you laugh for?

Tanya: I didn't.

Pavel: Yes, you did; don't argue. Very smart of him I should say. Will you wait for me here? I want to run into the house and change my shirt—it's all sweaty.

Yakov: Let's sit down, shall we?

Tanya: I don't feel like it.

Yakov: Don't be angry. Listen to this: I saw a froggy in a boggy on a soggy-woggy loggy.

Tanya (*in surprise*): What?

Yakov (*repeating it*): That's what's called a *bon mot*.

Tanya (*laughing*): I call it horrid. Did you make it up yourself?

Yakov: I did.

Tanya: I don't believe you.

Yakov: Honest to goodness. Don't you think it's funny?

Tanya: Not in the least.

Yakov: Then what did you laugh for? There never was anybody so unreasonable!

(They sit without speaking for a little while.)

Yakov (*gloomily*): Once there was an actor who said: "It's better to have little brains than big pimples." Do you like that?

Tanya (*smiling*): You're a perfect idiot.

Yakov (*gaily*): Anything to amuse you. But you *are* unreasonable. I'll bet the salesmen in the shops can't stand you.

Tanya (*injured*): I don't care whether the salesmen in the shops can stand me or not.

Yakov: You ought to. Some of them are very handsome.

Tanya: Oh, leave me alone!

Yakov: You've quite worn me out.

Tanya (*getting up*): Poor thing! Let's go and have tea.

Yakov: You go. I'll come later. (*Shakes his fist behind her back and sticks out his tongue.*)

Tanya (*turning round*): I feel so tired!

Yakov (*jumping up*): I'm very sorry. (*To himself.*) Just you wait, my pretty one!

(From the garden comes the voice of Mastakov saying:

"You'd better lie down and take a nap.")

Kharitonov (*at the gate*): I don't want to sleep, I want to talk.

Mastakov: What about?

Kharitonov: Let's sit down here, in your favourite spot. Weren't you sorry to cut down that copse?

Mastakov: Very.

Kharitonov: I thought so. Look what's left—not enough to whittle a toothpick out of. Sit down. What makes you so glum and unsociable today?

Mastakov: You just imagine it.

Kharitonov: Do you think I'm blind just because I've had a little drink? I see much better when I've got a drop

inside me. You're jumpy and keep peering into corners. What's the reason?

Mastakov: Oh, nothing in particular. I've got something on my mind. Building is what I love above everything else. Building beautifies this earth of ours—a poor sort of earth.

Kharitonov: You're wrong. It's a rich sort of earth. We suck it and suck it, but nobody can suck it dry.

Mastakov: And life is so uncertain. . . .

Kharitonov: Everybody sucks it—the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker, but Russia goes right on living, praised be the Lord! And she'll go on living to the end of time. But you look as bleak as an autumn day—makes a fellow want his overcoat. Lonesome for the widow, is that it? Can't blame you for that—she's one that anyone would pine for. Going to marry her?

Mastakov: I don't know. I'm no match for her.

Kharitonov: Why not? Her husband was somebody, but they say she comes of simple stock. A singer or something of that sort, wasn't she? In a word, a woman with a past.

Mastakov (*sharply*): The past is the past.

Kharitonov: But if it's in your bones?

Mastakov: What do you mean?

Kharitonov: If it's part of your—well, soul, shall we say? The past isn't tar on the fence that can be scraped off—oh, no! It goes deep, brother.

Mastakov (*getting up*): Sorry, but I've got to go. There's a matter I must give some thought to.

Kharitonov (*calling after him*): Give some thought to your stepdaughter! We've wasted enough words—it's time to get down to business.

(*Nikita glances out of the lodge.*)

Kharitonov: Who's there?

Stone-Mason: Me. (*Comes out.*) I've got a complaint to make to you, Yakim Lukich.

Kharitonov: Let's hear it.

Stone-Mason: That nephew of yours is always up to mischief.

Kharitonov: Even chickens make mischief when they're young. Well?

Stone-Mason: He tried to threaten me—

Kharitonov: Don't be afraid of him. Let him threaten all he likes, just don't pay any attention to him, see?

(From behind the lodge comes the Old Man in pilgrim's attire with a knapsack on his back, a pot and tea-kettle hanging from his belt. Behind him comes the Young Girl, also with a knapsack on her back. She has an expressionless face and big lacklustre eyes. The Young Girl bows. The Old Man stands motionless.)

Kharitonov: Hullo. Isn't this a pleasure, just!

Stone-Mason: Where have you come from?

Old Man: From Stephen's.

Kharitonov: Is she your daughter?

Old Man: She's my soul sister.

Kharitonov: Youngish for a sister.

Old Man: We weren't all born the same year.

Kharitonov: Quite right.

Young Girl (to the Stone-Mason): What's that they're building?

Stone-Mason: A school.

Kharitonov: Is she a maid?

Old Man: She is.

Young Girl: Isn't it a factory?

Stone-Mason: No, the factory's further—three versts or so.

Kharitonov: How many children has she had?

Old Man: One, but it was simple-minded too.

Stone-Mason: We're going to begin building another one soon.

Kharitonov: Simple-minded? (Gets up, goes into the garden.) Why don't you ask alms?

Old Man: There's a time for everything.

Kharitonov: Hm. Well, it's time for me to have tea.

Young Girl: Who's building it?

Stone-Mason: Mastakov, Ivan Vasilyevich.

Old Man: Does he live here?

Stone-Mason: Yes.

Old Man: Born here?

Stone-Mason: Why should you want to know that?

Young Girl: I've heard it said the folk here are a good sort.

Stone-Mason: There are all kinds.

Old Man: Has he been living here long?

Stone-Mason: Going on twenty years. (Stopping and

glancing at the Old Man suspiciously.) What makes you think he wasn't born here? I didn't say he wasn't.

Young Girl: They say he's kind-hearted.

Stone-Mason: Sometimes he is, sometimes he isn't. He don't like good-for-nothings.

Old Man: What are good-for-nothings?

Stone-Mason: Folk that the wind blows up and down the roads.

Young Girl: Let's go, brother.

Old Man: Where to? We'll have a rest first. I'm in no hurry. Nobody's waiting for me.

Stone-Mason: You don't look like a pious pilgrim.

Old Man: Don't I? What do I look like?

Stone-Mason: I don't know. You don't talk like one, either.

Old Man: Every bird has its own song.

Stone-Mason: You don't look like a pilgrim at all. If it's alms you're after, go into the courtyard—that way, round the corner.

Old Man: What's the hurry? Want to get rid of me?

Stone-Mason: Not particularly, but why should you hang about? You'll be lighting your pipe and throwing a match down.

Old Man: I don't smoke.

(Nikita goes into the lodge.)

Old Man *(to the Young Girl in a low voice, after first glancing furtively about)*: Keep your eyes open, Marina. Eyes and ears. Take notice of everything, and if you scent danger, run into town, to Ilya—

Young Girl: I know.

Old Man: He'll go straight to the police and tell them everything. Don't forget.

Young Girl: I won't.

Old Man *(looking about)*: Look how they've built everything up, the hyenas. Shut out the sky. Trying to cut themselves off from God, the heretics. Hiding their iniquity behind brick and stone.

Young Girl *(softly)*: Look—someone's coming.

(Enter Yakov and Tanya.)

Yakov: Do tell me.

Tanya: Wait. Where could he be? (*Calls.*) Father!

Yakov: We'll find him later. Tell me first.

Tanya: It's tiresome to tell people things.

Yakov: But you like to listen, don't you?

Tanya: If it's interesting. Father!

Yakov: Gossip's always interesting.

Tanya: Uh-huh.

Yakov: The gossips turn a fellow inside out.

(*The Young Girl bows to them.*)

Tanya: Pilgrims always know a lot of gossip.

Yakov: She looks as if she was made of wood. Here, let me give him a scare.

Tanya: I wouldn't.

Yakov: You'll see how funny it'll be. (*Staring intently at the Old Man.*) My God, is it you?

(*The Old Man stares back at him unperturbed.*)

Yakov: Have you been here long?

Old Man: Not very.

Yakov: Going back to jail soon?

Old Man: Soon as you.

Yakov: Me? What do you mean?

Old Man: Just that. When are you thinking of going back?

Yakov: There's no reason why I—

Old Man: They'll find a reason.

Yakov (*embarrassed*): How dare you—!

Tanya (*holding him back*): Don't touch him. He's a rude old man.

Yakov (*walking away*): No scaring him, the tramp!

Young Girl: Haven't you got something for a pair of poor homeless pilgrims, miss? Something to eat, something to drink? In the name of Christ.

Tanya: Go and ask in the kitchen—over there. Where could father be?

Yakov: He'll come.

Tanya: What a dull day! If only something would happen!

Yakov: A fire, for instance. Do you like fires?

Tanya: I'm afraid of them. But sometimes I get so bored I'd be glad to have anything happen, no matter how awful it was.

Y a k o v : Marry me.

T a n y a : I'm not joking. Sophia Markovna said she didn't know what it meant to be bored. How can that be? Even dogs get bored sometimes. Do you like apricots?

Y a k o v : I like you.

T a n y a : Oh, stop it!

Y a k o v : Really I do. Why don't you want to marry me? It'd be such fun! We'd buy an automobile.

T a n y a : I told you I wanted to think it over.

Y a k o v : You're taking a mighty long time about it. Getting married isn't like playing bridge—you don't have to think. I'm broad-minded, light-hearted, and easy-going. And I'm poor, so you can be sure I'd be faithful. Honest to goodness. You can do whatever you like when you're my wife.

T a n y a : I can do that now.

Y a k o v : No, you can't, because you're not married and you've got to be on your guard. We men are robbers who prey on inexperienced girls. Once you're a married woman you'll know what it means to do as you like. Take Sophia Markovna, for instance—she has one affair after another.

T a n y a (*regretfully*): They say such horrid things about her!

Y a k o v : You don't have to let your appetite be spoiled by what people say. And as for Pavel—he's mean and coarse and has no use for anybody.

T a n y a : Oh no, you're mistaken. He's in love with Sophia Markovna.

Y a k o v : Pavel? I don't believe it!

T a n y a : Yes, he is. I myself saw him kiss her gloves.

Y a k o v : Who'd ever have thought it!

T a n y a : She left her gloves at our house—

Y a k o v : And he kissed them? The silly ass! Well, she's sure to be your stepmother one of these days.

T a n y a : I'm glad of it.

Y a k o v (*glumly*): I don't know why.

T a n y a : There'd be a clever woman in the house I could talk to about frocks and things. And if she was here we'd remodel the house. It's too small for us.

K h a r i t o n o v (*enters*): Ah, the lovey-doves! Where's Ivan Vasilyevich?

Y a k o v : We couldn't find him.

K h a r i t o n o v : The architect has come.

Tanya: Oh, I must go and see him. He's charming! (*Hurries out.*)

Kharitonov: Well, how're things progressing? Slow?

Yakov: Rather. She's so wishy-washy!

Kharitonov: It's you that's wishy-washy! Anyone else'd—

Yakov (*resentfully*): I can't take her by force, can I?

Kharitonov: Why not? The girls like to be taken by force. You blockhead! If it was me, the church bells would have been ringing long ago.

Yakov: Go ahead and marry her yourself!

Kharitonov: Tut-tut! Who are you talking to? You'll be in a pretty fix if I go up the flue and leave you without a kopek to your name!

Yakov: Sh, somebody's coming—it must be Ivan Vasilyevich.

Kharitonov (*glances round, then takes a silver ruble out of his pocket and speaks in a loud voice*): Take this coin, for instance—not very big, but the whole world rests on it. That's a thing you've got to appreciate. Prettier than a posy, stronger than gunpowder. Money's to be treasured, and not thrown recklessly about. (*Reverting to his former tone.*) What's the idea of fooling me? Nobody's coming.

Yakov: I heard steps behind the lodge.

Kharitonov: Steps! See that you wind up this business before the day's out. Go and find her. Don't let her out of your sight.

Yakov: And if she's a half-wit?

Kharitonov: All the better for you, idiot!

(They go out. Mastakov comes slowly from the building site. His eyes are bent on the ground and he looks depressed. From behind the lodge comes the Old Man. He stops and stands with both hands on his stick, staring hard at Mastakov.)

Old Man (*in a low voice*): Good day to you, Gusev.

Mastakov (*in the same tone*): Good day, Anton.

Old Man: I'm not Anton any more, I'm Pitirim. I made myself over, like you, except that there's no reason why I shouldn't go on being Anton. Why don't you look at me?

Mastakov: I've seen you.

Old Man: You have? Where? When?

Mastakov: On the porch of the church. And I saw you a minute ago walking down the road with a woman.

Old Man: So you've been expecting me? (*Mastakov makes no answer.*) If you recognized me you must have been expecting me.

Mastakov: I recognized you at the church—by your eyes.

Old Man: Well then, invite me to be your guest.

Mastakov (*wearily*): Listen, Anton, you're a clever man, you know what your coming here means to me. Don't beat about the bush—come right out with it: what do you want of me?

Old Man (*laughing and shaking his head*): Is that a nice thing to say? Here I've come to pay a visit to my old friend—you and me have been through a lot together, haven't we?—and you ask me what I want of you!

Mastakov: I can give you a neat little sum if—

Old Man: Money! What do I want with money? I'm old. I'll die soon.

Mastakov: That woman with you, is she—?

Old Man: She's a maid. A smart one. Tied tight to me.

Mastakov: Does she know about me?

Old Man: What do you think?

Mastakov (*seizing him by the shoulder*): Don't fool with me, you old rascal!

Old Man (*ducking adroitly to escape his grasp*): Come now, no rough handling if you please! (*The Young Girl comes out from among the trees.*)

Old Man: You can't scare me. There's no horror I haven't faced.

Mastakov: What do you want?

Old Man: To have a little talk with you.

Mastakov: What about?

Old Man: Oh, there's plenty for you and me to talk about.

Mastakov (*after a moment's pause*): Our paths parted long ago, Anton—

Old Man: But they've come together again, as you see.

Mastakov: Why can't you come straight out with it? What do you want?

Old Man: I want a lot.

Mastakov: Well?

Old Man: I want to get my full pay for all the years I suffered.

Mastakov: How much?

Old Man: I haven't added it up yet.

(Mastakov locks his hands behind his back and stares at him in hatred.)

Old Man: What are you looking at?

Mastakov: I haven't forgotten what sort of person you are.

Old Man: Haven't you? Thanks.

Mastakov *(despairingly)*: What do you want of me, Anton?

Old Man: Scared, are you? One of life's little jokes, Gusev—here you are rushing about, building away, and I come quietly creeping up on you, little by little—

Mastakov: What harm have I ever done you? I don't know of any.

Old Man: Nor do I.

Mastakov: I took pity on you back in those days.

Old Man *(with a little laugh)*: A man's got to know how to take pity. It's not such a simple thing—taking pity on others.

Mastakov: And now you wish me harm?

Old Man *(pricking up his ears)*: I'll tell you later what I wish. Somebody's coming, and there's a horse out in the road—hear it? I'll go into the kitchen and you send for me this evening, will you?

(Mastakov nods. Zakharovna comes out of the garden.)

Zakharovna: Good gracious, Ivan Vasilyevich, where have you been? We've been looking for you high and low!

Mastakov *(glumly)*: Show this man to the kitchen and feed him.

Zakharovna: As if there was time for that today!

Mastakov: Do what you're told!

Zakharovna: They're waiting for you in there. *(To the Old Man.)* Come along.

Old Man: A stern master you've got.

Zakharovna: Hold your tongue.

Old Man: And you're a stern one too, it seems. What you need is the stick.

Zakharovna (*turning round*): What's that?

(*Mastakov shakes his finger at her. Left alone, he mutters to himself: "God, it can't be! It can't!" He turns and walks towards the building site and meets Sophia Markovna on the way. She appears to be upset about something.*)

Sophia Markovna: What nonsense did you write me? I can't believe it! Are you mad? (*Seizes his hand.*) Speak! Tell me everything! Are you really an escaped convict?

Mastakov (*looking away*): I am. I was sentenced to four years.

Sophia Markovna: What for?

Mastakov: I served two years and five months, then I ran away.

Sophia Markovna: Impossible! Look me in the eye! What were you sentenced for? Counterfeiting?

Mastakov: Murder.

Sophia Markovna (*pushing his hand away*): You, a murderer!? How did it happen?

Mastakov: I don't know.

Sophia Markovna: Pull yourself together. You mustn't lose your head at a moment like this. How did it happen? Oh, hurry and tell me!

Mastakov: I don't know. That's what I said at the trial—I don't know. I was only twenty years old at the time—a recruit. We were drinking. Somebody knifed a cattle dealer. I was tipsy and didn't see him—I don't even know what he looked like. I didn't do it, but there was nobody else to blame, so they blamed me. They found a spot of blood on my clothes.

Sophia Markovna: Whose blood?

Mastakov: I don't know. The recruits got into a fight—I was with them.

Sophia Markovna: Are you telling the truth? Are you? But of course you are. You couldn't have . . . no, you couldn't possibly! But why did you wait so long to tell me? Why didn't you tell me before?

Mastakov (*crushed*): A man has come here who was in exile with me. He has been searching me out—sent somebody

to find out all about me. On Thursday I saw him on the porch of the church. I recognized him instantly.

Sophia Markovna: You should have told me at once. I believe you—believe you implicitly.

Mastakov: I tried to tell you this morning, but you wouldn't let me.

Sophia Markovna: This morning? You mean. . . . Oh, how stupid I was! I thought. . . . How impossibly stupid! Forgive me.

Mastakov: I've been wanting to tell you for a long time, but I lacked the courage. It meant too much to me. I have no one in the world but you—you are a . . . a sister and everything else to me.

Sophia Markovna: What does that man want?

Mastakov: I can't make him out. He'll ruin me.

Sophia Markovna: You mustn't say that. Where is he?

Mastakov: In the kitchen. He's an evil creature. Help me, Sophia Markovna! I'll be your slave for the rest of my life! I want to live!

Sophia Markovna: I won't let him hurt you.

Mastakov: I said to myself: "I'll live as she wants me to, and when the time comes I'll say: This is what I am! But my conscience is clear. You taught me to do good. Life held no meaning for me before I met you—"

Sophia Markovna: This is no time to say such things.

Mastakov: Do you believe me?

Sophia Markovna: How can you ask? When are you going to speak to him?

Mastakov: This evening.

Sophia Markovna: Arrange for me to hear what you say. I'll spend the night here. Be sure that the children don't find out anything.

Mastakov (*with a grim little laugh*): Pavel would be only too glad to.

Sophia Markovna: The main thing is to remain calm when you talk to him.

Mastakov: What if he should involve you in it?

Sophia Markovna: Me? Nonsense! Let's go into the house.

Mastakov: Sophia Markovna—

Sophia Markovna: Well? Take yourself in hand.

M a s t a k o v : I'm afraid.

S o p h i a M a r k o v n a : That won't help you.

M a s t a k o v : I'm afraid of what you will think of me.

S o p h i a M a r k o v n a : But you're innocent, aren't you?

All of this is just a horrible mistake, isn't it?

M a s t a k o v : It is! I swear to God it is!

(They go out. The Young Girl appears in the bushes and scratches her chin as she gazes dull-eyed after them.)

C U R T A I N

ACT III

A large room with a writing-desk and three easy chairs in the middle of it. A lamp with a blue shade is lighted on the desk. Behind a screen in one corner can be seen the head of a bed. In the other corner is a tiled stove with a couch in front of it and a door hung with heavy draperies beside it. A big bookcase stands next to the door. In the wall facing the audience is another door. Mastakov is half-reclining on the couch. Somebody knocks at the door in the back wall.

Mastakov (*getting up*): Yes?

Zakharovna: He's awake.

Mastakov: Bring him here.

Zakharovna: He's asked for tea.

Mastakov: Give it to him and then bring him here.

Zakharovna: Don't be so nice to him, Ivan Vasilyevich. There's something wicked about that old man.

Mastakov: That's all right. Run along.

Zakharovna: He keeps asking all sorts of questions about you—chiselling away, chiselling away.

Mastakov: What's that?

Zakharovna: Chiselling away—how you live, and what's your business, and who Sophia Markovna is—

Mastakov: Sophia Markovna?

Zakharovna: He pretends to know everything—as if he was just asking for the looks of it. Chiselling away like a judge getting at the truth.

Mastakov: A judge?

Zakharovna: A judge.

Mastakov: He used to know me when I ... when I was poor. We lived together.

Zakharovna: We can't be nice to all the people we used to know.

Mastakov (*pacing the floor*): Is Sophia Markovna in Tanya's room?

Zakharovna: Yes.

Mastakov: Ask her to come here. Politely. Tell her I want to see her a minute. (*Somebody knocks. Zakharovna is about to open the door when Mastakov seizes her hand.*) Wait! Who is it?

Zakharovna: Good gracious! Who could it be, master, but one of our own folk?

Mastakov (*with suppressed anger*): You don't understand, you old fool!

Sophia Markovna: It's you who needs to be shouted at.

Mastakov: Be off with you, Zakharovna!

Zakharovna: I can see it's time for me to go. (*Goes out.*)

Sophia Markovna: How are you feeling?

Mastakov: Wretched.

Sophia Markovna: Shame on you for being so easily frightened!

Mastakov: Matters are very serious.

Sophia Markovna: It's too soon to say that.

Mastakov: I know him.

Sophia Markovna: We'll see him and talk to him and give him whatever he wants. Then I'll quietly set about getting you a pardon. We'll find the best lawyer there is. Money will buy anything. They say that is reprehensible, but what is one to do if there is no other way out?

Mastakov: I don't know what to say to him.

Sophia Markovna: You don't consider yourself a criminal, do you? Then what have you to be afraid of?

Mastakov: You don't know what people can be like.

Sophia Markovna: We shall see. Where shall I hide?

Mastakov: Must you?

Sophia Markovna: I'll sit here behind the bookcase and cover myself with the portiere. (*Smiling.*) I certainly never imagined I would be taking part in such an amazing scene!

Zakharovna (*entering glumly*): He don't want tea. Shall I show him in?

Mastakov: Yes, do.

Sophia Markovna: See, she didn't notice me. Be careful now, don't lose your temper.

Mastakov: What if you should get caught in this trap along with me? What would I ever do?

Sophia Markovna: Hush!

(She hides. Mastakov heaves a sigh as he looks in her direction. She peeps out from behind the portiere and smiles.)

Mastakov *(with a grim little laugh)*: Do you find it amusing?

Sophia Markovna: Oh, yes. And the least bit frightening. Sh! They're coming!

(Someone knocks. Zakharovna mutters to herself as she lets the Old Man and the Young Girl in. The Old Man turns to the corner where the bed stands and crosses himself, then sniffs the air.)

Mastakov *(nodding in the direction of the Young Girl)*: What did you bring her for?

Old Man: She's with me always, like my sins.

Mastakov: Send her out. I refuse to talk to you in front of her.

Old Man *(calmly settling himself in one of the easy chairs)*: Oh, no; you won't refuse. Don't pay any attention to her. She's dumb as the earth—strike her, beat her, and not a sound will she make. But lay a hand on me and she'll raise a hue and cry.

Mastakov *(glowering at the Young Girl; she gazes about her with curiosity, feeling the upholstery of one of the chairs)*: Sit down.

Old Man: Sit down, Marina, don't be afraid. *(Bouncing in the chair)*. Soft as a feather bed, these chairs of yours. But it's dark in here. Can't you give us more light?

Mastakov: No, I can't.

Old Man: You live in darkness. Comfortable and well-fed, but in darkness.

Young Girl: There's a good smell in here, like a baby's sweat.

Old Man: Take the shade off the lamp.

Mastakov: What for?

Old Man: To make it lighter. What sense is there in hiding the light? There, that's better. What are you going to treat me to?

Mastakov: Will you have some vodka?

Old Man: Oh, no! You'll not get me to drink vodka. You're a sly old fox, Gusev!

M a s t a k o v (*striking the desk with his hand*): Out with what you have to say!

O l d M a n (*giving a little jump*): Don't you go hitting the desk like that again! Sounded like a gun shot. What do those windows open out on? Marina, have a look.

M a s t a k o v: What are you after, Anton?

O l d M a n (*watching the Young Girl*): On the courtyard?

Y o u n g G i r l: Yes. The kitchen's on that side.

M a s t a k o v: What do you want?

O l d M a n: What should an old man like me want? I don't know myself.

M a s t a k o v: Come out with it. Don't tempt me, Anton; don't make me lose my temper.

O l d M a n: And if you do?

M a s t a k o v (*getting up*): I'll—I'll—

O l d M a n (*leaning back in the chair*): Well?

Y o u n g G i r l: Don't shout, merchant; this place is full of people and it wouldn't sound nice. And keep away from him.

M a s t a k o v: Hold your tongue!

O l d M a n: Keep quiet, Marina. I know him; he's hotheaded but he gets over it quick. He's really good at heart.

M a s t a k o v: What do you want, Anton?

O l d M a n: I haven't decided yet. Don't be in such a hurry; I've got to think it over.

M a s t a k o v: What a vicious creature you are!

O l d M a n: We're all birds of a feather.

(Pause.)

O l d M a n (*begins in a soft, plaintive tone, but grows sarcastic and imperious as he goes on*): So here we are, Gusev, sitting facing each other, you and me—both of us sinners, only I meekly paid for my sins as laid down by the law, while you escaped your lawful punishment. I withered and dried up in bondage, while you grew fat and sleek in riches, sitting in soft chairs. And now here we are, face to face. For seven years I searched for you—I was sure you was safe and sound and enjoying life. I was sure of it.

M a s t a k o v: Say what you have to say quickly.

O l d M a n: Don't hurry, you'll burn your tongue—isn't that what they say to children when they sit down to their soup? Don't hurry, you'll burn your tongue. Well, as I was saying, I searched for you everywhere. I wanted to get a look at a

fellow bold enough to skip the law. Christ died for other people's sins, but you didn't want to suffer even for your own. Very bold you are.

Mastakov: I wasn't guilty of any crime—I was sentenced by mistake.

Old Man: Oh, I know—that's what we all say when we face the judgement of this earth, accused by our fellows. I said it myself.

Mastakov: I've lived an upright life all these years.

Old Man: So that's how it is! Oh, no, Gusev, that won't do. We'd all like to hide our sins behind an upright life. That's not the law. Who's to pay, eh? Jesus Christ Himself had to pay for breaking the ancient law. The law was: an eye for an eye, but Christ said: return good for evil.

Mastakov: I've done no little good to others.

Old Man: That I can't say. People live as they always have—in want and privation, and in the darkness of sin. And their lot seems to be growing worse, have you noticed that, Gusev?

Mastakov: What is it you want of me? What is it?

Young Girl: Don't stop him, don't interrupt—he don't like that.

Mastakov: Anton!

Old Man: My name is Pitirim. As for what I want—try to guess. You and me are of the same stock, yet for twelve years I meekly, honestly paid for my sins with the suffering of a martyr, while you? You escaped the law.

Mastakov: So you want to hand me over? You want them to seize me?

Old Man: I haven't said what I want yet.

Mastakov: Very well, hand me over to the authorities and ruin my life. What benefit will it bring you?

Old Man: That's my business.

Mastakov: You haven't much time left to live.

Old Man: So I'll live it well.

Mastakov: You can't work.

Old Man: You've worked enough for both of us.

Mastakov: Let me live in peace, Anton. Who are you that you should judge me?

Old Man: Any man has a right to judge you. Why did you run away? Why did you refuse to suffer?

Mastakov: I wanted to live—to work—

Old Man: It's more holy to suffer than to work.

Mastakov (*wrathfully*): Of what use is suffering? What's the good of it? Who profits by it? Tell me that, you fiend!

Old Man: Don't bark at me! I've been barked at all my life. I've got you in my fist like a caught bird. What's it to me that you've made a soft little nest for yourself and found yourself a swell mistress—

Mastakov (*in fury*): How dare you! (*Hurls himself at him.*)

Young Girl (*rushing to the window*): Help!

Old Man (*dropping on to the floor behind the desk*): Break the window, Marina!

Sophia Markovna (*springing out of the corner, pushing the Young Girl back against the desk, and seizing Mastakov by the arm*): Leave the room! And you, too, young lady—get out!

Old Man (*getting up and gazing round in fright*): So that's the underhand way you do things!

Young Girl (*cringing and holding on to the Old Man*): What's happened? And they call themselves respectable folk!

Mastakov (*rushing about the room*): For God's sake keep out of this, Sophia Markovna!

Sophia Markovna: Leave the room! And you too, young lady!

Old Man: She won't go.

Young Girl: I won't go.

Sophia Markovna: Take her out, Ivan Vasilyevich. And you sit down, Old Man. I want to talk to you.

Old Man (*sullenly*): I don't want to talk to you. Who are you? I don't know you.

Sophia Markovna: You soon will.

Old Man: I'm going.

Sophia Markovna: Come, now, no foolishness. Ivan Vasilyevich, I told you to leave. (*To the Old Man.*) Tell that girl of yours she's to go.

Old Man (*after some hesitation*): Go out, Marina, but stay near the door—close by, mind. And I want you to know you can't scare me, my fine lady!

Sophia Markovna: I know that. I have no desire to scare you. (*She locks the door after Mastakov and the Young Girl and takes a chair opposite the Old Man.*) Tell me briefly: what is it you want?

Old Man (*recovering*): What do you think?

Sophia Markovna: You want to torture him, is that it? They tortured you, and now you want to get revenge by torturing him, am I right?

(*The Old Man stares at her without answering.*)

Sophia Markovna: You resent the fact that he has found a place for himself in life and you haven't?

Old Man (*with a little laugh*): So you heard all we said, did you?

Sophia Markovna: Well, you have tortured him. You've tortured him enough.

Old Man (*mockingly*): Enough? I see. Very simple.

Sophia Markovna: And now think back on all you've suffered and endured and ask yourself if it isn't time to have a rest, to live in peace and comfort?

Old Man: So that's what you're getting at! Don't think I'll fall for that, young lady.

Sophia Markovna: I realize how deep your resentment is and how badly you want to get revenge.

Old Man: I thought you had something else to say—something clever and weighty. You've got spirit in you, young lady, but not much brains.

Sophia Markovna: You're taking vengeance on the wrong person. It's not he who made you suffer.

Old Man: And what if I think everybody's guilty? What then?

Sophia Markovna: That's not true. It's not fair.

Old Man: And I say it is.

Sophia Markovna: You were punished unjustly, weren't you?

Old Man (*after a pause*): Well?

Sophia Markovna: Why should you, who have known the injustice of suffering, wish to make others suffer?

Old Man: Hm! That Gusev of yours wants to go to heaven in spite of his sins, does he? Well, heaven's not for him! It's for me, for poor unfortunates like me. That's the law. As for Gusev—if I'm to suffer, he's to suffer twice as much.

Sophia Markovna: But why? What an evil man you are!

Old Man: You intend to marry him, don't you? You wouldn't go to all these pains for a mere lover. A lover's a passing fancy—today a blond, tomorrow a brunet. Bah, you

women! You all ought to be drowned, but there's no puddle stinking enough to drown you in.

(*Sophia Markovna walks back and forth in silence.*)

Old Man (*watching her mockingly*): What else have you to say?

Sophia Markovna: Ivan Vasilyevich is a good man. He is always helping others.

Old Man: Building schools and things? It's not schools that need building, but shelters for wanderers. Folk wander from place to place and they need somewhere to spend the night.

Sophia Markovna: Do you mean to say it will really give you pleasure to ruin him?

Old Man: So you've come to the end of your rope, have you? And how bravely you flew out of that corner! An eagle come to defend her young! I don't like happy folk. They're too smooth—nothing to catch hold of. They slip out of your fingers like wet soap. Well, looks like you couldn't get the better of me, young lady.

Sophia Markovna (*in despair*): Will nothing soften your heart?

Old Man (*with a laugh*): Marry me. Kiss me, make love to me—

Sophia Markovna: You beast!

Old Man: Maybe that'll soften it. As for my being a beast—I've heard that before. I don't mind. I get on very well being a beast.

Sophia Markovna: How dreadful!

Old Man: Don't like it? Then let's call it off, young lady. You can't feed sugar to a wolf. I've been sick to death of people for a long time now, and the ones I hate most are the nice clean ones like you.

Sophia Markovna (*with a choking cry*): Is there nothing human about you at all?

Old Man: Yes, there is. Try and find it. But you won't—not you. What can you do to bring me round? Nothing. Not a word you say will move me. There aren't many years left to me, and those that are are cheerless. I spent all my youth in exile, and it's there I left the strength of my body. Do you think I didn't find a woman sweet in those days? Yet for twelve years I didn't touch a woman's breast. Day and night I sweated myself

out for you, and for that lover of yours. What are you squirming for? It hurts to hear the truth, doesn't it?

Sophia Markovna: The man you're revenging yourself upon is not the one who ruined your life. Believe me, he isn't.

Old Man: I have no time to look for the guilty ones. As for Gusev—here's where I've got him—like a caught bird. He didn't serve out his suffering. Why didn't he? I served out mine. Am I his judge? I am. His rightful, unrelenting judge. He tortured me all these years and now he wants to buy me off? Well, he won't! Never, never! A mountain of gold wouldn't pay for a single one of the tears I've shed. Let me out, hear? I've had enough of this.

Sophia Markovna: And is there no mercy—not the least little bit—in your heart?

Old Man: Enough, I say. You'll get nowhere with me. Mine's been a cruel life. (*Goes to the door and stops.*) The way you flew out of that corner, eh? I thought everything was up—thought I'd met my match. (*Laughs. Mastakov and the Young Girl appear in the doorway.*) I'm tired, Gusev. Time for me to go to bed. Show me the way. That's a mean old woman you've got in the kitchen—she gets on my nerves.

Young Girl: Come, brother, the beds are ready.

Old Man: A pretty lady you've got to defend you, Gusev—don't often meet them that pretty. She won't be of any help to you in court, but she's pretty just the same. (*To Sophia Markovna.*) When he gets sent back to Siberia, will you go with him? She won't Gusev. Women don't stick to us when we're down. Ah, you poor, miserable creatures, the very sight of you wrings my heart. (*Goes out.*)

Mastakov (*in a low voice*): Go home, Sophia Markovna.

Sophia Markovna: Not a word. What a horrible man! Just see what they've brought him to! I'm going up to town to ask advice. The public prosecutor is a good friend of mine. I'll be back tomorrow—or perhaps you had better come to my house. Yes, do that. You must get away from here. That Old Man is the devil incarnate. The way he looks at you! What eyes he has! Have you spoken to the girl?

Mastakov: Yes. She's like a mechanical toy.

Sophia Markovna: Stupid?

Mastakov: Lifeless. Nothing will come of it, Sophia Markovna—there's nothing we can do. The judgement of one's fel-

low-men. . . . Men are very hard-hearted. I used to read the lives of the saints. Wonderful books. I found consolation in knowing how many of the saints had been sinners, and I would say to myself: I, too, will atone for my sins; I, too, will be forgiven.

Sophia Markovna: But how have you sinned? You say that—

Mastakov (*with a little laugh*): I hardly know myself. Oh, it's true I'm not guilty of murder or robbery. But as you see, he. . . . Perhaps there is something else I am guilty of. I don't know.

Sophia Markovna: What was he sentenced for?

Mastakov: Rape.

Sophia Markovna (*with a shudder*): Ugh. Look, let me speak to that girl of his.

Mastakov: I don't think you ought to.

Sophia Markovna: Bring her in. I've got to tie his tongue for two or three days.

Mastakov: If anything should happen, take Tanya to live with you.

Sophia Markovna: Don't let such thoughts come into your mind.

Mastakov: She's so helpless.

Sophia Markovna: Go and bring the girl.

Mastakov (*going out*): There's no point in it. I despise myself.

(Left alone, Sophia Markovna paces the floor in agitation. The door beside the stove opens softly and Zakharovna peers into the room.)

Zakharovna (*in a whisper*): Sophia Markovna! (*Her whisper does not reach Sophia Markovna.*) Sophia Markovna!

Sophia Markovna (*startled*): What! Were you there all the time? Did you hear?

Zakharovna (*tearfully*): As soon as he came I felt in my bones something awful was about to happen. I could see it in Ivan Vasilyevich's face. And soon after that I hear him say to that girl of his: "We'll sail out of here with a big cargo, you and me!"

Sophia Markovna (*not quite believing her*): You heard him say that? Really?

Zakharovna: Really. "Keep your eyes open, simpleton," he says. "Here's where your luck begins."

Sophia Markovna (*excited*): Are you sure you heard him say that?

Zakharovna: Sure as sure. I'm scared of him, and so I follow him about like his shadow and listen to everything he says.

Sophia Markovna (*glad*): So that's how it is! He was just frightening me to raise his price, the wretch!

Zakharovna: Sophia Markovna—

Sophia Markovna: Bring the girl to me.

Zakharovna (*softly*): Wouldn't it be better to get rid of the old man some other way?

Sophia Markovna: What way?

Zakharovna: I know a way. I've got it.

Sophia Markovna (*irritably*): Speak out. What way?

Zakharovna: Rat poison.

Sophia Markovna (*stunned*): Arsenic?

(*Zakharovna wipes her eyes and nods her head.*)

Sophia Markovna (*softly, in horror*): What are you saying! How dare you!

Zakharovna: I'd do it myself.

Sophia Markovna: That would be a crime, a sin, murder!

Zakharovna (*sighing*): I know.

Sophia Markovna: And you, a good woman like you, could do such a thing? You must be mad!

Zakharovna: How else can we get rid of him? He'll ruin the family—take everything they've got. He'll never give in. I know his kind: pious sinners, tattle-tales in the service of the Lord.

Sophia Markovna: Did you really think I would agree to such a thing, or were you just testing me?

Zakharovna: Me test you? Oh, my—no.

Sophia Markovna: Then why—? Or did you think Ivan Vasilyevich was capable of it?

Zakharovna: I told you I'd do it myself.

Sophia Markovna (*frightened*): Good heavens, what's happening!

Zakharovna: You're a smart woman, with lots of book learning—will you really let that worm—

Sophia Markovna (*almost in tears*): But can't you understand that that would be murder?

Zakharovna: What's to become of the children if the old man has his way? Think of the disgrace for Tanya! And Pavel? He'll go straight to the dogs. They've got their lives before them. And what'll happen to you?

Sophia Markovna: Incredible! I forbid you even to think of such a thing, do you hear? Give me that arsenic this very minute.

Zakharovna: But you won't do it.

Sophia Markovna (*indignantly*): Be off! You're insane. How dare you suspect me of such a thing! You've gone clean out of your mind, old woman.

(*Zakharovna stands without speaking.*)

Sophia Markovna (*more calmly*): You'll ruin all of us with your wild ideas. Go and call the girl. (*A knock at the door. Mastakov brings in the Young Girl.*)

Sophia Markovna (*to Mastakov*): Come here. (*Takes him aside and speaks in a whisper.*) Keep an eye on Zakharovna. She wants to poison the old man. She's got some arsenic—

Mastakov: Things get worse and worse.

Sophia Markovna: Go out and take her with you.

Mastakov (*going out*): Come along, Zakharovna.

Sophia Markovna (*to the Young Girl*): Sit down.

Young Girl: That's all right.

Sophia Markovna: Please, sit down.

(*Smiling, the Young Girl sits down in an easy chair and pinches the stuff with her fingers.*)

Sophia Markovna: Your guardian—

Young Girl: My brother. The Old Man.

Sophia Markovna: He wants to ruin the owner of this house. Do you know that?

Young Girl: 'Course I do.

Sophia Markovna: And do you want to, too?

Young Girl: Me? Why should I? I don't know him.

Sophia Markovna: Don't you feel sorry for him?

Young Girl: Folk don't feel sorry for their own kin, let alone—

Sophia Markovna: Are you a married woman?

Young Girl: I'm a maid. Why?

Sophia Markovna: You're young. You have a long life ahead of you.

Young Girl: God willing.

Sophia Markovna (*jumps up and walks quickly back and forth, whispering to herself despairingly*): I can't . . . I don't know how. God help me! I simply can't.

Young Girl (*with a smile*): That's a pretty frock you've got on. And boots, too.

Sophia Markovna (*going over to her*): I wanted to ask you to speak to the Old Man. Don't let him do anything so wicked.

Young Girl: He's not easy to speak to.

Sophia Markovna: What will you gain by ruining another's life? Have we a right to judge others? To pass sentence on each other?

Young Girl: 'Course we have. They give me a sentence.

Sophia Markovna (*in a hollow voice*): Did they? What for?

Young Girl: For the baby. I had it in a cowshed—it was so cold there the baby froze to death. They said I smothered it and give me a sentence.

(*Once more Sophia Markovna paces the floor.*)

Young Girl: Hurry and say what you want to. The Old Man don't like me to be out of his sight.

Sophia Markovna (*going over to her and speaking in a hopeless, plaintive tone*): I have nothing else to say—I've said everything. I can only ask you to help, to beg the Old Man not to do us any harm. I'll give you any sum of money you want.

Young Girl (*distrustfully*): Me?

Sophia Markovna: Yes, you.

Young Girl: He'll take it away from me.

Sophia Markovna: Leave him.

Young Girl: Where'll I go? He'd be sure to find me. He's a stubborn one, he is. Oh, no, if you're going to give me money, we'll have to think of some other way.

Sophia Markovna: You're a woman—

Young Girl: A maid.

Sophia Markovna: You ought to pity people, you ought to be kind.

Young Girl: It costs us women too dear to be kind. I was kind once, and been cursing myself for it the last nine years.

Sophia Markovna: We're all unfortunate.

Young Girl (*sweeping her with a glance*): Oh, not all.

Why all? (*Thinking out loud.*) 'Course if I'm in on your secret you'll pay me good. I might even ... (*looks at Sophia Markovna with a meaning smile*) feed him something ... you know....

Sophia Markovna (*alarmed*): Who?

Young Girl: Anybody. With money I could go far away. I could leave him. He's lived his life, the Old Man has.

Sophia Markovna: Does he mistreat you?

Young Girl: Not always.

Sophia Markovna: What are you to him? A relative?

Young Girl (*with a sigh*): A dog. A dog that met him in the road and trotted after him. When he needs me, he pets me; when he's sick of me he kicks me. Folk are tame when they've got to be, but they're wild animals at heart. The owner here—is he your sweetie?

Sophia Markovna: He's a good man.

Young Girl: They're all good when they want something of you. But it's time for me to be going.

Sophia Markovna: And so you are willing to help me?

Young Girl: I guess I'd better.

Sophia Markovna: I was sure you had a kind heart!

Young Girl: Us women have all got weak hearts. Good-bye. I'll talk to that old woman of yours.

Sophia Markovna (*uneasy*): Be careful what you say to her. Her mind is touched.

Young Girl: They all get that way in old age. But she's a good woman. There's something I'd like to ask you for.

Sophia Markovna: What is it? Anything you like.

Young Girl (*in the tone of a beggar asking alms*): Haven't you got some old clothes I could wear? And some boots? Especially a frock—like the one you're wearing. It's too pretty for words!

Sophia Markovna (*amazed*): But ... but you.... Very well, I'll find a frock for you—more than one. And some boots too.

Young Girl: I'm sure I'll be very grateful to you.

Tanya (*coming in*): What's she here for?

Sophia Markovna: I'll tell you later, Tanya.

Young Girl: Is she his daughter?

Sophia Markovna: Yes.

Young Girl: And the curly-headed boy his son?

Tanya: What does she want?

Sophia Markovna: Wait, Tanya, I beg you to.

Young Girl: A son and a daughter! I can see it's not easy for you. Looks like you, too, have got one of those weak hearts that don't know what's good for it. (*Goes out.*)

Tanya (*in surprise*): What's that? What did she say? Did she tell your fortune?

Sophia Markovna (*hastily*): Yes, she told my fortune. What's the matter with you? You seem to be upset about something.

Tanya (*puzzled*): I don't know what the matter is. I'm afraid. Zakharovna keeps muttering about some awful calamity.

Sophia Markovna (*frightened*): What sort of calamity?

Tanya: I don't know. She's always teasing or frightening me. This house gives me the creeps. Pavel's in love with you.

Sophia Markovna: What nonsense!

Tanya: Yes, he is. That's why he's so cross all the time. People in love are always cross. He kisses your gloves. Why don't you tweak his ears for him?

Sophia Markovna: What an absurd mix-up!

Tanya: Something very strange is going on. Today's been a horrible day. Funny—I graduated from the gymnasium and can't make head or tail out of anything, while Zakharovna is illiterate and understands everything. What's the calamity she keeps talking about?

Sophia Markovna (*angrily*): She's a stupid old woman. I'll go and tell her so this very minute. (*Makes for the door.*)

Tanya: Wait! I wanted to ask you—Gone, and at a run. How very undignified! (*Goes over to the desk and begins rearranging the things on it while she hums to herself*):

He'll dash to my door on a fine white horse

And he'll knock at the door with his sword....

Pavel: Where's father?

Tanya: I don't know. Pavel, what makes everybody so edgy today?

Pavel: Does that interfere with your day-dreaming? You're always day-dreaming instead of doing what you ought to.

Tanya: Is kissing ladies' gloves doing what you ought?

Pavel: Who kisses ladies' gloves?

Tanya: You do.

Pavel: Idiot!

Tanya: Don't dare call me names!

Pavel: I'd like to give you a good walloping.

Tanya: Go away.

Pavel: Go yourself—to the devil.

Tanya (*tearfully*): So I will, you horrid boy!

Pavel: Jelly-fish! (*Left to himself, he walks angrily up and down smoking a cigarette. Suddenly he stops, listens and goes cautiously over to the window.*)

Old Man (*outside the window*): Don't believe them when they start purring. Anybody'll make promises when you've got them by the throat.

(*Pavel glances furtively about, gives a bewildered smile, runs his fingers through his hair, and listens again.*)

Old Man: I know him all right—he was like that when he was young, too.

(*Mastakov enters, sees Pavel and goes over to him. Pavel doesn't hear him.*)

Mastakov (*putting his hand on the boy's shoulder*): What are you doing here?

Pavel (*starting away*): Nothing.

(*He looks at his stepfather fearfully and makes for the door. Mastakov glances out of the window, turns back swiftly and holds out his hand.*)

Mastakov: Pavel! Pavel!

(*Pavel goes out, slamming the door after him.*)

Mastakov: So he knows. Well, what of it?

ACT IV

Rear entrance of the old house belonging to Mastakov. The moon is shining brightly. Tanya and Zakharovna are sitting on the steps, the Young Girl is standing in the doorway chewing something. On the left is a fenced garden with a gate leading into it. The lighted window of the kitchen can be seen to the left of the entrance, the windows of Mastakov's room to the right. A bench stands under these windows.

Tanya: Go on.

Zakharovna: Eh?

Tanya: Go on with your story.

Zakharovna: I forget where I left off ... hm ... so I loved all three of them at once.

Tanya: Why three?

Zakharovna: Why not? Three-four—the number don't count. And I loved my husband too. How I did pity that man! My heart fairly burst a-pitying of him every time I went off with another! Cried my eyes out at times. I used to say to myself: here is he counting me his own true wife, and here am I off with another! And that'd make me love and pet him as never before.

Tanya: Is that the right way to behave?

Zakharovna: You'll see for yourself in time.

Tanya: Do all women act like that?

Zakharovna: All as have got any spirit in them. I was full of spirits in my young days.

Tanya: Who was your first lover?

Zakharovna: A land surveyor. Smooth all over, he was—like a mouse. I had two brothers, very strict. Soon as they heard he'd robbed me of my maidenhood they took him fishing and drowned him.

Tanya (*thoughtfully*): How simply you say that! As if it was perfectly natural.

Zakharovna: What's that?

Tanya: You say frightful things and they don't sound frightful at all.

Zakharovna: Frightful? It's love I'm talking about.

Tanya: Didn't you feel sorry for him?

Zakharovna: For who?

Tanya (*vexed*): Tck! The land surveyor, of course.

Zakharovna: Cried my eyes out. I was young and soft-hearted those days. It's our woman's lot to be soft-hearted: we was born to love the men, and that's what we do. Sometimes love's worse'n taking poison, but we take it just the same. We feel sorry for this fellow, we're afraid of that one, we can't resist the other, and so we love them all.

Pavel (*in the doorway behind the Young Girl*): Harping on the same subject, you old crone? And you, Tanya—aren't you ashamed? Just you wait! (*Disappears.*)

Zakharovna (*mockingly*): Oh, what a fright he give me! He's always about, that boy, like an evil spirit. The same old subject indeed! What else am I to talk about? I've got no book learning—there's nothing I know but my own life.

Tanya: He says I ought to be ashamed, but he himself has a girl in town.

Young Girl: They make the shame and then blame us for it.

Zakharovna: Is that tramp of yours asleep?

Young Girl: He's lying down.

Tanya (*to the Young Girl*): Do you tell fortunes?

Young Girl: What do you mean? With cards?

Tanya: With cards, or palm reading.

Young Girl: Lord, no! That'd be a sin. I'm no gypsy.

Tanya: Well, you told Sophia Markovna's fortune, didn't you?

Young Girl: Not I. I wouldn't dream of doing no such thing!

Zakharovna (*alarmed*): They were just ... just having a little talk.

Tanya: They were not. Sophia Markovna told me so herself. You're trying to hide something from me.

Zakharovna: From a clever girl like you? Nonsense! You know everything without us telling you.

Old Man (*coming out on the porch*): What might you be talking about?

Zakharovna: About rivers and lakes, about ducks and drakes, about the sky above and how to make love....

Old Man: You're too old to make jokes, aren't you?

Zakharovna: I've been making jokes all my life.

Tanya: Who is he to tell us what we ought to do? The idea!

Old Man: Up to your tricks, old woman! I heard the filthy things you told the young miss.

Zakharovna: No tricks at all. What need of tricks has she? She's no gypsy, no horse thief.

Tanya: I want to know what right you have to tell us what to do!

Zakharovna: Let's hear what *you* have to say, once you're so upright.

Old Man: I'm not a teller of tales.

Zakharovna: Then tell us the truth.

Old Man: Who wants to hear the truth?

(Goes down the steps, halts, looks up at the sky, then goes over to the garden fence.)

Tanya: A horrid old man! Anyone would think this was his house.

Zakharovna: Hadn't you better go to bed, Tanya? It's late.

Tanya: I don't feel like it.

Zakharovna: Then ... then go in and fetch me my shawl. I'm catching a chill. That's a dear.

Tanya: Very well—foxy! *(Goes out.)*

Zakharovna *(softly to the Young Girl)*: Well, what do you say?

Young Girl: All of you make big promises....

Zakharovna: What do you mean—all of you? Not a soul but me is to know about this.

Young Girl: And the fine lady? She asked me, too.

Zakharovna *(frightened)*: Her? She couldn't have!

Young Girl: She did.

Zakharovna *(anxiously)*: Der mel!... But look, a chance like this only comes once in a lifetime. Listen to me, an old woman—

Pavel *(coming out of the kitchen)*: Don't listen to her, listen to me.

Young Girl: It's too soon to listen to you.

Pavel: Come into the garden with me.

Young Girl: I'm afraid of you.

Pavel: Why of me more than others?

Young Girl: Your hair's so curly.

Kharitonov (*after a pause*): I wouldn't mind having a glass of kvass, or tea.

Pavel: The samovar's boiling in the dining-room.

Kharitonov: At midnight? Hm.

(*He gets up and goes into the kitchen, beckoning Pavel to follow him. Pavel does so reluctantly. The Young Girl stands near the steps with a dreamy smile on her face.*)

Zakharovna glances out of the kitchen window.)

Young Girl: Come here.

Zakharovna: What for?

Young Girl: Sit here with me a bit.

Zakharovna: It's time to go to bed.

Young Girl: That doesn't matter. Sit here awhile.

(*Pause.*) That boy....

Zakharovna (*uneasy*): What about him?

Young Girl: He's nice. Very affectionate.

Zakharovna: What did he say to you?

Young Girl: Different things.

Zakharovna: For instance?

Young Girl: What they always say to the maids. You know.

Zakharovna: Merciful heavens! Mind you don't....
(*Stops herself.*) I wouldn't talk to him much about his stepfather if I was you.

Young Girl: Why should I?

Zakharovna: That's right. That boy hasn't got much sense yet.

Young Girl (*with a sigh*): He's still young.

Pavel (*from inside the house*): Zakharovna!

Zakharovna: Coming! Deary me—nothing but trouble, trouble, trouble....

Old Man (*from the window*): Marina!

Young Girl: What?

Old Man: You here?

Young Girl: Yes.

Old Man (*coming out on the porch and glancing about*):
What did you talk to the boy about?

Young Girl: He asked my name, how old I was, where I come from. Listen—

Old Man: I'm listening.

Young Girl: Drop this business.

Old Man (*on his guard*): Drop it? Why should I?

Young Girl: Take as much money as you can get and drop it. If you don't, we'll find ourselves in trouble.

Old Man (*after a pause*): So you feel sorry for them, do you?

Young Girl: That, too. They're quiet and peace-loving and they live a good life—plenty of everything: cows, horses, lots of chickens and geese. Pigs, too.

Old Man (*complacently*): You little fool.

Young Girl (*after a pause*): Listen—

Old Man: What else?

Young Girl: You can make them do whatever you want. Make the master's son marry me. I'd live with him and you'd live with us. I'd be good to you.

Old Man: You little fool.

Young Girl: Is that all you can say?—fool! fool! Look out that you're not a fool yourself. They'll put a powder in your tea and that'll be the end of you.

Old Man (*quickly*): Are they thinking of doing that?

Young Girl: I just said that to show you. How do I know what they're thinking of doing? But it's not hard to get rid of a person, is it?

Old Man (*with a snort*): There's nothing else they can do to me. They've got nothing to fight me with, nothing at all. I'm holding a chain in my hand, and they're on the other end of it. One link fits into another; one crime leads to another.

Young Girl: Drop it all. Take a thousand rubles—or even ten thousand. Why not? Listen—

Old Man (*gloatingly*): So they want to get rid of me, do they?

Young Girl: Did I say that? I never said any such thing.

Old Man: You don't have to. It's all that fine lady's doings! The snake! Very slick of her. (*Sternly.*) Mind you keep on your toes! Don't miss a word they say, not even a wink.

Young Girl: They'll get us in trouble. There's a lot of them. That old woman—she knows what's up. She's a smart one, she is.

Old Man: Sh, somebody's coming. Come here. (*Takes her behind the house. Kharitonov and Zakharovna come out on the porch, both of them looking distressed.*)

Kharitonov: He's not here either. Where could he be hiding, the tramp!

Zakharovna: Don't call him names. God willing, things'll settle.

Kharitonov: Settle?

Zakharovna: Yes, that Old Man—

Kharitonov: Him settle? Here? Who'd want that?

Zakharovna: Not settle, but go away. Everybody'd want that. He's a wicked Old Man.

Kharitonov: Listen, old woman, what's going on here?

Zakharovna: I'm sure I don't know.

Kharitonov: You're lying.

Zakharovna: Why should you say such a thing to me, Yakim Lukich? I'm old and foolish.

Kharitonov: The older you get, the more lies you tell.

Zakharovna: You'd ought to have a heart-to-heart talk with Ivan Vasilyevich. You're a man.

Kharitonov: Out with it, now!

(From behind the house come Mastakov and Sophia Markovna. She is in travelling clothes.)

Kharitonov: Where are you going this time of night?

Sophia Markovna: I'm going home and Ivan Vasilyevich is seeing me off.

Mastakov: Just to the carriage. I won't run away.

Kharitonov (*softly*): Listen, friend—

Mastakov: What is it?

Sophia Markovna: Come along. Good-bye, Yakim Lukich.

Kharitonov (*standing in her path*): Just a minute, Sophia Markovna. As you know, I owe a great deal to Ivan Vasilyevich and am very grateful to him. Tell me what has happened. I can see—

Mastakov (*in a flat voice, with a little laugh*): This is what has happened, Yakim—

Sophia Markovna (*hurriedly*): You can tell him afterwards.

Mastakov: After what? When I was young I—

Sophia Markovna: —had an accident.

Mastakov: I was arrested and sentenced to exile, and I ran away.

Kharitonov (*aghast*): You? You must be joking! (*To Sophia Markovna.*) He is joking, isn't he?

Mastakov: My real name is Gusev—Mitri Gusev.

Kharitonov: I don't believe you. It's... It's monstrous! Unbelievable!

Mastakov: That Old Man knew me in those days.

Kharitonov: So that's it! Good God! Is he asking for much?

Mastakov: He's not asking for anything. He wants to turn me over to the police.

Kharitonov: No! Whew!

Sophia Markovna: Yakim Lukich, I beg you not to mention this to anybody.

Kharitonov (*overwhelmed*): Good lord, do you take me for a fool?

Sophia Markovna: You wouldn't want to lose my friendship, would you?

Kharitonov: Sophia Markovna—

Sophia Markovna (*meaningly*): And so I can count on you to be silent? Tomorrow I shall begin trying to get a pardon for him.

Mastakov: There's no sense in trying.

Kharitonov: What a fix to be in!

Mastakov: Tell me honestly, Yakim: do you think it's possible to pardon me?

Kharitonov: But I... who am I?

Mastakov: Do you believe in my innocence?

Kharitonov: If I was the one to give it... the pardon... but I don't know... I don't understand. And it isn't me, that's the point. Lots of people will have their say—the newspapers, you know. If one is pardoned, all the others will set up a cry: "Pardon us too!" That's the point.

Sophia Markovna: Enough of this, Yakim Lukich. (*To Mastakov.*) Come along.

Mastakov: I'm coming.

Kharitonov: Don't be angry, Sophia Markovna. Unfortunately it's not up to me. I just wanted to get the picture clear. They'll all start shouting: "Pardon us too!" That'd be a fine how-d'ye-do! Will you take me into town with you?

Mastakov: But you said you were going to spend the night here.

Kharitonov: Ah, yes. Where's that Yakov of mine? Yakov!

(Goes hurriedly into the kitchen.)

Sophia Markovna: Why did you tell him? Oh, why? I begged you not to.

Mastakov: I wanted to confirm my suspicions. Did you see how he took it? And he's supposed to be my friend. Scared to death, and I didn't even tell him I was a convict.

Sophia Markovna: He's a worthless creature. If he ... but he can't do anything to harm you.

Mastakov: Because you hold his notes of hand? He can if he wants to. A former friend is a vicious enemy.

Sophia Markovna: We won't talk about it any more now. Tomorrow morning you'll come up to town and we'll write an application to the public prosecutor.

Mastakov: What do I care about prosecutors? It's you I'm ashamed to face.

Sophia Markovna: How can you say such a thing? Remember that I love you—yes, love you and will fight for you tooth and nail. (Mastakov silently kisses her hand.) My money and connections are yours. But most important of all: my heart is yours. I won't let that Old Man ruin your life. He looks upon himself as a great avenger—he, you see, has suffered! Ugh, how I hate suffering! There is no justice in it—none at all! But be calm, darling, and have faith in me. I won't let him ruin you, do you hear?

Mastakov: I have deceived you, the person dearer to me than anyone else in the world.

Sophia Markovna (*impatiently*): Don't. You must have more faith in human nature.

Mastakov: I know it better than you do.

Sophia Markovna: People are better than you think they are.

Mastakov: They measure everything by their own suffering and are deaf to other people's. They nurse their grievances all their lives and try to find someone on whom they can wreak vengeance. Oh, no—I haven't a chance in the world. I say it very calmly—I haven't a chance.

Sophia Markovna: Give me your hand. Here's to our luck! Darling, we're going to win!

Mastakov: Sophia Markovna ... let me kiss you ... for the love of God.

Sophia Markovna: Of God?

(He kisses her passionately. Kharitonov and Yakov watch them from the kitchen door. Yakov looks frightened.)

Sophia Markovna: I must go now. Keep a tight hold on yourself, darling. We'll see each other tomorrow. Remember what I told you about Zakharovna—don't let her out of your sight. She's very odd. Come, take me to the carriage. I know how hard it is for you, but you've got to put up a good defence. Remember that happiness awaits us. I'm certain of it; it all depends on me, I swear it does. You love me, don't you? Tell me you love me.

Mastakov: More than life itself.

Sophia Markovna: The old man is worn out. He's ill, poisoned by the grudge he bears, and his illness is beyond remedy. All he can do is suffer—he's not capable of anything else. Suffering is his profession, and he has elevated it to a fine art. There are lots of people like him. They enjoy their suffering because it gives them the right to take vengeance, to ruin other people's lives. None are as egotistical as those who have been wronged.

Mastakov: Do you think so? I'm not sure. Take me, for instance. I've been wronged, but am I egotistical? I don't know how to be. But let's not talk about it any more. Good-bye, my love. What happiness it has been to know you!

Sophia Markovna: Has been? Why has been? Do you really—

(They go out. Kharitonov and Yakov steal down the porch steps.)

Yakov: So now Pavel is to be master here?

Kharitonov: Go and find a horse. We've got to get away in a hurry.

Yakov: Maybe I'll come to terms quicker with Pavel about Tanya.

Kharitonov *(thoughtfully)*: Maybe. Try. With this disgrace in the family you ought to get a much bigger dowry. Did you ever hear of anything like it? Tck, tck, tck. Maybe even I will get something out of it. Well, what are you standing there for? Go and find a horse.

*(He walks up and down smoking and muttering to himself.
Pavel comes to the kitchen window and looks out.)*

P a v e l : Yakim Lukich.

K h a r i t o n o v (*softly*): What?

P a v e l : Have you seen the Old Man out there?

K h a r i t o n o v : No.

P a v e l : He isn't in the house either. What could have become of him?

K h a r i t o n o v : The devil must have made off with him. Come here a minute.

P a v e l (*coming out on the porch*): Has Sophia Markovna gone?

K h a r i t o n o v : Listen, Pavel ... er ... a stepson, of course, has no more right to give orders to his stepfather than a son to his father, but when it comes to money matters, friendship and kinship don't count. It's like a game: who'll win? Have you noticed that there's ... er ... something wrong in your family?

P a v e l (*on his guard*): Well?

K h a r i t o n o v : Don't you ... er ... feel something in the air?

P a v e l (*suspiciously*): What do you mean?

K h a r i t o n o v : That old man, for instance—that pilgrim.

P a v e l : What about him?

K h a r i t o n o v : Here's what: I've known you all your life, so to speak, and ... er ... all the rest. In other words, you mean a lot to me. I take a big interest in your future.

P a v e l (*with a little laugh*): This is the first time I ever heard it.

K h a r i t o n o v : Is it? Well, it's never too late to begin. I'm your elder by about twenty-five years. There's a lot of things I can teach you.

P a v e l : Glad to hear it.

K h a r i t o n o v : Don't laugh—it's too soon for that. There's something I could tell you that'd make your hair stand on end.

P a v e l : About my stepfather?

K h a r i t o n o v : Look, we're all pickets in the same fence, so we've got to stand together, haven't we?

P a v e l : I suppose so.

K h a r i t o n o v (*listening*): Wait. Tanya's coming. There's no need for her to know this. Come into the garden—we'll talk there.

(Tanya and Zakharovna come out of the kitchen. Kharitonov looks back at them as he hurries away.)

Kh ar i t o n o v : I'm late—I overslept, and I've got business in town early in the morning. *(Disappears.)*

Z a k h a r o v n a : Where are you going? You ought to be in bed.

T a n y a : Nobody else is. Tell me this, nanny—what's going on?

Z a k h a r o v n a : Nothing that I know of.

T a n y a : That's not true.

Z a k h a r o v n a : It's a bright night and nobody feels like sleeping.

T a n y a : That's not true.

Z a k h a r o v n a : Why isn't it? You can see for yourself nobody's asleep. You aren't either.

T a n y a : You think you're very clever, don't you?

(The sound of a shot comes from the other side of the garden.)

T a n y a : Oh, what's that? Did you hear? I knew it!

Z a k h a r o v n a *(vexed)* : What did you know? It's just Stepanich scaring away robbers, and you—

T a n y a : Robbers? Then why is Pavel in such high spirits? There's something wrong if Pavel is feeling gay, you can be sure of that.

• *(The Old Man comes scuttling out from behind the house.)*

O l d M a n : Who shot that gun?

Z a k h a r o v n a : The watchman.

O l d M a n : Shooting is forbidden.

Z a k h a r o v n a : Not here. We're outside the town.

T a n y a *(severely, but anxiously)* : It's none of your business who shot the gun.

O l d M a n : You don't know what I'm here for, young lady, and it'll be a sad day for you when you find out.

Z a k h a r o v n a *(hastily, placatingly)* : There's some tramps spending the night in the new building. Stepanich shot in the air to warn them they're to mind their own business.

T a n y a : How dare you say such a thing, you horrid old man!

Stepanich (*running in all out of breath*): Zakharovna! Come quick! Ivan Vasilyevich has shot himself!

Tanya (*crying out*): I told you so! (*Runs into the house.*)

Zakharovna (*running after her*): Wait! Merciful heavens!

Stepanich: Bring water, Zakharovna, and some towels!

Old Man (*rushing about the yard*): Marina! Where are you? Marina!

Pavel (*running out of the garden*): Hurry, nanny! Stepanich, drive to town for the doctor!

Old Man (*running into the kitchen*): Marina!

Kharitonov (*from the garden*): How did it happen?

Stepanich: An accident. He takes my gun and looks at it. "Why don't you clean it?" he says. "It's all rusted," he says, and turns round and the gun goes off in his hands—shoots him in the mouth.

Kharitonov: The mouth? Ugh!

Stepanich: Blew off his head.

Pavel: Hitch up the cart.

Stepanich (*sinking weakly down on a step*): What's the sense? What can a doctor do?

Kharitonov: Come along, Pavel! Where's Yakov?

Pavel: I'm afraid. Come with us, Stepanich.

Stepanich: Where to? What for? So that's the end of the master! What a man he was!

Pavel: They'll give it to you for that gun!

Stepanich: Let them. What do I care?

(They go out. The Old Man comes running out of the kitchen with his stick and knapsack in his hand. The Young Girl, also with her knapsack, comes out after him.)

Old Man (*under his breath*): The sly old fox!

Young Girl: What did I tell you?

Old Man (*his hands shaking*): Here, help me on with this. The heretic!

Young Girl: What'll become of us?

Old Man: We've got to get away. They'll beat the life out of us. We've got to get to town. They won't find us there. Hurry up. Did you take everything?

Young Girl: What's there to take? I told you they'd get us in trouble.

Old Man: Hold your tongue! He turned coward. Showed the white feather.

Young Girl: You'd ought to have done it different.

Old Man: Hold your tongue, I tell you!

(Zakharovna and Tanya come out with towels and a pail of water.)

Zakharovna *(shouting)*: Well, you old devil, are you satisfied?

Tanya: We ought to hold the Old Man.

Zakharovna: What for? Who wants him?

(They run out.)

Young Girl *(tearfully)*: Can't you hurry? What good did we get out of it? You'd ought to have took—

Old Man: Come on, Marina, come on.

Young Girl: All for nothing. You tortured him to death, that's what you did—tortured him to death.

Old Man: God only knows why it turned out this way. *(Crosses himself and goes into the garden.)* There's a hole in the fence we can crawl through.

Young Girl: They'll come after us.

Old Man: They'll not be thinking about us for a while. Hurry, Marina. So you called down the punishment of the Lord on your head, did you, you heretic? *(Shakes his stick at the house.)* The Lord's cluttered up the earth with fine folk like you, with loathsome worms like you, but He'll sweep you all into the dragon's mouth—sweep away all this maggoty muck!

Young Girl *(giving him a push)*: Hurry! A fine prophet you turned out to be! Fooled me, that's what you did.

Old Man: Just you wait! Just you—

Young Girl: You'd better tend to your own affairs before you go about the Lord's, you old pig.

Old Man: Marina—

Young Girl: Fooled me. "We'll sail out of here with a big cargo!" says you. Well, where's the cargo?

Old Man (*fiercely*): Shut up, you hussy!

Young Girl: Who are you bawling at? I'm not afraid of you!

Old Man: Watch your step!

Young Girl: What's to hold me to you now? Get along, you pig! Fool that I am! Why didn't I listen to those good people? Oh, what a fool I am!

Old Man (*muttering to himself*): Just to think! Just to think!

CURTAIN