

The Lower Depths

(1902)

by Maxim Gorky



*Liberated from
capitalist control
to educate the masses
by
Socialist Stories*

CHARACTERS

Mikhail Ivanovich Kostylyov, 54 years old, owner of a
lodging-house

Vasilisa Karpovna, 26 years old, his wife

Natasha, 20 years old, her sister

Abram Medvedev, 50 years old, their uncle, a policeman

Vasya Pepel, 28 years old

Andrei Kleshch, 40 years old, a locksmith

Anna, 30 years old, his wife

Nastya, 24 years old, a streetwalker

Kvashnya, 40 years old, a woman who peddles dumplings

Bubnov, 45 years old, a hatter

The Baron, 33 years old

Satin

The Actor } Approximately the same age, about 40

Luka, 60 years old, a pilgrim

Alyoshka, 20 years old, a cobbler

Krivoi Zob }
The Tatar } Dock hands

ACT I

A cellar resembling a cave. The heavy vaulted ceiling is smoke-blackened and in places the plaster has fallen off. Light descends from a square window upstage right. A thin partition turns the right corner of the stage into a room for Pepel. Near the door of this room is Bubnov's bunk. A large Russian stove occupies the upper left corner. A door in the stone wall to the left leads to the kitchen where Kvashnya, the Baron, and Nastya live. A wide bed enclosed by dirty cotton hangings stands against the wall between the stove and this door. Bunks are built against all the walls. Downstage left stands an upturned log to which are attached a vice and an anvil. Behind the anvil on a similar, but lower log, sits Kleshch, trying keys in an old lock. The floor about him is cluttered with rings of miscellaneous keys, a battered tin samovar, a hammer and files, etc. The centre of the lodging is occupied by a large table, two benches and a stool, all of them dirty and unpainted. Kvashnya is busy at a samovar standing on the table, the Baron is chewing a piece of black bread, and Nastya is sitting with her elbows on the table, poring over a dog-eared novel. Anna can be heard coughing behind the curtains of the bed. Bubnov is sitting on his bunk with a hat block between his knees, calculating how to cut a cap out of strips of cloth ripped from an old pair of trousers. Near him lie bits of rags and oilcloth and pieces of cardboard for making the visors of caps. Satin, who has just awakened, is lying on his bunk and snarling. The Actor is coughing and moving about on top of the stove, out of sight of the audience. It is a morning in early spring.*

Baron: What next?

Kvashnya: Oh no, you don't, my darling, says I. Keep your distance, says I. I've already had my try at that sort of thing, and you couldn't drag me to the altar again for a hundred baked crawfish, says I.

Bubnov (to Satin): What're you grunting about?

* A Russian stove is so constructed that the space above the oven is large enough to serve as a bed.—*Tr.*

(*Satin snarls again.*)

K v a s h n y a : Me, a free woman as is her own boss, to go and have herself writ into somebody else's passport? says I. That I should become the slave of some man? Not on your life! Oh no! Not if he was the King of America himself!

K l e s h c h : That's a lie!

K v a s h n y a : What's that?

K l e s h c h : That's a lie. You'll marry Abram!

Baron (*snatching Nastya's book and reading the title*): "Fatal Love." (*Laughs.*)

N a s t y a (*reaching for the book*): Here, give it back! Come on! No fooling!

(*The Baron teases her by waving the book in the air.*)

K v a s h n y a (*to Kleshch*): You're a red-headed old goat, that's what you are! A lie! How dare you insult me like that!

Baron (*striking Nastya over the head with the book*): You're a fool, Nastya!

N a s t y a (*snatching the book away*): Give it to me!

K l e s h c h : What a fine lady! But you'll marry Abram all right! That's all you're waiting for!

K v a s h n y a : Oh yes, of course! What else? The way you've rode your wife to death!

K l e s h c h : Shut up, you bitch! That's none of your business!

K v a s h n y a : O-ho! Don't like to hear the truth, eh?

Baron : There they go! Nastya, where are you?

N a s t y a (*without raising her head*): Oh, get out!

Anna (*peering out from behind the curtains*): The day's begun! For God's sake, don't shout. Don't quarrel!

K l e s h c h : Whining again!

Anna : Every blessed day! You might let a person at least die in peace!

B u b n o v : Can't scare death off with a little noise.

K v a s h n y a (*going over to Anna*): How'd you ever live with that fiend, my poor dearie?

Anna : Leave me alone. Go away.

K v a s h n y a : Hm. There's a martyr for you! Any easier in your chest today?

Baron : Kvashnya! Time to go to market!

K v a s h n y a : Just a minute! (*To Anna.*) Wouldn't you like some nice hot dumplings?

Anna: No, thanks. Why should I bother to eat?

Kvashnya: You just try them. Good and hot—they'll loosen up your cough. I'll leave them here in this bowl so's you can help yourself when you feel like it. Come on, me lord! (*To Kleshch*). Br-r-r! You hobgoblin!

(*Goes into the kitchen.*)

Anna (*coughing*): Oh, Lord!

Baron (*slyly giving Nastya's head a push*): Drop it, you little fool!

Nastya (*muttering*): Get out! I'm not in your way, am I?

(*Baron whistles a tune as he goes out on the heels of Kvashnya.*)

Satin (*raising himself on his bed*): Who gave me a beating last night?

Bubnov: What difference does it make to you?

Satin: None, I suppose. But what did they give me a beating for?

Bubnov: Were you in a card game?

Satin: I was.

Bubnov: That explains the beating.

Satin: The scoundrels!

Actor (*poking his head over the edge of the stove*): They'll beat you to death one of these days.

Satin: You're an ass.

Actor: Why?

Satin: You can't kill a person twice.

Actor (*after a pause*): Why not? I don't see why not.

Kleshch (*to Actor*): Get down off that stove and tidy up. Afraid of spoiling your hands?

Actor: That's none of your business.

Kleshch: Wait till Vasilisa comes in. She'll show you whose business it is!

Actor: To hell with Vasilisa! It's the Baron's turn to tidy up today. Baron!

Baron (*entering from the kitchen*): I haven't time to tidy up. I'm going to market with Kvashnya.

Actor: What do I care? You can go to jail for all I care, but it's your turn to sweep the floor. I'm not doing another man's job for him.

Baron: To hell with you! Nastya will sweep the floor. Hey

there, "fatal love"! Wake up (*Snatches the book out of her hands.*)

Nasty a (*getting up*): What do you want? Give it back! Funny, aren't you? And you call yourself a gentleman!

Baron (*handing back the book*): Sweep the floor for me, Nasty a. That's a good girl.

Nasty a (*going into the kitchen*): Oh, won't I just! I'd love to!

Kvashnya (*at the kitchen door, to the Baron*): Come on! They'll manage here without your help. Hey, there, Actor! It's you they're asking, so be so kind. It won't break your back.

Actor: Humph! Always me. I don't see why—

Baron (*entering from the kitchen with a wooden yoke on his shoulders from which are suspended two baskets containing crocks covered with dirty rags*): Heavier than usual today.

Satin: Was it worth getting yourself born a Baron?

Kvashnya (*to the Actor*): You begin that sweeping, now!

(*She makes for the passage, letting the Baron go out first.*)

Actor (*climbing down off the stove*): It's harmful for me to inhale dust. (*Proudly.*) My organism is poisoned with alcohol. (*He becomes meditative, sinking down on one of the bunks.*)

Satin: Organism. . . . Organon. . . .

Anna: Andrei Mitrich. . . .

Kleshch: Now, what do you want?

Anna: Kvashnya left me some dumplings. Take them and eat them.

Kleshch (*going over to her*): What about you? Don't you want them?

Anna: No. Why should I eat? But you're a working man. You need food.

Kleshch: Are you afraid? Don't be afraid. You can't tell, maybe—

Anna: Go ahead and eat them. I'm feeling bad. I guess it'll be soon now.

Kleshch (*going out*): Don't fret. Maybe you'll get better. It sometimes happens. (*Goes into the kitchen.*)

Actor (*loudly, as though he had suddenly awakened*): Yesterday the doctor in the clinic said to me: Your organism, he said, is completely poisoned with alcohol.

Satin (*smiling*): Organon. . . .

Actor (*insisting*): Not organon. Or-gan-ism.

Satin: Sicambri!

Actor (*waving his hand at him*): Idiocy! But I'm talking serious. Yes, I am! If your organism is poisoned, it must be harmful to sweep the floor, to breathe that dust.

Satin: Macrobiotics! Hah!

Bubnov: What's that you're garbling?

Satin: Words. Then there's that: trans-scen-dep-tal.

Bubnov: What does that mean?

Satin: Don't know. Forgot.

Bubnov: Then what do you say it for?

Satin: Just for fun. I'm sick of all the words people use, brother. I'm sick of all our words! I've heard them all a thousand times!

Actor: In "Hamlet" they say, "Words, words, words!" A wonderful play! I acted the part of the grave-digger.

Kleshch (*entering from the kitchen*): When are you going to start acting the part of the floor-sweep?

Actor: Mind your own business! (*Striking his breast.*)
"Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered!"

(At some distance off stage is heard a confusion of voices, cries, police whistles. Kleshch sits down to work, making a rasping noise with his file.)

Satin: I love odd, incomprehensible words. When I was a boy working in a telegraph office I did a lot of reading.

Bubnov: Were you a telegraph operator, too?

Satin: I was. (*Gives a little laugh.*) There are some fine books, and a great many curious words. I was once a well-educated man, did you know that?

Bubnov: Heard it a hundred times. What if you were? A lot of difference it makes now! Take me, for instance. I was a furrier once. Had my own shop. My hands used to be all yellow from dyeing the fur—hands and arms, right up to the elbow. I thought they'd stay that way to the day of my death. I thought I'd die with those yellow arms, and now look at them. Just plain dirty. Humph!

Satin: Well, what of it?

Bubnov: Nothing. That's all.

Satin: Then what was the point of your speech?

Bubnov: There wasn't any. Just an idea. It turns out that no matter how carefully you paint the outside, it all rubs off. It all rubs off. Humph!

S a t i n : Oh, how my bones ache!

A c t o r (*sits hugging his knees*): Education is nothing; it's talent that counts. I once knew an actor who could only read out his role by syllables, but when he acted, the theatre rocked and roared with the rapture of his audience.

S a t i n : Bubnov, lend me five kopeks!

B u b n o v : I've only got two.

A c t o r : I'm telling you it's talent you need to be an actor. And talent means believing in yourself, in your ability.

S a t i n : Give me five kopeks and I'll believe you're a genius, a hero, a crocodile, a police officer! Kleshch, give me five kopeks!

K l e s h c h : Go to the devil! Too many like you around.

S a t i n : No swearing, if you please. Don't I know you haven't got a kopek to your name?

A n n a : Andrei Mitrich . . . I can't breathe . . . so stuffy. . . .

K l e s h c h : What do you expect me to do about it?

B u b n o v : Open the door into the passage.

K l e s h c h : Oh yes, of course. You up there on your bed and me down here on the floor. Change places with me and you can open the door. I've got a cold as it is.

B u b n o v (*calmly*): It's not me that wants the door open. It's your wife that's asking.

K l e s h c h (*sullenly*): There are plenty of things a person can ask for.

S a t i n : How my head's humming! Why should people lam each other over the bean?

B u b n o v : Not only over the bean, but over the whole remaining territory of the body. (*Getting up.*) I'm going out to buy some thread. Wonder what's keeping our landlord and his wife so long today? Maybe they've kicked the bucket. (*Goes out.*)

(*Anna coughs. Satin lies motionless with his hands under his head.*)

A c t o r (*glancing miserably about him, goes over to Anna*): Feeling bad?

A n n a : It's so stuffy.

A c t o r : I'll take you out into the passage if you like. Come, get up. (*He helps her rise, throws some rags about her shoulders and leads her out.*) That's it. Steady. I'm sick myself—poisoned with alcohol.

K o s t y l y o v (*in the doorway*): Out for a walk? How pretty the two, the lamb and the ewe!

A c t o r : Out of the way! Can't you see we're sick?

K o s t y l y o v : Oh, yes! By all means! (*Humming a church tune through his nose, he glances suspiciously about the lodging, turning his head as if listening for something in Pepel's room. Kleshch viciously jangles the keys and rasps with his file, watching the movements of the landlord from under lowered brows.*)
Scratching away?

K l e s h c h : What's that?

K o s t y l y o v : I say, scratching away? (*Pause.*) Hm. Now then, what was it I wanted to ask? (*Speaking quickly and in a low voice.*) Has my wife been here?

K l e s h c h : Didn't see her.

K o s t y l y o v (*stealing toward the door to Pepel's room*): You're taking up a lot of space for two rubles a month, aren't you? A bed, and a place to sit besides. Hm. Worth at least five rubles. I'll have to throw on another half ruble.

K l e s h c h : Throw on a noose and choke me to death! On your last legs, and still wondering how you can snatch another half a ruble!

K o s t y l y o v : Why should I choke you? Who'd profit by that? Live on, and may the Lord help you. But I'll throw on that extra half-ruble just the same! I'll buy some oil for my icon lamp and let it burn before the holy image, a sacrifice in retribution for my sins, and for yours too. You never think of your sins, do you now? Oh, it's a wicked man you are, Andrei! Your wife has wasted away from your meanness. Nobody likes you, nobody respects you. Scraping away at that iron of yours, getting on everybody's nerves—

K l e s h c h (*shouting*): Did you come here just to poison my life?

(*Satin roars.*)

K o s t y l y o v (*with a start*): Good gracious, my good man—

A c t o r (*entering*): I fixed her up out there in the passage, wrapped her up.

K o s t y l y o v : You have a kind heart, brother. That's a good thing. It'll all be counted to your credit.

A c t o r : When?

K o s t y l y o v : In the next world, brother. There everything, every little deed, is counted.

Actor: Maybe you'll reward me for my kindness here and now?

Kostlyov: How could I do that?

Actor: By crossing out half my debt.

Kostlyov: Hee-hee! You will have your fun, your little jokes! As if a kind heart could be rewarded with money! Goodness is the highest of all blessings. But a debt's a debt, which means it must be paid. As to the kindness you show an old man like me, you shouldn't seek reward for it!

Actor: A rascalion, that's what you are, old man!

(Goes out into the kitchen. Kleshch gets up and goes out into the passage.)

Kostlyov *(to Satin)*: The scraper here, he ran away. Hee-hee! He don't like me.

Satin: Who but the devil could like you?

Kostlyov *(playfully)*: Now why should you say such things to me! Me, as loves you all so! Don't I know you're all my brothers, my poor, unfortunate, fallen brothers? *(Suddenly and quickly.)* Er . . . a . . . Vasya—is he home?

Satin: Go and look.

Kostlyov *(going over and knocking at the door)*: Vasya!

(The Actor appears in the kitchen door chewing something.)

Pepel: Who's there?

Kostlyov: It's me. Me, Vasya.

Pepel: What do you want?

Kostlyov *(moving away)*: Open the door.

Satin *(without looking at Kostlyov)*: He'll open the door, and there she is.

(The Actor gives a snort.)

Kostlyov *(uneasily, in a lowered voice)*: What? Who's there? What did you say?

Satin: You speaking to me?

Kostlyov: What was it you said?

Satin: Nothing special. Talking to myself.

Kostlyov: Watch your step, brother! A joke's a joke, but in the right place! *(Knocks sharply at the door.)* Vasya!

Pepel *(opening the door)*: Well? What do you come here bothering me for?

Kostlyov (*peeping into the room*): I ... you see ... you....

Pepel: Did you bring the money?

Kostlyov: I have some business with you.

Pepel: Did you bring the money?

Kostlyov: What money? Wait a minute.

Pepel: The seven rubles for the watch. Where is it?

Kostlyov: What watch, Vasya? My goodness, you—

Pepel: Careful, careful! People saw me sell you that watch yesterday for ten rubles—three rubles down, seven to come. Let's have it. Why do you stand there gaping? Hanging around disturbing everybody instead of going about your business!

Kostlyov: Sh-h-h! Don't be angry, Vasya! The watch, it's—

Satin: Stolen goods.

Kostlyov: I don't handle stolen goods! How dare you—

Pepel (*taking him by the shoulders*): What are you pestering me for? What do you want?

Kostlyov: Me? Why, nothing. Nothing at all. I'll be going if you're like that.

Pepel: Get out, and bring me that money!

Kostlyov (*leaving*): Bah! Such coarse people!

Actor: A real comedy!

Satin: Good. That's what I like.

Pepel: What was he doing here?

Satin (*laughing*): Can't you guess? Looking for his wife. Why don't you bump him off, Vasya?

Pepel: As though I'd ruin my life for a swine like him!

Satin: Be smart about it. Then you could marry Vasilisa and collect our rents.

Pepel: Wouldn't that be fun! Before I knew it you'd guzzle down all my property and me in the bargain, out of the goodness of my heart. (*Sitting down on one of the bunks.*) The old devil! He woke me up. And I was having such a nice dream! I dreamt I was fishing and caught a huge pike. Couldn't find a pike that size outside of a dream. There it was on the end of the line, and me scared the rod would snap, so I get a net ready—here, thinks I, I'll catch it now—

Satin: That wasn't a pike. It was Vasilisa.

Actor: He caught Vasilisa long ago.

Pepel (*angrily*): You can all go to the devil, and take her with you!

Kleshch (*entering from the passage*): Devilishly cold!

Actor: Why didn't you bring Anna in? She'll freeze out there.

Kleshch: Natasha took her into the kitchen.

Actor: The old man will chase her out.

Kleshch (*sitting down to work*): Then Natasha will bring her back.

Satin: Vasya! Lend me five kopeks!

Actor (*to Satin*): Five kopeks? Vasya! Lend us twenty kopeks!

Pepel: I'd better hurry and give it to them before they ask for a ruble. Here.

Satin: Thermopylae! Thieves are the finest people in the world!

Kleshch (*sullenly*): Money comes easy to them. They don't work.

Satin: Lots of people get money easy, but not many give it up easy. Work? Find me work it's a pleasure to do, and maybe I'll do it. Hm. Maybe. When work is a pleasure, life is a joy. When work is a duty, life is slavery! (*To the Actor.*) Come, O Sardanapalus! Let us be going!

Actor: Let us be going, oh Nebuchadnezzar! I'll get as soused as forty thousand sots!

(*They go out.*)

Pepel (*yawning*): How's your wife?

Kleshch: You can see it won't be long now.

(*Pause.*)

Pepel: Why in the world do you keep on scraping away there?

Kleshch: What else should I do?

Pepel: Nothing.

Kleshch: Then how'd I feed myself?

Pepel: Other people manage.

Kleshch: Who, these here? Do you call them people? Tramps! Ragamuffins! Scum of the earth! I'm a working man, and it makes me ashamed just to look at them. I've been working as long as I can remember. You think I won't pull myself out of here? I will! I may scrape all the skin off my body, but I'll crawl out of here. Just you wait—my wife will die soon.

I've only been living here six months, but it seems like six years.

Pepel: You're no better than the rest of us, so there's no sense in talking like that.

Kleshch: No better! You have no honour, no conscience!

Pepel (*indifferently*): Who wants them—honour and conscience? You can't wear honour and conscience on your feet in place of boots. It's only those in power who need honour and conscience.

Bubnov (*coming in*): Br-r-r! I'm frozen.

Pepel: Bubnov! Have you got a conscience?

Bubnov: What's that? A conscience?

Pepel: Yes, a conscience.

Bubnov: Why should I? I'm not rich.

Pepel: That's what I say: it's only the rich who need honour and conscience. But Kleshch here is bawling us out. Our conscience, he says—

Bubnov: Would he like to borrow a conscience?

Pepel: Oh no, he's got a fine one of his own.

Bubnov (*to Kleshch*): So he's selling it? Well, he won't find a customer here. If it was some old cards now, I might be interested—and then only if he'd let me have them on credit.

Pepel (*instructively*): You're a fool, Andrei! When it comes to conscience, you'd do well to listen to Satin—or even the Baron.

Kleshch: There's nothing they can teach me.

Pepel: They've got more brains than you have, even if they are drunks.

Bubnov: The man who's drunk as well as wise, has won himself a double prize.

Pepel: Satin says everybody wants others to have a conscience, but nobody wants one himself. That's the truth.

(Natasha comes in. She is followed by Luka with a stick in his hand, a knapsack on his back, a pot and a tea-kettle tied to his belt.)

Luka: Greetings to you, honest folk.

Pepel: (*stroking his moustache*): Ah, Natasha!

Bubnov (*to Luka*): We were honest in the past, the year before last.

Natasha: Here's a new lodger.

L u k a : It's all the same to me. I have respect for crooks too. Not a flea but has its merits, the way I look at it. They're all of them black, they all of them jump. Now where were you thinking to put me up, my dear?

N a t a s h a (*pointing to the kitchen door*): In there, grandad.

L u k a : Thank you, my girl. If you say there, then it's there I go. Any place that's warm is home to old bones.

P e p e l : A queer old fellow you've brought in, Natasha.

N a t a s h a : He's better than you are. Andrei, your wife is sitting in our kitchen. Come and get her in a little while.

K l e s h c h : All right. I will.

N a t a s h a : You might be a little gentler with her now. You can see it won't be long.

K l e s h c h : I know.

N a t a s h a : It's not enough to know.-You've got to understand. After all, it's dreadful to die.

P e p e l : I'm not afraid.

N a t a s h a : Aren't you now? Such a fine brave fellow!

B u b n o v (*giving a little whistle*): The thread's rotten!

P e p e l : Honest to goodness I'm not. I'm ready to die this very minute! Take that knife and stick it in my heart. I'll die without so much as a gasp. I'll even be glad, because it's by a spotless hand.

N a t a s h a (*going out*): Do you expect me to swallow that?

B u b n o v (*with a wail*): The thread is rotten!

N a t a s h a (*at the door to the passage*): Don't forget about your wife, Andrei.

K l e s h c h : I won't.

P e p e l : There's a girl for you!

B u b n o v : Not bad.

P e p e l : Why is she like that with me? Always putting me off. She'll be ruined if she stays here.

B u b n o v : It's because of you she'll be ruined.

P e p e l : What makes you say that? I . . . I pity her.

B u b n o v : Like the wolf pities the lamb.

P e p e l : That's a lie! It's hard for her to live here. I can see that.

K l e s h c h : You just wait until Vasilisa catches you talking to her!

B u b n o v : Vasilisa? She's not one to give away things for nothing. She's a ferocious dame!

Pepel: (*lying on the bed*): To hell with the two of you!
A couple of prophets!

Kleshch: You'll see. Just wait.

Luka (*singing in the kitchen*): Midnight glo-o-om ... the road is lost in da-a-rkness. ...

Kleshch (*going into the passage*): What's he howling about? Another one!

Pepel: What a bore life is! Funny, how I get like this at times. A bloke lives along day after day, without noticing anything, and then all of a sudden he feels as if he had caught a chill. Very tiresome.

Bubnov: Tiresome? Hm.

Pepel: Very.

Luka (*singing*): Ah-h! No pa-a-th in sight!...

Pepel: Hey! Old man!

Luka (*peering through the door*): Is it me you're calling?

Pepel: Yes, you. Stop singing.

Luka (*coming out*): Don't you like it?

Pepel: I might if it was good.

Luka: You mean to say it's no good?

Pepel: Exactly.

Luka: Fancy that! And here was I thinking I had a good voice. It's always like that: a person thinks to himself—my, don't I do that nice; and then somebody comes along and says it's no good.

Pepel (*laughing*): True enough.

Bubnov: A minute ago you were bored to death, and now you're laughing.

Pepel: What do you care, you old croaker!

Luka: What's that? Who's feeling bored?

Pepel: Me. I'm the one.

(*The Baron comes in.*)

Luka: Fancy that! There's a girl sitting out there in the kitchen reading a book and crying. Really crying. Tears running down her cheeks. I says to her: "What is it, dearie?" And she says, "The poor man!" And I says, "What man?" "Here in the book," she says. Now what would make a person spend time on things like that? She must be bored, like you.

Baron: She's a fool.

Pepel: Ah, the Baron! Had your tea?

Baron: I have. What next?

Pepel: Would you like me to stand you a half-pint?

Baron: I would. What next?

Pepel: Get down on all fours and bark like a dog.

Baron: Blockhead! Do you take yourself for a rich merchant? Or are you just drunk?

Pepel: Go ahead and bark to amuse me. You're a gentleman, and once upon a time you didn't look on people like us as human beings.

Baron: Well, what next?

Pepel: Well, so now I'm telling you to get down on all fours and bark like a dog, and you're going to do it, do you hear?

Baron: I do, you fool, and I'm going to do it. But I don't see what pleasure it can give you, once I myself realize I've become almost worse than you are. You wouldn't have tried to make me get down on all fours when I was your superior.

Bubnov: True enough.

Luka: Very well put.

Bubnov: What's past is past and nothing left but chicken feathers. There's none of your fine gentlemen here. All the colours have been washed off. Nothing but naked people.

Luka: In other words, everybody's equal. But were you really a baron once, my good man?

Baron: What do you call this? Who are you, you hobgoblin?

Luka (*laughing*): I've seen a count, I've seen a prince, but never before have I seen a baron, and a mangy one at that.

Pepel (*laughing*): A baron! You make me blush!

Baron: It's time you had more sense, Vasya!

Luka: Dear, dear, dear! When I look at you, brothers, the way you live! Ah, me!

Bubnov: We wake with a groan, and sleep with a moan—that's the way we live.

Baron: We lived better once upon a time. I remember waking up in the morning and having coffee served to me in bed. Coffee and cream.

Luka: It's human beings we are, all of us. No matter what airs we put on, no matter how we make believe, it's human beings we were born, and it's human beings we'll die. People are getting wiser, the way I see it, and more interesting. The worse

they live, the better they want to live. A stubborn lot, human beings!

Baron: Who are you, old man? Where did you come from?

Luka: Me?

Baron: Are you a pilgrim?

Luka: We're all pilgrims on this earth. I've heard it said that this very earth of ours is a pilgrim in the skies.

Baron (*sternly*): Let that be as it may, but you—have you a passport?

Luka (*after a pause*): And who might you be, a nark?

Pepel (*joyfully*): Good for you, old man! He took a pretty nip out of you that time, you Baron, you!

Bubnov: Yes, he put our fine gentleman in his place!

Baron (*embarrassed*): Well, what of it? I was only joking, old man. I don't own one of those documents myself.

Bubnov: Liar!

Baron: That is, I have some papers, but they're no good.

Luka: They're all the same, those papers. None of them's any good.

Pepel: Let's go and have a drink, Baron.

Baron: I don't object! Well, good-bye, old man. You're a rascal, that's what you are!

Luka: Takes all kinds of people to make the world.

Pepel (*at the door to the passage*): Come on if you're coming! (*Goes out. The Baron hurries after him.*)

Luka: Was he really a baron once?

Bubnov: Who knows? It's true he's from the gentry. Even now, all of a sudden, he'll do something that shows he's from the gentry. He don't seem to have got out of the habit yet.

Luka: Belonging to the gentry's like having the smallpox—a person may recover, but the scars remain.

Bubnov: He's all right on the whole—just gets up on his hind legs once in a while, like about your passport.

Alyoshka (*enters slightly drunk, whistling and playing on an accordion*): Hey, lodgers!

Bubnov: What are you bawling about?

Alyoshka: Excuse me. Forgive me. I'm very polite by nature.

Bubnov: Been on a spree again?

Alyoshka: Haven't I, just! The policeman Medyakin just threw me out of the station and said, "Don't let me catch a sniff

of you in the street again!—Not a teenty-weenty!” says he. But I’m a person of character. My boss snarls at me, but what’s a boss? Pooh, pooh! A mere misunderstanding! He’s a drunk, my boss is, and I’m a person as doesn’t care about nothing. I don’t want nothing! Here, take me for half a ruble. I don’t want nothing! (*Nastya enters from the kitchen.*) Offer me a million—I won’t have it! And do you think I’ll let anybody, especially a drunk, tell me what to do? Not on your life!

(*As she stands in the doorway, Nastya watches Alyoshka and shakes her head.*)

L u k a (*kindly*): What a muddle you’ve got yourself into, young man!

B u b n o v : Crazy, that’s what he is!

A l y o s h k a (*throwing himself on the floor*): Here, eat me up! I don’t want nothing! I’m a desperate fellow! Try and prove to me who’s my betters! Why am I any worse than the rest? That Medyakin says to me, I’ll smash your mug in if I catch you in the street! But out I’ll go! Out I’ll go and lie down in the middle of the street—here, run over me! I don’t want nothing!

N a s t y a : Poor fellow! Twisted and knotted at such an early age!

A l y o s h k a (*catching sight of her and getting up on his knees*): Mademoiselle! Parlez français! Merci! Bouillon! I’ve been on a spree!

N a s t y a (*in a loud whisper*): Vasilisa!

V a s i l i s a (*opening the door quickly and speaking to Alyoshka*): You here again?

A l y o s h k a : How d’ye do! Be so kind—

V a s i l i s a : I warned you not to show yourself again, you puppy, and here you are!

A l y o s h k a : Vasilisa Karpovna! Here, I’ll play you a funeral march, want me to?

V a s i l i s a (*taking him by the shoulder*): Get out!

A l y o s h k a (*making for the door*): Wait a minute! The funeral march! I just learned it! A brand-new tune! Wait a minute! You can’t do that!

V a s i l i s a : I’ll show you whether I can or not! I’ll set the whole street against you, you heathen! You’re too young to go around yapping about me!

Alyoshka (*running out*): I'm off!

Vasilisa (*to Bubnov*): Don't let me catch him here again, hear?

Bubnov: I'm not a watchdog.

Vasilisa: What do I care what you call yourself. Don't forget you're living on charity. How much do you owe me?

Bubnov (*undisturbed*): I haven't counted.

Vasilisa: Well, I'll count it for you!

Alyoshka (*opening the door and shouting*): Vasilisa Karpovna! You can't scare me! You can't scare me-e-e! (*Disappears.*)

(*Luka laughs.*)

Vasilisa: And who might you be?

Luka: A wanderer. A pilgrim.

Vasilisa: For the night or to stay?

Luka: I'll have a look around first.

Vasilisa: Passport?

Luka: If you like—

Vasilisa: Give it to me!

Luka: I'll deliver it . . . er . . . to your chambers in person.

Vasilisa: A pilgrim? A tramp's more like it!

Luka (*with a sigh*): You're not a very gentle soul.

(*Vasilisa goes over to the door of Pepel's room. Alyoshka pokes his head through the kitchen door and whispers, "Has she gone?"*)

Vasilisa (*turning to him*): You still here?

(*Alyoshka gives a piercing whistle and disappears. Nastya and Luka laugh.*)

Bubnov (*to Vasilisa*): He's not here.

Vasilisa: Who?

Bubnov: Vasya.

Vasilisa: Did I ask you where he was?

Bubnov: Well, you were sniffing about.

Vasilisa: I'm looking to see that everything's in order, see? Why hasn't the floor been swept? How many times have I ordered you to keep this place clean?

Bubnov: It's the Actor's turn to sweep.

Vasilisa: I don't care whose turn it is! If the sanitary inspector comes and fines me I'll throw you all out!

Bubnov (*calmly*): And then what'll you live on?

Vasilisa: Don't let me find a speck on the floor! (*Going towards the kitchen and speaking to Nastya.*) What are you moping here for with your mug all swollen? Standing there like a dummy! Sweep up this floor! Have you seen Natasha? Has she been here?

Nastya: I don't know. I didn't see her.

Vasilisa: Bubnov! Was my sister here?

Bubnov (*indicating Luka*): She brought him in.

Vasilisa: And that one—was he home?

Bubnov: Vasya? He was. But Natasha only spoke to Kleshch.

Vasilisa: I'm not asking you who she spoke to! Dirt everywhere! Filth! A lot of swine! Get this place cleaned up, do you hear?

(*Goes out quickly.*)

Bubnov: Was there ever a woman as nasty as her?

Luka: She's not one to fool with!

Nastya: Anybody'd get nasty from such a life. Tie anybody up to a husband like hers—

Bubnov: She's not tied very tight.

Luka: Does she always go about exploding like that?

Bubnov: Always. She came to see her lover, and he wasn't here.

Luka: That is annoying, of course. (*Sighs.*) Dear, dear, dear! The number of people as try to run this earth of ours, all of them threatening fearful threats. And still there's no order and no cleanliness!

Bubnov: They want order, but they haven't got the brains to make it. Still, the floor's got to be swept. Nastya! Why don't you do it?

Nastya: Why do you suppose? Am I your chambermaid? (*After a moment's silence.*) I'm going to get drunk today—crazy drunk.

Bubnov: At least that's something.

Luka: Why do you want to get drunk, my girl? Just a little while back you were crying, and now you say you want to get drunk.

Nastya (*challengingly*): I'll get drunk and start crying all over again. That's all.

B u b n o v : Not very much.

L u k a : But what's the cause? Even a pimple has its cause.

(Nastya shakes her head in silence.)

L u k a : Dear, dear, dear! Such people! Whatever's going to become of you? Here, I'll sweep the floor for you. Where's the broom?

B u b n o v : Behind the door in the passage.

(Luka goes out into the passage.)

B u b n o v : Nastya!

N a s t y a : What?

B u b n o v : Why did Vasilisa go after Alyoshka like that?

N a s t y a : He's been telling everybody that Vasya was sick of her and was going to throw her over for Natasha. I'd better get out of here—move to another place.

B u b n o v : What's that? Where to?

N a s t y a : I'm sick of it all. I'm not wanted here.

B u b n o v (*complacently*): Nor anywhere else. Nobody's wanted on this earth.

(Nastya shakes her head, gets up and quietly goes out into the passage. Medvedev enters, followed by Luka with the broom.)

M e d v e d e v : I don't think I know you.

L u k a : And do you know all the others?

M e d v e d e v : I'm supposed to know all the people on my beat. But I don't know you.

L u k a : That's because not all the earth falls within your beat, uncle. There's a wee little bit left over.

(Goes out into the kitchen.)

M e d v e d e v (*going over to Bubnov*): My beat may not be big, but it's worse than a big one. Just now, before knocking off, I had to take Alyoshka the cobbler to the station, and what do you suppose he did? Laid down in the middle of the street, started playing on his accordion and yelling "I don't want nothing!" There was horses going by, and carts and things. He might have got run over or something. He's a noisy youngster. But I've fixed him up, all right. He seems to like making a row.

Bubnov: Coming over for a game of draughts tonight?

Medvedev: All right. Hm.... What about that Vasya?

Bubnov: Nothing special. Same as ever.

Medvedev: In other words, alive and kicking?

Bubnov: Why not? No reason why he shouldn't be alive and kicking.

Medvedev (*doubtfully*): You think so? (*Luka goes out into the passage carrying a pail.*) There was some gossip going round about Vasya. Haven't you heard it?

Bubnov: I hear lots of gossip.

Medvedev: About him and Vasilisa. It seems ... er ... haven't you noticed anything?

Bubnov: What, for instance?

Medvedev: Well ... anything. Maybe you know and won't tell. Everybody knows. (*Sternly.*) No lying, now!

Bubnov: Why should I lie?

Medvedev: That's it, the dirty dogs! They say Vasya and Vasilisa... you know. But what do I care? I'm not her father—only her uncle. Why should folk laugh at me? (*Kvashnya comes in.*) Whatever's come over people lately—laughing at everybody. Ah, it's you! Back already!

Kvashnya: My most respected police force! He kept pestering me at the market again, Bubnov. Nothing will do but I must marry him!

Bubnov: Go ahead. Why not? He's got money, and isn't too rickety yet.

Medvedev: Me? Ho-ho!

Kvashnya: You, old wolf, you! Don't touch my sore spot. I tried it once, getting married. It's like jumping through a hole in the ice. Once you've done it, you'll never forget it.

Medvedev: Oh, come—husbands are different.

Kvashnya: But I'm the same. As soon as my darling better half passed out—may he sizzle in hell!--I sat there blissfully for a whole day all by myself: just sat there trying to believe my good luck.

Medvedev: If your husband beat you without good cause, you should have complained to the police.

Kvashnya: I complained to God for eight years. He didn't help.

Medvedev: It's forbidden to beat your wife nowadays. They're very strict nowadays. Law and order! Mustn't beat anybody without good cause—only to preserve order.

Luka (*leading in Anna*): Now you see, we made it. How can a body like you go walking about all by herself—so shaky on her legs? Where's your place here?

Anna (*showing him*): Thank you, grandad.

Kvashnya: There she is, a married woman. Look at her!

Luka: She's put together very shaky, poor little thing! I heard her moaning and found her clutching the wall, trying to make her way through the passage. You shouldn't let her walk about by herself.

Kvashnya: Forgive us such an oversight, good sir. Her chambermaid, it seems, is having a day-off.

Luka: Look at that—turning it into a joke! You can't do that to a person. Everybody's got some worth, however slight.

Medvedev: You'd ought to keep an eye on her. What if she should die all of a sudden? That would be a great nuisance. Don't let her out of your sight.

Luka: Quite right, Sergeant.

Medvedev: Well, now, I may not quite be a sergeant as yet—

Luka: Think of that, now! From the looks of you—

(Noise and confusion in the passage. Stifled cries are heard.)

Medvedev: A row?

Bubnov: Sounds like it.

Kvashnya: I'll go and have a look.

Medvedev: I've got to go too. Oh, these duties! I don't see why we should pull people apart who are fighting. They'd stop of themselves when they got tired. It'd be better to let them slug each other as much as they liked. They'd remember it and wouldn't be so quick to pick a fight the next time.

Bubnov (*climbing down off his bunk*): You speak to your chief about that.

Kostilyov (*throwing open the door and shouting*): Abram! Come quick! Vasilisa's after Natasha. She'll kill her! Hurry up!

(Kvashnya, Medvedev and Bubnov rush into the passage. Luka shakes his head and gazes after them.)

A n n a : Oh, Lord! Poor Natasha!

L u k a : Who's fighting?

A n n a : Our landladies. They're sisters.

L u k a (*going over to Anna*): What are they fighting over?

A n n a : Nothing special. They've got too much energy, that's all.

L u k a : What's your name?

A n n a : Anna. I keep looking at you—you remind me of my father, so soft and gentle.

L u k a : I've been pushed around a lot. That's what makes me so soft. (*He gives a crackling laugh.*)

C U R T A I N

ACT II

The same scene. Evening. Satin, Krivoi Zob, the Baron and the Tatar are playing cards near the stove, while Kleshch and the Actor look on. Bubnov and Medvedev are having a game of draughts on Bubnov's bunk. Luka is sitting beside Anna. The lodging is lighted by two lamps, one of them on the wall near the cardplayers, the other on Bubnov's bunk.

Tatar: Once more I play. That's all I play . . .

Bubnov: Zob! Sing us a song! (*Sings.*)

Every morn the sun arises. . . .

Krivoi Zob (*joining in*):

Still my cell is filled with gloom. . . .

Tatar (*to Satin*): Shuffle cards. Shuffle good. We know how you play.

Bubnov and Krivoi Zob (*together*):

Day and night the prison sentries,
Ah-h!

Watch the window of my room. . . .

Anna: Fights . . . insults . . . nothing else. . . . That's all I've seen . . . all I've known.

Luka: Ah, my poor dearie, don't fret!

Medvedev: Hey, where are you moving! Watch out!

Bubnov: Hm. Well. . . .

Tatar (*shaking his fist at Satin*): Why you hide them cards? I see! You god-damn. . . .

Krivoi Zob: Forget it, Asan! They'll cheat us anyway. Bubnov, start up the song again!

Anna: I never had enough to eat . . . counted every crumb . . . always trembled with fear . . . scared to eat more than the other person . . . never had anything to wear but rags. Why?

Luka: Poor little thing! Are you tired? Everything will be all right.

Actor (*to Krivoi Zob*): Throw on your Jack—your Jack, damn you!

Baron: And we've got the King!

Kleshch: They always go one higher.

Satin: It's a habit of ours.

Medvedev: King!

Bubnov: Me too. Well, now?

Anna: And now I'm dying. . . .

Kleshch: See that? See that? Quit the game, Asan! Quit it, I say!

Actor: Can't he think for himself?

Baron: You watch out, Andrei, or I'll send you flying straight to hell!

Tatar: Come on. Deal again. The pitcher bring water and broke herself. Me too.

(Kleshch shakes his head and goes over to Bubnov.)

Anna: I keep thinking: dear God, will this torture go on in the next world too? There too?

Luka: No, no. You won't suffer there, my pretty. Sleep in peace. Everything will be all right. You'll have a good rest there. Be patient just a little longer. Everybody has got to be patient—each in his own way.

(He gets up and goes into the kitchen with quick little steps.)

Bubnov *(singing)*:

Guard my window at your pleasure—

Krivoi Zob:

I will never run away!

(In unison.)

Though I languish for my freedom,
Ah-h!

Chains are forcing me to stay!

Tatar *(shouting)*: Aha! Put card up sleeve!

Baron *(in some embarrassment)*: Well, where do you expect me to put it—up your nose?

Actor *(convincingly)*: You're mistaken, Asan. No one has ever—

Tatar: I see! Cheat! I no play!

Satin *(gathering up the cards)*: All right, get out, Asan. You knew we were cheats. Why did you start playing with us?

Baron: Lost twenty kopeks and makes a noise like three rubles! And calls himself a Tatar!

Tatar (*angrily*): Gotta play fair!

Satin: What for?

Tatar: What you mean, what for?

Satin: Just what I said—what for?

Tatar: You don't know?

Satin: No, I don't know. Do you know?

(The Tatar spits in anger, the others laugh at him.)

Krivoi Zob (*undisturbed*): You're crazy, Asan. Can't you see that if they tried living honestly, they'd starve to death in three days?

Tatar: I no care. Gotta live honest.

Krivoi Zob: Harping on the old string. Come on, let's go and have our tea. Bubnov!

Ah, my chains, my iron halter....

Bubnov:

Unrelenting iron guard....

Krivoi Zob: Come along, Asan! (*He goes out singing.*)

I can neither loose nor break them....

(The Tatar shakes his fist at the Baron, then follows his friend out.)

Satin (*laughing and addressing the Baron*): Once again, your honourable honour, it seems you have been dumped in a ditch. Hm, an educated gentleman, and don't know how to slip a card up your sleeve!

Baron (*shrugging his shoulders*): How the devil it ever happened!

Actor: No talent. No faith in yourself. Without that—nothing. Failure.

Medvedev: I've got one King, but you've got two.

Bubnov: You can still win if you're smart. Your move.

Kleshch: You've lost already, Abram Ivanich!

Medvedev: Keep out of this, hear? Shut up!

Satin: Winnings—fifty-three kopeks!

Actor: Three of them go to me. But what do I want with three kopeks?

Luka (*entering from the kitchen*): Well, now you've stripped the Tatar, I suppose you'll be going out for a drink?

Baron: Come with us.

Satin: I'd like to see what you're like when you're drunk.

Luka: No better than when I'm sober.

Actor: Come on, old man. I'll recite some verses to you.

Luka: What's that?

Actor: Poetry.

Luka: Poetry? What do I want with poetry?

Actor: It can be amusing. But it can also be sad.

Satin: Well, poet, are you coming?

(Goes out with the Baron.)

Actor: Coming. I'll catch you up! Listen to this, old man. It's from some poem. Ugh ... I can't remember the beginning. Can't remember! (*Rubs his forehead.*)

Bubnov: Here goes your King! Your move!

Medvedev: I shouldn't have moved there, damn it all!

Actor: Formerly, when my organism was not yet poisoned with alcohol, I had a good memory, old man. But now—? Everything's over for me now, I always brought down the house with those lines—tremendous applause! And you don't know what applause means, my friend. Applause is like vodka! I used to come out and stand like this. (*Strikes a pose.*) I'd stand like this ... and (*He is silent.*) Can't remember a word—not a word. And it was my favourite poem. That's pretty bad, isn't it, old man?

Luka: It is, once it's your favourite. All your soul goes into your favourite.

Actor: I've drunk up my soul, old man. I'm ruined. And why? Because I had no faith in myself. I'm done for.

Luka: That's nothing. All you have to do is take a cure. They cure people of drunkenness nowadays, haven't you heard? Cure them free of charge. They've opened up a kind of healing centre, so to speak, where they cure them for nothing. That's because they see a drunkard's also a human being, and they're even glad when he wants to be cured. So you just go there. Go and try it, do.

Actor (*pensively*): Where? Where is this place?

Luka: It's in some city or other. What do they call it? A funny name. Let me see ... never fear, I'll find out the name. Meantime, you be getting yourself ready. Drop the vodka. Take yourself in hand and hold on, and then you'll go for a cure and

begin life all over again. Won't that be fine? All over again. Just make up your mind, once and for all!

A c t o r (smiling): All over again. All from the beginning. Yes, that sounds fine. All over again. (*Laughs.*) Of course! I can do it! Don't you think I can do it?

L u k a: Of course you can. A person can do anything, if he wants to badly enough.

A c t o r (as though suddenly waking up): You're a little cracked, aren't you, old man? Well, good-bye for the present. (*Whistling.*) Good-bye, old man. (*Goes out.*)

A n n a: Grandad.

L u k a: What is it, dearie?

A n n a: Talk to me.

L u k a (going over to her): Very well. You and me'll have a nice little chat.

(Kleshch watches them, then silently goes over to his wife, looks at her and makes movements with his hands as if there were something he wanted to say.)

L u k a: What is it, brother?

K l e s h c h (under his breath): Nothing.

(Goes slowly towards the door to the passage, stands in front of it in hesitation a second or so, then suddenly goes out.)

L u k a (following him with his eyes): It's hard for that man of yours.

A n n a: I can't be thinking of him now.

L u k a: Did he often beat you?

A n n a: Something awful. It's because of him I got like this.

B u b n o v: My wife had a lover once. The rascal played a good game of draughts.

M e d v e d e v: Hm.

A n n a: Grandad, please tell me something.... I'm feeling so bad....

L u k a: That's nothing. That's just before you die, pigeon. It'll be all right, dearie. You just keep hoping. This is how it'll be—you'll die now, you see, and everything'll be quiet and peaceful. You won't have to be afraid of nothing any more, nothing at all. Just lie there in peace and quiet. Death's kind to us poor mortals. He smooths out all the wrinkles, death does. That's

why they say: eternal rest. And that's she truth, lovey, because where can a person hope to get any rest in this world?

(Pepel comes in. He has had a drink, looks dishevelled and is in a sullen mood. He sinks down on a bunk by the door and sits there silent and motionless.)

A n n a : But there in that other world—will we be tortured there too?

L u k a : There won't be nothing there. Nothing at all. You just believe me. Peace and quiet and nothing else. They'll summon you before the Lord God and say: See, Lord, it's your faithful servant Anna who has come.

M e d v e d e v (*sternly*): How do you know what they'll say there? You're a fine one, you are!

(On hearing Medvedev's voice, Pepel lifts his head and listens.)

L u k a : If I say it, I must be knowing it, Sergeant—

M e d v e d e v (*appeased*): Hm. Maybe. I suppose that's your business. But I told you I'm not a sergeant. Not yet.

B u b n o v : Double jump.

M e d v e d e v : You devil. I hope you—

L u k a : And the Lord God will look at you so gentle and tender like, and say: Of course I know Anna! And He'll say: You just lead our Anna right into Paradise—that's what He'll say. Let her rest up a bit. I know what a hard life she's had. I know how tired she is. Let her have peace and quiet now.

A n n a (*gasping*): Oh, grandad ... dearest grandad ... if it would only be like that! If only ... peace and quiet ... not to feel anything. ...

L u k a : You won't feel anything, my pretty. Nothing at all. Believe me. You must die now gladly, without any fear. Death, I'm telling you, is a tender father to us, his children.

A n n a : But ... maybe ... maybe I'll get well?

L u k a (*smiling deprecatingly*): What for, dearie? To be tortured again?

A n n a : To live ... just a little ... just a little longer. Once you say there won't be any suffering there. ... I could bear it here ... I could.

L u k a : There won't be nothing at all there. Just—

P e p e l (*getting up*): You're right. But maybe—you're wrong.

A n n a (*startled*): Good heavens!

L u k a : What's that, my handsome fellow?

M e d v e d e v : Who's shouting?

P e p e l (*going over to him*): Me! What of it?

M e d v e d e v : You oughtn't to shout, that's what. A person should conduct himself peaceful.

P e p e l : Blockhead! And their uncle! Ho-ho!

L u k a (*to Pepel, under his breath*): Stop shouting, hear? The woman's dying. The earth colour has come to her lips already. Leave her alone.

P e p e l : Out of respect for you, grandad. You're a smart feller, grandad. You lie beautifully. Nice to listen to your fairytales. Go ahead and lie. That's all right. Not many pleasant things to listen to in this world.

B u b n o v : Is it true she's dying?

L u k a : I think so.

B u b n o v : That means the end of her coughing. A nasty cough she had. Double jump.

M e d v e d e v : Pooh! Devil take you!

P e p e l : Abram!

M e d v e d e v : Who said you could call me by my first name?

P e p e l : Abram! Is Natasha sick?

M e d v e d e v : What business is it of yours?

P e p e l : You'd better tell me. Did Vasilisa beat her bad?

M e d v e d e v : It's none of your business. It's a family affair.

Who are you to butt in?

P e p e l : Whoever I am, you'll never get another look at Natasha if I don't want you to.

M e d v e d e v (*leaving his draughts*): What? What's that? Who are you talking about? She's my niece, you thief, you!

P e p e l : I may be a thief, but you haven't caught me!

M e d v e d e v : Just wait! I'll catch you, all right. And soon!

P e p e l : If you catch me, it'll be the end of this little nest of yours. Do you think I'll keep my mouth shut in court? The wolf will bare his fangs. They'll ask me: Who taught you to steal and showed you where? Mishka Kostylyov and his wife! Who handled your stolen goods? Mishka Kostylyov and his wife!

M e d v e d e v : You're a liar. Nobody'll believe you!

P e p e l : They'll believe me because it's the truth! And I'll drag you in, too—hah! I'll ruin all of you, you bastards! You'll see!

M e d v e d e v (*frightened*): Liar! You liar! What harm have I ever done you? Throwing yourself on me like a mad dog!

P e p e l : What *good* have you ever done me?

L u k a : Hm!

M e d v e d e v (to *Luka*): What are you croaking about? What business is it of yours? This is a family affair.

B u b n o v (to *Luka*): Keep out of it. The noose isn't for you and me.

L u k a (*mEEKly*): Yes. I'm just saying if a person hasn't done his neighbour good, he's done him bad.

M e d v e d e v (*missing the point*): Blah! We here, we all know each other, but you—who are you? (*Gives an angry snort and hurries out.*)

L u k a : The gentleman seems to be angry. Dear me! Your affairs here, brothers, are a bit tangled, as I see it.

P e p e l : He's run off to tell Vasilisa.

B u b n o v : You're a fool, Vasya. Showing off how brave you are! Watch out! It's all right to be brave when you go to the woods for mushrooms, but there's no sense in it here. They'll snap off your head in an instant.

P e p e l : Oh, no, they won't! Nobody's taking a fellow from Yaroslavl with his bare hands! If it's a fight they want, they'll get it!

L u k a : But really now, don't you think you'd do well to clear out of here, lad?

P e p e l : Where'll I go? Tell me that.

L u k a : Well now, Siberia for instance.

P e p e l : Not me. No, thank you. I'll wait to be sent to Siberia free of charge.

L u k a : Take my advice and go out there. Out there you'll find the right path to follow. They need people like you out there.

P e p e l : My path has been laid out for me. My father spent most of his life in jail and ordered me to do the same. Ever since I was a kid I've been called a thief, or the son of a thief.

L u k a : It's a fine place, Siberia. A golden land. If a person is strong and has a good head on his shoulders, he'll feel as snug there as a cucumber in a hot-house.

P e p e l : Why do you tell such lies, old man?

L u k a : Eh?

P e p e l : Deaf. What do you tell lies for, I say?

L u k a : What lies have I told?

P e p e l : Everything you say's a lie. Everything's good, according to you: this place, that place. A pack of lies. What makes you tell them?

L u k a : You just believe what I say and go out there to see for yourself. Then you'll say thank you. Why should you stay here? And why should you be so anxious to know the truth? The truth may turn out to be an axe on your neck.

P e p e l : It's all the same to me. If it's an axe, it's an axe.

L u k a : Foolish lad. There's no sense in killing yourself.

B u b n o v : What are you two arguing about? Is it the truth you're after, Vasya? What for? You know it without being told. Everybody knows it.

P e p e l : Quit your croaking. Let him tell me. Listen, old man—is there a God?

(Luka smiles, but says nothing.)

B u b n o v : People are like chips of wood floating on the river—and chips fly off as houses are built.

P e p e l : Well, is there? Speak up.

L u k a *(quietly)* : There is if you believe there is; there isn't if you don't. Whatever you believe in, that's what there is.

(Pepel stares at the old man in silent wonder.)

B u b n o v : I'm going for my tea. Anyone coming along?

L u k a *(to Pepel)* : What are you staring at?

P e p e l : Nothing. Listen, you mean—?

B u b n o v : Then I'll go alone.

(Goes to the door and is met by Vasilisa.)

P e p e l : In other words, you—

V a s i l i s a *(to Bubnov)* : Is Nastya here?

B u b n o v : No. *(Goes out.)*

P e p e l : Ah, here she is.

V a s i l i s a *(going over to Anna)* : Still alive?

L u k a : Don't disturb her.

V a s i l i s a : What are you doing here?

L u k a : I can leave if you want me to.

V a s i l i s a : *(going to the door of Pepel's room)* : Vasya, there's something I want to speak to you about.

(Luka goes to the door into the passage, opens it and slams it shut. Then he cautiously climbs from one of the bunks up on to the stove.)

V a s i l i s a *(from Pepel's room)* : Vasya, come here!

P e p e l : I don't feel like it.

Vasilisa: What's the matter? What are you sore about?

Pepel: I'm fed up. I'm sick of all this business.

Vasilisa: Sick of me too?

Pepel: Yes, you too.

(Vasilisa pulls her shawl tight, pressing her hands to her breast. She goes over to Anna's bed, glances through the curtains, and crosses to Pepel.)

Pepel: Well, say what's on your mind.

Vasilisa: What's there to say? I can't make you love me, and it's not my nature to go begging. Thanks for telling me the truth.

Pepel: What truth?

Vasilisa: That you're sick of me. Or maybe it's not the truth?

(Pepel stares at her in silence.)

Vasilisa *(going up to him)*: What are you looking at? Don't you recognize me?

Pepel *(with a sigh)*: You're too damn good-looking, Vasilisa. *(She puts her hand on his shoulder, but he shrugs it off.)* But you never won my heart. I lived with you, and all the rest, but I never liked you.

Vasilisa *(under her breath)*: So that's it! Well—

Pepel: Well, and there's nothing for you and me to talk about! Nothing at all. Get away from me!

Vasilisa: Have you fallen for somebody else?

Pepel: What business is it of yours? If I had, I wouldn't ask you to help me get her.

Vasilisa *(significantly)*: Too bad. Maybe I *could* help you get her.

Pepel *(suspiciously)*: Get who?

Vasilisa: You know. Why pretend? I'm used to talking straight, Vasya. *(Lowering her voice)*. I won't deny it—you've hurt me. It's as if you'd given me a lashing for no good reason and to no purpose. You said you loved me, and then all of a sudden—

Pepel: Not all of a sudden. It's been like this for a long time. You have no heart, woman. A woman ought to have a heart. Us men are beasts, and you've got to . . . you've got to teach us. What did you ever teach me?

Vasilisa: Let bygones be bygones. I know a person's not free in himself. If you don't love me any more, I can take it. That's how it'll be.

Pepel: So now it's all over between us? And we part peaceable, without any scenes? That's good.

Vasilisa: Oh, no! Wait a minute! Don't forget I always hoped you'd help me throw this yoke off my neck. I thought you'd help me get away from my husband, my uncle, from all this life. And maybe it wasn't you I loved so much as this hope, this idea of mine, see? I was waiting for you to pull me out.

Pepel: You're no nail, I'm no pliers. I, too, thought that one as smart as you—you *are* smart—you're a clever one—

Vasilisa (*straining towards him*): Vasya, let's help each other.

Pepel: How?

Vasilisa (*forcefully, in lowered tones*): My sister ... I know you like her.

Pepel: And so that's why you beat her? You watch out, Vasilisa! Keep your hands off her!

Vasilisa: Wait. Don't flare up. We can arrange everything quietly, without getting mad. How would you like to—to marry her? I'd give you some money—three hundred rubles. If I get more, you can have that too.

Pepel (*moving away*): What? What's behind this?

Vasilisa: Help me get rid of my husband. Take that noose off my neck.

Pepel (*whistling softly*): So that's it! Oho! You *are* smart! Your husband in his grave, your lover in jail, and you yourself—

Vasilisa: Vasya! Why in jail? Don't do it yourself—get somebody else to do it. And even if you did do it yourself, who'd know? Natasha ... think it over. ... You'll have money. ... You can go away. ... I'll be free forever. ... As for my sister—it'll be good for her to get away from me. It's hard for me to see her all the time. She makes me sore because of you. I can't stop myself. I torture her. I beat her. I beat her until it makes even me cry to see her. But I beat her just the same, and I'll keep on beating her.

Pepel: You're a brute, and you boast of it.

Vasilisa: No, I don't. I just tell the truth. Think, Vasya. Twice they threw you in jail on account of that husband of mine—on account of his greediness. He sucks my blood like a leech—been sucking it for four years. What kind of a husband is he?

And he keeps squeezing Natasha out, nagging her, calling her a beggar. He's poison for everybody.

Pepel: You're a sly one.

Vasilisa: It's clear as day. You'd have to be a fool not to understand what I'm after.

(Kostilyov comes in quietly and steals forward.)

Pepel *(to Vasilisa)*: Get out!

Vasilisa: Think it over. *(Catches sight of her husband.)* What do you want? Have you come for me?

(Pepel starts up and stares wildly at Kostilyov.)

Kostilyov: It's me, just me. You two here—alone? Having a little talk? *(Suddenly he stamps his foot and begins to screech.)* God damn you, Vasilisa! You beggar, you! *(He is frightened by his own shouts and by the frozen silence with which they are received.)* O Lord, forgive me! Leading me into sin again, Vasilisa! Here I am searching for you everywhere. *(Again raising his voice.)* It's high time you were in bed! Forgot to fill the icon lamp again, damn you! You pig! You pauper! *(He shakes a trembling finger at her. Vasilisa goes slowly to the door of the passage, her eyes fixed on Pepel.)*

Pepel *(to Kostilyov)*: Get out of here! Get out, I tell you!

Kostilyov *(shouting)*: It's me who owns this place. Get out yourself, you thief!

Pepel *(in a strained voice)*: Get out, I say.

Kostilyov: Don't you dare! I'll show you! I'll—

(Pepel takes him by the collar and starts shaking him. Suddenly someone is heard to move about on top of the stove and to give a loud and long-drawn yawn. Pepel lets go of Kostilyov, who runs with a cry into the passage.)

Pepel *(jumping up on to the bunk by the stove)*: Who's there? Who's up on the stove?

Luka *(poking his head up)*: Eh?

Pepel: You!

Luka: Me. Me myself. Oh, dear Lord in heaven!

Pepel *(shuts the door into the passage and looks vainly for the bar which secures it)*: Damn it all! Climb down, old man!

Luka: Ri-ight away! I'm coming!

Pepel *(roughly)*: Why did you crawl up on the stove?

L u k a : Where should I have crawled?

P e p e l : You went out into the passage.

L u k a : That's a cold place for an old man like me.

P e p e l : Did you . . . hear anything?

L u k a : 'Deed I did. How could I have helped hearing? Did you think I was deaf? Ah, lad, luck comes your way. You're a lucky one.

P e p e l (*suspiciously*): What makes you say that?

L u k a : It's lucky for you I crawled up on that stove.

P e p e l : Why did you make all that noise?

L u k a : It was getting too hot for me, that's why. And you can be thankful for that. The lad will be forgetting himself, thinks I. He'll be squeezing the breath out of that old feller.

P e p e l : I would have for sure. Ugh, how I hate—

L u k a : I know. Easy as sitting down. Lots of times people make slips like that.

P e p e l (*smiling*): Maybe you made such a slip yourself once upon a time?

L u k a : Listen, lad, listen to me. Keep away from that woman. Shoo her away. Shoo! Shoo! She'll get rid of that man of hers without your help, and better than you could do it. Don't listen to her, to that she-devil. Look at me—see how bald I am? And what might be the cause? Women. I've known more women in my time than I had hairs on my head. But this Vasilisa here is worse than any harpy.

P e p e l : I don't know whether I should say thank you or—

L u k a : Don't say nothing. You'll not find better words than those I've spoken. Listen to me—the lady that you're fond of—you just take her arm, right about face, and forward march! Get away from here! As far away as you can go!

P e p e l (*sullenly*): There's no knowing people—who's good and who's bad. There's no knowing.

L u k a : What's there to know? A person's not always the same. It all depends on how his heart's tuned. Today he's good, tomorrow he's bad. But if that girl has got a real grip on your soul, then be off with her, and that's that. Or else be off alone. You're young yet. You've got plenty of time to get a woman.

P e p e l (*taking him by the shoulders*): Tell me the truth. Why are you saying this?

L u k a : Here, let me go. I'll just have a look at Anna. She was breathing hard a minute ago. (*He goes over to Anna's bed, opens the curtains, looks in, touches her. Pepel watches him with*

a thoughtful, perplexed look on his face.) Have mercy, O Lord! Mercifully receive the soul of Thy servant Anna.

Pepel (*under his breath*): Dead? (*He strains forward to get a better look at the bed, but he does not go over to it.*)

Luka (*softly*): It's all over now, her torture. Where's that man of hers?

Pepel: In the pub, I suppose.

Luka: He's got to be told.

Pepel (*shuddering*): I hate corpses.

Luka (*going to the door*): Why should you like them? It's the live ones we ought to like. The live ones.

Pepel: I'll go with you.

Luka: Afraid of the corpse?

Pepel: Hate it.

(They hurry out. The stage is empty and silent. Dull incomprehensible sounds come from beyond the door into the passage. At last the Actor comes in.)

Actor (*he does not close the door, but stands on the threshold leaning against the jamb, calling out in a loud voice*): Old man! Where are you? It's come back to me! Listen! (*He takes two uncertain steps forward, strikes a pose, and recites*):

If no path can be found that leads
To the realms of sacred truth,
Then blessed the crazed mind
That brings men soaring dreams.

(Natasha appears in the doorway behind the Actor.)

Actor: Old man!

If tomorrow the sun should cease
To light the earth with its rays,
Tomorrow some madman's dream
Would illuminate the world.

Natasha (*laughs*): Pie-eyed. The simpleton!

Actor (*turning to her*): Ah, it's you. Where's the old man? The lovely old man? Nobody here, it seems. Farewell, Natasha! Fare thee well!

Natasha (*entering*): Saying farewell before you've said hullo?

Actor (*blocking her path*): I am ... going away. When spring comes I shall be no more.

Natasha: Let me pass. Where are you going?

Actor: In search of a certain town. To take a cure. You, too, must leave. Ophelia, hie thee to a convent! There exists, it seems, a healing centre for organisms—for drunkards. A marvellous place. Everything marble—even the floors. Very bright. And clean. And lots of food. All for nothing. Marble floors—fancy that! I'll find it and get well and then. . . . I am about to be reborn, as the King said. . . . King Lear. My stage name is Sverchkov-Zavolzhsky, Natasha, but nobody knows it. Nobody. Here I have no name. Can you understand how it hurts to lose one's name? Even dogs have a name. . . .

(Natasha passes the Actor at a safe distance and goes over to Anna's bed, looking through the curtains.)

Actor: No name, no man.

Natasha: Look! Oh, dear! She's dead!

Actor (*shaking his head*): It cannot be.

Natasha (*stepping back*): She is. Look.

Bubnov (*in the doorway*): Look at what?

Natasha: Anna. She's dead.

Bubnov: At last she's stopped that coughing of hers. (*Goes over to Anna's bed, looks through the curtains, goes to his own bunk.*) Kleshch will have to be told. That's his business.

Actor: I'll go. I'll say—she's lost her name! (*Goes out.*)

Natasha (*from the centre of the room*): And me to ... some day ... like that ... driven down into some basement ... downtrodden. . . .

Bubnov (*spreading some old rags out on the planks of his bunk*): What's that? What're you muttering about?

Natasha: I was just thinking out loud.

Bubnov: Waiting for Vasya? Watch out! You'll break your neck over that Vasya.

Natasha: Does it make any difference what I break it over? Let it be him. He's better than most.

Bubnov (*lying down*): That's your business.

Natasha: It's a good thing, of course, her dying ... but a pity. What does a person live for?

Bubnov: It's the same for all of us: we get born, live our lives, and die. I'll die, and you will too. Why feel sorry for anybody?

(Luka, the Tatar, Krivoi Zob and Kleshch come in. Kleshch is the last. He walks slowly and all hunched over.)

Natasha: Sh! Anna—

Krivoi Zob: We know. May she rest in peace, now she's dead.

Tatar *(to Kleshch)*: Have to drag her out. Have to drag her into passage. Can't have dead people here. Live people sleep here.

Kleshch *(in a quiet tone)*: We'll drag her out.

(They all go over to the bed. Kleshch stares at his wife over the shoulders of the others.)

Krivoi Zob *(to the Tatar)*: Do you think she'll smell? There's nothing to smell. She dried up while she was still alive.

Natasha: Good Lord, you might at least feel sorry for her! Say one little word of pity! But not you!

Luka: Don't mind them, dearie. How can they—how can any of us be expected to pity the dead if we don't pity the living? We don't even pity ourselves, let alone the dead!

Bubnov *(yawning)*: You can't scare death off with words. You can sickness, but not death.

Tatar *(moving away)*: Call the police.

Krivoi Zob: Yes, we've got to do that, Kleshch! Have you notified the police?

Kleshch: No. They'll make me bury her, and I've only got forty kopeks.

Krivoi Zob: In that case, borrow something. We can take up a collection—five kopeks—whatever a man's able. But hurry and notify the police or they'll be thinking you killed her or something.

(Goes over to the bunks and is about to lie down beside the Tatar.)

Natasha *(going over to Bubnov)*: Now I'll dream about her. I always dream about dead people. I'm afraid to go home alone. It's dark out there in the passage.

Luka *(following her out)*: It's the living ones you have to be afraid of, take my word for it.

Natasha: See me out, grandad.

Luka: Come along, come along. I'll take you. (*They go out. Pause.*)

Krivoi Zob: O-oh-ho! Asan! It'll soon be spring. At last we'll get warm. The muzhiks in the village have begun to mend their ploughs and their harrows. Getting ready to turn the soil. Hm. And us? Eh, Asan? Snoring away, the damn Mohammedan.

Bubnov: Tatars are good at sleeping.

Kleshch (*standing in the middle of the lodging and staring dully in front of him*): What am I to do now?

Krivoi Zob: Go to sleep, that's what.

Kleshch (*softly*): And what about her?

(*Nobody answers. Satin and the Actor come in.*)

Actor (*shouting*): Old man! Come here, my loyal Kent!

Satin: Make way for Miklukho-Maklai!

Actor: It's decided, once and for all. Old man! Where's that town? Where are you?

Satin: Fata Morgana! The old fellow lied to you. There's nothing of the sort. No towns. No people. Nothing.

Actor: That's a lie!

Tatar (*jumping off his bed*): Where's boss? I go for boss. No can't sleep, why for I pay money? Dead people. Drunks.

(*Goes out quickly. Satin whistles after him.*)

Bubnov (*sleepily*): Go to bed, fellows. Stop your noise. A man's supposed to sleep at night.

Actor: Ah! Here lies a corpse! "Our fishing nets have caught a corpse!" Poetry. Béranger!

Satin (*shouting*): A corpse hears nothing! A corpse feels nothing! Shout as much as you like! A corpse hears nothing!

(*Luka appears in the doorway.*)

ACT III

A back yard littered with rubbish and overgrown with weeds. A high brick fire-wall upstage cuts off a view of the sky. Against this wall grow elder bushes. To the right is a dark log wall—perhaps of a shed or a stable. On the left is Kostilyov's house with the lodging in the basement. It is grey and ramshackle, with the stucco crumbling off. It stands at an angle, so that the far corner reaches almost to upstage centre, leaving only a narrow passage between the brick wall and the house. There are two windows in the house, one a basement window downstage, the other about six feet higher and upstage. A log some 12 feet long lies near the house; beside it—a dilapidated and overturned wooden sledge. Old boards and beams form a pile of wood near the building on the right. Day is drawing to a close and the rays of the setting sun cast a red glow upon the brick wall. It is early spring; the snow has just melted and the black branches of the elder bushes are as yet without buds. Natasha and Nastya are sitting on the log; Luka and the Baron on the sledge; Kleshch is lying on the pile of wood to the right. Bubnov's face is seen at the basement window.

Nastya (closing her eyes and nodding her head in rhythm to the sing-song chanting of her tale): So he comes at night to the garden, to the summer-house, like we planned. I've been waiting so long I'm all atremble with fear and sorrow. And he's all atremble, and white as a sheet, and in his hand he holds an involver—

Natasha (chewing sunflower seeds): See? So it must be true what they say about students being desperate.

Nastya: And he says to me in a fearful voice: My precious love, he says—

Bubnov: Ho-ho! Precious, did you say?

Baron: Shut up! If you don't like it, don't listen, but don't interfere with her lying. Next!

Nastya: My precious, he says, my beloved! My parents, he says, will never consent to my marrying you. They threaten to lay their curse on me forever for loving you. And for that reason, he says, I must take my own life. And there he has that big involver with all those bullets in it. Farewell, he says, beloved

of my heart. There's no changing my mind. I can't go on living without you! And I says to him: My adored friend! My Raoul!

Bubnov (*in amazement*): What? How's that? Growl?

Baron (*roaring*): You've forgotten, Nastya! Last time he was Gaston!

Nastya (*jumping up*): Shut up, you scum! You homeless pups! As though you could understand love—true love! But me—I've known it, true love! (*To the Baron.*) You're a nobody! You, as used to drink coffee in bed!

Luka: Ju-u-ust a minute! Don't go stopping her, now! Let her go on. It's not the words that count, but what's behind them—that's the thing. Go on, my girl! Don't mind them.

Bubnov: A crow in peacock's feathers. Well, let's hear the rest.

Baron: Go on.

Natasha: Don't listen to them. Who are they? They're only jealous because they've got nothing to tell about themselves.

Nastya (*sitting down again*): I don't want to go on. I won't tell you any more. Once they don't believe me and laugh at me— (*Suddenly she stops, is silent a minute, and then, closing her eyes, continues in a loud, impassioned voice, beating time with her hand as if listening to distant music.*) And I say to him: Joy of my life! Sun of my soul! Nor can I go on living in this world without you, because I love you with all my soul and will go on loving you as long as this heart beats in this breast. But don't end your life, which your dear parents need so bad, since you're all the joy they've got. Throw me over! Better my life should wear away with pining for you, my beloved! I'm all alone. I'm—I'm that sort. Let me go to my ruin. It's all the same. I'm not worth anything. There's nothing left for me. . . . Nothing left. . . . Nothing left. . . .

(She covers her face with her hands and weeps silently.)

Natasha (*turning away and speaking softly*): Don't cry. You mustn't.

(Luka smiles and strokes Nastya's head.)

Bubnov (*laughing*): She's a fine one!

Baron (*also laughing*): You think that's the truth, grandad? That's all out of that book "Fatal Love." A lot of nonsense. Let her be!

N a t a s h a : What do you care? Keep your mouth shut, once the Lord saw fit to make you what you are.

N a s t y a (*furiously*): You lost soul! You emptiness! Where's your heart?

L u k a (*taking Nastya by the hand*): We'll go away from here, dearie. Don't mind them. You're the one that's right, not them. I know. Once you believe you had that true love, you really did. You did indeed. But don't get angry with the fellow you live with. Maybe it's jealousy makes him laugh. Maybe he never knew that true kind. Maybe he never knew any kind at all. Come away.

N a s t y a (*pressing her hands to her breast*): Believe me, grandad! I swear it was like that! Everything I said.... He was a student, a Frenchman. They called him Gaston. He had a black beard and wore patent-leather boots. Strike me dead this minute if it's not the truth! And how he loved me! How he loved me!

L u k a : I know. I believe you. Patent-leather boots, you say? Fancy that! And you loved him too? (*They disappear around the corner.*)

B a r o n : A stupid wench! She's got a good heart, but there never was anyone so stupid.

B u b n o v : Why should a person want to lie like that? And swear it's the truth, like in court.

N a t a s h a : It's more pleasant to lie than to tell the truth. Me, too—

B a r o n : You too? Next?

N a t a s h a : I keep dreaming and dreaming. And waiting.

B a r o n : What for?

N a t a s h a (*smiling self-consciously*): I don't know. I just keep thinking that tomorrow ... somebody will come ... somebody special. Or else something will happen.... Something unusual. And I keep waiting. Always waiting. But when you come to think of it, what could happen?

(*Pause.*)

B a r o n (*with a wry smile*): There's nothing to wait for. Me, for instance, I'm not waiting for anything. Everything's over. Passed. Finished. Next?

N a t a s h a : Or else I imagine tomorrow I'll die all of a sudden. And then everything goes cold inside me. Summer's a good time to imagine you'll die, because of the thunderstorms; you could easily get struck by lightning.

Baron: Yours is a poor sort of life, and it's all the fault of that sister of yours—a devilish temper she's got.

Natasha: Who's got a good sort of life? Everybody has it bad. Don't I see it?

Kleshch (*until now he had been lying motionless and detached, but at these words he springs up*): Everybody? That's a lie! Not everybody. If it was everybody it wouldn't be so bad. Then you wouldn't mind.

Bubnov: What devil stuck his fork in you this time? Yelping like that!

(*Kleshch lies down again, muttering to himself.*)

Baron: I'd better go and make my peace with Nastya. If I don't, she'll hold out on the drink money.

Bubnov: Hm. How people love to lie! Nastya, now, you can understand her. She's used to painting her mug, so she thinks she can do the same to her soul. Rouge her soul. But what do the others want to lie for? That Luka, for instance. He lies without getting anything out of it, and him an old man. What does he do it for?

Baron (*with a snort, as he goes out*): They've all got grey little souls. They'd all like to rouge them a bit.

Luka (*entering from around the corner*): Why did you go and upset the girl, your lordship? Let her enjoy her cry. If it gives her pleasure to let the tears flow, why should you mind?

Baron: She's a dunce, old man. She gets on your nerves. Today it's Raoul, tomorrow Gaston, but the story's always the same. I'd better go and make my peace with her just the same. (*Goes out.*)

Luka: That's right. Be nice and gentle with her. It never does any harm to be gentle with a person.

Natasha: You've got a good heart, grandad. What makes you so kind?

Luka: Kind, you say? Very well, if that's the way you see it. (*The soft music of an accordion and singing comes from the other side of the brick wall.*) Somebody has to be kind in this world. You've got to have sympathy for people. Christ loved everybody, and told us to do the same. And I can tell you truly that many a time you can save a person by pitying him in time. Like, for instance, that time I was a watchman on a country estate belonging to an engineer near the town of Tomsk. This estate, now, stood in the middle of the woods. It was winter-

time—very beautiful—and me all alone on the estate. One day I hear noises—somebody breaking in!

N a t a s h a : Thieves?

L u k a : Thieves they were. Breaking in. I pick up my gun and go out. There they are, two of them, opening a window, and so busy at it they don't notice me. "Hey, you!" I shout. "Get out of here!" They turn on me with the axe. "If you don't keep back, I'll shoot!" I cry and point my gun first at one, then at the other. Down they go on their knees, begging me to let them go. But me, I'm mad by then; on account of the axe, and I says to them: I chased you away, you pixies, but you wouldn't go, so now, I says, one of you go and cut a good switch off those bushes. They bring the switch. Now, says I, one of you get down, and the other give him a thrashing. And that's how, according to my orders, they flogged each other. And when the flogging was over they say to me: "Grandad," they say, "give us something to eat for the love of Christ. We've been tramping the countryside on empty bellies." There's your thieves for you, my dear! (*Laughs.*) There's your axe for you! Both of them fine chaps at heart. I says to them: "Now why couldn't you have come and just asked me for something to eat at the very start?" "We're sick and tired of asking," they say. "We asked and asked and nobody gave us anything." After that they lived with me for the whole winter. One of them, Stepan by name, used to take the gun and go off to the woods. The other, Yakov they called him, was sick all the time. Kept coughing. All three of us kept watch over that estate. And when spring came they said: "Farewell, grandad." And off they went. Set out for the west.

N a t a s h a : Were they escaped convicts?

L u k a : That's what they were. Escaped convicts. Escaped from the place where they were deported. Fine lads they were! If I hadn't taken pity on them, now, they might have killed me or done something else just as bad, and that would have meant a trial, and jail, and Siberia. What for? A jail can't teach a person what's right, and Siberia can't teach a person what's right, but a man—he can teach a person what's right, and very easy at that.

(*Pause.*)

B u b n o v : Hm. Take me, now—I'm no good at lying. Why lie? The way I see it, go ahead and speak the whole truth. What's there to be afraid of?

Kleshch (*jumping up again as if stung and crying out*): The truth? What truth? (*Tearing at the rags that cover him.*) Here's the truth! No work. No strength. That's the truth! No shelter! Not even a roof of my own! Nothing left but to die like a dog! There's your truth for you, you old devil! What do I want with your truth? All I want's a chance to take a breath—to take a living breath! What wrong have I ever done? What do I want with your truth? I want a chance to live, god-damn it! They don't let you live, and there's your truth!

Bubnov: Just see how the fellow's touched!

Luka: Mother of God! But listen, my friend. You—

Kleshch (*trembling with agitation*): All of you babbling about the truth! You, old man, trying to comfort everybody! Well, I hate everybody, and that's the truth, may it be cursed and damned forever! Do you understand? It's high time you understood! To hell with your truth! (*Runs around the corner of the house, looking back and shouting.*)

Luka: Dear, dear, dear! How upset the fellow is! Where has he gone?

Natasha: He's gone off his chump.

Bubnov: Very amusing. As good as play-acting. That happens every once in a while. He hasn't got used to life yet.

Pepel (*entering slowly from behind the house*): Greetings, friends! Well, Luka, you sly old fox, still telling your fairytales?

Luka: You should have heard how that man went off just now!

Pepel: Who, Kleshch? What's wrong with him? I met him running as if the devil was after him.

Luka: Anybody'd run if his heart was touched like that.

Pepel (*sitting down*): I don't like the fellow. Too proud and vicious. (*Imitating Kleshch.*) "Me—I'm a working man!" As though that made him better than anybody else! Go ahead and work if you like it, but why be so proud of yourself? If a person's worth depended on how much work he did, a horse would be better than any human—goes on hauling day in and day out without a word. Natasha! Your folks at home?

Natasha: They've gone to the cemetery. Then they intended to go to vespers.

Pepel: So that's why you have nothing to do for a change!

Luka (*turning thoughtfully to Bubnov*): The truth, you

say? The truth doesn't always cure a person's ailments. You can't always help a soul with the truth. Once, for instance, there was a case like this: a certain man I knew believed in a true-righteous land.

B u b n o v : In a what?

L u k a : In a true-righteous land. "There ought to be," says he, "a true-righteous land in this world. And that land," thinks he, "must be inhabited by special people—good people, people who honour each other, and who in every little thing help each other. Everything," thinks he, "must be wonderfully fine in that land." And so he thought to go in search of the true-righteous land. He was a poor man and had a hard life. Sometimes things got so bad it looked as if there was nothing left for him to do but lie down and die. But he didn't give up. He would just smile to himself and say: "That's all right, I can bear it. I'll wait just a little longer and then I'll quit this life and go to the true-righteous land." That was his only joy in life—his faith in the true-righteous land.

P e p e l : Well, did he ever get there?

B u b n o v : Where? Ho-ho!

L u k a : And then to the village where he lived—this all happened in Siberia—they exiled a very learned man, with books, and charts, and all the things that go with a man of learning. And this poor man says to the man of learning, he says: "Be so kind as to tell me where this true-righteous land lies, and how to get there." Then and there the learned one gets out his books and opens up his charts and looks and looks, but he can't find the true-righteous land anywhere. Everything is in its place, all the lands are on the charts, but the true-righteous land is nowhere to be found!

P e p e l (*in a hushed voice*): Nowhere to be found?

(*Bubnov laughs.*)

N a t a s h a : Stop laughing. Go on, grandad.

L u k a : The man can't believe it. "It must be somewhere," says he. "Take a better look, because if there's no true-righteous land, then all your charts and books are of no account." The learned one doesn't like this. "My charts," says he, "are the very best, but there's no such place as your true-righteous land." That makes the poor one furious. "What's that?" says he. "Here I've gone on living and bearing it all these years just because I was sure there was such a place, and now according to the charts it

turns out there isn't any such place! A swindle, that's what it is!" And he says to the learned one: "You wretch! It's a rascal you are, and not a man of learning!" And he gives him a whack over the ear—bang! Then another one—bang! (*A moment's pause.*) And after that he goes home and hangs himself.

(*Everyone is silent. Luka, smiling, glances at Pepel and Natasha.*)

Pepel (*under his breath*): The hell you say! A dreary sort of a story!

Natasha: He couldn't stand being fooled.

Bubnov (*sullenly*): Another fairy-tale.

Pepel: Hm. . . . So it turns out there isn't any true-righteous land!

Natasha: It's a pity about the man.

Bubnov: All made up. Ho-ho! A true-righteous land! Spun out of his head. Ho-ho! (*Withdraws from the window.*)

Luka (*nodding in the direction of Bubnov's window*): Laughing. Tck, tck, tck! (*Pause.*) Well, friends, I wish you well. I'll soon be on my way.

Pepel: Where are you going?

Luka: To the Ukraine. I heard as how they've opened up a new faith there and I want to look into it. People are always seeking, always wanting something better. May the Lord give them strength.

Pepel: Do you think they'll ever find what they're looking for?

Luka: Indeed I do. He who seeks always finds. He who wants a thing bad enough always gets it.

Natasha: If only they would! If only they would think of a better way of life!

Luka: They will. But we've got to help them, my dear. We've got to respect them for their seeking.

Natasha: How can I help them? I need help myself.

Pepel (*determinedly*): I'm going to speak to you again, Natasha. I'm going to ask you again. Here, in front of him, who knows everything. Come away with me.

Natasha: Where shall we go? To jail?

Pepel: I told you I'd give up stealing. I swear to heaven I'll give it up. And once I've said it, I'll do it. I know how to read and write. I'll work. He says we ought to go to Siberia of our own free will. Shall we? Do you think I don't hate this life?

Oh, Natasha, I understand—I see it all. I console myself by saying that people who are called honest steal more than I do. But it doesn't help. That's not what I want. I don't regret anything, and I don't believe in a conscience. But there's one thing I do believe: this is no way to live. A man ought to live better. He ought to live so that he can respect himself.

L u k a : That's the thing, my lad! May the Lord help you! May Christ show you his mercy. That's the thing: a man has to respect himself.

P e p e l : From my earliest years I've been a thief. I've never been called anything but Vasya the thief; Vasya, the son of a thief. So that's what you think of me, is it? Very well, then that's what I'll be: a thief! See? Maybe it was just for spite I became a thief. Maybe I'm a thief just because nobody ever thought of calling me anything else. But you, Natasha? If you—?

N a t a s h a (*sadly*): Somehow I don't believe what anybody says. And I'm uneasy today. I have a sinking feeling, as if something was going to happen. You shouldn't have brought this up today, Vasya.

P e p e l : But when? This isn't the first time I've said it.

N a t a s h a : Why should I go with you? As for loving you—I can't say I love you so much. Sometimes I like you, and then again I just can't stand the sight of you. I don't suppose I love you. When you love a person you can't see the bad in him. But I see it in you.

P e p e l : Don't be afraid. I'll teach you to love me. You just say the word. I've had my eye on you for more than a year now, and I see you're a serious, upright girl, one who can be depended on. I've fallen hard for you, Natasha.

(Vasilisa appears in the window in all her finery and stands listening, half-hidden by the window-frame.)

N a t a s h a : You've fallen for me—and what about my sister?

P e p e l (*uneasy*): Well, what about her? There are lots like her.

L u k a : Don't you think about that, my dear. When there's no bread, a person'll eat grass.

P e p e l (*moodily*): Take pity on me. This is no life. A dog's life, with no joy in it. It's like living in a bog where everything you snatch at gives way because it's rotten. That sister of yours—I thought she was different. If she hadn't been so greedy for

money I'd have done anything for her sake. If she'd been all mine. But she wanted something else—money. And a free rein. A free rein to live a wanton life. She couldn't help me. But you—you're like a young fir-tree that bends but doesn't break.

L u k a : Take my advice and marry him, my girl. He's not a bad chap. You just keep reminding him that he's good—don't let him forget it. He'll believe you. You just say to him over and over again: "You're a good man, Vasya, and don't you forget it." Think, my dear: what other way out is there for you? That sister of yours is a wicked beast. And as for her husband—the old man is worse than any words can say, and so is this whole life here. What other way out is there? And he's a strong lad.

N a t a s h a : There's no other way out for me. I know. I've thought about it. Only—I don't believe anybody. But still, there's no other way out.

P e p e l : Yes, there is, but I won't let you take that path. I'd rather kill you.

N a t a s h a (*smiling*): I'm not your wife yet, but here you are ready to kill me.

P e p e l (*taking her in his arms*): Forget it, Natasha! That's how it's got to be.

N a t a s h a (*nestling against him*): I must tell you one thing, Vasya, and I swear it before God. The first time you lift your hand against me or do me any other wrong I'll not spare myself. I'll either kill myself or—

P e p e l : May my hand wither and drop off if ever I lift it against you!

L u k a : Don't worry, dearie, he needs you worse'n you do him.

V a s i l i s a (*from the window*): So the match is made! From now on it's love, honour and obey!

N a t a s h a : They've come back! My God! They've seen us! Ah, Vasya!

P e p e l : What are you scared of? Nobody'll dare touch you now!

V a s i l i s a : Don't worry, Natasha, he won't beat you. He can no more beat you than love you. I know!

L u k a (*under his breath*): That woman! A snake if there ever was one!

V a s i l i s a : He just knows how to make pretty speeches.

K o s t y l y o v (*entering*): Natasha! What are you doing here, you lazy-bones? Spreading gossip? Complaining about your rela-

tives? And you haven't got the samovar ready? Haven't set the table?

Natasha (*going out*): But you intended going to church.

Kostylyov: It's none of your business what we intended doing. See that you do what you're told to, what you're ordered to.

Pepel: Hold your tongue! She's not a servant to you any more! Natasha, don't go! Don't do anything for them!

Natasha: Don't tell me what I'm to do. Your time hasn't come yet! (*Goes out.*)

Pepel (*to Kostylyov*): Leave her alone: You've had your way with her long enough. She's mine now.

Kostylyov: Yours? When did you buy her? How much did you pay?

(*Vasilisa laughs.*)

Luka: Go away, Vasya.

Pepel: Take care, or you'll be laughing on the other side of your face!

Vasilisa: Aren't I scared, just! Frightened to death!

Luka: Go away, Vasya! Can't you see she's just egging you on, trying to get your dander up?

Pepel: Ah.... Oh yes. She's lying. You're lying! You won't have things the way you want them!

Vasilisa: And I won't have them the way I *don't* want them, Vasya!

Pepel (*shaking his fist at her*): We'll see! (*He goes out.*)

Vasilisa (*disappearing from the window*): I'll see you have a proper wedding!

Kostylyov (*going over to Luka*): What are you doing here, old man?

Luka: Nothing, old man.

Kostylyov: They say you're going to leave us?

Luka: High time.

Kostylyov: Where are you going?

Luka: To follow my nose.

Kostylyov: Like the tramp you are. Makes you uneasy to stay in one place very long, eh?

Luka: A rolling stone gathers no moss, as the saying goes.

Kostylyov: That's said about a stone, but a person ought to settle in one place. People aren't supposed to live like roaches—scuttling here and there and everywhere. A person ought to

make himself at home in some place and not be a stranger everywhere.

L u k a : And what if a person's at home everywhere?

K o s t y l y o v : That means he's a tramp and a useless creature. There has to be some use got out of a person. He ought to work.

L u k a : Think of that, now!

K o s t y l y o v : Yes, he ought. What's a stranger? A stranger's a strange person, one who isn't like others. If he's a pilgrim with knowledge—that is, if he's learned things—things nobody cares to know—not even if it's the truth he's learned, because—well, people don't always want to know the truth—let him keep it to himself. If he's a true pilgrim, he'll hold his tongue, or else talk so that nobody knows what he's talking about. And he shouldn't want to change things, or interfere in anything, or upset people to no good purpose. It's none of his business how people live. It's for him to lead a pious life. He ought to live in a cave in the forest where nobody can see him. He has no right to mix in people's affairs, trying to tell them what's right and what's wrong. But he ought to pray for everybody—for all our worldly sins—for yours and mine and everybody else's. That's why he renounces the vanities of this world—so he can pray. (*Pause.*) But you—what kind of a pilgrim are you? You haven't even got a passport. A respectable person ought to have a passport. All respectable human beings have got passports. . . .

L u k a : Some of us are humans, some are just beings.

K o s t y l y o v : None of your cleverness, now. None of your riddles. I guess I'm as smart as you are. What's that you're saying—humans and beings?

L u k a : There's no riddle here. I'm just saying as there's barren soil, and there's fertile soil, and whatever you sow on fertile soil is bound to bear fruit. That's all.

K o s t y l y o v : Well, what of it?

L u k a : Take you, for example. If the Lord God himself should say to you: "Mikhail! Be a human!" it wouldn't make any difference at all. You'd just keep right on being what you are.

K o s t y l y o v : Hm. Listen, my wife's uncle, he's a policeman. If I—

V a s i l i s a (*coming in*): Tea's ready, Mikhail Ivanovich.

K o s t y l y o v (*to Luka*): Get out of here. Don't let me catch you in my house again!

Vasilisa: You'd better clear out, old man! You've got a long tongue. Who knows but what you're an escaped convict.

Kostilyov: Get out of here this very day, or I'll—

Luka: Call your uncle? Go ahead and call him. Tell him you've caught an escaped convict. Maybe the uncle will get a reward—three kopeks or so.

Bubnov (*at the window*): Selling something? What's that for three kopeks?

Luka: They're threatening to sell me.

Vasilisa (*to her husband*): Come along.

Bubnov: For three kopeks? Watch out, old man. They'll sell you for half a kopek!

Kostilyov (*to Bubnov*): So you've crawled out? Like a goblin from under the stove. (*Goes out with his wife.*)

Vasilisa: How many thieves and rascals there are in the world!

Luka: May you enjoy your tea!

Vasilisa (*turning around*): Hold your tongue, you shrivelled mushroom!

(*She and her husband disappear around the corner of the house.*)

Luka: I'll be leaving tonight.

Bubnov: That's good. It's always well to leave in good time.

Luka: A truer word was never spoke.

Bubnov: I know what I'm saying. I probably escaped jail by leaving in time.

Luka: Did you, now?

Bubnov: Yes, I did. Here's how it was: my wife got mixed up with a furrier, an able master—good at turning dog pelts into racoon. Cats, too—into kangaroos, or muskrats or anything else. A smart chap. It was with him my wife got mixed up, and they clung so tight to each other I had to look sharp so they didn't poison me or get rid of me in some other way. Sometimes I'd beat my wife; then the furrier'd beat me. He was a fierce fighter. Once he pulled half my beard out and broke a rib. I used to lose my temper, too. One day I lammed my wife over the head with an iron poker, and a big war was on. But I see nothing will come of it—they're sure to get me—so I makes up my mind to bump off the wife before she bumps off me. I had it all thought out, but I caught myself in time and went away.

L u k a : Good for you—leave them alone to turn cats into muskrats as much as they like.

B u b n o v : But the shop belonged to the wife, and I got left in the state you see me in now. Truth to tell, I'd have drunk up the shop. It's the drink that makes me—

L u k a : The drink, eh?

B u b n o v : I'm a ferocious drinker. Once I go on a jag, I drink up everything but my own hide. And I'm lazy. You wouldn't believe how I hate to work!

(Satin and the Actor come in. They are arguing.)

S a t i n : Nonsense! You won't go, you know you won't. You're just fooling yourself. Old man! What twaddle have you been pouring into this fellow's ear?

A c t o r : That's a lie! Grandad, tell him he's lying. I *will* go. I worked today—swept the street. And I haven't had a single drink. Think of that! Here they are—my thirty kopeks, and I'm sober!

S a t i n : Idiotic. Here, give me that money. I'll drink it up, or else lose it in a card game.

A c t o r : Hands off! That goes towards buying my ticket.

L u k a *(to Satin)*: Why should you be wanting to set him off the right path?

S a t i n : "Tell me, O wizard, beloved of the gods, just what is the fate that the future conceals?" I've been cleaned out, brother! Lost all I had! But there's still hope for the world, grandad; there's cleverer sharks than me left.

L u k a : You're a gay fellow, Konstantin, and a pleasant one.

B u b n o v : Actor! Come here!

(The Actor goes over to the window and stoops down to talk to Bubnov in a low voice.)

S a t i n : I was amusing when I was young. Nice to recall those times. A rakish lad, I was. Danced superbly, acted on the stage, was always making people laugh. A charming young fellow.

L u k a : And how did you get switched off the track, eh?

S a t i n : You're an inquisitive creature, old man. You'd like to know everything, wouldn't you? What for?

L u k a : I'd like to understand this human business. But when I look at you, I don't understand a thing. You're a good fellow, Konstantin, and a clever one, and yet—

Satin: It was jail did it, grandad. I spent four years and seven months in jail, and nobody will have you after a jail sentence.

Luka: Oho! And what were you put in jail for?

Satin: For killing a rascal. I killed him in a burst of wrath and indignation. It was in jail I learned to play cards—and other things.

Luka: Did you kill him on account of a woman?

Satin: On account of my own sister. But don't you go prying. I don't like to be asked questions. And that all happened long, long ago. My sister died. Nine years ago. She was a lovely sister.

Luka: You don't take life so hard. You should have heard that locksmith howl a while back! Ai-i-i!

Satin: Kleshch?

Luka: Him. "No work!" he shouted. "No nothing!"

Satin: He'll get used to it in time. Well, what am I to do with myself now?

Luka (*softly*): Look. Here he comes.

(*Kleshch comes in slowly, with hanging head.*)

Satin: Hey, you widower! What've you got your nose between your knees for? What're you thinking about?

Kleshch: I'm thinking about what I'm going to do. No tools. They all went for the funeral.

Satin: Take my advice and don't do anything. Just be a burden to the world.

Kleshch: It's all right for you to talk, but I have shame.

Satin: Get rid of it. People aren't ashamed to have you lead a dog's life. Think it over. You stop working, I stop working, hundreds and thousands of others—everybody does the same. See? We all stop working. Nobody will raise a finger to do a thing! What will happen then?

Kleshch: We'll all die of starvation.

Luka (*to Satin*): You should join the Runaways, with such ideas. There's a kind of people called Runaways.*

Satin: I know. They're not such fools, grandad.

(*From the window of the Kostylyovs' flat can be heard the cries of Natasha: "Stop! Oh, stop! What have I done?"*)

* A religious sect.—Tr.

L u k a (*anxiously*): Natasha? Is it her screaming like that?

(*From the Kostylyovs' flat comes a crashing of dishes, a murmur of voices, and the shrill cries of Kostylyov: "You bitch! You whore!"*)

V a s i l i s a : Stop! Wait! I'll show her! Take that! And that!

N a t a s h a : They're killing me! Killing me!

S a t i n (*shouting at the window*): Hey, you in there!

L u k a (*rushing hither and thither*): Vasya! It's Vasya we want here! O Lord! Good people! Brothers!

A c t o r (*running off*): Here, I'll go and get him.

B u b n o v : They beat her all the time now.

S a t i n : Come, old man. We'll be witnesses.

L u k a (*following Satin*): A poor sort of witness I make. That's not for me. It's Vasya we need, and need him quick.

N a t a s h a : Sister! Sister! Ah-h-h!

B u b n o v : They've gagged her. I'll go and have a look.

(*The commotion in the Kostylyovs' flat dies away as the people evidently move out into the hall. The old man is heard to cry "Stop!" A door slams, and this chops off the noise like the blow of an axe. Silence on the stage. Spring twilight. Kleshch is sitting on the overturned sledge with an air of detachment, rubbing his hands tensely. He mutters something unintelligible which focuses into the following lines: "But how? A man's got to live, hasn't he?" [In a loud voice]: "A roof! I need a roof over my head! I haven't got a roof! I haven't got anything! A man's alone—all alone. That's where the trouble lies. No one to help him." He goes off slowly, all bent over. An ominous silence reigns for a few seconds. Then from off stage comes a vague murmur which grows into chaotic sound as it draws nearer. Separate voices can be distinguished.*)

V a s i l i s a : I'm her sister! Let me at her!

K o s t y l y o v : You have no right.

V a s i l i s a : Jail-bird!

S a t i n : Call Vasya! Hurry! Beat him, Zob!

(*A police whistle blows.*)

T a t a r (*running on, his right arm in a sling*): What kind of law—to kill in day-time.

K r i v o i Z o b (*followed by Medvedev*): Hah! I gave him a good one!

M e d v e d e v : You—how dare you fight?

T a t a r : And you? What duty you have?

M e d v e d e v (*running after the Tatar*): Stop! Give me back my whistle!

K o s t y l y o v (*running on*): Abram! Seize him! He killed—

(From behind the corner come Kvashnya and Nastya supporting the dishevelled Natasha between them. Satin walks backward, pushing off Vasilisa who is trying to get at her sister. Alyoshka leaps about her like an imp, whistling in her ear, shouting, howling. They are followed by a small and ragged crowd.)

S a t i n (*to Vasilisa*): What's the idea, you damned slut?

V a s i l i s a : Get away, jail-bird! It may cost me my life, but I'll tear her to pieces!

K v a s h n y a (*leading Natasha away*): Enough, Vasilisa! Have some shame! You're behaving like a brute.

M e d v e d e v (*seizing Satin*): Here you are! Caught at last!

S a t i n : Lam into them, Zob. Vasya! Vasya!

(They gather in a crowd near the passage between the brick wall and the house. Natasha is led over and seated on the pile of boards to the right.)

P e p e l (*coming suddenly through the passage and silently pushing everybody aside with strong vigorous movements*): Where's Natasha? You—

K o s t y l y o v (*hiding behind the house*): Abram! Catch Vasya! Brothers, help catch Vasya! Thief! Robber!

P e p e l : You old fornicator!

(With a great sweep of his arm he strikes the old man, who falls in such a way that only his head and shoulders can be seen from behind the corner of the house. Pepel rushes over to Natasha.)

V a s i l i s a : Thrash Vasya, fellows! Thrash the thief!

M e d v e d e v (*shouting to Satin*): Keep out of this! It's a family affair! They're all relatives! You don't belong here!

P e p e l : What is it? What has she done, stabbed you?

K v a s h n y a : Just look what the brutes have done! Scalded her legs with boiling water!

N a s t y a : Upset the samovar on her!

T a t a r : Maybe accident. Have to know for sure. Mustn't make mistake.

N a t a s h a (*almost fainting*): Vasya, take me away. Hide me.

V a s i l i s a : My God! Look here! He's dead! Killed!

(Everyone rushes to the passage where Kostylyov is lying. Bubnov separates himself from the crowd and goes over to Vasya Pepel.)

B u b n o v (*in a low voice*): Vasya! The old man—he's done for.

P e p e l (*looks at him without comprehending*): Call an ambulance. We'll have to take her to the hospital. I'll get even with them for this!

B u b n o v : I'm saying that somebody's finished off the old man.

(The noise on the stage goes out like a fire flooded with water. Separate remarks are passed in hushed tones: "Really?" "That's bad." "Hm." "Let's get away from here." "What the hell!" "Watch out!" "Beat it before the police come." The crowd dwindles. Bubnov, the Tatar, Nastya and Kvashnya rush over to the body of Kostylyov.)

V a s i l i s a (*rising from the ground and crying triumphant-ly*): Murdered! There's the one who murdered my husband! Vasya did it! I saw it myself! I saw it, friends! Well, Vasya? So the police are coming for you?

P e p e l (*leaving Natasha's side*): Let me pass. Out of my way! (*Takes a look at the old man, then turns to Vasilisa.*) Well, are you satisfied? (*Touches the body with his foot.*) Done for, the cur. So you got what you wanted. Humph! Maybe I ought to bump you off too. (*Throws himself at her. Satin and Krivoi Zob quickly intercede. Vasilisa runs into the passage.*)

S a t i n : Think what you're doing!

K r i v o i Z o b : Take your time!

V a s i l i s a (*reappearing*): Well, friend Vasya, there's no escaping your fate. The police! Abram, blow your whistle!

M e d v e d e v : The devils snatched my whistle away.

A l y o s h k a : Here it is! (*He gives a blow. Medvedev runs after him.*)

Satin (*leading Pepel over to Natasha*): Don't let it trouble you, Vasya. You killed him in a fight. That's nothing. That won't cost you dear.

Vasilisa: Hold Vasya! He killed him! I saw him do it!

Satin: I had a whack at him three or four times myself. It didn't take much to finish him off. I'll be a witness, Vasya.

Pepel: I don't want to slip out of it. I want to drag Vasilisa into it. And I will, so help me God! That's what she wanted. She talked me into killing her husband. She talked me into it.

Natasha (*suddenly, in a loud voice*): Ah! . . . Now I see! So that's how it is, Vasya! Oh, good people, they did it together! They planned it all! Very well, Vasya! So that's why you talked to me tonight? So she could hear? Good people, she lives with him. You all know that. Everybody knows it. They did it together. She—she talked him into killing her husband. He stood in their way. And I stood in their way. That's why they've made a cripple of me.

Pepel: Natasha! What are you talking about!

Satin: Hm, devil take it!

Vasilisa: Liar! She's lying! I—he's the one! Vasya killed him!

Natasha: They did it together! Curse you! Both of you!

Satin: It's a game. Watch out, Vasya! They'll have a rope round your neck before you know it!

Krivoi Zob: Can't make head or tail out of it! A fine business!

Pepel: Natasha! Do you really. . . . Are you serious? . . . How can you think that I . . . with her. . . .

Satin: Think what you're saying Natasha!

Vasilisa (*from the passage*): They've murdered my husband, sir. Vasya Pepel, the thief—he did it. I saw him, Inspector. Everybody saw him.

Natasha (*tossing about in a half-conscious state*): Good people, it was my sister and Vasya Pepel who did it! Listen to me, Inspector. It was my sister—she showed him how. She talked him into it. He's her lover. There he is, damn his soul! They killed him! Take them both. Take them to jail! And take me, too! Put me in jail! For the love of Christ, put me in jail!

ACT IV

The scene is the same as in Act I, except that the partition which once formed Pepel's room has been taken down and Kleshch's anvil is gone. The Tatar tosses and moans on a bunk in the corner which was Pepel's room. Kleshch sits at the table repairing an accordion, occasionally trying the keys. At the other end of the table Satin, the Baron and Nastya are sitting. There is a bottle of vodka, three bottles of beer and some black bread in front of them. The Actor is moving about and coughing on top of the stove. Night. The stage is lighted by a lamp standing in the centre of the table. The wind is blowing outside.

Kleshch: He disappeared in all the hubbub.

Baron: Separated himself from the police like smoke from fire.

Satin: Like the sinful from the righteous.

Nastya: He was a good old man. But you—you're not humans. You're dung!

Baron (*drinking*): To your health, my fine lady!

Satin: A queer bird. Nastya, here, she fell in love with him.

Nastya: Yes, I fell in love with him. That's the truth. He saw everything and understood everything.

Satin (*laughing*): He was like mush for the toothless.

Baron (*laughing*): Like a plaster for boils.

Kleshch: He had pity, but you—you don't know what pity is.

Satin: What good would my pity do you?

Kleshch: I don't mean you. You do, well, not exactly pity folk, but at least spare their feelings.

Tatar (*sitting down on one of the bunks and rocking his sore arm like a baby*): He was good old man. He know law of soul. Who know law of soul—he good. Who lost law—he lost himself.

Baron: What law, Asan?

Tatar: Different law. You know what.

Baron: Next!

Tatar: Don't hurt people. That's law.

Satin: That's called: "Penal Code for Criminals and Miscreants."

Baron: And then there's that "Statutes of Penalties Imposed by Justices of the Peace."

Tatar: Koran is law. Your Koran also law. Every soul must have Koran, yes!

Kleshch (*trying out the accordion*): Wheezes, damn it! What the Tatar says is right. People ought to live according to the law. According to the Bible.

Satin: Why don't you?

Baron: Just try it.

Tatar: Mohammed gave Koran, Mohammed said: here—the law! Do what it say here. Then come time—Koran too little. New time, new law. Every new time give new law.

Satin: Right you are. Now the time's come for the "Penal Code." A good strong law. It'll take a lot of time to wear out that law.

Nastya (*banging a glass on the table*): Why, oh why should I go on living here with you all? I'll go away—anywhere—to the ends of the earth!

Baron: Barefoot, my fine lady?

Nastya: Naked! Crawling on all fours!

Baron: A sight for sore eyes, my fine lady! Fancy that! On all fours!

Nastya: That's how I'll go. I'll go any way at all, just to get rid of the sight of you. If you only knew how sick I am of everything! Of everybody and everything!

Satin: Take the Actor with you when you go. He's planning the same trip. He just found out that half a mile from the end of the earth there's a hospital for organons.

Actor (*thrusting his head over the edge of the bunk on top of the stove*): Organisms, fool!

Satin: For organons poisoned by alcohol.

Actor: Oh, he's going, have no fear. He's going! You'll see!

Baron: Just who is he, my good sir?

Actor: Me!

Baron: Merci, votary of the goddess—what's her name? Goddess of the drama, tragedy. What d'you call her?

Actor: Muse, you dolt! She's not a goddess, but a muse.

Satin: Lachesis? Hera? Aphrodite? Atropos? The devil only knows which. It's all the doings of that old man, Baron. He got the Actor all stirred up.

Baron: The old man's crazy.

Actor: Ignoramuses! Barbarians! Mel-po-me-ne! Oh, he'll go away, you can be sure of that! Heartless creatures! "Gorge yourselves, benighted minds!..." That's from Béranger. He'll find a place for himself where there is no ... no....

Baron: No nothing, my good sir.

Actor: That's it. No nothing. "That yawning hole shall be my grave. This wasted frame, no hand can save." And why should you go on living? Why, oh why?

Baron: Hey you—"Edmund Kean, or Genius and Dissipation." Stop shouting!

Actor: I'll shout all I want to!

Nastya (*raising her head from the table and waving her hands*): Go on shouting. Make them listen.

Baron: What's the sense of it, my fine lady?

Satin: Leave them alone, Baron! To hell with them! Let them yell! They'll split their heads open. The important thing is: don't interfere with people, as the old man said. It was him, like a cake of yeast, put the ferment in our fellow lodgers.

Kleshch: He lured them to enchanting places, then slipped away without showing them the road.

Baron: The old man was a faker.

Nastya: You're a faker yourself!

Baron: Shut up, my fine lady!

Kleshch: As for the truth—the old man had no use for it. He was very set against the truth, and so he should be. When you come to think of it, what talk of truth can there be? Life's hard enough without it. Take the Tatar here—got his arm smashed at work and now he'll have to chop it off. There's your truth for you!

Satin (*pounding on the table*): Silence! You're a lot of cattle! Blockheads! Shut up about the old man! (*More calmly.*) And you're the worst of them, Baron. You don't understand anything. And you lie. The old man wasn't a faker. What is the truth? Man!—that's the truth. He knew this, but you don't. Your heads are like bricks. I understand him. Of course, he lied, but he did it out of pity for you, devil take you! Lots of people lie out of pity for their brothers. I know. I've read books. They lie beautifully, with inspiration, stirring you up. There are lies that console, that reconcile a person to his lot. Lies find an excuse for the weight that smashed the worker's arm; lies blame a man for starving to death. I know your lies! Only those who

are faint-hearted or live at other people's expense have need of lies. Some people are supported by lies, others hide behind them. But the person who is his own boss—the person who is independent and doesn't suck other people's blood—what need has he of lies? Lies are the religion of slaves and bosses! Truth is the god of the free man!

Baron: Bravo! Well said! I agree with everything you say! You talk like . . . like a respectable gentleman.

Satin: Why shouldn't a cheat sometimes talk like a respectable gentleman, if your respectable gentlemen so often talk like cheats? There are lots of things I've forgotten, but I still remember a thing or two. That old man was a smart fellow. He acted on me like acid on an old, dirty coin. Let's drink to his health! Fill my glass.

(Nastya fills Satin's glass with beer and hands it to him.)

Satin *(with a short laugh)*: The old man lives by his own wits. He sees everything with his own eyes. One day I said to him, "Grandad, what do people live for?" *(Imitating the voice and manners of Luka.)* "They live to make life better, my friend. Now, for instance, let's say we have some carpenters—junk, all of them. And then from among them is born one carpenter—a carpenter the likes of whom the earth has never seen; outshines all the others, he does, and none can even hold a candle to him. On all carpentering he leaves his own mark, so that craft moves forward twenty years in one jump. The same it is with all the others—tinsmiths, cobblers, all the working folk, and all the peasants too—and even the gentlefolk. All of them live to make life better. Each thinking it's for himself he's living, but really he lives to make life better. For a hundred years they live—maybe even for more, and all to make life better."

(Nastya looks intently at Satin. Kleshch, too, stops working on the accordion and listens. The Baron drops his head on his chest and softly drums on the table. The Actor quietly lets himself down off the stove on to one of the bunks.)

Satin: "All of them, my good friend, every last one of them, lives to make life better," says the old man. We ought to be considerate of one another. For you see, it's not for us to know who a person is, and why he was born, and what he can do. Maybe he was born for our good fortune, to be some great help

to us. And particular it's the children we must respect—the little ones. It's freedom they need, the little ones. We musn't interfere with them; we must be considerate of them."

(Laughs softly. Pause.)

Baron *(meditatively)*: Hm. To make life better? That reminds me of my family—an old family, dating back to Catherine the Great. Nobles. Warriors. Came from France. Served the tsar and kept climbing up and up. During the reign of Nicholas I, my grandfather, Gustave Débile, held high office. Wealth, hundreds of serfs, horses, servants—

Nastya: Liar! That's all bunk!

Baron *(jumping up)*: Wha-at?

Nastya: That's all humbug!

Baron *(shouting)*: A mansion in Moscow! A mansion in St. Petersburg! Carriages with our coat of arms on them!

(Kleshch takes up his accordion and walks off to one side, from where he observes the scene.)

Nastya: Claptrap!

Baron: Shut up! Dozens of lackeys, I'm telling you!

Nastya *(enjoying it)*: Popycock!

Baron: I'll kill you!

Nastya *(about to run away)*: You never had a carriage!

Satin: Drop it, Nastya! Don't make him mad.

Baron: Just wait, you scum! My grandfather—

Nastya: You never had a grandfather! You never had anything!

(Satin laughs.)

Baron *(sinks down on a bench, weak with fury)*: Satin, tell her—that bitch—or are you laughing too? Don't you believe it either? *(Shouting in despair, banging the table with his fists.)* It's all true, god-damn you!

Nastya *(triumphantly)*: Aha! Howling! See what it's like when nobody believes you?

Kleshch *(returning to the table)*: I was sure there'd be a fight.

Tatar: Ah, stupid people! Very bad!

Baron: I ... I won't have people making fun of me! I have ... I can prove it. I have papers, you devils!

Satin: Forget them! And forget about your grandfather's carriages. They won't get you very far, those bygone carriages.

Baron: How dares she!

Nastya (*mockingly*): Hear that? How dares she!

Satin: Well, she does. And why is she any worse than you are? Even if she never had any carriages, or grandfathers, or even a mother and father.

Baron (*more composed*): Devil take you! You always take things calmly. I'm afraid I have no character.

Satin: Get one. It'll come in handy. (*Pause.*) Nastya, do you ever go to the hospital?

Nastya: What for?

Satin: To see Natasha.

Nastya: A little late, aren't you? She left the hospital long ago. Left it and disappeared. Gone without leaving a trace.

Satin: That means—all gone.

Kleshch: I wonder who'll give it to the other harder: Vasya to Vasilisa, or the other way round.

Nastya: Vasilisa will wriggle out of it somehow. She's foxy. But they'll send Vasya to hard labour in Siberia.

Satin: Oh no, he'll only get jail for killing in a fight.

Nastya: Too bad. They ought to send him away—to send all of you away. Sweep you out like garbage. Throw you on some dump.

Satin (*surprised*): What's that you're saying? Have you gone clean off your chump?

Baron: I'll give her a smack on the ear. What nerve!

Nastya: Go ahead and try. Just touch me!

Baron: I'll try it, never fear!

Satin: Stop it! Don't touch her. You mustn't hurt people. I can't get that old man out of my head. (*Laughs.*) You mustn't hurt people! But what if they hurt me—hurt me so bad I'll never get over it? What then? Am I supposed to forgive them? Never! Nobody!

Baron (*to Nastya*): Don't forget you're not my equal! You're . . . you're the scum of the earth!

Nastya: Ugh, you louse! You live on me like a worm on an apple.

(*Burst of laughter from the men.*)

Kleshch: You little fool! An apple!

Baron: How can anybody get mad at her? She's an idiot.

N a s t y a : Laughing, are you? Fooling yourself. You don't really think it's funny.

A c t o r (*sullenly*): Give it to them!

N a s t y a : If only I could! I'd ... I'd ... (*Picks up a cup and smashes it on the floor.*) That's what I'd do to you!

T a t a r : Why break dishes? Eh ... bad woman!

B a r o n (*getting up*): Now I'll teach her some manners!

N a s t y a (*running toward the door*): You can go to hell!

S a t i n (*calling after her*): Enough of this! Who are you scaring? What's it all about, anyway?

N a s t y a : Wolves! I hope you choke! Wolves!

A c t o r (*sullenly*): Amen!

T a t a r : O-o-o! Bad woman—Russian woman. Nervy. Too free. Tatar woman not like that. Tatar woman knows law.

K l e s h c h : She needs a good shaking.

B a r o n : The slut!

K l e s h c h (*trying out the accordion*): Good. But the lad doesn't come for it. He's going to the dogs fast.

S a t i n : Here, have a drink.

K l e s h c h : Thanks. Time to turn in.

S a t i n : Getting used to us?

K l e s h c h (*drinks, then goes over to a bunk in the corner*): I suppose so. It turns out there are human beings everywhere. At first you don't notice it, then you have a better look and there they are—human beings.

(The Tatar spreads a cloth of some sort on his bed, kneels on it and begins to pray.)

B a r o n (*pointing to the Tatar and speaking to Satin*): Look at that.

S a t i n : Leave him alone. He's a good fellow. Don't disturb him. (*Laughs.*) Why should I be feeling so kind-hearted today?

B a r o n : You always get kind-hearted when you've had a drink—and clever, too.

S a t i n : When I'm drunk everything looks rosy. He's praying? Fine. A person can be a believer or not, just as he pleases. That's his business. A person's free to choose. He pays for everything himself: for believing, for not believing, for loving, for being clever. A person pays for everything himself, and that's why he's free. Man—there's your truth! What's a man? Not you, nor me, nor him. Oh no! But you and me and him and the old man, and Napoleon, and Mohammed—all in one! (*Drawing the*

figure of a man in the air.) Comprehend? That's tremendous! It includes all beginnings and all endings. All things are part of Man; all things are for Man. Only Man exists; the rest is merely the work of his hands and his mind. How marvellous is Man! How proud the word rings—MAN! A man should be respected. Not pitied—pity is degrading. Respected! Baron, let's drink to Man! (*Stands up.*) How good to feel oneself a Man! Here am I—ex-convict, murderer, card-sharper—all of that! When I go down the street people take me for a thief. They step aside and steal furtive glances at me. Often they call me a rascal, a faker! Work, they say! Work? What for? To fill my belly? (*Laughs.*) I've always despised people who think too much about their bellies. The belly isn't the main thing, Baron. Indeed it isn't. Man is superior to that. Man is superior to his belly!

Baron (*shaking his head*): Good for you—thinking things out like this. It must warm your heart. As for me—I can't. I don't know how. (*Glancing about and speaking under his breath.*) Sometimes I'm afraid. Understand? Scared. I keep thinking—what'll happen next?

Satin (*walking up and down*): Nonsense! What should a man fear?

Baron: As long as I can remember there's been a sort of fog in my head. I never could understand anything. I ... it's strange, but ... it seems to me I've just been changing my clothes all my life. What for? Can't make it out. First I was a student—wore the uniform of the Institute for Sons of the Nobility. What did they teach me there? Can't remember. Got married. Put on a dress suit, then a dressing-gown. But the wife I chose was a bad one. Why did I marry her? Can't remember. I squandered all my means—wore some kind of a grey jacket and faded pants. How did I lose everything? Can't remember. Worked in a government office—uniform again, cap with a badge on it. Embezzled government money. They put me in convict clothes. After that I donned these rags. And that's all. Like in a dream, isn't it? It's even funny.

Satin: Not very. More stupid than funny.

Baron: It is. I, too, think it's stupid. After all, I must have been born for something.

Satin (*with a short laugh*): You must have. "Man is born to make life better!" (*Nodding his head.*) Good words.

Baron: Drat that Nastya! Where did she run off to? I'll go and have a look. After all, she's—(*Goes out. Pause.*)

Actor: Tatar! (*Pause.*) Asan!

(*The Tatar turns his head.*)

Actor: Pray for me.

Tatar: What?

Actor (*softly*): Say a prayer for me.

Tatar (*after a pause*): Say your own prayers.

Actor (*quickly climbs down off the stove, goes over to the table, pours himself out a glass of vodka with shaking hands, swallows it down, almost runs out into the passage*): I'm off!

Satin: Hey, you! Sicambri! Where are you going?

(*Whistles. Bubnov and Medvedev come in, the latter wearing a woman's quilted jacket. Both are slightly drunk. In one hand Bubnov is carrying a string of pretzels, in the other a couple of smoked fish. One bottle of vodka is thrust under his arm, another, sticks out of the pocket of his coat.*)

Medvedev: A camel is something like a donkey, only without ears.

Bubnov: You're something like a donkey yourself.

Medvedev: A camel doesn't have any ears at all. He hears with his nose.

Bubnov (*to Satin*): So here you are, friend! I searched the pubs for you. Take this bottle. All my hands are busy.

Satin: Put those pretzels on the table and one of your hands will be free.

Bubnov: Quite right. Just look at him. He's a smart fellow, ain't he?

Medvedev: All cheats are smart. I know! They couldn't get on if they weren't. A good fellow can be stupid, but a bad fellow has got to be smart. But about that camel, you're all wrong. It's a beast of burden. No horns, no teeth—

Bubnov: Where's everybody? How is it nobody's here? Hey, crawl out! The treat's on me! Who's that in the corner?

Satin: How long will it take you to drink up your last kopek, you old scarecrow?

Bubnov: Not long. This time the capital I saved up wasn't very big. Zob! Where's Zob?

Kleshch (*coming over to the table*): He's gone.

Bubnov: Gr-r-r! You bulldog, you! Grrr! Woof! Woof! No barking! No grumbling! Drink, you dunce. Don't stand there

hanging your head! I'm treating tonight! And how I love it! If I was rich, I'd open up a pub and serve drinks free of charge! Honest to God! With music and a chorus for sure. Come on in, everybody! Eat, drink, and listen to the songs for your soul's ease! No money? Here you are—a free pub! As for you, Satin, I'd... I'd give you half my money besides! That's what I'd do!

Satin: Give me all of it—this very minute!

Bubnov: Everything I have? This very minute? Hah! Here you are—a ruble ... another ... twenty kopeks ... chicken feed....

Satin: That's enough. It'll be safer with me. I'll gamble with it.

Medvedev: I'm a witness that the money was given out for safe keeping. How much?

Bubnov: You? You're a camel. We don't need witnesses.

Alyoshka (*enters barefoot*): Fellows! I got my feet wet!

Bubnov: Come on and get your throat wet! That's all you need. Your singing and playing is all very good, my lad. But your drinking—that's no good. That's harmful, brother. Drinking's harmful.

Alyoshka: You're a good example. The only time you're at all like a human being is when you're drunk. Kleshch! Is my accordion ready? (*Sings and dances.*)

Oh, if I had a mug,
As ugly as a bug,
My lady fair
Would give me the air!

I'm cold, brothers. I'm fro-o-zen!

Medvedev: Hm... May I ask who your lady fair is?

Bubnov: Leave him alone. Mind your own business. You're not a policeman now—not a policeman and not an uncle.

Alyoshka: You're just the aunt's husband.

Bubnov: One of your nieces is in jail, the other is dying.

Medvedev (*proudly*): That's a lie. She's not dying. She simply disappeared.

(*Satin laughs.*)

Bubnov: What difference does it make? Once you've lost your nieces, you're no longer an uncle.

Alyoshka: Your Excellency! Retired drummer-boy to the goat!

The dame—she's got money,
And me—I'm dead broke,
But still I'm a jolly,
A marvellous bloke!

It's damned cold in here.

(Krivoi Zob comes in. Throughout the rest of the act other figures of men and women drift in. They take their things off and lie down grumbling on the bunks.)

Krivoi Zob: What did you run away for, Bubnov?

Bubnov: Come here. Sit down and let's have a song. My favourite, eh?

Tatar: Must sleep night-time. Sing songs day-time.

Satin: That's all right, Asan. Come over here.

Tatar: What you mean, that's all right? Make noise. Make big noise when you sing songs.

Bubnov *(going over to him)*: How's the arm, Asan? Did they cut it off?

Tatar: What for? Wait. Maybe don't cut it off. Arm isn't old iron. Cut it off easy when time come.

Krivoi Zob: You're done for, Asan. No good for anything with one arm. People like us are worth as much as our arms and our backs, brother. No arm, no man. Done for. Come on, have a drink and forget it!

Kvashnya *(coming in)*: Hullo, dearies! What weather! Cold and slush! Is my policeman here?

Medvedev: Here I am!

Kvashnya: There! You've taken my jacket again! And it looks as if you'd had a nip or two, eh? What do you mean by it?

Medvedev: On the occasion of Bubnov's birthday ... and the cold ... and the slush. ...

Kvashnya: Watch your step! The slush! None of your monkey business! Come to bed!

Medvedev *(going into the kitchen)*: I really could sleep. It's high time.

Satin: Aren't you pretty strict with him?

Kvashnya: That's the only way, friend. You've got to keep a tight hold on a man like him. When I took him in to live

with me, I think to myself: I may get some good out of him, seeings as he's on the force and you're all such a bunch of rowdies and I'm a poor defenceless woman. But he starts drinking straight off. I can't be having a thing like that!

Satin: You picked a poor helpmate.

Kvashnya: There aren't any better ones. You wouldn't live with me—such a swell you are! And even if you did, it wouldn't last more than a week. And you'd gamble me away in no time—me and all my claptrap.

Satin (*laughing*): Right you are, woman. I'd gamble you away for sure.

Kvashnya: See? Alyoshka!

Alyoshka: Here I am.

Kvashnya: What's this gossip you've been spreading about me?

Alyoshka: Only the truth. There's a woman for you, I says! Simply a marvel! Ten poods of fat, bones, and muscle, and not an ounce of brains!

Kvashnya: That's a lie now. I've got a very lot of brains. But why did you say I beat that policeman of mine?

Alyoshka: I thought you gave him a beating that time you dragged him off by the hair.

Kvashnya (*laughing*): Fool! You ought to pretend not to see. Why hang out your dirty clothes for everybody to gape at? And besides, you've hurt his feelings. He's took to drink because of your gossip.

Alyoshka: Proof of the saying: even a chicken drinks.

(*Satin and Kleshch laugh.*)

Kvashnya: Ooh, what a tongue you've got! What sort of a person are you anyway, Alyoshka?

Alyoshka: The best in the world! I try my hand at anything, and follow my nose wherever it goes!

Bubnov (*beside the Tatar's bunk*): Come on! We won't give you a chance to sleep anyway! We're going to sing all night long! Zob!

Krivoi Zob: Sing? Why not?

Alyoshka: And I'll accompany you.

Satin: We'll see how.

Tatar (*smiling*): Well, shaitan Bubno, bring some wine. We drink. We have good time. We die, once upon time.

B u b n o v : Fill up his glass, Satin! Sit down, Zob! It's not much a fellow needs, friends. Here am I with a drink in me and happy as a lord! Zob, start up the song—you know, my favourite! I'm going to sing—and bawl my eyes out.

K r i v o i Z o b (*singing*):

Every morn the sun arises. . . .

B u b n o v (*joining in*):

Still my cell is filled with gloom. . . .

(*Suddenly the door bursts open.*)

B a r o n (*shouting from the doorway*): Hey, folks! Come here! Come quick! The Actor has hung himself! Out in the vacant lot!

(*Silence. All look at the Baron. Nastya appears from behind him and walks slowly, wide-eyed, towards the table.*)

S a t i n (*softly*): Tck! Spoiled the song, the fool!

C U R T A I N