

The Caucasian Chalk Circle

(1944)

by Bertolt Brecht

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CHARACTERS

DELEGATES OF THE "GALINSK"

GOAT-BREEDING KOLKHOZ:

an old peasant, a peasant woman, a young peasant, a very young worker

MEMBERS OF THE "ROSA LUX-

EMBURG" FRUIT-GROWING

KOLKHOZ: an old peasant, a peasant woman, the woman agronomist, the girl tractor driver, the wounded soldier, and other peasants and peasant women

THE EXPERT FROM THE CAPITAL.

ARKADI CHEIDZE, the singer

HIS MUSICIANS

GEORGI ABASHVILI, the governor

HIS WIFE NATELLA

THEIR SON MICHAEL

SHALVA, the aide-de-camp

ARSEN KAZBEKI, the fat prince

THE RIDER FROM THE CAPITAL

NIKO MIKADZE and MIKHA

LOLADZE, doctors

SIMON CHACHAVA, a soldier

GRUSHA VACHINADZE, a kitchen maid

THREE ARCHITECTS

BROTHER ANASTASIUS, a monk

FOUR CHAMBERMAIDS: Assya, Masha, Zulika, Fat Nina

THE NURSE

THE WOMAN COOK

THE MAN COOK

THE STABLE HAND

SERVANTS IN THE GOVERNOR'S PALACE

IRONSHIRTS AND SOLDIERS OF

THE GOVERNOR AND THE FAT PRINCE

BEGGARS AND PETITIONERS

THE OLD DAIRY MAN

TWO UPPER-CLASS LADIES

THE LANDLORD

THE HOUSE SERVANT

THE CORPORAL

BLOCKHEAD, a soldier

A PEASANT WOMAN AND HER HUSBAND

THREE PEDDLERS

LAVRENTI VACHINADZE, Grusha's brother

HIS WIFE ANIKO

THEIR HIRED HAND

THE PEASANT WOMAN, for a time Grusha's mother-in-law

HER SON YUSSUP

THE BLACKMAILER

WEDDING GUESTS

CHILDREN

AZDAK, the village scribe

SHAUVA, a policeman

A FUGITIVE, the grand duke

THE NEPHEW OF THE FAT

PRINCE

THE DOCTOR

THE INVALID

THE LAME MAN

LUDOVKA, the landlord's
daughter-in-law

A POOR OLD PEASANT WOMAN

HER BROTHER-IN-LAW IRAKLI,
a bandit

THREE KULAKS

ILLO SHUBOLADZE and SANDRO
OBOLADZE, lawyers

THE VERY OLD COUPLE

The Dispute over the Valley

Amid the ruins of a war-torn Caucasian village the members of two kolkhoz villages, for the most part women and old men, but also a few soldiers, are sitting in a circle, smoking and drinking wine. With them is an expert from the state reconstruction commission in the capital.

A PEASANT WOMAN, LEFT (*pointing*) Over there in the hills we stopped three Nazi tanks, but by that time the apple orchard was ruined.

AN OLD PEASANT, RIGHT Our beautiful dairy farm: nothing but rubble!

A GIRL TRACTOR DRIVER, LEFT I set that fire, comrade.
(*Pause*)

THE EXPERT Now listen to the minutes: Delegates of the Galinsk goat-breeding kolkhoz have come to Nukha. At the approach of Hitler's armies, the kolkhoz, by order of the authorities, drove its goats eastward. Its members are now contemplating a return to this valley. Their delegates have inspected the village and surroundings and found much destruction. (*The delegates, right, nod*) The adjoining Rosa Luxemburg kolkhoz grows fruit. (*Turning to those on the right*) Within the framework of the reconstruction program they have put in a petition that the former territory of the Galinsk kolkhoz, a valley where the grazing is poor, should be converted to orchards and vineyards. As expert for the

reconstruction commission, I call on the two kolkhoz villages to decide between them whether the Galinsk kolkhoz should return here or not.

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT First I wish to protest again against the restriction of discussion time. It has taken us delegates of the Galinsk kolkhoz three days and three nights to get here, and now we're told that only half a day has been set aside for discussion.

A WOUNDED SOLDIER, LEFT Comrade, we haven't as many villages or as much manpower or as much time as we used to.

THE GIRL TRACTOR DRIVER All pleasures have to be rationed. Tobacco and wine are rationed, and that goes for discussion too.

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT (*with a sigh*) Death to the Fascists! Very well, I'll come straight to the point and explain why we want our valley back. There are many reasons, but I'll begin with the simplest. Makinā Abakidze, bring out the goat cheese.

(*A peasant woman, right, takes an enormous cheese wrapped in a cloth from a basket. Applause and laughter*)

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT Help yourselves, comrades. Take some.

AN OLD PEASANT, LEFT (*distrustfully*) Are you trying to influence us?

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT (*amid laughter*) How can I expect to influence you, Surab, you valley-thief! Everybody knows you'll take the cheese and the valley too. (*Laughter*) All I want from you is an honest answer: do you like the taste of this cheese?

THE OLD PEASANT, LEFT The answer is yes.

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT You do, do you? (*Bitterly*) I ought to have known you wouldn't know anything about cheese.

THE OLD PEASANT, LEFT Why not? I've told you I liked it.

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT Because you can't like it. Because it's not the same as in the old days. And why isn't it the same? Because our goats don't like the new grass the way they liked the old grass. Cheese isn't cheese because grass isn't grass, that's the trouble. Kindly put that in your minutes.

THE OLD PEASANT, LEFT But your cheese is perfect.

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT It is not perfect, it's barely middling. The new pasture is no good, whatever the young folks may say. I say we can't live there. It doesn't even smell like morning in the morning.

(Several laugh)

THE EXPERT Let them laugh, they know what you mean. Comrades, why does a man love his home country? Because the bread tastes better, the sky is higher, the air is spicier, voices ring out more clearly, the ground is softer to walk on. Am I right?

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT The valley has always belonged to us.

THE SOLDIER What do you mean "always"? Nothing has always belonged to anybody. When you were young, you didn't even belong to yourself, you belonged to the princes Kazbeki.

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT The valley belongs to us by law.

THE GIRL TRACTOR DRIVER The laws will have to be reexamined in any case to see if they still apply.

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT Of course. I suppose it doesn't make any difference what kind of tree grows outside the house where you were born? Or who you've got for a neighbor? Doesn't that make any difference? Why, one of our reasons for wanting to come back is to have you near our kolkhoz, you valley-thieves. Now you can laugh again.

THE OLD PEASANT, LEFT (laughs) Then why don't you listen quietly to what your "neighbor," Kato Vachtang our agronomist, has to say about your valley?

A PEASANT WOMAN, RIGHT We haven't said half of what we've got to say about our valley. The houses aren't all gone, the foundations of the dairy are still intact.

THE EXPERT You have a right to government aid in either place—you know that.

THE PEASANT WOMAN, RIGHT Comrade expert, this isn't a matter for bargaining. I can't take your cap and give you another and say "this one is better." Maybe the other is better, but you like your own best.

THE GIRL TRACTOR DRIVER It's not the same with a piece of land as with a cap. Not in our country, comrade.

THE EXPERT Don't get excited. It's true we must regard a

piece of land largely as an implement for producing something useful, but it's equally true that we must recognize people's love for a particular piece of land. Before proceeding with the discussion, I propose that you tell the comrades from the Galinsk kolkhoz what you are planning to do with the disputed valley.

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT Agreed.

THE OLD PEASANT, LEFT Right, give Kato the floor.

THE EXPERT Comrade agronomist!

THE AGRONOMIST, LEFT (*stands up, she is in army uniform*)

Comrades, last winter, when we were partisans fighting in these hills, we talked about the possibility of vastly increasing our fruit production once the Germans were driven out. I drew up an irrigation project. By damming our mountain lake we can irrigate three hundred acres of barren ground. That will enable our kolkhoz not only to plant more fruit trees, but to put in vineyards as well. However, the project will only be worthwhile if we can include the disputed valley, now belonging to the Galinsk kolkhoz. Here are my calculations. (*She hands the expert a portfolio*)

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT Put it down in the minutes that our kolkhoz is planning to start breeding horses.

THE GIRL TRACTOR DRIVER Comrades, the project was worked out in the days and nights when we were hiding in the mountains, half the time without cartridges for the few rifles we had. Even a pencil was hard to get.

(*Applause on both sides*)

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT Our thanks to the comrades of the Rosa Luxemburg kolkhoz and to all those who fought for our country!

(*They shake hands all around and embrace*)

THE PEASANT WOMAN, LEFT Our idea was that our soldiers, our men and yours, should come home to a still more fertile country.

THE GIRL TRACTOR DRIVER As the poet Mayakovski said, "The home of the Soviet people shall also be the home of reason!"

(*The delegates right, except for the old peasant, have stood up and are studying the agronomist's sketches with the expert. Exclamations such as "Why a twenty-three-yard*

fall?"—"The rock here will be blasted."—"All they really need is concrete and dynamite!"—"They'll make the water come down here; mighty clever!"

A VERY YOUNG WORKER, RIGHT (to the old peasant, right) They're going to irrigate all the fields between the hills. Look at that, Alleko.

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT I won't look. I knew their project would be good. I refuse to be forced at gunpoint.

THE SOLDIER, LEFT But they're only trying to force you at pencil point.

(Laughter)

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT (stands up gloomily and goes to look at the drawings) The trouble is these valley-thieves know perfectly well that nobody in this country can resist machines and projects.

THE PEASANT WOMAN, RIGHT Alleko Bereshvili, you're the worst sucker of all for new projects, everybody knows that.

THE EXPERT How about my minutes? Can I say that you'll go back to your kolkhoz and recommend that they relinquish their old valley in the interest of this project?

THE PEASANT WOMAN, RIGHT I'll recommend it. How about you, Alleko?

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT (over the drawings) I request copies of the plans to take back with us.

THE PEASANT WOMAN, RIGHT In that case we can sit down to eat. Once he has the plans and a chance to discuss them, the matter is settled. I know him. And the rest of our people are the same.

(The delegates embrace each other again, laughing)

THE OLD PEASANT, LEFT Three cheers for the Galinsk kolkhoz and good luck with your horses!

THE PEASANT WOMAN, LEFT Comrades, in honor of the delegates from the Galinsk kolkhoz and of the expert, we have arranged to put on a play related to our problem. Arkadi Cheidze, the singer, will take part.

(Applause. The girl tractor driver has run off to get the singer)

THE PEASANT WOMAN, RIGHT Comrades, your play had better be good, we're paying a valley for it.

THE PEASANT WOMAN, LEFT Arkadi Cheidze knows 21,000 lines by heart.

THE OLD PEASANT, LEFT We've worked up the play under his direction. He's a hard man to get. You people from the planning commission should arrange to have him come north more often, comrade.

THE EXPERT Economics is more in our line.

THE OLD PEASANT, LEFT (*smiling*) You organize the redistribution of vineyards and tractors, why not of songs?

(*Led by the girl tractor operator, Arkadi Cheidze, the singer, enters the circle. He is a powerfully built man of simple ways. He is accompanied by musicians with their instruments. The artists are greeted with applause*)

THE GIRL TRACTOR DRIVER Arkadi, this is the comrade expert. (*The singer greets those around him*)

THE PEASANT WOMAN, RIGHT I am greatly honored to make your acquaintance. I heard about your songs when I was a little girl in school.

THE SINGER This time it will be a play with songs, and almost everyone in the whole kolkhoz will take part.

THE OLD PEASANT, RIGHT Will it be one of the old legends?

THE SINGER A very old one. It is called *The Chalk Circle* and comes from the Chinese. We play it in different form, though. Shura, show them the masks. Comrades, it is an honor for us to entertain you after a difficult debate. We hope you will find that the old poet's voice still rings true, even in the shadow of the Soviet tractors. It may be wrong to mix different wines, but old and new wisdom make an excellent mixture. Well, I hope we shall all get something to eat before the play begins. That helps.

VOICES Of course.—Everybody to the club house.

(*All go gaily to dinner. As they are leaving, the expert turns to the singer*)

THE EXPERT How long will this story take, Arkadi? I've got to go back to Tiflis tonight.

THE SINGER (*offhand*) Actually there are two stories. A couple of hours.

THE EXPERT (*confidentially*) Can't you make it shorter?

THE SINGER No.

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The Noble Child

(The singer is sitting on the ground in front of his musicians. A black sheepskin cloak over his shoulders, he leafs through a worn-out copybook with slips of paper inserted)

In olden times, in bloody times
 There ruled in this city, known as "the accursed city"
 A governor by the name of Georgi Abashvili.
 He was as rich as Croesus.
 He had a beautiful wife.
 He had a thriving child.
 No other governor in Gruzinia had
 So many horses in his stable
 And so many beggars at his door
 So many soldiers in his service
 And so many petitioners in his courtyard.
 How shall I tell you the kind of man Georgi Abashvili was?
 He enjoyed his life.
 One Easter Sunday morning
 The governor and his family went
 To church.

(From the archway of a palace pour beggars and petitioners, holding up emaciated children, crutches and petitions. Behind them two Ironshirts, then, splendidly attired, the governor and his family)

THE BEGGARS AND PETITIONERS Mercy, your grace, the taxes are too high.—I lost my leg in the Persian War, where can I get . . .—My brother is innocent, your grace, a misunderstanding.—He's starving on me.—He's our last remaining son—please release him from military service.—Please, your grace, the water inspector has been bribed.

(A servant collects the petitions, another hands out coins)

from a pouch. The soldiers push back the crowd, striking at them with heavy leather whips)

A SOLDIER Back! Clear the church door.

(Behind the governor, his wife, and an aide-de-camp, the governor's child is rolled out through the archway in a magnificent baby carriage. The crowd presses forward again to see him)

THE SINGER *(while the crowd is whipped back)*

That Easter the people saw the governor's heir for the first time.

Two doctors never stirred from the side of the Noble Child Apple of the governor's eye.

(Cries from the crowd: "The child!"—"I can't see him, don't push so." "God bless you, your grace.")

THE SINGER

Even the powerful Prince Kazbeki

Paid his respects to him at the church door.

(A fat prince steps forward and greets the family)

THE FAT PRINCE Happy Easter, Natella Abashvili.

(A command is heard. A dust-covered rider dashes in and holds out a roll of papers to the governor. At a sign from the governor the aide-de-camp, a handsome young man, goes to the rider and holds him back. A brief pause while the fat prince looks distrustfully at the rider)

THE FAT PRINCE What a beautiful day! When it rained last night, I thought to myself: gloomy holidays. But this morning, the sky was clear. I love clear skies, Natella Abashvili, and a simple heart. And little Michael, every inch a governor. Ti-ti-ti-ti. *(He tickles the child)* Happy Easter, little Michael, ti-ti-ti-ti.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE What do you think, Arsen, Georgi has finally decided to start building the new east wing. The whole neighborhood with its wretched shacks is being torn down to make room for the garden.

THE FAT PRINCE That is good news after so much bad news. What do you hear about the war, brother Georgi? *(The governor makes a gesture meaning that he doesn't wish to speak of it)* A strategic withdrawal, I hear? Oh well, there are always these little setbacks. Good days and bad days. The fortunes of war. Not very important, is it?

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE He's coughing! Georgi, did you hear?
(Sharply to the two dignified doctors standing right behind the baby carriage) He's coughing!

FIRST DOCTOR *(to the second)* Permit me to remind you, Niko Mikadze, that I was opposed to that lukewarm bath. A slight error in the temperature of the bath water, your grace.

SECOND DOCTOR *(also very polite)* I am unable to agree with you, Mikha Loladze. The temperature of the bath water was that prescribed by our great and beloved Mishiko Oboladze. More likely a draft during the night, your grace.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE But do something for him! He looks feverish, Georgi.

FIRST DOCTOR *(over the child)* No cause for alarm, your grace. We shall make his bath water a little warmer and it won't happen again.

SECOND DOCTOR *(with a venomous look at him)* I won't forget that, my dear Mikha Loladze. No cause for concern, your grace.

THE FAT PRINCE Ai, ai, ai, ai. I always say: If my liver pains me, give the doctor fifty strokes across the soles of his feet. And that's only because the times have gone soft; in the old days it was simply: Off with his head!

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE Let's go inside, it's probably because of the draft out here.

(The procession consisting of the family and their servants turns into the church door. The fat prince follows. The aide-de-camp steps out of the procession and indicates the rider)

THE GOVERNOR Not before mass, Shalva.

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP *(to the rider)* The governor does not wish to be molested with reports before mass, especially if, as I presume, they are depressing. Go to the kitchen, my friend, and tell them to give you something to eat.

(The aide-de-camp joins the procession while the rider with a curse enters the palace gate. A soldier comes out of the palace and stops in the archway)

THE SINGER

The city is silent.

Pigeons are strutting on the square.

A soldier of the palace guard
 Is joking with a kitchen maid
 Who is coming up from the river with a bundle.
(A kitchen maid with a bundle wrapped in large green leaves tries to enter the archway)

THE SOLDIER What's this? Not in church? Playing hooky from services, young lady?

GRUSHA I was all dressed, but then they were missing a goose for Easter dinner and they asked me to get one, because I know about geese.

THE SOLDIER A goose? *(With affected suspicion)* I'd like to see that goose.

(Grusha does not understand)

THE SOLDIER You've got to watch your step with women. "I've only been getting a goose." That's what they say, when actually it's something entirely different.

GRUSHA *(goes resolutely up to him and shows him the goose)* Here it is. And if it isn't a good fifteen-pound goose crammed full of corn, I'll eat the feathers.

THE SOLDIER A queen of a goose. The governor himself will eat it. So you've been down by the river again?

GRUSHA Yes, at the poultry farm.

THE SOLDIER Oh, at the poultry farm down by the river? Not upstream in those willows?

GRUSHA I only go to the willows when I wash clothes.

THE SOLDIER *(pointedly)* Exactly.

GRUSHA Exactly what?

THE SOLDIER *(winking)* Exactly what I meant.

GRUSHA Why shouldn't I wash clothes by the willows?

THE SOLDIER *(with exaggerated laughter)* "Why shouldn't I wash clothes by the willows?" That's good, really good.

GRUSHA I don't understand you, soldier. What's good?

THE SOLDIER *(slyly)* If someone finds out what I know, hot and cold she's sure to grow.

GRUSHA I fail to see what anybody can know about those willows.

THE SOLDIER Even if there were bushes nearby, where someone can sit and see everything? Everything that goes on when a certain person "washes clothes"!

GRUSHA What goes on, soldier? Can't you just say what you mean and be done with it?

THE SOLDIER Something that someone can see.

GRUSHA Why, soldier, you wouldn't mean that on a hot day I sometimes put my toes in the water, because that's all there is to it.

THE SOLDIER There's more. Your toes and something more.

GRUSHA What more? Well, maybe my foot.

THE SOLDIER Your foot and a little more. (*He laughs loudly*)

GRUSHA (*angrily*) Simon Chachava, you ought to be ashamed. Sitting in the bushes on a hot day, waiting for someone to put her leg in the water. And probably with some other soldier at that! (*She runs away*)

THE SOLDIER (*calls after her*) Not with another soldier!
(*As the singer resumes his story, the soldier runs after Grusha*)

THE SINGER

The city lies silent, but why these men in arms?

The governor's palace is at peace.

Why then is it a fortress?

(*The fat prince comes quickly out of the church door, left. He stops and looks around. Two Ironshirts are waiting outside the archway to the right. The prince sees them and passes them slowly, making a sign to them; then he goes out quickly. One Ironshirt goes through the archway into the palace; the other stays behind on guard. Muffled cries are heard from various directions in the background. "Ready!" The palace is surrounded. Church bells are heard in the distance. Out of the church door comes the governor's family and the rest of the procession*)

THE SINGER

Then the governor returned to his palace

And the palace was a trap.

The goose was plucked and roasted

But the goose was not eaten

Noon was no longer a time for eating

Noon was a time for dying.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE (*passing by*) It's really impossible to live in this hovel, but of course Georgi builds only for his

little Michael, not for me. Michael is everything, everything for Michael!

THE GOVERNOR Did you hear that? Brother Kazbeki wishing us a happy Easter! That's all very well, but as far as I know it didn't rain in Nukha last night. Where brother Kazbeki was, it rained. Where was brother Kazbeki?

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP We must investigate.

THE GOVERNOR Yes, immediately. Tomorrow.

(The procession turns into the archway. The rider who has meanwhile come out of the palace steps up to the governor)

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP Excellency, won't you listen to the rider from the capital? He arrived this morning with confidential papers.

THE GOVERNOR *(continuing on his way)* Not before dinner, Shalva!

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP *(while the procession disappears into the palace and only two soldiers of the palace guard remain at the gate; to the rider)* The governor does not wish to be molested with military reports before dinner, and his excellency is devoting the afternoon to a conference with eminent architects who have also been invited to dinner. Here they come. *(Three gentlemen have entered. While the rider goes off, the aide-de-camp welcomes the architects)* Gentlemen, his excellency is expecting you for dinner. He will devote the whole afternoon to you. And your great new plans! Come quickly!

ONE OF THE ARCHITECTS We are filled with admiration that his excellency should think of building despite the alarming reports about the Persian war.

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP "Because of them" would be more accurate. It's nothing. Persia is far away! The garrison here would let themselves be hacked to pieces for the governor. *(Noise from the palace. A woman's shrill scream. Cries of command. Aghast, the aide-de-camp goes toward the archway. An Ironshirt steps out and stops him with his pike)*

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP What's going on? Put down that pike, you dog! *(Furiously to the palace guard)* Disarm this man! Don't you see this is a plot against the governor's life?

(The soldiers of the guard do not obey. They look coldly and indifferently at the aide-de-camp and watch the following scene without interest. The aide-de-camp fights his way into the palace)

ONE OF THE ARCHITECTS The princes! The princes met in the capital last night. They are opposed to the grand duke and his governors. Gentlemen, we'd better clear out.
(They go off quickly)

THE SINGER

O blindness of the great! They live like gods on high
Great over bended backs, trusting
In hired fists, confident
Of their power that has already endured so long.
But long is not forever.

O passage of time, o hope of the poor.

(Out through the archway comes the governor, in chains, between two soldiers armed to the teeth. His face is gray)
Forever good-bye, great lord. Deign to walk with head erect.

From your palace windows hostile eyes look down upon you.

You will need no more architects. A plain carpenter is all you'll need.

You will not be moving to a new palace, but to a small hole in the ground.

Look round you one last time, blind man.

(The arrested man looks around)

Are you pleased with what you had? Between Easter mass and Easter meal

You will go to the place whence no one returns.

(He is led away. The palace guard falls in behind. A horn sounds the alarm. Noise behind the archway)

When the house of the great man collapses

Many small folk will be crushed under the ruins.

Those who never shared the fortune of the mighty

Will often share their downfall. The

Swift-plunging wagon

Drags the sweating draft horses

Down to the abyss.

(Panic-stricken servants come rushing out of the archway)

THE SERVANTS *(all at once)* The baskets! All into the third courtyard! Provisions for five days.—The mistress has fainted.—Carry her downstairs, somebody, she can't stay here.—What about us?—They'll slaughter us like chickens. They always do.—Mother of God, what's going to happen?—They say there's been bloodshed in the city.—Nonsense, the governor has only been politely requested to attend a meeting of the princes. Everything will be settled peaceably, I have it from a reliable source.

(The two doctors rush into the courtyard)

FIRST DOCTOR *(trying to hold back the other)* Niko Mikadze, it is your duty as a physician to stay with Natella Abashvili.

SECOND DOCTOR My duty? Yours!

FIRST DOCTOR Whose turn is it with the child today, Niko Mikadze, yours or mine?

SECOND DOCTOR Mikha Loladze, do you really suppose I'm going to spend another minute in a plague-ridden house on account of that brat?

(They start to fight. All that can be heard is: "You're neglecting your duty!" and "Duty be damned!" Then the second doctor strikes the first one down)

SECOND DOCTOR Oh, go to hell! *(Out)*

THE SERVANTS Nothing to worry about until tonight, the soldiers won't be drunk before then.—Doesn't anybody know if they've mutinied?—The palace guard has ridden away.—Doesn't anybody know what's happened?

GRUSHA Meliva the fisherman says a comet with a red tail was seen over the capital; that means calamity.

THE SERVANTS They say news reached the capital yesterday that the Persian war has been completely lost.—The princes have all risen up. They say the grand duke has fled. All his governors are going to be executed.—They won't hurt the little people. I've got a brother in the Ironshirts. *(The soldier Simon Chachava appears, looking for Grusha in the crowd)*

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP *(appears in the archway)* Into the third courtyard, all of you! Everybody help with the packing! *(He drives the servants off)*

(*Simon finally finds Grusha*)

SIMON There you are, Grusha. What are you going to do?

GRUSHA Nothing. If the worst comes to the worst, I have a brother with a farm in the mountains. But what about you?

SIMON Me? Nothing. (*Again with formality*) Grusha Vachnadze, your question about my plans gives me pleasure. I have received orders to escort Lady Natella Abashvili.

GRUSHA But hasn't the palace guard mutinied?

SIMON (*gravely*) It has.

GRUSHA Isn't it dangerous to escort her?

SIMON In Tiflis they say: Is stabbing dangerous for the knife?

GRUSHA You're not a knife, Simon Chachava, you're only a man. What's the lady to you?

SIMON The lady is nothing to me, but I've got orders and I'm going.

GRUSHA Then you're just stubborn, soldier, running into danger for no reason at all. (*Someone calls her from the palace*) They want me in the third courtyard, I'm in a hurry.

SIMON If you're in a hurry, let's not argue. A good argument takes time. May I ask whether the young lady still has her parents?

GRUSHA No. Only my brother.

SIMON Since the time is short, my second question is: Is the young lady as healthy as a fish in water?

GRUSHA Maybe a stitch in my right shoulder now and then, but otherwise strong enough for every kind of work. No one has ever complained.

SIMON That is common knowledge. When it's Easter Sunday and someone has to go for the goose nevertheless, she's the one. Third question: Is the young lady impatient? Does she want cherries in the winter?

GRUSHA Not impatient, but when people go off to war for no reason and there's no news, it's bad.

SIMON There will be news. (*Again Grusha is called from the palace*) And now the main question . . .

GRUSHA Simon Chachava, I have to go to the third courtyard and I'm in a big hurry, so the answer is "Yes."

SIMON (*very much embarrassed*) They say that haste is the wind that blows the scaffolding down. But they also say that the rich are never in a hurry. I'm from . . .

GRUSHA Kutsk . . .

SIMON So the young lady has made inquiries? I'm healthy, I have no one to look out for, I get ten piasters a month, it'll be twenty when I'm paymaster, and with all my heart I ask for your hand.

GRUSHA Simon Chachava, it's all right with me.

SIMON (*takes from his neck a thin chain with a little cross on it*) The cross belonged to my mother, Grusha Vachnadze, the chain is silver; please wear it.

GRUSHA Many thanks, Simon.

(*He puts it around her neck*)

SIMON I've got to harness the horses, the young lady must understand that. The young lady had better go to the third courtyard now, or there will be trouble.

GRUSHA Yes, Simon.

(*They stand undecided*)

SIMON I'm only taking her to the troops who are still loyal. When the war is over, I'll be back. Two or three weeks. I hope the time won't hang heavy on my betrothed until I return.

GRUSHA

Simon Chachava, I will be waiting for you.

Never fear. Go off to war, soldier
 The grim, bloody war, the hard bitter war
 From which not every man returns.
 But when you return I'll be there.
 I will be waiting for you under the green elm tree
 I will be waiting for you under the bare elm tree
 I will be waiting till the last has come home again
 And even more.
 When you come back from the war
 No boots will be standing at the door.
 You will find no one in bed but me

And my mouth will be un-kissed.
 When you come back home
 You'll be able to say everything's just the same.

SIMON I thank you, Grusha Vachnadze. And good-bye!
(He bows low to her. She bows just as low to him. Then she runs away quickly without looking back. The aide-de-camp steps out of the archway)

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP I harness the horses to the big carriage, don't stand around, you stinker!
(Simon Chachava comes to attention and goes off. Out the archway creep two servants, bowed under the weight of enormous trunks. Behind them stumbles Natella Abashvili supported by her waiting-women. Following her, a woman carrying the child)

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE Nobody attends to anything. I'm at my wits' end. Where is Michael? Don't hold him so clumsily. Load the trunks on the carriage. Is there any news of the governor, Shalva?

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP *(shakes his head)* You must leave at once.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE Any word from the city?

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP No. It's been quiet so far, but there's no time to be lost. There's no room in the carriage for the trunks. Take out what you need. *(The aide-de-camp goes out quickly)*

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE Just the barest necessities! Quick! Open the trunks, I'll tell you what's needed.
(The trunks are put down and opened)

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE *(pointing to some brocade dresses)*
 The green one and of course the one with the fur trimming! Where are the doctors? That terrible migraine is coming on again, it always starts at the temples. The one with the pearl buttons . . .
(Enter Grusha)

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE Taking your time, aren't you? Get the hot water bottles.
(Grusha runs out, comes back in a moment with the hot water bottles, and is silently ordered about by the governor's wife)

- THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE (*watching a young chambermaid*)
Don't tear the sleeve!
- THE YOUNG WOMAN But gracious lady, nothing has happened to the dress.
- THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE Because I caught you. I've been watching you for a long time. All you're good for is making eyes at the aide-de-camp! I'll kill you, you bitch! (*Strikes her*)
- THE AIDE-DE-CAMP (*comes back*) You must hurry, Natella Abashvili. There's fighting in the city. (*Off again*)
- THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE (*lets the young woman go*) Good God! Do you think they'll dare lay hands on me? Why should they? (*All are silent. She begins to rummage in the trunks*) Find my brocade jacket! Help her! What's Michael doing? Is he asleep?
- THE NURSE Yes, gracious lady.
- THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE Then put him down a minute and bring me my red boots from the bedroom, I need them for my green dress. (*The nurse puts the child down and runs. To the young woman*) Don't stand around, you! (*The young woman runs away*) Stay right here or I'll have you whipped. (*Pause*) Look how these things have been packed! Without love, without understanding. If I'm not there standing over them . . . In times like these you see what kind of servants you've got. Masha! (*With an imperious gesture*) You know how to fill your bellies, but you never heard of gratitude. I'll remember this.
- THE AIDE-DE-CAMP (*in great agitation*) Natella, you must come at once. The carpet weavers have revolted, they've just hanged Judge Orbeliani of the superior court.
- THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE Why? I must take the silver one, it cost a thousand piasters. And this one and all the furs, and where's my wine-red dress?
- THE AIDE-DE-CAMP (*trying to pull her away*) Riots have broken out in the slums. We've got to be going. (*A servant runs off*) Where is the child?
- THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE (*calling the nurse*) Maro! Get the child ready! Where are you?
- THE AIDE-DE-CAMP (*on his way out*) We may have to forget about the carriage and go on horseback.

(The governor's wife rummages among the dresses, throws some on a pile that is to go along, then takes them off again. Sounds are heard. Drums. A red glow appears in the sky)

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE *(rummaging desperately)* My wine-red dress, I can't find it. *(Shrugging her shoulders, to the second woman)* Take the whole pile to the carriage. Why hasn't Maro come back? Have you all gone crazy? I knew it would be on the bottom.

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP *(returning)* Quick! Quick!

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE *(to the second woman)* Run! Just throw them in the carriage!

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP We're not taking the carriage. Come now, or I'll go without you.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE Maro! Bring the child! *(to the second woman)* Look for her, Masha! No, first take the dresses to the carriage. Nonsense, I wouldn't dream of going on horseback! *(Turning around, sees the fiery glow and freezes with fright)* Fire! *(She rushes off; the aide-de-camp follows her. Shaking her head, the second woman follows her with the bundle of dresses)*

(Servants come out from the archway)

THE WOMAN COOK The east gate must be on fire.

THE MAN COOK They've gone. They've left the carriage and all the provisions. How are we going to get out of here?

A STABLE HAND Yes, this house won't be healthy for a while. *(To the third woman)* Zulika, I'll get a couple of blankets and we'll clear out.

THE NURSE *(coming out of the archway with a pair of boots)* Gracious lady!

A FAT WOMAN She's gone.

THE NURSE What about the child? *(She runs to the child and picks him up)* The beasts, they've left him. *(She hands the child to Grusha)* Hold him a second. *(Lying transparently)* I'm going to see about the carriage. *(She runs off after the governor's wife)*

GRUSHA What have they done to our master?

THE STABLE HAND *(drawing his finger across his throat)* Fft!

THE FAT WOMAN *(growing hysterical at his gesture)* Merciful heavens above! Georgi Abashvili, our master! Hale and

heartly at morning mass, and now . . . take me away. We're lost! We'll die in sin. Like Georgi Abashvili our master.

THE THIRD WOMAN (*trying to soothe her*) Calm down, Nina. You're not in danger. You've never hurt anybody.

THE FAT WOMAN (*while she is being led away*) Merciful heavens above, we must all get away before they come, before they come.

THE THIRD WOMAN Nina takes it more to heart than his wife. These people can't even do their own mourning! (*She catches sight of the child that Grusha is still holding*) The child! What are you doing with the child!

GRUSHA They left it behind.

THE THIRD WOMAN She left him? Michael, who was sheltered from every draft!
(*The servants gather around the child*)

GRUSHA He's waking up.

THE STABLE HAND Better put him down! I don't like to think what would happen to anybody they find with that child. I'll get our stuff; wait here, all of you. (*Goes off into the palace*)

THE WOMAN COOK He's right, once they start fighting each other, they wipe out whole families. I'm getting my things. (*All have gone out except for two maids and Grusha with the child in her arms*)

THE THIRD WOMAN Didn't you hear? Put him down.

GRUSHA His nurse gave him to me to hold for a second.

THE WOMAN COOK You simple soul, she won't be back.

THE THIRD WOMAN Keep away from him.

THE WOMAN COOK They'll be hunting him more than his mother. He's the governor's heir. Grusha, you're a good soul, but you're not very bright. Take it from me, if he had leprosy it couldn't be worse. Just save your skin.
(*The stable hand has come back with bundles which he distributes among the women. All except Grusha prepare to leave*)

GRUSHA (*obstinately*) He hasn't got leprosy. He's looking at me. He's somebody.

THE WOMAN COOK Then stop looking at him. You're the

boneheaded kind that falls for anything. Go get the lettuce, they say, you have the longest legs; and you run. We're taking the oxcart, you can come with us if you hurry. Lord, the whole district must be on fire!

THE THIRD WOMAN Haven't you packed anything? There isn't much time, the Ironshirts will be here any minute.

(The two women and the stable hand go off)

GRUSHA I'm coming.

(Grusha lays the child down, looks at it for a few moments, takes pieces of clothing from the trunks that are standing around, and covers the sleeping child. Then she runs into the palace to get her things. Hoofbeats and women's screams are heard. Enter the fat prince with some drunken Ironshirts. One is carrying the governor's head on a pike)

THE FAT PRINCE Here in the center! *(One of the soldiers climbs on the back of another, takes the head and holds it tentatively over the archway)* That's not the center, further to the right, that's it. When I give orders, I see to it that they're carried out properly. *(While the soldier, with hammer and a nail, fastens the head to the wall by the hair)* This morning at the church door I said to Georgi Abashvili: "I love clear skies," but to tell the truth I prefer the lightning that strikes out of a clear sky. Yes, indeed. The only trouble is they've taken the brat away. I need him badly. Search all Gruzinia for him. A thousand piasters.

(While Grusha, looking cautiously around, comes to the portal, the fat prince goes off with the Ironshirts. Again the sound of hoofbeats is heard. Carrying a bundle, Grusha goes toward the archway. When she has almost reached it, she turns around to see if the child is still there. The singer starts singing. She stands motionless)

THE SINGER

As she stood there between door and archway, she heard
Or thought she heard a faint cry: the child
Called out to her, he didn't whimper, but said quite reason-
ably

Or so at least it seemed to her.

"Woman," he said, "help me."

And he went on, not whimpering, but saying quite reasonably

“Consider, woman, that one who does not hear a cry for help

But passes by with distracted ear will never
Hear again the hushed call of her lover nor
The blackbird in the dawn nor the contented
Sighs of the tired grape pickers at angelus.”

Hearing this

(Grusha takes a few steps toward the child and bends over him)

she went back for one last look

At the child. Just to stay with him

For a few moments until someone should come—

His mother perhaps or someone else—

(She sits down, leaning against a trunk and facing the child)

Until she should have to go, for the danger was too great,
the city was full

Of flames and lamentation.

(The light dims as though evening were turning to night. Grusha has gone into the palace and come back with a lamp and some milk which she gives the child to drink)

THE SINGER *(in a loud voice)*

Terrible is the temptation to do good!

(All through the night, Grusha sits watching the child. Once she lights the little lamp to look at the child, once she throws a brocade mantle over him. From time to time she listens and looks around to make sure no one is coming)

THE SINGER

Long she sat with the child

Till evening came, till night came

Till the dawn came. Too long she sat

Too long she saw

The quiet breathing, the little fists

Until toward morning the temptation grew too great

And she stood up, bent down and with a sigh picked up the
child

And carried him away.

(She does as the singer says)

Like something stolen she took him
Like a thief she crept away.

3

The Flight to the Northern Mountains

THE SINGER

When Grusha Vachnadze left the city
On the Gruzinian military highway
On the way to the northern mountains
She sang a song, she bought milk.

THE MUSICIANS

How can she, so human, hope
To escape the bloodhounds, the setters of snares?
To the deserted mountains she plodded
Along the Gruzinian military highway she plodded
She sang a song, she bought milk.

(Grusha Vachnadze plodding along, carrying the child in a sack on her back, in one hand a bundle, in the other a large stick)

GRUSHA (*sings*)

Four old commanders
Set out for Iran.
The first commander never fought
The second's fighting came to naught
The third one found the weather not right
The fourth one found his soldiers would not fight.
Four old commanders
Away they ran.
Sosso Robakidze
Marched off to Iran.
The war he fought was hard and tough
He won the battle soon enough
The weather was all right for him

His soldiers hacked away with vim.
 Sosso Robakidze
 Is our man.

(A peasant hut appears)

GRUSHA *(to the child)* Noon, time to eat. So we'll sit in the grass and wait impatiently while good old Grusha buys a cup of milk. *(She sets the child on the ground and knocks at the door of the hut; an old peasant opens)* Could you give me a cup of milk, grandfather, and a millet cake perhaps?

THE OLD MAN Milk? We haven't got any milk. The high and mighty soldiers from the city have taken our goats. Go to the high and mighty soldiers if you want milk.

GRUSHA But you must have a cup of milk left for a child, grandfather?

THE OLD MAN For a "God-reward-you," I suppose?

GRUSHA Who said anything about God rewarding you? *(Takes out her purse)* We pay like princes. Our heads in the clouds, our behinds in the water! *(Grumbling, the peasant brings milk)* And what is the price of this cup of milk?

THE OLD MAN Three piasters. Milk has gone up.

GRUSHA Three piasters? For a thimbleful? *(Without a word the old man slams the door in her face)* Michael, did you hear that? Three piasters! We can't afford it. *(She goes back and sits down and gives the child her breast)* We'll just have to try it again this way. Suck hard, think of those three piasters! There's nothing there, but you think you're drinking, and that's something. *(She sees that the child has stopped sucking, and shakes her head. She stands up, goes back to the door and knocks again)* Grandfather, open up, we'll pay! *(In an undertone)* I hope you drop dead. *(When the old man opens the door again)* I expected to pay half a piaster, but the child needs it. How about one piaster?

THE OLD MAN Two.

GRUSHA Don't close the door again. *(She rummages a long while in her purse)* Here are two piasters. But this milk had

better be filling, we have a long way to go. It's highway robbery and a sin.

THE OLD MAN Kill the soldiers if you want milk.

GRUSHA (*giving the child milk to drink*) It's an expensive treat. Drink, Michael, it's half a week's wages. The people around here think we've made our money sitting on our asses. Michael, Michael, I've certainly let myself in for something. (*Looking at the brocade mantle in which the child is wrapped*) A brocade mantle worth a thousand piasters, and not one piaster for milk. (*She looks back*) Now there's a carriage full of rich refugees. Let's try and get a ride.

(*Outside a caravanserai*)

(*Grusha, wearing the brocade mantle, is seen approaching two fine ladies. She is holding the child in her arms*)

GRUSHA Oh, do the ladies wish to spend the night here too? It's so dreadfully crowded everywhere, and not a carriage to be had! My coachman simply took it into his head to go back. I've come at least half a mile on foot. Barefoot! My Persian shoes—you know those heels. But why doesn't somebody come?

OLDER LADY The landlord is taking his time. Ever since the events in the capital, the whole country has lost its manners. (*Out comes the landlord, a very dignified old man with a long beard, followed by his house servant*)

THE LANDLORD Forgive an old man for making you wait, my ladies. My little grandson was showing me a peach tree in blossom, over there on the slope, beyond the corn fields. We have a few fruit trees over there, a few cherry trees. Further west (*he points*) the ground is stonier, the peasants drive their sheep there to graze. You ought to see the peach blossoms, such an exquisite pink.

OLDER LADY You have a fertile region here.

THE LANDLORD God has blessed it. How are the fruit blossoms coming along further south, my ladies? You're from the south, aren't you?

YOUNGER LADY I must admit I didn't pay much attention to the landscape.

THE LANDLORD (*politely*) I understand. The dust. On our

highway it's best to proceed at a moderate pace, provided one isn't in too much of a hurry.

OLDER LADY Put your veil around your neck, dearest. The evening breezes here seem rather cool.

THE LANDLORD They come from the Yanga-Tau glaciers, my ladies.

GRUSHA Oh, I'm so afraid my son will catch cold.

OLDER LADY It's a good-sized caravanserai. Shall we go in?

THE LANDLORD Oh, the ladies desire rooms? But my caravanserai is overcrowded and the servants have run away. I'm dreadfully sorry but I can't accommodate any more people, not even with references . . .

YOUNGER LADY But we can't spend the night on the road.

OLDER LADY (*dryly*) How much is it?

THE LANDLORD My ladies, surely you must understand that a landlord must be extremely careful in times like these with so many refugees looking for a place to stay. Perfectly respectable persons of course, but frowned on by the authorities. And so . . .

OLDER LADY My dear man, we are not refugees. We are on our way to our summer residence in the mountains, and that's all there is to it. It would never occur to us to ask your hospitality if we . . . if we needed it *that* badly.

THE LANDLORD (*nodding agreement*) Of course not. Still, I doubt whether the one tiny room I have available would suit the ladies. I am obliged to charge sixty piasters per person. Are the ladies together?

GRUSHA In a way. I, too, am in need of lodging.

YOUNGER LADY Sixty piasters! The man's a cutthroat!

THE LANDLORD (*coldly*) My ladies, I have no desire to cut anyone's throat, and so . . . (*Turns to go*)

OLDER LADY Must we talk about throats? Come along. (*Goes in, followed by the house servant*)

YOUNGER LADY (*in despair*) A hundred and eighty piasters for one room. (*Looking around at Grusha*) But not with a child! That's impossible! Suppose it cries!

THE LANDLORD The price of the room is a hundred and eighty piasters, for two persons or for three.

YOUNGER LADY (*changed on hearing this, to Grusha*) On the

other hand, my dear, I couldn't bear to think of you out on the road. Do come in.

(They go into the caravanserai. On the other side of the stage the house servant enters from the rear with baggage. Behind him the elderly lady, then the second lady and Grusha with the child)

YOUNGER LADY A hundred and eighty piasters! I haven't been so upset since they brought poor Igor home.

OLDER LADY Must you talk about Igor?

YOUNGER LADY Actually there are four of us, the child is a person, isn't it? *(To Grusha)* Couldn't you pay at least half?

GRUSHA That is impossible. You see, I had to leave in a great hurry and the aide-de-camp forgot to give me enough money.

OLDER LADY Maybe you haven't even got the sixty?

GRUSHA I will pay that.

YOUNGER LADY Where are the beds?

THE HOUSE SERVANT No beds. There are blankets and sacks. You'll just have to make do. Be glad you're not being lowered into the ground, like plenty of others. *(Goes out)*

YOUNGER LADY Did you hear that? I'm going straight to the landlord. The man must be flogged.

OLDER LADY Like your husband?

YOUNGER LADY You're so cruel. *(She bursts into tears)*

OLDER LADY How will we ever make anything resembling beds out of this?

GRUSHA Leave it to me. *(She puts the child down)* It's always easier when there's more than one. And there's still your carriage. *(Sweeping the floor)* I was taken utterly by surprise! "My dear Anastasia Katarinovska," my husband said to me before dinner, "lie down a while, you know how those migraine headaches will come over you." *(She drags sacks into place, makes up beds; the ladies watch her at work and exchange glances)* "Georgi," I said to the governor, "with sixty guests for dinner I can't lie down, the servants aren't to be trusted, and Michael Georgivitch won't eat without me." *(To Michael)* You see, Michael, everything's going to be all right, didn't I tell you? *(She suddenly notices that the ladies are looking at her strangely)*

and whispering) There. At least we won't be lying on the bare ground. I've folded the blankets double.

OLDER LADY (*in a tone of command*) You're very clever at bedmaking, my dear. Show me your hands!

GRUSHA (*frightened*) What do you mean?

YOUNGER LADY You've been told to show your hands.

(*Grusha shows the ladies her hands*)

YOUNGER LADY (*triumphantly*) Cracks! A domestic!

OLDER LADY (*goes to the door, calls out*) Servants!

YOUNGER LADY We've caught you, you hussy. What have you been up to? Confess.

GRUSHA (*confused*) I haven't been up to anything. I thought maybe you'd take us with you in your carriage, just a little way. Please don't make a fuss. I'll go of my own accord.

YOUNGER LADY (*while the older lady continues to call for servants*) You'll go all right, but with the police. In the meantime stay here. Don't move!

GRUSHA But I was even going to pay the sixty piasters. Here. (*shows her purse*) See for yourself, I've got them. Four tens and a five, no it's a ten, that makes sixty. I only wanted the child to ride in the carriage, that's the truth.

YOUNGER LADY Oh, you wanted to ride in the carriage! Now it comes out.

GRUSHA Gracious lady, I confess, I'm of lowly descent, please don't call the police. The child is of high station, look at his linen, he's a refugee like yourselves.

YOUNGER LADY Of high station, we've heard that one. His father's a prince, isn't he?

GRUSHA (*wildly to the elderly lady*) Stop screaming! Haven't you any heart?

YOUNGER LADY (*to the elderly lady*) Be careful, she's going to attack you. She's dangerous! Help! Murder!

THE HOUSE SERVANT (*entering*) What's wrong?

ELDERLY LADY This person has wormed her way in here by playing the lady. Probably a thief.

YOUNGER LADY And dangerous too. She wanted to kill us.

Call the police. I feel my migraine coming on, oh heavens!

THE HOUSE SERVANT There isn't any police right now. (*To*

Grusha) Pack up your belongings, sister, and make yourself scarce.

GRUSHA (*angrily picking up the child*) You monsters!

At a time when they're nailing your heads to the walls!

THE HOUSE SERVANT (*pushing her out*) Shut your mouth. Or the old man will come, and then I pity you.

OLDER LADY (*to the younger lady*) Look and see if she hasn't stolen something!

(*While the ladies on the right search feverishly to see whether something has been stolen, the house servant steps out the door left with Grusha*)

THE HOUSE SERVANT I always say: Don't buy a pig in a poke.

Next time take a look at people before you trust them.

GRUSHA I thought they'd be decent if they thought I was one of them.

THE HOUSE SERVANT That was silly of you. Believe me, nothing is harder than imitating lazy, useless people. Once they suspect you of being able to wipe your own ass or of ever in all your life working with your hands, you're done for. Wait a second, I'll get you some millet bread and a few apples.

GRUSHA Better not. I'd better go before the landlord comes.

If I walk all night, I'll be out of danger, I think. (*Goes*)

THE HOUSE SERVANT (*calls softly after her*) Keep to the right at the next crossing.

(*She disappears*)

THE SINGER

When Grusha Vachnadze went northward
Prince Kazbecki's guards followed her.

THE MUSICIANS

How can a barefoot girl escape from the Ironshirts?
The bloodhounds, the setters of snares?
Even at night they hunt. Pursuers
Never get tired. Butchers
Never sleep long.

(*Two Ironshirts are trotting along the highway*)

THE CORPORAL. Blockhead, you'll never amount to anything.
Your heart isn't in it. A superior can tell that by the little

things. When I laid that fat woman the other day, you carried out my orders, you held her husband, you kicked him in the stomach, but did you take pleasure in it like a good soldier, or did you just go through the motions? I watched you, Blockhead. You're dead wood, you're a tinkling cymbal, you'll never get a promotion. (*They go on a while in silence*) Don't think I won't remember that every move you make is a display of insubordination. I forbid you to limp. You only do it because I sold the horses because I'd never get such a good price again. By limping you wish to intimate that you don't care for hiking, I know you. It won't do you any good, it will make things worse for you. Sing!

THE TWO IRONSHIRTS (*sing*)

To the war my weary way I'm wending
 While my sweetheart stays to mind the cattle.
 Loyal friends her honor are defending
 Till I come back from the bloody battle.

THE CORPORAL Louder!

THE TWO IRONSHIRTS

As into my grave instead I travel
 See my sweetheart throwing in the gravel
 Hear her say: "There go the feet with which he chased me
 There the arms that many times embraced me."

(*Again they walk for a while in silence*)

THE CORPORAL A good soldier has to put his heart and soul in it. He'll let himself be torn to pieces for a superior. With his dying glance he takes in his corporal's nod of approval. That's all the reward he wants. There won't be any nod for you, and you'll have to kick in all the same. Damnation, how am I going to find the governor's brat with a subordinate like you, just tell me that.

(*They go on*)

THE SINGER

When Grusha Vachnadze came to the Sirra River
 Her flight became too much for her, the helpless child too
 heavy.

THE MUSICIANS

In the corn fields the rosy dawn
Is merely cold to one who has not slept. To the fugitive
The merry clatter of milk pails from the farm where the
smoke rises

Sounds menacing. Carrying the child, she
Feels its weight and little else.

(Grusha stops outside a farm)

GRUSHA Now you've wet yourself again and you know I have no diapers for you. Michael, I'll have to leave you now. We're far enough from the city. They can't care enough about a little nothing like you to follow you all this way. That peasant woman looks friendly, and get a whiff of the milk! So good-bye, Michael, I'll forget how you kicked me in the back all night to keep me on the move, and you forget the short rations. I did my best. I'd have liked to keep you longer because your nose is so little, but it can't be done. I'd have liked to show you your first bunny and—teach you to stop wetting yourself, but I've got to go back, because my sweetheart the soldier ought to be back soon, too, and what if he didn't find me? You can't ask that of me, Michael.

(A fat peasant woman carries a milk pail in through the door. Grusha waits until she is inside, then she goes cautiously toward the house. She steals up to the door and sets the child down in front of it. Then she hides behind a tree and waits until the peasant woman comes out again and finds the bundle)

THE PEASANT WOMAN Heavens above, what's this? Husband!

THE PEASANT *(coming out)* Now what? Let me eat my soup.

THE PEASANT WOMAN *(to the child)* Where's your mother?

Haven't you got one? It's a boy, I believe. And he's got fine linen, this is a noble child. And they just drop it on the doorstep. What terrible times!

THE PEASANT If they think we're going to feed him, they're mistaken. Take it to the priest in the village, and that's the end of it.

THE PEASANT WOMAN What would the priest do with him? He needs a mother. There, he's waking up. Don't you think we could keep him?

THE PEASANT (*shouting*) No!

THE PEASANT WOMAN If I bed him down in the corner beside the armchair, I'll only need a basket, and I'll take him out to the fields with me. Look, he's laughing. Husband, we have a roof over our heads, we can do it, I'm not listening.

(She carries him in, the peasant follows protesting. Grusha comes out from behind the tree, laughs and hurries away in the direction from which she came)

THE SINGER Why so happy, woman returning homeward?

THE MUSICIANS

Because with a smile, the helpless child has

Got himself new parents, I am happy. Because the dear child
Is off my hands, I am glad.

THE SINGER And why so sad?

THE MUSICIANS

Because I am free and unburdened, I am sad

As one who has been robbed

As one who has been made poor.

(She has only gone a little way when she meets the two Ironshirts who bar the way with their pikes)

THE CORPORAL Young lady, you have bumped into the armed forces. Where have you come from? And why? Have you illicit relations with the enemy? Where are they? What movements are they making in your rear? What about the hills, what about the valleys, how are your stockings fastened?

(Grusha stands stock still in a fright)

GRUSHA They are well-fortified, you'd better stop short.

THE CORPORAL I always stop short, you can count on me for that. Why are you gaping at my pike? "A soldier in the field never lets his pike out of his hand." That's the regulation, Blockhead, learn it by heart. Well, young lady, where are you going?

GRUSHA To meet my sweetheart, soldier, a certain Simon Chachava, of the palace guard in Nukha. If I write him a letter, he'll break every bone in your body.

THE CORPORAL Simon Chachava, of course, I know him. He

gave me the key, said to look in on you now and then. Blockhead, we're getting unpopular. We'd better tell her our intentions are honorable. Young lady, I may seem to make jokes, but I'm serious underneath. So here you have it officially: I want a child from you.

(Grusha lets out a little scream)

THE CORPORAL Blockhead, she catches our meaning. A sweet shock, isn't it? "But first I must take the buns out of the oven, lieutenant. First I must change my torn shirt, colonel!" Joking aside, poking aside, young lady: we're combing the region for a certain child. Have you heard anything about such a child, that's turned up from the city, a noble child in fine linen?

GRUSHA No, I haven't heard a thing.

THE SINGER

Run, kind-hearted girl, the killers are coming!

You who are helpless, help the helpless child! And so she runs.

(She turns suddenly and runs away in panic fear, toward the peasant's house. The Ironshirts exchange glances and follow her cursing)

THE MUSICIANS

In the bloodiest times

There are kindly people.

(In the peasant's house the fat peasant woman is bending over the child in its basket when Grusha Vachnadze rushes in)

GRUSHA Hide him, quick. The Ironshirts are coming. I left him on the doorstep, but he's not mine, he comes of a noble family.

THE PEASANT WOMAN Who's coming? What Ironshirts?

GRUSHA Don't waste time. The Ironshirts that are looking for him.

THE PEASANT WOMAN They've no business in my house. But it looks like I'll want a word with you.

GRUSHA Take off his fine linen, it will give us away.

THE PEASANT WOMAN Don't bother me with linen. In my house I give the orders. And don't throw up on my furniture. Why did you leave it? That's a sin.

GRUSHA (*looking out*) They'll be coming out from behind the trees any minute. I shouldn't have run away, that made them angry. Oh, what should I do?

THE PEASANT WOMAN (*also peers out and is suddenly scared stiff*) Mother of God, the Ironshirts!

GRUSHA They're looking for the child.

THE PEASANT WOMAN But what if they come in here?

GRUSHA You mustn't give it to them. Say it's yours.

THE PEASANT WOMAN Yes.

GRUSHA They'll run it through if you give it to them.

THE PEASANT WOMAN But suppose they ask me for it? I've got silver for the harvesters in the house.

GRUSHA If you give it to them, they'll run it through, right here in your house. You've got to tell them it's yours.

THE PEASANT WOMAN Yes. But suppose they don't believe me?

GRUSHA If you say it like you meant it . . .

THE PEASANT WOMAN They'll burn the roof over our heads.

GRUSHA That's why you've got to say it's yours. His name is Michael. I shouldn't have told you that.

(*The peasant woman nods*)

GRUSHA Don't nod your head like that. And don't tremble, they'll notice.

THE PEASANT WOMAN Yes.

GRUSHA Stop saying "yes." I can't stand it. (*Shakes her*) Haven't you one of your own?

THE PEASANT WOMAN (*mumbling*) Gone to war.

GRUSHA Then maybe he's an Ironshirt himself. Would you expect him to run babies through? Wouldn't *you* give him a piece of your mind! "Stop poking your pike into my house, is that how I raised you? Wash your neck before you talk to your mother."

THE PEASANT WOMAN That's a fact. I wouldn't let him do that.

GRUSHA Promise to tell them he's yours.

THE PEASANT WOMAN Yes.

GRUSHA They're coming now.

(*Knocking at the door. The women do not answer. Enter the Ironshirts. The peasant woman bows low*)

THE CORPORAL That's her all right. What did I tell you?

I've got a nose on me. I could smell her. I've got a question to ask you, young lady: Why did you run away? What did you think? That I wanted something from you? I bet it was something indecent. Admit it!

GRUSHA (*while the peasant woman keeps bowing*) I left milk on the stove. I suddenly remembered it.

THE CORPORAL I thought it was because you thought I was looking at you indecently. As if I had some idea about you and me. Kind of a sensual look, see what I mean?

GRUSHA I didn't see anything like that.

THE CORPORAL But it's possible, don't deny it. After all, I could be a swine. I'll be perfectly frank with you: I could get all sorts of ideas if we were alone. (*To the peasant woman*) Haven't you something to do in the yard? Feed the chickens?

THE PEASANT WOMAN (*falling suddenly on her knees*) Mr. Soldier, I didn't know a thing. Don't burn the roof over my head!

THE CORPORAL What are you talking about?

THE PEASANT WOMAN It's got nothing to do with me, Mr. Soldier. She left it on my doorstep, I swear it.

THE CORPORAL (*sees the child and whistles*) Oho, there's a little fellow in the basket, Blockhead, I smell a thousand piasters. Take the old woman outside and hold her fast. Seems to me I've got a little interrogation on my hands. (*Without a word the peasant woman lets the soldier lead her away*)

THE CORPORAL So here's the baby I wanted of you. (*He goes to the basket*)

GRUSHA Mr. Officer, it's mine. It's not the one you're looking for.

THE CORPORAL Let's have a look. (*He bends over the basket*) (*Grusha looks about in despair*)

GRUSHA It's mine, it's mine.

THE CORPORAL Fine linen.

(*Grusha rushes at him to pull him away. He flings her off and again bends down over the basket. She looks about desperately, sees a big log, lifts it and brings it down on the corporal's head from behind. He collapses. Quickly picking up the child, she runs out*)

THE SINGER

And fleeing from the Ironshirts
 After twenty-two days of flight
 At the foot of the Yanga-Tau glacier
 Grusha Vachnadze adopted the child.

THE MUSICIANS

The helpless one adopted the helpless one.
*(Grusha leans over a half-frozen stream and scoops up
 water for the child in the hollow of her hand)*

GRUSHA (*sings*)

Since no one wants to take you, child
 I shall have to take you.
 Black the day as black can be
 If you're satisfied with me
 I will not forsake you.

I have carried you so far
 Sore my feet and bleeding
 Spent such fortunes buying milk
 You've grown dear to me
 (Fondness comes from feeding.)

I will throw your linen out
 Swaddle you in tatters
 I will wash you and baptize
 You in glacier water.
 (You'll just have to stand it.)

*(She has taken off the child's fine linen and wrapped him
 in a rag)*

THE SINGER

When Grusha Vachnadze, pursued by the Ironshirts
 Came to the footbridge leading over the glacier to the
 village on the eastern slope
 She sang the Song of the Shaky Bridge and risked two
 lives.

*(A wind has come up. The footbridge appears in the half-
 light. One cable is broken and the bridge is slanting over*

the abyss. Peddlers, two men and a woman, are standing undecided at the end of the bridge when Grusha arrives. One of the men is fishing with a pole for the dangling cable)

FIRST MAN Take your time, young lady, you won't get across the pass anyway.

GRUSHA But I have to take my baby to my brother's place on the east side.

THE WOMAN Have to! What do you mean have to! I have to get across because I have to buy two carpets in Atum, which a woman has to sell because her husband died. But can I do what I have to do; can *she*? Andrey has been fishing for the cable for two hours, but even if he catches it how are we going to make it fast? Tell me that.

FIRST MAN (*listening*) Sh-sh, I think I hear something.

GRUSHA (*in a loud voice*) The bridge isn't all that shaky. I think I'll try to cross it.

THE WOMAN I wouldn't try it if the devil himself were after me. Why, it's suicide.

FIRST MAN (*shouting*) Ho!

GRUSHA Don't shout! (*To the woman*) Tell him not to shout.

FIRST MAN But somebody's shouting down there. Maybe they've lost their way down there.

THE WOMAN Why shouldn't he shout? Is there something shady about you? Are they after you?

GRUSHA I guess I'd better tell you. The Ironshirts are after me. I hit one of them on the head.

SECOND MAN Hide the stuff.

(The woman hides a sack behind a rock)

FIRST MAN Why didn't you tell us right away? (*To the others*) If they catch her, they'll make hash out of her!

GRUSHA Get out of the way, I've got to cross that bridge.

SECOND MAN You can't! The chasm is two thousand feet deep!

FIRST MAN Even if we could catch the cable, there wouldn't be any sense in it. We could hold it in our hands, but the Ironshirts could cross the same way.

GRUSHA Out of my way!

(Not very distant cries: "She's up there!")

THE WOMAN They're coming close. But you can't take your child on the bridge. It's almost sure to collapse. And look down there.

(Grusha looks into the chasm. More cries from the Iron-shirts below)

SECOND MAN Two thousand feet.

GRUSHA But those men are worse.

FIRST MAN You can't do it. Think of the child. Risk your own life if they're out to get you, but not the child's.

SECOND MAN Besides, she'll be heavier with the child.

THE WOMAN Maybe she really has to get across. Give it to me, I'll hide it, and you'll try the bridge by yourself.

GRUSHA No. Where he goes, I go. *(To the child)* We're in this together, son. *(Sings)*

Deep is the chasm, son
See the bridge sway
Not of our choosing, son
Is our way.

You must go the way that
I have picked for you
You must eat the bread that
I have saved for you

Share the two, three morsels
Taking two of three.
How big or how little
Better not ask me.

I'll try it.

THE WOMAN It's tempting God.

(Cries from below)

GRUSHA I beg you, throw your pole away, or they'll fish up the cable and come after me.

(She goes out on the swaying bridge. The peddler woman screams when the bridge threatens to break. But Grusha goes on and reaches the other side)

FIRST MAN She's across.

THE WOMAN *(who had fallen on her knees and prayed,*

angrily) It was a sin all the same.

(The Ironshirts appear from below. The corporal's head is bandaged)

THE CORPORAL Have you seen a woman with a child?

FIRST MAN *(while the second man throws the pole into the chasm)* Yes. There she is. And the bridge won't carry you.

THE CORPORAL Blockhead, you're going to pay for this.

(Grusha on the opposite side laughs and shows the Ironshirts the child. She goes on, the bridge stays behind. Wind)

GRUSHA *(looking around at Michael)* Never be afraid of the wind, it's only a poor devil like us. His job is pushing the clouds and he gets colder than anybody.

(Snow begins to fall)

The snow isn't so bad either, Michael. Its job is covering the little fir trees so the winter won't kill them. And now I'll sing a song for you. Listen! *(Sings)*

Your father is a bandit
And your mother is a whore
Every noble man and honest
Will bow as you pass.

The tiger's son will
Feed the little foals his brothers
The child of the serpent
Bring milk to the mothers.

4

In the Northern Mountains

THE SINGER

The sister trudged for seven days.
Across the glacier, down the slopes she trudged.

When I come to my brother's house, she thought
He will stand up and embrace me.

"Is it you, sister?" he will say.

"I've long been expecting you. This is my beloved wife.
And this is my farm, mine by marriage.

With eleven horses and thirty-one cows. Be seated!

Sit down at our table with your child and eat."

Her brother's house was in a smiling valley.

When the sister came to the brother's house, she was ill
from her journey.

The brother stood up from the table.

(A stout peasant couple who have sat down to eat. Lavrenti Vachnadze already has his napkin around his neck when Grusha, supported by a hired hand and very pale, enters with the child)

LAVRENTI VACHNADZE Where have you come from, Grusha?

GRUSHA *(feebly)* I've come across the Yanga-Tau pass,
Lavrenti.

HIRED HAND I found her outside the hay shed. She has a child
with her.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW Go and curry the bay. *(The hired hand goes out)*

LAVRENTI This is my wife, Aniko.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW We thought you were working in Nukha.

GRUSHA *(who can hardly stand up)* Yes, I was.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW Wasn't it a good position? We heard it
was.

GRUSHA The governor has been killed.

LAVRENTI Yes, we heard there was trouble. Your aunt told
us, don't you remember, Aniko?

THE SISTER-IN-LAW It's perfectly quiet here. City people are
always looking for trouble. *(Goes to the door and calls)*
Sosso, Sosso, don't take the cake out of the oven yet, do
you hear? Where are you anyway? *(Goes out, calling)*

LAVRENTI *(quickly, in an undertone)* Have you a father for
it? *(When she shakes her head)* Just as I thought. We've
got to think up something. She's very religious.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW *(coming back)* Those servants! *(To Grusha)* You have a child?

GRUSHA It's mine. *(She slumps over. Lavrenti raises her up)*

THE SISTER-IN-LAW Saints alive, she's got some disease. What will we do?

(*Lavrenti starts leading Grusha to the bench by the stove. Aniko, horrified, gestures him to stop and points to a sack by the wall*)

LAVRENTI (*takes Grusha to the wall*) Sit down. Sit down. It's only weakness.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW What if it's scarlet fever!

LAVRENTI There would be spots. It's weakness, Aniko, nothing to worry about. (*To Grusha, who has sat down*) Are you feeling better now?

THE SISTER-IN-LAW Is the child hers?

GRUSHA Mine.

LAVRENTI She's going to join her husband.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW Oh. Your meat is getting cold. (*Lavrenti sits down and begins to eat*) It doesn't agree with you cold, the fat is no good when it's cold. You know you have a delicate stomach. (*To Grusha*) If your husband's not in the city, where on earth is he?

LAVRENTI He lives across the mountains, she says.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW Oh. Across the mountains.

(*Sits down to eat*)

GRUSHA I think you'll have to take me somewhere to lie down, Lavrenti.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW (*continues her interrogation*) If it's consumption, we'll all get it. Has your husband a farm?

GRUSHA He's a soldier.

LAVRENTI But he's inherited a farm from his father, a small farm.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW Hasn't he gone to war? Why not?

GRUSHA (*with difficulty*) Yes, he's gone to war.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW Then why are you going to the farm?

LAVRENTI When he comes back from the war, he'll go to the farm.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW But you're going there right away?

LAVRENTI Yes, to wait for him.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW (*screams*) Sosso, the cake!

GRUSHA (*mumbles feverishly*) A farm. Soldier. Wait. Sit down, eat.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW It's scarlet fever.

GRUSHA (*starting up*) Yes, he has a farm.

LAVRENTI I think it's weakness, Aniko. Don't you want to see about the cake, my love?

THE SISTER-IN-LAW But when will he come back if what they're saying is true and the war has broken out again?

(*Waddles out, calling*) Sosso, where are you? Sosso!

LAVRENTI (*stands up quickly, goes to Grusha*) We'll put you to bed right away. She's a good soul, but not until after dinner.

GRUSHA (*holds out the child to him*) Take it! (*He takes it, looking around*)

LAVRENTI But you can't stay long. She's religious, you see. (*Grusha collapses. Her brother catches her*)

THE SINGER

The sister was too sick.

The cowardly brother had to take her in.

The autumn went, the winter came.

The winter was long

The winter was short.

The people mustn't find out.

The rats mustn't bite.

The spring mustn't come.

(*Grusha sitting at the loom in the storeroom. The child is huddled on the floor. They are wrapped in blankets*)

GRUSHA (*sings while weaving*)

The loved one prepared to go

And his betrothed ran after him pleading

Pleading and in tears, tearfully admonishing:

Dearest love, dearest love

If you must go off to war

If you must fight in the hard battle

Don't run ahead of the war

And don't lag behind the war

Up in front there is red fire

In the rear there is red smoke.
 Keep in the middle of the war
 Stay close to the banner bearer.
 The first are always sure to die
 The last are sure to be struck down as well
 Those in the middle come home again.

Michael, we must be very clever. If we make ourselves as small as cockroaches, my sister-in-law will forget that we're in the house. We'll be able to stay until the snow melts. And don't cry because it's cold. If you're poor and suffer from the cold besides, people won't like you.

(Lavrenti comes in. He sits down beside his sister)

LAVRENTI Why are you sitting here bundled up like coachmen? Is the room too cold?

GRUSHA *(hastily removing her shawl)* It's not cold, Lavrenti.

LAVRENTI If it's too cold, you shouldn't be sitting here with the child. Aniko would never forgive herself. *(Pause)* I hope the priest didn't ask you questions about the child.

GRUSHA He asked, but I didn't tell him anything.

LAVRENTI That's good. I wanted to talk to you about Aniko. She's a good soul, but she's so very, very sensitive. If people say the least thing about the farm, she gets upset. You see, she takes everything to heart. One time the milkmaid had a hole in her stocking in church, and my dear Aniko has been wearing two pairs of stockings to church ever since. You won't believe it, but it's in the family. *(He listens)* Are you sure there are no rats here? You can't stay here if there are. *(A sound is heard as of dripping from the roof)* What's that dripping?

GRUSHA It must be a leaky barrel.

LAVRENTI Yes, it must be a barrel.—You've been here for six months now. Was I talking about Aniko? Of course I didn't tell her about that Ironshirt, she has a weak heart. So she doesn't know you can't look for work, and that's why she spoke the way she did yesterday. *(They listen again to the dripping of the melting snow)* You can't imagine how worried she is about your soldier. "Suppose

he comes home and doesn't find her?" she says, and lies awake at night. "He can't be home before spring," I say. The good soul. (*The drops fall faster*) When do you suppose he'll come, what do you think? (*Grusha is silent*) Not before spring. Don't you agree? (*Grusha says nothing*) I see, you've given up expecting him. (*Grusha says nothing*) But when spring comes and the snow thaws here and on the passes, you can't stay here any longer, they're likely to come looking for you, and people are talking about an illegitimate child.

(*The glockenspiel of the falling drops has become loud and steady*)

LAVRENTI Grusha, the snow is melting on the roof; it's spring.

GRUSHA Yes.

LAVRENTI (*with enthusiasm*) I'll tell you what we'll do. You need a place to go, you've got a child (*he sighs*), so you need a husband to make people stop gossiping. I've been asking around—oh, very cautiously—about a husband for you. I've found one, Grusha. I've spoken to a woman who has a son just across the mountain, with a small farm, she's willing.

GRUSHA But I can't marry anybody, I've got to wait for Simon Chachava.

LAVRENTI Of course. I've thought of all that. You don't need a husband in bed, only on paper. I've found the right man. This woman I've made arrangements with—her son is dying. Isn't that perfect? He's at his last gasp. It will be just like we said: "A husband across the mountains." And when you got there, he breathed his last and you were a widow. What do you say?

GRUSHA I could use an official document for Michael.

LAVRENTI An official document makes all the difference in the world. Without an official document even the shah of Persia wouldn't dare to call himself the shah. And you'll have a roof over your head.

GRUSHA What does the woman want for it?

LAVRENTI Four hundred piasters.

GRUSHA Where did you get them?

LAVRENTI (*guiltily*) Aniko's milk money.

GRUSHA Over there nobody will know us.—All right, I'll do it.

LAVRENTI (*stands up*) I'll let the woman know right away.
(*Goes out quickly*)

GRUSHA Michael, you certainly mess things up. I came by you as a pear tree comes by sparrows. And because a Christian bends down and picks up a crust of bread to make sure that nothing is wasted. Michael, I ought to have left in a hurry that Easter Sunday in Nukha. Now I'm the ninny.

THE SINGER

The bridegroom lay on his deathbed when the bride appeared.

The bridegroom's mother was waiting at the door and pressed her to make haste.

The bride brought a child with her, the witness hid it during the wedding.

(*A room divided by a partition: on one side a bed. Under the mosquito netting a very sick man lies motionless. The mother-in-law comes running in on the other side, pulling Grusha by the hand. After them Lavrenti with the child*)

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW Hurry, hurry, or he'll kick in on us before the wedding. (*To Lavrenti*) You didn't tell me she had a child already.

LAVRENTI What difference does it make? (*With a gesture toward the dying man*) It can't matter to him, not in his condition.

MOTHER-IN-LAW Not to him! But I'll never outlive the disgrace. We're honest folk. (*She starts to cry*) My Yussup doesn't have to marry a woman that has a child already.

LAVRENTI All right. I'll throw in another two hundred piasters. You have it in writing that the farm goes to you, but she is entitled to live here for two years.

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW (*drying her tears*) That will hardly cover the funeral expenses. I hope she'll really give me a hand with the work. But where has the monk gone now? He must have crawled out the kitchen window. Now

we'll have the whole village on our necks if they hear that Yussup is giving up the ghost. Oh my goodness! I'll go get him, but he mustn't see the child.

LAVRENTI I'll make sure he doesn't see it. But why a monk and not a priest?

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW It's just as good. Except I made the mistake of giving him half his fee before the ceremony, so now he's gone off to the tavern. I only hope . . . (*She runs off*)

LAVRENTI The priest was too expensive for her, the skinflint. She's hired a cheap monk.

GRUSHA Send Simon Chachava over here if he turns up.

LAVRENTI Yes. (*Indicating the sick man*) Don't you want to take a look at him?

(*Grusha, who has picked up Michael, shakes her head*)

LAVRENTI He doesn't even move. I hope we're not too late. (*They listen. On the other side neighbors enter, look around and line up along the walls. They begin to mumble prayers. The mother-in-law comes in with the monk*)

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW (*after a moment's surprise and irritation, to the monk*) There you have it. (*She bows to the guests*) Please be patient just a minute. My son's fiancée has just arrived from the city and there's to be an emergency marriage. (*Goes into the bedroom with the monk*) I knew you'd spread it far and wide. (*To Grusha*) The marriage can take place right away. Here's the contract. Me and the bride's brother . . . (*Lavrenti tries to hide in the background after quickly recovering Michael from Grusha. The mother-in-law waves him away*) Me and the bride's brother are the witnesses.

(*Grusha has bowed to the monk. They go to the bedside. The mother-in-law pushes back the mosquito netting. The monk begins to reel off his lines in Latin. Meanwhile Lavrenti tries to prevent the child from crying by showing him the ceremony and the mother-in-law keeps motioning him to put the child down. Once Grusha looks around toward the child and Lavrenti waves the child's hand at her*)

THE MONK Are you prepared to be a faithful, obedient, and

good wife to this man and to cleave to him until death you do part?

GRUSHA (*looking at the child*) Yes.

THE MONK (*to the dying man*) And are you prepared to be a good husband and provider to this woman until death you do part?

(*When the dying man does not answer, the monk repeats his question and looks around*)

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW Of course he is. Didn't you hear him say yes?

THE MONK All right, we declare the marriage concluded. But how about extreme unction?

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW Nothing doing. The marriage cost enough. Now I've got to attend to the mourners. (*To Lavrenti*) Did we say seven hundred?

LAVRENTI Six hundred. (*He gives her the money*) I won't sit down with the guests. I might make friends with somebody. So good-bye, Grusha, and if my widowed sister comes to see me one of these days, my wife will bid her welcome, or she'll hear from me.

(*He goes. The mourners look after him indifferently as he passes through*)

THE MONK And may one ask who this child is?

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW A child? I don't see any child. And you don't see one either. Understand? Or maybe I'll have seen certain goings-on behind the tavern. Come along now.

(*They go into the other room, after Grusha has set the child on the floor and told him to keep quiet. She is introduced to the neighbors*)

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW This is my daughter-in-law. She was just in time to find our dear Yussup alive.

ONE OF THE WOMEN He's been lying abed a whole year now, hasn't he? When my Vassili went off to the army, he came to the farewell party.

ANOTHER WOMAN A thing like this is terrible for a farm, the corn ready to reap and the farmer in bed. A good thing for him if he doesn't have to suffer much longer is what I say.

FIRST WOMAN (*confidentially*) At first we thought he took to his bed to keep out of the army. And now he's dying!

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW Do sit down and have a few cakes.

(The mother-in-law beckons to Grusha and they both go into the bedroom where they take pans of cake from the floor. The guests, including the monk, sit down on the floor and start a muffled conversation)

A PEASANT *(the monk has taken a bottle from his cassock and passed it to him)* There's a child, you say? How can that have happened to Yussup?

THIRD WOMAN She was certainly lucky to swing it, with him so sick.

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW Now they've started gossiping; and they'll be eating up the funeral cakes and if he doesn't die today, I'll have to bake more tomorrow.

GRUSHA I'll bake them.

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW Last night some men rode by and I went out to see who it was. When I came back he was lying there like a corpse. That's why I sent for you. He can't last long now. *(She listens)*

THE MONK Dear wedding guests and mourners! Deeply moved, we stand before a death bed and a marriage bed, for a woman has been married and a man is soon to be buried. The groom has been washed and the bride is hot. For in the marriage bed there lies a last will, which arouses the lusts of the flesh. Dearly beloved, how various are the paths of humankind! One dies to get a roof over his head, another marries in order that flesh may return to the dust whence it was made. Amen.

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW *(who has listened)* He's getting even. I shouldn't have taken such a cheap one, he's no better than I paid for. An expensive one behaves. In Sura there's a priest who's even said to be a saint, but naturally he costs a fortune. A fifty-piaster priest like this has no dignity, he's got just enough religion for fifty piasters, no more. When I went to get him out of the tavern, he was making a speech and yelling: "The war is over! Beware of peace!" We'd better go in.

GRUSHA *(gives Michael a cake)* Here's a cake for you, be nice and quiet, Michael. We're respectable people now. *(They take the cake pans out to the guests. The dying man sits up under the mosquito net, sticks his head out, and looks*

after the two women. Then he sinks back. The monk has taken two bottles from his cassock and passed them to the peasant who is sitting beside him. Three musicians have entered; the monk grins and waves to them)

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW (*to the musicians*) What are you doing here with your instruments?

A MUSICIAN Brother Anastasius here (*indicating the monk*) said there was a wedding.

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW What's this? Three more people on my neck? Don't you know there's a dying man in there?

THE MONK A fascinating problem for a musician. Shall it be a muffled wedding march or a dashing funeral dance?

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW Play something at least, we know nothing can stop you from eating.

(The musicians play a mixture of genres. The women pass cakes)

THE MONK The trumpet sounds like a whimpering baby, and you, little drum, what is your message to the world?

THE PEASANT (*beside the monk*) Couldn't the bride give us a little dance?

THE MONK With a skeleton?

THE PEASANT (*beside the monk, sings*)

Mistress Roundass thought it was time to wed
She took an elderly man to bed
To frolic and to dandle.
Next morning she had changed her mind:
I'd rather have a candle.

(The mother-in-law throws the drunken man out. The music breaks off. The guests are embarrassed. Pause)

THE GUESTS (*loudly*) Did you hear that? The grand duke is back.—But the princes are against him.—Oh, it seems the shah of Persia has lent him a big army to restore order in Gruzinia.—How can that be? The shah of Persia hates the grand duke!—But he also hates disorder.—Anyway the war is over. Our soldiers are coming back. (*Grusha drops the cake pan*)

A WOMAN (*to Grusha*) Aren't you feeling well? It's the excitement over our dear Yussup. Sit down and rest, my dear.

(Grusha stands tottering)

THE GUESTS Now everything will be the same as before.—Except there will be more taxes, because we'll have to pay for the war.

GRUSHA (*feebly*) Did someone say the soldiers are coming home?

A MAN I said so.

GRUSHA That can't be.

THE MAN (*to a woman*) Show her your shawl! We bought it from a soldier. It's from Persia.

GRUSHA (*looks at the shawl*) They're here.

(A long pause. Grusha kneels down as though to pick up the cakes. She takes the silver cross and chain from her blouse, kisses the cross and begins to pray)

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW (*seeing that the guests are silently looking at Grusha*) What's got into you? Can't you pay attention to our guests? What do we care about these fool rumors from the city?

THE GUESTS (*loudly resuming their conversation while Grusha kneels with her forehead to the floor*) You can buy Persian saddles from the soldiers, some are exchanging them for crutches.—Only the bigwigs on one side can win a war, the soldiers on both sides lose it.—At least the war's over. It's something if they can't drag you off to the army any more. (*The peasant in the bed has sat up. He is listening*)—What we need is two more weeks of good weather.—Our pear trees are hardly bearing at all this year.

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW (*passing the cake*) Have a little more cake. Help yourselves. There's more.

(The mother-in-law goes into the bedroom with the empty cake pan. She does not see the sick man. She is bending over a full cake pan on the floor when he begins to speak in a hoarse voice)

YUSSUP How much more cake are you going to stuff into their bellies? Do you think I shit money? (*The mother-in-law turns abruptly and stares at him aghast. He climbs out from behind the mosquito net*) Did they say the war was over?

THE FIRST WOMAN (*in the other room, amiably to Grusha*) Has the young lady someone in the army?

THE MAN It's good news that they're coming home, isn't it?

YUSSUP Stop goggling. Where is this woman you've saddled me with?

(Receiving no answer, he gets out of bed in his nightgown and staggers past the mother-in-law into the other room. She follows him trembling, with the cake pan)

THE GUESTS *(see him and exclaim)* Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Yussup!

(All spring up in alarm, the women rush toward the door. Grusha, still on her knees, turns her head and stares at Yussup)

YUSSUP A funeral supper. Wouldn't that suit you! Get out before I take a whip to you.

(The guests leave the house in haste)

YUSSUP *(grimly to Grusha)* Upsets your little game, eh? *(She says nothing; he takes a millet cake from the pan the mother-in-law is holding)*

THE SINGER

Oh, confusion. The wife discovers she has a husband!

By day she has the child. At night she has the husband.

Day and night her beloved is on his way.

The couple look each other over. The room is small.

(Yussup sits naked in a tall wooden bathtub and the mother-in-law adds water out of a pitcher. In the bedroom Grusha is sitting huddled over with Michael who is playing at mending straw mats)

YUSSUP She should be doing this, not you. Where has she gone now?

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW *(calls)* Grusha! Yussup wants you.

GRUSHA *(to Michael)* Here are two more holes for you to mend.

YUSSUP *(as Grusha enters)* Scrub my back!

GRUSHA Can't the farmer do it himself?

YUSSUP "Can't the farmer do it himself?" Take the brush, damn it! Are you my wife or are you a stranger? *(To the mother-in-law)* Too cold!

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW I'll get some hot water right away.

GRUSHA Let me go.

YUSSUP You stay right here! (*The mother-in-law runs out*)

Rub harder. And don't put on airs like you'd never seen a naked man before. Who made your kid? The Holy Ghost?

GRUSHA The child wasn't conceived in joy, if that's what the farmer means.

YUSSUP (*looks around at her and grins*) I wouldn't say that, to look at you. (*Grusha stops scrubbing him and shrinks back. The mother-in-law enters*) Nice work. You've married me to a cold fish.

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW She just doesn't try.

YUSSUP Pour, but be careful. Ouch! Careful, I said. (*To Grusha*) I wouldn't be surprised if you'd got yourself in trouble in the city. Or what would you be doing here? But I won't go into that. I haven't said anything about the bastard you've brought into my house, but with you my patience is running out. It's not natural. (*To the mother-in-law*) More! (*To Grusha*) Even if your soldier comes back, remember, you're married.

GRUSHA Yes.

YUSSUP But your soldier won't come back any more, it's no use thinking he will.

GRUSHA No.

YUSSUP You're cheating me. You're my wife and you're not my wife. Where you lie, there's nothing, but nobody else can lie there. When I go out to the fields in the morning, I'm dead tired; when I lie down at night, I'm as spry as the devil himself. God made you a woman, and what do you do? My farm doesn't bring in enough for me to buy a woman in the city, and besides, there's the trip to think of. A woman hoes the fields and spreads her legs, that's what it says in our almanac. Do you hear me?

GRUSHA Yes. (*Softly*) I'm sorry to be cheating you.

YUSSUP She's sorry! More water! (*The mother-in-law pours more water*) Ouch!

THE SINGER

As by the brook she sat washing the linen
She saw his face in the water. And his face grew paler
With each passing moon.

When she stood up to wring out the linen
 She heard his voice from the murmuring maple and his voice
 grew softer
 With each passing moon.
 Sighs and excuses multiplied, salt tears and sweat were shed.
 With each passing moon the child grew up.

(Grusha is kneeling by a small brook, dipping clothes in the water. A little way off some children are standing. Grusha is talking to Michael)

GRUSHA You may play with them, Michael, but don't let them order you around because you're the smallest.
(Michael nods and goes to the other children. They start to play)

THE BIGGEST BOY Today we're going to play Heads Off. *(To a fat boy)* You're the prince, you're supposed to laugh. *(To Michael)* You're the governor. *(To a little girl)* You're the governor's wife, you're supposed to cry when his head is chopped off. And I'm going to chop his head off. *(He shows his wooden sword)* With this. First the governor is brought into the yard. The prince leads the procession, the governor's wife comes last. *(The procession forms, the fat boy goes first, laughing. Then come Michael and the biggest boy, then the little girl who is crying)*

MICHAEL *(stops still)* Me chop head off too.

THE BIGGEST BOY That's my job. You're the littlest. Governor is easiest. Get down on your knees and let your head be chopped off. It's easy.

MICHAEL Want sword too.

THE BIGGEST BOY It's mine. *(Gives him a kick)*

THE LITTLE GIRL *(calls to Grusha)* He won't play right.

GRUSHA *(laughs)* They say the smallest duckling knows how to swim.

THE BIGGEST BOY You can be the prince if you can laugh.
(Michael shakes his head)

THE FAT BOY I laugh best. Let him chop your head off once, then you chop his off and then me.
(Reluctantly the biggest boy gives Michael the wooden sword and kneels down. The fat boy has sat down, slapping

his thighs and laughing loudly. The little girl is wailing. Michael swings the big sword and cuts the other boy's head off; he falls down in the process)

THE BIGGEST BOY Ouch! I'll show you the right way.

(Michael runs off, the children after him. Grusha looks after them laughing. When she turns back, Simon Chachava, in a ragged uniform, is standing on the other side of the brook)

GRUSHA Simon!

SIMON Am I addressing Grusha Vachnadze?

GRUSHA Simon!

SIMON *(formally)* God bless the young lady. I hope she is well.

GRUSHA *(stands up happily and bows low)* God bless you, soldier. And thank heaven you have returned in good health.

SIMON As the haddock said, they found better fishes, so they didn't eat me.

GRUSHA Bravery, said the kitchen helper; luck, said the hero.

SIMON How have things been? Was the winter bearable, were the neighbors kind?

GRUSHA The winter was rather hard, Simon, and the neighbors as usual.

SIMON May I ask whether a certain person is still in the habit of putting her legs in the water when she washes clothes?

GRUSHA The answer is no because of the eyes in the bushes!

SIMON The young lady is speaking about soldiers. A paymaster is standing before you.

GRUSHA Doesn't that mean twenty piasters?

SIMON And lodging.

GRUSHA *(tears coming to her eyes)* Behind the barracks, under the date palms.

SIMON Exactly. I see the young lady has taken a look around.

GRUSHA So she has.

SIMON And she hasn't forgotten. *(Grusha shakes her head)* Then the door is still on its hinges, as they say? *(Grusha looks at him in silence and shakes her head again)* What do you mean? Is something wrong?

GRUSHA Simon Chachava, I can never go back to Nukha again. Something has happened.

SIMON What has happened?

GRUSHA It has happened that I hit an Ironshirt on the head.

SIMON Grusha Vachnadze must have had good reason.

GRUSHA Simon Chachava, my name isn't the same as before.

SIMON (*after a pause*) I don't understand.

GRUSHA When do women change their names, Simon? Let me explain. Nothing has come between us, everything is the same, you've got to believe me.

SIMON Nothing has come between us, but something has changed?

GRUSHA How can I explain it so quickly with the brook between us? Can't you take the bridge and come over?

SIMON Perhaps it's no longer necessary.

GRUSHA It's very necessary. Come over, Simon. Hurry!

SIMON Does the young lady mean the soldier has come too late?

(Grusha looks at him despairingly, her face bathed in tears. Simon stares straight ahead. He has picked up a piece of wood and is whittling)

THE SINGER

So many words are said, so many words are left unsaid.

The soldier has come. Where he has come from he does not say.

Hear what he thought and did not say:

The battle began at gray of dawn, blood flowed at noon.

The first fell before me, the second fell behind me, the third fell next to me.

On the first I trampled, the second I left behind, the third was run through by the captain.

My first brother perished by iron, my second brother perished by smoke.

They struck flame from my head, my hands were frozen in my gloves, my toes in my stockings.

To eat I had aspen buds, to drink I had maple broth, I slept at night on stones, or in water.

SIMON I see a cap in the grass. Can there be a child so soon?

GRUSHA Yes, Simon, there is. How could I hide it? But you mustn't fret, it's not mine.

SIMON They say: Once the wind starts blowing, it blows through every crack and cranny. The lady need say no more.

(Grusha bows her head and says nothing)

THE SINGER

Yearning there was, but no waiting.

Broken the oath. The reason is not reported.

Hear what she thought and did not say:

Soldier, when you were fighting in the battle

The bloody battle, the bitter battle

I found a child who was helpless.

I hadn't the heart to leave it.

I had to care for what would have perished

I had to bend down for bread crumbs on the ground

I had to tear myself to pieces for what was not mine

A stranger.

Someone must help

For a sapling needs water.

The baby calf strays when the cowherd sleeps

And the cry goes unheard!

SIMON Give me back the cross I gave you. No, throw it in the brook.

(He turns to go)

GRUSHA Simon Chachava, don't go away, it's not mine, it's not mine! *(She hears the children calling)* What is it, children?

VOICES Soldiers!—They're taking Michael away!

(Grusha stands horrified. Two Ironshirts come toward her, leading Michael)

IRONSHIRTS Are you Grusha? *(She nods)* Is this your child?

GRUSHA Yes. *(Simon goes away)* Simon!

IRONSHIRTS We have a court order to take this child, found in your care, to the city. There is reason to believe that it is Michael Abashvili, son of Governor Georgi Abashvili and

his wife Natella Abashvili. Here is the order, duly signed and sealed. (*They lead the child away*)

GRUSHA (*runs after them shouting*) Leave him, please, he's mine!

THE SINGER

The Ironshirts took the cherished child away. The unhappy woman followed them to the perilous city.

The mother who had borne him demanded the child's return. His foster-mother appeared in court.

Who will decide the case, to whom will the child be given?

Who will the judge be? A good one? A bad one?

The city was in flames. On the seat of justice sat Azdak.

5

The Story of the Judge

THE SINGER

Hear now the story of the judge:

How he became judge, how he passed judgment, what manner of judge he is.

That Easter Sunday when the great uprising took place and the grand duke was overthrown

And Abashvili, his governor, our child's father, lost his head
Azdak the village scribe found a fugitive in the thicket and hid him in his hut.

(*Ragged and tipsy, Azdak helps a fugitive disguised as a beggar into his hut*)

AZDAK Stop panting. You're not a horse. And running like snot in April won't save you from the police. Stop, I tell you. (*He catches the fugitive, who has kept going as though to run through the opposite wall of the hut*) Sit down and eat, here's a piece of cheese. (*He rummages through a chest full of rags and fishes out a cheese; the fugitive starts eating avidly*) Haven't eaten in some time, huh? (*The fugi-*

tive grumbles) What were you running for, you asshole? The policeman wouldn't even have seen you.

THE FUGITIVE Had to.

AZDAK Shits? (*The fugitive looks at him uncomprehendingly*) Jitters? Scared? Hm. Stop smacking your lips like a grand duke or a pig! I can't stand it. We've got to take blue-blooded stinkers the way God made them. Not you. I once heard of a chief justice who was so independent he farted at dinner. When I watch you eating, horrible thoughts come to me. Why don't you say something? (*Sharply*) Let's see your hand! Can't you hear me? I want to see your hand. (*Hesitantly the fugitive holds out his hand*) White. So you're not a beggar at all. A phony, a walking swindle! And me hiding you like you were a self-respecting citizen. What are you running for if you're a landowner? That's what you are, don't deny it, I can tell by your guilty look! (*Stands up*) Get out! (*The fugitive looks at him uncertainly*) What are you waiting for, you peasant-flogger?

THE FUGITIVE Looking for me. Request undivided attention, have proposition.

AZDAK What's that? A proposition? That's the height of insolence. He wants to make a proposition! The victim scratches till his fingers are bloody, and the leech makes a proposition. Get out, I say!

THE FUGITIVE Understand point of view, convictions. Pay hundred thousand piasters one night. Well?

AZDAK What? You think you can buy me? For a hundred thousand piasters? A rundown estate. Let's say a hundred and fifty thousand. Where are they?

THE FUGITIVE Not on me naturally. Will send. Hope no doubts.

AZDAK Deep doubts. Get out!

(*The fugitive stands up and trots to the door. A voice from outside*)

VOICE Azdak!

(*The fugitive turns around and trots to the opposite corner, where he stops still*)

AZDAK (*shouts*) I'm busy. (*Steps into the doorway*) Are you nosing around again, Shauva?

SHAUVA THE POLICEMAN (*outside, reproachfully*) You've caught another rabbit, Azdak. You promised it wouldn't happen again.

AZDAK (*sternly*) Don't talk about things you don't understand, Shauva. The rabbit is a dangerous and harmful animal that eats plants, especially the varieties known as weeds, and must therefore be exterminated.

SHAUVA Azdak, don't be so mean to me. I'll lose my job if I'm not severe with you. I know you've got a good heart.

AZDAK I haven't got a good heart. How often do I have to tell you I'm an intellectual?

SHAUVA (*slyly*) I know, Azdak. You're a superior man, you say so yourself. All right, I'm only an uneducated Christian and I ask you: If one of the prince's rabbits is stolen and I'm a policeman, what am I to do about the guilty party?

AZDAK Shauva, Shauva, you ought to be ashamed. There you stand asking me a question when a question is the worst of all temptations. Suppose you were a woman, Nunovna, for instance, the wicked slut, and you show me the upper reaches of your leg, Nunovna's I mean, and ask me: What should I do about my leg, it itches—is she innocent, behaving like that? No. I catch rabbits, but you catch men. A man is made in God's image, a rabbit isn't, you know that. I'm a rabbit-cater, but you're a cannibal, Shauva, and God will judge you. Go home, Shauva, and repent. No, wait a minute, maybe I've got something for you. (*He looks around at the fugitive who stands there trembling*) No, never mind. Go home and repent. (*He slams the door in his face. To the fugitive*) You're surprised, aren't you? That I didn't hand you over. But I couldn't even hand a bedbug over to that dumb-ox policeman, it goes against my grain. Never be afraid of a policeman. So old and such a coward. Eat up your cheese like a poor man, or they're sure to catch you. Do I have to show you how a poor man behaves? (*He pushes him down in his chair and puts the piece of cheese back in his hand*) This chest is the table. Put your elbows on the table, surround the cheese on the plate as if it might be snatched away at any moment, can you ever be sure? Hold your knife like a small sickle and don't look at the

cheese so greedily, your expression should be more on the sorrowful side, because it's already vanishing, like all beauty. (*Watches him*) They're looking for you, that's in your favor, but how can I know they're not mistaken about you? In Tiflis one time they hanged a landowner, a Turk. He was able to prove that he didn't just cut his peasants in half the usual way, but quartered them. He gouged out twice as much taxes as anybody else, his zeal was above suspicion, but they hanged him as a criminal all the same, just because he was a Turk, which he couldn't help. That was an injustice. He found himself on the gallows the way Pontius Pilate found himself in the Creed. To make a long story short, I don't trust you.

THE SINGER

And so Azdak lodged the old beggar for the night.
 When he found out that he was the grand duke in person,
 the butcher
 He was ashamed. He denounced himself, he ordered the
 policeman
 To take him to Nukha, to court, to be tried.
 (*In the courthouse yard three Ironshirts are sitting drinking.
 From a column hangs a man in a judge's robe. Enter Azdak
 bound, dragging Shauva behind him*)

AZDAK (*cries out*) I helped the grand duke, the grand thief,
 the grand butcher, to escape. In the name of justice I demand
 a public trial and a severe sentence!

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT Who's this bird?

SHAUVA It's Azdak, our scribe.

AZDAK I'm a contemptible traitor, a marked man! Report,
 flatfoot, how I insisted on being taken to the capital in
 chains because I sheltered the grand duke, grand scoundrel,
 by mistake, which was only made clear to me later by this
 document that I found in my hut. (*The Ironshirts study the
 document. To Shauva*) They can't read. See, the marked
 man denounces himself! Tell them how I made you run
 with me half the night to clear everything up.

SHAUVA By threatening me. That wasn't nice of you, Azdak.

AZDAK Shut up, Shauva, you don't understand. A new era has dawned, it will rumble over you like thunder, you're through, policemen will be exterminated, pfft. Everything will be investigated, brought to light. A man with any sense will turn himself in, he can't escape from the people. Report how I yelled all the way down Shoemaker Lane. (*He acts it out with sweeping gestures, squinting at the Ironshirts*) "I let the grand scoundrel escape out of ignorance. Tear me to pieces, brothers!" To forestall any questions.

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT And what was their answer?

SHAUVA They comforted him on Butcher Lane and laughed themselves sick on Shoemaker Lane, that's all.

AZDAK But you're different, I know that, you're men of iron. Where's the judge, brothers, I want to be questioned.

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT (*points to the hanged man*) There's the judge. And stop bothering us. We're touchy about that kind of thing right now.

AZDAK "There's the judge." Such an answer has never been heard in Gruzinia. Townspeople, where is his excellency the governor? (*He points to the gallows*) There's his excellency, stranger. Where is the chief tax collector? The chief recruiting officer? The patriarch? The chief of police? Here, here, here, all here. Brothers, that's what I was expecting of you.

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT That's enough! What did you expect, you clown?

AZDAK What happened in Persia, brothers, what happened in Persia?

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT What happened in Persia?

AZDAK Forty years ago. Hanged, the whole lot of them. Viziers, tax collectors. My grandfather, a remarkable man, saw it. Three whole days, all over the country.

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT But who governed if the vizier was hanged?

AZDAK A peasant.

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT And who commanded the army?

AZDAK A soldier, soldier.

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT And who gave them their pay?

AZDAK A dyer, a dyer gave them their pay.

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT Are you sure it wasn't a carpet weaver?

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT But why did all that happen, you Persian?

AZDAK Why it all happened? Do you need a special reason? Why do you scratch yourself, brother? War! Too much war! And no justice! My grandfather brought back a song that tells the way it was. My friend the policeman and I will sing it for you. (*To Shauva*) And keep a good hold on the rope, that goes with it. (*He sings, while Shauva holds the rope*)

Why are our sons not bleeding any more, and our daughters weep no more?

Why is it that only the calves in the slaughterhouse have any blood left?

Why is it that only the willows on Lake Urmi are shedding tears?

The emperor stands in need of a new province, the peasant must hand over his savings.

So that the roof of the world may be conquered, the roofs of all the huts are carted off.

Our men are taken away, scattered to all four winds so that the noble lords at home may feast and revel.

And the soldiers kill one another, the generals salute one another.

They bite the widow's tax farthing to see if it is real.

The lances are broken.

The battle has been lost. But the helmets have been paid for. Is it so? Is it so?

SHAUVA Yes, yes, yes, yes, it is so.

AZDAK Do you want to hear the rest?

(*The first Ironshirt nods*)

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT (*to the policeman*) Didn't he teach you the song?

SHAUVA Oh yes, but my voice is no good.

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT No. (*To Azdak*) Go on, go on.

AZDAK The second stanza is about the peace. (*Sings*)
 Public offices overcrowded, officials sitting all the way out
 to the street.
 Rivers overflow the banks and devastate the fields
 Men who can't take their own pants down are ruling
 empires.
 They can't count to four but they eat eight courses.
 The corn growers look round for buyers, find only starve-
 lings
 The weavers go home from their looms in rags.
 Is it so? Is it so?

SHAUVA Yes, yes, yes, yes, it is so.

AZDAK

That's why our sons are not bleeding any more, and our
 daughters weep no more
 Why only the calves in the slaughterhouse have any blood
 left.
 Why it is that only the willows on Lake Urmi are shedding
 tears.

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT (*after a pause*) Are you going to sing
 that song here in town?

AZDAK What's wrong with it?

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT Do you see that red glow over there?
 (*Azdek looks around. There is a fiery glow in the sky*)
 That's out in the slums. When Prince Kazbeki had Govern-
 or Abashvili beheaded this morning, our carpet weavers
 caught the "Persian disease" too and asked if Prince Kazbeki
 didn't eat too many courses. And at noon today they strung
 up the city judge. But we took care of them for two
 piasters a weaver. See what I mean?

AZDAK (*after a pause*) I see. (*He looks around fearfully,
 slinks off to one side and sits down on the ground with his
 head in his hands*)

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT (*after all have taken a drink, to the third*)

Now we're going to have a little fun.

(The first and second Ironshirt go toward Azdak, blocking his retreat)

SHAUVA I don't think he's really bad, gentlemen. Steals a few chickens, maybe a rabbit now and then.

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT *(stepping up to Azdak)* You came here to fish in troubled waters, didn't you?

AZDAK *(looking up at him)* I don't know why I came here.

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT Are you the kind that sides with the carpet weavers? *(Azdak shakes his head)* What about that song?

AZDAK Got it from my grandfather. A stupid, ignorant man.

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT Right. And what about the dyer that handed out the pay?

AZDAK That was in Persia.

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT And what about your denouncing yourself for not hanging the grand duke with your own hands?

AZDAK Didn't I tell you I let him go?

SHAUVA I'll vouch for that. He let him go.

(The Ironshirts drag the screaming Azdak to the gallows. Then they let him go and laugh uproariously. Azdak joins in the laughter and laughs loudest. Then he is untied. All begin to drink. Enter the fat prince with a young man)

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT *(to Azdak)* Here comes your new era. *(More laughter)*

THE FAT PRINCE And what might there be to laugh about, my friends? Permit me to put in a serious word. Yesterday morning the princes of Gruzinia overthrew the grand duke's bellicose government and liquidated his governors. Unfortunately the grand duke himself escaped. In this fateful hour our carpet weavers, those eternal agitators, have had the audacity to revolt and hang the city judge, a man whom everyone loved, our dear Illo Orbeliani. Ts, ts, ts. My friends, what we need in Gruzinia is peace, peace, peace. And justice! Here I've brought you my dear nephew, Bizergan Kazbeki, an able man, to be the new judge. I say: The decision rests with the people.

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT You mean we're to elect the judge?

THE FAT PRINCE Exactly. The people will elect an able man.

Talk it over, my friends. (*While the Ironshirts put their heads together*) Don't worry, duckling, the job is yours. And once they nab the grand duke, we can stop sucking up to the rabble.

THE IRONSHIRTS (*among themselves*) They're scared shitless because they haven't caught the grand duke.—We can thank this village scribe for letting him go.—They're not sure of themselves yet, that's why they're saying "my friends" and "the decision rests with the people."—Now he's even talking about justice for Gruzinia.—But fun is fun, and this is going to be fun.—We'll ask the village scribe, he knows all about justice. Hey, stinko . . .

AZDAK Do you mean me?

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT (*continues*) . . . would you want this nephew for a judge?

AZDAK Are you asking me? You're not asking me, are you?

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT Why not? Anything for a laugh.

AZDAK The way I see it, you want to put him to the test. Am I right? Haven't you got some criminal handy, so the candidate can show his ability? One who knows the ropes.

THE THIRD IRONSHIRT Let's see. We've got the governor's bitch's two doctors down in the cellar. Let's take them.

AZDAK No, that's no good. You can't take real criminals when the judge hasn't been confirmed in office. It's all right for him to be a jackass, but he's got to be confirmed in office, or it's an offense against the law, which is a very sensitive organ, something like the spleen, which must never be punched or death sets in. You can hang them both, that won't be an offense against the law, because no judge was present. The law must be administered with perfect gravity, because it's so stupid. For instance if a judge jails a woman for stealing a piece of millet bread for her child, and he hasn't got his robe on or he scratches himself while handing down the sentence, so that more than a third of him is naked, I mean, suppose he has to scratch the upper part of his leg, then his judgment is a scandal and the law has been flouted. A judge's robe and a judge's hat can hand down a better sentence than a man without them. Justice goes up in smoke if you're not very careful. You wouldn't test a jug of wine

by giving it to a dog to drink, hell, your wine would be gone.

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT So what do you suggest, you hair-splitter?

AZDAK I'll play the defendant for you. I already know who he'll be. (*He whispers something in their ears*)

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT You?

(*All laugh uproariously*)

THE FAT PRINCE What have you decided?

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT We've decided to give it a try. Our good friend here will play the accused, and here's a seat of justice for the candidate.

THE FAT PRINCE It's unusual, but why not? (*To his nephew*)

A mere formality, duckling. What have you learned? Who won the race, the slow runner or the fast one?

THE NEPHEW The stealthy runner, Uncle Arsen.

(*The nephew sits down on the seat of justice, the fat prince stands behind him. The Ironshirts sit down on the steps. Azdak enters with the unmistakable gait of the grand duke*)

AZDAK Is there anybody here who knows me? I am the grand duke.

THE FAT PRINCE What is he?

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT The grand duke. He really knows him.

THE FAT PRINCE Good.

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT Start the trial.

AZDAK Hear I'm accused inciting war. Ridiculous. Repeat: ridiculous! Sufficient? If not sufficient, brought lawyers, believe five hundred. (*He motions behind him, as though there were many lawyers around him*) Need all available seats for lawyers.

(*The Ironshirts laugh; the fat prince joins in*)

THE NEPHEW (*to the Ironshirts*) Do you wish me to try the case? I must say it seems rather unusual, in poor taste I mean.

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT Get started.

THE FAT PRINCE (*smiling*) Throw the book at him, duckling.

THE NEPHEW Very well. People of Gruzinia versus grand duke. Accused, what have you to say for yourself?

AZDAK Plenty. Naturally read war lost. Declared war only on advice patriots like Uncle Kazbeki. Demand Uncle Kazbeki as witness. (*The Ironshirts laugh*)

THE FAT PRINCE (*good-naturedly to the Ironshirts*) Quite a character, isn't he?

THE NEPHEW Motion overruled. Obviously you can't be prosecuted for declaring war, every ruler has to do that now and then, but only for conducting it incompetently.

AZDAK Nonsense. Didn't conduct it at all. Had it conducted. Had it conducted by princes. Naturally fouled it up.

THE NEPHEW Do you mean to deny that you were in supreme command?

AZDAK Certainly not. Always in supreme command. When born, bellowed at nurse. Raised to drop shit in privy. Accustomed to command. Always commanded officials to rob my treasury. Officers flog soldiers, only my command; landowners sleep with peasants' wives only my strict command. Uncle Kazbeki here has big belly only by my command.

THE IRONSHIRTS (*applauding*) He's rich. Hurrah for the grand duke!

THE FAT PRINCE Answer him, duckling! I'm with you.

THE NEPHEW I will answer him as befits the dignity of the court. Accused, respect the dignity of the court.

AZDAK Right. Command you proceed with trial.

THE NEPHEW Not taking commands from you. You claim forced by princes declare war. How then can you claim princes fouled up war?

AZDAK Not sending enough men, embezzling funds, delivering sick horses, drinking in whorehouse during attack. Move call Uncle Kaz witness.

(*The Ironshirts laugh*)

THE NEPHEW Do you mean to make the monstrous assertion that the princes of this country did not fight?

AZDAK No. Princes fought. Fought for war contracts.

THE FAT PRINCE This is too much. The man talks like a carpet weaver.

AZDAK Indeed? Only tell truth!

THE FAT PRINCE Hang him! Hang him!

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT Take it easy. Go on, excellency!

THE NEPHEW Silence! Pronounce sentence: must be hanged.
By neck. Lost war. Sentence pronounced. Irrevocable.
Take him away.

THE FAT PRINCE (*hysterically*) Take him away! Take him away!

AZDAK Young man, earnestly advise not fall into clipped, military delivery in public. Can't be employed watchdog if howl like wolf. Get me?

THE FAT PRINCE Hang him!

AZDAK If people notice princes talk same as grand duke, they will hang grand duke and princes. Moreover annul sentence. Reason: war lost, but not for princes. Princes won their war. Collected three million eight hundred sixty-three piasters for horses not delivered.

THE FAT PRINCE Hang him!

AZDAK Eight million two hundred forty thousand piasters for army provisions not supplied.

THE FAT PRINCE Hang him!

AZDAK Therefore victorious. War only lost for Gruzinia, not present in this court.

THE FAT PRINCE I think that will do, my friends. (*To Azdak*) You can step down, gallowsbird. (*To the Ironshirts*) My friends, I think you can now confirm the new judge.

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT I guess we can. Bring down the judge's robe. (*One of them climbs on another's back and takes off the hanged man's robe*) And now (*to the nephew*) beat it, so the right ass can sit in the right seat. (*To Azdak*) Step forward, take the seat. (*Azduk hesitates*) Sit down on it, man. (*Azduk is forced onto the seat of justice by the Ironshirts*) The judge was always a blackguard, so now let a blackguard be judge. (*The robe is put on him, a basket is set on his head*) Look at our judge!

THE SINGER

There was civil war, the ruler was insecure.
Azdak was made judge by the Ironshirts.
For two years Azdak was judge.

THE SINGER AND HIS MUSICIANS

When with flame the skies were glowing and with blood
the gutters flowing

Bugs and roaches rose from every crack.

Lances were replaced by cleavers, sermons made by unbelievers

And upon the seat of justice sat Azdak.

(Azdak is sitting on the seat of justice, peeling an apple. Shauva is sweeping the courtroom. On one side an invalid in a wheelchair, a doctor who is the defendant, and a lame man in rags. On the other side a young man accused of blackmail. An Ironshirt bearing the banner of the Ironshirts corps, stands at the door)

AZDAK Today, in view of the large number of cases pending, the court will hear two cases at once. Before I begin, a brief announcement: I take. *(He holds out his hand. Only the blackmailer takes out money and gives it to him)* I reserve the right to punish one of the parties here present *(He looks at the invalid)* for contempt of court. *(To the doctor)* You are a doctor, and you *(To the invalid)* are the plaintiff. Is the doctor to blame for your condition?

THE INVALID He is. I had a stroke on account of him.

AZDAK That would be professional negligence.

THE INVALID Worse than negligence. I loaned him money for his studies. He's never repaid a cent, so when I heard he was treating patients for nothing, I had a stroke.

AZDAK You had every right. *(To the lame man)* And what are you doing here?

THE LAME MAN I'm the patient, your worship.

AZDAK I gather he treated your leg?

THE LAME MAN Not the right one. My rheumatism was in my left leg, he operated on the right leg, that's why I limp.

AZDAK And he did it for nothing?

THE INVALID A five-hundred-piaster operation for nothing! Gratis! For a mere thank you. And I staked him to his studies! *(To the doctor)* Did your professors teach you to operate for nothing?

THE DOCTOR Your worship, it is indeed customary to ask for the fee before operating, because the patient pays more willingly before an operation than afterward. In the present case I believed at the moment of operating that my assistant had already collected my fee. I was mistaken.

THE INVALID He was mistaken! A good doctor doesn't make mistakes! He examines the patient before operating.

AZDAK That is correct. (*To Shauva*) What's the other case, Mr. Public Prosecutor?

SHAUVA (*zealously sweeping*) Blackmail.

THE BLACKMAILER Your worship, I'm innocent. I simply wanted to ask a certain landowner whether he had really raped his niece. He informed me most amiably that he had not; if he gave me money, it was only because my uncle wishes to take music lessons.

AZDAK Aha! (*To the doctor*) Whereas you, doctor, can cite no extenuating circumstance for your offense?

THE DOCTOR The most I can say is that to err is human.

AZDAK Don't you realize that a good doctor must have a sense of financial responsibility? I once heard of a doctor who made a thousand piasters out of a sprained finger by discovering that it had something to do with the circulation, which an incompetent doctor might have overlooked, and another time by careful treatment, he turned a gall bladder into a gold mine. There's no excuse for you, doctor. Uxu, the grain dealer, had his son study medicine to learn business methods, which gives you an idea of the high standards of our medical schools. (*To the blackmailer*) What's this landowner's name?

SHAUVA He doesn't wish to be named.

AZDAK Then I'll hand down the verdicts. The court holds that blackmail has been proved, and you (*to the invalid*) are fined one thousand piasters. If you have another stroke, the doctor is ordered to treat you free of charge and amputate if necessary. (*To the lame man*) You are accorded a bottle of cognac in lieu of damages. (*To the blackmailer*) You will assign half your fee to the public prosecutor inasmuch as the court does not divulge the landowner's name, furthermore you are advised to study medicine because you're cut out for that profession. And you, doctor, for unpardonable professional error, you are acquitted. Next cases!

THE SINGER WITH HIS MUSICIANS

Every pleasure costs full measure, funds are rarely come by squarely

Justice has no eyes in front or back.

That is why we ask a genius to decide and judge between us
Which is done for half a penny by Azdak.

(From a caravanserai on the Gruzinian military highway comes Azdak, followed by the landlord, the old man with the long beard. Behind them the hired hand and Shauva carry the seat of justice. An Ironshirt takes his stance with the banner of the Ironshirts corps)

ADZAK Put it here. Here at least we get some air and a bit of a breeze from that lemon grove over there. It's a good thing for justice to be conducted in the open. The wind picks up her skirts and you can see what she's got on underneath. Shauva, we've had too much to eat. These inspection trips are strenuous. *(To the landlord)* It's about your daughter-in-law?

THE LANDLORD Your worship, it's about the honor of my family. I wish to make a complaint on behalf of my son who has gone across the mountains on business. Here is the guilty hired hand, and here is my unfortunate daughter-in-law. *(Enter the daughter-in-law, a voluptuous type. She is veiled)*

AZDAK *(sits down)* I take. *(With a sigh the landlord gives him money)* Good. So much for the formalities. A case of rape?

THE LANDLORD Your worship, I caught the fellow in the stable, pushing our Ludovika into the straw.

AZDAK Yes, yes, the stable. Splendid horses. That little bay struck my fancy.

THE LANDLORD Naturally, on behalf of my son, I raked Ludovika over the coals.

AZDAK *(gravely)* I said it struck my fancy.

THE LANDLORD *(coldly)* Really?—Ludovika confessed that the hired man had taken her against her will.

AZDAK Remove your veil, Ludovika. *(She does so)* Ludovika, the court has taken a fancy to you. Tell us what happened.

LUDOVIKA *(who has learned her part by rote)* When I entered the stable to look at the new foal, the hired hand said to me without provocation: "Warm weather we're having," and placed his hand on my left breast. I said to him: "Stop that," but he continued to touch me in an im-

inoral manner, which aroused my anger. Before I could discern his sinful intentions, he had overstepped the bounds. The deed was done when my father-in-law entered and kicked me by mistake.

THE LANDLORD (*explaining*) On my son's behalf.

AZDAK (*to the hired hand*) Do you admit that you started it?

HIRED HAND Yes, sir.

AZDAK Ludovika, do you like sweets?

LUDOVIKA Yes, sunflower seeds.

AZDAK Do you like to sit a long time in the bathtub?

LUDOVIKA Half an hour or so.

AZDAK Mr. Public Prosecutor, put your knife on the ground over there. (*Shauva does so*) Ludovika, go pick up the public prosecutor's knife.

(*Swaying her hips, Ludovika goes over to the knife and picks it up*)

AZDAK (*pointing at her*) Did you see that? The wiggle on her. The guilty party is discovered. Rape is proved. By eating too much, especially sweet things, by prolonged sitting in warm water, by indolence and a soft skin, you have raped that poor man. Do you think you can display a rear end like that in court and get away with it? It's premeditated assault with a dangerous weapon. You are sentenced to assign to the court the little bay that your father-in-law rides on his son's behalf. And now, Ludovika, you will accompany me to the stable, because the court wishes to inspect the scene of the crime.

(*Over the Gruzinian military highway Azdak on his seat of justice is carried from place to place by his Ironshirts. Behind him Shauva carrying the gallows and the hired hand leading the little bay*)

THE SINGER WITH HIS MUSICIANS

Times when master fights with master for the poor are no disaster

Chaos gets the tax collector off their back.

Bearing weights and measures phony, leading someone else's pony

Through the country rode the poor man's judge, Azdak.

And he took away from Croesus and distributed gold pieces
 To their rightful owners gave them back.
 By a bodyguard protected of the humble and neglected
 Rode Gruzinia's good-bad judge, Azdak.

(The little procession moves off)

When you go to judge your neighbors leave at home your
 legal papers
 Take a good sharp ax and you'll be on the track.
 Never mind about God's thunders, axes often will do
 wonders.
 Such a wonder worker is the judge Azdak.

(Azdak's seat of justice is set up in a tavern. Three kulaks are standing before Azdak, to whom Shauva brings wine. In the corner stands an old peasant woman. In the open doorway and outside, the audience of villagers. An Ironshirt stands at the entrance with the banner of the Ironshirts corps.)

AZDAK The public prosecutor has the floor.

SHAUVA It's about a cow. For five weeks the defendant has had in her barn a cow belonging to the kulak Suru. She has also been found in the possession of a stolen ham, and some cows belonging to the kulak Shutev were killed after he had asked the defendant to pay the rent on a field.

THE KULAKS It's my ham, your worship.—It's my cow, your worship.—It's my field, your worship.

AZDAK What have you to say to all this, little mother?

THE OLD WOMAN Your worship, one night five weeks ago, just before morning, somebody knocked on my door, and outside there was a man with a beard, holding a cow. "Dear lady," he said to me, "I am St. Banditus, the worker of miracles, and because your son was killed in the war I'm bringing you this cow as a souvenir. Take good care of her."

THE KULAKS Irakli, the bandit, your worship.—Her brother-in-law, your worship! The cow-thief, the firebug!—He should have his head cut off!

(A woman's scream is heard from outside. The crowd grows uneasy and moves back. Enter Irakli the bandit with an enormous ax)

THE KULAKS Irakli! *(They cross themselves)*

THE BANDIT A very good evening to you, dear friends! A glass of wine!

AZDAK Public prosecutor, a jug of wine for our guest. Who are you?

THE BANDIT I'm a wandering hermit, your worship, and thank you for the charitable gift. *(He drains the glass that Shauva has brought him)* Another.

AZDAK I'm Azdak. *(He stands up and bows; the bandit bows likewise)* The court bids the visiting hermit welcome. Continue, little mother.

THE OLD WOMAN Your worship, the first night I didn't know St. Banditus could perform miracles; it was only a cow. But a few days later the kulak's hired men came and wanted to take the cow away. Outside my door they turned around and went home without my cow and great big bumps sprouted on their heads. Then I knew St. Banditus had moved their hearts and changed them into kindly men. *(The bandit laughs loudly)*

THE FIRST KULAK I know what changed them.

AZDAK That's fine. You'll tell us later. Continue!

THE OLD WOMAN Your worship, the next to be changed into a good man was the kulak Shutev, a devil as everyone knows. But St. Banditus got him to remit the rent on my little field.

THE SECOND KULAK Because somebody cut my cows' throats in the field.

(The bandit laughs)

THE OLD WOMAN *(at a sign from Azdak)* And then one morning the ham came flying through the window. It hit me in the small of my back, I'm still lame, see, your worship. *(She takes a few steps. The bandit laughs)* I ask you, your worship: When did a poor woman ever get a whole ham without a miracle?

(The bandit begins to sob)

AZDAK *(coming down from his seat)* Little mother, that

question goes straight to the heart of this court. Kindly be seated. (*Hesitantly the old woman sits down on the judge's chair. Azdak sits on the floor with his glass of wine*)

AZDAK Little mother, I almost called you Mother Gruzinia, the Sorrowful

The Bereft, whose sons are in the war

Beaten with fists, hopeful -

Weeping when she gets a cow.

Surprised when she is not beaten.

Little mother, deign to sit in merciful judgment upon us, the damned.

(*Bellows at the kulaks*) Admit you don't believe in miracles, you godless scum! Each of you is fined five hundred piasters for godlessness. Get out!

(*The kulaks slink out*)

AZDAK And you, little mother, and you, pious man, share a jug of wine with the public prosecutor and Azdak.

THE SINGER AND HIS MUSICIANS

So he bent the regulations to his own interpretations

And he took the law and stretched it on a rack.

And they found out with a shock, it's men with nothing in their pockets

Who alone are able to corrupt Azdak.

Seven hundred days and twenty, he dealt justice to the gentry

And he dealt them every joker in the pack.

On the woosack you could find him with the gallows close behind him

Passing judgments worthy of Azdak.

THE SINGER

Then the days of disorder were over, the grand duke returned.

The governor's wife returned, vengeance was taken.

Many died, again the slums were in flames, Azdak was seized with fear.

(*Azdak's seat of justice in the courthouse yard. Azdak is*

sitting on the ground, mending his shoe and talking with Shauva. Noise from outside. Behind the wall the fat prince's head is carried past on a pike)

AZDAK Shauva, the days of your bondage are numbered, the minutes for all I know. For a long time now I've led you by the iron bit of reason till you bled at the mouth, spurred you on with syllogisms and abused you with logic. You're weak by nature; if an argument is slyly tossed your way, you gobble it up, you can't control yourself. It is your nature to lick the hand of a higher being, but there are very different kinds of higher beings. Now you are going to be set free, and soon you'll be able to follow your bent, which is low, and your unerring instinct which teaches you to plant your heavy boot in human faces. For the days of confusion and disorder are past and it's too soon for the great day that I find described in the Song of Chaos, which we shall now sing one last time in memory of those glorious times. Sit down and don't tangle with the tune. Don't be afraid, let it be heard, the refrain is loved by all. (*Sings*)

Sister, veil your face, brother, go get your knife, the times are out of joint.

The masters are filled with lamentation and the little men with joy.

The city says: Let us drive the powerful from our midst.

The offices are invaded, the lists of serfs are destroyed.

The masters are harnessed to the millstones. Those who have never seen daylight come out.

The ebony poor-boxes are shattered, the sesnem wood is cut up for beds.

Those who had no bread have granaries now, those who begged for grain, now distribute grain.

SHAUVA Oh, oh, oh, oh.

AZDAK Where are you, general? Please, please, please make order.

The son of the respected lord can no longer be known. The child of the mistress becomes the son of the slave-girl.

Rich aldermen look for refuge in cold barns, and the pau-

pers who could scarcely find ditches to sleep in loll in soft beds.

The former boatman now owns many ships. When the owner looks for them, they are no longer his.

Five men are sent out by their masters. They say: Go yourselves, we have already arrived.

SHAUVA Oh, oh, oh, oh.

AZDAK Where are you, general? Please, please, please make order!

Yes, that's what our country might have come to if law and order had been neglected any longer. But now the grand duke, whose life I saved like a dumb ox, has returned to the capital and the Persians have lent him an army to restore order with. Already the slums are in flames. Bring me the thick book I always sit on. (*Shauva takes the book from the seat of justice and Azdak opens it*) This is the book of the law, I've always used it, you can testify to that.

SHAUVA Yes, to sit on.

AZDAK Now I'd better look and see what they can pin on me. I've connived with paupers, that will cost me dearly. I've helped poverty up on its rickety legs, they'll hang me for drunkenness; I've looked into rich men's pockets, they'll get me for blasphemy. And there's nowhere I can hide, everybody knows me, because I've helped everybody.

SHAUVA Someone's coming.

AZDAK (*stands up in a fright, then goes trembling to the chair*) Finished! But I won't do anybody the favor of behaving like a great man. I beg you on my knees for mercy, don't go away, I'm drooling at the mouth. I'm afraid of death. (*Enter Natella Abashvili, the governor's wife, with the aide-de-camp and an Ironshirt*)

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE Who is this fellow, Shalva?

AZDAK A fellow who knows his place, your excellency, and yours to command.

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP Natella Abashvili, the late governor's wife, has just returned. She is looking for her two-year-old son, Michael Abashvili. She has received word that the child was carried off to the mountains by a former servant.

AZDAK The child will be brought back, your highness. Yours to command.

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP They say the woman calls the child her own.

AZDAK She will be beheaded, your highness. Yours to command.

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP That will be all.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE (*on her way out*) I don't like that man.

AZDAK (*follows her to the door, bowing low*) It will all be taken care of, your highness. Yours to command.

6

The Chalk Circle

THE SINGER

Hear now the story of the lawsuit over Governor Abashvili's child

And how the true mother was identified

By the famous test of the chalk circle.

(In the yard of the courthouse in Nukha. Ironshirts bring in Michael, lead him across the courtyard and out behind. An Ironshirt holds Grusha back in the archway with his pike until the child has been led away. Then she is admitted. With her is the woman cook from the former governor's household. Tumult and fiery glow in the distance)

GRUSHA He's a brave boy, he can already wash himself.

THE COOK You're in luck, it's not a real judge, it's Azdak. He drinks like a fish and he doesn't know a thing, the biggest thieves have got off free. He gets everything mixed up and the rich people never bribe him enough, that makes it better for our kind of people.

GRUSHA I need luck today.

THE COOK Don't say it! (*She crosses herself*) I'd better say another rosary for the judge to be drunk. (*She moves her lips in silent prayer while Grusha tries in vain to get a*

glimpse of the child) The only thing I don't understand is why you're so intent on keeping him if he isn't yours. In times like these.

GRUSHA He's mine, I've brought him up.

THE COOK Didn't you ever stop to think what would happen if she came back?

GRUSHA At first I thought I'd give him back, and then I thought she wouldn't come after him any more.

THE COOK And even a borrowed coat keeps a body warm, is that it? (*Grusha nods*) I'll swear to anything you say, because you're a good girl. (*Refreshes her memory*) I was boarding the child for five piasters and then on Easter Sunday evening when the trouble broke out, Grusha came and took him. (*She sees the soldier Chachava approaching*) But you haven't done right by Simon, I've talked with him, he doesn't understand.

GRUSHA (*who doesn't see him*) I can't worry my head about him now if he doesn't understand.

THE COOK He understands that the child isn't yours, but your being married and not free till death you do part is too much for him to understand.

(*Grusha sees Simon and greets him*)

SIMON (*gloomily*) I wish to inform the lady that I am ready to swear. I am the father of the child.

GRUSHA (*softly*) That's all right, Simon.

SIMON At the same time I wish to state that this obligates me in no way. Nor the lady either.

THE COOK You didn't have to say that. You know she's married.

SIMON That's her affair, no need to rub it in.

(*Two Ironshirts come in*)

THE IRONSHIRTS Where's the judge?—Has anyone seen the judge?

GRUSHA (*who has turned away and covered her face*) Stand in front of me. I shouldn't have come to Nukha. If I run into the Ironshirt I hit on the head . . .

ONE OF THE IRONSHIRTS (*who have brought the child steps forward*) The judge isn't here.

(*The two Ironshirts go on looking*)

THE COOK I hope nothing has happened to him. With another

you won't stand any more chance than a snowball in hell.
(Another Ironshirt enters)

THE IRONSHIRT *(who has inquired about the judge, reports)*
 Nobody there but two old people and a child. The judge
 has taken a powder.

THE OTHER IRONSHIRT Keep looking!
(The first two Ironshirts go out quickly, the third stops still. Grusha lets out a scream. The Ironshirt turns around. It is the corporal, he has a scar across his whole face)

THE IRONSHIRT IN THE ARCHWAY What's the matter, Shotta?
 Do you know her?

THE CORPORAL *(after staring at her at length)* No.

THE IRONSHIRT IN THE ARCHWAY They say she kidnapped the
 Abashvili child. If you know anything about it, you can
 make a pile of money, Shotta.
(The corporal goes off cursing)

THE COOK Is he the one? *(Grusha nods)* He'll button up if
 you ask me. Or he'll have to admit he was after the child.
 GRUSHA *(relieved)* I'd almost forgotten I saved the child from
 them . . .

(The governor's wife comes in with the aide-de-camp and two lawyers)

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE Thank goodness the populace haven't
 come. I can't stand the smell. It gives me migraine.

THE FIRST LAWYER Please, gracious lady, be careful what you
 say until we get another judge.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE I haven't said a thing, Illo Shuboladze.
 I love the common people and their simple, straightforward
 ways, it's only the smell that gives me migraine.

THE SECOND LAWYER There won't be much of an audience.
 Most of the people have shut themselves up in their houses
 on account of the fighting in the slums.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE Is that the creature?

THE FIRST LAWYER My dear Natella Abashvili, please refrain
 from invective until it's definite that the grand duke has
 appointed a new judge and we're rid of the present judge
 who is just about the lowest individual ever seen in a judge's
 robe. Look, things seem to be moving.
(Ironshirts enter the yard)

THE COOK The mistress would be tearing your hair out if she didn't know that Azdak is the friend of the poor. One look at a face is enough for him.

(Two Ironshirts have started fastening a rope to a column. Azdak is brought in in chains. Behind him, also in chains, Shauva. After him come the three kulaks)

AN IRONSHIRT Thought you'd make a getaway, did you? *(He strikes Azdak)*

A KULAK Take off his robe before you string him up!
(Ironshirts and kulaks pull the judge's robe off Azdak. His ragged underwear becomes visible. One gives him a push)

AN IRONSHIRT *(pushing him to another)* Want a lump of justice? Here it is!

(Amid cries of "You take it!" and "I don't need it!" they push Azdak from one to the other until he collapses. Then he is pulled to his feet and dragged under the noose)

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE *(who has been clapping hysterically during the "ball game")* I disliked that man the moment I laid eyes on him.

AZDAK *(covered with blood, panting)* I can't see. Give me a rag.

THE OTHER IRONSHIRT What do you want to see?

AZDAK You, you dogs. *(He wipes the blood from his eyes with his shirt sleeve)* Greetings, dogs! How are you, dogs? How's the dog pack, stinking nicely? Licking the old boot again? Back at each other's throats, dogs? *(A dust-covered rider has entered with the corporal. He has taken papers from a leather pouch and looked through them. Now he intervenes)*

THE DUST-COVERED RIDER Stop! Here's the grand duke's decree concerning the new appointments.

THE CORPORAL *(roaring)* Attention! *(All come to attention)*

THE DUST-COVERED RIDER Here's what it says about the new judge: We hereby appoint a man who distinguished himself by saving a life that is of the utmost importance to our country—a certain Azdak of Nukha. Who's he?

SHAUVA *(pointing to Azdak)* The one under the gallows, your excellency.

THE CORPORAL *(bellowing)* What's going on here?

THE IRONSHIRT Beg leave to report that his worship was already his worship and was denounced by these kulaks as an enemy of the grand duke.

THE CORPORAL (*indicating the kulaks*) Take them away! (*They are led off, bowing without interruption*) See to it that his worship suffers no further annoyance. (*Goes out with the dust-covered rider*)

THE COOK (*to Shauva*) She clapped before. I hope he saw her.

THE FIRST LAWYER This is disastrous. •
(*Azdak has fainted. He is brought down, revives, and is again clothed in the robe of justice. He staggers out of the group of Ironshirts*)

THE IRONSHIRTS No offense, your worship!—What does your worship wish?

AZDAK Nothing, fellow dogs. An occasional boot to lick. (*To Shauva*) You're pardoned. (*He is unbound*) Get me some red wine, sweet. (*Shauva goes out*) Beat it, I've got a case to try. (*The Ironshirts go off. Shauva comes back with a jug of wine. Azdak drinks copiously*) Something for my ass! (*Shauva brings the law book and puts it on the seat of justice. Azdak sits down*) I take!

(*The plaintiffs who have been holding a worried conference smile with relief. They whisper among themselves*)

THE COOK Oh dear!

SIMON They say "You can't fill a well with dew."

THE LAWYERS (*approach Azdak, who looks up expectantly*)

A perfectly ridiculous case, your worship.—The defendant has abducted the child and refuses to return it.

AZDAK (*holds out his open hand, looking at Grusha*) A very attractive young lady. (*They give him more*) I open the proceedings and demand the strict truth. (*To Grusha*) Especially from you.

THE FIRST LAWYER High court of justice! As the people say, "Blood is thicker than water." This venerable wisdom . . .

AZDAK The court wishes to know what counsel's fee is.

THE FIRST LAWYER (*astonished*) I beg your pardon? (*Azdak amiably rubs his thumb and forefinger together*) Oh! Five hundred piasters, your worship, to answer the high court's unusual question.

AZDAK Did you hear that? The question is unusual. I ask you because I listen with a very different ear if I know you're good.

THE FIRST LAWYER (*bows*) Thank you, your worship. High court of justice! Of all human ties the ties of blood are the strongest. Mother and child: can there be any closer relationship? May a child be taken from its mother? High court of justice! She conceived it in the sacred ecstasies of love, she carried it in her womb, fed it with her blood, bore it in pain. High court of justice! It is common knowledge that even the ferocious tigress, robbed of her cubs, goes ranging through the mountains without rest, shrunk to a shadow. Nature itself . . .

AZDAK (*interrupting, to Grusha*) What's your answer to that and all the rest of what counsel is going to say?

GRUSHA It's mine.

AZDAK Is that all? I hope you can prove it. In any case, I suggest that you tell me why you think I should award you the child.

GRUSHA I brought him up the best I knew how, I always found him something to eat. He had a roof over his head most of the time, I let myself in for all kinds of trouble for his sake, and expenses too. I didn't worry about my own convenience. I taught the child to be friendly to everyone and right from the start to work as best he could, he's still so little.

THE FIRST LAWYER Your worship, it is significant that the defendant herself alleges no blood tie between the child and herself.

AZDAK The court takes note.

THE FIRST LAWYER Thank you, your worship. Permit a sorely bereaved woman, who has lost her husband and must now fear to lose her child, to address a few words to you. Gracious Natella Abashvili . . .

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE (*softly*) A cruel fate, sir, compels me to plead with you to return my beloved child. It is not for me to describe the torments of a bereaved mother, the sleepless nights, the . . .

THE SECOND LAWYER (*erupting*) It is unspeakable how this

woman has been treated. She is barred from entering her husband's palace, the income from his estates is withheld from her. Without an iota of feeling they tell her the income is entailed to the legal heir, she can't do a thing without the child, she can't pay her lawyers! (*To the first lawyer who, in despair over this outburst, is motioning him frantically to keep quiet*) My dear Illo Shuboladze, why should it not be made known that the Abashvili estates are at stake?

THE FIRST LAWYER Honored Sandro Oboladze, please! We agreed we . . . (*To Azdak*) It is true, of course, that the outcome of this trial will also determine whether our noble client obtains possession of the sizable Abashvili estates; "also," I say, and by design, for the paramount consideration, as Natella Abashvili justly pointed out in the first words of her moving plea, is the tragedy of a mother. Even if Michael Abashvili were not heir to the estates, he would still be my client's dearly beloved child.

AZDAK Enough! The court looks upon your mention of the estates as proof that we're all human.

THE SECOND LAWYER Thank you, your worship. My dear Illo Shuboladze, we can prove in any event that the woman who seized the child is not the child's mother! Allow me to set the hard facts before the court. By an unfortunate concatenation of circumstances, this child, Michael Abashvili, was left behind when his mother fled the city. Grusha, a kitchen maid in the palace, was present that Easter Sunday and was seen busying herself with the child . . .

THE COOK While the lady was busy worrying which dresses to take with her!

THE SECOND LAWYER (*impassive*) Almost a year later Grusha appeared with the child in a mountain village and concluded a marriage with . . .

AZDAK How did you get to this mountain village?

GRUSHA On my feet, your worship, and he was mine.

SIMON I am the father, your worship.

THE COOK He was boarding with me, your worship, for five piasters.

THE SECOND LAWYER This man is Grusha's betrothed, your worship, his testimony is therefore untrustworthy.

AZDAK Are you the man she married in the mountain village?

SIMON No, your worship. She married a peasant.

AZDAK (*motions Grusha over to him*) Why? (*Indicating Simon*) No good in bed? I want the truth.

GRUSHA We didn't get that far. I married on account of the child. To give him a roof over his head. (*Indicating Simon*) He was in the war, your worship.

AZDAK And now he wants to get back with you, is that it?

SIMON I wish to state . . .

GRUSHA (*angrily*) I'm no longer free, your worship.

AZDAK And the child, you claim, comes from whoring? (*When Grusha does not answer*) Let me ask you one question: What kind of a child is it? A ragged little bastard off the streets or the child of a noble, well-to-do family?

GRUSHA (*angrily*) An ordinary child.

AZDAK I mean: did he show refined features at an early age?

GRUSHA He showed a nose in his face.

AZDAK He showed a nose in his face. I regard that as a significant answer. There's a story they tell about me; it seems that once before pronouncing a verdict I went out and sniffed at a rosebush. Little tricks like that are necessary nowadays. Now I'm going to make it short, I'm not going to listen to any more of you people's lies—(*to Grusha*) especially yours. I can imagine how you (*to the group around the defendant*) cooked this all up to pull the wool over my eyes. I know you, you're crooks.

GRUSHA (*suddenly*) I can imagine you'd want to make it short, I saw what you took.

AZDAK Shut up! Did I take anything from you?

GRUSHA (*in spite of the cook who is trying to restrain her*) Because I haven't got anything.

AZDAK Perfectly right. I don't get a thing from you down-and-outers, I could starve. You want justice, but you don't want to pay. When you go to the butcher's, you know you'll have to pay, but you go to the judge like you'd go to a wake.

SIMON (*in a loud voice*) "When the horse was to be shod, the horse fly held out his legs." As the saying goes.

AZDAK (*takes up the challenge with enthusiasm*) "Better a

treasure from the manure pile than a pebble from a mountain spring."

SIMON "A fine day, let's go fishing, said the angler to the worm."

AZDAK "I'm my own master, said the hired man and cut off his foot."

SIMON "I love you like a father, said the tsar to the peasants and chopped the tsarevitch's head off."

AZDAK "A fool's worst enemy is himself."

SIMON But "a fart has no nose!"

AZDAK You're fined ten piasters for indecent language in court, that'll teach you what justice is.

GRUSHA Some justice! You throw the book at us because we don't talk refined like her with her lawyers.

AZDAK Right. You're too dumb. You deserve to be sat on.

GRUSHA Because you want to hand the child over to that woman who's so refined she wouldn't know how to change its diapers! You don't know any more about justice than I do, put that in your pipe!

AZDAK You've got something there. I'm ignorant, the pants under my robe are full of holes, see for yourself. With me it all goes into eating and drinking, I was raised in a monastery. Come to think of it, I'm fining you ten piasters too, for contempt of court. What's more, you're stupid, antagonizing me instead of making eyes at me and wiggling your ass a little to put me in a good humor. Twenty piasters.

GRUSHA You can make it thirty and I'll still tell you what I think of your justice, you drunken turnip. How dare you talk to me like the cracked Isaiah on the church window—big shot! When they pulled you out of your mother, they didn't expect you to rap her knuckles if she stole a cup of millet some place, and aren't you ashamed of yourself to see me trembling like this on account of you? You serve these people so their houses won't be taken away—because they stole them; since when do houses belong to bedbugs? But you take care of them, or they couldn't drag our men off to their wars, you flunky!

(Azdak has stood up. He is beaming. Halfheartedly he strikes the table with his little gavel as though to obtain

order, but when Grusha goes on reviling him, he merely beats time for her)

GRUSHA I have no respect for you. No more than I have for a thief and murderer with a knife, he does what he pleases. It's a hundred to one you can take the child away from me, but I'll tell you one thing: for a job like yours they should only pick rapists and usurers, to punish them by making them sit in judgment over their fellow men, which is worse than hanging on the gallows.

AZDAK That makes it thirty, and I'm not going to wrangle with you any more, this isn't a tavern. I'm a judge and I've got my dignity to think of. To tell you the truth, I've lost interest in your case. Where are those two who wanted a divorce? *(To Shauva)* Bring them in. I'm adjourning this case for fifteen minutes.

THE FIRST LAWYER *(as Shauva leaves)* We can rest our case, gracious lady, it's in the bag.

THE COOK *(to Grusha)* You've rubbed him the wrong way. Now he'll take the child away from you.

(Enter a very aged couple)

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE Shalva, my smelling salts.

AZDAK I take. *(The old people do not understand)* I hear you want a divorce. How long have you been together?

THE OLD MAN Forty years, your worship.

AZDAK Why do you want a divorce?

THE OLD MAN We don't like each other, your worship.

AZDAK Since when?

THE OLD WOMAN The whole time, your worship.

AZDAK I will take your request under deliberation and give you my decision when I'm through with the other case. *(Shauva leads them to the rear)* I need the child. *(Motions Grusha to come over to him and bends down to her in a not unfriendly manner)* Woman, I've seen you have a soft spot for justice. I don't believe he's your child, but supposing he were, wouldn't you want him to be rich? You'd only have to say he's not yours. One two three he'd have a palace, and plenty of horses in his stable and plenty of beggars on his doorstep, plenty of soldiers in his service and plenty of petitioners in his courtyard. See? What's your

answer to that? Don't you want him to be rich? (*Grusha is silent*)

THE SINGER Hear now what the angry woman thought and did not say: (*Sings*)

If he walked in golden shoes
Cold his heart would be and stony.
Humble folk he would abuse
He wouldn't know me.

Oh, it's hard to be hard-hearted
All day long from morn to night.
To be mean and high and mighty
Is a hard and cruel plight.

Let him be afraid of hunger
Not of the hungry man's spite
Let him be afraid of darkness
But not fear the light.

AZDAK Woman, I think I understand you.

GRUSHA I won't give him up. I've raised him and he knows me.

(*Shauva brings the child in*)

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE He's in rags!

GRUSHA That's not true. They didn't give me time to put on his good shirt.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE He's been in a pigsty!

GRUSHA (*furiously*) I'm not a pig but I know someone who is. Where did you leave your child?

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE I'll show you, you vulgar slut. (*She is about to fling herself on Grusha but is restrained by the lawyers*) She's a criminal! She ought to be flogged! This minute!

THE SECOND LAWYER (*stops her mouth*) Gracious Natella Abashvili! You promised . . . Your worship, the plaintiff's nerves . . .

AZDAK Plaintiff and defendant: the court has heard your case,

but has not yet ascertained who this child's real mother is. It is my duty as judge to pick a mother for the child. I'm going to give you a test. Shauva, take a piece of chalk. Draw a circle on the floor. (*Shauva draws a chalk circle on the floor*) Put the child in the circle! (*Shauva places Michael, who is smiling at Grusha, in the circle*) Plaintiff and defendant, stand just outside the circle, both of you! (*The governor's wife and Grusha step close to the circle*) Each of you take the child by one hand. The true mother will have the strength to pull the child out of the circle.

THE SECOND LAWYER (*quickly*) High court of justice, I object to making the fate of the large Abashvili estates, which are entailed to the child as heir, hinge on the outcome of so dubious a contest. Furthermore, my client is not as strong as this person who is accustomed to physical labor.

AZDAK She looks well fed to me. Pull!

(*The governor's wife pulls the child out of the circle. Grusha has let go, she stands aghast*)

THE FIRST LAWYER (*congratulates the governor's wife*) What did I say? The ties of blood.

AZDAK (*to Grusha*) What's the matter with you? You didn't pull.

GRUSHA I didn't hold on to him. (*She runs to Azdak*) Your worship, I take back what I said against you, I beg your forgiveness. If only I could keep him until he knows all his words. He knows just a few.

AZDAK Don't try to influence the court! I bet you don't know more than twenty yourself. All right, I'll repeat the test to make sure.

(*Again the two women take their places*)

AZDAK Pull!

(*Again Grusha lets the child go*)

GRUSHA I raised him! Do you want me to tear him to pieces? I can't.

AZDAK (*stands up*) The court has now ascertained who the true mother is. (*To Grusha*) Take your child and clear out. I advise you not to stay in the city with him. (*To the governor's wife*) And you get out of here before I convict you of fraud. The estates devolve to the city, they will be

turned into a park for the children, they need it, and the park shall be named "Azdak Park" after me.

(The governor's wife has fainted and is led away by the aide-de-camp; the lawyers have already gone)

(Grusha stands motionless. Shauva brings her the child)

AZDAK Because I'm taking off the robe of justice, it's got too hot for me. I'm nobody's hero. But I invite you all to a little farewell dance out there in the meadow. Oh, I almost forgot something, too much wine. The divorce. *(Using the seat of justice as a table, he writes something on a piece of paper and starts to leave)*

(The dance music has started up)

SHAUVA *(has read the paper)* But this is all wrong. You haven't divorced the two old people, you've divorced Grusha from her husband.

AZDAK Divorced the wrong people? That's too bad, but it sticks, I retract nothing, the law's the law. *(To the very old couple)* I invite you to my celebration instead, I'll bet you still like each other enough to dance together. *(To Grusha and Simon)* And from you two I want forty piasters.

SIMON *(takes out his purse)* Fair enough, your worship. And many thanks.

AZDAK *(putting the money away)* I'm going to need it.

GRUSHA We'd better leave the city tonight, hadn't we, Michael? *(Starts to lift the child on her back. To Simon)* Do you like him?

SIMON *(lifts the child on his back)* Beg to report: I like him.

GRUSHA Now I can tell you: I took him because I betrothed myself to you that Easter Sunday. So it's a child of love. Michael, let's dance.

(She dances with Michael. Simon dances with the cook. The old couple dance too. Azdak stands in thought. Soon the dancing couples hide him. He is seen from time to time, more and more seldom as more couples come in and dance)

THE SINGER

And that night Azdak disappeared and was never seen again. But the people of Gruzinia did not forget him, they long remembered

The days of his judging as a brief

Golden Age when there was almost justice.
(The dancers dance off the stage. Azdak has vanished)

And you who have heard the story of the chalk circle
Bear in mind the wisdom of our fathers:
Things should belong to those who do well by them
Children to motherly women that they may thrive
Wagons to good drivers that they may be well driven
And the valley to those who water it, that it may bear fruit.