

The People's Prophet (Tragical)

Mykola Kulish

ACT I, SCENE 1

Madam Stakanchykha Tarasovna has cried and grown sad at her home (on 37 Philistine St.).

“Oh, who will say, who will tell me—you, my daughter, or you, my little bird, or you, Holy Virgin—where he’s running off to and who’s going to look after poor me?”

The canary in its cage hangs its head. The icon of the Virgin Mary grows sad. They are silent. Only Middle daughter attends to her mother.

“Oh Mama!”

“Don’t interrupt!”

“Drink this, Mother dear.”

“What is it?”

“Valerian drops.”

“Go away! Leave me alone! Do you think valerian drops can put an end to such a drama of the heart... Give me poison!”

“It would be better if you moved away from the window, or else—”

“Or else what?”

“Well, people are passing by the window.”

“Give me ground glass! I’ll poison myself!”

“The neighbors can see you and hear you.”

“Let them see me! Let them hear me! If they’re friends, may they have pity on me, and if they’re enemies—may they rejoice that there’s such a drama in our house, that my lawful husband is running awa-a-a-y ...”

ACT I, SCENE 2

Oldest daughter enters. Middle daughter addresses her.

“Did you call our godfather?”

“He’s coming.”

Tarasovna

(stirring suddenly)

“Where is he—is he far?”

“He’ll be here in a minute.”

“Where? I’m asking.”

“I told you, Mama—he’ll be here in a minute. He had to make a quick stop, because his stomach was bothering him.”

Tarasovna

(wipes her eyes)

“Oh God, you could have said so right away. Is everything cleaned up in there?”

Oldest daughter

“I cleaned up yesterday.”

Middle daughter

(to oldest daughter)

“Did you tell Godfather that Papa already went to get a passport?”

“What do you think?”

“And what did he say?”

“He said he already knew that.”

Tarasovna

“Did you call the basses from the church?”

“Liubunia went to get them.”

“And the vodka for the basses?”

“She’ll buy the vodka, too.”

“Go, my dear, and chop up some onion very fine and some radishes, and brush them with oil, as a snack for people.”

Oldest daughter

(bursts out angrily)

“Me, it’s always me! Go get your godfather, and go call the basses, and go chop the onions. While that one stands there, with her arms folded.”

Middle daughter

“And who watered the flowers, if not me? And who goes around with the valerian drops, if not me? What, are you blind?”

(They pinch each other, but so that their mother doesn’t see.)

“Ouch!”

“Ow! Ouch!”

Tarasovna

“Oh, I will die! I’ll die twice, with such daughters. It’s not enough that my eyes have grown dim and that the sun has turned black—no, they have to go and add more grief. Give me the cards! I’ll try one more reading. One more, and that’s it.” *(She lays out the cards. Looks. Clutches her heart.)*

“Oh no, the road again!”

Both daughters

“Oh Mama, can it be—can it really be?”

“Are you, blind? Can't you see the red six?”

Tarasovna's eyes show a deep, mystical horror:

“I read his fortune again and again, and always this card... And then there's the dream... a road in a field, and a jagged moon that's so sad, and so pale... As if trying to flee, it rolls behind the earth. And I'm standing along the road, like a lonely shadow... My soul feels that moon—that's our father! He'll run away, he'll ro-o-oll off, he'll die on the ro-o-oad...”

Both daughters

“Mama, please, be quiet!

“The neighbors are coming.”

Tarasovna

“Enough of this silence. I've been silent long enough! And enough of this pretense! Let everyone know the drama happening in this house and in my heart...”

ACT I, SCENE 3

Neighbors enter quietly and solemnly as befits such an occasion. They stop.

The two daughters turn like swallows to their mother:

“Maybe you'd like a compress, Mama?”

“Maybe you should lie down and rest, Mama?”

Neighbors

(They sigh. They nod their heads. And, as befits such an occasion, they say philosophically)

“We won't have any rest until we get to the Communists' dachas—the ones at the cemetery.”

“We'll get all the sleep we want there.”

“Greetings, Tarasovna!”

Tarasovna

(Barely managing to raise herself, she greets them.)

“Sit down, dear neighbors. Even though I'm ill, even though there's such a drama in the house, I ask you, nonetheless, please—be seated. *(Gives Middle daughter a handkerchief)*. Get me another handkerchief!”

Middle daughter

“It's soaking wet... How can you cry so much, Mama?”

Neighbors

(Smiling at such a question, they answer)

“Hm... And why not?”

“Silly question.”

“Like they say—young and green.”

Tarasovna

“I’m not as sorry for myself as I am for them, for my dear children. The first one can’t sleep—Mama, she says, I can’t; the second one can’t sleep—she’s quietly crying in her pillow; the third one, Liubunia, stays up with me through the entire night, like a shadow... And their father doesn’t care: he’s running a-wa-a-ay...”

Neighbors

“You mean that at his age, Malakhii Mynovych is considering such a thing? It’s hard to believe.”

Tarasovna

“He’s all set already. Look—a staff and a sack with dry crackers.”

Oldest daughter

“He even dried them himself.”

Tarasovna

“And in secret... Now he’s run down to the ExecCommittee¹ to get a Soviet passport... He’s running away today.”

Neighbors

“But where to? At the risk of jinxing him by asking, where is he going, Tarasovna?”

“Don’t ask!”

Oldest daughter

“He won’t say.”

Tarasovna

“He won’t say, dear neighbors. Even Kum² asked him. I even paid for prayers in church. We even got him drunk. He won’t say.”

Neighbors

(even more amazed)

“Hm... Sure enough—it’s a staff. And a sack. It’s what you’d take on a pilgrimage... Maybe he’s preparing for a pilgrimage, to some icon, or something like that?”

Tarasovna

“What does he care about icons, when—of all things—he forbade me to bake Easter bread.”

Neighbors

“Why, that’s unbelievable!”

Tarasovna

“To the pigs! I colored a basket of Easter eggs and he gave them to the pi-i-i-gs... Seven years it’s been like this—there’s no happiness in the house, no peace; the seventh year is drawing to a

close, and on top of that he's running a-w-a-y..." (*begins to wail loudly*)

Daughters

"Oh no, oh no, Mama—oh no!"

Neighbors

"What's the matter with you, Tarasovna! Get a hold of yourself! You'd think someone had just died. Is that any way to carry on, really?"

Tarasovna

"I can't get a hold of myself, dear neighbors. It would be better if he'd die. Then I could send him off to the next world, instead of having him run off to who-knows-where... At least you can go to the dead for counsel: you can lean against the cross and pour out all your grief. But if he runs off, where will I go? Where will I look for him? In what world, along what roads... He'll be neither dead nor a-li-i-ive..."

Neighbors

(*Even they are touched. They blow their noses into handkerchiefs and aprons.*)

"What a drama! Who needs to go to the movies?! (*After a pause*) At least tell us when this all happened to him—why, and how?"

Daughters

(*bursting forth impatiently*)

"It started when the soldiers burned down our fence."

"Not true! It was when the bullet struck the doorway."

"I'll tell you!"

"I will!"

Tarasovna

(*cuts them short*)

"No one can talk about a husband better than his lawful wife—that's me!... Like a swallow, like a swallow, dear neighbors, I'll tell you about it quickly because today is a workday... Back when the Revolution began, when it began, back then..."

Daughters

"The soldiers..."

"Don't interrupt, stupid!"

"...burned down our fence."

Neighbors

"That's when the red-headed Commies butchered our pigs."

Tarasovna and daughters

(*ying with one another*)

“That’s when it all began, dear neighbors. At first, Malasyk began drinking water secretly...”

“Papa’s teeth even chattered.”

“Don’t interrupt, ’cause I was the only one who saw it. Three daughters, three grown girls in the house, but no one ’cept me saw how my Malasyk drank water and how his teeth chattered...”

“Mine chattered too, Mama.”

“You’re lying! You slept through the whole Revolution. Liubunia was the one who clenched her little teeth, poor thing, so that she wouldn’t cry because of the Revolution...”

“We all clenched our teeth.”

“Shut up! And at night, before daybreak, dear neighbors, when even the Revolution was dozing off, we all huddled together and cried and cried and cried...”

Neighbors

(disquieted)

“The Revolution hit hard, it hit absolutely everyone.”

Tarasovna

“But it hit me hardest, and why me? What for?”

Daughters

(one after the other)

“It was then that...”

“Don’t interrupt.”

“... the postmaster was killed.”

Tarasovna

“Shut up! It was when the postmaster was killed that Malasyk started shaking and trembling and walled himself up in the storeroom.”

Neighbors

“Huh? What?”

Daughters

“Papa...”

“Walled himself up...”

“And we plastered over the door.”

Tarasovna

“He sat it out for two years.”

Neighbors

(standing up in surprise)

“You don’t say!”

“Two years in the storeroom?!”

Tarasovna

“Just imagine what torture it was to keep quiet. I kept quiet and they kept quiet, as if their mouths were full of water.”

Neighbors*(looking around at each other)*

“So, Malakhii Mynovych didn’t really go to his brother’s place, out to the village, like you said?”

“No, no... Only now can I finally admit it, dear neighbors—only now can I finally tell you the whole truth.”

“And he didn’t work there?”

“No, and again no! Only God knew that Malasyk was sitting here, walled up—only God, and me, and the girls, and Kum...”

Neighbors*(annoyed that they didn’t know about this)*

“Well, who would’ve believed it! How do you like that! At night we thought we heard... Well, where did he—excuse the expression—go to relieve himself?”

Middle daughter

“Through the little window.”

Tarasovna

“Shush! Through the secret window, into a little pot.”

Neighbors

“You mean the one that’s chipped?”

Tarasovna

“In that very one. I bought it when I was pregnant with Liubunia.”

Neighbors*(shrugging their shoulders)*

“Hm... Every morning you’d see it: a pot by the fence... But you’d never guess that Malakhii Mynovych was sitting there in the storeroom ... walled up.”

Tarasovna

“Once the NEP began—you remember, neighbors—they allowed Kum to deal in icons?”

Neighbors

“Of course! For the first time since the Revolution we could buy incense.”

Middle daughter

“Only then did Papa come out.”

Tarasovna

“Shush!... And it would’ve been better if he had stayed walled up forever, instead of reading all those Bolshevik books—and now running a-wa-a-ay...”

ACT I, SCENE 4

Liubunia, the youngest daughter, runs in. She drops a basket and folds her hands over her heart.

“Here you are crying, here you are grieving, and you don’t even know that Papa’s left the ExecCommittee. (*Tarasovna cries out*). He kissed me, and was glad and happy.”

Tarasovna

“Did he get the passport?”

Liubunia

“I don’t know. He went to the Head of the District Police. And I ran over to the church, Mama, fell to my knees and prayed. ‘Dear God,’ I said, ‘Dear God—don’t send me good fortune, just make Papa stay home!’ I kissed the floor (*cries as she goes through the motions*). Did I do the right thing, Mama?”

Tarasovna

“You did right, dear. And the basses? The basses?”

Liubunia

“They’ll be here right away.”

Neighbors

“Did you order a prayer service?”

Liubunia

“No, Godfather said to call the bass and the tenor from the church choir to stop Papa with singing. Oh, I forgot! Mama! Mokii Iakovych said that most of all, Papa loves not ‘A Mercy of Peace,’ but ‘Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me.’”³

Tarasovna

(*bustles about*)

“Your godfather must be told about this right away... (*to the Oldest daughter*) Go call him!”

Oldest daughter

“But you can’t call him now! He had to make a stop in a certain place!”

ACT I, SCENE 5

The Oldest daughter bites her tongue as Kum solemnly enters. He’s exhausted.

Tarasovna

(*as if to God*)

“How could you take so long ...when there’s such grief—such grief, Kum!”

Kum

(keeping his hands on his stomach)

“Easy there! I would’ve flown on wings, Kuma, but—do you hear this? *(he pauses while the others listen and then adds)* Do you hear how it’s churning. Phew! ... So, you say he’s running away?”

Tarasovna

“He’s already left the ExecCommittee.”

Kum

(authoritatively)

“I know.”

Liubunia

“He kissed me and was glad and happy.”

Kum

(more authoritatively)

“I know that too.”

Tarasovna

“He’s gone to the Head of the District Police.”

Kum

(with insurmountable authoritativeness)

“And this, too, is no secret to me.”

Tarasovna

“Why do I have to go through such a drama, Kum? Why?”

Kum

(solemnly points upward)

“Only That One knows.”

Neighbors

(murmuring)

“It’s true, it’s true! Only That One knows why.”

Kum

(to the Neighbors)

“Good health to you, neighbors!”

Neighbors

“And good day to you!”

Kum

“What troubles we’ve got! Malasyk is running away from us—and where to, he himself probably doesn’t know.”

Tarasovna

“The cards always show the same thing—the road.”

Kum

“I know that, and I say: may the road lead him to the cemetery, so long as it doesn’t lead to ...”

Tarasovna

“My God, to where?”

Daughters

“Where, Godfather?”

Neighbors

“Where?”

Kum

(Turns to the birdcage. Mournfully shakes his head)

“Good day, little birdy! Are you sad too, that your master is running away? *(Turns to the Neighbors)*. No wonder the song goes, ‘The canary sings so mournfully.’⁴ *(Becoming completely dramatic, proclaims)* Listen, Tarasovna, and you, my goddaughters, and you, neighbors! I found out that the ExecCommittee doesn’t have the power to forbid our Malakhii to run away.”

Tarasovna

(sways; then to Kum, to everyone)

“It’s ringing... in my ears... a high-pitched ringing...”

Kum

(seeing that Liubunia is staring strangely and not moving, he turns to her)

“Are you managing all right, my godchild?”

Liubunia

“During the Revolution, Godfather, everyone drank water and their teeth chattered. I was the only one who stood like this, and through the whole Revolution I stood as if for the Stations of the Cross. It only hurt here *(points to her jaw)*. But now it hurts here *(points to her jaw)*, and it hurts here *(clutches her heart)*, and my knees hurt, they hurt...”

Kum

“The Head of the District Police himself told me, you know. The Soviet government, he says, has no law that forbids running away from home. All the more so since, he says, your Malakhii’s no minor.”

Tarasovna

“Kum! What shall we do now?”

Daughters

“Godfather, help us!”

Neighbors

“Such a drama, such a drama!”

Kum

“Easy now! Do you understand now, about my stomach, my nerves, and everything?... All because of Malakhii. Did you call

the basses?"

Liubunia

"They said they'd be here right away."

Kum

"Listen once again! Easy now, that means no crying, and, more important, no fainting—until I say so. That's the first thing."

Neighbors

"Listen! Listen!"

Kum

"Bring the canary here! Closer to the table!... Like this. Light the icon lamp!"

Tarasovna

"He'll break it, Kum!"

Daughters

"Papa doesn't believe in icon lamps anymore."

Kum

"And I say—light it!... Do you have any incense?"

Tarasovna

"Yes. Get it, dear, it's over there, over there on the icon shelf."

Kum

"Smoke up the room, so that it overpowers him. It doesn't mean a thing that he's now turned against religion. For twenty-seven years a person loved canaries, enjoyed the scent of incense, and adored church singing, and now all that disappears without a trace? That's the second thing."

Neighbors

(nodding their heads)

"That's right! That's for sure!"

Kum

"Another thing—which of the chickens did Malakhii like best?"

Tarasovna

"The yellowish one with the golden crown."

Kum

"Kill it!"

Tarasovna

"What's the matter with you, Kum? Such a fine chicken!"

Kum

"Kill it, I say. Let one of the girls run in. Let's see here—you, Liubunia! No, you're going to be playing the harmonica. You,

Verunia. Run in with the chicken, screaming that neighbor Tukhlia hit it over the head with a stick and killed it.”

Tarasovna

“That’s a priceless chicken, Kum!”

Kum

“That’s the whole point! Belt it so hard its eyes pop out, so that Malakhii gets all fired up. With any luck, God grant it, he’ll bring legal charges, like he did three years ago over the rooster.”

Neighbors

“Actually, that’s a good idea. One of you—go, run along.”

Tarasovna

“Verunia, run!”

All together to Verunia, and Verunia to herself

“Run, run!” (*she runs off*).

Kum

“That’s only three things. As for number four—easy now. There I was walking along, looking at nature... And you know what I noticed (*pauses*). I noticed that nature is not the same as it was during the old regime (*pauses*). And why?.. Because the Communists have spoiled even nature... I’ll spin a web of questions around Malakhii—he won’t escape... Not long ago, at the District Village Building, a speaker from town gave a talk, and I kept piling up more and more questions on him, as if they were rocks... Here come the basses.”

ACT 1, SCENE 6

No sooner do the Choristers walk in the door than everyone makes way for them. The Tenor, stuttering, greets everyone.

“I he-he-heard that...”

Fortunately, the Bass finishes for him

“Malakhii Mynovych is running away?”

Kum

“It wouldn’t be so bad if he’d die voluntarily, even today. Forty-seven years old, think of it, a family, where all is as it should be, and all of a sudden—he’s running away.”

Tenor and Bass

(surprised)

“And to-to-to...”

“To where, I’d like to know?”

Kum

“I’m going, Kum,” he says. ‘Where to?’ I ask. ‘Later,’ he says, ‘I’ll reveal everything.’”

Tenor and Bass

“Mo-mo-mo-st...”

“Strange!”

Kum

“My heart throbbed as if he'd struck me with nettles. All our lives we were friends. You could even say there were no secrets between us, and then, how do you like that?! He locked himself up, fell silent, immersed himself in dark thoughts, and how do you like that?! He's running away, and how do you like that! He's running away today.”

Tenor

“Wou-wou-wouldn't this have a better effect on him? ‘O Lo-Lo- (sings) O Lord, Thou hast been pleased in one single moment to grant Paradise unto the well-disposed thief’⁵...”

Kum

“No, no! Sing Dekhtiarov's ‘A Mercy of Peace.’ He liked that most of all. We'd be fishing and he'd be quietly singing ‘A Mercy of Peace.’ He himself would say, ‘I feel weak; I see divine visions,’ he'd say, ‘when I hear this hymn...’”

ACT I, SCENE 7**Oldest daughter**

(in the doorway)

“Papa!.. Papa's coming!”

The tension increases. Everyone stirs and bustles about.

Tarasovna

“Is he far off?”

Oldest daughter

“He's coming up to the yard.”

Tarasovna

“Kum! What do we do now?”

Bass

“Maybe we should start?”

Tenor

“Do-sol-mi-do!”

They all turn to Kum. He stands with his hand raised like a scepter.

Kum

“Easy now. I'll give a sign. Kill the chicken! Bring out the incense!”

ACT I, SCENE 8

*Malakhii enters. Stops in the doorway. Silence.
Only the rustling of eyes is heard.*

Kum

“Why stop in the doorway, Kum? Don’t you recognize us? These are your friends, who have gathered after they heard you were running away today.”

Malakhii

(entering the room dreamy-eyed)

“I’m not running away; I’m setting out.”

Kum

“It’s all the same. You’re running away.”

Malakhii

“Oh, we don’t understand, we don’t even see yet—the rights, the civic rights the Revolution gave a person! Truly, we need new eyes to see them.”

Kum

“What’s this all about, Kum, even though I already know?”

Malakhii

“He wanted to stop me from setting out on my journey... And he’s the Head of the District Police, no less! Just like you, Kum, he can’t understand that the Revolution granted me the right to make a great journey.”

Kum

“So, that means you’re going?”

Malakhii

“I’m going, Kum! I’m going, my friends!”

Kum

“Where?”

Malakhii

“Where?... Into the sky-blue distance.”

Neighbors

(like reeds in the wind—sh-sh-sh)

“Where, did he say? Where? What?”

Kum

(glances sharply at Malakhii)

“All joking aside, tell me—where?”

Tarasovna

“People have come to see you off, at least tell them. Where?”

Malakhii

(a dreamy look in his eyes)

“Oh, Kum, and you, friends! If you only knew. It’s as if I hear music and actually see the sky-blue distance. What ecstasy! I’m going ... By the way, put out the icon lamp!”

Kum

“You mean the icon lamp is interfering with your running away?”

Malakhii

“Not with me—with you! It’s interfering with your escape from the prison of religion. Put it out! It’ll soon be a month since it’s become useless. We have electricity! And here you are with an icon lamp.”

Kum

“A question!”

Malakhii

“And it smells of incense. How dare you burn incense! Open the window!”

Tarasovna is about to move, but Kum stops her with his gaze. Malakhii notices this and opens the window himself. Puts out the icon lamp.

Kum

“Easy now! I have a question.”

Malakhii

“Be my guest.”

Kum

“But take it easy! Kum, are you for socialism?”

Malakhii

“Yes.”

Kum

“And even for cooperatives?”

Malakhii

“And are you for the icon lamp?”

Kum

“Easy now! Since I’m doing the asking, please do the answering.”

Malakhii

“Go ahead, ask!”

Kum

“How can you be for socialism, to say nothing of cooperatives, when it’s all lies, down to the last dot?”

Malakhii

“In other words?”

Kum

“Easy now! So why is it that when I bought some Soviet cloth at the Co-op, and wore it for less than a month, it began to fade and to come apart? And that’s a fact, like two times two.”

Neighbors

“It’s true! You get some blue cloth for a ribbon, or, say, a flag, and pffft—it fades and goes white.”

Malakhii

(smiling)

“Go on!”

Kum

“Why, when my wife bought a Soviet-made comb—of the best quality, no less—which wasn’t even for herself, but for... *(turns to the others as if they were witnesses.)* Ninonka, an innocent child whose hair is like flax *(the others nod their heads as if to say, ‘We know’)* ... Why, I ask you, did as many as three teeth immediately fall out—and that, too, is a fact!”

Malakhii

“Three teeth. Go on!”

Kum

“Why is the thread rotten, and why do socks rip after three days? Why aren’t the public baths as clean now as they used to be? And why can’t you get a doctor, even if you were to die three times over?”

Malakhii

“Socks and public baths. Go on!”

Kum

(in a loud voice, like a tribune)

“And why, for the third year in a row, is there no spring but always some kind of misunderstanding in nature: it’s cold, it even snows, and suddenly—boom, it’s as hot as the highest seat in a bathhouse?!.. And you mean to tell me that that’s not a fact?”

Bass

“That’s a fact!”

Tenor

“That’s a fact!”

Neighbors

“It sure is a fact! It’s a fact, all right!”

Malakhii

“Is that all?”

Kum

“Let’s say it is, even though I’ve got a million more questions.”

Malakhii

(*a dreamy look in his eyes*)

“Tell me, why it is that before the Revolution, you, Kum, and I, and all of us were afraid to think, and now I think about everything, about everything?”

Kum

(*goes over to the canary*)

“Go on!”

Malakhii

“Tell me, why was I afraid to dream, even though I was tempted to grab a sack and staff and set out, to set out into the distance. I drove away such dreams, but now—I freely take my staff in hand, put some crackers in my sack, and set out.”

Kum

(*sarcastically*)

“So you’re running away. Go on!”

Malakhii

“Tell me, why did I tremble before the higher-ups, why did I tiptoe around at work and at home? Like this, like this (*demonstrates by tiptoeing*)... I used to give flies the right of way. But now (*looks at everyone somewhat strangely*) I write letters to the Council of People’s Commissars of Ukraine, and I’ve received a reply. (*Pulls out a letter and solemnly raises his voice*) Please stand! (*Reads*) ‘USSR, the Administrative Council of the People’s Commisars, Kharkiv, date, number. In answer to your questions, the office of the Council of the People’s Commisars wishes to inform you that your projects and letters have been received and forwarded to the People’s Commissariat of Education and the People’s Commissariat of Health.’ What rapture! The Council of the People’s Commisars of Ukraine, the Olympus of proletarian wisdom and power, informs me, a former mailman, that my projects have been received. (*A little majestically*) My projects! That’s where I’m going. And there are answers in my projects to all your questions, Kum. As soon as they’ve been examined and approved, then you, Kum, and all of you—all of you—will immediately receive all your answers. Immediately, I say! And I’m setting out right now. Liubunia! Get me a shirt and some underwear for the road!”

Kum

“Kum! Don’t go!”

Malakhii

“Don’t you understand? The projects have been forwarded for preliminary assessment. I must set out immediately, toot de

sweet! I'm afraid that the People's Commisars won't understand something in the projects and explanations will be needed. A shirt and underwear!" (*Exits to another room*)

Everyone falls silent.

Tarasovna

(mumbles with numb lips)

"Oh Mother of God! Kum! Neighbors! Save me! I beg you—save me!... Don't let him go, I beseech you!...

Kum

"Easy now!... He's shown his hand... So that's what it's all about! For a whole year he's been writing something at night, and borrowing money from me for stamps..."

Liubunia

(clutches her mother)

"Oh, Mama! Godfather! I'm afraid! Today in church, when I was praying, it felt ... like a cold spirit passed over me. I looked—there was sorrow in God's eyes and the shadow of the inevitable. The shadow of the inevitable."

Tarasovna

"My heart's contracted! I, too, feel that he's setting out on a fatal journey."

Kum

"Easy now! He's certainly climbing high, all the way to the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee, and to the Council of the People's Commisars. He's all puffed up with pride, while we—mere serfs—are supposed to be dumb. And this is our Kum! No! I won't let him go! I swear to God, may I die if I don't turn him back! I'll bring him back even if he's already on the road. I'll break through to the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee myself! Here's what we'll do. As soon as he comes out, I'll give a speech, and you, Mokii Iakovych, begin 'A Mercy of Peace.'"

Tenor

(immediately stirs)

"Do-do-do, sol-sol, mi, do-do-do. Liuba Malakhievna! Na-na-na-du-dunia! Join in with the harmonica."

Kum

(again raises his hand like a scepter)

"Easy now! Not all at once, I say! In this order: first, I give a speech, then the canary, 'A Mercy of Peace,' tears, and the chicken. Just be sure you don't mess up! I'll give the signal."

Everyone repeats to themselves:

"Speech, canary, 'A Mercy of Peace,' tears, and the chicken."

ACT I, SCENE 9

Malakhii enters, ready to set out. Kum blocks his way.

Kum

“Are you really going, Kum?”

Malakhii

“I’m going, Kum.”

Kum

(Looks at everyone. In a quiet voice)

“The speech. *(In a loud voice)* Listen, Malakhii—not only you, but all who are present in this house! It seemed to us that you’d live out your years without any cares, and that you’d pass away here, in the arms of your friends, and we’d follow behind your coffin, singing: ‘O Holy God, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us.’ ... Give me some water! *(Drinks and sighs heavily.)* Easy now! It seemed that I’d be speaking these words over your coffin, or you’d be speaking them over mine, since it’s all the same. But it turned out differently. You chose a different path for yourself and betrayed religion, the law, your wife and children, and us, your friends and your Kums. And where are you going, anyway—just think! Drink some water, Tarasovna!”

Tarasovna

(drinks the water. Barely able to speak)

“I won’t make it on my own. I’ll die, Malasyk.”

One of the neighbors also wants a drink but Kum sternly glares at him and stoppers the water bottle.

Kum

“I just don’t believe it! I don’t believe that you’ll set out on this dark path. For who if not you was the most faithful Christian and sang in the church choir for twenty-seven years? And as for the Holy Scriptures, you know them down to the last letter! Don’t go! The parishioners beg you! They want to elect you head of the parish—and that’s a fact.”

Bass, Tenor, Neighbors

“Actually, that’s true! The elections are this Sunday!”

Kum

“If you’re going, take a good look around you—look how your wife is grieving, how crestfallen your daughters are, bending like willows over a pond in the steppe. Look, even the canary’s grown sad.”

Malakhii

(walks up to the canary cage. Stands lost in thought. They all hold their breath. Malakhii takes down the cage.)

“That’s how I used to sit, like that, losing the best years of my life in a cage. (*Walks over to the window and releases the canary*) May you, too, fly away into the sky-blue horizon, little bird. (*Turns to everyone*) Farewell!”

Kum

(*gives the signal to the **Tenor**, then turns to **Malakhii***)

“Malakhii, don’t go or you’ll die!”

Malakhii

“So I’ll die!”

“For what, Kum?”

“For the sake of a higher goal.”

Liubunia begins playing the harmonica, the tenor waves his arms like wings, and the singing begins: ‘Mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise.’ (*by Dekhtiarov*). **Malakhii** hesitates, wants to say something, but **Bass** does not let him; he drowns out all the other voices and the harmonica; the veins in his neck swelling, he draws out ‘We lift them up unto the Lord.’⁶

Malakhii

(*smiling painfully, he addresses Kum*)

“Here I’ve swept out the cobwebs of religion from my soul, yet I don’t know why this singing stirs me so wondrously.”

The **Choir** continues singing “*It is right and just to worship the Father, and Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, one in Essence and Undivided.*”

Malakhii

“I remember in my childhood hearing this sung during Pentecost. It seemed to me as if God Himself had descended to earth right there, on the outskirts of our village, and was walking across a field swinging a censer. Just a little old man dressed in white, with sad eyes, censuring the wheat, the flowers, and all Ukraine. (*To the **Neighbors** and to **Kum***) Do you hear the ringing of the bells on the censer and the singing of the larks?”

Kum

“Why, Malakhii, they’re going to be singing ‘A Mercy of Peace’ in church this Sunday, just like that! Stay with us!”

Kum takes **Malakhii** by the hand and is about to take the sack off his shoulder.

Malakhii

(*suddenly coming to*)

“Let go! Stop this poisonous singing! Quiet!”

Kum

(*gestures with his hand*)

“Sing!”

Malakhii

“So-o-o! You purposely called the choir together, to poison me again with this singing and incense! Well, you won’t succeed! Because, look: someone in red—you can’t see his face—is coming up to little old God and throws a hand grenade!”
(The Choir thunders: “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Heavenly Hosts; heaven and earth are full of Thy glory”⁷)

“Do you hear the thunder? Fire and thunder above the flowering Ukrainian steppes! It’s crumbling—look, the shattered sky is falling; there go forty martyrs, head first. Christ and Mohammed, Adam and the Apocalypse, are all falling, head over heels. And the constellations of Cancer and Capricorn are going up in smoke. *(Sings out with all his might)* ‘Do you hear, the trumpets have sounded’... I hear the trumpets of the Revolution. I see the horizon of a sky-blue socialism. I’m going! *(To his wife)* Farewell, and good health to you, old woman!”

Tarasovna*(sobbing)*

“Don’t go, Malasyk, or I’ll die here!.. It’ll come, hunchbacked grief will come at night and sit at the head of the bed... It’ll wither me up, it’ll crush me to death!”

ACT I, SCENE 10

Suddenly Oldest daughter runs in with a dead chicken.

“Mama! Papa! Our chicken’s been killed!” *(Silence hangs over the room)*

Kum

“Which one?”

“The yellowish one—here, the one with the golden crown.”

Malakhii*(Takes the chicken and examines it)*

“Who killed it?”

Oldest daughter

“Vasyl Ivanovych Tukhlia. He whacked it on the head with a cudgel.”

Kum

“Well, Malakhii! You haven’t even walked out of the yard yet, and here your enemies have already reared up. If I were you, I wouldn’t let Tukhlia get away with this. I’d immediately call the police, take him to court, and ...”

Neighbors

“That’s right—you should take him to court!”

Tarasovna

“Why, that’s no chicken—it’s pure gold. You remember, Malasyk, how you used to feed it wheat mash when it was just a little chick, and how it would hop up on your shoulder when it finished?”

Kum

(sees that Malakhii is lost in thought)

“Call the police! I’ll act as witness. Good people—look, what barbarity! An innocent chicken’s been killed, and for what?”

Malakhii

“Yes. This is barbarity.”

Kum

“Then call the police and write out a complaint!”

Malakhii

“No, there’s no need. You can’t destroy evil and you can’t build socialism by writing out complaints. This crime convinces me all the more that I must immediately hurry to the Council of Peoples’ Commissars to speed up the implementation of my projects. Because the main thing now is the reform of man—and that’s exactly what my projects are about. I’m going!”

Kum

(now even he’s lost)

“Kum, don’t go! Remember when we were schoolboys and ate Easter eggs on Good Friday?”

(Malakhii puts on his cap)

“Don’t go—or I’ll belt you!”

*Liubunia falls to her knees before her father,
imploring him with her eyes alone.*

Malakhii

“You’ve moved me, you’ve raised doubts in me... But I can’t, child—I can’t stay, Kum—because I’ve been moved and shaken a hundred times more deeply by the Revolution.”

ACT I, SCENE 11**Tarasovna**

(rushes in from the kitchen with a freshly baked sweet bread)

“Malasyk! Here I’ve baked your favorite sweet bread for you. Don’t go, Malasyk! It turned out so light and fragrant... And look, on top I put a five-pointed star out of raisins.”

After hesitating three more times, Malakhii sets out, forcing himself to take each step, as if he were pulling himself out of mud. As he crosses the

*threshold his steps become freer. The sweet bread falls to the floor.
Tarasovna's legs give way, and she falls on the shattered plate.*

Neighbors

"And the plate shattered."

Tarasovna

"It's not the plate, dear neighbors—it's my life that has shattered."

She weeps quietly and deeply. The daughters swoon. Liubunia stands frozen like a statue. Kum opens the door and watches Malakhii. Neighbors, like reeds in the evening, whisper:

"There's a drama for you! Now you can finally cry all you like!"

* * *

ACT II, SCENE 1

The telephones are ringing at the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR—Officers are complaining that Malakhii Stakanchyk is giving them trouble.

"Is this the officer on duty at the Council of People's Commissars? This is the district commandant's office calling. We request a directive, Comrade. What are we to do with Malakhii Stakanchyk? You know, the crazy one who keeps writing up projects. He's been coming here for three weeks now, day in and day out. It wouldn't be so bad if he came just by himself, but he's been dragging in others. Who? Well, for example, some guy had a fight with his wife, so he brought him in; someone else cussed somebody out, and he dragged them both in; some drunk was getting soused in an alley, and he even managed to convince him to come. He demanded their immediate reform. At your command, Sir! Yes—Yes—Yes—. And if he doesn't obey, then what? (*slams the receiver down*) There's a directive for you!"

Second officer

"What did he say?"

First officer

"'Tactfully and considerately,' he says, 'advise the old man to go back home. A letter's been written to the Regional Executive Committee to secure him a post.' A bone won't keep a mad dog away."

Second officer

"Do you think he's—crazy?"

First officer

“If he’s not crazy, then either you or I are crazy. There’s no other option.”

Second officer

“He’s ... just odd!”

First officer

“And his projects?”

Second officer

“Insanity is too strong a word for it. I heard that at the Council of People’s Commissars they’re saying that all the old man did was simply serve up a hodge-podge of cabbage and cake, mixing the Bible with Marx, akathists with Anti-Dühring.”

First officer

“Well, if it’s so simple, please—tactfully and considerately—advise him to return home. Here he comes.”

Second officer

“Alone?”

First officer

“Of course not. Now he’s going to serve you up some cabbage and cake, and you’ll have to tactfully and considerately swallow it.”

Malakhii’s voice is heard

“O people, people!...”

First officer

(clutching his head)

“You hear that?.. Here we go!”

ACT II, SCENE 2

Malakhii enters with a staff. Behind him, a group of people come stumbling in, lost and even frightened: an Old man draped in a loose cloak, with an umbrella; a former soldier in Riding breeches; a Madam, on in years, wearing an elegant straw hat with a quivering pink feather in it; a made-up Young miss; a Pale girl; a Bachelor past his prime; an old Peasant woman.

Malakhii

(letting them through)

“‘O, people, people,’ said the great Taras.⁸ *(To the Officers)* And this in the capital, no less, I’d like to add.”

Second officer

(taking up Malakhii’s tone of voice)

“Tell us, what happened?”

Malakhii

“What happened? First—pass on my greetings to the proletarian Olympus. More precisely: to the People’s Commissars and the Chairman. Most respected socialist fathers! While waiting for the approval of my projects (for the third week now), I congratulate you on this, my saint’s day. What will you console me with on this fated and holy day? I ask with what, because the shadow of Ukrainian sorrow has fallen upon my shoulders as well; the moon has disappeared, the wheat has burned dry, the landlady has thrown me out of the apartment ...”

A commotion breaks out.

“What happened to the wheat?”

“What landlady?”

“What does this have to do with us?”

“Why us?”

(Someone interrupts) “Why?—“

(Two together) “—were we brought in?”

Malakhii

“Haven’t I untangled and solved enough questions and problems? Note: problems are the seals that lock the doors into the future. 1) Concerning the immediate reform of man and primarily those of Ukrainian descent, because otherwise as peasants and translators we’ll still be busting sod in the next world, 2) concerning the reform of the Ukrainian language in keeping with socialist principles, and not like the telegraph office, where they charge you for two words, ‘to’ and ‘night,’ when you write ‘tonight’ 3) supplement: a plan for the rebuilding of Ukraine with its center in Kyiv, because Kharkiv looks like an office to me. Socialist fathers! Once more I remind you: hurry up with my projects, especially with the one concerning the immediate reform of man. Here is living proof of the urgent need for such reform (*points his finger at all the people he brought with him*) One, two, three, four, five, six, seven!”

“Yesterday there were five, the day before yesterday there were three...”

First officer

(speaking to all of them)

“What happened? What did he bring you in for?”

An even noisier commotion breaks out.

“We don’t even know!”

“We were standing near a church, talking about this and that, when suddenly ...” (*begins the Old man, fidgeting*)

“Par-don! This girl began to feel faint in church, so I quickly stepped in and brought her out for some fresh air. You all know

what a pungent smell there is in church during Pentecost: birch leaves, grass, flowers... (*Says the **Woman with the pink feather, trembling***) I brought her out into the shade, and suddenly he comes up (*indicates **Malakhii***) 'I'm taking you to the Council of People's Commissars.' 'Me?' 'You' 'Excuse me, I wouldn't budge from this spot by the church,' I said, 'but if it's to the Council of People's Commissars, well, that's another matter!'"

"I was just standing there. Along comes this old bag ... this citizen. She asked me about something. And suddenly: 'Go to the Council of People's Commissars!' 'I beg your pardon—I am a member of several groups: children, Aviachem, and the house coop and so, why should I go to the Council of People's Commissars?' (*Shouts the **Man in riding breeches** as if he were barking*). What for?"

Malakhii

"What for?... O, people! It was written in the ancient books of the Rig-Veda: do not strike a woman, even with a flower—and what did you do? (*To **Old man and Riding breeches***) On the eve of socialism, you pushed aside a woman by striking her with an insulting word."

Riding breeches

"Me? I struck her?"

Malakhii

"You (*turning to **Madam and Bachelor***) did something even worse—you stalked a girl near church (*points to the **Pale girl***). O people!"

Madam Apolinara

"Me? Why, on the contrary, I'm a woman myself!"

Riding breeches (anxiously)

"Excuse me, Messur! I struck someone? Whom?"

Malakhii

"Whom? (*Turns to the **Old woman-pilgrim***) What did you want to ask them, citizen? I see you've come from the village."

Ahapiia

"Uh-huh... I've had a rough go of it, dearie. People said the road to Jerusalem's open now..."

Malakhii

"Excuse me for interrupting: What did you ask them about?"

Ahapiia

"If they knew whether the road to Jerusalem was open."

Malakhii

(*turns to **Old man and Riding breeches***)

“And you. What did you tell her?”

Old man

“We?”

Riding breeches

“You mean—me?”

Malakhii

“Yes! You! Did you tell her that now, instead of going to that grave of a Jerusalem, we should be going to Lenin’s mausoleum, to the new Jerusalem, also the new Mecca—to Moscow?! No! Instead you said: ‘Go on, Granny, go ahead.’ How insulting, how disgusting! And to whom, I ask? To a woman, to a peasant woman!”

Riding breeches

“Not a single insulting word! On the contrary, I’ve been in the military from childhood. Politeness is my element! My ideal!”

Malakhii

(to Old man)

“And you. Instead of confirming and convincing her of all that I’ve said, that soon, soon, soon the time will come when the entire world will sing unto Moscow—‘O shine, shine, shine so brightly, O New Jerusalem, shine, glory, the Revolution’s glory over thee has risen’—you said: ‘Get out of here! Go to the labor exchange!’”

Old man

“I didn’t know that you’re supposed to direct such people to Moscow.”

Malakhii

(with greater feeling)

“Aha! He didn’t know! Living proof, I say—and I continue with my case. (*To Pale girl*) Tell me please—and excuse me for the expression—what did they entice you with, into what profession did they tempt you (*Points to Madam and Young miss*) today by the church?”

(Pale girl remains silent)

“Didn’t they say: Thirty karbovantsi a month, good food, including sweets, linen, and clothing?”

Madam Apolinara

(her pink feather quivering)

“Par-don, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! (*To Pale girl*) Tell him, child. (*To Young miss*) You tell him, Matilda dear, what I said, what I talked about, when we led this poor thing out of church. ‘My dear child!’ I said. Matilda dear, tell him, how I said it.”

Matilda

“‘My dear child,’ you said, Madam Apolinara ... (*lights up a cigarette, inhaling deeply*) ‘My dear child! Are you one of those typists, by any chance?’”

Madam Apolinara
(*to the Pale girl*)

“‘And what did you say, dear... Well? Well? (*Sees that the girl is not going to speak and answers for her, changing to a young, sorrowful voice*) ‘No, I’m a medical assistant,’ said my dear child. I sighed deeply and heavily and asked... Matilda, what did I ask about?’”

Matilda

“‘At what hospital? How much do you make?’ you asked.”

Madam Apolinara
(*answering for the girl*)

“‘At the Saburovka asylum,⁹ 18 a month,’ said the child. Matilda even cried out. (*To Matilda*) Show us how you cried out!’”

Matilda

“‘Oh! Why, you can go crazy working there.’”

Madam Apolinara

“‘Matilda cried out and then I added: ‘Oh, my dear child! Once I too was a poor orphan, a pale little girl who worked and worked and cried and cried, until ... my fate changed for the better.’ (*To Malakhii*) Well, wasn’t that what I said? Wasn’t that what our conversation was about? Excuse me, if you please! I know what I said, and what I still intend to say.’”

Malakhii

(*having listened to every word she said, abruptly stops her with his hand*)

“‘More precisely: ‘I worked and worked and cried and cried, until I finally spit on all of it like this, “pfuui,” and went to one of those madams,’ you said. ‘And Matilda here, she did the same, and take a look—you and she, she and you,’ you said, and you even showed her—oh, woman!’”

Madam Apolinara

“‘Me?’”

Malakhii

“‘And you enticed her and cleverly tempted her, telling her that you could offer food and drink, fine clothing, fragrant soap, hygiene, even chocolate.’”

Madam Apolinara

“‘Matilda dear, tell everyone—did I say such things, darling?’”

Matilda

“On the contrary, and nothing of the kind!”

Bachelor

“I was there when it happened. Madam citizen said nothing of the kind. On the contrary, even though I don't know their social origins, I can say, nonetheless, that their behavior with Olia was as correct as you'd expect on International Woman's Day.”

Malakhii

“The experts proclaim and write that there is nothing beyond class identity, but, I say—here you have it. Here you have a solidarity of evildoers that goes beyond class. (*To the Bachelor*) Who, if not you, first approached her with oranges, tempting her like a snake under the tree near the church, to forget about Kyriushyk and to love you. And who if not Olia, crying bitterly, scattered your oranges about and ran into the church to forget everything?”

Bachelor

“So it turns out that I made her enter the church? Ha, ha, ha! Why, I know all the anti-religious propaganda by heart, and, on the contrary, I continuously agitated that she dump everything and not be afraid of God.”

Madam Apolinara

“And I led her out of church.”

First officer

(*comes up to Olia and inquires seriously and considerately*)

“Please tell us, Comrade, did they really try to persuade you—to coax you—to give up Soviet labor and go ... well ... go into another line of work, or something?”

Olia

(*after a pause*)

“No.”

Second officer

(*knitting his brow*)

“No?... Then perhaps someone was a nuisance, or insulted you, or behaved impolitely? Tell us openly, don't be afraid. I assure you, no one will cause you any unpleasantness.”

Olia

“I'm not at all afraid. I said—no! (*her voice becomes tinged with anger*) And if you really want to know, I was bothered most by him (*looks at Malakhii*). All morning long he shadowed me. Just like a phantom. (*To Malakhii, angrily*) Tell me, why did you follow me? What for?”

Malakhii

“I wasn’t shadowing you. I was protecting you from those who really were stalking you.

Olia

(with anger and mockery in her voice)

“Have you ever been in an insane asylum, by any chance?”

Malakhii

“For twenty-seven years.”

Commotion. Everyone becomes agitated.

Olia

(takes two steps toward Malakhii)

“What? And where was this?”

Malakhii

“In the midst of my family.”

Olia

“And I thought—maybe for real.”

Malakhii

“It was for real, *Olia*, because the contemporary family is an insane asylum. The first stage of an insane asylum. An insane asylum nook: abbreviated—*InsaNook*.”

Olia

“What about love?”

Malakhii

“That’s an illusion! A sky-blue illusion—in other words, a dream. Wasn’t it love, unfulfilled, that brought you to church today? (*Olia looks down at the floor. Malakhii takes two steps toward her*) And wasn’t it they (*indicates Bachelor and Madam Apolinara*) who, taking advantage of your condition, sought to tempt you and lure you onto the false path, to play on the strings of universal love?”

Olia

(raises her head)

“No!” *(turns sharply and leaves)*

Bachelor

(to Malakhii)

“Well?”

Madam Apolinara

(starts after Olia)

“My child! *Olia*! (*Olia gives her a look that immediately silences her. She then turns to Malakhii*) Now, please—you guide her! If you please! I have an income... (*To the Officers*) And finally, I request protection from such and similar innuendos

and, of all places, in the Council of People's Commissioners!
Matilda!" (*demonstratively steps aside*)

Matilda

"Me too!" (*moves away*)

Bachelor

"This is slander! A provocation!" (*moves away*)

Old man

"Well, um..." (*hobbles off to the side*)

Riding breeches

"And why?" (*moves away*)

ACT II, SCENE 3

Unshaven and grim, Kum walks into the office. Behind him comes Liubunia, stepping warily and carrying a small bundle.

Kum

"Easy now! He's here!" (*Without hurrying, he silently walks up to Malakhii, stops, looks at him, walks on past him, turns, and walks up to him again.*)

First officer

"What's your business here, Comrade? Whom do you wish to see?"

Kum

(Glances grimly at Officer, moves away from Malakhii, stands around a bit waiting to see whether he'll say something, whether he'll smile, then comes up to him for the third time.)

"At least you could say hello, Kum, but if you're not going to speak to me, then I'm not going to speak to you either. (*To Officers and to everyone*) Huh? We nearly got run over by a car, and this is the kind of reception we get!"

Liubunia

(fearfully draws near to Malakhii)

"Papa! Mama ...!" (*her lips quiver and she can say no more*)

Kum

"Easy now! Well, Kum! Your wife—my Kuma—greet you."

Liubunia

(overcoming her quivering)

"She said 'A curse upon you, Liubunia, if you come home without Papa.'"

Kum

"Easy now! She kept imploring, sobbing, and said that she has three daughters: Faith, Hope, and Love,¹⁰ (*to everyone*) my

godchildren. (*To Malakhii*) She's keeping Faith and Hope at home and has sent Love to bring you back."

Malakhii

"Ye shadows of the past, be away from my sight! Away from my sight!"

Liubunia

"Papa!" (*She wants to say something more, but Kum cuts her off by giving her a glass of water*)

Kum

"Drink, Liubunia! Drink, my godchild, for though the water is cold, it's warmer than your own father's heart and blood. (*To Madam Apolinara*) Would you believe that he's actually her father?"

Madam Apolinara

(*quietly*)

"I sympathize... Tell me, what position does he hold? What's his rank?"

Kum

"Him? He doesn't hold any position! On the contrary, even though he's a grown man, he behaves like a juvenile delinquent. It's been three weeks since he ran away from home."

Madam Apolinara

"Aha-a! So that's who he is! (*to her friends*) He's a nobody—you understand?"

Riding breeches

"How's that?"

Madam Apolinara

"He ran away from home, and his daughter is looking ..."

Bachelor

"Aha-a!... With a mistress?"

Madam Apolinara

"What else! He took the money, cleaned them out, and the daughter here just caught up with him, you understand? He has no authority to drag us around to Councils of People's Commissars, not to mention interrogate us! No authority—and I'm not staying here a minute longer. Matilda! Allons, we're going home! (*To the Officer*) Au revoir!" (*She leaves*)

Matilda

"Me, too!" (*She leaves*)

Bachelor

"I was ready a long time ago!" (*He leaves*)

Old Man

“He-he... Me, too.” (*Hobbles off*)

Riding breeches

“And why?” (*And he leaves*)

Malakhii

“All of this—plus what occurred before, plus the fact that they escaped—convinces me all the more of the immediate need for the reform of man, according to my projects. (*To the Officers*) Where are my projects? For a year and a half I carried them around in my head, then I spent another half-year writing and rewriting them *calligraphically*—where are they?”

Second officer

“I told you already....”

Malakhii

“Send them immediately to the Council of People’s Commissars for consideration! See that you send them today! Do you hear? No—send them off now! Right now! What are you standing around for? How can one stand around, when you yourselves have just seen and heard the things that are being done to people—it doesn’t matter at all that radios are playing, trolley cars grazing, cars romping around!”

Second officer

“Now look here, my good man! You spent two years writing two wonderful—and let me add—unusually serious projects, right?”

Malakhii

“Yes.”

“And you expect such projects to be reviewed and studied—and they must be seriously and thoroughly studied—in some two weeks?”

“What are you trying to say?”

“You see, more time is needed. The State Planning Committee, for instance, has to study your projects. So I advise you to find any old job—by the way, there is a directive to the Regional Executive Committee to give you a job—and wait for an evaluation of your projects. And, in the meantime, you could, perhaps, write a few more new ones.”

Malakhii

(*thinks it over and quietly smiles to himself*)

“All right! I agree.”

Officers

(*happily*)

“Really?”

“That’s wonderful! And look, your daughter’s come for you.”

Kum

“Not only my godchild—I, his Kum, have come, too.”

Second officer

“And your Kum. Now you can all return home to your district...”

Kum

“And when we get back, Kum, I will congratulate you on your saint’s day! (*To the Officers*) He just turned 47 today. (*To Liubunia*) And just think how the folks back home must feel—his saint’s day has come and the man himself is not even there!”

Malakhii

“I agree—on one condition: give me a position here, in the capital, at the Council of People’s Commissars. Even as a doorman, but here.”

Second officer

“How do you like that! What’s the matter with you, my good man! All the positions at the Council of People’s Commissars are filled, including the doorman’s. To fire someone just to put you in—you know yourself, it won’t do: after all actual people are sitting in these positions.”

Malakhii

“I’ll stand. If everyone else is sitting, give me a job standing. Otherwise I’ll turn into Simon the Pole-sitter, right here, and won’t budge until the Council of People’s Commissars reviews my projects. Besides that, I ask that you stop smoking!”

Second officer

“Excuse me!”

Malakhii

“I feel bad for this placard—it cries out, practically yelling—and no one listens to it. And this is the Council of People’s Commissars after all.”

First officer

“Just don’t you start yelling!”

Kum

“Easy now!”

Malakhii

“Millions look with entreaty upon this, their highest institution, upon this mountain, this transfiguration of Ukraine, upon the new Mount Tabor, and here you are walking around beneath this placard and breaking the first, most important commandment of socialism: No smoking! No, once again I’m convinced that without my immediate reform of man, all placards

are only patches on old clothing. Where are my projects? I'll go right now and hand them over to the Head of the Council of People's Commissars personally. He'll understand, because he sees and hears how the Revolution is being harmed by people, people, and people."

Kum

"You, Kum, are a prime example. Who, if not you, came here to interfere in the work of these comrades, who are special people, who've gained experience during the Revolution?"

Malakhii

(paying no attention to that)

"Reform is urgently needed—most urgently, I say. You see what's happening to people, don't you? *(Points to the **Old peasant woman**-pilgrim who has fallen asleep on a stool and is quietly snoring)* You see? Do you hear? She just walked into her own Council of People's Commissars—and she's already fallen asleep! Here—before your very eyes—is the reason for the urgency of reform. Call the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars over! And hurry, please! This will be an interesting and instructive scene: the best son of the people, the head of the Council of People's Commissars, will wake up the darkest element of the same people, right here in his own office, in the presence of a reformer from those very same people. Oh, friends! Call the Chairman right away! By the way, call a photographer, too.... *(dreamily)* The Chairman'll come in, touch her—by the way, tell him not to forget a scepter, because a Chairman requires a scepter. He'll come in, touch her with the scepter and ask: 'Who are you, Citizen, who has come and fallen asleep?'"

Ahapiia

(awakens)

"I'm Ahapiia Savchykha! I got tired, dearie—I'm goin' to Jerusalem."

"Where?" the Chairman will ask."

"To Jerusalem, or to Mount Athos."

"Dark is your path, Citizen, and unprogressive!' the Chairman will say."

"It's a dark one all right, dearie. So dark that as you go, you can't even tell if there's a path leading there or not—and nobody knows. In our village folks were saying that the Soviet government made a deal with the Turks for Christ's Tomb, and that they opened the road for pilgrims, but is that really true?"

"Oh, people, people!" the Chairman will say, and then politely add, 'Today you no longer need go to Jerusalem but to a new destination.'"

“To which one, dearie?”

“To which one? To the great one mentioned above, no. 66600-6003—to the sky-blue destination. Then, Citizen, you’ll return home to your village, and along the way you’ll preach a sermon both new and beautiful.”

Ahapiia

“No, I vowed to go to Jerusalem. I sold the house and everything in it, just so I could get there, or to Mount Athos—I saw a painting of it with the Holy Virgin sitting on little clouds flooded with divine light. Do you think I’d come back after that?”

Malakhii

(a little dreamily)

“‘Oh, come back, Citizen,’ the Chairman will say.”

Ahapiia

“Oh no, I won’t go back.”

Malakhii

“Oh, go back—I’ll add from myself.”

Ahapiia

“Oh no!”

Malakhii

(angrily)

“Go back!”

Ahapiia

(also with feeling)

“No!”

Malakhii

(irritably)

“You serf!”

Ahapiia

(joyfully)

“That’s what the monks once called me at the Caves Monastery—‘the servant of God Ahapiia.’”

Malakhii

(moving away)

“My, what serfs we still are! With the same fear as when stealing plums at night—that’s how she looks at this socialism. Too bad I don’t have a scepter.”

Kum

“A question! (*Malakhii turns toward him*) This time, not for you, Kum. (*To the Officers*) A question! I’ll give it to you straight!”

Second officer

“Go ahead! Give it to me straight!”

Kum

“You mean to tell me that the Council of People’s Commissars does not have the power to force him home—under police escort, if it comes to that?”

Second officer

(shrugs his shoulders)

“There are no grounds.”

Kum

“What do you mean, there are no grounds? Why, the man ran away from home, his wife’s (my Kuma’s) heart has suffered one blow after another, his daughters are out of their minds. (*To Liubunia*) I’m beginning to wonder, my Godchild, if the chickens haven’t all died, because who’s going to look after them now—for example, today, when it’s so hot and uncomfortable. (*Wipes his face with a handkerchief and turns to the Officers*) Besides that, all the neighbors, the entire population of the town, are talking, walking around, and asking themselves: ‘What kind of a government is this, if parents can run away from home?’”

Second officer

“File a suit in court.”

Kum

“With regard to your bureaucratic words, allow me to state that I am dissatisfied with the Soviet government.”

Second officer

“Well, what can you do—”

Kum

“Easy now!.. I’m dissatisfied, and I have a legal right to feel dissatisfied. But, be that as it may, that’s not what I came to the Council of People’s Commissars to say.”

Second officer

“Well, what then?”

Kum

“Here is a petition. Please read it aloud in his presence, in mine and my godchild’s.”

*Second officer begins reading quietly so the
First officer comes up and continues loudly*

First officer

“... on the basis of the Communist Party programs that offer free government medical care, on the one hand, and on the basis of the apparent mental sickness of our father and Kum, on the

other hand, my godchild and I, collectively, petition the Council of People's Commissars to send our father and Kum to an insane asylum for examination; and if he has even a little bit of intelligence left, then—"

Kum

"In regard to what follows in the petition, the pre-war solipsitor advised me that the Council of People's Commissars does not have the right to reject not only my request but that of my godchild."

Liubunia

"But we're not really serious..."

Kum

(interrupting)

"Easy now!

First officer

(having finished reading the petition)

"All right! We'll think about it."

Kum

"You think about it—just don't think too long."

Malakhii

(to Kum)

"You're sending me to an insane asylum? Me? How dare you! I've been sent by the people."

Kum

"You're lying, Kum! All the neighbors, all our people, sent me here to bring you back home."

Malakhii

"I've walked through more than a hundred villages, farmsteads, and little towns on my way to Kharkiv, the capital of the USSR—even now the dust from the paths through the steppe is still upon my feet. I drank water from hundreds of wells and springs as I rested, and I chatted with the people. I'm a delegate!"

Kum

"You're lying! You ran away from home!"

Malakhii

"I'm an all-Ukrainian delegate, Kum!"

Kum

"On the contrary, though all Ukraine may soon become delegates, you and I—never! So let's go home, I say."

Malakhii

(to Officers)

"I demand, first, you chase him out of here; and second, that

you immediately call the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and all the People's Commissars over here. I myself intend to show you, right here, using Ahapiia as an example, how one must go about the immediate reform of man. Well? What are you waiting for?"

Kum

"I have demands, too! Not only I, but my godchild here, and his wife back there. And I've already told you how the neighbors and folks are going around, making demands. Send him back there immediately!"

Malakhii

(insulted, speaks grandly)

"Send me? A reformer? *(Goes over to the telephone)* Operator? Tell the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and all the People's Commissars to stick their little pins in their buttonholes and get over here to this office for a meeting—immediately! Did you get that? Today's agenda: a lecture by the reformer Malakhii on the immediate reform of man, using Ahapiia as living proof—there's such a sky-blue yonder today, and she's standing here shelling sunflower seeds. Don't interrupt! Who's that interrupting me?"

First officer

"Comrade Reformer! Order, please!"

As soon as he leads Malakhii away from the telephone, Kum grabs it.

Kum

"Comrades of the Council of People's Commissars! Don't listen to him! Don't listen to him, I say, can't you tell that he's not all there. He's gone soft in the head... Please stop interrupting!"

First officer

(takes the phone away from Kum and calls back)

"Hello... A little tragicomedy has just occurred. These are the same people who came from Yesterday... no, no, from the little town called Yesterday... No, they're not drunk... I'll explain all of this a little later..."

A Messenger enters.

First officer

(to Malakhii)

"They just called from the Council of People's Commissars, and they want you to go see the Deputy Chairman."

Malakhii

(joyfully)

"How do you like that, Kum!.. *(Grandly)* Call back and tell

him—I'm coming. No, better yet, give me the phone—I'll call him myself. From this day forth, let there be no intermediary between me and the government. Enough!"

First officer

"He's not by the phone any more. By the way, they said you should come right away. They're waiting for you at the dacha of the Council of People's Commissars."

Malakhii

"What rapture! I'm going! By the way—come along, Ahapiia. I'll introduce you to the Deputy Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, as living proof of the need for my projects..."

Ahapiia

"Maybe he can tell me if there is a road to Jerusalem now?"

First officer

"They requested strictest confidence. You understand?"

Malakhii

"Aha! Well then, for the time being you stay here, Ahapiia. I'll be back soon. And where am I supposed to go? Where?"

First officer

(fills out a form and hands it to the Messenger)

"This comrade here will escort you. *(To Messenger)* Please conduct the Comrade Reformer to the Saburov dacha."

Malakhii

"Thank you!" *(makes an insulting gesture to Kum and follows Messenger out of the room)*

Kum

"Where are you sending him?"

First officer

"Just as you requested—to the psychiatrists, for examination."

Ahapiia

(moving over to the phone, she timidly takes the receiver and whispers into it)

"Comrades! Please tell me—how do I get to Jerusalem?"

* * *

ACT III, SCENE 1

Cawing, large beaked ravens circle above Malakhii in the garden of the Saburov asylum. Patients around him begin to stir and shout.

First patient

“Hey, blackies! Shut up!... Why, God hadn’t even finished creating the world before they covered the sky and began nibbling at the first golden star and turned the sun into a sieve... It’s dark and I’m cold! (*Shouts sadly at the crows and turns to Malakhii*) Reform the sun!”

Malakhii

(*gesturing with a movement of his head and hands*)

“I’m reforming it!”

Second patient

(*having listened intently to everything the entire time, whispers furtively*)

“Quiet, I beseech you.”

ACT III, SCENE 2

Olia, an attendant, appears, followed by an unmarried Male attendant past his prime.

Male attendant

“Olia Manoilovna!”

Olia

“I’ve already told you...”

Male attendant

“Olia!”

Olia

“Get away!”

Male attendant

“He brought you into disrepute, but I have an entirely different love in mind... Come over to my place, or else I’ll come over to yours.”

Olia

“I’ll tell the city commissar...” (*leaves*)

First patient

(*to Malakhii*)

“The professor purposely let them into the garden so that they can peck at my head... Here, look what they’ve already done... (*goes down on his knees*). Drive them out!”

Malakhii

(*with a wave of his hand*)

“I’ll drive them out!”

ACT III, SCENE 3

A Third patient comes up. He has been sweeping up something near him the entire time.

Third patient

“Sweep up the crumbs! Look—they’ve made a mess...”

ACT III, SCENE 4

A Fourth patient comes running up with a yellow flower.

Fourth patient

“Have you seen Olia? She’s enchanting today. She’s beautiful. She has such a tender and fragrant sexual gland (*smells the flower*). I’ve never seen one like this before, although I’ve made love...”

First patient

“They’ll even peck at a gland.”

Third patient

“Let ’em peck, just so they don’t stomp around...”

Second patient

(in a wavering voice)

“Quiet!.. They’ll hear you.”

Fourth patient

“I made love with girls, women, old bags... I remember where it all happened. First in the kitchen, then in the pantry, in the cemetery, in the church garden—grass covered with dew and bells; the bells are still there, a little white apron, a sharp crescent moon on the right...”

Third patient

“On crumbs, on bread no less!..”

Fourth patient

“Just a minute! Altogether that’s one hundred and seven women in fifteen years, fourteen thousand, five hundred thirty... thirty...”

First patient

“Help chase them away! Oo-ou-ou...”

Wailing mournfully, he begins to run and hop about. The others join in, each with his own gesture, shout, or song.

ACT III, SCENE 5

Attendant enters. The Fourth patient comes up to him.

Fourth patient

“Did you see Olia?”

Attendant

“Go that way! She’s over there...” (*points in the direction opposite to where Olia is*)

Fourth patient

“She has a sexual gland beautiful and fragrant as a rose—I saw...”

Attendant

“Where did you—see?”

Fourth patient

“I was sitting over there in the bushes... And she came up...”

Attendant

“And?”

Fourth patient

“She was picking flowers...”

Attendant

“And?”

Fourth patient

“She bent over...”

Attendant

“Well, go on.”

Fourth patient

“And I saw... On her leg, near her knee... And at night she came to me, and if it weren’t for the cat...”

Attendant

“What cat?”

Fourth patient

“Why, the same cat that brought me three kittens this last night. Tell me, what right does that cat have to meow to everyone that I’m the father...”

Attendant

“Now you’ve really lost it. Go on over there and join the rest of them.”

Fourth patient

(going over)

“Every time I wake up at night, there she is with the kittens, meowing and meowing to everyone: meow-meow-meow...”

ACT III, SCENE 6

Olia approaches Fourth patient to calm him down.

Attendant blocks her way.

Attendant

“This little intellectual says that you often visit him at night.”

Olia

“Every day he gets worse.”

Attendant

“Maybe there’s some truth to what he says?”

Olia

“What? My God! Trokhym Ivanovych!”

Attendant

“Don’t blame me if you hear even worse gossip about you than that.”

Olia

“Gossip?”

Attendant

“I know about everything, Olia—how and where you romped around, and how you fed Kyriushyk ice cream, and how you sprinkled the bed sheets with flowers, how you took off your white shirt...”

Olia

(shudders)

“It’s not true!”

Attendant

“Not true? Why, I know absolutely everything about your love, and I can even tell you the date when you drew Kyriukha to yourself with your braid and fell asleep that way...”

Olia

“How did you ... find out about this! Oh God! Who told you about this?”

Attendant

“You’re asking me, who?”

Olia

“Tell me!”

Attendant

“You’re quite pretty right now. This shame really becomes you—really. Eyes like two heavenly orbs, and all that...”

Olia

(quietly mouthing the word)

“Who?”

Attendant

“A little birdie told me about the ice cream, because it was sitting on a tree and saw absolutely everything. A moth told me about the sheets and flowers, and I was told about your braid by a fly—ha-ha-ha. Now, now... I'm joking, I mean—what's a fly anyway? A dumb insect, ha-ha-ha ...”

Olia

“What should I do now?”

Attendant

“There's nothing else to do but dump Kyriushyk, because, like it or not, he's already chasing after someone else.”

Olia

“Can you just forget about your true love?”

Attendant

“If you don't dump him, there'll be talk.”

Olia

“Trokhym Ivanovych! Do you really want to parade me in front of the whole world to be mocked, so that my heart dies of shame? What did I do to you?”

Attendant

“Nothing. But I want you to make love to me, because I've grown weary without it... Do you hear?.. It's time to think about me, too.”

Olia

(wringing her hands)

“Tell me, how did you find out? Trokhym Ivanovych! Tell me!”

Attendant

“About what?”

Olia

“Well...about the ice cream, the bed, the flowers?”

Attendant

“I already told you: a bird, a moth, a fly...”

Olia

“Trokhym Ivanovych! Tell me!”

Attendant

“Ask me nicely!”

Olia

“Trokhym Ivanovych ...”

Attendant

“Ask nicely!”

Olia

“Well... Darling! Tell me!”

Attendant takes her hands and draws her to him.

Olia

“Let me go!”

Attendant

“Now, now... Don't be so stubborn!”

Olia

“You're hurting my hands!”

ACT III, SCENE 7

Fifth patient approaches them, bent over double and tightly clenching his fists.

Fifth patient

“Help me!”

Attendant

(to Olia)

“This one imagines that he's carrying a huge boa constrictor on his shoulders and that its tail is dragging around somewhere in the netherworld... But unrequited love is worse than that boa constrictor, because it crushes the heart, not the hands. Like this! Like this!”

Olia

(cries out)

“Stop torturing me!”

Fifth patient

“I can't. I'm exhausted! I'm going to drop it any minute. Any minute now there's going to be a catastrophe. Help me!”

Attendant

“He told me ... Kyriukha.”

Olia

“He did!...”

Fifth patient

(to Malakhii)

“I don't dare drop this reptile... This boa constrictor is universal evil. And as soon as I drop it, it'll crush the whole world... Help me!”

Malakhii

(motioning with his arm)

“I'll help you!”

Olia

“You mean, it was him?”

Attendant

“You still don’t believe me? Here (*points to her back*) you have a birthmark. Right? (*Points to her breasts*) And your left one is a little bigger than your right one... Right? And you love everything to be ...” (*whispers something into her ear*).

Olia

“And didn’t he tell you that right here and now I’m carrying ... his child?”

Attendant

“That’s nothing! A double abortion—you get Kyriukha out of your heart and the kid out of your belly, and the problem’s solved.”

Olia

“And didn’t he tell you about his disease?”

Attendant

“About what disease? You’re joking—right, Olia Manoilovna?”

Olia

“You want to find out for yourself?”

Attendant

“All right, all right... He did this to me on purpose, because of the money... What a rat, ugh! Why didn’t you tell me about this right away? How can you play with someone like this?!” (*He leaves*)

Olia collapses and begins sobbing deeply.

Fifth patient

“There’s going to be a catastrophe any minute now! I’m dropping it! Help!”

Malakhii, who has been observing Attendant and Olia without being noticed, becomes agitated as never before.

Malakhii

“Immediately... The reform of man is needed immediately! Now, I say, or never! Besides, I’m convinced that no one except me will undertake this reform... Right. It’s just that I don’t know where to start... A whirlwind of thoughts—sky-blue, green, yellow, red... How many there are! A whole snowstorm! The sky-blue ones are the most numerous, and I think they will be the best and most appropriate for my reforms. I have to catch them. Here’s one! Here’s another! Here’s a third. They’re like butterflies, and look what they’re turning into!”

In his fevered imagination wondrous projects, reforms, and entire scenes blossom. At first from the sky-blue undulations and butterflies some kind of sky-blue circles with yellow hot centers run together and entwine. The

singing of Dekhtiarov's "Mercy of Peace" resounds, mixed with "The International," with the metallic clinking of the censer, and with the trilling of larks. Then the following appears: Somewhere in a sky-blue Council of People's Commissars, sky-blue People's Commissars are sitting listening to his talk about the immediate reform of man. They applaud, praise him, and greet him. He continues to show the People's Commissars firsthand how the reform of man should proceed. One by one the following approach him: the elderly man in a loose hanging cloak, the former soldier in riding breeches, the lady, Ahapiia, the attendant, the patients. He covers the head of each with a sky-blue cloth, he instructs and persuades each, and then makes a magic movement with his hand; and then from under the headcover emerges a reborn person, terribly polite, unusually good, angel-like. Then these people and many others with red poppies and yellow marigolds, and with Malakhii at the head, go off into the sky-blue distance. Along the way they see Mount Tabor and Olia carrying apples to be blessed. People sing "Hossana" to her, but in some new fashion. Then in the sky-blue delirium some kind of new Jerusalem glimmers, and beyond are sky-blue valleys, sky-blue hills, again valleys, sky-blue rains, downpours and finally a sky-blue nothingness.

ACT III, SCENE 8

Malakhii comes to. Olia is gone. Patients are wandering about to and fro.

Malakhii

"So... On the basis of what I've seen (*he takes a handful of dirt, spits several times, kneads it together, and anoints himself*), I anoint myself a people's commissar. (*Loudly*) It's come true! Listen everyone, everyone, everyone!.. In the name of the sky-blue revolution, I have anointed myself a People's Commissar..."

Second patient

"Quiet! I saw camel ears growing in the grass."

Malakhii

"Let them grow!"

Second patient

"They're listening."

Malakhii

"Wonderful!"

Second patient

"And they pass things on."

Malakhii

"To whom?"

Second patient

"To everyone."

Malakhii

(raises his head)

“Wonderful! Hey, camel ears! Pass on my first decree to everyone, to everyone.”

Patients

(among themselves)

“To everyone, everyone, everyone.”

Malakhii

“By the grace of the great mother of our Revolution, I have anointed myself a People's Commissar. My credentials: a staff and a bag of crackers; I've renounced my family status and have covered my entire previous period of service on foot. I drank water from 107 wells—a People's Commissar without portfolio. My external emblems and insignias: a red ribbon over the left shoulder, a staff and a trumpet, for Ukrainians a straw hat, and, on major holidays, a crown made of a sunflower in my hand. The People's Commissar Malakhii. No, that's not right. The People's Malakhii, and in parentheses, People's Commissar. Abbreviated to Peopmalakh... No. Peopmalakhpeop.”

Patients

“The People's Commissar. The Peopmalakhpeop has appeared.”

Someone

(drops to his knees)

“Lead us out of here!”

Someone

(agitatedly)

“He's a pretender. Don't believe him!”

Third patient

“If you are a big leader, then command them not to crumble the Holy Bread. They should pick up the crumbs. They're the ones that cause famines. The idea was to have a wedding, when boom—the bride and the matchmaker shriveled up on the vine and, instead of melons, children's heads sprouted up. What screaming, what lamentation, they say.”

Malakhii

“I will command them! I will lead you out! I take all your requests and demands to heart. As a matter of fact, here's my second decree. To everyone, everyone, everyone! Immediately get rid of all briefcases and portfolios. When officials ask where they are supposed to file demands and complaints, answer: from now on, carry all of the people's complaints, demands, and requests 1) in your head, 2) in sacks of sincerity, instead of in

briefcases or in portfolios. The People's Malakhii, People's Commissar. Abbreviated—Peopmalakhpeop. Kharkiv, Villa Saburov."

Patients

"Lead us out, Peopmalakhpeop!"

Malakhii

"I will lead you out, and I will lead you! I will lead you to where the sky is glowing and the earth is sky-bluing, where beyond the sky-blue horizon, world-awakening socialist roosters sing on golden roosts."

Patients

"They won't let us go! Don't believe him! The guards won't let us go! The two heavenly guards and the hen won't let us go."

Malakhii

"I'll tell you the word that will allow us to pass. A password that will topple the wall... Come closer for the password!"

Patients

"The password! The password! The password!"

Malakhii

(quietly to each)

"Sky-blue dreams."

Patients

(repeating the password, they rush to the wall)

"So lead us out! Lead!"

Malakhii

"Climb over!"

One of the patients

"But what if they catch us?"

Malakhii

"They won't catch you! The People's Commissar himself is standing guard over you. Climb over, I say!"

The patients climb up and over the wall. Malakhii waits until the last patient is over. Then he spits in his hands.

Malakhii

"In the name of the Socialist Mother of our Revolution!" *(he begins climbing over)*

ACT III, SCENE 9

Olia

(runs up)

"Stop! Where are you going?"

Malakhii

(from the wall)

“Don’t jinx me with your ‘where.’ Don’t you understand yet? I have to go around to every house, every field boundary, every factory, to teach everyone about sky-blue dreams.”

Olia

“Aren’t you ashamed of yourself, trying to climb over the wall! Get down!”

Malakhii

“The People’s Commissar has the right to climb over all enclosures in Ukraine, over all walls and fences. That’s my prerogative.”

Olia

“I’m asking you, imploring you, come down.”

Malakhii

“Hm... She’s asking. *(Climbs down from the wall)* If any poor or insulted person asks the People’s Commissar to hang himself, then he must do so immediately. You see, Olia, the People’s Commissar has honored your request, and now you honor mine. Let me go there.”

Olia

“Where?”

Malakhii

“There, to everyone out there—but first of all, to the hegemons.”

Olia

“Stay with us a little longer, rest, and then you can go...”

Malakhii

“Olia! You mean, you think I’m crazy?”

Olia

“Well, just... Why, no one—no one thinks you’re crazy.”

Malakhii

(penetratingly)

“Olia! Your eyes are so clear and pure that I can see even a slight shadow of untruth in their depths, and I see, ‘Of course he’s crazy.’”

Olia

“Not at all! It just seems that way to you.”

Malakhii

“I want you to know, Olia—I’m not crazy. As it happens, a small mistake was made. Guess what kind?”

Olia

“I don’t know... Tell me!”

Malakhii

“A teensy-weensy one. The escort made a mistake. Instead of taking me to the villa of the Council of People’s Commissars, he took me to the Saburov villa. That’s all. And Olia should straighten out this mistake by letting me go.”

Olia

“No, no! I can’t! Ask the professor. He’s wise and good, he’ll examine you... And anyway, they’re going to let you go soon. I heard that they only sent you here for observation. Do you really have it so bad here? Look how green it is—what flowers, what fresh air!”

Malakhii

“It’s not sky-blue! Oh, Olia! The renewal of man and the earth in sky-blue space, like a white swan swimming musically and with ease on quiet ponds, now depends entirely on you. (*Somewhere beyond the orchard a factory whistle sonorously sounds. Malakhii comes to.*) Do you hear? I have to go there, there to the hegemony! And I really will go crazy if I’m too late and can’t get them to follow me.”

Olia

“Oh, God! The factory whistle—twelve o’clock. It’s mealtime now. Where are the others... where are they?”

Malakhii

“They’ve already gone.”

Olia

“Really? They’ve already gone to eat?”

Malakhii

“Yes. They’ve gone to a sky-blue meal.”

Olia

“Then let’s go as well. Hurry!” (*she leaves*)

Malakhii

(*follows her out, but soon returns—alone.*

Starts to climb over the wall. Hesitates.)

“No. She asked me.”

ACT III, SCENE 10

Olia

“People’s Commissar!”

Malakhii

“Don’t worry! I have refrained and have honored your

request. But I must try to convince you. Olia, I have to nurture the sky-blue dreams in you first, all the more so because in your eyes they haven't faded yet—they resound like a whole torrent there. I'll begin with you."

Olia

"And I'll call the attendant!"

Malakhii

"Olia! I'll fall to my knees, here... I'll bow at your feet, I beseech you—let me go..."

Olia

"You have a fever, People's Commissar. You need to lie down."

Malakhii

"Just the opposite—I need to stand up. Olia, just for a minute... Just consider what my projects will do for you personally. You of all people are always nurturing sky-blue dreams. If you don't let me go, I'll have to put on a black veil of mourning and take them to their graves."

Olia

"They're calling."

Malakhii

"And if you let me go, he'll come back."

Olia

"Who?"

Malakhii

"Kyriushyk."

Olia

"He won't come back."

Malakhii

"According to my plans, he will come back. Without fail. At night, in the winter."

Olia

"Hm... And why not in the spring?"

Malakhii

"In the winter. You, Olia, after lighting the lamp of loneliness, will spin the thread of women's sorrow. And a cradle will quietly creak-creak and in the cradle a child will quietly cry-cry. And the grieving mother, Olia, will sing a song, the same one that she ... (*he sings*) 'O sleep child, that has no swaddling clothes. Until mother returns from the field and brings three little flowers: one will be dreaminess, another will be sleepiness, and the third will be happiness...' (*leans toward Olia*) Is Olia in tears?"

Olia

(*through tears*)

“Well, and then what?”

Malakhii

“In the winter, at night. There will be a blizzard over the entire steppe, over the entire world: who-who-oo. The horses in the steppe clippity-clop—that’s him, coming back from a revolutionary campaign...”

Olia

“Who?”

Malakhii

“According to my projects—Kyriushyk.”

Olia

“Really?”

Malakhii

“Without fail. He’ll stop at the window, knock quietly: “Open the door, O wife Olia, faithful friend”... (*to Olia*) Olia?”

Olia

(*quietly*)

“She’ll open the door.”

Malakhii

“Covered and blanketed with snow, he’ll stand in the doorway: “Hi,” he’ll say. Then Olia in reply (*sings from a well-known soldier’s song, having changed some words*), ‘Welcome, welcome, my darling—please come into the house.’ Then your darling will say: ‘Olia, renewed now after the reform of man, having atoned for my sins against you in battles for sky-blue dreams, I have come back to you. Forgive me...’ Olia will say...”

Olia

(*dreamily*)

“I forgive you! I forgive you!”

Malakhii

“Then your darling seats his Olia near the cradle... Like this (*seats Olia on a stump*). Then he gazes lovingly at her, at the dear child, then he presses her to his heart, then he gazes into her eyes, then he kisses her saintly knees that have grown cold... Is Olia crying?”

Olia

“No... it’s just me, being silly (*dreamily*). Oh how I have sorrowed, waiting for you, my darling!”

Malakhii

“This will all take place in accordance with my projects I have to hurry, Olia. I’m leaving.”

Olia

(dreamily)

“Go! Go!”

Malakhii

(climbs up on the wall, sits down)

“Let’s go together, Olia. I’ll present you to the Council of People’s Commissars as living proof of the need for my immediate reforms...”

Nearby, Attendant’s voice is heard: “Olia Manoilovna!”

Olia

“They’re calling!.. Run away!”

Malakhii

“I’m not running away—I’m walking away! Olia, I’ll be waiting for you at the celebration of the renewal of our Ukrainian people, which will take place on the 20th of August according to the new style, or, according to the old style, on the Feast of the Transfiguration. Details—confetti, paper streamers, and such—are in my decrees...” *(jumps down from the wall and patters off somewhere.)*

ACT III, SCENE 11

Attendant

(runs in)

“Olia Manoilovna, Stakanchyk’s relatives have come for him. *(Looks around)* Well, where is he?”

Olia

(blocks the spot where Malakhii climbed over)

“I don’t know.”

Attendant

(suspiciously)

“What do you mean, you don’t know? I’ll write a report to the doctor on duty about how someone’s been jumping in the bushes with the patients, and then—I don’t know... *(Olia remains silent)* You lied about Kyriushyk. He says he doesn’t have any disease. *(Olia remains silent)*. Where is Stakanchyk? And where are all the patients? Did they all run away?”

Olia

(comes to)

“The patients? They’re over there.”

Attendant

“Where?”

Olia

“They went to eat, and Stakanchyk too.”

Attendant

“What are you talking about? They’re not there.”

Olia

“Ah, there they are, don’t you see? They went around the corner.”

Attendant runs off. Somewhere nearby alarmed voices can be heard:

“Someone let the patients out! The patients have run away!”

Olia climbs over the wall.

ACT III, SCENE 12

Kum and Liubunia are waiting and worrying near the office.

Liubunia

“I can hardly believe that Papa is about to come out, that we’re about to take him home. God! How we have walked all over the place, how we have asked around, and oh, how we have had our fill of talk! Isn’t that right, Godfather?”

Kum

“Easy now! Even though I’m pretty worried myself. Here, my Godchild, put your hand here, on the heart...”

Liubunia

“Oh!”

Kum

“No, no... on my heart.”

Liubunia puts her hand on Kum’s heart.

Kum

“Well?”

Liubunia

“Oh it’s pounding!”

Kum

“That’s not a heart, it’s a big grain mortar. Do you hear it? Thud-thud-thud-thud. I’m mighty worried. *(After a pause)* But why should I worry, when I can already see it: an old willow near Zahnyboh’s dam, the rustling of the rushes... Kum is sitting there and I’m sitting there, Kum is fishing and I’m fishing. And we are out in nature and nature, itself is so peaceful and serene. When suddenly—z-z-z-z... Kum, a mosquito! And Kum says, “Huh?” and slaps his forehead...”

Liubunia

“Papa’s forehead was always covered with bumps after fishing.”

ACT III, SCENE 13

Attendant enters.

Attendant

“You’ve come for the patient Stakanchyk, have you?”

Kum

“Not only me but his daughter as well.”

Attendant

“He’s no longer here.”

Kum

“What do you mean, not here?”

Attendant

“He’s run away.”

Kum stands dumbfounded. Liubunia is wracked by spasms.

Liubunia

“Oh... oh... oh...”

Kum

“Don’t shout, because I can’t hear anything anyway. (*To Attendant*) Tell me, did you just hit me?”

Attendant

“Me?... Not at all.”

Kum

“Then why is my head ringing?”

Liubunia

(*again wracked by spasms*)

“He ran away...”

Kum

“Don’t!”

Liubunia

“He ran away...”

Kum

“Don’t say those words!”

Liubunia

(*crying*)

“He-e ra-an a-wa-ay...”

Kum

(*to Attendant*)

“A question!”

Attendant

“Please.”

Kum

“When did he run away?”

Attendant

“Fifteen minutes ago... But don't worry. We immediately called the police, and they'll soon catch him ...”

Kum

“Thanks. They won't catch him now.”

Attendant

“You don't think so?”

Kum

“They won't catch him: When he took the neighbor to court over the rooster, it took three years but he won the case.”

Attendant

“What's a rooster got to do with it?”

Kum

“It shows, young man, Kum's character. Once he's begun running away, he'll keep running until his death. Understand?”

Attendant

“I don't understand a thing.”

Kum

“What do you mean, you don't understand! He's running away, and you don't understand! And what if I take you and even the members of the Councils of People's Commissars to court, because you didn't guard him well enough, because he ran away and may do devil-only-knows-what... You'd all be bureaucrats after that!.. As it is now, we don't need you, young man... And anyway, it would've been better if you had shot me right in the heart with a twenty-inch cannon than to bring such news. Go—because I can't stand the sight of you!”

Attendant

“And I tell you, the police will catch him. Stop by tomorrow.”
(*Leaves*)

Kum

“I'll sit down now and mourn for a bit... I'll grieve and worry about him. Oh, Kum, Kum! I loved and respected you like my own brother. I carried you in my heart, even to the point of calluses... (*After a pause*) And now, having mourned a bit, I say—enough! Let's go home, Liubunia, and right away at that!”

Liubunia

“Without Papa?”

Kum

“Not only without Papa but without my Kum.”

Liubunia

“Godfather!”

Kum

“Home!”

Liubunia

“Godfather!”

Kum

“Enough!”

Liubunia

“Godfather! How will we be able to show ourselves without Papa?”

Kum

“We’ll arrive at night.”

Liubunia

“Why, Mama will curse me... And how will you go to church, to the bazaar? Everywhere they’ll ask why you returned without your Kum.”

Kum

“I won’t go to church. Besides, why should I worry when I’ve decided to go home, get sick, and die...”

Liubunia

“We can’t go home without Papa.”

Kum

“Can or can’t—enough, I say!”

Liubunia

“Who are you going to go fishing with now?”

Kum

“I’ll go by myself!”

Liubunia

“But we can’t—we can’t without Papa. Who’s going to play checkers with you? Who’ll talk politics with you?”

Kum

“I’ll talk to myself!”

Liubunia

“And who are you going to sing ‘Oh, my green orchards’ with? And what about Christmas and Easter?”

Kum

“I’ll sing by myself! I’ll sing alone—I’ll get sick alone, and I’ll die alone! Alone!”

Liubunia

“Godfather! Just remember how on your name-day you were

taking Papa home, and you got lost on your own street, and if it weren't for our dog, Polkan, you wouldn't have found the gate."

Kum

"Don't remind me. Do you think I'm saying that Kum's a bad man? Is that what I'm saying? Am I?"

Liubunia

"No."

Kum

"The calluses on my heart are from love and disappointment. Who are we, Kum and I? Who? Are we little boys, little pioneers running on ahead, or are we approaching the grave?.. (*After a pause*) He's going to run around to all kinds of People's Commissars of Education, rush to the All-Union Central Executive Committee, and I'm going to be selling my last piglets to get him to come home?... Enough! Home!"

Liubunia

"I won't go, Godfather."

Kum

"What?"

Liubunia

"I'll search on my own. I'll find him and bring back happiness. And if I don't..."

Kum

"You'll die!"

Liubunia

"If I don't, then I'll die... I'll commit suicide."

Kum

"And what about your dear mother and my Kuma, Godchild, who is lying sick and possibly dying... of typhus?"

Liubunia

"When Mama blessed me as I set out and kissed my hands, watered them with her tears, she asked, beseeched me, commanded me not to return home without Papa."

Kum

"And what if your sisters, Verunia and Nadiunia, are also lying there, weak from malaria, and no one there to give them water, and no one to put a compress to their foreheads?"

Liubunia

"I can't! From the time I ran into the church and prayed, I already felt that fate would part us."

Kum

“And what if all the flowers on the windowsill and in the garden are withering?”

Liubunia

“Every night the same dream, Godfather: as if I were alone in the steppe, weaving a wreath of blue-bottles and marigolds, but they're dry, dry like the ones for laying at the head of the deceased... A prophesy of fate—you can't avoid it, Godfather.”

Kum

“The chicks are fading because there's no water, and the hen doesn't know what to do next, where to find water.”

Liubunia

“Godfather!...”

Kum

“And after all this, you're still not coming?”

Liubunia

“No!”

Kum

“Aha! So you want to show that you have your Papa's character. Then know this, know that I, too, am a somebody, and my character is three times tougher than Kum's and yours. Farewell! (*Moves away. Angrily*) Come to your senses! You'll die! (*Liubunia is silent. Kum pulls on his hat.*) You'll die, I tell you!”

* * *

ACT IV, SCENE 1

The workers at the “Hammer and Sickle” factory are surprised to see an old man in a straw hat climbing over the wall to the factory.

First worker

“Look! Someone's climbing over... Hey, Citizen!”

Second worker

“Sh-h-h! It's probably a spy or robber trying to sneak in...”

First worker

“Then he has to be arrested!”

Third worker

(seriously, calmly)

“Important people don't climb over walls to visit us, that's a fact. So don't get all hot and bothered, fellas... Silence and a pair

of eyes are better than a wagging tongue. So let's find out who it is and what he's all about."

Workers diligently return to work and pay no special attention to their guest. As if to say, 'Well, if he's climbing over, let him climb over.'

Malakhii

(from the wall)

"Greetings to the hegemons! (*The Workers silently and laconically exchange greetings. Malakhii notices this and responds sarcastically*) I greet you, and at the same time ask: You mean that even hegemons are walled off by walls, and what walls at that (*points to the walls around the factory*). Then, please be so kind as to tell me, what distinguishes you from those sitting in prisons and insane asylums? There they have walls, and here you have walls."

Third worker

"There they limit your rights and here they defend your rights, since there are still a lot of enemies around."

Malakhii

"Time to break down the walls, Hegemons, to immediately destroy these walls here, because they block the road to you."

Third worker

"For whom?"

Malakhii

"For your friends, O Hegemons—I say."

Third worker

(to his pals)

"For our friends, I'd say we have a front gate and doors."

Malakhii

"They didn't let me through the gate."

Third worker

"Didn't recognize you, or what?"

Malakhii

"They didn't recognize me and didn't acknowledge me despite my showing them the emblems and insignias of my office, described in my first decree, by which every living person in Ukraine should know me (*points to his staff and his straw hat, looks at the Workers*). You mean you don't recognize me either? (*Pulls a red ribbon across his left shoulder*) And even now you don't recognize me? That's what happens when you don't read the decrees. Listen once more: by the grace of the great Mother of our Revolution, I was anointed the People's Commissar Malakhii..."

Second worker

“So what?”

First worker

(to **Third worker**)

“He’s drunk.”

Third worker

“No, no.”

First worker

“What do you mean, ‘No?’ Look... I don’t care if he’s drunk himself into a stupor, but he’s drunk himself up to the rank of a People’s Commissar.”

Third worker

“Listen more carefully!”

Malakhii

(*has meanwhile climbed down from the wall and walked up to the **Workers***)

“What are you making?”

Third worker

“Can’t you see? Forms.”

Malakhii

“And I’ve come to you to make reforms.”

Third worker

“What kind?”

Malakhii

“Sky-blue ones. More precisely—the immediate reform of man. Because—do you know what things have come to today? Newspaper boys are shouting, shouting that two old women were raped...”

First worker

“Well, someone must have been really hot.”

Malakhii

(*doesn’t grasp the irony*)

“And this on the eve of socialism, in the country that composed the best love song in the world about a green periwinkle, the star and the moon, the red guilder-rose, where even the People’s Commissar himself guards sky-blue dreams at night—two old women were raped, and the people, the people!...”

(*Beyond the wall a young man’s cheerful and sonorous voice is heard*)

“R-r-ra-dio! A terrible rape of two unfortunate old women, the older of whom is sixty-seven years old.”

Malakhii

“Do you hear that?”

First worker

(*ironically*)

“The old grannies really got a treat.”

Malakhii

“I’m sure that if you were to pass out a questionnaire in the evening on the streets with one question, ‘What are people thinking about at the moment?’—what do you think, what would most people be thinking about?”

Third worker

“Can’t say. People think about all kinds of stuff.”

Malakhii

“Well, I can.”

Third worker

“Let’s hear it.”

Malakhii

“They’re thinking and dreaming not about sky-blue reforms but about the forms of women’s legs, without paying the least bit of attention to the fact that as a consequence of such dreams, love is reduced to legs. The eyes are not aglow, the heart does not sing—and that’s why two old women were raped... No, I can’t wait any longer. It’s time to start (*blows reveille into his fist*). Ta-ta-ra-ta-ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ra-ta-ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta! The sirens are roaring in the factories, the horns are sounding and wires humming. Ukraine is singing beyond the graves in the valley, and above all is heard the golden bugle of the People’s Commissar: The bugle is calling to you, Hegemons, about the sky-blue distance and about sky-blue dreams...”

ACT IV, SCENE 2

Other Workers gather

“Who’s the orator? What organization’s he from? What’s he talkin’ about?”

“He’s come to us from the People’s Commissars.”

“No, no! He calls himself a People’s Commissar.”

“In my opinion, a clown has arrived from the circus.”

“You hit the nail on the head! Just what we need! It’s an actor from a Ukrainian troupe.”

First worker

(*to Third worker*)

“I can see he’s mixed vodka and beer.”

Third worker

“Think so?”

First worker

“That’s a fact!”

Third worker

(with a smile)

“Listen more carefully, I tell you.”

Malakhii

“I’ve come to you, Hegemons, to undertake the immediate reform of man. Listen to me and no one else. (*Someone whistles derisively*) Who’s whistling at the speech of the People’s Commissar? Who, I ask, is interfering?”

Someone

“And who’s interfering with our work?”

Malakhii

“There’s enough whistling in Ukraine. Dry eastern winds are whistling, young men are whistling at girls, the police whistle at night, people get drunk on the streets, two old women were raped... I’ve come to carry out the immediate reform of man and, above all, the reform of the Ukrainian people, because as peasants and translators...”

A murmuring passes among the Workers.

Workers

“He’s a loony...”

“He’s pretending.”

“Take him to the office!”

“Let the old man have his say.”

Third worker

(calmly)

“Listen more carefully, Comrades!”

Malakhii

“Listen to me, Hegemons, and I will lead you out from these smoke-covered walls. Through alleys and byways, past factories and plants, over field boundaries and paths, way, way beyond the graves into the sky-blue distance will I lead you. Ta-ta, ta-ta! Rise up, O People, for I bring you reforms—not forms, but reforms! Ta-ta, ta-ta! Come to the new Mount Tabor on the 20th of August, on the 6th according to the old style, bring a red poppy, marigolds, but most of all bring your little sky-blue dreams. There we will become sanctified, sanctified—renewed... And while you’re at it, bring the Ukrainian language. By the way, do you know why our language stood at the doorway for ages? God forgot about it when he was mixing languages at the tower of Babel. On top of that, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles in all languages, he forgot about our Ukrainian

language. The Council of People's Commissars has already turned its attention to this, but without me it's not likely to get anywhere..."

Third worker

(loudly, powerfully)

"Oh, it is, and it will!!! Comrades... *(Steps forward toward Malakhii)* Are you a peasant?"

Malakhii

"No."

Third worker

(insistently)

"And not a worker?"

Malakhii

"I'm the People's Malakhii."

Third worker

"From the alleys and byways, along twisting paths, even over these walls, these kinds of Malakhiis come to us. And who are they? It wouldn't be so bad if they were just melancholy dreamers. Unfortunately, there are plenty of those even among our kind. Their eyes are Jesus-like, in their heads is sky-blue smoke, they go around collecting sins and ride them for all its worth—it's all right, I say, if these little jesuses on donkeys—"

Malakhii

"Hosanna unto them! They cleanse the world."

Third worker

"If you want to clean up, switch from the donkey—"

Someone

(interjects from the side)

"—to the waste barrel." *(An outburst of laughter)*

Third worker

"Even to a barrel. It's better to be a barrel-maker than a little jesus like this one here. It's all right if they're just little jesuses; that's not so bad. But what if you hear an entirely different kind of music in one or two words of their pious little sermons..."

Malakhii

"A sky-blue music..."

Third worker

"Then, Comrades, we have to say—it's not the music of our class! Behind their sky-blue words hide bourgeois, chauvinistic stingers. Behind that sky-blue fog enemies lie in wait for us. Their plans and forms are veiled in their sky-blue reforms. So beware!"

Malakhii

“I announce the immediate reform of man, Hegemons, and I intend to carry it out.”

Third worker

(wags his finger)

“Oh, you’ll carry it out, all right, but as you see it—we know you... No, better we carry it out in the image and likeness of the proletariat.”

Malakhii

“Ta-ta... And will you also carry out the reform of the Ukrainian people?.. Far, far away, he sits by a little window in a house, making bast shoes and looking out to see if old-man God is bringing him rain for his wheat, or if his sons are returning from the army, or his daughters from day-laboring. ‘And day passes and night passes, no God shows up—and no rain, the rapids roar, the moon rises as it always rises, there is no Cossack Sich anymore... The rushes ask the Dnipro...’¹¹”

Voices

(bursting forth)

“That’s an old song.”

Malakhii

“Where have our children gone, where do they wander?”

Third worker

“Tomorrow, over there, where the rapids roar, it won’t be the moon that rises. Tomorrow, you might say, electrical suns will rise and light up the whole Cossack steppe, our whole Ukraine, all the way to the sea...”

Malakhii

“Question: to which sea?”

Third worker

“Tomorrow over there, where the gulls whimper flying about, sirens of sea-going ships will, you might say, sing out. The horns of new factories will resound. Today Dniprelstan with its dynamo-motors is already shattering that rush-like melancholy and that perverse—may it rot in hell—longing for the rapids. I’ve already heard it during an excursion...”

Malakhii

“Forget your Dniprelstan! Right here they’re shouting—don’t you hear—about the rape of two old women. O Hegemons! It won’t help!”

Third worker

“It will help! That’s where we’re beginning our reform of the entire Ukrainian race. There and here and everywhere that you find the hand of a worker...”

ACT IV, SCENE 3

A Worker comes running up, soaked with sweat.

“Are the forms ready?”

The Workers exert themselves.

“Ready!”

Sweaty worker

“We’re pouring out the pig-iron!.. (shouts in the directions where bright red fires flare up) All set! Pour!”

A fiery liquid pours forth into channels and troughs and lights up the entire pouring area with a fiery red, hot light. The redness flares up and is reflected in the faces and eyes of all present. Workers begin moving about. Jumping across the channels, attending to the forms, Workers use shovels to direct the fiery lava into the forms. They carry it in ladling pots. They shout at Malakhii.

Workers

“Get out of the way, old man!”

“Watch out there, hey!”

“Move over—hey, what’s your name!.. Malakhii!..”

“Someone show him the way out, or else he’s gonna melt.”

And in the smoke and fiery redness, he wanders helplessly between the fiery rivulets, until someone leads him to the door and says:

“That’s the trouble with these reformers...”

Coming to, Malakhii glances at the fire, the smoke, and the fiery redness, and says:

“They have their own dreams, red dreams. What a tragedy!”

Shielding his eyes, he leaves. Behind him the thundering symphony of labor continues.

* * *

ACT V, SCENE 1

Madam Apolinara worries that the police might close down her establishment; she worries most at night.

“Keep an eye out, Ahapiia—sometimes the police show up. If they do, say, ‘These are my granddaughters, Olenka and Liubonka, they just arrived... came to prepare for the sacrament, or something like that.’”

Ahapiia

(agrees to everything)

“Oh Lordy! Whatever you want, just so you get me a pass to Jerusalem somehow.”

Madam Apolinara

“I’ll get it somehow!”

Ahapiia

“Soon?”

Madam Apolinara

“Just wait!”

Ahapiia

“I’ve been waiting a month. (*whispers*) No money, and no Jerusalem.”

As if to spite Apolinara, tonight disturbing whistles are heard somewhere not far off.

ACT V, SCENE 2

A nervous Guest pops out of a little storeroom.

Guest

“Whistles!.. Oh, Madam Apolinara, how many times have I advised you to rent safer quarters, to get farther—farther from Soviet rule..”

Reproachfully and angrily glances at Madam Apolinara and runs up the stairs and out the back door. He has forgotten to button his suspenders.

Madam Apolinara

(follows him, wringing her hands)

“Oh, I know it’s trouble, but what can you do—we’re illegal now.”

ACT V, SCENE 3

Liubunia comes out of the same storeroom.

Liubunia

“It’s boring... Let the music play.”

Madam Apolinara

“No, my dear. Don’t you hear the whistles?”

Liubunia

“I’ll run away!”

Madam Apolinara

(to the Musician)

“All right, play! But, please—piano, piano...”

Liubunia

(goes up to Ahapiia)

“And what if Papa’s home?”

Ahapiia

“God only knows...”

Liubunia

“As soon as I think about it, my whole world turns black. What if Papa's home and I'm here!.. (to the *Musician*) Louder!”

ACT V, SCENE 4

Two Girls enter swaying on the stairs with Guests and Matilda.

“Well... We're here.”

First girl

“Pussy-cats, you won't regret it.”

Guest

“No regrets, no summons, no tears. All will pass, like the smoke of white apple trees.¹²”

Second girl

“Bravo!”

Guest

“Engulfed by the gold of withering.”

Madam Apolinara

(to the *Girls*)

“You've come, my darling children... And where is Olia?”

Matilda

“Some wine! Then we'll tell you about Olia...”

Second girl

(to one of the guests)

“May I have a pear?”

Guest

“Help yourself... ‘I will not be young again.’ Take whatever your little heart desires!”

Girls

“Oh, what a kind fella!”

Guest

(becomes alarmed at his own generosity)

“But only on one condition.”

Girls

“What condition?”

Guest

“You have half a minute to choose (*takes out his watch*). Half a minute for whatever you want. Half a minute! One, two!”

Girls

“Chocolate! Wine! Pastry!”

Guest

“What kind of chocolate? What kind of wine?”

Girls

“Red, sweet, wine! No, white wine!”

Guest

“Well, what kind—tell me.”

Second girl

“Candy! Turkish delight!”

Guest

“Which do you prefer?”

Second girl

“Candy!”

Guest

“A hundred grams? Two hundred grams? Three hundred grams? A half minute has passed.”

First girl

“So soon?”

Guest

“My life, or did I but dream you...”

First girl

“I wanted chocolate.”

Guest

“Just like spring merrymaking, I galloped through in the morning on a rose-colored steed...’ No, enough.”

(sits down on the table).

Second girl

“Just you wait! We’ll tell you the same thing: anything you like, but only half a minute... Ha-ha-ha. I can imagine! Half a minute...”

Madam Apolinara

“Oh, Musia, Musia. How can you joke like that? The guests might think you’re really serious—half a minute...”

She pours the wine. The Guests take to treating the Girls.

Ahapiia

(to Liubunia)

“How nice it would be, sweetie, if you found your Papa, and I found the road to Jerusalem. Do you happen to know Vakulykha, dearie?”

Liubunia

“No, I don’t. I’m not from your parts, Granny.”

Ahapiia

“I forgot that you’re from the steppe somewhere... Out of the entire region, Vakulykha was the only one who had been to Jerusalem...”

Liubunia

“It hurts, Granny—my heart—like I’m going to die...”

Ahapiia

“And she died so nicely, did Vakulykha! She returned from Jerusalem, and on the third day she died...”

The Girls spring up from the table.

Girls

“Madam Apolinara! Mommy! The guests would like to dance some. May we?”

Madam Apolinara

“But I beg you, girls—piano! Pianissimo!”

Musician plays a foxtrot. Shadows run along the walls and the ceiling, the Girls and the Guests dance.

Liubunia

“Here they are, playing music and dancing, and for some reason I see before me the windmills on the outskirts of our little town. And what if Papa is already coming up to the windmills, and I’m here?”

Ahapiia

“She looked like she had fallen asleep. Her face was bright and white—God’s truth, I’m not lying. In her coffin they put a splinter from the Lord’s grave that she had brought back; they put in fragrant herbs and a little cypress cross... God grant you, sweetie, and me and everyone to pass on as Vakulykha passed on. (*Liubunia goes into the small storeroom. Ahapiia continues.*) Should I write out a request? Comrades, Vakulykha died thus and such, and I want the same. You won’t believe me, Comrades, but I dream of it already. I go, as if floating on air, past a warm sea, and the path is covered with red flowers, and somewhere beyond the sea the glow of heaven is visible, like a sunrise in summer... You know, Comrades, if it doesn’t work out with Jerusalem, then I...” (*dozes off*).

ACT V, SCENE 5

Olia brings in Malakhii. From the doorway she shouts

“I have a guest, too, and what a guest!”

*Girls and Guests greet Olia with applause and shouts of "hurrah."
Musician strikes up a fanfare.*

Malakhii

(standing on the stairs)

"So here's where they've finally acknowledged me! *(Bows grandly)* We greet our loyal followers!.."

Madam Apolinara

(to Olia)

"I think this is Mira's—Liubunia's..."

Olia

"Father."

Madam Apolinara

"Why did you do this, Olia?.. To distress the dear child! Why the drama?"

Olia

"Where is she?"

Madam Apolinara

"Sh! Her head hurts. She's asleep."

Olia

(looks in the little storeroom)

"Mira, are you asleep? She's asleep! *(Goes up to Malakhii)* What's more precious, People's Commissar—a father or sleep?"

Malakhii

"Sleep, if it comes after work."

Olia

(smiles crookedly)

"Weariness after work. Excuse me, I'll go change, I'm soaked; *(to everyone)* it's raining outside."

ACT V, SCENE 6

In a rush another Guest comes dashing in.

"Welcome, Counter-Revolution!"

Madam Apolinara

(delighted, but also anxious)

"My God! Girls! Look who's here..."

Girls

(to the new Guest)

"A-ah! We-ell! Our 'never' has arrived."

Guest

(looks at his watch)

"Oh no! 1:15. The train's at 2:00. I still have to send a

telegram... Right! A bottle of beer for me, two bottles of wine and candy for the girls—quick!”

Madam Apolinara

“Maybe you’d like to have dinner, darling...”

Guest

“No time! No time! Where’s Mira?”

Girls

“Mira! Mira! ‘Never’ has come to see you.”

Madam Apolinara

(even more anxious)

“Sh! Piano, girls... *(to Guest in a solicitous voice)* Maybe you could select a different partner today?”

Guest

“Never, Counter-revolution! I just dropped in for five minutes.”

Madam Apolinara

“She’s sick.”

Guest

“What’s she got?”

Madam Apolinara

“She has a headache.”

Guest

“A trifle!”

Madam Apolinara

“Darling, there’s going to be a drama...”

Guest

“Never! Mira! May I?” *(Goes to the storeroom).*

Malakhii

(to Apolinara)

“Who is he, anyway?”

Madam Apolinara

“A friend of ours... So gay and oh so kind...”

Malakhii

“Who’s he going to?”

Madam Apolinara

“I don’t really know... You see, I provide meals for them—that is, they come to eat, and they rest here, and some even bring a guest... How can you know what they’re up to? Trouble, that’s what I have with them, trouble... Would you like a little vodka or beer after being out in the rain?”

Malakhii

“I forbid you to sell love in boxes!”

Madam Apolinara

“What love?”

Malakhii

“In boxes, I say! You think I don't see—you've made a bunch of boxes for love, as if they were little bathrooms. Where's the moon? Where are the stars, I ask? Where are the flowers? (*Takes a homemade flute from his pocket and begins to play*) A decree for everyone, everyone, everyone!. From this day on, we forbid the buying and selling of preserved love in wooden—not to mention plywood—boxes... No, that's not it. In order not to crush the principles of our econo-politics, we temporarily allow the buying and selling of love, but not in boxes, nor preserved: only with a moon, with night stars, on the grass, on flowers. Should someone get the urge during the day, then primarily over there, where the sun resounds in its hurry and golden bees buzz like this: bz-z-z... People's Commissar (*thinks a bit*) The First.”

ACT V, SCENE 7

Liubunia runs in. Behind her comes the Guest.

Guest

“Where are you going? I have no time, Mira!”

Liubunia

“It's Papa's voice! Let me go!.. My darling Papa—lovely, dear, precious Papa!.. (*kisses his hands*). It was so hard, so hard to find you.”

ACT V, SCENE 8

Olia comes rushing in; Girls run up; Guests approach, wobbling.

Olia

“I found him for you.”

Ahapiia

“And I was dreaming of an angel playing on a golden flute... When suddenly, poof—why it's Liubunia's daddy.”

Girls

“It's really your father? Mira! Is this your father?”

Malakhii

“I'm not a father. I'm the People's Malakhii. You mean you haven't read the first decree? I renounced my family status...”

“Never” looks at his watch, waves his hand in disgust, and runs off.

Liubunia

“Dear Papa! Don’t mind that I look like this—that I’m dressed this way...”

Malakhii

“I’ve renounced my family status, I say!”

Liubunia

“Forgive me, dear Papa! This isn’t really me. I did it just to find you, to earn a few kopecks...”

Ahapiia

“Forgive her for going astray, and God will forgive you even greater sins.”

Olia doesn’t take her eyes off Malakhii.

Liubunia

“Vanko will be here in a minute, and we’ll drive down to the train station... I’ve got some money, a whole fifty-three rubles. I’ll buy reserved-seat tickets, and flavored mineral water and oranges for the road. You’ll lie down, Papa—you’ll rest, my dear Papa, who’s already turning gray...”

Malakhii

(moves away)

“I tell you, there is no dear Papa!.. And there’s no Kum! There’s a People’s Malakhii the People’s Commissar! Peopmalakhpeop. The First!”

Liubunia

“What am I supposed to do now?”

Olia

(to Malakhii)

“So what’s she going to do now—hey you, People’s Misfortune!”

Malakhii

“Light the fire of universal love on the streets of your cities, warm the weary—in my sky-blue countries they’ll raise monuments to you for this...”

Liubunia

“What should I do now?”

Olia

“We’ll ask him to tell another little sky-blue lie, and you know about whom? About the darlings who come back to us on winter nights. Ha-ha-ha. So many of the darlings have already slept with me that if I have to take them all in and warm them from their campaigns, they’ll suffocate me... Musician! A ring song!”

Liubunia staggers off to the storeroom as though ill.
The *Girls* pick up *Olia's* call.

Girls

“Bravo! Bravo! A song! *Olia's* going to sing a ring song!”

Olia

(sings, accompanied by music)

“I lost my dear ring,
I lost my love,
because of that ring
I cry day and night.
My darling, he left me
with a child in my arms;
when I look at the child
my eyes fill with tears.
Because of you, my child,
I'll drown myself in the sea.”

Malakhii

(ascends the steps)

“Hello, hello! Pass this on to everyone by radio, to everyone, everyone living in Ukraine—to the people, poplars, our willows, steppes, and the ravines, and the stars in the sky.”

Olia

“With my blonde braid long
On the waves I tossed,
With my right hand I waved.
Farewell, my darling, farewell!”

Malakhii

(forlorn)

“Pass on that the People's Malakhii is already sorrowing, that a silver tear is running down his gray whiskers and is dripping into the sky-blue sea. How tragic this is: he is sorrowing over sky-blue dreams...”

He is surrounded by Girls and Guests. They are laughing and dancing. At this very moment Ahapiia shouts

“Liubunia has hanged herself!”

Madam Apolinara

“She hanged herself!”

Girls

(look into the storeroom)

“She hanged herself!”

“She hanged herself!.. Mirka!.. Oh God!”

They become alarmed. Guests and Girls run about in confusion. All rush to the stairs and the door.

Ahapiia

(to **Malakhii**)

“Your daughter hanged herself!”

Malakhii

“Don’t worry, faithful one—she didn’t hang herself; she drowned in a sea... More precisely, in a sky-blue sea...”

ACT V, SCENE 9

Olia

(comes out of the storeroom)

“I took her down... She’s dead... (to **Malakhii**) Do you hear! You’re the one who drove her—to her death!”

Malakhii

“You better catch the new moon, for it’s getting wet in the sea.”

Olia

“He’s gone completely mad... Where to now after sky-blue dreams? (She answers herself, with conviction) What more is there to think about! Go there!... Go back. To work!” (Ties on a kerchief and sets off with determined tread)

ACT V, SCENE 10

Madam Apolinara rushes in with a small trunk, into which she has stuffed jewelry, gold rings, pieces of silk, and such.

Madam Apolinara

“I may be bad, but I’m not like him ...” (Spits on **Malakhii** and runs off)

Malakhii

“They spat upon him and struck him on the cheeks. So he took up his golden horn and blew into it... (takes out his flute) and played a universal sky-blue symphony (plays upon the flute). I am the universal shepherd. I graze my flock. I graze them and graze them and play...”

Ahapiia lights a candle. **Malakhii** plays. It seems to him that he really is creating some kind of a beautiful sky-blue symphony, even though the flute resounds with a nasal and wild dissonance.

The End

Translated by George Mihaychuk

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¹ Executive Committee (Vykonavchyi komitet, abbreviated Vykonkom). Executive committees were organs of government on the oblast and district levels.

² A *kum* (pronounced "koom") is someone who is a godparent to one's child. The relationship is mutual, so that the godparent is *kum* to the parents and the parents are *kums* to the godparent. *Kum* is male, *kuma* is female. Thus Kum is the godfather of Malakhii's daughters, and Tarasovna is his Kuma.

³ "A Mercy of Peace, A Sacrifice of Praise" is a part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Divine Liturgy that follows after the singing of the Symbol of the Orthodox Faith.

⁴ "The Canary" is a soldier's marching song.

⁵ The words are from the exapostilarion sung during the service on Holy Thursday.

⁶ "We lift them up unto the Lord" (Imamy ko Hospodu) is a continuation of the choir's response to the priest's words in the Divine Liturgy. The music sung by Bass and Tenor is part of the exchange between priest and choir that follows the singing of the Symbol of the Orthodox Faith.

⁷ A continuation of the choir's response to the priest's words.

⁸ "Taras" refers to Taras Shevchenko, the national bard of Ukraine

⁹ The Saburov Psychiatric Hospital is located outside of Kharkiv.

¹⁰ Liubunia is a diminutive form of the name Liubov, which means Love.

¹¹ Lines from Taras Shevchenko.

¹² This and subsequently quoted poetry are from the Russian poet Sergei Esenin (Yesenin).

