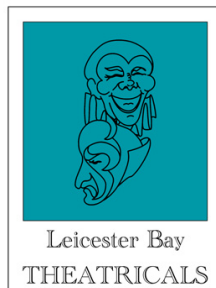


**PERUSAL SCRIPT**

# GOD'S FOOLS



by Thomas F. Rogers



Newport, Maine

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## GOD'S FOOLS

### CHARACTERS

**MITJA** -- a young Russian careerist, active in the Komsomol

**NADEZHDA (NADJA) MAKSIMOVNA** -- his mother, in her early fifties

**GALINA NIKOLAEVNA** -- her friend, a famous poet

**BORIS SERGEEVICH** -- Mitja's colleague in the Ministry of Propaganda, his same age

**SONJA** -- Mitja's fiancée, a graduate student and guide-interpreter for Intourist

**SAMARIN** -- a defrocked priest

**LEV VASILEVICH** -- Mitja's neighbor and mentor in the KOMSOMOL

**COOPER** -- an American tourist (ostensibly)

### **PRODUCTION NOTE:**

The premiere production featured portions of the following works of Russian composers to heighten the play's mood. They are strongly recommended though left to the discretion of those who may wish to produce this script in the future:

- as pre-show music, which blends into Lev Vasilevich's mime at the beginning of the play: Glinka's "Kamarinskaja";
- behind certain nostalgic lines in the reminiscences of Boris, Nadja, Galina and Samarin: excerpts from
- Shostakovich's late string quartets and from Stravinsky's "Pastorale" orchestrated for solo violin;
- between acts: Russian Orthodox liturgical anthems sung by mixed acappella voices;
- at the play's conclusion, during the bow and throughout the audience's departure: Borodin's "On the Steppes of Central Asia".

### **NOTES:**

"It would be ironic, indeed, if God were in exile somewhere in the 'atheistic' East; and if the culture produced amidst its silence and suffering were to prove more remarkable than that of the talkative and well-fed West. But this, perhaps, is the irony of freedom, which tends to be treasured by those who do not have it and profaned by those who do. "--James H. Billington, "The Irony of Russian History," in The Icon and the Axe (Random House, 1966), pp. 594-5.

On January 1, 1973, a Russian defector, SERGEJ KOURDAKOV, was murdered in the foothills of Los Angeles by agents of the KGB--ostensibly a suicide. He was twenty-two. In the USSR he'd been recruited to terrorize Christians. Conscience-struck by his victims' courageous suffering, he joined the Soviet navy and jumped ship off the Canadian coast. While seeking asylum, he became a Christian convert and, despite ongoing threats against his life, frequently addressed large gatherings of young Americans, telling them his story. At Brigham Young University the premiere performances of JOURNEY TO GOLGOTHA (GOD'S FOOLS) were dedicated to his memory.

This play addresses the plight of writers and religious dissidents in the USSR. Its characters are modeled after some of Russian's greatest contemporary poets and religious martyrs--some purged by Stalin, some assassinated since World War II and others still alive in Soviet prisons or residing, as emigres, in the West. The play commemorates all who were ever persecuted by totalitarian regimes--not because they opposed the systems under which they found themselves but because, as poets, they valued life above political expediency and, as believers, they pledged their highest loyalty to God, not to other men. Such victims of conscience are a notable phenomenon in the Twentieth Century. The play traces the growing disillusionment of a promising Komsomol youth who is engaged by the State Secret Service to disrupt the worship of various Christians. Their courage and integrity so contrast with the cruel, self-serving duplicity of his employers and associates that he finally joins his victims. In doing so, he is reconciled to his God fearing mother and rises to the stature of his father, a brilliant poet and artist who was himself liquidated in Stalin's purges.

**Thomas F. Rogers:** A former director of the BYU Honors Program, Thomas F. Rogers is professor emeritus of Russian language and literature at Brigham Young University and the author of more than a score of plays, many on Mormon subjects. Four of these have been published in *God's Fools* (Signature Books, 1983), which also received the Association of Mormon Letters Drama Prize that same year: **HUEBENER** (the first literary treatment of its subject), **FIRE IN THE BONES** (again, the first literary treatment of its subject, the 1857 Mountain Meadows Massacre), **GOD'S FOOLS** (or **JOURNEY TO GOLGOTHA**) and **REUNION**. Other titles include: **The SECOND PRIEST, The ANOINTED** (an Old Testament narrative with music by C. Michael Perry) and **The SEAGULL** (adapted from the Chekov play). In 1992, **GENTLE BARBARIAN, FRERE LAWRENCE** and **CHARADES** were published in a second anthology entitled *'Huebener' and Other Plays by Thomas F. Rogers*, in 1992. Then . He has also penned stage adaptations of Dostoevsky's novels **CRIME AND PUNISHMENT** and **THE IDIOT**, an opera libretto based on Hawthorne's **THE SCARLET LETTER** and a translation of Georg Buechner's **WOYCZEK**. The first of these received a BYU production, directed by Tad Danielewski, in which Rogers played the role of Marmeladov.

In 1995–1996 **GOD'S FOOLS** was produced (in translation) by a professional repertory theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia, where Rogers was then serving as an LDS mission president. He also played the role of the American double spy Cooper in that production. During that mission he directed LDS Church members in a stage adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and a Russian language version of **HUEBENER**.

At BYU and in Provo, Utah, he directed the premiere productions of Robert Vincek's *For the Lions to Win*, Thom Duncan's *Matters of the Heart* and Eric Samuselsen's *Accommodations* and in Bountiful, Utah, a production of **HUEBENER**. He directed Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* (in German) for Deutsches Teater Salt Lake City, where he also performed as an actor, and Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, Pirandello's *It Is So If You Think So* and Pinter's *The Caretaker* for the BYU Department of Theatre.

Cited by Eugene England as “undoubtedly the father of modern Mormon drama,” Rogers received the Mormon Arts Festival's Distinguished Achievement Award in 1998 and in 2002 a Lifetime Service Award from the Association of Mormon Letters. His published stories have appeared in volume 2, no. 2 of *Sunstone*, the Summer 1991 and Winter 2001 issues of *Dialogue* (receiving an annual *Dialogue* fiction award) and in the collections *Christmas for the World* (SLC: Aspen Books, 1991) and *The Gifts of Christmas* (SLC: Deseret Book Co., 1999). Rogers has served as editor of *Encyclia*, journal of the Utah Academy and authored two critical monographs: *'Superfluous Men' and the Post-Stalin 'Thaw'* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972) and *Myth and Symbol in Soviet Fiction* (San Francisco & New York: The Edwin Mellen Research University Press, 1992). He studied at the Yale School of Drama and holds degrees from the University of Utah, Yale, and Georgetown. He has also studied theater in Poland and Russian at Moscow State University and taught at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and the University of Utah. He has intensively studied some ten languages and extensively extensively in Russia, Eastern Europe, India, China and the Middle East. He and his wife Merriam are the parents of seven children, thirty-eight grandchildren and, so far, three great grandchildren. They reside in Bountiful, Utah.

**GOD'S FOOLS** by *Thomas F Rogers*.

5M 3W. I Interior. 2hrs. This play commemorates all who were ever persecuted by totalitarian regimes--not because they opposed the systems under which they found themselves, but because they valued religious freedom above political expediency, and as believers, pledged their loyalty to God, not other men. The character of Mitja, the protagonist, was suggested by the case of Sergej Kourdakov, a young defector with a similar background, who, in 1973, is believed to have been murdered by the KGB in the foothills of Los Angeles--ostensibly a suicide. **ORDER # 3062**

### InterConnections

One of life's most important purposes and functions—its greatest source of fulfillment, at least for me—is to commune, to “connect,” with others at ever deeper levels of understanding, mutual acceptance, sharing, identification by merging into one another's lives. And yet, how we tend to stifle our inclination, our need to do so, therewith missing the satisfaction and joy—the very nourishment to our souls—that alone derive from such communion, such connection. We do this largely, I think, from fear—fear of rejection. It is easily the most tragic tendency in human affairs and leads not only to emptiness and depression, but to resentment, hostility, and vengeful scapegoating. It lies at the root of the psychology that engenders and exacerbates all conflict and war, whether public or domestic, at every interpersonal level. If the devil inspires anything in us, it is our fear and subsequent disregard of each other, hence of ourselves. There are doubtless practical reasons—limits of attention and energy and time and availability—which preclude our attaching ourselves to or demonstrating our affinity for other than a certain number. But this should never serve—as it mostly does—as a pretext for our not universally caring for and about everyone of whom we become aware or who sooner or later enters our presence.

**From the INTRODUCTION of “The Collected Plays of Thomas F. Rogers, Volume 1: Perestroika and Glasnost. (Available from Leicester Bay Theatricals)**

"The selections in this first volume of Tom Rogers's collected plays appear under the collective sub-title "Perestroika and Glasnost." The Russian word perestroika means "restructuring," and glasnost means "openness." Those terms refer to Communist Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's 1985-91 radical changes to Soviet economic structure, internal policy, and foreign relations. He led a major change in the leadership of the Communist Party, and decentralized economic planning in favor of market forces. He also reduced central Party control of the mass media, religious groups, and Soviet citizens whose views may have differed from those of their leaders. The results of this massive new "restructuring" and "openness" were felt across the Soviet Bloc. Communist governments collapsed, and the USSR dissolved into multiple independent republics.

The five plays in this volume suggest that on the personal level, too, "restructuring" and "openness" can cause similarly significant change. And a natural hoped-for result of pursuing such personal perestroika and glasnost is the communion which Tom Rogers wants for everyone, in all our relationships—the communion to which he has devoted his entire professional life, accompanied by all the interpersonal and even religious connotations "communion" implies.

Tom Rogers is unabashedly idealistic and ambitious. He wants to change us, and thereby to change the world. These five Perestroika and Glasnost plays by Tom Rogers cry to us in our wilderness, urging us to help prepare the world for better things, whatever the cost. These plays are bold and uncompromising theatrical explorations of the most profound and vexing social dilemmas." —**Bob Nelson, Professor of Theatre at the University of Utah**

(in this book you can peruse CHARADES, CRIME AND PUNISHMENT, GOD'S FOOLS, THE IDIOT, and THE SECOND PRIEST)

## GOD'S FOOLS

### ACT ONE

*(Moscow. The living room in the apartment of Nadja and Mitja. The room is dominated by a large oval table—as in most European living-dining rooms. A large samovar sits prominently in the table's center. Prominently displayed on one of the walls is a large icon with a candle on the shelf in front of it.)*

*(Lev, middle-aged, stands before a small bookcase. Making sure he is unobserved, he removes a flask of vodka from his vest pocket, takes several deep swallows and returns the flask to his pocket. He then deftly fingers the volumes on each shelf, checking once or twice to see if other books or objects lie behind them. His manner seems less eager or furtive than habitual, as if he had done the same thing many times before while waiting in peoples' living rooms. Nadja enters from a back room, carrying a glass in a metal holder.)*

**NADJA:** *(while filling the glass with tea from the samovar)* Still admiring my Zhukovsky?

**LEV:** I'll pay you top price whenever you're ready to part with it.

**NADJA:** I could use the money, but it was my husband's, and I have so little to remember him by.

**LEV:** I understand, Nadja Maksimovna. It was thoughtless of me. I'll try to suppress my greed.

**NADJA:** There you are, Lev Vasilich. As usual, my only choice of beverage. Mitja will be paid next week. Then I can afford a little elegance.

**LEV:** The widow's plight: a meagre pension. Don't apologize, Nadja Maksimovna. I understand. That's why I've tried to look after your son—send extra jobs his way.

**NADJA:** It was kind of you to arrange that part-time work for him. I don't know now we'd have managed without it.

**LEV:** He'll do well at the Ministry of Propaganda. Isn't he engaged to a young lady who also works there?

**NADJA:** Yes, Sonja's a beautiful girl. She also works part time for *Intourist*. And she's very literary. She is writing a dissertation on some of our poets.

**LEV:** I'm anxious to meet her.

**NADJA:** They'd like to marry some time this year.

**LEV:** Before they finish school?

**NADJA:** Yes, we have only the one bedroom.

*(Pointing to a sofa)*

So I've offered to take Mitja's bed here, but they worry about displacing me.

**LEV:** Don't concern yourself, Nadja Maksimovna. Mitja has a great future before him, and the Party will recognize that as soon as he's old enough to join.

**NADJA:** His assignments keep him out so late. What does he do? He never tells me a thing.

**LEV:** Well . . . he recruits his friends in the Komsomol.

**NADJA:** "Recruits"?

**LEV:** They keep order at public gatherings. And it's so convenient being your neighbor. Whenever I get the word—they usually phone me—I just step across the hall and alert Mitja. At once he and his boys are ready to go.

**NADJA:** They're zealous, I must say.

**LEV:** We make it worth their while.

*(A knock. Nadja goes to the outer door, admitting Boris, impeccably dressed and in his early twenties.)*

**BORIS:** Nadezhda Maksimovna?

**NADJA:** That's right.

**BORIS:** I ...

*(Noticing Lev)*

... I'm a friend of your son Mitja. I work at the Ministry. He ... asked me to drop by. It's about ... tickets for a play.

**NADJA:** He's not in right now. I don't expect him for quite some time. And I haven't seen any tickets. I wouldn't know where to look for them.

**BORIS:** He asked me to wait until he returns. No matter how late.

**NADJA:** That's odd. Couldn't he bring them to you tomorrow—at work?

**BORIS:** Tomorrow's my day off. The play's tomorrow night. I live in the suburbs and ... well, it's the only way we could make contact.

**NADJA:** In that case, please come in.

*(Admitting him)*

This is Lev Vasilevich, our neighbor.

**BORIS:** Good evening.

**LEV:** My pleasure.

**NADJA:** May I serve you some tea?

**BORIS:** Please don't bother.

**LEV:** Here, have mine. I didn't touch it. And I really must be going. I have another appointment. Thank you for your kind hospitality, dear Nadja.

**NADJA:** I didn't do a thing. And you didn't even taste my tea.

**LEV:** Visiting you is refreshment all its own.

**NADJA:** You should have been a poet yourself, Lev Vasilich.

**LEV:** In the final stages of Communism—when we can at last afford the time—I will become one and write you nothing but sonnets.

**NADJA:** Do you really think we'll live that long?

**LEV:** I sometimes wonder, but I'm still hopeful—especially if the next generation are all like your Mitja.

**NADJA:** You're quite a patriot, Lev Vasilich.

**LEV:** *(eyeing Boris)* I love my country. So few seem to any more. When I was younger than anyone here I helped dig the trenches around Moscow that kept the Nazis at bay. And it brought us so close, as comrades. I love my country .... it was a pleasure meeting you. I'm afraid I didn't catch your name.

**BORIS:** Boris.

**LEV:** And the patronymic?

**BORIS:** Sergeevich.

**LEV:** Boris Sergeich. May you have a pleasant evening at the theatre tomorrow.

**BORIS:** Thank you.

**LEV:** What play are you going to, by the way?

**BORIS:** It's ... an avant-garde play. I forget the title.

**LEV:** Where?

**BORIS:** At ... the Taganka.

**LEV:** (*with mock disapproval*) One of those naughty satirical plays...?

(*Suddenly smiling*)

That's fine, as far as I'm concerned. Youth must have a chance to rebel. The theatre's as safe a way as any. But be careful. Don't applaud too loudly. Don't appear too enthusiastic, if you know what I mean.

**BORIS:** I understand.

**NADJA:** Please drop by another time, Lev Vasilich. But give me notice, and I'll prepare some *pirozhki* with apple filling.

**LEV:** I'll do that. *Do-svidanja*.

**NADJA:** *Do-svidanja*.

**BORIS:** *Poka*.

(*Lev leaves. Nadja closes the door.*)

**NADJA:** Such a pleasant man.

**BORIS:** So he seems ....

**NADJA:** Well, please sit down. Let me pour you some more tea.

**BORIS:** Please don't bother.

**NADJA:** I haven't much to read—unless you care for poetry. There's some Zhukovsky.

**BORIS:** Not Zhukovsky! I take exception to Zhukovsky. He's too sentimental. I suspect people who are too sentimental, don't you? They can too easily cover their sins with fragile tears and quivers of the chin. Surely you've been around long enough to agree with me.

**NADJA:** I'm not sure I can afford to agree with you—not yet. Your nails are a bit too clean.

**BORIS:** My nails?

**NADJA:** Informers always dress and groom themselves too well. They're also usually a little too polite.

**BORIS:** Like the man who was just here?

**NADJA:** Lev Vasilich? Oh, he's pleasant enough .... He just drinks too much.

**BORIS:** Nadja Maksimovna ... please forgive me for lying to you.

**NADJA:** What about?

**BORIS:** Those tickets—and your son.

**NADJA:** You didn't come for tickets?

**BORIS:** No, and your son doesn't expect me either.

**NADJA:** Then you are an informer.

**BORIS:** No.

**NADJA:** Does my son even know you?

**BORIS:** Yes. And I also work at the Ministry. That much is true. In fact, we share adjoining desks. We're quite good friends. That's why it's so very awkward—my being here.



**NADJA:** Why are you here then?

**BORIS:** To attend your meeting.

**NADJA:** What?

**BORIS:** Father Samarin invited me.

**NADJA:** "Samarin"?

**BORIS:** Please, you needn't pretend you don't know him. I'm perfectly safe. I'm a believer too. I've known him for years—ever since he returned from the camps. I know all about the camps.

**NADJA:** Were you there?

**BORIS:** No. But my mother was. She died there too.

**BORIS:** I'm sorry. But that makes you suspect too. How did you get hired at the Ministry? You should be a street cleaner—or working at the public baths.

**BORIS:** My father immediately divorced her. She insisted he do so—for my sake.

**NADJA:** Ah, yes.

**BORIS:** It's a common practice.

**NADJA:** I know.

**BORIS:** But a prisoner who survived told us about her.

**NADJA:** Where was she—your mother?

**BORIS:** At Magadan.

**NADJA:** Ah...Magadan.

**BORIS:** I can still remember the day of her arrest. I was maybe eight then. We'd just come back from the ferris wheel at Gorky Park. I can still remember the striped balloon I held in my hand. Just as we reached our apartment a man in a long coat came up to us and addressed my mother: "Good day, dear comrade. Could I trouble you to come see us? You may be able to help a friend of yours who's in trouble. "My father signaled to her to go at once—to show she wasn't afraid. She didn't even look at me. My father said: "We'll expect you for supper. Do you want your coat?"—the coat that might have saved her in the camps. "Why should I?" she replied. "It's a very warm day." We never saw her again ...

**NADJA:** What did they charge her with?

**BORIS:** The usual—treason.

**NADJA:** On what grounds?

**BORIS:** It was true—a friend of hers, her supervisor at work, had already been arrested. She was guilty by association.

**NADJA:** (*knowingly*) I see....

**BORIS:** He was overheard telling an anti-Soviet joke. But the joke—we finally learned what it was. Want to hear it? I shouldn't be telling it either, Should I?

**NADJA:** I won't report you....

**BORIS:** It went this way: "What's the difference between capitalism and socialism...?" Well?

**NADJA:** There are lots of differences.

**BORIS:** Yes, but fundamentally it's that under capitalism man exploits man, while under socialism it's just the opposite ....

*(Both laugh.)*

You shouldn't be enjoying this.

**NADJA:** (*trying to contain herself*) I know ... .And you shouldn't talk this way. You shouldn't be so bitter. Let me see her picture—your mother's.

**BORIS:** (*showing her his wallet*) Here .... But what about *my* picture?

**NADJA:** *Your* picture?

**BORIS:** The one she had with her when they shipped her to the camps—the only memento of her only child.

**NADJA:** They took it away from her when she entered the box car. They put it in a pile with all the others from which little girls in ribbons and little boys in short pants looked up at their criminal mothers. And soldiers stomped across their faces before they burned them.

*(In a suddenly shrill voice)*

So why are you joking with me ...?!

**BORIS:** How did you know?

**NADJA:** I know.

**BORIS:** I can tell you know....

**NADJA:** Now prove to me you're a believer.

**BORIS:** I can recite "Holy Russia."

**NADJA:** Good!

**BORIS:** (*with gradually increasing fervor*) "So you listened to the evil counsel, Betrayed your ancient home. Like the least slave of the lowest slave."

**NADJA:** (*interrupting and repeating his last words in Russian*)... "Rabom poslednevo raba."

**BORIS:** "Shan't I bow to you with my face in mud?

Bless the print of your bare feet?

You homeless, wanton, drunken Russia—Fool in Christ??"

**NADJA:** (*removing his glasses, staring deeply into his eyes, then suddenly smiling*) You may stay for the meeting.

**BORIS:** Thank you. Mitja doesn't know, does he?

**NADJA:** It's safe. He's with his fiancée tonight.

**BORIS:** Sonja.

**NADJA:** She's a guide-interpreter, you know. This evening they're escorting an American to the Bolshoi. I had to be sure before I consented to the meeting. It's the first time we've met here. I have more to lose than you if Mitja finds out. He is very loyal to ... the establishment.

**BORIS:** I know. But he's also fair. He has high principles.

**NADJA:** Still he rejects his mother's 'sentimentality.'

**BORIS:** And mine—I've never let him see it. Or anyone else, really. I've had an instinct about that.

**NADJA:** A fortunate instinct—keep it honed. It will prolong your life .... But how did you meet Father Samarin?

**BORIS:** I'm an icon fancier. I happened to visit his church one rainy day just after he returned from Kolyma. There he was—way up on a ladder—polishing the candelabra with his one good hand. He came down and said to me, glancing at the torrent of rain outside: "You know, if we really look at the visible world, we'll realize that what we see is absurd. But for some reason people prefer to believe in this absurdity rather than resolve the question of immortality." And I knew I had more to learn from him. So I've gone to him at least

once a month, making sure no one saw me. Until now .... How do you know him?

**NADJA:** We're old friends. He knew my .... We're very old friends. That's all.

**BORIS:** Then maybe you know how he lost his fingers—four of them on the same hand.

**NADJA:** It was at Kolyma. They were going to send him to the gold mines. They perish there so quickly. Some in just weeks. It ruins their lungs. And Samarin was already in weakened condition. So he weighed that against saving himself. After all, he's only human. He was felling trees at the time. So the day before he was to go to the mines he took an axe, spread his fingers on a log, and swung the axe. It was as simple as that .... He still suffers for it—in his conscience.

**BORIS:** Who can judge him for that?

**NADJA:** No one. But he judges himself. I think it tempered him, though—made him all the more spiritual. No one is the same after the camps. You're either stronger or totally broken.

**BORIS:** I understood that in order to survive the camp, you have to compromise one way or the other—at least learn how to lie.

**NADJA:** Your mother obviously didn't. How did she die? Did they tell you?

**BORIS:** They worked her too hard. When she finally gave in they reduced her rations and let her starve.

**NADJA:** Of course.

**BORIS:** Her friend—the one who told me about her—said she had terrible scurvy and frostbite. They also put her in a punishment cell without a window—which brought on pneumonia.

**NADJA:** How long was she that way?

**BORIS:** Fortunately, not long. They'd load the hopelessly ill on an old wooden barge, haul it far out on the ocean and detonate an explosive charge that was planted in the timbers ...

**NADJA:** I see .... Forgive me, my son. Joke all you want ... all you're able ....

**BORIS:** (*changing the subject*) Speaking of icons, you have a striking one there—in the corner.

(*Approaching the icon and crossing himself*)

It reminds me of the martyr Avvakum. Who made it?

**NADJA:** A man named Stiva—Stepan.

**BORIS:** A priest?

**NADJA:** No. Did they tell you about the pilgrimage?

**BORIS:** I heard there'd be one. When?

**NADJA:** In two more days. For Epiphany.

**BORIS:** Where to?

**NADJA:** To Zagorsk. The archbishop Aleksej will be there to bless the pilgrims. It may be his last public appearance .... Will you come?

**BORIS:** Am I invited?

**NADJA:** I'm sure you will be.

**BORIS:** Whom do I ask? Samarin?

**NADJA:** Whom did Avvakum ask to be a martyr? The Patriarch Nikon?

**BORIS:** Of course not. The Patriarch opposed him. He asked the Lord what he must do. And the Lord told him.

**NADJA:** Who told you to come here?

**BORIS:** Samarin.

**NADJA:** I see ....

**BORIS:** You mean I must still take Christ upon myself?

**NADJA:** Give yourself to him. Completely. Then He will instruct you.

**BORIS:** Yes. I still need to do that.

**NADJA:** “Knock, and it Shall be opened unto you.”

*(A knock. Nadja smiles at the coincidence, then admits Galina, in her sixties, and Samarin, also middle-aged.)*

**GALINA:** My dears!

*(Both Galina and Samarin embrace and kiss Nadja in the Russian manner.)*

**SAMARIN:** *(noticing Boris)* Boris!

*(They embrace.)*

Galina Nikolaevna, this is Boris Sergeich, a dear friend and brother.

*(Apprehensively)*

Nadja, are you quite sure it's convenient for us to be here?

**NADJA:** Absolutely. Mitja had other plans.

**SAMARIN:** Good.

*(Pointing to Boris)*

This is a very courageous young man.

**GALINA:** You mean he's refused to join that great conspiracy of the silent? Silence, you know, is the real crime against humanity.

*(With mock concern)*

You're not a member of the Party?

**BORIS:** Please. Don't flatter me.

**GALINA:** Because, you see, Party members do have at least three remarkable qualities: they are intelligent, honest, and of course dedicated to the Party.

**NADJA:** Galina, you can't mean it?

**GALINA:** I'm very serious, Nadja. It's only that no one person possesses all three. Normally two—but never three. If, for instance, a particular comrade is dedicated to the Party and also honest—he's not very intelligent. If he's intelligent and dedicated to the Party—then he's not very honest. Whereas if he's both honest and intelligent, he's—

**BORIS:** *(guffawing)* Not dedicated to the Party! How true!!

**GALINA:** Which, I suppose, is why our highest legislative body, the Supreme Soviet, consists of basically two kinds of people: those capable of nothing at all and those capable of practically everything.

**BORIS:** *(laughing hysterically)* It's too true!!

**NADJA:** Too painful.

**SAMARIN:** Too painfully true.

**GALINA:** Yes, it's all too true.

**BORIS:** *(to Nadja)* And you called *me* bitter!

**NADJA:** She had a son too, like your mother.

**BORIS:** Who died in the camps?

**SAMARIN:** Her son starved in Leningrad. During the blockade.

**NADJA:** Galina Nikolavna also spent time in the Gulag—before the War. That's how I know what they do to

children's pictures. So, you see, there's very little difference—except that she survived the camps.

**BORIS:** How, may I ask?

**GALINA:** I lied sometimes, and sometimes I stole government property.

**NADJA:** But you never hurt anyone.

**GALINA:** I tried not to

**SAMARIN:** I too learned to ...

*(Inspecting his mutilated hand)*

...cheat. I, your priest .... But I really believe the camps blessed us—in a number of ways. I find I can withstand the cold much better now than in my youth. One appreciates simple things so much more keenly.

**GALINA:** It's true. Your cares are simpler, your pleasures less sophisticated: yesterday I had a super day. I cut my toenails.

**SAMARIN:** And you long to work.

**GALINA:** That's where I wrote some of my best poems.

**SAMARIN:** You somehow don't grow so old, either. You learn to face death.

**GALINA:** And there's more time for God.

**SAMARIN:** *(touched by Galina's saying so)* Oh, the women. The wonderful women there are in this world!

*(To both Nadja and Galina)*

You're so much more indispensable than we men—for all our bravado and the way we try to run the show. It was a simple Siberian woman who showed me how to delouse my underwear under the most primitive conditions. Any guesses?

**BORIS:** No. How?

**SAMARIN:** By burying each piece overnight in the ground. Lice need air just like we do. You leave a small corner of each undershirt or pair of shorts protruding above the ground. They collect on it, and you can pick them off in the morning.

**NADJA:** So that's what women are good for?

**SAMARIN:** And much more, my dear. By comparison, men stand up to pain badly. And hardly any know how to mend or wash their clothes on the sly or sew on buttons. That's critical in the Arctic. It's terribly important to learn to button your pants in the frost and have the buttons to do it with. Grown men cry if they can't. And when they're finally released, the women swarm in from the nearby villages: "Let me wash your shirt for you."

**GALINA:** Of course they're also asking the men to consider them as wives. Love and the whole business of setting up house together begins with a tattered shirt .... One day during my second year at Kolyma we saw the miners come to town. Most were on their last legs and hadn't seen a woman in years. One of them suddenly noticed us and cried out: "Look, the women! Our women! Dear ones—wives, sisters, friends! Tell us how we can take your pain upon ourselves." I was serving some of them. One old father stared at me and whispered, "It's three years since a woman served me soup. Say something nice to bring back old times." He held out his bowl in a huge hand that had once been strong—the hand of a farmer or stonemason with a big black thumbnail. As I ladled his soup, he added, "Thanks, my pretty one. Pray God you'll see your children again one day." I leaned across the counter, drew his head toward mine, and kissed him on his toothless mouth with its prickly stubble....

**SAMARIN:** Yes ...

**GALINA:** *(to Boris, who is visibly overcome)* I'm sorry, my boy. Don't cry. Please don't. That's all in the past now—at least for you and me. The Father is right. You must be very courageous, exceptional. Or you wouldn't be here tonight. You see how few of us there are.

**BORIS:** *(to Galina)* You said you write poems. Aren't you the famous poet Galina Nikolaevna Lobabanova?

**GALINA:** *(pointing to a gold medal pinned to her dress)* I'm Lobanova.

**BORIS:** May I hear you recite your verse sometime?

**GALINA:** Tonight, in fact. That's how Father Samarin preaches, you know. Though you may not recognize what I read tonight. They're none of my 'official' ones.

**NADJA:** Please seat yourselves around the table.

*(They do so. A Kremlin clock chimes in the distance.)*

**SAMARIN:** You're sure we have enough time, Nadja?

**NADJA:** Quite sure. Please don't worry.

**SAMARIN:** Well then, what shall it be first? No atheists tonight. You know, it's always hard to get going without a few of them. They set such a fire under you—make you think harder and pray so much more earnestly.

**BORIS:** Shouldn't we begin with a prayer?

**SAMARIN:** I'd rather work up to it, if you don't mind.

**GALINA:** He's getting so unorthodox since the de-frocking.

**SAMARIN:** I propose we begin with one of Galina Nikolavna's poems.

**GALINA:** But, Nadja, we also need to hear one of Stiva's.

**BORIS:** Stiva's? The icon maker's?

**NADJA:** Shh!

**BORIS:** Who is this Stiva...?

**SAMARIN:** A ... dear friend of ours.

**GALINA:** Nadja, bring one out—one Father hasn't heard before.

**NADJA:** . All right. I know he would want me to share it with his friends.

*(She retires to an inner room.)*

**BORIS:** Is this Stiva—this Stepan—some relation of hers?

**SAMARIN:** I knew him at Kolyma. That's how I came to know Nadja Maksimovna.

**GALINA:** He was only the father of her only child.

**BORIS:** Mitja?

**GALINA:** You know him?

**SAMARIN:** You mustn't tell. She and Stiva were faithful but never married. That's why Mitja bears his mother's maiden name. As things turned out, it was best that way. It protected them both.

**BORIS:** I understand.

**NADJA:** *(returning with a sheaf of poems)* This is sadder, I think, than Galina's.

**GALINA:** Of course it is. It ought to be.

**NADJA:** I haven't memorized it yet. It's still too painful.

**GALINA:** May I read it for you?

**NADJA:** *(handing Galina several sheets)* Please.

**GALINA:** *(reading)* "From the one son I have they rent me,

Flayed my friends in the torture yard;  
In an unseen corral they pent me  
With their potently organized guard.  
They cried havoc at me and slaughter,  
Paying silence in wage's stead.  
They brewed me venom for water  
And fed me slander for bread.”

*(Turning to another sheet, She inadvertently drops the first under the table. The others, their gaze focused elsewhere, do not notice.)*

“To the utmost margin they drove me  
And then, somehow, left me there;  
Let me be the town madman, roving  
The quieted land and square....”

*(A long pause.)*

**BORIS:** Another ‘fool for Christ’s sake.’

**SAMARIN:** Yes. Another ‘fool for Christ’s sake.’

**BORIS:** *(to Galina)* What of the verse you promised?

**GALINA:** What’s the time like?

**NADJA:** We’re still fine, I think.

**GALINA:** All right. I’m afraid, Nadja dear, that once again you were my inspiration. It’s about the Virgin Mother:

“Magdalena beat her breast and wept.  
The loved disciple seemed hammered out of stone.  
As for the Mother, where she stood in silence,  
No one dared look that way ....”

**NADJA:** Yes.

**GALINA:** And now your thoughts, Father.

**SAMARIN:** My thoughts are prompted by these poems on suffering: You know, Russia is...Golgotha, and where Golgotha is, there too is Resurrection. Therefore, I think that people believe better in Russia, just like the first Christian martyrs. To endure, to experience sufferings—or at least to do so through compassion for your neighbor—this is the most reliable proof of the Resurrection. Let’s thrust our fingers into Christ’s wounds and overcome our fear of suffering. Only then will we become truly free.

**NADJA:** Thank you, Father.

**SAMARIN:** Now who would like to pray?

**BORIS:** May I?

**SAMARIN:** I was hoping you’d be the one.

*(Boris stands, and all bow their heads. As he prays, Mitja enters the outside door, followed by Sonja and Cooper.)*

**BORIS:** Master ... We thank Thee that we have found one another...and through one another—Thee ....  
Strengthen us and our faith. Guide us to assist all who have not yet glimpsed Thy Light.

**MITJA:** What’s this?

*(The others open their eyes, startled, and face the door.)*

**NADJA:** *(crossing herself)* Lord have mercy!

*(Both parties stare transfixedly at each other.)*

**MITJA:** I don't believe it. A religious meeting? Here?

**NADJA:** Forgive us, Mitja. I thought you'd be out much later. But this must be your and Sonja's guest—the American.

**MITJA:** Uh, yes. This is Mr. Cooper.

**SONJA:** *(going to Nadja, kissing her warmly on the cheek, then speaking to Cooper)* Mitja's mother and her friends.

**COOPER:** *(to Sonja)* I'm pleased to meet them. But we mustn't intrude.

**MITJA:** Mr. Cooper wanted to see a typical Soviet apartment. For some reason, he thought it was not allowed. So we brought him here to assure him that, as usual, his government had lied to him. But now he'll think we're all still as superstitious as our ancestors.

**COOPER:** *(to Sonja)* Please don't worry on my account. I understand that there are believers everywhere. In fact, I'm something of a believer myself.

**SONJA:** He says he's religious.

**GALINA:** Father! Imagine!

**SAMARIN:** A brother from across the ocean. You're the first I've ever met.

**COOPER:** *(removing several small volumes from his briefcase and passing them to the others)* What a happy surprise. I've presents—I've some pocket Bibles in Russian for just such an occasion.

**NADJA:** A surprise indeed!

**BORIS:** But dare we take them?

**SAMARIN:** Dare or not, we must be gracious. Our profound thanks.

**BORIS:** And mine.

**NADJA:** Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

**GALINA:** We are very pleased to have you here. Does he understand Russian, by the way?

**SONJA:** He speaks with some hesitation. But he understands quite well. He's a publisher and well educated. He wants to bring out an anthology on Russian poets. He's interested in my dissertation. And, of course, you're on his list also

**COOPER:** That's not *the* Lobanova?

**SONJA:** *(to Galina)* He said he thought you only wrote patriotic verse.

**BORIS:** Because she's not an atheist doesn't make her any less a patriot.

**NADJA:** Let's not forget what she wrote during the Leningrad blockade:

"I am not one of those who left the land  
To the mercy of its enemies.  
Their flattery leaves me cold."

**COOPER:** That's it!

**GALINA:** "I heard a soothing voice

That cried: 'Come here,  
Leave your wild and sinful country,  
Leave Russia forever.



But like a child I indifferently blocked my ears.

*(Nadja recites the last two lines with her.)*

We are a people without tears,  
Straighter than you ... more proud.”

**COOPER:** Wonderful! Yes, it's she—the peerless Leningrad poet. Sonja, you must help us arrange a contract. What a pleasure to be here with all of you .... And just look at that marvelous icon. If I'm not mistaken, it's from the early School at Novgorod. Just before Rubljov. They used peasants as models, didn't they?

**SONJA:** *(to Nadja)* He thinks your icon's from Novgorod.

**NADJA:** Mercy, no. It's very recent.

**BORIS:** The painter wasn't even a master. He was principally a poet. He ....

**COOPER:** Yet another poet? Well, that's one poet I want to know better—especially if he painted such a haunting expression.

*(Sonja has meanwhile whispered the translation of his words to the others.)*

**GALINA:** *He* was haunted. That's why.

**COOPER:** You must tell me more about him.

**SONJA:** *(to the others)* He wants to know more about the poet-painter. So do I.

**COOPER:** *(as, whispering to the others, Sonja continues to interpret)* I have a theory about faces. Apart from its likeness to a window, the closest analogy to the face is fire and water—at which one never wearies of looking. The face is constantly in flux. And that is especially true of the saintly face in an icon, like this one, whose features seem so animated behind the flickering of a candle—fascinating .... But I'm disrupting your service. You must continue. I'll just stand by and observe.

**SONJA:** He wants you to continue your... service.

**MITJA:** I'm afraid that won't be possible.

**SAMARIN:** I'm agreeable, if the others are. We've nothing to fear or be ashamed of.

**MITJA:** *(enraged)* Mother, this is disgraceful! And you, Boris Sergeich—old women are one thing, old women and a corrupt priest. But an employee of the Ministry?? I'm dumbfounded that you'd be such a fool!

**COOPER:** Please, Mitja. Sonja, tell him that I like their service. Besides, I've been told that Soviet citizens enjoy all the freedoms we do.

**SONJA:** And we do!

**COOPER:** Including freedom of religion.

**SONJA:** *(to Mitja)* He says the service should continue. That will prove we have religious freedom.

**MITJA:** He has just witnessed a man praying—in an assembly of fanatics. Doesn't that prove it to him?

**COOPER:** If that is so, then you won't mind if I stay to the end, will you? The Father said he didn't mind. And, as my official guides, you will stay too, won't you?

**SONJA:** Of course we will, Mr. Cooper.

*(Whispering)*

You must put up with it, Mitja.

*(To Samarin)*

Please continue.

**SAMARIN:** Actually, we were very near the end. Boris Sergeich was praying, wasn't he?

**MITJA:** He was. I'm a witness.

**NADJA:** Please don't report him, Mitja. He tried to be discrete. He meant no harm.

**SONJA:** It's going to be difficult—with Mr. Cooper here. He's a publisher. He may write about it when he returns to America.

**COOPER:** Oh, please trust me. I won't mention it. I understand—better than you may think. I gave you those Bibles, didn't I? I'm a sympathizer, at heart.

**SONJA:** He says he won't tell.

**NADJA:** *(to Mitja)* Then will you ...?

**MITJA:** *(reluctantly)* All right.

*(To Boris)*

But you'd better not let me catch you again—particularly in my—

**GALINA:** In your mother's-

**MITJA:** Apartment.

**BORIS:** Please allow me to remind you, Mitja, that we are really doing nothing wrong.

**MITJA:** It's expressly forbidden to hold unauthorized meetings—especially religious ones. So why do you so flagrantly oppose the law?

**BORIS:** Because I guess what we do here gives me something the state cannot.

**MITJA:** You find the state deficient?

**BORIS:** I suppose I do.

**MITJA:** That's treasonous. It's anti-Soviet.

**BORIS:** I can't help it.

**COOPER:** Forgive my interrupting. But may I say something?

**SONJA:** He'd like to speak

**COOPER:** It's always intrigued me why if, according to Marxist theory, the one just and ideal economic system—presumably socialism—will automatically eliminate bourgeois attitudes and if religion is one of these—why then would anyone feel threatened by such a small gathering as this? Or why such a young and vigorous political system as yours could not realistically afford to admit it has a few deficiencies.

**SONJA:** He says religion should not threaten our system and that we should admit our...deficiencies.

**MITJA:** We have no deficiencies—nothing at least to compare with your capitalist corruption in the West.

**COOPER:** For instance?

**SONJA:** He'd like some examples.

**MITJA:** Well, in the first place, your big elected officials—your presidents and senators—all have to be millionaires.

**COOPER:** Interesting.

**MITJA:** What did he say?

**SONJA:** He seemed surprised.

**MITJA:** I wouldn't expect him to admit it. Well, what about your Watergate? We never have scandals like that.

**COOPER:** You don't publicize them, anyway. But don't forget, we sent Nixon's men to jail.

**SONJA:** He's implying that we have our scandals too but just don't mention it.

**MITJA:** Tell him to prove it if he can.

**COOPER:** It's only human nature. Power invariably corrupts.

**SONJA:** He says all power is corrupt.

**MITJA:** More Russians vote for their leaders than Americans.

**COOPER:** Because they have to. And they're also told who to vote for.

**SONJA:** He claims we do not choose our leaders.

**MITJA:** What about the traffic in drugs and all those American addicts? We have nothing like that.

**COOPER:** Over half your country's male adults are alcoholics. It makes them more docile. And the state nets tremendous profits from its vodka monopoly.

**SONJA:** He says we're a nation of drunkards.

**COOPER:** We can live in any city we want without special permission.

**SONJA:** They have no internal passports.

**MITJA:** That helps us regulate our society—controls imbalances in population and keeps track of criminals, far better than you do.

**COOPER:** You have criminals then? Why don't we ever read about their crimes, your airplane disasters or your crop failures?

**SONJA:** Why don't we print bad news?

**MITJA:** It isn't edifying.

**COOPER:** What about the Gulag?

**MITJA:** He just mentioned our penal system, right? Tell him that's how we insure a safe and orderly society—by getting rid of traitors and other undesirables.

**NADJA:** Mitja! You don't know what you're saying!

**MITJA:** Hush, Mama! If you'd only known some of them.

**GALINA:** This is too ironic!

**COOPER:** And, finally, what of religious freedom?

**SONJA:** He doesn't think we have religious freedom.

**MITJA:** But we do. Every individual may believe as he wishes, We just don't allow any public indulgence in childish fantasies or...

*(Staring at Samarin)*

...support priest-charlatans who live off the gullible with their superstitions and religious claptrap.

**COOPER:** Like that icon there?

**SONJA:** Like an icon?

**MITJA:** Exactly. Many here, including my mother, still debase themselves before them with all their bowing and scraping.

*(Rushing to the icon and spitting on it)*

I spit on those icons.

**SAMARIN:** That's interesting.

**MITJA:** What's interesting?

**SAMARIN:** We bow and scrape, as you say, while you spit. Which is really more debasing ...? We were about to conclude our service. That still needs taking care of. If you'd rather I relieved you, Boris Sergeich? You have more at stake than the rest of us.

**BORIS:** That may be, Father. But I have even more to gain. And I am ready to commit myself. Will you be my witness—in front of these others?

**SAMARIN:** If you are certain.

**BORIS:** I am.

**SAMARIN:** Are you willing to join us in two more days? For the pilgrimage to Zagorsk?

**COOPER:** Did he say “Zagorsk”?

**BORIS:** I will be there.

**MITJA:** Mama, I forbid you to go.

**NADJA:** But why?

**MITJA:** I just do. And I advise you all to stay away.

**NADJA:** Well, we shall see ....

**SAMARIN:** All right, Boris Sergeich.

**BORIS:** *(kneeling before Samarín, closing his eyes, and squaring his arm, as if taking an oath)* Christ! God!

Guide my thoughts and actions. Build my faith. Make me Thy instrument. Use me now and until my death.

Bless me that I may reach and save another. So bless us all. Amen....

*(A long silence. All seem genuinely stunned by the power and conviction of Boris's utterance. As he rises, Samarín embraces him, then Galina and Nadja.)*

**SAMARIN:** you are a true son. The Holy Spirit be with you.

**MITJA:** Disgusting!

*(To Boris)*

A member of the Komsomol—don't you respect your Communist heritage?

*(Picking up one of the pocket Bibles, Boris goes to Mitja and rests his hand on Mitja's shoulder. As he speaks, Mitja seems transfixed by his boldness.)*

**BORIS:** This is my heritage—and yours. I love you, Mitja. I don't know how, but I will help you—whatever it may cost. I pledge my very life for you.

*(Another silence. Slowly, Mitja raises his free hand and removes Boris's.)*

**MITJA:** I feel sorry for you. Don't you realize what you're risking? Your job. Perpetual persecution. I tell you this as a friend.

*(Removing Boris's glasses and placing them on the table)*

Your vision's off, as if you only had one eye. And you don't even know it.

**NADJA:** Mitja, please.

**BORIS:** Only one eye?

*(To Nadja)*

My mother lost an eye at Magadan. Feeding branches into a cutter. You didn't know I was the offspring of one of your “undesirables” either, did you, Mitja? When the other prisoners tried to comfort her, she replied: “Don't worry, girls—one eye is quite enough for looking at a life like ours. But there's one thing they can't have. They can't have my soul.”

**MITJA:** *(to Sonja, strangely calm)* It's late. Ask Mr. Cooper if he has heard enough now—if we might escort him to his taxi.

**COOPER:** Yes, Mitja. It is late. And I thank you all for having me. I hope to meet you again, Madame Lobanova, and to learn some more about the poet who painted that beautiful icon. Thank you, everyone, for your marvelous hospitality. I'm going to Vladimir-Suzdal in the morning. I should be back in two days. I'll stay in touch. Again, my thanks.

**SONJA:** He thanks you all.

*(To Galina and Samarin)*

I'll contact you later regarding his anthology.

**SAMARIN:** May we accompany you to the street, Mr. Cooper?

**COOPER:** I'd be honored.

*(They bid goodbye to Nadja and Mitja in Russian.)*

Goodnight, friend Mitja. *Spokojnoj nochi.*

**MITJA:** Goodnight, Mr. Cooper.

**SONJA:** *(to Mitja, with a kiss on the cheek)* I'll see you tomorrow, won't I?

**MITJA:** Of course. I must retire right away, though. I'm on the early shift. Please excuse me.

**COOPER:** By all means.

**BORIS:** *(also leaving)* *Do-svidaniya,* Mitja.

*(Mitja turns away without answering.)*

Your heritage runs deeper than you imagine. Your father, Mitja, be true to him.

**NADJA:** Boris Sergeich. Please.

**MITJA:** My father? I have no father. I've never known him. I'm a bastard, see. For all I know, my mother's half-nun, half-whore!

**NADJA:** Have mercy!

**SONJA:** Mitja!

**BORIS:** Then get to know him.

**MITJA:** How? My mother won't speak of him.

**BORIS:** There is a way

*(The guests all leave.)*

**MITJA:** I'm sorry for what I just said. But, Mama, please. Stay away from those people. And don't bring them here again

**NADJA:** But this is my apartment.

**MITJA:** If YOU only knew how awkward it is!

**NADJA:** It was only awkward because you came home too soon.

**MITJA:** That doesn't change the facts.

**NADJA:** The facts, my son, are that this is my life—what's left of it. I've paid a terribly high price for it. I and others. And this is how I intend to live it. God grant that I do not trouble anyone else in doing so.

**MITJA:** But it's not that simple. If you only knew!

**NADJA:** In the future I'll try to be more discrete, Mitja. Just give me better warning. Since I cannot expect you to join with us, I will try not to besmirch your reputation or jeopardize your chances for advancement.

**MITJA:** *(unusually agitated)* If you only knew! If you only knew!

*(A knock. Mitja opens the door, readmitting Cooper.)*

**MITJA:** Mr. Cooper!

**COOPER:** Please. I'll be brief.

**MITJA:** He's speaking Russian!

**COOPER:** Yes, I speak better than I let on.

**MITJA:** Where's Sonja—and the others?

**COOPER:** She's waiting for me on the landing. We told the others to go ahead. I told her I wanted to see you

alone.

**MITJA:** But—

**COOPER:** You see, I also collect icons. I must buy that one.

**MITJA:** It's my mother's.

**NADJA:** No. The artist made it for YOU, not me. It's *yours*, Mitja.

**MITJA:** Mine?

**NADJA:** Yes.

**MITJA:** In that case, I will sell it. I'll even give it away.

**NADJA:** I was afraid you would. I should have said nothing.

**MITJA:** That may curb your superstition.

**NADJA:** I'll just buy another at Zagorsk. Out of tin or paper. It doesn't matter.

**MITJA:** Mama, no. You mustn't go there!

**NADJA:** But I must. Whether you dispose of your icon or not, Mitja, I'm going. It will make no difference.

**MITJA:** *(to Cooper)* Then it's yours.

**COOPER:** How much? I insist on paying.

**MITJA:** I don't care.

**COOPER:** Five hundred?

**MITJA:** Fine.

**COOPER:** Here then. I have just that amount. Five hundred dollars.

**MITJA:** I won't take dollars. They're illegal. We can only trade in rubles.

**COOPER:** Then I'll need to exchange them. I'll have your rubles when I return from Vladimir Suzdal.

**MITJA:** That will be fine. Is that all?

**COOPER:** Just this: when do we make the transaction? I'd rather keep it confidential—just between us. Don't want other collectors aware of it just now. When would be a good hour?

**MITJA:** In two days?

**COOPER:** Yes, two days from now.

**MITJA:** How about seven in the evening?

**COOPER:** Good. I'll be here then. Thank you. Good evening, Madame. *Spokojnoj nochi.*

**MITJA:** *Spokojnoj nochi.*

*(Cooper leaves.)*

**NADJA:** Such a strange man. Are all Americans like that one?

**MITJA:** I'm sure they're not. He puzzles me though. What's he after? Poets? Christian converts? Icons?

**NADJA:** Perhaps all three.

**MITJA:** Perhaps.

**NADJA:** Mitja, you must get to bed. We can talk about the rest another day...

*(Caressing him)*

Flesh of my flesh. My only child. My dove. I love you and shall forever. You know that, don't you?

**MITJA:** *(removing his shirt)* I do. That's why you torment me so.

**NADJA:** I don't mean to.

**MITJA:** I know .... Just one thing, Mama: you mustn't make that pilgrimage to Zagorsk.

**NADJA:** Why?

**MITJA:** You mustn't!

**NADJA:** Then tell me why.

**MITJA:** It's not just an ordinary group of Orthodox old women, Mama—whatever your priest may have told you.

**NADJA:** Probably not. Father Samarin isn't ordinary either.

**MITJA:** That's right. That's why he's been defrocked. He's a radical, Mama. He won't make peace with the state like other priests.

**NADJA:** Who let the state tell them what to preach, you mean.

**MITJA:** He's a dissident. That's why he went to prison.

**NADJA:** I know more about that than you.

**MITJA:** Whatever you know, you should also know that most of the people there will be like him—leaders of underground sects: radical Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostals, even Jehovah's Witnesses.

**NADJA:** How glorious. Believers—all.

**MITJA:** *(exiting to a back room and projecting his voice from behind stage)* Knowing this, the state is going to intervene—make arrests and ... and rough up those who may resist.

**NADJA:** Aah! A pogrom! Then they will brutalize us. There may be deaths.

**MITJA:** *(from backstage)* It's possible.

**NADJA:** *(dressing the sofa with a blanket and pillow)* But why break the heads of helpless old men and women?

**MITJA:** *(still backstage)* A few here and there—to discourage the rest.

**NADJA:** In the dark countryside, too—so others won't notice and become incensed at such arrogant, one-sided brutality?

**MITJA:** *(returning to the room, now in pajamas)* Mama, how do you know all this?

**NADJA:** Mitja, Mitja. I wish I could tell you. But I vowed I never would. Just believe me, I do know. One generation is no different than the next ...

*(Gasping, then suddenly sobbing)*

Oh, Mitja!

**MITJA:** What is it, Mama ...?

**NADJA:** *(partially regaining her composure)* That question you just now asked me.

**MITJA:** Question?

**NADJA:** How I know what I know.

**MITJA:** Yes?

**NADJA:** Mitja. That's not for you to ask me. What I know is in the past. What's past is fiction. Only the present really exists—and the future, when it comes. Isn't that what they teach you, your dialecticians—that only the 'synthesis' counts, not what went before?

**MITJA:** Something like that.

**NADJA:** So the question's really for me to ask of you, and how I fear it. I fear it with all my soul, but I must ask: Mitja, how do *you* know all this? Only certain people are told these things—especially in advance—only the people who need to know. So how do you ...?

**MITJA:** How do I know? I just do, Mama.

**NADJA:** Has it anything to do with Lev Vasilich? What does he recruit you for?

**MITJA:** I can't tell you ....

**NADJA:** No. You're not allowed to. And it wouldn't change anything. I see that .... Mitja, dear, how can this be? I love you so, and you break my heart.

**MITJA:** You break mine, Mama....

*(A long pause. They stare at each other, tormented.)*

**NADJA:** I'll go to bed now. So that you will too. Just one more thing.

**MITJA:** Yes, Mama?

**NADJA:** Do Marx and Lenin ever say anything about 'mercy'?

**MITJA:** 'Mercy'? The trouble with a word like 'mercy,' Mama—it depends on whose 'mercy' you're talking about and for what or whom. It's a slippery eel. It can mean anything you want it to. It's too subjective. You may even end up having mercy for an enemy that way, if you're not careful

**NADJA:** Exactly.

**MITJA:** What do you mean?

**NADJA:** Is that so bad—to love one's enemy?

**MITJA:** I won't argue with you, Mama. You're too confused.

**NADJA:** All right. But, Mitja, please, please have mercy on that young man who works with you, Boris Sergeich.

**MITJA:** I won't have to raise a finger, Mama. He won't last long. He's gone too far already. He'll give himself away again, and others won't hesitate to deal with him.

**NADJA:** Then don't you. Promise ...?

**MITJA:** Yes, Mama. Now go to bed.

*(Nadja kisses him, then turns toward the bedroom. Noticing the icon, she starts to kneel before it, then, sensing Mitja's stare, hesitates, but finally kneels for a brief moment and crosses herself, then turns out an overhead lamp, and leaves. A knock. Mitja stirs, rises, drapes the blanket over his shoulders, turns on the overhead lamp and goes to the door, admitting Sonja.)*

You're back?

*(They kiss.)*

**SONJA:** Darling. I just saw him off

**MITJA:** Cooper?

**SONJA:** Yes. There were so few taxis out. We had a long wait.

**MITJA:** You should have gone with him.

**SONJA:** His hotel's in the opposite direction

**MITJA:** Not from your apartment.

**SONJA:** I'm staying overnight with a friend. The driver radioed for another taxi. It will be here in a few minutes. Besides, I had to see you—alone: Is this any way to live—never having time to ourselves?

**MITJA:** No ....

*(They kiss.)*

I wish we did. I wish we were married ....

**SONJA:** Me too.

*(Another kiss.)*

**MITJA:** Lev Vasilich says we'll get that apartment. He says it won't be long.



**SONJA:** He's been so helpful. He must think a lot of you.

*(Noticing the sheet of paper Nadja dropped under the table)*

What's this?

*(Picking it up and reading):*

"From the one son I have they rent me,  
Flayed my friends in the torture yard;  
In an unseen corral they pent me  
With their potently organized guard."

**MITJA:** Pretty morbid, isn't it?

**SONJA:** It has a familiar cadence. The handwriting's not your mother's, is it?

**MITJA:** No. It looks like a man's.

**SONJA:** I think I'll take it with me, show it to my professor.

**MITJA:** Always 'sleuthing' one more poet!

**SONJA:** There aren't enough really good ones. And this one's very good.

*(A knock.)*

Who can that be?

**MITJA:** *(going to the door)* It's probably Lev Vasilich. He often drops by after Mama's gone to bed.

**SONJA:** But you need your rest.

*(Mitja admits Lev.)*

**MITJA:** Lev Vasilich. This is my fiancée, Sonja. I've already told you about her.

**LEV:** I'm delighted. My congratulations.

**SONJA:** Thank you. And thanks for being such a good friend to Mitja.

**LEV:** He more than earns what I can do for him .... I understand you're quite a scholar.

**SONJA:** Mitja's prejudiced.

**LEV:** When do you plan to marry?

**SONJA:** As soon as we can qualify for an apartment or Mitja's Mother can exchange this one for something larger.

**LEV:** Don't worry. I have a little influence. You may get that apartment before you know it.

**SONJA:** I can't believe it.

**LEV:** Why not?

**SONJA:** That you'd be so helpful, I mean. But I must be going. And you both must have things to talk about.  
Excuse me.

*(Mitja sees her to the door. While their backs are turned, Lev quickly removes his flask and takes a long, deep swallow, then returns it to his vest pocket.)*

**MITJA:** I'll see you to your taxi.

**SONJA:** That won't be necessary. Tend to Lev Vasilich ....

*(They kiss. Sonja leaves.)*

**LEV:** I'm sorry it's so late. Your guests were here so long. I saw Sonja at your door. Finally, I decided it wouldn't hurt to meet her. And she took my cue. She didn't stay long. Very sensitive. Very discrete. A charming young lady. You've chosen well.

**MITJA:** Thank you.

**LEV:** And how did it go with Mr. Cooper?

**MITJA:** He's a strange bird. Either very naive or he knows too much. I couldn't tell which.

**LEV:** Gave you a mixed scent, did he?

**LEV:** You could say that.

**LEV:** A familiar pattern.

**MITJA:** I wondered. But I couldn't be sure.

**LEV:** He's definitely an agent.

**MITJA:** He also wants to buy this icon. Tried to pay me in dollars.

**LEV:** You refused?

**MITJA:** Dollars, yes. But not rubles. He'll bring rubles when he comes again.

**LEV:** Good. So far you've done everything just right. When's he coming back?

**MITJA:** In two days. Here. Seven p.m.

**LEV:** Excellent.

**MITJA:** Any instructions?

**LEV:** Not for now. You'll do better if you don't know too much.... In two days, you say?

**MITJA:** Yes.

**LEV:** You'll have a busy night then, won't you? As soon as you're through with Cooper, you'll need to gather your Komsomols. They're still on alert, aren't they?

**MITJA:** Yes.

**LEV:** But tone it down.

*(Producing a rubber-encased chain and handcuffs)*

Here, use these. That last raid on the Ritualists left tell-tale scars. One young girl was pretty badly disfigured. Word can get out too easily that way. Beat them all you want, but where it won't show. They do that to themselves anyway, the Flagellants. Particularly their old men. But spare their faces.

**MITJA:** We'll be more careful in the future. I promise.

**LEV:** Please, as few deaths as possible. Oh, I don't mind an occasional priest or ring leader. Like that Mennonite one of you killed last winter.

**MITJA:** I didn't know he'd died. It was Georgi who pulled the knife on him, but he didn't mean to.

**LEV:** Of course not. The man came at him with an ink well, didn't he? It was pure self-defense. And it wasn't such a bad thing either—not with that one. He was too popular.

**MITJA:** It still bothers me.

**LEV:** You mustn't let it. It would affect your boys. They might lose their nerve .... By the way, there'll be a bonus for the pilgrimage. There's a crossroads about eight kilometers before Zagorsk.

*(Mitja picks up the instruments of torture and conceals them under his bed.)*

Desolate country. We'll take you there in a truck. The pilgrims plan to reach Zagorsk by sunrise.

**MITJA:** How do you know?

**LEV:** One or two are informants. We'll identify them for you. You mustn't touch them. It's a large group, too. All dissident. Some even openly criticize the regime. We just can't have it.

**MITJA:** How will they be charged—those you arrest?

**LEV:** For harboring weapons in their places of meeting ... and the ritual slaughter of infants.

**MITJA:** They really don't, do they?

**LEV:** Of course not.

**MITJA:** Weapons either?

**LEV:** Good heavens, I hope not. If they do, we're getting pretty slack. The bonus, by the way, will be fifteen more rubles for each of your men. Not bad for a single night's raid, eh?

**MITJA:** They'll be very pleased.

**LEV:** But tell them not to drink it all up afterward. We had you train by roughing up alcoholics and hooligans, remember? I'd hate to see your boys end up their own victims.

**MITJA:** I'll tell them .... By the way, Lev Vasilich. Have you time for a question?

**LEV:** Of course, my boy.

**MITJA:** I'm curious, for some reason, to know if there are ever any scandals involving our top leaders like the American Watergate—since Trotsky, I mean. We never read about them in our history books.

**LEV:** That's true. No nation has such a positive history. And those glowing chapters in our history books prove it ...

**MITJA:** One more question. Why do so many of our people drink—so heavily? And why doesn't the State restrict the consumption of alcohol ...?

**LEV:** Well, I'll be the first to admit that Russians drink a lot, and that's not a good thing. But our people have sacrificed so much to bring socialism to its present stage of development. They've earned the privilege.

**MITJA:** I see.

**LEV:** Don't worry about matters so beyond your control. Leave the difficult problems to the Party, and, before you know it, you too can make an important contribution. I'm proud of you, Mitja. You'll go far if you simply trust those who've gone before. I've seen many like you. but nobody who could command a group his age the way you do.

**MITJA:** They're good boys.

**LEV:** But you make them that way. You inspire them

**MITJA:** I just try to take it as seriously as they do.

**LEV:** That's what I mean. Well, you need to get to bed. I'll make sure you have the day off day after next—so that you're well rested for the raid. And ready for Cooper.

**MITJA:** Thanks.

**LEV:** But remember, not a word to anyone. Not even your men. Until that very evening.

**MITJA:** I understand.

**LEV:** *Spokojnoj nochi.*

**MITJA:** *Spokojnoj nochi.*

**LEV:** By the way, Mitja—I'd almost forgotten—I have some unpleasant news on top of all the rest.

**MITJA:** Oh?

**LEV:** Yes. One of your fellow employees, I believe, a certain Boris Sergeevich-

**MITJA:** Boris? Has he done something he shouldn't have?

**LEV:** I'm afraid he has, although I suppose we'll never know his real motive.

**MITJA:** I know he's been emotionally distraught. Recently anyway. Is it something he said?

**LEV:** No. He didn't even leave a note.

**MITJA:** A note?

**LEV:** They found Boris Sergeevich's body just a half hour ago in the Moscow River

**MITJA:** No!!

**LEV:** It was clearly suicide. There was also a witness.

**MITJA:** Only a half hour ago, you say?

**LEV:** I understand he'd been here earlier—with your mother and some of her friends. A government employee, too. Sad, isn't it? And so unnecessary. At least there's sometimes a useful lesson for the rest of us in another man's misfortune. And for that we can only be grateful, don't you agree?

**MITJA:** Who told you? That he was here, I mean?

**LEV:** Just one of my many sources. I hope my sad news won't disturb your sleep, Mitja, but thought you should know.

**MITJA:** Yes. Thank you.

**LEV:** Once again, *Spokojnoj nochi*.

**MITJA:** *(in a faltering voice)* You also, Lev Vasilich

*(Lev leaves. Mitja stand in place, then, suddenly moves to his mother's door and knocks.)*

Mama ...?

*(A pause. The door opens.)*

Were you asleep, Mama?

**NADJA:** *(entering in a night gown, her hair undone)* As well as I ever sleep these days.

**MITJA:** I'm sorry I woke you

**NADJA:** What is it, my dove?

**MITJA:** Let me see now. How does it go?

**NADJA:** How does what go?

**MITJA:** "From the one son I have they rent me,

Flayed my friends in the torture yard

*(Nadja gasps.)*

They brewed me venom for water.

And fed me slander for bread."

**NADJA:** Where did you learn those words?

**MITJA:** On a sheet of paper. In a man's handwriting. We found it under the table

**NADJA:** I see.

**MITJA:** Who wrote those words, Mama?

**NADJA:** Why do you ask?

**MITJA:** I'm not sure, but somehow I need to know

**NADJA:** Is that right?

**MITJA:** Yes.

**NADJA:** Then I'll consider telling you. But not tonight.

**MITJA:** No? Do you have more of his poems?

**NADJA:** Yes.

**MITJA:** Could I read them?

**NADJA:** I'll get you some more. That can't hurt, I suppose. I'll get them in the morning

**MITJA:** Mama?

**NADJA:** Yes?

**MITJA:** Please, Mama. Now

**NADJA:** All right....

*(Nadja goes to her room. He gazes in the direction of her door until she returns.)*

Here.

**MITJA:** *(reading several lines, then looking up at her)* Thank you. Mama. What do you know about my father? Anything more? You're not that kind of woman.

**NADJA:** In spite of what you called me?

**MITJA:** In spite of that. I'm sorry.... Nothing? You still refuse to tell me?

**NADJA:** Maybe some day

**MITJA:** Some day, then?

**NADJA:** Yes. Some day

**MITJA:** *(sitting on the sofa and beginning to read)* Will I like them?

**NADJA:** I don't know.

**MITJA:** Shall I tell you if I do?

**NADJA:** Yes. But only if you like them....

*(He returns to the poems. Nadja starts for her bedroom, then, noticing the icon, moves toward it, lights its candle, crosses herself, and fully genuflects. Mitja observes her, but says nothing. Nadja silently prays, then rises and returns to her room. Mitja continues to read, then, turning his gaze to the icon, suddenly goes to it. He hesitates, then stands back, aghast. Augmenting the light of the flickering candle, a spotlight has meanwhile picked up the features of the face in the icon. They are Boris's. After a beat, Mitja rushes, as if propelled, to the opposite end of the room and continues staring at the icon. The lights slowly fade.)*

16 pages in Act Two