

STOLEN HAPPINESS

by Ivan Franko

Translated into English by Alina Zatsepina,

Winner of the First Iryna Steshenko Ukrainian Drama Translation

RURAL LIFE DRAMA in 5 acts.

CHARACTERS:

***Mykola Zadorozhnyi**, a man, about 45 years old, short, skewed, moves slowly.*

***Anna**, his wife, a young woman, about 25 years old.*

***Mykhailo Hurman**, a gendarme, a tall, strong man, about 30 years old.*

***Oleksa Babych**, a peasant, about 40 years old, Mykola's neighbour.*

***Nastia**, his wife, about 35 years old.*

***The reeve**, a peasant, about 50 years old.*

***Shloma**, a tenant.*

Peasant men and women, boys and girls, musicians, etc.

It takes place around the year of 1870 in Nezvanychi village near the Carpathian Mountains.

ACT 1

*Inside the village house. Night. The sound of the wind can be heard from outside while the snow beats against the windows. There's a fire burning in the stove with pots on it. **Anna** and **Nastia** are busy cooking at the stove. There are girls and boys on the bench, on the stool, near the stove and on the stove, some of them spin, others wind the yarn on the reels; in the middle of the house, one boy knits mittens next to the chair, while the other twists a string on the spinning wheel.*

SCENE 1

Boys, girls, Anna and Nastia.

Boys and girls (*singing*):

Behind the mountain, the rocky mountain,

A husband and his wife live wrong.

She makes a snow-white bed for him,

And he has a whip and grim.

Their lovely bed turned to a dusty thing,

The young body's torn by a wire ring.

Their white sheets are like a sting,

The bloody whip continues to cling.

Nastia (*interrupts, waving the washcloth*). Oh, shame on you! Why did you come up with such a whiny song! It's like you're mourning the deceased.

1 boy (*laughs*). Yeah, and you had goosebumps.

Nastia. Curse you and your head! You think that I'm like your father's wife that never got out of bruises.

1 boy. My late father used to say: "If your husband doesn't beat you, he doesn't love you".

2 boy. Oh, your father was a good barber. He knew how to make boys bleed too.

1 boy. At no cost! That's worth something too!

Nastia. You should be ashamed to talk and sing such things here, in this house. Chase dull care away! It's as if you mentioned an evil spirit to a small child. God's angels are flying here. It's one house in the whole village where there is holy peace, and consent, and harmony, and love – and you have started something that is disgusting.

1 girl. Don't be afraid, aunty, we won't drive the holy angels out of the house with our singing.

Nastia. And how do you know that? Maybe you will? You know what old people say: don't call the wolf out of the woods. Sometimes it happens that if you say an evil word in a bad hour, it'll come true. My late mother told me that once there was one such...

1 boy. Bite your tongue! Go to the stove and see how soon those dumplings will be ready, because then Mykola will come from the town and kick us out.

Nastia. Look how fast you are! Don't worry, the dumplings will be ready. Just make sure you finish your mitten. (*Goes to the stove.*)

1 girl. Well, let's finish that song, girls. It's so lovely. And so touching that it makes me want to cry.

Anna (*at the stove*). Wait until you get married and have all that stuff on your shoulders, then you'll want to cry even more.

Girls. Here you go! How do you know that? Have you experienced it?

Anna. Well, I'm not talking about myself. But what I have experienced is enough for me and God to know.

Girls (*silent for a moment, then start singing*):

Oh, my hubby, hubby, don't beat me so much,

My body is white, and it hurts from touch.

Let me go, my hubby, to the cherry garden,

I'll pick a red rose, its beauty will never harden.

I'll pick a red rose and put it on water so clear:

Float, my flower, to my parents no longer here.

Float, float, my flower, on the Danube river,

When you see my dear mother – my message deliver.

Nastia (*meanwhile, she pulled out the dumplings, drained the water, poured oil on them, salted, and put them on the table*). Well, stop singing! Quit your work! The dumplings are on the table! (*Boys and girls leave their work and sit down at the table with a cheerful noise and eat. Nastia and Anna are near the stove; she also took some dumplings and sits near the stove with her shoulders turned to the table*). Well, my friend, help us too!

Anna (*looks to the window*). Good heavens, what a snowstorm out there! If only they hadn't lost their way!

Nastia. Don't be afraid, it's not their first time.

Anna. I don't know why, but I'm so frightened, so sad for some reason, as if some great misfortune is hanging over me.

Nastia. I can see that, my dear. You've been acting unlike your usual self all day.. And I'm already thinking to myself, why should you be sad? You're living as in God's pocket...

Anna. Me?

Nastia. You have a kind, calm, hard-working husband, who almost prays to you.

Anna (*sighs*). But what of that?!

Nastia (*quieter*). Yeah, you mean that you have no children. Don't worry, God is kind, you'll have them.

Anna (*waving her hand*). Oh, I don't mean this!

Nastia. What are you talking about? What else do you want? Did your brothers cheat you out of your dowry? Ugh! Forget about the dowry! That'll be punished for it someday.

Anna (*rushes like stung*). Oh, my friend! I'm not talking about the dowry. And why do you mention my brothers? You know that they are my worst enemies.

Nastia. I know, my dear, I know! I've heard enough about your unhappy maidenhood.

Anna (*briskly*). What? About my maidenhood? What do you know about it?

Nastia (*kindly*). I know everything, my dear, I know everything. How your brothers beat you, took you for a hireling, didn't let you be in society, and in the end they forced you to marry a hired man, and even robbed you of your dowry. Oh, and if only that!

Anna. How's that? Do you know something else?

Nastia (*laughs*). Oh, don't be afraid, my friend! I tell you that I know everything, even though you lived far away from us, in a different county, and I've never even seen your brothers.

Anna. And how do you know all these things?

Nastia (*laughs*). A little birdie told me, my sweetheart! There were people who told me. You would never have guessed who.

Anna. You must have seen my close friend somewhere at the fair.

Nastia. Oh, my dear friend! Am I so often at those fairs?! No, the message itself came to my house, and not long ago, but yesterday.

Anna. Well, then I can't guess who it could be.

Boys and girls (*get up from eating*). Thank you, aunty Anna, and you, aunty Nastia, for dinner!

1 boy. Thank you that my soul is now full!

Nastia (*beats him with a washcloth*). Go away, go away, you naughty child!

Girls. Well, it's time for us to go home. The road may get covered with snow, and we won't be able to get down the street.

2 boy. Don't be afraid, my swallows! There are enough guys here, each of us will take two of you on his shoulders and carry you home.

1 girl. Oh, what strong men! You would move around and hurt yourselves!

They gather up, take the slivers and yarn, and leave.

Well, good night!

They kiss Anna, and she illuminates their path to the porch using a flashlight..

Anna. Good night, girls, good night! And come again tomorrow, please!
(*Closes the door behind them.*)

SCENE 2

Anna and Nastia.

Nastia. I had to go, too.

Anna (*clears the table*). Oh, stay a little longer. Your house is not empty, and if your husband passes by our house, you'll hear him. And I'll have more fun waiting.

Nastia (*helps to clear*). Yes, it's true. But still, the house needs attention. Well, I'll do it for you... (*Stops in the middle of the hut in front of Anna, with a bowl in her hands.*) Well, aren't you curious how I found out about your maidenhood?

Anna. I don't care! I'm not capable of solving riddles.

Nastia (*slyly*). And doesn't your heart tell you anything?

Anna. My heart? What's your point? What should it tell me?

Nastia. Aha, but your face keeps changing! You first turn pale, then you blush again! Don't be afraid! I know everything from him.

Anna. Come to your senses! What are you talking about? Who?

Nastia. From Mykhailo. Who else?

Anna. Which Mykhailo?

Nastia. Hey, my friend, don't pretend you don't understand. We're both adults! Do you know Mykhailo Gurman, huh?

Anna (*steps back and crosses herself*). Holy Christ! What are you saying, my friend? Mykhailo Gurman – yes, I knew him, but he is gone for a long time. He died in Bosnia.

Nastia. Who told you that?

Anna. I know this, my brothers told me.

Nastia. Of course they did, your brothers!

Anna. His mother showed me the letter, she cried.

Nastia. Well, it must have been a fake letter, because Mykhailo is alive.

Anna. My friend, for God's sake, don't say that! Maybe you were dreaming? Maybe his spirit appeared to you?

Nastia. No, Anna, I'm telling you, he's alive. He's been serving in the gendarmerie for three years. He was somewhere in the other place, and now he's been relocated here. He came to our house and asked about you yesterday.

Anna. Oh, my God, what is this? What's happening to me? My friend, my darling! Tell me you're dreaming! It's... it's so crazy! After all, I swore to Mykhailo that I'd rather go to the grave than marry anyone else. And now!.. He came for my soul. No, no, you're joking, you just say that!

Nastia. Cross yourself, my friend! Why are you so scared? It's obvious that the brothers deceived you. So, you're not to blame. He said so himself. He didn't blame you at all. If only you had heard the heartfelt and beautiful words, he spoke about you!

Anna. No, no, no! Don't tell me anything! I don't want to hear about him, I don't want to see him. (*Walks around the hut, wringing her hands.*) Oh, my God! Oh my God, is it true? Have they deceived me too? They sold me like a pig in a poke.

Nastia. Calm down, my dear! What can we say about what is lost?! May God punish them for this.

Anna (*still walks around the hut in a daze*). And for what? Why? Oh, I know, I know! They were afraid of Mykhailo, so that he would not take away my dowry from them. Oh, yes, yes! And this obedient hired man is even happy to get something. Lord, save me! Don't let me go mad!

Nastia (*takes her by the shoulder*). Come to your senses, my friend! What are you talking about? Isn't it a sin? You're a married woman now, you must forget all about it.

Anna (*cuddles up to her, in a moment*). Yes, the truth is yours! The truth is yours! I must forget. Even if my heart breaks, I must forget. Oh, my God! How hasn't it broken yet? I suffered a lot during those years! And now I thought that the old wounds would stop hurting. And here you are! Here you are! The one who was dead to me until now, reappears. My dear friend, my sweetheart! Can you give me some advice on what I should do? Give me a potion to stop the pain here, here!

Nastia. Where can I get a potion, my dear? I won't advise you anything, except one thing: pray to God and he'll avert this disaster from you.

Anna. I prayed, my friend, I prayed! I beat my brow against the stone stairs of the church, I poured my tears on the floor – nothing helps.

Nastia (*listens*). Shh, can you hear it? Probably, the bell is ringing. Probably, our men are coming.

Anna (*near the window*). It's ringing! It's hardly audible over the whistling wind, but it's ringing. Thank God they're coming! Let's go meet them!

Both get dressed hastily and go out.

SCENE 3

In a moment Anna, Nastia and Babych come in. Babych is covered in snow, with a whip in his hands.

Babych. May God give you a good evening!

Anna. God bless you! So, you are saying my husband didn't go with you?

Babych. No, my friend. I left him at the salt mine. He was putting his pile of firewood and started to talk to the reeve, but I didn't wait until the end and went behind the others.

Anna. For God's sake. How could you leave him alone in such terrible weather?

Babych. Don't worry, he won't be alone. He's probably gone to Kupinnia¹ with the folks from Peredilnia². And the others went to Radlovychi³ by the main road. But he'll be back soon, don't worry. His horses are good.

Anna. Oh, I'm scared. They say there are wolves in the forest. God forbid any misfortune!

Babych. Calm down, my friend! God is kind to us, he'll avert bad luck from us. And Mykola is not a child. He takes care of the cattle. Well, woman, let's go home, the horses are cold there.

Nastia. Well, good night, my friend. Pray to God, dear, everything will be fine!

Babych. Good night!

Anna. God be with you!

Babych and Nastia leave.

SCENE 4

Anna (*alone, dressed in sheepskin coat and kerchief, sits by the window and listens*). No sound! Only the wind whistles and howls. (*Wringing her hands.*) And he is alive, alive, alive! They deceived me, fooled me, cheated me, robbed me of everything, of everything! No, I don't want to think about it. I have a husband, my legal husband. I vowed to him, and I'll keep my word. (*Listens.*) Ah! Here he's coming! Well, finally! Glory to God! (*Comes out.*)

¹ **Kupinnia** is the name of a village.

² **Peredilnia** is the name of a village.

³ **Radlovychi** is the name of a village.

SCENE 5

Mykola and Anna.

The rattle of horse collars is heard behind the stage. After a moment, Mykola enters, all covered with snow, wearing a woolen coat over a sheepskin coat, a lamb fur hat, gloves and with a whip in his hands. He stands in the middle of the hut, pulls out the whip from behind the belt, and begins to shake off the snow, stomping his boots. Then, gasping, he begins to take off his clothes.

Mykola. That's the way you earn your living! That's how you live and prosper! Oh my God, I don't know how I didn't lose my life on the way! Oh, and I'm so exhausted! I'm frozen to death! (*Opens the window and shouts.*) Anna, the horses need water! I thought about giving them a drink in Kupinnia, but I couldn't!

Anna (*behind the stage*). All right, all right! I've already prepared the water.

Mykola (*closes the window, takes off the woolen coat, then the sheepskin coat and hangs them on the hanger*). Well, good work, nothing to say! Risk your life for a meagre salary – it'll pay off. You work all day long, move, drag, take care of cattle, freeze and get wet like a dog – and for all this you get nothing. When it comes to paying, they, the miser, will scrimp for even that. And they'd have gobbled that up. When they give a man that bloody kreuzer⁴, you can see that they would rather die than pay. I hope that our labour will make their eyes pop out, rotten people! (*Sits down at the end of the table and begins to pull off his boots.*) My poor horses! (*Shouts.*) Woman, hey, woman! Anna! Where are you?

Anna (*enters*). Did you call me?

Mykola. Yes, I did. Well, have the horses been drinking?

⁴ The **kreuzer** was a coin and unit of currency in the southern German states prior to the introduction of the German gold mark in 1871/73, and in Austria and Switzerland.

Anna. Yes, they have. They were so cold, poor things, shaking like a leaf. Poor creatures! I added some whey to their water, and they drank two buckets each.

Mykola. Do they have anything to eat there?

Anna. Well, I didn't rely on you to feed them. They have about three litres of oats each, and I chopped some chaff, well, and shoved some hay behind the ladder. Well, why are you so late?

Mykola. Don't ask me. You'd better come and help me take off my boots. They're frozen like ice. I am afraid I've had my feet frostbitten.

Anna. Heaven forbid! What are you talking about? That's all we wanted! *(She takes a boot, pulls it, and, looking into Mykola's face, puts his foot down, steps back and crosses herself.)* Holy, holy, holy! Mykola! What's wrong with you? You are all covered in blood!

Mykola. Me?

Anna. For God's sake! What's this? Was there a fight? Or maybe you hurt yourself?

Mykola. No, no, don't be afraid!

Anna *(rushes to him and unbuttons his vest)*. Just wait! My God, you have blood on your shirt! Well, what happened to you, Mykola?

Mykola. That's our decent and honourable reeve.

Anna. What? Did he hit you?

Mykola. It doesn't look like he was stroking me, does it? *(Slams his fist on the table.)* But I won't let him get away with it! I'll take revenge!

Anna. Oh, what happened between you two? Why?

Mykola. Ask me, and I'll ask you. For nothing! He grabbed me out of the blue. Let the evil spirits grab him.

Anna (*still looking at him*). Don't curse him, Mykola, don't enrage God! Oh my Lord, you've lost a quart⁵ of blood! You unlucky fellow! Let me wash you. There's still some warm water left somewhere. (*Goes to the stove.*)

Mykola (*shouts*). No need! I'll take him to court! Tomorrow, just as I am now, I'll go to the judge. Let the lords see! Don't wash me!

Anna (*pours water into a bowl and approaches*). Go, go, you poor head! Don't make a laughing stock of yourself! You can't do anything to the reeve, you'll only make a fool of yourself.

Mykola. What do you mean I can't do anything? Does the imperial law allow him to mistreat people like that? If he's the reeve-entrepreneur who delivers firewood to the salt mine, then he's free to kick the soul out of a man?

Anna. Were you selling logs again?

Mykola. Well, I must have sold some. For God's sake, your husband suffered in the forest, froze like a dog, had nothing behind his vest besides his shirt, and he needed something to warm his soul.

Anna. Oh, Mykola, Mykola! I've told you several times: you'd better wait than do it! And now you want to go to court! After all, the reeve will put you in jail for such a thing sooner than you will put him!

Mykola (*looks at her with fear*). Hey, woman! You're right! I haven't thought of that. Well, go ahead, wash me!

Anna (*washes him*). I am prepared to bet that you not only sold the logs, but also said an evil word to the reeve.

Mykola. Me? God punish me if I'd said anything! He clung to me because the cord⁶ of firewood wasn't full. As usual, I was the last one to load, and he approached me. Someone must've split on me to him that I sold a couple of those stupid logs.

Anna. He might've seen it with his own eyes.

⁵ The **quart** is a unit of volume equal to a quarter gallon.

⁶ The **cord** is a unit of measure of dry volume used to measure firewood and pulpwood.

Mykola. Devil knows, maybe he did. It's enough that he came to me. "I won't pay you," he says, "until the cord of firewood is full". And I say, "Whatever was in the forest is here". And he says to me, "You're lying, you've sold five logs". And I say to him, "Even if I did, I wasn't the only one. Others sell too". And he keeps on, "Who sells?" Who? Who? What should I have told him? To tell the truth, I didn't see anything, and it's a shame to blame just anyone. So I just told him, "You yourself, before you were an entrepreneur, were selling this and that". No sooner had I told him that, than he rushed at me and started hitting me with a stick! On my head, and wherever he could reach. Then I didn't even realise when, and who, and how I was taken away and put on the sleigh.

Anna (*shakes her head*). I thought you were supposed to say something like that. The reeve isn't the kind of man to attack someone for nothing.

Mykola (*bitterly*). Oh, yes, he isn't. Everyone is honest, everyone is clever, except your husband.

Anna. I'm not taking your honour, but you shouldn't have sold the logs.

Mykola. But we should be cold and hungry!

Anna. You should have taken a couple of kreuzers from home for horilka⁷, if you can't live without it. After all, we're not so poor.

Mykola. Just think of it! To go to work and take money from home!

Anna. Well, if so, you have the job you wanted. (*Lays the table and begins to serve dinner.*) Well, but where have you been so long?

Mykola (*angrily*). Why do you care about that? It's not your concern! If you don't like me so much, don't ask me anything!

Anna (*puts the bowls on the table*). Well, if you talk to me like that, you probably won't be any lovelier.

⁷ **Horilka** is a Ukrainian alcoholic beverage. The word horilka may also be used in a generic sense in the Ukrainian language to mean vodka or other strong spirits.

Silence. Mykola taps his fingers on the window, Anna serves dinner. Mykola turns around and starts to eat in silence. However, the knocking at the window is heard. Anna shudders, Mykola drops the spoon from his hands.

Anna. Holy, holy, holy! What is it?

Mykola. Someone is knocking at the window! At such a late hour, in such bad weather – oh, maybe some bad luck!

A voice behind the window. Hey, people, open the door, don't let the soul perish!

Anna. Someone must have lost their way. I'll open.

Mykola. Anna, wait! Maybe it's someone evil?

Anna. So what? Should we let a man die? And why do you think it's someone evil? We have nothing to take, we don't owe anyone anything, so why should we be afraid? (*Exits. The bolts are rattling.*)

SCENE 6

Mykola, in a moment the gendarme with a carbine comes in, covered with snow, followed by Anna.

The gendarme. May God give you a good evening!

Mykola. God bless you!

The gendarme. I apologise for intruding into your house at such a late hour. But there's such a terrible storm, God forbid! I lost my way, I thought that I'd either freeze somewhere in a snowdrift, or wolves would catch me.

Anna (*crosses herself*). My God!

The gendarme (*looks back at her, stares, then overcomes himself*). Oh, yes! It could have happened this way. There, near the forest, you can hear them howling. These beasts could greet me any moment!

Mykola. Take off your clothes, sir, and sit down! You can't go any further now, at night.

The gendarme. No way! I can't feel my legs, I'm so cold and tired! Oh, thank God, that I got out of that snowy hell alive! (*Shakes off the snow and begins to undress. Mykola looks at him closer.*)

Mykola. Where did you come from, Mr Gendarme?

The gendarme. I'm from the town.

Mykola. Well, yes, from the town. But where were you born? Excuse me, but it seems to me that I've seen you somewhere before.

The gendarme (*laughs*). Well! Come on! Mykola, old fellow! Don't you recognise me? (*Taps him on the shoulder.*)

Mykola. Mykhailo Hurman! So it's you! And we were wondering... Anna, don't you recognise Mykhailo?

Anna (*completely lost, stands at the end of the table and, without looking at them, whispers a prayer*). And leave, and weaken, and let go, Lord...

The gendarme (*laughs*). Anna! Darling! Why have you become so pious? Won't you greet an old friend?

Anna (*gives him her hand*). How are you, Mr Gendarme?

The gendarme (*looked at her intently for a minute, then let go of her hand, gritted his teeth and turned away, speaks only to Mykola*). Well, I'll not forget this night as long as I live. You know, when I heard those wolf voices through the wind, and so close – well, I thought it was my end! And so I suddenly felt as if I had a fever. And at the same moment I saw a light aside. At first, I thought that it was a wolf blinking its eyes, but then I saw that this light was standing still... And I didn't think about anything else, didn't reason, only started to run through the snow, through some ditches, snowdrifts and fences. And only God knows where I got so much strength from. I fell down about ten times, it's true, but I thank God that at least my bones are still intact!

Mykola. Well, thank God! But tell me, please, what's the matter with you? Where did you appear from? They said you...

The gendarme (*laughs*). Ha, ha, ha! What do they say about me?

Mykola. Well, that you are deceased, dead...

The gendarme (*laughs even louder and comes up to him. Mykola steps back*). Ha, ha, ha! Yes, that's true! Indeed, I'm a dead man. Don't you believe me, Mykola? I'm dead! I came from the grave.

Mykola (*frightened, crosses himself*). Holy, holy, holy!.. (*Smiles slightly*.) Well, why are you talking such nonsense, Mykhailo? You shouldn't joke about such things.

The gendarme (*menacingly*). Do you think I'm joking? Here, touch me! (*Stretches out his hand, Mykola jumps away*.) See! But it's pointless! Do you know why I came, Mykola?

Mykola. You? To see me?

The gendarme. Yeah! For your soul. (*Laughs*.) Ha, ha, ha! You're so scared! Well, don't be afraid, poor fellow! Your soul is not such a valuable thing that even the dead come from the grave for it. Don't be afraid, look, I'm a living man, just like you! (*Claps him on the shoulder*.) And I'll tell you now where I came from. After returning from the army, I sold my land and house and joined the gendarmes, and I've been serving for three years. I was right on the border, catching smugglers, and a couple of weeks ago I was relocated to this county.

Mykola. Couldn't you have told me that from the very beginning? Here you are! You started to scare me with the dead man. Hey, Mykhailo, Mykhailo! I see you're still as rowdy as you used to be. (*Shakes his head*.) Well, sit down and have dinner with us.

The gendarme. That's a really clever word. (*Takes a spoon and sits down at the table*.) Why are you having dinner so late? It's probably midnight!

Mykola. I was in the same situation as you. I've just come back after the journey.

The gendarme (*eating*). Which journey?

Mykola. From the town. I was carrying firewood to the salt mine and was late. I hardly got home (*eats*). And I also was in Kupinnia, unfortunately. I thought

it would be faster to go across the forest, but it was snowing so badly there that I almost killed my horses.

The gendarme (*puts the spoon down and looks at him surprised*). What? Were you in Kupinnia tonight?

Mykola. Yes, I was.

The gendarme. Passing by the tavern there?

Mykola. Well, there's no other place to go. I also stopped there. I wanted to give some water to the horses, but some evil spirits took the bucket. I started knocking to the Jews, but no one came out, and I thought to myself, "Hey, it's so close to home!" And without getting through to anyone, I left.

The gendarme. And how long ago was it?

Mykola. Oh, probably about three hours ago. Although it's barely half a mile from us to the tavern in Kupinnia, after I set out, I kept getting stranded and straying off course. It seemed as if I had been riding for at least half a year. And I was by myself in the forest.

The gendarme. So, were you riding alone? And don't you know if someone else was behind you?

Mykola. No one was there! Our guys all left before me, and they all went to Radlovychi along the main road.

The gendarme. Well, was there a light in the tavern?

Mykola. Yes, there was a light, but the windows were covered, and the door was locked. Perhaps the Jews were already asleep because no one responded to my knocking.

The gendarme (*grumbles*). Well, probably!

They eat in silence. Anna sits near the stove, tries to eat, but cannot do it.

Well, thank you, good man, for dinner! (*Puts down the spoon and stands up.*)

Mykola. There's nothing to thank for. God bless you! (*Gets up too, both sit down on the bench.*)

Anna silently clears the table.

The gendarme (*looking at Mykola from the side*). Why do you have such a scratched face, Mykola? I don't remember you being eager for a fight!

Mykola (*confused*). Me? Ha, ha, ha! What do I have to do with a fight? I'm a calm man. Those damned logs fell on me today. I just started to take a log from the pile, and the whole top layer fell on me. It's luck I wasn't killed on the spot.

The gendarme. Oh, that's a terrible accident!

Mykola. Oh, may God protect us from such a job!

The gendarme. Do you earn much a day?

Mykola. Eh, my earnings are thin on the ground. I get a meagre salary. And as much as I move, freeze, exhaust myself and the horses, and get tired, I would refuse even those earnings.

The gendarme (*looking at his face again*). But you, fellow, must have been badly hit by those logs. Your whole right side is scratched like with a rake.

Mykola. Yes, I'm telling you that when the logs hit my right side, I thought that my head had broken into small pieces.

The gendarme (*gets up, walks around the hut and sits down to the left of Mykola, and then looks at him*). Oh, but you have even worse wounds on your left side.

Mykola (*confused*). I fell on the ground with that side, right on the branches, and that's how I ended up. It's lucky that I didn't put my eye out with a twig.

The gendarme (*looks into his eyes*). Yes, and there's a scar on the front of the forehead, as if someone scratched you. And bruises under the eyes. Hey, Mykola, confess, it's not because of the logs!

Mykola (*even more confused*). Why are you talking like that?! What do I have to confess? God knows I didn't fight with anyone! And why would I deceive you?

The gendarme (*laughs and taps him on the shoulder*). Well, well, Mykola, don't be afraid! I'm your guest now, so you don't need to confess to me. But I'll tell you one thing anyway, my friend: you were not born to be a cheat. I can tell right away when you want to lie, and you can't manage it!

Mykola (*frightened*). God punish me, then!

Anna. Mykola, stop swearing! You'd better think about where we'll arrange a place for Mr Gendarme to sleep. It's late, and you're both exhausted, it's time to sleep.

Mykola. Oh, oh, oh, you're right, my dear! And I, a fool, was so busy talking and forgot about it! I'll be right back! (*Rushes here and there in the hut, but can't put himself in order. Puts on a hat and a sheepskin coat.*)

Anna. Hey, where are you going?

Mykola. I'll be right back! You know, here what I have in mind: I'll bring a sheaf of straw, we'll place it here on the ground for Mykhailo. You just bring a blanket and a pillow, and he'll cover himself with a sheepskin coat.

The gendarme. Oh, thank you. I have my cloak.

Anna. I can bring the straw myself.

Mykola. Come on! You don't need to! I'll bring it myself. (*Takes his hat and goes out.*)

SCENE 7

The same ones without Mykola. Anna fusses around the bedclothes. The gendarme approaches her and takes her by the shoulders.

The gendarme. Anna!

Anna (*barely audible*). What do you want?

The gendarme. Don't you even want to look at me?

Anna turns to face him, but at once she looks down and turns silent. The gendarme looks at her for a long time.

Demons! Bastards! They kept their word and buried you alive! May God never forgive them for that!

Anna. Who are you talking about?

The gendarme. Who else but your beloved brothers? You know, when I was taken to the army, one of them said to me in the tavern: “Mykhailo, may God bless you, but don’t think about Anna. She won’t be yours, even if we had to bury her alive”. I laughed in his face then, but I see that they kept their word.

Anna (*hesitantly*). So you... are not angry with me? Don’t you curse me?

The gendarme. Angry with you? Poor little girl! Don’t I know that you are not guilty of anything, that you had no will of your own, that you were tricked, deceived, forced?

Anna starts crying.

No, I’ll be honest with you, the first time I found out you married this oaf, I was furious with you. I’d have killed you if you’d been anywhere near me. I ran around the field like a madman all day long, cursing you, asking God for the heaviest punishment, the most terrible disaster for you.

Anna (*frightened*). Mykhailo!

The gendarme. Don’t be afraid, God is not a child to listen to the curses of a mad man.

Anna (*through tears*). Oh, I’m afraid he did listen to you!

The gendarme (*joyfully*). What? So haven’t you forgotten me? Do you still love me, Anna?

Anna (*with fright pushes him away from her*). Be silent, be silent! What are you saying? Don’t you dare speak to me like that. I’m a married woman, I have a husband.

The gendarme. Today he is a husband, but tomorrow he may not be one.

Anna. How come? What do you mean? What are you talking about?

The gendarme. Nothing. It’s nothing. But if he hadn’t been here, you’d be...

Anna. Shut up! Shut up! Don't speak! And don't you dare think anything evil about my husband!

The gendarme. Hey, you can say whatever you want! We'll see later. What I think of him is my own concern.

Anna (*takes him by the shoulder*). Mykhailo, what are you up to? Tell me!

The gendarme. Leave me alone! You'll see tomorrow!

Anna. Tomorrow? So there's something? Are you planning something? Something terrible? Oh, yes! I can see it in your eyes! I heard it in your voice when you asked him about those scars. Oh, I know you, you have a heart of stone! I'll not ask you to have mercy on us, not to destroy us. I'll just tell you that you'll take responsibility for two innocent people!

The gendarme. I have faith in God, so I won't take for a single one. But I can tell you that your husband would have done very well if he had stayed at home and not gone to work.

Anna. You are a beast, a cruel beast! You planned to bring us trouble and now you think you've found a way to do it. But God will punish you, he will punish you severely!

The gendarme (*laughs*). Ha, ha, ha! That's good: two dead people have come together, who loved each other in life and didn't forget each other in death, and having come together, have nothing better to do than quarrel. Anna, my heart! Do you hate me so much?

Anna. What do you want of me? Why did you come here?

The gendarme. I swear I didn't mean to. Two months I've been here and you know that until today I avoided your home. I don't know whether God or evil spirits brought me here.

Anna. That's enough. My husband is coming! (*Makes the bedclothes, the gendarme sits down at the end of the table and seems to be dozing.*)

SCENE 8

The same ones and Mykola with a sheaf of straw.

Mykola (*throws the sheaf in the middle of the hut*). God, what a blizzard there! Tomorrow, probably, our hut will be swept away with the roof. I barely got out of the house to the barn. (*Takes off his outer clothing.*) And you, Mykhailo, are you dozing? I thought you'd want to talk to your old friend (*blinks at Anna*). After all, you were in love once...

The gendarme. Eh, that was just foolishness in the man's head when he was young. And now, when the man's been trained in the army, and chased through the Bosnian mountains, and toughened up in the gendarmerie service, he has no time to remember his old love. And your wife, pardon the word, seems to be a bit jaded. You must hold her tightly in your hands, huh?

Mykola. Me? Her? God, she's... I'd have her... But what can I say?! It's funny to me, an old man. But it's true that she becomes sad and wistful near me.

The gendarme. Well, that's between you two. I shouldn't interfere.

Mykola. Yes, brother, you are right. As is the gander, so is the goose. No stranger should interfere.

Anna (*makes a sleeping place for the gendarme on the ground*). Have you locked the door, Mykola?

Mykola. Yes, of course! (*Yawns.*) Oh, it's time to sleep. (*Crosses himself and whispers a prayer to the holy icons.*)

The gendarme. I ought to undress myself. (*Takes off his clothes, crosses himself, and lies down on the ground.*) And if I don't wake up early tomorrow, be kind enough to wake me up when you get up.

Anna. All right, all right. (*Puts his carbine on the bench, looks into the stove and shuts it. Meanwhile, Mykola, having finished his prayer, undresses and lies down on the bed.*)

Mykola. Are you sleeping, Mykhailo?

The gendarme. I'm dozing. Why?

Mykola. Oh, nothing. Good night!

The gendarme. Good night!

Anna crosses herself, then stands near the stove and puts out the lamp.

The curtain falls.

ACT 2

The scenery is the same. Daytime. The flames of fire can be seen in the stove. Mykola steams birch twigs and twists vine ropes. Anna is either busy at the stove or helps.

SCENE 1

Mykola and Anna.

Mykola. Well, hold it well, don't drop it! (*Twists.*) Yes. Now come here. Curse him and his logs! A man would rather screw those earnings, but not here, you should go again to complete that bloody cord of wood, damn it.

Anna. It'll definitely be easier to ride today than yesterday. You see, the weather got better!

Mykola. Yes, it's better! But yesterday the road got drifted with snow so badly that you couldn't find a trace. No, I'm not going today. I'll ruin myself and the horses, and what for? Curse him and his logs.

Anna. It's probably better not to go than to wade through the snow with a burden. Logs won't run away, and there's work at home. Oh, if only you had listened to me yesterday and stayed at home!

Mykola. Why?

Anna. Nothing. But my heart feels some misfortune. What a bad dream I had today, may God protect me! It was like I was throwing corals around the hut, around the pen, around the whole village, and they were so big and red...

Mykola (*as if to himself*). Corals mean tears.

Anna. And then it was like dogs were barking at our hut from all sides, getting to the door, sticking their heads in the windows, and so fierce and furious...

Mykola. Fierce dogs mean misfortune.

Anna. And then it was like I was being dressed for marriage in all white: white shoes, white skirt, white wimple.

Mykola. Holy, holy, holy! What are you saying, woman? May God keep all evil away from us! What are you talking about?

Anna. What's wrong? Is that supposed to mean anything?

Mykola. At least don't mention it in a bad hour! God! It's just a dream! All things are up to the Lord. One must never get ahead of oneself, that's it! (*Continues to twist.*) Hmm, and what should I do with that cord of firewood, I don't know.

Anna. Maybe we should go and ask Babych if he's going?

Mykola. You are right. If he's going, it's not good for me to stay here. As soon as I fix the sleigh, I'll go to him. (*Throws the ready-made vine ropes and sits on the bench.*) Oh, my lower back hurts! My goodness, the man has worked his strength for other people, and now he has only the remnants left for himself. Anna!

Anna (*near the stove*). What do you want?

Mykola. Why did this gendarme get up so early? I didn't see when he left.

Anna. He said he had to go, the service...

Mykola. You know, when I saw him, I immediately froze on the spot. At that hour, in that uniform, it seemed that a dead man from the next world had come to us. But then, I saw he was alive.

Anna. Didn't you know he was here?

Mykola. Me? How was I supposed to know? I was sure he had rotted away in Bosnia long ago. After all, your brother swore to me that he was gone, even

showed me a document from the army. The only problem is that I'm not very literate, so I couldn't read it.

Anna. So you were deceived as well as me.

Mykola. I don't know why they wanted to send you far away so badly.

Anna. But I know. They didn't want to give me anything from my dowry. Well, if I had married Hurman, he'd have ripped it out of their throats. You know what kind of man he was. They were afraid of him, so they joined forces with the reeve to send him, a single child, to the war, and then used the time to send me to the other side of the county. That's all the wisdom.

Mykola. Lord, I had no idea who pulled the strings. The man has never been with wealthy people, so he doesn't understand the wealthy stuff.

Anna passes by him, he catches her, hugs her and kisses her on the forehead.

My poor soul! Did you love this Mykhailo very much?

Anna (*outbursting*). Well, why should we talk about it? Whether I loved him or not, there's nothing to remember now. You'd better go and prepare the sleigh! Lunch is ready. By the time you're done there, it'll have cooled down properly.

Mykola. You're right, Anna! (*Gets up and takes the vine ropes.*) It's not the time for the poor man to dwell on memories, he has work to do. Pour it, I'll be ready in a minute! (*Goes out.*)

SCENE 2

Anna. *Mykola is behind the stage.*

Anna (*pours borsch⁸ into a bowl, puts beans into another bowl and puts them on the table*). Did you love this Mykhailo very much? It seems much, if I still tremble when I think about him, a chill goes through me. It seems that I did.

⁸**Borsch** is the variant of soup, made with red beetroots as one of the main ingredients, which gives the dish its distinctive red colour. Borsch is a signature dish of Ukrainian cuisine.

Or maybe I was afraid of him more than I loved him. Oh, he has the strength! He can grab an ox by the horns and throw it to the ground. Lord, he'll have no trouble taking two oxen such as mine in one handful. His look seems to pierce through you like a hot wire. Oh, and I'm afraid of him now! I'm afraid of him as if he were my worst enemy! And I'm sure that if he sets his sights on us, he'll wipe us to dust, destroy us, ruin us. How can my husband fight him?

Mykola (*behind the stage*). Anna, Anna, Anna!

Anna. What do you want?

Mykola. Where did you put the haynet? I want to put hay for the horses.

Anna. The haynet is on the porch. I put the hay long ago. Come and eat.

(*Removes the ashes from the stove.*)

Mykola. I'll be right back, as soon as I fix the skis on the sleigh. Two of them have fallen out somewhere.

Anna. Leave the skis alone, they won't run away! Oh, God, the further it goes, the worse I feel. It's frightening, like before a fire. I keep thinking that some misfortune is coming...

SCENE 3

Mykola and Anna.

Mykola (*creaked the door as he entered*). W-well!

Anna (*jumps up near the stove*). Oh! Is that you?

Mykola. What's the matter with you, woman? You're white as a sheet!

Anna. Nothing, nothing. I'm just not feeling well. It must be the stove... I got a little hot, and my head is dizzy. Just sit down and eat, I'll drink some water, it will make me feel better.

Mykola (*sits down at the table, crosses himself and takes a spoon*). Come and eat too. It's bad to eat alone.

Anna. Oh, come on! Don't worry about it, just eat! I'll go to Babych and ask him if he's going to the forest.

Mykola. Well, if so, then go. A little walk may relieve your headache. Go, go! (*Eats.*)

Anna puts a kerchief on her head and heads for the door. At that moment the door opens. The gendarme, the reeve, Babych, the deputy and a peasant enter.

SCENE 4

Mykola, Anna, The gendarme, the reeve, Babych and a peasant.

The reeve (*entering*). Glory to Jesus Christ!

Mykola. Glory forever. Please welcome to the table!

The reeve. Thank you! May God bless you!

Mykola. Sit down, Mr Reeve. Why have you come here to us?

The reeve (*sits on a stool with his shoulders to the table, the gendarme is on a bench, the deputy and the peasant stand and look around the hut*). Hm, not so good. We have a little question for you.

Mykola. For me? What's the matter?

The reeve. Did you tell Mr Gendarme yesterday that you were in the tavern in Kupinnia last night?

Mykola. Yes, I was there. Not in the tavern, but near the tavern.

The reeve. Late at night?

Mykola. Yes, it was late. I saw no one coming behind me.

The reeve. Did you come home covered in blood?

Mykola. Y... y... yes.

The gendarme. What? Did you come home covered in blood? I didn't hear anything like that from you. Ma'am, is it true?

Anna. Yes, it's true. I washed him myself.

The gendarme. Oh, that's an important thing. (*Writes in a book.*) And you said that you were injured in the forest, while taking logs. So did you go to the town all covered in blood and return from the town all covered in blood?

The reeve. He told you that? Well, it's not true. He was intact and clean in town. I saw him myself at the salt mine.

Mykola. Tell the truth, Mr Reeve!

The reeve. Which truth?

Mykola. After all, it is you, who hurt me so much.

The gendarme (*jumps up*). What? What? What?

The reeve. You're lying, Mykola. It's true that we had a little argument about those logs, but I had no intention to hurt you.

Mykola. I have witnesses. I didn't wash off the blood deliberately and came home like that to put you to court.

The reeve. Ha, ha, ha! Me! To court!

The gendarme. Who are your witnesses?

Mykola. Well, my friends Babych and Kalynych were also there, so they can testify.

Babych (*scratches his head*). I was there really, but I have nothing to say now. I didn't see Mr Guvnor hurting you. He hit you upside the head, that's true, but to hurt you like that, I can't testify to that.

The peasant. Neither can I.

The gendarme. Mykola Zadorozhnyi, I'm arresting you. (*Takes out iron chains with handcuffs from the bag.*) Give me your hands and don't think of resisting because it'll be worse for you.

Anna. Oh, my God!

Mykola. Are you arresting me? Me? What for?

The gendarme. You probably know better than I do. Last night in Kupinnia, all the Jews were slaughtered in the tavern.

Mykola. Oh, my God! So am I to blame for this?

The gendarme. I don't know. I hope not. But tell me, isn't everything against you? If you're innocent, you have nothing to fear. Your truth will come out in court. But I have to do my job. Give me your hands!

Mykola. God sees everything. I'm innocent. Do with me whatever you wish. (*Gives his hands, the gendarme chains him up.*)

The gendarme. Yes, that's smart. Now tell me, where are those boots you were wearing yesterday?

Mykola. They are over there, near the stove.

The gendarme. Deputy, bring them here!

The deputy hands them over, the reeve and the gendarme examine them by the window.

Here! There's blood!

The reeve. And here it is too!

The gendarme. That's sad. Put them aside!

Mykola. It's my blood, it dripped on the way.

The gendarme. You'll explain it in court, it doesn't concern us. Did you have an axe with you? Where is it?

Mykola. There, under the bench.

The gendarme. Deputy, bring it here!

The deputy gives it to him, the gendarme and the reeve examine it.

There's blood here too. Here on the handle.

The reeve. And here on the butt. And on the blade.

The gendarme. Put it aside! Now show me your sheepskin coat!

They inspect the sheepskin coat.

There's blood here too. Put it aside. (*Goes to the bed and searches under the pillows in the straw. To Anna.*) Open the chest!

All that time, Anna stands as if dumbfounded, she does not move, only looks at him.

The gendarme. Do you hear me, woman? Open the chest! (*When she doesn't move, he takes the key from behind her belt, opens the chest and together with the reeve begins to inspect everything.*) Well, there's nothing here. Mr Reeve, the deputy, and you, witnesses, go with him and search the whole

homestead, pavilion, shed, barn, all sorts of hiding places! I'll listen to the lady here.

The reeve. Well, Mykola, come with us!

Mykola. Lord, you know why you are sending such a heavy burden on me, let your will be done! (*Goes out, followed by the reeve, the deputy and the peasant.*)

SCENE 5

The gendarme and Anna.

The gendarme (*silent for a moment after everyone has left, standing motionless in the middle of the hut opposite Anna, who stands near the extinguished stove. Then he straightens up and raises his head. Sharply.*) Anna!

Anna raises her head, looks at him with unconcealed anxiety and lowers her eyes.

The gendarme. Come here!

Anna approaches him and stops.

The gendarme. Closer, closer! Look into my eyes! Just look!

Anna (*tries to look, trembles all over, then kneels down in front of him*).

Mykhailo! Mykhailo! Don't torture me! I can't look at you! You are so scary!

The gendarme. Silly girl! Why should you be afraid? I can be scary to thieves and robbers, that's my job. Don't be afraid!

Anna. But he didn't do anything! Mykhailo! What did you say against him? I swear to you, he's innocent!

The gendarme. Who is he? Oh, your Mykola! Well, maybe he is guilty.

Anna. No, no, no! Never! He's so kind, he wouldn't trample a worm for nothing, let alone kill a man!

The gendarme. He killed me! He made me unhappy! No, don't tell me about him! Why should I care about him? I'm not his enemy, but there's evidence

against him, so I must arrest him. I must do it. Do you hear? It's my job. If he's innocent, his truth will come out in court.

Anna. So what do you want of me? I wasn't with him, I don't know anything. I only know that he came home covered in blood and said that the reeve had beaten him.

The gendarme. I don't care about it. You'll say this stuff in court. I want to talk to you about something else. Anna, look into my eyes! (*Takes her by the shoulders and looks into her eyes.*) And you are still beautiful, young, pure! Anna, do you love me?

Anna (*trembles*). Mykhailo, let me go!

The gendarme. No, I won't! Tell me now. Do you love me?

Anna (*turning away*). No, no, I don't love you! You are terrible! I don't love you!

The gendarme (*menacingly*). Look into my eyes. Do you hear?

Anna looks into his eyes.

Tell me now. Do you love me?

Anna. Mykhailo! My darling, don't torture me! When you stare at me like that, it's so painful, so scary. I'm not like myself!

The gendarme. Nonsense! Tell me. Do you love me?

Anna (*hardly audible*). I do.

The gendarme. Say it again! Say it louder!

Anna. I do love you.

The gendarme. Remember this. And will you be mine? Just stand there, don't tremble! You should know that you can't run away from me! Oh, I'm not the kind of man to let you run away! If I had luck after all these years, I won't let it go! I'll sink my teeth into it, but I won't let it go. Tell me. Will you be mine?

Anna. For God's sake, Mykhailo! Don't say that! I'm a married woman! I made a vow. It's a sin to listen to such things, a sin to think of such things!

The gendarme. Wasn't it a sin to give me your word and then marry another man? Wasn't it a sin to steal my happiness?

Anna. Mine is stolen too, my darling! And my heart is broken, and I'm mated with an unloved man! With such an oaf that it's just out of all notch! People laugh at him, and make fun of him! And you still want to torture me!

The gendarme. You're talking nonsense! If everything you say is true, then be mine! Against the wishes of those who separated us. Those who stole our happiness. We'll steal it back, our happiness!

Anna. God will punish us, God!

The gendarme. Don't believe it! God doesn't need our suffering. But we have a chance, so let's live freely and enjoy our happiness.

Anna. How long will it last?

The gendarme. Happiness never lasts long. Happiness is everything – a day, an hour, a minute.

Anna. And then?

The gendarme. Then? I don't care what will happen then! We've suffered so far, and we'll suffer again. Wow, it's a long journey of life. Are you afraid?

Anna (*keeping her eyes on him, hardly audible*). No, I'm not afraid.

The gendarme. So do you want to be happy?

Anna (*in the same way*). Yes, I do.

The gendarme. Then will you be mine?

Anna (*in the same way*). Yes, I will.

The gendarme. Remember this! Keep your word. And if you deceive me now, woe to you! I'll take a terrible revenge on you and on him.

Anna (*in the same way*). No, I won't deceive you.

The gendarme. Well, wake up! Why are you talking as if in a dream? (*Shakes her by the shoulders.*) Here they come. Cry, wring your hands so they don't guess anything. Ask me to have mercy on him. And when they take him to the town, I'll come to you.

Anna stands silently near the stove with her hands wrung.

SCENE 6

The same ones and Mykola chained, the reeve and the peasant.

The gendarme. Well, Mr Reeve, have you found anything suspicious?

The reeve. Nothing, Mr Gendarme. Only two skis are missing on the sleigh, and the third one is a bit smeared with blood.

The gendarme. Yes, this is also important. (*Writes in the book.*) Well, now take him. And take these things away. Did you take the ski out of the sleigh?

The deputy. I took it out, here it is.

The gendarme. Good. Take it, and watch it so the blood won't be wiped off. And you, Mr Reeve, get a carriage for us. It'll be hard to chase the arrestee to the town on foot in the snow. Maybe he has accomplices, so that they don't attack and repel him somewhere in the forest.

Mykola. Oh, my God! What is happening to me? Why am I being punished so heavily?

The reeve (*scratches his head*). It'll be hard to find a carriage today, Mr Gendarme. Those who have a carriage all went to work, either to the woods or to the logs. We can take Mykola's horses and harness them to his sleigh.

The gendarme. Well, that's also possible.

The reeve. Then someone from the village can sit with you – he'll drive the horses and then come back.

The gendarme. Very well. I'll probably have to come back here anyway, to look for accomplices.

The reeve. That's even better. Come on, Babych, go and harness the horses!

Babych leaves.

Mykola (*who was still sitting on the stool and wiping his tears with his hands*). Anna!

Anna (*as if dumbfounded*). What do you want, Mykola?

Mykola. You have a pure soul, innocent... Pray to God that my own innocence may soon be proved.

Anna. A pure soul... And is yours less pure?

Mykola. Take care of the household! We don't have much stuff, so don't let it be lost. And don't waste money on lawyers to defend me. I hope that even without them our merciful Father will get me out of this misfortune.

Anna. Well, if you say so...

Mykola. Yes, yes, yes, don't do that. Trust in God. Only... (*Trembles, twists his face to cry, convulsively embraces her.*) Anna! My Anna! Only... don't forget me! (*Wipes his eyes.*)

Anna. Come on, Mykola! Should you cry in front of other people? Calm down! God is with us.

Mykola. Yes, it's God's will! May he do with us all what he has planned. Let's go, good people. (*Kisses Anna and goes out, followed by the gendarme, the reeve and the others. After his leaving, Anna wants to rush to the door and stops, clasps her head, then wrings her arms.*)

Anna. Here you are, God's angels have flown over the house!

The curtain falls.

ACT 3

It takes place in front of the tavern. On the right side is a village road, on the left is a high fence, in the depths of the stage is the tavern with a wide-open gate. Near the tavern, there are stools; near the fence, there are big wooden logs for sitting.

SCENE 1

Three girls dressed in festive church clothes come out of the tavern.

The first girl. Quickly, girls, quickly run and call the boys!

The second girl. Why? What did Shloma say?

The first girl. There'll be music. Run!

The third girl. Hey, did the reeve allow it?

The first girl. I guess he did, if Shloma says so.

SCENE 2

The reeve and the girls.

The reeve (*comes down the street and turns to the tavern, hears their words*). Aha, you are already talking about music! The reeve didn't allow it and won't allow it in any way.

The third girl. So, there'll be no music before Lent?

The reeve. There will be no music, no music!

The first girl. Don't listen, girls! Run quickly! If Shloma says there'll be music, it'll surely be!

They hold hands and run out laughing.

The reeve. You sneaky little magpie! So you take Shloma's word more seriously than mine? Just wait! (*Threatens her with a walking stick, then, adjusting the sheepskin coat, goes to the tavern.*)

SCENE 3

Nastia and two other women come out of the tavern.

Nastia. Where are you going, my friend?

The first woman. I'm going home.

Nastia. Oh, you have some spare time. Thank God your children don't cry there anymore. Let's sit here on the log. Look, the sun's shining, it's a pleasure to sit here. These are the last days of winter, but it feels like spring has already come.

The second woman. Let's sit for a while, why not? We have nowhere to hurry. I hear that there'll be music, so let's see how young people are having fun.

They sit down.

The first woman. So, Nastia, you say that something's wrong with Mykola?

Nastia. The Holy Spirit is with us, my dear friend! They say they're going to hang him.

Both women. Jesus! (*Cross themselves.*)

The first woman. And who would have thought he was a murderer! Such a quiet and humble man...

The second woman. Oh, my dear, a man is a man, but an evil man, even if he had no strength, could hurt anyone.

The first woman. I heard that they stole a lot of money from Abramko. Do you know if they have found it?

Nastia. Not a trace of it. Mykola is as silent as a dead man, he doesn't want to give out his accomplices.

The first woman. What a fool! As if it'll help him if he rots and they live.

The second woman. So, they have such a thieves' law that one doesn't dare to betray the other, even if he himself has to die.

The first woman. The souls of stone. My God! And such people are born, suck mother's milk, and walk on the ground, and sing songs!

The second woman. No, my friend, they don't sing songs. They never sing. Have you ever heard Mykola sing?

The first woman. It's true! As long as I know him, I've never heard a song from him! What a mystery!

The second woman. Well, what about his wife? Poor soul! So young, so beautiful and comes from such a nice family! After all, her father was known in every village. He was the wealthiest man in the whole county, a public official. And now here she is!

Nastia. Oh, my dear friend! You don't know what kind of woman she is.

The first woman. Well, what kind?

Nastia (*lowers her voice, with a squeeze*). She is really bad!

Both women (*clap their hands on the hems*). What are you saying?

Nastia. Exactly what you can hear. After all, we are close neighbours. I don't really care, but I can see exactly what is happening at her place.

Both women. So what? Tell us!

Nastia. What can I tell you? It's disgusting to tell. Do you know who she goes out with? With the gendarme. The same one who put her husband in prison.

The women. Jesus Christ!

Nastia. She's been in love with him since she was a girl. He's from the same village as her. And her brothers forced her to marry Mykola.

The women. Well, we know that. But with the gendarme!

Nastia. He spends the night with her twice a week. He comes at dusk, leaves before dawn. He's supposedly looking for Mykola's accomplices. He told my husband so himself, of course!

The women. Lord!

SCENE 4

Anna, the women and **Nastia**.

During that conversation, the stage is gradually filled with boys and girls. They stand in groups, chatting, laughing. Some older women and men walk down the street, some enter or leave the tavern.

Anna (*enters dressed in festive church clothes, looks around fearfully and approaches the sitting women*). Glory to Jesus Christ.

The first woman (*coldly*). Glory forever!

Anna. Haven't you seen here... (*Breaks off and looks around.*)

The second woman. Are you looking around for your husband? No, he wasn't here.

Anna (*turns to her, frightened*). For my husband? No, I'm not looking for my husband.

Nastia (*with a pinching reproach*). We were just talking about him, Anna, you know. They say he is very weak.

Anna (*almost faintly*). Weak? I haven't heard that. What's the matter with him?

Nastia (*in the same way*). They're going to hang him.

Anna (*shudders, and then, seeing that Nastia is mocking her, also answers sharply*). Hang him? Oh, this is such a weakness that I can't help him with it. If he's guilty, then let him for his crime.

Nastia (*turns away from her, to the first woman*). You know, there was a man from Nepytyv⁹ who was in the same prison with him, and now he's out. He was talking to my husband, "Zadorozhnyi from your village had a message. He said, "Ask my wife to visit me at least once. Tell her to bring me some money and a clean shirt. And let her hire a lawyer for me".

Anna goes outside and disappears.

SCENE 5

The same ones without Anna. There are more boys and girls coming. A hubbub.

The first woman. She's disgusting!

The second woman. Nasty soul!

Nastia. She has no heart! And it was obvious at once. After all, when they took him, she should've said a word and shed a tear, as an honest woman would do! But she didn't!

The first woman. I wonder who she was looking for here?

Nastia. For him, for him! For her gendarme.

The first woman. Hey, is he here?

Nastia. Today I saw him in the church. Maybe, he is.

⁹ Nepytyv is the name of a village.

The second woman. And it seems to me that I saw him going to the reeve.

Nastia. She was probably waiting for him in the house, and having no patience, went to look for him in the village.

The second woman. Well, that would have been too much. Unless she has lost all her shame.

Nastia. And you think she hasn't? You'll see! She'll be here dancing with him.

The women. Ugh! Curse her!

SCENE 6

*The same ones, **the musicians**, and then **the reeve**.*

A hubbub among the youth. The musicians are coming! Musicians! Make some space for the musicians! (*Several boys take out a raised wide bench from the tavern porch and place it outside near the wall.*) That's it! It will be good here!

The musicians – three peasants, one with a violin, the second one with a bass, the third one with a tambourine – enter, bow in all directions, then get on the bench, where chairs have been placed for them. They sit down and move the bows on the instruments, testing them. There is a hubbub around, laughter, jokes. The stage fills up.

The reeve (*comes out of the tavern, menacingly*). What's going on here? (*Seeing the musician.*) What are you doing here? Who let you?

The musicians (*stand up, take off their hats, the violinist speaks*). Mr Guvnor, we were asked to come here. We are working people. We aren't entitled to ask permission. We were asked to come, they said it was allowed.

The reeve. Who asked you?

The violinist. The boys, of course. There are Andrukh, and Oleksa, and Stepan.

The crowd quietens down. Three boys come forward and bow to the reeve.

The reeve. What do you want?

The first boy (*bowing*). We'd like to ask you, Mr Guvnor, to let us dance a little. It's Lent soon, it's the last time.

The reeve (*sternly*). Whose son are you?

The boy. My father is Vasyl Pivperechnyi. I'm Oleksa.

The reeve. And have you been to church today?

The boy. Yes, I have, Mr Guvnor.

The reeve. And have you heard what His Grace the Priest preached?

The boy. Yes, I have, sir.

The reeve. And did he tell you to go to the tavern for music and dancing?

The boy. No, he didn't.

The reeve. Well, do you follow his words in this way?

The boy (*scratches the back of his head and smiles*). Who would listen to him, Mr Guvnor?! Our priest is old. Does he know what young people need? So if you allow... It's up to you, not to His Grace.

The other boys. Yes, yes! We ask Mr Guvnor to allow us.

The reeve. I don't allow it! It's forbidden.

SCENE 7

The same ones and Shloma.

Shloma (*runs out of the tavern with a bottle and a shot glass*). What do you mean it's forbidden? Why? (*To the boys.*) No, no, don't be afraid, Mr Guvnor is joking. Why not? (*Pours a shot glass.*) Well, may God bless you, Mr Guvnor!

The reeve. No, Shloma, if you're told you can't, then you can't. But I'll have a drink because something is making me sick (*drinking*). And I'll pay you, but neither dancing nor music are allowed here.

Shloma. But, Mr Guvnor, you have no right to order me. It's my income. I have a permission.

The reeve. A permission? What kind of permission?

Shloma. What do you mean? An imperial permission, with a seal! Look!
(*Pulls a paper folded tenfold out of his shirt and hands it to the reeve.*)

The reeve (*uncomfortably unfolding the paper, examines it from all sides, obviously not being able to read it, and then gives it to the Jew*). But if so, if you have a permission, it's another thing. It's no longer my control zone.

Shloma. See? Didn't I say there would be music? Well, boys, what are you standing around for? Get to the girls! Look, they seem to be ready to dance. And you, musicians, will you have a drink?

The musicians. That's what we're supposed to do.

The bassist. God himself ordered it.

Shloma (*treats them*). Go on, drink, drink, and play well!

The musicians. That's our thing.

The reeve. And remember to be decent, without offending the Lord.

Shloma. You hear what Mr Guvnor says? Don't offend the Lord!

The reeve. As soon as the sun goes down, then stop and go home. I'll send the deputy here, so that no one dares...

Shloma. Why, Mr Guvnor? Why bother the deputy? Don't I know what I'm supposed to do? When the time comes, I'll tell them to stop. Well, have a great time! And you, sir, come with me. I have something very good to tell you.
(*Pulls him to the tavern.*)

SCENE 8

*The same ones without **the reeve** and **Shloma**.*

The crowd parts, making space in the middle. Senior men and women sit either near the musicians, or along the wall on benches, or on logs. Children climb on a fence. Boys and girls stand around in two rows. The musician starts to play.

One boy. Hey, let's have a good time today! Let the evil laugh! Musicians, play some kolomyikas¹⁰! Play such jolly music to make our blood race!

The musicians play kolomyikas, and several couples dance. After a while, the musicians stop their music, the dancers stand up.

The boy. Why? Why are you standing?

The violinist points to the street with his bow.

A hubbub. Gendarme! Gendarme! The one who put Mykola in prison!

Everyone quietens down, their faces show anxiety and even fear.

SCENE 9

*The same ones, **The gendarme** and **Anna**.*

The gendarme (*pulling Anna's hand*). Well, come on, come on! Why are you hesitating?

Anna. But have you no fear of God, Mykhailo? Let me go! Look, people are staring.

The gendarme. So what if they're staring? Whoever is interested, let them look. What do I care? I'll be neither full nor hungry because of people's surprise.

Anna. But it's a shame. My face turns red. They are whispering, pointing fingers.

The gendarme (*looks at her menacingly*). Anna, I thought you were a smart woman, but you're still talking silly things. After what happened, you can still consider people's looks and whispers! Ugh, pure woman's nature!

Anna. Mykhailo!..

The gendarme. No, don't say that! I don't want to know you or see you when you're like that.

Anna. Mykhailo!..

¹⁰ The **kolomyika** is a Hutsul (Ukrainian) music genre that combines a fast-paced folk dance and comedic rhymed verses.

The gendarme. Well, are you coming?

Anna. Oh, God, what am I going to do?..

The gendarme. And will you dance with me?

Anna (*with fear*). Here? In front of everybody?

The gendarme. Are you doing that again? Not another word! Will you or will you not?

Anna (*whispering*). Lord, grant me the courage! (*Gives him her hand. They both approach the crowd in front of the tavern.*)

The gendarme. Glory to Jesus!

Peasant men and women (*bow*). Glory Forever!

The gendarme. I heard music here a moment ago and saw a dance.

One boy. Well, and what then? Can't we dance?

The second boy. It's Lent soon.

The third boy. Mr Guvnor gave his permission.

The gendarme. Well, well, I don't say anything. Go ahead and dance. Come on, musicians, play! Let me hear what you can do here in Nezvanychi. Maybe I'll want to dance with you. May I, boys?

Boys. Oh, you are welcome!

Music is playing. The gendarme, after listening for a while, takes Anna by the hand and goes with her to the tavern.

SCENE 10

*The same ones without **the gendarme** and **Anna**.*

The first woman. She really went with him.

The second woman. It's clear that she was feeling uncomfortable initially. She resisted a bit.

Nastia. She's not used to it yet, my friend. But she'll adjust quickly. He'll train her.

The second woman. He's so ugly! And he's the ugliest when he smiles. When he shows those white and big teeth, it seems like he is about to bite.

*Music, dancing. In a moment, **the gendarme** and **Anna** come out of the tavern, hold hands and start dancing too.*

SCENE 11

*The same ones, **the gendarme** and **Anna** dance. Slowly the dancing couples part. There is indignation on all faces. **The gendarme** and **Anna** are left alone.*

The gendarme (*seeing this, stops, menacingly*). What's this? (*Turns around.*) Why don't you dance?

Boys (*bowing, slyly*). That's enough for us.

The gendarme. Why? Don't you want more?

One boy. No. We've suffered enough.

The gendarme. Did you, guys, do this for me?

The boy. Maybe so.

The gendarme. What? Dare you do such a shame to me?

The boy (*more boldly*). And how dare the lord do such a shame to us?

The gendarme. What kind of a shame?

The boy. Dancing with such a woman.

The gendarme. What kind of a woman?

The boy. You know best who she is. We don't dance with her.

The gendarme. But I dance with her. You dare not shame me. I am the emperor's servant.

The boy. We all are. And you won't force us to dance.

The gendarme (*softer*). Maybe I will. (*Shouting.*) Jew! Hey, Shloma!

SCENE 12

*The same ones and **Shloma**, followed by **the reeve**.*

Shloma (*with a funnel in his hand*). What do you want, Mr District Gendarme?

The gendarme. A bucket of horilka and half a barrel of beer for the whole community, on me, got it? And now!

One boy. Don't waste your money, sir! We won't drink your horilka or your beer and won't dance with this woman. We have respect neither to you nor to her. You can have what you have, but you can't have us dance with you. If Mr Guvnor forbids us to dance any longer, we'll go away. Hey, boys, girls, let's go home!

The reeve (*stands in the middle*). Hey, hey! What has happened here?

The boy (*bowing*). Nothing, sir. We have danced enough and we are going home noq.

The reeve. Oh, so quickly?

The boy. After all, His Grace the Priest was very strict.

The reeve. You, jester! Will you remind me of that? Tell the one with no eyes and nose, not me. Do you think I'm so stupid that I don't see what's going on here?

The boy. Well, why is sir asking?

The reeve. Shut up, you fool! Boys, shame on you! Mr Gendarme is your guest now, you invited him yourselves – don't be afraid, I saw through the window! And now you're making such a mess of him? Ew, that's not nice.

The boy. Do we have to dance with her?

The reeve. Anna is a good woman! What is wrong with her?

The boy. Her husband is to be hanged, and she's here to dance. Is that what a good woman does?

The reeve. Don't listen, children! It's a lie. Her husband hasn't been on trial yet. We don't know if he's guilty, and no one is hanged without a trial. And if Mr Gendarme does not shy away from leading her to dance, you have no right to behave like that. Well, well, do not snort, but be glad that you are allowed to

have fun. And you, Mr Gendarme, do not resist the children. You see, they don't do it out of malice. Well, musicians, go on, play!

*The musicians play; slowly, sluggishly, the dancing begins. After a while, **the gendarme and Anna** start dancing again. Suddenly, in the middle of a beat, the musician stops, the couples, except for **the gendarme and Anna**, stand frozen.*

SCENE 13

*The same ones, in a moment, **Mykola**.*

*The musicians and some of the dancers see Mykola before he appears on the stage. **The gendarme and Anna** stand back to him.*

The gendarme (*stomping his foot*). The hundred devils! What's this again? Why have you stopped? Hey, musicians! Do you want to...

The musician silently points with his bow.

The gendarme (*turns around, sees Mykola*). Well, what's this?

Mykola (*in a sheepskin coat, with a beard on his face, with a small bundle of his belongings on his shoulders enters and bows to the people*). Glory to Jesus Christ!

All. Glory forever!

Anna (*seeing him, screams*). Oh, my God! I am lost! Mykola!

Mykola (*smiling sadly*). What can I see! My wife is here. That's good. And you are here, Mr Gendarme. Well, I suppose I've interrupted your fun!

The gendarme. Well, how are you doing, Mykola? What happened to you? Did they release you?

Mykola. Yes, thank God, they did.

The gendarme. It makes me very happy. (*Comes up and gives him his hand.*) Do you know who you have to thank for that?

Mykola. How should I know? Would they tell me? They came, opened my cell, told me to get out, and that's all.

The gendarme. You should thank me.

Mykola. You? Why?

The gendarme. Because I finally found the real killer. And not just one, but a whole bunch of them. If not today, I'll arrest them tomorrow. It has cost me a lot of work, that's for sure. There was such a situation that a man almost died himself, but, you see, when I arrested you, I felt sick inside. It seemed to me that you were not guilty and would think that I got you into trouble out of the blue. And I couldn't sleep until I found the trail of the killers.

Mykola (*bowing to him*). May God pay you for all the good, and for the evil... (*Looks reproachfully at Anna.*) May God not remember the evil!

The gendarme (*laughs*). Yeah, evil! I haven't done so much evil to anyone. Maybe someone else has done more evil to me, but I don't remember.

Mykola (*hastily*). Me neither, me neither! God forbid! There is nothing to remember!

The gendarme. I barely dragged your wife out of the house by force, so that she could get some fresh air and show herself among people.

Mykola. Thank you, thank you for taking care of her. I heard there, in that hell, I heard how you looked after her. Thank you! (*Bows.*) Well, Anna, why are you looking so condemned? Why don't you greet me?

Anna. We'll have time to greet each other later. Why do it here, in front of all the people?

Mykola. Really, really. It's a private matter, nothing to show in front of people. Well, let's go home. Stay in the grace of God, good people! (*Bows and starts to go. Anna follows him.*)

The gendarme. Mykola, hey! Wait a minute!

Mykola (*looking around*). What do you want?

The gendarme. Well, don't you want to invite me to your place? After all, today is a festive day, we must celebrate it somehow. Don't think you'll get away with it!

Mykola (*concerned*). Well, if it's your pleasure... To tell the truth, I didn't think...

The gendarme. Have you ever thought about anything in your life!? Others have been thinking for you. Wait, if you don't mind, everything's on me. Hey, Jew!

Shloma (*runs out with empty glasses*). What do you want, sir?

The gendarme. A bottle of horilka, cherry liqueur, whatever else you have, pack it in a basket, and now! I am ready to pay.

Shloma. No, no, I'm not asking anything from Mr District Gendarme. Where should I send it?

The gendarme. To Mykola. Quickly!

Shloma. All right, all right! (*Goes to the tavern.*)

The gendarme (*waving his hat*). Well, people, God bless you! (*Goes away.*)

Nastia (*grumbles after him*). To their doom!

Music. Boys and girls are getting ready to dance again.

The curtain falls.

ACT 4

Mykola's hut.

SCENE 1

Anna *alone.*

Anna (*near the window, coils yarn on the swift and counts threads*). Eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. (*Stops.*) He hasn't been here for seven days. Maybe he'll come today. I'm afraid of him, and I can't live without him. (*Continues coiling.*) Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty. (*Stops, closes her eyes and reflects.*) How terrible! How formidable! And what a strength! It seems that if he wanted to, he could have crushed me and that... my... gabber. He

would pierce us with a single glance. And the more terrible, the more sharply he speaks to me, the more I seem to love him. I tremble all over, and it seems that I drown in him, become a part of him. And then I have no will, no thought, no strength, no reason, nothing. Nothing matters to me then, I'm ready to give everything to him, to disgrace myself when he wants it! Ah! (*Continues coiling.*) Twenty and one, and two, and three, and four. (*Ties a strand.*) And didn't I give him everything, everything that a woman can give to her beloved man? Even my soul, my honour, my good name. I broke my vow for him. I exposed myself to people's laughter. Well, and what?! I don't care! He is everything to me: world, people, honour, and vow. (*Coils.*) One, two, three, four, five, six...

SCENE 2

The gendarme and Anna.

The gendarme (*enters*). Good afternoon, Anna! Are you alone?

Anna (*drops the swift and spindle from her hands*). Ah! Is that you? Where have you been so long? Why did you not come for such a long time?

The gendarme. Where's your husband?

Anna. He's threshing in the barn.

The gendarme. Well, how is he?

Anna. What do you mean?

The gendarme. Doesn't he reproach you, beat you, scold you?

Anna. He? Not a word. He didn't even ask why I didn't visit him in prison. He hangs around the house, and chores as usual.

The gendarme. Well, didn't you start a conversation with him?

Anna. What would I talk to him about? I'm sick of him. He'd be better off rotting away in prison.

The gendarme. Well, do you think he knows about what happened between us?

Anna. Who knows? He didn't even give me a hint.

The gendarme. Well, could the neighbours have told him?

Anna. Maybe, they could. But why should I care? I'm calm now, I'm not afraid of anything, I don't think about anything, I don't know anything, it's only you in my mind. (*She approaches him, timidly.*) Mykhailo, can I hug you?

The gendarme embraces her.

Anna. And kiss you?

They kiss.

You know, earlier I think I'd have died of shame if I had even thought that as a married woman I could kiss another man like that. And now! (*She kisses him passionately.*) My darling! Now I have no anxiety, no shame!

Mykola opens the door, but, seeing that Mykhailo and Anna are kissing, he steps back and slightly locks the door.

The gendarme (*whispering*). It was him.

Anna. Let him be! I'm not afraid of him.

The gendarme. Well, I'm not afraid of anything either. But I don't want to talk to him now. I only came for a moment. I have to go to the reeve to give him a letter, and then I'll come to you for a few hours. Goodbye! (*Picks up the carbine and leaves.*)

Anna. Come! I'll wait for you with dinner! (*Takes up coiling again.*) Yes, he saw us. Well, and if so? If his eyes hadn't come out yet, he must have seen us. If not now, he'd have seen us on Thursday. I'm not going to hide from him. Let him do what he wants with me! (*Counts threads quietly, ties a strand.*)

SCENE 3

Mykola and Anna.

Mykola (*enters with a flail in his hand*). Are you alone, Anna?

Anna. Yes, I am.

Mykola. Has that... gendarme... gone already?

Anna. He went to the reeve, but he said he'd be back in an hour. Did you want to talk to him?

Mykola. Me?.. Well, no... Maybe... a few words... But no! Why would I want to talk to him? You see, a chain broke in the flail, so I came to tie it up. Do you have any rope?

Anna. No, I don't. Here's a strand. Weave it yourself.

Mykola. Yes, I can do that. *(Takes the yarn, drives an awl into the table, forms strings out of the yarn, drools them over and starts weaving. Anna continues coiling, whispering, counting the threads. Mykola in a moment.)* Anna!

Anna. What do you want?

Mykola. So this gendarme, this Mykhailo Hurman...

Anna. Well, what do you want of him?

Mykola. I know you were in love with him when you were a girl... and you still are.

Anna *(stops coiling and looks at him).* Well, and what of that?

Mykola *(dropping his head).* Well, nothing. Am I telling you anything? *(Is silent for a moment, and then begins to cry and bends his head to the table.)*

Anna. So why are you crying? Why are you tearing my heart?

Mykola. Because... because... mine is being torn. *(Stands up and approaches her quickly.)* Anna! Don't you love me even... even a little bit?

Anna. I don't.

Mykola. Have you ever loved me?

Anna. No, I haven't.

Mykola. And cannot you make yourself live with me as earlier?

Anna. No. *(Shakes her head.)* It's gone now.

Mykola *(turns away).* Well, it must be God's will. Lord, why did you take me out of a prison? Why didn't you let me rot there? I thought that there is no worse torment than imprisonment. And when the lords came and told me, "Mykola, you are free, we know you are innocent", my God, my heart almost

burst with great joy. I was asking God for wings to fly home as soon as possible, and then I found such a thing... that my tongue doesn't turn to say it! Such a thing that prison seems like a paradise to me! (*Sobs.*) And for what fault is God punishing me so severely? How have I offended him, how have I angered him?

Anna. Quiet, Mykola, don't cry! And don't blame me. You know very well that it's not my fault either. They forced me to marry you. As long as I could, I was faithful to you, even though I loved another man. But now I have no more strength for it.

Mykola. So what should we do? How should we live?

Anna. Do what your heart tells you to do. Kill me, send me away, keep me, I don't care.

Mykola. Listen, Anna! I understand you. I love you. I feel sorry for you as if you were my own soul. I don't want to be your torturer because I know you've suffered a lot. I only ask you one thing: think about people! Not about me, let me be nothing for you, but about people. So that people do not laugh at us!

Anna. Can I forbid them to laugh? Let them laugh if they find it funny.

Mykola. But still... Don't appear in public... with him. Don't disgrace me. If not, kill me so I don't have to look at it!

Anna. It's not up to me, Mykola. I have one man now – him, as I had you. I'll do what he tells me, and I don't care about anything else. Let it be disgrace; let it be death. I'm not afraid of anything with him. And you do what you want.

Mykola (*clutches his head with his hands*). God, God, she's gone completely mad! She speaks as if in a fever. It's him, the cursed man, who gave her some potion, some magical mixture, he drove her to madness to make fun of me. (*Walks around the hut with an expression of severe pain. Anna continues to coil.*)

SCENE 4

The same ones and the gendarme.

The gendarme (*enters*). Glory to God! Hello, Mykola!

Mykola (*gloomily*). Hello, Mykhailo!

The gendarme (*laughing, slaps him on the shoulder with his palm*). And yet for once you speak to me as to an old friend.

Mykola. It'd be better if we had never known each other.

The gendarme. Why? Ugh, Mykola, you're so frowning! As if I'd stabbed your father.

Mykola. You've made something worse.

The gendarme. Hey, come on, don't talk nonsense! You'd better sit down here! (*Forces him to sit down at the end of the table, puts his carbine and hat on the other end of the table, and then takes out a bottle of horilka out of his bag.*) Look, we'll consult with this fortune teller on how to live in the world. Anna, go find us some glasses!

Anna gets up and puts a shot glass, bread, and cheese on the table.

Mykola. Thank you, I don't drink horilka.

The gendarme. What do you mean you don't drink? What are you talking about, Mykola? You've been drinking for a week, and now you don't drink! That's nonsense! (*Pours.*) To your health, Mykola! (*Drinks.*) Ah!.. Look, I am drinking. (*Pours.*) Here, you drink too! And don't be sad! Cheer up! Let someone else be sad.

Mykola (*takes a shot glass*). I see, there's no other way to deal with you. I wish you'd die, Mykhailo! (*Drinks.*)

The gendarme (*laughs*). Ha, ha, ha! You wish I'd die! That's a good wish for me! Ha, ha, ha! You're a ridiculous man, Mykola, indeed, a ridiculous man! (*Slaps him on the shoulders.*)

Mykola. Well, Mykhailo, everyone gets what he deserves!

The gendarme. So you think I deserve to die?

Mykola. I think it'd be better for me, and for you, and for her. (*Points to Anna.*)

The gendarme. And for her! Oh, we forgot about the lady! (*Pours.*) Well, Anna, drink to your husband's health!

Anna. To your health, Mykhailo! (*Drinks.*)

The gendarme. Ha, ha, ha! You see, Mykola, your wife wishes me a little different thing than you do! Well, let's drink to her health now! (*They drink.*)

Mykola. And your horilka is strong, Mykhailo. Two shots have already hit the head.

The gendarme. Don't offend my horilka! It's only your head that is not strong, that's it! When a man's head is strong, he doesn't feel drunk even after ten shots.

Mykola (*leans his head on his elbow*). Weak head, you mean. You're right! It was dizzy even without your horilka, and now it's even worse. Do you know, Mykhailo, what I'll tell you, just out of friendship, out of good old friendship?

The gendarme. What?

Mykola. Could you stop coming here?

The gendarme. Why? Are you tired of my visits, Mykola?

Mykola. Tired, not tired, but yes. I think it'd be better if you didn't show up anymore.

The gendarme. I can't, my friend, God knows I can't. My job requires that I must go to your place all the time. And besides, my dear, there's one more thing.

Mykola. What is it?

The gendarme. It seems to be a government secret, but I'll tell you this anyway. But first, let's drink! Let all evil go away! (*Pours, they drink.*) So here's the thing, my friend. Allegedly, you've been let out of prison...

Mykola (*wonders*). Allegedly? What do you mean by that?

The gendarme. Well, well, you're taking everything so seriously now, as if you really felt guilty! Eh, Mykola! You feel innocent now, don't you? (*With pressure.*) Your own conscience tells you that you aren't guilty, doesn't it? (*Looks him straight in the eyes.*)

Mykola (*confused, shouting*). I swear by God that it's true!

The gendarme (*mockingly*). Well, well, Mykola! Don't talk like that! Don't show off in front of the gendarme with such words. Because between us, gendarmes, there's such an opinion, brother, that if suspicion falls on someone, and they start to refer to God as a witness, it means that their soul isn't quite pure. Something is wrong with it.

Mykola (*frightened*). So... so... you think that I...?

The gendarme (*laughs and claps him on the shoulders*). Ha, ha, ha! You're a child, Mykola, that's what I think! It's too easy to frighten you. Don't be afraid! The devil is not so black as he is painted. What seems so scary to you now is not so scary either. A man gets used to everything!

Mykola. What are you talking about? I don't quite understand you.

The gendarme. You'll understand, brother, you'll understand when the time comes. And do you know what I'd advise you now?

Mykola. What?

The gendarme. Be calm. Don't make any noise. Live quietly, humbly, as God ordered, and don't care about anything that happens around you.

Mykola. Don't care about anything? Do you think it's possible?

The gendarme. Why not? I guess it is. Believe me, my friend! I've been to a lot of places, I've seen a lot of things. So, I'll tell you this: thousands of people live like you, and don't even ask how it happened, where it came from, who is to blame? Where would a man get so much wisdom to sort it all out? It happened this way, it turned out this way – what can you do? You must take life as it is, you have to live as you can.

Mykola. With a broken heart?

The gendarme. It's not important. Who has it intact?

Mykola. And on the public laughingstock?

The gendarme. Forget the public! What do you want of them? If you laugh at them, they won't laugh at you. They'll come to you later.

Mykola (*thoughtfully*). Well, wise advice. Only, perhaps, it's too tough for my weak head. (*Grabs his head with his hands and begins to sob.*) Oh, too tough, too tough! My head won't stand it!

The gendarme. Don't worry, it'll stand. I'll help you. I'll wring everyone's neck, who'd dare to laugh at you.

Mykola. There'll be many of them.

The gendarme. Don't worry, it's my responsibility! And now, my friend, Mykola, you know what?

Mykola. What?

The gendarme. I see you're very tired. You're sleepy. Go to the barn, and sleep there.

Mykola. And you?

The gendarme. Don't worry about me. I'll get some rest too, and then I'll go home.

Mykola. So, Mykhailo, why don't you go to the barn and sleep there?

The gendarme. Well, well, don't make a scene! Here's your coat (*takes the sheepskin coat from the hanger and puts it on his shoulders*), a pillow and a blanket. (*Pulls the pillow and the blanket from the bed and puts them on him.*) Go! (*Pushes him out of the door. Silence. Mykola's heavy sigh and slow steps are heard behind the stage.*)

SCENE 5

The gendarme and Anna.

The gendarme (*hugs Anna*). Well, now we're alone.

Anna. Quiet! I'm afraid he might do some harm to himself.

The gendarme. Don't be afraid! He's too weak now, too drunk! He'll dive into the straw and fall asleep.

Anna (*leans to him*). Mykhailo, Mykhailo! What will happen to us? Where will it lead? How will it end?

The gendarme. Silly girl! That's what she's worried about! As if anyone in the world knows how it will end and where it will lead! Live and breathe while you live! Are you feeling bad? If you're not, then thank God. When it gets bad, then there'll be time to think about the bad! How will it end?! It won't end with anything. We'll live as long as we can. We'll love as long as we can. We'll laugh at people's faces as long as we can, until we are respected. And then? Then there's only one end: we'll all die and go to hell. That's how it will end if you want to know. (*Hugs her.*)

The curtain falls.

ACT 5

*Mykola's hut. Daytime. The table is pushed back, peasant men and women sit at the table and on the stool, **Babych** and **Nastia** are between them. **Mykola**, drunk, with a glass in his hand, is in the middle of the hut. On the table is a large bottle of horilka, bread and salt.*

SCENE 1

Mykola, Babych, Nastia, peasant men, women

Peasants (*sing "Crane Song" in drunken voices*):

There's a plough in the forest,

Forest, forest, forest, forest (2), forest.

Oh, it ploughed a field (2), the smallest,

Smallest, smallest, smallest, smallest (2), smallest.

Oh, it sowed the seeds (2) of hemp,

Hemp, hemp, hemp, hemp (2), hemp.

There a crane has took (2) a step,

Step, step, step, step (2), step.

Oh, I'll take a stick (2) of beech,

Beech, beech, beech, beech (2), beech.

And his leg I'll break (2) – each,

Each, each, each, each (2), each.

During the last stanzas, the peasants sway, bump shoulders, and nod their heads, looking at Mykola, who stands with his head hanging down and holds a shot glass in his trembling hand. When the singing is over:

Mykola. Well, may God bless you, my friend! (*Drinks.*)

Babych. May God grant you all the good things!

Mykola. No, don't say that! What's good? I don't ask God for anything good. I've suffered enough, I've had enough. (*Pours a shot glass and hands it to Babych.*) Here you go!

Babych. Thank you very much. No, my dear friend, don't anger God! What God gives is not a misfortune. Many times, a man thinks that he doesn't know why a misfortune has come upon him, and then he looks back a day or two later and it has turned out for his good. To your health, neighbour! (*Turns to the other peasant and drinks.*)

The first peasant. May God grant it to you too!

Mykola. Well, don't tell me that. I've already experienced firsthand what kind of good it is. No, dear friends, believe me or not, but it seems to me that Mr God sometimes makes fun of us!

Peasants. Be careful with what you say, friend! It's an insult to God!

Mykola (*waves his hand*). Only one thing keeps me alive – this life-giving liquid! (*Picks up a shot glass, pours it and drinks.*)

Nastia (*near the window to the second woman, nodding her head*). I knew it'd come to this. That woman has neither shame nor heart.

The first woman. Oh, that's for sure. My husband said that he'd talk to the council about flogging her in front of the whole community, so that she doesn't set a bad example.

Nastia. I guess it'd be worth it. They were in church even today. – Fear God! The world has never seen anything like this. She came to the church with a

different guy, and when she stood there, she turned her face not to the icons, not to the holy altar! No! She impiously turned her face to him, to him, whispering prayers. The women beside her stepped back, made a circle around her, as if they were trying to keep away from an infected one, but she seemed to ignore it. She stood during the whole liturgy like that. But not the entire service, because soon “It is Truly Meet” was sung, and the gendarme came out of the church, blinked at her, and she followed him out.

The first woman. Where did they go?

Nastia. Probably to the tavern. They’re both getting drunk in a private booth there. (*Whispers.*)

Babych. Mykola, are you saying that your wife is starving you?

Mykola. Who? Me? When did I say that? Where?

Babych. That’s what I heard.

The first peasant. I heard it too. This rumour is spreading all over the village.

Mykola (*in a drunken rage*). This rumour is a lie! Everyone lies, whoever spreads it further. Who cares about me and my wife?

Nastia. Well, we certainly don’t care. But there’s someone who does.

Mykola. Who cares about what we eat, what we cook, whether we are full or hungry?

Babych. Don’t be angry with me for asking you, my friend. I didn’t ask you out of malice. Because, you see, some people wanted... at the public council...

Mykola. What? What? What? The public council has no right to touch my wife. The council has no right!

Babych. Well, if you’re not offended by her yourself, then sure. Just, you see, people are complaining a lot, saying that she sets a very bad example, pardon me, by going out in public with that gendarme.

Mykola (*grabs his head*). Ow, ow, ow! People! Don’t kill me softly here! Don’t torture me! Don’t bother my heart! Don’t watch after my wife! Drink,

honest and good people, when you come to me, treat yourself and say something cheerful. Otherwise, ugh! It's hard enough for me without your words, and you make it even harder.

Nastia. Oh, my dear friend, don't we know that it's hard for you? (*Drinks.*)

Mykola. Oh, it's hard, my dear, it's hard! (*Pours and drinks.*)

Nastia. But they say she doesn't talk to you at all?

Mykola. What can we talk about? She doesn't talk, and I don't talk. We walk around like oafs all day long. She just keeps looking out the window to see if he's coming. She could at least say a word to me.

Nastia. Oh, you poor man, my dear, poor man! (*Pours and drinks.*)

Mykola. Oh, I'm poor, my dear, terribly poor! (*Pours and drinks.*) Like weeds on the roadway. (*Cries.*)

Nastia. But don't I know that you've been starving many times? And she gives what she cooks to that bastard. I'm your close neighbour, my dear. I know everything, I see everything, even if I don't want to see it. My heart is breaking so much! Indeed, my dear, it is. (*Cries and hugs him.*)

Babych. Well, well, woman, maybe we should go home?

Peasants. Yes, it's time to go.

Mykola. Good people, honest neighbours! Stay a little longer! Don't rush, don't go away! I'm glad to hear a human voice here. Talk to me, treat yourself. Come on, please! Oh, there's a shot! What's the matter? Is the bottle empty? I'll get another one in a minute. I have a barrel hidden in the barn. What should a sinful man do? When such a thing has fallen on my head, what can I do? No work attracts me, and I've lost my desire for life and the household. Ugh, what do I need it for?! I sold the horses, hid the money, and am drinking it away. Let it go! When it's gone, I'll sell something again.

Babych. Oh, my friend, my friend, you're doing the wrong thing! You've taken such an absurd thing too seriously, and you're wasting your property because of such a worthless woman!

Mykola. And what do I need it for? Will I have a normal life? No, I won't, my friend! Everything is gone! I can't be the householder anymore, so let it all go! I'll sell the field, I'll sell the hut, let it go.

Babych. Go on, go on. I'll sell everything, you say. And what will happen then?

Mykola. When will this "then" be? How will this "then" be? It's already "then" for me, my friend. It's all over now. Nothing more will happen. Nothing at all. To hell it all! (*Leaves with a bottle.*)

The first woman. They've completely ruined the man! They've completely confused him!

The second woman. The poor man didn't have much of a brain, and even that has gone.

Nastia. I'd bet that she gave him some kind of potion.

Babych. And most of all, I feel sorry for the household. The man worked hard, all his life, making his eyes pop out of his head, suffered, endured – oh, my God, he suffered a lot! Finally, he got a piece of bread, and he lived, praised God, and hoped for children, and here you are! It's like a fire coming out of the blue.

The first woman. Speak up, my friend, speak up! You say, to hope for children. The problem is that they don't have children. If she had children, she wouldn't have done this. I'll say a word for her as well.

The first peasant. I don't believe it. If a woman is like that, you can't even chain her to the family. And she will leave her children.

The first woman. Don't listen to him, my friend, don't listen, indeed! Children are a great thing. Children are half of a mother. One half might be happy to leave, to allow her to go, but the other half won't let her, it shouts, "And us, mom! What about us?" And it won't let the other half leave.

Mykola (*comes in with a bottle and puts it on the table*). Here it is! Here's our joy! Here's our only consolation. (*Picks up the bottle, shakes it, and puts it*

down again.) It's full, it's enough for us! Come on, honest friends, my pleasant neighbours – God bless us! (*Pours, drinks and everyone drinks in turn.*)

Babych. My friend Mykola, hey, my friend!

Mykola. What?

Babych. I'd tell you something, but I'm afraid you'll get mad at me.

Mykola (*sits down next to him, hugs him around the neck, crying*). Tell me, my friend, tell me! You're my closest neighbour, you're my advisor. Tell me!

Babych. I'm not saying this out of malice, but you, my friend, are too soft, too pliable.

Mykola (*shakes his head and sighs heavily*). Oh, yes, yes, too soft, too pliable.

Babych. And they see that you are like that, and they mistreat you.

Mykola (*grabs his head*). Oh, they mistreat me, they mistreat me! It's hurting my heart! (*Cries.*)

Babych. Quiet, my friend! Don't cry! Don't be a child!

Mykola. Don't be a child? What do you mean?

Babych. You should have treated your wife a little more roughly. You should have shouted at her, threatened her, or even hit her once or twice. You know, a woman loves a whip like a horse, and without it she becomes completely indolent.

Mykola. Oh, she becomes indolent, indeed.

Babych. Well, treat this gendarme the same way. Has he triumphed over you, or what? Show him that you're the man here. Tell him not to come here.

Mykola. Oh, I asked him for this, but he doesn't care, he even laughs.

Babych. You asked him! For God's sake, my friend, who asks for such a thing? It's certain that he won't listen to your asking. You should speak to him sharply!

Mykola. Oh, my dear friend, I'm afraid of him! He's as scary as an executioner.

Babych. Ugh, my friend! You're a mature man after all. Why should you be afraid? He can't do anything to you!

Mykola (*straightens up*). That's right! Why should I be afraid of him?

Babych. Threaten him that you'll go to court to file a complaint that he prevents you from living with your wife.

Mykola. That's right! He has a superior over him too! To file a complaint!

Babych. That he is seducing the whole village, shaming the whole community.

Mykola. Huh, that's going to be a serious punishment for that!

Babych. And what did you think? They'll take him away from here! And you'll deal with your wife later. If only he'd vanish from here.

Mykola. Oh, I'll probably deal with her. After all, you, neighbours, know how kind, sincere, and faithful she was before the evil fate brought him to my house! She looked as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, you know! (*Cries.*)

Nastia. Don't let him in the house, my friend, that's what! Lock the door in his face. Hit his head with a chain. That's what I'd do if I were you!

Mykola. Yes, yes, yes! His head with a chain! His uniform to shreds! Let him complain about me! I already know how to defend myself!

Babych. Call us as witnesses, my friend. We'll testify how they treated you!

Peasants. Yes, yes! We'll all testify! He'll be fired from the service, and you'll get away with it!

Mykola (*jumps up*). All right! I'll do it, I'll take the plunge. Or what, am I not a man, not a householder? Come on, neighbours, let's drink! God will pay you back for your advice. We'll see who's the man here. (*Drinks and treats them in turn.*)

SCENE 2

The same ones. The gendarme and Anna enter.

The gendarme (*a little drunk*). Gee, gee, gee! What's going on here? A celebration, a dinner for friends or a wake?

Mykola. Yes, a wake, a wake.

The gendarme. For whom?

Mykola. For myself. For my honour, for my peace, for my life.

The gendarme (*goes to the table – people part in front of him, he sits down. Anna also sits down near the stove*). Aha, I see you're already a little tongue-tied!

Mykola. What do you mean, 'tongue-tied'? I'm not tongue-tied, I'm telling the truth! You, Mykhailo, have messed up my life, so I can't find the way out.

The gendarme. Well, Mykola, don't talk nonsense, and in front of other people, but rather treat your guest.

Mykola. Oh, you've treated me enough! You don't deserve such a treat from me!

The gendarme (*jumps up and approaches him*). What are you saying? What? What kind of a treat?

Mykola (*spits in his face*). This one, if you want to know.

The gendarme (*punches him in the head*). That's what you get for that!

Mykola falls to the ground. People rush to Mykola, Anna to Mykhailo.

Anna. Mykhailo, calm down. What are you doing?

The gendarme. I'm calm and I'm not doing anything else, but I won't let anyone spit in my face! Don't worry, it won't hurt him. He has 'stars' in front of his eyes, but it'll teach him a lesson. He'll sober up quickly. And I wanted to have a reasonable conversation with him anyway.

Mykola (*struggles to get up, and he is put on the bench*). So this is how you pay me back for my kindness?

The gendarme. Not for kindness, Mykola! Only God will pay back for kindness. I'm paying back for your stupidity. For spitting on the emperor's uniform.

Mykola. I'm not spitting on the emperor's uniform, but on that bastard who dishonours the image of God. Do you know him? Mykhailo Hurman!

Peasants. Yes, yes!

The gendarme (*represses his anger*). You know, dear witnesses, I want to have a word with Mykola. You are not needed here. Why don't you go to hell?

Mykola. No, neighbours! Stay, don't leave! I'm asking you. I invited you here, he has no right to kick you out.

The gendarme (*jumps up and grabs his carbine*). I'm telling you, you bad drunks, get out of here! If you don't leave now, I'll hit you in the chest with my rifle butt. Out!

Peasant men and women leave in a hurry. Some of them cross themselves and spit.

SCENE 3

Mykola, The gendarme, and Anna.

Mykola (*jumps up to him*). How dare you kick my guests out of my house, huh? Did they come to see you? Did they drink your horilka?

The gendarme (*pushes him aside*). Shut up, you fool! Listen to what I'm going to say. Sit down here!

Mykola reluctantly sits down.

Listen, Mykola, what are you actually doing?

Mykola. What do you mean?

The gendarme. Why are you hurting yourself? You've quit your job, neglected your household, sold your horses, and now you're just messing around with drunks and wasting your property? Or is that all right, huh?

Mykola. It's better than leading another man's wife to sin.

The gendarme. Mykola, Mykola, you shouldn't even mention that.

Mykola. Oh, really?! I shouldn't even mention the things that make my heart break and my head explode? Thank you for your kindness. Tell me,

Mykhailo, what should I remember? Whom should I care for? Whom should I work for?

The gendarme. At least for yourself.

Mykola. Don't worry, I do care about myself! I sell, give away, waste and drink away what I don't need, and take only what I need. And there's only one thing I need now – this! (*Shakes the bottle.*)

The gendarme. Ugh, Mykola, be ashamed of yourself!

Mykola. I should be ashamed! Ha, ha, ha! Are you ashamed? Is this worthless woman ashamed of being dragged around the village with you? Are you both ashamed?

The gendarme. You can't bother us.

Mykola (*gets mad*). Who can't? Me? And who are you here? What right do you have to order me around?

The gendarme (*forces him back to his seat*). Well, well, don't be so angry! I'll tell you what right I have. Listen, Mykola! Do you know who I used to be, back in our village?

Mykola. Who? A brawler, a bully.

The gendarme. You're lying, my friend. I used to be an honest young man, maybe a little hot-tempered, hot-headed. But I didn't like offences, I couldn't bear lies, and that was the cause of my unhappiness.

Mykola. There was something more.

The gendarme. You're right. And I'll tell you now what else caused my unhappiness. I fell in love with this poor girl, Anna, an orphan, abused and insulted by her violent brothers. This love was my only, most precious treasure, and it could have made me a good, decent man. And you, Mykola, you stole that only happiness from me by joining those bastards.

Mykola (*gets mad*). Me? I stole it from you... (*Grabs his head.*) Oh, God, what's wrong with me? Is the whole world turning upside down? I'm ashamed,

deprived of honour, peace and respect, destroyed, killed. Do you think I turned out to be a villain?

The gendarme. Don't clutch your head, Mykola! Your conscience tells you that I'm right.

Mykola. No, you're lying. I didn't force her! She was even grateful to me...

The gendarme. You can see her gratitude.

Mykola. You, the enemy, it was you who seduced her, tricked her, charmed her!

The gendarme. You had three years to charm her. Why didn't you do it?

Mykola. Because I'm not a magician, that's why!

The gendarme. Because you have no backbone, you are not a real man, that's why!

Mykola. Who has no backbone? Is it me?

The gendarme. Of course it's you.

Mykola. So I'll show you now how I have no backbone. Get out of the house! (*Grabs him by the shoulders.*)

The gendarme (*pushes him away*). Go and sleep, Mykola! You're a little drunk.

Mykola. Drunk or not, it's none of your concern. Just get out of my house!

The gendarme. I won't give in. I'll stay here if I want to.

Mykola (*gently*). Go away, Mykhailo! Don't make me angry.

The gendarme (*gently*). And don't get angry, my dear, it's not good for you. I'll spend the night here. And tomorrow we'll both go to town.

Mykola. Both? Why?

The gendarme (*takes out a paper and shows it to him*). Look, do you know what kind of document this is?

Mykola. The devils would know, not me!

The gendarme. That's too bad, Mykola! You should know it. It says something about you too.

Mykola. What does it say about me?

The gendarme. An order from the court to bring you in. I still have to give it to the reeve. They reported something about you in court again.

Mykola. Ah. Judas! Are you still trying to intrigue against me? Do you really want to destroy me? You won't get it! (*Pulls the paper out of his hands and tears it to pieces.*) Here, take it, take it, take it!

The gendarme. You fool, what have you done? Do you know what you'll get for this?

Mykola. Not me, but you.

The gendarme. No, you! Here, get one! (*Hits him in the face.*) That's for the deposit! Here, that's one more! (*Swings at him.*)

Mykola (*grabs the carbine*). You get one too! (*Attacks Mykhailo.*)

Anna (*rushes in between them*). Step aside, Mykola!

Mykola (*pushes her away*). You step aside!

The gendarme. Leave him alone, Anna! I'm not afraid of him anyway. (*Grabs the carbine, wants to snatch it from Mykola.*) Let go of it, you fool! Don't joke with it!

Mykola. Here's my joke! (*Drops the carbine, grabs an axe, and stabs it into the gendarme's chest. He falls.*)

Anna. Oh, my God! Are you alright, Mykhailo? (*Rushes to him.*)

The gendarme (*clutching his chest, from which blood is gushing*). Oh, it's all right! Nothing! It's all right.

Anna. There's blood! Blood! You're hurt, Mykhailo, wounded. My dear! Where is the wound?

The gendarme. It's all right, Anna, all right! It was just a joke. It'll hurt a little, and then it'll stop. Come on, Mykola! Why are you trembling? Give me your hand!

Mykola (*throws down the axe*). Oh... oh... is it all right?

The gendarme (*weaker*). Give me your hand! (*Holds out his bloody hand. Mykola gives his.*) Thank you! You've done me a favour, and I'm not angry with you! I wanted to do it myself, but for some reason my hand didn't rise.

Anna. Mykhailo, my sweetheart, tell me, how are you? Where's your wound?

The gendarme. I'm telling you, I'm perfectly fine. I don't even need any medicine! Here are the witnesses! Well, thank God! Thank God!

SCENE 4

The same ones, the reeve, Babych, Nastia, peasants.

The reeve. Hey! What's going on? Who's making all the noise?

Nastia. Oh, my God! The gendarme's been killed.

The reeve. Is he dead? Mykola, Anna! What's going on? Speak up, why are you standing there as if dumbfounded?

The gendarme (*weakly*). Mr Reeve! Leave them alone! They're not guilty! I... I myself...

The reeve. What happened to you? Why did you kill yourself?

The gendarme. It was necessary. That's my concern... Anna! Mykola... Farewell... and forgive me. (*Dies.*)

Anna (*rushing to the corpse*). Mykhailo, my dear Mykhailo! Who are you leaving me with? What am I going to do without you?

Mykola. Anna, calm down. Don't you have someone to live for?

The curtain falls.