

**МАКСИМ
ГОРЬКИЙ**

THE LOWER
DEPTHS

Максим Горький
The Lower Depths

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Maksim Gorky

The Lower Depths / A Drama in Four Acts

INTRODUCTION

De profundis ad te clamavi. In this phrase, with his penchant for epitome, the late James Huneker summarized the masterpiece of Russia's single living master of the drama, Maxim Gorky, as he saw it in Berlin under the German title of "Nachtsyl" or "Night Lodging." "Na Dnye" is the Russian – literally "On the Bottom." Partly because "The Lower Depths" is a more faithful rendering of the original than "Night Lodging" and partly because it implies so vividly the play's keynote as the shrewd Huneker detected it beneath a guise alien to both Russian and English, the title adopted by Laurence Irving for the British version has been preferred for its introduction to American audiences by the company which discovered it and first set it on its stage in Moscow, December 31 (our calendar), 1902.

In "The Lower Depths" more than in any other single play throughout its history, the Moscow Art Theatre concentrates its dramatic ideals and methods, its esthetic theory and practice, and through the production of this play it most emphatically justifies its artistic faith in spiritual or psychological realism as a dramatic medium of expression. The plays of Tchekhoff, of course, serve the same ends, but no single one of them does so quite as richly as does Gorky's masterpiece. At the hands of Stanislavsky and his associates, "The Lower Depths" draws much of its convincing power from its unusual use of and dependence on the channels of expression which are peculiar to the art of the theatre. It is almost wholly independent of drama as literature. Less than any play I know, is it possible to imagine its potential effect in the theatre from a reading of its printed lines. In my book, "The Russian Theatre," I have thus analyzed this factor:

"The Lower Depths' is not so much a matter of utterable line and recountable gesture as it is of the intangible flow of human souls in endlessly shifting contact with one another. Awkward but eloquent pauses and emphases, the scarcely perceptible stress or dulling of word or gesture, the nuances and the shadings of which life is mostly made and by which it reveals its meaning – these, and the instinctive understanding of the vision of the playwright by those who seek to interpret him, are the incalculable and unrecordable channels through which 'The Lower Depths' becomes articulate at the Moscow Art Theatre."

Just as this theatre discovered or, rather, rescued Tchekhoff as a dramatist, so it first stood sponsor for the author of "Foma Gordeyeff" as a playwright. During the first half of the season of 1902-1903, two of his plays were produced – "Smug Citizens" and "The Lower Depths." The latter was recognized at once as a work of supreme merit and moment. Tchekhoff himself had written to its youthful author five months before its première: "I have read your play. It is new and unmistakably fine. The second act is very good, it is the best, the strongest, and when I was reading it, especially the end, I almost danced with joy." At the première, the rival dramatist's verdict was publicly ratified, for Gorky was called before the curtain twenty times, and the press was unanimously enthusiastic. The play has held its place in the repertory of the Moscow Art Theatre ever since, and eight of its most important rôles are still played by those who created them, just two decades ago.

Miss Covan's translation of this play, I believe, deserves particular attention. There have been numerous translations, differing only in the nature of their ineptitude. Here for the first time, the vigor, the virility, the humanity and the humor of the original survive the transfer from the Russian tongue to our own, without mysterious and vaguely symbolic "meanings" gratuitously appended. As nearly as it is possible with printed words to convey the impression which Gorky desires and obtains through the intangible media of the living stage, the following version succeeds. I realized for the

first time, as I read it, that the overwhelming impression of the play at the hands of the Moscow Art Theatre is due as much to the genius of the playwright as to that of his interpreters.

THE EDITOR.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MIKHAIL IVANOFF KOSTILYOFF —*Keeper of a night lodging.*

VASSILISA KARPOVNA —*His wife.*

NATASHA —*Her sister.*

MIEDVIEDIEFF —*Her uncle, a policeman.*

VASKA PEPEL —*A young thief.*

ANDREI MITRITCH KLESHTCH —*A locksmith.*

ANNA —*His wife.*

NASTYA —*A street-walker.*

KVASHNYA —*A vendor of meat-pies.*

BUBNOFF —*A cap-maker.*

THE BARON.

SATINE.

THE ACTOR.

LUKA —*A pilgrim.*

ALYOSHKA —*A shoemaker.*

KRIVOY ZOB } —*Porters.*

THE TARTAR }

NIGHT LODGERS, TRAMPS AND OTHERS.

The action takes place in a Night Lodging and in “The Waste,” an area in its rear

ACT ONE

A cellar resembling a cave. The ceiling, which merges into stone walls, is low and grimy, and the plaster and paint are peeling off. There is a window, high up on the right wall, from which comes the light. The right corner, which constitutes Pepel's room, is partitioned off by thin boards. Close to the corner of this room is Bubnoff's wooden bunk. In the left corner stands a large Russian stove. In the stone wall, left, is a door leading to the kitchen where live Kvashnya, the Baron, and Nastya. Against the wall, between the stove and the door, is a large bed covered with dirty chintz. Bunks line the walls. In the foreground, by the left wall, is a block of wood with a vise and a small anvil fastened to it, and another smaller block of wood somewhat further towards the back. Kleshtch is seated on the smaller block, trying keys into old locks. At his feet are two large bundles of various keys, wired together, also a battered tin samovar, a hammer, and pincers. In the centre are a large table, two benches, and a stool, all of which are of dirty, unpainted wood. Behind the table Kvashnya is busying herself with the samovar. The Baron sits chewing a piece of black bread, and Nastya occupies the stool, leans her elbows on the table, and reads a tattered book. In the bed, behind curtains, Anna lies coughing. Bubnoff is seated on his bunk, attempting to shape a pair of old trousers with the help of an ancient hat shape which he holds between his knees. Scattered about him are pieces of buckram, oilcloth, and rags. Satine, just awakened, lies in his bunk, grunting. On top of the stove, the Actor, invisible to the audience, tosses about and coughs.

It is an early spring morning.

THE BARON. And then?

KVASHNYA. No, my dear, said I, keep away from me with such proposals. I've been through it all, you see – and not for a hundred baked lobsters would I marry again!

BUBNOFF [*to Satine*] What are you grunting about? [*Satine keeps on grunting*]

KVASHNYA. Why should I, said I, a free woman, my own mistress, enter my name into somebody else's passport and sell myself into slavery – no! Why – I wouldn't marry a man even if he were an American prince!

KLESHTCH. You lie!

KVASHNYA. Wha-at?

KLESHTCH. You lie! You're going to marry Abramka..

THE BARON [*snatching the book out of Nastya's hand and reading the title*] "Fatal Love".. [*Laughs*]

NASTYA [*stretching out her hand*] Give it back – give it back! Stop fooling!

[The Baron looks at her and waves the book in the air]

KVASHNYA [*to Kleshtch*] You crimson goat, you – calling me a liar! How dare you be so rude to me?

THE BARON [*hitting Nastya on the head with the book*] Nastya, you little fool!

NASTYA [*reaching for the book*] Give it back!

KLESHTCH. Oh – what a great lady.. but you'll marry Abramka just the same – that's all you're waiting for.

KVASHNYA. Sure! Anything else? You nearly beat your wife to death!

KLESHTCH. Shut up, you old bitch! It's none of your business!

KVASHNYA. Ho-ho! can't stand the truth, can you?

THE BARON. They're off again! Nastya, where are you?

NASTYA [*without lifting her head*] Hey – go away!

ANNA [*putting her head through the curtains*] The day has started. For God's sake, don't row!

KLESHTCH. Whining again!

ANNA. Every blessed day.. let me die in peace, can't you?

BUBNOFF. Noise won't keep you from dying.

KVASHNYA [*walking up to Anna*] Little mother, how did you ever manage to live with this wretch?

ANNA. Leave me alone – get away from me..

KVASHNYA. Well, well! You poor soul.. how's the pain in the chest – any better?

THE BARON. Kvashnya! Time to go to market..

KVASHNYA. We'll go presently. [*To Anna*] Like some hot dumplings?

ANNA. No, thanks. Why should I eat?

KVASHNYA. You must eat. Hot food – good for you! I'll leave you some in a cup. Eat them when you feel like it. Come on, sir! [*To Kleshtch*] You evil spirit! [*Goes into kitchen*]

ANNA [*coughing*] Lord, Lord.

THE BARON [*painfully pushing forward Nastya's head*] Throw it away – little fool!

NASTYA [*muttering*] Leave me alone – I don't bother you.

[The Baron follows Kvashnya, whistling.]

SATINE [*sitting up in his bunk*] Who beat me up yesterday?

BUBNOFF. Does it make any difference who?

SATINE. Suppose they did – but why did they?

BUBNOFF. Were you playing cards?

SATINE. Yes!

BUBNOFF. That's why they beat you.

SATINE. Scoundrels!

THE ACTOR [*raising his head from the top of the stove*] One of these days they'll beat you to death!

SATINE. You're a jackass!

THE ACTOR. Why?

SATINE. Because a man can die only once!

THE ACTOR [*after a silence*] I don't understand —

KLESHTCH. Say! You crawl from that stove – and start cleaning house! Don't play the delicate primrose!

THE ACTOR. None of your business!

KLESHTCH. Wait till Vassilisa comes – she'll show you whose business it is!

THE ACTOR. To hell with Vassilisa! To-day is the Baron's turn to clean... Baron!

[The Baron comes from the kitchen.]

THE BARON. I've no time to clean.. I'm going to market with Kvashnya.

THE ACTOR. That doesn't concern me. Go to the gallows if you like. It's your turn to sweep the floor just the same – I'm not going to do other people's work.

THE BARON. Go to blazes! Nastya will do it. Hey there – fatal love! Wake up! [*Takes the book away from Nastya*]

NASTYA [*getting up*] What do you want? Give it back to me! You scoundrel! And that's a nobleman for you!

THE BARON [*returning the book to her*] Nastya! Sweep the floor for me – will you?

NASTYA [*goes to kitchen*] Not so's you'll notice it!

KVASHNYA [*to the Baron through kitchen door*] Come on – you! They don't need you! Actor! You were asked to do it, and now you go ahead and attend to it – it won't kill you.

THE ACTOR. It's always I.. I don't understand why..

[The Baron comes from the kitchen, across his shoulders a wooden beam from which hang earthen pots covered with rags.]

THE BARON. Heavier than ever!

SATINE. It paid you to be born a Baron, eh?

KVASHNYA [*to Actor*] See to it that you sweep up! [*Crosses to outer door, letting the Baron pass ahead*]

THE ACTOR [*climbing down from the stove*] It's bad for me to inhale dust. [*With pride*] My organism is poisoned with alcohol. [*Sits down on a bunk, meditating*]

SATINE. Organism – organon..

ANNA. Andrei Mitritch..

KLESHTCH. What now?

ANNA. Kvashnya left me some dumplings over there – you eat them!

KLESHTCH [*coming over to her*] And you – don't you want any?

ANNA. No. Why should I eat? You're a workman – you need it.

KLESHTCH. Frightened, are you? Don't be! You'll get all right!

ANNA. Go and eat! It's hard on me... I suppose very soon.

KLESHTCH [*walking away*] Never mind – maybe you'll get well – you can never tell! [*Goes into kitchen*]

THE ACTOR [*loud, as if he had suddenly awakened*] Yesterday the doctor in the hospital said to me: "Your organism," he said, "is entirely poisoned with alcohol."

SATINE [*smiling*] Organon.

THE ACTOR [*stubbornly*] Not organon – organism!

SATINE. Sibylline..

THE ACTOR [*shaking his fist at him*] Nonsense! I'm telling you seriously.. if the organism is poisoned.. that means it's bad for me to sweep the floor – to inhale the dust.

SATINE. Macrobistic.. hah!

BUBNOFF. What are you muttering?

SATINE. Words – and here's another one for you – transcendentalistic.

BUBNOFF. What does it mean?

SATINE. Don't know – I forgot.

BUBNOFF. Then why did you say it?

SATINE. Just so! I'm bored, brother, with human words – all our words. Bored! I've heard each one of them a thousand times surely.

THE ACTOR. In Hamlet they say: "Words, words, words!" It's a good play. I played the gravedigger in it once..

[Kleshtch comes from the kitchen.]

KLESHTCH. Will you start playing with the broom?

THE ACTOR. None of your business. [*Striking his chest*] Ophelia! O – remember me in thy prayers!

[Back stage is heard a dull murmur, cries, and a police whistle. Kleshtch sits down to work, filing screechily.]

SATINE. I love unintelligible, obsolete words. When I was a youngster – and worked as a telegraph operator – I read heaps of books..

BUBNOFF. Were you really a telegrapher?

SATINE. I was. There are some excellent books – and lots of curious words.. Once I was an educated man, do you know?

BUBNOFF. I've heard it a hundred times. Well, so you were! That isn't very important! Me – well – once I was a furrier. I had my own shop – what with dyeing the fur all day long, my arms were yellow up to the elbows, brother. I thought I'd never be able ever to get clean again – that I'd go to my grave, all yellow! But look at my hands now – they're plain dirty – that's what!

SATINE. Well, and what then?

BUBNOFF. That's all!

SATINE. What are you trying to prove?

BUBNOFF. Oh, well – just matching thoughts – no matter how much dye you get on yourself, it all comes off in the end – yes, yes —

SATINE. Oh – my bones ache!

THE ACTOR [*sits, nursing his knees*] Education is all rot. Talent is the thing. I knew an actor – who read his parts by heart, syllable by syllable – but he played heroes in a way that.. why – the whole theatre would rock with ecstasy!

SATINE. Bubnoff, give me five kopecks.

BUBNOFF. I only have two —

THE ACTOR. I say – talent, that's what you need to play heroes. And talent is nothing but faith in yourself, in your own powers —

SATINE. Give me five kopecks and I'll have faith that you're a hero, a crocodile, or a police inspector – Kleshtch, give me five kopecks.

KLESHTCH. Go to hell! All of you!

SATINE. What are you cursing for? I know you haven't a kopeck in the world!

ANNA. Andrei Mitritch – I'm suffocating – I can't breathe —

KLESHTCH. What shall I do?

BUBNOFF. Open the door into the hall.

KLESHTCH. All right. You're sitting on the bunk, I on the floor. You change places with me, and I'll let you open the door. I have a cold as it is.

BUBNOFF [*unconcernedly*] I don't care if you open the door – it's your wife who's asking —

KLESHTCH [*morosely*] I don't care who's asking —

SATINE. My head buzzes – ah – why do people have to hit each other over the heads?

BUBNOFF. They don't only hit you over the head, but over the rest of the body as well. [*Rises*] I must go and buy some thread – our bosses are late to-day – seems as if they've croaked. [*Exit*]

[Anna coughs; Satine is lying down motionless, his hands folded behind his head.]

THE ACTOR [*looks about him morosely, then goes to Anna*] Feeling bad, eh?

ANNA. I'm choking —

THE ACTOR. If you wish, I'll take you into the hallway. Get up, then, come! [*He helps her to rise, wraps some sort of a rag about her shoulders, and supports her toward the hall*] It isn't easy. I'm sick myself – poisoned with alcohol.

[Kostilyoff appears in the doorway.]

KOSTILYOFF. Going for a stroll? What a nice couple – the gallant cavalier and the lady fair!

THE ACTOR. Step aside, you – don't you see that we're invalids?

KOSTILYOFF. Pass on, please! [*Hums a religious tune, glances about him suspiciously, and bends his head to the left as if listening to what is happening in Pepel's room. Kleshtch is jangling his keys and scraping away with his file, and looks askance at the other*] Filing?

KLESHTCH. What?

KOSTILYOFF. I say, are you filing? [*Pause*] What did I want to ask? [*Quick and low*] Hasn't my wife been here?

KLESHTCH. I didn't see her.

KOSTILYOFF [*carefully moving toward Pepel's room*] You take up a whole lot of room for your two rubles a month. The bed – and your bench – yes – you take up five rubles' worth of space, so help me God! I'll have to put another half ruble to your rent —

KLESHTCH. You'll put a noose around my neck and choke me.. you'll croak soon enough, and still all you think of is half rubles —

KOSTILYOFF. Why should I choke you? What would be the use? God be with you – live and prosper! But I'll have to raise you half a ruble – I'll buy oil for the ikon lamp, and my offering will atone for my sins, and for yours as well. You don't think much of your sins – not much! Oh, Andrushka, you're a wicked man! Your wife is dying because of your wickedness – no one loves you, no one respects you – your work is squeaky, jarring on every one.

KLESHTCH [*shouts*] What do you come here for – just to annoy me?

[*Satine grunts loudly.*]

KOSTILYOFF [*with a start*] God, what a noise!

[*The Actor enters.*]

THE ACTOR. I've put her down in the hall and wrapped her up.

KOSTILYOFF. You're a kindly fellow. That's good. Some day you'll be rewarded for it.

THE ACTOR. When?

KOSTILYOFF. In the Beyond, little brother – there all our deeds will be reckoned up.

THE ACTOR. Suppose you reward me right now?

KOSTILYOFF. How can I do that?

THE ACTOR. Wipe out half my debt.

KOSTILYOFF. He-ho! You're always jesting, darling – always poking fun.. can kindness of heart be repaid with gold? Kindliness – it's above all other qualities. But your debt to me – remains a debt. And so you'll have to pay me back. You ought to be kind to me, an old man, without seeking for reward!

THE ACTOR. You're a swindler, old man! [*Goes into kitchen*]

[*Kleshtch rises and goes into the hall.*]

KOSTILYOFF [*to Satine*] See that squeaker – ? He ran away – he doesn't like me!

SATINE. Does anybody like you besides the Devil?

KOSTILYOFF [*laughing*] Oh – you're so quarrelsome! But I like you all – I understand you all, my unfortunate down-trodden, useless brethren.. [*Suddenly, rapidly*] Is Vaska home?

SATINE. See for yourself —

KOSTILYOFF [*goes to the door and knocks*] Vaska!

[*The Actor appears at the kitchen door, chewing something.*]

PEPEL. Who is it?

KOSTILYOFF. It's I – I, Vaska!

PEPEL. What do you want?

KOSTILYOFF [*stepping aside*] Open!

SATINE [*without looking at Kostilyoff*] He'll open – and she's there —

[*The Actor makes a grimace.*]

KOSTILYOFF [*in a low, anxious tone*] Eh? Who's there? What?

SATINE. Speaking to me?

KOSTILYOFF. What did you say?

SATINE. Oh – nothing – I was just talking to myself —

KOSTILYOFF. Take care, brother. Don't carry your joking too far! [*Knocks loudly at door*]

Vassily!

PEPEL [*opening door*] Well? What are you disturbing me for?

KOSTILYOFF [*peering into room*] I – you see —

PEPEL. Did you bring the money?

KOSTILYOFF. I've something to tell you —

PEPEL. Did you bring the money?

KOSTILYOFF. What money? Wait —

PEPEL. Why – the seven rubles for the watch – well?

KOSTILYOFF. What watch, Vaska? Oh, you —

PEPEL. Look here. Yesterday, before witnesses, I sold you a watch for ten rubles, you gave me three – now let me have the other seven. What are you blinking for? You hang around here – you disturb people – and don't seem to know yourself what you're after.

KOSTILYOFF. Sh-sh! Don't be angry, Vaska. The watch – it is —

SATINE. Stolen!

KOSTILYOFF [*sternly*] I do not accept stolen goods – how can you imagine —

PEPEL [*taking him by the shoulder*] What did you disturb me for? What do you want?

KOSTILYOFF. I don't want – anything. I'll go – if you're in such a state —

PEPEL. Be off, and bring the money!

KOSTILYOFF. What ruffians! I – I – [*Exit*]

THE ACTOR. What a farce!

SATINE. That's fine – I like it.

PEPEL. What did he come here for?

SATINE [*laughing*] Don't you understand? He's looking for his wife. Why don't you beat him up once and for all, Vaska?

PEPEL. Why should I let such trash interfere with my life?

SATINE. Show some brains! And then you can marry Vassilisa – and become our boss —

PEPEL. Heavenly bliss! And you'd smash up my household and, because I'm a soft-hearted fool, you'll drink up everything I possess. [*Sits on a bunk*] Old devil – woke me up – I was having such a pleasant dream. I dreamed I was fishing – and I caught an enormous trout – such a trout as you only see in dreams! I was playing him – and I was so afraid the line would snap. I had just got out the gaff – and I thought to myself – in a moment —

SATINE. It wasn't a trout, it was Vassilisa —

THE ACTOR. He caught Vassilisa a long time ago.

PEPEL [*angrily*] You can all go to the devil – and Vassilisa with you —

[Kleshtch comes from the hall.]

KLESHTCH. Devilishly cold!

THE ACTOR. Why didn't you bring Anna back? She'll freeze, out there —

KLESHTCH. Natasha took her into the kitchen —

THE ACTOR. The old man will kick her out —

KLESHTCH [*sitting down to his work*] Well – Natasha will bring her in here —

SATINE. Vassily – give me five kopecks!

THE ACTOR [*to Satine*] Oh, you – always five kopecks – Vassya – give us twenty kopecks —

PEPEL. I'd better give it to them now before they ask for a ruble. Here you are!

SATINE. Gibraltar! There are no kindlier people in the world than thieves!

KLESHTCH [*morosely*] They earn their money easily – they don't work —

SATINE. Many earn it easily, but not many part with it so easily. Work? Make work pleasant – and maybe I'll work too. Yes – maybe. When work's a pleasure, life's, too. When it's toil, then life is a drudge. [*To the Actor*] You, Sardanapalus! Come on!

THE ACTOR. Let's go, Nebuchadnezzar! I'll get as drunk as forty thousand toppers!

[They leave.]

PEPEL [*yawning*] Well, how's your wife?

KLESHTCH. It seems as if soon – [*Pause.*]

PEPEL. Now I look at you – seems to me all that filing and scraping of yours is useless.

KLESHTCH. Well – what else can I do?

PEPEL. Nothing.

KLESHTCH. How can I live?

PEPEL. People manage, somehow.

KLESHTCH. Them? Call them people? Muck and dregs – that's what they are! I'm a workman – I'm ashamed even to look at them. I've slaved since I was a child... D'you think I shan't be able to tear myself away from here? I'll crawl out of here, even if I have to leave my skin behind – but crawl out I will! Just wait.. my wife'll die.. I've lived here six months, and it seems like six years.

PEPEL. Nobody here's any worse off than you.. say what you like.

KLESHTCH. No worse is right. They've neither honor nor conscience.

PEPEL [*indifferently*] What good does it do – honor or conscience? Can you get them on their feet instead of on their uppers – through honor and conscience? Honor and conscience are needed only by those who have power and energy.

BUBNOFF [*coming back*] Oh – I'm frozen.

PEPEL. Bubnoff! Got a conscience?

BUBNOFF. What? A conscience?

PEPEL. Exactly!

BUBNOFF. What do I need a conscience for? I'm not rich.

PEPEL. Just what I said: honor and conscience are for the rich – right! And Kleshtch is upbraiding us because we haven't any!

BUBNOFF. Why – did he want to borrow some of it?

PEPEL. No – he has plenty of his own.

BUBNOFF. Oh – are you selling it? You won't sell much around here. But if you had some old boxes, I'd buy them – on credit.

PEPEL [*didactically*] You're a jackass, Andrushka! On the subject of conscience you ought to hear Satine – or the Baron.

KLESHTCH. I've nothing to talk to them about!

PEPEL. They have more brains than you – even if they're drunkards.

BUBNOFF. He who can be drunk and wise at the same time is doubly blessed.

PEPEL. Satine says every man expects his neighbor to have a conscience, but – you see – it isn't to any one's advantage to have one – that's a fact.

[Natasha enters, followed by Luka who carries a stick in his hand, a bundle on his back, a kettle and a teapot slung from his belt.]

LUKA. How are you, honest folks?

PEPEL [*twisting his mustache*] Aha – Natasha!

BUBNOFF [*to Luka*] I was honest – up to spring before last.

NATASHA. Here's a new lodger.

LUKA. Oh, it's all the same to me. Crooks – I don't mind them, either. For my part there's no bad flea – they're all black – and they all jump – .. Well, dearie, show me where I can stow myself.

NATASHA [*pointing to kitchen door*] Go in there, grand-dad.

LUKA. Thanks, girlie! One place is like another – as long as an old fellow keeps warm, he keeps happy.

PEPEL. What an amusing old codger you brought in, Natasha!

NATASHA. A hanged sight more interesting than you!.. Andrei, your wife's in the kitchen with us – come and fetch her after a while.

KLESHTCH. All right – I will.

NATASHA. And be a little more kind to her – you know she won't last much longer.

KLESHTCH. I know.

NATASHA. Knowing won't do any good – it's terrible – dying – don't you understand?

PEPEL. Well – look at me – I'm not afraid.

NATASHA. Oh – you're a wonder, aren't you?

BUBNOFF [*whistling*] Oh – this thread's rotten.

PEPEL. Honestly, I'm not afraid! I'm ready to die right now. Knife me to the heart – and I'll die without making a sound.. even gladly – from such a pure hand.

NATASHA [*going out*] Spin that yarn for some one else!

BUBNOFF. Oh – that thread is rotten – rotten —

NATASHA [*at hallway door*] Don't forget your wife, Andrei!

KLESHTCH. All right.

PEPEL. She's a wonderful girl!

BUBNOFF. She's all right.

PEPEL. What makes her so curt with me? Anyway – she'll come to no good here.

BUBNOFF. Through you – sure!

PEPEL. Why through me? I feel sorry for her.

BUBNOFF. As the wolf for the lamb!

PEPEL. You lie! I feel very sorry for her.. very.. very sorry! She has a tough life here – I can see that.

KLESHTCH. Just wait till Vassilisa catches you talking to her!

BUBNOFF. Vassilisa? She won't give up so easily what belongs to her – she's a cruel woman!

PEPEL [*stretching himself on the bunk*] You two prophets can go to hell!

KLESHTCH. Just wait – you'll see!

LUKA [*singing in the kitchen*] “In the dark of the night the way is black.”

KLESHTCH. Another one who yelps!

PEPEL. It's dreary! Why do I feel so dreary? You live – and everything seems all right. But suddenly a cold chill goes through you – and then everything gets dreary.

BUBNOFF. Dreary? Hm-hm —

PEPEL. Yes – yes —

LUKA [*sings*] “The way is black.”

PEPEL. Old fellow! Hey there!

LUKA [*looking from kitchen door*] You call me?

PEPEL. Yes. Don't sing!

LUKA [*coming in*] You don't like it?

PEPEL. When people sing well I like it —

LUKA. In other words – I don't sing well?

PEPEL. Evidently!

LUKA. Well, well – and I thought I sang well. That's always the way: a man imagines there's one thing he can do well, and suddenly he finds out that other people don't think so.

PEPEL [*laughs*] That's right.

BUBNOFF. First you say you feel dreary – and then you laugh!

PEPEL. None of your business, raven!

LUKA. Who do they say feels dreary?

PEPEL. I do.

[The Baron enters.]

LUKA. Well, well – out there in the kitchen there's a girl reading and crying! That's so! Her eyes are wet with tears.. I say to her: "What's the matter, darling?" And she says: "It's so sad!" "What's so sad?" say I. "The book!" says she. – And that's how people spend their time. Just because they're bored.

THE BARON. She's a fool!

PEPEL. Have you had tea, Baron?

THE BARON. Yes. Go on!

PEPEL. Well – want me to open a bottle?

THE BARON. Of course. Go on!

PEPEL. Drop on all fours, and bark like a dog!

THE BARON. Fool! What's the matter with you? Are you drunk?

PEPEL. Go on – bark a little! It'll amuse me. You're an aristocrat. You didn't even consider us human formerly, did you?

THE BARON. Go on!

PEPEL. Well – and now I am making you bark like a dog – and you will bark, won't you?

THE BARON. All right. I will. You jackass! What pleasure can you derive from it since I myself know that I have sunk almost lower than you. You should have made me drop on all fours in the days when I was still above you.

BUBNOFF. That's right.

LUKA. I say so, too!

BUBNOFF. What's over, is over. Remain only trivialities. We know no class distinctions here. We've shed all pride and self-respect. Blood and bone – man – just plain man – that's what we are!

LUKA. In other words, we're all equal.. and you, friend, were you really a Baron?

THE BARON. Who are you? A ghost?

LUKA [*laughing*] I've seen counts and princes in my day – this is the first time I meet a baron – and one who's decaying – at that!

PEPEL [*laughing*] Baron, I blush for you!

THE BARON. It's time you knew better, Vassily.

LUKA. Hey-hey – I look at you, brothers – the life you're leading.

BUBNOFF. Such a life! As soon as the sun rises, our voices rise, too – in quarrels!

THE BARON. We've all seen better days – yes! I used to wake up in the morning and drink my coffee in bed – coffee – with cream! Yes —

LUKA. And yet we're all human beings. Pretend all you want to, put on all the airs you wish, but man you were born, and man you must die. And as I watch I see that the wiser people get, the busier they get – and though from bad to worse, they still strive to improve – stubbornly —

THE BARON. Who are you, old fellow? Where do you come from?

LUKA. I?

THE BARON. Are you a tramp?

LUKA. We're all of us tramps – why – I've heard said that the very earth we walk on is nothing but a tramp in the universe.

THE BARON [*severely*] Perhaps. But have you a passport?

LUKA [*after a short pause*] And what are you – a police inspector?

PEPEL [*delighted*] You scored, old fellow! Well, Barosha, you got it this time!

BUBNOFF. Yes – our little aristocrat got his!

THE BARON [*embarrassed*] What's the matter? I was only joking, old man. Why, brother, I haven't a passport, either.

BUBNOFF. You lie!

THE BARON. Oh – well – I have some sort of papers – but they have no value —

LUKA. They're papers just the same – and no papers are any good —

PEPEL. Baron – come on to the saloon with me —

THE BARON. I'm ready. Good-bye, old man – you old scamp —

LUKA. Maybe I am one, brother —

PEPEL [*near doorway*] Come on – come on!

[Leaves, Baron following him quickly.]

LUKA. Was he really once a Baron?

BUBNOFF. Who knows? A gentleman – ? Yes. That much he's even now. Occasionally it sticks out. He never got rid of the habit.

LUKA. Nobility is like small-pox. A man may get over it – but it leaves marks.

BUBNOFF. He's all right all the same – occasionally he kicks – as he did about your passport.

[Alyoshka comes in, slightly drunk, with a concertina in his hand, whistling.]

ALYOSHKA. Hey there, lodgers!

BUBNOFF. What are you yelling for?

ALYOSHKA. Excuse me – I beg your pardon! I'm a well-bred man —

BUBNOFF. On a spree again?

ALYOSHKA. Right you are! A moment ago Medyakin, the precinct captain, threw me out of the police station and said: "Look here – I don't want as much as a smell of you to stay in the streets – d'you hear?" I'm a man of principles, and the boss croaks at me – and what's a boss anyway – pah! – it's all bosh – the boss is a drunkard. I don't make any demands on life. I want nothing – that's all. Offer me one ruble, offer me twenty – it doesn't affect me. [*Nastya comes from the kitchen*] Offer me a million – I won't take it! And to think that I, a respectable man, should be ordered about by a pal of mine – and he a drunkard! I won't have it – I won't!

[Nastya stands in the doorway, shaking her head at Alyoshka.]

LUKA [*good-naturedly*] Well, boy, you're a bit confused —

BUBNOFF. Aren't men fools!

ALYOSHKA [*stretches out on the floor*] Here, eat me up alive – and I don't want anything. I'm a desperate man. Show me one better! Why am I worse than others? There! Medyakin said: "If you show yourself on the streets I smash your face!" And yet I shall go out – I'll go – and stretch out in the middle of the street – let them choke me – I don't want a thing!

NASTYA. Poor fellow – only a boy – and he's already putting on such airs —

ALYOSHKA [*kneeling before her*] Lady! Mademoiselle! *Parlez français* – ? *Prix courant?* I'm on a spree —

NASTYA [*in a loud whisper*] Vassilisa!

VASSILISA [*opens door quickly; to Alyoshka*]

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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