

The Suicide

By

Nicolai Erdman

Adapted by Gyllian Raby and Anna MacAlpine
Thanks to Larisa Brodsky.

Erdman's play was banned in 1932 and was not produced until the late 1970's. It exists in numerous versions, translations and adaptations.

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ACT I

Semyon Podsekalnikov, played by Marcus Schwan. A young unemployed man, recently married, supported by his wife and mother-in-law. Somewhat hypochondriac. *Harlequino*.

Masha Lukianovna, played by Kaitlin Race. A young factory worker, recently married to Semyon and struggling to get by. Matter of fact, hard working, and in love. *Columbina*.

Serafima, played by Cassandra van Wyck. Masha's mother, a survivor; a superstitious woman who believes in miracles. She has no subtlety but indefatigable physical endurance. *The Crone*.

Margarita Ivanovna, played by Justine Benteau. An experienced woman of the world; once beautiful, she is now sexy. Excellent at the restaurant/sleazy bar business. Voice like scotch and cigars; knows her impact. *Francheschina*.

Alexander Petrovich Kalabushkin, played by Derek Ewart. Owner of the fair-ground shooting gallery and assorted business ventures. A cynical, depressive bear of a businessman who cultivates his handsome moustache. *Brighella*.

Yegor Timofeevich, played by Kanthan Annalingam. A Postman and Party member; committed to discipline; 30 something; sensitive, petty and vengeful. *Il Capitano*.

Grusha, played by Rachel Romanoski. A 'server' at Margarita's cafe; young and very poor; her family killed during the war, lucky to be Moscow. *Columbina*.

Natasha, played by Brie Lidstone. A 'server' at Margarita's cafe; a gypsy orphan that Margarita has taken in due to her musical skill and general desperation to earn momey. *Clementina*.

Sonia, played by Nikki Morrison. A young 'server' at Margarita's cafe who also works in the fairground; secret upper middle class bourgeois background; struggles to get by and tries to persuade the other girls to start a cabaret business with her. *Claudia*.

Aristarkh Dominikovich Grand-Skubnik, played by Brent Cairns. Highly educated, 40 something; desperately hoping to retain social privilege while flaunting a superficial revolutionary dedication. His relatives are in prison for joining the "White Russian" forces that fought against the Soviet army. His ragged suit and

(MORE)

coat still show signs of impeccable tailoring; speaks with an Oxford accent.

Kleopatra Maximovna, played by Ioanna Al-Khayed. A striking young woman; leader of the now discredited, Decadents, Romantics and Symbolists' movement. She is the ex-lover of Viktor, who dropped her when politically expedient; determined to get him back.

Father Yelpidy, played by Evan Bawtinheimer. An Orthodox priest concerned about the anti-religious bent of the Revolution. He is sexually repressed, deeply depressed, and addicted to alcohol.

Viktor Viktorovich, played by Evan Mulrooney. A Byronic poet of vast pretension who is desperately trying to survive the stylistic Revolution with as little change as possible.

Raisa Filipovna, played by Karyn Lorence. A New Woman who uses feminist rhetoric to hold on to the advantages gained during the war. More at home bargaining than on the shop floor.

Stepan, played by Sean Rintoul. An odd jobs man who makes a little extra carrying coffins and playing guitar with the gypsy band at Margarita's restaurant. Envious the rich.

Oleg, played by James Lowe. An intern at "Eternity" Funeral parlour. Depressed, cynical. Envious the rich.

Musicians, played by Conor Cooper (tuba) and Anna MacAlpine (clarinet). Uncertain what the Revolutionary regime will mean for traveling people. They play for joy and sadness.

ACT IScene 1

In the darkness a dog barks. Semyon can't sleep.

SEMYON

Masha. Are you sleeping? Masha?

Masha startles into wakefulness.

MASHA

What? !

SEMYON

Shhhh..it's just me. Sorry...

MASHA

Semyon...

Masha returns to an exhausted sleep.

SEMYON

Masha, can I ask you-- are you sleeping Masha?

MASHA

What?

SEMYON

Did we eat all the sausage?

(Pause)

That baloney sausage?

MASHA

Did you look?

SEMYON

It's cold. I thought /you'd remember.

MASHA

You wake me in the middle of the night for *baloney* sausage?

SEMYON

I'm hungry.

MASHA

Go to sleep!

*She turns from him. He sighs. They try to settle.
After a moment:*

MASHA

You've killed something in me with that sausage, Semyon. Every day I get up in the freezing dark and walk to the factory. Twelve hours of mind-numbing, back-breaking work-- and after I get home and eat and fall into bed exhausted, what d'you do? Semyon...? Are you sleeping?

(A snore. A slow fury ignites in Masha.)

Semyon!

SEMYON

(waking with a start)

What? !

MASHA

I said: let me sleep!

SEMYON

(puzzled)

But/ Masha ?--

MASHA

But no, you've got to wake me for baloney sausage.

SEMYON

(suddenly alert)

Oh! Is there any left?

MASHA

Yes, yes!-- because **you didn't eat it at supper!**

SEMYON

I wasn't hungry at supper.

MASHA

That's **why** you're hungry now.

SEMYON

I couldn't eat.

MASHA

Mother and I go out of our way to put food on the table my darling/ your *favourite* food...

SEMYON

Exactly, that's the reason I can't eat/ exactly--

MASHA

We put more food on your plate than on our own--

SEMYON

You torment me.

MASHA

What?!

SEMYON

How can I eat with the two of you watching me like I'm some sort of parasite, starving you mouthful by mouthful? I've no job and no money, as your mother helpfully reminds me twenty times a day, so I don't buy the food --but I still get just as hungry, and you pile my plate high to torment me.

MASHA

Now is **not** the time/ for this.

Semyon lights a lamp by the bed.

SEMYON

Every meal is torment! I try not to eat, but then in the middle of the night when I'm alone in bed with you, dreaming and drooling about sausage--you crucify me /with guilt.

MASHA

I *crucify* you??

SEMYON

In your way/ yes--

MASHA

Oh climb down from the cross!

She is getting out of bed.

One order of baloney coming right up!

SEMYON

--with your *psychology* ...

MASHA,

Which would you prefer, white bread or brown?

SEMYON

Makes no difference because--

MASHA

Or cake? Baloney on cake?

SEMYON

--I'm not going to eat it.

MASHA

Oh ho, you're going to eat it my friend.

Masha heads to the kitchen .

SEMYON

Can't you see what you're doing?

She exits.

SEMYON

Your psychology is killing me. 'Counselor, is Semyon Podeskalknikov a man or a maggot?' After careful consideration, the jury concludes: he's/ a--

Masha returns with a half-eaten BALONEY sausage and a crust of bread.

MASHA

Maggot! Dinner is served my lord maggot.

SEMYON

Not hungry.

MASHA

You'll eat this if /I have to

SEMOYON

Please/

MASHA

--stuff it down your /throat.

SEMYON

Let go woman/ you're going to--

MASHA

Eat! Eat your face off /you lazy--

SEMYON

Argh!

They struggle over the plate and it goes flying with a crash. The dog outside barks. In their respective rooms off, Yegor and Serafima stir.

YEGOR

Keep it quiet down there! /Workers are sleeping!

SERAFIMA

(calling)

Masha--?

They stop as if the Yegor is the House Authority.

SEMYON

(lowering his voice angrily)

(MORE)

SEMYON (cont'd)

You think you can boss me around because you wear the pants in this house. All right, this hallway. And it's killing me.

MASHA

You're just hungry Semyon.

SEMYON

(a decision)

Look. I'm going to show you.

Semyon sits on the edge of the bed, throwing off his blankets. He crosses his legs. He hits his knee with the side of his hand. His right arm jerks up in a reflex action and drops to hit his face. Repeat to show it isn't a freak occurrence.

It never used to happen.

MASHA

Maybe you could get a job at a circus--

SEMYON

I wasn't going to tell you because--

MASHA

--a *traveling* circus, preferably...

SEMYON

(forgets to lower his voice)

I'm falling apart Masha!

MASHA

(forgets to lower her voice)

You're falling apart? You're falling apart?

SEMYON

I thought you'd care!

MASHA

I can't go on.

SEMYON

What do you mean?

MASHA

This is no way to live...

SEMYON

You mean you want to be set free. 'Get rid of Semyon'. Which would you prefer: I cut my throat or hang myself?

MASHA

Lord God spare me!

SEMYON

If you had three wishes, the first would be: "Semyon dies!"!

MASHA

May be!- right at this moment--

SEMYON

"I'd do better without Semyon, get rid of him"...

MASHA

It's hard to disagree.

Semyon blows out the lamp. Pause.

SEMYON

Bitch.

MASHA

Baloney!

As Masha yells, they pound each other with pillows. Above, Yegor sticks his head out of his apartment in his disheveled sleeping gown. He blows a whistle.

YEGOR

Keep it quiet down there! Quiet!

They stop as if the School Principal has spoken.

SEMYON

Good bye Masha. I hope you'll be very happy.

Pause. Then three girls with a bottle of vodka burst out of Alexander's room, next to Yegor's.

SONIA

(giggling)

Goodnight comrades! If you're bored, come join us!

YEGOR

Quiet! Quiet!

{NATASHA

You keep it quiet!

{GRUSHA

Party at Sonia's!

YEGOR

I work in three hours!

MASHA

I work in two.

GRUSHA

We're working now my da-a-rling.

YEGOR

Precisely! I'll report you to the housing committee Kalabushkin! And I'll report you Podsekalnikovs for conjugal activities in the hallway!

The girls clatter down the stairs and leer at Masha in her bed.

MASHA

This is my bedroom.

The girls exit still mocking Yegor; he slams his door. Quiet reigns.

MASHA

Semyon? I can't sleep angry...Are you...? Why did you say goodbye instead of goodnight?...Semyon?

Masha feels her way through the darkness as Serafima, Masha's mother enters.

Listen, whatever I said, I didn't mean it...where are you? I'm sorry my darling...

SERAFIMA

(whisper)

Masha?

MASHA

Mother! What are you doing here?

SERAFIMA

You know I never interfere Masha, but the walls are --well,there are no walls-- What's the matter?

MASHA

Semyon was hungry.

SERAFIMA

What'd he do /now?

MASHA

Nothing! I can't find him.

SERAFIMA

(addresses the dark room)

Well done, comrade hero-- you've made your wife cry/
you useless worm--.

MASHA

(tearfully)

I'm not! Mother!

SERAFIMA

--come out and face her!

Silence.

MASHA

Where are you? Senyechka...??Say something...

Silence. Serafima baits Semyon

SERAFIMA

Oh well, he's dropped dead.

MASHA

Merciful God, he's gone to kill himself. Mother! Find
the lamp.

*Masha feels around in the darkness. Serafima drops
to her knees and gropes about.*

Semyon, please. I didn't mean it. Talk to me for God's
sake.

There's a loud crack

SERAFIMA

Ow!

MASHA

What was that?

SERAFIMA

(controlled)

The chair, Masha, my head against the chair.

MASHA

Good! The lamp's there; quickly, light it!

Serafima lights the lamp. Masha looks around.

MASHA

He's gone.

SERAFIMA

Gone where at this time of night?

MASHA

I think he's gone to kill himself.

SERAFIMA

Lord help us.

MASHA

He said I was killing him, I laughed and now he's gone to do it himself!

SERAFIMA

It's a nightmare.

MASHA

I've got to find him. Where's my skirt?

SERAFIMA

Here are his pants./Allelujah!

MASHA

I don't need his pants Mother (she realises) Oh /you mean --

SERAFIMA

Would any self-respecting Russian man leave the house without pants--?

MASHA

Then he must be--?

SERAFIMA

In the bathroom--

MASHA

Opening a vein!

Masha takes the lamp from Serafima, runs for the bathroom.

SERAFIMA

Dear God, a suicide in the family.

Masha runs up the stairs which lead up to the next landing, on which there are doors to the bathroom and Alexander's room. The stairs continue up to Yegor's attic. Masha tries the bathroom door-- it's locked.

MASHA

Semyon, open the door. Open up, come on. Talk to me !

Below, Serafima lights another lamp under an icon.

SERAFIMA

Help us blessed mothers of Uutivan, of Vatapad, of Kupiatist, of Novo-nikito, speak to my son-in-law...

MASHA

(calling down)

He's locked the door

SERAFIMA

What's he say? /(murmurs) Holy Virgin of Vydropus, of Smolensk..

MASHA

Nothing. He won't answer. What if he's dead already?

SERAFIMA

I'll kill him. /(murmurs) Dear Virgin of Pskov..

MASHA

I'm going to wake Alexander Kalabushkin.

SERAFIMA

You can't! He buried his mother last week--

MASHA

He runs the "Test Your Strength" booth at the fairground-- he can break the door down.

SERAFIMA

-- he's in mourning. /(murmurs) Mother of Sviagorsk, / of Abalata-Znamenie, Blessed Virgin of Kazan...

MASHA

Then he'll understand compassion. I can't do it myself, I need a man.

Masha goes to Alexander's door and knocks. The lazzo of unintended sexual innuendo.

SERAFIMA

-- let Alexander Kalabushkin teach my son in law a lesson/ let his muscles ripple in his little white shirt as he seizes the cowering Semyon Semyonovitch ...

SERAFIMA continues murmuring under the scene at the door: 'let him black his eye oh Mother of Ibirsk, break both his legs Saint Sarah of Pimenov, make him crawl oh Virgin of Camargue...'

MASHA

Alexander Kalabushkin, it's me, Maria Lukianovna. I need a man, I need you, help me!

ALEXANDER (OFF)

Take a cold shower Comrade!

MASHA

Please, I'm only a woman, what can I do? I need your strong arms --right now, right now!

MARGARITA

Alexander and I are sitting here in deep mourning/Where's your sense of decency?

ALEXANDER

Grieving! We're grieving!

Masha knocks harder.

MASHA

I'm desperate for a strong man/--please, please Alexander Kalabushkin/--

MARGARITA

Desperate!?

Masha knocks harder.

MASHA

--I'm at the end of my rope! I have to break down the door!

MARGARITA

Break down the door! You ladies man...

Suddenly Masha doesn't know what to do.

MASHA

Wha--? Not this door- I'm a married woman! I'm--

The door opens to reveal Margarita in a sleazy kimono, awry, with an unlit cigarette.

MARGARITA

Aren't we all?

MASHA

I need Comrade Kalabushkin/ quickly, quickly.

ALEXANDER

But Sweetheart, what about your husband?

MASHA

He's locked himself in the bathroom, he's trying to kill himself.

ALEXANDER

Why didn't you say--?

He speeds past Margarita to the bathroom door. Masha follows. The lazzo of mistaking the hidden listener.

MARGARITA

The bathroom?

SERAFIMA

No pants.

ALEXANDER

(knocking)

Hey pal; are you all right in there?

Pause. Casual:
What ya doin' ?

MARGARITA

So: knock it down.

ALEXANDER

Shh ...

MASHA

What's he waiting for?

SERAFIMA

A shot.

Alexander recoils

ALEXANDER

He's got a gun?

SERAFIMA

We don't know.

MASHA

Should we call the police?

MARGARITA AND ALEXANDER

No police.

ALEXANDER

Say something sweet to him, and while he's distracted I'll- (He mimes.)

MASHA

Darling it's me, Masha. I love you!

Alexander prepares himself to break down the door. He slowly approaches it followed by Masha, Serafima, and Margarita.

Suddenly, a chain flushes and the door flies open. Yegor Timofeevich comes flying out in his sleepwear. He sees them and scowls.

YEGOR

Can't a constipated comrade take a dump in the night without the whole building taking notes?

He retrieves his newspaper, stomps up to the attic

MASHA

I'm sorry, comrade!

(to Serafima)

It's your fault, you said he was in the toilet. He must have gone outside!

SERAFIMA

Without his pants? Here, comrades, are his very pants.

MARGARITA

Did you check the kitchen?

MASHA

The kitchen!

Masha runs out; Alexander and Margarita follow but Alexander holds her back.

ALEXANDER

Go home.

MARGARITA

Charming.

ALEXANDER

This is none of your business.

A sound like a gun crack. Serafima screams. Alexander speaks to Serafima then Margarita.

Wait! Go!

He exits like a bat out of hell towards the sound.

SERAFIMA

Mother of God, he shot himself.

MARGARITA

None of my business.

Margarita loiters.

SERAFIMA

I saw a lot of death in the war--

MARGARITA

I was smart, stayed home.

SERAFIMA

--but this is shameful.

MARGARITA

Shame is stupid.

SERAFIMA

Too smart is stupid.

Enter Alexander, pulling the struggling Semyon by the feet.

SEMYON

Masha! / Let me go Alexander Kalabushkin!?

SERAFIMA

Ha! Dragged like the rat he is!

ALEXANDER

(to Serafima)

Your daughter's on the kitchen floor.

Serafima and Margarita are horrified.

MARGARITA

What did you do?

SEMYON

She ran into the cupboard door.

Serafima and Margarita exit to the kitchen. Lazzo of sexual misunderstanding.

SEMYON

Masha's hurt--! Why are you--? Get your hand out of my pocket!

Alexander immobilises Semyon.

ALEXANDER

I'm your friend Semyon!

SEMYON

But... Masha's my wife.

Alexander immobilises Semyon again.

ALEXANDER

But I am your Friend.

SEMYOPN

What are you doing? Let go of me!

ALEXANDER

Listen to me!

SEMYON

But Masha--!

Alexander adjusts his hold on Semyon

ALEXANDER

Masha wants you to listen. Pretend I'm her and I'll give you a tax free cigar.

SEMYON

Talk fast...

Alexander releases Semyon from his wrestling hold and gives him a cigar.

ALEXANDER

Think of how you are loved, Semyon, how you are needed!

SEMYON

Well I...Alexander, this is.../ I do! But--

ALEXANDER

No no, I'm asking you, as a friend--

SEMYON

--a neighbour--

ALEXANDER

--as a **dear friend**, Semyon Semyonovich, to really listen...

SEMYON

I'll listen.

ALEXANDER

It's so hard... (Semyon nods, concerned) I'm going to say something... meaningful.

SEMYON

All right.

Lazzo of the inverted persuasion.

ALEXANDER

Look at this world. This...beautiful world.

Alexander indicates the apartment, the grey dawn.
Life is a wonderful gift, Semyon.

SEMYON

Mm hmm...

ALEXANDER

A miracle, full of wonder.

SEMYON

If you say so.

ALEXANDER

Here you are, at the revolutionary dawn of a brave new age. Age of industry and the working man. Age of the electrical machine and business opportunity--

SEMYON

Age of being cut off for unpaid bills.

ALEXANDER

God, I know! It's like the Dark Ages! Did I tell you I stood in line every day, for three weeks to get them to get them to change that bill? It was their mistake, but naturally, it's the small businessman who suffers. Cigar trade: they all want a cut!--and I ask myself: "is it worth it? Is this all there is?"

SEMYON

I know.

ALEXANDER

Some bureaucrat in a heated office hitting me with this regulation and that regulation: "your shooting gallery needs a license"; "you can't travel without a permit"; "Mr. Kalabushkin, where's your identity card?". I go from desk to desk, fill out form after form and, as the line stretches into eternity, I realize I'm going to die waiting to live.

SEMYON

I know.

Alexander pulls himself back.

ALEXANDER

But life is beautiful, comrade. I read it in *Pravda*, the state newspaper/ and...

SEMYON

And *Pravda* will retract it soon.

ALEXANDER

Ha ha. You think too much.

SEMYON

I'm unemployed.

ALEXANDER

Tough.

SEMYON

I know men with two jobs. Why's there no work for me?

ALEXANDER

You gotta make your own work pal.

SEMYON

Amazing! The same thought hit me when you were dragging me across the floor: "Make Your Own Work"! And that exact moment, my fingers touched this booklet propping up the kitchen table! It's... like destiny.

ALEXANDER

What is ?

SEMYON

This manual for playing the tuba.

ALEXANDER

The tuba.

SEMYON

Look: you can learn in only twenty lessons.

ALEXANDER

(reading)

'For the first time I, Theodor Hugo Schultz, celebrated master of music, share my knowledge with the masses.'

SEMYON

Twenty concerts a month at five rubles a shot, plus tips -

ALEXANDER

That's a lot of cash.

SEMYON

I've got the will, I've got the time, I've got the manual; all I need is the tuba.

ALEXANDER

So, with this tuba-destiny, life's worth living?

SEMYON

Yes.

ALEXANDER

Then you do agree that life *is* worth living?

SEMYON

Yes.

ALEXANDER

Right pal, give me the gun.

SEMYON

What gun?

ALEXANDER

The gun you were putting in your mouth when I came into the kitchen.

SEMYON

You're kidding me.

ALEXANDER

You were going to shoot yourself.

SEMYON

Why?

Lazzo of the unthinking betrayal of dangerous secrets.

ALEXANDER

Oh come on, that mother-in-law for one thing. How d'you stand it? And living off Masha? Watching her work; seeing her trapped and old before her time - you must feel terrible.

SEMYON

How d'you know all this??

ALEXANDER

Masha.

Semyon turns away.

ALEXANDER

Now come on, Semyon. Life is beautiful.

SEMYON

Give up.

ALEXANDER

Give me the gun first.

SEMYON

You're crazy! Where'd I get a gun?

AJEXANDER

Panfidich traded his razor for one at Borzov's.

SEMYON

Borzov's round the corner?

AJEXANDER

Yeah. No license of course. But if you're just using it the once, why would you care?

Semyon suddenly starts rummaging through his belongings.

What're you doing?

Semyon finds a razor and holds it aloft

SEMYON

My father's razor. Swedish steel.

Semyon threatens Alexander with the razor

ALEXANDER

Semyon, I beg you: think how life is--

SEMYON

Beautiful! You showed me the light Alexander, thank you! By the way-- here's my gun.

Semyon tosses the baloney sausage at Alexander, then exits out of the window.

ALEXANDER

If you wake Borzov at this hour, he'll murder you!

SEMYON

(off)

Saves me the job!

Pause. Alexander chuckles.

ALEXANDER

He 's a joker.

He takes a bite of the baloney. Serafima and Margarita enter, with the semi-conscious Masha.

SERAFIMA

Don't drag her, she's not a sack.

MARGARITA

She's a dead-weight.

SERAFIMA

Get her thighs.

MARGARITA

I've got her thighs.

ALEXANDER

Ladies. Let me.

Alexander lifts Masha and places her on the bed. She's going to have a big lump on her head.

She stirs.

SERAFIMA

She needs air. Unbutton her--

Alexander grins and flexes his fingers.

MARGARITA AND SERAFIMA

I'll do it.

MASHA

Semyon? Is he dead?

ALEXANDER

Not yet. But I have to tell you, he's quite determined.

MASHA

Where is he?

ALEXANDER

Gone into the night.

SERAFIMA

With no pants.

ALEXANDER

And a razor.

MASHA

It's my fault. It's all my fault.

SERAFIMA

(to Alexander))

Call the police.

MARGARITA AND ALEXANDER

No Police!

SERAFIMA

They'd sort him/ out.

MARGARITA

What, sentence him to life?

SERAFIMA

(rolling her eyes)

Smart is stupid...

MASHA

What should I do? What can I do?!

ALEXANDER

Get him a tuba.

MASHA

A what?

ALEXANDER

A tuba.

MARGARITA

It's a musical instrument, like a trumpet but bigger.

MASHA

He wants a *tuba*?

ALEXANDER

A tuba is...destiny. A tuba would make him a man.

MARGARITA

How?

ALEXANDER

He'd... play for money.

MASHA

How much do these 'tubas' cost?

MARGARITA

About five hundred rubles.

MASHA

If we had five hundred rubles...! Mother, the world's upside down!

ALEXANDER

It's a big investment.

MARGARITA

I've got a tuba.

SERAFIMA

Who are you?

MARGARITA

No names.

ALEXANDER

This is Margarita Ivanovna.

SERAFIMA

Holy saints protect us--

MARGARITA

Thanks. Now my husband finds out.

SERAFIMA

(to Margarita)

--You run that stinking eatery next to the fair. It used to be a decent place but I've heard /what you've done with it--

MARGARITA

Yes, I've made it successful.

SERAFIMA

Successful! Ha! Diseased party girls /and gypsies, adultery and lice--

MASHA

Mother!/ Shh...

SERAFIMA

--and drunken soldiers dancing...

MARGARITA

And instruments for the Soviet trio "Tsigane"-- including a tuba.

MASHA

Margarita Ivanovna - Would you take pity on a desperate wife and her poor old mother and let us borrow a tuba?

MARGARITA

Hm. I do need someone to clean the toilets. Especially the mens'.

SERAFIMA

You think you can scare ,me? I clean where no one dares. /Days in the hospital, nights in the abattoir...

MASHA

Oh thank you! She'll do it! /Thank you!

MARGARITA

The tuba's yours. Come get it.

Margarita turns to exit.

ALEXANDER

Are we finished 'mourning', Margarita?

MARGARITA

You are such a very sad man!
(Alexander shrugs expansively)
Men are a burden, always.

Margarita exits with Masha and Alexander.

SERAFIMA

(calling after them)

Wait! What if he comes back before you do? What do I say?

ALEXANDER

Cheer him up. Tell him some jokes.

Masha, Alexander and Marguerita exit

SERAFIMA

I don't know any jokes.

Serafima is alone. She hugs Semyon's pants fearfully. Semyon re-enters through the window and she hides in panic. He takes a package out of his pocket and unwraps it: Serafima sees a gun. He loads it with bullets then takes up pen and paper.

SEMYON

(writing)

'In the event of my death-'

Serafima finds a hole in the pants and laughs wiggling her finger through it. Lazzo of the inappropriate mother-in-law and her awful laugh.

SERAFIMA

Semyon look, it's funny!

SEMYON

I'm looking.

SERAFIMA

Your pants have a hole!

SEMYON

Yes. Can I have some time alone please?

SERAFIMA

I've got a joke.

SEMYON

Please?

SERAFIMA

No no, you'll die laughing, you'll-- There were these Fritzes, during the war, foreigners, you know --

SEMYON

What about them?

SERAFIMA

And they ate a Bowser alive. Ha ha, imagine...

SEMYON

They what?

SERAFIMA

A Bowser is a dog, Semyon.

SEMYON

They ate a live dog?

SERAFIMA

People don't do that.

SEMYON

So?

SERAFIMA

So those Germans gobbled it up! Oh--

Semyon crumples a sheet of paper and starts over.

SEMYON

Sera/fima--

SERAFIMA

--You'll like this one--

SEMYON

--go away.

SERAFIMA

During war-time we had a prisoner in our village jail: not a word of Russian; little tiny guy-- and of course, he was shell-shocked. His head shook all the time like this.

Serafima demonstrates the head shaking. Semyon clenches his teeth.

SEMYON

I'm busy!

SERAFIMA

It was so comical! So, one night, we all went to the jail with bread and meat jelly, saying "are you hungry?" Well, of course he was starving-- but his head's going like this from side to side like he's saying "no, not hungry, no".

SEMYON

That's horrible!

Semyon crumples a sheet of paper and starts over.

SERAFIMA

..."Are you sure?"; "No no no"/ "Shall we leave the food here?"; "No!"...

Serafima roars with laughter.

SEMYON

For pity's sake! Will you shut / up?

Semyon starts throwing crumpled paper at her. Serafima goes up to the bathroom. She stops.

SERAFIMA

Did you hear the one about Alexander the Great and the Jews?

SEMYON

Get out! OUT!!

Serafima exits. Semyon returns to his letter. Reads.

'In the event of my death, no one is to blame. Signed, Semyon Semyonovich Podsekalknikov.'

Semyon puts the gun to his temple and closes his eyes. He lowers it. He puts the gun in his mouth and closes his eyes. He lowers it. He puts the gun to his heart. He rocks with despair. In the distance we hear a mournful tuba. As he listens other instruments join in until a fast uplifting number accelerates. Musicians of the gypsy band march on stage to deliver the tuba to Semyon.

Act Two

In the Podeskalnikov hallway. Semyon sits on a stool, holding the tuba, the manual open in front of him. Masha and Serafima hover anxiously.

SEMYON

'Chapter one. How to play. The tuba is played with three fingers. Put the first finger on the first valve, the second finger on the second valve and the third finger on the third valve.'

He looks up, holding his position.
How's this?

MASHA

(encouraging)
Good!

SEMYON

'Upon blowing into the mouthpiece, the note "B" is obtained.'

Semyon blows. He blows again. Nothing.
It's not working. Why isn't it working?

*Masha crosses her fingers behind her back.
Serafima prays. The lazzo of the pretentious musician.*

SEMYON

Wait, the next chapter is 'How To Blow.'

MASHA

You look like a natural. You hold that tuba so well!

SEMYON

'In order to blow properly, I, Theodor Hugo Schultz, internationally renowned Concert Tubist, suggest this simple and economical method. 'Tear off a little piece of yesterday's newspaper and place it on the tongue.'

Serafima and Masha look about.

MASHA

Newspaper... Newspaper...

SERAFIMA

(wickedly) Yegor Timofeevich left his Pravda in the-

SEMYON

Tear off a piece. Smaller! D' you want to choke me? Put it on my tongue.

Masha does so. Semyon mumbles unintelligibly.

MASHA

Sorry?

More unintelligible mumbling. Masha looks blank. Semyon spits out the paper, irritated.

SEMYON

Read the next instruction, please.

Semyon puts another piece of paper in his mouth.

MASHA

'Tear off a piece of "Pravda" and place it on the tongue.'

SEMYON

Uhhhhh...

MASHA

'Then spit the paper on the floor. While spitting, memorise the position of your mouth then blow just like you spit.'

Semyon prepares himself. He spits. Without moving his mouth, he puts it over the mouthpiece. He blows. Nothing.

MASHA

Dear God in Heaven, if you exist, let him make a sound...

Semyon blows. The tuba emits a loud honk.

SERAFIMA

(to Masha)
See? Solid proof.

SEMYON

Masha, hand in your notice. Your working days are over.

Masha embraces him.

(MORE)

SEMYON (cont'd)

Twenty concerts a month at five rubles each plus tips.
In gross earnings per year, that's ...

MASHA

That's one thousand three hundred rubles !

SERAFIMA

But... you will learn to play it?

SEMYON

Are you deaf?

He blows the instrument again...loudly.A strangled yell from Yegor, above.

MASHA

It's beautiful! You're brilliant!

SEMYON

Just think, just think Mashenka, how good it'll be! Me, home from my continental tour, loaded down with cash. You, reclining on our Indian settee in a silken evening gown. I'll say, ', ,have the painters finished upstairs?' and you'll say--

MASHA

'Yes,Senyechka the nursery is ready.'

Semyon and Masha gaze at one another in love. A family tableau.

SERAFIMA

Oh, the nursery!

SEMYON

And you'll say, "here's your eggnog, son in law, in your own silver goblet"

SERAFIMA

Maybe learn to play it first.

SEMYON

Listen to the music, woman!

He blows another bellowing note. Yegor appears above.

YEGOR

What the-- You're not playing that in here!

(Semyon blows.)

Over my dead body!

(Semyon laughs then blows again.)

(MORE)

YEGOR (cont'd)
I'll fill in a form about you !

Yegor exits. Semyon blows an almost melody; the women applaud.

SERAFIMA
Now play a tune.

SEMYON
Peace, Serafima. Focus, please. Art is in progress.
(he reads.)
'Scales. The scale is the umbilical cord of music. Once you have mastered the scale, you are a musician.'

MASHA
Play the scale, Senyechka.

Semyon reads:

SEMYON
'In order to conquer the scale, I, Theodor Hugo Schultz, internationally renowned Concert Tubist, suggest the following method. Go out and buy yourself a an inexpensive pi-... '
(He turns the page.)
'ano.'

SERAFIMA AND MASHA
A piano!

SEMYON
That can't be right.
(Reads)
'Buy yourself an inexpensive pi- ...
(Checks to see if pages are stuck)
ano. See appendix for more information about the piano'

MASHA
The appendix, there.

SEMYON
(reads)
'Play the scale on your piano and then repeat it on your tuba.'

MASHA
How are we going to buy a piano?

SERAFIMA
Oh no.

SEMYON

Theodor Hugo Schultz you are a rat. You're a swindling cheat and a bastard. May you and your scales rot in everlasting hell!

Semyon is raging with grief; he throws the manual.

SERAFIMA

You can't trust anyone these days.

SEMYON

This tuba was my destiny!

SERAFIMA

It sounded like stomach cramps.

SEMYON

How will we live? This is the end, the end!

Masha is trying to comfort him.

MASHA

We'll manage.

SERAFIMA

We always manage.

MASHA

We've still got my wages.

SERAFIMA

And we've never counted on you anyway.

SEMYON

Exactly! Exactly!

*Semyon tears up the manual and kicks the stool.
Serafima quickly moves the tuba to safety.*

SERAFIMA

Help me with my second job, cleaning toilets.

SEMYON

Line up the toilets, give me a rag! No wait, why don't you just piss on me directly!

He picks up a small cup to throw.

MASHA

Don't break that.

SEMYON

We'll buy you another.

MASHA

We can't.

SEMYON

We'll manage somehow!

They fight for the cup. Semyon smashes it.

SERAFIMA

You wicked man.

MASHA

It was a wedding gift.

SEMYON

I wish that was my skull.

MASHA

It was the only one left...

SEMYON

You were better off before you married me.

MASHA

We don't need anything to sit on do we? We'll manage!

Masha breaks the stool and looks around for something else. Semyon is really worried.

SEMYON

Don't...Stop it. Leave me Masha! Get out while you still can.

SERAFIMA

'Get out' he says...

Alexander enters, then wishes he hadn't.

MASHA

You dare tell me to 'get out'? And mother, who cleans toilets so you can have your tuba, you want her to 'get out' too? If you died, Semyon, if you died, we are the only people in the whole world who would weep by your grave and...this is no way to live....

Pause. Semyon and Masha stare at each other.

SERAFIMA

Are you leaving him?

Delicately and awkwardly, Alexander navigates the space between them.

MASHA

Do you want me to ?

SEMYON

It's up to you.

MASHA

But you say you'd rather kill yourself than live with me.

Pause. Semyon is silent. Alexander exits.

MASHA

I give up.

Serafima escorts Masha to the kitchen.

SERAFIMA

There's work back at the village, digging turnips, don't you worry...

SEMYON

Where are you going?

MASHA

I don't know...

The women exit. Semyon is alone.

SEMYON

Let her go. Set her free. One less flea in the flea pit.

(He takes out his letter and gun.)

Count to ten and the torment's over.

He puts the gun to his temple and closes his eyes. Alexander enters, leading Aristarkh Dominikovich Grand-Skubik.

SEMYON

One, two, three...

ARISTARKH

I can't thank you enough

SEMYON

Four, five...

ALEXANDER

The small fee we talked about -?

SEMYON

Six...

ARISTARKH

Of course.

SEMYON

Seven ...

ARISTARKH

Here you are.

SEMYON

Eight, nine...

ALEXANDER

Go on.

Alexander exits.Pause.

SEMYON

Nine and a half...

ARISTARKH

(calling)

Comrade! Good day.

(Semyon jumps. He hides the gun.)

Pardon me, did I interrupt? If you're in the middle of something, please continue.

SEMYON

That's all right, thank you sir.

ARISTARKH

Oh, don't call me 'sir'. Here we are, two revolutionary comrades, thinking men, no difference whatsoever between us.

(Semyon smiles nervously.)

Except that you are very likely the Semyon Podsekalnikov who has decided to kill himself.

SEMYON

Yes. No! I mean, I'm not him.

(Aristarkh picks up Semyon's discarded note from the table.)

If you're looking for an unlicensed firearm, sir, I don't have such a thing, especially to kill myself.

ARISTARKH

Curious!

(reads)

'In the event of my death, no one is to blame.' This seems to be a suicide note. And of course, you've signed it, haven't you?

SEMYON

Yes.

ARISTARKH

Comrade, I'm here to help you.

SEMYON

How?

ARISTARKH

For a start, this note will never do.

SEMYON

What's wrong with it?

ARISTARKH

Think, Semyon, think. What is wrong with this note?

SEMYON

Er-

ARISTARKH

"No one is to blame?!" *Of course* someone's to blame! My dear boy, you are so right to take leave of your life. It's not worth living; of course it's not; it must be simply horrifying. And someone *is* to blame. I cannot name them but, as a dead man, you can do so. Semyon, tell me fearlessly, who do you blame?

SEMYON

Theodor Hugo Schultz.

ARISTARKH

Schultz. I don't know him personally-- is he a Comintern man?

(he shudders)

I think they're all to blame; We thinkers have been silenced-- silenced like white slaves in the proletariat's harem... Thus, as an *intellectual*, you want to die quid pro quo don't you? Speaking for the truth?

SEMYON

Yes.

ARISTARKH

And what is the truth?

Semyon shrugs.

ARISTARKH

Think, think Semyon! The controls, the financing, the systemic corruption, the rationing, the grinding unemployment, and your social despair. Are these things your creation? Are they your destiny? No, they result from particular political and economical machinations. And who is necessary to save Mother Russia from these machinations?

SEMYON

Intellectuals...?

ARISTARKH

Bravo! Bravo Semyon; I see intelligence shining in your eyes. I know you want to die a meaningful, heroic death, admired by nation and family...

SEMYON

It does sound good.

ARISTARKH

Then act quickly. Tear up this worthless note and write another. Accuse them, blame them, speak your heart.

SEMYON

Blame the intellectuals.

ARISTARKH

No! - defend us! Defend! And perhaps end by asking:
why a loyal citizen like
(he gives a small bow)
Aristarkh Dominikovich Grande-Skubnik has not been
employed in the construction of soviet socialism?

SEMYON

You're unemployed like me?

ARISTARKH

Not quite like you. But Semyon, when you have revised your note, I will personally ensure that it will be read across Russia.

SEMYON

Why would Russia read my note?

ARISTARKH

Because of your sacrifice!

SEMYON

That simple?

ARISTARKH

Your name--a slogan!Your head-- a brass bust. Your picture on every front page! The elite of our nation,the Intelligentsia, will gather at your coffin, comrade.We will drown your hearse in flowers and elegant horses with white pom poms will bear you to the cemetery.

SEMYON

White pom poms?

ARISTARKH

I would enjoy such a death myself only, alas, I'm needed alive.

SEMYON

My life will have meant something.

ARISTARKH

Permit me to embrace you... You are a true Intellectual,and my equal. I didn't cry when my mother died. My poor mother. But now... now...

(Aristarkh weeps. Semyon comforts him.)

I will return in one hour for your note.

Aristarkh exits.

SEMYON

I'll write the truth and the whole truth and find enough blame to fill the Volga and cover all the land! Where's paper? I need more paper!

(Serafima and Masha enter in coats)

Masha I need -- are you going out?

MASHA

Why would you care?

SEMYON

If you are, could you bring me back some paper?

MASHA

Get it yourself!

They exit. Semyon shouts after them.

SEMYON

It's not just the Comintern oppressing me, it's you!

(The door slams.)

She'll be so sorry when I'm dead; she'll be jostling the intelligentsia for a look /at my grave...

Alexander appears at the window with Kleopatra Maximovna.

ALEXANDER

Psst...Semyon -

SEMYON

Comrade! Have you got any paper?

ALEXANDER

No. Got someone who wants to meet you.

Alexander heaves and Kleopatra appears. The lazzo of romantic hypnotism.

KLEOPATRA

Hello...Are you Semyon?

Pause. Semyon is gazing at her. Alexander struggles to hold her up as she poses.

SEMYON

Oui...

KLEOPATRA

Excuse my clandestine arrival...

ALEXANDER

Kiki, clandestine is extra.

Kleopatra reluctantly pays more. Alexander winks at Semyon and goes.

KLEOPATRA

I'm Kleopatra Maximovna.Kiki. I know all about you.So tragic and so brave. I beg you; on my knees I implore you: do not throw away your beautiful life.

SEMYON

(modest)

Oh...

KLEOPATRA

We are so similar, Comrade Potsen--Pidsuk--

SEMYON

Podsekalnikov, Semyon.

KLEOPATRA

So similar, I'm inspired to ask an intimate favour.

SEMYON

Please.

KLEOPATRA

You are a man of great soul. Most men look at me and they just see a face, they see Kleopatra Maximovna; face, face, face, and when they pursue me they just want my body, they want to take my body and make love to it as if my body was just a body alone without a thinking, feeling soul-- but Semyon, you are not like that, are you?

SEMYON

No. No, definitely.

KLEOPATRA

My mother was a gypsy. She went mad; I'm not ashamed. I grew up wild, slender as a birch tree, free as the wind... All my life, I've searched for the man who would understand my soul and now I think I've found him, found him in you, but it's too late - you are to die in this cruel way./ You are to kill yourself.

SEMYON

Yes... But maybe not yet...

Yegor emerges from his room and watches the scene.

KLEOPATRA

Look in my eyes. Take my hands. Love is agony.

SEMYON

Yes...

KLEOPATRA

Can you feel it? Beating here?

SEMYON

Yes.

KLEOPATRA

Even in our time, when love is despised, trampled by the poets with their formalist nonsense, it beats! Don't kiss me- .

SEMYON

Sorry--

KLEOPATRA

--I ask this small favour: kill yourself for the one woman who understands the love in your soul. Kill yourself for Kleopatra: for Kiki and for love. Lovers will sob upon your grave. We will carry your coffin draped with flowers...

SEMYON

--and white pom poms?

KLEOPATRA

Yes! Love! Will you promise yourself to me?

SEMYON

I'm sort of committed -

KLEOPATRA

We are both in chains. Write about it. Write how you feel...

Kleopatra is giving him little kisses on the face

SEMYON

But um--

KLEOPATRA

Say you die for despair that you will never be worthy of me. Then Viktor Viktorivich will dump her, because he will see me for what I am, because he is an aesthete while she is a bitch.

SEMYON

Who?

KLEOPATRA

Raisa Filipovna. She wants his body, only his body, while I adore his soul... Defend the soul, M'sieur Pister--Pidstip--

SEMYON

--Podsekalnikov--

KLEOPATRA

--and you'll never be forgotten.

Masha calls from downstairs.

MASHA

Semyon? Semyon!

SEMYON

I thought she'd gone to work.

KLEOPATRA

What is it?

SEMYON

Oh God-- Quick - It's my--

Semyon wants Kleo to hide but there isn't time. Lazzo of hiding the girlfriend from the other girlfriend.

MASHA

Semyon--? I--

SEMYON

(to Kleopatra as he guides her to Alexander's room.)

My Cook.

MASHA

What?

SEMYON

'Cook' me some soup. And an egnog.

MASHA

Who do you think you are?

KLEOPATRA

She's so rude!

SEMYON

Please?

MASHA

I was about to buy a train ticket but Mother said, "give him another chance" --

SEMYON

She sometimes brings her mother, a vicious hag; quick, hide in here...

MASHA

Who is that?

KLEOPATRA

Defy her with our love. Kiss me...

Semyon tries to indicate to Masha that he doesn't know why Kiki is kissing him. He pushes Kleopatra into the room and holds the door shut. Masha is aghast. Through the following Kiki is trying to get through the door as Semyon holds it shut.

MASHA

I'm going away now Semyon.

SEMYON

Masha...

MASHA

Would you pass me my coat... Yegor?

YEGOR

Yes, Yes!

(Yegor races to get Masha's coat. She walks to the door. He holds the coat out for her.)

I'm giving your wife her coat, comrade.

MASHA

Goodbye, Yegor.

KLEOPATRA

Semyon...!

SEMYON

No --wait Masha--

YEGOR

Maria Lukianovna, you are so lovely, I always view you from the Marxist point of view, which is to say as drab and sexless. But when you gaze at me as you do now - you are so bright, I shut my eyes to breathe.

Masha kisses Yegor's cheek. She leaves. He follows.

SEMYON

Masha--Kiki look-- Masha--please Kiki-- Masha wait--
WAIT, Masha, WAIT!

Lazzo of the revolving door when Masha brushes past Father Yelpidy and Serafima who are entering. Kleopatra knocks on the door. Semyon gives Kleopatra a flying shove to the back of Alexander's room and slams the door.

MASHA

(off))

I hate you !

SEMYON

No...

Semyon pursues Masha but the lazzo continues as Yelpidy grabs his arm and swings him around. Kleopatra escapes and takes a few steps down the stairs; seeing Yelpidy she runs back to hide.

YELPIDY

Slow down my boy! HARLOT! The devil won't get you while I'm here. In paris eat fillets and spirits of platypus.

SEMYON

Let /go of me. Masha--!

SERAFIMA

Hold him tight Father Yelpidy! (to Semyon) This is your last chance. Masha--?

(momentarily she wonders where is Masha)

-- demands you listen to the Holy Father.

SEMYON

Will she come back if I do?

SERAFIMA

If you repent.

Semyon waivers then decides to stay.

YELPIDY

You are contemplating a mortal sin!

SERAFIMA

He doesn't even believe in God.

YELPIDY

Well God believes in you, boy... unless you despair.

SEMYON

(gritting his teeth)

Does Masha *need* me to do this?

YELPIDY

When you despair, it's too late. You're on the slimy, slippery slope to hell.

SEMYON

Yes.

SERAFIMA

Watch your language.

YELPIDY

Hell. Devoured by flesh eating insects while frying in tar and always, out of your straining reach, cool lakes of glacial vodka. Poison frogs infect your glands; ears ring with demon sounds. Doleo! Scalds and blisters. Morsus Doleo! Ulcerated bursts...thirsts... terrible, afflicting pain...

SERAFIMA

Isn't there any more helpful advice, Father?

YELPIDY

Not for a godforsaken suicide.

(suddenly inspired.)

Unless-- Will you be writing a note, boy?

Alexander appears at the window.

ALEXANDER

Aha!

SEMYON

Yes.

YELPIDY

Will you be mentioning despair?

SEMYON

Maybe.

YELPIDY

Then tell the people how you despaired in God.

(Yelpidy perambulates, forking Alexander
some cash on his way)

Describe how I, Father Yelpidy, came to save you from
damnation, how you laughed and pushed me away, but no
sooner were you dead, than you realized your mistake.

Serafima starts to guide Yelpidy away.

SERAFIMA

Yes Father, he'll take some time to think about it...

YELPIDY

You promised tea.

SERAFIMA

And a little something to help it down...?

*They exit to the kitchen. Alexander heads up to
his room. Yegor enters.*

SEMYON

Stop Alexander, she's in your room!

Whistling, Alexander goes in.

YEGOR

Who is?

*Kleopatra squeals. Yegor smiles with malice. Semyon
dithers about whether to fetch Kleopatra.*

YEGOR

You see? Precisely, I-- tell me about commas.

SEMYON

Commas? Well--

YEGOR

Punctuation.

(stands at attention;reads)

"Pravda. Comrade Editor. Scientists have proved there are spots on the sun. Just such a spot in sexual matters is Alexander Kalabushkin. The keeper of the shooting gallery is a counter-revolutionary who spends his nights in orgies his anti-Soviet eroticism flagrantly revealed. Signed, thirty-five thousand postmen."

SEMYON

Thirty-five thousand postmen!

YEGOR

It's my pen name.

Alexander opens his door and steps out with a box of contraband cigars, laughing with Kiki who remains offstage.

ALEXANDER

No no, thank you, Comrade!

Yegor challenges him. The lazzo of unknowing self-incrimination.

YEGOR

In "a counter revolutionary who spends his nights in orgies his anti-Soviet eroticism fully revealed", where is the comma?

ALEXANDER

After 'orgies'-- of course my poor Yegor.

SEMYON

Yegor-

YEGOR

(to Semyon)

Comrade, honest workers are slaves to these educated classes. If you're going to kill yourself, do it for the Proletariat.

SEMYON

Alexander-

ALEXANDER

Hey! You talk to him, you come through me-- got that?

Waving his letter triumphantly, Yegor exits through the window.

SEMYON

Alexander, the counter revolutionary?

ALEXANDER

Yes?

SEMYON

Is you.

ALEXANDER

Bring him back! You're fast Semyon run! My life's on the line!

Alexander dashes upstairs to hide his contraband; Semyon pursues Yegor. Father Yelpidy enters from the kitchen to see Semyon leap through the window. Viktor and Raisa enter. Lazzo of the embarrassing social greeting.

YELPIDY

Harlots!

VIKTOR

(to Yelpidy)

Comrade Podsekalknikov. An honour more in the breach than the observance.

YELPIDY

Wrong sinner!

Yelpidy slugs from his flask. Viktor and Raisa sit nervously. Aristarkh enters.

VIKTOR

Comrade Podsekalknikov.

ARISTARKH

Wrong today sir; wise tomorrow.

Aristarkh lounges. They eye one another.

VIKTOR

Where is Podsekalknikov?

Voices are heard in Alexander's room

KLEOPATRA

(to Alexander)
Monster...You stink like a hound!

VIKTOR

Ah--Comrade Podsekal--
(Kleopatra emerges)
Kiki.

KLEOPATRA

Viktor.

RAISA

(explodes)
I want my money back! Kalabushkin, did I give you five rubles for a meeting with that slut?

ARISTARKH

I also paid five rubles!

YELPIDY

And I!

VIKTOR

How is Kiki involved in this?

ALEXANDER

She's leaving.

RAISA

You promised him to us-- and now *she* has him?

YELPIDY

He 's promised to the Church!

VIKTOR

Where is Podsekalnikov?

KLEOPATRA

Viktor--!

RAISA

He believes in the New Soviet Woman Kiki, you're over!

ARISTARKH

I demand to know what I paid for!

ALEXANDER

You paid for an opportunity comrade, like everyone else.

RAISA

It's a *lottery*?

ALEXANDER

All clients pay for access to the suicidal man.
I'll present him with your various notes but,
obviously, I can't predict which one he'll choose.

ARISTARKH

I can. He'll shoot himself on behalf of the
intelligentsia.

KLEOPATRA

He'll shoot himself for love!

RAISA

Kah! For Women in the Work-place!

VIKTOR

What about Poetry? / What about Art?!

Raisa comforts Viktor.

YELPIDY

His lost soul might save ten thousand!

VIKTOR

Where the hell *is* Podsekalnikov?

Margarita enters with a depressed Semyon.

MARGARITA

He's here. I found him at the train station.

SEMYON

I couldn't catch Yegor Timofeevich. And Masha's gone .

ALEXANDER

All right, everybody. No more meetings. Go home.

*Kleopatra throws her arms around Alexander. Under
Margarita's gaze he is uncomfortable.*

KLEOPATRA

Remember: my note first. Adieu...

She leaves. Semyon sits, head down.

ARISTARKH

Might we know the time of death, Semyon Semyonovich?

MARGARITA
What?

SEMYON
The time?

ARISTARKH
Would tonight at midnight suit you? To--

VIKTOR
Shuffle off this mortal coil.

MARGARITA
If it's his last night he should have a party.

RAISA
Good idea!
(to Semyon)
Would you like that?

SEMYON
A party...

MARGARITA
Your new friends will pay for it. Right?

They all look at one another and agree.

RAISA
My Dressmakers' Soviet will outfit you. They'll love it!
And Viktor will write your obituary. He's very good.

VIKTOR
From fall of light to stroke of midnight.

ARISTARKH
Midnight it is then. (he salutes) Comrade.

*At a nod from Alexander, Raisa and Viktor follow
Aristarkh out. Semyon is dazed.*

SEMYON
I want a reason for living. But I can't find it alive.

MARGARITA
Shame on you Kalabushkin.
(Alexander goes into his room.)
Listen, maybe there's no reason to go on but there's no
reason not to. Something turns up. We manage.

*Margarita kisses Semyon. Yegor enters; he's
astonished.*

YEGOR

How do you do it?

MARGARITA

(to Yegor) Have you no shame? Give him some privacy!

YEGOR

It's a public hallway!

Yegor runs from Margarita; she calls upstairs.

MARGARITA

Alexander Kalabushkin, you're a promiscuous goat and a heartless opportunist. But, since you're grieving for your mother, I expect you at my restaurant in ten minutes.

Margarita exits.

SEMYON

At the stroke of twelve there's a chasm... Between the tick and the tock I'll be gone. 'Counselor, What is on the tick side?' 'Everything'. 'And on the tock?' 'Nothing'. Tick-- I am still with myself, my wife, the sun and the water. This I understand. Then tock...

(He stops. Alexander enters with a pile of notes.)

What's this?

ALEXANDER

Causes. You make the choice; I make the profit. I mean, I know it's all to get your wife to settle down, right pal? You'd never... (he mimes)

Semyon evades, shuffles through the papers, reads.

SEMYON

'Dearest Comrade'... 'To the hero of our Revolution'... ha, like I'm someone who makes things tick...

ALEXANDER

Uh--my mother, comrade. I've got some grieving to do...

Alexander follows Margarita off. Semyon thinks.

SEMYON

Tick: A human being is a cage and the poor soul is bored to death in this cage. Tock: the soul flies out and cries 'Hosanna!', it cries, 'Hosanna' ... And God says, "what soul are you?". "A beggar and a crazy fool". "Have you suffered?" "Yes I've suffered". "Then go have a good time!"...and the soul begins to dance, to dance and dance, and sing...

Distant music is heard as the scene transforms around Semyon and, as night falls, he is singing at Margarita's restaurant...

ACT THREEAt Margerita's restaurant

Night. Guests have assembled including:

Margarita, Grusha, Sonia, Natasha, Alexander, Aristarkh, Kleopatra watching Victor and Raisa, and Father Yelpidy. It's a messy party and Serafima cleans up after everybody.

Three Musicians play in a gypsy/klesmer style. Semyon is in his undershirt, about to limbo dance under a broom held by Grusha and Oleg; Sonia pours vodka into his open mouth, Natasha holds back-up glasses on the back of an overturned guitar. Lamp light with huge shadows. Oleg introduces the drinking song "Start Wearing Purple".

OLEG

'To us has come our very own Semyon':

ALL

(singing)

Semyon Semyon drink up Semyon/ Semyon Semyon drink up
now/Your sanity and wits they will all vanish, I
promise/ it's just a matter of time!

SEMYON

(limbo dancing with a glass on his
forehead, singing)

And you can start wearing purple wearing purple!/Start
wearing purple for me now/ a purple a purple little
lady is perfect / for dirty no-good Russian clown/Ya ya
ya...

GRUSHA

Bravo!

SEMYON

(standing momentarily as all applaud
him) What's the time Grusha?

GRUSHA

Vodka time!

Refills all round

MARGARITA

Don't think, drink!

VIKTOR

(conducting the band)

Chorus!

ALL

Start wearing purple wearing purple...

Semyon seizes the broomstick to balance it on his nose. The guests cheer wildly.

ARISTARKH

Honour and glory to you dear Semyon!

Kleopatra embraces Semyon to show Viktor

KLEOPATRA

What a man! Such passion!

VIKTOR

Glory and honour to you Comrade Podsekalnikov!

ALEXANDER

(drunk)

You're the man of the hour / Semyon!

ARISTARKH

Our hero! The government will surely stretch out its hand--

RAISA

Who needs the government? During the war Soviet women ran this country--the working women who struggle now for jobs!

VIKTOR

Friends; Russians; Comrades. We come to bury Semyon and to praise him!

RAISA

Semyon Semyonivitch, leader in our struggle!

All raise the toast.

SEMYON

Follow the leader!

Music. Raisa and Viktor embrace, then follow Alexander and Aristarkh wildly chasing Semyon

MARGERITA

Sonia! Open another case!

SONIA

That's three cases...

MARGERITA

Mark down twelve rubles.

SERAFIMA

Father, how does all this sinning make my son-in-law more saintly?

MARGARITA

Number three toilet--needs unblocking. Shoo...

YELPIDY

(to Grusha and Raisa)

Did you hear the one about Pushkin and the bath-house?

RAISA

Pushkin, the poet--?

YELPIDY

Followed a whore to the bath-house/ heh heh heh

GRUSHA

Windy chinks and peepholes--

NATASHA

(as Pushkin) "I can see you Comrade!"

KLEOPATRA

I don't like smut;/excuse me.

YELPIDY

Yes you do, all the little girls/like it.

GRUSHA

(toasts)

Smutty working girls!

RAISA

Do you vote "yes" to smutty girls comrades?

VIKTOR, SEMYON AND ALL

Yes!

*Raisa toasts laughing heartily; Aristarkh sulks;
Kiki is put out. The music ends. Semyon gives the
musicians money.*

SEMYON

You must have a hell of a piano to play like that. It's an honour having you at my... at my ...here:take this.

(To Serafima as they start another tune)

(MORE)

SEMYON (cont'd)

Oh, I wish Masha was here.

SERAFIMA

Such a fine party and you don't let her enjoy it.

SEMYON

(sings to the tune of 'Kalinka')
 Mashenka! Mashenka! Mashenka my dear--
 (the mood saddens and continues as
 underscore)
 ...What's the time?

*The lazzo of the serious speech and the vulgar
 joke that use the same words.*

ARISTARKH

Comrades! This young man is leaving us for a better
 place!

SONIA

That's any place not this place.

ARISTARKH

No, even further away!

Music underscore continues.

VICTOR

That undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler
 returns.

Yelpidy continues his joke

YELPIDY

So Pushkin whips off his pants--

ARISTARKH

His death will have an impact on every Russian.

YELPIDY

--and tells her "behold"--

ARISTARKH

Semyon Semyonovich will be /the...

music underscore continues ever more romantic...

YELPIDY

--the prick of conscience!/Hee hee hee hee!

ARISTARKH

--Men will rise to your example Semyon./The gates of the Kremlin/ will be thrown open--

RAISA

And women!

SEMYON

The Kremlin?

ARISTARKH

--and the worker will offer his hand to the intelligentsia!

KLEOPATRA

for love!/--

VICTOR

-and the worker will offer his hands to the poet of Russia--

KLEOPATRA

--for love!

RAISA

--and the poets of Russia will vow to fight for--

KLEOPATRA

love--

Raisa silences Kleopatra

RAISA

--equal pay for Soviet women!

MARGARITA

Music!

ARISTARKH

I didn't weep when my mother died...not a tear comrades, but now...

Music breaks into a fast number under the toast. Kleopatra bites Raisa; they square off for a confrontation. Natasha and Oleg distract them.Semyon dances.

ALEXANDER

(to Margarita)

What a business!

NATASHA

Here's to Semyon Semyonovitch!

VIKTOR

Courtier, soldier, /scholar

{ARISTARKH

--Scholar;

OLEG

Long life!

Everything stops.

ARISTARKH

Well...

ALEXANDER

Speech! Speech!

KLEOPATRA

Speech!

Pause. Semyon stands alone.

SEMYON

What time is it?

ARISTARKH

Ten to midnight.

MARGARITA

But our clock is always fast.

GRUSHA

We have fourteen beats in the bar.

NATASHA AND GRUSHA

Dead beats!

Natasha and Grusha stomp. Yegor enters.

SEMYON

Yegor's here! 'To us has come our very own Yegor':

Semyon motions the band to play. The girls stomp harder.

ALL

Yegor, drink up, drink up Yegor/ Yegor drink up drink up now/Your sanity and wits they will all vanish, we promise/ Yegor drink up drink up now!

YEGOR

Thank you, comrades, I don't use alcohol myself, but I was once toasted warmly when I won my People's Award /for Speedy Delivery--

SEMYON

--for Speedy Delivery!
(to the girls)

ALEXANDER

Speedy with the ladies eh, Yegor?

(Alexander flings Yegor at Grusha and Natasha and he ends up on their shoulders amid squeals and cheers. Serafima is crossing with bucket and mop)

SERAFIMA

Disgusting, wretched, vile!

YEGOR

I deny your slander!

VIKTOR

And where is the People's Award for Poetry comrades? A poet understands the Russian character better than anyone, yet he receives no awards.

ARISTARKH

You should write about intellectuals.

VIKTOR

I write about workers.

YEGOR

Post men?

VIKTOR

Well...

YEGOR

I'm a post man. I want to hear about post men.

GRUSHA

Oo, audience of one.

RAISA

And post women.

ARISTARKH

(to Viktor)
What do you say, comrade?

VIKTOR

Certainly the postal worker is heroic...resilient... so often called to endure the unendurable, that his--her--his/her character must crack.

YEGOR

(dangerously)

We are thirty-five thousand post men. And not one of us has a crack.

RAISA

That's not what Pushkin said!

Laughter. Yegor silences everyone.

YEGOR

The character of the Russian postman was conceived in Marxist theory and born in our great revolution!

VIKTOR

(at attention)

I revere the Revolution and the postmen of our Soviet Republic!

YEGOR

And are we cracked?

Viktor flounders. Kleopatra defiantly rescues him.

KLEOPATRA

Yes! In the Soul, like all true Russians.

Viktor orates for his life. The band sensitively accompany him.

VIKTOR

O Postman in your Soviet beaver cap, ride your sleigh across the steppe, silver bells a-tinkle, gypsies singing round you, your favourite dog howls at the moon...

KLEOPATRA

My mother was a gypsy...

VICTOR

O hear! A guitar string breaks!
The postman weeps into his homespun mitts,
He wants to toss his hat into the sky,
to weep, to sing, to curse, and to repent!
To have a good drink, and throw mail to the skies!
Your way, my way, the Russian way...

KLEOPATRA

(joining Viktor's oration)
Soul ripped out and tossed to the devil!

VIKTOR

Old Russia? New Russia, racing forward, --

KLEOPATRA

Leaping the cracks--!

Yegor is mollified about the cracks. Raisa is annoyed by Kleopatra's partnership with Viktor.

VIKTOR

Inspired by the Postman's Song!

Semyon leads applause.

RAISA

(reclaiming Viktor)
Semyon Semyonovich, we believe you support both women and poets.

SEMYON

Even women poets.

Aristarkh is visibly upset that Raisa is schmoozing Semyon; he starts to complain.

SEMYON

I support all of you. Sonia! Shoot me!

Viktor is smug; Aristarkh remonstrates with Alexander. Yegor disentangles himself from Grusha. Sonia serves Semyon a shot.

SONIA

Three litres of slivovitz.

MARGARITA

Mark down five roubles.
(to Semyon)

MARGARITA

You'll laugh about this in the morning.

Margarita banishes Serafima to the kitchen.

SEMYON

I'm laughing now. Life begins thirty minutes before it ends!

ARISTARKH

Ladies and gentlemen and postmen! Our friend, Semyon Semyonovich is now going to select his Cause /so kindly indulge--

SEMYON

Wait - I want to ask you something. What happens after?

ARISTARKH

Well, there's a lavish funeral, obviously, with celebrity invitations, Party media, all our premier citizens; then a huge procession: pom poms etcetera, then graveside orations from myself and whichever other/ causes you might select to...

MARGARITA

He doesn't mean what happens for you.

Aristarkh is non-plussed.

SEMYON

Is there Life after death?

KLEOPATRA

I am a spirit vessel. You could send me messages from /the -

VICTOR

The bourne whence no traveler returns-

KLEOPATRA

- spelling words and moving things from there to here...

{MARGARITA

Drink...

{SERAFIMA

(crossing to exit again)

Tsk tsk.

SEMYON

Is there Life after death?

ARISTARKH

What says the Church?

YELPIDY

God, I hate this question.

YEGOR

According to Socialism there **isn't**--

YELPIDY

According to Religion there **is**--

SEMYON

According to Alexander--?

ALEXANDER

C'mon! It's supposed to be a party!

MARGARITA

Music! What do I pay you for?

The Musicians play. Semyon drinks. Serafima lurks with her mop.

SEMYON

Drink to me, comrades!

The music is now like a dirge. Aristarkh hands Semyon the pistol and Alexander gives him the pile of notes.

ARISTARKH

Semyon Semyonovich, thinker of thinkers. Alone, with a pistol in his hand, he sets out on the highway of history...

VIKTOR

On his lips the lyrics of the Revolution... as he crunches over the salt of the earth...

KLEOPATRA

Seeking beauty...

YEGOR

For the masses!

ALEXANDER

Choose your Cause...

The Musicians finish. Semyon pushes the lottery notes away.

SEMYON

I am about to end my life. My God. I can do anything, anything. It doesn't matter; I'm going to die anyway! I could go to the Supreme Soviet, stick out my tongue at the chairman and say, "you didn't know there's a Podsekalnikov in Soviet Russia, did you--? Well, here I am comrades--dancing a ballet; eating your perogies!". I could shout at the top of my lungs that I, Podsekalnikov, am dying for... dying...

(MORE)

SEMYON (cont'd)

...for the first time in my life I'm not afraid. I'm happy Comrades, happy as a Tsar! oh hold me down I'm flying! What shall I do? Call the Kremlin. Call them to account openly, boldly. I wasn't much in life but when I'm dead, hear me roar! I'm a Colossus! A Caesar!

With a determined look in his eye Semyon grabs the telephone. Serafima returns from the toilets.

SERAFIMA

What are you doing?

SEMYON

(officiously to the operator)

Get me the Kremlin.

(Hush. Terror)

I said "the Kremlin" and they're putting me through! Me! The Kremlin! Straight through to the red heart of Soviet Russia!

SERAFIMA

Lord help us.

ARISTARKH

Stop him, someone.

Viktor and Aristarkh confer as cronies, their animosity forgotten.

SEMYON

Hello? Get me Mr. Moustachio, the top dog. Is this the top dog? Good evening. This is Semyon Semyonovich Podsekalnikov, an individual. I was going to be a genius but my parents were against it. Listen: I want you to know, I have read Marx and I **don't like him**. DON'T INTERRUPT ME!

shocked intakes of breath in the room

ALEXANDER

Hang up man, hang up

SEMYON

I find Marx boring.

SEMYON

I stand in line for a living, which is to say I'm unemployed, which is to say this line up makes me mad. Did I agree to be slapped in the face by my own Revolution? What did I ever do to be one of your statistics? DON'T INTERRUPT!

More shocked intakes of breath.

Yegor loses control momentarily.

YEGOR

Tell them their Socialism stinks! Tell them !

MARGARITA

For pity's sake, it's my number.

SEMYON

Listen up all you cowering cowards in the Kremlin !
There are two hundred million of us here in this Soviet Union, and each million is afraid of someone. I am the only one afraid of no-one. Meaning: I am a dead man. Meaning: I matter, I matter, I matter; I've become now what I always could have been: I am the boy genius and I thumb my nose at you, you sons of bitches!

RAISA

Oh no, no...

Alexander takes the phone and hangs it up. All exhale. Semyon slumps. Viktor speaks aside to Yegor.

VIKTOR

A word isn't a sparrow Comrade. You let it out, you can't catch it and for that they catch you and don't let you out".

ARISTARKH

Time marches on, comrade. Be so good as to select your Cause.

Victor takes dictation. Semyon, unaware, speaks simply.

SEMYON

Thank you, all of you, for coming to my party. I thought I was alone but you've shown me that you care. Asking, 'what d' you think Semyon?', 'how d' you feel...?

To my surprise, dear comrades, I'm going to die. Me, Semyon, tonight... heading west as they say, setting sail... (The clock begins to strike twelve)... My boat's called in and I'm answering the call. For all of us. Life?! I demand satisfaction.

A deathly hush. Viktor has been unable to take dictation but Semyon signs his name anyway. He holds his gun with one hand, picks up his bottle with the other and lifts it in a toast. He bows. He exits.

Silence.

Everyone applauds- except Alexander and Margarita who look at one another with concern, and Serafima who is puzzled.

SERAFIMA

(to the girls)
Where's he going?

They have no idea.

NATASHA

Did he really call the Kremlin?

SONIA

He left without paying.

GRUSHA

Creepy.

VIKTOR

'Heading west'-- sailing metaphor:poetry.

ARISTARKH

(pounds his fist into his hand)
'I am an individual'; a plea for intellectuals!

RAISA

And women.

ARIATARKH

Hardly.

YEGOR

He did it! He stuck out his tongue at the Kremlin!

Silence. They are waiting, listening hard.

RAISA

Where is it?

SERAFIMA

Where's what?

VIKTOR

The gunshot.

Pause. The discomfort grows.

MARGARITA

He's gone to sleep it off.

VIKTOR

If t'were done, when tis done, t'were well t'were done quickly...

ALEXANDER

(to Serafima)

I'll go look after him.

Alexander goes after Semyon.

We hear a distant gunshot. Reactions range from shock (Serafima) to concerned (Margarita, the band and the girls) to relieved (everyone but Yelpidy who has drunk himself unconscious).

ARISTARKH

Gentlemen - that's to say, people, and women - I see no reason why our friend could not be a man of many parts: poet and lover, Intellectual, womens' rights activist, representative of the people,
(Yelpidy staggers upright)
even a church disciple...

(Aristarkh raises his glass)

To Semyon Podeskalknikov...let us unite in his memory.

The band play a dirge. Viktor, Aristarkh, Raisa, and Kleopatra confer. Serafima stands slowly. The scene changes about her and the band as she sings.

ACT FOUR

Dawn, growing into a sunny morning.

The Podsekalnikov hallway apartment. Serafima is cuddling Masha, who is not relaxed.

SERAFIMA

The tempest rages, lightning flashes/Wind is howling,
thunder crashes/Sleep my little baby girl...

MASHA

Mother, where is Semyon?

SERAFIMA

Sleep my darling daughter/even when the fire burns you
and you're drowning in the water...

MASHA

Did you see I put two yolks in Semyon's egg nog? He
says no-one makes it quite like me.

SERAFIMA

Masha...

MASHA

Mother don't criticise! I took a vow "till death do us
part".

SERAFIMA

Yes.

MASHA

Semyon's not a dead weight.

SERAFIMA

No.

MASHA

He'll find a job.

SERAFIMA

Not where he is.

MASHA

Where is Semyon?

*Serafima avoids. Masha sees the note Semyon wrote
earlier. She picks it up and reads.*
In the event of my death, no-one is to blame.

SERAFIMA

They're looking for his body. They had to wait for dawn so they could see.

MASHA

Why didn't you-- No!

The shock hits Masha.

SERAFIMA

I couldn't find you/Where did you go?/How could I tell you--?

MASHA

Semyon, Semyon, no!/ Why did he?/ Where is he? Oh God mother-- why?

SERAFIMA

It's a terrible thing he's done./Oh Masha./Oh my poor little girl...

Serafima holds MASHA. Enter Yelpidy and Aristarkh, followed a moment later by Kleopatra and Raisa, who carries swatches of fabric.

YELPIDY

Weep, weep, poor lady. Weep for your children whose daddy is never coming home.

ARISTARKH

What daddy?

YELPIDY

The children's daddy.

ARISTARKH

Children? (Serafima indicates "no") No children.

YELPIDY

Weep, young widow/for the children he never had...

ARISTARKH

Thank you, Father, for those comforting words.

KLEOPATRA

Um, these are the household staff.

Raisa starts measuring Masha for clothes.

ARISTARKH

Devoted staff: we regret to inform you that Semyon Semyonovitch lies dead.

SERAFIMA

Where did you find him?

RAISA

Bust to hem, 39.

ARISTARKH

On the path of history.

SERAFIMA

Is that far away?

ARISTARKH

Quite far, under a tree. We will mark that tree, for he died a hero.

Masha emits a terrible cry of grief.

ARISTARKH

Goodness!

RASIA

36, 24, 36

SERAFIMA

(sotto voce)

Is he a mess?

ARISTARKH

I couldn't look. They of strong arms are bringing him.

Masha emits another terrible cry of grief

MASHA

Senyechka!

ARISTARKH

Is she going to do this for long?

SERAFIMA

Shhh, there Masha...

RAISA

I think brown felt hats...

KLEOPATRA

--sprinkled with tiny blue bells.

MASHA

My life is over... !

ARISTARKH

Oh come now.

RAISA

(putting hats on the sobbing Masha)
Try this one. Egalitarian yet elegant.

KLEOPATRA

Not every servant gets a new hat.

MASHA

What good is a hat? When I had Semyon I had no hat.

Viktor enters at the head of a small cortege

VIKTOR

He comes! Our Fallen Comrade.

They stand back respectfully. Alexander and Viktor enter, carrying Semyon's body. Margarita and Yegor follow; Yegor carries the gun. Semyon has a wound on his head. The sight of his blood horrifies Masha into silence. Yelpidy prays. Aristarkh weeps.

YELPIDY

Dominoes play us at dominoes. Words without sound./Amend

ARISTARKH

I didn't cry when my poor mother died...

Alexander and Yegor lay Semyon on the bed. Lazzo of the hats.

MASHA

Now I have a hat and no Semyon.

ALEXANDER

I'm sorry Masha. I never thought he'd...

Masha attacks Alexander, who is devastated.

MASHA

I don't want to live. I'll kill myself.

Yegor and Margarita restrain her.

MARGARITA

No you won't. You'll find a man who'll spoil your lipstick not your mascara.

MASHA

I don't wear lipstick.

YEGOR

Precisely! Maria Lukianovna! I thought your husband was a lazy slob. But Semyon Semyonovich had thoughts so radical I could never have dared imagine them, until today.

(Masha doesn't know what he means)

Today I became worthy of you, Maria Lukianovna.

I would carry any burden-- regular, or express --

MASHA

What?

YEGOR

--if you would deign to live with me in my room--

ALEXANDER

Bad timing, comrade.

MASHA

Go away! Leave me alone.

YEGOR

--I'd deliver you from solitude.

MASHA

Don't come near me, you little rat!/Go away!

YEGOR

I will go. (he runs, then stops) Goodbye, Maria Lukianovna.

MASHA

Get out, all of you, get out/ I hate you! Leave us alone!

Yegor makes his way upstairs. Yelpidy backs towards the door. Masha collapses next to the body.

YELPIDY

Excuse me/Important Church business...

MASHA

I want to die, I want to die!

KLEOPATRA

(amazed, to Viktor)

How his domestics loved him...

Alexander, depressed, goes up to his room and watches from the door.

VIKTOR

Not much of a selling point, sadly.

SERAFIMA

Wait, Father! How will we bury him? We've not a kopeck to our names.

ARISTARKH

Never fear, my good woman: we have taken it upon ourselves to pay for a hero's burial, modelled on Lenin's.

YELPIDY

Through the generosity of the Church-

ARISTARKH

And the last of my mother's antique furniture--

KLEOPATRA

We've booked a top quality undertaker.

ARISTARKH

An oak coffin with gilt fittings...

YELPIDY

A sung mass with full choir...

VIKTOR

A rhyming obituary...

RAISA

(presenting Serafime with a package)
And a new suit of clothes for him to wear at the burial.

SERAFIMA

That takes care of the dead but what about the living? We have no food.

ARISTARKH

Goodness, we need a reception!

VIKTOR

We must start a fund.

SERAFIMA

A fund?

ARISTARKH

Aha! A 'charitable fund'! I'll see to it --

VIKTOR

We'll see to it.

MASHA

Get out, go!

ARISTARKH

*You prepare the body and we'll provide the fund. A
bientot!*

Viktor, Kleopatra, Raisa and Aristarkh exit.

SERAFIMA

Real gentlemen!

MARGARITA

*Yes, they don't miss a turn.
(to Masha)
Come on. You'll be all right.*

SERAFIMA

*(examining Semyon)
Huh, neat little head wound. I always said he had no
brains. Ha! I'll get my bucket.*

*Serafima goes to the kitchen. Margarita comforts
Masha.*

MARGARITA

A charitable fund. A decadent hat. You'll survive this.

*Alexander beats his head against the wall.
Serafima returns with a bucket and cloth, singing.*

MASHA

I want to die.

SERAFIMA

*(to Margarita)
Hey, fancy woman: help me dress the guts.*

MARGARITA

I prefer men who are alive.

*She climbs the stairs to Alexander. We see them
embrace before stepping inside his room.*

*Masha lies next to Semyon. He cuddles up in the
same way as at the top of the show. She is
bewildered. She sits up and looks round at
Serafima then lies back down. He snores and turns
over.*

MASHA

Bastard.

She makes her hands into a single fist and hits him in the heart . Semyon starts.

SEMYON

Hosanna! I'm flying, I'm flying...

MASHA

Argh! Wake up!

Masha slaps him round the face.

Semyon spins and staggers to Serafima, sees her.

SEMYON

I'm dead. I'm in hell!

SERAFIMA

It's a miracle!

SEMYON

Get behind me Satan!

SERAFIMA

It's me Semyon, your mother-in- law!

SEMYON

Dear Father, I suffered her down on Earth; don't make me suffer eternally ...

Masha hits and punches him as she speaks.

MASHA

Wake up, you idiot. You're not dead; you're drunk! You stink of booze you pig!

SEMYON

Am I alive?

MASHA

I thought you were dead!

SEMYON

I'm alive?

She hits him again.

Mashenka, I'm alive!

Masha starts to cry. Semyon holds her. Serafima wearily picks up the bucket.

SERAFIMA

Well. You can wash your own sainted self.

She starts back up the stairs.

SEMYON

I'm alive!

We hear sounds from Margarita and Alexander.

SERAFIMA

Appalling, sinful, damned!

Serafima goes into the bathroom.

SEMYON

I was drunk, so drunk, so very drunk. At midnight I walked over the bridge, looked down into the darkness, drank more. One thought crashed through me: 'find Masha; get her back'. Run, run, run. Hit a tree. Stars... Drink more. One arm hugs the tree the other holds the gun at my head...but no it's the bottle so drink more 'til the stars burst and stream in trails. Then I feel something metal--Uh--'what's this?'- and bang -

Margarita and Alexander finish.

MASHA

You missed.

SEMYON

I guess.

MASHA

Stupid man.

SEMYON

Can't even kill myself.

MASHA

Stupid, useless /man.

(putting his hand up to his wound)

SEMYON

Masha! I'm wounded.

MASHA

You missed by a mile.

SEMYON

Aren't you happy?

MASHA

Better luck next time, eh?

Pause. She blurts:

Am I really so awful to live with?

SEMYON

No, I am. It's me. Masha, please--

MASHA

Oh Semyon.

OLEG

Heave! Heave! Over to you Stepan, over to you.
(Enter Stepan and Oleg with a coffin)
Does the deceased live here ?

SEMYON

What?

OLEG

The deceased?

STEPAN

Your way Oleg! Look out! Left-left-left--

SEMYON

Who are you?

OLEG

We're from 'Eternity'.

MASHA

Excuse me?

STEPAN

'Eternity'.

OLEG

The funeral parlour?

SEMYON

Ohh.

STEPAN

Where do you want it?

Pause.

OLEG

Decide, Comrades-- it's heavy. We carried it all the way.

Pause. Semyon, Masha and Serafima are staring at them in horror.

STEPAN

Look, I know it's a shock when you first see it, but take comfort from the fact that it's the best we make.

OLEG

I'd get this one myself if I could afford it - and if I was dead, obviously.

STEPAN

Aie, let's put it here.

Stepan and Oleg put down the coffin, move the wreaths and open the lid.

MASHA

'Your husband died a symbol', they said.

SERAFIMA

'We'll pay for everything', they said.

MASHA

They're even making me a hat. A real hat.

OLEG

Now. Where's the incoming occupant?

SEMYON

I, don't know what to tell you.

STEPAN

'The incoming occupant'. They make us say that, as if obscure language makes losing your loved one any easier. That's 'Eternity' for you: full of obscurity. I say, why can't we just say it like it is?

OLEG

The corpse. Where's the lifeless, mouldering corpse of
(he consults a clipboard)
Semyon Semyonovich Podsekalknikov?

SEMYON

(raising his right hand)
Here!

OLEG

Where?

SERAFIMA

He's not ready yet. He's not...dressed.

She shoves Raisa's package at Semyon. He quickly puts on the gold epauletted jacket and smiles at them. Oleg and Stepan find this odd.

STEPAN

We're supposed to lift him in for you.

SEMYON

No thanks.

STEPAN

It's part of the service.

MASHA

We'll manage.

STEPAN

We're meant to do it.

OLEG

It's not easy. They don't, you know... bend.

MASHA

We'll manage, thank you.

OLEG

Righty then.

(He holds out a clipboard)
Sign for it, will you?

Semyon avoids it and Masha takes it.
And there for all the furbelows.

She signs again. Stepan regards the coffin.

STEPAN

Must have been a Party member or something big.

SEMYON

He was a nothing. Unemployed. One of the two million.

OLEG

Yeah, it's hard to find a paying job. I'm an intern.

SEMYON

He dreamed of being an intern.

STEPAN

Well, it's a top-class coffin, fit for a prince. I mean a peoples...soviet...or something.

Pause. They stand expectantly. Lazzo of friendly aliens trying to communicate.

SERAFIMA

Well, thank you... See you later.

OLEG

Soon! (he realizes) Oh-- I didn't mean--

(He gestures death in the coffin)

SERAFIMA

No, I've a few years left!

They laugh. Pause

OLEG

I feel great compassion / for the deceased.

STEPAN

So do I.

SEMYON

Thank you.

Pause

{STEPAN { OLEG
The tip?

SEMYON

Ohhh! Masha--?

Masha searches her pockets and offers a tiny coin.

STEPAN

Thanks.

OLEG

We'll go feed our families on this.

MASHA

Sorry! Good luck!

Stepan and Oleg leave. Serafima has picked up one of the wreaths and reads the dedication.

SERAFIMA

'For my beloved Semyon. A thinker, a hero and an unforgettable son-in-law.' Unforgettable is right.

MASHA

It cost seven rubles. They've payed for everything!

They look at each other in horror.

SERAFIMA

They'll be back any minute!

MASHA

You can explain...

Semyon becomes abject. Serafima rushes to the window.

SERAFIMA

They're coming up the street./You useless worm!

MASHA

We can explain. I'll just tell them....

Masha struggles to find the words.

SEMYON

It's not too late; I'll kill myself.

MASHA

Better idea - I'll kill you!

SERAFIMA

No need; they'll kill him. Holy Virgin, pray for us!

Aristarkh, Yelpidy and Viktor enter. Masha and Serafima turn to face them. Behind them, Semyon panics. He jumps into the coffin and lies there, as if dead.

MASHA

Gentlemen.Comrades.There's been a terrible mistake. He isn't dead. There's been a ... a drinking error. He's still alive.

Pause.

VICTOR

Poor woman...

ARISTARKH

The evidence, madam, is against you.

MASHA

We *thought* he was dead -- and-- and so did he,
actually! But as you can see -

*Masha turns to see Semyon, corpse-like, in the
coffin. She tries to laugh.*

ARISTARKH

She's hysterical.

MASHA

Semyon! Get up out of there...

VICTOR

Her brain's affected. Tragic!

YELPIDY

Another case for the asylum.

MASHA

Stop this Semyon. I'm telling you...

VIKTOR / YELPIDY

Stop it /Dear lady take hold...

MASHA

Semyon GET UP! Mother, tell them ! Get up you lump!

ARISTARKH

When my poor mother died...

VIKTOR

The Tragedy of the Deranged Domestic.

Alexander and Margarita appear on the landing.

MASHA

I've had it with your baloney. Get up or I'll murder
you! I'm warning you-- Semyon!

*She goes to shake him. Yelpidy and Aristarkh stop
her.*

YELPIDY

Restrain her!

ARISTARKH

She'll damage the corpse...Comrade! Help your
neighbour!

MASHA

Semyon!

ALEXANDER

(takes hold of Masha)
Face the truth, Masha.

MASHA

Make him get up! He's making things worse!

YELPIDY

The man is dead, dead...

MASHA

Alexander Kalabushkin, Semyon is alive--

{MARGARITA

Oh no, no, you poor girl...

{ALEXANDER

He's gone, Masha.

MASHA

--He was talking to me two minutes ago. Get up Semyon,
I hate you, I hate you!

YELPIDY

I suggest that the charitable fund /is no longer
applicable...

SERAFIMA

(taking the money from Yelpidy)
Will aid and support the survivors. Masha, go upstairs
with Margarita.

MASHA

What are you saying?

SERAFIMA

I'm saying he's dead. Look at me (she winks) he's dead.

MASHA

He's not dead.

SERAFIMA

Oh, he's dead. Dead!/Dead.

ALEXANDER

I carried him home. He was frozen to the touch.

ARISTARKH

We must move things along; we are expected at the
church.

MASHA

No! I won't let you!

YELPIDY

Seclusion in a dark place. Restraints! Dominoes sank
tin ships in a dayo.

MARGARITA

Bring her up here.

ALEXANDER

Come on, Masha.

MASHA

Please, Alexander Kalabushkin, believe me-

ALEXANDER

Come on.

MASHA

Don't touch me. Put me down. Help!

*Alexander puts Masha over his shoulder. He carries
her up the stairs.*

MASHA

Semyon Semyonovich Podsekalnikov, you coward, you
coward! Face the music for once in your life!

VIKTOR

Her grief is epic. Andromache, Cassandra...

MASHA

WAIT!-- he's dead, I believe you! But don't bury him.
I beg you, don't bury him!

*Semyon sits up in a panic. No one is looking at
the coffin; all their eyes are on Masha. She is
the only person who sees him. She breaks free;
Alexander smacks Masha and she falls. Serafima
cries out in alarm.*

SERAFIMA

Masha!

MARGARITA

This isn't whack-a-mole.

ALEXANDER

Sorry.

MARGARITA

Bring her up here. All men are fools.

Serafima follows Margarita upstairs into Alexander's room. Semyon hurriedly lies down. A breath of relief.

YELPIDY

Doleo! Morsus doleo!

ARISTARKH

It's really too bad our champion is not from a better quality family.

VIKTOR

Yes, a People's Commissar would have fitted the bill much better. He's so common and idiotic-looking, like a rooster.

Viktor messes with Semyon's collar and hair.

ARISTARKH

Precisely: what can one say was remarkable about such an ugly fellow? Look at his nose.

VIKTOR

The old woman did a terrible job with his hair.

ARISTARKH

Perhaps we emphasize his masculinity to distract?

VIKTOR

Pad him out you mean? I have spare socks somewhere.

ARISTARKH

That would certainly help/ but--

YELPIDY

Just wrap him in a flag.

Yelpidy and Aristarkh drape a flag over Semyon while Viktor takes a note. Alexander enters.

VIKTOR

You're right, it's not the death that matters, but the cause of death.

Alexander has been observing from the stairs.

ALEXANDER

The martyr's in the coffin, comrades; all I need is your cash in my hand.

ARISTARKH

After the burial, everything after the burial.

ALEXANDER

We made a deal. The coffin doesn't leave 'til you're paid up. Cash or kind?

Viktor and Aristarkh make eye contact and sigh.

VIKTOR

We do have time.

ARISTARKH

Follow us to my mother's abode, and we will settle accounts.

Aristarkh, Alexander, and Viktor leave. Semyon opens his eyes.

SEMYON

Ugly, common *and* stupid. Three in one! But mild compared to Serafima on a Sunday. It's nothing new.

(Semyon picks up the gun.)

There's nothing new under the sun. So here's for nothing: are you ready this time? 'Yes I'm ready'. On my count? 'On your count'...

Lights fade as music from the funeral cortege rises.

One...for a rooster. Two...for a worm. Three...better luck next time. Four...a coward. Five...a real hat. Six...I hate you Semyon...Seven...I hate you Semyon...Eight...I hate you Semyon...

Melancholy music plays as lights fade. The scene shifts around Semyon as he continues to count.

ACT FIVE

A graveyard on the outskirts of the city.

In the darkness, Semyon's voice: one thousand and twentythree... I hate you Semyon...one thousand and twentyfour...

Lights reveal a freshly dug grave, the flag draped coffin and a camera behind which Alexander is taking a photograph. Posing in a tableau are Viktor, Raisa, Kleopatra, Aristarkh, Yelpidy. Watching in another group are Serafima, Masha, Margarita, Natasha, Grusha, Sonia, Oleg, Stepan and band members.

VIKTOR

Everyone, say "Cheer", but don't cheer.

RAISA

What?

VIKTOR

Say: "Cheer", but don't cheer.

RAISA AND OTHERS

"Cheer"...

Alexander ignites the camera. All angle for a solo photo.

ARISTARKH

He was philosopher and friend!

KLEOPATRA

I am his murderess! I confess it...

RAISA

He respected working women!

KLEOPATRA

Semyon Semyonovich wanted me body and soul and when I said, 'No, my darling! We must serve the Revolution', he ended his life. I murdered him, cruel destiny, I!

VIKTOR

Destiny? Ha!

KLEOPATRA

Jealous!

VIKTOR

His death is a clarion call for the poetry of
cracks--the tradition and the future of Our Mother
Russia..

MASHA

Who are all these people?

KLEOPATRA

He died for me!

MASHA

You're wrong. She's wrong.

KLEOPATRA

Oh oh and you are --

MASHA

His wife.

KLEOPATRA

(nods, recognizing her)
Ah, his cook--

MASHA

His wife.

MARGARITA

She's his wife.

KLEOPATRA

So what? Capitalist! Love knows neither bonds nor
boundaries-- he wanted me, me, me.

MASHA

Semyon, have you no shame?

RAISA

Opportunist! His dying words were "I pass the
flame...the women of Russia will never be defeated-- "

YELPIDY

Our comrade died to reunite State and Church...

ARISTARKH

The intellectual for our age!

KLEOPATRA

Reactionaries! You'll never know what it is to die for
love!

MASHA

No, but you will in a minute!

MARGARITA

Masha, you promised!

Margarita restrains Masha.

YELPIDY

I'm Spartacus Spanky, Amend. Time to close the coffin.

ALEXANDER

Masha?

MASHA

He's yours. You took him, you dressed him up, now shove him in the ground and God help you, Semyon.

She turns away. Alexander pauses over the coffin.

ALEXANDER

Forgive me brother.

Semyon embraces Alexander.

SEMYON

No, you forgive me.

Alexander screams. There is pandemonium.
Forgive me, comrades./All of you, forgive me!

{YELPIDY

Avaunt thee, Demon!

{KLEOPATRA

He lives! he lives!.

{ARISTARKH

GET BACK! GET BACK!

GRUSHA

Holy God.

NATASHA

Awkward!

SONIA

Eeeew!

SERAFIMA

Lie down or we'll have to give the money back.

VIKTOR

You're alive?

SEMYON

I'm alive. Sorry, but I'm alive!

MASHA

See? I told you.

ARISTARKH

But you killed yourself.

SEMYON

(shows the gun apologetically)
I tried to. I wanted to.

ARISTARKH

Fraud!

MASHA

He only missed by an inch.

MARGARITA

Alexander wept for you.

ALEXANDER

No, I had dust/in my eye...

KLEOPATRA

All my suffering for nothing.

SEMYON AND ALEXANDER

(to Kleopatra and Masha respectively)
Sorry.

VIKTOR

What will I do with my obituary?

SEMYON

Use it yourself, Comrade, when the time comes.

OLEG

We carried you here!

STEPAN

You heavy bastard...

ARISTARKH

I thought you were a hero and I find you are /a-

SEMYON

A worm. I'm a worm! Not food for worms!

KLEOPATRA

You're a liar.

VIKTOR

A beast without reason.

RAISA

Judas.

ARISTRARKH

How can you live with yourself?

SEMYON

I just don't want to die! Not for you, not for them, not for clever men or Yegor's masses, not for romance, not for art and not for God. For heaven's sake, why would God want me dead? I lay in my coffin listening to you, through my God-awful hang-over I saw the face of death and I realized, comrades, that I am, deep in my heart, madly, overwhelmingly in love. 'How I hunger', I thought, 'How I starve. Two whole days without a proper meal!' If I love anything in this world, it's my stomach!

MASHA

(wry)

Oh Semyon!

KLEOPATRA

Shoot him!

MASHA

Shoot her!

VIKTOR

Alive, you dig us a grave with your two hands.

ARISTARKH

You expose us to the rage and ridicule of all the land.

RAISA

You put us at risk!

YELPIDY

The burial **needs** a body! / Dominoes on a misery bus.

VIKTOR

There's one bullet left.

MASHA

No!

STEPAN

Use it!

VOICES

Use it! Use it!/ Use it! Sho-ot!

Semyon picks up the gun;

SEMYON

I don't want to live without you, Masha. But I could.

MASHA

I know. /I love you.

VOICES

Use it! Use it! Use it!

RAISA

Viktor will make you a symbol for eternity.

SEMYON

He could make me an astronaut for all I care, once I'm in that coffin.

ARISTARKH

Recant Podsekalnikov!

VIKTOR

Shoot yourself!

SEMYON

You don't mean it comrades;/ You'll forgive me!

Semyon carefully puts down the gun.

A VOICE

Shoot him!

Voices yell in agreement. Semyon runs and everyone but Alexander and Margarita pursue. The crowd corner Semyon. Viktor raises the gun to shoot him, then locks eyes with Aristarkh.

ARISTARKH

Should the funeral proceed as planned?

VOICES

Yes! Shoot him!

RAISA

Traitor to Women!

KLEOPATRA

To love!

VOICE

Traitor to the Revolution!

SEMYON

No Comrades -- I demand a final word!

(they agree)

I did NOT run away from the October Revolution.

Maybe I didn't go out the house the entire month, but

I didn't run away.

MASHA

It's true!

SEMYON

When the Revolution asked, my right hand went up! When it came to war, when it came to jobs, even when it voted against me, my right hand stayed up. I stuck it out, comrades, for years I stuck it out...

MASHA

It's true!

SEMYON

And now I want to ask the Revolution, "what more d'you want of me?" I never did a thing against our Revolution.

NATASHA

You criticised the Kremlin.

SEMYON

I was drunk!

ARISTARKH

True, but consider that what might be proper when expressed in a dead man's obituary is nonetheless **improper** when he shouts it over the telephone to the Kremlin!

SEMYON

Then I'll whisper it. What harm is a whisper? Even if we're alive and sober, can't we whisper Comrades? We want bread, we want jobs, we want a voice...because when we say 'life is hard', it gets easier.

OLEG

Life is hard/Comrade.

GRUSHA

More bread /would help.

NATASHA

More money/ would help.

YELPIDY

Vodka.

ARISTARKH

It is a **crime** to put Individual Wants before the good of Society.

SEMYON

Oh, guilty, guilty! But Society, Comrade, what's that? A factory for slogans! When our government puts out signs saying "for everyone, for everyone" I don't even look any more. I know it means for everyone but me. Once upon a time I was a man, comrades, I was a cog in the machine, but now!-- you're looking at a spare part. Hosanna! You can take your scientific construction of society, your achievements, your world conquests, Comrades. I'm not asking for much. Just a living wage and a peaceful life in a hallway with Masha and her mother, and those two; hell, even Yegor. I'll live for them, not die for you.

YELPIDY

You rob the kingdom of heaven for Earthly Delight.

SEMYON

What earthly delight? Life is hard! And about to get harder because I'm going to pay your money back, every kopek.

MASHA

We'll work for you.

SEMYON

I'll play the tuba for you. I'll send my mother in law down the salt mines.

SERAFIMA

You don't scare me.

SEMYON

I'm not the hero to get your slogan factory going. Forgive me.

Accepting defeat, Viktor lowers the gun.

KLEOPATRA

Viktor Viktorovich! You are magnificent in action.

VIKTOR

Kiki, you smell like Paris.

Kleopatra and Viktor embrace, reunited. Masha goes to Semyon.

RAISA

Oh for...Get me a drink.

SEMYON

Masha--

MASHA

Baloney.

Masha and Semyon embrace.

MARGARITA

(to Alexander)

I'm feeling very sad.

ALEXANDER

The future holds some serious grieving.

(to everyone)

'To us has come our very own Semyon'--alive!

Grusha, Sonia and Natasha break out drinks. The band find their instruments. Sonia picks up a message from a musician and gives it to Oleg.

MARGARITA

Speech! Speech!

SEMYON

Human life is strange and curious, Comrades. How did we get here? And what are we doing?

OLEG

Wasting a perfectly good coffin!

Off stage, a loud gun shot is heard.

STEPAN

Maybe not, comrade.

(A note flutters down from the sky.

Stepan opens it)

This just in from Eternity.

OLEG

A suicide! A real one this time?

STEPAN

It seems that Yegor-- that little post man?--he just shot himself.

MASHA

No. /No!

STEPAN

Following your/ example.

SERAFIMA

Holy God, why?

SEMYON

Why?

NATASHA

From us has gone our very own Yegor.

The End.