Anathema: A Tragedy in Seven Scenes

by Leonid Andreyev

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ANATHEMA

A Tragedy in Seven Scenes

BY

LEONID ANDREYEV

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION BY

HERMAN BERNSTEIN

New York THE MACMILLAN COMPANY 1910

"I myself shall bring them bread and milk.... Children are so tender.... They need so little; they eat a little crust of bread and they have enough, they drink a cup of milk and they know no thirst any longer. Then they sing...."—DAVID LUIZER.

To

NATHAN STRAUS

WHO SO GENEROUSLY SAVED THE LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN THE TRANSLATION OF THIS WORK IS HEARTILY DEDICATED BY HERMAN BERNSTEIN

CHARACTERS GUARDIAN OF THE ENTRANCES ANATHEMA DAVID LEIZER SARAH, his wife NAUM } their children ROSA } IVAN BEZKRAINY } SONKA ZITRON } tradespeople PURIKES DANCING-MASTER YOUNG MAN PALE MAN ORGAN-GRINDER WANDERER ABRAHAM KHESSIN WEEPING WOMAN WOMAN WITH CHILD IN HER ARMS DRUNKARD SONKA'S LITTLE GIRL LEIBKE

Musicians, Blind People, Crowd

ANATHEMA

PROLOGUE.

The scene represents a wild, deserted place, the slope of a mountain rising to infinite heights. In the rear of the stage, halfway up the mountain, huge iron gates, tightly closed, indicate the boundary of the world as we conceive it. Beyond the iron gates, which oppress the earth with their enormous weight, in silence and in mystery, dwells the Beginning of every being, the Supreme Wisdom of the universe.

At the foot of the Gates stands Someone guarding the entrances, leaning upon a long sword, perfectly motionless. Garbed in wide clothes, which are like stone in the motionlessness of their folds and creases, He hides His face beneath a dark cover, and is Himself the greatest of mysteries. Standing on the boundary separating two worlds, he is dual in his make-up;—in appearance a man, in reality a spirit. An arbitrator between two worlds, He is like unto a huge shield, which gathers all bolts,—all looks, all entreaties, all expectations, reproaches, and curses. The bearer of two elements, He wraps his speech in silence, which is like the silence of the iron gates, and sometimes in human words.

Amidst the rocks, looking around on all sides strangely and shyly, appears Anathema, someone accursed. Clinging to the grey rocks, himself grey, cautious and flexible, like a serpent seeking a hole, he goes stealthily and quietly to the Guardian of the Entrances, desiring to strike him with an unexpected blow. But he is frightened by his own audacity and, jumping to his feet, laughs defiantly and maliciously. Then he sits down on a rock, with an air of freedom and independence, and throws small cobblestones at the feet of the Guardian of the Entrances;—cunning, he conceals his fear beneath the mask of raillery and slight audacity. In the faint, grey, almost colorless light, the head of the accursed one seems enormous; especially large is his high forehead, which is furrowed by wrinkles of fruitless reflections and unsolvable eternal problems. Anathema's thin

beard is perfectly grey; his hair, once jet black, is also greyish, rising on his head in disordered tufts. Restless in his movements, he is vainly trying to conceal his alarm and his purposeless haste, which are forever devouring him. Endeavoring to emulate the proud stillness of the Guardian of the Entrances, he grows quiet for an instant in the pose of proud majesty, but the very next moment, in painful quest after the eternally elusive, he wriggles in mute spasms, like a worm under foot. And in his questions he is rapid and impetuous like a whirlwind, drawing strength and fury in his mad whirl....

ANATHEMA.

You are still here on guard? And I thought you were away,—even a chained dog has his moments of rest or sleep, even though the whole world be his kennel and Eternity his master! Is Eternity afraid of thieves? But do not be angry. I have come to you as a good friend and I implore humbly: Open the heavy Gates for an instant and allow me to have a glimpse of Eternity. You dare not? But perhaps the mighty gates have cracked from age, and the unfortunate, honest Anathema could peep into the narrow cleft, without disturbing any one,—show me it with a sign. Softly, on my belly, will I crawl over, I will glance at it and crawl back,—and He will not know. But I shall know and become a God, become a God, a God! I have so long wanted to become a God—and would I be a poor God? Look!

He assumes a haughty pose, but immediately bursts into laughter. Then he sits down calmly on a flat rock and, folding his legs under him, takes out dice. He mutters something to himself, yet loud enough to be heard by the Guardian of the Entrances.

If you don't want to you need not do it,—I shall not fight with you. Have I come here for that purpose? I simply roamed about the world and came here by mere accident—I have nothing to do, so I roam about. And now I am going to throw dice. If He were not so serious, I would have invited Him, too,—but He is too proud, too proud, and He does not understand the pleasure of the game. Six, eight,

twenty—correct! It's always correct when the Devil plays, even when he plays honestly.... David Leizer ... David Leizer ...

Turning to the Guardian of the Entrances, he speaks freely.

Do you know David Leizer? You surely do not know him. He is a sick and foolish old Jew, whom no one knows, and even your Master has forgotten about him. So says David Leizer, and I cannot help believing him—he is a foolish, but honest man. He is the man I have won just now with my dice—you saw it: six, eight, twenty.... One day I met David Leizer by the seashore, when he was questioning what the waves were complaining of; and I liked him. He is a foolish, but honest man, and if he should be well tarred and lighted, he would make a brilliant torch for my feast.

Chatting with feigned ease, he steps over softly to the rock nearest the Guardian.

No one knows David Leizer, but I shall make him famous, I shall make him mighty and great—it is very possible that I shall even make him immortal! You do not believe me? No one believes the wise Anathema, even when he speaks the truth—and who loves the truth more than Anathema does? Perhaps you? You silent dog, you who have stolen the truth from the world, you who have barred the entrances with iron!...

He rushes furiously toward the Guardian of the Entrances, but retreats from the stern, motionless Guardian, with a shriek of horror and pain. And he speaks plaintively, falling with his grey chest upon the grey rock.

Oh, the Devil's hair is grey! Weep, you who have grown fond of Anathema! Wail and grieve, you who are striving toward Truth, who are honoring wisdom—Anathema's hair is grey! Who will help the son of Dawn? He is alone in the universe. Wherefore, O Great One, have you frightened the fearless Anathema—he did not intend to strike you, he only wanted to approach you. May I come over to you? Tell me.

The Guardian of the Entrances is silent, but to Anathema it seems that he hears

something in the silence. Outstretching his serpentine neck, he shouts passionately.

Louder! Louder! Are you silent, or did you speak? I do not understand. The accursed one has a sensitive ear and discerns the shades of certain words in your silence; he feels a vague movement of thoughts in your motionlessness,—but he does not understand. Did you speak or are you silent? Did you say: "Come," or did it only sound so to me?

THE GUARDIAN.

Come.

ANATHEMA.

You said it, but I dare not come up to you.

GUARDIAN.

Come.

ANATHEMA.

I am afraid.

He advances toward the Guardian irresolutely, in zigzag movements; lies down on his belly and crawls, wailing with longing and fear.

Oh, I the prince of darkness, wise and powerful, and yet you see—I am crawling on my belly like a dog. And I am doing it because I love you, I want to kiss the hem of your cloak. But why does my old heart ache so much? Tell me, Omniscient.

GUARDIAN.

The accursed one has no heart.

ANATHEMA.

Advancing.

Yes, yes. The accursed has no heart, his chest is mute and motionless like the grey rock which does not breathe. Oh, if Anathema had a heart, you would have

destroyed him long ago by his sufferings, even as you destroy the foolish man. But Anathema has a mind that is searching for the Truth, unprotected against your blows—spare it.... Here I am at your feet, reveal your face to me. Only for an instant, as brief as the flash of lightning,—reveal your face to me.

He cringes servilely at the feet of the Guardian, not daring, however, to touch his cloak. He is vainly endeavoring to lower his eyes, which are quick and searching, sharp, flashing like coals beneath grey ashes. The Guardian is silent and Anathema continues his fruitless and persistent entreaties.

Do you not want to do it? Then call the name of Him who is beyond the Gates. Call it in a soft voice, and no one will hear it; only I will know it, the wise Anathema, longing for Truth. Is it not true that it consists of seven letters? Or of six? Or of one? Tell me. Only one letter—and you will save the accursed one from eternal tortures, and the earth, which I am tearing with my nails, will bless you. You may say it softly, softly, you may only breathe it, and I shall understand it, and I shall bless you.... Tell me.

The Guardian is silent, and Anathema, after some hesitation, full of fury, crawls away slowly, growing holder with every step.

It is not true that I love you.... It is not true that I wanted to kiss the hem of your cloak.... I feel sorry for you, if you believed me.... I simply have nothing to do, so I roam about in the world.... I have nothing to do, so I question the passers-by about this and that,—about things I know myself.... I know everything!

He rises, shakes himself like a dog that has just come out of the water, and choosing the highest rock, stands up there in a haughty, actorlike pose.

I know everything. With my wisdom I have penetrated the meaning of all things, the laws of numbers are known to me, and the book of Fates is open to me. At one glance I embrace life, I am the axis in the circle of time, which whirls rapidly. I am great, I am mighty, I am immortal, and man is in my power. Who will dare struggle

with the Devil? The strong, I kill, and the weak I force to whirl about in an intoxicating dance, a mad dance, a devilish dance. I have poisoned all the sources of life, on all its roads I have built ambuscades.... Do you hear the voice of those who curse? The voice of those who are exhausted under the burden of evil? Of those who dare in vain? Of those who long endlessly and terribly?

GUARDIAN.

I do.

ANATHEMA.

Laughing.

The name! Call the name! Illumine the way for the Devil and for man. All in the world want goodness, but know not where to find it; all in the world want fife, but meet only death. The name! Call the name of goodness, call the name of eternal life. I am waiting!

GUARDIAN.

There is no name for that which you ask, Anathema. There is no number by which to count, no measure by which to measure, no scales by which to weigh that which you ask, Anathema. Every one who has said the word, Love, has lied. Every one who has said the word, Wisdom,—has lied. And even he who has uttered the word, God,—has lied with the greatest and most terrible lie. For there is no number, no measure, no scale, no name for that which you ask, Anathema.

ANATHEMA.

Where shall I go? Tell me.

GUARDIAN.

Where you are going.

ANATHEMA.

What shall I do? Tell me.

GUARDIAN.

What you are doing.

ANATHEMA.

You speak through silence—can I understand the language of your silence? Tell me.

GUARDIAN.

No. Never. My face is open, but you see it not. My speech is loud, but you hear it not. My commands are clear, but you know them not, Anathema. And you shall never see, and you shall never hear, and you shall never know, Anathema, unfortunate spirit, deathless in numbers, eternally alive in measures and in weights, but as yet unborn to life.

ANATHEMA.

Tormented.

Never?

GUARDIAN.

Never.

Anathema leaps down from the rocks, and tosses about madly, devoured by grief. Clinging to the rocks, he embraces them tenderly and then pushes them away angrily; he moans bitterly. He turns his face to West and East, to North and South of the earth, flourishing his arms, as if calling the earth to wrath and vengeance. But the grey rocks are silent, West and East are silent, North and South are silent, and in stern motionlessness, heavily leaning on his sword, stands the Guardian of the Entrances.

ANATHEMA.

Rise, O Earth! Rise, O Earth, and gird your sword, O man. There will be no peace between you and Heaven; the earth is becoming the abode of darkness and death, and the Prince of Darkness ascends to his throne upon it—from now on and forever.

I am going to you, David. I will hurl your sad life towards the proud heaven like a stone from a sling—and the foundations of the high heavens will tremble. My slave, David! With your lips I will proclaim the truth about the fate of man.

He turns to the Guardian of the Entrances.

And you!...

He becomes silent, bashfully, confused by the Silence. He stretches himself lazily, as from tediousness, and mutters in a voice loud enough to be heard by the Guardian of the Entrances.

But am I not roaming about, because I have nothing to do? I have been here, and now I shall go there. Are there not plenty of roads for the gay Anathema, who is fond of healthy laughter and a carefree jest? Six.... That means that I bring to David a fortune which he does not expect.... Eight.... That means that David Leizer is healing the sick and reviving the dead. Twenty.... Correct! That means ... That means that David and I come to express our gratitude. David Leizer, the great, the powerful, the immortal David Leizer and I.... I am going.

Anathema departs.

Silence. The rocks are silent; the mute Gates, pressing the earth with their enormous weight, are silent; the Guardian, petrified, is silent.

Silence. But did not Anathema's footsteps awaken an alarming, resounding echo? One, two—some heavy steps are heard coming. It is like one footstep, but many people are coming; they are silent, but the silence is already quivering. A momentary confusion of sounds, of helplessness and tremulous outbursts, and suddenly the silence breaks out in high yellow flames of fire: somewhere below, in the invisible distance, on earth, long trumpets, carried by hands uplifted high, are blaring in rebellious, brasslike tones,—their defiant cry of revolt is turned both to earth and to Heaven.

One, two,—now it is clear that a crowd is moving; its monstrous voice, its blended

and separate sobs, its noisy and stormy speech is heard; and below, in the labyrinth from broken and dark passages, the first distinct sound rings out: "Da-a-vid!" It grows more distinct, rises higher, and now it soars overhead-on the wings of this brass fanfare, above the heavy stamping of the marching feet.

"Da-a-vid! Da-a-a-vid! Da-a-a-vid!"

The sounds blend harmoniously. They become the song of millions of people. The trumpets are blaring, exhausted; they call hoarsely with their brass voices—

Does the Guardian of the Entrances hear them? The grey rocks are covered with moans; passionate sobs rise to His feet, but the Guardian is motionless, the Guardian is speechless, and the iron Gates are mute.

The abyss crashes.

With one blow, as if splitting the earth, a brass roar and shout breaks forth,—and out of the fragments, like a spring from a rock that is split by lightning, a soft, harmonious, bright melody comes forth.

Then it dies out.

Silence. Immobility. Expectation, expectation, expectation.

CURTAIN

ACT ONE

The south of Russia. A hot summer midday. A wide road near the end of a large, thickly populated city. Starting from the left corner of the stage, the road crosses it diagonally, turning in the rear of the stage to the right. Two high stone posts, of ancient construction, dilapidated and slightly bent, indicate the boundary of the city. On the side of the city line, at the right post, there is a deserted, once yellow sentry-box, the plaster fallen of in spots and the windows tightly boarded and nailed up. On the sides of the road there are several small shops made of cheap wood, separated from one another by narrow passages—in the desperate and ineffectual

struggle for existence the little shops seem to be clambering stupidly upon one another. The people are dealing in all sorts of merchandise: candies, sunflower seeds, cheap sausages, herrings; each shop has a small, dirty counter, through which a pipe with two faucets stands out prominently—one of them for soda-water, at a penny a glass,—the other for seltzer. One of the little shops belongs to David Leizer; the others—to the Greek Purikes, to the young Jewess Sonka Zitron, and to the Russian, Ivan Bezkrainy, who, in addition to his business, mends shoes and rubbers; he is the only one who has "real noblemen's" cider for sale.

The sun is burning mercilessly and the few small trees, with their leaves curled up from the heat, are pining for rain; the dusty road is deserted. Beyond the posts, where the road is turning toward the right, there is a high precipice—the dust-covered tops of trees are seen here and there in the descending distance. And embracing the entire horizon, the sea has stretched itself in a smoky blue strip, sleeping peacefully in the heat and glare of the sun.

Sarah, David Leizer's wife, an old Jewess, exhausted by life, is seated in front of her little shop. She is mending some rags and is chatting languidly with the other shopkeepers.

SARAH.

No one is buying anything. No one is drinking any soda-water; no one is buying any sunflower seeds or any fine candies which melt in the mouth.

PURIKES.

Like an echo.

No one is buying anything.

SARAH.

One might think that all the people have died so as not to buy anything. One might think that we remained alone with our stores in the whole world—we alone in the

whole world.

PURIKES.

Like an echo.

We alone.

BEZKRAINY.

The sun has burnt all the customers—only the shopkeepers remained.

Silence. The soft sobbing of Sonka is heard.

BEZKRAINY.

Sonka, yesterday you bought a chicken. Did you kill or rob anybody that you can afford to buy chickens? And if you are so rich and you hide your money, why do you deal here and hinder us from making a living?

PURIKES.

Like an echo.

And hinder us from making a living?

BEZKRAINY.

Sonka, I am asking you,—is it true that you bought a chicken yesterday? Don't lie, I know it from trustworthy people.

Sonka maintains silence, weeping.

SARAH.

When a Jew buys a chicken, it is because either the Jew is sick or the chicken is sick. Sonka Zitron's son is dying; yesterday he commenced to die and to-day he will end it—the boy is tenacious and he is dying slowly.

BEZKRAINY.

Why did she come here if her son is dying?

SARAH.

Because it is necessary to trade.

PURIKES.

It is necessary to trade.

Sonka is weeping.

SARAH.

Yesterday we ate nothing, we waited for to-day; and to-day we will eat nothing, waiting that to-morrow will bring us customers and happiness. Happiness! Who knows what is happiness? All people are equal before God, and yet one sells two cents' worth, while another sells thirty cents' worth. And one always two cents' worth, while the other always thirty cents' worth, and no one knows why happiness is given to a person.

BEZKRAINY.

I used to sell thirty cents' worth, and now I sell only two cents' worth. At that time I had no "noblemen's" cider, and now I have it, and yet I sell only two cents' worth now. Luck is changeable!

PURIKES.

Luck is changeable.

SARAH.

Yesterday my son Naum came and asked me: "Mother, where is father?" So I said to him: "What for do you want to know where father is? David Leizer, your father, is a sick, unfortunate man, who is going to die soon; and he goes to the seashore to commune in solitude with God about his fate. Don't disturb your father, he is going to die soon—you had better tell me what you want to say." And Naum answered: "I will tell you, mother,—I am beginning to die!" That is what Naum answered. When David Leizer, my old husband, came home, I said to him: "You are still steadfast in your uprightness! Blaspheme God and die! For your son Naum is already beginning

to die."

Sonka is weeping more loudly.

PURIKES.

Suddenly looks around, frightened.

But what—But what if people should stop buying things altogether?

SARAH.

Frightened.

What do you mean?

PURIKES.

With ever growing fear.

What if people should suddenly stop buying things altogether? What are we to do then?

BEZKRAINY.

With alarm.

How is it possible that people should stop buying things altogether? That's impossible!

SARAH.

That's impossible.

PURIKES.

It is possible. Suddenly everybody may stop buying things.

All are seized with horror; even Sonka stops weeping, and pale-faced, she surveys the deserted road with her frightened, dark eyes. The sun is burning mercilessly. Anathema appears in the distance, at the turn of the road.

SARAH.

A customer!

PURIKES.

A customer!

SONKA.

A customer! A customer!

She cries again. Anathema comes nearer to them. Notwithstanding the heat, he wears a black coat of fine cloth, a black silk hat, black gloves; only his necktie is white, lending a solemn air to his costume. He is tall, and, though grey-haired, straight and stately. The face of the accursed one is of a swarthy-grey color; his features are stern and of peculiar beauty. When Anathema takes off his hat, his enormous forehead is revealed, furrowed by wrinkles. His head is unusually large and his greyish black hair is dishevelled. Anathema's neck is wiry and strong, but it is rather thin and long, and in his nervous contortions he carries his head like a heavy weight, giving it the appearance of strange inquisitiveness, restlessness and malignity.

SARAH.

Do you want perhaps a glass of soda-water, sir? It is as hot as in Hell, and if you don't drink, you may die of a sunstroke.

BEZKRAINY.

Real noblemen's cider!

PURIKES.

Violet soda! My God, violet soda!

SARAH.

Soda, seltzer!

BEZKRAINY.

Don't drink her soda-water. From her water rats are dying and roaches stand up on their hind legs.

SARAH.

Ivan, aren't you ashamed to take away a customer? I am not saying anything about your noblemen's cider, which is fit only for mad dogs to drink.

PURIKES.

Joyously.

A customer! A customer! Please don't buy anything from me, you needn't buy anything from me,—all I want is to look at you. Sonka, do you see? A buyer!

SONKA.

I don't see anything. I can't see.

Anathema lifts his hatband bows to all kindly.

ANATHEMA.

Thank you. I will drink a glass of soda-water with pleasure, and perhaps even a glass of your noblemen's cider. But I should like to know where David Leizer's business place is.

SARAH.

Surprised.

It is here. Do you want David? I am his wife, Sarah.

ANATHEMA.

Yes, madam Leizer, I want to see David, David Leizer.

SARAH.

Suspiciously.

You have come with bad news: David has no friends that wear clothes of such fine cloth as you wear. If that is so, you had better go away. David is not here, and I will not tell you where he is.

ANATHEMA.

Heartily.

Oh, no, madam, don't be uneasy; I am not bringing you any bad news. But how pleasant it is to see such love.—Do you love your husband very much, madam Leizer? He must be a very strong and healthy man, earning much money.

SARAH.

Frowning.

No, he is sick and old and unable to work. But he has not sinned against God or man in any way, and even his enemies dare not say anything bad about him. Here is some seltzer, sir, it is better than soda. And if you are not afraid of the heat, I would ask you to sit down and wait a while; David will soon be here.

ANATHEMA.

Sitting down.

Yes, I have heard many good things about your husband, but I did not know that he was so feeble and old. Have you any children, madam Leizer?

SARAH.

We had six, but the first four died....

ANATHEMA.

Nods his head compassionately.

SARAH.

Yes, we lived miserably, sir. And we have only two left. Our son Naum....

BEZKRAINY.

A good-for-nothing, who makes believe that he is sick and saunters about the city all day long.

SARAH.

Stop, Ivan, aren't you ashamed to slander honest people? Naum is going around

because he has to get credit. Then, sir, we have a daughter, and her name is Rosa. But unfortunately she is too beautiful, too beautiful, sir. Happiness what is happiness? One person dies of smallpox, while another person needs smallpox, but it would not come, and the face is as pure as a flower leaf.

ANATHEMA.

Feigning amazement.

Why are you so sorry about it? Beauty is a gift from God, which He has bestowed upon man, whom he has thus elevated and brought nearer to Himself.

SARAH.

Who knows? It may be a gift from God, and it may be a gift from somebody else of whom I would not speak. But there is one thing I do not know; why has a man beautiful eyes, if he must hide them? Why has he a white face, if he must cover it with soot and filth? Beauty is a too dangerous treasure, for it is easier to hide money from a robber, than beauty from a wicked man. (Suspiciously.) Did you come perhaps to see Rosa? Then you better go away,—Rosa is not here, and I will not tell you where she is.

PURIKES.

A buyer. Sarah, look, a buyer is here.

SARAH.

Yes, yes, Purikes. But he will not buy that which he has come for, and he will not find that which he is seeking.

Anathema smiles good-naturedly and listens attentively to the conversation; every time some one begins to speak, he stretches his neck and turns his head to the speaker, holding it slightly bent on one side. He makes grimaces like an actor, expressing now amazement, now sorrow or indignation. He laughs, inappropriately, thereby frightening and surprising the people.

BEZKRAINY.

Sarah, you are making a mistake in valuing your goods too highly and not selling when people are ready to buy. Every article loses its value if you keep it too long.

SARAH

Tearfully.

What a wicked man you are, Ivan. I gave you credit for ten copecks, and you are forever slandering us.

BEZKRAINY.

Don't pay any attention to me, Sarah,—I am wicked because I am hungry. You, sir, in that black coat, go away: Sarah is an honest woman and she will not sell her daughter to you, even if you offered her a million.

SARAH.

Hotly.

That's right, Ivan, thank you. But who told you, sir, that our Rosa is beautiful? It is not true—don't laugh, it isn't true, she is as ugly as deadly sin. She is as filthy as a dog that has just crawled out of the coal-hole of a ship; her face is furrowed by smallpox and it looks like a field where people dig lime and sand; there is on her right eye a cataract as large as on an old horse. Look at her hair—it is like faded wool, half torn away by birds; and when she walks, she stoops,—I swear to you, she stoops when she walks! If you take her, everybody will laugh at you, everybody will spit at you, the street urchins will give you no rest....

ANATHEMA.

Surprised.

But, madam Leizer, I have heard—

SARAH.

Sorrowfully.

You have heard nothing! I swear to you, you have heard nothing.

ANATHEMA.

But you yourself—

SARAH.

Imploringly.

Have I said anything? My God, women are so talkative, sir; and they love their children so dearly that they always consider them beautiful. Rosa—beautiful! (Laughs.) Just think of it, Purikes,—Rosa is beautiful!

She laughs. Rosa comes over from the direction of the city. Her hair is disheveled, almost covering her black, flashing eyes; her face is smeared with something black, and she is dressed wretchedly. She walks with a youthful and stately gait, but on noticing the strange man, she stoops like an old woman.

SARAH.

Here, here is Rosa; look, sir! My God, how ugly she is. David cries every time he sees her.

ROSA.

Offended, straightens herself.

There are uglier women than I am.

SARAH.

Persuasively.

What are you saying, Rosa? There is no uglier girl than you in the whole world. (Whispers entreatingly.) Hide your beauty, Rosa. A robber has come, Rosa,—hide your beauty! At night I will wash your face myself, I will comb your braids myself, and you will be as beautiful as a heavenly angel, and we will all pray to you. A robber has come, Rosa. (Aloud.) Did they throw stones at you again?

ROSA.

Hoarsely.

Yes, they did.

SARAH.

And the dogs attacked you, too?

ROSA.

Yes, they did.—

SARAH.

So you see, sir? Even the dogs!

ANATHEMA.

In a friendly tone.

Yes, it seems that I have made a mistake. To my regret, your daughter is really not pretty and it is painful to look at her.

SARAH.

Of course, there are uglier girls than she is, but—Go, Rosochka, go over there, take your work—What is there for a poor and ugly girl to do but work? Go, my poor Rosochka, go.

Rosa takes some rags to mend and disappears behind the counter. Silence.

ANATHEMA.

Is it long since you have this store, madam Leizer?

SARAH.

Calmed down.

Thirty years already, ever since David became sick. A misfortune happened to him when he served in the army,—he was trampled by horses and they crushed his chest.

ANATHEMA.

Was David a soldier?

BEZKRAINY.

Interposing.

David had an older brother, and he was a scoundrel, and his name was Moses.

SARAH.

With a sigh.

And his name was Moses.

BEZKRAINY.

And when the time came for Moses to serve in the army, he ran off on an Italian steamer. And David was taken in his place.

SARAH.

With a sigh.

David was taken.

ANATHEMA.

What injustice!

BEZKRAINY.

Have you ever met justice in the world?

ANATHEMA.

Of course I have. You are no doubt an unfortunate man, and everything appears to you in dark colors. But you will see, you will soon see, that justice does exist. (Freely.) The devil take it, I have nothing to do, so I always roam about the world, and I have not seen anything so plentiful as justice. How shall I say it, madam Leizer? There is more justice on earth than fleas on a good dog.

SARAH.

Smiling.

But what if it is just as hard to catch justice as to catch fleas....

BEZKRAINY.

And what if it bites just as the fleas do?

All laugh. From the side of the city appears an organ-grinder, exhausted, half-blinded from dust and perspiration. He wants to pass by, but suddenly he pauses in despair, and begins to play a terrible tune.

SARAH.

Pass on, please, pass on. We need no music.

ORGAN-GRINDER.

Playing.

Neither do I need it.

SARAH.

We have nothing to give you. Pass on.

ORGAN-GRINDER.

Playing.

Then I will die to the strains of music.

ANATHEMA.

Generously.

Please, madam Leizer, give him something to eat and water—I will pay for everything.

SARAH.

What a kind-hearted man you are. Go, musician, eat and drink. But for the water I will not take anything from you—let the water be mine.

The organ-grinder sits down and eats ravenously.

ANATHEMA.

Friendly.

Is it long you have been roaming over the world, musician?

ORGAN-GRINDER.

Morosely,

I used to have a monkey before—music and a monkey. The monkey was eaten up by the fleas, and my music box started to screech, and I am looking for a tree on which to hang myself. That is all.

A little girl runs in. She looks curiously at the organ-grinder, then turns to Sonka.

LITTLE GIRL.

Sonka, Ruzya died.

SONKA.

Already?

LITTLE GIRL.

Yes, he died. May I take some seeds?

SONKA.

Closing her store.

You may. Sarah, if a customer comes, tell him that I will attend to business to-morrow again, otherwise he may think that my store is closed for good. Have you heard it? Ruzya died.

SARAH.

Already?

LITTLE GIRL.

Yes, he died. Is the musician going to play?

Anathema whispers to Sarah and puts something into her hand.

SARAH.

Sonka, here is a rouble for you; you see, a rouble?

BEZKRAINY.

There is luck! Yesterday a chicken, to-day a rouble. Take it, Sonka.

All look greedily upon the rouble. Sonka and the little girl go out.

SARAH.

You are very rich, sir.

ANATHEMA.

With self-satisfaction.

Yes. I have a large practice—I am a lawyer.

SARAH.

Quickly.

David has no debts.

ANATHEMA.

Oh, I haven't come for that at all, madam Leizer. When you know me better, you will see that I bring, but do not take, that I make gifts, but do not take them back.

SARAH.

With fear.

Do you come from God?

ANATHEMA.

It would be too much honor for me and for you, madam Leizer, if I came from God. No, I have come of my own accord.

Naum comes over, looks at the customer with amazement, and sits down, exhausted, upon a rock. Naum is a tall, thin young man, with a narrow chest and a large, pale nose. He looks around on all sides.

NAUM.

Where is Rosa?

SARAH.

In a whisper.

Not so loud,—she is there. (Aloud.) Well, hew was it, Naum? Did you get any credit?

NAUM.

Slowly.

No, mother, I did not get any credit. I am beginning to die, mother,—everybody feels hot, while I am very cold; and I am perspiring, but my perspiration is cold. I met Sonka—Ruzya died already.

SARAH.

You will live yet, Naum, you will live yet.

NAUM.

Slowly.

Yes, I will live yet. Why isn't father coming? It is time for him to be here.

SARAH.

Clean a herring, Rosa. This gentleman is waiting for David a long time already, and David isn't here.

NAUM.

What does he want?

SARAH.

I don't know, Naum. Since he came, I suppose it was necessary.

Silence.

NAUM.

Mother, I am not going for credit any more. I will go with father to the sea. The time

has come when I must go and ask God about my fate.

SARAH.

Do not ask Him, Naum, do not ask.

NAUM.

I will ask Him.

SARAH.

Entreatingly.

Don't do it, Naum, don't ask.

ANATHEMA.

Why not, madam Leizer? Do you fear that God will give him a bad answer? You should have more faith, madam Leizer. If David heard you, he would not approve your words.

ORGAN-GRINDER.

Raising his head.

Is it you, young man, who wants to speak to God?

NAUM.

Yes, it is I. Every man can speak with God.

ORGAN-GRINDER.

Do you think so? Then ask for a new organ. Tell Him that this one is screeching.

ANATHEMA.

Compassionately.

He might add that the monkey was eaten up by the fleas—that he needs a new monkey.

He laughs. All look at him in perplexity; the organ-grinder rises and takes up his organ silently.

SARAH.

What do you want to do, musician?

ORGAN-GRINDER.

I want to play.

SARAH.

What for? We don't need any music.

ORGAN-GRINDER.

I must thank you for your kindness.

He plays something weird: the organ screeches, breaks off, wheezes. Anathema, with eyes lifted dreamily to the sky, keeps time with his hand, and whistles.

SARAH.

My God, how badly it sounds.

ANATHEMA.

This, madam Leizer (whistles),—this is called the world harmony.

The conversation dies away for some time: only the screeching of the organ and the whistling of Anathema are heard. The sun is still shining mercilessly.

ANATHEMA.

I have nothing to do, so I wander over the world.

He is carried away by the playing of the organ. Suddenly the organ breaks off with a screech, which rings in the ears for a long time, and Anathema remains as petrified with uplifted hand.

ANATHEMA.

Perplexedly.

Does it always end like this?

ORGAN-GRINDER.

Sometimes even worse. Good-by.

ANATHEMA.

Feeling his vest pocket.

No, no, you mustn't go away like that.... You have afforded us genuine pleasure, and I do not want you to hang yourself. Here is some change for you, and live on.

SARAH.

Pleasantly surprised.

Who could ever think, by looking at your face, that you are such a cheerful and kind-hearted man?

ANATHEMA.

Flattered.

Oh, do not embarrass me with your praise, madam Leizer. Why shouldn't I help a poor man who would otherwise hang himself! The life of man is a precious thing, madam Leizer,—and I always carry change with me.... But isn't that venerable man I see there David Leizer?

He looks in the direction where the road turns to the right.

SARAH.

Also looking at the road.

Yes, that is David.

All wait silently. On the dust-covered road appears David Leizer, walking slowly. He is tall, bony, with long, grey locks and a grey beard; on his head he wears a high, black cap; in his hand a staff with which he seems to measure the road. He looks down from under his heavy eyebrows; and thus, without lifting his eyes, he advances slowly and seriously to the people, and stops, leaning upon the staff with both hands.

SARAH.

Rising respectfully.

Where were you, David?

DAVID.

Not lifting his eyes.

I was by the sea.

SARAH.

What did you do there, David?

DAVID.

I looked at the waves, Sarah, and asked them whence they came and whither they were going. I was thinking of life, Sarah—whence it came and whither it is going....

SARAH.

What did the waves tell you, David?

DAVID.

They did not tell me anything, Sarah.... They come and go away again, and the man by the sea is waiting in vain for an answer from the sea.

SARAH.

With whom did you speak, David?

DAVID.

I spoke with God, Sarah. I asked Him about the fate of David Leizer, the poor Jew who is going to die soon.

SARAH.

With emotion.

And what did God tell you?

David is silent, his eyes lowered.

SARAH.

Our son Naum also wants to go with you to the sea and ask about his fate.

DAVID.

Lifting his eyes.

Is Naum going to die soon?

NAUM.

Yes, father,—I have already commenced to die.

ANATHEMA.

But, pardon me, gentlemen.... Why should you speak of death, since I have brought you life and happiness?

DAVID.

Turning his head to him.

Do you come from God? Sarah, who is he who dares to speak like this?

SARAH.

I don't know. He has been waiting for you a long time.

ANATHEMA.

Bustling about joyously.

Oh, ladies and gentlemen, smile. Attention for one minute and I will make you all laugh. Attention, gentlemen. Attention!

All look with tense attention at Anathema's mouth.

ANATHEMA.

Taking out a paper, solemnly.

Are you not David Leizer, the son of Abraham Leizer?

LEIZER.

Frightened.

Well, yes, I am. But there may be another David Leizer. I don't know—ask the people.

ANATHEMA.

Interrupting him with a gesture.

Didn't you have a brother, Moses Leizer, who fled to America thirty-five years ago on the Italian steamship Fortuna?

ALL.

Yes, he did.

DAVID.

But I did not know that he was in America.

ANATHEMA.

David Leizer, your brother Moses died!

Silence.

DAVID.

I have long forgiven him.

ANATHEMA.

And before he died he bequeathed all his fortune, amounting to two million dollars (to the people surrounding him), which means four million roubles,—to you, David Leizer.

A deep sigh goes through the crowd and all seem as petrified.

ANATHEMA.

Outstretching the paper.

Here is the document, you see—the seal.

DAVID.

Pushing the paper aside.

No, don't! Don't do that! You were not sent by God. God would not make sport of man in this way.

ANATHEMA.

Heartily.

This is not a jest. Upon my honor, it is the truth,—four millions. Allow me to be the first to congratulate you and to shake your honest hand warmly. (Takes David Leizer's hand and shakes it.) Well, madam Leizer, what have I brought you? And what will you say now? Is your daughter Rosa beautiful now or is she ugly? Aha! Are you going to die so soon, Naum? Aha! (Tearfully.) That's what I have brought you, people, and now permit me to step aside—and not to disturb you—

Lifts a handkerchief to his eyes and steps aside, apparently agitated.

SARAH.

Wildly.

Rosa!

ROSA.

Also wildly.

What is it, mamma?

SARAH.

Wash your face! Wash your face, Rosa! My God, quicker, quicker,—wash your face!

As though insane, she drags Rosa, washes her, splashing the water with trembling hands. Naum clings to his father's arm, hanging on to it, as though he is about to lose consciousness.

DAVID.

Take back your paper! (Firmly.) Take back your paper!

SARAH.

Have you lost your mind, David? Don't listen to him. Wash yourself, Rosochka, wash yourself! Let all the people see your beauty!

NAUM.

Seizing the paper.

It is ours, father. Father,—this is how God has answered you. Look at mother, look at Rosa—look at me: I was already commencing to die.

PURIKES.

Shouts.

Ai, Ai, look out, they'll tear the paper. Ai, Ai, take away the paper from them, quick!

Naum cries, Rosa, radiantly beautiful, her hair wet, but no longer covering her eyes, comes over to her father, laughing.

ROSA.

It is I, father! It is I! It is—I!

SARAH.

Wildly.

Where were you, Rosa?

ROSA.

I wasn't—I've just been born, mamma!

SARAH.

See, David, see—a human being has just been born! Oh, look at her, every one of you! Oh, open the doors of your vision, throw open the gates of your eyes—look at her, every one of you!

Suddenly David realizes the meaning of what has happened. He throws his cap from his head, tears his clothing, which seems to suffocate him, and pushing everybody aside, rushes to Anathema.

DAVID.

Sternly.

Why have you brought this?

ANATHEMA.

Meekly.

But, pardon me, Mr. Leizer, I am only a lawyer. I am sincerely glad.

DAVID.

Why have you brought this?

He pushes Anathema aside, and reeling, goes to the road. Suddenly he stops, turns around and shouts, flourishing his hands.

DAVID.

I Drive him away—that is the Devil. Do you think he brought me four million roubles? No, he brought me four million insults. Four million mockeries he hurled upon the head of David ... Four oceans of bitter tears have I shed over life, my sighs were four winds of the earth, my four children were devoured by hunger and diseases—and now, when I must die, he brings me four millions. Will they return to me my youth which I passed in privation, oppressed with grief, wrapped with sorrows, crowned with anguish? Will they repay me for one day of my starvation, one tear that fell upon a rock, one insult hurled at my face? Four million curses—that's what your four million roubles are—oh, Hannah, oh, Benjamin, and Raphael, and my little Moishe,—you, my little birdies, who died of hunger upon the naked branches of winter—what will you say if your father should touch this money? No, I don't need any money. I am telling you—I, an old Jew, dying of

hunger. I don't need any money. I don't see God in this. But I shall go to Him, I shall tell Him: What are you doing with David?—I am going.

Goes away, brandishing his hands.

SARAH.

Crying.

David, come back, come back.

PURIKES.

In despair.

The paper, pick up the paper.

ANATHEMA.

Turns around.

Calm yourself, madam Leizer, he will come back. It is always thus at first. I have wandered a great deal over the world and I know it. The blood rushes to the head, the feet begin to quiver, and man curses. That's nonsense!

ROSA.

What a crooked mirror, mother!

NAUM.

Cries.

Mamma, where is father going? I want to live.

ANATHEMA.

Throw away that piece of glass, Rosa. Mankind will reflect your beauty, the world will reflect your beauty—you will see yourself in the world.... Ah, you are still here, musician. Play something for us, please. Such a holiday must not pass without music!

ORGAN-GRINDER.

Shall I play the same?

ANATHEMA.

The same.

The organ wails and wheezes. Anathema whistles furiously, waving his hands, as though blessing everybody with the music and the whistling.

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO.

David Leizer lives richly. At the urgent request of his wife and his children he has hired a rich villa, by the sea-shore, engaged numerous servants, bought horses and carriages. Anathema, under the pretext that he had grown tired of his law practice, remained with David as his private secretary. Rosa is taking lessons in languages and deportment. Naum, who has grown very sick, near to death, is learning how to dance. The money has not yet arrived from America, but to David Leizer, the millionaire, a large credit has been extended.

The stage represents a rich parlor, white marble here and there, with large Italian windows and a door leading to a veranda. It is midday. Beyond the open windows, semi-tropical plants are visible, and the deep blue sea in the distance; through one of the windows, a view of the city is seen.

David Leizer is seated by the table, greatly depressed. A short distance away, on a divan, Sarah is seated, dressed richly, but without taste; she watches Naum learning how to dance. Naum is very pale, he coughs and almost falls from weakness, especially when, according to the rules of the dance, he must stand on one foot; but he is studying diligently! He is dressed rather richly, but his bright-colored vest and necktie spoil the elegance of his appearance. Near Naum, the dancing-master, with a fiddle and how, is hustling about, balancing himself, rising up and down. He is a man of unusual refinement and grace; he wears a white vest, patent-leather slippers, and a smoking jacket. And Anathema, standing at the veranda door, looks upon all

this with an air of sadness and reproach.

DANCING-MASTER.

One—two—three; one—two—three.

SARAH.

Look, David, see how successful our Naum is in his dancing. I could not hop like that for anything? poor boy!

DAVID.

I see.

DANCING-MASTER.

Monsieur Naum is very talented. Please, one-two—three; one—two—three. Pardon me, pardon me, this isn't exactly right. You must make the step more precise, neatly rounding the motion of the right foot. This way—this way.

Shows him how to do it.

Madam Leizer, dancing is quite like mathematics, a circle is necessary.

SARAH.

Do you hear, David?

DAVID.

I hear.

DANCING-MASTER.

Please, monsieur Naum. One—two—three.

Plays on his violin.

NAUM.

Out of breath.

One, two, three. One, two, three. One, two, three.

He turns around, and then, suddenly, almost falls down. He stops. His face is exhausted, deathly pale; he is seized with a fit of coughing. Then he resumes dancing.

NAUM,

One, two, three.

DANCING-MASTER.

That's the way, that's the way, monsieur Naum. Please, more neatly! More neatly, please! One, two, three.

He plays. Anathema walks over to Sarah cautiously and says in a low voice, yet loud enough to be heard by David:

ANATHEMA.

Madam Leizer, does it not seem to you that Naum is rather tired? This dancing-master knows no mercy.

DAVID.

Turning around.

Yes, it is enough. Sarah, you are willing to torture the boy.

SARAH.

Confusedly.

What have I to do with it, David? Don't I see that he is tired, but he wants to dance? Naum, Naum!

DAVID.

Enough, Naum! Take a rest.

NAUM.

Out of breath.

I want to dance.

Stops and stamps his foot hysterically.

Why am I not allowed to dance? Or do you all want me to die soon?

SARAH.

You will live yet, Naum. You will live yet.

NAUM.

Almost crying.

Why don't they allow me to dance? I want to dance. I have looked for credit long enough, I want to amuse myself. Am I an old man to be in bed and cough there? Cough! Cough!

He coughs and cries simultaneously. Anathema whispers something to the dancing-master, who expresses compassion, nods his head, and prepares to go.

DANCING-MASTER.

Until to-morrow, monsieur Naum. I am afraid that our lesson was a little too long.

NAUM.

To-morrow—don't fail to come to-morrow. Do you hear? I want to dance.

The dancing-master goes out, bowing. Naum follows him.

NAUM.

To-morrow, without fail. Do you hear? Without fail.

They go out.

ANATHEMA.

What are you thinking of, David? Allow me to be not only your private secretary—although I am proud of this honor—but also your friend. Since the time when you received the money you are oppressed by a dark sorrow, and it pains me to look at you.

DAVID.

What is there that I should rejoice over, Nullius?

SARAH.

And Rosa? Do not sin against God, David! Do not our eyes rest upon her beauty and youth? Before even the silent moon dared not look at her, one star dared not whisper about her to any other star,—while now she is riding about in a carriage, and everybody looks at her, and horsemen gallop after her. Just think of it, Nullius, horsemen gallop after her!

DAVID.

And Naum?

SARAH.

What about Naum? He has long been ill, you know it, and death upon a soft bed is not worse than death upon the pavement. And perhaps he will live yet, he will live yet (cries.) David, Abraham Khessin and Sonka's girl are waiting for you in the yard.

DAVID.

Morosely.

What do they want, money? Sarah, give them a few pennies and let them go.

SARAH.

In the end they will draw out all the money we have, Nullius. I have given to Khessin twice already. He is like sand,—no matter how much water you pour into it, it is always dry and greedy.

DAVID.

Nonsense! we have too much money, Sarah. But it pains me to look at the people, Nullius. Since the time when you brought us this fortune—

ANATHEMA.

Which you earned by your sufferings, Leizer.

DAVID.

Since that time, the people have changed so much for the worse. You like to have the people bow to you very low, Nullius? I do not like it—human beings are not dogs that they should crawl on their bellies. And you like to have the people tell you, Nullius, that you are the wisest, the most magnanimous, the best of all living beings—whereas you are only an ordinary old Jew, like many another Jew. I do not like it, Nullius,—for the sons of the God of truth and mercy it is unbecoming to lie, even while dying of the cruelties of truth.

ANATHEMA.

Thoughtfully.

Riches are a terrible power, Leizer. No one asks you where your money came from; they see your might and they worship it.

DAVID.

Might? And Naum? And I, Nullius? Can I buy for all the money even a single day of health and life?

ANATHEMA.

You look considerably fresher now.

DAVID.

Smiling gloomily.

Yes? Should I, perhaps, also engage a dancing-master? What do you advise me, Nullius?

SARAH.

Don't forget Rosa, father. Is it not a great sin against God to hide the beauty of the face? It is given as a joy and a pleasure to the eyes; God Himself reveals His beauty in a beautiful face, and did we not lift our hands against God Himself when we stained our Rosa's face with coal and soot, when we made her terrible and sorrowful

to look upon?

DAVID.

Beauty is withering. Everything is dying, Sarah.

SARAH.

But the lily also withers, and the narcissus dies, the petals of the yellow rose fall apart—would you, David, trample all flowers under foot and heap abuse upon the yellow rose? Do not doubt, David,—the God of righteousness has given you riches—will you who were so firm in misfortune that you did not blaspheme God even once—will you grow weak in your happiness?

ANATHEMA.

You are perfectly right, madam Leizer. Rosa has so many suitors that all she needs is to choose.

DAVID.

Rising angrily.

I will not give Rosa to any of them.

SARAH.

Why not, David?

DAVID.

I will not give Rosa to any of them. They are like dogs that want to eat out of the golden bowl—I will drive the dogs away.

Enter Rosa. She is dressed richly, but simply. She is somewhat pale and fatigued, but very beautiful. She tries to speak and to move gracefully, but at times she forgets herself and becomes rude and vociferous. She feds tormented by this. Rosa is accompanied by two horsemen. The older man is very pale and he frowns angrily. Naum clings to Rosa, as though seeking protection in her youth, strength, and beauty, and he walks faintly after her.

DAVID.

In a rather loud voice.

Sarah, here are the suitors.

SARAH.

Waving her hand.

Oh, be silent, David.

ROSA.

Kissing her mother carelessly.

How tired I am, mamma. Good afternoon, father.

SARAH.

Take care of yourself, Rosochka; you mustn't study so much.

To the older of the two cavaliers.

Please tell her that she mustn't work so hard—what does she need to work for now?

YOUNG RIDER.

In a low voice.

People should pray before your daughter, madam Leizer. Soon a temple will be erected in her honor.

OLDER RIDER.

Smiling.

And near the temple, a cemetery. Madam Leizer, there are always cemeteries near the temples.

ROSA.

Good-by. I am tired. If you are disengaged, come in to-morrow morning—I may go out with you again.

OLDER RIDER.

Shrugging his shoulders.

Disengaged? Oh, yes, of course, we are entirely free.

Harshly.

Good-by.

YOUNG RIDER.

With a sigh.

Good-by.

They go out.

SARAH.

Uneasily.

Rosochka, I think you have offended him. Why did you do it?

ROSA.

That doesn't matter, mamma.

ANATHEMA.

To David.

These are not suitors, David.

David laughs morosely. Anathema runs over to Rosa and offers her his arm. He leads her, half-dancing, merrily whistling the same tune that the organ had played.

ANATHEMA.

Oh, Rosa, were it not for my age (whistles) and not for my illness (whistles), I would be the first to ask your hand.

ROSA.

Laughing haughtily.

Better illness than death.

DAVID.

You are a very gay man, Nullius.

ANATHEMA.

Whistling.

The absence of wealth and, then, a clear conscience, David, a clear conscience. I have nothing to do, so I walk arm in arm with Rosa. You spoke of death, Rosa?

ROSA.

Yes.

ANATHEMA.

Stopping.

You are indeed beautiful, Rosa.

Thoughtfully.

And what if.... If.... But no; duty above all. Listen to me, Rosa: don't give yourself away to any one less than a prince, even though the prince of darkness.

NAUM.

Rosochka, why did you go away from me? I feel cold when you do not hold my hand. Hold my hand, Rosochka.

ROSA.

Hesitating.

But I must go to change my dress, Naum.

NAUM.

I will accompany you as far as your room. You know, I danced again to-day and danced very well. I am not so short of breath now any longer.

With a feeling of adoration and slight envy.

How beautiful you are, Rosochka!

SARAH.

Wait, Rosochka, I will comb your hair myself. Will you allow me?

ROSA.

You do it very badly, mamma; you kiss it more than you comb it—my hair gets entangled from your kisses.

DAVID.

Is that how you answer your mother, Rosa?

ROSA.

Stopping.

Why do you despise my beauty, father?

DAVID.

Before, I used to love your beauty, Rosa.

SARAH.

With indignation.

What did you say, David?

DAVID.

Yes, Sarah. I love the pearl when it is on the bottom of the sea; but after it is taken out of the sea, it becomes blood—and then I do not like pearls, Sarah.

ROSA.

Why do you despise my beauty, father? Do you know what another girl in my place would have done? She would have lost her mind and would have whirled about on earth like a dog that swallowed a pin. But what am I doing? I am studying, father. I am studying by day and night, father.

In great agitation.

I don't know anything. I don't know how to speak, I don't even know how to walk—I stoop, I stoop as I walk.

SARAH.

That isn't true, Rosa.

ROSA.

Agitated.

Here I have forgotten myself for a while, and I am shouting, I am croaking hoarsely, like a crow that has caught cold. I want to be beautiful—that's what I was born for. You laugh? It is in vain. Do you know that your daughter will be a duchess, a princess? I want to add a scepter to my crown!

ANATHEMA.

Oho!

All three go out. David jumps from his seat angrily and paces the room quickly.

DAVID.

What a comedy, Nullius! Yesterday she begged Heaven for a herring, and to-day a crown is not enough for her. To-morrow she will take the throne away from Satan and will sit upon it, Nullius, and she will sit firmly! What a comedy!

Anathema has changed the expression of his face; he is stern and morose.

ANATHEMA.

No, David Leizer, it is a tragedy.

DAVID.

'Tis a comedy, Nullius, a comedy. Don't you hear the laughter of Satan in all this?

Pointing at the door.

You saw a corpse dancing—I see it every morning.

ANATHEMA.

Is Naum so dangerously ill?

DAVID.

Dangerously ill? Three physicians, three serious gentlemen, examined him yesterday and told me quietly that in a month from now Naum will die, that he is already more than half a corpse. And every morning I see in this white marble parlor a corpse jumping to the tune of music—is it not a dream, Nullius? Is it not the laughter of Satan?

ANATHEMA.

And what did they say about your health, David?

DAVID.

I did not ask them. I don't want them to tell me. You may also jump to the tune of music, David. How would you like it, Nullius: two corpses dancing in a white marble hall?

He laughs bitterly.

ANATHEMA.

You frighten me, my friend. What is going on within your soul?

DAVID.

Do not touch my soul, Nullius—there is horror in it!

Clasps his head.

Oh! what shall I do? What shall I do? I am alone in the whole world.

ANATHEMA.

What ails you, David? Calm yourself.

DAVID.

Stopping before Anathema, horror-stricken.

Death, Nullius, death! You have brought us death. Was I not mute before the face of

Death? Did I not wait for it as for a friend? But here you have brought us riches—and I want to dance. I want to dance, yet death clutches at my heart; I want to eat, for hunger has entered my very bones,—but my old stomach refuses to accept any food; I want to laugh, but my face is sobbing, my eyes are weeping, and my soul is crying with mortal fear. Hunger has crept into my bones, and poison is already in my blood—there is no salvation for me; Death has overtaken me.

ANATHEMA.

Significantly.

The poor are waiting for you, David.

DAVID.

What matters it?

ANATHEMA.

The poor are waiting for you, David.

DAVID.

The poor are always waiting.

ANATHEMA.

Sternly.

Now I see that you are really lost, David. God has forsaken you.

David stops and looks at him, surprised and angry. Anathema, with head thrown back haughtily, meets his look calmly and sternly. Silence.

DAVID.

You say this to me, Nullius?

ANATHEMA.

Yes, I say this to you, David Leizer. Beware, David Leizer, you are in Satan's hands.

DAVID.

Terrified.

Nullius, my friend, you frighten me. What have I done to deserve your anger and these cruel, terrible words of yours? You have always treated me and my children so kindly.... Your hair is just as grey as mine, in your face I have long observed a hidden grief, and—I respect you, Nullius! Why are you silent? A terrible fire is burning in your eyes.—Who are you, Nullius? But you are silent.—No, no, do not lower your eyes, I am even more terrified when they are lowered, for then upon your brow appear fiery letters of some vague—of some terrible—fatal truth.

ANATHEMA.

Tenderly.

David!

DAVID.

Joyously.

You have started to speak, Nullius.

ANATHEMA.

Be silent and listen to me. From madness I will bring you back to wisdom, from death to life.

DAVID.

I am silent and I am listening.

ANATHEMA.

Your madness consists of this, David Leizer,—you have sought for God all your life, and when God came to you, you said: "I do not know You." Your death consists of this, David Leizer,—blinded by misfortunes, like a horse that is turning around in the darkness, you failed to notice the people and you remained in their midst alone, with your illness and your riches. There in the yard Life is waiting for you—and you, blind man, you close the door against it. Dance, David, dance,— Death has

lifted the bow and is waiting for you. Be more graceful, David Leizer, more graceful; round out your steps more neatly!

DAVID.

What do you want of me?

ANATHEMA.

Return to God that which God has given to you.

DAVID.

Darkly.

Has God given me anything?

ANATHEMA.

Every rouble in your pocket is a knife which you thrust into the heart of the hungry. Distribute your fortune to the poor, give bread to the hungry, and you will conquer Death.

DAVID.

No one gave a crust of bread to David when he was hungry. By satisfying their hunger, will I still the hunger that is in my bones?

ANATHEMA.

In them your own hunger will be stilled.

DAVID.

Shall I get back my health and my strength?

ANATHEMA.

In them you will be strong.

DAVID.

Shall I drive out death, already in my blood, which is as thin as water, which is already in my veins, that have become hard like dried-up cords? Shall I recover life?

ANATHEMA.

By their life you will prolong your life. Now you have but one heart, David,—but then you will have a million hearts.

DAVID.

But I shall die!

ANATHEMA.

No, you will be immortal!

David retreats in horror.

DAVID.

Your lips have uttered a terrible word. Who are you that you dare promise immortality? Are not life and death in the hand of God?

ANATHEMA.

God said: Reestablish life through life.

DAVID.

But people are wicked and vicious, and the hungry one is nearer to God than the well-fed.

ANATHEMA.

Remember Hannah and Benjamin....

DAVID.

Be silent!

ANATHEMA.

Remember Raphael and little Moishe....

DAVID.

Grief-stricken.

Be silent, be silent!

ANATHEMA.

Remember your little birds who died upon the cold branches of winter—

David cries Utterly.

ANATHEMA.

When the lark sings in the blue sky, will you say to it: "Be silent, little bird, God does not need your song"—And will you not give a kernel to it when it is hungry? And will you not cover it upon your breast when it is cold, that it may feel warm and save its voice for Spring? Who are you, then, unfortunate man, who has no pity on birds and who turns children out into the storm? Remember how your little Moishe died. Remember, David, and say: "The people are vicious, wicked, and unworthy of my kindness!"

David bends his knees as under a heavy weight and lifts his hands, as though warding off from his head a blow from the sky. He speaks hoarsely.

DAVID.

Adenoi! Adenoi!

Anathema, with arms folded on his breast, looks at him in silence.

DAVID.

Mercy! Mercy!

ANATHEMA.

Quickly.

David, the poor are waiting for you. They will go away soon.

DAVID.

No, no!

ANATHEMA.

The poor are always waiting, but they grow tired of waiting and they go away.

DAVID.

They will not go away from me. Oh, Nullius, Nullius!... Oh, wise Nullius! Oh, foolish Nullius! Is it possible that you did not understand that I have long been waiting for the poor and that their voice is in my ears and in my heart? When wheels are riding along a dust-covered road, on which rain had just fallen, they think as they turn and leave a trace: Here we are making a road. But the road was there before, Nullius, the road was there before!

Gayly.

Call the poor over to me.

ANATHEMA.

Consider, David, whom you are calling.

Darkly.

Do not deceive me, David.

DAVID

I have never deceived any one, Nullius.

Resolutely and majestically.

You spoke and I was silent, and I listened; now be silent and listen to me: I have given my soul not to man but to God, and His power is over me. And I command you: Call my wife Sarah over here, and my children Naum and Rosa, and all the people in my household, whoever they may be.

ANATHEMA.

Obediently.

I shall call them.

DAVID.

And call the poor who are waiting for me in the yard. And when you go out on the street, see whether there are any poor people waiting for me, and if you see them, call them also. For my lips are burning with their thirst, their hunger torments my body with insatiable hunger, and I am hastening to announce to the people my last, unchangeable will. Go!

ANATHEMA.

Obediently.

Your will is upon me.

Anathema goes to the door. Silence.

DAVID.

The spirit of God has come over me. Adenoi. Adenoi.... Who was the terrible one that spoke through the voice of old Nullius, when he spoke about my little children who died? Only an arrow out of the bow of the Omniscient strikes the very heart with such good aim. My little birds.... Verily, You have saved me upon the edge of the abyss, and You have torn my spirit away from the clutches of the Devil. He who looks straight at the sun may grow blind, but with the lapse of time the light may come back to the revived eyes; but he who looks into darkness grows blind forever. My little birds....

Suddenly he laughs softly and joyously, and he whispers.

I myself shall bring them bread and milk, I shall hide myself behind the bed-curtain that they should not see me—children are so tender and easily frightened and they are afraid of unfamiliar people; and I have such a terrible beard. (Laughs.) I shall hide myself behind the bed-curtain and will watch how the children are eating. They need so little; they eat a little crust of bread and they have enough; they drink a cup of milk and they know no thirst any longer. Then they sing—But how strange! does not the night pass away when the sun comes? do not the waves, at the end of the storm, lie down calmly and quietly like lambs resting in the pasture? Whence came

the alarm, the slight confusion, and the fear? Shades of unknown woes are passing over my soul and soaring noiselessly over my thoughts. Ah, if I remained poor, if I remained unknown, under the shade of the fence where the refuse is cast away! You have lifted me to the peak of the mountain and You show my old, sorrowful face to the world. But such is Your will. You will command—and the lamb will become a lion; You will command—and the furious lion will stretch out her powerful breasts to her little ones; You will command—and David Leizer, who has grown white in shade, will fearlessly rise to the sun. Adenoi! Adenoi!

Sarah, Naum, and Rosa enter, alarmed.

SARAH.

David, what is it you have called us for? And why was your Nullius so strict when he told us of your command? We have not sinned against you, and if we have sinned, investigate it, but do not look at us so sternly.

ROSA.

May I sit down?

DAVID.

Be silent and wait. All those whom I have called are not here yet. Be seated, Rosa, if you are tired, but when the time comes, rise. You, too, may sit down, Naum.

The servants enter irresolutely; a lackey, resembling an English Minister; a chamber-maid; a cook; a gardener; a dish-washer, and others. They move about in confusion. Soon about fifteen or twenty poor people enter, in groups. Among them are: Abraham Khessin, an old man; Sonka's girl; Joseph Kritsky, Sarah Lepke, and several other Jews and Jewesses. But there are also Greeks, and Little Russians, and Russians and other paupers whose nationality has been lost in rags and filth; two drunkards. Purikes, Ivan Bezkrainy, and the Organ-grinder, with the same outworn instrument, are also here. But Anathema is still away.

DAVID.

Please, please. Come in more boldly, don't stop at the threshold,—others are coming behind you. But it would be well if you wiped your feet first; this rich house is not mine, and I must return it as clean as when I took it.

KHESSIN.

We have not yet learned how to walk on rugs, and we have not yet any patent leather shoes, as your son Naum has. How do you do, David Leizer? Peace be upon your house.

DAVID.

Peace unto you, too, Abraham. But why do you call me David Leizer, when you used to call me simply David before?

KHESSIN.

You are now such a mighty man, David Leizer. Yes, I used to call you merely David before, but here I was waiting for you in the yard, and the longer I waited, the longer your name grew, Mr. David Leizer.

DAVID.

You are right, Abraham: when the sun sets, the shadows become longer, and when a man becomes smaller, his name grows longer. But wait another while, Abraham.

LACKEY.

To drunkard.

You better move away from me.

DRUNKARD.

Keep quiet, fool! You are a servant here, while we are the guests.

LACKEY.

Ruffian! You aren't in a car here, that you spit on the floor.

DRUNKARD.

Mr. Leizer, a certain man, who looked like an old devil, caught me by the collar and said: "David Leizer, who received an inheritance, is calling you." I asked him, "What for?" So he answered: "David wants to make you his heir," and he began to laugh. And now that I came here, your servant is chasing me away.

DAVID.

Smiling.

Nullius is a gay man and he never misses an opportunity for jesting. But you are my guest, and I ask you to wait.

SARAH.

After some hesitancy.

Well, how is your business getting along, Ivan? You have fewer competitors now.

BEZKRAINY.

It's bad, Sarah; we have no customers.

PURIKES.

Like an echo.

No customers.

SARAH.

Compassionately.

Ai—Ai—Ai! It's bad, if there are no customers.

ROSA.

Don't speak, mamma. Do you want, perhaps, to smear my face again with soot?

Pushing several paupers into the door, Anathema enters, apparently fatigued.

ANATHEMA.

Well, David, meanwhile receive these. Your millions frighten the poor, and nobody

wanted to follow me, thinking that some deception is hidden here.

DRUNKARD.

This is the man who caught me by the collar.

ANATHEMA.

Ah, is that you? How do you do? How do you do?

DAVID.

Thank you, Nullius. Now take ink and paper and sit down near me, by the table; bring me my old counting-board.... As everything I am about to say is very important, I ask you to write it correctly and to make no errors—we shall give an account of every word before God. I ask you all to rise and listen attentively, striving to understand the great words which I am about to utter.

Sternly.

Rise, Rosa.

SARAH.

God, have mercy on us! What are you going to do, David?

DAVID.

Be silent, Sarah. You will come with me.

ANATHEMA.

Ready.

All listen, standing.

DAVID.

Solemnly.

Upon the death of my brother, Moses Leizer, I received an inheritance (on the counting-board) of two million dollars.

ANATHEMA.

Nervously, lifting four fingers.

Which means four million roubles.

DAVID.

Sternly.

Do not interrupt me, Nullius. Yes, it does mean four million roubles. And now, submitting to the voice of my conscience and the command of God, and also in memory of my children, Hannah, Benjamin, Raphael, and Moses, who died of hunger and disease in their childhood....

He lowers his head and weeps bitterly. Sarah also cries bitterly.

SARAH.

Oh, my little Moishe! David, David, our little Moishe is dead.

DAVID.

Wiping his eyes with a large red handkerchief.

Be silent, Sarah. What was I going to say to them, Nullius?... Well, write, Nullius, write. I know.

Firmly.

I have resolved, in accordance with the command of God, who is Truth and Mercy, to distribute all my possessions to the poor. Am I speaking properly, Nullius?

ANATHEMA.

I hear God in your words.

At first no one believes David; but soon joyous doubts and unexpected fear come over them. As though in sleep the people repeat: "Four millions, four millions!" and they hide their faces with their hands. The Organ-grinder comes forward.

ORGAN-GRINDER.

Morosely.

Will you buy me a new organ, David?

ANATHEMA.

Hush, musician! Back!

ORGAN-GRINDER.

Retreating.

I want also a new monkey.

DAVID.

Let your hearts rejoice, O unfortunate people, and with a smile on your lips answer the mercy of Heaven. Go from here to the city, like heralds of happiness,—go through all its streets and squares, and shout everywhere: "David Leizer, the old Jew, who is to die soon, received an inheritance and now distributes it among the poor." And if you will see a man weeping, and a child whose face is bloodless and whose eyes are dim, and a woman whose breasts are shrunken like those of an old goat,—tell them also: "Go, David is calling you." Do I speak properly, Nullius?

ANATHEMA.

Yes, yes. But have you called all those who should be called?

DAVID.

And if you should see an intoxicated man slumbering amidst his vomitings, wake him and tell him: "Go, David is calling you." And if you should see a thief thrashed in the market-place by those he had robbed, call him also, with words of kindness, yet firm enough to be regarded as a command: "Go, David is calling you." And if you should see people who in their misery have become irritated and furious and who are beating one another with sticks and bits of brick, announce to them also in words of peace: "Go, David is calling you." And if you should see a bashful man, who while walking in the wide street lowers his eyes before the eyes of others, but who stares greedily when no one looks at him, tell him also in a low voice, without

offending his pride: "Are you not looking for David? Go, he has long been waiting for you." And if in the evening, when the Devil sows the seeds of night over the earth, you should see a woman, hideously painted, just as the heathen paint the bodies of their dead, and who stares boldly, for she has lost all shame, and who lifts her shoulders, for fear of a blow, tell her also: "Go, David is calling you." Do I speak properly, Nullius?

ANATHEMA.

Yes, David. But have you called all who should be called?

DAVID.

And whatever form of aversion or fear poverty may assume, and in whatever colors misery may paint itself, and by whatever words suffering may fence itself around, rouse with a loud call those who are fatigued, in words of life return life to those who are dying! Do not trust the silence and the darkness if they obstruct your way like a wall: Shout more loudly into the silence and the darkness, for there dwells unspeakable horror.

ANATHEMA.

That's right, David, that's right! I see how your spirit climbs to the peak of the mountain and how you knock loudly at the iron gates of eternity: Open! I love you, David, I kiss your hand, David,—like a dog I am ready to crawl before you and to obey your commandments. Call, David, call! Rise, O earth! North and South, East and West, I command you, by the will of David, my master, answer the call of him who calls you, and stop at his feet like four oceans of tears. Call, David, call!

DAVID.

Lifting his hands.

North and South....

ANATHEMA.

East and West....

DAVID.

David is calling you all.

ANATHEMA.

David is calling you all.

Confusion, tears, laughter,—for all believe him now. Anathema kisses David's hand, springing about delightedly. He drags the Organ-grinder by the collar to the center.

ANATHEMA.

Look, David, here's a musician!

Laughs and shakes the Organ-grinder.

So you don't want your old music, eh? You need a new monkey, eh? Perhaps you will ask for a powder that destroys the fleas? Ask; we shall give you everything.

DAVID.

Be quiet, Nullius, be quiet. We must work. You are an expert at counting, Nullius, are you not?

ANATHEMA.

I? Oh, Rabbi David! I am myself Numbers, I am myself—Measures and Weights.

DAVID.

Be seated, then; write and count. But there is one more thing, my dear children: I am an old Jew, who can divide a piece of garlic into ten portions. I know not only the need of man, but I saw also how a roach was starving—yes,—I saw also how small children died of hunger....

Lowers his head and heaves a deep sigh.

Therefore do not deceive me, and remember that there is a number and a measure for everything. And where ten copecks are needed, do not ask for twenty, and where

one measure of grain is needed, do not ask for two, for what is superfluous for one is always essential to another. Like brothers having one mother whose breasts are full but are quickly exhausted, do not abuse one another, and do not offend the generous but careful mother.... You may begin. Nullius, is everything ready?

ANATHEMA.

You may begin. I am waiting, David.

DAVID.

Stand in line, then, I beg you. I have not received the money yet; it is still in America, but I shall write down exactly how much each one of you is to get according to his need.

SARAH.

David, David, what are you doing with us? Look at Rosa, look at poor Naum.

Naum is dumfounded—he wants to say something, but is unable; he clutches the air with outstretched fingers. A little distance away from him, alone in her youth, strength, and beauty, amidst all these poor people, with emaciated faces and flat breasts, stands Rosa, who looks at her father defiantly.

ROSA.

Are we less your children than these who have been picked up in the street? And are we not brother and sister to those who died?

DAVID.

Rosa is right, mother,—everybody will get the proper share.

ROSA.

Yes? But do you know, father, what is the proper share for everybody?

She laughs bitterly and wants to go away.

DAVID.

Gently and sadly.

Stay here, Rosa!

ROSA.

I have nothing to do here. I have heard you call everybody.... Oh, you called very loudly! ... But did you call the beautiful? I have nothing to do here.

Goes out.

SARAH.

Rising irresolutely.

Rosochka!...

DAVID.

As gently as before, with a smile.

Stay here, mother. Where will you go? You will come with me.

Naum makes a few steps after Rosa, then he returns and sits down near Sarah.

DAVID.

Ready, Nullius? Come over, then, honorable man, you who stand first in the line.

KHESSIN.

Advancing.

Here I am, David.

DAVID.

What is your name?

KHESSIN.

My name is Abraham Khessin.... But have you forgotten my name? You and I played together when we were children.

DAVID.

Hush! It is necessary for the sake of maintaining order, Abraham. Write the name clearly, Nullius. This is the first who waited for me and upon whom the will of my God has manifested itself.

ANATHEMA.

Writes carefully.

Number one.... I'll rule the paper later, David. Number one: Abraham Khessin....

NAUM.

In a low voice.

Mamma, I will not dance any more.

CURTAIN.

ACT THREE

The same dust-covered road, with the bent posts and the old, deserted sentinel-box; the same little shops. The sun is burning as mercilessly as when Anathema first appeared there.

A large number of poor people are gathered there to welcome David Leizer, who had distributed his fortune among the poor. The air is rent by shouting, motion, and merry bustling. Purikes, Bezkrainy, and Sonka, happy now, and proud of their shops, are doing a brisk business in soda-water and candies. Sarah Leizer is sitting as before near her little shop, dressed neatly but poorly.

A solemn welcome is arranged for David and Anathema, who had gone to the seashore. All the little shops, even the posts and the deserted sentinel-box, are decorated with parti-colored rags and with branches of trees; on the right side of the road, upon the scorched grass, an orchestra is preparing to meet David—several Jews with various instruments, among which there are: a good violin, cymbals, a broken brass trumpet, and even a drum, slightly broken. The members of the orchestra are scolding one another criticizing each other's instruments.

There are a number of children in the crowd. Also, little babes in arms. Abraham Khessin and those who were in line when David started to distribute his money are there; a little distance away from the crowd stands the stern organ-grinder, with his organ.

YOUNG JEW.

Blowing his crushed trumpet.

But why does it play only on one side? Such a good trumpet.

VIOLINIST.

Agitated.

What do you want to do with me? How can you welcome David Leizer with such a trumpet? You might as well have brought along a cat and pulled her by the tail, and think that David would call you his son?

YOUNG JEW.

Obstinately.

It's a good trumpet. My father played it when he was in the army, and everybody was thankful to him.

VIOLINIST.

Your father played it, but who sat upon it? Why is it so crushed? How can you welcome David Leizer with such a crushed trumpet?

YOUNG JEW.

With tears.

It's a very good trumpet.

VIOLINIST.

To a clean-shaven old man.

Is that your drum? Tell me, do you seriously believe that this is a drum? Have you

ever seen another drum with a hole big enough for a dog to crawl through?

KHESSIN.

Don't get excited, Leibke. You are a very talented man, and your music will be fine, and David Leizer will be greatly moved by it.

VIOLINIST.

But I can't bear it. You are a very honorable man, Abraham Khessin, you have lived long in the world, but have you ever seen such a big hole in a drum?

KHESSIN.

No, Leibke, I haven't seen such a big hole, but that is not at all important. David Leizer was a multimillionaire, he had twenty million roubles, but he is unspoiled and humble, and your love will afford him joy. Does the soul need a drum to be able to express its love? I see here people who have neither drums nor trumpets, and who weep for happiness—their tears are noiseless like the dew.—Rise higher, Leibke, rise a little higher to the sky, and you will not hear any drums there, but therefore you will hear the tears falling.

OLD MAN.

You mustn't quarrel and darken the days of bright happiness,—that would be disagreeable to David.

A Wanderer is listening to their conversation; his face is stern and swarthy. His hair and his clothes are covered with dust. He is guarded in his movements, but his eyes, lustreless, stare ahead fixedly, like open windows at night.

WANDERER.

He has brought peace and happiness on earth, and the whole world knows of him already. I have come from distant places, where the people are different from you, and where the customs are different from yours, and only in their suffering and their misery they are your brethren. And there they know already about David Leizer,

who distributes bread and happiness, and they bless his name.

KHESSIN.

Do you hear, Sarah?

Wiping his eyes.

It is of your husband they are speaking, of David Leizer.

SARAH.

I hear, Abraham, I hear everything. But I hear no longer the voice of Naum who died; I hear no longer the voice of Rosa. Old man, you have wandered much over the world, and you know even the people that do not resemble us,—have you not met on the road a beautiful girl, the most beautiful of all girls on earth?

BEZKRAINY.

She had a daughter, Rosa, a beautiful girl, she ran away from home because she would not give up her share to the poor. Did she take much money along with her, Sarah?

SARAH.

Can there be such a thing as too much money for Rosa? You may as well say that there are too many diamonds in the Czar's crown and too many rays in the sun.

WANDERER.

No, I have not seen your daughter: I am traveling along the highways, and there you can see neither the rich nor the beautiful.

SARAH.

But perhaps you have seen people gathered, talking enthusiastically about a certain beautiful girl? That is my daughter, old man.

WANDERER.

No, I have not seen such people. But I have seen other people gathered, speaking

about David Leizer, who is distributing bread and happiness. Is it true that your David has healed a woman who was suffering from an incurable disease and was already dying?

KHESSIN.

Smiling.

No, that is not true.

WANDERER.

Is it true that David restored sight to a man who was blind from the day of his birth?

KHESSIN.

Shaking his head.

No, that is not true. Some one has been deceiving the people who do not resemble us. Only God can perform miracles—David Leizer is only a kind-hearted and worthy man, such as all men who have not forgotten God should be.

PURIKES.

It is not true, Abraham Khessin. David is not an ordinary man, and he possesses a superhuman power. I know it.

The crowd that surrounded them is eagerly listening to Purikes.

PURIKES.

I saw with my own eyes, how the one we regarded as a customer came upon the deserted, sunny road, but he was not a customer. I saw with my own eyes how he touched David with his hand, and David started to speak so terribly that I could not listen to him. Do you remember it, Ivan?

BEZKRAINY.

That's true. David is not an ordinary man.

SONKA.

Does an ordinary man throw money at people, like stones at a dog? Does an ordinary man go to weep over the grave of another's child, whom he did not bring forth, whom he did not fondle, and whom he did not bury when death came?

WOMAN.

With child in her arms.

David is not an ordinary man. Who ever saw an ordinary man who was more a mother to a child than his own mother? Who hides behind the bed-curtain and watches how other people's children are eating, and who weeps for joy at the sight of them? Of whom even the tiniest children are not afraid, and they play with his venerable beard as with the beard of their grandfather? Did not the stupid little Rubin tear out a tuft of grey hair from David Leizer's venerable beard? Did David grow angry? Did he cry out for pain, did he stamp his feet? No, he began to laugh as if overcome with happiness, and he cried as though for joy.

DRUNKARD.

David is not an ordinary man. He is a queer fellow. I said to him: "Why do you give me money? It is true, I am barefooted and unwashed, but do not think that I will buy boots and soap for the money you give me. I'll spend it on drink in the nearest dram-shop." That's what I had to tell him, for although I am a drunkard, I am an honest man. And the queer David answered me jestingly, like a good-natured lunatic: "Semyon, if it pleases you to drink, please drink,—I have not come to teach the people but to bring them joy."

OLD JEW.

There are many teachers, but there is none to bring them joy. May God bless David who brings joy to mankind.

BEZKRAINY.

To the drunkard.

So you didn't buy any boots, did you?

DRUNKARD.

No, I am an honest man.

VIOLINIST.

In despair.

Well, tell me all, you who have any conscience: Is this the kind of music that should greet him who brings joy to mankind? I am ashamed that I have gotten together such a poor orchestra, and I would rather die than disgrace myself before David.

SARAH.

To the organ-grinder.

Will you also play? You have such a fine organ now that even angels might dance to your music.

ORGAN-GRINDER.

I will.

SARAH.

But why have you no monkey?

ORGAN-GRINDER.

I couldn't find a good monkey. All the monkeys I have seen are either old, or mean, or altogether untalented, and are even unable to catch fleas. The fleas have already destroyed one of my monkeys, and I don't want another monkey destroyed that way. A monkey needs talent, just like a man,—it isn't enough to have a tail, even to be a monkey.

The wanderer is questioning Khessin in a low voice.

WANDERER.

Tell me the truth, Jew: I was sent here by my people, and I walked many miles on

my old legs, under the mercilessly scorching sun, for the purpose of learning the truth. Who is this David who brings joy to mankind. Let it be as you say that he does not heal the sick....

KHESSIN.

It is a sin and an offence against God to think that a human being can heal.

WANDERER.

Be it so. But is it not true that Leizer wants to build an enormous palace of white stone and blue glass and gather together all the poor of the world there?

KHESSIN.

In embarrassment.

I do not know. Is it possible to build such a large palace?

WANDERER.

With conviction.

It is possible. Is it true that he wants to take away the power from the rich and bestow it upon the poor? (In a whisper.) And to take the power from those who rule, the might from those who are in command, and distribute it among all the people on earth, giving an equal share to each of them?

KHESSIN.

I do not know

Timidly.

You frighten me, old man.

WANDERER.

Looking around cautiously.

And is it true that he has already sent heralds to the black people that they, too, shall prepare themselves to accept the new kingdom, for he wants to bestow the power

equally upon the black as upon the white, giving to each one according to his desire.

(In a mysterious whisper.)

In accordance with justice.

On the road appears David Leizer, walking slowly; in his right hand, a staff; Anathema is holding his left arm reverently. There is agitation and confusion among the waiting crowd: the musicians rush for their instruments; the women pick up their children quickly. They shout: "He's coming! He's coming!" They call: "Moishe, Petya, Sarah!"

WANDERER.

And is it true....

KHESSIN.

Ask him. Here he is coming.

Noticing the crowd, Anathema stops David, who is absorbed in thought, and he points triumphantly to the people. Thus they stand for some time: David with his grey head thrown back, and Anathema clinging close to him. Anathema whispers something in David's ear and keeps on pointing with his left hand. Leibke, bustling about desperately, gets his orchestra together and they begin to play a lively wild tune which is as discordant as the fluttering parti-colored rags. Shouting, laughter, the children are rushing forward, some one is crying; many people are outstretching their hands prayerfully to David. Then David moves forward amidst this chaos of lively sounds. The crowd makes room for him to pass; many throw branches and twigs on the ground and spread their clothes before him; women tear of their head-dress and throw it at his feet on the dusty road. Thus he walks over to Sarah, who rises and welcomes him together with the other women. The music stops. But David is silent. Confusion.

KHESSIN.

Why are you silent, David? The people you have made happy are greeting you and spreading their clothing before you on the ground, for their love is great and their hearts cannot comprise all their joy. Say a word to them—they are waiting.

David remains standing, with lowered eyes; with both hands he is leaning on his staff; his face is stern and serious. Anathema looks at him, over his shoulder, with alarm.

ANATHEMA.

They are waiting for you, David. Say unto them a word of joy and calm their love.

David is silent.

WOMAN.

Why are you silent, David? You frighten us. Are you not the David who brings joy to mankind?

ANATHEMA.

Impatiently.

Speak, David. Their agitated ears are waiting for a word of joy and by your silence, which is like the dumbness of the rock, you crush their soul to the earth. Speak!

DAVID.

Lifting his eyes and surveying the crowd sternly.

Wherefore these honors and the noise of voices, and the music which plays so loudly? To whom do you render honors worthy of a prince or of one who has performed a great deed? Is it before me, before a poor old man who must die soon, that you spread out your clothes upon the ground? What have I done to deserve your delight and exultation, to force tears of senseless joy from your eyes? I gave you money and bread—but that was the money of the Uppermost, it came from Him and went back to Him through you. The only thing I have done was not to hide the money like a thief, I did not become a plunderer, like those who have forgotten God.

Do I speak properly, Nullius?

ANATHEMA.

No, David, no. Your speech is not worthy of a wise man and it does not come forth from the lips of a humble man.

OLD MAN.

Bread without love is like grass without salt,—the stomach may be filled, but it leaves a bad taste in the mouth, and a bitter recollection.

DAVID.

Have I forgotten anything, Nullius? Remind me, my friend: I am old and my eyesight is poor, but do I not see musicians there, Nullius? Tell me! Do I not see flags as red as the tongues of crows over my head? Tell me, Nullius.

ANATHEMA.

You have forgotten the people, David. You do not see the children, David Leizer.

DAVID.

The children?

The women, weeping, hold out their children to David.

VOICES.

"Bless my son, David!" ... "Touch my little girl with your hand, David." "Bless." ... "Touch her with your hand." ...

DAVID.

Raising his hands heavenward.

Oh, Hannah, oh, Benjamin, oh, Raphael, and my little Moishe!...

Looks down, outstretching his arms to the children.

DAVID.

Oh, my little birds who died on the naked branches of the winter!... Oh, children, my

children, little children, tiny children!... Well, Nullius, am I not weeping? Am I not weeping, Nullius? Well, let everybody weep. Let the musicians play, Nullius—I understand everything now. Oh, children, little children, I gave you all, I gave you my old heart, I gave you my sorrow and my joy—Did I not give them all my soul, Nullius?

Crying and laughing through tears.

You have again wrenched my soul from the jaws of sin, Nullius. On the day of rejoicing I appeared mournful before the people, on the day of the people's exultation I did not raise my eyes to Heaven, but lowered them to the ground,—bad old man that I am. Whom did I want to deceive with my insincerity? Do I not live by day and night in raptures of joy, and do I not draw love and happiness with full hands? Why have I feigned sadness?... I do not know your name, woman; give me your child, the one that is laughing when everybody is crying, because he alone is sensible.

Smiling through tears.

Or are you perhaps afraid that I will steal it like a gypsy?

The woman kneels and holds out her child.

WOMAN.

Take it, David! Everything belongs to you,—we and our children.

SECOND WOMAN.

Take mine, too, David!

THIRD WOMAN.

Mine, mine!

DAVID.

Takes the child and presses it to his breast, covering it with his grey beard.

Hush!... It's my beard! Oh, what a terrible beard! But never fear, my little one, press

to me more closely and laugh—you are the wisest of all. Sarah, my wife, come over here.

SARAH.

Weeping.

I am here.

DAVID.

Let us step aside for a while. Woman, I will return the child to you, I will only hold it for a while.... Come, Sarah, let us step aside. Before you I am not ashamed to cry, be they tears of sorrow or tears of joy.

They step aside and cry softly. Only their stooping backs are seen, and David's red handkerchief with which he wipes his eyes, and the tear-stained face of the child.

VOICES.

Hush! hush! They are crying. Don't disturb their crying. Hush! hush!

Anathema, on tiptoe, whispers: "Hush, hush!" Then he goes over to the musicians and speaks to them in a low voice, conducting with his hand. Little by little the noise grows louder. Bezkrainy, Purikes, and Sonka are waiting, holding filled glasses in their hands.

DAVID.

Returns and wipes his eyes with his kerchief.

Here is your child, woman. We don't like him at all, do we, Sarah?

SARAH.

Weeping.

We have no children any longer, David.

DAVID.

Smiling.

No, no, Sarah! But are not all the children in the world our children? He has no children who has three, six, or even twelve, but not he who knows not their number.

SONKA.

Drink a glass of soda-water, honorable David Leizer—it is your water.

PURIKES.

Drink a glass of mine, David,—this will bring me customers.

BEZKRAINY.

Drink a glass of noblemen's cider, David. Now it is real noblemen's cider. I can say it frankly; with your money everything is becoming real.

SARAH.

Through tears.

I have always told you that your cider was bad, Ivan. And now, when it is real cider, you do not offer it to me.

BEZKRAINY.

Oh, Sarah....

DAVID.

She is jesting, Ivan. Thank you, but I cannot drink so much,—I will taste everybody's. It's very, very good water, Sonka. You have discovered the secret and you will soon grow rich.

SONKA.

I put a little more soda into the water, David.

WANDERER.

To Anathema, in a law voice.

Is it true—you are a close friend of David Leizer's, and you can tell it to me—is it true that he wants to build—

ANATHEMA.

Why so loud? Let us step aside.

They speak in a whisper. Anathema shakes his head negatively. He is truthful. He smiles and pats the old man on the shoulder. The old man evidently does not believe him. Then Anathema gradually leads the musicians away, also the Organ-grinder and the people beyond the stone pillars. Only the sound of their voices, their exclamations, their laughter are heard. A few remain and speak with David reverently.

KHESSIN.

Is it true, David, that you and Sarah are going to Jerusalem, to the Holy City, of which we can only dream?

DAVID.

Yes, it is true, Abraham. Although I am stronger now and I feel no longer any pain in my chest—

KHESSIN.

But that is a miracle, David!

DAVID.

Joy restores health, Abraham, and the serving of God strengthens a man. But after all, Sarah and I cannot live much longer, and we should like to rest our eyes upon the wonderful beauty of God's land. But why do you address me as a stranger, old friend? Have you not yet forgiven me?

KHESSIN.

Frightened.

Oh, do not say that, David! If you were to tell me: Call me "thou" or kill yourself, I would rather kill myself, but would not say "thou" to you. You are not an ordinary man, David.

DAVID.

I am not an ordinary man. I am a happy man. But where is the gay man Nullius? I don't see him. I suppose he is preparing some prank or another—I know him. There is a man who does not darken the face of the earth with gloom, Abraham, who is never averse to laughter, which is to life like dew upon grass, and which sparkles in many colors in the rays of the sun. Of course he is playing his pranks; do you hear?

Music is playing beyond the pillars; the organ, together with the orchestra, is playing the same tune it had played before. The sounds are discordant, somewhat wild, but strangely gay. Together with the music the crowd appears in a solemn procession. At the head of the procession, side by side with the Organ-grinder, walks Anathema, as if dancing. He carries the organ on a strap and turns the handle with one hand, keeping time with the other hand, whistling shrilly, and casting glances on all sides and skyward. The musicians and the poor, now gay, follow him. On passing David, Anathema bends his head toward him and keeps on playing and whistling. David, smiling, nods his head and adjusts his grey, long beard. The procession disappears.

SARAH.

With emotion.

What beautiful music! How fine, how solemn, David! David, is all this for you?

DAVID.

For us, Sarah.

SARAH.

What am I? I can only love our children. But you, but you—

With certain fear.

You are not an ordinary man, David.

DAVID.

Smiling.

So, so.... Well, what am I, then,—a governor?

Or, perhaps, a general?

SARAH.

Do not make light of this, David. You are not an ordinary man.

The Wanderer, who stood near by all the time and saw the solemn procession, now listens to Sarah's words and nods his head. Anathema, gay, somewhat out of breath, appears.

ANATHEMA.

How was it, David? I think it was not bad. They marched very well—better than I expected. Only that stupid trumpet.

Dancing, he passes David again, whistling. Then he bursts into laughter.

DAVID.

Good-naturedly.

Yes, Nullius. The music was very good. I never before heard such fine music. I thank you, Nullius,—you have afforded great pleasure to the people by your gayety.

ANATHEMA.

To the Wanderer.

Did you like it, old man?

WANDERER.

I liked it fairly well. But what will happen when all the nations on earth will bend at the feet of David Leizer?

ANATHEMA.

Astonished.

What is he saying, Nullius?

ANATHEMA.

Oh, David, it is very touching: the people are in love with you, even as a bride is in love with the bridegroom. This wonderful man, who has come thousands of miles—

WANDERER.

More.

ANATHEMA.

Asked me: "Does David Leizer perform miracles?" Well,... I laughed, I laughed.

KHESSIN.

He asked me, too, but to me it was not laughable. The ear of him who waits is keen,—even the stones seem to sing to him.

WANDERER.

Only the footsteps of the blind are short, but their thoughts are long.

He steps aside and, watches David. It is near sunset and the earth is in the embrace of shadows. Abraham Khessin bids David farewell and goes away. The shopkeepers prepare to close their shops. Silence and peace.

ANATHEMA.

Breathing with difficulty.

At last. We have worked quite hard, David—the trumpet alone (closes his ears)—what is that worth? (Candidly) My misfortune is that my ear is keen, unbearably sharp, almost—yes, almost like that of a dog. If I hear—

DAVID.

I am very tired, Nullius, and I want to rest. I do not feel like seeing any more people to-day, and you will not be offended, my old friend—

ANATHEMA.

I understand. I will only escort you to your palace.

DAVID.

Yes, yes, to my palace. According to my contract, I am king for six months more. Come, Sarah,—with you alone I want to pass the remainder of this great day in peace and joy.

SARAH.

You are not an ordinary man, David. How did you guess my desire?

They go away towards the pillars. David pauses, looks back, and says, leaning upon Sarah's shoulder:

DAVID.

Look, Sarah; this is the place where our life has passed—how sad and poor it is, Sarah, and it breathes of the homelessness of the desert. But was not it here, Sarah, that I learned the great truth concerning the fate of man? I was poor, alone, and near death, a foolish old man, seeking an answer from the waves. But now people have come—Am I alone now? Am I poor and near death? Listen to me, Nullius; there is no death for man. What death is there? What is death? Who was the mournful one that invented this strange word—Death?—Perhaps it does exist, I do not know—but I, Nullius—I am immortal.

As though struck, he lends down, but lifts his arms upward.

Oh, how terrible it is: I am immortal! Where is the end of the sky? I have lost it. I am immortal! Oh, the breast of man aches from immortality, and his joy bums him like a fire. Where is the end of man?—I am immortal. Adenoi! Adenoi! Blessed be the mysterious name of Him who has given immortality to man, forever and aye.

ANATHEMA.

Hastily.

The name! The name! Do you know the name? You have deceived me.

DAVID.

Not listening to him.

I give the spirit of man over to the boundless space of Time. May it five immortally, in the immortality of fire. May it live immortally in the immortality of light, which is life. And may darkness stop before the dwelling of immortal light. I am happy, I am immortal—O my God!

ANATHEMA.

Ecstatically.

It is a lie! Oh, how long yet will I listen to this foolish man? North and South, East and West, I am calling you. Quicker, come here, to the aid of the Devil! Rush over here in four oceans of tears and bury man in your abyss. Come here! This way!

No one heeds Anathema's sobs, neither David, radiant with the ecstasy of immortality, nor Sarah, nor the other people, who listen attentively to David. Anathema moves restlessly about, alone, cursing. A shrill voice is heard; a woman, terribly painted, rushes in from the road. Her clothes are torn, and her beautiful face is disfigured. She screams and sobs and calls wildly.

WOMAN.

My God! Where is David, who is distributing his fortune? Two days and two nights, two days and two nights, I have been looking for him all over the city, but the houses are silent and the people are laughing. Tell me, kind people, have you not seen David, who brings joy to the people? Do not look upon my open bosom—a wicked man tore my clothes and scratched my face. Oh, do not look upon my open bosom: it never knew the happiness of feeding innocent lips.

WANDERER.

David is here.

WOMAN.

Falling on her knees.

David is here? Oh, have pity on me, people! do not deceive me; I am blinded by

deceit, and falsehoods have made me deaf. Do I hear right? Is David here?

BEZKRAINY.

Yes, there he stands. But you are too late—he has already distributed all his fortune.

PURINES.

He has already distributed all his fortune.

WOMAN.

What are you doing to me, people? Two days and two nights I have been looking for him—the people deceived me, and now I am too late. I will die on the way now—I have nowhere else to go.

Tearfully, flings herself about on the dust-covered road.

ANATHEMA.

It seems that somebody has come to you, David.

DAVID.

Advancing.

What does this woman wish?

WOMAN.

Without lifting her head.

Are you David, who has brought joy to mankind?

WANDERER.

Yes, it is he.

DAVID.

Yes, it is I.

WOMAN.

Without lifting her head.

I do not dare glance at you. You must be like the sun.

Gently and trustfully.

Oh, David, how long I have been looking for you!... The people kept deceiving me all the time. They told me that you went away, that you do not exist at all, and that you never existed. One man said to me that he was David, and he seemed to be kind, but he treated me like a robber.

DAVID.

Rise!

WOMAN.

Permit me to rest here, at your feet. Like a bird that has crossed the sea, I am beaten by the rain, I am exhausted by the storms, I am tired to death.

Weeps; continues trustfully.

Now I am calm, now I am happy: I am at the feet of David, who has brought joy to mankind.

DAVID.

Irresolutely.

But you have come too late, woman. I have already given away everything I had, and I have nothing left.

ANATHEMA.

Yes. We have distributed all the money. Go home, woman,—we have nothing left. We feel sorry for you, but you are too late. Do you understand? You are too late,—only this morning we gave away the last penny.

DAVID.

Don't be so cruel, Nullius.

ANATHEMA.

But it is the truth, David.

WOMAN.

Doubtingly.

That is impossible!

Lifting her eyes.

Are you David? How kind-hearted you are. Did you say that I am too late? No, he said it—his face is mean. David, please give me some money and save me. I am tired to death. And your name is Sarah? You are his wife? I have heard about you, too.

Crawls over to her and kisses her dress.

WOMAN.

Plead for me, Sarah.

SARAH.

Weeping.

Give her some money, David. Get up, my dear; it is very dusty here—you have such beautiful black hair. Sit down here, and rest yourself. David will soon give you money.

Lifts the woman and seats her near herself upon a rock, and caresses her.

DAVID.

What shall I do?

Confusedly; wiping his face with a red kerchief.

What shall I do, Nullius? You are such a wise man,—help me.

ANATHEMA.

Outstretching his arms.

By God, I do not know. Here is the list—we have not a cent, and I am an honest

lawyer, not a counterfeiter. I can't bring you every day an inheritance from America.

Whistles.

I have nothing to do, so I roam about the world.

DAVID.

Indignantly.

That is cruel, Nullius. I did not expect it from you. But what shall I do? what shall I do?

Anathema shrugs his shoulders.

SARAH.

Sit here, my dear; I will come back soon. David, let us step aside; I must tell you something.

They step aside and whisper.

ANATHEMA.

Did they beat you hard, woman? Evidently the man who was beating you was not skillful—he did not knock your eyes out, as he wanted to do.

WOMAN.

Covering her face with her hair.

Do not look upon me!

SARAH.

Nullius, come over here.

ANATHEMA.

Goes to her.

Here I am, madam Leizer.

DAVID.

In a low voice.

How much money have we for our journey to Jerusalem?

ANATHEMA.

Three hundred roubles.

DAVID.

Give it to the woman.

Smiling and crying.

Sarah does not want to go to Jerusalem. She wants to continue in business here until death comes. What a foolish woman, Nullius, isn't she?

Cries restrainedly.

SARAH.

Does that cause you much pain, David? Were you so eager to go?

DAVID.

What a foolish woman, Nullius. She does not understand that I also want to remain in business here.

Cries.

ANATHEMA.

Moved.

You are not an ordinary man, David.

DAVID.

It was my dream, Nullius, to die in the Holy City and to join my dust to the dust of the righteous people buried there. But (he smiles) is not the ground everywhere kind to its dead? Give the money to the poor woman. Well, Sarah, how shall it be? We must open a store and learn from Sonka how to make good soda-water.

ANATHEMA.

Triumphantly.

Woman, David, who has brought joy to mankind, gives you money and happiness.

BEZKRAINY.

To Sonka.

I told you that he has not distributed all his money. He has millions.

WANDERER.

Listening.

That's right. How could David give away everything? He only started to give away.

The woman thanks David and Sarah; he places his hands upon her head, as though blessing her. Behind him, from the side of the field, something grey appears, dust-covered, moving slowly. They move silently, and it is hard to discern at first that they are human beings. The grey dust has equalized them—their distress and their suffering have made them brethren. There is something alarming in their dull, inflexible movement—and the people look upon them uneasily.

BEZKRAINY.

Who is coming there on the road?

SONKA.

Something grey is crawling along the road. If they are human beings, they do not look like human beings.

PURIKES.

Oh, I am afraid for David. He stands with his back toward them, and does not see them. And they are coming like blind people.

SONKA.

They will soon crush him. David, David, turn around and look.

ANATHEMA.

It is too late, Sonka,—David can't hear you now.

PURIKES.

But who is that? I am afraid of them.

WANDERER.

These are our people! These are blind people from our land,—they have come to David for their eyesight.

Loudly.

Stop, stop! you have reached your destination. David is in your midst.

The blind, almost crushing the frightened David, pause and seek him with their fingers.

THE BLIND.

Where is David? Help us to find David. Where is David, who brings joy to mankind? He is here. I feel him already with my fingers. Are you David? Where is David? Where is David? Are you David?

DAVID.

Frightened voices come out of the darkness.

It is I—I am David Leizer. What is it you wish of me?

SARAH.

Weeping.

David! David!

I don't see you.

David, David, where are you?

THE BLIND.

Closing in around him.

Here is David. Are you David?

CURTAIN.

ACT FOUR

A large, high, somewhat dark room—David's study in the rich villa where he spends his last days. Two large windows in the room: one overlooking the road to the city; the other, on the left, overlooking the garden. Near this window, a large writing-table, covered with papers in disorder—sheets of paper of various sizes, and large books. Under the table, and near it, paper torn into small bits. A large Bible, bound in old leather, lies on the floor, open, with its back upward, resembling the roof of a house which is falling apart. Notwithstanding the heal, there is a fire in the fireplace. David Leizer feels cold and feverish.

It is growing dark. Through the lowered blinds, faint sunlight comes in, but it is already dark in the room. Only the small lamp on the table brings out into bold relief the white heads of David and Anathema.

David is sitting by the table. His hair and beard, unkempt for some time, lend him a savage and terrible appearance; his face is emaciated, his eyes are wide open; clasping his head with both hands, he stares fixedly through his large spectacles, examines a paper, throws it aside, takes up another paper, and nervously turns the leaves of a heavy volume.

Anathema stands near him, holding the back of his arm-chair. He is motionless, thoughtful, and stern.

The windows are closed, but through the dosed windows comes the muffled noise of many voices. It increases slowly, wavering in force and impassionateness. Those who had been called by David are now besieging his house. Silence.

DAVID.

It has crumbled away into dust; Nullius! The mountain that reached the sky has split into rocks, the rocks have turned into dust, and the wind has carried the dust away. Where is the mountain, Nullius? Where are the millions which you brought me?

Here I have been looking for an hour through my papers for one copeck, only one copeck, that I may give it to him who asks for it, but I cannot find it. What is lying around there?

ANATHEMA.

The Bible.

DAVID.

No, no, I mean there, among the papers. Let me have it. I think it is an account I haven't examined yet. That would be good luck, Nullius!

Stares intently.

No, it is all crossed out here. Look, Nullius, look! A hundred, then fifty, then twenty,—and then one copeck. But I cannot take this copeck away from him, can I?

ANATHEMA.

Six, eight, twenty,—correct.

DAVID.

No, no, Nullius,—one hundred, fifty—twenty,—one copeck. It has all melted away, it slipped through my fingers like water. And the fingers are dry already—and I feel cold, Nullius!

ANATHEMA.

It is warm here.

DAVID.

I say it is cold here, Nullius. Throw some logs of wood into the fireplace.... No, wait. How much does a log cost? Oh, it costs a great deal; put it away, Nullius,—this accursed fire is devouring wood so quickly, as though it did not know that every log of wood is—a life. Wait, Nullius.... You have a splendid memory, you never forget anything, like a book—don't you remember how much I designated for Abraham Khessin?

ANATHEMA.

At first, five hundred.

DAVID.

Yes, yes, Nullius, of course,—he is an old friend of mine; we used to play together. And for a friend five hundred is not much at all. Of course, he is an old friend of mine, and I must have pitied him and left to him more than to the others in the end—for our friendship is such a tender feeling, Nullius. But it is bad if a man wrongs strangers and distant people on account of a friend—for they have no friends or protection. And we will cut down Abraham Khessin's allowance, we will cut it down just a little bit....

With fear.

Tell me, how much have I now allowed for Abraham?

ANATHEMA.

One copeck.

DAVID.

Impossible! Tell me that you have made an error! Have pity on me, and tell me that you have made an error, Nullius! It cannot be—Abraham is my friend—we used to play together. Do you understand what it means when children play together, and then they grow up and they have grey beards, and they smile together at the past? You have also a grey beard, Nullius.

ANATHEMA.

Yes, my beard is grey. You allowed one copeck for Khessin.

DAVID.

Takes Anathema by the arm; in a whisper.

But she said that her child would die, Nullius,—that he is dying already. Understand me, my old friend, I must have money. You are such a fine man, you are (pats his

arm) such a kind man, you remember everything, like a book,—search a little more.

ANATHEMA.

Bethink yourself, David; your reason is betraying you. It is already two days that you have been sitting here at this table, looking for that which is no more. Go out to the people who are waiting for you, tell them that you have nothing left, and dismiss them.

Angrily.

DAVID.

But did I not go out ten times already to the people and did I not tell them that I have nothing left? Did a single one of them go away? They stand and wait there, and they are firm in their misery, like a rock, obstinate like the child at the mother's breast. Does a child ask whether there is milk in the mother's breast? When I speak, they are silent and they listen to me like reasonable people; but when I become silent, the spirit of despair and want seizes upon them and wails in a thousand voices. Did I not give everything away to them, Nullius? Did I not cry out all my tears? Did I not give them away all the blood of my heart? What are they waiting for, Nullius? What do they want of the poor Jew, who has already exhausted his life?...

ANATHEMA.

They are waiting for a miracle, David.

DAVID.

Rising, with fear.

Be silent, Nullius, be silent,—you are tempting God. Who am I that I should perform miracles? Bethink yourself, Nullius. Can I make two copecks of one? Can I come over to the mountains and say: "Mountains of the earth, turn into mountains of bread and satisfy the hunger of the hungry"? Can I come over to the ocean and say: "Sea of water as salty as tears, turn into a sea of milk and honey and quench the

thirst of the thirsty"? Think of it, Nullius!

ANATHEMA.

Did you see the blind?

DAVID.

Only once did I dare lift my eyes,—but I saw strange, grey people, into whose eyes some one had spat something white, and they feel the air as if it were a danger, and they fear the earth as though it were a horror. What do they want, Nullius?

ANATHEMA.

Did you see the sick and the maimed, with organs of the body missing,—did you see them crawl on the ground? Out of the pores of the earth they come like a perspiration of blood—the earth is of them.

DAVID.

Be silent, Nullius.

ANATHEMA.

Did you see people who are devoured by their conscience: their face is dark, as though scorched by fire, and their eyes are surrounded with white rings, and they run about in a circle like mad horses? Did you see people who look straight ahead, and in their hands they hold long staffs for measuring the road? These are the people searching after truth.

DAVID.

I dared not look any further.

ANATHEMA.

Did you hear the voice of the earth, David?

Enter Sarah; she advances to David timidly.

DAVID.

Is that you, Sarah? Shut the door tightly, do not leave a crevice behind you. What is it you wish, Sarah?

SARAH.

With fear and faith.

Are you not entirely prepared yet, David? Make haste and go out to the people: they are tired of waiting and many of them fear death. Dismiss these, for others are coming, David, and soon there will be no place for a man to stand. The water has already given out in the fountains and they are not bringing any bread from the city, as you have ordered, David.

DAVID.

Uplifting his hands; horrified.

Awaken, Sarah, sleep has enmeshed you in nets of cunning and your heart is poisoned with the madness of love. It is I, David!...

With fear.

And I did not command to bring bread.

SARAH.

If you are not quite ready, David, they can wait. But order lamps lighted and give bedding for the women and the children,—for night will soon set in and the earth will grow cold. And order them to give milk to the children—they are starved. There, in the distance, we have heard the sound of innumerable footsteps: are those not herds of cows and goats, full of milk, driven here at your command?

DAVID.

Hoarsely.

Oh, my God, my God!...

ANATHEMA.

In a low voice, to Sarah.

Go away, Sarah: David is praying. Do not disturb his prayer.

Sarah goes away timidly and cautiously.

DAVID.

Mercy! Mercy!

The noise outside the windows subsides. Suddenly it is heard again: Sarah had notified them that they must wait.

DAVID.

Mercy! Mercy!

ANATHEMA.

In a commanding tone.

David be a man in the face of the great fear. Did you not call them here? Did you not call loudly, in a voice of love, to the silence and the darkness where unspeakable horror dwells? And now they have come to you—North and South, East and West, and like four oceans of tears they have stretched themselves at your feet. Rise, David!

DAVID.

What shall I do, Nullius?

ANATHEMA.

Tell them the truth.

DAVID.

What shall I do, Nullius? Shall I perhaps take a rope and, hanging it upon a tree, strangle myself like the one who had once betrayed? Am I, perhaps, a traitor, having called them and not given anything to them, and loving them in order to destroy them? Oh, how my heart is aching!... Oh, how my heart is aching, Nullius! Oh, I feel

as cold as the ground that is covered with ice, and within it there is heat and white flame. Oh, Nullius, have you seen the white flame on which the moon turns dark and the sun burns like yellow straw?

He tosses about.

Hide me, Nullius. Is there not a dark room, where the light does not penetrate? are there not strong walls through which I would not hear these voices? Whither are they calling me? I am a sick old man, I cannot endure and suffer so long—I myself had small children, and did they not die? What were their names, Nullius? I have forgotten. Who is it they call David, the man who has brought joy to mankind?

ANATHEMA.

That was your name, David Leizer. You are deceived, Leizer. You are deceived even as I am deceived!

DAVID.

With entreaty.

Protect me, Nullius. Go out to them and tell them aloud, so they all can hear: "David Leizer is a sick old man, and he has nothing left." They will listen to you, Nullius,—you have such a respectful appearance,—and they will return to their homes.

ANATHEMA.

Yes, yes, David. You see the truth already, and you will soon proclaim it to the people. Ha, ha! Who said that David Leizer could perform miracles?

DAVID.

Folding his arms.

Yes, yes, Nullius.

ANATHEMA.

Who dares demand miracles of Leizer? Is he not a sick old man,—mortal like all the

rest?

DAVID.

Yes, yes, Nullius,—a man.

ANATHEMA.

Did not love deceive Leizer? It said to him: "I shall do everything,"—and it raised only dust on the road like the blind wind from behind a corner, which bursts in noisily and lies down quietly, which blinds the eyes and stirs up the dust. Let us go, then, to Him who gave love to David, and ask Him: "Wherefore did you deceive our brother David?"

DAVID.

Yes, yes, Nullius! Of what good is love to man if it is powerless? Of what good is life if there is no immortality?

ANATHEMA.

Rapidly.

Go out and tell this to them,—they will listen to you. They will lift their voice to Heaven—and we shall hear the answer of Heaven, David! Tell them the truth and you will stir up the earth.

DAVID.

I am going, Nullius. And I will tell them the truth—I have never lied. Open the doors, Nullius.

Anathema quickly throws the door open and respectfully allows David to pass to the balcony. David walks slowly, with an air of importance. Then Anathema closes the door behind David. The noise suddenly subsides, a deathlike silence sets in, and David's quivering voice is heard faintly. Anathema dances about the room in a fit of ecstasy.

ANATHEMA.

Ah! you would not listen to me,—now listen to them. Ah! you forced me to crawl on my belly like a dog. You would not permit me to glimpse even through a crevice!... You laughed at me in your silence!... You tortured me by your motionlessness. Listen, then, and answer, if you can. It is not the Devil who speaks to you, it is not the son of Dawn who raises his voice,—it is man, it is your favorite son, your care, your love, your tenderness, and your proud hope, that is wriggling under your foot like a worm. Well? You are silent? Lie to him by your thunder, deceive him with your lightning,—how dares he look into the heavens? Let him, like Anathema?

Wailing.

The poor, offended Anathema, who is crawling on his belly like a dog....

Furiously.

Let man crawl back again to his dark hole, let him decay in silence, bury himself in gloom, where unspeakable horror dwells.

A myriad-voiced sound is heard from outside the windows.

ANATHEMA.

Do you hear?

Sarcastically.

It is not I. It is they. Six, eight, twenty-correct. It is always correct with the Devil....

The door opens and David, horror-stricken, runs in. A shout is heard behind him. David closes the door and holds it with his shoulder.

DAVID.

Help, Nullius! They will soon break in—the door is not strong; they will break it.

ANATHEMA.

What do they say?

DAVID.

They do not believe me, Nullius. They ask for a miracle. But do the dead also shout?—I saw the dead they have brought here.

ANATHEMA.

Furiously.

Then lie to them, Jew!

David goes away from, the door and says mysteriously, with confusion and fear:

DAVID.

Do you know, Nullius, something is going on within me,—I have nothing,—but here I went out to them, I saw them and suddenly I felt that it is not true—I do have something. And I spoke, but I did not believe it myself; I spoke, and yet I felt that I stood with them and shouted against myself, and demanded angrily.... With my lips I declare that I have nothing,'and with my heart I promise them, and with my eyes I cry out, Yes, yes, yes! What shall I do, Nullius? Tell me, are you sure that I have nothing?

Anathema smiles. Sarah's, voice is heard behind the door on the right; a knock at the door.

SARAH.

Let me in, David.

DAVID.

Do not open the door, Nullius.

ANATHEMA.

It is your wife, Sarah.

He opens the door. Sarah enters, leading by the hand a pale-faced woman who is carrying something in her arms.

SARAH.

Meekly.

Forgive me, David. But this woman says that she cannot wait any more. She says that if you delay any longer, she will not recognize her child when he is revived. If it is necessary for you to know his name, it is Moishe, little Moishe. He is a dark little one,—I looked at him.

WOMAN.

Falling down on her knees.

Forgive me, David, for breaking the line and not waiting for my turn. But there are those who died but a little while ago, while I am carrying him already three days and three nights on my breast. Perhaps it is necessary for you to take a look at him? Then I will uncover him—I am not deceiving you, David.

SARAH.

I have looked at him already, David. She let me hold him awhile. She is very tired, David.

David retreats slowly, the palms of his hands outstretched forward. He moves thus until he reaches the wall.

DAVID.

Mercy! Mercy!

Both women wait patiently.

DAVID.

What shall I do? I am fainting, O God! Nullius, tell them that I do not resurrect the dead!

WOMAN.

I implore you, David! Do I ask you to restore life to an old man who has lived long and who has deserved death for his evil deeds? Do I not understand whom it is possible to resurrect and whom it is not possible to resurrect? But perhaps it is hard

for you because he is dead so long. I did not know this,—forgive me. And when he was dying, I promised him: "Moishe, do not be afraid to die—David, who brings joy to mankind, will restore your little life to you."

DAVID.

Show him to me.

Looks at him, shaking his head, and weeps, wiping his eyes with his red kerchief. Sarah looks at him confidently, leaning on his shoulder.

SARAH.

How old was he?

WOMAN.

Two years, going on the third.

David turns his tear-stained face to Anathema and says in a strange voice:

DAVID.

Shall I make an attempt, perhaps, Nullius?

Suddenly he bends down and cries hoarsely:

Adenoi!... Adenoi!... Begone! Begone! The Devil has sent you here. Tell them, Nullius, that I do not resurrect the dead. They have come to mock me! Look, they are both laughing there. Begone! Begone!

ANATHEMA.

In a low voice, to Sarah.

Go away, Sarah, and lead the woman away. David is not quite ready yet.

SARAH.

In a whisper.

I will take her to my room. Later you may tell David that she is there.

To the woman.

Come, woman,—David is not quite ready yet.

They go out. David, exhausted, sits down in an arm-chair and lowers his grey head. He reads something softly.

ANATHEMA.

They have gone, David. Do you hear? They have gone away.

DAVID.

Nullius, did you see? It was a dead child. Moishe.... Yes, yes, Moishe, a dark little one; we looked at him.... (Loudly, in despair.) What shall I do? Teach me, Nullius.

ANATHEMA.

Quickly.

Flee!

Listens to what is going on outside the window, nods his head affirmatively, and advances to David cautiously, like a conspirator; David waits for him, with his arms folded as in prayer, a confident smile on his lips. His back is bent, and he frequently takes his red kerchief from his pocket, but does not know what to do with it.

ANATHEMA.

In a whisper.

We must flee, David, flee!

DAVID.

Joyously.

Yes, yes, Nullius,—we must flee.

ANATHEMA.

I shall hide you in a dark room which no one knows of; when they fall asleep, tired of waiting and hungry, I shall lead you through the sleeping people—and will save you.

DAVID.

Joyously.

Yes, yes, save me.

ANATHEMA.

And they will be waiting! In their sleep they will, wait and dream dreams of great expectations—and you will not be here any longer!

DAVID.

Nodding his head joyously.

And I shall not be here any longer, Nullius! And I shall have fled already, Nullius!

Laughs.

ANATHEMA.

Laughing.

And you will not be here any longer! You will have fled! Let them speak to Heaven then.

They look at each other and laugh.

ANATHEMA.

In a friendly tone.

Wait for me, David. I shall go out at once and see whether the house is still surrounded. They are such madmen!

DAVID.

Yes, yes, look. They are such madmen! Meanwhile I shall prepare myself, Nullius.... But I ask you, do not leave me here all alone for a long time.

Anathema goes out. David goes cautiously on tiptoe to the window and wants to look out, but he dares not; he goes to the table and is frightened by the scattered sheets of paper; he moves cautiously to the corner where his clothes are. He dresses

hastily, mixing up his clothes. For a long time he does not know what to do with his beard; suddenly he pushes it under his coat and hides it with his collar.

DAVID.

Muttering.

Yes, yes. I must hide my beard. All the children know my beard.... But why did they not tear it out? Yes, yes, my beard.... But what a black coat! It does not matter, you will hide it. That's the way. Rosa had a mirror.... But Rosa ran away, and Naum also died, and Sarah—oh, but why does not Nullius come? Does he not hear how they are shouting?...

A knock on the door.

DAVID.

Frightened.

Who is there? David Leizer is not here.

ANATHEMA.

It is I, David; let me in.

Anathema enters.

DAVID.

Well, Nullius,—it is possible to recognize me now, is it not?

ANATHEMA.

Very good, David. But I don't know how we can get out. Sarah has filled the house with guests: in every room the blind and the maimed are waiting for you with a pleasant smile; there are also dead people there, David. Your Sarah is a splendid woman, but she is too much of a hostess, David, and she intends to build up a fine household on miracles.

DAVID.

But she must not do it, Nullius.

ANATHEMA.

Many people are already sleeping at your doors, smiling in their dreams,—self-confident, lucky people, who have managed to outstrip the others.... And in the garden and in the yard....

DAVID.

With fear.

What is there in the yard?...

ANATHEMA.

Not so loud, David. Look and listen.

He puts out the light in the room and draws aside the draperies; the windows are lit up with a red light; it is dark in the room, but David's head, and the paper on the floor, are tinted a pale crimson hue.

DAVID.

Frightened, in a whisper.

Where does this fire come from, Nullius? I am afraid.

ANATHEMA.

Also in a whisper.

'Tis a cold night, and they have started bonfires. Sarah told them that they would have to wait a long time yet, so they have taken precautions.

DAVID.

Where did they get the wood?

ANATHEMA.

They broke certain things. Sarah told them that you ordered them to start bonfires, and they are humbly burning whatever wood they find.... And there, David, farther

away....

DAVID.

In despair.

What is it, Nullius? What else can there be, there yonder?...

ANATHEMA.

I do not know, David. But from the upper window, which was wide open, I heard something like the roaring of the ocean when the rocks tremble with pain from the beating of the breakers; it was as though the roaring of brass trumpets that I heard, David,—they are shouting to the sky and to you, and they are calling you.... Do you hear?

In the muffled noise and chaos of sounds, ring out the sounds: Da-vid! Da-vid! Da-vid!

DAVID.

I hear my name. Who is calling? What do they want?

ANATHEMA.

I don't know. Perhaps they want to crown you as their king.

DAVID.

Me?

ANATHEMA.

You, David Leizer. Perhaps they are bringing you might and power—and the power of performing miracles—do you not want perhaps to become a God, David? Look and listen.

He throws the windows wide open. The sounds of the voices calling "Da-vid, Da-vid, Da-vid!" grow louder and are mingled with the blowing of trumpets.

David at first moves to the wall, then he slowly advances to the window. He

straightens himself, looks out of the window, and pushing Anathema aside, outstretches his arms to the poor of the earth.

DAVID.

Calling.

Come this way! Come here! To me! I am here! I am with you!

ANATHEMA.

Astonished.

What? You are calling them? You—are—calling—them? Bethink yourself, Leizer!

DAVID.

Angrily.

Be silent! you do not understand me! We are all human beings and we shall go together.

Enthusiastically.

And we shall go together! Come here, brethren, come! Look, Nullius,—they have lifted their heads, they are looking, they hear me. This way! this way!

ANATHEMA.

Will you perform miracles?

DAVID.

Angrily.

Be silent—you are a stranger. You speak as an enemy of God and mankind. You know neither pity nor compassion. We are tired, we are exhausted,—even the dead have grown tired of waiting. Come here—and we shall go together. This way!

ANATHEMA.

Looking at David.

Are not the blind showing the way to them?

DAVID.

Who needs eyesight if not the blind? This way, blind!

ANATHEMA.

Are not the lame making the road and swallowing the dust there?

DAVID.

Who needs the road if not the lame? This way, maimed!

ANATHEMA.

Are they not carrying the dead on the stretchers, swaying with measured steps? Look, David, and dare to say: "Come this way, to me. I am he who resurrects the dead!"

DAVID.

Tormented.

You know no love, Nullius.

ANATHEMA.

"I am he who restores sight to the blind"—

Loudly, through the window.

This way! Nations of the earth, seeking God,—come together, at the feet of David—he is here!

DAVID.

Not so loud.

ANATHEMA.

Eh, this way! Suffering mothers,—fathers who have lost their reason in grief,—brothers and sisters who devour one another in the convulsions of hunger—come this way, to David, who has brought joy to mankind!

DAVID.

Seizing him by the shoulder.

You have lost your mind, Nullius. They may hear you and may break into the house.... What are you doing, Nullius? Be more cautious.

ANATHEMA.

Shouting.

David is calling you!

DAVID.

Dragging him away from the window forcibly.

Be silent! I'll choke you if you utter another word. You dog!

ANATHEMA.

Releasing himself.

You are as foolish as a human being. When I call you to flee from here, you curse me. When I call you to love—you want to choke me.

With contempt.

Man!

DAVID.

Enfeebled.

Oh, do not ruin me, Nullius. Oh, forgive me if I have angered you, foolish old man that I am, with a memory that fails me. But I cannot—I cannot perform any miracles!

ANATHEMA.

Let us flee from here.

DAVID.

Yes, yes, let us flee.

Irresolutely.

But where? Where do you want to lead me, Nullius? Is there a place on earth where God is not present?

ANATHEMA.

I shall lead you to God.

DAVID.

No, I don't want to go to Him. What will God tell me? And what shall I answer Him? Be considerate, Nullius. Can I say anything in answer to God now?

ANATHEMA.

I shall lead you to the desert. We shall leave here these wicked and vicious people, who are seized with the itch of suffering and who break down posts and fences like hogs that scratch themselves.

DAVID.

Irresolutely.

But they are human beings, Nullius.

ANATHEMA.

Renounce them, and, pure, stand up in the desert before the face of God. Let the rock be your bed, let the howling jackal become your friend, let only the sky and the sand hear the penitent moans of David—not a single stain of another's sin shall come upon the pure snow of his soul. He who remains with lepers becomes a leper himself—only in solitude will you see God. To the desert, David, to the desert!

DAVID.

I shall pray.

ANATHEMA.

You will pray.

DAVID.

I shall exhaust my body with fasting.

ANATHEMA.

You will exhaust your body with fasting.

DAVID.

I shall cover my head with ashes.

ANATHEMA.

What for? Unfortunate people do that. But you will be happy, David, in your sinlessness. To the desert, David, to the desert!

DAVID.

To the desert, Nullius, to the desert!

ANATHEMA.

Quickly.

Let us run. There is a cellar here of which no one knows. There are old barrels there, and there is the smell of wine. I shall hide you. And when they fall asleep—

DAVID.

To the desert! To the desert!

They rush out quickly. Disorder and silence in the room.. Through the open window soon comes in the noise of voices and of brass trumpets, moans and sobs of the mob,—"Da-a-a-vid!"

And with its pages bent under it, like a house that is falling apart, lies the Bible, with its back upward.

SLOW CURTAIN.

ACT FIVE.

On the right, upon the slope of a mountain, a dilapidated stone fence. On the left, the sea is seen. Beyond the fence, a deserted garden; among the trees two tall cypress

trees stand out prominently. The sea is dark. It is before a storm. The sky is overcast with heavy clouds, which are driven rapidly by the wind.

As the curtain goes up no one is on the stage; then Anathema climbs over the fence and assists David over the fence. David is very weak and moves with difficulty. Their dark clothes are covered with mud and torn in places. Both have lost their hats on the way.

ANATHEMA.

Quicker, quicker, David! They are pursuing us. In this dark garden, where it is so quiet, I heard a roaring in the distance, on that side,—as though there were another sea there. Quicker, David!

DAVID.

I can't, Nullius. Put me down here that I may die.

ANATHEMA.

Put your foot here, on this rock. Take care.

DAVID.

Before my eyes are paths which turn and turn and lead to the wall. Then there are more walls, Nullius, and this dark ditch where a bloated dead horse is lying. Where are we, Nullius?

ANATHEMA.

We are at the sea. We shall take a boat from the fishermen and trust ourselves to the waves—You will sooner find mercy with the senseless waves, David, than with the maddened people.

DAVID.

Yes, it is better to die.

He lies down by the fence.

I am fifty-eight years old, Nullius, and I must have a rest.... But who was the man that met us on the highway and was so greatly overjoyed, and ran off shouting: "Here is David, who has brought joy to mankind? How does he know me? I had never seen him before.

ANATHEMA.

As if surveying the shore.

Your fame is great, David.... Strange, I do not find any path leading downward.

DAVID.

Shutting his eyes.

The cypress trees have turned dark—there will be a storm to-night, Nullius. We should have remained at the stone pit: it was dark and quiet there, and I slept like a man with clear conscience.

Grumbling.

But why are you silent, Nullius? Or am I to speak all alone, as if I were already in the desert?

NULLIUS.

I am searching.

DAVID.

With dissatisfaction.

What else is there to search for? We have searched enough to-day, and we jumped like trained dogs. I felt ashamed, Nullius, when I climbed the fences like a little boy stealing apples. You had better come over here and tell me something about your wanderings. I am too tired to sleep.

ANATHEMA.

You'll not be able to sleep, David.

Advancing.

There is no way down to the sea.

DAVID.

What of it? Look for it elsewhere.

ANATHEMA.

Outstretching his hand in the direction of the city.

Look, David; what is that white line there in the distance?

DAVID.

Lifting his head.

I don't see it.

ANATHEMA.

It is the city which is awaiting you. Now listen. What is that noise in the distance?

DAVID.

Listening.

That—of course, Nullius, that is the echo of the waves of the sea.

ANATHEMA.

No. It is the voice of the people, who will come here soon and will demand miracles from you, and will offer you the kingdom of the poor on earth. When we were hiding in the rocks, I heard two men speak as they hastened to the city: they said that you had been carried away by some evil one and that it was necessary to rescue you from that evil one and offer you the kingdom.

DAVID.

Am I not a sick old Jew? Am I a piece of gold that I should be stolen? Leave me alone, Nullius; you are raving like the other people.... I am sleepy.

ANATHEMA.

Impatiently.

But they are coming this way.

DAVID.

Let them come. You will tell them that David is sleeping and that he does not want to perform miracles.

He prepares himself for sleep.

ANATHEMA.

Bethink yourself, David.

DAVID.

Stubbornly.

He does not want to perform any miracles. Good night, Nullius. I am old and I do not like to talk nonsense.

ANATHEMA.

David!

David does not answer; he falls asleep, his hands folded under his head.

ANATHEMA.

Awaken, David! the people have come here.

Pushes him angrily.

Get up, I say. You make believe that you are asleep—I don't believe you. Do you hear?

Through his teeth.

You've fallen asleep—damned flesh!

Steps aside and listens.

ANATHEMA.

Ha, ha! They are coming.... They are coming.... And their king is sleeping! They are coming—and their miracle-worker is sleeping the sleep of the horse which draws water. They are carrying a crown and death—and their victim and master is catching the wind with an open mouth, smacking his lips for pleasure. O miserable race! There is treachery in your bones, betrayal in your blood, and falsehood in your heart! It is better to rely upon flowing waters, to walk upon the waves as upon a bridge; it is better to lean upon the air as upon a rock, than to trust one's haughty anger and bitter dreams to a traitor.

Goes over to David and pushes him rudely.

Get up! Get up, David,—Sarah is here, Sarah, Sarah!

DAVID.

Awakening.

Are you here, Sarah? I'll be up soon; I am very tired, Sarah.... What is this? You, Nullius? Where is Sarah? Didn't she call me just now? How tired I am! how tired I am, Nullius!

ANATHEMA.

Sarah is coming. Sarah is carrying an infant.

DAVID.

What infant? We have no small children. Our children—

Half rises, looks around, frightened.

What is that, Nullius? who is crying there?

ANATHEMA.

Sarah is carrying a dead child. You must resurrect the dead child, David. He is dark, and his name is Moishe—Moishe—Moishe!

DAVID.

Rising.

We must flee, Nullius. We must flee. But where is the road? Where have you led me to?

Seizes Anathema by the arm.

Listen how they are shouting. They are coming this way, to me—oh, save me, Nullius!

ANATHEMA.

There is no way.

Holding David.

There is an abyss.

DAVID.

What shall I do, Nullius? Shall I, mayhap, hurl myself down and dash my head against the rocks? But am I a wicked wretch that I should come to God without His calling me? Oh, if God only called me—faster than an arrow would my old soul rush to Him....

Listens.

They are shouting. They are calling ... calling? Step aside, Nullius; I want to pray.

ANATHEMA.

Steps aside.

But make haste, David; they are near.

DAVID.

Do you hear? They are coming. I love them, but my love is bitterer than hatred, and it is as powerless as indifference. Kill me, and meet them yourself. Kill me—and meet them with mercy, with love. Fertilize the hungry earth with my body and grow bread upon it, drown sorrow with my soul and grow laughter upon it. And joy, O

Lord, joy for mankind....

The approach of an enormous mob is heard.

ANATHEMA.

Advancing.

Quicker, David, quicker,—they are approaching.

DAVID.

One moment, one moment.

In despair.

Joy ... What else? Only one word—only one word—but I have forgotten it.

Weeping.

Oh, what a great number of words there are, but one is missing.... But, perhaps, you need no words at all?

ANATHEMA.

Only one word is missing? How strange! It seems that they have found their word—do you hear them wailing? "Da-a-vid! Da-a-vid!"

Rise, David, and meet them proudly; it seems they are beginning to mock you.

David rises. Some one rushes in ahead of the mob, shouting joyously: "David!" and runs back. The sea looks in one place as though stained with blood.

DAVID.

Retreating a step.

I am afraid, Nullius. This is the same one we met on the road, with a red little beard.... I fear him, Nullius.

ANATHEMA.

Meet them proudly. Strike them with the truth, David,—with the truth!

DAVID.

But do not leave me alone, Nullius, or I shall forget again where the truth is.

People appear on the fence. They are exhausted, mud-covered, like David. They seem to be blind yet their faces are radiant with joy, and they keep exclaiming: "Da-vid! Da-vid!"

DAVID.

Outstretching his arms.

Back—

They do not listen to him and keep climbing the fence, wailing.

ANATHEMA.

Audaciously.

Where are you going? Back—back, you were told.

The people in the front rank pause in fear.

VOICES.

Stop! Stop! Who's that? That's David. No, that's the robber. The one who has carried him off. The robber.

A RESTLESS MAN.

Silence! Silence! David wishes to speak. Listen to David.

They become silent; but in the distance people are still shouting: "Da-vid!"

DAVID.

What is it you want? Yes, it is I, David Leizer, a Jew from the same city that you come from. Why do you pursue me like a thief and frighten me like a robber with your shouting?

ANATHEMA.

Audaciously.

What do you want? Go away from here. My friend David Leizer does not want to

see you.

DAVID.

Yes. Let me die here, for death is already approaching my heart; go home to your wives and your children. I cannot ease your sufferings in any way,—go. Do I speak properly, Nullius?

ANATHEMA.

Yes, David.

THE RESTLESS MAN.

Our wives are here and our children are here. Here they stand, waiting for your word of kindness, David,—you who have brought joy to mankind! I have no strength left in me and I have nothing to say. Go.

WOMAN.

Move forward a little, Rubin, and bow to our master David. You probably remember him, David? Bow to him once more, Rubin.

The boy bows timidly and hides in the crowd again. Laughter.

OLD MAN.

Smiling.

He is afraid of you, David. Don't be afraid, boy.

Milled laughter. The Wanderer comes forward.

WANDERER.

You have called us, David, and we have come. We have long waited silently for your merciful call, and now your call has reached the remotest boundaries of the earth. The roads have become black with people; the deserted roads have come to life and the narrow paths are filled with footsteps, and they will soon become highways—and even as the blood that is in the body all rushes to the heart, so all the

poor on earth will come to you alone. Welcome to you, our master David—the people are bowing before you with their life and the earth.

DAVID.

Tormented.

What do you want?

WANDERER.

Softly.

Righteousness.

DAVID.

What do you want?

ALL.

Righteousness.

Expectation.

DAVID.

With sudden hope.

Tell me, Nullius, tell me: Is righteousness a miracle?

ANATHEMA.

Bitterly.

There are the blind—they are innocent. There are the dead—and they are also innocent. The earth is bowing before you with its graves, and it greets you with darkness. Perform a miracle.

DAVID.

A miracle? Again a miracle?

WANDERER.

Suspiciously and sternly.

And the people do not want you to speak with him whose name we dare not utter. He is an enemy of mankind, and at night, when you were asleep, he carried you off to this mountain—but it did not occur to him to carry off the heart of the people; and, beating unceasingly, this heart has brought us to you.

ANATHEMA.

Audaciously.

It seems that I am superfluous here.

DAVID.

No, no. Do not forsake me, Nullius.

Tormented.

Begone, begone from here! You are tempting God—I do not know you. Begone.... Begone!

ANATHEMA.

Begone!

VOICES.

Frightened.

David is angry. What shall we do? The master is angry. David is angry.

OLD MAN.

Call Sarah.

WOMAN.

Call Sarah. Sarah!

VOICES.

Sarah! Sarah! Sarah!...

DAVID.

Horror-stricken.

Do you hear? They are calling.

JOYOUS VOICE.

Sarah is coming.

The mob grows bolder.

KHESSIN.

Bowing several times.

It is I, David,—I. Peace be with you, our master David.

SONKA.

Smiling and bowing.

Peace be with you. Peace be with you, David.

David turns aside and covers his face with his hands.

ANATHEMA.

Indifferently.

Begone!

General confusion; interrupted smiles, muffled groans. Sarah, led respectfully by the arms, advances to David. Nearing him, she walks alone.

ANATHEMA.

Turn around, David.... Sarah is here.

SARAH.

Peace be with you, David. Forgive me for disturbing you, but the people have asked me to speak with you and to find out when you intend to return home to your palace. And they have also asked you to make haste, David, for many have died already of unbearable sufferings—and the dead have already grown tired of waiting. And many have already lost their reason from their unbearable sufferings, and they will soon

commence to murder; if you will not make haste, David, all the people will become enemies—and it will be hard for you to establish a kingdom upon the dead earth.

Bitter wailings in the distance: "Da-vid! Da-vid! Da-vid!"

DAVID.

With restraint.

Go away, Sarah.

SARAH.

Humbly.

Your clothes are torn, David, and I fear that there are wounds upon your body. What ails you? Why do you not rejoice with us?

DAVID.

Weeping.

Oh, Sarah, Sarah! What are you doing with me? Consider, Sarah,—consider you all. Have I not given everything away to you? I have nothing left. Have pity on me even as I had pity on you,—and kill my unnecessary body with stones. I love you—and words of anger are powerless upon my lips, and wrath upon loving lips does not frighten you—have pity on me. I have nothing more. I have a little blood in my veins, but would I not give away the last drop of it, if I could only quench your bitter thirst? Like a sponge I would have squeezed my heart between the palms of my hands—and the cunning heart, so greedy for life, would not dare hide a single drop....

Be tears his clothes and scratches his chest with his nails.

Here my blood is flowing—my blood is flowing? has a single one of you smiled a smile of joy? Here I am tearing the hair of my beard and I fling the grey locks—I fling them at your feet—has a single dead person risen? Here I spit into your eyes—will one blind man regain his sight? Here I bite the rocks—the rocks—like a

mad beast—will one hungry person be satiated? Here I hurl myself at you—

Be makes several quick steps, and the crowd retreats in horror.

ANATHEMA.

That's right, David! Strike them!

SARAH.

Retreating.

Oh, do not punish us, David.

WANDERER.

To the crowd.

He obeys the one who carried him off. He says: I shall not give anything to the people. He spits and says he spits into the eyes of the people....

Cries of horror and growing malice. But in the distance there are still prayerful wailings: "Da-vid! Da-vid! Da-vid!"

SOMEONE.

He dares not spit at the people. We have done him no wrong.

ANOTHER VOICE.

I saw it, I saw it. He lifted stones. Defend yourselves.

ANATHEMA.

Be on your guard; they will soon throw stones at you. They are beasts.

WANDERER.

To David.

You have deceived us, you Jew.

SARAH.

Do not dare speak like this.

KHESSIN.

Seizes the Wanderer by the chest.

Another word and I shall choke you.

DAVID.

Shouting.

I have not deceived any one. I have given everything away and have nothing left.

ANATHEMA.

Do you hear, fools? David has nothing.

Laughs.

Nothing. Am I not telling the truth, David?

WANDERER.

Do you hear? He has nothing. Why, then, did he call us? He has deceived us. He has deceived us.

KHESSIN.

Perplexed.

But that is true, Sarah; he himself says that he has nothing.

SARAH.

Do not mind David. He is ill. He is tired. He will give us everything.

WANDERER.

With sorrow and anger.

How could you do that, David? What have you done with the people, accursed one?

RESTLESS MAN.

Listen what David, who has brought joy to mankind, has done to me. He promised me ten roubles, and then took it back and gave me one copeck, and I thought that the

copeck was not really a copeck—I went to a store with it and demanded a great deal, but they laughed and chased me away as a thief. You are the thief. You are the robber; you have left my children without milk. Here is your copeck.

Throws the copeck at David's feet. Many other people follow his example.

SARAH.

Defending David.

Do not dare offend David.

David weeps silently, his face covered with his hands.

ANGRY MAN.

Traitor! He raised the dead out of their graves in order to make sport of them. Strike him with stones.

Bends down to lift a stone. A strong wind rises; in the distance thunder-peals resound. The mob is horror-stricken.

DAVID.

Raising his head and baring his chest.

Stone me—I am a traitor!

Louder thunder-peals. Anathema laughs merrily.

WANDERER.

Traitor! Stone him! He has deceived us! He has betrayed us! He has lied to us!

Confusion. They advance towards David, lifting stones; some flee, sobbing.

DAVID.

Take me. I am going to you.

ANATHEMA.

Where? They will kill you!

DAVID.

You are my enemy. Leave me.

Releases himself from his grasp.

WANDERER.

Raising a stone above his head.

Back! Satan!

ANATHEMA.

Hastily.

Curse them, David. They will soon put you to death. Quick!

David lifts his arms and sinks down, struck by a stone. Almost in silence, grumbling, they hurl stones upon his motionless body. Thunder-peals. Anathema is laughing. Suddenly a woman screams. Then another. All are shouting. The mob runs away. The last one lifts a stone to throw it on David's head, but looks around and finding himself alone, lets the stone fall out of his hand and runs away with a wild outcry.

ANATHEMA.

Swaying himself in every direction, he leaps upon a rock, jumps down, then up again.

Ah, you have triumphed, David!

Laughter.

Look! Look how the herd you have cursed is fleeing. Ha, ha! They are falling from the rocks. Ha, ha! They are hurling themselves into the sea. Ha! They are trampling children under their feet. Look, David,—they are trampling upon children. You have done it. Great and mighty David Leizer! Favorite son of God! You have done it. Ha, ha, ha!

He whirls around, madly laughing.

Ah, where shall I go with my joy? Ah, where shall I go with my tidings? the earth is

too small for it! East and West! North and South! Look and listen. David, who has brought joy to mankind, is put to death by mankind and by God. And upon his ill-smelling corpse I—Anathema—will put my foot.

To heaven.

Do you hear? Answer, if you can.

He tramples upon David's body. Then a groan is heard, and David's grey, blood-stained head lifts itself, quivering strangely.

ANATHEMA.

Retreating.

You are still alive? You have lied even this time.

DAVID.

Crawls.

I am coming to you. Wait for me, Sarah. One moment.

ANATHEMA.

Bending over, examines David.

You are crawling? Like myself? Like a dog? After them?

DAVID.

In the agony of death.

Oh, I cannot reach them. Carry me, Nullius. Do I say that it is not necessary to stone me? Oh, let them stone me. Carry me, Nullius. I shall lie down quietly on the threshold, I shall only look through the crevice and see how the little children are eating.... Oh, my beard.... Oh, my terrible beard.... Oh, don't be afraid, my little one,—you alone are laughing. My little children, my tiny little children....

ANATHEMA.

Stamping his foot.

You are mistaken, David. You are dead. And your children are dead. The earth is dead—dead—dead. Look.

David rises with difficulty and looks into the distance, his weak hands outstretched.

DAVID.

I see, Nullius. My old friend—my old friend, stay here, I beg you—and I shall go to them. Do you know, Nullius....

Confused.

I think that I found a copeck....

Laughs quietly.

I told you, Nullius, to examine that paper. Abraham Khessin, my friend—

Firmly.

Abraham Khessin is my friend....

He sinks down and dies.

Thunder in the distance. It is dark; the sun, red, is seen on the horizon, near the water. It sets.

ANATHEMA.

Bending over him.

Is it true this time? Are you dead? Or do you He again? No—it is an honest death now. Let me have your fist. Open it. You don't want to? But I am stronger than you.

Rises and examines what David had in his hand.

A copeck!

Throws it down with contempt. Pushes David with his foot.

Farewell, fool. To-morrow people will find your body here and will bury you with pomp, according to the custom of the people. Kind-hearted murderers, they love those they kill. And out of the rocks with which they stoned you for your love, they

will erect a tall, crooked, and stupid tombstone. And in order to enliven the stupid, dead pile of stone, they will put me on the top.

He laughs. Then he suddenly breaks of his laughter and assumes a haughty pose.

Who shall wrench the victory from the hands of Anathema? The strong I kill, the weak I force to whirl about in an intoxicating dance—a mad dance—a devilish dance.

He strikes the ground with his foot.

Be subdued, O earth, and bring me your gifts humbly! Kill, burn, betray, O man, in the name of your master! I steer my boat over a sea of blood which smells so sweetly,—and my sails are burning red—

To heaven.

To you, for an answer! Not as a dog crawling on his belly, but as a distinguished guest, as the reigning prince of the earth, I shall come sailing to your mute shores.

Majestically.

Be prepared. I shall demand an exact answer. Ha, ha, ha!

Disappears in the darkness, bursting into laughter.

CURTAIN.

EPILOGUE.

Nothing has happened; nothing has changed. As before, the earth is weighted down by the heavy iron Gates, closed from time immemorial, beyond which dwells in silence and in mystery the Beginning of every being, the Supreme Wisdom of the universe. And the Guardian of the Entrances is just as silent and as sternly motionless as before. Nothing has happened; nothing has changed.

The grey light, as grey as the rocks, is terrible; the place is terrible, but Anathema likes it. And he appears again; but he does not crawl on his belly like a dog; nor does he hide himself beyond the rocks like a thief. Like a conqueror, he is trying to seal

his victory by his haughty gait, by the importance of his slow movements. But as the Devil can never be truthful, and as there are no bounds to his doubts, he brings his duality even into this: He walks like a conqueror, yet he is afraid; he throws his head back high like a sovereign, and yet he laughs at his exaggerated self-importance; a gloomy and malicious clown, he longs for greatness; and forced to laugh, he despises laughter.

Thus, assuming important airs beyond measure, he goes up to the middle of the mountain and waits there in a haughty pose. But his uncertain importance is devoured by the silence, even as dry wood is devoured by fire—and he begins to hurry, without holding out the pause, like a poor musician, striving to conceal himself and his doubts and his odious fear in a vast deal of jests, in loud shouting and in rapid gestures. He stamps his foot and shouts in a voice of assumed sternness.

ANATHEMA.

Why are there no trumpets here? Why no celebration? Why are these old and rusty gates closed? And why does no one hand me the keys? Is it proper in decent circles to meet thus an eminent guest, the reigning prince of the earth, which is friendly to us? Only the doorkeeper is here, apparently asleep, and no one else. It is bad—bad!

He bursts into laughter, and stretching himself wearily, sits down upon a rock. He speaks humbly and with an air of fatigue.

But I am not vainglorious. Trumpets, flowers, and shouting—all this is useless! I myself heard at one time how the people trumpeted glory for David Leizer, but what has come of it?

He heaves a sigh.

It is sad to think of it.

He whistles mournfully.

You have surely heard of the misfortune that has come upon my friend David

Leizer? I remember when I last chatted with you,—you did not know this name then.... But do you know it now? It is a name to be proud of! When I left the earth, the entire earth in a million of hungry throats called this glorious name, shouting: "David is a deceiver! David is a traitor! David is a liar!" Then it seemed to me that some of the people reproached also another one—for my honest friend, who died an untimely death, did not act so incautiously in his own name.

The Guardian is silent. And Anathema shouts now with an air of real triumph, breathing malice.

The name! Call the name of him who has ruined David and thousands of people! I, Anathema, have no heart, my eyes have dried up from the fire of Hell, and there are no tears in them, but if the tears were there I would have given them all to David. I have no heart, but there was an instant when something five trembled in my chest, and I was frightened: I wondered whether a heart could be born. I saw how David was perishing and thousands of people with him, I saw how his spirit, grown dark, curled up piteously like a dead worm in the sun, was hurled down into the abyss of non-existence, into my abode of darkness and death.... Tell me, are you not the one who has ruined David?

GUARDIAN OF THE ENTRANCES.

David has attained immortality, and he lives forever in the deathlessness of fire. David has attained immortality, and he fives forever in the deathlessness of fight, which is fife.

Dumfounded, Anathema falls to the ground and lies motionless for an instant. Then he lifts his head, which is as angry as that of a serpent. He rises and speaks with the calm of boundless wrath.

ANATHEMA.

You fie! Forgive me my daring, but you fie. Surely your power is immense—and you can give immortality to a dead worm that has turned black from the sun. But

would that be just? Or do the numbers fie to which you, too, must submit? Or do all the scales fie, and is all your world nothing but one fie,—a cruel and mad game of laws, a malicious laugh of a despot at the dumbness and submissiveness of the slave?

He speaks gloomily, in the grief of deathless blindness.

ANATHEMA.

I am tired of searching. I have grown tired of life, of aimless tortures—of the quest after the ever elusive. Give me death, but do not torment me with ignorance; answer me honestly, even as I am honest in my uprising as a slave. Did not David love? Answer. Did not David give his soul away? Answer. And did they not stone David, who had given his soul away? Answer.

GUARDIAN.

Yes. They stoned David, who had given his soul away.

ANATHEMA.

Smiling darkly.

Now you are honest and you answer me with modesty. Without having stilled the hunger of the hungry, without having restored sight to the blind, without having brought to life those who had died innocently,—having stirred up dissension and dispute and cruel bloodshed, for the people have already risen against one another and are committing violence, murder, and plunder in the name of David,—did not David manifest the powerlessness of love, and did he not create a great evil which could be numbered and weighed?

GUARDIAN.

Yes. David has done that which you say; and the people have done that of which you accuse them. And the numbers do not lie, and the scales are correct, and every measure is what it is.

ANATHEMA.

Triumphantly.

You say that!

GUARDIAN.

But that which you do not know, Anathema, is not measured with a measure, and is not calculated in numbers, and is not weighed on scales. Light has no boundaries, nor is there any boundary for the glow of fire—there is a red fire, and there is a yellow fire, and there is a white fire, in which the sun bums like a yellow straw,—and there is still another unknown fire, whose name no one knows—for there is no limit to the glow of fire. Having died in numbers, having died in measures and in weights, David has attained immortality in the deathlessness of fire.

ANATHEMA.

You lie again!

He flings himself about on the ground in despair.

ANATHEMA.

Oh, who will help the honest Anathema? He is being deceived eternally. Oh, who will help the unfortunate Anathema? His immortality is deception. Oh, weep, you who have grown fond of the Devil; wail and grieve, you who strive for truth, who honor wisdom,—Anathema is being deceived eternally. When I win, he takes it away from me. When I come out victorious, he fetters the conqueror in chains, he pricks out the eyes of the ruler, and to the haughty he gives the traits of a dog, a wagging and quivering tail. David, David, I was a friend to you,—tell him that he lies.

He puts his head down on his outstretched arms, like a dog, and wails bitterly.

Where is the truth? Where is the truth? Where is the truth? Was it not crushed with stones? Is it not lying in the ditch together with the carrion? Oh, the light has died

out from the world! Oh, the world has no eyes!... he crows have pecked them out.... Where is the truth? Where is the truth? Where is the truth?

Plaintively.

Tell me, will Anathema ever learn the truth?

GUARDIAN.

No.

ANATHEMA.

Tell me, will Anathema ever see the gates open? Shall I ever see your face?

GUARDIAN.

No. Never. My face is open, but you see it not. My speech is loud, but you hear it not. My commands are clear, but you know them not, Anathema. And you will never see, and you will never hear, and you will never know, Anathema, unfortunate spirit, deathless in numbers, ever alive in measure and in weight, but as yet unborn to life.

Anathema leaps to his feet.

ANATHEMA.

You lie,—silent dog, you who have robbed the world of the truth, you who have barred the entrances with iron! Farewell; I like a fair game, and I pay when I lose. And if you will not pay, I shall cry before the whole universe: "Help! I have been robbed!"

He bursts into laughter. Whistling, he retreats a few steps, and turns around. He speaks unconcernedly.

ANATHEMA.

I have nothing to do, so I roam about the world. Do you know where I am going now? I shall go to the grave of David Leizer. Like a grieving widow, like the son of a father who had been murdered from behind the corner by a traitor's blow,—I shall

sit down on David Leizer's grave and shall weep so bitterly, and cry so loudly, and call so terribly, that not one honest soul will remain that would not curse the murderer. Insane from grief, I shall point to the right and to the left.... Was not this the one who killed him? Did not that one assist in the bloody crime? Did not that one betray? I shall cry so bitterly, I shall accuse so sternly, that all on earth will become murderers and hangmen, in the name of Leizer, in the name of David Leizer, in the name of David, who brought joy to mankind! And when from the heap of corpses, of filthy, foulsmelling, and disgusting corpses I shall announce to the people that you are the one who killed David and the people,—they will believe me.

Bursts into laughter.

For you have such a bad reputation—of a liar, a deceiver, a murderer. Good-by.

He goes off laughing. His laughter resounds once more from the depths. And then everything relapses into silence.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ANATHEMA: A TRAGEDY IN SEVEN SCENES ***

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