The Suicide

By

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

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

Royalty free with permission, Gyllian Raby
2012.
Department of Dramatic Arts
Brock University
graby@brocku.ca
ACT I

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

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

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

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


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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


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

Scene 1

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

SEMYON
Masha. Are you sleeping? Masha?

Masha startles into wakefulness.

MASHA
What? !

SEMYON
Shhhh..it’s just me. Sorry...

MASHA
Semyon...

Masha returns to an exhausted sleep.

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

MASHA
What?

SEMYON
Did we eat all the sausage?

(Pause)

That baloney sausage?

MASHA
Did you look?

SEMYON
It’s cold. I thought /you’d remember.

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

SEMYON
I’m hungry.

MASHA
Go to sleep!

She turns from him. He sighs. They try to settle.

After a moment:

(CONTINUED)
MASHA
You’ve killed something in me with that sausage, Semyon. Every day I get up in the freezing dark and walk to the factory. Twelve hours of mind-numbing, back-breaking work—and after I get home and eat and fall into bed exhausted, what d’you do? Semyon...? Are you sleeping?
(A snore. A slow fury ignites in Masha.)
Semyon!

SEMYON
(waking with a start)
What?!

MASHA
I said: let me sleep!

SEMYON
(puzzled)
But/ Masha ?--

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

SEMYON
(suddenly alert)
Oh! Is there any left?

MASHA
Yes, yes!—because you didn’t eat it at supper!

SEMYON
I wasn’t hungry at supper.

MASHA
That’s why you’re hungry now.

SEMYON
I couldn’t eat.

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

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

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

SEMYON
You torment me.
MASHA
What?!

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

MASHA
Now is not the time/ for this.

Semyon lights a lamp by the bed.

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

MASHA
I crucify you??

SEMYON
In your way/ yes--

MASHA
Oh climb down from the cross!

She is getting out of bed.
One order of baloney coming right up!

SEMYON
--with your psychology ... 

MASHA,
Which would you prefer, white bread or brown?

SEMYON
Makes no difference because--

MASHA
Or cake? Baloney on cake?

SEMYON
--I’m not going to eat it.

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

Masha heads to the kitchen .

(CONTINUED)
SEMYON
Can’t you see what you’re doing?

She exits.

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

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

MASHA
Maggot! Dinner is served my lord maggot.

SEMYON
Not hungry.

MASHA
You’ll eat this if /I have to

SEMOYON
Please/

MASHA
--stuff it down your /throat.

SEMYON
Let go woman/ you’re going to--

MASHA
Eat! Eat your face off /you lazy--

SEMYON
Argh!

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

YEGOR
Keep it quiet down there! /Workers are sleeping!

SERAFIMA
(calling)
Masha--?

They stop as if the Yegor is the House Authority.

SEMYON
(lowering his voice angrily)

(MORE)
SEMYON (cont’d)
You think you can boss me around because you wear the
pants in this house. All right, this hallway. And it’s
killing me.

MASHA
You’re just hungry Semyon.

SEMYON
(a decision)
Look, I’m going to show you.

Semyon sits on the edge of the bed, throwing off
his blankets. He crosses his legs. He hits his
knee with the side of his hand. His right arm
jerks up in a reflex action and drops to hit his
face. Repeat to show it isn’t a freak occurrence.
It never used to happen.

MASHA
Maybe you could get a job at a circus—

SEMYON
I wasn’t going to tell you because—

MASHA
—a traveling circus, preferably...

SEMYON
(forgets to lower his voice)
I’m falling apart Masha!

MASHA
(forgets to lower her voice)
You’re falling apart? You’re falling apart?

SEMYON
I thought you’d care!

MASHA
I can’t go on.

SEMYON
What do you mean?

MASHA
This is no way to live...

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

(CONTINUED)
MASHA
Lord God spare me!

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

MASHA
May be!—right at this moment—

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

MASHA
It's hard to disagree.

Semyon blows out the lamp. Pause.

SEMYON
Bitch.

MASHA
Baloney!

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

YEGOR
Keep it quiet down there! Quiet!

They stop as if the School Principal has spoken.

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

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

SONIA
(giggling)
Goodnight comrades! If you're bored, come join us!

YEGOR
Quiet! Quiet!

{NATASHA
You keep it quiet!

{GRUSHA
Party at Sonia's!

(CONTINUED)
YEGOR
I work in three hours!

MASHA
I work in two.

GRUSHA
We’re working now my da-a-rling.

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

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

MASHA
This is my bedroom.

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

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

    Masha feels her way through the darkness as Serafima, Masha’s mother enters. Listen, whatever I said, I didn’t mean it...where are you? I’m sorry my darling...

SERAFIMA
    (whisper)
Masha?

MASHA
Mother! What are you doing here?

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

MASHA
Semyon was hungry.

SERAFIMA
What’d he do /now?

MASHA
Nothing! I can’t find him.

(CONTINUED)
SERAFIMA  (addresses the dark room)
   Well done, comrade hero-- you’ve made your wife cry/
   you useless worm--.

MASHA    (tearfully)
   I’m not! Mother!

SERAFIMA   --come out and face her!

   Silence.

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

   Silence. Serafima baits Semyon

SERAFIMA    Oh well, he’s dropped dead.

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

   Masha feels around in the darkness. Serafima drops
to her knees and gropes about.
   Semyon, please. I didn’t mean it. Talk to me for God’s
   sake.

   There’s a loud crack

SERAFIMA    Ow!

MASHA    What was that?

SERAFIMA    (controlled)
   The chair, Masha, my head against the chair.

MASHA    Good! The lamp’s there; quickly, light it!

   Serafima lights the lamp. Masha looks around.

MASHA    He’s gone.
SERAFIMA
Gone where at this time of night?

MASHA
I think he’s gone to kill himself.

SERAFIMA
Lord help us.

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

SERAFIMA
It’s a nightmare.

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

SERAFIMA
Here are his pants./Allelujah!

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

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

MASHA
Then he must be--?

SERAFIMA
In the bathroom--

MASHA
Opening a vein!

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

SERAFIMA
Dear God, a suicide in the family.

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

(CONTINUED)
MASHA
Semyon, open the door. Open up, come on. Talk to me!

        Below, Serafima lights another lamp under an icon.

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

MASHA
        (calling down)
He’s locked the door

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

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

SERA FIMA
I’ll kill him. /(murmurs) Dear Virgin of Pskov..

MASHA
I’m going to wake Alexander Kalabushkin.

SERA FIMA
You can’t! He buried his mother last week--

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

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

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

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

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

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

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

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

ALEXANDER (OFF)
Take a cold shower Comrade!

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

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

ALEXANDER
Grieving! We’re grieving!

Masha knocks harder.

MASHA
I’m desperate for a strong man/—please, please Alexander Kalabushkin/—

MARGARITA
Desperate!?  
Masha knocks harder.

MASHA
— I’m at the end of my rope! I have to break down the door!

MARGARITA
Break down the door! You ladies man...

Suddenly Masha doesn’t know what to do.

MASHA
Wha—? Not this door— I’m a married woman! I’m—

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

MARGARITA
Aren’t we all?

MASHA
I need Comrade Kalabushkin/ quickly, quickly.

ALEXANDER
But Sweetheart, what about your husband?

(CONTINUED)
MASHA
He’s locked himself in the bathroom, he’s trying to kill himself.

ALEXANDER
Why didn’t you say--?

_He speeds past Margarita to the bathroom door._
_Masha follows. The lazzo of mistaking the hidden listener._

MARGARITA
The bathroom?

SERAFIMA
No pants.

ALEXANDER
(knocking)
Hey pal; are you all right in there?

_Pause. Casual:_
What ya doin’?

MARGARITA
So: knock it down.

ALEXANDER
Shh . . .

MASHA
What’s he waiting for?

SERAFIMA
A shot.

_Alexander recoils_ 

ALEXANDER
He’s got a gun?

SERAFIMA
We don’t know.

MASHA
Should we call the police?

MARGARITA AND ALEXANDER
No police.

ALEXANDER
Say something sweet to him, and while he’s distracted I’ll— (He mimes.)

(continued)
MASHA
Darling it’s me, Masha. I love you!

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

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

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

He retrieves his newspaper, stomps up to the attic

MASHA
I’m sorry, comrade!
(to Serafima)
It’s your fault, you said he was in the toilet. He must have gone outside!

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

MARGARITA
Did you check the kitchen?

MASHA
The kitchen!

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

ALEXANDER
Go home.

MARGARITA
Charming.

ALEXANDER
This is none of your business.

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

Wait! Go!

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

SERAFIMA
Mother of God, he shot himself.

(CONTINUED)
MARGARITA
None of my business.

Margarita loiters.

SERAFIMA
I saw a lot of death in the war--

MARGARITA
I was smart, stayed home.

SERAFIMA
--but this is shameful.

MARGARITA
Shame is stupid.

SERAFIMA
Too smart is stupid.

Enter Alexander, pulling the struggling Semyon by the feet.

SEMYON
Masha! / Let me go Alexander Kalabushkin!?

SERAFIMA
Ha! Dragged like the rat he is!

ALEXANDER
(to Serafima)
Your daughter’s on the kitchen floor.

Serafima and Margarita are horrified.

MARGARITA
What did you do?

SEMYON
She ran into the cupboard door.

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

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

Alexander immobilises Semyon.

ALEXANDER
I’m your friend Semyon!

(CONTINUED)
SEMYON
But... Masha’s my wife.

    Alexander immobilises Semyon again.

ALEXANDER
But I am your Friend.

SEMYON
What are you doing? Let go of me!

ALEXANDER
Listen to me!

SEMYON
But Masha--!

    Alexander adjusts his hold on Semyon

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

SEMYON
Talk fast...

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

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

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

ALEXANDER
No no, I’m asking you, as a friend--

SEMYON
--a neighbour--

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

SEMYON
I’ll listen.

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

(CONTINUED)
SEMION
All right.

Lazzo of the inverted persuasion.

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

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

SEMION
Mm hmm...

ALEXANDER
A miracle, full of wonder.

SEMION
If you say so.

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

SEMION
Age of being cut off for unpaid bills.

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

SEMION
I know.

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

SEMION
I know.

Alexander pulls himself back.

(CONTINUED)
ALEXANDER
But life is beautiful, comrade. I read it in Pravda, the state newspaper/ and...

SEMYON
And Pravda will retract it soon.

ALEXANDER
Ha ha. You think too much.

SEMYON
I’m unemployed.

ALEXANDER
Tough.

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

ALEXANDER
You gotta make your own work pal.

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

ALEXANDER
What is?

SEMYON
This manual for playing the tuba.

ALEXANDER
The tuba.

SEMYON
Look: you can learn in only twenty lessons.

ALEXANDER
(reading)
For the first time I, Theodor Hugo Schultz, celebrated master of music, share my knowledge with the masses.

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

ALEXANDER
That’s a lot of cash.
SEMYON
I’ve got the will, I’ve got the time, I’ve got the manual; all I need is the tuba.

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

SEMYON
Yes.

ALEXANDER
Then you do agree that life is worth living?

SEMYON
Yes.

ALEXANDER
Right pal, give me the gun.

SEMYON
What gun?

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

SEMYON
You’re kidding me.

ALEXANDER
You were going to shoot yourself.

SEMYON
Why?

Lazzo of the unthinking betrayal of dangerous secrets.

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

SEMYON
How d’you know all this??

ALEXANDER
Masha.

Semyon turns away.
ALEXANDER
Now come on, Semyon. Life is beautiful.

SEMYON
Give up.

ALEXANDER
Give me the gun first.

SEMYON
You’re crazy! Where’d I get a gun?

ALEXANDER
Panfidich traded his razor for one at Borzov’s.

SEMYON
Borzov’s round the corner?

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

Semyon suddenly starts rummaging through his belongings. What’re you doing?

Semyon finds a razor and holds it aloft

SEMYON
My father’s razor. Swedish steel.

Semyon threatens Alexander with the razor

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

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

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

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

SEMYON
(off)
Saves me the job!

Pause. Alexander chuckles.

(CONTINUED)
ALEXANDER
He’s a joker.

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

SERA FIMA
Don’t drag her, she’s not a sack.

MARGARITA
She’s a dead-weight.

SERA FIMA
Get her thighs.

MARGARITA
I’ve got her thighs.

ALEXANDER
Ladies. Let me.

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

She stirs.

SERA FIMA
She needs air. Unbutton her--

Alexander grins and flexes his fingers.

MARGARITA AND SERA FIMA
I’ll do it.

MASHA
Semyon? Is he dead?

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

MASHA
Where is he?

ALEXANDER
Gone into the night.

SERA FIMA
With no pants.

ALEXANDER
And a razor.

(CONTINUED)
MASHA
   It’s my fault. It’s all my fault.

SERAFIMA
   (to Alexander))
   Call the police.

MARGARITA AND ALEXANDER
   No Police!

SERAFIMA
   They’d sort him/ out.

MARGARITA
   What, sentence him to life?

SERAFIMA
   (rolling her eyes)
   Smart is stupid...

MASHA
   What should I do? What can I do?!

ALEXANDER
   Get him a tuba.

MASHA
   A what?

ALEXANDER
   A tuba.

MARGARITA
   It’s a musical instrument, like a trumpet but bigger.

MASHA
   He wants a tuba?

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

MARGARITA
   How?

ALEXANDER
   He’d... play for money.

MASHA
   How much do these ‘tubas’ cost?

MARGARITA
   About five hundred rubles.
MASHA
If we had five hundred rubles...! Mother, the world’s upside down!

ALEXANDER
It’s a big investment.

MARGARITA
I’ve got a tuba.

SERAFIMA
Who are you?

MARGARITA
No names.

ALEXANDER
This is Margarita Ivanovna.

SERAFIMA
Holy saints protect us--

MARGARITA
Thanks. Now my husband finds out.

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

MARGARITA
Yes, I’ve made it successful.

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

MASHA
Mother!/ Shh...

SERAFIMA
--and drunken soldiers dancing...

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

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

(CONTINUED)
MARGARITA
Hm. I do need someone to clean the toilets. Especially the mens’.

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

MASHA
Oh thank you! She’ll do it! /Thank you!

MARGARITA
The tuba’s yours. Come get it.

Margarita turns to exit.

ALEXANDER
Are we finished ‘mourning’, Margarita?

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

Margarita exits with Masha and Alexander.

SERAFIMA
(calling after them)
Wait! What if he comes back before you do? What do I say?

ALEXANDER
Cheer him up. Tell him some jokes.

Masha, Alexander and Marguerita exit

SERAFIMA
I don’t know any jokes.

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

SEMYON
(writing)
‘In the event of my death—’

Serafima finds a hole in the pants and laughs wiggling her finger through it. Lazzo of the inappropriate mother-in-law and her awful laugh.
SERAFIMA
   Semyon look, it’s funny!

SEMYON
   I’m looking.

SERAFIMA
   Your pants have a hole!

SEMYON
   Yes. Can I have some time alone please?

SERAFIMA
   I’ve got a joke.

SEMYON
   Please?

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

SEMYON
   What about them?

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

SEMYON
   They what?

SERAFIMA
   A Bowser is a dog, Semyon.

SEMYON
   They ate a live dog?

SERAFIMA
   People don’t do that.

SEMYON
   So?

SERAFIMA
   So those Germans gobbled it up! Oh--

   Semyon crumples a sheet of paper and starts over.

SEMYON
   Sera/fima--
SERAfIMA
--You’ll like this one--

SEMYON
--go away.

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

Serafima demonstrates the head shaking.
Semyon
clenches his teeth.

SEMYON
I’m busy!

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

SEMYON
That’s horrible!

Semyon crumples a sheet of paper and starts over.

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

Serafima roars with laughter.

SEMYON
For pity’s sake! Will you shut / up?

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

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

SEMYON
Get out! OUT!!

Serafima exits.
Semyon returns to his
letter.

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

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

Act Two

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

SEMYON

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

He looks up, holding his position.

How's this?

MASHA

(encouraging)

Good!

SEMYON

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

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

Masha crosses her fingers behind her back.

Serafima prays. The lazzo of the pretentious musician.

SEMYON

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

MASHA

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

SEMYON

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

Serafima and Masha look about.
Masha
Newspaper... Newspaper...

Serafima
(wickedly) Yegor Timofeevich left his Pravda in the-

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

Masha does so. Semyon mumbles unintelligibly.

Masha
Sorry?

More unintelligible mumbling. Masha looks blank.

Semyon spits out the paper, irritated.

Semyon
Read the next instruction, please.

Semyon puts another piece of paper in his mouth.

Masha
’Tear off a piece of ”Pravda” and place it on the tongue.’

Semyon
Uhhhh...

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

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

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

Semyon blows. The tuba emits a loud honk.

Serafima
(to Masha)
See? Solid proof.

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

Masha embraces him.

(MORE)
SEMYON (cont’d)
Twenty concerts a month at five rubles each plus tips.
In gross earnings per year, that’s ... 

MASHA
That’s one thousand three hundred rubles!

SERAFIMA
But... you will learn to play it?

SEMYON
Are you deaf?

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

MASHA
It’s beautiful! You’re brilliant!

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

MASHA
’Yes, Senyechka the nursery is ready.’

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

SERAFIMA
Oh, the nursery!

SEMYON
And you’ll say, ”here’s your eggnog, son in law, in your own silver goblet”

SERAFIMA
Maybe learn to play it first.

SEMYON
Listen to the music, woman!

*He blows another bellowing note.* Yegor appears above.

YEGOR
What the-- You’re not playing that in here!
(Semyon blows.)
Over my dead body!
(Semyon laughs then blows again.)
(MORE)

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

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

SERAFIMA
    Now play a tune.

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

MASHA
    Play the scale, Senyechka.

    Semyon reads:

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

SERAFIMA AND MASHA
    A piano!

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

MASHA
    The appendix, there.

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

MASHA
    How are we going to buy a piano?

SERAFIMA
    Oh no.

(CONTINUED)
SEMYON
Theodor Hugo Schultz you are a rat. You’re a swindling cheat and a bastard. May you and your scales rot in everlasting hell!

Semyon is raging with grief; he throws the manual.

SERA FIMA
You can’t trust anyone these days.

SEMYON
This tuba was my destiny!

SERA FIMA
It sounded like stomach cramps.

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

Masha is trying to comfort him.

MASHA
We’ll manage.

SERA FIMA
We always manage.

MASHA
We’ve still got my wages.

SERA FIMA
And we’ve never counted on you anyway.

SEMYON
Exactly! Exactly!

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

SERA FIMA
Help me with my second job, cleaning toilets.

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

He picks up a small cup to throw.

MASHA
Don’t break that.

(CONTINUED)
SEMYON
    We’ll buy you another.

MASHA
    We can’t.

SEMYON
    We’ll manage somehow!

    They fight for the cup. Semyon smashes it.

SERAFIMA
    You wicked man.

MASHA
    It was a wedding gift.

SEMYON
    I wish that was my skull.

MASHA
    It was the only one left...

SEMYON
    You were better off before you married me.

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

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

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

SERAFIMA
    ’Get out’ he says...

    Alexander enters, then wishes he hadn’t.

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

    Pause. Semyon and Masha stare at each other.

SERAFIMA
    Are you leaving him?
Delicately and awkwardly, Alexander navigates the space between them.

MASHA
Do you want me to?

SEMYON
It’s up to you.

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

Pause. Semyon is silent. Alexander exits.

MASHA
I give up.

Serafima escorts Masha to the kitchen.

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

SEMYON
Where are you going?

MASHA
I don’t know...

The women exit. Semyon is alone.

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

(He takes out his letter and gun.)

Count to ten and the torment’s over.

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

SEMYON
One, two, three...

ARISTARKH
I can’t thank you enough

SEMYON
Four, five...

(CONTINUED)
ALEXANDER
   The small fee we talked about -?

SEMYON
   Six...

ARISTARKH
   Of course.

SEMYON
   Seven ...

ARISTARKH
   Here you are.

SEMYON
   Eight, nine...

ALEXANDER
   Go on.

        Alexander exits. Pause.

SEMYON
   Nine and a half...

ARISTARKH
   (calling)
   Comrade! Good day.
   (Semyon jumps. He hides the gun.)
   Pardon me, did I interrupt? If you’re in the middle of something, please continue.

SEMYON
   That’s all right, thank you sir.

ARISTARKH
   Oh, don’t call me ‘sir’. Here we are, two revolutionary comrades, thinking men, no difference whatsoever between us.
   (Semyon smiles nervously.)
   Except that you are very likely the Semyon Podsekalnikov who has decided to kill himself.

SEMYON
   Yes. No! I mean, I’m not him.
   (Aristarkh picks up Semyon’s discarded note from the table.)
   If you’re looking for an unlicensed firearm, sir, I don’t have such a thing, especially to kill myself.

(Continued)
ARISTARKH
Curious!
(reads)
‘In the event of my death, no one is to blame.’ This seems to be a suicide note. And of course, you’ve signed it, haven’t you?

SEMYON
Yes.

ARISTARKH
Comrade, I’m here to help you.

SEMYON
How?

ARISTARKH
For a start, this note will never do.

SEMYON
What’s wrong with it?

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

SEMYON
Er-

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

SEMYON
Theodor Hugo Schultz.

ARISTARKH
Schultz. I don’t know him personally-- is he a Comintern man?
(he shudders)
I think they’re all to blame; We thinkers have been silenced-- silenced like white slaves in the proletariat’s harem... Thus, as an intellectual, you want to die quid pro quo don’t you? Speaking for the truth?

SEMYON
Yes.
ARISTARKH  
And what is the truth?  

Semyon shrugs.  

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

SEMYON  
Intellectuals...?  

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

SEMYON  
It does sound good.  

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

SEMYON  
Blame the intellectuals.  

ARISTARKH  
No! - defend us! Defend! And perhaps end by asking: why a loyal citizen like

(he gives a small bow)

Aristarkh Dominikovich Grande-Skubnik has not been employed in the construction of soviet socialism?  

SEMYON  
You’re unemployed like me?  

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

SEMYON  
Why would Russia read my note?  

ARISTARKH  
Because of your sacrifice!

(CONTINUED)
SEMYON
That simple?

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

SEMYON
White pom poms?

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

SEMYON
My life will have meant something.

ARISTARKH
Permit me to embrace you... You are a true Intellectual, and my equal. I didn’t cry when my mother died. My poor mother. But now... now...
(Aristarkh weeps. Semyon comforts him.)
I will return in one hour for your note.

Aristarkh exits.

SEMYON
I’ll write the truth and the whole truth and find enough blame to fill the Volga and cover all the land! Where’s paper? I need more paper!
(Serafima and Masha enter in coats)
Masha I need -- are you going out?

MASHA
Why would you care?

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

MASHA
Get it yourself!

They exit. Semyon shouts after them.

SEMYON
It’s not just the Comintern oppressing me, it’s you!
(The door slams.)
She’ll be so sorry when I’m dead; she’ll be jostling the intelligentsia for a look at my grave...

(CONTINUED)
Alexander appears at the window with Kleopatra Maximovna.

ALEXANDER
Psst...Semyon -

SEMYON
Comrade! Have you got any paper?

ALEXANDER
No. Got someone who wants to meet you.

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

KLEOPATRA
Hello...Are you Semyon?

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

SEMYON
Oui...

KLEOPATRA
Excuse my clandestine arrival...

ALEXANDER
Kiki, clandestine is extra.

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

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

SEMYON
(modest)
Oh...

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

SEMYON
Podsekalnikov, Semyon.

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

(CONTINUED)
SEMYON
Please.

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

SEMYON
No. No, definitely.

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

SEMYON
Yes... But maybe not yet...

Yegor emerges from his room and watches the scene.

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

SEMYON
Yes...

KLEOPATRA
Can you feel it? Beating here?

SEMYON
Yes.

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

SEMYON
Sorry--

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

KLEOPATRA
Yes! Love! Will you promise yourself to me?

SEMYON
I’m sort of committed -

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

Kleopatra is giving him little kisses on the face

SEMYON
But um--

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

SEMYON
Who?

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

SEMYON
--Podsekalnikov--

KLEOPATRA
--and you’ll never be forgotten.

Masha calls from downstairs.

MASHA
Semyon? Semyon!

SEMYON
I thought she’d gone to work.

KLEOPATRA
What is it?

SEMYON
Oh God-- Quick - It’s my--
Semyon wants Kleo to hide but there isn’t time. Lazzo of hiding the girlfriend from the other girlfriend.

MASHA

Semyon--? I--

SEMYON

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

My Cook.

MASHA

What?

SEMYON

‘Cook’ me some soup. And an eggnog.

MASHA

Who do you think you are?

KLEOPATRA

She’s so rude!

SEMYON

Please?

MASHA

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

SEMYON

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

MASHA

Who is that?

KLEOPATRA

Defy her with our love. Kiss me...

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

MASHA

I’m going away now Semyon.

SEMYON

Masha...
MASHA
Would you pass me my coat... Yegor?

YEGOR
Yes, Yes!
(Yegor races to get Masha’s coat. She walks to the door. He holds the coat out for her.)
I’m giving your wife her coat, comrade.

MASHA
Goodbye, Yegor.

KLEOPATRA
Semyon...!

SEMYON
No --wait Masha--

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

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

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

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

MASHA
(off)
I hate you!

SEMYON
No...

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

YELPIDY
Slow down my boy! HARLOT! The devil won’t get you while I’m here. In paris eat fillets and spirits of platypus.
SEMYON
Let /go of me. Masha--!

SERAFIMA
Hold him tight Father Yelpidy! (to Semyon) This is your last chance. Masha--?
(momentarily she wonders where is Masha) -- demands you listen to the Holy Father.

SEMYON
Will she come back if I do?

SERAFIMA
If you repent.

Semyon waivers then decides to stay.

YELPIDY
You are contemplating a mortal sin!

SERAFIMA
He doesn’t even believe in God.

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

SEMYON
(gritting his teeth)
Does Masha need me to do this?

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

SEMYON
Yes.

SERAFIMA
Watch your language.

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

SERAFIMA
Isn’t there any more helpful advice, Father?

(CONTINUED)
YELPIDY
Not for a godforsaken suicide.
  (suddenly inspired.)
  Unless-- Will you be writing a note, boy?

  Alexander appears at the window.

ALEXANDER
Aha!

SEMYON
Yes.

YELPIDY
Will you be mentioning despair?

SEMYON
Maybe.

YELPIDY
Then tell the people how you despaired in God.
  (Yelpidy perambulates, forking Alexander
  some cash on his way)
Describe how I, Father Yelpidy, came to save you from
damnation, how you laughed and pushed me away, but no
sooner were you dead, than you realized your mistake.

  Serafima starts to guide Yelpidy away.

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

YELPIDY
You promised tea.

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

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

SEMYON
Stop Alexander, she’s in your room!

  Whistling, Alexander goes in.

YEGOR
Who is?

  Kleopatra squeals. Yegor smiles with malice. Semyon
  dithers about whether to fetch Kleopatra.
YEGOR
   You see? Precisely, I-- tell me about commas.

SEMYON
   Commies? Well--

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

SEMYON
   Thirty-five thousand postmen!

YEGOR
   It’s my pen name.

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

ALEXANDER
   No no, thank you, Comrade!

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

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

ALEXANDER
   After ‘orgies’-- of course my poor Yegor.

SEMYON
   Yegor--

YEGOR
   (to Semyon)
   Comrade, honest workers are slaves to these educated classes. If you’re going to kill yourself, do it for the Proletariat.

SEMYON
   Alexander--

   (CONTINUED)
ALEXANDER
Hey! You talk to him, you come through me-- got that?
Waving his letter triumphantly, Yegor exits through the window.

SEMYON
Alexander, the counter revolutionary?

ALEXANDER
Yes?

SEMYON
Is you.

ALEXANDER
Bring him back! You’re fast Semyon run! My life’s on the line!
Alexander dashes upstairs to hide his contraband; Semyon pursues Yegor. Father Yelpidy enters from the kitchen to see Semyon leap through the window. Viktor and Raisa enter. Lazzo of the embarrassing social greeting.

YEL PIDY
Harlots!

VIKTOR
(to Yelpidy)
Comrade Podsekalnikov. An honour more in the breach than the observance.

YEL PIDY
Wrong sinner!
Yelpidy slugs from his flask. Viktor and Raisa sit nervously. Aristarkh enters.

VIKTOR
Comrade Podsekalnikov.

AR ISTARKH
Wrong today sir; wise tomorrow.
Aristarkh lounges. They eye one another.

VIKTOR
Where is Podsekalnikov?
Voices are heard in Alexander’s room
KLEOPATRA (to Alexander)
    Monster...You stink like a hound!

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

KLEOPATRA
    Viktor.

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

ARISTARKH
    I also paid five rubles!

YELPIDY
    And I!

VIKTOR
    How is Kiki involved in this?

ALEXANDER
    She’s leaving.

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

YELPIDY
    He’s promised to the Church!

VIKTOR
    Where is Podsekalnikov?

KLEOPATRA
    Viktor--!

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

ARISTARKH
    I demand to know what I paid for!

ALEXANDER
    You paid for an opportunity comrade, like everyone else.

(CONTINUED)
RAISA
   It’s a lottery?

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

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

KLEOPATRA
   He’ll shoot himself for love!

RAISA
   Kah! For Women in the Work-place!

VIKTOR
   What about Poetry? / What about Art?!

   Raisa comforts Viktor.

YELPIDY
   His lost soul might save ten thousand!

VIKTOR
   Where the hell is Podsekalnikov?

   Margarita enters with a depressed Semyon.

MARGARITA
   He’s here. I found him at the train station.

SEMYON
   I couldn’t catch Yegor Timofeevich. And Masha’s gone.

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

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

KLEOPATRA
   Remember: my note first. Adieu...

   She leaves. Semyon sits, head down.

ARISTARKH
   Might we know the time of death, Semyon Semyonovich?

(CONTINUED)
MARGARITA  
What?

SEMYON  
The time?

ARISTARKH  
Would tonight at midnight suit you? To--

VIKTOR  
Shuffle off this mortal coil.

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

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

SEMYON  
A party...

MARGARITA  
Your new friends will pay for it. Right?

They all look at one another and agree.

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

VIKTOR  
From fall of light to stroke of midnight.

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

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

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

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

Margarita kisses Semyon. Yegor enters; he's astonished.
YEGOR
How do you do it?

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

YEGOR
It’s a public hallway!

Yegor runs from Margarita; she calls upstairs.

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

Margarita exits.

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

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

What’s this?

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

Semyon evades, shuffles through the papers, reads.

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

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

Alexander follows Margarita off. Semyon thinks.

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

( CONTINUED )
Distant music is heard as the scene transforms around Semyon and, as night falls, he is singing at Margarita’s restaurant...
ACT THREE

At Margerita’s restaurant

Night. Guests have assembled including:

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

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

OLEG

‘To us has come our very own Semyon’:

ALL

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

SEMYON

(limbo dancing with a glass on his forehead, singing)
And you can start wearing purple wearing purple!/Start wearing purple for me now/ a purple a purple little lady is perfect / for dirty no-good Russian clown/Ya ya ya...

GRUSHA

Bravo!

SEMYON

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

GRUSHA

Vodka time!

Refills all round

MARGARITA

Don’t think, drink!

(CONTINUED)
VIKTOR
(conducting the band)

Chorus!

ALL

Start wearing purple wearing purple...

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

ARISTARKH
Honour and glory to you dear Semyon!

Kleopatra embraces Semyon to show Viktor

KLEOPATRA
What a man! Such passion!

VIKTOR
Glory and honour to you Comrade Podsekalnikov!

ALEXANDER
(drunk)

You’re the man of the hour / Semyon!

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

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

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

RAISA
Semyon Semyonivitch, leader in our struggle!

All raise the toast.

SEMYON
Follow the leader!

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

MARGERITA
Sonia! Open another case!
SONIA
    That’s three cases...

MARGERITA
    Mark down twelve rubles.

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

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

YELPIDY
    (to Grusha and Raisa)
    Did you hear the one about Pushkin and the bath-house?

RAISA
    Pushkin, the poet--?

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

GRUSHA
    Windy chinks and peepholes--

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

KLEOPATRA
    I don’t like smut;/excuse me.

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

GRUSHA
    (toasts)
    Smutty working girls!

RAISA
    Do you vote "yes" to smutty girls comrades?

VIKTOR, SEMYON AND ALL
    Yes!

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

SEMYON
    You must have a hell of a piano to play like that. It’s an honour having you at my... at my... here: take this.
    (To Serafima as they start another tune)
    (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
SEMYON (cont’d)
Oh, I wish Masha was here.

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

SEMYON
(sings to the tune of ‘Kalinka’)
Mashenka! Mashenka! Mashenka my dear—
(the mood saddens and continues as underscore)
...What’s the time?

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

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

SONIA
That’s any place not this place.

ARISTARKH
No, even further away!

Music underscore continues.

VICTOR
That undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns.

Yelpidy continues his joke

YELPIDY
So Pushkin whips off his pants--

ARISTARKH
His death will have an impact on every Russian.

YELPIDY
--and tells her "behold"--

ARISTARKH
Semyon Semyonovich will be /the...

music underscore continues ever more romantic...

YELPIDY
--the prick of conscience!/Hee hee hee hee!
ARISTARKH
--Men will rise to your example Semyon./The gates of the Kremlin/ will be thrown open--

RAISA
And women!

SEMYON
The Kremlin?

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

KLEOPATRA
for love!--

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

KLEOPATRA
--for love!

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

KLEOPATRA
love--

Raisa silences Kleopatra

RAISA
--equal pay for Soviet women!

MARGARITA
Music!

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

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

ALEXANDER
(to Margarita)
What a business!
CONTINUED:

NATASHA
Here’s to Semyon Semyonovitch!

VIKTOR
Courtier, soldier,/scholar

{ARISTARKH
--Scholar;

OLEG
Long life!

Everything stops.

ARISTARKH
Well...

ALEXANDER
Speech! Speech!

KLEOPATRA
Speech!

Pause. Semyon stands alone.

SEMYON
What time is it?

ARISTARKH
Ten to midnight.

MARGARITA
But our clock is always fast.

GRUSHA
We have fourteen beats in the bar.

NATASHA AND GRUSHA
Dead beats!

Natasha and Grusha stomp. Yegor enters.

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

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

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

(CONTINUED)
YEGOR
   Thank you, comrades, I don’t use alcohol myself, but I was once toasted warmly when I won my People’s Award for Speedy Delivery--

SEMYON
   --for Speedy Delivery! (to the girls)

ALEXANDER
   Speedy with the ladies eh, Yegor?

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

SERAFIMA
   Disgusting, wretched, vile!

YEGOR
   I deny your slander!

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

ARISTARKH
   You should write about intellectuals.

VIKTOR
   I write about workers.

YEGOR
   Post men?

VIKTOR
   Well...

YEGOR
   I’m a post man. I want to hear about post men.

GRUSHA
   Oo, audience of one.

RAISA
   And post women.

ARISTARKH
   (to Viktor)
   What do you say, comrade?
VIKTOR
Certainly the postal worker is heroic...resilient... so often called to endure the unendurable, that his--her--his/her character must crack.

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

RAISA
That’s not what Pushkin said!

Laughter. Yegor silences everyone.

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

VIKTOR
(at attention)
I revere the Revolution and the postmen of our Soviet Republic!

YEGOR
And are we cracked?

Viktor flounders. Kleopatra defiantly rescues him.

KLEOPATRA
Yes! In the Soul, like all true Russians.

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

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

KLEOPATRA
My mother was a gypsy...

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

(CONTINUED)
KLEOPATRA  
(joining Viktor’s oration)
Soul ripped out and tossed to the devil!

VIKTOR
Old Russia? New Russia, racing forward, --

KLEOPATRA
Leaping the cracks--!

_Yegor is mollified about the cracks. Raisa is annoyed by Kleopatra’s partnership with Viktor._

VIKTOR
Inspired by the Postman’s Song!

_Semyon leads applause._

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

SEMYON
Even women poets.

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

SEMYON
I support all of you. Sonia! Shoot me!

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

SONIA
Three litres of slivovitz.

MARGARITA
Mark down five roubles.
(to Semyon)

MARGARITA
You’ll laugh about this in the morning.

_Margarita banishes Serafima to the kitchen._

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

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

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

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

MARGARITA
He doesn’t mean what happens for you.

Aristarkh is non-plussed.

SEMYON
Is there Life after death?

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

VICTOR
The bourne whence no traveler returns--

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

{MARGARITA
Drink...

{SERAFIMA (crossing to exit again)
Tsk tsk.

SEMYON
Is there Life after death?

ARISTARKH
What says the Church?

YELPIDY
God, I hate this question.

YEGOR
According to Socialism there isn’t--
YELPIDY
According to Religion there is---

SEMYON
According to Alexander--?

ALEXANDER
C’mon! It’s supposed to be a party!

MARGARITA
Music! What do I pay you for?


SEMYON
Drink to me, comrades!

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

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

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

KLEOPATRA
Seeking beauty...

YEGOR
For the masses!

ALEXANDER
Choose your Cause...

    *The Musicians finish. Semyon pushes the lottery notes away.*

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

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

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

SERAFIGMA
What are you doing?

SEMYON
(officiously to the operator)
Get me the Kremlin.
(Hush. Terror)
I said "the Kremlin" and they’re putting me through! Me! The Kremlin! Straight through to the red heart of Soviet Russia!

SERAFIGMA
Lord help us.

ARISTARKH
Stop him, someone.

Viktor and Aristarkh confer as cronies, their animosity forgotten.

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

shocked intakes of breath in the room

ALEXANDER
Hang up man, hang up

SEMYON
I find Marx boring.

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

More shocked intakes of breath.

(CONTINUED)
Yegor loses control momentarily.

YEGOR
Tell them their Socialism stinks! Tell them!

MARGARITA
For pity’s sake, it’s my number.

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

RAISA
Oh no, no...

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

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

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

Victor takes dictation. Semyon, unaware, speaks simply.

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

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

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

(CONTINUED)
Silence.

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

SERAFIMA  
(to the girls)  
Where’s he going?

They have no idea.

NATASHA  
Did he really call the Kremlin?

SONIA  
He left without paying.

GRUSHKA  
Creepy.

VIKTOR  
‘Heading west’—sailing metaphor: poetry.

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

RAISA  
And women.

ARISTARKH  
Hardly.

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

Silence. They are waiting, listening hard.

RAISA  
Where is it?

SERAFIMA  
Where’s what?

VIKTOR  
The gunshot.

Pause. The discomfort grows.

MARGARITA  
He’s gone to sleep it off.

(Continued)
VIKTOR
If t’were done, when tis done, t’were well t’were done quickly...

ALEXANDER
(to Serafima)
I’ll go look after him.

Alexander goes after Semyon.

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

ARISTARKH
Gentlemen - that’s to say, people, and women - I see no reason why our friend could not be a man of many parts: poet and lover, Intellectual, womens’ rights activist, representative of the people, (Yelpidy staggers upright)
even a church disciple...
(Aristarkh raises his glass)
To Semyon Podeskalnikov...let us unite in his memory.

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

Dawn, growing into a sunny morning.

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

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

MASHA
Mother, where is Semyon?

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

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

SERAFIMA
Masha...

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

SERAFIMA
Yes.

MASHA
Semyon’s not a dead weight.

SERAFIMA
No.

MASHA
He’ll find a job.

SERAFIMA
Not where he is.

MASHA
Where is Semyon?

Serafima avoids. Masha sees the note Semyon wrote earlier. She picks it up and reads. In the event of my death, no-one is to blame.
SERAFIMA
They’re looking for his body. They had to wait for dawn so they could see.

MASHA
Why didn’t you-- No!

The shock hits Masha.

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

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

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

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

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

ARISTARKH
What daddy?

YELPIDY
The children’s daddy.

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

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

ARISTARKH
Thank you, Father, for those comforting words.

KLEOPATRA
Um, these are the household staff.

Raisa starts measuring Masha for clothes.

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

(CONTINUED)
SERAFIMA
Where did you find him?

RAISA
Bust to hem, 39.

ARISTARKH
On the path of history.

SERAFIMA
Is that far away?

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

* * * * *

Masha emits a terrible cry of grief.

ARISTARKH
Goodness!

RASIA
36, 24, 36

SERAFIMA
(sotto voce)
Is he a mess?

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

* * * * *

Masha emits another terrible cry of grief

MASHA
Senyechka!

ARISTARKH
Is she going to do this for long?

SERAFIMA
Shhh, there Masha...

RAISA
I think brown felt hats...

KLEOPATRA
--sprinkled with tiny blue bells.

MASHA
My life is over... !
ARISTARKH
Oh come now.

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

KLEOPATRA
Not every servant gets a new hat.

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

Viktor enters at the head of a small cortège

VIKTOR
He comes! Our Fallen Comrade.

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

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

ARISTARKH
I didn’t cry when my poor mother died...

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

MASHA
Now I have a hat and no Semyon.

ALEXANDER
I’m sorry Masha. I never thought he’d...

Masha attacks Alexander, who is devastated.

MASHA
I don’t want to live. I’ll kill myself.

Yegor and Margarita restrain her.

MARGARITA
No you won’t. You’ll find a man who’ll spoil your lipstick not your mascara.
MASHA
I don’t wear lipstick.

YEGOR
Precisely! Maria Lukianovna! I thought your husband was a lazy slob. But Semyon Semyonovich had thoughts so radical I could never have dared imagine them, until today.
(Masha doesn’t know what he means)
Today I became worthy of you, Maria Lukianovna. I would carry any burden—regular, or express—

MASHA
What?

YEGOR
— if you would deign to live with me in my room—

ALEXANDER
Bad timing, comrade.

MASHA
Go away! Leave me alone.

YEGOR
—I’d deliver you from solitude.

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

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

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

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

YELPIDY
Excuse me/Important Church business...

MASHA
I want to die, I want to die!

KLEOPATRA
(amazed, to Viktor)
How his domestics loved him...

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

(CONTINUED)
VIKTOR
   Not much of a selling point, sadly.

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

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

YELPIDY
   Through the generosity of the Church--

ARISTARKH
   And the last of my mother’s antique furniture--

KLEOPATRA
   We’ve booked a top quality undertaker.

ARISTARKH
   An oak coffin with gilt fittings...

YELPIDY
   A sung mass with full choir...

VIKTOR
   A rhyming obituary...

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

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

ARISTARKH
   Goodness, we need a reception!

VIKTOR
   We must start a fund.

SERAFIMA
   A fund?

ARISTARKH
   Aha! A ‘charitable fund’! I’ll see to it --

(CONTINUED)
VIKTOR
We’ll see to it.

MASHA
Get out, go!

ARISTARKH
You prepare the body and we’ll provide the fund. A bientot!

Viktor, Kleopatra, Raisa and Aristarkh exit.

SERAFIMA
Real gentlemen!

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

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

Serafima goes to the kitchen. Margarita comforts Masha.

MARGARITA
A charitable fund. A decadent hat. You’ll survive this.

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

MASHA
I want to die.

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

MARGARITA
I prefer men who are alive.

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

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

(CONTINUED)
MASHA
Bastard.

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

SEMYON
Hosanna! I’m flying, I’m flying...

MASHA
Argh! Wake up!

Masha slaps him round the face.

Semyon spins and staggers to Serafima, sees her.

SEMYON
I’m dead. I’m in hell!

SERAFIMA
It’s a miracle!

SEMYON
Get behind me Satan!

SERAFIMA
It’s me Semyon, your mother-in-law!

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

Masha hits and punches him as she speaks.

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

SEMYON
Am I alive?

MASHA
I thought you were dead!

SEMYON
I’m alive?

She hits him again.
Mashenka, I’m alive!

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

(CONTINUED)
SERAFIMA
Well. You can wash your own sainted self.

She starts back up the stairs.

SEMYON
I’m alive!

We hear sounds from Margarita and Alexander.

SERAFIMA
Appalling, sinful, damned!

Serafima goes into the bathroom.

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

Margarita and Alexander finish.

MASHA
You missed.

SEMYON
I guess.

MASHA
Stupid man.

SEMYON
Can’t even kill myself.

MASHA
Stupid, useless /man.

(putting his hand up to his wound)

SEMYON
Masha! I’m wounded.

MASHA
You missed by a mile.

(CONTINUED)
SEMYON  Aren’t you happy?

MASHA  Better luck next time, eh?

    Pause. She **blurts**:
    Am I really so awful to live with?

SEMYON  No, I am. It’s me. Masha, please--

MASHA  Oh Semyon.

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

SEMYON  What?

OLEG  The deceased?

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

SEMYON  Who are you?

OLEG  We’re from ‘Eternity’.

MASHA  Excuse me?

STEPAN  ‘Eternity’.

OLEG  The funeral parlour?

SEMYON  Ohh.

STEPAN  Where do you want it?

    Pause.
OLEG Decide, Comrades-- it’s heavy. We carried it all the way.

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

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

OLEG I’d get this one myself if I could afford it – and if I was dead, obviously.

STEPAN Aie, let’s put it here.

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

MASHA ‘Your husband died a symbol’, they said.

SERAFIMA ‘We’ll pay for everything’, they said.

MASHA They’re even making me a hat. A real hat.

OLEG Now. Where’s the incoming occupant?

SEMYON I, don’t know what to tell you.

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

OLEG The corpse. Where’s the lifeless, mouldering corpse of (he consults a clipboard) Semyon Semyonovich Podsekalnikov?

SEMYON (raising his right hand)

Here!
OLEG
Where?

SERAFIMA
He’s not ready yet. He’s not...dressed.

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

STEPAN
We’re supposed to lift him in for you.

SEMYON
No thanks.

STEPAN
It’s part of the service.

MASHA
We’ll manage.

STEPAN
We’re meant to do it.

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

MASHA
We’ll manage, thank you.

OLEG
Righty then.

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

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

She signs again. Stepan regards the coffin.

STEPAN
Must have been a Party member or something big.

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

OLEG
Yeah, it’s hard to find a paying job. I’m an intern.
SEMYON
He dreamed of being an intern.

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

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

SERAFIMA
Well, thank you... See you later.

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

(He gestures death in the coffin)

SERAFIMA
No, I’ve a few years left!

They laugh. Pause

OLEG
I feel great compassion / for the deceased.

STEPAN
So do I.

SEMYON
Thank you.

Pause

{STEPAN { OLEG
The tip?

SEMYON
Ohhh! Masha--?

Masha searches her pockets and offers a tiny coin.

STEPAN
Thanks.

OLEG
We’ll go feed our families on this.

MASHA
Sorry! Good luck!

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

(CONTINUED)
SERAfIMA
‘For my beloved Semyon. A thinker, a hero and an
unforgettable son-in-law.’ Unforgettable is right.

MASHA
It cost seven rubles. They’ve payed for everything!

They look at each other in horror.

SERAfIMA
They’ll be back any minute!

MASHA
You can explain...

Semyon becomes abject. Serafima rushes to the
window.

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

MASHA
We can explain. I’ll just tell them....

Masha struggles to find the words.

SEMYON
It’s not too late; I’ll kill myself.

MASHA
Better idea – I’ll kill you!

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

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

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

Pause.

VICTOR
Poor woman...

ARISTARKH
The evidence, madam, is against you.

(CONTINUED)
Masha
We thought he was dead -- and-- and so did he, actually! But as you can see -

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

Aristarkh
She’s hysterical.

Masha
Semyon! Get up out of there...

Viktor
Her brain’s affected. Tragic!

Yelpidy
Another case for the asylum.

Masha
Stop this Semyon. I’m telling you...

Viktor / Yelpidy
Stop it / Dear lady take hold...

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

Aristarkh
When my poor mother died...

Viktor
The Tragedy of the Deranged Domestic.

*Alexander and Margarita appear on the landing.*

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

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

Yelpidy
Restrain her!

Aristarkh
She’ll damage the corpse... Comrade! Help your neighbour!

Masha
Semyon!

*(CONTINUED)*
ALEXANDER  
(takes hold of Masha)  
Face the truth, Masha.

MASHA  
Make him get up! He’s making things worse!

YELPIDY  
The man is dead, dead...

MASHA  
Alexander Kalabushkin, Semyon is alive—

{MARGARITA  
Oh no, no, you poor girl...

{ALEXANDER  
He’s gone, Masha.

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

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

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

MASHA  
What are you saying?

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

MASHA  
He’s not dead.

SERAFIMA  
Oh, he’s dead. Dead!/Dead.

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

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

(CONTINUED)
MASHA
No! I won’t let you!

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

MARGARITA
Bring her up here.

ALEXANDER
Come on, Masha.

MASHA
Please, Alexander Kalabushkin, believe me-

ALEXANDER
Come on.

MASHA
Don’t touch me. Put me down. Help!

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

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

VIKTOR
Her grief is epic. Andromache, Cassandra...

MASHA
WAIT!— he’s dead, I believe you! But don’t bury him.
I beg you, don’t bury him!

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

SERAFIMA
Masha!

MARGARITA
This isn’t whack-a-mole.

ALEXANDER
Sorry.
MARGARITA
   Bring her up here. All men are fools.

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

YELPIDY
   Doleo! Morsus doleo!

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

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

   Viktor messes with Semyon’s collar and hair.

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

VIKTOR
   The old woman did a terrible job with his hair.

ARISTARKH
   Perhaps we emphasize his masculinity to distract?

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

ARISTARKH
   That would certainly help/ but--

YELPIDY
   Just wrap him in a flag.

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

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

   Alexander has been observing from the stairs.

ALEXANDER
   The martyr’s in the coffin, comrades; all I need is
   your cash in my hand.
ARISTARKH
After the burial, everything after the burial.

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

*Viktor and Aristarkh make eye contact and sigh.*

VIKTOR
We do have time.

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

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

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

*(Semyon picks up the gun.)*
The ‘s nothing new under the sun. So here’s for nothing: are you ready this time? ‘Yes I’m ready’. On my count? ‘On your count’...

*Lights fade as music from the funeral cortege rises.*
One...for a rooster. Two...for a worm. Three...better luck next time. Four...a coward. Five...a real hat. Six...I hate you Semyon...Seven...I hate you Semyon...Eight...I hate you Semyon...

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

A graveyard on the outskirts of the city.

In the darkness, Semyon’s voice: one thousand and twenty-three... I hate you Semyon... one thousand and twenty-four...

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

VIKTOR
Everyone, say "Cheer", but don’t cheer.

RAISA
What?

VIKTOR
Say: "Cheer", but don’t cheer.

RAISA AND OTHERS
"Cheer"...

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

ARISTARKH
He was philosopher and friend!

KLEOPATRA
I am his murderess! I confess it...

RAISA
He respected working women!

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

VIKTOR
Destiny? Ha!

KLEOPATRA
Jealous!

(CONTINUED)
VIKTOR
His death is a clarion call for the poetry of cracks—the tradition and the future of Our Mother Russia.

MASHA
Who are all these people?

KLEOPATRA
He died for me!

MASHA
You’re wrong. She’s wrong.

KLEOPATRA
Oh oh and you are --

MASHA
His wife.

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

MASHA
His wife.

MARGARITA
She’s his wife.

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

MASHA
Semyon, have you no shame?

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

YELPIDY
Our comrade died to reunite State and Church...

ARISTARKH
The intellectual for our age!

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

(CONTINUED)
Masha
No, but you will in a minute!

Margarita
Masha, you promised!

*Margarita restrains Masha.*

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

Alexander
Masha?

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

*She turns away. Alexander pauses over the coffin.*

Alexander
Forgive me brother.

*Semyon embraces Alexander.*

Semyon
No, you forgive me.

Alexander screams. *There is pandemonium.*

{Yelpidy
Avaunt thee, Demon!

{Kleopatra
He lives! he lives!.

{Aristarkh
GET BACK! GET BACK!

Grusha
Holy God.

Natasha
Awkward!

Sonia
Eeeew!

Serafima
Lie down or we’ll have to give the money back.
VIKTOR
You’re alive?

SEMYON
I’m alive. Sorry, but I’m alive!

MASHA
See? I told you.

ARISTARKH
But you killed yourself.

SEMYON
(shows the gun apologeticaly)
I tried to. I wanted to.

ARISTARKH
Fraud!

MASHA
He only missed by an inch.

MARGARITA
Alexander wept for you.

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

KLEOPATRA
All my suffering for nothing.

SEMYON AND ALEXANDER
(to Kleopatra and Masha respectively)
Sorry.

VIKTOR
What will I do with my obituary?

SEMYON
Use it yourself, Comrade, when the time comes.

OLEG
We carried you here!

STEPAN
You heavy bastard...

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

SEMYON
A worm. I’m a worm! Not food for worms!

(CONTINUED)
KLEOPATRA
You’re a liar.

VIKTOR
A beast without reason.

RAISA
Judas.

ARISTARKH
How can you live with yourself?

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

MASHA
(wry)
Oh Semyon!

KLEOPATRA
Shoot him!

MASHA
Shoot her!

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

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

RAISA
You put us at risk!

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

VIKTOR
There’s one bullet left.

MASHA
No!

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

STEPAN
Use it!

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

Semyon picks up the gun;

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

MASHA
I know. /I love you.

VOICES
Use it! Use it! Use it!

RAISA
Viktor will make you a symbol for eternity.

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

ARISTARKH
Recant Podsekalnikov!

VIKTOR
Shoot yourself!

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

Semyon carefully puts down the gun.

A VOICE
Shoot him!

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

ARISTARKH
Should the funeral proceed as planned?

VOICES
Yes! Shoot him!

RAISA
Traitor to Women!
KLEOPATRA
To love!

VOICE
Traitor to the Revolution!

SEMYON
No Comrades -- I demand a final word!
(they agree)
I did NOT run away from the October Revolution.
Maybe I didn’t go out the house the entire month, but
I didn’t run away.

MASHA
It’s true!

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

MASHA
It’s true!

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

NATASHA
You criticised the Kremlin.

SEMYON
I was drunk!

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

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

OLEG
Life is hard/Comrade.

(CONTINUED)
GRUSHKA
More bread would help.

NATASHA
More money would help.

YELPIDY
Vodka.

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

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

YELPIDY
You rob the kingdom of heaven for Earthly Delight.

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

MASHA
We’ll work for you.

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

SERAfIMA
You don’t scare me.

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

Accepting defeat, Viktor lowers the gun.
CONTINUED:

KLEOPATRA
Viktor Viktorovich! You are magnificent in action.

VIKTOR
Kiki, you smell like Paris.

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

RAISA
Oh for...Get me a drink.

SEMYON
Masha--

MASHA
Baloney.

Masha and Semyon embrace.

MARGARITA
(to Alexander)
I’m feeling very sad.

ALEXANDER
The future holds some serious grieving.
(to everyone)
‘To us has come our very own Semyon’--alive!

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

MARGARITA
Speech! Speech!

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

OLEG
Wasting a perfectly good coffin!

Off stage, a loud gun shot is heard.

STEPAN
Maybe not, comrade.
(to everyone)
(A note flutters down from the sky.
Stepan opens it)
This just in from Eternity.
OLEG
   A suicide! A real one this time?

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

MASHA
   No. /No!

STEPAN
   Following your/ example.

SERAFIMA
   Holy God, why?

SEMYON
   Why?

NATASHA
   From us has gone our very own Yegor.

   The End.