

**VERA
OR THE NIHILISTS**

by

Oscar Wilde

CHARACTERS

Persons in the Prologue

PETER SABOUROFF, *an Innkeeper*

VERA SABOUROFF, *his Daughter*

MICHAEL, *a Peasant*

DMITRI SABOUROFF

NICOLAS

COLONEL KOTEMKIN

Persons in the play

IVAN THE CZAR

PRINCE PAUL MARALOFFSKI, *Prime Minister of Russia*

PRINCE PETROVITCH

COUNT ROUVALOFF

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

BARON RAFF

GENERAL KOTEMKIN

A PAGE

COLONEL OF THE GUARD

Nihilists

PETER TCHERNAVITCH, *President of the Nihilists*

MICHAEL

ALEXIS IVANACIEVITCH, *known as a Student of Medicine*

PROFESSOR MARFA

VERA SABOUROFF

SOLDIERS, CONSPIRATORS, Etc.

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

PROLOGUE

A Russian Inn

ACT I

99 Tchernavaya, Moscow. A large garret.

ACT II

Council Chamber in the Emperor's Palace.

ACT III

As in Act I.

ACT IV

Antechamber of the Czar's private room.

PROLOGUE

SCENE: A Russian inn. Large door opening on snowy landscape at back of stage. PETER SABOUROFF and MICHAEL.

PETER

(warming his hands at a stove)
Has Vera not come back yet, Michael?

MICHAEL

No, Father Peter, not yet; 'tis a good three miles to the post office, and she has to milk the cows besides, and that dun one is a rare plaguey creature for a wench to handle.

PETER

Why didn't you go with her, you young fool? She'll never love you unless you are always at her heels; women like to be bothered.

MICHAEL

She says I bother her too much already, Father Peter, and I fear she'll never love me after all.

PETER

Tut, tut, boy, why shouldn't she? You're young, and wouldn't be ill-favoured either, had God or thy mother given thee another face. Aren't you one of Prince Maraloffski's gamekeepers; and haven't you got a good grass farm, and the best cow in the village? What more does a girl want?

MICHAEL

But Vera, Father Peter --

PETER

Vera, my lad, has got too many ideas; I don't think much of ideas myself; I've got on well enough in life without 'em; why shouldn't my children? There's Dmitri! Could have stayed here and kept the inn; many a young lad would have jumped at the offer in these hard times; but he, scatter-brained featherhead of a boy, must needs go off to Moscow to study the law! What does he want knowing about the law? Let a man do his duty, say I, and no one will trouble him.

MICHAEL

Ay! but, Father Peter, they say a good lawyer can break the law as often as he likes, and no one can say him nay. If a man knows the law he knows his duty.

PETER

True, Michael, if a man knows the law there is nothing illegal he cannot do when he likes: that is why folk become lawyers. That is about all they are good for; and there he stays, and has not written a line to us for four months now -- a good son that, eh?

MICHAEL

Come, come, Father Peter, Dmitri's letters must have gone astray -- perhaps the new postman can't read; he looks stupid enough, and Dmitri, why, he was the best fellow in the village. Do you remember how he shot the bear at the barn in the great winter?

PETER

Ay, it was a good shot; I never did a better myself.

MICHAEL

And as for dancing, he tired out three fiddlers Christmas come two years.

PETER

Ay, ay, he was a merry lad. It is the girl that has the seriousness -- she goes about as solemn as a priest for days at a time.

MICHAEL

Vera is always thinking of others.

PETER

There is her mistake, boy. Let God and our little Father the Czar look to the world. It is none of my work to mend my neighbour's thatch. Why, last winter old Michael was frozen

(MORE)

PETER (cont'd)

to death in his sleigh in the snowstorm, and his wife and children starved afterwards when the hard times came; but what business was it of mine? I didn't make the world. Let God and the Czar look to it. And then the blight came, and the black plague with it, and the priests couldn't bury the people fast enough, and they lay dead on the roads -- men and women both. But what business was it of mine? I didn't make the world. Let God and the Czar look to it. Or two autumns ago, when the river overflowed on a sudden, and the children's school was carried away and drowned every girl and boy in it. I didn't make the world -- let God or the Czar look to it.

MICHAEL

But, Father Peter --

PETER

No, no, boy; no man could live if he took his neighbour's pack on his shoulder.

(Enter VERA in peasant's dress)

Well, my girl, you've been long enough away -- where is the letter?

VERA

There is none to-day, Father.

PETER

I knew it.

VERA

But there will be one to-morrow, Father.

PETER

Curse him, for an ungrateful son.

VERA

O Father, don't say that; he must be sick.

PETER

Ay! Sick of Profligacy, perhaps.

VERA

How dare you say that of him, Father? You know that is not true.

PETER

Where does the money go, then? Michael, listen. I gave Dmitri half his mother's fortune to bring with him to pay the lawyer folk at Moscow. He has only written three times, and every

(MORE)

PETER (cont'd)
time for more money. He got it, not at my wish, but at hers --

(*pointing to VERA*)
-- and now for five months, close on six almost, we have heard nothing from him.

VERA
Father, he will come back.

PETER
Ay! the prodigals always return; but let him never darken my doors again.

VERA
(*sitting down pensive*)
Some evil has come on him; he must be dead! Oh! Michael, I am so wretched about Dmitri.

MICHAEL
Will you never love any one but him, Vera?

VERA
(*smiling*)
I don't know; there is so much else to do in the world but love.

MICHAEL
Nothing else worth doing, Vera.

PETER
What noise is that, Vera?
(*A metallic clink is heard*)

VERA
(*rising and going to the door*)
I don't know, Father; it is not like the cattle bells, or I would think Nicholas had come from the fair. Oh, Father! it is soldiers coming down the hill -- there is one of them on horseback. How pretty they look! But there are some men with them, with chains on! They must be robbers. Oh! don't let them in, Father; I couldn't look at them.

PETER
Men in chains! Why, we are in luck, my child! I heard this was to be the new road to Siberia, to bring the prisoners to the mines; but I didn't believe it. My fortune is made! Bustle, Vera, bustle! I'll die a rich man after all. There will be no lack of good customers now. An honest man should
(MORE)

PETER (cont'd)
have the chance of making his living out of rascals now and then.

VERA
Are these men rascals, Father? What have they done?

PETER
I reckon they're some of those Nihilists the priest warns us against. Don't stand there idle, my girl.

VERA
I suppose, then, they are all wicked men.

Sound of soldiers outside; cry of 'Halt!' Enter Russian officer with a body of soldiers and eight men in chains, raggedly dressed; One of them on entering, hurriedly puts his coat above his ears and hides his face; some soldiers guard the door, others sit down; the prisoners stand.

COLONEL
Innkeeper!

PETER
Yes, Colonel.

COLONEL
(pointing to Nihilists)
Give these men some bread and water.

PETER
(to himself)
I shan't make much out of that order.

COLONEL
As for myself, what have you got fit to eat?

PETER
Some good dried venison, your Excellency -- and some rye whisky.

COLONEL
Nothing else?

PETER
Why, more whisky, your Excellency.

COLONEL

What clods these peasants are! You have a better room than this?

PETER

Yes, sir.

COLONEL

Bring me there. Sergeant, post your picket outside, and see that these scoundrels do not communicate with any one. No letter writing, you dogs, or you'll be flogged for it. Now for the venison.

(To PETER bowing before him)

Get out of the way, you fool! Who is that girl?

(Sees VERA)

PETER

My daughter, your Highness.

COLONEL

Can she read and write?

PETER

Ay, that she can, sir.

COLONEL

Then she is a dangerous woman. No peasant should be allowed to do anything of the kind. Till your fields, store your harvests, pay your taxes, and obey your masters -- that is your duty.

VERA

Who are our masters?

COLONEL

Young woman, these men are going to the mines for life for asking the same foolish question.

VERA

Then they have been unjustly condemned.

PETER

Vera, keep your tongue quiet. She is a foolish girl, sir, who talks too much.

COLONEL

Every woman does talk too much. Come, where is this venison? Count, I am waiting for you. How can you see anything in a girl with coarse hands?

He passes with PETER and his aide-de-camp into an inner room.

VERA

(to one of the Nihilists)

Won't you sit down? You must be tired.

SERGEANT

Come now, young woman, no talking to my prisoners.

VERA

I shall speak to them. How much do you want?

SERGEANT

How much have you?

VERA

Will you let these men sit down if I give you this? *(takes off her peasant's necklace)* It is all I have; it was my mother's.

SERGEANT

Well, it looks pretty enough, and is heavy too. What do you want with these men?

VERA

They are hungry and wretched. Let me go to them?

ONE OF THE SOLDIERS

Let the wench be, if she pays us.

SERGEANT

Well, have your way. If the Colonel sees you, you may have to come with us, my pretty one.

VERA

(advances to the Nihilists)

Sit down; you must be tired.

(Serves them food)

What are you?

A PRISONER

Nihilists.

VERA

Who put you in chains?

PRISONER

Our Father the Czar.

VERA

Why?

PRISONER

For loving liberty too well.

VERA

(to the prisoner who hides his face)

What did you want to do?

DMITRI

To give liberty to thirty millions of people enslaved to one man.

VERA

(startled at the voice)

What is your name?

DMITRI

I have no name.

VERA

Where are your friends?

DMITRI

I have no friends.

VERA

Let me see your face!

DMITRI

You will see nothing but suffering in it. They have tortured me.

VERA

(tears his cloak from his face)

O God! Dmitri! my brother!

DMITRI

Hush! Vera; be calm. You must not let my father know; it would kill him. I thought I could free Russia. I heard men talk of Liberty one night in a café. I had never heard the

(MORE)

DMITRI (cont'd)

word before. It seemed to be a new God they spoke of. I joined them. It was there all the money went. Five months ago they seized us. They found me printing the paper. I am going to the mines for life. I could not write. I thought it would be better to let you think I was dead; for they are bringing us to a living tomb.

VERA

(looking round)

You must escape, Dmitri. I will take your place.

DMITRI

Impossible! You can only revenge us.

VERA

I shall revenge you.

DMITRI

Listen! there is a house in Moscow --

SERGEANT

Prisoners, attention! -- the Colonel is coming -- young woman, your time is up.

Enter COLONEL, AIDE-DE-CAMP, and PETER.

PETER

I hope your Highness is pleased with the venison. I shot it myself.

COLONEL

It had been better had you talked less about it. Sergeant, get ready.

(Gives purse to PETER)

Here, you cheating rascal!

PETER

My fortune is made! Long live your Highness. I hope your Highness will come often this way.

COLONEL

By St. Nicholas, I hope not. It is too cold here for me.

(to VERA)

Young girl, don't ask questions again about what does not concern you. I will not forget your face.

VERA

Nor I yours, or what you are doing.

COLONEL

You peasants are getting too saucy since you ceased to be serfs, and the knout is the best school for you to learn politics in. Sergeant, proceed.

The COLONEL turns and goes to top of stage. The prisoners pass out double file; as DMITRI passes VERA he lets a piece of paper fall on the ground, she puts her foot on it and remains immobile.

PETER

(who has been counting the money the COLONEL gave him)

Long life to your Highness. I will hope to see another batch soon.

(Suddenly catches sight of DMITRI as he is going out of the door, and screams and rushes up)

Dmitri! Dmitri! my God! what brings you here? He is innocent, I tell you. I'll pay for him. Take your money --

(flings money on the ground)

-- take all I have, give me my son. Villains! Villains! where are you bringing him?

COLONEL

To Siberia, old man.

PETER

No, no; take me instead.

COLONEL

He is a Nihilist.

PETER

You lie! you lie! He is innocent.

(The soldiers force him back with their guns and shut the door against him. He beats with his fists against it)

Dmitri! Dmitri! a Nihilist! a Nihilist!

(Falls down on floor)

VERA

(who has remained motionless, picks up paper now from under her foot and reads)

'99 Rue Tchernavaya, Moscow. To strangle whatever nature is in me; neither to love nor to be loved; neither to pity nor to be pitied; neither to marry nor to be given in marriage, till the end is come.' My brother, I shall keep the oath.

(MORE)

VERA (cont'd)

(Kisses the paper)
You shall be revenged!

VERA stands immobile, holding paper in her lifted hand. PETER is lying on the floor. MICHAEL, who has just come in, is bending over him.

END OF PROLOGUE

ACT ONE

SCENE: 99 Tchernavaya, Moscow. A large garret lit by oil lamps hung from ceiling. Some masked men standing silent and apart from one another. A man in a scarlet mask is writing at a table. Door at back. Man in yellow with drawn sword at it. Knocks heard. Figures in cloaks and masks enter.

Password. Per crucem ad lucem.

Answer. Per sanguinem ad libertatem.

Clock strikes. CONSPIRATORS form a semi-circle in the middle of the stage.

PRESIDENT

What is the word?

FIRST CONSPIRATOR

Nabat.

PRESIDENT

The answer?

SECOND CONSPIRATOR

Kalit.

PRESIDENT

What hour is it?

THIRD CONSPIRATOR

The hour to suffer.

PRESIDENT

What day?

FOURTH CONSPIRATOR

The day of oppression.

PRESIDENT

What year?

FIFTH CONSPIRATOR

The year of hope.

PRESIDENT

How many are we in number?

SIXTH CONSPIRATOR

Ten, nine, and three.

PRESIDENT

The Galilæan had less to conquer the world; but what is our mission?

SEVENTH CONSPIRATOR

To give freedom.

PRESIDENT

Our creed?

EIGHTH CONSPIRATOR

To annihilate.

PRESIDENT

Our duty?

NINTH CONSPIRATOR

To obey.

PRESIDENT

Brothers, the questions have been answered well. There are none but Nihilists present. Let us see each other's faces.

(THE CONSPIRATORS unmask)

Michael, recite the oath.

MICHAEL

To strangle whatever nature is in us; neither to love nor to be loved, neither to pity nor to be pitied, neither to marry nor to be given in marriage, till the end is come; to stab secretly by night; to drop poison in the glass; to set father against son, and husband against wife; without fear, without hope, without future, to suffer, to annihilate, to revenge.

PRESIDENT

Are we all agreed?

CONSPIRATORS

We are all agreed.

They disperse in various directions about the stage.

PRESIDENT

'Tis after the hour, Michael, and she is not yet here.

MICHAEL

Would that she were! We can do little without her.

ALEXIS

She cannot have been seized, President? But the police are on her track, I know.

MICHAEL

You always do seem to know a good deal about the movements of the police in Moscow -- too much for an honest conspirator.

PRESIDENT

If those dogs have caught her the red flag of the people will float on a barricade in every street till we find her! It was foolish of her to go to the Grand Duke's ball. I told her so, but she said she wanted to see the Czar and all his cursed brood face to face for once.

ALEXIS

Gone to the State ball!

MICHAEL

I have no fear. She is as hard to capture as a she-wolf is, and twice as dangerous; besides, she is well disguised. To-night it is a masked ball. But is there any news from the Palace, President? What is that bloody despot doing now besides torturing his only son? What sort of a whelp is this Czarevitch, by the way? Have any of you seen him? One hears strange stories about him. They say he loves the people; but a king's son never does that. You cannot breed them like that.

PRESIDENT

Since he came back from abroad a year ago his father has kept him in close prison in his palace.

MICHAEL

An excellent training to make him a tyrant in his turn; but is there any news, I say?

PRESIDENT

A council is to be held to-morrow, at four o'clock, on some secret business the committee cannot find out.

MICHAEL

A council in a king's palace is sure to be about some bloody work or other. But in what room is it to be held?

PRESIDENT

(reading from letter)

In the yellow tapestry room called after the Empress Catherine.

MICHAEL

I care not for such long-sounding names. I would know where it is.

PRESIDENT

I cannot tell, Michael. I know more about the inside of prisons than of palaces.

MICHAEL

(speaking suddenly to ALEXIS)

Where is this room, Alexis?

ALEXIS

It is on the first floor, looking out on to the inner courtyard. But why do you ask, Michael?

MICHAEL

Nothing, nothing, boy! I merely take a great interest in the Czar's life and movements, and I knew you could tell me all about the palace. Every poor student of medicine in Moscow knows all about king's houses. It is their duty, is it not?

ALEXIS

(aside)

Can Michael suspect me? There is something strange in his manner to-night. Why doesn't she come? The whole fire of revolution seems fallen into dull ashes when she is not here.

MICHAEL

Have you cured many patients, lately, at your hospital, boy?

ALEXIS

There is one who lies sick to death I would fain cure, but cannot.

MICHAEL

Ay! and who is that?

ALEXIS

Russia, our mother.

MICHAEL

The curing of Russia is surgeon's business, and must be done by the knife. I like not your method of medicine.

PRESIDENT

Professor, we have read the proofs of your last article it is very good indeed.

MICHAEL

What is it about, Professor? PROFESSOR: The subject, my good brother, is assassination considered as a method of political reform.

MICHAEL

I think little of pen and ink in revolutions. One dagger will do more than a hundred epigrams. Still, let us read this scholar's last production. Give it to me. I will read it myself.

PROFESSOR

Brother, you never mind your stops; let Alexis read it.

MICHAEL

Ay! he is as tripping of speech as if he were some young aristocrat; but for my own part I care not for the stops so that the sense be plain.

ALEXIS

(reading)

'The past has belonged to the tyrant, and he has defiled it; ours is the future, and we shall make it holy.' Ay! let us make the future holy; let there be one revolution at least which is not bred in crime, nurtured in murder!

MICHAEL

They have spoken to us by the sword, and by the sword we shall answer! You are too delicate for us, Alexis. There

(MORE)

MICHAEL (cont'd)

should be none here but men whose hands are rough with labour
or red with blood.

PRESIDENT

Peace, Michael, peace! He is the bravest heart amongst us.

MICHAEL

(aside)

He will need to be brave to-night.

The sound of sleigh bells is heard outside.

VOICE

(outside)

Per crucem ad lucem.

(Answer of man on guard)

Per sanguinem ad libertatem.

MICHAEL

Who is that?

*Enter VERA in a cloak, which she throws off,
appearing in full ball dress.*

VERA

God save the people!

PRESIDENT

Welcome, Vera, welcome! We have been sick at heart till we
saw you; but now methinks the star of freedom has come to
wake us from the night.

VERA

It is night, indeed, brother! Night without moon or star!
Russia is smitten to the heart! The man Ivan whom men called
the Czar strikes now at our mother with a dagger deadlier
than any ever forged by tyranny against a people's life!

MICHAEL

What has the tyrant done now?

VERA

To-morrow martial law is to be proclaimed over all Russia.

OMNES

Martial law! We are lost! We are lost!

ALEXIS

Martial law! Impossible!

MICHAEL

Fool, nothing is impossible in Russia but reform.

VERA

Ay, martial law. The last right to which the people clung has been taken from them. Without trial, without appeal, without accuser even, our brothers will be taken from their houses, shot in the streets like dogs, sent away to die in the snow, to starve in the dungeon, to rot in the mine. Do you know what martial law means? It means the strangling of a whole nation. The streets will be filled with soldiers night and day; there will be sentinels at every door. No man dare walk abroad now but the spy or the traitor. Cooped up in the dens we hide in, meeting by stealth, speaking with bated breath; what good can we do now for Russia?

PRESIDENT

We can suffer at least.

VERA

We have done that too much already. The hour is now come to annihilate and to revenge.

PRESIDENT

Up to this the people have borne everything.

VERA

Because they have understood nothing. But now we, the Nihilists, have given them the tree of knowledge to eat of, and the day of silent suffering is over for Russia.

MICHAEL

Martial law, Vera! This is fearful tidings you bring.

PRESIDENT

It is the death-warrant of liberty in Russia.

VERA

Or the signal for revolution.

MICHAEL

Are you sure it is true?

VERA

Here is the proclamation. I stole it myself at the ball to-night from a young fool, one of Prince Paul's secretaries, who had been given it to copy. It was that which made me so late.

VERA hands proclamation to MICHAEL, who reads it.

MICHAEL

'To ensure the public safety -- martial law. By order of the Czar, father of his people.' The father of his people!

VERA

Ay! a father whose name shall not be hallowed, whose kingdom shall change to a republic, whose trespasses shall not be forgiven him, because he has robbed us of our daily bread; with whom is neither might, nor right, nor glory, now or for ever.

PRESIDENT

It must be about this time that the council meet to-morrow. It has not yet been signed.

ALEXIS

It shall not be while I have a tongue to plead with.

MICHAEL

Or while I have hands to smite with.

VERA

Martial law! O God, how easy it is for a king to kill his people by thousands, but we cannot rid ourselves of one crowned man in Europe! What is there of awful majesty in these men which makes the hand unsteady, the dagger treacherous, the pistol-shot harmless? Are they not men of like passions with ourselves, vulnerable to the same diseases, of flesh and blood not different from our own? What made Olgiati tremble at the supreme crisis of that Roman life, and Guido's nerve fail him when he should have been of iron and of steel? A plague, I say, on these fools of Naples, Berlin, and Spain! Methinks that if I stood face to face with one of the crowned men my eye would see more clearly, my aim be more sure, my whole body gain a strength and power that was not my own! Oh, to think what stands between us and freedom in Europe! a few old men, wrinkled, feeble, tottering dotards whom a boy could strangle for a ducat, or a woman stab in a night-time. These are the things that keep us from liberty. But now methinks the brood of men is dead and the dull earth grown sick of childbearing, else would no crowned dog pollute God's air by living.

OMNES

Try us! Try us! Try us!

MICHAEL

We shall try thee, too, some day, Vera.

VERA

I pray God thou mayest! Have I not strangled whatever nature is in me, and shall I not keep my oath?

MICHAEL

(to PRESIDENT)

Martial law, President! Come, there is no time to be lost. We have twelve hours yet before us till the council meet. Twelve hours! One can overthrow a dynasty in less than that.

PRESIDENT

Ay! or lose one's own head.

MICHAEL and the PRESIDENT retire to one corner of the stage and sit whispering. VERA takes up the proclamation, and reads it to herself. ALEXIS watches and suddenly rushes up to her.

ALEXIS

Vera!

VERA

Alexis, you here! Foolish boy, have I not prayed you to stay away? All of us here are doomed to die before our time, fated to expiate by suffering whatever good we do; but you, with your bright boyish face, you are too young to die yet.

ALEXIS

One is never too young to die for one's country!

VERA

Why do you come here night after night?

ALEXIS

Because I love the people.

VERA

But your fellow-students must miss you. Are there no traitors among them? You know what spies there are in the University here. O Alexis, you must go! You see how desperate suffering has made us. There is no room here for a nature like yours. You must not come again.

ALEXIS

Why do you think so poorly of me? Why should I live while my brothers suffer?

VERA

You spake to me of your mother once. You said you loved her. Oh, think of her!

ALEXIS

I have no mother now but Russia, my life is hers to take or give away; but to-night I am here to see you. They tell me you are leaving for Novgorod to-morrow.

VERA

I must. They are getting faint-hearted there, and I would fan the flame of this revolution into such a blaze that the eyes of all kings in Europe shall be blinded. If martial law is passed they will need me all the more there. There is no limit, it seems, to the tyranny of one man; but to the suffering of a whole people there shall be a limit. Too many of us have died on block and barricade: it is their turn to be victims now.

ALEXIS

God knows it, I am with you. But you must not go. The police are watching every train for you. When you are seized they have orders to place you without trial in the lowest dungeon of the palace. I know it -- no matter how. Oh, think how without you the sun goes from our life, how the people will lose their leader and liberty her priestess. Vera, you must not go!

VERA

You are right: I will stay. I would live a little longer for freedom, a little longer for Russia.

ALEXIS

When you die then Russia is smitten indeed, when you die then I shall lose all hope -- all... Vera, this is fearful news you bring -- martial law -- it is too terrible. I knew it not, by my soul, I knew it not!

VERA

How could you have known it? It is too well laid a plot for that. This great White Czar, whose hands are red with the blood of the people he has murdered, whose soul is black with this iniquity, is the cleverest conspirator of us all. Oh, how could Russia bear two hearts like yours and his!

ALEXIS

Vera, the Emperor was not always like this. There was a time when he loved the people. It is that devil, whom God curse, Prince Paul Maraloffski, who has brought him to this. Tomorrow, I swear it, I shall plead for the people to the Emperor.

VERA

Plead to the Czar! Foolish boy, it is only those who are sentenced to death that ever see our Czar. Besides, what should he care for a voice that pleads for mercy? The cry of a strong nation in its agony has not moved that heart of stone.

ALEXIS

(aside)

Yet shall I plead to him. They can but kill me.

PROFESSOR

Here are the proclamations, Vera. Do you think they will do?

VERA

I shall read them. How fair he looks! Methinks he never seemed so noble as to-night. Liberty is blessed in having such a lover.

ALEXIS

Well, President, what are you deep in?

MICHAEL

We are thinking of the best way of killing bears.

(Whispers to PRESIDENT and leads him aside)

PROFESSOR

(to VERA)

And the letters from our brothers at Paris and Berlin. What answer shall we send to them?

VERA

(takes them mechanically)

Had I not strangled nature, sworn neither to love nor to be loved, methinks I might have loved him. Oh, I am a fool, a traitor myself, a traitor myself! But why did he come amongst us with his bright young face, his heart aflame for liberty, his pure white soul? Why does he make me feel at times as if I would have him as my king, Republican though I be? Oh, fool, fool, fool! False to your oath! Weak as water! Have done! Remember what you are -- a Nihilist, a Nihilist!

PRESIDENT

(to MICHAEL)

But you will be seized, Michael.

MICHAEL

I think not. I will wear the uniform of the Imperial Guard, and the Colonel on duty is one of us. It is on the first floor, you remember; so I can take a long shot.

PRESIDENT

Shall I not tell the brethren?

MICHAEL

Not a word, not a word! There is a traitor amongst us.

VERA

Come, are these the proclamations? Yes, they will do; yes, they will do. Send five hundred to Kiev and Odessa and Novgorod, five hundred to Warsaw, and have twice the number distributed among the Southern provinces, though these dull Russian peasants care little for our proclamations, and less for our martyrdoms. When the blow is struck, it must be from the town, not from the country.

MICHAEL

Ay, and by the sword, not by the goose quill.

VERA

Where are the letters from Poland?

PROFESSOR

Here.

VERA

Unhappy Poland! The eagles of Russia have fed on her heart. We must not forget our brothers there.

PRESIDENT

Is it true, Michael?

MICHAEL

Ay, I stake my life on it.

PRESIDENT

Let the doors be locked, then. Alexis Ivanacievitch entered on our roll of the brothers as a student of the School of Medicine at Moscow. Why did you not tell us of this bloody scheme of martial law?

ALEXIS

I, President?

MICHAEL

Ay, you! You knew it, none better. Such weapons as these are not forged in a day. Why did you not tell us of it? A week ago there had been time to lay the mine, to raise the barricade, to strike one blow at least for liberty. But now the hour is past! It is too late, it is too late! Why did you keep it a secret from us I say?

ALEXIS

Now by the hand of freedom, Michael, my brother, you wrong me. I knew nothing of this hideous law. By my soul, my brothers, I knew not of it! How should I know?

MICHAEL

Because you are a traitor! Where did you go when you left us the night of our last meeting here?

ALEXIS

To mine own house, Michael.

MICHAEL

Liar! I was on your track. You left here an hour after midnight. Wrapped in a large cloak, you crossed the river by a boat a mile below the second bridge, and gave the ferryman a gold piece, you, the poor student of medicine! You doubled back twice and hid in an archway so long that I had almost made up my mind to stab you at once, only that I am fond of hunting. So! you thought you had baffled all pursuit, did you? Fool! I am a bloodhound that never loses the scent. I followed you from street to street. At last I saw you pass swiftly across the Place St. Isaac, whisper to the guards some secret password, enter the palace by a private door with your own key.

CONSPIRATORS

The palace!

VERA

Alexis!

MICHAEL

I waited. All through the dreary watches of our long Russian night I waited, that I might kill you with your Judas hire still hot in your hand. But you never came back; you never left that palace. I saw the blood-red sun rise through the

(MORE)

MICHAEL (cont'd)

yellow fog over the murky town; I saw a new day of oppression dawn on Russia; but you never came back. So you pass nights in the palace, do you? You know the password for the guards; you have a key to a secret door. You are a spy -- I never trusted you, with your soft white hands, your curled hair, your pretty graces. You have no mark of suffering about you; you cannot be of the people. You are a spy -- a spy -- traitor!

OMNES

Kill him! Kill him!
(*Draw their knives*)

VERA

(*rushing in front of ALEXIS*)
Stand back, I say, Michael! Stand back all! Do not dare lay a hand upon him! He is the noblest heart amongst us.

OMNES

Kill him! Kill him! He is a spy!

VERA

Dare to lay a finger on him, and I leave you all to yourselves.

PRESIDENT

Vera, did you not hear what Michael said of him? He stayed all night in the Czar's palace. He has a password and a private key. What else should he be but a spy?

VERA

Bah! I do not believe Michael. It is a lie! It is a lie! Alexis, say it is a lie!

ALEXIS

It is true. Michael has told what he saw. I did pass that night in the Czar's palace. Michael has spoken the truth.

VERA

Stand back, I say; stand back! Alexis, I do not care. I trust you; you would not betray us; you would not sell the people for money. You are honest, true! Oh, say you are no spy!

ALEXIS

Spy? You know I am not. I am with you, my brothers, to the death.

MICHAEL

Ay, to your own death.

ALEXIS

Vera, you know I am true.

VERA

I know it well.

PRESIDENT

Why are you here, traitor?

ALEXIS

Because I love the people.

MICHAEL

Then you can be a martyr for them?

VERA

You must kill me first, Michael, before you lay a finger on him.

PRESIDENT

Michael, we dare not lose Vera. It is her whim to let this boy live. We can keep him here to-night. Up to this he has not betrayed us. Tramp of soldiers outside, knocking at door.

VOICE

Open, in the name of the Emperor!

MICHAEL

He has betrayed us. This is your doing, spy!

PRESIDENT

Come, Michael, come. We have no time to cut one another's throats while we have our own heads to save.

VOICE

Open, in the name of the Emperor!

PRESIDENT

Brothers, be masked, all of you. Michael, open the door. It is our only chance.

Enter GENERAL KOTEMKIN and soldiers.

GENERAL

All honest citizens should be in their own houses an hour before midnight, and not more than five people have a right to meet privately. Have you not noticed the proclamation fellows?

MICHAEL

Ay, you have spoiled every honest wall in Moscow with it.

VERA

Peace, Michael, peace. Nay, Sir, we know it not. We are a company of strolling players travelling from Samara to Moscow to amuse his Imperial Majesty the Czar.

GENERAL

But I heard loud voices before I entered. What was that?

VERA

We were rehearsing a new tragedy.

GENERAL

Your answers are too honest to be true. Come, let me see who you are. Take off those players' masks. By St. Nicholas, my beauty, if your face matches your figure, you must be a choice morsel! Come, I say, pretty one, I would sooner see your face than those of all the others.

PRESIDENT

O God! If he sees it is Vera, we are all lost!

GENERAL

No coquetting, my girl. Come, unmask, I say, or I shall tell my guards to do it for you.

ALEXIS

Stand back, I say, General Kotemkin!

GENERAL

Who are you, fellow, that talk with such a tripping tongue to your betters?

(ALEXIS takes his mask off)

His Imperial Highness the Czarevitch!

OMNES

The Czarevitch! It is all over!

PRESIDENT

I knew he was a spy. He will give us up to the soldiers.

MICHAEL

(to VERA)

Why did you not let me kill him? Come, we must fight to the death for it.

VERA

Peace! he will not betray us.

ALEXIS

A whim of mine, General! You know how my father keeps me from the world and imprisons me in the palace. I should really be bored to death if I could not get out at night in disguise sometimes, and have some romantic adventure in town. I tell in with these honest folks a few hours ago.

GENERAL

Actors, are they, Prince?

ALEXIS

Ay, and very ambitious actors, too. They only care to play before kings.

GENERAL

I' faith, your Highness, I was in hopes I had made a good haul of Nihilists.

ALEXIS

Nihilists in Moscow, General! With you as head of the police! Impossible!

GENERAL

So I always tell your Imperial father. But I heard at the council to-day that that woman Vera Sabouroff, the head of them, had been seen in this very city. The Emperor's face turned as white as the snow outside. I think I never saw such terror in a man before.

ALEXIS

She is a dangerous woman, then, this Vera Sabouroff?

GENERAL

The most dangerous in all Europe.

ALEXIS

Did you ever see her, General?

GENERAL

Why, five years ago, when I was a plain Colonel, I remember her, your Highness, a common waiting-girl in an inn. If I had known then what she was going to turn out, I would have flogged her to death on the roadside. She is not a woman at all, she is a sort of devil! For the last eighteen months I

(MORE)

GENERAL (cont'd)

have been hunting her, and caught sight of her once last September outside Odessa.

ALEXIS

How did you let her go, General?

GENERAL

I was by myself, and she shot one of my horses just as I was gaining on her. If I see her again I shan't miss my chance. The Emperor has put twenty thousand roubles on her head.

ALEXIS

I hope you will get it, General; but meanwhile you are frightening these honest folk out of their wits, and disturbing the tragedy. Good-night, General.

GENERAL

Yes; but I should like to see their faces, your Highness.

ALEXIS

No, General; you must not ask that; you know how these gipsies hate to be stared at.

GENERAL

Yes. But, your Highness --

ALEXIS

(haughtily)

General, they are my friends, that is enough. Good-night. And, General, not a word of my little adventure here, you understand.

GENERAL

But shall we not see you back to the palace? The State ball is almost over and you are expected.

ALEXIS

I shall be there; but I shall return alone. Remember, not a word.

GENERAL

Or your pretty gipsy, eh, Prince? Your pretty gipsy! I' faith, I should like to see her before I go; she has such fine eyes through her mask. Well, good night, your Highness; good night.

ALEXIS

Good night, General.

Exeunt GENERAL and the soldiers.

VERA

(throwing off her mask)
Saved! and by you!

ALEXIS

(clasping her hand)
Brothers, you trust me now?

Exit.

TABLEAU

ACT DROP

ACT TWO

SCENE: Council Chamber in the Emperor's Palace, hung with yellow tapestry. Table, with chair of State, set for the Czar, window behind, opening on to a balcony. As the scene progresses the light outside gets darker.

Present: PRINCE PAUL MARALOFFSKI, PRINCE PETROVITCH, COUNT ROUVALOFF, BARON RAFF, COUNT PETOUCHOF.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

So our young scatter-brained Czarevitch has been forgiven at last, and is to take his seat here again.

PRINCE PAUL

Yes; if that is not meant as an extra punishment. For my own part, at least, I find these Cabinet Councils extremely tiring.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Naturally, you are always speaking.

PRINCE PAUL

No; I think it must be that I have to listen sometimes. It is so exhausting not to talk.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

Still, anything is better than being kept in a sort of prison, like he was -- never allowed to go out into the world.

PRINCE PAUL

My dear Count, for romantic young people like he is the world always looks best at a distance; and a prison where one's

(MORE)

PRINCE PAUL (cont'd)
allowed to order one's own dinner is not at all a bad place.
(*Enter the CZAREVITCH. The courtiers rise*)
Ah! Good afternoon, Prince Your Highness is looking a little pale to-day.

CZAREVITCH
(*slowly, after a pause*)
I want change of air.

PRINCE PAUL
(*smiling*)
A most revolutionary sentiment! Your Imperial father would highly disapprove of any reforms even with the thermometer in Russia.

CZAREVITCH
(*bitterly*)
My Imperial father had kept me for six months in this dungeon of a palace. This morning he has me suddenly woke up to see some wretched Nihilists hung; it sickened me, the bloody butchery, though it was a noble thing to see how well these men can die.

PRINCE PAUL
When you are as old as I am, Prince, you will understand that there are few things easier than to live badly and to die well.

CZAREVITCH
Easy to die well! A lesson experience cannot have taught you, much as you know of a bad life.

PRINCE PAUL
(*shrugging his shoulders*)
Experience, the name men give to their mistakes. I never commit any.

CZAREVITCH
(*bitterly*)
No; crimes are more in your line.

PRINCE PETROVITCH
(*to the CZAREVITCH*)
The Emperor was a good deal agitated about your late appearance at the ball last night, Prince.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

(laughing)

I believe he thought the Nihilists had broken into the palace and carried you off.

BARON RAFF

If they had you would have missed a charming dance.

PRINCE PAUL

And an excellent supper. Gringoire really excelled himself in his salad. Ah! you may laugh, Baron; but to cook a good salad is a much more difficult thing than cooking accounts. To make a good salad is to be a brilliant diplomatist -- the problem is entirely the same in both cases. To know exactly how much oil one must put with one's vinegar.

BARON RAFF

A cook and a diplomatist! an excellent parallel. If I had a son who was a fool I'd make him one or the other.

PRINCE PAUL

I see your father did not hold the same opinion, Baron. But, believe me, you are wrong to run down cookery. Culture depends on cookery. For myself, the only immortality I desire is to invent a new sauce. I have never had time enough to think seriously about it, but I feel it is in me, I feel it is in me.

CZAREVITCH

You have certainly missed your *métier*, Prince Paul; the cordon bleu of the kitchen would have suited you much better than the Grand Cross of Honour. But you know you could never have worn your white apron well; you would have soiled it too soon, your hands are not clean enough.

PRINCE PAUL

(bowing)

You forget -- or, how could they be? I manage your father's business.

CZAREVITCH

(bitterly)

You mismanage my father's business, you mean! Evil genius of his life that you are! Before you came there was some love left in him. It is you who have embittered his nature poured into his ear the poison of treacherous council, made him hated by the whole people, made him what he is -- a tyrant!

The courtiers look significantly at each other.

PRINCE PAUL

(calmly)

I see your Highness does want change of air. But I have been an eldest son myself.

(Lights a cigarette)

I know what it is when a father won't die to please one.

The CZAREVITCH goes to the top of the stage, and leans against the window, looking out.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

(to BARON RAFF)

Foolish boy! He will be sent into exile, or worse, if he is not careful.

BARON RAFF

Yes. What a mistake it is to be sincere!

PRINCE PETROVITCH

The only folly you never committed, Baron.

BARON RAFF

One has only one head, you know, Prince.

PRINCE PAUL

My dear Baron, your head is the last thing any one would wish to take from you.

(Pulls out snuff-box and offers it to PRINCE PETROVITCH)

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Thanks, Prince! Thanks!

PRINCE PAUL

Very delicate, isn't it? I get it direct from Paris. But under this vulgar Republic everything has degenerated over there. Côtelettes à l'impériale vanished of course with the Bonaparte, and omelettes went out with the Orleanists. La belle France is entirely ruined, Prince, through bad morals and worse cookery.

(Enter the MARQUIS DE POIVRARD)

Ah! Marquis. I trust Madame la Marquise is well.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

You ought to know better than I do, Prince Paul; you see more of her.

PRINCE PAUL

(bowing)

Perhaps I see more in her, Marquis. Your wife is really a charming woman, so full of esprit, and so satirical too; she talks continually of you when we are together.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

(looking at the clock)

His Majesty is a little late to-day, is he not?

PRINCE PAUL

What has happened to you, my dear Petrovitch? You seem quite out of sorts. You haven't quarrelled with your cook, I hope? What a tragedy that would be for you; you would lose all your friends.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

I fear I wouldn't be so fortunate as that. You forget I would still have my purse. But you are wrong for once; my chef and I are on excellent terms.

PRINCE PAUL

Then your creditors or Mademoiselle Vera Sabouroff have been writing to you? They compose more than half of my correspondents. But really you needn't be alarmed. I find the most violent proclamations from the Executive Committee, as they call it, left all over my house. I never read them; they are so badly spelt as a rule.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Wrong again, Prince; the Nihilists leave me alone for some reason or other.

PRINCE PAUL

(aside)

True! Indifference is the revenge the world takes on mediocrities.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

I am bored with life, Prince. Since the opera season ended I have been a perpetual martyr to ennui.

PRINCE PAUL

The maladie du siècle! You want a new excitement, Prince. Let me see -- you have been married twice already: suppose you try -- falling in love for once.

BARON RAFF

I cannot understand your nature.

PRINCE PAUL

(smiling)

If my nature had been made to suit your comprehension rather than my own requirements, I am afraid I would have made a very poor figure in the world.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

There seems to be nothing in life about which you would not jest.

PRINCE PAUL

Ah! my dear Count, life is much too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it.

CZAREVITCH

(coming back from window)

I don't think Prince Paul's nature is such a mystery. He would stab his best friend for the sake of writing an epigram on his tombstone.

PRINCE PAUL

Parbleu! I would sooner lose my best friend than my worst enemy. To have friends, you know, one need only be goodnatured; but when a man has no enemy left there must be something mean about him.

CZAREVITCH

(bitterly)

If to have enemies is a measure of greatness. then you must be a Colossus, indeed, Prince.

PRINCE PAUL

Yes, your Highness, I know I'm the most hated man in Russia, except your father, except your father of course. He doesn't seem to like it much, by the way; but I do, I assure you.

(Bitterly)

I love to drive through the streets and see how the rabble scowl at me from every corner. It makes me feel I am a power in Russia one man against millions! Besides, I have no ambition to be a popular hero, to be crowned with laurels one year and pelted with stones the next; I prefer dying peaceably in my own bed.

CZAREVITCH

And after death?

PRINCE PAUL

(shrugging his shoulders)

Heaven is a despotism. I shall be at home there.

CZAREVITCH

Do you ever think of the people and their rights?

PRINCE PAUL

The people and their rights bore me. I am sick of both. In these modern days to be vulgar, illiterate, common and vicious, seems to give a man a marvellous infinity of rights that his honest fathers never dreamed of. Believe me, Prince, in good democracy, every man should be an aristocrat, but these people in Russia who seek to thrust us out are no better than the animals in one's preserves, and made to be shot at, most of them.

CZAREVITCH

(excitedly)

If they are common, illiterate, vulgar, no better than the beasts of the field, who made them so?

Enter AIDE-DE-CAMP.

AIDE-DE-CAMP

His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor!

(PRINCE PAUL looks at the CZAREVITCH, and smiles)

Enter the CZAR, surrounded by his guard.

CZAREVITCH

(rushing forward to meet him)

Sire!

CZAR

(nervous and frightened)

Don't come too near me, boy! Don't come too near me, I say! There is always something about an heir to a crown unwholesome to his father. Who is that man over there? I don't know him. What is he doing? Is he a conspirator? Have you searched him? Give him till to-morrow to confess, then hang him! -- hang him!

PRINCE PAUL

Sire, you are anticipating history. This is Count Petouchof, your new Ambassador to Berlin. He is come to kiss hands on his appointment.

CZAR

To kiss my hand? There is some plot in it. He wants to poison me. There, kiss my son's hand; it will do quite as well.

PRINCE PAUL signs to PRINCE PETOUCHOF to leave the room. Exeunt PETOUCHOF and the guards. CZAR sinks down into his chair. The courtiers remain silent.

PRINCE PAUL

(approaching)

Sire! will your Majesty --

CZAR

What do you startle me for like that? No, I won't.

(Watches the courtiers nervously)

Why are you clattering your sword, sir?

(To COUNT ROUVALOFF)

Take it off. I shall have no man wear a sword in my presence --

(looking at CZAREVITCH)

-- least of all my son.

(To PRINCE PAUL)

You are not angry with me, Prince? You won't desert me, will you? Say you won't desert me. What do you want? You can have anything -- anything.

PRINCE PAUL

(bowing very low)

Sire, 'tis enough for me to have your confidence.

(Aside)

I was afraid he was going to revenge himself, and give me another decoration.

CZAR

(returning to his chair)

Well, gentlemen.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

Sire, I have the honour to present to you a loyal address from your subjects in the Province of Archangel, expressing their horror at the last attempt on your Majesty's life.

PRINCE PAUL

The last attempt but two, you ought to have said, Marquis. Don't you see it is dated three weeks back?

CZAR

They are good people in the Province of Archangel -- honest, loyal people. They love me very much -- simple, loyal people; give them a new saint, it costs nothing. Well, Alexis --

(turning to the CZAREVITCH)

-- how many traitors were hung this morning?

CZAREVITCH

There were three men strangled, Sire.

CZAR

There should have been three thousand. I would to God that this people had but one neck that I might strangle them with one noose! Did they tell anything? Whom did they implicate? What did they confess?

CZAREVITCH

Nothing, Sire.

CZAR

They should have been tortured then; why weren't they tortured? Must I always be fighting in the dark? Am I never to know from what root these traitors spring?

CZAREVITCH

What root should there be of discontent among the people but tyranny and injustice amongst their rulers?

CZAR

What did you say, boy? tyranny! tyranny! Am I a tyrant? I'm not. I love the people. I'm their father. I'm called so in every official proclamation. Have a care, boy; have a care. You don't seem to be cured yet of your foolish tongue.

(Goes over to PRINCE PAUL and puts his hand on his shoulder)

Prince Paul, tell me, were there many people there this morning to see the Nihilists hung?

PRINCE PAUL

Hanging is of course a good deal less of a novelty in Russia now, Sire, than it was three or four years ago; and you know how easily the people get tired even of their best amusements. But the square and the tops of the houses were really quite crowded, were they not, Prince?

(To the CZAREVITCH, who takes no notice)

CZAR

That's right; all loyal citizens should be there. It shows them what to look forward to. Did you arrest any one in the crowd?

PRINCE PAUL

Yes, Sire; a woman, for cursing your name.

(The CZAREVITCH starts anxiously)

She was the mother of two of the criminals.

CZAR

(looking at CZAREVITCH)

She should have blessed me for having rid her of her children. Send her to prison.

CZAREVITCH

The prisons of Russia are too full already, Sire. There is no room in them for any more victims.

CZAR

They don't die fast enough, then. You should put more of them into one cell at once. You don't keep them long enough in the mines. If you do they're sure to die; but you're all too merciful. I'm too merciful myself. Send her to Siberia. She is sure to die on the way.

(Enter an AIDE-DE-CAMP)

Who's that? Who's that?

AIDE-DE-CAMP

A letter for his Imperial Majesty.

CZAR

(to PRINCE PAUL)

I won't open it. There may be something in it.

PRINCE PAUL

It would be a very disappointing letter, Sire, if there wasn't.

(Takes letter himself, and reads it)

PRINCE PETROVITCH

(to COUNT ROUVALOFF)

It must be some sad news. I know that smile too well.

PRINCE PAUL

From the Chief of the Police at Archangel, Sire. 'The Governor of the province was shot this morning by a woman as

(MORE)

PRINCE PAUL (cont'd)

he was entering the courtyard of his own house. The assassin has been seized.'

CZAR

I never trusted the people in Archangel. It's a nest of Nihilists and conspirators. Take away their saints; they don't deserve them.

PRINCE PAUL

Your Highness would punish them more severely by giving them an extra one. Three governors shot in two months!

(Smiles to himself)

Sire, permit me to recommend your loyal subject, the Marquis de Poivnard, as the new governor of your Province of Archangel.

MARQUIS DE POIVNARD

(hurriedly)

Sire, I am unfit for this post.

PRINCE PAUL

Marquis, you are too modest. Believe me, there is no man in Russia I would sooner see Governor of Archangel than yourself.

(Whispers to CZAR)

CZAR

Quite right, Prince Paul; you are always right. See that the Marquis's letters are made out at once.

PRINCE PAUL

He can start to-night, Sire. I shall really miss you very much, Marquis. I always liked your taste in wine and wives extremely.

MARQUIS DE POIVNARD

(to the CZAR)

Start to-night, Sire?

PRINCE PAUL whispers to the CZAR.

CZAR

Yes, Marquis, to-night; it is better to go at once.

PRINCE PAUL

I shall see that Madame la Marquise is not too lonely while you are away; so you need not be alarmed for her.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

(to PRINCE PETROVITCH)

I should be more alarmed for myself.

CZAR

The Governor of Archangel shot in his own courtyard by a woman! I'm not safe here. I'm not safe anywhere, with that she-devil of the revolution, Vera Sabouroff, here in Moscow. Prince Paul, is that woman still here?

PRINCE PAUL

They tell me she was at the Grand Duke's ball last night. I can hardly believe that, but she certainly had intended to leave for Novgorod to-day, Sire. The police were watching every train for her; but, for some reason or other, she did not go. Some traitor must have warned her. But I shall catch her yet. A chase after a beautiful woman is always exciting.

CZAR

You must hunt her down with bloodhounds, and when she is taken I shall hew her limb from limb. I shall stretch her on the rack till her pale white body is twisted and curled like paper in the fire.

PRINCE PAUL

Oh, we shall have another hunt immediately, for her, Sire! Prince Alexis will assist us, I am sure.

CZAREVITCH

You never require any assistance to ruin a woman, Prince Paul.

CZAR

Vera, the Nihilist, in Moscow! O God, were it not better to die at once the dog's death they plot for me than to live as I live now! Never to sleep, or, if I do, to dream such horrid dreams that hell itself were peace when matched with them. To trust none but those I have bought, to buy none worth trusting! To see a traitor in every smile, poison in every dish, a dagger in every hand! To lie awake at night, listening from hour to hour for the stealthy creeping of the murderer, for the laying of the damned mine! You are all spies! You are all spies! You worst of all -- you, my own son! Which of you is it who hides these bloody proclamations under my own pillow, or at the table where I sit? Which of ye all is the Judas who betrays me? O God! O God! methinks there was a time once, in our war with England, when nothing could make me afraid.

(MORE)

CZAR (cont'd)

(This with more calm and pathos)

I have ridden into the crimson heart of war, and borne back an eagle which those wild islanders had taken from us. Men said I was brave then. My father gave me the Iron Cross of Valour. Oh, could he see me now, with this coward's livery ever in my cheek!

(Sinks into his chair)

I never knew any love when I was a boy. I was ruled by terror myself how else should I rule now?

(Starts up)

But I will have revenge; I will have revenge. For every hour I have lain awake at night, waiting for the noose or the dagger, they shall pass years in Siberia, centuries in the mines! Ay! I shall have revenge.

CZAREVITCH

Father! have mercy on the people. Give them what they ask.

PRINCE PAUL

And begin, Sire, with your own head; they have a particular liking for that.

CZAR

The people! the people! A tiger which I have let loose on myself; but I will fight with it to the death. I am done with half treasures. I shall crush these Nihilists at a blow. There shall not be a man of them, no, nor a woman either, left alive in Russia. Am I Emperor for nothing, that a woman should hold me at bay? Vera Sabouroff shall be in my power, I swear it, before a week is ended, though I burn my whole city to find her. She shall be flogged by the knout, stifled in the fortress, strangled in the square!

CZAREVITCH

O God!

CZAR

For two years her hands have been clutching at my throat; for two years she has made my life a hell; but I shall have revenge. Martial law, Prince, martial law over the whole Empire that will give me revenge. A good measure, Prince, eh? a good measure.

PRINCE PAUL

And an economical one too, Sire. It will carry off your surplus population in six months, and save you any expense in courts of justice; they will not be needed now.

CZAR

Quite right. There are too many people in Russia, too much money spent on them, too much money on courts of justice. I'll shut them up.

CZAREVITCH

Sire, reflect before --

CZAR

When can you have the proclamations ready, Prince Paul?

PRINCE PAUL

They have been printed for the last six months Sire. I knew you would need them.

CZAR

That's good! That's very good! Let us begin at once. Ah, Prince, if every king in Europe had a minister like you --

CZAREVITCH

There would be less kings in Europe than there are.

CZAR

(in frightened whisper, to PRINCE PAUL)

What does he mean? Do you trust him? His prison hasn't cured him yet. Shall I banish him? Shall I...?

(whispers)

The Emperor Paul did it. The Empress Catherine there --

(points to picture on the wall)

-- did it. Why shouldn't I?

PRINCE PAUL

Your Majesty, there is no need for alarm. The Prince is a very ingenuous young man. He pretends to be devoted to the people, and lives in a palace; preaches socialism, and draws a salary that would support a province. Some day he'll find out that the best cure for Republicism is the Imperial crown, and will cut up the red cap of liberty to make decorations for his Prime Minister.

CZAR

You are right. If he really loved the people, he could not be my son.

PRINCE PAUL

If he lived with the people for a fortnight, their bad dinners would soon cure him of his democracy. Shall we begin, Sire?

CZAR

At once. Read the proclamation. Gentlemen, be seated. Alexis, Alexis, I say, come and hear it! It will be good practice for you; you will be doing it yourself some day.

CZAREVITCH

I have heard too much of it already.

*Takes his seat at the table. COUNT ROUVALOFF
whispers to him.*

CZAR

What are you whispering about there, Count Rouvaloff?

COUNT ROUVALOFF

I was giving his Royal Highness some good advice, your Majesty.

PRINCE PAUL

Count Rouvaloff is the typical spendthrift, Sire; he is always giving away what he needs most.

(Lays papers before the CZAR)

I think, Sire, you will approve of this: -- 'Love of the people,' 'Father of his people,' 'Martial law,' and the usual allusions to Providence in the last line. All it requires now is your Imperial Majesty's signature.

CZAREVITCH

Sire!

PRINCE PAUL

(hurriedly)

I promise your Majesty to crush every Nihilist in Russia in six months if you sign this proclamation; every Nihilist in Russia.

CZAR

Say that again! To crush every Nihilist in Russia; to crush this woman, their leader, who makes war upon me in my own city. Prince Paul Maraloffski, I create you Maréchal of the whole Russian Empire to help you to carry out martial law. Give me the proclamation. I will sign it at once.

PRINCE PAUL

(points on paper)

Here, Sire.

CZAREVITCH

(starts up and puts his hands on the paper)
Stay! I tell you, stay! The priests have taken heaven from the people, and you would take the earth away too.

PRINCE PAUL

(hurriedly)
We have no time, Prince, now. This boy will ruin everything. The pen, Sire.

CZAREVITCH

What! is it so small a thing to strangle a nation, to murder a kingdom, to wreck an empire? Who are we who dare lay this ban of terror on a people? Have we less vices than they have, that we bring them to the bar of judgment before us?

PRINCE PAUL

What a Communist the Prince is! He would have an equal distribution of sin as well as of property.

CZAREVITCH

Warmed by the same sun, nurtured by the same air, fashioned of flesh and blood like to our own, wherein are they different to us, save that they starve while we surfeit, that they toil while we idle, that they sicken while we poison, that they die while we --

CZAR

How dare -- ?

CZAREVITCH

I dare all for the people; but you would rob them of common rights of men.

CZAR

The people have no rights.

CZAREVITCH

Then they have great wrongs. Father, they have won your battles for you; from the pine forests of the Baltic to the palms of India they have ridden on victory's mighty wings! Boy as I am in years, I have seen wave after wave of living men sweep up the heights of battle to their death; ay, and snatch perilous conquest from the scales of war when the bloody crescent seemed to shake above our eagles.

CZAR

(somewhat moved)

Those men are dead. What have I to do with them?

CZAREVITCH

Nothing! The dead are safe; you cannot harm them now. They sleep their last long sleeme in Turkish waters, others by the wind-swept heights of Norway and the Dane! But these, the living, our brothers, what have you done for them? They asked you for bread, you gave them a stone. They sought for freedom, you scourged them with scorpions. You have sown the seeds of this revolution yourself -- !

PRINCE PAUL

And are we not cutting down the harvest?

CZAREVITCH

Oh, my brothers! better far that ye had died in the iron hail and screaming shell of battle than to come back to such a doom as this! The beasts of the forest have their lairs, and the wild beasts their caverns, but the people of Russia, conquerors of the world have not where to lay their heads.

PRINCE PAUL

They have the headsman's block.

CZAREVITCH

The block! Ay! you have killed their souls at your pleasure, you would kill their bodies now.

CZAR

Insolent boy! Have you forgotten who is Emperor of Russia?

CZAREVITCH

No! The people reign now, by the grace of God. You should have been their shepherd, you have fled away like the hireling, and let the wolves in upon them.

CZAR

Take him away! Take him away, Prince Paul!

CZAREVITCH

God hath given his people tongues to speak with; you would cut them out that they may be dumb in their agony, silent in their torture! But, He hath given them hands to smite with, and they shall smite! Ay! from the sick and labouring womb of this unhappy land some revolution, like a bloody child, may rise up and slay you.

CZAR

(leaping up)
Devil! Assassin! Why do you beard me thus to my face?

CZAREVITCH

Because I am a Nihilist!

*The ministers start to their feet; there is a dead
silence for a few minutes.*

CZAR

A Nihilist! a Nihilist! Viper whom I have nurtured, traitor whom I have fondled, is this your bloody secret? Prince Paul Maraloffski, Maréchal of the Russian Empire, arrest the Czarevitch!

MINISTERS

Arrest the Czarevitch!

CZAR

A Nihilist! If you have sown with them, you shall reap with them! If you have talked with them, you shall rot with them! If you have lived with them, with them you shall die!

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Die!

CZAR

A plague on all sons, I say! There should be no more marriages in Russia when one can breed such Serpents as you are! Arrest the Czarevitch, I say!

PRINCE PAUL

Czarevitch! by order of the Emperor, I demand your sword.

*CZAREVITCH gives up sword; PRINCE PAUL places it on
the table.*

CZAREVITCH

You will find it unstained by blood.

PRINCE PAUL

Foolish boy! you are not made for a conspirator you have not learned to hold your tongue. Heroics are out of place in a palace.

CZAR

*(sinks into his chair with his eyes fixed on the
CZAREVITCH)*

O God! My own son against me, my own flesh and blood against me; but I am rid of them all now.

CZAREVITCH

The mighty brotherhood to which I belong has a thousand such as I am, ten thousand better still!

(The CZAR starts in his seat)

The star of freedom is risen already, and far off I hear the mighty wave Democracy break on these cursed shores.

PRINCE PAUL

(to PRINCE PETROVITCH)

In that case you and I must learn how to swim.

CZAREVITCH

Father, Emperor, Imperial Master, I plead not for my own life, but for the lives of my brothers, the people.

PRINCE PAUL

(bitterly)

Your brothers, the people, Prince, are not content with their own lives, they always want to take their neighbours' too.

CZAR

(standing up)

I am tired of being afraid. I have done with terror now. From this day I proclaim war against the people -- war to their annihilation. As they have dealt with me, so shall I deal with them. I shall grind them to powder, and strew their dust upon the air. There shall be a spy in every man's house, a traitor on every hearth, a hangman in every village, a gibbet in every square. Plague, leprosy, or fever shall be less deadly than my wrath; I will make every frontier a graveyard, every province a lazaret-house, and cure the sick by the sword. I shall have peace in Russia, though it be the peace of the dead. Who said I was a coward? Who said I was afraid? See, thus shall I crush this people beneath my feet!

*(Takes up sword of CZAREVITCH on table and tramples
on it)*

CZAREVITCH

Father, beware, the sword you tread on may turn and wound you. The people suffer long, but vengeance comes at last vengeance with red hands and silent feet.

PRINCE PAUL

Bah! the people are bad shots; they always miss one.

CZAREVITCH

There are times when the people are the instruments of God.

CZAR

Ay! and when kings are God's scourges for the people. Take him away! Take him away! Bring in my guards.

(Enter the Imperial Guard. CZAR points to CZAREVITCH, who stands alone at the side of the stage)

We will bring him to prison ourselves: prison! I trust no prison. He would escape and kill me. I will have him shot here, here in the open square by the soldiers. Let me never see his face again.

(CZAREVITCH is being led out)

No, no, leave him! I don't trust guards. They are all Nihilists!

(To PRINCE PAUL)

I trust you, you have no mercy.

(Throws window open and goes out on balcony)

CZAREVITCH

If I am to die for the people I am ready. One Nihilist more or less in Russia, what does that matter?

PRINCE PAUL

(looking at his watch)

The dinner is sure to be spoiled. How annoying politics are; and eldest sons!

VOICE

(outside, in the street)

God save the people!

CZAR is shot, and staggers back into the room.

CZAREVITCH

(breaking from the guards, and rushing over)

Father!

CZAR

Murderer! Murderer! You did it! Murderer!
(*Dies*)

TABLEAU

ACT DROP

ACT THREE

SCENE: same and business as Act I. Man in yellow dress, with drawn sword, at the door.

Password outside. Vae tyrannis.

Answer. Vae victis (repeated three times).

Enter CONSPIRATORS, who form a semicircle, masked and cloaked.

PRESIDENT

What hour is it?

FIRST CONSPIRATOR

The hour to strike.

PRESIDENT

What day?

SECOND CONSPIRATOR

The day of Marat.

PRESIDENT

In what month?

THIRD CONSPIRATOR

The months of liberty.

PRESIDENT

What is our duty?

FOURTH CONSPIRATOR

To obey.

PRESIDENT

Our creed?

FIFTH CONSPIRATOR

Parbleu, Monsieur le President, I never knew you had one.

CONSPIRATORS

A spy! A spy! Unmask! Unmask! A spy!

PRESIDENT

Let the doors be shut. There are others but Nihilists present.

CONSPIRATORS

Unmask! Unmask! Kill him! kill him!

(Masked Conspirator unmasks)

Prince Paul!

VERA

Devil! Who lured you into the lion's den?

CONSPIRATORS

Kill him! Kill him!

PRINCE PAUL

En vérité, Messieurs, you are not over-hospitable in your welcome.

VERA

Welcome! What welcome should we give you but the dagger or the noose?

PRINCE PAUL

I had no idea really that the Nihilists were so exclusive. Let me assure you that if I had not always had an entrée to the very best society, and the very worst conspiracies, I could never have been Prime Minister in Russia.

VERA

The tiger cannot change its nature, nor the snake lose its venom; but are you turned a lover of the people?

PRINCE PAUL

Mon Dieu, non, Mademoiselle! I would much sooner talk scandal in a drawing-room than treason in a cellar. Besides, I hate the common mob, who smell of garlic, smoke bad tobacco, get up early, and dine off one dish.

PRESIDENT

What have you to gain, then, by a revolution?

PRINCE PAUL

Mon ami, I have nothing left to lose. That scatter-brained boy, this new Czar, has banished me.

VERA

To Siberia?

PRINCE PAUL

No, to Paris. He has confiscated my estates robbed me of my office and my cook. I have nothing left but my decorations. I am here for revenge.

PRESIDENT

Then you have a right to be one of us. We also meet daily for revenge.

PRINCE PAUL

You want money of course. No one ever joins a conspiracy who has any. Here.

(Throws money on table)

You have so many spies that I should think you want information. Well, you will find me the best-informed man in Russia on the abuses of our Government. I made them nearly all myself.

VERA

President, I don't trust this man. He has done us too much harm in Russia to let him go in safety.

PRINCE PAUL

Believe me, Mademoiselle, you are wrong. I will be a most valuable addition to your circle, and as for you, gentlemen if I had not thought that you would be useful to me I shouldn't have risked my neck among you, or dined an hour earlier than usual so as to be in time.

PRESIDENT

Ay, if he had wanted to spy on us, Vera, he wouldn't have come himself.

PRINCE PAUL

(aside)

No; I should have sent my best friend.

PRESIDENT

Besides, Vera, he is just the man to give us the information we want about some business we have in hand to-night.

VERA

Be it so if you wish it.

PRESIDENT

Brothers, is it your will that Prince Paul Maraloffski be admitted, and take the oath of the Nihilist?

CONSPIRATORS

It is! It is!

PRESIDENT

(holding out dagger and a paper)

Prince Paul, the dagger or the oath?

PRINCE PAUL

(smiles sardonically)

I would sooner annihilate than be annihilated.

(Takes paper)

PRESIDENT

Remember: Betray us, and as long as earth holds poison or steel, as long as men can strike or women betray, you shall not escape vengeance. The Nihilists never forget their friends, or forgive their enemies.

PRINCE PAUL

Really? I did not think you were so civilised.

VERA

(pacing up and down behind)

Why is he not here? He will not keep the crown. I know him well.

PRESIDENT

Sign.

(PRINCE PAUL signs)

You said you thought we had no creed. You were wrong. Read it!

VERA

This is a dangerous thing, President. What can we do with this man?

PRESIDENT

We can use him. He is of value to us to-night and to-morrow.

VERA

Perhaps there will be no morrow for any of us; but we have given him our word: he is safer here than ever he was in his palace.

PRINCE PAUL

(reading)

'The rights of humanity'! In the old times men carried out their rights for themselves as they lived, but nowadays every baby seems born with a social manifesto in its mouth much bigger than itself. 'Nature is not a temple, but a workshop: we demand the right to labour.' Ah, I shall surrender my own rights in that respect.

VERA

(pacing up and down behind)

Oh, will he never come? Will he never come?

PRINCE PAUL

'The family as subversive of true socialistic and communal unity is to be annihilated.' Yes, President, I agree completely with Article 5. A family is a terrible incumbrance, especially when one is not married.

(Three knocks at the door)

VERA

Alexis at last!

Password: Vae tyrannis!

Answer: Vae victis!

Enter MICHAEL STROGANOFF.

PRESIDENT

Michael, the regicide! Brothers, let us do honour to a man who has killed a king.

VERA

(aside)

Oh, he will come yet!

PRESIDENT

Michael, you have saved Russia.

MICHAEL

Ay, Russia was free for a moment when the tyrant fell, but the sun of liberty has set again like that false dawn which cheats our eyes in autumn.

PRESIDENT

The dread night of tyranny is not yet past for Russia.

MICHAEL

(clutching his knife)

One more blow, and the end is come indeed.

VERA

(aside)

One more blow! What does he mean? Oh impossible! but why is he not with us? Alexis! Alexis! why are you not here?

PRESIDENT

But how did you escape, Michael? They said you had been seized.

MICHAEL

I was dressed in the uniform of the Imperial Guard. The Colonel on duty was a brother, and gave me the password. I drove through the troops in safety with it, and, thanks to my good horse, reached the walls before the gates were closed.

PRESIDENT

What a chance his coming out on the balcony was!

MICHAEL

A chance? There is no such thing as chance. It was God's finger led him there.

PRESIDENT

And where have you been these three days?

MICHAEL

Hiding in the house of the priest Nicholas at the cross-roads.

PRESIDENT

Nicholas is an honest man.

MICHAEL

Ay, honest enough for a priest. I am here now the vengeance on a traitor!

VERA

(aside)

O God, will he never come? Alexis! why are you not here? You cannot have turned traitor!

MICHAEL

(seeing PRINCE PAUL)

Prince Paul Maraloffski here! By St. George, a lucky capture! This must have been Vera's doing. She is the only one who could have lured that serpent into the traESIDENT

PRINCE PAUL has just taken the oath.

VERA

Alexis, the Czar, has banished him from Russia.

MICHAEL

Bah! A blind to cheat us. We will keep Prince Paul here, and find some office for him in our bloody reign of terror. He is well accustomed by this time to bloody work.

PRINCE PAUL

(approaching MICHAEL)

That was a long shot of yours, mon camarade.

MICHAEL

I have had a good deal of practice shooting, since I have been a boy, off your Highness's wild boars.

PRINCE PAUL

Are my gamekeepers like moles, then, always asleep?

MICHAEL

No, Prince. I am one of them; but, like you, I am fond of robbing what I am put to watch.

PRESIDENT

This must be a new atmosphere for you, Prince Paul. We speak the truth to one another here.

PRINCE PAUL

How misleading you must find it! You have an odd medley here, President.

PRESIDENT

You recognise a good many friends, I dare say?

PRINCE PAUL

Yes, there is always more brass than brains in an aristocracy.

PRESIDENT

But you are here yourself?

PRINCE PAUL

I? As I cannot be a Prime Minister, I must be a Nihilist. There is no alternative.

VERA

O God, will he never come? The hand is on the stroke of the hour. Will he never come?

MICHAEL

(aside)

President, you know what we have to do? 'Tis but a sorry hunter who leaves the wolf cub alive to avenge his father. How are we to get at this boy? It must be to-night. To-morrow he will be throwing some sop of reform to the people, and it will be too late for a republic.

PRINCE PAUL

You are quite right. Good kings are the only dangerous enemies that modern democracy has and when he has begun by banishing me you may be sure he intends to be a patriot.

MICHAEL

I am sick of patriot kings; what Russia needs is a Republic.

PRINCE PAUL

Messieurs, I have brought you two documents which I think will interest you -- the proclamation this young Czar intends publishing to-morrow, and a plan of the Winter Palace, where he sleeps to-night.

(Hands papers)

VERA

I dare not ask them what they are plotting about. Oh, why is Alexis not here?

PRESIDENT

Prince, this is most valuable information. Michael, you were right. If it is not to-night it will be too late. Read that.

MICHAEL

Ah! A loaf of bread flung to a starving nation. A lie to cheat the people.

(Tears it up)

It must be to-night. I do not believe him. Would he have kept his crown had he loved the people? But how are we to get at him, and shall we who could not bear the scorpions of the father suffer the whips of the son? -- no; whatever is, must be destroyed: whatever is, is wrong.

PRINCE PAUL

The key of the private door in the street.

(Hands key)

PRESIDENT

Prince, we are in your debt.

PRINCE PAUL

(smiling)

The normal condition of the Nihilists.

MICHAEL

Ay, but we are paying our debts off with interest now. Two Emperors in one week. That will make the balance straight. We would have thrown in a Prime Minister if you had not come.

PRINCE PAUL

Ah, I am sorry you told me. It robs my visit of all its picturesqueness and adventure. I thought I was perilling my head by coming here, and you tell me I have saved it. One is sure to be disappointed if one tries to get romance out of modern life.

MICHAEL

It is not so romantic a thing to lose one's head, Prince Paul.

PRINCE PAUL

No, but it must often be very dull to keep it. Don't you find that sometimes?

Clock strikes six.

VERA

(sinking into a seat)

Oh, it is past the hour! It is past the hour!

MICHAEL

(to *PRESIDENT*)

Remember to-morrow will be too late.

PRESIDENT

Brothers, it is full time. Which of us is absent?

CONSPIRATORS

Alexis! Alexis!

PRESIDENT

Michael, read Rule 7.

MICHAEL

'When any brother shall have disobeyed a summons to be present, the president shall inquire if there is anything alleged against him.'

PRESIDENT

Is there anything against our brother Alexis?

CONSPIRATORS

He wears a crown! He wears a crown!

PRESIDENT

Michael, read Article 7 of the Code of Revolution.

MICHAEL

'Between the Nihilists and all men who wear crowns above their fellows, there is war to the death.'

PRESIDENT

Brothers, what say you? Is Alexis, the Czar, guilty or not?

OMNES

He is guilty!

PRESIDENT

What shall the penalty be?

OMNES

Death!

PRESIDENT

Let the lots be prepared; it shall be to-night.

PRINCE PAUL

Ah, this is really interesting! I was getting afraid conspiracies were as dull as courts are.

PROFESSOR MARFA

My forte is more in writing pamphlets than in taking shots. Still a regicide has always a place in history.

MICHAEL

If your pistol is as harmless as your pen, this young tyrant will have a long life.

PRINCE PAUL

You ought to remember, too, Professor, that if you were seized, as you probably would be, and hung, as you certainly would be, there would be nobody left to read your own articles.

PRESIDENT

Brothers, are you ready?

VERA

(starting up)

Not yet! Not yet! I have a word to say.

MICHAEL

(aside)

Plague take her! I knew it would come to this.

VERA

This boy has been our brother. Night after night he has perilled his own life to come here. Night after night, when every street was filled with spies, every house with traitors. Delicately nurtured like a king's son, he has dwelt among us.

PRESIDENT

Ay! under a false name. He lied to us at the beginning. He lies to us now at the end.

VERA

I swear he is true. There is not a man here who does not owe him his life a thousand times. When the bloodhounds were on us that night, who saved us from arrest, torture, flogging, death, but he ye seek to kill? --

MICHAEL

To kill all tyrants is our mission!

VERA

He is no tyrant. I know him well! He loves the people.

PRESIDENT

We know him too; he is a traitor.

VERA

A traitor! Three days ago he could have betrayed every man of you here, and the gibbet would have been your doom. He gave you all your lives once. Give him a little time -- a week, a month, a few days; but now! -- O God, not now!

CONSPIRATORS

(brandishing daggers)

To-night! to-night! to-night!

VERA

Peace, you gorged adders! peace!

MICHAEL

What, are we not here to annihilate? Shall we not keep our oath?

VERA

Your oath! your oath! Greedy that you are of gain, every man's hand lusting for his neighbour's pelf, every heart set on pillage and rapine; who, of ye all, if the crown were set on his head, would give an empire up for the mob to scramble for? The people are not yet fit for a republic in Russia.

PRESIDENT

Every nation is fit for a republic.

MICHAEL

The man is a tyrant.

VERA

A tyrant! Hath he not dismissed his evil counsellors. That ill-omened raven of his father's life hath had his wings clipped and his claws pared, and comes to us croaking for revenge. Oh, have mercy on him! Give him a week to live!

PRESIDENT

Vera, pleading for a king!

VERA

(proudly)

I plead not for a king, but for a brother.

MICHAEL

For a traitor to his oath, a coward who should have flung the purple back to the fools that gave it him. No, Vera, no. The brood of men is not yet dead, nor the dull earth grown sick of childbearing. No crowned man in Russia shall pollute God's air by living.

PRESIDENT

You bade us try you once. We have tried you, and you are found wanting.

MICHAEL

Vera, I am not blind, I know your secret. You love this boy, this young prince with his pretty face, his curled hair, his soft white hands. Fool that you are, dupe of a lying tongue, do you know what he would have done to you, this boy you think loved you? He would have made you his mistress, used your body at his pleasure, thrown you away when he was wearied of you; you, the priestess of liberty, the flame of revolution, the torch of democracy.

VERA

What he would have done to me matters little. To the people, at least, he will be true. He loves the people; at least, he loves liberty.

PRESIDENT

So, he would play the citizen-king, would he, while we starve? Would flatter us with sweet speeches, would cheat us with promises like his father, would lie to us as his whole race have lied.

MICHAEL

And you whose very name made every despot tremble for his life, you, Vera Saboureff, you would betray liberty for a lover and the people for a paramour!

CONSPIRATORS

Traitress! Draw the lots; draw the lots!

VERA

In thy throat thou liest, Michael! I love him not. He loves me not.

MICHAEL

You love him not? Shall he not die then?

VERA

(with an effort, clenching her hands)

Ay, it is right that he should die. He hath broken his oath. There should be no crowned man in Europe. Have I not sworn it? To be strong, our new republic should be drunk with the blood of kings. He hath broken his oath. As the father died so let the son die too. Yet not to-night, not to-night. Russia, that hath borne her centuries of wrong, can wait a week: for liberty. Give him a week.

PRESIDENT

We will have none of you! Begone from us to this boy you love.

MICHAEL

Though I find him in your arms I shall kill him.

CONSPIRATORS

To-night! To-night! To-night!

MICHAEL

(holding up his hand)

A moment! I have something to say.

(Approaches VERA; speaks very slowly)

Vera Sabouroff, have you forgotten your brother?

(Pauses to see effect; VERA starts)

Have you forgotten that young face, pale with famine; those young limbs twisted with torture; the iron chains they made him walk in? What week of liberty did they give him? What pity did they show him for a day?

(VERA falls in a chair)

Oh! you could talk glibly enough then of vengeance, glibly enough of liberty. When you said you would come to Moscow, your old father caught you by the knees and begged you not to leave him to die childless and alone. I seem to hear his cries still ringing in my ears, but you were as deaf to him as the rocks on the roadside. You left your father that night, and three weeks after he died of a broken heart. You wrote to me to follow you here. I did so, first because I loved you; but you soon cured me of that whatever gentle feeling, whatever pity, whatever love, whatever humanity, was in my heart you withered up and destroyed, as the canker worm eats the corn. You bade me cast out love from my breast as a vile thing, you turned my hand to iron, and my heart to stone; you told me to live for freedom and revenge. I have done so. But you, what have you done?

VERA

Let the lots be drawn!

CONSPIRATORS applaud.

PRINCE PAUL

(aside)

Ah, the Grand Duke will come to the throne sooner than he expected. He is sure to make a good king under my guidance. He is so cruel to animals, and never keeps his word.

MICHAEL

Now you are yourself at last, Vera.

VERA

(standing motionless in the middle)

The lots, I say, the lots! I am no woman now. My blood seems turned to gall; my heart is as cold as steel is; my hand shall be more deadly. From the desert and the tomb the voice of my prisoned brother cries aloud, and bids me strike one blow for liberty. The lots, I say, the lots!

PRESIDENT

Are ready. Michael, you have the right to draw first: you are a regicide.

VERA

O God, into my hands! Into my hands!

They draw the lots from a bowl surmounted by a skull.

PRESIDENT

Open your lots.

VERA

(opening her lot)

The lot is mine! See, the bloody sign upon it! Dmitri, my brother, you shall have your revenge now.

PRESIDENT

Vera Sabouroff, you are chosen to be a regicide. God has been good to you. The dagger or the poison?

(Offers her dagger and vial)

VERA

I can trust my hand better with the dagger; it never fails.
(Takes dagger)

(MORE)

VERA (cont'd)

I shall stab him to the heart, as he has stabbed me. Traitor, to leave us for a ribbon, a gaud, a bauble, to lie to me every day he came here, to forget us in an hour. Michael was right, he loved me not, nor the people either. Methinks that if I was a mother and bore a man-child, I would poison my breast against him, lest he might grow to a traitor or to a king.

PRINCE PAUL whispers to the PRESIDENT.

PRESIDENT

Ay, Prince Paul, that is the best way. Vera, the Czar sleeps to-night in his own room in the north wing of the palace. Here is a key of the private door in the street. The password of the guards will be given to you. His own servants will be drugged. You will find him alone.

VERA

It is well. I shall not fail.

PRESIDENT

We will wait outside in the Place Saint Isaac, under the window. As the clock strikes twelve from the tower of St. Nicholas you will give us the sign that the dog is dead.

VERA

And what shall the sign be?

PRESIDENT

You are to throw us out the bloody dagger.

MICHAEL

Dripping with the traitor's life.

PRESIDENT

Else we shall know that you have been seized, and we will burst our way in, drag you from his guards.

MICHAEL

And kill him in the midst of them.

PRESIDENT

Michael, you will lead us?

MICHAEL

Ay, I shall lead you. See that your hand fails you not, Vera Sabouroff.

VERA

Fool, is it so hard a thing to kill one's enemy?

PRINCE PAUL

(aside)

This is the ninth conspiracy I have been in in Russia. They always end in a voyage en Sibirie for my friends and a new decoration for myself.

MICHAEL

It is your last conspiracy, Prince.

PRESIDENT

At twelve o'clock, the bloody dagger.

VERA

Ay, red with the blood of that false heart. I shall not forget it.

(Standing in middle of stage)

To strangle whatever nature is in me, neither to love nor to be loved, neither to pity nor to be pitied. Ay! it is an oath, an oath. Methinks the spirit of Charlotte Corday has entered my soul now. I shall carve my name on the world, and be ranked among the great heroines. Ay! the spirit of Charlotte Corday beats in each petty vein, and nerves my woman's hand to strike, as I have nerved my woman's heart to hate. Though he laugh in his dreams I shall not falter. Though he sleep peacefully I shall not miss my blow. Be glad, my brother, in your stifled cell, be glad and laugh to-night. To-night this new-fledged Czar shall post with bloody feet to hell, and greet his father there! This Czar! O traitor, liar, false to his oath, false to me! To play the patriot among us, and now to wear a crown; to sell us, like Judas, for thirty silver pieces, to betray us with a kiss!

(With more passion)

O Liberty, O mighty mother of eternal time, thy robe is purple with the blood of those who have died for thee! Thy throne is the Calvary of the people, thy crown the crown of thorns. O crucified mother, the despot has driven a nail through thy right hand, and the tyrant through thy left! Thy feet are pierced with their iron. When thou wert athirst thou calledst on the priests for water, and they gave thee bitter drink. They thrust a sword into thy side. They mocked thee in shine agony of age on age. Here, on thy altar, O Liberty, do I dedicate myself to thy service; do with me as thou wilt!

(Brandishing the dagger)

(MORE)

VERA (cont'd)

The end has come now, and by thy sacred wounds, O crucified
mother, O Liberty, I swear that Russia shall be saved!

ACT DROP

ACT FOUR

*SCENE: Antechamber of the Czar's private room.
Large windows at the back, with drawn curtains over
it.*

*Present: PRINCE PETROVITCH, BARON RAFF, MARQUIS DE
POIVRARD, COUNT ROUVALOFF.*

PRINCE PETROVITCH

He is beginning well, this young Czar.

BARON RAFF

(shrugs his shoulders)

All young Czars do begin well.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

And end badly.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

Well, I have no right to complain. He as done me one good
service, at any rate.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Cancelled your appointment to Archangel, I suppose?

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

Yes; my head wouldn't have been safe there for an hour.

Enter GENERAL KOTEMKIN.

BARON RAFF

Ah! General, any more news of our romantic young Emperor?

GENERAL KOTEMKIN

You are quite right to call him romantic, Baron, a week ago I found him amusing himself in a garret with a company of strolling players; to-day his whim is all the convicts in Siberia are to be recalled, and the political prisoners, as he calls them, amnestied.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Political prisoners! Why, half of them are no better than common murderers!

COUNT ROUVALOFF

And the other half much worse?

BARON RAFF

Oh, you wrong them, surely, Count. Wholesale trade has always been more respectable than retail.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

But he is really too romantic. He objected yesterday to my having the monopoly of the salt tax. He said the people had a right to have cheap salt.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

Oh, that s nothing; but he actually disapproved of a State banquet every night because there is a famine in the Southern provinces.

The young CZAR enters unobserved, and overhears the rest.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Quelle betise! The more starvation there is among the people the better. It teaches them self-denial, an excellent virtue, Baron.

BARON RAFF

I have often heard so.

GENERAL KOTEMKIN

He talked of a Parliament, too, in Russia, and said the people should have deputies to represent them.

BARON RAFF

As if there was not enough brawling in the streets already, but we must give the people a room to do it in. But, Messieurs, the worst is yet to come. He threatens a complete
(MORE)

BARON RAFF (cont'd)

reform of the public service on the ground that the people are too heavily taxed.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

He can't be serious there. What is the use of the people except for us to get money out of? But talking of the taxes, my dear Baron you must really let me have forty thousand roubles to-morrow; my wife says she must have a new diamond bracelet.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

(aside to BARON RAFF)

Ah, to match the one Prince Paul gave her last week, I suppose.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

I must have sixty thousand roubles at once, Baron. My son is overwhelmed with debts of honour which he can't pay.

BARON RAFF

What an excellent son to imitate his father so carefully!

GENERAL KOTEMKIN

You are always getting money. I never get a single kopeck I have not got a right to. It's unbearable; it's ridiculous! My nephew is going to be married. I must get his dowry for him.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

My dear General, your nephew must be a perfect Turk. He seems to get married three times a week regularly.

GENERAL KOTEMKIN

Well, he wants a dowry to console him.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

I am sick of town. I want a house in the country.

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

I am sick of the country. I want a house in town.

BARON RAFF

Gentlemen, I am extremely sorry for you. It is out of the question.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

But my son, Baron?

GENERAL KOTEMKIN

But my nephew?

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

But my house in town?

COUNT ROUVALOFF

But my house in the country?

MARQUIS DE POIVRARD

But my wife's diamond bracelet?

BARON RAFF

Gentlemen, impossible! The old régime in Russia is dead; the funeral begins to-day.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

Then I shall wait for the resurrection.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Yes; but, en attendant, what are we to do?

BARON RAFF

What have we always done in Russia when a Czar suggests reform? -- nothing. You forget we are diplomatists. Men of thought should have nothing to do with action. Reforms in Russia are very tragic, but they always end in a farce.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

I wish Prince Paul were here. By the by, I think this boy is rather ungrateful to him. If that clever old Prince had not proclaimed him Emperor at once without giving him time to think about it, he would have given up his crown, I believe, to the first cobbler he met in the street.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

But do you think, Baron, that Prince Paul is really going?

BARON RAFF

He is exiled.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Yes, but is he going?

BARON RAFF

I am sure of it; at least he told me he had sent two telegrams already to Paris about his dinner.

COUNT ROUVALOFF

Ah! that settles the matter.

CZAR

(coming forward)
Prince Paul had better send a third telegram and order --
(counting them)
-- six extra places.

BARON RAFF

The devil!

CZAR

No, Baron, the Czar. Traitors! There would be no bad kings in the world if there were no bad ministers like you. It is men such as you are who wreck mighty empires on the rock of their own greatness. Our mother, Russia, hath no need of such unnatural sons. You can make no atonement now; it is too late for that. The grave cannot give back your dead, nor the gibbet your martyrs, but I shall be more merciful to you. I give you your lives! That is the curse I would lay on you. But if there is a man of you found in Moscow by to-morrow night your heads will be off your shoulders.

BARON RAFF

You remind us wonderfully, Sire, of your imperial father.

CZAR

I banish you all from Russia. Your estates are confiscated to the people. You may carry your titles with you. Reforms in Russia, Baron, always end in a farce. You will have a good opportunity, Prince Petrovitch, of practising self-denial, that excellent virtue! that excellent virtue! So, Baron, you think a Parliament in Russia would be merely a place for brawling. Well, I will see that the reports of each session are sent to you regularly.

BARON RAFF

Sire, you are adding another horror to exile.

CZAR

But you will have such time for literature now. You forget you are diplomatists. Men of thought should have nothing to do with action.

PRINCE PETROVITCH

Sire, we did but jest.

CZAR

Then I banish you for your bad jokes. Bon voyage Messieurs. If you value your lives you will catch the first train for
(MORE)

CZAR (cont'd)

Paris.

(Exeunt MINISTERS)

Russia is well rid of such men as these. They are the jackals that follow in the lion's track. They have no courage themselves except to pillage and rob. But for these men and for Prince Paul my father would have been a good king, would not have died so horribly as he did die. How strange it is, the most real parts of one's life always seem to be a dream! The council, the fearful law which was to kill the people, the arrest, the cry in the court-yard, the pistol-shot, my father's bloody hands, and then the crown! One can live for years sometimes without living at all, and then all life comes crowding into one single hour. I had no time to think. Before my father's hideous shriek of death had died in my ears I found this crown on my head, the purple robe around me, and heard myself called a king. I would have given it up all then; it seemed nothing to me then; but now, can I give it up now? Well, Colonel, well?

Enter COLONEL OF THE GUARD.

COLONEL

What password does your Imperial Majesty desire should be given to-night?

CZAR

Password?

COLONEL

For the cordon of guards, Sire, on night duty around the palace.

CZAR

You can dismiss them. I have no need of them.

(Exit COLONEL. Goes to the crown lying on the table)

What subtle potency lies hidden in this gaudy bauble, the crown, that makes one feel like a god when one wears it? To hold in one's hand this little fiery-coloured world, to reach out one's arm to earth's uttermost limit, to girdle the seas with one's galley; to make the land a highway for one's hosts; this is to wear a crown! to wear a crown! The meanest serf in Russia who is loved is better crowned than I. How love outweighs the balance! How poor appears the widest empire of this golden world when matched with love! Pent up in this palace, with spies dogging every step, I have heard nothing of her; I have not seen her once since that fearful hour, three days ago, when I found myself suddenly the Czar of this wide waste, Russia. Oh, could I see her for a moment; tell her now the secret of my life I have never dared to

(MORE)

CZAR (cont'd)

utter before; tell her why I wear this crown, when I have sworn eternal war against all crowned men! There was a meeting to-night. I received my summons by an unknown hand; but how could I go? I, who have broken my oath! who have broken my oath!

Enter PAGE.

PAGE

It is after eleven, Sire. Shall I take the first watch in your room to-night?

CZAR

Why should you watch me, boy? The stars are my best sentinels.

PAGE

It was your Imperial father's wish, Sire, never to be left alone while he slept.

CZAR

My father was troubled with bad dreams. Go, get to your bed, boy; it is nigh on midnight, and these late hours will spoil those red cheeks.

(PAGE tries to kiss his hand)

Nay, nay; we have played together too often for that. Oh, to breathe the same air as her, and not to see her! the light seems to have gone from my life, the sun vanished from my day.

PAGE

Sire -- Alexis -- let me stay with you to-night! There is some danger over you; I feel there is.

CZAR

What should I fear? I have banished all my enemies from Russia. Set the brazier here, by me; it is very cold, and I would sit by it for a time. Go, boy, go; I have much to think about to-night.

(Goes to back of stage, draws aside a curtain. View of Moscow by moonlight)

The snow has fallen heavily since sunset. How white and cold my city looks under this pale moon! and yet what hot and fiery hearts beat in this icy Russia, for all its frost and snow. Oh, to see her for a moment; to tell her all; to tell her why I am a king! But she does not doubt me; she said she would trust in me. Though I have broken my oath, she will have trust. It is very cold. Where is my cloak? I shall sleep for an hour. Then I have ordered my sledge, and, though I die

(MORE)

CZAR (cont'd)

for it, I shall see Vera to-night. Did I not bid thee go, boy? What! must I play the tyrant so soon? Go, go! I cannot live without seeing her. My horses will be here in an hour; one hour between me and love! How heavy this charcoal fire smells.

(Exit the PAGE. Lies down on a couch beside brazier)

Enter VERA, in a black cloak.

VERA

Asleep! God, thou art good! Who shall deliver him from my hands now? This is he! The democrat who would make himself a king, the republican who hath worn a crown, the traitor who hath lied to us. Michael was right. He loved not the people. He loved me not.

(Bends over him)

Oh, why should such deadly poison lie in such sweet lips? Was there not gold enough in his hair before, but he should tarnish it with this crown? But my day has come now; the day of the people, of liberty, has come! Your day, my brother, has come! Though I have strangled whatever nature is in me, I did not think it had been so easy to kill. One blow and it is over, and I can wash my hands in water afterwards, I can wash my hands afterwards. Come, I shall save Russia. I have sworn it.

(Raises the dagger to strike)

CZAR

(starting up, seizes her by both hands)

Vera, you here! My dream was no dream at all. Why have you left me three days alone, when I most needed you? O God, you think I am a traitor, a liar, a king? I am, for love of you. Vera, it was for you I broke my oath and wear my father's crown. I would lay at your feet this mighty Russia, which you and I have loved so well; would give you this earth as your footstool; set this crown on your head. The people will love us. We will rule them by love, as a father rules his children. There shall be liberty in Russia for every man to think as his heart bids him; liberty for men to speak as they think. I have banished the wolves that preyed on us; I have brought back your brother from Siberia; I have opened the blackened jaws of the mine. The courier is already on his way; within a week Dmitri and all those with him will be back in their own land. The people shall be free -- are free now. When they gave me this crown first, I would have flung it back to them, had it not been for you, Vera. O God! It is men's custom in Russia to bring gifts to those they love. I said, I will bring to the woman I love a people, an empire, a world! Vera, it is for you, for you alone, I kept this crown;

(MORE)

CZAR (cont'd)

for you alone I am a king. Oh, I have loved you better than my oath! Why will you not speak to me? You love me not! You love me not! You have come to warn me of some plot against my life. What is life worth to me without you?

CONSPIRATORS murmur outside.

VERA

Oh, lost! lost! lost!

CZAR

Nay, you are safe here. It wants five hours still of dawn. Tomorrow, I will lead you forth to the whole people --

VERA

To-morrow -- !

CZAR

Will crown you with my own hands as Empress in that great cathedral which my fathers built.

VERA

(loosens her hands violently from him, and starts up)

I am a Nihilist! I cannot wear a crown!

CZAR

(falls at her feet)

I am no king now. I am only a boy who has loved you better than his honour, better than his oath. For love of the people I would have been a patriot. For love of you I have been a traitor. Let us go forth together, we will live amongst the common people. I am no king. I will toil for you like the peasant or the serf. Oh, love me a little too!

CONSPIRATORS murmur outside.

VERA

(clutching dagger)

To strangle whatever nature is in me, neither to love nor to be loved, neither to pity nor -- Oh, I am a woman! God help me, I am a woman! O Alexis! I too have broken my oath; I am a traitor. I love. Oh, do not speak, do not speak --

(kisses his lips)

-- the first, the last time.

He clasps her in his arms; they sit on the couch together.

CZAR

I could die now.

VERA

What does death do in thy lips? Thy life, thy love are enemies of death. Speak not of death. Not yet, not yet.

CZAR

I know not why death came into my heart. Perchance the cup of life is filled too full of pleasure to endure. This is our wedding night.

VERA

Our wedding night!

CZAR

And if death came himself, methinks that I could kiss his pallid mouth, and such sweet poison from it.

VERA

Our wedding night! Nay, nay. Death should not sit at the feast. There is no such thing as death.

CZAR

There shall not be for us.

CONSPIRATORS murmur outside.

VERA

What is that? Did you not hear something?

CZAR

Only your voice, that fowler's note which lures my heart away like a poor bird upon the limed twig.

VERA

Methought that someone laughed.

CZAR

It was but the wind and rain; the night is full of storm.

CONSPIRATORS murmur outside.

VERA

It should be so, indeed. Oh, where are your guards? where are your guards?

CZAR

Where should they be but at home? I shall not live pent round by sword and steel. The love of a people is a king's best bodyguard.

VERA

The love of a people!

CZAR

Sweet, you are safe here. Nothing can harm you here. O love, I knew you trusted me! You said you would have trust.

VERA

I have had trust. O love, the past seems but some dull, grey dream from which our souls have wakened. This is life at last.

CZAR

Ay, life at last.

VERA

Our wedding night! Oh, let me drink my fill of love to-night! Nay, sweet, not yet, not yet. How still it is, and yet methinks the air is full of music. It is some nightingale who, wearying of the south, has come to sing in this bleak north to lovers such as we. It is the nightingale. Dost thou not hear it?

CZAR

O sweet, mine ears are clogged to all sweet sounds save shine own voice, and mine eyes blinded to all sights but thee, else had I heard that nightingale, and seen the golden-vestured morning sun itself steal from its sombre east before its time, for jealousy that thou art twice as fair.

VERA

Yet would that thou hadst heard the nightingale. Methinks that bird will never sing again.

CZAR

It is no nightingale. 'Tis love himself singing for very ecstasy of joy that thou art changed into his votaress.

(Clock begins striking twelve)

Oh, listen, sweet, it is the lovers' hour. Come, let us stand without, and hear the midnight answered from tower to tower over the wide white town. Our wedding night! What is that? What is that?

Loud murmurs of CONSPIRATORS in the street.

VERA

(breaks from him and rushes across the stage)

The wedding guests are here already! Ay! you shall have your sign!

(Stabs herself)

You shall have your sign!

(Rushes to the window)

CZAR

(intercepts her by rushing between her and window and snatches dagger out of her hand)

Vera!

VERA

(clinging to him)

Give me back the dagger! Give me back the dagger! There are men in the street who seek your life! Your guards have betrayed you! This bloody dagger is the signal that you are dead.

(CONSPIRATORS begin to shout below in the street)

Oh, there is not a moment to be lost! Throw it out! Throw it out! Nothing can save me now; this dagger is poisoned! I feel death already in my heart. There was no other way but this.

CZAR

(holding dagger out of her reach)

Death is in my heart too; we shall die together!

VERA

Oh, love! love! love! be merciful to me! The wolves are hot upon you! -- you must live for liberty, for Russia, for me! Oh, you do not love me! You offered me an empire once! Give me this dagger, now! Oh, you are cruel! My life for yours! What does it matter?

Loud shout in the street, 'VERA! VERA! To the rescue! To the rescue!'

CZAR

The bitterness of death is past for me

VERA

Oh, they are breaking in below! See! The bloody man behind you!

(CZAR turns round for an instant)

Ah!

VERA snatches dagger and flings it out of window.

CONSPIRATORS

(below)

Long live the people!

CZAR

What have you done?

VERA

I have saved Russia!

(Dies)

TABLEAU

CURTAIN