

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

by

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CHARACTERS

SAM PETERS A foreign journalist

CLARA DOBIN Grusha's aunt

SCHWARTZ Tax Collector and Magistrate

SPELT Undertaker and Assistant to Sputtini

HORTENSIUS GRIMM Old friend of Clara

SPUTTINI Representative of the revolutionary government

GRUSHA YOLLIS

MAGNON YOLLIS Grusha's estranged husband

SVELTYA Magnon's girlfriend

GRUNIN Local businessman

EDDY YOLLIS Elder son of Grusha and Magnon

VASHA YOLLIS Younger son of Grusha and Magnon

ACT 1

SCENE 1

A village square that might be anywhere and nowhere. Whitewashed buildings, old and weathered. Bead curtains hang in doorways. One of the buildings could be a house of worship - though not of any recognizable denomination. To one side of the square, a raised plinth. The stage should be set with a number of raised observation points - which could double as the roofs of buildings. We hear a jeep drawing to a halt, the door slamming and footsteps on gravel. SAM PETERS enters. He is dressed in khaki shirt and shorts that might be military issue, an incongruous 'outback' hat, and carries a leather bag. He looks around uncertainly, peers down one side-street, then another without seeing anyone. Retrieving a camera from his bag, he takes snap-shots of the square. CLARA, middle-aged, in simple peasant dress and scarf, appears from behind the bead curtains of a doorway.

CLARA

Pssst!

PETERS

What?

CLARA

Who you looking for?

PETERS

Where is everyone?

CLARA

Taking a siesta. At my age you don't sleep so much.

PETERS

I took some shots of the square. Very pretty.

CLARA

We don't get many sightseers here.

PETERS

I'm not a sightseer .

CLARA

A soldier?

PETERS

No. I'm a reporter, I write stories for newspapers.

CLARA

We haven't had any newspapers since the revolution.

PETERS

Oh?

CLARA

Too few of us living in these parts. We're not cost effective. That's what they said. Sent you up here did they?

PETERS

Who?

CLARA

Whoever sends people.

PETERS

No one sent me. I go wherever there's something to write about.

CLARA

You won't find much here.

PETERS

I wanted to see how the revolution has affected a remote village like this one. Does everything go on just as before, or has the new regime brought changes? Are the people happier, or not? That sort of thing.

CLARA

Some people are better off that's for sure. But it's not for me to say.

PETERS

The revolution promised sweeping changes.

CLARA

Does your work do any good?

PETERS

If it weren't for journalists, no one would know what's going on. Corruption would be rife, politicians would run amok, abuses would go unchecked. We like to think we're the voice of the people. Their independence if you will.

CLARA

You wouldn't be here if the authorities didn't allow it. Nobody gets a permit to come up here - unless they're on the government side.

PETERS

That's where being a foreigner can help. Governments tend to be more accommodating to the press because they don't want to get a bad reputation.

CLARA

You mean you don't have a permit?

PETERS

Sure I have one. Had to show it three times on my way here. But I didn't have to make any special promises to get it.

CLARA

Are you sure you don't work for the government?

PETERS

Of course not. Look, here's my union card.
National Union of Journalists with my photograph.

CLARA

I suppose it's genuine.

PETERS

Will you help me?

CLARA

To do what?

PETERS

To meet people here. Learn what going on.

CLARA

Isn't it you who supposed to be helping us?

PETERS

I don't follow you.

CLARA

Giving us a voice. Didn't you just say that?

PETERS

We help each other. First, I have to listen.

PETERS makes a note.

CLARA

What are you writing?

PETERS

I'm noting down that you're very sharp. I mean, intelligent. My name's Peters, by the way, Sam Peters.

CLARA

Most people call me Aunt Clara. But you can skip the aunt, seeing as how you aren't from round here. The sun's gone down behind the church. Everyone will be about shortly. Stay here by me and I'll tell you who's who.

CLARA and PETERS move to the entrance door of CLARA's house. The stage comes alive with villagers greeting each other, chatting.

CLARA (Con't)

That's Grimm over there. The one who just waved. He's my cousin; we grew up together. His wife died in the same month as my husband. Grimm's the honorary mayor of the village. We don't have a real mayor because we're too small. To tell the truth, Grimm's not as clever as he might be. But he has a good heart. The one he's chatting to is Grunin. We call him the tycoon because he's the only one in the village with a factory and machines.

PETERS

What does he make?

CLARA

Knives, ploughs, horseshoes, coffins. What doesn't he make? People come from miles around to buy from him. His prices are a scandal, but where else can you get such stuff? The city's too far away. And they're all thieves there as well, so it comes to the same thing. He's the richest man in the district. Now I ask you, how could he have made so much money if it wasn't by cheating his customers? He has a nice manner, mind you. Civil to everyone, which is more than can be said for Magnon. He's over there with that woman. She isn't his wife either. Look at the way she's dressed. Men are fools. See a bit more than they should and their tongues hang out like washing on a line. I won't foul my lips by telling you her name. You can ask her yourself if it's so important. As for him, he's a rat who never did an honest day's work in his life. There he goes running off with his whore - heaven forgive me for swearing. Knows too well what I think of him. His real wife's my niece. Grusha. My only one. Bless her heart. She has two sons by that monster; and the eldest certainly takes after his father. If it weren't against the law, I take my kitchen knife to that man. Are you writing this down?

PETERS

Everything.

CLARA

Well you can leave out that last bit. I don't want
any trouble.

SCHWARTZ and SPELT pass by.

SCHWARTZ

Good afternoon Aunt Clara.

SPELT

Leave her alone, Schwartz. Nobody wants your
good wishes.

SCHWARTZ

(to CLARA)

You have a visitor.

CLARA

So you see.

SCHWARTZ

Won't you introduce us?

PETERS

Sam Peters.

SCHWARTZ

New resident?

SPELT

Schwartz is our magistrate and tax collector.

PETERS

Both?

SCHWARTZ

We combine the two positions to save money.

They go together very well.

SPELT

He wants to know if you'll be paying taxes.

PETERS

Just passing through.

SPELT

You'll escape his clutches then. Nobody else does round here.

CLARA

Good-bye gentlemen.

Schwartz and Spelt walk on.

SCHWARTZ

(to Spelt)

There no need to be so rude in front of strangers.

SPELT

Does no harm to warn people.

SCHWARTZ

What about?

SPELT

You.

Exeunt.

CLARA

Petty government officials. We never had them
before the revolution.

PETERS

Who's the sarcastic one?

CLARA

Spelt. He's the official undertaker. Government
appointed. I ask you. We've been burying people
for hundreds of years. Used to be a farmer did
Spelt. Grew the best vegetables in the district from
his own field. Now all he does is sneer at
everything. When he's not running around after
Sputtini.

PETERS

Sputtini?

CLARA

The one in the red coat with his back turned to us. He's not from here. Arrived around two years ago, just after the revolution. Said he'd come to ensure the valley was free of traitors. He's a sort of priest too, or so he claims; though if you ask me he acts more like the other one.

(She points towards the ground)

Who's he talking to? God save us, it's Grusha, my niece. What does he want with her? See that?

GRUSHA emerges from behind SPUTTINI, brushing him off with an angry gesture.

PETERS

It's a bit confusing.

CLARA

It's not London or New York.

Schwartz and Spelt reappear beside SPUTTINI. They clap their hands and the villagers gather round. SPUTTINI mounts the plinth.

PETERS

What going on?

SPELT

Attention citizens. Quiet if you please.

CLARA

Another of his little speeches. We get at least one a week.

SPUTTINI

Peace among you. The revolution has brought a glorious new era to our country. Yet the work of renewal has only just begun. If we are to be successful in this great enterprise, a change must take place in the mind of every citizen. We must all work towards the same ends: improving the welfare of our people, keeping our children in school and off the street, providing work for all, cleansing our moral fabric, defending our frontiers against the aggressions of hostile nations. Never forget that we are besieged by enemies; foreigners who want to take for themselves what is rightfully ours; spies and counter-revolutionaries, wretches who will stop at nothing to betray us. Where are they? They are here, among us. We must root them out. How do we recognize them? Not by what they say - they are not so stupid as to criticize the revolution in public - but by their silence. Whoever fails to praise the revolution is an enemy. Whoever is not with us is against us. Long live the revolution. Praise be to God.

VILLAGERS

Long live the revolution.

GRUSHA

(loudly)

All sounds very fine. But it's no different from what the old government used to say.

GRUSHA (Con't)

And we didn't have to put up with a bunch of
upstarts telling us what to do...

GRIMM

Grusha! Careful.

GRUSHA

...and growing rich on it.

SPUTTINI

What's that woman saying?

GRUSHA

He heard.

SPUTTINI

Grimm, you're the mayor here.

GRUSHA

Sputtini was as poor as door mouse when he turned
up a couple of years ago. Didn't even have a good
pair of shoes. How come he owns half the land
down by the river. And the second biggest house in
the village.

CLARA

(to PETERS)

She's going too far.

GRIMM

Grusha. That's enough. As the mayor I have to uphold standards.

GRUSHA

What standards are they, Uncle Grimm?

SPUTTINI

Am I to stand here and be insulted? I who defend the revolution? Where's Magnon? Can't he control his own wife?

GRUSHA

I'm no wife to Magnon. Not any more. The whole village knows why. Besides, according to your revolution, men and women are equal.

SPUTTINI

What of it?

GRUSHA

We're allowed to speak our minds.

GRIMM

(to SPUTTINI)

She's upset about her husband. It understandable.

SCHWARTZ

A mother of grown sons. She should be ashamed.

SPELT

That's a brilliant remark.

CLARA

Grusha.

SPUTTINI

One more word and I'll ask Schwartz to arrest you
as a counter revolutionary.

CLARA

Come on Grusha, come away. You can't speak like
that in public. It's too dangerous.

GRUSHA

So what are we to do - just accept what going on?

CLARA

For the time being.

GRUSHA

If we keep quiet, these thieves will get away with it.

CLARA

I want to introduce you to someone.

SPUTTINI

After that unfortunate interruption, I suggest we
return to our labours.

SPUTTINI descends from the plinth and casts a lingering look at GRUSHA before walking off.

GRUSHA

(referring to PETERS)

He looks like one of those funny tourists from America.

CLARA

He's a journalist. Wants to write about us.

GRUSHA

Whatever for? There's nothing here.

CLARA

That's what I told him. But he seems nice enough.

GRUSHA

I'm sorry, Aunt Clara. I know you mean well. But I'm not up to meeting anyone now. Let me go home. Perhaps I'll meet him later.

CLARA

I wish you'd be a little more careful with your tongue .

GRUSHA

You know I'm right, don't you?

CLARA

All I know is you're my only niece. And I want to see you safe and happy.

GRUSHA

Love you Aunt Clara.

GRUSHA leaves.

CLARA

(To PETERS)

A ball of fire that girl. But she's a danger to herself. The old government was lax and inefficient, and you could say more or less what you liked. Not any more. It's not safe. Don't know why I'm telling you this.

PETERS

I seem to have come to the right place after all.

CLARA

We have our troubles, if that's what you mean.

PETERS

Where do we go from here?

CLARA

I'm not going anywhere. Except to heaven if God will have me when my time comes.

CLARA (Con't)

If you want to learn more about us, all you need do is wait and watch. Ours is a small enough world. Look who's coming. Out of the way, quick. I don't want to meet them.

CLARA leads PETERS to one side. Enter SVELTYA and MAGNON.

SVELTYA

You always wanted me. Or so you say. So why don't you get on with it?

MAGNON

I'm still married, Sveltya. But you're the one.

SVELTYA

You told me you'd get a divorce.

MAGNON

I keep you well enough. You get plenty of money from me.

SVELTYA

I didn't come for the money. You're not so rich. I want you too. It's only normal. Don't you like the way I am?

MAGNON

You drive me nuts.

MAGNON grabs SVELTYA roughly but she twists away.

SVELTYA

Not here, Magnon.

MAGNON

Not here, not there, not anywhere.

SVELTYA

I told you. There's to be no more until we're married. Or at least until you get a divorce. You have to make do with looking.

MAGNON

I want to marry you. You know that. My wife's the problem.

SVELTYA

You mean she wears the pants.

MAGNON

She does not! I make the decisions in my household. But if I divorce her without a good reason, she gets the property. And most of the money I made in town too. There'd be practically nothing left for you and me. And then what?

SVELTYA

Well you have to find an answer. Otherwise, Sveltya keeps herself to herself. Maybe she'll find somebody who really wants her.

MAGNON

I found you. And I'm going to keep you.

SVELTYA

Not as your whore.

MAGNON

That's how you started, isn't it?

SVELTYA

That part of my life is over. And I don't like to be reminded of it.

MAGNON

In any case, I can't get rid of my wife just like that.

SVELTYA

You could if you wanted to.

MAGNON

Just tell me how. It's me who's in the wrong.

SVELTYA

Didn't you hear what she was saying just now?
Right here in the square? Arguing with Sputtini. She
doesn't like the revolution. Maybe a lot of others
don't like it. But they keep quiet.

MAGNON

She's like a wild animal.

SVELTYA

Isn't it treason to speak against the revolution?

MAGNON

Yes but she's the mother of my sons. I couldn't ...I mean...it's the death penalty...no... a divorce is one thing... but...

SVELTYA

(Walking off)

Why should a girl have to put up with all this? I'm going back home.

MAGNON

Sveltya wait. I'll work it out some way. Just have a little patience.

SVELTYA

Patience!

Exeunt SVELTYA laughing, MAGNON in pursuit.

CLARA

She's not so stupid as she seems that Sveltya. Who knows what Magnon'll get up to with her goading him on.

PETERS

Attractive.

CLARA

You men are all the same. It's Grusha I worry about. I wish to God she hadn't married that wretch. But if a girl comes from a poor family, she doesn't have much choice in our part of the world. Grusha's father died when she was only fifteen and he was the only breadwinner. Magnon had inherited a little money and some land, so she married him to protect her own family. For a time it worked; though he was always rough with her. But he went off to the city - to find real wealth so he claimed - and everything started to go wrong. Then one day he showed up with that unmentionable on his arm. They say he owns part of a brothel in the city where they supply fresh girls to the government. The village gossips about it. But my Grusha looks them all in the eye. She knows she's in the right.

PETERS

Your niece does seem to have strong opinions.

CLARA

Opinions never did any harm. Though men may not like to hear them from a woman.

Enter GRUNIN, SCHWARTZ and SPELT.

GRUNIN

What do you want with me? I'm a busy man.

SCHWARTZ

I need to speak to you urgently.

GRUNIN

Then make an appointment with my secretary.

SCHWARTZ

I've tried that. She says you're too busy to see anyone.

GRUNIN

The street is hardly the place.

SCHWARTZ

It's about your taxes.

GRUNIN

My taxes?

SCHWARTZ

A large sum has been accumulating since the revolution.

GRUNIN

What are you talking about?

SCHWARTZ

There's a new value added tax on coffins.

GRUNIN

Coffins are essential items.

SPELT

You make money on them, don't you?

GRUNIN

Very little if the truth be told. They're the charitable part of the business.

SCHWARTZ

Well the tax must be paid. The revolution needs the money. And I have to warn you, the penalties for default have increased. You can pass the cost onto the customer anyway.

GRUNIN

Is that a joke?

SPELT

He means to the family of the deceased. The family always pays.

GRUNIN

What if they can't afford it?

SCHWARTZ

They must afford it. It's the law now. Promulgated last week as a matter of fact.

GRUNIN

I didn't know.

SPELT

Everyone must be buried in a coffin. Except for criminals. They get cremated. Families in financial difficulty can receive a subsidy...

SCHWARTZ

After a means test.

SPELT

... but they have to buy government standard.

GRUNIN

Government standard? For coffins?

SPELT

Speaking as the undertaker, I'd say the specifications are not what they might be; but they'll do. If you play your cards right, you could get the whole regional market.

SCHWARTZ

Provided your taxes are in order.

SPELT

And Mr SPUTTINI agrees.

GRUNIN

That son of a bitch?

SCHWARTZ

Mr Grunin, do you want to stay in business or not?

SPELT

Mr Sputtini's the one you have face in the long run.

SCHWARTZ

Even a tax reduction is not impossible, with the right approach.

GRUNIN

So Sputtini's behind this.

SCHWARTZ

I work for the revolution.

SPELT

We all do.

SCHWARTZ

You too Mr Grunin.

GRUNIN

So what do you want me to do?

SCHWARTZ

An interview with Mr Sputtini would help. You don't really know him, Mr Grunin, if I may say so. I guarantee you'll find him gracious and reasonable. He has everyone's best interests at heart.

GRUNIN

Let me know when he's free.

SCHWARTZ

We'll arrange it right away.

GRUNIN

Don't expect me to thank you.

GRUNIN leaves.

SCHWARTZ

Mission accomplished.

SPELT

You enjoy your work, Schwartz.

SCHWARTZ

Of course.

SPELT

That's the difference between you and me. What's it like to get pleasure from screwing people.

SCHWARTZ

I work for the good of the country.

SPELT

Is that what it is?

SCHWARTZ and SPELT leave. GRIMM enters, pursued by MAGNON.

MAGNON

Mr Grimm, I've been looking for you.

GRIMM

A man of my age doesn't go anywhere very fast.

MAGNON

I wanted a word with you in private.

GRIMM

Let's sit here for a moment.

MAGNON

Are you sure no one can hear?

GRIMM

When you've been around as long as me, you learn there are no real secrets in this village. I sometimes feel the gossips hereabouts know more about me than I do myself. Only the other day I overheard Mrs Porphyry in this very square tell Mrs Zeldin that I had an affair with Aunt Clara.

CLARA

(Sotto voce)

Wait 'til I see her next.

MAGNON

Couldn't we go to your office?

GRIMM

Sputtini requisitioned it. Said I didn't have official status.

MAGNON

This is a confidential matter.

GRIMM

Nobody's around. You might as well spit it out while you have the chance.

MAGNON

It's about my wife. I....Are you sure nobody can hear?

GRIMM

You're worried about what happened today between Grusha and Sputtini. Grusha's a firebrand.

MAGNON

Fact is, we don't get on.

GRIMM

You don't treat her very well.

MAGNON

Is it my fault? You heard what she said today in front of the whole village. She's a trouble-maker. Always has been. Now she's against the revolution. If I don't take action, people will start accusing me too.

GRIMM

Why are you telling me this?

MAGNON

You're the mayor. You can help.

GRIMM

I don't see how. It's none of my business.

MAGNON

You can divorce us.

GRIMM

Well I could. Provided both parties agree.

MAGNON

I know she wants out. And I'm willing to let her go in return for the property. It's mine anyway. Belongs to the family. On my side.

MAGNON (Con't)

Two fields down by the river, the house and a few other bits and pieces. The two boys are grown up and don't want to live with their mother any more. My idea is for her to move out of the house. Then I'll move back in with the boys and... with the boys. Mr Schwartz helped me work it out.

GRIMM

And where will Grusha live?

MAGNON

With Aunt Clara. They'll be company for each other.

GRIMM

What about that creature you parade around with?

MAGNON

Sveltya. Yes. Well. She'll be my new wife as soon as the divorce comes through. The boys are happy about that one.

GRIMM

It won't do Magnon. What you propose is against our laws on the protection of women.

MAGNON

Grusha's not a normal woman, is she? She's a counterwhatsisname. Know what I mean? Against the revolution.

GRIMM

Even if she's a bit of a handful, you can't ride over the law. You have to find accommodation with your wife. I'm not suggesting that's easy. Women don't always do what their husbands want. But that's how it is. Her opinions aren't so important anyway. She's not going to change the course of history. Nobody ever has. But the point is, she's still your wife, and it's your duty...

MAGNON

My duty?

GRIMM

The authorities wouldn't like your attitude. There a new emphasis on family life. Anyone guilty of breaking up a home has to pay a large fine - and can even be gaoled.

MAGNON

I didn't know.

GRIMM

You'd better be careful.

MAGNON

What am I going to do?

GRIMM

Stick to your wife. That's my best advice.

MAGNON

I'm finished with her.

GRIMM

Then there's nothing more I can say. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must be on my way.

MAGNON

I'm not stopping with you, Grimm. You're not the boss of this village. Should've known you'd be on Grusha's side. I'll go above you, see if I don't.

He leaves

GRIMM

I didn't know. People today aren't what they were. No manners at all.

He leaves.

CLARA

See what I told you about Magnon?

PETERS

It's just a domestic squabble.

CLARA

Not what you came here for, right?

PETERS

Husband and wife problems are too common to be news. Unless the people involved are famous.

CLARA

They're famous around here. He's a bad one that Magnon. Always was. You shouldn't go round in that jungle get-up. You stand out like a goat on a hilltop. I'll lend you some of my husband's clothes.

PETERS

He won't mind?

CLARA

Where he is they don't worry about clothes any more.

PETERS

Sorry. I put my foot in it.

CLARA

You're forgiven. Come on in then.

PETERS

I like to meet Grusha.

CLARA

All in good time.

SCENE 2

The main room of Grusha's house. Crude furniture, a kitchen/eating table, a solid-fuel stove, upright wooden chairs, a hearth. The remains of a meal on the table.

GRUSHA

I've told you, I don't like you going off to the city.

EDDY

A man can't stay around here. Not any more. We have to go where the action is.

GRUSHA

What action is that?

EDDY

Where we can make money. Find our place in the world. Make a better life.

VASHA

For you too, mum.

GRUSHA

You don't need a big city to know where you belong. And you Eddy have no business taking Vasha. He's too young.

VASHA

I'm only two years younger than Eddy. That's nothing nowadays. We look after each other. And dad will be coming every week.

GRUSHA

Don't talk to me about your father.

EDDY

Why not?

GRUSHA

Look what the city did for him.

EDDY

Can you blame him?

GRUSHA

What do mean by that?

EDDY

Nothing.

GRUSHA

If you're a man already, you can say what's on your mind.

VASHA

We love you, mum. But...

GRUSHA

But what?

VASHA

You can be a bit difficult.

GRUSHA

All mothers are difficult. How else are we to bring up children?

EDDY

We can stand it. But it's how you talk to everyone else. Including dad. You're always fighting, accusing people of corruption.

GRUSHA

It's a corrupt world.

EDDY

Doesn't mean you have to bad-mouth the authorities.

GRUSHA

I always taught you to stand up for what you believe. And that's what I do.

EDDY

At the family's expense. If they come for you, we'll get it too.

GRUSHA

Who's been filling your heads with nonsense?
Nobody's going to come for me. I wouldn't do
anything that would harm my own sons. You're my
pride and happiness.

EDDY

You put dad off though. He couldn't cope with you.

GRUSHA

Now listen to me both of you. You've got it very
wrong if you think I'm to blame for your father and
me splitting up. Believe me it isn't my fault he goes
round with a cheap hooker.

VASHA

Mum!

GRUSHA

That what she is, isn't she?

VASHA

She's quite nice when you get to know her.

GRUSHA

No comment. But let's not row. I made you some
sandwiches for the trip. And there's fruit too in this
bag.

A knock on the door.

EDDY

Someone's at the door.

VASHA

I'll get it.

EDDY

No. Let's get out of here. It'll be Aunt Clara or some other gossip. And we'll have to stay and make small talk. Let's go out the back door.

GRUSHA

When will I see you?

VASHA

Soon. Don't worry.

GRUSHA

How could I not worry? Come here both of you. I'm your mother, don't forget. Whatever you do, you'll always have my blessing. Look after each other. I pray God to keep you out of trouble.

More knocking.

VASHA

We'll keep in touch, mum. Promise.

EDDY

Try to make it up with Dad.

VASHA

He'll leave his ways if you're gentle with him.

GRUSHA

I'm not so sure about that. But for your sakes, I'll see what I can do. Go now if you must. And come back to me.

EDDY and VASHA leave. More knocking.

SPUTTINI (O.S.)

Anyone in?

GRUSHA

My god it sounds like Sputtini. What the devil can he want?

(Aloud)

Who is it?

SPUTTINI (O.S.)

It's me. Alfredo.

GRUSHA

What do you want?

SPUTTINI (O.S.)

A quiet chat. That's all.

GRUSHA

There nothing quiet about your shouting.

She opens the door. SPUTTINI, elegant, enters.

SPUTTINI

Apologies for raising my voice. I trust I'm not interrupting anything?

GRUSHA

As a matter of fact, you are. You've come to arrest me?

SPUTTINI

Why would I do such a thing?

GRUSHA

Aren't I an enemy of the regime?

SPUTTINI

Not at all. You've expressed your views. I don't say I agree with them. But that doesn't mean you have to be suppressed. Constructive criticism can only be healthy. And I'm sure you mean well. You want the best for our country.

GRUSHA

The country's too much for me to think of. I only see what happens here, in our little world. What do you want with me, Mr Sputtini?

SPUTTINI

Alfredo please.

GRUSHA

This isn't a social visit.

SPUTTINI

But it is a social visit. May I call you Grusha?

GRUSHA

It's my name.

SPUTTINI

Perhaps we could sit down? I've come for a chat with you because...well...after what happened in the square, I thought we might, you know, make up, if you see what I mean.

GRUSHA

No, I don't see.

SPUTTINI

There's no need for us to fight in public, Grusha. Or in private for that matter. As long as there's respect. I know life isn't easy for you right now. Your husband....

GRUSHA

Leave him out of it. I have no husband.

SPUTTINI

I agree the situation isn't pleasant for you. Your sons are grown up. You're alone in the world. You need protection.

GRUSHA

I have my friends.

SPUTTINI

What a brave woman you are. Worthy of the greatest admiration. I mean what I say. You could become an important figure in the district. Have some real influence.

GRUSHA

With my views? The authorities would love that.

SPUTTINI

Are you really so much against change?

GRUSHA

Not change. Just repression.

SPUTTINI

You don't have to agree with everything the government does. The trick is to work underground. Say the right things and quietly do as you please. What matters is the impression. And with my backing you can...

GRUSHA

Your backing?

SPUTTINI

I may appear to be hard and unbending. That's because of my responsibilities. Inside I'm the same as any other man. I understand the needs of a woman like you; and I feel it's my duty to offer you what help I can.

GRUSHA

I don't know what to say.

SPUTTINI

Just give me your hand, and we'll seal our friendship. I've always wanted to touch that hand, ever since I first saw you. Two years ago now. I asked you the way to the church. You don't remember. But how could I forget? And when I learned of your domestic difficulties, I began to think of you. More and more as a matter of fact. I've been alone a long time, Grusha. A troubled past. We needn't go into that. The point is, here we are, the two of us, solitary figures in the world. So much to share, so much comfort to give. I always felt this would happen one day. Funny how quiet and shy you are when it comes to the heart, and so fiery about politics and that sort of thing.

GRUSHA

What are you doing?

SPUTTINI

Don't worry. Nobody will know about us. And even if they find out, they wouldn't dare say anything. You're beautiful Grusha.

GRUSHA

Stop that. Take your hand away.

SPUTTINI

Like a little fighting, do you? Go on.

GRUSHA

Let me go.

SPUTTINI

That's the spirit. Like a bit of rough stuff do we? Why don't I hit you, too? Hit you back. Like this. And this. And this. Do you like it? Eh? Feels good?

GRUSHA

God help me.

SPUTTINI

Shall we try the bedroom? Over there is it?

SPUTTINI drags GRUSHA in the direction of the bedroom.

SPUTTINI (Con't)

Don't want to go eh? Of course we do.

GRUSHA

(calling)

Help me.

SPUTTINI

No shouting now. That's going too far. Get in there woman. And don't argue. You led me on. Now you have to face the consequences.

SPUTTINI drags GRUSHA off stage. Sounds of struggling, followed by an angry cry from GRUSHA, then a howl of pain from SPUTTINI.

SPUTTINI (O.S.) (Con't)

You vicious bitch.

Knocking at the door.

GRIMM (O.S.)

What's going on?

GRUSHA reappears in disarray.

SPUTTINI

Don't open the door. I forbid it.

GRUSHA

Get out of my way.

She opens the door to GRIMM and CLARA.

GRIMM

What's going on? We were passing by, arguing as usual, when we heard this awful scream.

CLARA

GRUSHA. Your face. Something nasty's happened.

(Noticing SPUTTINI)

Where did he come from?

GRUSHA

Ask him.

GRIMM

SPUTTINI. I must say...

SPUTTINI

I'm the victim of a terrible outrage.

GRIMM

Whatever do you mean?

GRUSHA

Get him out of here.

GRIMM

Sputtini...

SPUTTINI

I came here as a conciliatory gesture. You're both aware of what happened during the last public meeting. And we all know Grusha's views on the revolution. Deeply concerned about the possible damage to the harmony of our village life, I felt it my duty to patch things up with Grusha, to bring her back, as it were, into the fold. I called on her, in the strictest confidence - so that she wouldn't be compromised - only to find myself the object of what I have to say was a brazen attempt at... my honour. When I refused to succumb, she burst into rage and attacked me. I'm not used to violence. No doubt I lack the right kind of experience. As her friends, I suggest you tell her that her conduct is not acceptable in our community. Grimm, you're a sensible man. I leave the matter in your hands. And, of course, in Aunt Clara's. For the good of all, I would prefer to avoid any further mention of this incident. I suggest you do the same. And now I must be on my way.

GRIMM

Wait a minute. Please, Sputtini.

GRUSHA

Let him go. I don't want him in this house or anywhere near it.

SPUTTINI

We'll talk later Grimm.

SPUTTINI leaves.

GRIMM

I must say...

GRUSHA

I feel sick.

CLARA

Grimm, will you get some water?

(To GRUSHA)

Can you tell us what happened?

GRIMM

Sputtini must have made a dreadful mistake. He's an honest man.

CLARA

For heaven's sake, Grimm.

GRUSHA

He tried to rape me.

GRIMM

He wouldn't do a thing like that.

GRUSHA

No. He has the village on his side. Maybe the whole world. Isn't that the way things are? He walked out of here, promising not to say a word and knowing that if I speak no one will believe me.

GRIMM

Nothing serious seems to have happened.

GRUSHA

Didn't it? Can't you bring yourself to doubt your beloved Suttini.

CLARA

Will you shut up Grimm?

(To GRUSHA)

He didn't....

GRUSHA

No.

CLARA

Try not to upset yourself any more.

GRUSHA

I'm all right.

CLARA

You're trembling.

GRUSHA

Just give me a minute or two. Anyway, I don't really matter.

GRIMM

That's simply not true.

GRUSHA

Sputtini's the one who carries your hopes. With his talk of the glories of the revolution and the wealth that will come to the district. We all dream of a happy future. That's what Sputtini relies on. The revolution is the pathway, and Sputtini the prophet who'll show us the way. Strange how he's the one who's got wealthy. The one who takes whatever he wants whenever he wants it.

GRIMM

Grusha please don't.

GRUSHA

You know it's the truth Aunt Clara.

CLARA

I'm too old to fight battles.

GRUSHA

Too old to be raped, as well.

GRIMM

Grusha!

GRUSHA

Sorry, I didn't mean that. Forgive me. I must be in a state of shock.

CLARA

The Sputtini's of this world will always be with us. No matter how much we hate them. If he goes, another will take his place.

GRUSHA

I don't know if I can accept that Aunt Clara. Honesty must mean something to our lives. Otherwise why would we want it for ourselves? If cheating and lying bring power and wealth, then why aren't we all cheats and liars? Is goodness no more than a trap for the ignorant and the stupid? Tell me it isn't so.

CLARA

All I know is the older I get the less I trust people.

GRUSHA

I'll denounce Sputtini.

GRIMM

The authorities will ask for proof.

GRUSHA

You were both witnesses.

GRIMM

We saw nothing.

CLARA

It would be your word against his.

GRUSHA

You know what happened. Couldn't you say you were there?

CLARA

You want us to lie for you?

GRUSHA

No, I suppose not. What can I do?

CLARA

Just stay away from him. And keep quiet.

GRIMM

I'll have a word with him. Tell him to keep away from you.

CLARA

Yes. Tell him that everybody should keep quiet and pretend nothing's happened.

CLARA (Con't)

(To GRUSHA)

You've a black eye. I'll bathe it.

GRUSHA

If Eddy and Vasha were here they'd kill him.

They've gone to town.

GRUSHA and CLARA leave for the bedroom.

GRUSHA (O.S.) (Con't)

I should have killed him myself.

CLARA (O.S.)

Just let it pass.

GRIMM

I'll be off to see Sputtini then. Everything will be fine. You'll see.

SCENE 3

SPUTTINI's office. SPUTTINI is at the desk. A knock on the door. SPELT enters.

SPELT

You have a visitor.

SPUTTINI

Ah yes. Grimm wanted to see me.

SPELT

It's a woman.

SPUTTINI

If it's Magnon's wife I don't wish to see her.

SPELT

Not his wife. The other one.

SPUTTINI

What other one? Oh, really? Send her in. And Spelt.

SPELT

Yes.

SPUTTINI

There's no need to grin. You know I never refuse to meet anyone.

SPELT

Except Magnon's wife, right?

SPUTTINI

Get out.

SPELT exits. SPUTTINI hurriedly checks his appearance in a hand mirror. SVELTYA enters, closing the door behind her.

SVELTYA

So nice of you to give me your time Mr Sputtini.

SPUTTINI

I'm at your service.

SVELTYA

Some of the villagers won't have anything to with me. They think I'm not proper.

SPUTTINI

I can't control public opinion.

SVELTYA

Just because I dress ...well...you know...to look nice. It doesn't mean I'm not a good person.

SPUTTINI

Of course not.

SVELTYA

Mostly they don't say anything. Not directly. But I know what they think. And they're wrong. I act like I do because its the only way for a poor girl to get on. I'm no different from any other woman. Trying to survive in a man's world.

SPUTTINI

What are you talking about?

SVELTYA

Every woman needs a man who treats her well.

SPUTTINI

You haven't come to talk about your friendship
with Magnon?

SVELTYA

I wouldn't call it a friendship. We want to get
married.

SPUTTINI

He's already married.

SVELTYA

Yes. But look at his wife.

SPUTTINI

What's the matter with her?

SVELTYA

Well she's not like me, is she?

SPUTTINI

That's hardly the point.

SVELTYA

But it is the point. Magnon wants me, not her. And
who can blame him? She's a loud mouth. Everybody
knows that. Problem is Magnon can't divorce her
without losing the property.

SPUTTINI

Nothing anyone can do about that. Where the husband is openly...consorting with someone else, then our laws settle common property on the wife.

SVELTYA

That why I'm here.

SPUTTINI

I don't follow.

SVELTYA

Everyone knows Grusha's against the revolution. Some say she's up to something. You know, plotting.

SPUTTINI

Against who?

SVELTYA

The government I suppose. She says all kinds of things about you, too.

SPUTTINI

What kind of things?

SVELTYA

Just that you're a fake and a swindler. And you used the revolution to get rich. Oh, and you're too fond of women.

SPUTTINI

Is that so?

SVELTYA

If I were you I wouldn't stand for it.

SPUTTINI

No.

SVELTYA

You'll do something about her?

SPUTTINI

Perhaps.

SVELTYA

I could get you more details if you need them.

Would you like that?

SPUTTINI

Possibly.

SVELTYA

It's late. I must be going.

SPUTTINI

We haven't finished our discussion

SVELTYA

Haven't we?

SPUTTINI

I was hoping to learn more about your views.

SVELTYA

I'll come back again. When all this is over, and things are quieter. If you like. Bye Mr Sputtini.

SVELTYA exits.

SPUTTINI

Damnation.

SPELT enters.

SPUTTINI (Con't)

What is it?

SPELT

Grunin's here. I told him you were busy but he insisted on waiting.

SPUTTINI

Did he see my last visitor?

SPELT

Nobody could miss her. Come in Mr Grunin.

GRUNIN enters.

SPUTTINI

Mr Grunin, I apologize for keeping you waiting. A tedious visit from that lady friend of Magnon's. Wants a commercial licence if you please. You can imagine what kind of business she'd run.

GRUNIN

I don't mind competition, Sputtini. As long as it's respectable.

SPUTTINI

Drink?

GRUNIN

Let's not stand on ceremony, Sputtini. You know why I'm here. I've told Schwartz already, you'll get no more tax from me. And if I'm pressed any more, I'll take my factories elsewhere. Plenty of other districts are crying out for investment.

SPUTTINI

Mr Spelt will take notes.

GRUNIN

Makes no difference whether he does or he doesn't. I speak my mind. The government needs factories.

SPUTTINI

Not at any cost.

GRUNIN

What do you mean?

SPUTTINI

I gather you're a friend of Grusha Yollis.

GRUNIN

What of it?

SPUTTINI

She's under investigation as an enemy of the state.
Suspicion is also directed at you.

GRUNIN

She was good to me, was that woman, when my
wife died. And I'll not forget it. Whatever you have
on her, it'll never stick.

SPUTTINI

Anything will stick if you put enough glue on it.
And unless we can come to some accommodation,
I'll ensure it does stick. There'll be a fine for unpaid
taxes big enough to put you under. If things go
really badly you might even lose your neck.

GRUNIN

Are you threatening me?

SPUTTINI

I'm just giving you the facts. You'd be unwise to force my hand, Mr Grunin. You're not as important as you may think. Manufacturers are replaceable.

GRUNIN

What do you want?

SPUTTINI

Nothing too onerous. Merely for you to act as a witness, in case of need.

GRUNIN

What kind of witness?

SPUTTINI

We may need you to make a few observations about Grusha. Something like: while she was helping you cope with the death of your wife, she tried to draw you into a conspiracy against the government. And when you rightly refused, she offered you physical favours in an attempt to win you over.

GRUNIN

That's a pack of lies.

SPUTTINI

Horrified and disgusted, by her behaviour, you lodged a formal complaint with the authorities.

GRUNIN

I never did and I never would.

SPUTTINI

Perhaps not. But that's what you'll say.

GRUNIN

Why should I?

SPUTTINI

Because that way you'll be exonerated of all crimes.

GRUNIN

I've committed no crimes.

SPUTTINI

And as a reward, you'll receive a five-year tax holiday and cancellation of your fines. If you refuse, on the other hand, I suspect you won't be in business much longer.

GRUNIN

So you give me no choice?

SPUTTINI

You have as much choice as I or anyone else. Sooner or later we all come to the same end. Only the journey matters. The trick is to travel in style.

SPUTTINI (Con't)

You're rich, so you already have most of what you need. I'm not as wealthy as you, but I've a little something that you've rather overlooked.

GRUNIN

What's that?

SPUTTINI

Some people use the term power. I prefer to call it influence. Without people like me, the likes of you can't function.

GRUNIN

You paint a nasty picture.

SPUTTINI

We must take the world as we find it.

GRUNIN

How do I know you'll keep your word?

SPUTTINI

We'll put it in writing. You sign a deposition against Grusha and in return you'll get your exemptions.

GRUNIN

What about the market for standard coffins. Schwartz made a promise.

SPUTTINI

We'll give you an exclusive licence for the whole district. Will that do?

GRUNIN

I have to think about it.

SPUTTINI

Thinking won't be much help. If the answer is 'no', my guess is you'll go to gaol or worse. And the proceedings against Grusha Yollis will go ahead anyway. Nothing you can do to stop them.

GRUNIN

How did you get all this power, Sputtini?

SPELT

Took it, didn't he?

(Sotto voce)

While the rest of us stood and watched.

SPUTTINI

Spelt will draw up the documents right away. They should be ready in this office by tomorrow morning. Please come before noon.

GRUNIN

What makes you so sure I'll sign?

SPUTTINI

You're an intelligent man, Mr Grunin. You know we can't afford to lose each other. Until tomorrow then.

Refusing SPUTTINI's hand, GRUNIN turns to leave.

GRUNIN

(To SPELT)

If I'd known you were doing this kind of work I'd have offered you a job myself to keep you out of mischief. He marches out angrily.

SPELT

I'll say one thing. Nobody fixes things like you, Mr Sputtini.

SPUTTINI

Thank you Spelt. I receive so little acknowledgement. If it weren't for me there'd be a detachment of the revolutionary army in the district, stealing from everyone and raping the women. Only my presence keeps them away. If they knew about Grusha and her group, of course, they'd be here at once.

SPELT

That's a good story.

SPUTTINI

It's not a story. Grusha must be kept secret from the outside world if we want to remain secure.

SPELT

My lips are sealed.

SPUTTINI

So they should be.

They leave.

SCENE 4

CLARA and PETERS emerge. He is dressed in 'local' garb.

CLARA

See what kind of problems we have? Sputtini's dangerous. A manipulator. Takes everything he can get and more.

PETERS

Nothing unusual in that.

CLARA

Don't like to judge, eh?

PETERS

I have my opinions. But I don't interfere. My job is to report things as I see them. Frankly Sputtini's a pretty ordinary villain by modern standards.

CLARA

You don't know how he operates. He's after Grusha's neck and I'm worried. Maybe you can help.

PETERS

How?

CLARA

By telling the world what he's like.

PETERS

Go on.

CLARA

He blackmails people. Steals their land. And Grusha's not the first woman he's had a go at since he's been here either.

PETERS

Can we prove any of this?

CLARA

The whole village knows about him.

PETERS

Will any of his victims talk?

CLARA

I don't know. People are frightened of him.

PETERS

I can't just take your word Clara. There has to be evidence.

CLARA

At least if Sputtini knows there's a reporter watching, he might leave Grusha alone.

PETERS

I can't promise to have an effect on what happens.

CLARA

You can try.

PETERS

What happens next?

CLARA

Sputtini's planning to have Grusha indicted. That's clear enough. They'll probably put her on trial.

PETERS

For what?

CLARA

Counter-revolution.

PETERS

And if they find her guilty?

CLARA

There's only one punishment around here. Death by stoning.

PETERS

You can't be serious.

CLARA

We had a guilty verdict last year. I don't mind saying, I'm frightened.

PETERS

This is a real story. Seems I've come to the right place.

ACT 2

SCENE 1

Sputtini's office.

SPELT

The paperwork's complete. She can stand trial anytime.

SPUTTINI

Tomorrow at noon will do nicely.

GRIMM

Not so fast. You've no evidence that Grusha's broken the law. Just a few silly accusations. People aren't so easily fooled. They know well enough when someone's innocent.

SPUTTINI

You misunderstand, Grimm. There are serious implications for the whole district if we are seen to be harbouring dissidents. We'll be explaining that to the citizens over the next twenty-four hours.

GRIMM

What kind of man are you ?

SPUTTINI

A God-fearing man, Grimm. One who abides by
the laws of heaven and earth. As I trust you do also.

GRIMM

No man has ever questioned my faith.

SPUTTINI

Let them not start now when you are in the evening
of life.

GRIMM

Magnon surely won't let this happen. For all his
questionable behaviour with that other woman,
Grusha's still his wife.

Enter MAGNON

SPUTTINI

Here is Magnon. He can tell us himself.

MAGNON

Tell you what, Mr Sputtini?

GRIMM

Your wife...

MAGNON

I have no wife.

GRIMM

Your wife is to be put on trial for sedition and conspiracy against the state. That is if Sputtini gets his way.

MAGNON

Grusha?

GRIMM

She's accused of plotting to overthrow the revolutionary government. They've thrown her in jail.

SPUTTINI

A precautionary measure, in case she takes flight.

MAGNON

I'm a bit taken aback.

GRIMM

You should have been the first to know.

MAGNON

It's no picnic having a wife like that, I can tell you. She's a difficult woman. I'm not being blamed, am I?

SPUTTINI

Not as yet. We have numerous statements against her from all over the district.

SPUTTINI (Con't)

Most important of all, a major figure in our community has decided to speak out.

GRIMM

Who?

SPUTTINI

Mr Grunin.

GRIMM

Grunin wouldn't have anything to do with this. He's a good friend to Grusha.

MAGNON

She's always in his house. 'Helping out' according to her. Who'd believe that kind of story. What do you think a man and a woman do together when they're alone?

GRIMM

You want to get rid of her. We all know that, Magnon.

MAGNON

If I do, any man can see why.

SPUTTINI

You surely don't condone her behaviour, Grimm?
Not a man of your experience?

GRIMM

Condoned? No I... But she's innocent.

SPUTTINI

Grunin has already made a statement to the contrary.

SPELT

Chapter and verse.

SPUTTINI

You'll hear his evidence tomorrow.

GRIMM

Is there nothing I can do?

SPUTTINI

She seduced him.

MAGNON

If the law doesn't get them both, I will. Take my word for it.

SPUTTINI

If you value your property, then don't get involved, Magnon. Grusha will stand trial. And as for Grunin, he's already confessed, shown contrition, and agreed to be a witness for the prosecution. That's enough. If you wish to help in this matter, you can be at the trial as a witness.

MAGNON

You bet I will.

GRIMM

I've heard enough. This whole thing is a pack of lies. And I know why. You won't get away with this, Sputtini.

He leaves.

SPUTTINI

We must stick to the law.

MAGNON

That's right. The law is the law.

SPUTTINI

Off you go then, Magnon. Until noon tomorrow.

MAGNON

I'll be there.

MAGNON leaves

SPUTTINI

It a hard life, Spelt.

SPELT

Who for?

SPUTTINI

When the day draws to an end, you can go home and relax. Drink with your friends. Whatever takes your fancy. I can never rest. Never lower my guard. That's the only way to be a leader. Eternal vigilance; cold severity. I'm a compassionate man. But it's my task to raise a shield against our enemies.

SPELT

What are you talking about?

SPUTTINI

Half the district would like to pull me down. They don't realize that if I were to go, someone more ruthless would take my place.

SPELT

That's hard to imagine.

SPUTTINI

What was that?

SPELT

I agree.

SPUTTINI

The state wants 100 per cent allegiance. They've burned villages because of a single dissident. Killed everyone.

SPUTTINI (Con't)

They use some kind of chemical now, so strong a single drop on your skin is enough to make you shrivel like paper in a fire.

SPELT

You ever see it?

SPUTTINI

They warned me before I came. 'If anything goes wrong, Sputtini,' they said. 'You'll go with the rest of them.' On the other hand, I'm allowed to make a little money. Instead of taking a salary.

SPELT

You've done that all right

SPUTTINI

I deserve it. You're poor Spelt, but you don't take any risks. That the difference between us.

SPELT

Except that if things go wrong, we all get it. You said so.

SPUTTINI

That's why everyone must support me. And why we have to win this trial. The regime expects it. The beast must be fed.

SPELT

Time for your speech.

SPUTTINI

See what I mean? No peace for those of us who take
on the cares of others.

SPELT

I picked out speech thirty-two from the approved
list. The one you used last time we had a trial.

Scene 2

A prison cell crudely furnished with a bunk bed, and a table with one chair. On the table, a plate, a glass and a water jug. On a stand against one wall is a washing bowl and above it, a small mirror. A single barred window. Sputtini's amplified voice and the occasional chorus or round of applause from villagers are heard in the distance. GRUSHA sits alone on the bed.

SPUTTINI (O.S.)

Quiet, peace-loving districts, just like our own, can
be destroyed from the inside just as easily as if an
enemy attacked them. How? By betrayal? Several
villages have suffered this fate in the last few years.
Hundreds have died. We must not let this happen
here.

Applause.

SPUTTINI (O.S.) (Con't)

We want success for the revolution. And peace.

VILLAGERS (O.S.)

Peace. Peace.

SPUTTINI (O.S.)

None of us have anything to fear. So long as we support the revolution. So long as we go about our daily business. So long as we are vigilant in seeing that nobody works against us. Then we will all see improvements in our way of life. Our fruits and grain will fetch higher prices - guaranteed by the government. We will have paved roads to replace our dirt tracks. Street lighting. A school and a hospital. But, my friends, before any of these things come to pass, we must purge our district of dissidents and rabble-rousers. Despite all our efforts, they remain among us. The countryside is peppered with spies and insurgents. Snivelling lackeys in the pay of foreigners whose only purpose is to bring this country to its knees. One of them, alas, is in our midst at this very moment. A woman. I think many of you know to whom I refer. A woman whose sinister activities have finally come to light. She will stand trial. Here in this very square. You will hear what her accusers say, and what she says in her defence. I would like you all to be present. Noon tomorrow. You, the people, will be her judge. In the name of god almighty who is merciful to those who obey him. Go your ways in peace.

A rattle of keys in the cell door. SPELT enters, locking the door carefully behind him.

SPELT

Not touched your food? You need to be strong to defend yourself against that lot. You can't do it on an empty stomach. Well? Come on. Say something. Listen. You think I enjoy this job? I keep myself going with wisecracks. But I see through all of them.

GRUSHA

Sputtini pays your wages, doesn't he?

SPELT

I can't battle against the storm. Not with a wife and three kids. I drift where the wind blows. Like a fallen leaf.

GRUSHA

You're not dried up yet Spelt.

SPELT

Inside I am. Dried and withered. Not like you. You have plenty of fight.

GRUSHA

I'm against the likes of Sputtini.

SPELT

That's what I mean. Though what good does it do? You land in jail and I have to look after you. I told Sputtini. I'm an undertaker not a gaoler. Guarding prisoners isn't in my job description.

GRUSHA

What did he say?

SPELT

That I'm on the payroll, and if I didn't do what I was told I'd be out of a job. Truth is, I wouldn't have to do this kind of work if there were more people to bury. We don't die off fast enough. But I shouldn't be talking about me. It's you I'm concerned about.

GRUSHA

Concerned?

SPELT

The whole village knows you're innocent. Only most are too scared to say anything. Including me.

GRUSHA

You're scared too?

SPELT

I know on which side the bread's buttered. You won't eat?

GRUSHA

No. Thank you.

SPELT

I'll take it away then before it starts to smell.

SPELT exits with the tray, but immediately returns.

SPELT (Con't)

(continuing)

Almost forgot why I came in. You have a visitor.

GRUSHA

Who is it?

SPELT

Grunin.

GRUSHA

What does he want?

SPELT

Search me.

GRUSHA

He's the main prosecution witness. Is this some kind of trap?

SPELT

I don't think so. He offered me a tidy sum not to tell Sputtini he'd paid you a visit.

GRUSHA

Did you accept?

SPELT

Sure I accepted. I wouldn't have told Sputtini
anyway.

SPELT exits. GRUSHA approaches the washing bowl and peers into the mirror.

GRUSHA

Who are you Grusha Yollis? What brought you
here? Do you know there are illnesses that can't be
cured?

(She crunches up her face with her
hands)

What if I were like Spelt?

SPELT (O.S.)

Surprised she agreed to see you frankly. I wouldn't.

GRUNIN (O.S.)

Thank you Spelt.

SPELT (O.S.)

Make it short. You never know when Sputtini will
be back. You'll have me in jail myself, you two.

GRUNIN enters

GRUSHA

What can I do for you, Mr Grunin?

GRUNIN

I know it may seem strange, this visit. But I'm in an impossible position.

GRUSHA

You?

GRUNIN

I'm to testify against you.

GRUSHA

Yes.

GRUNIN

The whole thing is a nasty farce.

GRUSHA

Why do you say that?

GRUNIN

Do you think I want to stand up and tell a pack of lies about you of all people? Sputtini forced me to it.

GRUSHA

How could he do that?

GRUNIN

Threatened to ruin me. I tried to find a way out. But then I thought if I don't do it, somebody else will.

GRUNIN (Con't)

And all I stand to gain by being honest is to join you in here. Or maybe worse.

GRUSHA

Is that why you came here? So that I could forgive you? I'm not god.

GRUNIN

I want to help you escape. It would be easy enough. This place isn't a real prison. With one of my men to help, I could have you out of here in ten minutes. We could do it tonight. After Spelt goes off duty.

GRUSHA

If I did escape, where would I go?

GRUNIN

To the city. Aren't your sons there?

GRUSHA

They're with friends of their father.

GRUNIN

Well perhaps you could go abroad. For a year or so anyway. I'll help you on the financial side. It's the least I can do.

GRUSHA

I can't just run off like a criminal. Even if I did, how could I go on without my family and my friends? My life is here in the village.

GRUNIN

You'd be able to come back after a while, when all this has blown over.

GRUSHA

Away from here I would die a little bit every day. Here I may lose the fight; but I'll have my moment in court against Suttini and against everything he done to us. And who says I can't win?

GRUNIN

What about your children? Your sons?

GRUSHA

When they were young they needed me. Now it is I who need them. I miss them. They don't even know what's going on here. Perhaps they'll come tomorrow.

GRUNIN

Is there nothing I can do to change your mind?

GRUSHA

I have nowhere else to go. Whereas you....

GRUNIN

Yes?

GRUSHA

You could tell the truth tomorrow. You could change your story.

GRUNIN

In theory, yes.

GRUSHA

But you prefer to lie.

GRUNIN

I wouldn't lie just to save my own skin. But I'm an important employer in this district. A lot of families depend on me for their income. I can't let them down for the sake of a principle. I came here with good intentions. I don't want you to go through with the trial and I'm ready to get you out of here. Do you want to be a martyr?

GRUSHA

You don't even know why I'm here.

GRUNIN

According to Sputtini you're a counter-revolutionary.

GRUSHA

I don't take to revolutionaries with their ready-made answers to everything. Specially not when they repress their own people.

GRUSHA (Con't)

I admit my tongue can be a bit sharp where the new government's concerned. But I'm hardly a danger to the nation. That's not why I'm on trial.

GRUNIN

Then why?

GRUSHA

Sputtini tried to... No. Forget it. Whatever I say doesn't matter.

GRUSHA bangs on the door.

GRUSHA (Con't)

Strange how shy I am to mention it. As if I were the guilty one.

GRUNIN

What was that?

SPELT enters

SPELT

Time up is it? I didn't even have to call you.

GRUNIN

Is there nothing I can do to persuade you?

GRUSHA

No.

GRUNIN

Good-bye then Grusha. You're a stubborn woman.

GRUSHA

Show him out, will you Spelt?

SPELT

He can find his own way.

GRUNIN

We meet again tomorrow. No one can say its my fault. I did my best.

GRUNIN leaves.

GRUSHA

Spelt.

SPELT

What is it my dear?

GRUSHA

Is there no news of my sons?

SPELT

Afraid not. Perhaps they still haven't heard.

GRUSHA

I sent word to them.

SPELT

They'll be on their way.

SPELT leaves. GRUSHA sits down once more on the bunk and stares into the audience.
CLARA and PETERS, who have been observing, now come to life.

PETERS

Where are you going?

CLARA

I have to talk to Grusha. I can't leave her in this state.

PETERS

I'm coming too. If I may, that is.

CLARA

This is a family matter, Mr Peters.

PETERS

Call me Sam.

CLARA

Sam.

PETERS

It's also a matter of human rights. I have to know what's going on and take notes.

CLARA

Well don't say anything. Just stay in the background.

PETERS

That's my role.

PETERS and CLARA arrive at the gaol.

SPELT

I'm not supposed to let you anywhere near here, Clara. Sputtini's orders.

CLARA

Glad to see you pay no attention.

SPELT

I do pay attention. Everything Sputtini says enters my head. What happens when it gets there is not so clear. Before this business is over, I'll be in the dock myself. Make it quick, will you? As for you Mr Peters.

PETERS

Sam's the name.

SPELT

Don't say I let you in.

PETERS

Journalists don't reveal their sources.

SPELT

Unless it suits them.

PETERS

That's rather unfair.

SPELT

So are they.

SPELT exits.

GRUSHA

I'm so glad you come.

CLARA

How could I stay away?

GRUSHA

(to PETERS)

Why are you here?

PETERS

To record what's happening. So I can tell the world.

GRUSHA

Is that why you brought him, Aunt Clara?

CLARA

He may be able to do something.

PETERS

It may be your best hope.

CLARA

How are you coping?

GRUSHA

I'm scared. But not defeated. I'm going to fight
Sputtini tomorrow. I'll tell my story in front of
everyone. People will listen. They know, in their
hearts, who Sputtini is and what he stands for.

PETERS

(scribbling)

That's very well expressed.

GRUSHA

This case has nothing to do with politics or the
revolution. Sputtini wants me out of the way
because of what happened at home the other day.
That's why he accused me so quickly. Before I
could accuse him. No doubt my ex-husband is
backing him up.

CLARA

If you say this in public, nobody will believe you.
Sputtini has a way with public opinion. You know
that.

GRUSHA

Maybe.

CLARA

There's only one way you can survive this. And that's by confessing your guilt and apologizing. Say you were weak. You made mistakes. People will understand, and they'll demand mercy for you, a light sentence. What they can't stand is courage. Makes them feel small; because they don't have it themselves. They'll call it stubbornness and hate you for it.

GRUSHA

You want me to lie like Grunin and Magnon and whoever else they get to testify against me?

CLARA

What do you expect? That one truthful voice will blot out all the lying ones? The truth will have no place in Sputtini's court.

GRUSHA

I haven't killed or stolen. All that's happened is I've become an inconvenience.

CLARA

Not to those of us who are on your side. I don't care if you have to lie. I just want you to stay with us. I'm older than you.

CLARA (Con't)

And I know that you don't get to my age unless you bend before the wind. Don't be so pure in heart that you can't even listen to an old woman who loves you.

GRUSHA

I'm not so pure in heart, Aunt Clara. Just a woman who doesn't know what's happening to her. Yesterday morning I was at home, giving Eddy and Vasha a big breakfast before they went off to town.

PETERS

Forgive me for butting in. I've been trying to take notes, but to tell the truth, I still don't grasp why you're being put on trial. I mean the official reason.

CLARA

Treason. Crimes against the state.

PETERS

On the evidence, that's ridiculous. Unless there's something I've overlooked.

GRUSHA

You'd have to know what it is to be a woman, Mr Peters in a world like ours.

SPELT enters hurriedly.

SPELT

Sputtini's on his way. Better get going. Quick. Or I'll be on trial instead of her.

CLARA

I don't know any more what to say.

SPELT

You'll see each other tomorrow in court.

GRUSHA

What about Vasha and Eddy?

CLARA

No sign of them. I'm sure they'll come.

PETERS

Thanks for allowing me to be here.

SPELT

Out. Both of you. Leave through the back entrance.

SPELT ushers CLARA and PETERS out, and locks the door. GRUSHA lies down on the bunk and closes her eyes.

GRUSHA

Dear God help me.

Scene 3

The main square. A table has been set up opposite the dais. SPELT is seated at the end of the table with a minute book in which he takes notes. At the centre of the table, an empty chair. SPUTTINI is seated apart. All the villagers are present, some sitting on the floor, others standing apart or leaning on the walls of houses. SCHWARTZ enters and sits at the table. PETERS has changed into his own clothes.

SPELT

Silence please. Silence for the magistrate.

SCHWARTZ

This square is now a courtroom. I ask you in the name of the revolution to respect the proceedings about to take place here. You are not to offer opinions or interfere with the witnesses. You must listen carefully to the arguments for at the end of the trial you will be called upon to pronounce your verdict.

He signals to SPELT.

SPELT

The court is now in session. Anyone interrupting or making too much noise will be fined.

SCHWARTZ

Mr Sputtini for the prosecution.

SPUTTINI

Thank you. This is an important day, though a sombre one. We have before us a most serious case, all the more serious because it involves a member of our own community. In the dock stands a woman whom we all know. She was born here, has lived here all her life. She is part of us. And yet, she is accused of betrayal and treason; of plotting against the state - and that means against each and every citizen.

SPUTTINI (Con't)

You will hear witnesses of impeccable character who will tell you what they know of her crimes. She will no doubt wish to defend herself. She has a right to do so. Let us pray to God that He will bring us to a just decision in this matter. For He watches over us as we deliberate. The government too, far away in the capital expects us to fulfill our duty. And now to the business in hand.

PETERS

Excuse me. One moment.

SPELT

It's the journalist.

SPUTTINI

A journalist? Daring to interrupt a court? Mr Schwartz, I protest.

SCHWARTZ

Quiet please.

PETERS

I was only wondering if the accused woman should have representation. I mean someone to defend her. Isn't that the law?

SCHWARTZ

Normally, that is so.

SPUTTINI

We have no lawyers here on either side. So it's fair.

Does everyone agree?

GRUSHA

I can defend myself well enough.

SPUTTINI

Excellent.

PETERS

I just asked. That's all.

SPELT

(Writing)

Ten dollar fine...journalist.

SPUTTINI

And now if we are free from interruptions, let's begin. We'll start with the husband of the accused. He will attest to her character and tell us what he knows. Magnon Yollis, please step up and face the court.

SVELTYA

You're on. This is your chance.

MAGNON

He didn't tell me I'd have to start.

SVELTYA

What does it matter? You know what to say. My heart's pounding. Feel it. That's enough. Sputtini's waiting.

SPUTTINI

Magnon, please.

MAGNON walks forward and stands facing the audience.

SPUTTINI (Con't)

Well?

MAGNON

What do you want to know?

CLARA

Nothing that you could tell us.

A smattering of laughter.

SCHWARTZ

Silence.

SPUTTINI

(to MAGNON)

Is that your wife in the dock?

MAGNON

'course it is. I mean it was my wife.

SPUTTINI

You're divorced?

MAGNON

Not yet.

SPUTTINI

You are no longer living together?

MAGNON

No. I got better food in the pot now.

SPUTTINI

Would you tell us why you're no longer with the accused?

MAGNON

Obvious, isn't it?

SCHWARTZ

The court needs to hear your reasons, Magnon.

MAGNON

Right. Well she doesn't behave like a real wife.

SPUTTINI

Go on.

MAGNON

She was spending all her time with Mr Grunin.
 Don't know what they were up to. Not for me to
 say. The boys were always complaining that their
 mother was never at home. I was away a lot on
 business, wasn't I? But I heard all the rumours. And
 where there's smoke there fire. That's what I say.

SPELT

(To himself as he writes)

Where there smoke there's fire. That's original.

SCHWARTZ

Spelt if you please.

MAGNON

Who'd put up with it?

CLARA

Who'd put up with him?

SCHWARTZ

Who said that? Ah! Clara Dobin. She's not a part of
 this case. Mr Spelt please take a note.

SPELT

Aunt Clara..... warning.

SVELTYA

They should put me on the stand. I'd tell them.

GRIMM

Sveltya's a character.

CLARA

A bitch. Take my word for it.

MAGNON

Can I step down now?

SPUTTINI

You've nothing more to say?

MAGNON

No.

SCHWARTZ

Grusha, do you wish to question this witness?

GRUSHA

Not him.

MAGNON

She daren't ask me anything, 'cause she knows what answer she'd get.

GRUSHA

I'd get lies, Magnon. The whole village knows you for what you are.

SCHWARTZ

Off you go Magnon.

MAGNON rejoins SVELTYA.

SPUTTINI

Now we come to our key witness, a man of great importance, a benefactor of our community without whom we would be hard pressed to survive. For it is he who provides us with work, with dignity, and who ensures we have bread on our table. Please Mr Grunin, take the stand.

GRUSHA

I can save him the trouble by telling you what he'll say.

SCHWARTZ

The accused will have her turn to speak. Proceed Mr Sputtini.

SPUTTINI

Thank you. Mr Grunin, tell us, please what your relationship with the accused woman has been. We have heard that the accused was in the habit of visiting you. Alone. What have you to say to this?

GRUNIN

She helped me.

MAGNON

Just as I said.

SPUTTINI

Go on.

GRUNIN

After my wife died, Grusha looked after the house
and such like. I'm too busy for that sort of thing,
you see.

GRUSHA

What sort of thing, Grunin?

GRUNIN

Cooking and cleaning and the like.

CLARA

You should be grateful.

SCHWARTZ

Clara Dobin! You are not part of this trial.

SPELT

Ten dollars.

GRUNIN

I was grateful enough at the time. But then....

SPUTTINI

Then what?

GRUNIN

Do I have to go through with this?

SPUTTINI

It's the law.

GRUNIN

Well...I...began to realize that...

GRUSHA

Go on Grunin. Don't be shy.

GRUNIN

There. That's what she used to say to me. 'Don't be shy'.

SPUTTINI

And what did she mean by that?

GRUNIN

I didn't know at first. Then it dawned on me. She was always talking politics. One day she came as usual to cook my dinner. Or was it to clean? I don't remember. Anyway, politics came up again, so to speak. I wouldn't have paid attention, only this time she seemed serious. She criticized.

SCHWARTZ

Criticized who, Mr Grunin?

GRUNIN

The government, the revolution and all that. I told her to be careful with that kind of talk because you never knew who might be listening. It's a free country. Especially after the revolution. But that doesn't mean you can go about slinging mud and creating suspicion. A lot of people have been caught out doing that. So I've been told. Though I've no personal experience of these matters. Being a businessman myself. I keep out of it as any man would who's got any sense. Where was I?

SPELT

Who knows?

SPUTTINI

What did Grusha tell you?

GRUNIN

She came up to me. Looked me in the eye. And I said to her, 'Why are you looking at me like that?' And she said 'It's time to speak my mind'. Or something similar.

SPUTTINI

And then what?

GRUNIN

And then what? Oh yes. And then she said 'I want you to join the party'. I think that was it.

SPUTTINI

Did you get that down Mr Spelt?

SPELT

(Irritated)

Yes. I got that down Mr Sputtini.

SPUTTINI

Please go on Mr Grunin. The party.

GRUNIN

She said the party needed help. I think she was talking about money. That's something I have a little of, I don't mind admitting.

SPUTTINI

The party needed money.

GRUNIN

For the campaign and other things.

SPUTTINI

What other things?

GRUNIN

I wouldn't swear to it, but I think they wanted to buy...

SCHWARTZ

Yes Mr Grunin?

GRUNIN

Weapons.

GRUSHA

You're a bad liar Grunin.

SCHWARTZ

If the accused does not keep quiet, she will be escorted from the court.

SPUTTINI

So the party wanted to buy weapons. But what party are we talking about?

GRUNIN

She didn't say.

SPUTTINI

I must warn you not to conceal evidence from the court. Did she name the party or not?

GRUNIN

She did. Only I don't remember what it was called.

SPUTTINI

It wasn't the government party.

GRUNIN

No. The opposition.

SPUTTINI

But there is no opposition. We are have a coalition government.

GRUNIN

Well it wasn't official. It was clandestine. That was it.

SPUTTINI

And what were the aims of this so-called party?

GRUNIN

They wanted to change things. According to what she told me. Yes. 'This government's no good,' she said. 'It's corrupt. Full of people getting rich on the backs of the poor. We must bring it down'.

SPUTTINI

Did she mention any names?

GRUNIN

Yours, as a matter of fact.

SPUTTINI

Mine! And what did you reply?

GRUNIN

I was shocked I can tell you. I'm not very political. I told her to leave me out of it.

SPUTTINI

And then?

GRUNIN

Isn't that enough?

SPUTTINI

I believe you have more to tell.

GRUNIN

(embarrassed)

Do I have to?

SCHWARTZ

You must complete your testimony Mr Grunin.

GRUNIN

Right. When I didn't respond to what she was telling me, she tried another tactic. She made a suggestion to me that I...that we...that if I agreed to join the party and provide it with a little money, I could...she would...Well she said she'd pretend to be my wife.

MAGNON

I knew it. I said so to everybody. What man would stay with her? Who can blame me?

GRUNIN

Naturally, I couldn't. Not with another man's wife. I have my principles.

SPUTTINI

Do you have anything further to tell the court?

GRUNIN

No. I'm done for.

SPUTTINI

Grusha Yollis, you may question the witness.

GRUSHA

I have nothing to say to this man.

CLARA

Grusha, don't be a fool. Fight for yourself. You know this is all lies.

GRUSHA

He knows it too, don't you Grunin?

SPUTTINI

Thank you Mr Grunin. You may step down. The court is most grateful to you.

CLARA

Proud of yourself Grunin?

GRUNIN

We have to carry on, don't we? We have to carry on.

CLARA

I hope your conscience will never let you rest.

GRUNIN

What good will it do for Grusha whether I rest or not? She brought this on herself. Now I'll thank you to let me pass.

SPUTTINI

We need call only one other witness. Though the prosecution case is already foolproof, a small matter remains to be clarified. I call our respected honorary mayor, Mr Hortensius Grimm to take the stand.

GRIMM

What? Me? Sputtini, you never warned me about this. I won't say a word against Grusha.

GRUSHA

Oh Grimm.

GRIMM

Don't you worry my dear. You can rely on me.

SCHWARTZ

Mr Grimm please.

GRIMM mounts the stand.

SPUTTINI

This is just a small matter. Mr Grimm. You and I are old friends. And I'm sure we can get this over with a minimum of fuss. Three days ago, you found me in the house of the accused. Is that true?

GRIMM

I can't deny that.

SPUTTINI

Did Grusha accuse me of anything?

GRIMM

I don't think we need talk about that.

SPUTTINI

I think even the accused would like to hear what you have to say.

GRUSHA

Yes. That right. Go on Grimm. I do want to hear.

GRIMM

When Grusha was a baby, I held her in my arms. I never thought I'd be called like this.

SPUTTINI

I'll repeat the question. Did Grusha accuse me of anything that day in her house?

GRIMM

Yes.

SPUTTINI

Go on.

GRIMM

She said you tried to...to...rape her.

SPUTTINI

Yes. I wanted you to say it out loud. Do you know why? Because it shows clearly that the accused will stop at nothing to besmirch the good name of this village and the people who live peacefully within it. I bring it up also, because I have nothing to fear from slander of this kind.

GRIMM

No, no. That's wrong.

SPUTTINI

Thank you Grimm. No more questions.

GRUSHA

I want to ask something.

SCHWARTZ

Proceed.

GRUSHA

Tell the people what state I was in on the day I
accused Sputtini.

GRIMM

A very bad state. I mean she was crying. And she
had bruises on her face, as if someone had hit her.

GRUSHA

And had someone hit me?

GRIMM

It seemed to be so.

SCHWARTZ

But you couldn't be sure.

GRIMM

Well I didn't see it myself. But I suppose...

SCHWARTZ

Suppose?

GRIMM

You know what happened, Grusha.

GRUSHA

You don't have to say anything else, Grimm. It's all words anyway.

CLARA

You stay right there Grimm. You know exactly what you saw. Get it out. I'll say it if you won't. Call me up, Sputtini.

SPUTTINI

Because of her relationship to the accused, Clara Dobin is not considered a reliable witness.

SPELT

(To SCHWARTZ)

Why not? He can't stop people from testifying.

SPUTTINI

She'll say whatever suits her.

SPELT

What's so different about that?

SCHWARTZ

It's not your job to intervene in the proceedings. Merely to record them.

SPELT

Now look. I don't poke my nose in where I'm not wanted, but...

He is interrupted by a commotion off-stage. Everyone turns to look but it is GRUSHA who sees first.

GRUSHA

Vasha, Eddy. Thank God. Come to me.

VASHA hurries to GRUSHA and they embrace. EDDY moves more slowly.

GRUSHA (Con't)

(continuing)

My sons will defend me. They know how I live. I missed you both.

EDDY

We've only been gone a few days.

MAGNON

My boys!

VASHA

We heard about the trial. But it's all nonsense. What are you doing to our family Sputtini?

MAGNON

Stay out of this, Vasha. Mr Sputtini's only following the law.

VASHA

And the law says to prosecute my mother, is that it? We heard all about it on the way here.

VASHA (Con't)

It's a stitch-up. This isn't a court, anyway. And what are you doing standing there Mr Grimm?

GRIMM

I'm a witness my young friend. I'm sorry.

VASHA

Against my mother?

GRIMM

I seem to have made a mess of it.

EDDY

Cool it Vasha.

VASHA

But Eddy.

EDDY

If she's guilty, the court will find out.

SPUTTINI

You're an intelligent young man Eddy. A credit to the village. However, you and your brother have interrupted the proceedings. The evidence is in and now we have to decide...

VASHA

Wait a minute. I want to say something.

SPUTTINI

I can't see that this young man will have anything important to add.

SPELT

Then you got nothing to worry about, have you?

SCHWARTZ

Let the boy have his five minutes. It's a free country.

GRUSHA

No Vasha. I don't want you exposed to this farce.

VASHA

I want to help.

GRUSHA

You can't help, my son. Nothing you say will count in the eyes of these people. And they'll brand you a traitor as well.

VASHA

I don't care.

MAGNON

Well you'd better care, my boy. You tell him Eddy.

EDDY

Cool it, Vasha. She'll get what she deserves.

VASHA

What she deserves is to be left alone. You know that as well as I do.

EDDY

All I know is she was never around when we needed her and she was always fighting with Dad.

VASHA

No.

EDDY

I told you to cool it. And so did Dad.

GRUSHA

Stop it both of you. Don't fight on my account. I couldn't stand that. Eddy, if you think I'm guilty of something... One day, perhaps, you'll understand what it means to have a child condemn you. If this is what you came to tell me, then let them take me away.

VASHA

Mum I have to speak.

GRUSHA

No.

CLARA

You should be ashamed of yourselves. All of you.

PETERS

This is looking serious. I need some photographs.
With the court's permission.

No one pays attention.

PETERS (Con't)

(continuing)

I guess it's okay

SCHWARTZ

That finalizes the case. I don't think the jury will
need much time to debate the issue. It's pretty
simple.

SPELT

Wait a minute. I want a word.

SPUTTINI

It's not your job.

SPELT

Fuck my job. I've lived in this village longer than
you. Even though you ended up as my boss. I'm a
cynical son-of-a-bitch. And I got my reasons. But I
can't sit here and watch you lot destroy this
woman. Because that what you're doing: destroying
her. You're going to put her down after this. And
the whole bloody lot of you can't wait for it to
happen. You say she's guilty?

SPELT (Con't)

I see you nodding your heads every time Sputtini opens his mouth. But none of you know what she guilty of.

SCHWARTZ

Treason.

SPELT

Schwartz has got it. But what does 'treason' mean? I'll tell you. It means disagreeing with Sputtini here. Our local lord and master. He who speaks with authority. And where does he get that authority? From the government of course. And where does the government get it? Sputtini will tell you it's from God Himself. And you know what? We're all stupid enough - or scared enough - to believe him.

SPUTTINI

This is blasphemy.

SPELT

If it's blasphemy, then I'll go to hell. At least I'll be able to speak my mind there.

SCHWARTZ

Spelt, I'm warning you.

SPELT

This woman you're accusing has done nothing wrong except get up Sputtini's nose. What did you want from her Sputtini?

SCHWARTZ

That's enough. You're under arrest.

SPELT

(to SPUTTINI)

Did she turn you down? Or are you getting her land too like you got mine?

SPUTTINI

I took your land at market value.

SPELT

So I could pay Schwartz's trumped-up taxes.

SCHWARTZ

Arrest this man.

SPELT

You're a cheap lackey, Schwartz. And you'll never be anything else.

SCHWARTZ

Take him down. He'll will be charged later.

SPELT is dragged offstage.

SPUTTINI

Are there any other comments?

CLARA

I've nothing left.

SPUTTINI

Good. Then we shall take your verdict. It will be a decision of the whole village. So nobody can say this wasn't a fair trial.

SCHWARTZ

A show of hands for those who believe Grusha Yollis is guilty of plotting against the state.

The villagers raise their hands. After a stare from SPUTTINI, GRIMM also raises his hand, but lowers it again when SPUTTINI turns away. SCHWARTZ counts.

SCHWARTZ (Con't)

Those who say she is not guilty?

CLARA and VASHA raise their hand. GRIMM, after a stare from CLARA, does likewise.

VASHA

(Sotto voce to EDDY)

Raise your hand. Or I'll never speak to you again.

EDDY raises his hand.

SPUTTINI

Three votes against. Grimm's being invalid for having voted twice.

SCHWARTZ

Also family votes don't count.

CLARA

(to PETERS)

You're the only one who can do something. If they see you have influence outside, they might stop this.

PETERS

They already know I'm here. You can see it changes nothing.

CLARA

Tell them the whole world will learn about this farce; that we'll be branded as monsters.

PETERS

What difference would it make? People act as they will.

CLARA

You might at least try. It's Grusha's life we're talking about.

PETERS

No Clara. It not my role to change things. Only to report them.

SCHWARTZ

Grusha Yollis, you have been found guilty of treason by this people's court. Do you have anything to say?

GRUSHA

I don't know what to say. You all know me. We're neighbours. How little it takes to forget what that means. Soon, you'll look back on all this as a distant memory. And you'll think 'She was a bad one, that Grusha. A spy and a whore as well.' And the wise ones will add 'She didn't even defend herself. She knew she was guilty all along. We all did.' And whoever listens will nod their head in agreement. Then a few years will pass, and I'll be out of mind altogether. Maybe it's better like that. Because if you no longer want me, then there's no place left for me anywhere. Not in this village, nor in your hearts. And I don't want to say any thing more. Except to tell my sons that I love them.

SCHWARTZ

In accordance with our law, and the most sacred law of heaven, you will be taken from here and stoned to death. God be merciful.

VILLAGERS

God be merciful.

VASHA

(Screaming)

No.

SPUTTINI

All your property will be forfeited to the state.

MAGNON

Hey. Wait a minute. That's not her property. It's mine.

SCHWARTZ

The state has priority over all the possessions of condemned criminals.

MAGNON

But that'll ruin me.

SPUTTINI

We have more important things to concern us today. Away with her.

GRUSHA is led off. The villagers follow, including PETERS, camera in hand.

MAGNON

You're a bastard Sputtini.

SVELTYA

He's clever you must admit.

MAGNON

What did you say?

SVELTYA

Mr Sputtini. Can I ask you something?

MAGNON

Sveltya, come back here. Nothing's happened. I promise you. I'm going to be rich. Wait for me.

All leave except CLARA and GRIMM.

GRIMM

I can't face seeing what they'll do to her.

CLARA

You nearly voted for it.

GRIMM

Sputtini was trying to bully me.

CLARA

What with? You're an old man, Grimm. What could he do to you that would make any difference?

GRIMM

I'm still alive, don't forget.

CLARA

Is that what you call it?

GRIMM

In the old days, I stood up for what I thought.

Somehow, the fight's gone out of me.

Offstage: sound of stones and rocks being thrown. Grunts of effort and cries of excited men and women. A loud scream followed by more rocks, then a lone voice praying.

Onstage: CLARA and GRIMM standing apart, listen. At length PETERS reappears.

PETERS

I got the whole thing on film. All over in a flash. Incredible. The most disgusting act I've ever witnessed. Maybe it won't make headlines, but it's a dead cert for a feature piece. I have to thank you for showing me all this, introducing me to the village and so forth. I know what we witnessed is a genuine tragedy. But still, without you I'd never have stayed to see it. Thank you Clara. May I call you 'Aunt Clara'? I must get this written up while it's fresh. So I'll have to be going. If there's anything I can ever do for you. Please contact me. It a long way; but you never know. Here's my card. Mr Grimm, sir; it's been a pleasure. Even under the difficult circumstances.

CLARA

There is one thing you can do for me Mr Peters.

PETERS

Delighted.

CLARA

Go quickly. And don't ever think of coming back.

PETERS

I don't understand.

GRIMM

We're all in the dark.

CLARA

You said journalists were the voice of the people.
But I didn't hear your protest when they took
Grusha away. You can't do anything for us.

PETERS

With luck my report will create a stir.

CLARA

What good is that to Grusha, or to us? You have no
place here This is our life and our history; and you
should leave us to curl up in it. Forget all about us,
Sam. And go in peace.

PETERS

Right. I'll go then. Right away.

PETERS leaves. We hear his footsteps, then the sound of a jeep driving away. The drone of the engine empties into the distance. GRIMM and CLARA walk into CLARA's house. The hanging beads in front of the door sing behind them.

END