

The Prophet: A Play in Three Acts

Stuart Holroyd

CAST

GURDENSKY

PETER

ANTON

LUC

ABRAM

EVA

JAROSLAV COTYN

FRANK SOLOMON

CAPTAIN SCRIASSEV

MAJOR TOLKEIN

LIEUT. SMIRNOFF

LIEUT. WACLAW

TWO THUGS

RADIO ANNOUNCER

MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR

SOLDIERS, REVOLUTIONARIES, ETC.

ACT ONE

Scene One

GURDENSKY's attic in the poor quarter of the city of Minz in Eastern Europe.

Time: the late 1950s.

The attic comprises two rooms. The entire front of the stage is a sitting-room, but cutting diagonally across from the O.P. downstage corner is a wall, behind which is the kitchen. The kitchen is raised a couple of steps from the level of the sitting room. The wall may be a real one which can be made transparent by effects of lighting, or an imaginary one, indicated only by the raised rostrum. The back wall of the sitting-room should also be transparent, and behind it there should be the entrance from the stairs and a corridor leading to a corner where doors into both the kitchen and the sitting room are together. The roof slopes down on the prompt side of the stage, and there is a skylight in it.

The room is full of bric-a-brac from all over the world. On a vast divan strewn with colourful cushions, sits GURDENSKY, one leg tucked under him, and smoking a cigarette. He is not a large man, but immediately his presence is dominating. His head is bald, his eyes clear and direct, and he speaks with an indeterminate accent in a voice that is clipped

Stuart Holroyd (1933-2025) was a British playwright, critic, and writer on topics including parapsychology, sexuality, and poetry. This text of Holroyd's unpublished play is reproduced with permission of his widow Gyll Holroyd.

and vigorous and always seems to be on the border of laughter.

His followers are sitting or standing around him in various attitudes. Some are smoking, some drinking tea, others just listening. ANTON and LUC, the youngest men present, and just out of college, are standing.

The windows of the rooms are shuttered, and from outside there comes the sound of a bombardment, Heavy shells whistle and explode intermittently. But GURDENSKY is undeterred.

GURDENSKY: They are so comical these human beings. In all seriousness they come and asks “What shall we do to be free?” Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! I say: “You must first learn not to do anything.” And they look at me as if I’d said they had suddenly grown horns on their heads. [*He bends over to flick the ash from his cigarette onto the floor, then abruptly looks up and barks out.*] Stop!

All the others present immediately freeze in the positions they are in. GURDENSKY looks around at them and continues:

How can you be free before you exist?

It’s as absurd as to expect the foetus in a woman’s womb to understand logarithms. Most men don’t exist yet. They sleep their time away. Twenty persons in one skin fight a perpetual war, and that is called living. Relax!

The others resume what they were doing.

Did the glass burn your hand, Peter?

PETER: [*Examining his hand.*] It was blistering hot.

GURDENSKY: But you didn’t flinch. Excellent! [*He turns to ANTON.*] Anton, you changed the expression on your face. When I spoke the word it was registering fear.

ANTON: Well, what do you expect? Cooped up in this attic we’re asking for it. They’ve withdrawn every soldier from the city. They’ll flatten the place.

GURDENSKY: No one is forcing you to continue with the work.

ANTON: We could at least go down into the basement, Gurdensky.

GURDENSKY: [*Ignoring him*] But the really comical thing, the thing one can’t bear to think long about for fear of splitting of laughter, is that these people who do not exist make an awful lot of noise about it.

With a resounding crash, a shell scores a direct hit on a neighbouring building.

LUC: The lousy, rotten bastards! They’ll kill us, Gurdensky.

GURDENSKY: Ah, Luc has the right idea. We should swear at these troublesome fellows who don’t exist. [*He shouts out.*] Bugger the bastards! May worms multiply in their entrails! Ha! Ha! That’s very good.

ANTON: I don’t see what good it’s going to do. What a cowardly way to put down a revolution. They might at least fight it out in the streets.

GURDENSKY: Don't underestimate the power of the curse, Anton. I met a very interesting man when I travelled in the East in my youth. I had to spend one night in the railway station at Tiflis. Early in the morning this old man, Karapet, came along. His job was to pull the rope of an old steam whistle to wake up the employees of the railway company. But before he pulled the rope he turned towards the town and shouted out like a Mohammedan mullah from a minaret: "Your mother is a bastard, your father is a bastard, your sister is a harlot. May there be plague in your house and unnatural monsters born of your flesh." Then he pulled the whistle. I was very intrigued by this performance, so I asked the old man what it was all about, he explained, "For the first two years that I did this job", he said, "I used to get a strange uneasy feeling every morning before I sounded the whistle. I thought a great deal about this, and then one day I suddenly understood it. Because of the position of the station in the middle *of* the town I wake up *not* only the railway employees but everyone else as well. So every morning at the same moment five thousand people curse me violently, sending out to me waves of all kinds of malice. So I swear at them first, and since I started the practice I have not once experienced my old uneasiness." From Karapet I learnt that the curse has power. [*Shouting:*] Hell to the bastards!

ANTON: Well, no amount of swearing is going to keep one of those shells from hitting us.

GURDENSKY: Peter, don't the English have a saying: "every bullet has its bullet"?

LUC: That's a comforting thought, I must say!

GURDENSKY: It contains a great truth: there's nothing you can do. Everything happens. In Tiflis I discovered that in every family there were at least seven or eight children. When I asked Karapet the explanation of this, he said: "I am responsible." I looked at him with great awe until he explained that when he sounded his whistle it was too late for people to go back to sleep and too early for them to get up! You see, that is your normal, mechanical man. He does not choose. Accident gives his life its shape and changes it continually. With him everything happens.

A dive bomber is heard zooming low and dropping a bomb nearby.

PETER: Now they're sending bombers over.

ANTON: I tell you, they're out to flatten Minz.

ABRAM: All because a few students took it into their heads to revolt!

GURDENSKY: I warned Cotyn what would happen. He was too pig-headed to take notice.

LUC: All I want is the chance to get my hands on the throat of one of those bastards.

GURDENSKY: Are you losing interest in the work too, Luc?

LUC: What's the good of working on yourself when you might be blown to pieces any second?

GURDENSKY: Life has a way of preserving its own.

ANTON: We might at least give life a helping hand by adjourning to the cellar

GURDENSKY: All do as you judge best. Gurdensky is not moving from here.

He goes into the kitchen.

ANTON: Eva, can't you try and make him see sense?

EVA: Who am I to argue with him? You heard what he said. No one's holding you.

LUC: O, these fanatics!

PETER: What's wrong with being a fanatic? How else are you to be successful in the work?

LUC: The work! The work! I'm sick of hearing about it.

ABRAM: Why don't you go and join the revolutionaries then?

LUC: I might at that.

ANTON: It'd be burning our boats. He'd never take us back. But at a time like this... O, I don't know.

PETER: You're no good for the work in that state of mind, anyway.

ANTON: Eva, he takes more notice of you than anyone else...

EVA: I still have faith in him, even if you haven't.

LUC: Faith! [*A bomb drops nearby.*] What can faith do against those?

EVA: I don't know, but I'm willing to give it a try. I know nothing's going to be achieved with bombs and bullets, anyway. I heard the echo of bullets when they shot my husband in the prison yard. And three years later I heard the echo of the guns when they gave him a grand State funeral as a hero. Madness is added to madness when you start to live by bombs and bullets. There must be another way.

ANTON: Then you won't try and reason with him?

EVA: O, don't be feeble. Either stay or go.

GURDENSKY returns, carrying a bottle of wine and some tumblers on a tray.

GURDENSKY: Now we will drink some wine. Tokay: an aristocrat of drinks. [*As he pours the wine into the glasses:*] it's good that we rescued some bottles before those barbarian revolutionaries broke into the shops and poured everything down the drains. Just think of it: the essence of centuries of civilization flowing away through the sewers of Minz. [*He hands the glasses around.*]

LUC: Would you rather we left the stuff for them to get drunk on? [*Turning away when he is offered a glass—*] Not for me.

ANTON: Gurdensky, I understand all that about everything happening, but there is

such a thing as common prudence. I mean, shouldn't we take precautions?

GURDENSKY: The great Mullah-al-Nassan said: He who takes precautions falls backwards over the precipice.

ANTON: Talk about Cotyn being pig-headed!

GURDENSKY: This is a time for making choices.

ANTON: I believe in the revolution.

GURDENSKY: The revolution is adolescent nonsense. [*Gently:*] But don't think I'm trying to influence you!

LUC: People are dying out there, Gurdensky.

GURDENSKY: Yes, that's what happens when you start a revolution. What do you want Gurdensky to do about it?

LUC: You needn't be so bloody complacent. "Life preserving it's own." That's all shit! And you'd see it, the rest of you, if you weren't starry eyed with superstition.

ABRAM: You're a very young man, Luc, and very lost. We Jews have been a lost people for three thousand years, so I can sympathise with you. But please don't talk about things you know nothing of. Life does preserve its own and it is the very thing you call superstition that was kept my people alive through the ages they have wandered the face of the earth.

LUC: That's not what I was talking about, old boy. It's the superstition that Gurdensky has spun around his own person that gets me. How could any of you ever have fallen for it?

GURDENSKY: Why did you come to me in the first place, Luc?

LUC: I make a special study of frauds.

GURDENSKY: For that, few men would need to leave their rooms.

LUC: Go on, sneer! [*Turning to the rest-*] You fools! What has he ever done for any of you but fill your heads with a lot of spiritual mumbo-jumbo? Can't you see he's a fraud?

PETER: You're making a fool of yourself, Luc.

LUC: You can talk! Everyone knows you hang onto Gurdensky's shirt-tail because you made a fool of yourself once too often with the Communists, and are afraid to commit yourself again.

PETER: That's not true.

LUC: Failures, every one of you. Well, I for once have had enough of the stink of morbid spirituality that hangs around this place. I'm going to join Cotyn.

LUC marches out.

GURDENSKY: Luc is cut out to be a hero. A pity! I had hoped he might be useful.

ANTON: I'm going too, Gurdensky,

GURDENSKY: To be a hero?

ANTON: I don't agree with all Luc said. But I do think it's wrong to concentrate on developing oneself when others are fighting to the death for freedom.

GURDENSKY: Why are they fighting if not because men have too long put off doing what we're doing? That's an idea. But...

ANTON: You can't ignore reality when it looks you in the face.

GURDENSKY: Tell that to Cotyn.

ANTON goes.

ACT ONE

Scene Two

A big bomb falling nearby rocks the building. In the room things fall. Everyone except GURDENSKY recoils in terror.

GURDENSKY: We must hope that wasn't a direct hit on Luc. I would hate to see him disillusioned so soon.

EVA: Gurdensky, the crucifix has broken.

Around the room there are sacred objects representing all the major world religions.

GURDENSKY: Let's see it. [*EVA hands the two parts of the crucifix to him. As he examines it:*] weren't you once an idolater, Eva?

EVA: A Catholic, yes.

GURDENSKY: That's the hardest tradition to break with. You see, it's not broken. Jesus has come detached that's all. But we can easily crucify him again, because he simply hooks on, like that. [*He hands the crucifix back to her.*] It's a sham, you see. As my teacher, Mullah-al-Nassan memorably said, "no idol is worth the candle."

ABRAM: That was a close miss, Gurdensky. For the sake of the future of the work, shouldn't we shelter downstairs?

GURDENSKY: Aha! Luc's talk about superstition has got Abram worried. Perhaps we're not life's mysteriously preserved favourites, but just a lot of damn fools sitting in the air when it's raining bombs. Eh?

ABRAM: I have complete faith in your powers, Gurdensky.

GURDENSKY: So you stay by me because you reckon it's your best bet in a bombardment.

ABRAM: No, it's not that.

GURDENSKY: Well, listen: perhaps your complete faith is misplaced. It certainly is if you think I've any power over events. Do you know why I'm staying up here and not scurrying to safety? Simply because I'm profoundly indifferent to life.

PETER: Gurdensky indifferent to life. That I will not believe.

GURDENSKY: [*Refilling his wine glass and lighting a cigarette—*] What's so strange

about it? Haven't I lived long enough? I was born in the middle of a peasant's revolt, and the first smell in my nostrils was of gunpowder. Wouldn't it be a masterpiece of life's irony for me to end the same way? I, Gurdensky, whose work and study has all been directed towards the evolution of the man of the future, to die in a heap of rubble with the last thought that there might be no future! The idea seduces the aesthete in me. It would make such a perfect tragedy!

PETER: You can't really feel like that, Gurdensky. It contradicts all your teaching.

GURDENSKY: Give my attitude a different name then. Instead of "indifference to life" call it "acceptance of fate." As far as you're concerned it amounts to the same thing: neither I nor my teaching – no, not even my curses – can protect you from these bombs.

ABRAM: So all that about life preserving its own was just what Luc said it was?

PETER: Shit was the word he used.

GURDENSKY shrugs.

PETER: Are you mocking us, Gurdensky. That would be too cruel. You must know what this means to us.

GURDENSKY: I never promised you anything.

PETER: But you must have known we took your very existence for a promise.

Another bomb drops close by.

ABRAM: Is this the time to desert us?

GURDENSKY: Eva has said nothing.

EVA: I have been remembering something you said when your friend Sri Ramamahan died. You said: "I feel such a power of life in me that it is hard to believe that anyone I love could die." Indifference: no, the man who spoke those words could never be indifferent.

GURDENSKY: My Antigone! My Magdalen! You know, we talk a great deal about the evolution of man without stopping to think that maybe woman's already got there!

PETER: [*Relieved.*] So you were kidding us, Gurdensky?

GURDENSKY: They say a man betrays his true self under the influence of wine. I think fear might have the same effect. *In timor veritas*. Mullah-al-Nassan himself might have thought of that one.

The lights dim to denote the passage of time.

ACT ONE

Scene Three

EVA: The bombardment has stopped.

GURDENSKY: Eva hears silence while we all talk. That's very good! [*He opens a*

window, and amits a low whistle.] Cotyn has a lot to answer for.

The rest go over to the window.

PETER: Who's going to clear that mess up?

ABRAM: Look, you can see right across to the Victory Gate.

GURDENSKY: Now they will send in the tanks. Soon the rebellion that never became a revolution will be a page of pitiful history,

JAROSLAV COTYN bursts into the room, followed by a seedy and insignificant looking man. He is sixty-two years old, of immense bulk, heavily bearded, with a shock of unruly hair. He exudes energy and enthusiasm, so that his presence transforms any company he is in.

COTYN: Gurdensky, you old miracle-worker! How do you do it? This must be the only house in the quarter that's not suffered so much as a scratch.

GURDENSKY: Gurdensky's famous luck. But what are you doing here, Cotyn? Should you not still be leading the gallant revolutionaries?

COTYN: The revolution is going underground. Here, I want you to meet a very important friend of mine, Frank Solomon.

GURDENSKY and the newcomer acknowledge one another.

GURDENSKY: You've chosen a strange time to come introducing friends. What's behind it?

COTYN: Frank is a journalist, working for an American paper; the... what do you call it, Frank?

FRANK: The *Noo York Daily Noos*.

COTYN: That's it: the *Noo York Daily Noos*. He was stranded in Minz when the revolution broke out, so now he's going to write up our story and tell it to the world. Isn't that right, Frank?

FRANK: Dead right. Boy, this'll be the scoop of all time.

PETER: If you get a chance to tell it.

FRANK: Don't you worry. A good journalist would get a story out of Hell itself.

EVA: It's a wonder none of them have, then. There must be a lot of them down there!

FRANK: [*Looking appreciatively at EVA*] Well now! [*To COTYN*:] Has it got brains as well?

COTYN: [*Laughing*.] No, we mustn't think that way about Eva. Aha! Here come the deserters.

ANTON and LUC enter, LUC is leaning heavily on Anton, and they are both breathless from climbing the stairs.

We found them outside in the street. They told me they'd just walked out on you, Gurdensky, in favour of the revolution, and they were scared to come back. I told them they were fools on both counts, and so here they are, back again, and only the worse by one sprained ankle.

LUC: That damn bomb blasted me down the stairs. Don't you laugh, Gurdensky, I wouldn't be back here but for this.

GURDENSKEY: I'm not laughing. It's no joke that I have a gang of revolutionaries here at this time. What do you want, Cotyn?

LUC sits down and EVA attends to his ankle.

COTYN: Yes, to business, as I told you, Gurdensky, the revolution is going underground. They will, overrun us and they will think they have beaten us. But not for long! The revolution will be like the germ of the plague. No one will see it, but it will get into the blood-stream of our country. It will strike back at the enemy hard, and continually, and unexpectedly, always bringing death to them and destruction to their works, until at last the banner of freedom is raised in Minz.

GURDENSKEY: Who are you trying to convert? I asked you what it is you want of me, Cotyn.

COTYN: Asylum.

GURDENSKEY: Asylum? You have a nerve! I told you before you started it that your revolution was madness. You wouldn't listen. Now Minz is a smoking ruin, hundreds of innocent people have been killed, and you come here asking for asylum.

COTYN: [*With disarming seriousness:*] You know me well enough, Gurdensky. You know me for a true revolutionary, who would not stop at sacrificing his own life for the cause. But the revolution is not defeated, and while it lives I must live to lead it. I no longer ask you to join us. I only ask you to give us shelter until the crisis has passed.

GURDENSKEY: And risk the life of everyone here?

COTYN: Will you not all benefit when the revolution triumphs? O no! To think of your own life at a time like this is unworthy of you, Gurdensky.

GURDENSKEY: It's you who should be thinking of it. And of the thousands of other lives that are going to be wasted if you continue with this madness.

COTYN: Do you refuse me asylum?

GURDENSKEY: I am neutral in this war.

COTYN: That's all I ask of you. Be neutral. It's because I know you'll be able to persuade them of your neutrality that I'm willing to trust my life to your hands. I wouldn't take the risk if I didn't believe it was at least ninety percent safe.

GURDENSKEY: I don't trust you, Cotyn. I remember the happy idea you had not long ago that Gurdensky might best serve the revolution as its martyr.

COTYN: [*Laughing:*] O, that was never serious. You didn't take it for serious, did you? No, Gurdensky has a sense of humour. But why shouldn't you trust me now? You will be the one who has the power.

GURDENSKY: Why here? You must have hundreds of revolutionary friends.

COTYN: I am so easily recognised. For others, going underground just means returning to their work and living in their families. But I have no work except the Revolution, no family except my comrades in arms. They are fools, these soldiers. When they hear we have gone underground they will search the sewers! They will not think to look on the rooftops. But that is where we will be, Frank and I. We will be safe up there in your observatory. You cannot refuse such a small thing at such a crucial time in history.

GURDENSKY: Why should I grant it? Out of loyalty to the revolution? I don't believe in the revolution and I would like to see it ended. Out of fellow-feeling for you, who have no fellow-feeling for anyone, but are moved only by a dream of revolution, glory and freedom that has already cost untold numbers of lives? Rather ask me to have fellow feeling for a hyena!

COTYN: [*Turning suddenly on PETER*—] Peter, Pinto, would you celebrate with us if the revolution was successful?

PETER: Indeed, I wish is every success, but...

COTYN: Would you be better off for it?

PETER: Well, yes, no doubt.

COTYN: What about you, Abram Grunwald. Would you accept the revolution's benefits?

ABRAM: Yes.

COTYN: Eva?

EVA: No one could answer otherwise than yes, Cotyn, but...

COTYN: [*Turning back to GURDENSKY*—] That's all I wanted to hear. Do you hear, Gurdensky? From the mouths of the faithful: no one will renounce the freedom that the revolution will bring them. Yet I am not asking any of you to fight with us...

There is the sound of shooting in the street, ANTON looks out of the window.

ANTON: The tanks! Now it's too late.

GURDENSKY: Are they coming here? [*To COTYN, who has gone to look out the window*:] Keep that beard of yours out of sight, Cotyn, you fool.

ANTON: They're swinging the gun round. It's pointing right at the house now.

FRANK: [*Rushing to the window and gesticulating wildly*—] They can't shoot! They mustn't!

COTYN: [*Holding him*—] They will if they see you. Keep back.

ABRAM: Get down on the floor against the walls. It's safest. [*He follows his own advice but the rest just stand tense and waiting.*]

ANTON: An officer has got out of the tank and is coming here with two soldiers.

GURDENSKY: Peter, the ladder! Go up to the observatory quickly. Marcel, Anton, you

go too. Don't make a move up there, any of you. Wait until we call.

The ladder has been put up against the skylight.

Anton go first, you know how the doors open.

ANTON mounts the ladder, opens the skylight and disappears onto the roof.

COTYN: You won't fail us, Gurdensky. I have complete faith in you.

GURDENSKY: Get out of sight, you cunning bastard!

Laughing, COTYN follows FRANK up the ladder.

Quickly, Luc, or the revolution will suddenly be all over.

LUC manages to haul himself up the ladder and disappears onto the roof. The skylight is closed and GURDENSKY removes the ladder.

Now Gurdensky will play at being Gurdensky, the sage of Mina.

He squats cross-legged on the divan.

Burn some incense, Eva, it will add local colour. [*He begins to intone:*]

Mitraya Namah,

Ravaye Namah,

Bhanave Namah,

Adityaya Namah...

ACT ONE

Scene Four

Suddenly the door bursts open and two soldiers rush in, sten guns at the ready, followed by an officer. GURDENSKY is unperturbed, and continues:

GURDENSKY: Marichaye Namah,

Baskaraya Nama.

Om... mmmmmmm

OFFICER: You've got visitors, holy man.

GURDENSKY: You have interrupted our prayers.

At the back of the room, EVA lights the incense and turns around with it in her hand. The soldiers suddenly wheel round at the sound, and when they see her with the stick of incense in her hand they drop their guns, back away to the wall and raise their arms, muttering in terror.

OFFICER: Fools! Haven't you seen incense before? [*To PETER:*] How can you fight a war when they give you a batch of superstitious peasants? [*To the SOLDIERS:*] Would you expect a beautiful woman like this to throw dynamite about? Pick up your guns. We're supposed to be putting down a desperate revolution. [*To GURDENSKY:*] I'm sorry.

GURDENSKY: Do you expect me to accept an apology from you when you have just put our lives in dire danger with your bombs?

OFFICER: What? Were you up here throughout the bombardment?

GURDENSKY: Our faith preserved us.

OFFICER: Miraculous! You must be either fools or saints.
GURDENSKY: We are both those things.
OFFICER: *[Pacing around and making a show of searching the room.]* Is there anyone else in the building?
GURDENSKY: No. You will not find any revolutionaries. They have all gone underground.
OFFICER: *[Suddenly stopping in front of PETER.]* Are you not fighting in the revolution? You look an able and spirited man.
PETER: Yes, I am a man of the spirit. I don't believe in fighting, or in the revolution.
OFFICER: *[To ABRAM:]* Are there any arms here?
ABRAM: We have no enemies. What would we do with arms?
OFFICER: You're too good to be true! All right, listen from now on Minz is under martial law. Your lawful government has asked our army to help put down a revolution, and until the revolution is suppressed and your government returns, there will be an eight o'clock curfew in the city, and any citizen will be liable to be searched and questioned at any time. Provided you are not revolutionaries, you have nothing to fear – except perhaps the woman, she is rather beautiful.
GURDENSKY: She will be safe in my care.
OFFICER: Good. My name is Captain Scriashev. You should mention me if anyone else troubles you. *[He salutes, and bows to EVA.]* I will return.
He is about to give an order when one of the soldiers draws his attention to LUC's discarded boot, which was forgotten in the emergency.
SOLDIER: Captain, this boot.
SCRIASSEV: What about it?
SOLDIER: It belongs to none of these, sir.
He points to the feet of all present. Captain SCRIASSEV follows his finger on its round.
SCRIASSEV: So what?
SOLDIER: So it belongs to someone else, sir.
SCRIASSEV: Are you looking for promotion? Come along, we've a revolution to suppress.
SOLDIER: *[Thrusting the boot under SCRIASSEV's nose.]* Smell the boot, Captain.
SCRIASSEV: I won't smell it. Take it away.
SOLDIER: It's been worn recently. Someone is hiding, sir.
SCRIASSEV: We've searched the place haven't we?
SOLDIER: Everywhere except the roof, sir
Everyone looks up to the skylight.
SCRIASSEV: Is there anything on the roof?
GURDENSKY: A small observatory from which we study the stars. But no one is hiding

there. You are quite free to waste your time looking, though.

SCRIASSEV: Yes, we are wasting our time. Come.

SOLDIER: [*Stubbornly:*] It is still suspicious sir. Why only one boot?

SCRIASSEV: Yes, where is the other boot?

GURDENSKY: Sad to say, there is no other boot.

SCRIASSEV: But boots come in pairs.

GURDENSKY: This boot belongs to one of our community who only has one leg. His other was shot off in the last war.

SOLDIER: Where is he?

SCRIASSEV: Don't speak out of turn, man! [*To GURDENSKY:*] Yes, where is this one-legged comrade?

GURDENSKY: He lives on the other side of town.

SCRIASSEV: And his boot is here?

GURDENSKY: He has another boot – for the same leg.

SCRIASSEV nods appreciatively, but the mystery of the boot has awakened the detective in him.

SCRIASSEV: But what is his boot doing here when he is on the other side of town?

GURDENSKY: He came with two boots.

SCRIASSEV: But you say he only has one leg.

GURDENSKY: Among other things, we're a community of craftsmen here. One of our friends is a boot repairer, and our one-legged friend brought his boot to be repaired. Have you any more questions? Would you have us all tell you our life stories? Surely your war can wait an hour or two while we probe the mystery of the boot a little deeper.

SCRIASSEV: Yes, I see no reason why not. [*To the soldiers:*] Tell Lieutenant Salk to take command and continue. Then both of you stand guard outside this building and wait for me. I wish to continue this investigation alone.

The soldiers salute and march out. When they have gone. SCRIASSEV turns and contemplates the group for a moment, then laughs.

You were putting on an act for my benefit, weren't you, Gurdensky?

GURDENSKY: [*His usual composure suddenly gone—*] What? How do you know my name?

SCRIASSEV: You answer my question first. Weren't you putting on an act?

GURDENSKY: Certainly not. I have no information about the revolutionaries.

SCRIASSEV: No, I mean all that mumbo-jumbo when we first came in: it was not what I had learned to expect of Gurdensky.

GURDENSKY: O that? Yes, maybe I was acting a little then.

SCRIASSEV: Naturally! How were you to know that Captain Scriashev would come? You thought you had to impress some damnfool officer that you are just harmless cranks.

He laughs.

GURDENSKY: I like to share a joke.

SCRASSEV: Forgive me, I must explain who I am. You will remember your follower of some years ago, Sigrid Svetlos. She is a very old and dear friend of mine, and has often talked to me about you and your teachings. In fact I almost feel like an old disciple myself. [*He laughs.*] I'm sorry I had to bully you a little, but I must be very careful with the men. [*He waves a warning finger—*] Fraternisation! Very serious! So now I am at your service. When I heard we were to come to Minz to squash the revolution, I said: this is the gods' plan for me to meet Gurdensky, and perhaps serve him. I promised Sigrid to look after you. She is well and sends you her warm regards.

GURDENSKY: You are welcome here.

ABRAM: Welcome! I should think so! This is nothing less than another of your miracles, Gurdensky.

SCRASSEV: Yes, Captain Scriassev is one of Gurdensky's miracles. I like that idea.

GURDENSKY: Better than being one of his disciples, anyway.

SCRASSEV: I don't understand.

GURDENSKY: When a man calls himself my disciple I make him eat red chillis until he is cured.

SCRASSEV: Ah, I see, we are democratic here? Well, that's good. That suits my purpose perfectly.

GURDENSKY: What purpose?

SCRASSEV: [*Becoming very businesslike—*] I will tell you. In the army there are other officers like me. We are not all iron-heeled tyrants, as the people of Minz must think. Nor are we all satisfied with the regime we work under, [*in a conspiratorial tone:*] some of us even have radical and revolutionary opinions!

PETER: You mean that secretly you're on the side of the revolution?

SCRASSEV: This revolution is childish, neurotic and ill-planned. We have no hesitation in fighting it. No, the revolution we believe in is the one that Gurdensky teaches. We believe that man must change before his society and its institutions can change. Is that not true, Gurdensky?

GURDENSKY: It is what I have always said.

SCRASSEV: These are very important ideas. They are the real revolutionary ideas. We must discuss them in great detail. What I want to suggest is that you allow me to bring here three or four of the officers I told you of so that we can hold discussions with you like those you had in Sigrid's days.

GURDENSKY: Gurdensky's door is always open to those who seek the truth.

SCRASSEV: Then we shall come as often as we can. No doubt it will take some weeks

to establish order and bring the government back. Let us hope that they will be revolutionary weeks in a sense that nobody suspects. We will lay the foundations of the true revolution!

GURDENSKY: We do not assemble here under a banner of revolution or any other idea. We do not aim to achieve anything. You and your friends will only be welcome if you expect nothing, and if you bring food.

SCRIASSEV: I understand. You are wise not to get involved in politics. Gurdensky will be the catalyst of the revolution. That is right.

GURDENSKY: Food and drinks don't forget. The conquering army will be well supplied. I will need your help in feeding my flock.

SCRIASSEV: That too is right. You have an exquisite sense of justice, Gurdensky. I will have supplies sent here. We will try and make our first discussion tomorrow night. Say eight o'clock?

GURDENSKY: We will expect you.

SCRIASSEV: I must get back to my men. Goodbye, until tomorrow at eight. [*To EVA:*] Don't go out. Most of this army has been in barracks in the desert for eight months! If your hair were not so beautiful I would advise you to shave it off for safety. But that would be a crime! Only take care. You can depend on Captain Scriashev. Goodbye everyone.

SCRIASSEV leaves.

ACT ONE

Scene Five

EVA: That one would swear eternal friendship as he cut your throat!

ABRAM: He's heaven-sent. Believe me, Gurdensky, I'll never doubt your luck again.

PETER goes up the ladder to give the rest the all-clear.

GURDENSKY: Miracle, the patent cheap cement of faith! Well, I'm not so happy at our miraculous Captain Scriashev. His ideas are too big.

COTYN: [*Coming down the ladder—*] Gurdensky! Wonder man! The revolution will put up a statue to you. Not for a moment did I doubt that you'd get rid of them.

PETER: Not only that. They're going to supply us with food.

COTYN: No! [*The entirety of his gigantic frame rocks with laughter.*] O, you absolute genius! What it is to have an angel on your side who has the Devil's cunning! How did you do it. Tell us the whole story. [*To FRANK:*] Frank, you must write it down. Every great epic needs its seasoning of comedy. Come, I'm so ready to laugh I can hardly hold it in!

In fact, he fails to hold it in, and gurgles about the stage like a schoolboy with a bun in his mouth.

GURDENSKY: I'm afraid it's not very funny. The officer was so anxious to bring his friends to our meetings that I made it a condition that they should supply us with food and drink.

COTYN greets the news with torrential laughter, but when the significance of GURDENSKY's words reaches him he suddenly becomes serious and paces thoughtfully about the room.

COTYN: [Suddenly brightening.] Could it be more perfect? Could the kindest Providence have planned it better? [Loftily:] This proves that the revolution has the sanction of the highest authority!

GURDENSKY: Cotyn, your imagination runs away with you.

COTYN: But it is irresistible. Fate. Necessity. Gurdensky, you understand all that. And also it is so deliciously funny. You must enjoy the fun of it at least, Gurdensky, with your famous sense of humour. Just imagine: while I direct the revolution from your observatory, the enemy will be down here holding spiritual conversations! And they will even bring me food! O, it is too beautiful, too funny for words! The perfect facade. It is irresistible!

GURDENSKY: But if Gurdensky resists?

COTYN: But Gurdensky can't. [He laughs infectionally.] You must see it. This way you will remain quite neutral – yes, that is essential – but at the same time you will serve the revolution.

GURDENSKY: Which revolution?

COTYN: I don't understand.

GURDENSKY: No, of course. Well, your idea has one merit. That way I might be able to stop your more extravagant follies.

COTYN: [Who is willing to concede anything to gain his end.] Yes, you see! *He fills a glass with wine.*

GURDENSKY: As you say, it is irresistible!

They laugh together and drink a toast as the curtain falls.

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Scene One

Late afternoon the following day.

The kitchen is lit up, and in it COTYN is speaking to FRANK. FRANK sits at the table, with pencil and notepad. COTYN, restless as ever, moves around the room as he speaks.

COTYN: Now, my dear Frank, we come to the real meat. You must do a chapter with the title: 'Cotyn's Theory of Revolution'. If I am killed, the work must continue. We begin: "Revolution is to the body politic what a physical regimen is to the body of a man; it is the means whereby it overcomes the limitations of its nature and ascends..."

FRANK: What a minute! What a minute!

COTYN: Do I go too fast?

FRANK: The hell you do! I'm about two laps behind you. Just let me do the talking a minute, will you?

COTYN: There's a lot to get through, and precious little time, but if you must...

FRANK: It just seems to me we're skimping important subjects. You want to put these revolutionary theories over to the world at large: right? Well, I can tell you, you won't do it by feeding them theories. People want a story. So let's stick to history a bit longer. Let's get the facts.

COTYN: What more facts do you need?

FRANK: Facts about you, Cotyn. [*Flicking through the pages of his notepad.*] We're building up a very thrilling story here. But it needs the human interest. Now you've given me plenty of stuff about your fellow revolutionaries, but the real hero of the story still moves through it like a shadow. I need more background material on you now.

COTYN: [*Who has taken out his teeth to inspect something that was troubling him.*] I wear false teeth: is that what you call human interest?

FRANK: Yes, the great American public will love you for that. A hero with false teeth! That's fine copy.

COTYN: [*Confidentially:*] Also I drink and like girls, but perhaps you shouldn't tell them that!

FRANK: No, what we have to get now is some idea of how you've spent your life.

COTYN: I have spent it in the service of the Revolution.

FRANK: Good, I will write that down. And now how old are you?

COTYN: Sixty-two. Since I was eighteen I have devoted myself to the cause of the Revolution.

FRANK: Tell me more about that. What exactly did you do? What were your methods?

COTYN: Whenever there has been the smell of revolution on the wind, I have followed, it to its source. When I was young, I simply went and fought

with people anywhere who rose up against the regime. Then I became famous for it, and revolutionary groups began to call on me to help organize their uprisings. But the work of the last years has been the most important of all.

FRANK: What has that been?

COTYN: [*Testily:*] See how you confuse things! You need to know my theory of revolution before you can understand this work.

FRANK: It's my job to put the pieces together afterwards. We'll come to your theory soon. But for now just brief me on this work you've been doing.

COTYN: I have been forming the Revolutionary Committees. There are now in existence seventy Revolutionary Committees in major towns throughout the countries controlled by puppet governments. Each has a trained armed force of men to support its authority and carry out its orders when the time comes.

FRANK: And when will that be?

COTYN: We will know it when it comes. I had thought that this revolution in Minz might be the spark, but we have yet to see. Perhaps the straw is not dry enough yet, but when it is there will be a blaze to dazzle the world.

ACT 2

Scene Two

The lights dim in the kitchen and come up in the sitting room, where GURDENSKY is squatting on his divan, talking to PETER, ABRAM and EVA. LUC sits dejectedly apart.

GURDENSKY: All this effort, this doing, this trying to achieve things: it is all so very childish. The drop of water in the water-fall said: "O, what power I have! And how beautiful I am when I rise in spray over the rocks!" But five minutes later it became part of the still water in the lock. That is your average man. That is our friend Cotyn. He is the drop of spray that for a moment when the sun catches it takes pride in itself. But five minutes later? Ah, we mustn't think of that! To give you another picture: Cotyn is like the solitary wave on the sea of history that in its egoism believes it can turn the tide. All he will do is make a big splash before he disappears. We have no alternative but to watch the comedy. We must only be careful we are not swamped.

ABRAM: That you can still call it a comedy: that's what beats me.

GURDENSKY: It is always a comedy when men fool themselves with their piety or their passion. Nothing is funnier than men's infinite resource in the art of self-deception.

PETER: Gurdensky is getting at us again.

GURDENSKY: You're not a self-deceiver, Peter. Maybe when you were in the Party, but

now you're both saved and damned by your honesty with yourself. The self-deceivers are the religionists with their mummery and superstition, and the idealists with their seeking for causes and ends. We must watch the comedy they play and learn from it that man does not want truth, he wants action.

ACT TWO

Scene Three

ANTON enters, highly agitated. LUC rises on seeing him.

ANTON: It's all over. We're finished. There's hardly anyone left to fight the revolution. Where's Cotyn?

GURDENSKY: What's happened?

ANTON: Some bastard must have talked. They even called at my lodgings, but luckily I wasn't there. It's only a matter of time, though. We're well and truly trapped.

LUC: If I could lay my hands on the lousy traitor, I'd...

COTYN comes in from the kitchen

COTYN: What's the excitement?

ANTON: Jarowitz, Archard, Cantay, Lipsom, Kossov, Milcher, and a dozen others all arrested. They went for them all at the same time. No time for warnings. It was highly organized.

COTYN: Someone must have spoken under torture. Poor fellow! I know how devilish they can be. But now there will be more tortures, and perhaps others will speak. We must do something quickly.

ANTON: What can we do? Half a dozen against half the world.

LUC: And me with a bad foot!

COTYN: We are not half a dozen, Anton, we are millions. Millions are awaiting the call to revolution. Is a local setback going to turn history off its course? No! But it could seriously delay the Revolution. That is what we must think about. If we are completely defeated here in Minz, revolutionaries everywhere will lose heart. But if in spite of everything we are successful...! Maybe this is a sign.

GURDENSKY: [*Laughs.*] You're an incredible optimist, Cotyn. You're told all your leaders have been arrested, and you say it's a sign!

COTYN: Has anything been achieved in this world except by optimists?

GURDENSKY: Look at things as they are and ask yourself: has anything been achieved?

COTYN: One cannot speak to you, Gurdensky. You are a cynic.

GURDENSKY: Which is a dirty word for realist! Face the facts, Cotyn. The revolution is being hounded to earth in Minz. If you can get out and live to fight another day, you'll be lucky. But, on any sensible view, that's what you

ought to do.

COTYN: You could give me no better reason for not doing it. Every success the cause has ever had has come from not taking the sensible view. You do not understand the psychology of these things, Gurdensky, but there comes a point in every battle when a counter-attack, precisely because it seems most improbable, stands the best chance of success. If you can still rally your forces and take the offensive when the enemy is expecting you to retreat in disorder, there's a good chance of snatching the victory from him.

GURDENSKEY: At least you'll die with honour. Isn't that a consideration?

COTYN: If one dies for the Revolution, one dies with honour anyway.

GURDENSKEY: I suspect you've conceived a vocation for martyrdom in your old age. While the 'Revolution' is still to be achieved, is there not more honour in living for it than in dying for it?

COTYN: There are certain conditions under which life is not acceptable.

GURDENSKEY: Romantic rubbish! A man responsible for so much suffering cannot afford the luxury of self-respect. Be realistic! You can't expiate all those lives by sacrificing your own, but only by continuing the work you have begun.

COTYN: I thought you didn't believe in the revolution, Gurdensky.

GURDENSKEY: I don't believe in it being used as an instrument of anyone's private salvation.

COTYN: Are you saying, I do that?

GURDENSKEY: Yes, when you think idealistically instead of strategically.

COTYN: What do you know about strategy? It has been my life's work. I tell you, now is the moment to counter attack: when they are least expecting it.

GURDENSKEY: Who do you expect to follow you in such madness?

COTYN: The students will. And many of the workers wanted to go on fighting when we went underground. The Revolutionary Committee will issue a proclamation...

ABRAM: The Revolutionary Committee is behind bars.

COTYN: [*Undeterred:*] I will issue a proclamation on behalf of the Revolutionary Committee calling for a spontaneous uprising of the people of Minz against the oppressor.

PETER: The oppressor has tanks, guns, and bombers.

COTYN: At the same time I will send a message to all the other Revolutionary Committees. They will learn of the heroism of the people of Minz and it will be the sign for the banner of revolution to be raised throughout half the world. All the guns and bombers they have will not be equal to the power of the people's revolutionary will.

GURDENSKY: Come down to Earth, Cotyn, this great Revolution is only your own fantasy, and you have no right to ask people to die for it.

COTYN: Every step forward that mankind has taken has started as somebody's fantasy.

GURDENSKY: Think of the fantasies that have failed, but still been paid for in blood. You'll get the students to revolt all right. They're hot-headed and frustrated enough. But if the millions turn a deaf ear to the story of the heroes of Minz, will you answer for their lives?

COTYN: I'll answer for any lives that are sacrificed to the Revolution, You can ask me no questions, Gurdensky, that I haven't already asked myself.

GURDENSKY: One perhaps.

COTYN: Ask it.

GURDENSKY: Would there be any life for you if you didn't have your dreams of revolution? If you had no revolutionary followers, and around you saw only people happy in their fetters: could you still live?

COTYN: You create for me a world in which I would be powerless to help any of my fellow creatures, and I answer you that in such a world I could not live, because I am not a man who can live for himself alone. But that world is a fantasy, and as long as the real world is as it is and men are...

GURDENSKY: It is not a fantasy, Cotyn. It is the world in which you and I both live.

COTYN: I can only answer your cynicism with action. We are wasting breath, and that is a crime when there is so much to be done.

GURDENSKY: Then act, Cotyn. Go and proclaim your revolution and sentence to death thousands of hot-headed youths. Don't stop to think about it. Don't deliberate over their destinies with mere words.

COTYN: I have already done my thinking. And I have thought of something that does not seem to have occurred to you, Gurdensky. I have thought what the world would be like if there were to be no revolution. Can you think of the society of an ant hill and then add to it cruelty and terror? I reject such a world completely, and I have dedicated myself to the Revolution because it is the only way I can actively reject it.

LUC: There's your answer, Gurdensky.

GURDENSKY: Yes, a good answer. Only I might have said the very same myself. The question is which of us most completely rejects this world: you who continue to fight against it and try to destroy it, or I who retire from it and fight to build in myself and in others a world that denies it?

COTYN: You are right, Gurdensky. It is you who most completely rejects this world. You reject it entirely and retreat to your pinnacle of spirituality. But think over this: the revolution that finally counts will be for the sake of man, and it will not be won by those who reject men and stand aloof

from them, but by those who love them and serve them and are willing to sacrifice themselves for them.

GURDENSKY: Your eloquence will no doubt persuade many to die for your harebrained cause.

COTYN: We'll see who is right.

There is a heavy knocking at the door.

GURDENSKY: Quickly: to the observatory!

Before they have time to put up the ladder, two SOLDIERS enter.

ACT TWO

Scene Four

SOLDIER: Anyone by the name of Gurdensky here?

GURDENSKY: I am Gurdensky. What do you want?

SOLDIER: I've a load of stuff outside for you, sir. By Captain Scriashev's orders, sir.

GURDENSKY: Of course, for tonight. Please bring it in. Some of my friends here will help you.

SOLDIER: No need, sir. [*Shouting to someone outside:*] Right! Bring the stuff in here.

As a couple of soldiers bring in boxes of food and wine, COTYN tries to make himself as inconspicuous as possible, and GURDENSKY engages the N.C.O. in conversation.

GURDENSKY: This revolution must be well under control if your officers can spare the time to come here.

SOLDIER: Never stood a chance, sir. Pity we had to chuck all that stuff into Minz. And who's gained by it, I ask you? If it was my home town, I know what I'd think of them revolutionaries.

GURDENSKY: Is there anything in the rumour that they've all been arrested?

SOLDIER: All but the leader and a few others, so I'm told. But they expect to catch up with them by tomorrow.

GURDENSKY: I almost wish they would hold out longer so that ^[L]~~SEP~~ we might see more of your charming Captain Scriashev.

SOLDIER: Yes, he's a good type, the Captain, when he's sober. Well that's the lot, sir. Thank you.

GURDENSKY: [*With elaborate courtesy:*] Thank you, gentlemen.

The soldiers go. Everyone bursts out laughing and GURDENSKY behind to inspect the boxes.

Such fools! See what you're up against, Cotyn?

COTYN: Why don't you join us, Gurdensky? Join your brains with ours. It will be great work, freeing the world of the tyranny of such fools.

GURDENSKY: I would, if I could spare the time. But I have important work to do. [*He*

opens a box—] Aha! caviar! And a whole chicken. Cotyn, I must say this revolution of yours has its good points.

But COTYN and Anton have gone up the ladder. LUC is heaving himself up after them.

LUC: Go on, laugh! I'm just waiting to see which if you has the last laugh!

ACT TWO

Scene Five

The same evening.

GURDENSKY is squatting on the divan, winding up an old gramophone on which he is playing oriental music. COTYN, FRANK, and ANTON are in the kitchen, making final preparations to go out, LUC, looking depressed, supports himself on the kitchen table.

GURDENSKY: [*Calling without looking round.*] It's a quarter before eight, Cotyn. If the officers come early and find you here, history is going to suffer a setback.

COTYN: [*Coming into the room—*] We are ready to go now.

LUC: Cotyn, you're going to need every man who can fire a gun.

COTYN: And every man who fires a gun is going to need two legs to carry him. No, Luc, it would be suicide. You will fight another day.

GURDENSKY: O, spoil sport, Cotyn! Why not let him fight? You're already condemning hundreds to a useless death. It's illogical to draw the line at Luc.

COTYN: Those who fight for the revolution must all have an equal chance.

GURDENSKY: Of course, you're one of these comical killers with a code of honour! [*Rising and extending his hand to COTYN—*] The world will be a duller place without you, Cotyn.

COTYN: Gurdensky, if this gamble fails and I do not come back, I would like to think that you will ponder over what it means to sacrifice one's life so that men might be free.

GURDENSKY: I will promise you this: that you can comfort yourself with the thought that I will be here to continue the work that you intended.

COTYN: First you would have to learn to love men as they are. [*He returns to the kitchen, followed by LUC. GURDENSKY returns to his oriental music.*] Ready Anton? You are right not to fight, Frank. The pen is mightier than the sword! Only keep close to us and keep your eyes and ears open. Goodbye everyone. Pray for us, or whatever you do in this madhouse! We will go down the fire escape and through the yard for safety.

PETER: Have you thought again of the lives of those students, Cotyn?

COTYN: [*Patting him on the shoulder—*] Don't be angry with me, Peter. Yourself give a little thought to the alternative.

COTYN, ANTON and FRANK go out of the kitchen window and onto the fire escape. As they go the others wish them well.

LUC: Lousy hypocrites! If my leg was good I would fight to the death beside

that man.

ABRAM: Yes, Cotyn is a hero. But this is no time for heroes.

PETER: He's just a Party fanatic turned inside out. How can he be so blind?

GURDENSKY: [*As they go into the sitting room—*] Well, Luc, maybe in spite of yourself you'll live to be an old man.

LUC: I'd rather die than live shamefully in a country of slaves.

GURDENSKY: What romantic nonsense: to die as a gesture of revolt! What will it take to make people like you and Cotyn realise that at today's price gestures are a luxury?

There is a knocking at the door.

Not a moment too soon! Eva, let in our guests. Now, Luc, don't get any ideas of serving the revolution! When they come in here, they are not officers, but individuals. So behave like a true man of the spirit, and don't pull a gun!

He rises to greet the officers.

ACT TWO

Scene Six

EVA ushers four officers into the room.

SCRIASSEV: We are a little early. I hope we don't interrupt anything.

GURDENSKY: We were waiting for you. May we take your coats, gentlemen? You are very welcome to Gurdensky's modest apartments.

SCRIASSEV: Let me introduce: Major Tolkien, Lieutenant Waclaw, Lieutenant Smirnoff.

Each in turn stiffly bows to GURDENSKY.

GURDENSKY: You don't know how glad I am to see you, gentlemen. I take it as a sign that this rebellion is well under control.

SMIRNOFF: It's been a feeble effort from the start. These people have no spirit.

SCRIASSEV: But they are a sign, Smirnoff. Let's not condemn them out of hand. Their restlessness shows that there are deep currents of revolt moving beneath the surface. We are a part of the same movement. Only we understand better than they do what sort of a world it is we are living in.

GURDENSKY: Ah yes, the true revolution! That is something we must talk about, gentlemen. But first we must drink and have some food. Please sit down. That was an excellent feast you sent us, Captain Scriashev. More than we will be able to dispose of tonight. But in these difficult times we have many mouths to feed here, and you may be sure it won't be wasted.

EVA brings in wine and glasses on a tray.

This is Eva.

TOLKIEN: The girl with the beautiful hair that we have heard so much about.

EVA: Have you indeed?

GURDENSKY: [*Waving his finger at Tolkien*—] Ah, indiscreet, Major Tolkien! Captain Scriashev told you in strict confidence of his ambitions with Eva.

SCRISSEV: Who said anything about ambitions?

GURDENSKY: Men always have ambitions with Eva. But I act as her guardian. Shall we have some food now? Eva, be so kind.

EVA: It's all ready.

EVA returns to the kitchen.

GURDENSKY: This is Peter, and this Abram: both faithful workers for the revolution.

WACLAW: For our revolution, I hope.

GURDENSKY: There is only one true revolution, Lieutenant Waclaw. Now Luc here is a true revolutionary. Eh Luc? Christ had his 'Beloved Disciple', I have Luc!

LUC turns away and goes into the kitchen.

Please make yourselves comfortable, gentlemen. Take off your belts, unbutton your uniforms, you are here to enjoy a civilized evening [*pouring into the glasses*.] Let me give you some of this excellent wine that Captain Scriashev so kindly provided.

LUC: [*In the kitchen, to EVA*.] Now Gurdensky is in his element: eating, drinking and playing the fool. And out there tonight history is being made.

EVA: If you ask me, we could do with less history and more talk.

LUC: [*Going through the pockets of the officers' coats*—] Talk! Hot air! That's all there ever is in this place. One day a cold wind of reality will blow right through it and freeze that silly grin on Gurdensky's face.

EVA: What are you doing? Remember what Gurdensky said: they're our guests.

LUC: There's a revolution on, my dear girl.

EVA: A revolution! What sort of a world do you think you'd make if you did win? A gang of idealists and pickpockets!

She takes a tray of food into the sitting room. While she is away, LUC finds a document that interests him. She returns.

LUC: Perhaps I can do my little bit for the revolution after all.

EVA: What have you found?

LUC: Never you mind. There are guns in the observatory. I'll go up the fire escape.

He makes for the window.

EVA: You're mad. You can't do anything with that foot. You'll never get away.

LUC: I'm not going to spend the night of the revolution listening to Gurdensky's spiritual stupidities.

EVA: [*Standing between him and the window*—] I can't allow you to go.

LUC: You can't stop me. If you try I'll kick up a fuss and then the cat will be out of the bag.

LUC pushes past her.

EVA: But they'll notice you're missing.

LUC: Gurdensky will explain. He's never at a loss for a plausible lie.

He goes out of the window onto the fire escape. The stage darkens to denote the passage of time.

ACT TWO

Scene Seven

Later. The remains of a feast litter the room. Gurdensky, squatting on the divan, is still eating and drinking. The four officers, obviously drunk, are engaged in animated argument.

WACLAW: No, you are wrong, Smirnoff. Wrong! wrong! wrong! wrong! wrong!

SMIRNOFF: I know I am right, Wacław. Don't try to bully me.

WACLAW: You are wrong.

SMIRNOFF: All right, I'm a reasonable man. Show me exactly where my argument is wrong.

WACLAW: Now I've forgotten what we were arguing about, you have made me so mad with your stupidity. But I know for certain that you were wrong.

SCRIASSEV: Perhaps Gurdensky can bring us back to the point.

GURDENSKY: No, Tolkien there will do it. He's been following everything very carefully.

TOLKIEN: I've been following it with disgust. I think Wacław and Smirnoff have shown themselves up as complete fools.

WACLAW: We might have known you'd pull your rank on us.

SMIRNOFF: Gurdensky didn't ask your opinion of us. He asked you to bring the argument back to the point.

TOLKIEN: If I remember rightly, the point Wacław was originally making was that tolerance is an essential virtue in any leader of men. Smirnoff was arguing that leadership must be strong, and to be strong it must to a certain degree be intolerant.

SCRIASSEV: Yes, that's the issue. What do you think, Gurdensky?

GURDENSKY: I'd like to hear your opinion, Scriashev. You're far too self-effacing.

He continues to eat.

SCRIASSEV: [*Embarking upon it with relish—*] Well, the question is an important one: leadership of men. Surely what we have to analyse is the psychology of leadership?

TOLKIEN: Ah, psychology, that is very important!

He nods sagely.

SCRIASSEV: Yes, we have to ask: why do men want to be leaders?
SMIRNOFF: It is a responsibility that the superior man voluntarily takes on.
SCRIASSEV: But why?
SMIRNOFF: Because he wants to. Why else?
SCRIASSEV: But why does he want to? This is an important question, isn't it, Gurdensky?
GURDENSKY: Very important. But don't ask me it. I've no idea why men want to be leaders.
WACLAW: Don't you?
GURDENSKY: No.
WACLAW: What are we doing here, then?
GURDENSKY: It is a misunderstanding; but the wine is delicious! Let us come to the point.
SMIRNOFF: Well, there have to be leaders, it's as simple as that. The world couldn't do without them.
SCRIASSEV: But why do some men choose to be leaders and others not? Let's approach it this way. Can I assume that all we four want to be supreme leaders of mankind?

The proposition receives unanimous assent.

Good; well then let's examine our motives. Are they good motives?

Assent, mingled with some protests that the question should even be asked.

That is to say, then, that they are not selfish motives?

Indignant denials.

We want to lead men for their own good?

Smiling assent from all.

Could we say that our motive is love of our fellow men?

The point is conclusively carried, but Smirnoff ingenuously crowns it with:

Certainly; but remember also that most of them are too stupid, dull and unimaginative to know what is good for themselves!

Which is also carried unanimously.

WACLAW: Yes, now I must agree with Smirnoff for a change. Men are weak: they need strong leadership. They are unimaginative: they need far-sighted leadership. They are lazy: they need vigorous and stern leadership.

TOKLIEN: Who are these leaders who combine strength and foresight with love of their fellow men?

SCRIASSEV: They must be superhuman. Don't you agree, Gurdensky?

GURDENSKY: I will tell you what I think afterwards. Carry on. All this interests me greatly.

SMIRNOFF: It's too late in the day for modesty, We've already said that we all think of ourselves as supreme leaders of men.

- TOLKIEN: So it follows that we are supermen?
- WACLAW: Why shy away from the word?
- TOLKIEN: I don't. I just find it strange that four Supermen should at this particular time be in the same regiment.
- SMIRNOFF: What are you suggesting?
- TOLKIEN: I said I find it strange that providence should be so prodigal.
- SCRIASSEV: It is, yes, very strange!
- WACLAW: Perhaps some of us are mistaken.
- SMIRNOFF: I for one know I'm not.
- TOLKIEN: Shall I tell you something about yourself, Smirnoff? You're too self-assertive to be true. Modesty is the mark of the superman.
- SMIRNOFF: The modest superman! O, that's a real gem! I'll tell you what's the mark of the superman, Major. It's having a destiny and knowing it.
- SCRIASSEV: You're a hopeless romantic, Smirnoff. The superman is simply infinitely more intelligent and far-sighted than ordinary men.
- SMIRNOFF: Here's another fancies himself the intelligent superman! Do you really fancy yourself, Scriashev?
- SCRIASSEV: You will see when the time comes.
- SMIRNOFF: [*Laughing:*] what about Waclaw?
- WACLAW: You can laugh, but I'll show you!
- SMIRNOFF: O, you poor fool! I tell you it's the sense of destiny that counts, I seem to be the only one that knows anything about it.
- WACLAW: You are wrong, Smirnoff. Wrong! wrong! wrong! wrong! wrong!
- SCRIASSEV: Gurdensky, please tell us what you think. If this goes on the lieutenants will come to blows.
- GURDENSKEY: [*Speaking ruminatively in fits and starts, deliberately playing the eccentric, allowing one thought to run into another and making no attempts to be coherent—*] All right, I will give you some words, gentlemen. First, let me thank you for an excellent meal; yes, most enjoyable; and the wine. Now words, yes. Leadership: that's a very big subject for little men to dispute about. The question is whether it should be by example or coercion. A very big subject, very important! Yes. Next: the exemplary life. That's another very big, very important subject. You need some words of wisdom on the exemplary life, gentlemen. Badly need some words of wisdom. But in a war who is wise? Who can be wise in a war, gentlemen? Who ever heard of a wise general, or a wise admiral? Wise after the event, certainly. But wise-after-the-event generals and admirals are usually making up for a bad conscience. And majors – think of majors! It seems to be a general law that they turn spiritual at sixty. It always

saddens me to see a wasted life. Shall I tell you the story of my life? Yes, I will, there are a lot of words in it. As a boy I was a goatherd In Bulgaria [*he chuckles to himself*] almost too picturesque to be true! Living with goats, one learns inner silence, gentlemen. You should all live with goats for a time! I was sixteen before I spoke my first word to a human being. Then I won a scholarship: God knows how I won a scholarship, but I must have done, otherwise how could a poor goatherd become a knowledgeable man? It has always puzzled me. I went to Sophia. Sophia: a beautiful old city, and a fitting place for the young Gurdensky to receive his initiation into the mysteries of the world. Sophia, as you will remember, gentlemen, in the Cabbalistic philosophy, is the female principle, the principle of wisdom. A very interesting conjunction, that. It bears thinking about. Excuse me, I want some coffee.

He rises abruptly and goes into the kitchen.

SCRIASSEV: [*To ABRAM:*] Is Gurdensky always so strange?

ABRAM: You've to watch his eyes to hear him.

SMIRNOFF: If you ask me, he's a fraud.

TOLKIEN: [*Beckoning SCRIASSEV to a corner where they will not be overheard:*] I'm suspicious of this set-up. Did your men search the place thoroughly?

SCRIASSEV: Yes, all down here. But they have a place they call an observatory up on the roof. We didn't search there.

GURDENSKY: [*In the kitchen, to EVA:*] They're so slow-witted! You can feed them any sort of nonsense. Another hour with them would drive me mad, or convert me to Cotyn's idea of revolution, which would amount to the same. If I thought this was the kind of human material we have to work with I would pray for nature to try again with another species.

EVA: Can't we get rid of them?

GURDENSKY: They talk about the rebirth of man, and imagine themselves midwives! Such idiocy! Yes, get rid of them. Put arsenic in their coffee.

TOLKIEN: [*To PETER:*] Captain Scriashev tells me you have an observatory here.

PETER: Yes, just a small one, on the roof.

TOLKIEN: I'm a keen astronomer. May I take a look?

PETER: I... I don't know. You'll have to ask Gurdensky. I'm not sure that we can get up there.

SCRIASSEV: Surely we can get up through the skylight. Haven't I seen a ladder somewhere around?

PETER: [*Alarmed*] I don't know. It's not used very much, you know. There may not even be a telescope. We'll ask Gurdensky, [*calling:*] Gurdensky!

GURDENSKY: [*Coming from the kitchen*] We will just have a cup of coffee before you leave, gentleman. What's the matter?

TOLKIEN: Your follower here seems a little alarmed that we should ask to visit the observatory. I was just explaining to him that I am a keen astronomer.

GURDENSKY: An astronomer? Then certainly you must see the observatory. Eva, just get the key.

EVA goes into the kitchen.

Are you an expert on the night sky, Major Tolkien?

TOLKIEN: [*Uncomfortably:*] Not exactly. Just a stargazer, you know.

EVA: The key's not in its usual place, Gurdensky.

GURDENSKY: You had it last, Abram, Let's see. Excuse us a moment.

They go into the kitchen.

SMIRNOFF: Stargazer!

EVA: But there are guns up there, Gurdensky.

GURDENSKY: Yes, you must get anything suspicious out and bring it down the fire escape, Abram, come with me. I'll delay them as long as I can.

ABRAM and GURDENSKY return to the sitting room.

GURDENSKY: You go first, Abram, and get the door open.

ABRAM goes up the ladder.

We have a difficult door up there. So exposed to the weather. But Abram knows how to open it. Yes, I'm glad you had the idea to look at the night sky tonight, Major Tolkien. With a little luck we might see the Perseids. It is the time of year for them, isn't it?

TOLKIEN: [*Uncertain:*] Yes, I believe it is; about May, yes.

GURDENSKY: I have neglected my study of the skies lately. And age is beginning to play tricks with my memory. You know, I couldn't tell you if Verga is in the constellation Lyra or Canis Major. I will be glad of your help in brushing up my astronomy.

TOLKIEN: I warn you, I'm only an amateur.

GURDENSKY: But keen. Strange how modest people are about their knowledge of the sky. I once spent two hours doing most of the talking with a little man who, later, to my surprise, turned out to be astronomer royal to the Shah of Persia.

SCRIASSEV: [*Mischievously:*] Perhaps Major Tolkien will surprise you too.

GURDENSKY: I'm sure that's what he intends, with this fake modesty of his.

TOLKIEN: If I surprise you, it will only be with my ignorance. But let us go and see this observatory.

GURDENSKY: Allow me to go first, gentlemen, then I can give you a hand.

He begins to climb the ladder, but is interrupted by a loud knocking at the door. The soldier who delivered the food in the earlier scene enters unceremoniously.

ACT TWO

Scene Eight

SOLDIER: Major Tolkien, sir.

TOLKIEN: What do you mean, bursting in like this, man?

SOLDIER: The revolutionaries have broken out again, sir.

TOLKIEN: But we've got most of them behind bars.

SOLDIER: It's the students, sir. They made a surprise attack on the post office, and captured it. And now they've got the radio station surrounded. General Spantin has issued, orders, sir.

TOLKIEN: We will have to put off our study of the heavens until another time.

But GURDENSKY, for whom those words are intended, has gone into the kitchen. He now appears with a sten gun.

GURDENSKY: If any of you moves, he will be studying the heavens before his time.

TOLKIEN: So I was right!

SMIRNOFF: He is a rebel.

SCRIASSEV: I hope this is one of your famous jokes, Gurdensky. It's badly timed, but if you end it now we'll forget about it.

GURDENSKY: [*To the soldier:*] Join your officers. All stand over there.

WACLAW: Fool!

GURDENSKY: Peter, Abram, Eva: very quickly examine your consciences, and if you agree that we must join the revolution now that it has really started, relieve these clowns of their guns.

They at once comply.

No torments of conscience?

PETER: It's no good trying not to be a leader any longer.

GURDENSKY: Sit down where you were before, gentlemen. We will continue our discussion. Only this time I will do the talking. Go on.

SMIRNOFF: You're laying up an awful lot of trouble for yourself, wise man.

GURDENSKY: Sit down. [*To EVA:*] Where's Luc?

EVA: I couldn't stop him. He went out to join them.

GURDENSKY: Heroic jackass!

TOLKIEN: Heroic jackass yourself, Gurdensky. Do you hope to get away with this? Are you fool enough to think this rebellion stands a chance?

GURDENSKY sits on the divan, covering them all with his gun.

SCRIASSEV: You'll deserve the justice you get, Gurdensky. You're a worse traitor than those out there. You've betrayed the true revolution because you hadn't the patience to wait.

GURDENSKY: The 'true revolution' being the one that takes you to the top! Don't talk to me any more of the true revolution. I'm joining the rebels now because

I've learned from you just now far man still is from changing from a stupid, selfish, vacillating animal into a creature of will, humanity, and direction. If you fools are examples of modern man, the true revolution is no nearer than it was in the Stone Age.

TOLKIEN: The rebellion will be put down. You'll be arrested and deported with all the other insurgents. Then what will you have achieved?

GURDENSKY: Aha! Our Major Tolkien has the gift of prophecy! Did you read all this in the stars, Major?

SCRIASSEV: How can you be such a fool, Gurdensky? These rebels, even if they were successful, wouldn't give a damn for your ideas. Like most people, they're out for what they can get for themselves. You might be their hero for a time, but soon you'll go the way of all prophets and die at their hands because you ask too much of them. We may not be your ideal new men, but we are a minority and we can attain power. You will achieve more through us than through an unintelligent mob. You have to choose; and if you choose the mob you give up any hope of ever completing your work.

GURDENSKY: If I choose you I do worse, because I give up any hope of the work being completed. I cannot take sides with an order based upon murder, tyranny and authority, whatever fine ideals it professes.

SCRIASSEV: What do you think they're doing out there now? Murdering and terrorizing, that's what. So what is there to choose between us? Don't be naive, Gurdensky. You can't sit there pointing a gun at us and say you reject tyranny and authority.

GURDENSKY: With you, tyranny and authority are rational and systematic. With these revolutionaries they are spontaneous. They've been oppressed for years.

SCRIASSEV: What is it with you? I don't see that you are swept up in a spontaneous and irrational passion. You can't get away from it, Gurdensky. You belong with us.

GURDENSKY: Tyranny and authority could never be part of my political creed, as they are with you. I am forced by circumstances to resort to them.

SCRIASSEV: Doesn't that just prove that your creed is a realistic one? You are temporising, Gurdensky. Only politicians talk about being 'forced by circumstances'. Either you side with tyranny and authority or you don't. I'm going to put you to the test, Gurdensky. I'm going to come and take that gun from you.

He rises.

GURDENSKY: Sit down.

SCRIASSEV: No. You can shoot me if you like. But then Gurdensky will have climbed down from the pinnacle of his ideals and stooped to use murder as a

method of bringing his revolution closer.

He takes a step forward.

GURDENSKY: I will shoot; I've warned you.

SCRIASSEV: I've told you what it will mean if you do.

He approaches closer. GURDENSKY shoots him in the knee, and he falls and grips his leg.

GURDENSKY: Idiot! It means nothing of the kind. It's straightforward case of self-defence.

SCRIASSEV: Bastard! You'll suffer for this, I tell you! Your hour of glory isn't going to last long.

He passes out.

GURDENSKY: Eva, patch him up, there's a good girl. [*To the other prisoners:*] does anyone else want to chop logic with me to the cost of a broken leg or worse?

TOLKIEN: There'll be worse than a broken leg coming to you, Gurdensky, when this rebellion is put down.

SMIRNOFF: A broken neck – if you're lucky!

PETER: [*Who has been fiddling with the radio—*] Quiet! I've got something.

Above a good deal of atmospherics, a voice comes across from the radio.

VOICE: Dear listeners, good people of Minz, here is your Minister of the Interior to make an important announcement.

PETER: Now for a pack of lies!

MIN. INT.: [*On radio:*] People of Minz, dear Comrades, a state of emergency exists in your city. Fascist reactionary elements have started an attack against our public buildings. The counter-revolutionary gangs that terrorised Minz two days ago and forced your government to appeal for help from our allies in order to restore order, have again started their bloody and dastardly attacks. These bandits have broken into factories and public buildings and have murdered many civilians, members of the national defence forces, and fighters of the State security organs. Our loyal allies are now engaged in the work of liquidating these counter-revolutionary gangs. While this most sacred work for the cause of our country is being performed by our allies, the Government appeals to the law-abiding inhabitants of Minz to remain calm, bolt their doors, and not leave their homes until the crisis has passed. Police units have been issued orders to act with the full force of the law against violators of this order.

VOICE: That was the Minister of the Interior. Further announcements about the crisis will be made in due course. Meanwhile we continue with our programme of Viennese dance music.

TOLKIEN: You see, Gurdensky, it's only a question of time. You achieve nothing by keeping us here. The army will do its job without us.

GURDENSKY: The Minister of the Interior is a liar.

SMIRNOFF: And you are a fool.

LUC enters from the kitchen, having come up the fire escape and through the window. He carries a gun.

LUC: So, the party is still going on? I'm going to take over now, Gurdensky. We're not playing saints and soldiers any more.

EVA: But Gurdensky has joined the revolution.

LUC: The worm has turned, eh? You're cleverer than I thought, Gurdensky, to realise that when it comes to politics even saints have to be on the winning side.

GURDENSKY: [*Tossing him the gun*—] You can take over this job, Luc. The role of revolutionary bores me. Only these fools bored me a little more.

PETER: What's happening out there? The Minister of the Interior just broadcast that the revolution's being suppressed.

LUC: That's the last broadcast he'll make. The radio station will fall any time now. All over Minz people are hearing the news and coming out to fight. Tomorrow we'll throw out these foreigners together with their puppet government, and Cotyn will be elected our Premier. And this is the revolution that Gurdensky called adolescent nonsense!

GURDENSKY: We are still declaring war on the biggest military power in the world. How many divisions were sent to suppress Minz, Major Tolkien?

TOLKIEN: Only one.

GURDENSKY: Out of how many?

TOLKIEN: A total of eighty-two.

GURDENSKY: You see: If they really want to crush us we won't stand a chance.

LUC: They wouldn't dare. All the world would be against them.

GURDENSKY: Their minds work in a strange way. They might think it better to fight it out with the whole world than to be defeated by a band of revolutionary idealists in Minz.

LUC: Either way, they will be beaten. How can you still be a pessimist, Gurdensky? This is one of the great moments of history. Not since the French Revolution has there been anything like it. Out there in the streets children are fighting against tanks with petrol bombs for the cause of freedom. Women too. I've seen them. For years they've kept us in terror with their secret police. No one dared tell them what he was thinking, for fear of being betrayed. All of us were alone.

And now, tonight, the great lie is exposed. We are learning that we were never alone, that we all had the same thoughts, even though we wouldn't confess them: thoughts of freedom. They have bullied us, brainwashed us, tortured us, shouted their slogans down our ears day and night, killed

and deported our relatives? And they have achieved nothing. All the time we all dreamed of freedom. And with our dreams we have defeated them. Ha! listen to the stupid music they play to make people think everything is as it always was. Fools! Everything has changed. History has begun again. If it wasn't for my foot, I would dance to their stupid music.

Suddenly the music stops, and COTYN's voice is heard over the radio.

COTYN: Freedom-loving people of Minz, loyal patriots, this is Jaroslav Cotyn, leader of the People's Revolutionary Committee, speaking to you. A miracle has happened in Minz tonight.

LUC: Yes, no less than a miracle! You see, it's Cotyn. I told you they would get into the radio station.

COTYN: ... The enemy tank forces that entered Minz today are being attacked and destroyed in every part of the city. Our own army has defied the puppet government's orders, and aligned itself with our glorious cause. Night workers in the factories have downed tools and come out en masse to help^[LUC]_{SEP} us. What started as a students' revolt has become a national uprising against tyranny. Great efforts are still needed, but the tide has turned, and as a result of this heroic night we might expect to see a wave of glorious revolution sweep across the earth, carrying before it all tyranny, injustice, secret police and puppet ministers, and leaving behind a world not ruled by fear and authority but by justice and goodwill. In the name of this most sacred cause, I call upon you, patriots of Minz, to seize with both hands the opportunity that this night offers, to rise up with a single will against the enemy and drive them forever from our city. Arms are being issued to loyal patriots at the post office. Arise, people of Minz! The whole world has its eyes upon you.

Rousing music follows COTYN's speech.

LUC: Yes, it will be a lesson to the whole world! Tonight I wouldn't be anywhere but in Minz.

Taking advantage of a moment's inattention by LUC, TOLKIEN draws a gun from a shoulder holster and covers them.

TOLKIEN: Don't move! [*GURDENSKY turns*] I'll not hesitate to shoot, Gurdensky. [*To his men:*] get their guns.

GURDENSKY: This is an amusing game we play.

SMIRNOFF: You'll have your laughs, don't worry.

GURDENSKY: What does it matter who has the guns in here? It's out there that things are being decided.

SCRISSEV: [*Struggling to his feet*] There are a few things to be decided in here, too. *SCRISSEV drags himself across to GURDENSKY and hits him hard in the face.*

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

Scene One

The action is continuous with Act Two.

TOLKIEN: That's enough, Captain Scriashev.

SCRASSEV: I've a score to settle with this bastard.

TOLKIEN: That's enough, I said. He'll get what's coming to him.

GURDENSKEY: Nothing's more certain. We'll all get what's coming to us.

TOLKIEN: And I don't want any veiled threats from you, Gurdensky.

GURDENSKEY: A logical point, Major, nothing more. Who am I to make threats?

SMIRNOFF: You bloody quack saint, you've got away with it for too long.

SCRASSEV: Just let me take a smack at him, Major. I promise I'll stop short of killing him.

TOLKIEN: Gurdensky will be treated as a prisoner of war.

LUC: War! Don't kid yourself, Mister Major. Out there I've seen some of your men step down from their tanks and shake hands and joke with the people they're supposed to be fighting. Do you call that war? This is revolution, Major. You've no right here, and some of your men know it.

TOLKIEN: You'll gain nothing by lying.

LUC: Go and see for yourself.

TOLKIEN: That's just what I'm going to do. Captain Scriashev, since you can't move I'm going to appoint you to guard over the prisoners. And Lieutenant Waclaw, you will stand guard over Captain Scriashev. There must be no reprisals. Understand?

SCRASSEV: Yes.

TOLKIEN: Lieutenant Smirnoff, come with me. And you, soldier. Just cover them. I'll send news soon.

TOLKIEN, SMIRNOFF and the soldier leave. There is a long silence in which SCRASSEV sits, gun at the ready, looking at GURDENSKEY.

ACT THREE

Scene Two

GURDENSKEY: Do you play baccarat, Captain Scriashev?

SCRASSEV: No. Keep your mouth shut.

GURDENSKEY: Not a gambler. I'm surprised. An all or nothing man like you...

He moves.

SCRASSEV: Stay still or I'll shoot.

GURDENSKEY: As the wisest man in the world, my old friend Mullah-al-Nassan said: He only demands all or nothing whose imagination is like a dog's.

SCRASSEV: I can do without your cracks, Gurdensky. Just stay still and be quiet.

GURDENSKEY: Major Tolkien said nothing about silence. You can't shoot me for talking.

- SCRIASSEV: I warn you, I can get so mad I don't answer for what I do.
- LUC: Now, Captain: better be a good boy, or the revolution will come along and eat you up.
- GURDENSKY: Yes, careful how you play your cards. Captain Scriashev. From where I'm sitting your hand doesn't look a very good one.
- LUC: It's a lousy one. Nothing's going to stop the revolution now.
- SCRIASSEV: You forget the other eighty divisions of our army.
- LUC: You know nothing about the other seventy centres where the revolution will blaze out now. No, Captain Scriashev, you're on the wrong side. Though, of course, it's not too late to change, like those men of yours I saw in the square.
- GURDENSKY: Now there's an offer that should appeal to the gambler in you, Captain,
- SCRIASSEV: [*Shouting:*] Be quiet, both of you. How big a fool do you take me for, expecting me to fall for your lies?
- COTYN'S VOICE: [*Over the radio*] Good people of Minz, this is Jaroslav Cotyn, leader of the People's Revolutionary Committee, bringing you the great news that the revolution is a success. More quickly and more completely than any of we revolutionaries had dared to hope, the enemy tank regiment that invaded your city yesterday has virtually been put out of action. The heroes of the hour are the children of Minz, who by dropping Molotov cocktails into their petrol tanks, have destroyed some forty or fifty of the enemies' tanks. The crews of many others have surrendered. Fighting is still going on in many places, but I have no hesitation in proclaiming, people of Minz, that the day is ours and you are now free.
- And now some words for listeners elsewhere. This victory is a sign. The torch that has been lit today in Minz must now be carried throughout the hemisphere. Revolutionary committees everywhere, the great day for which you have been preparing for years, has now dawned. The children of Minz have shown you the way. Take your courage in both hands and follow their great example. Their lives depend on you. So rise up, this is the Revolution; fight for all you are worth, for you are fighting for freedom, and you are worth nothing if you are not free. That is all I have to say. Here in Minz there is a great deal to do, and we have no time to waste on words.
- GURDENSKY: [*Laughing:*] But here in Gurdensky's attic in the middle of Minz, we have all the time in the world to waste on words. Put away that toy, Captain Scriashev. You may get a nervous twitch in your finger and shoot yourself in the other leg. As Mullah-al-Nassan in his wisdom said: "He who stands by the gun is a bloody fool."
- SCRIASSEV: I'd rather be a live fool than a dead duck.

GURDENSKY: Oh excellent! Excellent! That's an epigram worthy of Mullah himself. But now, taking ^[11]_{SEP} into account what you have just heard, don't you think that, in the interests of remaining a live fool, you should give up your gun and throw yourself on the mercy of the Revolutionary Committee?

SCRIASSEV: I'd throw myself on the mercy of a bayonet before I'd do that.

GURDENSKY: Ah yes; all or nothing again. You know, I wonder that you don't have second thoughts about a way of looking at things that has already cost you a smashed leg. If the superman could learn one or two things from the street Arab he might really be someone to look out for.

SCRIASSEV: I have my orders. And just you remember you're prisoners of war.

GURDENSKY: Ah, the superman has his orders! Aren't you climbing down from your pinnacle a little, Captain? But it's a good thing. Don't imagine I'm mocking you. I would like to see you climb down further. The superman has become the military man who 'has his orders'. Might he not now become the man of common sense who has his own best interests at heart?

SCRIASSEV: I can look after my best interests, don't you worry.

GURDENSKY: Indeed? Then you must know who you are. You will be able to answer a question that has been puzzling me. Are you the self-styled disciple of Gurdensky, the friend of Sigrid Svetlos and seeker after wisdom? Or the military man with a job of destruction to do? Or the revolutionary who challenged Gurdensky for having different ideas of revolution? Or the Superman? If you know what your interests are, you obviously must know who you are. Would you be so kind as to tell me?

SCRIASSEV: You talk too much. Why don't you learn to shut up and look after your own interests?

GURDENSKY: But people are my interest. There are so many of them; at least half a dozen in every skin.

There is a knock on the door.

SCRIASSEV: [To LUC:] Answer it. I'll be covering you. Any tricks and I'll shoot. If they're revolutionaries get them in. Waclaw, stand over there and cover the rest.

Another knock.

Go on. And remember your 'best interests'.

ACT THREE

Scene Three

LUC goes to the door and opens it. Two boys, no older than fourteen, are standing there. They are armed.

BOY 1: Sir, if you are a friend of the Revolution, may we drop bombs from your windows on to the tanks?

SCRIASSEV: Get them in.

BOY 2: Are you a coward? A man of your age?

LUC: No; listen; tell Cotyn to help Gurdensky. Quick! Go!

SCRIASSEV shoots LUC down. The boys run away.

SCRIASSEV: Come back, you boys, or you'll be shot. Waclaw: after them. [*Waclaw rushes out in pursuit. SCRIASSEV drags himself into the room. There are shots, cheers from the boys, and then silence. Shouts:*] Lieutenant Waclaw! Waclaw, did you get them? [*Silence; SCRIASSEV becomes uneasy.*] Waclaw!

GURDENSKY: Two unnecessary lives! For the sake of those eighty divisions, I hope they never put you in command of the army, Captain Scriassev.

SCRIASSEV: Waclaw! [*PETER moves towards the door.*] Where are you going? Stop! I'll shoot!

PETER: To get Luc. Shoot if you want.

He goes. EVA follows him.

GURDENSKY: I warned you about that nervous finger, didn't I? Now you're alone, and the boys will go and tell Cotyn. Hadn't you better give up your gun?

SCRIASSEV: [*Now very nervous*] Tolkien will be back soon. Perhaps we'll capture your great man, Cotyn. Perhaps those boys will lead him into a trap. That would be a lesson for you, Mister Cocksure Gurdensky.

GURDENSKY: Like everything, it's a matter of chance; so why are you so nervous?

PETER: [*Bringing LUC in*] Who'd have thought Luc would have ended up a martyr?

EVA: He was a good boy, even if he was hotheaded. He did it to save us, Gurdensky.

GURDENSKY: Like most heroic actions, it was stupid. We'd have been saved anyway. But you're right: he had, as they say, a good heart. I could have wished him a better head for Gurdensky's teaching, then he might still be alive.

SCRIASSEV: [*in a paroxysm of terror*] Stand with your backs to the wall, all of you. Go on. Go on. Leave him there. Leave him, I say, or you'll join him. Stand against the wall. You too, Gurdensky. This is something you didn't foresee. Think you'd have been saved anyway, do you? Well, that's leaving Captain Scriassev out of account, isn't it? I'll teach you that you can't afford to do a thing like that. You're wrong, Gurdensky; everything

is not a matter of chance. I have the gun. Didn't it occur to you that I might just shoot you all and then get out of here?

GURDENSKY: How far do you think you'd get with a smashed leg in the middle of a revolution? You're safer here.

SCRIASSEV: Very smart. But I'm not convinced, Gurdensky.

GURDENSKY: I wouldn't try to convince you. Whatever you do, you won't be able to help it, and the result will not be what you expect.

SCRIASSEV: Words! I don't know how you've got away with it for so long, Gurdensky. It will be a service to the world to rid it of you.

EVA: [*Stepping forward*] Remember what the Major said, Captain Scriashev?

SCRIASSEV: Stay against the wall.

EVA: No reprisals, he said. Do you think you'd get away with it if he came back and found us all shot?

SCRIASSEV: I warn you!

EVA: Even if you did escape the revolutionaries, you'd not escape being punished by your own people.

SCRIASSEV: [*Hysterical as she closes upon him and he backs away:*] I'll shoot!

EVA: Maybe you will. You weren't above shooting Luc in the back. But I'm taking the risk.

ABRAM leaps to her aid as she takes the gun from him. The disarmed SCRIASSEV collapses his head into his hands.

PETER: Brave girl!^[SEP]

EVA: [*Sitting.*] I don't know what got in to me!

GURDENSKY: I hope this doesn't mean that you too have a taste for martyrdom, Eva,

EVA: I just thought only a woman would stand a chance.

GURDENSKY: I admit I was wondering how Gurdensky's angel was going to get us out of that. Thank, you, Eva. [*To the others:*] but now we must prepare in case our Major Tolkien comes first. Peter, you and Eva wait in the kitchen, so that when they come in here Abram and I can be in front of them, and you can come in and cover them from behind.

PETER: [*Pointing to Scriashev—*] What about him?

GURDENSKY: I'll watch him.

SCRIASSEV: You've won, Gurdensky. But only because I wasn't unscrupulous enough to shoot a woman.

GURDENSKY: But I've known all along that you're not really the all-or-nothing man you'd like to be. You're very human.

SCRIASSEV: That's more than can be said of you.

GURDENSKY: True, I will be inhuman enough to shoot you if you try to warn Tolkien: and not in the leg this time.

SCRIASSEV: I believe you, you bastard.

GURDENSKY: Then keep quiet. We'll wait in silence.

ACT THREE

Scene Four

The lights dim to denote the passage of time. In the darkness we hear the voice of the radio announcer.

RADIO: This is Radio Minz broadcasting to the world. Free countries of the world, in the name of the freedom that is being so heroically fought for in our city tonight, we appeal to you for help. In Minz tonight a great blow has been struck against tyranny. But surprise and daring have been our allies, and, disorganised and badly armed as we are, we not only cannot press home our advantage, but in a matter of days, unless we receive help, we might expect to be attacked again and obliterated. So we appeal to you, you free countries. There is no time for the United Nations to agree to taking action. You must rally to our call individually and send forces. We know you will not fail us, and in that knowledge we continue to fight and sacrifice our lives. Long may there be freedom throughout the world!

The voice ceases and martial music is heard on the radio. It fades. We hear the sounds of street fighting, and in the darkness see flashes through the windows.

PETER: It would have been impossible not to take part, Gurdensky.

EVA: Cotyn was right, we have to fight if we're going to live in the new world.

ABRAM: I could kick myself now for holding back.

GURDENSKY: No country will come to the help of the heroes of Minz.

VOICE: Free countries of the world, our fate is in your hands. We will be able to hold out only for two or three days. Here in Minz, students and children are at this moment risking their lives because they believe that a new and free world is about to be born. Do not let their sacrifice be in vain. They need help in their fight against tyranny. In their name I appeal to you.

ACT THREE

Scene Five

Suddenly there is shouting outside and COTYN and some other revolutionaries burst into the room. The lights go up.

COTYN: Damn those boys, they were fooling us. [*Seeing LUC—*] what happened to Luc?

GURDENSKY: Captain Scriassev here had an attack of nerves.

COTYN: [*Dragging the trembling SCRIASSEV to his feet.*] Worm! [*He pushes him down again.*] Is everyone else all right?

GURDENSKY: Yes.

- COTYN: Many younger than him have given their lives tonight. It has been a tragedy. But also a triumph. We have won, Gurdensky. We have driven them from the city. Steiner himself has flown into Minz to organize the withdrawal. I'm bewildered at the speed of it. It's as if everyone was waiting, with ready-made bombs, for the order. But there have been many deaths. An unarmed crowd that went to pull down their flag from the police station was mowed down. As you said, I have a lot to answer for. Even Luc here: I stopped him coming with us on account of his foot. But we can't all be like Gurdensky. We can't all keep our hands clean, otherwise nothing will be achieved.
- GURDENSKY: Why did you come? There must be many other things for you to be doing.
- COTYN: You gave me asylum. It was the least I could do. [*Looking at LUC*—] how did he die, defending you?
- GURDENSKY: Yes.
- COTYN: Then he's a burden for your conscience, not mine.
- ANTON: If you've got such a thing.
- GURDENSKY: I'm glad to see you are still alive, Anton.
- ANTON: I won't shake your hand. Mine are unavoidably dirty.
- COTYN: Enough of that, Anton. In times like these, every man has to follow his own lights.
- ANTON: There are some people others look to for a lead. They're not free to do as they like.
- EVA: I won't stand by and hear Gurdensky abused. Obviously he's not going to defend himself, but before you start jumping to conclusions you should at least know that he stood up for the revolution. He arrested four of their officers.
- COTYN: [*Delighted*.] Is this true, Gurdensky?
- GURDENSKY: Yes, but not worth reporting. All I have to show for it is one worm with a broken leg.
- COTYN: But you took up arms! You joined us! [*Embracing him*—] Gurdensky, I promise that you'll never regret it. We were unfair to you, we underestimated you, but you will understand and forget it. It was only because I wanted you to be a part of this great moment in history. But you are with us! This is great news. Why didn't you tell us immediately?
- GURDENSKY: I chose the better of two evils. That's no occasion for celebration.
- COTYN: You chose to come down from your pinnacle, to involve yourself, dirty your hands! You put before all else your love of man, and pity for him. That was a right choice, Gurdensky. It was a great choice. Of course it's an occasion for celebration.
- GURDENSKY: You're an old sentimentalist, Cotyn. Who said anything about love of

man? It was more hatred of this superman [*he gestures towards SCRIASSEV*] and his like that made me take up a gun.

COTYN: What does it matter? You are with us, one of us. Why shouldn't this revolution give the opportunity for the revolution that you look forward to, Gurdensky?

GURDENSKY: Because it will go the way of all revolutions, and merely whip up into a froth the human scum of the earth.

COTYN: I'm not sure that I understand. Are you with us or against us?

GURDENSKY: Against you, Cotyn, as I always was. I'm always against fanaticism, except when a man turns the power of it upon himself to change himself. I'm against the way you toss human lives over your shoulder as food for the hounds whose baying you take for revolution. Most of all, I'm against the grand humanitarian principles you use to justify your folly.

COTYN: Are you mad?

GURDENSKY: Yes, in most people's eyes. Especially Anton's here. Only you and I know how sane I am.

COTYN: That's the height, of madness. To suggest... Do you think I'd risk my own life...?

GURDENSKY: Aren't you a political adventurer?

COTYN: Gurdensky, I came here to answer a call to help you. Is this fair to me?

GURDENSKY: Don't misunderstand me. I think you're a most amiable and pleasant fellow; and with your friends even warm. I'm very touched that you should have come to my relief. But it doesn't alter my opinion that you sadly lack realistic imagination, Cotyn. You were taken by surprise when the people rallied to your call for revolution, and you will be taken by surprise again when this bright flame you have lit gutters out without anything having been achieved. For that's what will happen.

COTYN: I'll hear no more, you tuppenny-ha'penny prophet! There's work to be done.

He moves towards the door, but before he reaches it TOLKIEN and SMIRNOFF burst in, breathless and pursued by a shouting mob.

ACT THREE

Scene Six

TOLKIEN: Scriashev, quickly... [*he takes in the situation and turns to GURDENSKY*] Gurdensky, they'll kill us. You must help us. They're mad. Protect us!

VOICES: [*Off:*] They went in there. I saw 'em. After 'em. String 'em up, the bastards!

Some thugs appear in the door, but COTYN bars the way.

COTYN: What do you want here?
1st THUG: We saw them come in.
2nd THUG: Collaborator!
3rd THUG: Shove him out of the way. Who's he think he is?
4th THUG: String the bastards up, and him too if he doesn't clear out of the way.
COTYN: I'm Jaroslav Cotyn.
2nd THUG: Who's he when he's at home?
OTHERS: Come on, what are we waiting for?
They push COTYN before them into the room.
There they are. Get them!
GURDENSKY: Hold your distance, you scum, and keep quiet.
3rd THUG: Well, listen to Grandad!
GURDENSKY drags the young man out of the crowds by his ear.
GURDENSKY: On your knees! He forces him down. I said be quiet. [*To the rest:*] I suppose you think a revolution's a hell of a lot of fun, with the chances it gives you for killing, looting, raping and getting drunk.
The crowd whoops and cheers. One shouts: 'Who's drunk?'. Laughter.
Yes, get your laughing in now, because you won't feel like it in a few days' time when they come back with more tanks and soldiers. O yes, they'll come back, and they'll make a thorough job of it next time. I wonder how many of you were informers? Three out of every ten people in Minz were in the pay of the secret police. Did you know that? Which of you were, eh? Of course, they won't speak up. But wait till the secret police are back. One or two of you might be tempted to save your own skins by identifying those involved in the murder of three officers during the revolution.
1st THUG: They murdered two kids.
2nd THUG: Yes, they've got it coming.
GURDENSKY: All right: all except you two clear out of here. Get to your homes and keep out of trouble.
3rd THUG: I thought there was a revolution to fight.
GURDENSKY: The revolution can do without your type. And you needn't worry about the officers. They'll get their desserts. Jaroslav Cotyn here, whom none of you seem to know, is the leader of the People's Revolutionary Committee.
4th THUG: What, 'im that was talking on the wireless?
COTYN: The same.
4th THUG: Well, whadya know!
GURDENSKY: Go on, out!
3rd THUG: S'pose it's all right then. C'mon fellers.

The crowd drifts out. GURDENSKY urges the boy on his knees to follow them with a touch of foot. Only the 1st and 2nd THUGS remain.

COTYN: That was nicely handled, Gurdensky,

GURDENSKY: I didn't want them tearing my place apart. There are things I value here.

TOLKIEN: How can I thank you? They would have killed us.

2nd THUG: Lousy skunks!

GURDENSKY: Well, Cotyn, if anyone represents the law in this lawless city, I suppose it must be you. What are you going to do with our three officers? These two are charged with murder by these representatives of the citizens of Minz, and Captain Scriashev there killed Luc.

TOLKIEN: This is scandalous! We are prisoners. We must be treated according to the rules of the Geneva Convention.

COTYN: Your leaders would have done well to look up the Geneva Convention before they sent you here. [*To the two thugs:*] let's hear your evidence, you men.

1st THUG: They just shot a couple of kids. He saw 'em plain as we see you. Didn't we?

2nd THUG: Yes, in the back it was, too.

1st THUG: Killed 'em dead.

2nd THUG: Not more'n fifteen, either of 'em.

1st THUG: No, one wore short pants. Lovely kids!

2nd THUG: Shot 'em in the back. Lousy bastards!

1st THUG: Bein' strung up's too good for 'em.

COTYN: All right. [*To Tolkien:*] Have you any defence?

TOLKIEN: I refuse to submit to a summary trial like this.

COTYN: [*Fingering his gun menacingly*] Have you anything to say in your defence?

TOLKIEN: Do you think you can take what these ruffians say as evidence? They weren't even under oath.

COTYN: Did you shoot the two kids?

TOLKIEN: We're not in Minz on a holiday. We've a job to do.

COTYN: Shooting children in the back: is that in the Geneva Convention?

TOLKIEN: The job of a soldier in wartime is to kill the enemy, whoever they are. We saw these boys destroy one of our tanks with a petrol bomb. Their age is irrelevant. They would have destroyed other tanks if we hadn't shot them.

COTYN: I'm surprised that a man who believes in the book, as you do, should risk such a departure from it. Wouldn't the same argument justify the shooting of prisoners of war? After all, they might live to fight again.

TOLKIEN: Prisoners can be confined out of harm's way.

COTYN: What if they can't? What if you were in our position and had no space for prisoners and no one to guard them. Wouldn't you shoot them?

TOLKIEN: No, I'd hand them over to the United Nations pending the settlement of the dispute.

COTYN: [*Laughing:*] I bet you would! And the United Nations would hand them right back and say "no thank you." Major, I'm going to sentence you and the Lieutenant to death for the murder of those two children.

SMIRNOFF: Murder is a civilian offence. You can't...

TOLKIEN: It's no use, Smirnoff. He has no alternative.

COTYN: It's good of you to be so understanding, Major.

TOLKIEN: I'm not being understanding. I'm showing you how little difference your revolution is going to make.

COTYN: Anton, take two men and carry out the sentence in the yard.

ANTON: All right. Come on, you two. March!

TOLKIEN: You should make this Anton the head of your secret police.

ANTON: That's enough from you. Go on!

TOLKIEN and SMIRNOFF are marched off.

1st THUG: That's how the bastards want treating!

COTYN: [*Shouting:*] Get out of my sight, both of you! You scum!

2nd THUG: Who do you think you are?

GURDENSKY: He's overwrought. Go on.

1st THUG: Talk about democracy!

They go.

GURDENSKY: That was neatly handled, Cotyn.

COTYN: You can't afford to be sentimental in a situation like this.

GURDENSKY: How right you are! Sentiment is out of the question, and so are love, goodwill, justice and freedom; but of course only until the day after the revolution, when everything will be perfect!

COTYN: Are you making mock of my ideas, Gurdensky?

GURDENSKY: I don't need to; your behaviour does that!

COTYN: If I dealt in insults, I could apply that one to you.

GURDENSKY: Captain Scriashev is suffering acute suspense. It would be kind to let him know what his fate is to be.

COTYN: He murdered Luc, didn't he?

GURDENSKY: Any of us will testify that he killed Luc.

SCRISSEV: You can shoot me. I'll at least die with the satisfaction of knowing you'll all end before a firing squad, or worse.

COTYN: Another prophet! Well you're right, I'm going to shoot you, and I'm going to do it myself so that no one can say I passed on all the dirty work.

SCRISSEV: It's good to know I'll be of use to you.

COTYN has come so close that SCRIASSEV can make a grab for his gun. He does so, but COTYN rabbit punches him to the ground and shoots him when he is down. He turns away.

COTYN: It's like treading on a slug: it makes you retch. But what else could I do?

GURDENSKY: You do nothing. Man's sublime arrogance is in the thought that he can do.

COTYN: Don't give me that, just because you see I'm a bit put out. We're doing something in Minz tonight that will make history. [*Indicating SCRIASSEV:*] Don't imagine this proves anything.

GURDENSKY: Before long you'll take such things in your stride. And then of course, when the miraculous day dawns, you'll be as meek as a lamb and as loving as a young mother!

COTYN: I hate the sight of death, Gurdensky.

GURDENSKY: That's soon got over.

COTYN: There's no other way of fighting a revolution.

GURDENSKY: Of course not. The only question is, should a revolution be fought? But it's too late for you to ask that.

COTYN: [*Fiercely:*] I've asked it. Yes, a hundred times. I've lain awake at night trying to digest your ideas of a bloodless revolution, and I've decided they don't make sense. You may be able to look on and bide your time while the secret police drag innocent people from their beds to be murdered or deported, and spread their network of informers so that everyone trembles with fear and seals his lips. Perhaps you can, but I can't let these things happen and do nothing about them. I can't watch men being reduced to animals without shouting out my protest. I'm a man, not a god. I don't have all-seeing eyes, but I do know that what I do see I don't like, and I can't live with myself unless I try to alter it.

GURDENSKY: As you said yourself: every man must follow his own light.

COTYN: But am I not right?

GURDENSKY: Are you delirious? Haven't I been telling you from the start that you're wrong.

COTYN: Yes, it was a stupid question.

ABRAM: I believe you are right, Cotyn.

COTYN: What, have I got a convert? At this unlikely hour?

ABRAM: If there's one chance in a thousand of the revolution being successful, it must be taken. [*To GURDENSKY:*] He speaks of the secret police. We Jews know what it's like to go for years with fear of them as a constant bed partner. Such fear is worse than death; it takes the manhood out of you and leaves you a cringing shell of self-hate. Even if the revolution does fail finally, might it not give them enough of a shock to bring in a more liberal government, as happened in Poland? Anyway, I'm for the

revolution.

COTYN: [*Almost tearful with emotion, wringing ABRAM's hand.*] Welcome, Abram, welcome to the ranks of the desperate men. You cement my faith.

GURDENSKY: He means that he's going to be even more pig-headed from now on! Shame on you, Abram!

COTYN: Listen, Gurdensky: there's no freedom except in commitment to a cause. Abram's just learned that, and it might do you some good to think over what he's said.

GURDENSKY: What if the cause turns out to be a bad 'un? Do you prove your freedom then by sticking to it or by abandoning it?

COTYN: I've no time to argue about theory any more, Gurdensky.

GURDENSKY: It seems to me that you can't abandon a bad cause, because then you leave yourself without a cause, that is to say unfree. So what do you do: kid yourself that the bad cause is a good one after all?

COTYN: No, you make it good. You're like all your prophetic clan, Gurdensky. You juggle with good and evil like a clown with bottles, making sure that they never touch one another, if you had any of that realistic imagination you talk about, you'd know that the world's not like that. Everything in it is a mixture of good and bad, and if being human means anything at all it means working to keep the good uppermost.

Anton and the two men return.

ANTON: The sentence has been carried out, Cotyn.

GURDENSKY: I couldn't give you a better answer. Two men have been shot on your orders, for the sake of 'keeping the good uppermost'!

COTYN: There was no other way.

GURDENSKY: You don't know what you've let loose upon the world, Cotyn. And none of us will ever know how much you've put the clock back in trying to put it forward.

COTYN: That's mystical humbug. We've beaten them. At this moment their troops are withdrawing beyond our frontiers.

GURDENSKY: You talk about strategy, but don't seem to recognize it when it stares you in the face.

COTYN: The terms of the withdrawal pact have been broadcast to the world. They wouldn't dare...

GURDENSKY: Are you sure? As the Leader, you should have at least one certainty to play on. How about the other seventy hotbeds of revolution? What's happening there?

COTYN: There's no news yet.

GURDENSKY: What do you expect?

COTYN: It's only a matter of hours since they had the sign. It's too early to expect results.

GURDENSKY: There are going to be no other revolutions, are there, Cotyn?

COTYN: Not after this one.

GURDENSKY: I mean in any of the seventy cities.

COTYN: Are you suggesting I'm a liar?

GURDENSKY: The revolutionary organization doesn't exist, does it?

COTYN: Of course it exists. I've spent my life building it up.

GURDENSKY: You've spent your life building a fantasy. I know more about you than you think, Cotyn. I know that these Revolutionary Committees you talk about are nothing more than a few followers here and there who hang on your words. They're no more able to start revolutions...

COTYN: Shut up! What's this poisonous rot you're filling their ears with?

GURDENSKY: The truth, Cotyn.

COTYN: I know one thing: that you're one of the biggest frauds that ever set foot on this earth. What have you to show for a life's work? A rag-bag of big ideas and a diminishing crew of followers. I've no more time for you, Gurdensky. There are practical things to be done. [*To the rest*] Come on.

GURDENSKY: Wait! I don't think you've finished recruiting yet. Peter here has been waging a war in himself, but I think he's now reached a decision.

PETER: Yes, Gurdensky, I can't go back on what I've done. You led us into the revolution in the first place, don't forget. What you say about Cotyn may be right, but I don't see that there's any alternative to fighting now.

GURDENSKY: Then fight.

PETER: I agree with you that the spiritual revolution is the most important, and can't be rushed. But this one is with us, here and now. Cotyn has started something that's got to be finished.

COTYN welcomes him with a vigorous handshake and smiles.

GURDENSKY: What do you say, Eva? Should we take the work to another city, join the refugees who are no doubt streaming west over the frontiers at this moment?

EVA: Leave Minz? I couldn't, Gurdensky. All this has set me thinking. I can't go on running away from what's happened. All along I've tried to ask myself: what would my late husband have me do? I know he'd be ashamed of me leaving Minz at this time, when the cause he gave his life for stands a chance of being realised.

GURDENSKY: Life is so tediously predictable. With a lot of luck you'll all learn one day that nobody ever does anything. Everything happens. [*He rises and goes to the door.*] So Gurdensky wins the argument and Cotyn wins the day.

EVA: Gurdensky!

COTYN: [Barring her way] Let him go. It must be a blow to him.
ANTON: You wouldn't know it. I don't think he cares about anybody.
PETER: He's like the Sphinx. There's no telling what goes on in that noodle.
ABRAM: He'll go on, anyway. We can be sure of that.
COTYN: That's more than we can be certain of. Well, to business. We've got to make preparations in case...
EVA: He'll not come back.
COTYN: But he took nothing.
EVA: I know how he does things.

ACT THREE

Scene Seven

FRANK SOLOMON, the journalist, rushes in.

FRANK: Here you are! I've been combing the city for you, Cotyn. Nobody seemed to know what had happened to you.
COTYN: Ah, my biographer!
FRANK: Your betrayer, Cotyn.
COTYN: What?
FRANK: I've got to confess it. Don't shoot me till I've finished. You can then if you like. I betrayed you, Cotyn. It was me gave the names of your collaborators to the secret police. I was working with them. They set me to spy on you.
COTYN: Kossov, Jarowitz and Milcher were tortured to death.
FRANK: Please let me finish.
COTYN: Do you work for the *Noo York Daily Noos*?
FRANK: No.
COTYN: You rat!
FRANK: You've won me over, Cotyn. It was masterly, the way you organised the revolution. Give me a chance. What could I know about justice, freedom and love, brought up by a tyrant of a father and trained from early in life to be a spy? Your performance was a revelation to me, Cotyn. Such love of man for man! From now on I'm your disciple. You can trust me, I promise.
COTYN: What! When you see we've won you come to me with this slobbering tale?
FRANK: But you haven't won, Cotyn, you haven't won.
COTYN: What do you mean?
FRANK: Listen, please. I have information. It proves I'm in earnest. The remains of the tank force is withdrawing northwards out of the city isn't it?
COTYN: Yes, we made a pact with them.

FRANK: You see, my information is correct.
COTYN: That's no news to us.
FRANK: No, but it will be news when I tell you that the withdrawal is just a blind, and that they are at this moment double-crossing you, won't it?
COTYN: What are you telling me?
FRANK: That at the same time as they're withdrawing to the north, they're sending massive forces in from the west. They've mobilised the eleventh army. It's now about seventy miles from Minz and advancing.
COTYN: They'll run over us like a sea.
FRANK: I want to fight on your side, Cotyn, for freedom and the Revolution.
COTYN: Do you think we'll stand a chance against the eleventh army? Last time there were fewer of them and surprise was on our side.
FRANK: There's hope, Cotyn.
COTYN: What hope?
FRANK: If we can only hold out until the Revolution explodes in all the other cities where you've been preparing it. [*COTYN turns away to the window.*] Don't you see? Then they'll have to come to terms. It's only a matter of holding out.

All eyes are on COTYN.

COTYN: There's still time for any of you to get to the frontier.
ANTON: No, we bought it.
PETER: The cold comfort of a hero's end!
FRANK: What are you all so gloomy about? You've won the first leg. And it's plain there's a good chance...
COTYN: Shut your mouth, Frank.
FRANK: What's got into you?
COTYN: [*To the others:*] It was the right thing to do, wasn't it? Could we stand, the terrors of the secret police any longer? Isn't there a limit to what men can take and still remain men?
ABRAM: If there's another way, I don't see it.
EVA: [*Quietly:*] He did.
FRANK: What the hell! The battle's not lost yet. It's not even started.
COTYN: [*Going to the door*] Everything happens.
ANTON: You're not walking out on us, Cotyn, not now. Do you hear? Cotyn!
He fires a shot after him. COTYN is out of sight and we do not see if it hits him.
FRANK: Is everyone mad?

CURTAIN