

Ján Solovič

PETER
AND
PAUL



PETER AND PAUL

by

JAN SOLOVIC

Translated from the Slovak by Ewald Osers

English translation: Ewald Osers 1986

CHARACTERS

Peter, Tsar of Russia, 26

Paul, a journeyman shipwright, 30

Franz, an admiral }
 } both between 50 and 60
Fedor, a general }

Adam, landlord of the Black Bear, 50

Barbara, a cook, Paul's mother, 50

Mos, a servant at the Black Bear, 70

Nicholas, owner of the Golden Griffin apothecary's shop, 50

Veronica, his daughter, 20

Joanna, a master shipwright's widow, 50

Matthew)
) journeyman, between 20 and 25
Mark)
)
Pecko)

Urban, the City Captain, 50

Ursula

Beata

Agatha

nuns of uncertain age

Guards

The theatrical realization of this comedy is left entirely to the imaginative talent of producer, stage designer and musical director. But I should like to draw attention to the following points:

- (1) The entire action takes place in Bratislava (then Pressburg) within a span of 36 hours at the height of the summer of 1698.
- (2) I have deliberately avoided the baroque gold ornaments so typical of the religious and secular architecture of the nobility and the mighty of the age: the 12 acts are all set in a popular environment. However, the squares with their market stalls, the shipyards with their journeymen's hostels, the inns and the apothecary's shop offer a wealth of opportunity for creating a colourful mosaic of the city which even then was a bustling centre in the heart of Europe.
- (3) I do not regard this rich colourful panorama as some additional dimension but as an indispensable component of the main theme of the play: I still believe that theatre has something to do with looking at someone or something.
- (4) The stage music should consistently proceed from motifs of the day, which have kept their charm through the centuries. A simple melodic texture and easily remembered tunes, should create motifs accompanying the individual characters as well as humorous intermezzos.

- (5) The introductory motto (which follows) should be brought to the spectator's notice not only in a programme note, since not everyone buys a programme: it should either be distributed as a free leaflet or else, following the dimming of the house lights, be read over a loudspeaker, or, as a further alternative, appear as a painted text on a curtain:

MOTTO

From 18th to 20th July 1698 Bratislava had a distinguished visitor -- Peter the Great, Tsar of Russia. Shortly after ascending the throne this energetic young ruler decided to modernize his empire. For that reason he travelled to Western Europe. His embassy consisted of 250 members but the Tsar himself remained incognito. This had the advantage that he could avoid all formal engagements and instead meet the ordinary people. Peter stayed longest in Holland and in England. On his return journey he stopped in Vienna, where he was probably told that Bratislava had a prosperous shipbuilding industry, where vessels for the imperial Danube flotilla had been built for some 400 years.

By a succession of unfortunate circumstances the city chronicles of just those years were lost, so that no reports of the Tsar's visit can be found in the city archives. We do not know anything definite about the programme of his three days' stay. Dr. Andor Sas, who has researched the visit, has found no hard facts; he supposes, however, that Peter I, while in Vienna, was persuaded to visit Bratislava by the Captain of Bratislava Castle and Hereditary Lord Lieutenant, Count Pálffy.

Ľudo Zúbek: Moja Bratislava

ACT ONE

The pillory in the Fish Market

Saturday evening

The square is crowded with curious people

First Scene

URBAN, PAUL, MARK, MATTHEW, PECKO, VERONICA, BARBARA,
JOANNA, NICHOLAS, town guards

URBAN (after a drum roll reads the proclamation): Be it known to all citizens of Pressburg! After careful consideration we have come to the decision that the journeyman Paul here present, having been found guilty of unruly behaviour and of insulting his guild-master, be justly punished by detention in the pillory, from this hour until Monday morning. Let the honest and god-fearing citizens, as they pass him on their way to church tomorrow, see him, mock him and condemn him as a warning to all those like him, who start brawls in our city and lack the proper respect for their superiors. In accordance with custom, the culprit, while in the pillory, will suffer hunger and thirst. Any person attempting to give him bread or water risks a penalty of ten strokes. For that purpose also the town rack is placed on show in the Fish Market. Let everyone have it before his eyes! To make sure the journeyman Paul suffers shame

not only in his sinful mind but also on his body, he shall be naked to the waist in the pillory, so that everyone may freely spit at him. Signed in the name of justice by Judge Krištof in his own hand.

BARBARA: Fine justice, Captain! I wonder your tongue doesn't turn to stone! Where's the justice here? Where, I ask? Come on, show it me, that blind hag justice who allowed a man to be condemned for speaking the truth!

URBAN: Silence!

BARBARA: What I say is the truth!

URBAN: Too late now, Barbara! You should have brought up that boy of yours better!

BARBARA: You're one to talk!

URBAN: Shut your mouth or I'll put you behind those bars with him!

BARBARA: I'd show you all right, you bloodsucker!

URBAN: Guards! Tear his shirt off!

VERONICA: Don't you dare tear it! I gave it to him as a present.

NICHOLAS: Not anything to boast about... But remember one thing: that good-for-nothing isn't darkening my door again!

VERONICA: You wouldn't do that to me, Father!

NICHOLAS: You see if I don't! I'm not having him in my house! Understand? I won't have you associating with a man the whole town can spit at with impunity!

PAUL: No one's spat at me yet, Mr. Nicholas.

NICHOLAS: They will, they will.

VERONICA: No, Father, no!

NICHOLAS: I've said he isn't entering the Golden Griffin again.

BARBARA: He's young and he's in fine health -- why should he want the apothecary?

PECKO: He doesn't want the apothecary; he wants the apothecary's daughter!

BARBARA: He'll find another if her father's going to get on his high horse. In our fine city, happily, there's no shortage of pretty girls.

PECKO: I can just see them chasing him once they see him with his bare behind!

PAUL: Envy, Pecko, envy! You watch out you don't end up in here yourself. Because when they pull your breeches down there won't be anything there! The girls' eyes will pop out in vain; they won't see anything. You've nothing there!

NICHOLAS (once the laughter has died down): Impertinent devil! Aren't you disgraced enough? D'you have to ridicule a workmate?

BARBARA: What ridicule? He's speaking the truth.

URBAN: Don't you get carried away by that truth of yours, or else...

BARBARA: That's enough, Captain, unless you want to hear a few more home truths in front of all these witnesses...

URBAN: See this key? I'm locking your son up with it today. And tomorrow? Maybe tomorrow it'll be you.

BARBARA: You wouldn't go about boasting of what I might then tell about you and that judge of yours to anyone curious enough to stop in front of these bars.

URBAN (opening the pillory): Come on then! Let's all see your navel!

PAUL (a little embarrassed, takes off his shirt. He hesitates whether to hand it to his mother or his girl)

VERONICA: I'll wash it for you and send it by Monday.

PECKO: Better use some strong thread, so he can show it to the children one day.

NICHOLAS (to Veronica): Home!

VERONICA: Father...

NICHOLAS: At once! Before I lose my temper!

Scene Two

The same except for Nicholas and Veronica

URBAN (locks the pillory and importantly, so all present should see it, inserts the big key in the leather pocket of his coat)

PECKO: Well, Mistress, what do you think?

JOANNA (who had been standing in the background): What a disgrace! Why, I won't be able to show my face in the street tomorrow! A journeyman from my workshop in the town pillory! Nothing like that's ever happened before.

BARBARA: Stop acting the saint, Joanna! You could have coughed up a ducat, same as the other masters, and my Paul wouldn't be sitting here till Monday morning. After all, there was a whole lot of them fighting but they've locked up only this one. Fine justice, I say.

URBAN: The others had right on their side.

BARBARA: You can stuff your right!

URBAN: Guards! We're moving off! We've heard enough women's tittle-tattle!

Scene Three

The same except for Urban and the guards

JOANNA (to Barbara): Don't you accuse me of being stingy with my ducats. I wanted to do it but he said: Don't you dare bribe those villains. said truth was on his side.

PAUL: And so it is!

PECKO: And what does that truth look like now, through the bars?

MARK: Listen, Pecko, one more squeak out of you and I'll send you flying you leave a trail of dust all the way to your native village!

MATTHEW: You mind your manners, Pecko! Sneering at a mate when he's in the pillory!

JOANNA: Stop it, all of you! Start another fight here and we can close down the workshop altogether. Go to bed, all of you! And I want to see you in church tomorrow!

MARK: Have a heart, Mistress! We toil all week long, from four in the morning till late at night!

MATTHEW: Can't we have a bit of a lie-in on Sunday?

JOANNA: You'll get enough sleep. A real man only needs a short snooze; there's no need for him to lie idly in a featherbed.

MARK: Featherbed, my foot! We'd know all right what to do in a featherbed...

PAUL: Chance would be a nice thing.

JOANNA: Shush, you in there! Better search your conscience!

BARBARA: He's got a clean conscience, and well you know it, Joanna. He said no more than the truth when he called Joachim an old soak, with his wits dulled by drink and an old dotard to boot.

JOANNA: I didn't vote for him to be guild-master.

BARBARA: You all go on about the disgrace of what's happened, but the worst disgrace is that of your famous shipbuilders' guild for keeping as its head a drunken fool who's long ceased even to look like the head of a guild!

JOANNA: I inherited the business from my husband, God rest his soul, and it isn't Joachim who's building ships in Pressburg but the rest of us.

MARK: That's the truth, but the shoemakers' journeymen started it by making rude remarks about us.

PECKO: We defended you too, Mistress.

MATTHEW: You did your defending from behind the stove in the hostel!

PECKO: Don't you shoot your mouth off, Matt, or I'll tell the mistress what you've been saying about her...

JOANNA (to Matthew): What have you been saying?

MATTHEW: Nothing. Nothing really. I was just talking to Mark...

JOANNA (to Mark): What did you talk about?

MARK: Nothing. Nothing really. He said to me that our mistress...

JOANNA (to Matthew): That our mistress -- what?

MATTHEW: That our mistress might still...

JOANNA (to Mark): Might still -- what?

MARK: Nothing. Nothing really.

PECKO: That our mistress might still be...

MARK (softly): Shut up!

JOANNA (to Pecko): That's enough. I don't want to know. And be off with the lot of you! Hanging about a rack isn't a good idea. (Exit with the journeymen.)

Scene Four

PAUL and BARBARA

BARBARA (now that they are alone): Why do you do it, Paul?

PAUL: They are so stupid. They can't see further than their own noses.

BARBARA: And you can?

PAUL: I don't know if I can but I'd like to. The things we could do! places we could get to with our ships! But we've got to stick to rules made by a guild-master who's a drunkard. Do you know where Danube flows?

BARBARA: I'd guess to Budin... That's the farthest I've ever been from Pressburg, I went there to pick grapes, and now I'm here. Everyone should look after his own business.

PAUL: You think that's a good thing?

BARBARA: Probably yes, since everybody's doing it. You keep thinking up sorts of nonsense for your mistress, and look where it's got you! She left you in a pretty pick'le!

PAUL: She would have bribed the judge and the captain to let me go free. But she wanted something in return.

BARBARA: What did she want?

PAUL: She wanted me to give up Veronica.

BARBARA: The shameless old bitch. Old enough to be your mother. See what money does to you? She thinks if she's got money she can do anything she likes. That's why she changes her dress three times a day. Trying to tempt a young lad. It shouldn't be allowed in a fine place like our Pressburg!

PAUL: I told her to keep her ducats.

BARBARA: Good for you. Bad enough that I sold myself cheap once in my life. You mustn't do the same. Tomorrow I'll bring you some of the titbits we're cooking for Adam's guests at the Black Bear.

PAUL: Don't you dare! Didn't you hear what he said? Suppose someone saw you!

BARBARA: I'm not going to let you be hungry and thirsty. I'm not afraid of the devil himself!

PAUL: Hush! Don't blaspheme!

(The Angelus is sounded. Barbara crosses herself.)

Scene Five

The same and URSULA, BEATA, AGATHA.

The nuns enter in single file. At first they gaze on the ground, as if in prayer, but when they catch sight of Paul in the pillory

Agatha and Beata slow their step and stop.

URSULA (noticing that she is in front on her own): Sisters! Merciful sisters! What do I see? Where are you looking? Lord be merciful upon them and forgive them their sinful glances. Have I not told you a hundred times that your lover is not of this world?

BEATA: Yes, Sister.

AGATHA: A hundred times.

BEATA: That he is not...

AGATHA: Of this world.

URSULA: Drop your eyes and forget at once what you have seen. Once and for all.

BEATA: Once and for all.

AGATHA: We'll forget.

BEATA: What we have seen here.

URSULA: That's right. And now let us hurry, for we must not be outside the convent walls after dark. (Exeunt)

Scene Six

BARBARA and PAUL

BARBARA: I can just see them sighing all night long as they're forgetting once and for all.

PAUL: Never mind them, Mother, but don't you forget the main thing. Tomorrow, exactly at noon, when this place will be full of gawpers, you send Pitya here with his fiddle. I want him to play some fine music to cheer me up.

BARBARA: Dear God, what am I to do with the boy? Another of his wild ideas! Still, I won't let him down.

(Musical theme)

ACT TWO

At the Black Bear inn

First Scene

FEDOR, FRANZ and PETER

PETER: Tell me, Admiral, where are we actually?

FEDOR: I'll tell you one thing: we've travelled all over Europe but we've never drunk any wine like this.

FRANZ: And that's the truth. Absolute nectar.

FEDOR: And the landlord said he'd bring out a better one still.

PETER: Admiral, where are we?

FRANZ: In Pressburg.

PETER: Where?

FRANZ: In Pressburg. An hour on the Danube from Vienna.

PETER: Upstream or down?

FRANZ: Downstream. This is the coronation place of the Hungarian kings.

PETER: What kings?

FRANZ: The kings of Hungary.

PETER: I see. And what are we doing here, General?

FEDOR: We need some rest. We have a long journey behind us and an even longer one ahead.

PETER: We could have rested in Vienna.

FRANZ: With the emperor so near?

FEDOR: Impossible! We wouldn't have been left in peace.

PETER: But surely nobody knows who I am.

FRANZ: True, but if word had leaked out to the emperor...

FEDOR: You wouldn't have been left alone for a minute.

PETER: And what are we going to do here?

FRANZ: In the morning Pálffy's expecting us. He's prepared a splendid programme. You can always rely on Pálffy.

PETER: And until morning?

FEDOR: Until morning?

PETER: What are we going to do all night?

FEDOR: At night all decent people...

PETER: As for you, dear General, I don't need three guesses. People like yourself get quietly drunk and fall asleep. Or the other way round. They sleep till they wake up, and then they get drunk.

FEDOR: Even though you're younger than us you've got to look after yourself. We're on our return journey now, we're on our way home, and once we're home there are the colossal duties of a ruler awaiting you.

PETER: Kindly leave what's awaiting me to me. And woe betide you if I find out that we've made this *détour* solely so you two can indulge your drunkard's palates.

FEDOR: You don't like this wine?

PETER: I'm beginning to feel anger rising in me.

FRANZ: That's easily dispelled. All we need do is order something better.

FEDOR: Your wish is our command, Majesty.

PETER: Take care, General. I can see the wine's beginning to loosen your
* tongue dangerously.

FEDOR: Did I say anything I shouldn't?

PETER: You both know perfectly well you're not to address me as Majesty.

FEDOR: But between just the three of us...

FRANZ: In inns like this the walls have wonderful ears.

PETER: So I continue to be just a gunner to everybody, dear Fedor and dear
Franz.

FEDOR: At your service, Mr. Gunner.

FRANZ: We've kept your incognito for two years, in front of the Dutch, the
English, the Germans, and heaven knows who else.

PETER: Perfectly true, except that, as you said yourselves, you've never
drunk such good wine anywhere else. In other words, the danger is
greater here.

FEDOR: I trust you don't doubt our hard heads.

PETER: They'd better be.

FEDOR: A real man, especially a Russian general nurtured on harder liquor starting with his native vodka, can't be overcome even by a whole barrel of some Pressburg wine!

PETER: What about you, Franz? Are you equally sure?

FRANZ: I'm not so sure that I'd take an oath on my honour as an admiral that after a barrel of this wine I could reliably tell the vertical from the horizontal position, but what I am sure about is that I like it as I haven't liked a wine before.

FEDOR: Landlord! Where are you? Can't you see the admiral's beaker is empty?

Scene Two

The same and ADAM

ADAM (carrying a jug of wine): God bless you, gentlemen! At the Black Bear one has ever drunk a toast from an empty beaker. I'm very particular about that. In my cellars, sirs, the barrels don't run dry. At my inn anyone who got the money can order anything his palate fancies and his stomach can take.

PETER: What wine is that you're pouring?

ADAM: Saint-George's. One of the best wines in the whole of Hungary.

PETER: And how big is that Hungary of yours?

ADAM: Hungary... Well...

FRANZ (in a whisper to Peter): About the size of Perm Province.

ADAM: Hungary is famous for its wines.

PETER: And for anything else?

ADAM: Oh yes... but mainly for its wine. The Saint-George growers deliver four hundred barrels to the imperial court each year.

PETER: Tell them they might have some new customers.

ADAM: Who're they? If I may ask?

FRANZ: But first we must do a little more tasting.

ADAM: No need for you to travel to the Saint-George vineyards. I've got enough of it in my cellar for a whole army. I could also serve you some other kinds.

FEDOR: Well said, landlord; well said!

ADAM: You can rely on me, sir. Adam from the Black Bear in Pressburg is an expert, with a reputation far and wide.

PETER: So you have some other wine?

ADAM: From Pezina.

PETER: Bring us some of that too. Anything else?

ADAM: From Grinava.

PETER: That too. Any other?

ADAM: From Modra.

PETER: Let's have that too. Anything else?

ADAM: From Limbachy.

PETER: Bring us some of each kind.

ADAM (stands looking at Franz and Fedor)

PETER: What are you standing there for? Get a move on!

ADAM: I don't know if the distinguished gentlemen...

PETER: What distinguished gentlemen? What about the distinguished gentlemen?

ADAM: If the distinguished gentlemen want the same.

PETER: I know best what these gentlemen want. That's what they keep me for. (To Fedor) Correct?

FEDOR: Correct, Your...

FRANZ (to Peter): Quite correct, quite correct. (To the landlord) That's what we keep him for.

ADAM: At your command. I'll bring you some of each. (Looks searchingly at Peter)

PETER: You say you're Adam?

ADAM: That's right, gentlemen. Adam.

PETER: And where's your Eve?

ADAM: Eve?

PETER: Surely every landlord must have a wife. A pretty wife.

ADAM: Is that it? Mr. Gunner wants more than just drink.

FRANZ: Come, come. No offence. Our gunner is still a young blade. When he drinks a good wine he wants to caress more than just a beaker.

ADAM: Well, gentlemen, with that caressing it'll be a little difficult.

FRANZ: — And why's that?

ADAM: I only have a cook.

FEDOR: Send her in!

ADAM: And a servant.

FEDOR: Send her in!

ADAM: Only I don't know if she'll be to your taste.

FEDOR: Leave that to us.

FRANZ: Don't dilly-dally. Go and call your Eve.

ADAM: She isn't Eve.

FEDOR: What does the name matter?

ADAM: Well, as you wish. (Shouts) Meg!

ACT THREE

The pillory in the Fish Market as in Act One

PETER (walks into the square and curiously inspects the pillory with Paul imprisoned in it)

PAUL (after a while of mutual inspection): What are you staring at?

PETER: Can't I stare?

PAUL: Why not -- but watch out.

PETER: What for?

PAUL: That your eyes don't pop out.

PETER: How odd.

PAUL: What?

PETER: This cage.

PAUL: Are you saying you've never seen one before?

PETER: A cage yes, but a man inside never.

PAUL: You're a stranger, aren't you? Where from?

PETER: From a long way away.

PAUL: What are you?

PETER: A wayfarer.

PAUL: Try another.

PETER: What don't you believe?

PAUL: Judging by your boots, your cloak and your hat you're not just anybo

PETER: A gunner.

PAUL: Don't give me that. Since when have gunners been knocking about Pressburg just as they please? What's more at midnight, at the witching hour!

PETER: You afraid?

PAUL: Me? No. As you can see, I'm locked up. As is the custom in Pressburg. Always bolt your doors and windows properly at night.

PETER: You in there for punishment or just from mischief?

PAUL: Aren't you perhaps a little too noseey?

PETER: For punishment then. What have you been up to?

PAUL: You don't really think I'll confess to you here and now.

PETER: As you wish; I just wondered if I couldn't help somehow.

PAUL: Why?

PETER: Well, because you're human and you're in a cage.

PAUL: Let those be ashamed who locked me up in it.

PETER: You're not going to tell me then?

PAUL: Why should I? So you can bruit it about the world that in Pressburg they lock up shipwrights' journeymen in the pillory?

PETER: A shipwright's journeyman?

PAUL (extending his hand through the bars): Paul.

PETER (squealing with pain): Ow-ow-ow, you're a tough one all right and no mistake! Such strength in one hand.

PETER: Well then. For how long?

PAUL: Till Monday morning.

PETER: A great idea. Punish them on Sunday, and on Monday hey presto be
work.

PAUL: Listen, if you're such a great fellow, couldn't you try ...?

PETER: What?

PAUL: Shift this bar a little, the one under the lock?

PETER: With pleasure. (He tries, the bar gives way.)

PAUL: Well, hat off, my friend! You've got enough strength for three.

PETER: But not much use if the lock won't yield.

PAUL: Why shouldn't it yield? Of course it will. You've got strong ha
and I'll add a little train-oil.

PETER: What's that?

PAUL: Got a knife?

PETER (produces a knife): Ever heard of a gunner without a knife?

PAUL: Excellent! A real killer blade.

PETER: Except that it won't cut through the bar.

baC PAUL: No need to. All it needs is turning the bolt of the lock a little bit. Look, on this side here the weld is rusty. I'll push in it halfway and you lever.

PETER: All right, let's try ...

PAUL: Lift it a bit more ... That's it ... Steady now ... Got it! (A click and the bars of the cage open.) What did I tell you? (Jumps out of the pillory.)

PETER: You've got nimble fingers. Is that what got you in there?

PAUL (returning Peter's knife): Pressburg journeymen don't steal.

PETER: If I hadn't seen this with my own eyes I'd have never believed that one could get round such heavy forging.

PAUL: I learned a few things from my master blacksmiths ... and they weren't just ordinary blacksmiths.

PETER: Where was that?

PAUL: Long way away, by the sea, in Bremen.

PETER: So what are you doing here when you've been to Bremen?

PAUL: This is my home. Bremen was where I spent some time as a journeyman. P

PETER (inspecting the pillory): Really, what does the world look like through those bars? P

PAUL: Why don't you find out? PE

PETER (gets into the pillory): A bit tight, isn't it? PA

PAUL (shuts the gate on him). PE

PETER: Stop fooling! PA

PAUL: What a surprise for Captain Urban when instead of Paul he finds Peter here in the morning.

PETER: You'd do that?

PAUL (opens the cage): No, not really. I'm not a thief or a vagabond, even a rioter.

PETER: What are you then?

PAUL: I've told you. A journeyman from the famous workshop of mistress Joanna and of the even more famous guild of St. Nicholas, where for the Danube flotilla of our sovereign, the Emperor, have been in Pressburg for over a hundred years. PA

ya PETER: A hundred years? I only know that Hungary is famous for her vines.

th PAUL: A lot of things we could do.

PETER: You? And how many of you are there in that famous workshop of yours?

PAUL: Come along. See you for yourself.

PETER: Where to?

PAUL: Don't be afraid. You won't get lost in Pressburg with me.

(Musical theme)

ACT FOUR

In a Pressburg hostel, accommodation
for travelling journeymen, night

First Scene

PETER, PAUL, MARK, MATTHEW and PECKO

PAUL (enters together with Peter among the sleeping journeymen, for a while looks around in the half-light, then shakes Matthew): Matt, get up!

MATTHEW (merely grunts happily and turns over)

PAUL (grabbing Mark's foot): Mark, wake up!

MARK (acts exactly as Matthew but yawns angrily)

PETER: They sleep soundly, don't they, your friends.

PAUL: They don't get much sleep during the week. (He pulls the blanket
Matthew) Matt, get up, it's time.

MATTHEW (alarmed): What's that? Daybreak already?

PAUL: Will be ... Quite soon.

MATTHEW (rubbing his eyes): Get out! That you, Paul?

PAUL: It's me.

MATTHEW: Am I seeing things or am I dreaming?

PAUL: Neither, Matt.

MATTHEW: I am dreaming. You're talking nonsense. You're right now sitting
the cage in the Fish Market. (He yawns and settles down again)

PAUL (shaking Mark on the next bunk): Mark, at least you wake up!

MARK (jumping straight out of bed): What's that, is it Monday already? Have we slept right through Sunday?

MATTHEW: Go back to sleep. We haven't slept through Sunday. You're just dreaming all this.

PAUL: You're not dreaming, boys. Get up.

MARK (touches Paul, doubtfully): Cross my heart, it is Paul.

MATTHEW (sitting up): So Joanna has after all ransomed you from Urban?

PAUL: No Joanna and no Urban.

MARK: Who then?

PAUL: There are still some good people about.

MARK (gesturing towards Peter): This one here? Who's he?

PAUL: Come on, wake up now. You've never had such a visitor in a Pressburg hostel.

MARK: Who is he?

PAUL: Can't you see? A man, but not just anybody. He got me out of the pillory!

MARK: With a key? Or how?

PAUL: Shake hands with him and you'll find out he has no need of keys.

MARK (hesitates for a moment, then extends his hand to Peter): Well the welcome among us if you're a righteous man.

PETER (again introduces himself only with a handshake, an earlier on to Mark cries out with pain)

PAUL: Not so loud, you'll wake Pecko and he'll make a beeline for the J

MATTHEW (nervously extends his hand to Peter but he only smiles and with mighty grip lifts him up)

PAUL: Well, what d'you say? This is gunner Peter.

MARK: I'm Mark.

MATTHEW: I'm Matthev.

PAUL: These are rather dry introductions. Haven't you got a bottle somewhere?

MARK: How can a bottle last here ... with so many thirsty throats about

PAUL: Not even you, Matt?

MATTHEW: Had one last night ...

MARK: Wait. Pecko's sure to have something hidden away. (Moves over to the sleeping Pecko and cautiously turns him over)

MATTHEW (gives him a helping hand)

PECKO (grunts but does not wake up)

MARK (triumphantly produces a little bottle)

MATTHEW (takes it from him): The dirty swine! It's empty.

MARK: Can't celebrate much with that one.

PAUL: No use, boys; that's it. But the worst thing is that decent Slovaks don't know how to celebrate in any other way.

MARK: Is there a better way?

MATTHEW: And don't you think that our forefathers would have long discovered a better way if there was one?

PAUL: Now then, gunner; how's it in your country? What's it like there?

PETER: Much the same.

MATTHEW: Well, it's one way.

PAUL (to Peter): And what will you think of us now?

PETER: That's my business.

PAUL: Not entirely. You helped me out of the cage.

MATTHEW: And no one else has ever managed that in our glorious city of Pres before.

PAUL: So I've got to pay my respects to you.

PETER: And if I don't much care for your respects?

PAUL: Now don't say that or else ...

PETER: I can see now why they locked you up in that cage.

MATTHEW: That's no secret anyway.

MARK: Captain Urban publicly announced it to all and sundry.

PETER: I wasn't present.

MARK: For insult and causing a disturbance in the Ventura pub.

MATTHEW: Except that the truth is that Paul here defended the honour of the guild of shipwrights which the cobblers and clothiers here despise because of our drunken guild-master.

MARK: And when things got really hot he even told the guild-master to his face that it was time he gave up his post to one of the younger or more capable masters.

MATTHEW: Nowadays we don't just knock boats together as they did in his day but we build ships. And not just ordinary ships -- but he no longer understands anything and merely wrecks whatever he can with that sozzled head of his.

MARK: His small vessels are being turned turtle by the Turks on the lower Danube just like nutshells. Only thing of any use against the Turks nowadays is a proper ship with thirty gun-barrels on each side.

PETER: And you build such ships with thirty barrels?

MARK: Even bigger ones than that. Just getting one ready now. A proper job, for oars and sail. A real beauty ... and we could do more. We've got a famous yard -- except that Mistress Joanna lacks courage. Now Paul here, if he showed you all the things he's thought up ... enough to make our sovereign the Emperor sit up and stare at the kind of flotilla he could have! We could chase the Turks down the Danube!

PETER: And why don't you?

MATTHEW: Because our guild-master acknowledges only that which has always been
Anything new he finds fault with.

PETER: You did say thirty barrels on each flank?

PAUL: Cannon, they're the latest thing. That ship should be built as soon
possible. To ride true and steady in the water. Now that's a real
enjoyable job.

PECKO (awakening with a shout): Thieves!

MATTHEW: You dreaming?

PECKO (looking for his little bottle): I'm not dreaming. You thieves, where
is my flask?

PAUL (chucks the empty bottle over to him): Here you are. But you dream
that slivovitz yourself.

PECKO: Me? You finished it!

PETER: It really was empty.

PECKO: And who are you? What's that stranger doing here?

PAUL: He's here to hire you for work. He's searched all over the world
such an eternal apprentice as yourself.

PECKO: Don't give yourself airs. I can become a master one day, but you never.

PETER: Never? Why's that?

PECKO: Son of a fallen woman.

PETER: Of what?

PECKO: He's a bastard. And such people are debarred here from ever advancing beyond journeyman.

PETER: This a fact?

PAUL (merely nods assent)

PETER: Strange rules you have here.

PECKO: Why strange? Sound rules. A proper master should be the son of God-fearing parents.

PAUL: Like yourself. Except that your head's full of straw and you'll never finish your apprenticeship.

PECKO: I'll finish it when I finish it. That's my business. But there's no help for you.

PETER: But why? If he knows his job?

PECKO: The law is the law, and there's no way out.

PETER: And the Emperor. That Emperor of yours? Does he agree with such vile law?

PECKO: And what about you? If you're not one of us, who are you and what doing here?

PETER: I'm merely here for a little chat with the journeymen of the famous shipwrights' guild.

PECKO: Does the guild-master know about this?

PETER: Why don't you run and tell him? Let him come if he feels like it. A certain gunner would like to meet him, because he's never before blackguard who'd lock his own people up in a cage.

PECKO: Only those who deserve it.

MATTHEW: Shut up, Pecko, or you'll find yourself such a cripple in the morning that Mistress Joanna will fling a penny into your hat.

PECKO: Ruffian!

MARK: No one's laid a finger on you yet.

PECKO: Just you try.

PETER: Listen, you dung-beetle. (He throws a coin at his feet) Here's some change and now run along and come back with something in your empty bottle.

PECKO (looking at the coin in surprise): A ducat. Didn't I say so? A thief, and what's more a rich one.

PETER: Get out!

PECKO (tests the ducat between his teeth and then hurries out)

PAUL: He won't find anything in the middle of the night anyway.

PETER: Go on, tell me more. The kind of ships you build.

PAUL: Where's that key to the shipyard, boys?

MATTHEW: In the little window by the main door.

MARK: And you show him yours too.

PETER: His ship?

MARK: Well, so far she's only like a toy ...

MATTHEW: He's thought up a ship which would move equally in the water and land.

PETER: Boys, are you sure you haven't had a drop too much?

MATTHEW: You don't believe me? You'll see for yourself!

PETER (to Paul): I didn't think you belonged in that cage from the start. Let's be off then! We haven't got too much time.

MATTHEW: And suppose Pecko comes back with something after all?

PETER: Then you can drink to the health ...

PAUL: ... of Peter and Paul. Damn it, a shirt! Somebody lend me a shirt!

(Musical theme)

Scene Three

The same and MEG

MEG (an old woman with a dirty apron and a scarf on her head, appears in the doorway) You called?

ADAM: I did.

FEDOR (hurriedly raises his beaker and drinks)

FRANZ (does likewise)

PETER (bursts out laughing, holding his sides)

MEG: What is your wish, gentlemen?

FEDOR: Nothing.

FRANZ: Nothing now.

PETER: Nothing on the whole, babushka, nothing from you.

ADAM: Tell Barbara to kill a chicken! The gentlemen will dine.

FEDOR: I knew there was something missing, to go with the wine.

FRANZ: If there's nothing else, chicken will do.

ADAM: If you please, gentlemen. In the next room. There I'll lay your table in proper style. Meg, don't just stand there. Get the gypsies. Step out now! A good dinner needs music.

If you please, gentlemen. This way.

Scene Four

MEG and BARBARA

MEG (clearing the empty beakers from the table and muttering to herself) The devil sent them to us, so we don't get any peace even on Saturday night.

BARBARA (stopping in the doorway): Who are they?

MEG: How should I know? There are three of them. I'm to kill a child.

BARBARA: I had a feeling we'd be cooking tonight. So much the better. The boy won't go hungry or thirsty. But where are they from? London?

MEG: Foreigners.

BARBARA: So much the better. Just a plain meal then.

MEG: He's ordered the gypsies for them.

BARBARA: You don't say?

EG: You know Adam. When he smells money he can strip a naked louse bare.
(Catches sight of Adam approaching and quickly disappears.)

Scene Five

ADAM and BARBARA

ADAM: What are you standing here for? Have you nothing to do?

BARBARA: What do you mean? I'm killing a chicken and preparing a banquet.

ADAM: We haven't had that kind of guests for a long time. Make a good job
of the dinner, won't you? The wine has tickled their appetite. They
are hungry.

BARBARA: Where have they come from?

ADAM: Vienna, I guess. But they're Russians. A general, and admiral, and
the youngest one -- they say -- a simple gunner. But they're
treating him with great respect. It's a bit of a mystery. A general
and an admiral with a simple gunner?

BARBARA: The mystery will be solved by the morning. The wine will loosen
their tongues.

Scene Six

The same and PETER

PETER (enters)

ADAM (to Barbara): Back to your kitchen. Don't let me catch you here again

PETER: That was the other Eve?

ADAM: Barbara, my cook. An excellent cook. You'll be licking your chin

PETER: Not me. I'm for bed.

ADAM: The gentlemen won't be needing you?

PETER: They'll be perfectly happy by themselves.

ADAM: Your room is ready. Unless...

PETER: Unless what?

ADAM: Unless you'll be lonely on your own.

PETER: I'll worry about that. I'll take a short walk first.

ADAM: I understand. If I might advise...

R: I'll take my own advice, thank you.

: We know how to treat foreign guests in our famous Pressburg.

R: I've said you could leave that to me. And you'd better not say anything to those two in there.

: I understand, most noble Mr. Gunner.

R: Why most noble?

: Adam of the Black Bear wasn't born yesterday.

R: You'd better see to your guests. And we'll want a good breakfast in the morning!

(Musical theme)

ACT FIVE

The Black Bear inn, as in Act Two. Morning.

Scene One

MEG and FEDOR

MEG (with a bucket and broom collides in the door with Fedor)

FEDOR (his head is wrapped in a towel and he is holding it between his hands) Oh, babushka, kind-hearted babushka, could you carefully bring me a bowl of sour milk?

MEG: Wouldn't a pickled gherkin be better?

FEDOR: You might bring that too, matyushka, only move carefully because head might explode at any moment.

MEG: Don't worry, young sir, it won't.

FEDOR: How do you know?

MEG: Because I can see you've got it all tied up with a mighty bandage.

FEDOR (unties the towel and hands it to Meg): Dip it in cold water for me, would you?

Scene Two

The same and FRANZ

FRANZ: Ah, something nice and cold would be most welcome.

EG: Shall I get you a towel too?

FRANZ: Call the landlord!

EG: At your service. (Runs off).

EDOR: Oh my little head, my dear little head.

FRANZ: If memory serves me, General, you said yesterday that not even a barrel of wine could lay you low.

EDOR: Tell me, dear Franz, can you explain why every drinking bout starts so pleasantly and ends so unpleasantly?

FRANZ: Not for everyone.

EDOR: Your head isn't splitting?

FRANZ: It'll pass.

FEDOR: I'm sick and tired of all this travelling. Franz, I beg you, for heaven's sake don't think of anything else, let's go home... Home. Aren't you anxious to be back home? Home cooking, a good bath, and your own wife? God... we've been on the road for two years.

FRANZ: Go wake His Majesty. They'll be here any moment. We're going on hunt.

FEDOR: I don't really feel at all like bouncing about up and downhill and jumping with all those packs of hounds about!

FRANZ: But the hunt's what we came for.

FEDOR: You're always coming up with some new idea, dear Franz. But I beg you most urgently, let's go back home.

FRANZ: Hold on, Fedor, hold on. A few days more and you'll be with your Vasilisa Ivanovna.

FEDOR: Ah, the dear soul. I don't even know if she's still alive.

FRANZ: You don't have to worry about her.

FEDOR: Or who she's living with back home.

FRANZ: Now that's a more serious matter, General, much more serious.

DOR: It's all very well for you to make fun of it, seeing that you're a bachelor.

ANZ: Go and wake him; it's high time.

DOR: My poor head, my poor dear head. (Exit).

Scene Three

ADAM and FRANZ

AM (as always with a full jug) Good morning, good morning, Admiral. In the pink of condition, I see, after a good night's sleep.

ANZ: I wouldn't put it quite like that.

AM: What shall it be for breakfast for the gentlemen?

ANZ: I think the general's already ordered.

AM: Sour milk with gherkins? You can't be serious.

ANZ: If I had my way I'd have a proper tankard of beer and then we'd see, as we Germans say, what we might float on top of it...

AM: Do you wish me to get a coach ready?

FRANZ: How far is it from here to Palffy's Stupava?

SCENE Four

The same and FEDOR

FEDOR (in a panic): Franz! For Heaven's sake!

FRANZ: What's happened?

FEDOR: The room's empty. And the bed hasn't been slept in.

ADAM: Not slept in?

FRANZ: You're seeing things, General.

FEDOR: Come and look for yourself.

FRANZ: You must have looked in the wrong room.

FEDOR: But they've got no other rooms here. Only three.

ADAM: That is so. Just those three.

FRANZ (getting up): No practical jokes, please! You know that admirals stand practical jokes.

DOR: I'm not joking.

ANZ (exit)

DOR (to Adam): Landlord, you haven't seen him?

AM: Seen whom?

DOR: Our gunner, of course.

AM: I haven't.

DOR: Holy Mother of God, defend us! That would be a disaster!

AM: A disaster? To be sure, a disaster.

DOR: You really haven't seen him?

AM: A fellow like that doesn't suddenly disappear like a needle in a haystack.

DOR: Until what hour did we sing?

AM: You sang till dawn.

DOR: And did he sing with us?

ADAM: That, sir, I couldn't say. I don't look into people's rooms.

FRANZ (returning): It really is empty!

ADAM: Empty. Where do you think he is?

FEDOR (to Franz): Listen, Franz! Do you remember when we stopped?

FRANZ (off stage): Remembering isn't my strong suit.

FEDOR: We've got to find him!

ADAM: Don't worry. Nothing's going to happen to your gunner in our far
Pressburg!

(Fedor and Franz exeunt)

ADAM: Hmm... Very odd...

(After a moment's reflection he gets on with his work.)

Scene Five

JOANNA and ADAM

ANNA (enters, festively dressed): Good morning, Adam.

ADAM: Welcome, Mistress, come in. To what do we owe this visit to our humble...

ANNA: Where's Barbara?

ADAM: In the kitchen, where else? The house is full of guests.

ANNA: Call her!

ADAM: What's up?

ANNA: Do as I say: call her!

ADAM (shouting): Barbara! (To Joanna) You're trembling all over, Mistress. Is anything wrong with you?

ANNA: I'm not shaking, I merely want to ask...

ADAM (shouting): Barbara! Didn't you hear me calling you?

Scene Six

The same and BARBARA

BARBARA: D'you expect me to drop those dumpling and come running?

JOANNA: Where's Paul?

BARBARA: Paul? Don't pretend you don't know! He's in the pillory, of course...

JOANNA: We've got to find him!

JOANNA: The pillory's empty.

ADAM: Are you serious?

JOANNA: Locked but empty.

BARBARA: You're having us on!

JOANNA: Gospel truth. I've come straight from the Market.

BARBARA: Empty?

JOANNA: Empty.

BARBARA: What about Urban?

ANNA: He's standing there, cursing, berating the guards, shouting and threatening.

Scene Seven

The same and FRANZ and FEDOR

FEDOR: Send out search parties! Send search parties out at once!

BARBARA: For whom?

FEDOR: For our gunner.

FRANZ: He can't be far.

ANNA: Who?

FRANZ: A gunner gentlemen, Joanna. You don't know him.

BARBARA: Are you saying that two men are missing?

FEDOR: Who else is missing?

BARBARA: My son.

ANNA: My journeyman.

ADAM: Well, what a business! A fine Sunday morning this is going to be
our famous Pressburg!

(Hammering on the door)

Scene Eight

The same and MEG

MEG: They're here!

ADAM: Who's here?

MEG: Urban and some guards on horseback. They've surrounded the inn
all sides. Heaven help us! Save yourselves if you can!

(Musical theme)

ACT SIX

In a shipyard on the Danube. Daytime.

Scene One

PETER and PAUL

PETER (looking around himself with downright passionate curiosity and inspecting the various parts of ships, masts and rudders)

PAUL (engrossed in his explanations is scarcely aware of Peter.) Water and timber -- these are two elements a master shipbuilder, if he's a true mariner, must feel in his bones, as the saying goes. And not just any water or any timber. You might think, just looking at it, that water is water. Or that, at most, there are two kinds -- salt water and fresh water. But that's a layman's view, the view of someone who only looks at the water. Take our water here, the water that flows down the riverbed of the Danube -- how many people actually realize that it will change several times a year, according to how much snow we've had. One moment it will eat the timber up worse than woodworm, and at another time it will take it and do it no harm. The water of summer

floods it quite different from that during an autumn drought. One moment it comes thundering down you're afraid to even look at it, it'll spill over the banks on both sides, and the next it will flow lazily down its bed. Except that a ship can't choose the weather, it's got to ride properly. Downstream and even against the current under a hot sun and in a snowstorm, and it's got to stand up to all these. But it can only do so if it's built of the right kind of timber. And timber, my dear fellow, is a real miracle. Shipbuilders timber is like baker's flour. You can't bake good bread from poor flour. Many a time they dump all kinds of stuff here. Ignorant master shipwrights will buy it and then expect to build some miraculous vessel. Except that you can't buy timber just by looking at it. A master shipwright must have a nose for the right kind of timber and buy only the stuff that smells right. Fortunately there's still plenty of good timber in our forests. You won't find better timber from the Black Forest all the way down to Ismail. That kind of timber fair sings into your ears when you pick it up. And it's a joy to work. When I've got that kind of timber I don't care if it's day or night. I'd go without food or drink. That kind of work is pure joy. And it's a real sin to put it off. That kind of work wants to be done in the sweat of your brow, but I tell you it's worth it. Take a closer look at this rudder. Take a closer look at it. That won't wobble in a storm. It's made of one piece. Not a drop of glue in it.

PETER (puts down his pipe and expertly handles the rudder handed to him).
This is a splendid piece of workmanship.

On : Know anything about ships?

ER: Not as much as you do.

rrr : If our mistress Joanna weren't afraid of Joachim we could have a workshop today that wouldn't have its equal far and wide.

ul ER: But you haven't shown me your... your miracle boat yet. The one that can travel over dry ground and water.

L: That's only a toy as yet. Everyone's saying only a lunatic could have thought of it. But I keep thinking that if it works as a toy, why shouldn't it work in reality? (He produces the model of his ship with wheels.)

ER: Over land and water, you say?

L: Try it. It's quite simple. The principle of an ordinary wagon with four wheels. As the vehicle enters the water the two wheels operate as paddle wheels.

ER: It looks simple enough.

PAUL: I've calculated the force needed for the paddle wheels. They could be worked by half the number of men used on the oars. And maybe one could manage without oarsmen altogether. The horse that would be harnessed between the shafts on dry land could be taken below once the ship was in the water, and made to operate the paddle wheel in the manner of a draw-well.

PETER: Ever seen anything like it anywhere?

PAUL: Like this? No; but when a fellow drifts about the world he picks up a thing or two here and there.

PETER (trying the model out on the ground): I've seen a lot, but a ship on water...?

PAUL: All kinds of things are happening now. The other day, when I told some of our men that when I was in France I saw a machine which could subtract, divide and multiply, they just laughed at me.

PETER: You saw that machine with your own eyes?

PAUL: With my own eyes. A brass box, no bigger than an ordinary brick, in it eleven complete and six incomplete little wheels.

PETER: And those wheels?

PAUL: I'm telling you. All by themselves they add, subtract, multiply and divide any number you like.

PETER: That would mean that your machine could replace the human mind?

PAUL: Just that. The man who invented it claims that the human mind operates in a similar mechanical manner. With the difference that not all human heads are the same. He's got a funny name, that man.

PETER: Pascal. Listen, Paul, listen to me carefully. You've no business to be here.

PAUL: And why's that?

PETER: You just don't belong here.

PAUL: And where do I belong?

PETER: To a more worthy destiny.

PAUL: I don't understand.

PETER: I'll put it differently. You'll come away with me.

PAUL: Where to?

PETER: It's some distance, but you won't regret it. Never you fear.

PAUL: I'm not going anywhere.

PETER: You are. I've got a river back home, three times as big as this Danube of yours. You'll build ships on the Don. As many as you like. For me.

PAUL: For you?

PETER: Yes, only for me and my fleet.

PAUL: What fleet can you have?

PETER: My... imperial fleet. Ever since last night you've been asking me what I was. Well, I'm the Tsar of Russia.

PAUL: What's that?

PETER: Something like your emperor.

PAUL: And your name's Peter?

PETER: Yes -- Peter.

PAUL: Every decent emperor is called Ferdinand, or Maximilian or Leopold.

PETER: But Peter?!

PETER: I am Peter the First.

(after a moment's hesitation laughs out loud): Don't pull my leg.

I've been straight with you and told you everything about myself --

his and you're trying to make fun of me!

you

I'm serious.

Don't tell me that the Tsars of Russia bus about the world just like that? I bet they look different from you!

Scene Two

The same and MATTHEW and MARK

ing NEW (running on-stage): Bad news, fellows! Take to your heels!

Beat it, and fast! If they catch you, you're for it!

Who's going to catch us?

The guards are out to catch Paul.

NEW: And some soldiers as well.

The town captain is offering a reward for whoever brings Paul back to the pillory. (To Peter): And you're being sought by your own top brass!

MATTHEW: The general and the admiral. Asking questions everywhere...

PAUL (to Peter): A fine Tsar you are! Just an ordinary deserter.

MATTHEW: Really, fellows, don't hang around here. Pecko's bound to have
the mistress that you were at our hostel last night.

MARK: And the guards have blocked the road to the river.

PAUL: So which way do we go?

PETER: The way we came. We'll go and meet them.

MARK: You must be mad! You don't know our guards! They'll beat you
you remain a cripple for the rest of your life!

PETER: They've got nothing on me.

MARK: If you've deserted you're in it as much as Paul. Top brass has
sense of humour.

PETER: I'll teach them some humour, you'll see. The general and the
I'll enjoy teaching their drink-sodden heads some humour.

PAUL: I don't know what you're saying. But we'll have to beat it
The only safe way of escape now is... through the convent...

MARK: They won't sniff around for us there.

(The sound of hooves is heard on the cobble stones.)

MATTHEW: What did I tell you? They're here already! Come on, boys!

MARK (helps Peter and Paul to escape from the shipyard.)

Scene Three

URBAN and guards, MATTHEW and MARK

URBAN (running on-stage): Where is he?

MARK: Where's who, sir?

URBAN: The son of Barbara the cook from the Black Bear, the journeyman Paul!

MATTHEW: If you please, sir, since last night he's been inside...

MARK: ... the pillory. Locked up.

MATTHEW: In the Fish Market, sir.

URBAN (to the guards): Search the place! Turn everything upside down!

MATTHEW: You mean he's escaped?

MATTHEW: How could he escape, through those heavy bars?

URBAN (to the guards): Search the place! (He notices that the two guards are curiously inspecting the model dropped on the ground): What's this thing here?

MARK: It's a ship, sir.

URBAN: On wheels?

MARK: On wheels.

URBAN: A lunatic! And a dangerous one at that.

MARK: Dangerous?

URBAN: Today he fixes wheels to a ship and tomorrow, for all you know, fit wings to it.

MARK: I don't believe it.

URBAN: Decent folk have to be protected against lunatics. Lunatics never yet brought any good into this world.

MARK: Looks like it, too.

(after a pause): Who does?

This world.

And who might you be?

The journeyman Mark

You too such a good-for-nothing, like that bastard?

M: No, sir, he's got respectable parents.

(after a pause): Well, that's something, at least.

GUARD: Beg to report, sir, I have not found anyone...

GUARD: ... in the whole shipyard.

(pointing to the model): Confiscate that rubbish!

MAN: But it's a toy, sir.

MAN: Chop it up and burn it! I'm not having decent people's heads turned by toys such as this.

GUARD: Yes sir.

URBAN: And continue the search!

SECOND GUARD: There's nothing down there but the swollen river.

URBAN: You'll catch him if you have to drink the river down to its

MATTHEW: What a drinking party that'll be!

URBAN: What was that?

MATTHEW: Nothing, sir. But won't you need some help with all that dr

URBAN: Seems to me you're a bit touched in the head yourself?

MATTHEW: As you think, sir. It's possible.

URBAN (angrily kicking the door): Damned place! Whole shipyard full
of lunatics. Fine job they'll be turning out.

(A musical theme concludes the first half of the play.)

INTERMISSION

ACT SEVEN

Inside the convent garden wall. Daytime.

Scene One

BEATA and AGATHA

BEATA (Hanging out some freshly laundered habits to dry on a line): Have you heard?

AGATHA: What?

BEATA: He got away.

AGATHA: Who?

BEATA: He.

AGATHA: The one from the Fish Market?

BEATA (sods meaningly)

AGATHA: When?

BEATA: At night.

AGATHA: Who told you?

BEATA: At morning Mass.

AGATHA: Will they catch him?

BEATA: Who knows.

AGATHA: But how?

BEATA: God be with him.

AGATHA: They'll beat him up.

BEATA: They shouldn't.

AGATHA: Why not?

BEATA: But surely...

AGATHA: He's a human being?

BEATA: Created in God's likeness.

AGATHA: Some in God's, some in the Devil's.

BEATA: This one didn't look like him.

THA: Like who?

ATA: The Devil.

THA: How do you know?

ATA: I noticed it.

ATHA: When?

ATA: Last night.

ATHA: Lord, forgive us

ATA: ... our sins

GATHA: And don't speak again

ATA: About his?

GATHA: It's a sin.

EATA: Why?

GATHA: I don't know.

EATA: We should go to confession

AGATHA: Suppose we don't...

BEATA: ... get absolution?

AGATHA: Better not confess anything.

BEATA: God is more merciful...

AGATHA: ... than Father Victorinus.

BEATA: Indeed yes.

AGATHA: And don't think any more.

BEATA: Of him?

AGATHA: He's sure to be unclean.

BEATA: Why?

AGATHA: If he torments you so much.

BEATA: Doesn't he you?

AGATHA: Hush, and come along. (Exeunt)

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Scene Two

PETER and PAUL

PAUL (curiously pushes up his head from behind the high wall, then he climbs on to it and helps Peter up. He is the first to jump down.) Careful! Land on both feet, or you'll break a leg!

PETER (hesitates for a moment).

PAUL: Well? Are you with me or with them?

PETER (jumps down): You know I'm with you.

PAUL: Of course you are. What choice have you got?

PETER: Except that we're no safer here.

PAUL: They won't search for us here. And if they do -- look! (He shakes the washing line with the habits)

PETER: I don't see anything.

PAUL (pulls a habit off the line): They'll never spot us if we're nuns.

PETER (disgusted): You want to put that on?

PAUL: Why not?

PETER: Are you crazy?

PAUL (already wearing the habit): They've never had an Ursuline nun like
one in Pressburg before.

PETER: You're right there. Except that this skirt's barely down to my

PAUL (pulls the habit over Peter's head): Never mind. You'll just have to
a little if there's someone about.

PETER: And what about my moustache?

PAUL: Moustache? You tie a cloth over your nose.

PETER: You going to turn me into a living mummy?

PAUL: You'll be a nun with toothache.

PETER: Very well. But you'll have to pray for me.

PAUL: Trust me. In this disguise we now slowly cross the garden into
courtyard, devoutly, eyes dropped to the ground, and then, just
quietly, past the gatehouse and out on the road.

R (looking exceedingly comical in the habit which barely reaches down to his knees): You're a rogue all right!

Why?

R: Are we going to walk huddled up like this all the way? People will think I'm in a certain condition.

Only if somebody sees us.

R: By then it'll be too late.

: Don't worry. In this country hardly anybody takes any notice of nuns. And put that broad hat on your head. That's better! If you pull it down no one can see your face.

R: Someone's coming.

L: On your knees!

R (kneels down, face to the wall)

L (does likewise, in an attitude of prayer)

Scene Three

The same and BEATA and AGATHA

BEATA (with a basket of freshly washed linen, as in the earlier scene):
To dream of clouded water...

AGATHA: ... means misfortune.

BEATA: And of a golden stag?

AGATHA: That isn't in the dream book.

BEATA: She forbade us to have dream books.

AGATHA: But I don't have one.

BEATA: So how do you know?

AGATHA: Got a good memory.

BEATA (catches sight of the praying figures and goes rigid)

AGATHA: What's the matter?

BEATA (silently motions her to look towards the wall)

GATHA (opens her eyes wide and falls silent)

BEATA: They weren't here a moment ago.

no: GATHA: No.

BEATA: Where can they have sprung from?

GATHA: No idea.

BEATA: They're in prayer.

GATHA: I can see that.

BEATA: But why by the wall?

GATHA: I don't know.

BEATA: Ask them.

GATHA: Why me?

BEATA: Aren't you curious who they are?

GATHA (after a pause): Good morning, dear sisters. (After a pause, when she has had no answer) They pray a lot more intently than we do.

BEATA: Maybe they haven't heard us.

AGATHA (louder): I say, welcome to our house, dear sisters.

PAUL (half turning, in a whisper): Thank you.

BEATA: Are you by any chance the novices from the Marian convent?

PAUL (silently nods assent)

AGATHA: We've been expecting you for the past three days.

BEATA: Well, come in then. Mother Ursula has been worrying lest some ill
befallen you on your journey.

PAUL: No, nothing has happened to us.

AGATHA: What kept you so long?

PAUL: Terrible weather we had.

AGATHA: You don't say.

PAUL: Thunderstorms flooding the roads.

BEATA: How strange. Here in Pressburg we haven't had a drop of rain in
months.

A: Come inside, sisters. You must be starved after your long Journey.

Thank you so much. But we are not in the habit of feeding our sinful bodies without prolonged prayer first.

A (softly to Agatha): Did you hear that? I can see them introducing strict regime here.

HA: Dear sisters, why don't you say your prayers indoors, under a proper crucifix instead of here by the wall?

L: To us every spot on God's earth is hallowed.

HA: Quite so, but Mother Superior is most anxiously waiting for you.

L: We'll come. We'll come in a moment. But we wish to enter into your midst in a state of grace and cleansed of all sin.

HA: Is there anything you need?

L: No, thank you. Please don't trouble yourselves.

HA: And what are we to say to Mother Ursula?

L: You don't have to say anything. Just leave us to finish our prayers in peace...

BEATA: And the other sister?

PAUL: When she's engrossed in prayer she is totally unaware of the world around her. Even of thunder and lightning.

AGATHA (softly to Beata): What did I tell you? These two are fanatics. They mean trouble.

BEATA: The Lord be with you, sisters.

PAUL: And with you likewise.

Scene Four

PETER and PAUL

PETER (eventually turning about, having made sure that Beata and Agatha are gone): Well, my dear Paul, we're in the soup all right. Up to your ears.

PAUL: Steady nerves, Mr. Gunner. Steady nerves!

PETER: What next?

PAUL: Nothing.

TER: You don't think they noticed?

UL: Noticed what?

TER: That we're wearing their clothes.

UL: Oh, I don't think so. They had other things on their minds. Didn't you hear? Interpreting dreams they were.

TER: But if anyone else comes along I won't be able to keep it up.

UL: As I'm saying: steady nerves!

TER: What are you going to do?

UL: As I said before. Devoutly gazing on the ground, we'll walk out with delicate mincing steps.

TER: Where to?

UL: I'm the helmsman here.

TER: Very well. What course will you navigate?

UL: Quiet.

TER: I've a feeling we're not going to take many delicate mincing steps.

PAUL: Why's that?

PETER: Take a look. The entire nunnery's on its way here!

PAUL: Darned gossips!

PETER: What now?

PAUL: Back over the wall.

PETER (gives Paul a leg-up)

PAUL (climbs to the top and helps Peter up)

Scene Five

URSULA, BEATA and AGATHA

URSULA (arrives at the precise moment when Paul is pulling Peter up to the top of the wall): Sisters! Dear sisters, what do I see? For Christ's wounds' sake! Sisters! Is that seemly? To escape from convent over the wall?

AGATHA: Lord forgive us for what we are seeing.

BEATA: Why, that sister's wearing riding boots!

GATHA: With spurs on!

URSULA: Apaga satanas! They're wearing our habits!

GATHA: Thieves!

URSULA: Thieves in our convent! That's never happened in our famous Pressburg before. Quickly! Call for help!

GATHA (squealing): Help!

BEATA (copies her)

URSULA: Thieves in the convent! Sound the alarm!

(Musical theme)

For
re

ACT EIGHT

Inside the Golden Griffin apothecary's shop. Daytime.

Scene One

VERONICA and BARBARA

(Hammering on the door. Veronica goes to open the door. In doorway stands Barbara)

BARBARA (runs in, out of breath): My dear child! Where is he?

VERONICA: Who?

BARBARA: Paul.

VERONICA: Paul? In the pillory in the Fish Market, of course. Where else

BARBARA: He isn't there any more. He's vanished and Captain Urban's galloped about the city with his guards. Turned the whole inn upside down. Thought I was hiding him.

VERONICA: How can he have vanished through the locked bars?

BARBARA: That's what I'd like to know.

ERONICA: I hope he's all right.

BARBARA: He won't be if they catch him.

ERONICA: What are we to do, Mother?

BARBARA: I really don't know. Better give me something for my pain.

ERONICA: Where does it hurt?

In

BARBARA: That depends on what's within easy reach.

ERONICA: How about a few drops on a lump of sugar?

BARBARA: Never mind the sugar. Don't go to any trouble.

ERONICA (picks up a glass caraffe)

BARBARA: I'm shaking all over. But listen, I haven't told you everything yet.

ERONICA (hands her a small glass)

BARBARA (drinks from the caraffe): Why get the glass dirty?

ERONICA: You said there was more?

BARBARA: Yes, someone else has gone missing. From the Black Bear. Some
who was with those two generals has vanished.

VERONICA: Vanished?

BARBARA: They're searching for him too. And the third piece of news: the
a burglary at the convent early this morning.

VERONICA: Never had that sort of thing in our famous Pressburg!

BARBARA: Certainly not.

(More hammering on the door)

VERONICA: I wonder who that can be? (She looks out through the window) The
nuns, it seems.

BARBARA: Didn't I tell you? Your father's going to do a roaring business
today. Those scared nuns will buy up half his shop.

Scene Two

The same and PETER and PAUL

VERONICA: Laudetur, dear sisters. What can I do for you?

PAUL: You might lock the door for a start.

VERONICA (hurling herself into Paul's arms): Paul, darling!

BARBARA (crosses herself comically and takes another swig from the caraffe): I'm seeing things.

PAUL: You're not, Mother. It really is me.

VERONICA (pointing to Peter): And this one with the moustache?

BARBARA: The gunner!

PAUL: How did you know, Mother?

BARBARA: How could I not know? The generals are chasing him.

PETER: So the comedy's over?

PAUL: What do you mean: over? Didn't you hear? You're wanted by the generals and I'm wanted by the guards.

BARBARA: How did you get here?

PAUL: As Ursuline sisters.

BARBARA: So it was you who burgled the convent?

PETER: We didn't take a thing.

PAUL: Only borrowed these. Sunday wear for a stroll through Pressburg.

BARBARA: So what do you propose to do?

PAUL: You'll hide us here till the evening, and in the evening...

VERONICA: In the evening -- what?

PETER: In the evening we'll move on.

VERONICA: Where to?

PETER: Far away. To a country where people aren't locked up in cages, where good craftsmen are appreciated.

VERONICA: You'd leave me here?

BARBARA: You'd leave us here at the mercy of a wicked world?

PETER: Fifty strokes -- that's what's awaiting him.

BARBARA: You see? All because of your silly ideas! Not only do they thrash you at home, but they even lure you away to foreign parts! (Hammer on the door)

VERONICA: Heavens, who can that be?

PAUL: Don't open! Not just yet!

VERONICA: It's my father!

BARBARA: He can open the door himself. Get to the inn quickly.

VERONICA: There are two men with him.

BARBARA: What kind of men. Guards?

VERONICA: No. Gentlemen.

BARBARA: Didn't I tell you? Those two are from our inn. The generals!

PAUL: Quick, let's get lost!

PETER: No need at all.

PAUL: Have you gone mad?

PETER: If you still don't believe me, you'll have your proof now.

VERONICA: Take those two mortars. Quick. I'll tell my father you've come in to grind some fragrant herbs.

Scene Three

The same and NICHOLAS, FRANZ and FEDOR

NICHOLAS: If you please, gentlemen, come right in. I'm sure we can help

FEDOR: Good man, I want something for a headache.

FRANZ: And I have a pain in my belly, Mr. Apothecary.

NICHOLAS: Naturally, naturally. We've got a wide selection of all the prescriptions which the famous Paracelsus recommended to us here in Pressburg. Very effective medicines. The gentlemen will be like reborn. (He looks at the nuns) I can see that even though today is the Lord's day there are always some sick people about.

VERONICA: The sisters have come in to grind up some fragrant herbs; they've run out of thyme. They need all kinds of things.

NICHOLAS: They're welcome to grind their paste. As much as they like. We have plenty of everything. And, Veronica, for these gentlemen here fill two glasses with water. I'm going to give them some drops.

BARBARA: D'you want me to help you?

NICHOLAS: What are you doing here? Hoping to find your flown bird here?

BARBARA: Mr. Nicholas, can't you see I'm worried sick about him?

NICHOLAS: Well, no one in Pressburg ever pulled that one off. Vanish from inside the pillory. No one ever!

FEDOR (holding his head): Of my poor head. Please don't split. Else I'll be finished here and now.

FRANZ: Never mind your head. A head can stand a lot. But one's belly...

FEDOR: Serves you right. Why the hell did we have to make this excursion to Pressburg! But this was your idea, dear Franz. Can you imagine what'll happen if we return without him?

FRANZ: That I can't.

FEDOR: But where is he? Where is he? For two years we never let him out of our sight, and now, at the very end of our travels, he gets lost like some mischievous child!

FRANZ: You shouldn't have drunk so much.

NICHOLAS: You're making a lot of fuss over an ordinary gunner! Why, the world's full of vagrant gunners! There are thousands of them about. You've lost one -- why not hire another?

FRANZ: A bold idea. What do you think, Fedor? Imagine ourselves
home with a false Peter.

FEDOR: Wouldn't be the first time in our history. But what about the
and the empire?

FRANZ: Well, somehow we might divide it up between ourselves.

PETER (can no longer restrain himself and starts pounding his mortar):
divide you two! Your general's and admiral's souls -- right down
middle! I'll divide you so you'll forget you ever were in Prussia.

FEDOR (throws himself at his feet): Your Majesty!

PETER (kicks him)

FRANZ: Is this really you, Mr. Gunner?

PETER: It is.

FRANZ (exploring Peter's face with his hands): You're right. The moustache
real.

FEDOR: But how did you get here?

PETER: As you can see, in a festive habit. (Throws off the habit)

NICHOLAS: Well, gentlemen! Let what is good be sent to us and all evil kept from us! And what about the other Ursuline sister?

PAUL: You know her all right, Mr. Nicholas. This one's wanted not by any generals but by the city guards.

NICHOLAS: You -- under my roof!

VERONICA: Father, for the love of God I beg you!

BARBARA: Have a heart and hold your peace until this evening!

NICHOLAS: Not one minute longer! Captain Urban has promised fifty ducats to whoever catches him.

PETER: Which means, dear Paul, that you've no choice left. You either come with us or the apothecary hands you over for fifty ducats.

VERONICA: My father wouldn't do that.

BARBARA: The Lord would punish him!

NICHOLAS: Not me. I didn't escape from the pillory.

PETER: Do you hear, Paul? You've only two alternatives. With me, or with them.

PAUL: With you? Where to? You've been caught already, but I'm still

PETER: You still don't believe me?

PAUL: No.

PETER: Very well. (To Franz and Fedor) Let's go.

NICHOLAS: Not so fast. Who's going to pay?

PETER (produces a moneybag and gives some money to Nicholas): For the medicine and for the ground herbs, and finally for him. (Points at Paul) So you don't have to denounce him.

NICHOLAS (at a loss): Of course, if that's your wish.

PAUL (moves over to Fedor): General, who is that man?

FEDOR (suddenly embarrassed; he does not know how to reply)

FRANZ (in a whisper to Fedor): Careful, dear Fedor. This is a test. At the very end of our travels.

FEDOR: Who do you think he is? A gunner. Our gunner.

PAUL (after a pause to Peter): Well, there you are.

NICHOLAS: But where did the gunner get all that money?

FRANZ: Our gunners are very well paid.

PETER: Until this evening then, Paul. You have until the evening. Consider well whether you'll trust the Tsar's word or that of an old woman.

(Musical theme)

ACT EIGHT

The Black Bear inn, as in Acts Two and Five. Daytime.

Scene One

PETER and FEDOR

PETER: While you two were quietly getting drunk...

FEDOR: Majesty, it wasn't like that at all. You are exaggerating a little as you always do.

PETER: As I said, while you were getting drunk with Franz on all those Prensburg wines...

FEDOR: Actually, they're not bad at all, I can vouch for that.

PETER: ... I was doing some work.

FEDOR: But you are not supposed to do any work. Least of all that kind.

PETER: What kind?

FEDOR: At night, with criminals.

PETER: He's no criminal! He's the only real discovery during my two years' travelling!

FEDOR: Aren't you exaggerating, Your Majesty?

PETER: He is the kind of man I'm looking for. A man who knows his job. He's got everything he needs. In his head and in his hands. In his brain and in his heart. He's a builder, a constructor. Inventor and manual worker in one person.

FEDOR: Isn't that too much?

PETER: And he doesn't realize what he's got. They should be paying him his weight in gold! Instead they're putting him in the pillory. An ordinary man of the people, but worth a dozen of my lazy, pampered Boyars' sons whom I sent out to Europe to study. I haven't had a fraction from them of what I got from this one man within the few hours we spent at the shipyard.

FEDOR: So that's where you were!

PETER: Where else did you think we were, my dear Fedor? This young Preasburg journeyman is ahead of his time with his ideas. He's more farsighted than most of us.

FEDOR: A clairvoyant or a conjurer?

PETER: Neither. A sound head, quite simply. Intelligence, Fedor! Ability to think a great idea through. That's the kind of man I need around me, and if Franz brings him to me now I'll make him a master shipwright such as our rivers have not seen before.

FEDOR: I don't see why you have to persuade him so hard?

PETER: Because he still doesn't believe who I am.

FEDOR: I can't say I'm surprised, the way you joined in his pranks. The last dressed up as a nun! Did you have to do that?

PETER: Any experience is valuable, Fedor, and often instructive. If I'm to be a good and enlightened ruler of my people then nothing's been a waste of time during this two years' incognito -- even though you two were more interested in glory and pompous masquerades.

FEDOR: If necessary, we can always buy him from his master.

PETER: He's a free man, he hasn't got a master.

FEDOR: And that employer of his, that mistress? How about her...? You know what women are like.

PETER: The mistress? That's not a bad idea at all.

FEDOR: There you are. I'm thinking of you and for you. Even when it seems to you that I'm not.

Scene Two

The same and ADAM

ADAM (enters, as always, with a full jug): Well, here's to your happy reunion. What wine may I offer the gentlemen today? I knew all along, and I said so, that Mr. Gunner couldn't get lost so easily in our Pressburg. What is your wish?

FEDOR (looking a little guiltily at Peter): I don't rightly know. The one had yesterday was good, but if you have something better still we might have a little tasting. What do you say, Mr. Gunner?

PETER: What we need at this moment is not wine but a woman.

ADAM: A woman? For heaven's sake, haven't you had enough? The whole night was not enough for you?

PETER: I mean a particular woman. The mistress shipwright who has that workshop down in the yards.

ADAM: Joanna is a very respectable and God-fearing widow.

PETER: We have no designs on her God-fearing respectability.

FEDOR: But we'd like to do some business with her.

ADAM: That's different. Business goes very well with respectability.

PETER: Get someone to fetch her!

ADAM: At your command. (As he makes his exit he collides in the door with Franz)

Scene Three

The same and FRANZ

PETER: Well, how did it go?

FRANZ: Not at all.

PETER: Not at all?

FRANZ: He won't hear of it.

PETER: Did you offer him money?

FRANZ: More than you suggested.

PETER: Silly fool! What's keeping him here?

FRANZ: To begin with, he still doesn't believe that you are who you say you are.

PETER: Do I have to show him my Coronation Charter?

FRANZ: Secondly, he keeps saying he won't go anywhere and can't go anywhere because he's pledged his word.

PETER: His word? To whom? To the emperor?

FRANZ: To that girl, the apothecary's daughter.

PETER: We can pave the road for him with girls like that, if that's what he wants. Did you tell him that?

FRANZ: I did. But it had no effect. He says this place is where he was born, and it is here and nowhere else that he's got to work, love and die.

PETER: Odd nation, these Slovaks. They flog him, they lock him up in a cage, and instead of fleeing as far as possible he thinks up reasons for staying.

FEDOR: Women... They're behind everything... But if we had a proper go at that mistress who employs him...

FRANZ: Majesty, do you really believe that that ship of his, the one that can move on land and on water, is worth our wasting all that valuable time?

PETER: It's my time. Mine alone. And what I do with it is up to me.

FRANZ: I was only trying to suggest that we could always place an order for that ship.

PETER: So they send it down the Danube into the arms of the Turks?

FRANZ: What Turks? It can travel overland, follow our own trail. And in complete safety.

PETER: It's not the ship I'm after but its inventor. Him above all.

Scene Four

The same and JOANNA and ADAM

ADAM (bringing Joanna in): If you please, gentlemen. You're in luck. I caught Mistress Joanna as she was leaving her house.

JOANNA: I don't know the reason for your invitation, gentlemen. But I'd like to say straight away that I wouldn't want to be late for Holy Communion.

FEDOR: So much the better. Excellent. Let's get down to business straight away.

PETER: Down to business.

FEDOR: We have learned, Mistress Joanna, that a ship is being built at your yard which we would be seriously interested in.

JOANNA: I'm pleased to hear it.

FEDOR: That's why we would like to have a little talk with you.

JOANNA: This is Sunday, the Lord's day, and it isn't proper to discuss such matters. But if you are really seriously interested I'll even forgo Holy Communion.

FEDOR: I was sure we'd come to an agreement.

ADAM: So your throats don't get dry I'll bring you something to drink. The stuff you had last night. (Exit)

PETER: You have some good journeymen.

JOANNA: I can't complain. I know how to pick them. I don't employ just any kind of riffraff.

PETER: We would be interested.

JOANNA: In my journeymen? Is that what you mean?

PETER: We would like... to set up a shipyard ourselves.

JOANNA (screams): Where? Here? To compete with me? And you have the nerve to tell me this to my face?

FEDOR: Not at all, dear Madam Mistress, not here.

JOANNA: Where then?

FRANZ: A long way away. Not on the Danube.

PETER: And as for your journeymen, we'd be interested in just one of them.

JOANNA: I don't need three guesses. His name wouldn't be Paul?

PETER: Precisely, Mistress.

JOANNA: Except that you're barking up the wrong tree.

PETER: Why is that?

JOANNA: The wrong tree totally. He got away from of the pillory during the night. So this business deal won't come off.

PETER: Got away, you say?

JOANNA: No one in our famous Pressburg has pulled that one off before.

FEDOR: And supposing we happened to find him?

JOANNA: Then he'll be free, as a journeyman, to decide whom to serve. To work for me or risk his neck in some foreign parts.

PETER: But here the rack is all ready for him.

JOANNA: I don't know who you are and where you are from, gentlemen.

PETER: We want to help a talented young man.

JOANNA: A what young man?

PETER: A talented one. You don't know the word?

JOANNA: No.

PETER: I don't know how to explain it to you. We want to help a journeyman who's condemned to eternally remaining a journeyman.

JOANNA: Why eternally?

PETER: Because your customs prevent him, as an illegitimate child, from ever becoming a master craftsman.

JOANNA: He can become a master all right, so long as he wants to.

PETER: Against the law?

JOANNA: Master status can be acquired by marriage.

FEDOR: To the apothecary's daughter? A shipyard?

JOANNA: With the apothecary's daughter her father's shop, with me a shipyard.

PETER (after a pause): With you?

JOANNA: With me! Is there something that strikes you as odd in my plan, young man?

PETER: There are quite a few things that strike me as odd in your famous Pressburg.

(The tense silence is broken by Adam's entrance with a jug)

Scene Five

The same and ADAM

ADAM: Well then, is your business deal settled? Mistress Joanna, shall we drink to it with a little Saint-George?

JOANNA: You're a real clown, Adam. You call me here for an interesting business deal and instead of a deal they want to set up a rival business. But you'd better watch out, gentlemen! Better watch out! Our guild won't be made a fool of.

ADAM: Surely it can't be as bad as that.

JOANNA: Oh yes, it is. Better open the door for me and help me into my coach.
(Exit with Adam)

Scene Six

The same without Adam and Joanna

FRANZ: Heaven help anyone who gets into the claws of an ageing woman with a sudden burst of new desire.

PETER: This means that in this situation we have only one choice.

FEDOR: One choice?

FRANZ: Majesty?

PETER: Abduction! You will use every means at your disposal. Every opportunity. Deception, cheating, bribery. Get him drunk and see Him and anyone with him. By tomorrow morning he must be in my car alive. Understand? Alive and well.

(Musical theme)

ACT TEN

The Golden Griffin apothecary's shop, as in Act Eight. Evening.

Scene One

NICHOLAS, VERONICA and PAUL

NICHOLAS (angrily): I said he's leaving!

VERONICA: Father, please!

NICHOLAS: High time. It's dark outside and I'm not having him under my roof a minute longer.

VERONICA: And suppose I leave with him?

NICHOLAS: I'd like to see you doing that!

VERONICA: I love him, Father. I love him.

NICHOLAS: I'll never understand how a decent girl can throw herself away on such a...

PAUL: Master Nicholas, I really don't know what you take me for. I haven't done anything improper.

NICHOLAS: No? You're on the run, I've been harbouring you all day, and you've even robbed a convent. You're not just a rioter but a thief into the bargain.

PAUL: We didn't take anything.

NICHOLAS: What are these then? (Points to the habits on the floor)

VERONICA: We'll return them to them like honest people. I'll take them back myself.

NICHOLAS: You? That would be the last straw! You're not to touch those habits. Do you want it bruited about that Nicholas of the Golden Griffin is in cahoots with villains?

PAUL: Maybe there was just a little villainy in it, but we're not thieves -- neither I nor my friend, the gunner.

NICHOLAS: What were you doing in the convent then?

PAUL: Should we have let ourselves be caught by the guards?

VERONICA: If you don't believe him, you might at least believe the two generals.

NICHOLAS: I trust them least of all.

PAUL: Weren't you paid in gold?

NICHOLAS: That's just why! God knows where they stole it. And those uniforms.
Who knows who they stripped them off.

(Hammering on the door)

VERONICA: Don't let anyone in, Father.

NICHOLAS: What are you saying? Don't you know the law on apothecaries? We've
got to be ready to help at any hour.

VERONICA: But only those who ask for help.

NICHOLAS: All right, run along and see who it is.

PAUL: Thank you, Master Nicholas.

NICHOLAS: For nothing.

PAUL: I hope I'll convince you one day.

NICHOLAS: And I'm hoping it won't be necessary.

Scene Two

The same and BARBARA

PAUL: Mother, what are you doing here?

BARBARA: For the love of God, I beg you, Mr. Nicholas, don't drive him away.
Hold out just a little longer.

NICHOLAS: How much longer?

BARBARA: I wish I could tell you. Till they leave him alone.

NICHOLAS: If they don't catch him today they'll catch him tomorrow. You know
Urban and his guards.

BARBARA: Never mind Urban and his guards.

NICHOLAS: What's that?

BARBARA: Those generals from our inn are trying to abduct him.

NICHOLAS: Didn't I say they were crooks? Fine crowd he got mixed up with!

PAUL: How was I to know what kind of people they are?

NICHOLAS (to Barbara): How is it you know about it?

BARBARA: Adam the landlord has his ears everywhere. Came running to me to the kitchen and said: Run along, you poor creature, run as fast as you can if you know where your son's hiding out. Tell him to beat it because these gents here have decided to catch him and carry him off with them. Into the wide world, no one knows where.

NICHOLAS: Carry him off, you say? But why?

BARBARA: That's what I'd like to know. It's those wild ideas of yours!

VERONICA: Paul, dearest, what do they want you for? Why is everyone after you?

PAUL: Never fear, I'm still here.

BARBARA: For how long, I wonder? How long, my only son?

(Hammering on the door)

VERONICA: No! We're not letting anybody else in!

BARBARA (to Nicholas): Hide him, Mr. Nicholas... Save him and we'll both serve you faithfully to the end of our days.

NICHOLAS: I don't need your services.

VERONICA: Father!

NICHOLAS: Go and open the door!

BARBARA: Master Nicholas, you did take the gunner's money!

NICHOLAS: I don't want it. Here, take it! Nicholas of the Golden Griffin will not tarnish his honour or his shop's good name by accepting money from highwaymen.

VERONICA: Consider what you are doing.

NICHOLAS: Go and see who it is.

PAUL: I shan't forget your kindness.

NICHOLAS: Never mind that now.

BARBARA: I'll always be in your debt.

NICHOLAS: You're taking advantage my good nature.

BARBARA: May it be repaid you on your children and children's children!

Scene Three

The same and JOANNA

JOANNA (enters with Veronica)

NICHOLAS: We are honoured. Welcome Mistress. What brings you to my dispensary?

JOANNA: Thank you for the inquiry. My health is still good enough for me to dispense with your services. But since I'm here anyway, give me a pennyworth of bay leaves.

NICHOLAS: You've come all the way for that? You are out of breath...

JOANNA: To tell you the truth, I haven't come for that alone.

NICHOLAS: Or are they now also after you?

JOANNA: Not me. But after my Joruneyman.

NICHOLAS: An unfortunate fellow. Most unfortunate.

JOANNA: Quite so. But I don't want the whole of Pressburg talking ill about me, and so I have come to help him.

PAUL: You help me, Mistress?

JOANNA: Yes, I have.

PAUL: How will you help me?

JOANNA: Leave that to me.

BARBARA: Do you know that he's wanted by two sides now?

JOANNA: I do. He's only one chance left.

BARBARA: One chance?

VERONICA: What chance?

JOANNA: To go with me.

PAUL: With you? Where?

JOANNA: I'll buy your freedom from the City Captain and make you a master.

PAUL: A master?

BARBARA: Merciful heavens!

PAUL: You know I can't be a...

JOANNA: But you can... by marriage.

PAUL: Marriage to you?

VERONICA (flings herself round Paul's neck)

NICHOLAS: Are you serious, Mistress Joanna?

JOANNA: Doesn't my idea appeal to you?

NICHOLAS: But you are...

JOANNA: Save yourself unnecessary words, Mr. Apothecary. Didn't you yourself say you didn't want to see him under your roof again?

NICHOLAS: One says a lot of things, but nothing's ever eaten as hot as it's cooked.

VERONICA: And you? You'd leave me for her? Expose me to the ridicule of all Pressburg?

JOANNA: Your father will find you a more suitable husband.

VERONICA: More suitable? So he's suitable enough for you but not for me? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

JOANNA: Quiet, girl, quiet. The town is full of armed guards. The merest whisper that he's at the Golden...

NICHOLAS: You wouldn't do that!

JOANNA (only to Paul): I'll wait till the morning. (Exit)

NICHOLAS (going after her): Mistress Joanna, you've forgotten your bay leaves!

Scene Four

The same without Joanna and Nicholas

BARBARA (after a while): What now?

PAUL: Nothing.

VERONICA: What shall we do?

BARBARA: Guards from one side, generals from another, and now Joanna from a third. Heavens above, how many sides are there in this world?

VERONICA: I'm not letting you go a single step.

PAUL: You will.

VERONICA: You want to become a master by marriage?

BARBARA: He can't be an apothecary.

VERONICA: You would accept Joanna as your daughter?

BARBARA: I'd like to tear her apart with my teeth, but what can a poor body do?

PAUL: I'll go back into the pillory.

VERONICA: How?

BARBARA: How will you get to the Fish Market?

PAUL: As an Ursuline sister no one's going to lift my skirt. In the morning they'll find me just where I should be. The mistress won't have to buy me off from Urban. I'll serve my punishment.

BARBARA: And what about the generals? Suppose they catch you there and drag you off?

PAUL: You will lead them on to a false trail.

BARBARA: How?

PAUL: You'll go back to the Black Bear and take them a message from me, that I'm sleeping at the Journeymen's hostel disguised as a nun. Veronica will get me a second habit and a bottle of fire-water to make sure I sleep well.

(Musical theme)

ACT ELEVEN

At the hostel, as in Act Four

Scene One

MATTHEW and MARK

MATTHEW (singing desperately and perhaps a little out of tune, but mainly sadly): Go and tell my mother

I won't be home tonight,

I won't be home tomorrow --

Go tell her not to sorrow...

MARK (from the next bunk): Stop whining, Matt. In a little while we'll have to get up for work.

MATTHEW: Any real Slovak, when he's got nothing to drink, bursts into song. Song's a great comforter.

MARK: Go to sleep and you'll feel better.

MATTHEW: We had a mate and now he's gone...

MARK: They haven't caught him yet and you're already burying him.

MATTHEW: They'll catch him in the end. But let me tell you, without him I won't work for Joanna any more.

MARK: You won't this, you won't that. And how are you going to live?

MATTHEW: Working with Paul was fun, mate. Hardly seemed like work, really. Except when he'd just invented something. But now Joanna is going to skin us alive, you'll see.

MARK: She'd better not try, or we'll show her what's what.

MATTHEW: We'll go back home. Work on the rafts.

Scene Two

The same and PECKO

PECKO (enters with a bottle): Listen everybody, I have some news! We're going to have a master.

MATTHEW: What's that?

PECKO: I'm saying: we're going to have a master!

MATTHEW: Who?

PECKO: Joanna is getting married -- to Paul.

MARK: But he's promised!

MATTHEW: You're talking nonsense.

PECKO: See this bottle? Where d'you think it comes from? Joanna said to me: Here, take this and have a drink with the boys at the hostel, so they don't call me tight-fisted again behind my back.

MATTHEW: Can it really be true?

MARK: She must have felt that things were going badly.

MATTHEW: But what will happen to Veronica?

MARK: What should happen to her? One of us three might start paying court to her.

MARK: I knew they wouldn't get Paul so easily.

Scene Three

The same and PAUL

PAUL (stops in the doorway in his nun's habit and watches them with a smile on his face)

PECKO (passes the bottle round; he is the first to catch sight of Paul and flings the bottle away in terror. Mark and Matthew notice him a moment later and turn rigid)

MATTHEW: Eh?

MARK: Wow!

PECKO: This has never...

MATTHEW: ... happened before.

MARK: A nun in the dormitory?

MATTHEW: Or else we're blind drunk.

MARK: Or seeing things.

PAUL: Neither drunk nor seeing things.

PECKO (squealing): Paul!

PAUL (strips off his habit and hands Pecko another bottle): Yes, it's me.
And this is for you, Pecko.

PECKO: For me?

PAUL: In return for that bottle of yours we drank the other night.

MATTHEW (trying to snatch the bottle from Pecko): Have you gone weak in
the head, Paul?

PAUL: It's yours, Pecko. Yours alone! Drink it before anyone pinches
it from you.

PECKO (looks at the bottle undecided, but then starts gulping it down)

PAUL: Look at him. And you said that milk was still dribbling down his
chin.

MATTHEW: How did you get here?

PAVEL: Can't you see?

MARK: As a Sister of Mercy.

PECKO: Good stuff, this, as God's my witness.

PAUL: Don't stint yourself, my dear fellow. You've never had anything finer.

MATTHEW: Surely you're not drinking it all by yourself?

PAUL: Leave him, Matt!

MARK: He really will.

PAUL: Leave him to enjoy himself. You don't want him to remember you in anger.

PECKO (takes another swig, but at that moment he sits down hard): So this is by way of an engagement drink? On your betrothal to Joanna?

MATTHEW: Master, indeed.

MARK: What a time we'll be having.

MATTHEW: Sheer joy.

PECKO: Under such a master. (Drains the bottle and instantly passes out)

PAUL (looking at Pecko, in a whisper): That's what I wanted.

MATTHEW: Heavens.

MARK: What was that you gave him?

PAUL: Don't worry. He's dead to the world and will sleep like a log. But so he doesn't catch cold we'll cover him up nicely. (Picks up the habit and drops it over Pecko)

MATTHEW: Look what an ugly Ursuline sister he's turned into.

PAUL: Quiet.

MARK: I think I heard a door creaking.

PAUL: Lie down quickly, and if you see two generals come in to take him away with them you will please help them. But be sure they pay you properly for it. I'll explain everything later. Now pretend to be asleep. (All three pull blankets over themselves)

Scene Four

The same and FEDOR and FRANZ

FEDOR: Tell you the truth, dear Franz, I don't like this business.

FRANZ: No more do I, but what could we do?

FEDOR: Just imagine him getting this idea somewhere in Holland. Dragging a living person along against his will. On such a long journey!

FRANZ: Careful now.

FEDOR: Where is he?

FRANZ: Can't you see? Right under your nose.

FEDOR: Really? The same habit he wore at the apothecary's this morning.

FRANZ: Tie his feet together.

FEDOR: Why me?

FRANZ: I'll carry him later.

FEDOR: You know, when you're engaged in something as ugly as this it's always wise to share the responsibility.

FRANZ: Careful now.

FEDOR: My hands seem to be shaking.

FRANZ: Don't wake him!

MARK (pretends to have just woken up): What are you doing here? Matt. Get up
there are thieves here!

FRANZ: Quiet, friend, quiet! We aren't thieves!

MATTHEW (also pretending to have just woken up): What's happening? Help!
Murderers!

FEDOR: We're not murdering anybody! We are...

FRANZ: We're here on a certain mission.

MARK: What kind of a mission?

FRANZ: We merely wanted to make the acquaintance of your mate. (To Matthew)
Watch out, we don't want to wake him! (To Mark) Would you like to
earn some money?

MARK: Why not? How much?

FRANZ (produces a moneybag and gives it to Mark)

MARK (taking the moneybag): And what do we have to do?

FEDOR (pointing to the sleeping Pecko): Help us carry him to our coach.

MARK: What are you going to do with him?

FEDOR: We have to abduct him.

FRANZ: In his own interest.

MARK: That's different. (Places Pecko across his shoulder) Where is that coach of yours?

Scene Five

The same without Franz, Fedor, Pecko and Mark

MATTHEW: What will they do to him?

PAUL: You needn't worry about him.

MATTHEW: What a comedy!

Scene Six

The same and MARK

MARK (returning): Where are they dragging him off to?

PAUL: A little sightseeing tour of the world.

MARK: Far?

PAUL: Not really. As soon as they find out who he is they'll dump him under the first cherry tree.

MARK: Ah! These are the people who wanted...

PAUL: Me.

MATTHEW: And what'll happen to you now?

PAUL: What do you suppose will happen? I'm going back into the pillory. Here, Matt, is the shirt I borrowed from you (takes it off), and in the morning, when Urban lets me out, all of you come to meet me. And take this along with you! (Points to the moneybag)

(Musical theme)

ACT TWELVE

The pillory in the Fish Market, as in Acts One and Three. Morning.

Scene One

PAUL and guards

(Distant sound of a cock crowing)

PAUL: At last. I thought morning would never come. (The tower clock strikes and a moment later the first guard arrives. He sleepily rubs his eyes and then stares in amazement at Paul inside the pillory)

PAUL: What are you gawping at? Have you never seen a journeyman shipbuilder in the pillory before?

FIRST GUARD (shakes his head in disbelief and walks off)

SECOND GUARD (enters from the opposite side and goes practically through the same motions as the first guard)

PAUL: What are you staring at? First the one, and now the other! D'you think I'm a ghost?

SECOND GUARD (runs off after the first guard)

PAUL: It must be difficult for those police skulls to grasp a journeyman's miracles. I can well believe it. I'm dying to find out what the captain will say!

Scene Two

URSULA, BEATA, AGATHA and PAUL

(As a bell is rung in a nearby tower the nuns enter in the same manner as in Act One)

AGATHA: He's here.

BEATA: Who?

AGATHA: The one who yesterday wasn't here.

BEATA: But who was here the day before.

AGATHA: They said he was lost.

BEATA: He probably wasn't.

AGATHA: Why not?

BEATA: Because he's here.

AGATHA: People will say anything.

BEATA: Doesn't he look sad.

AGATHA: Don't look at him.

BEATA: Poor fellow.

URSULA: Sisters! What do I see? What are you looking at? May the Lord be merciful upon you! And forgive you your sinful glances. Have I not told you a hundred times that our lover is not of this world?

BEATA: Yes, a hundred times.

AGATHA: That he is not...

BEATA: ... of this world.

URSULA: Drop your eyes and forget at once what you have seen here. Once and for all.

BEATA: Once and for all.

AGATHA: We'll forget...

BEATA: ... him whom we have seen here. (They move on but they remain in the background right to the end of the Act.)

Scene Three

MATTHEW, MARK and JOANNA

MATTHEW: It's long past the hour and you're still drifting around?

MARK: Let's go. The mistress is angry that no work's being done.

JOANNA (after a pause, to Paul): So that's it, is it? You've thrown the gauntlet back to me?

PAUL: I've served my punishment, go and get Urban. He should let me out now.

JOANNA: Are you sure he'll let you out?

MARK: That's what he declared.

MATTHEW: And what did you think?

Scene Four

ADAM, BARBARA and MEG

ADAM: That's something that's never happened in our famous Pressburg before. First there's a man in it, then there isn't, and now he's back again. If I didn't have a strong constitution I'd start believing in miracles.

BARBARA: (passing a basket to Paul through the bars): I've brought you some breakfast.

MEG: And not just any breakfast. You'll be licking your chops.

BARBARA: He must be thoroughly starved since Saturday evening...

ADAM: Where he's been since Saturday...

PAUL: Where I have been? I've been here. Haven't learnt how to fly yet.

ADAM: Maybe not how to fly but a lot of other things. I'm really very curious to see just how the captain will let you out from behind these bars.

BARBARA: In the proper manner!

Scene Five

The same and VERONICA and NICHOLAS

VERONICA (runs on-stage)

NICHOLAS (following her): Didn't I forbid you to leave the house?

VERONICA (gripping the bars hard): Paul, don't give me up!

NICHOLAS: Haven't you been disgraced enough? Do you want him to make you the laughing stock of the whole of Pressburg?

BARBARA: No one's making a laughing stock of you.

MEG: You're always imagining things.

ADAM: Believe me, Nicholas, there's no point in arguing with women.

NICHOLAS: I'm not arguing -- but they are on to me like wasps. (To Joanna)
Mistress, why don't you come to an agreement with my foolish daughter?

VERONICA: We have nothing to come to an agreement about.

Scene Six

The same and URBAN and guards

URBAN (enters accompanied by the two guards): Well, what a lot of hustle so early in the morning.

BARBARA: By now decent folk have almost forgotten when early morning was! Only captains can afford to waste so much of the day.

URBAN (to Paul): Well, welcome back. So our bird has returned to his cage?

PAUL: I'm just where you locked me up. My time's up.

URBAN: I'll give you time's up! Cheeky devil! I'll teach you to mock the law and the authorities!

BARBARA: Good people! Did you hear what he said? Who's mocking the law here?

URBAN: Where did you bum about?

PAUL: You locked the pillory yourself, and you've kept the only key since Saturday.

VERONICA: You can't deny that.

URBAN (to Veronica): Get down from those bars this minute!

NICHOLAS (runs up and pulls her down): Didn't you hear what the captain said? The disgrace of it!

URBAN: There's more to come, Master Nicholas. Such disgrace as the world hasn't seen.

NICHOLAS: I daresay you'll be locking him up for a nice long stretch now?

URBAN: That would be letting him off too lightly. Making fools of us! (To the first guard) Beat the drum!

FIRST GUARD (beats his drum)

URBAN (producing and reading a new sentence): The worthy citizens are hereby informed that the journeyman Paul, here present and on view in the pillory, has, for escaping during the period of his detention in the pillory, been sentenced, as a warning to others, not to fifty strokes with the lash as originally decided but to being beaten until he breathes his last breath. Judge Kristof, in his own hand. (Horror among all present) Well, have you now stopped laughing? (To the guards) Open the pillory and tie him to the rack!

BARBARA: Good people, have you heard what they're trying to do? They want to kill him!

MEG: Till he breathes his last, he said.

VERONICA: No! You won't! Or else let me join him!

JOANNA: Why don't you try it? Just try it, my dear; get the taste of the lash dancing on your back.

NICHOLAS: Mistress Joanna, she's only a child!

BARBARA: Devout people! Will you stand there and let them do this?

MARK: Hold it, captain.

URBAN: What's that?

MARK: I said: stop it.

MATTHEW: Let him go and you'll be richly rewarded.

URBAN: What's that?

MARK: You heard all right.

URBAN: Empty promises.

MATTHEW: Supposing they aren't?

MARK (slowly pulls out the moneybag)

URBAN (holds out his hand)

MARK (shakes out a few small coins)

URBAN: Want to insult me with a few pennies?

MATTHEW: Many a mickle makes a muckle, captain.

URBAN: Not enough. Not nearly enough for a rogue like this.

MATTHEW: But captain, don't you have God on your side?

URBAN: Be off with you. Everyone about his work!

PAUL: You've no right!

URBAN: What did you say?

PAUL: You've no right to chase the people away from an execution. Let them watch their mate go to his death.

JOANNA: Don't be afraid! They won't get you.

BARBARA: I'm glad to see that you have a conscience after all!

JOANNA (gives Urban a ducat)

URBAN (takes it but shakes his head): Only one ducat? From his own mistress
Is that all he's worth to you?

JOANNA: It's enough.

URBAN: Supposing it isn't?

JOANNA: That's all you're getting.

URBAN: Then better watch and see how the rack transforms him!

(To the guards who are tying Paul to the rack)

Properly, mind -- hands and feet! We don't want him to slip away or
vanish again!

PAUL: Mother, run!

BARBARA: Where to?

PAUL: To the inn. Get the gunner!

ADAM: He isn't going to help you. The gentlemen have just packed and are
leaving.

PAUL: Run! And tell him that if he really is the Tsar he should now save me
from these people.

Scene Seven

The same and PECKO

PECKO (running on-stage): People! Mistress! My dear workmates! I'm here!

PAUL: How did you get here?

PECKO: They chucked me out of some splendid coach -- you've never seen the like of it before.

PAUL: Where did they chuck you out?

PECKO: Just round the corner, by St. Michael's Gate.

PAUL: Mother dear, Veronica, fellows, run! They can't have got far.

URBAN (to Nicholas): Who's that he's calling to help him?

NICHOLAS: I don't know, sir. I have nothing to do with them.

URBAN: Nothing will help him, even if all the saints were to descend from heaven to plead for him.

URSULA (in the background): Let us pray, sisters.

URBAN: No need to, Mother Superior. No need. He led a sinful life, and full of sin he's going to where he'll never return from.

ADAM (to Urban): There really is no salvation for him?

URBAN: Landlord Adam, that you should ask!

ADAM: He's a human being, after all.

MEG: And to kill a man is a sin.

URBAN: Enough tittle-tattle. Guards! Begin!

MEG: At least you should have allowed him a meal.

URBAN: With an empty stomach he'll walk more briskly into the other world.

(Massive strokes with the lash)

PAUL (crying out): Peter! My friend, help me!

Scene Eight

The same and PETER

PETER: You tried to cheat me. Now bear the lash!

URBAN: Well said! Carry on!

(The second stroke and an even louder scream from Paul)

PAUL: Peter! If you really are the Tsar, don't let them...

PETER: Hurts, doesn't it? (To Urban) That will do!

URBAN: What business is it of yours? Who are you?

PETER: A traveller.

URBAN: If you're a traveller, go travel along your road.

PETER: Do you realize whom you are beating?

URBAN: How could I not realize it? A rioter, a rogue and a thief.

PETER: Happy the nation and happier still the ruler to whom such rioters, rogues and thieves are born! Captain, for what price would you sell me this rioter, rogue and thief?

URBAN: Sell him?

PETER (produces his moneybag)

URBAN: You mean: me sell him to you?

PETER: Who else? (Starts pouring the gold ducats from one hand into the other)

URBAN (looks at Peter in surprise, then picks up a coin which has dropped on the ground and tests it to see if it is genuine) How much would you offer for him?

PETER (wordlessly passes him the whole moneybag)

URBAN (grabs it and after a pause motions to the guard): Untie him!

(Everybody's eyes in the square are now solely on Peter and Paul)

PETER (in a whisper to Paul): In case you change your mind I'll be waiting for you for the next three days. In Vienna. The Green Tree Inn.
(Resolutely walks off)

PAUL (after a short pause): Can he really be the Tsar? (Into the auditorium)
What do you think? If he is the Tsar, then one more real Slovak has again shown real indecision... And if he isn't? Who can tell?

(Musical theme, into which the applause of those present blends)

THE END