

# ALOIS AND VILÉM MRŠTÍK: MARYŠA

## CHARACTERS:

LÍZAL, a farmer

LÍZALKA, his wife

MARYŠA, their daughter

ROZÁRA, a servant

VÁVRA, the miller

FRANCEK, a recruit

HORAČKA, his mother

STROUHALKA, Maryša's aunt

STROUHAL, her husband

GRANNY, Maryša's grandmother

INNKEEPER, Francek's guardian

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

PAVEL, a journeyman butcher

HRDLIČKA, the parish assistant

COURT ATTENDANT

FIRST RECRUIT

SECOND RECRUIT

THIRD RECRUIT

FRANĚK, a neighbour

BUČEK, a neighbour

COUNTRYWOMAN

FIRST NEIGHBOUR

SECOND NEIGHBOUR

VOJTĚNA, a day labourer

ROZSÍVALKA, a day labourer

HRDLIČKOVÁ, a day labourer

KRIŠTOFL, a day labourer

Musicians, farmers, youth, threshers, children.

*Place: a village in Moravia.*

*The third act takes place two years after the first.*

## DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS

LÍZAL is a farmer around sixty years old, not very tall, clean-shaven with greying hair. He has a bad leg, limps when he walks and supports himself on a stick. He wears typical yeoman's dress from the region east of Brno; worn-out dark trousers tucked into tall, unpolished boots and an old, long, yellow sheepskin coat, worn and patched. Underneath this he wears a long waistcoat with a row of unpolished metal buttons. He has a large red kerchief tied in a knot with one tip pulled through a buttonhole in his waistcoat. The rest of the kerchief is half pushed into the waistcoat. He has an old sheepskin cap on his head. He speaks quickly, disjointedly, with angry gestures. In his anger he stabs with both elbows behind him, especially if there is something he wants to emphasise. In general he gives the impression of a crafty and miserly yeoman.

VÁVRA, the miller, is well built and in his late forties. His trousers are tucked into high polished boots and he wears a short, unfastened coat; on his waistcoat, a heavy silver watch chain. He is clean-shaven, wears a cap with a peak and a broad polished belt. He acts with self-confidence.

MARYŠA (later Vávra's wife), Lízal's daughter, a young woman of medium height, the more refined type of countrywoman. She is wearing a short simple skirt of the flowered Turkish shawl type of material and an embroidered bodice. Her hair is plaited into a braid twisted into a crown. Around her neck she wears a horizontal ruff and a string of red beads. Her legs are enclosed in high lace-up boots and red stockings.

FRANCEK is a neatly-built but solid recruit. In the third and fourth acts he is dressed in narrow trousers tucked into high polished top boots, and an unfastened tight-fitting jacket, under that a dark waistcoat with a row of knitted black buttons and braids. In the first act he is in local costume; full sleeves and a picturesque embroidered waistcoat, a round hat wound round with decorative plaited ribbons and decorated with a tall bunch of artificial flowers, mirrors and gewgaws. Pink ribbons falls loosely to his forehead, and his chest is also abundantly decorated with ribbons. He wears a broad embroidered belt. The cut of the dress is from the surroundings of Klobouky near Brno. His behaviour is outgoing, adventurous and proud.

HORAČKA, Francek's mother, is around sixty years old, and wears a shawl. She supports herself on a stick. She is an anxious but sensible woman.

LÍZALKA, Maryša's mother, is dressed in what a countrywoman would wear at home. Her behaviour is obdurate and hard. She walks with a rocking motion, a toilworn tread.

HRDLIČKA, the parish assistant, is forty years old and wears an old military cap. His trousers are tucked into dirty tall boots.

THE RECRUITS (twelve to twenty of them) the first, second and third have military blue and red caps. The others, around twelve of them, wear hats local to south Moravia and feathered hats of the Klobouky region.

THE MUSICIANS are dressed like the other youth. Some of them wear military caps, others soft hats.

THE COUNTRYWOMAN is dressed for holy days.

THE PEOPLE (men and women) are dressed for holy days. The girls in the first act, about 15-20 of them, are proud of their folk dress with its many petticoats from the Klobouky region near Brno. Their short bell-shaped skirts are mainly white, with multicoloured aprons, sashes round their waists tied in a bow at the back, tall lace-up boots, red stockings, multicoloured bodices, full sleeves, broad Spanish ruffs and shawls crossed over their chests. Each of them has a black hymnbook under her arm, with flowers sticking out of it.

THE CHILDREN are miniature versions of the older girls and boys. Among them is one barefoot girl with a child on her back.

*Place: the edge of a village green in Moravia.*

*Time: October 1886. Sunday, after mass. The stage generally very lively, confused and chaotic.*

## ACT ONE

*(A Moravian village green, the village straggling out up to the left. Through the middle of the green runs a brook, at one place arched over by a humpback bridge. Downstage, opposite each other, are two peasant farms. One of them, opposite Lízal's farm, is set into the hill in such away that Lízal's cellar, built into the ground, is underneath it. In front of the farm is a small garden, known as "in front of our place". Where the garden reaches up to the door of Lízal's farm there is, by the threshold, a bench. Two trees in the garden.*

*As the curtain goes up there is a Sunday peace and quiet onstage. It is broken only occasionally by two or three flashes of colour- two or three girls in their Sunday best with hymn books, farmers in sheepskin coats and old women who cross the stage, some of them reappearing after a while. This happens at appropriate moments during the action. In the course of the action one of the girls enters the farm opposite the Lízal's. After a while two girls run from there, likewise in their Sunday best. Immediately after the curtain rises two girls picturesquely lean their elbows on the balustrade of the bridge in the middle, laughing and joking with the young man standing in front of them. With the approach of the singing recruits they both bashfully retreat and the young man joins the recruits. He sings along with them.)*

### Scene 1

*(Before the curtain rises, village music far offstage is playing at full throttle the song "Farewell, farewell", accompanied by male voices. At the same time from the opposite side of the stage, similarly offstage, shrieks can be heard from the inn and young people singing as they approach. These three or four recruits, Francek among them, sing in chorus offstage: "Ah, what is it that saddens me". When they have sung through the first verse, still well offstage, the curtain rises; soon after the song "Farewell" falls silent with the music and three or four young men approaching from offstage start on the second verse of the song: "You dearest parents..." With the third verse of the song: "The lord God Himself care for you", the recruits enter the stage with a somewhat uncertain step and approach the bridge. The girls retreat, the young man joins the recruits. With the fourth verse: "Music plays on all sides", they exit. By degrees offstage the song and the shrieks grow quieter, and Lízal and Vávra emerge from the underground cellar opposite Lízal's farm, talking whilst saying farewell. Lízal locks the cellar and lays a wine siphon on the bench in front of the farm. He has a bast basket dangling from his shoulder, and after a while he lays this too by the bench.)*

LÍZAL: *(He is silent while the song can still be heard, gazes round the village and frowns. When the noise lessens, he turns to Vávra.)* All you need to do is bandage the foal's leg as best you can, and bathe the sore frequently. Give it a week, and it'll be skipping around like a young deer. My black mare had the same thing - on the back leg in her case - and now - well, you see her now! I could ride to Australia and back on her. And give the stableboy a piece of your mind; the servant girl as well. Why don't he look after the livestock! If you don't take care of the livestock something's bound to happen.

VÁVRA: *(He has a thin stick in his hand which he slaps against his high boots. His face is clean-shaven, hard, but politely attentive.)* Eh, it does nothing to give a piece of my mind. I shout, scold, scream, thunder, beg, the day long, and nothing doing. I've thrown two servant girls out already, the other day I half-killed that lad, and much good it did me. The horse could have dropped dead in his stall and he'd never have noticed. *(Slaps his leg with the wand.)* No matter what you do, the children in rags,

up to their ears in dirt, the livestock breathing its last, and anyone with a hand to do it steals like a magpie. *(With emphasis and a sigh.)* Too much farm and no oversight. I reckon I'll get a tenant in or sell it.

LÍZAL: What kind of talk is that! Sell cheap and buy dear. Tenant, what tenant? He'll trash your mill and screw up your land, put not a drop of goodness back into it and squeeze it dry. It'll take you a good five, six years to put it back in order. *(Falls silent.)* It's true - true, you've got a fair bit of property there, and fine property too. You've got plenty of arable land, clean livestock, cattle like they were at court - but I've told you this before - you shouldn't have let your wife die on you. You can't stay like that. - Just come to an agreement, and there you are.

VÁVRA: It's not that easy.

LÍZAL: *(Puts down the bast basket and pulls from the left pocket of his waistcoat the remains of a cheroot, from the right a match which he strikes on his thigh, and lights up.)*

VÁVRA: Concerning what you've got in mind, there's no coming to an agreement.

LÍZAL: If you're going to go on talking as you have been - maybe not. Four thousand are four thousand, and I think I'm offering a good deal. You wouldn't get a better from anyone.

VÁVRA: *(Shrugs his shoulders.)* Who knows.

LÍZAL: Don't you forget you're a widower with three children. And when I give you thirty-five hundred you could make good use of it. I'm not going to beggar myself for the sake of my daughter.

VÁVRA: A likely idea.

LÍZAL: *(lightly, with a smile.)* Filip, I'm speaking from experience. I gave Josef what he wanted - and how did he repay me? And that was my own son!

VÁVRA: Well, there you are, you gave him thirty five acres of land - me you're offering only thirty five hundred in cash.

LÍZAL: And you're a son of mine?

VÁVRA: Fair enough. All the same, you're not giving it to me, you're giving it to your daughter. How does she take it, that she gets less than her brother?

LÍZAL: How does she take it! I must have been out of my mind that time *(he taps his forehead with his finger)* but I'm wiser today. Josef is a scoundrel - thirty five acres he got, and doesn't give his Dad the time of day. And who's going to guarantee my daughter would be different?

VÁVRA: Don't make me laugh! You think everyone's like Josef? All in all *(he smiles and kicks the ground)* - who knows how it was. Josef at least -

LÍZAL: *(Interrupts.)* Josef is a scoundrel! What he's got - that he can keep. -Just as long as he leaves me in peace and doesn't disgrace his family. Scoundrel! All he did was come and "Dad, money..." *(He throws out his hand.)* He got it - and plenty. - Now he complains.

VÁVRA: Well... let's leave it there. You know what I want - so we don't need to talk about it any more. What you're offering is too little. - It's too little for the mill...

LÍZAL: *(Irritated.)* Well - *(He wants to say something but stops himself - then adds with a smile.)* It's no use to play the lord and master. If it's humiliate me you want, I can do as good as you. *(Turns directly to Vávra.)* Every child knows you don't own everything. Your wife's property went to your children, and what is yours *(suddenly)* - the banks know best. You're in debt to the banks, you're in debt in Brno, you owe taxes, and only the fact you don't drink, you don't gamble, you don't throw yourself at God knows what like my lad does - that's the only reason I'd give you my daughter

VÁVRA: *(Meekly.)* Everyone's got their failing. You started off in debt...

LÍZAL: And you've fallen into it. Who knows who is the better manager -

VÁVRA: If your wife were sick and you'd had the doctor round for a year and a half, you'd have to fork out as well.

LÍZAL: Everything's your wife's fault. Even the fact you've now four children instead of three.

VÁVRA: *(Talks to the trellis of the little garden and as though he hadn't heard picks off splinters of wood whilst thinking. The recruits who crossed the stage a while ago return with Francek in front, crossing the back of the stage from the opposite side over the bridge and by the path across the stage still singing "My Old Dad". Not until they have left does Vávra continue.)* You know what? - We'll leave off abusing each other. What use is this kind of talk. Give me four thousand and we'll call it straight.

LÍZAL: *(Poisonously.)* Four - and wouldn't you rather have six? *(Starts laughing.)* Maryša and four thousand. *(Laughs.)* You're not stupid, I'll say that!... *(Seriously.)* If she were the kind of lily you'd need to gild to get someone to buy her! But Maryša? Confound it! Like you were looking her over, like something a Jew bargains for in the market? Straight as a candle, she can turn her hand to anything and make light work of it - you don't know her, if that's how you talk and bargain - *(Hunts in the pocket of his waistcoat for another match.)*

*(The distant singing and music of the procession.)*

VÁVRA: What wouldn't I know? I fancy Maryša; that's why I want her.

LÍZAL: *(Lights up for the second time. Puffs out a few times.)* The other day, dressed for church... I never looked at her in that way, but listen to me! *(Shakes his head.)* Your heart would leap in your body to look at a girl like that. -

VÁVRA: *(Who during Lízal's last words shows obvious unease - now he devotes all his attention to the increasing traffic; to Lízal.)* The recruits are going to your place to say farewell to the May Queen. Francek is sure to be with them.

LÍZAL: With who?

VÁVRA: With the May Queens.

LÍZAL: Is Francek the May King?

VÁVRA: No - but - everyone's saying farewell, he'll do it as well.

LÍZAL: Only if that's what I want. Let the May King say farewell to the May Queen, that's the custom. I've nothing against that, but my daughter's not for him -

VÁVRA: Now then, Councillor, no shouting. For he'll come, he'll come - let them say farewell. He'll be off on military service and you'll have some peace. Before he's back, you can have Maryša out of the house.

LÍZAL: *(In a huff.)* There we are! I've had her shut up for five weeks and now I'll let that womaniser in my door -

*(Music with shrieking comes nearer and drowns Lízal's speech. The music plays a country march.)*

## Scene 2

*(The preceding, plus the recruits, the musicians, people and children. The recruits put a broad sash around their necks and their waists. The musicians are in front of the recruits. The musicians position themselves opposite Lízal's farm in a semicircle and continue playing a march. They continue playing, and the village youth burst out in a thunderous song. The recruits sing several songs at once, one topping another - everyone singing his own song. They move into two large circles. The first circle stands at the front, holding each other round the neck, and singing: "There still is, there still is that Kloubouky measure." The second circle stands further to the back of the stage holding each other round the neck and singing: "I*

*always thought-". At the words "friends are at home - " the whole circle simultaneously jumps into the air in the rhythm of the song. As well as these two circles there are two more groups of two, three or four recruits. - Only now one of these comes and sings its own song: "Recruits of Diváky, what are you doing". The second group /two or three/ says goodbye to the rest and exits with the song "You Kloubouky gentlemen". All four songs burst on the stage at the same time. The stage is a chaos of movement, song, calling out, laughter. Right at the front of the stage the whole scene is hidden by a semi-circular group of 12-15 girls all in folk dress /white skirts, Turkish shawls, etc./ Just behind their circle a group of young men. They lift bottles and stagger, but more from high spirits than drunkenness. Young boys hang around the recruits and musicians. People pressing in on every side. - Children, farmers, old women and countrywomen press around the recruits. On meeting them the recruits say goodbye. Two recruits get into a quiet conversation with Vávra and drink to him. Some recruits greet Lízal, give him something to drink and then go into his farm. The musicians play - not many people are singing. The old people wipe their eyes. The stage is lively and noisy.)*

FIRST RECRUIT: *(Shouts to the music and song and raises a bottle of wine on high, until the wine spills out.)*

SECOND RECRUIT: *(Shouts along with the first to the music, raises an empty bottle high above his head and -.) And what'll we do with it, once it's empty! (Smashes the bottle on the ground and bursts out laughing.)*

BOYS: *(Run about collecting the shards and, at the side of the stage, lick wine from the broken bits.)*

THIRD RECRUIT: *(Comes out of Lízal's farm. To one of the neighbours.) Come on, drink with me for the last time! (Gives him a bottle.)*

*(The other recruits carry on singing, shouting, and saying goodbye.)*

NEIGHBOUR: *To your health, may all go well with you. (Drinks.)*

THIRD RECRUIT: *God willing! (Sighs.)*

*(The song and hurly-burly carry on. It's not necessary to understand what the recruits are saying.)*

### **Scene 3**

*(The preceding - enter Francek. Horačka hobbles after him.)*

FRANCEK: *(Shaking a neighbour's hand, saying goodbye.)*

*(The racket quietens a bit, but not completely.)*

HORAČKA: *(Hobbles to Francek.) Where are you, my boy? I almost didn't find you.*

FRANCEK: *What do you want, mother? (Approaches her downstage left.)*

LÍZAL - VÁVRA: *(Downstage right unobtrusively watch Francek.)*

HORAČKA: *(Thrusts a small bundle at Francek, lifts her apron and wipes her eyes.)*

FRANCEK: *(Takes the bundle and gives it to the nearest boy.) Put that in the cart for me. (To Horačka with a smile.) What are you crying about? Don't be so worried, Agnes won't desert you. Three years isn't so long.*

HORAČKA: *(Crying silently stretches her hand out and makes the sign of the cross on Francek's forehead, mouth and chest.) Our Lord God look after you and give you good fortune, my lad - and take care not to lose the bundle. You have two shirts in there, two towels, and scarves; and a bun. Well (waves her stick), God be with you. (Kisses him.) And say your prayers, not to get spoilt on military service! I'll send you a few kreutzers whenever I can. (She can't continue for crying.)*

FRANCEK: *(Puts his hand on her shoulder.) Well, I hope you prosper - and don't cry - work's the same, here or anywhere else. (He moves upstage and immediately returns amongst the recruits.)*

*(The racket quietens down.)*

FIRST COUNTRYWOMAN: Aha, Francek is going straight to the Lízal's.

FRANCEK: *(Pulls himself away from the recruits and daringly goes to Lízal's door; in the hall the recruits are saying goodbye to Maryša.)*

LÍZAL: *(Interrupts his conversation with a neighbour, comes forward and stops Francek in his tracks with his stick.)* Hola! And where to? *(All at once the stage quietens.)*

FRANCEK: *(Taken by surprise he does not answer. He recollects himself- cautiously.)* To your place, Councillor, sir, to say goodbye to Maryša...

LÍZAL: *(Turns him back with his stick.)* Not in here, you're not! Turn around and say goodbye to your own folk.

FRANCEK: I'm allowed to speak to her, aren't I?

LÍZAL: Speak to your equals. Maryša's not for you.

*(On the threshold Lízal pushes Maryša into the hall and closes the door.)*

FRANCEK: Maybe she is, maybe she isn't - Nobody's proposed to her yet -

LÍZAL: *(Pushes him back with his stick.)* I'm telling you, go your way! You've no business here -

FRANCEK: And that stick of yours... *(Snatches it away from him and bangs with it on the door.)*

LÍZAL: You - you - *(he can't speak for anger)* you - off with you! *(Laughter amongst the crowd - then the noise grows.)*

HORAČKA: *(Hobbies up to Francek and puts her hand on his chest. She can be heard through the noise on stage.)* Frankie, Frankie - please, I'm asking you nicely -

FRANCEK: *(Gently pushes her away.)* I know what these two are up to! *(Points to Vávra and Lízal.)* But - well! - As you like, nuncie; I won't stand in your way. Since they took me for service, since they took me, then I'll go. But in three years they'll let me go *(waves his finger)* woe befall you - scoundrels both - if you have your way...

HORAČKA: *(Clings to her son.)* Frankie, Frankie!

FRANCEK: *(Pulling himself away from her.)* As God is my witness! *(Grinds his teeth.)* - You'll have a bad time of it! -

LÍZAL: You dare threaten me?

HORAČKA: Frankie!

FIRST RECRUIT: Leave off, Francek, and come with us!!

FRANCEK: *(To Lízal.)* So - but - *(He disappears amongst the recruits.)*

*(Laughter - noise - song. The recruits get into a line with their arms round each other's necks and exit singing. The musicians in front of them now break into the middle verse of the song with the same march with which they came onstage. The music carries on for a long time into the distance, until it disappears. The stage empties. A girl with a child on her back runs and overtakes the others. At the end comes Horačka, wiping her eyes as she goes.)*

#### Scene 4

LÍZAL: *(Frowns as he looks after the vanishing hurly-burly. Spits.)* Blasted beggar! -

VÁVRA: Forget it. I told you. You should have let them say their farewells and you would've got away without any fuss. What good does it do to you? You're only pouring oil on the flames. Best to speed things up and get her out of the house. We'll come to an agreement. Thirty-eight hundred?

LÍZAL: *(Sullenly.)* Nothing doing. *(Suddenly he turns - decisively.)* Thirty-seven - *(Holds out his hand.)*

VÁVRA and LÍZAL: *(Look into each other's eyes.)*

LÍZAL: Yes or no?

VÁVRA: *(Slaps his hand into Lízal's.)*

LÍZAL: We can sort the rest out -

VÁVRA: And what if Maryša won't -

LÍZAL: *(Offended - already turning to leave, he straightens up and turns full face to Vávra.)*  
Won't what?! -

VÁVRA: *(Mildly.)* God willing! *(He is leaving.)* Goodbye! *(He exits as upright and with as firm a tread as a young man.)*

LÍZAL: *(After him.)* And don't forget the foal! Bind its leg.

## Scene 5

LÍZAL: *(Alone.)*

LÍZAL: Ach! *(Relaxes and slumps wearily on the bench, raises his sheepskin hat and wipes his forehead with his hand.)*

*(From the far end of the village can be heard noise and singing: "Carry me, my little horse", etc.)*

LÍZAL: *(Pensively during the end of the verse breaks into hoarse malicious laughter; from the depths of his heart.)* Sing your heart out! But they'll tame you. Confound the beggar! You own nothing hut the roof over your head and the shirt you wear, and you think you'll worm your way into my house? - And - and - *(Sits. Realises he is alone.)* What am I getting mad about!? Let him go on military service and let him yodel as much as he likes. *(Suddenly.)* And Maryša out of the house - right away! The sooner the better... A girl like the wind - she could bring me more shame.

*(Pause. In the distance still shrieking and song.)*

*(Suddenly Lizal bursts into loud laughter and points into the air.)* And him?! Him? *(More laughter.)* Eh - well there we are! - And - and - and - I'll give them to you right away! You only have to say and I - I'll pay your debts - I - already! I'm throwing thirty seven hundred into the air, without a second look. - He's clever, that's true. Only there's someone who's cleverer than clever - and that's me. If you want Maryša, you can have her - but I'm the one who'll manage the money, I'm the expert, I know what to do with it. I began with nothing too, and now look at me! What the devil - I have cattle, I have fields, I have everything. Yup - money is money, my dear Vávra, and whoever pays honour to money, will himself be honoured by that money. Yes, we're both lords and masters, you as me, but whoever has the money is the greater lord and master. And that's how it should be. If you don't have it, you're an everlasting beggar - Thirty-seven hundred is thirty-seven hundred, it takes time to get it together. If you want it, I won't keep it from you - but not straight away; not till I know whether you'll turn out a scoundrel like Josef. - As long as a son-in-law here, a son-in-law there - we can be good friends, but *(he scratches his ear)*, Lizal, careful! *(He tries to get up, then balances painfully on his leg.)* Confound it, it's hurting today! *(Looks round for his stick.)* Where's my stick? *(Sees where the stick has been thrown by Francek and his face clouds. He laboriously makes his way to the door, sits again and calls into the hall.)* Maryša! Maryša! *(Thinks.)*

*(Music in the distance.)*

So that's all right! *(Shakes his fist.)* I'll give you Maryša! *(Calls.)* Maryša! *(Whistles painfully and feels his leg.)* Hm! She's going to be surprised, when I tell her who her husband is. - Well, she's not going to like it, but - well - let be - she's a good daughter.

## Scene 6

*(Lizal, Maryša.)*

MARYŠA: *(Comes out of the farm.)* Whatever do you want.

LÍZAL: *(Coming out of his thoughts.)* Give me my stick - it's lying over there. -

MARYŠA: *(Gives him the stick.)*



LÍZAL: Where's your mother?

MARYŠA: Tidying up the kitchen. It will soon be noon. *(Goes into the garden and picks something.)* Papa, what are we going to do about that maize? The birds are eating it as it stands in the field.

LÍZAL: Leave the maize to look after itself and come here. I've something to tell you - where are you?

MARYŠA: *(Comes from the garden and closes the gate behind her.)*

LÍZAL: *(Takes her hand.)* What have you got there?

MARYŠA: Parsley. *(Apprehension and presentiments of bad news can be seen in everything she does.)*

LÍZAL: *(Lets go of her hand.)* Whatever. Maryša, are you – *(gently)* not yet minded to get married?

MARYŠA: *(Pulling herself away.)* Married! - No, I'm still not minded to get married.

LÍZAL: Well, that's enough, it's high time. You'll be twenty come St. Barnabas Day.

MARYŠA: *(Flounces away and retreats to the door.)* I don't know why you even talk about it. *(She is about to go inside when she suddenly turns in the doorway.)* And who are you thinking of for bridegroom? Who?

LÍZAL: *(Restrains himself.)* No, I'm not going to tell you that. Guess!

MARYŠA: *(Hangs her head and thinks.)*

LÍZAL: Someone not that far away from here -

MARYŠA: *(Glances at Lizal.)*

LÍZAL: And he has a mill.

MARYŠA: *(Straightens up and her eyes flash - dismayed.)* You can't mean -

LÍZAL: *(Nods his head joyfully.)* Vávra it is. -

MARYŠA: *(Stunned and confused.)* A widower? *(Breaks into sardonic but still restrained laughter, carefree and clear.)* A widower? With three children? *(She again laughs wildly.)* Well, that is something! -

LÍZAL: *(Starts in anger.)* Well, why not - widower or not, he's a fine figure of a man -

MARYŠA: *(Stops short, in the middle of her wildest laughter grows serious, lets go of the door handle and says darkly.)* I can't believe you mean this seriously?

LÍZAL: *(Still more under his breath and more to himself than to Maryša.)* Why shouldn't I mean it? I like him. He doesn't drink, doesn't gamble - solid as an oak - any woman would be glad to have one such as him.

MARYŠA: *(Tartly.)* No woman would want to have one like him. He beat his poor wife and the girls have all sorts of stories about him. Shame on him. - Three children, and running after a single girl -

LÍZAL: *(Loses his temper.)* Children, children! They're decent children, aren't they!

MARYŠA: For them as like 'em. I'm not going to get ready for the grave. There's where I'd go, I think, like his poor dead wife. That's what he's got on his conscience.

LIZAL: *(Clicks his tongue.)* What - what - *(Bangs his stick on the ground.)* What do you know about it! That's only women's gossip. It's all they've got to talk about it.

MARYŠA: You can say what you like *(defiantly)*, but I won't marry Vávra!

LÍZAL: *(Angrily.)* And Francek - you'd marry that beggar, would you?

MARYŠA: I never said I would.

LÍZAL: But he comes running after you. - You think I don't know? You think I'm deaf and blind? - But I'll put a stop to all that. Let the beggar go back where he came from. Let him go after his beggary and not come crawling to a proper farm. You'll marry Vávra! *(Calms down, in measured tones.)* What a farm, what a mill! Where's your good sense, my girl, where are your eyes?

MARYŠA: *(In tears, defiantly.)* Well, you do what you want - but I -

LÍZAL: *(Screams at her.)* Quiet! *(Takes his stick.)* You'll do as I order. And now, go!  
MARYŠA: *(Wants to say something, but flinches and bangs the door behind her.)*  
LÍZAL: Confounded girl. *(Stands up.)* - Ach! Well, her mother was the same before her, and today she's a model wife.

### Scene 7

*(Lízal and Hrdlička, the parish assistant.)*

HRDLIČKA: *(Enters, presents himself in front of Lízal with his cap doffed, red in the face, drunken; the cap in one hand and a short pipe in the other force him into a military posture.)* Praise to Christ Our Lord!

LÍZAL: For ever and ever amen. What do you want?

HRDLIČKA: Please, Mr. Councillor, sir, you're needed at the inn. The lads are fighting among themselves, you have to bring them to order.

LÍZAL: And where's the Mayor?

HRDLIČKA: Not-at-'ome.

LÍZAL: *(Spits.)* Who's fighting? Don't tell me it's not Honza Ryšánek?!

HRDLIČKA: Him, Honza, and Horačka's Francek.

LÍZAL: *(Straightens up.)* Francek? Go to the house, ask Maryša to give you the whip.

HRDLIČKA: *(Goes to the farm.)*

LÍZAL: *(Alone.)* I'll whip them on their way. Scoundrel! It doesn't even take one dance to get him into a fight.

HRDLIČKA: *(Returns with the whip.)*

LÍZAL: *(Takes the whip in silence and exits.)*

HRDLIČKA: *(follows him, then waits till Lízal leaves the stage.)*  
*(Lízal, morosely and mumbling on the way, disappears.)*

### Scene 8

*(Maryša immediately joins Hrdlička.)*

HRDLIČKA: *(Returns, runs up to Maryša and whispers something in her ear.)*

MARYŠA: Where is he? *(Hastily closes the door behind her.)*

HRDLIČKA: *(Puts his finger to his lips.)*

MARYŠA: So who's fighting there?

HRDLIČKA: *(Starts laughing.)* It was only - for the look of it - to get your dad out of the house. *(Quickly exits.)*

### Scene 9

FRANCEK: *(Enters from the opposite side.)*

MARYŠA: *(Runs straight to him.)* Frankie, what do you want? My mother's in the yard!

FRANCEK: Don't be afraid. What are you so tearful about?

MARYŠA: *(Slumps her shoulders.)* My God! *(Hides her face with her hands.)* Don't even remind me.

FRANCEK: *(Takes her by the hand.)* Don't cry, Maryša. It doesn't do us any good. Somehow we'll live through it and in three years, if God wills, we'll be together again. Think of me - and if you can, write to me.

MARYŠA: *(Gloomy and down-hearted.)* So you have to go now?

FRANCEK: They'll be getting in the cart. Once the noon bells ring, we're off. It'll be a sorrowful journey to Brno.

MARYŠA: Which way will you go? Along the high road or round by here?

FRANCEK: Round by here.

MARYŠA: Then go - and I'll look out for you.

*(They are both silent.)*

FRANCEK: *(Embraces her.)* God be with you, my poor little Maryša! And write to me! You can always give your letters to my mother. And I'll write to you the same way.

MARYŠA: *(in tears, nods her head, and they embrace each other in the alcove of the wall. Again she wraps her arm around his neck and breaks into silent tears. Then suddenly she pulls herself together and thrusts him away from her.)* Go! *(She remains where she is, in tears.)*

### Scene 10

LÍZALKA: *(Runs out exasperated with sleeves rolled up, without a shawl on her head and barefoot.)* Eh, you scum! *(Pulls Maryša into the hall and pushes Francek away. To Maryša.)* Get inside! *(Pushes her into the hall. To Francek.)* What do you want here?

FRANCEK: Nothing, I came to say good bye –

LÍZALKA: *(Barring the door.)* Huh, some kind of goodbye! *(Throws behind her.)* Just go and God-be-with-you and better stay there, it'd be better for you –

MARYŠA: *(Refusing to go over the threshold and beginning to scuffle with Lizalka in the doorway.)* Let go!

LÍZALKA: *(Shouting over Maryša.)* Are you going or aren't you? *(About to slap her in the face.)*

FRANCEK: *(Approaches them.)* Go, Maryša, go! But *(threatening)* we will say goodbye!

LÍZALKA: *(Slams the door.)*

*(Beyond the door can be heard screaming and quarrelling.)*

FRANCEK: *(Exits almost merrily.)*

*(For a few moments the stage is empty. The noon bells ring. A farmer enters, his cap doffed. Absolute silence. A few boys run across the stage and some girls with children on their backs. The bells finish.)*

ONE GIRL: *(Pulling up her sock as she runs.)* Boys! The recruits are coming! *(Music in all its force sounds from the village green.)*

### Scene 11

*(The stage fills up. People come from the direction of the singing, accompanied by music. A procession enters the stage, the musicians first. Behind them two carts, each one full of recruits. The horses have ribbons plaited into their manes. Small may trees on the carts. The recruits are singing, raising bottles, waving caps. They don't sing even this song in harmony - the second large group in the second cart doesn't begin singing until the first have reached the line "I didn't offend you". The singing voices unfold one on the other.)*

[ : God be with you

I'm leaving you now. :]

[ : I didn't offend you :]

none of you.

[ :As to the young,

so to the old, :]

[ : I didn't offend you:]

not one of you.

*(Offstage.)*

[ : God be with you,

I'm leaving you now, :]

[ : since I recognized :]

your treachery.

MARYŠA: *(Opens a window and watches the procession.)*

FRANCEK: *(From the first cart.)* Hola! *(Snatches the reins - the cart stops - the recruits are silent. Francek jumps down while the cart is still moving and goes quickly to the Lízal's farm.)*

MARYŠA: *(Disappears from the window.)*

FRANCEK: *(Grasps the door handle and turns it. The door is locked. He bangs on it.)*  
*(Beyond the door quarrelling, screaming and the noise of Lízalka and Maryša.)*

FIRST RECRUIT: *(From the cart.)* Break down the door!

FRANCEK: *(Even before he hears the shrieks from the other side of the door, jumps down, dashes out and leaping with a powerful upright body, does not kick, but with his knee forces open the door.)*

MARYŠA: *(With a cry flies straight into his embrace.)*

FRANCEK: *(Clasps Maryša in his embrace in the hall, so that they cannot be seen from the audience.)*

*(The crowd laughs.)*

FRANCEK: *(Lets go of Maryša, runs back and jumps on the running board of the cart. He stands there high above the cart with a may tree in his hand and shouts with the others: "God be with you", etc.)*

RECRUITS: *(Continuing with the song "God be with you".)*

MARYŠA: *(Falls weeping on the bench.)*

RECRUITS: *(Sing on.)*

*(The verses of the song continue and a march is played.)*

## **Scene 12**

*(Lízal enters at the last moment, just in time to see in fury Maryša leaving Francek's embrace. The carts leave - from the stage whistling, song, music. - The stage empties. - The song soon disappears in the distance.)*

LÍZAL: *(From a distance watches the recruits departing and threatens them with his cane.)*

For the last time, my lad, for the last time!

*(From the distance can be heard the melody of the song: "God be with you". The curtain quietly falls.)*

## ACT TWO

*(The living room of an ordinary peasant farmhouse. A table in an alcove, benches round it, two heavy carved chairs against the walls. On the left between the windows a painted chest, on the right opposite it a high made-up bed. Shelves fastened to the walls full of painted plates and jugs, in the corner a three-cornered cabinet, the "holy corner". In an alcove upstage left a tiled stove, benches around it, poles hanging from the top. Upstage right on an easy chair a basket of dried laundry.*

*Maryša stands by the basket, folding linen on the table. She is dressed as in Act One. On a low stool by the stove sits Granny, stripping the husks off maize. Granny is sitting downstage not far from the door into the next room. On a bench by the stove sits Aunt Strouhalka with a woollen scarf thrown around her shoulders. She is holding a key in her hand. Next to her is a basket from which in the course of the conversation she takes an apple, which she cuts up and eats piece by piece.)*

### Scene 1

*(Maryša, Strouhalka, Granny. When the curtain goes up, Aunt Strouhalka is in full flow. Maryša listens without answering, getting on with her work and turning her back on her aunt. After a while Lizalka comes in and listens.)*

STROUHALKA: *(With a sigh and assumed carelessness.)* Get along! *(She yawns affectedly.)*

MARYŠA: *(Angrily bangs the linen into the basket.)*

STROUHALKA: It's true! There's nothing worse than a marriage like that. You can't get properly to sleep and when you get up in the morning it's like walking in water; the ground gives way under your feet, everything falls out of your hands, and what you do enjoy, you only do it by halves, and your heart is like ice. *(She yawns again.)*

MARYŠA: So you know all that and you'd still drive me into it.

STROUHALKA: *(Denies it with a shake of her head.)* But that's only until you get used to it. I was the same, did nothing but find fault with my husband, and today? I'm happy I have my Tomáš. You'll say the same when the time comes. *(Yawns again.)* Get along, my child, marry while you're young - no one will take you when you're old and bent. You're like an over-ripe pear - no one wants you any more, they kick you aside.

*(Silence.)*

MARYŠA: *(With a smile.)* Well, I've time enough for such fortune.

STROUHALKA: Don't you believe it. Time blows away like foam - all that's left is plain flat water. *(With a sigh.)* If I were single, I'd marry Vávra like a shot.

MARYŠA: And suffer the same fate as his first wife. He used to beat her and - you think he'd treat the next one with kid gloves, do you?

STROUHALKA: There's no need to be beaten or for kid gloves. Every woman makes of her man what she wants him to be. If he turns out badly, that's the wife's fault.

MARYŠA: *(Coldly.)* Not in every case. *(Animatedly.)* His poor dead wife - what a kind person she was, and what sort of life did she have? She'd be with us today if it weren't for Vávra.

STROUHALKA: *(Irritated.)* Go to the devil with that sort of talk. Talk is talk and water flows, and it all washes away. The poor woman died of consumption. She was always such a dry little thing, ill till her dying day. Vávra didn't have much joy with her. He was the unlucky one, not her.

MARYŠA: *(As though she weren't even listening to Strouhalka, nods her head with a sigh and a bitter smile.)* My friend Stáza knows it's true. She was the maid there and had to run away because of him. That's the sort he was. That's what that consumption

was. And Stáza tells the truth, she can be trusted.

STROUHALKA: (*Derisively.*) Yes, but true to who. How she stole food from the mill for her mother, did she tell you that? When Vávra caught her red-handed and threw her out - didn't she tell you that as well? You believe any lies anyone tells you, but you're deaf to the truth.

MARYŠA: (*She can't listen to any more; she clasps her hands.*) For heaven's sake, Auntie, please, at least have pity. Does no one have a conscience any more? Anyone who comes here, everyone speaks of him, everyone praises him and doesn't want to know about anything else but him. Do you think I'm already so stupid? Even the maid's at it, and I know they're all set against me, and you with them. But say what you want about him, paint him in the finest colours you can - I just can't bear to see him. I tremble all over even to think of him. And you, when you know, a sensible woman with children, you should yourself have talked my parents out of it and not hounded me along with all the others.

STROUHALKA: Good gracious, girl, I'm not going to din him into you. Am I some sort of match-maker? You can do as you please. But you're still young, you don't have the understanding and experience I do at my age. Can't your aunt give you a little bit of advice? You can do what you want with it! I'm only telling you what I think, and then you think over afterwards, what it is you want yourself. What's it to me, after all? I won't be there with you.

MARYŠA: And when you won't be with me, why do you turn on me like this, why do you want me to be unhappy? Why?

STROUHALKA: (*Irritated.*) You've a head like a stone. A grown woman and you talk like a child.

MARYŠA: It seems already (*with tears in her eyes*) that I'm being hounded from home. I've wept, begged, pleaded, and it's like talking to a brick wall. I could weep blood, and it would do me no good. Today I have to go to catechism, and they don't even ask me if I want to or not. The banns have been called and it's as though I didn't exist. No one speaks to me nicely, everyone turns away - and if it lasts any longer, maybe, my God - (*She sinks into thought.*)

LÍZALKA: (*Listening at the half-open door, during the last words completely swings from the door and catches Strouhalka's eye.*)

MARYŠA: (*Continues.*) - maybe I'll have to give in -

STROUHALKA: And you'll be doing well; nothing but purgatory will wait for you at home.

MARYŠA: (*Passionately.*) And what if I run away!?

STROUHALKA: (*Perfectly calmly.*) You won't run away. Every girl says that before her wedding - and afterwards she's glad to be married.

MARYŠA: Not every girl -

STROUHALKA: Almost every girl.

MARYŠA: Look at Čermačka from Borkovany! They forced her to marry and already she's left her husband. It isn't even half a year since she was married.

STROUHALKA: (*Really losing her temper.*) That's enough! Čermák is a drunkard and an ugly fellow - whereas Vávra is a fine figure of a man, and the miller -

MARYŠA: (*Coldly.*) For those as like that. (*Fiery, almost screaming with rage.*) And if he were made of gold - I still wouldn't want him!

STROUHALKA: (*Bursts out laughing.*) All right, you don't want him, what's it got to do with me, that you scream at me so? You can marry Francek for all I care.

## Scene 2

(*The preceding, Lízalka entering the living room.*)

LÍZALKA: Maryša, go and get some glasses from the shelves.

MARYŠA: *(Leaves.)*

*(The preceding without Maryša.)*

LÍZALKA: *(Whilst Maryša is leaving, out loud to Strouhalka.)* Everything is all over the place, I can't find anything. I've never known such a mess - *(Once Maryša has left, interrupts herself and leans towards Strouhalka.)* Keep quiet about Francek, don't remind her of him. It only makes her worse.

STROUHALKKA: *(Claps her hands and twists round.)* Don't do this, don't do that - only I know what I'm doing.

### Scene 3

*(The preceding. Maryša enters with the glasses; later without Lízalka.)*

LÍZALKA: *(Takes the glasses from Maryša.)* I have to wash them. They're covered with dust. *(Leaves.)*

MARYŠA: *(Watches her till she leaves; then angrily.)* You did well to remind me. If nothing else, for his sake I won't do it.

STROUHALKKA: For his sake? For Francek?

MARYŠA: *(Walks angrily up and down the room, tidying up things lying around.)* He begs and beseeches me in his letters to remember him, not to ruin his life - *(Stops.)*

STROUHALKKA: *(Laughs.)*

MARYŠA: What are you laughing at, Auntie?

STROUHALKKA: Ah - so! But there is something there to laugh at! *(Nods her head in seriousness.)* The paper's soaked with tears and not a word of truth in it. Get away with such nonsense! Whoever takes a man seriously! No girl with any sense. - One's as bad as the next - they're all the same. *(In a tone of voice as though she is telling a fairy story.)* I too, my dear coz, once had my own František! And he too, would always say to me: If he didn't have me, he'd do something terrible - he wouldn't be able to bear it, he'd throw himself into the river - then again, he'd flee into the wide world and never more, never again return, he'd be damaged for life, his whole life ruined. And when I had to marry Tomáš, what did he do? - Nothing. He stormed around for a while, then he chatted up another girl, and settled down perfectly all right. They're all like that - flowers from the same meadow. *(To Granny.)* What, Granny, isn't that true, don't you agree?

GRANNY: *(From the stove - still husking maize - after a long pause.)* Eh, I wasn't listening to you.

MARYŠA: And maybe it isn't always true. Take Dostál - he's an old man now with white hair, one leg in the grave - he didn't get the girl he was in love with, and even now, when he thinks of his Philomena he hangs his head and says he cannot and can never forget.

STROUHALKKA: *(Yawns.)* Dostál is Dostál, he always cries when he's drunk, he doesn't even need to think of his Philomena. *(Takes an apple out of the basket, peels it and bites into it.)*

*(Silence.)*

STROUHALKKA: And Francek? He's a right one as well. Before you he had Sefka Vomastová, after her Tereza Fraňková, and after you God knows who else he'll have. He's off on military service and no one to watch over him there. Be glad he's gone. Who knows how it would have turned out. He's crafty, he is, and there's no playing with fire. He'd set the whole cottage alight.

MARYŠA: *(Remains silent.)*

STROUHALKKA: *(After a pause.)* If you won't take care of yourself, don't take care of him. -

It'll be water off a duck's back for him. You'll see - those tears you're weeping for him, not a drop will remain. Anyhow (*carelessly*) our Josef wrote that it's not only you he's thinking of there.

MARYŠA: (*Stubbornly.*) That's not true!...

STROUHALKA: It's a lie, then. I'm just telling you what Josef wrote. Don't let's argue over it. You don't have enough sense over all this, my dear girl. You have to remember, you're a silly little girl.

MARYŠA: Maybe I am silly, maybe I don't have as much sense as you, but I do have a heart... And you don't! You're all over me like a hornet's nest, when it collapses on you and goes on biting and stinging till you're stung to death. (*Half in tears.*) Everyone like a scorpion creeps up on you (*grabs the basket with the laundry*) without your knowing, and jabs you till the blood stops in your veins.

#### Scene 4

(*The preceding - Lízalka.*)

STROUHALKA: (*Throws up her hands and stands up.*) Well, think as you like.

LÍZALKA: (*Steps forward holding the glasses in her hand and listens for a while; defiantly.*) What do you want to talk to her at all for, you old woman, you. God knows who she thinks she is; whether we'll listen to her or she to us. (*To Maryša.*) Out of my sight and see to the stove! (*Looks at the stove.*) We're out of wood. (*To Strouhalka.*) She goes around as though she's blind.

(*The preceding without Maryša.*)

STROUHALKA: Dear coz - it won't work. She's got a head like a stone - you can't hammer in anything. Do what you may, it's like using a scythe to cut rock, tooth on tooth - and all in vain.

LÍZALKA: (*Calmly stands the glasses on the table and leans over to the window for a bottle of wine. Pours it into the glasses.*) The language she uses! We don't even listen any more. - Come along, try it - it's good. (*Gives Strouhalka a glass.*)

STROUHALKA: Here's health. (*Drinks.*)

LÍZALKA: Upon my soul, believe me or not, but I'll breathe a sigh of relief once it's all over. The devil's got into the girl. She's already begun to fight with me! She wanted to run away - she'd got everything ready, her bundle tied up and off with her. We had to bring her back by force. See how scratched my hands are. She struggled with me like a man. Look at her. (*Nods towards Maryša as she comes in.*)

#### Scene 5

(*The preceding. Maryša, Strouhal.*)

MARYŠA: (*Carrying an armful of wood for the stove, kneels in front of it and stokes the fire.*)

STROUHAL: (*Comes in after Maryša, wearing a sheepskin coat; in the doorway wags his finger at Strouhalka.*) Home with you! What are you nattering about? You're needed at home and here you are sitting around gossiping.

LÍZALKA: (*Pours wine for him.*) Have a drink with us. What's the hurry?

STROUHAL: (*Takes the glass.*) But - I've got plum brandy distilling, and I've got to stay by it. (*Weakens.*) Here's health and God's blessing! (*Drinks up his glassful in one gulp.*) I'm off. (*To his wife.*) Don't be long! (*Leaves in a hurry.*) God be with you!

(*The preceding without Strouhal.*)

STROUHALKA: Did you have something nice for lunch?

LÍZALKA: We didn't have anything yet. I'm waiting for my husband. (*To Maryša who up to now has been kneeling at the stove and resting her head in her hands in thought.*) What are you crouching there for? Go and get dressed. Vávra will be here any



minute. Josef is getting the cart ready.

STROUHALKA: They're off already? *(Looks meaningfully at Maryša.)*

LÍZALKA: We've nothing to wait for! The banns have been called, so there we are. *(To Maryša.)* Did you hear?

MARYŠA: *(Straightens up from the stove.)* I'm not going anywhere!

LÍZALKA: *(Shrieks.)* Shut up! You think you can speak like that to me? Aren't you ashamed, in front of people? Have you lost all shame, and respect to your parents? *(Crying.)* Didn't I look after her, sewed for her, washed for her, carried her, first on one arm and then on the other, nights I didn't sleep for her, she always had the best, I took from my own mouth to feed her - and what return do I get for it? Did we pinch and save so much for her to slave away for some idle Jack with nothing more than decaying thatch on the roof? Did we bring her up so she could bring us grief in our old age?

MARYŠA: *(Proudly.)* Rather than give me to Vávra, you should take me by the throat and strangle me - that's what I'm telling you!

LÍZALKA: *(With her hands on her hips, looking in amazement first at her daughter, then at Strouhalka.)* You - where did you learn to speak like that? This is something new again! Did this, that - did he teach you to speak like this? *(Looks at her.)* Is there any more shame you can bring on us? It takes the worst kind of woman to speak like that, and even she doesn't dare to. Aren't you frightened of God? Aren't you frightened of people, that they'll point at you? Aren't they already calling you names? - What do you go to church for? What do you do there? - I am your mother, you know! Have you forgotten that? *(To Strouhalka.)* She says I have to take her by the throat and strangle her. *(To Maryša.)* Do you know what you're saying? Or are you so stupid you don't even understand what you're saying -

MARYŠA: *(Holds her head.)* Maybe I don't understand - everything's spinning in my head, I'm totally confused - *(Bursts into tears.)* If you laid me in the grave, I wouldn't notice -

STROUHALKA: *(Gives Lizalka a wink.)* I'd better be going.

LÍZALKA: *(With ostentatious severity.)* Are you going to obey or not?

MARYŠA: But don't scream at me so! Throw me out of the house and you won't suffer any more.

LÍZALKA: And where will you go? Follow your soldier to Brno? Trail your shame around the world? Then you'll be crawling like that Vrbčena - a fine love! Her children out begging. Do you want to bring me to that sort of shame?

MARYŠA: And why should you sneer at beggars? You once had nothing yourself.

LÍZALKA: No, we didn't. But we obeyed our parents and that brought us a blessing. The rest was given by God. As the pastor says: "God blesses dutiful children, and punishes the undutiful".

STROUHALKA: There you are, my child, your mother speaks like a woman with experience - she doesn't have anything against you -

MARYŠA: *(During the last words of her aunt turns moved to Lizalka, clasps her hand.)* My dearest Mama, in God's mercy I beg you - don't force me. I promise you I will forget Francek, when he comes back from service - I will throw him out, I will listen to you in everything, just don't force me to marry Vávra. Don't break my life!

LÍZALKA: *(Loses her temper.)* Still moaning on to me! In there! *(Points to the other room.)* Go and get dressed!

MARYŠA: *(Begins to leave.)*

STROUHALKA: *(Adjusts the shawl around her shoulders and leaves with Lizalka.)*

**Scene 6**

*(Maryša, Granny.)*

MARYŠA: *(Stands on the threshold of the other room, looks around till she settles her eyes on Granny. Looks at her for a while then goes to her, kneels by her and takes her confidentially by the hand.)* My dearest Grandmother! What do you say to this?

GRANNY: There, there. *(Sighs and looks at the door, whether anyone is listening there. After a longish while she speaks slowly, choosing her words, a pause between each sentence, her voice direct, level, calm, without shaking.)* My mind's blank about this as well. It may as well be one way or the other. Either way, it's bad for you, my girl. There's nothing at home for you except scolding and beating and so I really don't know how best to advise you. One can't see into a person, not even into you. And then I think if it's František you like, it's already all one to you. They'll never give you to František - don't even think of it - so if you don't go with Vávra, there'll come another, or a third - Peter or Pavel - you can't stay single, sooner or later you'll have to marry.

MARYŠA: *(Stands up, holds her hand to her head.)* Granny *(dismayed)*, what are you saying?!

GRANNY: *(Stands up, wiping away her tears with her apron; she looks round. After a while.)* Eh, I can't tell you to fight for yourself. *(Bitterly.)* And it's better not to ask me. *(Looks round.)*

## Scene 7

*(The preceding. Lízal enters. Granny later hobbles out.)*

LÍZAL: *(Merrily.)* Well, Maryša - what now? Your bridegroom's coming any minute, and you're still not even dressed.

MARYŠA: *(Wipes the tears from her eyes.)*

LÍZAL: Still? It's not as though you were going to the slaughterhouse. Everyone has to go to catechism - *(Goes and takes off his sheepskin hat.)* You're strange, you womenfolk. Instead of making merry and laughing before your wedding - you burst into tears. You don't have to be frightened of catechism. You went to school and know it all.

MARYŠA: *(Runs to him and throws herself at his knees.)* My dearest Papa - for God's sake I beg you - *(She can't continue for crying and just kisses his knees.)*

LÍZAL: *(Raises her from the ground.)* But my little girl - child - my child - don't cry - *(Affably.)* I'm not going to give you away to Francek!

MARYŠA: But I swear to the living God - I'll forget all about him. - I won't even give him another thought!

GRANNY: *(Stands up and holding on to the furniture as she leaves, quietly shuffles out.)*

LÍZAL: But, but - what if you would - go on then - get yourself dressed nicely - *(Leads Maryša into the second living room.)* I'll have another talk with your mother - but just to please me - get dressed.

MARYŠA: *(Staggering, goes into the second room.)* My God, if I were to speak to a stone, it would sooner take pity. *(She leaves.)*

LÍZAL: *(Alone; crosses the room.)* That - that's - the devil's got into her. I never thought she would make so much trouble. *(Takes his pipe out of his pocket.)* I would - well, I wouldn't want to harm her.

## Scene 8

*(Lízal, Lízalka.)*

LÍZALKA: *(Entering.)* Well - and where's the bridegroom?

LÍZAL: *(Fitting his pipe.)* He'll be here in a minute.

LÍZALKA: And what about the notary? Did you go there?

LÍZAL: I did. Don't be so anxious - I know what I'm doing! *(He takes some documents from inside his coat and puts them in the triangular cupboard in the corner of benches by the table.)* She'll get what's hers. But he can redeem his own. I'm not going to pay his debts! But there's something else I don't like very much - Maryša. It's beginning to bother me. - That girl's fighting with all her strength.

LÍZALKA: *(Scornfully.)* Are you going to back down now? Every girl carries on like that before her wedding.

LÍZAL: Well, I don't mind - I know - I don't take much count of it either, but I'm a bit sorry for her with a widower and three children.

LÍZALKA: There's no point in feeling sorry! - It's got to be done while there's time. - *(Suddenly turns to him.)* And who would you want to give her to? *(Derisively.)* Francek?

LÍZAL: *(Starts.)* What Francek! Aren't there other bridegrooms enough?

LÍZALKA: *(Ironically.)* And what do you think leftover goods are worth! Do you think it will change for the better? I'm not saying she wouldn't get married, but she'd be hanging around us a year, two years, and then you'll have no choice but to give her to Francek. He'll get back from military service, and what then? I'm shaking all over with fear and anger just to think of it. That's why I'm saying, get rid of her - now! Whilst there's still time! Or there'll be a disaster, and won't you be sorry for her then?

LÍZAL: That's true, it's true. A girl like the wind - and that son of a devil is capable of anything. Well - well - so I'll go now to put it in the hands of God.

## Scene 9

*(The preceding. Vávra knocks and enters.)*

VÁVRA: Good afternoon! So you're here.

LÍZALKA: Welcome.

LÍZAL: *(Offers his hand in silence.)*

LÍZALKA: *(Wipes a chair with her apron.)* Sit down, Maryša will be dressed immediately. *(Brings a bottle. To Lizal.)* Serve some wine.

LÍZAL: *(Pours wine.)*

VÁVRA: *(Looks at his watch.)* It's time we were off. -

LÍZALKA: *(On her way to the second living room.)* It's not far to Moutnice. You'll be there in fifteen minutes. *(Goes to look for Maryša.)*

*(From the next room a muffled conversation between Maryša and Lizalka. Lizal, Vávra.)*

LÍZAL: *(Holds out the glass.)* Drink, then!

VÁVRA: *(Takes the glass.)* Here's health.

*(An argument breaks out in the next room.)*

LÍZAL: I must go and see if Josef has the horses ready. *(He looks anxiously in the direction of the next room. He leaves.)*

## Scene 10

*(Vávra, Maryša, Lizalka.)*

MARYŠA: *(Runs in ahead of Lizalka, who chases her. Maryša goes to the stove, sits on the bench and defiantly rests her head on her hand.)*

LÍZALKA: *(Behind her.)* Confounded girl! Are you going to keep on contradicting me? Can't you get dressed?!

VÁVRA: *(To Lizalka.)* Leave her alone - she'll go anyhow. *(Approaches Maryša.)*

LÍZALKA: I don't know why the ground doesn't open and swallow her up! *(Leaves.)*

## Scene 11

*(Vávra, Maryša.)*

MARYŠA: *(Turning to Vávra; beseechingly.)* Mr. Vávra, what have I done, that you pursue me like this? Can't you see I'm fighting it all I can, with all my heart I oppose you, you still want me to be your wife, and I cannot be yours. We're not just talking about a year or two! Why should I sacrifice my whole life for you? Can't you be reasonable, even when my parents can't!

VÁVRA: *(Sits next to her.)* Come, come! What are these tears for! Don't be afraid. You will be the light of my life. You won't have any regrets. Whatever you want I'll do for you, and you will always be better off with me than here. - It won't be as bad as you're imagining - it's only now that everything seems so terrible to you.

MARYŠA: And maybe it will be even worse than I'm imagining. *(Abruptly stands up.)* You have children! Aren't you afraid that people will laugh at you? Why you are slaving and sweating over a young girl? Don't you have a shred of conscience? Think it over - while there's time. *(She is silent.)* Do you want me to go with you to the priest, then to holy confession and communion? How can you have on your conscience such a terrible sin - ? You want to stand before God and - you're not afraid of Him? What sort of life will I have with you, when you don't take count of any of this? Think it over, what lies before you - the Lord God will punish you.

VÁVRA: My little Maryša! *(He gently takes her hand, then tries to embrace her in a sexual way.)*

MARYŠA: *(With a deft movement of her hand pushes him away and scratches his face.)* Leave me alone! *(She goes abruptly into the next room.)*

VÁVRA: *(Alone; touches his face, then his hand, shakes his head, goes to the table, pours some wine and drinks it in one gulp, then sits down and thinks.)* Upon my soul - what does it look like - I would do better to stay as I am. *(He falls silent, then abruptly stands up and shakes his fist after Maryša.)* But, once you're mine, you'll learn what obedience is.

## Scene 12

*(Vávra - Lizal enters and behind him shuffles Granny, who sits again at the table by the stove. Lizalka.)*

LÍZAL: So, the horses are ready - you can go with God's blessing. *(To Vávra.)* Where is Maryša? Isn't she dressed yet? *(He goes into the next room.)*

MARYŠA: *(Beyond the door, wrathfully.)* Go away! I'm getting dressed.

VÁVRA: *(Happily, to himself.)* There we are - it's done. *(From outside, the cracking of a whip.)*

LÍZAL: *(to Lizalka.)* Go in there - help her. -

LÍZALKA: *(Goes.)*

MARYŠA: *(Bangs the door in her face- in the same tone of voice.)* Go away! I'll dress myself. -

*(They all exchange glances.)*

LÍZALKA: I'll go in, and help her. -

VÁVRA: *(Restraining Lizalka.)* No - leave her alone. If she comes of her own free will - she'll come. Neither you nor I will achieve anything by force. - Leave her alone...

LIZALKA: You're not backing down, I hope? Wouldn't that bring shame on you?

VÁVRA: I'm not backing down, but leave her alone...

*(Silence.)*

## Scene 13

*(The preceding. Maryša. The door opens and Maryša comes out, pale with tears, dressed in*

*ceremonial folk costume. She hides her face with one hand and for a moment stands indecisively on the spot; then, after a profound silence, speaks.)*

MARYŠA: You see, I have submitted to you, so you won't need to rail against me for being a disobedient daughter. - *(To Vávra.)* I will marry you, Mr. Vávra *(with increasing passion)* but you should know who you are taking. *(As she walks to the outside door.)* It will be a life to make you want to drown yourself. *(She is the first to enter the hall.)*

OTHERS: *(Follow her.)*

MARYŠA: *(Whilst she goes to Granny, Vávra, Lízal and Lizalka are almost in the doorway, so that the scene between Maryša and Granny is played on an empty stage. She suddenly turns at the door, approaches Granny and hastily kisses her hand.)*

GRANNY: *(Stands, brushes her lap, faces Maryša, swings her arm and then puts her arthritic hand on the girl's breast.)* You're going already? *(Kisses Maryša on the forehead and starts crying.)*

*(In a profound silence Maryša quickly leaves.)*

#### **Scene 14**

*(Lively activity.)*

LÍZAL: *(Following Maryša.)* Thank God for that - it was hard work!  
*(They all leave except for Granny.)*

#### *Scene 15*

GRANNY: *(Alone. She accompanies them all to the threshold, then returns to her place, occupies herself again with the maize husks and sighs.)* Ah well! The Lord God help her! *(Carries on husking the maize.)*

*(The curtain falls.)*

## ACT THREE

*(Two years after Act One. A country inn. Upstage right a taproom fenced off by a high wooden partition. Hanging on the wall of the taproom an old poster of a steamship company, next to it a poster of a factory for agricultural machines, and next to that a chimney sweep's New Year greetings. A hatch for customers. In front of the taproom to the right a huge round table made out of solid wood on four legs. Two windows stage left. The downstage window has a small square table, a bench immediately under the window, and chairs round the table. There is a sewing machine by the upstage window. Next to the doors upstage is a long table with benches at its long sides.)*

*The Innkeeper's wife sits at the sewing machine, undoing something. The journeyman butcher stands in the taproom, cleaning the lamp. Lizal sits at the table upstage and says nothing, only drinks and draws on his pipe. Downstage left sits Francek. Downstage right is a door leading to the slaughterhouse. A farmer is standing by the bar drinking a glass of beer. In the course of the act a number of farmers straggle in wearing long brown sheepskin coats, some of them reaching to the ground.)*

### Scene 1

*(Innkeeper, Innkeeper's wife, Francek, Lizal, Pavel, Farmer.)*

FRANCEK: *(Sits apart from the others downstage left. His elbows are resting on his knees and he is looking at the ground. Sitting next to him is the Innkeeper with a pipe in his mouth and a white apron round his waist. With his back turned to the taproom he finishes speaking to Francek.)*

INNKEEPER: *(Confidentially.)* Were you up at the manor yet?

FRANCEK: No.

INNKEEPER: Then go and ask the steward to take you into service. You can't stay like this. And stop making so much of it. What's done is done, you're not going to break your neck over it, and no head's tough enough to knock through a wall. She's married, and there's an end on't. Give thanks to the Lord God you've been released from military service, and put yourself to make a decent living for yourself and your mother. Stop drinking and loafing about like this! I'm telling you as your guardian. Try and save something up - you've nothing to throw around. And leave Vávra in peace, there's nothing you can do about it- *(Goes and serves the farmer, who's finished his glass.)*

FARMER: *(leaves.)*

FRANCEK: *(After the Innkeeper finishes speaking drinks from a metal quart pot and pushes it away.)* Eh, I can't even drink for sorrow. It was for him she grew up, was it?

INNKEEPER: *(Comes back to him.)* I told you already. Forget it. You're not a milksop. If nothing else works, pull yourself together and go out into the world. Out of sight, out of mind.

FRANCEK: I'll go, uncle - but... *(Threatens someone or other with his fist.)*

INNKEEPER: *(Shrugs his shoulders and goes about his own affairs.)*

FRANCEK: *(Secretly wipes a tear from his eye with his knuckles and hurriedly takes a drink.)*

### Scene 2

*(The preceding. Franěk, a neighbour, enters.)*

FRANĚK: Good afternoon - *(To the Innkeeper.)* So, you've finished the slaughtering?

INNKEEPER: Almost.

FRANĚK: *(looks at Francek and touches him kindly on the shoulder.)* That you, Francek? The watchman's looking for you; you've got to go and see the mayor.

FRANCEK: (*Brusquely.*) What for now?

FRANĚK: I've no idea, something about your military pass.

FRANCEK: I'll go when I've drunk up. (*He takes a cheroot from his breast pocket and lights up.*)

### Scene 3

(*The preceding. Maryša / Vávrová enters, in a long calico skirt, lanky, pale, with eyes sunken under dark lids, her face hollow with a pointed chin. She has a basket full of empty beer bottles on her arm. She only speaks when she has to, does not look at anyone, and walks round Lízal as though she doesn't know he's there.*)

INNKEEPER: Welcome! What have you got for us?

MARYŠA / VÁVROVÁ: (*Silently takes out one bottle after another, stands them on the bar, then speaks in a quiet, tamed voice.*) I've come for meat.

INNKEEPER: (*To Pavel.*) Pavel, go and cut some meat for Mistress Vávrová.

(*The following scene, until Francek's exit, is played at the front of the stage.*)

PAVEL: (*Goes and opens the door into the slaughterhouse.*)

VÁVROVÁ: (*Follows him and stands at the door so that she can see into the slaughterhouse.*)

PAVEL: (*In the slaughterhouse.*) Suit you?

VÁVROVÁ: (*leans into the slaughterhouse.*) Why not. (*From the slaughterhouse can be heard two chops with an axe and rattle of the scales.*)

FRANCEK: (*Approaches Vávrová unnoticed and gives her his hand.*) Maryša - don't you know me? -

VÁVROVÁ: (*Inconspicuously turns her head towards him just a little and smiles slightly.*) It's you? Welcome back from military service. (*Takes Francek's hand and clears her throat.*) They let you go already?

FRANCEK: Yes. Well, and... (*He plays with his cheroot.*) How are you getting on?

VÁVROVÁ: (*Does not answer, just looks round, lifts her eyes and goes into the slaughterhouse.*)

FRANCEK: (*Waits for a few moments for Vávrová to come back, then suddenly goes to his beer, drinks it up, pays the innkeeper's wife sitting behind the sewing machine and is about to slip out.*)

INNKEEPER: You're not coming back?

FRANCEK: (*In the doorway, with bravado.*) I don't know. (*Leaves.*)

(*The preceding without Francek.*)

VÁVROVÁ: (*Leaves the slaughterhouse, on her way adjusting the lid on the basket, approaches the Innkeeper and gives him money.*)

INNKEEPER: How much are you giving me? (*Takes the money.*)

VÁVROVÁ: Two.

INNKEEPER: (*Gives her the change.*)

VÁVROVÁ: (*Takes the money.*) God be with you! (*Leaves.*)

### Scene 4

(*The preceding without Vávrová. Pavel, later a neighbour, Buček, comes in.*)

FRANĚK: (*Sits at the table with Lízal.*)

PAVEL: (*Comes in from the slaughterhouse.*) Welcome!

FRANĚK: (*To Pavel.*) Give me a beer.

INNKEEPER: (*Meantime, to Lízal.*) What's this, you and Maryša still not on speaking terms?

LÍZAL: (*Doesn't answer, stretches out in his chair, pulls his coat around him and drinks.*)

NEIGHBOUR BUČEK: (*Enters.*) Good afternoon - what's this, Vávrová going off with

Francek?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(With animation.)* They left together? *(Goes to the window.)* You're right. - My goodness, she's snubbing him; she doesn't want to go with him.

*(Everyone except Lízal pushes for space at the window.)*

NEIGHBOUR FRANĚK: It won't come to any good.

*(All of them except the Innkeeper's wife leave the window.)*

LÍZAL: *(Doesn't give anything away, spits loudly.)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Sits back at the sewing machine and noisily uses the scissors.)*

*(Silence.)*

INNKEEPER: *(Moves away from the window.)* She does well, to snub him. - She's married - what does she have to talk with him about.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Speaks with intervals dividing one sentence from another, applying herself to her work.)* Poor thing! What she looks like! I saw her in church the other day, but *(clasps her hands)* I did that over her in spirit, I was so scared for her. So dry, so thin - and now she walks so sadly, and those eyes, as though they wanted to speak - what a life she must have!

INNKEEPER: *(Looks round at Lízal; mockingly.)* Well, but she has the mill.

LÍZAL: *(Remains silent and drinks.)*

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Where did it all go - dear Jesus, where did it all go! That face, those hands! - such a young girl - anyone could rest their eyes on her, she was so pretty, always white, plump - and now - *(turns to them all)* maybe she doesn't even eat or sleep. And they say she doesn't complain - nothing - not a word from her they say, only what there has to be... - and so quiet - she walks softly, and suffers like a sheep caught in a thorn bush, till her sufferings come to an end, methinks. *(Directly to Lízal.)* Uncle Lízal, aren't you sorry for her? You shouldn't have done it - ruin her young life!

LÍZAL: *(Heaves a long sigh.)* Eh! *(He is silent. After a while.)* Ask me nothing, and leave me in peace.

INNKEEPER: *(Comes right up to him.)* They say Vávra's going to sue you, is that true? That you won't give him what you'd agreed to?

LÍZAL: What's it to you! Let him sue me!

INNKEEPER: Well, I don't know - Vávra's a crafty one.

## Scene 5

*(The preceding. Horačka enters during the conversation.)*

HORAČKA: *(Wound up in a woollen scarf, with a cane in her hand. She looks around uncertainly and then moves towards the Innkeeper's wife.)* God's Holy Name be praised! What are you making? *(Looks about and feels the material on the sewing machine.)* That's nice material - ! *(Turns to the Innkeeper.)* Please, wasn't Francek here? They told me he came here; wasn't he here?

INNKEEPER: He was-

HORAČKA: And where did he go, don't you know?

INNKEEPER: *(Doesn't answer.)*

HORAČKA: Dear God, I have such trouble with that boy. - Since he came back from military service, he's been good for nothing. He's gone from home all day, at night he comes in like a thief, and *(almost in tears)* they say he's drinking!?

INNKEEPER: *(Doesn't answer.)*

*(Everyone is silent.)*

FRANĚK: Well, old lady, forget your worries and come and have a drink. *(He gives Horačka some wine.)*



HORAČKA: (*With her left hand she unwinds the woollen scarf from her face, with her right she takes the glass.*) To your health, godfather! (*She drinks.*) It's a long time since I drank any wine. (*Wipes her mouth with her hand.*)

BUČEK: Have some of mine too. (*Gives her his glass.*)

HORAČKA: (*Playfully.*) Well really, - do you want to get me drunk! Well, God willing, health to you all. (*Takes a sip.*) Thanks be to God -

BUČEK: (*Still offering it to her.*) Have some more -

HORAČKA: No, I don't want any more. - That's enough - one shouldn't play with mischief -

BUČEK: (*Takes the glass from her.*) Well, auntie, what - won't you get married? - I'll be damned, you still know how to hop around a bit, don't you?

HORAČKA: Eh, what's that you're saying, who'd take an old woman like me?

INNKEEPER: (*Slyly.*) Neighbour Lízal is waiting here, once he's a widower - He'd fall for you.

LÍZAL: (*Looks round at them querulously.*)

HORAČKA: (*Merrily.*) Oh, uncle should look for someone rich and young. It's in his blood -

LÍZAL: Anyhow - life without money, it's bad -

HORAČKA: It's true, it can be bad (*wipes her mouth*), but not always, uncle, no. How often it happens one rich person marries another - then they fight - unhappiness at home and contentment gone. Other times there's not a penny in the house and they can still be happier than -

INNKEEPER: (*Interrupts.*) - than in the mill. You don't have to tell us that - he knows it too, and Vávra will still show it to him.

LÍZAL: (*Pounds his fist on the table.*) Can't you be done with it!?

INNKEEPER: (*Calms him.*) Don't pound like that on the table - it's not yours -

LÍZAL: Then why do you keep digging at me like that? Did I come here for you to keep digging at me? All I want is drink my glass in peace and without you niggling me all the time. What's it to do with you?

INNKEEPER: Depends how you take it: it does and it doesn't.

LÍZAL: I say it doesn't! Are you my family? You're not! Then what right have you to speak!

INNKEEPER: You're right, I'm not, but I can't just be a looker-on. Anyone with an ounce of feeling in his body, anyone'd be upset. It's only human. If the stable lad brings down my neighbour's horse, does it make any difference to me? It doesn't. So why do I beat the lad for tormenting the horse? Why does he load more on him than he can bear - eh? Is it any business of mine? No. And there we're speaking of a horse and here of a human being. Is it any business of mine?

LÍZAL: No. A horse is not a human being and a human being is not a horse.

INNKEEPER: Eh, you're speaking like a callow youth. You should have more sense, with your grey hairs. One foot in the grave and you're behaving like you owned the world. It's always the same: I have money, I have acres, I have yet another acre, and his daughter - he'll kill her with money. You may be a good husbandman, but as a father - I spit in front of you. (*Spits.*) So I'm telling you. You won't cut through the table by pounding on it.

LÍZAL: (*Waves his hand, takes a kerchief from his breast pocket and gradually between speeches wipe his eyes.*)

INNKEEPER: (*Moderates his tone.*) If you want to be a decent man, you'd acknowledge your fault and no one would dig at you.

LÍZAL: (*Hangs his head.*) I'm already silent, you see - But... (*indignantly*) well, who can help me! What's done is done. Do I have to take her back home?

INNKEEPER: Yes, that would be better, for her at least, if not for you.

LÍZAL: And what would become of her? (*Slowly looks round at Horačka and then reaches*

*for his glass. After a long while.)* Old woman!  
 HORAČKA: What do you want, old man?  
 LÍZAL: *(Gives her some wine.)* Have a drink. You still didn't have any of mine. And drink plenty, plenty, old woman, plenty - *(He gesticulates and doesn't finish his sentence.)*  
 HORAČKA: To your health, Uncle Lízal. And don't cry - it's too late to be sorry.  
 LÍZAL: Who would've expected it to turn out like this. I wouldn't even have been such a - but - my wife - she was as fierce as a dragon. She would have beaten me as well.  
 HORAČKA: *(Stands the glass on the table.)*  
 LÍZAL: Drink, old woman, drink more - drink away. I'm drinking too and I never used to! *(He turns fully towards the Innkeeper.)* Isn't that true, Innkeeper? I was always a good husbandman - and now I drink. *(Leans confidentially towards Horačka.)* Do you know then *(almost in a whisper)* that he beats her? **(Pathetically.)** He beats my child! Money - he wants money from her all the time - and he beats her. That's the life my pretty little Maryša has! -

## Scene 6

*(The preceding. The Court Attendant and two neighbours enter.)*

COURT ATTENDANT: Good afternoon. Is Mr. Lízal here?

LÍZAL: *(Wipes his eyes with his kerchief, looks sternly at the Court Attendant and speaks harshly.)* What do you want?

COURT ATTENDANT: Ah! That's Mr. Lízal? *(Unfolds the court order on the table.)* I have something for you here from the Imperial and Royal Provincial Court. Sign here, please, to say that you received it.

LÍZAL: From the court? *(Holds it a long way from his eyes and begins to read.)* And what is it?

COURT ATTENDANT: I don't know. *(Takes from the pocket of his waistcoat a small inkwell, dips in the pen, and gives the receipt slip to Lízal for his signature.)* Here - *(Points to the place for signature.)*

LÍZAL: *(Shakes the pen and signs clumsily.)*

COURT ATTENDANT: *(To the Innkeeper.)* Give me a beer.

LÍZAL: *(Finishes signing and in complete silence unfolds the document. Reads.)* What? *(Looks at the paper. Laughs.)* Vávra's suing me? A - a - and - confound it! *(Folds up the document.)* And at once! *(Shakes his sleeve.)* See the pickings, see them fall - Just you wait. *(Puts the suit inside his shirt.)* If you sue - then sue, but - *(reaches out for his glass and sprawls across the width of the table)* you won't get a penny for this little trick!... *(Drinks.)* You've served me nicely - nicely - my son-in-law - *(Sits down.)* Nicely - nicely -

HORAČKA: My goodness, why the big surprise?! Money is what he married her for, money is what he's suing you for. Well, I have to go. Thanks be to God, Uncle Lízal. *(To the Innkeeper.)* Please, Innkeeper, tell my Francek, if he comes here, that he's called to see the steward this evening. They have work for him up at the manor. Will you tell him that? *(To Lízal.)* God be with you, Uncle! *(Reaches to him on the left side on his stooped back.)* And don't let Maryša suffer, don't do it! Good night, God be with you!

NEIGHBOURS: *(In chorus.)* Good night!

## Scene 7

*(The preceding without Horačka.)*

LÍZAL: And I won't, I won't let my little girl suffer - I'll bring her home and give him nothing - nothing - nothing! *(Stands.)* Scoundrels! - they're all scoundrels! My son's a scoundrel, my son-in-law's a scoundrel, but that ugly widower's the biggest scoundrel

of all - (*Shrieks at the neighbours.*) And drink, lads, everybody, drink! I'll give something to all, but nothing to him. Innkeeper, glasses all round, drink. Your drinks are on me! I'll give to anyone, anyone who comes - and a bottle of wine on the table, and here to this gentleman from the office (*doffs his cap low*) as well. And - and drink away! No one's going to say I'm a miser! - (*Half in tears.*) Innkeeper, it's true, I'm not a miser? I'm a good husbandman - a strong yeoman, a grand cavalier, but no miser. Thirty-five acres, just as I bought it, that I have, and I bought another as well - I have horses, I could put forty weights on them and they would carry them from hell - and - and I used to have horses, I used to have - they could go round all Moravia at a trot without stopping! That's the sort of horses I used to have! But my son-in-law and my son, all they've got is cripples, mongrels, scraggy cats. And that widower has the worst horses in the world. He's a yeoman? I'm supposed to give him money I've sweated blood for? He'd borrow it from the saints and I'd pay it back to them! And where am I supposed to get it from? Bake it in the brick works? Pull it out of the fish pond?

### Scene 8

(*The preceding. Vávra enters.*)

VÁVRA: Good evening. Give me some wine. (*Sits at the table downstage left apart from the others.*)

LÍZAL: (*Doesn't notice him.*) Yup! A man has to slog as I had to slog. They all like to get it on a plate. (*Sees Vávra and stops himself.*) Aha! (*Opens his eyes wide. After a moment in complete silence.*) Where did you spring from? What do you want here?

VÁVRA: (*Says nothing and quietly settles himself on his chair. To the Innkeeper.*) Did my wife come here for meat?

INNKEEPER: She did. (*Stands the wine on the table and leaves.*)

VÁVRA: And who did she walk back with? I saw her from the plots.

LÍZAL: She left with Francek. You're sitting here and you're wife's going around with Francek. Aren't you ashamed? And what do you want here, may I ask?

VÁVRA: I think, the same as you.

LÍZAL: And when I'm here, you have to be here as well?

VÁVRA: (*Calmly.*) There's room for us both.

LÍZAL: But you ought to be at home.

VÁVRA: (*Derisively.*) Since I'm not at home, I'm here.

LÍZAL: But I'm telling you, you ought to be at home. You've got a wife, you've got children - you've got horses to look after, so as not to do me shame - for having such scraggy cats -

VÁVRA: Well, you don't have to ride them -

LÍZAL: I don't ride them, I don't, but it brings shame on me, my son-in-law having cats and not horses. And then you hang around the pubs.

VÁVRA: I think you've been here since opening time -

LÍZAL: And what's it to you if I have? I can sit here, I don't have children, but you're spending money and you have children -

VÁVRA: It's my own money I'm spending. You still haven't given me any.

LÍZAL: And I'm not giving you any. I gave to everyone, but you - I'm not giving to you.

VÁVRA: (*Opens his coat and settles it around him.*) We'll see what the court has to say to that.

LÍZAL: Aha - the court - the court - your court case (*Gestures, his thumb between his first and middle fingers.*) Let Maryša sue me, Maryša will get something, but you - you nothing - because you're a scoundrel, because you beat her, because you have debts

and you don't honour me...

VÁVRA: (*Laughs.*) I should honour you!

LÍZAL: I'd have rather given her to Francek than to you.

VAVRA: Why didn't you given her to him? You should have done -

LÍZAL: Because you pestered me like Judas - and I gave her to you because I thought you were a good husbandman. And you're suing me. Is that right?

VÁVRA: (*Derisively.*) It's not right.

LÍZAL: Well then -you, you...

VÁVRA: (*Abruptly stands up and takes hold of his chair.*)

LÍZAL: (*Stands up.*) - Scoundrel!

VÁVRA: (*Raises the chair on high, but slowly lowers it to the ground, aware of the cluster of neighbours, Lízal, his back turned to him as though nothing were happening, shuffles to the background.*) Quiet! - Or you'll breathe your last. One word from any of you, and you'll get it back - but not in words! (*Sits down.*) A man'll soon be afraid to visit the pub, you've all got tongues sharp as razors.

## Scene 9

(*The preceding - Francek enters.*)

ALL: (*Look at him and burst out laughing.*)

FRANCEK: (*Entering in a merry mood.*) Good evening - Aha - good evening all. - Uncle Lízal and Mr. Vávra! - That's a meeting of two brave souls. (*To Vávra in particular.*) In the name of Our Lord, good evening!

VÁVRA: Go your way and mix with your own kind.

FRANCEK: (*Derisively.*) Well, well - how grand we are - Pavel, give me a beer.

BUČEK: Where were you, that you're in such high spirits?

FRANCEK: Where was I? (*Stands with one foot on a chair.*) - I was at the mill. (*At these words the whole inn falls silent.*)

Well, what are you staring at? (*To Buček.*) You saw us or you didn't see us?

BUČEK: Belt up and keep your mouth shut. (*Gives him a beer.*) Get this down you. - You didn't get so much of it on military service - what?

FRANCEK: Sometimes enough. (*By turns almost all except Lízal drink to him.*)

PAVEL: (*Gives Francek a beer.*)

FRANCEK: (*In turns drinks to the neighbours. They clink glasses.*)

BUČEK: You must've been mad with them for discharging you?

FRANCEK: (*Laughs.*) And how! (*Bluntly.*) But believe me, when I see the criminality going on here, I'd be glad to be back there.

BUČEK: What do you mean, criminality? Who's stealing here?

FRANCEK: (*Nods towards Vávra.*) Ask him.

BUČEK: Eh, you're starting again. Leave off.

FRANCEK: (*Grasps his mug of beer and blows off the foam.*) And I'm not saying anything.

BUČEK: (*Reprimands him aside.*) Listen. Don't cause trouble. What'll you get out of it?

FRANCEK: (*Drinks.*) Nothing.

NEIGHBOUR FRANĚK: (*Calms Vávra.*)

VÁVRA: I'm not going to be slandered by a crofter like that!

FRANCEK: (*Who has heard Vávra's last words, approaches him.*) I'm a crofter, yes - that's true. - All I have is that cottage and a thatched roof over my head, but maybe the people in that cottage are more honourable than at the mill. That's what I'm telling you.

LÍZAL: (*Slaps his hand on his knee and strokes it. Throughout the whole scene he gets much pleasure from the argument.*) Right, right, František, right, keep on. The boy talks

like an apostle.

FRANCEK: *(Looks at Lízal amazed.)*

LÍZAL: Na, na, my boy, drink up.

FRANCEK: *(Looks at him contemptuously.)*

VÁVRA: It looks like Daddy wants to make friends with the boys.

LÍZAL: *(Cheered by this.)* Na, drink up! *(Goes to Francek and touches him on the shoulder.)*

František, listen - drink up.

FRANCEK: *(Abruptly turns to Lízal, looks at his glass and strikes it out of his hand, so that the wine goes all over the floor.)*

VÁVRA: *(Bursts out laughing.)*

FRANCEK: *(To Lízal.)* You can keep your wine, I've enough of my own.

VÁVRA: *(Finishes his laughing.)* It's a pity you don't have another daughter, you could have given her to him with another thirty-five acres.

FRANCEK: *(Scornfully.)* She'd be in better hands than yours.

VÁVRA: *(Scornfully.)* I believe you. Beggary always looks for a better home.

FRANCEK: But that beggary's dearer to me than a wealthy crook.

VÁVRA: *(Catches hold of the table.)* Who y're talking about?

FRANCEK: Whoever it fits.

VÁVRA: *(Threateningly.)* Lad - keep your mouth shut! You head for my mill, you mix with my wife - and on top of that you'll call me names? I'll shoot you like a dog if you take one more step towards the mill.

FRANCEK: *(Bursts into loud laughter.)* He'd shoot me, he would! *(He looks at the ground under his feet. Scornfully and at the same time defiantly.)* Criminal!

VÁVRA: *(Throws himself on Francek and catches him by the neck.)*

*(Vávra and Francek grapple with each other. Lízal, Pavel and the neighbours pull them apart. Vávra and Francek have disappeared in a tangle of sheepskin coats; after a while Vávra flies out at one side and Francek at the other.)*

FRANCEK: Take me by the throat, would you? Remember, I'm not afraid of you. I won't forgive you this. Off with you! *(He pushes his way out and shakes off the neighbours, who want to calm him and get him away from Vávra. The neighbours step away from him. They are taken aback by his daring language, so that Francek, as he speaks his passionate words, stands completely alone in the middle of the stage. Vávra also stands alone, a long way away from him.)* If you had a hundred rifles, if there were a whole regiment at the mill - remember, I'm not afraid of you! It wasn't for nothing I told you, when I went on military service: Woe, woe to you Uncle Lízal, and woe to you Vávra - by the living God I swore at that time that I would revenge myself on each and every one of you, and on you, Vávra, most of all. You ruined my life and I'll ruin yours. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. You'll pay in blood for each one of my tears. Remember this, I'm telling you here in front of witnesses: I will walk with your wife, and I will meet her - in broad daylight I'll come to your wretched mill - and better for you, Vávra, when we don't meet each other! *(Leaves abruptly.)*

BUČEK: *(Leaves with him.)*

## Scene 10

*(The preceding without Francek and Buček. The Innkeeper.)*

VÁVRA: *(Looks bemusedly and wrathfully after Francek.)*

INNKEEPER: *(Enters and looks after Francek; then looks at Vávra.)* What was all that noise in here? Don't tell me you were fighting?

ONE OF THE NEIGHBOURS: It was nothing. Just a bit of –

INNKEEPER: *(Looks at Vávra in astonishment.)*

NEIGHBOURS: *(Lay their money on the table and leave.)*

LÍZAL: Yes! He showed you - You should have been at home. *(Leaves.)*

VÁVRA: *(With a heavy wheezing sigh sits at the table; gloomily.)* Innkeeper, give me another.  
*(He stares straight ahead.)*

*(The neighbours and youth at the table carry on playing cards. Suddenly, agitated by the fight, they begin singing: "In front of our place is a garden -" etc.)*

*(The curtain falls.)*

## ACT FOUR

*(The main room in Vávra 's mill, furnished in peasant fashion. Upstage left in the corner a large tiled stove with a bench round it. Upstage right in the corner a high made-up bed. Above the bed, wooden shelves on which are arranged plates, glasses and a white flowered shawl. In the corner beyond the bed hang starched skirts half hidden by a woollen shawl. Through a window in the middle of the back wall a view of the village, as far as the inn with its lighted windows. Next to the window, by the bed, a large painted wooden chest. Downstage left an old-fashioned linen cupboard with compartments; standing on it are shining glass candlesticks with Candlemas candles embellished with artificial flowers, various kinds of glasses and hymn books, and in the middle a crucifix covered by a glass dome, in rows on the walls hang simple pictures, amongst them a Black Madonna. Between the stove and the linen cupboard there is a second made-up bed. By the door hangs a clock of the type known as Black Forest. Down stage right is a table with a simple burning oil lamp. The predominant feature of the room is its gloom.)*

### Scene 1

*(Vávrová, Lízal on his way out.)*

LÍZAL: Come on, be sensible - obey.

VÁVROVÁ: I was sensible last time and you weren't. You've made your bed, and you can lie on it, both of you. I'll stay here, as evidence of your shame, I'm not going anywhere. *(Strides up and down the room in anger. Suddenly she turns.)* He took me for money, so why don't you give it him?

LÍZAL: I would give it to a decent, orderly man - but I haven't got money to throw around. - Do you know he's suing me? That he wants to take me to court?

VÁVROVÁ: *(With a bitter smile.)* So that's why you want me to go with you!?

LÍZAL: That's not the reason.

VÁVROVÁ: Then why? Am I supposed to support you against my own husband? He had me from you for money, now he's suing you for that money, and he's right. Anyway, it's none of my business? I didn't sell myself, you sold me. You went to the notary without even asking me. Sort it out between yourselves; leave me in peace! -

LÍZAL: Then you won't obey?

VÁVROVÁ: I won't.

LÍZAL: You'll live to regret it!

VÁVROVÁ: I don't see why. - Remember, father, you used God to support you, you referred to Holy Scripture - just to have me here. You didn't even take the priest's advice, and he told you at the time that a marriage like this goes against the Lord God, against the Holy Church, against the whole of humanity, and you still stuck to it. What more do you want? You can see for yourself I'm happy here, I like it so much I don't even want to go home. I've got used to everything - the children, my husband, the hard labour, everything, even the beatings he gives me. What more do you want? What's done is done - what more will be done - you'll have that on your conscience.

*(The distant sound of a village dance, a melancholy melody.)*

LÍZAL: *(Startled.)* What more can happen?

VÁVROVÁ: Oh - nothing.

LÍZAL: *(Looks at her for a moment.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Faces him.)*

LÍZAL: What are you thinking about, you stupid wench?

VÁVROVÁ: *(Does not answer and continues to walk up and down the room, mechanically straightening a chair as she passes and tidying up other things.)* Nothing good, you can count on that.

LÍZAL: (*Wags his finger at her.*) Don't let's start arguing. (*Threateningly.*) People say you're meeting with Francek, that you want to run away with Francek.

VÁVROVÁ: (*Resisting, cries out in indignation.*) That's a lie! (*Pause.*) And even if it were true - it's between me and Vávra. It's nothing to do with you!

LÍZAL: I - I - ?! What's this! Nothing to do with your father! And who is it that people are going to point their fingers at? Whose child are you? Who brought you up?

VÁVROVÁ: (*With a bitter smile.*) You hardly brought me up at all. If it hadn't been for Granny, all I would have learnt from you was how to escape from my husband. Don't worry. (*Meaningfully.*) I'm not going to bring that shame on you, I'm better than you think. If you've nothing else on your mind - you can go with God's blessing.

LÍZAL: Then you're not coming?

VÁVROVÁ: No.

LÍZAL: Then suffer, if that's what you want! (*Growls and exits.*)

## Scene 2

(*Vávrová alone. A pause.*)

VÁVROVÁ: (*Continues to walk from place to place, immediately goes to look into the closet, returns, then into the hall - suddenly she stops in the middle of the stage and clutches her head.*) Walking around like a madwoman - I don't know any longer what I'm doing - (*Pause.*)

(*Music from the dance can be heard through the window.*)

VÁVROVÁ: (*Goes to the window and listens, then opens the windows; the music can be heard more clearly.*) The music! The music! I'm always at my worst at these times - (*Pause. She gives a long sigh and sits on the chest by the window; she is carried away by the music. It stops in the middle of the pause. Joyful shrieks from the young people, after the shrieks a girl singing.*)

Blue-grey dove, where have you been;  
that you have lost your ash-grey feathers...  
(*Etc. for as long as the direction allows.*)

VÁVROVÁ: (*During the song with a heavy sigh presses herself to the window.*) The girls singing - Francek rebelling - and I (*bitterly*) that's my sort of music!

(*A long pause. Knocking on the door.*)

VÁVROVÁ: (*Goes into the hall.*) Who's there?

## Scene 3

(*Vávrová, Rozára*)

ROZÁRA: (*From outside.*) Me -

VÁVROVÁ: (*Opens the door to the hall.*) Is it you, Rozára?  
(*They both enter.*)

ROZÁRA: It's me.

VÁVROVÁ: Why so early?

ROZÁRA: The master sent me to see to the cattle.

VÁVROVÁ: Did you close the hall?

ROZÁRA: No.

VÁVROVÁ: Go and close it. Bring in water, see to the cattle, and then you can go back.

ROZÁRA: (*Enters and takes off her holiday clothes in the closet; from the closet.*) Are the children asleep, madam?

VÁVROVÁ: They're asleep. Go and take a look at them. (*Sits and sews.*)

ROZÁRA: (*From the closet.*) Francek asked me if you were alone at home.



VÁVROVÁ: Wait! (*Listens.*) Some noise going on –  
ROZÁRA: (*Stands in the doorway.*) I think Vaclav's clambering onto his bunk - he's drunk again - he couldn't even speak. He drank a quart of plum brandy all at once.  
VÁVROVÁ: (*Not listening to her. - Quickly reaches for the lamp and shines it into the hall. Calls out loud.*) Is that you, Václav? (*No reply.*)  
(*A door creaks in the yard.*)  
ROZÁRA: (*Approaches her.*)  
VÁVROVÁ: (*Starts, gives Rozára the lamp and calls into the hall.*) Who is it?

#### Scene 4

(*Vávrová, Rozára, Francek.*)  
FRANCEK: (*Comes into the light.*) Good evening.  
VÁVROVÁ: (*Swings back and goes into the room.*)  
FRANCEK: (*Follows her.*)  
ROZÁRA: (*Stands the lamp on the table.*)  
(*An almost silent scene.*)  
VÁVROVÁ: (*A diffident reproach.*) How did you get here?  
FRANCEK: (*Puts down his cap.*) How I could. The way through from the road was closed. Rozára let me in through the hall.  
VÁVROVÁ: (*Looks reproachfully at Rozára.*)  
ROZÁRA: (*Hangs her head guiltily.*)  
VÁVROVÁ: Rozára, stay where you are!  
FRANCEK: (*Approaches Rozára.*) Rozára, leave us. I have to talk to your mistress.  
ROZÁRA: (*Exits.*)

#### Scene 5

(*The preceding without Rozára.*)  
VÁVROVÁ: (*Passionately.*) For God's sake, František, what are you thinking of - what is it you want here? What will people think of me, what kind of gossip have you got me into! You know I'm married - What sense do you have? I put up with enough from my husband, are you going to start as well? (*She crosses the room. Severely.*) Anyone meddles into it, they're around me like wasps. - (*Injured, turns to Francek. Proudly.*) And what stories are you spreading about me? - You asked Rozára - whether I was at home alone, and I hear you were telling them in the pub you were going to meet me. How can you talk like that?  
FRANCEK: That wasn't what I said.  
VÁVROVÁ: You must have said something -  
FRANCEK: All I said was (*defiantly*) that I would walk with you and I would meet with you.  
VÁVROVÁ: You said that in public? In front of everyone?  
FRANCEK: In front of everyone.  
VÁVROVÁ: (*Gazes at him for a while, then turns from him and bursts into wild laughter.*) I really don't know who of us is the biggest fool - if it's everyone like you, or me. (*Seriously.*) And you didn't care about my feelings, you didn't ask me, you didn't see that I am here? That you're damaging me? Who gave you any excuse for speaking like that - I did, maybe? (*She falls silent.*) I do love you and I didn't hide it and I still don't hide it, not from Vávra nor anyone - and I'm telling you now, but the way you think and talk about me - (*sorrowfully, almost in tears*) - that's how you hurt me, Francek, that's how you hurt me!  
FRANCEK: Well, it can't stay like that. I can't just leave you to him -  
VÁVROVÁ: (*In an even sterner tone of voice.*) Then what do you want of me?

FRANCEK: I'm going to Brno. I've work there for you and for myself as well. Get your things together and come with me!

ROZÁRA: *(Comes into the room with wood in her arms, puts it down by the stove and goes back into the hall, looking at them as she does so. It seems she wants them to know she's been listening.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Looks at him in dismay after Rozára has left.)* František! -

FRANCEK: What are you looking at? -

VÁVROVÁ: *(With growing amazement and horror.)* To Brno - with you? - me- another man's wife?

*(They look at each other.)*

FRANCEK: *(Harshly.)* Another man's - wife?

VÁVROVÁ: *(Holds her head in her hands.)* For the mercy of God - František!

FRANCEK: What are you frightened of?

VÁVROVÁ: *(Runs up to him and looks him in the eyes.)* What are you thinking of?! *(More quietly.)* Just think, what you are asking of me?! *(Takes him by the shoulders.)*

FRANCEK: *(Shakes his head.)*

VÁVROVÁ: I beg you, I beseech you. *(Sits with him on the bench by the stove. As far as possible to centre stage.)* Think about it. It isn't just you who's suffering, I suffer as well, and worse than you! - For I think about you wherever I go, and no one can imagine, how I don't sleep at night, how I cry all day. What I suffer from Vávra - I won't talk about that, what I suffer for you, is between God and myself. I am married, but my heart remained faithful to you, František. I would give you my soul, I love you so much, but what you ask of me - I cannot do it for you, František, I can't.

FRANCEK: *(Who has been looking dumbly at the ground throughout the monologue, now shakes his head and tries to object.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Doesn't allow him to speak.)* No, don't defend yourself - obey! Put these ideas out of your head! *(Strokes his hair and face.)* Do what I want, if you love me. - I am unhappy, but I won't be bad, do you understand? *(Puts her hands on his shoulders.)*

FRANCEK: I understand, but I can't obey you. You've ruined my life and you won't give me another. You at least could have pity on me, when I ask you.

VÁVROVÁ: No-no - no, František! Don't make my life more difficult than it is.

FRANCEK: I have no life without you.

VÁVROVÁ: Then go! *(Stands abruptly. Coldly.)* How can you be so obstinate! I won't allow you to commit this sin - don't even think of it. But remember: if you insist on this and if you injure me in front of people as you did yesterday, I will forget everything, forget you and forget myself, and commit such a sin that there will be no help either for you or for me.

FRANCEK: What do you mean by that?

VÁVROVÁ: Nothing yet. It slumbers and sleeps in me - once the sin awakens - the suffering will be over. One way or another - I will poison either myself or him - but I will not suffer long. Maybe in the most miserable imprisonment I would not live such a life as here. If it's my fate to be unhappy - let me be degraded till my dying day, destroyed for my whole life. No one could believe how happy I would be if lightning struck me out of the blue, if the waters came and swept me away - swept me away on the flood. *(Sits on a chair and cries.)*

*(Pause.)*

## Scene 6

*(The preceding. Rozára enters.)*

ROZÁRA: *(Looks at them for a moment.)* Madam, do I have to get wood from the pile for the

morning, or use what is under the woodshed?

VÁVROVÁ: Oh - whatever you like –

ROZÁRA: *(Remains standing in the doorway.)*

VÁVROVÁ: What else do you want?

ROZÁRA: *(With embarrassment.)* The master said you should get supper ready - he would be coming soon.

VÁVROVÁ: So –

ROZÁRA: *(Exits.)*

*(The preceding without Rozára.)*

FRANCEK: *(Reaching for his hat and getting ready to leave.)* As you wish, but - don't decide too quickly. What will you have from this - it's stupid! What I'm advising you is much better and wiser than what you're thinking about. - Maryša! There's no better time than today. Vávra is already drunk, he will sleep - he will know nothing. I already looked after Rozára myself - I'll wait for you by the floodgate at eleven. In three hours we'll be in Brno. –

VÁVROVÁ: Go by yourself, I'm staying where I am –

FRANCEK: *(Menacingly.)* Very well. But - remember this: if you don't come, I will come for you here, in broad daylight. And then let happen what will.

VÁVROVÁ: Vávra will shoot you -

FRANCEK: Let him shoot! Then all will be one to me as well.

VÁVROVÁ: *(Tries a conciliatory smile.)* You wouldn't do it. –

FRANCEK: *(leaving, at the door.)* I know whether I would do it or not. – Are you coming or aren't you?

VÁVROVÁ: *(On the opposite side of the stage; hesitates, then shakes her head.)* No. –

FRANCEK: Do as you like! *(Leaving.)* I'll be waiting by the floodgate.

VÁVROVÁ: *(Struggles with herself for a moment, until Francek is at the door, then calls after him.)* František!

FRANCEK: *(At the door looks round and waits with his head held high.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(For a moment struggles with herself. - A longer pause. Her arms hang still and dejectedly.)* No - I can't.

FRANCEK: *(Exits; in the hall to Rozára.)* Rozára, open up! I'm not going out the back way.

VÁVROVÁ: *(Alone; clasps her head in her hands, staggers to the table and sinks onto a chair.)*

*(Music from the dance can be heard again in the distance. A moment's silence.)*

## Scene 7

*(Rozára, Vávrová.)*

ROZÁRA: *(Enters, glances at Vávrová.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Stands up.)* Rozára!

ROZÁRA: What do you want, madam?

VÁVROVÁ: *(Strictly.)* Why did you let him in?

ROZÁRA: *(Remains guiltily silent. A pause.)*

VÁVROVÁ: You've served me badly! - *(Icily.)* Is everything done in the yard?

ROZÁRA: *(Readily.)* Everything's done.

VÁVROVÁ: What about the cowshed?

ROZÁRA: The calf is lying down and I gave the cow plenty of litter. She's not shivering so much.

VÁVROVÁ: No one has been at the mill?

ROZÁRA: No one.

VÁVROVÁ: Then you can go and close everything behind you.

**ROZÁRA: (Goes into the kitchen and changes her clothes.)**

VÁVROVÁ: *(Alone; she takes a few steps to the open window and listens to the music.)*  
*(Through the window the melody of a waltz and shrieking from the inn can be heard.)*

### Scene 8

*(Vávrová, Rozára enters dressed for the dance.)*

VÁVROVÁ: You're off? *(Nods her head.)* Don't stay there long.

ROZÁRA: Of course. *(She leaves.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Follows her to close the door and returns. She goes to make sure that everywhere is closed.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Alone.)* I'm glad to be on my own again. *(Goes to the chest, opens it and searches in it.)*

*(A long pause. Outside footsteps and talking can be heard.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Starts in fright, and jumps away from the chest in such a way that the lid slams shut with a bang.)*

*(Pounding on the door.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Across to the hall.)* Who's there?

VÁVRA: *(Behind the door.)* Me.

VÁVROVÁ: *(Goes to open it.)*

### Scene 9

*(Vávra, Rozára, Vávrová. The music in the distance fails silent.)*

VÁVRA: *(Enters noisily.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Sits to her sewing.)*

VÁVRA: *(Looks around the room and boastfully pushes his cap to the back of his head; he looks around again and fixes a long stare on his wife.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(To Rozára.)* Why don't you go to the dance?

VÁVRA: She stays at home. The young man gone, Josef gone, the cow sick, and the servants all in the inn? *(To his wife.)* Why aren't you in bed? *(Comes close up to her and gazes questioningly into her face.)*

ROZÁRA: *(Goes into the closet.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Moves aside with loathing of him.)*

VÁVRA: Why aren't you in bed, I'm asking you!

VÁVROVÁ: You can see for yourself, I'm sewing.

VÁVRA: Sewing, sewing! *(He bursts into coarse laughter.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Glances at him and goes back to her sewing.)*

VÁVRA: So you're sewing?! All right, sew, then. *(Puts one foot on the corner of the table. With frosty, ominous calm.)* And who've you had here, aren't you going to tell me?

VÁVROVÁ: *(Breaks the thread and is silent.)*

VÁVRA: Come on, tell us, who've you had here. Who's been on a visit?

VÁVROVÁ: Get to bed yourself, you'd do better.

VÁVRA: I'm asking you, who've you had here?

VÁVROVÁ: Who've I had here?! No one!

VÁVRA: So it's no one you've had here? And who was that lad - who just came out of here? I could see him from the roadside cross. Who was it?

VÁVROVÁ: *(Stands up resolutely and throws her sewing aside.)* If you saw him, why didn't you ask him.

VÁVRA: *(Takes his foot of the table.)* What have we here! That's how she answers? That's how she speaks to her husband? Very well. *(Goes to the closet door; opens it a little and calls.)* Rozára! *(Returns to his wife.)* He may be as careful as a polecat, as clever

as a tomcat, but he's not in this trap for the last time! - Once I catch him I'll shoot him like a dog, and you, you whore, I'll thrash you - I'll thrash you till I scourge the sin out of your soul!

VÁVROVÁ: Eh, the more the better!

VÁVRA: Rozára, do you hear me?!

### Scene 10

*(The preceding, Rozára enters, still tying the strings of her apron around her waist.)*

ROZÁRA: *(Remains timidly standing in the doorway.)* What do you want, master?

VÁVRA: *(At the back of the stage.)* Come here!

ROZÁRA: *(Moves a little towards him.)*

VÁVRA: *(In measured tones.)* Rozára, tell the truth. Who was here?

ROZÁRA: *(Glances at Vávrová and is silent.)*

VÁVRA: Don't look away, and tell me, who was here?

ROZÁRA: Master - *(The rest of her speech is unintelligible.)*

VÁVRA: Speak up - I can't understand you. *(Leaning towards her.)* Where were you?

ROZÁRA: *(Trembling all over.)* I was in the yard.

VÁVRA: In the yard. And who was here?

ROZÁRA: I don't know -

VÁVRA: *(in a threatening voice.)* Tell the truth!

ROZÁRA: *(Falls silent and looks towards Maryša apprehensively.)*

VÁVRA: Then we'll have to ask in a different way. *(Reaches behind the door for the whip hanging on a nail.)*

ROZÁRA: *(Frightened, wanting to return to the closet.)* Master! -

VÁVRA: *(Stands in her way.)* Tell the truth! *(Cracks the whip to one side, but without hitting her.)* Was somebody here or not? *(Stamps.)*

ROZÁRA: *(At the same moment in fright.)* There was.

VÁVRA: *(Leans towards her.)* Who? *(Raises the whip.)*

VÁVROVÁ: Leave her alone. She is not guilty. Francek was here.

VÁVRA: Ah-ha, little lizard! *(Lashes the whip to one side. To Rozára.)* And what did they talk about? Tell me!

ROZÁRA: *(Her teeth chattering.)* As God above me - master - I didn't listen, I don't know anything.

VÁVRA: *(Cracks the whip.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Strictly.)* I'll tell you, don't frighten her!

VÁVRA: Then you speak. They say he threatened me in the inn, that he was taking you with him to Brno today. *(To Rozára.)* Is that true?

ROZÁRA: He wanted her to go with him. -

VÁVRA: Where did he want her to go? *(Leans close to Rozára listening to her stammering out loud.)* To the floodgate? - and when? What time, didn't he say?

ROZÁRA: No - o... he didn't say anything.

VÁVRA: *(Angrily.)* Don't lie to me! If you know this, you must know the rest as well. *(Raises the whip.)*

ROZÁRA: I don't know, master, I didn't hear any more.

VÁVRA: *(Stands for a moment in thought, then points Rozára to the closet.)* To bed! *(Throws the whip at Maryša. Goes into the neighbouring room.)* I'll find out! - *(Returns with a shotgun.)*

VÁVROVA: *(Looks after Vávra, and when she sees him with the gun, jumps up in desperation, crying out.)* In Christ's name - Vávra! -

VÁVRA: *(With wild happiness.)* Now you know -

VÁVROVÁ: *(At the same time wrings her hands.)* What are you thinking of? -Where are you going?!

VÁVRA: *(Examines the lock of the gun.)* To shoot a dog. -

VÁVROVÁ: *(Jumps in front of him and tries to pull the gun from his hands. A struggle over the gun, she lets out a wild screech when Vávra throws her off.)* Rozára -here, quickly - Rozára -

ROZÁRA: *(Runs in from the closet and across the room, both of them attack Vávra.)*

VÁVRA: *(To Rozára.)* Rozára! Not another step! *(Repulses Rozára.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Escapes to the door.)*

VÁVRA: *(Gets in her way.)*

*(On the threshold and in the hall a new struggle over the gun.)*

VÁVRA: *(In the hail.)* Are you going to resist me? *(He tries to slam the door in her face.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(In the hall at the back of the stage falls on her knees and beseeches with clasped hands.)* Vávra! My dearest Vávra! *(Winds her arms around his legs.)* Come to your senses! You have children - a family. - Listen! I'll forgive you everything, I'll do everything for you, I'll forget everything.

VÁVRA: *(Meanwhile disengages his legs from her embrace, thrusts his wife into the hall and quickly and noisily closes the door turning the large key in the old, creaking lock.)*

*(Rattling of the door. In the distant the subdued music of a merry rhythm: the Gallop. Shrieking.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Rattling the door.)* Filip! Filip! - Have some sense! Don't bring disaster on the whole house! *(Tries in vain in the hall to open the locked door.)* The bully, the brute, the wretch - *(Returns to the room.)*

ROZÁRA: *(Cowering in fear in a corner of the living room on the same side from which Maryša comes.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Returning, on the threshold and intermittently in a faltering voice, drained of strength, even rasping, as though forced out of her.)* Beast!... Beast!... *(Hands clenched in a fist held in front of her; completely shaking with revulsion.)* Beast... *(For a moment she stiffens, but then she suddenly grasps her head, bends to the ground and presses her temples, in the same voice.)* Jesus Christ - Jesus Christ - he'll kill him - he'll kill him -

*(A shot backstage, followed immediately by another. At the same time: Rozára cowering in the corner with hands clasped to one side of her face, and Maryša, still more convulsively pressing her temples, both let out a despairing scream almost simultaneously. A short and terrible silence. Maryša stands up and rushes to the window seizing it on both sides as though she wanted to jump out. At that moment is heard.)*

FRANCEK: *(With a loud laugh.)* You missed, Vávra, you missed! Try again! *(Laughs again.)* *(Maryša gives a short cry of joy and jumps away from the window just at the moment when Vávra is seen from the window returning from the floodgate with raised shotgun talking loudly to himself.)*

VÁVROVÁ and ROZÁRA: *(With tension listen to the scraping of the key in the lock. Both of them look at the door in growing excitement.)*

VÁVRA: *(His whole body trembling, breathing heavily, bursts into the room. Without looking at anyone he throws the shotgun on the table and with exasperated hands digs around in the table drawer. When he doesn't find what he is looking for he rushes into the next room. Scarcely has he gone than Maryša, craftily following his every move, quickly jumps to Rozára's side and grasps her hand.)*

VÁVROVÁ: Rozára - run and tell Francek that - tomorrow I will go with him. - Do you hear - tomorrow - not today - *(Rozára disappears, in the hall Maryša noisily turns the key in the lock. Just as she crosses the threshold, hiding the key in her bosom, Vávra*

*enters from the next room.)*

VÁVRA: *(To her in the door.)* I'll shoot you, as God Almighty is above me, I'll shoot you!

VÁVROVÁ: *(With icy calm, standing on the threshold.)* No - you won't shoot, Vávra! *(Vávra flinches, reaching for his gun. - With emphasis, self-confidently. She speaks slowly, separating her words.)* You won't shoot, I'm telling you. As God Almighty is again above me, Vávra. *(Proudly, placing her hand on her breast.)* - I am still to be counted with - !

VÁVRA: *(Slowly holds onto back of the chair, looks at Maryša.)*

*(Both for a while look each other in the eyes. The curtain falls.)*

## ACT FIVE

*(The spacious kitchen in Vávra's mill, with a large but simple cooking range and a white oven upstage left. Upstage right are shelves with kitchen implements and a mortar. Stage left, a simple bed covered with a board; by the bed an easy chair. Downstage right a long table, plain, with cross legs. Down the long sides of the table are benches, as long as the table. Between the table and the shelves stage right a plain cupboard. A small bench by the door. The table is laid with mugs. Alongside the bed an old painted chest. On the wall by the cooking range hang a spoon holder; a wooden salt container and pots, wooden spoons are stuck into it. Wood is piled on the floor by the stove. By the table, an old-fashioned chair with a backrest. On the wall upstage an old grimy clock and a large black crucifix.)*

### Scene 1

*(Rozára, Vávrová, Vávra.*

*The day labourers, Vojtěna and Rozsívka are sitting on a bench and eating their breakfast at the table.)*

VÁVRA: *(His cap on his head, in his everyday clothes, his clothes powdered with flour, sits at the table and gloomily observes his wife's behaviour.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Looks into the oven and adds wood. She behaves coldly, silently, and, in front of the day labourers, as though nothing had happened. She goes again to the range, lifts the lid of some pans, looks into them, reaches into the salt container and adds salt; she remains at the range with arms folded.)*

### Scene 2

*(The preceding. The threshers Kristofl and Hrdličková enter.)*

KRIŠTOFL: Good day to you.

VÁVROVÁ: *(Scarcely noticing them.)* Welcome. Sit down and get warm.

KRIŠTOFL: *(Sits on the bench by the door, pulls out a pouch of tobacco and begins to fill his pipe.)* It's bitter cold out there. - And it wasn't before! - It only froze toward morning.

VÁVROVÁ: Wherever have you been, Hrdličková? I saw you a while ago in the yard.

HRDLIČKOVÁ: But - I was in the mill. I was watching Václav, the miller's assistant, how he was whimpering. Didn't I just laugh! - He overdid it yesterday and today even his shoes are hurting. - He swears he'll never drink so much again. *(Laughs.)*

KRIŠTOFL: *(Strikes a match on his thigh.)* Well, to drink a quart of plum brandy all at once - I think it would knock even a horse out.

VÁVRA: *(Looking round.)* Are you all here?

HRDLIČKOVÁ: Zofka's still to come.

VÁVRA: Where's Rozára?

VÁVROVÁ: She went to get water. She'll be here in a minute.

VÁVRA: Rozsívka and Vojtěna, you go and clean up the threshing floor. Kristofl will help you.

KRIŠTOFL: *(Knocks out his pipe.)* Come on then, time to start.

VÁVRA: And don't mess up my straw too much.

*(The threshers leave.)*

### Scene 3

*(The window of the kitchen looks onto the paving where a female worker cuts brushwood, sweeps up and sings: "Oh Christmas, long nights".)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Kneels down by the oven and pretends she is mending the fire.)*

VÁVRA: *(Throws his cap on the bench and turning his back on his wife, asks her harshly.)*  
Was the beet you brought from the first pile - or the one round the corner?



VÁVROVÁ: *(Does not answer, but then suddenly wakes from an apathetic paralysis.)* From the first pile.

VÁVRA: And you've fed the stalks to the cattle?

VÁVROVÁ: *(Pulls herself out of it.)* Stop fretting. We know what we have to do. *(Hastily straightens the pans on the stove.)*

VÁVRA: *(Roughly.)* I can ask, can't I?

VÁVROVÁ: *(With a laugh.)* Yes, you can ask... what do I care.

VÁVRA: What do you care. What do you care about anything. You're capable of things even the worst woman in the world who gets deported wouldn't do.

VÁVROVÁ: They didn't deport me yet!

VÁVRA: You're not far from it.

VÁVROVÁ: *(Laughs scornfully and mechanically adjusts the shawl around her head.)* I'm not, you're right.

VÁVRA: *(Looks around him and is silent.)* You'll see, you'll suffer for that František of yours! *(Reaches for his cap and orders her.)* Get my breakfast! I have to go for wood.

VÁVROVÁ: *(Stands as before in front of the range looking at one spot the whole time. As Vávra is leaving, she watches him for a long time.)*

VÁVRA: *(Leaves.)*

*(Vávrová alone.)*

VÁVROVÁ: Go, you ugly devil. You'll get something you've never swallowed in your life before. *(Goes hastily into the next room, where backstage we hear the same banging of the lid as in Act Four. She returns, gets the mortar from the shelf, throws the contents of a paper bag into it, and quickly pounds the arsenic.)* I'll put an end to you like a sewer rat and then you can roar and threaten as much as you like - *(She finishes the pounding. With even greater haste she pours the coffee and pours the poison from the mortar into the mug of coffee.)*

#### Scene 4

*(Vávrova, Vávra.)*

VÁVRA: *(Enters and hangs his saw on a nail.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Noisily goes through the spoon holder and then brings Vávra the mug with a spoon.)* Do you want white or black? This is black. -

VÁVRA: Give me black.

VÁVROVÁ: *(Stands the mug on the table in front of him.)*

VÁVRA: *(Sits in silence and puts his cap on the table; in a friendly way.)* Did you sweeten it?

VÁVROVÁ: *(Takes the sugar from the shelf, brings it to the table and in silence adds some to the coffee.)* I forgot. *(Goes back to the range and follows from one side his every move.)*

VÁVRA: *(Stirs the coffee with the spoon and sips it.)* Where did you get the coffee?

VÁVROVÁ: From the Jew.

VÁVRA: Why not from the co-operative?

VÁVROVÁ: They were closed.

VÁVRA: It tastes musty, or something. *(Drinks it quickly.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Shows agitation and does not know how or where she should stand. Watches Vávra the whole time. With ostentatious interest.)* Are you going to the manor woods?

VÁVRA: To the manor woods. - Why do you ask?

VÁVROVÁ: Why not; for the wood to be dry. Yesterday we couldn't even heat with it. *(They are both silent.)*

VÁVRA: *(Stands and approaches his wife with an indecisive step; looks at her, but sees her*

*to be unwelcoming, returns and drinks. Again approaches her. In a friendly way.) My little Maryša!*

VÁVROVÁ: What do you want?

VÁVRA: Why are you so unkind to me? Couldn't we be different together? Would it do you any harm, to look at me nicely? Listen! Maryša! - I'd forget everything, I'd never reproach you, I wouldn't threaten anyone, if only you were to show a little more good will on your side. -You've no idea, how much it hurts -

VÁVROVÁ: *(Covers her eyes and face with her hands and apron.)*

*(The noise of flails rings from the yard.)*

VÁVRA: I promised myself, once you became my wife I would do everything for you, anything you wanted - so you would be contented and happy with me. And now - look at me - look at yourself. We lie down in anger, we get up in anger. Does it need to be like that? Does it have to be? *(Clasps her lustfully to himself and tries to kiss her.)* Whatever your heart desires, I would deny you nothing. I would do everything for you. *(Kisses her.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Half voluntarily, half from necessity bends under his hand and lets herself be kissed on the face. Suddenly she shudders through her whole body, thrusts away his hand and avoids him in disgust.)*

VÁVRA: *(Controls his anger and touches her shoulder, beseeching her.)* When I ask you so nicely. And I have children; what will become of them, when they see what kind of life we lead?

VÁVROVÁ: *(Throws out her hands and pushes him away from her.) Sit down and drink! (Goes for the mug.) Why haven't you drunk it all? (Puts the mug back.)*

VÁVRA: *(Takes the mug and drains it to the last drop.)*

*(A moment's silence.)*

VÁVROVÁ: Which coat are you wearing?

VÁVRA: Bring me the long one.

VÁVROVÁ: *(Goes into the next room and immediately returns with the sheepskin coat.)*

VÁVRA: *(Puts the coat on - it is long and yellow.)* Watch over the threshers, and tell Rozára to put down new litter down for the cow. *(He leaves.)*

*(The flails beat offstage.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Overcome by agitation, she staggers - wraps her arms around her head and turns slightly towards the crucifix on the wall. Stands silently leaning on the wail and with head upright lies motionless against the wall.)* It's what he wanted himself.

*(The flails suddenly stop beating and from the yard the noise and grumbling of some men's and women's voices ring out. - The noise grows and comes nearer. A longer time has to pass before the flails stop beating, so that Vávrová has time to act out all the feelings passing through her at that point. From time to time she looks at the cross. When the flails stop beating, fear passes through her. A terrible silence. It is not until she has acted out this last fear, which convulses her violently, that Rozára runs in.)*

## Scene 5

*(Vávrová, Rozára.)*

ROZÁRA: *(Running straight for the water.)* For God's sake, mistress - what's wrong - the master's beside himself.

VÁVROVÁ: *(Doesn't move.)*

ROZÁRA: *(Gives her a surprised look and runs out again.)*

## Scene 6

*(Vávrová, the threshers.)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(Alone, still in the same place. The noise comes into the enclosure.)*  
*(A longer time passes. Maryša acts with her eyes. From the window can be seen the threshers, partly leading, partly carrying Vávra - half-dead. Screams.)*

VOICES: What's happened to him? What's happened? Just like that?!

VÁVROVÁ: *(Just as they are about to bring Vávra through the door upstage, throws her eyes to heaven.)*

WOMAN: *(Overtakes the threshers, looks at Vávrová closely, grasps her hand, pulls her centre stage and gazes into her averted face.)* Unhappy girl - you poisoned him!?  
*(The men carrying Vávra appear through the door upstage. Just the boots of Vávra's corpse appear in the doorway)*

VÁVROVÁ: *(In a hollow voice.)* I poisoned him.  
*(The curtain falls.)*

**The End**

## Jan Grossman Interpreting Maryša

The theatre director's attitude towards the text - at the moment he launches into it - can be described as an attitude towards material that has to be interpreted. The selection of tools and processes used to change the literary work into an audio-visual staging emerges from this interpretation. The path from the written drama to the transposed performance does not proceed as a "projection" from one field to another. In a strict theoretical sense such a "pure" or "objective" projection is not possible - not even in a staging that tries as far as possible to remain "faithful" to the author's "model". The smallest elements - the rhythm and intonation of the speech, the composition of the dialogue in space and time - are already in their shaping conditioned by the interpretation; they cannot be completely "contained" in the text, however full it is of detailed notes prescribing the tone, strength and emotional colour.

The idea behind the interpretation as the deciding moment in the genesis of the director's concept is obviously broad and more or less conscious; the interpretation is already a personally-felt concept of the specific, in the same way as the intentional and systematic assessment of the meanings - or meaningful accents - is in the overall construction of the drama, through which we enter the field where we talk about actualisation or adaptation. Simultaneously, we enter the dramaturgical field, whose primary act - the choice of the play - is, as a rule, similarly conditioned by the interpretation. (Why are we putting on this play, what do we want to "say" by it, and so on.)

The director's interpretation is most visible in plays that take place in a world distant from ours; in a world where we do not completely understand the organisation and hierarchy of values, the meaning of its cults, conventions and other specific aspects; or we understand them in a way different from that in which they were intended by the author and accepted by the audience of that time.

Even in cases where we want to stage a play which is historical (= distant from us) in an integrated or "faithful" way (or particularly in those cases), the necessity and need for interpretation comes to the fore, an interpretation which has to be very active and free. Only this can guide us from "words" to "meanings" and create a bridge between the historical experience of life and our own experience - a condition of every theatrical work, since it is inevitably realised in the "here and now".

In this dialectic between "faithful" and "free" (but in this respect only) the issue of the director's interpretation resembles the issue of literary translation from one language to another.

The literal - slavish - translation stays faithful to the letter of the text rather than to its meaning and can even cloud or damage it, for the meaning of a text is given only in its relation to and position in the structure of surrounding contexts, even ex-literary. Modern theory, therefore, proceeds from the basis that a truly integrated translation is one that has the same effect on today's reader as the original had on its readers in its own time and society. To preserve this "fidelity" - if we want to play a little with this word - the translator needs freedom and opportunity and (above all) ability to change or make substitutions.

(I am obviously speaking here in a generally theoretical way about a tendency that has been employed mainly in the field of poetry, where an effort to reach a congeniality of spirit between the translation and the original by a method of maximum freedom culminated in cases of texts written in an artificial and intricately layered language. The ideal - i. e., for the reader to understand the translation of a "distant" work without any explanatory apparatus and notes of the "untranslatable word play" type - remains in essence an ideal to which we can only more or less approximate.)

This need or necessity to convert in a translation appears as much in the sphere of "forms" as in the sphere of "contents".

For example, in Czech it is possible to copy, to "trace over" - as far as dimensions and appearances are concerned - the French Alexandrine. However, imitation cannot guarantee that this faithful Czech Alexandrine will fulfil the same function in the drama as its model; the original is differently and more deeply anchored in the literary and rhetorical consciousness of French culture, and is above all created by a language which in general has a faster tempo than Czech and gives rhythm to its verse in a different way.

We can reasonably suppose that the function of the Alexandrine - its ramified eloquence and at the same time its dynamics - can better be expressed in Czech by a free and freely phrased and rhythmic verse.

In a specific situation, the director's idea may - with plays which are more or less a permanent part of the classical, largely domestic repertoire and live in the theatrical consciousness - find itself in a situation where the text has acquired a fixed and concrete stage interpretation. The stronger this interpretation and the more we have it "in our blood", the more insistently it forces us towards a ready-made exposition that prevents an impartial approach and new exposition.

Thanks to this powerfully traditional interpretation, the play becomes so run-of-the-mill and self-evident that in reality we no longer know it.

Psychology knows this paradoxical phenomenon as saturation. It can be ascertained by simple tests: for example, a professor asks his or her students to draw or describe a piece of architecture they have all passed every day for years. Few of them can do it; a person thinks that he or she knows the particulars, but cannot produce them on request.

"Visual saturation is a problem in art schools where students have to be taught things they usually ignore. For this reason first-year students are sometimes for example instructed to bend over regularly and look at the world the other way up, head down. This reversed orientation enables them to observe details which usually go unnoticed." (J. L. Adams).

The director can, in relation to a text that is overgrown by fixed productions, analogously preserve his work in the early phases by changing the angle of his viewpoint.

In this case, not only the analysis of the text is important to the interpretation, but also - possibly as an aid - reviews of the traditional "presentation". We will demonstrate this approach as we analyse *Maryša* by the Mrštík brothers.

When *Maryša* was first written, the National Theatre in Prague did not grasp its importance; the play was included in its schedules, but on the fringe of the repertoire, in a cycle of folk productions - which at that time was the hallmark of substandard (or at least so far unverified) goods.

Nevertheless, the wisest critics (F. X. Šalda) immediately recognized *Maryša* as a revolutionary act in Czech dramaturgy, and it was soon adopted by an ever-growing community of audiences and theatres, including amateur theatres.

However, as what became one of the most frequently performed of Czech plays grew and prospered, a scenic "tradition" of *Maryša* as a set of prefabricated solutions emerged and established itself, a tradition of ready-made approaches and time-honoured intonation patterns - which was, with modifications, passed on from one generation to another.

*Maryša*, this vital work, soon became "classicised", became academically rigid. It was available for use as a reproduction of a fixed model rather than for new readings and new interpretations.

If, however, we want to stage *Maryša* "here and now", we have first to reconstruct the essence of the revolution caused by the harsh realism of the Mrštíks in its time. We have to revive and relive what, in the course of years, we have come to know by heart, something which has become habitual and derivative, even safe, but conventionalised; we have to renew

our feeling for the vigour of the original, for the meaning, dulled by sampling so many copies.

Šalda struck concisely and cogently to the heart of the Mrštík brothers' new drama; in contrast with Tyl's allegorical quality, following Stroupežnický's drawing in miniature, embroidered in the web of a naive intrigue (even in comparison with the descriptiveness of Jirásek), *Maryša* excels by virtue of one basic feature; its great strength lies in its richly imagined characters, who act as a function of the organism, and therefore of the supra-personal social structure; they create this structure and are created by it.

This social ground plan of the play is at first sight obvious, as the social root of the conflict. It is so innate to the play that it does not seem important to emphasise it. Everything is clearly delineated: on the one hand the wealthy farmer, on the other the poor crofter - the poles are thus so clear and antithetical that the charge between them can only be direct, and must subdue the motif of love with the same directness.

But the socially critical concept of the ground plan of the drama is no more than a ground plan. From this a very stratified construct develops, a construct decidedly not - as Šalda underlined - black and white. What does the uniqueness of this construct consist of?

What hits us so much between the eyes in the "classicising" tradition of *Maryša* is its folkloric nature: this is what determines the whole and its details. It begins with the use of an extensive and detailed apparatus of the stage directions, in which the authors describe the outward features of the characters, their clothing, the furnishing of the interiors and the uniqueness of the whole environment, and culminates with an emphasis laid on a precisely and sensitively noted dialect and its verbal exposition. It was the first time this was so strongly manifested in Czech drama: it has never aged, and scarcely been surpassed.

This linguistic perfection of the text has its dangers; it imposes and enforces the intonation of the speeches, the way they are structured, their rhythm and melody. Famous passages or excerpts from *Maryša* are fixed in the memory not only of actors but also of the audience and appear as both serious and humorous quotations in the field of extra-literary discourse.

This is another way in which the "classicising" tradition of producing *Maryša* originates. The established image of *Maryša*, of *Maryša* as concept and meaning, triumphs over *Maryša* as an authentically experienced work.

To some extent, the Mrštík brothers' drama shares the fate of famous operas, which we know as sets or anthologies of arias, duets and overtures rather than as musical dramas. The splendour of selected parts of the opera means that the opera as a whole is not really needed. And what is more, even this whole is unintentionally made light of (reduced to the "content" of the libretto) or partially concealed.

The same thing happens in *Maryša*; the fame of splendidly written monologues, aphoristic moments in the dialogue and brief phrases establish the play in our subconscious as a series of "numbers" and "turns" which only vaguely relate to the specific movement of the drama, its action and the solving of situations - i. e., to the drama as a whole.

Naturally, *Maryša* is and always will be a folklore play; but only when we understand folklore not as a doctrine of folk poetry, costume and customs, but - in the complete and original meaning of that word - folklore as a complex of folk wisdom, folk philosophical creativity if you wish, layered both horizontally and vertically through the movement of time and the shifting of social history.

Folklore thus conceived is an expression of Šalda's organism; it is the variously manifested and expressed sum of religious and moral basics; the aggregate of codified pieces of information, taboos and commands - the principles even of small marginalia - and of obligatory customs; a firm hierarchy of family and marital relationships, of relationships in the community, ethics and poetics; it expresses itself in a variety of forms, verbal and non-verbal, in poetry as in ritual, in the way that the conservative and inflexible structure of the

village at that time petrified everything into a rigid form.

In the drama by the brothers Mrštík, this folklore is introduced as a dynamic and brutal order that is not subordinate to mankind but has priority over it; it is the ruler of man, or at least determines his fate. It is a concrete but invisible fate or deity, deriving from this the sense of classical inexorability often forced on one during a reading of this play.

It was this concept above all that came up against the resistance of the conservative consumer of the time, able to accept folklore only as idyllically romantic or romanticising ethnography. And it is in this concept that the gesture of the drama, both creative and destructive, lies.

Šalda correctly notes that the strength of the drama is not in its story; this story or similar had already been used countless times. This means that the crucial load-bearing theme of *Maryša* is not going to be the struggle of inexperienced, pure love against a competent "professional" force, and against the law of property, which does not tolerate the conjunction of rich and poor. Nothing in this play is set out in black-and-white.

The main theme is the inexorable march of an order which is not fatal, but which deforms a person into becoming not only a victim but also an agent in the deformation of others, into becoming the upholder of that order. The order consolidates itself not by its victory over the victim but through the victim. The hangman does not turn the condemned man into a corpse, but into another hangman. And the living organism, incapable of defending itself against the infection by not accepting or rejecting it, must swallow it as a foreign body, assimilate it, absorb it, and go on living with it and through it. A person fights with pettiness for so long that he himself becomes petty; and he can suppress cruelty only by cruel means - which then cease to be the means and become the aim.

On this eternal roundabout the burden of deformed relationships can be eased or shifted, but cannot be discarded or disposed of. It is not that in *Maryša* there is a chivalrous struggle of "unspoiled" love against a "spoilt" world. Nothing, we are constantly reminded, is as black-and-white as that; the struggle is more like a confused war in which extremely varied and antithetical powers, deformed relationships, principles and prejudices are involved.

For Francek's love itself - the classic heldentenor of the play (or so it seems) - grows and increases only by prohibition and by being suppressed and demoralised; that may be the real reason it exists at all. We may well observe how modestly and feebly the amorous motif makes itself heard in the play. The erotic theme in Francek only develops and intensifies when it is deprived of its rights and dispossessed; thus the motivation of Francek's love is not to love but primarily to own. Ruined by property, he does not even have the revolutionary desire to destroy such "property"; he wants, in spite of everything, symbolically to become himself an owner. (To connect Francek's anarchist gesture - his departure to Brno - to an early solidarity with the beginnings of the workers' movement is a later construct; the motif is neither justified nor developed in the play. It is clearly not about where he is going, but what he is leaving; he is tearing himself away from the feudal torpor of the village).

Only if we read the play without preconceptions (without the habit of "classicising" it) does the tragic quality of the title character strike us with its full force: *Maryša* is a mere instrument for achieving the aim not only of her parents but also of her lover; in the first case she is being used so that property can be joined and become prosperous; in the case of Francek she becomes the basis of a new property ownership and the cure for a (justifiably) over-charged inferiority complex. (But both cases - this is not contradictory, but the dialectical stratification of the play - are to do with attitudes which are in their way positive: the parents "sensibly" value a secure life for their daughter above an impetuous and dangerous enthusiasm; Francek "morally" supports *Maryša*'s defiance against submission in the most vulnerable sphere of human life).

Nevertheless, Francek's love for *Maryša* becomes more and more of a means rather than

an aim; the demonstrative farewell before his departure for military service is definitely part of a regular ritual. But in his defiance there is already a source of different behaviour. It is plainly about, not loving and winning Maryša, but showing "publicly" and "in front of everyone" his predominance and will and power to manipulate without regard to anything and anyone. The fateful visit to Vávra's mill is not a lovers' tryst, with the intention of planning liberation and flight. It is a series of spectacular acts and scenes, the vociferous trumpeting of the victorious male, through which Francek himself does not only deny the aim of the meeting, but in a real sense shuts the door on it.

And what of Maryša in this final phase? Morality, which forced her into marriage with Vávra and thus brought her down, has in the course of the years been absorbed by her and immunised her. But it is only as a result of the actions in the third and fourth acts that she is forced to confirm this morality in herself and in the face of the world, and to intensify it even more, in a strength that is not only defensive but also aggressive.

And what are these actions? They are Lízal's and Francek's efforts to lift from her - for whatever reasons of their own - the heavy fetters, to snatch her out of the grasp of morality.

Maryša cannot return; she cannot, because she does not want to, and she does not want to, because she cannot. She has become that power which previously destroyed her: a new Lízalka. And with savage self-destructive irony she destroys others with her; she does not destroy them in revenge, but by the proclamation and realisation of that morality which was forced on her and which has become her truth, albeit painful to herself - "I am unhappy, but I will not be bad."

The only truly intimate scene between Francek and Maryša (in Act 4) is everything possible except a love scene in the usual sense. Not one word of tenderness or uniting feelings is heard, only the turmoil of a warlike campaign, a contest about superiority, about who is the owner of truth and ethics - or rather, the solution to be implemented. And this struggle (it is obvious) does not take place only between the two characters, but within their very selves, in a hopeless encounter with the deformations of the "organism".

Such is the essence of the folklore of Maryša; its poetry in the most ordinary sense of the word grows from this. Poetry that, in the breadth of the new spectrum, is the most powerful expression of folklore. It is a harsh poetry, raw and vital. And a very antithetical poetry.

In the Mrštík brothers' drama, the poetry of amorous longing or yearning is heard only very modestly. But the detailed theme of Strouhalka can be heard to the full: folk wisdom of corrupted compromise, the philosophy of mediocrity, which kills everything young and lively, surrounding it with an aureole of mature experience. And Granny's poetry? That too is poetry - but we may well read it in the only monologue through which Granny intervenes in the critical moments of the abandoned girl; it is the sclerotic philosophy of a senile defeatism, of demoralised values, anaesthetising, becoming indifferent. What other answer can Maryša make than: "Granny" (in dismay) "what are you saying?"

This situation reminds us very much of the dismay of Juliet in love, when her nurse - somebody closer to her than her own mother - responds to her suffering with advice which is the equivalent of treachery.

The poetry of Maryša is thus barely tender and not loving in the least; it is full of dark vortexes, torture and self-torture. And violence - not only violence, but the stimulation and enticement of violence as it permeates the characters of, in particular, Vávra, Maryša and Francek.

The universal "classicising" reading of Maryša encourages us to see it in black-and-white by overlooking or undervaluing the details of the play.

The Mrštík brothers accentuate even external details (the stage directions) in their attempt to capture the precise concrete details of a Moravian village. However, in the text



itself they work with details which are above all dramatically functional; the details refer beyond and above themselves, they are indications and guidelines to viewing the character - its relationships, its behaviour and its motivation for behaviour - from a new angle.

Let us take a few examples. Nowhere in the text of *Maryša* can direct, complete and unambiguous "information" about the nature of the family and marital life of the *Lízals* be found. We glimpse only details; here and there a few words slip out, delivered in a maudlin alcoholic flood when *Lízal* proclaims *Maryša's* misfortune to be solely the doing of his wife; he sees himself almost as a fellow-victim. But in the preceding act we know already that this is barely half-true. *Lízal* was always troubled by doubts about the appropriateness of the planned wedding, but not even the desperate prayer of his despondent daughter shakes his decision once made; *Lízal* even soothes her with hypocritical cowardice, as though it were only the catechism she was frightened of, even though "she knew it all in school". He is more easily convinced by *Lízalka*; in fact, his evasion is begging so to be convinced.

This does not however mean that the relationship between the married couple is governed by understanding; it is merely the necessary political agreement of two enemies. We read it well in the only dialogue between the *Lízals*, oozing frosty contempt, hatred, the apparent calm of a fastidiously maintained armistice - as though every sentence rent with enormous effort the normal state of silence reigning between them.

*Lízal* naturally plays the role of the farm manager when he leads the negotiations with *Vávra*; and he leads them confidently, with an aggressive sarcasm, knowing how to relish his trumps, how to get enjoyment "out of the game". But already here, at the very beginning of the play, minute cracks are shown to be opening in the picture of a prospering family. There is the brief appearance, again as an unobtrusive detail, of the figure of the excommunicated son *Josef*. *Vávra* uncovers this crack, and returns to it - the detail clearly has the power of argument. "Last time, who knows how it was. *Josef* at least..." But *Lízal* does not allow him to finish the sentence; he admits no argument and categorically slams the door shut on him.

*Josef* is a scoundrel. We don't talk about *Josef*. Nobody ever finds out anything about *Josef*. But it is through this masterly concealment - this detail - this scarcely indicated mystery - that the dark shadow of the family skeleton falls on *Lízal*: a shadow which never dissolves.

During the bargaining with *Vávra*, *Lízal's* relationship to his daughter is defined primarily as a relationship towards an exchange commodity. This would not have been a deviation from recognized norms in the village of that time. A wedding was the confirmation of new ownership, not of feelings of affection; nevertheless, the absence of affection in *Lízal* is pointedly underlined by this sharp detail. The dialogue begins with *Lízal's* thoughtful advice about how *Vávra's* sick foal should be treated. Then comes the long and difficult bargaining about *Maryša* - yet *Lízal* has not forgotten: "Don't forget about the foal. Bandage its leg." With this the scene ends.

The relationship to animals - especially to horses, as the motif is developed in Act Three - is heartfelt and convincing. "The best horses" are not simply a matter of pride and a representation of property, but a genuine love.

Suddenly, *Lízal* expresses feelings that in a negative way signal the absence of his feeling towards mankind. In the first version of *Maryša*, the *Mrštík's* wrote a scene where, in the dark and cold, *Vávra* waits for *Francek* by the floodgate with a loaded shotgun, and for the first time - alone - weighs up his life in an inner monologue. I can imagine how the authors might have written a different but analogous monologue for *Lízal*: a scene in which *Lízal*, abandoned and shut off from the world not only by his peasant's caution but also by his inner loneliness, would open his heart to his beloved horses in a warm stable.

It is not that all these details should be shown in the play, should be visibly and audibly present in its performance; they must be thought through. Their functional quality is not just in what they pronounce, but in what they keep silent or suppress; and it is above all in their

relationships. These details remain spaced out over the entire map of the play, like individual points waiting to be linked together in a possibly interrupted, but in fact continuous line, uncovering the layers of the characters and the wide branching of their movement towards dramatic events.

And so Lízal, for example, stops being a figure of a peasant sketched in one brushstroke who, possibly against his will, sells his daughter and later regrets it. Through the insight of details we acquire a deeper and wider analysis, offering a spectrum of means to the director and actor and to the intention of their staging. Lízal no longer stands so firmly astride his land; in his inner self he is more unstable than at first he seemed. This background allows one to imagine the backdrop to the Lízal's marriage, forcing the impression that it was closed in a similar way as that between Maryša and Vávra. This throws a clearer light on Lízalka too, and on her motivation for terrorising her daughter; the driving force in her case is not just a callous intransigence, but a true conviction, which grows out of the fact that she must herself have been broken in her youth.

The authors draw Vávra's character in even greater compositional detail. We penetrate the walls of Vávra's mill with difficulty, more through indications and information that contradicts itself. Vávra speaks of his own farm management only at the beginning; his detailed analysis of its decline and his reflections as to whether he wouldn't rather sell or rent it are, of course, tactical. They are there to show that it is not absolutely essential for him to find a housewife; if Lízal doesn't raise the dowry, Vávra will withdraw from negotiations and Lízal will lose an advantageous alliance.

But various bits of information circulate around this: apparently Vávra used to beat his late wife, and "the girls have all sorts of stories about him". Maryša knows that her friend Stáza had to run away from him. But Strouhalka knows another version: Stáza used to steal, and Vávra had to throw her out. Lízal recommends Vávra as a bridegroom since he neither drinks nor gambles. But Lízal flings his detailed knowledge of Vávra's difficult financial situation straight in his face. And his defence, that he spent everything on medical treatment for his sick wife does not stand up: "Everything's your wife's fault. Even the fact you've now four children instead of three." But immediately afterwards, Lízal tries to persuade Maryša: "What a farm, what a mill! Where's your good sense, my girl?"

We will never know for sure where the truth lies: in its inconsistency and impenetrability, the information shrouds Vávra's mill in mystery. It is, as it were, a "black mill", somewhat tantalisingly miraculous and unmapped. It is terrain from which the vacillating and split personality of Maryša's admirer and later husband derives, and in which he lives.

Even Vávra conducts the negotiations over Maryša in a tough and mercenary fashion - as we already said, this is how it was done. But in the course of haggling his words betray, almost unintentionally, a true liking for the girl and a male desire for her. And when the negotiations are confirmed, sudden doubt breaks through his self-confidence: "And what if Maryša won't..."

Even Lízal, as we know, is shaken by doubts about the Tightness of the marriage. Lízal however is quickly dissuaded, and lets himself be dissuaded. In Vávra's case, these doubts grow and increase and before the actual end, symbolised by the departure to catechism, they lead him to the edge of a decision to leave everything since it is "better to stay as I am".

Whereas the Lízals comfort their already degenerate feeling of guilt with empty phrases - "Every girl carries on like that before her wedding" - Vávra doesn't try to conceal anything from himself. And like Maryša, at the moment the last word is delivered, he sees the terrible picture of the future clearly and irrevocably: "It will be a life to make you want to drown yourself".

But Vávra can no longer stand down. And if he comforts himself with - "once you're

mine, you'll learn what obedience is" - it is not a victorious threat but a despairing resignation in the face of a way of life into which he has unintentionally manoeuvred himself.

Vávra's awareness of guilt has the great power and capacity of intellectual generalisation. It is a moral recognition of the impropriety of everything that is happening, a presentiment of the link with the wheel that turns and cannot be stopped. Vávra falls in a truly tragic way into the miasma of deformed relationships and - unlike Lízal - falls alive into it, "fully conscious".

And here too we can in the context, with all the details - which map and signal the backdrop and background - search for the inner polarisation and dimension of this character, rebelling most of all against any attempt at a linear, black-and-white "reading".

For the structure of the play as a whole, there is a connection between the meaning of several episodic characters and the meaning of the details. Rozára, for example, is far from being an auxiliary figure who only enables a shift in the action to take place in the fateful moments of Francek's visit to the mill.

If we again gather together all the contradictory and unclear "information" about Vávra's home and add to this other information (from the inn) and Maryša's silence, or at least her taciturnity, we are forced to ask the question: who is Rozára?

What is her position at the mill? Is she one of those girls who (they say?) were victims (?) of Vávra's sexual appetite? And what is her relationship to the new housewife? Why does she announce and organize Francek's visit?

We find no answer to these questions in the text; the authors have not given Rozára precise features. But nor does anything stop us from posing the questions and thus finding a wider character spectrum and a greater operational range for a concrete interpretation of the character.

This detail known as Rozára does not acquire a completely unambiguous shape, and perhaps cannot acquire one. However, it will be combined into the whole composition of details, and in its dimensions and by its point of view portrays the main theme of the drama: a picture of a world full of twists and turns, forcibly suppressed longings, silenced wrongs, smothered feelings, ancient guilts - a world of deformed products, in its convulsions producing further deformation.

As we said, it is possible to ease the burden of deformed relationships. But it is not possible to get rid of it; it is passed from one to another in the play.

Miroslav Bureš's "Opening of the Wells" (note: a cantata set to music by Bohuslav Martinů) ends with a line full of tenderness: "From hand to hand is passed the key. The key to home."

In their own way, the characters in Maryša pass on this key. But behind the doors of the home unlocked by this key burn the inextinguishable fires of hell.

The society in which Maryša originated has passed away, and with it the apparent steadfastness of its laws. But Maryša as a drama would have nothing to say to us if it were wholly and completely dependent on its story.

Like any great work of art, Maryša has the power of transcendence, the power of going beyond. It looks beyond its theme and story, above itself, to the formulation of the universal problems of mankind.

Perhaps the olden time of marriages of convenience for property and proprietary rights is gone. But not yet lost is our need again and again to rethink and reformulate the meaning of human existence. Mankind has constantly been forced to monitor its relationship towards its own brainchildren, towards organisms which may lose their function or even turn against mankind, making it uniform, reifying it, consuming it; organisms which cease to serve mankind, and begin to terrorise it.

Translated by Barbara Day

Jan Grossman (1925 -1993), one of the leading figures of Czech theatre towards the end of the past millennium, began his career as a critic who, under Communism, was hardly allowed to publish any work, and then only in specialist theatre journals. The reason is clear if we read this essay with the totalitarian context in mind, it was written in 1981 as a commentary to his landmark production of the play in Hradec Králové. It was this penetration to the underlying meaning that made his work as a theatre director so powerful.