The mother-in-law beckons him away from the child—the bride’s brother and I are the witnesses.

Grusha has bowed to the monk. They approach the bed: the mother-in-law lifts the mosquito-net: the monk begins babbling the marriage service in Latin. Meanwhile the mother-in-law beckons to Lavrenti to get rid of the child, but Lavrenti, fearing that the child will cry, draws its attention to the ceremony. Grusha glances once at the child, and Lavrenti makes the child wave to her.

The monk: Are you prepared to be a faithful, obedient and good wife to this man? And to cleave to him until death you do part?

Grusha looking at the child: Yes.

The monk to the dying man: And are you prepared to be a good and loving husband to your wife until death you do part?

As the dying man does not answer, the monk repeats the question, then looks round.

The mother-in-law: Of course he is! Didn’t you hear him say yes?

The monk: All right. We declare this marriage contracted.

Now what about Extreme Unction?

The mother-in-law: Nothing doing! The wedding was quite expensive enough. I must now take care of the mourners. To Lavrenti: Did we say 700?

Lavrenti: 600. He pays. Now I don’t want to sit and get acquainted with the guests. So farewell, Grusha. And if my widowed sister comes to visit me one day, she’ll get a ‘welcome’ from my wife. Or I’ll get disagreeable.

He leaves. The mourners glance after him without interest.

The monk: And may one ask whose this child is?

The mother-in-law: Is there a child? I don’t see any child. And you don’t see one either—understand? Or else I’ve seen all kinds of things happening behind the tavern! Come along now.

They move back to the room. After Grusha has put down the child and told it to be quiet, she is introduced to the neighbours.

This is my daughter-in-law. She arrived just in time to find dear Yussup still alive.
ONE OF THE WOMEN: He's been ill now a whole year, hasn't he? When my Vassili was called up he was there to say goodbye.

ANOTHER WOMAN: Such things are terrible for a farm. With the corn ripe on the stalk and the farmer in bed! It will be a blessing for him if he doesn't suffer much longer, I say.

FIRST WOMAN confidentially: At first we thought he took to his bed because of military service, you know. And now his end is coming.

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW: Please sit down and have some cakes. She beckons to Grusha and both women go into the bedroom, where they pick up trays of cakes from the floor. The guests, among them the monk, sit on the floor and begin conversing in subdued voices.

A VERY OLD PEASANT to whom the monk has slipped the bottle he has taken from his cassock: There's a little one, you say! How can Yussup have managed that?

THIRD WOMAN: Anyway, she was lucky to have brought it off in time, with him so sick.

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW: They are gossiping already. And stuffing themselves with the funeral cakes at the same time. And if he doesn't die today, I'll have to bake fresh ones tomorrow.

GRUSHA: I'll bake them.

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW: When some riders passed by last night, and I went out to see who they were, he was lying there like a corpse! That's why I sent for you. It can't take much longer. She listens.

THE MONK: Dear wedding guests and mourners! We stand deeply moved in front of a bed of death and marriage, because the bride gets into bed and the groom into the grave. The groom is already washed, and the bride is already hot. For in the marriage-bed lies the last Will, and that makes people randy. Oh, my children, how varied is the fate of man! The one dies to get a roof over his head, and the other marries so that flesh may be turned to dust, from which it was made. Amen.

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW who had listened: He's got his own
back. I shouldn’t have hired such a cheap one. That’s what you’d expect. An expensive one knows how to behave. In Sura there’s one who is even in the odour of sanctity; but of course he charges a fortune. A fifty-piastre priest like this one here has no dignity. And as for piety, he has precisely fifty piastres’ worth, and no more. And when I fetched him from the tavern he was just finishing a speech and shouting: ‘The war is over, beware of the peace!’ We must go in.

Grusha giving Michael a cake: Eat this cake and be a good boy, Michael. We are respectable now.

The two women carry the trays of cakes to the guests. The dying man is sitting up in bed; he puts his head out from under the mosquito-net and watches the two women. Then he sinks back again. The monk takes two bottles from his cassock and offers them to the peasant beside him. Enter three musicians, to whom the monk waves with a grin.

The mother-in-law to the musicians: What have you got your instruments for?

A musician: Brother Anastasius here—pointing at the monk—told us there was a wedding going on.

The mother-in-law: What! You brought them? Three more on my neck! Don’t you know there’s a dying man next door?

The monk: That’s a tempting task for an artist. They could play a hushed Wedding March or a gay Funeral Dance.

The mother-in-law: Well, you might as well play. I can’t stop you eating, in any case.

The musicians play a musical medley. The women offer cakes.

The monk: The trumpet sounds like a whining baby. And you, little drum, what gossip are you spreading abroad?

A peasant beside the monk: What about the bride shaking a leg?

The monk: Shake the legs or rattle the bones?

The peasant beside the monk, singing:

   When pretty Miss Plushbottom wed
   A rich man with no teeth in his head
They enquired, ‘Is it fun?’
She replied, ‘No, it’s none.
Still, there’re candles and soon he’ll be dead.’

*The mother-in-law throws the drunken man out. The music stops. The guests are embarrassed. Pause.*

**The guests loudly:** Have you heard the latest? The Grand Duke’s back!—But the Princes are against him.—Oh, the Shah of Persia, they say, has lent him a great army, to restore order in Grusinia.—How is this possible? After all, the Shah of Persia is against the Grand Duke!—But against disorder, too.—In any case, the war’s over. Our soldiers are already coming back.

*Grusha drops the tray of cakes.*

**An old woman to Grusha:** Are you feeling ill? That’s just excitement about dear Yussup. Sit down and rest awhile, my dear.

*Grusha stands, swaying.*

**The guests:** Now everything will be as it was. Only the taxes will go up because we’ll have to pay for the war.

**Grusha weakly:** Did someone say the soldiers are back?

**A man:** I did.

**Grusha:** That can’t be true.

**The man to a woman:** Show her the shawl. We bought it from a soldier. It’s from Persia.

**Grusha looking at the shawl:** They are here.

*A long pause. Grusha kneels as if to pick up the cakes. As she does so she takes the silver cross and chain out of her blouse, kisses it, and starts praying.*

**The mother-in-law while the guests silently watch Grusha:** What’s the matter with you? Won’t you look after our guests? What’s all this nonsense from the city got to do with us?

**The guests resuming their conversation while Grusha remains with her forehead bent to the ground:** Persian saddles can be bought from soldiers, but some exchange them for crutches.—Wars are won on one side only by the bigwigs, the soldiers on both sides are the losers.—At least the war’s over now.
It's something that they can't call you up any more.—The dying man sits bolt upright in bed. He listens.—What we need most are two weeks of good weather.—There's hardly a pear on our trees this year.

The mother-in-law offering the cakes: Have some more cake. And enjoy it. There's more to come. The mother-in-law goes to the bedroom with empty trays. Unaware of the dying man, she bends down to pick up some more cakes, when he begins to talk in a hoarse voice.

Yussup: How many more cakes are you going to stuff down their throats? D'you think I can shit money? The mother-in-law starts, and stares at him aghast, while he puts his head out from behind the mosquito-net. Did they say the war was over?

First woman talking kindly to Grusha in the next room: Has the young woman someone in the war?

The man: That's good news that they're on their way home, eh?

Yussup: Don't stare so! Where's the wife you've foisted on me?

Receiving no answer, he climbs out of bed and in his nightshirt staggers past his mother into the other room. Trembling, she follows him with the cake tray.

The guests seeing him and shrieking: Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Yussup!

Everyone leaps up in alarm. The women rush to the door. Grusha, still on her knees, turns round and stares at the man.

Yussup: The funeral supper! That's what you'd like! Get out before I kick you out!

The guests stampede from the house.

Yussup grumpily to Grusha: That puts a spoke in your wheel, eh?

Receiving no answer, he turns round and takes a cake from the tray which his mother holds.

The singer

Oh, confusion! The wife discovers that she has a husband!

By day there's the child, by night there's the man.
The lover is on his way day and night.
The married couple are looking at each other. The chamber is narrow.

Yussup sits naked in a high wooden bathtub. His mother pours water from a jug. Next door in the bedroom Grusha squats with Michael, who is playing at mending a straw mat.

Yussup: That's her business, not yours. Where's she hiding now?

The Mother-in-Law calling: Grusha! The peasant wants you!

Grusha to Michael: There are still two holes to mend.

Yussup as Grusha enters: Scrub my back!

Grusha: Can't the peasant do that himself?

Yussup: 'Can't the peasant do that himself?' Get the brush!

To hell with you! Are you the wife or are you a stranger?

To the mother-in-law: Too cold!

The Mother-in-Law: I'll run and get some more hot water.

Grusha: Let me do it.


And don't make such a fuss. You've seen a naked man before. That child of yours can't have come out of thin air.

Grusha: The child was not conceived in joy, if that's what the peasant means.

Yussup turning and grinning: You don't look like that. Grusha stops scrubbing him and starts back. Enter the mother-in-law.

This is a nice thing you've saddled me with here! A mule for a wife!

The Mother-in-Law: She isn't willing.

Yussup: Pour—but go easy! Ow! Go easy, I said. To Grusha.

I'd be surprised if you hadn't been up to something in the city. What else would you be here for? But I won't say anything about that. I also haven't said anything about the bastard you brought into my house. But my patience with you is coming to an end. That's against nature. To the mother-in-law: More! To Grusha: And even if your soldier does return, you're married.
GRUSHIA: Yes.
YUSSUP: But your soldier won’t return now. Don’t you believe it.
GRUSHIA: No.
YUSSUP: You’re cheating me. You’re my wife and you’re not my wife. Where you lie, nothing lies. And yet no other woman can lie there. When I go to work in the mornings I’m dead-tired. When I lie down at night I’m awake as the devil. God has made you a woman, and what d’you do about it? My fields don’t bring me in enough to buy myself a woman in town. Besides, it’s a long way. Woman hoes the fields and parts her legs. That’s what our calendar says. D’you hear?
GRUSHIA: Yes. Quietly. I don’t like cheating you out of it.
YUSSUP: She doesn’t like! Pour some more water. The mother-in-law pours. Ow!

THE SINGER
As she sat by the stream to wash the linen
She saw his image in the water, and his face grew dimmer
As the months passed by.
As she raised herself to wring the linen
She heard his voice from the murmuring maple, and his voice grew fainter
As the months passed by.
Prayers and sighs grew more numerous, tears and sweat flowed faster
As the months passed by, as the child grew up.

Grusha sits by a stream dipping linen into the water. Some distance away a few children are standing, Grusha is talking to Michael.

GRUSHIA: You can play with them, Michael. But don’t let them order you about because you’re the smallest.

Michael nods and joins the children. They start playing.

THE TALLEST BOY: Today we’re going to play Heads-off. To a fat boy: You’re the Prince and you must laugh. To Michael: You’re the Governor. To a girl: You’re the Governor’s wife and you cry when his head’s chopped off. And I do the
chopping. *He shows his wooden sword.* With this. First, the Governor's led into the courtyard. The Prince walks ahead. The Governor's wife comes last.

*They form a procession. The fat boy goes ahead, and laughs. Then comes Michael, and the tallest boy, and then the girl, who weeps.*

**Michael standing still:** Me too chop head off!

**The tallest boy:** That's my job. You're the smallest. The Governor's part is easiest. All you do is kneel down and have your head chopped off. That's simple.

**Michael:** Me too have sword.

**The tallest boy:** That's mine. *He gives him a kick.*

**The girl shouting to Grusha:** He doesn't want to do what he's told.

**Grusha laughing:** Even ducklings take to water, they say.

**The tallest boy:** You can play the Prince if you know how to laugh.

*Michael shakes his head.*

**The fat boy:** I'm the best laugh. Let him chop off the head just once. Then you do it, then me.

Reluctantly the tallest boy hands Michael the wooden sword and kneels. *The fat boy sits down, smacks his thigh and laughs with all his might. The girl weeps loudly. Michael swings the big sword and chops off the head. In doing so, he topples over.*

**The tallest boy:** Hi, I'll show you how to do it properly.

*Michael runs away, and the children run after him. Grusha laughs, following them with her eyes. On turning round, she sees Simon Chachava standing on the opposite bank. He wears a shabby uniform.*

**Grusha:** Simon!

**Simon:** Is that Grusha Vachnadze?

**Grusha:** Simon!

**Simon politely:** A good morning, and good health to the young lady.

**Grusha gets up gaily and bows deeply:** A good morning to the soldier. And thank God he has returned in good health.

**Simon:** They found better fish than me, so they didn't eat me, said the haddock.
GRUSHA: Courage, said the kitchen boy. Luck, said the hero.
SIMON: And how are things here? Was the winter bearable?
Did the neighbour behave?
GRUSHA: The winter was a little rough, the neighbour as usual, Simon.
SIMON: May one ask if a certain person is still in the habit of putting her leg in the water when washing her linen?
GRUSHA: The answer is no. Because of the eyes in the bushes.
SIMON: The young lady is talking about soldiers. Here stands a paymaster.
GRUSHA: Is that worth twenty piastres?
SIMON: And board.
GRUSHA with tears in her eyes: Behind the barracks under the date trees.
SIMON: Just there. I see someone has kept her eyes open.
GRUSHA: Someone has.
SIMON: And has not forgotten. Grusha shakes her head. And so the door is still on its hinges, as they say. Grusha looks at him in silence and shakes her head again. What's that mean? Is something wrong?
GRUSHA: Simon Chachava, I can never go back to Nukha. Something has happened.
SIMON: What has happened?
GRUSHA: It so happened that I knocked down an Ironshirt.
SIMON: Grusha Vachnadze will have had her reasons for that.
GRUSHA: Simon Chachava, my name is also no longer what it was.
SIMON after a pause: I don't understand that.
GRUSHA: When do women change their names, Simon? Let me explain it to you: Nothing stands between us. Everything between us has remained as it was. You've got to believe that.
SIMON: How can nothing stand between us and things be changed?
GRUSHA: How can I explain it to you? So fast and with the stream between us? Couldn't you cross that bridge?
SIMON: Perhaps it's no longer necessary.
GRUSHKA: It's most necessary. Come over, Simon. Quick!

SIMON: Is the young lady saying that someone has come too late?

_Grusha looks up at him in despair, her face streaming with tears._
_Simon stares before him. He picks up a piece of wood and starts cutting it._

THE SINGER

So many words are said, so many words are left unsaid.
The soldier has come. Whence he comes he doesn't say.
Hear what he thought but didn't say:
The battle began at dawn, grew bloody at noon.
The first fell before me, the second behind me, the third at my side.
I trod on the first, I abandoned the second, the captain sabred the third.
My one brother died by steel, my other brother died by smoke.
My neck was burnt by fire, my hands froze in my gloves, my toes in my socks.

For food I had aspen buds, for drink I had maple brew, for bed I had stones in water.

SIMON: I see a cap in the grass. Is there a little one already?

GRUSHKA: There is, Simon. How could I hide it? But please don't let it worry you. It's not mine.

SIMON: They say: Once the wind begins to blow, it blows through every crack. The woman need say no more.

_Grusha lowers her head and says no more._

THE SINGER

There was great yearning but there was no waiting.
The oath is broken. Why was not disclosed.
Hear what she thought, but didn't say:
While you fought in the battle, soldier
The bloody battle, the bitter battle
I found a child who was helpless
And hadn't the heart to do away with it.
I had to care for what otherwise would have come to harm
I had to bend down on the floor for breadcrumbs
I had to tear myself to pieces for what was not mine
But alien.
Someone must be the helper.
Because the little tree needs its water
The little lamb loses its way when the herdsman is asleep
And the bleating remains unheard.

Simon: Give me back the cross I gave you. Or better, throw it in the stream.
       He turns to go.
Grusha: Simon Chachava, don’t go away. It isn’t mine, it isn’t mine! She hears the children calling. What is it, children?
Voices: Soldiers have come!—They are taking Michael away!
Grusha stands aghast as two Ironshirts, with Michael between them, come towards her.
Ironshirt: Are you Grusha? She nods. Is that your child?
Grusha: Yes. Simon goes off. Simon!
Ironshirt: We have official orders to take this child, found in your charge, back to the city. There is suspicion that it is Michael Abashvili, son and heir of the late Governor Georgi Abashvili, and his wife, Natella Abashvili. Here is the document and the seal.
They lead the child away.
Grusha running after them and shouting: Leave it here, please! It’s mine!

The Singer
The Ironshirts took the child away, the precious child.
The unhappy girl followed them to the city, the dangerous place.
The real mother demanded the child back. The foster mother faced her trial.
Who will try the case, on whom will the child be bestowed?
Who will be the Judge? A good one, a bad one?
The city was in flames. On the Judgment Seat sat Azdak.
THE STORY OF THE JUDGE

THE SINGER

Listen now to the story of the Judge:

How he turned Judge, how he passed judgment, what
kind of Judge he is.

On the Easter Sunday of the great revolt, when the
Grand Duke was overthrown
And his Governor Abashvili, father of our child, lost his
head
The village clerk Azdak found a fugitive in the woods and
hid him in his hut.

*Azdak, in rags and tipsy, helps a fugitive dressed as a beggar into his hut.*

AZDAK: Don’t snort. You’re not a horse. And it won’t do you
any good with the police if you run like a dirty nose in
April. Stop, I tell you. He catches the fugitive, who has trottled
into the hut as though he would go through the walls. Sit down and
feed: here’s a piece of cheese. From under some rags in a chest
he fishes out some cheese, and the fugitive greedily begins to eat.
Haven’t had anything for some time, eh? The fugitive groans.
Why did you run so fast, you arse-hole? The police
wouldn’t even have seen you!

THE FUGITIVE: Had to.

AZDAK: Blue funk? *The fugitive stares, uncomprehending.* Got the
squitters? Afraid? Don’t slobber like a Grand Duke or a
sow. I can’t stand it. It’s well-born stinkers we’ve got to put
up with as God made them. Not the likes of you. I once
heard of a Senior Judge who farted at a public dinner. Just
to show his independence. Watching you eat like that really
gives me the most awful ideas! Why don’t you say someth-
ing? *Sharply.* Let’s have a look at your hand. Can’t you
hear? Show me your hand. *The fugitive slowly puts out his
hand.* White! So you’re no beggar at all! A fraud! A swindle
on legs! And here am I hiding you from the police as though you were a decent human being! Why run like that if you’re a landowner? Because that’s what you are. Don’t try to deny it. I see it in your guilty face. He gets up. Get out of here! The fugitive looks uncertainly at him. What are you waiting for, you peasant-flogger?

The Fugitive: Am hunted. Ask for undivided attention. Make proposition.

Azdak: What do you want to make? A proposition? Well, if that isn’t the height of insolence! He making a proposition! The bitten man scratches his fingers bloody, and the leech makes a proposition. Get out, I tell you!

The Fugitive: Understand point of view. Persuasion. Will pay 100,000 piastres for one night. How’s that?

Azdak: What? Do you think you can buy me? And for 100,000 piastres? A third-rate farm. Let’s say 150,000. Got it?

The Fugitive: Not on me, of course. Will be sent. Hope, don’t doubt.

Azdak: Doubt profoundly! Get out!

The fugitive gets up and trots to the door. A voice from off-stage.

Voice: Azdak!

The fugitive turns, trots to the opposite corner and stands still.

Azdak shouting: I’m not in. He walks to the door. Is that you spying around here again, Shauva?

Policeman Shauva outside, reproachfully: You’ve snared another rabbit, Azdak. You promised me it wouldn’t happen again.

Azdak severely: Shauva, don’t talk about things you don’t understand. The rabbit is a dangerous and destructive animal. It devours plants, especially what they call weeds. So it must be exterminated.

Shauva: Azdak, don’t be so hard on me. I’ll lose my job if I don’t arrest you. I know you have a good heart.

Azdak: I don’t have a good heart! How often am I to tell you I’m a man of intellect?

Shauva slyly: I know, Azdak. You’re a superior person. You
say so yourself. I'm a Christian and an ignoramus. So I ask you: if one of the Prince's rabbits is stolen, and I'm a policeman, what am I to do with the offender?

AZDÁK: Shauva, Shauva, shame on you! There you stand asking me a question. Nothing is more tempting than a question. Suppose you were a woman—let's say Nunovna, that bad girl—and you showed me your thigh—Nunovna's thigh, that is—and you asked me: what shall I do with my thigh? It itches. Is she as innocent as she pretends? No. I catch a rabbit, you catch a man. Man is made in God's image. Not so a rabbit, you know that. I'm a rabbit-eater; but you're a man-eater, Shauva. And God will pass judgment on you. Shauva, go home and repent. No, stop! There's something . . . He looks at the fugitive, who stands trembling in the corner. No, it's nothing after all. Go home and repent. He slams the door behind Shauva. To the fugitive: Now you're surprised, eh? Surprised I didn't hand you over? But I couldn't hand over even a bedbug to that beast of a policeman! It goes against my grain. Don't tremble at the sight of a policeman. So old and yet so cowardly! Finish your cheese, but eat it like a poor man, or else they'll still catch you. Do I even have to tell you how a poor man behaves? He makes him sit down, and then gives him back the cheese. The box is the table. Put your elbows on the table, and now surround the plate with your arms as though you expected the cheese to be snatched from you at any moment. What right have you to be safe? Now hold the knife as if it were a small sickle; and don't look so greedily at your cheese, look at it mournfully—because it's already disappearing—like all good things. Azdak watches him. They're after you. That speaks in your favour. But how can I be sure they're not mistaken about you? In Tiflis they once hanged a landowner, a Turk. He could prove he quartered his peasants instead of merely cutting them in half, as is the custom. And he squeezed twice the usual amount of taxes out of them. His zeal was above all suspicion, and yet they hanged him like a common criminal. Why? Because he was
a Turk—something he couldn’t do much about. An injustice! He got on to the gallows like Pontius Pilate into the Creed. In a word, I don’t trust you.

**THE SINGER**

Thus Azdak gave shelter to the old beggar
Only to find out that he was that murderer, the Grand Duke.
And he was ashamed of himself; he accused himself and ordered the policeman
To take him to Nukha, to Court, to be judged.

*In the Court of Justice three Ironshirts sit drinking. From a pillar hangs a man in judge’s robes. Engr Azdak, in chains, dragging Shawua behind him.*

**AZDAK shouting:** I have helped the Grand Duke, the Grand Thief, the Grand Murderer, to escape! In the name of Justice, I demand to be judged severely in a public trial!

**THE FIRST IRONSHIRT:** Who is this queer bird?

**SHAUVA:** That’s our clerk, Azdak.

**AZDAK:** I am despicable, treacherous, branded! Tell them, flatfoot, how I insisted on being put in chains and brought to the capital. Because I sheltered the Grand Duke, the Grand Swindler, by mistake. As I realized only afterwards when I found this document in my hut. *The Ironshirts study the document.* To *Shauva:* They can’t read. Point out that the branded man is accusing himself. Tell them how I forced you to walk with me through half the night, to get everything cleared up.

**SHAUVA:** And all by threats. That wasn’t nice of you, Azdak.

**AZDAK:** Shauva, shut your trap. You don’t understand. A new age has come, which will thunder over you. You’re finished. The police will be wiped out, pfft! Everything is being investigated, brought into the open. In these circumstances a man prefers to give himself up. Why? Because he won’t escape the mob. Tell them how I’ve been shouting all along Shoemaker Street! *He acts with expansive gestures, looking sideways at the Ironshirts.* ‘Out of ignorance I let the
Grand Swindler escape. Tear me to pieces, brothers! So as to get in first.

**The First Ironshirt:** And what was their answer?

**Shauva:** They comforted him in Butcher Street, and laughed themselves sick in Shoemaker Street. That's all.

**Azdak:** But here with you it's different, I know you're men of iron. Brothers, where is the Judge? I must be tried.

**The First Ironshirt** **pointing at the hanged man:** Here's the Judge. And stop 'brothering' us. That's rather a sore spot this evening.

**Azdak:** 'Here's the Judge.' That's an answer never heard in Grusinia before. Citizens, where's His Excellency the Governor? **Pointing at the gallows:** Here's His Excellency, stranger. Where's the Chief Tax Collector? Where's the official Recruiting Officer? The Patriarch? The Chief of Police? Here, here, here—all here. Brothers, that's what I expected from you.

**The Second Ironshirt:** Stop! What did you expect, you bird?

**Azdak:** What happened in Persia, brothers. What happened there.

**The Second Ironshirt:** And what did happen in Persia?

**Azdak:** Forty years ago. Everyone hanged. Viziers, tax-collectors. My grandfather, a remarkable man, saw it all.

For three whole days. Everywhere.

**The Second Ironshirt:** And who reigned after the Vizier was hanged?

**Azdak:** A peasant.

**The Second Ironshirt:** And who commanded the army?

**Azdak:** A soldier, soldier.

**The Second Ironshirt:** And who paid the wages?

**Adak:** A dyer. A dyer paid the wages.

**The Second Ironshirt:** Wasn't it a carpet weaver perhaps?

**The First Ironshirt:** And why did all this happen, you Persian?

**Azdak:** 'Why did all this happen?' Must there be a special
reason? Why do you scratch yourself, brother? War! Too long a war! And no justice! My grandfather brought back a song that tells what it was all about. I and my friend the policeman will sing it for you. To Shawva: And hold on to the rope, that’s part of it. He sings, with Shawva holding the rope.

Why don’t our sons bleed any longer, why don’t our daughters weep any more?
Why do only the calves in the slaughterhouse have any blood, why only willows on Lake Urmı tears?
The Grand King must have a new province, the peasant must relinquish his savings.
In order to capture the roof of the world, the cottage roofs have to be torn down.
Our men are scattered in all directions, so that the great ones can eat at home.
The soldiers kill each other, the marshals salute each other.
The widow’s tax money has to be fingered to see if it’s good, the swords break.
The battle has been lost, but the helmets have been paid for.

Is that right? Is that right?

Shauva: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, that’s right.
Azdak: Do you want to hear the whole thing?

The first Ironshirt nods.

The second Ironshirt to Shawva: Did he teach you that song?
Shauva: Yes. Only my voice isn’t good.
The second Ironshirt: No. To Azdak: Go on singing.
Azdak: The second verse is about the peace. He sings:

The offices are jammed, the officials are working in the streets.
The rivers overflow their banks and lay waste the fields.
Those incapable of letting down their own trousers rule countries.
Those who can’t count up to four devour eight courses.
The corn farmers look round for buyers, but see only the starving.  
The weavers go home from their looms in rags.  
Is that right? Is that right?  
SHAUVVA: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, that’s right.  
AZDAK:  
That’s why our sons bleed no longer, our daughters weep no more.  
That’s why only the calves in the slaughterhouse have any blood.  
And the willows in the morning on Lake Urmì have any tears.  
THE FIRST IRONSHIRT _after a pause_: Are you going to sing that song here in town?  
AZDAK: Of course. What’s wrong with it?  
THE FIRST IRONSHIRT: Do you see the sky getting red?  
_Turning round, Azdak sees the sky reddened by fire._ That’s in the outer town. This morning when Prince Kazbeki had Governor Abashvili beheaded our carpet weavers also caught the ‘Persian disease’. They asked if Prince Kazbeki isn’t eating too many courses. And this afternoon they strung up the town judge. But we beat them to pulp for two piastres per weaver, you understand?  
AZDAK _after a pause_: I understand.  
He glances shyly round and, creeping away, sits down in a corner, his head in his hands.  
THE FIRST IRONSHIRT _to the third, after they have all had a drink_: Just wait and see what’ll happen next.  
_The first and second Ironshirts walk towards Azdak and block his exit._  
SHAUVVA: I don’t think he’s a really bad character, gentlemen.  
He poaches a few chickens here and there, and perhaps an odd rabbit.  
THE SECOND IRONSHIRT _approaching Azdak_: You’ve come here to fish in troubled waters, eh?  
AZDAK _looking up_: I don’t know why I’ve come here.  
THE SECOND IRONSHIRT: Do you happen to be in with the
carpet weavers? *Azdak shakes his head.* And what about this song?

**AZDAK:** From my grandfather. A stupid, ignorant man.

**THE SECOND IRONSHIRT:** Right. And what about the dyer who paid the wages?

**AZDAK:** That was in Persia.

**THE FIRST IRONSHIRT:** And what about denouncing yourself for not having hanged the Grand Duke with your own hands?

**AZDAK:** Didn't I tell you that I let him escape?

**SHAUVA:** I swear to it. He let him escape.

_The Ironshirts drag Azdak screaming to the gallows. Then they let him loose and burst out laughing. Azdak joins in the laughter, laughing loudest. They then unchain him. They all start drinking._

_Enter the fat prince with a young man._

**THE FIRST IRONSHIRT to AZDAK:** There you have your new age.

*More laughter._

**THE FAT PRINCE:** And what is there to laugh about here, my friends? Permit me a serious word. Yesterday morning the Princes of Grusinia overthrew the Grand Duke's war-thirsty government and did away with his governors. Unfortunately the Grand Duke himself escaped. In this fateful hour our carpet weavers, these eternal trouble-makers, had the audacity to incite a rebellion and hang our universally beloved city Judge, our dear Illa Orbeliani. Tut-tut. My friends, we need peace, peace, peace in Grusinia. And justice. Here I bring you my dear nephew, Bizergan Kazbeki. He's to be the new Judge, a talented fellow. I say: the people must decide.

**THE FIRST IRONSHIRT:** Does this mean we elect the Judge?

**THE FAT PRINCE:** Precisely. The people propose a talented fellow. Confer, my friends. _The Ironshirts confer_.* Don't worry, little fox. The job's yours. And once we've run the Grand Duke to earth we won't have to kiss the rabble's arse any more.
THE IRONSHIRTS to each other: They've got the jitters because they still haven't caught the Grand Duke.—We've this clerk to thank for that. He let him get away.—They're not sure of things yet. So they say: 'My friends!' And: 'The people must decide!'—Now he even wants justice for Grusinia!—But fun's fun as long as it lasts.—We'll ask the clerk; he knows all about justice. Hey, scoundrel . . .

AZDAK: You mean me?

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT continues: Would you like to have the nephew as Judge?

AZDAK: You asking me? You're not really asking me that, are you?

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT: Why not? Anything for a laugh!

AZDAK: I take it you want him put to the test? Am I right?

Have you a crook on hand? An experienced one? So the candidate can show how good he is?

THE THIRD IRONSHIRT: Let me see. We have the Governor's two doctors down there. Let's use them.

AZDAK: Stop! That's no good! You can't take real crooks till we're sure of the Judge being appointed. He may be an ass, but he must be appointed or else the law is violated. The law is a very sensitive organ. Like the spleen. Once attacked with fists, death occurs. You can hang those two. Why not? You won't have violated the law, because no Judge was present. Judgment must always be passed with complete solemnity—because it's such rot. Suppose a Judge throws a woman into clink for having stolen a corncake for her child. And he isn't wearing his robes. Or he's scratching himself while passing sentence so that more than a third of his body is exposed—in which case he'd have to scratch his thigh—then the sentence he passes is a disgrace and the law is violated. It would be easier for a Judge's robe and a Judge's hat to pass sentence than for a man without all that paraphernalia. If you don't look out, the law goes up in smoke. You don't taste wine by offering it to a dog. Why not? Because the wine would be gone.
THE FIRST IRONSHIRT: So what do you suggest, you hair-splitter?
AZDAK: I'll be the defendant. I even know what sort. Azdak whispers to them.

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT: You? All burst out laughing.
THE FAT PRINCE: What have you decided?
THE FIRST IRONSHIRT: We've decided to have a rehearsal.
Our good friend will act as defendant, and here's the Judge's seat for the candidate.

THE FAT PRINCE: That's unusual. But why not? To the nephew: A mere formality, little fox. What did they teach you? Who gets there first? The slow runner or the fast one?

THE NEPHEW: The silent one, Uncle Arsen.
The nephew sits in the Judge's seat, the fat prince standing behind him. The Ironshirts sit on the steps. Enter Azdak, imitating the unmistakeable gait of the Grand Duke.


THE FAT PRINCE: What is he?

THE FAT PRINCE: Good.

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT: Get on with the proceedings.
AZDAK: Listen! I'm accused of war-mongering. Ridiculous! Am saying: ridiculous! Is that enough? If not, have brought lawyers along. About 500. He points behind him, pretending to be surrounded by lawyers. Requisition all available seats for lawyers. The Ironshirts laugh; the fat prince joins in.

THE NEPHEW to the Ironshirts: Do you want me to try this case? I must admit I find it rather unusual. From the point of view of taste, I mean.

THE FIRST IRONSHIRT: Go on.

THE FAT PRINCE smiling: Let him have it, little fox!

THE NEPHEW: All right. People of Grusinia versus Grand Duke. What have you to say, defendant?

AZDAK: Any amount. Of course, have myself read war lost.

Started war at the time on advice of patriots like Uncle
Kazbeki. Demand Uncle Kazbeki as witness. The Ironshirts laugh.

The Fat Prince to the Ironshirts, affably: Queer fish, eh?
The Neophew: Motion overruled. You're being accused not of declaring war, which every ruler has to do once in a while, but of conducting it badly.
Azdak: Rot! Didn't conduct it at all! Had it conducted. Had it conducted by Princes. Made a mess of it, of course.
The Neophew: Do you deny having been Commander in Chief?
Azdak: Not at all. Always was Commander in Chief. Even at birth howled at wet-nurse; trained to drop turds in latrine. Got used to command. Always commanded officials to rob my cash-box. Officers flog soldiers only on my command. Landlords sleep with peasants' wives only when strictly commanded by me. Uncle Kazbeki here grew stomach only on my command.
The Ironshirts clapping: He's good! Up the Grand Duke!
The Fat Prince: Answer him, little fox! I'm with you!
The Neophew: I shall answer him according to the dignity of the law. Defendant, preserve the dignity of the law.
Azdak: Agreed. Command you proceed with the trial.
The Neophew: It's not your business to command me. So you claim the Princes forced you to declare war. Then how can you claim they made a mess of it?
The Neophew: Are you making the outrageous claim that the Princes of this country did not fight?
Azdak: No. Princes fought. Fought for war contracts.
The Fat Prince jumping up: That's too much! This man talks like a carpet weaver!
Azdak: Really? Only telling the truth!
The Fat Prince: Hang him! Hang him!
The First Ironshirt: Keep quiet. Get on, Excellency.
The Neophew: Quiet! Now pass sentence. Must be hanged.
Hanged by the neck. Having lost war. Sentence passed. No appeal.

**THE FAT PRINCE:** *hysterically:* Away with him! Away with him! Away with him!

**AZDAK:** Young man, seriously advise not to fall publicy into jerky, clipped manner of speech. Can’t be employed as watchdog if howl like wolf. Got it?

**THE FAT PRINCE:** Hang him!

**AZDAK:** If people realize Princes talk same language as Grand Dukes, may even hang Grand Dukes and Princes. By the way, sentence quashed. Reason: war lost, but not for Princes. Princes have won *their* war. Got themselves paid 3,863,000 piastres for horses not delivered.

**THE FAT PRINCE:** Hang him!

**AZDAK:** 8,240,000 piastres for food supplies not produced.

**THE FAT PRINCE:** Hang him!

**AZDAK:** Are therefore victors. War lost only for Grusinia, which is not present in this Court.

**THE FAT PRINCE:** I think that’s enough, my friends. To **Azdak:** You can withdraw, gaol-bird. To the Ironshirts: I think you can now ratify the new Judge’s appointment, my friends.

**THE FIRST IRONSHIRT:** Yes, we can do that. Take down the Judge’s robe. *One of the Ironshirts climbs on the back of another and pulls the robe off the hanged man.* And now—to the nephew—you be off so that we can put the right arse on the right seat. To **Azdak:** Step forward, you, and sit on the Judge’s seat. **Azdak hesitates.** Sit down up there, man. **Azdak is thrust on to the seat by the Ironshirts.** The Judge was always a rascal. Now the rascal shall be the Judge. *The Judge’s robe is placed round his shoulders, the wicker from a bottle on his head.* Look! There’s a Judge for you!

**THE SINGER**

Now there was civil war in the land. The rulers were unsafe.

Now **Azdak** was made a Judge by the Ironshirts. Now **Azdak** remained a Judge for two years.
THE SINGER WITH HIS MUSICIANS
Great houses turn to ashes
And blood runs down the street.
Rats come out of the sewers
And maggots out of the meat.
The thug and the blasphemer
Lounge by the altar-stone:
Now, now, now Azdak
Sits on the Judgment throne.

Azdak sits on the Judge’s seat peeling an apple. Shawa sweeps out the hall. On one side an invalid in a wheelchair, the accused doctor and a man in rags with a limp; opposite, a young man accused of blackmail. An Ironshirt stands on guard holding the Ironshirts’ banner.

AZDAK: In view of the large number of cases, the Court today will hear two cases simultaneously. Before I open the proceedings, a short announcement: I receive—he stretches out his hand; only the blackmailer produces some money and hands it to him—I reserve for myself the right to punish one of these parties here—he glances at the invalid—for contempt of court. You—to the doctor—are a doctor, and you—to the invalid—are bringing a complaint against him. Is the doctor responsible for your condition?

THE INVALID: Yes. I had a stroke because of him.
AZDAK: That sounds like professional negligence.
THE INVALID: More than negligence. I gave this man money to study. So far he hasn’t paid me back one penny. And when I heard he was treating a patient free, I had a stroke.
AZDAK: Rightly. To the limping man. And you, what do you want here?
THE LIMPING MAN: I’m the patient, your Worship.
AZDAK: He treated your leg?
THE LIMPING MAN: Not the right one. My rheumatism was in the left leg, and he operated on my right. That’s why I’m limping now.
AZDAK: And you got that free?
THE INVALID: A 500-piastre operation free! For nothing!
For a God-Bless-You! And I paid this man’s studies! To the doctor: Did you learn to operate for nothing at school?
THE DOCTOR to Azdak: Your Worship, it is actually the custom to demand the fee before the operation, as the patient is more willing to pay before an operation than after. Which is only human. In this case I was convinced, when I started the operation, that my servant had already received the fee. In this I was mistaken.
THE INVALID: He was mistaken! A good doctor doesn’t make mistakes. He examines before he operates.
AZDAK: That’s right. To Shauva: Public Prosecutor, what’s the other case about?
SHAUVA busily sweeping: Blackmail.
THE BLACKMAILER: High Court of Justice, I’m innocent. I only wanted to find out from the landowner in question if he really had raped his niece. He kindly informed me that this was not the case, and gave me the money only so that I could let my uncle study music.
AZDAK: Ah ha! To the doctor: You on the other hand can’t produce any extenuating circumstances in your defence?
THE DOCTOR: Except that to err is human.
AZDAK: And you know that in money matters a good doctor is conscious of his responsibility? I once heard of a doctor who made a thousand piastres out of one sprained finger: he discovered it had something to do with the circulation of the blood, which a less good doctor would have overlooked. On another occasion, by careful treatment, he turned a mediocre gall bladder into a gold mine. You have no excuse, Doctor. The corn merchant Uxu made his son study medicine to get some knowledge of trade—our medical schools are that good. To the blackmailer: What’s the name of the landowner?
SHAUVA: He doesn’t want it to be known.
AZDAK: In that case I will pass judgment. The Court considers the blackmail proved. And you—to the invalid—are sentenced to a fine of 1000 piastres. If you get a second
stroke the doctor will have to treat you free and if necessary amputate. To the limping man: As compensation, you will receive a bottle of embrocation. To the blackmailer: You are sentenced to hand over half the proceeds of your deal to the Public Prosecutor, to keep the landowner’s name secret. You are advised, moreover, to study medicine. You seem well suited to that profession. And you, Doctor, are acquitted because of an inexcusable professional mistake. The next cases!

THE SINGER WITH HIS MUSICIANS

Beware of willing Judges
For Truth is a black cat
In a windowless room at midnight
And Justice a blind bat.
A third and shrugging party
Alone can right our wrong.
This, this, this, Azdak
Does for a mere song.

Enter Azdak from the caravansary on the highway, followed by the old, bearded innkeeper. The Judge’s seat is carried by a manservant and Shauva. An Ironshirt with a banner takes up position.

AZDAK: Put it here. Then at least we can get some air and a little breeze from the lemon grove over there. It’s good for Justice to do it in the open. The wind blows her skirts up and you can see what’s underneath. Shauva, we have eaten too much. These rounds of inspection are very exhausting. To the innkeeper: So it’s about your daughter-in-law?

THE INNKEEPER: Your Worship, it’s about the family honour. I wish to bring an action on behalf of my son, who’s gone on business across the mountain. This is the offending stableman, and here’s my unfortunate daughter-in-law.

Enter the daughter-in-law, a voluptuous wench. She is veiled.

AZDAK, sitting down: I receive. Sighing, the innkeeper hands him some money. Good. Now the formalities are disposed of. This is a case of rape?

THE INNKEEPER: Your Worship, I surprised this rascal in the stable in the act of laying our Ludovica in the straw.
AZDAK: Quite right, the stable. Beautiful horses. I particularly like the little roan.

THE INNKEEPER: The first thing I did of course was to berate Ludovica on behalf of my son.

AZDAK seriously: I said I liked the little roan.

THE INNKEEPER coldly: Really?—Ludovica admitted that the stableman took her against her will.

AZDAK: Take off your veil, Ludovica. She does so. Ludovica, you please the Court. Tell us how it happened.

LUDOVICA as though well rehearsed: When I entered the stable to look at the new foal, the stableman said to me of his own accord: ‘It’s hot today’ and laid his hand on my left breast. I said to him: ‘Don’t do that!’ But he continued to handle me indecently, which provoked my anger. Before I realized his sinful intentions, he became intimate with me. It had already happened when my father-in-law entered and accidentally trod on me.

THE INNKEEPER explaining: On behalf of my son.

AZDAK to the stableman: Do you admit that you started it?

THE STABLEMAN: Yes.

AZDAK: Ludovica, do you like to eat sweet things?

LUDOVICA: Yes, sunflower seeds.

AZDAK: Do you like sitting a long time in the tub?

LUDOVICA: Half an hour or so.

AZDAK: Public Prosecutor, just drop your knife on the floor.

SHAUNA does so. Ludovica, go and pick up the Public Prosecutor’s knife.

Ludovica, hips swaying, goes and picks up the knife.

AZDAK points at her. Do you see that? The way it sways? The criminal element has been discovered. The rape has been proved. By eating too much, especially sweet things, by lying too long in warm water, by laziness and too soft a skin, you have raped the poor man. Do you imagine you can go around with a bottom like that and get away with it in Court? This is a case of deliberate assault with a dangerous weapon. You are sentenced to hand over to the Court the little roan which your father liked to ride on behalf of
his son. And now, Ludovica, come with me to the stable so that the Court may investigate the scene of the crime.

Azdak is carried on his Judge's seat by Ironshirts from place to place on the Grusinian highway. Behind him come Shawa dragging the gallows and the stableman leading the little roan.

**The Singer with his Musicians**

No more did the Lower Orders
Tremble in their shoes
At the bellows of their Betters
At Come-Here's and Listen-You's.

His balances were crooked
But they shouted in the streets:—
'Good, good, good is Azdak
And the measure that he metes!'

He took them from Wealthy Peter
To give to Penniless Paul
Sealed his illegal judgments
With a waxy tear; and all
The rag-tag-and-bobtail
Ran crying up and down:—
'Cheer, cheer, cheer for Azdak
The darling of the town!'

The little group slowly withdraws.

To love your next-door neighbour
Approach him with an axe
For prayers and saws and sermons
Are unconvincing facts.

What miracles of preaching
A good sharp blade can do:
So, so, so, so, so Azdak
Makes miracles come true.

Azdak's Judge's seat is in a tavern. Three farmers stand before Azdak. Shawa brings him wine. In a corner stands an old peasant woman. In the open doorway, and outside, stand villagers and spectators. An Ironshirt stands guard with a banner.
AZDAK: The Public Prosecutor opens the proceedings.
SHAVUA: It's about a cow. For five weeks the defendant has had a cow in her stable, the property of farmer Suru. She was also found to be in the possession of a stolen ham. And cows belonging to farmer Shutoff were killed after he had asked the defendant to pay the rent for a field.
THE FARMERS: It's about my ham, Your Worship.—It's about my cow, Your Worship.—It's about my field, Your Worship.
AZDAK: Granny, what have you got to say to all this?
THE OLD WOMAN: Your Worship, one night towards morning, five weeks ago, there was a knock at my door, and outside stood a bearded man with a cow. He said, 'Dear woman, I am the miracle-working St Banditus. And because your son has been killed in the war, I bring you this cow as a keepsake. Take good care of it!'
THE FARMERS: The robber Irakli, Your Worship!—Her brother-in-law, Your Worship! The cattle thief, the incendiary!—He must be beheaded!
Outside a woman screams. The crowd grows restless and retreats.
Enter the bandit Irakli, with a huge axe.
THE FARMERS: Irakli! They cross themselves.
THE BANDIT: A very good evening, dear friends! A glass of wine!
AZDAK: Public Prosecutor, a jug of wine for the guest. And who are you?
THE BANDIT: I'm a wandering hermit, Your Worship. And thank you for the kind gift. He empties the glass which Shavua has brought. Same again!
AZDAK: I'm Azdak. He gets up and bows. The bandit also bows.
The Court welcomes the stranger hermit. Go on with your story, Granny.
THE OLD WOMAN: Your Worship, that first night I didn't know that St Banditus could work miracles, it was only the cow. But one night a few days later the farmer's servants came to take the cow away from me. Then they turned round in front of my door and went off without the cow.
And on their heads sprouted bumps big as a fist. Then I knew that St Banditus had changed their hearts and turned them into friendly people.

*The bandit roars with laughter.*

**The First Farmer:** I know what changed them.

**Azdak:** That’s good. You can tell us later. Continue.

**The Old Woman:** Your Worship, the next one to become a good man was farmer Shutoff—a devil, as everyone knows. But St Banditus brought it about that Shutoff let me off paying the rent for the field.

**The Second Farmer:** Because my cows were killed in the field.

*The bandit laughs.*

**The Old Woman answering Azdak’s sign to continue:** And then one morning the ham came flying in at my window. It hit me in the small of the back. I’ve been lame ever since. Look, Your Worship. *She limps a few steps. The bandit laughs.* I ask Your Worship: when was a poor old body ever given a ham except by a miracle?

*The bandit starts sobbing.*

**Azdak rising from his seat:** Granny, that’s a question that strikes strait at the Court’s heart. Be so kind as to sit down here.

*Hesitating, the old woman sits on the Judge’s seat. Azdak sits on the floor, glass in hand.*

Little mother, I almost called you Mother Grusinia, the woebegone

The bereaved one, whose sons are in the wat.

Who is beaten with fists, but full of hope.

Who weeps when she is given a cow

And is surprised when she is not beaten.

Little mother, pass merciful sentence on us, the damned!

*He bellows to the farmers.*

Admit that you don’t believe in miracles, you atheists! Each of you is sentenced to pay 500 piastres! For your lack of faith. Get out!

*The farmers creep out.*
And you, little mother, and you—to the bandit—pious man,
drink a jug of wine with the Public Prosecutor and Azdak!

THE SINGER WITH HIS MUSICIANS
To feed the starving people
He broke the laws like bread
There on the seat of justice
With the gallows over his head
For more than seven hundred
Days he calmed their wails
Well, well, well, did Azdak
Measure with false scales.

Two summers and two winters
A poor man judged the poor
And on the wreck of justice
He brought them safe to shore
For he spoke in the mob language
That the mob understands.
I, I, I, cried Azdak
Take bribes from empty hands.

THE SINGER
Then the era of disorder was over, the Grand Duke returned
The Governor's wife returned, a Judgment was held.
Many people died, the suburbs burned anew, and fear seized Azdak.

Azdak's Judge's seat stands again in the Court of Justice. Azdak sits on the ground mending a shoe and talking to Shauva. Noises outside. Above a wall the fat prince's head is carried by on a lance.

AZDAK: Shauva, your days of slavery are numbered, perhaps even the minutes. For a long time I have held you on the iron curb of reason, and it has made your mouth bloody. I have lashed you with arguments founded on reason, and ill-treated you with logic. You are by nature a weak creature, and if one slyly throws you an argument, you have to devour it; you can't resist. By nature you are compelled to lick the hand of a superior being, but superior beings
can be very different. And now comes your liberation, and
you will soon be able to follow your inclinations, which are
low. You will be able to follow your unerring instinct,
which teaches you to plant your heavy boot on the faces of
men. Gone is the era of confusion and disorder, and the
great times which I found described in the Song of Chaos
have not yet come. Let us now sing that song together in
memory of those wonderful days. Sit down and don’t
violate the music. Don’t be afraid. It sounds all right. It has
a popular refrain.

He sings

Sister, hide your face; brother, take your knife, the times
are out of joint.
The noblemen are full of complaints, the simple folk full
of joy.
The city says: let us drive the strong ones out of our midst.
Storm the government buildings, destroy the lists of the
serfs.
Now the masters’ noses are put to the grindstone. Those
who never saw the day have emerged.
The poor-boxes of ebony are broken, the precious sesame
wood is used for beds.
He who lacked bread now possesses barns; he who lived
on the corn of charity, now measures it out himself.

SHAUVA: Oh, oh, oh, oh.

AZDAK:

Where are you, General? Please, please, please, restore
order.
The son of the nobleman can no longer be recognized; the
child of the mistress becomes the son of her slave.
The councillors are taking shelter in the barn; he who
was barely allowed to sleep on the wall now lolls in bed.
He who once rowed a boat now owns ships; when their
owner looks for them, they are no longer his.
Five men are sent out by their master. They say: go
yourself, we have arrived.

SHAUVA: Oh, oh, oh, oh.
AZDAK: Where are you, General? Please, please, please restore order!
Yes, so it might have been, if order had been much longer neglected. But now the Grand Duke, whose life I saved like a fool, has returned to the Capital. And the Persians have lent him an army to restore order. The outer town is already in flames. Go and get me the Big Book I like to sit on. Shauva brings the book from the Judge's seat. Azdak opens it. This is the Statute Book and I've always used it, as you can confirm.

SHAUVA: Yes, to sit on.

AZDAK: Now I'd better look and see what they can do to me, because I've always allowed the have-nots to get away with everything. And I'll have to pay for it dearly. I helped to put Poverty on to its rickety legs, so they'll hang me for drunkenness. I peeped into the rich man's pocket, which is considered bad taste. And I can't hide anywhere, for all the world knows me, since I have helped the world.

SHAUVA: Someone's coming!

AZDAK in a panic walks trembling to the seat: The game is up! But I'll give no man the pleasure of seeing human greatness. I'll beg on my knees for mercy. Spittle will slobber down my chin. The fear of death is upon me.

Enter Natella Abashvili, the Governor's wife, followed by the Adjutant and an Ironshirt.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE: What kind of man is that, Shalva?
AZDAK: A willing one, Your Excellency, a man ready to oblige.

THE ADJUTANT: Natella Abashvili, wife of the late Governor, has just returned and is looking for her three-year-old son, Michael. She has been informed that the child was abducted to the mountains by a former servant.

AZDAK: It will be brought back, Your Highness, at your service.

THE ADJUTANT: They say that the person in question is passing it off as her own child.
AZDAK: She will be beheaded, Your Highness, at your service.

THE ADJUTANT: That's all.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE leaving: I don't like that man.

AZDAK following her to the door, and bowing: Everything will be arranged, Your Highness, at your service.

6

THE CHALK CIRCLE

THE SINGER

Now listen to the story of the trial concerning the child of the Governor Abashvili

To establish the true mother

By the famous test of the Chalk Circle.

The courtyard of the lawcourts in Nukba. Ironshirts lead Michael in, then go across the stage and out at the back. One Ironshirt holds Grusha back under the doorway with his lance until the child has been taken away. Then she is admitted. She is accompanied by the former Governor's cook. Distant noises and a fire-red sky.

GRUSHA: He's so good, he can wash himself already.

THE COOK: You're lucky. This is not a real Judge; this is Azdak. He's a drunk and doesn't understand anything. And the biggest thieves have been acquitted by him, because he mixes everything up and because the rich never offer him big enough bribes. The likes of us get off lightly sometimes.

GRUSHA: I need some luck today.

THE COOK: Touch wood. She crosses herself. I think I'd better say a quick prayer that the Judge will be drunk.

Her lips move in prayer, while Grusha looks round in vain for the child.

THE COOK: What I can't understand is why you want to hold on to it at any price, if it's not yours. In these days.

GRUSHA: It's mine, I've brought it up.
THE COOK: But didn’t you ever wonder what would happen when she returned?
GRUSHA: At first I thought I’d give it back to her. Then I thought she wouldn’t return.
THE COOK: And a borrowed coat keeps one warm, too, eh?
Grusha nods. I’ll swear anything you like, because you’re a decent person. Memorizes aloud: I had him in my care for five piastres, and on Thursday evening, when the riots started, Grusha came to fetch him. She sees the soldier Chachava, approaching. But you have done Simon great wrong. I’ve talked to him. He can’t understand it.
GRUSHA unaware of Simon’s presence: I can’t be bothered with that man just now, if he doesn’t understand anything.
THE COOK: He has understood that the child is not yours; but that you’re married and won’t be free until death parts you—he can’t understand that.
Grusha sees Simon and greets him.
SIMON gloomily: I wanted to tell the woman that I am ready to swear I am the father of the child.
GRUSHA low: That’s right, Simon.
SIMON: At the same time, I would like to say that I am hereby not bound to anything; nor the woman, either.
THE COOK: That’s unnecessary. She’s married. You know that.
SIMON: That’s her business and doesn’t need rubbing in.
Enter two Ironshirts.
THE IRONSHIRTS: Where’s the Judge?—Has anyone seen the Judge?
GRUSHA who has turned away and covered her face: Stand in front of me. I shouldn’t have come to Nukha. If I run into the Ironshirt, the one I hit over the head . . .
The Ironshirt who has brought in the child steps forward.
THE IRONSHIRT: The Judge isn’t here.
The two Ironshirts go on searching.
THE COOK: I hope something hasn’t happened to him. With any other Judge you’d have less chance than a chicken has teeth.
Enter another Ironshirt.
THE IRONSHIRT who had inquired for the Judge, to the other Ironshirt: There are only two old people and a child here. The Judge has bolted.

THE OTHER IRONSHIRT: Go on searching!

The first two Ironshirts go out quickly. The third remains behind. Grusha lets out a scream. The Ironshirt turns round. He is the Corporal, and has a large scar right across his face.

THE IRONSHIRT in the gateway: What's the matter, Shotta? Do you know her?

THE CORPORAL after a long stare: No.

THE IRONSHIRT: She's the one who's supposed to have stolen the Abashvili child. If you know anything about it, Shotta, you can make a packet of money.

Exit the Corporal, cursing.

THE COOK: Was it him? Grusha nods. I think he'll keep his mouth shut, otherwise he'll have to admit he was after the child.

GRUSHA relieved: I'd almost forgotten I'd saved the child from them...

Enter the Governor's wife, followed by the Adjutant and two lawyers.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE: Thank God! At least the common people aren't here. I can't stand their smell, it always gives me migraine.

THE FIRST LAWYER: Madam, I must ask you to be as careful as possible in everything you say, until we have another Judge.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE: But I didn't say anything, Illo Shuboladze. I love the people—with their simple, straightforward ways. It's just their smell that brings on my migraine.

THE SECOND LAWYER: There will hardly be any spectators. Most of the population is behind locked doors because of the riots in the outer town.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE looking at Grusha: Is that the creature?

THE FIRST LAWYER: I beg you, most gracious Natella
Abashvili, to abstain from all invective until it is absolutely certain that the Grand Duke has appointed a new Judge and we have got rid of the present one, who is about the lowest ever seen in a Judge’s robe. And things seem to be on the move, as you will see.

Ironshirts enter the courtyard.

The Cook: Her Ladyship wouldn’t hesitate to pull your hair out if she didn’t know that Azdak is for the poor people. He goes by the face.

Two Ironshirts begin by fastening a rope to the pillar. Azdak, in chains, is led in, followed by Shawa, also in chains. The three farmers bring up the rear.

One Ironshirt: Trying to run away, eh? He beats Azdak.

One Farmer: Pull the Judge’s robe off before we string him up!

Ironshirts and farmers pull the robe off Azdak. His torn underewear becomes visible. Then someone kicks him.

An Ironshirt pushing him on to someone else: Anyone want a bundle of Justice? Here it is!

Accompanied by shouts of ‘It’s all yours!’ and ‘I don’t want it!’ they hurl Azdak back and forth until he breaks down. Then he is hauled up and dragged under the noose.

The Governor’s Wife who, during the ‘ball-game’, has been clapping her hands hysterically: I disliked that man from the moment I first saw him.

Azdak covered in blood, panting: I can’t see. Give me a rag.

The Other Ironshirt: What is it you want to see?

Azdak: You, you dogs! He wipes the blood out of his eyes with his shirt. Good morning, dogs! How are you, dogs? How’s the dog world? Does it stink good? Have you got another boot to lick? Are you back at each other’s throats, dogs?

Enter a dust-covered rider accompanied by a corporal. He takes some documents from a leather case and looks through them. He interrupts.

The Rider: Stop! I bring a despatch from the Grand Duke, containing the latest appointments.
THE CORPORAL bellowing: Atten - shun!

All jump to attention.

THE RIDER: Of the new Judge it says: We appoint a man whom we have to thank for the saving of a life of the utmost importance to the country. A certain Azdak in Nukha. Which is he?

SHAUVA pointing: That’s him on the gallows, Your Excellency.

THE CORPORAL bellowing: What’s going on here?

THE IRONSHIRT: I ask to be allowed to report that His Worship has already been His Worship. He was declared the enemy of the Grand Duke only on these farmers’ denunciation.

THE CORPORAL pointing at the farmers: March them off! They are marched off, bowing incessantly. See to it that His Worship is exposed to no more indignities.

Exit the rider with the corporal.

THE COOK to Shawwa: She clapped her hands! I hope he saw it!

THE FIRST LAWYER: This is a catastrophe.

Azdak has fainted. Coming to, he is dressed again in a Judge’s robe. He walks away, swaying, from the group of Ironshirts.

THE IRONSHIRTS: Don’t take it amiss, Your Worship. What are Your Worship’s wishes?

AZDAK: Nothing, fellow dogs. An occasional boot to lick. To Shawwa: I pardon you. He is unchained. Fetch me some of the red wine. The sweetest. Exit Shawwa. Get out of here, I’ve got to judge a case. The Ironshirts go. Shawwa returns with a jug of wine. Azdak takes deep gulps. Get me something for my backside. Shawwa brings the Statute Book and puts it on the Judge’s seat. Azdak sits on it. I receive! The faces of the prosecutors, among whom a worried council has been held, show smiles of relief. They whisper.

THE COOK: Oh dear!

SIMON: ‘A well can’t be filled with dew!’ they say.

THE LAWYERS approaching Azdak, who stands up expectantly:

An absolutely ridiculous case, Your Worship. The accused has abducted the child and refuses to hand it over.
AZDAK stretching out his hand, and glancing at Grusha: A most attractive person. He receives more money. I open the proceedings and demand the absolute truth. To Grusha: Especially from you.

THE FIRST LAWYER: High Court of Justice! Blood, as the saying goes, is thicker than water. This old proverb . . .

AZDAK: The Court wants to know the lawyer’s fee.

THE FIRST LAWYER surprised: I beg your pardon? Azdak rubs his thumb and index finger. Oh, I see. 500 piastres, Your Worship, is the answer to the Court’s somewhat unusual question.

AZDAK: Did you hear? The question is unusual. I ask it because I listen to you in a quite different way if I know you are good.

THE FIRST LAWYER bowing: Thank you, Your Worship. High Court of Justice! Of all bonds the bonds of blood are the strongest. Mother and child—is there a more intimate relationship? Can one tear a child from its mother? High Court of Justice! She has conceived it in the holy ecstasies of love. She has carried it in her womb. She has fed it with her blood. She has borne it with pain. High Court of Justice! It has been observed, Your Worship, how even the wild tigress, robbed of her young, roams restless through the mountains, reduced to a shadow. Nature herself . . .

AZDAK interrupting, to Grusha: What’s your answer to all this and anything else the lawyer might have to say?

GRUSHA: He’s mine.

AZDAK: Is that all? I hope you can prove it. In any case, I advise you to tell me why you think the child should be given to you.

GRUSHA: I’ve brought him up ‘according to my best knowledge and conscience’. I always found him something to eat. Most of the time he had a roof over his head. And I went to all sorts of trouble for him. I had expenses, too. I didn’t think of my own comfort. I brought up the child to be friendly with everyone. And from the beginning I taught
him to work as well as he could. But he’s still very small.

THE FIRST LAWYER: Your Worship, it is significant that the person herself doesn’t claim any bond of blood between herself and this child.

AZDAK: The Court takes note.

THE FIRST LAWYER: Thank you, Your Worship. Please permit a woman who has suffered much—who has already lost her husband and now also has to fear the loss of her child—to address a few words to you. Her Highness, Natella Abashvili . . .

THE GOVERNOR’S WIFE quietly: A most cruel fate, sir, forces me to ask you to return my beloved child. It’s not for me to describe to you the tortures of a bereaved mother’s soul, the anxiety, the sleepless nights, the . . .

THE SECOND LAWYER exploding: It’s outrageous the way this woman is treated. She’s not allowed to enter her husband’s palace. The revenue of her estates is blocked. She is told cold-bloodedly that it’s tied to the heir. She can’t do anything without the child. She can’t even pay her lawyers. To the first lawyer who, desperate about this outburst, makes frantic gestures to stop him speaking: Dear Illo Shuboladze, why shouldn’t it be divulged now that it’s the Abashvili estates that are at stake?

THE FIRST LAWYER: Please, Honoured Sandro Oboladze! We had agreed . . . To Azdak: Of course it is correct that the trial will also decide whether our noble client will obtain the right to dispose of the large Abashvili estates. I say ‘also’ on purpose, because in the foreground stands the human tragedy of a mother, as Natella Abashvili has rightly explained at the beginning of her moving statement. Even if Michael Abashvili were not the heir to the estates, he would still be the dearly beloved child of my client.

AZDAK: Stop! The Court is touched by the mention of the estates. It’s a proof of human feeling.

THE SECOND LAWYER: Thanks, Your Worship. Dear Illo Shuboladze, in any case we can prove that the person who
took possession of the child is not the child’s mother. Permit me to lay before the Court the bare facts. By an unfortunate chain of circumstances, the child, Michael Abashvili, was left behind while his mother was making her escape. Grusha, the Palace kitchenmaid, was present on this Easter Sunday and was observed busying herself with the child...

**THE COOK:** All her mistress was thinking about was what kind of dresses she would take along.

**THE SECOND LAWYER** *unmoved:* Almost a year later Grusha turned up in a mountain village with a child, and there entered into matrimony with...

**AZDAK:** How did you get into that mountain village?

**GRUSHA:** On foot, Your Worship. And he was mine.

**SIMON:** I am the father, Your Worship.

**THE COOK:** I had him in my care for five piastres, Your Worship.

**THE SECOND LAWYER:** This man is engaged to Grusha, High Court of Justice, and for this reason his testimony is not reliable.

**AZDAK:** Are you the man she married in the mountain village?

**SIMON:** No, Your Worship, she married a peasant.

**AZDAK** winking at Grusha: Why? **Pointing at Simon:** Isn’t he any good in bed? Tell the truth.

**GRUSHA:** We didn’t get that far. I married because of the child, so that he should have a roof over his head. **Pointing at Simon.** He was in the war, Your Worship.

**AZDAK:** And now he wants you again, eh?

**SIMON:** I want to state in evidence...

**GRUSHA** angrily: I am no longer free, Your Worship.

**AZDAK:** And the child, you claim, is the result of whoring?

**Grusha does not answer.** I’m going to ask you a question: What kind of child is it? Is it one of those ragged street-urchins? Or is it a child from a well-to-do family?

**GRUSHA** angrily: It’s an ordinary child.

**AZDAK:** I mean, did he have fine features from the beginning?
GRUSHA: He had a nose in his face.
AZDAK: He had a nose in his face. I consider that answer of yours to be important. They say of me that once, before passing judgment, I went out and sniffed at a rosebush. Tricks of this kind are necessary nowadays. I'll cut things short now, and listen no longer to your lies. To Grusha: Especially yours. To the group of defendants: I can imagine what you've cooked up between you to cheat me. I know you. You're swindlers.
GRUSHA suddenly: I can quite understand your wanting to cut it short, having seen what you received!
AZDAK: Shut up! Did I receive anything from you?
GRUSHA while the cook tries to restrain her: Because I haven't got anything.
AZDAK: Quite true. I never get a thing from starvelings. I might just as well starve myself. You want justice, but do you want to pay for it? When you go to the butcher you know you have to pay. But to the Judge you go as though to a funeral supper.
SIMON loudly: 'When the horse was shod, the horsefly stretched out its leg', as the saying is.
AZDAK eagerly accepting the challenge: 'Better a treasure in the sewer than a stone in the mountain stream.'
SIMON: 'A fine day. Let's go fishing,' said the angler to the worm.'
AZDAK: 'I'm my own master,' said the servant, and cut off his foot.'
SIMON: 'I love you like a father,' said the Czar to the peasant, and had the Czarevitch's head chopped off.'
AZDAK: 'The fool's worst enemy is himself.'
SIMON: But 'a fart has no nose'.
AZDAK: Fined ten piastres for indecent language in Court. That'll teach you what Justice is.
GRUSHA: That's a fine kind of Justice. You jump on us because we don't talk so refined as that lot with their lawyers.
AZDAK: Exactly. The likes of you are too stupid. It's only right that you should get it in the neck.
GRUSHA: Because you want to pass the child on to her. She who is too refined even to know how to change its nappies! You don’t know any more about Justice than I do, that’s clear.

AZDAK: There’s something in that. I’m an ignorant man. I haven’t even a decent pair of trousers under my robe. See for yourself. With me, everything goes on food and drink. I was educated in a convent school. Come to think of it, I’ll fine you ten piastres, too. For contempt of Court. What’s more, you’re a very silly girl to turn me against you, instead of making eyes at me and wagging your backside a bit to keep me in a tood temper. Twenty piastres!

GRUSHA: Even if it were thirty, I’d tell you what I think of your justice, you drunken onion! How dare you talk to me as though you were the cracked Isaiah on the church window! When they pulled you out of your mother, it wasn’t planned that you’d rap her over the knuckles for pinching a little bowl of corn from somewhere! Aren’t you ashamed of yourself when you see how afraid I am of you? But you’ve let yourself become their servant. So that their houses are not taken away, because they’ve stolen them. Since when do houses belong to bed-bugs? But you’re on the look-out, otherwise they couldn’t drag our men into their wars. You bribe-taker!

AZDAK gets up. He begins to beam. With a little hammer he knocks on the table half-heartedly as if to get silence. But as Grusha’s scolding continues, he only beats time with it.

I’ve no respect for you. No more than for a thief or a murderer with a knife, who does what he wants. You can take the child away from me, a hundred against one, but I tell you one thing: for a profession like yours, they ought to choose only bloodsuckers and men who rape children. As a punishment. To make them sit in judgment over their fellow men, which is worse than swinging from the gallows.

AZDAK sitting down: Now it will be thirty! And I won’t go on brawling with you as though we were in a tavern. What would happen to my dignity as a Judge? I’ve lost all interest
in your case. Where's the couple who wanted a divorce?
To Shawa: Bring them in. This case is adjourned for fifteen minutes.

The first lawyer to the Governor's wife: Without producing any more evidence, Madam, we have the verdict in the bag.
The cook to Grusha: You've gone and spoiled your chances with him. You won't get the child now.

Enter a very old couple.

The Governor's wife: Shalva, my smelling salts!
Azdak: I receive. The old couple do not understand. I hear you want to be divorced. How long have you been living together?

The old woman: Forty years, Your Worship.
Azdak: And why d'you want a divorce?
The old man: We don't like each other, Your Worship.
Azdak: Since when?
The old woman: Oh, from the very beginning, Your Worship.

Azdak: I'll consider your case and deliver my verdict when I'm finished with the other one. Shawa leads them into the background. I need the child. He beckons Grusha towards him and bends not unkindly towards her. I've noticed that you have a soft spot for justice. I don't believe he's your child, but if he were yours, woman, wouldn't you want him to be rich? You'd only have to say he isn't yours and at once he'd have a palace, scores of horses in his stable, scores of beggars on his doorstep, scores of soldiers in his service, and scores of petitioners in his courtyard. Now, what d'you say? Don't you want him to be rich?
Grusha is silent.

The singer: Listen now to what the angry girl thought, but didn't say. He sings:

He who wears the shoes of gold
Tramples on the weak and old
Does evil all day long
And mocks at wrong.
O to carry as one's own
Heavy is the heart of stone.
The power to do ill
Wears out the will.

Hunger he will dread
Not those who go unfed:
Fear the fall of night
But not the light.

AZDAK: I think I understand you, woman.
GRUSH: I won't give him away. I've brought him up, and
he knows me.

Enter Shawa with the child.
THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE: It's in rags!
GRUSH: That's not true. I wasn't given the time to put on
his good shirt.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE: It's been in a pig-stye.
GRUSHA furious: I'm no pig, but there are others who are.
Where did you leave your child?

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE: I'll let you have it, you vulgar
person. She is about to throw herself on Grusha, but is restrained
by her lawyers. She's a criminal! She must be whipped! Right
away!

THE SECOND LAWYER holding his hand over her mouth: Most
gracious Natella Abashvili, you promised . . . Your
Worship, the plaintiff's nerves . . .

AZDAK: Plaintiff and defendant! The Court has listened to
your case, and has come to no decision as to who the real
mother of this child is. I as Judge have the duty of choosing
a mother for the child. I'll make a test. Shauva, get a piece
of chalk and draw a circle on the floor. Shauva does so. Now
place the child in the centre. Shauva puts Michael, who smiles
at Grusha, in the centre of the circle. Plaintiff and defendant,
stand near the circle, both of you. The Governor's wife and
Grusha step up to the circle. Now each of you take the child
by a hand. The true mother is she who has the strength to
pull the child out of the circle, towards herself.
THE SECOND LAWYER quickly: High Court of Justice, I protest! I object that the fate of the great Abashvili estates, which are bound up with the child as the heir, should be made dependent on such a doubtful wrestling match. Moreover, my client does not command the same physical strength as this person, who is accustomed to physical work.

AZDAK: She looks pretty well fed to me. Pull!

The Governor’s wife pulls the child out of the circle to her side. Grusha has let it go and stands aghast.

THE FIRST LAWYER congratulating the Governor’s wife: What did I say! The bonds of blood!

AZDAK to Grusha: What’s the matter with you? You didn’t pull!

GRUSHA: I didn’t hold on to him. She runs to Azdak. Your Worship, I take back everything I said against you. I ask your forgiveness. If I could just keep him until he can speak properly. He knows only a few words.

AZDAK: Don’t influence the Court! I bet you know only twenty yourself. All right, I’ll do the test once more, to make certain.

The two women take up positions again.

AZDAK: Pull!

Again Grusha lets go of the child.

GRUSHA in despair: I’ve brought him up! Am I to tear him to pieces? I can’t do it!

AZDAK rising: And in this manner the Court has established the true mother. To Grusha: Take your child and be off with it. I advise you not to stay in town with him. To the Governor’s wife: And you disappear before I fine you for fraud. Your estates fall to the city. A playground for children will be made out of them. They need one, and I have decided it shall be called after me—The Garden of Azdak.

The Governor’s wife has fainted and is carried out by the Adjutant. Her lawyers have preceded her. Grusha stands motionless. Shatma leads the child towards her.

AZDAK: Now I’ll take off this Judge’s robe—it has become
too hot for me. I’m not cut out for a hero. But I invite you all to a little farewell dance, outside on the meadow. Oh, I had almost forgotten something in my excitement. I haven’t signed the decree for divorce.

*Using the Judge’s seat as a table, he writes something on a piece of paper and prepares to leave. Dance music has started.*

*Shauva having read what is on the paper.* But that’s not right. You haven’t divorced the old couple. You’ve divorced Grusha from her husband.

**Azdak:** Have I divorced the wrong ones? I’m sorry, but it’ll have to stand. I never retract anything. If I did, there’d be no law and order. *To the old couple:* Instead, I’ll invite you to my feast. You won’t mind dancing with each other. *To Grusha and Simon:* I’ve still got 40 piastres coming from you.

**Simon pulling out his purse:** That’s cheap, Your Worship. And many thanks.

**Azdak pocketing the money:** I’ll need it.

**Grusha:** So we’d better leave town tonight, eh, Michael?

*About to take the child on her back.* *To Simon:* You like him?

**Simon taking the child on his back:** With my respects, I like him.

**Grusha:** And now I can tell you: I took him because on that Easter Sunday I got engaged to you. And so it is a child of love. Michael, let’s dance.

*She dances with Michael. Simon dances with the cook. The old couple dance with each other. Azdak stands lost in thought. The dancers soon hide him from view. Occasionally he is seen again, but less and less as more couples enter and join the dance.*

**The Singer**

And after this evening Azdak disappeared and was never seen again.

But the people of Grusinia did not forget him and often remembered

His time of Judgment as a brief Golden Age that was almost just.

*The dancing couples dance out. Azdak has disappeared.*
But you, who have listened to the story of the Chalk Circle
Take note of the meaning of the ancient song:
That what there is shall belong to those who are good for it, thus
The children to the maternal, that they thrive;
The carriages to good drivers, that they are driven well;
And the valley to the waterers, that it shall bear fruit.
Notes and Variants