

ACT III

A barn. Carts loaded with grain. The Imp as a Labourer. He is shovelling grain off the cart, and the Peasant is carrying it away in a measure.

LABOURER. Seven!

PEASANT. How many quarters?

LABOURER [looks at the numbers marked on the barn door] Twenty-six quarters. And this is the seventh bushel of the twenty-seventh quarter.

PEASANT. It won't all go in; the barn is nearly full!

LABOURER. Shovel it nice and even.

PEASANT. So I will.

Exit with measure.

LABOURER [alone, takes off his cap, his horns appear] It will be some time before he returns. I'll ease my horns a bit. [Horns rise] And I'll take my boots off too; I can't do it when he's here. [Takes his boots off, his hoofs appear. Sits on the threshold] It's the third year now.

It's near the time of reckoning. There's more corn than there's room for. Only one more thing left to teach him, and then let the Chief come and see for himself. I'll have something worth showing him! He'll forgive me for that crust!

Neighbour approaches. Labourer hides his horns and hoofs.

NEIGHBOUR. Good day to you.

LABOURER. The same to you.

NEIGHBOUR. Where's your master?

LABOURER. He's gone to spread the grain more even; it won't all go in.

NEIGHBOUR. Dear me, what a run of luck your master is having! More than he has room for? We're all amazed at the harvests your master has had these two years. It's as if some one had told him what was coming. Last year was a dry season, and he had sown in the bog. Others had no harvest, but your threshing ground was covered with sheaves! This year we've a rainy summer, and he's been sharp enough to sow on the hill. Everybody's corn has rotted, but you have a splendid harvest. What grain! Ah, what grain!

Takes some grain, weighs it in his hand, and chews it.

PEASANT [enters with empty measure] How d'ye do, neighbour?

NEIGHBOUR. Good day. I was saying to your man here, how well you managed

to guess where to sow your corn. Every one envies you. What heaps, what heaps of corn you have got! You'll not eat it all in ten years.

PEASANT. It's all thanks to Nicholas here. [Points to Labourer] It was his luck. Last year I sent him to plough, and what did he do but plough in the bog. I gave him a scolding, but he persuaded me to sow there. And so I did, and it turned out all for the best! And this year he again guessed right, and sowed on the hill!

NEIGHBOUR. It's as if he knew what kind of season it would be. Yes, you have got corn enough and no mistake! [Silence] And I have come to ask you to lend me a sack of rye. Ours is all used up. I'll return it next year.

PEASANT. All right, you may have it.

LABOURER [nudging the Peasant] Don't give it!

PEASANT. No more words about it. Take it.

NEIGHBOUR. Thank you. I'll just run and fetch a sack.

LABOURER [aside] He keeps to his old ways ... still goes on giving. He doesn't always obey me. But just wait a bit. He'll soon stop giving away.

Exit Neighbour.

PEASANT [sitting down on the threshold] Why should one not give to a good man?

LABOURER. Giving is one thing, getting back another! You know--

"It's a good world to lend in, a good world to spend in,

But to get back one's own, it's the worst world that's known."

That's what the old folk say.

PEASANT. Don't worry. We've plenty of corn.

LABOURER. Well, what of that?

PEASANT. We've enough, not only till next harvest but for two years ahead. What are we to do with it all?

LABOURER. What are we to do with it? I could make such stuff of this corn as would make you rejoice all the days of your life.

PEASANT. Why, what would you make of it?

LABOURER. A kind of drink. Drink, that would give you strength when you are weak, satisfy you when you are hungry, give you sleep when you are restless, make you merry when you're sad, give you courage when you're afraid. That's the drink I'd make!

PEASANT. Rubbish!

LABOURER. Rubbish indeed! It was just the same when I told you to sow in the bog, and then on the hill. You did not believe me then, but now you know! You'll find out about the drink the same way.

PEASANT. But what will you make it of?

LABOURER. Why, of this same corn.

PEASANT. But won't that be a sin?

LABOURER. Just hear him! Why should it be a sin? Everything is given for a joy to man.

PEASANT. And where did you get all your wisdom from, Nick? You seem a very ordinary man to look at, and hard-working too. Why, I don't remember you so much as ever taking your boots off all these two years

you've been with me. And yet you seem to know everything. Where did you learn it?

LABOURER. I've been about a good deal!

PEASANT. And so you say this drink will give one strength?

LABOURER. Just wait till you try it and see the good that comes of it.

PEASANT. And how are we to make it?

LABOURER. It's not hard to make when you know how! Only we shall want a copper and a couple of iron vessels.

PEASANT. And does it taste nice?

LABOURER. As sweet as honey. When once you've tasted it you'll never give it up.

PEASANT. Is that so? Well, I'll go to the neighbour's; he used to have a copper. We'll have a try!

Curtain.