

ACT IV

A barn. In the middle a closed copper on the fire, with another vessel, under which is a tap.

LABOURER [holds a tumbler under the tap and drinks the spirit] Well, master, it's ready now.

PEASANT [sitting on his heels and looking on] What a queer thing. Here's water coming out of the mixture. Why are you letting this water off first?

LABOURER. It's not water. It is the very stuff itself!

PEASANT. Why is it so clear? I thought it would be yellow like grain. This is just like water.

LABOURER. But you just smell it!

PEASANT. Ah, what a scent! Well, well, let's see what it's like in the mouth. Let me taste! [Tries to take the tumbler out of the Labourer's hand].

LABOURER. Mind, you'll spill it! [Turns the tap off, drinks and smacks his lips] It's ready! Here you are. Drink it!

PEASANT [drinks, first sipping, then taking more and more, till he empties the glass and gives it back] Now then, some more. One can't tell the taste from such a drop.

LABOURER [laughing] Well, you seem to like it! [Draws some more].

PEASANT [drinks] Eh, that's the sort! Let's call the missis. Hey, Martha! Come along! It's ready! Come on there!

Enter Wife and little girl.

WIFE. What's the matter? Why are you kicking up such a row?

PEASANT. You just taste what we've been distilling. [Hands her the glass] Smell! What does it smell of?

WIFE [smells] Dear me!

PEASANT. Drink!

WIFE. But perhaps it may do one some harm?

PEASANT. Drink, fool!

WIFE. True. It is nice!

PEASANT [a little tipsy] Nice indeed! You wait and see what'll happen. Nick says it drives all weariness out of one's bones. The young grow old. I mean, the old grow young. There now, I've only had two glasses of it, and all my bones have got easy. [Swaggers] You see? Wait a bit, when you and I drink it every day we'll grow young again! Come, Martha! [Embraces her].

WIFE. Get along. Why, it's made you quite silly.

PEASANT. There, you see! You said Nick and I were wasting the corn, but just see what stuff we've concocted. Eh? It's good, ain't it?

WIFE. Of course, it's good if it makes the old young again. Just see how jolly it has made you! And I feel jolly too! Now then, join in! Ah ... Ah ... Ah ... [Sings].

PEASANT. Yes, that's the way! We'll all be young, all young.

WIFE. We must call mother-in-law, for she's always sad and grumbling. She needs renewing. When she's younger she'll get kinder.

PEASANT [tipsy] Yes, call mother. Call her here, and grandfather too. I say, Mary, run and call your granny and great-grandfather. Tell him he must get down from the oven! We'll make him young again. Now then, quick! One, two, three, and away! Off like a shot! [Girl runs off. To

Wife] We'll have another glass.

Labourer fills and hands the glasses.

PEASANT [drinks] At first we got young at the top, in the tongue; then it went down into the arms. Now it has reached the feet. I feel my feet getting younger. They're moving of themselves. [Starts dancing].

WIFE [drinks] You're a real clever 'un, Nick! Now then, strike up!

Labourer takes a balaláyka[1] and plays. Peasant and Wife dance.

[1] The balaláyka is an instrument (generally three-stringed) used by Russian peasants, and answering to the negroes' banjo.

LABOURER [plays in the foreground of the scene, laughing and winking as he watches them. Then he leaves off playing, but they still continue to dance] You'll pay for that crust! You've done it now, my fine fellows. They'll never get out of it. The Chief can come when he likes now!

Enter a fresh-looking elderly woman, and a very old white-haired man, the Peasant's Grandfather.

GRANDFATHER. What's the matter? Have you gone mad? Dancing while every one else is at work!

WIFE [dances and claps her hands] Oh--Oh--Oh-- [Sings]

"That I'm sinning I will own,
Free from sin is God alone!"

OLD WOMAN. Oh, you wretch! The oven's not cleaned out yet, and here you are dancing!

PEASANT. Wait a bit, mother. See what has been happening here. We can make old people young again! Here you are! Just drink this! [Passes tumbler].

OLD WOMAN. There's plenty of water in the well. [Smells it] But what have you put in? My--what a smell!

PEASANT. You just drink it.

OLD WOMAN [tastes] Dear me! But won't one die of it?

WIFE. It will make you more alive. You'll grow young again!

OLD WOMAN. Nonsense! [Drinks] But it's nice! Better than our drinks. Here, father, have some too.

Grandfather sits down and shakes his head.

LABOURER. Never mind him. But granny must have another glass. [Hands some to the old woman].

OLD WOMAN. If only no harm comes of it. Oh dear, it does burn! But it is nice.

WIFE. Drink it! Then you'll feel it running through your veins.

OLD WOMAN. Well, I suppose I'll have to try. [Drinks].

WIFE. Has it reached your feet yet?

OLD WOMAN. True enough, it does run through you. I feel it here now! And it really makes one feel quite light. Come--give me some more. [Drinks again] Fine! Now I'm quite young again.

PEASANT. Didn't I tell you?

OLD WOMAN. Ah, it's a pity my old man is no longer here. He might have seen once more what I was like in my young days.

Labourer plays. Peasant and Wife dance.

OLD WOMAN [comes into the middle] Do you call that dancing? Let me show

you. [Dances] That's the way! Then like this, and like that! Do you see?

Grandfather goes up to the vessel and lets the spirit run out on to the ground.

PEASANT [notices and rushes at his Grandfather] What are you up to, you old fool? Spilling such fine stuff! Oh, you old dotard! [Pushes him away and holds tumbler under tap] You've emptied it all!

GRANDFATHER. It's evil and not good! God has sent you a good harvest for you to feed yourself and others, but you have turned the corn into devils' drink. No good will come of it. Give up this business. Else you'll perish and ruin others! You think this is drink? It's fire, and will burn you up! [Takes a brand from the fire and lights the spilt spirit. The spirit burns. They all look on with horror].

Curtain.