

ACT V

Interior of hut. The Labourer alone, his horns and hoofs showing.

LABOURER. There's lots of corn. More than there's room for, and he's now got a taste for it. We've been distilling again, and we've filled a barrel and hidden it away. We're not going to treat any one for nothing, but when we want to get something out of a fellow, then we'll treat him! So to-day I told him to invite the village elders and treat them, that they should divide up the property between him and his grandfather, and give everything to him and nothing to the old man! My three years are up to-day, and my work is finished. Let the Chief come and see for himself. I needn't be ashamed of his seeing it!

Chief appears out of the ground.

CHIEF. Time's up! Have you redeemed your bread-blunder? I told you I'd come and see for myself. Have you managed the Peasant?

LABOURER. Done him completely! Judge for yourself. Some of them will meet here soon. Get into the oven, and see what they'll do. You'll be well satisfied!

CHIEF [climbs into the oven] We'll see!

Enter the Peasant and four old men. The Wife follows. The men sit down round the table. The Wife lays the cloth, sets ox-foot brawn and pies on the table. The old men exchange greetings with Labourer.

FIRST ELDER. Well, have you made more of the drink?

LABOURER. Yes, we've distilled as much as we need. Why let valuable stuff be wasted?

SECOND ELDER. And is it a success?

LABOURER. Better than the first lot.

SECOND ELDER. But where did you learn to make it?

LABOURER. Going about in the world one learns many things!

THIRD ELDER. Yes, yes, you're a knowing fellow.

Wife brings spirits and glasses.

PEASANT. Have a drop!

Wife takes a decanter and fills glasses.

WIFE. Do us the honour!

FIRST ELDER [drinks] Your health! Ah, that's good. It runs right through all one's joints. That's what I call proper drink!

The other three Elders do the same. Chief gets out of the oven.

Labourer goes and stands by him.

LABOURER [to Chief] See what will happen now! I'll trip up the woman with my foot and she'll spill the liquor. Formerly he did not grudge his last crust, but now see what he'll do about a glass of spirits!

PEASANT. Now then, wife, fill again and hand it round in due order--first to our friend here, then to Daddy Michael.

Wife fills a glass and goes round the table. The Labourer trips her up; she stumbles and upsets the glass.

WIFE. Gracious goodness, I've spilt it! Why do you get in my way, confound you?

PEASANT [to Wife] There now, what a clumsy beast! Her fingers are all thumbs, and she goes swearing at others! See what fine stuff she goes spilling on the ground!

WIFE. I didn't do it on purpose.

PEASANT. On purpose indeed! Wait till I get up; I'll teach you how to pour spirits on the ground. [To Labourer] And you too, you confounded fool, what are you prancing round the table for? Go to the Devil!

Wife again fills and hands the glasses round.

LABOURER [goes back to the oven to the Chief] You see? Formerly he did not grudge his last crust, and now for a glass of spirits he nearly beat his wife and sent me to you--to the Devil!

CHIEF. It's good, very good! I'm satisfied.

LABOURER. You wait a bit. Let them empty the bottle--and you'll see what will happen. Even now they are giving each other smooth oily words; presently they'll start flattering each other,--as cunning as foxes.

PEASANT. Well, old friends, what's your opinion of my business? My grandfather has been living with me, and I have been feeding him and feeding him, and now he's gone to live with my uncle, and wants to take his share of the property and give it to uncle! Consider it well; you are wise men. We could as well do without our own heads as without you. There's no one in the whole village to come near you. Take you for example, Iván Fedótitch--doesn't every one say you're first among men? And as for me, I'll tell you the truth, Iván Fedótitch, I'm fonder of you than of my own father or mother. As for Michael Stepánitch, he's an old friend.

FIRST ELDER [to Peasant] It's good to talk with a good man. It's the way to get wisdom. It's just the same with you. One can't find any one to compare with you either.

SECOND ELDER. Wise and affectionate--that's what I like you for.

THIRD ELDER. You have my best sympathy. I can't find words to express it. I was saying to my old woman only to-day ...

FOURTH ELDER. A friend, a real friend!

LABOURER [nudges the Chief] Do you hear? All lies! They abuse one another behind their backs, but see how thick they are laying it on now,--like foxes wagging their tails! And it all comes from that drink.

CHIEF. That drink is good, very good! If they take to lying like that, they'll all be ours. Very good; I'm satisfied!

LABOURER. Wait a bit. When they've finished a second bottle it will be better still!

WIFE [serves] Do have another glass.

FIRST ELDER. Won't it be too much? Your health! [Drinks] It's pleasant to drink in the company of a good man.

SECOND ELDER. How can one help drinking? Health to the host and hostess!

THIRD ELDER. Friends, your health!

FOURTH ELDER. This is a brew of the right sort! Let's be merry! We'll arrange things for you. 'Cos it all depends on me!

FIRST ELDER. On you? No, not on you, but on what your seniors say.

FOURTH ELDER. My seniors are greater fools. Go where you came from!

SECOND ELDER. What are you up to now? You fool!

THIRD ELDER. It's true what he's saying! 'Cos why? The host is not entertaining us for nothing. He means business. The business can be arranged. Only you must stand treat! Show us due respect. 'Cos it's you as wants me, and not I you! You're own brother to the pig!

PEASANT. And you're itself! What are you yelling for? Think to surprise me? You are all good at stuffing yourselves!

FIRST ELDER. What are you giving yourself airs for? See if I don't twist your nose to one side!

PEASANT. We'll see whose nose will get twisted!

SECOND ELDER. Think yourself such a marvel? Go to the Devil! I won't speak to you--I'll go away!

PEASANT [holds him] What, will you break up the company?

SECOND ELDER. Let me go, or I'll call for help!

PEASANT. I won't! What right have you to ...?

SECOND ELDER. This right! [Beats him].

PEASANT [to the other Elders] Help me!

They fall on one another, and all speak at once.

FIRST ELDER. That's why. 'Cos it means we're all having a spree-ee!

SECOND ELDER. I can arrange everything!

THIRD ELDER. Let's have some more!

PEASANT [to Wife] Bring another bottle!

All sit round the table again and drink.

LABOURER [to Chief] Have you noticed? The wolf's blood in them was aroused, and they've turned as fierce as wolves.

CHIEF. The drink is good! I'm satisfied!

LABOURER. Wait a bit. Let them empty a third bottle. Things will be better still!

Curtain.