

KITCHEN  
A play by  
Maksym Kurochkin

Translated by John Freedman

*Note: this is a rough draft that will be workshopped at WordBRIDGE in  
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John Freedman  
Jfreed16@gmail.com  
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## **Characters**

Gunther - the owner of a castle

Kitchen-maid/Kriemhild

Hagen -- hatchet man, kitchen supervisor

Lazy/Attila

Novice/Siegfried

Tatyana/Brunhild

Chubby/Lawyer

Copperpot - senior potwasher

Young Copperpot - junior sister of the senior potwasher

Hot Chef

Cold Chef

Kolya Pillowplumper - an apprentice

Mama Valya - a cook

Savage Huns - emergency people

Question Mark - human curiosity personified

Guard

Hunters

TV set

## ACT I

KRIEMHILD

The heavens and earth have blessed my labor,  
How could it not be so?  
A princess by birth, I have known no privation,  
And the simplest of hobbies known to my sex  
Have never guided the ship of my days.  
I never once held a needle in hand.  
I never embroidered pillows of linen  
With colorful threads of words and dreams  
Like other young ladies do.  
The fame of the seamstress is not one I sought.  
But now a miracle comes to Kriemhild...  
These clever hands have sewn  
A morning star and a rising sun at night.  
A peppery flock of geese flies high,  
Here stands a lion with a golden mane.  
Kriemhild! You are a loving wife. And that is why  
You stitched this symphony of water lilies  
And braided in such delicate designs  
Of heather, vines and thistle flowers...  
Kriemhild! You are a loving wife! Siegfried  
Is your king. I kiss the name  
Forever more - Siegfried! Siegfried! Siegfried!

*Enter HAGEN.*

HAGEN

*(To himself.)*

O how I hate that sound. *(Aloud.)* Kriemhild,  
Hello!

KRIEMHILD

*(Frightened.)*

Who's there?

HAGEN

Your ancient friend.

KRIEMHILD

Hagen? You frightened me.

HAGEN

I don't believe my eyes, Kriemhild.  
A needle and a thread?

KRIEMHILD

Hard to believe it.

But I sewed Siegfried a shirt.  
And the grumpiest old seamstress  
Even showered my work with praise.

HAGEN

'Tis dazzling work, I'll say.

KRIEMHILD

My hands had never held a needle.  
A miracle, indeed. Just you imagine...  
Not once did I prick a finger,  
Nor miss or drop a stitch,  
Nor fray so much as one fine thread.

HAGEN

One envies Siegfried.

KRIEMHILD

I want these charming figures here  
To turn back every arrow and spear.  
May they dare not hurt my husband.  
Every sign I sewed was whispered to me by the wind,  
Hinted by the secret skills of the wisest wives of Burgundy.

HAGEN

But what's the point? Siegfried is indestructible.  
We know the tale of how he bathed himself  
In dragon's blood  
And thus became immune  
To every thrust or blow.  
He does not fear the bloodiest wound  
Delivered by the sharpest iron mace.  
Your husband wears a skin of armor.

KRIEMHILD

And yet can be laid low.  
For when the wounded serpent gushed  
A bloody fountain and bathed my daring hero,  
A tiny leaf kicked up in the bedlam of the battle,  
Clung to his spine, and stole my peace for evermore.

HAGEN

*(Unable to hide his joy.)*

I thought that was a lie.

KRIEMHILD

No, it is the truth.  
In the tiny spot that shiv'ring leaf  
Came to rest upon his back,  
The shield Siegfried wears  
Is interrupted e'er so slightly.  
O damnéd leaf!

None did who could destroy you:  
Hordes of hungry caterpillars,  
Nocturnal frost or raging forest fires.

HAGEN

Where did you say that leaf, it came to rest?

KRIEMHILD

What's it to you?

HAGEN

I have my pressing reasons.

KRIEMHILD

My husband and I alone, we know that spot.  
Upon my honor as a princess  
And upon a weighty sword I swore  
To keep this secret forever and day.

HAGEN

Farewell then. My men await me at the hunt.  
A vicious beast roams the woods of Burgundy.  
He is angry, treacherous and mad.  
We bet your Siegfried: Who among us  
Would be the first to slay the rabid monster.

KRIEMHILD

My prayers are with you...

HAGEN

*(Under his breath.)*

I doubt with me.  
*(To Kriemhild.)* And now goodbye.

KRIEMHILD

What did you want?

HAGEN

Not to frighten you, Kriemhild -

KRIEMHILD

But still -

HAGEN

Siegfried, the man you love -

KRIEMHILD

He what?

HAGEN

He's alive and well.  
As ever, protected by his armor,

Rivals he has none.  
In any fight  
Against the worthiest foe  
He'll return a hundred blows  
For every one he takes.

KRIEMHILD

Then what's your worry? Say so quick.

HAGEN

In the darkest forest we chased the beast  
And happened on a den of thieves.  
From their perches in the tops of trees  
They fire on all who pass on foot - or ride on horses.  
It's a terrible greeting.  
Rather like the attack of a million vicious bees.

*Pause.*

My master huntsman died yesterday in the wood.

KRIEMHILD

An arrow brought him down?

HAGEN

An arrow? You jest, my Queen.  
Five thousand arrows did the job -  
They are still sticking out of my man's back.

KRIEMHILD

His back, you say?

HAGEN

Farewell.

KRIEMHILD

But wait!  
What if I told you where death's window lies?

HAGEN

Then could I keep him safely covered.  
His living shield I could be  
To keep the dirty dogs at bay!  
But only if I knew of Siegfried's weakness.

KRIEMHILD

O, the stinging pincers of my oath -  
I'm suffocating.  
Siegfried! My dearly loved husband!  
What is your silly wife to do?  
How may I slay the vulture of misfortune?  
How do I spy the enemy in mask?

HAGEN

Be quick about it, timid wife.  
The trumpets call. The hunt is on.  
I must go.

KRIEMHILD

No, wait, I pray thee.  
Kriemhild has been convinced.  
Your steely loyalty has won me, Hagen.  
I'll do it. Pray teach me what to do.

HAGEN

Give your spouse the shirt that you have made him.  
And have him wear it to the hunt.  
First, however, sew a tiny little cross  
Right on the spot the leaf left leave for death.  
Make haste, Kriemhild!

*Exit HAGEN.*

KRIEMHILD

*(Sewing on the cross.)*

Bad knots.  
Unruly thread.. My needle taunts my will.  
But there. The cross is sewn.

*Enter SIEGFRIED.*

SIEGFRIED

How do you do, Kriemhild?

KRIEMHILD

Siegfried?

SIEGFRIED

If he, to whom you declared your love, goes by the name of Siegfried,  
then it is I who answers to that name. What's that upon your finger?  
Blood?

KRIEMHILD

Blood?

SIEGFRIED

You must have pricked your finger.

KRIEMHILD

Pricked my finger?

SIEGFRIED

O, day of wonders!  
My Kriemhild is an echo!

Awake, my wife!  
I've come to say goodbye.

KRIEMHILD  
So soon? So quickly?

SIEGFRIED  
What happened to your pretty little head?  
What turns your words into a jumble?  
What thief has stolen my queen's thoughts?

KRIEMHILD  
'Twas yesterday you swore my lap  
Could never lap up all that you desire.  
But that was yesterday. (*Looks in a mirror.*)  
O, poor Kriemhild.  
Your husband leaves you for a pack of hunting hounds.

SIEGFRIED  
That isn't fair, my love.

KRIEMHILD  
Forgive your wife. For you she is prepared  
To be a lowly vendor, the Scythian muse of gossip,  
A grumpy shrew, a dirty witch's broom,  
A hissing, hideous crocodile,  
If only you would leave the hunt.  
She had a dream!

SIEGFRIED  
Leave the dreams and fears 'til later.

KRIEMHILD  
I dreamed that you were crushed between two mountains.

SIEGFRIED  
You promised me a new embroidered shirt.

KRIEMHILD  
Stay home, Siegfried.

SIEGFRIED  
Brunhild, you know -

KRIEMHILD  
What about Brunhild?

SIEGFRIED  
Simply that her husband is a lucky man.  
The King of Burgundy goes out to hunt  
In a cloak Brunhild has fashioned.  
To please her Gunther she gave up sleep,

She scorned the wending world of dreams,  
And stitched a cloak with busy hands.

KRIEMHILD

Brunhild is a witch.

SIEGFRIED

That just might be.  
But look outside the window!  
You see those beggars there?  
A teeming army of sightless cripples.  
What brought them here at this bright hour  
To the royal palace yard?  
Scraps from the table of the King?  
News that alms are to be offered?  
The hope of being healed?  
No, my wife!  
Just as a helpless pup finds the bitch's teat  
And blades of grass stretch up towards the sun,  
The sightless sockets of these beggars  
Strive to drink the wine of warmth and light.  
Their blackened eyes divined your splendid work,  
Your work lamp shone out in the dark.  
A purple cloak - the true gift of a queen -  
But mark me, I pray, no violet design  
Nor witch's signs, nor rubies set in silk  
Shall ever make Brunhild eclipse  
The beauty of my darling wife.

KRIEMHILD

All right. You win.  
Take your shirt,  
The gift your Kriemhild promised.  
And what will be will be.

SIEGFRIED

A miracle is this,  
More splendid than any I have ever heard  
By any earthly name.  
Such celestial gardens. Such unicorns  
Against an azure sky... Such fields and hills  
Such towns and rivers...  
Such tribes as you or I could never know...  
It's all right here.  
Kriemhild, your art surpasses all the arts  
Of all the other gloried wives.

KRIEMHILD

The trumpets call.  
Go forth, courageous knight.  
Fly to wake the sleepy spirits of the wood,  
To knock at pinecones high up in the trees,

Your steed to trample under kingdoms made of ants.  
And when you whistle may the giant,  
Blue-haired bison and wild, furry bears  
Resigned to fickle fate come at your beck and call  
From out the brooding, wily wood.  
I trust your hunt shall bear a feast.  
May joy and bliss dance on your shining spear.  
And should you wish to rest  
In dappled sun amidst the forest green,  
I pray a wild goose shall spread its mighty wings  
And fan the sweat that gathers on your heated brow.  
Return alive.

SIEGFRIED

I kiss the cross - I shall return. (*Leaves.*)

*A kitchen in a medieval castle. COPPERPOT washes silverware with disgust. The remainder of the Kitchen People prepare a wedding dinner.*

COPPERPOT

(*Angrily*)

A wedding, you say? A wedding? What wedding? Why in the kitchen? Why today? Can anybody tell me that - why?

*No one hurries to answer*

I'm not even talking about this specific wedding. Screw it. I just sincerely want to know - what the hell? You know how many weddings we've done? Huh? Because everybody knows perfectly well what's going on. So why, then? I can understand exceptions - I might be faithful myself someday. If I ever get married it's for better or for worse. But there is such a thing as karma. And there is still the unsolved matter of premarital fidelity - fidelity to whom is what I want to know. The Prince? No, it's this specific thing today I'm talking about. I've had it with all that philosophy bullshit - I want life. Where's there life? Life outside the bounds. You know, on the side. I don't care what you say about me. You know, you can say whatever you want. Take Pillowplumper here - who cares about him? Pillowplumper!

KOLYA PILLOWPLUMPER

Huh?

COPPERPOT

Who cares about you?

KOLYA PILLOWPLUMPER

(*Embarrassed*)

Uh -

COPPERPOT

Duh! Nobody cares about you. Take my sister, for example. Where is she I'd like to know? I don't mean "where" in the grand sense. I mean, where is she?

MAMA VALYA

Went to make a phone call.

COPPERPOT

What the hell does "phone call" have to do with her express duties here? Ah?! (*Confidentially.*) My sister is a spoon washer.

HOT CHEF

But really - what the hell is this weird wedding?

*Enter YOUNG COPPERPOT*

COPPERPOT

Speaking of the devil. Where were you, sweetie pie?

YOUNG COPPERPOT

Went to make a phone call.

COPPERPOT

A phone call. You know what this is called? (*Holds up a long-handled fork.*)

YOUNG COPPERPOT

A fork.

COPPERPOT

A fork for what?

YOUNG COPPERPOT

Fer - I dunno.

COPPERPOT

*(To her sister.)*

This is a fork for a cheese plate. When you get it through your pretty little head that this is a fork for a cheese plate, then you can go make phone calls. Call yourself silly for all I care. That'll be your business, then. But until then, sister Sue, keep the nose to the grindstone. I have no intention of being demoted back to spoon washer because of you. (*Removes her rubber gloves.*)

YOUNG COPPERPOT

I'm not a spoon washer.

COPPERPOT

You are a spoon washer, sister Sue. Don't talk back to me.

*Hands her rubber gloves to her sister. Pillowplumper dumps a huge container of dirty silverware in front of YOUNG COPPERPOT. The poor, lovelorn spoon washer sets to work.*

*(Taking pity on her sister.)* Don't take it to heart, Lucy. It's for your own good. Who were you calling?

YOUNG COPPERPOT *is* mum.

That soldier? Don't tell me - it's written all over your face. *(Runs out of pity.)* I don't even know how I'm going to talk to her after that.

HOT CHEF

Why don't you cut your sister some slack? She might have feelings, you know. Maybe she's in love.

COPPERPOT

What the hell could she possibly love? She's got nothing but that moron soldier in her head. That guy is a wreck of an individual. What stimulation could he possibly give her? She's a grown girl and she can't tell a sauce plate from a sugar dish. What the hell you gonna do with a soldier? Learn something first then go thinking about soldiers. Yeah you, scarecrow.

YOUNG COPPERPOT

He promised to marry me.

COPPERPOT

*(Choked with indignation.)*

I'll show him marriage. I'll take care of him. You're too young to get married. You gotta grow a brain first.

YOUNG COPPERPOT

But I have a kind heart, Marina.

COPPERPOT

Don't go casting aspersions on my biological makeup. Kind-hearted. If you're so kind-hearted how come you're so stupid? Huh? I'll tell you why. Because you can afford to be. Because I'm right here beside you. I take care of you. I think of everything. You've got nothing to worry about. I'll bet you think I enjoy seeing to it that you don't get used and insulted.

YOUNG COPPERPOT

I wish somebody would use me.

COPPERPOT

So that's how you pay me back for all my good deeds. *(Weeps.)*

YOUNG COPPERPOT

*(Runs to her sister.)*

Marina, sweetheart, forgive me.

COPPERPOT

Weddings, weddings, weddings. Everybody's gone nuts. (*Dries her tears.*) Now people are tying the knot in kitchens. And you know - it was some idiot among us who had this bright idea. Whoever it is, he ain't talking. Don't you wonder who it is? Come on, out with it.

HOT CHEF

I have a daughter. I don't have time for weddings.

COLD CHEF

I'm still sowing wild oats.

COPPERPOT

Mama Valya?

MAMA VALYA

Why so ironic?

COPPERPOT

Maybe you, Nadya?

*All exchange smiles. KITCHEN-MAID doesn't realize at first they're talking about her.*

MAMA VALYA

Are you getting married, Nadya?

KITCHEN-MAID

Oh yes. Here's my fiancé. (*Shows her mop.*)

COPPERPOT

Yeah right. Then it's down to me, sister Sue... So, who else is there? Oh yes, the comedian. Where is he, by the way?

MAMA VALYA

Sleeping, as always.

COPPERPOT

I hate that about comedians - they're always inscrutable. They just blend into the woodwork until they screw up their face - then everybody's all attention. Why is that? I'm painting pictures here, telling stories, kicking up dust - but I'm no comedian. He's off sleeping somewhere, but he's a comedian. Is that fair?

KITCHEN-MAID

You're talking nonsense.

COPPERPOT

The only thing worse than a comedian is a kitchen-maid. The scourge of the earth. If I had my way, I'd have you all exterminated.

KITCHEN-MAID

Then you'd be living up to your neck in dirt.

COPPERPOT

Don't give me that. All the trash in the world comes from you kitchen-maids. Hey, comedian! Rise and shine.

*Stretching his arms, LAZY appears from beneath the counter.*

LAZY

Good morning.

COPPERPOT

*(Enunciates distinctly)*

After what happened yesterday - I'm not - talking to you!  
*(Demonstratively ignores LAZY. Chats warmly with the rest of the Kitchen People.)* You should have seen the accident Lucy and I came across today!

YOUNG COPPERPOT

*(Gaily.)*

Oh yeah.

COPPERPOT

We're heading to the subway and there was this bus on the corner, and a - you know - what do you call it?

YOUNG COPPERPOT

A car.

COPPERPOT

Yeah, a car. Smack head on! It even made us late.

YOUNG COPPERPOT

Until we got our fill of it we couldn't tear ourselves away.

MAMA VALYA

*(The cook's voice drips with profound emotion.)*

Were there casualties?

COPPERPOT

*(Boldly.)*

None!

*Her sister nods affirmatively.*

Only the driver got killed. But there weren't any casualties. *(As if providing important information to her attentive colleagues.)* And that basically is about it.

*Disappointed, her colleagues disperse.*

LAZY

*(Whispers to HOT CHEF)*

Peter, how go things with the gods of pilgrimage?

HOT CHEF

I don't solicit trips but I don't turn them down, either.

LAZY

What do you say we put together a little itinerary?

HOT CHEF

Can't do that without a map.

LAZY

And there's no need to. I took care of everything yesterday. Pinched one from the peons in the wait staff. *(Unfolds a huge wine map.)* Oh my my! Puny little atlas, isn't it?

HOT CHEF

It's all we've got.

LAZY

It'll have to do. We are hostages to circumstance.

HOT CHEF

Slaves of destiny.

LAZY

Shh! Someone might hear.

HOT CHEF

They already do. *(Nods at MAMA VALYA who industriously scrubs vegetables not far from the "travelers.")*

LAZY

Forget about it.

HOT CHEF

Forget about it.

*LAZY fiddles with the map.*

*(Again looks about conspiratorially.)* I see you are a geographer.

LAZY

I prefer "pilgrim," if you don't mind.

HOT CHEF

Ah, yes. Pilgrim.

LAZY

Or at least "nomad."

HOT CHEF

No no. Pilgrim it is.

LAZY

As you wish. You know this whole game of names has something Oriental to it. I try to disabuse myself of that. As for what the hell to expect from life - expect the worst. You give someone the moniker of Cosmic Challenger and they're pissed because they're a challenger and not the heavyweight Universal Champion. As such, I prefer to remain without sobriquets. It's less unnerving and more practical as regards the delicate objectives.

HOT CHEF

As for objectives - what is yours?

LAZY

Let's not get bogged down in objectives. My purposes are anti-humanist. (*Closes his eyes and pokes blindly at the wine map. Opens his eyes.*) What say ye of Burgundy?

HOT CHEF

Burgundy?

LAZY

Burgundy.

HOT CHEF

An important region.

LAZY

Important, is it?

HOT CHEF

Quite.

LAZY

What in Burgundy do you suggest we - take in?

HOT CHEF

Well, let's see, if your objective is didactic -

LAZY

That's putting it lightly.

HOT CHEF

Then there are four regions worthy of note: Côte du Rhône, Alsace, Bordeaux and Burgundy, and then the sub-regions of Languedoc Roussillon, Loire and Beaujolais.

LAZY

Let me remind you I am of Oriental heritage. I find it difficult to keep my focus. What I need are specific - uh, landmarks.

HOT CHEF

If we are interested in the finer impressions, then I would recommend something in the category of Grand Cru. Specifically, Corton Bressand. Grand Cru. Domaine Jacques Prieur. (*Certain no one is listening.*) Yield of '92.

LAZY

I'm afraid that impression may be a bit too fine for me. You don't happen to have anything simpler, do you? Something - (*sees MAMA VALYA approaching*) pungent.

HOT CHEF

That would be Aligoté.

LAZY

Sounds like something from the swamps. Can't you suggest anything simpler?

HOT CHEF

You mean simpler yet?

LAZY

Don't get me wrong. I've come a long way for this Burgundy of yours. Watery obstacles. Savage tribes. Scurvy. The path I traveled is littered with the bleached bones of fallen steeds. Buzzard bait. The bitter smell of conquered nations. Intrigues. All this stuff tires you out.

HOT CHEF

The comedian's at it again!

LAZY

I really would like some interesting impressions. You know, see something and just lose it. I crave the madness of color. Subtle interaction of shadings. Lunar intuition. Fields sown with millions of daisies and mysterious oaks. My soul yearns for that. You know?

HOT CHEF

We don't trade in two-buck-chuck. (*After a short pause.*) But we can order some.

LAZY

Do that for me, will you?

HOT CHEF

Kolya. Komm zu mir.

KOLYA PILLOWPLUMPER

(*Unhappy.*)

How many? Three?

HOT CHEF

Two's enough.

KOLYA PILLOWPLUMPER

I'm not going again.

LAZY

Three.

*KOLYA PILLOWPLUMPER takes a bag and goes after the two-buck-chuck.*

COPPERPOT

Where's he going?

KOLYA PILLOWPLUMPER

For some two-buck-chuck.

COPPERPOT

Did I say you could go?

LAZY

How gauche.

MAMA VALYA

Now, now boys. Hold on. Pleasure is the bait of sin.

*LAZY and HOT CHEF are indignant.*

HOT CHEF and LAZY

*(Simultaneously and interrupting each other.)*

Oh my my - a grown woman - an elderly woman - and she's at it too. Oh my my - pleasure, sin - did you hear that? Oh, I heard, I heard. Oh my my - you should be ashamed - oh Lord, oh my - pleasure, sin - oh my my, oh my Lord -

MAMA VALYA

The least you could do is set the silverware.

LAZY

What silverware?!

HOT CHEF

You hear that, Kolya?

KOLYA PILLOWPLUMPER

I heard. Kolya go here. Kolya go there. Kolya's no monkey's ass. Kolya's an apprentice. *(Muttering, goes out for the two-buck-chuck.)*

LAZY

*(Impressed by what he's heard - to HOT CHEF.)*

Maybe some Grand Cru?

HOT CHEF

Grand Cru coming up. (*Brings LAZY an opened bottle of Burgundy.*)

LAZY

(*Shakes the bottle well.*)

Grand Cru? Coo-coo. (*Lifts the bottle to his lips.*) Hey, not bad! (*Happier.*) What might an enigmatic individual do while waiting in anticipation of life-sustaining fluids?

COPPERPOT

It might not be a bad idea for an enigmatic skunk waiting in anticipation of some vile rotgut to peel a pound or two of carrots.

MAMA VALYA

Yeah, carrots. Could use some o' them.

LAZY

I will not peel carrots.

COPPERPOT

And why is that? Big-time comedian, are you?

LAZY

Being a big-time comedian has nothing to do with it. All the more so because I don't consider myself a comedian at all. That's what you keep calling me.

COPPERPOT

Then why?

LAZY

Because I don't know how to peel carrots.

MAMA VALYA

What do you know how to do?

LAZY

Madame, I cannot say I sufficiently esteem you as an interlocutor so as to articulate my capabilities in such a lowly exchange.

MAMA VALYA

(*To COPPERPOT.*)

What did he say?

COPPERPOT

He's being cheeky.

MAMA VALYA

(*To LAZY.*)

Are you being cheeky?

LAZY

That I am not. I'm telling you the truth. Do you recognize the difference? Okay. Let's say I have the power to divine the future. That's for starters.

YOUNG COPPERPOT

*(Extends her open palm.)*

Tell my fortune, please.

LAZY

Young lady, I don't believe we have been introduced. I shall not tell your future.

YOUNG COPPERPOT

*(Upset.)*

Why not?

LAZY

Small pickings, sweetheart. I deal in phenomena of global importance. The gift doesn't work on unexceptional individuals. The one thing I can say, Lucy? You will share the common destiny.

YOUNG COPPERPOT

What do you mean "common"? *(Offended.)* I don't accept that. I want to get married.

COPPERPOT

*(To her sister.)*

Calm down. *(To LAZY.)* Okay, so what do you have up your sleeve on a global scale? Can you conjure up disasters?

LAZY

In essence I am a disaster -

COPPERPOT

Well that's obvious. Got anything better than that?

LAZY

*(Slightly offended.)*

Sure. How about this?

*Enter NOVICE at a run.*

NOVICE

Good evening.

HOT CHEF

Hey.

MAMA VALYA

Ooh, a new one. Cute.

COPPERPOT

This is your disaster?

NOVICE

Where can I hide?

MAMA VALYA

Who are you, anyway?

NOVICE

*(Honestly.)*

I don't know.

HOT CHEF

Unique.

NOVICE

I mean I have suspicions, but I'm not certain.

COPPERPOT

What d'you come barging in here for? This is a kitchen. It's off limits.

HOT CHEF

Oh, come on, Marina. Can't you see the boy's a dimwit? Hey, boy - you a dimwit?

NOVICE

It's entirely possible. *(Glances around furtively.)* Where can I hide?

MAMA VALYA

What happened? Is somebody chasing you?

NOVICE

If somebody shouts, "Halt!" - does that mean they're chasing you?

MAMA VALYA

*(To COPPERPOT.)*

What do you think, Marina?

COPPERPOT

I think - I think it depends on who shouts it.

MAMA VALYA

Who was shouting it?

NOVICE

I don't know.

COPPERPOT

Man or woman?

NOVICE

First a woman, then a man.

MAMA VALYA

How did they shout it? "Halt!" and that was all?

NOVICE

The woman shouted, "Halt, where are you going?" and the man just shouted "Halt!"

COPPERPOT

Were they both shouting at the same time?

NOVICE

No. First the woman shouted. Then when I got up from the bed -

COPPERPOT

What bed?

MAMA VALYA

He got up out of his own bed. What are you asking the boy stupid questions for?

NOVICE

No. Her bed.

COPPERPOT

*(Haughtily, to MAMA VALYA.)*

You see?

MAMA VALYA

*(To NOVICE.)*

Listen dimwit, maybe you're not a dimwit?

NOVICE

I can't say.

COPPERPOT

Let's put it to the test. *(To NOVICE.)* You know how to kiss?

NOVICE

Maybe. Just let me refresh my memory.

COPPERPOT

All right. Shall we get fresh?

NOVICE

Okay.

*For some reason COPPERPOT keeps rubbing her hands and wiping her lips and then rubbing her hands again. Hesitantly comes within one step of NOVICE.*

COPPERPOT

Oh, Lucy, you do it. *(Pushes her sister into NOVICE's arms.)*

*The two kiss. After a moment of confusion, NOVICE beckons to YOUNG COPPERPOT and begins to treat her more brashly than decorum allows. COPPERPOT tries to pull her sister free of NOVICE. Finally she succeeds.*

*(Forcefully.)* Idiot. Maybe.

HOT CHEF

What are we going to do with him?

NOVICE

Hide me. I can sense he's near.

*They hide NOVICE. Enter HAGEN. He silently walks around the perimeter of the kitchen. Stops before LAZY.*

HAGEN

You?

LAZY

Perhaps. Considering what "I" means.

MAMA VALYA

*(Approaches holding a spoon.)*

Need more salt, sir?

HAGEN

*(Tastes.)*

No. *(Pause.)* Yes.

MAMA VALYA

*(In a forced voice.)*

What a help you are! *(Gestures to LAZY as if to say, "Call if you need me." Goes back to her place.)*

HAGEN

*(To LAZY.)*

I'm waiting.

LAZY

My pleasure. My origin is uncertain. There are several theories about that -

HAGEN

I don't care about your origin.

LAZY

Now that's a mistake. My origin is the key to everything. But if you aren't interested in my origin, let's talk about my upbringing. My education was overseen by people who were psychologically unbalanced and who were prone to marauding and mayhem -

HAGEN

What were you doing in her bedroom?

LAZY

Pardon me? Whose bedroom?

*HAGEN looks at the others in the kitchen with disdain and whispers in LAZY's ear.*

No, no. No, Hagen. No. It's true I am a man of pre-Christian morality but the mere notion of me with our dear, beloved king's wife - No. You're confusing me with someone. She's not my kind of woman, anyway. I would be more inclined to play house - *(looks over those present)* with Nadya. Nadya, shall we play house?

KITCHEN-MAID

Who are you to play house with me?! You aren't worth the ground I walk on.

COPPERPOT

The old hag's lost it.

LAZY

You see, Hagen? And you say - "bedroom." Queens don't love me. They don't and that's it.

COPPERPOT

*(Playfully.)*

I think you underestimate yourself.

LAZY

Marina. I'm talking about royalty.

COPPERPOT

Hagen, sir. Tell him he's in our way. When he's sober he's all gentleman: "Lovely Marina." "Sweet Copperpot." But when he's drunk all he's good for is sleeping under the counter. The kid lost interest in the finer things way too young.

*LAZY's only response is to bare his teeth.*

HAGEN

I saw you run out of the bedroom.

LAZY

That wasn't I.

HAGEN  
I shouted at you.

LAZY  
It wasn't I you shouted at.

HAGEN  
*(Growing angry.)*  
Listen, comic -

LAZY  
*(Interrupts.)*  
I am not a comedian.

HAGEN  
*(Slowly.)*  
Gunther told me you're a comedian. So that means you're a comedian.

LAZY  
What if he told you I'm a horse?

HAGEN  
If Gunther told me you were a horse, you would now be standing in a corral.

LAZY  
Listen to what you're saying. "Horse." "Corral." That makes sense. "Comedian." "Kitchen." What's that supposed to be about? If I were a comedian I wouldn't live in a kitchen. I'd be down at the bar.

COPPERPOT  
We don't have a bar here.

LAZY  
No bar. Ergo no comedian. *(Points a finger skyward.)* Logic!

*Enter NOVICE.*

NOVICE  
*(Happily, to LAZY.)*  
You too? You love logic, too?

LAZY  
Stupid idiot. *(Looks around. Sits next to MAMA VALYA. Twirls a carrot in his fingers. Begins peeling it in disgust, as if he were cleaning a mud-crusted horse's hoof.)*

*NOVICE is perplexed. Hagen stares at him.*

HAGEN

Do I know you?

NOVICE

How can you possibly know anything if you don't know yourself.  
(*Sadly.*) It's such a fine science, logic. (*To HAGEN.*) Did you ask me something?

HAGEN

(*Almost whispering.*)

What were you doing in Mrs. Tatyana's bedroom?

NOVICE

(*Becoming animated.*)

Oh, I love riddles! Wait a minute, wait a minute - don't tell me.  
(*Begins deciphering the riddle by logic.*) "Bedroom" - is a word coming from "bed." Hence, a "bedroom" denotes a room with a bed. If you suggest that I was in Mrs. Tatyana's bed room, then it follows - (*excitedly solves the riddle*) that I was in Mrs. Tatyana's bed! Logical?!

HAGEN

Keep it down.

TATYANA

(*Entering the room.*)

Speak up, young man! (*Walks right up to NOVICE.*) What did you say? What were you doing in my room?

NOVICE

(*Frightened.*)

I was in your bed.

TATYANA

In my bed! He was in my bed! (*To all.*) You heard that! Did you hear that? He was in my bed! (*Enunciates loudly.*) If only you were in my bed. You weren't in my bed. You were splayed out dead asleep in my bed! (*Walks about. Angrily. Expects the COPPERPOT sisters to understand.*) I have been married for 19 years and I am a free woman - you understand me. I was lying on the sofa reading a picture book and waiting for my lawyer. (*Enigmatically.*) Squeak! (*Looks out over the audience.*) A door! I begin to feel anxious. This guy comes in. I begin continuing to feel anxious and he looks at me. Now I'm totally anxiety-ridden. He comes up to me. He sits down. He lies down. He falls dead asleep! How are you ever going to trust your feelings again after that?

COPPERPOT

Do I ever know what you're talking about, Mrs. Tatyana.

TATYANA

I wake him up. He jumps up and runs away.

COPPERPOT

Oh, how like them that is. Yesterday I had this -

TATYANA

*(On her way out. To the COPPERPOT sisters.)*

I have a blouse for you.

COPPERPOT and YOUNG COPPERPOT

*(In tandem.)*

Oh, thank you, Mrs. Tatyana.

HAGEN

*(To TATYANA as she leaves.)*

Do you know him?

TATYANA

Who? This dimwit? Never seen him before today. *(Melting momentarily.)*  
He does remind me of one young - *(falls silent.)* No. It's not him.  
That one was no fool. Oooh, that one was no fool at all.

*Enter GUARD and CHUBBY. Chubby is loaded down with a briefcase, champagne and a bouquet of flowers.*

GUARD

Someone to see you, Mrs. Tatyana.

*TATYANA is transformed. She walks to CHUBBY a genuine lioness.*

TATYANA

Yarik, sweetie!

CHUBBY

*(Kissing her hand.)*

Tanya, darling!

TATYANA

I've so been waiting for you. *(Permits herself to acknowledge the bouquet.)* Is that for me? What's the occasion?

CHUBBY

It has been exactly ten days since I was given the honor of being your representative.

TATYANA

You're an interesting man, Yarik. Do you like bedrooms?

CHUBBY

*(Taken aback.)*

What?

TATYANA

Oh, nothing. Won't you come up to my quarters? (*Over her shoulder, to HOT CHEF.*) I'll not be having dinner. (*Leaves.*)

HAGEN

(*To TATYANA as she leaves.*)

What about the wedding, Mrs. Tatyana?

TATYANA

What wedding? I have business in town today. (*Leaves for good, trailing loud cascades of laughter behind her.*)

MAMA VALYA

By the way, sir, since you are a co-defendant here -

HAGEN

A confidant -

MAMA VALYA

...That's what I said - you know everything. What wedding? Who are we marrying off?

HAGEN

(*Not without bitterness.*)

I don't know.

COPPERPOT

You're aging, sir. Losing your touch.

HAGEN

If you're so brave, ask Gunther yourself.

COPPERPOT

You want me to? Why not? This Gunther guy - who is this Gunther? You think I haven't seen a million Gunthers? I'll out-Gunther any Gunther you show me. He's got a screw loose, that's for sure. Thinks he's doing me a big favor seating me at the table with him. If that's such a big favor, how come he sent all the waiters home? Who's going to wait on me? I want this thing on the up-and-up. I don't need anybody's handouts. My profession keeps me fed. Well, my profession doesn't keep me fed. It's my approach to it that does. I've got a good approach. If you want to know, I coulda nabbed this guy 300 times by now. Easy. The time just hasn't been right.

*Enter GUNTHER.*

GUNTHER

There was no time.

COPPERPOT

There was no time - (*realizing who has entered, she grins stupidly.*)  
Hel-l-o-o.

GUNTHER

*(In an unexpectedly strong, authoritative voice.)*

Ladies and gentlemen, I would ask a moment of your attention. I have raised the drawbridge. Until Miss Nadya marries, no one is leaving this castle. Thank you. *(Leaves.)*

MAMA VALYA

*(To NADYA.)*

Cat got your tongue?

KITCHEN-MAID

Don't you worry. I can't get married anyway.

COPPERPOT

Why's that?

KITCHEN-MAID

First of all, because he's no match for me -

MAMA VALYA

Who's no match for you?

KITCHEN-MAID

Nobody's a match for me. And second of all, I already have a husband.

MAMA VALYA

I thought you were a widow.

KITCHEN-MAID

*(Being agreeable.)*

I am.

MAMA VALYA

Then what do you mean?

KITCHEN-MAID

I don't know.

MAMA VALYA

*(Sighs.)*

Oh, don't our sins weigh heavy on us.

HOT CHEF

*(To HAGEN.)*

Would you just explain one thing to me, sir? Who drew up today's menu?

HAGEN

Why do you ask when you already know?

HOT CHEF

Because I don't understand. Is Gunther really going to eat this?

HAGEN

I don't know.

HOT CHEF

I don't think he is. This thing is as scary as I don't know what - as my own life.

HAGEN

Show me.

*HOT CHEF puts a huge carton box on the table and opens it. Most of the Kitchen People, unbeknownst to themselves, begin to sense a compelling need for the objects and utensils presently located on the table. Little by little all the Kitchen People gather around.*

HOT CHEF

Don't think that we are complete savages, sir. Exotic cuisine, a menu reminiscent of something - I understand all that. But this somehow makes me sick to my stomach.

MAMA VALYA

It's just a common lizard. Starts with an "m" or something.

COPPERPOT

A komodo, you mean?

MAMA VALYA

That's it. A komodo.

KITCHEN-MAID

*(Recognizing it.)*

A dragon.

COPPERPOT

Aha. An iguana. Shut up, why don't you?

HAGEN

Well, prepare it as best you can.

HOT CHEF

Okay, Marina. You wanted to be a cook. Here's your chance.

COPPERPOT

I am not cooking anything live.

HOT CHEF

Then how'd you boil those lobsters?

COPPERPOT

Lobsters are different. That's fish. This guy's kinda cute.

HOT CHEF

Lobsters are lobsters.

COPPERPOT

*(About the reptile.)*

Looks like he understands what we're saying. Smart little thing.

MAMA VALYA

Back off everybody. Don't crowd him in there. He's already getting nervous.

HAGEN

Would someone please kill this thing?

*NOVICE approaches to kill the dragon. Prepares to strike with a dagger. Blackout.*

*An open field. SIEGFRIED and GUNTHER stand at a chess board that HAGEN holds above his head as he kneels on one knee before them. Siegfried moves pieces quickly and easily. Gunther thinks over each move carefully. When he does make a move he snatches his opponent's pieces as a hawk would a mouse.*

GUNTHER

Your move.

SIEGFRIED

Pass.

GUNTHER

*As you wish. (Takes Siegfried's knight and loses interest in the game. Walks about the field doing gymnastic stretches.)*

SIEGFRIED

*(Still looking at the chess board.)*

I think it's the other way around.

GUNTHER

No. Something's wrong with you. You never used to lose. And if you did, you weren't afraid to admit it.

SIEGFRIED

How can you know I wasn't afraid to admit defeat if I never was defeated? That isn't logical.

GUNTHER

*(Vaguely taken aback, but quickly puts on a borrowed air of wisdom.)*

"He who has lost all but logic, has lost more than he who has lost all." *(Little by little begins to understand the full significance of his victory.)* Listen, what a shame. The world will be infinitely more boring when it loses its last immaculate hero - when it loses Siegfried.

SIEGFRIED

Why should it lose me?

GUNTHER

I don't mean it should. I mean it already has. Perfection is a rickety concept. One little misstep and it's gone. Reality is another thing, of course. It doesn't matter what you take out of it - it still remains reality. (*Gazes at Siegfried with warmth, continues analyzing the chess game.*) But you know, this suits you even more. Somehow you've become more - (*searches for the word*) more real -

SIEGFRIED

(*Gesturing at the pieces on the board.*)

What makes you think I lost?

GUNTHER

(*With feeling.*)

Have you really lost touch with the language of the birds?

SIEGFRIED

Why should I have lost that?

GUNTHER

I hate to inform you, but in the logic of mythology that is the most banal of all occurrences. The hero who has committed an error is deprived of his magical powers. (*Points at a crow sitting on a branch.*) What's that crow saying right now?

SIEGFRIED

Nothing.

GUNTHER

There, you see? It has begun.

SIEGFRIED

Nothing has begun. It isn't saying anything.

GUNTHER

Maybe. (*Talks animatedly on an abstract topic.*) You know, deciphering the language of birds has been my lifelong dream. In fact, that is one of the great dreams of all mankind. Funny. The dreams of mankind come true; mine do not. In other words, it is easier to fulfill the dreams of mankind than it is to fulfill the dreams of a single individual.

SIEGFRIED

(*Confused.*)

I don't follow you.

GUNTHER

Well look. If mankind is compelled to invent the wheel, it is not necessary for every individual to invent a wheel. It's sufficient for

just one person to do it. Same thing with the language of birds. Mankind is perfectly happy with that. I am not. Because I am not that one person. More to the point, I don't like the idea that you are that one person.

SIEGFRIED

*(Ignoring the hostile intent of Gunther's words.)*

In fact I never had the intention of deciphering the language of birds. I wanted to understand birds. You see? To understand them. That's what I wanted. I can give you an example, too: There are those who understand the language of the Britons. That is, of those who live in the British Isles. I know it's hard to believe, but it's true. I have seen such people myself. But! Even though they understand the British tongue, as a rule they still cannot fathom the British. So the question arises: What is the point of understanding the tongue of those you cannot fathom? First decipher the people, then study their language. Yes, I did come to understand the language of the birds and animals. What good did it do me? I was able to perform tricks like: "Hey-little-bitch-bring-me-my-slippers!" *(Watches as a puppy runs in with slippers in its mouth.)* Good girl! So what? And I learned that the world of fauna was no stranger to villainy and envy. And what of that? The main thing is this: When I cracked the code of the language of the birds, birds themselves caught on immediately and kept their lips zipped every time I appeared among them. This crow here - she's not saying nothing for nothing. She's keeping mum because she's got something to keep mum about.

GUNTHER

*(Makes final move on the chess board.)*

Checkmate!

*SIEGFRIED is silent for a few moments as he looks back and forth at the board and at Gunther.*

SIEGFRIED

Checkmate?

GUNTHER

You lose.

SIEGFRIED

*(Grows serious.)*

May I ask you a question, o Gunther, King of Burgundy? What game were you playing just now?

GUNTHER

*(Imitating Siegfried's tone.)*

I'll happily answer you, King Siegfried, son of Sigmund. I was engaging you in an ancient diversion devised in India. Its name is chess.

SIEGFRIED

*(After a pause.)*

I hate to disappoint you, Gunther. I was playing another game.

GUNTHER

*(Mocking.)*

And what was that?

SIEGFRIED

One much older than chess. Suicide chess.

*HAGEN shudders. The figures fall from the board. The old man stands up and stares at Siegfried with hatred. The crow caws.*

GUNTHER

What's that she said?

SIEGFRIED

She says - *(listens gloomily, but not for long)*. That's a stupid crow.

GUNTHER

But really.

SIEGFRIED

She said that Kriemhild sewed a cross on Siegfried's shirt.

GUNTHER

*(Unpleasantly surprised.)*

Is that so?

SIEGFRIED

Do me a favor. Take a look. *(Turns his back to Gunther.)*

GUNTHER

*(Touches the cross between Siegfried's shoulder blades with his fingers.)*

There's nothing here.

SIEGFRIED

You see? I told you the crow was stupid.

*SIEGFRIED laughs. GUNTHER laughs. HAGEN tries to laugh. Horns sound.*

*A flash of light.*

HOT CHEF

What was that?

COPPERPOT

A short at the substation.

HOT CHEF

What substation?

COPERKETTLE

I dunno. Whenever that happens in our village everybody blames it on the substation.

HOT CHEF

We are not in your village, Marina.

HAGEN

Back to work. Back to work. (*Bumps into NOVICE, who sits on the floor and rubs the back of his head.*) Fall?

NOVICE

I guess so.

HAGEN

Don't do that anymore. (*Looks at the dragon. A knife sticks out of its back.*) You know what, young man? I don't like you. I knew that the instant I saw you. I can't banish you from the castle, but if you go misbehaving I'll have you thrown from the top of a turret. You got me?

NOVICE

I do. Cause and effect. If event A occurs, event B is inevitable. Logic is a wonderful thing. It's the only saving grace for someone with my diagnosis.

HAGEN

What's your diagnosis?

NOVICE

Aeternitas vulgaris. Ordinary immortality. It's a stupid disease.

HOT CHEF

You mean you're contagious?

NOVICE

Don't worry. You personally are in no danger of contracting my disease.

MAMA VALYA

This is a public foodstuffs area. You better get him out of here, sir.

HAGEN

Don't worry.

MAMA VALYA

What do you mean "don't worry"?

*HAGEN stares at the cook.*

Okay, I got no worries. (*Calms down.*)

HAGEN

What are your symptoms?

NOVICE

I remember everything but with certain lacunae. I don't remember faces. I don't remember dates. I only remember certain words. I don't remember events and I don't remember people. But I'm a good learner. It's getting better every day. I'm remembering more and more. I remember you.

HAGEN

We know each other?

NOVICE

Let me recall. But the more I remember, the less I...

HAGEN

You what?

NOVICE

Nothing. I kind of like you people. May I pitch in? (*Sidles up to HOT CHEF.*) Who are you chopping that up for?

HOT CHEF

For the duck.

NOVICE

What does the duck care?

HOT CHEF

This duck no longer cares about a thing.

NOVICE

Then why are you chopping this up for it? Let me help you chop. Throughout the time of my illness I've grown accustomed to doing pointless things.

HOT CHEF

Why don't you help somebody else, partner.

NOVICE

No, I want to help you. Take a load off your feet. I see you are broken by grief.

COLD CHEF

(*Elbows his colleague in the ribs.*)

What are you so sad about? Out with it.

HOT CHEF

(*Boldly.*)

What grief? I have no grief. (*Sees NOVICE approaching him; his facial expression changes and he begins to shake.*) Go away. Go away. Please go away. (*Shakes. Drops a plate.*)

*Enter GUNTHER. Watches the scene with interest.*

GUNTHER

(*To Hagen.*)

Curious things happening in your kitchen.

HAGEN

(*To Gunther.*)

It's all thanks to you.

GUNTHER

What do I have to do with it? You're the kitchen superintendent.

HAGEN

Am I still in command?

GUNTHER

Of course. (*Beating him to the punch.*) Anything else you want to ask?

HAGEN

Yes. But not here.

GUNTHER

(*Irritated.*)

Then make yourself clear. Do you want to ask me something not here or do you want me to answer not here?

HAGEN

I would prefer not to discuss this in their presence.

GUNTHER

Oh, aren't we delicate?

HAGEN

All right, then, Gunther. Without delicacy. If I am your kitchen superintendent, I have the right to know what is going on. This wedding. The lizard. Some dimwit. And this clown? The comedian! Would you please tell me why this raw slab of meat has gained such power over you? You. Gunther. You! The sunshine of my life! What is he doing here?

GUNTHER

What a coincidence. I have just come here to inform you all. (*Looks over everyone in attendance.*) Ladies and gentlemen, this is an uncommon day in my life. This gentleman is my old friend. (*Points to Novice.*)

*All look on respectfully.*

We are peers. Ten, twenty years' difference is totally meaningless. And we are old. So I trust you will believe me when I say - I crave justice.

COPPERPOT

*(Whispers to her sister.)*

What did we feed him for breakfast?

YOUNG COPPERPOT

*(Also whispers.)*

Eggs over hard.

COPPERPOT

That explains it.

*The COPPERPOT sisters fold their hands on their stomachs and, with joyous smiles on their faces, continue listening to Gunther.*

GUNTHER

*(Having heard them.)*

I am not a doctor capable of healing the world. I am a patient. But if I cannot get any doctor to hear my cries, what other choice do I have?

*CHUBBY, brandishing a pistol, bursts into the kitchen.*

CHUBBY

This is an outrage, people! Everybody down on the floor!

*NOVICE and a few kitchen employees drop to the floor. Gunther and those around him continue standing. In the ruckus the KITCHEN-MAID slips out of the kitchen, giving a shove to TATYANA, who was waltzing in after Chubby.*

TATYANA

*(To KITCHEN-MAID, who keeps running.)*

Where are you going? Wait!

*KITCHEN-MAID pays her no mind and disappears.*

CHUBBY

*(To Gunther.)*

On the floor.

GUNTHER

I haven't finished speaking.

CHUBBY

I have a pistol.

GUNTHER

But I haven't finished speaking.

CHUBBY

I am threatening you with a firearm. I am presently in an altered state. My rights have been violated. I am moved by my innate sense of suppressed aggression. My pistol is legally registered. I am a member of the collegium of attorneys.

TATYANA

My lawyer.

CHUBBY

Her lawyer.

GUNTHER

I haven't concluded my thought.

NOVICE

*(Good-naturedly explains the situation to Chubby.)*

He *(points to Gunther)* is telling us something very important.

*(Confidentially.)* To tell you the truth, I don't understand a thing. But then don't judge by me.

CHUBBY

I'm not letting anybody out of here until you let me out of here.

GUNTHER

And I'm not letting anyone let anyone out of here until I finish what I have to say.

CHUBBY

Oh is that so? *(As an afterthought.)* I'm a lawyer.

TATYANA

*(To Gunther.)*

Have you raised the drawbridge?

GUNTHER

What if I have?

TATYANA

I have to be in town at ten o'clock.

GUNTHER

I'm sure you do.

TATYANA

*(To Chubby.)*

Fire away, punkins. There's no respect for your client here.

CHUBBY

I'm gonna shoot!

GUNTHER

And I shall continue. (*Continues.*) Tell me honestly. Consider me, your master and friend. And consider this disease that is wracking my soul. (*Points to NOVICE.*) One of us must die. Which of us shall live?

CHUBBY

My client wants out.

GUNTHER

Your client wants out because your client's lover is expecting her in town.

TATYANA

Yes, that's true.

CHUBBY

What business is that of yours?

GUNTHER

I am your client's husband.

TATYANA

My husband.

CHUBBY

I didn't know that. But that does not excuse you. I demand you release me and that woman. This is violent kidnap by means of -

GUNTHER

What is that pistol for?

CHUBBY

Don't interrupt me. Violent kidnapping -

GUNTHER

When an attorney forgets that his weapon is the word and not a pistol - and when a wife refuses to share her husband's day of shame - then this world, indeed, is sick!

CHUBBY

Oh that's easy for you to prophesize like that. Then explain to me why this world is sick and how you would describe a healthy world?

TATYANA

Yarik!

GUNTHER

Health -

CHUBBY

Excuse me for interrupting, but your very thought - "the world is sick" - is rather, how shall I say this, fetid.

GUNTHER

Health is what remains if you leave aside treatment.

CHUBBY

I'm sorry, but if I don't treat my appendicitis, nothing remains of me.

GUNTHER

Aha. Then health is a world without you.

CHUBBY

What's that supposed to mean? You've gone too far, good sir. A world without me - now that's fascism.

GUNTHER

A world with you is fascist, too.

CHUBBY

Why do you say that?

GUNTHER

Because you are indifferent.

CHUBBY

I am indifferent?

GUNTHER

You!!! Because, like many people, you believe that to be fascist one must do something. But since all of you are do-nothings, you think you're not fascists.

CHUBBY

You sure made a fascist of me quickly.

GUNTHER

I don't know if you're a fascist or not. What I do know is that you have done nothing whatsoever not to be one.

CHUBBY

Oh no. Now here I catch you up on a clear contradiction.

TATYANA

We aren't in your way here, are we?

CHUBBY

Tanya, sweetie. Give me just a minute to rebut this gentleman.

TATYANA

There's no stopping it now.

HOT CHEF

(To Chubby.)

Pardon me, but are you going to rebut him with a pistol aimed at his head?

CHUBBY

(Frightened.)

For God's sake no! (Lowers the pistol.) And so -

*HOT CHEF asks if he can go on serving. Receiving a positive response, he signals to the rest of the Kitchen People to prepare the wedding table.*

What was I saying?

GUNTHER

You wanted to catch me in a contradiction.

CHUBBY

Exactly! Follow my reasoning now. I mean, what I want to say is - follow the path of your own reasoning. (*Thinks hard upon Gunther's thoughts.*) If we follow your logic, a man is a fascist by nature.

GUNTHER

That disturbing conclusion cannot be excluded.

CHUBBY

Good. Very good. Ergo, you are also a fascist?

GUNTHER

No. I am not a fascist.

CHUBBY

Wait a minute. By your own logic you are a typical fascist. Or a sympathizer. You are human, aren't you?

GUNTHER

No I am not.

TATYANA

He's not human.

CHUBBY

Oh, I'm sorry. You're super-human. Yeah, we've heard that one before. But these little games always end badly.

GUNTHER

Let me say this about your "super-human." The prefix "super" implies the intensification or amplification of those qualities to which it is attached. A "supercomputer" or "superconductor" for example. I informed you that I am "not human." Henceforth, I am not "more than a human," I am "less than a human." This bears witness of my desire to repress in myself the few human-like qualities that I do have.

CHUBBY

For example?

GUNTHER

The ability to forget.

CHUBBY

Aha. Curious. In brief, you are saying that progress must consist not of increasing qualities, but of reducing them. In other words, the future human will be "contemporary man minus something." Do I understand you correctly?

GUNTHER

You could put it that way. But there also will definitely be a "plus something." Primarily, however, progress will require us to renounce some of our capabilities. That is, of course, if you define "progress" as a means of society's survival.

CHUBBY

Oh, now you're involved in the survival of society, are you?

GUNTHER

Surprising isn't it? Yes.

CHUBBY

Forgive me, but I have trouble believing that. If I am not mistaken, you are the proprietor of this luxurious abode?

GUNTHER

Yes, I am.

CHUBBY

What conclusions does that allow us to draw? You stuck a fake medieval castle here in the midst of an impenetrable Slavic wood. You outfitted it with a cheap restaurant. You bus in the tourists and, what? (*Makes a farting sound with his mouth.*) You know it yourself - this is all bogus and your castle is made of sand. By the way, I mean that in a literal sense. What does "survival" have to do with this? What has changed since you ruined the landscape with the blight of your big cement box? Who is better off for it? Him? Him? Her?

COPPERPOT

(*Quietly to Hot Chef.*)

Me. My metabolism has normalized.

HOT CHEF

I don't give a damn.

CHUBBY

Your castle is bereft of mystery. And without that, you are the proverbial emperor with no clothes.

NOVICE

(*To Gunther.*)

Are you an emperor?

CHUBBY

You playing at knights and damsels? Knock it off. You're a smart man. This is something the Yankees would do. Make a film about teenagers digging up Roland the Knight in an Oklahoma forest. But that's stupid! There are no Rolands in the Oklahoma forests! What's even stranger - there never were. That might not stop the Yankees, they don't care. But what about you?

GUNTHER

Me? Yes.

CHUBBY

There! You see? You've got to have a nose for these things. A sense of aesthetic shame. You don't plug a jet engine into an ox cart. (*Addressing COPPERPOT.*) You don't fancy yourself a prophetic water sprite when your name is Potsandpans.

COPPERPOT

My name is not Potsandpans.

CHUBBY

(*Waves off Copperpot.*)

On the other hand, while you were erecting all this, if you don't mind my saying so, you were not thinking about building a home and hearth. You were not assembling a defensive structure. You were deciding where to order drywall and which plumbing fixtures to choose. Do you buy the cheap stuff or the cheap stuff that looks good? You were thinking about what toilets to buy, my good man! How dare you, after that, philosophize about saving mankind?!

GUNTHER

You're right. Drywall is a silly material. But the question you ought to be asking is this: What could possibly have gotten into the head of the man (you know who I mean), who in our age and our climate (you know what I'm talking about), erected a medieval castle. Note that I did not say "a copy of a medieval castle." I did not say a "fake." I did not say a "model." I said "a castle." Because - (*Loses his train of thought*). Because - this is - a castle. (*Pulls thoughts together.*) And, yes, we do admit tourists here. Yes, we do feed our guests.

COPPERPOT

(*To herself.*)

Yeah, right.

GUNTHER

Just how we feed them, that's another question. We feed them as best we can. Right? We don't make anybody come here against their will. I'm right on that, aren't I?

*Kitchen People approve his unique vision of the restaurant business.*

I built this castle because I - because I could.

*Ecstatic response.*

I built this castle because - because there never were any castles here. (*Pumping himself up.*) I built it because - (*Changes course without a transition.*) You are right. I was thinking about plumbing fixtures. But that doesn't mean I wasn't thinking about defense.

CHUBBY

Make me laugh. Defense! From whom?

GUNTHER

I don't know. I swear, I don't know.

KITCHEN-MAID

*(Races in, but lags behind her own heroic pathos.)*

They're coming!

COPPERPOT

Who?

KITCHEN-MAID

Them. The forces.

HAGEN

What forces?

KITCHEN-MAID

The forces. The Military forces!

HAGEN

Have you been on the telephone?

KITCHEN-MAID

*(Proudly.)*

Yes, I succeeded in breaking through to the telephone.

HAGEN

Damn!

CHUBBY

What's wrong?

HAGEN

What isn't? Won't you continue?

CHUBBY

Personally, I have no desire to shoot. But that's me! I am a lawyer. I'm conducting consultations with my client and someone slams the door in my face. It's a disgrace. Anyone else in my place would -

HAGEN

That's enough. (*Takes the pistol from Chubby.*)

KITCHEN-MAID

Oh. Then why did I call in the military?

TATYANA

Fine time to ask now. (*To Gunther.*) Why did you take this, this, whoever she is, in?

KITCHEN-MAID

What do you mean, "take me in"? Who took me in?

GUNTHER

How could you?

TATYANA

What is she doing here?

GUNTHER

It doesn't concern you. I don't mess in your affairs.

TATYANA

On the contrary. I have a rendezvous in town with my lover and you won't let me go.

GUNTHER

That's just a coincidence. You have rendezvous with your lover every evening.

TATYANA

But this evening is special.

GUNTHER

This evening is special for me, too. And my special evening is more special than your special evening.

TATYANA

On what grounds?

GUNTHER

On the grounds of my profound inner convictions.

CHUBBY

Can't you keep it a bit more modest?

TATYANA

*(To Chubby.)*

Listen, jerk, can the modesty lessons.

CHUBBY

Tanya, what are you - ?

GUNTHER

Brunhild, I hardly recognize you.

TATYANA

*(To Gunther.)*

Why do you let people wrap you around their finger?

GUNTHER

What do you mean?

NOVICE

*(Raises his hand like a schoolboy.)*

I get it! I get it! She loves you.

GUNTHER

Naturally. But that's no reason to - *(embarrassed.)* Brunhild, do you want to go to town? Hagen, let her go.

TATYANA

No, Hagen. I'll stay here now.

GUNTHER

As you wish.

TATYANA

So ready to let me go. Oh, Gunther, Gunther. You're such a weak soul.

GUNTHER

Then divorce me if you want.

TATYANA

I love you.

GUNTHER

You know what else ticks me off? She says the word "love" and now she wants all of us to fall off our feet. You are my wife. That is your job. Do it.

CHUBBY

*(To Hagen, who looks over the pistol he holds.)*

Don't forget to give me that back later.

HAGEN

We'll see.

CHUBBY

What do you mean, "we'll see"? I've been straight with you.

*HAGEN gives Chubby a chilling stare.*

Okay, okay. Do whatever you have to do. *(Goes to console Tatyana.)*

GUNTHER

Miss Nadya.

KITCHEN-MAID

A-hum?

GUNTHER

Miss Nadya. Could you possibly cancel that request for the military forces?

KITCHEN-MAID

Oh, no problem. Right away. *(Prepares to run off.)*

GUNTHER

Miss Nadya.

KITCHEN-MAID

Yes?

GUNTHER

Use mine. *(Hands her a telephone.)*

KITCHEN-MAID

911?

GUNTHER

*(Smiles.)*

I don't know who you called.

KITCHEN-MAID

*(Dials.)*

Hello? Hello. It's me from the castle again. That long ago? What happens now, then? Yes, false alarm. No, nobody's torturing me. What's that you say? Can I go out? *(Covers the telephone with her hand and addresses Gunther.)* Can I go out?

*All look at Gunther. GUNTHER does not look at everyone.*

GUNTHER

No.

KITCHEN-MAID

*(Into the telephone.)*

No. Hello. Hello? *(Hands the phone back to Gunther.)* They said "don't worry."

COLD CHEF

Don't worry about what?

KITCHEN-MAID

They said don't worry.

HAGEN

*(To Gunther.)*

Trick didn't work, huh?

GUNTHER

*(Smiles.)*

Are they coming to rescue us, Hagen?

HAGEN

They are coming to rescue us, Gunther.

GUNTHER

*(To Chubby.)*

As I understand it, you are my wife's attorney.

CHUBBY

If you are my client's husband, then yes, I am your wife's attorney.

GUNTHER

One thing I don't understand - who says you can't be my attorney, too?

CHUBBY

The fact of the matter is that a family attorney is not quite the same thing as a family doctor. Aside from the ethical aspect, there is also the matter of an adaptable image, of reputation -

GUNTHER

Exactly. I need an attorney with an adaptable reputation.

CHUBBY

All right, then there's the purely theoretical question that has nothing to do either with me or with you - you know what I mean -

GUNTHER

I think it would be just to double the fee - no, triple it.

CHUBBY

Then there is an even more theoretical question - what do I have to do? Do you have a problem?

GUNTHER

A small one. This person right here. *(Points to NOVICE.)*

NOVICE

Now this is all just getting out of hand. You are constantly hinting at the fact that we were previously acquainted. You can see that I am ill. You could be kind enough to explain the circumstances. It's really quite aggravating. I really don't remember anything.

GUNTHER

First, let me say that I am hinting at nothing. I'm saying it loud and clear: We were acquainted. What would you like to know?

NOVICE

Everything. If you don't mind.

GUNTHER

Everything is not possible.

COPPERPOT

*(As a simple and curious person.)*

Can I listen to this?

GUNTHER

*(Guessing.)*

Lucy?

COPPERPOT

No, no. Marina.

GUNTHER

Make yourself comfortable, Marina. Here, let me make room for you. *(Scoots over.)* Ladies and gentlemen, whoever else among you is curious, don't miss this. Join us and listen. Mr. Hagen, here's a place for you in the front row. *(Whispers to COPPERPOT.)* Don't ever sit in the front row, Marina. It's where all the airheads sit. *(Immediately changing gears.)* Young lady, I like you.

*COPPERPOT makes eyes at him.*

*(Continues.)* I'm behaving stupidly. But bear with me. I have lived such a murky life that changing it is difficult. But it must be done. *(Thinks.)* My best friend! The beneficiary of my only truly villainous act. *(Points to NOVICE.)* Right there.

HAGEN

Do I know him?

*GUNTHER does not respond.*

GUNTHER

I can't brag that it was some sort of spectacular, super-extraordinary villainy that requires no shame and carries no guilt. Actually, it was all rather discreet, all within the general bounds of morality. I would even say it was a little tentative. Although not lacking in inspiration. And this inspiration - it didn't just fall upon me out of

nowhere, out of the clear blue sky. Its origin was this extraordinary man. He was the object of my villainy. Its target. (*Rests his hand on Novice's shoulder.*) There once was a head here. (*Rests his hand on Novice's head - NOVICE listens carefully.*) Who would ever believe it? Aside from bones and ceramic fillings there was an individual here, an enigmatic man, an abstract personality that was not receptive to description. Here flowered ancient gardens and a spotted unicorn reared its head.

COPPERPOT

Would somebody please translate.

GUNTHER

And this man, this being, nothing but meat, really - (*To Hot Chef.*) You're the specialist here. Are brains meat?

HOT CHEF

Is fish meat?

GUNTHER

Fish is meat.

HOT CHEF

Fish is fish.

GUNTHER

(*Irritated.*)

All right. Thanks for the definition. In short, I worshipped the stew that boiled here. A man is not great by his ability to adapt to circumstances. His greatness is revealed in his ability to ignore circumstances. And in this my best friend knew no equal.

COPPERPOT

He's back to talking Turkish again.

GUNTHER

Allow me to translate. He believed in dragons but not in traffic cops. (*Aside. Frustrated.*) It's absolutely pointless praising people you love. (*To the Kitchen People.*) What is it I want to say?!

MAMA VALYA

Yes!

GUNTHER

Villainy committed against a man of inspiration must be inspired itself! Is that clear?

COPPERPOT

Absolutely!

GUNTHER

Mr. Hagen. You knew him.

HAGEN doesn't believe it.

You did. You did. Don't pretend you didn't.

HAGEN

But then - if - uh - then -

GUNTHER

Yes, Hagen. Yes. If he is sitting here alive among us it means that God exists and all of that stuff. Precisely.

HAGEN

It's not him.

GUNTHER

Yes it is. It's another matter that I won't ask you to spend much time thinking about it. Just accept it as a given. It is he. (*For those who don't understand.*) For those who don't understand, Hagen and I once killed a man.

CHUBBY

If you start with declarations like that, no lawyer will be of any help to you by the final scene.

GUNTHER

Yes. Hagen and I killed a man. Moreover, this is the very man we killed.

CHUBBY

I trust you were a sickly type in your childhood.

GUNTHER

Perhaps I was -

CHUBBY

I would ask you to verify that without particular delay. But that's an aside. Excuse me for interrupting.

GUNTHER

I don't follow you.

CHUBBY

It's just lawyer talk. Pay no mind.

HAGEN

I remember. Siegfried is thirsty. I know a forest spring nearby. Siegfried leans over the water. The water is pure. I hit perfectly. The cross - right here between the shoulder blades. (*Spins in place as he tries demonstrating on himself.*)

GUNTHER

Hold on, friend. I didn't have it easy either. (*As usual, gives self over to abstract reasoning.*) So there, we have confessed. In theory that should take a load off our shoulders. But no. It only gets more confusing.

CHUBBY

Stop incriminating yourself. Zip those lips of yours. What is the point of going into these idiotic, public self-disclosures? You're declaring yourself a murderer -

GUNTHER

I never said I was a murderer.

CHUBBY

There. I like you that way much better. Repudiate the obvious. That's the proper tactic.

GUNTHER

You misunderstand me. I'm not playing games. Indeed I did not call myself a murderer. I simply said that I killed a man. And here is that man.

CHUBBY

You're a slippery one. But you're interesting.

GUNTHER

And you will all have to help me -

CHUBBY

With pleasure.

GUNTHER

... kill him again.

*All jump back from Gunther as if he were a poisonous serpent.*

CHUBBY

Now, wait a minute -

GUNTHER

No? That's a shame. (*Approaches Hagen.*) Mr. Hagen, I've got no one else to turn to.

HAGEN

Yes, Gunther. Yes.

GUNTHER

Pull yourself together. We've got time.

MAMA VALYA

(*To Gunther.*)

What is this harebrained idea?

GUNTHER

Who are you to ask?

MAMA VALYA

Mama Valya. Don't go pulling my leg.

GUNTHER

You're a cook, right? I've always wanted my own personal cook. And now I have lots of cooks. In fact, I may have too many.

MAMA VALYA

Don't go threatening me.

GUNTHER

I'm not threatening you.

MAMA VALYA

Don't you threaten me.

GUNTHER

Mama Valya. Don't get so worked up. I'm not such a villain.

MAMA VALYA

That's what I always say, too.

GUNTHER

Well, then, trust your intuition. (*Confidentially.*) Why don't you tell about Miss Nadya. The kitchen-maid.

MAMA VALYA

You mean little ol' Nadya here?

GUNTHER

Is that what you call her?

MAMA VALYA

How else am I supposed to call her? Nadya is Nadya.

GUNTHER

I wouldn't be so sure. There was a time, for example, when I called her Kriemhild.

NOVICE

What?

GUNTHER

Oh, look. He's perking up.

MAMA VALYA

Are you kidding? You used to know Nadya?

GUNTHER

Ha-ha! Did I know Nadya? I didn't just know Nadya. I worshipped Nadya.

MAMA VALYA

Nadya? Bull.

GUNTHER

Bull what?

MAMA VALYA

Bullshit.

GUNTHER

That's not bullshit.

MAMA VALYA

Nadya?

GUNTHER

Swear to God. Go on, tell 'em.

MAMA VALYA

What's there to tell about Nadya? Your Nadya's a wretched little thing.

GUNTHER

What's she so wretched about?

MAMA VALYA

Some members of the 'hood bumped off her husband last year.

GUNTHER

Could you make that a bit clearer?

MAMA VALYA

What's not clear about it? She had a man. A good man.

GUNTHER

And?

MAMA VALYA

Something happened. Either he pushed somebody or he got pushed. Basically, he disappeared. And she keeps believing he'll come back.

GUNTHER

You sure that was last year?

MAMA VALYA

Well, I don't know. The broad always walks around all gloomy. So it must have been not too long ago.

GUNTHER

That's logical.

MAMA VALYA

Man, there's nothing but logic around here.

GUNTHER

*(To all.)*

Now listen to my version.

*Everyone except KITCHEN-MAID and TATYANA gather around GUNTHER.*

Twenty years ago, and not one year ago, as Mama Valya says, the man you know as Mr. Hagen and I set out for Europe with this boy.

CHUBBY

You just set out for Europe.

GUNTHER

We just set out for Europe. No other details. Just set out for Europe. This boy was married to that woman who is presently sitting next to the big pot.

*KITCHEN-MAID sits next to a big pot.*

I was married to the woman who is sitting next to that thing that I don't what it's called.

*There sits TATYANA.*

HOT CHEF

That's a mixer.

GUNTHER

Next to the mixer. But I was in love, as I continue to be in love to this day, with that woman who is sitting next to the big pot. Mr. Hagen was not married.

HAGEN

I was.

GUNTHER

Ah, no, you see? He was. But that's not important because it had absolutely nothing to do with the story. So, as I was saying, we three set off as tourists to one of Europe's most ancient castles.

COLD CHEF

You didn't say that.

GUNTHER

Well I did now - one of Europe's most ancient castles. There was a dungeon in this castle and, naturally enough, we went down into the dungeon and there, in the dungeon -

YOUNG COPPERPOT

A drama was played out -

GUNTHER

Yes, a drama was played out. The most brilliant mind at university, the hero, the athlete, the dragon-slayer, the pride and joy and hope and blah-blah-blah-sis-boom-bah - perished.

COPPERPOT

Well that's obvious. How did it happen?

CHUBBY

Please, I implore you - keep silent. Don't divulge any more details.

GUNTHER

You've had enough details. What is important is that this man has returned. No, that's not even what's important. What is important is that I was expecting him.

MAMA VALYA

You mean he, like, died dead?

GUNTHER

Yes, quite obviously so.

HOT CHEF

He's dead, but he's sitting here. That's nonsense in my book.

GUNTHER

Nonsense.

KITCHEN-MAID

My husband was unable to stand stably in the dark. He had a problem with his inner ear.

CHUBBY

Well, thank God for that. It was an accident then.

KITCHEN-MAID

Two days before it happened I told this man here about my husband's condition. (*Points to Hagen.*)

MAMA VALYA

What do you say, Mr. Hagen?

HAGEN

You want to know why the lights were out in the dungeon? I put them out.

*Enter GUARD.*

GUARD

They're here!

*All are silent. Look at GUNTHER. We hear the distant sound of sirens and muffled voices on megaphones.*

GUNTHER

*(Turning around.)*

What do you think, captain? Can we be rescued without our permission?

GUARD

Without permission, perhaps. Without helicopters, I doubt it.

*HAGEN whispers to GUARD. Receiving his orders, GUARD leaves.*

GUNTHER

*(To Chubby.)*

In truth, if you have a place to take cover, there will always be someone to take cover from. *(To all.)* You wanted to know why I built this castle. This castle is bait.

CHUBBY

I had already considered that prospect.

TATYANA

That's what everybody says after the fact. I hate things like this.

GUNTHER

It took exactly six months after we opened for him to walk into my office. Now that was well done!

NOVICE

How did you find me?

GUNTHER

A changed man. Much better than the cadaver we left behind.

CHUBBY

Twenty years. That isn't logical. He's no more than twenty now.

GUNTHER

Where's the logic in the fact that a dead man is now sitting with us here in this kitchen?

CHUBBY

I suspect that's divine logic.

GUNTHER

You're going to laugh, but that's how I explain it too.

CHUBBY

Very touching story. But all things considered you haven't explained a thing.

GUNTHER

No, I explained it all! This man died. This man is alive. I've been observing him for two months. He remembers nothing. He just looks around, asks questions and reads. But isn't that reason enough to fear him? Think about it: He sees, he asks, he reads. What could be more dangerous? What will he remember? What will he be told?

CHUBBY

You're no fool, Gunther. This has the mark of a master plan.

GUNTHER

Exactly.

MAMA VALYA

I don't get the point of the castle either.

CHUBBY

Here's my version. (*To TATYANA.*) So that nobody can accuse me of saying this after the fact. (*Describes his version with theatrical flair.*) This young man (*by which he means Gunther*) decided to install his ailing friend in the castle so that his surroundings would be familiar. His purpose in that was to establish a link between the world of imagination (I mean his own imagination) and the world of reality (I mean this actual world, which, in fact, is actually a world of pseudo-reality). Reality and fantasy dissolve into one another, contradictions cease to nourish the illness and it dissipates, as did the old cathode ray spark in a certain kind of television I will not specify so as not to offend local manufacturers. Did I get that right?

GUNTHER

Fairy tales.

CHUBBY

Fairy tales, maybe. Only we're not just talking about an improved version of the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Right? We're also talking about realism? A plaster cast of reality. A realistic comedy. Right? (*Sprays spittle as he speaks.*) Kings! Castles! Doomed love! Conspiracies against a best friend! Amnesia! Amnesia is the soap opera's cheapest weapon! A lowly soap opera!

GUNTHER

In Dr. Rainer Telle's textbook on psychiatry -

CHUBBY

Telle-Schmelle! Who cares about these details? I don't give a damn about your doctor.

GUNTHER

I don't give a damn about stupid prescriptions for healing the fatally ill! (*Gunther is menacing. He grabs CHUBBY by the collar, yanks at him, shoves him towards the floor and shouts in his face.*) Are you listening to me?! Fatally ill! Fatally ill! Fatally ill! For whose sake do you think I'm telling you this? For some spectators? There are no spectators here. Everybody here is an accomplice. No reason to put a show on for them. When I say "fatally ill," that means I previously have taken measures to confirm the opposite. Do you understand? (*Slowly calms down.*) You say soap opera. But it's not my fault that my everyday experience is somebody else's fairy tale. Am I a king? I'm a king. And at the same time, I, the real me, am an extremely real person. My friend here - he really is my friend. The woman I used to love works for me as a kitchen-maid. That is NO fairy tale. Very simple, very common. She does an honest job. She came to her ex, asked for a job and I gave her one. Where's the fairy tale in that? Amnesia? Is that out of a fairy tale? Okay, every third pulp novel and every second trashy film uses it. But look around you. Every single individual has amnesia. Everybody forgets. Everybody. Everybody. You want proof? Take yourself. What are you doing here? Why did you appear in the kitchen? And packing a pistol, no less. So you'd be let out of the castle, right? Why did you forget about that? Why did you all forget that you are locked in here, that I ordered the drawbridge to be raised? Why don't you remember that?

HAGEN

Everybody remembers that perfectly, Gunther. It's just so unlike you. So everybody is going along with it. Waiting to hear what you will say. To tell them in three words what they must do.

GUNTHER

Kill that man.

COPPERPOT

Exactly three words, by the way.

END OF ACT I

## ACT II

*Tired Burgundian hunters rest by a fire in a forest clearing following a successful foray. Their servants struggle to turn a wooden spit that bends beneath the weight of a buck's enormous body. The fire sparks as the animal's blood drips into the flames. The drunken hunters laugh boisterously. The fat of fatted partridges drips down their chins. Their lips are as red as poppies encrusted in ice. The Burgundian hunters are in good spirits. Also in good spirits is their guest and blood-brother SIEGFRIED OF THE NETHERLANDS. His glass is filled more often than the others. His laughter is louder. His smile is like the rays of the sun; his breath is like the wind.*

1<sup>ST</sup> HUNTER

Huge! Bigger than a house.

2<sup>ND</sup> HUNTER

No! A house and chimney.

3<sup>RD</sup> HUNTER

A house with chimney and a servants' barn,  
A field circling 'round it all  
With orchards and a hill...  
That's how big the boar that threw itself on Siegfried!

4<sup>TH</sup> HUNTER

And what did Siegfried do?

SIEGFRIED

I grabbed it by its fang.

3<sup>RD</sup> HUNTER

The fang was like a glistening shooting star,  
Curled to slash the universe to shreds.  
I've heard the old men tell  
Of fearsome comets burning up the sky  
And stretching out to snatch their tail like a cat  
No more than once in every century.  
That's what this big boar's fang was like.

HAGEN

Do we really have such monsters in our wood?

2<sup>ND</sup> HUNTER

I swear it's true. I kiss my holy cross.

4<sup>TH</sup> HUNTER

So what did legendary Siegfried then?

SIEGFRIED

I pinned him to the ground.

3<sup>RD</sup> HUNTER

Tossed him with one hand!  
The beast fell stunned like so much chaff,  
And in the spot his belly crushed the grass  
A cavernous, black hole yawned open in the earth.

HAGEN

Your tongue is longer than your lies!

GUNTHER

Wait! Hear those steps? Something approaches.

SIEGFRIED

O, Gunther, Gunther. Are you king or not?  
Shame on you for fearing such a little thing.  
Your brave and loyal vassals stand primed to fight,  
Their lances sharp as lightning,  
Their necks and hands as steady as a rock.  
Shame on you for fearing such a little thing.

HAGEN

And shame on you for daring to teach  
The greatest king to wear a crown beneath this moon.

SIEGFRIED

Don't fan the flames of argument, old grouch.  
Better men there are to stir and rouse  
The demons of ancient injuries.  
Instead make peace between your king and me.  
And help us find the basis for the friendship  
That used to bind us.  
For that I'll pay you dearly.  
And every hurtful slip I make  
I shall atone as it befits me.  
Should roaring hordes of savage Huns  
Or else an evil tribe of Slavic renegades  
Attack the hallowed lands of Nibelungs,  
I shall raise my sword - the mighty Balmung -  
And prove to you in deed my loyal, steadfast faith.

HAGEN

What is your answer, king?

GUNTHER

I say there is no purer heart than that of Siegfried.  
And that our friendship isn't half as good as he.  
But I will raise this goblet with him  
And renew the union that once joined us.  
And even if there is no limit to the girth of boars he kills,  
The pride our Siegfried cultivates

And Siegfried's braggadocio -  
So what? I'll love him as a brother.  
So does the crown of Burgundy insist I speak.

*The hunters rejoice. SIEGFRIED extends his goblet of wine to Gunther.*

But then I am a man, and man is weak.  
And the splendor of intangible perfection  
Cuts his eyes as might a sharpened dagger.  
I cannot make myself forgive you, Siegfried.  
Forgive me, my insufferable friend.

*HAGEN sinks his spear into Siegfried's back. SIEGFRIED leaps to his feet. Staggers.*

I want to tell people the truth about the death of King Siegfried. Who will these people be? I do not know. Will they understand me? I am not sure. Will they believe me? I'm sure that they will not.

SIEGFRIED

That's probably as it should be.

GUNTHER

Perhaps. In truth, who could believe that with your death I punish myself for my pettiness and envy, so unworthy of a monarch. Who ever will believe that King Gunther killed King Siegfried to punish King Gunther?

SIEGFRIED

I will.

GUNTHER

You will... And will you believe that I killed you in order to preserve our friendship? So that time and our royal pride, our wives and our advisers, could not destroy it?

SIEGFRIED

I will.

GUNTHER

And will you believe that I long could not decide which of us must perish for our friendship? Will you believe that I resolved to kill you only because I discovered in myself the strength not to stop loving Siegfried after betraying him?

SIEGFRIED

I will.

GUNTHER

*(Changing.)*

Oh, how gullible you are, Siegfried! (*Changing again.*) Why didn't you tell me that you are helpless in the dark? Why didn't you entrust your secret to me, your best friend? Why did I have to send a special envoy to your wife to learn the truth? Me! Me! Why? Answer me that!

SIEGFRIED

My wife?

GUNTHER

You were afraid I might use the knowledge.

SIEGFRIED

Perhaps I am guilty before you, friend.

GUNTHER

Then die. Reap the rewards of your faith.

SIEGFRIED

I hardly know what to say. (*After a pause.*) I'll try.

*The kitchen. SIEGFRIED lies on the table. He is covered with shields, surrounded by funeral gourds and sprinkled in rice.*

KRIEMHILD

(*To Siegfried.*)

Now I recognize you.

MAMA VALYA

How are you feeling?

KRIEMHILD

(*Paying no attention.*)

My husband Siegfried was dead because I could not recognize him when he was alive. Now I have recognized him again.

MAMA VALYA

Marina, bring the smelling salts.

COPPERPOT

We've only got seltzer tablets left.

MAMA VALYA

Bring on the seltzer tablets.

KRIEMHILD

What do you think? Which comb would best groom my husband - the yellow one or this one with the big red teeth? I see you prefer the red one. Maybe you're right - dying a rat's death makes you rich.

MAMA VALYA

I don't understand. What do rats have to do with it?

KRIEMHILD

Rats have red blood. Didn't you know?

MAMA VALYA

People have red blood, too.

KRIEMHILD

People have blood the color of money. If your money is copper, you have copper-colored blood. If you have gold, you have gold-colored blood. If people had red blood they would be rats and rats would think they were people. And if rats come to believe that they are people, they will take to the streets to buy beer and stuffed animals for their sweethearts. Children will be hurt.

MAMA VALYA

Here Nadya, sweetie. Drink this.

KRIEMHILD

*(Horried.)*

Where am I? Siegfried my love, where am I?

MAMA VALYA

Have a good cry, sweetie. Have a good cry. You'll feel better.

KRIEMHILD

Do you hear that, Siegfried? These people are sorcerers. The spears of the assassins have not yet sent roots into your back and yet they have already transported us to another country. And it is a very strange country, indeed. People here cry to make things better. *(Laughs.)* Can you believe that?

COLD CHEF

We've got to do something.

HOT CHEF

I'll go ask. *(Goes to GUNTHER and HAGEN.)* Pardon my interrupting, but

-

HAGEN

We weren't saying anything.

HOT CHEF

Then I'm all the more sorry. Miss Nadya is not well. She needs a doctor.

GUNTHER

I am not a doctor.

HOT CHEF

She needs to be returned to town.

GUNTHER

Then send her there.

HOT CHEF

We need to get out to do that.

GUNTHER

Then go.

HOT CHEF

But -

GUNTHER

I'm no longer keeping you here.

HOT CHEF

*(Overjoyed.)*

Can I tell them?

GUNTHER

Go ahead.

*HOT CHEF returns to the Kitchen People.*

MAMA VALYA

What did he say?

HOT CHEF

Dome-diddley-ome-dome - go home!

*All heave a sigh of relief. Begin talking simultaneously and agitatedly. Someone looks at a watch and calculates if he can get home in time for the soccer game. Someone hunts for a purse she had squirreled away in a corner. Slipping out of their kitchen uniforms as they go, the Kitchen People head for the dressing room in one big, lively group. Remaining are: GUNTHER, HAGEN, TATYANA, KRIEMHILD and LAZY.*

GUNTHER

Look at them, Hagen. A minute ago all they knew was poor Kriemhild's suffering. They were worried about the poor fool, they sympathized with her. All I had to do was let loose the leash and they all forgot her instantly. Isn't that the epitome of human behavior?

*MAMA VALYA returns.*

MAMA VALYA

*(To Kriemhild.)*

Come along, honey-bun.

GUNTHER

There's a lesson for me, Hagen. I have no business chastising human vices.

KRIEMHILD

(*To Gunther.*)

King, give me back my king.

GUNTHER

If I were a bit younger I might comply with her wishes, for her words actually mean, "Be my husband, King, in place of the King cruel fate has taken from me." How my heart would have leapt to hear those words. I would have howled like a dog, "Yes, yes, yes, Kriemhild! Have your husband, me that is. Receive him, here I am, I am all yours, entrails and all! To hell with my old wife, to hell with royal honor and Burgundy. Let 'em all go to the dogs in hell! I'll be your husband!"

But I have so many gray hairs now, Kriemhild, that I have forgotten how to seek apples in birch trees. I know exactly what you are asking me. I even know what you will answer when I say, "I cannot return the husband that the heavens have taken from you." You will say, "If you cannot - "

KRIEMHILD

If you cannot return the husband that you have taken from me, then at least let me have his assassin's head on a platter.

GUNTHER

And you know what I will say to that.

KRIEMHILD

You will say, "No!"

GUNTHER

I will say "no." You will not receive the head of my trusted envoy. And my word on that is firmer than my life, Kriemhild.

KRIEMHILD

What is a helpless widow to do?

*GUNTHER walks right up to her.*

GUNTHER

Kriemhild, you are like a sister to me. Don't you realize your brother has your best interests at heart? I'll find you a new husband. Better than the other one.

KRIEMHILD

Does any lamp shine brighter than the sun?  
Is not the falcon Ruler of the skies?  
Is any river more watery than the Rheine?  
Whoever could replace the man I loved?

GUNTHER

Let's be honest. There are pisspots bigger than the Rheine. And our sun is just a little lantern dangling in the margins of the sky. Believe me, you will have a greater husband than Siegfried.

KRIEMHILD

I would smile through my tears  
At how you swear upon your own deceit.  
You're like a beggar in the street  
Who found a misplaced copper coin  
And now believes himself to be  
A king on par with Solomon.  
The tramp with sudden money in his pocket  
Would drink with gods  
And lie abed with flocks of beauties  
And shake from satiation of very last desire  
While giving Zeus a playful tap upon the nose.  
But all these dreams aren't worth the copper coin he found.

GUNTHER

There is a thing more dear than any copper coin,  
Than all the copper coins there are,  
And all the tribes of Solomon!  
That is - the scourge of God!

*Flaming arrows begin flying into the hall. At first they come rarely, but soon they come raining down.*

When the mountains hear the echo of the name  
Of him, whom I shall make your second spouse,  
They shall be swallowed in the fires of envy  
And the dainty, snowy hairs of nature's rocky beauties  
Shall melt in jaundiced blazes  
And plummet to the pasture lands below  
In crackling, rushing, tumbling avalanches.  
His name is more than thunderbolts  
That strike across the anxious heavens,  
Sowing fear in all who do there dwell:  
What is this dreadful name? Attila!

KRIEMHILD

What a fool I was to listen.  
Silly name for such a fat, old swine!  
The wily Hun - ruler of the kingdoms to the east!  
But like no other he just might  
Be Kriemhild's savior  
And help avenge her loving husband's murder.

*(To Gunther.)*

Back off, you snake. Give me time to think.

*While KRIEMHILD thinks, GUNTHER approaches LAZY.*

GUNTHER

I promised her she could have Attila for a husband. I can't go back on my word. Ask what you want - money, fame, the moon from the heavens - it's yours. Just play Attila for me.

LAZY

I can't play Attila.

GUNTHER

You already playing him somewhere else?

LAZY

I told you I would marry her, but I refuse to pretend that I am Attila the Hun.

GUNTHER

You'll be good at it. She's stupid, she'll believe anything.

LAZY

I cannot make believe that I am Attila the Hun.

GUNTHER

Why the hell not?

LAZY

Because I am Attila the Hun.

*Kitchen People return in fright. They carry YOUNG COPPERPOT in their arms.*

KRIEMHILD

What is this?

YOUNG COPPERPOT

*(In delirium.)*

Nibelungs, what are you doing?  
Your castle is devoured by rats,  
Your voices are eaten by worms,  
You wear an ugly monster on your heads  
Who slashes your brows of anger  
Like a diamond sickle slices through wheat.  
Nibelungs, what are you doing?  
Where is the unrestrained fury of the used and the insulted?  
Where are the howls of your wounds?  
Where are your daring, valiant eyes?  
Who among you chose the rat as nature's king?

KRIEMHILD

There is no grief; only happiness forgotten.  
The hero's dead - why now lament the hero?  
Killed long ago - not here and not by us.

But live our lives we must.

YOUNG COPPERPOT

Live our lives we must -  
Eat and marry - then eat again...  
Kriemhild you say they called you?  
An hour ago in your sad cloak  
You stood up like a radiant, black pearl,  
Hidden from tempests and temptations  
In the misleading guise of a mollusk.  
And all the species of the wat'ry deep -  
From the pale, half-dead crab  
To the giant killer whale...  
Sharks and eels and golden manta-rays,  
The hideous, misshapen giant turtle -  
All of them ruled over you, my queen!  
For all you were a silent slave.  
Your lot in life was sad, pathetic...  
But still a black star burned in you!  
And the glowing of its feeble rays,  
Unseen to all cold-blooded creatures  
Blinded the eyes of that Judge who stands above the World.  
He, who knows that neither piles of meat  
Nor forests of bones, nor sea Leviathans  
(That which today we call the whale)  
Are capable of making pearls out of sand!  
Your lot, indeed, was high, my queen!  
And yet you say, "Forget the hero!"  
Take that back, o child of monstrous thoughts!  
The hero is forgotten! - and the pearl becomes  
A common stone - a drop of sleaze,  
A gastronomic ailment, an obstacle to life...  
Forget the hero! - and all those rows of rubies  
Stitched into your regal collar,  
Shall shake as if a trumpet blows retreat,  
Shall pale to yellow and run like cowards.  
The hero is forgotten! - you are a rotting colossus,  
Whose dust the breeze shall raise and scatter.  
The hero is forgotten! - you are a torchlight without fire,  
The glittering, rancid meat of a queen.

TATYANA

When I get out of here I'm not going to town to see my lover. I'm heading straight for the beauty salon. To get a manicure. And then a pedicure. I'll have them do me a mask. Then I'll come home and lie in the bathtub. And then I'll have a cigarette. And after that - another cigarette. Then I will sit back and watch television. And after I have done all of that, then I will go to see my lover.

CHUBBY

You know, basically nothing has happened. The main thing is not to panic. Okay, a calamity befell us, what can you do about it? You can

not panic. Now wait, now wait, now wait - (*To Kriemhild, after thinking.*) You, please, call up those people you called and cancel the alarm. And everything will be fine. We will take into account your feelings for the dear departed. The negligent will be punished. If you think about it, you're very fortunate: your tragedy occurred right before the eyes, if you will, of a professional witness, a member of the collegium of attorneys. Rejoice!

KRIEMHILD

You mean I was lucky?

CHUBBY

Naturally, it is unnatural to speak of such a tragic misunderstanding in a blatantly joyful manner. But essentially? Yes, you lucked out.

KRIEMHILD

Listen! I was lucky! I am so thrilled! But that means I am the cause of the peril now hanging over your heads.

CHUBBY

Well, it sort of happened that, not really trying to do it, that's what you did.

KRIEMHILD

Yes, my mind did not see what my hands were doing!

CHUBBY

And now it does. So now's the perfect time to rectify your error.

KRIEMHILD

Yes, now I see.

CHUBBY

Isn't that just marvelous? (*Hands KRIEMHILD his phone.*)

KRIEMHILD

(*Dials.*)

Hello? Oh, hello! It's me from the castle again. No, I won't do it again. Yes, right from inside. Yes, I can go now.

*All nod supportively.*

The others? Who do you mean? You mean my husband's assassins?

*All look concerned.*

Yes, of course they can go if you let them go. But I don't think that would be fair. (*Shakes the telephone receiver.*) We were cut off.

(*Dials again.*) I haven't said all I wanted to say.

HOT CHEF

Now listen here, Nadya. Listen to me. You are upset. They could easily misunderstand you. Innocent people might suffer, you understand?  
(Takes the phone from Kriemhild.)

KRIEMHILD

Where do you see innocent people? You don't think you are innocent, do you?

HOT CHEF

Nadya, come to your senses. What am I guilty of?

KRIEMHILD

You're guiltier than all of them. You serve an assassin.

HOT CHEF

Everybody serves him.

KRIEMHILD

Then everybody's guilty.

HOT CHEF

You worked for him, too.

KRIEMHILD

And I did, too.

HOT CHEF

So what do we do then?

KRIEMHILD

I don't know. I'm weak. What can I do? I can only howl, "Remember Siegfried's death!" "Remember Siegfried's death!" (Approaches LAZY.)  
Tell me, handsome. Are you really who you say you are?

TATYANA

Get yourself a man and calm down, for God's sake.

KRIEMHILD

(To LAZY.)

Say it yourself.

ATTILA

I am Attila, ruler of the East.

KRIEMHILD

Listen Attila, ruler of the East. I don't want to make any more mistakes.

ATTILA

Beware mistakes.

KRIEMHILD

Why are you here?

ATTILA

To dry your tears.

KRIEMHILD

My brother Gunther also wants to dry my tears. Kriemhild's tears are to no one's advantage. Tears are damp. Dampness attracts worms. And in these climes even old worms are cramped for space. Did Gunther pay you to marry me?

ATTILA

Yes.

KRIEMHILD

Why did you accept that money?

ATTILA

So he would not realize who I really am.

GUNTHER

Good answer, ace.

KRIEMHILD

You do understand why they want to marry me off, don't you?

ATTILA

Of course.

KRIEMHILD

If I take an unworthy groom, I am a traitor to my husband. If I betray my husband, how will I take revenge on his assassins?

ATTILA

I am worthy of you, Kriemhild.

KRIEMHILD

Attila the Hun is worthy of me, that is true. What shall you give to receive Kriemhild?

ATTILA

Twelve crowns, a sprawling territory reaching from the Rheine to the Great Wall of China. Additionally, I shall add all future conquests to your dowry. You shall be known as the Empress of South and Central Europe - the Italites, the Ostrogoths, the Lombards, the Franks and the Germans -

KRIEMHILD

The Bourgognes?

ATTILA

Burgundy is in flames. Worms is under siege. My captains await my orders to storm the citadel. I shall give them the signal when I can declare you my wife.

HAGEN

*(To Gunther.)*

I don't like this guy.

GUNTHER

An amazing kid! Look how her cheeks have gone all rosy. Look how she's looking at him! Marvelous performer, just marvelous. He's kinda chewing the scenery, but in a case like this that's just what you need. Crazies are gullible when it comes to theatrical flair. Marvelous performer.

HAGEN

I don't like any of this one little bit.

KRIEMHILD

*(To Gunther.)*

Why did you arrange this?

GUNTHER

You happy?

KRIEMHILD

What good is my happiness to you?

GUNTHER

You'll never believe me. I promised Siegfried I would look after you.

KRIEMHILD

Why not? I believe you. My Lord! I am talking to you, Gunther.

GUNTHER

But that's only natural.

KRIEMHILD

You have emerged as a factor, Gunther. A determining factor who must be taken into account. How unbearable it is to admit that.

GUNTHER

I rather like it. Just wait a bit, you'll soon be inviting me to baptisms. Life does with us what it will. We will be friends again as once we were. What do you say, Nadya?

KRIEMHILD

Where did you find Attila?

GUNTHER

Actually, he found me. To put it in old-fashioned terms, he "inquired about an audience." *(To Hagen.)* Isn't that how it happened?

HAGEN

I didn't want to hire him.

GUNTHER

So he found me. We had a small chat. And I realized, this is the guy. Think about it Nadya, a person our day and age is incapable of saying, "I am Attila." I don't know why. But it's not possible. Maybe it's shame or maybe it's something else. Shame, probably. But this guy - he can! (*To Lazy.*) Say it.

ATTILA

I am Attila, ruler of the East.

GUNTHER

Splendid. What more could a looney bird like you ask for?

KRIEMHILD

(*Rattles off her words.*)

The head of my husband's assassin!

GUNTHER

(*Gaily.*)

No, no, no. Forget that now. No more silly games. Live your life and enjoy it. You know, you could at least give me a peck on the cheek for finding you such a keeper.

*KRIEMHILD kisses Gunther.*

HOT CHEF

So how are we going to get out of here?

GUNTHER

One more problem to solve. (*To Hagen.*) Come on, barbarian, do something. Reinstate lines of communication. Tell your friends in the security forces to quit messing in my personal affairs.

*Hagen is silent.*

What's the matter? Why are you looking at me like that? Did I say something wrong? (*To Hagen.*) What is wrong? Call, shout, write letters. There are no hostages here! Nobody is being killed! You can't kill a man who is already dead. We're having a friendly little party here. A wedding. We're throwing a wedding! I invited all of you, my dear people, to the wedding of a woman I love. But you may leave. That's all right. Everyone does that. Go on, go. I must admit I thought there was something binding us. But I was wrong. There's nothing awful about that. That's the way it is these days - I understand that. Go on, go on. But the wedding will take place.

HOT CHEF

Weddings are good. But to tell you the truth, I think I'll go.

GUNTHER

Go on, go on -

HOT CHEF

Yes. What I don't understand is how I physically get out of here.

GUNTHER

What are you all making such a big deal out of this for? Okay, so a few security forces showed up. Some trigger-happy soldier shot off a few rubber bullets. By mistake he hit some little girl. No, that's awful, I know. But where's the big tragedy? Get the white flags out and wave 'em. Here, you want my kerchief?

HOT CHEF

I don't think she took a rubber bullet.

GUNTHER

What then? Speak up. No loaded pauses here. Say that awful word lurking behind your enigmatic expression. If not a rubber bullet, then what? Speak up. Don't frighten me.

HOT CHEF

A rock.

GUNTHER

A rock? Nonsense. We aren't Neanderthals.

TATYANA

Are you speaking for yourself?

GUNTHER

Who would use a rock?

HOT CHEF

Who would use combat elephants, siege towers, ballistas, catapults and battering rams? Who would employ archers, slingshotters and spearmen? What are 500,000 horsemen doing surrounding your castle?

GUNTHER

How many thousand horsemen are surrounding my castle?

HOT CHEF

500,000.

GUNTHER

Horsemen?

COLD CHEF

Horsemen.

GUNTHER

Hm. Tomorrow we all begin a short vacation. How many horsemen did you say?

HOT CHEF

500,000.

GUNTHER

Oh, forget the tourists. We all need a break. Turn on some music.

COLD CHEF

We only have television.

GUNTHER

That'll do.

*They turn on the television.*

TV

...and raised the drawbridge o'er the moat.  
O woe, o woe to us - there may be victims.  
Scattered phrases fly to us on gusts of wind,  
Ancient horrors are reflected in the eyes of birds.  
The Nibelungs have locked themselves inside the castle  
And no one has the right to leave...

GUNTHER

What is this crap? (*Changes the channel.*) Oh, here's the weather.

TV

...the dreadful predictions have come true.  
The savage airy leaps of furry squirrels  
And the burrowing of striped shrews  
Have come together in a mysterious ornamental script.  
The city is stricken by the scourge of tornados  
And the hoods of BMWs are shattered by hail.  
When time comes to a halt, sulfurous comets  
Shall not fill the world so full of evil  
As...

*GUNTHER changes the channel.*

Heh, heh. Cool, Butthead.

Ha, ha. Beavis, cool!

*Everybody is happy, just as if they've run into old friends.*

Heh, heh. Those eggheads in the castle think they're hot tamales.

GUNTHER

What's my castle got to do with it?

TV

Yeah, Butthead. Ha, ha. What's the castle got to do with it?  
You dick-brain, Beavis. The castle has nothing to do with it. The  
castle is fucked.

The castle will save no one from the plundering Huns.  
The Nibelungs are wasting their time in there.  
None again shall ever see the light of day...

*Gunther turns off the TV.*

GUNTHER

That God damn broad! (*To Kriemhild.*) Is this your work, witch?

KRIEMHILD

What do you say, my king?  
That savage midgits rustle in the dark?  
That vengeful arrows rain down from the skies?  
Or that each and every one who has an eye  
To see the blood that flows,  
Or has an ear to hear  
The howls of Queen Kriemhild,  
Or tears to share her weeping -  
That each and every one of them is trapped by fate?  
Oh yes! Is caught upon a fishing hook!  
The fisherman is caught no less -  
And much the sadder for it -  
Pulled amongst the reeds and shoals  
Behind the writhing fish,  
Risking all, his boat and oars,  
And life into the bargain.  
But there is no going back!  
He cannot cut the line  
(His hungry children wait at home).  
So too does Queen Kriemhild steer  
The ship of vengeful fortune.  
My work? Yes, it is my work!  
I wept: Therein lies my woman's work.  
But someone hidden there, beyond the icy  
Vault of heaven's desert  
Took heed and heard my sad and wailing plaint  
Above the din of prayers offered up by common priests.  
My work? No, my cunning king!  
Kriemhild is naught but bones and joints,  
I am a sack of stinking meat,  
A wretched drinking barrel gone dry.  
The sharpened tip of a flaming arrow.  
My work? Oh, no! The work is HIS!  
It was HE who wove my tears from rivers,  
To drown this blust'ry age in seething floods,  
An age that never stopped to pause  
The day my husband died; the dazzling Siegfried.  
My work? Yes! My work!

My hand now grips the pleated whip  
And I have leave to flog and thrash my age  
Then drive the bloody mares back home.

HOT COOK

*(Holding a book in hand.)*

This book has talking pictures in it. It's my daughter's birthday tomorrow. What a wonderful age we live in when books can talk! I wouldn't want to live in any other age. I want to live in that age when tomorrow I will give my daughter a gift of a book with talking pictures. Nadya, can I give my daughter a book with talking pictures?

KRIEMHILD

Do you keep the memory of Siegfried's death?

HOT COOK

My daughter came late in life. This book has two stories in it and fourteen talking pictures.

KRIEMHILD

Do you remember how the hero perished?

HOT CHEF

Vaguely.

KRIEMHILD

I pity you. Prepare to die.

GUNTHER

Queen Kriemhild. Nadya, sweetheart. What scum you are, Nadya. After that, how can I be your friend? Okay, so your squeeze was rubbed out. It happens. What are you going to do about it now? Be an idiot? Don't try to levitate. Don't try to become an icon. You're a doe, Nadya, a mare. You are a - there, remembered the word - a warm-blooded sow. Quit messing with people's brains. Have you lost your mind? You're not even that crazy, I'll tell you. You don't qualify as mad. You're too rational. Your card came up and now you're putting on this show. It's your business how you do it. Maybe by hypnosis, maybe you really did sell your soul to the devil. But right here (*points to his head*) you are a PhD. But you'd better take stock a little more carefully - consider what you're up against. All this pride of yours is propped up by nothing but my good wishes for you. I'm not indifferent when it comes to you. I've never denied that and I never will. But you're not battling some abstract figures - they are live flesh and blood. I'm being as patient as I can but at some point I'm going to crack and you're going to go flying. No hypnosis will help you then. You'll have the appropriate severance pay for a kitchen-maid and a letter of reference for your next job. Look at her. This bimbo got it in her head to avenge the death of Siegfried, the King of the Netherlands. But she's gainfully employed as the lowly maid of the kitchen. If you want to be a hero - go ahead, let's talk money. You've got it all figured out, Nadya. You've counted every tear and how much interest

each one will bring. I already composed a business plan for my friend Attila. I'm not just supplying you with a husband. There's also such a word as a dowry. Your dowry, Miss Nadya, is equal approximately to one-third of my entire holdings. I could have split it down the middle. But I thought, half, that sounds phony. I mean I love myself more than I do you. (*Calming down.*) True, on the cusp of a certain twist of fate I killed and robbed your husband. But there is this little detail - your husband was very understanding about the whole thing. I didn't say he forgave me. But he understood me. You don't believe me? Is that too big to fit in your little head? Have you ever thought what a chore it was for him to live among pudding heads like you? Do you know anything about the man whose death you want to avenge? You didn't know a damn thing about him. Yes, he was Siegfried. Yes, he was a dazzling hero. Yes, he was a magical boy. Yes he was the slayer of the fucking dragon. That's all true! But do you know the other truth? Have you ever thought what it means that "Siegfried spoke the languages of the animals and birds"? You think that phrase means what it says? You're right. It does. He did. But that phrase has another meaning, too. He understood everything. Think on that, now. He understood everything. Here. On earth. Not there - but here. You think he didn't know that you sewed that cross on his shirt? Of course he did. But he made himself not know. That's what he was like, your Siegfried. It was his own fault. Yes, his own fault! Judge Siegfried! Judge him. But judge him in me. Here is where he lives. And continues to grow. Listen Kriemhild, don't get in the boy's way. Know your place, kitchen-maid!

I could even understand it if you were to say, "What do you want of me, Gunther? You started this whole thing. You're the one who roused Kriemhild from her slumber. You're the one who found me a new husband. What do you expect from me now?" I want this all to remain among us, Kriemhild. Don't mix other people up in this, Nadya. Don't do that. Let them go home to their wives and their televisions, to their shiny fry pans and their dark thoughts. Let 'em go. This doesn't concern them.

KITCHEN PEOPLE

(*Chaotically.*)

Yeah, it doesn't concern us.

GUNTHER

That's not true, either... But screw it. What do I care about kitchen people? What do I care about people? What do I care about you, Kriemhild? Who made you a queen? Did you do it? No. My love did. So why are you not grateful? Where is your memory? You think you lamented Siegfried! I am the one who lamented Siegfried. You say your husband was lost? For me the whole world was lost. The mirror shattered. I'm alone, now, Nadya.

Farewell, friend. Farewell. You will be remembered for all the wrong reasons. People will avenge your death, but it is not you they will avenge. (*To Siegfried.*) Siegfried! Why are you silent? Show this witch, your wife, what I meant to you. Give me your hand, friend!

*Extends his hand to Siegfried. SIEGFRIED lies motionless. HAGEN approaches GUNTHER and slaps his face.*

HAGEN

I'm ashamed of you, king. What if he had given you his hand? What then? The slate wiped clean? No more great kings?! No more great friendships?! No more great quarrels?! Just Peter and Pimply who punched each other on the nose and made up because they didn't have enough between them to buy a bottle? Is that how you want it? No, Gunther! I did not serve you or Pimply. I served Gunther, the hallowed King of Burgundy. And I want to die a servant of Gunther, the hallowed King of Burgundy.

GUNTHER

Thank you, friend. I forgot myself.

*SIEGFRIED raises his hand.*

Too late, Siegfried. It's too late.

HAGEN

Scratch the air with your claw, you stinking crab. Screw you, hero.

*KRIEHMILD heard every word Hagen said. And, boy, did she ever hear...*

CHUBBY

What I'm missing here are a few lifelike details. Somehow you guys are always drifting off into the abstract. On the other hand, I realize not everybody does in his mother-in-law over the last bottle of hooch hidden in the closet. I guess some vile deeds must be committed over principles. Where would we be without those?

KRIEMHILD

*(To all.)*

You hear me? I am to be married. I must have rosy cheeks and a pale forehead. I must transform into a herring and lay a row of eggs. Do you like caviar, my love?

ATTILA

Yes, I do love children.

KRIEMHILD

*(To the Kitchen People.)*

I shall be wed. What do you say to that?

COLD CHEF

It's high time.

KRIEMHILD

Good words, those.

COPPERPOT

I hope you croak.

KRIEMHILD

Bad words.

MAMA VALYA

Do as you see fit.

KRIEMHILD

Worthless advice. (*Passing Gunther.*) You I already know. (*Stopping before HOT CHEF.*) What is your advice?

HOT CHEF

Don't go bearing daughters, Kriemhild.

KRIEMHILD

I'll remember that.

*KRIEMHILD wanders at length about the kitchen as if searching for water with a divining rod. Finally stops next to HAGEN. Steps away from him. Approaches him again.*

*(Sniffing him.)* Is this the smell of an assassin?

HAGEN

Come here.

KRIEMHILD

*(Emits a low snarl. Laughs.)*

Marry, marry, marry - I want to get married!

GUNTHER

Everything is ready, Nadya. Everything is ready. Everything you could possibly want.

*HAGEN signals to the cooks, who suddenly leap into motion. The banquet table is set.*

KRIEMHILD

I want to hear a boys' chorus sing. I want a white wedding gown. I want salads and music. I want drunken fights. I want it to be just like everybody else's wedding.

*Music sounds.*

GUNTHER

You will have your salads and gowns, Nadya. Whatever you want.

*A huge coat is placed on ATTILA's shoulders. A white pinafore is tied on KRIEMHILD. CHUBBY, now dressed as a chaplain, conducts the wedding service. A boys' choir sings, the Kitchen People toss rice at the*

*bride and groom. Kisses. The groom takes the bride in his arms and carries her to the banquet table.*

ATTILA

I realize how silly this is. But I am happy.

KRIEMHILD

*(Through the laughter and tears of joy.)*

I am not.

*All are finally seated at the table. Even YOUNG COPPERPOT sits at the bride's left hand. Noise. Laughter. Shouts. GUNTHER stands to make a speech. He clinks his glass with his fork, asks for silence.*

GUNTHER

Our crew is a young one. This is our first wedding. What can I say? These are not common people joining their futures in matrimony today. Mr. Attila has not been with us long. But we have come to know him and love him. He has a great imagination, he is a gifted young man. He's vain. Yes, he is vain. But there is something about him. And that is why we love him. *(Wipes perspiration from his brow.)* And now for our Nadya. Miss Nadya. Our Queen Kriemhild.

*KRIEMHILD appears to be listening with great pleasure.*

Everyone loves her. She has a marvelous quality - her sense of loyalty. We envy Nadya. To you, my straight and true.

KRIEMHILD

Just one minute, please. He'll be right here.

GUNTHER

Who?

KRIEMHILD

Literally just a few seconds. He's on his way.

ALL

Who?

KRIEMHILD

What do you mean, who? My first husband. You know him. Siegfried.

*SIEGFRIED stands. Walks to the table. Sits at a prepared place setting.*

Now, you may go on.

GUNTHER

What more can I say? *(Drinks.)* Pour me another one. To you, Nadya. Everything is going to be fine. *(Sits down, upset.)*

KRIEMHILD

*(To Siegfried.)*

Why are you silent? Say something, puppy. *(Weeps.)* What would you like? Stuffed mushrooms? *(Hysterically.)* "Yes" - "No" - answer!

*SIEGFRIED is silent.*

What, then?

HOT CHEF

Give him a little salad. Just the thing.

*MAMA VALYA whacks him on the side of the head.*

CHUBBY

*(To KRIEMHILD.)*

Nadya! Our favorite bride! Might I ask a little question? You have invited your - how shall I put this? - your past to join us at the table. Were you doing that for the symbolism of it? Was that your metaphor? Was that your effort to remind those of us among the living that death has a way of coming along? If so, what prompted you to think we don't know that? We know that. It's just that you can't do without trivial symbols. Do you really think you can escape reality? I understand. You even do a pretty good job of it. You can take flight from reality - one doesn't need much brains for that. But you know where you are trapped? In your anti-cellulite stockings. Now that's your reality. There's your metaphor. There it is - your whole vengeance scheme boils down to stockings.

*SIEGFRIED falls under the table. He is lifted back into place.*

Now that's just what I would have expected. That's exactly what I would have expected! Moreover, if right now, in full flight, you find a way to bring this disgraceful madness of yours to a shuddering halt, that would be a lot more impressive than making dead bodies dance. Now that would be a metaphor with a capital M! You would be transformed - crowned by the crown of thorns of rational suffering. Humility, incidentally, was not devised by stupid individuals. In fact, the holy fathers say -

TATYANA

Yarik, enough of that crap.

GUNTHER

Yeah, pal. Be a friend and cap the fountain.

CHUBBY

What are you people always getting in the way for? *(To Kriemhild.)* Idiots! And they keep on playing high-minded games with you. They do not comprehend the full danger of the situation. And you don't either. Moron! Forget these Nibelungs. *(Waves at GUNTHER and TATYANA.)* Remember these people! *(Points at the Kitchen People.)* If you don't

calm down, these folks will calm you down, but good. Consider this: Because of you they have already missed a grand sum total of approximately 100 hours before the television. Withdrawal is going to set in any minute now. They will rip you limb from limb. They don't give a damn about your didactic principles. Your Siegfried for them is nothing but a pain in the ass. To tell you the truth, I don't put much stock in you, either. As far as I can tell, you don't miss a trick yourself. You appreciate poetry. I even got carried away listening to you. But a marriage, Miss Nadya, is a social contract! Vengeance for husbands must be kept to a minimum. Go ahead, take on 250 lovers. Let Gunther here choke in jealousy (I do hope he understands my turn of speech). You and I may be the same age, but allow me to give you some fatherly advice: Tuck it up where you need some tucking up, Nadya. Get some Botox wherever you need it. Lose some weight if you have to. You'll see - the whole world will look different. What Huns? What are you talking about? There aren't any Huns. And there never were.

ATTILA

I could argue that with you.

CHUBBY

Oh, let's argue it! Let's argue, debate, let's meet and negotiate. I'll be only too happy. But what the hell do Huns have to do with it?

KRIEMHILD

I now have a champion. A husband. Attila the Hun.

CHUBBY

Oh come off it! What husband? What Attila? (*Foaming at the mouth.*) This is no Attila, Nadya! This is a pretty little boy toy. You have been handed a pretty little boy toy. For money - you get that? For money! For big money!

GUNTHER

Not that big.

CHUBBY

For not that big o' money! And you infuriate me because it's obvious that you knew all that. I'm going to pop out of my skin. Because these are not my lines, you realize that? I am a splendid-hearted man, Nadya, and I have no desire to lecture a woman about menopause. But I have no choice. Because all of this (*makes a sweeping gesture*) is nothing but pure physiology. Miss Nadya, you have five, six, maybe ten years left. Enjoy them, for God's sake, and quit filling your head with satanic gobbledygook. Take a big bite of humble quiche, young lady! Damn it, you're going to make me forget how to talk altogether. Humble quiche. How's that for a Freudian error. In short, cool it, Nadya. That's what I want to say. Cool it. That's my message to you.

KRIEMHILD

Was that a toast?

CHUBBY

If you'd only cool it, yes that would be a toast.

KRIEMHILD

I'm quite calm and collected. Shall we drink? (*Runs about the kitchen, clinking glasses individually with everyone in the Slavic manner. Drinks.*) I might not have you killed.

CHUBBY

Oh, thank you.

KRIEMHILD

Yes, it's probably true. I am not the most virginal of brides. But if you want to know, I have suffered. Not only suffered. And this, you don't know - I have thought about my suffering.

CHUBBY

Oh, God. Spare me.

KRIEMHILD

I don't care if it sounds silly. But I have given it thought. And here is the conclusion I have come to: One must live honestly.

CHUBBY

Oh that's brave. Take you long to think that up?

KRIEMHILD

Nineteen years.

CHUBBY

What do you mean by "honestly"? Does that word have some cosmic connotation for you or do you use it like all reasonable people do?

KRIEMHILD

One must do what one says.

CHUBBY

Oh right. And I was getting worried. I thought, what if this broad really does come up with some theory, and reinterprets the truth on a grand scale. That'll keep us nimble, I thought. But it was a false alarm, thank God. We got off without any new breakthroughs in the sphere of the spirits.

KRIEMHILD

Maybe I am stupid. But you all are presently living by a plan that stupid little me devised.

CHUBBY

Allow me to doubt that heavily. Life, Nadya, is like a sheet of drafting paper smudged all over in black spots. Sketching out plans on it is absolutely pointless.

KRIEMHILD

The truth lies outside the bounds of all truisms.

CHUBBY

Perhaps. But the fact that you are a moron, Nadya, is not only a truism, it is also true.

GUNTHER

Take it easy, now.

CHUBBY

Lay offa me! (*To Kriemhild.*) Living honestly does not mean doing what you say. Living honestly means doing! Doing! Think about that. That ought to keep you busy for another 19 years.

KRIEMHILD

I grant you life.

CHUBBY

Oh go fuck yourself.

*GUNTHER grabs him by the lapels.*

GUNTHER

Okay, attorney, you've said enough.

CHUBBY

And now what?

*GUNTHER does not respond. CHUBBY doubles over in laughter. GUNTHER lets him go.*

"You've said enough, attorney"! No. "Okay, attorney, you've said enough"! "Okay!" There's a big word, huh? - "Okay"! (*Doubles over in laughter again.*) Real tough. And that tsk, tsk look in his eyes! (*Calms down.*) And this guy calls himself an assassin. All right, shhh, I'm done. (*He truly does fall silent.*)

TATYANA

May I propose a toast?

HOT CHEF

I want to too.

COPPERPOT

After me. I thought of it first.

HOT CHEF

Go right ahead.

TATYANA

I spend most of my time here in silence. That's the role I have - to be silent. The assumption is that I'm this pale little wallflower who keeps all her thoughts and experiences to herself. I disagree here and there, quarrel, rebel - but always silently. Silently. That's my role. Okay. I won't argue. I can be silent, too. But then somebody else say it for me. Say what it is that I'm being silent about. Kriemhild! We used to be friends! I was a bitch and you were always an angel. You were never an angel, my friend. And your Siegfried was no angel, either. He was the angel. (*Points to Gunther.*) I'm a nobody in this. I'm the lawfully wedded wife. Nobody hears me, nobody sees me, nobody's interested in me. Did he ever love me? I have no idea. Probably not. But think about it: If it was for me, a little gray mouse, that he did what he did - and he murdered his friend - then just imagine what he would be willing to do for a peacock like you.

*All sit in silence.*

COLD CHEF

I have a moped.

KRIEMHILD

My congratulations.

COLD CHEF

It's almost brand new.

KRIEMHILD

(*Absentmindedly.*)

Oh, excellent. Fine.

COLD CHEF

I haven't even ridden on it yet. I'm supposed to pick it up at the shop tomorrow.

KRIEMHILD

(*Compassionately.*)

Tomorrow? (*Shakes her head.*)

COLD CHEF

(*Pleading.*)

Tomorrow. (*Grows agitated.*) Can I just have enough time to pick it up and take a quick ride? Just once. Then I'll come back. (*Weeps.*)

*KRIEMHILD does not respond.*

COPPERPOT

I want to drink to you, my friend. I always thought you were just some pitiful broad. In fact, you're a mean-spirited pitiful broad.

(*Shouts.*) What have you done to my sister?

KRIEMHILD

What sister? The sister who is ten times purer in heart and a hundred times more beautiful? The sister you called a gutter snipe when she begged you not to deprive her of the only suitor she ever had? The sister who's life you ruined?

COPPERPOT

That's not true.

KRIEMHILD

It is true.

YOUNG COPPERPOT

He had two Spanish roses imprinted on his shield. One had a pale, sharp thorn. The other was bound in metal mesh. I gave him my garland. What was so wrong with that?

COPPERPOT

What's wrong is that he doesn't even remember your name.

YOUNG COPPERPOT

You know what? I can't remember how many lilies there were in the upper left-hand corner of his coat-of-arms. Two or three? Four?

COPPERPOT

Don't torture yourself. What lilies? That creep walked all over you.

YOUNG COPPERPOT

Yes, that knight kissed my feet.

COPPERPOT

Lucy, come to your senses. We're going to be fine. We'll buy a new teapot and I'll let you wear the lavender sandals. If you want me to, I'll go spend a whole month in the country with Mom. You can have the place to yourself. Well, maybe not a month, but two weeks for sure. Would you like that?

KRIEMHILD

I'll take you with me to the capital of the Huns. You'll have 200 splendid handmaidens. You'll be clothed in the finest of finery. Every morning you will be awakened by bagpipes and hunting horns. And if you grow tired of German music, I will hire an ensemble of Hun drummers. Jewelers from Kiev shall forge ten golden rings for every one of your fingers. The Ugro-Finnish tribes shall send you gifts of beaver and fox. You shall spit into golden chalices and not so much as a single bedbug will dare drop on your head from the ceiling for I will order my seamstresses to hang a valence of silk above your bed. The finest knights and noblest kings of conquered nations shall compete to sigh at your side.

COPPERPOT

I'll talk to him. He'll fall in love with you yet. He can... Your soldier's a good guy. He just had a bad childhood.

YOUNG COPPERPOT

*(Coming to her senses.)*

What in the hell happened to me? *(Throws herself into her sister's embrace.)* Marina!

COPPERPOT

Lucy! *(Weeps. Calms down.)*

*KRIEMHILD is angry. Paces the kitchen like a vulture hunting carrion. Roars.*

KRIEMHILD

Who will go with me? I'll spare your life. There will be no gold. No servants. You'll be slaves yourselves. But you'll live.

HOT CHEF

I, for example, was quite offended by the words of this gentleman here. *(Points at CHUBBY.)* What he said about us supposedly not sympathizing with you. I don't agree with that at all. I even feel a toast coming on. I want to drink, Nadya, to trust. You appealed to us with your abstract problem. And you must admit that a problem that hangs on for 19 years is an abstract problem. You appealed to us as a person who believed we would help. You didn't try to grovel or ingratiate yourself. Maybe this isn't the best way of saying it, but I'm grateful to you, Nadya, for the trust you showed us. If it wasn't for my daughter, who's birthday it is tomorrow, I'd go with you.

KRIEMHILD

Who's daughter's birthday is tomorrow? The one in plot eight?

HOT CHEF

I don't understand.

KRIEMHILD

What? You mean you don't know what plot eight means? Then why do you go there every week?

HOT CHEF

I have relatives there.

KRIEMHILD

You have a daughter there.

HOT CHEF

My daughter is alive. I bought her a book with talking pictures.

KRIEMHILD

Come along with the Huns. I changed my mind. You won't be a slave. You'll be my kitchen superintendant. I'll import eight cauldrons from China for you - each bigger than the last. In the eighth you'll be able to boil an entire Roman legion.

HOT CHEF

What about my daughter?

KRIEMHILD

*(Changing tactics.)*

What if she's already there? And is waiting for you?

HOT CHEF

*(Laughs.)*

No, Nadya. My daughter died. She's buried in plot eight. Row three. On one side of her is Zinaida Zubchenko. On the other is Anton Roitbruth. Everything I am is located right there - between Zubchenko and Roitbruth. How can I possibly leave?

KRIEMHILD

Who is with me? You? You? You?

*All refuse.*

*(To MAMA VALYA.)*

What about you?

MAMA VALYA

I'd go with you, Nadya. But what about my cat? And the kitten?

KRIEMHILD

No. I wouldn't take you anyway. You will die.

HAGEN

Leave her alone.

KRIEMHILD

You slit my throat and now you don't want me dripping blood on your carpet.

HAGEN

I am a man of ancient mores, Kriemhild. Blood doesn't concern me. I am concerned about my king's honor.

KRIEMHILD

Your king is as much a dirty killer as you are.

HAGEN

My king carries out his thoughts through to the end. You do not. Weep, people of the kitchen! Weep. Our king has been brought down by a hag. The light of our lives was doused by a teaspoon of water. Our pride and joy has fallen to his knees. Weep. I am a man of ancient mores. I have one thought, one capability, one faith. I pity you people of many thoughts and many capabilities. I pity you. I, Hagen von Trone, the killer of the dragon's killer.

*KRIEMHILD flies about the kitchen.*

KRIEMHILD

You dare remind me of Siegfried! You will never forget Siegfried!  
(*Runs to Attila.*) Are you really Attila?

ATTILA

I swear by the memory of Siegfried.

KRIEMHILD

No. Swear by something more tangible. The internet, for instance.

ATTILA

I swear by the internet!

KRIEMHILD

You hear that? None of you will see daybreak!

COLD CHEF

You laughed when I mentioned my moped. You've got all these big world problems going on. And I've just got a moped. Yeah? So I'm an idiot, yeah? I don't give a damn about that moped. I don't give a damn. It's not, it's not about the moped. It's something else. It's about the way I'll take it in my hands. Kiss its headlight. It's not even that. It's about the way I'll ride it and all the girls will make fun - "Look at that idiot on his moped!" And that'll be fun for me, too. Fun! Do you understand that? (*Weeps.*)

TATYANA

Oh, Lord! Gunther. Husband. Sweetheart. Look at me. It's me. Your Brunhild. Don't you recognize me? It's me.

*GUNTHER recognizes BRUNHILD.*

BRUNHILD

Maybe we didn't live the life we planned. But we have lived our lives together. (*To the Kitchen People.*) He is in the process of losing it. He always loses it in situations like this. But let me tell you a secret. When you listen to my husband, you should keep your own thoughts in your head. That way you'll understand what he's trying to say. (*To Gunther.*) Kiss me.

*GUNTHER kisses BRUNHILD. Shots are fired. Shouts of anger. The sound of punches being thrown. Enter GUARD lazily fighting off Huns by shooting his pump rifle. Slams the door in the face of a mad crowd of barbarians. Kitchen People help him erect barricades.*

GUARD

(*Under complete control.*)

They broke through. (*Looks the scene over.*) You haven't finished here yet?

KRIEMHILD

*(To GUARD.)*

Do you cherish the memory of Siegfried?

GUARD

You talking about the hero of that medieval saga?

KRIEMHILD

I am talking about my husband.

GUARD

*(Attending to his own wound. Speaks bookishly.)*

Unquestionably. The Dutch prince was a courageous and powerful knight. A storied hero. Having washed himself in the blood of a serpent, for all practical purposes he became invincible. Moreover, Siegfried acquired many other extraordinary qualities. This, consequently, leads to one of the reasons for his death.

KRIEMHILD

Are you prepared to avenge his murder?

GUARD

Let's put it this way: I condemn Siegfried's vile murder. But one must consider that Hagen von Trone was absolutely selfless in his villainous doings. The evil he commits is perpetrated for the glory and the good of the royal House of Burgundy. He carried out the murder of Siegfried in the capacity of a loyal vassal in response to unforgivable offenses hurled at King Gunther.

*KRIEMHILD chews pots and pans.*

As for Kriemhild, I personally am deeply disappointed at her bloody mercilessness and her transformation from a tender spouse into an evil witch. *(Tries to scratch his back.)* Deeply disappointed. *(Falls. A spear protrudes from his back.)*

GUNTHER

*(Almost imperceptibly losing it.)*

All things considered, Kriemhild is not the point. What's your name, kitchen cook?

HOT CHEF

I am not a cook. I am the Senior Chef of the Hot Division.

GUNTHER

I didn't mean to offend you, Senior Chef of the Hot Division. Say your name, please.

HOT CHEF

Peter. *(Thinks.)* Hooch.

GUNTHER

*(Thinks.)*

That's a fine name. *(Thinks.)* Dear Mr. Peter... Hooch. Have you ever thought of the fact that, when we erect the structure of our homes, we, in effect, are building future ruins? And after many centuries - or months or days - following the end of contemporary civilization, our descendants shall wander among the ruins -

COLD CHEF

Or, perhaps, *our* descendants.

GUNTHER

Or your descendants. Or maybe no one's descendants. Or maybe no one will wander the earth. But these people, they will think that the ruins were intended as such - to be ruins. They will think we contracted to build empty window holes and piles of debris and fragments of walls. And at some point, without fail, someone will say, "How wise our ancestors were! They built homes it is impossible to inhabit. They recognized the value of pointless activity." And we will remain silent for we will be ashamed to tell them the truth.

HAGEN

We will not be ashamed, because we will no longer be.

GUNTHER

And for that reason, too. *(Finally loses it and falls on his knees before Attila.)*

*HAGEN stands alongside GUNTHER, ready to defend him against an entire division sent by Kriemhild.*

CHUBBY

Mrs. Kriemhild. Sweetheart. I seem to recall you promising to spare a little something. You know, someone's life and such.

KRIEMHILD

I have not forgotten.

CHUBBY

Maybe the time has come to, uh, spare it.

*KRIEMHILD approaches CHUBBY. Kisses him on the forehead.*

KRIEMHILD

Go. *(Pushes CHUBBY towards the door.)*

CHUBBY

But there's all those, you know - *(Points.)*

KRIEMHILD

Go on. Go.

*CHUBBY walks to the doors that the HUNS are assaulting. The doors swing open, CHUBBY disappears through them, the doors swing shut.*

COLD CHEF

He's gone.

ATTILA

Now that our official brainiac has left the stage I trust that a wretched Ruler of the Universe might now be able to get a word in edgewise. Or do you all still have more complaints? Dear sister-cooks, have you exhausted your resources of idiocy? You don't say. But has the terror of it all made the proper impression on you? Is there anyone else here who doesn't believe in Huns? Why are you so transfixed on those doors? Is that where you fear they will appear? What about here? (*Taps MAMA VALYA on her bald head.*) Although it's true, of course - they may come through the door.

In principle, this is where I should undergo a transformation. I should transform from a lazy young man into the terrible Attila the Hun. But there won't be any transformations. Because the evil old man with crooked legs and a shaved head - that's the Attila of your imagination. Cute little me - that's the Attila you are fated to meet. I realize it's difficult to believe that the State of Burgundy will be wiped off the face of the earth not by a hideous cannibal, but rather by a charming individual with a weakness for alcohol. Pour me a drink, by the way. But get this through your heads: I have no desire to violate the rules of hygiene just in order to support your misconceptions about me. I will not eat dead bodies. For you this is all just a passing moment. For me it's my work. I have been in the service of the Great Master of the world since my early youth.

Beyond that - riddles. Beyond that - questions. The biggest question is what am I going to do with you? You see yourselves - Kriemhild insists on formally observing the laws of retribution. It is not my place to judge whether she is right (although she's obviously not). But as a newlywed I am in no position not to give in to her whim.

So, wife, what shall we do? There are two essential choices - to avenge or not to avenge. Everything involving the first case is clear - we make ourselves out to be the arms of fate and with rapacious smiles on our lips we look on as a sea of Huns inundates the island of Nibelungs. Or we can not avenge. No, listen to what I have to say. Don't forget who I am. My capabilities, give or take a little, are limitless. So if you resolve to call off your eccentric demands, I can take on the practical side of things myself. There are endless possibilities. First, we can always write this off as if it were a common show played out in a theater. Second, we can call it someone's drunken meanderings and hallucinations. I have, after all, downed a hell of a lot of your Burgundy wine. Third -

KRIEMHILD

Stop it. This earth was soaked with Siegfried's blood. Now it shall drink the blood of his assassins.

ATTILA

Where have you seen any earth here? I don't get it. I think this is called "linoleum." *(To those around him.)* I've done all I could, folks.

HOT CHEF

We appreciate the effort.

ATTILA

You see it's pointless to argue.

COLD CHEF

Absolutely pointless.

ATTILA

All right. Don't lose heart. You probably can guess that I prepared a few windfall benefits in the event of this outcome. All of your dreams shall come true. Your dead loved ones shall come back to life. Your grief shall be dispersed. You shall have your moped. The Copperpot sisters shall have a legion of husbands. Peter shall have back his daughter. But he'll have to die to have her. *(Pause.)* Huns! Are you prepared to storm?

*A roar goes up outside the doors.*

Nibelungs, are you ready?

*Raising their weapons on high, the Kitchen People attempt to muster an aggressive roar. It's pathetic, but heroic.*

GUNTHER

Wait! This isn't what I... It's not how I... This is all wrong. It's about me. You all have nothing to do with it. It's... I... My... I'm to blame -

COPPERPOT

Quit blabbering. If you don't have the guts, the exit's over there. See the little green lights? *(Shows in detail how Gunther can leave by way of the theater stalls.)* But if you're with us, here - take this. *(Hands Gunther a weapon.)*

GUNTHER

What is this?

YOUNG COPPERPOT

It's a fork for a cheese plate. You'd think you'd know by now.

GUNTHER

*(Pitifully.)*

Siegfried. It was I who killed you.

HOT CHEF

Come to your senses, King. Who cares about some old Siegfried? The Huns are at our doors. Every knife and fork counts now.

COLD CHEF

Take heart, boss. We'll show 'em!

COPPERPOT

Yeah, yeah! We'll show 'em!

MAMA VALYA

Where are those Huns? Gimme the Huns! Open those gates! I'm going to tear these guys to shreds!

ATTILA

*(To Kriemhild, affectionately, intimately.)*

You're a fool, sweetheart.

*The doors fly open. Enter, somewhat embarrassed, a group of quiet, savage HUNS. They mix with the Kitchen People. They all talk about something - introduce themselves, shake hands. Rarely, as if joking, they poke each other with knives and forks. Along the edge of the stage ATTILA arranges them one-by-one - Hun, Nibelung, Hun, Nibelung. ATTILA blows a referee's whistle. A battle begins. But one second before that, a sudden black-out. Silence.*

*Emergency teams stride among smoking remains. They flash flashlights, pull apart scattered debris, argue among themselves. SIEGFRIED, GUNTHER, BRUNHILD and HAGEN sit by a small campfire. They cook and eat a wild boar.*

SIEGFRIED

*(Flicking a cigarette lighter.)*

That's not true. It's still a very useful thing. I don't know what it's called, but the very notion that you can call forth fire not by the efforts of your thoughts, but by a simple flicking of the finger - that's a really useful idea. Just imagine, you can set a fire without having to think at all. Or to feel anything. Amazing. Don't you agree?

BRUNHILD

There's much of interest. A mixer. Quite poetic.

HAGEN

I like the notion of "traffic cops."

*Enter KOLYA PILLOWPLUMPER.*

KOLYA PILLOWPLUMPER

Where are you? I brought the two-buck-chuck.

ATTILA

Hey, it's Kolya. What are you wandering around here for, friend?

KOLYA PILLOWPLUMPER

Where's the hot chef?

ATTILA

The hot chef? He went visiting. To see his daughter.

KOLYA PILLOWPLUMPER

Lucy too?

*Nobody answers.*

Where's Lucy?

ATTILA

Have a drink, Kolya. Drink up.

*KOLYA drinks. Enter KRIEMHILD in her kitchen-maid garb. Pulls a sack behind her, filling it with junk.*

KRIEMHILD

Siegfried!

*SIEGFRIED does not reply. Looks over the head of his widow.*

ATTILA

Drop by and see us, Kolya. Now you know where to find us.

*NIBELUNGS stand, wipe their lips on their sleeves, stretch their wings and fly away.*

*(Remaining on earth. To KITCHEN-MAID.) Clean up well, here.  
(Disappears.)*

*Light disappears too. Remaining on the darkened stage are people among the ruins, CHUBBY, KOLYA, KRIEMHILD. CHUBBY grooms and primps.*

QUESTION MARK

Camera. Action. *(Voice changes.)* And what, in your opinion, was the cause of it all?

CHUBBY

Considering the complexity of the situation, I would not exclude any of the extant versions.

QUESTION MARK

I realize you find it difficult to speak. However, one follow-up question. Insofar as I understand it, you left the building literally moments before it all happened. Did you feel anything?

CHUBBY

I find it difficult to speak. (*Weeps.*) I am an attorney. (*Weeps and snuffles at length.*) Many dear friends... I grew so close to them... And you know what is worst of all?

QUESTION MARK

What is that?

CHUBBY

Nothing indicated a tragedy was in the making. (*Walking off camera, snuffles gaily.*)

*KRIEMHILD stands on stage with her long, black cellophane sack. Howls at the top of her lungs.*

CURTAIN