

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 13, No.3 - Fall 1967

Editor of this issue: Bronius Vaškeelis

ISSN 0024-5089

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LITUANUS

www.lituanus.org

THE ORATOR

KAZYS SAJA



KAZYS SAJA was born in 1932 in Skėriai, Lithuania. He was educated in the Technical School of Agriculture, Teachers College in Klaipėda and later studied Lithuanian language and literature at the Pedagogical Institute in Vilnius. Since 1958 he works as a professional writer, mainly in the genre of drama

Saja began writing stories, feuilletons and pieces for the stage while he was a student at the Technical School. However, his literary debut came with the comedy *A Bet* (*Lažybos*, 1954). For more than a decade his comedies comprised a great part of original repertory for the theater of amateur groups, published in several collections: *Because of a Kind Heart* (*Vis per gerą širdį*, 1956), *Comedies* (*Komedijos*, 1957), *A Woman Goes Through the Rain* (*Motėris eina per lietų*, 1962) *Two Mice* (*Dvi pelės*, 1966). Since 1962, his more important published dramatic works are: *The First Drama* (*Pirmoji drama*, 1962) *Anxiety* (*Nerimas*, 1963), *Two plays* (*Dvi pjesės*, 1965) and *The Little Plays* (*Mažosios dramos*, 1968).

Saja also published several collections of humorous stories, including *Wooden Shoes* (*Klumpės*, 1958), *Jurgis on the Roof* (*Jurgis ant stogo*, 1963), *In Palanga and Elsewhere* (*Palangoje ir kitur*, 1963).

THE ORATOR

One act tragicomedy with prologue

by

KAZYS SAJA

Translated by Skirmantė Makaitis

CHARACTERS:

ORATOR
HIS FATHER
MOTHER
WIFE
SON
BROTHER HUNCHBACK
BROTHER PIZONAS

GOVERNESS
BOARDER
NEIGHBOR
COMMANDANT

The action takes place in a large house several stories high. It has been renovated, repaired, and painted many times.

The characters, except the NEIGHBOR and COMMANDANT, are personifications of various aspects of the ORATOR. The FATHER is his mind; the MOTHER, his heart; the WIFE, his ambition; etc.

PROLOGUE

A silhouette of the house is depicted on the curtain. The NEIGHBOR appears through an opening in the curtain where a door is represented.

NEIGHBOR. Hello! Hello hello hello. You're here to see the Orator, I suppose? I, unfortunately, am only his Neighbor. And I won't be divulging a secret if I tell you — happy is the home which has such a wise, such an eloquent Orator! Brick walls like these, as you can see, do not grow old. When they begin to crack and fall, the Orator takes the floor. He convinces our Commandant that the time has come to prop up this, to patch up that, to whitewash something else. For example, the Orator says: "We need larger windows! More light, more sun, fresh air, and smiling!" And lo and behold, the Commandant puts in bigger windows. . . Someday — we're all mortal, after all — someday we'll affix a marble plaque on this house, and on it will be written: "A fiery Orator lived, spoke, and grew silent here. His orations inspired us to undertake great works and noble deeds." But what joy overcomes us when we remember that the Orator is alive, healthy, and still writing! His most fiery speeches are yet to be said, and we will have the pleasure of seeing him with our own eyes and hearing him with our own ears. (*A sound like coughing or cackling is heard.*) Oh, yes. . . And so, I won't be divulging a secret if I tell you — happy is the home which has such a solicitous and orderly Commandant! Such a just and fatherly head of the house! (*HUNCHBACK approaches the NEIGHBOR.*) Oh! Whom do I see? The Orator's brother. Hello hello! I was just saying, a Commandant like that is a curse of God, and an Orator like that is a gift of God.

HUNCHBACK. Why such a great curse and such a little gift?

NEIGHBOR. Little gift? Really, now... Not everyone can boast that his father is the mind, and his mother, the heart.

HUNCHBACK. That's true, there are sometimes orphans in our house. And some boast that their father is the Commandant. . .

NEIGHBOR. Well, never mind, never mind. But in conclusion, if it won't be divulging a secret. . .

HUNCHBACK. It will be. And it isn't necessary. We'll see the conclusion ourselves. (*Exits.*)

NEIGHBOR. Oh. Well, all right. What happiness, what terror. . . What happiness, what terror. . . (*Follows HUNCHBACK.*)

The curtain rises.

A strangely-shaped room with several doors and one window. Some sort of pipe is sticking up out of the floor, and from time to time it emits mysterious sighs and frightening growls. A huge cloth-covered statue is standing in the middle of the room. The ORATOR is at his desk, writing his speech. The gray-haired FATHER sits achoss from him, smoking a pipe. The MOTHER is embroidering stylized suns, camomiles, and tulips on a large linen cloth. The GOVERNESS is giving the WIFE a manicure. HUNCHBACK idles about, stopping here and there to look at what the others are doing. The little SON, with a paper crown on his head, rides a stick and waves a plywood sword about fighting with the wall, the pipe, and the covered statue.

ORATOR (*solemnly reads what he has written*). "Man is great, because he approaches ever closer to that perfection which once belonged to God alone. With his gentle fingers he plays the harps of the angels, bends iron and steel, and crumbles diamonds. He breeds animals and plants which did not exist in nature, and he invents machines a million times as strong as himself." Well, what do you think?

HUNCHBACK. Man is so omnipotent, but here I am with my hump. . .

FATHER (*to the ORATOR*). Why the introducion? Just come right to the point and say that yesterday one of our tenant climbed on the roof, cried out a few words to the people below, and jumped off.

(*A car goes by in the street with sirens wailing.*)

MOTHER (*covering her eyes with her embroidery*). Can't you write a speech without those horrible things?

WIFE. What did he say when he jumped?

ORATOR. He was high up, the traffic was noisy, and nobody heard him.

GOVERNESS. What could he have said? "A happy life to you all; but me, I'm tired of it." That's all.

HUNCHBACK. Yes. He yawned, shut his eyes, and kerplunk. ..

WIFE (*to the ORATOR*). It's your duty to say what he didn't.

SON. Daddy, I will! I'll say it! (*To HUNCHBACK*) Hold my horse. (*Climbs on a chair*) Let the Commandant see! Let everybody see! I wanted a real horse! I wanted a real sword! And a real crown... So there! (*Jumps off and plays dead*)

MOTHER. That child will hear all sorts of things he shouldn't and kill himself one day. .. Come here, little one, come to me.

HUNCHBACK (*lifts him up*). A real horse needs a lot of grass. Here, take your stick. A real sword is sharp; you can cut yourself. And a crown is heavy; your little head would bow down under its weight.

GOVERNESS (*to the SON*). You can have everything when you grow up. You'll be wise like your grandfather. You'll be happy...

SON. Happy like whom?

HUNCHBACK. Well, let's say like me.

SON. Like you? (*Shakes his head*)

GOVERNESS. Like our Commandant.

(*The SON shakes his head again.*)

MOTHER. Whom do you want to be like, then, whom?

SON. I'm like Hunchback, like you, and like the person who jumped off.

ORATOR. Listen! This is what comes next. (*Reads*) „There is justice, as boundless as the sea, so wide that its shores cannot be seen. But people long to discover those shores, and let them be permitted to seek them."

FATHER, MOTHER, WIFE. And let them be permitted to seek them.

ORATOR. "But there is also an everyday justice, which we see like a drop of water in the palm of a hand. And when that drop turns to tar, we ourselves are guilty!"

FATHER, MOTHER, WIFE. We ourselves are guilty.

(*Pieces of plaster fall from the ceiling.*)

FATHER. But the guiltiest are those who have been given the most.

WIFE. Who live above us.

HUNCHBACK. Those who have been given much are afraid they'll lose what they have, and those who have been given nothing, long to acquire something. . .

(*The ORATOR writes.*)

WIFE. And tell the whole truth about the Commandant! He acts as if he were the owner of the house instead of its manager.

HUNCHBACK. Well, what do you want? Our Commandant is a fine example of the justice of Providence. He, poor man, was given little in the way of brains, but he has been allowed to teach others.

ORATOR. That's just how I'll put it!

HUNCHBACK. He has no heart and is incapable of loving us, and that is why we are obliged to love and honor him. And

under no circumstances are we to envy him his riches, his power, or the love which women bestow on him.

WIFE. And who gave him exclusive rights to the swimming pool, I'd like to know.

HUNCHBACK. After all, he's the dirtiest and needs it the most. . .

MOTHER. Oh God! The other day we almost suffocated from the smoke. The people ran out, they didn't know what was the matter, only all their stoves were smoking. And it turns out that the Commandant had climbed on the roof and stuffed up the chimney so he could sunbathe !

HUNCHBACK. That's not true. That's not the way it was. The Commandant himself climbed into the chimney. Old age, you know, he's going to smoke himself quite often now. If his corpse doesn't decay, he'll be proclaimed a saint.

ORATOR. I'm writing it down, I'm writing it all down! Keep talking, keep talking.

WIFE. Everyone should be able to use the elevator, not just the tenants on the top floors.

MOTHER. If he'd at least put in a larger window. There's so little sunshine in here, so little. Look at the curtain I've embroidered; where will I hang it?

FATHER. Take this down. There is no greenery left for the eyes to gaze on, no peace and quiet for the ears. Living in the dark, we are becoming more and more like ants.

WIFE. And don't forget to mention the Boarder. Who is she? Why is she living in our apartment?

MOTHER. Oh, Lord, I'm so afraid of her! She's blind, so it's all the same to her whether it's night or day. She constantly walks about like a spook and I can't get to sleep.

FATHER. Shh! Let him write, let him write while she's gone.

WIFE. Let's talk quietly, let's talk quietly. . .

(Pause.)

GOVERNESS. Shh! What's that sighing?

FATHER. That's from downstairs. The pipe.

GOVERNESS. What about him, can't he hear us?

HUNCHBACK. You know what I've decided?

ALL. Shh! Shh!

HUNCHBACK. But wait! I have a great idea! In your opinion, who's got the best life? Hypocrites, swindlers, and liars. But fooling others is a tricky business at best. If everybody started fooling everyone else, we'd only end up getting caught in our own snares.

WIFE. So what would you suggest?

HUNCHBACK. Let's learn to fool ourselves! Why not establish a school in our house? First grade, fool your stomach. Second grade, eyes and ears. And the third, fool your heart and mind! You'll get your diploma and be a qualified optimist, the happiest person in the world.

FATHER. You know, he has a point.

HUNCHBACK. And not only a point. I have an example. Just look! *(Points at the ORATOR)* Look at him glow! He's writing his speech and fondling his illusion as if it were a purring cat. "I'm writing a remarkable oration. Time does not pass in vain, and the future, thanks to my efforts, will be much brighter than the present. . ." But he'll soon wake up.

ORATOR. Done already! *(To HUNCHBACK)* With your help I've created a masterpiece of an oration! Come here, I'll kiss you on your wise hump.

HUNCHBACK. I trust you won't kiss the Commandant's...

ORATOR. Oh, no. A speech like this is worth a lifetime. There's nothing left to do but die after making it.

SON. Don't die, daddy! Let me make a speech instead. I know an oration, too.

GOVERNESS. Let's hear it, let's hear it.

SON.

When the pussy broke an urn,
Daddy said, for he was stern,
"Naughty, naughty kitty cat,
I shall punish you for that."

ORATOR. Very good. Now take a bow.

GOVERNESS. But wait, that's not the end of it.

SON.

Then that shameless cat jumped up.
Pounced on dad and ate him up.

ORATOR. What? But I'm not a mouse or a sparrow! Who taught you that?

(The SON looks at the GOVERNESS.)

GOVERNESS. You can't change the words of a song.

SON. You can't change them, daddy.

(Groping her way, the BOARDER comes in and looks at the ORATOR with unseeing eyes.)

ORATOR. Why are you looking at me like that? Good evening.

BOARDER. So it's you... I can't see, you know, I can only smell. Why are you sweating so much?

WIFE. It's a family holiday here, as it were. The Orator has written a new, very daring. . .

ORATOR. Never mind! It's nothing to brag about.

(The BOARDER cackles, goes up to the statue, and uncovers it, revealing a frightful monstrosity. Everyone looks at it with expressions of horror.)

MOTHER. What's that monstrosity for? People aren't crows, why scare them like that?

BOARDER. People aren't crows, they're wolves. When they get their courage up.

ORATOR. Fear turns them into wolves! Fear makes them devour each other. *(Hides his speech in a desk drawer).*

WIFE. Watch out that fear doesn't turn you into a lamb.

ORATOR. Why do you say that? Do you think I'm afraid?

WIFE. Won't you read us your speech?

ORATOR. Keep quiet. Anyway, what for?

GOVERNESS. And in any case, we should first consider whether anyone will stand to gain by it.

ORATOR. Gain by it? Me? I don't need anything.

GOVERNESS. Is that so? What about a new apartment with a larger window?

ORATOR. That doesn't matter. It's my duty to make the speech.

WIFE. After a speech like that the people will carry you out on their shoulders.

GOVERNESS. Yes, it would be a real spectacle for the people.

ORATOR. Spectacle ? Who do they think I am ? A comedian ?

GOVERNESS. Don't be angry. I understand: a singer is happy when he sings well; an orator, when he has an opportunity to astound with his eloquence. . . But there are other pleasures as well. One also has to think of one's family.

ORATOR. What are you suggesting? That I not make the speech at all?

FATHER. Don't be so hot-headed. Let's consider the matter.

SON. Make it, make it, make it.

GOVERNESS. As for you, you little grasshopper, it's way past your bedtime.

SON. I'm not sleepy! Make the speech, make the speech, make the speech! I'm going to stab that monster!

GOVERNESS. Tomorrow, you can stab it tomorrow.

SON. I don't want to, I won't go with you! Daddy, you will make the speech, won't you? You will, won't you?

(The ORATOR is silent.)

HUNCHBACK. Let's go, hero. When you fall asleep you can dream whatever you like. You can stab the monster, and hear your father's speech. . . You can do everything in your dreams. *(Leads the SON off)*.

MOTHER. I have a feeling that your speech will cause a lot of trouble.

FATHER. Yes, but it should stir up the passive masses. It should make them aware.

GOVERNESS. Well, you'll have them stirred up for a day or two, and then what? The same thing all over again. . .

(PIZONAS enters, stretching.)

PIZONAS. You woke me up with all your arguing. *(To the ORATOR)* Before you stir up the water, ask yourself if you'll catch the fish. 'Cause otherwise you might get your pants wet for nothing.

(The BOARDER cackles.)

WIFE *(to the ORATOR)*. Aren't you sorry to put away

such eloquent speech? ORATOR. Of course I'm sorry. WIFE. So are you a man or aren't you? PIZONAS. Well, you know, one can demonstrate his masculinity in a number of ways.

(The ORATOR looks to his FATHER and MOTHER for support, but their eyes are glued to the statue, which the BOARDER, turning it this way and that, is sculpturing and making more and more horrible.)

ORATOR. I wish I hadn't been an Orator. . .

PIZONAS. Wait. What are you moaning about? First ask yourself whom you want to please. Whom do you want to please?

ORATOR. I defend those who... I struggle!

GOVERNESS. Against whom? Against yourself. Take everything that life offers you before you criticize it.

PIZONAS. Auntie says to him, "Here's a piece of candy," and he shakes his head. "Here's a little horse," he refuses it. And then he complains that auntie never gave him anything. . .

ORATOR. But what if I know that the little horse is stolen, that the candy is bitter, and that the auntie's a witch? It's my duty to tell the truth.

GOVERNESS. And what will the truth do for you? And how do you know that your truth is the truest?

ORATOR. Well, what do you suggest? That I lie, keep quiet, not make my speech?

PIZONAS. No, you should give a speech. Only not the one you wrote.

ORATOR. What should I say, then?

PIZONAS. First you ought to offer anniversary greetings to the Commandant, and thank him. . . At least for the fact that he is no worse than he is.

GOVERNESS. That's right, a well-chosen compliment is sometimes more effective than criticism !

PIZONAS. Then you can put in some criticism, too. Only not too much. After your speech he'll stand up and thank you for your remarks and say, "Dear citizens, the critical observations of our highly honored Orator are entirely correct, and the defects he pointed out will be corrected in the near future." Lengthy applause and shouts of "Long live the Commandant !"

ORATOR. And what about me? Where will I hide my face?

GOVERNESS. What do you mean? You mean it's more pleasant to look at that monstrosity?

PIZONAS. There'll always be somewhere to turn your face. You'll kill a number of birds with one stone. The people won't have a single complaint about either you or the Commandant ; that's one bird. The Commandant will be satisfied with you ; that's two birds. . .

ORATOR. But what of my honor? My conscience?

PIZONAS. Honor. . . If honor is worth anything, you should buy something for it !

GOVERNESS. What's the good of a treasure like that if you don't use it? You can take pride in it all you want, but people will still consider you a beggar.

ORATOR (to his family). You hear that? Why are you silent?

(They don't answer.)

GOVERNESS. Just look. From here the statue is not all that horrible.

(HUNCHBACK returns.)

PIZONAS. Yes. There is something very. . . instructive about it.

HUNCHBACK *(to the ORATOR)*. And how does it look to you.

ORATOR. It looks to me like I'll break my neck with that speech...

HUNCHBACK. How can you break it when you don't even have one? Your head is attached right to your stomach. *(To the FATHER, MOTHER, WIFE)* Hey, you! What do you think you're looking at? Television? The Orator's not getting his supper, so he's considering forgetting the speech.

MOTHER *(as if awakening)*. There, you see... A drop in the palm of a hand. . .

ORATOR. A drop. . . I'm only a drop myself! This is the only life I have! *(Wants to tear up the manuscript)*.

FATHER. Wait, don't tear it up yet. Read it. If your own speech won't convince you, well.. .

(The ORATOR reads.)

HUNCHBACK *(to the GOVERNESS and PIZONAS)*. What have you done to him? He has no backbone left at all.

PIZONAS. Better without a backbone than with a hump.

ORATOR. No! I'd rather live the way I've lived up to now. I have to make the speech.

PIZONAS. Who said you'd be living the way you've lived up to now?

BOARDER. There's a basement, there's a first floor. . .

ORATOR. What are you trying to say?

GOVERNESS. Think about it. You've still got the bird in your hand.

ORATOR. Get away from that monstrosity! Don't look at it, turn away, tell me what to do! Should I tear it up or not? Should I make the speech or not?

BOARDER, GOVERNESS, PIZONAS. Tear it up!

FATHER, MOTHER, WIFE. Make it!

ORATOR (to HUNCHBACK). And you?

HUNCHBACK (*looking at the statue*). I'm ... with the majority. ..

ORATOR. Where's the majority? What's the majority? My God! To hell with the speech ! We'll move upstairs, and that horrible statue can stay here.

BOARDER. Oh, you'll find my works everywhere. Smaller in some places, bigger in others.

ORATOR. So what should I do? What should I do?

BOARDER. Shut your eyes, and you won't see a thing. Just like me.

ORATOR. Live with my eyes shut? See nothing, know nothing, and keep quiet ? Only then ?

BOARDER. Then you won't be afraid.

GOVERNESS. Peace and quiet. What's wrong with that?

ORATOR. It's man's duty to see! It's his duty to understand and not be afraid!

PIZONAS. That's what you say, but you're afraid, dear boy...

ORATOR. That's what I say and I'm afraid. And I'll say it anyway.

BOARDER. Listen! Someone's knocking.

ORATOR. Come in.

(*The NEIGHBOR enters.*)

ORATOR. What's the matter ? Why are you so out of breath ?

NEIGHBOR. The Commandant. ..

ORATOR. The Commandant what? Where? Tell me.

NEIGHBOR. The Commandant wants to know why your light is burning so late. I say, I don't know. I say, I can drop over. And tell him, I say...

ORATOR. Is he very angry?

NEIGHBOR. I don't know. Not very, if I understood correctly. . . from a distance. I say, he's writing a new speech, I say. . . if it's not divulging a secret.

PIZONAS. Blockhead!

NEIGHBOR. And then I say, I'll drop over, and tell him to put it out.

ORATOR. And what did he say?

NEIGHBOR. He says, "It won't be necessary," he declared. "I'll drop over myself." That's just what he declared. He'll be here soon.

ORATOR. You're very wordy. You're very wordy! Quick, let's gather up all the papers! Let's set the table, and think how we

should receive him.

(PIZONAS, the GOVERNESS, and the ORATOR crawl around on all fours, gathering up the scattered manuscript. The WIFE and MOTHER set the table. The FATHER, thoughtful and sad, sits off to the side.)

HUNCHBACK. And what did you climb all the way up there for?

NEIGHBOR. Who, me? Well, you know, you go up one step, and then another, and before you know it, you're at the top.

HUNCHBACK. But I'm asking you why. Why did you go see the Commandant?

NEIGHBOR. Everyone does. .. Some ask questions, others make complaints. As for me, sometimes I take out the garbage, sometimes I dust the rugs.

HUNCHBACK. How can the Commandant see our lights from up there?

(The NEIGHBOR shrugs his shoulders.)

HUNCHBACK. Could it be that you're dusting those rugs on our heads?

NEIGHBOR. Me ? Where the wind blows, there... You can't dust against the wind.

ORATOR. Father, stop smoking. Hunchback! Let's think.

WIFE. We don't have time to change.

FATHER. Why should we change? Let everything stay just the way it is.

PIZONAS. Right, let's pretend we weren't expecting him to drop in on us.

ORATOR. Neighbor, do us a favor and keep a lookout for him. As soon as you hear the elevator. ..

NEIGHBOR. All right, all right, I'll come and tell you. Only hurry, hurry. *(Leaves.)*

ORATOR. We ought to make that pipe less conspicuous. Hunchback, put a chair over it and sit down.

HUNCHBACK. All right. But if it starts to make rumbling noises, I'll say: Commandant, it's your pipe, it's only 'your pipe.

PIZONAS. You won't say anything! Just do as you're told! ORATOR. What else? What else? Mother, we'll make him a present of your curtain.

PIZONAS. Now there's an idea. We need a larger window, and as far as I know, he needs larger curtains.

ORATOR *(to the MOTHER)*. No tears, please, no tears! *(To the WIFE)* Here, you present it to him. From the family.

FATHER. What about the speech?

ORATOR. I'll improvise something. Let's sit down at the table, let's sit down at the table!

(Everyone sits down, in any order.)

ORATOR. Wait, wait, not like that. Father, you look too morose.

PIZONAS. That's true. If the Commandant sits down here

and asks what the matter is... ORATOR. Mother, you too... Your face is tear-stained. Sit down somewhere out of the light. *(To the GOVERNESS and PIZONAS)* You two sit here. You'll give a more cheerful impression. My Wife next to me. WIFE. What about the Boarder?

BOARDER. Don't worry about me. I have my work to do and I'll be doing it.

(The SON comes in wearing a long nightgown.)

WIFE. Well, why aren't you sleeping?

SON. I was dreaming... My sword broke, and I..

ORATOR. What? You're not dressed? Get to bed! Get to bed this instant!

(The SON runs out.)

PIZONAS. So what are we going to do? Just sit here?

ORATOR. Let's think of something. Father! You have a good head for things like that!

FATHER. But you don't listen to me.

PIZONAS. In my opinion, we should put a bottle on the table and drink.. . A most innocent pastime.

GOVERNESS. And when he ask why we're drinking, huh?

WIFE. Let's read something!

ORATOR. What, for instance? *(To PIZONAS)* Do you know what kind of books he likes?

PIZONAS. Books? Eh, let's try to get along without them.

ORATOR. Well? Well, what, then? What do we do?

GOVERNESS. You read your speech. That's... a beginning, and then we'll criticize you.

ORATOR. Sure... thanks.

PIZONAS. Listen, that's not bad! We'll criticize, and you'll make the appropriate changes and apologies. Remember that a single lost sheep is worth more than a hundred of the most obedient ones.

WIFE. No, no, don't be a sheep.

ORATOR. Then what? What? Shall I become a lizard, or a cuckoo bird?

HUNCHBACK. Why not try being a human being?

ORATOR. Keep quiet! Let's think while there's still time.

FATHER. If I were the Commandant. . . If I saw the Father and mother shoved into a corner.. .

ORATOR. Well, where would you like to sit? Where? On my back?

PIZONAS. No, that's really not a good idea.

GOVERNESS. You know what? We can play "Simon says..."! That'll be a clear allusion to the Commandant.

NEIGHBOR *(bursts in)*. He's coming down! I can hear it!

ORATOR. Neighbor! Hurry, join the circle! Everyone, everyone, everyone! I don't want anybody off in a corner.

PIZONAS. Who's going to be Simon?

HUNCHBACK. Maybe I should take the Commandant's place ?

GOVERNESS. That's true, who'll be in the middle?

PIZONAS. Put the statue in the middle, the statue!

(Commotion. The men push the statue into the center.)

ORATOR. Hurry, hurry! Father, closer to the Governess. Neighbor, grab my Wife! Neighbor, give me your hand!

PIZONAS. Merrily, merrily! Ready now, let's begin!

ORATOR *(begins)*. Simon says...

GOVERNESS (*resolutely corrects him*). Commandant Simon says, do this!

ALL. Commandant Simon says, do this!

(*Not knowing what else to do, they all raise their hands and assume the position of the monster in the center.*)

PIZONAS. More spirit, more spirit! Circle 'round!

HUNCHBACK. Now what does Simon say?

SON (*comes in hesitantly and inconspicuously*). Daddy, what are you doing?

(*The COMMANDANT is standing by the other door, not knowing whether he should leave or stay. Seeing him, they all freeze with hands outstretched, as if crucified.*)

ORATOR. Get out of here! And shut the door! You're all we need!

COMMANDANT. You could be a bit more polite with your Commandant. (*Exits.*)

(*A pause.*)

HUNCHBACK. Did you see that? With what courage he asked him to leave!

GOVERNESS. Bravo! Bravo!

WIFE (*to the ORATOR*). I'm proud of you... Congratulations! Now you're the man I love.

ORATOR (*coughing*). Yes, I've just made my shortest and most daring speech.

SON. And I thought you were scolding me, daddy.

GOVERNESS. Whatever for, little one, whatever for? You're our future, our pride and joy. Our only consolation . . .

SON. Let me go, you're strangling me.

PIZONAS. Mind your manners, sonny, mind your manners.

MOTHER (*to the ORATOR*). Are you lying, my son?

ORATOR. About what? No, mother. You can throw your arms around me and congratulate me. At the critical moment, I managed to find the strength. (*Hugs his MOTHER, and in a low voice says to PIZONAS and the GOVERNESS*) What should we do? What should we do?

GOVERNESS. Run and apologize.

PIZONAS. Go ahead, we'll come with you.

ORATOR. I'll just go look to make sure the Commandant didn't fall down the stairs...

GOVERNESS. The poor Commandant... But next time he'll know better than to come in without knocking.

(*The ORATOR, PIZONAS, and the GOVERNESS leave. The BOARDER covers her statue and curls up at its feet like a dog.*)

NEIGHBOR (*to HUNCHBACK*). Didn't I tell you! ? An Orator like that is a gift of God!

(*Everyone stands silently with head bowed.*)

NEIGHBOR. And if it's not divulging a secret, one of these days. . .

FATHER. Why say anything more, Neighbor? The people can see for themselves.

NEIGHBOR. People? Which one of them, I'd like to know, can cast the first stone? Which one of them?

HUNCHBACK. Never mind. Don't say anything.

MOTHER. Leave now, Neighbor. We want to put out the lights.

NEIGHBOR. All right, right away... But mark my words: the Orator will be the commandant someday! And his assistant.. . well, I'd lay down my life for him! (*Exits.*)

(*HUNCHBACK puts out the light.*)

CURTAIN

1966.