

# LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 15, No.1 - Spring 1969

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## ON THE BLADE OF A KNIFE

A drama in three acts by  
JURGIS JANKUS

### CHARACTERS:

DAUGVYDAS, (pronounced Dowg-vee-das) leader of a local company of Lithuanian freedom-fighters.

LAIMA, wife of Daugvydas, formerly a school-teacher recently released by the NKVD from jail.

ANTANAS, a local Communist Party organizer, long active in tracking down freedom-fighters, a man of sadistic temperament.

ALGIS, local secretary of the *komsomol* (*Young Communists' League*), secretly working for the Lithuanian cause.

KARPENKO, a senior officer of the NKVD, in command of the force stationed in the neighborhood.

PRANAS, a freedom-fighter, brother of Rasa.

ALKSNIS, a freedom-fighter, husband of Auksė.

RASA, a Lithuanian girl, tortured to death by Antanas.

AUKSĖ, a Lithuanian girl, tortured to death by Antanas.

OFFICERS and SOLDIERS.

The action takes place in a rural district of Lithuania about, the year 1949.

### SYNOPSIS of ACTS I and II.

Daugvydas, leader of a company of Lithuanian freedom-fighters, has been fighting for many years against the communist security police or NKVD, sometime known by the older name of chekists. The Russian commander of the NKVD in the locality is Karpenko. Karpenko's close associates include Antanas, a Lithuanian who grew up in this same district with Daugvydas. But Antanas is a man of sadistic bent and has joined the Russian cause.

Not long before the play opens the NKVD captured Laima, the wife of Daugvydas. About the same time Antanas seized Rasa and Auksė, the sister and wife respectively of two of Daugvydas's men, and tortured them to death. Antanas gave out that the two women had been destroyed by the freedom-fighters on suspicion of having betrayed Laima to the NKVD.

When the play opens, Karpenko is trying to use Laima in order to entice Daugvydas and his men. He has released her from prison and instructed her to negotiate an agreement with Daugvydas. The latter meanwhile is willing to enter into an apparent agreement in the hope of outwitting Karpenko. Daugvydas has realized that it is hopeless to continue the armed

struggle, since no help has come from the Western Powers; so he is trying to arrange for his wife, his men and himself to return to civilian life.

According to the agreement which Laima has negotiated between Daugvydas and Karpenko, Daugvydas is to bring his men by night to the farm-house where the action of the play takes place. Then Karpenko with the NKVD will come and receive their surrender; in return Karpenko has undertaken not to harm them. Under cover of this apparent agreement with Karpenko Daugvydas has launched a different plan: he and his men will leave Laima bound in the house amid signs of a disturbance. When the chekists find her, she is to tell them that the agreement between Karpenko and Daugvydas has been betrayed to the freedom-fighters; that the latter have beaten and bound her and led Daugvydas away for execution. If Laima can convince the NKVD of this story, Daugvydas hopes that Karpenko will let her return unharmed to her profession of school-teacher. Furthermore his men and he are to return to civilian life under assumed names in various parts of the country; he has friends who gained employment in the communist bureaucracy and these have supplied new identity-papers for his men.

Complications develop in the first two acts of the play. Antanas comes to the farm-house unexpectedly and says that he is to bring Laima to Karpenko again. Antanas sets bottles of gasoline in the windows of the house, so that the chekists can set fire to the house by shooting from a distance when they come for the freedom-fighters. But Daugvydas, who has been hiding in the house, surprises Antanas and disarms him, finally returning his pistol to him but keeping the bullets. Daugvydas warns Antanas that he has friends in good positions and these will retaliate, if Karpenko and Antanas do any harm to the freedom-fighters after their surrender. Then Daugvydas lets Laima go with Antanas to Karpenko on condition that she is to return the same evening.

At the beginning of Act II Antanas comes back to the farm-house in the evening and brings Algis with him. Algis is a young Lithuanian who has become local secretary of the komsomol (*Young Communists' League*); but in fact unknown to Karpenko and Antanas, he is working for the Lithuanian cause. Antanas stations Algis in the attic of the house; he is to watch the freedom-fighters gather below and then, by lighting a candle at the upper window, he is to give the signal to the NKVD to attack. Antanas particularly instructs Algis to ensure that Daugvydas is killed in the fight.

Antanas hastens away when Daugvydas and Pranas, one of the freedom-fighters, approach the house. Algis comes down from the attic and reports Antanas's scheme to Daugvydas and Pranas. In return they show him the bottles of gasoline and point out that he too would have been burned to death in the conflagration. They remove the bottles from the windows. Laima returns to the farm-house and says that the chekists are gathering at Kielai nearby. So Daugvydas tells Algis to go to Karpenko at Kielai and report that Daugvydas has caught and disarmed him (*Algis*) and that the freedom-fighters will gather at the house in half an hour.

Laima further informs Daugvydas and his men, who have joined him in the house, that she has told Karpenko about Antanas's bottles of gasoline and Karpenko has instructed her to remove them from the windows. She says that Karpenko and his officers have set off for Kielai, leaving the NKVD headquarters in town empty. Thereupon Daugvydas adds a new item to his plan; while Karpenko and the chekists are at Kielai, Daugvydas and his men will go to the town and there set fire to the headquarters and arsenal of the NKVD. Before setting off from the farm-house, the freedom-fighters carry out the main item of Daugvydas's original plan: they create signs of a disturbance in the main room, they bind Laima and, when Daugvydas cannot bring himself to strike her in the face, Alksnis does so.

### ACT III

*(A large room in a house that once belonged to a well-to-do peasant. It has evidently been a dining-room; a table with chairs of various styles has been pushed a little to one side of the center. The rear wall of the room has two windows; between them is a book-case with books that are old and worn. A paraffin-lamp, an ink-well and some papers are on top of the book-case. The table is covered with a homemade table-cloth of dark color; it might serve equally well as a bed-spread. The walls are papered, but the wall-paper is so old that neither its original color nor its pattern can be discerned. In places the wall-paper has been torn away, leaving grey patches of irregular shape.*

*The atmosphere of the room is lonely and hopeless. There is not the slightest hint to suggest that the inhabitants of the house, if anyone does live there, have any intention of staying another day.*

*Two doors lead into the room from the left. The more distant door, nearer to the window, opens into the vestibule and the main entrance to the house; the nearer door opens into the kitchen. On the right side of the room there is a single door into the bedroom. The doors were once painted white but they are now dirty and scratched; the paint has begun to peel off.*

*Broken pieces of crockery and glasses, together with fragments of bread, are scattered on the table and the floor. Some of the chairs have been overturned. Laima is lying on her side on the floor with her face turned towards the audience; her hands and feet are bound, her face is besmirched with dirt and blood. It is night-time.*

*Faces appear outside the window and at once disappear again. Laima notices that there are people near the house. She raises her head, listens, utters a loud groan and falls back on the floor.)*

LAIMA. Help! Hel-lp! Isn't anyone going to come past here? Help!

*(A soldier puts his head in through the door, looks around and withdraws hastily.)*

LAIMA. Help!

*(Antanas puts his head in through the kitchen-door, but Laima does not see him.)*

LAIMA. Oh, my dearest! They were all kind to me before but not one of them's here now. Isn't anybody going to help me? Has time stopped still? Help! *(Antanas enters noiselessly while Laima is still talking, Karpenko enters in silence through the main, door. Aware of them, Laima begins to throw herself about in an attempt to free herself from her bonds.)*

LAIMA. Comrades, my dear comrades! Won't you ever come? Now they're tracking down the gang in the fields, and no one cares what happens to me. Help! Come and lose-en these frightful ropes!

*(Antanas and Karpenko exchange inquiring glances.)* ALGIS. *(Enters hurriedly through the kitchen-door. He pauses. Seeing Laima, he runs past Antanas to her.)* What 's happened?

LAIMA *(Raising her head.)* Oh, Algis, dear! Where're the others? Be a good fellow and untie these ropes. They're eating through my wrists.

ALGIS. *(Bends down to attend to the bonds.)* Who's got a knife? There are so many knots that I wouldn't be able to unfasten them all, even if I went on till morning. *(Antanas and Karpenko thrust their hands into their pockets. Antanas first draws out a knife and hands it to Algis. More men, some in uniform and some without uniform, appear in the door-ways.)*

LAIMA. *(Pretending that she only catches sight of Antanas now.)* You're here too? That's better. And I thought that they were coming back.

ANTANAS. But what's happened?

ALGIS. Just a minute. I'll free her at once. Why the hell did they have to truss her up like this? *(He cuts the ropes fastening Laima's feet to her hands.)* Roll over on your face; it'll be easier for you. *(Laima rolls over and Algis begins to cut through a knot.)* This knife's as blunt as a mallet.

ANTANAS. Give it to me!

ALGIS. Wait a minute. It's quicker to untie the knots than to cut them with your knife. *(He throws the knife to one side. Antanas bends down to pick it up, but Karpenko seizes his hand before he can reach it.)*

KARPENKO. Where is Dogovydas?

ANTANAS. She's the only one who can tell.

KARPENKO. *(Bending over Laima.)* Where is Dogovydas?

LAIMA. *(Raising her head from the floor.)* Why're you all standing here? Save Daugvydas! Save him! Maybe he's still alive.

ANTANAS. But where is he? What's happened?

LAIMA. Oh, how it hurts!

ALGIS. So much for your hands. Now your feet. But look, your hands're all covered with blood.

LAIMA. Just a minute, let me sit up. *(Sitting on the floor with her back against the wall, she shakes her arms. She bends her feet to one side and Algis begins unfastening the knots on her feet.)*

ANTANAS. We know that it hurts. Tell us where Daugvydas has taken them.

LAIMA. Daugvydas hasn't taken them; they've taken him. If I'd known that you can't keep your mouths shut, I wouldn't have budged a step from the jail.

ANTANAS. Who can't keep his mouth shut?

LAIMA. Oh, how do I know? Maybe you, maybe your friends.

ANTANAS. No one heard anything from me.

KARPENKO. *(Coming back from the door, where he has been talking with another officer.)* Who didn't hear anything?

ANTANAS. Laima says that we betrayed Daugvydas.

KARPENKO. *(To Laima.)* Who betrayed him?

LAIMA. My God, how am I supposed to know? I only worked for you, giving you all I had, and you... oh!

ALGIS. *(He has finished unbinding her feet.)* Look, the blood has soaked right through your stockings. Can you stand up? *(He takes her arm in his hands, while Karpenko supports her from the other side.)*

ANTANAS. As long as no one accuses you, don't be in a hurry to accuse others.

LAIMA. Accuse me? Whatever for? *They* could accuse me and they did. Look, they poured gasoline on me and they wanted to set fire to the whole house.

KARPENKO. Set fire to it? *(He looks at Antanas.)* What have they done to Dogovydas?

LAIMA. I don't know. Algis is here. He left Daugvydas with me at the gate. Didn't he tell you so ?

KARPENKO. He told me.

LAIMA. As soon as we came indoors, they jumped out at us from everywhere. They took Daugvydas's rifle and his pistol and they searched me. They began beating me and Daugvydas. Daugvydas wanted to fight them, alone against them all, but a tall man with fair hair hit him in the back with the butt of a rifle and knocked him down. At first I thought he had killed him, but Daugvydas was still alive. He tried to get up, but they started kicking him about the floor with their feet, like a ball. They all shouted, calling him a traitor and a communist louse and other names like that. They wanted to hang him. One of them climbed into the attic and fastened a noose through the ceiling. I don't know how they made a hole for it. They wanted to hang us both in the same noose, but the man with fair hair stopped them. He said it wasn't the right death for Daugvydas. He said the forest had sheltered him for years with its branches and the forest must have its own revenge. He said, when the trees saw the chekists coming, they used to lower their branches and cover Daugvydas, because they thought that he was their true-born son, but now they would see his disgrace. He said he and his men would bend two birch-trees down, fasten one of Daugvydas's legs to each, pour gasoline over him, set fire to him and let him go. "We'll see," he said, "How the communist bubble bursts in half with a crack and lights up the whole sky above Top Hill. But tie the woman up and leave her here. We'll come back and spend the night with her, and tomorrow we'll hand her over to Antanas. He'll take care of her just as well as he took care of Rasa and Auksé."

ANTANAS. Shut up!

LAIMA. *(To Karpenko.)* But do something. They took all the gasoline from the windows and dragged Daugvydas away. He's still alive. They won't give him a quick death; they'll drive him around in the forest and torture him.

KARPENKO. Where is To... How is it called?

ALGIS. I know.

ANTANAS. I know too.

KARPENKO. *(To Algis)* Show them the way, bring me Dogovydas alive.

ALGIS. I understand. Alive. KARPENKO. Never mind understand, but bring him alive. Bring them all back alive. It doesn't matter how. But Dogovydas has to be alive. I need to talk with him. Make sure that he's alive. And keep as many alive as you can.

*(He goes to the door, says something in an undertone to the other officer and points to Algis.)*

ALGIS. It shall be done.

KARPENKO. Bravo, molodetz! [Attaboy.]

ALGIS. Said and done!

*(He raises his fist, joins the officers at the door and goes out with them. Antanas sets off to follow him.)*

KARPENKO. You stay here with me.

ANTANAS. It'll be better for two to go. Some of them don't know Daugvydas; they may shoot him. I guarantee that if we go together... KARPENKO. Molchat! [Silence.] You stay here and you tell me who else knew about the gasoline on the window-sills.

ANTANAS. *(Stubbornly.)* Only she and I. *(He points to Laima.)*

KARPENKO. Who else?

ANTANAS. No one.

KARPENKO. *(Pointing with his finger at the ceiling.)* Who knew about that?

*(Antanas looks at the ceiling but says nothing.)*

KARPENKO. *(Stubbornly.)* Who else?

ANTANAS. Algis and I. No one else.

KARPENKO. The gasoline — you, she and the bandits knew about it. The hole in the ceiling — you, Algis and the bandits. Did she know about the hole?

ANTANAS. No. Well, I don't really know. Perhaps she knew.

KARPENKO. Molchat! [Silence.] During the night we'll think about it and remember.

LAIMA. But if you catch them, they'll tell you themselves; they'll tell you how they learned everything.

KARPENKO. Da, da! [Yes, yes.] We'll catch them. Da, da-Anton, I told you before, I want Dogovydas alive. I told you...

*(There is a sharp knocking on the window.)*

VOICES. It's burning! The town's burning! All at once. Like gunpowder!

*(The voices mingle in a confused noise, so that no more words can be distinguished.)*

KARPENKO. *(Leaping to the window.)* Ah, chort [The devil.] Quick! *(He addresses his last word to Antanas but rushes out through the door without waiting to see what Antanas does. Antanas spits noisily and follows him slowly. From outside can be heard the shrill voice of Karpenko, then other voices; suddenly there is silence.)*

LAIMA. *(Listens for a few moments, blows on her knuckles, which are still red and bloody, then turns towards the window. Through the window the sky can be seen lit up with the faltering light of a great fire.)* The rats' nest is burning merrily, and the rats are running about in the field at their wits' end to save what they can. But you won't save a thing. Smoke and sparks are carrying your plans to heaven, when they cry out for the vengeance of the the Lord. Months will pass before you forge new plans. Blood-drinking Antanas will squirm on his belly at the feet of the blood-drinking Karpenko, begging for a morsel of favor and a drop of forgiveness. God, forgive me for having a heart full of hatred, but how can I love evil that has no seed of good in it? Good Lord, why can't You do us a little miracle? Make all the evil melt away in this fire; take the rats away from our country in whole caravans, so that we can live, work and build again without alarm or terror. Don't You see an appeal in those eyes that well up with frozen panic, eyes of ordinary people, when they go to bed at night, eyes full of anxiety as they wonder what will happen at midnight or what will happen in the morning, however bright the daylight? Yes, Good Lord, I'm talking alone like a mad woman, but I'm talking with You, because I've no one left to hear me, if I want to speak the truth. I used to talk with Daugvydas as much as my heart desired, and that made it easier to carry my burden. It was the same with Pranas and with Alksnis. You know better than I do how unshakable they are and how kind. Especially Alksnis. If his soul could be seen, it would be as gentle as lamb's wool and as firm as steel. Where are they now? And Kazys and Rubuilis? Lord, cover their tracks with last year's leaves and burn every clue away! How the fire blazes! It makes me sorry for buildings; they were built with our sweat. But I'm glad to see them burn; the rats' lair's on fire.

*(As she utters the last words, she turns round quickly, sees Antanas in the center of the room and screams. Antanas has thrust his head in silently through the kitchen-door and listened to Laima's speech; then while she was still talking, he has crept slowly into the room. He is half-way across the floor when she finishes and turns round. As she turns suddenly and screams, Antanas shudders and stands still. They stare at one another in silence for a few moments.)*

ANTANAS. So you're talking with your little god. But you see what he's like; he didn't check your tongue, but he stretched a cloud down beneath my feet, so that the floor-boards didn't creak. Can you explain how that happened? Maybe the little lord was so busy thinking up plots with you that he fell fast asleep. Tomorrow there'll be rain, because the little god'll weep; he'll weep bitterly, when he sees what's come of his work. *(For a time they both remain silent.)*

ANTANAS. Haven't you anything to say? Has god woken up and changed that nimble little tongue of yours into a pillar of salt? *(Laima turns away to the window.)*

ANTANAS. You needn't watch through the window; there's nobody coming. Even the tall fellow with fair hair won't bring his gang to play with you. There'll be just you and me. Tonight at least. You've explained everything now and you won't lead me a dance any more. What next? Turn round and come to me with outstretched arms; come and trust your Antanas. Haven't you been waiting a long time for us to be alone together without fear of being interrupted ?

*(Laima turns round, looks at Antanas but does not speak. Apparently she cannot follow her own thoughts; repeatedly she opens her mouth, as if to speak, but does not say anything.)*

ANTANAS. That's better. At least we can see one another face to face. After the trick you played on me today, I ought to talk to you in a different tone. I ought to take a whip and beat you till every inch of your flesh was sore.

LAIMA. You've no right to complain. I haven't done anything to you.

ANTANAS. And who denounced me to Karpenko ? I thought he was going to tear me in pieces.

LAIMA. You denounced yourself!

ANTANAS. Of course you're never in the wrong.

LAIMA. You said yourself that Karpenko had told you to put the gasoline on the window-sills. How was I to know that you were making it up ?

ANTANAS. You've no business to open your big mouth where it wasn't needed and turn everything round your way.

LAIMA. Who invited me? Who persuaded me to arrange everything ? Why couldn't I say my say ?

ANTANAS. And you said it. Doesn't it ever occur to you that maybe those were your last words?

LAIMA. And I don't regret anything at all.

ANTANAS. Tomorrow we'll see whether you've no regrets, when Karpenko and I take you in hand. You'll squeal, my girl, but that won't help you. Word by word the truth'll drip out of you like pearls.

LAIMA. *(Forcing herself to laugh.)* But why not the other way round? What's to prevent Karpenko and me from taking you in hand? D'you really think he'll believe your word? You were glad because we're alone. Doesn't Karpenko know what a liar you are? Why should he believe you, when you tell him what you've heard me say?

ANTANAS. Don't be in such a hurry to boast. They're sure to catch some of the bandits and...

LAIMA. *(Interrupting sharply.)* Don't use that word! Not when I'm listening.

ANTANAS. When they squeeze the truth out of them, you'll be able to wriggle as much as you like but you won't wriggle away. *(Suddenly he changes his tone.)* But that's not why I've stayed here. I was concerned for you. The fire was such a shock that even Karpenko forgot you. I didn't forget you. I stayed because I couldn't leave you, injured and helpless, in this hell.

LAIMA. Thanks for your concern, but it's unnecessary.

ANTANAS. There you go again, all chase and bitterness There's no need for us to lie to one another. We have differences and we've made mistakes.

LAIMA. Kindly refrain from including me in your gang. I haven't made any mistakes.

ANTANAS. All right, all right. Be as pure as you like. I've made mistakes and I'm fully aware of what I've done.

LAIMA. *(With sarcasm.)* Thank heaven, at least you know what you've done.

ANTANAS. *(Pretending not to hear.)* Even so we're both Lithuanians. You say that I'm nothing without the Russians. But you must remember, when the Lithuanian was master here, he never had need of me, but the Russian can't do without me.

LAIMA. He couldn't till this evening.

ANTANAS. Don't deceive yourself. They couldn't do without me before and they won't be able to do without me in future. You know how I love you. Why shouldn't we agree and go together?

LAIMA. Where?

ANTANAS. It doesn't matter where. So long as we keep together and stay alive.

LAIMA. How can you go on living?

ANTANAS. Why not? You were afraid of Daugvydas before, but he isn't there any more...

LAIMA. What makes you think that he isn't there any more?

ANTANAS. After he betrayed them ? They'd pardon me sooner than they'd pardon him. I know Pranas, I know Alksnis. The two of them would be enough. I heard you praying, but you needn't bother; he's burnt away in one of those bonfires. You'll see, tomorrow they'll find his bones among the ashes.

LAIMA. (*Giving emphasis to every word.*) And you can look me calmly in the face and say that ?

ANTANAS. I don't mean to hurt your feelings; I've only told you a simple fact. And if you want to know, he had a quicker and easier death at the hands of his friends than if Karpenko had captured him alive. If he'd fallen into that butcher's hands, he'd have taken three years to die and still been alive. He'd have stayed alive till Karpenko squeezed out every single word like a pimple. (*Laima shudders*)

ANTANAS. Don't be frightened. That won't happen to him now.

LAIMA. I'm not frightened. It makes no difference to me what happens to anyone. I'm just tired. Go home now, and tomorrow we'll see.

ANTANAS. That's clever. I know we'll see tomorrow. If we're going together, we're going together.

LAIMA. (*At a loss.*) Where together?

ANTANAS. Everywhere together. Today we'll sleep together, tomorrow we'll pull wool across the eyes of the Russians together, and afterwards we'll live together.

LAIMA. I told you to go home.

ANTANAS. From today my home is where you are. (*He tries to embrace her.*)

LAIMA. (*Escaping from him.*) I told you to keep away from me. ANTANAS. That's news to me. Don't you remember what you said today, when I went with you to the town ?

LAIMA. Understand once and for all that we live in different worlds.

ANTANAS. Then you weren't telling me the truth?

LAIMA. There's such a lake of blood between you and me that no one will ever swim across it.

ANTANAS. You were just weaving a snare for me ?

LAIMA. The corpses of Rasa and Aukse are between us.

ANTANAS. Shut up!

LAIMA. And the sufferings of my uncle the forester cry out for vengeance.

ANTANAS. Stop blaming me for Daugvyda's crimes.

LAIMA. Don't tell yourself lies. As it happened, someone hiding from your gang climbed into an oak-tree opposite the forester's well and saw what you did.

ANTANAS. Be quiet! (*He comes closer to her.*)

LAIMA. I don't see any need to be quiet. You know that little Kazytė was hiding behind a bale of flax at the end of the bed and saw what you did to Rasa. My God! I'd rather die a hundred times than let you touch me with your hands. Get out of here! Get out now! Tomorrow we'll meet in front of Karpenko and I'll be glad to see the big criminal throttle the little criminal.

ANTANAS. (*With a loud laugh.*) Don't act the lioness when you're only a half-dead alley-cat! I can see that you want make me lose my temper, but you won't succeed. This is your last chance. If you know what happened to Rasa, perhaps you

know why it happened! If you know what happened to Auksė, perhaps you know why that happened too. I've nothing to worry about and only desire your happiness. You'll be happy with me; only you must give up your obstinacy and begin to act reasonably.

LAIMA. Get out!

ANTANAS. I told you, I won't go anywhere before I get what I want.

LAIMA. You're out of your mind.

ANTANAS. Just you come to your senses! Tomorrow we'll go to Karpenko and tell him that we were planning to liquidate Daugvydas. He'll start shouting and drive me out of the room; he'll threaten me with Siberia, he'll threaten to hang me. An hour later he'll bring me back, pat me on the shoulder, say "molodetz" and forget all about it.

LAIMA. Then please, leave me alone and go home. Go to Karpenko, tell him whatever you like, do whatever you like, only go away! Please go away. You reek of blood! Go away!

ANTANAS. No, you're not big enough to drive me away. I've plenty of time and you can't escape. First we'll play a little game and then we'll reach an agreement, you'll see. *(Still speaking, he begins moving round the table towards Laima, but she runs to the other side of the table and pulls it into a corner of the room.)*

LAIMA. Just you dare!

ANTANAS. You like to barricade yourself. All right. Have it, your own way. But remember, Antanas never begged and pleaded with anyone like he did with you. You can choose that corner, if you want to, but you'll stay in it. *(He picks up the remaining bottle of gasoline.)* They were wise men, those bandits, they left a bottle for me. *(He throws gasoline from the bottle on to Laima twice.)*

LAIMA. *(Shrinking into the corner.)* You're out of your mind.

ANTANAS. On the contrary this is the way to bring you back to your senses. *(He takes a box of matches out of his pocket and taps it.)* Do you hear? I pleaded with you before. Now you can come out from behind the table and plead with me to go with you. I'll take those soaking rags off you myself. Otherwise... *(He throws gasoline on to her again.)* Take your choice. *(He draws a match from the box.)* Just one match and you'll be a ball of flame. *(Laima pushes the table against Antanas in the hope of throwing him off his balance. But he pushes the table back and thus confines her again to her corner.)*

ANTANAS. *(Laughing.)* It'd be good to hear what Karpenko has to say when he sees a red rooster *(he imitates Karpenko's pronunciation)* on Laima's roof. You'd better not try to fight; I've strength to overcome three like you. Look, out there the flames are beginning to die down; Karpenko'll soon be free to come here with his band. He likes the smell of burning flesh. More than once I've heard him say that, after the Germans had fired their flamethrowers at the trenches, the air all around would be heavy with the strangely agreeable smell of roast flesh. You've only to say the word and we'll be friends. You can't imagine how kind I can be, how faithful, how easy to live with. Just look me in the eyes. Have you ever seen so much love and self-sacrifice in anyone else's eyes? If you'll come with me, I'll give up my whole career, my whole future. We'll shut ourselves up in a little collective farm and be happy together. Please, look me in the eyes.

LAIMA. I see two lakes of blood and a flood of hatred. It's a long time since you had the eyes of a human being.

ANTANAS. All right, you can't keep putting off your choice. You won't go with me; then you won't go against me *(He lights a match and holds it in his hand. Laima shrinks further into the corner and raises her hands in front of her, ready to ward off a match if he throws one.)*

ANTANAS. I won't give you a chance to go running to Karpenko tomorrow and telling him a lot of sweet-tongued lies about me. We're going to balance our accounts today and right here. *(The flame of the burning match reaches his fingers. He drops the match,, squashes it with his foot and shakes his singed fingers.)*

LAIMA. So you've run out of courage. What's the matter? You had plenty of courage before.

ANTANAS. I don't want to take action a second earlier than I must. I'm really sorry for you. Just think of your children. Here, give me your hand, *(he stretches his hand across the table)* and no one will ever separate us. Don't worry, I'll be a good father to your children.

LAIMA. *(Shuddering.)* Even if I wanted to, I couldn't touch you or your hand. As for my children — O God, give me strength! You a father to my children? Just look at yourself. You only take things for yourself or destroy them; you don't know how to do anything else. First show that you can do better than that. You go your way and let me go mine. I promise not to say a word to anyone about what's happened here. I'll try to forget all that you've made me suffer. Go away and learn to be a man for your own sake and that of everyone else.



ANTANAS. *(With a twisted smile.)* You've a sweet tongue, but you won't persuade me. Either you go with me now or you'll never go anywhere.

LAIMA. *(Resolutely)* If I can't go, you won't go either.

ANTANAS. *(With a hoarse laugh.)* That's news. Here! *(He tries to strike a match but it breaks. He takes another.)*

LAIMA. *(Jumps quickly on to the table.)* We'll both burn. I'll perish but I'll do some good. You can set fire to me, but I'll cling to you and we'll both burn. You won't shake me off, don't deceive yourself.

*(Antanas walks slowly backwards, fingering the matchbox. Then he leaps towards the kitchen-door and strikes a match. Laima jumps down from the table and runs towards Antanas, but the kitchen-door opens, Daugvydas enters and strikes Antanas on the back of the neck with his hand. Antanas falls to the floor and lies still on his face.)*

LAIMA. *(Stands dumb-founded for a time, then rushes to Daugvydas.)* Daugvydas!

DAUGVYDAS. *(Bends over Antanas, turns him over on to his back, searches his pockets quickly, finds a pistol in one of them and checks it for bullets.)* He must have a store of bullets; it's fully loaded again. *(He puts the pistol in his own pocket.)* I don't think he'll need it any more. *(He puts his arms round Laima.)* My poor child!

LAIMA. O Daugvydas, I never, never imagined that you would take the risk of coming back.

DAUGVYDAS. *(In a contented tone.)* Don't you realize, darling, that I'm accustomed to walking on the blade of a knife? Somehow we thought it might be dangerous to go ahead through the fields; we might stumble on someone in hiding. So we climbed on to the cattle-shed to wait and see the fire.

LAIMA. But the fire, it's been quite a time now... Or perhaps it only seemed a long time to me; every second was like a year.

DAUGVYDAS. When they all rushed out, we thought that you were alone.

LAIMA. Then you aren't alone?

DAUGVYDAS. For the present all three of us are still together. When we climbed down from the cattle-shed, we first checked to see if any spies were lurking. Then we came and looked through the window, to see if you were alone, and what we saw made our hair stand on end. Alksnis wanted to shoot, but I held him back and tried my luck once more. But you're all covered with gasoline. You'd better go and change.

LAIMA. The gasoline won't do any harm. It's a good disinfectant. But you'd better hurry. You can never tell where someone may be lying in wait.

*(While Daugvydas is embracing Laima, Antanas recovers consciousness and, realizing what has happened, feels cautiously in his pocket for the pistol. Not finding it, he lies still for a moment, then turns his head and sees floor. It is within reach of his hand. He stretches out his arm, takes the knife and jumps up.)*

LAIMA. *(Shouting.)* Daugvydas!

*(She pulls him to one side and jumps herself in opposite direction. Daugvydas turning round strikes Antanas's arm with his elbow and thus escapes a knife-blow aimed at his back. Then Antanas grabs Laima by the collar with his left hand and threatens her with the knife, but Daugvydas draws the pistol.)*

DAUGVYDAS. *(Shouting.)* Stop.

*(Antanas pauses with his hand raised.)*

DAUGVYDAS. Drop that knife!

ANTANAS. And what'll you do if I don't drop it? *(With a sudden movement he pulls Laima so that she stands in front of him. He holds her firmly with his left arm around her waist and points the knife at her throat above the breastbone.)* If you move a step, the knife'll be in Laima's throat up to the handle. *(To Laima)* And don't you try to kick.

LAIMA. I know. You'll do the same to me as you did, to the forester's wife. They found her with a knife in her throat.

ANTANAS. Shut up!

DAUGVYDAS. Laima, please keep calm. *(To Antanas)* You needn't hide behind her. I'm not going to shoot. I've no intention of killing you.

ANTANAS. Of course I'll believe you. All of a sudden you're an innocent little lamb. Baa, baa!

DAUGVYDAS. D'you remember how we used to shoot down cherries from the trees with pop-guns? Believe me, I made great progress in those years. I've no need to take your life, but I'll maim you for the rest of your days. At once. You can't cover your right elbow and that's as much as I need. I'll shatter it and you'll have to serve your gods with one arm. Don't try to move your arm. The slightest movement, and your arm 'll fall off as if it were chopped through. Unclench your fist and drop the knife. But don't try to stab her! You might have time to grade the skin but not to stab her flesh. Drop the knife. I won't wait for ever. One, two...

ANTANAS. *(Unclenches his fist, letting the knife drop, and pushes Laima angrily to one side.)* If you don't want my life, good night! *(He turns to go out.)*

DAUGVYDAS. Wait, don't be in such a hurry.

*(Antanas makes an impatient gesture with his hand and begins to go.)*

DAUGVYDAS. *(In a loud tone.)* Stop!

ANTANAS. *(Stopping and turning round)* What d'you want now?

DAUGVYDAS. Bring up a chair and sit down here at the table.

ANTANAS. I'm not tired. Say what you want to; I can listen standing up.

DAUGVYDAS. *(Pushes the table nearer to the middle of the room, so that there is free passage round it on all sides.)* Please sit down. After all I'm still the host in my own house. Please, don't waste time.

ANTANAS. *(Drawing up a chair and sitting down at the table.)* All right. I'll be your guest under compulsion.

DAUGVYDAS. *(Sits down at the corner of the table. To Laima)* Laima, you need to relax a bit. Go and change.

LAIMA. Can't I stay with you? Is it something special?

DAUGVYDAS. As far as I'm concerned you can stay. I don't intend anything disagreeable, but you 'll find it pleasanter to go.

LAIMA. *(Kissing Daugvydas.)* Daugvydas, don't stain yourself.

DAUGVYDAS. She 's a strange girl. Twice she was close to death at your hands but she still pleads for you.

ANTANAS. Pleads for me? Ha, ha! It's only that she doesn't want you to dirty your hands by touching me.

DAUGVYDAS. Does it matter why? All that matters is that what she says helps you.

ANTANAS. It doesn't look as if I shall have much help from you this evening.

DAUGVYDAS. For you it's still evening, but it seems to me that's nearly dawn. Sometimes it's hard to imagine how the time stands still. Perhaps you remember the last time we were talking under the willows at the manor, wondering what would happen to our country: would it stay neutral, or would the Germans get it or would the bolsheviks? You were right. The bolsheviks got us. But you were wrong as well. You said they would learn progress from us, but it's been the other way round; we have to learn regression from them. We 're going back to the age of the cave-man.

ANTANAS. Are you trying to convert me to the path of truth?

DAUGVYDAS. Nothing of the kind. Whatever a man is in the depth of his heart, that he continues to be. I believe that communism has converted you to your own path.

ANTANAS. What d 'you mean by that?

DAUGVYDAS. Communism has created the conditions in which you can display your real nature freely without restraint, without fear of being called to account.

ANTANAS. You 're opening a trial in court. You want to justify your intended action by bourgeois morality; or maybe you want to explain yourself in advance to your lord god, so that he won't send you to hell for murdering a man. It's important to demonstrate to his providence that Antanas isn't a man, nor even a dog, nor a rat --Laima likes the word — but something

still lower. Antanas may be a rotten mushroom or a fungus or a speck of dirt. You wash him off your hands and that's the end of him.

DAUGVYDAS. (*Smiling.*) Interesting ideas. You know, in the few years we've spent going back to the cave-man I've had plenty of time to think, but I've never dared to lower my enemy to that level. Anyway we grew up together and we've so many treasured recollections of little things in common. Let me be quite frank: many a time I've been very sad to think that you joined the quislings. Many a time I've wished we'd had you with us, when we had a chance to sting the Russians. Many a time I've longed for your inventiveness and your skill in achieving one thing while you're doing another.

LAIMA. (*Enters. She has changed her clothes but not washed her face.*) There they are! I was all on edge with fear, but they're just sitting here and talking.

DAUGVYDAS. (*To Laima*) Have you any writing-paper and a pencil and an envelope ?

LAIMA. They must be somewhere here. The way things have been happening lately, maybe I've forgotten how to write.

ANTANAS. What? Have I got to write my last confession?

LAIMA. (*Taking the stationary from the book-case.*) There, I've found them. (*She puts the writing materials on the table and looks at the two men in turn with a glance of inquiry. Antanas tries to smile a twisted smile of irony. Daugvydas continues staring in concentration at Antanas.*)

DADGVYDAS. As far as I've heard — you needn't be surprised; I have friends among the people you trust most - as far as I've heard, your relations with Karpenko are not very good.

ANTANAS. You know, you can leave my business to me.

DAUGVYDAS. Just now I received a report that the little Russian is tearing about at the scene of the fire in search of you, but he can't find you anywhere, and that makes him still wilder.

ANTANAS. Don't worry. Karpenko knows where I am.

DAUGVYDAS. One way or the other, it'll be better and healthier for you not to meet him face to face, and that's why I want you to write him a farewell letter.

ANTANAS. I'm not planning to go away anywhere, and as for my relations with others, you needn't worry.

DAUGVYDAS. That's the sort of tone I like, frank, manly and straightforward. I'm not suggesting that you should go anywhere, and I don't bother my head about your business. All the same, pick up the pencil and write: "Comrade Karpenko..." Kindly write in Russian, so that he can understand without a translator. Come on, now: "Comrade Karpenko." (*Antanas does not move.*)

DAUGVYDAS. I need this letter, so please write. (*He pushes the paper nearer to Antanas.*) It'll be better for you to do it with a good grace. I know your methods, but believe me, I don't want to use compulsion. Let's agree with a good grace.

ANTANAS. (*Jumping up.*) What the devil d'you want of me? My life? Take it, and you won't get anything more.

DAUGVYDAS. We've plenty of time.

ANTANAS. Ha! The fire 's nearly burnt out, and Karpenko will be here any minute to take Laima away.

DAUGVYDAS. You shouldn't be in such a hurry to give away secrets. It'd be much better if you'd sit down and do as I tell you. I've posted sentries all around, and if the Russians make the slightest movement in this direction, I'll know at once. You see, I'm telling you a secret in return (*Antanas stares with his eyes cast down.*)

DAUGVYDAS. You remember Rasa and the way you tried to make her sleep with you. Shall I remind of your whole procedure? First you...

LAIMA. You needn't tell him, Daugvydas.

DAUGVYDAS. You see, you showed such inventiveness that Laima can't bear to listen to the story. I'll be more direct but consequential. I warn you, if you don't write, what I dictate to you, you won't get out of here alive. Don't rely on my good nature; don't imagine that I wouldn't harm a defenseless man. You're not defenseless and I'm not doing you any harm. But from now on for every attempt to resist you'll get one bullet. Not a mortal bullet, but one that you'll feel. I'll hold back the last bullet till I get signal the Russians are coming. I can tell you in advance that the first bullet will lodge in your left arm. Please sit down. (*He aims the pistol. Antanas shudders and sits down.*)

DAUGVYDAS. Take the paper and the pencil. (*Antanas hesitates.*)

DAUGVYDAS. Don't waste time! You'll have to write all the same, unless you want to be riddled with bullets like a sieve.

ANTANAS. Just a moment. What d' you want me to write ?

DAUGVYDAS. I've told you already.

ANTANAS. Just a moment, just a moment. If I write, will you let me out of here alive ?

DAUGVYDAS. I've told you my word. If you like, I'll give you the pistol back. Of course it won't be loaded.

ANTANAS. Will I be able to go?

DAUGVYDAS. Yes.

ANTANAS. And when I'm in the doorway, I'll get a bullet in my back.

DAUGVYDAS. I've told you that I'll let you go alive, and that means that I'll let you go alive. Kindly stop wasting time.

ANTANAS. All right. But let me tell you that if you cheat, you won't get very far.

DAUGVYDAS. I know, and so I've no intention of trying to cheat you. Start writing: "Comrade Karpenko, I'm tired being your slave."

ANTANAS. I can't write like that. (*He tries to stand up.*)

DAUGVYDAS. (*Places the muzzle of the pistol against the nape of Antanas's neck.*) "I'm tired of being your slave. Today I wanted to dispose of the last bandits, but you spoiled my plan. There are spies among your chekists, but you put the blame on me. It's always like that. When a Russian makes a mistake, I'm held responsible. By the time you get this letter, there'll no trace of me left in this district. Don't order any search for me. In the fraternal republics I have friends who will be glad to receive me. If you 're so clever, you can conduct the business alone, for in the whole of the Soviet Union you won't find another stupid slave like I've been. Very good. Now sign it. Address the envelope. That's right. Put the letter in the envelope. Stick it down. Give it to me. (*He takes the letter from Antanas, draws the pistol away from his neck and puts it in his own pocket.*) Now we can have a talk like good neighbors. (*Antanas wipes the perspiration from his brow. Laima, who has watched without moving while the letter was being written, heaves a deep sigh, as if heavy stone had fallen from her breast.*)

DAUGVYDAS. Forgive me, Laima. After I saw how he behaved with you, I couldn't be otherwise. (*To Antanas*) After you've terrorized so many for so long, it must be strange to be terrorized yourself. But I know you won't learn your lesson, however much I wish you would.

ANTANAS. Can I go now?

DAUGVYDAS. Soon... I'd just like to ask you one friendly question. (*He takes the lamp from the table and hangs it on the wall above the book-case.*)

LAIMA. Wasn't it all right ?

DAUGVYDAS. I don't like it on the table. It can be seen too far away in the fields. The chekists may think that the bandits have come back. (*To Antanas*) The forester was such an honest man, a sort of patriarch of the woods. Tell me, who first thought of butchering his whole family ? He hadn't done anyone any harm.

ANTANAS (*Quickly*) Karpenko thought of that himself.

DAUGVYDAS. But how could he know that the destruction of that family would shock the whole neighborhood like a thunderbolt?

ANTANAS. (*Evidently relieved.*) O, the devil only knows.

LAIMA. It wasn't you who told him, was it, Antanas ?

ANTANAS. Maybe it was me, maybe it was the others. He was always asking who were the most honest people in the neighborhood. But I guess I can go now. You'd rather be alone. I give you my word that I won't let anyone know that I've been here. I haven't seen Daugvydas at all. You don't believe me, I know. Well then, don't believe me that's what I deserve. But a time will come when you'll believe me. I'll keep my mouth firmly shut. (*He comes nearer to Daugvydas.*) You know what, Daugvydas destroy that stupid letter. Otherwise I'll have to say in what circumstances I wrote it.

*(Alksnis and Pranas enter in silence through the kitchen-door. )*

Of course, Daugvydas, it makes no difference to you. You'll go away, and disappear, but what'll happen to Lai-ma? She'll have to live here. What about the children? They can't just disappear. Why should they suffer ? Whatever happens, they won't have an easy life. Let's not take a joke too far. I must admit, I broke out into a cold sweat, out some jokes are like that. Then we're agreed? If the letter doesn't appear, I'll be as silent as the earth itself. Good night.

*(He turns to go, sees Alksnis and Pranas and retreats a step, but recovers himself at once.)* So we have more friends of Daugvydas. I hadn't noticed you. Good evening and good night! *(Pranas and Alksnis stay by the door.)*

PRANAS. We learned that you were here, so we came to make your acquaintance.

ANTANAS. Oh, come, come, don't we know one another already ?

ALKSNIS. Then we've come to renew old acquaintance. Perhaps you'd forgotten. I'm Aukse's husband.

PRANAS. And as you perhaps know, I'm Rasa's only brother.

ANTANAS. Daugvydas, you gave me your word.

ALKSNIS. We understand that you were the last person to see Aukse and Rasa alive.

PRANAS. So we'd like to have a little talk with you about their last hours.

ANTANAS. Daugvydas, you promised to let me go.

ALKSNIS. He isn't holding you and we don't intend to stay here. Let's go. *(He takes Antanas by the arm.)*

ANTANAS. No! No!

PRANAS. Let's go.

*(He tries to take Antanas by the other arm, but Antanas frees himself, runs to Daugvydas and catches sight of the knife, which is still lying on the floor. Daugvydas nimbly puts his foot on the knife.)*

ANTANAS. You deceived me. You betrayed me. *(He takes cover behind Daugvydas's back.)*

DAUGVYDAS. Why d'you say I betrayed you? I said that you'd be able to go, and now you can go. I didn't promise to defend you. Besides I don't even know what they want with you.

ANTANAS. You don't know? You?

ALKSNIS. *(In a hard tone.)* Don't exasperate people. The night's almost over. Let's go.

*(He goes round Daugvydas and seizes Antanas. But Antanas frees himself again and falls on his knees.)*

ANTANAS. Listen. We're all Lithuanians. I've killed people, but I swear I didn't kill them of my own free will. As the Lord God sees me, I was not a free agent. Karpenko did everything; Karpenko always decided what was to be done. We're fellow-countrymen, we're brothers, and I want to live too. Daugvydas has my letter. I'll do everything that I wrote in it. I'll disappear. I'll flee to Poland or to Germany. My good fellows. Give me a chance to redeem all the evil I've done with good. I don't want to die. I can't die like this.

PRANAS. Nobody's killing you, but you have to get out of here.

ALKSNIS, When we're outside, we'll make an agreement.

*(Alksnis and Pranas take Antanas by the arms and begin leading him out. Laima turns her face to the wall.)*

ANTANAS. I swear by the Lord God! My good fellows, don't kill me!

*(They lead Antanas out. Laima comes to Daugvydas and buries her face in his shoulder.)*

LAIMA. O Daugvydas, Daugvydas! *(There is a brief silence.)* Should Alksnis do such a thing?

DAUGVYDAS. *{Gazing into the distance.}* He hit you in the face.

LAIMA. That was different. By hitting me he saved me; maybe he saved my life. And he didn't find it easy.

DAUGVYDAS. There are many things that aren't easy. You know how he loved Auksė, but you don't know that when he heard what Antanas had done to her, we kept him bound for two weeks, till he got over his fury. If we'd let him loose, he' s have killed Antanas and Karpenko and anyone he caught, or rather he'd have been destroyed before he could graze anyone's skin. He was raving and he'd have gone out openly in broad daylight. Afterwards he thanked us for saving his life.

LAIMA. And now? What's he going to do now?

DAUGVYDAS. Let's leave them to decide what they're going to do. Each of them has a head on his shoulders and a conscience.

LAIMA. But suppose Antanas pleads and weeps till they let him go?

DAUGVYDAS. You mean, will he keep his promises?

LAIMA. O Daugvydas, I don't know anything any more. He was so terrified.

DAUGVYDAS. Let's leave the decision to them.

LAIMA. But suppose they believe his promises and let him go?

DAUGVYDAS. Then a lot of people will be killed. Isn't this case rather like the blow Alksnis struck you in the face ?

LAIMA. I'm not sorry for Antanas. He was an animal and no one will change him. But I'm sorry for Alksnis and Pranas. Why didn't I bring something to defend myself with ? I'd have made an end of him right here; it would've been natural and just.

DAUGVYDAS. (*Sitting down on the corner of the table.*) How wonderful it would be if we could bring all that has happened to an end here, if we could put a period to the horror of the past, if we could begin to live like human beings. free from the terror of hunted animals! But now it's time to set off again.

LAIMA. You know, I've had a silly idea but it's very beautiful. As I understand from Antanas, they believe that the freedom-fighters have really liquidated you and left your body to burn in some building in the town. They think they'll only find your bones. Maybe you could stay here a week at least. You could have a rest and I'd be happier. No one'll search for us here.

DAUGVYDAS. It's a lovely dream. And it's a great temptation, but you can never tell what they'll do. Maybe tomorrow they'll search this house so thoroughly that we couldn't hide a needle from them.

LAIMA. But what 'll they look for here ?

DAUGVYDAS. How can you tell ? They may look for weapons or a hiding-place or money or all three at once. No, Laima, what would happen to you if they found me here and took me away?

LAIMA. They'd take us both.

DAUGVYDAS. But would you ever forgive yourself, if your beautiful idea came to that?

LAIMA. O Daugvydas, it's better not to talk about it. It makes my spine shudder. You'd better go. But be careful.

DAUGVYDAS. I'll try to leave as little trace as if I were drowned, but I'm uneasy for you. Karpenko won't leave you in peace. He'll try to untie all the knots.

LAIMA. We'll just have to rely on one another.

DAUGVYDAS. I've never relied on you more than I do now, but it's hard for me to think what...

LAIMA. (*Putting her hand to his lips.*) Never mind. Roses don't grow on the blade of a knife. I'll say good-bye to the children for you. Don't let anyone see you. Heaven knows, perhaps people will believe the legend you're no longer among the living.

DAUGVYDAS. I'll find some way of sending you news.

LAIMA. Take your time. We can only win by patience. (*She kisses Daugvydas.*) And the children will never believe that their father was a bandit. (*She kisses him again.*)

DAUGVYDAS. Let me kiss the bruises on your cheeks. (*He kisses her gently many times.*) Does it hurt?

LAIMA. No, your kisses take away the pain and the irritation. (*Someone knocks at the door. Daugvydas starts and runs into the bedroom.*)

LAIMA. Come in. *(She draws her hands through her hair.)*

ALGIS. *(Enters. He is out of breath.)* I came as quickly as I could. I thought that Mr. Daugvydas might still be here.

LAIMA. Is he needed somewhere ?

ALGIS. No. Karpenko's on his way here.

LAIMA. *(Turning to the door into the bedroom.)* D'you hear, Daugvydas?

DAUGVYDAS. *(Appearing in the doorway.)* Is the road open in the direction of Top Hill ?

ALGIS. All the roads are open tonight. Karpenko has stationed men on the slopes and in the park of the manor, to prevent anyone escaping to the forest. He thinks that the incendiaries are hiding somewhere here. He has sent a request to Regional Headquarters for reinforcements of several hundred chekists and tomorrow he'll start combing the slopes, the park and the town. I've never seen him in such a passion before. He says he'll burn alive everyone he captures.

LAIMA. But what's he coming here for?

ALGIS. He wants Antanas. When he couldn't find him anywhere, first he told me to take a horse and ride to Antanas's house and bring him back. Then he changed his mind, seized a horse and began riding with me. When we'd ridden up the hill, we saw the river shining below. Karpenko stared at the river and swore. He said: "We've put a cordon along the edge of the forest, but they can swim across the river." Then he told me to ride for Antanas, bring him here and wait, but he himself hurried back to post sentries along the river.

DAUGVYDAS. There you axe, I've won again. Good-bye, Lai-ma. *(He kisses her.)* Good-bye, Algis. You've undertaken a hard task and a dangerous road, but stick to it. *(Daugvydas shakes Algis's hand warmly and goes out through the kitchen-door. Laima and Algis continue to stare in silence after him. Suddenly the door opens and Daugvydas comes back in haste.)*

LAIMA. O God, are they here already ?

DAUGVYDAS. No. I just thought I'll leave the letter with you. Mail it tomorrow; he'll get it sooner. Or let Algis mail it. *(He kisses Laima again. When he reaches the doorway, he waves his hand and goes out.)*

LAIMA. Heaven help him! If he can only...

ALGIS. He'll disappear as if he'd never been. Now they're going to be tied to the town for a few days, and by the time they're ready to look further afield, our men'll all be safe.

LAIMA. If anyone can be safe in this repulsive broad Soviet fatherland.

ALGIS. Presently we'll all learn to walk on the blade of a knife. By the way, has Antanas been here ?

LAIMA. He was here, but he's gone.

ALGIS. Did he see Mr. Daugvydas ?

LAIMA. *(After hesitating.)* He saw him.

ALGIS. And Mr. Daugvydas let him go ?

LAIMA. Forgive me, Algis, perhaps I've said too much. I keep forgetting the freedom-fighters' rule: the less you know of what your brothers are doing, the easier it'll be for you if you get into trouble. Isn't that right?

ALGIS. Excuse me; somehow I began questioning you without wanting to. Really I only needed to know whether Antanas was here, as I'm looking for him. If he wasn't here, then as far as I'm concerned too he wasn't here.

LAIMA. He was here, Algis, he was here. Tell them that he was here. I shall tell them too. I'm feeling so tired, Algis, and my mind may grow confused.

ALGIS. We're all locked up in a mad-house, where the insane are the least unhappy. I'm not in trouble at all, as far as I can see, but on a day like this I'd be glad to go out of my mind. Then I wouldn't be worried about what's going to happen...

*(He is cut short when the door opens with a crash. Karpenko rushes in. Two soldiers follow him. His face is distorted with unrestrained fury.)*

KARPENKO. *(To Algis)* Have you found Anton? Where's Anton?

ALGIS. He's not at his home. He's been here but he's gone away.

KARPENKO. *(To Laima)* Where?

LAIMA. *(Calmly.)* I don't know. He didn't talk much. He asked for some paper, wrote you a letter and left.

KARPENKO. A letter?

LAIMA. *(Giving him the letter.)* He asked me to mail it, so that you'd get it soon.

KARPENKO. *(Opens the letter hurriedly and reads it.)* What?... What?... *(After reading the letter he thrusts What?... What?)* *(After reading the letter he thrusts it towards Laima.)* Izmiennik! [The traitor.] *(He thrusts it towards Algis.)* Svolach! [The blackguard.] *(He turns towards the audience with his fists raised a little above his shoulders.)* O ty sukin syn! Nu pasmotrim! [You son of a bitch. But we'll see.] He won't escape. Nowhere. *(To Laima)* Nowhere.

LAIMA. No, nowhere.

KARPENKO. Summon all the komsomol to you. At once! *(To the soldiers)* Paidiom! [Let's go.] *(Turning to Laima, and laughing bitterly.)* Anton escape ? Nowhere.

LAIMA. *(Repeating his words like an echo.)* Nowhere, certainly, nowhere.

*(All leave except Laima. She stands in front of the bookcase, looks straight ahead and repeats again.)* Nowhere... certainly, nowhere. And where could he, since they're everywhere... Nowhere, my God, no one will escape... *(Suddenly she remembers something.)* But why did I give him the letter now? Didn't Daugvydas say tomorrow? That would not be given them time to get far away... But now the bloodhounds 'll be let loose in all directions... The roads 'll be blocked. And they don't know that I've given him the letter. They're not hurrying; they think they've plenty of time to cover up the clues. O, how stupid I was!.. Good Lord, why did You only make me think of it a few moments too late ? Or was it better this way? Was it?

*(As she finishes speaking, the room grows dark and a ray of light falls from above. Rasa and Aukse appear one on each side of Laima.)*

RASA. They will escape.

AUKSĖ. And no one will find any trace of them.

RASA. They will escape and live.

LAIMA. Oh, you two are here. That's much better. I felt so lonely, so deserted, as if there weren't a living soul here but only a great fear.

RASA. And anxiety.

LAIMA. Yes, anxiety too. But how do you know about that ? There are no more anxieties where you are.

RASA. *(Ignoring the question.)* You'll never be alone.

AUKSĖ. Our graves and the graves of our brothers will always be with you.

LAIMA. I shall visit them in search of support.

AUKSE. Bring your children with you.

'RASA. Strength rises from the graves of our brothers and fills the heart.

LAIMA. Yes, like the new life which all the earth breathes in spring.

AUKSĖ. It rises from their graves all the year round. RASA. And a new Lithuania will spring from them like a green shoot.

AUKSĖ. And it will grow.

RASA. And no one will hold back its growing any more.

LAIMA. No one, no one will hold back its growing!

(Curtain)