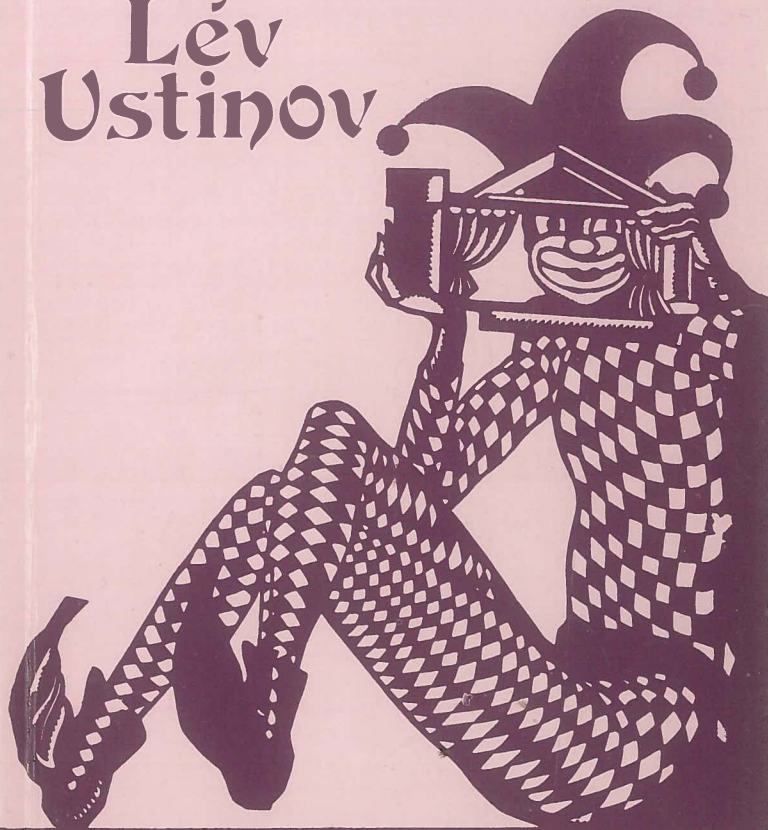


SEVEN FAIRY TALES FOR THEATER

by
**Lev
Ustinov**



*There is nothing
more serious than
a funny fairy tale.*

L. Ustinov

THE LIVE MUSIC
A GYPSY TALE
TOUCH-ME-NOT
THE NORTHERN
MONKEY
THE MUDDLEHEADED
KINGDOM
THE LITTLE
ORGAN-GRINDER
A CITY WITHOUT LOVE

These seven fantasies for the stage, or for reading, have been written by one of the most famous story-tellers of our times.

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In my knansack that's on my head.

A CITY WITHOUT LOVE

A Fantasy in Two Acts

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

CLOWN

RULER of the city

ANNA, the Ruler's daughter

EMPTYMAN

QUEEN SWALLOW

GATEKEEPER

NOBODY'S BOY

TWO SOLDIERS—"Tarabars"

DOG THE NARRATOR

ACT ONE*

DOG: Have you ever seen a city painted grey all over? No?.. Well, here you are—look at this. Houses, pavements, roads, doors, window frames, roofs, the towers of the prison, the fortress walls, and their gates—all grey. Dark grey, light grey, nearly black, almost white, grey stripes, grey spots and dots—but grey nevertheless. And there are grey telegraph poles with grey wires. And signs on which, in black on white or white on black, is written: "SEE A TREE—CUT IT DOWN", "FLOWERS ARE THE ENEMY OF MAN", "GREY IS SALVATION FROM MISFORTUNE"... A strange city isn't it? You don't like it? Nor do I.

GATEKEEPER (*chasing after a fly*): Fly away, I tell you! Fly away this instant! Only grey flies are allowed to buzz about in our city. And you're green... If you don't fly away, I'll... (*Trips and falls.*) Damned fly!... (*To the audience.*) Don't laugh, there's nothing to laugh at. When I was young and silly, I used to laugh a lot, too. Laughter without cause is a sign of stupidity... When our Ruler, twenty years ago, forbade laughter, I stopped laughing with pleasure. Now I never get bellyache from laughing too much, and I never ever cry, because I don't laugh till the tears come ... and when the Ruler prohibited love—that was the happiest day of my life... You see, just at that time I was tangled up with two girls. I liked them both, and I simply didn't know which to choose. We

*The author firmly insists on using the given variant of translation for the staging of this play.

always met as a threesome, and they never stopped snarling at each other... And then came this edict, and the problem was solved... Love went out of our city... Love doesn't love very much once it's forbidden...

DOG: This is Anna, daughter of the Ruler of the city. There's nothing special about her. Her hair is quite ordinary. And so are her eyes. There's just her nose—small, rather sharp, and slightly turned up. She's the sort that bursts out laughing given the slightest reason. But she was less than a year old when laughter was forbidden and she simply doesn't know how to laugh. She just sighs and sighs. Perhaps a sigh is a former laughter.

ANNA: Damnation be upon you, old Gatekeeper!

GATEKEEPER: Damn you, too, Anna!

DOG: That's how they greet each other in this city. They fight against any expression of tenderness and affection. Tenderness softens the soul, you see, and a tender soul is receptive to love.

ANNA: How are things, old Gatekeeper? Has anyone come to our city?

GATEKEEPER: No, no one... (*Sighs.*)

ANNA: Why do you sigh?

GATEKEEPER: From happiness... I used to laugh when I was happy, but now I sigh. Very likely the sighs are my former laughter... When you are with me I feel warmer somehow... (*He remembers and looks round, frightened.*) Sterner, that is. I feel hardness and cruelty filling my soul!

ANNA (*sadly*): And you are afraid of me... There's only Emptyman who is not afraid of me, and I hate him!

GATEKEEPER: Just mind you don't say that to his face, that's all.

ANNA: I know...

GATEKEEPER: And I'm not afraid of you. I know that you've a kind... (*Suddenly remembers.*)

I mean you have a hard heart... (*In a whisper.*) But in our city that's very dangerous. It's the kind heart that's the first to get into trouble.

ANNA: Prove you're not afraid of me!

GATEKEEPER: How?

ANNA: Laugh! I want to know what laughter sounds like.

GATEKEEPER: That's not fair. You know I can't refuse you anything.

ANNA: Laugh! Laugh! I shan't tell anyone.

GATEKEEPER (*tries to laugh, but from his throat comes a hoarse snarl*): I can't do that. I've forgotten how.

ANNA: Oh, try to remember! You used to laugh before...

GATEKEEPER (*makes another unsuccessful attempt*): It's no good. Laughter can live only when it's fed with laughter. Otherwise it dies from starvation.

ANNA: Does that mean that your laughter is dead?

GATEKEEPER: Probably... Just wait here a minute while I run and take the soup off the stove. (*Goes out.*)

ANNA whistles softly. SWALLOW runs to her.

ANNA: I came to the wall yesterday, but you weren't there. Where were you?

SWALLOW: I'm very busy. Spring is on its way, didn't you know?

ANNA: I never notice such things.

SWALLOW: Well, yes, that's understandable. But if you were to climb high, high up into the sky, you would see spring spreading over the land. I must build myself a nest, and show the young birds how to build one, too. They play too much up in the sky... Believe me, it's not easy being Queen Swallow...

ANNA: Are you a severe queen?

SWALLOW: I try to be, but they don't take much notice of my severity!

ANNA: Why?

SWALLOW: Because they know that, at heart, I am kind.

ANNA: Then how do you make them obey you?

SWALLOW: I have to spend a great deal of time explaining everything to them.

ANNA: Let's dance. Just a little...

SWALLOW: But what if someone sees us?

ANNA: We'll dance and keep watch at the same time.

ANNA and SWALLOW dance and sing.

In slippers new I go
Along the springy way.
What is this I find?
Who is here today?

Singing a sweet song
He brings us a surprise.
Sweets or happy greetings:
The secret's our surprise.

DOG: You see? They're already dancing like mad, and not keeping watch at all. It's always the same: just cheer up even a little bit and all fear disappears.

ANNA and SWALLOW (*sing*):

Singing a sweet song
He brings us a surprise.
Sweets or happy greetings:
The secret's our surprise.

SWALLOW: Oh! Emptyman is coming!

ANNA: Quickly! Fly away!

SWALLOW: It's too late! He's seen us...

ANNA (*frightened*): What shall we do?

SWALLOW: I'll fly away, and you make a very angry face and throw a stone at me.

ANNA: But what if I hit you?

SWALLOW: Don't worry, I'll manage to dodge it. I'm very agile.

SWALLOW flies off; ANNA makes an angry face and throws a stone. ANNA, hearing SWALLOW cry out, winces.

EMPTYMAN (*comes in leaning menacingly on a long, gnarled stick, and thrusting his long, pointed beard suspiciously first to one side and then to the other*): Don't think you can fool me! I saw everything!

ANNA: What of it! I threw a stone at her.

EMPTYMAN: Just for show... And before that you were dancing with her. I shall tell your father and you will be punished. And I shall make an order that all swallows are to be exterminated.

ANNA: Father won't believe you.

EMPTYMAN: He will. He knows I see everything. I even see through walls! And I even know what our subjects dream about.

ANNA: Go on then, look! See as much as you want! It's all the same to me—I hate you!

EMPTYMAN: Aha! You have declared your hate for me! Now you will be my wife... Yes! Yes! You will have to marry me. According to Paragraph 70, Article 71 of the 72nd Law, the ideal marriage is that in which the bride and groom hate each other. After the wedding their marital relationship does not deteriorate—it couldn't be worse to start with!.. I have spoken, and now I am going... (*Goes out.*)

DOG: Yes, there he goes, brimming with awful menace, knowing that he will carry out his threat. Anna knows it, too. She already regrets her fiery outburst and is very distressed. But, as you yourselves know, troubles never come singly. Look to the left... Do you see? There goes Swallow, using her wing as a crutch. Her other leg is broken.

ANNA (*rushing up to SWALLOW*): What's the matter?

SWALLOW: Nothing. It's nothing... It's all my fault.

ANNA: Did the stone hit your leg?

SWALLOW: You didn't mean to do it?

ANNA: Of course I didn't!.. But what will happen to you now?

SWALLOW: Nothing much... They'll just choose another swallow to be queen. The Queen, you see, must be perfect.

ANNA: And won't they take you south?.. When the cold weather comes...

SWALLOW: I wouldn't go anyway.

ANNA: Why?

SWALLOW: One can live as a guest, but to die one should be at home.

ANNA: Woe is you! Woe is me! I'm in trouble, too. I declared my hate to Emptyman...

SWALLOW: Oh, why did you have to do that!

ANNA: I couldn't help myself... I'm fed up with always pretending to him...

In the distance can be heard the tramp of feet. It comes closer.

Hide! It's the Soldiers, the Tarabars!

ANNA and SWALLOW flatten themselves against a niche in the wall. Marching strictly in step, two SOLDIERS enter.

DOG: Now you can see why Anna and Swallow were so frightened. The Soldiers are ferocious in appearance, and have rifles with enormously long, sharp bayonets. Their moustaches are more pointed than any cat's, and the spurs on their boots would make the most dandified cock in the world die from envy. And what's more, the song they're singing, to be quite honest, is far from being a lullaby!

SOLDIERS (*sing*):

The bullet's a fool,
The bayonet's grand,
The wolf is stronger
Than the lamb.

DOG: We're lucky this time—the Tarabars have gone past.

SWALLOW and ANNA leave their hiding-place.

ANNA: Now I'll make a bandage for you. (*She resolutely takes hold of her sleeve and tears off a strip of material.*)

DOG: She's wearing a very pretty dress. You might even say it is her favourite dress. If Anna were to catch it on a thorn and tear it, she would cry and cry. But now...

SWALLOW: What are you doing? That's your favourite dress!

ANNA: A friend's life is more precious than a favourite dress. (*Bandages Swallow's leg.*)

DOG: Yes, that's what she said: "A friend's life is more precious than a favourite dress." Of course, a kind act is good even without words. However... Kind words with an act of kindness is like flowers at a fiesta.

SWALLOW: Take care... The Gatekeeper's coming!

ANNA: Don't be afraid. He's an old natter-bags, but he'd never give me away.

GATEKEEPER (*enters*): Damn it!.. I ate my soup too quickly and I've scalded my tongue! It's difficult to speak even...

ANNA: That's no great loss. You'll just have to grumble less...

GATEKEEPER (*alarmed*): What are you doing? Are you mad?

ANNA: Poor Swallow has a broken leg.

GATEKEEPER (*loudly, on purpose*): Then break the other one!

ANNA: Shh...

GATEKEEPER (*in a whisper*): If anyone sees you showing compassion and finds out I saw this and didn't report it, we'll both perish... Stop it, at once!

ANNA: You'd do better to keep watch and see that no one does see us.

GATEKEEPER: That's not fair of you. You know I can't refuse you anything.

CLOWN (*appearing above the city wall*): Greetings!

GATEKEEPER *sways, and sits down on the ground. ANNA and SWALLOW stand as if frozen.*

DOG: They're like that because it was so unexpected. Just imagine: you meet a clown, not in a circus, but in a bus or on the Underground. You'd be very surprised, too. And our clown, being a wandering clown, has a habit before entering a new, unknown town, of putting on his make-up and his best clown's costume. And that's why his black and white hat, with its little bell, is now sticking up above the city wall.

GATEKEEPER: Who are you?

CLOWN: Open the gate, kind old man, and then I'll tell you who I am.

GATEKEEPER (*jumping up with indignation*): You're an informer! You're going to tell on me—you're going to say I'm kind? Rubbish! Whoppers and lies! I'm the hardest-hearted man in the city! And I sing an angry song. It's fearsome! (*Seizes his watchman's staff, and, waving it like a drum major at the head of a military band, sings.*)

Hey, traveller, don't think that soon you'll find Peace and dreams under someone's roof.

We simply don't allow into this city

Anyone who's ever been in love.

No, don't ask for bread!

Don't ask for water!

Away with

Your hunger and thirst.

Day is not day.

Night is not night.

Away! Be off!

CLOWN: Well, that certainly is a fearsome song. It's a simply excellent fearsome song... But, in the first place, I've never in all my life been in love; and, secondly, I don't propose to ask for food or drink—I'll earn them for myself. Thirdly, I see your Swallow has only one good leg left, and making two legs out of one is for me a mere trifle.

ANNA: Dear Gatekeeper, let him in at once.

GATEKEEPER: It's all lies! Whoppers and lies! Rubbish! I've seen folks make one leg out of two, but to make two legs out of one... Rubbish! Whoppers and fibs!...

CLOWN: You don't believe me? Watch! See this finger? (*Makes a movement of the right hand over the left thumb and this finger disappears.*) Allez-oops! (*After a brief pause, he passes the right hand over the hand with the missing finger and it is back in place.*)

DOG: Not bad, eh? He learnt that trick from an old magician who himself had got it from an old magician. And people are always amazed by it—just as Anna, Swallow, and the Gatekeeper are amazed by it now.

GATEKEEPER (*to ANNA*): Well, all right. I'll let him in... But remember, no more favours! (*Opens a little door in the gate.*)

CLOWN (*enters the city. His costume is a continuation of his hat: one half white, and the other black. He goes up to SWALLOW and makes a sweeping gesture with his arm*): Allez-oops!

SWALLOW (*cries out*): Oy! Where's my leg?

CLOWN: One moment, please...

ANNA: Look! You have two legs again! Two good legs! You are still Queen of Swallows! (*To CLOWN.*) Damnation be upon you!

CLOWN (*surprised*): What for?

ANNA: Ah, yes, you don't know yet... That's how we greet each other in our city.

CLOWN: Charming... Then damn you, too!

ANNA: Tell us, who are you?

CLOWN: I am a wandering clown, an illusionist-manipulator, conjuror-magician. And who are you?

ANNA: I am the daughter of the Ruler of the City. They call me Anna.

CLOWN: Very nice...

ANNA: Don't use that word! Better to say it sounds revolting—I'll be quite pleased with that.

CLOWN: I see... I've been in many strange cities, but this beats the band... Shall I compose a song in your honour?

ANNA: Go ahead.

CLOWN (*takes a guitar from behind his back, sings*):

I met a girl in this strange town,

I bowed and said, "It's a pleasure!"

Her answer was only a shrug and a frown...

NOBODY'S BOY (*appears above the wall and sings in the same melody*): ...It's better such a new friend to treasure!

CLOWN (*embarrassed*): You again? Don't on any account let him into the city. He's trailed me for three weeks trying to find out the secret of my tricks. My head's reeling from his endless questions.

NOBODY'S BOY: They never let me in anywhere, but I always manage to get in by myself. (*Jumps down from the wall.*)

CLOWN: Chase him out, this instant!

NOBODY'S BOY: Quiet, now, quiet... You can't chase me away.

GATEKEEPER (*grasping his staff*): Why not?

BOY: I've nowhere to go.

GATEKEEPER: You've come from somewhere, so go back there.

BOY: I've not come from anywhere. I have no home, no father, no mother, I haven't even a brother or sister.

ANNA: But who feeds you?

BOY: I breakfast on curiosity, dine on what I learn after breakfast, and sup on the hope of my next breakfast... And if I come across a crust of bread, then I eat it between meals.

ANNA: Here's a candy for you.

BOY: Thanks. I just happen to have a free moment, so I'll devour it mercilessly. (*Makes a fearful face and swallows the sweet.*)

ANNA: I permit him to stay in the city.

BOY: Oh, there's no need to permit me anything. It's much more interesting doing things without permission! Damnation be upon you! (*Runs round the corner of the nearest house.*)

GATEKEEPER (*to ANNA*): You feel sorry for others too often. You watch, no one will take pity on you...

SWALLOW: The swallows are waiting, I must fly... Thank you, Clown. If you stay in this city, all the birds will be very glad... (*Flies away.*)

CLOWN: Has it been long forbidden to love in your city?

GATEKEEPER: A very long time. Twenty years.

CLOWN: Is it possible that for twenty years no one here has fallen in love?

GATEKEEPER: There have been occasions...

CLOWN: What happened to them?

GATEKEEPER: Those who fell in love were exe-

cuted, and those who were the object of this love were imprisoned for life.

CLOWN: But surely there was secret love. Like when someone is in love, but never, until death, declares his love.

GATEKEEPER: Yes, there were cases...

CLOWN: They survived then?

GATEKEEPER: Their bones survived.

ANNA: We have that kind of thing under control. Father's assistant, Emptyman, has made a splendid invention. Once every day a bell rings, and all the inhabitants of the city put special stethoscopes to their hearts...

CLOWN: Stethoscopes?

ANNA: Yes... Little metal discs with rubber tubes... If you have a sore throat, or bronchitis, or heart trouble, the doctor always puts such a disc on your back...

CLOWN: Forgive me, I have never been ill...

ANNA: So, Emptyman invented this special stethoscope which can detect the lover-criminal immediately! In the Central Control Room amongst the green lights on an illuminated control panel a lamp burns red!

CLOWN: But suppose someone doesn't put the stethoscope to his heart?

ANNA: They'd still find him out on the cliff of love. There, you see, sticking up above the city. It's a magic cliff. It doesn't matter how much one tries to hide one's love, love will draw you to this cliff. A photo-telescope is trained onto the cliff, automatically taking pictures, and to be photographed there leads to criminal prosecution. Clever, isn't it?

CLOWN: Very... Well, I think I'll perhaps be on my way... All the best!

ANNA: You're leaving?

CLOWN: Yes. There's nothing for a clown to do in a city where people don't know how to laugh.

ANNA: And do you know how to laugh?

CLOWN: Of course.

ANNA: Laugh!

DOG: If you are asked to laugh just like that for no reason at all, anybody would laugh, but especially a clown.

CLOWN laughs.

Strange... I thought that laughter would be quite different... Did it hurt you to laugh?

CLOWN: Why?

ANNA: Your face went all crinkly, and you bared your teeth like a fierce dog...

CLOWN: Poor girl... You have never laughed happily, or seen happy people laughing... Do you know how much you are missing because of them?

ANNA: How much?

CLOWN: Everything, and yet little... (*Holds out his hand to ANNA.*) Goodbye... I wish you everything that you fear most...

GATEKEEPER: Hey! Hey! Let go of her hand!.. Damnation be upon you—and I hope you lose your way!

A song is heard; it comes nearer.

Grey, grey, colour grey,
The best colour, come what may...

ANNA: It's father!

GATEKEEPER: And Emptyman is with him...

DOG: And here come Emptyman and the Ruler of the City. You heard the Ruler's little song. Well, it isn't just a song. As composers would say, it's his masterpiece. Look, he's wearing grey shoes, a grey suit, grey bowler hat, and on top of his bowler hat is a dull white coronet. He struts about the city with a bold, bouncy step. He interferes in everything, checks

everything, and everyone is bored stiff with him. At one of the city meetings—someone or other was being executed—he announced that he felt young and healthy, that he had no intention of dying, and ordered that he should therefore be considered immortal. He thinks that everything in the city is in order, that everything is according to the rules, and that if he is satisfied with everything, why shouldn't he sing?

RULER (*sings*):

Grey, grey, colour grey,
The best colour, come what may.

Grey, grey, colour grey,
That's the colour, come what may.

Grey clouds, grey blood,
A grey world of grey mud.

Grey, grey, colour grey,
That's the colour, come what may!..

(*Catches sight of CLOWN, falls silent, and stares at him in surprise.*) Damnation be upon you, stranger! Who may you be?

CLOWN: A wandering conjuror, Your Royal Highness!

RULER: Please... There's no need for such flowery titles. Just be like everyone else, and call me Your Immortal Municipality.

CLOWN: An excellent title! I shall address you by it at every suitable opportunity.

RULER: Any opportunity is suitable for showing deference to the Ruler. So long as you are in the city, address me like that all the time. Will you be with us long?

CLOWN: No, I am just perambulating.

RULER: Where is your perambulator?

CLOWN: I haven't got one.

RULER: Then you must say you are walking through, and not perambulating. (*Does a quick knees-bend, as if doing his daily exercise drill.*)

DOG: The Ruler always does this when he is pleased with something he has said. And everyone around him also does a knees-bend, as if in approval of the Ruler's words. So what? Customs vary. Some applaud, others do knees-bends—what's the difference?

GATEKEEPER: Permission to report, Your Immortal Municipality?

RULER: Report.

GATEKEEPER: Rules of city-entry fully observed. The perambulator... Sorry, the walker-through has sworn that he has never been in love, is not in love, and will not be in love.

CLOWN: Don't worry. I shan't be staying very long. I'll just earn a few coppers, buy some food, eat it, and be on my way.

RULER: You wish to buy food?... But do you know when a person must eat?

CLOWN: The rich man—when he feels like it, and the poor man when he can.

RULER: No, no, no! Definitely not!.. Everyone must breakfast at breakfast time, dine at dinner time, and sup at supper time. And if someone should breakfast at supper time, or sup at dinner time, he will be executed!..

DOG: He shouts, as if from a tribune, at the whole world. He even begins to talk nonsense. But when this happens Emptyman tugs at his sleeve, and he stands stock-still like a broken toy, and begins to talk normally, that's if it's at all possible to call him normal. In my opinion, he's a bit touched. By the way, I'm fed up with him. (*Climbs up into his box.*)

RULER: If you don't answer correctly the following two basic questions, I shall have you expelled from the city forthwith. (*Pauses, then shoots the question directly, like a sharp spear.*) Into which sea does the Volga flow? No prompting! Anyone who prompts will be executed!

CLOWN: The Volga flows into the Caspian Sea.

RULER: Correct!.. And what do horses eat?

CLOWN: Horses eat oats.

RULER: Well done!.. The earth is round, water is wet... Right is that might which conforms to the laws of might. Feathers are soft, stone is hard... That which is useful is not harmful, and that which is harmful is not useful...

EMPTYMAN tugs at his sleeve.

All right... And now show us a trick.

CLOWN: Attention! *(Takes a flask from his belt, drinks a mouthful, then goes up to the RULER, grasps a grey button between his fingers and tears it from the grey suit.)*

RULER *(screams)*: What?! What have you done?! You have ruined... You have stolen municipal property! That which belongs to me, belongs also to the city, and vice versa!

EMPTYMAN: Do you order him to be hanged, burnt alive, or simply have his head cut off?

RULER *(complainingly)*: We have a record of every button...

CLOWN: Fine! You like to count things, so count!.. Watch! I have in my hands one button... I swallow it... *(Puts the button into his mouth, and makes out that it is very difficult for him to swallow such a big button.)*

RULER: We'll have to cut him up into little pieces to find the button...

CLOWN: Attention now!.. Concentrate!.. Look at my ears! *(Makes passes with his hands and takes from his ears two grey buttons.)* Congratulations, Your Immortal Municipality! Now your city is a button to the good. And a spare button always comes in handy...

RULER *(again begins to get wound up, and he shouts the last phrases as if from a tribune)*: We

don't need a spare anything!.. Superfluity makes you soft! And that leads to love! Only he is happy who lives by the rules! And love does not obey the rules. They love who they like, they love who they are able to love, but more often than not they love any old how! Proceeding from the above-mentioned facts, we absolutely precisely decree that love is evil. In our city only one kind of love is permitted: rulers must love to rule, and subordinates must love being subordinate! *(Feeling satisfied with himself, he does a knees-bend.)*

All around also do knees-bends.

We!.. Only we!.. We!.. And no one else!..

EMPTYMAN tugs at his sleeve.

Nevertheless, it was interesting. How did you do it?

ANNA: Terribly interesting!

CLOWN: It's trade secret.

ANNA *(capriciously)*: Daddy, I want to know this secret!

CLOWN: An open secret kills a trick.

EMPTYMAN: If I were in your shoes I'd rather kill the secret than be killed myself...

RULER: Come on, now. Quickly. How is it done?..

CLOWN: Simply and naturally... When I drank tomato juice for the first time in my life, it suddenly seemed that everything doubled in my ears. Someone said to me "Hello", and it seemed as if two people were saying "Hello". Someone invites me to their home this evening, and it seems as if two are inviting me to their home, and I simply don't know which invitation to accept; consequently I stay at home. And once I accidentally swallowed a plum-stone, and I suddenly felt a tickling in my ears. I stuck my fingers

in and pulled out two plum-stones. And then the happy thought came to me to become a conjuror.

RULER: Very interesting!.. When I was young I loved beer, and everything was double to me, too. Only it was my eyes and not my ears...

EMPTYMAN: Your Municipality...

RULER: Er, yes... I was joking! I never did!.. Never!.. I never!.. I never, never did!

EMPTYMAN tugs at his sleeve.

All right... Now what are we to do with him? Let him stay or chase him out?

ANNA: Let him stay.

RULER (*menacingly*): You answered my question?

ANNA (*frightened*): No... I only wanted...

RULER: Only I am permitted to answer my own questions!

EMPTYMAN: Permission to put a question to the conjuror, Your Immortal Municipality?

RULER: Permission granted.

EMPTYMAN: Can you swallow a gold coin, and bring out two from your ears?

CLOWN: I can.

EMPTYMAN: Then swallow this.

CLOWN: A dear trick costs dear.

EMPTYMAN: How much?

CLOWN: One gold coin.

EMPTYMAN (*to the RULER*): Do you agree?

RULER: Agree! I'll say I agree!

EMPTYMAN: But first I must sniff him. (*Sniffs CLOWN.*) He smells all right; nothing suspicious.

RULER: Give him the coin! Quick!

CLOWN: Just one condition: payment in advance.

EMPTYMAN: Here.

CLOWN (*puts the coin in his pocket*): And now give me the gold coin.

EMPTYMAN gives CLOWN a coin, and he immediately swallows it and takes from his ears two gold coins.

RULER: Hurrah! All rules have been observed, all our problems are solved! From tomorrow morning you will begin to swallow coins. You're just what we need!.. I decree that it shall be announced to the entire city that the era of plenty is approaching. Trickster-mickster, the man we've long been looking for has been found. In the next two or three days there will occur an economic miracle. We shall all be rich! Us!.. All of us!.. At last!.. I decree that the conjuror be awarded a leg of ham!

EMPTYMAN tugs at his sleeve. The SOLDIERS bring in a leg of ham, place it at CLOWN's feet, and run out.

Yes, yes... And you, my trusty Emptyman, for your brilliant idea, are awarded the Order of Outstanding Severity (Class Nought) and may ask me for anything you wish.

EMPTYMAN: Your Immortal Municipality! This morning, your daughter Anna declared her hate for me. And in accordance with the laws of our city she must now marry me.

ANNA: Daddy, I don't want to marry him!

RULER: Maybe she's too young for you...

ANNA: Look at him, Daddy: he's so old. I should be so miserable!

EMPTYMAN: Misery tempers a person and makes him hard. And hardness, severity, that's just what you lack.

RULER: You are right. But perhaps we should wait a while?

EMPTYMAN: Your Immortal Municipality, if you yourself break the rules, then...

RULER: Never!.. Daughter, dear... Anna, darling...

Don't leave me!.. I don't want to live without you!.. But if you don't abide by the rules...

ANNA: Damned city! Damn the rules! (To *EMPTYMAN*.) If only I could, I'd strangle you with my own hands!

EMPTYMAN (admiringly): Your Municipality! Listen to her! She's becoming hard and merciless already.

ANNA: You're evil and heartless!

EMPTYMAN: Ha-ha! You've guessed correctly. I haven't a heart. No heart! You don't believe me?.. Hey, Clown, listen here, and tell her!

CLOWN (puts his ear to *EMPTYMAN*'s chest): Silent—like the grave.

EMPTYMAN: Yes. And in this grave is buried the hopes of all those who have ever tried to stir pity in me.

CLOWN: But what have you done with your heart?

EMPTYMAN: When I realised that every person is born with a kind heart, I tore it from out of my breast, because even in childhood I had already decided to become great and merciless! I began by murdering frogs, then dogs...

CLOWN: And then people?

EMPTYMAN: I particularly enjoy killing people.

RULER (to *EMPTYMAN*): You're the most harsh!.. The most awful!.. The most! The most! I admire! I am proud... (Stops in mid-word.)

The sound of a siren spreads over the city. Bells ring out hysterically. Everyone rushes about in confusion.

CLOWN (to *GATEKEEPER*): What's happened? Fire?

GATEKEEPER: Some fool's fallen in love, more likely.

The TARABARS enter, running. They speak in the peculiar language which EMPTYMAN always addresses them.*

SOLDIER: A-ka flow-kow-er-ker has-kas bloo-koo-med-ked in-kin the-ke de-ke-sert-kert!

EMPTYMAN (to the RULER): A flower has bloomed in the desert!

RULER: How terrible!

EMPTYMAN: What are your orders?

RULER: Tear it up by the roots! Then hang it! Then cut it into pieces and burn it! Follow me!

CLOWN: What language were they speaking?

ANNA: Emptyman has taught them a secret language, and they respond only to him.

The RULER, EMPTYMAN, ANNA, GATEKEEPER and the SOLDIERS run out.

BOY (jumps down from a roof like a bolt from the blue): Well, panic in the city! What a carry-on!.. Everyone is hiding in their houses, locking doors, shutters, putting out stoves! No baking or frying... And I love the smell of food!.. You know, if you sniff hard enough you can kind of eat... Honest! I did an experiment. Just smelly—full belly!.. And then... You swallow a button... I follow that... But how does it get in your ear?

CLOWN: Get away!

BOY: I found a tailor and cadged some buttons from him.

CLOWN: Give them here.

BOY: I've swallowed them... Imagine, I swallowed

*Emptyman claims to have invented a special language for the Tarabars. Actually, all he does is separate words into syllables and put after each syllable a "k" with its vowel sound. He has trained them to respond to orders *only* when given in this language, but when they sing their theme song, they do this in normal language.

six buttons, but not one came out of my ears!.. I winked my finger right inside, but I couldn't find anything...

CLOWN: If you don't want to lose your ears, stop this nonsense.

BOY: What for! If I swallow all the buttons in the world, perhaps then I'll become a real conjuror!

CLOWN: That's not very likely...

BOY: Why not?

CLOWN: To be a wandering clown you need to be able to sing and dance.

BOY: I know how to dance. Not as well as you, that's true, but I could learn. I can't sing, though. In one town they beat me unmercifully. At first I thought that I'd sung something wrong, but it seemed I just couldn't sing at all... Funny people!

CLOWN: It takes a lot of practice.

BOY: I'm not all that busy.

CLOWN: You need to be gay and kind to people.

BOY: I'm kind-hearted. Only I haven't anything, so I can't give them anything.

CLOWN: You must be educated.

BOY (*proudly*): I am educated.

CLOWN: How much schooling have you?

BOY: A whole year.

CLOWN: And then they chucked you out?

BOY: Yes.

CLOWN: Why? Hooliganism?

BOY: There was no one to pay for my education, and so they chucked me out... But honest, I know six letters of the alphabet, and I can even count up to ten. I'm very educated...

CLOWN smiles, and for the first time looks seriously at this pestering boy.

DOG (*appears*): You know, that's often the way: friendship, to which you don't respond, is terribly

irritating and burdensome. And then suddenly something clicks and you see him in a different light, and your irritation disappears.

CLOWN: OK. If you behave yourself...

DOG: But what will happen if Nobody's Boy behaves himself isn't made clear, because...

To the sound of the dead march an awesome procession bears in a slender, green blade of grass. In front is the RULER, behind him are the SOLDIERS with the blade of grass in their hands, and bringing up the rear ceremonially paces EMPTYMAN hollowly singing, and enunciating each word clearly to the tune of the dead march.

EMPTYMAN (*sings*):

Death to all grass,
To all trees and flowers!
Death to all grass,
To all trees and flowers!

BOY: What are they going to do to the grass?

CLOWN: Execute it.

BOY: Is this some sort of game they have?

CLOWN: Unfortunately, they play this game with other things besides grass.

BOY: With what else?

CLOWN: People.

RULER (*commands*): Pre-prepare to hang!

The SOLDIERS bring in a gallows, throw a rope over it, and tie the grass to the end of the rope.

EMPTYMAN: Death! Death-keath!

The SOLDIERS pull the rope tight.

RULER: For quartering pre-prepare!

EMPTYMAN: *Bring-king in-kin the-ke block-kok!*

The SOLDIERS bring in the block, put the grass on it, place their enormous axes above the grass. From off-stage is heard a menacing roll of drums.

EMPTYMAN: *death-keth!*

The blows of the axes cut the grass into three pieces.

RULER: Pre-*pare* to burn!

EMPTYMAN: *Bring-king in-kin the-ke brazier-kazier!*

The SOLDIERS bring in the brazier with blazing coals.

BOY: Halt!

Everyone freezes in astonishment at this unexpected interruption, and turn to look at him.

This is stupid!

RULER: What is stupid?

BOY: This is. What you're doing now.

EMPTYMAN (*evilly*): So you think you're clever?

BOY: Yes.

RULER: Just as a matter of interest, what ground have you for thinking this—that you're clever?

BOY: I've had a whole year's schooling, and I know that grass is for feeding cows, hens and pigs.

RULER: First, we feed cows with their own milk, pigs with their own pork, and hens with their own eggs. Therefore the maintenance of cows, pigs and hens is quite self-supporting. We invented this method... So that... Our... Town... Our... Great... Eternal... City...

EMPTYMAN *tugs at his sleeve.*

And secondly, how do you come to be here?

GATEKEEPER (*frightened*): *The gates were closed...*

BOY: Correct! Gates exist to be locked, but fences are for climbing.

EMPTYMAN: You learned this at your lessons at school, too?

BOY: No, at breaks.

RULER: And do you know what to expect for your impudence?

BOY: What?

RULER: The same fate that is about to befall the grass, got?

BOY: Before you can hang me, you've got to catch me! To execute me, you've got to hold me! And to burn me, you've got to grab me! And on the whole... You all make me sick. You're evil, and you are bores! A great conjuror comes to you. He wants to make you all happy! I've seen him do his tricks in five different cities. I was just winded with laughing at him!.. But you make him make money. You're worse than bandits, highwaymen! You take away everyone's breaks, and leave only lessons!..

EMPTYMAN: Seize him!

Perhaps you've noticed what happens when ten grown-ups try to catch one lively lad? Anyway, watch... NOBODY'S BOY wriggles out of their grasp and runs off, while the grown-ups, rubbing their bumps and bruises, look at each other vacantly in surprise.

RULER: Damned boy! He's ruined the whole splendour of the execution...

EMPTYMAN: Never mind... We'll finish off this execution in a mood of joyful anticipation of the next...

RULER: I'm afraid he'll run away...

EMPTYMAN: There's nowhere for him to run away to! (*Tears the bits of grass from the hands of a SOLDIER and throws them into the fire.*)

There is a sizzling, and from the fire bursts a cloud of smoke, and as the smoke rises skywards there is a thin cry "Oil!"

RULER: We have done that which had to be done.
EMPTYMAN: Hip-hip!

And everyone, except for Clown, shouts a short, but unanimous "hurrah".

RULER: And now I decree the capture of the boy!.. And henceforth, as a consequence of his impudence, we shall execute all children who consider themselves cleverer than their parents! Children!.. Must!.. Be!..

EMPTYMAN tugs at his sleeve.

Forward! To the chase!

EMPTYMAN, the RULER, GATEKEEPER and the TARBARS run out.

ANNA: They'll catch him!

CLOWN: And you wouldn't want them to catch him?

ANNA: He's amusing... Little boys are very like swallows...

DOG: She said that so sadly that she even jumped at the sound of her own voice. And CLOWN took her hand, and ANNA wasn't in the least angry. She only looked at him in amazement. It's often like that: when something strange happens to us we seek the answer not in ourselves, but in those around us...

CLOWN: Are you sorry for the grass?

ANNA: No.

CLOWN: You enjoyed the execution?

ANNA: No.

CLOWN: Your hands are cold.

ANNA: They're always cold... But yours are hot. Why?

CLOWN: It depends upon one's heart.

ANNA: Does that mean you have a cold heart?

CLOWN: No, a kind heart...

ANNA: It's dangerous to be kind...

CLOWN: I know.

ANNA: You're not afraid of anything?

CLOWN: Nothing.

ANNA: Not even of love?

CLOWN: Any why should I be afraid of that?

ANNA: Love brings only unhappiness.

CLOWN: But I've seen happy lovers, too.

ANNA: And what did they look like?

CLOWN: They were laughing with happiness.

ANNA: Making faces like mad dogs?

CLOWN bursts out laughing.

Shh!.. If someone sees...

CLOWN: What will happen?

ANNA: You will be executed.

CLOWN: And wouldn't you want them to execute me?

ANNA: No, I wouldn't.

CLOWN: Why?

ANNA: I don't know... Probably because you saved Swallow...

She suddenly withdrew her cold hand from his warm hand and jumped to one side, just as a passerby jumps to avoid being splashed by a vehicle going through a puddle.

CLOWN: What's the matter with you?

ANNA: I don't know... I'm afraid of you...

CLOWN: Take a good look at me... I'm quite harmless...

ANNA (shouts): Get away!.. Leave this city!.. This minute!.. (Turns sharply on her heel, and runs out.)

CLOWN, shaking his head sadly, looks after her. Self-assured, but looking carefully about him all the time, NOBODY'S

BOY enters.

BOY: Why did she shout at you like that?

CLOWN: It's none of your business.

BOY: A splendid answer!.. In fact, you could say that it is a grown-ups' favourite reply... But you're right! Even when I was still at school I learned never to get mixed up with girls. Even if they're in the wrong, it's you who gets it in the neck...

CLOWN: They didn't catch you, then?

BOY: Certainly not! They couldn't catch kippers... We had a teacher at school! A simply amazing teacher! At breaks he would catch us at full pelt!.. O!.. He taught arithmetic, and he had everything worked out. He would catch us at a right angle, and drag us off to the staff room along the hypotenuse! Are you thinking of presenting this ham to a museum?

And here comes the familiar song of the RULER. 'Grey, grey, colour grey, That's the colour, come what may.'

CLOWN: Maybe it would be a good idea to have our snack elsewhere...

BOY: Correct! "Observe silence while eating." "As I eat, I am deaf and dumb." "When I eat, I speak and listen."

CLOWN and NOBODY'S BOY go out carrying the ham. They've gone just in the nick of time—RULER and EMP-

TYMAN enter.

EMPTYMAN: Your Immortal Municipality, I beg you to set the date for our wedding.

RULER: First catch the boy.

EMPTYMAN: He'll never leave our city alive!

RULER: No!.. Catch him first!

EMPTYMAN: Is it worth it, all this fuss about some boy?

RULER: It's worth it okay.. I sense danger... It would be disgraceful to perish because of an impudent boy...

EMPTYMAN: You've nothing to fear. Why, you are immortal, Your Municipality!

RULER: Even the immortal dislike being ruined. It's all very well being immortal when you're living. Because life... Is... The most... That...

EMPTYMAN tugs at his sleeve.

I have such a great deal to do... I should like to complete the greyification of the city in my lifetime.

EMPTYMAN: Your Immortal Municipality! If you only knew how much I hate your daughter Anna! It's a passionate hatred! I can't live without this hate! It's the most beautiful hatred in the world! It's the sort of hate you dream of all your life!

RULER (touched): All right... I set the time of the wedding for tomorrow evening.

EMPTYMAN: I'll be your faithful slave twice over!

RULER: And let this be the most miserable wedding there has ever been!.. Order the dressmaker to sew a grey wedding gown for Anna... (He sings.)

Grey, grey, colour grey,
That's the colour, come what may!

EMPTYMAN and RULER go out. Immediately the cliff is illuminated so that it stands out above the grey, miserable roofs.

DOG: It's strange, but grass and flowers grow on this cliff. But perhaps it isn't so strange... After all, it is the cliff of love. Yes, you didn't know, did you: the action is taking place in a southern city. See how quickly it goes dark here. The moon climbs over the horizon as swiftly as a boy clambering up a fire-escape. But the moon looks dejected and sad. It's understandable. When the cliff of love is deserted, the moon feels miserable. But what's this?... It seemed as if the moon smiled... Look! There's someone on the cliff. Yes, it's the Clown!.. Someone else, too?... Anna? Well, well!..

ANNA (*frightened*): Who's there?

CLOWN: It's me.

ANNA: Why did you come here?

CLOWN: I had a longing for flowers.

ANNA: How did you know you would find flowers here?

CLOWN: On a cliff of love there must be flowers. This is the cliff of love, isn't it?

ANNA: Yes.

CLOWN: And those who fall in love are attracted here by an irresistible force?

ANNA: No, that isn't true! I came to make sure no one was here. I am the Ruler's daughter, and I have the right to check the whole city! (*Plaintively.*) I just came to check...

CLOWN: And I came to check, too... Down there I couldn't be certain you were falling in love...

ANNA (*almost shrieking from fear*): Go away! Go away this minute! If they see you—we shall perish. A telephoto lens is focussed on the cliff. It's taking pictures all the time and transmitting them to the Central Control Room.

CLOWN: I'm not afraid to die. I'm only afraid to go through life without love.

ANNA (*stretches out her hands towards him*): I implore you, go away!

He takes her hands in his own, and she shudders as if she has a fever. They fall silent for a second, and speak to each other in a whisper.

CLOWN: What is the matter?

ANNA: I don't know...

DOG: You know, there are such moments in life when a whisper is like a life-belt, whereas a word spoken aloud would be like a ball and chain round one's legs.

CLOWN: Are you cold?

ANNA: Let go of my hands...

CLOWN: All right...

ANNA: No, don't let go!.. Quick, go away!.. Leave this city!..

CLOWN: I can't leave...

ANNA: Why?

CLOWN: I am holding your hands. They won't let me go.

ANNA: What shall we do?

CLOWN: We'll leave together... There are many beautiful cities on this earth, where flowers grow at the windows and even in the streets, where the most respected people are those who love, and only those completely devoid of love are punished and put in prison.

Suddenly the bell rings out again, and the siren once more starts to wail.

ANNA: We are lost!

CLOWN: Run!

ANNA: Where?

CLOWN: Let's get out of this disgusting city!

ANNA: They'll lock the gates.

CLOWN: We'll climb over the wall!

ANNA: They'll put a high-tension electric current through it. Even the swallows can't fly over it.

CLOWN: Quick! I can hear soldier's boots approaching!

ANNA and CLOWN run out. RULER and EMPTYMAN dash in.

RULER: There's no one here... Perhaps the telescope made a mistake?

EMPTYMAN: The silhouettes of two persons were clearly visible on the photograph. (*Sniffs about the place.*) Look, footsteps!... A man's and a woman's!

RULER: Whose footsteps? Whose?

EMPTYMAN: Your Immortal Municipality, order all the inhabitants of the city to be woken up. Every single one! And let everyone put his stethoscope to his heart, and we, in the central control-verifier, will soon see who is in love!

RULER: City gates closed?

EMPTYMAN: Of course!

RULER: Current not?

EMPTYMAN: Full electric power!

RULER: Then we'll find them. And execute them!... And let this execution be my wedding present to you and Anna.

EMPTYMAN: Death to lovers!

RULER: Death!

DOG: Whether they will catch them or not, no one can say, it's as luck would have it. I, for one, have chased a dachshund the day before yesterday. I've been chasing her for two hours long, and all in vain. I've only scratched my paws badly... And yesterday it was my turn to run away from a huge Great Dane; I could hardly make it... Horrors! Why is it that we always chase one another?

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

DOG: Here it is, the Central Control Room, that terrible room where the fate of more than one citizen has been decided. And it is here that the destiny of Anna and Clown is now being resolved. To the contemporary eye there's nothing particularly awful in this room. On the contrary: it has an aura of romanticism, of semi-secret scientific laboratories, a place where wizards in stiff white overalls perform twentieth-century wonders. But, of course, we too live in the twentieth century and know that the spectacular inventions of the human mind can be turned to good and to evil... Here, in the Central Control Room, evil reigns... It blinks ominously from the panel with the green lights. And the good... Look at the heavy gloomy steel safe on the left. Do you see it? However, we mustn't run ahead; we'll find out more about that a little later...

EMPTYMAN and the RULER enter the Central Control Room.

EMPTYMAN: I'm switching on the last block—"Centre Two"!

RULER: We'll get them now! And death to them! Death!

EMPTYMAN pulls a lever on a control panel and presses down the knife-switch. Green lamps start to flicker on the panel. EMPTYMAN and the RULER both peer intently at the panel. Both are visibly upset.

EMPTYMAN: Strange...

RULER: Again no sign?

EMPTYMAN: No...

RULER: Does that mean the telescope made a mistake?

EMPTYMAN: Your Immortal Municipality, the telescope cannot make a mistake!

RULER (*menacingly*): Then who made the mistake? Who caused all the panic? Every time there's a panic my liver catches it and that takes a day off my life! And life!.. To me!.. Is essential!.. For!.. The fruition!..

EMPTYMAN tugs at his sleeve.

You will spend tomorrow overhauling the telescope, while I get busy with that Clown, performing the economic miracle.

EMPTYMAN (*tenses suddenly, like a beast of prey scenting a victim*): Your Municipality, look!

RULER: What is it?

EMPTYMAN: One bulb isn't lit! Someone hasn't put the stethoscope to his breast!

RULER: Perhaps he's just asleep?

EMPTYMAN: He's not asleep, but trembling from fear! The cat knows when he's lapped up the cream!

RULER: You think?..

EMPTYMAN: Yes.

RULER: Whose light is it?

EMPTYMAN: Number M-8.

RULER: Who does that belong to?

EMPTYMAN: Just a moment, we'll find out!
(*Seizes an enormous, thick ledger and feverishly thumbs through it.*)

RULER (*rushing about the room*): Love!.. How I hate love! There's nothing more disgusting than lovers! I'll execute them! All!.. Always!.. Everywhere!.. To the last one!..

EMPTYMAN (*frightened*). Your Immortal Municipality!..

RULER: Found it?

EMPTYMAN (*confused*): Yes, I did...

RULER: Whose light is it?

EMPTYMAN (*stammering*): It-it is... It's Anna's light...

RULER: It can't be!

EMPTYMAN: Look...

RULER (*glances at the ledger*): No!.. My daughter cannot fall in love! I've brought her up to hate. Every morning at breakfast she's taken hate-pills!

EMPTYMAN: But it's her light...

RULER: The child's probably just playing, and hasn't bothered to use the stethoscope.

EMPTYMAN: But she's not a child any longer. We're getting married tomorrow.

RULER: Have her come here and put the stethoscope to her heart—you'll see, I'm right.

EMPTYMAN: *Sol-kol-diers-kiers!*

The TARABARS enter.

Bring-king An-kan-na-ka here-kere!

The TARABARS run out to carry out the order.

RULER: It simply cannot be true!

EMPTYMAN: Your Immortal Municipality! Remember the curse which hangs over you... Two lovers make an illness, three an epidemic. If more than three lovers appear in the city, your power will collapse!

RULER: I haven't forgotten, but this just can't be true!

The TARABARS bring in Anna.

ANNA: You sent for me, father?

RULER: Where have you been?

ANNA: Strolling in the city.

RULER: And you didn't hear the siren?

ANNA: Yes, I heard it.

RULER: Then why didn't your bulb light up?

ANNA: But you yourself never take the test.

RULER: I am the Ruler of the city. I'm above suspicion.

ANNA: And I am the Ruler's daughter, and I too am above suspicion. The whole point of this machine is that we should check others, and not others us.

RULER: You are right. I hadn't noticed how you've grown up. You've turned into an intelligent daughter, as well as being hard... Children mature so quickly these days... All right, you can go on with your walk.

EMPTYMAN: No, wait!.. Your Immortal Municipality, look at her closely... See the pallor of her face and the strange sparkle in her eyes? These are symptoms of love... I demand a test!

ANNA: I am the Ruler's daughter and you have no right whatsoever to make this demand!

EMPTYMAN: I demand that my bride be put to the test!

RULER: Daughter, dear, what does it matter?.. Why, if you're not in love, then you've nothing to worry about.

ANNA: I don't want to give in to his demands!

RULER: All right, I say you don't have to give in to his demands, but you must accede to my request.

ANNA (*suddenly beginning to shout*): I hate you all! You're mean, nasty people!.. You'll die not from wounds. You'll die from boredom!.. Look! Look all you can! (*Seizes a stethoscope and presses it to her breast.*) Switch on your contraption! It's like the executioner's axe. In this city everything's like the executioner's axe!

EMPTYMAN switches on the control-verifier, and among the dull green lights one lamp burns bright red.

RULER (*shouts*): Enough! Switch it off!

EMPTYMAN switches off the verifier, and the lights go out.

EMPTYMAN (*with malicious satisfaction*): I was right!

RULER (*baffled*): How can this be?.. Who are you in love with?

ANNA: It's none of your business!

RULER: Wait a moment... All's not lost yet... We are forced to execute anyone who is in love, but, in exceptional circumstances, the person who is loved may be sentenced to life imprisonment... Don't despair... I'll build you a sweet little prison. I'll lay on three film-shows a day for you, and you can have anything you want... But we must execute him. You must tell us who he is!

ANNA: That I'll never tell you!

EMPTYMAN (*sarcastically*): It all sounds very fine and sassy, but you know only too well: we have our secret ways... We'll just apply them, and you'll come out with it all.

ANNA: Very well... I'll tell you...

RULER: Out with it!.. Out with it, quickly, who is the scoundrel?!

ANNA (*points at EMPTYMAN*): Him!

EMPTYMAN (*frightened*): It's not true!.. It's a lie!.. You said yourself you hate me... You declared your hate for me!..

ANNA: It's only a short step from hate to love.

RULER: Soldiers! Seize him!

But the TARABARS do not budge.

Why are you standing there? What is this—a rebellion?

EMPTYMAN: They don't understand ordinary language.

RULER: Then you order them to arrest you!

EMPTYMAN (*falling on his knees*): Have-mercy... It's not true... Mercy...

DOG: Aha! It seems the executioner is also afraid to die. And when death looks him in the face he turns coward.

ANNA: Look, father, our Emptyman isn't so hard after all now he's begging for mercy.

EMPTYMAN: I had no mercy for the guilty, but I'm innocent! Innocent!

RULER: Order the Tarabars to seize you! Or I'll do it myself! I'll behead you with the gold symbolic axe! (*Tears the gold axe from the wall.*)

EMPTYMAN (*crawling on his knees*): Wait... Wait... I've got it... (*Jumps up, and from his throat issues a triumphant howl.*) Ah! Your Immortal Municipality, there's one person in our city who hasn't been tested!

RULER: Who?

EMPTYMAN: The Clown.

ANNA: He's not a resident of this city and he needn't take the test!

EMPTYMAN: Look at her trembling! I know all the variations of trembling and I know that they only tremble like that in fear of a loved one.

ANNA: You have no right to execute him!

RULER: We have no right to do only that which we're unable to do. Give him the test!

EMPTYMAN (*to the TARABARS*): Clown-kown to-koo the-ke ste-ke-tho-ko-scope-kope!

The TARABARS go out. Their awful song can be heard:

The bullet's a fool,
The bayonet's grand.
The wolf is stronger
Than the lamb.

EMPTYMAN: Watch this bulb... We'll soon see...

ANNA (*in a whisper*): If they find him, we're lost...

And suddenly the bulb starts to flicker. It is red.

EMPTYMAN: Everything clear now?!

RULER: Go! Prepare for execution!

EMPTYMAN: It's a long time since I've done it with so much pleasure! (*Goes out.*)

Now once again the square is before us, in front of the gates. This is where the CLOWN will be executed. There he stands, tied to a stake, and before him is EMPTYMAN, triumphant. Beside him is the RULER, but he is pensive and his face is even a little sad.

DOG: Just look at the Ruler's face! It is so sad!.. A sorry sight and strange too: a sad fellow-executioner... Could it be that he feels pity for his victim?

RULER (*beckons EMPTYMAN to him*): Is there some proviso which permits postponement of an execution?

EMPTYMAN: According to law, we may do so for up to two hours.

RULER: What about two days? Just two little days?

EMPTYMAN: No, the law demands the immediate execution of those in love! We are exterminating love in order that it will not exterminate us!

RULER: Pity! A great pity.. He brings such beautiful coins out of his ears... And I was banking on an economic miracle!

DOG: As you can see, the executioner is sad only when it doesn't pay to kill.

RULER: Hey, you, Clown... I was banking on you... Already before my very eyes a wonderful future for my city was unfolding... We'd have been so

rich, we'd have been able to buy up neighbouring cities... We!.. Should have become!.. Lords!.. Of squares!.. Streets!.. Houses!.. People!.. Of their children!.. Their hearts!.. Their souls!.. Everything!.. All of them!..

EMPTYMAN tugs at his sleeve, and he once more reverts to a plaintive voice.

But now none of this will happen... You've betrayed me, Clown! Yes, yes, you're a traitor! And we won't just execute you... We shall execute you with a gold axe, our city's symbol of the golden age of cruelty... (To *EMPTYMAN*.) Bring in the golden axe, and I'll bring Anna. The conjuror's useless now—the sooner he's dead the better! (*Goes out.*)

EMPTYMAN: Sol-kol-diers-kiers!

Enter the TARABARS.

Watch-kotch out-kout!

The TARABARS twirl their moustaches menacingly, and sing fearsomely:

The bullet's a fool,
The bayonet's grand.
The wolf is stronger
Than the lamb.

NOBODY'S BOY furtively comes into the square. The soldiers point their bayonets at him.

DOG: Ha! Ha! He spat on their bayonets. It's a well-known fact that you can't do anything with little boys—not even soldiers.

BOY: Halt-kalt!

The TARABARS halt.

At-kat ease-kease!

The TARABARS freeze.

About-kout face-kace!

The TARABARS execute an about-face.

CLOWN: How come you know the language of these awful soldiers?

BOY: Ha, awful, are they... In our school all the girls spoke this language... You could even say it was their favourite language...

CLOWN: You're a good lad... You're a simply splendid lad. You might even turn out to be a real clown. But I shan't be able to teach you any tricks... They're about to execute me.

BOY: No! I don't believe it! You can save yourself!

CLOWN: How?

BOY: Start laughing... As loud as you can... Remember, in another city they were just about to execute someone. But you came along. You came along and burst out laughing. And then everyone burst out laughing. They laughed and they forgave. And everything was in order. Indeed, happy people can forgive the things for which angry people would punish.

CLOWN: But in this town they cannot forgive, because here they don't know how to laugh.

BOY: Then burst into tears! Remember how those bandits grabbed you in the forest and wanted to rob and murder you... But you burst out crying—and they all started to cry. And the bandits began to repent of their evil-doings and let you go. And it makes sense. Anyone who can cry can understand another's grief.

CLOWN: But Emptyman and the Ruler are more fearsome than the most fearsome bandits. They don't know how to cry... Come on, I'd better let you into the secret of at least one of my tricks.

BOY: Later.

CLOWN: Later will be too late. After all, to do tricks you need hands, and a head... And when I haven't a head...

BOY: No! I'll save you!

CLOWN: How?

BOY: Well, I may have a plan... I heard everything they said... They're not only cruel, they're greedy, too... And our teacher always used to say that throughout history the biggest single cause of death has been the plague, and the second—greed!.. Mind you, I said from the start I'd finish up a general!.. Swallow! Dear Queen Swallow, I need you badly!

SWALLOW appears.

We must save my friend!

SWALLOW: He's not only your friend, he's mine too! I'll do anything I can. But what can I do?

BOY: I've heard that the swallows once walled-in a sparrow which had broken into their nest...

SWALLOW: Yes, it is true. But it was a very bad sparrow.

BOY: Could you swallows break through the walls of the prison with your beaks?

SWALLOW: We couldn't, no. But the sand martins who live on the cliff could. They have very strong beaks.

BOY: How long would you need to get all the swallows in the land to fly here?

SWALLOW: Two hours.

BOY: Splendid! And how many swallows would it take to lift me up into the air, put me down, and again pick me up?

SWALLOW: On a rope?

BOY: Threads would be better, they're less noticeable.

SWALLOW: A thousand swallows.

BOY: Are there that many in this city?

SWALLOW: Yes, there are.

BOY: Then get them together quickly, as fast as you can—and get hold of some thread. As much thread as possible. (*To CLOWN.*) So long! Be seeing you!

CLOWN: Goodbye, my young friend!

BOY: No! No! So long! See you again soon!

NOBODY'S BOY and SWALLOW run out. Enter EMPTYMAN, the RULER, and ANNA. In EMPTYMAN'S hands is a golden axe.

RULER: Why are your soldiers standing with their backs turned? Is that how they guard a state criminal?

EMPTYMAN: *About-kout face-kace!*

The TARABARS about-turn.

RULER: Nevertheless, the gold coins would have come in very handy.

EMPTYMAN: If an epidemic of love breaks out in the city, no amount of money will save us.

CLOWN: Anna, what are they going to do with you?

ANNA: They're putting me in prison, for life.

CLOWN: You live in a cruel city, but sooner or later cruelty kills those who practice it. With death we shall find freedom, but still better, when freedom faces death... Believe me, you will live to see freedom!

EMPTYMAN: Stop talking!

RULER: Money! Coins!.. Ah! Such lovely coins!.. If only we could kill not the Clown himself, but just his love...

EMPTYMAN: To kill love requires betrayal.

RULER: A splendid idea! I'll try it... I'll try it right away... Listen, Clown! Sell us your love for two gold coins. Write down an undertaking that you will be pleased for Anna to marry Emptyman. Write it, and you will live.

CLOWN: I prefer to die.

RULER: Fool... Why, if you die you lose her anyway!

CLOWN: If death is the only way to avoid being a scoundrel, then long live death!

EMPTYMAN: Well said! I'll begin by cutting off his hands ... and arms... The armless conjuror—doesn't sound bad, does it?!

ANNA: Use your axe on me instead!

EMPTYMAN: Why do you think it would be better?... Better to execute you both... But we'll stick to one for the moment... (*Raises the axe.*)

And suddenly from somewhere up above a voice rings out: "Stop!" EMPTYMAN freezes with the axe in his hands, and everyone else looks up in astonishment. From above there descends an old woman on a broomstick, dressed in rags. Her hair is tousled. It is NOBODY'S BOY posing as a witch.

"WITCH" (*in a hissing hiss*): Why are you staring at me as if I were some kind of puzzle? I'm a witch... An everyday, ordinary witch... And I'm on your side. I like your cruel ways. I'm cruel and merciless, too.

RULER: What do you want, dear witch?

"WITCH": When I want something I'll let you know... However, what I'd like to see is the same marvellous way of life in neighbouring cities as you have here.

RULER: That's just what we'd like! We were banking so much on an economic miracle, but, unfortunately, Clown went and fell in love.

"WITCH": That's terrible!.. Disgusting!..

RULER: He made such beautiful coins...

"WITCH": I know.

EMPTYMAN (*suspiciously*): How do you know?

"WITCH" (*pointing upwards*): Up there I see everything and know everything! I know all about you, too!

EMPTYMAN starts back.

I'll help you to capture the other cities! There's no need to execute the Clown!

RULER: Dear Mistress Witch, according to our laws...

"WITCH": I know!.. Here are two pills! Each one has taken half a lifetime to prepare. In two hours they will kill love. After two hours not a trace of love will remain!

RULER: Splendid! We may postpone the execution for exactly two hours. For two hours only!

CLOWN: I refuse to swallow this pill!

ANNA: And I too refuse.

"WITCH": Take them to the prison and there force them to swallow them!

EMPTYMAN (*shouting*): To hell with pills! I'll execute him myself immediately! I'm not going to be deprived of that pleasure!

RULER: You think only of yourself. But I consider the whole city. Our!.. Great!.. City!.. Must!.. Be!..

The "WITCH" jumps across to him and tugs at his sleeve.

Let's give it a try... It may work, you never know?

EMPTYMAN: Nothing will come of it. It's a useless waste of time.

"WITCH": Who made this gold axe?

EMPTYMAN: I did.

"WITCH" (*leaning towards EMPTYMAN's ear*): Is

it really made of pure, 22-carat gold, like they say?

EMPTYMAN (*frightened*): Hush!.. All right, I agree.

“WITCH”: Good luck to you, then! Damnation be upon you! (*Makes a sign with her hand and rises up.*)

Everyone follows her with their eyes, and suddenly a broomstick falls from the sky.

“WITCH” ’s VOICE: Hey, Emptyman! It’s all yours. You can sweep the streets with it!

EMPTYMAN (*seizing the broom*): I will too! I shall sweep from this city all infections of love. And from all other cities as well. I shall obliterate friendship, laughter, and sadness. Cruelty! Cruelty alone shall reign on earth!

EMPTYMAN and the RULER lead out ANNA and the CLOWN. The “WITCH” rushes in, and SWALLOW after her. The “WITCH” throws off her shaggy, grey, tow wig and we see the familiar face of NOBODY’S BOY.

SWALLOW: You spun around so much that the threads nearly tangled up. The swallows could scarcely hold you.

NOBODY’S BOY: Is the mortar ready?

SWALLOW: It’s ready.

BOY: But where are the sand martins?

SWALLOW: They’re on their way to the city.

BOY: How many are there?

SWALLOW: A million, perhaps two. But now Emptyman and the Ruler must be got into their Control Room.

BOY: Two shakes of a lamb’s tail, and they’re there.

SWALLOW: How will you manage it?

BOY: The Tarabars will help me. You see, I speak

their language... What’s going on there? Why are the Swallows screaming like that?

SWALLOW: I’ll go and see... (*Runs out.*)

BOY: *Sol-kol-diers-kiers!*

The TARABARS come to attention.

Shoul-kol-der-ker-arms-karms! (They obey.) Run-kun to-koo the-ke lov-kov-ers-kers cliff-kiff!

The TARABARS go out, marching strictly in step to their fearsome song:

The bullet’s a fool,
The bayonet’s grand.
The wolf is stronger
Than the lamb.

DOG: Notice how well he mimics Emptyman’s voice when he commands the Soldiers? I swear he might have been made into quite a good clown! Might have been... Forgive me, I’m jumping ahead again... But here’s Swallow. But why is she flapping her wings in alarm? Not another disaster? Don’t you think there’s too much trouble here for just one city?

BOY: What’s happened?

The hubbub of the swallows in the distance can be heard.

SWALLOW: We can’t save Anna and the Clown...

BOY: Why?

SWALLOW: All along the city walls there’s a current of high-tension electricity, and the tension has been raised so high that the sand martins can’t pass through it. They’re dying in their hundreds, but they can’t get through.

BOY: Stop them!

Swallow gives a chirrup in an incomprehensible swallow language, and the distant hubbub ceases.

SWALLOW: What shall we do now?

BOY (*starts to sing*):

To dream up something
You have to think a little bit.
Don't be afraid, don't tremble,
And then it'll come to you.

Once more the siren starts to wail and the bell to ring.

SWALLOW: Oh, no! Don't say someone else has fallen in love?

BOY: Aha!... It's all going according to plan! I sent the Tarabars to the cliff of love. They must have been seen through the telescope, and now there's a panic on. Now Emptyman and the Ruler will rush to the Central Control Room. And they'll be walled-in! Just like that impudent sparrow!

SWALLOW: But so long as the current is on...

BOY (*thoughtfully*): So long as the current is still on... Wait a minute... To dream up something, you have to think a little bit... At school we also had wires with electricity running through them, and when our teacher caught us in full flight—if only you knew how beautifully he caught us—he used to say that if one of us were to accidentally fall onto the wires, then not only would he cause a power-cut and thus interrupt the lessons in school, but he would also perish himself.

SWALLOW: What are you planning to do?

BOY: He was a smashing teacher! He always used to say: better be happy for a day than be bored for a lifetime... You know the plan of attack; I'll send you the order.

SWALLOW: What are you up to?

BOY: But our Clown's a grand chap, too. I once

dreamed of being a teacher, and then I dreamed of being a clown... I dreamed...

DOG: He said that—"I dreamed..."—in a strange kind of way. It sounded terribly grown-up. Indeed, in the last hour of life children and old men are as if the same age.

SWALLOW: What are you planning to do?

BOY: Nothing special...

To dream up something
You have to think a little bit.
Don't be afraid, don't tremble,
And then it'll come to you.

And, singing this song, he goes out. He goes out the way one goes for good. His song dies away in the distance. And suddenly it stops altogether. Straight away, overhead there is noise of wings.

DOG: That's the swallows making that noise. Sand martins, country swallows, town swallows. Swallows of the entire world. Kind, brave swallows. And they obey their Queen like lightning.

SWALLOW (*shouting a command into the sky*): First, second, and third squadrons of town swallows, Central Control Room—attack!

Noise of wings intensifies.

The remaining four squadrons prepare to attack! Sand martins, I thank you for your loyalty in friendship, and we are all delighted that you have come!

Friendly twittering from above.

There is hard and difficult work ahead for your strong beaks. Behind the walls of the prison are our friends, Clown and Anna. You must break through

those walls, just as you dig into the cliffs above the sea to build your nests. Forward, friends!

The noise of wings rises to a crescendo. It is the sand martins rushing into battle. The noise subsides, but immediately the sound is heard of thousands of tiny beaks tapping at the stone.

Tenth squadron of town swallows, your orders are to keep up a supply of mud and mortar!

The tapping of beaks grows louder and louder, and, finally, there is a crash and it stops.

The prison walls are down! Good old sand martins—hurrah!

There is a triumphant twittering overhead. In run CLOWN and ANNA. They look happy and confused. They don't know yet what has happened.

CLOWN: Why did the prison walls collapse?

SWALLOW: The sand martins broke them down to save you!

ANNA: Look! The entire sky is filled with swallows!

CLOWN: Where are they all from?

SWALLOW: All over the world. They flew here to help us.

ANNA: But how did they manage to get over the wall?

SWALLOW: I don't know. Nobody's Boy did something to the electric current.

CLOWN: We must get away quickly before we're caught again!

SWALLOW: There's no one to catch you. The Ruler and Emptyman are in the Central Control Room. The swallows walled them in. And they'll never again get out into the city.

CLOWN: But there are the Tarabars—where are they?

SWALLOW: Sitting on the cliff of love crying their eyes out.

CLOWN: Then we'll go to the Central Control Room and tell the Ruler and Emptyman that their rule is at an end.

ANNA: They won't believe you. They'll fight.

CLOWN: They'll believe me. When they hear the Song of Friendship and Love, they'll realise it's time to get out of town.

ANNA: But we don't know such a song.

CLOWN: I'll teach you... (*Sings.*)

You can dress up in warm clothes,
You can muffle your soul in hundreds of different

words,
But the things that warm the heart and save you from
boredom,

Are laughter, a jolly holiday, friendship and love.

Hey, come out to play,

Don't sit at home!

Bring your palette

And brush with you!

Right above you

Is a sky-blue sky,

A sky sky-blue,

Right above you.

Don't be afraid of joy,

Hurry to the feast.

We'll paint the whole wide world

All the colours of a rainbow in spring!

GATEKEEPER comes in. He's laughing—in fact he's dying from laughter.

GATEKEEPER: Oh, it's so funny... I haven't laughed for twenty years, but I'm making up for it

now... Laughter... For twenty years I guarded Emptyman and the Ruler against everyone, but now I'm guarding the city against them... (*Suddenly becomes serious.*) Lies. Lies and whoppers... They'll never give in without a fight. Whoppers and lies...

CLOWN: If they don't give in, we'll give it to them!!

CLOWN, ANNA, GATEKEEPER and SWALLOW go out. In the Central Control Room the RULER and EMPTYMAN rush about. They are dashing about with candles in their hands, pulling switches, tugging at wires, but the lights panel remains in darkness.

RULER: Why won't the bulbs light up?

EMPTYMAN: Something's gone wrong with the electricity.

RULER: For twenty years we've had no trouble, and now it's gone wrong. And just at that very moment when we're in deadly danger! If two more lovers are in the city it means an epidemic's started! My power hangs by a whisker! I can even see the whisker. It's very, very slender. And if power depends upon a whisker, it depends upon any barber who comes along.

EMPTYMAN: Don't worry, Your Immortal Municipality! I'll go to the power station right away—everything'll be all right. The new lovers we'll be executed along with the Clown. And not a second's delay.

RULER: Go! Fast as you can! We're in danger!

EMPTYMAN tries to open the door. He pushes it with his shoulder, kicks it, but it won't give.

EMPTYMAN (*puzzled*): Someone has locked us in...

RULER (*frightened*): First the lights go out, then there's a big crash in the city, now the door can't be opened! Strange... More than strange... Suspicious... Open the window, cautiously...

EMPTYMAN draws the curtain, but behind the glass is blackness.

It can't be night already?

EMPTYMAN (*peering through the glass*): We're walled in!

RULER: What?! Who's walled us in?

EMPTYMAN: Swallows. I recognise their work. They did the same thing to a sparrow once...

RULER: But we're not sparrows! We!.. Are rulers!.. Us!.. No one!.. Has!.. The right!.. Why don't you tug my sleeve?

EMPTYMAN: I'm afraid it's no use...

RULER: I decree that all swallows be exterminated!

EMPTYMAN: Who's to obey your decree? We haven't any soldiers even.

RULER: Soldiers!.. The Tarabars will save us! And loyal Gatekeeper!

Outside we hear a children's song.

RULER: What's that?

EMPTYMAN: The Grey-School choir.

RULER: Disgraceful! They're corrupting our children! I won't allow it! I order that the rebellion be put down!

EMPTYMAN: Rebellions need putting down before they break out. Once they've started, it's time to run.

RULER: I'll fettle their song! (*Sings.*)

Grey, grey, colour grey,
That's the colour, come what may!

And you sing! Sing!

EMPTYMAN: Our song, it would seem, is sung...

RULER (*goes to pieces and plaintively asks*): Is it? I thought things were bad, but this is awful... What do we do now?

EMPTYMAN: Run.

RULER: But how? We're walled in!

EMPTYMAN: Here, look, under the floor, there's an underground passage. It leads outside the city walls. (*Opens a trapdoor.*)

RULER (*jumping into the trap*): Get the secret papers out of the safe!

EMPTYMAN: No need... I've had them here a long time... (*Points to his breast, and with a slow, heavy gaze takes in his Central Control Room.*)

RULER: Quick! They're coming!..

EMPTYMAN: It doesn't matter... There are other cities... And as long as there are people with heads on their shoulders, there'll be executioners to cut them off... (*His face once more assumes a haughty, cruel look. He climbs through the trapdoor, and the hatch bangs above his head.*)

DOG: I don't know about other cities, but there'll be no executioner in this one. That's certain.

CLOWN'S VOICE (*from other side of wall*): Hey, you in there!.. Ruler! Emptyman! Your rule is at an end!

ANNA'S VOICE: They've melted away!

SWALLOW'S VOICE: Perhaps they've suffocated?

GATEKEEPER'S VOICE: If our Ruler is silent it means he's not there.

SWALLOW'S VOICE: I'll get down the chimney and see what's happened.

SWALLOW appears in the room from above.

SWALLOW: No one's here. They've fled!

Blows sound against the door from outside. The door opens. Enter CLOWN, ANNA and GATEKEEPER. But SWALLOW runs out.

CLOWN: So this is it—the Central Control Room.

GATEKEEPER: That damned light panel needs smashing!

CLOWN: No, don't. It'll still come in useful.

ANNA: For what?

CLOWN: We'll watch for lovers' lights on this panel, too. And the one which burns brightest will rule the city!

Suddenly there is heard in the room a regular, thumping noise. Everyone listens.

ANNA: It's coming from the safe... The top-secret papers are kept in there.

CLOWN (*rushes to the safe and opens it*): Well, what do you know!.. The likes of this has never been seen before... Inside the safe there shines and beats a human heart. Whose heart is it?

HEART'S VOICE: I—I'm the heart of Emptyman.

DOG: The heart spoke. Are you surprised?.. Well, to be quite honest, everyone in the room is just as surprised as you are.

ANNA: Do you guard the secret documents?

HEART'S VOICE: No. He has hidden them in his breast, instead of me.

CLOWN: What a funny custom—keeping a heart in a safe.

HEART'S VOICE: In childhood I was a very kind heart, but when Emptyman got older, kindness got in his way, and he started to stifle the kindness in me. Then he put me in the safe.

ANNA: But hearts can't live without a body. They'll die!

HEART'S VOICE: He knew that... And sometimes, at night, he'd secretly take me back... But there was so little kindness left in me, I needed it all for myself.

SWALLOW (*runs in, greatly agitated and distressed*): Nobody's Boy... To let the swallows pass, he

threw himself on the wire... He cut off the electric current, but his heart was burnt out...

Enter the TARABARS, looking sad, and carrying NOBODY'S BOY in their arms.

CLOWN: Goodbye, little friend... You didn't manage to become a clown, but, better still, you succeeded in being a real person. And that's much more difficult...

ANNA: He died like a hero...

Heart speaks again.

HEART'S VOICE: Give me to him... In place of his burned-out heart... It's very difficult, I know, to be the heart of a young boy. You work terribly hard... But I'm yearning for kindness, and I shall be very good.

CLOWN (*takes the heart from the safe*): Quick! To the doctor's!

The SOLDIERS bear out NOBODY'S BOY, and CLOWN the heart, and everyone goes, too. We're in the square again.

ANNA, CLOWN, GATEKEEPER, the TARABARS and SWALLOW are here.

ANNA: And when will our wedding take place?

CLOWN: Now.

ANNA: Where?

CLOWN: Here. In the square. Let everyone watch our wedding. People must learn to love again.

NOBODY'S BOY runs into the square, out of breath.

BOY: There!.. In the desert!.. A blade of grass has grown. A slender, slender blade... And I've told all the lads in the city that if anyone touches it, he'll have me to reckon with!

ANNA and CLOWN embrace him.

ANNA: We're so glad... We're so very glad that you are still alive!

CLOWN: Are you staying in this city?

BOY: Only good and happy people live here now. And it's foolish to fool good people... Of course, every city should have its own clown. But two clowns in one city is a bit too much... (*Listens attentively to something in the distance.*) It seems someone's calling me... Someone's crying for help somewhere. I don't know who or where, but it seems it's time for me to hit the road... Learn to laugh, my friends! They say laughter is good for your health! Farewell, Dog. In case you need me—just bark, and I'll hear you. (*He leaves.*)

DOG: I am dead certain he will sure find his city and will save someone... He'll need a little bit of courage for that—and there are a lot of people who need to be helped.

CURTAIN

Translated by Peter FRANK