



# *The Difficult Meaning of Life*

*Dramatization of James Hilton's novel "Knight Without Armour"*

by Christian Lanciai (2013)

*Dramatis Personae:*

Fothergill  
Stanfield  
Maronin  
policemen  
Savanrog  
Two guards  
Four Prisoners  
Seven Cossacks  
Countess Maria Alexandra Adraxin  
A colonel  
A major  
A sergeant  
A red army soldier

A red army captain  
Commandant Bernstein  
A professor of philosophy  
A baker  
A refugee  
Captain Pushkov  
A gardener  
A railway guard  
A bargeman  
An American doctor  
A London doctor  
An Irish bartender

The action takes place in Russia from 1907 (Petersburg, Siberia and Ukraine)  
to London and south Ireland (the final act) in 1929.

Act I scene 1. On a bridge at Saint Petersburg

*Fothergill* If anyone lived a completely meaningless life, it was me, but I am afraid the greater part of humanity shares my fate. What have I accomplished? Absolutely nothing, since all I did was to make a fool of myself. I took sides with justice against injustice and actively joined the suffragettes, whereupon the girl I sacrificed myself for married my uncle for his money, who discarded me. I took a job as war correspondent in the Russian war against Japan and only fell ill but learned much about war and the invalids. My documentaries on the other side of war were not politically correct, so my boss discharged me. Humiliated and somewhat unjustly dealt with I did not wish to return to England. I could go anywhere but not home. But I had learned Russian at the hospital and made the acquaintance of a nobleman who offered me a position as tutor for his daughters at his estate in Rostov with other society girls. There I was for two years, far too long for my own good, but a publisher in Petersburg offered me a job as a consultant and translator. So I came to Petersburg, the capital of the greatest country in the world, built by Italian architects and Swedish war prisoners; but my boss published a translated book with unfortunate hints at the private life of the Czar, as if that was something of a secret. They all had their party ballerinas. I was blamed and sacked and ordered to leave the country within a week. Anything else you wish to know?

*Stanfield* My dear friend, I am afraid that you are our man. Imagine that you happened to be English! I was so positive you must be a Frenchman.

*Fothergill* And I took you for a dangerously curious Russian.

*Stanfield* We are all chameleons who have worries about surviving. But I have an offer for you.

*Fothergill* Don't tell me you are a hooker for the British Intelligence.

*Stanfield* It is well paid. Do you have anything to lose?

*Fothergill* You've got me there. I liked it here in Petersburg and would be reluctant to leave it. What's the hitch?

*Stanfield* The risks.

*Fothergill* What risks?

*Stanfield* You must assume a Russian identity, but that's no problem, since you already have a Russian identity. The balance is between not being taken by the Russians as a spy and traitor and not being taken by the police as a revolutionary.

*Fothergill* What do you ask of me? What do you want me to do?

*Stanfield* We are curious about the revolutionary movement. We need an agent who could be accepted as a Russian, get inside revolutionary circles and tell us what is going on. It's nothing worse than that.

*Fothergill* And for that you wish to pay me?

*Stanfield* Much more than you need and more than you ever earned before.

*Fothergill* I never wanted to have anything to do with politics, but you force me into it. I have no choice. There is nothing for me to do in England, and no one will miss me there. They all just wanted to get rid of me. I didn't want to leave Petersburg, and now you give me the possibility to remain. New identity, faked passport and protected incognito?

*Stanfield* Anything you wish and more. You will have a Russian identity with a Russian name and passport, which you are requested to stick to for your own safety. If you get caught in any circumstance you must never reveal yourself as an Englishman. No one in England and least of all ourselves will know anything about you. The fellow you were in Russia will leave Russia and disappear in Berlin. The one you will be in a few weeks will have another face, a full grown beard and a thoroughly Russian personality, soul and identity. You will never be anything else as long as you remain in our service.

*Fothergill* I am willing to take the risks.

*Stanfield* That's a good sport. Only your life will be at stake.

*Fothergill* I am used to it. I almost lost it in the Russian war with Japan.

*Stanfield* Were you wounded?

*Fothergill* Far from it. My life poured out of me the back way. Stomach poisoning.

*Stanfield* That happens easily in the tropics. Where was it?

*Fothergill* Mukden.

*Stanfield* A bloody hole. You were lucky to get out alive.

*Fothergill* I wonder. For what? For adding to the total meaninglessness of life?

*Stanfield* Welcome to the first circle. We are all in limbo, but we who are aware of it at least try to get our bearings.

*Fothergill* Is that the meaning of life? To find one's bearings?

*Stanfield* That's something to start with. Perhaps it could lead you somewhere.

*Fothergill* I doubt it, but I would like to give it a chance.

*Stanfield* Welcome to His Majesty's Secret Service.

*Fothergill* In what capacity? A messenger of bad news?

*Stanfield* Anything will do. The point is that you are with us. (*claps his shoulder and brings him off, probably for a visit at some bar.*)

Scene 2.

*Maronin* I don't know why I did it, but I had to do it. I had no choice. The cause demanded it. And who was he? A member of the Russian mafia ruling the empire, a leader of the bureaucracy, a representative of the system, a minister of the interior. But it was my own fault. I aimed badly, was nervous and had a shaky hand. He fired back. I never expected that. If a murderer knew that his victim would return the murder, he would never commit any murder. (*knocking desperately on the door. Fothergill opens up, unrecognizable as a Russian with a full grown beard.*)

*Fothergill* Maronin!

*Maronin* I apologize. I had nowhere else to go.

*Fothergill* You are wounded!

*Maronin* As if I didn't know.

*Fothergill* (*helps him in, the scene opening to the apartment of a philologist.*) How did it happen?

*Maronin* You don't want to know. You can get into trouble for helping a political murderer.

*Fothergill* Was it you?

*Maronin* It was me. You have every right in the world to throw me out into the street to the police and justice to save your skin.

*Fothergill* Never! We must get a doctor.

*Maronin* Never. He would only ask questions and get into trouble himself. Think of doctor Mudd, who helped President Lincoln's wounded murderer.

*Fothergill* He did his duty, and so must I. You didn't after all murder the highest responsible for the country.

*Maronin* Only next to it, a worthless puppet, a bureaucrat obeying orders without considering them, a cog-wheel in the system, which keeps going on grinding humanity into soulless automatons anyway.

*Fothergill* But you are still alive.

*Maronin* Not for long.

*Fothergill* Was it worth sacrificing your life for the death of a government official?

*Maronin* My life was worthless anyway. If I hadn't done it, I would have ended up a suicide instead, like most revolutionaries.

*Fothergill* You mustn't say so. You must live.

*Maronin* For what? For more terrorist actions? For the self-destructive dragon of the revolution? For other governments of murderers to replace the present government of murderers?

*Fothergill* Life is always worth living.

*Maronin* That's the most trivial banality you could have uttered.

*Fothergill* But it's true.

*Maronin* For me the meaning of life is death, and I found it as a reward for my murder in being murdered myself.

*Fothergill* No, Maronin, you are young, you are handsome, you have all life before you, you mustn't give up, as a youth you are the hope of the future!

*Maronin* Don't try to give me ideas. I failed, like everybody else. (*dies*)

*Fothergill* No, Maronin! (*bursts out crying with the dead Maronin in his arms, when there are hard knocks on the door.*)

*Policeman* (*outside*) Open up! It's the police!

*Fothergill* Maronin! What have you done! And for what! (*gets up and lets the policemen in.*)

*Policeman* Peter Vasilievich Uranov?

*Fothergill* Yes, that's me.

*Policeman* You have let in a nightly visitor in spite of regulations.

*Fothergill* I know. He was in urgent need. I couldn't do anything else.

*Policeman* Where is he?

*Fothergill* He is dead. (*indicates the body*)

*Policeman* (*inspecting*) Shot. Do you know how he was shot?

*Fothergill* No.

*Policeman* He must have told you.

*Fothergill* He came here dying.

*Policeman* Did you know him?

*Fothergill* Not very well.

*Policeman* But you knew who he was and had seen him before.

*Fothergill* Yes.

*Policeman* According to the porter, he has come on night visits before.

*Fothergill* Once.

*Policeman* Why? Are you in league with each other?

*Fothergill* Certainly not. I protested against his first visit. That's why I was surprised that he dared show up again.

*Policeman* He has shot the minister of the interior.

*Fothergill* I know nothing about that.

*Policeman* Being so casual about it you must have known about it. Or else you would have been surprised or shocked.

*Fothergill* I *am* surprised and shocked.

*Policeman* Try that on someone else. You are hereby under arrest as a suspect.

*Fothergill* For what?

*Policeman* It doesn't matter. You are a suspect. That's all. Take him out. And take away the body.

(*Fothergill is taken away by the policemen, and the body is removed.*)

*Policeman* (*the last one to leave*) Of course he is an accomplice. Or else the murderer would never have come here or at least never been let in.

Scene 3. In prison.

*Savanrog* It will pass, my friend, it will pass. Either you are carried out dead or alive. Everything else is impossible.

*Fothergill* Does anyone here know for what he has been charged?

*Savanrog* No chance and no risk. They are all equally guilty and/or innocent. You are in the Gonchamaya prison for political prisoners, but here are some real criminals as well. There are probably even some disguised government spies who are only here to report what we are saying. Welcome to the back side of the craziest of all crazy worlds.

*Fothergill* They seem to take it rather easy here.

*Savanrog* They are on vacation. They are relieved of the stress of the political and the acquisitional society. It is the happy go lucky Limbo living in great expectations of a lifetime sentence.

*Fothergill* Are they all sentenced for life? No executions?

*Savanrog* You never can tell. At least there is no amnesty. Political prisoners are always summarily sentenced for what they don't know that they have done but usually just happened to get into.

*Fothergill* Siberia?

*Savanrog* That's the usual and most common thing. But they have at least found the meaning of life. Look! They don't care about the world, keep laughing and joking, play cards and cheat money from each other and at least try to amuse themselves unlike the world that messed them up.

*Fothergill* Do you think life has any meaning?

*Savanrog* Life is a prison. Would you rather be dead? No one would, so the meaning of life must be the prison life. All you have to do is to make the best of it until you get executed.

*Fothergill* What an ironic blind alley of no end!

*Savanrog* You said it. You'll just keep on treading water although there isn't any.

*(enter two guards)*

*Guard 1* Peter Vasilievich Uranov?

*Fothergill* That's me. *(rising)*

*Guard 2* Come with us.

*Peter* Delighted. Where to, if I may ask?

*Guard 1* You are exiled for high treason.

*Peter* How many years?

*Guard 1* As many as you please. Forever.

*Savanrog* Siberia as usual.

*Peter* No trial?

*Guard 1* There was one already.

*Peter* Without me?

*Savanrog* Of course, like always.

*Guard 1* The evidence was enough.  
*Peter* For what?  
*Guard 1* For your crime.  
*Peter* Which was?  
*Guard 1* That's none of my business.  
*Guard 2* Only you could know yourself.  
*Peter* No, I don't. I was arrested for helping and not letting down a wounded man who died in my arms. Was that a crime?  
*Guard 1* You let him in when nightly visits were forbidden.  
*Peter* He was wounded.  
*Guard 1* It doesn't matter. You let him in.  
*Guard 2* And he had shot the minister of the interior.  
*Peter* He did that after I had known him.  
*Guard 1* But that's when you let him in.  
*Savanrog* Don't argue, Peter. Can't you see your case is hopeless? They pass sentence on political prisoners in their absence just to speed up the merry-go-round, since more people are being arrested than there is time to give them a fair trial. It must end up in a disaster for the lack of balance, since no country can be transformed completely to a prison only.  
*Peter* Aren't all countries, if life is a prison?  
*Savanrog* You are right. You are wiser than me. Good luck. From Siberia maybe you could escape to America.  
*Guard 1* No one escapes from Siberia.  
*Savanrog* But all try, and those that succeed vanish. Where do you think they are going?  
*Guard 1* They die anonymous and are buried anonymous.  
*Savanrog* That's what all people do, so there is no difference. I will see to it that you can take with you all the books you want for some entertainment on the journey, Peter. You could do with some change over there.  
*Peter* Thank you.  
*Guard 1* Fall into line! You are leaving with that rain!  
*Peter* Thanks for helping me sticking to the timetable.  
*Guard 2* Our privilege. *(They march out with Peter.)*  
*Savanrog* While life here continues as usual with poker games and dirty jokes as if nothing had happened. And nothing happens, until you are taken away forever. What a great joke is life, but the joke is without meaning, since the meaning of life seems to be that the joke isn't funny at all.

Scene 4. The prison camp at Russkoyansk.

*(Enter Peter, in a miserable prisoner's outfit. The other prisoners wake up.)*

1 A living snowman!

2 Then they haven't completely forgotten us.

3 What can we do for you?

4 Here we have all comforts except human.

*Peter* I can see that. I am exiled here for ten years for trying to escape from Irkutsk.

4 What a stupid thing to do. That's what they said, wasn't it? And then they gave you ten more years north of the arctic circle. You couldn't very well get a jollier treat.

*Peter* Hardly. My name is Peter Vasilievich Uranov. I was sentenced for having tried to save the life of a revolutionary.

1 Call me crook. They all do. I am a murderer.

*Peter* Professionally?

1 Ha-ha!

2 Call me scrubber. They all do. I am the one trying to keep the place clean. It's impossible. I tried that in society as well by throwing bombs at villains. That too was impossible. Here at least I can scrub potatoes.

3 Call me Vladimir. The less said of me, the better.

4 That counts for all of us. I am Vladislav, Polack. I was a secret police in the czar's service who betrayed policemen to the terrorists.

*Peter* They would have shot you for that.

4 They never learned everything I did.

1 Welcome to our gang. You were probably sent here by mistake, maybe even to the wrong village. Here at least it's no use trying to escape.

2 If you try you'll get lost immediately and disappear. There is nothing to escape to.

*Peter* I can well understand that. The winter makes it impossible, and when the snow melts we are completely isolated as the entire region turns into an endless bog.

1 Make yourself at home. All we can do here is to help each other survive in vain.

*Peter* No problem. I have work to do.

4 Did you come here for work?

*Peter* I got some books with me and other material. Does anyone of you know how to read, write and count? *(The others look stupidly at each other.)*

4 Not much.

*Peter* Then I can teach you. I have been a teacher.

3 I bet you were sentenced just for the sake of your pretty eyes.

*Peter* I didn't even know I had pretty eyes, but that explains it.

2 We have got a fool in our midst! Let's give him a cheer!

*(They cheer.)*

1 Now let's make some tea. Our snowman could need some thawing.

*(They set about it.)*

Act II scene 1. Eight years later. The same hut.

*7 cossacks arrive at the hut outside.*

1 Do you really think anyone could still be living here?

2 According to the reports, five were exiled here.

1 No one has visited or heard anything about them for five years.

3 According to the Yakutians someone is living here.

4 Let's see. *(They pound the door.)*

*Peter (appearing from behind a corner, aged.)* No Yakutian pounds like that.

1 *(calling)* Anybody home?

*Peter (opens, looks them over, invites them in)* Come in.

2 Are you alone here?

*Peter* Since three years. I had four fellows, but they died in sickness or drowned. Who are you, and what do you want?

1 We bring you good news. We go from one prison camp to another. The Czar is ousted, and all prisoners are free.

*Peter* Take that again, but slower.

3 Have you lived here all alone for three years?

*Peter* No, there were always Yakutians around.

4 Then you were alone.

*Peter* I had my books and my work. Now please, take it again from the beginning. What has actually happened?

3 We have made revolution in Russia and now have a democratically elected government under the leadership of the social democrat Alexander Kerensky, who has provided a provisional government, which we must have, since we are at war since three years.

*Peter* War?

4 Yes. The whole world is at war. Everybody is in it. Germany and Austria started it against Serbia and Russia, and France and England joined our side.

*Peter* So you are making a revolution in the middle of a burning war?

2 Yes, for we are tired of the war.

*Peter* If Kerensky started a revolution to end the war, why doesn't he end the war?

3 Good question. That's what we have been wondering also.

4 Perhaps he doesn't want to let France and England down, who in that case would stand up to the Axis alone.

*Peter* The Axis?

4 Austria and Germany.

*Peter* So the war has been going on for three years?

1 Three years this autumn.

*Peter* A world war?

3 That no one can afford, least of all Russia.

*Peter* It could never end well.

1 But now at least you are liberated. That's a good start for the revolution.

*Peter* It must leave the war. Or else there will never be order in Russia.  
4 Tell that to Kerensky, when you come to Petersburg.  
3 You are coming with us to Irkutsk. From there we must go east, but you may go home.  
*Peter* What is 'home'?  
4 Have you forgotten?  
*Peter* I never had one.  
3 Then you can make one now.  
*Peter* Do you think so?  
3 It's worth a try.  
*Peter* I doubt it. I have only a few things to pack, so we could leave immediately.  
1 We should hurry, because the thaw is coming.  
*Peter* I know. You can trust me. There's no danger. I know the ways.  
2 What luck that we should find you!  
*Peter* For good and for worse. Honestly I don't care, but I will come with you.  
4 You will be a national hero among many others.  
*Peter* Thanks, but that honour is not for me.  
(*packs his few things in a bundle and follows them out.*)

## Scene 2. A prison.

*Countess Adraxin* Who could understand anything of this absurd revolution? We get a revolution promising us gold fields and green forests and the most impossible of all, freedom, and liberate all prisoners without distinction, who then flood the entire country so that no order can be kept, while the new government senselessly sticks to holding on to the war, which must ruin the whole world. When order can't be maintained, the terrorists take over, who start massacres on all people of any class or education. That's my only crime: I am an educated aristocrat. That's why I am in prison waiting for transport to Moscow to be executed. Well, here is that commissar who will send me on. I hope he doesn't bring any worse news. What news, comrade commissar?

*Peter (as a commissar)* Unfortunately I have bad news for you. That countess who was supposed to go with you has committed suicide.

*Adraxin* Poor thing. She was too sensitive and unstable and scared out of her wits. She probably took her own life rather than being executed by the Bolsheviks.

*Peter* Exactly.

*Adraxin* How did she do it? You have most meticulously eliminated all suicide possibilities for us.

*Peter* She pricked herself with a safety pin in her throat until she hit an artery and bled to death.

*Adraxin* A grotesque witness and testimony of the revolution. How could your authorities allow her to have access to a safety pin?

*Peter* Negligence. The chief commissar is very upset. She would have been an important witness against the enemies of the people.

*Adraxin* I assume that's also why they want to spare me until I have testified enough?

*Peter* Your assumption is correct.

*Adraxin* And who are the enemies of the people? Those who protected them, supported them and gave them work for hundreds of years, or those who massacre them, send them to war, start civil wars and mass executions?

*Peter* A leading question.

*Adraxin* You seem curiously detached for a commissar. A true Bolshevik would have gone mad or shot or raped me on the spot. Who are you really? Have you taken on a Bolshevik disguise to survive?

*Peter* I am innocent of my own destiny, which has turned me absolutely indifferent. I was eight years in Siberia for having helped a wounded fellow being and was made a commissar when I was released. I just hung on. I did nothing myself.

*Adraxin* Then you are nothing.

*Peter* Exactly.

*Adraxin* And you have been entrusted with the unpleasant and risky task of bringing me alive to Moscow, a mission that could be running the gauntlet the whole way, since all Bolsheviks desperately want to take the life of a dangerously educated countess.

*Peter* I have no choice but to carry through my commission.

*Adraxin* You are just hanging on.

*Peter* What else can I do?

*Adraxin* And what did you do before you were sent to Siberia?

*Peter* I worked as clerk and translator.

*Adraxin* In Moscow?

*Peter* Petersburg.

*Adraxin* At least I don't have to fear anything from you. I accept you as my escort.

*Peter* It will be my honour, Countess.

*Adraxin* Hush! Not so loud! Don't say that word so that anyone can hear. It's forbidden nowadays to use any other title than comrade or commissar.

*Peter* I apologise, comrade countess.

*Adraxin* That's right! *(takes his hand)* You amuse me. May I ask a favour?

*Peter* What about?

*Adraxin* Not that I have anything against company in bed, but there are a bit too many around here, and bedbugs are not my favourites. *(dashes her mattress, which explodes with bugs.)*

*Peter* I understand. You will have another mattress.

*Adraxin* Thanks for the courtesy.

*Peter* It will be an obligation. The authorities do not wish to see you eaten up before you have testified.

*Adraxin* That's what I mean. The interest of the authorities happens to coincide with my own in this matter, which is no compliment from the authorities but a mere coincidence, am I correct? (*Peter gives a small polite bow and leaves.*) An odd piece of wreckage of the revolution. Whatever he is, he is no Russian. (*The countess again amusedly dashes her mattress with the same reeking result.*)

Act III scene 1. The banquet at Saratursk.

*A sumptuous banquet with all soldiers in very high spirits and obviously somewhat drunk, with also one or two women.*

*Colonel (rising, clinking the glass)* It's a great day, my soldiers, as we celebrate our first great victory west of the Ural over the red bandits. We now control all Siberia, the Cossacks are pressing on from Ukraine in the south, from Riga we are now marching against Petersburg, which soon will be given its old name back again, and the French and British have promised us a fourth front from the Arctic Sea and Archangelsk. We can't lose, for victory is already here! Moscow is within our reach! (*All cheer and raise their glasses.*)

And as a symbol for our victory we have here with us tonight one of our liberated guardian angels, a good representative of the best and noblest people here in our country. May I present Countess Maria Alexandra Adraxin, who would have been brought to Moscow for execution if we had not liberated her! (*All cheer. The colonel makes a sign, and Adraxin enters quite remade all in white and dazzling beauty.*)

You are the very highlight of our victory here tonight, Countess, and an honour to our festive banquet and our victorious company!

*Adraxin* You are not yet in Moscow, comrade. You still have much to do.

*Colonel* We thank you for a relevant reminder!

*Adraxin* Honestly speaking you shouldn't be sitting here drinking all night allowing your victory to confuse your minds while the red terrorists might well be preparing a counter attack.

*A major* Are you a strategist, Countess?

*Adraxin* No, but I have seen enough of the revolution to understand how it works. It doesn't rest for a moment but keeps changing all the time, so that you never can tell from one day to another what will happen next.

*A sergeant* Tell us, Countess! How did you get clear of the reds?

*Adraxin* I wanted to escape to America by Siberia as the only survivor of my family, when I was seized by the reds and was to be brought to Moscow for trial and execution by a commissar, who showed the same indifference to the revolution as I did. I would have been used as a witness against my own relatives and friends to be shot afterwards. But a bridge had collapsed on the way, and we had to find another way through the woods, my commissar followed as far as he could until you had taken Yekaterinburg and proceeded across the Ural. Then he thought it best for me to join you and brought me to your lines.

*Colonel* Who was he?

*Adraxin*      Whoever he was, I don't think he was the one he pretended to be. I have met many of that kind. They change sides according to necessity and really only want to live in peace and not have anything to do with politics and its strifes. He had landed where he was and obeyed orders and defied them when he found this more opportune.

*Colonel*      He saved your life.

*Adraxin*      For good and for worse.

*Major*        Don't you want to live?

*Adraxin*      Life is to be lived. As long as you live you should make the best of it. Death comes later.

*Sergeant*     Very true, Madame! Your health, Princess!

*Adraxin*      I am no princess, only countess. (*reciprocates the toast*)

*Colonel*      Aren't you related with the Czar?

*Adraxin*      Remotely.

*Colonel*      How did you react when the Czar and his entire family were murdered?

*Adraxin*      He had a royal cousin in England, who could have saved their lives. When a decision was necessary, they forbade the Czar's family to come to England, although they were allies. England has never acted more cowardly.

*Major*        They have a socialist prime minister.

*Adraxin*      No, he was only liberal.

*Sergeant*     What will you do now?

*Major*        Join us in our triumph to Moscow! Be our figurehead!

*Adraxin*      That would be my pleasure if you would prevail. (*Cannon fire suddenly breaking out.*)

*Colonel*      Ambush! Take cover! The reds are back!

(*Gunfire, gunsmoke and total chaos. The lights go out, and everyone is dispersed in all directions.*)

*Adraxin (the only one left)* Now they are coming to get me again. What will come next in this bloody mess of a black comedy? (*calmly retires in the dreadful din*)

*Major*        Madame, you must come with us! The reds are recapturing Saratursk!

*Adraxin*      I must nothing. What have I to do with your civil war?

*Major*        They will murder you!

*Adraxin*      I don't think so until they do.

*Major*        The only possible life is with the whites. We support life and preserve it and live for it. You saw that now tonight when we rather made a halt and celebrated than carried on with the offensive. The reds only want to subject the entire world to their power. They are mad power fanatics who will murder anyone who they believe stand in their way. The ruling class of our empire was a harmless society of people who only wanted to live for the quality of life, for its pleasures and spiritual values. They didn't want anything to do with politics. The communists intend to extirpate them to their last member, delete them from history and make it impossible for such good people to exist. You are one of them who so far managed to survive and could

be an important symbol for all of us who haven't already lost our families for the senselessness of the revolution. Come with us and live with us.

*Adraxin* Like some kind of an upper class whore? Don't you think that I can see you through? Since my family was murdered and I was forced to leave our estate I have constantly been importuned by people from all levels, from white generals to red commissars and dirty coal miners and peasants. I know you all. You all want to save me with the excuse that all the others want to kill me just to possess me. Thank you, I will manage better on my own. I am starting to learn my destiny now and how to handle it. Mind your own business, rescue your own lives and fight it out until you die in your lousy meaningless vulgar war, and let me take care of my own destiny.

*Major* As you wish, Madame, I can't force you, but I have warned you.

*Adraxin* Thanks for the warning, but it was self-evident before you mentioned it. Good luck with your civil war, Major. *(The major makes a brief salute and leaves hurriedly.)*

He will never make it. They are all lost. The West has already betrayed them, and the communists will outrank them in evil. I am sorry for Koltchak and the others.

*Red soldier (entering with a senior)* Here she is, Captain!

*Captain* Unmolested, I hope.

*Soldier* It looks like it.

*Captain* I hope the whites didn't treat you badly, Madame.

*Adraxin* You will not be able to make a soldier's whore out of me either, even if it would cost me my life.

*Captain* That is not the issue. You are an important prisoner as witness against the crimes of the abolished aristocracy against the people of Russia.

*Adraxin* And who is massacring the people of Russia? We did not. You are.

*Captain* Who do you mean?

*Adraxin* All you who take part in the civil war, reds and whites.

*Captain* That's judging all without distinction. All we want is social justice.

*Adraxin* By massacres without fair trials?

*Captain* Your ancient regime sent anyone to prison camps without fair trials.

*Adraxin* But you murder anyone without fair trials. Which is worse? Haven't you simply adopted evil instead of stopping it?

*Captain* It must be eliminated and extirpated! Then we can start building a new better world and make it a paradise.

*Adraxin* On the ruins of the one you destroyed and over uncountable mass graves overflowing with the curses of restless violated corpses? Do you think the world will ever be able to forget the Czar and his family?

*Captain* It must!

*Adraxin* Even less it will!

*Captain* Comrade princess, you are unreasonable. You are hopeless.

*Adraxin* Thanks for the compliment.

*Captain* She is under arrest! Isolation cell!

*Soldier* Yes, captain. (*leads Adraxin out.*)

*Captain* Too beautiful for this world. She will never make it. Beautiful innocence insisting on conserving her innocence must drive all men mad until they have succeeded in ruining her. She stands no chance. Only I could protect her, but the soldiers want to get rid of me. The chaos of Russia is getting worse every day, and the Bolshevik revolution and its desertion of the war only made matters worse...

## Scene 2.

*Adraxin* You have saved me again.

*Peter* Or else you would have been killed.

*Adraxin* What happened?

*Peter* The soldiers stormed the prison. All whites were to be killed. They had already murdered their command.

*Adraxin* Did you see it coming?

*Peter* It was unavoidable. No one could be trusted. Anyone could be bribed by anything. That's why I so easily could smuggle letters and a pistol to you.

*Adraxin* Three shots were needed to blow off the lock. These modern pistols cause so little damage.

*Peter* If you had remained you would have been murdered.

*Adraxin* That's what they all say. 'Stay on, and get killed. If you don't come with us you will get killed.' The whole world wants to kill me for some reason, but I only see all these people murdering each other.

*Peter* You have to stay off.

*Adraxin* When we departed I advised you to join the reds, since you were already a commissar. Didn't you?

*Peter* No.

*Adraxin* Why not?

*Peter* I was never one of them and never will be.

*Adraxin* Why?

*Peter* Because I am not one of them.

*Adraxin* Then we are both outsiders in this world. They massacred my family, and they expropriated our estate, but I have relatives and friends abroad. If you could help me to Rostov or Odessa...

*Peter* That's precisely my intention. Earlier on you tried to bribe me to it, but I don't want any payment.

*Adraxin* Have you changed your mind? You no longer want to bring me to Moscow?

*Peter* I never wanted to, but I had to seem like wanting to, for a start.

*Adraxin* And I almost thought you were a communist.

*Peter* I am almost human. That's all I am.

*Adraxin* Then you are well on your way.

*Peter* I hope so.  
*Adraxin* Who are you really?  
*Peter* I told you. I was a book clerk in Saint Petersburg.  
*Adraxin* And before that? You are almost forty.  
*Peter* Before that I was nothing. My life started with that arrest. But who are you besides the Countess Adraxina?  
*Adraxin* I am actually a widow, but we never had children. We were married for four years, the count and I, when he was dragged into the war and died in Galizia. When the revolution arrived most of my relatives left the country and urged me to do the same, but I persisted in remaining. When the Bolshevik revolution arrived it was too late. Our estate was plundered and confiscated, they destroyed everything that was beautiful which they didn't understand, and those relatives who remained were all probably shot with all our staff and servants. The Czar was transferred to Tobolsk, and I tried to escape incognito to the whites in Siberia but was caught. The rest you know. But I still know nothing about you.  
*Peter* You know me. That's enough.  
*Adraxin* You have given me something to live for.  
*Peter* What?  
*Adraxin* You, my mysterious saviour and knight without armour.  
*Peter* No, you saved me, or at least my soul. I never had anything to live for. In you I have suddenly discovered a meaning to my life.  
*Adraxin* So let's stay together and keep running away together.  
*Peter* Precisely my intention.  
*(They can't help it. They meet in a kiss.)*  
*Adraxin* Come now. We must hurry on. They will look for us.  
*Peter* Yes, my love. Let's leave the world behind.  
*(He kisses her again, and they hurry on.)*

### Scene 3.

*A long line of beggars/refugees along a table with an investigator protected by red guards.*

*Bernstein* Next! *(An old man is next.)* Profession?  
*Old man* Professor, PhD.  
*Bernstein* Bourgeois. Away with him.  
*Old man* I never had anything to do with any violence in all my life.  
*Bernstein* The more reason to have you shot. You served the establishment. Away with him. Next! *(He is taken away. Next one is a simple man.)* Profession?  
*The man* Baker.  
*Bernstein* Capitalist. Away with him! Shoot him!  
*The man* I have only been baking bread...  
*Bernstein* You have made money! You have made profits! You are a parasite! Away with him! Next! *(a refugee)* So what did you do in your life?

*Refugee*      Tried to survive.

*Bernstein*    How?

*Refugee*      By escaping.

*Bernstein*    Have you been escaping all your life?

*Refugee*      Yes, I imagine that's what I have been doing.

*Bernstein*    You can't make a living on that. How did you make your living? Are you a train robber?

*Refugee*      No, I begged.

*Bernstein*    A parasite then. Away with him.

*Refugee (down on his knees)* My wife was raped by the whites. My children were murdered by the reds. My home was burnt by partisans. What else could I do than escape? Take my life then, so that I don't have to escape any more!

*Bernstein*    You actually ask for it. Away with him! Next! (*Peter and Adraxin are next.*) So what do we have here then? A fake farmer and his feeble daughter! I don't think you are even related. Look at her fine hands. She hasn't worked in all her life. Get me the picture gallery!

*Peter*        She has been ill for a long time and only recently recovered.

*Bernstein*    And you don't talk like a farmer at all but like an educated man, but your appearance indicates the contrary. Have you been to Siberia? It looks like it. In that case you are free. Let's look at the woman. (*watches an album of photographs that has been brought*) That's what I thought. Look! You are the Countess Maria Alexandra Adraxin, related with the Czar. You have absconded us for months!

*Adraxin*     That's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard. If I resemble someone totally unknown to me, it's not my fault.

*Bernstein*    She even talks like a princess. You betray yourself, damned spy and traitor of Russia! You shall be executed!

*Pushkov (intervening)* Excuse me, comrade, but I sent you these two for closer examination. You are not here to execute anyone at random without releasing eventual innocents. What's your evidence? Let me see the photograph. (*He is shown the photograph.*) All these photographs are outdated and worthless. You can't judge someone on the single evidence of an inadequate photograph more than ten years old.

*Bernstein*    Then prove her innocent, if you can!

*Pushkov*     There are other prisoners here from the Adraxin estate. One who worked there must be able to identify her.

*Bernstein*    Fetch him then, and let's get this over with! No whites must survive! (*Pushkov leaves; to Adraxin:*) I know that you are the wanted countess. It doesn't matter what anyone says. It shows all over. Your white hands, your aristocratic ways, your pretty looks, everything speaks against you. You have no chance. You might as well confess being the enemy of the people that you are. (*Pushkov returns with an old man.*)

*Pushkov*     This man was a gardener at the Adraxins in all his life. Taminsky, did you know the countess?

*Gardener* I saw her grow up and was present at her wedding. Yes, I confess that I knew her, since I saw her every day all her life. Is she still alive? All her family was murdered.

*Bernstein (angrily)* Is that her? (*pointing rudely at Adraxin*)

*Gardener* That one? No.

*Bernstein* Are you sure?

*Gardener* I have never seen that woman before.

*Bernstein* You are lying!

*Gardener* Why should I lie? I am an old man and have nothing left to lose except my life.

*Bernstein (mad with rage)* He is lying! The old fool is lying! He is pulling my leg!

*Pushkov* Nevertheless he is a reliable witness. You can't execute her after such a testimony.

*Bernstein* Away with them! (*to Peter and Adraxin*) Your examination will continue later on. You will remain under arrest for the time being.

*Pushkov* Come with me. (*takes care of Peter and Adraxin*)

*Bernstein* Next! (*some gipsies come up*) Gipsies! I can see it at once! Parasites! Away with them! Next!

*Pushkov (halting Peter and Adraxin)* You are going by train to Samara for further investigation. Two soldiers will escort you. (*Two soldiers take over. Pushkov makes a salute and leave them.*)

*Peter* Did you recognize the gardener?

*Adraxin* Of course.

*Peter* Was he lying?

*Adraxin* For all that he was worth, just to save our lives. That commandant did anything to sacrifice any lives. The gardener did the contrary.

*Peter* A gardener will be a gardener. His vocation is to cultivate and make life prosper.

*Adraxin* That's why they always survive.

*Peter* Come, my friend, we must catch that train. (*shows the soldiers that they are ready, and they leave.*)

#### Act IV scene 1. The compartment.

*Adraxin (waking up)* Were are we?

*Peter (has also just risen)* I was just wondering that as well.

*Adraxin* Have we awakened to a dream? This is a first class compartment.

*Peter (amazed)* Indeed, it doesn't look any better.

*Adraxin* It was an ordinary train with almost only freight cars loaded with refugees, and there was one first class wagon, and that's where we are.

*Peter* It must be some mistake.

*Adraxin* Or an intentional one.

*Pushkov (opening the door, looking in)* You have slept long and well.

*Peter* Are you responsible for this?

*Pushkov* Yes. My orders are to bring you to Samara for identification.

*Peter* In a first class wagon?

*Pushkov* Any complaints?

*Adraxin* Not at all. But why are we so honoured?

*Pushkov (taking a seat)* This is my compartment. I am captain in the Red Army and privileged. I shouldn't let you out of my sight, for you are not supposed to escape. So it's best for all of us that you are safely escorted in my own compartment. Any objections to this severe army surveillance? Well then. I hope your night has been comfortable.

*Peter* It couldn't have been more so. We are not exactly spoiled by comfort.

*Pushkov* Except that lady, who isn't exactly spoiled by the opposite. In our time you can only survive by means of lies, since the whole world and age is a lie. Taminsky is a virtuoso on lying. Your lives were not the first ones he saved.

*Peter* Does that mean you consult him every time a life should be saved?

*Adraxin* Even if he hadn't been there, an old photograph could never have served as proof, and I would have denied it to the end.

*Peter* Fortunately I could be of some assistance. The photograph was undoubtedly of you, Countess. That's why Bernstein grew so furious since it was so obvious.

*Adraxin* You have saved our lives. Why?

*Pushkov* I don't really know myself. Maybe because at length you must grow weary of all the meaningless massacres and mass executions. It grew more and more tedious, and it's never a pleasure. It's only meaningless and nothing else. If then you see a possibility to save one life that seems worth saving, then this acquires a meaning.

*Adraxin* But we will still be shot in Samara?

*Pushkov* Most likely. Bernstein wanted you decapitated in public. At least that won't be necessary. Many are just clubbed to death or cut down with bayonets to make it quicker.

*Adraxin* We are sincerely grateful for the respite you have given us.

*Pushkov* Not at all. All life is just a short respite from death. You'll have to take care of those brief moments of light in life that aren't just about death.

*Adraxin* We brought some food. The least we can do is to share with our friend, isn't it, Peter?

*Peter* Absolutely.

*(Adraxin opens her basket, and Pushkov is amazed when it seems inexhaustible as she brings out bread and butter, ham and caviar, washed carrots and potatoes, boiled eggs and finally a bottle of brandy among other things.)*

*Pushkov* How did you get all this? It's an entire pentry!

*Peter* It's a long story.

*Adraxin* At Novarodar we were taken care of by a peasant family, where the mother had served in an aristocratic family that was completely wiped out but for a

small girl. They were always living well with the family where welfare was constant, and during the years they had collected a considerable store of food. When we left them they asked us to look up the little girl where she was lodged in Saratov and try to bring her with us on our escape south towards Denikin's lines to reach Rostov or Odessa. We were arrested on the way and gathered with you, and here we are now without any possibility to reach Saratov. But we still have all their food.

*Peter* And you? What is your story? You seem rather young for a captain in the Red Army.

*Pushkov* Let's not talk about it. All history is just a great mistake that went wrong from the beginning and constantly has grown worse by its own vicious circles, and we are its slaves and victims. Let us instead enjoy what we have and forget what we lost and what's ahead of us. You are actually bringing forth a banquet as if by magic.

*Adraxin* To your honour, who at least temporarily did something to save a human life.

*Pushkov* I couldn't help it. I saw my chance and took it. It's seldom you get the opportunity to save a life in this revolution, and I only helped you a small stretch on the way. Tell me, is that real brandy that you have? I am not used to such stuff.

*Peter* Have some more. It will do you good.

*Pushkov* It does indeed. I never felt so good before.

*Peter* Then it's about time.

*Pushkov* And you, Sir? How did you end up in our impossible world?

*Peter* I always wondered that myself.

*Adraxin* He has spent eight years in northernmost Siberia.

*Pushkov* What did he do? Throw bombs at one of the Czar's uncles?

*Adraxin* No. The same as you. He tried to save a human life.

*Pushkov* Typical. Monsters are rewarded and promoted for their crimes, while those who try to do some good are punished. For having helped you on the way this far I might get shot. Bernstein promised to arrange it, since he was so cocksure that you were you.

*Adraxin* And still you let me get away.

*Pushkov* Some get away with life, others get away by death, the ultimate escape for those who cannot get away with life. If life has no meaning its only meaning becomes death. When I saw you, Countess, and you dared to lie so openly, I suddenly saw a meaning with life and decided to take that chance and try to save you. I don't know if it will succeed, but it's the first thing in life I will not regret. Pardon me. *(starts sobbing and suddenly bursts out crying. Adraxin embraces him and tries to comfort him.)*

*Adraxin* I know how it feels. I am a widow after a handsome young man who was sacrificed in the war for the evil wills of others. It helps to cry out. Crying is good for you. It's even good for your health. Not to cry is much worse.

*Pushkov* I am sorry. *(dries his tears)* It must be the brandy. We Russians so easily get over-sentimental, and the vodka turn sorrows into oceans. But you don't seem to be sentimental at all, comrade.

*Peter* I am afraid that's the last thing I am.

*Pushkov* Still you are a Russian.

*Peter* If only I were that at least.

*Adraxin* I knew it. You must be French or Nordic.

*Peter* It doesn't matter. I quote our friend here, that the less said about yourself, the better. Let's finish the brandy instead.

*Pushkov* Allow me. (*stands up with his glass*) In such a great moment as this you must deliver a speech. It's the first and last time we are able to dine together, since we will probably see no more of each other after Samara, but I will bring this moment with me into eternity. I beg to offer you my thanks. This was a finer meal than the richest banquet. I will never forget you, mysterious baron from nowhere and the most beautiful princess that anyone ever meaninglessly tried to sentence to death. I don't think anyone will succeed. We belong to a better world, all three of us, and therefore we have no business with this bloody grotesque, mad and hysterical world of strife and nonsense. Our outsidership enobles us and saves us for eternity. I can't get much more solemn. Is it enough? (*Adraxin pulls him down.*)

*Peter* We are speechless in view of such eloquence.

*Adraxin* It was too eloquently noble to be answered.

*Pushkov* I love you, Princess. (*cries again*) That's why I wanted to save you. Suddenly I saw the only meaning of life I've ever seen. It was worth trying.

*Adraxin (embracing him again)* You are a sensitive young man. What are you doing in this revolution?

*Pushkov* The same as you. I was just caught up by it.

*Peter* Have some more brandy. It will do you good.

*Pushkov* Thank you. (*drinks*) Thank you for existing and turning up, so that I could try to save you.

*Adraxin* By your effort you might even have saved yourself.

*Pushkov* No, I am lost. I see life in your eyes for the future, but as a communist I am hopelessly a victim to the revolution. There is no hope for us terrorists who have thrown the world into endless troubles. I wish I could escape with you.

*Adraxin* Perhaps we all three will get shot at Samara. (*The train jerks as if to stop.*)

*Pushkov (empties his last glass, gets serious again)* We now come to the Tarzov station, which is the last stop before Samara. The train will stop here to change some carriages. There is time for us to go out and move around a little. The town is by the Volga, and there are always barges anchored here, which go down the river. For a small fee they take passengers. Just saying.

*Adraxin* And in Samara no one knows what's in store for us.

*Pushkov* You will surely be identified. Taminsky did what he could. You must do the rest yourselves.

*Adraxin* And you?

*Pushkov* Don't think of me. I will take a walk. (*leaves the compartment.*)

*Peter* He offers us a way out.

*Adraxin* If he loses us he will get shot.

*Peter* It seems as if he didn't care.

*(A gunshot is heard and many upset voices.)*

Something has happened.

*Adraxin* We must find out before leaving.

*Peter* Let me go there.

*Adraxin* No, Peter, I think it was our friend. *(opens the door to go out when a guard comes by.)* Do you know what has happened?

*Guard* It was a young officer who shot himself in his head in front of all the waiting passengers. There was blood all over the place.

*Adraxin* That's what we were afraid of. Yet another suicide. *(closes the door)* We have no choice.

*Peter* Yes, that was the signal. It was his way of releasing us.

*Adraxin* For the time being. *(takes his hand, and they leave the compartment for the hall to later leave the train.)*

## Scene 2. On the Volga.

*Bargeman* Quietly mother Volga keeps flowing out into all eternity. I was born here on board on the barge among the waves that lulled me to sleep every night and calmed me down through all my life. I am as calm and full of contentment as she, a soft and comforting unending stream of life that never runs out, only is replenished and growing broader and larger all the time. Ride softly, my old timber barge, towards Saratov and your release, where you will be unburdened of your loads to then go up again all along the river like a salmon and collect new loads of cargo. Everything is in order regardless of the turbulence and lunacy and errors of the world, which are no concern of ours. *(Adraxin and Peter appear.)* Have you had a good sleep, my children?

*Peter* Thanks for your kindness to bring us along.

*Bargeman* You are paying for it. I hope that the necessity for you to work together with my shitty family will not inconvenience you.

*Peter* On the contrary. It's only pleasant.

*Bargeman* How is your wife?

*Peter* Unfortunately not so well. The chill and humidity brings her down.

*Adraxin* It will pass. If I only relax and rest I will surely be all right.

*Peter* I wonder, since we pass Samara tomorrow. There are sure to be red guards who will search the barges for stowaways and refugees.

*Bargeman* Don't worry. There is a hiding place in the prow which no one can discover, and only I can move the logs that conceal it.

*Peter* We thank you.

*Bargeman* As long as you are on board you are in perfect safety. My barge and life on the river is a protected world from the hopelessly lost and loose mental state of a society ashore. *(walks on)*

*Peter* If we can get clear of Samara we will be free.

*Adraxin* How far is it to Saratov after that?

*Peter* A few weeks.

*Adraxin* There the princess is waiting for us that we promised to take care of.

*Peter* If she is still there.

*Adraxin* She must be. That's our mission. We promised our kind supporters in Novarodar, and we owe it to them to keep our promise.

*Peter* Of course.

*Adraxin* Will you promise to keep it, even if I would not make it?

*Peter* You are not that ill.

*Adraxin* I always had problems with the Russian winters. We always left in winter to go abroad or to China. I have spent many winters in Paris and on the Riviera. Do you think we might come there again?

*Peter* From Rostov or Odessa we could reach Constantinople. If we only get within Denikin's lines, the rest will be easy. You must make it.

*Adraxin* I am not as robust as you and only a woman.

*Peter* We are both alien birds to this world, hopelessly ununderstanding outsiders, but we could deal with it together.

*Adraxin* But the small girl...

*Peter* She is included.

*Adraxin* She is the future. I am of the past. You are the transition.

*Peter* We owe it to the future to deliver the good of the past.

*Adraxin* What was good in the past except all that which now is dead and lost forever? (*starts crying. He embraces her, and they tenderly walk away together.*)

Act V scene 1. The Red Cross expedition in Pavlokov.

*Doctor* Can you repeat that again from the beginning. Although the child wasn't yours you still claim it.

*Peter* Not entirely.

*Doctor* According to your earlier information, the child was your wife's who died on the way.

*Peter* We were never married.

*Doctor* How can you then claim the child?

*Peter* It seemed natural.

*Doctor* My friend, we will do all we can to help you and satisfy your interests, but your story is full of question marks.

*Peter* I am painfully aware of it. Let's try then to stick only to what chiefly matters. I saved the Countess Alexandra from the revolution. All her family had been wiped out, but there remained one daughter safely brought to the care of a family in Saratov. We tried to reach there down the Volga with a bargeman, but the hygienic conditions on board were abominable, and she caught typhus and died. I promised

her to take care of the daughter and succeeded in finding her with a sorely tried family in Saratov and managed in spite of all to bring her here, but here I myself was hit by the infection.

*Doctor* We never had such a difficult case of typhus as you. It's a miracle that you got through.

*Peter* But what about the girl?

*Doctor* Like so many other orphans that were washed up here like human wreckage from the revolution, we tried to find a home for her abroad by getting her adopted. We succeeded with our first transportation of adopted orphans to America, but that will probably be the only one. She was among them and landed in Denver. That's why her name became Mary Denver, since it was impossible to find out her true name. You were too ill to be able to make her story clear. She now probably carries the name of her adoptive parents.

*Peter (sighs)*

*Doctor* I am sorry if you had wanted to adopt her.

*Peter* What is done is done. The important thing is that she is well taken care of. She was still not my daughter, and I had fulfilled my promises to her mother as far as I could.

*Doctor* You did indeed. You saved her life.

*Peter* What will become of me now?

*Doctor* You would be very useful to us with your linguistic knowledge if you stayed with us as an interpreter. Meanwhile we continue to try to find your family. You seem to have had a brother in Indonesia with a rubber plantation who plans to go to Cairo in half a year. You could meet him there. Perhaps he could employ you.

*Peter* I would never recognize him.

*Doctor* He wouldn't either, to be sure. He didn't know that you existed. To your family you appear to have vanished without a trace in Russia ten years ago.

*Peter* Yes, I did. My come-back to reality was not intended.

*Doctor* I am sorry if we helped you with that matter.

*Peter* No harm done. (*clasps his hand*) I am looking forward to working with you.

## Scene 2. A clinic in London.

*Doctor 2* How long since you last were in London?

*Fothergill* 23 years ago.

*Doctor* How does it feel to be back again?

*Fothergill* To be honest, I feel nothing at all.

*Doctor* After eight years in the tropics you should have been much more worn and torn and aged than you are, so it wasn't for health reasons that you abandoned your rubber plantations?

*Fothergill* The plantations were my brother's. When he suddenly died without children I inherited them, and since I had worked with him during the years I could continue managing them, but in the end I grew tired of them.

*Doctor* You haven't thought about writing other books than of rubber? With your experience of the revolution in Russia you ought to have much to tell.

*Fothergill* Maybe. I have many lost years in Russia to recover, which task I devoted myself to after selling the plantations and returning to Europe.

*Doctor* I wanted to come to that. You are no youth any more. I advise you to stop smoking and drinking.

*Fothergill* That was my only means of relaxation and enjoyment.

*Doctor* Cut down on it at least, and you should avoid strenuous exertions and strong emotions.

*Fothergill* Is it the heart?

*Doctor* Have you had premonitions?

*Fothergill* No, just general tiredness.

*Doctor* That's the definite signal that you must slow down and not expose your body to strenuous exertions or unsound extravagance. You overstrained yourself for years in Russia, and that has left you with a mark.

*Fothergill* Still it was there I had my life.

*Doctor* Any results of your research for the daughter?

*Fothergill* They found her at last. The family lived in Red Springs, Colorado, until the husband died, when the mother and girl moved to Philadelphia. They are now travelling in Europe for the daughter's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

*Doctor* Will they come to England?

*Fothergill* They have already been here and continued to Ireland. I will try to find them there.

*Doctor* Take it easy.

*Fothergill* I will try.

*(The doctor sighs and ends the examination.)*

### Scene 3. A rustic hotel lobby in Ireland.

No guests, and the bartender is closing up when Fothergill comes to the bar.

*Fothergill* A double.

*Bartender* At this hour?

*Fothergill* I hope it doesn't upset your schedule.

*Bartender* On the contrary. I was giving up hope of any more customers today.  
*(serves a double whisky.)* It's on the house.

*Fothergill* It's unnecessary. I am your richest customer.

*Bartender* It's still on the house. You are the most interesting guest.

*Fothergill* Why?

*Bartender* You have a secret and keep it.

*Fothergill* I will divulge it tomorrow, but only to whom it concerns.

*Bartender* The young Miss Mary Consett? You have been with her more for each day and all evening today.

*Fothergill* I hope no one will mind.

*Bartender* Her mother seems to encourage it.

*Fothergill* Since her mother is as she is, you concentrate on the private moments with the daughter, since the mother only talks all the time.

*Bartender* Yes, she does. May I be curious and ask what your secret is about and why it concerns a young American?

*Fothergill* She is not American. She is Russian and aware of it.

*Bartender* So? War refugee and adopted?

*Fothergill* Yes.

*Bartender* America had enough of them after the war and put an end to the flood of refugees.

*Fothergill* A hundred orphans came out alive from revolutionary Russia, and one of them was Mary Consett. I happened to know her mother.

*Bartender* Bly me.

*Fothergill* She died in Russia.

*Bartender* That's a whole novel. Why didn't you tell it before? You have been staying a week here without telling us.

*Fothergill* It's like a difficult constipation. You have to prepare and mobilize your strength.

*Bartender* Like going to confessional with a difficult crime.

*Fothergill* Yes, something like that.

*Bartender* To be honest, my friend, I don't think the mother is quite honest.

*Fothergill* What do you mean?

*Bartender* She knows you have money and therefore hangs on to you, using her daughter for bait.

*Fothergill* Is that what the guests are thinking?

*Bartender* It's what everybody sees except you.

*Fothergill* I see something else that nobody else sees.

*Bartender* You are not in love with her?

*Fothergill* That's not what it is about.

*Bartender* But?

*Fothergill* The meaning of life.

*Bartender* Which everybody looks for in vain.

*Fothergill* Her mother was the meaning of life.

*Bartender* Her real mother?

*Fothergill* Yes.

*Bartender* Was she shot by the Bolsheviks?

*Fothergill* They wanted to but never succeeded. She always got away.

*Bartender* And saved her daughter.

*Fothergill* No, that was left to me.

*Bartender* You have to tell me more about it some other time. I am closing now.

*Fothergill* I will tell her tomorrow, if it is not too late.

*Bartender* Stay on and help yourself with another glass, if you want. I am going to bed. *(leaves)*

*Fothergill (alone)* No, I will never be able to tell her, for I will never be able to make it right. Words always distort, and only the private and personal experience is absolutely true. I will leave it at that. I have left my fortune to her, and she will have to try to find out by herself why when I am gone. Thanks, my heart, for telling me when it's time to turn in. I hope my forbidden double whisky will help you on the way. I couldn't have died in a happier moment if I was to die now, when I found her and concluded my affairs to her benefit, like a final fulfilment of my promise to my life's only woman and meaning. *(finishes his grog and starts ascending the stairs to his room, feels his heart...)*

*(Manali, 2.11.2013,  
translation August 2018.)*