

Tolstoy Leo

The First Distiller



Leo Tolstoy
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ACT I

PEASANT [*ploughing. Looks up*] It's noon. Time to unharness. Gee up, get along! Fagged out? Poor old beast! One more turn and back again, that will be the last furrow, and then dinner. It was a good idea to bring that chunk of bread with me. I'll not go home, but sit down by the well and have a bite and a rest, and Peggy can graze awhile. Then, with God's help, to work again, and the ploughing will be done in good time.

Enter Imp; hides behind a bush.

IMP. See what a good fellow he is! Keeps calling on God. Wait a bit, friend, – you'll be calling on the Devil before long! I'll just take away his chunk. He'll miss it before long, and will begin to hunt for it. He'll be hungry, and then he'll swear and call on the Devil.

Takes the chunk of bread and sits down behind the bush watching to see what the Peasant will do.

PEASANT [*unharnesses the horse*] With God's blessing! [*Lets the horse loose, and goes towards the place where his coat is lying*] I'm awfully hungry. The wife cut a big chunk, but see if I don't eat it all. [*Coming up to the coat*] Gone! I must have put it under

the coat. [*Lifting the coat*] No, it's not here either! What has happened? [*Shakes the coat*].

IMP [*behind the bush*] Go on, go on, search away! I've got it safe!

PEASANT [*moves the plough and shakes his coat again*] This is strange! Very strange! No one was here, yet the chunk is gone! If the birds had been at it there would be some crumbs left, but there's not a single crumb! No one has been here, and yet some one has taken it!

IMP [*rises and looks out*] Now he'll call on the Devil.

PEASANT. Well, it seems there's no help for it! Never mind, I shan't starve to death. If some one has taken it, he's taken it; let him eat it, and may it do him good.

IMP [*spits*] Oh, the damned peasant! Instead of swearing properly, he only says, "May it do him good." What can one do with such a fellow?

Peasant lies down to rest, makes the sign of the cross, yawns, and falls asleep.

IMP [*comes out from behind the bush*] It's all very well for the boss to talk. The boss keeps on saying, "You don't bring enough peasants to Hell! See what a lot of tradesmen, gentlefolk, and all sorts of people flock in every day, and how few peasants!" Now, how's one to get round this one? There's no way of getting hold of him. Haven't I stolen his last crust? What can I do better than that? And yet he didn't swear. I'm at my wits' end what to do! Well, I must go and report!

Disappears into the ground.

Curtain

ACT II

Hell. The Chief of the Devils sits in the highest place. The Devil's Secretary sits lower down, at a table with writing materials. Sentinels stand at each side. To the right are five Imps of different kinds. To the left, by the door, the Doorkeeper. A dandified Imp stands before the Chief.

THE DANDY IMP. The whole of my booty for the three years has been 220,005 men. They're all in my power now.

THE CHIEF. All right. Thank you. Pass on.

The Dandy Imp goes to the right.

THE CHIEF [*to the Secretary*] I'm tired! Is there much business left? Whose reports have we had, and whose are still to come?

THE SECRETARY [*counts on his fingers and, as he counts, points to the Imps to the right. When he mentions any Imp, the one referred to bows*] We've had the Gentlefolks' Devil's report. He's captured 1836 in all. And the Tradesmen's Devil's with 9643. From the Lawyers', 3423. The Women's we've also just had: 186,315 married women, and 17,438 maids. Only two Devils are left, the Officials' and the Peasants'. There are altogether 220,005 souls on the list.

CHIEF. Well then, we'd better finish it all to-day. [*To the Doorkeeper*] Let them in!

The Officials' Devil enters, and bows to the Chief.

CHIEF. Well, how have you got on?

OFFICIALS' IMP [*laughing, and rubbing his hands*] My affairs are all right, just as soot they are white! The booty is such that I don't remember anything like it since the creation of the world.

CHIEF. What, have you captured a great many?

OFFICIALS' IMP. It's not so much the quantity. Only 1350 men in all, but such splendid fellows! Such fellows, they might shame any Devil! They can embroil people better than we ourselves can. I've introduced a new fashion among them.

CHIEF. What's that new fashion?

OFFICIALS' IMP. Why, in former times lawyers were in attendance on the judges and deceived people. Now, I've arranged for them to do business also apart from the judges. Whoever pays most, is the one to whose business they attend. And they'll take such trouble over it that they'll make out a case where there is none! They and the officials between them embroil people far better than we Devils can.

CHIEF. All right. I'll have a look at them. You may pass on.

The Officials' Imp goes to the right.

CHIEF [*to Doorkeeper*] Let in the last one.

Enter the Peasants' Imp with the chunk of bread. He bows to the ground.

PEASANTS' IMP. I can't live like this any longer! Give me another appointment!

CHIEF. What appointment? What are you jabbering about?

Get up and talk sense. Give in your report! How many peasants have you captured this week?

PEASANTS' IMP [*crying*] Not one!

CHIEF. What? Not one! What do you mean? What have you been doing? Where have you been loafing?

PEASANTS' IMP [*whimpering*] I've not been loafing; I've been straining every nerve all the time, but I can't do anything! There now, I went and took his last crust from under the very nose of one of them, and, instead of swearing, he wished it might do me good!

CHIEF. What?.. What?.. What are you mumbling there? Just blow your nose, and then speak sensibly! One can't make head or tail of what you're saying.

PEASANTS' IMP. Why, there was a peasant ploughing; and I knew he had brought only a chunk of bread with him, and had nothing else to eat. I stole his crust. By rights he should have sworn; but what does he do? He says, "Let him who has taken it eat it, and may it do him good!" I've brought the chunk of bread away with me. Here it is!

CHIEF. Well, and what of the others?

PEASANTS' IMP. They're all alike. I could not manage to take a single one.

CHIEF. How dare you appear before me with empty hands? And as if that were not enough, you must needs bring some stinking crust or other here! Do you mean to mock me? Do you mean to live in Hell and eat the bread of idleness? The others

do their best, and work hard! Why, they [*points to the Imps*] have each supplied 10,000 or 20,000, or even 200,000. And you come with empty hands, and bring a miserable crust, and begin spinning your yarns. You chatter, but don't work; and that's why you've lost hold of them. But wait a bit, my friend, I'll teach you a thing or two!

PEASANTS' IMP. Before you punish me, listen to what I'll tell you. It's all very well for those other Devils, who have to do with gentlefolk, with merchants, or with women. It's all plain sailing for them! Show a nobleman a coronet, or a fine estate, and you've got him, and may lead him where you like. It's the same with a tradesman. Show him some money and stir up his covetousness, and you may lead him as with a halter. And with the women it's also plain sailing. Give them finery and sweets – and you may do what you like with them. But as to the peasants – there's a long row to hoe with them! When he's at work from morn till night – sometimes even far into the night – and never starts without a thought of God, how's one to get at him? Master, remove me from these peasants! I'm tired to death of them, and have angered you into the bargain!

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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