

THE BARTERED BRIDE

Music by
Bedřich Smetana

English Version by
Donald Pippin
(1993)

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Marenka | a village girl |
| Kruschina | a villager, father of Marenka |
| Ludmila | Kruschina's wife, Marenka's mother |
| Tobias Micha | a landowner |
| Hata | his wife |
| Vasek | their son |
| Jenik | Son of Micha by a former marriage |
| Kezal | a marriage broker |
| Circus Director | manager of a traveling circus |
| Esmeralda | a dancer |
| Indian | a performer |

Villagers, clowns, dancers

The Bartered Bride

Smetana

English Version by Donald Pippin

ACT ONE

Spring has done it again, bursting out with reckless, irrepressible, intoxicating abandon. Magic is in the air. It's holiday time in Bohemia, time to celebrate, time for song and dance. Yet the very two people that we would expect to be leading the revels are not even joining in. Though they have not known each other for long, Marenka and Jenek are obviously made for each other, but a heavy cloud hangs over their future. Their dreams are in grave jeopardy. Who's to blame? The parents, of course. Marenka's father was, to say the least, short-sighted.

Years ago, faced with a financial crisis, he was forced to borrow a substantial sum of money. With a six year old daughter who gives every indication of blossoming into a beauty, why look further for collateral? In short, he signed a contract promising her to the son of the prosperous farmer who came to his rescue. Now a dozen or so years later, the time for repayment has come due, unfortunately at the very time that Marenka, now indeed a beautiful young lady, has displayed a perverse streak of independence by finding on her own the man she wants to marry.

It should be said that even in this rural bastion of traditional family values, the days are happily past when a father had absolute, dictatorial control over his daughter's destiny and could simply have the girl locked up and starved into submission. Still, even in the relatively enlightened era when this opera took place, the vast majority would feel that only the most hardhearted, the most pigheaded, the most ungrateful of daughters would presume to pit her own unripened judgment against his maturity and wisdom, much less defy his express wishes. Ah, you say, but what about the mother? Let's not bring in irrelevancies.

All told, farmer Micha seems to be holding all of the trump cards. Nonetheless, in order to clench the deal, leaving nothing to chance, he has taken the wise and prudent step of enlisting the services of Kezel, the highly capable marriage broker, in fact the best in the entire world. He says so himself.

Furthermore, who is this Jenek anyway, the man that Marenka is so wild about? Does she or anybody else know anything about him? A newcomer in town, is he a drifter, a vagrant, or worse? Has he even got a family? And why the great mystery about his past? Sounds like he has

something to hide. One hates to think that Marenka is throwing herself away on a conniving opportunist.

So who is it to be, Jenik or the son of Tobias Micha? Either way, frankly, I don't like the look of it. Yet what can you do but sit back and see what happens?

Scene: A village, on a spring feast day.

CHORUS of country folk

Come along, the mood is merry;
See the budding peach and cherry.
Love that hovers in the air
Beckons to the young and fair.

Season full of hope and rapture,
Youth and beauty in their glory,
Days of bliss beyond recapture!
Time unfolds a darker story.

Trials, troubles
Hurdles lie ahead.
Love begins to flicker;
Bored wives boss and bicker;
Husbands turn to liquor.
Watch out!

Now's the time, sweet lads and lasses!
Live your life before it passes.
Breathe the magic in the air,
Summoning the young and fair.

Now's the time, sweet lads and lasses,
Green and tender, young and fair.
Live your life before it passes,
Breathe the magic in the air.

JENIK Darling, we're together —
Why so sad and silent?

MARENKA Our love's on the line.
Mother broke the news.
This very day, I'm to meet the man
Forced on me by my father.
He won't even listen!

JENIK Courage! With our weapons, faith and trust,
We are bound to win.
Stay on course and don't be afraid;
Steadfast hearts cannot be swayed.

CHORUS

No more weeping, no lamenting!
Though your father seems unbending,
Love will find a happy ending.

Come along, the mood is merry;
See the budding peach and cherry.
Love that hovers in the air
Beckons to the young and fair.

Now's the time, sweet lads and lasses,
Green and tender, young and fair.
Live your life before it passes;
Breathe the magic in the air.

Now for dancing, now for singing!
As the song and dance continue,
Show us, give it all that's in you.
Show us! Let's see what you can do.
Everyone, you and you,
Show us what you can do.
Everyone, you and you, you and you.

(Chorus exits)

MARENKA

This hardly is the day I want to dance,
With so much at stake.

JENIK

Brace yourself. Who is this foolish fellow
That wants to buy you?

MARENKA

Son of a local farmer.
They together are coming to the house
To make a bid for my hand,
And drive a bargain.

JENIK

And us? Haven't they been told?

MARENKA

They refuse to hear.
The farmer has a hold on my father,
Money borrowed years ago,
And it's me he's offered up as repayment.
Things like happiness
Hardly seem to matter.

JENIK

Would that I were richer!

MARENKA

Oh, let's not even speak of money!
But there's something else,
Hard for me to put into words.
Something secretive ...
At times, my love, you seem a little distant.
A cloud of sadness comes over you.
Oh, is there someone you cannot forget —

A girl who sighs and waits for you back home?

JENIK

No one! No one!

MARENKA

You are all to me that matters,
Earth and water, light and air;
If the golden goblet shatters,
Tender trust becomes despair.

You arrive, a total stranger,
From a land of darker skies;
Yet I fear no threat of danger
When I gaze into your eyes.
Never mind who you are or from where.

Yet I long to hear your story,
Eager to relive and share!
I long to hear, relive and share.
Be it hardship, grief or glory,
Half your burdens I would bear.

Why did you leave your home
For travel to parts unknown?
You've barely said a word about
The story of your life.

JENIK

Unhappy memories
Far better not to dwell on.
I was born to blessings in abundance,
But my dearly beloved mother died.
Soon thereafter, my father married a second wife,
Who hated me and turned my father's heart against me.

I was unjustly cast from the house,
To wander, toil and struggle for my daily bread.
In the graveyard lay my mother;
A rough and winding road was I to tread.

JENIK

Cloudless days of childhood happiness were over;
Only a barren, lonely desert lay ahead.
Days of childhood games were over;
Painful years of barren, lonely desert lay ahead.

MARENKA

Cast aside and forced to suffer!
How rough the road you had to tread!
Lonesome and long, now it is over;
Brighter journeys lie ahead.

JENIK

But to hell with my misfortunes!
For these miseries,
One kiss is ample compensation.

Turning toward tomorrow,
Sorrows all will be forgot
When we are wedded.
After winter, springtime follows.

Like a pair of loving swallows,
High and homeward-headed,
Light and feather-weighted,
Lucky and elated,
We shall nest in peace.
Turning toward tomorrow,
Married! Sorrows all will be forgot.

MARENKA

Hush! Watch out!
Here they come, with the broker.
The play begins.

JENIK

Then I'd better not remain ...
Parting, parting, parting
Means new pain.
Think of me until we meet again.

(They exit)

(Kezal, Kruschina, and Ludmila enter)

KEZAL

Sir, no argument holds water;
You signed away your daughter,
You signed away your daughter
And today it's time for payment.

On cue, with due respect,
I come here to collect.
My purpose I'll pursue
Until you daughter says, "I do."
Until you daughter says, "I do."

KEZAL

Never shifty, never shady,
Ever in demand;
And in the service of a lady
I am ready always
To lend a hand,
For with my powers to persuade
I am the master of my trade.

I've no doubt your grateful daughter
Will adore the husband who bought her.
Can she raise the least objection
To a match of such perfection,
Such perfection?

As a model marriage-broker
Of solid record,
Not merely mediocre,
I will see that she is suited.

As soon as you agree
To quite a modest fee,
My purpose I'll pursue
Until your daughter says, "I do."
Until your daughter says, "I do."

Go for the best!
None but the best do I assist.
No underdogs are on my list.

KRUSCHINA *(to Ludmila, his wife)*
You look a little worried;
I say let's go ahead.

LUDMILA
But why the rush to strike a deal?
Yes, why so hurried?
Our daughter's an adult;
With her at least we should consult.
For she may harbor reservations;
Some discomfort she may feel.

KEZAL
Reservations? Reservations? Reservations?
But it's not for her to say,
Not for her to say.
By God, a daughter's duty is to nod
And obey.

LUDMILA
She might wish a brief inspection
Of the man she's going to marry.

KEZAL
Look him over? An inspection? An audition?
Why is that necessary?
No, a man of his position
Doesn't need to take a test;
He is QED the best.
My word!
She will not remain unfeeling
When she learns with whom we're dealing.
His family! His property! His repute!

Plus a farm he's got a fortune
Worth a ton of loot,
In solid gold to boot.
No more talk, it's time for action,
First talk, then action!
For total satisfaction
We must bring the two together.

By giving me the lead
Success is guaranteed.
My purpose I'll pursue
Until your daughter says "I do."

LUDMILA
When people learn,
There is bound to be some talk.
When people learn, they're bound to talk.

KRUSCHINA
(How I'd like to tell him
Go take a walk.
I yearn to say go take a walk.)

KEZAL But remember I've a temper
When I see somebody balk.

KRUSCHINA Micha! Never very close, we once were acquainted.
By his first wife he had a son,
And then another by his second,
But neither one nor t'other would I recognize.

KEZAL He remembers
That agreement you made when you borrowed some money:
Your daughter's hand in marriage was the mortgage.

LUDMILA Do say at least
Which of the two sons has the claim on her?

KEZAL Glad you ask it.
But there is only one that counts: Vasek.
Micha's first son took off on his own,
And if still alive,
He has left no traces.

KRUSCHINA Well, then, tell us about young Vasek.
What has he got that makes him Mister Right?

KEZAL A man of substance
And solid merit!
A farm of fifty fertile acres he'll inherit.

Serene and sunny,
He's lots of money,
And charm to spare;

Sweet as candy, mild as bread and water,
Made in heaven for your lovely daughter,
He's the answer to a mother's prayer.

A prize example,
A peerless model.
He doesn't gamble, stay up late, or hit the bottle.

His form, perfection;
His clear complexion
Beyond compare.

Man of vigor, strong and sturdy,
Over twenty, under thirty;

Disposition sweet and pleasant,
Not a yokel, not a peasant;
Seldom rough and never rowdy,
Says Hello instead of Howdy.

Not a loner, not a hermit —
Ask a neighbor to confirm it.

Keeps the closet neat and tidy,
Mass on Sunday, fish on Friday.

Gentle as a lamb or kitten;
Warmer than a woollen mitten.

Knows and does his duty;
Never morose or moody,
He's a father's pride and joy;

KEZAL Firm and resolute,
Bountiful to boot,
But deep inside, a starry-eyed
And simple boy.

KRUSCHINA and LUDMILA
We're impressed by your approval,
So sincere and on the level.
Clearly he's the very one
We would hope to call a son.

KEZAL Here's Marenka, looking nervous;
Her discomfort ought to serve us.

KRUSCHINA and LUDMILA
Here's Marenka
Looking ill-at-ease and nervous.

(Marenka enters)

MARENKA Pardon, father. Pardon, mother.
Have I kept you waiting?

KEZAL It is you that we were just congratulating!
Little one, it's time you learn
Of our affection and concern.
Coming to the point, without ado,
We've the man for you!

MARENKA A man I do not even know?

KEZAL Any childish qualm you will soon outgrow.

LUDMILA *(quietly to Marenka)*
If you do not wish to have him,
You can just say no.

MARENKA What if I refuse?
What if I say no?
I'm the person who must choose,
And you can tell him so.

LUDMILA You can still refuse,
You can just say no.
You're the person who must choose,

And we shall tell him so.

KRUSCHINA and KEZAL

Do you dare refuse?
Do you dare say no?
It's your father who must choose,
Because we tell you so.

KEZAL

So onward! Go to it!
Why the hesitation?
A simple yes will do it,
And then a honeymoon and wild celebration.

MARENKA

You seem to know what I should do,
But I may take another view.
I'm not so impatient, sir, as you.
Perhaps I have a reason
Not hard to guess,
A plain and simple reason why
I cannot say yes.

KEZAL

Foolish girl! You object?
Have you lost all respect?
But tush! My resolve is unshaken.
Petty hurdles I ignore
In the middle of a tug of war.

MARENKA

I'll never weaken;
My heart has been taken.

KRUSCHINA and LUDMILA

She'll never weaken;
Her heart has been taken.

KEZAL

With support and with some backing
I can send the fellow packing.

MARENKA

I have made my vow to heaven.

KEZAL

Vows unwritten, merely spoken,
Born at six and dead at seven.

MARENKA

Mine is one that stays unbroken.

KEZAL

From a list of men so meager
You were hasty, over-eager.

MARENKA

As I told you before,
He's the man I adore.

KEZAL

Childish notions we ignore
When a bidder offers more.
Notice, by the way,
I've some cards to play.

**You wait! You wait!
I rely on cash and cunning
And can bargain with the best;
I'll send the rascal running,
Make him fade into the west.**

MARENKA and LUDMILA

**You deal in cash and cunning
And can bargain with the best
Yet we shall send you running
Fading off into the (far, far) west.**

MARENKA

**I'm already engaged.
I've made a sacred promise
I intend to keep.**

KRUSCHINA

**This without even asking me!
Does a father have no rights?
What if Micha chooses to sue?
My pledge I cannot go back on.**

LUDMILA

**No doubt a promise made
After a round or two.**

KEZAL

**Nonetheless!
Here is the contract,
Duly drawn up by the parties,
With your signature.**

MARENKA

**What is that to me?
I was only six.
Listen closely:
I'm the one that shall decide
If and when to be a bride.**

(She exits)

KEZAL

What is the world coming to?

KRUSCHINA

**You could have been more diplomatic.
And where's the bride groom?
You have overlooked a great
Opportunity.
To win her over, we should start
By introducing him.**

KEZAL

**Later, later! Rather risky to rush it.
He's ill-at-ease and bashful,
And allergic it would seem to petticoats.**

KRUSCHINA

That could indeed slow down a courtship.

KEZAL

**Here's my advice:
Meet accidentally;
You might begin by bumping into Micha,
Maybe at the village inn.**

Here it will be bedlam,
Hordes of people dancing.
That other fellow I can handle.
Cash will bring him round.

(They go their separate ways)

CHORUS

To your feet, you sturdy folk!
A perky beat begins the polka.
After labors, time for leisure;
Come, good neighbors, cut the measure.

Merry makers here outnumber
Those who choose to snooze and slumber.
Who can sit and twiddle thumbs
To the fiddle and the drums?
Who can merely twiddle thumbs
To the fiddle and the drums?

After labors,
Come, good neighbors!
You that toil and till the land,
Take your partner by the hand.

Hearts enkindle, spirits rally;
Song and sunlight fill the valley.
Body heat and beat combine,
Sending shivers down the spine.
Hearts enkindle, spirits rally;
Song and sunlight fill the valley.

End of Act I

ACT II

Marenka, the sought-after bride, and Kezel, the unstoppable marriage broker, definitely at cross purposes, each decide to take matters into their own hands.

Marenka, dangerously vulnerable to the power of parental pressure, hoping to lop it off at the roots, turns her charm on young Vasek, the shy suitor so eloquently promoted by the marriage broker. Taking advantage of their never having actually met, her plan is to scare him away from the monstrous, malevolent Marenka and the grizzly fate that would follow marriage, and to steer him toward a sweeter solution.

Kezel, whose commission depends upon getting her married to this same shy suitor, turns his own particular brand of charm on Marenka's beloved Jenik, our hero. Or villain. At this point hard to say which.

Hoping to dissuade him, carrying the art of salesmanship to lyric heights, Kezel points out the more enduring value of gold over love, the

more tangible satisfaction bestowed by income and property, as personified by a rich and available widow, and caps it off with a simple straightforward offer to buy him off. Will he actually succeed in getting this professedly ardent lover to sign the infamous agreement that barter off his own bride? How low can a man sink?

Before we get too worked up about it, I think we'd better join the boys in the barroom.

Scene: The village inn.

CHORUS A man has many friends,
But beer's about the best.
Beer's about the best.
A swallow is followed
By vigor and zest.

The barley that ferments and mellows
Turns all into jolly good fellows.

If down and out or bitter,
Have another beer,
Have another beer.
Here bigger is better
To trigger a cheer.
The bigger the better
To trigger a cheer.

We say to each man and his brother,
Drink up and then order another.

JENIK Good fellows! I differ.
You've all got it wrong.
In time, you will sing a softer, sweeter song,
And turn to love
For inspiration richer
Than ever found in foaming pitcher.

CHORUS Ah! Spoke like a bloke who has seen the true light.
(pointing to Kezal)
Stay out of the way of that man on your right.

KEZAL Ah! But what if you are poor?
Is love to be the cure?
Will it help you win the fight?
Go for property and money —
These will serve you in the end.
Poverty is not so funny.
Gold, not love, will prove the better friend.
Go for property and money —
Gold, not love, will serve you in the end
And prove the better friend
After all, after all.

CHORUS

A man has many friends,
But beer is still the best
Beer is still the best.
A swallow is followed
By vigor and zest.
The barley that ferments and mellows
Turns all into jolly good fellows.

If down and out or bitter,
Have another beer,
Have another beer.
Here bigger is better
To trigger a cheer.
The bigger the better
To trigger a cheer.

We say to each man and his brother,
Drink up and then order another.

KEZAL

Go for gold, my friend.
Go for gold and you cannot go wrong.

JENIK

But love inspires a sweeter song.
Ah, but love inspires a sweeter song.

Dance: Furiant

VASEK (*entering*)

See – see - see here, my son,
My - my- my mother said,
Now – now - now twenty one,
High – high - high time you wed.

She- she - she said I'll not
Be – be - be satisfied
Till - till you have got
Yourself a bride.

You – you've grown up so fast,
So spread out your wings
And - and do at last
The manly thing.

High time you leave the nest,
And go- go settle down
Or you'll be, you'll be at best
The village clown.

Otherwise, no surprise
If fine local folk
Start calling you just a joke,
Start to call you a joke,
Just a joke, just a joke.

(Marenka enters)

MARENKA So you must be Marenka's fiancé people talk about.

VASEK Indeed – indeed I am, but - but how did you know it?

MARENKA That certain air of polish,
Dash and elegance.
Yet the village girls are worried;
They fear for your life.

VASEK Did you, did you say my life?

MARENKA Oh, that hussy! She's in love with another
And will stop at nothing.

VASEK In love in love with another?
But she is mine!

MARENKA Ha ha ha ha!
I'm told you've not even met?

VASEK No no not as yet.
But but she knows
We're getting getting getting married.

MARENKA What's that to her?
She's set a trap for you —
Oh, the heartless little shrew!
And she's concocted
A plot to have you murdered.

VASEK Me- m- m- m- murdered!
If mother only knew!
But she has made her made her mind up.
I've got to marry that Marenka.

MARENKA Marry! Go ahead!
But why to her?
(coquettishly)
Someone else might be more willing.
Take a look around.

VASEK But where?

MARENKA There's someone fair, not far away,
With warm and tender eyes.
While hoping, praying night and day,
For you alone she sighs.
For you alone she pines and sighs.

VASEK Do you mean, you mean for me?
Can this be true?
Fair, not far away ...
In love with me!
How I wish she were you!
But that Marenka will get even.

MARENKA No! She'll gladly settle for her freedom back again.

VASEK What will mother say
If I disobey?

MARENKA Tell her with relief and pride
You've found a better bride.

VASEK How how pretty is she?

MARENKA Pretty as Marenka.

VASEK Is she nice and friendly?

MARENKA Nicer, yes, and far more friendly than Marenka.

 This person fair, not far away
 With warm and tender eyes.
 While hoping, praying night and day,
 For you alone she sighs.
 For you alone she pines and sighs.

VASEK C- could it happen?
Do you mean it? You really really mean it?
Someone out there?
Wanting me and waiting?
What a surprise!
Oh what a wonderful surprise!
Could it really happen?
Could it really, really happen?
A real surprise!
You're sure I'm the one?
Are you sure?

MARENKA And unless you offer hope,
Either it's knife or rope.
Can you be deaf and blind,
So callous and so unkind,
By seeming cold as ice
To a pearl beyond a price
Who fades away
While you delay?

VASEK Why why why do you weep?

MARENKA For a love that lies so deep.

VASEK (*retreating*)
I'd help if I could,
But don't think I should.

MARENKA Ah! Heartless, cruel coward!
To leave a love-stricken maid,
Alone and betrayed,

By bitter grief devoured!

VASEK Still I wonder wonder who
You could be referring to.
Mercy me, what to do
I have not got a clue,

 Though though I wish it were you!
Yes, if it were you,
My, my dream's come true.

MARENKA So it's me you want to wed!

VASEK Yes, yes, you're the one.

MARENKA Why delay? Let's go ahead.

VASEK Oh, what joy! What fun!

MARENKA Each day we'll greet with new delight,
And never fuss or fight.
Each day we'll greet with new delight,
And never, never, never fuss or fight.
So, it's true that I'm the one.

VASEK Yes, yes, none but you!

MARENKA Sooner settled, sooner done.

VASEK My dream has come true.

MARENKA Listen well to what I tell you.
Then repeat it:
You must take a solemn oath to this effect:
Marenka I renounce and my engagement I reject,
On my honor!

VASEK Yes but that, but that
Is too much to expect!

MARENKA You turn your back when I plead?
Such a love is cold indeed,
Just a shallow passing phase.
Marry Marenka, and good luck
In the dark, silent days.
(starts to leave)

VASEK Stop! I've changed my mind!

MARENKA *(echoed by Vasek)*
Here you vow upon your life
Not to take her for your wife.
You renounce her as of now.
No matter what, no matter how,
You'll never break that solemn vow.

VASEK I'll keep that solemn vow.

TOGETHER Here's someone fair, not far away
With warm and tender eyes.

MARENKA While hoping, praying night and day,
For you alone she sighs.
For you alone she pines and sighs.

VASEK With her my future lies.
While hoping, praying night and day
For me alone she sighs,
Can it be for me she pines and sighs?

(They exit)

(Jenik enters briskly, followed by Kezal)

KEZAL Stay, my son, a word or two!
May I have the pleasure?

JENIK I have better things to do;
I am not at leisure.

KEZAL Do you not know who I am?

JENIK Nor, sir, do I give a damn.
Yet I know you well by sight.

KEZAL Though you appear fairly bright,
And a delight to behold,
Your future hopes are chancy.
There's a lady, so I'm told,
Who's caught your fancy.
What have you got to offer?

JENIK Such concern on my account!
God smiles upon the lover.
We people so in love
Rely on powers above.

KEZAL Rubbish! Hear some good advice:
You're not in paradise.
Here at hand, understand,
Only money will suffice,
As you'll find to your sorrow,
Not today but tomorrow,
When you have to beg or borrow.

Where, my friend, are you from?
Speaking man to man, sir,
Give an honest answer.

JENIK From afar I have come,
Miles away,

Past Moravia's borders —
There I've called my home.

KEZAL

It is there you should return.
Local girls, you will learn,
On the whole,
Look for cash, not soul.

JENIK

There are some that you omit,
Blessed with beauty, charm and wit.
I know one that stands alone,
A blessed angel,
And soon to become my own.

KEZAL

When the love is new
Men will bill and coo,
Blind with devotion.

Till the eyes are clear,
Every wife is sheer
Beauty in motion.

By a law unwritten,
Foolish men are smitten
With a purring kitten's
Velvet paws.

Horror all the greater
When the tiger later
Bares its sharpened claws.

Till the wheel is spun
And the prize is won,
Love is play and fun,
Pleasure and delight.

Sad to say, but soon
Past the honeymoon,
There's a change of tune
And of appetite.

Love is bound to lose —
Take it from me.
Wiser men would choose
Income and property.

Poor, deluded lover,
Pause and think it over:
You could live on clover,
Not a blank.

Men astute and clever
Turn their talents ever
Toward a better balance
In the bank.

KEZAL Summing up, weighing and contrasting,
Oh, my friend!
Gold I say, gold is longer lasting
In the end.
Go for gold!

JENIK (*with irony*) With advice you are unstinting,
Your concern I understand.

KEZAL I am merely hinting
I can deal you a better hand.

 (*echoed by Jenik*)
Looking around,
For you I have found
One second to none.

 Here's a wife
To last for life,
Who offers more than passing fun.

 This willing spouse
Is blessed with a house
And money to burn.

 Yours to own,
Her land alone
Will guarantee a fine return.

 She's got a garden,
Goats and a gander,
Cows, for example,
Cream thick and ample;
Orchards, such as
Pears and peaches,
Each as much as
Seven acres;
Hogs and horses,
Coach and carriage —
Yours {mine}, of course
Assuming marriage.
All to call your own, to have and hold.
{All my own to have and hold.}

 For such a bride men go to battle,
Swords are drawn and sabers rattle
As in the splendid days of old
When the men did deeds both big and bold.
To (a life of) sheer delight can you say no?

JENIK So kindly meant, I'm grateful, though
To your blueprint I must say no.
To your kind proposal I say no!
Yes! To your kind proposal I say no!

KEZAL Drop romantic foolishness.
I will make it worth your trouble.
Grow up!
Love is adolescent.
Call it off, for one hundred of the best.

JENIK A measly hundred!
For two broken hearts you would pay so little?
No, no, my friend. Just count me out.

KEZAL Two hundred crowns I meant to say.

JENIK Money's not the issue.

KEZAL All right, three hundred.
That's my final offer.
All of that for one tiny signature!
You'd better reconsider.
Certain friends of mine are strong and husky,
Only too glad
To bloody up a chap like you.
Careful, or you'll wind up
Losing both bride and money.

JENIK So? So?
Who's the stranger who offers to buy me out?

KEZAL (*indicating himself*)
Who else?

JENIK What! Shopping for yourself?
Sir, I'll not sell to you
For all the money in the world.

KEZAL Don't be silly! I'm already married;
One wife is quite enough.
But maybe you should know
I am acting on behalf
Of the son of Tobias Micha.
We put the agreement into writing;
You are paid in full, ready cash!
Then off and away!

JENIK All right. Might as well.
Money I could use.
Three hundred smackers and the deal is settled.
But on one condition:
Marenka is to be married to no one else
But a son of Tobias Micha.
Otherwise the whole agreement's null and void.

KEZAL Yes, of course, of course, no question!
Nothing wrong with that.
This agreement gives the bride to none but Micha's son.

JENIK **On this vital point I must insist:
Micha's son it is,
Only he, and nobody else —
Stated clearly in the contract.**

KEZAL **I can think of no objection.
In fact, that's just where we started.**

JENIK **One final matter ...**

KEZAL **Yes?**

JENIK **This also you must add:
That after my former bride
And Micha's son have taken holy vows,
Now husband and wife,
Micha must cancel and forget
The sum of money owed him by Marenka's father.
He'll write it off as paid in full.**

KEZAL **That will be agreeable.**
(Kezal leaves)

JENIK *(alone)*
**Foolish man
To believe for a minute!
But my net is drawn,
And you are in it.**

**Forward unconquered!
We are soon to reach our destination.
Driven to barter
By the pain of loss and separation.
The former martyr
Finds jubilation!**

JENIK **In tears and laughter
We shall be one;
Another chapter
Has just begun.**

**Bursting with flowers,
Spring smiles again.
Heaven is ours
Through sun and rain.**

**Winter is gone;
Warm light begins to shine
Welcome the dawn
Proclaiming you are mine.**

**Dark clouds dispersed, the sun will shine
Because you're mine.**

(Kezal returns, accompanied by Kruschina, Ludmila and chorus of villagers)

KEZAL Gather round for a public reading,
A bid we thought you ought to hear.
You can play a part in this proceeding
If you'll kindly lend an ear.

CHORUS Heaven knows where this man is leading.

KEZAL Disinterested,
You are requested
To confirm that terms are drawn airtight.

CHORUS We come together,
Deciding whether
All is clearly down in black and white.

KEZAL Plainly and concisely stated:
"My former bride now I'm renouncing."

CHORUS His engagement terminated!
And his bride he's now renouncing?

JENIK *(takes the paper and reads)*
"She goes to no one other than
The son of that fine, upstanding man,
Tobias Micha."

KEZAL To one alone, the son of Micha.

JENIK "If his love is deep and strong,
And if both are satisfied,
To each other they belong,
Now and ever side by side."

KEZAL These conditions
We set down as stipulated.

CHORUS Though defeated,
He appears elated.

KRUSCHINA So unselfish! So high-minded!
(to Jenik) It's enough to bring a tear.
Name another half so nice,
Willing so to sacrifice.

KEZAL Sir, you can drop the gratitude
(to Kruschina) Until his motives are reviewed.
Modest offers I have made
That may have swayed him:
Cash in hand, three hundred will be paid him.
For this amount (that you provide)
He offers up his bride.

CHORUS How degrading! How disgusting!

Has he not a jot of pride?

KRUSCHINA Going for the gold, indeed!
Oh, this modern generation;
Goaded on by naked greed!

KEZAL Punctum satis, punctum satis ...
Latin gives the legal touch we need.
Now the signatures —
One and then the other,
And we're all done!

JENIK Glad to sign it: Jenik Horak.

KRUSCHINA My contempt can I control?
This riff raff would sell his soul.

CHORUS Has this man no pride?
Out for gold,
Out for gold,
He has sold out for gold.

CHORUS Pride and honor cast aside,
Common decency defied!
Boo the bum who barter off his bride!
Out for gold!
Boo the bum who barter off his bride.
He has sold out for gold.
Sheer greed, shocking to behold.
The bounder! Bounder!

End of Act II

ACT III

I warned you from the start. Remember? I hope you weren't taken in by that exquisite love duet. I have to admit, he sounded sincere. But this same apparently high-minded young man, *so* full of lofty sentiments, this master of the mellifluous phrase, this molder of melody, has finally shown his true colors. He has succumbed to bribery, selling off his bride to the son of Tobias Micha, and for the paltry sum of three hundred crowns to boot. You saw it happen.

Who can blame the now twice-bartered bride for disbelief, disillusion, despair, disgust, rage -- in that order.

Meanwhile, the rush of events has been too much for young Vasek, unaccustomed to a leading role in life's turbulent drama. First, finding himself engaged to a girl he has never even met, then discovering that his new fiancée plans to murder him as soon as they are married, then falling in love with the pretty girl who has tipped him off and who then vanished as

quickly and mysteriously as she came. All of this dwarfed by the overriding question: what to tell mother? Who would not collapse under the strain? But Vasek's day is far from over. The Pocket Circus has come to town, featuring a gypsy tight-rope walker , , ,

Oh, yes. During the course of this act you will finally meet Tobias Micha and his wife Hata, the parents who are so determined to see their son wed to Marenka. If you think you saw them earlier, put it down to the power of illusion . . .

Scene: The village.

VASEK

(alone)

W- would that it were over!
These problems of a l- lover!

O dear! O dear! O dear! You heard her,
You heard her talk about m- murder,
No sooner am I m- married
Th- than right away I'm b-b-buried.

One thing, and then an- n- nother!
Wh- what am I to tell mother?

No wonder that I st- stutter,
As weak as melted b- b- butter.

If only it would be over!
Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh!
Nothing but problems for a lover!

(The circus director and members of circus troupe enter, followed by villagers.)

DIRECTOR

(spoken)

Attention, ladies and gentlemen! Announcing a sensational performance brought here to your own town from triumphs in Paris, London, Moscow, Kansas City. Featuring the gorgeous, glamorous Esmeralda, star of the tight rope. *(Fanfare)* Appearing with her, today only, a real authentic North American Indian, captured on the island of Manhattan, 50,000 miles away, when rescued from the clutches of a grizzly bear. *(Fanfare)* We bring you also the bear *(Fanfare)* — miraculously tamed and trained to execute faultlessly the mndance that has taken Paris by storm — the celebrated can-can.

DIRECTOR

(sung)

Step up, ladies and gentlemen;
Take in the spectacle.
Come, be one of the lucky few.
Here is a sample
For free!
Just for you!

Dance of the Comedians

VASEK This I c-call exciting!
The pretty, pretty, pretty gypsy girl
I could, I could die watching.

ESMERALDA Sweetie, are you coming to the show?

VASEK Wouldn't miss it,
If you're going to do a dance on the tightrope.

INDIAN (*rushing in*) Oh, director! Urgent crisis!
Hope for the best and brace yourself!
Billy has hit the bottle again;
After topping his record,
He is sprawling on the barroom floor.

 So now we're stuck.
Who in heavens name can play the bear?

DIRECTOR Damn it! Damn it!
He's our star attraction.
What is a show without the bear?
Angry customers will run us out of town,
God only knows whether we make it alive.
We must come up with a substitute,
Some local talent.
What can we lose?

INDIAN Not so simple.
I've already started looking.
Totally unsuccessful!
No one seems to be the type.
One too small, the other too big, and so it goes.
After all, the fur has to fit.
Each and every minute counts;
Show time in half an hour.

DIRECTOR Do some thinking, Esmeralda.

VASEK Es- me- me- ralda is her name?
I like her more and more.
What I wouldn't wouldn't give to kiss her!
I'd be the envy and the talk of the town.

ESMERALDA You're a nice young man!
Just the sort I could go for.

VASEK You could fall in love in love with me?

INDIAN (*to Director*)
Hallelujah! Under our nose we find the bear!
Yes, the skin will fit him like his own.

DIRECTOR Right you are! Go spread the word,

The show goes on!
First, I may have to do some talking.

(to Vasek)

Ah! Young stranger!
What do you think of Esmeralda?
You're a very lucky man.
Join our little troupe, and Esmeralda's yours.
She'll show you how to dance —
The rest will be simple.

VASEK Teach me how, how to dance?
Oh, no! Oh, no! I can't, I can't!

ESMERALDA Then trust love to teach you
All you need to know.

VASEK Love could make it easy?

DIRECTOR Kindly take a moment to consider, friend:
For excitement and for glitter,
Choose the road to fame and stardom,
And pleasure round the clock.
Go traveling —
Wild applause and standing ovations!
Yes, we actors are accepted
In the highest social circles.
Malum molorem —
There I go again, talking Latin.
In the words of Socrates,
"All the world is a stage."
But we actors get to play both clown and king,
And the end we are told in advance.

ESMERALDA Come and join the troupe.
Give it a go!
And later on, love and kisses on the side.

DIRECTOR What are you afraid of?
Step into the water.
Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

ESMERALDA Must I beg you on hands and knees?
Be a darling!
For today. For me.
Remember, I'm yours.

VASEK But what will I be doing?

ESMERALDA Dancing!

VASEK Me a dancer? But - but how?

ESMERALDA That I will show you.
Closely, you and I together ...

VASEK But my – my – my - mother ...

ESMERALDA She will never know.

ESMERALDA and DIRECTOR

Come, the role is simple:
You will be the bear,
Powerful but nimble,
Pawing at the air.

Like a scary picture from a story book,
Make the public laugh or shudder with a look.

Burly yet entrancing,
Hear the thunder of applause
As your dancing
Draws a round of hurrahs and hurrahs,
Of hurrahs and hurrahs.
Come! Be the bear and save the show —
Is it yes or no?
Is it yes or no?

(They go off, beckoning for Vasek to follow.)

VASEK *(alone)*
Strange, if not miraculous!
Suddenly for me
All the young, pretty girls are going crazy!

(Enter Hata, Micha, Kezal)

HATA Heavens, we have hunted high and low!
Finally we find you.
Come, my son,
We've picked you a beautiful bride,
And you must get acquainted.

VASEK No, no, I don't want to.

HATA How can you think of refusing?
After the trouble and pains we have gone to!
Look at your father;
Once married, you will be glad and grateful.

KEZAL Ecstatic! None of these doubts and trepidations
When you have signed the agreement.

VASEK Who, who is the girl
You want me to wed?

MICHA Dear Marenka Kruschina,
What a lucky lad you are!

VASEK No, no! Out of the question!

HATA, KEZAL and MICHA

What! Sudden, like a thunderbolt!
Rupture, riot and revolt!
Can I believe what I am hearing?
Why? Why this nasty jolt?
You must have lost your mind.
What phantom are you fearing?

VASEK

She means to wait, to wait till we are wed,
Then have me bumped off.
She wants to see me dead.

HATA, KEZAL and MICHA

A goblin from a closet
Leaps out with a warning.
Speak up! Who was it?

VASEK

She's a girl I think I would like instead.

HATA, KEZAL and MICHA

Some nosy busy-body!

VASEK

Oh, no! She just kindly wanted me to know.

HATA, KEZAL and MICHA

What more did she have to say?

VASEK

What she said then I'll not forget:
She fell in love when our eyes met.

HATA

You know her name?

VASEK

Well, not yet.

(He runs off)

HATA, KEZAL and MICHA

For this I wasn't ready!
More than a little shady.
Who is this alleged lady?
His story takes the cup.
This elusive leading lady
Is someone he made up.

KEZAL

This stuff I do not buy;
He's feeding us a lie.

MARENKA

(bursting in, with Kruschina and Ludmila)
No, no, no, no, no!
It's wicked slander!
How can you stoop so low
To stain his honor so?
You'll never persuade me
That my beloved has betrayed me.

KRUSCHINA

Misled and mortified!

KEZAL Like countless men, he lied.

KRUSCHINA Each person has a price.

KEZAL Here's proof that we are right
Set down in black and white:
For a mere three hundred
He tosses away his bride.

MARENKA (*weeping*)
How I trusted and believed in him!
Oh, God! What have I done?
Was love a dream that lured me on?
I can still hear him sigh,
"My love, I'm yours alone!"

KRUSCHINA Go forward, say goodbye,
Forget that shifty lout,
And thank your lucky star
That you have found him out.

KEZAL Accept another man,
Someone better, by far.

LUDMILA My dear, be philosophic:
Men are the way they are.

MARENKA Though traded off for money,
I'll marry no one else.
In grief eternal I shall brood
In lonely solitude,
In lonely solitude.

MICHA, KRUSCHINA and KEZAL
The sorrow will subside,
Though now you suffer
From wounded pride.

(*Vasek enters*)

KEZAL Hey, Vasek! Come over here!
Enough of this foolishness!
We are close to success.

VASEK Why pester, pester me for nothing?
(*seeing Marenka*)
There she is, the girl I spoke of!

OTHERS (None would call him over bright.)

VASEK The one you tried to make, to make a joke of.

OTHERS (Yet for once could he be right?)

VASEK We ... this morning met ... and she
Said ... that she could go ... for me,
That she could go for me, for me!

OTHERS Fool, she is Marenka,
The bride we had in mind.
Delightful to find you
Already so inclined.

KEZAL No more procrastinating!
There's nothing gained by waiting
Go get the pen and ink.

MARENKA Wait a little longer.
Give me time to think.

OTHERS Think it over, Marenka, take a while.
In time, blighted hopes will fade away.
Later on, you'll even smile
At heartaches of today.

Comfort and happiness are here at hand.
Turn away from castles built on sand.

MARENKA Oh, where am I to turn?
Where, oh where?

(All exit except Marenka)

Rage and despair!
Alone at last
To dwell upon my grief.
Hard as I try to deny it,
My very eyes confirm it.
If only we could have a talk ...
Yet what would be the purpose?
Does love come down to a heartless game?
Disillusioned,
Oh, where to hide my shame?

My love was born of fire and air,
Warm sunlight after showers,
A joy almost too great to bear,
A pathway strewn with flowers.

The springtime buds that blossomed forth
Lie withered now and faded;
A blast of winter from the north
My sheltered heart invaded.

No! He's the person I revere!
No, no, no, no, no!
How could I believe him insincere?
A dream while I was sleeping!
And now awake, I'm misty-eyed
From weeping.

Still misty-eyed from weeping.

MARENKA Oh, lovely spring!
So bright, so fair!
Sweet memory that feeds despair!
In cold November, say goodbye
To green and tender leaves that die.
Oh, lovely spring
That was so fair!

(Jenik enters)

JENIK My dearest heart, my love, my own!
I've found a neat solution!
I grant my venture may have sewn
The seeds of some confusion.

MARENKA Stand back! Drop the romantic role.
I'm sick and tired of it!
My trusting heart you stole,
And now you sell it off for profit.
Speak! Did it happen? Is it true?
Say yes or no. One word will do.

JENIK Not so simple as you might suppose.

MARENKA You brought the deal to a close.
You knew what you were doing?

JENIK You said it! Eager! Willing! Knowing!

MARENKA And of remorse ... no tiny trace!
No hint, no indication!

JENIK Love, now that we are face to face,
A word of explanation!

MARENKA To mention love at such a time!
A joke! I plan to marry Vasek.

JENIK Ha ha ha ha! Now who is joking?
Ha ha ha ha! I am laughing — ha, ha, ha, ha!
But you know full well
That would be a major crime!

MARENKA Ha! Who are you to laugh at him?

JENIK Give me a chance to tell you.
And meanwhile, do not look so grim.

MARENKA When someone tries to sell you! ...

JENIK My love, allow me to reply
And kindly stand corrected.

How could I look you in the eye
If guilty as suspected?

MARENKA And why should I believe a lie
 Though polished and perfected?
 What double talk can justify
 The cash that you've collected?

(Kezal enters)

KEZAL Jenik! Aha! Itching to collect the money!
 Be patient, stick around.
 After our witnesses arrive
 You can put it in your pocket.

MARENKA Ha! Not even blushing!

KEZAL *(to Marenka)* You're in luck!
 Micha's son is yours as soon as we have signed.

JENIK I can speak for her!
 Him, no one else, she will marry,
 As I've clearly stipulated.
 Do we understand?

KEZAL Said like a pro!
 A born marriage broker!

MARENKA I speak for myself!
 No, no! Not for the world!
 Am I clear enough?
 I'd die before I would marry him.

JENIK *(to Kezal)*
 Want to wager she will change her mind?
 Twenty to one, she'll marry Micha's son.

MARENKA You oaf! Not yet satisfied with a mere three hundred?
 No! Money's all that matters.
 I see you as you are — Insufferable!

JENIK Be lenient, be patient!
 You'll later understand
 And welcome the role of bartered bride.
 When love and trust go hand in hand,
 The door will open wide.

 He loves you sincerely — marry Micha's son!
 Have mercy and surrender;
 No longer shun the heart of one
 So tough and yet so tender.

 Be lenient, be patient!
 You'll later understand
 And welcome the role of bartered bride.

MARENKA (He played on my feelings,
Oh, but how could I have been so blind?)

KEZAL (For modesty and wisdom, he's
At least a second Socrates,
Restoring faith in humankind.)
Come! Come! Come!

Both families are meeting here;
No time is left to ponder.

MARENKA No matter, I no longer care,
So why not knuckle under?

JENIK These parents of the happy pair
Will find that I'm no bounder.

KEZAL With love no longer in our way,
Get ready for the signing.

MARENKA Beset by panic and dismay,
I see no silver lining.

JENIK With witnesses in full array,
We're ready for the signing.

MARENKA Worn down, mystified,
I bow my head in dismay.

JENIK With time on our side,
We're well along on the way.

KEZAL Both families are here today
With faces bright and shining;
With love no longer in the way,
Get ready for the signing.

(he leaves)

JENIK *(to Marenka)*
Oh, say that Micha's son will do.

MARENKA Go! Take your money, too!

(Kruschina, Ludmila, Micha, Hata, Kezal and chorus of villagers enter)

CHORUS Sooner or later, do make up your mind.
Do, do make up your mind.
Better to bear it and be resigned,
And be resigned
After the document's safely signed.

MARENKA (One bride for sale! He's made a deal.
Love is no more the question.
My anger I shall conceal

By taking his suggestion.)
On with the plan!
Bring forth the man.

CHORUS It's on with the wedding!
The tearful bride has seen the light;
The wedding day is looming bright.

JENIK (*emerging*)
Come, celebrate the groom and bride!
Together may they walk forever
Side by side!

HATA and MICHA Our Jenik! Gone so many years!

JENIK Yes, father. After long delay,
Alive and well, your son reappears.
Cast out to wander and to roam,
Grown up a little, I come home.

KEZAL (By rumor and report misled,
I counted on his being dead.
Can he be Micha's elder son?
My plots and plans have come undone.)

JENIK What relief! What a thrill!
My parents know me still,
Back from the dead.
(*indicating Hata and Kezal*)
And how it fills an aching void
To see these two so overjoyed.

HATA He's much alive and that's a fact;
He's back with his old tricks intact.

JENIK Your hatred is all too plain.
You'd gladly send me off again.
Soon I shall go, but not alone.
For Micha's son the reward is sweet:
Marenka I can claim my own.

HATA There's no reward for low deceit!

JENIK Deceit? No, all's fair in love.
Yet I had best be wary.
(*to Marenka*) It's up to you --
My brother or myself?
Name the one you prefer.
Which of us will you marry?

MARENKA Ah! That has been long decided!
I'm yours alone, and you are mine!

KEZAL (A sneaky dog! A slimy snake!
This marriage seemed a shoo-in.

Unless she does a double-take,
I'll see my name in ruin,
My reputation run amuck;
I put it down to lousy luck.
The pair of them I'd like to do in.)

MICHA You blasted windbag!
On your hot air may you choke.

HATA This wonder-worker, full of smoke,
Has in fact become the local joke.

KEZAL (A sneaky dog! A slimy snake!
Unless she does a double-take
My pull and clout are both at stake,
What was a shoo-in
Now turned to ruin,
My reputation run amuck.
I put it down to lousy luck.)

JENIK and MARENKA
In such a hurry to have it signed,
The broker faces going broke.

LUDMILA and KRUSCHINA
Although not so inclined,
He's pulled a master stroke.

JENIK and MARENKA
The broker is about to find
His profits up in smoke.

QUARTET Though hardly what he had in mind,
The broker's pulled a master stroke.
Though far, I fear, from what he had in mind,
The broker's pulled a master stroke.

FIRST BOY (*running in*)
Run for your life! The bear is loose!

SECOND BOY The bear! The bear! He's headed this way!

VASEK (*entering in bearskin*)
D- don't be afraid.
I'm not a bear,
I'm only only Vasek.

HATA You booby! You will be my death!
This is the limit!
Go and take it off, stupid!
Running wild in a bearskin!

KRUSCHINA (*to Micha*)
Though no doubt a doting father,
You are not blinded:

Vasek needs more time to ripen.
Here's Jenik in the meantime ...
Come, come! Embrace him!
He is of your blood.
You are his father.

LUDMILA

I pray to God on your behalf
For a reconciliation.
Oh, why not kill the fatted calf
And call for celebration?
And call for celebration?

MICHA

No prod is needed, no further pressing:
I give you both my blessing.

TUTTI

Rights and wrongs at war no longer,
Love emerges all the stronger.
Wedding bells benignly pealing
Usher in a time of healing.
You that come from far and wide,
Share it with the bartered bride!

End of the Opera

