

# THE SPECIAL CASE

(A play in three short acts)

By Richard Balthazar

**TIME:** mid-nineteenth century

**PLACE:** St. Petersburg, Russia

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## CHARACTERS

*(in order of appearance)*

PORFIRY PETROVICH – police investigator, around 35, in a waistcoat

OFFICER – Nikolay's police escort, in police/official uniform

NIKOLAY – peasant house-painter in spotted work clothes

RODION ROMANOVICH RASKOLNIKOV – student in his early 20's, in tattered trousers, threadbare overcoat, etc.

DMITRY PROKOFICH RAZUMIKHIN – student friend of Rodion and cousin of Porfiry, respectably dressed, but frayed

STEPAN – workman in non-descript work clothes

**SETTING:** The office of Porfiry Petrovich, with a large desk by a couch, a small round table, and two chairs. Doorway to anteroom on stage right; window on stage left; and on the back wall a closed door.

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## ACT ONE:

### ONE AFTERNOON

*(PORFIRY paces. OFFICER stands behind NIKOLAY, whose arms are bound.)*

OFFICER *(thrusting NIKOLAY to his knees)*: Your Excellency! Here's that housepainter we arrested, sir.

PORFIRY: Housepainter?

OFFICER: Yes, sir, that Nikolay we picked up at his brother's apartment, sir.

PORFIRY *(glowering at NIKOLAY)*: So!.. So you're the one that murdered that old woman and her sister with the ax!

NIKOLAY *(cringing)*: I didn't... Your Honor, sir... I never...

OFFICER: They saw him running down the stairs from the murder scene with that other painter Mitka, your Excellency.

NIKOLAY: We was just horsing around, sir! After all day painting in that apartment...

PORFIRY: But you left for a while earlier, didn't you? Went upstairs to Aliona Ivanovna, the old pawnbroker—and you...

NIKOLAY (*sobbing*): No! No Christian could do such a thing! Chopping up those...

OFFICER (*interrupting*): Why weren't you painting when Mr. Koch passed the landing?

PORFIRY (*sighing*): Indeed. (*motioning them away*) Lock him up. I'll question him later.

*(Exit OFFICER and NIKOLAY. PORFIRY continues pacing for some moments in contemplation. Enter OFFICER, closing the door behind him.)*

OFFICER: Forgive me, Excellency. Mr. Razumikhin has just arrived with a friend.

PORFIRY: My dear Cousin! Excellent! Do show them in.

*(OFFICER opens door, and enter RODION in the midst of a laugh, followed by DMITRY with a ferocious expression. As OFFICER exits, RODION bows to PORFIRY, and they take each other's hand.)*

RODION (*attempting a serious expression*): I'm so very pleased... and honored... (*glances at DMITRY and chuckles again*)

DMITRY (*waving his hand in irritation*): Damn it! (*scowls and turns away*)

RODION: Excuse me, Excellency... I'm Raskolnikov.

PORFIRY (*still holding RODION's hand*): Not at all! It's a pleasure. And that was very nice, the way you came in... (*to DMITRY's back*) What's wrong with you, Dmitry Prokofich? Won't my sweet Cousin even say hello?

RODION (*cautiously pulling his hand from PORFIRY's grip*): He's mad at me. I said he reminds me of Romeo, and... Our Dmitry here is in love with my sister! (*to DMITRY's back*) Look how you've scrubbed yourself up today, Romeo! Even slicked down your hair with oil!

DMITRY (*without turning around*): Pig! (*When PORFIRY and RODION laugh heartily, he turns to them scowling.*) To hell with all of you! (*suddenly laughing*) Forget it, Porfiry! We're all fools! Down to business! Here's my friend, Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov—you wanted to meet. And he's got a little business too. Where you keep the tobacco nowadays, Cousin?

PORFIRY (*motioning to the desk*): Help yourself. (*to RODION*) Welcome, please have a seat.

*(While DMITRY rolls a cigarette, PORFIRY and RODION sit on the couch.)*

RODION: I've heard about the... that... the terrible murder of that old woman and her sister... with an ax... You see, I've been quite ill, rather invalid... Aliona Ivanovna took my pledge on some items. A silver watch, and a ring.

PORFIRY: Just make a formal statement to the investigator in charge that such and such items belong to you, and you'd like to redeem...

RODION: That's just the point. Right now I'm... I'm not exactly in funds, you see. I'll just sort of make a statement now that these things are mine, and when I get the money...

PORFIRY: It makes no difference. If you want though, you may write directly to me.

RODION: Excuse me for disturbing you with such trifles... Worth about five rubles in all, but they're especially dear to me. The silver watch was all my father left behind. And now my mother's come to visit me, and if she finds out the watch is lost...

PORFIRY: So your mother's come to see you, has she?

RODION: Yes, she and— (*pointedly to DMITRY*) —my sister arrived yesterday evening from Ryazan... Quite unexpected.

PORFIRY: Your things won't get lost in any case. I've been waiting for you for a long time.

DMITRY: What's this? You've been waiting? You knew he'd been pawning things there?

PORFIRY: Of course. (*to RODION*) The ring and watch were at her place wrapped up in paper where your name was clearly written in pencil—and the day and month she got them from you.

RODION: You're so observant. She must've had lots of customers. But you remember me.

PORFIRY: Of all of them, you're the only one who hadn't reported.

RODION: I wasn't entirely well.

PORFIRY: I heard, and you were upset about something. You're pale even now, aren't you?

RODION: Not pale at all... On the contrary, I'm quite well!

DMITRY: Listen to him! Till yesterday he was delirious, practically raving... Porfiry, he could barely stand up! But soon as we turned our backs, he sneaked out and fooled around somewhere till almost midnight! While utterly delirious—a most remarkable case!

RODION: Rubbish! Don't believe him. But you don't believe it anyway.

DMITRY: You were delirious, not in your right mind! Why else sneak out like that?

RODION (*to PORFIRY, calmly*): I got fed up with them and went out to find an apartment where they couldn't find me. I inquired around about flats to rent. But excuse me, Porfiry Petrovich, we've bothered you with our stupidity for too long. You must be fed up with us.

PORFIRY: Why, bless you, sir! Quite the contrary. If you only knew how much you interest me! I'm curious to look and listen... And I must admit, I'm glad you finally decided to report.

DMITRY: Come on now, Cousin! Some tea? My throat's bone-dry.

PORFIRY: An excellent idea. Give me just a moment.

(*Exit PORFIRY.*)

RODION: Dmitry! You knew I didn't want to come here. We were just going to report the pawns and go. And here you beg for tea!

DMITRY: Calm down, Rodya. Porfiry serves better tea than you'll be sipping for a good while.

RODION: But I'm feeling quite... so very ill.

DMITRY: Then some hot tea will be fine medicine.

RODION: Fine future brother-in-law you are, sponging tea and tobacco off rich relatives!

(*RODION laughs at DMITRY's fierce expression as PORFIRY enters with tea tray.*)

PORFIRY (*laughing also*): You know, Cousin, I've got a hangover from the party last night.

DMITRY: Was it fun? I left just when it was getting interesting. Who won?

PORFIRY (*pouring tea*): Those eternal questions... and we sailed off into the clouds.

DMITRY: Just imagine, Rodya! Arguing if there's such a thing as crime or not. Everybody talking their heads off!

RODION: What's so unusual about that? It's an ordinary social question.

DMITRY: From the socialist point of view, crime is a protest against the abnormality of the social order—no other causes admitted! It's always "the influence of the environment"—If society were constructed normally, all crimes would disappear because there'd be nothing to protest against, and we'd all become righteous in a flash!

PORFIRY (*laughing, to RODION*): He's off again beating the big drum! (*to DMITRY*) No, my friend, environment accounts for a lot in crime, I assure you.

DMITRY: Such nonsense! (*to RODION*) Rodya, he could prove to you right now that the only reason your eyes are blue is because the Church of Ivan the Great is a hundred meters tall! And prove it clearly—in a progressive manner—with liberal overtones! (*laughs*)

RODION (*to PORFIRY*): Are you really such a joker?

PORFIRY: Did you think I wasn't? Wait. I'll fool you too—ha-ha-ha! Speaking of crimes, environment—I'm reminded of your little article "On Crime" or something like that. I had the pleasure of reading it a couple months ago in the Weekly Review.

RODION: My article? About six months ago I really did send them an article on a book I read, about the time I left the university.

PORFIRY: You didn't know about it? My goodness, they must owe you money.

DMITRY: Bravo, Rodya! I didn't know either.

RODION: How'd you know it was mine? They're only signed with initials.

PORFIRY: Through the editor. I was extremely interested. As I recall, you discussed the psychological state of a criminal through the whole course of a crime. And you maintain that the criminal act is always accompanied by illness. Very original, but personally that wasn't what really interested me. It was an idea slipped in at the end, only hinted at, unclearly... the notion that there may be certain kinds of people who can... I mean who are endowed with the right to commit all sorts of crimes and excesses, and the law, as it were, is not written for them.

DMITRY: How's that? What do you mean, the right to commit crime? Not because of the influence of the environment, I hope.

PORFIRY: Not at all. In this gentleman's article, people are either ordinary or extraordinary. The ordinary have no right to transgress the law—because they're ordinary. However, the extraordinary have the right to commit crimes simply because they're extraordinary.

DMITRY: What do you mean? It can't possibly say that!

RODION: That's not quite the way I put it—but the gist. Only I don't insist that extraordinary people are obliged to commit excesses—just that the extraordinary man has the inner right to permit his conscience to transgress... certain obstacles—but only if his idea—maybe involving the salvation of mankind—requires it. All the lawgivers and architects of society, all your Mohammeds and Napoleons—all criminals to a man—if only for violating the old law in giving a new one. Nor did they stop short of bloodshed. There's nothing especially new here. It's been in print a thousand times. The ordinary people preserve the world and cause it to multiply. The extraordinary move it, lead it to their goals. They have the same right to exist.

PORFIRY: Tell me, though. How do you tell the extraordinary from the ordinary? Are they marked from birth? We need a more external definition. Forgive me for the natural anxiety, but

could there be a special kind of clothing, for example, or stamp them with something or other? Because, you'll agree, if there were a mix-up, and someone from the one part imagined he belonged to the other, and if he started "eliminating all obstacles," as you put it, then there's a—

RODION: —Oh, it happens quite frequently. But a mistake is possible only for the ordinary people. Quite a few of them can whimsically imagine themselves as advanced people, and quite sincerely, mind you. But I don't see significant danger here. They never go far.

PORFIRY: Well, you've calmed me on that score. But say, are there lots of these extraordinary ones who have the right to cut down others? You understand, of course, I'm quite ready to bow down to them, but it would be a bit, ah, sticky, wouldn't it, if there were an awful lot of them?

RODION: Don't worry about that either. People with a new idea, capable of something new, are born rarely. And the great geniuses—the summits of mankind—perhaps one appears out of many thousands, of millions. There's surely a natural law, undiscovered as yet, of course...

DMITRY: Are you both joking? Are you serious, Rodya? Of course, as you say, it isn't new. But permitting bloodshed according to conscience—that's even more appalling than legal permission! You couldn't possibly believe that! I'll read it.

RODION: That isn't in the article. Only some implications.

PORFIRY: Yes, yes. I almost see what your attitude to crime is. But, excuse me for being a nuisance, but I still worry about practical aspects. What if some young fellow starts imagining he's a Napoleon—of the future, of course—and decides to remove all obstacles, you know...

RODION: There could be such cases. The vain and the stupid especially will go for that bait, and young people in particular. (*gets up from the couch, holding his cap*)

PORFIRY (*also rising*): Well, sir, one more tiny idea—in itself whimsical, a psychological idea. When you wrote that article... It couldn't be though, he-he! Maybe you thought yourself—just a little bit, you know—one of those extraordinary men? In your sense, I mean. Well?

RODION: It might be.

PORFIRY: And maybe decided to... hurry mankind progressively along—to transgress an obstacle? Let's say, perhaps, to murder or to rob?

RODION: If I had transgressed, I certainly wouldn't tell you about it.

PORFIRY: No, no, I mean merely from the literary point of view, sir.

RODION: I don't consider myself a Napoleon... or anyone like that.

PORFIRY: Oh, nonsense! Who in old Russia nowadays doesn't consider himself something of a latter-day Napoleon?

DMITRY: It was probably some demented Napoleon that chopped up old Aliona Ivanovna.

*(RODION turns to leave.)*

PORFIRY *(holding out his hand)*: Going already? I'm so glad to meet you. And don't worry about that report. Just write it the way I told you. Or best of all bring it to me yourself... even tomorrow. We'll fix it up. We'll talk. You were one of the last people there.

RODION *(shaking his hand briefly)*: Do you want to question me officially?

PORFIRY: Why, whatever for? I've seen all the old woman's other customers, but you as the last one... Oh, when you were on the stairs that time... allow me... was it about eight o'clock?

RODION: About eight.

PORFIRY: Going up or down, did you see an apartment open on the second floor? Remember? And two housepainters, or maybe just one? Did you notice? It's very important for them.

RODION: Painters? No, I didn't see them. Nor an apartment open... On the fourth floor, though, I remember someone was moving out of an apartment—carrying a couch out, they pressed me to the wall. Painters, though, I don't recall any.

DMITRY *(to PORFIRY)*: What are you up to anyway? They were painting on the day of the murder, and he was there three days before!

PORFIRY *(clapping himself on the forehead)*: Oh, pfoo! Got mixed up! Damned if I know which side is up in this case! We need so badly to find anyone who saw them in that apartment around eight o'clock. I imagined you... Completely mixed up!

DMITRY *(on his way to the door)*: You should be more careful, dear Cousin.

*(PORFIRY sees RODION and DMITRY out the door.)*

**\*END OF ACT\***

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**ACT TWO**  
**THE NEXT DAY**

*(PORFIRY paces around the couch where the workman STEPAN sits.)*

PORFIRY: So, Stepan, my good man. You say you saw the young gentleman—the one who asked about the blood in that apartment?

STEPAN: Yes, Your Honor, I was at the gate—our workshop's there, furriers, you know, artisans. He sure seemed crazy or sick.

PORFIRY: What makes you say that?

STEPAN: Well... The way he kept ringing and ringing the bell till the janitor came out—that's Borisych, who said this guy looked all over the apartment for the blood.

PORFIRY: Anything else strange about him, Stepan?

STEPAN: Maybe the way when they're coming back downstairs, him carrying on about getting the police if Borisych suspects him of the murder.

PORFIRY: Did you ever see this gentleman before?

STEPAN: No, your Honor. But I've seen him since... just last night. I was pretty drunk, you see, and wandering around the streets, I saw this same guy. Just to tease him—I swear it, your Excellency!—I called him 'murderer.'

PORFIRY: Just teasing, of course. And what did the gentleman say to that?

STEPAN: He walked at least a hundred paces beside, just staring, wild-eyed, not saying a—

*(KNOCK at door; PORFIRY hurries STEPAN out through rear door.)*

PORFIRY: No matter what you hear, don't stir! *(closes and locks door)*

*(Enter RODION. PORFIRY offers both hands in greeting.)*

PORFIRY *(cont'd.)*: So, my worthy friend, here you are! Do sit down, please, on the couch.

RODION *(sitting and holding out a paper)*: I brought you this statement—about the watch. Is it correct, or should I copy it over?

PORFIRY *(taking it)*: Statement? Ah, so... Don't worry, it's exactly right. Don't need another thing. Has your health improved, my boy?



RODION: I think. You said yesterday you'd like to ask me—as a matter of form—about my acquaintance with the old pawnbroker?

PORFIRY: Yes, yes. Relax! There's no hurry, no hurry at all. (*starts pacing the room*) We'll manage. You know, my apartment is through there. (*indicates rear door*) I get it free from the government. An official apartment's not a bad deal, ah?

RODION: Not a bad deal. You know what? I believe there's a kind of juridical rule of thumb—start off obliquely, trifles or even serious matters, just so long as they're absolutely irrelevant, to encourage or you might say divert the one you're interrogating. Put him off his guard. Then all of a sudden you take him completely by surprise, the most crucial and dangerous question, bang on the head! Isn't that right?

PORFIRY: Well, well. So I was telling you about my apartment for... that? (*laughs heartily*)

RODION (*standing up*): Porfiry Petrovich, yesterday you said you had some questions. If you have something to ask me, ask. If not, please let me leave. I'm fed up with all of this, you hear! It's partly this that made me sick. (*raising his voice*) Please interrogate me or let me go at once!

PORFIRY: Heavens! What are you talking about? What do I have to interrogate you about? Now, don't worry about it, please. There's no rush, no rush. I consider you my guest. Do sit down, please do. Or I might think you're angry. (*resumes pacing*) Rodion Romanovich, I'll tell you something about myself. I'm a bachelor, you know, unsociable and unknown. Here, I mean here in Russia, especially in Petersburg circles, when two intelligent men with a certain respect for each other—let's say you and me, for example—I mean thinking people—we're embarrassed and tongue-tied. Come on now, put your cap down. It makes me feel awkward.

(*RODION puts his cap down and sits down again.*)

PORFIRY (*cont'd.*): Take five minutes with a friend and relax. Well, don't be offended, my friend, if I walk up and down. I sit all the time, and I need to walk... Hemorrhoids, you know. I should do gymnastics for the cure. And as far as my duties here are concerned, sometimes these things are more confusing to the interrogator than to the man he's interrogating.

RODION: That's hard to believe, sir. I bet you know what you're doing at every moment.

PORFIRY: A man gets all mixed up—yes, yes! Always pounding on the same thing, like a drum. He-he-he! As for our juridical rules of thumb, as you so wittily put it, I agree with you completely. Well, now, anyone who's under arrest—even the dumbest peasant—knows they'll start out lulling him with irrelevant questions and then suddenly, smacko! Right on the head—He-he-he! As you put it...

RODION: Why are you mocking me?

PORFIRY: You were absolutely right when you mocked our police formalities with such wit, he-he! All these profound psychological devices of ours are quite absurd. You study law, don't you Rodion Romanovich?

RODION: Yes, I did—for two years at the university.

PORFIRY: Well, then, here's a little item for your future interest. Now, let's say I consider some man or another guilty. Why, I ask you, should I bother him too soon—even if I have evidence against him, eh? I'm bound, for example, to arrest someone as quickly as possible—like that peasant housepainter Nikolay—you've heard, I'm sure.

RODION: I have indeed.

PORFIRY: Yes, but then another man may have quite a different character. Why shouldn't I let him run around town a bit? He-he!

RODION: What are you driving at?

PORFIRY: Well, alright, let's say there's evidence. But evidence can cut both ways. I like a case that's mathematically clear, with evidence on the order of twice two's four—direct and unmistakable proof! This ax-murder case is certainly special.

RODION: In what way, may I ask?

PORFIRY: Actually, my dear Rodion Romanovich, the typical case, the one for which the legal rules and regulations were designed, doesn't exist—because every case, every crime, turns immediately into a special case—unlike anything that ever happened before.

RODION (*laughing*): That's ridiculous!

PORFIRY: Now suppose I leave this gentleman completely alone... but every minute of every hour I let him know, or at least let him suspect, that I know everything, right down to the dirt under his fingernails. Day in and night out, I follow him, keep constant watch on him, and since he's always in a state of doubt and terror, his head will start swimming, and he'll come of his own will. Yes, and he'll do something that will be like twice two.

RODION: You're playing games with me! Trying to frighten me!

PORFIRY (*ignoring RODION's objection, pacing*): Why should I worry if he gads about a bit? I've got him where I want him, and he isn't going to get away. Anyway, where would he go? He-he! Abroad? Your Polish gentleman now would get away abroad, but not him—especially since I keep track of him and have taken measures. Into the hinterlands? Well now, you know, it's inhabited by peasants—regular, crude Russian peasants. Our cultivated man, he'd sooner take jail than live with a bunch of foreigners like our peasants, he-he!

RODION: You're not really very funny, you know.

PORFIRY (*again ignoring the comment*): He has no place to get away to. He-he! Freedom will lose its charm. He'll start brooding and weaving a net around himself—worry himself to death!

RODION: You're weaving the net, Porfiry Petrovich, giant webs like some grotesque spider!

PORFIRY: If I give him enough rope, he'll do me a nice mathematical job, all by himself, like twice two... And that will be very nice.

RODION: You certainly are sure of your powers, Inspector.

PORFIRY: Here I am letting you in on all this gratis, he-he! But human nature helps this old Inspector out. Let's say he tells a lie, this man I'm talking about, that special case, who strides over all obstacles—and he lies extremely well. But he'll pretend to turn pale, as if he were play-acting. Yet somehow he pales too naturally, too much like the truth—It make you think. Ah, human nature is a mirror, yes, the most limpid mirror, sir. Behold and admire—There you are! Why, Rodion Romanovich, you've gone so pale! Is it stuffy in here? Shall I open the window?

RODION: Don't bother. (*laughs, abruptly stops, and gets up*) Porfiry Petrovich! I see that you really do suspect me of murdering that old woman and her sister! If you can arrest me—arrest me! But I won't allow you to laugh in my face and torment me! I won't allow it!

PORFIRY (*gasping in alarm*): Oh, good heavens! Now what's the matter? Rodion, my friend, my good fellow! What's the matter with you?

RODION (*shouting*): I won't allow it!

PORFIRY (*whispering*): Hush, my dear fellow! They'll hear, you know, and come in. Just think, what will we tell them?

RODION (*mechanically, whispering*): I won't allow it! I won't allow it!

PORFIRY: You could use a drink of water, my friend—you're quite hysterical. (*pours a glass of water for him*) You'll drive yourself crazy that way. Come, drink just a drop.

(*RODION lifts the glass, but suddenly puts it down on the table.*)

PORFIRY (*cont'd.*): Slight touch of hysteria—you should take better care of yourself. Dmitry Prokofich came back to see me yesterday after you left. We ate dinner and talked about your, shall we say, feverish behavior. My goodness, maybe you sent him? Do sit down—make yourself comfortable, for Christ's sake!

RODION: No, I didn't send him! But I knew he'd gone to you.

PORFIRY: Well, I know some of your other little deeds too, Rodion Romanovich. I know everything—how you tried renting an apartment. Around nightfall, you started ringing the bell

at that house, asking the janitors about the blood and getting them all mixed up. You'll drive yourself crazy that way, boiling with indignation at the wrongs you've suffered—raging up hill and down dale, trying to get everyone to commit himself as soon as possible. So you can have done with it once and for all. Because you're fed up with these stupid suspicions—isn't that right? For Christ's sake, do sit down! You look awful. Do make yourself comfortable.

*(RODION sits back down.)*

PORFIRY (*cont'd., hovering over RODION*): What are you up to, my boy? If you keep abusing your nerves, you'll wind up delirious. Going around ringing doorbells at night and asking about blood! Sickness, Rodion Romanovich, sickness. You're doing all this in a delirium!

RODION: I wasn't delirious! I was fully conscious! Do you hear?

PORFIRY: Yes, I hear—and I understand. Yesterday you also said you weren't delirious. Listen here, Rodion Romanovich, my friend. If you were really guilty, you see, if you were somehow mixed up in this damned ax-murder—excuse me—would you go around insisting you weren't delirious and did all this consciously? Would you insist on it so stubbornly? Likely quite the opposite, I'd think. Because if you were involved, it stands to reason that you'd insist you were delirious. Wouldn't you? Not so?

RODION: And if I'm not involved...

PORFIRY: Oh, and about Dmitry Prokofich—I mean you really should say came on his own and try to hide sending him! Yet you insist that it was at your instigation.

RODION: I didn't say... You keep lying! You want to frighten me—either that or you're laughing at me! Besides, the criminal's best gambit is not hide what doesn't have to be hidden.

PORFIRY: What a difficult fellow you are to pin down! I think you do believe me though. Just believe me a bit, and I'll persuade you all the way. I really like you and sincerely wish you well. Yes, I do. You better keep an eye on that disease of yours. What's more, your family's here, and you should think about them, comfort them—yet you do nothing but scare them.

RODION: What business is that of yours? How do you know all this? Are you watching me and want me to know that?

PORFIRY: Why, you just told me all about it yourself! You're so excited you don't even notice how you let everything out of the bag, not just to me—to others too. This suspiciousness makes you lose the common sense view of things.

RODION: I have no idea what you're talking about.

PORFIRY: Now the doorbells, for example. I handed you this fact gratis—me, the investigator! And you don't see anything in that? Now, if I suspected you—even a little—would I have done that? On the contrary, I'd not have let on that I already knew this fact.

RODION: A perfectly meaningless fact.

PORFIRY: Still, I'd draw you off in the opposite direction, then suddenly I'd smash you with it, asking what you were doing in the murdered woman's apartment, and why those questions about the blood. So I must not harbor any suspicions, or I'd have acted differently.

RODION: You keep lying! What are you driving at? Why do you lie?

PORFIRY: Lying? Me? But how did I treat you? Prompting you myself, giving you every means for your defense. Sickness, I said, delirium. You were insulted. He-he-he!

RODION (*rising and pushing past PORFIRY*): Am I under suspicion or not? Say it, Porfiry Petrovich, definitely and conclusively, right now!

PORFIRY: What do you want to know for? Why, you're like a child asking to play with fire. And why are you so upset? Ah?

RODION: I tell you once more—I can't put up with any more—

PORFIRY: —What? Uncertainty?

RODION (*shouting and pounding the table*): Don't provoke me! I won't have it! I cannot and I will not have it! You hear!

PORFIRY (*whispering*): Why, hush, hush! They'll hear you! I warn you seriously—Watch yourself! I'm not joking, sir!

RODION (*suddenly whispering*): I won't allow myself to be tortured! Arrest me, search me, but kindly proceed according to the regulations—and don't play with me! (*starts for the door*) Well, will you arrest me?

PORFIRY (*taking his arm*): But what about my little surprise? Want to take a look?

RODION: What surprise? What?

PORFIRY (*offering a key and indicating the back door*): It's locked, sir—here's the key.

RODION: You're lying, you damned clown! I understand everything! You're taunting me so I'll give myself away! (*lunges at PORFIRY*)

PORFIRY (*backing away*): Why, you can't give yourself away any more than you already have, Rodion Romanovich, my friend. Why, you're in a state! Don't shout, or I'll call my men, sir!

RODION: Call your men! You knew I was sick and worked me into a fury so I'd give myself away! Then suddenly clobber me with your priests and deputies... What are you waiting for?

PORFIRY: What priests? You're dreaming! According to the regulations, as you say— (*breaks off at sounds of COMMOTION outside the door*)

RODION: Ah! They're coming! You were waiting for them! Let's have it out! I'm ready!

PORFIRY (*looking out the door*): What's going on? I warned you...

OFFICER (*from offstage*): It's the prisoner Nikolay, your Excellency.

PORFIRY (*shouting*): Get him out of here! Wait! How did he get in!

(*More COMMOTION, and enter NIKOLAY with OFFICER trying to restrain him.*)

PORFIRY (*cont'd.*): Get out! Not yet! Wait till you're called.

NIKOLAY (*falling to his knees*): I'm guilty! I sinned! I'm the murderer!

PORFIRY: What? You... What are you...? Whom did you murder?

NIKOLAY: The old woman and her sister—I killed them with an ax. Darkness came over me.

PORFIRY (*looking at RODION, then back at NIKOLAY*): I didn't ask about any darkness. Did you really kill them?

NIKOLAY: I'm a murderer! I'll make a statement, your Honor.

PORFIRY: Hah! In such a hurry! Did you kill them by yourself?

NIKOLAY: By myself. Mitka don't have nothing to do with it.

PORFIRY: But the janitors ran into both of you, didn't they?

NIKOLAY: I just did that for a cover, sir.

PORFIRY (*muttering to himself*): Someone else's word... (*to RODION*) Rodion Romanovich, dear friend! Well, you see what surprises... If you don't mind...

RODION: Looks like you weren't expecting this.

PORFIRY: Yes—and you didn't either. Your hand's trembling, he-he!

RODION: You're trembling too, Porfiry Petrovich.

PORFIRY: You're an ironical person. Well, then—till soon.

RODION: If you ask me, it's goodbye.

PORFIRY: As the Lord disposes, Rodion Romanovich. Just one word—according to the regulations, I have a few questions—and so we'll be seeing each other after all, sir.

RODION: Please excuse me, Porfiry Petrovich. I lost my temper.

PORFIRY: No matter. Well, we'll be seeing each other, God willing. Look after your health now. Yes, your health...

RODION: I'd wish you success, but yours is such a comical profession. Here you've been grilling this wretched Nikolay, and now he's confessed, you'll pick him apart again, say he's lying and not using his own words!

PORFIRY: He-he-he! You noticed that I said... Clever, clever, yes. You notice everything! Yes, a really playful mind. A very good day to you.

RODION (*exiting*): A very good day...

**\*END OF ACT\***

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**ACT THREE**  
**A COUPLE DAYS LATER**

(*PORFIRY sits at his desk as OFFICER ushers RODION into the room.*)

PORFIRY: Why, Rodion Romanovich, my dear fellow. So good of you to visit.

RODION: What visit, Porfiry Petrovich? You had Dmitry 'invite' me here at three o'clock. (*laughs*) What are you up to now, Inspector?

PORFIRY: Ah, you are punctual. He-he! But it was only my suggestion of convenience for a small matter. (*motioning to the couch*) Do relax for a moment.

RODION (*sitting down*): Well, what is it? I've other business...

PORFIRY: I owe you an explanation, Rodion Romanovich. A strange scene passed between us last time we met. It ended up indecently—not like gentlemen. I may be very much to blame.

RODION: What do you take me for? (*stands up*) This isn't why you called me here! Don't play the fool with me!

PORFIRY: My dear Rodya—may I be so familiar? I actually did have something else—but first wanted as a gentleman to correct a wrong.

RODION: What else?

PORFIRY (*handing him a small package*): Simply this. Your pledges with Aliona Ivanovna—so as not to distress your mother. How is she and your lovely sister?

RODION (*sitting again to look into the package*): I'm sure Dmitry has kept you well-informed.

PORFIRY: At any rate, it's better to deal openly with each other now, without such scenes and suspicions. Nikolay settled matters for us then. I was a bit stunned. Perhaps by nature you're quite irritable, Rodion Romanovich—too much so, given your other qualities, and I like to think I understand them to some degree.

RODION: Why are you talking this way?

PORFIRY: I made you suffer, my dear Rodion. I'm not a monster. I understand a man who's depressed, but proud, imperious, and impatient. I believe you're a decent person, though I don't agree with all your views. I don't wish to deceive. Since we met, I've felt drawn to you, but from first glance you didn't take to me, and why should you?

RODION: So now you think I'm innocent. Is that what you're saying?

PORFIRY: I want to go over everything with you, that whole dark episode. First the rumors, then a complete coincidence, and then your little scene at the apartment. It all added up to the same thing, Rodion, my boy. A hundred rabbits don't make a horse, as the English say, and yet I remembered that little essay of yours. As I read it, I thought, "That man's heading for trouble." It's dangerous, this proud, suppressed enthusiasm in a young man.

RODION: Thanks for the psychological advice.

PORFIRY (*standing up and pacing around the couch*): And Nikolay's got his own psychology. How about Nikolay? That was a thunderbolt, wasn't it? A bolt from the blue! I didn't believe in that thunderbolt, not in the slightest!

RODION: Dmitry said you're in the process of accusing Nikolay, and you've convinced him...

PORFIRY: That Dmitry Prokofich! He had to be decoyed off. And Nikolay, he's still a child. He belongs to one of those religious sects—spent two years under some holy elder in a village and read the old 'true' books. Now he's remembered that talk about taking suffering upon oneself for salvation. He'll retract his testimony. No, Rodion Romanovich, it wasn't Nikolay.

RODION: So then... who... killed...?

PORFIRY: What do you mean, who killed? Why, Rodion Romanovich, you killed! You committed the murders, yes.

(*RODION starts to get up, but sits down again.*)



PORFIRY (*cont'd.*): You didn't understand me correctly, and that's why you're so amazed. I really did want to bring the case out into the open.

RODION (*whispering*): I didn't do it.

PORFIRY (*also whispering*): No, it was you, Rodion, you and nobody else.

*(They fall silent, RODION holding his head, and PORFIRY quietly waiting.)*

RODION: Your same old tricks, Porfiry Petrovich. How come you don't get sick of them?

PORFIRY: Oh, stop that. What are tricks to me now? It might be different if there were witnesses here, but we're alone, whispering to each other. I don't want to hunt you down and catch you like a rabbit. I'm convinced, no matter what you say.

RODION: If you think I'm guilty, why don't you haul me off to jail?

PORFIRY: Come now, what if I am convinced? Why should I arrest you? So you can have a respite? I'm going to arrest you anyway, and I had you come here (quite against the rules) to let you know in advance. But in the second place, I had you come because—

RODION: —In the second place?

PORFIRY: Because I owe you an explanation. I'm sincerely well disposed to you, whether you believe it or not. In the third place, I want to make a frank and open proposal: confess and give yourself up. Well, have I spoken frankly with you or haven't I?

RODION: Listen, Porfiry Petrovich, what if you yourself are making a mistake?

PORFIRY: No, I'm not making a mistake. I have one little clue.

RODION: What little clue?

PORFIRY: I'm not going to tell you, Rodion. Anyway, I'm going to arrest you. So you figure it out. It must be for your sake alone. I swear to God, it would be better.

RODION: Suppose I were guilty—why give myself up and confess when you say I'd just be going to jail for a respite?

PORFIRY: Ah, you fasten on words too literally. Consider the reduction in your sentence. Figure it out yourself. I swear to you I'll arrange things so your crime will appear as a kind of lapse, because a lapse is what it was.

RODION: I don't want your reduction in sentence!

PORFIRY: That's just what I was afraid of. Ah, don't despise life! You have a lot of it still ahead of you. You're an impatient man!

RODION: What did you say? A lot ahead of me?

PORFIRY: Life! And it's not forever—the chains. Is it the bourgeois disgrace that scares you? You're young after all. Don't be ashamed to give yourself up and confess.

RODION: Oh, to hell with it!

PORFIRY: You've lost confidence. You invented a theory, and now you're ashamed because it went wrong. Because it wasn't so original after all. At least you didn't deceive yourself for long, but went straight to the end of the road. Rodion Romanych, suffering is also a good thing. Go and suffer. Give yourself up to life directly. Don't puzzle over it. It will carry you straight to shore and set you on your feet. After all, it's lucky you only killed an old woman. Some other theory, and you might have done something a hundred million times more awful!

RODION: And who are you? With such tranquility you utter prophecies!

PORFIRY: Who am I? A man with a heart like yours. I bet you think I'm trying to put one over on you right now. Well, maybe I really am.

RODION: When will you arrest me?

PORFIRY: I can let you wander around for a day or two yet. Think it over, my friend, and pray to God. You'd be better off.

*(RODION gets up and takes his cap.)*

PORFIRY *(cont'd., pacing around near RODION)*: Going for a walk? A fine evening...

RODION: Porfiry Petrovich, you mustn't think that I confessed to you today. I listened to you only because I was curious.

PORFIRY: Why, you're trembling. Don't worry, my boy. Have it your way. Go for a little walk. *(lowering his voice)* But one small request. If—I mean I don't believe you would, mind you—in case it should occur to you, instead of confessing, to end things in some fantastic way—lay hands on yourself—an absurd proposition—well, what I mean is—please leave a brief but circumstantial note. A couple lines, that's all.

RODION: A couple lines! Why, you—

*(A KNOCK at the door, and enter OFFICER with DMITRY.)*

OFFICER: Mr. Razumikhin to see you, Excellency. *(exits)*

PORFIRY: Welcome, Cousin. Thank you for being so punctual.

DMITRY: Greetings, Porfiry Petrovich.

RODION (*to PORFIRY*): What are you up to now?

PORFIRY: I took the liberty of asking our friend Dmitry to drop in—just in case. I mean, with your poor health. (*to DMITRY*) I thought you might help Rodion Romanych home.

RODION (*to PORFIRY*): You had this planned too?

PORFIRY (*to DMITRY*): Rodya stopped by to pick up his pledges, and our little meeting has taken its toll on his nerves. Could you be so kind?

DMITRY: Why, of course, Cousin. (*to RODION*) Come, Rodya, let's leave this dragon alone in his lair. My, but you do look ill.

RODION (*emphatically*): I'm perfectly fine!

DMITRY (*to PORFIRY*): Well, anyway, now you can finish affairs with Nikolay, no? I'm glad you've dispensed with all those absurd suspicions—at last.

PORFIRY: Yes, at last. No more suspicions at all. Eh, Rodya? Well, good sirs, goodbye. And Rodion Romanych, I wish you pleasant thoughts and good beginnings.

DMITRY (*exiting*): Come, Rodya. Enough of this murderous nonsense.

RODION (*exiting*): Quite enough.

**\*THE END\***

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