

BY SERGEY RATZ

The tycoon awakening
(A Christmas tale)

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CAST:

Tormentawer – a warlock tycoon, 30 years old, aka a Toy seller.

Cravenarch von Munch – a successful businessman, 50 years old, head of a household.

Lissie – a pure-hearted girl.

Ciao – a talking fluffy toy.

Morning Star – a sylvan enchantress.

Phil – a boy who sold his soul, the son of Cravenarch von Munch.

Beck – Lissie's pet, a talking dog.

Chinna – Lissie's pet, a talking cat.

SHAPESHIFTERS:

Dread Wolf;

Wolf cub;

Informer Owl.

Forest animals: a hare, a fox, a moose, a bear.

Children: friends of Phil.

Masked guests at the party held by Cravenarch von Munch.

Soldiers (two).

ACT 1.

Scene 1.

The action takes place in a small village where exclusive villas stand next door to the locals' little houses. It's the Christmas Eve.

Phil is playing with his friends at the edge of the village; they have a snowball fight. Phil flirts with his girlfriend Lissie quite openly.

LISSIE: Wow, that's great, Phil! Isn't it so?

PHIL: Of course it is! The Christmas will be here in a couple of hours, and we'll be celebrating it together!

They start dancing a reel.

LISSIE: I have a gift for you. But let it be secret for a while, ok?

PHIL: Sure, Lissie, I'll wait; and I have a gift for you too. And for now I can pull your sledge for a while, if you want me to.

LISSIE: Oh yes, I do!

A voice behind the stage:

Christmas toys! Toys! All for naught! Come and get them!

Children stop and pay attention. A tall old man appears on the stage. His eyes are hidden behind round dark blue glasses. He wears an incredibly long robe of Asian design, a Santa Claus hat with long hair hanging out from underneath it, and a patched sack over his shoulder. The man puts the sack at his feet and opens it, still yelling:

TOY SELLER: Toys! Handmade Christmas toys! All for naught, for less than a penny! *(Aside, ominously)* For your pitiful souls! *(Obviously pretending)* Ah, children, I like you all so much that I could cry!

The children, among them Lissie and Phil, gather round the Toy seller. He gives stuff out to children, including Lissie, for symbolic payment – bright wrappers, candy. Phil gets his toy and wants to run off, but the Toy seller takes him by the hand.

TOY SELLER: Wait a bit, lad. I have a very special toy for you:

Toy seller leans to mutter something in Phil's ear.

PHIL: Wow! I couldn't even dream of that! And those soldiers, are they really lifelike?

TOY SELLER: Lifelike, indeed.

PHIL: And a general's uniform.

TOY SELLER: Oh yes, a general's.

Lissie's pulling Phil away. She does not like the Toy seller apparently.

LISSIE: Phil, let's go to the sledge ride!

PHIL: Wait, Lissie, don't you see what he's going to give me! Lifelike toy soldiers, just you imagine! And the uniform of a real general!

LISSIE: Don't trust him! I don't like this man, there's something wicked about him.

TOY SELLER. Listen, girl, you've got your candy. Now, don't bother us any longer and go home.

The Toy seller pushes the girl away rather rudely.

LISSIE: Don't trust him, Phil! I can see just how much he loves children! *(To the Toy seller in a challenging tone)* Here's your candy!

The girl throws the candy at the Toy seller and runs away exclaiming:

LISSIE: I'm waiting for you, Phil.

TOY SELLER: Such an ungrateful girl she is. Give her a candy, and she throws it in your face! O tempora, o mores! So, Phil, do you like your gift?

PHIL: Well... I'd like to... I'd like to have a look before...

TOY SELLER: Have a look, of course: (*Opens the sack a little*)

PHIL: A real general's uniform indeed! Are all these things mine?

TOY SELLER: They are, all of them, but I'll ask you for something in return:

PHIL: What? A dime, maybe?

TOY SELLER: The dime won't be enough for that, I'm afraid:

PHIL: What do you want, then?

TOY SELLER. Just a little thing; just your soul.

PHIL: How would I give it to you?

TOY SELLER. It's as simple as ABC. Just say out loud "I'd like to trade my soul for the soldiers and the general's uniform", and that's it:

PHIL: Is that so simple?

TOY SELLER: It's the easiest thing to pledge your soul or to lose it at all.

PHIL: I agree.

TOY SELLER: So, repeat the words I told you before.

PHIL: I'd like to trade my soul for the soldiers and

the general's uniform. Ouch! (*Clutching to his chest.*) Something pricked me!

TOY SELLER: So, the deal is done.

PHIL: And where're my gifts?

TOY SELLER: The uniform is in a box beneath the Christmas tree. And the soldiers are waiting for you already. (*A trumpet's calling, a drum's rolling*) See you at on Christmas night.

The white fog appears, and the Seller disappears into it. The boy stands all alone, still clutching toat his chest. Lissie runs to him and takes his hand, looking into his face.

LISSIE: Phil, are you all right?

PHIL: Wait, Lissie, I'm busy right now. (*Waving her away*)

LISSIE: How can you be busy, when you offered to go to a sledge ride just five minutes ago? Let's go then.

PHIL: Leave me be. I have to go put on my new costume. My general's uniform, can you imagine that? I'll be commanding my soldiers at the party.

LISSIE: But what about me? Aren't you inviting me too? What happened to you?

PHIL: Don't you understand that you'll just be a bother there? Just look at yourself – your coat

looks are like a mangy monkey's skin! And my mother will not let you come without a party dress.

LISSIE: How can you say that, Phil? We are friends, aren't we?

PHIL: I'm busy. Farewell!

The boy and the girl run in opposite directions.

Phil is happy, and Lissie is crying.

The end of Scene 1.

SCENE 2.

A room in the little house where Lissie lives. There is but a little furniture few and which is all very plain: a stove in a corner, a table, a rocking chair, and a large draped window.

The girl runs into the room. She hasn't recovered from Phil offending her yet. Lissie takes her coat off, still sniffing.

LISSIE: *(Voice full of tears)* Grandma, grandpa! *(Looking around)* He's such a hypocrite! "Let's go for a sledge ride", he said! Show him a gaudy trinket, and he forgets everything! He forgot our friendship, forgot all about me! That nasty Toy seller! He managed to lure Phil away so easily! *(Comes to the table and sits on*

the chair) Granny and grandpa are somewhere away... *(Suddenly notices a note, takes it and carefully reads aloud)* We are at your aunt Glasha's place, making a pie. Start the fire and wait for us. Love, Grandma and Grandpa.

The girl approaches the stove and strikes a match. As the burning firewood starts crackling merrily, the room becomes cozier.

LISSIE: *(Sadly and thoughtfully)* No Christmas tree, no holiday dress... And Phil did not invite me to the party, and Granny and Grandpa are out and I don't know when they will come back. And Mommy and Daddy are away in US on business. They promised to send me toys, but the delivery seems to be delayed. Even Chinna, my cat, and Beck, my shaggy dog pal, are off somewhere...

She sits down in the rocking chair and falls into a slumber. Suddenly flashing lights start running over the walls. The sound of footsteps can be heard from behind the stage. Lissie wakes up.

LISSIE: *(Cautiously)* Are Granny and Grandpa back? *(Comes towards the window. Her voice is trembling)* Who's there?

CIAO: *(In a squeaky voice)* Please, open the door!
I'm freezing to death!

LISSIE: *(To the audience)* Actually, you should never open a door to a stranger, especially when you are home alone. But just listen to that voice, it is so pitiful!

The girl cautiously comes to the door and unlocks it. Some frozen creature falls on her, tumbling both of them down to the floor.

CIAO: *(Hoarsely, tumbling around with the fallen girl)* Right now I'd give the world for a cup of hottest tea.

Lissie helps the creature into the chair and moves it closer to the fire. Her guest is a talking fluffy toy with its nose hanging over the upper lip, and round eyes looking asquint. Its long ears hang down to its narrow shoulders. Its head is crowned with a scarlet topknot. As the toy gets warmer, its ears slowly unwrap and start looking like a pair of spring cactuses. There are fig leaves hanging over the toy's velvet brown hips and a string of beads on its neck.

CIAO: Tea and sugar, please. And do not forget a slice of lemon!

Lissie gives him a cup of tea. The cup and the spoon jingle like bells in Ciao's frozen paws.

CIAO: I also wouldn't mind a piece of apple or cherry pie, some goose paste and a bit of baked ham with horse radish:

LISSIE: What a little glutton!

CIAO. Why, I'm just a full-blooded creature with a healthy appetite and a long bloodline! Allow me to introduce myself. Ciao-Bambino-Mury, or just Ciao-boy for my friends. *(Nodding gracefully and spilling the tea on the floor)* My ancestors are from the Bambino-Mury tribe that lived in Bamburia Mountains of the Sheerkhan highlands long ago. A gift of dance magic had been bestowed upon them. Listen how well I can snap!

An incredibly long (2 meters) paw appears from underneath the rug and snaps at the girl's nose. She recoils, startled.

LISSIE: Yipe! What a paw!

CIAO: *(Jumps from under the rug, full of enthusiasm)*
And now... I'm going to overwhelm you!

Starts step-dancing, spinning in place, then makes a somersault and...thuds on the floor.

CIAO: So, How d'you like that? *(Stands up clutching at the small of his back and breathing heavily)*

LISSIE: That was great! But still, come eat some pie and tell me what you are doing here, on the edge of the forest. By the way, I'm Lissie.

CIAO: Nice, so nice to meet you. *(Looking about conspiratorially)* Now, listen to a terrible story. But you have to keep it in the strictest secret. *(Lowering his voice until it becomes almost a whisper)* Do you understand? Don't tell anybody or they... *(Makes a gesture as if cutting his really long neck with the edge of his paw)* You have to swear by the Christmas goose and apple dumplings. Now, repeat what I'm saying: "Hereby I, Lissie, swear that should I give away the secret of Ciao-boy, I can kiss goodbye the Christmas goose and apple dumplings". *(Biting off a good piece of pie with enthusiasm)*

LISSIE: Hereby I, Lissie, swear by the Christmas goose and by apple dumplings.

CIAO: Good for you. Now listen to me and bite on what I'm going to tell you. Sit down or you'll swoon like most girls do. Now it's time for Ciao-boy to speak. *(Spreads his paws wide and stares at her)* Year by year, somewhere around here, in the deep forests of the North, the famous Enchantress lights up a Christmas tree. And year by year, crowds of guests gather, and everyone gets a gift from her - a

hand-made toy. But now the Enchantress is in a deep sleep, and hardly anyone is able to wake her up.

LISSIE: (*Excited*) But she has to decorate the Christmas tree! There's only a few hours left before the Christmas Eve!

CIAO: That's just it! Tormentawer, the warlock tycoon, put her asleep and took the best part of the toys away. I was lucky enough to fall from a sack hole. The warlock wants to make a profitable sale.

LISSIE: To sell the toys for money?

CIAO: (*Chuckles*) Oh you innocent. Tormentawer is already rich enough. He needs souls. But hush now! (*Covers his mouth with paw while looking around*) He wants to rule and to command them.

LISSIE: (*Thoughtfully*) But... what can a person give his soul for?

CIAO: Well... For an ocean liner, for a supersonic plane, for an island, for a living pretty doll, for a regiment of robosoldiers, or for a place.

LISSIE: For a place? Which place do you mean?

CIAO: One in the Parliament. Quite expensive they are, you know. Or, for example, Phil, the boy from your neighborhood, has given his soul for a dozen toy soldiers and a general's uniform.

Lissie jumps to her feet, pressing her hand to her breast.

LISSIE: *(Full of sorrow)* How? How did he give his soul? That's impossible!

CIAO: Everything is possible. Haven't you noticed how different he is now?

LISSIE: Now I start to realize what's going on. What should we do? We have to save Phil and to stop Tormentawer somehow!

CIAO: I guess we have to wake the Enchantress as soon as possible, to stop short the toy sale, to return your friend's soul, and to bring all the toys back to the Christmas tree. That's when it will light up.

LISSIE: *(Excited)* So what are you waiting for? *(Looking at the toy closely)* Ahem... I don't think you'll be able to go more than a dozen meters in these clothes.

She runs to another room dragging the toy by his paw, and in a moment comes back. Ciao looks confused dressed in a hat with earflaps, a sweater and a scarf.

Ciao. (Indignantly) I am a first-class dancer! I won't go anywhere in these clothes!

LISSIE: These are my grandfather's clothes! Don't be a beast. Time's running out.

CIAO: But I'm not a grandpa! I'm a proud falcon of the south:

Suddenly a huge hairy dog appears behind Ciao's back. The dog stands on its hind paws like a professional boxer.

BECK: *(In a low and menacing voice)* And right now the proud falcon is going to transform into a plucked hen.

CIAO: *(In a squeaky voice, retreating)* Going, going, already gone!

LISSIE: O dear! Beck, you scared me:

BECK: We'll have to use the northern road, guys. I know it like my own hind paw:

A cat named Chinna appears beside the girl and starts gliding from one person to another.

CHINNA: *(Mewing tenderly)* And my eyes won't let you down too. I heard some bad news today: Tortmentawer ordered his shapeshifters to catch Ciao-boy. The wolves want to surprise him and so they lie in wait on the northern road.

Beck makes a couple of movements that show he used to be a boxing champion. Chinna takes an Aikido's pose.

BECK: A wolf can be beaten with a dog's claws!

CHINNA: And with a cat's cunning!

LISSIE: Well, is everyone set?

EVERYBODY: *(In unison)* Yes!

LISSIE: And the commander shall be...

CIAO: *(Cocky)* Ciao-boy, since he is the smartest...

LISSIE: Beck shall be in command! Forward, guys.

To the Enchantress' realm!

Lissie holds out her hand, then Beck puts his paw on her palm, then Chinna does, and finally, Ciao puts his own paw on top.

Hey, be brave and look ahead:

With your good and faithful friend

You'll prevail forever.

Cheer up while staying tight,

Grant your friend inspiring sight,

Shrug and say «Whatever!»

Cruel fate awaits ahead:

Rocks and marshes're grim and dead.

Cheer up while staying tight,

Grant your friend inspiring sight,

Shrug and say «Whatever!»

When your boat's sinking deep

And cunning foes by near do sweep

Cheer up while staying tight,

Grant your friend inspiring sight,

Shrug and say «Whatever!»

Pockets full of holes and air,
Stomach growls in despair
Cheer up while staying tight,
Grant your friend inspiring sight,
Shrug and say «Whatever!»

The end of Scene 2.

Scene 3.

The stage is divided in two with a partition representing the guardhouse wall. There is snow everywhere.

There's a crude table within the guardhouse with a few bottles of turbid liquid and some snacks. On the wall there is a portrait of an old and seasoned wolf in a general's uniform and cap. A Wolf in an open captain's jacket sits at the table. Across the table there's a Cub who is wearing a neat and fully buttoned-up lieutenant's jacket. He's hiccupping and, between hiccups, carefully blowing dust off his new uniform cap that he holds on his lap. An Owl in a sergeant's uniform walks around the table. Shoulder belts and holsters hang from chair backs.

The shapeshifters eat and drink, and talk to each other while picking their teeth.

The friends make their way from the forest to the guardhouse window.

LISSIE: *(Gestures her friends to be quiet)* Hush, friends. We have to discover their plans. Let's hide right here.

They hide behind the snowdrift under the guardhouse window.

DREAD WOLF: *(Growling dangerously at the Cub)* So, do you know where you are?

CUB: *(Squeaks and hiccups)* A... aye, sir. On duty.

OWL: *(Refilling glasses)* Cherry-boy. Haven't got a clue.

DREAD WOLF: *(Growling dangerously)* Shut up! You're in the pack now! And today is your trial day. Got it?!

CUB: *(Still hiccupping)* A-aye, sir.

DREAD WOLF: And now, my brethren in arms, let's drink to our boss. Stand up and down your glasses!

Everybody stands up and drinks, groaning and grunting. The Owl serves refreshments, showing a great skill.

DREAD WOLF: *(Admiringly nods towards the portrait)* What a wise head he has! And what amazing

long paws! And the claws! It's a rare prey that gets out of them! Every night, every night, you know, he had been bringing huge bunches of bucks. Can you imagine that?!

OWL: (*Servilely refills the Wolf's glass*) He knew how to fleece our simpleton moneybags, take my word for that. What an eye he had!

DREAD WOLF: Aye, he had indeed. When we had the night watch together, we would see a tipsy guy walking, and he'd say to me, look, I bet that guy has a hundred bucks in his right pocket – let's go and check. Then we checked – and there was exactly as much money as he said, can you imagine that?

CUB: (*Amazed*) Real ace!

DREAD WOLF: You know, guys, he came here as a newly minted lieutenant, not even an army school behind him, and now he is a general! A real example of what an ordinary shapeshifter can achieve when he constantly improves his skills and abilities. (*Nodding towards the Cub*) Repeat it after me, pup.

CUB: When he constantly improves his skills and abilities.

OWL: And the eye!

DREAD WOLF: And the eye for money, of course. Right, pals. Let's sing together a favorite song of his.

They all sing together, thumping the table. The Wolf has a bass voice, and the Cub has a falsetto one.

My duty starts tonight,
It runs so smooth and bright.

Chorus: Shapeshifter I am, shapeshifter I am En-
listed shapeshifter I am.

(repeat 2 times)

I'll find you everywhere,
You'd better to prepare

Chorus

All nights are fun so far
We are on duty, we are.

Chorus

DREAD WOLF: *(Embracing the Cub's shoulders)* Now, do you get what's awaiting you under my command?

CUB: Aye, sir. Power and glory.

DREAD WOLF: *(In tutorial manner)* Do not forget your eyes while improving your nose. Let's say for example... Have you seen anything new in the valley below?

CUB: Well... some poachers set their traps all around the lake. Also, people are felling the trees and selling them abroad with fake documentation.

DREAD WOLF: Eh, what an egghead you are, and already a lieutenant! They've opened a new stall there and named it "The roasted pie". What a poetic name.

CUB: Should I take it under my protection?

DREAD WOLF: (*Irritated*) Just have it under your paw, and keep an eye open from now on. Such things shouldn't be overlooked, roger that?

CUB: Roger.

DREAD WOLF: Ok. Now give the description of that outlaw toy.

CUB: Well... looks like a stray southern lad. Nose like a sausage, and donkey ears...

CIAO: (*Thrusting his head from behind of the snow-drift*) You're a stray lad yourself! (*Indignantly*) My nose is genuinely Roman, and my ears are just like my father's, a famous lawyer ...

Lissie and Beck's heads appear next to Ciao's.

LISSIE: Calm down, boy. You're the prettiest.

CIAO: (*Gratefully*) I know, Lissie, that only you recognize me as I truly am.

BECK. (*Menacingly*) Quiet, guys! The most important stuff is coming on.

The senior shapeshifter looks around with suspicion.

DREAD WOLF: *(Suspiciously)* I smell a stranger nearby.

OWL: C'mon, there's nobody in this neck of woods except for that Ciao runaway. I set up a trap for him with a bell he lost once; he'll put it back on, he won't be able to resist, and that'll be the end of him. I'll find him by the sound of the bell and bring him just to the Christmas tree foot.

CUB: And where's the bell?

OWL: Curiosity killed a pup, you know? I have hung it on a branch over the path just across the guardhouse we're sitting in. *(Refilling the glasses)*

DREAD WOLF: Now, stand up and let's drink to our victory! We have to catch that toy, otherwise *(Looking at the others significantly; the Cub takes a couple of steps back)*... Otherwise, Tormentawer will be displeased and will cut our tails off. We have to fulfill the order by any means, especially since we've already spent all the advance money on drink.

THE SHAPESHIFTERS: To the victory! *(In unison)* Honor or money!

Lissie, Beck, Chinna and Ciao exchange glances.

CIAO: I'm doomed. Tormentawer put out an order for me.

CHINNA: But I know what to do.

Chinna takes the bell off the branch and runs through the audience. The shapeshifters jump up, jack out their pistols and run after her. They keep shooting in the air and yelling "Stop now, long-nose! Honor or money!"

Lissie runs out to the middle of the stage. Beck and Ciao follow close behind her.

LISSIE: The road is clear, guys!

CIAO: Hark on! To the Enchantress' realm!

BECK: Let's save her!

Scene 4.

The room is large and bright, with adornments hanging from the ceiling, and a bed standing right in the middle. A young brunette with a stylish haircut sleeps on the bed. The audience can guess that such beauty can be no other than the Sylvan Enchantress sleeping because of the evil spell. Her name is Morning Star or, as forest animals call her, "our Starry".

The first to appear in the room is tiptoeing Ciao,

then come the rest of the company.

Ciao approaches the bed head and addresses everyone present.

CIAO: *(Tragically)* Lo and behold, the tree stands grim and lightless, no decorations around — good work.

Beck and Lissie come towards the bed too. Silhouettes of the animals can be seen in the large window: they came to show support. They wave their paws and moan expressing their condolences.

Beck. *(Thoughtfully looking at the beautiful woman)* My dear, what a beauty, and in such circumstances.

Lissie: (Cuddles to Beck) I'm scared, Beck. What should we do?

Meantime, Ciao's bustling around, peeking under the bed and checking every corner. Obviously, he's looking for something.

CIAO: *(Standing on all fours)* What should we do, what should we do... We should wake the damsel up!

Lissie starts patting the Enchantress' face while Beck's shaking her by the shoulders.

LISSIE: She's out like a light.

BECK: Yeah, the poison was too strong.

LISSIE: *(In trembling voice)* She won't die, will she?

CIAO: No, she won't.

Ciao rushes towards the window and opens it wide. A cloud of frozen air suddenly comes into the room scattering Lissie, Beck and Ciao to the sides. The furthest to fall is the Enchantress, thrown from her bed. Annoyed, Lissie gestures to Ciao that he is crazy.

BECK: You almost have frozen all of us, dilly!

But at the very moment the sleeping Enchantress is waking up from the cloud of frozen air.

THE ENCHANTRESS: *(Joyfully)* Ciao, how did you get here?

Ciao rushes to the Enchantress and embraces her.

CIAO: I'm not alone here but with Lissie and Beck. They are my friends.

Lissie and Beck take a bow.

CIAO: This is Morning Star, our Enchantress. Do you have any idea what happened to you?

ENCHANTRESS: No, but my head feels too heavy. I think I fell asleep.

LISSIE: Please, try to remember.

ENCHANTRESS: *(Slowly)* Yes, I think I remember now... Oh yes, I do now.

LISSIE: Wonderful!

BECK: Good girl!

CIAO: The more details the better.

BECK: Details are very important.

THE ENCHANTRESS: Well, that was like this: I had been decorating the Christmas tree when a huge car appeared just in front of me. Jeep Cherokee, I guess. Then, a handsome man in a suede coat and a broad-brimmed hat came out.

CIAO: *(Aside).* That was Tormentawer, sure as sure.

THE ENCHANTRESS: He offered me some sweets and a foreign drink, and asked whether I was free that night.

BECK: *(To the spectators)* My dear young friends. Don't talk to strangers in the street, otherwise it may end badly.

THE ENCHANTRESS: *(Uneasily)* So, I could not help taking a sip *(Waving towards an empty bottle)* And that very moment, my head started to swim.

BECK: *(Sniffing the bottle)* There are traces of the cannabiolo sedative in this bottle.

LISSIE: What a dirty trick to give it to a girl!

CIAO: It's girls that such things usually happen to. *(To the Enchantress)* Was he wearing round blue glasses?

THE ENCHANTRESS: He was.

CIAO: What about a "scull-and-bones" ring? Was it on? Did he have it?

THE ENCHANTRESS: I think yes... Yes, indeed, he was.

CIAO: That's Tormentawer, for sure. He's fond of all kinds of baubles.

THE ENCHANTRESS: *(Looks down at her chest with terror)* My pendant! My amethyst star is missing! *(Starts checking her every pocket)* I cannot neither light the Christmas tree nor summon golden snow without it!

BECK: *(Sympathetically)* I'm dead sure, my dear, that Tormentawer stole your star as well as the toys.

THE ENCHANTRESS: Oh dear, the toys too?!

BECK: You have missed everything. But have no fear – we came here to wake you up and to help you with the toys and the Christmas tree.

CIAO: Ok. Now listen everybody. Lissie, Beck and I are going to hurry back and to disrupt the auction Tormentawer had planned. And you are going to wait here, my Enchantress.

THE ENCHANTRESS: Oh no, I won't miss such a de-nouncement.

LISSIE: *(Shyly)* My dear Enchantress, but your

pantyhose are torn, and we don't have any costumes to attend the party. And my coat is awful too...

THE ENCHANTRESS: Hah, a piece of cake! *(Takes a flashlight from her pocket and turns it on. Then she directs the beam into the audience and then to her friends)*

Light dies away, music starts to play. The ceiling and walls start shimmering with stars of all colors. A few moments later, the friends appear on stage all dressed up: Lissie dressed wears a sable-edged princess gown, the youthful Enchantress, a Firebird costume, while Beck and Ciao are wearing tail-coats. Everybody has half-masks on. The friends are looking at each other, surprised.

CIAO: The party, ah, the party. The party's my second name! *(The friends join their hands)* And now... let's take off!

BECK: Just an hour before midnight!

CIAO: Wow, it's a bit scary, isn't it?

LISSIE: No, it isn't!

Lights are on and the friends, dressed up beautifully, leave the stage.

The end of Act 1.

ACT 2

Scene 1.

A study of Cravenarch von Munch, the head of the household where the Christmas party is held. High gothic door stands in the background. Music plays cheerfully. Spectators can see moving guest silhouettes through the glass. Suddenly the window opens with a squeak, and Beck and Ciao jump down from the windowsill. They give their paws to Enchantress and Lissie to help them get into the room. The company checks the room, everybody move on their tiptoes. They come to the door and start to listen for something.

BECK: *(Annoyed)* We have only an hour before midnight, and we're standing here doing nothing.

CIAO: *(To Lissie and the Enchantress)* I have a plan.

THE ENCHANTRESS: *(Irritated)* Not now, Ciao. *(To Lissie)* It's interesting there, isn't it?

LISSIE: Oh yes! Do you think there will be dancing?

THE ENCHANTRESS: *(Clapping)* Of course!

BECK: Come on, girls!

LISSIE: Cut off, Beck, let us watch a little bit. I want to show off my new gown before those sthat swellhead.

THE ENCHANTRESS: I want to show off to somebody too. *(Smooths the hem of her dress and pirouettes around. Then, to Beck and Ciao)* So, how do we look?

They hear the sound of the drum.

LISSIE: *(Excited)* Look! Phil 's coming with his soldiers.

BECK: Everybody hide, quick!

THE ENCHANTRESS: *(Sounding moody)* But our gowns... We're going to have them wrinkled.

CIAO: *(Fingering his top lock)* You girls, hide in the cabinet. I'll be under the ottoman. Beck will stand behind the curtain.

They scatter to hide. Ciao falls two times while running towards the ottoman, and then hides underneath. After that the door opens and Phil comes in, followed by the marching soldiers. The boy stumbles and falls over the ottoman; however, the soldiers catch him and get him up again.

PHIL: What a mess! *(Comes to the mirror and starts*

to straighten his uniform) It does fit great. (To the soldiers) Great!

THE SOLDIERS: *(In unison) Aye, sir! Great!*

PHIL: *(In a patronizing tone) Good work, guys.*

THE SOLDIERS: *(Standing very straight) At your service, sir!*

PHIL: And bring that ottoman here.

The soldiers lift up the ottoman. Ciao's feet in scarlet slippers are hanging from beneath its drapes. They move as if he's running. Then the soldiers put the ottoman at Phil's feet. The boy reclines on it, still looking at himself in the mirror.

PHIL: The Toy seller was right. The uniform is really that of a real general. *(Taking a glance at the soldiers) And the soldiers look alive. Now then, hep two!*

THE SOLDIERS: Hep two, hep two!

PHIL: Wow, great! Ouch! *(Clutches at his breast) Something pricked me again, and I feel chilled inside. (Jumps up. The ottoman slides aside. To himself) Ah, never mind. It'll pass soon.*

Sits down where the ottoman used to stand and falls. The soldiers once again catch him and put him on his feet.

PHIL: I am so clumsy today. *(Once again comes to-*

wards the mirror) Daddy promised me that to-day he'd settle something with some guy called Tormentawer. And after that I'll become Secretary of Defense. Perhaps the youngest one ever. Hey, guys, follow me!

*Leaves the room accompanied by the soldiers.
Beck cautiously comes out from behind the drape.*

BECK: Everything's ok now. Come out, girls.

*Lissie and the Enchantress appear from the cabinet
and they all gather in the center of the study.*

LISSIE: Where in the world is Ciao?

*The ottoman rolls out from the corner squeaking
with Ciao's voice.*

(Desperately) Help me! I'm stuck.

*Beck lifts the ottoman with the toy's feet hanging
from it. The dog gives the ottoman a good shake,
and Ciao falls on the floor.*

BECK: Hey, Ciao, you looked like a little turtle!
(Laughs roaringly)

CIAO: The proud eagle did not lose any time in vain!

I have a new plan! (*Everybody gathers around him, and he starts whispering something*)

BECK: Hush! Somebody's coming! I feel Tormentawer here.

Everybody scatters.

CIAO: I'm with the girls! (*Gets into the cabinet*)

The door opens.

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: Welcome, Mr. Tormentawer. (*They come to the desk and sit down on the chairs*)

TORMENTAWER: Well, let's go on.

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: (*Draws open a cigar box*)
You are wellcomewelcome.

They start smoking.

TORMENTAWER: (*Coldly*) My dear von Munch! It doesn't seem like a profitable deal to exchange the position of Minister for Defense of such a beautiful country just for your pitiful soul.

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: (*Flustering and growing red*) What if I add the soul of my beloved wife? I hold her so dear you know. A love late in my life. And that soul of hers, it's like a pure diamond.

TORMENTAWER: (*Ironically*) You think so? But has she got any soul? To my knowledge, she wasn't quite so pure and naïve when you met her. What's her occupation?

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: She's a social psychologist. Cures people's souls, you know.

TORMENTAWER: (*With forced interest*) What an interesting genteelism for the oldest profession in the world! No, my dear. I wouldn't give a penny for her soul, so let your love remain with you. By the way, what does your wife usually do on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons?

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: (*Embarrassed*) She's in town. She gives some consultations there, and after that she joins her fitness group.

TORMENTAWER: Blessed be the believers: (*Addressing the spectators*) She has been working for our company as a senior specialist for a long time already. However, you have much more valuable souls to offer, you know. Your dear sister, for example. (*Voice full of sweetness*) Or, let's take the person who bakes you those sweet apple pies on Saturdays.

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: (*Surprised*) Mommy?

TORMENTAWER: Indeed, my dear friend. Your precious Mommy, for her soul is pure gold.

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: (*Whines*) But... my Mommy! I love her so much, and value her so much too.

TORMENTAWER: *(Coldly)* We don't have much time to argue. The auction starts five minutes from now.

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: *(With much difficulty)* Of course, I understand you. But... could you add something to your offer?

TORMENTAWER: *(Interested)* And what do you wish for?

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: What about the Golden Forest on the Northern shore?

TORMENTAWER: *(Astonished)* You want the entire shore?

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: *(Quickly)* Yes, all of it!

TORMENTAWER: *(Full of respect)* You've got the noblest and most grand personality of all the people I've ever met! You've a long and prosperous way ahead of you. Well, are we agreed? *(Shake hands)*

Suddenly there's a sound of a broken window and a bell chime. Chinna jumps from the window with the bell in her paw. She slips past the startled Tormentawer and Cravenarch von Munch, and runs through the door. The shape-shifters jump over the windowsill in hot pursuit. The Owl flies straight into the closed door, then falls on the floor and remains sitting and rubbing his beak. The two wolves overturn the desk and

start to retreat towards the door when they notice Tormentawer standing there. The Cub peeks from behind the Dread Wolf's back, terrified.

DREAD WOLF: *(Retreating)* The toy should be somewhere here.

CUB: *(From behind the Dread Wolf's back)* I can smell him.

TORMENTAWER: *(Stands up and speaks in a creepy voice)* So, that's the way you're following my orders, right? *(Moves towards the shapeshifters)*. You lost the toy and chased the cat! Who are you working for? Me or those toy people *(Nods towards the spectators)* I sell? Now, if you still want to keep your skin and your rank, get back to work! *(Cravenarch von Munch shrinks in terror)* Put sheep skins on and get into the auditorium to watch! And you, Owl, will be disguised as a stuffed bird.

Owl hiccups, stands up and freezes with his wings spread wide.

TORMENTAWER: And do not forget that "I'm cutie white lamb" song. No mistakes. Now then, together and in unison!

The shapeshifters mask their faces and shoulders with lambskins, then draw themselves to full height and start howling:

I'm a cute lamb knocking at your door,
I'm so gentle and sweet, love me and adore.
Mommy is not home, Daddy too is gone,
Please, open the door to not be alone.

I will read a book, sing a song to you,
I can give you hugs and some candy too.

Mommy is not home, Daddy too is gone,
Little children's bones are left alone.

TORMENTAWER: *(Severely)* You cannot sing of anything but horrors and crimes. Let's do the last verse once again. Correct lyrics, do you get me? *(Waves a hand like a conductor)* Hey-ho!
I'm so gentle and sweet, cute white lamb,
If the child is happy, happy then I am.

TORMENTAWER: *(Satisfied)* Much better now.

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: *(Pleasingly)* Mr. Tormentawer, it is time for the auction to start.

TORMENTAWER: *(Eerily)* Well, let's go and buy some living souls! *(To Cravenarch von Munchy)* And you will introduce me to the others.

They leave the stage followed by the jogging shapeshifters.

Ciao, Lissie and Enchantress run onto the stage.

Shortly after that Beck appears.

CIAO: Be brave, pals! They won't recognize us now.

BECK: Especially with those ears of yours.

THE ENCHANTRESS: No haste, please.

LISSIE: We'll be acting strictly according to the plan.

The company slip through the door. The music starts to play.

The end of Scene 1.

Scene 2.

The hall is blazing with lights. Its corners are furnished with Christmas decorations. "Polonaise" by Oginsky is playing in the distance. Cravenarch von Munch comes to the middle of the stage.

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: *(Waves his hand to stop the music)* Ladies and gentlemen! Now you are to see the surprise our dear guest Mr. Tormentawer has prepared especially for you. *(The guests start whispering and exchanging glances)* Hereby I declare our one and only auction started! And our unique lots are: the kingdom of Lomaco, the queen's place, the golden mine

of Ui mountains, the “Dreadnought” airship carrier, a nuclear warhead complete with SS-class missile, the position of the president of the Maru Republic, and the princess of the kingdom of Begginland!

VOICE OF A MASKED PERSON: For sure, Von Munch managed to get the sweetest bit long before the auction.

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: *(Speaks more loudly)* Ladies and gentlemen! The terms are clear and well-known to everybody! Everything is up to your fate and fortune. Everybody is fully anonymous and called up by the masks they wear. Please, put your souls into this ball.

The light fades out. A shimmering ball appears over the people’s heads. It is slowly descending until it hovers just over the floor. Men and women hasten towards Tormentawer sitting in the chair. The guests kiss his hand, bow, then take tokens from a sack. After that they come towards the ball and put their gleaming souls into it. The ball sparkles with shimmering lights.

THE ELEPHANT MASK: Wow! I’ve got the gold mine!

THE DONKEY MASK: And I’ve got the aircraft carrier.

THE LYNX MASK: And I’m the queen now! Amazing!

THE RABBIT MASK: And I’m the president! However, there’s a strange cold in my breast: *(To the*

donkey mask) And what about you?

THE DONKEY MASK: Yeah, but it's gone already!

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: My dear guests! Hereby I announce the ladies' choice. After that, the auction will be carried further on.

The tango starts playing. Lissie and the Enchantress exchange expressive glances and then move ahead decisively: Lissie goes towards Phil while the Enchantress, towards Tormentawer.

Tormentawer. *(Leading the Enchantress skillfully. To the spectators)* It would be so great to seduce her and get her soul.

Phil and Lissie are dancing around close by. Ciao slips between them, than he chaffs back-to-back with Tormentawer and steals the amethyst star from his pocket. The shapeshifters in lambskins look behind the masks and clean up the guests' pockets, showing their trophies to each other. Beck stands, waiting for his hour to come, with paws crossed on his breast. The guests boast to each other about the tokens they got.

TORMENTAWER: *(With tenderness)* Oh princess, from which country did you come to this poor place?

THE ENCHANTRESS: From the dark and thick forest I came. A small cottage I have there.

TORMENTAWER: *(Voice full of sweetness)* Yet you deserve more, much more. For I can see you on your own yacht somewhere in the southern seas, or receiving ambassadors and rulers of other countries in a castle of your own.

THE ENCHANTRESS: It doesn't matter much to me.

TORMENTAWER: *(Passionately)* I shall publish a book dedicated to you! I shall stage a drama dedicated to you! You're going to become the queen of millions of hearts! *(His voice is trembling)* And after all, a lady needs someone to support her and protect her. I love you and ask you to marry me.

The shapeshifters recognize Ciao and grab him. They twist his arms and bring him to Tormentawer.

DREAD WOLF: What shall we do with him?

The music stops. Tormentawer leads Enchantress to the chair. The guests form a semi-circle around them.

TORMENTAWER: *(Carelessly)* Bring this dumb rag doll to the kitchen and burn him in an oven *(Puts his palm on his breast, then checks his pockets for something. Addresses the guests)* My star is missing! *(To Ciao)* It's him! He did it! Shake him up!

The shapeshifters turn Ciao upside down and start to shake him. However, nothing falls on the floor. A brawl starts then. Beck and Chinna attack the shapeshifters and strike them down.

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: *(Screeching)* Alarm! Robbers! We are robbed! Anybody, help!

The guests are like mannequins. They do not make any attempts to help, just keep watching what's going on. Tormentawer hurries to the middle of the hall and takes the ball.

TORMENTAWER: *(Crying out aloud)* I am Tormentawer, the master of souls! I command you to take them!

The enraged crowd attacks the friends and immediately ties them up. Tormentawer shakes off dust from his sleeve.

TORMENTAWER: Well, well, my dear von Munch. We have some thieves in our house, haven't we? They got my family heirloom, the amethyst star pendant, for example. And God only knows what else they have stolen.

THE LYNX MASK: *(Squeaking)* My diamond necklace is lost.

THE RABBIT MASK: *(Bass voice)* And my golden cigar box.

THE LION MASK: (*Screeching*) And my wallet too.

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: (*Hiccups*) Real rogues they are.

THE DONKEY MASK: Throw them into the oven!

THE RABBIT MASK: No, into an ice-hole!

TORMENTAWER: (*Dreadfully*) My dear friends, we don't want to have a lynching here, do we? Are there any officers of the law here?

DREAD WOLF AND CUB: (*In unison*) There are, indeed.

They come out from the circle and stand in the middle of the hall. The guests are still keeping the friends tied.

DREAD WOLF: Well, our law would be simple: the cat and the doggie go into the ice-hole, and the puppet, to the oven. As for the girls (*grins*) I propose to sell them to our guests from the far south.

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH. (*Hiccups*) You're absolutely correct. Somebody should pay for the moral and material damages I've borne. (To the guests) Can you see how my hands are trembling and my soul's trying to break loose from my body (*To Tormentawer*) Sorry, I forgot I sold it already... Anyway, my window is broken.

Everybody starts clattering.

TORMENTAWER: Calm down! We have to ask these young ladies how they got to fall this low before the law will prevail. *(To the girls)* Please begin.

LISSIE: *(Indignantly)* Order them to untie us! *(Tormentawer gives a sign and the shapeshifters untie the rope)* What have you done?! You stole the soul from my friend Phil! *(The boy frowns. The girls moves around the hall, addressing the spectators)* He was such a nice boy not so long ago! He had been giving me sledge rides and building snow fortresses with me, and giving me his friendship! But look at him now. He's just a toy now, a tin soldier! He'll carry out every order you give him!

EVERYBODY: Good, that's very good!

LISSIE: *(To Tormentawer)* I see that now he's capable of anything, any low act. Give him the soul back. Immediately!

TORMENTAWER: *(In sweet yet unnatural voice)* Alas, my young lady! *(Comes towards Phil and embraces his shoulders)* It's impossible for two reasons. First of all, this friend of yours and all the guests here, all of them gave their souls on from their own free will. *(The guests start to clatter in confirmation. Tormentawer lifts up his hand and starts to walk around. Talks to Lissie)* And secondly, you're free to ask if they

are ready to redeem their souls and to give back all those benefits obtained. Try to start with Phil.

LISSIE: (*Warmly*) Phil, my dear! (*Runs to Phil and tries to take his hand*) Come on, leave that uniform here and be a sweet boy like you were before.

THE MASKS: (*In unison*) Yeah, right, like he'd do it!

PHIL: (*Scornfully, arrogantly*) You're talking such nonsense, Lissie. Who's going to refuse the position of the Minister for Defense by ntheir own free will? You are running a fever, aren't you? (*To the guests*) She is running a fever, isn't she?

THE MASKS: (*In unison*) Fever! She's running a fever!

The masked guests start jumping around the girl.

TORMENTAWER: Silence! (*Everybody freeze*) Well, now you see. (*In a benign tone*) Or, for example, let's ask Mr. von Munch. Will you, my dear sir, give me back the Golden Forest that lies on the Northern shore? And get back the souls of your beloved Mommy and that of your dear sister, of course.

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: (*Teeth clattering*) I think, it is impossible, Mr. Tormentawer. I have sold the forest already.

THE MASKS: (*Delighted applause*) What an ace he is!
A real ace!

TORMENTAWER: (*Ironically*) And how much did you
get for that?

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: (*Chokes*) Well... I... I have...

TORMENTAWER: (*Cheerfully*) Come on, don't be so
shy. We are all so close to each other here.

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: (*Pants*) Twenty million dol-
lars.

THE MASKS: (*Start clattering in unison*) What an ace
he is! A real ace! Twenty million!

TORMENTAWER: (*Comes closer to Lissie*) And what
about you, Lissie? Do you think you're much
better? The only point, I guess, is the price.
How much would you like to get?

LISSIE: (*Fervently*) My soul is priceless. However,
I'd rather give it to this toy. He has no soul yet
he is better than all of you here. (*To Ciao*) Take
it, my dear.

THE ENCHANTRESS: (*With ringing voice*) Wait, Lissie!
I'll help you!

*She takes the amethyst star out of the folds of her
gown. The star radiates a violet beam of light.*

TORMENTAWER: (*Excited*) Stop the thief! That's my
heirloom!

THE ENCHANTRESS: (*In anger*) Oh no, it won't do, you
dirty-handed moneymaker! This star belongs

to me, the sylvan Enchantress. And it was you who came to my forest hut and stole my pendant through doping me with your brew. You are a tormentor tycoon!

TORMENTAWER: *(Hysterically)* What are you waiting for?! Shut her mouth!

Ciao, Lissie, Beck, and Chinna encircle the Enchantress to protect her. Beck and Chinna pose dangerously.

BECK: There's going to be a real fight!

The guests rush towards the company. As the Enchantress directs the beam onto the ball, the latter falls. Dozens of soul lights start flapping up to the sky. Tormentawer lies on his back with legs twitching. He protects his eyes with a palm. The guests start scattering, then they stop and admire the soaring souls. One by one they start to remove their masks. One of the lights falls onto Phil's breast.

PHIL: Ah, I feel such a nice warmth.

The guests come to each other, take each other's hands and look into each other's eyes. After that they go away in pairs. Lissie stands sobbing quietly. Phil comes to her and takes her hand.

PHIL: *(Full of tenderness)* Let's go for a sledge ride, Lissie! I'll show you the snow fortress I built especially for you!

LISSIE: You are the old Phil again? You are really that Phil of mine?

PHIL: Yes, I am.

THE ENCHANTRESS: May some goodness happen during the Christmas night.

Cravenarch von Munch runs around the hall and wails, clutching to his breast:

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: *(Moans and wails)* Oh, my money! My dear money is lost! What will I say to my Mommy? What will I say to my dear sister! Water, anybody give me water, please! Oh, how it burns! Oh, what are you doing with me, my shameful soul! Everything, every dollar shall I return to my country! And the Golden Forest too! And the shore! Everything for children! For children!

Ciao, Beck and Chinna are jumping around. The shapeshifters are hovering around timidly, trying to get into step. Tormentawer comes closer to the Enchantress.

TORMENTAWER: *(Agitated)* What have you done to me? *(With a palm on his chest)* As feel my

heartbeat, I want to fly so high. I recognized you, my beautiful inconnu. (*Bending the knee and offering his hands to the Enchantress. There's something shimmering in his palms*) I offer you my hand and my heart which is bursting with love and passion for you. Come with me, and we'll fly to the Canaries tonight, to spend a fortnight there.

THE ENCHANTRESS: To the Canaries? Two weeks, you say? A wedding journey?

TORMENTAWER: Yes, yes! We'll get married there, I know a pastor on the islands.

THE ENCHANTRESS: Oh no. For sure, I'm free now, and nobody has ever made me a proposal like this, to get married and fly to the Canaries, but that's not enough for me.

TORMENTAWER: (*Intensely*) What do you wish for, then?

THE ENCHANTRESS: (*Strictly*) I wish to talk seriously to you. Then I'd like to bring the toys and to light the Christmas tree.

TORMENTAWER: At your service. My jeep awaits around the corner.

As Tormentawer and the Enchantress come to the edge of the stage, talking softly, Beck runs to the center of the room.

BECK: Wait, guys! What shall we do with the shapeshifters? They can still do much harm to everybody!

The shapeshifters tremble in fear. Dread Wolf buttons his uniform up. The Cub sets his cap straight.

CIAO: Perhaps, we should send them to a special zoo for rare carnivores. There is quite enough space for them in Hal-Kutras, for example. Three meals a day, fresh air promenades, and finally, it's close to the village. We'll be sending them some goodies there.

THE SHAPESHIFTERS: *(In unison)* No! We don't want to Hal-Kutras!

DREAD WOLF: *(Pitifully)* They will put me into the lions' cage there, I know. It's bad for my health, and I'm too old for that!

CUB: Please, Beck, let us join the dog guard. We'll do our best, I promise.

THE ENCHANTRESS: Should we believe them then?
(Comes towards Beck)

BECK: I think I can just about manage to believe them. But no robbery and debauchery at all. Am I clear?

THE SHAPESHIFTERS: *(Retreating)* As clear as glass.

BECK: *(Menacingly)* Show me your pockets, young one.

CUB: *(Shyly)* Of course, I just meant to. *(Draws out the cigar box, the necklace and the wallet out of his pocket)* I'd like to... I found them on the floor, really. *(Runs towards the owners)* Please, everything is safe and intact.

Phil and Lissie run into the room.

PHIL: *(Cheerfully)* Look, everybody! The golden snow is falling outside!

LISSIE: Make your wishes! Open the windows and hurry on to performing good deeds right now!

The guests open windows and admire the golden snow. Tormentawer is deep in thought.

PHIL: *(To the Enchantress)* Is it true, that all the wishes shall be fulfilled? All the wishes of all the children worldwide?

THE ENCHANTRESS: It is true. And our friend Tormentawer is going to help us in fulfilling that.

TORMENTAWER: *(With confidence)* I'll help indeed. *(Comes towards Enchantress looking at her with love)*

THE ENCHANTRESS: Don't forget how much you owe to our village. You have to return everything, and pay all taxes, and then you can sleep well. How long can you wander around without hav-

ing even a hut waiting for you in your native land? So, are we agreed?

TORMENTAWER: We are. I'll give all money I have to my Motherland.

THE GUESTS: Good man, Tormentawer! (*Applause*)

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: (*To the spectators*) It's reckless. Quite reckless, I think.

THE ENCHANTRESS: You'll be beloved and respected by everybody: by policemen, by prosecutors, by army, and by the president too.

TORMENTAWER: (*Excited*) And by the President too?

THE ENCHANTRESS: Only those of pure soul and burning heart are respected and supported by the President. Do you want to have a talk with him?

TORMENTAWER: But how can it be possible?

THE ENCHANTRESS: Everything is possible for I am an enchantress. Don't you remember that? And your soul now is very different from what it used to be.

The Tormentawer's cellphone rings. The President's voice can be heard.

THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE. Mr. Tormentawer, I would like to express my satisfaction for you being the first tycoon who returned all his money on his own free will. Thereby you gave a fine example to all those soulless tycoons who still

keep their eyes closed. Do you have any personal requests?

TORMENTAWER: (*Drawing himself to full height*) I'd like to ask you to spend some money I'll give for the army purposes for a new aircraft carrier to be built. And to name that carrier after my own name, should it be possible. Sorry for this little weakness.

THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE: Well, I guess "Tormentawer" is a name good enough for an aircraft carrier. I will forward your request to those whom it may concern. Anything else?

TORMENTAWER: Yes, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE: Tell me then.

TORMENTAWER: (*Faintfully*) Yes. I would like to ask that a three-room apartment be given to every just-married pair. Is it possible too?

THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE: I suppose we can grant this request. Can you tell me what your plans are for the future?

TORMENTAWER: I'm quite a good mathematician, so I could work as a mathematics teacher in the village.

THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE. Have no fear on that. We'll settle the issue of your employment. The Motherland needs such people as you.

For a moment there's deep silence. Then every-

*body rushes to Tormentawer, with Cravenarch
von Munch leading the way.*

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: My dear friend, I always believed your fortune is yet to come. *(To everybody present)* A great ship needs deep waters, you know. And he will distinguish himself someday.

THE ENCHANTRESS: *(Shyly)* Now I agree to marry you, Tormentawer.

The guests and the friends surround the lovers.

TORMENTAWER: But I have nothing now. Neither a house, nor money. We cannot even go to the Canaries as I promised before.

THE ENCHANTRESS: It doesn't matter much for me, for I have my little forest house. We will live there together. The only thing that matters is your soul full of generosity and tenderness. Am I right, friends?

CRAVENARCH VON MUNCH: *(Obsequiously)* She's right. She's right indeed, Mr. Advisor to the President.

Tormentawer and the Enchantress join hands.

TORMENTAWER AND THE ENCHANTRESS: *(In unison)* Listen everybody! We're waiting for you in the forest where our marriage will be held!

THE GUESTS: Hip-hip-hurrah! Long live the sweet-hearts! Long live love and prosperity!
The lovers kiss.

The end of Scene 2.

Scene 3.

Lissie's room. A huge Christmas tree stands in the corner with candles burning on its branches. A shining box with scarlet bow can be seen behind the tree. There is also a cake on the table. The girl's sleeping in the rocking chair. Then she wakes up.

LISSIE: *(Surprised)* The tree! And candles are burning! What a huge cake! *(The girl examines the tree, and then she puts her palms to her breast.)* Ah, what a wonderful princess gown! What a wonderful coat! I would like Phil to see me in that coat! I'll try them on right now. *(Lissie returns in a few moments)* These are from Granny and Grandpa, for sure!

The girl starts dancing around the room, and then she finds the box. She unties the bow carefully,

but in this very moment Phil runs into the room accompanied by his friends.

PHIL: *(Raptly)* Lissie! I've got an invitation to the Christmas party for you! We'll spend this Christmas together! Wow, you're so beautiful in this gown!

*The girl smooths the pleats of her gown shyly.
Phil's friends gather around her.*

LISSIE: *(Wily)* And we shall go for sledge rides, shan't we?

PHIL: *(To his friends)* Shan't we, guys?

FRIENDS: We shall, indeed!

LISSIE: And shall we build a snow fortress?

PHIL: We shall. But only together.

LISSIE: All right.

PHIL: Where's this shining box from?

Everybody examines the box.

LISSIE: This is a gift. From Mommy and Daddy, I guess. I wonder, what's in there?

The girl pulls the bow, the box opens and Ciao jumps from it. It seems like he's alive.

LISSIE: Yay! *(Clapping)*

Children and Ciao dance around the room together.

PHIL: Look! The golden snow's falling.

LISSIE: Let's open the windows and make our wishes, quickly!

They open windows – there's the golden snow falling outside. Some couple walks up the hill, embracing each other.

PHIL: *(To Lissie)* Who are they?

LISSIE: *(To Phil's friends)* These are our new maths teacher and his wife. They love each other so much, and they love us, their pupils. Look, they wave us hello!

The lovers wave in greeting, and the children wave back to them.

PHIL: Lissie, I'd like to see the golden snow falling everywhere!

LISSIE: *(Addressing the spectators)* It is falling already throughout all the country! And we gladly invite you all to our Christmas party!

The children join their hands and start dancing around the Christmas tree.

The end.

