

Janacek: From the House of the Dead
Excerpt from Act II: Skuratov's story

- Cook: Alexander Petrovitch. We've got the evening off and a theater show.
- Priest: Peace on this holiday.
- Prisoners: We too wish for peace.
- Cook: A piece? A kopek's worth?
- Small Prisoner: Cut me a kopek's worth.
- Skuratov: Brothers the General's coming. He's inspecting all of Siberia.
- Small Prisoner: He'll do in the warden, won't he?
- Tschekunoff: What business is that of yours?
- Small Prisoner: You don't care about anything. You just sleep, you idiot.
- Skuratov: Oh, what a vain and useless man I am. I was sent here only because I was in love.
- Prisoners: That's why they sent you to prison?
- Skuratov: That's right. And besides I fired a shot at a German. Tell me, was that enough reason to send me to prison?
- Prisoners: What happened? Tell us about it.
- Skuratov: Ok. From the beginning.
- Drunken Prisoner: He's lying he's lying
- Skuratov: I have to begin from the beginning.

They sent me to Yuryev, a lovely town with lots of Germans. I couldn't keep my eyes of their women. I took a liking to a German girl, Luise. She and her aunt were washerwomen. At first I just used to stand under their window but soon we were good friends. She was such a sweet thing. I'd never known a girl like her. I asked her to let

me do things for her. But she said “Sasha, you can’t do that. I want to stay chaste so I can be a proper wife to you.” Then she laughed and said “so let’s get married.”

Drunken Prisoner: Lies! He’s lying!

Skuratov: Just think, brothers. She would be my wife. How happy that would make me. So I went straight to my colonel.

Drunken Prisoner: Lies. You’re lying.

Skuratov:

Then one day Luise didn’t come. I waited and waited. She didn’t come. I wrote her a letter. She didn’t answer. What’s up? Some trick? She’d never told a lie, Luise; she doesn’t know how to lie. I write: “if you don’t come today I’ll come to you! Your aunt is behind this.” She came, came and wept. “Sasha a rich relative wants to marry me.” I felt as though I’d been hit. And she just cried. “So you want to rob me of my happiness?” She puts her arms around me. O Luise! A mere soldier wouldn’t be a good match, not even a corporal! Next day I went to the man’s shop. I look at him through the window. There he sits, the German. 50 years old, long hooked nose, bulging eyes, a watchmaker, repairing a watch. I felt like smashing the window! “Enough,” I think, “let bygones be bygones.” So I go back that evening to the barracks, lie down and think, Petrovitch, and cry bitter tears.

Drunken Prisoner: Lies! He lies!

Prisoners: Hou! Hou!

Skuratov:

One day passed and another, I don’t see Luise. He made her promise not to see me any more. When I realized it was all over, I took my coat and went to her place. Just in case, I took my pistol with me. I went in. There was the bridegroom in tails. Luise sat across from him. Also that aunt of hers. They sat silently. The German was seething with anger. Luise went pale. “What can I do for you,” says the German. “Do for me? Greet the wedding guest! Pour me some wine! I’ve come to be entertained!” “Sit down.” “Why so rude? I come in friendship. I want to be your friend.” “I can’t be your friend. You’re nothing but a soldier!” “You scarecrow, you know I could blow you away right now! Do you want me to shoot you?” “That’s not allowed.” “Not allowed?” “No!” “Then, take this!” A shot rang out. He fell. The women scream. I run off. Captured. Sentenced to life.

The prisoners: And Luise?

Skuratov: Oh, Luise.

The Prisoners: La la la la etc.

Schapkin: If the mare is black, you'll never wash her white. If the mare is black, you'll never wash her white. I've a fine shirt and velvet trousers too, velvet trousers too.