

**LEONID
ANDREYEV**



ANATHEMA

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Leonid Andreyev

Anathema

A Tragedy in Seven Scenes

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AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION BY

HERMAN BERNSTEIN

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"I myself shall bring them bread and milk.... Children are so tender.... They need so little; they eat a little crust of bread and they have enough, they drink a cup of milk and they know no thirst any longer. Then they sing...."—DAVID LUIZER.

To

NATHAN STRAUS

**WHO SO GENEROUSLY SAVED THE LIVES OF
THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN
THE TRANSLATION OF THIS WORK
IS HEARTILY DEDICATED
BY
HERMAN BERNSTEIN**

CHARACTERS

GUARDIAN OF THE ENTRANCES

ANATHEMA

DAVID LEIZER

SARAH, *his wife*

NAUM } *their children*

ROSA }

IVAN BEZKRAINY}

SONKA ZITRON} *tradespeople*

PURIKES

DANCING-MASTER

YOUNG MAN

PALE MAN

ORGAN-GRINDER

WANDERER

ABRAHAM KHESSIN

WEEPING WOMAN

WOMAN WITH CHILD IN HER ARMS

DRUNKARD

SONKA'S LITTLE GIRL

LEIBKE

Musicians, Blind People, Crowd

ANATHEMA

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PROLOGUE.

The scene represents a wild, deserted place, the slope of a mountain rising to infinite heights. In the rear of the stage, halfway up the mountain, huge iron gates, tightly closed, indicate the boundary of the world as we conceive it. Beyond the iron gates, which oppress the earth with their enormous weight, in silence and in mystery, dwells the Beginning of every being, the Supreme Wisdom of the universe.

At the foot of the Gates stands Someone guarding the entrances, leaning upon a long sword, perfectly motionless. Garbed in wide clothes, which are like stone in the motionlessness of their folds and creases, He hides His face beneath a dark cover, and is Himself the greatest of mysteries. Standing on the boundary separating two worlds, he is dual in his make-up;—in appearance a man, in reality a spirit. An arbitrator between two worlds, He is like unto a huge shield, which gathers all bolts,—all looks, all entreaties, all expectations, reproaches, and curses. The bearer of two elements, He wraps his speech in silence, which is like the silence of the iron gates, and sometimes in human words.

Amidst the rocks, looking around on all sides strangely and shyly, appears Anathema, someone accursed. Clinging to the grey rocks, himself grey, cautious and flexible, like a serpent seeking a hole, he goes stealthily and quietly to the

Guardian of the Entrances, desiring to strike him with an unexpected blow. But he is frightened by his own audacity and, jumping to his feet, laughs defiantly and maliciously. Then he sits down on a rock, with an air of freedom and independence, and throws small cobblestones at the feet of the Guardian of the Entrances;—cunning, he conceals his fear beneath the mask of raillery and slight audacity. In the faint, grey, almost colorless light, the head of the accursed one seems enormous; especially large is his high forehead, which is furrowed by wrinkles of fruitless reflections and unsolvable eternal problems. Anathema's thin beard is perfectly grey; his hair, once jet black, is also greyish, rising on his head in disordered tufts. Restless in his movements, he is vainly trying to conceal his alarm and his purposeless haste, which are forever devouring him. Endeavoring to emulate the proud stillness of the Guardian of the Entrances, he grows quiet for an instant in the pose of proud majesty, but the very next moment, in painful quest after the eternally elusive, he wriggles in mute spasms, like a worm under foot. And in his questions he is rapid and impetuous like a whirlwind, drawing strength and fury in his mad whirl....

ANATHEMA.

You are still here on guard? And I thought you were away, —even a chained dog has his moments of rest or sleep, even though the whole world be his kennel and Eternity his master! Is Eternity afraid of thieves? But do not be angry. I have come to you as a good friend and I implore humbly: Open the heavy Gates for an instant and allow me to have a

glimpse of Eternity. You dare not? But perhaps the mighty gates have cracked from age, and the unfortunate, honest Anathema could peep into the narrow cleft, without disturbing any one,—show me it with a sign. Softly, on my belly, will I crawl over, I will glance at it and crawl back,—and He will not know. But I shall know and become a God, become a God, a God! I have so long wanted to become a God—and would I be a poor God? Look!

He assumes a haughty pose, but immediately bursts into laughter. Then he sits down calmly on a flat rock and, folding his legs under him, takes out dice. He mutters something to himself, yet loud enough to be heard by the Guardian of the Entrances.

If you don't want to you need not do it,—I shall not fight with you. Have I come here for that purpose? I simply roamed about the world and came here by mere accident—I have nothing to do, so I roam about. And now I am going to throw dice. If He were not so serious, I would have invited Him, too,—but He is too proud, too proud, and He does not understand the pleasure of the game. Six, eight, twenty—correct! It's always correct when the Devil plays, even when he plays honestly.... David Leizer ... David Leizer ...

Turning to the Guardian of the Entrances, he speaks freely.

Do you know David Leizer? You surely do not know him. He is a sick and foolish old Jew, whom no one knows, and even your Master has forgotten about him. So says David Leizer, and I cannot help believing him—he is a foolish, but honest man. He is the man I have won just now with my

dice—you saw it: six, eight, twenty.... One day I met David Leizer by the seashore, when he was questioning what the waves were complaining of; and I liked him. He is a foolish, but honest man, and if he should be well tarred and lighted, he would make a brilliant torch for my feast.

Chatting with feigned ease, he steps over softly to the rock nearest the Guardian.

No one knows David Leizer, but I shall make him famous, I shall make him mighty and great—it is very possible that I shall even make him immortal! You do not believe me? No one believes the wise Anathema, even when he speaks the truth—and who loves the truth more than Anathema does? Perhaps you? You silent dog, you who have stolen the truth from the world, you who have barred the entrances with iron!...

He rushes furiously toward the Guardian of the Entrances, but retreats from the stern, motionless Guardian, with a shriek of horror and pain. And he speaks plaintively, falling with his grey chest upon the grey rock.

Oh, the Devil's hair is grey! Weep, you who have grown fond of Anathema! Wail and grieve, you who are striving toward Truth, who are honoring wisdom—Anathema's hair is grey! Who will help the son of Dawn? He is alone in the universe. Wherefore, O Great One, have you frightened the fearless Anathema—he did not intend to strike you, he only wanted to approach you. May I come over to you? Tell me.

The Guardian of the Entrances is silent, but to Anathema it seems that he hears something in the silence. Outstretching his serpentine neck, he shouts passionately.

Louder! Louder! Are you silent, or did you speak? I do not understand. The accursed one has a sensitive ear and discerns the shades of certain words in your silence; he feels a vague movement of thoughts in your motionlessness,—but he does not understand. Did you speak or are you silent? Did you say: "Come," or did it only sound so to me?

THE GUARDIAN.

Come.

ANATHEMA.

You said it, but I dare not come up to you.

GUARDIAN.

Come.

ANATHEMA.

I am afraid.

He advances toward the Guardian irresolutely, in zigzag movements; lies down on his belly and crawls, wailing with longing and fear.

Oh, I the prince of darkness, wise and powerful, and yet you see—I am crawling on my belly like a dog. And I am doing it because I love you, I want to kiss the hem of your cloak. But why does my old heart ache so much? Tell me, Omniscient.

GUARDIAN.

The accursed one has no heart.
ANATHEMA.

Advancing.

Yes, yes. The accursed has no heart, his chest is mute and motionless like the grey rock which does not breathe. Oh, if Anathema had a heart, you would have destroyed him long ago by his sufferings, even as you destroy the foolish man. But Anathema has a mind that is searching for the Truth, unprotected against your blows—spare it.... Here I am at your feet, reveal your face to me. Only for an instant, as brief as the flash of lightning,—reveal your face to me.

He cringes servilely at the feet of the Guardian, not daring, however, to touch his cloak. He is vainly endeavoring to lower his eyes, which are quick and searching, sharp, flashing like coals beneath grey ashes. The Guardian is silent and Anathema continues his fruitless and persistent entreaties.

Do you not want to do it? Then call the name of Him who is beyond the Gates. Call it in a soft voice, and no one will hear it; only I will know it, the wise Anathema, longing for Truth. Is it not true that it consists of seven letters? Or of six? Or of one? Tell me. Only one letter—and you will save the accursed one from eternal tortures, and the earth, which I am tearing with my nails, will bless you. You may say it softly, softly, you may only breathe it, and I shall understand it, and I shall bless you.... Tell me.

The Guardian is silent, and Anathema, after some hesitation, full of fury, crawls away slowly, growing

holder with every step.

It is not true that I love you.... It is not true that I wanted to kiss the hem of your cloak.... I feel sorry for you, if you believed me.... I simply have nothing to do, so I roam about in the world.... I have nothing to do, so I question the passers-by about this and that,—about things I know myself.... I know everything!

He rises, shakes himself like a dog that has just come out of the water, and choosing the highest rock, stands up there in a haughty, actorlike pose.

I know everything. With my wisdom I have penetrated the meaning of all things, the laws of numbers are known to me, and the book of Fates is open to me. At one glance I embrace life, I am the axis in the circle of time, which whirls rapidly. I am great, I am mighty, I am immortal, and man is in my power. Who will dare struggle with the Devil? The strong, I kill, and the weak I force to whirl about in an intoxicating dance, a mad dance, a devilish dance. I have poisoned all the sources of life, on all its roads I have built ambuscades.... Do you hear the voice of those who curse? The voice of those who are exhausted under the burden of evil? Of those who dare in vain? Of those who long endlessly and terribly?

GUARDIAN.

I do.

ANATHEMA.

Laughing.

The name! Call the name! Illumine the way for the Devil and for man. All in the world want goodness, but know not where to find it; all in the world want life, but meet only death. The name! Call the name of goodness, call the name of eternal life. I am waiting!

GUARDIAN.

There is no name for that which you ask, Anathema. There is no number by which to count, no measure by which to measure, no scales by which to weigh that which you ask, Anathema. Every one who has said the word, Love, has lied. Every one who has said the word, Wisdom,—has lied. And even he who has uttered the word, God,—has lied with the greatest and most terrible lie. For there is no number, no measure, no scale, no name for that which you ask, Anathema.

ANATHEMA.

Where shall I go? Tell me.

GUARDIAN.

Where you are going.

ANATHEMA.

What shall I do? Tell me.

GUARDIAN.

What you are doing.

ANATHEMA.

You speak through silence—can I understand the language of your silence? Tell me.

GUARDIAN.

No. Never. My face is open, but you see it not. My speech is loud, but you hear it not. My commands are clear, but you know them not, Anathema. And you shall never see, and

you shall never hear, and you shall never know, Anathema, unfortunate spirit, deathless in numbers, eternally alive in measures and in weights, but as yet unborn to life.

ANATHEMA.

Tormented.

Never?

GUARDIAN.

Never.

Anathema leaps down from the rocks, and tosses about madly, devoured by grief. Clinging to the rocks, he embraces them tenderly and then pushes them away angrily; he moans bitterly. He turns his face to West and East, to North and South of the earth, flourishing his arms, as if calling the earth to wrath and vengeance. But the grey rocks are silent, West and East are silent, North and South are silent, and in stern motionlessness, heavily leaning on his sword, stands the Guardian of the Entrances.

ANATHEMA.

Rise, O Earth! Rise, O Earth, and gird your sword, O man. There will be no peace between you and Heaven; the earth is becoming the abode of darkness and death, and the Prince of Darkness ascends to his throne upon it—from now on and forever. I am going to you, David. I will hurl your sad life towards the proud heaven like a stone from a sling—and the foundations of the high heavens will tremble. My slave, David! With your lips I will proclaim the truth about the fate of man.

He turns to the Guardian of the Entrances.

And you!...

He becomes silent, bashfully, confused by the Silence. He stretches himself lazily, as from tediousness, and mutters in a voice loud enough to be heard by the Guardian of the Entrances.

But am I not roaming about, because I have nothing to do? I have been here, and now I shall go there. Are there not plenty of roads for the gay Anathema, who is fond of healthy laughter and a carefree jest? Six.... That means that I bring to David a fortune which he does not expect.... Eight.... That means that David Leizer is healing the sick and reviving the dead. Twenty.... Correct! That means ... That means that David and I come to express our gratitude. David Leizer, the great, the powerful, the immortal David Leizer and I.... I am going.

Anathema departs.

Silence. The rocks are silent; the mute Gates, pressing the earth with their enormous weight, are silent; the Guardian, petrified, is silent.

Silence. But did not Anathema's footsteps awaken an alarming, resounding echo? One, two—some heavy steps are heard coming. It is like one footstep, but many people are coming; they are silent, but the silence is already quivering. A momentary confusion of sounds, of helplessness and tremulous outbursts, and suddenly the silence breaks out in high yellow flames of fire: somewhere below, in the invisible distance, on earth, long trumpets, carried by hands uplifted high, are

blaring in rebellious, brasslike tones,—their defiant cry of revolt is turned both to earth and to Heaven.

One, two,—now it is clear that a crowd is moving; its monstrous voice, its blended and separate sobs, its noisy and stormy speech is heard; and below, in the labyrinth from broken and dark passages, the first distinct sound rings out: "Da-a-vid!" It grows more distinct, rises higher, and now it soars overhead—on the wings of this brass fanfare, above the heavy stamping of the marching feet.

"Da-a-vid! Da-a-a-vid! Da-a-a-vid!"

The sounds blend harmoniously. They become the song of millions of people. The trumpets are blaring, exhausted; they call hoarsely with their brass voices—

Does the Guardian of the Entrances hear them? The grey rocks are covered with moans; passionate sobs rise to His feet, but the Guardian is motionless, the Guardian is speechless, and the iron Gates are mute.

The abyss crashes.

With one blow, as if splitting the earth, a brass roar and shout breaks forth,—and out of the fragments, like a spring from a rock that is split by lightning, a soft, harmonious, bright melody comes forth.

Then it dies out.

Silence. Immobility. Expectation, expectation, expectation.

CURTAIN

ACT ONE