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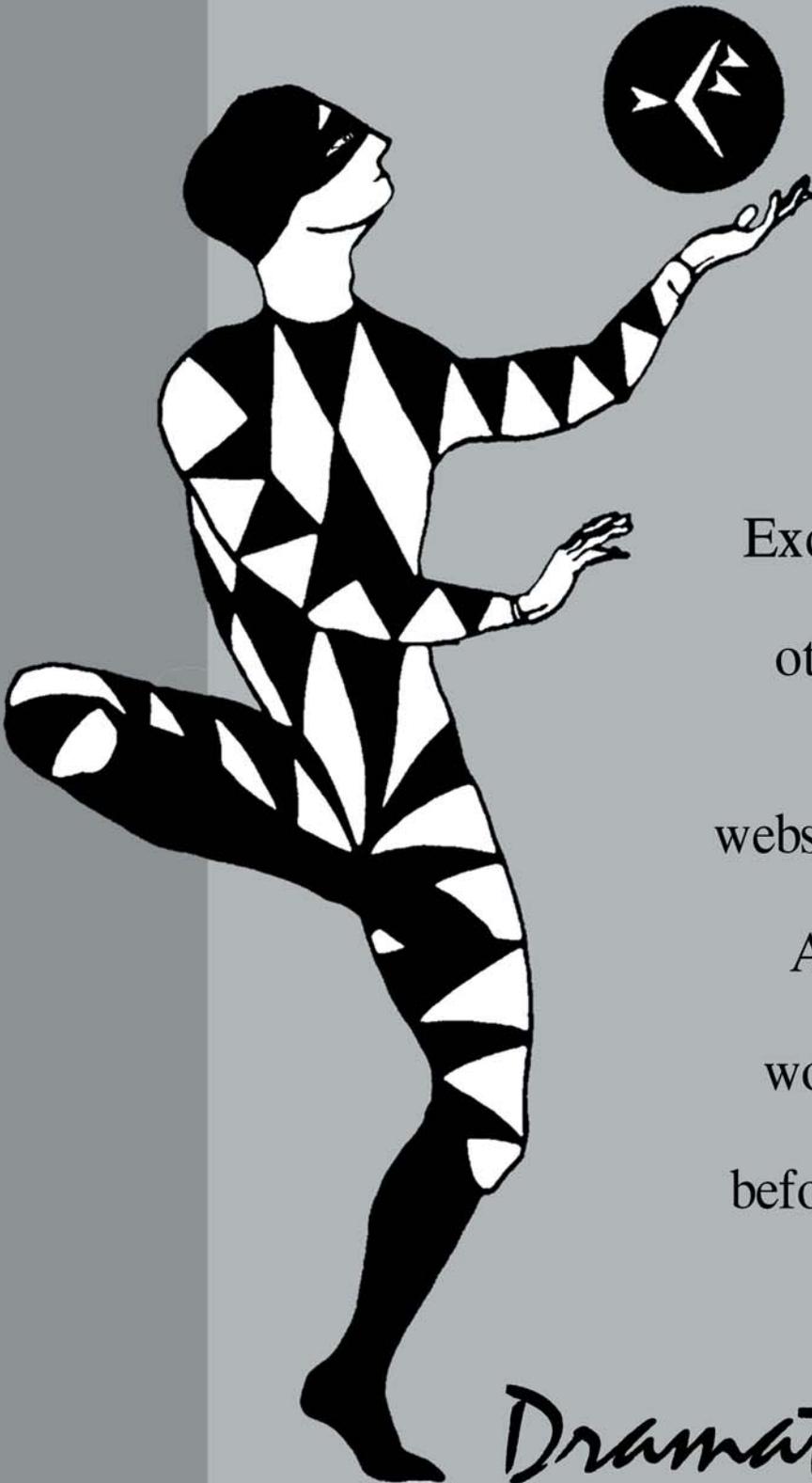
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Dramatic Publishing



A PLAY IN ONE ACT

ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN'S

One Day in the Life of
Ivan Denisovich

TRANSLATED BY

MAX HAYWARD and RONALD HINGLEY

ADAPTED AS A PLAY BY

ROBERT BROME



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

CHICAGO

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(ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF IVAN DENISOVICH)

One Day in the Life of
Ivan Denisovich

A Play in One Act

FOR ELEVEN MEN

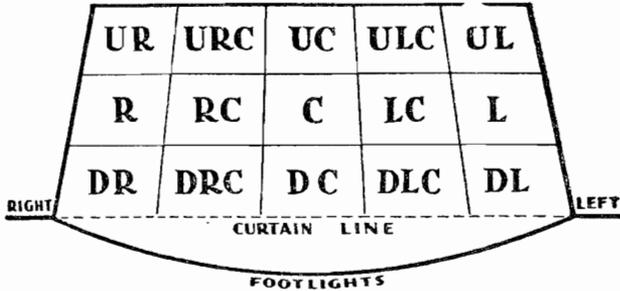
CHARACTERS

IVAN DENISOVICH SHUKHOV *a carpenter*
GOPCHIK *an impulsive lad*
DR. GRIGORYEVICH *the Medical Officer*
CAESAR *a former movie cameraman*
TYURIN *boss of Gang 104*
SENKA *a partially-deaf man*
ALYOSHKA *a devout Baptist*
BUYNOVSKY *a former naval captain*
THE WARDER *a guard*
LT. VOLKOVY *the Discipline Officer*
THE NARRATOR

PLACE: *A bunk room in a Siberian work camp.*

TIME: *January, 1951. 5:00 A.M.*

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: U R for *up right*, R C for *right center*, D L C for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: A 3-tiered bunk, two double-tiered bunks, blankets, two boxes, one dangling light bulb, pile of boots in middle of room, Bible hidden in mattress in middle bunk U R C (bunk room); wooden forms, hammers and nails, pieces of wood, ragged piece of tarpaulin with a few sticks under it (work area); card table and two chairs, chess board and men, bottle.

DENISOVICH: Empty bucket, makeshift knife, bowl of soup and spoon.

GOPCHIK: Rag (to bandage hand).

CAESAR: Pipe, newspaper.

BUYNOVSKY: Battered package containing sausages and cheese, tobacco in pocket.

WARDER: Clipboard, metal cane.

PRODUCTION NOTES

STAGING: Bunks could easily be replaced by folding wood-and-canvas camp cots, or metal cots. Seven single mattresses arranged around the edges of the room would be equally effective. The prisoners all wear drab, dark trousers and jackets; a number is stenciled in white block numerals on the chest and back of each man's outfit. A few of the men still wear their dark stocking caps; others may wear home-made cloth caps with ear flaps. They also have heavy mittens.

TEMPO: Nothing adds more to the polish of a production than the quick picking up of cues. Unless there is a definite reason for a pause, train your actors to come in with their speeches "on the heels," so to speak, of the preceding speeches. When a production lags, audience interest likewise will lag. It is always advisable during the last week of rehearsals to hold one or more sessions during which the actors merely sit around in a circle and go through lines only, with the express purpose of snapping up cues.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

SCENE: *A small bunk-room in a Russian work camp in Siberia. A door leading to a corridor is U R; a small, bleak, square window is D L. It is half-coated with frost. It is before dawn and the place is lighted intermittently by search beacons that prowl the compound outside. The room accommodates seven men. A three-tiered bunk is U R C against back wall. One double-tiered bunk is against the wall R, another against the wall at L. Two wooden boxes are the only other furnishings, one at R C, one at L C. Illumination is provided by a single bulb. C. dangling on an electric cord. Wind moans eerily, off L. throughout the play. The men are sleeping in their bunks. For warmth they sleep fully clothed except for their felt boots, which are thrown in a heap in the center of the room.)*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *There is a brief pause. The seven men are asleep in their bunks. GOPCHIK stirs restlessly in his bunk and moans. BUYNOVSKY coughs. DENISOVICH shrugs deeper under the skimpy blanket. Offstage is heard the clang of a hammer striking an iron rod three measured strokes. The NARRATOR speaks. He may step in front of the curtain at one of the corners of the stage near the proscenium or he may speak over a loudspeaker system. If he appears, he should be dressed in the same sort of ragged, nondescript clothing as the prisoners.)*

NARRATOR. Reveille was sounded, as always, at 5 A. M.--a hammer pounding on a rail outside camp headquarters. The ringing noise came faintly through the window panes covered with ice more than an inch thick, and died away fast. It was cold and the warder didn't feel like going on banging. Denisovich never slept through reveille but always got up at once.

(DENISOVICH begins climbing clumsily from his bed, fully clothed and wearing a crudely patched home-made cap with ear flaps down, and then goes to the pile of boots, hunts for his own and starts pulling them on. From time to time he glances uneasily at the bunk where GOPCHIK lies. GOPCHIK has not responded to the summons but occasionally stirs and moans softly.)

NARRATOR *(continuing through this)*. Denisovich knew that the early bird could always scrounge a little something on the side, by sewing someone a cover for his mittens out of a piece of old lining, or by bringing one of the big gang bosses his dry felt boots while he was still in his bunk, to save him the trouble of hunting around in his bare feet, or by going to the mess hall to pick up bowls from the table and take them to the dishwashers. Oh, there were ways of getting food. The trouble was, there were always too many other people with the same idea. All the same, one evening the cook had tossed him the heel of a loaf. It wasn't as much as two slices of bread, but it was more than one slice. He'd ripped the mattress seam and hidden it inside in the sawdust. It was taking a chance. The guards might notice it and eat it. Maybe he'd be smart to eat it himself. But it gave a man a good feeling to know he had something put by against a rainy day. *(DENISOVICH crosses to the bunk, feels for the bread, adjusts it to be better concealed, glancing*

over his shoulder as he does so. GOPCHIK moans again and DENISOVICH crosses to him anxiously and bends above the cot in low-voiced colloquy with him. While this is going on, BUYNOVSKY leaves his bunk and begins to put on his boots. Like DENISOVICH, he has slept in what clothing he has. Then one by one, as the NARRATOR proceeds, the other men get up, don their boots and go out. At this time the lights outside wink out and a red glow through the window indicates the dawn.)
NARRATOR *(continuing through preceding action).*

This morning Denisovich was worried about Gopchik. It had only been a case of a frostbitten thumb, but now there were signs of infection. Gopchik was sixteen. He'd been only eight years old when he'd been caught carrying milk to a partisan hidden in the woods, but they'd sentenced him to ten years in the prison camp, the same as if he were a man. Denisovich was sentenced at the same time, and he'd always tried to give the kid a break. Actually Gopchik reminded Denisovich of his own son--the boy that died--he was the same type, hot-headed, impractical. The kid had even been foolish enough to protest Denisovich's imprisonment--as if the authorities cared whether or not the sentence was just. Fat chance of their turning loose a good carpenter! Well, that was eight years ago and they'd both be out soon! Actually, not very soon, if you wanted to split hairs. With luck they'd be out in two years. That is, if the Commandant didn't decide to keep them longer. That happened. Buynovsky said it would happen. He said Denisovich was a fool to turn in such good work. But--there was the rub. Denisovich was a good workman. How does a person stop himself from being what he is? You might as well expect a cabbage to turn into a pumpkin!

BLACKOUT

(The sound of vigorous hammering is heard. After a moment the lights come up on a small downstage area of the stage. DENISOVICH, BUYNOVSKY and SENKA are working. The window now shows daylight. DENISOVICH is working hard just pounding the last nail into a wooden form for the cement base. BUYNOVSKY and SENKA are languidly helping. They bring additional wood, steady the form, etc. TYURIN enters.)

TYURIN. The forms ready?

DENISOVICH. Almost. I'm on the last.

TYURIN. I sent in the wood half an hour ago. What's the matter?

DENISOVICH. Too rotten to hold nails.

TYURIN *(crossing over and inspecting the wood in process)*. Looks fine to me.

DENISOVICH. This isn't the same wood, comrade boss. *(He continues to work feverishly.)*

TYURIN. Where'd you get it?

DENISOVICH *(apologetically)*. Well, actually, comrade boss, I noticed that the boards over that broken window were pretty fair quality.

TYURIN. So?

DENISOVICH. So I and Senka pried them loose and I nailed the rotten wood over the window instead.

TYURIN. You said it wouldn't hold nails.

DENISOVICH *(grinning)*. Not much problem there, comrade boss, with the wind off the steppes always beating on that window. The boards'll stay in place there--*(interested.)*--but now you get some wet cement pressing on a form----

TYURIN *(interrupting)*. Just hurry it up. I won't report you for stealing communist property unless someone else notices. *(TYURIN goes out.)*

DENISOVICH *(glancing affectionately after him)*. A good fellow, the boss.

BUYNOVSKY. You're a fathead, Ivan Denisovich. The shutters keep the wind off us. Why waste good wood on the forms? The cement will freeze anyway.

DENISOVICH (*proudly*). Ah, but I've thought of that! Look here. (*Steps to a low pile hidden under a ragged piece of tarpaulin and draws it aside, showing a few sticks.*) I got this wood together. Meant to use it at the barracks, but--if we damp it down so it burns slow, it'll bring the temperature up enough so the cement will set before it freezes.

BUYNOVSKY (*clapping his head in his hands and shaking his head*). You fool! Nitwit! Who cares if the cement freezes?

DENISOVICH (*straightening and speaking with dignity*).

Sir, I know you're an educated man--far different from me. You were once a big officer in the Soviet navy, a captain, some say. But, if you'll excuse the remark, I care.

BUYNOVSKY. Under in the name of all the saints, why?

DENISOVICH. Because I'm a good carpenter. That's why. (*With abrupt change of manner.*) You, Senka --(*Pokes him to get his attention and shouts in his left ear.*)--take the wood and start the fire--mind you bank it well. (*SENKA springs into action.*) You, Buynovsky, hurry! Help me with this!

BLACKOUT

NARRATOR (*speaking through the blackout*). There was a delay in the men's getting back to camp. Denisovich insisted that the last of the cement be poured, and that held up the whole group. Then first the guards miscounted and then a man was missing and had to be found. It was only when they lined up to be frisked for stolen tools that Denisovich remembered the piece of steel. Finding it had been such luck! It must have fallen off a wagon

bringing bags of cement. He'd just happened to catch the glint of steel sticking out of the snowbank and by pretending to drop his mitten he'd been able to snatch it up unnoticed. He'd shaped a handle and set the steel in it and then in the rush of work he'd forgotten it and made no plan for getting it past the friskers! Should he drop it while there was still time? Oh, Father in Heaven, he couldn't. Such a bright, strong piece of steel with a natural point at one end! A knife that could mean the difference between death and life to a man in this camp! Desperately, he hid it in his mitten and placed himself where he'd be searched by one of the older friskers. Maybe an old fellow like that would be careless. If it were found he'd end up in the cold cells. You didn't last long there in seventeen below zero weather with only eight ounces of bread and hot food every third day! "God in Heaven," he prayed, "help me and keep me out of the cold cells!" And--miraculously--God helped! The chief warden shouted: "Let's have the fellows from the tool works," and the old man forgot the other mitten and waved him on. Now if only the lousy house patrol hadn't found the bread he'd sewed up in his mattress! And if only Gopchik were all right! He'd left word for the medical orderly that Gopchik was sick. But--wouldn't you know it! Just when things were looking hopeful the warden singled him out!

VOICE of WARDER (*shouting offstage*). You--S-854! Fall out!

VOICE of DENISOVICH (*replying offstage*). Yes, sir, comrade warden.

NARRATOR. They set him to wiping up the warden's room with a bucket of water! It was the job of the headquarters orderly, but he'd bribed his way out of it. A carpenter shouldn't be given such chores! But Denisovich knew better than to protest. He

sloshed water around until the warder yelled at him to hurry and get the hell out. Then he simply ran a damp cloth over the floor so no dry spots would show. The warder was busy playing chess with Volkovoy, the Discipline Officer. They didn't notice. He threw the rag behind the stove. They never glanced up. Denisovich stepped quickly to the officer's door and threw the remaining water on the path used by the top brass. Ha! That ought to fix them! Wouldn't take long for it to freeze at seventeen below zero, and then with the light snow falling and covering the icy path--ha--he might even catch one of the big shots!

(Another small stage area lights up. WARDER and LT. VOLKOVVOY are sitting at a card table playing chess. There is a bottle on the table. DENISOVICH stands near the door with an empty bucket in his hands.)

WARDER *(without looking up)*. Don't open the officer's door, you jackass! Finish and get out! *(Moves a piece.)*

DENISOVICH. Yes, comrade warder.

WARDER *(yelling without looking up)*. What were you doing with the door open? Now it's cold as hell in here! *(VOLKOVVOY, without looking up, smiles and moves a piece.)*

DENISOVICH *(guiltily)*. Nothing, comrade warder, nothing at all. I was just tidying up.

WARDER *(moving a chess piece hastily and then looking up)*. Making an officer of the camp uncomfortable in sub-zero weather by opening a door unnecessarily is sabotage. Once more, and you'll get two days in the cold cells. *(He turns back to his game.)*

VOLKOVVOY *(pleased at the turn of the chess game)*. Check! *(The WARDER stares at the chess-board and slaps his open hand to his forehead in dismay.)*

There is a loud thump against the outside door and a shout of someone falling outside.)

OUTSIDE VOICE. What miserable offense of a pig is responsible for ice on the officers' pathway? (*VOLKOVYOY and the WARDER leap up instantly and cross to doorway, opening the door.*)

WARDER. The Commandant!

VOLKOVYOY (*pushing out past him*). Allow me to help you up, sir.

WARDER. I personally will investigate this. Who could be responsible for such a thing? (*He exits through door, leaving DENISOVICH on the stage. He looks after them, then turns to face the audience. A big, broad smile lights up his face. He crosses his arms and then speaks.*)

DENISOVICH. Who indeed could have done such a terrible thing with their dirty old mop water?

BLACKOUT

NARRATOR (*continuing through blackout*). Well, you do what you can! If you can't fight the enemy in big ways, you must fight in little ways. Gopchik would laugh. That is, he'd laugh if he were feeling better, and he very well might be. Denisovich had seen just as bad an infection clear up overnight. One plunge of the orderly's hypodermic. You'd say it wasn't a thing to make any difference but it worked all the same! When Denisovich noticed Gopchik wasn't in the dining room, he got a bowl of soup for him, but still from force of habit, when he entered their room, he went first to be sure the bread was still in the mattress, and to hide his knife. Then he saw that the medical orderly was there.

(Bunk room lights up. GOPCHIK is seated on the bottom bunk L. His right hand is being examined by

DR. GRIGORYEVICH, the medical officer. DENISOVICH crosses at once to his bunk, glances quickly over his shoulder to be sure he is unobserved, and assures himself the piece of bread is still there. Then he takes off his mittens and hides the knife in his boot top. He hides the bowl of soup under the mattress. The others do not notice him. GOPCHIK stares worriedly at his infected thumb. Then his eyes probe those of the doctor.)

GOPCHIK. The thumb does not . . . look so good? *(No answer from the DOCTOR, who slowly turns the hand over to inspect the back of it and traces the inflammation up the arm.)* But it will be . . . all right? . . . *(Still no answer.)* Doctor. . . . My hand!

DOCTOR. You must go on Sick Call tomorrow morning. I will send an order to Camp Headquarters for your admission to the hospital.

GOPCHIK. Hospital? But this--this is only frost-bite----

DOCTOR. The hand has been frozen. Infection lies deep in these fingers. The flesh is deteriorating.

GOPCHIK. You have antibiotics!

DOCTOR *(frowning, starting to rewind rag--the original bandage--around hand)*. I must do--preventive surgery--at the wrist.

GOPCHIK *(unbelievably)*. You--you would cut off my--hand?

DOCTOR. With delay, I would have to amputate the arm.

GOPCHIK *(terrified)*. No! No!

DOCTOR. You have nothing to say about it, Gopchik. I am responsible for the health of the four hundred men in this camp.

GOPCHIK *(in shock)*. Oh, God! . . .

DOCTOR. You knew the risk. Why weren't you more

careful?

GOPCHIK. Careful? How? (*Angrily.*) People who are warm don't sympathize with people who are cold! Try working thirteen hours a day at seventeen below zero! Just try it!

DOCTOR (*sighing*). I don't run the work camp. I only practice medicine, here in Siberia. (*Wryly.*) And not by choice.

GOPCHIK. Not by choice do I build walls and string barbed-wire fences, in January, for the new prison camp, three kilometers away!

DOCTOR. Then are we not lobsters in the same trap?

GOPCHIK. Those madmen in Moscow---

DOCTOR (*sharply*). Keep your political opinions to yourself.

GOPCHIK (*in a burst of hysteria*). I would rather keep my hand! Doctor, you must save it. Please save my hand!

DOCTOR (*having finished rewrapping GOPCHIK'S hand*). Look on the bright side. The amputation will qualify you as a permanent invalid. You will get work inside. (*On the word "amputation," DENISOVICH has paused sharply.*)

GOPCHIK. Spraying beds for lice! Sewage duty.

DOCTOR (*standing*). Report to the hospital no later than five-thirty in the morning. (*Pauses, softening a bit.*) The operation will not be painful. We will put you to sleep. (*DENISOVICH, at R, closes his eyes, half sick.*)

GOPCHIK (*rising in frenzy*). Is it because it's too much bother to treat my hand?

DOCTOR (*stiffening*). I have turned men in for less than that! (*A shrill, steam train whistle echoes on the wind from off L.*)

GOPCHIK (*accusingly*). Do I not tell the truth, Doctor?

DENISOVICH (*warningly*). Gopchik! . . . (*The DOCTOR turns and strides U R. He glances bitterly at*

GOPCHIK.)

DOCTOR. Am I to blame if the drug shipments from Moscow do not come? (*DR. GRIGORYEVICH exits angrily U R. DENISOVICH watches GOPCHIK, who sinks on the lower bunk L, sobbing quietly. DENISOVICH brings out the bowl from the top bunk, then pauses.*)

DENISOVICH. Gopchik, I'm sorry!

GOPCHIK (*bitterly*). It's your fault! You sent him.

DENISOVICH. It wasn't safe to let it go longer. You had red lines streaking up your arm. You can't wait with infection, you'll lose your arm. (*Draws near him and shows the food.*) I brought your gruel.

GOPCHIK (*surly*). Eat it yourself. I don't want it!

DENISOVICH. You don't! (*Half lifts the spoon to his mouth, then firmly puts it back.*) You should eat it whether you're hungry or not. It will give you strength.

GOPCHIK. Take it away!

DENISOVICH. I told the cook it was for a sick friend.

He didn't take it out of the bottom of the kettle-- but he didn't take it off the top, either. It's almost thick and there's a piece of fish skeleton in it. You should suck the bones.

GOPCHIK (*turning away in disgust*). The sight of it sickens me. (*DENISOVICH takes a deep breath of the aroma, again half lifts a spoonful to his mouth. Then he firmly replaces the spoon in the bowl.*)

DENISOVICH. I'll put it here, Gopchik, in case you get hungry in the night. (*Sets bowl on box at L C.*) And do not think about tomorrow. Just live each day as it comes. One day at a time. I have learned that.

GOPCHIK (*looking at him, slowly*). But tomorrow you will still have both hands! (*Rises, crossing R C.*) Ivan Denisovich, I will not let them do it. In this world a man needs both hands. Both fists!