

George M. Grow



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# The Beggars' Banquet

A play for fun and study  
in three acts  
Dawn of the new era

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# Characters

## TEAM:

The pretty seminar facilitator Aida Slamecka; 28, integral scientist, solar garden operator; well-known from the TV survival college Local Vegetation and Food; dark-skinned, black braids, extra dark painted eyes, red stockings, green miniskirt with tight waistband

Leo, the assistant; 32, son of Spanish immigrants; swimmer, participation at the Olympic Games in Nairobi, U.S. master in breast-stroke and freestyle; buff body, glittering artiste suit made of white latex with straps; suspenders, semi-nude chest, penis-décolleté

Mr. Todd Kessler, the charming voice from the loudspeaker; 41, counselor, moral philosopher and legislation supervisor; legate of the Ministry of Education and Arts

## PARTICIPANS:

Babir, 52, arrived quite recently from India to New York; taxi driver, seeking work

Tad Shelter, 41, the publisher of the weekly paper “The Good News”, circulation, 2,000

Leonie Butterworth, 74, widow of an industrialist; red-haired, straw hat with faded roses, gigantic golden arm rings, pearl choker, in full feather, outrageous, but very much a lady of the world, with a strange grace despite all the grotesqueness

## GUESTS:

Young man with full fishing gear

Young lady, red cap, red bag

## The audience

TROUBLEMAKERS:

Inspector third class

Sergeant

CAPSULE GUEST:

Chad the bum; black eye, yellow garbage bag instead of trousers, narrow pink-colored belt, cap with a blue visor and the logo “International Bank of Pennsylvania”.

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*The Beggars’ Banquet*

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Background information and a Portrait of the play’s main character you can find at page 68.

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The Beggars’ Banquet

**First Act**

FIRST SCENE

*Chad on a tumbledown bench in the Ramble, the eighteen-hectare designer primeval forest in the middle of Central Park. Sinuous paths, dense foliage and rocks. Through the branches, the view at the San Remo, the luxury apartment building, only one of whose two twin towers remains standing. Nightfall. A creek is burb-ling, birds are twittering. Chad rummages in a plastic bag and reveals various utensils: laundry, clothes, toiletries and a role of TP. Then he hastily*

*bundles everything up and hides the pack in the hollow of a rotten tree since he hears approaching noises. Shortly inside the picture, Babir the drop-out.*

CHAD (jumping to his feet, brandishing a branch in his hand). Who's there? Reveal yourself, lurker! (He hears some cracks from the undergrowth.) I warn you and I'm not unarmed, I know how to defend myself! (He performs a couple of movements of his own martial style.) Hua he! Ho ha! He!

BABIR (stops, draws the plastic bag to his chest protectively and leans slowly into the scene. Then he looks back in fright.)

CHAD (tries to espy the comer with his wooden weapon at the ready). What do you want with me? Come closer so I can see you!

BABIR (approaches with short, stiff steps, stops and lets the plastic bag slip to the ground; joyfully). Well, I never! There you are again! What an un-expected pleasure! How are you doing? Do you still issue death certificates?

CHAD (drops the stick; coolly). The dead are buried. Do you hear the birds?

BABIR (turns an ear upwards but does not seem to be especially fond of it). I'm pleased to see you. I thought you were done for.

CHAD. Tell me about it. I went missing for some weeks, but then I stopped waiting although it sometimes happens that a missing person is found.

BABIR. You don't say. Who was looking for you, then?

CHAD (silently looks up to the sky). The park is under the flight route of the migrating birds. It's a long way from the Arctic to the tropics. At times, you can find half of the American species here: songbirds, ducks, herons, crows, cormorants. They are unaffected by everything.

BABIR. May I ask where the Sir has passed the last weeks?

CHAD. Under the sky. In hell.

BABIR. In hell? Where?

CHAD (without look and gesture). Right over there.

BABIR. Where there?

CHAD. I was lying on the moss and was staring to the sky. I was sick for some weeks, but today has been the first beautiful day after a long time and I could get out of my nest. Anyway, I've to go back now that I'm not cold, that I don't relapse. You know relapses are dangerous without medicine.

BABIR. You poor. What's wrong with you?

CHAD. No job, no medicine. It's that simple. Now we are over the worst and nothing has gotten better. The Christmas trees should have taken me.

BABIR. Christmas trees?

CHAD. The flares, you oaf. The heck with it!

BABIR. Buck up, there are still possibilities, things are looking up!

CHAD. I bring the garbage away on some days. You see how the park is going to seed. You have to be there and ready for anything, isn't that right?

BABIR. Whether I'm there, I don't know. I miss my home. My wife, my children. Every time I see a father

with a little boy, I feel miserable. My relatives thought that somebody like me would be urgently needed in America, and so I rode on an open-bed truck two weeks through the desert, through Pakistan, Iran and Turkey as far as Istanbul. There were twenty-five of us on the bed, all crammed together. On the way through the desert, we saw many corpses and gaunt people straying all over the place with the death in their eyes. Truck drivers apparently simply abandoned people along the way. Then the passage. The rickety tub that was supposed to bring us over wasn't big enough for so many. We had to bail water out of the boat with our shoes. When we arrived in Boston, I did not even have the strength to go ashore. Never again will I go abroad without my family, and when I go back to India, I want to go comfortably by airplane.

CHAD (squats on the bench). So I guess you haven't raised the cash yet.

BABIR. How should I? Today the ticket would set me back twelve million. Every week another zero. Fiscal officers have gone insane because all the zeroes, but say, how can we celebrate our reunion, old friend? (He sits down with Chad and puts his arm around his neck.)

CHAD. You stink.

BABIR. As if you don't? Haven't you got used to it?

CHAD (sniffs at him). To my own smell I have. (He distastefully takes Babir's hand off his shoulder and moves aside.)

BABIR. Oh, yes, so it is with the Americans. (Silence.)

CHAD (whistles).

BABIR. Strange thing happened this morning. I was on an errand. This young lady came through the thicket on the other side of the park. She was very excited and had dirt on her hands. I brought her letter to a notary in the 8th street. Just fancy, in her office, there were sacks of rice stacked from the floor to the ceiling, and because she wanted to send me away without way money, I asked her whether she would kindly refund my favor with a handful of rice.

CHAD. Rice, my God. (He licks his lips.)  
And did she give you any?

BABIR. "How humble of you," she said and asked me, "What do you think I'll be living off of in ten years?" Then she gave me a kiss on my cheek, pushed me into the corridor and bolted the door four times.

CHAD. Was she pretty?

BABIR. And how, clean and elegant.

CHAD. And what did you prefer: the rice or the kiss?

BABIR. The kiss. You can eat bark and grass, but you don't get a kiss each day.

CHAD. What are you complaining, then?

BABIR. Who is complaining? It's always the same in this nation state: The more energy a man drains from others, the better he feels.

CHAD (picks up the newspaper from the ground and browses through it. Babir reads along.) The Indian rupee has stabilized. Zurich notes twenty-two per cent. Zurich lies on Lake Zurich. The newspapers shall stop setting the people against each other. That makes no sense, any-

way. I find it very right for the government to ask the population not to sell their houses to Asians. This is finally a good law. They have been exploited us many years, that's good enough. I would show every slant-eye immediately.

BABIR. If I were in your position, I wouldn't do that.

CHAD. Listen to this. And why not?

BABIR. Because you would be complying with the government.

CHAD. So what? I can whisper you that the government doesn't have any power. Don't tell me you are in on it with the rice monkeys, are you? (He mistrustfully looks over to him.) This wouldn't surprise me, you...

BABIR. Indian.

CHAD. Indian. Indians are no rice monkeys, anyway. I would massage the wretch who hides even one slant-eye till his pacifist soul ascends to the great unknown.

BABIR (looking into the paper). The world has been getting small, very small.

CHAD. My eye, how did you get that idea, there are just too many people. If the world is too small, mankind must die out or shrink.

BABIR. Shrink? Oh, right, modesty, it always helps.

CHAD. What are you babbling? Growth blockers are the future of mankind. Increase the dose from generation to generation till twenty Japanese can live in a single shoe box. Just like we chase after zeroes, mankind chases after events. Not only the politicians, everyone failed. Everyone was a part of the system, me and you as well.

BABIR. I can't see that happening. I

came from India just to teach how to become a pure soul, how to live righteously.

CHAD. What righteously? That I go to heaven, if I have suffered enough, that I must humble myself here in order to splurge there?

BABIR. The sages always agree in the end.

CHAD (throws the paper away, gets up and walks with a rolling gait to the hollow tree; constrained). Ha, ha. I actually just wanted to say that nobody can solve the problems.

BABIR. But can bear them.

CHAD (after a short think). There are some people who want to investigate how much man can bear, just to calm their nerves. I know who they are, and I know what they want. I know them by sight.

BABIR. What was that?

CHAD. They come by car.

BABIR. What car?

CHAD. Official cars, I've observed it all.

BABIR. All what?

CHAD. They recruit for Unit Five.

BABIR. But there is no Unit Five.

CHAD (wryly). Yes, of course, there is no secret unit, but your God is evermore.

BABIR. You only have to look at the world the right way. To stop at that what people say is despicable. The first law of life is to keep moving.

CHAD. You think you're funny, do you? What is supposed to move? Ass, hands, legs, brain, feelings? That all is in motion and nothing is getting any better.

BABIR. Does this surprise you since the prime mover arises from the same will that is nature itself?

CHAD Damned revolution of the mind.

This is how you make yourself look ridiculous, and it doesn't put food on the table.

BABIR. You're very much mistaken.

People like you are aware just of the natural will. This will comes over man and not from man.

CHAD. Okay, just keep preaching, hungry bellies have other worries.

BABIR. If you had attempted the will within the unity, you also could pull the strings to the fullest. Again and again, an apple or a nut falls on my head, or I find a gold ring behind the bushes, a bag full of coal, or I meet someone who gives me a job. You must earn your fortune. Be open for God's surprises.

CHAD. The pouch of coal is a mystery to me to this day. You probably knew about it before you went with me behind the barn.

BABIR. But I did share it with you.

CHAD. But it's also true that you wanted me to join this sect.

BABIR. That's how I know you Americans: Assume the worst for never being disappointed. What the hell is wrong with learning to reach utter clarity, if you elude every interpretation, if you abide by this what is directly manifested to your senses, or do you lack the courage to do it?

CHAD. Aha, like in the gulag, then.

BABIR. What?

CHAD. Have you been living under a rock? The Siberian prison camps. Only that the rich are slaving now. People say that the labor is so hard and life so full of deprivation there that you only can survive if you stop thinking and being focused on what

you were immediately doing. So the gulag is your long-sought paradise, isn't it?

BABIR (has his own thoughts on this matter, then): With you altos it is always that way: As of forty, he has his own opinion, namely not any.

CHAD. Perhaps in India. Here nobody listens to you if you start with instructions. Anyway, as far as I know, you've read not even the Bible.

BABIR. Yes, I did. To page four. The rest is appendix and footnote. If you have understood the beginning, you understand it all.

CHAD. You're talking about First Fall of Man.

BABIR. I talk about the fact that there are two special trees in the garden Eden: the tree of knowledge of good and bad, right and wrong, mine and yours, the tree whose fruits are things, in sum, the fruits of diversity - but there still is a second tree in this garden. It's the tree of life.

CHAD. The whole world wonders what the secret of life would be, and thus, of course, you find it in the Bible on page three.

BABIR. The God of the Bible put up the tree of life in the east of the garden. ---- The Orient is located in the east. ----- Orientation. (Hoping that Chad solves the puzzle thanks to his notes, Babir wants - but...)

CHAD (takes the plastic bag out from the stash, sits down next to him on the bench and offers him an apple). I won't kiss you, preacher, but take this!

BABIR. Woa. (He smells at it.) Where did you get this?

The Beggars' Banquet  
SECOND SCENE

*Spacious hall with classical elements, 3rd elevator floor; the high windows look out on the glass façade of the Brother Tower and the remnant of the Ernest Falk Bank which has survived up to the eighth floor; demolished, moldering, gutted. Behind this, the tower of the World Trade Center from which a huge edge has been ripped out. In the foreground, the embankment of the overhead railway with the rusted signal tower. In the hall, on the right, a splendid black piano and a drum kit; on the left, a number of filing cabinets and a door to the side rooms; straight ahead, an estrade with a speaker's pult against which the seminar facilitator is leaning; on the right, five high windows looking out on tree-tops and glassy façades.*

LOUDSPEAKER (while the theater curtain opens). ...Prad Biswanger, Elisa Eckhard, Doctor Paul Kafka, Annie Clorine Shelter, Susan Bachmann, Nicole Paul, Babir Shubhash, Tod Shelter, Doctor Amanda Simmons, Chip Aquino, Professor Sal Leville, Adam Cortez and Leonie Butterworth. Congratulations!

MRS. SLAMECKA. Thank you, Mr. Kessler. (To the seminar participants). These are the lucky people who have been admitted to the preparation seminar. I ask the people summoned to stay. Everyone who hasn't been called

can leave the hall or remain and observe quietly. You are welcome to make a new application the next deadline, then, I'm sure, you will be better prepared.

BABIR (comes rushing tardily into the hall. To Mrs. Slamecka.) Excuse me! The streets are full of demonstrators. I got completely stuck. Am I too late? My name is Babir Shubhash. May I ask whether I've passed?

MRS. SLAMECKA (peruses the list). Ba ... Ba ... Babir Shubhash. Take a seat. You have been approved. Let anyone else who shows up late be warned. Everybody who is late a second time will be dismissed. Okay. What's next? Well, every person whose name has been read out is looking forward to a seminar taking twelve mornings. The approval examination will take place here in the office on November 18th. Please take the exact date from the blackboard a few days in advance. You, Sir!

CHAD. I wasn't called up. Can I still keep the tuxedo from the wardrobe department or do I have to give it back? We're going to have a cold winter this year.

MRS. SLAMECKA. The attire in our wardrobe department is a private donation, ladies and gentlemen. We are not entitled to reclaim it from you. The mister with the faded flower in his buttonhole!

TAD. At first I'd like to say how pleased I am at being approved as a mendicant apprentice.

CHAD. I'll be your understudy.

A VOICE. Lucky beggar.

MRS. SLAMECKA. He is but this has

nothing to do with luck at all. The general songs of the gentleman were bewitching.

CHAD (gives Babir a dig with his elbow; quietly). Where on earth are we here? I'd better take my chances right now. (He gets up.) You know where you can find me. (Off.)

BABIR. Don't run away, brother!

YOUNG MAN. May I ask whether we get food stamps as it is generally provided for pupils and students.

MRS. SLAMECKA. Mr. Kessler!

LOUDSPEAKER. We don't distribute any food stamps, but to apprentices, the canteen is available free of charge at each meal time.

MRS. SLAMECKA. Does anybody else have a question? No? Then we can start with the lesson. (She calls out through the open door.) Leo, the documents!

LEO (enters the room and puts a bundle of papers on the lectern.

FEMALE VOICES (donate admiration).

LEO. Señora.

MRS. SLAMECKA. That's the trick of the matter: He who wants to be a good beggar must enchant the people. Let's start straight away with the first sentence of the Beggars' Codex. The beggars are...?

ONE AND ALL. The beggars are the temples of the town.

MRS. SLAMECKA. The beggars are...?

ONE AND ALL. The beggars are the temples of the town.

MRS. SLAMECKA. Now the second clause. The beggar is...?

ONE AND ALL. The beggar is a vessel open on all sides.

MRS. SLAMECKA. The beggar is...?

ONE AND ALL. The beggar is a vessel open on all sides.

MRS. SLAMECKA. Leo!

LEO (flips through the files).

MRS. SLAMECKA. Right! Who among you would like to say something about the change of paradigm in the begging tradition? The mister in the elegant pinstripe suit!

TAD. Not all that long ago, a line was drawn between man and man, between the casual strolling of upscale people and the poor beggars. Today, in the best case, the beggar and the patron are one. They together form the altar on which actuality and reality meet each other.

A VOICE. He stands for a world in which everybody has enough.

MRS. BUTTERWORTH. And is enough.

MRS. SLAMECKA. Excellent! Anybody else? Perhaps you? Here we go, the young man with the big hole in his trousers!

YOUNG MAN. Human fortune isn't composed satisfying your needs...

MRS. SLAMECKA. Absolutely. In the affluent society, most people had plenty they could live off, but they didn't know what they were living for. Senselessness, boredom, frustration, emptiness. Neurotic means: It comes to a hunt for lust. They want to fill this emptiness. They permanently wonder: What else is there?

A VOICE. Logotherapy.

MRS. BUTTERWORTH. Is not Jesus the Logos?

MRS. SLAMECKA. Mr. Kessler!

LOUDSPEAKER. "Every day and every hour offers a new meaning, and everyone has his own meanings," according to its founder Viktor Frankl. According to the Integral

Word and Practice Book, it's here all about the secondary quest for meaning. Secondary sense opens at SUB-JECTS. Subjects do not only preserve our existence, they are opposed to life as something that emerges from the inconspicuousness of things, because it might not be directly present, doesn't fit in, obstructs the way, needs to be improved, triggers desire or whatever – something that reveals itself in the mode of diversity as a resistive experience. As unquestionably meaningful this is for the art of living, as dissatisfying the secondary logos proves to be, if the secondary sense highlights have themselves leveled out on a once again dissatisfying standard, since, of course, the sense of the moment hardly touches the great questions of life.

MRS. SLAMECKA. Put simply, if they do not reveal themselves to the primary meaning, even intellectuals, artists, rich and creative people can be affected by this emptiness.

LOUDSPEAKER. The primary sense is far deeper, more lasting and a more fulfilling sense. Now, not only single moments, situations, people, insights and events make sense, but one finds the sense in the whole of being. The Logos Primos does not open by way of one's attitude TOWARDS the objects but opens WITHIN the world and the consciousness of BEING the world...

MRS. SLAMECKA. Stop! Thanks, Mr. Kessler! We have understood that the pure meaning doesn't reach us via objects. In the encounter with

the beggar, the giver learns to get from the consciousness of resistant diversity to the consciousness of sense-giving unity. And how, ladies and gentlemen, is this process named generally?

YOUNG LADY. Offering a sacrifice?

MRS. SLAMECKA. And what is the formula for this?

SEVERAL VOICES. The one sense discloses itself within the sacrifice of one's self.

MRS. SLAMECKA. Once again!

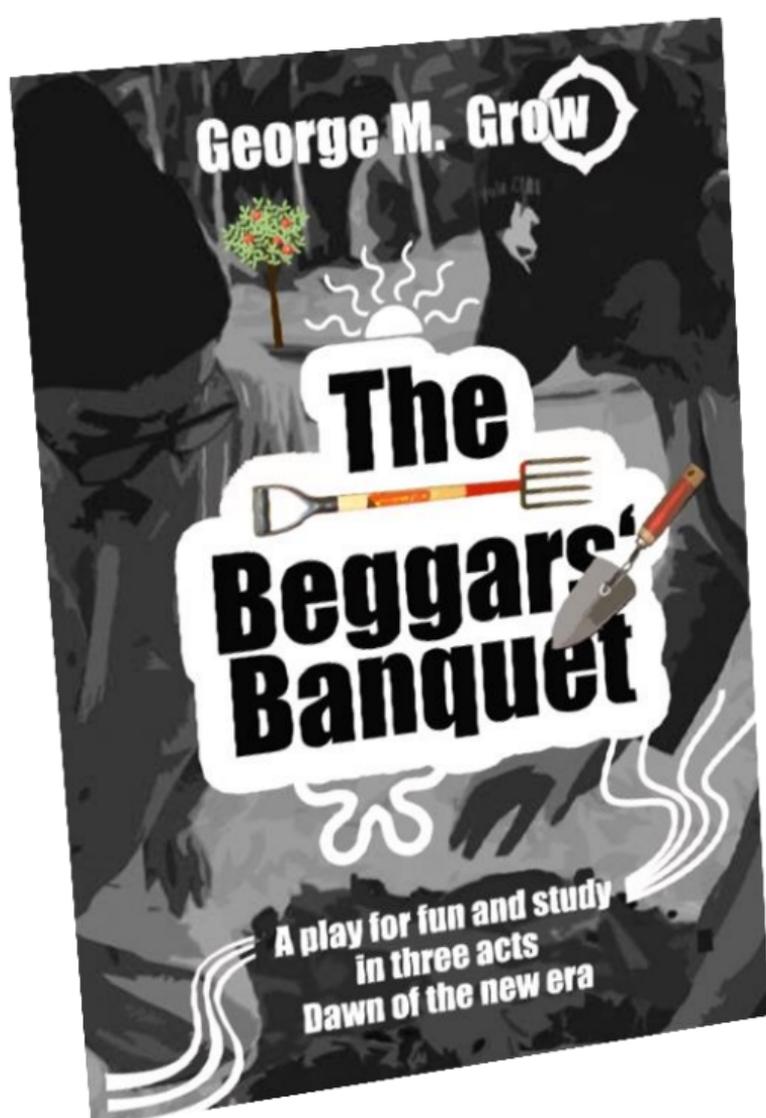
ONE AND ALL. The one sense discloses itself within the sacrifice of one's self.

MRS. SLAMECKA. Excellent, ladies and gentlemen, I like the sound of this. Furthermore, I want to remember that the offering cannot be a person, an object, anything that is sunken or burnt, but the consciousness of things. Is this understandable? Yes, well, then to you, Mr. Kessler!

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End of extracts

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by George M Grow



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