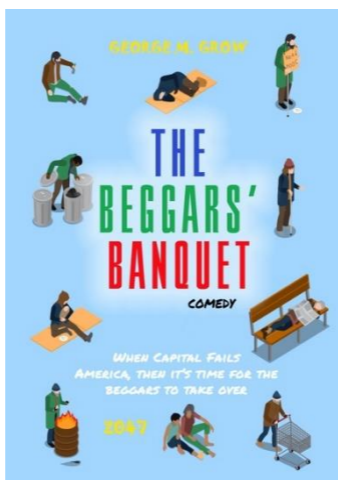
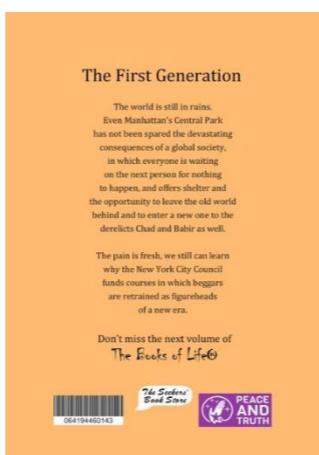


George M. Grow
The Beggars' Banquet
Comedy

"When capital fails Amerika,
then it's time for the beggars
to take over"



From the series
The Books of Life®



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Reading sample, page 43

New York City in the not too distant future after the Great Destruction; in a civil administration building directly opposite the old Central Station or what is left of it, in a classroom on the 8th floor, in the middle of the Beggar Seminary, led by Mrs. Slamecka and her assistant Leo, plus Dr. Kessler, the friendly voice out of the loudspeakers; present about 40 candidates for the official Beggar License for the state of New York – a necessary measure against the massive flood of beggars in the half-ruined metropolis, which is about to flourish anew.

MRS. SLAMECKA. Marvelous, well done! I can already see your donation plates overflowing. Our world needs people like you, it gasps for you, it won't leave you alone any more: people who were able to realize what they long to become in the world on their own. Well, ladies and gentlemen! Now I'd like to ask you to put yourself into the role of the donor and turn yourself emphatically towards Leo who is playing the beggar now. Leo!

LEO (takes a step forward and composes himself. Then he lets his eyes glide slowly, dead slowly across the audience from left to right and back again).

MRS. SLAMECKA. Okay, ladies and gentlemen, who of you would choose Leo to be his temple now? TAD, MRS. BUTTERWORTH, YOUNG LADY AND OTHER WOMAN (eagerly raise their hands).

LEO (leaps aside and salutes towards the door).

UNEXPECTED VISITOR (feverishly looks around). Doctor Slamitskiss?

MRS. SLAMECKA. I'm not sure, what can we do for you?

UNEXPECTED VISITOR (while he is taking off his gloves looking around). Is this Mardi Gras, is this a circus, what a sight you are!

MRS. SLAMECKA (humbly). I don't know what brings you here, Mister. Eh? Calm down and take a seat, Sir!

UNEXPECTED VISITOR. I? (Indig- nantly.) Don't you recognize the uniform!

SERGEANT (knocks on the open door). Inspector, Inspector!

INSPECTOR. What's the news, Sergeant?

SERGEANT. If I may respectfully re- port, everything is in order.

INSPECTOR. Has the mob stopped shooting?

SERGEANT. I respectfully report, were only shots of joy.

INSPECTOR. Anything else?

SERGEANT. Twenty-two arrests on the pier. No further casualties, everything back under control.

MRS. SLAMECKA. Gentlemen, I'm surprised at you! You are disrupting the class. Take your official deal in where they belong or state what do you want. Obviously you don't even know who you are looking for!

INSPECTOR. Mrs. Slamitskirts, a doctor.

SERGEANT. Inspector! I respectfully report, the person we are looking for is called (he reads from the organizer in his hand) Slamecka.

MRS. SLAMECKA. And what do you want with her?

INSPECTOR. Aha, so it's you. Don't

pull my leg, Doctor!

MRS. SLAMECKA (with a concerned glance at the wall clock). Our program has a tight schedule, and the next power cut won't wait, Inspector.

INSPECTOR (points decisively at the seminar facilitator. To the sergeant.) Identity check, chop, chop!

MRS. SLAMECKA. Leo, go and get the secretary.

LEO. Si, Señora!

INSPECTOR. He can leave it. The inquiries revealed that the beggar in front of the Central Station is one of your pupils, if it is you, then.

SERGEANT (fishes the scanner out of his pocket, comes towards the pretty seminar facilitator and starts the procedure). Keep still, don't blink!

LEO (to the hostess). Señora! Shall I have him summoned now?

MRS. SLAMECKA (while the officer is undertaking the biometric metering). I don't understand, has he been misbehaving?

TAD (at the window). He is at the main entrance down there. Easy to see from here.

SERGEANT (to his supervisor while the young man, the young lady, Babir, Mrs. Butterworth and some others are crowding to the window). I respectfully report, iris check done. It cannot be denied: she is the one we're looking for.

MRS. SLAMECKA. Nobody is denying anything. (She breaks loose and rushes to the window. On tiptoes, she looks over people's shoulders down to the Central Station.) My goodness! There he is standing without a stitch on.

MRS. BUTTERWORTH. Ho, ho!

BABIR. How many people are down

there?

YOUNG LADY. Half Manhattan is assembled around him.

TAD. His hat is full of coinage.

SERGEANT. I respectfully report, the naked dude, he... (He whispers into his ear.)

INSPECTOR. No!

SERGEANT. Yes. Twice already.

INSPECTOR. What a mess. (Towards the seminar facilitator). Go down and put an end to this shameless display!

TAD. I think he's singing.

MRS. BUTTERWORTH. What is he singing, then?

MRS. SLAMECKA. Leo, if you would open the window please!

LEO (pushes his way through the crowd and opens the window).

MRS. SLAMECKA. Silent now!

THE NUDE IN FRONT OF THE CENTRAL STATION (sings). Live my life in ever-growing rings that [incomprehensibly] make their way o'er everything. I [incomprehensibly] might not accomplish them, but I'll try it till it [incomprehensibly] brings.

MRS. BUTTERWORTH. Does someone understand him?

TAD. Quite!

THE NUDE IN FRONT OF THE CENTRAL STATION.

Circle around God [incomprehensibly] around the ancient tower [incomprehensibly] and I'll circle for thousands of years [incomprehensibly] and I don't know: Am I a falcon, a storm [incomprehensibly] or a great song...

THE PEEPERS (move their eyes from the right to the left. Their looks follow the incoming express train. The beggar's voice is drowned out by its noise).

MRS. BUTTERWORTH (looking at her watch). The George Washington punctual as a Swiss clockwork. Oh, how I love the old iron horses!

LEO. Not even it doesn't stop anymore. Only the local trains at the top and the bottom of the hour.

MRS. BUTTERWORTH. Hardly anybody can afford to ride. But it would be fine in any case.

THE THICK CLOUDS FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON'S SMOKESTACK (advances through the open window into the hall as if it was a giant snail).

MRS. BUTTERWORTH AND OTHERS (cough).

MRS. SLAMECKA (wipes tears from her face). Leo, shut it, close the window!

LEO (shuts the window).

INSPECTOR (is trying to wave the intruded fume away; towards the head of the seminar). I say it for the last time: Go down and put an end to this brazen performance!

MRS. BUTTERWORTH. What's eating you, Inspector. It's the most natural thing of the world.

SERGEANT. Not as natural as you claim. Let's have a rational look at this case: The naked beggar shall be an example. He may lead the people to the summit of their inner nakedness. The outer nakedness of the beggar in front of the Central Station distracts from it. He misleads the people. He is an affront to the city and has to be taken off the road.

MRS. SLAMECKA. Mr. Kessler, what do you know of this?

LOUDSPEAKER. As laid down in the cult method and order law of January 9th, 48, the beggar is

inviolable for everyone even for the organs of the executive authorities – as long as he doesn't step outside his safe zone. But if it should turn out – and I quote –, “that a physical danger arises from him, the official act can be extended into the safe zone.”

MRS. SLAMECKA (to the inspector with the spiked helmet). There you are, or has he hurt anybody?

INSPECTOR. Not physically but to our morals. Now go and fetch the guy off the street!

YOUNG MAN. So quickly? Nothing has taken yet.

MRS. BUTTERWORTH. If his donors don't achieve insight, his hat won't fill anymore and he will change the tactics.

YOUNG LADY. Agreed.

INSPECTOR. What agreed?

A VOICE. Hit the road!

INSPECTOR (flummoxed).

MRS. SLAMECKA. Don't make a big deal out of this. Even the inspector will

wise up yet that we can only make progress when new ideas have room to develop.

INSPECTOR. But still, aggressive begging is prohibited.

MRS. SLAMECKA. If this were a case of aggressive begging, you would have put him away by now. However, since the seminar must go on, and the power outage cannot be put off till later and you wouldn't like to leave us, I suggest that you participate in our training. Just what falls under the scope of aggressive begging, Inspector?

INSPECTOR (holds out his shoulder with the badge to the seminar leader). Chief Inspector, if you

please! Now, this law is interpreted very narrowly in New York City. Obstructing passersby, holding a newspaper in front of their faces, obstructing pedestrian traffic by stepping out of the safe zone, disrupting public order by reckless behavior and many other things falls under the scope of aggressive begging.

SERGEANT. Indecent speech is punishable as well. Moreover, speaking, singing and playing instruments with a volume of over sixty phons must be prosecuted.

MRS. SLAMECKA (to the apprentices). In order to avoid exceeding the sound level, a phonometer is included on the card you will receive from us. (She holds one of the cards up and shows it round.) To check how loud you speak, rhyme, sing or play, keep the corner on the left above pushed down for at least five seconds. The volume then appears on the display stripe accurate to within five percent. To perform the measurement correctly, you hold the card as far away as possible from yourself. (She takes up the said stance). Speech test. It does not take much to be free and whoever is free is king. Let's see what this does. (She reads from the display.) 58.2 phons.

CHIEF INSPECTOR. My respect!

APPRENTICES. It doesn't take much to be free, and whoever is free is king. It doesn't take much...

MRS. SLAMECKA. Please, ladies and gentlemen!

SERGEANT. That comes to eight hundred bucks or to twelve hours in jail for each of you.

MRS. SLAMECKA. If we were not in the magistrate.

CHIEF INSPECTOR. I'll say.

SERGEANT. It surprises me a little that you are raising your eyebrow now, doctor. The whole begging cult is based on a hypothesis, anyway. If there is a funny, an awfully funny thing at all, than it's this here.

LEO. Tas cosas más importantes no son cosas.

SERGEANT. What is he babbling about?

MRS. SLAMECKA. He said that the most important things were no things.

CHIEF INSPECTOR. Does he have a residence permit, then, that allows him a say?

LEO. Como dos elefantes en cristal-eria.

SERGEANT. I did follow that. All of you are blind to the facts. This has been getting about by now.

MRS. BUTTERWORTH, YOUNG MAN, YOUNG LADY AND OTHERS
(gazingly grope their way. Jolly).
We are blind, we are blind, we are blind!

SERGEANT (grows suspicious). And how do you know that I am a Sergeant if you are blind?

MRS. BUTTERWORTH. By the tone of your voice, all sergeants have the same tone of voice.

SERGEANT (distrustfully). You seem to have had some experience with the police. At least you're always cheerful, huh? You get chops and ham every day, don't you? Well, in that case, I also would be happy like you, but it's not funny to betray people into acts of foolishness. Always stick to the facts, take my advice!

MRS. SLAMECKA. We are observing the law, that must suffice for you.

SERGEANT (to himself). A flight of fancy, nothing but a flight of fancy.

MRS. SLAMECKA. Aha, and why is it that today that the beggars are overwhelmed with gifts and not the rich and the powerful?

CHIEF INSPECTOR. Because your cult has taken on the scale of an epidemic. You drive the whole town crazy. People want a new start, a real new start, that doesn't beat me. But that they stream into the temples and go home addled, that your cult is subsidized by the municipal government and the shrines are financed through taxes is a relapse to unfortunate times. All that we are missing now are the muezzin singing from the penthouse and the mayor preaching from the pulpit. If I were in charge...

MRS. SLAMECKA. But you aren't. There are no priests and pulpits. And why did you say *sect*? It seems that reading is not your strong point, is it?

LEO (points to the door plate and reads what is written on it). Section and not Sect.

INSPECTOR. Hanky-panky, then prove it!

MRS. SLAMECKA. Mr. Kessler, if you would put in a word!

LOUDSPEAKER. Substance and substratum have been proven. The substance is the sum of the matter as the body. The substratum is its nature, its mind. Natural scientists fathom the substance, beggars and donors the substratum.

CHIEF INSPECTOR. Believing folk!

MRS. SLAMECKA. Our believe is not

based on old books and rumors, it belongs the present times. Therefore, we believe in the divine ones, who confirm the guideposts independently of each other everywhere on earth again and again. Mr. Kessler, how many are they to date?

LOUDSPEAKER. Exactly 15,843.

MRS. SLAMECKA. In them we believe, in the children of God.

LOUDSPEAKER. Before the researcher hands down an assessment...

MRS. SLAMECKA. Pronounces.

LOUDSPEAKER. ...he subjects to the experiment.

CHIEF INSPECTOR. Come off it, we're already pleased if you know where and how you are allowed to experiment.

SERGEANT. And who are these children of God, you perhaps?

LOUDSPEAKER. The pupils who are raised from birth in the care of their parents under strict scientific leadership in one of the Life Villages and attain insight in their sixteenth year by executing the parametric guideposts are called the children of God.

MRS. SLAMECKA. There you have it! By the way, it isn't useful to blame us for faith. We don't convey any contents, we convey the method. This is the point to return to our program. Ladies and gentlemen, if you take your seats please!

THE APPRENTICES (adjourn back to their seats).

MRS. SLAMECKA (to the police officers). What about you, look for a place to sit, there are still some free!

CHIEF INSPECTOR AND SERGANT (remain standing on the left next

to Leo and the speaker's podium).
MRS. SLAMECKA (unswervingly). As you already know, ladies and gentlemen, every other cathedral, every other church and every other chapel was redesigned as I-Court as penance and compensation for the gloomy past of the Church of Rome.

TAD. The whimpering and begging institutions were enough to make you puke.

YOUNG MAN. Even puking shall set ye free.

MRS BUTTERWORTH: Everybody needs his high point in life!

MRS. SLAMECKA. Please, ladies and gentlemen! I insist that you show more respect for the believers. Even if they might be clinging to illusions, they might just lead a respectable life that demands big sacrifices day for day. But let's get to the point now! You are well-advised, if you chose a site near an I-Court, since people like to get in the right mood before they enter it. Leo will hand over you a temporary begging license. It's restricted to one week and authorizes you to gain your first experiences until next Monday.

CHIEF INSPECTOR. And do you know where you are allowed to set yourself up?

YOUNG LADY (bored). Within the white markings.

LEO (strides by the rows and hands over the approvals).

MRS. SLAMECKA. Take into account that trainees may not use all the sites. For the time being, you will have to be content with the odd-numbered locations.

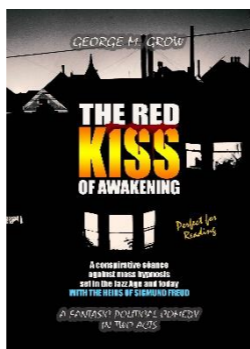
SERGEANT. Article 7b.

YOUNG LADY. Can we use a stool or

a lounge chair?

End of the reading

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