

## Characters

### Hunger Artists

ALFONS	husband of Ivona	<i>Lyric Tenor</i>
IVONA	wife of Alfons	<i>Coloratura Soprano</i>

### Chorus of Butchers

BRONISLAV	father of Milos	<i>Bass</i>
JAN	assistant to Bronislav	<i>Tenor</i>
MILOS	assistant to/son of Bronislav	<i>Countertenor</i>

### Piano

## Synopsis

### Setting

The entire opera is set in Prague sometime in 1924 within the confines of a town square. Within a large cage, the two hunger artists Alfons and Ivona are starve themselves and occasionally perform “hunger routines.” Hunger is their art and the townspeople their audience. Beside the hunger artists sit three butchers: Bronislav, Jan and Milos. Their job is to ensure that the hunger artists do not eat. They sit there all night, bored, eating giant slabs of cooked meat off of large barbecue forks.

### Scene I: In the town square at midnight

The butchers sit and watch the hunger artists, all the while commenting upon their circumstances as well as the circumstances of the hunger artists. Alfons comes into view in his cage. He begins to search through a pile of things. Alfons interrupts his search with a caterwaul of hunger pain. The butchers engage Alfons with taunts as he resumes his searching. Alfons cries out once more. The butchers ask him “What is in the bag?” Alfons finds a soiled bag. Ivona, also in the cage with Alfons, wakes up and comes into view. Alfons ruminates upon the circumstances of his art as well as his relationship to Ivona. Alfons picks up the burlap sack he spotted before. Ivona, snatches it from Alfons and hides it behind her back. This sparks a quarrel between them regarding trust. Ivona tries to change the subject by propositioning Alfons. Alfons declines due to fatigue and lack of stamina. Ivona suggests that they perform a hunger routine to build up his energy. This excites the butchers. Alfons and Ivona perform a well rehearsed number (a performance within a performance). The number is cut short with a true wail of hunger—Alfons hunches over and has to lie down. The butchers express dissatisfaction. Ivona puts Alfons to bed. She retrieves

the burlap sack and pulls out an apple. She expresses her desire to eat the apple, considers her relationship to Alfons, and then returns the apple to the sack without coming to a decision.

**Scene II: Ivona leaves the cage**

Alfons, Jan and Milos are now asleep. Ivona leaves the cage, holding the burlap sack. Bronislav shines a flashlight on her. Ivona tries to give her apple to Bronislav for fear of giving in to her hunger. Bronislav refuses to help her, derides her and finally convinces her to “take a nibble.” Ivona takes a bite of the apple and is overwhelmed with satisfaction. Bronislav forces her back into her cage.

**Scene III: Ivona re-enters the cage**

Ivona re-enters the cage, inadvertently waking Alfons. Alfons takes the bag and pulls out the bitten apple. He chastises her for betraying him and breaking the fast. Ivona argues that they can go on sneaking food without anyone being the wiser. Alfons is too ethical for this and does not accept this proposition. The butchers chime in with their comments while Alfons and Ivona lament this unfortunate turn of events. Alfons, totally disgusted, screams at Ivona, “Eat Ivona, eat!” and throws her out of the cage.