

LEO TOLSTOY

THE POWER OF
DARKNESS

Лев Толстой

The Power of Darkness

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Содержание

CHARACTERS	5
АКТ I	6
АКТ II	16
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	17

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CHARACTERS

PETER IGNÁTITCH. *A well-to-do peasant, 42 years old, married for the second time, and sickly.*

ANÍSYA. *His wife, 32 years old, fond of dress.*

AKOULÍNA. *Peter's daughter by his first marriage, 16 years old, hard of hearing, mentally undeveloped.*

NAN (ANNA PETRÓVNA). *His daughter by his second marriage, 10 years old.*

NIKÍTA. *Their labourer, 26 years old, fond of dress.*

AKÍM. *Nikíta's father, 50 years old, a plain-looking, God-fearing peasant.*

MATRYÓNA. *His wife and Nikíta's mother, 50 years old.*

MARÍNA. *An orphan girl, 22 years old.*

MARTHA. *Peter's sister.*

MÍTRITCH. *An old labourer, ex-soldier.*

SIMON. *Marína's husband.*

BRIDEGROOM. *Engaged to Akoulína.*

IVÁN. *His father.*

A NEIGHBOUR.

FIRST GIRL.

SECOND GIRL.

POLICE OFFICER.

DRIVER.

BEST-MAN.

MATCHMAKER.

VILLAGE ELDER.

VISITORS, WOMEN, GIRLS, AND PEOPLE *come to see the wedding.*

N.B.— The 'oven' mentioned is the usual large, brick, Russian baking-oven. The top of it outside is flat, so that more than one person can lie on it.

ACT I

The Act takes place in autumn in a large village. The Scene represents Peter's roomy hut. Peter is sitting on a wooden bench, mending a horse-collar. Anísya and Akoulína are spinning, and singing a part-song.

PETER [*looking out of the window*] The horses have got loose again. If we don't look out they'll be killing the colt. Nikíta! Hey, Nikíta! Is the fellow deaf? [*Listens. To the women*] Shut up, one can't hear anything.

NIKÍTA [*from outside*] What?

PETER. Drive the horses in.

NIKÍTA. We'll drive 'em in. All in good time.

PETER [*shaking his head*] Ah, these labourers! If I were well, I'd not keep one on no account. There's nothing but bother with 'em. [*Rises and sits down again*] Nikíta!.. It's no good shouting. One of you'd better go. Go, Akoúl, drive 'em in.

AKOULÍNA. What? The horses?

PETER. What else?

AKOULÍNA. All right. [*Exit*].

PETER. Ah, but he's a loafer, that lad ... no good at all. Won't stir a finger if he can help it.

ANÍSYA. You're so mighty brisk yourself. When you're not sprawling on the top of the oven you're squatting on the bench. To goad others to work is all you're fit for.

PETER. If one weren't to goad you on a bit, one'd have no roof left over one's head before the year's out. Oh what people!

ANÍSYA. You go shoving a dozen jobs on to one's shoulders, and then do nothing but scold. It's easy to lie on the oven and give orders.

PETER [*sighing*] Oh, if 'twere not for this sickness that's got hold of me, I'd not keep him on another day.

AKOULÍNA [*off the scene*] Gee up, gee, woo. [*A colt neighs, the stamping of horses' feet and the creaking of the gate are heard*].

PETER. Bragging, that's what he's good at. I'd like to sack him, I would indeed.

ANÍSYA [*mimicking him*] “Like to sack him.” You buckle to yourself, and then talk.

AKOULÍNA [*enters*] It's all I could do to drive 'em in. That piebald always will ...

PETER. And where's Nikíta?

AKOULÍNA. Where's Nikíta? Why, standing out there in the street.

PETER. What's he standing there for?

AKOULÍNA. What's he standing there for? He stands there jabbering.

PETER. One can't get any sense out of her! Who's he jabbering with?

AKOULÍNA [*does not hear*] Eh, what?

Peter waves her off. She sits down to her spinning.

NAN [*running in to her mother*] Nikíta's father and mother have come. They're going to take him away. It's true!

ANÍSYA. Nonsense!

NAN. Yes. Blest if they're not! [*Laughing*] I was just going by, and Nikíta, he says, “Good-bye, Anna Petróvna,” he says, “you must come and dance at my wedding. I'm leaving you,” he says, and laughs.

ANÍSYA [*to her husband*] There now. Much he cares. You see, he wants to leave of himself. “Sack him” indeed!

PETER. Well, let him go. Just as if I couldn't find somebody else.

ANÍSYA. And what about the money he's had in advance?

Nan stands listening at the door for awhile, and then exit.

PETER [*frowning*] The money? Well, he can work it off in summer, anyhow.

ANÍSYA. Well, of course you'll be glad if he goes and you've not got to feed him. It's only me as'll have to work like a horse all the winter. That lass of yours isn't over fond of work either. And you'll be lying up on the oven. I know you.

PETER. What's the good of wearing out one's tongue before one has the hang of the matter?

ANÍSYA. The yard's full of cattle. You've not sold the cow, and have kept all the sheep for the winter: feeding and watering 'em alone takes all one's time, and you want to sack the labourer. But I tell you straight, I'm not going to do a man's work! I'll go and lie on the top of the oven same as you, and let everything go to pot! You may do what you like.

PETER [*to Akoulína*] Go and see about the feeding, will you? it's time.

AKOULÍNA. The feeding? All right. [*Puts on a coat and takes a rope*].

ANÍSYA. I'm not going to work for you. You go and work yourself. I've had enough of it, so there!

PETER. That'll do. What are you raving about? Like a sheep with the staggers!

ANÍSYA. You're a crazy cur, you are! One gets neither work nor pleasure from you. Eating your fill, that's all you do, you palsied cur, you!

PETER [*spits and puts on coat*] Faugh! The Lord have mercy! I'd better go myself and see what's up. [*Exit*].

ANÍSYA [*after him*] Scurvy long-nosed devil!

AKOULÍNA. What are you swearing at dad for?

ANÍSYA. Hold your noise, you idiot!

AKOULÍNA [*going to the door*] I know why you're swearing at him. You're an idiot yourself, you bitch. I'm not afraid of you.

ANÍSYA. What do you mean? [*Jumps up and looks round for something to hit her with*] Mind, or I'll give you one with the poker.

AKOULÍNA [*opening the door*] Bitch! devil! that's what you are! Devil! bitch! bitch! devil! [*Runs off*].

ANÍSYA [*ponders*] "Come and dance at my wedding!" What new plan is this? Marry? Mind, Nikíta, if that's your intention, I'll go and ... No, I can't live without him. I won't let him go.

NIKÍTA [*enters, looks round, and seeing Anísya alone approaches quickly. In a low tone*] Here's a go; I'm in a regular fix! That governor of mine wants to take me away, – tells me I'm to come home. Says quite straight I'm to marry and live at home.

ANÍSYA. Well, go and marry! What's that to me?

NIKÍTA. Is that it? Why, here am I reckoning how best to consider matters, and just hear her! She tells me to go and marry. Why's that? [*Winking*] Has she forgotten?

ANÍSYA. Yes, go and marry! What do I care?

NIKÍTA. What are you spitting for? Just see, she won't even let me stroke her... What's the matter?

ANÍSYA. This! That you want to play me false... If you do, – why, I don't want you either. So now you know!

NIKÍTA. That'll do, Anísya. Do you think I'll forget you? Never while I live! I'll not play you false, that's flat. I've been thinking that supposing they do go and make me marry, I'd still come back to you. If only he don't make me live at home.

ANÍSYA. Much need I'll have of you, once you're married.

NIKÍTA. There's a go now. How is it possible to go against one's father's will?

ANÍSYA. Yes, I daresay, shove it all on your father. You know it's your own doing. You've long been plotting with that slut of yours, Marína. It's she has put you up to it. She didn't come here for nothing t'other day.

NIKÍTA. Marína? What's she to me? Much I care about her!.. Plenty of them buzzing around.

ANÍSYA. Then what has made your father come here? It's you have told him to. You've gone and deceived me. [*Cries*].

NIKÍTA. Anísyá, do you believe in a God or not? I never so much as dreamt of it. I know nothing at all about it. I never even dreamt of it – that's flat! My old dad has got it all out of his own pate.

ANÍSYA. If you don't wish it yourself who can force you? He can't drive you like an ass.

NIKÍTA. Well, I reckon it's not possible to go against one's parent. But it's not by my wish.

ANÍSYA. Don't you budge, that's all about it!

NIKÍTA. There was a fellow wouldn't budge, and the village elder gave him such a hiding... That's what it might come to! I've no great wish for that sort of thing. They say it touches one up...

ANÍSYA. Shut up with your nonsense. Nikíta, listen to me: if you marry that Marína I don't know what I won't do to myself... I shall lay hands on myself! I have sinned, I have gone against the law, but I can't go back now. If you go away I'll ...

NIKÍTA. Why should I go? Had I wanted to go – I should have gone long ago. There was Iván Semyónitch t'other day – offered me a place as his coachman... Only fancy what a life that would have been! But I did not go. Because, I reckon, I am good enough for any one. Now if you did not love me it would be a different matter.

ANÍSYA. Yes, and that's what you should remember. My old man will die one of these fine days, I'm thinking; then we could cover our sin, make it all right and lawful, and then you'll be master here.

NIKÍTA. Where's the good of making plans? What do I care? I work as hard as if I were doing it for myself. My master loves me, and his missus loves me. And if the wenches run after me, it's not my fault, that's flat.

ANÍSYA. And you'll love me?

NIKÍTA [*embracing her*] There, as you have ever been in my heart ...

MATRYÓNA [*enters, and crosses herself a long time before the icón. Nikíta and Anísyá step apart*] What I saw I didn't perceive, what I heard I didn't hearken to. Playing with the lass, eh? Well, – even a calf will play. Why shouldn't one have some fun when one's young? But your master is out in the yard a-calling you, sonnie.

NIKÍTA. I only came to get the axe.

MATRYÓNA. I know, sonnie, I know; them sort of axes are mostly to be found where the women are.

NIKÍTA [*stooping to pick up axe*] I say, mother, is it true you want me to marry? As I reckon, that's quite unnecessary. Besides, I've got no wish that way.

MATRYÓNA. Eh, honey! why should you marry? Go on as you are. It's all the old man. You'd better go, sonnie, we can talk these matters over without you.

NIKÍTA. It's a queer go! One moment I'm to be married, the next, not. I can't make head or tail of it. [*Exit*].

ANÍSYA. What's it all about then? Do you really wish him to get married?

MATRYÓNA. Eh, why should he marry, my jewel? It's all nonsense, all my old man's drivel. "Marry, marry." But he's reckoning without his host. You know the saying, "From oats and hay, why should horses stray?" When you've enough and to spare, why look elsewhere? And so in this case. [*Winks*] Don't I see which way the wind blows?

ANÍSYA. Where's the good of my pretending to you, Mother Matryóna? You know all about it. I have sinned. I love your son.

MATRYÓNA. Dear me, here's news! D'you think Mother Matryóna didn't know? Eh, lassie, – Mother Matryóna's been ground, and ground again, ground fine! This much I can tell you, my jewel: Mother Matryóna can see through a brick wall three feet thick. I know it all, my jewel! I know what

young wives need sleeping draughts for, so I've brought some along. [*Unties a knot in her handkerchief and brings out paper-packets*] As much as is wanted, I see, and what's not wanted I neither see nor perceive! There! Mother Matryóna has also been young. I had to know a thing or two to live with my old fool. I know seventy-and-seven dodges. But I see your old man's quite seedy, quite seedy! How's one to live with such as him? Why, if you pricked him with a hay-fork it wouldn't fetch blood. See if you don't bury him before the spring. Then you'll need some one in the house. Well, what's wrong with my son? He'll do as well as another. Then where's the advantage of my taking him away from a good place? Am I my child's enemy?

ANÍSYA. Oh, if only he does not go away.

MATRYÓNA. He won't go away, birdie. It's all nonsense. You know my old man. His wits are always wool-gathering; yet sometimes he takes a thing into his pate, and it's as if it were wedged in, you can't knock it out with a hammer.

ANÍSYA. And what started this business?

MATRYÓNA. Well, you see, my jewel, you yourself know what a fellow with women the lad is, – and he's handsome too, though I say it as shouldn't. Well, you know, he was living at the railway, and they had an orphan wench there to cook for them. Well, that same wench took to running after him.

ANÍSYA. Marína?

MATRYÓNA. Yes, the plague seize her! Whether anything happened or not, anyhow something got to my old man's ears. Maybe he heard from the neighbours, maybe she's been and blabbed ...

ANÍSYA. Well, she is a bold hussy!

MATRYÓNA. So my old man – the old blockhead – off he goes: “Marry, marry,” he says, “he must marry her and cover the sin,” he says. “We must take the lad home,” he says, “and he shall marry,” he says. Well, I did my best to make him change his mind, but, dear me, no. So, all right, thinks I, – I'll try another dodge. One always has to entice them fools in this way, just pretend to be of their mind, and when it comes to the point one goes and turns it all one's own way. You know, a woman has time to think seventy-and-seven thoughts while falling off the oven, so how's such as he to see through it? “Well, yes,” says I, “it would be a good job, – only we must consider well beforehand. Why not go and see our son, and talk it over with Peter Ignátitch and hear what he has to say?” So here we are.

ANÍSYA. Oh dear, oh dear, how will it all end? Supposing his father just orders him to marry her?

MATRYÓNA. Orders, indeed. Chuck his orders to the dogs! Don't you worry; that affair will never come off. I'll go to your old man myself, and sift and strain this matter clear – there will be none of it left. I have come here only for the look of the thing. A very likely thing! Here's my son living in happiness and expecting happiness, and I'll go and match him with a slut! No fear, I'm not a fool!

ANÍSYA. And she – this Marína – came dangling after him here! Mother, would you believe, when they said he was going to marry, it was as if a knife had gone right through my heart. I thought he cared for her.

MATRYÓNA. Oh, my jewel! Why, you don't think him such a fool, that he should go and care for a homeless baggage like that? Nikíta is a sensible fellow, you see. He knows whom to love. So don't you go and fret, my jewel. We'll not take him away, and we won't marry him. No, we'll let him stay on, if you'll only oblige us with a little money.

ANÍSYA. All I know is, that I could not live if Nikíta went away.

MATRYÓNA. Naturally, when one's young it's no easy matter! You, a wench in full bloom, to be living with the dregs of a man like that husband of yours.

ANÍSYA. Mother Matryóna, would you believe it? I'm that sick of him, that sick of this long-nosed cur of mine, I can hardly bear to look at him.

MATRYÓNA. Yes, I see, it's one of them cases. Just look here, [*looks round and whispers*] I've been to see that old man, you know – he's given me simples of two kinds. This, you see, is a sleeping draught. “Just give him one of these powders,” he says, “and he'll sleep so sound you might jump on him!” And this here, “This is that kind of simple,” he says, “that if you give one some of it to drink it has no smell whatever, but its strength is very great. There are seven doses here, a pinch at a time. Give him seven pinches,” he says, “and she won't have far to look for freedom,” he says.

ANÍSYA. O-o-oh! What's that?

MATRYÓNA. “No sign whatever,” he says. He's taken a rouble for it. “Can't sell it for less,” he says. Because it's no easy matter to get 'em, you know. I paid him, dearie, out of my own money. If she takes them, thinks I, it's all right; if she don't, I can let old Michael's daughter have them.

ANÍSYA. O-o-oh! But mayn't some evil come of them? I'm frightened!

MATRYÓNA. What evil, my jewel? If your old man was hale and hearty, 'twould be a different matter, but he's neither alive nor dead as it is. He's not for this world. Such things often happen.

ANÍSYA. O-o-oh, my poor head! I'm afeared, Mother Matryóna, lest some evil come of them. No. That won't do.

MATRYÓNA. Just as you like. I might even return them to him.

ANÍSYA. And are they to be used in the same way as the others? Mixed in water?

MATRYÓNA. Better in tea, he says. “You can't notice anything,” he says, “no smell nor nothing.” He's a cute old fellow too.

ANÍSYA. [*taking the powder*] O-oh, my poor head! Could I have ever thought of such a thing if my life were not a very hell?

MATRYÓNA. You'll not forget that rouble? I promised to take it to the old man. He's had some trouble, too.

ANÍSYA. Of course? [*Goes to her box and hides the powders*].

MATRYÓNA. And now, my jewel, keep it as close as you can, so that no one should find it out. Heaven defend that it should happen, but *if* any one notices it, tell 'em it's for the black-beetles. [*Takes the rouble*] It's also used for beetles. [*Stops short*].

Enter Akím, who crosses himself in front of the icón, and then Peter, who sits down.

PETER. Well then, how's it to be, Daddy Akím?

AKÍM. As it's best, Peter Ignátitch, as it's best ... I mean – as it's best. 'Cos why? I'm afeared of what d'you call 'ems, some tomfoolery, you know. I'd like to, what d'you call it ... to start, you know, start the lad honest, I mean. But supposing you'd rather, what d'you call it, we might, I mean, what's name? As it's best ...

PETER. All right. All right. Sit down and let's talk it over. [*Akím sits down*] Well then, what's it all about? You want him to marry?

MATRYÓNA. As to marrying, he might bide a while, Peter Ignátitch. You know our poverty, Peter Ignátitch. What's he to marry on? We've hardly enough to eat ourselves. How can he marry then?..

PETER. You must consider what will be best.

MATRYÓNA. Where's the hurry for him to get married? Marriage is not that sort of thing, it's not like ripe raspberries that drop off if not picked in time.

PETER. If he were to get married, 'twould be a good thing in a way.

AKÍM. We'd like to ... what d'you call it? 'Cos why, you see. I've what d'you call it ... a job. I mean, I've found a paying job in town, you know.

MATRYÓNA. And a fine job too – cleaning out cesspools. The other day when he came home, I could do nothing but spew and spew. Faugh!

AKÍM. It's true, at first it does seem what d'you call it ... knocks one clean over, you know, – the smell, I mean. But one gets used to it, and then it's nothing, no worse than malt grain, and then it's, what d'you call it, ... pays, pays, I mean. And as to the smell being, what d'you call it, it's not for the

likes of us to complain. And one changes one's clothes. So we'd like to take what's his name ... Nikíta I mean, home. Let him manage things at home while I, what d'you call it, – earn something in town.

PETER. You want to keep your son at home? Yes, that would be well: but how about the money he has had in advance?

AKÍM. That's it, that's it! It's just as you say, Ignátitch, it's just what d'you call it. 'Cos why? If you go into service, it's as good as if you had sold yourself, they say. That will be all right. I mean he may stay and serve his time, only he must, what d'you call it, get married. I mean – so: you let him off for a little while, that he may, what d'you call it?

PETER. Yes, we could manage that.

MATRYÓNA. Ah, but it's not yet settled between ourselves, Peter Ignátitch. I'll speak to you as I would before God, and you may judge between my old man and me. He goes on harping on that marriage. But just ask – who it is he wants him to marry. If it were a girl of the right sort now – I am not my child's enemy, but the wench is not honest.

AKÍM. No, that's wrong! Wrong, I say. 'Cos why? She, that same girl – it's my son as has offended, offended the girl I mean.

PETER. How offended?

AKÍM. That's how. She's what d'you call it, with him, with my son, Nikíta. With Nikíta, what d'you call it, I mean.

MATRYÓNA. You wait a bit, my tongue runs smoother – let me tell it. You know, this lad of ours lived at the railway before he came to you. There was a girl there as kept dangling after him. A girl of no account, you know, her name's Marína. She used to cook for the men. So now this same girl accuses our son, Nikíta, that he, so to say, deceived her.

PETER. Well, there's nothing good in that.

MATRYÓNA. But she's no honest girl herself; she runs after the fellows like a common slut.

AKÍM. There you are again, old woman, and it's not at all what d'you call it, it's all not what d'you call it, I mean ...

MATRYÓNA. There now, that's all the sense one gets from my old owl – “what d'you call it, what d'you call it,” and he doesn't know himself what he means. Peter Ignátitch, don't listen to me, but go yourself and ask any one you like about the girl, everybody will say the same. She's just a homeless good-for-nothing.

PETER. You know, Daddy Akím, if that's how things are, there's no reason for him to marry her. A daughter-in-law's not like a shoe, you can't kick her off.

AKÍM [*excitedly*] It's false, old woman, it's what d'you call it, false; I mean, about the girl; false! 'Cos why? The lass is a good lass, a very good lass, you know. I'm sorry, sorry for the lassie, I mean.

MATRYÓNA. It's an old saying: “For the wide world old Miriam grieves, and at home without bread her children she leaves.” He's sorry for the girl, but not sorry for his own son! Sling her round your neck and carry her about with you! That's enough of such empty cackle!

AKÍM. No, it's not empty.

MATRYÓNA. There, don't interrupt, let me have my say.

AKÍM [*interrupts*] No, not empty! I mean, you twist things your own way, about the lass or about yourself. Twist them, I mean, to make it better for yourself; but God, what d'you call it, turns them His way. That's how it is.

MATRYÓNA. Eh! One only wears out one's tongue with you.

AKÍM. The lass is hard-working and spruce, and keeps everything round herself ... what d'you call it. And in our poverty, you know, it's a pair of hands, I mean; and the wedding needn't cost much. But the chief thing's the offence, the offence to the lass, and she's a what d'you call it, an orphan, you know; that's what she is, and there's the offence.

MATRYÓNA. Eh! they'll all tell you a tale of that sort ...

ANÍSYA. Daddy Akím, you'd better listen to us women; we can tell you a thing or two.

AKÍM. And God, how about God? Isn't she a human being, the lass? A what d'you call it, – also a human being I mean, before God. And how do you look at it?

MATRYÓNA. Eh!.. started off again?..

PETER. Wait a bit, Daddy Akím. One can't believe all these girls say, either. The lad's alive, and not far away; send for him, and find out straight from him if it's true. He won't wish to lose his soul. Go and call the fellow, [*Anísyá rises*] and tell him his father wants him. [*Exit Anísyá*].

MATRYÓNA. That's right, dear friend; you've cleared the way clean, as with water. Yes, let the lad speak for himself. Nowadays, you know, they'll not let you force a son to marry; one must first of all ask the lad. He'll never consent to marry her and disgrace himself, not for all the world. To my thinking, it's best he should go on living with you and serving you as his master. And we need not take him home for the summer either; we can hire a help. If you would only give us ten roubles now, we'll let him stay on.

PETER. All in good time. First let us settle one thing before we start another.

AKÍM. You see, Peter Ignátitch, I speak. 'Cos why? you know how it happens. We try to fix things up as seems best for ourselves, you know; and as to God, we what d'you call it, we forget Him. We think it's best so, turn it our own way, and lo! we've got into a fix, you know. We think it will be best, I mean; and lo! it turns out much worse – without God, I mean.

PETER. Of course one must not forget God.

AKÍM. It turns out worse! But when it's the right way – God's way – it what d'you call it, it gives one joy; seems pleasant, I mean. So I reckon, you see, get him, the lad, I mean, get him to marry her, to keep him from sin, I mean, and let him what d'you call it at home, as it's lawful, I mean, while I go and get the job in town. The work is of the right sort – it's payin', I mean. And in God's sight it's what d'you call it – it's best, I mean. Ain't she an orphan? Here, for example, a year ago some fellows went and took timber from the steward, – thought they'd do the steward, you know. Yes, they did the steward, but they couldn't what d'you call it – do God, I mean. Well, and so ...

Enter Nikíta and Nan.

NIKÍTA. You called me? [*Sits down and takes out his tobacco-pouch*].

PETER [*in a low, reproachful voice*] What are you thinking about – have you no manners? Your father is going to speak to you, and you sit down and fool about with tobacco. Come, get up!

Nikíta rises, leans carelessly with his elbow on the table, and smiles.

AKÍM. It seems there's a complaint, you know, about you, Nikíta – a complaint, I mean, a complaint.

NIKÍTA. Who's been complaining?

AKÍM. Complaining? It's a maid, an orphan maid, complaining, I mean. It's her, you know – a complaint against you, from Marína, I mean.

NIKÍTA [*laughs*] Well, that's a good one. What's the complaint? And who's told you – she herself?

AKÍM. It's I am asking you, and you must now, what d'you call it, give me an answer. Have you got mixed up with the lass, I mean – mixed up, you know?

NIKÍTA. I don't know what you mean. What's up?

AKÍM. Foolin', I mean, what d'you call it? foolin'. Have you been foolin' with her, I mean?

NIKÍTA. Never mind what's been! Of course one does have some fun with a cook now and then to while away the time. One plays the concertina and gets her to dance. What of that?

PETER. Don't shuffle, Nikíta, but answer your father straight out.

AKÍM [*solemnly*] You can hide it from men but not from God, Nikíta. You, what d'you call it – think, I mean, and don't tell lies. She's an orphan; so, you see, any one is free to insult her. An orphan, you see. So you should say what's rightest.

NIKÍTA. But what if I have nothing to say? I have told you everything – because there isn't anything to tell, that's flat! [*Getting excited*] She can go and say anything about me, same as if she

was speaking of one as is dead. Why don't she say anything about Fédka Mikíshin? Besides, how's this, that one mayn't even have a bit of fun nowadays? And as for her, well, she's free to say anything she likes.

AKÍM. Ah, Nikíta, mind! A lie will out. Did anything happen?

NIKÍTA [*aside*] How he sticks to it; it's too bad. [*To Akím*] I tell you, I know nothing more. There's been nothing between us. [*Angrily*] By God! and may I never leave this spot [*crosses himself*] if I know anything about it. [*Silence. Then still more excitedly*] Why! have you been thinking of getting me to marry her? What do you mean by it? – it's a confounded shame. Besides, nowadays you've got no such rights as to force a fellow to marry. That's plain enough. Besides, haven't I sworn I know nothing about it?

MATRYÓNA [*to her husband*] There now, that's just like your silly pate, to believe all they tell you. He's gone and put the lad to shame all for nothing. The best thing is to let him live as he is living, with his master. His master will help us in our present need, and give us ten roubles, and when the time comes ...

PETER. Well, Daddy Akím, how's it to be?

AKÍM [*looks at his son, clicking his tongue disapprovingly*] Mind, Nikíta, the tears of one that's been wronged never, what d'you call it – never fall beside the mark but always on, what's name – the head of the man as did the wrong. So mind, don't what d'you call it.

NIKÍTA [*sits down*] What's there to mind? mind yourself.

NAN [*aside*] I must run and tell mother. [*Exit*].

MATRYÓNA [*to Peter*] That's always the way with this old mumbler of mine, Peter Ignátitch. Once he's got anything wedged in his pate there's no knocking it out. We've gone and troubled you all for nothing. The lad can go on living as he has been. Keep him; he's your servant.

PETER. Well, Daddy Akím, what do you say?

AKÍM. Why, the lad's his own master, if only he what d'you call it... I only wish that, what d'you call it, I mean.

MATRYÓNA. You don't know yourself what you're jawing about. The lad himself has no wish to leave. Besides, what do we want with him at home? We can manage without him.

PETER. Only one thing, Daddy Akím – if you are thinking of taking him back in summer, I don't want him here for the winter. If he is to stay at all, it must be for the whole year.

MATRYÓNA. And it's for a year he'll bind himself. If we want help when the press of work comes, we can hire help, and the lad shall remain with you. Only give us ten roubles now...

PETER. Well then, is it to be for another year?

AKÍM. [*sighing*] Yes, it seems, it what d'you call it ... if it's so, I mean, it seems that it must be what d'you call it.

MATRYÓNA. For a year, counting from St. Dimíttry's day. We know you'll pay him fair wages. But give us ten roubles now. Help us out of our difficulties. [*Gets up and bows to Peter*].

Enter Nan and Anísya. The latter sits down at one side.

PETER. Well, if that's settled we might step across to the inn and have a drink. Come, Daddy Akím, what do you say to a glass of vódka?

AKÍM. No, I never drink that sort of thing.

PETER. Well, you'll have some tea?

AKÍM. Ah, tea! yes, I do sin that way. Yes, tea's the thing.

PETER. And the women will also have some tea. Come. And you, Nikíta, go and drive the sheep in and clear away the straw.

NIKÍTA. All right. [*Exeunt all but Nikíta. Nikíta lights a cigarette. It grows darker*] Just see how they bother one. Want a fellow to tell 'em how he larks about with the wenches! It would take long to tell 'em all those stories – “Marry her,” he says. Marry them all! One would have a good lot of wives! And what need have I to marry? Am as good as married now! There's many a chap as envies

me. Yet how strange it felt when I crossed myself before the icón. It was just as if some one shoved me. The whole web fell to pieces at once. They say it's frightening to swear what's not true. That's all humbug. It's all talk, that is. It's simple enough.

AKOULÍNA [*enters with a rope, which she puts down. She takes off her outdoor things and goes into closet*] You might at least have got a light.

NIKÍTA. What, to look at you? I can see you well enough without.

AKOULÍNA. Oh, bother you!

Nan enters and whispers to Nikíta.

NAN. Nikíta, there's a person wants you. There is!

NIKÍTA. What person?

NAN. Marína from the railway; she's out there, round the corner.

NIKÍTA. Nonsense!

NAN. Blest if she isn't!

NIKÍTA. What does she want?

NAN. She wants you to come out. She says, "I only want to say a word to Nikíta." I began asking, but she won't tell, but only says, "Is it true he's leaving you?" And I say, "No, only his father wanted to take him away and get him to marry, but he won't, and is going to stay with us another year." And she says, "For goodness' sake send him out to me. I must see him," she says, "I must say a word to him somehow." She's been waiting a long time. Why don't you go?

NIKÍTA. Bother her! What should I go for?

NAN. She says, "If he don't come, I'll go into the hut to him." Blest if she didn't say she'd come in!

NIKÍTA. Not likely. She'll wait a bit and then go away.

NAN. "Or is it," she says, "that they want him to marry Akoulína?"

Re-enter Akoulína, passing near Nikíta to take her distaff.

AKOULÍNA. Marry whom to Akoulína?

NAN. Why, Nikíta.

AKOULÍNA. A likely thing! Who says it?

NIKÍTA [*looks at her and laughs*] It seems people do say it. Would you marry me, Akoulína?

AKOULÍNA. Who, you? Perhaps I might have afore, but I won't now.

NIKÍTA. And why not now?

AKOULÍNA. 'Cos you wouldn't love me.

NIKÍTA. Why not?

AKOULÍNA. 'Cos you'd be forbidden to. [*Laughs*].

NIKÍTA. Who'd forbid it?

AKOULÍNA. Who? My step-mother. She does nothing but grumble, and is always staring at you.

NIKÍTA [*laughing*] Just hear her! Ain't she cute?

AKOULÍNA. Who? Me? What's there to be cute about? Am I blind? She's been rowing and rowing at dad all day. The fat-muzzled witch! [*Goes into closet*].

NAN [*looking out of the window*] Look, Nikíta, she's coming! I'm blest if she isn't! I'll go away. [*Exit*].

MARÍNA [*enters*] What are you doing with me?

NIKÍTA. Doing? I'm not doing anything.

MARÍNA. You mean to desert me.

NIKÍTA [*gets up angrily*] What does this look like, your coming here?

MARÍNA. Oh, Nikíta!

NIKÍTA. Well, you are strange! What have you come for?

MARÍNA. Nikíta!

NIKÍTA. That's my name. What do you want with Nikíta? Well, what next? Go away, I tell you!

MARÍNA. I see, you do want to throw me over.

NIKÍTA. Well, and what's there to remember? You yourself don't know. When you stood out there round the corner and sent Nan for me, and I didn't come, wasn't it plain enough that you're not wanted? It seems pretty simple. So there – go!

MARÍNA. Not wanted! So now I'm not wanted! I believed you when you said you would love me. And now that you've ruined me, I'm not wanted.

NIKÍTA. Where's the good of talking? This is quite improper. You've been telling tales to father. Now, do go away, will you?

MARÍNA. You know yourself I never loved any one but you. Whether you married me or not, I'd not have been angry. I've done you no wrong, then why have you left off caring for me? Why?

NIKÍTA. Where's the use of baying at the moon? You go away. Goodness me! what a duffer!

MARÍNA. It's not that you deceived me when you promised to marry me that hurts, but that you've left off loving. No, it's not that you've stopped loving me either, but that you've changed me for another, that's what hurts. I know who it is!

NIKÍTA [*comes up to her viciously*] Eh! what's the good of talking to the likes of you, that won't listen to reason? Be off, or you'll drive me to do something you'll be sorry for.

MARÍNA. What, will you strike me, then? Well then, strike me! What are you turning away for? Ah, Nikíta!

NIKÍTA. Supposing some one came in. Of course, it's quite improper. And what's the good of talking?

MARÍNA. So this is the end of it! What has been has flown. You want me to forget it? Well then, Nikíta, listen. I kept my maiden honour as the apple of my eye. You have ruined me for nothing, you have deceived me. You have no pity on a fatherless and motherless girl! [*Weeping*] You have deserted, you have killed me, but I bear you no malice. God forgive you! If you find a better one you'll forget me, if a worse one you'll remember me. Yes, you will remember, Nikíta! Good-bye, then, if it is to be. Oh, how I loved you! Good-bye for the last time. [*Takes his head in her hands and tries to kiss him*].

NIKÍTA [*tossing his head back*] I'm not going to talk with the likes of you. If you won't go away I will, and you may stay here by yourself.

MARÍNA [*screams*] You are a brute. [*In the doorway*] God will give you no joy. [*Exit, crying*].

AKOULÍNA [*comes out of closet*] You're a dog, Nikíta!

NIKÍTA. What's up?

AKOULÍNA. What a cry she gave! [*Cries*].

NIKÍTA. What's up with you?

AKOULÍNA. What's up? You've hurt her so. That's the way you'll hurt me also. You're a dog. [*Exit into closet*].

Silence.

NIKÍTA. Here's a fine muddle. I'm as sweet as honey on the lasses, but when a fellow's sinned with 'em it's a bad look-out!

Curtain

ACT II

The scene represents the village street. To the left the outside of Peter's hut, built of logs, with a porch in the middle; to the right of the hut the gates and a corner of the yard buildings. Anísya is beating hemp in the street near the corner of the yard. Six months have elapsed since the [First Act](#).

ANÍSYA [*stops and listens*] Mumbling something again. He's probably got off the stove.

Akoulína enters, carrying two pails on a yoke.

ANÍSYA. He's calling. You go and see what he wants, kicking up such a row.

AKOULÍNA. Why don't you go?

ANÍSYA. Go, I tell you! [*Exit Akoulína into hut*] He's bothering me to death. Won't let out where the money is, and that's all about it. He was out in the passage the other day. He must have been hiding it there. Now, I don't know myself where it is. Thank goodness he's afraid of parting with it, so that at least it will stay in the house. If only I could manage to find it. He hadn't it on him yesterday. Now I don't know where it can be. He has quite worn the life out of me.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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